

## Pot and porn

### Lead-in

'Pot' and 'porn' are slang terms for *marijuana* and *pornography*. Can you explain the terms below? What is the connection between the terms in each list?

- |   |                 |                |                  |
|---|-----------------|----------------|------------------|
| 1 | cash crop       | marijuana      | black market     |
| 2 | hardcore porn   | video rentals  | cable television |
| 3 | migrant workers | shadow economy | exploitation     |

What do you think is the connection between pot, porn and illegal immigrants in the US?

You are going to read an article with the title, *Pot and porn net more than corn*. What do you think the article will be about?

### Reading 1

Before reading the article, try to predict the answers to the questions below.

- What percentage of the US economy is accounted for by marijuana, pornography and illegal labour?  
A 10%      B 25%      C 50%
- Which cash crop produces most revenue in the US?  
A tobacco      B marijuana      C maize (corn)
- How many Americans grow marijuana?  
A 2 million      B 3 million      C 5 million
- What percentage of secondary school students know how to get drugs/  
A about 70%      B about 90%      C 100%
- How much money does hardcore pornography generate annually?  
A \$5 billion      B \$10 billion      C \$20 billion
- How many porn websites are there?  
A 3,000      B 30,000      C 300,000
- How many illegal immigrants are there in the US?  
A 6 million      B 8 million      C 10 million

Read the article below. Did you guess the right answers?

## Pot and porn net more than corn by *Duncan Campbell in Los Angeles*

Marijuana, pornography and illegal labor have created a market in the United States which now accounts for as much as 10% of the American economy, according to a study. As a cash crop, marijuana is believed to be bigger than maize, and porn revenue is equal to Hollywood's domestic income. Despite laws that punish marijuana cultivation more strictly than murder in some states, Americans spend more on illegal drugs than on cigarettes. And despite official disapproval of pornography, the US leads the world in the export of sex videos, according to a book, *Reefer Madness: Sex, Drugs And Cheap Labor In The American Black Market*, by Eric Schlosser. Although the official American economy has been suffering, the shadow economy is enjoying unprecedented levels of success. No aspect of farming has grown faster in the US over the past three decades than marijuana.

While the nation's largest legal cash crop, maize, produces about \$19bn in revenue, "plausible" estimates for the value of marijuana crops reach \$25bn. Steve White, a former coordinator for the US drug enforcement administration's cannabis eradication program, estimates that the drug is now the country's largest cash crop. Some estimates suggest 3 million Americans grow marijuana, although mostly for their own or their friends' use.

The laws against the drug are strict. There were 724,000 people arrested for marijuana offences in 2001 and about 50,000 are in prison. Commercial growers can serve sentences far longer than those for murder, but the high risks appear to have had little effect on production or availability: 89% of secondary school students asked indicated that they could easily obtain the drug.

The annual number of hardcore video rentals in the

US rose from 79m in 1985 to 759m in 2001. Hardcore pornography in the shape of videos, the Internet, live sex acts and cable television is now estimated to generate around \$10bn, about the same amount as Hollywood's US box office receipts. Americans spend more money at strip clubs than at Broadway, regional theatres and orchestra performances combined.

Now the US leads the world in pornography; about 211 new films are produced every week. The Internet has provided a fresh and profitable outlet. In 1997 about 22,000 porn websites existed; the number is now closer to 300,000.

Meanwhile more than a million illegal farm workers are estimated to be employed in the US, with the average worker being a 29-year-old from Mexico. The total number of illegal immigrants in the US is estimated at about 8 million and many are being paid cash in a shadow economy. Many live in primitive conditions: a survey in Soledad, in the heart of California's agricultural territory, found that one-eighth of the town's official population were living in garages.

"Migrant work in California has absorbed Mexican surplus labor, while Mexico has in effect paid for the education, health care and retirement of California's farm workers," writes Schlosser.

Schlosser believes that the shadow economy will thrive as long as marijuana and pornography remain illicit. "A society that can punish a marijuana offender more severely than a murderer is caught in the grip of a deep psychosis," he concludes. "Black markets will always be with us. But they will recede in importance when the public morality is consistent with our private one."

*The Guardian Weekly* 20-3-0508, page 14

### Glossary

Broadway = New York's theatre district

### Reading 2

Read the passage again and discuss the points below with a partner.

- 1 'The American authorities are tough on the producers and users of pot and porn, but the black market is successful and growing.' According to the article, is this true or false?
- 2 Find five examples from the article that show that the black market in pot and porn is growing.
- 3 Why does Schlosser think pot and porn should be decriminalized? In his opinion, what is wrong with the way Americans are approaching the problem of drugs and pornography?

## Vocabulary in context

Match the words from the article in A with synonyms in B.

|               |                       |
|---------------|-----------------------|
| A             | B                     |
| plausible     | money                 |
| illicit       | produce               |
| revenue       | destruction           |
| unprecedented | believable            |
| generate      | develop well          |
| thrive        | illegal               |
| eradication   | never happened before |

## Follow-up

Discuss these questions in groups.

- 1 Do you think pot and/or porn should be legal or illegal? Why or why not?
- 2 What's the situation in your country? Are pot and porn legal? Are they a big problem? What do your government and your society do about these problems?
- 3 What do you think your society should do about pot and porn?

Work in small groups. You form a committee whose purpose is to control the production and sale of marijuana and pornography in your region. Decide on a five-point plan to control the problem. Consider the following.

- 1 Will you legalize or criminalize pot and porn?
- 2 Will you target producers or users, and how?
- 3 Will you focus on education, or getting tough with criminals?