

RACE AND CLASS DIMENSIONS OF THE WAR ON DRUGS: A HUMANITARIAN CRISIS

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The U.S. war on drugs has been waged along class and race lines, both domestically and internationally. Rather than finding long-term solutions to the social development issues in target communities, drug policy has exacerbated problems of poverty and social marginalization. This paper examines how the war on drugs has prejudicially targeted poor people of color in U.S. cities, and impoverished Colombian farmers, who have been disproportionately victimized by U.S. drug policies. The focus of law enforcement on urban drug use, and the mandatory sentencing disparities between crack cocaine and powder cocaine in the United States, has contributed to a disproportionate number of African-Americans and Hispanics being incarcerated. This strategy has led to serious dislocations within the families and communities of these populations. Similarly, militaristic drug policies in Colombia have destroyed food crops and displaced thousands of poor farmers and their families, while failing to confront an underlying development crisis in rural communities. We argue that U.S. drug policies have effectively created a humanitarian crisis in both the United States and Colombia, particularly for people of color and certain sectors of the lower class.

I. THE HOME FRONT

Over the past 30 years, the U.S. government's annual drug-war budget has skyrocketed from approximately \$100 million to almost \$20 billion.³ A substantial portion of this money has been used to fund the construction of prisons to house convicted domestic drug users, and to provide military aid and weapons to foreign armies waging the war on drugs overseas. According to figures from the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP), approximately two-thirds of the federal drug budget is used for interdiction, law enforcement and supply-reduction programs, while only one-third is earmarked for prevention, treatment and demand reduction.⁴

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³ Sanho Tree, *The War at Home*, SOJOURNERS MAGAZINE, May-June 2003 at 20.

⁴ *Punishment and Prejudice: Racial Disparities in the War on Drugs*, HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH, Vol. 12, No. 2, May 2000, available at <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2000/usa>.

Both the illegal drug trade and the war on drugs have become vital components of the U.S. economy.⁵ Among the companies benefiting from drug-war funding are Sikorsky in Connecticut, Textron in Texas, Monsanto in Missouri, Dyncorp and Lockheed Martin in Maryland, and construction companies throughout the United States involved in prison building. In addition, U.S. companies also profit from the drug trade itself. Banks benefit from the illicit drug proceeds that are laundered through their financial networks, while the bottom line of chemical companies is boosted by the use of their products in drug-processing labs. While the drug war focuses on the economically marginalized, the actions of these other key players in the process are mostly ignored.

In the United States, primarily black and Hispanic neighborhoods endure the militaristic presence of heavily-armed police narcotics squads carrying out “zero tolerance” drug policies. While record numbers of low-level drug dealers and urban users are being sent to prison, most middle- and upper-class white suburban drug users remain relatively free to indulge their habits. Mandatory prison sentences for drug offenses, partially resulting from the desire of politicians to appear tough on drugs, have resulted in America incarcerating more of its own citizens than any other country. The United States, with five percent of the world’s population, has twenty-five percent of the world’s prisoners. Approximately one-quarter of America’s two million prisoners are in jail for non-violent drug offenses—more than the total number of prisoners in the European Union.⁶

⁵ James Petras, *Pillage, Corruption and Complicity: U.S. Banks and the Dirty Money Empire*, *BALT. CHRONICLE*, October 3, 2001, available at http://baltimorechronicle.com/dirty_oct01.html.

⁶ Tree, *supra* note 3, at 20.



Source: *The Sentencing Project*

In 1986 Congress passed the Anti-Drug Abuse Act with very little debate, establishing harsher prison sentences in an attempt to combat the growing use of crack cocaine in U.S. cities. According to Michael Coyle, a research associate with The Sentencing Project, an organization that conducts research on U.S. criminal-justice policy, the Anti-Drug Abuse Act “included mandatory sentencing laws based on the premise that crack cocaine was 50 times more addictive than powder cocaine. For good measure, Congress doubled that number and came up with a sentencing policy based on the weight of the drug an individual was convicted of selling. Thus, federal sentences for crack were constructed to relate to sentences for powder cocaine in a 100:1 quantity ratio.”⁷ As a result, says Coyle, a conviction for selling 500 grams of powder cocaine results in a five-year mandatory sentence, whereas only five grams of crack cocaine would trigger the same five-year mandatory sentence.⁸ Essentially, Congress imposed disparate sentencing laws for basically the same drug; both crack and powder cocaine are derived from the coca plant. Furthermore, crack became the only drug that carried a mandatory sentence for first offenders. And while possession of five grams of crack (the weight of two pennies) automatically resulted in a five-year mandatory sentence, the maximum sentence for possession of the same amount of powder cocaine or heroin was one year in prison.⁹

⁷ Michael Coyle, *Race and Class Penalties in Crack Cocaine Sentencing*, THE SENTENCING PROJECT, Fall 2002 at 1, available at http://www.sentencingproject.org/pubs_04.cfm.

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ *Id.* at 6.

The race and class bias of the new sentencing laws soon became apparent as the ratio of minority to white prisoners increased dramatically. Because crack sold for a fraction of the cost of powder cocaine, it became popular in poor urban neighborhoods, many of which were black and Hispanic. In contrast, most of the principal users of powder cocaine were middle- and upper-class whites living in wealthy suburban neighborhoods. The increasingly militaristic war on drugs has mostly targeted urban areas, resulting in frequent heavy-handed counter narcotics operations by police units. A study conducted by Dr. Barbara Meierhofer for the Federal Judicial Center illustrated the discriminatory nature of the mandatory sentencing laws, “In 1986, before mandatory minimums for crack offenses became effective, the average federal drug offense sentence for blacks was 11 percent higher than for whites. Four years later, following the implementation of harsher drug sentencing laws, the average federal drug offense sentence was 49 percent higher for blacks.”¹⁰

By the late 1990s, despite constituting only 13 percent of the nation’s drug users, blacks represented 58 percent of imprisoned drug offenders.¹¹ This rate of incarceration has contributed to a social breakdown in many poor inner-city neighborhoods. The number of black children growing up fatherless has skyrocketed, with 70 percent currently living in single-parent homes without their biological father compared to only 14 percent 20 years ago.¹² While mandatory sentencing is not solely responsible for this escalating social crisis, it appears to be a significant contributing factor. Thirty-eight percent of the nation’s 750,000 incarcerated blacks are in prison for drug offenses—compared to 27 percent for violent crimes—and many of them are males 20-29 years old. The majority of these offenders are low-level dealers or users; in fact, statistics released by the United States Sentencing Commission show that only 11 percent of federal drug offenders are high-level dealers.¹³

The dramatic increase in the prison population has proved to be an economic boon for rural communities, while exacerbating the social crisis in urban neighborhoods and even undermining the U.S. democratic process. In the latter part of the twentieth century, rural American agricultural and small manufacturing communities were struggling to survive. But as a 2003 report published by The Sentencing Project titled “Big Prisons, Small Towns: Prison Economics in Rural America” points out, “With an average of 35 jobs being created for every 100 inmates being housed, and state prison populations increasing by an annual average of 8.1 percent from 1985 to 1995, local officials began to consider prisons as an economic development tool.”¹⁴ In the past two

¹⁰Barbara S Meierhofer, *The General Effect of Mandatory Minimum Prison Terms: A Longitudinal Study of Federal Sentences Imposed*, FEDERAL JUDICIAL CENTER, 1992 at 20.

¹¹ *Drug Policy and the Criminal Justice System*, THE SENTENCING PROJECT, Aug. 2001 at 4-5, available at http://www.sentencingproject.org/pubs_04.cfm.

¹² *Did You Know?*, UNITED WAY OF ROCK RIVER VALLEY, 2005, available at <http://www.unitedwayrrv.org/www/factoids.asp>.

¹³ *Supra* note 4.

¹⁴ Ryan S. King, Marc Mauer and Tracy Huling, *Big Prisons, Small Towns: Prison Economics in Rural America*, THE SENTENCING PROJECT, Feb. 2003 at 1, available at http://www.sentencingproject.org/pubs_06.cfm.

decades, 213 prisons have been opened in rural areas, housing prisoners from distant cities and even other states.

This process has had devastating consequences on poor inner-city minority communities. First, it has made it even more difficult for children to maintain some sort of relationship with their imprisoned fathers because of the expense and time required to visit distant prisons. Second, it has undermined the democratic system by shifting federal dollars and elected representation away from urban neighborhoods to rural communities. One of the incentives to entice rural communities to build these prisons in their backyards has been to allow them to include the prison population in their census count, which translates into more federal funding for the local community. *The Wall Street Journal* illustrated how this process works in the small Arizona town of Florence, which, according to the U.S. Census Bureau's 2000 census, has an "official" population of 17,054. However, 11,830 of the town's residents are prisoners, whose presence translated into about \$4 million in federal funds for the small community in 2004.¹⁵ The town receives this funding based on its population, despite the fact that it bears no responsibility for the cost of housing the prisoners.

The flip side of this coin occurs in communities where prisoners are from, primarily poor inner-city neighborhoods. With increasing numbers of blacks and Hispanics being sent to distant prisons as a result of mandatory drug sentencing, the census count shows a smaller population meaning less federal funding and, because constituencies are determined by population, decreased electoral representation. Given that the census only occurs every ten years, many of these prisoners will return home to live in their urban neighborhoods while rural communities continue reaping the financial benefits from their incarceration.

Racially biased mandatory drug sentencing has negatively impacted democracy in a number of other ways. Forty-six states prohibit felons serving time from voting and 32 states prohibit citizens on parole or probation from voting. In fourteen states, felons lose their right to vote for life. Of the 3.9 percent of felons who were disenfranchised in the run-up to the 2000 presidential election, 1.4 million were black males—about 13 percent of African-American men. The Sentencing Project's Assistant Director Mark Mauer, in his testimony before the House Judiciary Committee, warned that this crisis is likely to worsen: "Given current rates of felony convictions and incarceration, we can expect that in the next generation of black men 30-40 percent will lose the right to vote for some or all of their adult lives."¹⁶

The mandatory sentencing laws are not the only form of legislation that has disproportionately affected minorities and lower economic classes. The Welfare Reform Act of 1996 contains a provision stating that anyone with a felony conviction for using or selling drugs is subject to a lifetime ban on receiving

¹⁵ Sheldon, Randall G., "Cashing in on Crime, Part III: The Prison Industrial Complex," *Z Magazine*, April 22, 2004, available at <http://zmag.org/content/showarticle.cfm?SectionID=43&ItemID=5381>

¹⁶ *Testimony of Mark Mauer, Assistant Director, The Sentencing Project, Before the Constitution Subcommittee, House Judiciary Committee on Felony Voter Disenfranchisement*, U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY, October 21, 1999, available at <http://judiciary.house.gov/legacy/maue1021.htm>.

government financial assistance and food stamps. This provision only applies to drug offenders, not to violent felons. Consequently, someone who has served a sentence for murder is still eligible for welfare benefits. The sponsor of the felony drug provision, Republican Senator Phil Gramm from Texas, made it clear that it was intended to aid the nation's war on drugs: "If we are serious about our drug laws, we ought not to give people welfare benefits who are violating the nation's drug laws."¹⁷ By 2002, there were more than 92,000 women—and by extension 135,000 children—affected by the lifetime welfare ban. While black and Hispanic women constitute approximately 23 percent of the U.S. female population, they represent 48 percent of women affected by the welfare ban.¹⁸

In 1998, Congress enacted a similar ban preventing drug offenders from receiving government grants or financial aid for college education. Over the past seven years, tens of thousands of college-bound students have been denied federal aid because of prior drug convictions, often for past misdemeanors such as marijuana possession. As is the case with the lifetime welfare ban, the college aid ban only applies to drug offenders, while convicted murderers and rapists are still eligible for government grants and student loans. Partly due to mandatory drug sentencing, black males are almost seven times more likely to go to prison than whites, resulting in a disproportionate number of young black men being declared ineligible for federal college aid.¹⁹

In sum, U.S. drug-war policies that have utilized mandatory sentencing laws, disenfranchisement, and lifetime bans on receiving welfare benefits and student financial aid have disproportionately affected minorities and the lower classes. A young black teenage parent convicted for a first offense of possessing five grams of crack cocaine would be sentenced to five years in prison and could lose his or her right to vote for life, become ineligible to receive welfare benefits and food stamps, and not qualify for student financial aid should he or she want to get an education in order to obtain a decent job to provide for his or her child. This dead-end approach generates almost unsurpassable barriers for individuals and families attempting to change their lives.

II. THE COLOMBIAN FRONT

Most of the almost \$3 billion the United States has spent waging the drug war in the Andean region over the past four years has gone to Colombian military and police forces who, like their counterparts in the United States, have primarily targeted economically marginalized communities. U.S.-sponsored aerial fumigation has targeted poor farmers in remote regions that have been neglected by the Colombian government for decades, leaving many peasants without jobs, health care, potable water, electricity, or sufficient infrastructure to get their legal crops to markets. The rare occasions they have had contact with the government

¹⁷ Patricia Allard, *Life Sentences: Denying Welfare Benefits to Women Convicted of Drug Offenses*, THE SENTENCING PROJECT, Feb. 2002 at 1, available at http://www.sentencingproject.org/pubs_11.cfm.

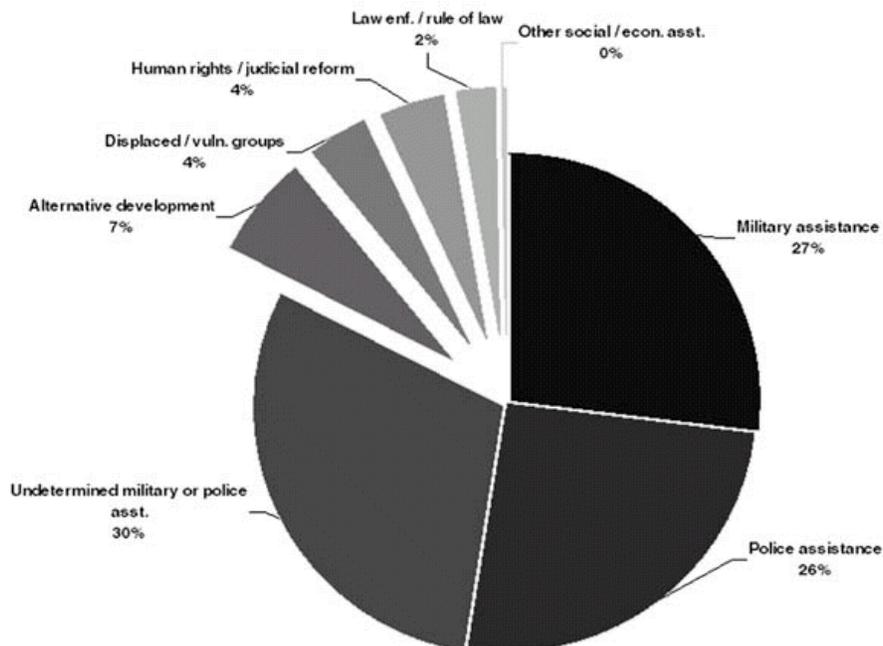
¹⁸ *Id.* at 6.

¹⁹ Thomas P. Bonczar, *Prevalence of Imprisonment in the U.S. Population, 1974-2001*, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE, 2003 at 8, available at www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/abstract/piusp01.htm.

have usually consisted of forays into their villages by Colombian soldiers who routinely accuse them of being sympathetic to leftist guerrillas.

In July 2000, the U.S. Congress approved a \$1.3 billion contribution to Plan Colombia, a strategy devised by Washington and Bogotá to dramatically curtail the flow of cocaine to the United States by fumigating coca plants—which provide the principal ingredient in cocaine—in mostly guerrilla-controlled territory in southern Colombia. More than 70 percent of the U.S. aid was earmarked for Colombia’s military and police forces, with only eight percent allocated for alternative crop programs.²⁰

All U.S. Aid to Colombia 1997-2003 (Approx. \$2.92 billion)



Source: Center for International Policy

Prior to launching Plan Colombia’s initial fumigation campaign, the Colombian government called on peasants to sign “social pacts” that offered \$1,000 in materials, technical assistance, and a promise not to fumigate in return for their switching from coca to legal crops. Some peasants accepted the offer while others, distrustful of a government that had repeatedly failed to deliver on past promises, steadfastly refused. As one resident in the southern Colombian town of La Hormiga explained, “Historically, the government has never helped anyone here. People helped themselves and with coca the economy became good. Now the government wants to help, but people are afraid it will ruin the economy.”²¹

²⁰ *The Contents of the Colombia Aid Package*, CENTER FOR INTERNATIONAL POLICY, January 26, 2001, available at <http://ciponline.org/colombia/aidsumm.htm>.

²¹ Interview conducted by Garry Leech in La Hormiga, Putumayo, Colombia. (Feb. 10, 2001).

Plan Colombia's initial six-week spraying campaign was launched in the southern department of Putumayo in December 2000. It not only resulted in the destruction of 62,000 acres of coca, but also devastated food crops and adversely affected the health of local children. Even farmers who had signed social pacts in return for a promise that their fields would not be fumigated stood by helplessly as the spraying killed their newly planted alternative crops.²²

Serious questions have been raised about the tactics used during the fumigation campaign. An estimated 85,000 gallons of the herbicide glyphosate was dumped onto Putumayo's coca fields by planes that routinely sprayed at an altitude of 100 feet.²³ However, the Monsanto Corporation, the manufacturer of Monsanto's Round-Up Ultra, the type of glyphosate being used in Colombia, cautions against aerial application at altitudes greater than ten feet above the top of the targeted crops. According to Monsanto, higher altitudes increase the risk of drift and "even very small amounts of Round-Up herbicide brands may damage crops if allowed to drift into fields adjoining the target area."²⁴

Ricardo Vargas, a researcher for Acción Andina, an organization studying drug policy in the Andes, has criticized the amount of herbicide used in the fumigation campaign: "The dosage of glyphosate being used in the forced eradication of illicit crops is five liters per acre, which drastically exceeds the normal recommended dosage of one liter per acre." Another reason the herbicide has been so destructive, according to Vargas, is because they are adding a surfactant called Cosmo-Flux 411F that "makes the glyphosate heavier and stickier, making it adhere better to the coca plants."²⁵

Cosmo Flux also increases the destructiveness of glyphosate by making it more potent. As Colombia's regional director of the Pesticide Action Network, doctor Elsa Nivia points out that "Cosmo-Flux substantially increases the biological activity of the agro-chemicals, allowing better results with smaller doses."²⁶ But in the fumigation campaign in southern Colombia, Cosmo-Flux has not been added to smaller dosages of glyphosate, but rather to a dosage that is five times greater than that recommended.

According to many peasants in Putumayo, the herbicide not only contaminated coca, but also maize, yucca, plantains, and even animals and children. Doctors at the local hospital in the small town of La Hormiga witnessed some of the human health consequences of the initial fumigation campaign. "I have treated people with skin rashes, stomachaches and diarrhea caused by the fumigation. And I have treated five children affected by the fumigation in the past

²² Based on interviews and observations while conducting field research in Putumayo, Colombia (Feb. 2001).

²³ "Drug War Called Threat to Amazon," *Associated Press*, February 28, 2001, available at <http://www.cannabisnews.com/news/thread8833.shtml>.

²⁴ *Roundup Ultra-Max Product Label*, MONSANTO COMPANY, available at <http://www.monsanto.com/monsanto/layout/VSearchResults.asp?queryText=Roundup+Ultra>.

²⁵ RICARDO VARGAS MEZA, FUMIGACIÓN Y CONFLICTO: POLÍTICAS ANTIDROGAS Y DESLEGITIMACIÓN DEL ESTADO EN COLOMBIA [FUMIGATION AND CONFLICT: ANTIDRUGS POLITICS AND DELEGITIMATION OF THE COLOMBIAN STATE] 4 (Santafé de Bogotá: TNI/Acción Andina/Terver Mundo Editores, 1999).

²⁶ Nivia, Elsa, "Cosmo-Flux 411F: Coadyuvante adicionado al Roundup Ultra en la erradicación forzosa de cultivos ilícitos en Colombia," RAPALMIRA, January 2001.

25 days,” said doctor Edgar Perea. “I don’t know how many the other doctors have treated.”²⁷

Many families fled the fumigation. Some of them set up house in rundown wooden shacks in the town of San Miguel near the Ecuador border. Cecilia Ramírez, a middle-aged woman who, along with her husband and three children, abandoned their farm in La Dorada in January after it had been fumigated, claimed, “Everything was killed. Maize, yucca, everything.”²⁸ She began selling home-cooked food to travelers crossing the border in a desperate struggle to support her family. Even Commander Enrique, chief of Putumayo’s paramilitary forces and a supporter of Plan Colombia, admitted that “if you go to San Miguel you can find peasants who don’t have food and money because the fumigation was indiscriminate and killed licit and illicit crops.”²⁹

Doctor Ruben Dario Pinzón of the National Plan for Alternative Development (PLANTE), the government agency in charge of the alternative-crop program, also criticized the spraying: “Growers financed by PLANTE have been fumigated because they are in a small area in the middle of coca growers. It is impossible to protect them because the pilots can’t control exactly where they fumigate. They fumigate the whole area.”³⁰

The devastation wrought by the initial spraying campaign led to protests by thousands of farmers and the governors of the six southern departments affected by the fumigations. While they failed to convince the government to switch from aerial spraying to manual eradication, it was agreed that PLANTE would inform the National Anti-Narcotics Directorate of the location of farmers who had signed social pacts in the hopes that their fields would not be fumigated.

However, subsequent spraying campaigns continued to destroy alternative crops. Victoriano Mora, a Putumayo farmer who signed a social pact in April 2002, replaced his coca plants with lulo plants that produce fruit used to make juice drinks. Four months later, his newly planted crops were destroyed by the fumigation. Meanwhile, two nearby coca fields were scarcely affected by the herbicide.³¹

Even when alternative crops of local farmers manage to survive the fumigation, the social pacts often provide insufficient resources to maintain a family. According to one local official who requested anonymity because of rebel death threats, “Plan Colombia was the worst thing that could have happened to us. There was a lot of corruption as NGOs from Bogotá invaded Putumayo. We know how to work with the people in Putumayo, but with Plan Colombia came a lot of people from other places to manage the projects and the government only gave the money to these organizations.”³²

These accusations of corruption and waste were echoed by Jair Giovanni Ruiz, an agro-industrial engineer with the Ministry of the Environment’s

²⁷ *Supra*, note 21.

²⁸ Interview conducted by Garry Leech in San Miguel, Putumayo, Colombia (Feb. 8, 2001).

²⁹ Interview conducted by Garry Leech in La Hormiga, Putumayo, Colombia (Feb. 7, 2001).

³⁰ Interview conducted by Garry Leech in Puerto Asis, Putumayo, Colombia (Feb. 6, 2001).

³¹ Based on interview and observations while conducting field research in Putumayo, Colombia (Aug. 2002).

³² Interview conducted by Garry Leech in Puerto Asis, Putumayo, Colombia (Aug. 19, 2002).

Corpoamazonia (Corporation for Sustainable Development in the Southern Amazon). Ruiz claimed that peasant farmers received little of the alternative-crop funding, “Maybe a cow or three chickens, but the farmers can’t live off of these. Maybe the money got lost on the way, or maybe [the government] contracted a lot of experts in order to supply a cow.” The bottom line, according to Ruiz, is that “there was bad management of the Plan Colombia resources.”³³

While 20 percent of U.S. aid going to social and economic development programs has proven to be woefully inadequate and inefficiently disbursed to implement effective long-term alternative-crop strategies, the other 80 percent of Plan Colombia aid has proven very effective at destroying the livelihood, not only of impoverished coca growers, but also of those farmers willing to sign social pacts. Needless to say, a wary populace, already distrustful of a government that has repeatedly abandoned it, is now more skeptical than ever about the rhetoric emanating from Bogotá and Washington. As Mario Cabal of PLANTE succinctly stated, “We have money for helicopters and arms for war, but we don’t have money for social programs.”³⁴

To make matters even worse for rural Colombians, the Bush administration’s expansion of the U.S. military role from counternarcotics to counterinsurgency operations under the guise of the “war on terror” has allowed U.S.-trained counternarcotics battalions and helicopter gunships to be used against Colombia’s two leftist guerrilla groups that are on the State Department’s list of Foreign Terrorist Organizations. This military escalation has drawn the United States even deeper into Colombia’s dirty war, with evidence of collusion between the new U.S.-trained counternarcotics battalions and right-wing paramilitary death squads that are also on the State Department’s terrorist list.

The U.S. Congress passed the original Plan Colombia aid bill with the understanding that some of the funding would be used to create, train, and arm three new Colombian army counternarcotics battalions that would function independently from the Colombian army’s counterinsurgency troops. The intent was to keep U.S. aid out of the hands of Colombian army units that routinely collaborate with right-wing paramilitaries responsible for more than 70 percent of Colombia’s human-rights abuses, according to human-rights groups and the U.S. State Department.³⁵

It is now evident that this strategy to defend the human rights of Colombia’s peasant population has failed. According to Catalina Diaz of the human-rights group Colombian Commission of Jurists (CCJ), her organization has presented evidence to the U.S. embassy that makes it “very clear that there is a tolerance and acceptance of the paramilitaries by this [U.S.-trained counternarcotics] brigade.”³⁶ Additionally, in a 2002 incident, a few miles upriver from Puerto Asis in Putumayo, one of the authors observed an army patrol consisting of soldiers from a U.S.-trained counternarcotics battalion allow four paramilitaries armed with AK-47s and walkie-talkies to pass unhindered.

³³ Interview conducted by Garry Leech in Puerto Asis, Putumayo, Colombia (Aug. 20, 2002).

³⁴ *Id.*

³⁵ *Colombia: Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – 2001*, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE, March 4, 2002, available at <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2001/wha/8326.htm>.

³⁶ Interview conducted by Garry Leech in Bogotá, Colombia (Aug. 22, 2002).

The right-wing gunmen openly brandished their weapons as they prepared to board canoes on the Putumayo River. That same night, a paramilitary death squad killed three unarmed civilians in Puerto Asis. Two were shot in the head, while the third was hacked open from the neck to the belly button with a machete.³⁷

U.S. and Colombian officials claimed that Plan Colombia would bring peace and economic prosperity to Colombia while dramatically curtailing illicit drug production. But after almost four years and \$3 billion, it has instead contributed to a dramatic increase in poverty and a growing discontentment among those Colombians directly affected by the militaristic aerial fumigation campaign. Following an August 2004 visit to Colombia, U.S. drug czar John Walters admitted that Plan Colombia has failed to achieve its own stated goal to reduce the flow of cocaine to the United States: "We have not yet seen in all these efforts what we're hoping for on the supply side, which is a reduction in availability."³⁸

One of the reasons there has been no reduction in the supply of cocaine to the United States is that aerial fumigation has simply dispersed production from Putumayo to other departments throughout the country. Coca cultivation existed in twelve of Colombia's thirty-two departments at the outset of Plan Colombia; it now exists in twenty departments.³⁹ As a result, the U.S.-sponsored militaristic counternarcotics campaign is now devastating the lives of impoverished peasants throughout Colombia.

While Plan Colombia has failed to achieve its stated objective, it has provided security for multinational oil companies operating in the South American country that supply U.S. energy needs. According to the Colombian Army commander responsible for protecting Putumayo's oil operations, Lt. Col. Francisco Javier Cruz, U.S. drug-war aid has made the region safer for conducting oil operations because the army has been able to use "helicopters, troops and training provided in large part by Plan Colombia."⁴⁰ And Lt. Col. Cruz is clear regarding his mission: "Security is the most important thing to me. Oil companies need to work without worrying and international investors need to feel calm."⁴¹

Security for multinational oil companies, however, has not translated into security for impoverished Colombian peasants. As one Putumayo resident candidly stated, "Everyone knows the conflict in the Middle East is because of oil, and Colombia's problems are no different. Maybe the coca is going, but there's still oil. And if there's oil, then the armed groups won't leave because they are interested in places where there are money and power."⁴²

³⁷ Based on observations while conducting field research in Putumayo, Colombia (Aug. 17, 2002).

³⁸ "U.S. Anti-Drug Campaign 'Failing,'" BBC News, August 6, 2004, *available at* <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/3540686.stm>.

³⁹ Joseph Contreras, "Failed 'Plan,'" *Newsweek*, August 29, 2005.

⁴⁰ Lt. Col. Francisco Javier Cruz, interview with author, March 2, 2004, Orito, Putumayo, Colombia.

⁴¹ Lt. Col. Francisco Javier Cruz, interview with author, March 2, 2004, Orito, Putumayo, Colombia.

⁴² Interview conducted by Garry Leech on March 4, 2004, Puerto Asís, Putumayo, Colombia.

Conclusion

While strategies implemented in the war on drugs in the United States and Colombia are clearly distinct, a comparative analysis brings to the forefront a number of common themes that provide useful practical comparisons and point to overall failure. Ultimately, the war is not being won either in terms of its goal to halt drug production at the source, or in terms of decreasing the availability of drugs on the streets of U.S. cities. Equally significant, it has done little to confront the deepening socioeconomic marginalization of target communities, which plays a key role in creating incentives to participate in the production, distribution, and use of drugs. While incarceration may be a contributing factor to reduced rates of drug-related crimes in the United States, as a long-term strategy, this approach is highly problematic given its inherent class and racial bias and implications of increased social dislocation and family breakdown highlighted throughout this article. The spin-off costs in broader terms of democracy and human rights point to the need for multi-pronged strategies addressing the roots of the various levels of breakdown within U.S. inner cities, and the increasingly obvious crisis of development in Colombia's long-neglected rural areas.

More troubling conclusions emerge as one reflects on the fact that cocaine is no longer the principal drug threat in the United States and yet the war on drugs continues to focus on this derivative of the coca plant. In 2004, according to the U.S. government's National Drug Intelligence Center, "The percentage of state and local agencies that identify methamphetamines as their greatest drug threat (39.6%) surpassed that of cocaine (35.6%), including crack."⁴³ Despite the fact that methamphetamine use is more prevalent among rural whites than urban blacks and that much of it is produced domestically, the emphasis of the war on drugs continues to be on law enforcement in U.S. cities and militaristic counternarcotics campaigns in Colombia. Consequently, U.S. drug-war strategies are not only failing on their own terms, they are also contributing to a humanitarian crisis that could prove to be a formidable challenge for future social policy.

⁴³ 'The National Drug Threat Assessment,' National Drug Intelligence Center, February 2005.

