

CLEARCUTS, CULTURAL CLEANSING, COMPLETE COMMUNITY COLLAPSE

In 1985 I moved from the most paranoid city on the East Coast to the most paranoid town on the West Coast. Thirty-two years later, I still live here--the culmination of the back to the land movement which traveled north from San Francisco and spread as far north as Alaska and across the U.S. I became an ex-patriated New Yorker, now living in the land of my loves: ancient redwoods, the Pacific Ocean, and the sacred herb.

Fast forward to 2018. The wholesale price of full-term sun grown weed has dropped from \$4000/pound to \$400. The amount grown in the Emerald Triangle—Humboldt, Mendocino and Trinity Counties—along with the rest of California and the United States has exploded exponentially by a factor of perhaps ten thousand-fold. There is no official statistic except that the market is beyond glutted, the herb has been legalized either medicinally and/or recreationally in more than half the United States and all of Canada, and the once booming, politically radical, underground economy of Humboldt County and the back-to-the-landers which birthed our community clinic, our radio station, our community center, our gamut of environmental and civil rights organizations, Veterans for Peace, our hospice care, our sustainable forestry movement, and much more, is now in an economic free-fall, a full fledged instant depression just on the verge of turning our hippy-paradise into a ghost town.

Stores are reporting sales (and sales taxes) dropping as much as 80%, including the farm stores and the auto parts shops. Layoffs are abounding. Land values are dropping well over 50% without a bottom in site. Taxes for schools, roads, environmental protection, social services, et al and disappearing.

All of this has been completely predictable. People sang the praises of legalization from Bob Marley on down, but only to the politically and historically savvy was the future seen: the small farmer always gets the short end of the stick. The pioneers who created sensimilla and isolated CBD's (apart from THC) as a medicinal component of cannabis, are being swept away into the dustbin of history by a Mount Everest of regulations, taxes and fees along with and invasion of moneyed invaders and just plain old fashioned greedy Earth destroying mega-growers. To put it bluntly (no pun intended), the number of gardens in Humboldt went from perhaps nearly a thousand growing 25 to 100 plants each to ten thousand gardens growing 1000 to 3000 plants. It's amazing anyone can sell anything at all at any price, and many small farmers can not. It is the end of the world as we know it after 50 glorious years of counter-culture rule in Humboldt.

But the cultural cleansing of the children of the 60's is far from the only casualty of the "green rush" in the home of the tallest trees on Earth. Those redwoods themselves are being clearcut for greenhouses, stream water for fish survival is being diverted to water and then polluted with nitrogen fertilizer run-off beyond the pale, wildlife is being decimated by rat-poison to stop mice from chewing the ganja stalks for moisture in our hot dry summers (perfect for growing weed), rentals and housing costs quadrupled or simply became unavailable for anyone at any price when they were converted to indoor and outdoor grow operations, courteous driving became a thing of the past, thousands of large supplementally lit greenhouses light up the once graceful night sky, and armed home invasions and outright murders skyrocketed into daily occurrences. It all started to feel like I was living in New York all over again. Well, at least I was trained from birth to fend off thieves and drive like I own the road. Oh, did I mention you can't find a parking spot in Garberville anymore?

But even the horrors that followed the "green rush" as it's called, are now receding as growing pot is no longer profitable and in fact, is outright dangerous to your own freedom and financial solvency given the army of bureaucrats and law enforcement that has arrived courtesy of the taxes and fees charged to the few who dare attempt to go legal. As the saying goes, the growers are now paying for the bullets for their own firing squads.

People have invested hundreds of thousands of dollars only to find they can't reach the ever shifting goal posts with a price that has plummeted by 90%, if a farmer can sell it at all, which many can not. The local stores are empty of customers, including the once flourishing farm stores. Giant, lit-up greenhouses light up the once graceful night sky.

While the "white market" farmers are regulated, the government regulators are not. They are there to create jobs for themselves and at between \$10,000 and \$80,000 per day per violation (you read that right),

they can seize your land, your pot, your possessions, your money, and your ability to survive at all. Now while some of the players being busted are well-deserving of being run out of town for raping the land, running generators 24/7 and turning our culture into thugville, the general rule of law enforcement has always been go for the low hanging fruit. Statistics now show that for every big, earth-destroying grow they tear down, there is a small farmer that goes down as well. The reason is simple: the mom and pop farmers don't shoot back.

The list of the violations you can be raided for now that pot is legal is infinite, but here's a sample. Keep in mind none of these regulations apply to growing any other agriculture product. Also keep in mind that the timber industry ruled and raped this land for over a century, killing the fish, the mammals, birds, the redwoods themselves and shall we never forget, the Native Americans who were slaughtered to make way for it all.

Now the pot farmer is supposed to spend, by regulation, the costs of restoring the damage done for a hundred years by "legal" logging. Department of Weight and Measures is now part of your life. Thousands of trimmers employed each harvest are now wiped out because a sterile environment with a handicapped bathroom is required for workers (many here still have outhouse) leading the way for low wage, legal sweat shops. Native American archeological studies are required. Your driveway and original main dirt roads are now scrutinized for their steepness. Unpermitted houses (90% of the houses here) are targeted by code enforcement for condemnation. Third party facilitators who are supposed to help farmers get through regulation can be incompetent and corrupt, taking your money and going out of business. Farmers can't even go out of business and sell their land once the permit process is started because now the land is on radar and federally insured loans aren't granted for places with cannabis permits.

Surveillance cameras are to be installed at farms and dispensaries, with 24/7 security guards coming up next. Each plant must be tagged as part of track and trace. Paperwork with all kinds of statistics, such as how much weight in leaves did you prune this week, are to be submitted to the government, along with daily water consumption. Farmers must pay 30% taxes before they start growing, with the size of the garden, not the amount of weed, being the taxable target. Put in some vegetables in your garden or have the deer eat it or thieves steal it all, or perhaps you just can't sell it, and you've still got to pay—up front. While I can double the list of impassable obstacles easily, I suggest the reader consider this: this is not the way of the outlaw pirate grower living off grid 40 minutes up a dirt road who disdains the system. And just to really mess with everyone, the regulations are revised or completely changed monthly.

Before you start playing the worlds tiniest violin for the plight of the unknown formerly rich grower who charged thousands a pound for the product, consider this: none of this would have been the case in the first place if our federal government, not to mention the worlds' governments hadn't decided that the people who smoked and/or grew cannabis had to be reigned in with draconian laws as part of creating a society submissive to the state. The prohibition of sacred herbs and the government encouraged insertion of addictive drugs and alcohol goes back nature people. Terrence McKenna's classic Food of the Gods: A

Radical History of Plants, Drugs, and Human Evolution is the definitive read on this subject.

While much of these observations are about the farmer, it is crucial not to forget how this affects the consumer. Everyone knows that the price of weed was inflated radically by the storm troopers descending from helicopters to squash the twenty-five plants Joe and Josephine Hippy were growing. But to prohibit them from growing and selling it at whatever today's fair market value is, even at \$100/pound, is to disrespect and crush the very people who store the library of knowledge on how to grow the best organic herb. Speaking of organic, the consumer can forget about organic labeling many would desire because that is issued by the federal government which considers cannabis in the same category as heroine. So buyer beware. Your weed is being grown indoors or with supplemental lighting in greenhouses burning massive amounts of climate-changing fossil fuels instead of in the full sun as Gaia intended. To sum it up, a friend recently said to me, "Do you know any product that became better with mass production?"

There is a solution to the sticky trap of legalization, however. Just as small vegetable and fruit farmers can pay \$30/year for a farmer's market permit for a hundred plant garden with no inspections or regulators spying on them from drones in the air or by in-person armed visits by land, so can the weed market become diversified and the small farmer who knows how to grow the organic, sticky, purple Kush be put back in business.

On a positive note, with the unemployment of hundreds of former small farmers, the growers who wish to remain in the hills are remembering that weed wasn't always the only way to make a living. Our labor shortage now how willing workers, our rental shortage turning around, vegetables are being planted again, the traffic is slowing down, and people are remembering what back to the land really meant. With property prices plummeting, perhaps a new generation of Earth lovers will snatch up some of nature's beauty and get back to the land themselves without the hassle of being in constant fear of arrest amidst the splendor of it all.

The old Buddhist saying comes to mind: "This too shall pass." And so it is that the 60's is officially coming to an end in this remote but distinguished capital of sixtiesdom. This saga continues to be played out in the hills of north California, where the redwoods grow so tall. To my fellow New Yorkers, I say there may not be much you can do about it from the Big Apple. But when you do come to "legalize" it in your neck of the woods, see what you can do to not create the quagmire Humboldt fell into. At the very least, say a little prayer or a few kind words for us the next time you burn one.

-Darryl Cherney has been an Earth First! organizer and singer/songwriter for the redwoods. He produced the award winning documentary, *Who Bombed Judi Bari?*, now available on youtube, based on he and Judi Bari being car-bombed, falsely arrested for the crime in 1990 by the FBI and Oakland police and then successfully suing the them. He challenged Jill Stein for the Green Party candidacy for President in 2016. He is now 62 and lives happily in Southern Humboldt on 123 acres with his chickens, rabbits, dogs, cats, apple trees, his 6 year old daughter and Mother Nature.

