

COCAINE POWDER SCREENS AND THE GRAY LADY:  
NEW YORK TIMES COVERAGE OF THE WAR ON  
DRUGS IN COLOMBIA, 1971 – 2001

by

DANIEL PARRA MEJIA

DIANNE BRAGG, COMMITTEE CHAIR  
SCOTT PARROTT  
STEVEN BUNKER

A THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts in the Department of Journalism & Creative  
Media in the Graduate School of The  
University of Alabama

TUSCALOOSA, ALABAMA

2019

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## ABSTRACT

There is a vast amount of literature about media coverage of the United States protracted war on drugs. Mainly, researchers have analyzed anti-drugs campaigns, its most frequent themes, frames, and narratives in network news coverage. However, little research has been done on United States newspapers coverage of the war on drugs, and there is almost none in reference to the United States' war on drugs and its relationship with Colombia, the world's top cocaine producers during the 1980s and 1990s. This paper will analyze how the *New York Times* covered the war on drugs in Colombia from the day Nixon first declared it on June 17, 1971, to the day Bush shifted the country's focus away and announced the "War on Terror" on September 20, 2001.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am appreciative of having this opportunity to thank the many people without whose help I would not have begun, and certainly not completed, this research project. I share my immense gratitude for Dr. Dianne Bragg, who not only served as my committee chair, but as an example of the powerful impact that a committed educator can bring to the world. Thank you for not giving up on me.

I would also like to thank my committee members, Dr. Scott Parrott and Dr. Steven Bunker for your immense generosity in sharing expertise to propel me forward, sometimes despite myself. Your questions and constructive input have guided me through what started truly as a general curiosity, to something put into action and new questions to consider.

I am eternally grateful to my wonderful family and friends for the ongoing love and support and believing in my worth and the work that I pursue. I know I am so fortunate to know each of you.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

For more than four decades the US government has been fighting against drugs (their production and their consumption), inside and outside of its territory. Every president from Nixon to Trump, regardless of his party affiliation, has poured millions of dollars into the war on drugs. The United States alone invested more than one trillion dollars from 1971 to 2010 to fight this war.<sup>1</sup> According to John Whitehead, “America’s so-called ‘war on drugs’ ranks as the longest-running, most expensive and least effective war effort by the American government.”<sup>2</sup> Despite all these efforts, the United States keeps ranking among the top three countries with more prevalence of cocaine use in the world.<sup>3</sup>

Domestically, one of many side effects of the war on drugs is the number of people incarcerated for drug offenses in the United States. According to the Sentencing Project, a criminal justice reform advocacy organization, “the number of people incarcerated for drug offenses in the US skyrocketed from 40,900 in 1980 to 469,545 in 2015.”<sup>4</sup> Over the last 40 years, the number of people behind bars for a drug offense increased 500 percent, and “the war on drugs has long hit minority communities the hardest.”<sup>5</sup> This extremely high number of people incarcerated for drug offenses, along with a lack of visible and solid results in the war on drugs,

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<sup>1</sup> Tim Dickinson, “Why America Can't Quit the Drug War,” *Rolling Stone*, 2016. Accessed November 10, 2018. <https://www.rollingstone.com/culture/culture-news/why-america-cant-quit-the-drug-war-47203/>

<sup>2</sup> John Whitehead, “America’s Longest Ongoing War: The War on Drugs.” *Huffington Post*, Jan. 11, 2012.

<sup>3</sup> United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), *Global Overview of Drug Demand and Supply Latest Trends, Cross-Cutting Issues*. (United Nations publication, 2018).

<sup>4</sup> Sentencing Project, “Criminal Justice Facts.” Accessed November 10, 2018. <http://www.sentencingproject.org/criminal-justice-facts/>

<sup>5</sup> German Lopez, “The war on drugs, explained,” *Vox*, May 8, 2016. Accessed January 31, 2019 <https://www.vox.com/2016/5/8/18089368/war-on-drugs-marihuana-cocaine-heroin-meth>

have finally gained the attention of the majority of US citizens. In 2017, a Pew Research Center survey about the legalization of marijuana showed that for the first time a majority of Americans, 57 percent, answered favorably on legalization.<sup>6</sup>

Internationally, on the other hand, America's drug war has had an incalculable effect on the lives of hundreds of thousands of people outside the United States. The war on drugs has led to a bloodbath in Mexico and Colombia that together have reached around 500,000 dead as a result.<sup>7</sup> For decades, Colombia was known as the world's largest producer of cocaine; due to this prominence as a producer, the United States and the Colombian governments have created alliances to stop the drug production. The Medellín cartel alone, at its height, "earned as much as \$4 billion a year—most of it cash—for its members and controlled 80 percent of the cocaine supply in the United States, leaving tens of thousands of corpses in its wake."<sup>8</sup> Due to Colombia's prominent role, this paper analyzed the way the *New York Times* covered the war on drugs in Colombia from 1971, when it was first declared by Nixon, to 2001, when the war on terror started; though drug prohibition predates. Moreover, this thesis investigated how the *New York Times* portrayed this war, its participants and its problems to find out if there were trends or an evolution of the coverage of the war on drugs.

The articles selected for the analysis came from The *New York Times* ProQuest database. The words to select the articles were: 1) "Colombia," "marijuana," and/or "cocaine." A preliminary search showed 3,526 articles that included news, reports, features, editorials,

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<sup>6</sup> Pew Research Center, "Support for Marijuana Legalization Continues to Rise," Accessed August 1, 2018 <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/10/12/support-for-marijuana-legalization-continues-to-rise/>

<sup>7</sup> Rafael Coda, "México y Colombia: dos guerras con medio millón de muertos," *Proceso*, Aug. 6, 2018. Accessed January 31, 2019 <https://www.proceso.com.mx/545829/mexico-y-colombia-dos-guerras-con-medio-millon-de-muertos>

<sup>8</sup> Peter Green, P. Cocainenomics. *The Wall Street Journal*. (2015). Accessed August 28, 2018 <http://www.wsj.com/ad/cocainenomics>

biographies, interviews and obituaries. Classified ads and display ads were excluded. The sample of articles for this research was 20 percent of the total, meaning 706 articles were selected randomly: every 5th article was selected to be part of the sample. I analyzed 71 articles from 356 articles published in the 1970s (from June 17, 1971 to June 17, 1981); 288 articles from 1,441 articles published in the 1980s (from June 18, 1981 to June 18, 1991), and 347 articles from 1,729 articles published in the 1990s (from June 19, 1991 to September 20, 2001). In this way, each presidency constituted a chapter starting with Nixon and ending with Clinton.<sup>9</sup>

The reason this research focused on the *New York Times* alone because of its national reputation in the United States, its international exposure, and its influence to lead the world media agenda: “the Gray Lady of American journalism.”<sup>10</sup> Also, it is “on this basis that the [*New York*] *Times* has acquired its special status as the newspaper of record in the United States, a trusted media source supposedly dedicated to truthfulness and objectivity, regardless of political consequences.”<sup>11</sup> Additionally, the *New York Times* is one of the few US newspapers that has online access to every article the newspaper has published since its inception. Considering all these characteristics, the *New York Times* made the research process more accessible and customizable for researchers that use keyword(s), terms(s) and timeframes.

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<sup>9</sup> Since I only analyzed until September 20, 2001, just eight months of George W. Bush presidency, then I included it as part of the Clinton’s administration.

<sup>10</sup> Nikki Usher, *Making News at The New York Times* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2014).

<sup>11</sup> Howard Friel and Richard A. Falk, *The Record of the Paper: How the New York Times Misreports US Foreign Policy* (New York: Verso, 2004), 2.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### a. A Brief Context

For decades, historians have debated about some of the justification behind the war on drugs, and what its roots were. According to historian Isaac Campos, the association between marijuana and madness and/or violence has a long and traceable history that began in Mexico. Campos overturns received wisdom of the origin of War on Drugs, demonstrating that anti-marijuana sentiments began not in the United States but rather in Mexico, but also for reasons involving race and class.<sup>12</sup> Ironically, the Asian origins of the plant had been forgotten by the eighteenth-century, so the misconception of marijuana as an indigenous plant strongly associated with religious practices grew up freely inside the Mexican idiosyncrasy for more than a century. Later, that same indigenous-root misconception was fostered by the United States, to the point that it was

from Mexican sources that the US government and press first heard that marijuana turned ordinary people into ferocious maniacs. It was during that early era, through the work of Mexican scientists, novelists, journalists, and artists, that these ideas became sufficiently entrenched as to make any deviation from them appear, appropriately, ‘crazy’ decades later.<sup>13</sup>

In terms of prohibition, Mexico also has drafted prohibitionist doctrine and drug laws since 1846, when marijuana entered the regulatory system of typical elemental medicines of the

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<sup>12</sup> Isaac Campos, *Home Grown: Marijuana and the Origins of Mexico's War on Drugs* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 4.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, 227.

*protomedicato* system. Beginning in the last half of the nineteenth century, the prohibitionist discourse against marijuana provided the ideological foundation and justification for the federal prohibition of marijuana in Mexico in 1920, seventeen years prior to that in the United States. By then, fears of social Darwinism, its application to the “competition between nations” combined with a strengthened central government provided the perfect storm for a Republic-wide campaign to wage war against national degeneracy embodied by marijuana. The rationale was: degeneracy of the user led to the degeneracy of the family which led to the degeneracy of the nation, and this led the necessity of laws to prohibit drugs. In this way, Campos traced how the prohibitionist discourse and notions of national degeneracy traveled north and became the ideological foundation of today’s War on Drugs that many identify as originating in the United States. This prohibitionist discourse and association with individual and national degeneracy underpinned the justification and logic of now nearly a century of a War on Drugs.

The prohibition of cocaine, like the marijuana prohibition, has a long history that easily goes back to the eighteenth century. As historian Paul Gootenberg described, it was during the 1800s, when the curiosity in the coca leaf began. In 1860, Albert Niemann, a doctoral student in chemistry at Göttingen University searching for the active principle of the coca leaf, first isolated cocaine from coca. “With coca no longer shrouded in Andean legend, the next two decades sparked a whirlwind of experiments on cocaine, a rare and expensive drug still lacking a practical application, which it would only find as a local anesthetic after 1884.”<sup>14</sup> Decades later, United States and Peru started to promote herbal cures based on coca and medical cocaine. By the end of the nineteenth century, the medical and legal prestige of cocaine broke up, sinking

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<sup>14</sup> Paul Gootenberg, *Andean Cocaine: The Making of a Global Drug* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 23.

fast. By 1920, the United States reframed it as an “abusable drug.” At the same time, the United States and the League of Nations championed an international-driven ban of cocaine. The end of WWII and the creation of the United Nations marked a threshold in the erection of global prohibitions. For Gootenberg, it was during 1948 to 1961 when the UN adopted the goal of eradicating cocaine at the source.

In Latin America, from Cuba to Chile and Argentina, underground circuits of cocaine traffickers emerged from 1950 to 1970, and by the 70s, “cocaine demand returns to United States in Nixon era as a pricey, glamorous ‘soft’ drug.”<sup>15</sup> For Gootenberg, the 1945-1965 period was called the “Pre-Colombian era of drug trafficking.” For him, it was precisely the CIA interruption of Chile’s path in democracy during the tragic events of September 11, 1973, that opened the door for Colombian traffickers to flourish—a very high price for combating socialism in Latin America.<sup>16</sup> According to Bagley, Colombians earned “more from the drug trade than do any other nationality of the western hemisphere. During the 1980s 70 to 80 percent of the refined cocaine and 50 to 60 percent of the marijuana available in the US market have come from Colombia.”<sup>17</sup> This characterization of the country made Colombia’s cocaine production a big player in the world trafficking.

#### b. Some Media Effects and the War on Drugs

Erving Goffman introduced the concept of “frame,” highlighting that people “rely on socially shared meanings to categorize information into ‘schemas’ or ‘primary frameworks.’”<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Paul Gootenberg, *Andean Cocaine: The Making of a Global Drug* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), xvi.

<sup>16</sup> Paul Gootenberg, “The ‘Pre-Colombian’ Era of Drug Trafficking in the Americas: Cocaine, 1945-1965,” *The Americas* 64, no. 2 (2007).

<sup>17</sup> Bruce M. Bagley, “Colombia and the War on Drugs,” *Foreign Affairs* 67, no. 1 (1988): 70.

<sup>18</sup> Bryant Jennings, and Dolf Zillmann, *Media Effects: Advances in Theory and Research* (Mahwah, N.J.: Taylor & Francis, 2002), 101.

Most of the persuasive power to change people's perception toward a point of view came from the process of selection and presentation of information. For this reason, framing studies tend to focus on the way frames were gathered by news producers (frame building), and on the way news frames influenced audiences (frame setting). For Gitlin, frames are "largely unspoken and unacknowledged," and also "organize the world both for journalists who report it and, in some important degree, for us who rely on their reports."<sup>19</sup> For Gamson, frames are "central organizing ideas," significant parts of the media discourse that constitute coherent and meaningful packages of information.<sup>20</sup> According to Entman and Paletz, frames are aspects of an issue more salient than others that define and highlight the source(s) of problem(s), promoting preferred policies and configuring specific moral judgments.<sup>21</sup>

In the case of covering drugs and the war on drugs, framing has shaped political discourses, national and international policies formations, news coverage, and public opinion over decades. Frames have played a prominent role in the construction of lexical choices. For example, the *New York Times* helped to develop the association between marijuana and Mexican people, and changed the usage from the old word cannabis to the new and foreign-sound, marijuana.<sup>22</sup> As Griffin et al. and Campos suggested, the media often associated marijuana with violence and mental illness.

Sometimes the media, without noticing, adopts a piece or entire discourse that politicians, policies, and officials push to be adopted. Those words, phrases or expressions tend to push an

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<sup>19</sup> Todd Gitlin, *The Whole World Is Watching: Mass Media in the Making & Unmaking of the New Left* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 7.

<sup>20</sup> William A. Garrison, "The 1987 Distinguished Lecture: A Constructionist Approach to Mass Media and Public Opinion," *Symbolic Interaction* 11 (1988): 165.

<sup>21</sup> David Paletz and Robert M. Entman, *Media Power Politics* (New York: Free Press 1981).

<sup>22</sup> Hayden Griffin, Alexis Lynn Fritsch, Vanessa Woodward, and Richard S. Mohn, "Sifting through the Hyperbole: One Hundred Years of Marijuana Coverage in The New York Times," *Deviant Behavior* 34, no. 10 (2013).

agenda that normalizes and facilitates the use of stigmatized language.<sup>23</sup> Framing shapes the salience of particular attributes attached to an issue determining how the issue is perceived, how the public should think about the issue, when the issue became a problem, and consequently proposes what course of actions are necessary to solve that problem.<sup>24</sup> Usually, media tend to support “governments and their agencies, private enterprise, the prestigious professions, and a variety of other national institutions.”<sup>25</sup> Framing “could be the result of information sources, policy and political actors, interest groups, and other elites attempting to influence the media to build an issue agenda or frame an issue in a way they desire.”<sup>26</sup>

Most of the research about the war on drugs has analyzed broadcast news, not newspapers. In 2017, Maria Orsini published an article analyzing the frames to describe the war on drugs from 2000 to 2015 on nightly programs on NBC and ABC. She identified the four most used frames: ongoing fight; dangerous use; violent traffickers; and fallen star.<sup>27</sup> These results show how the media has influenced the public perceptions of illegal drugs, creating both a stigmatized representation and oversimplification of a complex issue. The media has usually engaged in a process that Reinerman and Levine call “routinization of caricature,” in which the news presents rare and extreme cases as typical or as if they were occurring daily. For these authors, “as in all drug scares since the nineteenth-century crusade against alcohol, a core feature

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<sup>23</sup> David Altheide, “The News Media, the Problem Frame, and the Production of Fear,” *The Sociological Quarterly*, 38(1997).

<sup>24</sup> Guy Golan and Wayne Wanta, “Second-Level Agenda Setting in the New Hampshire Primary: A Comparison of Coverage in Three Newspapers and Public Perceptions of Candidates,” *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, no. 2 (2001).

<sup>25</sup> Herbert J. Gans, *Making Sense of America: Sociological Analyses and Essays* (Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999), 61.

<sup>26</sup> Trent Seltzer, and Stephen W. Dittmore, “Down, Set, Frame: Second-Level Agenda Building and the NFL Network Carriage Dispute,” *International Journal of Sport Communication* 2, no. 3 (2009): 344.

<sup>27</sup> Maria Orsini, “Frame Analysis of Drug Narratives in Network News Coverage,” *Contemporary Drug Problems*, (2017): 189. “Media Narratives and Drug Prohibition: A Content Analysis of Themes and Strategies Promoted in Network News Coverage, 2000-2013,” (Master’s thesis, Marshall University, 2015).

of war drug discourse is the *routinization of caricature*—worst cases framed as typical cases, the episodic rhetorically recrafted into the epidemic.”<sup>28</sup> Since the beginning of the coverage of drug stories, there has been a strong relationship between drugs and racism, xenophobia, sexism, classism, and oppression.<sup>29</sup> Consequently, the more the media covered it, the more stereotypes were created. For example, “black crack whores,” “crack dealers,” and “crack babies,” are just some of the examples.<sup>30</sup>

According to historian Mathew Lassiter, white teenagers have represented the “most sympathetic victims of the narcotics trade, the distinctively illegitimate targets of law enforcement crackdowns, and the chief beneficiaries of public health prevention campaigns.”<sup>31</sup> In 2003, Altheide found that both crime and fear dominated the newspapers and television coverages in the United States, and that the use of the word ‘fear’ increased around 100 percent during the 90s. In this article, Altheide came to the same conclusion outlined by Reinerman concluding “another consequence of the nature and extent of crime reporting is that the discourse of fear becomes taken for granted as a description of reality.”<sup>32</sup> In this long timeline of America’s war on drugs, there is no nothing about how the *New York Times* covered, portrayed and described the war on drugs in Colombia. Thus, this thesis hoped to contribute to the exploration of this topic.

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<sup>28</sup> Harry Levine and Craig Reinerman, *Crack in America: Demon Drugs and Social Justice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 24.

<sup>29</sup> Harry Levine and Craig Reinerman, “What’s Behind ‘Jar Wars,’” *Nation* 244, no. 12 (1987).

<sup>30</sup> Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: New Press, 2012), 5.

<sup>31</sup> Matthew Lassiter, “Impossible Criminals: The Suburban Imperatives of America’s War on Drugs,” *Journal of American History* 102, no. 1 (2015): 127.

<sup>32</sup> David Altheide, “Mass Media, Crime, and the Discourse of Fear,” *The Hedgehog Review*, no. 3 (2003): 20.

### 3. RICHARD NIXON’S YEARS, 1971- 1974

On June 17, 1971, after a two-hour meeting, president Nixon opened his press conference by saying, “America’s public enemy number one in the US is drug abuse. In order to fight and defeat this enemy, it is necessary to wage a new, all-out offensive.”<sup>33</sup> With that statement, the war on drugs began. Later in that speech, he said “this would be a worldwide offensive dealing with the problems of sources and supplies.” It was the Nixon administration that escalated the drug policy internationally, and through this, it implicitly focused on Latin America. In this move, some academics saw one of the first political moves to try to control drug traffic by maintaining US hegemony in Latin America.<sup>34</sup> One of the most cited examples in this regard is “Operation Intercept” in which US federal agents closed the US–Mexico border to search for illegal drugs on every vehicle crossing from Mexico into the United States. Nixon pushed the agenda of foreign supply as a prominent issue. For example, “drug trafficking from abroad became national enemies, and the war against foreign supply became of a critical plank of US antidrug policy”<sup>35</sup> Nixon totally transformed and reordered drug prohibition and policy on drug warfare.

Nixon's political attack on marijuana from Mexico, starting with 1970 Operation Intercept, showed smugglers and dealers—especially astute Colombians—that a more concentrated, pricey, elite substance like cocaine, by now trendy in “disco” and other cultural escapisms, was the wave of the future. Cocaine overflowed its post-war Latin-inflected ghetto markets. As southern-cone militarism channeled the flow of cocaine towards Colombia and squeezed drug scenes in places like Buenos Aires or Sao Paulo,

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<sup>33</sup> “Public Enemy Number One: A Pragmatic Approach to America’s Drug Problem,” *Nixon Foundation*, last modified June 29, 2016, <https://www.nixonfoundation.org/2016/06/26404/>

<sup>34</sup> William Avilés, *The Drug War in Latin America: Hegemony and Global Capitalism* (Routledge Studies in US Foreign Policy. New York: Routledge, 2018), 37.

<sup>35</sup> Bruce Bagley and William Walker, *In Drug Trafficking in the Americas* (Miami: University of Miami, 1996), 106.

signs pointing north to its potential growth market among moneyed American consumers.<sup>36</sup>

Gootenberg would go even further by stating that “like the South American supply of cocaine, North American drug demand was politically constructed.”<sup>37</sup> It was during the Nixon administration that “cocaine seized at US borders rose exponentially, from 26 pounds in 1967 to 52 pounds in 1969 to 436 pounds in 1971.”<sup>38</sup> The Nixon administration also launched the Drug Enforcement Administration, known as the DEA, in 1973. The DEA was an “internationalized bureaucracy with domestic powers,” but it was “Nixon and Henry Kissinger’s short-sighted foreign policies what did not help here. The green light given to right-wing military regimes in Chile, Brazil, and Argentina inadvertently worked to funnel the trade into willing Colombian hands.”<sup>39</sup>

Nixon, wrote historian Richard Davenport-Hines “detested the hedonism and easy gratification of many young people. Healthy white adult males had a duty to work: ‘dropouts’ defied the core values of good Americans. The Woodstock peace-and-love music festival of 1969 brought out all the ferocious aggression in him.”<sup>40</sup> An interview that sounds more like a confession to John Ehrlichman, assistant to the president for domestic affairs under President Nixon, might illustrate more on this:

The Nixon campaign in 1968, and the Nixon White House after that, had two enemies: the antiwar left and black people. You understand what I’m saying? We knew we couldn’t make it illegal to be either against the war or black, but by getting the public to associate the hippies with marijuana and blacks with heroin, and then criminalizing both

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<sup>36</sup> Paul Gootenberg, *Andean Cocaine: The Making of a Global Drug* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 175.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 307.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 307-308.

<sup>40</sup> Richard Davenport-Hines, *The Pursuit of Oblivion: A Global History of Narcotics* (New York: Norton, 2002), 421.

heavily, we could disrupt those communities. We could arrest their leaders, raid their homes, break up their meetings, and vilify them night after night on the evening news. Did we know we were lying about the drugs? Of course we did.<sup>41</sup>

After these brutally honest words, the interviewer, Dan Baum, added a blunt force paragraph about the history of the war on drugs:

Nixon's invention of the war on drugs as a political tool was cynical, but every president since — Democrat and Republican alike — has found it equally useful for one reason or another. Meanwhile, the growing cost of the drug war is now impossible to ignore: billions of dollars wasted, bloodshed in Latin America and on the streets of our own cities, and millions of lives destroyed by draconian punishment that doesn't end at the prison gate; one of every eight black men has been disenfranchised because of a felony conviction.

In his 1990 memoir, *In the Arena: A Memoir of Victory, Defeat, and Renewal*, Nixon wrote that “to erase the grim legacy of Woodstock we need a total war against drugs. Total war means war on all fronts against an enemy with many faces.”<sup>42</sup> At this moment, the US government thought marijuana use led “to more dangerous drugs.” The fact is, according to Davenport-Hines, “that the *lack* of marijuana leads to more dangerous drugs. Each time law enforcement is escalated, drug-trafficking has to escalate to survive.”<sup>43</sup>

In 1972, the headlines of the *New York Times* began to highlight early Colombia-US drug trafficking and, at the same time, closer Colombia-US cooperation to fight it. On March 11, a headline announced a “shift” in the way the United States watched narcotics: “US Drug Watch Shifts its Focus: Narcotics Agents Increased in South America.”<sup>44</sup> The article noted that the

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<sup>41</sup> “Legalize It All. How to win the war on drugs,” *Harper's*, April 2016. Last modified April 2016, <https://harpers.org/archive/2016/04/legalize-it-all/>

<sup>42</sup> Richard Nixon, *In the Arena: A Memoir of Victory, Defeat, and Renewal* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990), 133.

<sup>43</sup> Richard Davenport-Hines, *The Pursuit of Oblivion: A Global History of Narcotics* (New York: Norton, 2002), 422.

<sup>44</sup> Joseph Novitski “US Drug Watch Shifts Its Focus,” *New York Times*, Mar. 12, 1972. 17.

number of American narcotics agents on duty had “increased sixfold in the last two months in an effort to stem the flow of heroin, cocaine and marijuana into the United States.”<sup>45</sup> The *New York Times* article also noted that “the United States Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs has opened offices manned by two or more agents in Paraguay; in Bogotá, Colombia; in Caracas, Venezuela; and in Quito, Ecuador.” The rapid growth of agents’ presence in Latin America jumped from three countries (Mexico, Panamá, and Argentina) to seven countries in an effort to fight “illegally distilled cocaine from Andean plantations in Peru and Bolivia.”<sup>46</sup> The article acknowledged that Peru and Bolivia were at the epicenter of the cocaine trade, which confirmed what cocaine historians have suggested: “Until the mid-1990s, Peruvian and Bolivian campesinos dominated coca growing and traded their *pasta básica de cocaína* in a clear international division of labor.”<sup>47</sup> At the same, the article’s penultimate paragraph confirmed Gootenberg’s statement that “the transition to Colombian middlemen came in the period 1970-75.”<sup>48</sup> The Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs “reported to believe that Peruvian coca paste is being refined to cocaine powder in clandestine laboratories in Guayaquil, the principal port in Ecuador, and perhaps also in Colombia.”<sup>49</sup> For the Bureau, Colombia had clearly become one part of the cocaine trade puzzle.

In 1973, while Colombian drug traffickers were rising, Chileans were closing their chapter in the drug trade. One example of their last moves was Perry J. Morgan, sentenced to five years for cocaine smuggling.<sup>50</sup> According to Gootenberg Chile “was the major and now

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Joseph Novitski “US Drug Watch Shifts Its Focus,” *New York Times*, Mar. 12, 1972. 17.

<sup>47</sup> Paul Gootenberg, *Andean Cocaine: The Making of a Global Drug* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008): 301.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Joseph Novitski “US Drug Watch Shifts Its Focus,” *New York Times*, Mar. 12, 1972. 17.

<sup>50</sup> Frank Prial, “2 Frogmen Seized in Narcotics Case,” *New York Times*, Apr 21, 1973. 62.

forgotten transit route for illicit cocaine throughout the 1950s. In fact, the Chilean corridor, linked to Bolivia, grew sporadically until the early 1970s, when the 1973 coup finally propelled the cocaine trade to Colombia.”<sup>51</sup> In a sensational turn, the article made a curious comparison “the smuggling operation recalled a popular film released in 1948, called ‘To the Ends of the Earth,’ in which Dick Powell played a federal narcotics agent.”<sup>52</sup> The war on drugs, as Reeves and Campbell wrote, “produces bang-bang and the most vivid pictures—customers cruising the crack houses, trembling crack babies, cops going in for the bust as the hand-held camera shakes along behind.”<sup>53</sup> Additionally, this article exemplifies the characteristic of providing a street value to the confiscated drug. In this case, 1,487 pounds of marijuana and 22 pounds of cocaine cost 7.5 million.<sup>54</sup> three months later, an article said 600 pounds of cocaine had a street value of “\$10 million”<sup>55</sup> More or less, it meant a \$2.5 million dollars difference in less than three months for less cocaine.

In a different seizure, Howard Fuchs, a 27-year-old former city welfare investigator and a 1968 graduate of Yeshiva University, was found the mastermind of a 61-person ring, “all of them in their 20’s, middle class, and well-educated.”<sup>56</sup> This ring operated by flying private planes from Colombia to Mexico, where women, called “mules,” “would smuggle the drugs across California border, sometimes carrying the drugs in their undergarments. The drugs would then be transported by automobile to Mr. Fuchs, for distribution along the East Coast.”<sup>57</sup> In this

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<sup>51</sup> Paul Gootenberg, “The ‘Pre-Colombian’ Era of Drug Trafficking in the Americas: Cocaine, 1945-1965,” *The Americas*. no. 2 (2007): 146.

<sup>52</sup> Frank Prial, “2 Frogmen Seized in Narcotics Case,” *New York Times*, Apr 21, 1973. 62.

<sup>53</sup> Jimmie Lynn Reeves and Richard Campbell, *Cracked Coverage: Television News, the Anti-Cocaine Crusade, and the Reagan Legacy* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994).

<sup>54</sup> Frank Prial, “2 Frogmen Seized in Narcotics Case,” *New York Times*, Apr 21, 1973. 62.

<sup>55</sup> M. A. Farber, “61 Seized in a Drug Ring with Middle-Class Ties,” *New York Times*, Jul 26, 1973. 77.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

article, it was possible to find an interesting statement: “the indictment and the arrest marked ‘the first time’ that a ring dealing in any kind of drugs had been ‘destroyed in its entirety, including the foreign supplier, the couriers, distributors and organizers.’”<sup>58</sup> The idea of total destruction is hard to believe. Usually, after a seizure, agents described their efforts in superlative phrases, but it was unusual to find officials saying they destroyed a ring in its entirety. Mario Merola, Bronx District Attorney, is an example of extreme hyperbolic statements in saying they destroyed an entire organization—even internationally. Just a few lines later, John Fallon, the New York/New Jersey region’s director of the Federal Drug Enforcement Administration, stated that Americans were also deeply involved in the drug business. “These people are from a walk of life that we’ve never dealt with before. Even the people of Colombia were Americans, nor heavy Latin connections.”<sup>59</sup>

In January 1973, the *New York Times* published one of the first articles to note the Colombian government’s commitment to fight drugs. It said the Colombian president, Misael Pastrana, “had pledged to ‘commit the necessary economic resources’ to combating the traffic in narcotics.”<sup>60</sup> The announcement came to light during a visit of two US representatives, Morgan F. Murphy, D-IL, and Robert H. Steele, R-CT, who were investigating drug routes to the US. They asserted “that 100 percent of cocaine and 50 to 60 percent of the heroin entering in the United States went through Latin America. Colombian ‘was one of the real holes left.’”<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> M. A. Farber, “61 Seized in a Drug Ring with Middle-Class Ties,” *New York Times*, Jul 26, 1973. 77.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> “Colombia Pledges a Drug Crackdown,” *New York Times*, Jan 15, 1973. 17.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

Nixon resigned, the war on drugs he begun has not been resolved yet, and “with its aim of unconditional surrender, it is a war that cannot be won.”<sup>62</sup> Nixon’s vision of drugs, drug producers and drug users as enemy has not changed. The war on drugs declared by Nixon added up to the fear of drugs, the fear of national degeneration, and it only strengthened the prohibitionist perspective of drugs. Gerald Ford stepped in and continued Nixon’s policies focusing on law enforcement, heavier punishments and cutting supplies rather reducing demand. After more than thirty decades, very little has been added to this vision.

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<sup>62</sup> Richard Davenport-Hines, *The Pursuit of Oblivion: A Global History of Narcotics* (New York: Norton, 2002),

#### 4. GERALD FORD'S YEARS, 1974-1977

In the war on drugs, Gerard Ford's administration was an heir of the Nixon administration that, to some extent, was an heir of Nelson Rockefeller's New York drug laws. Rockefeller became Ford's Vice president, "used crime problems associated with drug-users as a central tactic in his strenuous campaign for re-election as Governor of New York State," in 1966 and "drugs became a decisive electoral factor for the first time."<sup>63</sup> For historian Julilly Kohler-Hausmann, the Rockefeller Drug Laws germinated a prohibitionist doctrine "because they served as inspiration for the 'War on Drug' policies enacted nationwide that have fueled the unprecedented recent explosion in incarceration."<sup>64</sup> The Rockefeller Drug Laws "were not only a formative historical event in their own right, but they also shed light onto the wider phenomena of 'get tough' criminal policies and rhetoric that escalated in 1970s."<sup>65</sup> Moreover, Ford adopted a mandatory sentencing strategy, as law professor Hadar Aviram framed it, "for the purpose of protecting the victims."<sup>66</sup> In his autobiography *Time to Heal*, Ford would say that:

Too many Americans had forgotten that the primary purpose of imprisonment was not to rehabilitate the convicted criminal so that he could return to society but to punish him and keep him off the streets. The certainty of having to spend a specified time behind bars after being convicted of a serious offense, was more important as a deterrent that almost

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<sup>63</sup> Richard Davenport-Hines, *The Pursuit of Oblivion: A Global History of Narcotics* (New York: Norton, 2002), 392.

<sup>64</sup> Julilly Kohler-Hausmann, "'The Attila the Hun Law': New York's Rockefeller Drug Laws and the Making of a Punitive State," *Journal of Social History* 44, no. 1 (2010): 72.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> Hadar Aviram, *Cheap on Crime: Recession-Era Politics and the Transformation of American Punishment* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015), 80.

anything else. . . I do not seek vindictive punishment of the criminal but protection of the innocent victim.<sup>67</sup>

Ford talked about mandatory-minimums, tougher sentencing and mandatory prison sentences for those who violated criminal laws. The Ford administration's foreign policies were inherited since Ford had not developed his career as an American foreign relations expert. According to Sebastián Cutrona, professor of international studies, the Ford administration and its war on drugs "was nonetheless waged sporadically. Furthermore, neither Gerald Ford (1974–1977) nor Jimmy Carter (1977–1981) continued with Nixon's approach to narcotics. By contrast, both administrations appeared less committed to develop fundamental changes and drug policy remained stagnant."<sup>68</sup> During these years an attitude emerged that was more tolerant toward drugs, particularly to marijuana. It was during the later 1970s, that 11 states decriminalized marijuana use, and the debate to legalize it began.

The *New York Times* articles focused on results, and one article naively stated that the influx of cocaine from Colombia had "been severely curtailed by the arrest of 45 persons over the weekend and 43 others previously."<sup>69</sup> In retrospect, this passage, looks more like baby steps against middlemen from Colombian rings than a severe cut. One of the first pieces written after some US representatives visited Colombia was "Encounter: A 'Healthy, Democratic' Mugging in Colombia" in which the country was represented as an unsafe place.<sup>70</sup> About Bogotá, *New York Times*' correspondent Marvine Howe, said "I have been warned of the dangers facing a lone American woman. I should keep my valuables in the Bogotá safe; I should go out in the streets

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<sup>67</sup> Gerald Ford, *A Time to Heal: The Autobiography of Gerald R. Ford* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979), 64.

<sup>68</sup> Sebastián Antonino Cutrona, *Challenging the US-Led War on Drugs: Argentina in Comparative Perspective* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 19.

<sup>69</sup> "News Summary and Index," *New York Times*, Oct 07, 1974. 74.

<sup>70</sup> Marvine Howe, "Encounter: A 'Healthy, Democratic' Mugging in Colombia," *New York Times*, June 23, 1974. 432.

only if absolutely necessary, preferably with a bodyguard or gun.”<sup>71</sup> Later, Colombia was described as a place where people trick others. For example, Kelly Ann, 23-year-old daughter of the manager of the New York Yankees, “was arrested Nov 16 when the police found about a pound of cocaine strapped to her legs. She says she was tricked into carrying it.”<sup>72</sup>

One of the first front page articles about drugs and Colombia during Ford’s presidency was “Top Drug Dealers Named by Police.”<sup>73</sup> Its first paragraph said that “Thirteen drug traffickers—four whites, five blacks and four Hispanic persons—are now believed by narcotics investigators to be the dominant figures.” If the verb “believe” is not weak enough to be used in the first paragraph, the second paragraph of the article rephrases the situation, “The 13 have been identified by knowledgeable law-enforcement officials as being either principal dealers or the financiers behind many narcotics deals.”<sup>74</sup> These were mainly formal aspects of the rhetoric of the article that should have called the attention of the editor. Additionally, this article was ambiguous. “Although there has been a recent increase in narcotics trafficking in New York, police officials acknowledged that undercover operations aimed at high-middle-and small-level violators have decreased because of cuts in the Police Department brought on by the city's fiscal crisis. Surprisingly, this article concluded with a kind of reflection about race: “Nobody cares now because they think narcotics is once more a ghetto problem. But, believe me it's also in the suburbs, it's just not as visible.”<sup>75</sup> This would be one of the rare articles that had some sort of criticism of policies during this presidency.

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> “Son of US Ambassador Held in Britain in Cocaine Case,” *New York Times*, Dec 11, 1975. 8.

<sup>73</sup> Selwyn Raab, “Top Drug Dealers Named by Police,” *New York Times*, Dec 9, 1975. 1.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

Later that year, the *New York Times* published a profile article of a detective living in Chile, and the headline ran: “Narcotic Agent Lives a Boyhood Dream.” The article, which did not have a byline, was a profile of George Franguile, a 37-year-old Federal Drug Enforcement agent living in Santiago, Chile. Franguile “must cope with the frustrations every Federal narcotics agent faces in Latin America. He had to maintain a low profile, stay on good terms with operatives from rival police forces and let local authorities make cases he has developed.”<sup>76</sup> Interestingly, the article framed the political atmosphere of Chile and its change after a recent coup: “Latin-American countries generally will not extradite their own nationals who have been indicted on drug violations in the United States. But after the overthrow of the government of Salvador Allende in 1973, Mr. Franguile found the situation there more ‘flexible.’”<sup>77</sup> As this article showed, the US government tried for a while to present a better scenario for the war on drugs after Allende’s overthrow; but in fact, as it was revealed later in 2006, Augusto Pinochet was accused, among many other crimes, of refining cocaine at the Talagante chemical plant and of selling it to the US and Europe.”<sup>78</sup>

By 1975, the *New York Times* was calling attention to Latin America’s predominant role in drug smuggling. “In the last two years, Latin America has become the major source of hard drugs entering the United States.”<sup>79</sup> More specifically, this article characterized Latin America as the monopoly controller of drugs which “now supplies all of the cocaine sold in the United States, where the demand for the drug has risen.” This front-page article noted that “the New York Times has conducted a two-month investigation in eight Latin American countries to

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<sup>76</sup> “Narcotic Agent Lives a Boyhood Dream,” *New York Times*, Apr 24, 1975. 26.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>78</sup> Paul Gootenberg, *Andean Cocaine: The Making of a Global Drug* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 304.

<sup>79</sup> Nicholas Gage, “Drug-Smuggling Logistics Bizarre and often Fatal,” *New York Times*, Apr 22, 1975. 1.

explore how the drug traffic works there, how narcotics reach the main market in New York, who the major dealers are and what the United States and Latin American nations are doing about the problem.” One of its conclusions was Colombians, Cubans and Mexicans dominated the drug flow. Another conclusion suggested that the rings’ power was “so influential politically that they were considered ‘untouchable’ in their native countries,” and that judges sometimes competed “to try major narcotics cases because of the potential payoffs involved.” Additionally, the article also provided a broad context about the drug scenario in Colombia: “Federal authorities believe Colombia now has between 60 and 80 major criminal organizations engaged in the cocaine traffic.” The profile of Colombia determined that an estimate of 300 kilograms of cocaine were sent to the United States. Another remarkable conclusion from this article was that “cocaine seizures in the United States have increased 700 per cent since 1969.” Coincidentally, this article also touched on the shift in Chile since the coup in 1973, the change “has acted against major traffickers, jailing them, expelling them to the United States or forcing many of them to flee the country.”<sup>80</sup>

In 1975, the *New York Times* published one of the first articles in which a foreign leader criticized the US actions in the war on drugs. Alfonso López Michelsen, the liberal president of Colombia at that time, openly said “that he believed that the smuggling was initiated, organized and financed in the United States and that it was in the United States that it must be stopped.”<sup>81</sup> This article also showed some of Colombia’s war results: “We confiscate an average of three planes a week.”<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Thomas Butson, “Bogota, to Combat Guerrillas, Promotes Rural Reform through Cooperatives,” *New York Times*, Sept. 21, 1975. 10.

<sup>82</sup> Thomas Butson, “Bogota, to Combat Guerrillas, Promotes Rural Reform through Cooperatives,” *New York Times*, Sept. 21, 1975. 10.

In 1976, an unofficial competition of what seizure was the biggest became popular in the newspapers. As it had become a usual practice, the *New York Times* included the estimated value of the seizures, emphasizing that “the seizure was one of the largest ever made by the United States law enforcement agency.”<sup>83</sup> Also, in terms of journalistic accuracy, this article presented one of many examples of misspelling Colombia as “Columbia,” as in “the ship left the port of Cartagena in Columbia.”<sup>84</sup>

In 1976 as well, the newspaper published one of the first articles that mentioned aids to fight the war on drugs coming from the United States to Colombia. The article said that the United States gave “more than \$5 million this year for the training of personnel and the purchase of equipment, including three helicopters.”<sup>85</sup> By then, one of the problems persecuting drug traffickers in Colombia was “finding judges and prosecutors who will handle such cases” because criminal organizations killed judges and prosecutors. Moreover, drug smugglers had co-opted members of the naval army. For example, the *ARC Gloria*, an insignia Colombian naval training schooner, carried 30 kilograms of cocaine during a 4th of July visit to New York.

At the same time, efforts such as publishing drug violators’ names to alert the public did not show results authorities expected. “the police say these people continue to deal in drugs at a level equivalent to what existed when the first list was made four years ago.”<sup>86</sup> In this way, Ford’s administration ended up with no strong results, nor did they diminish the influx of drugs

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<sup>83</sup> “A Panamanian Freighter, Loaded with Marihuana, is Towed to Miami Base,” *New York Times*, Oct. 20, 1976. 42.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>85</sup> Juan de Onis, “Drug Traffic Turns Colombian Coast into Zone of Terror,” *New York Times*, Oct. 25, 1976. 2.

<sup>86</sup> Fred Ferretti, “How Wheels of Justice Turned for 8 'Cogs' in Traffic of Drugs,” *New York Times*, Jan. 25, 1977. 35.

into the United States. Jimmy Carter, as many presidents did before and after him, promised a change in the war on drugs following the same prohibitionist doctrine.

## 5. JIMMY CARTER'S YEARS, 1977-1981

The Carter administration marked a difference from aggressive posture and tone of Rockefeller's approach. In comparison, however, Carter kept shifted federal drug policy dollars away from treatment/prevention to "greater law enforcement on a domestic and international level while increasing funding for the war on drugs."<sup>87</sup> This does not mean that Carter's administration had no enthusiasm or that the war on drugs suddenly became irrelevant. In fact, federal funds dedicated to the drug war "increased to \$382 million in fiscal 1977 under Ford to \$855 million in fiscal year 1981 at the end of the Carter administration."<sup>88</sup> In contrast, "Carter was the only president who did not increase incarceration while in office" and he "wanted to dismantle the costly and ineffective Law Enforcement Administration Act (LEAA)," because the LEAA had no effect on reducing the crime rate.<sup>89</sup> Under President Carter, a report from the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) found that "cocaine as typically used in the United States at present poses only a limited hazard," and many experts still perceived it to be a soft drug of elites.<sup>90</sup> Additionally, Carter's administration and the DEA praised Mexico's program, especially, its apparent reduction of drugs crossing the United States border.

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<sup>87</sup> William Avilés, *The Drug War in Latin America: Hegemony and Global Capitalism* (Routledge Studies in US Foreign Policy. New York: Routledge, 2018), 40.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Linda Mancillas, *Presidents and Mass Incarceration: Choices at the Top, Repercussions at the Bottom* (Santa Barbara, California: Praeger, 2018), 45.

<sup>90</sup> Paul Gootenberg, *Andean Cocaine: The Making of a Global Drug* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 310.

In terms of foreign policy, both the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) and the Trilateral Commission played prominent roles in the Nixon and Carter administrations. Advisors such as “Henry Kissinger and Richard Helms were CFR members in the Nixon administration and Carter’s foreign policy team was dominated by representatives of the Trilateral Commission. This prominence in foreign policy circles would be partially diluted by the influence of these new think tanks.”<sup>91</sup> The Carter administration, through the State Department, promoted greater military involvement to stop marijuana production and trafficking. One example of this is Operación Fulminante, launched in Guajira and the Atlantic coast, with 10,000 Colombian soldiers.<sup>92</sup> Furthermore, the Carter Administration promised more resources such as helicopters and technology worth \$3.7 million. Later, a US congressional fact-finding mission to Colombia would find that the helicopters were too small and ineffective for crop eradication.<sup>93</sup> It would be during the Carter administration that both the cocaine and the Colombian drug cartels burgeoned, a fact that his political adversaries would point that out to say that cocaine use had exploded on his watch.

In New York, for example, some *New York Times* articles said that drug use continued to flourish on the streets. In 1977, the newspaper reported that in New York City an ounce cost “at least \$1,000. A gram, which is .035 of an ounce and scarcely enough for a couple of good snorts, goes for at least \$75, and by then has been diluted 50 to 80 percent.”<sup>94</sup> In East Orange, New Jersey, police had found a hydraulic press for compressing the drug into cakes.<sup>95</sup> In Brooklyn, at

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<sup>91</sup> William Avilés, *The Drug War in Latin America: Hegemony and Global Capitalism* (Routledge Studies in US Foreign Policy. New York: Routledge, 2018), 41.

<sup>92</sup> William Avilés, *The Drug War in Latin America: Hegemony and Global Capitalism* (Routledge Studies in US Foreign Policy. New York: Routledge, 2018), 31-32.

<sup>93</sup> Bruce Bagley, “Colombia and the War on Drugs,” *Foreign Affairs*, no. 1 (1988): 79.

<sup>94</sup> Tom Buckley, “\$75 for a Couple of Snorts,” *New York Times*, Jan. 30, 1977. BR. 44.

<sup>95</sup> “24 Arrested with 12 Lbs. of Cocaine,” *New York Times*, May 19, 1978. A. 15.

a the Tunnel Bar at Smith and Bergen Streets, dealers offered jobs as a “swimmer, one of the men used to recover cocaine dumped overboard or lowered into the water after a ship is docked.”<sup>96</sup> According to a Federal official at that time, this job paid \$2,000 for each kilogram. In terms of fighting drugs, DEA authorities said that “the Colombian Government has taken no action against them, saying that it has lacked proof,” and most of the cocaine came in Grancolombiana Line vessels, which was owned by the Colombian Government.<sup>97</sup> At the same time, drug enforcement agents found that smuggling routes from Colombia went not only to Miami, but also to New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Savannah, Jacksonville, New Orleans, Houston, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Portland, and Seattle.<sup>98</sup>

By then, places such as Key West were struggling with drug consumption. A 1978 article pointed out that:

It is perhaps Key West's willingness to accept deviations from the norm that explains its tendency to look the other way at its drug problem. Nowhere is that problem more publicly evident than at Mallory Square at sunset. That somnambulist, glazed-eyed fascination with the setting sun is for many the culmination of a day's singular devotion to the ingestion of drugs. The city fathers don't like to talk about it, but marijuana and cocaine are as easy to come by in Key West as its famous dessert, key lime pie. No wonder. The Florida Keys have always been a smuggler's paradise, almost impossible for the Coast Guard and law-enforcement agencies to patrol adequately. The name of the smuggling game in Prohibition was booze, but now, almost daily, The Key West Citizen carries accounts of seizures of dozens of [b]ales of marijuana and harder drugs from Yucatan, Colombia and elsewhere.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Max Seigel, “Colombians Guilty of Drug Smuggling,” *New York Times*, July 04, 1978. 7.

<sup>97</sup> Max Seigel, “US Indictments Tell of Swimmers and Ships and Murder for Cocaine,” *New York Times*, Mar. 21, 1978. 74.

<sup>98</sup> “24 Arrested with 12 Lbs. of Cocaine,” *New York Times*, May 19, 1978. A. 15. Max Seigel, “Cocaine Conspiracy is Called Disrupted by 57 Indictments,” *New York Times*, Mar. 22, 1978. A. 22.

<sup>99</sup> Albin Krebs, “Key West: Anyone's Place in the Sun,” *New York Times*, Dec. 31, 1978. SM3.

By the end of 1978, the newspaper reported that Colombia supplied “80 percent of the cocaine entering the United States. Marijuana production this year is estimated at more than 50,000 tons.”<sup>100</sup> During this time, Colombia faced a new political reorientation because a new president, Julio César Turbay Ayala, had introduced a “security statute,” a state-of-siege power. One of his strategies consisted of blocking the northern coast, seizing around 6,000 tons of marijuana and nearly 300 aircraft and boats. In 1979, when President Turbay agreed on a US-Colombia extradition treaty that allowed Colombian traffickers to be extradited and tried in US courts, the US ambassador in Colombia, Diego C. Asencio, petitioned \$16 million in additional assistance out of the total \$42 million earmarked for worldwide narcotics interdiction. This marked a milestone in anti-narcotics aids from United States to Colombia during the 1970s.<sup>101</sup>

At that time, not only Colombians were trafficking drugs from Colombia, but also US citizens. When the Colombian government captured two US drug traffickers, the *New York Times* portrayed them compassionately and pityingly. The DEA acknowledged it had opened “an investigation last week into the case of William A. Spradley, the Houston fireman who was arrested in Colombia.” McLemore wrote a letter asking fire chief, V.E Rogers for help. Days later, the chief helped to “secure Mr. Spradley release and returned to Houston.” Articles covering the issue also mentioned that “more than 120 Americans have been arrested by the army since its offensive against marijuana traffickers began six months ago. Nearly 70 airplanes attempting unauthorized landings in the Guajira Peninsula have been captured or crashed.”<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Juan de Onis, “Colombian President Steps Up Army's Role in Anticrime Efforts.” *New York Times*, Nov. 26, 1978. 13.

<sup>101</sup> Bruce Bagley, “Colombia and the War on Drugs,” *Foreign Affairs*, no. 1 (1988): 79.

<sup>102</sup> “2 Houston Men Held in Colombia are Fined \$20,000 on Air Charge.” *New York Times*, May 23, 1979. A. 13. John Crewdson, “Drug Unit Denies it is Investigating Houston Firemen,” *New York Times*, May 19, 1979. 6.

By 1979, drug trafficking had become a lucrative business that attracted different kinds of people, for instance “cocaine among middle- and upper-income Americans is fueling an illicit, newly white-collar trade that may exceed \$15 billion a year.”<sup>103</sup> Some of the effects that have been described before about Colombians’ lawyers becoming interested in representing drug dealers also started to surface as a problem in the US Lawyers “get involved in a case representing a defendant and see how much money there is in cocaine and they wind up in the business.” Drugs were getting becoming more popular among all society’s layers in the United States, and the myths about the aphrodisiac effects of cocaine—that the press had run since 1916— were reproduced by the *New York Times* as well at the end of 1970s. Robert Lindsey, *New York Times*’ reporter, wrote cocaine “generates a sense of self-confidence and optimism, clarity of vision, boundless energy and euphoria and, for some users, enhanced sexual sensibility”<sup>104</sup> As Richard Davenport-Hines has described, this myth captured the mind of the people since 1916, when Major General Sir Francis Lloyd characterized its effects by saying “cocaine was being used as ‘an aphrodisiac.’”<sup>105</sup> Lindsey’s article also said that some of the economic effects of the drug influx were that “over the past two years or so drug dealers had invested many millions of dollars from cocaine profits in California real estate, especially luxury homes and commercial property, and in small business.”<sup>106</sup> The influx of money was so outrageous, that some dealers bought money-counting machines by the dozen, and had a variety of aircrafts with a crew of order-ready pilots. Some of them preferred to weigh the money rather

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<sup>103</sup> Robert Lindsey “Upper-Income Users Spur Cocaine Dealing,” *New York Times*, Sept. 05, 1979. A. 17.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Richard Davenport-Hines, *The Pursuit of Oblivion: A Global History of Narcotics* (New York: Norton, 2002), 220.

<sup>106</sup> Robert Lindsey “Upper-Income Users Spur Cocaine Dealing,” *New York Times*, Sept. 05, 1979. A. 17.

than counting it. By the end of 1979, Florida, Texas, Arizona, New York and California, were “considered the nation’s principal centers of trade.”<sup>107</sup>

One rare finding throughout this decade was finding articles that included some history of some drugs or history of the prohibition of drugs. One example of this stated that the stimulative power of cocaine had been “discovered by European upper class in the final third of the last century and before long use of cocaine, packaged sometimes as patent medicine,” it had “become a fad in certain quarters in the United States” until the “Federal Government banned it in 1906, cocaine was one of the principal ingredients in Coca-Cola.”<sup>108</sup> Another rare finding throughout this decade was the reorganization of law enforcement priorities for police departments. University of California, Berkeley, began promoting marijuana decriminalization in which Berkeley’s police would make “marijuana enforcement their lowest law enforcements priority.”<sup>109</sup> A similar initiative had been approved in 1973 but it never became official since “state laws prohibiting marijuana possession superseded the Berkeley law.”<sup>110</sup>

In 1980, authorities were making changes at airports and officers were becoming more and more precocious, even more intuitive as this headline suggests *A Quiet Suspicion: Looking for Drugs in Airport Crowds.*<sup>111</sup> Airports doubled part-time inspectors and customs officials were in the front line “in the war against drug smuggling.” If there was a turn in the way news was reported during the 70s, it was the focus on airports. The DEA estimated “that nearly half of the heroin brought into the United States” was “carried through airport terminals.” Moreover,

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> “Raffle Flavors Berkeley’s Pro-Marihuana Initiative.” *New York Times*, April 16, 1979. A.15.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> George Goodman, “A Quiet Suspicion: Looking for Drugs in Airport Crowds,” *New York Times*, July 01, 1980. B. 3.

“there were 434 narcotics seizures in 1979 at Kennedy, including 44 kilograms of heroin, and 307 seizures between last October and May of this year.”<sup>112</sup> Focusing on airports also brought up again the figure of drug mules, or just “mules, as the agents call them,” and their racialization. The process was complete subjective. For example, Agent Festa mentally analyzed “racial composition,” “apparent economic and social status,” and then “he weighed these observations against a store of personal prejudices and impressions built up over 11 years as a customs inspector —according to his superiors, one of the best at Kennedy.” It was “through this subjective process that” Fest was “able to spot potential smugglers as somehow not fitting in with the rest of the passengers.”<sup>113</sup> Authorities implemented other less subjective methods, such as spying. But “a Federal judge ruled” that “Government agents could not use a telescope to spy on suspected criminal activities taking place on ‘private premises’ without first getting a court warrant.”<sup>114</sup> This case involved government agents surveilling a Colombian suspect preparing cocaine for sale in Queens.

Throughout this time, judges were dealing as well with Vietnam veterans who had been smuggling. Peter L. Krutschewski for example, was asking the jury to find him temporarily insane for smuggling drugs into the US from 1973 to 1975 from Colombia and Mexico. Peter L. Krutschewski, “one of the most decorated Army pilots who made it out of Vietnam” said “it resulted from the stress suffered during his 1,000 hours of combat as a helicopter pilot.” Right after the war, Krutschewski spent more than a year working to earn an undergraduate degree in business administration at Michigan State University. But he said he missed the risks he experienced in Vietnam. Smuggling for him was “similar to Vietnam because it was a life or

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Joseph Fried, “Use of Telescope for Surveillance without Warrant is Ruled Illegal,” *New York Times*, June 12, 1980. A. 28.

death risk; it was survival.”<sup>115</sup> The American Psychiatric Association and the Veterans Administration had recently recognized a temporary ailment known as post-traumatic stress disorder or “Vietnam syndrome.” This type of legal defense, using post traumatic disorders, had been used to win acquittals for veterans in California and Pennsylvania. Krutschewski’s attorney, Robert Craig, argued that he was not the kingpin of a drug-smuggling operation that the government made him out to be. Krutschewski’s defense story was right on one point: he was not the kingpin of the drug-smuggling. At that time, Pablo Escobar, one of the most notorious drug dealers in the world, was starting to forge his power. However, the first mention of his name in the *New York Times* does not appear until July 28, 1984, when he was arrested along with 10 other men for drug trafficking, and he was wrongly cataloged as Nicaraguan.<sup>116</sup> By that time, he was already recognized as one of the top-level traffickers in Colombia.

Meanwhile in Colombia, the situation for judges worsened. Medellín cartel had killed two judges, had threatened more than 11 judges, and 182 of them had resigned to avoid dealing with drug cases. The president of the Colombian criminal court stated that Medellín have now “laboratories all over the city and it has become our domestic industry.” Medellín city was going through the type of changes that some US cities have seen before. For instance, “Medellín has changed completely in recent years. Costs of living, especially real estate, have risen.” This change from being a staging area to become a city full of laboratories was the new phase in which Colombian drug traffickers would dominate the whole process of cocaine production. The Colombians, wrote *New York Times*’s reporter, Warren Hoge, “control this from the moment they purchase the cocaine base from Bolivia and Peru, through the refining process and including

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<sup>115</sup> Ex-pilot In Drug Smuggling Trial Cites Stress of Vietnam Fighting,” *New York Times*, Aug. 31, 1980.

<sup>116</sup> “11 Indicted by US as Drug Smugglers,” *New York Times*, July 28, 1984.

the retailing of the drug in the United States.”<sup>117</sup> From this time also came the \$2-billion a year estimate produced by the cocaine business that was used by authorities for a while, “with half of it returning to this country and the other half remaining in the United States.”<sup>118</sup>

In 1981, a front-page article announced the disruption of Cali cartel. The investigation, officials said, was “one of the first to penetrate the tightly knit world of Colombian narcotics trafficking, a world in which a rigid code of silence is enforced by murder.”<sup>119</sup> It was an investigation that took three years, and ““represented one of the most significant enforcement operations ever undertaken, because of the size, scope, sophistication and impact of the smuggling ring”; all very favorable descriptions. By the beginning of the 1980s, officials stated that “an estimated 25 to 31 tons of the white powder are being smuggled into the country every year,” and officials said it had a value of “more than \$20 billion.” The leader behind this ring was known as Victor Crespo, the alias of José Santacruz Londoño, one of the leaders of the Cali cartel. The arrest of José Santacruz Londoño, AKA Victor Crespo, took 15 years. One last characteristic of how these groups operated was its cold violence, a characteristic that made them harder to find, “Why? Because Colombians will not only murder the person who testifies against them, but will not hesitate to murder their families, even those still in Colombia. They're the most violent narcotics dealers.”<sup>120</sup>

By 1981, headlines about drugs involved even athletes, for example: “Broncos' Drug Use Described as Social.” In this article, three Denver Broncos players, no names specified, were the focus of a cocaine and marijuana investigation, “The News’s source, identified by the paper as

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Warren Hoge, “Colombian City is Corrupted by Cocaine,” *New York Times*, Nov 07, 1980. 6.

<sup>119</sup> Leslie Maitland “Through Luck and Dogged Work, Agents Disrupt a Top Cocaine Ring,” *New York Times*, June 14, 1981. 1.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

the Denver players' supplier, was quoted as having said he had provided cocaine and marijuana to eight to 10 Broncos in the last several years.” The supplier admitted that he had provided drugs to former Denver Nuggets players, Denver residents and athletes from out-of-town teams. “‘I might get together with one or two on Monday and drink wine and snort some coke,’ he said. ‘For the players, I think it was a way to escape reality. Those players weren’t taking the drugs to help them in a game. It was for relaxation. The pressure on them is so intense.’”<sup>121</sup> In the penultimate paragraph of this article, the supplier and informant mentioned how he acquired drugs: “The man, whose account was supported by lie-detector tests, said that he had obtained the cocaine from a friend who made regular flights to Bogota, Colombia, and that organized crime was not [in]volved.”<sup>122</sup> This negation of relationship with organized crime was hard to believe, and the article did not explore that.

In the second half of 1981, interestingly, FBI agents started to be part of the pool of sources in the news, “‘We think he may have put 480,000 pounds of marijuana into the US,’ said Jim Franklin, an FBI agent.”<sup>123</sup> This subtle gesture might be considered a component in the framing process. According to criminal justice sociologist Beckett state actors have an important impact on framing issues. In frame theory, primary and legitimate sources “appear to play a particularly important role in this process of signification.” Beckett also suggested “that the politicization of the crime and drug issues has been the result of their social construction by the mass media and especially state actors.”<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> "Broncos' Drug use Described as Social," *New York Times*, June 02, 1981. C. 14.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Leslie Maitland, “Agents Who Tailed Plane to Colombia Seize Cocaine,” *New York Times*, June 02, 1981. 1.

<sup>124</sup> Katherine Beckett, “Setting the Public Agenda: ‘Street Crime’ and Drug Use in American Politics,” *Social Problems*, no. 3 (1994): 440.

It was during the beginning of the 80s when the nickname “Colombian cowboys,” started to appear in the news. One example of this connotation said “‘Cocaine cowboys’ and their sidekicks have also been running into tough poses. In June, a special Federal task force uncovered a nationwide ring of cocaine smugglers centered in New York.” The article estimated that 70 percent of the cocaine entered through Florida. In Florida, additionally, middle-aged lawyer Randy Ludacer, was “asking to be made a licensed pirate, free to rove and legally bound to plunder drug smugglers.” He did not use the word “pirate,” but he used instead “privateer” recalling the war of 1812. He had 100 volunteers, “most of them graybeard former ship captains, retired law enforcement officers, former agents for the Central Intelligence Agency and a few mercenaries down on their luck ready to go after the \$7 billion in drugs that is estimated to be smuggled each year into the south Florida pipeline.” Congress rejected his petition.

Until this point in 1981, Colombia was becoming a synonym of cocaine and one of the biggest cocaine producers.

It will not be until the 1980s and the Reagan administration that the boom of cartels, drug kings and more spectacular seizures will explode in the media.

## 6. RONALD REAGAN YEARS, 1981-1989

The Reagan administration revitalized the war on drugs by injecting a more aggressive discourse and greater military and federal spending. Reagan relaunched the war on drugs on June 24, 1982, in his called as the “battle flag” speech. Additionally, agencies grew exponentially. For example, the DEA had 1900 agents in 1980 and 2800 in 1989. The DEA also maintained over 6,000 employees in 170 offices within the United States and in 48 foreign countries. Also, the amount of federal money spent on drug control “rose from \$3 billion in 1986 to \$8 billion in 1990.”<sup>125</sup> Similarly, the federal drug budget increased “from \$1.8 billion to 12.5 billion from 1981 to 1993.” The Justice Department “received over one billion dollars in illegal assets through asset forfeiture provisions between 1985 and 1991.”<sup>126</sup>

Scholars such as Richard Davenport-Hines asserted that Reagan surpassed Nixon by far as wrong-headed drug warrior. For Reagan, supposed Republican pillars such as hard work and just rewards were at risk in the middle classes because of the marijuana. To fight this threat, he appointed Carleton Turner as the first drug czar. Turner was a government chemist with an expertise in marijuana, and he made marijuana suppression his main priority.<sup>127</sup> One of the consequences of this change is reflected in the increase in the Federal prison population from 315,974 prisoners, in 1980 to 739,980 prisoners, in 1990. The unprecedented rise in incarceration

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<sup>125</sup> Richard Davenport-Hines, 2002, *The Pursuit of Oblivion: A Global History of Narcotics* (New York: Norton, 2002), 425.

<sup>126</sup> William Avilés, *The Drug War in Latin America: Hegemony and Global Capitalism. Routledge Studies in US Foreign Policy* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 41.

<sup>127</sup> Richard Davenport-Hines, 2002, *The Pursuit of Oblivion: A Global History of Narcotics* (New York: Norton, 2002), 435-436.

rates, sentence lengths, required prison time for minor offenses, and intensified punishment for drug crimes was attributed to a punitive political climate in the criminal justice policy.<sup>128</sup> For scholars such as Travis, Western and Redburn there is no doubt that the war on drugs drove much of the sudden rise in US incarceration rates. The incarceration rate for drug offenses increased tenfold, jumping from 10,000 in 1980 to about 120,000 admissions by 1990.<sup>129</sup> It was precisely under the Reagan administration that a new wave of racialized mass incarceration exploded in the United States.<sup>130</sup> The Reagan strategy targeted poorer, minority drug users. For example, the possession of five grams of crack required a five-year sentence, whereas 500 grams of cocaine required the same five-year sentence. Basically, a 100-to-1 punitive difference compared to cocaine. Because of this disparity, this punitive strategy was perceived by many as racist.<sup>131</sup>

In terms of foreign policy, Reagan along with Republican and Democratic leaders in Congress promoted the drug war domestically, and expanded it globally as part of a transnational project that promoted neoliberalism, while weakening any socialist influence within Latin America.<sup>132</sup> With Pentagon funding for drug war missions, Edwin Meese, chairman of the national drug policy board, and Carlton Turner, director of drug abuse policy office, put in place a more aggressive posture on drug policy.<sup>133</sup> These political actions made the 1980s decade the beginning of the neoliberalization of Latin America as William Avilés noted:

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<sup>128</sup> Jeremy Travis, Bruce Western, and Steve Redburn, *The Growth of Incarceration in the United States: Exploring Causes and Consequences* (Washington: National Academies Press, 2014), 356.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 357.

<sup>130</sup> Dawn Paley, *Drug War Capitalism* (Oakland: AK Press, 2014), 41.

<sup>131</sup> Richard Davenport-Hines, 2002, *The Pursuit of Oblivion: A Global History of Narcotics* (New York: Norton, 2002), 442.

<sup>132</sup> William Avilés, *The Drug War in Latin America: Hegemony and Global Capitalism. Routledge Studies in US Foreign Policy* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 45.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*

The 1980s and 1990s would also witness a Latin American shift toward neo-liberalism and a political shift to low-intensity democracies, as the United States, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank utilized a crushing debt crisis to extract concessions from Latin American governments, specifically policies that would facilitate the investments and interests of transnational capital. This economic offensive was coupled with a militaristic expansion, which included the drug war, as the militarists allied with neoliberals within the Reagan administration to promote a more coercive and market fundamentalist foreign policy.<sup>134</sup>

During the 1980s, Colombia became one of the largest Latin American recipients of US military aid during the Cold War. For Example, Plan Lazo was the first major United States rearrangement of anti-communist and counter-insurgency of the Colombian military during the 1960.<sup>135</sup> By 1967, US military aid to Colombia reached \$160 million.”<sup>136</sup> Additionally, the School of the Americas and Southern Command had used improper instruction materials (executions of guerrillas, extortion, physical abuse, coercion, and false imprisonment) in training Latin American officers from 1982 to 1991.<sup>137</sup> All these reports and information came out to light after many years passed.

At the beginning of the Reagan administration, more drug trafficking routes were discovered in places such as the Bahamas, Cayman Islands and Panama. A *New York Times* article said that Donald Raulerson, 40 years old, “attracted police attention two and a half years ago when he reported the theft of \$980,000 in cash,” money he had won gambling.<sup>138</sup> Raulerson had “been held on \$10 million bond since his arrest in August, when he was called ‘the big potatoes man’ among 61 people indicted in Operation Bancoshares.”<sup>139</sup> In terms of hyperbolic statement about

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> Doug Stokes, “Why the End of the Cold War Doesn't Matter: The US War of Terror in Colombia,” *Review of International Studies* 29, No. 4 (2003), 577.

<sup>136</sup> Doug Stokes, *America's Other War Terrorizing Colombia* (New York: Zed Books, 2005), 73-74.

<sup>137</sup> Doug Stokes, “Why the end of the Cold War doesn't matter,” *Review of International Studies* 29, No. 4 (2003): 583-584.

<sup>138</sup> “‘Big Potatoes Man' Thought to Be Head of Large Drug Ring,” *New York Times*, Oct. 19, 1981.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

drug seizures, 1982 showed some examples such as the 14-month joint operation by the United States and Colombian government in which Attorney General, William French Smith, said in a news conference that the seizure of 6.5 million pounds, “or one-fifth of the amount that enters this country annually,” was “the most successful international marijuana interdiction effort to date.”<sup>140</sup>

A month later, Federal officials claimed again that the latest seizure was “the largest single seizure of cocaine in the nation’s history. Customs agents intercepted 3,748 pounds of the drug Tuesday at Miami International Airport.” To emphasize the importance of the interception, the seizure was announced “in a statement by Vice President Bush. Mr. Bush heads a special group set up by President Reagan to combat drug-related crime in south Florida.”<sup>141</sup> Another inconsistency found in the drug reportage from 1981 to 1982 was that in the article “Drug Snares in Florida,” Colombia was portrayed as a main producer of drugs in 1981, saying “it is estimated that 70 percent of the cocaine and 80 percent of the marijuana in the United States enters through Florida, -most of it from Colombia.” But in 1982, an article reported that “Bolivia is the source of more than half of all the cocaine that reaches the United States.”<sup>142</sup> These inconsistencies raise questions whether there was an unrealistic cocaine production estimate in Colombia or Bolivia, and more profoundly, if these inconsistencies were the base to calculate the year-round cocaine influx into the United States.

The lack of journalistic accuracy played an important role in constructing the idea that the war on drugs was providing “results” and making “progress”. One article, “Federal Agencies Cut

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<sup>140</sup> “Colombia Aids US in a Drug Seizure,” *New York Times*, Feb. 05, 1982: A.10.

<sup>141</sup> “Arrests Seen Soon in Cocaine Seizure,” *New York Times*, Mar. 11, 1982. A.22.

<sup>142</sup> Caroline Wright and Michael Rand. “Drug Snares in Florida,” *New York Times*, Aug. 09, 1981, A.4. Warren Hoge, “Bolivians Find a Patron in Reputed Drug Chief,” *New York Times*, Aug. 15, 1982. A.1.

Drug Traffic,” said Federal agents had “apparently reduced the tide to a trickle, at least temporarily, according to leaders of the effort.”<sup>143</sup> The article said that “Federal authorities caution that it is most likely only a brief respite.” Another way to show that the Nixon administration and the authorities were stopping drugs was through the cash flow in Miami-area banks. One article tried to establish links between two phenomena (less money in banks means less drugs) with no solid base. “Miami banks have recorded an increase of 20 percent a year in cash deposits over cash withdrawals. For the first two months of this year, cash deposits were down 14.2 percent from the level for the first two months of 1981.”<sup>144</sup> The lack of support raise questions such as what if fewer people were saving money or fewer people were using the banks or people were spending more money?<sup>145</sup> At that time, only in Miami, drug money could account for a fifth or more of the region’s economic base, “according to economists” in the area. Drug money had such impact that John McMullan, executive editor of *The Miami Herald*, told the *New York Times* “that wiping out the drug traffic would actually hurt the local economy.” The big profits from cocaine trafficking were “luring more and more middle-class and upper-income Americans to the cocaine trade.”<sup>146</sup>

One example of the high-profile people involved in drugs was the arrest of John Z. DeLorean, an engineer for General Motors credited with developing popular cars such as the Pontiac Firebird and the GTO and later founder of The DeLorean Motor Company. The *New York Times* published this news in the front page, and stated that “businessmen, physicians,

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<sup>143</sup> Gregory Jaynes “Federal Agencies Cut Drug Traffic,” *New York Times*, May 02, 1982. A. 33.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> Even though there were many different reasons that could be related to this deposit decrease, the author preferred to frame it as “a side effect of the diminished drug traffic.” Gregory Jaynes, “Federal Agencies Cut Drug Traffic,” *New York Times*, May 02, 1982. A. 33.

<sup>146</sup> Robert Lindsey, “Cocaine Trafficking and Its Huge Profits Luring Middle Class.” *New York Times*, Oct. 24, 1982. A1.

lawyers and bank officials were among the leaders of a ring that smuggled into the country 3,748 pounds of cocaine confiscated in March in Florida in the largest cocaine seizure made in this country.”<sup>147</sup> The article summarized different arrests involving middle-class people that year, but the most relevant information from it was that it showed, for the first time in the sample of articles analyzed, a direct reference towards police involvement. Robert Lindsey’s article said “there has been an increase in the number of policemen charged with cocaine dealing. Fourteen policemen were arrested in Chicago in June for selling the drug.”<sup>148</sup> In the long history of the war on drugs, this was not the first time that federal officials were involved in drugs. During the Vietnam War, “the CIA reportedly helped to transport this opium to laboratories in the ‘Golden Triangle’ where the borders of Burma, Laos and Thailand converge,” then, the CIA protected the heroin business of its warlord allies and at the same time distributed heroin in Vietnam.<sup>149</sup>

Another unusual point in Lindsey’s article was the inclusion of criticism, and even more rare, criticism using official sources. One official said, “he said he believed that, despite the Reagan Administration’s increased efforts to reduce the flow of illicit drugs into the country, relatively few smugglers and dealers were being caught.”<sup>150</sup> Another official went even further ““If we get one-tenth of 1 percent of the coke in this town, I’d be surprised. We don’t have the manpower, the Feds don’t have it, and when you’re dealing with cocaine, you’re usually dealing with sophisticated people who wouldn’t touch heroin with a 10-foot pole but don’t see anything wrong with using cocaine.”<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> Robert Lindsey, “Cocaine Trafficking and Its Huge Profits Luring Middle Class.” *New York Times*, Oct. 24, 1982. A1.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> Richard Davenport-Hines, 2002, *The Pursuit of Oblivion: A Global History of Narcotics* (New York: Norton, 2002), 424.

<sup>150</sup> Robert Lindsey, “Cocaine Trafficking and Its Huge Profits Luring Middle Class.” *New York Times*, Oct. 24, 1982. A1.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

In 1983, the association between communists and drugs kept being pushed as well. One example of this was the case of Mario Esteves Gonzalez, a Cuban defector, who “said that his chief mission on behalf of the Cuban Government was to distribute cocaine, marijuana and methaqualone tablets in New York, northern New Jersey and Florida.”<sup>152</sup> This association goes back to 1930, when Harry J. Anslinger, the first drug czar from 1930 to 1960, “demonized drugs by conflating them with Communism and organized crime, convincing many politicians to back legislation that severely punished all drug law violators without exception in order to maintain security of country and family.”<sup>153</sup> In the case of Reagan and his administration, he “believed wholeheartedly that ‘a nexus existed between Cuba, Nicaragua, and the guerrillas in the northern Andes to facilitate drug traffic in order to finance Marxist revolutions throughout the hemisphere.’”<sup>154</sup> The way Selwyn Raab confirmed the communist-drug assumption can be seen in statements such as: “Esteves’s allegations about the Cuban Government’s complicity in narcotics trafficking were ‘very credible,’” and with more emphasis lines after, when it says:

Justice and State Department officials gave various explanations for the Cuban Government’s purported role in drug deals. The officials offered these theories about why the Cubans had become involved in drugs in the United States: to obtain hard foreign currency for use in international trade; to retaliate against American trade restrictions on Cuba; to cause social unrest in the United States, or to help finance leftist movements in Latin America.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> Selwyn Raab, “A Defector Tells of Drug Dealing by Cuba Agents,” *New York Times*, Apr. 04, 1983. B. 1.

<sup>153</sup> Brionna Mendoza, “A Threat to National Security: The Cold War on Drugs,” *History Matters*, no. 13 (2016): 5.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid*, 14.

<sup>155</sup> Selwyn Raab. “A Defector Tells of Drug Dealing by Cuba Agents,” *New York Times*, Apr. 04, 1983. B. 1.

For several decades, different US administrations “believed that supplying narcotics to American youth would erode their societal foundations, ultimately making them more susceptible to instigate revolution as they matured and moved into positions of power. This distrust of the Castro and Sandinista regimes further intensified as evidence surfaced throughout the 1980s indicating that certain figures in each government had actively participated in drug [trafficking].”<sup>156</sup>

In the second half of 1983, there were three ton-size cocaine seizures, but two of them were described in less than 150 words: one of 1,000 pounds of cocaine in a shipment of carnations from Colombia; another of 1.3 tons of cocaine paste; and the last, which “was called the second-largest seizure of the drug in this country,” of 1,391 pounds of cocaine found in a shipload of fungicide from South America.<sup>157</sup> All of them received very little media attention. If during 1983 the *New York Times* did not use much superlative language to describe drugs seizures, then, 1984 would bring it back. “The biggest drug raid in history was reported by the United States ambassador to Colombia. He said that Colombian policemen attacked a jungle cocaine processing plant guarded by Communist guerrillas and seized 13.8 tons of cocaine with a street value of \$1.2 billion.”<sup>158</sup> However, the tendency to describe seizures in terms of weight changed temporarily to describing them in terms of value or money involved, “it has yielded more than \$3.5 million in seized cocaine, the customs agency said.”<sup>159</sup> Another example was found in the article “14 Seized on L.I. In Cocaine Ring,” which described a “ring that smuggled

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<sup>156</sup> Brionna Mendoza, “A Threat to National Security: The Cold War on Drugs,” *History Matters*, no. 13 (2016, May): 14.

<sup>157</sup> “Cocaine Cache in Carnations.” *New York Times*, June 13, 1983. A. 11; “Over 1,300 Pounds of Cocaine Seized Aboard Ship in Tampa.” *New York Times*, Aug. 20, 1983. 12; “Drug Raid in Peru Nets 4 Colombian Officers,” *New York Times*, Aug. 02, 1983. A. 7.

<sup>158</sup> International Summary, *New York Times*, Mar. 21, 1984. B. 1.

<sup>159</sup> “US Cocaine Drive delays travelers,” *New York Times*, Mar. 15, 1984. B. 13.

\$25 million a week worth of cocaine into Suffolk and Nassau Counties and the Borough of Queens.”<sup>160</sup> Another characteristic found this year was the lack of drug-related long articles. Even news concerning US diplomats working in Colombia was described in 125 words: “more than 10 American diplomats and their families have left Colombia because of threats from drug traffickers angered by a United States-Colombian crackdown on international cocaine smuggling.”<sup>161</sup> Or even the coverage of a slight increase of cocaine’s price was developed in two paragraphs.

Another initiative the US government used to demonize and galvanize the association between communists and drugs, was Nicaragua’s case. “A Government affidavit filed in a United States District Court today accuses the Nicaraguan Government of direct involvement in cocaine trafficking between South American countries and the United States.”<sup>162</sup> The article also assured that Tomas Borge, interior minister and brother of Daniel Ortega, and Humberto Ortega, defense minister, had been directly involved in the drug trading. The article considered the statements of a Nicaraguan Embassy official who called the allegations lies, “They made it up. It’s just another part of the Reagan Administration campaign against US”<sup>163</sup> However, this was just one sentence in an 18-paragraph article supporting the Reagan administration’s accusations. The Reagan administration not only used that association in Nicaragua and the Contras who smuggled cocaine, but also in Colombia and some of its communist guerilla groups. However, one crucial misinterpretation must be highlighted from the article “Colombian Rebels Announce a Truce.”<sup>164</sup> The gigantic Colombian laboratory known as “Tranquilandia” was not protected by

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<sup>160</sup> “14 seized on L.I. in cocaine ring,” *New York Times*, June 9, 1984. 26.

<sup>161</sup> “10 US Diplomats Leave Colombia After Threats.” *New York Times*, Nov. 24, 1984. 5.

<sup>162</sup> Joel Brinkley, “US Accuses Managua of Role in Cocaine Traffic,” *New York Times*, July 19, 1984. A. 6.

<sup>163</sup> Joel Brinkley, “US Accuses Managua of Role in Cocaine Traffic,” *New York Times*, July 19, 1984. A. 6.

<sup>164</sup> “Colombian Rebels Announce a Truce,” *New York Times*, May 27, 1984. A. 11.

guerrilla members since it was constructed by the Medellín Cartel, the arch enemy group of the Colombian guerrillas M-19, the Popular Liberation Army and the Colombia Revolutionary Armed Forces. About this misleading information on the left-wing rebel group, the article said, “that group has been the main target of charges of cooperation between guerrillas and narcotics traffickers in Colombia. Both United States diplomats and Colombian Army officers say its members were protecting clandestine laboratories at a jungle site known as Tranquilandia, where 13 tons of cocaine were seized by troops March 13.”<sup>165</sup>

One of the most interesting articles found in 1984 was a sharp letter to the Editor published in September reconsidering and reevaluating drug policies. “Your Aug. 30 editorial ‘Cocaine vs. Democracy in the Andes’ was disturbing. As the United States attempts to control drug production in Peru, Bolivia and Colombia, it must emphasize reduced cultivation, rather than eradication, of the coca plant.” Basically, the letter was a wakeup call to stop condemning “the coca plant simply because North Americans abuse the alkaloid cocaine.”<sup>166</sup>

In January 1985, the Colombian government started the new year by strengthening its relationship with the American government through the extradition of four men, a historic event in the Colombia-US drug war.<sup>167</sup> By 1985, Colombia has already changed its international perception. In this article, “Colombia, producer of more marijuana and cocaine than any other nation in the world, has until recently been a ‘safe haven’ for drug traffickers fleeing the authorities.”<sup>168</sup> In the political scene of the country, there was a division between those who supported extraditions and those who did not. Among those who did not support it, there were

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<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

<sup>166</sup> “Don’t Deprive Andeans of Their Coca Plants,” *New York Times*, Sept. 12, 1984. A. 30.

<sup>167</sup> Stephen Engelberg, “Colombia Turns Over to US 4 Facing Drug Trial,” *New York Times*, Jan. 06, 1985. A. 15.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid.

some politicians who were allied with drug cartels. The assassination of the minister of justice, Rodrigo Lara, on April 30, 1984, by Pablo Escobar's hitman, had pushed forward extradition laws in the Colombian congress. On top of that, cartels had started to kill those who had supported the extradition laws. For example, the United States Ambassador to Colombia had received death threats against him, and "the Ambassador returned to the United States in reaction and he remains 'on vacation' in this country."<sup>169</sup> The extradition of the four men, as Thomas P. DeCair, a Justice Department spokesman said in the article, "was the first extradition since the United States negotiated a new treaty with Colombia in 1982." They were the first four, and 23 more were on list to be extradited. At the same time, in less than a month Griselda Blanco de Trujillo, considered the female Pablo Escobar, was captured by the DEA in Irvine, California. The cocaine queen "used special brassieres, girdles and dog cages to bring hundreds of pounds of narcotics into Europe and the United States."<sup>170</sup>

By 1985, the DEA had finally learned that "they had overestimated the amount of cocaine smuggled into the United States by a cartel when they said it handled up to a quarter of total imports."<sup>171</sup> Officials thought that an important ring "headed by two Peruvian nationals, was responsible for 20 percent to 25 percent of the total cocaine entering the United States each year." This information would sound credible if the article was not contradictory. On one hand, it started by saying the amount was overestimated, but the fifth paragraph said, "in a joint statement, the F.B.I., D.E.A. and the United States Attorney's office said the figure of 20 percent to 25 percent had been based on an old, unreliable report and should not have been included in a press release." This affirmation made it look like the FBI and the DEA did not know how much

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<sup>169</sup> Stephen Engelberg, "Colombia Turns Over to US 4 Facing Drug Trial," *New York Times*, Jan. 06, 1985. A. 15.

<sup>170</sup> "Suspect is Called Cocaine Queen," *New York Times*, Feb. 22, 1985. B. 3.

<sup>171</sup> "Officials Overestimate Smuggling of Cocaine," *New York Times*, Mar. 21, 1985. A. 19.

was being smuggled into the country, as if after more than a decade fighting this war, they still were having trouble calculating it. The article ends, corroborating this assumption by saying, “‘Nobody knows how much cocaine comes into this country every year,’ an F.B.I. spokesman, Gary Laturno, said today. ‘What we do know is that this is a major cartel from Peru and Columbia. Beyond that we can’t say anything.’”<sup>172</sup> Once again, the article misspelled Colombia.

Meanwhile, on South Florida streets, the news was a “64 percent increase rise in drug-related prosecutions in South Florida, and \$19 million in cash and property was confiscated. But while in 1983 government agents in South Florida seized 6 tons of cocaine and 850 tons of marijuana, by 1985 these figures were 25 tons and 850 tons respectively.”<sup>173</sup> Not only seizures skyrocketed in that year, but mandatory prison sentences did as well. “The foolishness of Florida state law aggravated the problem by providing identical mandatory prison sentences for trafficking in either marijuana or cocaine. As one smuggler turned DEA informer observed in 1985, ‘If you are going to get fifteen years for doing one and fifteen years for doing the other, you’re going to go for the coke.’”<sup>174</sup> Also, it meant that most of the captures were the lowest link in the drug smuggling chain. This effect was seen as well at the US-Mexico border. One op-ed essay said “to satisfy US demands for a crackdown on the booming drug trade, Mexican authorities are shooting up low-level suspects and parading poor farm workers arrested in the marijuana fields in front of foreign journalists. But somehow there are never any arrests of the men who have made millions on heroin, cocaine and pot.”<sup>175</sup> The prosecution of dealers and

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<sup>172</sup> “Officials Overestimate Smuggling of Cocaine,” *New York Times*, Mar. 21, 1985. A. 19.

<sup>173</sup> Richard Davenport-Hines, 2002, *The Pursuit of Oblivion: A Global History of Narcotics*, (New York: Norton, 2002), 437.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, 437-438.

<sup>175</sup> William Safire, “Essay; Mote in A Gringo Eye,” *New York Times*, Mar. 25, 1985. A. 19.

consumers, and an egalitarian prison sentence for either marijuana or cocaine, had problematic results.

Drug dealers were reinventing their practices as well as “clandestine cocaine laboratories in the New York area and Virginia, believed to be new bases for drug trafficking in the United States.”<sup>176</sup> Ten Colombians were arrested and the “officials said cocaine conversion laboratories had been established at several rural locations, including a 47-acre tract at 680 Sound Avenue in Baiting Hollow; a secluded 66-acre site in Fly Creek, N.Y., 90 miles west of Albany, and a property in Gordonsville, Va.” This marked an important change in the way drug dealers managed the drug business, and officials felt that this case represented “a disturbing trend in cocaine trafficking.” About this choking find, officials said “we are paying a price for success in combating the problem at its source. Now we have this new phenomenon confronting the US.”<sup>177</sup> Moreover, a State Department report on worldwide drug production said, “that most major drug-producing nations continue promising to eradicate their marijuana, coca or opium-poppy crops while actually doing little or nothing toward that end.”<sup>178</sup> The few exceptions in this trend were, surprisingly, Colombia, Ecuador and Jamaica. Despite this, an article published in November, said that the drug business was “still dominated by Colombia, with Peru and Bolivia.”<sup>179</sup> The article also said that “cocaine use in the United States rose 11 percent in 1984”, and “in early 1984 cocaine was so plentiful that there were large wholesale price drops in many US cities. Kilogram prices were as low as \$16,000 in South Florida and \$30,000 in New York, although by the end of the year prices rose to \$33,000 to \$38,000 in Miami and \$40,000 to

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<sup>176</sup> Jesus Rangel, “10 Held In 3 Cocaine Raids; Shift from Colombia Is Seen,” *New York Times*, July 12, 1985. B. 3.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>178</sup> Joel Brinkley, “US Says Nations Are Not Destroying Drug Crops,” *New York Times*, Sept. 25, 1985. A. 11.

<sup>179</sup> “US Says Use of Cocaine Rose Sharply in '84,” *New York Times*, Nov. 07, 1985. A. 18.

\$45,000 in New York.”<sup>180</sup> This economical effect, popularized the problem bringing “the street price of the drug to record lows, the precise opposite of its stated central aim, and pushed drug abuse in new and perilous directions.”<sup>181</sup>

As 1986 began, the tensions rose between the United States, the Soviet Union, and Cuba. In a January front-page article, President Reagan accused these countries of aiding terrorist movements in the Western hemisphere. “The hand of the Soviet Union and its Cuban surrogates can be found behind terrorist movements such as the M-19 in Colombia.” At the same time, president Reagan continued pushing the association between communism and drugs. He said, “these twin evils -narcotics trafficking and terrorism- represent the most insidious and dangerous threats to the hemisphere today.”<sup>182</sup> In practice, the United States has had various interests in “Latin America which often have inhibited or diluted Washington’s commitment to combating international drug trafficking during the 1980s. Among the most obvious of these competing foreign policy interests or objectives are anti-communism, democratization, regime stabilization, and economic development.”<sup>183</sup>

Meanwhile, cartels in Colombia had been growing exponentially and had been expanding their influences on top official positions, and the *New York Times* reported that one consul, Roberto C. Jaramillo, “used diplomatic privilege to prevent American customs agents from inspecting suitcases and other containers filled with cocaine.”<sup>184</sup> Additionally, this article showed a new smuggling route into the US: Mexico. “The smugglers also flew cocaine to Mexico and

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<sup>180</sup> “US Says Use of Cocaine Rose Sharply in '84,” *New York Times*, Nov. 07, 1985. A. 18.

<sup>181</sup> Paul Gootenberg, *Andean Cocaine: The Making of a Global Drug* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 324.

<sup>182</sup> Gerald Boyd, “Reagan Accuses Soviet of Aiding Latin Terrorists,” *New York Times* Jan. 03, 1986. A. 1.

<sup>183</sup> Bruce Michael Bagley, “US Foreign Policy and the War on Drugs: Analysis of a Policy Failure.” *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs*, no. 2/3 (1988): 201.

<sup>184</sup> Philip Shenon, “Ex-consul Named as Drug Smuggler,” *New York Times*, Apr. 22, 1986. A. 11.

then hid it in secret compartments built into a pickup truck that was driven into the United States, the department said.”<sup>185</sup> According to Boullosa and Wallace, “the Colombians launched something of a pilot project in the early 1970s devoted to developing a supplementary route through Mexico.”<sup>186</sup> The direct contact was Juan Ramón Matta Ballesteros, a Honduran who received the cocaine in Mexico and moved the product across the border. “Once the Matta connection was established in the mid-1970s, he and his associates became the premier couriers in Mexico of Colombian cocaine. Still, up to the early 1980s, their transshipments accounted for only 30 percent of the coke consumed in the United States. What sent them into hyperdrive was the election in 1980 of Ronald Reagan.”<sup>187</sup> That is why in May 1986, the United States was claiming that “Mexican production of heroin and marijuana are rising dramatically, while Mexican dealers have also become major traffickers in cocaine, which has gained them more than \$1 billion a year.”<sup>188</sup> Mexico’s role in the war on drugs had changed from being a hero to a villain in the last years.<sup>189</sup> In 1987, two years before, a report issued by the House Select Committee on Narcotics Abuse and Control had “called Mexican drug enforcement ‘an enormous success’ and the best program in the world.”<sup>190</sup> The reason for such an abrupt change, detailed the article, was Mexico’s declining economy. It “has drawn poor peasants into the narcotics trade as legitimate sources of income have vanished.” The article recognized that most of the world’s cocaine was still produced in Colombia; however, only in the last “18 months Mexican dealers have become significant ‘wholesale brokers,’ Lawn said, smuggling from

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<sup>185</sup> Philip Shenon, “Ex-consul Named as Drug Smuggler,” *New York Times*, Apr. 22, 1986. A. 11.

<sup>186</sup> Carmen Boullosa and Mike Wallace, *A Narco History: how the United States and Mexico jointly created the “Mexican drug war.”* (New York: OR Books, 2016), 34.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid*, 35.

<sup>188</sup> Joel Brinkley, “US Aides Accuse Mexico As Drug Trade Surges,” *New York Times*, May 12, 1986. A. 4.

<sup>189</sup> A State Department report published in 1989 praised Mexico’s efforts to fight drugs. Elaine Sciolino, “US Study Praises Mexico’s Drug Moves,” *New York Times*, Mar 01, 1989. A. 8.

<sup>190</sup> Joel Brinkley, “US Aides Accuse Mexico As Drug Trade Surges,” *New York Times*, May 12, 1986. A. 4.

Colombia at least one-third of the roughly 242,000 pounds of cocaine believed consumed in the United States last year.”<sup>191</sup> At the Mexico-California border, from Oct. 1, 1985, to March 30, 1986, US authorities “seized more than 10,700 pounds of cocaine.”<sup>192</sup> This article is also an example of the difficulty estimating the street value of a cocaine pound. This article said that the average United States wholesale price of cocaine was “\$19,000 a pound,” yet in February, two months before, another article said that 185 pounds of cocaine had an “estimated street value of \$25.5 million,” more or less, \$137, 837 per pound; a difference of more than \$118,000 in two months.<sup>193</sup> Another example of this apparently randomness in the street value of drug seizures was found in September, in which 600 pounds of cocaine “a street value in excess of \$137 million,” meaning \$228,333 per pound, more or less.<sup>194</sup>

Since clandestine cocaine laboratories production in the United States had been discovered by accident in the New York area and Virginia, the idea of blaming foreign countries for their failure to stop cocaine production seemed to have lost strength. Now, the US domestic production of cocaine was growing dramatically as well. Federal said the US laboratory found not far from Albany “could produce 1,000 pounds of cocaine a week, almost one-third of the estimated United States supply.”<sup>195</sup> Moreover, authorities were conscious and outspoken about this problem. “Drug law-enforcement officials acknowledge that increasing domestic production of marijuana and cocaine is a matter of great political sensitivity, since it is difficult to convince foreign countries such as Mexico that they should control drug trafficking while it proliferates in the United States.” However, it is possible to find a tendency to keep blaming foreign countries

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<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

<sup>192</sup> Joel Brinkley, "US Aides Accuse Mexico As Drug Trade Surges," *New York Times*, May 12, 1986. A. 4.

<sup>193</sup> “9 Arrested And 185 Pounds of Cocaine Seized in Queens,” *New York Times*, Feb. 23, 1986. A.33

<sup>194</sup> Alfonso Narvaez, "600 Pounds of Cocaine Seized in Jersey," *New York Times*, Sept. 06, 1986. 1. 30.

<sup>195</sup> Joel Brinkley, "Drug Production in US Is Reported at Record Levels," *New York Times*, June 02, 1986.

and to keep pushing the international drug-problem agenda. The problem then was that some countries had fought ferociously to stop drug production, pushing the problem into the United States:

Enforcement officials say that some foreign countries, reacting to pressure from the United States, have made production more difficult within their borders, causing traffickers to believe it is safer, easier and cheaper to move their operations here. 'We have some of the most remote areas in the world in rural areas of this country,' said Anthony Senneca, deputy chief of the Drug Enforcement Administration's cocaine investigations section. Colombian cocaine traffickers, he said, are increasingly setting up production laboratories in the United States partly for that reason, and also because Colombia has made it more difficult for them to buy the chemicals they need, particularly ether.<sup>196</sup>

In New York, attorney Robert M. Morgenthau, and the United States Attorney in Manhattan, Rudolph W. Giuliani, disputed "over where the blame lies."<sup>197</sup> The domestic drug flood was so undeniable that the fear of losing the war on drugs started to appear, "the dispute reflected the growing concern of public officials who are responsible for fighting the rise in crack traffic and addiction, and who must explain the government's losing battle."<sup>198</sup> The drug problem had escalated to the point of "the Drug Enforcement Administration's 300 agents in New York, who are still fighting a substantial heroin problem in the city, say they alone cannot break the back of the thriving cocaine industry here." Just in 1985, law-enforcement authorities around the United States had "seized 30 laboratories where imported cocaine paste was processed, as against 21 the year before and roughly five a year in 1982 and earlier."<sup>199</sup> Later in

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<sup>196</sup> Ibid.

<sup>197</sup> Peter Kerr, "A Losing Drug Fight; Morgenthau-Giuliani Clash Reflects Wide Concern Over Who Is to Blame," *New York Times*, July 14, 1986. B. 1.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid.

<sup>199</sup> Joel Brinkley, "Drug Production in US Is Reported at Record Levels," *New York Times*, June 02, 1986. A. 1.

Joel Brinkley's article, the author shows how the United States fought domestic drug production, and how about \$10 million were used "to eradicate Mexican marijuana plants and opium poppies."<sup>200</sup> Another important aspect of the latter quote is that it shows how the Asian origin of the marijuana had been forgotten, and as Campos has explained, by the eighteenth-century, a "gradual adoption into local medical practice had imbued it with a certain indigeneity by association."<sup>201</sup>

On top of domestic drug production, there was another issue: the immigration, which slipped into Brinkley's article as a subtext, "the Immigration and Naturalization Service, the fourth Federal agency named by Mr. Morgenthau, is overwhelmed by a vast illegal immigrant population in the city and is hardly equipped to make a major effort to deport cocaine dealers, many of whom are illegal aliens from South America and the Caribbean."<sup>202</sup> The main problem for Giuliani was "that as long as the state criminal justice system put only a small number of arrested drug violators in prison, an increase in law enforcement would not solve anything," and on top of that, officials agreed that "as long as cocaine production is allowed to continue in countries like Colombia, Peru and Bolivia, and it pours into United States ports, law-enforcement agencies in New York will be fighting at best a rear guard action."<sup>203</sup> Curiously, in 1986, the Reagan administration signed the Anti-Drug Law that considered drug trafficking a threat to the national security of the United States. That directive was updated in 1989 by George Bush Sr., and broadened the role of US troops in anti-narcotics activity in Latin America, allowing them to

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<sup>200</sup> Joel Brinkley, "Drug Production in US Is Reported at Record Levels," *New York Times*, June 02, 1986. A. 1.

<sup>201</sup> Isaac Campos, *Home Grown: Marijuana and the Origins of Mexico's War on Drugs* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012): 73.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>203</sup> Peter Kerr, "A Losing Drug Fight; Morgenthau-Giuliani Clash Reflects Wide Concern Over Who Is to Blame," *New York Times*, July 14, 1986. B. 1.

go on patrol instead of being restricted to their bases.”<sup>204</sup> And also in 1986, “the average sentence under federal drug laws for blacks was 11 percent higher than whites; four years later the average was 49 per cent higher for blacks. Blacks in some cities were over twenty times more likely to be arrested on drug charges (and nationally four times as likely).”<sup>205</sup>

In Mexico, cities like Guadalajara were struggling with drug stereotypes. “the United States Drug Enforcement Administration regards Guadalajara as one of a half-dozen major narcotics centers in Latin America.”<sup>206</sup> As usually comes in terms of perception, there were two perspectives involved: “Mexico’s second-largest city is floating between two conflicting images: By broader Mexican standards, it remains violent and corrupt; but by Guadalajara’s own recent standards, things are definitely improving.”<sup>207</sup> Academics have explained this issue by saying:

When Operation Condor smashed into Sinaloa, the top narco bosses—who had been left suspiciously untouched—simply relocated. They moved their operations down from the mountains to Mexico’s second-largest city, Guadalajara, in the state of Jalisco. There they bought splendid villas and continued their business on an even bigger scale. Condor inadvertently centralized the trade by winnowing out the small fry and strengthening those with the resources to buy protection from the police, the military, the DFS, and PRI politicians.<sup>208</sup>

In the meantime, in Colombia, Virgilio Barco, “a 64-year-old political centrist with strong ties to the United States, also promised in an inaugural address to continue the fight against narcotics trafficking.”<sup>209</sup> His government plan was “oriented toward social areas, with

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<sup>204</sup> Dawn Paley, *Drug War Capitalism* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2014), 41.

<sup>205</sup> Richard Davenport-Hines, *The Pursuit of Oblivion: A Global History of Narcotics* (New York: Norton, 2002): 442.

<sup>206</sup> Alan Riding, "Guadalajara Battles Its Drug Image," *New York Times*, Aug. 27, 1986. B. 6.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid.

<sup>208</sup> Carmen Boullosa and Mike Wallace, *A Narco History: how the United States and Mexico jointly created the “Mexican drug war”* (New York: OR Books, 2016): 32.

<sup>209</sup> Alan Riding, "New Colombia Chief Stresses Domestic Problems," *New York Times*, Aug. 08, 1986.

particular emphasis on reducing unemployment, which stands at about 15 percent.”<sup>210</sup> The main obstacles in this picture were the cartels. Just one cartel based in Colombia, Federal investigators said, “smuggled at least 58 tons of cocaine into the United States in this decade.”<sup>211</sup> This was the first mention of the Medellín Cartel “based on evidence produced by undercover agents and informers, for the first time [agents] detailed the nature and scope of the ring, called the ‘Medellin Cartel’ for the Colombian resort city in which it originated.” About the cartel, the United States attorney for the southern district of Florida, Leon Kellner, said “Miami has become its corporate and distribution headquarters,” and it was “set up as early as 1978 to coordinate and consolidate the increasingly lucrative cocaine smuggling traffic.” The organization of this group surprised authorities for their “meticulous bookkeeping devoted to insuring each member of the cartel” was getting a fair share, and because they “had to inventory everything coming into the country and they had to account for it.” Richard Gregory, chief of the criminal division of the United States Attorney’s office, described that to avoid suspicion, “Colombians hired non-Hispanic couriers to pick up shipments elsewhere,” noting that “trucks headed south to Florida rarely arouse suspicions of state patrols on the outlook for drug shipments.” The cartel had bought “houses, positioned strategically around the country, for the sole purpose of storing cocaine, and people were hired to ‘house-sit’ the dwelling and look after its contents, paid \$10,000 or more on the condition that they did not leave the property until trucks appeared to haul away the cocaine.” The cartel also had developed a set of instructions on how “to ‘blend into a community,’ whether it was a suburban house or urban development, to avoid attention,” and strongly enforced aspects such as “keeping the lawn carefully cut and not letting pets loose on the street, anything that might draw a neighbor over for a complaint and unnecessary

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<sup>210</sup> Alan Riding, "New Colombia Chief Stresses Domestic Problems," *New York Times*, Aug. 08, 1986.

<sup>211</sup> Jon Nordheimer, "US Details Workings of Vast Drug Ring," *New York Times*, Nov. 19, 1986. A. 16.

conversation.”<sup>212</sup> Some of the names that appeared in the article were: the three brothers Jorge Ochoa-Vasquez, Fabio Ochoa-Vasquez and Juan David Ochoa-Vasquez; Carlos Lehder, a former Colombian senator considered one of that country's biggest cocaine traffickers; Pablo Escobar-Gaviria, “a major cartel figure”; Rafael Cardona-Salazar, the organizer of the cartel’s smuggling operations into the United States; “a suspect named only as ‘Jota,’” described as the cartel’s chief accountant and financial adviser; Federico Vaughn, “a former junior aide in the Nicaraguan Government”; Gonzalo Rodriguez-Gacha, a cartel member known as ‘the Mexican’ who the indictment says arranged for the distribution of cocaine through Panama to the West Coast of the United States ”; Tomas Borge, the Nicaraguan Interior Minister “photographed along with Nicaraguan soldiers loading cocaine on an airplane flown to Managua by an American undercover agent, Barry Seal.” Seal “was murdered earlier this year in Baton Rouge, La., an act today’s indictment said was ordered by the cartel.”<sup>213</sup>

In 1987, more high-profile people were captured because of drug trafficking. The manufacturer of high-powered speed boats, Midnight Express of Opa Locka, Florida, “admitted concealing the source of smugglers’ cash, and this month the most prominent designer of power racing boats, Don Aronow, was shot to death in what the police described as a slaying characteristic of drug traffickers, although his death is still under investigation.”<sup>214</sup> Just days before, George Morales, the three-time winner of the Offshore Powerboat world championship, “was charged last year with two counts of conspiracy to smuggle 1,200 to 1,500 kilograms of cocaine from Colombia to the Bahamas and then into the United States.” Bill and Don Whittington of Fort Lauderdale, two brothers and international-fame automobile racers “were

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<sup>212</sup> Ibid.

<sup>213</sup> Jon Nordheimer, “US Details Workings of Vast Drug Ring,” *New York Times*, Nov. 19, 1986. A. 16.

<sup>214</sup> Peter Kerr, “Coastal Drug Running Is Luring Adventurers,” *New York Times*, Feb. 28, 1987. 1. 11.

sentenced to 15 years and to 18 months in prison for their involvement in a \$73 million marijuana smuggling operation.”<sup>215</sup> Also Randy Lenier, the 1985 Indianapolis 500 rookie of the year car driver, and John Lee Paul, Camel GT auto racing circuit winner, were “sentenced last month to 20 years for attempted murder in a drug case and also faces drug trafficking charges.” In 1986, Paul’s son, John Paul Jr., “was sentenced to five years in prison on drug charges.”<sup>216</sup>

Meanwhile, Colombian drug traffickers were in a crusade against all kinds of efforts to revoke the extradition laws. Enrique Parejo Gonzalez, the Colombian ambassador to Hungary and former Justice Minister who until recently had headed anti-drug campaigns, “was shot and seriously wounded today in Budapest in an apparent extension of the country’s drug war into Eastern Europe.” Hernan Botero Moreno “claimed to have shot ‘the traitor Parejo’ on behalf of those whose extradition is being sought by the United States.”<sup>217</sup> Guillermo Cano Isaza, director of *El Espectador* and second largest newspaper in the country, was murdered just a month before as part of this retaliation. At the same time, the Supreme Court, which reviewed all extradition requests, had been offered multi-million-dollar bribes and, for a short period of time, had declared unconstitutional the extradition treaty with the United States. It was a move interpreted by some people as a victory for narcotics traffickers.

Economists estimated that the money inflow entering Colombia from cocaine trafficking was around “\$500 million to \$800 million a year, with such drug centers as Cali and Medellin the main recipients.”<sup>218</sup> On top of this, more than 30 judges, 20 journalists, and numerous police officers had been killed in the last several years. It was a situation that Colombian authorities

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<sup>215</sup> Peter Kerr, "Coastal Drug Running Is Luring Adventurers," *New York Times*, Feb. 28, 1987. 1. 11.

<sup>216</sup> “Sports People; Morales Pleads Guilty," *New York Times*, Jan. 27, 1987. A. 23.

<sup>217</sup> Alan Riding, “Colombia Envoy, A Drug Foe, Is Shot in Budapest,” *New York Times*, Jan. 14, 1987. A.9.

<sup>218</sup> Alan Riding, “Colombia Polishes Its Image as a Debtor,” *New York Times*. Aug. 12, 1987. D.15.

tried to counterattack by carrying out “1,198 raids” and arresting “783 suspects, including three who are on a list of 113 reported traffickers whose extradition has been requested by the United States.”<sup>219</sup> Moreover, leading traffickers had offered on two occasions “to repatriate several billion dollars to help pay off the country’s foreign debt if the Government would renounce Colombia’s 1979 extradition treaty with the United States, under which 13 Colombians have already been sent for trial in the United States.”<sup>220</sup> This populist strategy was done mainly to generate local support. And one month later that year, Carlos Lehder Rivas, “accused of heading one of the world’s largest cocaine rings[,] was held in a secret place” in Colombia. Brian Raftery, an assistant special agent in charge of the Jacksonville office, said that Lehder was “one of the most dangerous traffickers in the world.”<sup>221</sup> Carlos Lehder was described by Gootenberg as “the neo-Nazi from Quindío, Armenia, [who] also dabbled in marijuana and learned about cocaine in an American jail cell in the early 1970s before establishing his infamous Colombia-Bahamas-Florida cocaine island-hopping corridor.”<sup>222</sup> To explain Gootenberg’s neo-Nazi label and to make Lehder’s character more complex, Lehder claimed that he “formed his own political party-based on a confusing blend of populism, anticommunism, anti-Americanism, right-wing nationalism, free-market capitalism, and neo-fascism—which did attract a small following.”<sup>223</sup> His populist and anti-American views were explained as a call “for the overthrow of Colombia’s ‘monarchical oligarchy,’ and considered cocaine and marijuana to be ‘revolutionary weapons’ against North American imperialism.”<sup>224</sup> Right after Lehder was apprehended, the DEA and

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<sup>219</sup> Alan Riding, “Colombia Polishes Its Image as a Debtor,” *New York Times*. Aug. 12, 1987. D.15.

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>221</sup> “Agent Seeks Tighter Security for Colombian Drug Suspect,” *New York Times*, Feb. 07, 1987. 1.6.

<sup>222</sup> Paul Gootenberg, *Andean Cocaine: The Making of a Global Drug* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008): 305.

<sup>223</sup> Bruce Michael Bagley, “Dateline Drug Wars: Colombia: The Wrong Strategy.” *Foreign Policy*, no. 77: 162.

<sup>224</sup> Rensselaer Lee III, “Dimensions of the South American Cocaine Industry.” *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs*, no. 2/3 (1988): 92.

Colombian agents arranged Lehder's transportation to the United States, "rather than having to go through the final formalities attendant upon the extradition process."<sup>225</sup> In May 1987, Carlos Lehder, "accused of heading a cartel responsible for supplying 80 percent of the cocaine smuggled into the United States," offered to cooperate with the authorities. He had also written a letter in March to Vice President Bush, but the "prosecutor refused to give any more details to reporters, or to release the letter."<sup>226</sup> Later in November, Edward R. Shohat, one of Mr. Lehder's attorneys, would say "that the Government's case is only 'a masquerade of horrors' designed to convict his client at any cost." Shohat further said that "Mr. Lehder was a businessman interested only in developing an island paradise and selling aircraft."<sup>227</sup> In Lehder's trial, Robert L. Vesco, the fugitive American financier who stole \$224 million from an international investment fund, was identified "as a co-conspirator in the trial of Carlos Lehder Rivas."<sup>228</sup>

Other drug kingpins' characteristic practices were to kill witnesses of their acts. Miguel Velez, Luis Carlos Quintero Cruz, and Bernardo Antonio Vasquez were accused of the first-degree murder of Adler (Barry) Seal, "a key Government drug witness," in front of a large jury pool that consisted of "about 400 prospective jurors [who had] reported to a basketball and livestock arena this morning for the second start of the trial of three Colombian nationals." The first trial "ended in January in Baton Rouge when District Judge Frank Saia declared a mistrial because he said an impartial jury could not be found."<sup>229</sup> In the article, Seal was described as a drug smuggler who had "infiltrated the Colombia-based Medellin cocaine cartel as an undercover informant for the Drug Enforcement Agency," and his information had "led to the

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<sup>225</sup> Ethan Nadelmann, "The DEA in Latin America: Dealing with Institutionalized Corruption," *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs*, no. 4 (1987): 28.

<sup>226</sup> "US Rejects Offer by Suspect," *New York Times*, May 06, 1987. A. 32.

<sup>227</sup> "Cocaine Jury is Told Defendant Viewed Hitler as His Hero," *New York Times*, Nov. 19, 1987. B. 11.

<sup>228</sup> "Fugitive Financier is Called Co-Conspirator in Drug Trial." *New York Times*, Dec. 11, 1987. D. 18.

<sup>229</sup> "Second Trial in Murder to Begin in Louisiana," *New York Times*, Apr. 07, 1987. D. 30.

indictment in Miami of some of the cartel's reported leaders."<sup>230</sup> For a while, Seal was presented as an important undercover informant in which the fight against the communist-Sandinista "connection eclipsed the fact that the leaders of the Medellín cartel had been indicted together for the first time. Politics grabbed the headlines, while the cartel leaders largely escaped notice."<sup>231</sup> All of this was part of the Reagan administration's dirty war against Nicaragua, and the blocking of loans requested by the Nicaraguan government to the American Development Bank "illustrates the hypocrisy of the Reagan administration as the private agricultural sector was the very area that Washington had said it had hoped to preserve against an alleged Marxist takeover."<sup>232</sup>

One interesting article published in 1987 was "A National Crusade"; New Voice and Visibility for D.E.A. In New York," because it was astonishingly pleasant towards New York's DEA office director, Robert M. Stutman.<sup>233</sup> For the *New York Times*, the new director used "well-sculpted quotes" and "had made it onto newspapers' front pages" several times. Stutman had "decided to tell the world that D.E.A. exists," and "[had] higher political ambitions." He was considered "a leader in the tactic," and was highly regarded as someone that "[had] given a new voice and new visibility to the agency charged with spearheading the nation's battle against drugs." Maybe the reason why this article praised Stutman was because he "emphasizes public speaking and giving time to the news media, unlike most Federal drug agents, who for decades have believed that their role of penetrating the dark netherworld of drug traffickers would be better served if they avoided the spotlight."<sup>234</sup> However, Stutman's "new" approach "of putting

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<sup>230</sup> "Second Trial in Murder to Begin in Louisiana," *New York Times*, Apr. 07, 1987. D. 30.

<sup>231</sup> Carmen Boullosa and Mike Wallace, *A Narco History: how the United States and Mexico jointly created the "Mexican drug war"* (New York: OR Books, 2016): 173.

<sup>232</sup> Doug Stokes, *America's Other War. Terrorizing Colombia* (New York: Zed Books, 2005), 31.

<sup>233</sup> Peter Kerr, "New Voice and Visibility for D.E.A. In New York," *New York Times*, Mar. 15, 1987. A. 5.

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*

pressure on those who use drugs as well as those who supply them,” loses heart at the end of the article when Stutman said, “a great deal of what we do now is complex conspiracy work dealing with people who do are not criminals, including bank executives, airline executives and others. It is important that they know who we are and that we are not some kind of secret C.I.A. organization for drugs.” What in the headline had been called “a crusade,” was rephrased later to it was important “that they know who we are.” This kind of yellow-journalism headlines “provides an emergency atmosphere within which institutions may be restructured and funds granted.”<sup>235</sup> And if there is one single year budget change that is remarkable during the 1980s, it is from \$394 million in 1986 to \$774 million in 1987.<sup>236</sup>

1987 was also a year in which the story of the Nicaraguan group, Contras, opened a new chapter that the *New York Times* titled “Iran-Contra Inquiries Find More Leads, More Mysteries.”<sup>237</sup> Wanda Palacio, an eyewitness, had “told Congressional investigators that she witnessed drugs being exchanged for guns intended for the Contras.” Southern Air, which planes had been in Colombia on a charter contract to carry drilling equipment, vehemently denied the allegation. In January of 1987, “newspapers reported that the Justice Department had recently suppressed a DEA investigation of Southern Air Transport for drug trafficking.”<sup>238</sup> This story indicated that “the Americans got involved in smuggling drugs to supply the Nicaraguan

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<sup>235</sup> Richard Davenport-Hines, *The Pursuit of Oblivion: A Global History of Narcotics* (New York: Norton, 2002), 436.

<sup>236</sup> “Staffing and Budget,” Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA). Accessed October 20, 2018. <https://www.dea.gov/staffing-and-budget>

<sup>237</sup> Stephen Engelberg, “Iran-contra Inquiries Find More Leads, More Mysteries,” *New York Times*, Aug. 23, 1987. A. 5.

<sup>238</sup> Peter Dale Scott. *Drugs, Oil, and War: The United States in Afghanistan, Colombia, and Indochina* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 89.

Contras. That’s right, drug smuggling, organized by the CIA to support the Contras.”<sup>239</sup> This would be an example in which the DEA and CIA worked at cross-purposes.

In 1988, the *New York Times* published a comparative chart of the major drug-producing countries that had diplomatic relations with the United States.

<b>Marijuana</b>	<b>1986</b>	<b>1987</b>
Mexico	4,000—6,000	5,970—7,130
Colombia	2,500—3,630	3,435—7,760
Jamaica	1,450—2,025	325—535
Belize	550	200

<b>Coca Leaf</b>	<b>1986</b>	<b>1987</b>
Bolivia	44,000—52,920	46,000—67,000
Colombia	12,000—13,600	18,000—23,000
Peru	95,000—120,000	98,000—121,000
Ecuador	1,000	Up to 400

Based on this chart, Colombia was the third largest producer, however, the tendency had been to describe it as the major producer, usually the supplier of 80 percent of the drug that came to the United States.<sup>240</sup> That same year, two months before, a different article said Colombia, and more specifically, the Medellin Cartel, provided “as much as 80 percent of the cocaine consumed

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<sup>239</sup> “Drug Smuggling and The Contras,” Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). Accessed October 20, 2018. [https:// www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/document/cia—rdp90—00965r000707110001—8](https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/document/cia—rdp90—00965r000707110001—8)

<sup>240</sup> “The Sources of Drugs,” *New York Times*, Mar. 02, 1988. A. 6.

in the United States.”<sup>241</sup> No article explained or explored these discrepancies, moreover, no article explored how this data was gathered.

Another topic that was contradicted in the *New York Times* articles this year was the Cuban government’s involvement in drug trafficking. Jack Hook, a spokesman from the Drug Enforcement Administration, said that the 3,800 pounds of cocaine smuggled by 17 Colombians into Florida, did not necessarily mean “the Cuban Government has an official policy of assisting drug traffickers.”<sup>242</sup> However, a front-page article revealed a contrary message, “Federal prosecutors suggested a connection between Fidel Castro, the Cuban leader, and drug operations run by General Noriega and the so-called Medellin cartel, a Colombian cocaine ring that is said to be responsible for more than half of the cocaine smuggled into the United States.”<sup>243</sup> The association between drugs and communism continued, even though its relationship was becoming blurrier over time, and again, no article explained or explored these discrepancies.

One of the longest articles (1,010 words) found in 1988, was not about Colombian drugs but its flowers, and economic sanctions to Colombia.<sup>244</sup> Colombia’s flower industry had annual earnings of \$170 million industry, and it “stands as one of the success stories in this country’s effort to diversify its exports away from its dependence on coffee.” This industry, composed approximately by 285 companies, had started from scratch 20 years ago, and had “turned Colombia into the dominant foreign supplier of flowers to the United States and the world’s second-largest exporter of flowers after the Netherlands.” The problem, however, was that

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<sup>241</sup> Alan, Riding. “In Colombia, Drug Money Talks at The Highest Levels,” *New York Times*, Jan. 17, 1988.

A. 3.

<sup>242</sup> “Drug Smugglers Used Cuban Base for US Shipment, Jury Charges,” *New York Times*, Feb. 27, 1988. 1. 6.

<sup>243</sup> Philip Shenon, “Noriega Indicted by US for Links to Illegal Drugs,” *New York Times*, Feb. 06, 1988. 1.

<sup>244</sup> Alan Riding, “Colombia's Diversification into Flowers Pays Off,” *New York Times*, Jan. 11, 1988. D. 10.

Colombian flowers arriving in Miami were “subjected to lengthy delays in customs inspections in reprisal for Colombia’s release from jail in late December of Jorge Luis Ochoa Vasquez, a powerful cocaine trafficker.”<sup>245</sup> A prior economical reprisal had imposed in 1987. In this article there was an idea of punishment that was being reinforced by authorities, such as Phillip McLean, the United States charge d’affaires, who “said that the action was taken as a response to those who considered Ochoa’s release a victory.” The release in 1987 of Jorge Luis Ochoa, who had assumed Lehder’s old role as “king of cocaine transportation”, brought “angry protests from the Reagan Administration, which ordered tighter controls over passengers and products arriving from Colombia as a reprisal measure.”<sup>246</sup>

At the same time, a so-called war of the Colombian cartels had started in January after a car bomb exploded outside the Monaco building, a fancy eight-story apartment house owned by Pablo Escobar in Medellín. “The Monaco explosion was the showcase event in the so-called War of the Cartels, a 1988 struggle for cocaine markets, power, and hegemony between Pablo Escobar and the Cali cartel led by Gilberto Rodriguez Orejuela and Jose Santacruz Londoño.” Originally, Escobar blamed the DEA for the bombing, “then decided that the Cali group was trying a power play to eliminate him and take over his networks.”<sup>247</sup> The Medellín and Cali cartel, named for the Colombian cities in which they are based, began informing the police about each other’s shipments. To some extent, this turbulent period seems to have helped US

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<sup>245</sup> Alan Riding, "Colombia's Diversification into Flowers Pays Off," *New York Times*, Jan. 11, 1988. D. 10.

<sup>246</sup> Guy Gugliotta, and Jeff Leen, *Kings of Cocaine: Inside the Medellín Cartel, an Astonishing True Story of Murder, Money, and International Corruption* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989), 83. “Cocaine Trial is Interrupted, with no Explanation Given,” *New York Times*, Mar. 24, 1988. A. 24. More briefs about Lehder’s trial appeared months later, “Prosecutors Rest their Case in Colombian's Cocaine Trial,” *New York Times*, Apr. 30, 1988. 1. 7. “News Summary,” *New York Times*, May 20, 1988. A. 2. “Cocaine Smuggler Sentenced to Life,” *New York Times*, July 21, 1988. A. 14.

<sup>247</sup> Guy Gugliotta, and Jeff Leen, *Kings of Cocaine: Inside the Medellín Cartel, an Astonishing True Story of Murder, Money, and International Corruption* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989), 336.

authorities, even though Colombia was entering one of its bloodiest times. For example, New York's police "seized more than two tons of cocaine and \$2 million in cash at the Queens home of Hernando Grajales Rizo, who was described as the New York representative of the Cali cartel." The arrest led to a speculation in which the police was "working with information from the Medellin cartel." Robert M. Stutman, special agent in charge of the Drug Enforcement Administration in the state, totally denied that idea since it could have bombarded DEA's competitiveness; however, the antepenultimate paragraph said "The cocaine, which was reportedly owned by the Cali cartel, was discovered with the help of an anonymous letter sent from Colombia to the American authorities."<sup>248</sup>

Remarkably this article described, for the first time in the articles selected for the sample, a more detailed and complex Colombian drug situation. For example, it showed that there were two cartels, in different cities, with different members and different ways of operating. It said:

The Medellin cartel has been held responsible for the killings of an attorney general, a justice minister, several Supreme Court justices and several prominent journalists in Colombia as part of its campaign of intimidation directed at forestalling the application of an extradition treaty between Colombia and the United States. In contrast, the Cali cartel, which is apparently led by Gilberto Rodriguez Orejuela and Jose Santacruz Londono, developed the cocaine and crack markets in New York but has maintained a lower profile in Colombia and has concentrated on legitimate businesses.<sup>249</sup>

Even more surprising, this article includes, for the first time in the articles selected for the sample, the voice of an expert—even though the article does not name it—the war between. The expert said that cartels has not influenced "the wholesale price of cocaine here or on the

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<sup>248</sup> Alan Riding, "Gangs in Colombia Feud Over Cocaine," *New York Times*, Aug. 23, 1988. A. 1.

<sup>249</sup> *Ibid.*

street price in New York,” and that this was “a reflection of the continuing availability of the drug despite efforts by the police to choke off supplies.”<sup>250</sup>

The Op-ed article “We Are Losing the War on Drugs,” by Robert M. Morgenthau, district attorney of Manhattan, at first glance seemed a critical analysis but, in the end, it was just another article asking for less drugs coming into the country. Morgenthau said “curtailing the influx of illicit drugs must become a priority item on our foreign policy agenda. We must recognize that Mexican ‘black tar’ and Colombian ‘white powder’ pose as grave a threat to our nation's wellbeing as Nicaraguan or Cuban ‘Reds.’” Morgenthau rationale was based on the single argument: sanctions against drug producing countries. “Each year that the Federal Government fails to act, the problem grows more intractable. Colombian traffickers last year grossed more than \$4.5 billion from cocaine. By comparison, our foreign aid payments to Colombia were a paltry \$11.5 million.” His job at the local law enforcement was not criticized, obviously, because he was “putting more drug dealers in jail for longer terms than ever before,” so “the failure of the war on drugs cannot be blamed on local law enforcement.”<sup>251</sup> For him, all the problems were reduced to a foreign policy issue, nothing new as it has been shown in the different chapters covered so far. Later that year, another Op-ed would replicate the model of the first one assuring that “with ample resources and a strategy of eradication and interdiction, the cocaine industry of Latin America could be brought to its knees. We are losing the war on drugs largely because our Government has not taken the initiative to provide the ammunition or a battle plan for victory.”<sup>252</sup> Elizabeth Holtzman was the District Attorney in Brooklyn, and her arguments focused as well on developing a strategic plan for each drug producing country,

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<sup>250</sup> Alan Riding, "Gangs in Colombia Feud Over Cocaine," *New York Times*, Aug. 23, 1988. A. 1.

<sup>251</sup> Robert M. Morgenthau, “We are Losing the War on Drugs,” *New York Times*, Feb. 16, 1988. A 21.

<sup>252</sup> Elizabeth Holtzman and Stephen J. Solarz, “Going Straight to the Source in the Drug War,” *New York Times*, Aug. 12, 1988. A. 27.

“whatever the costs to the United States, however, they will be minimal compared to the untold millions now spent trying to cope with the deadly consequences of cocaine.”<sup>253</sup> One more time, the solution was cutting the production, not the demand, a strategy they called going straight to the source in the drug war. Again, there was nothing new on it.

Curiously, the longest article in 1988 (3511 words) praised Reagan’s efforts to the point of making it look like a direct PR response. For example, the lines said, “No President has spoken out more against drugs than President Reagan. No Administration has signed more anti-drug treaties or spent more money to stem the flow of drugs into this country.” From now, it seemed like propaganda from the administration and at the same time, as an excuse in which the administration had done its job, but it had faced “the inability of successive administrations to deal with it effectively,” so “legislators and local officials have begun demanding that the United States take more effective action against countries that tolerate or ignore the drug industry.” The annual certification process to qualify countries’ drug efforts, as part of the 1986 anti-drug law, was presented as “a largely ineffective exercise in cracking down on the drug trade.” This year, Colombia, an ally, passed the certification test, however, there was a push because “Reagan has never used the law to penalize an American ally.”<sup>254</sup>

Just a month later, surprisingly, another front page gave voice to the other side, the drugs legalization debate. “The Mayors of Washington, Baltimore and Minneapolis and several Congressmen have declared in the past three weeks that the nation's prohibition against drugs may have failed. They have called on the Federal Government to consider repealing laws against

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<sup>253</sup> Elizabeth Holtzman and Stephen J. Solarz, “Going Straight to the Source in the Drug War,” *New York Times*, Aug. 12, 1988. A. 27.

<sup>254</sup> Elaine Sciolino and Stephen Engelberg, “Fighting Narcotics: US is Urged to Shift Tactics,” *New York Times*, Apr. 10, 1988. A. 1.

cocaine, heroin, marijuana and other drugs.”<sup>255</sup> The publication of this article might be associated with an agenda-setting effect from other media that were approaching this problem from a different perspective. “Arguments for legalization have appeared in recent issues of highly respected publications, including *Foreign Policy*, *The Economist* and *The Lancet*, a British medical journal.” Peter Reuter, an economist who studies illegal drug markets with the Rand Corporation in Washington, suggested that “If drugs were legal, the argument goes, drug black markets worth tens of billions of dollars would evaporate, the empires of drug gangsters would collapse, addicts would stop committing street crimes to support their habit, and the police, courts and prisons would no longer be overwhelmed by a problem they cannot hope to defeat.” At the same time, this article used a historical perspective, a very unusual route in the articles analyzed so far, “scholars say that reports from the turn of the century, when cocaine and heroin were legal in the United States; studies of alcohol Prohibition from 1920 to 1933, and the arrival of cheap, plentiful cocaine in the early 1980's suggest legalization would lead to large and possibly staggering medical consequences.”<sup>256</sup> Suddenly, the prohibition era was brought up to the arena and the debate over drug consumption was reframed as a health concern rather than a criminal justice problem. “Legalization would save the Federal, state and local governments more than \$8 billion a year from the costs for the police, courts and prisons, [Ethan] Nadelmann said [an assistant professor at the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs at Princeton University],” and the Federal Government “could reap billions in tax revenue that could be applied to drug rehabilitation and education programs.” From an economics perspective, a study conducted by the Research Triangle Institute in North Carolina, now RTI

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<sup>255</sup> Peter Kerr, "The Unspeakable is Debated: Should Drugs be Legalized?" *New York Times*, May 15, 1988. A. 1.

<sup>256</sup> *Ibid.*

International, “estimated that in 1983 drug abuse cost the nation \$60 billion. Of that cost, \$24 billion was from drug-related crimes: the police, courts, jails and the toll taken on victims. More than \$33 billion was the cost of lost productivity to society and injuries suffered by heavy drug users themselves.”<sup>257</sup>

In this way, the Reagan administration ends, but part of his domestic and international policies would serve as a legacy to the George H. Bush administration. George H. Bush would inherit most of Reagan’s war on drugs, but one of Bush’s bastions would be the international fight, and more specifically, the Andean drug producers.

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<sup>257</sup> Ibid.

## 7. GEORGE H.W. BUSH YEARS, 1989 – 1993

It was not a coincidence that the first major speech delivered by President Bush centered on illicit drugs. “The gravest threat facing our Nation today,” as he called it on September 5, 1989, was the threat of illegal substances. At that time, “every major public opinion poll showed that by a wide margin Americans regarded the drug epidemic as the Nation’s most serious problem. One pollster even marveled that a domestic issue —fear of drugs— had replaced fear of war as the greatest concern of Americans.”<sup>258</sup> The Bush administration inherited the belief that the cocaine industry consisted solely of cartels operating within producing countries. Therefore, the international strategy to fight this problem was focused principally on the Andean Ridge, located in Colombia, Peru, and Bolivia.<sup>259</sup> Drugs were a domestic issue with a nonnative solution, therefore “Bush’s definition of insiders and outsiders [affected] his view of domestic problems, particularly the drug issue.”<sup>260</sup> This “language of war has once again served in part as a way of fantasizing the true nation: projecting certain features of social life —street crime and drug abuse— as existentially external: not a consequence even in part of the character or organization of the body politic itself.”<sup>261</sup> If something in the war on drugs had been successful to this point, it would be “in diverting public attention away from fundamental social problems

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<sup>258</sup> National Drug Control Strategy, *Progress in the War on Drugs 1989-1992* (Washington, 1993), 1.

<sup>259</sup> Eugene Bouley, “The Drug War in Latin America. Ten years in a Quagmire,” in *Drug War, American Style: The Internationalization of Failed Policy and its Alternatives*, ed. Jurg Gerber and Eric Jensen (New York: Garland Publishing, 2001), 170.

<sup>260</sup> Kerry Mullins and Aaron Wildavsky, “The Procedural Presidency of George Bush,” *Political Science Quarterly* 107, No. 1 (1992): 37.

<sup>261</sup> Jeremy Elkins, “The Model of War,” *Political Theory* 38, No. 2 (2010): 224.

that [had plagued] society. The Reagan and the Bush administrations convinced a substantial proportion of North Americans that the dangers emanating from the use of cocaine, marijuana, crack, and heroin constituted one of the greatest threats not only to their health, but also to their existence as a society.”<sup>262</sup> The public’s perception of the dangers associated with the use of drugs was being well manipulated.

William Bennett was the nation’s so-called ‘Drug Czar’ under the George H. Bush, and just after the “Bush administration blitz surrounding the release of William Bennett’s first drug plan in 1989, for example, the public concern about drugs increased phenomenally.” Additionally, “at the height of the media blitz, drugs were named the most important issue facing the society by 43% of those polled. Six months later, however, the intensity of concern had again declined.”<sup>263</sup> The war against drugs served multiple purposes: “Politicians routinely cultivate drug menaces as classic sociological ‘moral panics’ to divert attention from root causes in urban social distress.”<sup>264</sup> Some of the changes emphasized by the Bush administration were “more stringent law-enforcement measures, such as the death penalty for major drug traffickers, international banking and money-laundering restrictions, and regulation of the export of chemicals used in the manufacture of controlled substances.”<sup>265</sup>

Considering federal, state and local governments’ budgets, the Bush administration spent approximately \$100 million during his war on drugs. In the 1980s alone, “a decade supposedly

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<sup>262</sup> Christina Johns, "The War on Drugs: Why the Administration Continues to Pursue a Policy of Criminalization and Enforcement," *Social Justice* Vol. 18, No. 4 (1991): 147.

<sup>263</sup> *Ibid*, 148.

<sup>264</sup> Paul Gootenberg, “Talking about the Flow: Drugs, Borders, and the Discourse of Drug Control,” *Cultural Critique* No. 71, (2009): 27.

<sup>265</sup> *Ibid*, 154.

devoted to shrinking the federal government, the federal drug-fighting budget grew nine-fold to almost \$13 billion a year, or about twice that of the Environmental Protection Agency.”<sup>266</sup>

In terms of foreign policy, Bush built upon Reagan’s international campaign against drugs. More specifically, in 1989 the Bush administration promoted the Andean Initiative (AI), “which pledged \$2.2 billion in a five-year program in largely military and police support to [the] Colombia, Peru, and Bolivia region.”<sup>267</sup> This initiative was, to some extent, a response to increasing violence in Colombia, and called for greater involvement of Colombian military forces to the counter-narcotics effort. In this regard, the State Department maintained that the “Andean ‘cooperation’ is defined by the involvement of their armed forces and acceptance of US military aid.” Between 1988 and 1991, “US military aid to Colombia increased sevenfold, while funding for military drug interdiction missions nearly quadrupled between 1989 and 1993.”<sup>268</sup>

At the same time, during the Bush administration, a broader trade agreement was built with the United States and Colombia. In Colombia, the government began to use the term “economic opening” to describe a new era of open economic borders and neoliberalism. However, the Andean Initiative “did little to assist coca farmers whose production continued at the same levels during the first ten years of the act.”<sup>269</sup> The Andean Initiative was then reinvigorated with an economic plan: the Andean Trade Preference Act and the Enterprise for the Americas Initiative (EAI):

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<sup>266</sup> Dan Baum, "Tunnel Vision: The War on Drugs, 12 Years Later," *ABA Journal* 79, No. 3 (1993): 70. David E. Rosenbaum, "New Bush Budget Will Stick to Themes from Campaign," *New York Times*, Dec. 24, 1989. A. 18.

<sup>267</sup> William Avilés, *The Drug War in Latin America: Hegemony and Global Capitalism. Routledge Studies in US Foreign Policy* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 54.

<sup>268</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>269</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

What the EAI did represent was another important example, like certification, of drug policy being linked/integrated into the larger and more central agenda of greater economic integration and trade liberalization. Importantly, coordination between US agencies and Latin American governments was given greater emphasis under these Bush plans initiating a trend in which different US administrations would seek consensus and cooperation over unilateral imposition of drug war objectives. The desire to seek consensus was also reflected in the tendency to shift away from the hard power/unilateral measures prominent in US foreign policy during the Cold War and one increasingly focused on seeking consensual forms of social control.<sup>270</sup>

These economic policies were subtly added to foreign policies and drug policies, and they all fit perfectly into a scenario in which drugs were severely condemned in the United States. Moreover, 1989 was a crucial year in terms of drug-related news coverage. The 71-article sample for 1989 corresponds with the same number of articles analyzed in the entire 1970s. In 1989, there were nine front-page articles, the largest number in a single year in the sample. One of the reasons why drug related news skyrocketed that year might be the escalation in the Colombian conflict. In one single year, 15 judicial officers were killed; two presidential candidates, Luis Carlos Galán and Bernardo Jaramillo Ossa, were killed; the headquarters of two national newspapers, a commercial airplane in mid-air, and the Administrative Department of Security building were all bombed; and several pro-extradition judges, left wing politicians, and state governors were killed as well. Academics, journalists, and the Colombian government have recognized 1989 as one of the bloodiest years in Colombian history.<sup>271</sup>

In the middle of this bloodbath, a *New York Times* article reported that Fabio Ochoa Restrepo, a drug king who had been listed among the richest men in the world along with Pablo

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<sup>270</sup> William Avilés, *The Drug War in Latin America: Hegemony and Global Capitalism. Routledge Studies in US Foreign Policy* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 57

<sup>271</sup> See “1989: año para tener en la memoria,” *El Espectador*, Jan 14, 2014. “1989, el año negro que está en la impunidad,” *El Tiempo*, Nov 21, 2009. “Mourning Latest Victim Colombia Will Seek to Extradite Drug Figures.” *New York Times*, Aug. 20, 1989. A. 14. “Bogota Magistrate is Slain; Ruled Against 2 Drug Chiefs,” *New York Times*, Aug. 18, 1989. A. 14.

Escobar, had written a letter to President Virgilio Barco Vargas saying “no more drug trafficking, no more war, no more assassinations, no more bombs, no more arson,” so “let’s sit down and talk.”<sup>272</sup> The Colombian government, however, did not want to negotiate, and in a single weekend the government seized: “678 firearms, 3,303 rounds of ammunition, 1,161 cars and trucks, 4 tons of coca paste, 242 pounds of cocaine, 62 airplanes, 18 helicopters, 141 homes, offices and ranches, 30 yachts, 13 motorcycles, 42 two-way radios and 5,222 farm animals and pets.”<sup>273</sup> In Santa Marta, a Caribbean coastal city in Colombia, “the police invaded a local yacht club, impounding a small flotilla of leisure boats, largely christened with women’s names: Alexandra, Ana Cristina, Cecilia, Karina, Natalia and Sarah.”<sup>274</sup> In Medellín, Colombia’s most violent city and one of the battlegrounds of the cartel’s war, mayor Juan Gomez Martinez advocated for discussion between the cartels and the government. Escobar and Rodriguez Gacha offered to invest their personal fortunes—each “believed to be worth over \$1 billion—in Colombian industry in return for ‘reintegration in Colombian society,’” but the government did not accept it.<sup>275</sup> The upcoming weeks were a hell of bombings and shootings in hotels, supermarkets, banks, police stations, movie theaters, post offices, and schools: “in the last six

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<sup>272</sup> *Forbes Magazine*, July 25, 1988. James Brooke, “2 Cocaine Figures in Colombia Seek A Deal on Amnesty,” *New York Times*, Aug. 30, 1989. A. 1.

<sup>273</sup> James Brooke, “Bogota Says it Plans to Extradite Major Drug Financier to the US,” *New York Times*, Aug. 23, 1989. A. 1.

<sup>274</sup> James Brooke, “Bogota’s Hottest Tour: Pleasure Domes of the Cartels,” *New York Times*, Aug. 30, 1989. A. 10.

<sup>275</sup> James Brooke, “In the Drug War, Medellin is a Reluctant Fighter,” *New York Times*, Sept. 25, 1989. A. 8.

weeks, nearly 130 bombs have exploded in the country, killing 10 people and wounding 146.”<sup>276</sup>  
Due to the fear, many people were saying “the Government should stop the war.”<sup>277</sup>

The circumstances worsened when an economist, indicted for money-laundering, was extradited to the United States by the DEA, and the cartels counter-attacked by threatening “to kill 10 judges for every person extradited.”<sup>278</sup> After cartel’s paid assassins killed 50 judges and 170 judicial employees, judges and court workers went on strike “demanding greater protection against a surge of violence related to the drug trade.”<sup>279</sup> Even the justice minister, Monica de Greiff, resigned after she “received numerous threats against her life.”<sup>280</sup> To aggravate this situation, coffee prices were plunging. President Virgilio Barco Vargas said coffee’s income helped to fight cocaine, and Enrique Santos Calderón, a journalist for *El Tiempo*, said that certainly this was “a military war, but first and foremost it [was] an economic one.” For him, Colombia would “receive more than \$100 million in new anti-drug assistance. But it will lose \$500 million each year because of the United States-inspired dissolution of an international coffee agreement.”<sup>281</sup> President Barco had given indications of a full commitment to prosecuting the war against trafficking rings, so when he traveled to Washington on September 28, 1989, he

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<sup>276</sup> Joseph B. Treaster, "Colombians, Weary of the Strain, are Losing Heart in the Drug War," *New York Times*, Oct. 02, 1989. A. 1. See also Joseph B. Treaster, "In Bogota, Fear Invades the Streets, the Nights, the Dreams," *New York Times*, Sept. 12, 1989. B. 9; Joseph B. Treaster, "Colombian 'Day of Love' Broken by a Long Night of Drug Violence," *New York Times*, Sept. 17, 1989. A.1; David E. Pitt, "Bogota Reporters Reveal Fears at Frontline of the Drug War," *New York Times*, Nov. 02, 1989. B. 16; and, James Brooke, "For the Children, Colombia, is a very Scary Place to be," *New York Times*, Sept. 26, 1989. A. 14.

<sup>277</sup> Joseph B. Treaster, "Colombians, Weary of the Strain, are Losing Heart in the Drug War," *New York Times*, Oct. 02, 1989. A. 1.

<sup>278</sup> Joseph B. Treaster, "Colombia Deports Drug Trade Figure; Reward for 2 Suspects," *New York Times*, Sept. 07, 1989. B.15.

<sup>279</sup> Joseph B Treaster, "Colombia Judges and their Aides Go on Strike to Demand Protection," *New York Times*, Nov. 04, 1989. 1. 4.

<sup>280</sup> James Brooke, "Bogota Justice Chief is Reported to Resign Amid Death Threats," *New York Times*, Sept. 22, 1989. A. 1. "Colombia Justice Aide Backs Drug Extradition," *New York Times*, Oct. 07, 1989. 1. 4.

<sup>281</sup> Joseph B Treaster, "Coffee Impasse Imperils Colombia's Drug Fight," *New York Times*, Sept. 24, 1989. A. 20. Enrique Santos Calderon, "A Voice from Bogota; War on Drugs, for Real, with Casualties," *New York Times*, Oct. 01, 1989. A.3.

did not ask for assistance, but “he did ask for and receive a pledge from Bush to help restore the International Coffee Agreement, whose collapse in July—in part because of US objections—threatened the vulnerable Colombian economy with a loss of some \$400 to \$500 million annually.”<sup>282</sup> One more time, the US government used economic sanctions to penalize Colombia.<sup>283</sup>

On top of the violence, Yair Klein, an Israeli mercenary, was training paramilitary groups in Colombia and he “had been involved in the assassinations of some labor union officers.”<sup>284</sup> For Americas Watch, an American human rights group, “Colombian cocaine dealers financed, trained and directed paramilitary death squads that committed most of Colombia’s political killings and massacres in 1987 and 1988.”<sup>285</sup> In 1988, around 4,000 Colombians died in political violence; of this number, 800 Colombians died in direct combat between guerrillas and soldiers, and the rest were killed by drug-financed death squads. Instead of attacking the armed guerillas, the paramilitary death squads “attacked unionists and left-wing politicians allied with the guerrillas.”<sup>286</sup> As the violence had grown, the press was attacked as well. In May, a bomb exploded inside the office of one newspaper, *El Espectador*. The *New York Times* reported that Colombia was “among the most dangerous countries in the world for a journalist.” The Committee to Protect Journalists, “which records only the most rigorously documented cases,”

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<sup>282</sup> Bruce Michael Bagley. “Dateline Drug Wars: Colombia: The Wrong Strategy.” *Foreign Policy*, no. 77 (1989-1990): 159.

<sup>283</sup> “Hometown Mourns Colombian Drug Dealer,” *New York Times*, Dec. 19, 1989. A. 12. Joseph B Treaster, “Drug Trafficker’s Death Cheers Many Colombians,” *New York Times*, Dec. 17, 1989. A. 43.

<sup>284</sup> Joel Brinkley, “Israeli Reservist Denies Links to Drug Dealers,” *New York Times*, Sept. 01, 1989. A. 6. “Israeli Tied to Suspect Colonel is Discovered Slain in Miami,” *New York Times*, Jan. 26, 1990. A. 13. Later his involvement training paramilitary groups would be proved. Jeff Gerth, “Report Says Mercenaries Aided Colombian Cartels,” *New York Times*, Feb. 28, 1991.

<sup>285</sup> James Brooke, “Drugs and Terror Linked in Colombia,” *New York Times*, Apr. 06, 1989. A. 7.

<sup>286</sup> James Brooke, “Drugs and Terror Linked in Colombia,” *New York Times*, Apr. 06, 1989. A. 7.

said that “in the last five years at least 19 Colombian journalists have been slain as a result of their work.”<sup>287</sup>

Internationally, the cartels’ power and influence had reached Europe and were well established in Spain, where drugs could be spread to other European countries. “Europe is where the United States was 8 or 10 years ago in terms of cocaine,” said Miguel Solans Soterias, head of Spain's National Drug Program. ‘It’s still the drug of yuppies, of successful artists and sportsmen. The worst lies ahead.’” The *New York Times* wrote that “alarm bells started to ring first in Spain not only because seizures of cocaine began to rise sharply here, but because it became clear that traffickers linked to Colombia's powerful Medellin and Cali cartels had chosen this country to be the strategic beachhead of their European offensive.”<sup>288</sup> The story of the early indicators of the drug trade such as lawyers eager to defend arrested traffickers, banks eager to deposit the narco-dollar, and an influx of money going to real estate investment, began in the southeastern Spain. Moreover, in Italy, “Colombian operators have joined forces with the Naples-based organized crime group known as the Camorra to distribute cocaine. But in other countries, they said, Colombians —the Medellin cartel is said to be better placed in the region than the Cali cartel— control all stages except the final retailing of cocaine to consumers.”<sup>289</sup>

The demand and production of drugs expanded rapidly. In the Peruvian Amazon, “driven by American and European demand for cocaine, Peruvian coca growers have chopped down large stretches of Amazon rainforest and are dumping millions of gallons of toxic chemicals into its highlands and headwaters.” Coca plantations had been “growing sevenfold here in the last 15

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<sup>287</sup> Mark A. Uhlig, "As Colombian Terror Grows, the Press Becomes the Prey," *New York Times*, May 24, 1989. A. 1.

<sup>288</sup> Alan Riding, "Colombian Cocaine Dealers Tap European Market," *New York Times*, Apr. 29, 1989. 1. 1.

<sup>289</sup> *Ibid.*

years to meet an increasing demand for cocaine in the United States and Europe,” becoming the “largest crop under cultivation in the Peruvian Amazon.”<sup>290</sup> In one of Colombia's richest coca-producing regions, Cauca, people such as Jesus Antonio Daza Ortiz, a 23-year-old farmer, “started working night and day, pulling up everything to plant coca -coffee, sugar cane, bananas, everything,”<sup>291</sup> He could process up to a ton of coca leaves a week and earned around \$8,000 a week from drug traffickers. “The money, a fortune beyond imagining just a few years before, brought a burst of wild spending. ‘During the bonanza,’ Mr. Gomez said, using the popular term for the cocaine boom, ‘we would drink only champagne and cognac. Before that, we didn’t even know what champagne and cognac were.’”<sup>292</sup>

One after another, these news bombarded the United States raising many questions, including, as in one editorial, “if the Colombians are so willing to act against the drug traffickers, why isn’t Washington willing to give more help?”<sup>293</sup> The editorial, published on August 23, 1989, asked “Why hasn’t the US acted to provide even the modest help needed to equip the Colombian police? There is speculation that President Bush might propose some such aid in the speech that William Bennett, the drug czar, has been preparing for him to deliver on Sept. 5. But why wait even that long?” Four days later, the newspaper reported that President Bush would send “\$65 million in aid to the Colombian government. The aid package includes helicopters, airplanes, weapons, ammunition and other equipment, along with technical advisers.”<sup>294</sup> For a while, William J. Bennett, the director of national drug control policy, considered a military

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<sup>290</sup> James Brooke, "Peruvian Farmers Razing Rain Forest to Sow Drug Crops," *New York Times*, Aug. 13, 1989. A. 1.

<sup>291</sup> James Brooke, "Peruvian Farmers Razing Rain Forest to Sow Drug Crops," *New York Times*, Aug. 13, 1989. A. 1.

<sup>292</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>293</sup> "Help Colombia Fight Back, Now," *New York Times*, Aug. 23, 1989. A. 20.

<sup>294</sup> Bernard E. Trainor, "Military Assumes Wider Role in Anti-Drug Effort," *New York Times*, Aug. 27, 1989. A. 24.

intervention in Colombia even though “several Bush Administration officials have made conflicting statements recently about the possible deployment of the military.”<sup>295</sup> European countries also offered aid packages: Britain offered “radios and training for executive protection,” Argentina offered “three light military planes,” West Germany, “offered training for protecting judges and courtrooms.”<sup>296</sup> The problem with the US “aid package was its overall emphasis on conventional military equipment that strongly suggested, despite denials, that the Bush administration favored militarization of the drug war in Colombia —evidence of military complicity in the drug trade and the trafficker-funded paramilitary groups notwithstanding.”<sup>297</sup> In regards to this aid package, American and Colombian officials stated that most of the equipment in a \$65 million emergency package was “unlikely to have a major effect against the traffickers.”<sup>298</sup> 85 percent of the \$65 million aid would be used on eight “A-37 subsonic jets, 7 helicopters, 20 jeeps, 3 ambulances, some field medical kits, radios, machine guns and a pair of C-130’s, along with crates of spare parts for the big planes” that were more useful for the army and air force than the police, even though they had “requested hundreds of items in nearly 40 categories of surveillance and tracking devices as well as bomb detectors and equipment for tracing phone calls and scrambling police telephone calls to prevent interception by traffickers.”<sup>299</sup>

One of the few articles criticizing Bush’s drug plan was an op-ed stating that the “new strategy would continue to concentrate primarily on law enforcement, despite overwhelming

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<sup>295</sup> Richard L. Berke, "Bennett Calls Use of Army Possible," *New York Times*, Sept. 09, 1989. 1. 7.

<sup>296</sup> James Brooke, "Europe to Join Colombia's Drug Fight," *New York Times*, Sept. 15, 1989. D. 17.

<sup>297</sup> Bruce Michael Bagley, "Dateline Drug Wars: Colombia: The Wrong Strategy," *Foreign Policy*, no. 77 (1990): 165.

<sup>298</sup> Joseph B. Treaster, "US Sending Wrong Equipment to Fight Drugs, Colombians Say," *New York Times*, Sept. 12, 1989. A. 1.

<sup>299</sup> Bernard E. Trainor, "A Hard War for Colombia; Anti-Drug Units Face Formidable Obstacles," *New York Times*, Oct. 22, 1989. A. 13.

evidence accumulated during the past eight years of the minimal impact of law enforcement on drug abuse and drug trafficking.”<sup>300</sup> Joseph Califano, a former secretary of Health, Education and Welfare, wrote another op-ed criticizing US drug focus

Washington is embarking on another drug-of-the-month war, the third since 1986. Like its predecessors, our nation’s latest war is destined to be another fool’s errand because of its narrow focus on illegal drugs and its failure to confront society’s pervasive problem of addiction. Even the bellicose political rhetoric is misleading, for drugs come to America not by invasion, but by invitation.<sup>301</sup>

Califano, also wrote that “America’s problem was addiction, not limited illegal drugs, and he rephrased Nixon saying ‘addiction is Public Health Enemy No. 1.’” Even the New York’s police department commander Francis C. Hall, with 36 years of experience on the force, said that in a hypothetical scenario the problem would remain here: “Let’s imagine for a minute that we could stop all drugs coming into the United States —all heroin, all cocaine. Synthetic drugs would take over within two months. So we really have to stop and say, ‘Holy cow, is the problem really in Colombia?’ Well, no, the problem is here.”<sup>302</sup> The Defense Department did not see the issue in this way, so they reserved “\$470 million” for the military.<sup>303</sup> Moreover, William J. Bennett, the director of national drug control policy under Bush, had plan that simply called “for a huge increase in Federal prison capacity and, among other things, designates five urban areas for new anti-drug spending.”<sup>304</sup>

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<sup>300</sup> Mathea Falco, "The Bush Drug Plan: Nothing New," *New York Times*, Sept. 05, 1989. A. 19.

<sup>301</sup> Joseph A. Califano, "Drug War: Fool’s Errand no. 3," *New York Times*, Dec. 08, 1989. A. 39.

<sup>302</sup> David E. Pitt, "The Region - Q & A: New York’s Drug Commander; Report from the Field on an Endless War," *New York Times*, Mar. 12, 1989. A. 1.

<sup>303</sup> Bernard E. Trainor, "Military Assumes Wider Role in Anti-Drug Effort," *New York Times*, Aug. 27, 1989. A. 24.

<sup>304</sup> Julie Johnson, "Drug Gangs and Drug Wars Move into the Rural States, US Warns," *New York Times*, Aug. 04, 1989. A.1.

Meanwhile, the *New York Times* covered how corruption was playing an important role within the United States as “more and more allegations are surfacing of law-enforcement officers, both Federal and local, being corrupted. In a recent case, a veteran Border Patrol officer was arrested on drug trafficking charges and the authorities are investigating the possible involvement of other agents in the case.”<sup>305</sup> In a telling statement on the scope of the problem, this article stated that “no one knows the full volume of cocaine, marijuana and other drugs that are moved illegally across the [California] border.”<sup>306</sup>

Statistics published in 1989 pointed out an increase in drug seizures of nearly 15 times as that in 1986. At the same time, “Federal criminal cases in Arizona for drug-related violations increased 85 percent from 1987 to 1988. The Federal Reserve Bank’s current cash surplus in Los Angeles soared to \$3.8 billion from \$165 million in 1985, which law-enforcement authorities attribute largely to drug money being laundered in Los Angeles.”<sup>307</sup> In economic terms that year, American banks estimated that “as much as \$100 billion from selling cocaine in the United States is being sent from the country annually through the electronic transfer of money from American banks to accounts in foreign countries.”<sup>308</sup> Economists said “the cost of illicit drugs to American society has risen substantially in the last few years, to far more than \$60 billion annually,” and in addition to the panic that this amount created, medical experts compare the drug cost to the enormous economic effects of the nation's battle against cancer, which the American Cancer Society estimates at about \$70 billion annually.”<sup>309</sup> Just in one seizure, agents

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<sup>305</sup> Richard L. Berke, "Drug Rings Turn Border into a Vast Route to US," *New York Times*, Aug. 27, 1989. A. 1.

<sup>306</sup> Ibid

<sup>307</sup> Richard L. Berke, "Drug Rings Turn Border into a Vast Route to US," *New York Times*, Aug. 27, 1989. A. 1.

<sup>308</sup> Stephen Labaton, "Banking's Technology Helps Drug Dealers Export Cash," *New York Times*, Aug. 14, 1989. A. 1. Peter Applebome, "Glimpsing into World of Drug Money," *New York Times*, Sept. 10, 1989. A. 20.

<sup>309</sup> Stephen Labaton, "The Cost of Drug Abuse: \$60 Billion a Year," *New York Times*, Dec. 05, 1989. D. 1.

confiscated “\$45 million in bank accounts from the operation in New York City, Atlanta, Miami and San Francisco.”<sup>310</sup> Once again, using pompous phrases, this operation was “easily the largest operation to disguise the origins of drug money ever uncovered by Federal agents, Attorney General Dick Thornburgh said.”<sup>311</sup> This year was not exempt of grandiloquent phrases to frame drug seizures.

In January of 1990, in a new twist, two *New York Times* articles covering the summit on drugs between the United States and Bolivia, Colombia and Peru, presented the United States as “the greatest cocaine-consuming nation in the world,” and as “a huge consumer of illicit drugs,” a label that had not been used by the *New York Times* articles.<sup>312</sup> However, the main struggle was that “police forces alone cannot handle the powerful drug rings,” and some South American countries “expressed fear that using the military would expose their poorly paid armed forces to drug dealers’ bribes.”<sup>313</sup> In this way, the Bush administration wanted to emulate changes in the State and Defense Department at the beginning of his administration to incorporate the military into the war on drugs, but now in different countries. This political move was accompanied by economic changes as well, “Academic experts see the apparent contradictions of trying to help Colombia fight a drug war on the one hand and then penalizing it with trade actions on the other as the result of the fiercely competing tugs of domestic American interests.”<sup>314</sup> By then coffee prices had dropped by a third and the Federal import surcharge on Colombian flowers was in force. In the United States, the meeting was perceived as a shift, “with the United States

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<sup>310</sup> Michael Wines, "US Says it Broke Vast Drug Money Scheme," *New York Times*, Mar. 30, 1989. A. 22.

<sup>311</sup> Michael Wines, "US Says it Broke Vast Drug Money Scheme," *New York Times*, Mar. 30, 1989. A. 22.

<sup>312</sup> "The US and Panama; 3 Latin Lands Join US a Drug Pact," *New York Times*, Jan. 15, 1990. A. 10.  
Joseph B. Treaster, "Vast Security Setup Awaits Bush in Colombia," *New York Times*, Feb. 14, 1990. A. 6..

<sup>313</sup> Robert Pear, "The World; on Drugs, Bush Aims for a Meeting of the Minds, at Least," *New York Times*, Feb. 11, 1990. A. 3.

<sup>314</sup> Clyde H. Farnsworth, "Colombia Envoy Angry about US Trade Policy," *New York Times*, Jan. 24, 1990. A. 13.

acknowledging that it must be more aggressive in helping Andean countries economically, and those countries intensifying their law enforcement efforts against drug traffickers.”<sup>315</sup> But US officials said “that despite all this effort there has not been even a hint of a reduction in the flow of cocaine to the streets of the United States.”<sup>316</sup> For National Drug Control policy officials, “the Colombian Government has made much progress interrupting the operations of the cocaine ring based in Medellin, Colombia, it has overlooked the growth of the country's other major cocaine ring, operating out of Cali.”<sup>317</sup> One problem with this article was that it associated blocking narcotics and drug consumption as these two phenomena were intrinsically and strongly correlated.

In May 1990, Colombia elected Cesar Gaviria as a new president and in August his presidency began. Gaviria said reducing the US demand for cocaine, was the way to resolve the problem.<sup>318</sup> He also “decided not to extradite drug traffickers who surrender and confess,” and promised “to build high-security prisons and to provide protection and anonymity to judges and witnesses.”<sup>319</sup> As Colombians voted for president, they also voted for a new party made up of former M-19 guerrilla members.<sup>320</sup> These changes did not receive support from US administration officials and some members of Congress. One of the first drug lords who surrendered “in exchange for the Government’s promise not to extradite him to the United

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<sup>315</sup> Richard L. Berke, "Bush Gets some Praise for Andean Drug Talks," *New York Times*, Feb. 17, 1990. 1. 3.

<sup>316</sup> Treaster, Joseph B. "Drug Traffickers' Offer to Quit the Business is Dividing Colombians," *New York Times*, Feb. 09, 1990. A. 12.

<sup>317</sup> Clifford Krauss, "Anti-drug Effort Drags Outside US," *New York Times*, Nov. 25, 1990.

<sup>318</sup> James Brooke, "Man in the News: Cesar Gaviria Trujillo; Colombian on the Spot," *New York Times*, May 29, 1990. A. 10. "230,000 Troops Patrol Colombia on Election Eve," *New York Times*, May 27, 1990. A. 17. "Drug War at Stake in Colombia Vote," *New York Times*, May 26, 1990. 1. 3.

<sup>319</sup> "Bogota Says It Will Not Extradite Drug Traffickers Who Surrender," *New York Times*, Sept. 08, 1990. 1. 7. James Brooke, "Colombia Swears in President, a Foe of Traffickers," *New York Times*, Aug. 08, 1990. A. 3.

<sup>320</sup> James Brooke, "The World: High Risk; Colombia's Guerillas Break into Politics," *New York Times*, June 03, 1990. A. 5.

States” was Jorge Luis Ochoa, ranked second in the Medellín cartel after Pablo Escobar. Although United States officials received this news positively, they wanted longer time in jail for drug traffickers as opposed to the 30 years of prison proposed by the Colombian government. By May 1990, three more prominent drug traffickers surrendered. For a while, even Escobar considered “to accept a Government offer of leniency.”<sup>321</sup> On June of 1991, Escobar surrendered but protecting him was no small and easy endeavor since Escobar’s security in jail consisted of 40 guards and 150 soldiers. The problem with this initiative was that even from behind bars drug lords kept controlling their cartels.<sup>322</sup> Meanwhile, the Cali cartel kept working to become the nation's No. 1 drug organization. For Robert C. Bonner, head of the Drug Enforcement Administration, there was “no question that the Cali cartel [was] the predominant cocaine distribution organization in the world.”<sup>323</sup>

However, for some surprising reason, news on the US war on drugs dwindled in 1991. The bombastic seizure headlines disappeared, and the hyperbolic language to describe them faded. Based on *New York Times* coverage, the war on drugs, at least momentarily, focused on foreign countries. After the Bush Administration invaded Panama in 1989, the trial of Gen. Manuel Antonio Noriega became a center of interest.<sup>324</sup> In July of 1992, Noriega was sentenced “to 40 years in prison on eight counts of drug trafficking, money laundering and racketeering,”

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<sup>321</sup> Joseph B. Treaster, "Drug Baron in Colombia may Give Up," *New York Times*, June 04, 1991. A. 16.

<sup>322</sup> James Brooke, "Drug Baron's Prison has Every Comfort, Even Mom and TV," *New York Times*, June 22, 1991. 1. 1.

<sup>323</sup> James Brooke, "Cali, the 'Quiet' Drug Cartel, Profits by Accommodation," *New York Times*, July 14, 1991. A. 1. "Cali Earns a New Reputation: World's no. 1 Cocaine Seller," *New York Times*, May 15, 1991. A. 8.

<sup>324</sup> David Johnston, "Links to Noriega Bought Freedom for an Informer," *New York Times*, Mar. 03, 1991. A. 24. "Two in Noriega Case found Guilty of Plot in Shipping Cocaine," *New York Times*, Mar. 20, 1991. A. 26. Larry Rohter "Noriega's Lawyer Presses Ex-pilot," *New York Times*, Oct. 02, 1991. A. 20. Larry Rohter, "Witness in Noriega Trial Describes Cash Delivery," *New York Times*, Oct. 09, 1991. A. 23. Larry Rohter, "Noriega Defense Says He was Faithful US Ally in Drug War," *New York Times*, Feb. 04, 1992. A. 10. Shirley Christian, "Despite Distrust, most Panamanians seem Friendly to US," *New York Times*, June 12, 1992. A. 11. Larry Rohter, "Noriega Sentenced To 40 Years in Jail on Drug Charges," *New York Times*, July 11, 1992. 1. 1. Larry Rohter, "Noriega Sentenced To 40 Years in Jail on Drug Charges," *New York Times*, July 11, 1992. 1. 1.

and with Noriega's sentence, the CIA's image and, by extension, the Reagan's administration, was cleared because Noriega's drug involvement represented a bump in the drug war road and a pebble in Bush's shoe because he had defended Noriega as an ally during the Reagan administration. Noriega's sentence can be interpreted as a political act to exonerate and to whitewash this scandal.

Surprisingly, the *New York Times* dedicated an entire article to criticism of the war on drugs, and this article was the first article from the sample that did that.<sup>325</sup> Joseph Treaster's article described an uneasy feeling toward the war on drugs because 20 years had passed and "the United States has poured nearly \$70 billion into fighting drugs." In it, the drug use polls were questioned for the first time, and national surveys showed "middle-class cocaine use on the decline," a "22 percent" dropped since 1988. But Federal officials said "6.4 million Americans used it last year," and Marijuana use had "a similar decline from its 1979 peak" but was "now at roughly the same level among young adults—with about half having tried it—as it was 20 years ago, when war was declared." For the first time as well, budget spending was looked at carefully to conclude, for example, that "for most of the Reagan years, even as crack sent overdose deaths and crime rates soaring, only about 20 percent of the budget went to treatment and education." The Bush administration was questioned as well, saying Bush "will spend nearly \$12 billion on drugs, more than double what was spent in Mr. Reagan's last year in office. More than two-thirds of it is going to tactics that have consistently failed to cap the gushers of drugs: police training for South America, swarms of planes and boats, a picket of radar balloons and drug agents at the borders, more jails and battalions of police officers."<sup>326</sup>

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<sup>325</sup> Joseph B. Treaster, "Echoes of Prohibition; 20 Years of War on Drugs, and no Victory Yet," *New York Times*, June 14, 1992. A. 7.

<sup>326</sup> *Ibid.*

After all this basic questioning, the criticism did not last more than a month. The same journalist, Joseph Treaster, wrote an alarmist article a month later stating that the drug situation in New York was worse, and that Hospital treatment of heroin and cocaine cases was rising sharply. "In a midyear assessment, the New York State Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services reported that emergency-room treatment for adverse effects from heroin increased by more than half in the first nine months of 1991 over the previous year and that emergency treatment for cocaine was up almost a third."<sup>327</sup> The problem with this data was that it did not necessarily represent a trend in the city or the nation, yet it might have an effect that generalizes the country. Precisely, the most convenient fear-epidemic effect to fight drugs. This kind of news, combined with news about street shootings between gangs, deaths of people and journalists, and shootings at police stations, helped to consolidate the urgency to stop drugs and to trigger the thought, "Who's Safe?" as one headline suggested.<sup>328</sup> If this were not enough, heroin had become a major problem.<sup>329</sup>

A large portion of the attention was redirected to Colombia when "Escobar escaped from the resort-like Colombian prison in where he had been held for a year."<sup>330</sup> A storm of criticism came after this news and Escobar's picture appeared in the front page of the *New York Times*.<sup>331</sup> President Gaviria faced intense criticism nationally and internationally.<sup>332</sup> Escobar's escape came

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<sup>327</sup> Joseph B. Treaster, "Hospital Data show Increase in Drug Abuse," *New York Times*, July 09, 1992. B. 1.

<sup>328</sup> James Bennet, "Shifting Mob Rules: Who's Safe?" *New York Times*, Mar. 12, 1992. B.3. "Officers Feel Besieged After Shooting," *New York Times*, Mar. 16, 1992. B.5.

<sup>329</sup> Joseph B. Treaster, "Nigerian Connection Floods US Airports with Asian Heroin," *New York Times*, Feb. 15, 1992. 1.1.

<sup>330</sup> "News Summary," *New York Times*, July 23, 1992. A. 2. "Bush Helps Spur Attitude Change," *New York Times*, July 28, 1992. A. 12.

<sup>331</sup> James Brook, "How Escobar, a Rare Jailbird, Lined His Nest," *New York Times*, Aug. 05, 1992. 1. 1  
James Brook, "Jailed Drug Cartel Chief Still Feared in Colombia," *New York Times*, Jan. 21, 1992. A.12.

<sup>332</sup> Alan Riding, "Iberian-American Talks Start as 18 Nations Meet in Madrid," *New York Times*, July 24, 1992. A. 3.

along with fear and violence that was “exceeding all the limits.”<sup>333</sup> Paramilitary groups were massacring people they thought were guerilla members or guerilla sympathizers. For the most part, “the US news media have portrayed the drug terrorists as the only perpetrators of violent crime, ignoring the role of Colombian state agents, whose human rights abuses have been denounced by Amnesty International, American Watch and the Washington Office on Latin America.”<sup>334</sup> Jorge Gómez Lizarazo was a Colombian former judge, lawyer and human rights activist, and in his article he condemned the alliance between paramilitary groups, military officials and drug traffickers in specific regions. He claimed that “The US must bear some responsibility for this situation,” and in the name of the drug war, “the main victims of Government and Government-supported military actions are not traffickers but political opposition figures, community activists, trade union leaders and human rights workers.”<sup>335</sup> As another Latin American writer said about Peru’s drug war case, “the lame-duck Bush Administration might be promoting democracy elsewhere, but not in South America.”<sup>336</sup> Again, the critical voice came from outside the newspaper.

The George H. Bush administration ended in 1993, and with it another chapter of the war on drugs concluded; however, the Reagan-Bush initiative of fighting drugs internationally and the Bush idea of focusing the fight on specific countries persisted on into the Clinton administration.

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<sup>333</sup> "Violence Takes Over a Colombian City," *New York Times*, Mar. 01, 1992. A. 12. David Gonzalez, "Slaying of a Hispanic Journalist Silences Crusader Against Drugs," *New York Times*, Mar. 13, 1992. A. 1. "Ex-Leader of Death Squads is Fatally Shot in Colombia," *New York Times*, Jan. 11, 1992. 1.3.

<sup>334</sup> Jorge, Gomez Lizarazo, "Colombian Blood, US Guns," *New York Times*, Jan. 28, 1992. A. 21.

<sup>335</sup> Jorge, Gomez Lizarazo, "Colombian Blood, US Guns," *New York Times*, Jan. 28, 1992. A. 21.

<sup>336</sup> Gustavo Gorriti, "America's Dance with a Dictator," *New York Times*, Dec. 27, 1992. E. 11.

## 8. BILL CLINTON YEARS, 1993 – 2001

On the surface, the Clinton administration tried to do things differently such as reducing the funds for the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP). However, in 1996 the *National Drug Control Strategy* was substantially changed in reaction to political pressures and public opinion.<sup>337</sup> Clinton's first budget consisted of \$8.3 billion "for law enforcement and interdiction with only \$4.7 billion for treatment programs and prevention. This emphasis persisted despite the RAND Corporation for the Office of National Drug Control Policy finding that treatment was ten times more cost-effective than interdiction in reducing US cocaine use."<sup>338</sup> The Clinton strategy ultimately embraced and reiterated the goal of seizing as much as possible; the goal of destroying the major cartels; the goal of bringing them to justice (by extradition). If to some extent William Bennett, drug czar under Bush, represented the views of the administration, Clinton's drug czar, General Barry McCaffrey, maintained the same confrontational spirit towards drugs. Moreover, McCaffrey's ideas are packed in the title of his book *The Destructive Impact Of Drugs On The United States: How The Legalization Of Drugs Would Jeopardize The Health And Safety Of The American People And Our Nation*, and in the title of his first chapter: "What Proponents of Legalization Really Want: Easy Access to all Drugs of Abuse."<sup>339</sup> If,

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<sup>337</sup> Eugene Bouley, "The Drug War in Latin America. Ten years in a Quagmire," in *Drug War, American Style: The Internationalization of Failed Policy and its Alternatives*, ed. Jurg Gerber and Eric Jensen (New York: Garland Publishing, 2001), 172.

<sup>338</sup> Richard Davenport-Hines, 2002, *The Pursuit of Oblivion: A Global History of Narcotics* (New York: Norton, 2002), 446.

<sup>339</sup> Barry McCaffrey, *The Destructive Impact of Drugs on the United States: How the Legalization of Drugs Would Jeopardize the Health and Safety of the American People and Our Nation*. (Washington, The Office, 1999).

during the 1980s, Reagan blamed Sandinistas for the cocaine flood, then in the 1990s, Clinton's drug czar, General Barry McCaffrey, would blame "narco-guerrillas."<sup>340</sup>

Eradication had been an important program during the Bush administration, but it would be during the Clinton administration that this strategy became "the highest priority," as the administration focused on strengthening the political will of "source and transit countries to support" the war on drugs.<sup>341</sup> The eradication areas proposed by Plan Colombia, the name of a United States foreign aid program to combat Colombian drug cartels, "focused primarily on the Amazon region controlled by FARC, not on the drug areas controlled by warlords like Castaño [leader of a paramilitary group] and the Henao-Montoya group [North Valley Cartel]."<sup>342</sup> Once again, the plan to break foreign drug sources of supply consisted basically of strengthening host nation institutions—similar to what Bush had proposed—and providing training and operational support—also Bush's view. Plan Colombia was a United States foreign aid initiative mainly created to combat drug cartels, and tangentially, the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC). However, the majority of the money went to fund and train the Colombian military to fight the guerrillas. Plan Colombia has been called a "continuation of the US policy of intervention in Latin America" that sought "to eradicate the drugs, trade and eliminate the guerrilla factions who thrive on it, but in essence, it is aimed at reconsolidating American power in the region."<sup>343</sup>

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<sup>340</sup> Peter Dale Scott. *Drugs, Oil, and War: The United States in Afghanistan, Colombia, and Indochina*, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 16.

<sup>341</sup> Eugene Bouley, "The Drug War in Latin America. Ten years in a Quagmire," in *Drug War, American Style: The Internationalization of Failed Policy and its Alternatives*, ed. Jurg Gerber and Eric Jensen (New York: Garland Publishing, 2001), 173.

<sup>342</sup> Peter Dale Scott. *Drugs, Oil, and War: The United States in Afghanistan, Colombia, and Indochina*, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 75.

<sup>343</sup> James Petras, "Geopolitics of Plan Colombia," *Economic and Political Weekly*, no. 52/53 (2000): 4617.

If it is possible to talk about real changes between the Bush and Clinton plans for Latin America, one of them would be the long-term period, more or less 15 years (depending on the source), established for the Plan Colombia. US policy-makers described it as an effort to eradicate drug production and trade by “attacking the sources of production,” a rhetoric that had been circulating for decades; however, the plan had specific targets such as the areas of guerrilla influence or control. Since the Colombian guerrillas had started to control areas of coca leaf crops and, by extension, taken part of the business, Washington used this line of argument to develop a direct military advisory to destroy what they renamed the “narco guerrillas.” The Plan “would commit approximately \$1.6 billion dollars in US financial and military assistance to the Colombian government.”<sup>344</sup> Just by analyzing the battlegrounds of the Plan Colombia, it meant changing from urban operations, where the war against cartels had been fought, to rural operations where the army and the guerillas fought. As with many other US drug policies, Plan Colombia was, like so many so-called US aid programs in the past, “90 percent military. Originally it was meant to complement economic aid from the European Union, but the EU pulled back because it disapproved of the US military approach.”<sup>345</sup> As it has been the usual approach, the plan was “a godsend for the usual suppliers of munitions, herbicides, and helicopters,” including a “\$234 million contract for Sikorsky Aircraft alone.”<sup>346</sup> And in the end, it failed. Its initial objective to seriously disrupt the country’s flow of cocaine to the United States did not work and “cocaine production does not appear to have gone down.” Moreover, although “the aim of Plan Colombia was to reduce violence, in the first eight years there was an

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<sup>344</sup> William Avilés, “US Intervention in Colombia: The Role of Transnational Relations,” *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 27, No. 3 (2008): 410.

<sup>345</sup> Peter Dale Scott. *Drugs, Oil, and War: The United States in Afghanistan, Colombia, and Indochina*, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 73.

<sup>346</sup> *Ibid.*

increase in the number of victims affected by the internal conflict” and it has created a major humanitarian cost.<sup>347</sup>

Meanwhile, the pressure to either capture or kill Escobar increased in 1993. Early that year, Escobar had announced a new wave of violence to pressure the government to ban extradition. In a letter that Escobar had sent to the Prosecutor General, Escobar “sought the same treatment as that given to rebels; groups that have received pardons in exchange for demobilizing.”<sup>348</sup> As if the new wave of violence was not enough, a new group of Escobar’s old allies had declared a war against him: “a powerful faction of the Medellin cocaine cartel has turned on its godfather and vowed his destruction.”<sup>349</sup> The group called itself Persecuted by Pablo Escobar [Pepes] and “in only one month, this group had “killed over 20 Escobar loyalists and carried out 11 dynamite attacks, causing damage of about \$8 million to properties owned by the Escobar family.”<sup>350</sup> At this time, alliances with other traffickers, like the Cali cartel, were a key role:

It is not disputed that in 1993, while working for the Cali cartel, AUC leader Carlos Castaño ‘collaborated with the CIA and the Colombian police to bring down the fugitive drug baron, Pablo Escobar.’ Carlos Castaño and his brother were leaders of a death squad, Los Pepes, that tracked down and killed members of Escobar’s organization. They did so on the basis of information from the CIA, which was transmitted via a special squad of the Colombian National Police, on good terms with the Cali cartel? The US embassy had intelligence reports that in fact Los Pepes ‘had been created by the Cali Cartel,’ yet the Los Pepes killers fraternized with at least two DEA agents and gave one of them a gold watch.<sup>351</sup>

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<sup>347</sup> Natalio Cosio, “Has Plan Colombia Really Worked?” *BBC News*, Feb. 4, 2016. Accessed November 10, 2018. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-35491504>

<sup>348</sup> “3 Bombs Explode in Colombia Cities,” *New York Times*, Feb. 01, 1993. A. 8.

<sup>349</sup> James Brooke, “Old Drug Allies Terrorizing Escobar,” *New York Times*, Mar. 4, 1993.

<sup>350</sup> “Colombian Bombings Called Retaliation Against Escobar,” *New York Times*, Feb. 02, 1993. A. 9.  
James Brooke, “Old Drug Allies Terrorizing Escobar,” *New York Times*, Mar. 4, 1993. A. 10.

<sup>351</sup> Peter Dale Scott. *Drugs, Oil, and War: The United States in Afghanistan, Colombia, and Indochina*, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 88.

Because of the apparently close relationship between the Pepes and US government officials, in April 2001, Amnesty International USA filed a lawsuit to “obtain CIA records on Los Pepes.” Amnesty International USA, AIUSA, alleged that “its investigation pointed to an extremely suspect relationship between the US government and the Castaño family at a time when the US government was well aware of that family’s involvement in paramilitary violence and narcotics trafficking.”<sup>352</sup>

In 1993, the *New York Times* began using the term “drug terrorism.” One example said that “drug terrorism” had killed 36 people in Colombia in 1993.<sup>353</sup> The other mention of the word “terrorism” this year was in an editorial that said “but this murder” of Manuel de Dios Unanue, a Cuban-born US journalist editor-in-chief of New York City’s largest Spanish-language daily newspaper (El Diario La Prensa), “was an act of terrorism and needs to be treated as such.”<sup>354</sup> For the writer of the editorial, this murder should be interpreted by the Clinton administration as “an alarming reminder of how deeply the Colombian drug lords have penetrated American defenses.” Robert C. Bonner, a DEA agent, had assured that drug barons sent “hit men to New York on a regular basis to kill people. They usually target people who have violated some rule, or people they think have ripped off money or dope,” and cartels power extended as far as their drug links. In Mexico, “two Roman Catholic Cardinals [were] shot to death today along with six other people when gunmen believed to be involved with drug traffickers opened fire outside the airport in the western city of Guadalajara.”<sup>355</sup> In this way,

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<sup>352</sup> Oliver Villar and Drew Cottle, *Cocaine, Death Squads, and the War on Terror: US Imperialism and Class Struggle in Colombia*, (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2011): 213. The suit resulted in the declassification of documents. The Pepes Project archive can be consulted at <http://pepes.exposed/>

<sup>353</sup> "Growth, Pollution and Crime Stifling Bogota," *New York Times*, Sept. 09, 1993. A. 15.

<sup>354</sup> "Terrorism from Colombia," *New York Times*, May 13, 1993. A. 22.

<sup>355</sup> Tim Golden, "Cardinal in Mexico Killed in a Shooting Tied to Drug Battle," *New York Times*, May 25, 1993. A. 1.

Mexico began its own “Colombian-style narcotics terrorism” in which two car bombs had been “set off in the western city of Culiacan” and “more than a dozen men with automatic rifles burst into a discotheque in the beach resort of Puerto Vallarta gunning for vacationing traffickers from Tijuana.”<sup>356</sup>

Escobar’s death hit the *New York Times*’ front page two days in a row in December of 1993, while hundreds of people attended his burial in Medellín.<sup>357</sup> In fact, the Medellín cartel had been losing power while the Cali cartel was rising. Even after Escobar’s death, attacks against his family continued.”<sup>358</sup> Escobar’s death also raised questions about what direction the war on drugs was going to take. The following day of Escobar’s death, an editorial said, “the demise of one powerful drug lord will not bring much relief to societies victimized by the drug trade. Market control in cocaine has already passed to a cartel based in Cali, another Colombian city. Even if the suppliers’ identities have changed, demand from users remains insatiable.”<sup>359</sup> This editorial considered how much the panorama will change because Escobar’s death “can bring scant comfort. Instead it should bring a renewed realization that catching suppliers, while necessary, is no panacea. The other great need is to treat and reduce the numbers of those who demand the drugs.”<sup>360</sup> Moreover, Brooklyn’s district court judge Jack B. Weinstein wrote in an Op-ed that “a nonpartisan Federal Commission on Drugs needs to be formed. Its object should be to report candidly on the costs, benefits, risks and advantages of present and potential national

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<sup>356</sup> Tim Golden, "Cardinal in Mexico Killed in a Shooting Tied to Drug Battle," *New York Times*, May 25, 1993. A. 1.

<sup>357</sup> “Head of Medellin Cocaine Cartel Is Killed by Troops in Colombia,” *New York Times*, Dec. 3, 1993. Joseph B. Treaster, "US Says it Foiled Killings Plotted by Drug Chief," *New York Times*, July 23, 1993.

<sup>358</sup> "Escobar's Brother Injured by Letter Bomb in Prison," *New York Times*, Dec. 19, 1993. A. 11.

<sup>359</sup> "One Drug Lord Dies," *New York Times*, Dec. 04, 1993. 1.20.

<sup>360</sup> “Colombia Is Defending Arrival of US Troops,” *New York Times*, Dec. 30, 1993.

drug policies.”<sup>361</sup> In it, Weinstein also asked “How should marijuana be treated? Has it become such a large and widely available cash crop that prohibition is neither attainable nor affordable?” He also reconsidered the basic views “How dangerous is marijuana? Does it have useful therapeutic values? How much money could be saved in law enforcement by decriminalizing its use? Would savings be offset by an increase in health and other costs attributable to a rise in consumption?”<sup>362</sup> Op-eds were one of the few spaces where criticism and questioning emerged, again, not from the newspaper’s coverage. By then, criticism was a rare discourse because the predominant doctrine, rhetoric and policy was the prohibitionists.<sup>363</sup>

The Cali cartel was the main target in the war on drugs and the new president elected in 1994, Ernesto Samper assured that his goal was not “to fight against drug corruption,” not against “drug terrorism,” as Gaviria did. Even though “he had no specific plans to pursue the Cali cartel,” he “placed much of the blame for drug trafficking on consumer countries unwilling to repress demand.”<sup>364</sup> On corruption, during the presidential rallies, the losing presidential candidate, Andres Pastrana, released tapes “in which leaders of the Cali cartel were heard offering millions of dollars, through an intermediary.” Just the mere suspect of this accusation made “Washington worried about Colombia’s commitment to keep battling the export of cocaine.”<sup>365</sup> Robert Gelbard, assistant secretary of state for international narcotics matters, said that Samper’s tapes were “the worst kind of information we could receive.”<sup>366</sup>

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<sup>361</sup> Jack B. Weinstein, "Drugs, Crime and Punishment; the War on Drugs is Self-Defeating," *New York Times*, Jul 08, 1993. A. 19.

<sup>362</sup> Ibid.

<sup>363</sup> Christopher Lehmann, "Winning Drug Fights but Not the War," *New York Times*, Apr. 22, 1993. C.21.

<sup>364</sup> James Brooke, "Colombia's New Leader Vows to Crack Down on Cali Cartel," *New York Times*, Aug. 07, 1994. A. 16.

<sup>365</sup> James Brooke, "Colombia's New Leader Vows to Crack Down on Cali Cartel," *New York Times*, Aug. 07, 1994. A. 16.

<sup>366</sup> James Brooke, "Talks in Colombia," *New York Times*, June 24, 1994. A.2.

Another case of corruption related to drugs in 1994 was the \$32 million laundered in a case that involved a branch of the American Express Company and a Mexico's drug cartel. "Two bank directors were convicted in June," and the company "agreed to forfeit \$25 million in laundered money, pay a \$7 million penalty and spend \$3 million to improve a compliance program."<sup>367</sup> A United Nations conference on organized crime stated that year, "it is not just the growers, smugglers and assassins who make the worldwide drug trade a scourge, but a new breed of skilled money-managers, lawyers and other professionals in the pay of the mob."<sup>368</sup> As part of the drug money laundering, the Cali cartel leaders had used "105 American companies that accepted drug money for electronics, auto parts and other goods shipped to Colombia."<sup>369</sup> The money exchange was so exuberant, that it "helped improve the United States' balance of trade with Colombia. Ten years ago, the country had a \$5 billion trade deficit; last year it had a \$5 billion surplus"<sup>370</sup> Salomon Kalmanovitz, co-director of Colombia's Central Bank, estimated "drug trafficking brought in \$3.5 billion a year or 5 percent of the gross domestic product of almost \$70 billion. Doug Wankel, chief of operations at the Drug Enforcement Administration, says that \$4.5 billion to \$7 billion is a conservative estimate of drug money in the Colombian economy."<sup>371</sup> Both estimates showed a massive influx of money created by drug trafficking.

In 1995, the government captured important heads of the Cali cartel such as the brothers Gilberto and Jorge Eliécer Rodríguez Orejuela and José Santacruz Londoño.<sup>372</sup> At the same time,

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<sup>367</sup> Allen R Myerson, "American Express Unit Settles Laundering Case," *New York Times* Nov. 22, 1994. D.2.

<sup>368</sup> Alan Cowell, "Laundering of Crime Cash Troubles U.N.," *New York Times*, Nov. 25, 1994. A. 17.

<sup>369</sup> Clifford Krauss and, Douglas Frantz, "Cali Drug Cartel Using US Business to Launder Cash," *New York Times*, Oct 30, 1995. A. 1.

<sup>370</sup> Clifford Krauss and, Douglas Frantz, "Cali Drug Cartel Using US Business to Launder Cash," *New York Times*, Oct. 30, 1995. A. 1.

<sup>371</sup> "Drug Crackdown is Believed to Sap Colombia's Economy," *New York Times*, Nov. 24, 1995. A. 7.

<sup>372</sup> Treaster, Joseph B, "Colombian Drug Lord Captured in Police Raid in His Hometown," *New York Times*, June 10, 1995. Michael Cooper, "US Indicts A Fugitive Over Drugs," *New York Times*, June 08, 1995. B. 3. "Drug Cartel Suspect Arrested in Colombia," *New York Times*, Mar. 04, 1995.

the investigation that suggested that the Colombian president, Ernesto Samper Pizano, had been the beneficiary of \$6 million in campaign donations from the Cali cocaine cartel started to give some results. For example, Fernando Botero, Colombia's Defense Minister, resigned due to this investigation and "the campaign's treasurer, Santiago Medina, was arrested."<sup>373</sup> These results sent ripples into the United States and the Clinton administration threatened "to withdraw the \$70 million a year in aid it sends to Colombia to fight the drug trade."<sup>374</sup> At the time, President Samper's situation was food for thought to analysts who predicted a resignation or an extradition as it had occurred to former President Carlos Salinas de Gortari of Mexico.<sup>375</sup> Even after capturing six of Cali cartel top seven leaders, President Samper could not "divert [the] attention from questions regarding his ties to drug traffickers. Rather, documents seized by the police in recent raids against drug traffickers seem to be providing much of the evidence that has shaken the Samper administration."<sup>376</sup>

As part of US efforts to stop Cali cartel money laundering, President Clinton "moved to freeze any assets of Colombia's biggest drug cartel that are in the United States and to stop American firms from doing business with any of its front organizations."<sup>377</sup> On New York city streets, law enforcement officials saw drug prices to soar. In what officials described "as the most precipitous shift in almost six years," the *New York Times* reported that "the wholesale price of cocaine has increased nearly 50 percent since May, while retail prices have gone up 30

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<sup>373</sup> "Courage in Colombia," *New York Times*, Aug. 04, 1995. A. 26. Treaster, Joseph B, "Arrest in Colombia Heartens US," *New York Times*, June 12, 1995. A. 8. "Bribes, Not Bullets, is Cartel's Policy," *New York Times*, June 27, 1995. A. 8. "Colombia Gets Tough with Drug Cartel," *New York Times*, July 29, 1995. A. 18.

<sup>374</sup> "Courage in Colombia," *New York Times*, Aug. 04, 1995. A. 26.

<sup>375</sup> Larry Rohter, "The New Latin Scandals Challenge Democracies," *New York Times*, Oct. 22, 1995.

<sup>376</sup> Diana Jean Schemo, "Colombia in Crisis as Drugs Tar Chief," *New York Times*, Aug. 13, 1995.

<sup>377</sup> Alison Mitchell, "US Freezes Assets of Cartel in New Effort Against Drugs," *New York Times*, Oct. 23, 1995. A. 11.

to 60 percent or more.”<sup>378</sup> Another result was the decrease of the size and number of shipments of cocaine into New York. Only four months ago, Federal agents said to the newspaper, “shipments weighing 1,000 pounds or more were coming into the city in trucks, ships and airplanes; now, they typically weigh less than 200 pounds.”<sup>379</sup> During these years, big seizures became rare in the news reported by the *New York Times*, and the grandiloquence of its sizes disappeared momentarily.

One rare finding was “Big Cocaine Cache Is Found Stashed in Airliner Cockpit.” In traveling from Denver to Dallas, agents found “nearly 65 pounds of cocaine” hidden inside “an electronic system with components under the cockpit’s ceiling panel” of an American Airlines Boeing 757 jetliner.<sup>380</sup> When analyzing the headline of this article and the amount of the cache, it sounds inflated to say “Big Cocaine Cache” to describe just 65 pounds. Even more excessive is the \$3 million street value of it because it meant that a pound could cost \$46,153 approximately. In an earlier article, “Colombia Arrests Raise Price of Cocaine in New York City,” authorities had said that a cocaine kilogram could cost “an average of \$26,000 per kilogram,” and in places like Detroit, authorities had “reported an increase in wholesale prices from \$22,000 to \$32,000 per kilogram.”<sup>381</sup> Even more surprising was to find a later article, written by the same author, Christopher S. Wren, saying “even after many sizeable, well-publicized seizures, the street price seldom changes. Sometimes, it even drops.”<sup>382</sup> Another interesting point about this *New York Times* article was the amount of drugs seized in 1995: “nearly 100 tons of drugs in the United

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<sup>378</sup> Clifford Krauss, "Colombia Arrests Raise Price of Cocaine in New York City," *New York Times*, Sept. 15, 1995. A. 1.

<sup>379</sup> Ibid.

<sup>380</sup> Christopher S. Wren, "Big Cocaine Cache is found Stashed in Airliner Cockpit," *New York Times*, Mar. 23, 1996. 1. 6.

<sup>381</sup> Clifford Krauss, "Colombia Arrests Raise Price of Cocaine in New York City," *New York Times*, Sept. 15, 1995. A. 1.

<sup>382</sup> Christopher S. Wren, "Why Seizing Drugs Barely Dents Supply," *New York Times*, Dec. 15, 1996.

States last year.” One important question that emerges from this quote is why the news stop covering seizures? Where in the news are these 100 tons of drugs? The answer to these questions might curiously be inside the same article “‘The numbers are, in fact, just decorations on the policy process, rhetorical conveniences for official statements without any serious consequences,’ writes Peter Reuter, who teaches drug policy at the University of Maryland. ‘Indeed, the irrelevance of the numbers is itself a condemnation of drug policy decision making.’” Another way to answer these questions is “authorities typically overstate the dollar value of confiscated drugs by calculating not the wholesale price, like \$9,000 per pound for cocaine or \$40,000 for heroin, but what the consumer might pay somewhere down the line.” Evaluating seizures by the projected street value, “is like estimating losses from cattle rustling according to the price of a steak in a New York restaurant. A more accurate measure would be the lower cost to the trafficker of replacing the drug, which can be less than \$1,000 per pound of cocaine when it leaves Colombia,” said Mark A. R. Kleiman, a drug policy at the University of California at Los Angeles. Moreover, this article also questions the importance of seizures by saying “Critics of the nation’s drug war say that the negligible impact on supply or price proves that seizures are largely a waste of time and money.”<sup>383</sup>

Early in 1996, New York City Police Department had announced the “start of a big offensive against drugs” with “up to 3,000 officers and detectives” that expected to “to yield 2,000 additional arrests in the first four weeks and 8,000 additional arrests over the first six months. Those numbers themselves pose potential problems for city officials: possible overcrowding in local jails and an increase in police overtime expenses.”<sup>384</sup> The plan was

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<sup>383</sup> Ibid.

<sup>384</sup> Clifford Krauss, "Police to Start Big Offensive Against Drugs," *New York Times*, Apr. 04, 1996.

launched even though “the overall number of murder victims has fallen,” and “there were fewer murders in public places, fewer murders stemming from spontaneous disputes and robberies, fewer drug-related murders.” The homicide rate was “falling across the nation, particularly in the biggest and most violent cities,” and a critical factor, was that there seemed “to be fewer guns on the streets.”<sup>385</sup> Contradictorily, the 1996 *National Drug Control Strategy* report said that “The number of Americans who use cocaine has been reduced by 30 percent since 1992. The amount of money Americans spend on illicit drugs has declined from an estimated \$64 billion five years ago to about \$49 billion in 1993 —a 23 percent drop. We are finally gaining ground against overall crime: drug-related murders are down 12 percent since 1989; robberies are down 10 percent since 1991.”<sup>386</sup>

As part of the US initiatives to cripple the manufacture of Colombian cocaine, the United States imposed stricter controls on chemicals such as “M.E.K. (methyl ethyl ketone), acetone, toluene potassium permanganate and ethyl ether, which all have legitimate industrial uses but are also used in cocaine processing.”<sup>387</sup> But for what the United States had not prepared preventions measures was the confirmation of the rumors about President Ernesto Samper and the \$6 million accepted for his election campaign. One of the first measures taken by the US government was the declaration of a decertification, leaving “Colombia ineligible for any United States aid with the exception of assistance linked to fighting drug trafficking.”<sup>388</sup> Afterwards, the US Transportation Department “announced plans to cancel the flights of Avianca or Aces, another

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<sup>385</sup> Michael Cooper, "Steep Drop in Random Killings Signals Shift in New York Crime," *New York Times*, Dec 29, 1996. 25.

<sup>386</sup> National Drug Control Strategy, *National Drug Control Strategy: 1996* (Washington, 1996), 49.

<sup>387</sup> Christopher S. Wren, "US Imposes Strict Controls on Chemical Exports to Colombia," *New York Times*, Mar 28, 1996.

<sup>388</sup> Diana Jean Schemo, "US Slap on the Hand Brings Colombia Out Punching," *New York Times*, March 6, 1996.

Colombian airline, to Miami or New York after the Colombian Government rejected a request by American Airlines to resume its Bogota-to-New York service.”<sup>389</sup> Internally, the United States was having disputes about drugs as well. On the one hand, human rights groups “alleged that Colombian military units receiving American anti-drug weapons and equipment were using the aid to strafe villages and assassinate leftist politicians. In 1993 the General Accounting Office concluded that aid had indeed gone to abusive units.”<sup>390</sup> On the other hand, the study “An Empirical Examination of Counterdrug Interdiction Program Effectiveness,” supported majorly by republicans, was opening the door to a pre-election debate about drugs. The study stated that “since 1985, increases in the price of cocaine in American cities have coincided with interdictions in Peru, Bolivia and Colombia.” For Peter Reuter, a drug-policy expert at the University of Maryland, the misinterpretation of the study was that “description of the illegal drug market as free and unrestricted”; almost as a simplistic correlation between production and demand ignoring that “drug syndicates sometimes maintain substantial inventories to minimize disruptions and hold back cocaine to manipulate the price.”<sup>391</sup> Another example of this simplistic view of the drugs market from officials said that “a seizure the size of the one in March might be expected to have a momentary impact on supply, and therefore price.”<sup>392</sup> Officials rarely knew what was causing the rise of prices, but they always released the same oversimplified formula: seizures raise prices.

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<sup>389</sup> Diana Jean Schemo, "To Punish Colombia, US may Revoke Air Route." *New York Times*, Aug 04, 1996. 10.

<sup>390</sup> "American Drug Aid Goes South," *New York Times*, Nov. 25, 1996. 14.

<sup>391</sup> Christopher S. Wren, "What Price Victory? Study Feeds Contention," *New York Times*, Sept. 29, 1996. 19.

<sup>392</sup> Christopher S. Wren, "Cocaine Price Soars, and Officials Seek Answers," *New York Times*, May 02, 1997. 1.

In many aspects, 1996 and 1997 were years with more similarities than differences in terms of drug news: rare coverage about seizures (just one article in 1997), sparse coverage about battles won in the war on drugs, and much of the attention focused on Colombia, and Mexico, secondarily.<sup>393</sup> Very slowly, Mexico's role in the drug trafficking scene started to be represented in the *New York Times* news and the troubled relationships between the US and Mexico government flourished.<sup>394</sup> But mostly, Colombia keep being the center of scandals and corruption and drugs news during 1997. For example, Colombia suspended all aerial eradication of drug producing crops for a few days and this triggered alarms in the US government.<sup>395</sup>

In 1997, the topic that received most of the attention was the money accepted by Samper's campaign from the Cali cartel. Drug leaders such as Miguel Rodríguez Orejuela admitted financing the political campaign, then two more ministers resigned, and more senators were condemned.<sup>396</sup> In October of 1997, \$50 million in equipment was granted "to help Colombia's military fight guerrillas involved in drug trafficking in the south."<sup>397</sup> And in 1998, most of the coverage turned to the guerrilla: how many they were, how powerful they were, how much money they were making.<sup>398</sup> The scenario was bizarre or as two articles said, it was a "spectrum of sorrows," Colombia was "a land where death is a fact of life": the government, the

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<sup>393</sup> Sam Dillon, "US Seizes \$5.6 Million Hidden in a Truck on Way to Mexico," *New York Times*, Apr. 13, 1997. 6. Robert D. Mcfadden, "Limits on Cash Transactions Cut Drug-Money Laundering," *New York Times*, Mar. 11, 1997. 1.

<sup>394</sup> Clifford Krauss, "Fighting the Drug War with Boomerangs," *New York Times*, Mar. 30, 1997. E. 5.

<sup>395</sup> "News Summary," *New York Times*, Feb. 15, 1997. 2. "News Summary." *New York Times*, Mar. 06, 1997. A. 2. Colombia Seeks Help from Skies in Drug War," *New York Times*, Mar. 18, 1997. 8.

<sup>396</sup> "Cali Drug Dealer Admits Aiding Politicians," *New York Times*, Mar. 13, 1997. 13. "Colombia Senator Arrested," *New York Times*, Sept. 04, 1997. A. 3. Diana Jean Schemo, "Confusion in a Confession," *New York Times*, Mar. 09, 1997. E. 2. Diana Jean Schemo, "Two Colombian Cabinet Ministers Forced Out in New Scandal," *New York Times*, Aug. 21, 1997. 9. Diana Jean Schemo, "The Allies of Samper Eye Asylum," *New York Times*, Aug. 28, 1998. 9. Diana Jean Schemo, "Colombia in Disarray, but Leader Prospers," *New York Times*, Aug. 26, 1997. 3.

<sup>397</sup> "US Is to Help Army in Colombia Fight Drugs but Skeptics Abound," *New York Times*, Oct. 25, 1997.

<sup>398</sup> "Coca Growers in Colombia Scorn New President's 'Marshall Plan'," *New York Times*, Aug. 20, 1988. "US to Change Strategy in Narcotics Fight in Colombia," *New York Times*, Aug. 14, 1988. "A Colombian Guerrilla's 50-Year Fight," *New York Times*, July 19, 1999.

paramilitary groups and the guerillas fought in the countryside leaving behind death while all sides accused each other of drug corruption.<sup>399</sup> For a while, the Colombian government “agreed to a United States demand to test a chemical to kill coca crops, even though the manufacturer warned against its use.”<sup>400</sup> The Clinton administration ventured to say that with more money and “a broad strategy to set up American anti-narcotics efforts in the Andes,” then “Colombian cocaine and heroin could disappear from the streets of the United States.”<sup>401</sup>

With the arrival of a new president in August of 1998, Andres Pastrana, and his disposition to open peace talks with the guerrilla, Colombia improved relationships with the United States.<sup>402</sup> At the beginning of 1999, the news coverages had an optimistic tone, such as “with US Training, Colombia Melds War on Rebels and Drugs.”<sup>403</sup> The relationship between the two countries improved more when Colombia reopened the door to extradition, and later on extradited two drug traffickers.<sup>404</sup> The good relationship between Colombia and the United States led to a meeting between a State Department spokesman and representatives of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) “to demonstrate our [US] support for the Colombian peace process.”<sup>405</sup> Primarily, the US government promoted this opportunity as a way “to stem cocaine production.” Additionally, the Clinton Administration “announced that it would ask Congress to approve \$1 billion to \$2 billion in aid to Colombia,” though Pastrana had

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<sup>399</sup> "Colombia Rebels Report Dozens of Troops Killed," *New York Times*, Mar 06, 1998. 9. Juan Carlos Esguerra, "Colombia's Drug War," *New York Times*, Jan. 09, 1998. Larry Rohter, "A Land Where Death is a Fact of Life," *New York Times*, Nov. 14, 1999.

<sup>400</sup> "News Summary," *New York Times*, June 20, 1998. A. 2.

<sup>401</sup> "News Summary," *New York Times*, Apr. 01, 1998. A. 2.

<sup>402</sup> "Colombia Installs New President Who Plans to Talk to Rebels," *New York Times*, Aug. 8, 1998.

<sup>403</sup> "With US Training, Colombia Melds War on Rebels and Drugs," *New York Times*, July 29, 1999.

<sup>404</sup> Philip Shenon, "Colombia Extradites Drug Suspect to US," *New York Times*, Nov. 22, 1999. "Colombia Extradites Drug Suspect to the US, the 2nd in Days," *New York Times*, Nov. 26, 1999. A. 25.

<sup>405</sup> "US Met Colombian Rebels at Bogota's Request," *New York Times*, Jan. 05, 1999. 3.

estimated the assistance in \$3.5 billion.<sup>406</sup> Days later, both presidents talked at a United Nations meeting.<sup>407</sup> The peace talks between the President and the guerrilla continued through 2000 and were extended until 2002. Suddenly, in 2000 the coverage of the Colombian peace process attracted the attention of the *New York Times* and it was covered closely. In comparison, the *New York Times* had an average of 140 articles per year covering the war on drugs in Colombia during the 1990s decade; however, there was a unique peak of 232 articles in 2000. The sample of articles analyzed here for 2000 was 50 (21% of the total).

Meanwhile, President Clinton kept defending the aid package arguing that Colombia was improving its human rights climate.<sup>408</sup> Through that aid, Colombia became the third main recipient of American security aid after Israel and Egypt. However, the kidnapping of people and the hijacking of a plane by guerillas weakened the peace process, especially, in the United States where “military and law-enforcement officials concerned that the United States could be dragged into a long and costly struggle that may ultimately have little impact on the drug trade.”<sup>409</sup> From a different perspective, “human rights groups had urged the administration to scrap the aid plan, arguing that it would embolden the Colombian military to step up rights abuses.”<sup>410</sup> This warning was an echo of the Colombian government ombudsman’s office blaming “paramilitary death squads for the executions of 902 people in 155 massacres last year.”<sup>411</sup> A report by Human Rights Watch investigators declared in February that “units of the Colombian Army continue to

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<sup>406</sup> Diana Jean Schemo, "Dole Vows More Border Agents for Drug Fight," *New York Times*, Oct. 08, 1999. Larry Rohter, "Plan to Strengthen Colombia Nudges US for \$3.5 Billion," *New York Times*, Sept 18, 1999. 6.

<sup>407</sup> Christopher S. Wren, "Raise Intervention Abilities, Clinton Urges U.N. Members," *New York Times*, Sept 22, 1999. A. 1.

<sup>408</sup> "Clinton Defends the Outlay Of \$1.3 Billion to Colombia," *New York Times*, Aug 26, 2000. "Clinton Defends Colombia Outlay," *New York Times*, Aug 31, 2000.

<sup>409</sup> Tim Golden, "US Antidrug Plan to Aid Colombia Faces Skepticism," *New York Times*, Feb. 06, 2000. 1. "Kidnapping and Hijacking Threaten Colombia's Peace Efforts," *New York Times*, Sept. 21, 2000. 13. Eric Schmitt, "Senate Fight Snags Aid Bill for Kosovo and Colombia," *New York Times*, Mar. 22, 2000. A. 5.

<sup>410</sup> "Clinton Clears Way for Aid to Colombia," *New York Times*, Aug. 23, 2000. A. 10.

<sup>411</sup> Larry Rohter, "Death Squad or Paladins? A Colombian Defends Role," *New York Times*, Mar. 12, 2000.

work closely with right-wing paramilitary forces.”<sup>412</sup> The next month, the leader of the country’s right-wing death squads with 5,500 armed members, Carlos Castaño, gave an interview in which he declared “I am a patriot, not a bandit.”<sup>413</sup> Despite the strong opposition from human rights organizations, the Clinton administration approved in June a \$1.3 million aid package, Plan Colombia, designed to fight drug production and trafficking.<sup>414</sup> While these events were unfolding, the *New York Times* did not take a critical perspective of it. In this regard, this analysis agrees with Delacour when he said that the “*New York Times*’ field reporting has left much to be desired. Larry Rohter, a *Times* correspondent based in Rio de Janeiro, reported on Colombia until July 2000. Rohter’s reporting was heavily biased toward the US State Department’s characterization of Colombia’s civil conflict.”<sup>415</sup> Ironically, most of the criticism came from readers and not from journalistic sources, and the way to express this criticism was fundamentally through letters to the editor. For example, Kevin B. Zeese, president of common sense for drug policy, argued “more of the same will not work.”<sup>416</sup> “When will it become clear that the demand for the drugs in the United States is the real reason for the drug trafficking?” asked another letter.<sup>417</sup> Another letter said, “our experiment with alcohol should have taught us that prohibition wastes money, creates violence and corruption, and fails to lessen drug use.”<sup>418</sup> In August, president Clinton defended Plan Colombia, and he asserted that it was “to fight drugs not rebels.”<sup>419</sup> In October, the European Union announced a package of “\$321 million in

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<sup>412</sup> Tim Golden, "Colombian Army Still Aiding Paramilitary Forces, Report Says," *New York Times*, Feb. 24, 2000. A. 5.

<sup>413</sup> Larry Rohter, "Death Squad or Paladins? A Colombian Defends Role," *New York Times*, Mar. 12, 2000.

<sup>414</sup> Christopher Marquis, "Bankrolling Colombia's War on Drugs: House and Senate Will Now Reconcile Bills," *New York Times*, June 23, 2000. A. 11.

<sup>415</sup> Justin Delacour, "Plan Colombia: Rhetoric, Reality, and the Press," *Social Justice* 27, no. 4 (2000): 70.

<sup>416</sup> Kevin B. Zeese, "A Misguided War on Drugs," *New York Times*, Dec. 07, 2000. A. 38.

<sup>417</sup> Norman E. Mann, "Fight Drugs at Home," *New York Times*, Jan. 16, 2000.

<sup>418</sup> Joseph D. McNamara, "Colombia's Drug War," *New York Times*, Feb. 20, 2000.

<sup>419</sup> Marc Lacey, "In Visit to Colombia, Clinton Defends US Outlay," *New York Times*, Aug. 31, 2000. A. 1.

nonmilitary aid. That appears to leave Colombia short of the total.”<sup>420</sup> Meanwhile, a small number of articles covered paramilitary actions and their financing: first by cartels, later by national and international companies and drug trafficking. As Delacour has highlighted, Rohter, a [*New York Times*] correspondent based in Rio de Janeiro, and most other correspondents covering Colombia generally disregard the considerable evidence indicating that paramilitaries are far more involved in the trafficking of drugs.”<sup>421</sup>

The change of US administration complicated the relationships between the two countries. In 2001, at the beginning of Bush’s presidency, the head of state assured that US support would be limited to training Colombian forces. In 1999, there were “around 250 American military trainers” in Colombia,<sup>422</sup> Moreover, the US government used 180 American contractors even though it was perceived as “a way for the American government to deny or play down any responsibility if something goes wrong.”<sup>423</sup>

Since September 11, and after the War on Terror was declared, the connection between the two wars was quickly made:

Since the start of their bombing campaign, allied officials have tried to link the new war on terror to the old war on drugs. In Washington, some officials have likened Afghanistan to Colombia, where drug money and terror tactics have both been essential to enemies of the American-backed government.<sup>424</sup>

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<sup>420</sup> Juan Forero, "Europe's Aid Plan for Colombia Falls Short of Drug War's Goals," *New York Times*, Oct. 25, 2000. A. 12. Jeanne Moore, "World Briefing," *New York Times*, July 08, 2000. A. 8.

<sup>421</sup> Justin Delacour, "Plan Colombia: Rhetoric, Reality, and the Press," *Social Justice* 27, no. 4 (2000): 71.

<sup>422</sup> "Waging Peace in Colombia," *New York Times*, May 15, 1999. 16.

<sup>423</sup> "Role of US Companies in Colombia Is Questioned," *New York Times*, May 18, 2001.

<sup>424</sup> "A War on Terror Meets a War on Drugs," *New York Times*, Nov. 25, 2001.

In this way, the old war on drugs met the new war on terror while the US demanded for an improvement in human rights from the Colombian government.<sup>425</sup> One of the best conclusive reflections of 2001 was made by a reader in a letter to the editor by Emmett Barcalow:

How many innocent people in Colombia will be made to suffer because some Americans crave illegal drugs? Unless we learn that treatment must be the main strategy, we'll continue to destroy families and neighborhoods in our own country by jailing hundreds of thousands of nonviolent drug offenders, and destroy other countries, like Colombia, by enticing them to supply our demand for drugs and then forcing them to declare war on drugs.<sup>426</sup>

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<sup>425</sup> Paul Wellstone, "Bush should Start Over in Colombia," *New York Times*, Dec. 26, 2000. Emmet Barcalow, letter to the editor, *New York Times*, Dec. 20, 2001.

<sup>426</sup> "Colombia, Drugs and Us," *New York Times*, Dec. 20, 2001.

## 10. CONCLUSION

Analysis of three decades of news, reports, features, editorials, biographies, and interviews published by the *New York Times* about the war on drugs, one aspect seems dominant: a lack of criticism. The idea of the *New York Times* as an institution in which “the mere printing of words could “influence the State Department and perplex the President,” or “stop a military invasion,” totally disappeared while covering the war on drugs from 1971 to 2001.<sup>427</sup> During this period, there was a lack of critical voices, perspectives, and articles exclusively or mostly dedicated to covering alternative approaches in the war on drugs. From a purely journalistic perspective, the majority of these articles rely heavily on official sources, especially Drug Enforcement Administration agents. Relying almost exclusively on official sources allows the government to indiscriminately control the frames and create its own agenda-setting effect without filters. In this case, the main discourse was, and to some extent remains, primarily prohibitionist, even though it has been virtually infective. The spread of prohibitionist understanding militarized communities, cities, and countries, and an international war was declared based on this view. “The language of war has once again served in part as a way of fantasizing the true nation: projecting certain features of social life —street crime and drug abuse— as existentially external: not a consequence even in part of the character or organization of the body politic itself, but as something against which the true body politic is to be identified.”<sup>428</sup> One of the ripple effects with the war on drugs was that it generated, as a war

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<sup>427</sup> Talese, Gay, *The Kingdom and the Power*, (New York, World Pub. Co., 1969), 5.

<sup>428</sup> Jeremy Elkins, “The Model of War.” *Political Theory* 38, no. 2 (2010): 224.

discourse usually does, a combative discourse. It is in these kinds of situations where critical and investigational journalism can provide unbiased news because, in any war, lives are at stake. The history of the war on drugs needs to be revisited and reviewed by those who have covered or are covering it. As the *New York Times* did with the War in Iraq, an editorial can be published in which they recognized that in “multiple instances the news was not as rigorous as it should have been,” or to show that different administrations and different administration officials sometimes fell for misinformation.<sup>429</sup> It would be naive to blame individual reporters covering the war on drugs, as a deeper examination might indicate that the problem included editors at several levels who should have pressed for more skepticism, more sources, and less hyperbolicism. For example, why journalists did not ask about how drugs’ street value was calculated?

Derived from this problem, the next important point that needs to be highlighted is the lack of consistency in the data used by the news. For example, a 1981 article reported that Colombia was already the main producer of drugs such as cocaine and marijuana, but a 1982 article said Bolivia was “the source of more than half of all the cocaine that reaches the United States.”<sup>430</sup> Again, some skepticism would have caught these discrepancies and explored them. It is difficult to have a useful discussion without solid facts. These inconsistencies hide the big picture, the global perspective and the interconnectedness of the drug problem. The articles analyzed here tended to focus on one single element such as a seizure, or a drug trafficker while only marginally referring to the wider system in which these parts existed. This tendency to cover news in segments, one piece at a time, meant the real scope of the war on drugs was lost. Colombian journalist Álvaro Sierra in a forum about drug trafficking coverage wrote to illustrate

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<sup>429</sup> “From the Editors; The Times and Iraq,” *New York Times*, May 24, 2004.

<sup>430</sup> Caroline Wright and Michael Rand. “Drug Snares in Florida,” *New York Times*, Aug. 09, 1981, A.4. Warren Hoge, “Bolivians Find a Patron in Reputed Drug Chief,” *New York Times*, Aug. 15, 1982. A.1.

this problem: “Like Winston Churchill said about the Kremlin, to estimate information about a clandestine business through seizures, arrests, and consumption surveys is like predicting the outcome of a dog fight taking place under a rug.”<sup>431</sup>

Additionally, drug news tended to be ahistorical in that it rarely presented any history of the war on drugs or the prohibition of the drugs or the history of the war on drugs. Without context, drug war coverage easily fell into the category of the extraordinary, such as drugs found in hollow artificial limbs or how Chapo Guzman’s defense lasted just 30 minutes.<sup>432</sup> This focus on the extraordinary, that in many cases became sensationalistic, left the field open for the official storyline. As Luis Astorga, Mexican academic, stated that the press has not maintained “a critical, or at least a prudent, distance from the official discourse,” and this major problem can be perfectly exemplified by the *New York Times*’ coverage of the war on drugs. Over the last several decades analyzed here, government “had a monopoly over the definition of drugs and drug trafficking. The academy, the media, the political opposition, and civil society have not generated other discourses to compete with this.”<sup>433</sup> If there has been one clear victor after decades of the war against drugs, it would be the dominant discourse of the international prohibitionist policy, and, as a result, officials’ influence on public opinion on drugs. If the public do not have the information necessary to evaluate the policies against drugs, then what kind of discussion to develop public policies would exist? In conclusion, changing the

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<sup>431</sup> Austin Forum on Journalism in the Americas. *Coverage of Drug Trafficking and Organized Crime in Latin America and the Caribbean*, (Knight Center for Journalism. 2010), 37.

<sup>432</sup> “Smuggling of Drugs in False Legs Laid to Two Colombians,” *New York Times*, Apr 04, 1973. Alan Feuer, “El Chapo’s defense? It Lasted Just 30 Minutes,” *New York Times*, Jan. 29, 2019.

<sup>433</sup> Luis Alejandro Astorga, “Tráfico de drogas ilícitas y medios de comunicación” (presentation, Media Conference: war, terrorism and violence, towards a culture of peace, Universidad Iberoamericana México, D.F., May 5-6, 2003).

prohibitionist doctrine, more than a century old, is not on the horizon; however, what it seems more realistic and necessary is to improve the coverage of the war on drugs.

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