

Cannabis, Media, and the Neoliberal Marketplace: The Problem with Just Saying Yes to Color-Blind Legalization Narratives

CORINNE WEINSTEIN¹
Rutgers University, USA

As recreational cannabis becomes increasingly legalized in the United States, the media play a key role in shaping the public's imagination about the recreational cannabis industry and its users. Cannabis prohibition rhetoric, which once associated racial minorities with criminality and deviance, has been supplanted by modern cannabis legalization rhetoric, which associates recreational cannabis with White individualists and the virtues of the neoliberal marketplace. Through a textual analysis of the docuseries *High Profits*, this article identifies how color-blind racial ideology found in the series reflects the greater rhetoric around recreational cannabis in media that prioritizes catering to White comfort and promoting color-blind idealizations of the American Dream over calling on media consumers to consider and address the lasting racialized harms of cannabis prohibition.

Keywords: cannabis, marijuana, prohibition, legalization, media, color-blind ideology

As of the 2022 U.S. election cycle, 21 states and the District of Columbia have legalized cannabis for recreational use (DISA Global Solutions, 2022). Alongside its increasingly legal status, the public image of recreational cannabis has become more positive in recent years, with the media playing a key role in shaping this image (Stringer & Maggard, 2016). Though cannabis was once inextricably associated with criminality and deviance, the cannabis legalization movement has ushered in a reassessment of recreational cannabis as a legitimate business venture and fairly harmless substance used by members of mainstream culture (McGinty et al., 2016; Mortensen, Moscovitz, Wan, & Yang, 2020; Schlusser, 2017; Vuolo, Kadowaki, & Kelly, 2017), a shift that has been reflected in popular media (Goff, 2015; Stringer & Maggard, 2016).

This article interrogates one of these popular media texts—the CNN reality television series *High Profits* (Germer, Keels, Rockafellow, & Wingrove, 2015e)—as a representation of the larger discourse surrounding recreational cannabis. Frequent, positive representations of recreational cannabis in media may contribute to dispelling harmful stereotypes about cannabis and help media consumers become more familiar and comfortable with cannabis (Stringer & Maggard, 2016). However, a failure to address how these harmful stereotypes and historical practices of “othering” cannabis users have disproportionately impacted racial minorities and continue to do so despite the increasingly legal status of cannabis creates a situation

Corinne Weinstein: corinne.weinstein@rutgers.edu

Date submitted: 2022-06-15

¹ Thank you to Chenjerai Kumanyika for guiding this project.

Copyright © 2023 (Corinne Weinstein). Licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution Non-commercial No Derivatives (by-nc-nd). Available at <http://ijoc.org>.

in which the recreational cannabis industry is poised to operate through color-blind racial ideology, which leaves the racial minorities harmed by cannabis prohibition unaccounted for. Using Bonilla-Silva's (2010) color-blind racial ideology framework, a textual analysis of *High Profits* reveals that the series largely follows the color-blind logics of contemporary cannabis media by promoting the idea that cannabis is no longer worthy of concern, especially when it is legitimated through the marketplace under the control of hardworking, White individualists who can be trusted with recreational cannabis. As an illustrative text of an emerging industry, *High Profits* contributes to larger cultural narratives around legalized recreational cannabis that prioritize White comfort over encouraging consumers to consider and address the lasting racialized harms of cannabis prohibition.

Literature Review

Color-Blind Racial Ideology and the Neoliberal Marketplace

The post-racial sensibility that permeates contemporary American culture—in which racism is considered to be a problem of the past and no longer relevant in determining the life outcomes of racial minorities—fails to recognize how racism has changed shape and grown more complex over time, appearing in more covert forms today compared with overtly racist acts of the past (Bonilla-Silva, 2010; Mills, 1997; Squires, 2014). Bonilla-Silva (2010) argues that modern forms of racism can be understood as operating through color-blind racial ideology, which rationalizes the persistence of racial inequality as the outcome of nonracial dynamics while absolving White people from taking responsibility for racial inequality in the process. Although dominant legal and social systems in the United States are structured to benefit White people at the expense and exploitation of non-White bodies, color-blind racism capitalizes on the invisibility of Whiteness to promote the perspective that these systems are spaces of equal opportunity regardless of race, in line with a supposedly post-racial society (Harris, 1993; Lipsitz, 2018; Mills, 1997).

Bonilla-Silva (2010) identifies four central frames of color-blind ideology: Abstract liberalism, which uses ideas associated with political and economic liberalism such as individualism and work ethic to allow Whites to appear reasonable and moral while opposing systemic approaches to address racial inequality; naturalization, which explains away racial phenomena by suggesting that racial differences are natural occurrences based in biology; cultural racism, which relies on cultural arguments to explain differential life outcomes among races; and minimization of racism, which asserts that discrimination and racism are no longer central factors affecting minorities' life chances. Each frame repositions racism as an individual act rather than a systemic phenomenon, aligning with the neoliberal idea that individuals are responsible for their own success and therefore should not seek out collective solutions or state intervention to solve problems (Harvey, 2005). The frame of abstract liberalism in particular appeals to the neoliberal idea that the marketplace is neutral and functions through meritocracy despite the reality that the marketplace, like other systems in the United States, is designed to favor and reward Whiteness (Bonilla-Silva, 2010; Harvey, 2005).

Expanding on Bonilla-Silva's (2010) framework, Jayakumar and Adamian (2017) offer a fifth ideological frame, the disconnected power analysis frame, which reflects the increasing willingness of White people to align with theoretical understandings of structural racism while simultaneously disconnecting such

critical perspectives from their own positionality and personal experiences and actions. The disconnected power analysis frame reflects the underlying anxieties of White fragility by allowing White people to prioritize the maintenance of their image as non-racist or anti-racist while exercising their privilege to ignore how they as an individual have personally benefited from Whiteness (Jayakumar & Adamian, 2017). This fifth frame is an important addition to Bonilla-Silva's (2010) framework because even with renewed recognition that American society is not in fact post-racial and that race continues to determine life outcomes, color-blind ideology continues to circulate alongside more socially progressive ideas. In the context of recreational cannabis legalization, focusing on the White experience with cannabis allows color-blind ideology to thrive as White individuals, and particularly White entrepreneurs, are able to play a role in reducing the stigma around cannabis without addressing how that stigma has continued to negatively impact racial minorities.

Constructing Color-Blind Cannabis

The constructed image of cannabis in the public imagination has shifted drastically over time, from the racially charged prohibition rhetoric of the past to the neoliberal-friendly legalization rhetoric that has become increasingly common today. In the 1930s, Harry J. Anslinger, commissioner of the Department of Justice's Drug Enforcement Administration, created an association between cannabis, racial minorities, and criminality by spreading false information that linked the supposedly negative qualities of cannabis to those of racial minorities through fabricated anecdotal stories (Schlussel, 2017; Vuolo et al., 2017). Anslinger's propaganda appealed to White anxieties by claiming that racial minorities were spreading their deviant behaviors of promiscuity and violence to White people and thus threatening the stability of the nation (Schlussel, 2017). These fears were especially heightened following the successes of the Civil Rights movement, to which the Nixon administration responded by pivoting to color-blind language such as "law and order" and "tough on crime," subtly referencing White anxieties without overtly pointing to racial minorities as the cause of social problems (Schlussel, 2017).

In writing about Nixon's racially targeted policies, Elwood (1995) discusses how the usage of metaphor in "war on drugs" rhetoric evokes a strong emotional response by constructing a threatening image of the "other" that is attempting to destroy America's freedom, democracy, and sacred rights, thus creating an air of moral crisis. This strategy, Kumanyika (2016) argues, seeks to further conceal its underlying racial motivations, as metaphorical warfare "make[s] it possible to deny the ugly intent of the violent repression of specific groups, while unleashing the mindsets, mechanisms, and literal machinery of war" (p. 256). The rhetoric around cannabis prohibition increasingly aligned with moral appeals as the quality of immorality once associated with cannabis itself began to be applied to cannabis users instead (Elwood, 1995; Vuolo et al., 2017). By positioning the war on drugs as a product of a crisis of character, rather than a product of racist systems, this rhetoric appeals to the neoliberal ideal of individual responsibility (Harvey, 2005) while employing color-blind frameworks to argue that there is something either naturally or culturally deficient about racial minorities that has made the war on drugs a necessary strategy to maintain social order (Bonilla-Silva, 2010).

While cannabis prohibition rhetoric predominantly portrayed racial minorities as social deviants engaging in and promoting immoral behavior through cannabis (Schlussel, 2017; Vuolo et al., 2017), cannabis legalization rhetoric has instead focused on portraying a culture of White individualism that can be

trusted to use recreational cannabis responsibly and in line with neoliberal goals. In his analysis of cannabis legalization campaigns, Schluskel (2017) notes how advertisements overwhelmingly relied on images of White, middle-class individuals to appeal to voters, citing an example featuring a young White woman explaining to her mother over e-mail how cannabis makes her feel safer than alcohol, which signals to White audiences “that marijuana is not so ‘bad’ from a racial perspective” (p. 887). These campaigns appealed to the ideals of personal choice and responsibility for one’s life outcomes championed by neoliberalism, such as when Rick Steves, at an event for the Washington legalization campaign, declared, “I’m a hardworking, churchgoing, child-raising, taxpaying citizen. If I want to go home and smoke a joint and stare at the fireplace for two hours, that’s my civil liberty,” resulting in thunderous applause from the crowd (Schluskel, 2017, p. 910). In these instances, a new image of cannabis users is constructed through color-blind logics, as the non-White, “othered” cannabis user is replaced with familiar members of mainstream, White culture who can be trusted to use cannabis responsibly.

Recreational cannabis legalization narratives also emphasize the potential marketplace value of recreational cannabis, providing further legitimacy for cannabis as a substance that can be successfully integrated into mainstream systems. In line with Schluskel’s (2017) findings, McGinty and colleagues’ (2016) analysis of news coverage around cannabis legalization found a major theme to be the idea that the legal cannabis industry can effectively reduce the power of drug syndicates by redirecting illegal drug money toward legally derived tax revenue that can be used to support infrastructure. Here, cannabis gains value as a potential marketplace commodity while the contrast between legal regulation and illegal distribution provides another opportunity for the legal recreational cannabis industry to be further differentiated from the racially charged culture associated with illegal cannabis.

While appealing to White sensibilities and mainstream legitimacy may be effective for recreational cannabis legalization campaigns, this approach shifts focus away from the real harms of cannabis prohibition; in other words, while legalization campaigns emphasize how cannabis prohibition threatens the individual freedoms of White people, what is really at stake is how the racially targeted rhetoric of cannabis prohibition continues to negatively impact racial minorities. The racially targeted war on drugs first waged by Nixon has been carried forward by future presidencies—for example, Clinton is cited as waging a more intense war on drugs than any president in history before him (Stringer & Maggard, 2016)—and racially skewed arrest rates have persisted through each subsequent president’s term (American Civil Liberties Union [ACLU], 2020). Despite comparable usage rates across different races, an ACLU report found that Black people were 3.64 times more likely than White people to be arrested for cannabis possession in 2018. As Haney López (2006) argues, being assigned a “criminal” identity can be inherently limiting as individuals are inhibited from moving beyond their designated social role, which points to how an arrest for a cannabis-related offense can have consequences beyond that single incident. These arrests can have significant economic consequences for racial minorities; a report by The Bronx Defenders (2014) surveying the experiences of low-level cannabis offenders found that enforcement acts “as a hidden regressive tax on the residents of low-income communities of color and present[s] another obstacle to economic opportunity and financial and social stability,” citing fines, court fees, lost wages, and missed days of work, appointments, and schooling as key consequences (p. 2). Thompson (2019) identifies the vicious cycle of racially targeted punishment:

Because of mass incarceration's scale and impact on poor communities of color, the children of incarcerated adults experience greater poverty as well as increased anti-social behavior and illegal activity. The results are higher rates of policing, more incarceration, more poverty, and so on. (p. 234)

Pointedly, racist associations with cannabis have also motivated police brutality, such as the fatal shootings of Philando Castile and Keith Lamont Scott in which police officers claimed to fear for their lives due to the presence of cannabis and did not face any charges (Ingraham, 2017). Therefore, while the stakes of cannabis legalization for White people have to do with individual freedoms, for racial minorities these stakes can be as severe as life or death, with economic disadvantage being a best-case scenario for many.

This disparity extends to the legal recreational cannabis industry today, which has been dominated by White males and propped up by exceptionally high investment requirements and bans against convicted drug felons from applying, while Black aspiring cannabis entrepreneurs have been rejected from the industry without explanation (Jan & Nirappil, 2017). Racial division has been captured well by Southerland and Steinberg (2018) in their contrasting of former House speaker John Boehner's entry into the legal cannabis industry despite his past support of prohibition laws with the experience of Fate Vincent Winslow, a Black man serving life without parole for helping an undercover officer buy two dime bags of cannabis. While color-blind logics uphold the idea that the neoliberal marketplace provides fair opportunities for anyone to succeed in the legal recreational cannabis industry, this sentiment does not reflect reality for many racial minorities.

Cannabis on Television: Portraying the "Real" Users and Sellers of Cannabis

As recreational cannabis legalization rhetoric has primarily appealed to White consumers, representations on television have largely followed suit, favoring accessible and familiar depictions of cannabis that fail to address racially charged prohibition rhetoric. Media depictions of recreational cannabis have the potential to influence perceptions of popular myths about cannabis (Mortensen et al., 2020; Stringer & Maggard, 2016), especially when there is high exposure to cannabis content in the media, or when an individual does not have direct knowledge about illicit drugs (Stringer & Maggard, 2016). Stringer and Maggard (2016) found that media coverage of cannabis has become increasingly positive, aligning with the trend of public attitude toward cannabis. As an important ideological source in American culture (Ouellette & Hay, 2008), television depictions of recreational cannabis thus may play an important role in shaping public attitudes about cannabis.

Writing about depictions of cannabis on television over time, Goff (2015) notes how cannabis narratives have undergone significant changes:

Since the earliest references to weed in scripted TV shows to today, pot-related story lines have evolved from "Protagonist smokes weed—with disastrous results" to "with nostalgic results" to "with comic results" to, essentially, just "Protagonist smokes pot." It's tangential to the results. (p. 16)

Cannabis narratives have not only shifted over time but have also become more prevalent and, like legalization campaigns, tend toward focusing on White entrepreneurs and users. In the scripted television space, a number of series have cannabis entrepreneurship as the central focus: A White suburban housewife tries to earn money for her family by selling cannabis on *Weeds* (Kohan, Benabib, Salsberg, & Burley, 2005–2012); two White women dream of economic success through the cannabis industry on *Mary + Jane* (Blakely et al., 2016); Kathy Bates leads a workplace sitcom at a cannabis dispensary on *Disjointed* (Javerbaum, Lorre, & Bell, 2017–2018); and *High Maintenance* (Blichfeld, Gregory, & Sinclair, 2016–2020) follows a White cannabis courier as he delivers cannabis to customers around New York City. Furthermore, many characters have been featured on scripted television regularly using cannabis recreationally without consequence, including the three best friends who live and work together on *Workaholics* (Anderson et al., 2011–2017), the opportunistic Erlich Bachman on *Silicon Valley* (Berg, Judge, Lassally, & Rotenberg, 2014–2019), and the free-spirited leading women of *Broad City* (Glazer, Hernandez, Jacobson, & Poehler, 2014–2019). Recreational cannabis use has even appeared on broadcast television: Molly's sister on *Mike & Molly* (Lorre & Higgins, 2010–2016) is often depicted as high; reminiscing about cannabis use while in college leads the characters on *How I Met Your Mother* (Bays, Fryman, Thomas, & Harris, 2005–2014) to bake cannabis brownies in the present day; and the characters on *New Girl* (Baer et al., 2011–2018) ingest cannabis in multiple episodes, including an episode that takes place at a party full of police officers, in which the use of cannabis is ultimately laughed off as a joke. While this list is by no means exhaustive, the plethora of examples of mostly White characters using and/or selling cannabis without consequence contributes to the larger narrative that cannabis is not a big deal when put into the hands of White people, informing the color-blind logic that mainstream White culture can maintain control over cannabis in a way that cultural "others" cannot.

Cannabis-related programming has also proliferated in the unscripted television space and generally falls into three major categories: cooking shows, comedic shows, and docuseries. These depictions may be especially powerful in shaping a viewer's perception of cannabis; Ouellette and Hay (2008) describe reality television as a quintessential technology of neoliberal citizenship, as the genre uses "the cultural power of television . . . to assess and guide the ethics, behaviors, aspirations, and routines of ordinary people" (p. 2). Across its different forms, reality television instructs viewers to take responsibility for their own empowerment—implying that failure to succeed economically is a result of poor personal choices—and support privatized welfare over public solutions (Ouellette & Hay, 2008; Redden, 2018). Depictions of cannabis entrepreneurs on reality television may be particularly instructive at a cultural moment when independent entrepreneurs are heroic neoliberal figures and reality television franchises like *Shark Tank* (Linger, Burnett, Gurin, & Newbill, 2009–present) explicitly celebrate the entrepreneurial spirit (Horowitz, 2020).

Methodology

Based on the criteria of focusing on entrepreneurship in the recreational cannabis industry on reality television, the series *High Profits* (Germer et al., 2015e) was chosen for analysis. The eight-episode docuseries aired on CNN between April and June 2015 and followed a White couple named Brian and Caitlin as they aspire to become successful entrepreneurs in the legal recreational cannabis industry in Colorado.

Although *High Profits* aired in 2015, it continues to stand out as the only reality television series about the recreational cannabis industry that follows a single story for multiple episodes, allowing the possibility for viewers to grow attached to the “characters” featured in the show as they might with a scripted program alongside the neoliberal instruction characteristic of reality television programming. CNN being one of three major cable news networks (Katz, 2018), the channel may communicate a certain authority of truth telling to its primarily White (Weinstein, 2014) and older-skewing (Katz, 2018) audience. Additionally, the series can be viewed today on Max streaming service or purchased from outlets including Amazon Prime and iTunes, and so contemporary audiences may continue to encounter this series as a rare example of the “realities” of the recreational cannabis industry and of cannabis culture more generally.

For analysis, the series was viewed twice. During the first viewing, notes were taken on general themes present throughout the series. During the second viewing, specific examples of themes relevant to the color-blind ideological framework first outlined by Bonilla-Silva (2010) and expanded on by Jayakumar and Adamian (2017) were noted, and content was paused as needed to record relevant quotes. Examples from each episode were then sorted into thematic categories, allowing an assessment of the volume and frequency of identified themes. In the narrative of *High Profits* (Germer et al., 2015e), three color-blind themes emerged: A recognition that cannabis has been falsely associated with criminality without recognition of how that association has been used to justify discrimination against racial minorities; a legitimization of recreational cannabis through the neoliberal marketplace in pursuit of the American Dream; and strict cultural guidelines that communicate to viewers that hardworking White individualists can be trusted to safely sell and consume recreational cannabis.

Analysis: *High Profits*

Turning Cannabis Trivial

The primary conflict of *High Profits* (Germer et al., 2015e) is the community unrest in Breckenridge, Colorado, that occurs when Brian and Caitlin open their recreational cannabis business on Main Street, the popular tourist street in town. Many local residents feel the business will harm the town’s image, and the town council ultimately decides to conduct a public vote about whether or not Brian and Caitlin’s business, the Breckenridge Cannabis Club (BCC), can stay in its current location. Thus, Brian and Caitlin are compelled to address the historical associations between cannabis and criminality to dismantle them and win the town’s favor. However, because virtually no people of color appear on the show, they are not required to consider the racial implications underneath these associations.

High Profits (Germer et al., 2015e) engages in multiple strategies to show how concerns about a recreational cannabis store on Main Street do not align with reality. In episode 2, the notion that Breckenridge is an inherently conservative town is called into question through the featuring of Ullr Fest, an annual massive street party during which open container laws are lifted on Main Street. Amid footage of intoxicated people in Viking gear, cheering crowds, parade floats, and an open bonfire, Caitlin points out the party culture to the camera: “Ullr fest is so funny. They throw out condoms every year. It’s like a legit adult party in the middle of downtown Breck” (Germer, Keels, Rockafellow, & Wingrove, 2015d, 19:42). Shortly after, council member Ben Brewer addresses the incongruity more directly: “Are we hypocritical

to accommodate so much tolerance for alcohol while at the same time not tolerating marijuana? We closed down Main Street, basically for the purpose of drinking beer and, you know, having a big party” (Germer et al., 2015d, 21:48). Here, “othering” cannabis is a less effective strategy in the context of a society that increasingly views cannabis as similar to alcohol (Schlussel, 2017), making it seem unrealistic to think of cannabis as existing outside of mainstream culture.

The series features several residents who vehemently oppose Brian and Caitlin’s business but do so in a way that undermines their credibility in the same way that cannabis prohibition rhetoric today can be recognized as mostly fabricated and overblown. One of these opponents, an uptight woman named Karyn Contino, who mentions that she smoked a significant amount of cannabis while growing up in the 1960s and 1970s, goes to the BCC one afternoon to confront Brian and Caitlin. When Contino asks who their customers tend to be, Brian responds,

You [points to Contino]. People your, people your age that run in your circles. I think it just hasn’t been spoken about in a lot of family circles, but um, we’re finding a lot of the uh, baby boomer crowd, you know, maybe a little bit younger than them, are coming in and I mean they’re our major clientele and I, I don’t think that those people are ruining Main Street, attracting those people to Main Street. (Germer, Keels, Rockafellow, & Wingrove, 2015a, 18:41)

Brian’s response makes clear to Contino what she already acknowledged through her personal admission of cannabis use—that cannabis users are regular people just like her, even if this fact is not spoken about openly.

In a more pointed highlight of hypocrisy, an employee of the BCC reveals that one of their strongest opponents, business owner Mike Dudick, has shopped at their store before, leading to the following confrontation:

Documentarian to Dudick: Did you buy weed in the BCC?

Dudick: Yeah, yeah. ‘Cause, several times.

Documentarian: Did you under medical?

Dudick: No, not under medical. I bought it retail.

Documentarian: Oh, under recreational.

Dudick: Yeah, yeah. I’ve been in there. I have, I have no problem with pot. Um, I think that the, the thing that, the thing . . .

Documentarian: You voted against it though, right?

Dudick: No, no . . .

Documentarian: To being on Main . . .

Dudick: I, I wanted them to move because I thought it was, I think that brand of Breckenridge Main Street is, that uh, it doesn’t belong there.

Documentarian: So for you as a local, why did you go into the BCC and not go to . . .

Dudick: ‘Cause it was convenient! I didn’t, I, I went to BCC ‘cause I didn’t want to have to drive down there. (Germer, Keels, Rockafellow, & Wingrove, 2015h, 40:28)

Dudick expresses throughout the series that his primary concern with the BCC is its convenient location, and so the Documentarian took this opportunity to show how Dudick's argument, much like Contino's, does not line up with his personal actions.

In both instances, opponents of the BCC are concerned with how the BCC will change the culture of the town. However, many residents of Breckenridge are quick to recognize that cannabis has long been a part of that culture. In one example, resident Brad Williamson points out, "Weed has always been a part of the culture and the brand of Breckenridge. You would come here and you would ask your ski instructor to get you weed. You know, it's part and parcel of the ski culture" (Germer, Keels, Rockafellow, & Wingrove, 2015g, 25:14). In another scene, council member Elisabeth Lawrence drives down Main Street past the BCC, which appears to be operating like any other business on the street. She comments, "See, I like to drive by. I love to drive by and see like is that store hurting anyone? Like is it bothering anyone?" (Germer et al., 2015g, 04:36). In these instances, the BCC appears to seamlessly blend into Breckenridge.

In other instances, the idea that the BCC is a threat is played for amusement. Caitlin uses criminal language ironically over the course of the series, like saying they are "slinging dope" (Germer, Keels, Rockafellow, & Wingrove, 2015b, 18:03) and referring to Brian as a "drug lord" (Germer et al., 2015a, 40:39). Members of law enforcement mostly appear as spectators of the BCC, sometimes to the point of boredom. On opening day, two laid-back police officers nonchalantly observe the long line waiting to enter the BCC. An enthusiastic customer takes a picture of her two sons smiling alongside the officers, bags of cannabis in hand. She explains, "I wanted my picture taken, and I wanted my kids to show it to my grandkids and say, 'Look! I was with grandma, and we bought weed legally'" (Germer et al., 2015b, 29:02). The presence of law enforcement provides a visual guarantee of safety while ultimately indicating to viewers that if the police are not concerned about legal recreational cannabis, they do not need to be either.

In undermining the credibility and logic of associating cannabis with criminality and failing to recognize the racist motivations behind this association, this narrative thread aligns with the disconnected power analysis frame of color-blind ideology (Jayakumar & Adamian, 2017) as those featured in the series never consider how their Whiteness has allowed them to move past the idea that cannabis is dangerous in a way that others cannot. Notably, the single instance of Brian and Caitlin acknowledging that people remain in and are still sent to prison for cannabis-related offenses while others are beginning to build business empires through recreational cannabis occurs in the opening minutes of the series: While driving toward Breckenridge to begin their journey, they pass a prison, and Brian cheekily comments, "I bet there's guys right there in that prison for doing just what we're about to do" (Germer et al., 2015b, 01:26). Instead of leveraging any kind of social critique about cannabis prohibition, those featured in *High Profits* choose to focus their attention on what can be gained from cannabis legalization rather than what has been unjustly lost. This theme is echoed several episodes later when Brian explains his past experience with cannabis prohibition:

When I was 21, I got busted in college for growing three marijuana plants and had possession of two ounces of marijuana. I wasn't in the, in the business of selling marijuana. I got caught growing my own pot. And I got two felony convictions out of it. I've regretted it every minute since . . . but everything I did that day would be completely legal here in Colorado right now. (Germer et al., 2015g, 03:13)

Despite pointing out the irony of his past actions being legal today, Brian's recounting of this story makes clear that he has respect for the law and does not question its validity. In *High Profits* (Germer et al., 2015e), questioning the idea that cannabis is dangerous is only acceptable when cannabis is actually legal.

Legitimizing Cannabis Through the American Dream

Alongside the primary conflict of *High Profits* is the underlying idea that Brian and Caitlin are good people who should be admired for their pursuit of the capitalist American Dream. In one episode, council member Elisabeth Lawrence makes an impassioned speech to the community in support of the BCC, after which she explains,

There is something to be said about free market. Let it reign here. These people are capitalists. Let them be capitalists. I will gain nothing from that store being on Main Street, but it is the right thing to do. (Germer, Keels, Rockafellow, & Wingrove, 2015f, 26:22)

Through this line of thinking, anyone who opposes the BCC is subsequently accused of undermining the wisdom of the marketplace, which should be trusted to determine who may succeed economically. Brian and Caitlin lean into this notion by emphasizing just how profitable their business can be; after bringing in \$15,000 in sales tax revenue on their first day alone, Caitlin mockingly says, "Now how's our image for Breckenridge?" (Germer et al., 2015b, 30:19).

Alongside their ability to generate significant income, Brian and Caitlin are renowned for their good character and their aspirations, which are firmly grounded in the traditional American Dream, leaning into the color-blind idea that if someone with good character works hard enough, they will succeed economically. Even those who oppose the BCC appear to like the couple, including Karyn Contino, who refers to Brian as "pretty smart" (Germer et al., 2015a, 19:34). John Warner, the mayor of Breckenridge, who is more ambivalent about the BCC, comments on how Brian's good character adds complexity to the situation: "I kidded Brian, I said, 'Brian, if you were an asshole, it'd be a lot easier to, you know, send you down to Airport Road'" (Germer et al., 2015b, 39:06).

Brian and Caitlin's story is ultimately a traditional "pulled up by the bootstraps" narrative, including the acknowledgment that they came from humble beginnings, living paycheck to paycheck before their recreational cannabis business took off. Episode 2 follows Caitlin for a day of shopping and pampering, as she gets her hair done and shops for new clothes. Noting that she used to get hand-me-down clothes from family members and cannot bring herself to stop looking at price tags even though she no longer needs to, Caitlin explains,

It's fair that we get to spend a little bit of money on ourselves. It's hard, you know, year after year uh, seeing the same pants that you've had just get worse and worse. Now I have some more money. I just don't know if I have any time! (Germer et al., 2015d, 27:39)

Through this narrative, Brian and Caitlin have successfully class ascended by pursuing the American Dream, while Caitlin's comment about having more money but less time reminds viewers that this change in personal fortune was a result of traditional marketplace values of hard work and persistence.

The idea that finding success through recreational cannabis is a legitimate point of entry into the American Dream is especially emphasized through Brian, the ideal, capable, and successful White male. Brian is rarely depicted outside of the context of the business, but when he is, his masculine qualities are emphasized. In episode 4, Brian laments how he does not have much time to enjoy the outdoors, which is followed by a montage of stylistic images of Brian and his garden manager Erik hunting for elk, intercut with footage of residents expressing their dissatisfaction with the BCC. In this sequence, Brian's ambitious, masculine dream is pitted against unwarranted concerns that impede his ability to succeed. Ultimately, Brian's story is framed as a story of redemption; returning to the moment in which Brian reveals that he was given two felony convictions in the past, Brian connects this past experience to the present day:

Until this point, I have not officially been an owner. I've not been allowed to call myself an owner. I finally get to apply to be the owner of this place. We're going to schedule an appointment for as soon as possible. Basically it's like a second chance to prove I can be professional. Then I'll finally be able to claim ownership around here. (Germer et al., 2015g, 03:36)

Brian's explanation of his criminalized past is juxtaposed with his present-day behavior as this admission occurs at a moment when Brian and his workers have no choice but to destroy about 80% of their plants to comply with the law dictated by the Marijuana Enforcement Division. Brian's pride as a legitimate owner today who is ready and willing to comply with the law is a strategic contrast to his past actions.

Brian and Caitlin's story, and particularly Brian's story, models how an individual's willingness to work hard enough to overcome their social position—in this case, as a member of the working class and being assigned a criminal identity—is the key factor in determining success through the marketplace. This sensibility aligns with the abstract liberalism frame of color-blind racial ideology (Bonilla-Silva, 2010), which asserts that the marketplace will reward those who are willing to put in the work of pursuing the American Dream, in the process ignoring how Brian and Caitlin's Whiteness have made this pursuit possible in the first place. Brian does not mention whether his felony charges resulted in prison time, but it is clear that this incident did not impact his ability to enter the recreational cannabis industry in the way that it has for racial minorities.

A Cannabis Culture of Trustworthy, Hardworking, White Individualists

Underneath Brian's story of redemption is the larger implication that Brian has become part of a culture that can be trusted with recreational cannabis. This aligns with the final theme evident throughout *High Profits* (Germer et al., 2015e), which is that Brian and Caitlin, those they employ, and those who make purchases from the BCC, all qualify as hardworking, White individualists who can be trusted to sell and use recreational cannabis responsibly. While Brian and Caitlin's story is legitimated by their pursuit of the

American Dream, the BCC is legitimated as a safe and regulated business juxtaposed with the specter of the black market that recreational cannabis has otherwise been associated with. Acknowledging this association in the first episode, the mayor, John Warner, explains how this influences his opinion of the BCC:

One of the reasons I voted for Amendment 64 was it takes the criminal act of purchasing marijuana out of the hands of criminals. You don't have a black market. You have a good proprietor like Brian selling to you across a counter. It's an above-board deal. (Germer et al., 2015b, 37:20)

The BCC, as a neoliberal capitalist enterprise, is thus positioned throughout the series as an antidote to illegal drug activity. In one of the very few instances of a non-White person appearing on screen, a man with a Mexican Spanish accent explains why he came to the BCC on opening day:

I came all the way from Mexico City just to be one of the first to buy recreational marijuana the legal way. I stopped buying because I know that every cent I put into marijuana goes to the black market, to the cartels. If this works out in Colorado, maybe one day will Mexico, we can do it and stop the . . . the killing, stop the black market, and I don't know, what's all the fuss about, making it illegal. (Germer et al., 2015b, 32:24)

This customer's testimony overtly contrasts Brian and Caitlin's legal business against the racially charged dangers of the Mexican drug trade while reiterating the importance of personal responsibility in the neoliberal marketplace by making clear that engaging with the illegal cannabis industry comes down to individual choice.

In addition to the BCC being portrayed as a safe and controlled business, Brian is shown to be an agent of maintaining order in the community, a position of authority granted through his legitimate business venture. On opening day, Brian confronts Chaz Jaco, a man handing out cannabis to customers waiting in line to enter the BCC by way of "donations" as payment. Dressed in a hat and sunglasses, with hipster facial hair and a cannabis leaf bandana around his neck, Jaco embodies the image of the stereotypical "stoner" from which Brian and Caitlin wish to distance their business. Brian, visibly angry, confronts Jaco outside:

Brian: You can't be selling pot out here.

Jaco: Oh, no, I was just donating, bro.

Brian: Yeah, that's not legal in Colorado.

Jaco: See, it's like on different accounts. Like I give it to you on one account.

Brian: Sure, but then they pay you for it.

Jaco: It's like I gave 'em it and then they're like, "Here's some money." Like . . .

Brian: Yeah, that's called a sale.

Jaco: Nah, it's . . .

Brian: They define it real clearly. I promise. Just because you might not make a profit, that's just a bad business model. It doesn't make it legal. (Germer et al., 2015b, 33:38)

At the end of the exchange, Brian emphasizes that he has paid \$20,000 for a state licensing fee that Jaco clearly does not have, using this opportunity to emphasize the legally regulated status of his business as distinct from Jaco's illegal activity. The two men end their conversation with a handshake and Jaco never appears again, indicating to viewers that Brian has successfully eliminated him as a threat.

Brian is again called on to be an agent of social order when Karyn Contino visits the BCC. On her walk over, Contino points out a man, Sebastian McCulla, donning dreadlocks, a bushy beard, patchwork pants, and socks with visible holes. She comments to the camera, "That's exactly what I don't want on Main Street" (Germer et al., 2015a, 17:01). On Contino's insistence, Brian goes outside to reason with McCulla:

Brian: Yeah, so what we're trying to prove is that we attract, you know, a lot of these high-end, middle-America types that come here with their kids and their family to spend a bunch of money. What we're trying to do is, is make our image look so not stereotypical marijuana? You know, not rolling joints out front and not, you know, not playing music. Um, I was hoping I could convince you to sit on a different bench. Um, so that I could not have that fight with the council that like, "Hey, there's guys rolling a joint outside." I can't have anyone show up in council and say—

McCulla: Damn. I mean, I'll definitely leave, but damn! I thought, I thought Breckenridge was way cooler. (Germer et al., 2015a, 20:44)

In this instance as well as the instance with Jaco, there is a strategy of "othering" stereotypical recreational cannabis users and sellers as part of a cannabis culture that does not align with the safe and legal ethos of the BCC or with Brian and Caitlin's character. Both Jaco and McCulla appear to be White, but they are still identified as existing outside of the constructed culture of White, hardworking individualists who can be trusted with cannabis because of their stereotypical appearance and behavior.

In contrast to Jaco and McCulla, the series features BCC customers who align with the desired culture. One emblematic example is James Posey and his wife, Jodie, who appear in episode 4. The Poseys are shown greeting the workers of the BCC with hugs, who then help James pick out the best cannabis products for his needs while James expresses awe at the employees' knowledge. James, a war veteran, explains his appreciation for the BCC:

I was disabled in Afghanistan in 2011. We took a blast, and I have rods and screws in my back. [cut to Posey showing the injury to the camera]. It fuses six different vertebrae together. The cannabis store knocks out about five or six bottles of medications. It's actually a much better alternative. (Germer, Keels, Rockafellow, & Wingrove, 2015c, 04:59)

An older, stocky man dressed in a casual white polo with sunglasses perched on top of his head, Posey fits the visual requirements of a responsible recreational cannabis user while reminding viewers that cannabis use can serve many purposes beyond recreation, and so users who fit into the desired culture should not be judged.

The admiration Posey expresses toward the workers of the BCC informs a larger trend of the (all-White) BCC employees being portrayed as recreational cannabis users who are fun but also serious and ambitious, once again aligning with the acceptable archetype of the hardworking, White individualist. In the first episode, viewers are introduced to Lauren Hoover, an attractive young woman who works as an assistant manager at the BCC. As the camera follows Hoover on a bright, snowy day to her home, Hoover describes herself as a “fitness girl” who is on her way to do mountaintop yoga although she must first hit Yeti, her bong. In Hoover’s home, viewers are offered artistic shots of Hoover smoking out of Yeti, after which she explains,

I have to get out and do something when I get stoned. Contrary to what a lot of people think, stereotypically [she takes another hit from Yeti and playfully blows smoke into the camera]. I do not like smoking and just chilling on the couch. Yoga!! (Germer et al., 2015b, 09:39)

As Hoover practices various yoga positions in the snow, she goes on to tell the camera crew that her father runs a ministry but is “totally cool” with what she does for a living. Hoover’s non-stereotypical “stoner” identity, alignment with upper-class-coded leisure activities, and support from her father lend credibility to the idea that Hoover can be trusted with recreational cannabis.

Episode 3 introduces Sunny Stowell, a budtender recently hired by the BCC, who is known for his upbeat attitude and impressive knowledge about cannabis. Although Stowell’s appearance aligns more with “stoner” stereotypes—he regularly wears a baseball cap and large earrings, and his arms are covered in tattoos—he wins the approval of Brian and Caitlin, as well as customers such as James Posey, through his expertise and kindness. In the first scene he is featured in, Stowell meticulously does inventory before commenting to the camera: “I have two passions. Helping people and helping people” (Germer et al., 2015a, 13:04).

Later in the same episode, Stowell gathers several employees to try a new smoking device, the “octodab,” which another employee dubs the “friendship dab.” Stowell proposes a toast—“to working just in the best place ever with the best people ever!”—before all the employees use the “octodab” together, leading to the following exchange:

Employee 1: I feel fantastic.

Employee 2: It took teamwork. You have to work together to do the octodab.

Employee 3: Octodab!

Employee 4: Octodab!

Josh Smith, assistant manager: This is nice.

Stowell: You know, it’s also, we’re not going crazy, you know.

Smith: No! God, no!

Stowell: A little dab’ll do you. A big dab’ll do you. We’re just high sitting around chillin’, like. We’re not hurting anybody. You know?

Employee 2: No damage done, right? (Germer et al., 2015a, 38:42)

In this example, Stowell is able to spread his positivity and connect with others through recreational cannabis use. Stowell and Hoover are two representatives of the larger culture of BCC employees, who regularly express their passion for cannabis and are frequently shown helping customers in the store.

By featuring recreational cannabis culture in Breckenridge from multiple perspectives—those who sell it, those who buy it, and those who use it—the series employs the color-blind framework of cultural racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2010) by carefully identifying those who can be trusted with recreational cannabis. Following the prevalent theme found in legalization campaigns (Schlussel, 2017) and articulated through other representations of cannabis on television, *High Profits* (Germer et al., 2015e) makes clear that recreational cannabis has a valuable role to play in the culture of hardworking, White individualists who can be trusted to engage responsibly with recreational cannabis.

Conclusion

As recreational cannabis legalization continues to gain traction in the United States, attention must be paid to the ways in which the intentional association between cannabis and White individualists in the media comes at the expense of racial minorities who face lasting harms from cannabis prohibition. Color-blind logics found in *High Profits* (Germer et al., 2015e)—that the association between cannabis and criminality is unwarranted, that cannabis fits into the American Dream, and that cannabis is in the hands of those who can be trusted—fail to recognize how these arguments became accessible only after cannabis could be effectively associated with the safety of Whiteness. Furthermore, focusing solely on the economic potential of legalized recreational cannabis reframes the issue as one of lost money rather than one of lost lives, ignoring the inhumane reality that people still remain in prison for cannabis-related offenses.

Instructive examples such as national legalization efforts in Canada indicate that without meaningful racial justice initiatives, the legal recreational cannabis industry will continue to perpetuate existing social inequalities (Centre on Drug Policy Evaluation, 2020). Although some legalization campaigns have included rhetoric about addressing the harms caused by cannabis prohibition to minority communities (Schlussel, 2017), and some political leaders have expressed intentions to approach cannabis legalization from a social justice perspective (e.g., Official Site of The State of New Jersey, 2020), there must be a more cohesive effort to challenge the dominance of color-blind neoliberal logics that keep racial minorities left out of the conversation and the industry. Representations of cannabis in the media, such as those found in *High Profits* (Germer et al., 2015e), can assist or inhibit this effort as they contribute to the larger public imagination around legal recreational cannabis.

References

- American Civil Liberties Union. (2020). *A tale of two countries: Racially targeted arrests in the era of marijuana reform*. Retrieved from <https://www.aclu.org/report/tale-two-countries-racially-targeted-arrests-era-marijuana-reform>
- Anderson, B., Etten, K., Holm, A., Newacheck, K., Devine, A., & Horne, I. (Executive Producers). (2011–2017). *Workaholics* [Television series]. Van Nuys, CA: Mail Order Comedy, Avalon.

- Baer, B., Chernin, P., Finkel, D., Kasdan, J., Meriwether, E., Pope, K., & O'Malley, E. (Executive Producers). (2011–2018). *New girl* [Television series]. Los Angeles, CA: Elizabeth Meriwether Pictures, American Nitwits, Chernin Entertainment, 20th Century Fox Television.
- Bays, C., Fryman, P., Thomas, C., & Harris, C. (Executive Producers). (2005–2014). *How I met your mother* [Television series]. Los Angeles, CA: Bays & Thomas Productions, 20th Century Fox Television.
- Berg, A., Judge, M., Lassally, T., & Rotenberg, M. (Executive Producers). (2014–2019). *Silicon Valley* [Television series]. Los Angeles, CA: Judgemental Films, Altschuler Krinsky Works, Alex Berg Inc., 3 Arts Entertainment, HBO Entertainment.
- Blakely, M., Casady, G., Chung, T., McElroy, J., Dogg, S., Elfont, H., & Kaplan, D. (Executive Producers). (2016). *Mary + Jane* [Television series]. Los Angeles, CA: Multi-Start Productions, Entertainment 360, Merry Jane, MTV Production Development.
- Blichfeld, K., Gregory, R., & Sinclair, B. (Executive Producers). (2016–2020). *High maintenance* [Television series]. New York, NY: Janky Clown Productions.
- Bonilla-Silva, E. (2010). *Racism without racists: Color-blind racism & racial inequality in contemporary America* (3rd ed.). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Centre on Drug Policy Evaluation. (2020). *How diverse is Canada's legal cannabis industry? Examining race and gender of its executives and directors*. Retrieved from https://cdpe.org/wp-content/uploads/dlm_uploads/2020/10/How-Diverse-is-Canada%E2%80%99s-Legal-Cannabis-Industry_CDPE-UofT-Policy-Brief_Final.pdf
- DISA Global Solutions. (2022). *Map of marijuana legality by state*. Retrieved from <https://disa.com/map-of-marijuana-legality-by-state>
- Elwood, W. (1995). Declaring war on the home front: Metaphor, presidents, and the war on drugs. *Metaphor and Symbolic Activity*, 10(2), 93–114. doi:10.1207/s15327868ms1002_2
- Germer, S., Keels, J., Rockafellow, M., & Wingrove, J. (Executive Producers). (2015a). Caitlin's law [Television series episode]. In S. Germer, J. Keels, M. Rockafellow, & J. Wingrove (Executive Producers), *High profits*. Breckenridge, CO: Bat Bridge Entertainment.
- Germer, S., Keels, J., Rockafellow, M., & Wingrove, J. (Executive Producers). (2015b). Dreams of empire [Television series episode]. In S. Germer, J. Keels, M. Rockafellow, & J. Wingrove (Executive Producers), *High profits*. Breckenridge, CO: Bat Bridge Entertainment.

- Germer, S., Keels, J., Rockafellow, M., & Wingrove, J. (Executive Producers). (2015c). Game on [Television series episode]. In S. Germer, J. Keels, M. Rockafellow, & J. Wingrove (Executive Producers), *High profits*. Breckenridge, CO: Bat Bridge Entertainment.
- Germer, S., Keels, J., Rockafellow, M., & Wingrove, J. (Executive Producers). (2015d). Hazard pay [Television series episode]. In S. Germer, J. Keels, M. Rockafellow, & J. Wingrove (Executive Producers), *High profits*. Breckenridge, CO: Bat Bridge Entertainment.
- Germer, S., Keels, J., Rockafellow, M., & Wingrove, J. (Executive Producers). (2015e). *High profits* [Television series]. Breckenridge, CO: Bat Bridge Entertainment.
- Germer, S., Keels, J., Rockafellow, M., & Wingrove, J. (Executive Producers). (2015f). Of and for the people [Television series episode]. In S. Germer, J. Keels, M. Rockafellow, & J. Wingrove (Executive Producers), *High profits*. Breckenridge, CO: Bat Bridge Entertainment.
- Germer, S., Keels, J., Rockafellow, M., & Wingrove, J. (Executive Producers). (2015g). She will kill us all [Television series episode]. In S. Germer, J. Keels, M. Rockafellow, & J. Wingrove (Executive Producers), *High profits*. Breckenridge, CO: Bat Bridge Entertainment.
- Germer, S., Keels, J., Rockafellow, M., & Wingrove, J. (Executive Producers). (2015h). Sneaky smart [Television series episode]. In S. Germer, J. Keels, M. Rockafellow, & J. Wingrove (Executive Producers), *High profits*. Breckenridge, CO: Bat Bridge Entertainment.
- Glazer, I., Hernandez, T., Jacobson, A., & Poehler, A. (Executive Producers). (2014–2019). *Broad city* [Television series]. New York, NY: Paper Kite Productions, 3 Arts Entertainment, Jax Media, Comedy Partners.
- Goff, L. J. (2015, April). Weed on TV: Just say . . . why not? *Multichannel News*, 36(15), 16–17. Retrieved from <https://www.nexttv.com/news/weed-tv-just-say-why-not-389883>
- Haney López, I. (2006). *White by law: The legal construction of race* (10th anniversary ed.). New York, NY: New York University Press.
- Harris, C. I. (1993). Whiteness as property. *Harvard Law Review*, 106(8), 1707–1791.
doi:10.2307/1341787
- Harvey, D. (2005). *A brief history of neoliberalism*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Horowitz, D. (2020). *Entertaining entrepreneurs: Reality TV's Shark Tank and the American Dream in uncertain times*. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press.

- Ingraham, C. (2017, June 21). Officer who shot Philando Castile said smell of marijuana made him fear for his life. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2017/06/21/officer-who-shot-philando-castile-said-smell-of-marijuana-made-him-fear-for-his-life/>
- Jan, N., & Nirappil, F. (2017). Marijuana industry remaining elusive for Black entrepreneurs. *The Jacksonville Free Press*, 30(30), 1–4.
- Javerbaum, D., Lorre, C., & Bell, W. (Executive Producers). (2017–2018). *Disjointed* [Television series]. Burbank, CA: Chuck Lorre Productions, Warner Bros. Television.
- Jayakumar, U. M., & Adamian, A. S. (2017). The fifth frame of colorblind ideology: Maintaining the comforts of colorblindness in the context of White fragility. *Sociological Perspectives*, 60(5), 912–936. doi:10.1177/0731121417721910
- Katz, A. J. (2018, January 19). Here's the median age of the typical cable news viewer. *TVNewser*. Retrieved from <https://www.adweek.com/tvnewser/heres-the-median-age-of-the-typical-cable-news-viewer/>
- Kohan, J., Benabib, R., Salsberg, M., & Burley, M. A. (Executive Producers). (2005–2012). *Weeds* [Television series]. Santa Clarita, CA: Titled Productions, Lionsgate Television, Showtime Networks.
- Kumanyika, C. (2016). Policing and the “war on Black bodies.” *College Literature*, 43(1), 252–258. doi:10.1353/lit.2016.0015
- Linger, Y., Burnett, M., Gurin, P., & Newbill, C. (Executive Producers). (2009–present). *Shark tank* [Television series]. Culver City, CA: MGM Television, Sony Pictures Television Studios.
- Lipsitz, G. (2018). *The possessive investment in Whiteness: How White people profit from identity politics*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.
- Lorre, C., & Higgins, A. J. (Executive Producers). (2010–2016). *Mike & Molly* [Television series]. Los Angeles, CA: Chuck Lorre Productions, Warner Bros. Television.
- McGinty, E., Samples, H., Bandara, S., Saloner, B., Bachhuber, M., & Barry, C. (2016). The emerging public discourse on state legalization of marijuana for recreational use in the US: Analysis of news media coverage, 2010–2014. *Preventive Medicine*, 90(1), 114–120. doi:10.1016/j.ypmed.2016.06.040
- Mills, C. W. (1997). *The racial contract*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

- Mortensen, T., Moscowitz, L., Wan, A., & Yang, A. (2020). The marijuana user in US news media: An examination of visual stereotypes of race, culture, criminality and normification. *Visual Communication (London, England)*, 19(2), 231–255. doi:10.1177/1470357219864995
- Official Site of The State of New Jersey. (2020, November 6). *Governor Murphy announces appointments to cannabis regulatory commission*. Retrieved from <https://nj.gov/governor/news/news/562020/approved/20201106a.shtml>
- Ouellette, L., & Hay, J. (2008). *Better living through reality TV: Television and post-welfare citizenship*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Redden, G. (2018). Is reality TV neoliberal? *Television & New Media*, 19(5), 399–414. doi:10.1177/1527476417728377
- Schlussel, D. (2017). The mellow pot-smoker: White individualism in marijuana legalization campaigns. *California Law Review*, 105(3), 885–928. doi:10.15779/Z38PZ51K8D
- Southerland, V. M., & Steinberg, J. B. (2018, April 19). Boehner benefits from weed. Blacks are in prison for using it. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/19/opinion/boehner-marijuana-blacks-prison.html>
- Squires, C. (2014). *The post-racial mystique: Media and race in the twenty-first century*. New York, NY: New York University Press.
- Stringer, R., & Maggard, S. (2016). Reefer madness to marijuana legalization: Media exposure and American attitudes toward marijuana (1975–2012). *Journal of Drug Issues*, 46(4), 428–445. doi:10.1177/0022042616659762
- The Bronx Defenders. (2014). *The hidden tax: Economic costs of marijuana enforcement in the Bronx and New York City*. Retrieved from <https://www.bronxdefenders.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/The-Hidden-Tax-A-Bronx-Defenders-Report-Dec2014.pdf>
- Thompson, H. (2019). The racial history of criminal justice in America. *Du Bois Review*, 16(1), 221–241. doi:10.1017/S1742058X19000183
- Vuolo, M., Kadowaki, J., & Kelly, B. C. (2017). Marijuana's moral entrepreneurs, then and now. *Contexts (Berkeley, Calif.)*, 16(4), 20–25. doi:10.1177/1536504217742387
- Wilstein, M. (2014, December 15). *Only 1% of Fox News viewers are Black*. Mediaite. Retrieved from <https://www.mediaite.com/tv/only-1-of-fox-news-viewers-are-black/>