

James H. Mills, *Cannabis Britannica: Empire, Trade, and Prohibition, 1800-1928*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2003.

Despite a current interest in cannabis policies and laws among governments, the media, not to mention publishers, and a host of official bodies and pressure groups, there are few historical accounts of the origins of those regulations, or explanations of the manner in which these contentious codes were enacted. This book examines these origins in the British context to 1928 when the Coca Leaves and Indian Hemp Regulations first established cannabis's place in British law. More importantly, it meticulously details the circumstances that led to the introduction of international restrictions on cannabis substances in these years. The second half of the story, the author asserts in the introduction, will be the subject of a subsequent volume.

The story, in this volume, starts with a British government far less interested in the intoxicating properties of the cannabis plant than in the use of its fibres as a source of cordage for the rigging of the navy upon which the security of the nation and the exploitation of its empire depended. Along these lines, dictionary definitions of "cannabis" from the eighteenth century focus almost entirely on the various profitable manufactures that were dependant on hemp, including sail cloth, ticking, sacking, twine and nets. A century later concerns had hardly shifted, as the sails and cordage of a single ship of war still required 180,000 lbs of rough hemp for its construction. For similar reasons, a decree in 1563 already required landowners with 60 acres or more to cultivate hemp or face a fine of £5. Clearly, the weed was fundamental to both the British economy and the experiment of empire over many centuries.

Alternatively, in India hemp was used primarily for narcotic purposes, circumstances that increasingly frustrated its imperialist rulers. Unsited to the manufacture of cordage because of the way it was grown, Indian hemp was destined for the cannabis markets of the East, its South Asian cultivators apparently uninterested

in the cordage crisis of the British Empire. It was in India that an awareness of hemp narcotics among colonial administrators was formed, and it is therefore to these sources that Mills turns in order to shed light on attitudes to cannabis in these years.

From the early 1700s, medical men and scientists of the East India Company had been gathering information relating to the plant's uses. Among its first recorded medical applications, cannabis - boiled in milk - was valued as a cough medication and was reputed to cure jaundice. Few western practitioners, however, had direct experience of cannabis preparations leading to a large amount of confusion and a distinct lack of precision in early writings on the drug. Mills, in turn, is particularly careful in tracing the longevity of certain lore through cannabis correspondence produced over many centuries. Not until the 1830s was a definitive account of cannabis produced by Limerick-born William Brooke O'Shaughnessy, who, soon after graduating from Edinburgh with an MD, entered the Indian Medical Service in search of greener pastures. Besides promoting and pioneering an Indian telegraph system, O'Shaughnessy eagerly conducted experiments with local drugs and medicines, publishing widely on his research, much of it conducted while Professor of Chemistry and Medicine in the Medical College of Calcutta. Having carefully observed various animals, including dogs, cats, pigs and even fish, under the influence of cannabis, O'Shaughnessy progressed to trials with patients and even students. The results of these experiments, not to mention regular self-experimentation, led him to surmise that doses of the plant might be used effectively to treat rheumatism, rabies, tetanus and cholera, among a host of other conditions. By 1839, after further tests, O'Shaughnessy concluded that "the results seem to me to warrant our anticipating from its more extensive and impartial use no inconsiderable addition to the resources of the physician" (3). In later years, and in less-restrained terms, he was to describe cannabis as a "wonder-drug."

While scientists and medical practitioners discussed the plant's medical benefits, East India Company revenue officers

had fewer difficulties sizing up its financial potential, taxes on the commence of cannabis having been levied in India as early as the 1790s. By 1833, the East India Company had given up its original function as a trading company altogether and derived its income solely from tax collection. As such, the British profited handsomely from being the rulers of the world's largest cannabis producer. However, cultivators, like many entrepreneurs since, successfully evaded the despised dope duty. By seeking to evade the law, those producers of the plant who sought to maximise their profit margins brought about not only the introduction of an increasingly-complex customs system and ever-stricter systems of surveillance, but also led the plant and its various preparations to be first associated with criminality in the minds of British government officials.

Concurrently, much evidence of a relationship between cannabis use and insanity began to issue from colonial administrators, even though the plant was rumoured to have been used in some circles to treat mental illness. A series of annual reports from Indian asylums in the 1870s, for example, suggested that the largest single cause of illness among patients was cannabis use, thirty-three percent of all cases having been attributed to ganga-smoking. These statistics alone sparked a colony-wide inquiry by an India government that was eager to locate any sources of disorder in the society it was trying to manage. Some of this evidence even found its way into the debates of British politicians in the House of Commons. Temperance advocates and critics of imperialism, for example, joined forces with veteran anti-opium campaigners and drew on asylum statistics in order to question the nature of Gladstone's government and its policies. From these quarters, cannabis was described as "the most horrible intoxicant the world has yet produced" (4). Their successful campaign eventually forced the government to establish the Indian Hemp Drugs Commission (IHDC) in 1893, which, to the dismay of the drug's fiercest critics, ruled the plant was not the dreaded intoxicant many had made it out to be. Besides

questioning the manner in which asylum records were kept, the commission, after amassing eight volumes of witness statements, denied any link between social problems and cannabis use, even claiming that ‘moderate’ and ‘habitual’ use of cannabis had no health implications; only excessive use was to be avoided. The report remains the most extensive survey of a cannabis-using society by a Western government to date.

Not surprisingly, cannabis dropped off the political agenda in the years immediately following this comprehensive inquiry. Meanwhile, cannabis consumption and its associated tax revenue only increased. For example, at the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, the tax on hemp narcotics in Delhi amounted to a third of all excise income. Besides the fact that hemp narcotics occupied an unshakeable place in the religious life of Indian society, its increased consumption was the result of its price relative to other drugs, as well as a general belief that cannabis assisted labourers to bear fatigue and exposure.

In contrast, back in Britain, cannabis remained relatively unknown, except in medical and scientific circles, where it was recognised as a potential treatment for conditions varying from insomnia to asthma. While scientists continued to support O’Shaughnessy’s original conclusions, a new generation of practitioners obsessively pursued efforts to locate the plant’s active ingredient in order to produce more consistent and predictable cannabis concoctions. A highly positive reception among medical practitioners, however, did not prevent the issue from again exploding onto political agendas at the Second Opium Conference in 1924, and primarily as a result of illegal drug movements internationally, rather than domestic drug use in Britain. Following protests introduced by Egyptian delegates, egged on by American support, and based on generalisations about cannabis use similar to those previously dispelled by the IHDC report, trade in the drug was officially outlawed by the League of Nations, a decision that clearly had lasting repercussions. Mills goes on to demonstrate the way in which British policy was subsequently

driven by mistakes and misunderstandings, along with the regular appearance of salacious reports involving exotic foreigners and helpless provincial girls in British newspapers, rather than by well-informed debate, let alone expert opinion. Similar concerns led the Pharmaceutical Society to include the drug in its Poisons Schedule in 1924, thereby imposing a set of controls on who could buy and sell cannabis substances.

In sum, the book convincingly demonstrates that, in the case of laws and regulations governing cannabis, assessments have been formed on the basis of political and moral agendas rather than informed debate and well-established policy models. To its credit, Mills also does this without focusing on an existent rich harvest of cannabis conspiracy theories. Given that British governments since 1928 have regularly appealed to precedent in order to bolster their stolid stance in relation to cannabis only makes this study more relevant outside the field of history. Should the next volume turn up as many episodes of political misjudgement and misunderstanding, it will make for equally-compelling reading, even if the laws governing hemp drugs were to be relaxed in the meantime.

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Elaine Frantz Parsons, *Manhood Lost: Fallen Drunkards and Redeeming Women in the Nineteenth-Century United States*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003.

Nineteenth-century Americans easily recognized the tale of the young man full of promise who took one sip of demon rum and slid into an abyss of despair and depravity. In novels, plays, poems, pamphlets, and lawsuits, the drunkard's story appeared again and again. Elaine Frantz Parsons argues in *Manhood Lost* that this familiar story led to increased emphasis on environmental influences as the root causes of drunkenness