

# Humboldt

LIFE ON AMERICA'S MARIJUANA FRONTIER

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flowering annual. All species of cannabis are dioecious—that is, male and female flowers appear on separate plants. Males produce pollen, and females produce seeds—and that's where the trickery begins. Both plants produce flowers, but unpollinated females produce much more resin, the sticky substance that contains both the terpenes that give pot its potent aroma and the cannabinoids that are responsible for its psychoactive properties, notably delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol, or THC. In order to grow seedless female flowers, sinsemilla, you must remove the male plants before pollination.

Around the same time that marijuana growers in Humboldt and the neighboring counties of Trinity and Mendocino began producing sinsemilla, the U.S. government inadvertently helped create a market for their new industry. In the mid- to late 1970s, the American government supported the Mexican government's spraying of the toxic herbicide paraquat on the Mexican marijuana crop. At the time, more than 90 percent of the marijuana smoked in the United States came from abroad. The strains were called Acapulco Gold, Colombian Gold, and Panama Red, after the places where they were grown. Like the jug wines that graced American dinner tables at the time, these were simple, lightweight versions of what was to come.

Marijuana continued to flow north from Mexico, but after the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) warned of the serious health risks that paraquat-laced pot posed to consumers, there was a sudden interest in other sources. By 1979, the year Congress suspended the paraquat-

spraying program, an estimated 35 percent of the marijuana smoked in California was homegrown. This percentage would only continue to rise in the following years, as California marijuana became synonymous around the state and nation with a quality high. By 2010, the year of the legalization vote, one study estimated that 79 percent of all marijuana consumed in the United States came from California.

And so an industry was born in Humboldt County, one that would bridge the cultural divide between hippies and rednecks by providing income for all, and would bring a new economic boom to the area just as the old industries were drying up. Word spread, and people flocked from faraway places to cash in. As the pillar of the local economy became a forbidden plant, Mare would hear stories about friends who had helped teach old-timers how to grow. On her trips into town, she'd notice how some hippies had started wearing the checked flannel shirts of the loggers, and how some of the rednecks had begun wearing their hair long. Things started to feel more equal. The children of the two cultures were the true hybrids. They went to school together, became friends, and fell in love with each other. As the local logging and fishing industries dwindled even further, bumper stickers began to appear on the backs of the dusty pickups around town announcing the transition: "Another Logger Gone to Pot."

By 1979, even *The New York Times* took note. "Marijuana Crops Revived California Town" was the headline of an article about Garberville. The story was one that would be retold in every medium over the coming decades: growers