

U.S. Moral Panics, Mexican Politics, and the Borderlands Origins of the War on Drugs 1950-1962

On August 6 1956 the U.S. consul in Tijuana reported on the local reaction to a recent TV interview by the San Diego District Attorney. During the interview the District Attorney not only blamed Mexico for youth drug problems but also cast doubt on the Mexican authorities' willingness to control narcotics traffic. He argued that the solution was the prohibition of U.S. youths from entering Mexico, the expansion of customs facilities at San Ysidro, and, if necessary, the temporary closure of the border. Only such a drastic measure, he claimed, would force the Mexican authorities take note. As the consul explained, national politicians ignored the slight. But, local politicians could not. The Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) Governor of the newly-created state of Baja California Norte - Braulio Maldonado Sández- was already under pressure. On both sides of the border, newspapers and civil society organizations were accusing Maldonado of ordering the murder of the crusading Tijuana journalist, Manuel Acosta Meza, just two weeks earlier. The combination of factors had compelled the governor to act. During the first week of August, he had sacked the city police chief, announced that he was going to temporarily move the seat of government from Mexicali to Tijuana, and ordered an immediate cleanup of "vice, official bribery and other conditions reflecting adversely on Tijuana".¹

This article examines California's 1950s moral panic over drug use and its consequences in the bordering Mexican state of Baja California Norte. As the consul suggested, the 1950s drug panic worked at two levels. In California both politicians and members of civil society developed a distinct set of arguments on how to stop the drug trade. These blamed U.S. drug use on Mexican supply, targeted the problem of Mexican corruption, and suggested manipulation of the border as a means to blackmail the Mexican authorities to crack down on traffickers. By the late 1960s, these arguments had become cornerstones of U.S., and particularly Republican, counter-narcotics policy. In 1969

¹ National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), Record Group (RG)59, 1955-59, Report of Robert Hale, 6 Aug 1956. Baja California Norte had been made a state in 1953. Lawrence Douglas Taylor Hansen, "La transformación de Baja California en estado, 1931-1952," *Estudios Fronterizos*, 1. 1 (2000).

President Nixon even implemented the de facto shutting of the border in the form of Operation Intercept. But, California's moral panic not only formed the basis for Nixon's war on drugs, it also had serious contemporary effects south of the border. Here, again as the consul indicates, a complex interplay of exogenous and endogenous pressures emerged. Californian denunciations of Baja California's corruption interwove and strengthened homegrown, Mexican hostility to the ruling PRI party. Such opposition took the form of a critical public sphere, combative civil society organizations, and by the late 1950s, a powerful local branch of the opposition Partido Acción Nacional (PAN). Such groups, when combined with U.S. pressure, often forced the local authorities to enact periodic, well-publicized crackdowns on narcotics traffickers, corrupt cops, and low-level addicts.

By examining the dynamics and effects of California's 1950s moral panic, this article brings together, works off, and revises two distinct historical traditions. The first is the scholarship on the United States' war on drugs. Though there is still debate over the origins, aims, rhythms, and geographies of the country's anti-narcotics efforts, recent works have pinpointed the 1950s as a decisive point of inflection.² During this decade, politicians, bureaucrats, and members of civil society not only established a new, and radically more punitive judicial framework, but also developed a distinct underlying "narrative" or "cultural script" to describe the drug trade and justify these legal changes. This narrative contained two elements – the African-American or Mexican-American drug pusher and the white, often female, drug user or victim. As Matthew Lassiter argues, this "pusher-victim" narrative emerged in the white suburbs of California and other southern states, and "fused the categories of race, gender, class, age and space in potent ways". It would, he argues, form the basis for the inequalities of mass incarceration of the

² E.g. Phil Nicholas y Andrew Churchill, "The Federal Bureau of Narcotics, the States, and the Origins of Modern Drug Enforcement in the United States, 1950-1962", *Contemporary Drugs Problems* 39 (2012): 595-640; Matthew Lassiter, "Impossible Criminals: The Suburban Imperatives of America's War on Drugs," *Journal of American History*, 102.1 (June 2015): 126-40; Kathleen J. Frydl, *The Drug Wars in America, 1940-1973* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Matthew D. Lassiter, "Pushers, Victims and the Lost Innocence of White Suburbia: California's War on narcotics during the 1950s", *Journal of Urban History*, 41.5 (2015): 787-807; Eric Schneider, *Smack, Heroin and the American City* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 51-74.

succeeding decades.³ This article builds on such findings, but pushes them further. Here, we argue that a third and crucial element of this narrative was the Mexican drug trafficker. This narrative underlay a series of suggested approaches to drug use, which also emerged during the 1950s. These stressed the idea that anti-narcotics effort should squeeze supply south of the border, that Mexican authorities were often unwilling to do this, and that manipulation of border traffic and trade could coerce them into action.

The second is the research on Mexico's own drug war. Early estimations of Mexico's anti-narcotics efforts highlighted the United States' pervasive influence. Scholars focused on a handful of moments when combinations of political pressure and economic blackmail pushed Mexico towards more hardline policies. They also emphasized the United States' financial and tactical support for police and military anti-narcotics campaigns.⁴ Yet recently, a handful of scholars have started to reframe and nuance this tale of diplomatic dependency. Some have stressed Mexico's homegrown counter-narcotics rhetoric, which rested on endogenous prejudices against indigenous groups, female healers, and Chinese immigrants and could predate, outstrip, and shape America's own anti-drug propaganda. Others have argued that exterior pressures may have inspired more aggressive narcotics policies, but they were also shaped and implemented according to more pressing domestic logics of institution-building, state-formation, and the

³ Schneider, *Smack*, 50; Lassiter, "Pushers", 788; Lassiter, "Impossible Criminals. For the inequalities of mass incarceration see Michelle Alexander, *The new Jim Crow: Mass incarceration in the age of colorblindness* (New York: New Press, 2010); Heather Ann Thompson, "Why Mass Incarceration Matters: Rethinking Crisis, Decline, and Transformation in Postwar American History", *Journal of American History*, 97.3 (2010): 703-34.

⁴ The three key dates were 1940 (when a U.S. narcotics embargo shut down Mexico's attempt to create a state narcotics monopoly), 1947-1948 (when Federal Bureau of Narcotics head Harry Anslinger used his standing at the United Nations to push Mexico into increasing its campaign against opium poppy growers and switching anti-narcotics operations from the Department of Health to the Federal Judicial Police), and 1969 (when Operation Intercept forced Mexico into closer anti-drugs operations with the United States). William O. Walker, *Drug Control in the Americas* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1989); Luis Astorga Almanza, *Drogas sin fronteras* (Mexico City: Grijalvo, 2003); Mariana Flores Guevara, La alternativa mexicana al marco internacional de prohibición de drogas durante el Cardenismo, Unpubl. BA thesis, 2013; Ricardo Pérez Montfort, *Tolerancia y prohibición: Aproximaciones a la historia social y cultural de las drogas en México 1840-1940*, 162-8, 282-307; Froylan Enciso, "Los fracasos del chantaje: Regimen de Prohibicion de Drogas y Narcotráfico," in Arturo Alvarado and Mónica Serrano, (eds.), *Los grandes problemas de México: Seguridad Nacional y Seguridad Interior*, (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 2010), pp. 61-104

repression of rural revolts.⁵ This article acknowledges such conclusions but also extends them down to the subnational level. At the border, localized moral panics – perhaps more than federal U.S. drug policy - could shape efforts to the south. Yet, even here domestic politics played a decisive role. In Baja California Norte, civil society organizations, newspapers, and opposition politicians fed, read, rejigged, and re-deployed U.S. denouncements in order to press for political change. And to survive, local PRI politicians had to act, firing corrupt cops, arresting major drug traffickers, and operating periodic moralization and clean up campaigns.

Moral Panics and the Mexican Border

During the 1950s, a series of moral panics over the use of heroin and marijuana beset California politics. Like most moral panics, they had some basis in observed reality, but were prone to hyperbole, allowed limited rational debate, and instead extended throughout a series of self-enforcing arenas.⁶ No doubt, the concept of the moral panic

⁵ For those that have emphasized endogenous pressures, see Perez Montfort, *Tolerancia*, 71-76; Elaine Carey, *Women Drug Traffickers: Mules, Bosses, and Organized Crime* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2015); Isaac Campos, *Home grown: Marijuana and the origins of Mexico's war on drugs* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012); Benjamin T. Smith, "Drug Policies in Mexico, 1900-1980" in Beatriz C. Labate, Clancy Cavnar, & Thiago Rodrigues, (eds.), *Drug Policies and the Politics of Drugs in Latin America*, (Cham: Switzerland, Springer International Publishing, 2016), 33-53; Isaac Campos, "A diplomatic failure: the Mexican role in the demise of the 1940 Reglamento Federal de Toxicomanías", *Third World Quarterly* (2017). For those that have emphasized the instrumental use of drug policy, see Carlos Pérez Ricart, "U.S. pressure and Mexican anti-drugs efforts from 1940 to 1980: Importing the war on drugs?" in Wil Pansters, Benjamin T. Smith, Peter Watt, (eds.) *Beyond the Drug War in Mexico: Human rights, the public sphere and justice* (London: Routledge, 2017); Carlos Pérez Ricart, *Las agencias antinarcoicas de los Estados Unidos y la construcción transnacional de la guerra contra las drogas en México (1938-1978)*, Unpubl. Ph.D diss, Freie Universität Berlin, 2016; Alex Aviña, "Group Blood: Drugs, Death Squads and the Dirty War Origins of the Mexican Narco-State," Paper given at University of Warwick Conference on Drugs, Politics and Society: The Regional History of the Mexican Drug Trade, 19-20 June 2017; Adela Cedillo, "The Drugged Condor: The Transformation of Outlaw Peasants into Counterinsurgency Targets in Northwestern Mexico during the 1970s," Paper given at University of Warwick Conference on Drugs, Politics and Society: The Regional History of the Mexican Drug Trade, 19-20 June 2017.

⁶ Undoubtedly, there was drug dealing in Tijuana and some trafficking over the Mexico-California border. But, Californian estimates were way in excess of the traffic's significance. The San Diego Customs Office reports from the early 1950s demonstrate a decline in cross-border traffic and a rise in the imports of Asian heroin. In fact, in 1952 the primary concern on the California-Mexico border was the smuggling of rare birds. NARA (Riverside), RG 36, Annual Reports of San Diego Customs Office, 1948-1954. Furthermore, contrary to assertions, marijuana rarely led to heroin addiction, most addicts were from minority not suburban white populations, most addicts were in their late twenties not their teens, and California only accounted for around 5 per cent of U.S. addicts. Schneider, *Smack*, 75-97.

has certain analytical limits.⁷ But, for our purpose, the diachronic approach first employed by Stanley Cohen is useful.⁸ As in our case, it can account for multiple agents with diverse interests and motivations - media that search to boost profits, politicians focused on electoral gain, and civic groups intent on drawing moral boundaries. Despite their differences, they all presented themselves as “right-thinking people” and “socially accredited experts”; united they man ‘the moral barricades’. At the same time, it can also explain how the framing practices of these groups coalesce and mutually reinforce one another to form moral panics. Together these spokespersons became the “primary definers” of the state drug “problem” and suggest both the nature of the debate and viable solutions.⁹ Furthermore such moral panics are not just hot air; they ‘make things happen’.¹⁰ As they “are condensed political struggles’ around wider discourses of law, order and security, they have the capacity to trigger broader legal, institutional and political shifts.¹¹ In the UK during the 1970s, the moral panic about ‘mugging’ fed off wider discourses about crime, race, and youth and then eased the way for a conservative backlash.¹² During the 1980s, the moral panic over drugs, and particularly crack cocaine, helped usher in mass incarceration.¹³

⁷ Cary Bennet, “Drugs, moral panics and the dispositive”, in *Journal of Sociology*, first published September 6, 2017, <https://doi-org.proxy.library.uu.nl/10.1177/1440783317727877>, 1-19; Amanda Rohloff & Sarah Wright, “Moral Panic and Social Theory. Beyond the Heuristic”, in *Current Sociology*, 58.3 (2010), 403-419; David Garland, “On the concept of moral panic”, in *Crime, Media, Culture*, 4.1 (2008), esp. 21-25; Matthew David, Amanda Rohloff, Julian Petley and Jason Hughes, “The idea of the moral panic-ten dimensions of dispute”, in *Crime, Media, Culture* 7.3 (2011), 215-228..

⁸ Stanley Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics* (London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1972). This diachronic approach contrasts with the attributional approach developed by Erich Goode, Nachman Ben-Yehuda, *Moral Panics: The Social Construction of Deviance* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994). See Chas Critcher, “Moral Panic Analysis: Past, Present and Future”, in *Sociology Compass* 2.4 (2008). Several studies attempt to connect Cohen’s original concept to recent theorizing, see e.g. Bennett, “Drugs, moral panics and the dispositive”, Rohloff & Wright, “Moral Panic and Social Theory”.

⁹ Cohen, *Folk Devils*, p. 28; Hall et al, *Policing the Crisis*, pp. 57-60. Particularly relevant for our case is the influential study by Stuart Hall, Chas Critcher, Tony Jefferson, John Clarke, and Brian Roberts, *Policing the Crisis. Mugging, the State, and Law and Order* (London: MacMillan, 1978). For Mexico, see Wil G. Pansters, *Política y Poder in Puebla. Formación y ocaso del cacicazgo avilacamachista, 1937-1987* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1998), 248-260.

¹⁰ Garland, “On the concept of moral panic”, 15.

¹¹ See Stanley Cohen in the introduction to the third edition, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics* (London/New York: Routledge, 2011), xlv.

¹² Hall et al, *Policing the Crisis*.

¹³ See his *Mass Imprisonment: Social Causes and Consequences* (London: Sage, 2000).

California's 1950s panics relied on a cultural tradition of borderland permissiveness, but they were also new. Drugs – rather than sex or alcohol - now became the key biopolitical metaphor for exterior threats to the body politic.¹⁴ 1950s moralizers blamed Mexican narcotics for California's drug problem, created the specter of the border kingpin, denounced Mexican corruption, and started to promote the partial or wholesale closure of the border to force the Mexican authorities to stop narcotics at source. The panics had a distinct, traceable geography moving up from the border cities of San Diego and Calexico to Los Angeles and even San Francisco. Finally, they also had a distinct chronology, culminating in series of federal investigations and presidential inquiries in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

Californian alarm over Mexican drug trafficking rested on both a culturally-constructed black legend of border permissiveness and a regular rhythm of one-off panics.¹⁵ These went back to the 1910s, when they focused on the allure of Chinese opium dens and horse-racing.¹⁶ During the following decade, they intertwined with anti-alcohol discourses and peaked with the uproar surround the so-called "Shame Suicides" of 1926. In the wake of the deaths, the *Los Angeles Times* called Tijuana the "Gomorrhah of Mexican cities".¹⁷ The end of prohibition and the Mexican decision to prohibit gambling dissipated the appeal of these border fright stories. But, they reappeared with force during the 1940s, and now focused on the mafia's supposed influence and the growth of the

¹⁴ For biopolitics and narcotics, see Susan Marjorie Zieger, *Inventing the Addict: Drugs, Race, and Sexuality in Nineteenth-century British and American Literature* (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2008), 202-3, 233-42.

¹⁵ There is extensive literature on this black legend. Humberto Felix Berumen, *Tijuana la Horrible: Entre la historia y el mito* (Mexicali: Colegio de la Frontera Norte, 2003). For good examples of cultural works, which helped create the black legend, see Dashiell Hammett, *The Golden Horseshoe and other stories* (New York: Mysterious Press, 2016); Oakley Hall, *Corpus of Joe Bailey* (New York: Arbor House, 1953); Carroll Graham, *Border Town* (New York: Dell, 1952 edn); Raymond Chandler, *The Chandler collection. 2: the high window, The long good-bye, Playback* (London: Pan Books, 1986); *The Champ* (directed by Franco Zeffirelli).

¹⁶ *Evening Tribune*, 27 May 1916; *San Diego Union*, 30 May 1916; *San Diego Union*, 30 May 1916; Robin E. Robinson, Vice and Tourism in the US-Mexico Border: A Comparison of Three Communities in the Era of U.S. Prohibition. Unpubl. Ph.D, Arizona State University, 2002, 104. In 1920 the board of Temperance, Prohibition and Public Morals of the Methodist Church declared that Tijuana was "a mecca for prostitutes, booze sellers, gamblers and other American vermin". John A Price, *Tijuana: Urbanization in a Border Culture*, (Notre Dame, Ind: University of Notre Dame Press, 1973), 53.

¹⁷ Vincent Cabeza de Vaca and Juan Cabeza de Vaca, "The "Shame Suicides" and Tijuana", *Journal of the Southwest*, 43.4 (2001), 603-35. Robinson, Vice, 219-225, 219.

prostitution industry. By the end of the decade, politicians and civil society organizations were highlighting the risk of venereal disease infecting U.S. marines and pushing the authorities to make Tijuana off limits to service men.¹⁸

Like previous scares, the drug panic was rooted in the print media. Starting in the early 1950s, borderland newspapers, like the *San Diego Union*, the *Evening Tribune*, the *Calexico Chronicle*, and the *Coronado Eagle and Journal*, ran an increasing number of stories on drug use, drug peddling, and drug trafficking. From 1940 to 1950, the *San Diego Union* published 1645 articles on narcotics. The following decade, the paper published nearly triple that amount. Over 30 percent of these articles made direct reference to Mexico and over a quarter mentioned the city of Tijuana.¹⁹ By the end of the decade, other California newspapers had started to replicate the *San Diego Union's* emphasis. Between 1950 and 1958, just over 5 per cent of *Los Angeles Times* articles on drugs mentioned Mexico. Over the next two years, 13 per cent of such articles made the link. In comparison, other major U.S. newspapers failed to mark the connection. Only 3 percent of *New York Times* and 2 percent of the *Washington Post's* drugs articles referenced Mexico.²⁰

To establish the link between drug use and Mexico, newspapers used three approaches – sensationalist news stories, investigative reports, and campaigning editorials. Minor stories of drug busts or petty drug deals often stressed the source of the narcotics. On 18 June 1953, the *Coronado Eagle and Journal* reported the arrest of a high school student with a couple of marijuana cigarettes. “Tijuana dope bust” read the rather misleading

¹⁸ For moral panic over the mafia, see J. L. Albin, *The American mafia: Genesis of a legend*, (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1971); Michael Woodiwiss and Dick Hobbs, “Organized Evil and the Atlantic Alliance: Moral Panics and the Rhetoric of Organized Crime Policing in America and Britain”, *Journal of Criminology*, 49.1 (2009), 106-28. *San Diego Union*, 12 Nov. 1944; NARA, RG59, 1945-49, Waldo Bailey to Secretary of State, 6 Oct. 1948. The *San Diego Journal* opined, “Tijuana emerges not as a colourful tourist lure with striped burros, fancy souvenirs, jai alai games, dog races and languorous Latin entertainment. Instead, it is seen clearly starkly as a source of human pollution, of utter depravity”.

¹⁹ Between 1950 and 1960, there were 4722 articles in the *San Diego Union* that mentioned “narcotics”. 1427 also mentioned Mexico. 1291 also mentioned Tijuana. *San Diego Union*, 01/01/1950-01/01/1960.

²⁰ Search for “narcotics” and “Mexico” in *Los Angeles Times*, 01/01/1950-01/01/1959; *Los Angeles Times* 01/01/1959-01/01/1961. *New York Times*, 01/01/1950-01/01/1960; *Washington Post*, 01/01/1950-01/01/1960.

headline.²¹ When the Los Angeles police arrested a gang of professional roller skaters turned marijuana peddlers, the *San Diego Union* ignored the strange backstory and instead ran the tale under “5 Indicted in LA, Tijuana Dope Ring”.²² News reports on congressional hearings were also framed to emphasize the Mexican connection. In May 1953, the *Los Angeles Times* headed its report on the Governor’s Commission on Organized Crime with “Mexico Blamed for Flood of Heroin coming into State”, neglected to mention the report’s mentions of European or Asian heroin, and instead cherry-picked alarmist accusations of a “bumper crop of Mexican opium” and the unsubstantiated rumor of a “top German scientist” processing the crop into narcotics.²³

Newspaper editors complemented these stories with hysterical investigative reports on drug use south of the border. The *San Diego Union* started the trend in early 1950 by publishing a series of pieces on drug gang vendettas in Tijuana. The reporter followed the career and bloody demise of the minor hoodlum, Antonio Piños Oros, and concluded that the city was “like the Chicago of Al Capone”.²⁴ Two years later, the paper followed up the investigations with a series of articles by Gene Fuson, who posed as a drug addict to buy narcotics in Tijuana. Here, he explained how “hypes” (heroin addicts) and “weedheads” taught him the street lingo (“a mixture of gangsterese and jivetalk”), the “mannerisms of a head”, and how to walk with the “peculiar shuffle of the Pachuco”. After picking up some tips, he visited “junky alley” where he tried to purchase some “H (heroin)” but was only offered “secas (marijuana)”. The next day Fuson’s search for “the action” was more successful. He went to an underground bar where teenagers drank and smoked or as they allegedly put it “lush[ed] for a double kick”, a sailor made love in a back room, and a bathroom attendant sold pornography. At first, he admitted “business was rotten and the atmosphere matched it; a compound of stale beer, cooking onions, stale smoke”. But by 2 am teenagers started to appear. Most were Mexican Americans “dressed in the Pachuco uniform of Levis, flying jackets with the collars turned up and “shag” haircuts”. Within an hour the place was full, a five piece jazz band had started to

²¹ *Coronado Eagle and Journal*, 18 Jun. 1953.

²² *San Diego Union*, 12 May 1960.

²³ *Los Angeles Times*, 11 May 1953.

²⁴ *San Diego Union*, 28 Feb 1950.

play and the bar had transformed into a, “shouting, struggling, jitterbugging mass of humanity”. The dancing was, the journalist concluded, fuelled by marijuana, which was sold by “the Duchess”, “a cadaverous [man] with acne scars and bushy hair” from the back of a closely guarded booth.²⁵

Seven years later, the *Los Angeles Times* ran a similar if even more influential series. In early 1959 the editors sent Gene Sherman to the border to investigate “the repeated stories of drug seizures that could be traced back to Mexico.” Here, he spent three months interviewing “dope peddlers, addicts, public officials, legislators and members of the underworld” before publishing the series in July. In one article he described how a Los Angeles teenager - “blonde, cute as a button” - had become addicted to “Mexican marijuana”. In another he visited Tijuana, where he was offered marijuana, “sex movies”, “a live show... two girls. In a private house. Just for you.” In subsequent articles, he interviewed a former heroin addict and peyote consumer who had seen “lots of amoeba and a big spider” and a 16-year-old San Diego girl who was not only “strikingly beautiful” but also crossed the border three times a day to get her fix.²⁶ The combination of titillation, exploitation, and xenophobia was a hit; politicians lined up to congratulate the Times on its series, and Sherman won a Pulitzer for the pieces – grouped together under the title “A Mexican Monkey on Our Back”.²⁷

Finally, newspapers undergirded news stories and investigative reports with strongly worded editorials, which pressed politicians to act on their assertions of the links between drug use and Mexico. In the wake of Sherman’s articles, the *Los Angeles Times* was particularly pushy. On 12 July, the paper introduced the journalist’s series with the editorial “Where Narcotics Come From”. Though the bulk of the reporting was actually done in the United States, the editors concluded that the main “take home” from the articles “besides the grisliness of addiction and the depravity of the traffic” was “that Mexico is the source of most of South California’s illicit narcotics.” Less than a week

²⁵ *San Diego Union*, 2 Feb. 1952; *San Diego Union*, 3 Feb. 1952. See other articles in series by Fuson in *San Diego Union*, 27 Jan. 1952-6 Feb. 1952.

²⁶ *Los Angeles Times*, 12-17 Jul. 1959.

²⁷ *Los Angeles Times*, 12 Mar. 1960.

later, the paper again urged politicians to take note of the articles, temporarily close the border, and “help make the boundary of the U.S. and Mexican Californias the dividing line between respectable prosperity and squalid depravity”.²⁸

Outside print journalism, the mass media’s depiction of the links between drug use and Mexico was more muted. Federal control of film and TV was more developed. Harry Anslinger disapproved of onscreen portrayals of drug use and at least one TV documentary “on the easy purchase of drugs in Tijuana” was dropped at the last minute “because of the Good Neighbor Policy”.²⁹ But, gradually a range of different genres started to investigate the border drug trade. Between 1949 and 1950, studios released three noir flicks, *Borderline*, *Federal Man*, and *Johnny Stool Pigeon*, which all concerned “real life” investigations into narcotics smuggling at the U.S.-Mexico border. Seven years later, they put out *The Tijuana Story*, which concerned the death of Tijuana journalist, Meza Acosta, and insinuated the responsibility of the Baja California Norte governor. The film was so incendiary, it was banned in Mexico. Finally, in the late 1950s there was a rash of films on the Mexican drug trade, ranging from trashy and xenophobic teen exploitation films like *Eighteen and Anxious* (1957) and *The Young Captives* (1959) to more subtly subversive movies like *Touch of Evil* (1958) where the hero was a Mexican drugs cop (admittedly played by Charlton Heston) married to a blonde, American woman.³⁰ By the late 1950s TV stations had also started to show depictions of the trade. In November 1959 KRCA showed three telecasts entitled “Heroin” about the “problem of narcotics in Mexico and California”. In the most explosive episode an undercover reporter purchased heroin on a Tijuana street and interviewed a former Mexican cop, who explained the ways that the authorities protected the trade.³¹

As we shall see, the media’s focus on border drug trafficking resonated with groups on both sides of the border. In Mexico, journalists and citizens both fed and fed off the

²⁸ *Los Angeles Times*, 12 Jul. 1959; *Los Angeles Times*, 19 Jul. 1959.

²⁹ *Desert Sun*, 20 Dec. 1958

³⁰ *Borderline* (1950); *Federal Man* (1950); *Johnny Stool Pigeon* (1949); *Tijuana Story* (1957); *Eighteen and Anxious* (1957); *The Young Captives* (1959); *Touch of Evil* (1958).

³¹ *Desert Sun*, 14 Nov. 1959; *Los Angeles Times*, 15 Nov. 1959

accusations. In California, it attracted two groups in particular. The first were moralizing civil society organizations.³² These included women's organizations, like the General Federation of Women's Clubs and the Women's Civic League, business organizations like the Rotary Club, the Lions, and various Chambers of Commerce, parents groups, and veterans' organizations. Together these groups wrote complaints to politicians and newspapers, thanked papers for their alarmist coverage, held public meetings to highlight the trend, and collected vast numbers of signatures for petitions designed to force politicians to crack down on the traffic.³³ San Diego's Junior Chamber of Commerce even organized its own ad hoc investigation of the Tijuana vice scene. In May 1957 a handful of members crossed the border, purchased pornographic literature, and reported that, "narcotics in the form of marijuana, heroin and other opium derivatives are easily available to any juvenile".³⁴

The second were low-level elected officials from border communities. These comprised law enforcement officials, like the San Diego sheriff Bert Strand, school board heads like Richard Barbour, who declared Tijuana "probably the most sinful city in the Western world", and judicial appointees, like the San Diego District Attorney, Don Keller, and the Superior Court judge "Hanging John Hewicker" aka "Blood John" who laughed uproariously when his fellow judges presented him with a miniature guillotine on his retirement.³⁵ These figures realized that election depended on a hardline law and order stance and that the easiest target was Mexico. In 1952 the mayor of Tijuana wryly observed that, "every time there are elections in San Diego, most of the candidates try to

³² For the rise of the suburban right and these groups, see Lisa McGirr, *Suburban warriors: The origins of the new American Right* (Princeton: University of Princeton Press, 2001); Michelle Nickerson, *Mothers of conservatism: Women and the postwar right* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

³³ *San Diego Union*, 29 Jul. 1958; *Los Angeles Times*, 4 Mar. 1952; *San Diego Union*, 22 Dec. 1952; *Los Angeles Times*, 21 Jul. 1960; *San Diego Union*, 10 Feb. 1950; *San Diego Union*, 12 Feb. 1952; *Juvenile Delinquency, hearings before the Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency of the Committee on the Judiciary US Senate, Pursuant to S. Res 89 Investigation of Juvenile Delinquency in the United States*, September 24, 27 and October 4, 5 1954, (Washington DC, Government Printing Office, 1955), p. 70. They even wrote to the Mexican president. Archivo General de la Nación (AGN), Adolfo Ruiz Cortines (ARC), 422/1, Kenneth Beam to President Ruiz Cortines, 20 Feb. 1953; AGN, Adolfo López Mateos (ALM), 422/2, Patricia Reveles to President López Mateos, 6 Apr. 1960; AGN, ALM, 422/3 Marian A. Herzer to President López Mateos, 6 Jun. 1960.

³⁴ *San Diego Union*, 9 May 1957.

³⁵ *San Diego Union*, 12 Dec 1956; *Noticias*, 20 Jul. 1958; *San Diego Union*, 6 Dec. 1960; *San Diego Union*, 28 Feb. 1952; *San Diego Union*, 28 Apr. 1955; *San Diego Union*, 20 Nov. 1956; *San Diego and Point Magazine*, February 1957, p. 33

use the city of Tijuana and the charges of drug smuggling for campaign material in their favor”.³⁶ Two years later a former soldier and FBI agent, Hank Adams, - dubbed (quite possibly by himself) “The One Man Army of Tulagi” - proved the mayor’s point. Not content with boasting that he had killed ten Japanese soldiers in World War II, he tried to become San Diego County sheriff on the platform that he would “sort out the problem of kids going to Tijuana for drugs”. These same figures also made frequent public declarations, which blamed crime and drug use on the proximity to the Mexican border. (Hewicker, for example, claimed that there were only two reasons to go to Tijuana - “to get shot or to buy narcotics”).³⁷ And, as we shall see, they often used their very limited authority to try blackmail Mexican authorities into action.

Together, the accounts of journalists, civil society spokespersons and politicians fed into large-scale public investigations. Some were local grand jury trials. In June 1951 there was a San Diego grand jury on marijuana use among local youths; two years later a Los Angeles grand jury looked into a Tijuana-based drug ring, which exchanged stolen cars for narcotics; and in 1960 Imperial County held its own inquiry into local drug dealing and concluded that “four big dealers in Mexicali supplied almost all the narcotics passing through Imperial Valley”.³⁸ Others were state-level studies, like the Special Crime Study Commission of the early 1950s, and the 1960’s Special Study Commission on Narcotics.³⁹ Others still were federal inquiries, like the hearings on juvenile delinquency held in cities throughout the southwest in 1955 and again in 1959.⁴⁰ The federal hearings

³⁶ *San Diego Union*, 3 Feb. 1952.

³⁷ *Coronado Eagle and Journal*, 3 Jun. 1954; *San Diego Union*, 1 Dec. 1955.

³⁸ *Sacramento Bee*, 26 Jun. 1951; *San Diego Union*, 20 Feb. 1952; *Los Angeles Times*, 25 Feb 1953; RG170, Box 161, Report of James Boyd, 21 Jul. 1960.

³⁹ *The Special Crime Study Commission on Organized Crime* (Sacramento: Government of California, 1953); *Final Report of the Special Study Commission on Narcotics* (Sacramento: Government of California, 1961).

⁴⁰ *Hearings before the Subcommittee on Improvements in the Federal Criminal Code of the Committee on the Judiciary, United States Senate, Eighty-Fourth Congress, First Session Pursuant to S. Res 67, Illicit Narcotics traffic, November 14, 15, 16, 17 and 18 1955* (Washington DC, Government Printing Office, 1956); *Hearings before the Subcommittee on Improvements in the Federal Criminal Code of the Committee on the Judiciary, United States Senate, Eighty-Fourth Congress, First Session on Illicit Narcotics Traffic, June 2, 3, 4, 1955* (Washington D.C.: Government printing Office, 1955); *Hearings before the Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency of the Committee on the Judiciary, US Senate, Eighty Fourth Congress, First Session on S. 959 A Bill to Prohibit Juveniles, April 28, 29 and 30 1955* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1955); *Hearings before the Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency of the Committee on the Judiciary United States Senate, Eighty Sixth Congress, First*

in particular were vast, public set pieces, which gave California newspapermen, politicians, civil leaders, and bureaucrats space and opportunity to stake out their assessment of the border drug problem and the possible solutions. These assessments were, in turn, refracted and amplified through a tub-thumping, local press. As the example suggests, the media, the principal spokespersons or “primary definers,” and the institutions, which fed and developed California’s drug panic, were intimately related. Sheriffs pushed border stoppages at Women’s Clubs meetings; district attorneys publicly praised newspaper investigations; and reporters performed star turns at senate hearings. Such a tight skein offered little space for debate or nuance.

Instead, California’s anti-narcotics crusaders stressed four, relatively consistent, claims. First, they argued that the principal reason for Californian drug use was the state’s proximity to the Mexican border. On the one hand, this aided smuggling. Officials repeatedly claimed that all the marijuana and 50 to 75 per cent per cent of the heroin in California was trafficked in from Mexico.⁴¹ As early as 1951, the San Diego Attorney General called Tijuana, a “nest of marijuana and heroin”.⁴² By the end of the decade, such opinions were even more commonplace. A 1959 *Los Angeles Times* editorial on the provenance of local narcotics was even read out at the subsequent subcommittee on juvenile delinquency. “Like the cancer it is, the illicit narcotics problem spreads with deadly insidious certainty from its origin. Nationally, the origin may be Communist China, Europe, or the Middle East. In Los Angeles, it primarily is Mexico”. Visual aids underpinned these assertions. In the same hearing one witness even produced bundles of marijuana wrapped in the *Sol de Sinaloa* to prove his point. On the other hand, if state sources were “dry”, young Californians could acquire drugs by means of a quick trip over the border. “It is no more difficult to buy opium and heroin in Mexican border towns than

Session Pursuant to S. Res. 54 (Narcotics, Crossing the Mexican Border by Juveniles, Juvenile Gangs, Juvenile Courts, and Community Programs in LA, San Diego and San Francisco, California) November 9-20 1959 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1960).

⁴¹ *Los Angeles Times*, 27 Aug. 1959; *Los Angeles Times*, 13 Jul. 1959; *Hearings Before the Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency of the Committee on the Judiciary, United States Senate, Eighty Sixth Congress First Session, Part 5, (Narcotics, Crossing the Mexican Border Juveniles, Juvenile Gangs, Juvenile Courts, and Community Programs in Los Angeles, San Diego and San Francisco, Calif.)* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1960), 596, 598.

⁴² *Madera Tribune*, 12 Dec. 1951.

it is to purchase a pair of boots”.⁴³ When Fuson, the *San Diego Union* journalist, posed as a “head” to score drugs in Tijuana he found that the situation “was literally running rampant”. In one brothel alone he had seen over 200 juveniles involved in a “marijuana party”. The attractions of border heroin were even more insidious. Again, according to Fuson, taxi drivers offered to drive curious Americans to so-called “shooting galleries” located in shacks on the edge of the city where “doctors” or “practical nurses” would help the out-of-towners hit their first vein.⁴⁴

Second, these activists started to focus to their fears on the carefully-crafted image of the border kingpin. Candidates to play the role were numerous. Contrary to Californian assertions, drug trafficking in northern Mexico was, in fact, relatively horizontal and organized by at least a dozen small, often family-run operations.⁴⁵ During the early 1950s, southern Californian newspapers put forward a variety of contenders including José Méndez García (shot in 1951), Telesforo Parra López, (forced underground after the break up of the cars-for-drugs ring in 1953), and perhaps best of all governor Maldonado’s nephew, Solomon Rodrigo Sánchez Jr. (sentenced to seven years in 1955).⁴⁶ But during the 1955 juvenile delinquency hearings, Californian politicians settled on the figure of Miguel “Big Mike” Barragán Bautista. During the November hearings in Los Angeles, “Big Mike” dominated proceedings. Heroin addicts testified that they often bought their personal supplies at “Big Mike’s” small four-room residence in Colonia Independencia. (“If Mike deals with you, there is no finger.”) The head of San Diego customs confirmed that he had known “Big Mike” for years and another narcotics cop claimed that “Big Mike’s” heroin network spread as far as east Texas. Such influence had bought the trafficker “a ranch”, “racing dogs”, “the largest house of ill repute in Tijuana” (where his wife was the madam and also principal heroin dealer), and a taxi rank. Over

⁴³ *Hearings Before the Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency of the Committee on the Judiciary, United States Senate, Eighty Sixth Congress First Session, Part 5*, 622, 677, 768.

⁴⁴ *San Diego Union*, 3 Feb. 1952; *Hearings before the Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency of the Committee on the Judiciary, US Senate, Eighty Fourth Congress, First Session on S. 959 A Bill to Prohibit Juveniles, April 28, 29 and 30 1955*, 30, 31.

⁴⁵ Schneider, *Smack*, 78. Wil Pansters and Benjamin T. Smith, “The War on Baja California: Drug Traffickers and User Culture in Tijuana”, Paper given at University of Warwick Conference on Drugs, Politics and Society: The Regional History of the Mexican Drug Trade, 19-20 June 2017.

⁴⁶ *Noticias*, 18 Aug. 1951; *Los Angeles Times*, 25 Feb. 1953; RG170, Box 161, 14 Nov 1955
GW Cunningham to Carlos Franco Sodi.

the next decade, “Big Mike” would reappear regularly in local newspapers and judicial hearings.⁴⁷

Third, California’s anti-narcotics moralizers concluded that the principal reason for the availability of narcotics was not U.S. demand but Mexican corruption. The newspaper reporters were particularly outspoken. Fuson suggested that the Mexican government needed to “pay more than lip service to its narcotics laws” and Sherman wrote that Tijuana was a “vile, vice strewn sump hole of civilization pandering to the lowest impulses of humanity riddled with graft and corruption” and called the claims that Mexicans were attempting to quash the trade “laughable”.⁴⁸ Summarizing the thinking quite succinctly, a follow-up editorial concluded that the “There is no reason why northern good living should not overflow the frontier, no reason except the tolerance on the southern side of the most inhuman of human indecencies”.⁴⁹ But, increasingly law enforcement officials also presented similar views. Keller, the San Diego District Attorney, repeatedly questioned the willingness of the Mexican authorities to arrest drug traffickers. And, weaving together the figure of the border kingpin and assumptions of Mexican corruption, LA Police Chief Parker claimed that the Tijuana police’s inability to arrest “Big Mike” demonstrated their “attitude of great indulgence” towards the trade.⁵⁰

Fourth, the California authorities viewed the solution to these problems as the manipulation of US-Mexican border traffic. Initially, the measure was preventative; officials proposed cutting youth drug use by closing the border to young American tourists. In 1951 the head of the San Diego Grand Jury suggested the move, which was

⁴⁷ *Hearings before the Subcommittee on Improvements in the Federal Criminal Code of the Committee on the Judiciary, United States Senate, Eighty-Fourth Congress, First Session Pursuant to S. Res 67, Illicit Narcotics traffic, November 14, 15, 16, 17 and 18 1955* (Washington DC, Government Printing Office, 1956), 3588-3612, 3694-6, 3762-86. For his subsequent appearances see *Los Angeles Times*, 2 Apr. 1960; *Los Angeles Times*, 26 Jan. 1961; *Report of the Committee on the Judiciary United States Senate, Made by its Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency pursuant to S. Res. 265...* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1964), 12-14.

⁴⁸ *Hearings before the Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency of the Committee on the Judiciary US Senate, Pursuant to S. Res 89 Investigation of Juvenile Delinquency in the United States, September 24, 27 and October 4, 5 1954*, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1955), 68; *Los Angeles Times*, 13 Jul. 1959.

⁴⁹ *Los Angeles Times*, 12 Jul. 1959.

⁵⁰ *Los Angeles Times*, 18 Nov. 1959; *Los Angeles Times*, 2 Apr. 1960; *San Diego Union*, 6 Dec. 1960.

quickly applauded by the San Diego District Attorney.⁵¹ A year later, the Customs Bureau agreed to register unaccompanied youngsters crossing the border.⁵² Soon after, the San Diego Sheriff took matters into his own hands and ran a series of police roadblocks to check on young tourists. On the U.S. side, the measure was extremely popular, especially with concerned parents and over the next decade San Diego's police officials periodically enforced roadblocks or youth curfews to appeal to these voters.⁵³

Yet sporadic border slowdowns also had another effect. On some days, traffic at the border backed up for over three miles. In Tijuana in early 1952, tourism declined and attendance at the Sunday horse races dropped markedly.⁵⁴ As the U.S. consul observed, Mexicans considered the move as the "equivalent of closing the border".⁵⁵ These effects south of the border turned the strategy from a stopgap measure designed to protect vulnerable Californians to a means to force Mexican officials to clamp down on the border drug trade. Prevention turned to extortion. Again, journalists pushed the move. As early as 1955, *San Diego Union* journalist, Fuson, voiced the idea, announcing at the juvenile delinquency subcommittee a "means of blackjacking the Mexican Government into doing something about this narcotics situation." "If that gate were slammed tomorrow morning and somebody said that they would open it when the narcotics business was stopped you would not find a narcotics peddler within 400 miles of that border by Sunday morning".⁵⁶ By the end of the decade, it had become a tenet of law-and-order thinking. Elected officials suggested, "closing the border" to make the Mexicans "take narcotics seriously" and LA Police Chief Parker claimed, "All you have to do is close the border. They [the Mexicans] will come round, they need the money. If that is the only way you can get anything done then maybe that's the solution."⁵⁷

⁵¹ *Sacramento Bee*, 26 Jun. 1951; *San Diego Union*, 25 Jun. 1951.

⁵² *Hearings before the Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency of the Committee on the Judiciary, U.S. Senate, Eighty Fourth Congress, First Session on S. 959 A Bill to Prohibit Juveniles, April 28, 29 and 30 1955*, 30.

⁵³ *San Diego Union*, 24 Dec 1953; *San Diego Union*, 9 May 1957; *San Diego Union*, 20 Mar. 1955.

⁵⁴ *Madera Tribune*, 3 Feb. 1952. *San Diego Union*, 10 Feb. 1952.

⁵⁵ NARA, RG170, Box 161, Consulate's Dispatch, 16 Jan. 1952.

⁵⁶ *Juvenile Delinquency, hearings before the Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency of the Committee on the Judiciary US Senate, Pursuant to S. Res 89 Investigation of Juvenile Delinquency in the United States, September 24, 27 and October 4, 5 1954*, p. 68.

⁵⁷ *Los Angeles Times*, 2 Apr. 1960.

Despite the uniform patina of the Californian claims, some patterns did emerge. As the figures for news stories indicate, the border panic started at the border in Imperial and San Diego counties. But, by the mid 1950s, it had spread northwards to the Los Angeles suburbs of Orange County and Riverside and then into Los Angeles itself. To put it another way measures voiced by the San Diego sheriff in 1952 were being echoed by the LA police chief less than a decade later.⁵⁸ In fact, by 1962, another subcommittee on juvenile delinquency was calling in police officers from as far north as Ventura county to comment on the border drug trade.⁵⁹ As the waves of panic spread, they increased in both intensity and political importance. By the end of the decade, federal congressmen were calling on both the U.S. State Department, and the FBN to take more forceful measures against Mexico. Such high-profile concern shifted the focus to Washington, where the same politicians forced President Eisenhower to hold an Interdepartmental Committee on Narcotics in 1960.⁶⁰ His successor, President Kennedy, followed up the meeting with the White House Conference on Narcotics three years later. The Mexican drug trade had rarely been the subject of national debate and, contrary to the Californian claims, it still accounted for a small percentage of total U.S. narcotics imports.⁶¹ But, by the early 1960s, the Californian panic had pushed border smuggling to the forefront of U.S. drug policy and U.S. pressure on the Mexican authorities to clamp down on the trade became increasingly firm, culminating in Nixon's border closure in 1969.

Baja California Norte Politics and the Mexican Reaction

California's moral panic helped generate the national rollout of a more aggressive foreign anti-narcotics policy. But the panic also had more immediate effects south of the border. At the national level, reaction was muted. The federal authorities had the support of the

⁵⁸ *Los Angeles Times*, 2 Apr. 1960; *Madera Tribune*, 3 Feb. 1952.

⁵⁹ *Hearings before the Subcommittee To Investigate Juvenile Delinquency of the Committee on the Judiciary, US Senate, Eighty Seventh Congress, Second Session, Pursuant to S. Res 265, Part II, Narcotics Traffic and Its Effects on Juvenile and Young Adult Criminality, May 9, 1,7 and 29 1962* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1963), 2681.

⁶⁰ *Los Angeles Times*, 2 Apr. 1960.

⁶¹ Frydl, *The Drug Wars*, 217-88; By 1960, the FBN acknowledged that around 19 per cent of Los Angeles heroin came from Mexico. *Los Angeles Times*, 6 Jan. 1960.

national press and the backing of the U.S. State Department and the FBN. At the state level, however, the effects were much more drastic. In Baja California, politics were open and combative. On one side was a weak branch of the ruling party (the PRI), which controlled the state through an elected governor - Braulio Maldonado (1953-1959) - and elected councils in Tijuana, Ensenada, Mexicali, and Tecate. On the other side were powerful civil society organizations, a belligerent, and popular local press, and by the end of the decade a powerful opposition party, the PAN. During the decade, these groups not only fed the California panic by passing news of scandals, poor policing, and general impunity northwards, but also used the subsequent U.S. pressure to push the governor to sack unpopular police chiefs, clean up residential zones, and curb the most obvious examples of corruption.

Federal Mexican reaction to the constant stream of accusations was denial. Government representatives rejected the existence of a large-scale drug trade, and pointed out that the problem of youth delinquency was a U.S. not a Mexican one. In May 1953, for example, the Mexican consul in Los Angeles publically rebuffed the “false accusations” of the California Crime Commission, asking for any proof of the claims of mysterious German chemists, official collusion with drug traffickers, or the open street sale of heroin.⁶² Such rebuffals were relatively easy. The Mexican authorities had the support of the U.S. State Department, which viewed the country as an important barrier to communist influence and was often willing to testify to the cooperation between the two countries.⁶³ They were also backed by Harry Anslinger and the FBN. Anslinger like the State Department viewed the drug war through a Cold War lens, was close to Mexico’s anti-narcotics officials, and was more concerned with stressing (admittedly imagined) threats of heroin from communist China. As a result, FBN estimates of the Mexican contribution to the U.S. drug problem remained extremely low throughout the 1950s.⁶⁴ Furthermore, in the

⁶² *Los Angeles Times*, 22 Jul. 1959; *Los Angeles Times*, 15 May 1959. Or see *Los Angeles Times*, 23 Jul. 1959.

⁶³ *Los Angeles Times*, 20 Nov. 1959.

⁶⁴ Frydl, *The Drug Wars*, 59-119; Pérez Ricart, “U.S. pressure”; *Los Angeles Times*, 13 Feb, 1953; NARA, RG170, Box 160, Oscar Rebaso to Harry Anslinger, 4 Sept. 1959; Oscar Rebaso to Harry Anslinger, 24 Aug. 1959; In 1960, the Mexican representative on the U.N.’s Commission on Narcotic Drugs “rejected with indignation” Californian accusations of corruption as “rumours”, claimed that the Mexican heroin trade was ““one small aspect of the entire narcotic drug problem” and backed his statement with recent

national capital, where most important politicians and opinion makers were based, narcotics were simply not an issue. Drug use was relatively low and the highbrow broadsheets either ignored border smuggling or reiterated official denials. In reaction to the accusations of Californian congressmen, a 1960 *Excélsior* editorial stated that it was “a common practice to heap infamy on Mexico as a principal market for drugs”. The paper called such claims “a joke in bad taste”; Mexico had very few users. The problem, the paper stated, was in the United States where the authorities were unable to control their addicts.⁶⁵

In contrast, in Baja California Norte, such denials were much tougher to make. At one level, the effects of the drug trade were more obvious. U.S. youths did smoke marijuana in clubs, buy hits from street heroin dealers, and occasionally overdose in Tijuana hotels.⁶⁶ Yet the visibility of the drug trade only partially accounts for the local reaction. Drug production and trafficking were relatively open in other regions of Mexico, yet local reactions were as muted as those of the national government.⁶⁷ Where Baja California really differed was in the local government’s inability to control the perception of the trade. On the one hand, the underlying support for the ruling party – the PRI – was weak. Baja California Norte had only been made an autonomous state in 1953.⁶⁸ The architecture of the ruling party was still under construction. Even the governor famously

FBN figures which put the amount of Mexican drugs entering the country at 5 percent. *Los Angeles Times*, 19 Jul. 1960

⁶⁵ *Excélsior*, 7 Jan. 1960.

⁶⁶ Stories of U.S. citizens overdosing in Tijuana hotels were extremely frequent in Tijuana newspapers and perhaps provided a counterweight to stories, which blamed official corruption for the drug trade. E.g. *Noticias*, 6 Aug. 1958.

⁶⁷ In Sinaloa, where most Mexican opium was grown, peasants arrived at the Rafael Buelna market in Culiacán with milk churns full of opium gum and searched out bulk buyers. The Sinaloa attorney general asserted, “Politicians, merchants, businessmen, policemen, peasants, everyone knew who sowed opium.” Yet discussion of the trade in the press and civil society was minimal. “Entrevista con Leonides Alfaro,” *Noroeste*, 12 May 2008; Manuel Lazcano Ochoa, *Una vida en la vida sinaloense*, (Culiacán: n.p., 1992), 198–9. In Tamaulipas, the trafficking of narcotics was probably on the same level as in Baja California Norte. Yet again, public discussion of the issue was minimal. In fact, drug traffickers openly moved around in Tamaulipas high society. Carlos Antonio Flores Pérez, *Historias de Polvo y Sangre: Génesis y evolución del tráfico de drogas en el estado de Tamaulipas* (Mexico City: CONACYT: CIESAS, 2013), 166-8, 171-77.

⁶⁸ Lawrence Douglas Taylor Hansen, “La transformación de Baja California en estado, 1931-1952,” *Estudios Fronterizos*, 1. 1 (2000).

described his administration as “harmoniously structured chaos”.⁶⁹ The traditional supports, like the peasant federations and workers unions, were small, underpowered, or too close to the communist party for membership. The popular sector, which was designed to bring together urban voters, barely existed. As so many inhabitants to the cities of Tijuana and Mexicali were relatively new, the sector lacked the established networks, which it relied on in other cities.⁷⁰ Finally, official control of the print media was also extremely fragile. During the same 1959 elections, the PRI only managed content in two newspapers. Even these were ineffective. They barely sold 500 copies; many were openly burned and those that were not were bought in bulk, defaced with the initials of the opposing party, and repurposed as anti-PRI propaganda.⁷¹

In contrast, opposition to the ruling party was relatively strong. Tijuana, in particular, contained a raft of independent civil society organizations from business groups like the Lions and Rotary Clubs, through cross-class single-issue organizations, like the tax pressure group, the Union of Contributors and Users of Public Services of Tijuana (Unión de Contribuyentes y Usuarios de Servicios Públicos de Tijuana) to working class groups like the mutual societies of the *barrios* of La Libertad and Zaragoza.⁷² These civil society groups were kept informed by a vibrant and popular public sphere.⁷³ The most strident was Manuel Acosta Meza’s *El Imparcial*. During the 1950s, his newspaper became increasingly critical of the state governor, Braulio Maldonado, who - he claimed - openly abetted local drug traffickers, gangsters, and other criminals. In 1956, Acosta even threatened to publish a list of all the public administrators who were taking money from

⁶⁹ In Carlos Ortega G. *Democracia Dirigida con Ametralladoras, Baja California, 1958-1960*, (El Paso, Texas: np, 1961), 8.

⁷⁰ Ortega G. *Democracia Dirigida*, 127.

⁷¹ Ortega G. *Democracia Dirigida*.

⁷² Taylor Hansen, “La transformación de Baja California”; *Noticias*, 14 Jun. 1958; *Noticias*, 3 Mar. 1957; William D. V. D’Antonio et al, “Institutional and Occupational representations in Eleven Community Influence Systems,” *American Sociological Review*, 26.3 (1961), pp. 440-6; Josefina Elizabeth Villa Pérez, *Prácticas Asociativas y Discursos Públicos en Tijuana, 1942-1968*, Unpubl. Ph.D thesis, Universidad Autónoma de Baja California, 2017; Correspondence with David Tamayo, 10 Mar. 2016, (UC, Berkeley) who is finishing a Ph.D on civil society organizations in Mexico during the period; *Noticias*, 14 Jun. 1958; Ortega G. *Democracia Dirigida*.

⁷³ For publications in Baja California Norte see *Anuario Estadístico Compendiado de los Estado Unidos Mexicanos* (Mexico City: Dirección General de Estadística, 1954); *Anuario Estadístico Compendiado de los Estado Unidos Mexicanos* (Mexico City: Dirección General de Estadística, 1960); *Medios Publicitarios Mexicanos* (May-August 1960).

the owners of illegal brothels or what he termed “the Union of Pimps”. The threat probably got Acosta killed.⁷⁴ But, other combative editors and journalists quickly took his place, including the editor of *Noticias*, Jose Garduño Bustamante, who was consistently critical of Maldonado’s government, always kept an eye on the window, “to avoid an attack on his life”, and was framed at least twice for narcotics trafficking.⁷⁵

Finally, these groups started to come together under the umbrella of the opposition PAN. Traditionally the PAN had been the party of fervent middle-class Catholics.⁷⁶ But, at particular conjunctures it was able to take advantage of the combination of PRI weakness, independent civil society organizations, and relatively open public spheres to make serious inroads in a handful of northern cities, including Tijuana and Ciudad Juárez.⁷⁷ In 1959, the newly invigorated opposition party put forward its own gubernatorial candidate, Salvador Rosas Magallón, a civic-minded lawyer who had previously worked on behalf of squatter communities. The PRI candidate won but at a cost. It was - as Ortega commented - “democracy” but “a democracy directed by machine guns”.⁷⁸

Baja California Norte’s opposition groups attacked the region’s drug trade for two reasons. In part, they shared the moral opprobrium of U.S. citizens groups. As early as 1951, the U.S. consul admitted that the city had a “very substantial element, supported and represented by the Mexican official family and civic groups” that was “alive to the

⁷⁴ Carlos Moncada, *Del México Violento, Periodistas Asasinados*. (Mexico City: Edamex, 1991), 90-95, 103-14; Carlos Ortega G., *Tijuana, La Ciudad Maldita*. (Mexico City: np, 1956), 12-32; Jesús Blancornelas, *En estado de alerta: Los Periodistas y el Gobierno Frente al Narcotráfico* (Mexico City: Plaza y Janés, 2005), 17-43; *San Diego Union*, 24 Nov. 1956; *San Diego Union*, 5 Jan. 1957; *San Diego Union*, 22 Feb. 1957; *San Diego Union*, 15 Nov. 1957.

⁷⁵ See the description of Garduño in E.H. Erlandson, *The Press of Mexico with Special Consideration of Economic Factors*, Unpubl. Ph.D diss., Northwestern University, 1963, 340-2. Apparently Garduño got off the narcotics charges as he explained to the U.S. Customs officials that he was too fat to get under his car to place the packages of marijuana. He also regularly ran an announcement on the front page of his newspaper claiming that the police chief of Tijuana was trying to set him up. *Noticias*, 4 Jul. 1958.

⁷⁶ Soledad Loaeza, *El Partido Acción Nacional: la larga marcha, 1939-1994. Oposición leal y partido de protesta* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica), 224-246; Donald J Mabry, *Mexico’s Accion Nacional, A Catholic Alternative to Revolution*, (New York, 1973), 26-44.

⁷⁷ Loaeza, *El Partido Acción Nacional*, 211-218, 239-240. For Ciudad Juárez, see William V. D’Antonio, and William H Form, *Influentials in Two Border Cities: A Study in Community Decision-making* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1965).

⁷⁸ Ortega G. *Democracia Dirigida*.

situation [of youth drug taking]” and was “anxious to bring about corrective measures”.⁷⁹ But, in part it was local politics. What better way to attack a political opponent than to feed the criticisms of a supposedly neutral neighbor?

The groups’ motivations were reflected in the two strategies used to confront the trade. On the one hand, they both nourished and amplified California’s own moral panic. Here, Acosta was key. As well as running *El Imparcial*, he worked as a United Press stringer and the *San Diego Union’s* Tijuana correspondent. In these roles he wrote dozens of denunciations of government complicity in both the prostitution and the drug trade.⁸⁰ He also became Fuson’s principal border whistleblower. When the journalist spoke at the subcommittee hearings he admitted that an unnamed source had passed him “a list of names and the type of operation and the racket they ran and how it works”. This same “confidential source” explained that one of the most profitable “rackets” was protecting drug traffickers.⁸¹ Acosta was rather unusual and perhaps the information he passed to Fuson helped seal his own death. But other groups also abetted the California activists. Civil society organizations, like the Chamber of Commerce and the Lions club, often met their American counterparts, denounced the state of the border, and promised to pressure their governor to clean it up.⁸² Opposition groups also repeated U.S. accusations to critique their own officials. Again, this was most obvious in the press. Garduño’s *Noticias* frequently reprinted the claims of San Diego policemen, judges, and moralizing parents boards. Furthermore, like Acosta he blamed drug trafficking on the state authorities. After reprinting the San Diego sheriff’s claims that in just two hours on the Tijuana strip he had been offered “marijuana, heroin, immoral films and pornographic literature”, he ridiculed the state governor’s claims to be clearing up the city. “Nothing

⁷⁹ NARA, RG59, 1950-1954, RG59 1950-1954, Louis Blancard to Secretary of State, 20 Jun. 1951.

⁸⁰ *San Diego Union*, 9 May 1950; *San Diego Union*, 3 May 1951; *San Diego Union*, 1 Sept. 1951;

⁸¹ The chairman of the committee tried to push Fuson on his source, mentioning “a local newspaperman down there who is none too welcome”. Fuson fudged his reply and talked of “several sources”. Yet the information that Fuson gave, especially relating to a vast, government built out-of-town brothel complex, came directly from Acosta Meza’s investigations. *Hearings before the Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency of the Committee on the Judiciary US Senate, Pursuant to S. Res 89 Investigation of Juvenile Delinquency in the United States, September 24, 27 and October 4, 5 1954* (Washington D.C.: Government Print office, 1955), 65-68.

⁸² *San Diego Union*, 8 Mar. 1957; AGN, ARC 566.23/12, Anonymous to Banco Nacional de Credito Agricola y Ganadero, 28 Sept. 1954.

changes... the fact is that the government has never worried about doing a true clean up of Tijuana”.⁸³

On the other hand, Mexicans also shaped their own narrative surrounding the trade. As the examples above suggest, this was explicitly political and focused on the local authorities thought to be protecting the racket. The drug trade became a crucial indicator of political corruption. Everyday accusations centered on the Tijuana police. In July 1958, for example, Garduño’s *Noticias* ran ample coverage of the investigation into claims that the Mexican secret service (the Dirección Federal de Seguridad or DFS) and the federal narcotics police had teamed up to traffic confiscated drugs over the border into San Diego.⁸⁴ In the same year, the Union of Contributors and Users of Public Services of Tijuana gathered thousands of signatures to demand the governor to “clean up the drug business”, reorganize the city’s police force, and up vigilance on the main street.⁸⁵ But, other accusations touched on higher officials.⁸⁶ In June 1956 *El Imparcial* ran a series of interviews with a local heroin addict, Juan García. García claimed that the municipal authorities ran the prison’s lucrative heroin racket, forcing pushers to take a certain amount of narcotics in return for a daily payment of 500 pesos. Such was the pressure to pay the bribe, the pushers held down new prisoners, injected them with the drug, and forced them into addiction.⁸⁷

Perhaps the most cogent statement of such systemic corruption was the 1956 exposé, *Tijuana, La Ciudad Maldita*. Carlos G. Ortega, one of Acosta’s journalists on *El Imparcial*, wrote the book in response to his boss’s murder. In it, he explicitly linked the prostitution racket and the drugs trade. They were, he argued, part of the same officially sanctioned business. Traffickers moved drugs and vulnerable young women from Mexico’s western sierra up to the border city.⁸⁸ Women and drugs were then distributed

⁸³ *Noticias*, 23 May 1957.

⁸⁴ *Noticias*, 10 Jul. 1958; *Noticias*, 14 Aug. 1958.

⁸⁵ *Noticias*, 14 Jun. 1958.

⁸⁶ See *Noticias*, 8 Jun. 1956.

⁸⁷ Carlos Ortega, *Tijuana, La Ciudad Maldita* (Mexico City: n.p., 1956), pp. 102-103.

⁸⁸ Such accusations have some merit. Less than a decade later, journalists in Jalisco would reveal the existence of a network of human and drug traffickers connecting the state to the border cities. Elisa Robledo, *Las Poquianchis!* (Mexico City: Selector, 1980).

around the city's bars, brothels, and billiards halls. A section of the narcotics was also set aside for sale in the local prison. Taxi drivers advertised both products to visiting Americans for a cut of the sale. All those involved paid the authorities in return for impunity. Payoffs went to policemen, municipal functionaries, local politicians, and the governor and his family. In the explosive final section of the book, Ortega started to name names, claiming that Braulio Maldonado's nephews, Salomon, Loreto and Melquiades Sáñez as well as the local congressman, Jose Ricardi Tirado, owned some of the most notorious local bars-cum-brothels, and were in charge of collecting contributions from the others.⁸⁹

From 1956 onwards, the PAN began to weaponise such denunciations, using them to attack the governor. The PAN leader, Rosas Magallón, was the first to republish Ortega's list of names in the party daily, *El Debate*.⁹⁰ By 1958, the accusations of official complicity in the trade had become a stock indictment of the ruling party. As competition for the gubernatorial election heated up, the PAN published a petition demanding Maldonado's resignation. The accusations were numerous and included suppressing the free press, running a group of armed thugs, robbing the state treasury and throwing poor urban squatters off valuable city-center land. But, they also included running the local prostitution and drug rackets "in conjunction with close members of his family".⁹¹

The state administration could have rode out either external denunciations or internal pressures with the support of the federal government and certain high U.S. profile figures in the United States. But the combination was too much. Governor Maldonado and his successor, Eligio Esquivel Méndez, were repeatedly forced to enact periodic public crackdowns on the drug trade. Some took the form of the mass arrest of small-time dealers. These took the form of raids or *razzias* of popular drug selling spaces such as billiards, brothels, and cantinas. For example, in September 1957 two days after Judge Hewicker had challenged the U.S. ambassador in Mexico City to visit Tijuana and had followed it up with one of his periodic demands to shut the border, the Baja California

⁸⁹ Ortega, *Tijuana*, pp. 20, 71, 130, 132.

⁹⁰ *El Debate*, 9 Jan. 1957.

⁹¹ Ortega G. *Democracia Dirigida*, p. 70.

Norte police made 83 arrests of “crooks and vagrants” throughout the city.⁹² The following year, there was an almost exact replay. On 15 August, Hewicker urged the “threat of federal closing or at least tightening of the international border”. Two days later, the Tijuana government imposed a curfew on under-18 year olds and arrested 79 youths who had broken the new law.⁹³

But the most regular site of these raids – and the place guaranteed to contain copious narcotics – was the local prisons. In the weeks following the Acosta Meza murder, there were repeated raids of known drug dealers houses and at least three major searches of the mens’ and women’s prisons. Here they found “large amounts of marijuana, heroin, droppers, needles, and spoons”.⁹⁴ These were not chance searches, they were planned swoops ordered from on high. In March 1957, the chief of the Tijuana police reported to Governor Maldonado that in the six months following Acosta Meza’s death, he “had been following strict orders relative to combatting narcotics” and “performing razzias on known drug addicts”.⁹⁵ The raids were designed to impress both local and international audiences. The detainees and their drug paraphernalia were paraded in front of the cameras; press releases on the prisoners were fed to local newspapers; and amounts of narcotics were totaled up and reported in formal conferences every few months.⁹⁶ Even these were calibrated to make an impact. On 26 March 1956 - the day President Eisenhower was meeting his Mexican counterpart, President Ruiz Cortines, at White Sulphur Springs - the Baja California Norte attorney general gave an interview with national and international pressmen on the recent counter-narcotics campaign. In the last four months (or since the embarrassing November 1955 juvenile delinquency hearings) the campaign had achieved “magnificent results” and arrested 52 dealers and captured 273 grams of heroin, 2 kilos of opium, 146 grams of morphine, 347 kilos of marihuana,

⁹² *Noticias*, 22 Sept. 1957.

⁹³ *Noticias*, 18 Aug. 1958.

⁹⁴ *Noticias*, 1 Sept. 1956; *Noticias*, 21 Aug. 1956.

⁹⁵ AGN, Departamento de la Salubridad, Caja 9369 Exp. 3, Ernesto Reyes Montenegro to Braulio Maldonado, 16 Mar. 1957.

⁹⁶ *Noticias*, 22 Jun. 1960; *Noticias*, 13 Sept. 1956; *Noticias*, 14 Sept. 1956; Archivo Histórico del Estado de Baja California (AHEBC), Secretaría de Gobierno, Caja 217.

and 3827 marijuana cigarettes.⁹⁷ Finally, starting in late 1957, the Mexican authorities publicized these results with official burnings. These were major public events attended by representatives of the health department, the police, and the attorney general. They were held in a large square by the Monumento a la Madre, just a few blocks from the border.⁹⁸ Concerned Californians could probably smell the smoke.

Raids had the advantage of mass arrests and bulk seizures. But, when the pressure was really on, the state authorities also went after some of the more significant traffickers. In the wake of the Acosta Meza murder, Tijuana police arrested Dominga Urias Iriarte aka “La Minga”, who was a major broker between Sinaloa growers and the border sellers, raided Mike Barragán’s ranch, and arrested a handful of other major traffickers in conjunction with the FBN. These included Barragán’s lieutenant, Antonio Gastelum.⁹⁹ After the 1959 elections and another embarrassing juvenile delinquency hearing, apprehension rose again. In the next six months, Mexican officials arrested two of Barragan’s lieutenants, Antonio Gastelum (again) and Urban Siqueiros, the 1953 cars-for-drugs mastermind, Telesforo Parra López, and two other key traffickers, Patricio Becerra Ortíz and Cruz Macias.¹⁰⁰ Barragán himself was a tougher proposition. He had top lawyers, was extremely careful to never personally touch the narcotics, and even shot a man who brought drugs to his ranch. As a result, repeated raids of his properties came up with nothing.¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ AHEBC, Secretaría de Gobierno, Caja 184, Exp. 4, Speech of Porfirio Díaz Sibaja, 1956. In fact, the figures given by Díaz compare favorably to Customs Bureau records of capture of smuggled drugs during the 1960s. If they are correct, in just six months the Mexican police captured around 1000 pounds of marijuana (347 kilos plus around 250 pounds in marijuana cigarettes). This was around the same amount of marijuana captured by the U.S. Customs Bureau at San Ysidro in a 12-month period (when the marijuana market in the United States was much greater) from 1962 to 1963. John Price, (ed.), *Tijuana '68: Ethnographic notes on a Mexican border city*.

⁹⁸ *Noticias*, 13 Aug. 1960; *Noticias*, 5 Dec. 1957; *Noticias*, 24 Mar. 1958.

⁹⁹ *Noticias*, 30 Jul. 1956; *Noticias*, 5 Aug. 1956; NARA, RG170, Box 161, Memorandum, 13 Sept. 1956.

¹⁰⁰ *Noticias*, 28 Mar. 1960; *Noticias*, 13 Apr. 1960; *Noticias*, 24 Aug. 1960; *Los Angeles Times*, 14 May 1960; *Los Angeles Times*, 6 Nov. 1959; *San Diego Union*, 29 Nov. 1959; NARA, RG170, Box 161, Memorandum from Benjamin White, 6 Aug. 1960.

¹⁰¹ *Noticias*, 5 Jul. 1956; *San Diego Union*, 24 Jul. 1961; NARA, RG170, Box 160, Major traffickers on U.S.-Mexican border, 1965; NARA, RG59, Consular report, 4 Feb 1961. Archivo del Tribunal Superior de Justicia de la Nación, Amparo Directo 252, Miguel Barragán Bautista.

Finally, the state authorities also enacted regular purges of the local police forces. This was not as easy as it might seem. By the 1950s, regional governments relied on numerous overlapping forces, including federal groups like the Federal Narcotics Police, the Federal Judicial Police, and the Dirección Federal de Seguridad and local units like the state judicial police, the municipal police, the state secret service, and the “juvenile police”. At the same time, these were “aided” by numerous informal policemen. These came from the ranks of loyal unions and received no official recognition or salary. Instead they were given a *charola* or badge and instructed to get revenue through demanding bribes in return for protection.¹⁰² From 1956 onwards, the mass sacking of the police was a regular occurrence. In the two months following Acosta Meza’s death, the state government not only fired the Tijuana police chief but also moved the state judicial police around the state’s four municipalities. Within a month, the state attorney general arrived in the city, sacked the new force, and hired another group. Their names were published in the city newspapers so “other elements do not usurp their role”.¹⁰³ Within just over a year, however, the problem had returned. Civil organizations wrote letters to the state government naming the unaccredited policemen and demanding that they were removed. Again, the state attorney general arrived in the city and performed another mass sacking.¹⁰⁴ Exactly the same process happened again in 1958 and in 1959.¹⁰⁵

Conclusions

During the 1950s California experienced a moral panic over youth drug use. Politicians, journalists, and civil society representatives focused on the threat of drug trafficking over the border and drug use in Tijuana. During this moral panic, they built on and developed various narratives, including those that stressed Mexican corruption and the protection of certain frontier kingpins. They also advanced the strategy of using the temporary closure of the border to force the Mexican authorities into action. By the early 1960s, these views had reached Washington, D.C.. At the White House Conference on Narcotic and Drug

¹⁰² *Noticias*, 7 May 1957.

¹⁰³ *Noticias*, 30 Sept. 1956; *Noticias*, 23 Oct. 1956; *Noticias*, 24 Oct. 1956; *Noticias*, 25 Oct. 1956.

¹⁰⁴ *Noticias*, 20 Oct. 1957; *Noticias*, 23 Oct. 1957.

¹⁰⁵ *Noticias*, 7 Jun. 1959; *Noticias*, 21 Mar. 1958; *Noticias*, 14 June 1958.

Abuse in September 1963, the Democrat Governor of California, Edmund Brown, urged “immediate action” to combat the border drug trade. Mexico, he claimed, was the “primary source for narcotics in our state”. Though such ideas crossed party lines, they were first introduced as national policy under President Nixon. As Vice-President Nixon had written to the *Los Angeles Times* to promise that the government would press for “a concerted effort on the part of the Mexican government officials.”¹⁰⁶ Eight years later, he introduced the idea where he knew it would have resonance, in suburban Anaheim California.¹⁰⁷ And in 1969 he fulfilled his promise by implementing Operation Intercept, a rigorous stop-and-search campaign, on the U.S. border. Like the early slowdowns, the operation was portrayed as a preventative strategy, designed to halt drug imports into the United States. Yet, just like these early, ad hoc closures, it actually functioned as a means of extortion. Disrupting trade pushed the Mexican government into action. As one FBI agent later expressed, “for diplomatic reasons the true purpose of the exercise was never revealed... it was an exercise in international extortion, pure, simple and effective, designed to bend Mexico to our will. We figured Mexico could hold out for a month, in fact they caved in after two weeks and we got what we wanted. Operation Intercept gave way to Operation Cooperation”.¹⁰⁸

California’s moral panic also had a profound effect over the border. The Baja California Norte government was forced to impose a series of counter-narcotics measures including periodic mass arrests, drug seizures, and the sacking of police officials. Yet, these measures were not simply reactions to exogenous U.S. pressure. They were also responses to endogenous demands from members of Mexican civil society to clean up local politics. To put it another way, Mexican drug policy was often determined by subnational politics. This occurred throughout the country where other waves of anti-drug policies were as dependent on regional political frameworks as federal mandates or U.S. coercion. In 1947 in Tamaulipas, in 1965 in Sinaloa, and in 1976 in Sonora intra-PRI factionalism broke down agreements between traffickers and political elites, triggered

¹⁰⁶ *Los Angeles Times*, 17 July 1960; *Los Angeles Times*, 12 May 1960.

¹⁰⁷ Patrick Timmons, “Trump’s Wall at Nixon’s Border”, *NACLA*, 27 Mar. 2017.

¹⁰⁸ Carey, *Women Drug Traffickers*, 163.

accusations in the public sphere, and generated a series of counter-narcotics measures.¹⁰⁹ But it had the most profound effect on the border, where opposition politics interwove with and enforced U.S. moral panics. To the east at the El Paso-Ciudad Juárez frontier a similar process emerged. During the 1950s, citizen groups, linked to an emboldened PAN, utilized Texas scare stories about the border vice trade to attack the regional governor and lever him from power.¹¹⁰ Together such processes suggest that scholars of the international drug war should move beyond the study of diplomats and heads of state and towards frameworks, which view everyday drug policy as a product of the convergence of U.S. pressure, subnational politics, and civic activism.¹¹¹

Finally, such observations reinforce the connections between the domestic and the international aspects of the war on drugs. Rather than seeing them as separate issues (to be studied by separate disciplines), we should instead observe them as deeply intertwined. We should, in short, view the thousands of African Americans languishing in U.S. prisons and the thousands of dead and disappeared Mexicans as two sides of the same coin, victims of the same interlinking processes. In the most basic terms, the domestic and the international drug war share a similar chronology. Both conflicts experienced a radical intensification from the 1970s onwards.¹¹² In the United States,

¹⁰⁹ Moncada, *Del México*, 74-81; *El Mundo*, 12 Mar. 1947; *El Mundo*, 21 Mar. 1947; Benjamin T. Smith, "The Rise and Fall of Narcopopulism: Drugs, Politics, and Society in Sinaloa, 1930-1980", *Journal for the Study of Radicalism*, 7.2 (2013); Kenneth F. Johnson, *Mexican Democracy: A Critical View* (New York: Praeger, 1978 edn), 173-190.

¹¹⁰ For the Texas panic over the trade see Carey, *Women Drug Traffickers*, pp. 143-5. For the rise of the PAN, D'Antonio, William V., and William H Form, *Influentials in Two Border Cities: A Study in Community Decision-making*. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1965). There was a similar situation in the 1980s Marco Antonio Bernal, 'Ciudad Juárez, 1983 y 1985: las dificultades de la democracia', in Soledad Loaeza and Rafael Segovia (eds.), *La vía política mexicana en la crisis* (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 1987), 149-170; Lilia Venegas Aguilera, 'Political Culture and Women of the Popular Sector in Ciudad Juárez, 1983-1986', in Victoria E. Rodríguez and Peter Ward (eds.), *Opposition Government in Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995), 97-111; Tonatiuh Guillén López, 'Political Culture from the Northern Border of Mexico. Elements for a Debate', in Wil G. Pansters (ed.), *Citizens of the Pyramid. Essays on Mexican Political Culture* (Amsterdam: Thela Publishers, 1997), 337-362.

¹¹¹ For a pioneering look at the intersection of local politics and "drug policy" more broadly understood see Paul Gootenberg, *Andean Cocaine: The Making of a Global Drug* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina Press, 2008), 105-43.

¹¹² For the 1970s as the key point of inflection in the United States, see Thompson, "Why Mass Incarceration Matters". For Mexico, see Perez Ricart, *Las agencias antinarcóticas* and D. Weimer, *Seeing drugs: modernization, counterinsurgency, and U.S. narcotics control in the Third World, 1969-1976*, (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2006), 172-214.

politicians turned towards mass incarceration, especially of African-Americans. Outside the country, these same politicians developed a policy of extortion to coerce foreign governments, like that of Mexico, to crack down on the trade. They share a similar narrative structure, which blames “outsiders” and “others” for white America’s problems.¹¹³ And they share an economic rationale, which seeks to distribute surpluses in financial capital, labor, and state capacity. On the domestic front, this has generated what Ruth Wilson Gilmore terms “the prison fix”.¹¹⁴ On the border, it has led to the growth of the Border Patrol and what commentators now term the security-industrial complex.¹¹⁵ And in Mexico and other South American countries, it has led to the increased funding of the police, the military, and global arms companies.¹¹⁶ But, as this article argues, the domestic and the international war on drugs also share similar roots in 1950s moral panics. These shared a ground zero – the borderlands and particularly California.¹¹⁷ These set out the moral landscape of Mexican traffickers, black and brown pushers, and white victims.¹¹⁸ And these both relied on the intersection of U.S. moralizing and Mexican politicking.

¹¹³ For white American drug crime, see Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, p. 99.

¹¹⁴ Ruth Wilson Gilmore, Golden Gulag, *Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

¹¹⁵ Kelly Lytle Hernández, *Migra! A History of the U.S. Border Patrol* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010); Todd Miller, *Border Patrol Nation: Dispatches from the Front Lines of Homeland Security* (San Francisco: City Lights, 2014).

¹¹⁶ Perez Ricart, *Las agencias antinarcóticas*; Winifred Tate, *Drugs, thugs, and diplomats: U.S. policy making in Colombia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015); E. Obando, “U.S. Policy toward Peru: At Odds for Twenty Years”, in B Loveman, (ed.), *Addicted to Failure: U.S. Security Policy in Latin America* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), pp. 169-96; D. Weimer, *Seeing drugs: modernization, counterinsurgency, and U.S. narcotics control in the Third World, 1969-1976*, (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2006).

¹¹⁷ Wilson Gilmore, Golden Gulag; Kelly Lytle Hernández, *City of Inmates: Conquest, Rebellion, and the Rise of Human Caging in Los Angeles, 1771-1965* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017).

¹¹⁸ Lassiter, “Impossible Criminals”.