

In Depth Feature:

Drug Culture: *To Deal or Not to Deal?*

By Greg Reed
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Several weeks ago, someone mentioned in class that drug possession charges involving marijuana were rising on college campuses around the U.S. This sparked my interest. My experiences with marijuana were limited and I wanted to know more about drugs and college, and as a side note maybe this newfound knowledge would help me understand why drug charges were on the rise. I first started with a few questions: How easy is it to score marijuana? How does a drug dealer do what he does? What are the pitfalls of smoking marijuana? They were basic, and could even be answered by a quick Google search, but it was a starting point to a two-weekend glimpse into the local marijuana culture.

I sat on my friend's bed watching him delicately peel open a cheap cigar. Earlier that evening we had opened up a grungy looking sandwich baggy and separated the marijuana from its seeds and stems. It was a very simple process that I learned within minutes, but now he needed to prepare a blunt. He dug his fingernails in along the seams of the machine rolled wrapper. My first question slipped easily into my mind, as I picked up the discarded cardboard box used to hold several more cigars. "Why Dutch Masters?" I asked my friend. He replied with an almost customer testimonial rhythm, "They're easier to re-roll, and they taste decent." I sniffed at the air while he continued to peel open the cigar. The strong scent of sugary sweet honey and tobacco clouded the air. He pressed firmly, so I could hear a cracking noise from the wrapper. This noise signifies that he was properly opening the seal. Then the wrapper snapped the wrong way, and in frustration with himself, my friend let loose a slew of curse words, but he shook his head to dispel the mistake. "I can just smoke a smaller blunt," he said, as

he cut the wrapper away. He placed the weed in the wrapper, and proceeded to do the familiar drug movie motions of licking the wrapper shut.

After he smoked most of the blunt, my friend was sufficiently prepared to start answering my questions. We first set down a few ground rules: 1. He speaks with anonymity, and is to be only referred to as Trabajo. 2. Although, I cannot reveal his prices, Trabajo has told me that he could technically get me high for 71 cents. 3. Trabajo would not let me reveal who his customers are or where they are located.

trafficking of drugs, he replied, "I get to walk everywhere which means none of that 'you crossed the yellow line' crap cops pull when they realize that you're listening to rap music. I really dig the fact that the floors are on top of each other. As far as I'm concerned, each floor is a new neighborhood. Except these neighborhoods are only an elevator ride apart."

When talking about profits, Trabajo added, "I'll throw you some nice round numbers. If I buy some grass for \$100, I always get at least \$400 in return. If I feel like getting my hustle on a bit, it can be

more likely to smoke weed, they are, but that's not what I mean. I mean that they're less likely to go to the police which makes me infinitely more comfortable approaching them. That's the biggest worry I have when I approach someone - that they're going to try to use me to get rid of a parking ticket."

After perceiving his last comment to be a bit racist, Trabajo then clarified with, "White folks are easier to rip-off though, so no worries."

We reviewed the question/answer session, so Trabajo could look over the questions and scratch any potentially

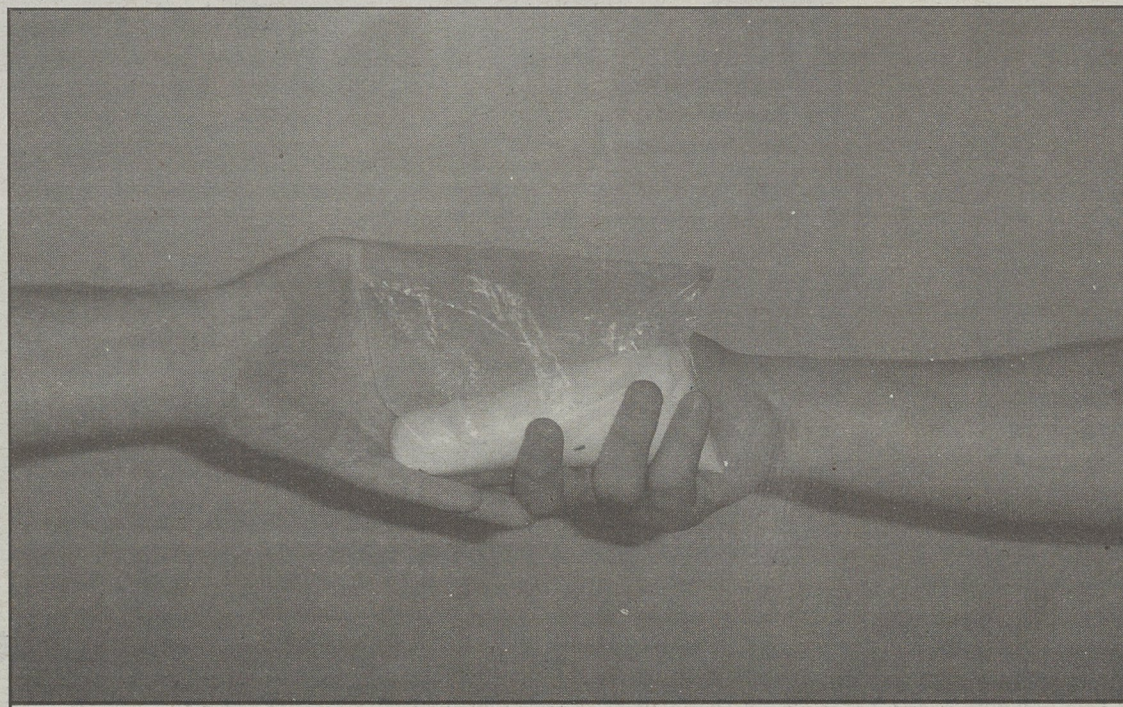
of criminal thrill. He found a way to make quick cash with relatively little risk. He maintains a loyal customer base, which feeds him more customers and more money. Even the way he spoke about people, that under normal circumstances would be considered his friends, was cruelly economical. Friends were scrutinized by personality and past smoking experiences; through this, Trabajo utilized their traits, specifically, laziness, desperateness, and general intelligence, to charge the person different prices for the same amount of marijuana.

I next found myself digging into another part of the drug culture: The Buyers. Again through a long time friend, I found two people who exemplified aspects of the buyer culture. Unlike Trabajo, I found the buyers to be much less informed. Their knowledge of the marijuana market was far different, and comparatively, lacked much of behind the scenes knowledge that Trabajo, and presumably other dealers have.

What I took away from them were the clear answers to my final two fundamental questions. How easy it to score marijuana? And what are the pitfalls of smoking marijuana?

This time, I was taken to a cramped, insect-infested attic with a single filth covered window. On a decrepit desk to my right, there rested a stem of incense burning a stuffy fruity smell. I sat on a bed doused with toys and rat feces. I watched my two friends sit on the floor preparing to smoke weed out of a bong.

My interview this time would be less structured, but would recognize similar ground rules to the interview with Trabajo. This time, humorously, they requested to be referred to as Godzilla and Smokey. I first centered my questions on the ease of getting marijuana. In Godzilla's case, he could easily get weed from a host of different people. He always had someone on hand, ready to be called at a moment's notice.



Approximately 49.1% of college students and 57.0% of young adults (ages 19-28) surveyed in 2005 reported being lifetime users of marijuana. Photo by: Justin Zickar

When asked about his fear of reprisal from authority, Trabajo answered, "I don't know if fear is the right word to use. Actually, it's not the right word. I consider the police before every transaction, I consider the police when I'm smoking, I consider the police when I'm shitting, I consider the police all the time, man. It is because I consider the police so often that I don't fear getting caught. I mean, if I think I might get caught, I don't go through with the transaction. Safety first. Money second."

I then asked Trabajo how the college community eased his

upwards of \$600. I usually settle for \$400 though. Generally speaking, the more money I want to make the more risks I have to take."

Trabajo then shared his inside remarks on how he finds new customers, enlightening me by saying, "From most likely to least likely to happen: They come recommended from a current customer, they're at a party drunk, and they're in the store buying blunts, or they're black."

I replied, "What do you mean by 'they're black?' Trabajo quickly said, "I don't mean that blacks are

problematic ones. Many questions that dealt with the specifics of pricing, or how he charged different customers different prices for virtually the same amount of marijuana were deemed both highly suspect and harmful to Trabajo's sales.

During this pick over, I found Trabajo's rejections were based on protecting his business, which forced an awry realization from me. Aside from the illegality of his product, Trabajo's practices and goals were no different from any small business. He is in this market to make money, not for some kind