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Cocaine, Pop Culture, and People of Color

By

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Cocaine: a glamour drug in powder form that helped shape 1980s Miami into a party city and when in the form of a rock, built the image of violence, crime, and despair. When examining both the powder form of cocaine, and its cheaper version that was cooked down into the form of a rock, a racial disparity was formed and made permanent by the US crime bill of 1986. Part of the reason as to why cocaine is so well known is because of its impact on various forms of pop culture whether it be in print or televised news, the impact on US laws, and on television and movies. In this paper the examination of cocaine's impact on people of color through the lens of pop culture will be provided through points of view from journalists, reporters, filmmakers, and interviews.

Beginning to gain notoriety in the 1970s with the disco era, cocaine is seen through the growth of the party atmosphere. It wouldn't be until 1976 that Colombia would shift its focus from marijuana production to cocaine due to the vast difference in profits made from cocaine. The coca leaf grows almost exclusively in both northern and western South America in mountainous regions making Colombia the perfect location for production.¹ When it comes to pricing, cocaine was one of the more expensive drugs at the time of its growth in popularity but due to such a mass production, the value has dropped from \$600 a gram in the 1980s to \$20-25 today.² It seemed like there were daily drug busts in Miami, shootings by Colombian and Cuban drug dealers in a war over turf provided the people of Miami the fear that the war was coming to them. These events are covered in shows such as *Miami Vice* and the film *Scarface* and become synonymous with cocaine for the violence crime world that encompassed the drug.

With the heavy influx of cocaine entering the United States and the price dropping down, there was more than enough to go around by the early 1990s. This led to the creation of 'crack'

¹ Dermot O'Connor, "The Political Economy of Colombia's Cocaine Industry", *Papel Politico*, (2009) pp. 81-106

² Nick Hazell, "Cheap Cocaine: It's a 'Social Thing'", *ABC News*, (2009).

which is a smokable form of cocaine. This was an even cheaper form of cocaine and used more by African Americans and Hispanics because both ethnicities were in lower socioeconomic standings and couldn't afford the more expensive form.³ With a more universal usage of the drug affecting everyone, the United States signed the crime bill of 1986 that sought to punish those that used or distributed various drugs. This bill created the 100:1 disparity between crack and cocaine. The possession of 5g of crack received 5 years in prison while one had to possess 500g of cocaine to receive the same 5-year sentence.⁴ The targeted group of this bill was to punish African Americans and Latin Americans since they were the predominant user of crack. This is covered in the news through the topic of sports as crack impacted it as well as leading to gang violence and racial discrimination. Both of those topics will be demonstrated in both TV broadcasts and print as well as films like *Boyz n the Hood* and *Straight Outta Compton*.

Part 1: Latin Americans and Cocaine

When examining the connection between cocaine and Latin Americans through the scope of pop culture, the examination through the news and political cartoons, movies, and television will provide points of view ranging from firsthand accounts, reporters in the field, journalists, as well the episodes and movies reflecting these perspectives. To begin, the start will focus on 'cocaine cowboys' and their coverage in the news.

News: Cocaine Cowboys and Cocaine Distribution in Miami. It is 1979, just after 2:00 in the afternoon, broad daylight, and armed hitmen get out of a phony delivery van with the marking "Happy Time Complete Party Supply". Armed with automatic submachine guns, the

³ Joseph J Palamar et al. "Powder cocaine and crack use in the United States: an examination of risk for arrest and socioeconomic disparities in use." *Drug and alcohol dependence* vol. 149 (2015): 108-16.
doi:10.1016/j.drugalcdep.2015.01.029

⁴ Public Law 99-570 (1986) 3207-3

hitmen strut out of the van and spot their target in Crown liquors at the Dadeland Mall; German-Jimenez Panesso and his bodyguard. They open fire in a wild west like shootout hitting and killing their two targets and wounding two innocent bystanders in the crossfire.⁵ Bolting back into the van, they drive away and ditch it at the far end of the mall. Upon investigation, police “described the van as a “war wagon” after an arsenal of firearms and bulletproof vests were discovered inside.”⁶ Panesso lay dead in a pool of blood on the floor, once a major figure in the drug trafficking trade, now just another statistic in the rising murder rate of Miami. One officer dubbed the scene as the work of “cocaine cowboys”.⁷

This wasn’t the beginning or the end of the coverage of homicides and shootouts in South Florida. This shooting happened on July 11th in 1979 and was a retaliation kill for a previous turf war involving German-Jimenez Panesso. *The Washington Post* reported that “A black Audi came roaring down a turnpike, a Latino hanging out a window and wildly emptying a .45-cal. submachine gun at a Pontiac.”⁸ The two vehicles both come to a halt and more automatic gunfire ensues. When the police arrive, Jaime Suescun, a Colombian, lay dead at the scene in the Audi along with powder white cocaine in the trunk.⁹ The vehicle’s registration belonged to German Jimenez Panesso who will meet his demise at the Dadeland Mall.

In this article, there is much detail on the shootings between both Cubans and Colombians as a result of the cocaine turf wars. An officer compared the two victims at the Dadeland Mall to “Swiss cheese” because they were shot so many times. But it also goes into detail about the type of shooting. Similar to a wild west like shootout, bullets are flying all around in an effort to hit

⁵ Brian Hamacher, “‘Dadeland Mall Massacre’: Thursday Marks 40th Anniversary of Infamous ‘Cocaine Cowboys’ Shootout”. *NBC Miami* (2019).

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ “The Cocaine Wars...”, *The Washington Post*. (1979).

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

their target. Stray bullets hit two innocent people as a result of this due to them doing what they can to kill their targets and no regard for the others around them.

Violent news stories taking over the evening news and morning papers will only increase. When examining this, *The Washington Post* stated that from January 1st to mid-July, there were “132 killings reported in the first half of 1979, they tied 37 to drug trafficking.” And that in Dade County, “drug killings accounted for 40 percent of the 57 homicides.” Three years ago, drug hits accounted for less than 10 percent.”¹⁰ Murder isn’t the only thing that is spiking, but the seizure of cocaine will spike to greater and greater hauls. In 1982, there was over \$100 million worth of cocaine seized from the Miami International Airport. With authorities taking this huge haul of cocaine, the Reagan Administration created the South Florida Drug Task Force to counter the growing amount of cocaine flooding in from the South Florida ports and Everglades.¹¹ It wasn’t just the Colombians who were involved with this drug flow, but the Cubans as well. Sal Magluta and Willie Falcon, both Cuban immigrants, brought close to \$2 billion of cocaine into Miami between the early 1980s to 1991.¹²

Throughout these three-examples provided above, the main commonality between them was that they all involved either Cubans or Colombians as the depicted criminal. Lt. Robert Willis of Homicide in Dade County had multiple comments about the various incidents that were reported above to *The Washington Post*. After examining the Dadeland Mall massacre he was quoted with saying that "Since then, it's just gotten progressively worse. You can't really explain it. "My group is angry at your group." They're not fighting for anything. It's the Hatfields and McCoys, "You killed one of mine, so I'll kill one of yours."¹³ The first murder that authorities related to

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ *Miami Drug Wars*. Flashback Miami Herald.

¹² Brian Hamacher “South Florida’s Most Notorious ‘Cocaine Cowboys’” (2017).

¹³ “*The Cocaine Wars...*”. *The Washington Post* (1979).

these groups of Latin Americans was the murder of a young Latin female who was involved in cocaine trafficking. "They have a total disregard for life" Willis was quoted with saying.

This type of language comes from an emotional place as these officers are the ones who have to keep coming to these crime scenes. But, when reporting on this and getting quotes that they are people who don't care about any other person other than themselves, or that they will do what it takes to take down their target, then negative connotations will begin to form towards these people.

News: Andean Initiative and Pablo Escobar. With coverage of turf wars here in the US and the cause being from cocaine, the United States pushed to go after the source of the drug which was the Andean Region. The War on Drugs was declared by Nixon in 1971, meaning by the time the Andean Initiative was signed, 1989, the War on Drugs had been in full swing. The purpose of this Initiative was to crack down on cocaine's influx into the United States as well as a way to put a stop to supplier, Pablo Escobar and the Medellin Cartel. The Andean Initiative's focus was on an "increase in law enforcement, military, and economic assistance to Bolivia, Colombia and Peru, in an attempt to dismantle drug organizations, isolate major coca growing regions, destroy production facilities and block precursor/essential chemical deliveries."¹⁴

Although the Andean plan had its heart in the right place, its execution would be a failure. Three years prior to the signing of the Andean plan, in 1986 both the Attorney General and Secretary of Defense signed letters stating that the "... international drug situation was in fact an emergency situation and a threat to U.S. interests."¹⁵ One of the biggest flaws with the Andean Plan was the funding.

¹⁴ Noel B Bergeron, "The Andean Initiative: A Faulty Campaign in the War on Drugs," (1991). Pg. 4

¹⁵ Ibid. pg. 3

The problem with the funding of the Andean Initiative was that it didn't produce a significant amount to counter the Cartels wealth and power. In the early 1980s in Colombia, Pablo Escobar had bought off many people such as government officials and the police with his vast amount of wealth as a means to protect his empire from law enforcement and politicians. To counter this, the Andean Initiative would send in militarized forces as well as funding. These "... assistance programs for these countries was \$260 million (\$90.8 - Colombia; \$97.6 - Bolivia; \$73.3 - Peru). These allocations were in addition to a separate \$65 million Colombian emergency military equipment and training program previously approved and in effect."¹⁶ To combat the Colombian Medellin Cartel and Escobar, the United States was putting in just \$155 million aid them. This amount would prove to be drastically underwhelming and insufficient in comparison to what Escobar had.

To put the insignificance into proportion, at the height of both Escobar and the Medellin Cartel's power, they were supplying 80% of the world's cocaine with 15 tons ending up in the US a day.¹⁷ With this supply, that meant that Escobar was making a profit that was strong enough to corrupt his own country, Colombia, and be a force to be reckoned with against the US. In 1989 he was listed as the seventh richest man in the world on Forbes magazine with an estimated gross of \$30 billion annually.¹⁸ With \$260 million being provided in the Andean Initiative, only \$90.8 million of it was for Colombia, and, as stated by the Colombian president Andres Pastrana in a *60 Minutes* interview, "even if we win in Colombia, there will always be another country to supply the US with drugs, as long as the demand for them remains."¹⁹

¹⁶ Ibid. pg. 6

¹⁷ Amanda Macias, "10 facts that reveal the absurdity of Pablo Escobar's wealth" *Business Insider*. (2015).

¹⁸ Teresa A Meade, *History of Modern Latin America: 1800 to the Present*. Wiley-Blackwell, (2016). Pg.302

¹⁹ Ibid. pg. 302

Escobar's control over Colombia was far more superior in comparison to the United States funding and effort at taking him down.

When the US worked with the Colombian president and government to extradite drug lords and traffickers to the United States, things only grew more out of control.²⁰ In mid-November of 1985, when the State of Colombia was building up evidence against the Medellin Cartel and Escobar in an effort to extradite them to the US, a guerilla force called M-19 who were funded by Escobar stormed Colombia's Palace of Justice in Bogota.²¹ *The Washington Post* published the sight that was demonstrated to them; a great loss of life and extensive damage done to the democracy of Colombia.²² With about 40 strong, M-19 held all 25 of the Supreme Court's members and over a hundred more hostage. In the aftermath of the 27-hour siege that resulted in the Colombian military exchanging heavy gunfire with the guerillas, most of the M-19 members lay dead along with 11 of the 25 Court members and 55 hostages as well as the main target for the siege, the destruction of the 600,000 pages of evidence against Escobar.²³ *The Washington Post* received information from reporters on the ground that "Some of the hostages shouted to troops to stop firing and send a government emissary to negotiate. No one came."²⁴ It was also reported that the military issued an "ultimatum at 11:50 that the guerrillas surrender, promising safe passage out of the courthouse and a fair trial." And that the "final assault came at 1:15 p.m. after an intense exchange of gun and rocket fire and loud explosions."²⁵ The shooting didn't stop until 2:20. The spectacle that the Cartel and Military put on for the Post was that of an unstable

²⁰ NPR. "Timeline: America's War on Drugs". (2007).

²¹ Colombia Reports. "1985 Palace of Justice Siege". *Colombia Reports*. (2016).

²² Bradley Graham, "27 Hours That Shook Bogota". *The Washington Post*. (1985).

²³ Christophe Woody, "33 years ago, rebels allegedly backed by Pablo Escobar stormed Colombia's Palace of Justice – here's how the terrifying siege went down". *Business Insider*. (2018).

²⁴ Bradley Graham, "27 Hours That Shook Bogota". *The Washington Post*. (1985).

²⁵ Ibid.

government and peoples who live in a lawless country without a strong form of government to protect its citizens and handle the threat that cocaine was having on the nation.

With images, videos, and quotes being relayed back to *the Washington Post* and TV stations via reports on the ground, Colombia was depicted as a war-torn city that looked to see no end to its corruption and violence. The country's handling of Escobar was depicted as a colossal failure due to letting him get to his level of power and wealth. He would be able to buy off many politicians and when that failed, he had half of their Supreme Court murdered. The violence back home in Miami was nothing in comparison to Colombia since no one was showing up to the capitol and wiping out half of the Supreme Court, but the coverage of the events built up the images that such acts of violence will continue to creep into the United States along with cocaine. This however wouldn't be the only time that Escobar and Colombia would be in the news for such an act.

From one tragedy to the next, Colombia would make headlines again for Cartels taking mass human life in an effort to maintain power. Four years after the siege of the Palace of Justice *The New York Times* covers the story of a Boeing 727 that blew up in the air over Bogota and crashed in the jungle hillside killing all 107 people on board. It didn't take long for the focus to shift towards Escobar due to *The Times* reporting that there was an anonymous type from a "... caller to a radio station asserting that drug traffickers had bombed the plane."²⁶ The caller said that this was the work of "The Extraditables" and that their target was to "kill five police informants" and that the "... five had given the police information that led to the discovery of the hide-out of the leader of the Medellin drug cartel."²⁷ "The Extraditables" were members of the Medellin cartel;

²⁶ AP. "All 107 Aboard as Colombian Jet Explodes". *The New York Times*. (1989).

²⁷ Ibid.

Gonzalo Rodriguez, Fabio Ochoa Vasquez, and Pablo Escobar.²⁸ The one responsible for planting the bomb wouldn't be sentenced until 1994. He would be sentenced to life in prison without parole and it was stated that he "... reputedly killed 50 police officers, judges and other officials in a ruthless career launched at age 12..." and was also "... convicted of smuggling tons of cocaine into the United States over a decade..."²⁹ One of the targets who didn't board the plane was the presidential candidate of Colombia, César Gaviria Trujillo. He campaigned on the push for extradition and make a stand against the Medellin Cartel with the aid from the United States. This posed a massive threat to Escobar and the trafficking of cocaine out of Colombia.³⁰

Images of bloody bodies, chaos in gunfights, and armed men storming buildings were something that many attribute to a war. Viewers were left seeing what had happened to Colombia due to the Cartels taking over demonstrating the threat that cocaine power had. The news in Colombia and the coverage in the United States would support these ideas only further cementing that this really was a war on drugs and needed to be stopped.

Magazines and Political Cartoons: *Paradise Lost?* and the Mariel Boatlift. South Florida has been painted as this tropical paradise to vacation where one can relax on the beach and soak up the sun, but that image quickly changed when people started to hear more and more about the rising crime in the state. *Paradise Lost?* is the most well-known magazine articles covering the Miami Drug War. There is an excerpt that goes into detail on the crime and who is to blame by saying...

²⁸ "Interviews - Jorge Ochoa | Drug Wars | Frontline." PBS. Public Broadcasting Service. Accessed December 6, 2021.

²⁹ Robert D McFadden, "Drug Trafficker Convicted of Blowing Up Jetliner" *The New York Times*. (1994).

³⁰ James Brooke, "Colombia Swears in First President, a Foe of Traffickers". *The New York Times*. (1990)

“Here is a picture of a policeman leaning over the body of a Miamian whose throat has been slit and wallet emptied. There is a sleek V-planed speedboat, stripped of galleys and bunks and loaded with a half-ton of marijuana, skimming across the waters of Biscayne Bay. Here are a handful of ragged Cuban refugees, living in a tent pitched beneath a highway overpass.”³¹

The “tidal wave of refugees”, as the article states, slammed into South Florida like a hurricane.³² The reason for the mass influx of Cuban immigrants was due to Fidel Castro opening the Mariel boatlift on April 20th in 1980. The writer of this article, James Kelly, stated that the “Cuban President Fidel Castro opened the port of Mariel to those who wanted to leave, about 125,000 "Marielitos" have landed in South Florida.”³³ With the increase in refugees entering into the city, the blame for the city’s issues were quickly put on the Cubans. “The wave of illegal immigrants has pushed up unemployment, taxed social services, irritated racial tensions and helped send the crime rate to staggering heights. Marielitos are believed to be responsible for half of all violent crime in Miami.”³⁴

In this article it presents the information and description of violent crimes in the Miami area as well as the increase in Latin Americans, specifically Cubans, coming into South Florida and that they are the cause of the increased crime. Blaming a minority for issues such as crime and unemployment out of the idea that they look “ragged” and aren’t originally from the US is a perfect form of racism based off of racial stereotypes.

³¹ James Kelly, “South Florida Is Hit By a Hurricane of Crime, Drugs and Refugees.” *South Florida: Trouble in Paradise*, (1981). Pg. 2

³² Ibid. pg. 2

³³ Ibid. pg. 2

³⁴ Ibid. pg. 2

With their increase, it is understandable that they would choose to live in Miami due to its positioning on the beach and it being near where they arrived. The city saw its Cuban working population increase by “20 percent”³⁵ With the harsh and abusive control that Castro and Communism played on the Cubans, it would be no surprise that they would want to flee the country in search of a better future for themselves or family. *Paradise Lost?* then went on to say that “It turned out that some of the exiles had been released from Cuban jails and mental health facilities.” Because of the mass arrival of Cubans coming into the city, many were put into refugee camps or deportation hearings. Upon background checks and research into the refugees, it was stated by *Politico* that “... more than 1,700 exiles were jailed, and another 587 were detained until they could find sponsors.”³⁶ This news coming out that some of the refugees could be either a criminal or disabled spread to the idea that not some of them could be but were in fact like that. “Cuban refugees were increasingly being viewed by American voters as undesirable immigrants.”³⁷ It was reported that “Demographic surveys of the refugee population further showed most of the Cuban arrivals were from “urban working- and lower-class origins,” as opposed to middle class.”³⁸ Along with unemployment increased, the United States was also going through an economic recession. With higher unemployment and lower wages, it was harder to find a wage that was livable. With a lack of jobs, experience, and a language barrier, almost all of the refugees would live a crime free life despite what the news tried to portray. As examined by *Politico*, the 1700 Cubans who chose the path of crime, only made up 1.3% of all of the refugees that came to Miami.

³⁵ Andrew Glass and Politico Staff. “Castro Launches Mariel Boatlift, April 20, 1980.” POLITICO, (2018).

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Alex Larzelere, *Castro's Ploy--America's Dilemma: the 1980 Cuban Boatlift*. Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, (1988).

Due to the rare percentage of Cuban immigrants turning to criminal involvement, the negative depiction of these people from not just the news, but from those who like to stereotype and point fingers took aim. FAIR, Federation for American Immigration Reform, was a restrictionist group towards not just immigrants, but immigration as a whole. They were an organization who saw it as their duty to create booklets of cartoons that depicted Latin Americans in racist manners.³⁹ On the cover was Fidel Castro strangling the Statue of Liberty and lighting a cigar from her torch. Racial political cartoons have always found a way to dehumanize, and this pamphlet was no different. With various cartoons of Latin American people in an effort to demonstrate what their “real” purpose only showed how farfetched they were. Racist caricatures by means to have the viewer make the mental disconnect that these aren’t in fact people but illegal aliens was the whole goal. Focusing more specifically on the Cubans, or Marielitos as many called them due to coming from the Mariel boatlift, FAIR described them as “40,000 criminals, homosexuals, and mentally defective persons.”⁴⁰ In one image, there is a destroyed and burned-out city with a sign over a busted-out building reading “Miami Market” with the looters and rioters depicted as the Marielitos.

Heidi Beirich of Southern Poverty Law said that “FAIR blames the Cubans for causing “chaos and crime” that “crippled Florida’s tourist trade.”⁴¹ The reality of the Cubans for causing the chaos and violence isn’t based in fact as there isn’t enough data to solely prove that they were responsible as well as with only 1700 of the 125,000 resulting in some form of a criminal behavior . The amount of those who were actually criminals or disabled was barely over a single percent, but it was enough for FAIR and those filled with anger to blame the whole of the

³⁹ Heidi Beirich, “The FAIR Files: Marielitos Are 'Criminals, Homosexuals, and Mentally Defective Persons'.” Southern Poverty Law Center, (2010).

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid

refugees. Another image that was put in the pamphlet was one of the cartoons depicting two Cubans headed towards the US. The one on the left says “, Land HO! It’s America! We made it – through stormy seas and personal travail. All the way from repressive Cuba!” to which the other responds with “, EL YAHOO! Let’s go burn down some barracks and turn over a few police cars!”⁴² In FAIR’s means of fear mongering, they have tried to show the United States as having weak borders as well as other countries seeing us as such. This image of violent and criminal Cubans was pushed with racial political cartoons, but the idea of their violence and involvement with cocaine would be supported in films and television shows like *Scarface*, *Miami Vice*, and *Narcos*.

Movies and Television: *Scarface*. *Scarface* is the most well-known film surrounding the Miami Drug War. It has shaped the various ways that people view it whether it be for better or worse such as those that wanted a piece of the lifestyle or were deterred from it due to the violence. *Scarface* focuses on the greed of the drug world and the rise and downfall of Tony Montana’s life.

As previously discussed, the film opens with the Cuban Mariel boatlift of 1980. Tony and Manny, his friend, are in one of the refugee camps for the Cuban immigrants. As mentioned above that very few of the Cuban immigrants were criminals, Tony however is one of the few with a criminal background who ended up in the United States.⁴³ Tony is shown in an overcrowded detention center where he awaits naturalization and in a later scene several minutes later both he and Manny are present during the April 11 riot under Interstate 95 in Miami. The film depicts Tony and Manny as criminals who you are rooting for, the anti-heroes. The viewer is aware that both the characters have killed people as well as aware that they are selling an

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Brian de Palma, *Scarface*. Universal studios, (1983).

illegal narcotic, the lifestyle that they live is glamorized in a sexy fashion. With fancy pinstripe suits with the undershirt collar tucked over the jacket, thick bands of cash to buy the club out, even a scene deciding which Porsche to buy, and the debate of whether or not he will buy a tiger, and yes Tony buys a tiger.⁴⁴ Throughout the film, the lavish lifestyles are flaunted to the viewer on screen, the whacking of rivals and fellow associates due to competition, betrayal, or them being a rat is shown just as much at the lifestyle.

In one moment Tony is in a club with some friends. Some Cuban hitmen pop up from a different table and start shooting in a ‘cocaine cowboy’ style spree. Although Tony is the target, he only gets hit in the arm while the hitmen kill several other innocent people in an attempt to get rid of Tony. Their disregard for other human life is demonstrated here but was fueled by the coverage of the shootings from in the media as discussed at the beginning of the paper.

Throughout all the fast cars, women, cocaine, and money, the downfall of Tony is his failure to complete a hit. Tony is tailing the target with a second hitman in his passenger seat who will detonate the remote car bomb on the intended victim’s car. Before the passenger can detonate the bomb, Tony’s morals take front seat, and he shoots the second hitman in the head. The reasoning for Tony failing the hit was because the target’s family was also in the car and Tony didn’t want to kill any women or children because he knows it’s morally wrong to kill innocent people, especially women and children, because they haven’t crossed him or caused him harm.⁴⁵ The drug lord that Tony works for will then send his army of goons to take him out as a retaliation for his failure to kill the target. Had Tony compromised on his morals and let the man detonate the bomb, he would have lived at the expense of killing an innocent woman and two children. This film shows that the slightest bit of compassion and morality will get you

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

killed in the world of drugs. Tony was ruthless with his enemy's and he was doing fine. The one time he chose to save a life because it was the right and honest thing to do, he was killed for it. This further demonstrated that the world of drugs isn't a morally right business and that the ruthless are the ones who survive.

Over the course of this film the groundwork for the negative stigma towards Cuban people is molded. Looking at Tony more closely, it is shown that he is one of the criminals of the Mariel boatlift to enter the United States. A group of people already seen as trouble and criminals when they first enter the country. While throughout the film, although Tony is on the tamer side in comparison to others at the start, he becomes more and more violent as he becomes more entangled with the lifestyle. Whether it is killing those who snitch on him, whacking a rival, or taking on an entire group of goons through a cocaine induced rage, these images build up the perception that Cubans are violent.⁴⁶

With a shift away from the violence and more towards the personality and style, these two pose as large standouts. Floral shirts with cream bottoms on a pastel backdrop or flashy linen suits all draw the viewer's eye. In one of the more humorous and calming moments, Tony and Manny talking about how-to pick-up women by the beach, and to get women, one must first get the money. After that you get the power. Once you have those, you'll get the women.⁴⁷ When it comes to examining the exaggerated style and focus on the Cuban/Colombian drug trade, *Miami Vice* will be the prime example.

Miami Vice. One of the most famous and iconic pieces to come out of the 1980s was *Miami Vice*. Sonny Crockett and Ricardo Tubbs driving at night through the streets of Miami in a black Ferrari Daytona with neon lights passing by while Phil Collins' *In the Air Tonight* plays

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

as if this was an MTV music video.⁴⁸ The depiction of the show was built on a glorified pedestal of the Miami Drug War. Latin Americans armed with automatic guns and fancy suits for a drug deal looked great for TV but was wildly inaccurate. Debunked in the documentary *Cocaine Cowboys*, former dealer Jon Roberts talked about how phony *Miami Vice* was in its depiction of drug deals. “There was never this Miami Vice ridiculousness in the street where cars would pull up with guns and say “lemme see what you got in the trunk”, let me check it, let me test it, then bring it back. It doesn’t work like that.”⁴⁹

When analyzing what Roberts had to say in comparison to what *Miami Vice* displayed, it is understood that reality is often disappointing. Creating an exaggerated swagger for film is great to put butts in seats and get views, but it creates this misconception of what really happened between drug deals. The dealers would have one car with drugs and another with payment. They would drop off the car at one location and leave it to be picked up by the other. This was done as a way of limiting the interaction between the dealer and distributor.⁵⁰ But none of that that was important for the show. The purpose was to be cool and flashy.

In the first season on the 12th episode, both Crockett and Tubbs have an altercation with some teenagers who bought a ticket to go to Colombia. Both Crockett and Tubbs know they are going to Colombia in an effort to distribute cocaine and the teenagers are promptly warned. Tubbs leans in and says that 95% of those so called “deals” are a trap and that they’ll get killed. During this scene a Colombian hitman enters the frame with a shotgun and kills one of the teenagers.⁵¹ When looking at photos of Colombian and Cuban hitman and drug dealers from various crime scene photos, there is one obvious difference between reality and Hollywood, the clothing. When

⁴⁸ “Miami Vice/Brother’s Keep” Episode. *Miami Vice* 1, no. 1. NBC, (1984).

⁴⁹ *Cocaine Cowboys*. Directed by Billy Corben. Magnolia Pictures, (2006).

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ “Miami Vice/Milk Run” Episode. *Miami Vice* 1, no. 12. NBC, (1985).

the hitman enters and shoots the teen, the hitman is wearing a light-colored double-breasted linen suit with a sky-blue tie. Jumping forward to season four we see Crockett and Tubbs going to a drug deal to exchange \$100,000 for several kilos of cocaine with some Colombians.⁵² Again the viewer sees the Colombians in flashy clothes. Evan Thomas of *Time* magazine examined this flash and the draw towards it. He said that “While NBC vigorously protests that only the bad guys take dope on *Miami Vice* and they come to an unseemly end, public polls show that many people still feel such shows glamourize drug use. Fast clothes and cars may be the toys of villains, but they are seductive nonetheless.”⁵³ The perception surrounding cocaine at the time was that it was a party drug that brought great things to one’s life that so many dream of. But, when looking at the same time period from the present day, the perception shifts as will be discussed with *Narcos*.

Narcos. A Netflix adaption of the true events between the early 1980s to mid-1990s that took place involving both DEA agents and other forces to take down Pablo Escobar and the Medellin Cartel set the tone for a more realistic approach to the idea which contrasted to *Miami Vice* and *Scarface* when it came to *Narcos*. When both comparing and contrasting the characters of *Narcos* and the other forms of cinema mentioned, the most obvious real difference that *Narcos* had was the violence. Many times when someone would rat on Escobar or members of the Medellin cartel, they would end up getting killed, however, if they were a woman, then the punishment was much worse. In the second episode of the first season a woman is an informant for the DEA. The cartel finds out about it and has her kidnapped and sent to be tortured. Here she is brutally raped and beaten for “betraying” their people.⁵⁴ A few episodes later the DEA and

⁵² “Miami Vice/A Bullet For Crockett.” Episode. *Miami Vice* 4, no. 20. NBC, (1988).

⁵³ Evan Thomas, “America’s Crusade: What is Behind the Latest War on Drugs” *Time Magazine* (1986).

⁵⁴ “Narcos/The Sword of Simon Bolivar”. Episode. *Narcos* 1, no. 2. Netflix. (2015).

Colombian military find the location of one of the cartel members. A massive firefight ensues resulting in the cartel member dying in a hail of gunfire while making his final stand.⁵⁵ Here is a similar fate to Tony Montana from *Scarface*. High on drugs and the power that has consumed Jose Gacha, he is brought down in a similar end. What the writers didn't want to shy away from in *Narcos* was the violence. The reality of these individuals was not that they were Robinhood figures who would provide to the poor, but cold-blooded criminals. One of the most violent of the group was Pacho Herrera who in the season premier of the third season has a man executed by tying each one of his limbs to a motorcycle. The riders then drive off ripping the man apart.⁵⁶ The messages were made loud and clear to competing cartels.

The reality of the historical events put on the television screen are represented in an accurate manner when it comes to *Narcos* tackling major historical moments. In episode four of the first season, the Palace of Justice goes under a siege by guerilla forces as discussed above. When looking at the same topic through the TV, the recreation of the event puts the viewer right in the middle of the chaos.⁵⁷ First by showing real footage then switching over to the siege from both the soldiers and guerillas perspective allowed for the audience to be able to understand how awful the event was in real life. Seeing bloody bodies on the street and in the building, guerillas starting a fire, then the camera switching back to actual footage demonstrated how big of a mess Colombia was in at the time. The same feelings happen in episode six of the same season when Avianca flight 203 blew up.⁵⁸ The unsuspecting bomber being told that he had a "listening" device that would record the conversation of their target allowed for the viewer to understand

⁵⁵ "Narcos/Explosivos". Episode. *Narcos* 1, no. 6. Netflix. (2015).

⁵⁶ "Narcos/Best Laid Plans". Episode. *Narcos* 3, no. 6. Netflix. (2017).

⁵⁷ "Narcos/The Palace in Flames". Episode. *Narcos* 1, no. 4. Netflix. (2015)

⁵⁸ "Narcos/Explosivos". Episode. *Narcos* 1, no. 6. Netflix. (2015).

what was about to happen and the gravity of the situation when it came to Escobar getting rid of anyone who stood in his way.

One thing that the viewer will detect is the heroes in the show. Although it takes place in Colombia and there are many people who help who are of Colombian descent, the main heroes in the show are white. Whether it's the field agents, those heading the investigation, or the director of the DEA, all of which are white and portrayed as the white saviors of the show further showing the lack of control that Colombia had on the situation. There wasn't any of that with *Scarface*, all but one of the characters of the movie are Cuban with one being Colombian. With *Miami Vice* there were people of color in both good and bad roles. Both *Scarface and Miami Vice* are from and set in the 1980s, while *Narcos* is only set in the 1980s. It appears that because *Narcos* is newer, the usage of the white saviors is done in an effort to white wash history due to white guilt. Using pop culture as a mediation for history is beneficial in providing various perspectives into an issue, however with film, the ideas and characters presented may be based off of stereotypes and cliches instead of original character development.

Part 2: African Americans and Crack Cocaine

When examining the connection between crack cocaine and African Americans through the scope of pop culture, the examination through the news surrounding both sports and gang violence as well as these same topics in both movies and music will provide various points of view on the topic of cocaine as well as violence and racial discrimination. To begin, and overview of that the War on Drugs is will be given and its impact on news and TV.

News: The War on Drugs Effect on the News. The War on Drugs is a global conflict that has been in effect since the 17th of June in 1971 when Richard Nixon declared the abuse of drugs

as a worthy opponent for war.⁵⁹ In the late 1970s to early 1980s, cocaine was blowing up in South Florida and being distributed around the country at an alarming rate. Tackling that problem the United States played both the offensive and defensive position in the war. When dealing with Latin Americans, predominantly Cubans and Colombians, the United States went after the cartels producing and distributing the cocaine through various overseas policies and initiatives. When it came to defending the frontlines at home, the US's response consisted of a new bill and anti-drug campaigns for schools and advertisements. All of these were covered on the television and in newspapers at the time. The time period that will be focused on here will begin at the mid-1980s with the Reagan administration.

With the crack epidemic beginning in the early 1980s, it was up to the Reagan Administration to ramp up the force against drugs. *Time Magazine* published many articles talking about the War on Drugs, and the impact that cocaine has had on society. In their mid-September issue of 1986 they stated that “Under Reagan, the drug-enforcement budget doubled from \$853 million in 1982 to \$1.5 billion in 1986.⁶⁰ With an increase in enforcement, the budget for treatment declined \$200 million in 1982 to \$126 million in 1986.”⁶¹ The primary focus here was not to curb addiction and treat those as patients, but instead as criminals.

The targeting of African Americans isn't anything new in the United States. In Michael Tonry's book *Malign Neglect*, it was stated that when examining the arrests of blacks in the 1980s, they made up 26.8% of all adult drug arrests while in comparison to the 1990s, it saw a rise to 40%. The pattern was similar to juveniles as well. Black youth making up 14.5% of all

⁵⁹ Richard Nixon Foundation. “President Nixon Declares Drug Abuse Public Enemy Number One”. YouTube June 17, 1971, (2016)

⁶⁰ Evan Thomas, “America's Crusade: What is Behind the Latest War on Drugs” *Time Magazine* (1986)

⁶¹ Ibid.

drug arrests and a spike to 48.8% in 1990.⁶² Targeting those who use drugs as the same criminals who deal and distribute it was all part of the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986.

One section of the Act, section A, focuses on the penalties for drug possession and the consequences for being caught with it. If one were to have crack cocaine or “cocaine base” in their possession, to receive a five-year prison sentence they would have to have five grams or more. If one were to have cocaine in a powder form, to receive the same five-year sentence they would have to have 500 grams in their possession.⁶³ Keeping the blatant disparity of punishment between crack and cocaine with crack having the harsher sentence, *Time Magazine* stated that “A gram of coke costs about \$100, but two beads, or pea-shaped pieces, of crack go for \$10, enough to guarantee a single user two or three blissful joyrides.”⁶⁴ Here it is demonstrated that crack is the cheaper of the two and is the poor man’s version of cocaine. *The New York Times* also wrote about the demographic of the user and wrote that “Crack... has largely remained a poor people's drug. Its rise in the past two years has had devastating effects on poor neighborhoods, but it has failed to make the same inroads into the middle class.”⁶⁵ With this Act implemented, the purpose of the great disparity between drug possession sentences wasn’t to crack down on drugs and put a stop to it, but to target African Americans. John Ehrlichman, Nixon’s Chief domestic advisor, said in an interview with Dan Baum that

“The Nixon campaign in 1968, and the Nixon White House after that, had two enemies: the antiwar left and black people. You understand what I’m saying? ... We knew we couldn’t make it illegal to be either against the war or black, but by getting the public to

⁶² Michael Tonry, *Malign Neglect: Neglect, Race, Crime, and Punishment*, (New York, Oxford University Press, 1995). Pg.111

⁶³ Public Law 99-570 (1986) 3207-3

⁶⁴ Evan Thomas, “America’s Crusade: What is Behind the Latest War on Drugs” *Time Magazine* (1986)

⁶⁵ Peter Kerr, “Rich vs. Poor: Drug Patterns Are Diverging”. *The New York Times* (1987).

associate the hippies with marijuana, and blacks with heroin, and then criminalizing both heavily, we could disrupt those communities. We could arrest their leaders, raid their homes, break up their meetings, and vilify them night after night on the evening news.

Did we know we were lying about the drugs? Of course we did.”⁶⁶

My making those that are involved with crack whether is being a user or seller, they were seen as the enemy of the people in this all-out war and the enemy wasn't just the drug, but black people as well.

When examining the data of arrests from Tonry's book, there wasn't just a minor increase in arrests, but a drastic change. Looking at the giant disparity between prison sentences and weight of possession of crack to cocaine, it was obvious that this new act was created to target African American people, especially after Nixon's Chief domestic advisor stated that that was the plan of the War on Drugs when it began in in the 70s.

News: Sports and Crack Cocaine. Money and cocaine went hand in hand like bread and butter. With many athletes having lucrative contracts and the love for partying, many turned to cocaine as a way of entertainment. In 1980, *The Washington Post*, reported that anywhere between 40-75% of athletes were using cocaine and 10% of those users were using crack.⁶⁷

The usage of drugs, predominantly cocaine and crack and heroin, especially in the NBA, was becoming so widespread that in 1983, the NBA issued a rule that anyone who was involved with either of the two drugs would be permanently barred from the organization. Michael Ray Richardson, the Nets' guard, had recently completed a five-week treatment for abuse of cocaine. When talking with reporters he said "Rules won't do it... The N.B.A. doesn't understand that drugs are a disease that changes your entire life. It's an illness, and only the player can cure it.

⁶⁶ Alex S. Vitale, *The End of Policing*. (Verso. Brooklyn, NY. 2018) pg. 133

⁶⁷ Chris Cobbs, "Widespread Cocaine Use by Players Alarm NBA", *The Washington Post* (1980).

The big problem is that people who are on drugs are ashamed to admit it. They have this terrible fear of getting up in the morning and seeing a newspaper headline that so and so is on drugs."⁶⁸ Richardson made a great point about abuse and that it is an illness. These people are suffering from addiction and need treatment, but many are either too afraid to seek it or enjoy the lifestyle of the drug too much. In 1986 the Washington Post issued a list of NFL players from 1980 to the present with it being 43 strong.⁶⁹ While some of the positives would be for performance enhancing drugs, 14 of the 43 were involved with cocaine or "forms of cocaine".

Although there would be rules placed in the professional league, people would still die of the drug. In June of 1986, the NBA draft would happen. Dominant college player Len Bias from the University of Maryland that many believed could rival Michael Jordan was the second pick of the NBA draft in the first round for the Boston Celtics. Two days later he would be lying face down dead at a campus party from "cocaine intoxication".⁷⁰ He was only 22 years old, however he wouldn't be the only young athlete to die as a result of using cocaine. Less than 10 days later, Don Rogers of the Cleveland Browns would have a heart attack after using cocaine. He was only 23 years old.⁷¹

Both Bias and Rogers' death took the country by storm due to both being high profile cases regarding young men. *The Washington Post's* reporting on the usage of cocaine in the 1980s showed that it was not only widely used, but that it had been going on for many years before in the 1970s. Even though there was a rule change in 1983, athletes ending up in rehab or being busted, people were still trying crack and still dying.

⁶⁸ Sam Goldaper, "N.B.A. Will Ban Drug Users" *The New York Times* (1983).

⁶⁹ "Reported NFL Drug Cases Since 1980" *The Washington Post* (1986)

⁷⁰ Susan Schmidt and Tom Kenworthy, "Cocaine Caused Bias' Death, Autopsy Reveals: Dose aid to Trigger Heart Failure; Criminal Inquiry to Be Pressed". *The Los Angeles Times* (1986).

⁷¹ Ben Donahue, "The Tragic Story of Browns Safety Don Rogers (Complete History)", Browns Nation. (2020)

News: Crack and Gang Violence on TV. Apart from the coverage in the news of cocaine's usage in sports, increased arrests, and the plan behind the War on Drugs, another topic covered would be the violence surrounding the drug. This section will dive into sources from television broadcasts and print and how they portrayed the events going on at the time. The first area looked at would be reporters with police officers on the 'frontlines'.

Reporters captured frustration between residents, interviews with officials, and ride alongs with police officers, all of which would help portray the chaos going on at the time, but the act of handling the epidemic of crack apart from arrests would remain absent. Mike Kelly of News Center 4 reported on the streets of East Polo Alto while doing a ride along with officer Doug Medina. "The area that we are going to now is another haven for violent crime and the trafficking of narcotics," the officer stated.⁷² Just several days prior to the filming an officer, Joel M. Davis, was gunned down in that same stretch that was being patrolled. The camera panned around the surrounding area; brown lawn, broken fences, battered cars, and African Americans wandering the streets. They take a turn down a street by the nickname of 'crack-row'. Officer Medina stated that this stretch is "... infested with drug dealers, and persons carrying guns. It's notorious for violent crimes against not only citizens but police officers as well."⁷³ Using the phrasing like 'infested', 'notorious', and 'haven' to describe the areas where these people live builds up a negative reinforcement towards these individuals that are then shown on TV.

In the same video the mayor of Polo Alto was interviewed about the crime in the previously reported area. He said that one out of five are involved in illegal activities in that area. When reporter John Falmer interviewed Sheriff Richard Rainey of Contra Costa County on the success of the War on Drugs, Sheriff Rainey said it's, "very obviously right now that the way that it is

⁷² Mike Kelly, "Dope 079". Archive.org. (1988).

⁷³ Ibid.

increasing, we are losing the War. There is no way that we are controlling the amount of cocaine and crack that is out on the street.”⁷⁴ His department is outmanned and underfunded for the task that they are trying tackle. When the clip ends the viewer is left in a state of discomfort ability because as explained above, there was a huge budget increase to tackle the war on drugs, almost double. There was also a new anti-drug abuse act created as well to curve the usage and dealing of crack, yet when the reporters are there with the police officers getting their take on the situation, they are blunt with their information. It has a hopeless sense to it in a way that even though all of this has been done to stop the drug, these officers are still losing the war. There is a drug that is ravaging these areas and greatly impacting these people, and the response to the situation is to send out patrol units to make arrests. This being portrayed on the screen builds up the connection between arrests and crack, not health crisis and crack. By having officers explain that they are losing the War on Drugs, that they can’t get a control on crack and cocaine coming in, and don’t have enough officers, the viewer is left with the fear of losing this War and fear that these drugs could make an impact on their lives and communities.

With the display of officers making arrests, and comments and statements by them that they are underfunded and losing the War, the talk of how to get a better handle on the situation is common. KPIX News, San Francisco News, held a televised town hall meeting with various citizens ranging from those concerned about crack to those who’ve been directly affected by the drug. Tanya, a young African American woman spoke about the lure to the drug dealing life and that, “they see this lifestyle that they wanna live, and because of drugs, once you get involved with the drug thing, the money is so quick and so fast you completely get caught up and don’t think of morals.”⁷⁵ One teen says how her high school was nicknamed “Homicide High” due to all of the murders

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ “48 HRS Crack Street 2” Archive.org 9/14/1989.

surrounding the school. The host of the town hall asks whether or not people would be more inclined to pay more in taxes that would directly go to countering the crack and cocaine dealers. It is reported that over 630 call in and 57% say they would pay higher taxes to counter the situation. The previous examples by officers and their interaction with crack were all in the surrounding Bay area, the same place that the town hall was hosted. The constant coverage of the effects that crack was having was slowly starting to creep into other's fears that they too could meet a similar state.

The coverage of drug kingpins would also be a topic in the news. With the 100:1 cocaine to crack ratio, it wasn't hard for the police to shake down someone and find a small amount of crack on them. This method was proving successful since there was a growing increase in those being sent to prison for the possession of crack. However, this won't stop crack because there will always be a user. The police would go after the supplier in an effort to stop the flow of drugs. For Colombia it was Pablo Escobar and the Medellin Cartel, in Oakland it would be a new person every few years taking over their predecessor's territory.

Taking down the kingpin responsible for the supply of drugs in an effort to stop the drug, however this task would prove to be more difficult than one would expect. The downside to bringing down a drug lord was a new one taking their place and having to start the whole process of building a new case all over again. As a result the control of crack and gang turf wars were showing no slowing down with the removal of major dealers. On local Los Angeles evening news, a news anchor releases the details of an Oakland local who had been arrested for crack cocaine possession. "A 20-year-old man accused of being Oakland's crack cocaine kingpin appeared in court today. He has been arrested in what police call the "biggest crack bust in city history." Police say gang warfare may break out to fill the power vacuum because of Reed's

arrest.”⁷⁶ First the graphic of pills and powder with the bolded white letters reading ‘crack’ followed by a courtroom sketch of Darryl Reed.⁷⁷ This would be a common sight when showing arrested drug dealers/kingpins, a courtroom sketch with a brief overview of them.

When looking further into an *LA Times* article on the same subject, it was stated that “In three years, Reed rose from street dealer to multimillionaire, according to Oakland narcotics Officer Ken Scott... Agents suspect that Reed may have taken over some of the territory previously controlled by reputed Oakland drug lord Rudy Henderson, who awaits trial in federal court on narcotics charges.”⁷⁸ This would be a common issue for law enforcement at the time in regard to the arrest of major drug dealers. At the time of his arrest Reed had control in “... East Oakland, West Oakland and North Oakland”⁷⁹ and now that territory is open for the taking. Reed on his way out and territory wide open. Reed seized his territory from his predecessor, Rudy Henderson, and now Reed’s territory will be fought over and seized just like the time before him. With one taking control after the next, the last major drug dealer of Oakland would be Anthony Flowers who would be sentenced in 1999 for his control of East Oakland for his reign between 1988 and 1994.⁸⁰

Between Flowers, Reed, and Henderson, the coverage of drug dealers controlling territory in Oakland was nothing new. Felix Mitchell was the original drug kingpin who turned Oakland into a drug cornerstone of the country back in the 70s.⁸¹ The predominant drug sold by this organization would be heroin but would shift to cocaine and crack cocaine towards the mid-1980s.⁸² When

⁷⁶ “Dope 094”. Archive.org. (1988).

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ United Press International. “Reputed Oakland Drug Kingpin Charged After Cocaine Lab Raid”. *Los Angeles Times*, (1988).

⁷⁹ David Debolt, “Oakland ‘crack king’ Darryl Reed gets clemency from Obama”. *The Mercury News* (2016).

⁸⁰ Thaa Walker, “Drug Kingpin's Sentencing Ends Bloody Era in Oakland / Decades of turf wars over as citizens reclaim their city”. *SFGate*, (1999).

⁸¹ Austin Hsu, “Felix Wayne Mitchell (“Felix the Cat”) (1954-1986)”. *Black Past*, (2018).

⁸² Ibid.

describing how to maintain control over their turf, it was stated that many of the techniques used are now the basis of modern gang violence. “These techniques included the use of children as delivery agents and spotters along with drive-by shootings to punish both their enemies and disobedient clients.”⁸³ The usage of drive-by shootings was nothing new in the world of crime. It had become popular during the prohibition era but faded out of fashion. It wasn’t until Felix Mitchell came along that it saw its reboot and one that would stick. It would become synonymous with gang violence and portrayed on the big screen to a great extent.

With constant coverage in various forms of media regarding the relationship between gangs, poverty, and crack, the targeting of minorities, mostly African Americans would be the target. When examining the number of arrests made from the War on Drugs, African Americans make up almost 30% of all drug related arrests even though they only make up 12.5% of the population.⁸⁴ This means that they are six times more likely to be arrested than their white peers. The targeting by police towards African Americans was shown on the news whether it be in print or televised, and the coverage and reporting of gang violence in California would reinforcement this idea that the War on Drugs really is a war. However, all of this would be provided as sources for film where the reality of these area will be put on the silver screen for everyone to see.

Boyz n the Hood. In 1991, the film *Boyz n the Hood* was released depicting the events previously discussed like gang violence, drug use, and crime. The film was written and directed by John Singleton, an African American who wanted to make an authentic film about gangs, drugs, and poverty. Starring rapper Ice Cube of the group NWA, Cuba Gooding Jr. and Laurence

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Betsy Pearl, “Ending the War on Drugs: By the Numbers”. Center for American Progress, (2018).

Fishburne, the strong African American leads would drive home the emphasis of racial discrimination from police and gang violence in the film.

The film begins in 1984 with the child version of the cast. A young Tre, who will be played by Cuba Gooding Jr. later in the film, is reprimanded by his teacher for having a volatile temper and lack of respect for authority. When his mother finds out, she plans on sending him off to live with his father in hopes he'll learn better morals and life lessons. Upon meeting his father, young Trey is ordered by his father to rake his leaves to learn about responsibility and hard work. Tre's father asks the boys if they rake the lawn he'll pay them five dollars to which one of the boys responds with "that ain't shit. I'd make more money doing nothin." Trey's father quickly asks, "doing what?" to which 'Doughboy', Tre's friend, said "working for his uncle."⁸⁵ Chris is eluding to doing criminal activities with his uncle for better pay. As a result of choosing that path in life, when Chris is shown later in the film as an adult, he is in a wheelchair having been paralyzed from a shooting. The last we see of 'Doughboy' and Chris in their childhood they are being arrested on the charges of shoplifting, small crime that would lead to greater criminal affairs in their lives.

When the viewer sees these children again, they are late teens at a BBQ, and the choices they made as children has molded them into the end product. Tre was sent off to his father to become a mature and responsible young man and he does just that. He is a good student, works at a clothing store, and plans on going to college. 'Doughboy', played by Ice Cube, is celebrating his release from prison and being a member of the local gang the Crips. He is accompanied by two new friends who are also Crip members, Dooky and Monster. Ricky, one of Tre and 'Doughboy's original friends his planning on becoming a star athlete and go to college. His only struggle is his grades.⁸⁶ Tre is one of the few from the film who has his life together, the only other one is his

⁸⁵ John Singleton, *Boyz n the Hood*. Columbia Pictures. (1991).

⁸⁶ Ibid.

girlfriend. The rest are trapped in their environment while Ricky sees his way out by means of sports.

Similar to the death of Len Bias, Ricky's life is cut short by means of the criminal underworld. Ricky is gunned down by some Bloods in a drive-by shooting by means of a retaliation for his affiliation to his half brother 'Doughboy'. While he saw his path out of the life of poverty, and drugs and gang violence, it would be ended by the cruel environment that he lived in. But, these crimes don't go unpunished in that life. 'Doughboy', Monster, and Dooky drive around at night looking for the Bloods that murdered his half brother. Similar to the Crips, they too commit a drive-by shooting and gun down the three Crips.⁸⁷ 'Doughboy' talks to Tre the next day and acknowledges that the Bloods are now going to be gunning for him. In the epilogue it is stated that 'Doughboy' is murdered two weeks later and both Tre and his girlfriend go to college. Like Chris one could end up paralyzed from a shooting, like Ricky one could end up being a casualty of an innocent killed in the war between gangs, or like 'Doughboy', one could end up murdered for continuing the feud between gangs. Unlike *Scarface*, there is nothing glamorous or redeeming about this film. *Scarface* had flashy cars and clothes, large wads of money, and a bright fun environment. When comparing it to *Boyz n the Hood*, the colors are darker, there aren't any flashy clothes or cars, and no one seems to be having as much fun as Tony Montana was.

When it comes to looking at racial discrimination, there are two instances in the film where Tre is involved. The first being when he is a child living with his father. A man breaks into their house but Tre's father fires two shots at him and he escapes. The police are called but it takes over an hour for them to arrive. When they do arrive, it is a white and black officer. However, the racism doesn't come from the white officer. The white officer says "we got a call of a burglary here?" to

⁸⁷ Ibid.

which Tre's father responds “, yeah, that was about an hour ago.” The black officer aggressively interjects and says “Whoa! We didn't ask you that.”⁸⁸ Hostile tension grows between Tre's father and the black officer. The white officer calmly asks questions and tries to get a statement. When it is stated that nothing is missing the black officer says, “Good. No need to make out a report.” When the white officer heads back to his vehicle the black officer leans in and glares then says, “you know its too bad you didn't get him. It would be one less nigga on the streets to worry about.”⁸⁹

When Tre is older, he has another run in with the police and he receives more harassment from the same black officer. They are profiled as suspects after a shooting and are pulled over. Upon stepping out of the vehicle, Ricky is questioned by a white officer and Tre is shoved around the hood of his car. When asked if he has drugs on him, Tre responds with “No”, but the officer doesn't like the response and turns him around saying, “you think you tough?”⁹⁰ as he put the barrel of his pistol up to Tre's neck to instill fear in him. The viewer sees the blatant targeting of both Ricky and Tre because of the color of their skin and the officer feels he has the authority to harass Tre because he is black and a suspect. Since the launch of the War on Drugs, there has been a growing number of police harassment towards African Americans.⁹¹ From Nixon's Chief domestic advisory advisor stating that the War was to target blacks, and that they make up a significantly larger portion of incarcerated inmates for drug possession in comparison to whites, the shake down and targeting of them by police was proving to be successful and displayed here

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Fabricant MC. “War crimes and misdemeanors: Understanding “zero-tolerance” policing as a form of collective punishment and human rights violation.” *Drexel Law Review*. (2011) 373–414.

in *Boyz n the Hood*. Another film where this would be displayed would be the film *Straight Outta Compton* based off the group NWA and named after their album.

Straight Outta Compton. The scene that is focused on here would be a police harassment that blatantly targets the group solely because they are black. A squad car pulls up and similarly to the officers in *Boyz n the Hood*, the officers are both black and white. The black officer does most of the talking as refers to the men as “niggas” and orders them to get on the ground. As more squad cars pull up they are forced to the ground. The black officer knocks the drink out of one of their hands.⁹² When their manager comes out of the building, he sees his musicians on the ground. He asks what is going on to which the black officer responds with “We’re checking these bangers to make sure they are clean.”⁹³ Their manager tries to explain that they are rappers but the officer’s rebuttal is that rap isn’t an art. “These clients of yours look like gang members.” is spoken by the black officer. As the manager starts to yell at the officers for police harassment and racism, he tells the group to get up. As Easy-E, one of the members, starts to get up, he is forced down on his face by a white officer. They force the manager to step back and the group to stay where they are. Everyone is still for about 10 seconds and then the officers let them up as a way of getting one last jab at them in a way of showing the power they have over the situation. As they go to walk back in the manager tells them to be quiet and just walk in. The black officer shoots back with “you heard what your massa said. Get inside. Boy!”. to which the manager fires back with a well-deserved, “you shut the fuck up.”⁹⁴ Similar to the DEA in *Narcos* being the white saviors to Colombia, the manager here is the white savior to the group. Being the lone man to stand up for the beaten down black men on the ground and make a stand against the racist

⁹² F. Gary Gray, *Straight Outta Compton*. Legendary Pictures. (2015)

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

officers. In *Boyz n the Hood* there was none of that, it was survival, but in these newer pictures the wrongs of the past have been re-written in an effort to show that there were still good white people in a time of hardship as well as to ease the White guilt.

Conclusion. The racial disparity between both African Americans and Latin Americans when it comes to cocaine has been demonstrated through pop culture that associating cocaine with these people of color through movies and shows, heavily criminalizing the drug, then vilifying them on the news, allowed for the support from the American people to lock them up and throw away the key. The coverage of violence like in Miami or Colombia, or Oakland would be used as inspiration for film. Violent and crass characters would be portrayed in these events for the viewer to watch for entertainment purposes.

When looking at the impact that this coverage and depiction has had on Latin Americans, racially charged comments based on the portrayal of these people has made it to the level of the President of the United States. In the 2016 presidential election Donald Trump talked about those across the border and was quoted with saying, “They’re bringing drugs, they’re bringing crime. They’re rapists, and some I assume are good people... Drugs are coming across, pouring across”.⁹⁵ Stereotypical and racially charged remarks like such would be supported by the extensive coverage of the news and impact on film. The violence from the Latin Americans would be depicted in *Scarface* and *Narcos*. These ill-informed remarks made from decades old movies and television has had the impact to reach the level of the president of the United States.

Targeting of African Americans is nothing new in America. Here the impact that a 19-year span has had from 1975 to 1994 has been examined through the coverage of how this drug

⁹⁵ “Drug Dealers, Criminals, Rapists’: What Trump Thinks of Mexicans.” BBC News. BBC, (2016).

epidemic was handled. It was met with harsh sentences with crimes made to target those of color. Today there is another epidemic, the opioid epidemic. Only instead of vilifying those users on the news, creating a new bill to lock them up for many years, and portraying them as criminals in films and shows, those that suffer from the addiction are viewed not as criminals, but as suffering from a disease. As of 2019, 49,860 people have died of an opioid overdose with 72% being White.⁹⁶ When it was Latin and African Americans affected by cocaine, they were portrayed as bad, but when it happens to White people, it's the opposite. To those abusing opioids, the same should be said to them as it was to people of color abusing cocaine. Just Say No.

⁹⁶ "Opioid Overdose Deaths by Race/Ethnicity" *KFF*, (2021)