

No Human Being Is Disposable

Introduction

Noam Chomsky

1995

Two facts about Colombia are crucial to bear in mind. The first is that Colombia has a horrendous human rights record, the worst in the hemisphere – not an easy prize to win. Political killings are variously estimated at 5 to 10 a day, mostly by the state security forces or their paramilitary associates. The second fact is that Colombia receives about half of U.S. military aid for the hemisphere, increasing under President Clinton, who turned to emergency overdrawing facilities when the Pentagon budget did not allow the increase.

State terror in Colombia has been appalling through the '80s, becoming even worse under the most recent ex-president, Cesar Gaviria. He has been a special favorite of the United States, so admired that the Clinton Administration rammed him through as Secretary General of the OAS, in a power play that was much resented in the hemisphere. Washington praised him particularly for his steps towards “building democratic institutions in a country where it was sometimes dangerous to do so.”

That it is dangerous to enter the public arena in Colombia is not in doubt. Thousands of members of the one real opposition party – the two that share political power have been aptly designated by a former President as “two horses [with] the same owner” – could easily testify to the dangers, had they not been murdered, including presidential candidates, mayors, and many activists. President Gaviria helped substantially to maintain and expand these dangers.

No patterns are broken by the fact that the hemisphere's leading human rights violator is the prime recipient of military aid and other support, or that the fact passes without notice. That's par for the course. An important study of the topic was published in 1981 by the leading academic specialist on human rights in Latin America, Lars Schoultz. He investigated U.S. foreign aid and torture in Latin America, and found that they correlated closely. As he put it, U.S. aid “has tended to flow disproportionately to Latin American governments which torture their citizens, ... to the hemisphere's relatively egregious violators of fundamental human rights.” This continued right through the Carter years, including military aid uncorrelated with need.

These facts might lead a superficial observer to conclude that the U.S. government just likes torture. But causal connection can't be deduced from a correlation; we have to look further. This was done in a broader study carried out at the same time by an economist at the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania, Edward Herman, published in a book we co-authored in 1979. Herman studied the relation between torture and foreign aid worldwide, finding that the same

correlation held: states that engage in torture are more likely to receive U.S. aid. But Herman also did a second study which offers a plausible explanation for the correlation. He compared U.S. aid with the climate for business operations, finding that the two were closely correlated. That makes sense. Foreign aid, after all, is largely a device whereby the U.S. taxpayer subsidizes U.S. corporations via some other country, which may incidentally gain from the process. Resorting to this device increasingly as opportunities for profit improve is completely natural, given the sources of policy-making.

Why then should there be a correlation between U.S. aid and torture? That becomes clear when we ask how the climate for business operations is improved. The answer is straightforward and well known: by torturing union leaders and human rights activists, murdering priests who are trying to organize peasants, and so on. Putting all this together, we find a derivative correlation between U.S. aid and torture. The proper conclusion then, is not that U.S. leaders enjoy torture; rather, it is a matter of indifference. What they care about is profits for U.S. investors, which just happen to be correlated with torture. Hence torture is rewarded, indirectly. The phenomenon is global, and understandable.

The case of Colombia sharpens the conclusion. A fine way to maintain a favorable investment climate is to create a society with formal democracy, but equipped with devices to ensure that it doesn't function to impede what really matters: enriching the wealthy. Under those conditions aid can flow freely and profits are not reduced by such interferences with the market as unions and human rights. The Latin American Bureau in Britain once described Colombia as a "democracy without people," which is pretty much accurate. Such a "democratorship," to borrow the term coined by Eduardo Galeano for Colombia, will naturally resort to torture, killing, "social cleansing," and other such procedures, so as to maintain an economic system in which half the children are hungry while the few live in luxury, along with foreign investors. That is what security forces are for. And it is the prime reason for military aid from the great power that has "assumed, out of self-interest, responsibility for the welfare of the world capitalist system," in the words of diplomatic historian Gerald Haines, senior historian of the CIA, discussing the U.S. takeover of Brazil in 1945.

The application of the general principles of world order to Colombia was explained lucidly by the president of the Colombian Permanent Committee on Human Rights, Alfredo Vasquez Carrizosa. He observed that Colombia has been progressing towards democracy not only since President Gaviria took over but since 1886, when its Constitution granted a wide range of rights, also instituting a state of siege that has persisted with little change so that "behind the facade of a constitutional regime we have a militarized society," with immense suffering and injustice.

It's not that Colombia is an impoverished society. It has enormous material resources, and might have undergone significant industrialization if the ruling business classes had not been so committed to free market policies. One of the small secrets about economic development, well known to economic historians, is that such policies impede development. Part of the reason why today's First and Third Worlds have diverged so radically since the 18th century is that the First World followed policies of protectionism and other state intervention, the U.S. often leading the way, while the Third World was subjected to market discipline, which was rammed down their throats. What possibilities there might have been for an industrial revolution in Colombia were aborted by its adherence to the rules taught by the IMF, the World Bank, and much of the academic profession.

The result is that Colombia is a rich country, but a very poor one for most of the population. Land is a big problem, not because it is in short supply, but because it's owned by a tiny number of people. Land reform legislation has been on the books since 1961, but it isn't implemented. The reason is that the country is run by the landowners and the army, which works for them and which is paid for by U.S. taxpayers. The current system was pretty well established by the Kennedy Administration, which in 1962 made a decision of immense significance for the hemisphere it controlled. It changed the mission of the Latin American military from hemispheric defense, a residue of World War II, to "internal security" – a code word that means: war against the population. The shift was implemented in planning, training, and material. It set off a plague of repression throughout the hemisphere beyond anything in its very bloody history. Some years later, the official in charge of counterinsurgency for the Kennedy and the early Johnson Administrations, Charles Maechling, described what happened clearly enough: the 1962 decision led to a change from toleration "of the rapacity and cruelty of the Latin American military" to "direct complicity" in "the methods of Heinrich Himmler's extermination squads."

The latter reference is appropriate. In his book *Instruments of Statecraft*, Michael McClintock describes how after World War II, Nazi specialists in counterinsurgency were brought to the United States to help develop the postwar manuals for training in counterinsurgency, modeled on the methods used by the Nazis to suppress the resistance. Maechling's reference to the neo-Nazi states, established throughout the hemisphere with the support of the Kennedy Administration and its successors, is more than metaphor.

The Kennedy intellectuals grasped the issues in their own ways. In internal communications in 1965, Defense Secretary Robert McNamara pointed out to National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy that U.S. military training had provided Latin American officers with "the understanding of, and orientation toward, U.S. objectives." That is important, he explained, because "in the Latin American cultural environment" it is recognized that the military must be prepared "to remove government leaders from office, whenever, in the judgment of the military, the conduct of these leaders is injurious to the welfare of the nation." He didn't say which nation he had in mind, but since they have the proper "understanding of and orientation toward U.S. objectives," I guess it really doesn't matter.

McNamara was doubtless thinking of the event described by Kennedy's Ambassador Lincoln Gordon as "the single most decisive victory of freedom in the mid-twentieth century," "a great victory for the free world" which should "create a greatly improved climate for private investment." Gordon was referring to the military coup in Brazil which overthrew the parliamentary regime and instituted the first of the neo-Nazi national security states of Latin America, with a domino effect that led to similar victories for "freedom" over much of the hemisphere.

Displaying their understanding of and orientation toward U.S. objectives, the Brazilian generals instituted an impressive wave of torture, murder, and other state terror. By these means, they created an "economic miracle." Brazil became "the Latin American darling of the business community," the business press exulted. Foreign investors did very nicely, as did a small sector of Brazilian society, some living in extraordinary luxury while much of the population was sinking to the conditions of Central Africa. That's virtually the definition of the technical term "economic miracle," as you discover if you look around the world, including Mexico, lauded as "an economic miracle" until December 19, 1994, when the bubble burst and the U.S. taxpayer was called on, as usual, to protect the rich from market discipline.

The effects of the new policy guidelines extended to Colombia. In the 1960s, Vasquez Carriosa continues, violence was “exacerbated by external factors” as the Kennedy Administration “took great pains to transform [Latin American] regular armies into counterinsurgency brigades, accepting the new strategy of the death squads,” and thus “ushered in what is known in Latin America as the National Security Doctrine, ... not defense against an external enemy, but a way to make the military establishment the masters of the game ... [with] the right to combat the internal enemy, as set forth in the Brazilian doctrine, the Argentine doctrine, the Uruguayan doctrine, and the Colombian doctrine: it is the right to fight and to exterminate social workers, trade unionists, men and women who are not supportive of the establishment, and who are assumed to be communist extremists.” The military is able to carry out these tasks once they have gained a proper “understanding of and orientation towards” U.S. objectives, thanks to the training paid for by U.S. tax dollars along with the arms to do the job.

The Colombian Minister of Defense explained that the official apparatus of terror is designed for “total war in the political, economic, and social arenas.” Officially the targets are guerrilla organizations. But as a high military official explained in 1987, these are of minor importance: “the real danger” is “what the insurgents have called the political and psychological war,” the war “to control the popular elements” and “to manipulate the masses.” The “subversives” hope to influence unions, universities, media, and so on. Therefore, “every individual who in one or another manner supports the goals of the enemy must be considered a traitor and treated in that manner.” The last is a quote from a 1963 military manual provided under the guidance of the Kennedy instructors and the Nazi advisors.

As I write this, the current edition of The New York Times [13 march 1995] provides a rare window on the official doctrine, referring to Argentina in the late 1970s. It reports the remorse of a naval officer over his participation in torture, drugging, and throwing people out of airplanes – the “Argentine doctrine” that proceeded with U.S. support, which is placed in the shadow in today’s news item.

Perhaps in 20 years we’ll learn something about the “Colombian Doctrine” that is being implemented today. We can learn something right now if we like, even from official sources, which recently provided a unique window into how they operate: the report of a commission set up by the Colombian Government to investigate the Trujillo massacre of March 1990. It gives a graphic account of the “Colombian Doctrine,” which is to say, U.S. doctrine. This 186-page report documents one atrocity, which by miraculous accident was investigated. The commission included members of the Colombian government, army, and police. It was established under pressure from the OAS (Organization of American States) and others. Its account is very much like what everyone can read in shocking detail in the regular reports of Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch/Americas, and other inquiries that are constantly appearing but almost never reported.

After entering the region where the village is located, the Armed Forces and National Police compelled someone to state under torture that he had been associated with the guerrillas and to provide names. Then, the report says, “the horror began.” People were “dragged out of their homes, tied up and taken to the luxurious hacienda” of a “well-known drug trafficker” and “shut into a fertilizer shed.” Just after 7AM, the officer in charge, Major Urueña, arrived with an associate. “First, they had breakfast. Then, the Major and several members of the armed group went into the shed and demanded each person’s identification papers and belongings.” The people were then taken blindfolded, one by one, for interrogation, beginning with a 59-year-old woman. “A coffee sack was tied over the head of each victim and he was thrown onto the ground. Then

Major Urueña took a water hose, turned it full force on the face of each victim – the mouth and nose – and began to interrogate them. When he finished, the victims were piled one on top of the other, and someone called for the blowtorch and the chain saw. Each victim was decapitated, cut into pieces with the chain saw and left to bleed. The heads and torsos were put into different sacks, and, later that night, loaded into a blue 1956 Ford truck, driven down to the Cauca river, and dumped into the water.”

A month later, the headless body of Trujillo’s parish priest was “fished out of the river,” the 27th victim. By then, one of the participants, a civilian auxiliary to Major Urueña, had fled and reported what had happened to the Colombian judicial authorities. He was later “disappeared,” and has not been heard from since. The authorities dismissed his charges, acquitting everyone implicated. The atrocities continued.

The story was reported by the Jesuit-based human rights group Justice and Peace (Justicia y Paz). Its director, Father Javier Giraldo, was able to interest the Human Rights Commission of the OAS, leading finally to this report. It concludes that the Colombian Army and police officers were directly responsible for the massacre and that the government and justice system were to blame for covering it up, specifically implicating Major Urueña. The Commission recommended criminal investigations, but expressed its “pessimism” that the pattern of impunity can be breached, and records the strong opposition of the Colombian government members to the “exploration” of international legal mechanisms, consistent with the norms of the “democratorship” that is successfully “building democratic institutions in a country where it was sometimes dangerous to do so.”

Justice and Peace reports over 350 other massacres since Trujillo, none of them investigated. This one exception, they point out, “gives insight into the moral fiber of former Colombian President Cesar Gaviria – now Secretary General of the O.A.S, who for four years turned a deaf ear” to requests for investigation of the massacre carried out during his term in office. And also into “the values and principles” of the army – but more important for us in the U.S., the values and principles of those who train and arm and instruct the army, along with others that follow similar doctrines.

To his credit, the new President, Ernesto Samper, on receiving the report accepted Colombian government responsibility – a historic first, I think. Urueña, who had been rewarded by promotion to Colonel, was removed from active service; that’s his punishment. The army “rallied around the Colonel,” Justice and Peace reports, and its commander dismissed the Commission’s findings as “a farce.” The report was presented to the OAS on February 7th with an agreement that in six months, Colombia must respond. The Justice and Peace report ends by saying: “The country is waiting.” How long it waits depends in large measure on what we do in the United States.

That’s the one case that the government officially concedes. Years after the events, the governments of Brazil and Argentina are conceding some of what happened after the historic 1962 change – not Chile, where the army is still granted impunity and substantial control. It’s good to learn how U.S. tax money is spent in the “Latin American cultural environment.” Possibly some day there’ll be questions raised here about the “North American cultural environment,” but we’ll wait a long time for that unless we do something about it, while plenty of people continue to suffer.

Atrocities in the region reached their peak during the Reagan years. That’s why the studies I mentioned about torture and aid have not been duplicated since 1980. No one bothers to prove

that 2 and 2 is 4. And it's still going on, the worst human rights violator in the hemisphere being rewarded by the largest grant of U.S. military aid.

The 1980s saw "the consolidation of state terror in Colombia," a European- Latin American inquiry into State Terror concludes. Training of Colombian officers increased along with terror. In the 1980s Colombia benefited from the largest U.S. training program, with three times as many officers trained as El Salvador – which wasn't too pretty either. They have also had Israeli, German, and British instructors, who train not only the army but also assassins and paramilitary forces linked to the drug cartels. Colombian intelligence (DAS) reports further that "North American instructors" – that means U.S. instructors – have been "detected" at these training camps. This 1988 report has yet to be published here in the mainstream, as far as I know, and if it's been followed up, I haven't heard about it.

I won't say any more about the hideous record of state terror, easily accessible to anyone interested. The pretext for U.S. support for these atrocities is the drug war, which became a national obsession when it was launched by George Bush in September 1989; re-launched, one should say, since this is a regular event. A month before, the largest shipment of arms ever authorized under the emergency provisions of the Foreign Assistance Act was sent to the Colombian army, setting the stage, William Hartung reports, "for sending more U.S. weaponry to Colombia than it had received in the entire decade of the 1980s," which was plenty. They were sent to the army – helicopters, planes, and so on, useless for the drug war, as was pointed out at the time. About 90–95% of counter-narcotic operations are conducted by the National Police, but not with bombers and helicopters. These have other uses. Human rights groups soon reported bombings of villages, massacres, and other atrocities. The effects of the arms shipments might well have been to strengthen the links between the security forces and narcotraffickers, and the land owning classes associated with them.

Colombia gets arms from other countries too, though in part that is a cover for U.S. arms shipments. Israel, in particular, is one of the funnels through which the United States sends arms to favored clients. Recall that the U.S. alone provides half of all its military aid in Latin America to Colombia. When we add the indirect aid it provides through its clients, and the contributions of other members of Washington's international terror network (including Britain, Germany, Taiwan, Israel, and so on), the aid to Colombia is quite substantial. There's a lot of talk right now about the Omnibus Anti-Terrorism Bill, with an odd omission: the center of international terrorism, where the bill is being debated.

Apart from its role in maintaining the "democratorship" and favorable investment climate, sale of arms to Colombia serves other needs. One of the leading monitors of international arms sales, William Hartung, points out in a recent book that the addiction to arms sales to the Third World is considerably more serious than drug addiction. The U.S. now has close to three-quarters of this market, making the term "addiction" more than appropriate. This is one of the ways to keep the Pentagon at approximately Cold War levels. True, the "Soviet threat" has substantially reduced, but without lessening the threat to our security, which the government now sees in "the technological sophistication of Third-World powers." For that threat to justify a big Pentagon budget, we have to make sure to send advanced armaments to the Third World. Otherwise, where will they obtain the technological sophistication that we have to find ways to protect ourselves from?

This is all explicit and frank in military journals and business propaganda. Thus you can read in Jane's Defense Weekly, the major international military journal, that U.S. tax dollars are now

going to pay Lockheed-Martin to upgrade F-16s for sale to Third World countries with loans from the Export-Import Bank, a further gift from U.S. taxpayers. And plainly taxpayers now have to fund the corporation to produce F-22 advanced fighters to defend us from the upgraded F-16s that we're sending to potential enemies. The corporate headquarters happens to be in Cobb County Georgia, represented in Congress by a gentleman named Newt Gingrich, who has been able to bring home more federal subsidies than any suburban county in the country outside of Arlington Virginia (part of the federal government) and the Florida home of the Kennedy Space Center (another part).

The arms sale addiction is only a small piece of a much larger one, on which the economy heavily depends. Military spending has generally long served as a cover for distributing public funds to advanced industry, military or not. Sale of arms to Colombia helps marginally here too – another factor that contributes to the correlation between military aid and torture.

Let's turn finally to the drug war, the pretext for all of this. Colombia became a major producer of cocaine in the late 1970s. Why? In fact, why do peasants in Latin America even bother to produce coca, apart from their own use, as they've done forever? The reasons are rooted in the social and economic policies imposed on the Third World. The rules dictate that they have to stop producing for their own needs, and turn export. And unlike the rich Western countries, they have to open their markets, specifically, to subsidized U.S. agricultural exports, which undermine domestic production. The local farmers are to become "rational producers" in accord with the precepts of modern economics, producing crops for export. And being rational, as they are, they turn to the crops that make the most money. Accordingly, coca production has just shot out of sight, helping to undergird "economic miracles." Jeffrey Sachs of Harvard, who has more recently been plying his trade in Poland and Russia, won his fame by setting things in order in Bolivia in 1985. Bolivia was in real trouble, but he instructed them in the proper free-market theory, and pretty soon all was fine, with good macro-economic statistics, and so on. There were also some side effects. One was that the "miracle" was relying very heavily on coca exports. Much the same is true in Peru.

Similar reasons lie behind Colombia's turn towards narcotrafficking. There were others as well. In 1988, the U.S. compelled coffee producers to break an agreement that had kept prices at some reasonable level. The price of coffee, Colombia's main export crop, fell 40%. When coffee prices collapse and half the children are already starving, people are likely to turn to where there are opportunities, thanks to the North American drug market. One major impetus for the huge increase in the flow of drugs is the free-market policies imposed on the Third World.

A second reason, somewhat narrower, has to do with U.S. drug policies. Their design has driven people from relatively harmless marijuana to hard drugs like cocaine, in ever more lethal form. Colombia shifted from producing marijuana to far more profitable and easily transportable cocaine.

Another question that arises about the drug traffic has to do with its scale. A recent study by the OECD – the organization of the rich countries – estimates profits from the international drug traffic at almost half a trillion dollars a year, of which over half circulates through the U.S. financial system. That suggests a way to deal with the drug problem: look at the place that is handling more than half the profits, U.S. financial institutions. What about Colombia? According to the OECD report, it receives about six billion dollars, which is 2 to 3% of what remains in the United States. "The big business is therefore in that country," the United States. I'm quoting from a review of the study by a member of the Andean Commission of Jurists and the Latin American

Association of Human Rights, published by the leading newspaper in Mexico, Excelsior, which published the report of the OECD study that tells us where the drug business is really going on.

What about the banks that are handling over 56% of the immense profits generated by narco-trafficking, according to the OECD? That's presumably illegal. In 1979 the government launched Operation Greenback, targeting banks that were handling drug money, which is apparently not too difficult to monitor. Huge sums of money were suddenly coming into Miami banks just as the cocaine racket was picking up steam, so the Justice Department went into action. But not for long. The operation was called off in 1982 by the drug czar of the Reagan Administration, vice-President George Bush. We therefore lack any further information about the estimated \$260 billion a year of drug money that flows through the U.S. financial system.

Other places are easier to investigate, like Panama. Recall that right after the drug war was announced again with huge fanfare by then-President Bush, the U.S. invaded Panama to protect us from the evil Hispanic narco-traffickers led by the arch-fiend Noriega. The invasion placed back in power the European elite of bankers and narco-traffickers. The new Attorney General and Treasury Minister, for example, had been directors of the First Inter-Americas Bank, which had been closed by Noriega because it was implicated in drug trafficking. President Endara, installed by the U.S. Army, along with his law firm, were also involved in the racket, it was reported. Since the invasion, Panama has grown as a narco-trafficking center, with perhaps twice as many narcotics flowing through as before.

One part of the drug racket is banking; another is the chemical industry. In 1989, in the six months preceding the announcement of the drug war the Colombian police found 1.5 million gallons of chemicals used for cocaine production, many of them with U.S. corporate logos on them. The CIA had reported that U.S. exports of such chemicals to Latin America far exceed any legal uses, while the Congressional Research Service concluded that more than 90% of the chemicals used for drug production come from the United States. So that suggests another way to deal with the narco-trafficking problem, if the war against drugs is a war against drugs, not something else.

Any discussion of substance abuse is seriously distorted if it avoids the leading killer, tobacco. The former head of the U.S. Office of Drug Abuse Policy, Dr. Peter Bourne, pointed out that the number of Colombians who die every year from substances produced in the United States far exceeds the number of North Americans who die from cocaine. The same is true here. Furthermore, unlike tobacco, cocaine is not subsidized by the U.S. government, except for the support we provide to the military who are involved in the racket, and isn't publicly advertised. There's no cocaine counterpart to the Marlboro Man. And Colombia does not strong-arm the U.S. into permitting aggressive advertising and distribution of cocaine, imitating Washington's behavior in Asia in support of its favored lethal substance. That is a major story in itself, which adds needed perspective to the narco-trafficking discussion, but I won't go into it here.

What about President Gaviria, Washington's good friend? Under his rule, the human rights record got even worse, but he did destroy one of the two big cartels, the Medellin cartel – handing its business over to its main competitor, the Cali cartel. The same Justice and Peace group published a report on this recently. According to their account, the two cartels were different in nature. The Medellin Cartel had lower class origins. Pablo Escobar, who ran it, was from the slums, and many of those involved were peasants or lower middle class, or workers who'd entered the rackets. And apparently the Medellin Cartel, though very brutal, had a populist character, like some city bosses and mafia elements. They had gained popular support by building sports fields,

helping poor people in need, and so on. The Cali cartel, in contrast, is strictly business, like the banks and chemical corporations. With the elimination of its Medellin rival, it now controls most of the drug trade in Colombia, according to the report.

The U.S. has tried to help now and then. In the 1980s, when the cocaine traffic was building up, the government of Colombia approached the United States for assistance in building a radar station to detect low-flying planes coming in from the main coca producing regions. The Reagan Administration was very enthusiastic about this idea, and did in fact construct a radar station for Colombia. The station was built on San Andres Island, which is as far as you can get on Colombian territory from the routes of the drug planes, but is off the coast of Nicaragua and therefore could be used to assist in Washington's terrorist war against Nicaragua.

In the same years, Costa Rica approached Washington with a similar request, and again help was offered. Costa Rica, however, turned to British experts for advice and analysis, and was informed that the station that the U.S. was planning to build would serve no drug purpose, but would be useful for aerial surveillance of Nicaragua. It could therefore help guide the U.S.-trained terrorists to attack "soft targets" like health clinics and agricultural cooperatives. Costa Rica didn't go along with the proposal, and this story too fell through the cracks.

The drug war serves several purposes. In part, it is a cover for counterinsurgency and sustaining the "democratorship." It also makes a small contribution to the arms production addiction. And it provides valuable mechanisms for locking up the superfluous population at home, an important matter as a major effort is underway to turn the United States itself into a society with striking Third World characteristics. Here, we don't (yet) carry out social cleansing by the security forces, so other means are needed for dealing with people lacking human rights because they do not contribute to profit-making. Locking them up makes sense, also providing a Keynesian stimulus to the economy. For that, the drug war is ideal, and it is used substantially for that purpose.

A large part of the jail population is there for victimless crimes, which are carefully crafted. Take cocaine. The drug of choice in the ghettos is crack, and penalties for possession are very harsh; the drug of choice in the rich white suburbs is powder, with much lower penalties – typical class-based legislation.

All of this explains a good part of what the drug war is about, and also why the U.S. prison rate is zooming beyond any developed country, and expected to continue to rise.

The drug war is also useful for frightening the population. When social policies are designed to harm the large majority, the intended victims have to be kept from seeing what's happening to them. There are a few classic methods. One is to get them to fear one another. The drug war probably has that effect. It's hard to test the impact on the general population, but it is easier to see how it affects articulate intellectuals. For an example, a recent issue of the Harvard Magazine, the journal that goes to alumni, has a cover story on someone who has developed new leadership techniques that are considered quite sensational. They're teaching them in business schools, and so on. He gives examples of how these techniques work, and how they can improve leadership. The main example he gives is George Bush's announcement of the drug war. Bush made a mistake, he says, not following these new methods. He describes how Bush came into office at a time when great fear and concern about drugs was spreading all over the country, so he reacted by declaring the war on drugs and going after Noriega to try to stop narco-trafficking. But it didn't work, because those are not the right leadership techniques.

The only problem with this analysis of improper and proper leadership is that concern about drugs was very low when Bush entered office, and remained so until the drug war was announced. There was plenty of concern about the budget, jobs, and other matters, but drugs were very low on the list. When Bush announced the drug war and the media went into operation with a really massive propaganda offensive, the polls showed a dramatic change. Drugs became a major concern as the result of highly effective propaganda, following the leader. At least among intellectuals, the right message may well have been established, one that's the opposite of the facts. Not an untypical feature of the intellectual culture, I should say.

One last comment: Colombia's tragedy, and that is what it is, has indigenous roots. For us in the U.S., the external causes are the ones of greatest importance, because these we can influence. But the sources are internal as well. This century opened with a civil war in Colombia in which perhaps a hundred thousand people were killed. A populist leader was murdered in 1948, and shortly after, power fell into the hands of the first formal fascist to take power after the Second World War, a supporter of Franco, who received U.S. backing. These events were followed by a huge upsurge of violence in which hundreds of thousands of people were killed. The U.S. role really begins in a major way with the Kennedy Administration as part of its general plans for Latin America, and has been highly significant since.

There also are complex links to our own society, which merit thought as well. The basic point was made more clearly and effectively than I can express it in a letter I received recently from a friend who is a leading Colombian human rights activist, Cecilia Zarate-Laun. I'll just quote from her letter, hoping that she won't mind; this wasn't prepared for publication, just a casual letter.

She is discussing a meeting of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, one of the few groups in the world that actually does something for poor and suffering people. It has an American branch, which just came out with a document called "The Women's Peace and Justice Treaty of the Americas" – an excellent statement, in my opinion, well worth reading and implementing. I don't expect to see a front-page article about it soon, but you can obtain it, and I'd advise doing so. She writes: "I firmly believe that everything is interrelated, since the real culprit is the economic system, and it is very important that the American people start connecting issues abroad with their own reality, starting with its foreign policy, since things do not happen in a vacuum. I will use an example to make my point: the drug issue. The children of poor women, who in Colombia have no opportunities because the society has abandoned them, and are forced to be hitmen or to work in the cocaine laboratories to make cocaine, or that are recruited to be members of a death squad team – they are in the same situation as the children of poor women in the United States who are forced to sell cocaine on the corners of the streets, or to be lookouts for the salesmen, and so on, and for the same reasons. The only difference is that the ones speak Spanish and the others speak English. The tragedy is the same."

I think she's right, and the tragedy is being heightened in both countries by deliberate and self-conscious social policy. Meanwhile we in the United States watch, and so far do nothing. If that is our choice, it's not hard to imagine the prospects.

The Anarchist Library
Anti-Copyright



Noam Chomsky
No Human Being Is Disposable
Introduction
1995

Retrieved on 19th June 2021 from chomsky.info
Introduction by Noam Chomsky in Juan Pablo Ordoñez, *No Human Being Is Disposable*,
Columbia Human Rights Committee, Washington DC, 1995

theanarchistlibrary.org