Cannabis Culture on Display

Deviant Heritage Comes Out of the Shadows

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■ **ABSTRACT:** Amid changing state laws to legalize the growing, selling, and use of cannabis for medical and recreational purposes in the United States, activists and advocates continue to help legitimize cannabis through museum-like practices and heritage work. They recognize the importance of destigmatizing the plant and its users, and effectively use exhibits to educate the public as one means of spreading their message. Given the rapid commodification of legal cannabis, some are also documenting its prohibition in order to protect members of cannabis subcultures whose livelihoods are now threatened. Through engaged scholarship, I examine efforts of two museums and two groups of advocates to represent and make visible the heritage of cannabis in the United States.

■ **KEYWORDS:** activism, advocacy, cannabis, counterculture, deviant heritage, exhibition, prohibition

At a cannabis industry event in Long Beach in September 2016, I met with a charismatic cannabis farmer, a hippie in his seventies, who was building his own brand for the legal market. He explained to me that other cannabis farmers in Northern California, so guarded just a few years prior, now found themselves coming out of the shadows to organize with each other, print business cards, and figure out how they were going to survive what seemed to be the inevitable transition to a government-regulated industry. Two years later, in June 2018, I was on a field trip to cannabis farms in Mendocino County with this man and other farmers to discuss cannabis appellations with the employees of the new state office, CalCannabis Cultivation Licensing. Along the way, the farmers shared the measures that they and their families undertook during prohibition to keep their crops safe from law enforcement, like growing under the tree canopy so drones could not spot them and between thick blackberry bushes in order to keep their plants hidden. What they were describing to me, and to state employees, was their once secret cultivation heritage.

In 2017, I became involved in the work of the Mendocino Appellations Project, which seeks to develop an appellation of origin (AO) system for cannabis. As the project evolved, I contributed my experience as an engaged anthropologist working with communities on collaborative research projects to assist in devising how to create a community-led research agenda so that these community members—cannabis farmers (or “cultivators” or “growers”)—could remain at the helm of any research undertaken in the establishment of appellations. I also spoke with

farmers about the emerging cannabis tourism sector, and how it was taking shape in the United States. Through my engagement, I better understood how the farmers identified themselves and how they valued their specialized knowledge. They also taught me about their relationships with cannabis and each other, and how they make sense of their past and future as cultivators of the plant. My engagement with this community was, at the time, considered risky to my professional reputation due to the stigmatization of cannabis, a subject that many social science scholars avoid altogether.¹ In fact, it only recently became more acceptable to produce scholarship about cannabis, as I argue here, due to activist messaging reaching a wider audience.

To combat this silencing stigma, activists and advocates, not scholars, have had to change the narrative about cannabis, and they did this within socially accepted platforms like museums and through other heritage work. In this article, I ask: how have long-term activists strategically worked to destigmatize cannabis through exhibitionary culture, and how are newer advocates, who seize upon that momentum, expanding on those efforts? I address the work of activists, museums, and advocacy groups in highlighting the multiple dimensions of prohibition-era cannabis use and communities. This information remained out of sight during prohibition, though generic references to it formed a hidden archive. Within the modality that Tony Bennett (1996) refers to as the “representational systems of museums,” activists and advocates attempt to make cannabis, and its “deviant heritage,” visible. I further elaborate upon these concepts in this article with respect to documenting and exhibiting cannabis as part of the heritage of the United States. Through museum visits, personal correspondence, interviews, and my ethnographic collaboration, I examine efforts by two museums, the Oaksterdam Cannabis Museum and the Oakland Museum of California, and two groups of advocates, the 420 Archive and the Origins Council, to represent and protect the heritage of cannabis in California.

So much has changed over the past decade. The topic of cannabis has permeated mainstream public and political culture in North America. As the stigma surrounding it lessens, cannabis appears in public discourse beyond counterculture and youth culture matters, increasingly intersecting with more far-reaching concerns of health and well-being, economic opportunity, and social justice. Likewise, what was once a fringe political issue—the legalization of cannabis—is now one for which political candidates in North America must formalize their positions in order to remain relevant in rapidly changing political times.

The plant was not always a pariah. Cannabis was legal in North America until the early twentieth century (for policy overviews, see Campos 2012; Cox 2018; and Hudak 2020). It was federally prohibited in the United States through the Marihuana Tax Act of 1937, which was overturned by the US Supreme Court in 1969 (*Leary v. United States*). In retaliation, Congress passed the Controlled Substances Act of 1970, which served as America’s legislation in accordance with the United Nations Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs. In Canada, it was prohibited in 1923, and in Mexico it was banned in 1920. In the decades following, cannabis went underground; people still grew it, sold it, and consumed it, but with more secrecy. When states began legalizing it for adult use in 2012, cannabis entered more prominent national and international conversations.² Similarly, by the time the Government of Canada legalized cannabis in 2018, there was already considerable media coverage on the topic, and Canadians nationwide debated the pros and cons of legalization, prognosticating its future as a legitimate commodity. Mexico decriminalized it in 2009, and after national protests on 31 October 2018 its Supreme Court ruled that an existing law prohibiting the recreational use of cannabis was unconstitutional.

In the United States, cannabis is still federally prohibited and designated a Schedule I substance, meaning that the federal government has deemed it to have no accepted medical uses and a high potential for abuse. In 1996, California historically voted to legalize the plant for medical purposes (Proposition 215 [the Compassionate Use Act of 1996]), reenergizing efforts

toward more comprehensive legalization. Currently, medical cannabis is legal or decriminalized in all but two states, Idaho and South Dakota. In those states with legalized medical cannabis, patients with a doctor's recommendation typically can grow the plant for personal use or acquire it from authorized distributors. Starting in 2012, states began legalizing cannabis for adult use, where individuals 21 years and older can grow their own or purchase it for nonmedical use. This list includes Colorado, Washington, Oregon, Alaska, California, Nevada, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, and Illinois (in Washington, DC, and Vermont, adults can possess cannabis but cannot legally purchase it). Today, more than half of the adults in the country have consumed cannabis at least once in their lifetime, and 22 percent use it somewhat regularly (Yahoo News/Marist Poll 2017).

Throughout prohibition, North American governments' official messaging about cannabis has often misled the public, like linking cannabis consumption to violent and criminal behavior. During the past 50 years, activists and advocates have pushed back against such misinformation, educating North American publics about the plant, its legal history, and its heritage. By disseminating such information through museum exhibits, film and television, social media, and print publications, they have helped to destigmatize cannabis for increasingly open-minded national and international audiences. According to a recent poll by the Pew Research Center, a staggering 91 percent of adults in the United States are in favor of some sort of legalization (Daniller 2019). Thanks to a massive shift in public perception, cannabis is finally moving out of the shadows and into the light.

Much of the information about cannabis that informs the post-prohibition policies of states has derived not from academic research, but from the long-term work of activists and advocates, who are undertaking most of this historical and cultural work on their own (and this vacuum has therefore created an urgent need for more research on cannabis-related issues). This is not to say that there was no scholarship on the plant prior to the loosening of prohibition, far from it (e.g., Becker 1953; Gaoni and Mechoulam 1964; Mikuriya 1969; Reiman 2009; Williamson and Evans 2000). Still, scholars have largely sidestepped research on cannabis-related topics or have been narrowly focused on negative outcomes of cannabis use for decades likely because of insufficient interest in a stigmatized subject due to limited funding and, in the United States, the obstruction of such research by the Drug Enforcement Administration. It is only through the push to legalize the plant that they have begun pursuing more research in this area.³ Thus, in this article I highlight the role that activists, those individuals who act with intention to bring about social or political change, and advocates, those who speak about social and political issues to bring attention to an injustice, have played in making visible the heritage of cannabis. In addition, I focus on their efforts to protect the heritage of cannabis farmers and activists at the end of prohibition, specifically in California, a state well known for its legacy of cannabis cultivation and the subcultures associated with the plant.

Deviant Heritage Made Visible

Exhibiting cannabis in museums and other venues is not entirely a novel enterprise. In 1985, Ben Dronkers and Ed Rosenthal founded the Hash Marihuana & Hemp Museum in Amsterdam (then named the Cannabis Info Museum), an endeavor made possible given policies governing cannabis sales and consumption in the Netherlands at the time (i.e., coffeeshops).⁴ Over the past several decades, there were also attempts at producing exhibits related to cannabis content in the United States. For example, Richard M. Davis ran the Mendocino Mobile Marijuana Museum in the 1990s. In addition, hobbyists have long been collecting historic material culture and other

paraphernalia for personal use. What is new is the volume of public exhibits and programming dedicated to cannabis that started to arise in the United States around 2012, especially those in more mainstream spaces, including science museums, art galleries, university museums, botanical gardens, and even for-profit novelty museums, reaching broader public audiences. These spaces help to legitimize cannabis heritage because the exhibits are located in places that symbolize worthwhile knowledge and ideas.

In his classic study, Howard S. Becker (1963) gave careful attention to how marijuana—now considered a derogatory name for cannabis—users came to be labeled as social deviants. If one breaks social rules, that person can both be labeled an outsider and internalize this label. Contemporaneously, Erving Goffman's groundbreaking work on stigma laid out the framework for how stigma, an "attribute that is deeply discrediting" (1963: 3), contributes to the social classification of those labeled with a negative stereotype as undesirable and unacceptable. Just because mainstream society considers particular subcultures odd, unwanted, and even embarrassing, information about these groups—whose members are considered outsiders—still shows up in official records and in private collections. Often information is muddled or muted in such records, so as not to draw attention. This practice results in the formation of a hidden archive, one unspoken and only known to those who can read the silences. The discomfort felt when identifying or learning heritage that should not be discussed or that carries distress because of stigma is what I call "deviant heritage." I use this concept to understand the condition of cannabis heritage in the United States, which was disguised during prohibition, but is now one that activists and advocates seek to make manifest. It can be seen alongside "dissonant heritage," which is, broadly speaking, heritage for which there is discordance of meaning and values as a type of undesirable heritage (Tunbridge and Ashworth 1996). Deviant heritage also connotes a possible temporal status, for if the signifier of deviance can change as the heritage is more broadly accepted, the heritage in question may only be considered deviant for a period of time. Still, even though deviant heritage might be included in a museum exhibit, and therefore made more visible, it does not mean that it is made nondeviant or normalized. While official museum and heritage work contributes to the legitimacy of their subjects through the provision of their inherent authority, they are only one realm of public culture in which deviant subjects are judged.

Another example of deviant heritage is that of the LGBT+ community. Before the social movement to end the stigmatization of nonnormative sexualities and gender identities and the fight for equal rights, the majority of members of this community led their private lives in secret, in large part due to fear of persecution. Their pasts were recorded, however, in hidden archives, like newsletters and advertisements of queer spaces, and in personal photographs and diaries (Robinson 2014). For several decades, the members of the LGBT+ community have pushed to fully develop official archives and museum collections of their heritage (Graves and Dubrow 2019; Steorn 2012); notable ones include the ONE National Gay & Lesbian Archives at the University of Southern California and IHLIA LGBTI Heritage at the Public Library Amsterdam. Because public culture considered nonnormative sexualities and gender identities as forms of social deviancy, the LGBT+ community's past was deeply stigmatized. However, through activism and advocacy and LGBT+ community members' work on changing the narrative and on documenting and sharing their heritage, the stigma is lessening and LGBT+ heritage is becoming more visible.

Museums, in a variety of forms, are powerful. Christina F. Kreps (2003a) offers a crucial overview of the comparative and historical work of exhibiting culture—from Indonesia to Native North America—as a critique of the Eurocentric model of museology. She argues that exhibits help to legitimize and empower social groups, including Indigenous communities who employ

their own curatorial practices (Kreps 2003a, 2003b). This has always been the work of museums, though typically of the ruling class (Bennett 1995), so it is unsurprising that, given time, marginalized groups would seize upon it. Tony Bennett's Foucauldian reading of the work the museum does through its "exhibitionary complex" (Bennett 1996, 2015) emphasizes that museums, as assemblages of social governance, function to consolidate disparate ideas rather than challenge them. As museums opened up to public audiences in the nineteenth century, they worked to refocus the public's gaze on material objects that represent ideas that museum authorities wanted to disseminate. This structure of power located at the museum through its objects and messages and the public is what Bennett refers to as a system of representation. However, disenfranchised groups, such as ethnic or religious minorities, utilize the "technologies of power" within museum-like work to proclaim their identity and gain recognition and the rights that come with it (e.g., Bell 2012; Phillips 2011). They knowingly, and either strategically or tactically, use the effects that museums have in order to pursue results that will benefit themselves. This also extends to other forms of heritage work. Laurajane Smith (2006) demonstrates how even the working class solidify their culture through the protections that formal heritage laws afford, offering Castleford in West Yorkshire as an example.

It is because of their desire to destigmatize, make visible, and protect cannabis subcultures and heritage that activists and advocates decisively employ the museum as a tool of change. Museum exhibits reflect a negotiation of public culture; they help to shape views of their visitors while curators manage their messaging. Activists and advocates work to reframe the narrative about cannabis and the communities that produce, distribute, and consume the plant that are marginalized by law and policy. Although this activist messaging is often presented in a dichotomous framework of those in power versus those who are disenfranchised, the situation that these activists wish to address is much more complex. Now that cannabis prohibitions are ending and the plant and its products are becoming legal commodities, new challenges are emerging, as they are also working to protect the heritage of cannabis as well as the people whose livelihoods depend on the plant.

Cannabis Heritage and Activism

Having never considered or given much thought to humanity's relationship to cannabis, it may be intriguing for some to entertain the idea of heritage related to the plant (though see Clarke and Merlin 2013; and Duvall 2016, 2019). Cannabis heritage is a neglected subject, so what does it entail? Simply put, it includes both the material and immaterial, or tangible and intangible, remains of cannabis's use by humans in the past and how they engage it in the present.

Cannabis and hemp both derive from the *Cannabis sativa* species, but cannabis has a psychoactive component scientifically identified as delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol (THC). People have been using and consuming the plant for thousands of years, and archaeologists have uncovered archaeobotanical evidence of its use, and perhaps consumption, throughout Asia and Europe (Clarke and Merlin 2013; Ren et al. 2019). It is native to Central Asia, but flourishes elsewhere and for millennia has been part of various cultural practices. In the nineteenth century, Western doctors and pharmacists began preparing tinctures made out of cannabis concentrates that were sold over the counter in Europe and the United States. The history of hemp in the United States dates back even longer, to the sixteenth century, its fibers used for industrial purposes such as cordage, paper, and building material. Even prohibition, from Reefer Madness to the War on Drugs, is part of cannabis heritage in the United States and has had a lasting impact on how we interact with the plant and its products today.

What is of real concern here, however, is that cannabis is the subject of political claims that invoke heritage. Due to its stigmatization and negative propaganda about the plant, there was an absence of acknowledgment, or denial, of its heritage in the United States, and this erasure is what activists seek to address. It is important to examine the nation's longer entanglement with cannabis as well as to give voice to the diverse consumers and others who work with the plant. It is critical to not just look into the activists' messaging, but to get to the bottom of how they are retelling the narrative of cannabis through exhibits and heritage work, and why, and whose voices they reflect and whose they silence, whether or not they do so inadvertently (see Trouillot 1995). After all, having a heritage is crucial to having a modern identity, and it is possible to examine the ongoing work of heritage-making by cannabis farmers and activists and their advocates.

Some groups, such as those who cultivate and distribute the plant, venerate cannabis and describe themselves as being part of a cannabis subculture of society. Other groups, such as counterculture movements of beatniks and hippies, Rastafarians (a religious minority group), jazz musicians, and the hip-hop community, might not define themselves explicitly under the banner of cannabis, but are commonly associated with the plant. However, many Americans are occasional consumers, and they do not have a strong connection to its heritage or self-identify as members of a cannabis subculture. Although its use during prohibition was, and in many cases still is, considered socially deviant, people in cannabis subcultures and/or in counterculture movements who were consuming cannabis or who were associated with it were influential in shifting the stigma of cannabis over time by informing the public about it (Davis 2015; Kilmer and MacCoun 2017). They and other social actors fought to legalize the plant over the past 50 years.

Political and social activism tied to counterculture movements in the 1960s and 1970s has had a lasting effect toward ending cannabis prohibition. Activists within these movements—for example, the free speech, civil rights, Feminist, and environmentalist movements—and activists and advocates inspired by what these movements achieved have continued to advance a great number of political and social causes. Since counterculture movements are viewed in opposition to mainstream society, their heritage is not necessarily represented or fairly portrayed outside of their own communities. Think of the gay liberation and the LGBT rights movements of the 1970s and the ongoing hard work of their activists and advocates not only for visibility but also for acceptance and equal rights. Hence, counterculture movements potentially become forms of deviant heritage that are hidden or prohibited.

Cannabis is similarly pigeonholed. Activists and advocates aim to have cannabis heritage included in the historical record, and they also push for a revision of its account. One way that they do this is by using exhibitions and heritage work to reframe thinking about cannabis. Especially as prohibition wanes (at least in states where cannabis is legal), threatening subcultures that were once secretive, like cannabis farmers, activists and advocates enthusiastically engage in the heritagization of these subcultures. By examining such efforts, we can better understand these actors, their contexts, and how inclusive or exclusive their telling of the cannabis story is.

Cannabis on Display

Activists and advocacy groups use the modalities of exhibitions to reframe the narrative about cannabis and to lessen the stigma attached to the plant and the consumers who use it. In this section, I describe an activist-driven museum that focuses on cannabis and a public museum that organized an exhibit on the subject: the Oaksterdam Cannabis Museum and the *Altered*

State: Marijuana in California exhibit at the Oakland Museum of California. I also discuss the work of two advocacy groups that are documenting cannabis heritage in rapidly changing times amid the dismantling of state prohibition in order to ultimately protect it: the 420 Archive and the Origins Council.

Oaksterdam Cannabis Museum

Given California's legacy of cannabis activism and its status as the leading cultivation hub in the United States, it is unsurprising that the state is the home of the first cannabis-focused university in North America, Oaksterdam, which is located in the progressive city of Oakland. Richard Lee, a well-known cannabis activist, founded the campus in 2007 to help legitimize the cannabis industry, offering courses from horticulture to business management. Just inside its current entrance is the Oaksterdam Cannabis Museum, which was founded in 2011.

In August 2018, I visited the museum, which is only about 400 square feet. It is self-guided with informational placards at each display and artifacts clearly labeled. The material culture on display includes a case with medical cannabis tincture bottles from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a case with information about the significance of industrial hemp in the United States, and display cases with an assortment of activist fliers and newsletters from the past several decades (see Figures 1, 2, and 3). The regular foot traffic through the museum seems to primarily be the Oaksterdam students on their way to class.

Figure 1. Display Cases at the Oaksterdam Cannabis Museum. Courtesy of Rachel F. Giraudo, 2018.

Figure 2. Display Case of Industrial Hemp at the Oaksterdam Cannabis Museum. Courtesy of Rachel F. Giraudo, 2018.

Figure 3. Medical Cannabis Tincture Bottles on Display at the Oaksterdam Cannabis Museum. Courtesy of Rachel F. Giraudo, 2018.

The museum's curator is Chris Conrad, whose role in documenting cannabis heritage and educating the public goes back more than 30 years. A dedicated activist, Conrad chose to focus on hemp and medical cannabis as a younger adult, working on publications and advocacy campaigns starting in the late 1980s. Together with his wife, Mikki Norris, he helped to redesign the Hash Marihuana & Hemp Museum in Amsterdam in the early 1990s. They then turned their attention to highlighting the damaging effects of the War on Drugs on American families, including how it disproportionately affected communities of color. In the mid-1990s, Conrad and Norris collected stories and photos from individuals who received mandatory minimum sentences for first-time, nonviolent drug charges, including possession and distribution, and heard how these harsh policies broke up families. Their focus was on the government's punitive measures related to drugs, and it illuminated the United States' dark prohibition heritage. At the time, this was still a more provocative message. They shared their findings with an exhibit prepared for the fiftieth Anniversary of the United Nations in San Francisco, *Human Rights '95: Atrocities of the Drug War*, and in their resulting book project, *Shattered Lives: Portraits from America's Drug War* (Norris et al. 1998). Noting how depressing and emotionally taxing, though important, sharing these stories could be, Norris chose as her next project in the first decade of the 2000s a campaign to destigmatize cannabis consumption and thereby lose the excuse for prohibition—the *Cannabis Consumers Campaign*—using an online survey for people to “come out” as cannabis consumers.⁵ This was an online exhibit that overturned derogatory stereotypes of people who consume cannabis, who were usually portrayed as lazy stoners, drug addicts, dirty, and uneducated. Conrad and Norris are a strong example of activists using the “technologies of power” within the exhibitionary complex for social and political change. They demonstrate through their activism just how crucial messaging is, whether it is highlighting a different perspective than one commonly told or challenging stigma and showing how exhibits are central to this exercise.

Altered State: Marijuana in California

Activism ultimately made possible the 2016 exhibit by the Oakland Museum of California, *Altered State: Marijuana in California*.⁶ Because of the stigma associated with cannabis, it was a subject not to be publicly discussed. However, activism propelled conversations of cannabis into the public, and onto the ballot, so that a museum exhibit could be a legitimizing force and also help to upend the notion of cannabis heritage in California as undeniably deviant. The exhibit, which was developed by Kathleen McLean and researched by Sarah Seiter, Associate Curator of Natural Sciences at the museum, played an important role in mainstreaming cannabis education during an election year in which Californians would ultimately vote in favor of legalizing adult-use cannabis with Proposition 64 (the Adult Use of Marijuana Act).

In June 2016, I had the opportunity to visit the recently unveiled exhibit for an event in support of Proposition 64, which took place the same day as a major cannabis industry event, which was also in Oakland. This was the largest exhibit dedicated to cannabis that a conventional, publicly funded museum in California has ever organized; it contained several sections that were well-researched and interactive: Cannabis Science, Medical Marijuana, Sacred Ganja, Youth and Weed, and Evil Weed. Notable content included a history of cannabis law and policy, an interactive portion for visitors to share their perspectives on cannabis, pop culture and paraphernalia associated with cannabis, and even several live cannabis plants in an indoor greenhouse (see Figures 4, 5, and 6).

According to its website, the Oakland Museum of California bridges art, history, and natural sciences under its mission “to inspire all Californians to create a more vibrant future for

themselves and their communities.”⁷⁷ It is a family museum that caters to visitors of all ages, including schoolchildren, though this particular exhibit was targeted to visitors aged 12 years and older. The timing of its opening in the spring before the election that would legalize adult-use cannabis in California is important because public opinion was malleable enough to make possible what would have in previous years been too controversial an exhibit. MacLean, Seiter, and the many advisors and contributors to the exhibit all demonstrate how important advocacy is to spotlighting cannabis heritage. Likewise, it shows why the museum can be an appropriate assemblage for activists and advocates to engage in order to give voice to a cause. In fact, *Altered State* won the Western Museums Association’s Charles Redd Center for Western Studies Award for Exhibition Excellence in September 2016, revealing how much more socially acceptable cannabis has become.

Figure 4. Dried Cannabis on Display at *Altered State: Marijuana in California*, Oakland Museum of California. Courtesy of Marc E. Shapiro, 2016.

Figure 5. Live Cannabis Plants on Display at *Altered State: Marijuana in California*, Oakland Museum of California. Courtesy of Marc E. Shapiro, 2016.

Figure 6. Interactive Activity at *Altered State: Marijuana in California*, Oakland Museum of California. Courtesy of Marc E. Shapiro, 2016.

420 Archive

It is precisely this legacy of activism along with a very rich cultivation history that historian Joe Hoover, of the Minnesota Historical Society, had in mind when he decided to start documenting the oral histories of medical cannabis activists and farmers from Northern California. Hoover recognized the peculiar absence of cannabis prohibition from official historical records several years ago, when he visited the exhibit *American Spirits: The Rise and Fall of Prohibition*. In fact, he observed that the only museum that mentioned the plant was that of the Drug Enforcement Administration. In a similar vein, Chris Conrad intuited that the generic term “fiber” in the text of a Smithsonian museum exhibit on American history was used to represent the specific term “hemp.” The United States has, in essence, created a hidden archive of cannabis history in the country. Hoover’s aim at the 420 Archive, a nonprofit he founded c. 2013, is to work with communities to more systematically record the oral history of cannabis activists and farmers, and thereby build a formal archive.⁸ He would also like to see important historic sites related to cannabis listed on the National Register. However, it is difficult to find financial resources for this undertaking, and the 420 Archive, like many other nonprofits and advocacy groups, relies on a broader support network.

Hoover and his associates are now interviewing farmers in Northern California’s Emerald Triangle, which includes the three counties—Mendocino, Humboldt, and Trinity—known for cannabis cultivation, as the communities there are changing due to the end of prohibition. This region has a greater than 50-year history of cannabis cultivation that took off with the Back-to-the-Land Movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The communities here consist of tens of thousands of farmers (there are inaccurate counts because of the secrecy of cannabis cultivation during prohibition) who for decades supplied the United States with most of its domestic cannabis (Hecht 2014). Paradoxically, since Proposition 64 passed, legalizing cannabis for adult use, new state and local regulations for cultivation, processing, and distribution are negatively affecting long-term cannabis farmers in the region. The farming communities here have for decades produced the most well-known sungrown cannabis in the United States. Due to the extra cost of regulatory compliance, individual and family farming operations find it difficult to meet the state’s regulatory demands and to simultaneously compete with big-money interests moving into the market. In fact, it has had such a devastating effect on farmers in Northern California that they have described it more than once as an “extinction.” A way of life, that includes communities of the counterculture movements, activists, and enthusiasts of cannabis, runs the risk of dramatically changing.

The activists and longtime farmers of Northern California are also getting old, and so we are losing an opportunity to record their life histories. Because of the link to social deviance, some of the activists were treated as fringe members of society, and since cannabis has been federally illegal for about 85 years, the farmers had to live in secrecy. Therefore, there is a dual issue in recording their oral histories: many farmers do not trust outsiders well enough to share their secrets, and time is literally running out. The 420 Archive, now in partnership with the Oral History Center at the University of California, Berkeley, is recording interviews with farmers and activists to formally archive this legacy and finally make it visible.

Origins Council

As cannabis catapulted into the public spotlight during the past several years thanks to long-term activism paying off with successful ballot initiatives, people whose livelihoods depended on cannabis cultivation and sales during prohibition were often negatively impacted by the high costs

of new regulations. The exorbitant cost to transition to legal cannabis is leaving many long-term farmers behind, and it is generally the wealthier or well-financed farmers that can continue in the regulated market. Even more egregious, some of the people who can afford to grow in the regulated market are new to cannabis, only joining the industry because of the promising financial return, rather than adhering to the values and practices that many people who self-identify as being part of a cannabis subculture uphold, like regenerative farming. Cannabis-cultivating communities are changing rapidly. Given the rush toward capitalizing on cannabis's newly legal status in several states and in Canada, the once secret societies of cannabis farmers are being thrust out of hiding in order to survive in the industry.

The Origins Council is an advocacy nonprofit based in California that seeks to create an appellation of origin (AO) system for cannabis to promote it as a product of place, like champagne from the Champagne wine region of France, *prosciutto di Parma* (“Parma ham”) from the Emilia-Romagna region of Italy, and tequila from Mexico.⁹ In 2017, California passed Senate Bill 94 that mandates a process for cannabis appellations in the state by 2021, so the state is leading the way toward an AO system for cannabis that, it is hoped, will influence the development of a global one. The Mendocino Appellations Project, a local project in Mendocino County, evolved into the Origins Council in 2019, as farmers from across California organized to establish local permitting programs and grower associations chose to work in coalition to protect their collective cannabis heritage.

Legalization has negatively impacted these farmers not only because of the high costs of regulatory compliance, but also due to the increasingly competitive marketplace for cannabis. For example, most farmers in the Emerald Triangle cultivate small batches (0.25–1.0 acres) of sungrown cannabis, yielding one to two harvests per year.¹⁰ They are now competing with newly established, well-capitalized multi-acre farms in traditional, commercial agricultural regions, as well as production in climate-controlled, light-assisted greenhouses and indoor warehouses, which can yield up to six harvests per year. This new commercialized production at scales of sometimes multiple acres per facility also brings concerns about energy consumption and the overall environmental sustainability of regulated cannabis production in California. It has been challenging for farmers in the state's legacy producing regions who hope to sell in the legal market to find distributors, as some distributors, notably in Southern California, have vertically integrated supply chains.

The Origins Council is concerned with protecting the heritage of sungrown cannabis cultivation, and, by establishing an AO system based on *terroir*, hopes to promote and sustain a craft cannabis market. It is following a community-driven research agenda, one that I helped to advise. Ultimately, each AO will be self-governed by the farmers, who are tasked with collecting data on soils, water, plant biology, oral history, and cultural heritage. Recording the cultural heritage of cultivation in proposed appellations (e.g., different cultivation practices from region to region) is one important component of establishing an AO system.

The economic benefit of an AO system is that only cannabis grown in the ground in state-approved appellations can be labeled as such, thus elevating the status and price of cannabis with this geographical indication. While the development of an AO system for cannabis will help many farmers, there are also farmers who protest it, like those who grow indoors, either full-time or partially. The sungrown farmers' claims of a cannabis-cultivating heritage are political, and they articulate their goals in terms of rural agricultural development (but see Polson and Petersen-Rockney 2019). However, they are motivated by self-preservation against big-money interests and not necessarily against urban farmers.

Discussion

Just a decade ago, it was difficult to find an audience beyond the cannabis community to discuss cannabis-related matters. The fact that the topic is accessible to the greater public through conventional venues is a testament to the hard work of activists and advocates over the past several decades. During prohibition, which persists in many states, people involved in cannabis were not only portrayed as deviant, they were also often ridiculed, and they often faced harsh legal repercussions. As presented in this article, this deviant heritage has been brought into the light by the work of activists and advocates. One way they have been able to do this is through the messaging of museum and heritage work.

Museums are the work of public culture. Utilizing and displaying material culture, museums help to shape society's values. That activists deploy the work of the museum—its exhibitionary complex—to make cannabis more visible, and to educate and influence the public, is telling of the ability of exhibitions to provide legitimacy. This was the effect of Chris Conrad and Mikki Norris's activism, with their involvement in the redevelopment of the Hash Marihuana & Hemp Museum in Amsterdam, their co-curated exhibit on the personal and familial human rights damages of the War on Drugs, Norris's online destigmatizing campaign, and Conrad's role as curator at the Oaksterdam Cannabis Museum. Museums and museum-like work affords soft power for which these two activists are now well known. The existence of more accessible museum spaces, like the Oakland Museum of California, which are publicly funded, are perhaps even more telling of how influential shifting narratives can be. Without the work of the activists and advocates, the curatorial team of the Oakland Museum of California would not have had the breadth of content to display in the *Altered State* exhibit. However, because of the museum's interest in this topic, the messaging was amplified during an election year at a state museum.¹¹

However, in consolidating ideas and perspectives of cannabis through exhibits, the efforts of activists and advocates potentially result in selective representations of cannabis subcultures. Thus, in revising the narrative on cannabis, some experiences are still silenced, and the hidden archive persists. This is an issue in the projects presented above that record the heritage of cannabis farmers in Northern California.

Thousands of individuals who farmed cannabis in California during prohibition are suddenly threatened from continuing their craft because of the high cost of joining a regulated market. Advocates are working to document and protect these cultivation heritages and those of cannabis subcultures at the end of state-level prohibition.¹² For example, the Origins Council is advocating for the development of a system to document the biological and cultural traits of sungrown cannabis so that communities can apply a geographical indication that can provide better marketing leverage. One partner of the Origins Council is the 420 Archive, which is recording oral histories of cannabis farmers and activists in Northern California. These oral histories and other recorded cultural information will be useful for the communities to demonstrate that they have a heritage and that their geographical region deserves recognition and protection. In doing so, they are participating in heritage-making with a goal to protect their political and economic stakes in the newly legalized industry. However, by promoting sungrown cannabis through AO, these farmers are prioritizing their cultivation heritage over the heritage of others, like that of the indoor famers in Southern California.

As public opinion changes, there is an increasing interest in capitalizing on a once hush-hush topic. For example, the recently opened (2018) for-profit cannabis museum in Las Vegas, Cannabition, provides exhibit space with plenty of cannabis paraphernalia. Its aim is to be an immersive tourism destination.¹³ Weedmaps, the for-profit website that serves as a directory for

cannabis dispensaries and delivery services, opened its own temporary museum in Los Angeles in 2019. The Weedmaps Museum of Weed is also a space where visitors can publicly consume cannabis in the later evening.¹⁴ These for-profit museums show that there is a market for cannabis museum exhibits, even if the focus is more for touristic purposes. All exhibits help to normalize cannabis, whether in publicly funded museums or privately funded ones. In fact, Joe Hoover notes that many farming communities would like their own cannabis-related museum, in large part, to lure tourists and economically benefit from this sector.

The recognition of cannabis heritage is exciting. There are many layers to the complex and complicated histories of cannabis in the United States and around the world to uncover. Activists and advocates, who helped to pave the way toward legalization, continue to work toward educating the public, deconstructing negative stereotypes associated with cannabis, and archiving cannabis heritage, thus laying claim to its protection. Now is the opportunity for scholars with specialized training to also pay critical attention to these heritage forms and the ways in which heritagization will affect diverse cannabis subcultures, and, likewise, how they may reify them. They can also further their involvement through advocacy by helping to document the life histories of cannabis activists and farmers, or by developing heritage management training for communities interested in preserving their cultural heritage. Even though cannabis is still federally prohibited in the United States, the counterculture movement to overturn this era of prohibition continues to energize people, and with this movement will come even broader social change.

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NOTES

1. In 2015, I co-organized the program “Cannabis Cultures: Tour, Discussion & Reception in Denver” for the Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association. The program, attended by over 120 conference-goers, included a tour to cannabis dispensaries in and around Denver, and a discussion and reception with leaders in the legal cannabis industry.
2. In fact, the debate on legalization took off even earlier. In 2009, the Department of Justice under the Obama administration issued a memorandum that deprioritized federal funding to raid cannabis distributors who were in compliance with state and local laws.
3. Scholars have pursued work on cannabis over the decades, though some have faced retribution for doing so, such as Suzanne Sisley, who was fired by the University of Arizona in 2014, arguably, for her federally funded research on cannabis as a treatment for posttraumatic stress disorder. It is the pioneering work of these scholars that further enables the advancement of this interdisciplinary field.
4. Dronkers also runs a museum by the same name in Barcelona. See the Hash Museum website: <https://hashmuseum.com/>.
5. See the *Cannabis Consumers Campaign*’s website: <http://www.cannabisconsumers.org/>. Norris also makes the connection between her work on changing the stigma by “coming out” and that of the LGBT rights movement.
6. See <https://museumca.org/exhibit/altered-state-marijuana-california>. The Oakland Museum Women’s Board funded this exhibit in part.
7. See Oakland Museum of California’s website: <https://museumca.org/>. The museum charges an entrance fee to nonmembers.
8. See the 420 Archive’s website: <http://www.420archive.org/>.
9. See the Origins Council’s website: <http://originscouncil.org/>.
10. Chris Conrad notes that in the early 2000s some farmers started growing much larger amounts throughout the year, looking to make a major profit versus the supplemental income that farmers had typically sought previously.
11. Other publicly funded museums are following this trend. For example, the University of California Botanical Garden at Berkeley and the Hearst Museum of Anthropology organized a speaker series on cannabis in 2018, *Cannabis in Context*, featuring cannabis scholars and policy experts. In 2019, the Hearst Museum of Anthropology also hosted the exhibit *Pleasure, Poison, Prescription, Prayer: The Worlds of Mind-Altering Substances* and an accompanying speaker series.
12. Other modes of cannabis heritage preservation include cannabis conferences, festivals, and competition events like the Emerald Cup.
13. See Cannabition’s website: <https://cannabition.com>.
14. See Weedmaps: Museum of Weed’s website: <https://themuseumofweed.com/>.

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