

GLOBALIZATION PROJECT CASE STUDY

International Organized Crime: The Cocaine Trade

This story raises questions about:

- global mafia connections
- money laundering
- bribery and corruption
- drug trafficking
- arms trafficking
- coca cultivation and cocaine production
- US anti-drug policies
- crop eradication
- Colombia's ongoing civil war
- human rights

Guide/Narrator

This is the story of Eduardo Garcia-Carrillo, Chief of Police in a small town in the North East of Colombia. While Garcia-Carrillo is a fictional character, his story is based on real historical events and the current political climate in Colombia today. Chief Garcia-Carrillo grew up in the Putamayo region of Colombia and began his career as a soldier. When he married and started a family, he joined the police force, working his way up the ranks over 25 years. Eduardo's story illustrates the intractability of the global drug problem, and the pervasiveness of international organized crime.

Eduardo Garcia-Carrillo

At 50, I'm now the Chief of Police here in my small town in the Northeast of Colombia. In twenty-five years on the police force, I have seen the crime situation in my town and throughout my country go from bad to much worse, particularly since the early 1980's, when cocaine trafficking began increasing significantly.

My country, Colombia, has a horrible but much deserved reputation for cocaine production and trafficking. Many people don't realize, however, that coffee historically has been our major crop, and that we also produce a lot of oil and ornamental flowers for the US. Because we have become the world's experts in the cultivation of coca and production of cocaine, however, it is cocaine that keeps Colombia in the headlines.

At first, only a few large organizations like the Medellin and Cali drug cartels controlled most of the cocaine production and trafficking. Now there are too many drug traffickers in Colombia to count, and they are working with criminals from the Russian mafia, the Sicilian mafia, and Mexican trafficking organizations. The Sicilians have been doing business with Colombia for more than ten years, trading their heroin for our cocaine. It works out for both groups because the Sicilians were getting arrested in large numbers for trafficking heroin in the United States, and our Colombian criminals were getting caught trying to traffic cocaine in Europe. So now they swap each other's product and stick to their own sales territories.

Russian criminals have also worked out a nice deal, trading surplus Cold War weapons for cocaine. In Colombia, FARC and paramilitary groups need weapons to continue their civil war, which has connections to drug traffic. We know that drug traffickers buy arms as well. Since the end of the Cold War, the Russians also have access to a huge market for cocaine in the former Soviet Union and Europe. Just last year they even tried to sell a submarine to one of the drug trafficking groups to make it a lot easier for them to transport their cocaine all over the world. But arms trafficking is not their main business. Illegal drugs are very profitable. Just like the Colombian groups, the Russian mafia earns most of its international revenues from drug trafficking, and so do the Sicilians.

I have seen both Sicilians and Russians in my small town. I know they are not here to do legitimate business. They are mafia, but there is nothing I can do about it. Laws get little respect here in Colombia, so sometimes we are forced to make our own arrangements. Here in my small town, we have an understanding with the local drug traffickers. They keep their violence off the streets, leave innocent people alone, pay our weekly "lunch money", and my police officers will not bother them. The arrangement works out well for everyone. My men get so little pay (I don't make much either), and we need to support our families. So each of my men gets about \$50 a week, and I make about \$100, not a huge amount of money. It helps just to make ends meet. I consider myself to be a moral man, but I honestly have no choice in accepting their cash bribes. We have an expression here in Colombia, *plomo o plata*. It means "silver or lead," i.e., take the bribe or you get a lead bullet.

My predecessor got too greedy. Instead of spreading the money around and allowing his men to earn a little on the side, he demanded that drug traffickers pay him \$1000 each week, which he kept to himself. He would have never gotten caught except that he didn't bother to launder the money. Eventually, the town government audited him, asking him where he earned the money to buy his nice house and nice car. He couldn't give them a plausible answer, so they checked his bank accounts and traced the money to the drug traffickers. He's now serving a three year jail sentence.

Sometimes I feel such despair. My country has so many problems and there don't seem to be any solutions in sight. The United States wants to help us, but the money they give us for Plan Colombia is not helping. They try to eradicate the crops by spraying the fields and setting up alternative development programs for the peasant farmers, but it's not working. The defoliant that the planes spray kills off food crops and makes people sick, and some say that the farmers' human rights are being violated. The Americans claim that 20% of the coca crops have been eradicated, but I don't believe it. They base that figure on last year's coca crop measurement. What they don't realize, or maybe just refuse to acknowledge, is that our peasants are planting new coca crops faster than the planes are eradicating existing crops. It's hopeless. The prices peasants earn from planting coca or making coca paste are many times higher than what they can earn from planting legal crops like corn or bananas.

Clearly US drug policy isn't working, and our own Colombian government hasn't been able to control drug traffic and the violence. Instead of emphasizing cutting off the drug supply, the US should consider using more of their anti-drug budget to cut demand in America. In fact, I heard about an important study that was done a few years ago suggesting that drug treatment programs are 23 times more cost-effective than these crop-eradication programs. And in parts of England they've had success in cutting demand and crime by legalizing drugs. We have a huge drug problem here, worse than in the US, and in both countries it has serious social and economic costs. Cocaine and heroin are so cheap here; even poor people can support their habit cheaply. But even with cheap drugs, the addicts still commit crimes, ruin their health, and abandon their children. It's terrible.