

The medellín cartel essay sample

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The infamous Medellín Cartel was a network of drug smugglers that was founded in the Colombian city of Medellín in the mid-1970s by the notorious Pablo Escobar. Escobar, known as *El Doctor* to the people of Medellín, was a ruthless criminal with a keen eye for public relations, bribing the most well-loved politicians, killing the most-hated industrialists, and endearing himself to the people with acts of charity and generosity (Bowden 21). Although he started off as a small-time crook, running extortion and protection rackets in his home town of Medellín, Escobar would soon discover the profits that could be made from smuggling cocaine. Working with fellow crime bosses the Ochoa brothers, Carlos Lehder, and José Rodríguez Gacha, Escobar saw to it that the Medellín Cartel become one of the wealthiest and most notorious drug smuggling operations in the world, flying cocaine grown in Colombia to sales points in Miami and elsewhere in the United States.

At the height of its power in the 1980s, the drug trade grew to become the largest industry in Colombia (Bowden 22), and the Medellín Cartel, which controlled the flow of more than half of the cocaine shipped to the United States, boasted a net worth of some \$28 billion. The Cartel operated throughout Central America and shipped thousands of kilograms of cocaine to the U. S. and Canada by means of carrier planes. The Medellín Cartel even concluded a deal with Panamanian General Manuel Noriega in 1982 that allowed it to ship cocaine through Panama in exchange for payments of \$100, 000 per load (PBS).

In the late 1970s, Pablo Escobar began to have political ambitions.

Presenting himself as a “ robin hood” figure, he was elected as a substitute city council member in Medellín in 1978, and then as Medellín’s delegate to

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the Colombian Congress from 1982-1984 (Bowden 30). In the mid-1980s, however, Escobar was forced out of Congress. At that time, the government began investigating his activities and the leader of the Medellín Cartel dropped out of mainstream politics, resorting once more to terrorist practices to make his voice heard.

By 1985, the Medellín Cartel was in trouble. Colombian popular opinion had turned against the gang, and the government had signed an extradition agreement with the United States, under which suspected drug traffickers could be shipped to the U. S. for trial. Pablo Escobar and the other leaders of the Medellín Cartel were terrified of this new deal, as they had little influence with U. S. politicians and feared punishment at the hands of the Drug Enforcement Agency (Wikipedia). The Cartel began to work overtime issuing threats to politicians and judges and calling on them to denounce the extradition treaty. In one of the most infamous incidents associated with the Medellín Cartel, the gang paid guerrilla group M-19 to storm the Colombian Supreme Court building. M-19 demanded that the Supreme Court renounce the treaty, and when they refused, the guerrillas held hostage the entire Court and its staff, a move that initiated a government siege of the building and resulted in the deaths of at least forty M-19 rebels and fifty Palace of Justice employees, including eleven of the twenty-four Supreme Court justices (Bowden 49). During the raid, the guerrillas managed to destroy six thousand criminal case files, including the records of prosecutions against Escobar and other Medellín Cartel bosses.

After this, Escobar and the Medellín Cartel continued their ruthless tactics, killing three presidential candidates and bombing and shooting hundreds of public officials, judges, police and civilians (Chepesiuk 62). The violence reached a peak in 1989-1990, when the Medellín Cartel declared “total and absolute war” against the government of Colombia. This war was fought by killing even more politicians, civilians, and government officials – anyone who opposed the Cartel and supported the extradition treaty. The tactics were ruthless. Car bombs went off in the streets, people were gunned down by shots from passing motorcyclists, and even an aircraft was blown up and 130 people killed so that informants aboard the plane would not be able to testify against the Medellín kingpins (Lutz 181). By 1993, some estimate that up to 3, 500 people had been killed in the Medellín Cartel’s brutal war against Colombia (Wikipedia).

The Colombian government’s efforts to stop the war had little effect. After offering a deal to the leaders of the Medellín Cartel, many “surrendered” and were held in jail for brief periods of time. In 1990, even Pablo Escobar turned himself over to Colombian officials and was incarcerated in a luxurious correctional facility that he himself had designed. He served a one year sentence between 1990-1991. During this time, however, he (and the other top Medellín bosses) continued to orchestrate the criminal operations of the Medellín Cartel from the safety of the government prison (Kenney 43).

The reign of the Medellín Cartel ended in 1993, with the death of its leader Pablo Escobar, and the killing and incarceration of several of the other most prominent bosses. With the aid of U. S. technology, Colombian police were

finally able to track Escobar down by electronically identifying his voice as he spoke on a cell phone, and then tracing the phone's signal to his secret safe house. The police stormed the location, and Escobar was finally killed while attempting to flee along with one of his bodyguards (PBS). With the loss of its leader, the Medellín Cartel began to fall apart. As Medellín's power waned, the Cali Cartel – the Medellín Cartel's arch-rival – became the new kings of the cocaine trade, and efforts to contain the drug trade were re-focused on Cali for the next decade.

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