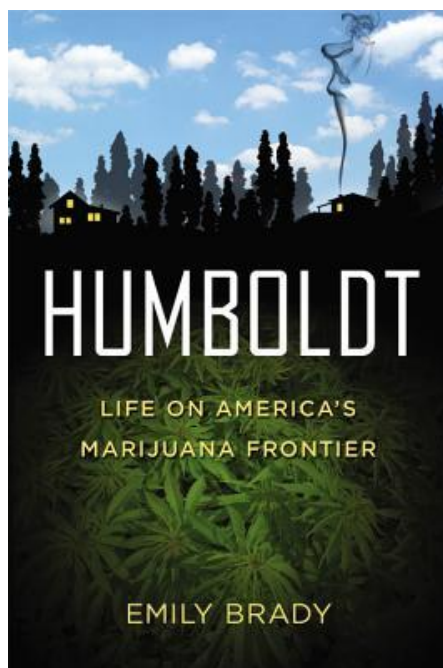




Humboldt: Life on America's Marijuana Frontier

Emily Brady

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In the vein of Susan Orlean's *The Orchid Thief* and Deborah Feldman's *Unorthodox*, journalist Emily Brady journeys into a secretive subculture--one that marijuana built.

Humboldt: Life on America's Marijuana Frontier

Say the words "Humboldt County" to a stranger and you might receive a knowing grin. The name is infamous, and yet the place, and its inhabitants, have been nearly impenetrable. Until now.

Humboldt is a narrative exploration of an insular community in Northern California, which for nearly 40 years has existed primarily on the cultivation and sale of marijuana. It's a place where business is done with thick wads of cash and savings are buried in the backyard. In Humboldt County, marijuana supports everything from fire departments to schools, but it comes with a heavy price. As legalization looms, the community stands at a crossroads and its inhabitants are deeply divided on the issue--some want to claim their rightful heritage as master growers and have their livelihood legitimized, others want to continue reaping the inflated profits of the black market.

Emily Brady spent a year living with the highly secretive residents of Humboldt County, and her cast of eccentric, intimately drawn characters take us into a fascinating, alternate universe. It's the story of a small town that became dependent on a forbidden plant, and of how everything is changing as marijuana goes mainstream.

Humboldt: Life on America's Marijuana Frontier Details

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Bill Brewer says

Northern California has always been a big and mysterious piece of the country to me. Loggers, fishermen, students, shop owners all wrestling something out of this beautiful country. It is surprisingly rugged and remote much more so than Oregon Coast where I have lived in the past. I was down there recently and recalled all of the information that had been subconsciously been entering my mind over the years about marijuana and pulled off the main road to drive through Garberville. It did not take long to drive through and out but I mentioned to my wife surely someone has written about this community. We stayed that night in Fort Bragg and got up the next morning to explore Mendocino and lo and behold this book was sitting in the local book store. This book lets you look beyond what you see and explains why you cannot see it. There is nothing unseemly or outrageous here but just a story about people living a beautiful a rugged part of the country that use to depend on logging and fishing. It follows the lives of four people who live in this country. Rural America is beautiful but hard to live in because of employment. These people are pioneers. As a side note I would like to thank the owners of the shops in these small towns including the book store where I bought this book. I browsed for about 30 minutes. I could have bought this home on Amazon for \$20.34 but I paid \$27.00 for it here. The marginal cost of \$6.66 is the price of a coffee and Danish from a neighboring coffee shop. Why are we willing to spend money on a coffee and Danish and deprive a book store owner of the right to compensation for exposing me to a book like this? Moral of the story support the book stores you browse. Buy something so they will be there in the future to offer a respite and educational experience for us all.

Dusty says

Humboldt county, sparsely-populated, green, surrounded by ancient redwood trees, is, in some ways, the epicenter of marijuana production in the United States. In the 1960s, hippies fleeing corporate greed and the government's violence and hypocrisy built communities here. Now, the place is inhabited by the families they established and, increasingly, by opportunistic businesspeople who have transformed the cultivation of marijuana from a small-time, family affair into a powerful, community-defining industry. There is perhaps no other place where the ups and downs of the United States' ban on marijuana have been experienced more intensely. The people of Humboldt have built schools and enriched their community in numerous other ways using marijuana profits. They have also been invaded by the U.S. military, raised their children behind suffocating cloaks of secrecy, and lost too many friends and neighbors to the violence that always accompanies underground markets.

I decided to read the book after the University of Texas, where I work, named it its "First-Year Forum" text for the 2014-15 school year. To clarify, this means that all students who enroll in the first-semester composition course--several thousand, in total--will be required to purchase and read the book, and then to research and write about the controversies it raises. The obvious one is whether marijuana should be legalized, for either medical or recreational purposes, at either the state, national, or even international level. However, the stories the author shares raise additional questions, some of them more specific, all of them reminding me that the legalization debate is connected to other pressing social issues. If marijuana is to be legal in some capacity, how is it to be grown? Is the industrial method, which raises thousands of plants in record time under intensely-hot bulbs, sustainable? If marijuana is to be restricted, how should we deal with offenders? Is it right to send as many people to prison as we have for dealing and consuming pot? What do

we make of the fact that the majority of these prisoners are black or Latino? If the United States legalizes (or continues to criminalize) the use of marijuana, what will the consequence be for the other countries from which we import so much of the drug? What responsibility do we have to help our neighbors--for example, Mexico--control their marijuana production? These are just a few examples.

The book is "relevant," even "important," now because Colorado, Washington, and the country of Uruguay have legalized marijuana (and other states and nations seem poised to follow). But I think *Humboldt* is more than just an intervention into a timely political debate. It is the result of a year's worth of time spent among the people of Humboldt and, as the author explains, it is just as much a "snapshot" of northern California living as it is an argument in favor of marijuana legalization. A hundred years from now, when the business about marijuana has been settled, I think readers will be able to look back on the book as a telling cultural document as well as a finely-crafted narrative. Whatever you're more interested in now--politics or plot--I recommend you give this book a chance.

Mike says

An interesting look at the economic and social impact of marijuana growing and legalization in rural Northern California.

Naftoli says

This is a fun and light read yet an excellent account of Humboldt's marijuana culture told through the life stories of four characters. I highly recommend it.

Valerie says

Since I live in Humboldt County and I have heard a lot about this particular book, I decided to read it to become more educated about the marijuana legalization issue, which is to be on this November's ballot once again in California. The author spent years with several people in Humboldt County to immerse herself in the cannabis culture so that she could write a realistic book about the subject. She uses her interviews with four main characters: Mare, Crockett, Emma and Bob, to illustrate four very different viewpoints on the drug. Mare is an "old-school" hippie, Crockett is one of the newer black market growers, Emma is a young lady who grew up in southern Humboldt County and has been around marijuana her entire life, and Bob is a deputy sheriff.

I thought the author did a great job in bringing out the various viewpoints of different segments of the population regarding legalization of marijuana. For instance, many of the black market growers do not want legalization to become a reality because their profits would dramatically decrease! (When thinking about the issues, it makes sense). Then there is the viewpoint of Mare and others like her, who are 'old-school' users and growers, who believe the drug should be legalized and grown outdoors in the sun as naturally as possible. One of the most confused and frustrated type person has got to be the law enforcement officer, who in general exists to enforce the law, and many believe that marijuana should be legalized; and then taxed and marketed, etc. so there are no more problems with having to write tickets for infractions, etc. which has been the current status quo since Arnold Schwarzenegger signed this legislation a few years ago. The drug should be either legal or illegal, without all the gray areas that law enforcement runs up against in dealing with it.

One of the things that surprised me the most is the fact that many marijuana plants are now grown indoors all year around, with the assistance of diesel powered generators, and with the use of clones rather than growing the plant from seed. There is a school of thought that believes that this is rather a negative thing because not only is it truly not natural, but it also leaves a huge carbon footprint. I had never even thought about this issue, but then I realized when I had read about the name of a strain of marijuana with the name and the word 'diesel' behind it, I had an 'aha' moment when I realized that meant this was clone pot grown indoors. Apparently, the dispensaries that sell marijuana pay over twice as much per pound for this product than they do for the plants grown outdoors. I had never even thought that the same plant grown indoors from clones would ever be prized more highly by anyone. What an education!!

I recommend this book to anyone who wants to get an overview of the issues revolving around the medical cannabis and legalization issues. It is very well written and addresses the major problems of the whole issue in a succinct and very interesting way.

Genie says

Interesting essay on the marijuana economy and culture present mostly in southern Humboldt County in California. Quick, interesting read. Very topical for today's controversies.

Miles says

This was a solid three-star read, but it gets an extra star for being about a subject that is particularly close to my heart. As a Humboldt native who grew up relatively insulated from the county's ubiquitous illegal marijuana production, I became increasingly interested in the subject as I got older and realized what a huge role pot plays in the local economy. This book is an interesting glimpse into the lives of growers and normal citizens whose lives are tied to the local drug trade. I grew up in Northern Humboldt and haven't spent a lot of time in SoHum, so my familiarity with most of the settings in this book was superficial. Still, it was wonderful to read Brady's descriptions of the redwoods and the natural landscapes of the place I call home. While I can't speak to the accuracy of her portrayal of the lives of growers, she certainly nailed it in her descriptions of the Humboldt vibe.

I am about to move back to Humboldt with my girlfriend and begin my adult life there, so I am very interested in how the eventual legalization of weed will affect the local economy. I support legalization, but I don't want many of the beautiful little towns in the area to disappear if weed suddenly plummets in price. I wouldn't mind, however, the dissolution of the wall of secrecy and danger that lingers behind the redwood curtain. Even if it comes with a temporary or even permanent economic price, I still think we need to legalize weed and bring its production, distribution, and consumption out of the shadows.

I usually don't have such a personal stake in books, and I found it hard to go through this narrative in an objective way. It really broke my heart to read about all the violence that has occurred over the years because of marijuana, much of which I'd never heard about. After reading this, I am much more grateful that I didn't grow up with the marijuana trade being a big part of my life.

I know the book is focused on the history of weed in Humboldt, but I wouldn't want readers to think that's all there is to this wonderful part of California. It's a great place to live and visit, with good, hardworking people, including many law-abiding farmers who raise delicious, organic produce and livestock. Humboldt possesses kind of breathtaking beauty that people travel across the world to see. It is a special place for lots

of reasons, and the primo weed is just one item on a long list of unique, wacky things that give the county its distinct character. Even though I believe marijuana should and will eventually be legalized in California, I hope Humboldt residents find ways to peacefully and creatively keep their communities alive. It will require a lot of effort and flexibility, but there is much worth preserving.

Crystal says

This is a very readable book about the cannabis industry in Humboldt County, CA, mostly told through the lives of four differently involved people: Mara, an aging hippie, part of those who "started it all" with the back to land movement of the '70s; Bob, a Sheriff's officer, who just spins his wheels trying to enforce an the un-enforceable law against the growing; Crockett, a cog in the commercial growing industry; Emma, who "escaped" the cycle of death and arrest among children of growers through education and who now wants to return to SoHum to help the youth. Having just been to Humboldt County, I found this book elucidating and was able to visualize the locales described therein. I had no idea that this industry was so big (70% of all marijuana used in the US is from Humboldt). The growers fear and voted against legalization as the prices would drop and would actually be an impact on the economy of the region. I highly recommend this book for anybody interested in California history and economy and anybody interested in where marijuana comes from.

Jessica Raya says

I had the pleasure of meeting Emily Brady a few months ago and knew instantly that this was a non-fiction writer whose book I had to read. I expected Humboldt to be smart and well-written. What I didn't expect was to be thoroughly captivated by these people and this place, so much so in fact that I'd devour the story over a weekend. Partial credit goes to the intriguing subject matter (having grown up in British Columbia, where the scent of pot is as ubiquitous as Lululemon leggings, even I had much to learn here), but far more credit goes to Brady's deft handling of it. This behind-the-livingroom-curtains look at one of America's most notorious and secretive communities reads more like a novel thanks to a cast of deeply sympathetic characters living under the threat of imminent loss. Their lives are built on stuff as strong as old growth redwoods and as fragile as a slip of paper that lets them grow medical marijuana. The possible legalization of pot and all the changes it will surely bring, many unforeseeable, hangs hazy and heavy over all of them. What will come of Mara, Emma, Bob and Crockett? Of this special place? It was hard to close the last pages and leave them there.

Caitlin says

A really fascinating look at a community on the brink of dynamic change. Reads like fiction, but with all the interesting details only nonfiction can provide. A quick and thought-provoking read!

Sophia says

Wow. What an incredible insight into such a taboo subject. Brady has really captured the personal and human side to the marijuana trade. It tells like a sequence of separate stories that all intertwine to paint a

delicate picture that leaves the reader with so many questions and an alternate view of this often negatively cast subject.

Rich says

A very engaging read that draws you in immediately with a colorful cast of characters... but it's all strictly nonfiction! Strongly recommended, for advocates, opponents, and everyone in between.

Jennifer says

Emily Brady's study of marijuana culture focuses on Humboldt County, part of California's Emerald Triangle where a great deal of pot has been grown in the past few decades. Most of the book involves the time period just prior to the first legalization push in Cali; her book illuminates the issue from several points of view, ranging from an old-school grower facing competition from the more high-yielding indoor farms, through a social worker and a police officer to a man who lives on the bleeding edge of Humboldt's underground economy. Brady shows why many pot farmers were opposed to legalization. It's an interesting look at the economics--and the human costs--of marijuana and the war on drugs.

David Ward says

Humboldt: Life on America's Marijuana Frontier by Emily Brady (Grand Central Publishing 2013) (338.17379) is an interesting tale about the state of present-day cannabis farming in Northern California to provide a supply of marijuana for the medical marijuana market. I have no way to judge the accuracy of her information, and it's not really important anyway. When this book was published (in 2013), the need for a steady stream of cannabis to supply the California medical marijuana trade truly made California the "marijuana frontier." In just a few short months, this frontier has moved on! The cannabis frontier has moved east to Colorado and north to Washington where growers are racing to supply enough marijuana to meet the market demands of not just the medical marijuana trade but, in addition, the recreational trade as well! When the average disinterested citizen becomes aware of the mountains of brand new tax revenue pouring into Colorado and Washington from the cannabis market, the drug war will be over, and the tokers will have won. My rating: 7/10, finished 3/4/14.

Kdorman says

Beginning in the sixties a lot of people joined the 'Back to the Landers' in an effort to live closer to the earth and 'be the change' that they wished to see in the world. For many in Humboldt County, under the beauty and grandeur of the Redwoods in the wilds of Northern California, this meant growing marijuana for a living.

Through a narrative of investigative journalism, Emily Brady illustrates the people and struggles of this relatively unique area through the eyes of its residents. While she interviewed hundreds ("some days it felt like everyone") she offers a glimpse into life in Humboldt from the perspective of four representative people. 'Mare' the older hippy woman and one of the original residents who grows only a few plants to supplement

her income. 'Crockett' who is second generation but works for others, grows and sells as much marijuana as possible. 'Bob' the local police officer who is trying to do his job in the most respectful way possible considering that he is living in a county where most people make their money through an illegal industry that may or may not gain legality in the near future. And Ms. Worldpeace, a girl who grew up in Humboldt, moved away, and realized that her childhood was very different from that of most other people she meets in Berkley.

Ms. Brady's presentation seems to be a fairly honest representation of the lives of those living in Humboldt County and through their individual perspectives she captures a lot of the issues that are being raised about marijuana and the cannabis sales on both a national level and a (Humboldt) local level.

It is an interesting and quick read that will almost certainly shed light on a culture with which many are unfamiliar.
