



Drug Wars: The Political Economy Of Narcotics

Curtis Marez

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Inaugurated in 1984, America's "War on Drugs" is just the most recent skirmish in a standoff between global drug trafficking and state power. From Britain's nineteenth-century Opium Wars in China to the activities of Colombia's drug cartels and their suppression by U.S.-backed military forces today, conflicts over narcotics have justified imperial expansion, global capitalism, and state violence, even as they have also fueled the movement of goods and labor around the world.

In *Drug Wars*, cultural critic Curtis Marez examines two hundred years of writings, graphic works, films, and music that both demonize and celebrate the commerce in cocaine, marijuana, and opium, providing a bold interdisciplinary exploration of drugs in the popular imagination. Ranging from the writings of Sigmund Freud to pro-drug lord Mexican popular music, gangsta rap, and Brian De Palma's 1983 epic *Scarface*, *Drug Wars* moves from the representations and realities of the Opium Wars to the long history of drug and immigration enforcement on the U.S.-Mexican border, and to cocaine use and interdiction in South America, Middle Europe, and among American Indians. Throughout Marez juxtaposes official drug policy and propaganda with subversive images that challenge and sometimes even taunt government and legal efforts.

As Marez shows, despite the state's best efforts to use the media to obscure the hypocrisies and failures of its drug policies—be they lurid descriptions of Chinese opium dens in the English popular press or Nancy Reagan's "Just Say No" campaign—marginalized groups have consistently opposed the expansion of state power that drug traffic has historically supported.

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