

# Drug enforcement administration: early years of the dea



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## **Abstract**

Drug Enforcement Administration or commonly known as the DEA is the United States federal law enforcement agency that is tasked with combating drug related crimes such as drug smuggling, trafficking, drug distribution, and drug abuse in the United States. Although the DEA is a United states agency, they are responsible for pursuing drug investigations both domestic and abroad. With over 1. 6 million drug related law violations in the United States annually, the United States federal government has gone to great lengths to protect America and its people against drug abuse. The Drug Enforcement Administration was established for the sole purpose of having a single federal agency to enforce the federal drug laws and to coordinate and control the governments drug control activities. In this paper we will highlight and discuss the early history of the Drug Enforcement Administration, the key role that the DEA has in protection our homeland, as well as statistics that make the DEA such a successful crime fighting organization.

*Keywords:* DEA, drugs, enforcement, government, illicit

Drug Enforcement Administration: Early Years of the DEA

Drug Enforcement Administration is a premiere agency of the U. S Department of Justice and is responsible for enforcing laws that cover trafficking in controlled substances, cultivation, production, smuggling, and distribution of illicit drugs. The introduction of drugs in America first came between 1850-1914 when Chinese immigrants brought opium to California during the gold rush. Later towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Civil War  
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wounded soldiers were being treated by drugs such as alcohol, opium, and camphor. Cocaine was introduced in 1885 as the first effective local anesthetic. (Reif W. J, 1999). Over the next few decades increasing concern about the debilitating effects of drug addiction led to laws restricting public access to drugs and imposed laws and control of use and distribution.

The Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) was established in 1973 through an Executive Order that was signed by President Nixon on July 28<sup>th</sup>, when he declared “ an all-out global war on the drug menace.” (Drug Enforcement Administration, 2008). Prior to the birth of the DEA, the federal drug law enforcement began in 1915 with the Bureau of Internal Revenue. By the 1960s, the Bureau of Drug Abuse Control (BDAC) and the federal Bureau of Narcotics (FBN) were the two agencies that were charged with drug law enforcement. (Drug Enforcement Administration, 2008). The introduction of drugs did not make a high impact on the American culture until the 1960s. Prior to the 1960s Americans did not see nor accept drug use as an unacceptable behavior. However, by the 1970s drug use in America became sufficiently serious enough to warrant a response and the Drug Enforcement Administration was created to deal with the ever-growing drug problem. The fight on the distribution and use of illegal drugs began in 1968 when President Johnson introduced the Reorganization Plan No. 1 to the Congress. (Drug Enforcement Administration, 2008). President Johnson combined two agencies into a third new drug enforcement agency which merged the Bureau of Narcotics, which was responsible for control of marijuana and heroin, with the Bureau of Drug Abuse Control, whose primary duties were

controlling drugs such as depressants, stimulants and hallucinogens and created the Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs.

The first narcotics task force was established in New York in 1970 under the supervision of the BNDD. The role was to maximize the impacts of cooperating federal, state and local law enforcement on drug investigations. (Drug Enforcement Administration, 2008). During this time heroin was a large problem and the law enforcement officials were set on finding new ways to limit availability and identify those responsible for heroin drug trafficking. This was the first time federal, state, and municipal law enforcement units agreed to collaborate with each other and formed the New York Joint Task Force which was comprised of 43 investigators and led by Chief Bruce E. Jensen. Due to America's fast growing drug problem, Congress passed the Controlled Substances Act (CSA) and the Control Act of 1970. The two documents replaced more than 50 pieces of drug legislation, and established a single system of control for both narcotics and psychotropic drugs in the U. S.

The Drug Enforcement Administration was an idea proposed by President Richard Nixon to create a single federal agency to enforce the federal drug laws as well as gather and organize the government's drug control activities. The Congress accepted the proposal and the departments of the Bureau of Narcotic and Dangerous Drugs (BNDD) and the Office of Drug Abuse Law Enforcement (ODALE) merged to create the Drug Enforcement Administration. John R. Bartels, Jr., became the DEA's first Administrator on October 4, 1973, his two goals for the DEA were to integrate narcotics agents with the U. S. Customs agents to create one effective force, the <https://assignbuster.com/drug-enforcement-administration-early-years-of-the-dea/>

second goal was to restore public confidence and faith in drug law enforcement. In October of 1973 the DEA established its first field intelligence unit. Unified Intelligence Division (UID) became the first task force of the DEA intelligence program. UID comprised of DEA special agents, DEA intelligence analysts, New York State Police investigators, and New York detectives. The UID was the first intelligence unit that was engaged in every aspect of the intelligence process to include, collection, evaluation, dissemination, and analysis. The UID became a key drug fighting unit that was able to disseminate extensive intelligence on traditional drug crimes as well as identify drug leaders and those who were likely to become leaders. Over the next few months the DEA introduced key agencies and systems such as the National Narcotics Intelligence System (NADDIS) which was the first creation of an all-electronic, centralized computer database for drug related records.

Drug use during the late 1970s escalated drastically, and by 1979, twenty-six million Americans were considered regular drug users. (Drug Enforcement Administration, 2008). The high increase of drug abuse came mostly due to the Government policies urging law enforcement organizations to de-emphasize cocaine and marijuana investigations because it was considered a more recreation drug for college students and favor heroin enforcement activities. With the de-emphasizes on marijuana and cocaine, smugglers and traffickers from Colombia faced minimal law enforcement opposition. However, with the lack of law enforcement the trafficker from Colombia were able to lay the foundation for the Medellin and Cali drug cartels.

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The Medellin cartel was a Colombian based cocaine-trafficking organization founded by one of the biggest drug lords of all time, Pablo Escobar. By 1980s the Medellin cartel controlled as much as 80 percent of the international cocaine supply and was responsible for ninety six percent of cocaine entering the United States. (Lutton, W., 1989). Pablo Escobar had established a multibillion-dollar cocaine industry that corrupted high-ranking politicians, police departments, and even the military. Pablo Escobar became one of the wealthiest criminals in history averaging \$2. 1 billion in personal income in one year. (Serena, 2017). In the late 1970s Escobar teamed up with Carlos Lehder and George Jung, two Medellin Cartel members who were brilliant in illegal flight trafficking and organized flights into Florida through the Bahamas using small planes that could be avoided being seen by radars. Over the next few years the American government along with help from the Mexican and Canadian government and drug trafficking organizations began to pick up on the Cartels movements and routes. However, due to the high amount of corrupted police and officials under Escobar's pay roll, Escobar and his fellow cartel members were able to stay one step ahead and move their channels and routes constantly. The Medellin Cartel was not only known for their drug crimes but also violence and crimes that extended beyond drug trafficking. The cartel killed anyone that got in the way or threatened the drug business. Although the exact number of murders is unknown, but it is estimated that over four thousand members of civilians, journalist, police members, and political officials have been murdered by the Medellin cartel. By the early 1980s the War on Drugs had been declared by the American government and the Drug Enforcement Administration sent two officers to Colombia to assist the Colombian government in apprehending and

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extraditing him to the U. S. Over the next few years Pablo Escobar was able to orchestrate his surrender and set up his prison time to server in La Catedral, a luxury prison overlooking Medellin. Escobar was able to escape the prison and returned to his old ways of trafficking drugs. However, after evading arrest began to take a toll on him, he became sloppy and was finally tracked down and shot by Colombian authorities who utilized phone signals to identify his location. Although Pablo Escobar was gone, the Medellin cartel was still far from over. Even today the Medellin Cartel still has some of the most efficient distribution networks in the world that are still used to funnel cocaine and other drugs into America.

The Cali mafia began in the early 1970s. Although the Medellin Cartel was powerful and gained international reputation due to their violence and murder, the Cali mafia traffickers were viewed as legitimate businessmen by counterfeiting and kidnapping, but eventually expanded into smuggling cocaine base to Colombia from Peru and Bolivia for conversion into powder cocaine. Having seen the fate of the Medellin Cartel, the Cali leaders passed themselves as law abiding businessmen who were investing in their country's future (Drug Enforcement Administration, 2008).

In the post- Cold War era, the drug epidemic spread quickly, and it wasn't long before Colombian drugs reached Europe. Over the years the Drug Enforcement Administration conducted many major operations and seizures both at home and abroad. In late 1979, the DEA with help from the U. S Customs Services conducted operation Boomer/Falcon, a two-part drug air interdiction campaign in the Turks and Caicos Islands close to the Bahamas.

The operation targeted a transshipment and refueling point for drug  
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smugglers from South America. One part of the investigation included seizures and arrests of pilots when aircraft landed with illicit drugs. The other part was an undercover investigation that collected intelligence about aircraft drug transportation. DEA agents posed as mechanics and would collect identification information and passed it to a command post in Miami, Florida. The operation was a huge success and accounted for 27 aircraft seizures, 1, 203 pounds of Quaaludes and almost eight tons of marijuana. (Drug Enforcement Administration, 2008). In 1981, the DEA conducted another major operation, Operation Grouper, which was a cooperation between the U. S. Coast Guard and twenty-one federal, state, and local agencies to stop and seize operations against marijuana traffickers from Columbia. The operation targeted Florida, Louisiana, and Georgia based trafficking organizations and accounted for 122 members being arrested, \$ 12 million worth of assets, \$1 billion worth of drugs, and thirty vessels and airplanes being seized, and in the early 1990s the DEA estimated a collection and seizure of 500 to 800 tons of cocaine per year. (Drug Enforcement Administration, 2008). Over the course of 30 years, the DEA conducted hundreds of operations that resulted in much success for the department and its fight on illegal drugs.

After being signed into effect in 1973, the DEA began Basic Agent training in 1975 and two years later re-constructed the course by lengthening the school from ten weeks to twelve weeks. Classes trained from 9 a. m. to 8 p. m. and received only five days off. Training consisted of field training and report writing exercises as well as conspiracy classes. Later, students received increase in law training, new conspiracy techniques,

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methamphetamine labs, and use of technological investigative aids. As the drug production, and drug smuggling increased so did the need for new drug enforcement technology. Technology such as video cameras and tape recorders were used for intelligence collection and surveillance. New data keeping software was constantly being upgraded to track drug related information on spreadsheets. New hacking technology was used to obtain information from such devices like cellular phones, digital pagers, and debit telephone cards that cartel and mafia leaders used.

Although the DEA has had a long fight on illegal drug production and trafficking such as cocaine, marijuana, crack, heroine and many more, the DEA has also had a major impact and change on the longstanding federal laws that pertain to controlled substances that are strictly managed and regulated to ensure an ample supply for authorized medical, scientific, and industrial purpose. In October of 1970, the DEA along with the United States Congress passed an act known as the Comprehensive Drug Abuse Prevention and Control Act of 1970. The Act was a federal law that amended the Public Health Service Act. The Act of 1970 provided increased research into prevention of drug abuse, treatment and rehabilitation of drug abusers and strengthen existing drug law enforcement authorities in drug abuse. In a review of substitute amendment to title I, it states that "prevention and rehabilitation techniques, utilizing medical, social welfare and other community resource, must therefore be mobilized to deal with these problems." (Washington U. S. Govt. Print, 1970). Certain substances are regulated due to their potential for abuse and unsafe nature. The DEA has worked closely with the government agencies and Congress to establish the

Controlled Substance Act (CSA) which allows control of production and distribution of pharmaceutical substances. The only persons who can lawfully manufacture and distribute controlled substances are those who have obtained a Drug Enforcement Administration registration. To obtain a registration from the DEA one must be a physician, dentist, veterinarian, hospital, or other person licensed or registered by the United States or the State (Taylor & Francis, 2011).

Drug Enforcement Administration is the primary agency to enforce federal drug laws. Their mission is to enforce controlled substances laws and to bring criminal and civil justice system of the United States to those involved in manufacturing and distribution of illegal controlled substance in the United States. With 21 domestic field divisions 86 foreign offices in 67 countries (Sacco, 2014), the DEA has played a crucial role in illicit drug supply reduction as well as protect and control many drugs that have legitimate medical purposes and are crucial in sustaining the welfare and health of American people. Due to President Nixon's war on drugs and great emphasis on drug law enforcement the DEA was able to combat the ever-growing drug epidemic that could have corrupted the United States as well as many other countries that were affected by drugs.

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