

Blown Away

THE WAR ON DRUGS:
FEEDBACK FROM THE FRONT LINE





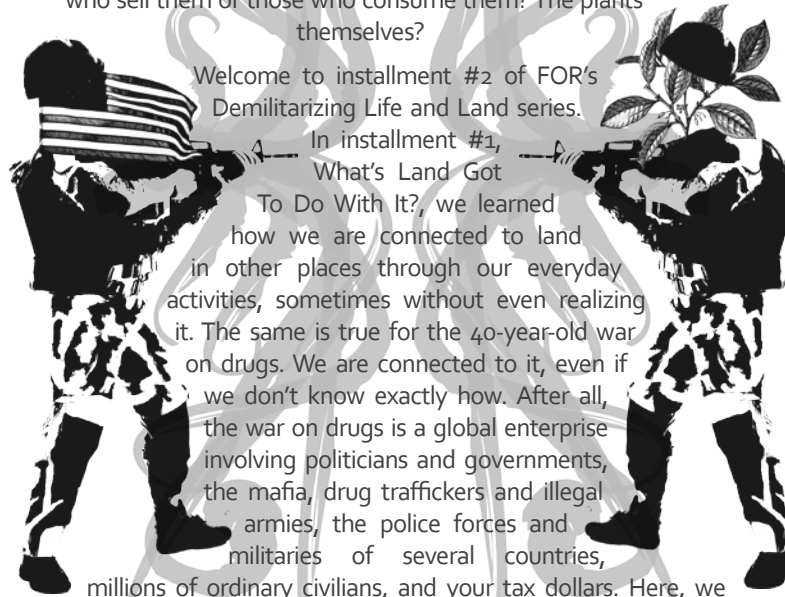
War on what?

Have you ever asked yourself how it's possible to fight a "war on drugs"? Wars are traditionally defined as conflicts between two nations or, at the very least, between two armed parties. How does the U.S. military and government seek out and hunt down substances like cocaine, heroin, and marijuana? Who are the enemies? The people who transport the substances? Those who sell them or those who consume them? The plants themselves?

Welcome to installment #2 of FOR's Demilitarizing Life and Land series.

In installment #1, What's Land Got To Do With It?, we learned

how we are connected to land in other places through our everyday activities, sometimes without even realizing it. The same is true for the 40-year-old war on drugs. We are connected to it, even if we don't know exactly how. After all, the war on drugs is a global enterprise involving politicians and governments, the mafia, drug traffickers and illegal armies, the police forces and militaries of several countries, millions of ordinary civilians, and your tax dollars. Here, we look at whom the war on drugs impacts, analyze some of the big interests involved, and offer a few alternatives.



War on whom?



"My name is
Linda Orozco.

I had heard talk about the war on drugs, and I felt confident it could not affect me, or any of my family members. How wrong I was! I gave birth to my third child, a son.

[As a teenager] he started to self medicate with alcohol and drugs... After almost ten years, my son had to be sent to a residential treatment center out of town to have any chance of recovery.



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\$1 beyond the greater New York metropolitan area

Victory, and defeat, in the war on drugs

by WILLIAM C. REMPEL

If the often-frustrating 40-year war on

As one U.S. drug agent told me:

"They held the dope hostage." Obviously, litigation was not an

easy either side, as

BIDEN PLEDGES SUPPORT IN WAR ON DRUGS

BY J. GARCIA

Henderson

Lebo said the meeting

Whose idea was it, anyhow, to jail someone for using drugs? Whose idea was it to declare a 'war on drugs,' which has only strengthened the cartels and drug lords and made enticing our children with heroin and cocaine so highly profitable? This is actually a war on us!

It's clear to me that, after 40 years of this failed public policy, it's time to ask ourselves what should be our destiny as a society: we can either continue punishing the action or start working in healing and preventing."

I'll take you on the trail of the coca leaf, all the way from where it's grown in Colombia to where it's consumed in the U.S. All the stories in the following pages come from real people.

"Prohibition generates violence and corruption by pushing drug markets underground and inflating prices. Violence is the norm in illicit gambling markets but not in legal ones. Violence is routine when prostitution is banned but not when it's permitted. Violence results from policies that create black markets, not from the characteristics of the good or activity in question."

Jeffrey Miron, Harvard Economist





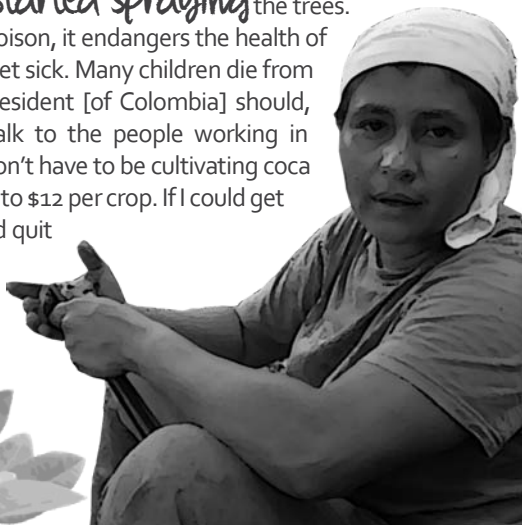
Trail of the coca leaf, first stop: Colombia

Centuries before the war on drugs started, the coca leaf was used (and still is!) by indigenous peoples for ritual purposes. In Colombia, Rosalba Acosta fled the violence of her region after her father was killed.

There are more than five million people like Rosalba in Colombia who have been displaced by violence. After losing her home and land, Rosalba started picking coca leaves, the raw ingredient for cocaine, for money. While working, she and her sons were affected by the fumigation planes that spray poisonous chemicals to kill the coca plants.

"The plane started spraying the trees.

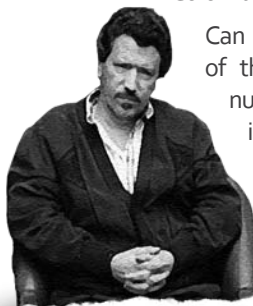
When they spray poison, it endangers the health of my children; they get sick. Many children die from the poison. The president [of Colombia] should, before spraying, talk to the people working in these fields... We don't have to be cultivating coca plants. I'm paid \$10 to \$12 per crop. If I could get another job, I would quit this one..."



If Rosalba's not getting rich, who is?

Rosalba started picking coca leaves because she was trying to provide her kids with enough to eat. How do the coca leaves she picked get processed into cocaine and how are they shipped out of Colombia?

Here's where Colombia's illegal armed groups and state officials come in. Armed groups that control large areas of the countryside come to the doorstep of the farmer, pick up the coca leaves and take them to processing stations. Then, through complex networks with many people along the way, the drugs are smuggled out of Colombia.



"We don't kill
judges or ministers,
we buy them."

GILBERTO RODRIGUEZ
OREJUELA
former Cali cartel leader

Can you believe that illegal groups make 70% of their income this way? The most recent number from the United Nations totals cash income from trafficking cocaine out of Latin America to North America and Europe at \$18 billion. It's hard to know exactly how much Colombian (and other) government officials are making off the drug trade, but it's clear that there is plenty of money to bribe local, regional, and federal officials.

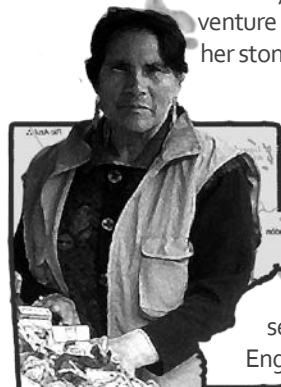


Transporting this stuff is dangerous
for those who choose to be involved...



...and for those who don't.

In some cases humans carry drugs from one country to the next inside their bodies. These people are called "mules" and you'll find them in every country along the route from production to consumption. Porota swallowed small balloons of cocaine and traveled by plane to transport the drugs, a dangerous venture because the cocaine balloons could burst in her stomach and kill her.



"I carried drugs because I had no help supporting my children and things were very difficult for us. I carried the drugs in my stomach. I got caught. They took us away and searched us. I did not understand a word of English. I thought I was going to be killed.

When I arrived in prison, I was in shock. I had never broken the law before. I tried to convince myself that it was a bad dream; that I would wake up with my children. But instead I wake up every day and see these walls."



Drugs go through Central America and Mexico, which are right smack in between where they are grown and where they are sold. In most of these countries, drugs are transported by drug cartels and protected by state forces. Since 2006, some 50,000 people have been killed in Mexico alone, many of them with no involvement in the drug trade. The violence is only getting worse.



JAVIER
SICILIA,
Mexican
poet whose
son was killed in 2001

"We are outraged, because this war has done nothing for us. It has not solved the problem. We need to create awareness, consciousness, so that the people, the American people, know that behind every drug consumer and behind every use of guns, we pay with dead people."





Between a rock and a hard place

Crack is a highly addictive rock form of cocaine, smoked rather than snorted. In the U.S., federal jail sentences for crack offences were exponentially higher than for powder cocaine until 2010, when these laws were changed; there's still an 18 to 1 sentencing disparity.

"When I was 21 years old, I found myself in a horridly abusive relationship and the only option I could see was to go live with my cousin. The thing was, he was dealing crack cocaine. And it wasn't long before he asked me to help him out with some favors: running errands, transferring money, whatever. I knew it was wrong, but I felt I had nothing else. I never used or sold drugs, but I was convicted for running errands and wiring money. Had I been convicted of a powder cocaine offense, I would be home with my three daughters and two grandchildren by now. Instead, I am a mother and grandmother serving a 27-year federal prison sentence for a first time, nonviolent crack cocaine offense."

HAMEDAH HASAN



Not so black and white. Or is it?

Most of the people in jail are just like Hamedah: poor and black or brown. Think of this: blacks are only 15 percent of crack users, but 85 percent of the people locked up for using crack. Whites are 65 percent of crack users, but only five percent of the people locked up for using crack.

There are more African American adults in prison or on parole today than were enslaved in 1850. There are more black people in the U.S. who can't vote today because they are convicted felons than in 1870, the year the 15th Amendment was ratified, which prohibits laws that deny the right to vote on the basis of race.

Since the beginning of the war on drugs, the U.S. prison population has increased by 360%!

In 2010, Uncle Sam estimated that 47% of the nation's population has used illegal drugs. Are we gonna put all those people in jail?



Now, are we at the beginning of the coca trail? Or the end?

Consumers of cocaine could be considered the beginning of the coca trail, because their money pays for everything we've seen so far in this booklet.

"I used to be a lawyer and a judge. At the age of 30, I developed a horrible addiction to cocaine. At the age of 35, after my second felony arrest for drug possession, I lost everything. I lost my license to practice law, my business, two homes, seven vehicles, all my worldly possessions of any intrinsic value, my marriage and my dignity. I was on the news no less than ten times in one year, being humiliated. I had no hope. I believed I had no future."

JASON

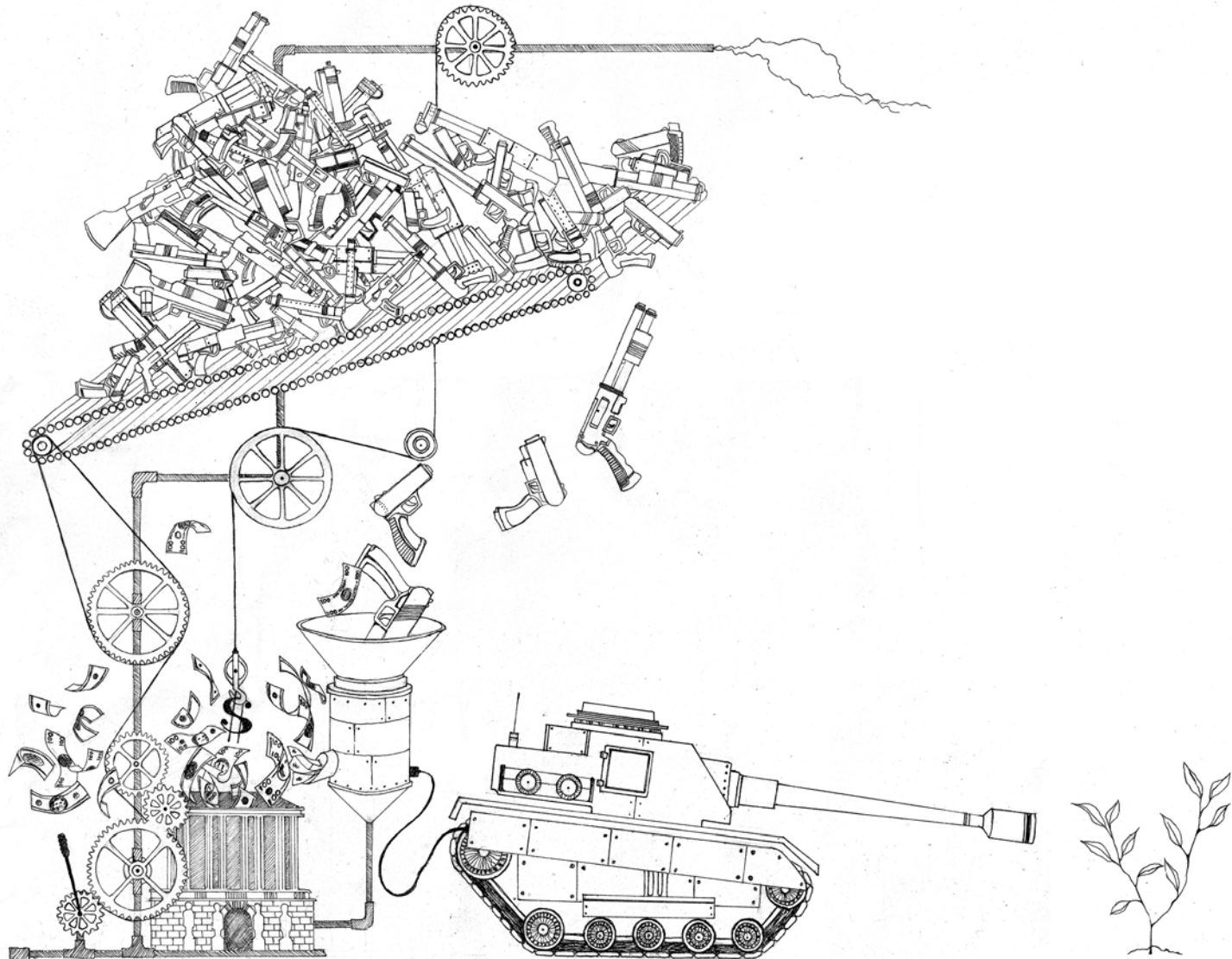
Jason may have felt like his situation couldn't have gotten any worse, but fortunately he didn't end up in jail. He went to treatment and was able to kick his habit.

How do we break the cycle?

In 2010, over 20 million people in the U.S. needed drug treatment, but never received it. Around 8 million of them wanted to enter a treatment program, but just couldn't afford it. We continue to designate 2.6 times as much money into policing and prisons as we do into treatment and prevention.

In the early '90s the U.S. government hired RAND Corporation, a conservative think tank, to analyze the cocaine trade. Why didn't the government listen when they concluded that every dollar invested in treatment is 23 times more cost effective at reducing cocaine use than every dollar spent on trying to stop people from growing or transporting drugs?







Is the end in sight?

In the previous section we met some of the people involved in the war on drugs: some grow coca, others transport it, and at the end of the line people sell it and use it. Policy makers have chosen to define the “enemies” in the war on drugs as Rosalba (they fumigate her crops), Porota (they arrest her for bringing drugs across the border), and Hamedah (they throw her in jail for running drug errands).

The war on drugs will never end with this strategy for two main reasons:

- 1) Numerous studies have shown that drugs are like anything else in the global market, in that they respond to the law of supply and demand: as long as someone in the U.S. is willing to buy it, someone somewhere will grow it, transport it, and sell it.
- 2) It's not just individuals along the way who are motivated by cash. There are bigger interests involved: businesses and governments are driven by money, too, and waging the war on drugs benefits various interests. The next section explores four of them.



Jailhouse Blues

"Despite spending hundreds of billions of dollars and arresting millions of Americans, illegal drugs remain cheap, potent and widely available throughout the country; the harms associated with them continue to mount."

ETHAN
NADELMANN
Drug Policy
Alliance

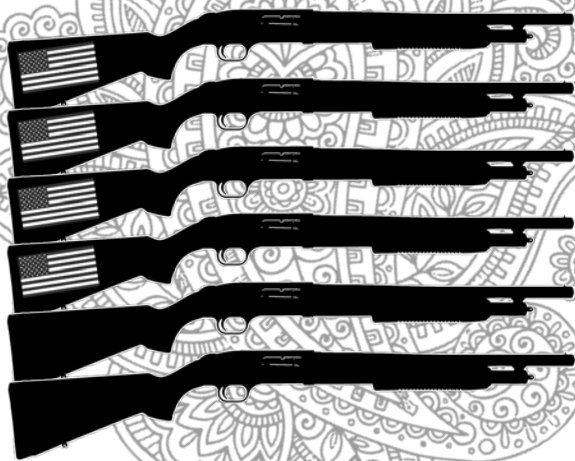
Politicians tend to be in favor of incarceration because they 1) score points for being tough on crime and drugs and 2) help enrich local economies -- prisons often become rural areas' biggest employers.

Private companies like to build prisons because they make money. Between 1990 and 2009, almost 17 times more private prisons were built than public ones. Since private prison companies are paid per prisoner, the more prisoners, the better the profit!

Three prison companies have spent \$22 million dollars over the last ten years to fund hundreds of lobbyists on Capitol Hill. They influence government policy toward longer sentences and harsher drug laws. Do you see the cycle? Prison companies make money; they spend the extra income to lobby politicians; politicians make decisions to benefit the companies. Then we have more prisons. This is sometimes called: the prison-industrial complex.

Lock 'em up! Load 'em up!

Did you know more than two out of every three guns seized in Mexico and traced in the last five years were sold in the United States?



There are three ways that U.S.-made weapons get to Mexico:

1) The U.S. government sends 'em!

Since 2007, the U.S. has given \$1.6 billion in military and police assistance to Mexico. Most of this has been in the form of helicopters and aircraft, as well as equipment (like night vision goggles and surveillance technology), training, and weapons.

2) The U.S. government gives licenses to dealers to sell 'em!

In 2010, more than 20,000 assault weapons and 14,000 military rifles were sold directly from U.S. weapons dealers to the Mexican armed forces.

3) Independent stores sell 'em and any ole' person can buy 'em!

There are more than 8,000 gun dealers in the border region. Picture this: you walk into a gun store, purchase twenty AK-47s, walk out, turn around, and sell them to a smuggler. The weapons are then taken across the border to be used by drug cartels. Meanwhile, you can just walk to the next store and do it all over again.



Dirty money

In the war on drugs, traffickers launder their money so that it looks like they earned it legitimately. For example, a boss sets up a restaurant and even though no one ever goes to eat there, on the books he makes it look like he's making lots of money. However, it's not only the cartels that profit from money laundering, other big businesses do too.

Take the case of Wachovia Bank, now folded into Wells Fargo: the U.S. side of the bank set up relationships with exchange offices in Mexico (think Western Union). This makes sense legally because Mexicans living in the U.S. send money home to help their families out. Unfortunately, Wachovia became a front for the drug cartels to move their money across borders, because neither

the exchange offices nor Wachovia asked any questions about deposits.

Sounds like risky business? From 2004 to 2007, drug cartels moved **\$378 billion through Wachovia** and into the U.S. banking system. This included \$13 million to purchase planes for drug traffickers.

You'd think that busting the banks for \$378 billion of laundered money over three years might be one way to fight the drug war, right? But even U.S. law enforcement officials admit that fighting money laundering isn't a priority. Robert Mazur who trains DEA officers, said:

"If you look at the career ladders of law enforcement, there's no incentive to go after the big money... The DEA is focused on drug trafficking rather than money laundering."



What's your war of choice?

In the U.S., capitalism is king. U.S. leaders have defended it with force, even when other democratic countries opt for different economic models. The U.S. has used military force to overturn governments and meddle in politics in many countries in Latin America. A few examples: in 1954 the CIA replaced the president of Guatemala with a dictator that favored U.S. interests; in 1973, a U.S.-supported military coup brought to power a regime that imprisoned, tortured, and killed leftist Chileans; in the 1980s, the U.S. funded and organized a right-wing armed group in Nicaragua to halt a socialist-communist revolution. Today the U.S. militarily supports a Honduran government chosen in a widely boycotted election during the wake of the 2009 coup.

Whether fighting the Cold War, the war on drugs, or the war on terror, the U.S. continues to militarize the region in the name of democracy. How is it that these

"democratic ideals" are often more about benefiting big companies and their investments than anyone else? As Colonel Ross Brown, commander of the U.S. military base in Honduras, said:

"By countering transnational organized crime, we promote stability, which is necessary for external investment, economic growth and minimizing violence."

The perception that U.S. militarization promotes stability and minimizes violence in Latin America is misguided, at best. But the aid continues to flow. Between 1996 and 2012, the U.S. government spent over \$16 billion on regional military and police aid. It's easier to fight a war "over there" and blame other countries (or plants) for our problems than to take a hard look at what's causing those problems at home.





So... what's the alternative?

So far we've learned a lot about the impacts of the war on drugs, especially how it affects people along the route from production to consumption. And we've seen a few of the bigger systems – the prison-industrial complex, weapons dealers, banks, and the U.S. government as a complex set of bureaucratic, political, and economic interests.

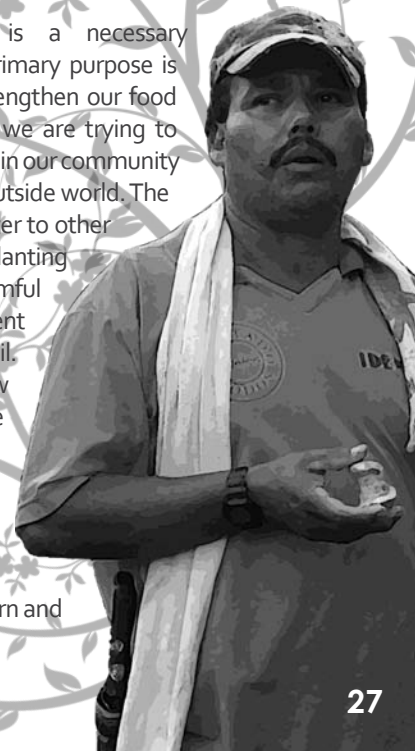
But we can't just critique things as they are; we also have to hear from the people who are building an alternative, those who have imagined how things could be different and are working towards that vision. So let's go back through the main stops on our travels – Colombia, Mexico, and the United States – to hear what people are doing to build a different world.



Plant seeds of life, not seeds of death

The rural farming community of San José de Apartadó declared itself neutral in the Colombian civil war in 1997. Since then, this self-defined Peace Community has faced constant violence and the threat of displacement. In an effort to build an alternative allowing them to stay on their lands without growing coca to make a living, they have developed the Agricultural Center. They're part of a larger network for food and agricultural autonomy in Colombia. Here's Javier:

"The Agricultural Center is a necessary alternative for farmers. Its primary purpose is to work on, research and strengthen our food sovereignty. In other words, we are trying to build an economy of food within our community that doesn't depend on the outside world. The Center is the alternative answer to other options in the area: like planting coca or participating in harmful international development projects like mining or palm oil. The Center is the way to show farmers that we are capable of planting and harvesting to maintain our own families using an alternative economy. It is for this reason that the Agricultural Center of the Peace Community was born and will continue."





NO CREEP
MENTETE



Reclaim the streets

Juarez Angels

Messenger Angels is a group of teenagers from the Christian Church Psalm 100 who dress up and take to the streets of Ciudad Juarez to protest the epidemic of violence there. Ciudad Juarez is Mexico's most violent city, with over 5,000 deaths in 2010-2011 because of violence related to the war on drugs. These young people persuaded city officials to donate old curtains to make angelic robes. They attach feathers to the curtains, put on makeup and sparkles and stand on chairs that make them over ten feet tall, their robes falling to the ground around them. Their signs are directed towards the criminals, saying things like "murderers repent." They protest at busy intersections, crime scenes, prosecutors' offices, and police stations.



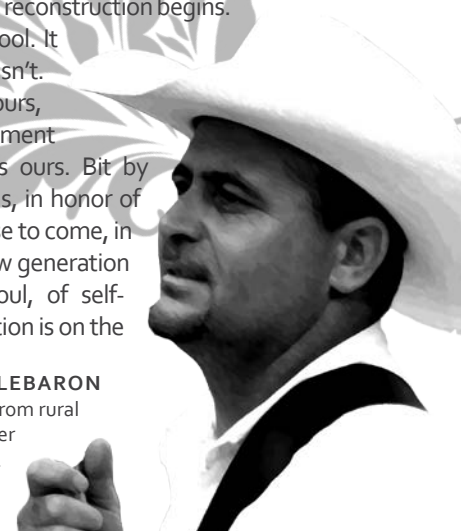
Caravan of Consolation

The Caravan of Consolation started on June 4, 2011 in Cuernavaca, Mexico. Poet and journalist Javier Sicilia convened the Caravan for victims of the war on drugs' violence in Mexico, to share their stories and anguish. They traveled for 3,400 kilometers in 14 buses, received by cities that organized mass gatherings, and made spontaneous pauses in towns where people awaited the caravan to tell their own stories.

"On the caravan we have been building humanity. From this moment on the reconstruction begins. We will use love as our tool. It sounds like utopia, but it isn't. We need to take what is ours, the streets, the government buildings. The country is ours. Bit by bit, with collective actions, in honor of those who lived, and those to come, in a nonviolent way. The new generation is an attitude of the soul, of self-respect. This new generation is on the march."

JULIAN LEBARON

a Mormon rancher from rural Chihuahua state. His brother was killed in July 2009.



Tear down those prison walls



"I would like to see us examine the ways in which the criminalization of certain behaviors, such as drug use and drug trafficking, has allowed the prison system to expand the way that it has. I would like to see us engage in a national conversation on true alternatives to incarceration. I'm not speaking about house arrest and probation and parole and so forth. I'm talking about ways of addressing social problems that are entirely disconnected from law enforcement."

There are many different alternatives to prison, which include community-controlled courts, councils, or assemblies to control the problem of crime. Critical Resistance is a prison abolition organization. They print a newspaper written mostly by prisoners, former prisoners, and community advocates, increase support for folks who are coming out of prison, and participate in coalitions that work to stop building future prisons.

"Abolition does not mean that we don't hold people accountable for their actions, but punishment creates the opposite of accountability — a sense of social isolation instead of responsibility to others."

- Critical Resistance

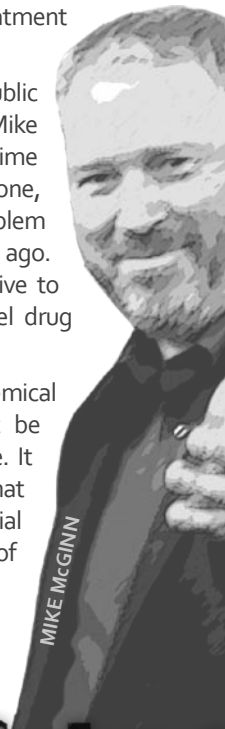
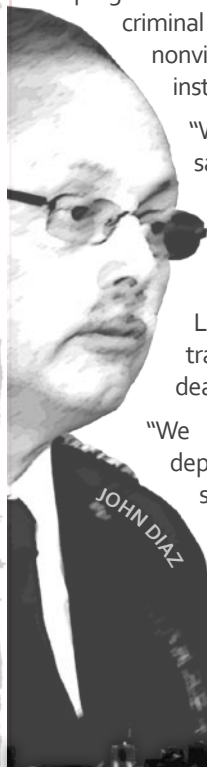
Lend a hand, not a hand-cuff



LEAD (Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion) is an innovative pilot program in Seattle designed to improve public safety and reduce criminal behavior. Beat officers offer to take low-level, nonviolent drug offenders to drug treatment instead of arresting them.

"We are looking for effective public safety solutions," said Mayor Mike McGinn. "If drug dealing and crime could be solved by arrests alone, we would have solved this problem a couple thousand arrests ago. LEAD offers a promising alternative to traditional responses to street-level drug dealing."

"We know that the issue of chemical dependency in our society cannot be solved by law enforcement alone. It is a complex social problem that requires a comprehensive social solution," says Seattle Chief of Police John Diaz.



Regulate it

Many individuals and plenty of organizations in the U.S. have been working for years on campaigns to legalize various drugs (certain drugs are already legal in some European countries). These days, even some Latin American presidents question the failed war on drugs and want to debate the possibility of legalization:



"We are living in the same building and our neighbor is the largest consumer of drugs in the world. Everybody wants to sell him drugs through our doors and windows. If the consumption of drugs cannot be limited, then decision-makers must seek more solutions -- including market alternatives."

Felipe Calderón, President of Mexico, 2006-2012.

"Take away the violent profit that comes with drug trafficking... If that means legalizing, and the world thinks that's the solution, I will welcome it."

Juan Manuel Santos, President of Colombia



"The war we have waged over the past 40 years has not yielded results. It's a war which, to speak frankly, we are losing..."

Otto Perez Molina, President of Guatemala



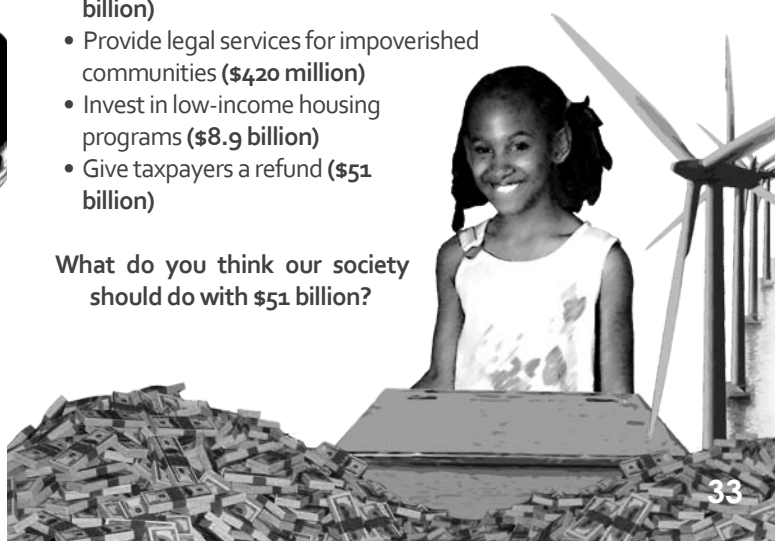
The Bottom Line

This year the U.S. federal government will spend about \$51 billion on the war on drugs. Where would you invest that cash?

Here are some ideas and their relative costs from the Drug Policy Alliance:

- Fund teacher training and afterschool programs (**\$4.6 billion**)
- Provide free high-quality pre-kindergarten education to all children of the U.S. (**\$33 billion**)
- Treat all eight million people in the U.S. suffering from drug addiction who want treatment (**\$14.8 billion**)
- Offer free breast cancer screening for all uninsured women in the U.S. (**\$1.4 billion**)
- Protect drinking water by replacing aging facilities (**\$11 billion**)
- Double the current U.S. investment in renewable energy (**\$34 billion**)
- Provide legal services for impoverished communities (**\$420 million**)
- Invest in low-income housing programs (**\$8.9 billion**)
- Give taxpayers a refund (**\$51 billion**)

What do you think our society should do with \$51 billion?



Summing it Up

Is the entire war on drugs fought just because we abuse the intoxication properties of a plant?

Well, what's clear is that this war sure isn't beating the drugs back! As of June 2011, according to the Global Commission on Drugs, the drug business is estimated to be the third biggest in the world, after oil and arms.

According to the same report, consumption and production of drugs haven't declined: worldwide opiate consumption increased by 34.5% in the last two decades, and that of cocaine by 25%.

Even without considering the harmful affects of drug use and addiction, the violence associated with moving drugs from farms where they are grown into people's hands has left hundreds of thousands dead and displaced from their lands, and many more in jail and prison.

Forty-plus years later and all that money spent, this is hardly a success story. Check out the next page to find out what you can do to help put an end to the failed war on drugs.

What can I do?

Here are some ideas of how you can get involved:

In your community:

- Become part of a network that supports formerly incarcerated people
- Visit a local prison, write an article about it, start a Critical Resistance chapter in your area
- Volunteer at a local drug treatment center
- Write a letter to the editor that challenges the war on drugs, its impacts at home and abroad
- Participate in the Days of Prayer and Action to change U.S. policy toward Colombia

In your state and beyond:

- Advocate for more funding to be directed towards drug treatment and prevention
- Advocate to shorten prison sentences for nonviolent drug offenses
- Educate yourself on how U.S. military aid fuels the fire of the war on drugs
- Sign up to receive urgent actions from organizations working on these issues (see next page)
- Support budget alternatives, such as that of the Congressional Progressive Caucus
- Join Javier Sicilia's Caravan of Consolation, traveling across the U.S. in summer 2012
- Travel to Colombia, Mexico, or Central America on a FOR or Witness for Peace delegation

Where can I learn more? How can I get involved?

Learn about work on the border and in Mexico:

Borderlands Heeding God's Call: heedinggodscall.org
Movement for Peace with Justice and Dignity:
movimientoporlapaz.mx
CIP Americas: cipamericas.org
Narco News: narconews.com

Learn about the prison abolition movement:

Critical Resistance: criticalresistance.org

Learn about efforts to regulate drugs:

Drug Policy Alliance: drugpolicy.org/action
Global Commission on Drug Policy:
globalcommissionondrugs.org
Law Enforcement Against Prohibition: leap.cc
Students for a Sensible Drug Policy: ssdp.org

Learn about efforts to demilitarize

U.S. policy in Latin America:

Fellowship of Reconciliation:
forusa.org/task-force-latin-america-caribbean
Washington Office on Latin America: wola.org
Global Exchange/Mexico Caravan:
globalexchange.org/mexico/caravan
Witness for Peace: witnessforpeace.org
Just the Facts: justf.org

Advocate budget alternatives:

New Priorities Network: newprioritiesnetwork.org

Where did all the information in this booklet come from?

The information in this booklet is based upon extensive research and Fellowship of Reconciliation's on the ground experience. Specific data and testimonies come from the following:

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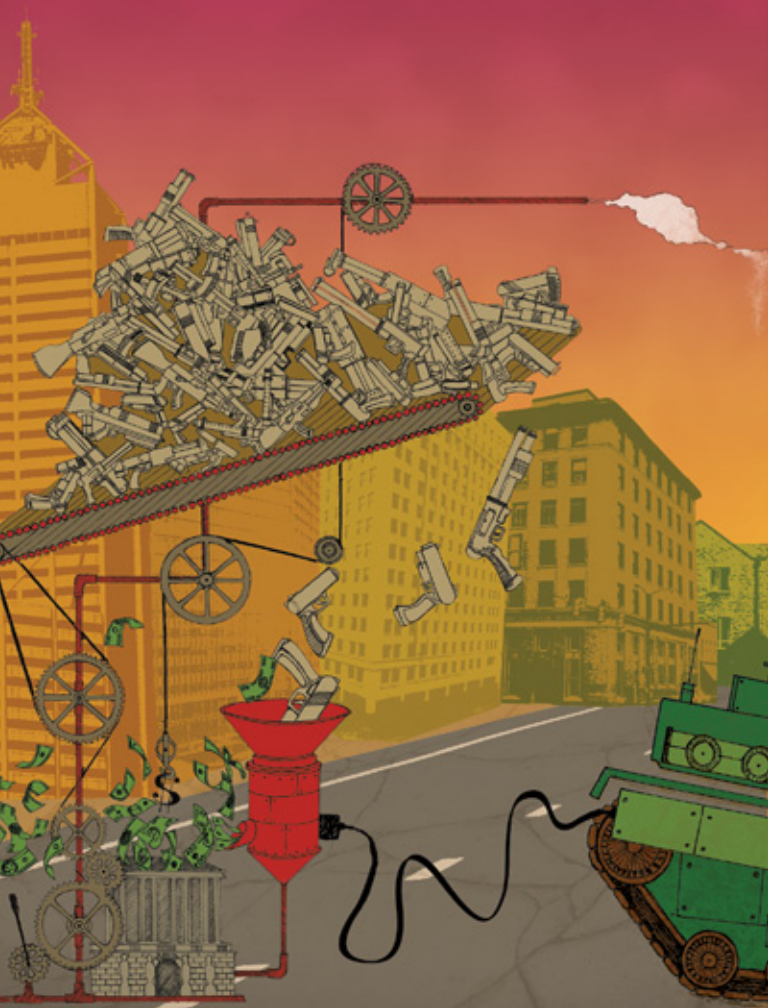
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