

Sociology of Crime, Law and Deviance
Volume 14

Popular Culture, Crime and Social Control

Mathieu Deflem
Editor



POPULAR CULTURE, CRIME AND SOCIAL CONTROL

SOCIOLOGY OF CRIME, LAW AND DEVIANCE

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SOCIOLOGY OF CRIME, LAW AND DEVIANCE VOLUME 14

POPULAR CULTURE, CRIME AND SOCIAL CONTROL

EDITED BY

MATHIEU DEFLEM

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JAI

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CONTENTS

LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS	vii
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INTRODUCTION: THE CRIMINOLOGY OF POPULAR CULTURE	ix
-----------------------------------------------------	----

PART I: CRIME AND SOCIAL CONTROL IN THE VISUAL ARTS

<i>REEFER MADNESS AND BEYOND</i> <i>Susan Boyd</i>	3
-------------------------------------------------------	---

<i>THE DARK KNIGHT: CONSTRUCTING IMAGES OF GOOD VS. EVIL IN AN AGE OF ANXIETY</i> <i>Nickie D. Phillips</i>	25
--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	----

<i>SUPERHERO JUSTICE: THE DEPICTION OF CRIME AND JUSTICE IN MODERN-AGE COMIC BOOKS AND GRAPHIC NOVELS</i> <i>Bradford W. Reynolds and Billy Henson</i>	45
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<i>TELEVISED IMAGES OF JAIL: LESSONS IN CONTROLLING THE UNRULY</i> <i>Dawn K. Cecil</i>	67
------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	----

PART II: RESISTANCE, CRIME, AND PROTEST IN MUSIC

<i>"I BROKE THE LAW? NO, THE LAW BROKE ME!" PALESTINIAN HIP-HOP AND THE SEMIOTICS OF OCCUPATION</i> <i>Judah Schept</i>	91
------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	----

RAP MUSIC'S VIOLENT AND MISOGYNISTIC EFFECTS: FACT OR FICTION?	
<i>Charis E. Kubrin and Ronald Weitzer</i>	121
CRIME, RESISTANCE AND SONG: BLACK MUSICIANSHIP'S BLACK CRIMINOLOGY	
<i>Viviane Saleh-Hanna</i>	145
THE DIFFERENT SOUNDS OF AMERICAN PROTEST: FROM FREEDOM SONGS TO PUNK ROCK	
<i>Ellen C. Leichtman</i>	173
PART III: CRIME AND JUSTICE IN NON-FICTION	
EVIL MONSTERS AND CUNNING PERVERTS: REPRESENTING AND REGULATING THE DANGEROUS PAEDOPHILE	
<i>Anneke Meyer</i>	195
FRAMING THE SCENE: PRESENTATIONS OF FORENSICS PROGRAMMING IN THE NEWS	
<i>Gregory G. Justis and Steven Chermak</i>	219
BEACH CRIME IN POPULAR CULTURE: CONFINING THE CARNIVALESQUE IN SALVADOR DA BAHIA, BRAZIL	
<i>Stephanie C. Kane</i>	243
HERE BE DRAGONS: LOMBROSO, THE GOTHIC, AND SOCIAL CONTROL	
<i>Nicole Rafter and Per Ystehede</i>	263
INDEX	285

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INTRODUCTION: THE CRIMINOLOGY OF POPULAR CULTURE

Crime and social control present important issues that move and affect large segments of society. Whether we consider the impact of criminal events in terms of victimization, the construction of deviance into criminalized acts, or the many socially relevant aspects related to criminal justice policies and other social control activities, crime and justice are matters that deserve our most serious attention. It is largely for this reason that scholars develop astute theoretical models and sophisticated methodologies to study crime and social control in their many significant components. Yet, the world of popular culture, which we tend to associate with playfulness and fun, has also embraced themes related to crime and its control. It is perhaps a sign of the very earnestness associated with crime and social control that these themes are also dealt with in the social institutions of entertainment. The study of such portrayals of crime and criminal justice in popular culture is the focus of the present volume.

Francois Truffaut (1985) once remarked that the task of the movie director is not to say something but to show something. Undoubtedly, this is true and, surely, this should be true of all exciting art. Yet, while not intent on saying something, artists also do say something and do transmit ideas, whether consciously or not, through their aesthetic expressions. It is possible therefore to analyze dimensions of popular culture from the viewpoint of various academic disciplines. Social scientists have particularly sought to unravel many aspects of social life as they are revealed in popular culture. Among the many sociologically relevant issues, crime and social control have received considerable attention.

More work has been done in the criminology of popular culture than can be reviewed here (see, e.g., Bailey & Hale, 1998; McMahon, 2008; Murley, 2008). Suffice it to say that diverse artistic and cultural expressions, such as paintings, sculptures, photographs, cartoons, and other visual arts in the print media, music, movies, television, and Internet-based audio-visual materials have been analyzed from the viewpoint of important matters relating to crime and social control. There also exist specialized journals in this area, such as the *Journal of Criminal Justice and Popular Culture* and

Crime, Media, Culture. It is in this rich burgeoning field of criminological analysis that the present volume is situated.

This work offers a range of innovative contributions that contemplate on some of the many ways in which themes related to crime and its control are addressed in a number of different manifestations of popular culture. In Part I, chapters are brought together that focus on the representation of criminologically relevant themes in the visual arts, including movies, comic books, and television. Susan Boyd's chapter addresses arguably one of the most famous and infamous examples of the treatment of drug abuse in the world of the cinema by discussing the representation of marijuana use in the cult classic *Reefer Madness*. Also focusing on other movies that portray illegal drug use, Boyd draws on feminist and critical criminology to argue that there are enduring links presented between illegal drugs and immorality that involve a stigmatization and moral condemnation of drug users. Nickie Phillips turns to a very topical theme by analyzing the popular movie *The Dark Night* in the wake of the events of September 11. Phillips' analysis focuses on the ideological messages of crime and justice that are presented in *The Dark Knight* and specifically shows how these messages reinforce the notion of the evildoer as an outsider. Bradford Reyns and Billy Henson next focus their criminological attention on the relatively unexplored art form of comic books. The authors find that crime control and crime prevention themes can be found across a broad range of comic books. They suggest that such representations may influence the public's perception of crime and thereby affect the legitimacy of the criminal justice system. In a final chapter on the visual arts, Dawn Cecil looks at televised images of incarceration in documentaries and reality-based programs. The author shows that jails of all sizes and types are presented but always in a sensationalized manner that is supportive of official criminal justice policies.

Part II focuses on criminological themes in popular music. Judah Schept first analyzes the lyrics and music videos of Palestinian hip-hop, with a special focus on the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. Based on a semiotic analysis, Schept finds that Palestinian hip-hop artists rely on terms from criminal justice to narrate their lives under occupation in contrast with an organically conceived connection to the land of Palestine. Charis Kubrin and Ronald Weitzer also focus on rap music, but their attention is centered on the existing academic scholarship about rap. The authors argue that this scholarship reveals several weaknesses in lacking rigidity of research. Accordingly, they make several recommendations to strengthen such contributions. Turning attention to black musicianship, Viviane Saleh-Hanna uses the scholarship that can be found in music lyrics to broaden the focus of mainstream criminological discourse. In particular, the author argues that black musicianship can offer

an antidote to the colonialism and racism that is often reproduced in criminology. A final chapter on music is offered by Ellen Leichtman, who centers her scholarly attention on protest music during the civil rights era and in the Punk movement. On the basis of her analysis, Leichtman argues that music should not be overlooked in the study of criminal justice as it can serve an important function to those who fight for justice.

The final part of this book brings together chapters that study themes of crime and justice in the non-fictional world of popular culture. Anneke Meyer first explores the representation and regulation of child sex crimes in the news media. On the basis of discourse analysis of newspaper stories, Meyer shows that the media construct pedophiles as members of a distinct and dangerous category of people and that this image also informs formal policies. Likewise focusing on news publications, Greg Justis and Steven Chermak analyze the manner in which forensics television programs are used in the news media. The authors find that such representations of forensics entertainment have been increasingly relied on in the news and that they greatly influence public perceptions. Stephanie Kane shifts the attention to popular culture as it is practiced in everyday talk, especially in discourse on crime. The author shows that the carnivalesque lifestyles on Brazil's beaches are confronted with the reality of armed robberies and that this duality informs popular culture as practical living. In the final chapter to this volume, Nicole Rafter and Per Ystehede analyze the criminology of Cesare Lombroso in the context of late 19th-century Gothicism. The authors argue that Lombroso's criminals were Gothic creations, drawn from literature and art, thereby manifesting a connection that exists between the worlds of fiction and science. Collectively, the authors of this volume hope to have offered analyses that may further stimulate scholarship on the criminology of popular culture and bring about stimulating discussions and debate.

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Mathieu Deflem
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PART I
CRIME AND SOCIAL CONTROL
IN THE VISUAL ARTS

REEFER MADNESS AND BEYOND

Susan Boyd

ABSTRACT

Purpose – This chapter analyses the independent U.S. film Reefer Madness, a fictional full-length feature about marijuana use and selling that has grown in cult status since it was produced in 1936. In addition, this chapter discusses a number of examples of early and contemporary illegal drug films that focus on marijuana, including a short film scene from Broken Flowers (2005).

Methodology – Drawing from critical and feminist criminology, sociology, and cultural studies, this chapter provides an analysis of fictional illegal drug films with a focus on marijuana.

Findings – The significance of a century of film representations that reinforce a link between illegal drug use, immorality, and crime is discussed. It appears that these themes are quite enduring.

Value – It is worthwhile to analyze illegal drug films, not just to explore the stigmatization of users, but to examine the social/political effects of these films, particularly the ways that certain kinds of negative images support drug regulation and its attendant policing.

INTRODUCTION

Film is one medium amongst many producing discourse about criminalized drugs, addiction, and justice. Print media, literature, music, art, and numerous other media contribute to our understanding of the images we see on the screen. Since the early 1900s, representations of illegal drug use and trafficking have often been central themes in Hollywood and independent films. Federal and state drug prohibition and film emerged during the same era in the United States. Before and since the criminalization of specific drugs such as opium, cocaine, and heroin, and later marijuana, filmmakers have contributed to discourses about drugs and the people who use, sell, and produce them. In addition, they have contributed to cinematic representations of criminal justice and societal responses to drug use and trafficking. The term “illegal drug films” refers to films that focus primarily on drug use, selling, production, and their consequences. Today, illegal drug films are common fare in Hollywood and independent film productions. In addition, movies that cannot be categorized as illegal drug films often include illegal drug use and selling in references or in short scenes.

This chapter examines the independent U.S. film *Reefer Madness*, a fictional full-length feature about marijuana use and selling that has grown in cult status since it was produced in 1936. In addition, this chapter discusses a number of examples of early and contemporary illegal drug films that focus on marijuana, including a short film scene from *Broken Flowers* (2005). It is worthwhile to analyze illegal drug films, not just to explore the stigmatization of users, but to examine the social/political effects of these films, particularly the ways in which certain kinds of negative images support drug regulation and its attendant policing. Drawing from critical and feminist criminology, sociology, and cultural studies, this chapter provides an analysis of illegal drug films with a focus on marijuana. Finally, the significance of a century of film representations that reinforce a link between illegal drug use, immorality, and crime is discussed (Taylor, 2008, p. 369).

POPULAR CULTURE, FILM, AND ILLEGAL DRUGS

Illegal drug films and short scenes about illegal drugs in movies provide systems of meaning about drugs, pleasure, states of consciousness, addiction, treatment, morality, criminal justice, order, disorder, and punishment (Boyd, 2008; Doyle, 2006; Manning, 2007; Valentine & Fraser, 2008;

Valverde, 2006). Mariana Valverde reminds us that representations “move us, stimulating the passions – pity and compassion as much as fear and anger – and triggering powerful memories, fears, dreams and hopes” (2006, p. 163). Illegal drug films also trigger laughter, grief, horror, recognition, disbelief, and hope – in other words, a wide spectrum of human emotions. Most important, films provide us with entertainment and are made for profit. Since the discovery of film in the late 1880s, viewers have been riveted by motion pictures, flocking first to penny arcades to watch half-minute silent films and later to movie theatres to view feature-length films. With the discovery of television in the late 1930s, and later video, computers, DVDs, and iPods, film viewing has expanded in the United States and elsewhere. Today the average American spends four hours a day watching television, DVDs, or iPods (Sourcebook for Teaching Science, 2009).

Illegal drug films are cultural products that provide a lens to understand the interplay between representations of illegal drug use, selling, crime, and criminal justice regulation. The cultural criminologists Ferrell and Websdale question the expansion of criminal justice practices in Western nations. They propose “a mode of analysis that embodies sensitivities to image, meaning, and representation in the study of deviance, crime, and control” in media and popular culture (Ferrell & Websdale, 1999, p. 3). Stuart Hall has long been interested in visual images of crime (Hall, 1981, 1997). He illustrates how pictures, or photos of crime, have ideological significance for they can “*enhance, locate, or specify*” ideological themes (*italic in original*, Hall, 1981). Visual representations of marijuana and other illegal drugs, users, dealers, and drug paraphernalia are fetishized in film, re(producing) images that we come to recognize and attach meaning to. When examining representations, whether film or print media, Valverde also emphasizes looking outside of the boundaries of criminology and the “crime and media” subdiscipline, and breaking out of the singular gaze on crime and law (2006, p. 11). The “domains of law, justice and crime are constituted in part through representations – and through people’s responses to these representations” (2006, p. 163). Film representations introduce and contextualize social problems and transmit ideas about the scope of these issues as well as notions about the appropriate methods of formal and informal regulation of these “problems.” For example, Doyle (2006) notes that “systems of meaning about crime and punishment develop in complex interplay between various cultural representations of crime, some modern, some age old, and with the pronouncements of other key authorities on crime, such as police and politicians” (p. 876). These systems of meaning, myths, and ideologies intersect on and off the film screen, informing our understanding of illegal

drugs, the people who use them, trafficking, and societal and criminal justice responses.

Illegal drug films cannot be categorized simply as crime films. Rather, in this chapter we will examine illegal drug films as a unique genre, acknowledging the “commonplace of drugs within popular cultures,” representations of “noncriminal drug consumers” (Manning, 2007, pp. 8, 25), and ruptures in law-and-order narratives. Although the majority of illegal drug films celebrate punishment and law and order, there is no single message in either Hollywood or independent films (Boyd, 2008; Valverde, 2006, p. 41). As we will see, cinematic scenes of illegal drug use and selling are “historically specific and historically rooted” (Manning, 2007, p. 5), providing systems of meaning that resonate, extend, and draw from understandings outside of film itself. Filmmakers, scriptwriters, directors, and producers draw from popular culture, print media, the professions (including criminal justice, psychiatry, etc.), art, literature, music, lived experience, and other media to create visual representations and narratives for the films we watch.

In contemporary history, myths about particular drugs often emerge during drug scares. The drug researchers Craig Reinerman and Harry Levine note that drug scares, often fuelled by moral reformers, are a “phenomena in their own right” and have long been a popular media creation (1997, p. 1). The phrase “drug scare” refers to “designated periods” of time when a number of antidrug individuals, groups, and media outlets (including newspapers, and fictive and documentary films) identify and denounce a particular drug as a new social problem requiring increased attention and regulation (1997, p. 1). Film representations of drugs introduce viewers to the dangers and joys associated with particular drugs.

BACKGROUND TO *REEFER MADNESS*

Michael Starks’s invaluable illustrated history of drugs in the movies, *Cocaine Fiends and Reefer Madness – An Illustrated History of Drugs in the Movies*, is the first comprehensive English-language book about both drug films and scenes with references to drugs (Starks, 1982). He includes stills from early silent, black-and-white, and short films, including Thomas Edison’s 1894 production, *Chinese Opium Den*, as well as experimental and feature-length sound films up to the late 1970s. Early feature-length films depict cocaine addiction (see *For His Son*, 1912) and opium dens with white women in close proximity to racialized Others (see *Broken Blossoms*, 1919). He also notes that a number of silent films in the 1920s, and later sound

films in the early 1930s, included references to marijuana and other drugs like cocaine and opiate derivatives that were not necessarily negative. For example, *The Mystery of the Leaping Fish* (1916) introduces movie viewers to Coke Ennyday, a Sherlock Holmes-type character who is helping the police crack an Asian opium drug-smuggling ring. Throughout the film, Coke Ennyday uses plentiful amounts of powder cocaine and laudanum, a liquid opium derivative. When he uses the drugs, he is depicted as cheerful and energetic. He is quite despondent without the drugs. Although the film condemns opium smuggling by Asian gangs, it does not condemn Coke Ennyday's drug use; however, this is not so surprising given the era in which the film was produced.

During the same period, drugs now considered very dangerous (opium, cocaine, and marijuana) were ingredients in patent medicines and elixirs commonly used by families to treat a wide range of illnesses (Berridge & Edwards, 1981; Musto, 2002). By 1906, Congress passed the Pure Food and Drug Act. It required all patent medicines and elixirs that contained opiates and cocaine to specify these ingredients on their label (Brecher et al., 1972, p. 47). In addition, a number of city ordinances and state laws in the late 1800s and early 1900s set out to restrict opium smoking in smoking houses and dens. Print media, moral reformers, and some pharmacists, doctors, and congressmen claimed that opiates and cocaine predisposed its users to insanity and crime. Drug historians note that American drug laws were gender, race, and class based from the start (Campbell, 2000; Musto, 1987). Unlike patent medicine and elixirs, containing opiates and cocaine and consumed by middle- and upper-class white Americans, opium in smokable form and powder cocaine were increasingly viewed as "substances associated with foreigners and alien subgroups" (Musto, 1987, p. 65). Cocaine became linked to supposedly "wild" African American men, and opium with "deviant and scheming" Chinese men. White moral reformers induced fear by claiming that these racialized categories of persons would introduce these drugs to white middle- and upper-class users (*ibid.*). By the early nineteenth century, sobriety, morality, and self-control became the model of respectability for white, Anglo-Saxon, middle-class, Protestant citizens. Cities like San Francisco introduced ordinances to regulate opium smoking in dens; however, it was not until Congress passed the national Harrison Narcotic Act of 1914 that opiates and coca leaves and their derivatives were regulated and taxed for internal revenue. The Harrison Act of 1914 is considered "a milestone in the history of drug control in the United States (Musto, 2002, p. 253). Shortly afterwards, Congress tightened up the Harrison Act and, by 1922, penalties for narcotic offences were

doubled (Brecher et al., 1972, p. 56). At this time, marijuana was not yet regulated, and film representations were not necessarily negative, even though moral reformers like Sara Graham-Mulhall, the first deputy commissioner in the Department of Narcotic Control in New York, condemned marijuana along with opium and called for stricter regulation in her book *Opium: The Demon Flower* (1926).

Michael Starks provides an example of a humorous film scene from the Hollywood comedy *International House* (1933) in his book, *Cocaine Fiends and Reefer Madness*. It shows Cab Calloway and his Cotton Club Band playing a hilarious version of the song *Reefer Man* (Starks, 1982, p. 101). But positive or humorous representations of marijuana in film ended following the establishment of the Motion Picture Production Code (MPPC) in 1930. By the 1920s, many states banned pictures of opium, cocaine, and drug dealing in film. The Code specifically banned explicit scenes of alcohol and illegal drug use and selling from Hollywood screens. The MPPC operated through self-censorship of the Hollywood film industry, and it was initially set up to respond to public disapproval of “immoral” behavior represented on and off the screen and to offset the possibility of state censorship (Starks, 1982). However, the MPPC had little control over independent movies, and a number of these independent drug films were produced in the 1930s. Many depicted explicit drug use and selling to “educate” moviegoers about the evils of marijuana. Thus, only independent films outside of the Hollywood industry continued to include representations of drugs and trafficking; these films most often demonized marijuana, and drugs like opium and heroin, and the traffickers who sold them (see *Narcotic*, 1934; *Assassin of Youth*, 1935; *Marihuana: The Weed with Roots in Hell*, 1935; *She Shoulda Said No!* 1949 (also released as *Wild Weed*); *Teenage Devil Dolls: One-Way Ticket to Hell*, 1955; *High School Confidential*, 1958). Audiences were drawn to these films by their vivid and lurid posters that depicted scantily dressed women seduced with the promise of drugs by devils and dark men. The posters promised a film containing explicit drug use accompanied by shocking images of female sexual abandon and immortality (Boyd, 2009; Shapiro, 2003).

Reefer Madness was directed by Louis Gasnier and produced in 1936. It is a morality tale commissioned by a church group to educate parents in the United States about the dangers of marijuana, and it was originally titled *Tell Your Children* (Nelson, 2004). After the film was completed, Dwain Esper purchased it for distribution. He edited the film and sent it out for distribution on the exploitation film circuit. Exploitation films were often billed as educational films. Many were cautionary tales accompanied, as

mentioned above, by sensational advertising. These films were often cheaply made, and independently produced, thus bypassing censorship procedures (Peary, 1981). Dwain Esper produced several other independent films in the 1930s to depict the horrors of drug use.

Reefer Madness was also produced with the support of Harry J. Anslinger, the first Commissioner of Narcotics in the newly created Federal Bureau of Narcotics in 1930 (Starks, 1982). Researchers in the United States and elsewhere have written about the shift in drug policy in the early 1900s and the direction it took after the establishment of the Federal Bureau of Narcotics. Early on, Anslinger was intent on pushing state laws to regulate marijuana, even though in the early 1930s recreational marijuana use was still very rare (Brecher et al., 1972; Musto, 1987). It was not until the mid-1930s that Anslinger shifted his focus and campaigned for federal control of marijuana. He was fond of highlighting individual case stories without providing evidence, sordid tales about drug addiction and trafficking, personal degradation, and crime in his talks, books, journal, and popular culture writing (Anslinger, 1933; Anslinger & Oursler, 1961; Anslinger & Tompkins, 1953). The exploitation films produced in the 1930s were supported by him for carrying the right message to viewers about drugs he deemed dangerous.

Even though most Americans in the 1930s were unfamiliar with marijuana, it has a long history in human societies (Grinspoon & Bakalar, 1997). Marijuana is a product of the hemp plant, *cannibis sativa*, and the drug was used for medicinal purposes in China, Africa, and India for thousands of years, and it was popular in medieval Europe; however, it only came to the attention of Western doctors in the mid-nineteenth century. At that time, these same doctors praised marijuana for its medicinal qualities and prescribed it for a range of ailments (*ibid.*). Patients in the United States and Europe consumed marijuana in liquid form like they consumed opiates and cocaine in patent medicines and elixirs at that time. Smoking marijuana was viewed in an entirely different manner, and most Americans had little experience with marijuana in smoking form, or with the recreational use of the plant. Drug historian David Musto notes that, in the United States, the practice of smoking marijuana was introduced to some black and white jazz musicians by Mexican laborers who had immigrated to the United States in the 1920s. As the Great Depression set in and jobs became scarce, Mexican immigrants who came north to work were increasingly made unwelcome and were stereotyped by moral reformers and the print media as a group associated with crime, violence, and marijuana use, even though there was no evidence to substantiate these claims (Musto, 1987). Marijuana became associated with Mexican immigrants, and moral reformers claimed that the

drug was also a “sexual stimulant” that lowered “civilizing inhibitions” (Musto, 1987, p. 219).

Similar to earlier drug scares and claims made by moral reformers and the print media about opium smoking and the racialized “Other,” marijuana use and selling was linked with Mexican laborers, and white and African American jazz players. The drugs, and the people who used them, were depicted by moral reformers as threats to rural white middle-class society, especially youth. In addition, themes produced through the prohibitionist discourses of earlier anti-opiate reformers and alcohol temperance movements became associated with marijuana. These themes linked drug use not only with the breakdown of the family and the Anglo-Saxon way of life, but with breaches of racial purity, and with the potential victimization of others by its users, who sold or gave drugs away to innocent and unsuspecting consumers. Once alcohol prohibition ended in 1933, marijuana become the number one enemy to be battled by the U.S. state and reformers (Anslinger & Oursler, 1961). By 1936, Anslinger’s attention turned more fully to national marijuana control.

Critics note that Anslinger enjoyed success in “using law enforcement to control public opinion regarding drug use and addiction” (Galliher, Keys, & Elsner, 1998, p. 661). He was also influential in the production of a wide variety of antidrug discourses during his long period in office as the U.S. drug czar. For 32 years, Anslinger pushed to criminalize specific drugs and called for more international, national, and state laws to prohibit their use. He used radio, the print media (newspaper and magazine articles, books), and film to “educate” Americans about the horrors of drugs like marijuana and concomitant dangerous drug dealers (Anslinger & Oursler, 1961; Anslinger & Tompkins, 1953). Anslinger also attempted to control the flow of scholarly research and artistic creations (including documentary, fictive film, and books) about drug use, while at the same time producing, disseminating, and supporting antidrug discourse (Anslinger & Oursler, 1961; Anslinger & Tompkins, 1953; Galliher et al., 1998). His attempts to censor representations of illegal drugs that did not fit with his antidrug ideology were accompanied by his suspicion regarding the Hollywood film industry and its actors. Anslinger’s role in the arrest and surveillance of high-profile actors (and academics like Alfred Lindesmith who held a very different view on addiction than himself) limited the availability of alternative information about marijuana, other criminalized drugs, addiction, and the law (Galliher et al., 1998; McWilliams, 1990). Whether intended or not, *Reefer Madness* successfully captures many of Anslinger’s views about marijuana, addiction, and the need for criminal justice regulation (Anslinger & Oursler, 1961; Anslinger & Tompkins, 1953).

Although *Reefer Madness* was originally created as an educational film in the mid-1930s, moviegoers rediscovered it in the early 1970s and responded quite differently than earlier viewers. It is now considered the best-selling cult feature film in the United States (Sandrew & Horvath, 2004). The film's dramatic cautionary tale is now interpreted quite differently. Contemporary audiences often howl with laughter at the overwrought scenes, and the film is billed as a comedy. It remains an all-time favorite, and several remastered releases of the film have been produced, including a color version released by Twentieth Century Fox in 2004. A 1998 musical that went on to Broadway, based on the original film, also spawned a made-for-TV movie.

Reefer Madness

Reefer Madness is one of several films produced with the support of the Federal Bureau of Narcotics outside of the Hollywood system. No Hollywood film depicted illegal drug use or trafficking as a central story line from 1934 to 1948. These independent U.S. films were produced before the criminalization of marijuana, during a time when most movie viewers had little knowledge of the plant (Musto, 2002). In these films, white middle-class youth are depicted as vulnerable not only to the negative effects of drug use, but to the seemingly parasitic and criminal ways of the people who sell drugs (Coomber, 2006).

Reefer Madness opens with the following script: "The motion picture you are about to witness may startle you. It would not have been possible, otherwise, to sufficiently emphasize the frightful tale of the new drug menace which is destroying the youth of America in alarming numbers." This foreword warns film viewers that marijuana leads to "acts of shocking violence ... ending in incurable insanity. ... The scenes and incidents, while fictionalized for the purposes of this story, are based upon actual research into the results of marijuana addiction."

Following these warnings, the camera shifts to a number of newspaper headlines: "Dope peddlers caught in high school," "Federals aid police in drug war," and "School-parent organizations join dope fight." Then the film cuts to a flyer, a public notice sponsored by a school and parent association and their guest speaker, Dr. Carroll. We then see Dr. Carroll standing in front of a desk speaking to parents at a meeting in a high school. He is lecturing about the evils of the new drug marijuana, at the same time as he is touting the fight against these drug traffickers by the Department of Narcotics. He states that marijuana is more addictive, "deadly," and "soul

destroying” than other illegal drugs such as heroin and cocaine. He claims that marijuana use is growing in every state; his claim is substantiated by a cutaway to a photo of a field of tall marijuana plants growing behind a tenement building, reminding viewers that the “evils” of poverty and urban deprivation now associated with marijuana and other drugs can travel from the inner city to rural and small-town spaces. Next the parents in the film are shown photos of containers that traffickers use to smuggle their drugs across borders, including heels of shoes and false bottoms of suitcases. Dr. Carroll then proceeds to lay out some “facts and case histories” about marijuana use: he tells a few stories about marijuana users who murder family members and a tale about a young woman found in the company of five men after using marijuana. Then Dr. Carroll introduces the central story, which unfolds on the screen, about two evil drug dealers named Jack and Mae who prey on innocent youth in a small rural town in middle America.

Reefer Madness portrays innocent middle-class white, small-town youth being lured into marijuana addiction, sexual depravity, insanity, and murder. The evil drug that compels them into corruption and crime is marijuana, supplied by Jack and Mae. In the film, American youth are represented as naively moral and innocent in gendered ways. The young men in the film are represented as “upstanding Americans,” good scholars, and athletes. The young women are depicted as moral and kind. Regardless of these scenes of innocence, marijuana supplied by evil dealers catapults these innocent youth into depravity and crime. Viewers are introduced to the practices of marijuana smoking through scenes of young people inhaling marijuana at Mae and Jack’s apartment. Soon the young women are dancing with abandon and lifting their dresses, and young men are making sexual advances, which the women seem to welcome. These effects are universal except for young Mary, a central character in the film. Mary is drawn to a marijuana party to search for her brother Bill. While there, she accidentally smokes marijuana in a cigarette given to her by her brother’s friend, Ralph. At this same party, Mary is shot and killed by Jack. Though this shooting is an accident, Jack frames Mary’s brother Bill for her murder. It was possible to frame Bill for his sister’s murder because he is depicted as being so stoned that he cannot remember clearly what happened at the party. Jack’s boss, depicted as the top dealer, tells Jack to get rid of Ralph before he cracks and tells the police what really happened at the party. Jack enters an apartment where Ralph is holed up with Mae and Blanche. Jack reaches for his gun, but Ralph is already paranoid from smoking so much marijuana, and he violently kills Jack with a fireplace poker. Ralph is driven to murder and insanity from smoking too much marijuana.

Reefer Madness, like other film productions in the 1930s, is presented as a “true case study” of the negative effects of drug use. In the film, marijuana is deemed “Public Enemy Number One!” and movie viewers are warned that marijuana is a “violent narcotic.” Just as significant, criminal justice, harsh drug laws, and increased policing are depicted as the solution to the marijuana epidemic. The police and Dr. Carroll, representing the Department of Narcotics, and the judge are depicted as the legitimate representatives of law and order and experts on marijuana. The final courtroom scene is long and instructive. Bill’s murder conviction is set aside and the charges are dropped against him once Blanche pleads guilty and provides state evidence against Jack. The judge firmly reprimands Bill, and makes him stay for the next case. Ralph is then led into the courtroom by two police officers. Once an innocent youth, Ralph is now depicted as incurably insane from smoking too much marijuana. The judge sentences him to life in a hospital for the criminally insane. Mae is imprisoned, and it is not clear at the end of the film what her sentence will be. Blanche, who helped to lure the youth to marijuana parties, later tells the police the truth about Mary’s death. Yet, at the end of the film she commits suicide rather than face her own overwhelming guilt and the criminal justice system. Once the police know the truth about Jack, they are shown with rifles and axes in their hands, busily rounding up suspects and bringing them into custody, including the top dealer. At the end of the film, Dr. Carroll appears again at the parent association meeting. He concludes, “that happened right here, to your neighbors. We must work untirelessly so that our children are obliged to learn the truth. Because it is only through knowledge that we can safely protect them.” He pointedly asks the parents if their son or daughter will be the next tragedy, ruined by marijuana.

Themes like criminality, insanity, violence, and sexual immorality depicted in *Reefer Madness* are also prevalent in a number of other independent films produced during the same era, including *Assassin of Youth* (1935) and *Marihuana: The Weed with Roots in Hell* (1935). As mentioned earlier, it is believed that the Commissioner of the Federal Bureau of Narcotics, Harry J. Anslinger, supported all three films (Starks, 1982). Unlike today where movie viewers can watch a vast array of films that depict marijuana use and selling in short scenes or as a central theme and where many of them (both youth and adults) have experimented with the drug, movie viewers knew little about marijuana in its smoking form in the early 1900s (Brecher et al., 1972; Musto, 1987, 2002).

Throughout the 1930s Harry J. Anslinger and the Bureau of Narcotics campaigned to criminalize marijuana; they were successful and in 1937 the Marijuana Tax Act was enacted. McWilliams argues that the Act created a

new class of criminals that helped to open “the door” for later drug laws “that were more severe and less effective” (1990, p. 190). Following the criminalization of marijuana in the 1930s, a number of other independent exploitation films about marijuana were produced, including *Teenage Devil Dolls: One-way Ticket to Hell* (1955), and *High School Confidential* (1958). These films center on white suburban or rural towns. As in earlier marijuana films, young middle-class female high-school students appear as vulnerable to drug dealers and the lure of marijuana. In these films, young girls become addicted to marijuana, rejecting their studies and middle-class norms, as they turn to harder drugs like heroin. In *Teenage Devil Dolls*, the main character, Cassandra, is portrayed as a pretty, smart, high school student who earns high grades and plans to go to college. Her educational aspirations are thwarted when she starts hanging around with a motorcycle gang. Later she is shown hooking up with a Mexican man, her dealer and the instrument of her further deprivation and addiction to heroin. In both *Teenage Devil Dolls* and *High School Confidential*, marijuana use is depicted as leading young innocent white women into addiction, sexual immorality, abandonment of gender-appropriate norms, and as a “gateway” drug to harder drugs like heroin. Cassandra hits rock bottom, engaging in the sex trade. Later, her Mexican dealer abandons her. At the film’s end, she is sent off to a Federal Narcotics Hospital to recover from her addictions and her criminal and immoral ways.

From 1937 on, federal law criminalized marijuana (the majority of states had already enacted legislation criminalizing marijuana possession and selling) (McWilliams, 1990, p. 78). Many states enacted mandatory minimums, laws that limit judicial discretion and sentencing. Mandatory minimum laws came into play at the federal level too. By 1951, federal mandatory minimum sentencing was enacted for all marijuana offences. In 1956, life imprisonment for drug trafficking and even the death penalty for some drug offences related to trafficking to minors were enacted (Brecher et al., 1972, p. 56; Musto, 2002, p. 276). These laws were enacted even though the LaGuardia Committee Report (1939–1944), based on a review of the scientific evidence of the time, recommended that marijuana be decriminalized. The LaGuardia Committee Report is not the first comprehensive scientific report on marijuana and other illegal drugs to be ignored by lawmakers (Brecher et al., 1972; Musto, 2002; Zimmer & Morgan, 1997).

Although Hollywood films produced in the 1930s tended to avoid explicit images of illegal drug use due to Production Code censorship, attitudes about film censorship and addiction began to shift in the late 1940s and early 1950s. *The Man with the Golden Arm* (1955) is most often cited as the first contemporary Hollywood film to challenge the censorship of screen

representations of drug use, addiction, and trafficking (Gardner, 1987; Starks, 1982). The film explicitly depicts the story of a young man (played by Frank Sinatra) who is addicted to heroin. His eventual withdrawal from the drug is a vivid and disturbing representation of the effects of drug use, as are scenes with his dealer. The film's producer, Otto Preminger, successfully challenged the Production Code, and the film was shown in theatres in the United States.

Brecher et al. note that 30 years of antimarijuana propaganda and increasingly harsher laws seemed to spur on marijuana use rather than deter it (1972, p. 422). By the mid-1960s to the early 1970s, marijuana survey data noted a steep increase in marijuana use and arrests (pp. 422, 433). At this time, long after the first federal law to regulate marijuana was passed in 1937, the drug became more widely used in the United States (and elsewhere). Marijuana became the illegal drug of choice for white middle-class youth and adults. The 1960s movement, or counterculture movement of the 1960s and 1970s, brought about social, cultural, and political change, including wider recreational use of the plant marijuana. Representations in film shifted again to reflect the times, and censorship of film became less restrictive in relation to images of drugs, drug use, and trafficking.

ALTERNATIVE AND STONER FILMS

Although a number of U.S. films were produced in the 1950s depicting marijuana use as negative and drug dealers as violent predators of youth, there was a huge shift in public attitudes towards the plant in the 1960s and early 1970s, and this shift was reflected in popular productions of that era. In addition, in the 1970s, several states reversed the trend of "escalating penalties" for marijuana offences, reducing marijuana possession to a misdemeanor (McWilliams, 1990, p. 79).

Films such as *I Love You Alice B. Toklas* (1968), *Easy Rider* (1969), and *Alice's Restaurant* (1969) represent recreational marijuana use as a positive normalized behavior that has no ill effects. Drug dealers of marijuana are not demonized; in fact, they are portrayed sympathetically and as challenging the status quo. Films produced during this time in other countries, including Britain and Canada, also introduced audiences to representations of normalized marijuana users and sympathetic dealers (Boyd, 2008; Coomber, 2006; Shapiro, 2003; Starks, 1982; Stevenson, 2000). Eventually a separate genre of movies emerged that has been referred to as "stoner films."

Stoner films are most often comedies that exaggerate marijuana use to ridiculous effect. These films are mostly male buddy films that centre on the use of copious amounts of marijuana and the buddies' subsequent adventures. The male buddies are unrepentant in their consumption of marijuana. Such films as Cheech and Chong's *Up in Smoke* (1978), *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* (1982), *Half Baked* (1998), and *Harold and Kumar Go to White Castle* (2004) fall into this category. These films offer alternative representations countering official antidrug discourse. They also normalize marijuana use in the sense that young men from all social, ethnic, and economic backgrounds have been represented smoking marijuana as part of masculine, pleasurable, youthful activities. However, although there is quite a bit of diversity in recent marijuana films, they continue to focus primarily on white middle-class youth culture. In addition, women are secondary characters in these films, and they are most often depicted as objects of male pleasure rather than as central characters (Boyd, 2008).

NORMALIZED MARIJUANA USE IN SHORT SCENES

Just as popular as feature-length films that focus primarily on marijuana use and selling, many nondrug movies feature a short scene of normalized marijuana use. These scenes are not characterized by the exaggeration of marijuana effects; rather, they tend to highlight the "everydayness" and normalization of drug use in people's lives on and off the screen. *Broken Flowers* (2005), a good example of this approach, is not a drug film per se, but it includes a short scene of normalized recreational marijuana use in suburban America. In one scene, two men who are friends (a black middle-aged man and a white man in his 50s) walk out of the house and go behind a garage to talk. The wife of Winston, the black man, shouts to him as they leave, "No cigarettes!" Behind the garage, Winston lights up a joint and passes it to his friend, Bill. At the same moment, Winston's seven-year-old daughter, Rita, approaches them and says, "Papa, you're smoking again?"

Winston says, "No, no, no. This is just herbs. It's just a little cheeba."

Bill says: "Let me see that." He takes the joint, raises it to his lips, and inhales, and says, "He's right. It's just cannabis sativa."

Winston says, "You see? Just a little indigo baby."

Rita replies, "Cause mamma says, 'No smoking tobacco anymore.'"

Winston claims, "Yeah. I know, I gave it up."

Rita: "Never!"

Winston: "Never! No more tobacco. I promise."

Rita: "Okay."

And she turns around and walks back toward the house. The two men resume smoking and talking. In the film, tobacco is represented as a negative drug. The film scene normalizes marijuana use and presents unproblematic middle-class use, as do many other films that include short scenes of people smoking a joint. The message is: no big deal. In the film scene, marijuana use is represented as a socially accepted activity that many responsible and noncriminal people engage in, regardless of its legal status.

TRAFFICKING AND VIOLENCE

Outside of *Reefer Madness* and other independent exploitation films produced in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s, this chapter has thus far focused on film representations that are sympathetic to marijuana users and sellers. Yet, film representations of violent drug dealers and innocent users being lured into corruption and immorality persist. Marijuana is often depicted as the first illegal drug a dealer sells before moving on to selling harder substances (see *Marihuana: The Weed with Roots in Hell*, 1935; *Blow*, 2001). Additionally, marijuana users, dealers, and grow-operation producers are depicted as violent and capable of murder. *Blow* (2001) and *Pineapple Express* (2008) are good examples of these types of films.

Blow (2001), based on a true story, introduces viewers to George Jung, a young white working-class man who innocently falls into selling and transporting marijuana in the United States in the late 1970s. All goes well for him, and he amasses quite a bit of money from the trade. He is depicted as an easygoing, nonviolent man, and the drug trade in the film is represented as an economic opportunity rather than as a criminal activity. However, after the sudden death of his girlfriend, George meets some high-level traffickers who sell cocaine, and soon he is married to a woman from Columbia who opens doors for him to engage in transporting cocaine into the United States. He is depicted using cocaine along with his wife and hanging out with violent Columbian traffickers. These traffickers kill an informer in front of George, and later he is brutally beat up and then shot by them. Soon, he too is carrying a gun and threatening his partner in crime with death. We see how quickly a fun-loving and peaceful marijuana-using dealer can become a murderous trafficker once he is corrupted through his association with Columbian cartels and his wife, Mirtha.

Pineapple Express (2008) is a good example of what first appears as a stoner flick that quickly turns into a violent caper about corrupt and violent police and drug lords who grow and sell marijuana. At the beginning of the film, viewers are introduced to Dale Denton and his slacker marijuana dealer, Saul Silver, both young white men who are mostly intent on smoking lots of marijuana. However, they are soon forced to go on the run after witnessing a murder by a corrupt Hispanic police officer named Carol and the city's white drug lord, Ted. Dale and Saul witness the shooting of a rival Asian drug dealer by them. They eventually end up at Saul's local supplier's home. Ted's violent henchmen have already roughed up Ray, and he does not want to discuss anything with them. Saul and Dale want answers, and soon they are engaged in a violent fight with Ray. Their peaceful marijuana slacker ways are quickly left behind. Later Ted's henchmen shoot Ray, but he survives. Ray, Dale, and Saul end up at the farmhouse where Ted grows marijuana. The slackers, fuelled by marijuana, take up arms and shoot a number of Ted's men, killing them and Carol. Against all odds, the three slackers survive. The film, though a comedy, contains a number of explicitly violent scenes. Carol, Ted, Saul, and Dale, are all represented as capable and ready to kill given the right circumstances.

MARIJUANA USE AND ARREST RATES

A number of the films discussed in this chapter are oppositional to antidrug war sentiments about marijuana; others perpetuate myths about racialized violent cartels, traffickers, and low-level dealers. Movies like *Blow* and *Pineapple Express* provide a mixed message, as do most films about illegal drugs, users, and dealers. Significantly, illegal drug films that focus on marijuana are understood by viewers against the backdrop of other popular films about heroin, cocaine, and methamphetamine use and selling, and discourses outside of film found in the print media, messages from the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), and the Partnership for a Drug Free America, etc. What is important to note is the interlocking nature of illegal drugs and criminal justice representations (Boyd, 2009; Jiwani & Young, 2006). Representations of marijuana production and trafficking are linked to crime, greed, violence, societal disorder, and corruption of youth. Representations of marijuana use are linked to excess, addiction, rejection of the work ethic and neoliberal goals, sexual abandon, depravity, and even murder. Young white women are represented as being especially vulnerable to marijuana and the lure of criminal and racialized drug dealers. Their