

**THE WAR ON DRUGS IN CHICAGO: THINKING LOCALLY, ACTING  
GLOBALLY**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

With a population of 2.9 million people, Chicago is the third largest city in the United States. Located in America's heartland, Chicago is one of the nation's most important transportation centers and home to one of the world's busiest airports: O'Hare International. A total of seven interstate highways run through the city; each day, thousands of trucks flow into Chicago's 200 truck terminals. Chicago is also known for its ethnic diversity. Less than 50 percent of the city's residents are Caucasians; the rest are African Americans, Hispanics (primarily of Mexican origin) and a growing South Asian population (the third largest in the United States after New York and San Francisco). Chicago's greater metropolitan area, known as Chicagoland, boasts a population of between 8 and 10 million people.

Chicago's reputation for crime and corruption has been longstanding. Whether deserved or not, Al Capone's legacy has been hard to shed. During the past 30 years, Chicago, like many other American cities, experienced a major rise in violent crime, which has gradually been declining since the mid-1990s. Last year (2005), Chicago recorded 448 homicides, the lowest total in 40 years. Still, the city's location makes it a hub for the drug trade and an uninterrupted supply of opiates from four global sources: Mexico, South America, Southeast Asia and Southwest Asia. According to the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), drugs are trafficked into the city by commercial trucks, package delivery services, couriers, railways and cars (DEA, 2005)

This paper traces Chicago's drug problem from the mid-1970s to the present, examines the scope and nature of the city's current drug problem, and describes, in detail, the prevailing strategies and tactics deployed by law enforcement agencies to reduce the supply and demand for drugs. Because of the global nature of drug trafficking, attention is also paid to ongoing efforts to disrupt the production and trafficking of drugs destined for Chicago.

### **CHICAGO'S DRUG PROBLEM: A 30-YEAR PERSPECTIVE**

#### **The Mexican Connection: "From the Farm to the Arm"**

By the mid-1970s, Chicago had become the major distribution hub for Mexican heroin in the United States. The impetus for Chicago becoming a center of illegal drug distribution for heroin smuggled from Mexico into the United States was the collapse of

the “French Connection” in 1972, which ended the New York-based *La Cosa Nostra*’s monopoly of the heroin trade (President’s Commission, 1986). With the sharp reduction of the availability of “white heroin” trafficked from Europe, one of Mexico’s major drug trafficking clans, the Herrera family, took advantage of the opportunity to fill the void by establishing almost exclusive dominance over the heroin trade east of the Mississippi River.

The Herrera clan, which consists of 3,000 to 4,000 members from approximately 15 families, related through marriage, though not all with the surname, was based in Durango, Mexico, 260 miles south of Guadalajara. Described by the deputy chief of the DEA as a “social phenomenon” (Wiedrich, 1984), they are believed to have started their smuggling activities in the early 1960s. Herreras came to Chicago seeking employment in the 1950s. However, their first encounter with the Chicago Police Department (CPD) was in 1973, when a beat police officer observed drug dealings by 17-year olds in one of the city’s neighborhoods. According to the commander of the CPD’s Gang Crimes Section at that time, “this was unheard of...kids dealing like that” (O’Brien, 1978a). Merely five years after that first encounter, one of Chicago’s leading newspapers, *The Chicago Tribune*, branded the city with a new title: “Heroin City, USA” (O’Brien and Koziol, 1978). By that time, the Herreras controlled the entire drug operation: the cultivation of opium poppies in the mountains northwest of Durango, the extraction of the opium and its transformation into heroin, the trafficking of heroin to Chicago, its sale on Chicago’s streets, and its distribution throughout the eastern half of the United States, including New York.

In 1977, the DEA in Chicago estimated that as much as 11 tons of Mexican heroin was being illegally trafficked from Mexico to Chicago. Although the reported figures for seized heroin at that time are inconsistent, seizures of heroin by the CPD and the DEA in Chicago reportedly increased from 32 pounds in 1973 to 411 pounds in 1977 (O’Brien and Koziol, 1978). According to the CPD, in 1977, 99 percent of the 400 known dealers of Mexican heroin in the city belonged to the Herrera family.

The lifestyle of the Herreras did not distinguish them from their neighbors or reveal their illegal activities. They continued residing in dilapidated houses and driving beat-up, used cars. They utilized neighborhood currency exchanges to transfer their drug

profits via money orders to Mexico. As CPD arrests of the Herreras increased, the family's monopoly began to erode. Newspaper accounts, during the late 1970s and early 1980s, relate the arrests of numerous Herreras, including clan members such as Jose Herrera, Jesus Herrera, Dias Jose Ramon- Herrera, Angel "Papo" Herrera, Asunción Herrera, Rodolfo Herrera-Medina and others. Rodolfo Herrera-Medina, for example, was among the 120 suspects arrested in the "biggest drug bust of all time," according to law enforcement officials. Coming after a two-year undercover investigation, code-named Operation Durango, between 400 and 500 federal and local law enforcement agents arrested the 120 suspects and seized 10 pounds of heroin, properties in excess of \$1 million and very large amounts of cash. Operation Durango also netted 13 pounds of cocaine, which by then had started to gain popularity (Possley and O'Brien, 1985).

Although Mexican authorities were accused by their American counterparts of complicity in the drug trade, the Mexican police occasionally acted against the Herreras. For instance, in the fall of 1978, seven major Herrera heroin dealers were imprisoned in Mexico and two were killed in a shootout with police. Even the so-called "godfather" of the organization, Jaime Herrera-Nevarez, was arrested and held in custody for six months, after two members of his organization implicated him as the owner of 13 pounds of heroin bound for Chicago (O'Brien, 1978b). Jaime Herrera-Nevarez was again arrested on drug charges in August 1988 and imprisoned in Mexico City (DEA, n.d.a). By then, however, as we discuss below, the drug scene in Chicago was beginning to change, with new players, especially Colombians, trafficking cocaine to Chicago. Moreover, by the early 1990s, the heroin trade in Chicago was being taken over by new smugglers, including Nigerians, Pakistanis, Thais, and Chinese (Blau, 1992).

### **The Southeast Asia connection: China White Heroin**

In 1991, the DEA's Domestic Monitor Program (DMP) reported that the supply of Southeast Asian heroin in Chicago had shifted consumer demand from the low purity Mexican heroin (brown) to high purity China white heroin (Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority, 1997). By 1994, heroin purity levels in Chicago had reached 28 percent, which was high for Chicago standards, but lower than the national average (Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority, 1997). Law enforcement officials and drug-treatment providers speculated that the demand for higher purity heroin was linked

to the desire of new and younger heroin users, who were leery of the growing danger of HIV infection and began to snort the drug rather than to inject it with syringes (Blau, 1992).

Over the years, the purity level of heroin in Chicago continued to increase. The traditional \$10 “dime bag” in 2003 was almost 10 times more potent than it had been in the mid-1980s. Dr. Westley Clark, director of the Federal Center for Substance Abuse Treatment in Washington D.C. was quoted in *The Chicago Tribune* as saying, “From a heroin consumer’s point of view, it’s as good as it’s ever been” (Bebow, 2004).

### **The Colombian Connection: Chicago’s Crack “epidemic”**

The most notorious Colombian drug organizations, operating out of Colombia in the 1980s and 1990s, were the Medellin and Cali cartels. Traffickers from Medellin started their illegal activities by trading marijuana. After switching to cocaine in the mid-1970s, they quickly established a monopoly over the drug’s distribution, which lasted until the death of the organization’s major leader, Pablo Escobar, in December 1993 (DEA, n.d.a.). The Medellin Cartel’s success prompted a competing cartel in Cali to also engage in drug trafficking. Unlike the Medellin cartel, the Cali group limited their violent activities and assumed a pretense of legitimacy. The violent battles waged between the Colombian government and the Medellin cartel provided the Cali cartel with the opportunity to gain supremacy in the mid-1990s. At the height of its power, the Cali organization had at its disposal 727 aircraft with which to traffic drugs to Mexico and from there to the United States (Constantine, 1997). With much prominence and power, the cartel planned to exercise control over the government. However, their attempt to influence Colombia’s 1994 presidential elections badly backfired. Colombia’s president, Ernesto Samper, having received campaign funding from the cartel, came under intense American pressure to crack down on the cartel’s leaders. Consequently, the Colombian government mounted a fierce military campaign against the organization, arresting the cartel’s leader in June 1995 (Luft, 1995). By the end of 1996, the entire top echelon of the organization was either dead or behind bars (Constantine, 1998). The imprisonment of the Cali cartel’s leadership by no means ended the trafficking of drugs from Colombia. As we discuss later in this paper, new organizations reactivated the trade to such an

extent that they became the world's leading traffickers of cocaine as well as a major source of heroin (Constantine, 1997).

Large quantities of cocaine began reaching Chicago in the mid-1980s. Before 1985, cocaine in Chicago was very expensive, costing as much as \$80,000 a kilo and not widely used. By 1988, however, the wholesale price of a kilo of cocaine was estimated at only \$15,000 with an estimated street value of \$140,000 (Risley, 1998). Such a sharp drop in cost clearly indicated that drug dealers were encountering few obstacles trafficking cocaine to Chicago. Indeed, as the CPD's deputy chief of detectives noted, such extraordinary high profits gave the traffickers the impetus to "seek an efficient delivery system" in order to carve out an ever-larger share of the market. Enter: Chicago's notorious criminal street gangs (Risley, 1998). With street gangs taking over the sale of cocaine in the city, competition among dealers reduced the price of cocaine even further, fights over gang turfs escalated the violence, and the arrests of people under the age of 18 rose sharply. According to Risley (1998), in 1985, the CPD arrested nearly 3,000 youths for narcotics offenses. By 1994, the number of youth arrested on drug charges had risen to 11,000. In 1989, several years after it became widespread in Los Angeles and New York, the introduction of crack cocaine in Chicago (cocaine that is 75-90 percent pure and is formed into small pellets, or rocks, that can be smoked) further aggravated the situation. The cheap price of cocaine, coupled with the fact that it could be snorted or smoked, rather than injected, increased the drug's popularity in the early 1990s to such an extent that the new phenomenon was termed an "epidemic."

The increasing popularity of cocaine was first officially documented in survey, conducted by the National Institute of Drug Abuse (NIDA), which found that 144,000 people in the Chicago metropolitan area had tried cocaine in 1990. The number of heroin users at that time was estimated to be only 36,000 (Blau, 1992). Admissions to publicly funded drug treatment centers in Illinois for persons addicted to cocaine, as measured by the University of Illinois, School of Public Health, also rose sharply.

As we previously noted, the central role that Chicago's gangs played in the city's illegal drug trade significantly affected the city's homicide rate, especially because gang members are much more likely to kill, not merely intimidate, their rivals. In fact, the enormous profits generated by street sales were used by gangs to purchase firearms of

increasing lethality, leading to the rise of gang-motivated homicides. It is unsurprising that Chicago's homicide rates, from 1970 through 1990, were only tangentially related to gang violence. However, a new trend, which began in 1991, showed a clear correlation between the number of gang-motivated homicides and the city's overall homicide totals (Lemmer, Bensinger and Lurigio, 2005). Another analysis, conducted by the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority (1997), indicated that Chicago's street gang-related homicides increased from 51 to 243 between 1987 and 1994. In 1994, street gang-motivated homicide, for the first time, became the most common type of homicide in Chicago, accounting for 243 of that year's total of 931 homicides (a record high, not seen since then).

Chicago's high homicide rate put increasing pressure on the CPD to reduce crime in the city. Beginning in the late 1980s, the CPD's Narcotics Section deployed a two-pronged strategy to reduce drug use in the city. The first strategy involved traditional police tactics aimed at reducing the supply of drugs by seizing contraband and arresting drug traffickers and street dealers. For example, in 1991, the Narcotics Section seized 3,430 grams of crack cocaine, compared with just 100 grams seized in 1988 (Silverman and Martin, 1993). Between 1991 and 1994, primarily because of drug arrests in Chicago, the number of felony cases filed in the Circuit Court of Cook County (Chicago and suburbs) increased from 13,318 to 18,233 (Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority, 1997). (County figures do not include federally prosecuted cases in Chicago. Although federal prosecutions in the 1990s accounted only for two percent of the drug prosecutions in the city, they usually involved large-scale investigations and prosecution in Chicago's federal courts of notorious gang leaders such as the Latin Kings' leader Gustavo Colon, and Larry Hoover, the highest-ranking leader of the Gangster Disciples.)

The CPD's second strategy was aimed at creating an environment that discouraged narcotics transactions through demand-reduction tactics. This strategy was based on the assumption that increasing the risk of arrest would deter consumers from buying illegal drugs. One such tactic, code-named Operation Risky Business, was initiated by the Narcotics Section in 1989. According to Risley (1990), the section's commander, the section deployed two to three police officers to pose as low-level street dealers in a particular area or street corner known for drug dealing. The officers would

sell a packet of one percent cocaine or one-half percent heroin to any individual who approached them to solicit drugs. These packets were produced by the CPD's crime laboratory. The transaction was videotaped by an officer in an unmarked police vehicle, and the offender was then arrested. If a vehicle was involved, it was seized. In 1989, the officers of Operation Risky Business arrested 388 offenders (Risley, 1990). Another related tactic involved the use of undercover police officers to make controlled purchases of narcotics from low-level dealers on city streets. These dealers were subsequently arrested and charged with the delivery of a controlled substance (Risley, 1990).

In 1993, as Chicago's homicide rate was peaking and pressure for reform was mounting, the CPD decided to "reinvent itself" by adopting a new and ambitious strategy that emphasized a proactive, rather than a traditional reactive, approach to crime fighting (Rodriguez, 1993). The Chicago Alternative Policing Strategy (CAPS), Chicago's own version of community and problem-oriented policing, began as a pilot project in 1993 and was implemented citywide by spring of 1995. Advocates of this new strategy have been encouraged by the city's decline in homicides to a 40-year low.

### **The Mexican-Colombian Connection: More Cocaine and Purer Heroin**

Geographically, Mexico provides a natural land-bridge between the drug producing countries of South America, specifically Colombia, and drug consumers in the United States. Seeing a need to secure their distribution routes to United States markets, the Cali cartel allied itself with traffickers from Mexico to transfer and deliver Colombian cocaine to the American markets. The collapse of the Cali cartel in 1995-1996 provided these Mexican traffickers an opportunity to increase their control over the cocaine trade. Consequently, Colombians remained in control of the sources of supply, the processing and manufacturing of the drugs, and their transportation to Mexico. The Mexicans, on the other hand, gained complete control over the distribution of cocaine in the western half of the United States and the Midwest, including Chicago. Commenting on this development in late 1997, the then administrator of the DEA, described this new situation as "the most significant change in the wholesale U.S. cocaine trade in the last two decades" (Constantine, 1997).

The Colombian cartels originally obtained unrefined cocaine from Peru and Bolivia. The planting of coca in Colombia began only in the early 1990s. Likewise, opium and marijuana cultivation and heroin production in Colombia did not start until drug traffickers in the 1990s were encouraged to do so by leftist guerrillas, especially the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), which controlled the territories in which the drug was produced. This arrangement provided the traffickers with a secure (secured by the FARC) supply of drugs. By taxing the shipments, the guerrillas obtained money to finance the war. Coca continues to be grown in FARC-controlled areas, and the guerrilla group has been accused of involvement in both drug production and distribution. However, right-wing paramilitary groups, such as the United Self Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC), have seized much of the territory controlled previously by the FARC and now control most of the illegal drug production and exportation to the United States. In October 2001, both the FARC and the AUC were named by the United States government as Specially Designated Global Terrorists, subjecting them to economic sanctions. In May 2003, they were further designated as Significant Foreign Narcotics Traffickers.

Large amounts of Colombian-grown cocaine and heroin have been recently reaching Chicago's neighborhoods and suburbs in order to meet the strong demand for narcotics (Main, 2004; Keilman, 2006). A study by the Office of National Drug Control Policy in Washington D.C. estimated, in 1997, that 333,000 people in Chicago and its suburbs were hard-core users of cocaine and heroin (Bendavid, 1997). A more recent study, describing the availability of drugs in Chicago as "bountiful," reported that Chicago ranked second in the United States in the number of heroin-related deaths (628 within a two-year period) and that the Chicago metropolitan area, for five consecutive years, recorded the largest number of heroin-related emergency room visits in the nation (Bebow, 2004). This grave situation prompted one of the area's most powerful Congressmen, Representative Henry Hyde, chairman of the International Relations Committee, to propose a five-point plan to eradicate opium in Colombia (Main and Sweet, 2003) and to organize a fact-finding mission to Colombia for Chicago and suburban police officials (Main, 2004).

Interviewed by the authors for the purpose of this paper, John Risley, an official CPD delegate on the mission and now Deputy Superintendent in charge of the CPD's Bureau of Strategic Deployment, reported that the trip achieved two main objectives. First, the Colombian hosts and the American delegates acquainted each other with their respective law enforcement priorities relative to the drug trade as well as its effects on the daily lives of ordinary citizens in Colombia and Chicago. Second, the trip provided the Americans with an opportunity to express appreciation for Colombia's efforts to combat that nation's major drug cartels. Risley specifically noted the difficulties faced by the Colombian police officers, including being forced to live in paramilitary barracks away from their families and being subjected to the heightened risk of injury and death. Although Colombian law enforcement officials have reciprocated by visiting Chicago, no joint counter-narcotics initiatives have been directly undertaken by the two law enforcement entities. The DEA remains the CPD's sole official conduit for sensitive intelligence regarding drug trafficking to Chicago (Risley, 2006).

## **THE SCOPE AND NATURE OF THE DRUG PROBLEM IN CHICAGO**

### **Marijuana**

The most widely available and used illegal drugs in Chicago are marijuana, cocaine, heroin and methamphetamines. (Although Chicago might be a methamphetamine transit point to other locations, its effects in Chicago appear to be minimal.) Marijuana is the drug of choice for 18-to-20 year-olds in Chicago and, therefore, is the most widely available illicit drug in the city. Bulk marijuana shipments are transported to Chicago by the same Mexican-based traffickers who smuggle cocaine and heroin. Criminal street gangs control the distribution and retail sale of the drug in the city (DEA, 2005). In a single seizure by the CPD in August 2005, 355 pounds of marijuana, with an estimated street value of just under \$1 million, was recovered from an Arizona resident of Mexican descent following a traffic stop in an area of Chicago long known as a gang stronghold of the Latin Kings (Noel, 2005). In May 2003, CPD officers had made an even larger marijuana seizure from four Chicago residents of Mexican descent when they recovered 4,941 pounds of marijuana with an estimated street value of \$13.5 million (CPD, May 2003).

Drug case submissions to the Illinois State Police (ISP) crime laboratory in Chicago also support the conclusion that marijuana is the most available drug in city's drug markets. From 1998 through 2005, an average of 26,151 marijuana cases per year was submitted by CPD officers to the ISP laboratory for analysis (Bauer, 2006), which reflects an apparent change in drug preferences in Chicago. In 1998, cocaine case submissions outnumbered those of marijuana cases. By 2000, the submission levels for these two substances were roughly equal, and beginning in 2001, marijuana cases outnumbered cocaine cases. Overall, during the eight-year period (1998-2005), marijuana cases constituted 42.9 percent of all drug case submissions to the crime laboratory, rising from 35.7 percent of all case submissions in 1998 to 48.4 percent in 2005.

### **Cocaine**

The Drug Abuse Warning Network (DAWN) has reported that there are more estimated cocaine-related emergency room visits in Chicago than in any other city it monitors (DEA, 2005). As we already noted, Mexican traffickers dominate the cocaine distribution network into and out of Chicago (as far east as New York City). In Chicago, local cells and gang members distribute and sell the drug (DEA, 2005). Although cocaine use in Chicago remains high, ISP crime laboratory submissions data suggests that its use might have diminished somewhat from 1998 to 2005. During this eight-year period, on average 23,056 cocaine cases per year were submitted by police in Chicago for analysis by the state laboratory (Bauer, 2006). Overall, cocaine cases constituted 37.8 percent of all drug case submissions, dropping from 45.5 to 33.1 percent of all drug cases sent to the state laboratory in 1998 and 2005, respectively.

From 1998 to 2005, the quantities of cocaine typically seized by police fell in the "personal use" or small-quantity, street-dealer levels. However, during this period, large seizures of several kilograms of cocaine also occurred frequently and were regularly reported by Chicago media. For example, following narcotics surveillance in August 2005, CPD officers recovered "five bricks of cocaine," with a combined weight of more than 12 pounds or about 5.45 kilograms (Noel, 2005). Other accounts contained specific references to the international connection to the city's gang-operated drug markets. Acting on a tip in September 2003, CPD and suburban police officers arrested two

Chicagoans and two Mexican nationals in a Chicago suburb and seized 312 kilograms of cocaine, with an estimated street value of \$39 million. The cocaine had been hidden in 760 five-gallon pails of green avocado dip (CPD, September 2003). In September 2005, CPD officials announced the seizure of 88 kilograms of cocaine, with an estimated street value of \$11.3 million, which was brought to Chicago via the Mexican pipeline (*Chicago Tribune*, September 2005). In another example, following a two-year investigation into a Four Corner Hustler street gang narcotics operation, CPD officers arrested both a high-ranking gang member and a Nigerian national who was identified by police officials as a major drug supplier. At the time of the suspect round-up in this case, police recovered 50 grams of crack cocaine, 11 pounds (5 kilograms) of powder cocaine, and 2.2 pounds (1 kilogram) of heroin (Bush and Heinzmann, 2005).

### **Heroin**

ISP crime laboratory submissions data for the years 1998 through 2005 indicate that despite the enforcement efforts from police, heroin availability has apparently remained fairly stable in Chicago. During 1998, there were 11,387 heroin submissions and in 2005 there were 11,124 heroin cases submitted from Chicago to the ISP laboratory. On average during the eight-year period, 11,393 heroin cases were submitted per year and overall heroin accounted for 18.7 percent of all drug cases from the city (Bauer, 2006). Chicago's hunger for heroin, noted earlier in this paper, continues to be satisfied by large supplies of heroin trafficked by Mexican-based organizations, independent Colombian traffickers, and Nigerian and other West African groups that smuggle Southeast and Southwest Asian heroin to the city (DEA, 2005). The Chicago heroin market is characterized by high quantities of the drug, high purity levels and low prices. At the retail level, the drug is sold by gang members in so-called open-air markets.

Beginning in June 2003, CPD officials placed a high priority on combating the city's gang-controlled open-air markets. Since that time, CPD officials have regularly reported on their efforts in this area, frequently conducting full press conferences announcing the results of their investigations. As heroin is sold via the same gang-controlled drug markets as cocaine, significant heroin seizures often occurred during investigations that recovered large quantities of cocaine. However, significant heroin-

specific investigations have also been conducted, disrupting several highly lucrative narcotics operations. In March 2004, 30 individuals were arrested in a series of raids conducted in Chicago, Indiana, and Ohio, which were aimed at the Chicago-based heroin trafficking network (*Chicago Tribune*, 2004). The April 2005 arrests by CPD officers of 13 members of the Unknown Vice Lords street gang further identified the inter-jurisdictional reach of Chicago's drug-dealing gangs. Operating from the Douglas Park area of Chicago's Westside, gang members were selling 13-dose, tin-foil packets of heroin, known as "jabs." These multi-dose packets were sold for \$100 to buyers from communities as far as 95 miles away from the city. By reselling the individual doses from the job at \$20 per dose, suburban and rural user-sellers could offset the cost of their own drug use through the sale of a portion of the heroin job to buyers in their communities (*Chicago Tribune*, 2005).

### **Methamphetamines**

For many communities in the United States, the methamphetamine problem has emerged as a more serious problem than marijuana, cocaine and heroin (Leiwand, 2005). The problem has largely affected rural or non-urban areas in the United States. Methamphetamine is often produced in local laboratories. However, according to the DEA, the drug is also trafficked from Mexico and California to Chicago for distribution in the Midwestern part of the country. There is no current evidence that Mexican produced methamphetamine is distributed in Chicago (DEA, 2005). From 1998 to 2005, methamphetamine seizures represented only 1 percent of the narcotics cases uncovered by the CPD and submitted for analysis to the ISP crime laboratory in Chicago, (Bauer, 2006).

### **THE LAW ENFORCEMENT EFFORT IN CHICAGO: A CLOSER LOOK**

The current law enforcement efforts in Chicago to combat the city's drug problems can be traced to "Operation Headache," which commenced in 1990. This investigation targeted Chicago's Gangster Disciples street gang and its imprisoned leader, Larry Hoover. Investigators from the Chicago Office of the DEA and the CPD's Gang Investigation Section discovered a level of organizational sophistication in the Gangster Disciples that rivaled that of traditional organized crime groups. Originally formed in Chicago's Southside Englewood community during the 1960s, by the 1990s, the

Gangster Disciples had grown into Chicago's largest street gang. Not only did the gang control large turf areas across Chicago, factions of the gang had been identified throughout the United States. The gang's criminal activities included narcotic sales, murders, aggravated batteries, drive-by shootings, ambush shootings, robberies, burglaries, theft, weapons violations, gang intimidations and assaults (Guzman, 1998). Estimates of the gang's membership in Chicago alone reached 30,000, with thousands of other members belonging to the gang's various factions in at least 35 states (Knox, 2001). Illinois prison officials estimated that 5,100 members of the Gangster Disciples were in Illinois Department of Corrections in the mid-1990s, including their leader, Larry Hoover (Parsons and Gibson, 1995). Hoover, then age 44, was already serving a 150-200 year prison sentence for a 1973 gang-related murder over drug profits (Martin, February 1996).

Because of the gang's considerable size, a key objective of its leadership was to develop the gang's sophistication. In addition to an increasingly hierarchical organizational structure, the gang adopted formal rules and attempted to emulate a corporate-style management approach, which included a board of directors, with Hoover as its chairman. Under Hoover's directions, the Gangster Disciples operated extensive narcotics trafficking operations and began to engage in an elaborate series of public relations actions intended to shield the gang from law enforcement scrutiny. These included the creation of a political action committee known as 21<sup>st</sup> Century Vote, a rap concert company and a prisoner rights advocacy group (O'Brien, O'Connor and Papajohn, 1995). These efforts met with some success. Hoover achieved support for his own parole from many prominent individuals, including a former Chicago mayor and numerous other elected officials and leaders in the African-American community. In addition, under the guise of community activism, Hoover operative and gang member, Wallace "Gator" Bradley was successful in being included in an Oval Office visit with an unsuspecting President Bill Clinton (Knox, 2001).

The five-year investigation conducted under Operation Headache disclosed that Hoover, with the assistance of at least 38 major coconspirators, was able to direct a massive cocaine and heroin trafficking network from his Illinois prison cell. Federal prosecutors reported that this drug network had amassed \$10 million in drug profits

during the course of the investigation. While individual gang members sold drugs for personal profit, “street taxes” were passed up the gang hierarchy and a portion of the weekly drugs sold were to include drugs purchased from and sold for the profit of gang leaders. Through the use of eavesdropping devices, investigators were able to secure the key evidence necessary to gain indictments, and ultimately convictions, for Hoover and his accomplices. Tiny wireless microphones were secreted in official visitor ID tags, which were then unknowingly worn by gang lieutenants as they met with Hoover in the Vienna, Illinois Correctional Center (O’Brien, 1995; O’Brien, O’Connor and Papajohn, 1995).

Operation Headache is also remembered for a key statement regarding the significance of the investigation, which was made by then U.S. Attorney James Burnes when he announced the indictments of Hoover and his coconspirators. On August 31, 1995, Burns declared: “We ripped off the head of the snake” (Lehmann and McNamee, 1995). Implied in the declaration was that the Gangster Disciples as a criminal organization would die as a result of the removal of the gang’s top leaders to federal prison and their corresponding isolation from the gang’s day-to-day activities. Initial reaction to the declaration can best be summarized as an overstatement from an overoptimistic prosecutor (Martin, 1996). However, with the distance of time, senior CPD officials have indicated that Operation Headache and subsequent investigations have altered Chicago’s gang landscape more than many critics had initially anticipated. Clearly, the Gangster Disciples remain Chicago’s largest single street gang, with affiliated factions in communities across the country. Nevertheless, the gang is more loosely organized, with more internal strife, ten years after Operation Headache than it was when the investigation commenced. Furthermore, the ability of gang leaders to tightly control the drug markets, operated by its various factions and members, has been significantly diminished (Risley, 2006; Cronin, 2006).

Major drug enforcement operations in the Chicago metropolitan area are now coordinated through a program called the High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA). Established by the United States Congress and implemented in Chicago in 1995, HIDTA coordinates all drug control efforts among local, state and federal law enforcement agencies. One important benefit of the program is that it reduces the risk to

police officers, engaged in undercover work or surveillance, that they will be unwittingly targeted by fellow police officers who otherwise would be unaware of an ongoing operation.

The DEA has been engaged in numerous counter narcotics operations in Chicago. The following is just one such example. Code-named Operation Money Clip, the DEA targeted a Mexican-based organization that trafficked cocaine, heroin and marijuana, and allegedly laundered as much as \$200 million from its operations in the United States. The operation started as a routine traffic stop in Texas and evolved into a multi-jurisdictional investigation involving DEA agents in 25 cities, including Chicago. The CPD, the Illinois State Police and several suburban police departments participated in uprooting the Chicago branch of the organization (DEA, 2004).

Given the scope of the drug problem in the United States, the capacity of the DEA to affect day-to-day drug operations in Chicago, or any local jurisdiction, is extremely limited. Survey data collected as part of the CAPS evaluation indicated that residents in many Chicago communities were significantly concerned about the drug problem in their communities. In 2003, 26 percent of all Chicagoans surveyed listed street-corner drug dealing as a “big problem” in their neighborhoods (the highest of the three possible levels of concern). The community’s acknowledgement of the drug problem’s connection to the city’s gang problem can also be inferred from these data. Gang violence was identified as a “big problem” by 21 percent of the surveyed residents (CCPEC, 2004). In fact, rising gang violence, connected to Chicago’s drug markets, which began during 2000, ended the city’s six-year decline in the overall yearly murder total. This increased gang violence coincided with unprecedented reductions in violence in New York City. Despite having more than twice the population of Chicago, these two factors allowed New York City to end the year with fewer murders than Chicago (Lemmer, Bensinger and Lurigio, 2006).

Chicago’s experience in 2001 highlights a key reality. Thomas P. “Tip” O’Neill, Jr., the former Speaker of the United States House of Representatives, once noted that no matter how expansive a particular issue might be, in the end, “all politics is local.” Given the design of American federalism, the delivery of key governmental services, including water, sanitation, public education, and fire protection, is considered to be a primary

function of state and local government. Law enforcement is among the “local” governmental concerns and, as such, O’Neill’s axiom would only be somewhat overstated if it were applied to law enforcement as: “all policing is local.” Collaborative efforts with law enforcement agencies at the national level are critical to the formation of truly effective responses to global threats, such as terrorism and the narcotics trade. Unlike in many other countries, thousand of local police agencies in the United States remain central to day-to-day, street-level, narcotics enforcement. As such, when the nexus between Chicago’s gang and drug problems spurred a spike in the city’s murder total, the DEA felt no political heat; responses to the concerns of elected officials and the community fell almost exclusively on the CPD.

The direct targeting of the city’s open-air drug markets was critical to the CPD’s efforts to reduce gang violence in Chicago. From 1998 through November 2003, the CPD conducted more than 50 drug conspiracy investigations, arresting 1,700 suspects, of whom 97 percent were convicted on criminal drug conspiracy charges. At a November 2003 press conference, held by Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley and Police Superintendent Philip J. Cline, the CPD continued to highlight its strategy to reduce violence through a reenergized and enhanced focus on gang suppression and the closure of gang-controlled drug markets (CPD, November 2003). Beyond its earlier community policing efforts, beginning in June 2003, the CPD intensified and implemented numerous elements of this strategy. These included reintroduction of a centralized gang intelligence unit; creation of a deployment operations center and rapid deployment units; expanded measures to identify and the intervene in retaliatory gang violence through the rapid deployment of gang violence suppression units; significantly increases in the use of street-corner drug conspiracy investigative techniques; and greater use of drug buyer sting operations (Lemmer, Bensinger and Lurigio, 2006).

In short, addressing the nexus between the city’s gang and drug problems was central to the CPD initiatives to reduce violent crime. These efforts first resulted in increased arrest activity on drug-related charges. In 2004, CPD officers affected 59,051 drug arrests, a 5.8 percent increase from 2003 (CPD, 2005). Police officials also indicated that the number of conspiracy investigations had increased significantly. As a result, compared with ten years earlier, there were fewer open-air drug markets in the

areas of the city where the prevalence had previously been greatest. Moreover, in those places where the open-air markets remained in operation, they were less profitable than in previous years (Risley, 2006). Of larger significance, violent crime had dropped sharply in Chicago, even as the number of murders in many other American cities began to rise again (Zernike, 2006). The number of Chicago murders fell 32.7 percent from 666 in 2003 to 448 in 2004. In 2005, the number of murders remained stable at 447. CPD officials declared that the historically low murder rate, which had not been seen in Chicago since 1965, was not an anomaly. In touting the lower homicide levels, the CPD also emphasized the 753 drug conspiracy arrests that it made in 2005, which occurred during the closure of another 53 open-air drug markets (CPD, 2006). However, while police officials declared that violence levels were down significantly and that they had affected the drug trade, they also recognized that the city's gangs have the capacity to adapt, and the demand for drugs in the city was still quite high. As such, the CPD's anti-drug and anti-gang efforts need to adapt as well (Risley, 2006; Cronin, 2006).

### **ACTING GLOBALLY**

According to the United States government, the drugs that most threaten the country are cocaine, heroin, marijuana and amphetamine-type stimulants (Department of State, 2006). As we stated earlier in this paper, these drugs also pose the greatest threat to Chicago. Colombia and Mexico are the main source countries for the trafficking of cocaine, heroin and marijuana to Chicago. Hence, our ensuing discussion of our country's global drug control strategies, which are undertaken in cooperation with foreign governments, is limited to these two countries.

#### **Colombia**

The vast majority (90 percent) of the cocaine trafficked to Chicago originates in Colombia. Likewise, most of the heroin that is smuggled to Chicago is processed from poppies grown in Colombia. Not surprisingly, tactics such as, crop eradication, interdiction, disruption of production, which are pursued jointly by the United States and Colombia, are strongly encouraged by law enforcement officials in Chicago (Risley, 2006).

**Interdiction.** Interdiction by the Colombian National Police, Army, Navy and Air Force resulted in record seizures of cocaine in 2005—more seizures than by any other

country (Department of State, 2006). Notwithstanding the success of Colombian interdiction efforts, cocaine and heroin continue to be trafficked north from Colombia through Central America and the Caribbean. A total of seven Central American countries are used by major drug traffickers to transit drugs from Colombia to Mexico. The Consolidated Counterdrug Database indicated that 90 percent of the cocaine intended for the United States market was trafficked through the so-called Central American corridor to Mexico during the first half of 2005 (Braun, 2005).

Colombian cocaine is smuggled by land, air and water. Most of the cocaine is transited by traffickers who take advantage of Central America's long coastlines. Since 2004, in night air smuggling has significantly increased and involves hundreds of airstrips scattered around Central America. U.S. Air Reconnaissance, for instance, reported the discovery of an "aircraft graveyard" in Guatemala, close to the Mexican border, with scores of damaged or abandoned airplanes that had been used by drug traffickers (Braun, 2005). Drug traffickers also use the Pan-American Highway as another smuggling route for cocaine and heroin. To counter these activities, the United States has entered into numerous bilateral agreements with the countries of the Central American corridor in order to conduct counter-narcotics operations aimed at seizing contraband. According to the U.S., such cooperative operations have recently yielded unprecedented amounts of seized cocaine (Braun, 2005).

The DEA, the Department of Justice, and the Department of Homeland Security and the Department of Defense are the federal agencies most frequently involved in interdiction activities. The DEA has launched hundreds of such operations. The multi-agency International Drug Flow Prevention Strategy (IDFPS) is a recent initiative implemented by the DEA to disrupt the transit of drugs and money between Colombia and the United States. The first IDFPS operation, called All Inclusive 1-2005, was started on August 5, 2005 and ended on October 8, 2005. Called "All Inclusive" because it targeted overland, maritime and air smuggling, it seized large quantities of cocaine and illegal currency in Nicaragua, Belize, Panama and Mexico (Braun, 2005).

**Crop Eradication.** Crop eradication in Colombia is carried out manually and through aerial spraying by U.S. government- supported Colombian police units and military forces. More than 170,000 hectares of coca were eradicated by these means in

2005, eliminating a potential yield of more than 150 metric tons of cocaine with an estimated street value of \$15 billion. In addition to the elimination of coca plants, the program eradicated 2,000 hectares of opium poppy in 2005 (Department of State, 2006).

**Disruption of Production and Networks.** A powerful deterrent for international drug traffickers is the fear of being captured and extradited to the United States. Therefore, an important U.S. strategy targets the leadership of major trafficking organizations. Under the administration of Colombia's current president, Alvaro Uribe, as many as 315 drug traffickers have been extradited from Colombia to the United States. With U.S. assistance, the upper-echelons (kingpins) of the Colombian trafficking organizations are being targeted by special police teams and air mobile commandos (known as the Jungle Commandos) that attempt to capture targeted leaders through a variety of special operations (Department of State, 2006).

**Institutional Support and Economic Assistance.** The United States has worked to strengthen and professionalize Colombia's police officers and prosecutors as well as its judicial and financial systems. To that end, our nation has provided these institutions with technical assistance, training and equipment. The United States has also intensified its efforts to prod the Colombian government to fight corruption, which will weaken the drug organizations' ability to bribe and intimidate government officials (Department of State, 2006). Our country has granted nearly \$5 billion to Colombia in economic assistance, making it the fifth largest recipient of American foreign aid. One of the more successful programs, initiated with this aid, entices Colombian farmers to stop cultivating coca and opium poppies by accepting "Alternative Development" to fund, for example, the ever expanding cut-flower business, which has turned into an annual \$600 million enterprise (PBS, 2006).

Efforts by the federal government to strengthen President Uribe's administration have showed signs of success. The recent congressional elections in Colombia evidenced public support for a right-of-center coalition and apparently provided the president with sufficient political power to win reelection in May 2006 (Forero, 2006a). In a show of support for President Uribe and his policies, shortly after the congressional elections, a federal grand jury in the United States indicted 50 commanders of the FARC, charging them with drug trafficking, manufacturing and exporting "devastating amounts of

cocaine” as well as using violence and intimidation to enforce their activities (Forero, 2006b). Colombia’s military forces continue their successful offensive (“Plan Patriota”) against the FARC while the government attempts to entice the right-wing paramilitary militias to demobilize with certain legal immunities. The government also has created an interagency organization to reassert its control over areas of the country previously held by the FARC and other militias. By the end of 2005, the Colombian police reestablished their presence in all of the country’s municipalities.

## **Mexico**

Mexico is the principal transit country for cocaine trafficked to the United States, including Chicago. As a source country, Mexico is the city’s major supplier of heroin and marijuana (Risley, 2006). Mexican-based criminal organizations continue to use the city as one of their major drug distribution centers. The federal government’s in Mexico is for both governments to exchange intelligence and information on illicit drug-related activities and to work as a “team” against the Mexican drug organizations (Department of State, 2006).

**Interdiction and Disruption of the Drug Trade.** In 2005, Mexican authorities mounted 28 separate major operations arresting drug traffickers, violent kidnappers, and corrupt officials all of whom were linked to drug trafficking. During the first 11 months of 2005, approximately 15,000 individuals were arrested on drug-related charges, large quantities of illegal drugs were seized, and cars, boats and airplanes were confiscated (Department of State, 2006).

Mexican-American bilateral cooperation in the war on drugs is based on numerous agreements and treaties signed by both countries. For example, Mexico is a signatory to the 1990 Ixtapa Declaration, under which the country is committed to undertake counter narcotics actions and prevent money laundering. U.S. law enforcement agencies, such as the DEA and FBI, maintain offices in Mexico and work with Mexican law enforcement agencies on a regular basis. Mexico’s DEA Country Office is located in Mexico City. Other DEA offices are located in Guadalajara, Hermosillo, Mazatlan and Monterrey. The DEA assists the Mexican government primarily in interdiction and crop eradication efforts. Special units of the Mexican Federal Investigations Agency (FIA) and the DEA meet regularly to share intelligence

and plan and execute investigations (Embassy, 2006). The U.S. and Mexico have agreed on a plan that targets the leadership of major drug trafficking organizations. Under terms of the U.S.-Mexico Extradition Treaty of 1980, more than 40 Mexican citizens and defendants accused of narcotics trafficking, money laundering and related serious crimes were extradited to the U.S. in 2005 (Department of State, 2006).

One example of many that illustrates interagency cooperation involving U.S. and Mexican law enforcement agencies was the recent arrest of Arriola-Marquez, a major Mexican drug trafficker and head of an international distribution network reaching into the U.S. The arrest was carried out by an elite drug enforcement unit of the AFI and followed an extensive investigation, which was assisted by the DEA. Other law enforcement agencies involved in this operation included the FBI, the Mexican Office of the Attorney General (PGR) as well as several other Mexican and American law enforcement agencies (DEA, 2006). Another sphere of Mexican-American bilateral cooperation is border security. Joint border security projects, along the borders and airports, include U.S. assisted and financed training, technical assistance and procurement of equipment to detect contraband. In 2005, the U.S. government provided Mexico with eight helicopters equipped with Infrared Radar and refurbished another eight helicopters to enhance police and border surveillance (Department of State, 2006).

**Crop Eradication.** The eradication of Mexico's opium poppies and cannabis crops is a difficult task. Military forces are dispatched to the remote Sierra Madre Mountains to destroy these crops manually, and helicopters spraying herbicides are also used in the eradication program. According to the Mexican government, during the first 11 months of 2005, eradication of marijuana totaled close to 31,000 hectares and the eradication of approximately 20,500 hectares of opium poppy (Department of State, 2006).

**Institutional Support and Economic Assistance.** The U.S. has been assisting the Mexican government to professionalize and upgrade its criminal justice system by providing training to Mexican police and prosecutors and donating equipment to their agencies. For example, the United States Embassy's Law Enforcement Professionalization and Training Program in 2005 sponsored training for 2,800 law enforcement personnel. A major player in the war on drugs, the PGR, received new tools

to improve the capabilities of the office to conduct investigations as well as special training to upgrade its information technology capabilities. According to a U.S. assessment, the AFI is evolving into the most professional and effective law enforcement agencies in Mexico (Department of State, 2006).

There have been many allegations of corruption against the persons responsible for Mexico's anti-drug efforts. During the past six years, however, President Vicente Fox's administration has instituted a number of anti-corruption measures in all government institutions, including the Mexican military (Department of State, 2006). The Fox administration's tenure is ending this year, with elections scheduled for July 2, 2006. As of this writing, the left-of-center Democratic Revolutionary Party leads Fox's party's (The National Action Party) candidate (under Mexican law, Vicente Fox is unable to succeed himself). Clearly, the end of the Fox Administration, regardless of the outcome of the elections, will usher in a new era in Mexican-American relations, with implications for the war on drugs.

## **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS**

The federal and state laws that control the manufacture, sale and distribution of illegal drugs in the United States are of fairly recent origin. One of the first anti-drug laws in the United States was a 1905 New York State law, which targeted cocaine, morphine and opium. More germane to current drug policy, however, was the passage of the Harrison Narcotic Drug Act of 1914. Applied to opium, coca leaves and their derivatives, the law was the first in a series of federal laws that attempted to stop drug trafficking. However, it took the federal government another 60 years before it created the DEA and launched the official "war on drugs." Established in 1973, the DEA consolidated all other federal drug enforcement agencies and became responsible for controlling the distribution and use of narcotics and other dangerous drugs.

This paper has demonstrated the extent to which Chicago, primarily because of its geographic location and diverse population, has become an extensive market and distribution hub for illegal drugs trafficked mainly from Mexico and Colombia. The most widely available illegal drugs in Chicago include marijuana, cocaine, and heroin. Marijuana has been smuggled from Mexico to Chicago since the 1950s. By the mid-

1970s, Chicago had become the major source of Mexican heroin in the United States, and large quantities of cocaine began reaching Chicago in the mid-1980s.

The global war on drugs has had little effect on the availability of either heroin or cocaine in Chicago. The bulk of the cocaine (90 percent) trafficked to Chicago originates in Colombia, and Mexico continues to be the city's major supplier of heroin and marijuana. It can, of course, be argued that without the global war on drugs, Chicago's drug problem would be even worse. Still, as we recognized in this paper, the capacity of the federal government to affect the day-to-day sale and possession of drugs in Chicago is extremely limited.

In the United States, the constitutionally defined responsibility for public safety is vested locally. Collaborative efforts with federal agencies, such as the DEA, are critical to Chicago's overall efforts to stem the distribution and sales of illegal drugs in the city. But in the final analysis, the CPD is ultimately responsible for responding to the drug- and crime-related concerns of the city's citizens and elected officials. Senior police officials in Chicago admit that the war on drugs cannot be won by local law enforcement alone. Nonetheless, they believe that their anti-drug and anti-gang efforts have disrupted the local drug trade and that they now have the strategic and technological capability to adapt to the ever-changing conditions and new challenges associated with the war on drugs.

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