



Pablo Escobar was first arrested for his role in the drug trade in 1976. Initially, however, he wasn't too worried about being extradited to the States.

Why would someone living in Colombia worry about being tried in America for whatever he was doing in Colombia?

Then ... when Escobar's role in flooding the U.S. with cocaine made *him* rich beyond all measure, and American drug use (with its attendant disastrous consequences) negatively impacted more and more people in the States ... the federal government took a different approach.

What if federal agents could stem the flood of drugs, like cocaine, by targeting the *suppliers*?

Maybe the governments of Colombia and America, for example, could agree on an extradition treaty which would allow the U.S. to capture, try, convict and then imprison key people—like Escobar—for his role in illegal drug trafficking?

Maybe an American "War on Drugs" could make Pablo a top target?

So ... the U.S. federal government started to get really serious about the problem when the Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs was transformed into the DEA (Drug Enforcement Administration). That happened on July 1, 1973.

By that time, the use of illegal street drugs was really starting to increase. It wasn't until the 1980s, however, that a genuine "War on Drugs" was launched.

How did that "war" happen? In Judson Knight's article about the DEA, online via the Internet FAQ Archives, we learn some things about America's "War on Drugs." Here are some excerpts:

On July 1, 1973, the Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs became DEA, which arrived on the scene as drug use was spreading from college campuses to the mainstream of middle-class life. At no time before or since has drug use been as socially acceptable as it was in the 1970s, and DEA faced an uphill battle both culturally and operationally.

The extraordinary growth in marijuana and cocaine use was coupled with a staggering rise in drug traffic from Colombia, Mexico, and other countries, and DEA greatly increased its interdiction efforts at borders, harbors, and airports.

This photo, for example, depicts a DEA agent guarding more than 5,000 pounds of cocaine which he, and fellow agents, had seized from a Panamanian ship. That ship had docked in Miami—a port which federal agents were targeting.

Drug use in the United States reached an all-time high in 1979, and began to steadily decline thereafter. The change is one for which DEA rightly claims considerable credit, but a number of factors contributed.

Some were at the level of policy, both public and private, including the "war of drugs" initiated by President Ronald Reagan, the "Just Say No" campaign of First Lady Nancy Reagan, and the efforts of companies who contributed airtime, advertising space, and creative talents to the Partnership for a Drug-Free America.

But a societal change was also underway, closely tied with the 1980s emphasis on traditional values, health and fitness, and self-help. By the beginning of the 1990s, Alcoholics Anonymous and other addiction recovery groups were as popular as drugs and alcohol had been a decade earlier.

Stopping drug abuse, however, was neither simple nor totally effective. And ... with new drugs came new challenges.

Because of the addictive nature of street drugs, for example, users were moving from drug abuse to drug dependency.

Even as drug use became less widespread, the level of commitment to drugs on the part of users deepened. This was accompanied by the rise of ever more dangerous drugs.

In the mid-1980s, there was ecstasy, followed by an extraordinarily lethal cocaine derivative called crack.

The underpinning of new criminal enterprises, crack spawned an attendant culture in America's inner cities, but the drug knew no ethnic barriers: users of all backgrounds joined the ranks of those addicted to this powerful narcotic.

Just as marijuana and even cocaine had once been mainstreamed among the youth culture as a whole, by the early 1990s one of the most powerful drugs of all, heroin, became a fixture among a much smaller youth segment of "Generation X."

Pundits even spoke of "heroin chic," a gaunt look attended by a lackadaisical demeanor and unkempt clothing, which penetrated fashion and culture in general.

This was followed a few years later by the surge in popularity of methamphetamines [also referred to as meth, crystal, chalk, ice] and other synthetic stimulants, produced in illegal laboratories across the nation.

In short ... while the "War on Drugs" may have had some success, it neither stopped the desire for drugs (by users) nor the supply of them (by traffickers).

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