

HEADS TOGETHER: THE ART BEHIND WEED & THE UNDERGROUND PRESS SYNDICATE

DAVID JACOB KRAMER

Images courtesy of the Author from "Heads Together: Weed and the Underground Press Syndicate 1965-1973"

The art in Heads Together speaks to a time when pot was smoked with optimism — as something potentially good for society and people, capable of activating profound transformation in the face of corrupt and powerful forces.

Now, as pot fast-tracks toward full legalization in the U.S. and beyond, its once incendiary status is brought into relief. Pot's profiteers in the corporate market today do not reflect those who fought for legalization, or the Black and Latino populations strategically criminalized in America for pot well before hippies were targeted, and long after.

The protest movement and counterculture of the sixties was fed by one of the greatest booms in publishing history. The Underground Press Syndicate (UPS) began as a loose confederation of five American papers in 1966, and within a few years swelled to over 500 across the world, reaching millions of readers. They "spread like weed," said Tom Forcade, the UPS director, weed-dealer, and eventual founder of *High Times*. The metaphor was apt: the UPS spurred the legalization movement, and weed became its totem.



STXDYOZ

MENU

HOMEPAGE

ABOUT STUDIO XYZ

COOKIE POLICY (EU)

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Weed was so pervasive it also became a helpful means for government agencies to crack down on the UPS — just bust into an editorial office and frisk the staff. These tactics meant activist groups adopted weed as an emblem of resistance. Weed would permeate UPS pages, with gaps in text crammed with weed-inspired “spot illustrations,” and it added a touch of flair to the mastheads of UPS titles. *Heads Together* collects these drawings, shining a light on lesser-known names in the stoner-art canon, and many who literally weren’t names at all, as no signature was attached to their illustrations.

The Marijuana Review

The Marijuana Review was run by Michael Aldrich, who had composed the first PhD dissertation on weed in the U.S. — “*Marijuana*

STXDYOZ *Folklore*.” A typical Marijuana Review article covered a topic like cannabis purification rites of Scythian nomads in the third to seventh centuries. The FBI found the publication threatening enough to bug its phones. Ultimately, Aldrich found his Buffalo, New York commune’s phone connected to a reel-to-reel recorder in the basement. He managed to waste all the tape on the machine by picking up the receiver and spending days reading out lurid passages from Henry Miller’s *Tropic of Cancer*.

Free John

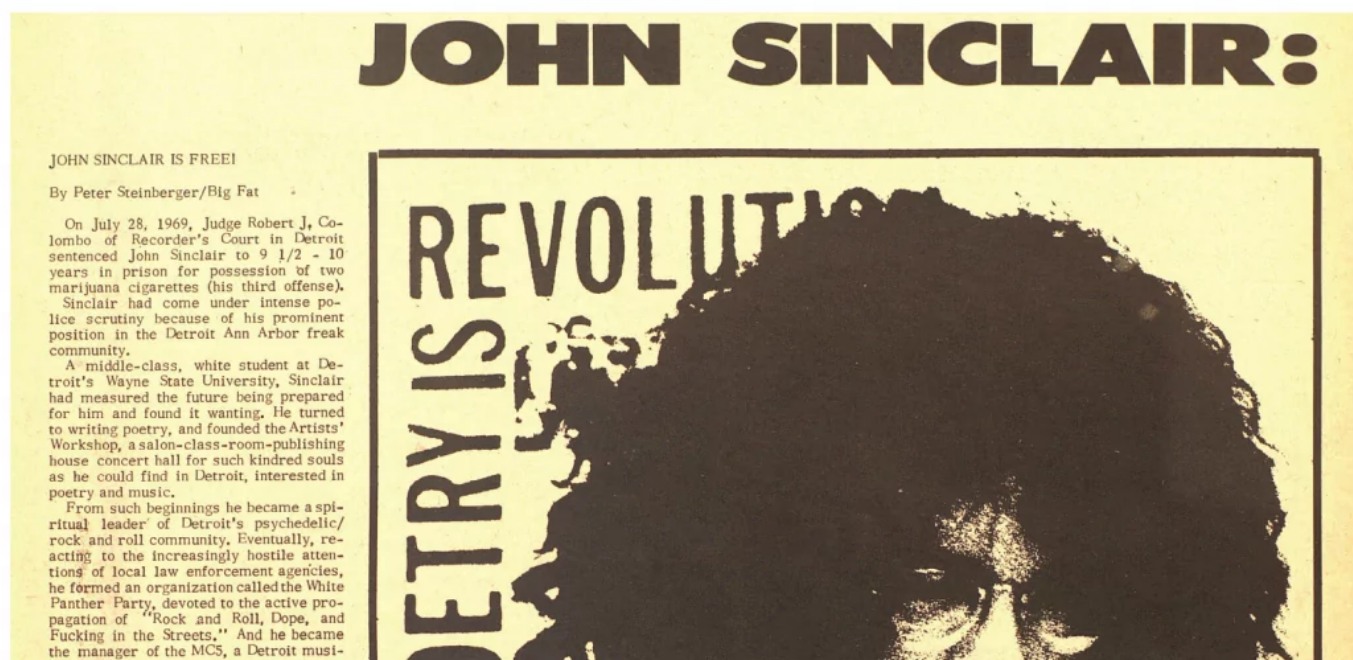
John Sinclair was a poet, Minister of Information for The White Panther Party, editor of the *Ann Arbor Sun*, and manager of the Detroit band, The MC5. An undercover agent befriended him for six months and arrested him when he handed her two joints. He got a ten-year sentence. His jail dispatches became weekly columns in multiple underground papers. John Lennon wrote a song in his name: “*They gave him ten for two / What else can the bastards do?*”

A global “*Free John!*” campaign ensued. Antiwar protesters across the country could be seen wearing “Free John” shirts, and carrying placards with the phrase. Fundraising ephemera was promoted across UPS papers, from posters to buttons, raising money for his legal defense. Sinclair was freed two years into his sentence, the day after a benefit concert with a heavy-hitting lineup of John Lennon and Yoko Ono, and jazz-luminary Archie Shepp.

STXDYOZ ed Sinclair for Heads Together before he passed away MENU April of this year, at the age of eighty-two. He smoked a joint and castigated the government with just as much fire and aplomb as ever. Here's an excerpt:

"We all lived together. So you could do this shit anytime and nobody would call the police.

That's what was at the bottom of all this: weed was very much a tremendous unifier. Unprecedented. Eventually you smoke enough weed and say, I don't want to join the army. It'll change everything. Shit hit the fan then. Our resistance got so large, they had to do something. They were our enemy. They dogged every aspect of creative life. We were all smoking weed, so we were in their sights. They were getting paid to disrupt our lives and put us in jail. I did two prison terms! There was a lot of paranoia. We were terrified. [Weed] was the basis of our life. It's what made us what we were. We were quite proud of it. The State and the people that put us all in prison, now they're getting rich off this, the rotten motherfuckers. They're out of their minds with greed. Better to get your weed from the guy down the street who'd bring it over to your house than go to a dispensary and pay an inflated price because the State is getting paid from each dispensary. They're grubbing as fiercely as they can now for the money. They could be selling rubbers, or any goddamn thing. Opening your mind? They don't want to talk about that."



STXDYOZ

isonment, Judge
s have denied him
s appeal has not

MENU

While in jail, Sinclair learned of a new charge brought against him: conspiracy to destroy, by bombing, property belong to the United States government, specifically, the Ann Arbor office of the CIA.

Sinclair denies guilt on this charge, for which the government's case appears to rest chiefly upon the testimony of David Valler, who is also serving a prison term for possession of marijuana.

Last fall, the Michigan State Department of Corrections removed Sinclair from Southern Michigan State Prison at Jackson, (an hour's drive from his wife and children, who live at the White Panther commune in Ann Arbor,) to the State House of Correction and Branch Prison at Marquette, in Michigan's Upper Peninsula. This is a 900 mile round trip for his family and his attorneys.

He is permitted no other visitors. Reporters are not permitted to speak with him. His mail is of course censored.

Describe the routine you have here. (PAUSE,...) I'm getting myself together... Let's decide on a general context for it... -- o.k. -- ...It's the best thing that ever happened to me or our organization. Why?

Because I'm isolated here, and have time to study, and read and think.

Do they let you have access to the materials you need for this?

I get most of the books I want, with some exceptions. The thing about the penitentiary is, that when you're on the street it's terrifying to think about going there, because you know nothing about it. (Blacks, though, have fathers and brothers who've been in -- for them, it's no kind of frightening thing.) But the penitentiary ain't shit to be afraid of. ...It's just like being a straight person: get up at seven, eat, work, have a lunch break, go back to work, and then at four o'clock go off work, and go eat dinner at five. Or, if you're lucky you don't have to work; you can stay in your cell. But they found out I liked being in my cell, and so they made me work.

What work do you do?
Sorting dirty underwear, in the laundry. How do you relate to the other prisoners?

Generally, excellently. They all know about my case; they read about me and hear about me on the radio. All the prisoners know that it's a meatball. (Prison slang for a phony charge). They watch as we keep trying to get bond, and so on. And they're aghast. They see that in a lot of cases they do get bail -- or would get it -- except for a lack of lawyers. So they're shocked to see the unfairness of my case. They can't believe I'm being held like this, without bond.

When I came here, the prison made me take this job in the laundry, and I had it for a month, when this real good clerk's

job came up: I was put in for it (by a prisoner-foreman at the laundry). They told him they wouldn't have me. And he couldn't understand it -- asked why -- they said we don't want him to have access to a typewriter all day long, because we don't like the stuff he writes.

As a white person, from the middle class, are you surprised at all by what your fellow prisoners are like?

Well, you see I'd been in jail before, served six months in Dehoco (Detroit House of Correction) and so was familiar with what the scene was like... Prisoners are proletarians and lumpenproletarians who got caught; they're not a special "criminal class." The whites are mostly southerners, and 98 per cent are from a working class or sub-working class background. That's what's so stupid about penitentiaries in the first place. This is just a town where we're all made to work to support the guards and the administration. Maybe 10 per cent of the prisoners should be segregated from the rest of the people because they've been so messed over by the social order that they can't relate to others except in destructive terms. The rest of us have no business being here at all.

If you have to stay here for 10 years will you be able to endure it?

Yes -- just as I do now, except for a longer time. I have a lot of studying to do, and never enough time to do it in. The point is, that I don't have to be here that long, but the only way to get me out is to organize politically, to do so.

If you are a political prisoner the only

way you can be released is through political action, but the contradiction there is that by law I've no business being here to start with. That's one mistake we've made so far: we've defined it for ourselves as a legal problem, and it's not that at all. As far as the legal aspect is concerned -- that's why they won't give me bond: because as soon as someone reads the briefs and rules in accordance with law, they'll have to cut me loose. So they keep me off the street by denying me bond.

Tell me what you want people to think about the Youth Culture, the White Panthers, and so on?

Essentially, we have a well-defined culture. Which means we have the basis for a national thrust. That is, what we MUST do is gain political power. We CAN do that because we have this shared culture, making us a people. Franz Fanon says that all culture is first and foremost NATIONAL struggle. That's how we make culture a political force.

Most of the things that people are doing now on campuses is not political -- or else it's reactionary.

Explain that.

The stuff going on now, trashing buildings, demonstrations and protests, is reactionary. They're just reacting to the pig power structure, and the way that it sets things up. To gain political power we must define the situation in our own terms. We have to go to Huey P. Newton's definition of power: the ability to define phenomena and make them act in a desired manner.

When we start defining the situation in



protest

"Instead of deadening people's consciousness, marijuana brings people back to life and expands their awareness of the world and their own possibilities for life in that world, and it leads them to questions that otherwise wouldn't have been asked: why are we at war in Indochina? Why is racism so rampant in every area of American life? Why can't people love each other? Why are our politicians and businessmen and generals such liars and hypocrites? Why is everything so fucked up?" (John Sinclair, *Marijuana Revolution*, 1971. Free pamphlet by the Rainbow People's Party of Ann Arbor, Michigan)

Amorphia

Rolling papers in the 1960s were not just paraphernalia, but vehicles for anti-war rhetoric, and even funded legalization efforts. Though Zig-Zag papers dominated the market, and the graphic of "Captain Zig-Zag" and his upturned mustache was a ubiquitous symbol

STXDYOZ : the UPS (and artist Alton Kelley's show posters for the MENU San Francisco Avalon Ballroom), by the early 1970s the counterculture was independently producing rival rolling papers of its own.

The Patriotic Rolling Co. Inc offered rice papers printed in the form of a draft card to set to flame. One could also spark up the American flag or a dollar bill. *"A free society rolling in money creates the highest form of government,"* the package punned. There was a technological innovation in the "Insta-Roach": each individual paper included a metal wire as its own in-built roach clip.

These were sold at the head shops sprouting up across the country. By the early 1970s, head shops weren't just in urban centers, but in suburbs and small towns, and were important distribution points for local UPS titles, too.

Non-profit legalization organization, Amorphia's Acapulco Gold Papers were hatched as a fundraising effort. Their sights were set beyond legalization, but to eventually cultivate and sell weed itself, then apply the proceeds toward saving the planet. An ad read: "Legalization is not an end; it is a means to create social change and a new form of economic organization."



Acapulco Gold Papers came in four types: rice paper, maiz paper, liquor rice paper, and cannabis paper — the first hemp papers sold in America in half a century. The only factory still manufacturing papers with hemp was in Spain. so that's where they went. However. the

STXDYOZ refused to print anything on the packaging associated MENU weed for fear of legal reprisal. Amorphia left the inside flap blank. Once in the U.S., they had stamps made that said: “*ALL AMORPHIA’S PROFITS FROM THESE PAPERS GO TO LEGALIZE MARIJUANA.*” They hosted stamping parties to complete the job.

Ads for Acapulco Gold Papers were reprinted in hundreds of UPS publications across the world, and the papers managed to raise over 200,000 dollars. In a 1973 interview in the *Ann Arbor Sun*, Amorphia’s political-director, Gordon Brownell, expressed his fears about the legalization they were fighting for: “We do not want to turn the legal marijuana market over to large corporate interests. We’re trying to get people to think of alternatives like Allen Ginsberg’s idea of having cooperative selling of marijuana on a subsistence basis.”

Hetty Maclise

I came across Hetty Maclise’s work while researching for the book. I kept spotting her drawings across multiple underground papers, along with her signature, “*Hetty.*” Her drawings are easily identifiable for their classically-inspired figures, airbrushed stencil silhouettes, and cursive poetry. I became more and more obsessed — but was unable to find much about her. She was so crucial in defining the look of what we know as psychedelic art, but she seems to have been left out of the canon.

As a staff artist on the *San Francisco Oracle* in 1967, Maclise invented the multicolor, iridescent look that would define so many UPS papers — by squeezing paint into the press from ketchup dispensers. The technique came to be known as “rainbow roll” or “split fount.” Moving to New York, Maclise went on to design and illustrate for the *East Village Other* paper, creating the weekly, full-page ads for Dynasty Records, visual interpreting poems by Diane di Prima, Tuli Kupferberg, and Ira Cohen that were syndicated across hundreds of underground press papers.


Maclise was married to Angus Maclise, an artist and composer, and

STXDYOZ | drummer for the Velvet Underground—the ceremoniously officiated by Timothy Leary. She was something of a Zelig figure: She opened her own leatherworks business in New York where she crafted the tasseled vest Jimi Hendrix wore for his iconic Woodstock performance. She also stars in Ira Cohen's Thunderbolt Pagoda.



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In 1967, Maclise was busted for three joints in Oklahoma City, while driving cross-country with her husband, Angus, along with Loudon Wainwright III (whose wealthy parents bailed him out immediately). Maclise spent a month in jail (and never forgave Wainwright). A few years later, her and Angus moved to Kathmandu, Nepal, where their son, Ossian, became ordained as a *tulku* at the age of five — meaning a reincarnation of a Buddhist Lama (a position he maintains until today in Tibet).

Smoke-In

The New Left developed the “sit-in” and “teach-in” as strategies for community engagement and protest in the early 1960s. The goals of the “love-in” and “be-in” are hazier. They reached their zenith in 1967 at the “Human Be-In,” where 30,000 gathered in San Francisco’s Golden Gate Park. There was also the “gay-in” in Golden Gate Park in 1970, to celebrate a year since the Christopher Street Riots. And a “sweep-in” where the Diggers activist group cleaned up the neglected streets of New York’s Lower East Side in 1967.

The “smoke-in” was an equal parts anti-war and pro-legalization protest. The first “smoke-ins” went down in 1967, where weed activists met over four weekends in New York’s Tompkins Square Park and handed out free joints. It coincided with a suite of pot protests in London after a bunch of rock stars were busted. The “Legalize Pot” rally was held in Hyde Park, where Allen Ginsberg chanted and attendees shared joints. Nobody was arrested, but the police had to remove protestors from a preserve dedicated to the park’s ducks.



STXDYOZ

MENU

arrested by campus police on drug charges. The smoke-in, sponsored by the Youth International Party (Yippies), was publicized through leaflets handed out earlier in the week.

CONTINUOUS ROCK music was featured as the crowd lolled about the soccer field east of Morrill Tower, a high-rise dormitory on the east bank of the Olentangy River, from noon to late Saturday night.

The gathering was to protest antidrug legislation proposed by Ohio Atty Gen. William Brown. Brown's claiming sole credit for the bill touched off a storm of

controversy in the Ohio House of Representatives about its originality.

The House recently passed the legislation which, if approved by the Senate in its present form, will stiffen present drug laws.

THE YIPPIES' promotional literature took a few swipes at Brown and urged attendance at the smoke-in by urging, "If enough of us do it (in this case smoke marijuana), anything is legal."

Those charged with first offense possession of marijuana, a misdemeanor, were:

Christopher A. Rogers, 20, of 1191 Lawrence Dr.; Donald E. Hutchinson, 19, of 1865 Park S; James W. Torrence, 22, of 901 E. 12th Ave.; Arthur L. Kegler, 20,

Yippies protest proposed bill via 'smoke-in'

By Sue Dickman

An Ohio State University student was one of 13 persons arrested Saturday following a marijuana "smoke-in" at the Morrill Tower athletic field during a rock concert, University police said.

James R. Hammond, a junior from Granville, was arrested and charged with possession of hallucinogens. He was released on his own recognizance.

Protest

The Youth International Party (Yippies) promoted the "smoke-in" to protest H.B. 1090 which would stiffen penalties for first offense possessions of marijuana and LSD.

The proposed Ohio drug law revision calls for a three-month jail sentence for first-time marijuana users and five years imprisonment for first offense possession of hallucinogens.

"building concentration camps for potheads."

One Yippie leaflet said, "If enough of us do it (smoke marijuana), anything is legal!" Hammond was the only student arrested.

Others arrested

Bryan C. White, of Columbus, was arrested and charged with possession of hallucinogens, possession for sale of hallucinogens and carrying a concealed weapon. He was the only person incarcerated, police said.

Steven A. Rowland, also of Columbus, was charged with second offense possession of hallucinogens.

Others arrested and charged with possession of hallucinogens were, according to police: Christopher A. Rogers, Donald E. Hutchinson, Kathleen M. Wade, Arthur L. Kegler and James W. Torrence, all of Columbus.

'Smoke-in' at OSU nets 10 arrests

Ohio State University police reported 10 arrests and no serious incidents following a Saturday rock concert and marijuana "smoke in" on the university's east athletic field attended by an estimated crowd of 2,000.

The "smoke-in" was promoted by the Youth International Party (Yippies) in protest of a proposed revision of Ohio drug laws to stiffen first offense marijuana and LSD possession sentences.

THE BILL, currently pending Senate action, would slap a three-month jail sentence on first-time marijuana users and make the first offense penalty for possession of hallucinogens 5 years imprisonment.

Of those arrested, OSU police said only two were

charges of possession of marijuana.

In another drug case, federal agents seized two pounds of high grade cocaine with a street value of about \$500,000 at Port Columbus Friday.

AGENTS of the federal Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) said the drug shipment arrived in an attaché case from the Bahamas addressed to a man who was arrested in a San Francisco drug raid Thursday.

The six people arrested in San Francisco tipped authorities to the arrival of the cocaine in Columbus.

MAY 11 SMOKE-IN

We played tag with the pigs all day & they never caught on. Affinity teams ran circles around them, passed out a lb. of pot, & even Joe Krak, the pig who infiltrated the SDS inner circle, couldn't figure out where the shit was coming from.

Even in a police state, giving away grass is as easy as iceing a Trot.

The only busts the pigs managed were AWAY from the crowd--People, at a smoke-in, for gawd sake, CLUMP! The 11 misdemeanor busts we felt responsibility for got taken to the University pig pen &, without even being fingerprinted, released on their own recognizance--which was like being taken to the principal's office. The guy who had hard drugs & a gun--& ran AWAY from the crowd--has only himself to blame.

We were always ready to fight if the pigs attacked. The whole point of the smoke-in was they can build concentration camps for us--but we'll fight like hell to stay out.

If enough of us do it, anything is legal!

YIPPIE!

model liberal dope bill. Brown was too drunk to tell the difference.

Brown rattled his swords a few times, but the GOPpers stood firm, & HB 1090 languished in committee, & the pot-taking citizenry was safe again--at least until after the next election.

"The generally agreed upon flag of our nation is black with a red, five pointed star behind a green marijuana leaf in the center. It is used by groups that understand the correct use of culture and symbolism in a revolutionary struggle." (Abbie Hoffman, Steal This Book, 1971)



MARIJUANA SMOKE IN



Morrill Tower Soccer Field at OHIO STATE U.

Yippie!

Ohio's drunken Atty. Gen. William Brown has proposed a new drug law (HB 1090), passed by the Ohio House with just three dissenting votes, which will make the following sentences mandatory:

- * 3 mos. for pot possession, 1st offense;
- * 5 yrs. for possession of 1 lb. of acid, 1st offense;
- * 10 yrs. for handing a joint to a 17 year-old.

To enforce HB 1090, the pigs will have to build concentration campus for potheads.

To enforce HB 1090, the pigs will have to forcibly arrest every damn one of us.

IF ENOUGH OF US DO IT, ANYTHING IS LEGAL!



STXDYOZ 4, 1970, in Washington, DC, bombarding 350,000 Nixon supporters at the Lincoln Memorial. They waved the Viet Cong and Youth International Party (Yippie) flag (a green pot leaf overlaid on a red socialist star). They smoked weed among the Nixon-ites, then bathed naked in the Reflecting Pool on the Mall. They were cleared by a riot squad and tear gas grenades. Another "smoke-in" was held at the National Mall a year later, establishing a tradition that continues to this day.

Narcs

NARC

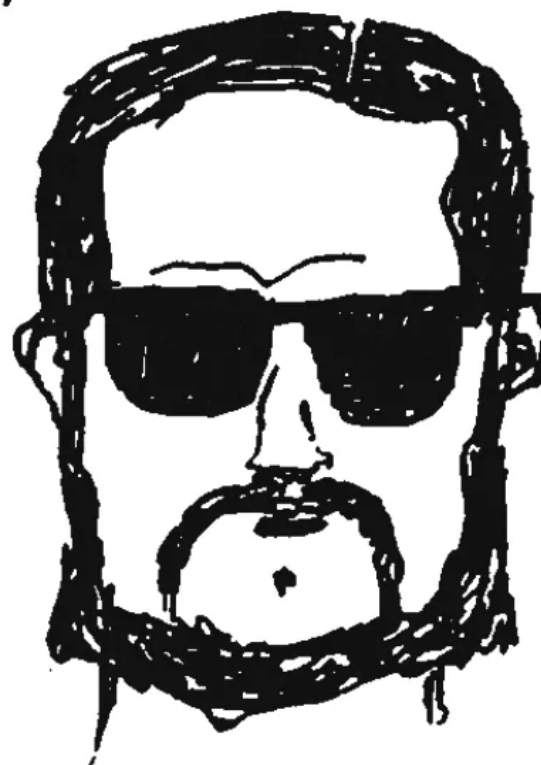
This guy is undercover narc officer, Patrick A. Wolf, SFPD. He was one of the guys who set up the Good Earth bust, and he is testifying at their trial.

He is 25-28, 5'10", 160 lbs, reddish-brown long hair, usually worn down to his shoulders and messy. Beard and moustache. Wears glasses or prescription sunglasses. Small nose and mouth, thick brown ridge. Very Irish looking. Slight Texas drawl. Seen wearing Levis, cowboy boots and green army jacket.



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Narcotics agents joined the staff of countless UPS papers, hung out at UPS communes' potlucks, and tried to join local bands. When Jackson, Mississippi's *Kudzu* was raided in October of 1970, staff were able to identify the narc as he was the only one on the team who didn't smoke weed. Cops snatched address books, trashed office gear, put guns to staffers' heads, and locked them up. No weed was found on anyone, and they were let go in the morning. "That little snake," *Kudzu's* editor, David Dogget, seethed over the narc. "All those years of embarrassing us at demonstrations with his ridiculous communist literature, and now he had gotten our house wrecked and caused us a night in jail."

Narcbuster



STXDYOZ

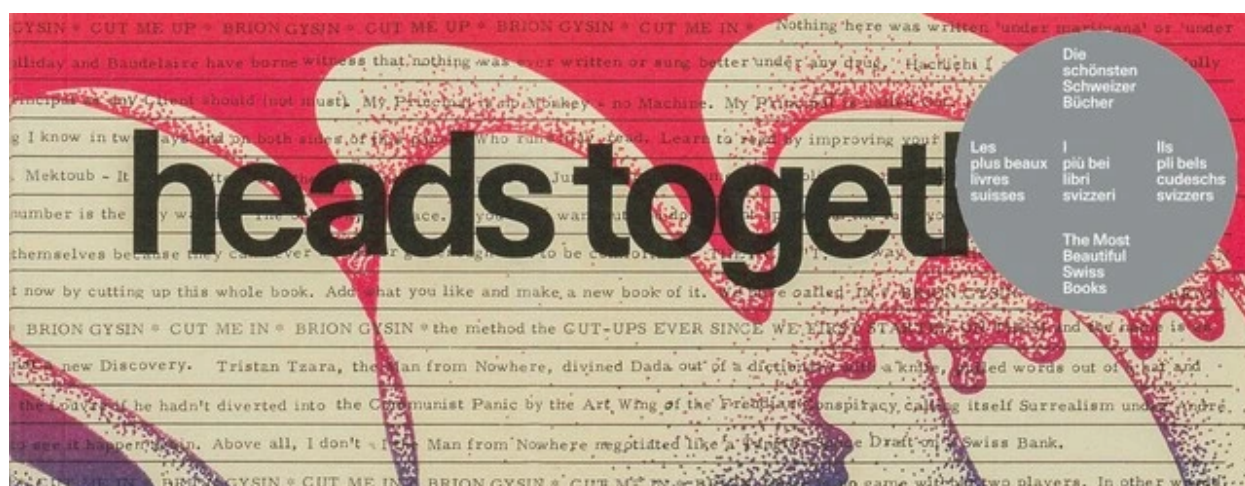
Leonard H. Belstner, narc as he looked in January.

MENU

To train narcs, a narc school was established at Quantico Marine Base in Virginia, instructing agents on how to share a joint and go long stretches without showering. Outing local narcs became a weekly standard across UPS papers, with sketches and photos of local undercover agents to look out for, where they hung out, what cars they drove, and what drugs they were selling.

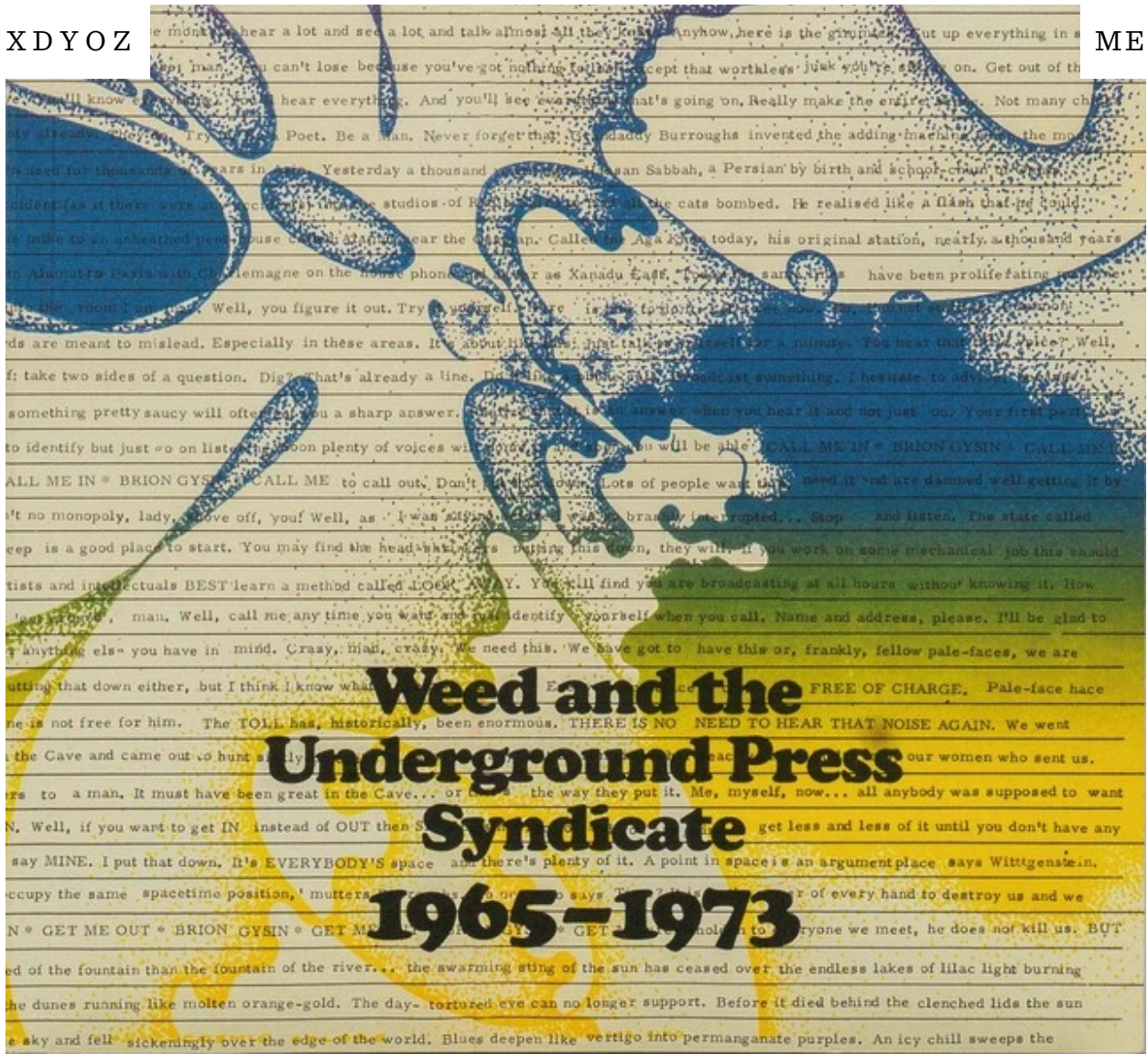
David Jacob Kramer is an Australian writer and cultural figure based in Los Angeles. He is known for his significant contributions to the literary and artistic community, particularly through his role as the co-founder of Family Books, which operated from 2007 to 2021.

*His most famous publication, **Heads Together: Weed and the Underground Press Syndicate 1965-1973** (published by Edition Patrick Frey) examines the intersection of cannabis culture and underground publishing, serving as a significant reference point within the context of underground art and establishing Kramer as one of the foremost experts on those publications we cannot do without, yet are impossible to find.*



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[Buy the book here!](#)