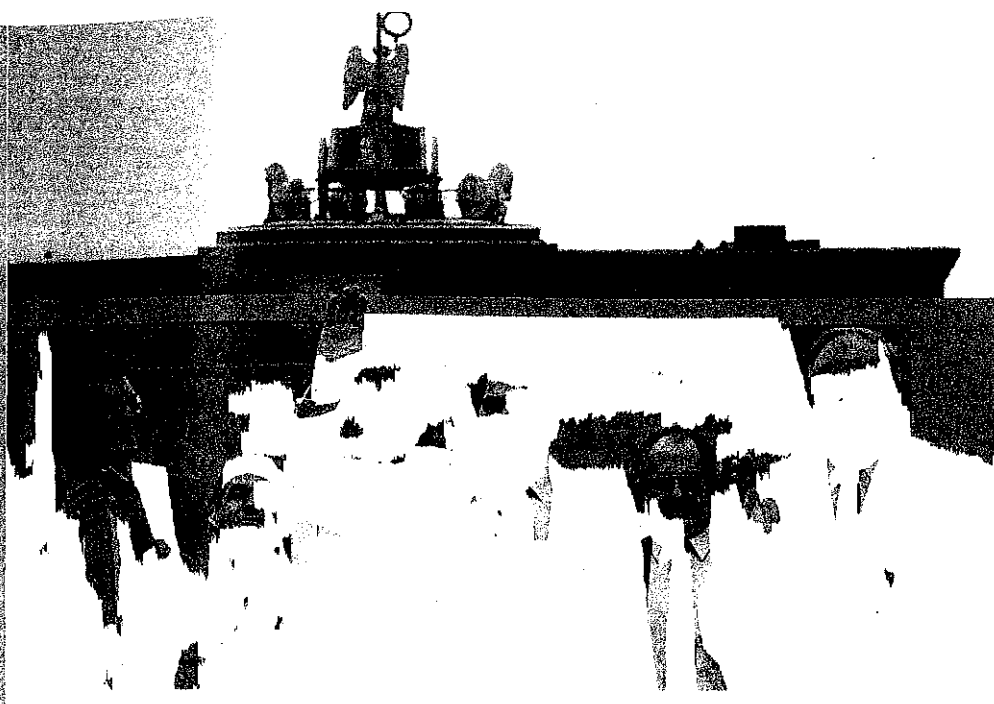


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Chapter Fourteen

THE CRACKDOWN IN AMERICA

THE REAGAN REVOLUTION AND THE WAR ON DRUGS

Jeremy Kuzmarov

"Crack was a parody of Reaganism, I concluded, a brief high with a bad aftertaste and untold bodily damage."

Jefferson Morley, "What Crack Is Really Like" (*New Republic*, October 2, 1989, p. 12)

In 1989 journalist Jefferson Morley smoked a rock of crack cocaine and wrote about his experience for *The New Republic*. Entitled "What Crack Is Really Like," the piece was written as a parody of the sweeping drug sensationalism that he saw pervading the country (Morley, 1989b). Morley concluded that crack was not instantaneously addictive, as it was portrayed in the media, and produced merely a mild euphoric high followed by a brief hangover. "If all you have in life is bad choices," he wrote, attempting to highlight structural variables like race and socioeconomic background as shaping addiction patterns, "crack may not be the most unpleasant of them" (Morley, 1989b: 12–13).

As Morley earned the ire of federal presidential drug policy advisor William Bennett, who called him a "defector in the drug war" (Morley, 1989a: 592), his journalistic stunt captured the zeitgeist of the late 1980s, which was best described in the title of a book by Mike Gray, *Drug Crazy* (see Gray, 1998). The Reagan administration is estimated to have spent over \$23 billion on drug control, with an emphasis on international interdiction and punitive enforcement. First declared by Richard Nixon in 1971 (and much earlier by Harry J. Anslinger), the "war on drugs" was part of a widescale ideological offensive designed to discredit and destroy the movements of the 1960s and to restore the climate of conformity and patriotism of the post-World War II era. Key to the transition from a welfare to a carceral state, the war on drugs exemplified the contradictions of modern conservatism, which preached a rhetoric of small government but spent billions on law and order programs and on the military. It was effective politically in that it diverted attention

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from the widening social inequalities and the breakdown of inner cities, which lay at the root of the rising drug consumption patterns. A disproportionate number of those arrested were minorities living in overpoliced ghettos; many of them turned to the illicit economy out of despair and in the absence of unionized factory jobs (Bourgeois, 1992; Reinerman and Levine, 1997). Sociologists Jeffrey Reiman and Paul Leighton have noted that, since the 1980s, "the rich get richer and the poor get prison" (Reiman and Leighton, 2006). The war on drugs has been in large part responsible for this dichotomy and very much a cornerstone of the Reagan revolution, which fundamentally transformed American life—predominantly for the worse.

The Reagan Revolution and the War on Drugs

The Reagan revolution was, at its core, a backlash against the social movements and the counterculture of the 1960s, which sought to establish alternative communities guided by pacifist and nonmaterialistic principles. During the 1960s marijuana and lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD) emerged as symbols of youthful rebellion, which was seen as capable of expanding individual consciousness. Hippie leader Jerry Rubin characterized drug use as a "cultural detoxicant" that signified the "total end of the protestant ethic" and helped break the "sham and hypocrisy and living death of plastic 9-5 America." In Vietnam, where soldiers got high in defiance of the war, sociologist Paul Starr wrote that "acid rock, drugs and peace emblems were as common in I-Corps as they were in California." On July 4, 1971 over a thousand GIs at Chu Lai held an antiwar rally that "evolved into the largest pot party in the history of the army" (Kuzmarov, 2009: 31, 64; see also Lee and Shlain, 1985).

President Richard M. Nixon declared a war on drugs on June 17, 1971—four days after the release of the Pentagon Papers; this was the centerpiece of his law-and-order mandate. Spending over \$300 million on treatment and \$800 million on enforcement, his administration established the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) and enacted eradication campaigns in Latin America and the Golden Triangle (Thailand, Laos, and Burma), where CIA-backed warlords supplied American GIs with high-grade heroin. Toward the end of his term, Nixon bragged that he had "brought the frightening spread of drug abuse, crime and anarchy to a standstill." DEA officials, however, admitted they were intercepting as little as 15 percent of the drugs that entered the country. Egil Krogh, a cabinet-level adviser, stated that enforcement efforts were "like squeezing a balloon. You squeeze it in one place and it will bulge out in another" (Kuzmarov, 2009: 1, 119, 141).

Despite its failure to curb supply rates, the war on drugs became institutionalized during the Carter and Reagan administrations. In response to the growing export of cocaine, which *Time Magazine* characterized as the "champagne drug of the rich," Carter initiated an eradication campaign in Peru's Upper Huallaga Valley (UHV) and coordinated what journalist Jack Anderson characterized as a "Vietnam style war" in Mexico that involved search-and-destroy missions and aerial defoliation campaigns that soiled the land (Kuzmarov, 2009: 167).

Domestically Carter maintained high-level funding for the DEA, although he endorsed an easing of punitive sanctions for marijuana, commenting that the

"penalties for possession of a drug shouldn't be more damaging to an individual than the use of the drug itself." By 1980, 10 states, including that of New York, had adopted decriminalization laws, making Carter susceptible to charges of being "soft on crime." Polls showed at this time that 50 percent of Americans feared walking on their street at night and 66 percent thought that drug use was a "major problem," particularly among high school students. The media aroused public fears by airing specials, for instance a CBS documentary titled "Reading, Writing and Reefer," which featured 15-year-old heroin addicts and 12-year-old middle school students from affluent suburbs who skipped class and smoked upwards of five joints per day (Wright, 1985: 5; Kuzmarov, 2009: 168).

In the late 1970s parent organizations such as the Parents Resource Institute for Drug Education (PRIDE) in Georgia began lobbying for greater government vigilance in the fight against drug abuse. Journalist Peggy Mann wrote a series of influential *Reader's Digest* and *Ladies Home Journal* articles that warned about a "lost generation" of American youth being corrupted by drugs (Mann, 1985). Prominent intellectuals of the period, such as James Q. Wilson of the Harvard Kennedy School, abandoned the scholarly emphasis on environmental factors, attributing the proliferation of drug abuse and crime in America to individual choices, intelligence, and cultural upbringing.

In his book *Thinking about Crime*, which greatly influenced the thinking of the Reagan administration, Wilson (1977) promoted the concept of the "career criminal," who could only be deterred through the threat of harsh punishment and through strict drug control measures like the public quarantining of addicts. Wilson's writings encapsulated a rising disenchantment with Great Society liberalism, which pervaded the United States during the late 1970s, and a perception that liberal social programs had wrought an ugly harvest of social disorder and criminality, as embodied by the explosion of drug abuse. They furthered the demand for the revival of harsh punitive measures, which the Reagan administration would meet (Allen, 1981; Murray, 1984).

Morning in America? The Reagan Revolution, the War on Drugs, and the Politics of Symbolism

Although he catered for an upper-class constituency and he supported a dangerous arms buildup and several death squad regimes in Central America, Ronald Reagan is revered in many parts of the United States. As historian Robert Dallek expressed it in a 1984 book, Reagan's appeal was (and remains) predicated on a politics of "symbolism," an ability to satisfy psychological rather than material needs (Dallek, 1984; Chomsky, 1991; Phillips, 1991). A large element in his appeal was his ability to promote nostalgia for the past and renewed pride in being American, which in part he did by associating himself with traditional values such as hard work, religious adherence, and patriotism.

The conservative revolution was, at its core, a hypernationalist movement, designed to revive American confidence and power in the aftermath of Vietnam (Engelhardt, 1995). The war on drugs was central to this mandate, although the fact is unrecognized by most historians.¹ Like Nixon, Reagan constantly harped on the theme

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that drugs had come close to destroying America and its youth during the 1960s and needed to be eradicated as a means of reviving the nation's global prestige. In a 1986 speech Reagan stated: "Drug abuse is the repudiation everything America is. The destructiveness and human wreckage mock our heritage." He added that America was

threatened by an epidemic of drug abuse that was growing in intensity since the 1960s. By 1980, illegal drugs were every bit as much a threat to the United States as enemy planes and missiles. The plague was fuelled by an attitude of permissiveness, both public and private. America was losing its future by default. (Quoted in Kuzmarov, 2009: 172)

In order to reverse these tendencies, Reagan increased funding for the DEA and the FBI, helped to establish a nationally coordinated border control system, and signed an executive order authorizing the CIA to produce intelligence on drug trafficking. In 1982 he assembled the South Florida Task Force under Vice President George H. W. Bush in order to facilitate cooperation between state and local law enforcement (Kuzmarov, 2009: 172; Valentine, 2009). He promoted harsh forfeiture laws, which gave police financial incentive to target drug offenders, and he intensified paramilitary raids on cannabis fields, targeting former hippie enclaves in northern California. Reagan also attempted to crack down on money-laundering banks, which was undermined by deregulatory policies that fueled corruption in the financial sector (Lernoux, 1984; Lee, 2012: 179).

The political mandate for the war on drugs was strengthened by the rise of the Colombian Medellín cartel, which was headed by the infamous Pablo Escobar Gaviria and instigated most of the shipping of cocaine into the United States. Beginning in the early 1980s, the media became filled with sensationalist pieces that depicted the harrowing violence unleashed by Escobar's henchmen in an effort to control the lucrative market from Cuban exiles (many of them were Bay of Pigs veterans formerly on the CIA payroll). Invoking a Vietnam analogy, Florida Senator Claude Pepper (D) commented:

We're seeing a Tet offensive in South Florida. 18,000 flights per year are smuggling narcotics and the influx of cocaine is having a horrifying effect on our communities, with people turning into walking zombies. You pick up the paper and read about a drug related murder ever day. (Quoted in Kuzmarov, 2009: 173; see also House Select Committee on Narcotics Abuse and Control, 1984: 2; Gugliotta and Leen, 1989)

Attempting to calm public anxieties, Reagan pushed Congress into amending the Posse Comitatus Act of 1878, so that military forces could be used to assist civilian officers in the enforcement of drug laws. By the mid-1980s the Pentagon had come to employ some of its most sophisticated weaponry, such as Black Hawk assault helicopters and "Blue Thunder" speed boats, for prohibition purposes. The Coast Guard began programming high-tech satellites to detect smuggling routes from the Caribbean. Reagan promoted stricter punitive sentencing through the 1984 Comprehensive Crime Control Act, which included a "drug kingpin law" that elevated the maximum penalty for drug traffickers to life imprisonment without the possibility of parole (Kuzmarov, 2009: 173).

In a shrewd public relations maneuver, Reagan enlisted the support of First Lady Nancy in the anti-drug crusade, after she received bad press for spending taxpayer dollars on fancy White House china. Nancy organized various anti-drug conferences involving first ladies from around the world and promoted anti-drug education and grassroots initiatives among America's youth, which epitomized the important nationalist underpinnings of the war on drugs (Baum, 1999).

In 1983, *US News & World Report* published an article titled "How Drugs Sap the Nation's Strength," which linked drugs to a decline in worker productivity and a 40 percent decline in Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT) verbal and math scores since the 1960s. Texas Governor Jim Wright stated: "Our elementary schools are functioning like fast breeder reactors for future junkies. This is the fountain from which we must draw our science, our leaders. The young are being enslaved through drugs and ruining their whole lives" (quoted in Kuzmarov, 2009: 173). In response to such views, the Reagan administration developed the Just Say No campaign, inaugurated by Nancy during a visit to an elementary school in Oakland, California. Over 10,000 clubs were eventually formed, and they sponsored public parades, rallies, drug hot-lines, and a national walk against drugs. In California, in 1986, over 8,000 youth gathered in the Rose Bowl to read in unison their Just Say No drug pledge. Displaying the intrinsic patriotic message of the campaign, they released thousands of red, white, and blue balloons with anti-drug slogans. The youth were meant to represent the bright future of America, unsullied by drugs. Reagan stated: "To the young people out there, our country needs you and it needs you to be clear eyed and clear minded. Please when it comes to drugs, Just Say No" (quoted in Kuzmarov, 2009: 174).

In March 1983, as part of a widescale media campaign, the White House Drug Abuse Council sponsored a made-for-television film, "Cocaine: One Man's Poison," about a man who destroyed his family life and career as a result of addiction. Drug Policy advisor Carleton Turner called the show a "perfect vehicle for deglamorizing drugs." In a 1986 letter signed by more than 300 members of Congress, Reagan pleaded for the collaboration of the major television networks in waging an "unprecedented, coordinated offensive against the culture that encourages the use of dangerous drugs." The White House's Office on Drug Abuse Policy subsequently aired a string of ads through the Media-Advertising Partnership for a Drug Free America, which had been established with network subsidies to "unsell" illegal drugs. Many ads featured prominent celebrities as well as the McGruff crime dog, a creation of Reagan publicists popular among kids (Kuzmarov, 2009: 174).

Prime-time shows also adopted anti-drug themes with government prodding. During an episode of the hit show *Punky Brewster*, Punky formed a Just Say No club at her school after being pressured by her friends to try drugs. At the end of the National Broadcasting Company (NBC) broadcast *Solcil Moon Frye*, the real life Punky, elaborated on the dangers of drug use. Nancy Reagan later appeared as a guest star on the NBC hit *Different Strokes* to decry the pernicious influence of drugs at the school of lead character Arnold (played by Gary Coleman). While not everyone took the anti-drug message seriously, the prominence accorded to it and the scope of the advertising campaign demonstrate how the Reagan administration was able to sway the content presented in the media and in popular culture and thus to solidify anti-drug mores in the United States.

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Overcoming the Vietnam Syndrome: Reagan's War on Drugs in the Military

During the Vietnam War era policymakers blamed drugs and the counterculture for the breakdown of the armed forces. Reagan consequently made drug control in the military a high priority. Commenting that "an alert mind in battle free of drugs can mean the difference between life and death," he commissioned the Pentagon to ensure strict enforcement standards and expanded recreational facilities on military bases, where boredom was seen as a root cause of addiction. Reagan also promoted drug education for new recruits and revived mandatory urinalysis testing. Under Operation Clean-Sweep, those found with traces of marijuana, cocaine, or heroin faced likely discharge or punishment—and not rehabilitation, which was prioritized by Nixon (Kuzmarov, 2009: 175).

Because of the new regulations, Reagan boasted in 1986 that drug use had declined by 67 percent in the armed forces, which he portrayed as a symbol of the resurgence of American military power—particularly in light of Operation Urgent Fury in Grenada, where the military overthrew a Marxist regime in less than a week (in a mission that "the NYPD could have carried out," as one analyst noted). In the mid-1980s some polls showed that nearly 70 percent of Americans approved Washington's delivery of a "stronger national defense." Reagan commented: "Restoring America's strength has been one of our administration's highest goals. We've turned a desperate situation around" (quoted in Pease, 1994: 575; see also Lewis, 1994). The war on drugs appeared to be pivotal in facilitating these ends and helped promote public assurances that the drug-tainted war in Vietnam was in the past.

"Narco-Guerrillas" and the Expansion of the International Drug War

Reagan's war on drugs was most vigorous in the international realm. In April 1986, at the urging of a House Select Committee on Narcotics Abuse and Control that pushed incessantly for the militarization of the war on drugs, Reagan signed a directive identifying drug production and trafficking as threats to American national security and brokered bilateral interdiction agreements with 23 countries pushing for crop substitution and alternative development projects. The most ambitious efforts were in Turkey, in the Golden Triangle (Thailand and Burma), and in Peru, where USAID provisioned \$26.5 million to help reduce coca cultivation in the Upper-Huallaga Valley and paid farmers \$300 per hectare of coca destroyed (McClintock, 1988; Walker, 1989: 203; Renard, 1996).

The State Department expanded the training and financing of counternarcotics police and army regiments throughout Latin America. Most of the advisory instruction was conducted at the US-run School of the Americas in Fort Benning, Georgia, which served as a center for the training of elite officers—including some of the continent's most notorious murderers and torturers—in counterinsurgency. The narcotic subsections sometimes served as a front for waging counter-guerrilla warfare and were staffed by security forces linked to major human rights violations, for example a notorious death squad operator in El Salvador, Dr. Hector Regaldo. These forces

helped to bolster the policing powers of repressive regimes and were implicated in extra-judicial kidnappings and torture, as well as in narcotics trafficking (at times). Stan Goff, a former Special Forces officer in Colombia who headed a training team, commented: "The training that I conducted was anything but counter-narcotics... It was updated Vietnam-style counter-insurgency, but we were told to refer to it as counter-narcotics should anyone ask... It was extremely clear to us that the counter-narcotics thing was an official cover story" (quoted in Stokes, 2005: 90; see also Gill, 2004; Marshall, 1991).

In 1986 Congress passed a law mandating the certification of American allies on the basis of their commitment to the anti-drug crusade as a precondition for their receiving foreign assistance. Critics charged that the screening was discretionary and enabled the State Department to intensify cooperation with the policing intelligence networks of client regimes engaged in the suppression of social movements deemed threatening to American interests. In Central America and the Andes, military equipment—including B-52s, helicopters, and assault rifles provided for drug suppression purposes—was utilized in direct strikes against insurgents and their civilian supporters, while their use was legitimized on the grounds that these people would harbor narcotic manufacturers and distributors (Scott and Marshall, 1991: 165–171; Kuzmarov, 2009: 177).

The State Department officially claimed that "narco-guerrillas" or "narco-terrorists" were plotting to undermine American national security through the export of drugs. Customs commissioner William Von Raab commented: "What we're seeing is the development of what I call the Siamese twins of death and destruction—international terrorism and narcotics smuggling. Drugs have become the natural ally of those who would choose to destroy the democratic societies [in our hemisphere] through violent means." The term "narco-guerrilla" and "narco-terrorist" were first employed by American ambassador to Colombia Lewis Tambs to promote Congressional support for the war against the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC)—a pro-Castro guerrilla organization intent on expelling American private investment and redistributing national wealth through land reform (US Congress, 1984: 2).

According to the DEA and regional specialists, FARC's involvement with drugs actually paled before the deeper corruption of government forces and was predominantly limited in this period to the taxing of coca farmers living under FARC's domain. Criminal traffickers throughout Latin America deplored leftist ideologies and amassed vast fortunes, for example lavish mansions, professional sports clubs, and their own petting zoos. Bolivian drug baron Roberto Suarez Gomez was so rich that he offered to pay off Bolivia's foreign debt on condition that his nephew be released from prison. The Medellín and Cali cartels contributed upwards of ten million dollars to the Nicaraguan contras—an amalgamation of US-trained paramilitary organizations dedicated to destabilizing the popularly backed Sandanista government. Suarez meanwhile allied himself with the right-wing Garcia Meza regime in the early 1980s, after the notorious "cocaine coup." In 1981 the Colombian M-19 guerrilla group kidnapped the daughter of Cali kingpin Jorge Luis Ochoa, an act that led to the eruption of violence between the two groups. The Colombian cartels eventually formed paramilitary "hunter-killer" squads designed to assist the state security apparatus and the military in targeting the *guerrilleros* and their followers with CIA assistance, even after the declaration of a ceasefire; thus they contributed

to a climate of terror. Thoumi, 1995; Hyatt, 1995. Hyatt criticized the Medellín centralizing production

Despite the drug policies, the DEA played a role in the spread of narcotics. The sting operation during which resulted in the capture of key traffickers, including Enrique "Kiki" Carrillo with the Colombia refining complex at the cartel to develop extortion and violence. Rodrigo Bonilla, with 2009: 397).

In 1985 the DEA's Police Patrol Unit joined national police. The processing laboratories. Using Bell 214 and power trimmers capable of 40 coca labs, the DEA cut off coca leaves (McClintock, 1995).

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In the Caribbean, government programs and the Reagan administration islands for aircraft

to a climate of terror that engulfed the country (Bagley, 1988: 70–92; Lee, 1989b; Thoumi, 1995; Hylton, 2006). Under Operation Pseudo Miranda, the CIA infiltrated the Medellín cartel and brokered deals to traffic cocaine with the goal of centralizing production and keeping it out of the hands of guerillas (Bucchi, 1994).

Despite the drug war's often being subordinated to broader foreign policy objectives, the DEA played a far more aggressive role in countering the transnational spread of narcotics throughout Reagan's presidency. In 1984 it launched an Andean sting operation dubbed Pisces; later it launched Operation Intercept II in Mexico, which resulted in the closing of the border for eight days and the arrest of several key traffickers, including a onetime CIA "asset" who had murdered DEA agent Enrique "Kiki" Camarena. On March 10, 1984 the DEA worked in collaboration with the Colombian national police to destroy the Medellín cartel's main cocaine refining complex at Tranquilandia in the Amazon rain forest. The operation forced the cartel to develop mobile refining plants as well as to increase the use of extortion and violence; this culminated in the murder of Justice Minister Lara Rodrigo Bonilla, who had sanctioned the raid (Bagley, 1988; Toro, 1995; Valentine, 2009: 397).

In 1985 the DEA launched Operation Condor in conjunction with Rural Mobile Police Patrol Units (UMOPAR), the counternarcotics brigade of the Peruvian national police. The mission consisted of joint military strikes and air raids on cocaine-processing laboratories in Tingo Maria, the capital of Peru's cocalandia in the UHV. Using Bell 214 and fixed wing C-123 helicopters donated by the US military and power trimmers capable of cutting coca bushes by air, Condor caused the demolition of 40 coca labs, the disabling of 40 airstrips, and the destruction of 725 metric tons of coca leaf (McClintock, 1988: 131–132; Menzel, 2006).

On the model of Condor, in 1986 the US led another four-month mission in Bolivia entitled Blast Furnace, in which a joint collaboration of 160 US military troops, 16 army helicopters, and anti-narcotics police conducted 256 raids and blew up 21 cocaine-processing laboratories in the Chapare region (though these were later found to have been empty). Touching off a widespread public outcry against the violation of national sovereignty, the operation also resulted in the murder of well-known botanist Noel Kempff and two other men after they mistakenly landed their plane near a drug-processing facility targeted for attack. Nevertheless, a year later, the DEA launched Operation Snowcap, where US Special Forces wearing camouflaged uniforms assisted Bolivian military officers in laying siege to regional refineries and in destroying thousands of hectares of coca-cultivating fields (Youngers and Rosin, 2005; Kuzmarov, 2009: 178). The House Foreign Affairs Committee later warned against the direct use of American personnel in drug operations, out of fear of their "dying an excruciating death on an isolated jungle floor." It instead advocated that the DEA train "local military forces" to carry out America's drug control mandate—just as the State Department was promoting greater reliance on proxy forces to fight revolutionary insurrections throughout the so-called developing world (State Department Draft Report, 1989: 10; Kuzmarov, 2009: 179).

In the Caribbean, where International Monetary Fund (IMF) structural adjustment programs and the debt crisis made farmers dependent on growing drug crops, the Reagan administration launched a joint policing effort to deny use of the Bahamas islands for aircraft refueling and as a staging area for smuggling. It also intensified

herbicide spraying (Bullington, 1992; Prashad, 2007). In 1981 Congress repealed the Percy amendment that banned chemical defoliants, which Vice President Bush viewed as "the most effective means" of destroying drug crops on a large scale. In the Golden Triangle, the DEA worked with police units to defoliate over 40,000 acres, though in Burma, as University of California ethnographer Bernard Nietchmann reported, "instead of spraying opium poppies with herbicides, the Air Force is spraying villages and food crops to weaken civilian support of armed resistance [against the government]" (quoted in Marshall, 1991: 27; see also Kuzmarov, 2009: 179; Lintner, 1994).

In Colombia and Peru aerial eradication was similarly incorporated into brutal pacification efforts designed to drive farmers from guerrilla territory into strategic government-controlled zones. In Guatemala it was part of a scorched earth campaign led by Generals Efraín Ríos Montt and Hector Gramajo that razed over 400 villages and killed over 100,000 civilians—mostly Mayan Indians loosely linked to M-13 and Guerrilla Army of the Poor (ERP) rebels (Shalom, 1993; Grandin, 2006).

Apart from contributing to a rising tide of state terror, chemical defoliation helped to destroy the livelihood of farmers, who had largely been driven to narcotic cultivation by external market forces, poor regional infrastructure, and neoliberal free trade policies that undermined local agricultural production. The sprayings further accelerated the process of deforestation, forcing Quechua Indian *cocaleros* in Bolivia and Peru to move deeper into the rain forest, where they practiced slash-and-burn agricultural techniques damaging to the soil. As in Mexico, the defoliants themselves caused protracted health and environmental damages, helping to turn part of the Andean landscape into what political scientist Cynthia McClintock aptly termed a "toxic waste dump" (McClintock, 1988: 104; see also Goti, 1992; Jelsma, 2001; Grandin, 2006: 216).

Unmindful of humanitarian ramifications, as in other realms of its foreign policy, the Reagan administration forged a pact with Peruvian President Alan García in 1988 to supply the military with a potent chemical herbicide called tebuthiuron (or spike), deemed capable of "wiping out" the regional coca crop. García approved the quid pro quo arrangement because of his reliance on the US to pay off the country's national debt and to help fight the left-wing Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path) and Tupac Amaru (MRTA) insurgencies. Human rights organizations later uncovered that Eli Lilly, the pharmaceutical company that had manufactured tebuthiuron, refused to sell the drug to American enforcement agents because it was thought to emit fumes capable of causing birth defects and cancer and to leave a residue in neighboring crops, plants, and water systems for up to five years. Despite protest from Congress and the resignation of Walter Gentner, the State Department's chief herbicide scientist, the deal went forward. The sale of tebuthiuron backfired politically by forcing many *cocaleros* to seek protection from Sendero guerrillas, who had the military capabilities to shield them from future chemical attack (the same was true of FARC in Colombia) (Gonzalez, 1992; Kuzmarov, 2009: 180).

One of Reagan's most publicized initiatives was the ratification of existing bilateral extradition treaties with the Andean countries. In 1987 this policy led to the deportation of 10 major Colombian traffickers, including Carlos Rivas Lehder, a flamboyant leader of the Medellín cartel, who was sentenced to life imprisonment without the possibility of parole. In a speech before the Hartford County Bar Association, Vice

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President Bush bragged that Lehder, who later cut his sentence by serving as an informant in the Noriega trial, "now sits to rot and languish in a Jacksonville jail [for the rest of his miserable life]" (quoted in Kuzmarov, 2009: 180). Lehder's imprisonment was widely publicized because of his support for left-wing guerrilla movements and espousal of an anti-American political ideology. In the early 1980s Lehder formed his own political party, Movimiento Latino Nacional (MLN), and hoped to use his public stature to wage an all-encompassing attack against the Colombian oligarchic leadership, which he considered to be "hopelessly dependent on North American economic and financial support." In 1985 Lehder appeared on Colombian television calling for an alliance of Marxist revolutionaries and military officers to join him in "the cocaine bonanza, the Achilles heel of American imperialism and the arm of the struggle against America" (quoted in Gugliotta and Len, 1990: 351). He also placed a bounty of \$350,000 dollars for the killing of American DEA agents (see also Bagley, 1988: 77).

Though Lehder's case was presented as sign of a left-wing conspiracy, his politics was in fact an anomaly, publicized in order to deflect attention away from the corruption of key governmental allies. These included Islamic extremist Gulbuddin Hikmatyar in Afghanistan, Pakistan's Zia Al-Huq, Burmese General Ne Win, and military and police officers throughout Latin America who were supported by US intelligence in using narcotics to fund counterinsurgency and terrorist activities (Lifschultz, 1992; Scott and Marshall, 1992; Nadelman, 1993; Webb, 1998). Nicaraguan contra operatives trained by the CIA were found to have smuggled drugs into the United States, including through clandestine flights from Mena, Arkansas, under the nose of then governor Bill Clinton (Cockburn and St. Clair, 1998: 332). The United States was long complicit in the global drug trade, the former chief of DEA intelligence Dennis Dayle admitting that almost all of his investigative targets in a 30 year career "invariably turned out to be working for the CIA" (Scott, 1996: 167). General Paul F. Gorman, head of the US southern command remarked that, "if you want to go into the subversion business, collect intelligence and move arms, you deal with the drug movers" (Marshall, 1991: 54).

In 1982 the CIA intervened to block the prosecution of Miguel Nazar Haro, the head of Mexican intelligence caught running a stolen car and a smuggling ring from the United States into Mexico and previously shut-down Operation Durian in Bangkok, in order to protect drug-trafficking "assets" who were providing arms to Taiwanese intelligence, in violation of congressional mandates. In Honduras, the US ambassador John Negroponte (later ambassador to Iraq) closed the DEA office in Tegucigulpa to protect the corrupt ruling oligarchy, including death squad operator Gustavo Alvarez Martinez, who established training camps for contra operatives to wage war on Nicaragua (Rosenberg, 1988; Marshall, 1991: 43; Scott and Marshall, 1992; Felber, 2001: 139).

The Reagan administration additionally reestablished diplomatic relations with Panamanian dictator Manuel Noriega after he agreed to provide air bases for the contras. A long-time CIA "asset" trained at the School of the Americas and under the USAID police programs, Noriega was implicated in arms for cocaine deals with Colombian cartels that operated processing labs in the Panamanian jungle. He presided over what John Kerry (D-MA) termed a "narcokleptocracy"; the term implies that Noriega pilfered all funds from drug sales to bolster his own fortune (Dinges,

1989). In 1987 Dr. Norman Bailey, a special assistant to President Reagan, resigned from the National Security Council because of Reagan's ties to Noriega. In an internal memo he stated: "It saddens me to think that successive administrations, both Democrat and Republican, all conspired for years to protect a group of despicable international outlaws." Democratic Senator Joseph D'Amato (NY) further charged that the war on drugs was "nothing more than rhetoric," which did little to "combat tin-horn dictators who hide behind puppet presidents and have turned governments into criminal drug enterprises" (both quoted in Kuzmarov, 2009: 181). These comments epitomize the double standards of Reagan's war on drugs, which indirectly and at times directly subsidized leading narco-traffickers while spending millions of taxpayer dollars on futile eradication campaigns.

Resistance and the Failure of Prohibition

Not surprisingly, American prohibition efforts yielded pronounced resistance. In Colombia, farmers subject to spraying allied themselves with the guerrillas for protection, while the cartels declared "absolute and total war" on the government with the support of paramilitary networks and hired teenage killers (known as sicarios), thus instigating an orgy of violence from which the country has yet to recover. When the United States refused to rescind its extradition treaty following a peace proposal in 1985, these cartels took over two dozen judges and parliament representatives hostage—which led to violent military counterreprisals and the destruction of the Palace of Justice. They later assassinated liberal presidential candidate Luis Carlos Galán. Through the end of the decade, many traffickers were able to operate with impunity, due to the fear they spawned. In 1987 the Colombian government released Ochoa from custody, in an act that US attorney general Edwin Meese termed "a shocking blow to international law enforcement." One DEA agent commented: "There isn't a cop that will arrest them, a judge that will try them or jail that will hold them out of fear for being killed" (quotations from Kuzmarov, 2009: 182).

Elsewhere in Latin America resistance was nearly as fervid, if only slightly less socially destructive. In Mexico farmers fired back at helicopters that were trying to defoliate their fields, while high-level traffickers assaulted and murdered anti-drug officers and other so-called drug-war "collaborators," provoking a malicious wave of government reprisals. Following the launching of Operation Intercept Part II, which employed electronic censor devices pioneered in the Laos "secret war," over 60,000 demonstrators took to the streets, in protest against the militarization of the drug war and against the continued presence of the DEA on Mexican soil, which they tied to a policy of American unilateralism and hegemonic encroachment (Toro, 1995: 5).

In Bolivia, Operation Blast Furnace undermined the presidency of Victor Paz Estenssoro, a key figure in the country's 1952 revolution, and helped to stoke strong anti-American sentiments. The Bolivian labor federation under the leadership of future President Evo Morales mobilized coca farmers and workers and peasants in the Chapare and Yungas regions to demonstrate against USAID-enforced crop substitution and aerial defoliation and conducted acts of civil disobedience in the form of rail and road blockades. US Secretary of State George P. Shultz was later the target

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of an attempted bombing, as the movement radicalized (Lee, 1989b; Menzell, 2006: 21). In Peru coca-growing farmers banded together to ambush DEA convoys, in response to brutal eradication campaigns that drove some to suicide, while Sendero guerrillas declared an all-out war against "government genocide and eradication," which it thought to be analogous. In 1988, Sendero cadres conspired with local cocaleros to murder 32 rural police patrol officers, while waging terrorist-style attacks against known DEA collaborators (Gonzalez, 1992: 109; Rojas, 2005: 213; Kuzmarov, 2009: 183).

Because coca was a profitable economic commodity and chewing it a socially accepted practice with deep historical roots, by the late 1980s Latin Americans of all political persuasions had come to view the DEA and other narcotics officers with suspicion and disdain (Allen, 2002; Spedding, 2003). The resistance to American interdiction efforts was a response to the deep shortcomings of America's foreign drug policy. While heavy on rhetoric and in some cases on action, American policy-makers failed to consider the local terrain in which they were operating, or to address the underlying factors that shaped the expansion of the international drug traffic, just as they failed to address the economic inequality, spiritual despondency, and community breakdown that breed the high rates of demand at home (Jones, 1992; Chomsky, 1993; Reinerman and Levine, 1997). The Reagan administration also failed to consider the protracted human costs to the war on drugs, which became increasingly high as the 1980s progressed and contributed to escalating cycles of violence.

Casual Drug Users as Accomplices to Murder? Crack and the Late 1980s Drug Frenzy

The 1980s anti-drug crusade in America reached its zenith during the last three years of Reagan's presidency, due in large measure to the spread of crack, a cheap form of cocaine that could be smoked. In June 1986 Len Bias, a basketball star at the University of Maryland, died of an apparent cocaine overdose (the evidence remains inconclusive) after being selected second in the National Basketball Association draft. His death helped spawn a media frenzy that was further provoked by DEA lobbying, as agent Robert Stutman acknowledged (Cole, 1989; Beckett, 1997: 56).

In May of that year, CBS aired a documentary titled *48 Hours on Crack Street*, which attracted over 15 million viewers and depicted in graphic detail the workings of the New York City crack trade. Host Dan Rather proclaimed: "Tonight, CBS takes you to the streets, to the war zone for an unusual two hours of hands on horror" (quoted in Reinerman and Levine, 1997: 20). The same month, ABC anchor Peter Jennings declared crack to be "instantaneously addictive" and "the most dangerous drug known to man." In June, *Newsweek* compared the spread of crack to a "medieval plague" and editorialized: "In 1941, the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor and we went to war, and today, little white packets are invading our country" (Kuzmarov, 2009: 184). By exaggerating the threat of crack and linking it to issues of national security, the media were able to capitalize on deep-rooted fears surrounding drugs—fears remnant from the 1960s—and to sell more copies or garner higher ratings.

In 1987 the DEA issued a report blaming the media for "distorting the public perception of crack," which it characterized as a "secondary rather than primary problem in most areas" (Reinarman and Levine, 1997: 32). The National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) concluded that less than 1 percent of young adults used crack, which was "not instantaneously addictive." They also found that the number of cocaine-inspired fatalities was "markedly" less than for alcohol and nicotine." Adam Paul Weissman of the *Washington Post* later admitted that he had become a "drug-hype junkie," while the *New York Times* editorialized that the media had "discovered crack and overdosed on oratory" (Kuzmarov, 2009: 184; see also Campbell and Reeves, 1994; Inciardi, 1997). Nevertheless, in a 1989 public opinion poll, 64 percent of respondents cited drugs—and, more specifically, crack—as the top national security threat confronting the nation. By this time congressional representatives had become flooded with letters that demanded greater vigilance in the face of a purported epidemic. One woman who supported the death penalty for traffickers wrote to Charles Rangel (D-NY) that "drugs were killing America and jeopardized American freedom" (Goode and Ben-Yehudah, 1994: 88; see also Reagan Presidential Library).

Government officials were at the vanguard in drumming up fears over drugs. In 1988 First Lady Nancy Reagan, who was addicted to prescription medication, characterized casual drug users as "accomplices to murder" (Kuzmarov, 2009: 184). Liberal rep. Stephen Solarz (D-NY) said drugs were "like missiles fired at American cities" (Scott and Marshall, 1991: 3). New York Mayor Ed Koch advocated strip searches conducted by the army on all travelers who entered the country from Southeast Asia and Mexico, and also the bombing of Medellín Colombia, while Arthur Ravenal, Jr. (R-SC) called for the military to shoot down on sight any aircraft suspected of smuggling drugs (Kuzmarov, 2009: 184; Mabry, 1988: 53). Illinois Congressman Henry J. Hyde suggested before the House Foreign Affairs Committee that "maybe a firing squad would be suitable punishment for federal agents caught collaborating with drug traffickers... It wouldn't bother me, I tell you. It's my kids or your kids." William Bennett, Secretary of Education under Reagan and later Director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy, added that he'd have no moral problem if all drug dealers were "beheaded" (both quoted in Kuzmarov, 2009: 185).

Even though his own son, Lowell Scott, had been at one time addicted to drugs, Los Angeles Police Department Chief Daryl Gates offered the most extreme prescription. He told a *Los Angeles Times* journalist that "casual drug users ought to be taken outside and shot." Reflecting the continued importance of drugs as a symbol of social subversion that survived from the 1960s, the inventor of the Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) team also called drug use a form of "treason" (Kuzmarov, 2009: 185).

Gates's comments exemplified the intense emotional sway that the drug issue held during the late 1980s. The 1986 mid-term and the 1988 federal election were both characterized by candidates challenging their opponents to take urine tests. In 1986 Congress unanimously passed the Omnibus Anti-Drug Abuse Act, which granted \$6 billion to the drug war over three years. "The bill is out of control, but of course I'm for it," said Congressman David McCurdy of Oklahoma, in a wry tone. Patricia Schroeder, a Democrat from Colorado further commented: "There's a mob mentality in there. In football there's a thing called piling on. I think that's what we're seeing

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here right before the election." Claude Pepper (D-FL) added: "We're close to the point now where you could put an amendment through to hang, quarter and draw drug dealers" (quoted in "House Passes \$6 Billion Anti-Drug Bill," 1986; see also Kuzmarov, 2009: 185).

Besides stiffer sentencing, the 1986 Anti-Drug Abuse Act mandated urinalysis testing for workers in "sensitive" jobs, including all federal employees and law enforcement officials, and imposed mandatory minimum sentencing regulations for possession and dealing offenses related to all illicit drugs, including marijuana. (As a result of lobbying by the pharmaceutical industry, ephedrine, a drug with a key role in the production of methamphetamines, remained legal.) In 1988 another major anti-drug bill was passed, which increased federal funding from \$4.1 billion in fiscal year 1988 to \$7.9 billion in 1990. Seventy-five percent of the funds were appropriated for supply-side interdiction. As in the 1986 Omnibus bill, drug enforcement and policing were prioritized over treatment. In 1987 Reagan had mandated a \$200 million cut in federal funding for drug rehabilitation programs, in an attempt to reduce the national deficit. This caused the closure of methadone clinics and therapeutic community centers established during the Nixon era and led to the chronic underfunding of treatment facilities (Hoffman, 1987; Perl, 1989: 89; Massing, 1998).

Reagan's legislation promoted particularly harsh penalties for crack. Under the terms of the 1986 Anti-Drug Abuse Act, possession with intent to sell five grams carried a mandatory minimum five-year sentence. Because crack was largely a phenomenon of the inner cities, many considered these sentencing stipulations to be racist, particularly in light of the fact that the mandatory minimum sentence for similar amounts of cocaine was just 10 to 37 months. The discrepancy in sentencing, coupled with overpolicing in ghetto communities, contributed to the "darkening" of America's overbloated prison system, which experienced a 98 percent rate of growth between 1980 and 1988. Dubbed the "gulag state" by critics, America in the mid-1980s surpassed both the Soviet Union and apartheid South Africa as the leading per capita prisoner state in the world. By the end of the decade, over one million inmates were incarcerated in federal or state facilities, 58 percent having been convicted on drug charges (Lusane, 1991; Reinerman and Levine, 1997: 260; Rosenblatt, 1996). Prison overcrowding became a major problem; it resulted in deteriorating conditions and cutbacks in educational opportunities for inmates (Abramsky, 2007). Despite its proclaimed fiscal conservatism, the Reagan government is on the whole estimated to have spent more than \$23 billion in the drug war, three fourths of the figure going toward law enforcement. Drug arrests increased by an average of 60 percent in major urban areas, for instance in New York City, where 88,641 people were indicted on drug charges in 1988, by comparison to just 18,521 in 1980. Approximately 70 percent of convictions were for felonies (Belenko, 1993: 119; Reinerman and Levine, 1997: 293).

These totals increased even further under Reagan's successor and ideological heir, George H. W. Bush, who took the drug war to new heights, in response to continued public hysteria and as a means of advancing the conservative emphasis on punitive law enforcement over social welfare programs for the poor. Bush became notorious for inflating the threat of crack when he claimed, in a national address, to have purchased the drug in a park across the street from the White House—in reality it had

been sold to the DEA in a prearranged buy (Beckett, 1997: 33–36). His administration utilized the end of the Cold War to pursue the full-scale militarization of the war on drugs; this was exemplified in its Andean strategy and invasion of Panama in order to overthrow Manuel Noriega, in an operation that claimed the lives of at least several thousand civilians (Chomsky, 1991; Johns, 1993).

The main opposition to the drug war came from intellectuals, including libertarian conservatives such as University of Chicago economist Milton Friedman, an advisor to Reagan who stated in an editorial:

Every friend of freedom must be as revolted as I am by the prospect of turning the United States into an armed camp, by the vision of jails filled with casual drug users and of an army of enforcers empowered to invade the liberty of citizens on slight evidence. A country in which shooting down unidentified planes “on suspicion” can be seriously considered as a drug war tactic is not the kind of United States I want to hand to future generations. (Quoted in Kuzmarov, 2009: 187)

The dissent pervading the American intellectual establishment was largely mooted, however, by the political climate of the times. For politicians, drugs provided a convenient scapegoat, which deflected attention from the widening inequalities bred by deindustrialization, corporate downsizing, and the decline of Great Society liberalism. One senator commented:

If we blame crime on crack, our politicians are off the hook. Forgotten are the failed schools, the malign welfare programs, the desolate neighborhoods, the wasted years. Only crack is to blame. One is tempted to think that if crack did not exist, someone somewhere would have received a federal grant to develop it. (Quoted in Alexander, 2010: 52)

Sociologists Craig Reinerman and Harry G. Levine add that “crack was a godsend to the right,” which used it as an

ideological fig leaf to place over the unsightly urban ills that had increased markedly under Reagan administration social and economic policies... They could blame an array of problems on deviant individuals and then expand the nets of social control to imprison those people for causing the problems. (Reinerman and Levine, 1997: 38)

These comments capture the political utility of the “crack scare” and of Reagan’s drug war during the 1980s, during which time the United States emerged as the world’s leading carceral state. This is one of the key legacies of the Reagan revolution.

NOTE

1. Princeton historian Sean Wilentz barely discusses the war on drugs in his supposedly comprehensive *The Age of Reagan* (Wilentz, 2008) while Gil Troy ignores bookshelves full of evidence in praising it in the few paragraphs he devotes to it in *Morning and America: Ronald Reagan and the Invention of the 1980s* (Troy, 2005). Besides the inadequacy of their discussion of the war on drugs, both books are flawed by failing to come to terms with the violence of Reagan’s foreign policy, especially in Central America, Sub-Saharan

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Africa, and Afghanistan, and by failing to articulate his role in building domestic legitimacy for the American imperial project in the aftermath of Vietnam. The opportunity thus exists for writing a much better scholarly synthesis.

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Before the end of his alienate, outrage, and His reforms, his bureaucratic power all had the appearance of the pre-Environmental Protection in Reagan's presidency; framework for protection of natural exploitation of naturalized that moment in 1987). For Hays and agency amounted to a nation; for this reason it politics.

Even from the distance allowed this sharp criticism more nuanced, touching quite specific: stripped of sections to abortion of nation of the species of international treaty but have more to do with For the writer Chris "Republican war on section until well into the In this essay I agree understanding change