

# **GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT STUDIES**

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## **GANJA AND GLOBALIZATION: A CARIBBEAN CASE STUDY\***

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### **ABSTRACT**

The opposition by an informal group of marijuana growers and their supporters to annual American-sponsored weed eradication operations in St. Vincent and the Grenadines raises a several interconnected questions about the relation between cannabis, class, and globalization in this small Eastern Caribbean country. What do elite Vincentians have to say about marijuana? How credible are their views from the perspective of Western scientific research? How do the views of the Vincentian intelligentsia correspond to the views of ordinary citizens, on the one hand, and to the beliefs and values of those who produce, distribute, and consume ganja, on the other? in this small country? What are the theoretical and practical implications of Caribbean attitudes towards and actions for and against illegal drugs for America's war on drugs? What do these various perspectives tell us about race, class, and culture? Answering these questions makes marijuana a trope for multidisciplinary global development studies: (1) it is a combined natural substance and socio-cultural construct that has had shifting, contradictory, and elusive uses and meanings for thousands of years; (2) it simultaneously bridges and isolates the private, public, and statist spheres of everyday reality; (3) it is an archetype of transnationalism; (4) it has been em-

ployed in all places and at all times to legitimize the stigmatization, harassment, and persecution of individuals and groups based on their race, class, ethnicity, ideology, or lifestyle; (5) it continues to be vigorously contested at the highest and lowest levels of global power and discourse; (6) it is an exemplar of the pervasive links and blurred boundaries between science, politics, and morality; and (7) it is an ideal springboard from esoteric scholasticism to public policy analysis.

## **GANJA AND GLOBALIZATION: A CARIBBEAN CASE STUDY**

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### **1. Introduction**

"Stay away, pot farmers tell Clinton," read the headline to a recent news item in the Canadian daily, the *National Post* (Graham, 1998, p. A13). The story concerned opposition by a newly formed group called the "Committee of Concerned Citizens and Marijuana Growers" to "Operation Weedeater," the latest and largest in a series of annual United States Drug Enforcement Agency (USDEA) eradication efforts in the dense hilly interior on the mainland of the small Eastern Caribbean country of St. Vincent and the Grenadines (hereafter referred to by its local acronym SVG). Claiming a membership of eight hundred, the Committee's opposition consisted of meeting with and writing to government officials, holding public demonstrations, and sending an inflammatory letter to President Bill Clinton questioning his country's narco-imperialism: "We strongly detest your interference<sup>1</sup> in our internal affairs; you have always stood against the interests of developing nations like ours" (Graham, 1998, p. A13).

The news item also reported an apparent contradiction between the goals of the US-led effort and the sentiment of many Vincentians:

Behind the audacity of the Marijuana Farmers' letter is a serious issue. Growing marijuana is illegal in St. Vincent but there is widespread sympathy for growers because of the island's poverty and endemic unemployment, now thought to be as high as 40 percent. Some parts of society tolerate the growing of marijuana, acknowledged Sinclair Prince, the government's chief information officer. People understand the economic situation and why others are involved in it (Graham, 1998, p. A13; emphasis added).

Like many media discussions of illegal drugs, the news item did not question the nature or depth of the alleged "widespread sympathy" towards marijuana, SVG's major export crop since the mid-1980s (Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, 1995).<sup>2</sup> Nor did it describe which "parts of society" and which "people" "understand" the

plight of "others" or whether "widespread sympathy" also included toleration for smoking weed.

The meaning and credibility of media-mediated public opinion concerned me as I tried to understand the local, national, and transnational implications of the competing class-based beliefs, values, and practices surrounding marijuana in SVG. Though its role in America's global "war on drugs"<sup>3</sup> has rarely if ever been described by a First World press, there has always been much public and private discussion of ganja, as *Cannabis sativa* is commonly called in the region, among people from all walks of life in this mainly rural peasant society. Much of this discussion concerned the concomitants of its use and interdiction: the "parts of society" involved with marijuana; the causes and consequences of smoking weed; United States pressure for and involvement in national eradication efforts (Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, 1994, 1995, 1996, 1997); and the thousands of police raids, marijuana seizures, lengthy imprisonments, and costly fines that accompany growing, peddling, and smoking cannabis. Over the past 25 years, for example, hundreds of poor Vincentians, unable to pay the \$500 fine, have spent a year in SVG's dungeon-like prison for the possession of small, personal use portions of marijuana.

These folk interests make marijuana a trope for multi-disciplinary global development studies: it is a combined natural substance and socio-cultural construct that has had shifting, contradictory, and elusive uses and meanings for thousands of years. It simultaneously bridges and isolates the private, public, and statist spheres of everyday reality and it is an archetype of transnationalism. It has been employed in all places and always to legitimize the stigmatization, harassment, and persecution of individuals and groups based on their race, class, ethnicity, ideology, or lifestyle and it continues to be vigorously contested at the highest and lowest levels of global power and discourse. It is an exemplar of the pervasive links and blurred boundaries between science, politics, and morality, and it is an ideal springboard from esoteric scholasticism to public policy analysis (see Abel, 1980; Dreher, 1982; Elwood, 1994; Grinspoon, 1977; Himmelstein, 1983; Negrette, 1990; Rubenstein, 1995; Rubin, 1975a).

Despite its multidimensionality, trying to understand marijuana in SVG is more manageable than trying to do so elsewhere because its widespread use in SVG goes back only to the early 1970s. What is the origin of contemporary ganja use in the country? What have influential Vincentians said about the substance and its devotees? How do the views of the Vincentian intelligentsia correspond to the views of the non-ganja-using public? How do all these views compare to the beliefs and values of those who produce, distribute, and consume ganja? What

does involvement with marijuana say about race, class, and culture in this small country? What are the public policy implications of class-based Caribbean attitudes towards and actions for and against illegal drugs for American narco-imperialism?

## **2. Where Cannabis is King**

A former British colony (1763-1979), SVG is composed of the mainland (St. Vincent Island; 344 square kilometers) which contains over 90 percent of the country's 115,000 people and the 44 square kilometers Grenadines,<sup>4</sup> a chain of small islands stretching from the main island to neighboring Grenada to the South. Most Vincentians are the descendants of thousands of African slaves forcibly transported to the colony between the early eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries to labor on the country's sugar plantations (Rubenstein, 1987). Though sugarcane is no longer grown, SVG is still economically dependent on Britain for the sale of all its bananas, the country's chief (legal) export crop.

SVG has long been considered one of the poorest countries with one of the highest unemployment rates in the Caribbean archipelago (Potter, 1992; Rubenstein, 1987). Together with its vast and rugged forested interior, inadequately patrolled coastal waters and proximity to marijuana hungry neighbors like Barbados, Grenada, St. Lucia and Martinique, this destitution and underdevelopment have helped propel SVG to the second highest Caribbean marijuana producer after Jamaica (Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, 1995), a country where ganja has been produced and consumed for nearly 150 years (Rubin and Comitas, 1975). This high level of production, together with the United States DEA allegations of "narcotics related corruption in senior levels of government" (Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, 1995), U.S. DEA funds to train and equip SVG's drug enforcement unit and threats of economic and other sanctions have been used to pressure the SVG government to increase its interdiction efforts and accede to large-scale annual American-sponsored eradication operations.<sup>5</sup>

## **3. Marijuana in the Media<sup>6</sup>**

In the absence of a comprehensive national study of beliefs about and attitudes towards marijuana and its devotees, its depiction in *The Vincentian*, the oldest weekly newspaper (circulation 4,500) in the country, provides a good socio-cultural window on the substance. The print material corroborates anecdotal evidence that the first contempo-

rary ganja smokers were overseas visitors, including Peace Corps volunteers and middle class and elite males, many of whom learned about weed while working or studying overseas (see Rubenstein, 1987, 1995, 1998). Like their First World counterparts, most of these men gave up their use of marijuana when they entered their late twenties or when police crackdowns accelerated during the late 1970s. The first commercial marijuana growers were also members of the rural planter class who reverted to legal crops after several police crackdowns.

Taking the lead from Carter's (1980, pp. 31-40, Table 10; cf. Himmelstein, 1983) anthropological study of marijuana in Costa Rica, I perused and classified all items dealing with drugs (marijuana, alcohol, and cocaine, but not tobacco) in *The Vincentian* from 1966 through 1992. Paralleling its treatment in Costa Rica, all but five of the 367 news reports, editorials, and letters to the editor dealing directly or indirectly with marijuana were negative in tone, substance, or intent (Table 1). Readers of *The Vincentian* have been supplied with a steady, near homophonic, stream of negative information about ganja: reports of major eradication efforts in the remote interior; news of big seizures by customs personnel; excerpts from anti-drug speeches by health care and government officials synopses of First World medical research alleging adverse effects of marijuana use; reports of the large number of "marijuana addicts"<sup>7</sup> admitted to the mental hospital; summaries of drug seminars held in the region; and highlights from local "drug abuse"<sup>8</sup> rallies. This varied and extensive anti-marijuana coverage—more than one item per month for the entire twenty-six-year period, 1966-1992, and nearly one weekly issue between 1987-1992 alone—served to create, confirm, and reinforce public opinion against ganja (cf. Carter, 1980, p. 37).

The fixation on the actual or assumed deleterious features of cannabis was itself not surprising, given that the local media receives most of its international material from like-minded First World news services (Elwood, 1994) where reports about illegal drugs are nearly always negative in tone or content.<sup>9</sup> Nor was the increased attention paid to marijuana during the late 1980s and early 1990s difficult to account for because this simply paralleled the increased recognition of and reaction to an expansion in local consumption and export production. What was curious, given extant First World scientific accounts of and changing public attitudes towards marijuana, was how outdated, superficial, vituperative, and dogmatic the newspaper and other accounts were.<sup>10</sup>

For example, in his August 16, 1985 piece, influential weekly columnist, political scientist and lawyer, Dr. Kenneth John, argued that:

... [I]t does seem to me that the drug [marijuana] has led to many blighted lives, a waste in human resources and a spiralling growth in crime. A casual walk around town and a peep into the prison and mental hospital will produce the evidence. Clearly, there is an upsurge in drug related crime if only because the stakes are so high.

John's self-assured but undocumented views about the relation between ganja and crime paralleled the official police position articulated by the Commissioner of Police who argued that, "The relationship between drugs and crime is clear.... Drug abuse breeds both serious crimes and gangland revenge" (*The Vincentian*, April 21, 1989).

Employing frightening metaphoric language and retributive theological rhetoric, even the country's prime minister, Sir James F. Mitchell, one of the region's longest serving leaders, conflated three dominant discourses (science, religion, and politics) to argue that the "drug problem"—which at the time consisted almost exclusively of the "marijuana problem"—"...is another cancer that is eating into our human society very rapidly," (that it) is "more serious than AIDS" and that:

[H]e with drugs has a lot of problems. He laughs when he should be solemn, he does everything the wrong way, because while he is still a human being in terms of the soul, put into him by God, the body is no longer his own. He dies a slow and painful death (*The Vincentian*, September 2, 1988).

Together with a loosely organized but active anti-marijuana campaign,<sup>11</sup> the views of Mitchell (a reputed atheist) and other political and intellectual demagogues helped form, affirm, and strengthen the position of the ordinary literate Vincentians who are the paper's main readers. Scores of letters to the editor referred to "hundreds of failures," "hideous drug addictions," "frustration, depression and a sense of hopelessness among users," and of people being "mentally destroyed" or "enslaved by their addiction to marijuana." It has been claimed that marijuana use "... inevitably destroys, maims, and permanently distorts the intellect, the bodies and the morality of its participants"; that "The amount of vagrants on our streets today (because of marijuana addiction) are numberless"; that "A large number of gruesome crimes committed are drug linked in some way"; that "The crime rate is on the increase, 93 percent of which is drug related"; and that "...the illicit use of drugs is causing our homes, society, states, nations, and the world on the whole to crumble."

Several letters also challenged the authenticity, ideology, work ethic, and honesty of Vincentian Rastafarians,<sup>12</sup> cannabis' most visible supporters:

The Rasta movement in St. Vincent is a fad or an immitationist [sic] cell with no philosophy, no creed, no organization and worst of all, no ambition. It seems as if the local movement is the product of a skillfully planned marketing arrangement for the sale of marijuana.... Their excuse for not making any contribution to society is phrased in the easy-to-learn expression, "Jah [God] say work is slavery."<sup>13</sup> Yet when they meet people who produce and get money they demand, "Forward a dollar, nuh man?" They do not cultivate but they reap saying: "Jah say all fruits belong to the children of Jah" (*The Vincentian*, May 1, 1979).

However, it would be wrong to claim that all non-ganja-using Vincentians are unequivocally opposed to all aspects of involvement with marijuana.<sup>14</sup> Attitudes towards growing and selling weed are especially ambiguous. Informal discussions with Vincentians from all occupations suggest that many people who reject marijuana consumption on medical or moral grounds support its production on agrarian or economic grounds. "Grow it but don't smoke it" is how one middle-class man recently expressed this sentiment, because they recognize that planting weed has reduced indigence and un(der)employment in several rural areas, it has stimulated commerce at the national level, and it has brought in much needed foreign currency. Conventional anti-marijuana wisdom was also once questioned by the publisher of *The Vincentian*, Edgerton Richards, who criticized the early American sponsored eradication efforts in the Northwestern part of the mainland that resulted in the destruction of millions of ganja plants:

A helicopter is seen day and night in the Leeward area intimidating old and young who are trying to make a living in the mountains of their area.... [W]hat must these youngsters do when this Government does not even provide road work for the unemployed? In the meanwhile, the Grenadines which is the main transshipment point for drugs is feeding this young Nation with harder drugs [i.e., cocaine] than the mild herbal plant grown here (*The Vincentian*, November 8, 1991).

Richards was a vocal opponent of the ruling regime, and political rather than economic considerations governed his editorial. Politics also governed the stinging reply from Marcus De Freitas, a former gov-



ernment Minister of Agriculture, who even used scriptural injunction to heap scorn on Richards:

The Good Book makes it clear that there is no room for lukewarm Christians and indeed, this analogy holds good regarding the drug menace that is afflicting societies everywhere.... I am really surprised and disturbed by what is written in the weekend papers where supposedly responsible people set out to make light of the efforts of the government and police at eradicating the marijuana plantations in this country.... [W]hen police and government are taking positive steps in the area of drug interdiction, we as citizens have the moral duty to support them (*The Vincentian*, November 22, 1991).

This attack had its intended effect, for Richards immediately remembered his "moral duty" by noting that, "I am all for helicopter patrols as I am, as everyone knows, antidrug" (*The Vincentian*, November 22, 1991).

#### 4. The Cannabis Contra-Culture

Such views are strongly, albeit quietly, contested by the ganja man, as anyone customary involved with growing, selling, or smoking marijuana is called.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, the lifestyle and world view of the ganja man are so contrary to the mainstream or "high culture" position of other Vincentians, often even including other family members, that they deserve to be called a ganja contra-culture.<sup>16</sup> Influenced by the reggae lyrics of Bob Marley and other Jamaican artists and the beliefs of SVG's small quasi-traditional religious Rastafarian population, the attitudes towards cannabis use held by the ganja man could hardly differ more from the mainstream position of "Others":

On deviance:

Marijuana is a recreation to me. I will smoke my ganja and I will do anything as normal. And who is there to judge let them judge me and they will see. The majority them whose fighting it never even smoked to see, 'Well, let me see how it feels' and them make a true observation.<sup>17</sup>

On addiction:

I have been smoking for a while (sixteen years) and I have never got hook on the habit. I could do without it.

**On criminality:**

It's not a habit where you have to kill a man or you have to break (into) somebody's house to get money to buy it. Herb (ganja) is not leading you into other habits so as to break people house to get money to buy it, or to break a bank or something.

**On conflict:**

It (ganja) teach you about how to live between your neighbor. Sometimes your neighbor might be come and just harassing you. I just go and burn a spliff (marijuana cigarillo) on she. And while she cursing, me just meditate.

**On industriousness:**

When I really burn (smoke) it, I work more than if I natural. Because it coming like a spirit it giving me. So every time I burn, it come like the bone them getting loosening up. Then the body mean it must just move.

**On healing:**

Ganja is a good medicine. Is the healing of the nation. That is a herb that we should take care of.

**On cognition:**

It make I think plenty wise. The first time I burn weed, it start to make I man think plenty thing about life. Think plenty, real meditation.

**On insanity:**

If you check the majority of people in the mental hospital, this madness have to come from them roots. It were there from creation.

**On sacredness:**

Some man say herb a drugs, but I man not go say herb a drugs. Cocaine is a drugs, strong rum is a drugs. No one can make a herb seed. A Jah give us senses to use everything and make it to a

use. Because if it wasn't good, he wouldn't give men wisdom to use it.

This is not to say that there is no ideological or behavioral diversity among those committed to ganja.<sup>18</sup> A couple of smokers claimed that others consumed too much weed. "You call them (those who smoke three or four spliffs a day) addicts. Them can't break off"—and one even admitted chronic dependence on the substance:

If I working, my whole salary almost going into herb because I can't live without my herb. I can't live without it. The first time I wake up in the morning, I need my medicine, I must take a drugs. When I done bathe in the morning, I must have my drugs. Anyhow it come, just give me it. Sun hot, rain come, give me my herb.<sup>19</sup>

## 5. Marijuana and (Psuedo) Science

Just as the occasional ganja man was out of step with his peers, there was the odd iconoclastic voices in *The Vincentian*, though these were quickly silenced as coming from people who were socially irresponsible, hedonistic, immoral, Godless, themselves addicted to drugs, or living off the drug trade (Rubenstein, 1995). When, for example, Basil "Bung" Cato wrote an op-ed piece (July 23, 1993) praising marijuana while condemning alcohol and tobacco, this was immediately followed by a two-part rejoinder— (July 30 and August 6, 1993—titled "The Big Lie About Marijuana" by Dr. Marcus Greaves, a local general practitioner. Like others before him, Greaves, who called marijuana the "Death Drug," supported his position with supernatural injunction:

[T]he fallen ones are all there to glorify D.D.D. (DISEASE, DEATH AND DESTRUCTION) in the maze of Drug, Rock, and Sensuality.... Fooled by the effects of drugs he [the user] is unable to judge either the extent or consequences of his acts so he blames someone else, even God. Like all solitary pleasures he becomes useless to himself, man and society and Christ must vacate his temple (emphasis added).

Dr. Greaves, like other Western-educated elite Vincentians, reveals a neo-puritanical antipathy to the quest for the "solitary" psychoactive "pleasures" of drugs like cannabis; chemical substances that alter everyday sensory perception, feeling, consciousness, even belief regardless of whether their consumption carries medical or other risks.

Morally opposed to the self-indulgence of marijuana use and to the pursuit of sensual joy as the sole justification for toking up, they are reacting against getting high for its own sake," "... pleasure for the sake of pleasure, rather than a reward worked for or earned" (Grinspoon, 1977, pp. 334) and the elementary fact that smoking grass makes most people feel good.

Dr. Greaves was not the only physician to conflate or replace medical science with Christian moral precepts to discredit marijuana and its users. Eleven years earlier, Dr. Cecil Cyrus, a general surgeon and the most respected member of the Vincentian medical establishment, published a series of four anti-marijuana articles in *The Vincentian*. This was followed by a specially commissioned Lions Club booklet (Cyrus, 1986) that is still in circulation. Together with the newspaper material presented by Greaves and several reports alleging a high rate of marijuana-induced mental illness among patients in the country's mental health facility,<sup>20</sup> this constitutes the "scientific" Western foundation—the logo centric, transcendental totalizing meta-narrative—of mainstream Vincentian aversion to marijuana use.

Though ideologically respectable and politically powerful at the national level, this foundation was set in Eurocentric positivist and pseudo-positivist quicksand. My review of the literature, including the studies cited by Dr. Cyrus, revealed that most of the effects of marijuana smoking he described were highly speculative or based on research results that either had been debunked, could not be replicated, or had been questioned on methodological or other grounds years before (see Glantz, 1984; Grinspoon, 1977; Relman et al., 1982).<sup>21</sup>

Dr. Greaves' evidence of the harm caused by marijuana was even more quixotic, based as it was on a (deliberate?) misinterpretation of antiquated, discounted, or otherwise questionable evidence by discredited and partisan anti-marijuana researchers. Those post-modern scholars who argue that there is little or no distinction, epistemological or otherwise, between "real science" and, say, alchemy may be pleased to learn that the battle over ganja in the public domain in SVG has been fought in the trenches of the most outlandish First World amateur and "scientific" positions about ganja. Two examples would have to suffice.

While Basil "Bung" Cato relies on the word of marijuana lay champion, Jack Herer (1991), Dr. Greaves quotes a pharmacologically specious assertion made by marijuana's most vociferous non-professional opponent, children's writer, Peggy Mann, that "There is not a single paper on the crude drug marijuana which gives it a clean bill of health, not a paper to support it as an innocent drug." In fact, "No drug, taken in small enough quantities, is inevitably toxic...." (Petersen, 1984, p. 1) and "We know that in large enough doses, all agents, in-

cluding therapeutic agents and water, can be toxic" (Lemberger, 1973, p. 1153). Conversely, the inability to give marijuana a "clean bill of health" does not necessarily mean that it is a "dangerous" drug.

Greaves, like Dr. Cyrus (1986, p. 3) before him, also garbles outdated material from Dr. Gabriel Nahas (1973, 1979), marijuana's most extreme and reviled scientific opponent, a man whose research has been termed "frank propaganda" (Ungerleider, 1975, p. 199), "meretricious trash" (Zinberg, 1973, p. 345), "genuinely dishonest" (Zinberg, 1976a, p. 670), and "psychopharmacologic McCarthyism" (Grinspoon, 1973). Whereas Nahas (1979, pp. 145\_146) states that, "THC (tetrahydrocannabinol), the major psychoactive substance in cannabis, tends to accumulate in the brain, sex glands, and other fatty tissues of the body in much the same manner as DDT (a highly toxic substance) is stored," he also admits that all this THC is gradually excreted within about a seven-day period. Greaves, on the other hand, seemingly unaware that "No lethal dose of marijuana has been established for any species" (Kleiman, 1989, p. 12), reformulates this to read that:

The THC ... accumulates in the brain, the testes, the ovaries and the fatty tissues producing a gradual yet cumulative poisoning.... This is really 'Internal Super Pollution' that clogs and poisons the system just like pesticides [i.e., DDT]. This drug does not leave the body even after 30 days of its last use.

## 6. Cannabis and Class

My review of the First World marijuana literature also showed a close correspondence between ethno science and "real science," between the Afrocentric emic position of the ganja man and the etic findings of Eurocentric science.<sup>22</sup> This is easy to explain. The experience of seasoned ganja users, many of whom have consumed at least a fat spliff a day for some 20 years, is that smoking marijuana does not lead to compulsive use,<sup>23</sup> insanity, sloth, apathy, violence, criminality, or (obvious) physical damage.

Given the nature of its color/class hierarchy (Rubenstein, 1987) and the history of the treatment of cannabis and its users in other times and places (Abel, 1980; Carter et al., 1980; Dreher, 1982; Elwood, 1994; Grinspoon, 1977; Himmelstein, 1983; Rubin and Comitas, 1975), accounting for the reinterpretation or distortion of First World marijuana research by intolerant and self-righteous local experts is just as easy. Though cannabis is now king of crops in SVG, it is a cultigen linked—in both belief and practice—to the most ignoble of Vincentians: young,

poor, Black men. Each of these labels implies hierarchy and moral evaluation. First, as in many societies, there is a degree of intergenerational estrangement in SVG where the young, especially teenaged and young adult males, are sweepingly regarded as rebellious, insolent, idle, and profligate. Second, as in many class-stratified capitalist societies, profligacy, indolence, and other individual character flaws are often invoked as explanations of indigence. Third, males are generally viewed as less responsible, moral, trustworthy, hardworking, and scrupulous than females. Fourth, as in most other Caribbean countries, race and skin color continue to be employed as denotations of rank and social worth.

Involvement with ganja, being a ganja man, is a combined age-class-gender-race meta-icon in a society stratified since its mid-eighteenth century British settlement by race and color, wealth and property, occupation and education, respectability and honor, and privilege and power (Fraser, 1975; Rubenstein, 1987). Political independence from Britain in 1979—an undemocratic transfer of power that many Vincentians now regret because they recognize (contrary to the sentimental interpretations of Basch et al. (1994, pp. 104-144)) that it merely passed control from one set of political masters to another while decreasing financial and other assistance from the former metropole (cf. Young, 1993, p.198)—has not radically altered the structure of the local hierarchy. Re-colonized by a local elite intolerant of grassroots political dissent, Vincentian "politricks," as public power machinations are called throughout the region, has always been characterized by rampant corruption, bureaucratic waste and mismanagement, patronage and victimization, vote buying, chronic floor crossing and other political gymnastics, and the manipulation of transnational migrant sentiments (Basch et al., 1994; Hourihan, 1975; John, 1970; Nanton, 1983; Potter, 1992, p. xxiv; Rubenstein, 1987).

To be sure, dark-skinned Vincentians have long made up most of the middle class and are joining the elite stratum in greater numbers all the time. However, the many examples of Black people, especially those who have returned from years of overseas work or education, rising in a single generation from near the bottom to near the top of the class pyramid have blurred rather than erased the main social, racial, and economic cleavages. As in colonial times, a disproportionate number of the largest businesses, such as supermarkets and the biggest department stores, are in the hands of Whites, Mulattoes, and overseas opportunists. Though most Vincentians, including most elected politicians and civil servants, are phenotypically dark-complexioned, the cultural politics of Vincentian race and nationality ("a Vincie is a Vincie") legitimizes the right of Sir James Mitchell—a near-white monied

member of an elite family and the country's (be) (k)nighted anti-drug crusader—to be prime minister,<sup>24</sup> and a wealthy man of unmixed Portuguese descent (a repentant Marxist with a Ph.D. in political studies) to be the newly elected (December 1998) opposition leader.<sup>25</sup>

The disproportionate power, wealth, and influence of Whites, Mulattoes, and foreigners highlight the fact that most Black Vincentians, three quarters of the population, are poor and most poor Vincentians (at least two thirds of the population) are Black. The lowest ranked, most destitute, and most politically powerless of Blacks are young rural males between their late teens and mid-thirties. Habitually labeled by all other status groups as rowdy, uncouth, blasphemous, lazy, thievish, ignorant and illiterate, sometimes feared for their alleged predilection for lawless or unruly behavior, and often reviled for appearing to flout societal norms of respectability, it is these youths and young men who now dominate marijuana growing, selling, and smoking. This near monopolization, based on the transfer of ganja from its early middle class and elite devotees, means that cannabis and subaltern class position now reinforce one another. On the one hand, since smoking marijuana is conspicuously associated with people whose behavior has traditionally been viewed as disreputable, aberrant and dangerous, ganja itself has become disreputable, aberrant, and dangerous. On the other hand, being a ganja (ab)user/ganja man serves as a convenient de-racialized icon of low or deviant status that all respectable Vincentians—rich and poor, Black and White—can readily point to and blame for the worst features of lower-class negritude.

Not unexpectedly, some of the severest critics of ganja have been Black people, themselves little removed from their rustic lower-class backgrounds. For these people, as well as those otherwise insecure about their racial identity, class standing, cultural distinctiveness, or national identity in what they recognize is a small and inconsequential Third World society where "Its people are not satisfied with themselves, their ways, and their leaders" (Young, 1993, p. 199), denouncing ganja abusers is much more than the condemnation of involvement with an illegal and "dangerous" substance. Thus it is not his medical training but his desire to obliterate his impoverished rural socio-economic background, to celebrate his own exalted position at the apex of the medical establishment by closeting his Otherness, that prompts Dr. Cyrus (1986) to label marijuana a "heinous indulgence" engaged in by what he contemptuously dismisses as "weird unkempt creatures," a thinly veiled allusion to the long and thickly platted hair of Rastafarians, marijuana's most conspicuous and unapologetic supporters. Linked as it is with Rasta rebelliousness and alienation, on the one hand, and an apparent rejection of the legitimacy of European-derived

mainstream Christian values (Rubenstein, 1987; cf. Wilson, 1973), on the other, membership in the ganja contra-culture symbolizes an immoral (and unlawful) repudiation of the existing socioeconomic hierarchy.<sup>26</sup> For elites and near elites, stigmatizing ganja's devotees is a convenient way to deflect attention from their near monopolization of the country's scarce resources while attributing all sorts of complex social and societal ills—crime, violence, insanity, school failure, unemployment, poverty—to the shameless and uncivilized behavior of those who used to be quietly called, in good "theoretical racist" fashion (Lowenthal, 1972, p. 95), worthless nayggers "niggers," but can now be loudly and publically branded and explained (and locked) away in a more politically correct race-neutral metonymic (yet totalizing) fashion as "drug addicts."

Whether they recognize it or not (and many Vincentians do), theoretical racism contains a measure of racial insecurity, if not self-hatred (Fanon, 1967; Heyer, 1993, p. 91; Lowenthal, 1972). The consciousness-raising efforts of SVG's American-inspired Black Power movement (circa early-1960s to mid-1970s), while they may have made it unacceptable to publicly denigrate blackness, could not easily overcome a 250-year legacy of slavery, (re-) colonialism, racism, micro-state insularity, and poverty. Most Black Power spokesmen (all were male) have either long migrated overseas—where they often consorted with and sometimes married white women—or have repudiated their radical roots by joining the ranks of the politricksters or professional elite. Their message of Black pride and solidarity is now a dim memory having been displaced, beginning in the mid-1980s when television finally began its pernicious spread throughout SVG, by racist images of Black American male irresponsibility, debauchery, and violence (Cole and Andrews, 1996; McCarthy et al., 1996). Vincentian Rastafarianism, having easily accommodated the idea and presence of genotypically/phenotypically White Rastafarians, on the one hand, and having little or no memory of the racially-supremacist exclusionary ideology of its orthodox Jamaican roots (Smith et al., 1960), on the other, has produced no race-based counter-narrative. The historical legacy and contemporary operation of these factors have produced both (sub-) conscious negative perceptions of Blackness and a longing to transcend, if not exorcize, the assumed biologically determined traits of negritude within a post-colonial context in which inferiorizing racial narratives are no longer publicly acceptable. The ganja man is a convenient periphrastic cultural master icon for all the negative traits formerly attributed to race—disinhibition,<sup>27</sup> hedonism, ignorance, blasphemy, criminality, and indolence (cf. Lowenthal, 1972, pp. 250-264)—a "conspicuous" ("A casual walk around town and a peep into the prison and mental hospital will produce the evidence") re-coded inferiorizing image meant to lionize the self by demonizing the Other.<sup>28</sup>



## 7. Public Policy Implications

To sum up, the discontinuity between the "high culture" perspective of the elite and middle classes and the oppositional cultural position of the ganja man is a product of: (1) the local media dissemination and popular acceptance of selected anti-marijuana First World media reports; (2) the deliberate and/or uncritical promulgation by poorly informed and/or morally, socially, and politically driven members of the local medical community of antiquated, fallacious, or misleading findings about marijuana; (3) a concerted government and NGO moral-political crusade against marijuana using bogus research and brute state force to liberate the "hostages of drug pushers and traffickers, enslaved by their addiction"; (4) diplomatic pressure and logistical assistance from the center of Dr. Greaves' "maze of Drug, Rock, and Sensuality," the United States; (5) recreance or indifference among those influential and knowledgeable Vincentians skeptical of the established mainstream position; (6) generalized historically rooted inter-race and class victimization and scapegoating in which, "... racism assumes more subtle and elusive forms .... The once largely biologized notion of race is now commonly being recoded as 'culture'" (Harrison, 1998, p. 610); and (7) the everyday experiences of and concomitant culture building among those who identify positively with the ganja contra-culture.

These factors answer the questions that formed the basis for this article and help account for the acquiescence of Caribbean governments to narco-imperialism in "America's backyard." First, though a few influential Vincentians have been outspoken in their opposition to American-sponsored weed eradication operations and though more people are becoming aware of, indeed even quietly supporting, the positive though problematic economic impact of illegal cannabis cultivation in this resource-poor country, the "widespread sympathy" reported by the *National Post* is an exaggeration: most Vincentians, including elite merchants who benefit directly from the cash spent by ganja men,<sup>29</sup> argue that they would like to see marijuana disappear from their country.

Second, those "parts of society" and "people" who might best "understand" the plight of their "others"—middle class and elite Vincentians, especially those who have received advanced overseas education—are reluctant to let their voices ring because this would repudiate their hard-fought class position and lifestyle while inviting the scorn of their peers in this small face-to-face society: it is one thing to enjoy a solitary high in the privacy of one's home; it is quite another to openly and unselfconsciously share a spliff with the Other on a village side path (cf. Dreher, 1982, pp. 95-131).

Third, what "widespread sympathy" there is to cannabis is confined to its production and external sale: chronic weed smokers continue to be seen as reprobates engaging in a physically, morally, and mentally damaging activity and local "... pushers are human beings, but how can we see them as such when they are responsible for hundreds of failures, dropouts from school, broken relationships, and 'unsober beings', who walk our streets every day infringing on the peace and security of their fellows' daily routine" (*The Vincentian*, December 15, 1995).

Fourth, in the domain mediating the national and the global, the Caribbean archipelago, "widespread sympathy" does not mark the way many West Indian professionals and other elites view illegal drugs.<sup>30</sup> Rooted in long-standing age, class, race and gender prejudices, the mainstream Vincentian position is a microcosm of the views of many, if not most, members of the Caribbean academic, medical, and political gentry. West Indian political scientists who have begun to write about drugs in the region (Griffith, 1993, 1997; Maingot, 1993), for example, have uncritically assumed that illicit mind-altering substances are unequivocally harmful, a supposition that many European researchers, including most cultural anthropologists (cf. Room, 1984) and hard science researchers, customarily question on empirical and other grounds. These Antilleanpolitical scientists, seemingly out of touch, morally and politically, with many of their First World colleagues, also have chosen to ignore the possibility that (1) many of the real or alleged problems associated with illicit drugs are rooted not in their intrinsic mind-altering properties or bio-chemical sequallae, but in the simple fact that modern states<sup>31</sup> have criminalized involvement with them; (2) the desire to take psycho-active substances is a natural (and hence normal) and institutionalized (and hence cultural) part of the human condition; and (3) the war on drugs—a fundamentally irrational, futile, anti-democratic, and anti-liberal moral crusade that has used spurious data and false assumptions about addiction, disease, crime, and drug-related violence to wage battle against the values and lifestyles of certain despised individuals and groups (Brownstein, 1992)—has created far more ethical, legal, social, political, and economic problems than it has solved (Alexander, 1990; Auld, 1981; Beauchesne, 1991; Elwood, 1994; Grinspoon, 1977; Grinspoon and Bakalar, 1993; Himmelstein, 1983; Kleiman, 1989; Nadelmann, 1989; Seigel, 1989; Zinberg, 1976b).

Considerations of class and culture may have turned many West Indian intellectuals into cheerleaders for "Operation Weedeater" and other examples of America's Stalinist drug policies. It may also be keeping them out of step with many of their extra-Caribbean counterparts. Days before the fall 1998 United Nations announcement of its

most ambitious—and costly—anti-drug program ever, hundreds of influential scientists and politicians, including former United Nations Secretary General Javier Perez de Cuellar and former U.S. Secretary of State George Shultz, presented a ground-breaking petition to the United Nations General Assembly in which they stated that:

We believe that the global war on drugs is causing more harm than drug abuse itself.... Human rights are violated, environmental assaults perpetuated and prisons inundated with hundreds of thousands of drugs law violators. Scarce resources better expended on health, education and economic development are squandered on ever more expensive interdiction efforts (*Winnipeg Free Press*, 1998, pp. A1-A2).

With so many individuals and institutions, ranging from street corner pushers, to drug cartels, to police forces and to United Nations agencies benefitting socially, politically, and economically from its continuity, the ideological convergence between these global elites and the unlettered Vincentian ganja man will produce no quick truce in the war on drugs. Still, it is worth noting that as these usually silenced ganja men begin to speak out and mobilize themselves into protest groups like the Committee of Concerned Citizens and Marijuana Growers, they can take some solace from the fact that their message, despised as it may be at home, has a growing global legitimacy that promises to reverberate for years to come.

## ENDNOTES

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1. This latest "interference" consisted of a two-week USDEA-directed operation by 120 troops from six other Caribbean countries and resulted in the destruction of some one million cannabis plants.
2. Given its clandestine production and sale, it is difficult to accurately determine the extent, value, and destination of harvested marijuana. Discussions with growers in the main production areas suggest that the bulk of crop yields, probably 60 percent or more, is sold to purchasers in and from neighboring islands (St. Lucia, Barbados, Martinique, and Grenada) or from Western Europe.
3. Except for a few passing comments on the war on drugs, a close textual reading of the rich drug metaphors in this article—"weedeater," "drugs," "war,"

"slavery," "disease," and "cancer"—are beyond its scope.

4. Little or no marijuana is cultivated in the arid Grenadines.

5. As far as marijuana is concerned, there is little reason to support the assertion of "narcotics related corruption in senior levels of government." First, marijuana production and distribution are small-scale enterprises dominated by a multiplicity of low-level growers, wholesalers, and retailers. Second, neither the USDEA nor other US drug interdiction agencies has conducted any in situ investigations of the ganja trade in SVG. Indeed, I suspect that the assertion that SVG is the second-highest marijuana producer in the entire Caribbean archipelago was taken from estimates made by Rubenstein (1992). I also suspect that assertions of high-level corruption are based on mischievous media speculation and idle gossip among the Vincentian chattering classes, which the USDEA has used to shame the government into "requesting" assistance with its weed eradication efforts. Of course, this does not mean that some high-ranking officials are not involved in the lucrative international smuggling of cocaine.

6. A fuller treatment of some of the issues in this section is found in Rubenstein (1995).

7. In SVG "drug addict" is a negative totalizing term, a transcendent status label meant to apply to the entire person that either determines the form and content of or swallows up other social positions occupied by that person, meant to apply to anyone who uses an illegal substance.

8. As in most other countries, the mainstream folk meaning of "drug abuse" in SVG is any use of any illegal substance.

9. From the early nineteenth century to the present, the print media has helped "... foment a series of drug scares, each magnifying drug menaces well beyond their objective dimensions" (Reinarmann and Duskin, 1992, p. 8; Himmelstein, 1983). One of the most notorious but far from isolated examples of media bias and fraud is the case of Janet Cooke, a middle-class Black *Washington Post* reporter whose widely cited 1980 heart-wrenching feature story about the tragic life of eight-year-old "Jimmy," a third-generation African-American ghetto-dwelling heroin junkie whose mother rationalized the boy's three-year-long addiction by claiming that, "Drugs and black folk been together for a long time," won her a coveted Pulitzer Prize in 1981 (Reinarmann and Duskin, 1992). Three days later, the prize was withdrawn after it was discovered that she had fabricated the story.

10. Should have I been surprised? After all, SVG has been called the "Third World's Third World" (Starbird, 1979), an appellation that, among other things, points to its intellectual and cultural "backwardness." Still, marijuana is a transnational substance par excellence and thousands of Vincentians have worked and studied in England, the United States, and Canada where:

The predominant (lay and scientific) opinion in the 1964-1976 period held that the dangers of marihuana had been greatly exaggerated in previous years and that the drug was generally a mild "hallucinogen," "intoxicant," or "euphoriant," not a dangerous narcotic (Himmelstein, 1983, pp. 100-101).

This does not mean that several well-funded non-government anti-drug associations such as Parents Resource Institute for Drug Education (PRIDE), Partnership for a Drug Free America, Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse, and others have not intensified their campaign against marijuana as its use has increased in the United States in recent years (Zimmer and Morgan, 1997, pp. 159-163). Rather, it means that as concerns about the drug's adverse effects have proven to be unfounded or exaggerated transcendental anti-marijuana meta-narratives have increasingly been ignored.

11. This 20-year-old campaign has involved both government and non-government organizations and has consisted of hundreds of radio and television clips; scores of speeches, rallies, marches, and workshops throughout the country; and several poster and pamphlet campaigns.

12. In SVG there is little adherence to the traditional tenets and beliefs of religious Rastafarianism, such as a belief in the divinity of the long deceased Ethiopian Emperor, Haile Selassie or a desire for repatriation to Africa—(Smith et al., 1960). Instead, most Vincentian Rastas are either social, political, or "stylistic" Rastas who celebrate their Otherness by (1) the dreadlocks hairstyle; (2) variable involvement with ganja; (3) alienation from Babylon (European-like lifeways and life spaces); (4) use of Rastafarian argot; and (5) an emphasis—in word if not deed—on generosity, egalitarianism and "peace, love, and harmony."

13. This may be a reference to those few Rastas who refuse all wage-labor employment claiming that such work is economically exploitative (in a Marxist sense), hierarchical, and demeaning. Conversely, they see self-employment and communal work (as artisans, farmers, fishermen, hucksters, etc.) as egalitarian, dignified and liberating (cf. Lewis, 1993).

14. There are even some health care professionals who reject the extreme position of the anti-ganja crusaders but are reluctant to voice their disapproval fearing, perhaps, that this might produce gluttony among ganja's proponents and censure from their colleagues.

15. Extrapolation from data from Leeward Village suggests that there are some 12,000 current ganja smokers in SVG, over two-thirds of them young black men of working-class or lower status. Though much heterogeneity in smoking behavior and belief characterize these men, I suggest that most of them would accept the ganja man appellation. Conversely, there are relatively few elite or middle-class smokers (and even relatively fewer elite and middle-class Rastafarian smokers), few female smokers, and few middle-aged or older smokers.

16. Anthropologists have long recognized the presence of either a contra or dual cultural orientation among many poor New World Black populations and have explained its existence as an adaptation to and means for resisting classism, racism, and destitution (Bryce-Laporte, 1970; Lieber, 1981; Reisman, 1970; Rodman, 1963, 1971; 1987; Valentine, 1972; Wilson, 1973; Young, 1974). For a detailed discussion of the Vincentian contra-culture see Rubenstein (1987).

17. Although I risk being charged with fostering inauthenticity, if not ethnocentrism, I have chosen to transpose these selections from the Vincentian Creole to make them comprehensible to readers of Standard English.

18. I mention this diversity to counter the impression that the ganja man is homogeneous Other. My brief list of carefully selected counter-hegemonic quotes may also (regrettably) romanticize the ganja counter-culture by ignoring its pervasive tribulation dimension, the fact that involvement with an interdicted substance gives rise to rip\_off (the theft of growing, harvested, or processed ganja by community members, often other ganja men), unfairness and robbery (being taken advantage of, exploited, or fooled in some ganja transaction or arrangement, sometimes accompanied by a fear or threat of physical violence), and fight down (actual physical violence among ganja men sometimes accompanied by the use of lethal weapons). When talking spontaneously about cannabis, the ganja man nearly always moves quickly to and is preoccupied with the tribulation he has experienced or witnessed.

19. In classical medical terms marijuana is not addictive: "For the vast majority of users, pot isn't physically addictive. It ranks far below drugs such as cocaine and heroin—or alcohol and tobacco—in inviting compulsive use" (Gallagher, 1991, p. 133).

20. The administrator of the SVG Family Planning Program, attributed 247 of the 358 admissions to the Mental Health Centre in 1986 to "marijuana abuse" (*The Vincentian*, April 15, 1988). One writer with connections to the Center compiled statistics showing that 142 of 169 mental patients who "abused marijuana" were males between 13\_30 years old (*The Vincentian*, July 14, 1989). Likewise, Burton Williams, Minister of Health, "stated that 70 percent of all admissions to the Mental Health Center in 1991 showed signs of drug abuse of cocaine and marijuana, and alcohol abuse" (*The Vincentian*, January 5, 1992). My review of the Center's admission process, testing procedures, and record keeping showed that there was no credible support, methodological or otherwise, for these statistics (Rubenstein, 1995). My review of the marijuana literature also showed that "reefer madness" had long been dismissed as a cause of chronic marijuana use (Glantz, 1984; Grinspoon, 1977; Himmelstein, 1983; Maykut, 1984).

21. A comprehensive state-of-the-art summary of the scientific literature dealing with marijuana is beyond the scope of this article. Suffice it to say that although marijuana is not a completely harmless substance—"No drug can be taken into the body with complete safety" (Schuckit, 1994, pp. 181)—it seems to be far less dangerous than either alcohol or tobacco (Hall et al., 1994; Selden et al., 1990). The editorial position of *Lancet* (1995, p. 1241), the prestigious British medical journal, is that, "The smoking of cannabis, even long term, is not harmful to health." The latest review article I could locate (Hall and Solowij, 1998) concludes that the most probable (though still unproven) adverse mental and physical effects of heavy, long-term cannabis use are bronchitis, psychological dependence (but not true physical addiction), and minor cognitive impairment, all a far cry from the damaging consequences enumerated by members of the Vincentian medical community.

22. I do not wish to imply by this assertion that the contra-culture is somehow more "authentic" or "real" than the mainstream culture, only that it is based on an actual experiential understanding of the causes and consequences of marijuana smoking.

23. Many ganja men who also use tobacco often go for days or weeks without a spliff when supplies are low, but they have difficulty coping without a multi-daily

nicotine fix.

24. During his first brief term as head of government in 1971, Mitchell, whom his political enemies claim is disdainful of darkly-hued people, admonished Vincentians "to get up and get," a barely masked allusion to the elite presumption of the laziness of the country's Black majority.

25. One contender for party leadership was dismissed by the chattering classes as being "too black," a direct reference to his pigmentation and a reminder that SVG, like all other Caribbean countries, has a continuous rather than a binary system of racial classification (as in the United States). Conversely, White opposition leader Dr. Ralph Gonsalves, aware that the "Black Skin, White Masks" (Fanon, 1967) of Vincentian racial politics now permits empathetic "cross dressing" tries to "blacken" his image by appearing on the campaign platform gaudily draped in the pan-negritude colors of black, green, red, and yellow.

26. Although my research in Leeward Village and elsewhere suggests that there are hundreds of secret elite and middle class smokers, they form a much smaller class segment than their bad boy lower-class counterparts. More importantly, their sole motive for smoking—to enjoy a relaxing high—brings them closer to their First World counterparts than to their Third World peers.

27. Though many Black Vincentians positively evaluate a partial loss of self-control in certain circumscribed settings (e.g., public Carnival celebrations), often mocking the stiff and reserved behavior of other ethnic groups, this sentiment does not apply to the loss of control believed to be associated with getting a bad head.

28. In describing his just completed tour of SVG's overcrowded prison, a close (Black) informant and influential politician turned to his (Black) wife and exclaimed, "If you see naygger!" Her subdued "mmhmm" acknowledgement punctuated what was a statement not of solidarity but of recognition of their moral (and physical) separation from the Other.

29. One Associated Press news story about the impact of "Operation Weedeater" read:

[W]hen the [ganja] harvest comes in, soda trucks return [from the countryside] to their Kingstown bases empty, and downtown stores do brisker businesses, said Martin Barnard, president of the Chamber of Industry and Commerce. They (the ganja farmers) told me they're in trouble—the jobs are not there, they have children to support, they have to turn to the hills to farm marijuana," said Barnard. "I am sympathetic to all that ... but at the end of the day we have to say, 'Fellows, it is illegal'" (Anderson, 1998).

30. The possible exception is Jamaica where, as in most Western countries, the use of ganja is increasingly tolerated among all classes of society.

31. In most countries, drug prohibition began only during the first decades of this century. The United States has always been the world leader in prohibition, interdiction, and punishment.

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