

# HIGH POINTS: AN HISTORICAL GEOGRAPHY OF CANNABIS\*

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**ABSTRACT.** Cannabis, including hemp and its psychoactive counterpart, has a long but largely overlooked historical geography. Situating the topic within varied perspectives such as world-systems theory, Foucauldian biopolitics, and the moral economy of drugs, this paper charts its diffusion over several millennia, noting the contingent and uneven ways in which it was enveloped within varying social and political circumstances. Following a brief theorization, it explores the plant's early uses in East and South Asia, its shift to the Middle East, and resultant popularity in the Arab world and Africa. Next, it turns to its expansion under colonialism, including deliberate cultivation by Portuguese and British authorities in the New World as part of the construction of a pacified labor force. The fifth section offers an overview of cannabis's contested history in the United States, in which a series of early 20<sup>th</sup>-century moral panics led to its demonization; later, the drug enjoyed gradual liberalization. *Keywords:* cannabis, marijuana, hemp, drugs, moral geographies.

Drugs have long played an important role in global trade and politics. Tobacco, introduced to the British by North American Indians, was simultaneously denounced as a “demonic vegetable” and enthusiastically embraced in the new custom of smoking. By the 17<sup>th</sup> century, write Kenneth Pomeranz and Steven Topik, it was “as if all the tobacco in the world was roaring in a great, brown tsunami up the Thames toward London” (1999, 99). Opium was as central to the foreign policy and foreign exchange of the British Empire in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as frigates, and British conflicts with Chinese attempts to limit imports of this drug from India led to the Opium Wars of the 1840s. The dramatic reductions in transport costs that occurred in the wake of industrial capitalism gave Europeans access to numerous exotic plants from around the world. In the process, drugs that had been primarily used in indigenous religious occasions, such as by Incan temple coca users, Sufi holy men, or Buddhist priests, became increasingly marketable and secularized, and diffused to become bourgeois pleasures, then mass delights. David Courtwright (2002) charts a 500-year-long “psychoactive revolution,” in which drugs have steadily increased in availability, potency, and popularity. Such observations point to the socially and spatially uneven nature of drug use, how it is invariably deeply tied to cultural perceptions and misperceptions, and the politics of moral regulation. A critically important drug in this regard is psychoactive cannabis.

Over the last three decades, a voluminous literature on cannabis has emerged. Its evolution, ecology, and genetics have been subject to extensive

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botanical analysis (for example Hillig and Mahlberg 2004; Hillig 2005). Another subset has been concerned primarily with the physiological and psychological impacts of its use (Kaplan and others 1986; Bachman and others 1988; Grinspoon and Bakalar 1993; Zablocki and others 1991; Zimmer and Morgan 1997; Iverson 2000). Issues of spatiality are often marginalized in this body of work. There is, of course, a vibrant extant literature on the geography of drugs (Rengert 1996; Steinberg, Hobbs and Mathewson 2004; Rengert, Ratcliffe and Chakravorty 2005; Taylor and others 2013), but it tends to focus on topics such as opium (Hobbs 1998) or geographies of addiction (Thomas and others 2008). While there are several competent and detailed histories of cannabis (Merlin 1972; Sloman 1999; Green 2002; Booth 2003; Lee 2013), which tend to concentrate on its illegalization in the U.S. (Weisheit 1992), geographic studies of the spatiality of one of the world's most popular drugs are surprisingly sparse. A series of case studies in the important volume *Cannabis and Culture* (1975) included historical accounts of cannabis use in Brazil (De Pinho 1975; Hutchinson 1975), Jamaica (Comitas 1975), India (Hasan 1975), South Africa (du Tout 1975), Colombia (Elejalde 1975), and Ethiopia (Van der Merwe 1975). Other local accounts include Costa Rica (Carter 1980), Belize (Steinberg 2004), and Amsterdam (Jansen 1990, 1991). Despite this multitude of rich case studies, surprisingly there is as yet no attempt to trace the plant's global diffusion from a geographic perspective, weaving its origins, diffusion, cultural and legal specifics, and envelopment within the world system into a single narrative. Of course, since Carl Sauer the domestication and diffusion of crops has been a significant topic of geographic inquiry (Harris 1967), a tradition to which this paper seeks to contribute.

From prehistoric Xinjiang to the slums of Kingston, Jamaica, from hashish smokers in medieval Cairo to casual pot users on American university campuses, psychoactive cannabis has a long and fascinating historical geography. Cannabis has long been entwined with the world economy and local social and cultural practices in a variety of ways; its historical geography, therefore, points to the intersections between broad social relations that give the plant's use some degree of consistency (especially religious and shamanistic applications) and the contingent specifics of individual societies and places. As such, the temporal and spatial diffusion of the plant lies at the intersections of Foucauldian biopolitics, ethnobotany and political ecology, the moral politics of desire and its control, and world-systems theory, a nexus of relations that plays out at multiple spatial scales ranging from international geopolitics to the rhythms of everyday life. The use of cannabis, and repeated attempts to regulate and curtail it, reflect changing and spatially uneven sets of social norms and practices that reflect the outlooks and strategies both of users and various state and religious bodies that have sought to marginalize it.

Inspired by similar treatments of salt (Kurlansky 2003) and sugar (Mintz 1986), this paper explores the global and historical diffusion of cannabis in four

sections. It opens with a brief statement about the varieties of cannabis, notably hemp and its psychoactive relative. Second, it embeds the topic within a theoretical perspective informed by biopolitics, world-systems theory, and cultural political economy. Third, it turns to the domestication and diffusion of cannabis in the premodern world, demonstrating that despite the manifold differences among cultures, it was viewed positively more often than not, frequently intertwined with religious purposes, and cultivated for both pragmatic and recreational reasons. The fourth part summarizes the role of the plant in the colonial world economy, particularly the New World, when it was both closely intertwined with the slave trade and subject to increasing state scrutiny and regulation. The fifth section dwells on the American context in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in which cannabis became wrapped up in the uniquely conservative political climate of the U.S. The conclusion situates contemporary debates about cannabis within the broader historical context of its use.

#### WHAT IS CANNABIS?

The genus cannabis includes several closely related species. The most common are two subspecies named by Carl Linnaeus in 1753, *Cannabis sativa* L. (the L is in honor of Linnaeus), widely known as hemp, which is not psychoactive, and *Cannabis sativa*, which is. Jean-Baptiste Lamarck identified a second species, *Cannabis indica*, and third, *Cannabis ruderalis*, was named in 1924 by a Russian botanist, D.E. Janischevsky; the latter is uncommon. (It should be noted that controversy at times attends to these taxonomic classifications). Each species has several variants and subspecies. The history and geographies of *Cannabis sativa* L. (hemp) and *Cannabis sativa* (marijuana) are very closely intertwined, but are not identical; the two tended to spread together over space and time. Hemp has a long history of applications: its fibers have been used for millennia to make rope, canvas (from Greek *kannabis*), clothing, paper, shoes, and sails. In contrast, *Cannabis sativa*, the focus of this paper, has long been cultivated for its psychoactive effects, which are attributable to a sticky resin that the female plant produces that is rich with cannabinoids. The most important of these, delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), was discovered by two Israeli biochemists in 1964. THC induces a variety of sensory and psychological effects, including mild reverie and euphoria; heightened sensory awareness, creativity, and empathy; impaired short-term memory; altered sense of time and space; enhanced appetite and sexual desire; occasional drowsiness; and a tendency to enhance introspection, although these effects vary among individuals depending on their age, dosage, strain consumed, and frequency of use (Zablocki and others 1991). Hemp contains less than 1 percent THC, whereas levels in psychoactive cannabis range from four to as high as 20 percent in newer varieties. Hashish (Arabic for “dry herb”) consists of the purified cannabis resin, and is considerably more potent. For cannabis to release THC into the bloodstream it must be heated above 100°C, i.e., it must be cooked or smoked. Historically,

cannabis consumed for its psychoactive purposes involved eating it, rubbing its heated oil on the skin, or inhaling the smoke that resulted after being thrown on fires; smoking in pipes was relatively uncommon until the custom was introduced from the New World in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Cannabis is prepared and consumed in a variety of forms, and has been long known by a variety of monikers, including *ma* in China; Arabic *kif*; *bhanga*, *charas*, and *ganja* in India; and *dagga* in Southern Africa. Likewise, the Sanskrit word *khanap* gave rise to the *kanab* in Farsi, *kannabis* in Greek, *konopyla* in Russia, *cainb* in Gaelic, German *henf*, Dutch *hennep*, Swedish *hampa*, and English *hemp*, although in contemporary usage it has been called pot, grass, and weed.

#### THEORIZING CANNABIS

Three conceptual tools can be utilized in understanding the geographies of cannabis use: biopower and biopolitics, world-systems theory, and cultural political economy. All three attempt to suture the broader dynamics of social relations with the contingent rhythms of everyday life, bringing these two scales into a creative tension.

The Foucauldian sense of biopower centered on the power/knowledge relations that produce human subjects, control bodies, and subject populations, typically within the context of the nation-state (Sawicki 1991; Elden and Crampton 2007). In managing a population with a diverse set of tools, the state politicized the biological dimensions of human existence, rendering docile large bodies of people so that their governance could be effected unproblematically. Michel Foucault's works, of course, famously focused on prisons, schools, hospitals, mental illness, sexuality, surveillance, and governmentality, but more recently biopower has been extended to other domains as well. For example, it has become widespread in critical analyses of drugs (for example, Bergschmidt 2004; Marez 2004; Keane 2009) as well as related topics such as policing (Corva 2009), the media, and education.

Second, cannabis may be understood within the context of world-systems theory (Wallerstein 1979). For example, flows of illegal drugs are often seen as evidence that national borders have declined in their regulatory power and thus pose a challenge to sovereignty (Gootenberg 2009; Neilson and Bamyeh 2009). Beyond the confines of the nation-state, cannabis has played out within the dynamics of the global economy. For example, assertive efforts by the British and Portuguese colonial governments from the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries to promote cannabis use were linked to the worldwide commodification of labor power and the production of a quiescent labor force (Angrosino 2003). Colonial biopolitics, a field that has come into its own (see Nally 2008), offers useful insights into the manner in which colonial subjects were selectively produced and managed through discourses that acquire the official backing of the state.

Finally, cannabis may also be embedded within the domain of cultural political economy, an approach that seeks to bridge the divide between traditional Marxist perspectives and poststructuralist concerns with identity politics, discourse, and political performance (Jessop and Sum 2001; Jessop and Oosterlynck 2008). One variant concerns human-plant interactions, typically theorized within the context of cultural ecology (Head and Atchison 2008; Hall 2009). Cannabis use has been alternately promoted and demonized, forming shifting, contingent, and contested islands of morality situated between competing discourses of legitimacy and illegitimacy (Thompson, Pearce, and Barnett 2007; Wilton and Moreno 2012). Cannabis consumption thus straddles the boundaries of moral geographies of inclusion and exclusion, including the regulation of the politics of desire *a la* Deleuze and Guattari (Goodchild 1996), a domain that clearly extends into other topics such as sex and alcohol. In this sense, its regulation—or lack thereof—reflects historically specific norms and legal codes, attempts by governments to produce morally proper subjects, and resistance to such limitations on the part of growers and users. For example, attempts to demonize marijuana and hashish frequently center on their alleged links to cultural subversion and disrespect for authority. As Michael Pollan (2001, 175) puts it, the drug “short-circuits the metaphysics of desire on which Christianity and capitalism (and so much else in our civilization) depend.” For those opposed to its use, cannabis represents a destabilizing threat to the established order (for example, in Confucian China), and hence a moral affront typically grounded in religious objections; nonetheless, hegemonic groups have at times actively encouraged cannabis smoking in the interest of promoting docility (for example, in British and Portuguese slave colonies).

In short, theorizations of cannabis cultivation and use are inextricably bound up with broader understandings of power, knowledge, class, ethnicity, and the state. Such configurations inevitably play out differentially over time and space. For this reason, illuminating the historical geography of the drug offers a window into the changing networks of power that have unevenly encouraged and discouraged its use in varying historical and geographical contexts.

#### PREMODERN OF CANNABIS CULTIVATION AND USE

The origins and earliest uses of cannabis are often shrouded by obfuscating veils of rhetoric promoted by the plant’s advocates and detractors alike. A sun-loving plant, cannabis evolved on the steppes of Central Asia, specifically Mongolia and southern Siberia (Figure 1), although others have variously suggested the Huang He River valley, the Hindu Kush mountains, South Asia, or Afghanistan as possible source areas. Its biogeography fluctuated over time, largely in response to the waxing and waning of Pleistocene glaciers from which it took refuge (Clarke and Merlin 2013). In the upper-Paleolithic period, its spatial distribution was markedly reshaped by human beings, who domesticated it. Ernest

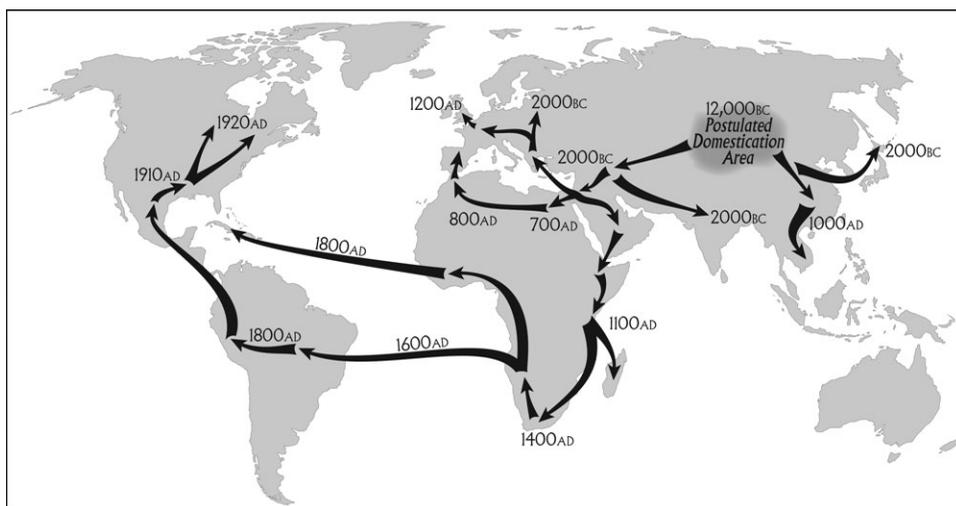


FIG. 1—Historical diffusion of *Cannabis Sativa*.

Abel (1980) suggests that its use goes back as far as 12,000 years, and that it is among humanity's oldest cultivated crops. It likely flourished in the nutrient-rich dump sites of prehistoric hunters and gatherers. Archaeobotanical evidence for its spread centers on pollen and seed analysis, although many cultures have written records of its cultivation and use. Aside from hemp fibers, cannabis seeds are nutritious, and its psychoactive properties may have been important for shamans or to break the monotony of everyday life (Clarke and Merlin 2013). Burned cannabis seeds have been found in kurgan burial mounds of the Pazaryk tribes in Siberia dating back to 3,000 BC (Godwin 1967), which also included censers to burn them. Tombs of Caucasoid nobles buried in Xinjiang and Siberia around 2500 BC, such as the Yanghai Tombs in the Turpan Basin of Xinjiang, occasionally include large quantities of mummified psychoactive cannabis sativa but not hemp (Rudenko 1970; Jiang and others 2006; Mukherjee and others 2008; Russo and others 2008).

Both hemp and psychoactive cannabis were widely used in ancient China. The Chinese used hemp widely, including rope, clothing, sails, and bowstrings. Paintings of the plant were found on Yangshao-era pottery dating to 6,200 BC (Li 1974, 1975), and it was widely cultivated on the loess plains of the Hwang He. The plant's written character, "ma," is derived from sketches of hanging hemp stalks drying. While its primary use was for its fibers, the first documented evidence of medicinal *cannabis sativa*, based on carbon-14 dating techniques, dates back to 4000 BC (Russo 2004). It was utilized as an anesthetic during surgery, including for the emperor Shen Nung in 2737 BC (Merlin 1972; Schlosser 2003). Cannabis elixirs were incorporated into certain Daoist religious ceremonies, often associated with the Hemp Maid, or Ma Gu, as described in the religious text *Secrets of the Golden Flower* (Abel 1980). Hui-Lin Li (1975)

notes that the first documented medical use is found in an herbal text of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD, the *Pen Ts'ao Ching* (Book of Odes), which chronicles oral traditions passed down from prehistoric times. The book notes that if taken in excess, cannabis “will produce hallucinations. If taken over a long term, it makes one communicate with spirits and lightens one’s body” (Li 1975, 56).

From Neolithic China, cannabis found its way to Korea and Japan around approximately 2000 BC, if not earlier. Sarah Nelson (1993) argues that hemp was cultivated by Chulmun coastal farmers in Korea. In Japan, it was used by the Jomon culture, and hemp patterns have been implicated in their famous rope-imprinted pottery. Later, hemp fibers were burned ceremonially by Shinto priests, who associated it with purity (Clarke and Merlin 2013). By the 6<sup>th</sup> century AD, however, with the ascendancy of Confucianism as state ideology under the Han empire, psychoactive cannabis use in China, Korea, and Japan began to decline steadily (Li 1974, 1975). In part due to its association with Central Asian nomads, and because Confucian moral values frowned on its potentially socially disruptive consequences, cannabis use waned, in contrast to opium. Robert Clarke and Mark Merlin (2013, 98) “suggest that after the rise of Confucianism, which spread from China through East Asia to Japan, the ingestion of *Cannabis* resin for psychoactive, ritualistic purification was eventually suppressed in Japan, as it was in China.”

Meanwhile, use of the plant was widespread among the Aryan nomadic herding tribes of the central Asian steppes, who carried it along the various paths that constituted the Silk Road over a vast swath of land stretching from Mongolia and Tuva to the Middle East and Eastern Europe. Burial tombs of the Phrygians and Scythians frequently contained *cannabis sativa* seeds (Sherratt 1995). Greatly enabled in their mobility by the horse and the wheel (Anthony 2007), Bronze Age tribes, particularly the Scythians, served as crucial vehicles for the plant’s diffusion into South Asia, the Middle East, and Eastern Europe.

Cannabis was carried into the South Asian subcontinent between 2000 and 1000 BC, most likely as part of the series of Aryan invasions (Zuardi 2006). Some speculate that cannabis may be the famous drug *soma*, widely used in the Aryan world and amply described in the *Rig Veda* (Bennett 2010; Clarke and Merlin 2013). In stark contrast to China, India developed a long and continuing tradition of psychoactive cannabis cultivation, often with medicinal and religious overtones. Goode (1969, 6) maintains that “marijuana-growing and its consumption probably reached its greatest efflorescence” in India. Local farmers often consulted with specialist *poddar* or *parakdar*, known as “ganja doctors.” Cannabis sativa was depicted extensively in the ancient Sanskrit Vedic poems, particularly the *Atharvaveda*, or “Science of Charms” (Bennett and others 1995), in which it is celebrated as one of “five kingdoms of herbs...which release us from anxiety” (Abel 1980, 19). It is mentioned in the *Bhagavad-Gita* as sharpening the memory and alleviating fatigue, and continues to have spiri-

tual connotations with the god Ganga (cognate with Ganges), from which the widespread term *ganja* is derived (Bennett and others 1995). Often it was consumed in weddings or festivals honoring the god Shiva, a.k.a. the Lord of Bhang, who is held to have brought it down from the Himalayas; cannabis is still offered to Shiva in temples on Shivaratri day (Hasan 1975). Devotional meetings called *bhajans*, not necessarily associated with Shiva, used the drug liberally. Gradually, the drug moved from religious to more secular and recreational purposes. *Ayurvedic* medicinal traditions used the drug extensively, typically mixed with other herbs. Its use was often associated with the Brahmin caste, which studiously avoided alcohol (Carstairs 1966), although it was widespread in many ceremonial occasions in ashrams and temples. Translucent resin from the female flower has long been smoked as *charas*, although the most common form of consumption is in the form of *bhang*, cannabis consumed as a mild paste or tea mixed with milk. Yogis or *sadhus* (ascetic holy men) and *faquirs*, or mystics, have long smoked cannabis sativa mixed with tobacco to enhance meditation, particularly during Diwali, the Festival of Lights, and during the Kumbha Mela festival every twelve years. Use and approval of cannabis were not uniformly distributed across India. In Madras, only the elite consumed it; in Delhi, it was used by rich and poor alike; in Hyderabad, only among the laboring poor; in Bombay, it was primarily confined to *faquirs*: while in Bengal it was considered an act of charity to supply religious wanderers with ganja (Mills 2005). Sikhs too used bhang as a beverage during religious rites.

Waves of migration from India carried the plant to Tibet and Nepal in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, where its use became entwined with Tantric traditions. Cannabis was introduced into Southeast Asia during the 6<sup>th</sup> century AD, where it was known both by the Sanskrit *ganja* and local terms such as Thai *kancha*, Cambodian *kânhch*, Lao *kan xa*, and Vietnamese *gai ândo* (Martin 1975). How far into the Malay islands it travelled, if at all, is not known.

Cannabis arrived in the Middle East between 2000 and 1400 BC (Forbes 1956; Bennett and others 1995; Aldrich 1997), perhaps as part of the broader Aryan infiltration of the region. The primary vehicle for its early diffusion seems to have been the Scythians, a nomadic Indo-European group who participated in trade and warfare with Semitic peoples for a millennium. The Scythians also cultivated cannabis to smoke, which they used for rituals and put in their burial tombs (Artamanov 1965), and brought it to Iran and Anatolia.

The Scythians likely carried it into southeast Russia and Ukraine, which they occupied for centuries. Aryan merchants, warriors, and traders introduced cannabis into Eastern Europe perhaps as early as 3000 BC (Clarke and Merlin 2013). Neolithic sites with burned cannabis seeds have been discovered in places ranging from Finland to Bulgaria. To this day, a traditional dish made in rural Poland and Lithuania is *semieniatka*, a soup made of hemp seeds (Benet 1975). In the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC, in the first Western mention of the plant, Herodotus

famously noted in *The Histories* that in Macedonia “The Scythians howl with joy for the vapour bath” (quoted in Benet 1975, 40), referring to the practice of shamanic chanting following the heating of cannabis seeds on stones and inhaling the fumes under small tents as part of purification ceremonies. He also noted the Thracians, closely related to the Scythians, introduced the plant into Dacia, where it was popular among a shamanic cult, the Kapnobatai (“Those Who Walk in the Clouds”). William Emboden (1990, 84) notes that “Their shamans, known as *Kapnobatai*, used hemp smoke to induce visions and oracular trances.” Nonetheless, until the 20<sup>th</sup> century there is a paucity of European written references to cannabis’s psychoactive properties, perhaps due to the popularity of beer and wine (Mikuriya 1969).

From the Slavic world, it diffused into Germany via migrating Teutonic tribes, notably the Allamanic peoples of the Rhein and Main rivers. It was introduced into Britain on the heels of the Anglo-Saxon invasions of the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD; hemp was grown widely during the late Saxon and Norman periods, and cannabis seeds have been found in medieval York, Norwich, Gloucester, Norfolk, and Scotland (Edwards and Whittington 1990). Cannabis seeds have also been found in the remains of Viking ships dating to the mid-9<sup>th</sup> century (Godwin 1967), and the famed German nun and musician Hildegard von Bingen (1098–1179) wrote of it that “Whoever has an empty brain and head pains, the head pains will be reduced” (quoted in Green 2002, 78). In northern France, hemp was cultivated as an alternative to flax; the Merovingian queen Arnegunde was buried with it around 570 AD. By the late-medieval era, hemp guilds were established in many cities, particularly early centers of mercantilism in northern Italy. Psychotropic cannabis, however, came under religious prohibitions: in 1484 Pope Innocent VIII issued a papal fiat linking it to witchcraft (Booth 2003). Nonetheless, some physicians, such as the Portuguese Garcia da Orta (1501–1568), continued to recommend it for a variety of ills.

Semitic peoples in the Middle East who acquired cannabis from Aryan cultures include the Assyrians, Egyptians, and Hebrews, who burned it as incense as early as 1000 BC. Hemp was used for robes of priests in Solomon’s temple and as a material for the construction of thrones. Psychoactive cannabis is mentioned in the Talmud, and the ancient Jews may have used hashish (Clarke and Merlin 2013). In Egypt, the origins of cannabis use are unclear; cannabis pollen was recovered from the tomb of Ramses II, who governed for sixty-seven years during the 19<sup>th</sup> dynasty, and several mummies contain trace cannabinoids. Cannabis oil was likely used throughout the Middle East for centuries before and after the birth of Christ (Benet 1975; Bennett and others 1995). In Zoroastrian Persia, widespread ritual use was made of a plant called *haoma*, which may or may not have been cannabis (Mechoulam 1986). Mircea Eliade (1951/2004), the prominent historian of religion, suggests that Zoroaster advocated hemp oil as a bridge between the physical and metaphysical worlds. One of the few surviving Zoroastrian texts, the *Vendidad*, tells of “mortals trans-

ported in soul to the heavens, where, upon drinking from a cup of bhanga, they had the highest mysteries revealed to them.”

Cannabis diffused into the Greco-Roman world either from the Middle East or from Eastern Europe, or both (Abel 1980). In classical Greece, cannabis was used both as a source of fiber and for its psychoactive properties (Butrica 2006; Hillman 2008). The physician Dioscorides prescribed it for toothaches and earaches, remedies that persisted through the medieval era. Athenaeus (170–230 AD) notes that the tyrant of Syracuse obtained hemp from the Rhone River valley in order to manufacture rope (Stefanis and others 1975). The Roman writer Lucilius mentions it in 100 BC as a major source of sails and canvas, and cannabis seeds have been found in the ruins of Pompeii. The primary source region of Roman hemp was Babylon. The Romans also appear to have appreciated the psychological effects of hemp oil: women of the Roman elite used it to alleviate labor pains. Pliny (23–79 AD) notes that it grew in Syria, Babylon, and Persia. The Roman emperor Aurelian imposed a tax on the plant in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD (Abel 1980). The famous Greek doctor Claudius Galen (131–201 AD) noted that cannabis was widely consumed throughout the empire (Clarke and Merlin 2013) and argued that overuse caused sterility.

The cultivation and use of cannabis in the classical Arab world has been the topic of some speculation. Sufi mystics are known to have used hashish regularly, and played a key role in spreading it throughout the Middle East. Medieval Arab doctors considered it a sacred medicine (Rosenthal 1971). The 13<sup>th</sup>-century physician Ibn al-Baitar described the plant's intoxicating effects, which was grown in Lebanon's Bekaa Valley. In many Arab communities, hashish—originally the Arabic word for cannabis, but today meaning only its purified resin—was the favored form of use, perhaps due to Koranic prohibitions against alcohol. Religious prohibitions were generally less strict concerning drugs that relieved pain. The discovery of hashish was allegedly attributable to Haydar, founder of a Sufi order in the mid-12<sup>th</sup> century, who used it to enhance ecstatic religious states (Abel 1980). The primary form of consumption was eating; smoking hashish only became popular later, with the introduction of tobacco.

Hashish, circulated widely throughout the Arabic empire from the 7<sup>th</sup> to the 13<sup>th</sup> centuries. Some speculate that the *hajj* to Mecca may have provided a mechanism for its diffusion during the Umayyad caliphate. Patrick Matthews asserts that “The recreational use of hashish spread west throughout the whole Muslim world at about the time of the Mongol invasions of the thirteenth century” (1999, 81). According to the medieval Muslim botanist Ibn al-Baytar, a second wave of cannabis introduction into Egypt occurred in the mid-12<sup>th</sup> century as the result of the emigration of mystic devotees from Syria (Khalifa 1975). Despite disapproval by the elites of the Arab-Berber kingdoms, its use was tolerated among low-income strata. By the mid-13<sup>th</sup> century, however, the

governor of Cairo initiated a major crackdown on the local cultivation and use of the plant.

The term hashish became famously associated with the *ashishin*, or the Assassins (Abel 1980). According to the legend of the Old Man of the Mountains, the 11<sup>th</sup>-century ruler Hasan-i Sabah, who commanded widespread fear and loyalty among his followers from his eyrie at Alamut. Selected warriors were ostensibly given hashish to give them a taste of heaven prior to undertaking suicidal missions. Although the story was transmitted to Europe by the Crusaders, perhaps as a means of downplaying Muslim bravery (Green 2002), its veracity has never been authenticated. Nonetheless, hashish and assassins remained firmly sutured in the popular imagination for the next millennium. In the mountains of Morocco, cannabis in the form of *kif* had a long history (Mikuriya 1967; McNeill 1992). It likely diffused to the Maghreb along the North African littoral. Cannabis reached Spain in the 8<sup>th</sup> century, following the Moorish invasion. Spanish colonial policy in Morocco toward the plant was very relaxed, particularly regarding its use by soldiers. Indeed, when Francisco Franco enlisted Berber mercenaries during the Spanish Civil War, he paid them in part with *kif*. Today, Morocco stands as one of the world's largest producers of hashish (Green 2002). Hashish smoking was also widespread in the Ottoman Empire, although less so among Turks as among Arabs (Stefanis and others 1975). For example, an epic 16<sup>th</sup>-century poem, *Benk u B de*, mentions the rival temptations of wine and hashish. Istanbul at the height of the empire in the 16<sup>th</sup> century had sixty *tekés*, or hashish smoking shops. The Sufi Dervish religious sect apparently came to know the drug intimately.

Cannabis entered Eastern Africa via Egypt and Ethiopia, most likely carried by Arab merchants. It was certainly used in Ethiopia by the 13<sup>th</sup> century (Van der Merwe 1975), where it likely entered via trade routes across the Red Sea. Brian Du Toit (1975) holds that cannabis was carried by Arab traders down the coast of Eastern Africa as part of a well-developed network that Janet Abu Lughod (1989) described as one segment of the late-medieval world system. Its diffusion throughout the African continent included the central role played by Zanzibar and Arab settlements on the east African coast; indeed, for most of its African history cannabis was closely associated with migrant Muslim populations. From there, it gradually spread to Bantu speakers in the interior, and was in use in the Zambezi River valley by the time the Portuguese arrived in 1531. It likely spread to the west by Swahili-speaking traders. Known as *dagga*, psychoactive cannabis has been consumed in southern Africa for at least five centuries. The Dutch wrote of it in 1658, which they described as "a dry powder which the Hottentots eat and which makes them drunk" (du Toit 1975, 88). It formed an important trade item in exchanges between Dutch and the Khoisan and Bantu speakers in the region, and became commonly used among the Tswana, Zulu, Sotho, and Swazis, including contemporary attempts to diversify crops in Malawi (Bloomer 2009). Under British rule, indentured Indian

laborers used it widely in South Africa. David Livingstone observed cannabis smoking in the Congo in 1865, and anthropologists in the 1920s reported its use by the Efe and Twa (“pygmies”) in the Ituri rain forest. By the 1880s, the use of cannabis was so widespread in what is now Tanzania that the word for it became synonymous with “senseless person.” Cannabis was not present in West Africa prior to WW II, when it was introduced by soldiers serving in the British and French armies, and its use there was long confined to males.

#### COLONIAL CANNABIS

With the rise of the capitalist world system, cannabis circulated worldwide. It was an adept traveler. The imposition of capitalist social relations, particularly the commodification of labor power, was frequently intertwined with the drug’s long-standing use in some regions and its introduction to others.

Cannabis was introduced to Latin America not once but several times in the 16<sup>th</sup> century (Partridge 1975), thus forming an integral part of the famous Columbian Exchange (Crosby 1973). European contact with the New World introduced the practice of smoking cannabis from a pipe, which greatly elevated its popularity. As Clarke and Merlin note, “Once people began to smoke rather than eat resinous *Cannabis* or concentrated hashish, many more began to consume it for its mind-altering effects” (2013, 240).

The Portuguese seem to have learned about it via Dominican missionary João dos Santos, who noted it was cultivated widely around the Cape of Good Hope (Green 2002; Booth 2003). From Angola, slaves brought cannabis to Brazil in the 16<sup>th</sup> century as an intoxicant (although Portuguese sailors may have provided another transmission mechanism), where it was known by a variety of local names, particularly *maconha* (a word of Angolan origin) and *diamba*. Cannabis was grown in Bahia by 1549, and spread into the state of Amazonas. Used first by sugarcane workers and grown amid the sugarcane fields in the northeast, it spread to fishing villages and longshore workers, and became known as the “opium of the poor” (de Pinho 1975). The drug was more rapidly adopted by mestizos than indigenous peoples, who possessed a formidable array of hallucinogens of their own (Hutchinson 1975). In many communities, religious syncretism included African spirits and plants; cannabis became important in subcultures such as *candomblé*. When the Portuguese Royal Court moved to Rio de Janeiro in 1808 to escape the Napoleonic invasion of Iberia, cannabis became a favorite pastime of Queen Carlotta Joaquina, wife of Emperor Don João IV. However, by 1830, under pressure from religious authorities, the municipal council of Rio had prohibited use of the plant.

To break the Russian monopoly on hemp, the Spanish repeatedly introduced the crop in Colombia in 1607, 1610, 1632, and 1789 to provide rigging for the imperial fleet, but it never succeeded in competing with the native plant *cabuya*. Chile, however, did develop the capacity to export hemp to Spain starting in 1545. Colombian villages often grow cannabis as a cash crop in small

quantities, and it is exported to cities and abroad (Elejalde 1975). Formerly, its use was limited to low-socioeconomic males, but in the 1960s it gradually began to spread to other social circles; less commonly, upper-class users are labeled *marijuaneros*, a term that carries connotations of laziness (Partridge 1975). Recreational cannabis appeared in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in the Magdalena River valley, various coastal ports, and in Panama during the construction of the canal in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Workers for the United Fruit Company apparently used the herb in several Central American countries. Hemp production began in Cuba in 1793 but gave way to expanding sugar plantations. In Mexico, cannabis was introduced by the conquistador Pedro Cuadrado, who served in Cortes's army (Abel 1980). To this day, Mexican Indian communities occasionally use *la santa rosa*, i.e., cannabis, in religious ceremonies, leaving perfumed bundles on alters to be consumed by church attendees (Williams-Garcia 1975).

Cannabis played an important, if largely unacknowledged, role in the British Empire (Mills 2005). The British learned about smoking cannabis from their Indian subjects, notably Irish physician William Brooke O'Shaughnessy, who conducted a series of experiments with cannabis in the 1830s, and concluded it had no negative medicinal effects (McKenna 1992). He went on to write the definitive 19<sup>th</sup>-century account of the drug, the *Bengal Dispensatory and Companion to the Pharmacopoeia* in 1842, dispelling many earlier misgivings and having wide influence for the next half-century.

The British, however, were far less interested in the intoxicating properties of cannabis than hemp fibers, which were widely deployed in sails, paper, rope, sacks, clothing, and nets. The European demand for hemp was voracious, and the major supplier was Russia (Abel 1980); to reduce their reliance upon Russian supplies, Britain sought out other sources. As early as 1563, Queen Elizabeth decreed that landowners throughout the empire with sixty or more acres must grow hemp or face a fine. In 1606 in Nova Scotia (then Nova Francia), experimental cultivation was started by Louis Hebert, apothecary to Samuel de Champlain (Green and Miller 1975). Farmers in the Jamestown colony in Virginia were required to grow hemp; George Washington and Thomas Jefferson grew hemp on their estates, and the Constitution was written on hemp. As Congress levied steep tariffs on imported hemp after the American Revolution, the domestic supply expanded, with the major center of production located in Kentucky. Domestically produced hemp began to contract after the Civil War, when imports from Russia eroded its market share and the cotton gin lowered the price of hemp's major substitute.

The popularity of hashish in Europe arose in the aftermath of the Napoleonic invasion of Egypt in 1798, when returning soldiers brought hashish with them to France. In Paris, the Club des Hachichins included Charles Baudelaire, Gustav Flaubert, Alexandre Dumas, and Honoré de Balzac. Once the province of the well-to-do, hashish became increasingly popular among the working

class, students, and immigrants. In Greece, immigrants and sailors brought the drug back from the Middle East, and the country became a major producer well into the 1920s (Abel 1980).

James Mills's (2005) *Cannabis Britannica* explores the historical origins of the U.K.'s legislation and regulations on cannabis preparations before 1928, revealing how the production, use, and regulation of cannabis before the 20<sup>th</sup> century were intimately bound up with imperialism. Mills argues that the drive towards prohibition grew out of the politics of empire rather than scientific or rational assessment of the drug's use and effects. Cannabis was also a source of imperial income. Mindful of the vast profits yielded from the opium trade, the British, finding themselves astride the world's largest market for drugs, taxed Indian cannabis heavily. From 1793 to the 1850s, the British East India Company happily derived a steady stream of revenues from taxing cannabis, granting licenses to retailers and wholesalers and caring little about how much was consumed. Bengal became a major exporter throughout India and other parts of the Empire. In some provinces, distributors were required to store their crop in government-owned warehouses. When local supplies ran low, the Company imported *charas* from Turkestan. Networks of supervisors were deployed to minimize peasant attempts to avoid taxation; many farmers grew small, dispersed plots to avoid accurate counting of their output. Colonial taxation of cannabis was increasingly associated with its criminalization. Mills argues that

In India, colonial officials began to associate cannabis with criminality at about the same time that they began to tax the trade in Indian hemp products more efficiently. Once a product becomes the subject of a state levy, and once the traditional producers and suppliers of that article act to protect their profits by evading that levy, that product and those traders become suspicious to administrators seeking to maximize the state's revenues. Cannabis assumed an air of illegality because the colonial state in India imposed duties on it and branded as criminal all who sought to preserve their income from trade in the substance by trying to dodge payment of those duties (2005, 218).

By the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, in the wake of the 1867 Sepoy Rebellion, the British sought explanations for disorder in the greater India colony, and increasingly came to settle on cannabis, which gradually acquired an aura of criminality, beginning with the requirement of licenses to grow the crop. This was no smooth process, however, and unfolded evenly over time and space, often meeting with resistance from peasant farmers and smugglers (Mills 2004). The colonial government's inquiry in 1870 concluded that sustained cannabis usage led to insanity, although the analysis was soon discredited for its improper use of statistics, largely reflecting British doctors' profound ignorance of Indian mores and behavior. In 1893, the famed Indian Hemp Drugs Commission concluded in a well-known, eight-volume work that bhang was a harmless drink with no ill biological or social effects, and the British colonial administration

decriminalized the drug. In the wake of the 1911 Revolution in China, which severely curtailed opium exports to that country, the rising price of opium led large numbers of users to switch to ganja; accordingly, consumption of imported Indian cannabis soared in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Drugs were important in several colonizers' attempts to compel local populations to produce export goods vital to the world economy. Alcohol was common labor pacifier in tropical plantations. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, British authorities brought 1.5 million "surplus" laborers from India to labor-short islands in the Caribbean. Indentured Indian workers brought ganja with them to Barbados and Jamaica after the abolition of slavery there in 1834, and it was tolerated so long as sugar production did not suffer (Angrosino 2003). Ganja's use was closely wrapped up with that of rum, so that the two drugs became intertwined in the cycle of work, debt, and poverty that characterized latifundial life on the sugar plantation, an excellent demonstration of colonial biopolitics. "The growing and trading of ganja seem to have been a thriving cottage industry on the margins of the estates, where the Indians came to be more explicit about the virtues of ganja in enhancing their ability to function as plantation laborers" (Angrosino 2003, 105). Indeed, a fully articulated "ganja complex" emerged that included local growers, paraphernalia, and a justificatory ideology that spread the crop from Indians to the islands' black residents; it was later vigorously adopted by the Rastafarians, for whom it continues to serve as a metaphor for the Burning Bush of the Bible (Rubin and Comitas 1976; Eyre 1985; Mahabir 1994). As late as 1907, company stores in Jamaica and Trinidad sold marijuana. Ultimately, however, three factors led to a sustained decline in ganja use and its replacement by rum: explosive rum production drove its price down to a level competitive with that of ganja; missionaries decried the "vile weed"; and mounting official disapproval led to antimarijuana crusades, ostensibly on the grounds that its use increased crime rates. By 1913 it was declared illegal, although Lambros Comitas notes that "The Jamaican ganja laws which date back to 1913 appear, in historical retrospect, to have been based on class and racial factors rather than on objective medical and social evidence" (1975, 131).

By the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, British diplomats sought to protect the plant from the determined efforts of countries that wanted to limit the world's drug supplies. However, under relentless pressure from the U.S. and League of Nations to curtail the drug, which had become embroiled in the international politics of opium, the British government gradually restricted production and sale of the plant. Political pressure from the temperance movement, which conflated drugs and alcohol, added fuel to the fire, although cannabis use in Britain remained rare. In 1916, it forbid the sale to members of the military; in 1925, it classified cannabis as a poison, and labels on vials carried the word in red letters; in 1928 it passed the Coca Leaves and Indian Hemp Regulations.

## REEFER MADNESS: AN AMERICAN STORY

Americans have had a long and colorful romance with illegal drugs, which typically migrated from marginalized bohemian cultures (for example, opium dens of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century) to the middle class (Morgan 1981; Jonnes 1996). In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, American cannabis use was concentrated among Mexican-Americans in the southwestern part of the country (Bonnie and Whitebread 1970). The Mexican Revolution of 1910–1911 introduced a new chapter in the historical geography of American cannabis. Waves of immigrants fleeing the violence washed across the southwestern U.S., bringing the herb with them. Many early prejudices against marijuana were thinly veiled racist fears of its smokers, often promulgated by reactionary newspapers such as those owned by the Hearst chain. Mexicans were frequently blamed for smoking marijuana, property crimes, seducing children, and engaging in murderous sprees.

The history of legal prohibitions against marijuana in the U.S. has been abundantly documented (Himmelstein 1983; Sloman 1999). The historical geography of marijuana use and its control reflecting a shifting series of localities enveloped in the growing popularization of the plant and evermore adamant attempts to control it. In 1914, El Paso initiated the first local ordinance banning the sale or possession of marijuana. The 1920s brought new rounds of users, including African-Americans and the Greenwich Village bohemian community (Polsky 1967). Sailors and Caribbean immigrants brought marijuana to coastal cities, above all New Orleans, where it became a mainstay of jazz musicians. Circuits of jazz musicians carried the drug to St. Louis, Kansas City, Chicago, and Harlem, as noted by 1930s songs such as Cab Calloway's "That Funny Reefer Man," Fats Waller's "Viper's Drag," and Benny Goodman's "Sweet Marihuana Brown." American jazz, increasingly popular in Britain, also facilitated the trans-Atlantic diffusion of the drug.

Simultaneously, the 1920s saw not only a prohibition against alcohol, but against most other drugs as well (for example, cocaine imports were prohibited in 1922). Unlike Prohibition, which restricted only the manufacture and distribution of alcohol, not its possession, marijuana laws have consistently outlawed the production, sale, possession, and consumption of the drug. American laws never effectively recognized a difference between hemp and marijuana, that is *cannabis sativa L.* and *cannabis sativa*. Indeed, one of the major forces behind making cannabis illegal was cotton-growers, who feared competition from hemp (Bonnie and Whitehead 1970; Galliher and Walker 1977; Baum 1996). In many respects, the hidden war on hemp served to legitimate the overt war on marijuana. No doubt the moral panic was conveniently fed by the potential competition that hemp offered to producers of paper, textiles, and synthetic fiber. Starting with Utah in 1915, twenty-nine states outlawed the plant by 1931.

The central figure in the war against marijuana was Harry Anslinger, first commissioner of the Federal Bureau of Narcotics (FBN) and its head for the next three decades. Anslinger repeatedly rejected clinical analyses that

concluded marijuana did not induce violent behavior or lead to the use of more addictive drugs. With a willing echo chamber of yellow journalism feeding the public one horror story after another, Anslinger successively tied marijuana use to jazz, which he despised due to the prevalence of African-American musicians, WW II (arguing that the Japanese used the plant to sap the will of American prisoners), and, later, the Cold War (where Communists took the role previously occupied by the Japanese). As Abel notes, "The more often the story of the Assassins was told, the more ludicrous it became. The image of the demented, knife-wielding, half-crazed hashish user running senseless through the streets, slashing at anyone unfortunate to cross his path, became part of the American nightmare of lawlessness" (1980, 224). The discourses surrounding the war against marijuana reveal how particular gender and ethnic categories are selectively deployed in deliberately inaccurate ways, often invoking racist imagery. The infamous movie *Reefer Madness* (1936), now a cult classic, depicted marijuana destroying the lives of adolescents, leading to murder, rape, and criminal insanity, and concluded it was more dangerous than heroin or opium. Marijuana posters typically portrayed a helpless, white female being seduced or overpowered by a Satan-like figure, often dark skinned. In 1937, Congress passed the Marijuana Tax Act, which put cannabis under the regulation of the Drug Enforcement Agency, effectively criminalizing possession throughout the country (Canada followed in 1938). Several observers conclude that the "marijuana crisis" was essentially manufactured by the FBN (Galliher and Walker 1977), an example of what Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994) label an "elite-engineered" moral panic.

During WW II, with Pacific supplies of jute, hemp, and sisal reduced, the federal government relegalized hemp, and initiated a Hemp for Victory campaign to encourage production, conveniently distinguishing it from marijuana, including films and a 4-H program to educate children. One consequence of this campaign was the inadvertent spread of "ditchweed" across much of the Midwest. Cannabis use in the Army was almost entirely confined to African-Americans; one survey indicated that 90 percent of smokers were black (Charen and Perelman 1946). Following the war, however, antihemp programs initiated by the DEA required permits to grow the plant, and in 1948 it was criminalized again. Users in the 1950s, other than traditional Latino or African-American minorities, include artists and writers of the "Beat Generation," who often experimented with peyote, mescaline, or LSD as well. In 1951, Congress passed the Boggs Act, which specified the same penalties for marijuana possession as for heroin (Schlosser 2003).

The 1960s mark a significant moment in the contentious history of marijuana use, including widespread growth in usage as the drug spread from low-income minority populations to include significant numbers of white, middle class, college-educated youth (Abelson and others 1977). Accounts of the drug's growth in popularity typically point to the radicalization of baby boom hippies,

the generally liberalized political climate wrought by the civil rights, women's rights, anti-Vietnam War, and environmental movements, and the inspirational role played by countercultural icons such as Timothy Leary. For many users, the drug represented a safe, largely symbolic means to reject middle class alienation.

A growing middle-class constituency, as opposed to the earlier generations of politically marginalized minorities, worked to reduce legal penalties for drug use, what Jerome Himmelstein (1983) calls the "embourgeoisement hypothesis." Joseph Gusfield pointed out that debates over marijuana laws symbolized the struggles over "the authority of adult culture and its power over youth" during an historical period "when adult public values were under attack in wide areas, including sex, work, goals, public decorum, and dress" (1981, 184). The 1970s represent a unique, if brief and tenuous, window of time in the historical evolution of American marijuana policy (DiChiara and Galliher 1994). In 1972, President Nixon appointed the National Commission on Marijuana and Drug Abuse, which soon concluded that the drug should be decriminalized; evidence notwithstanding, he immediately rejected their findings. Nixon's departure from office, however, was followed by a steady movement toward legalization. Albert DiChiara and John Galliher note that "Selective enforcement of marijuana laws, nominal sentences for large-scale dealers, the arrest of affluent users, and the fears of parents of youthful marijuana users all served to focus attention for a time on the legal controls rather than the drug itself" (1994, 72). Eleven states essentially decriminalized small amounts of the drug (Oregon in 1973; Alaska, Maine, California, Colorado, and Ohio in 1975; Minnesota in 1976; Mississippi, New York and North Carolina in 1977; and Nebraska in 1978). Legalization was supported by the American Bar Association, the American Medical Association, the National Council of Churches, and President Jimmy Carter (Schlosser 2003).

During this period, most marijuana smoked in the U.S. was imported, primarily from Mexico and Colombia, and to a lesser extent, Canada and Jamaica (Schlosser 2003, 35). In 1969, the federal government launched Operation Intercept along the border with Mexico, ostensibly to reduce the inflow of drugs but in practice as part of a broader publicity effort to ensure the public that it was active, if not efficient (Craig 1980). In 1975, the U.S. began large-scale spraying of the herbicide paraquat over Mexican marijuana fields, a tactic that encouraged smugglers to switch to lower-bulk, higher-value commodities such as cocaine. Ironically, as the drug's supply declined and prices rose, a domestic industry arose in response, including climate-controlled interior "gardens" hidden in basements and safe houses, which recoup their fixed costs by producing plants with much higher THC content than that grown in other countries. Thus, one unintended consequence of the war against marijuana was to drive growers indoors. To avoid arrest at home, many growers turn to rented storage units or apartments equipped with timing devices and automatic controls.

In the 1980s, the decriminalization movement abruptly ended in the face of a stridently moralistic conservative onslaught fueled by the New Right (Himmelstein 1983; Bachman and others 1988; Baum 1996; Marez 2004). As Dominic Corva (2008) notes, the war on drugs amounted to an attempt to govern unruly populations in new ways, militarizing efforts to control illicit substances. In 1979, the Drug Enforcement Agency initiated the Cannabis Eradication/Suppression Program, focusing on California and Hawaii. In 1982, President Reagan launched a war on drugs, including the White House Drug Abuse Policy Office, with its “drug czar.” Courts were encouraged to adopt mechanistic sentencing formulas, simplistic “zero tolerance” legislation that led to swollen jails. Politically conservative states enforced stiff marijuana laws to promote a public image of respectability as part of “get tough on crime” campaigns (Galliher and Cross 1982).

Today, the federal government still classifies marijuana as a Schedule I controlled substance, along with heroin and LSD, indicating it has high potential for abuse and addiction, no accepted medical uses, and no safe level of use. Twenty states have mandatory “smoke a joint, lose your license” statutes. The vast majority of large corporations have mandatory drug tests as a condition of employment. Drug offenses differ from most crimes in that they are simultaneously subject to federal, state, and local controls, and the accused may be tried twice for the same crime (Schlosser 2003, 54). Despite these attempts to restrict its use, marijuana is by far the most widely used illegal drug in the United States, consumed regularly by 14.8 million people or roughly 6 percent of the population (Department of Health and Human Services 2008). The number of Americans who grow marijuana has been estimated to lie between one and three million, of whom 100,000 to 200,000 are commercial growers (Schlosser 2003, 38). More than 700,000 people are arrested annually for marijuana possession (Schlosser 2003). Penalties vary widely among states, ranging from small fines to years in jail. Those convicted of a marijuana felony can be prohibited from receiving welfare payments or food stamps, penalties that do not apply to convicted murderers or rapists. In a country with one of the highest incarceration rates in the world, violent criminals are sometimes released to make room for nonviolent marijuana offenders. Not surprisingly, those arrested tend disproportionately to be poor or working class and people of color. Cannabis is a remarkably benign drug: there has never been a documented case of anyone ever dying from a marijuana overdose (Iverson 2000; Green 2002). In contrast, tobacco and alcohol kill 435,000 and 200,000 Americans annually, respectively. The question as to why this plant remains criminalized despite substantial scientific evidence that it is no more harmful than alcohol or tobacco remains highly pertinent. As Eric Schlosser points out, “A society that can punish a marijuana offender more severely than a murderer is caught in the grip of a deep psychosis” (2003, 74).

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, public opinion and policy toward marijuana in the U.S. have changed yet again. A sea change of opinion among the young, similar to

the growth of atheists and widespread support for gay marriage, has led the majority of Americans to support legalization, according to the Pew Charitable Trust (2013). Twenty-four states have decriminalized possession of one ounce or less, and in 2012 Colorado and Washington State legalized the drug for recreational use. The “medical marijuana” movement, often cloaking prescriptions in thinly disguised excuses, has played a key role in legalizing it in 23 states and the District of Columbia. Marijuana has found utility in the treatment of glaucoma and in relieving the nausea resulting from chemotherapy in cancer patients. Ironically, it is often conservative Republicans with libertarian leanings, such as former New Mexico governor Gary Johnson, who have called for marijuana liberalization. As the historical record of this drug makes clear, the open, legal use of marijuana is less a matter of moral equivalency than a return to the historical norm.

#### CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

What can be gleaned from this historical overview? Cannabis use, including hemp and its psychoactive cousin, has a long and often colorful history that reflects the contingent conjunction of numerous forces, including religion, migration, colonialism, and shifting moral environments. From China to India, the Middle East to Africa, Latin America to North America, various strains of cannabis have been widely intertwined with constellations of power, at times held to be sacred and at others denounced as immoral. While it has been accepted and tolerated more often than not, cannabis has also been repeatedly demonized in different historical contexts; attempts to restrict its usage have invariably reflected political and moral agendas rather than established science. For the last four decades, the antidrug crusade has been a central feature of American political and social life, leading to criminal penalties for countless users. The “war on cannabis” reveals the arbitrary nature of cultural and political taboos and the cultural construction of a drug war that disproportionately penalizes ethnic minorities. Nonetheless, the recent movement to relegitimize its use has steadily gained ground.

Outside of the U.S., the legalization of cannabis has made significant progress. Spain, Italy, Portugal, Switzerland, the Netherlands, and Belgium have all decriminalized marijuana possession. In 1976, the Dutch government initiated a gradual liberalization of “soft” drugs, which resulted in catapulting Amsterdam to the epicenter of the global cannabis culture, as manifested in its famous coffee shops and the annual Cannabis Cup world championship for highest-quality marijuana. Given the Dutch government’s liberal, paternalistic attitude, in which marijuana sale and usage are technically punishable but no longer criminal offenses, rates of drug-related arrests and imprisonment in the Netherlands are among the world’s lowest. A.C.M. Jansen (1991), who spent more than 400 hours exploring the world of Dutch coffee houses that sell soft drugs such as marijuana and hashish, notes that the Dutch strategy successfully

segregated marijuana consumption from that of hard drugs like cocaine and heroin. In 2001, Canada legalized the use, but not the sale, of marijuana for medicinal purposes. In 2002, Britain downgraded cannabis to a Class III drug, eliminating imprisonment as a penalty for possession. In 2007, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2007) estimated that 160 million people, or one out of every forty-three persons on earth, smoke cannabis for psychoactive purposes.

Viewed in the long-term context of the last millennium, debates over cannabis use today all too often ignore how it has been enveloped in multiple cultural political economies that have shaped its diffusion for centuries. From this vantage point, there is not one, single meaning to cannabis, but a multiplicity of meanings that arise from, and contribute to, local relations of power and ideology.

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