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Spanish is called la plaza, the main square. That was go back to the earliest days of Mexican drug trafficking. But it wasn't traffickers taking it out; it was policemen and politicians. They wanted their piece of a protection racket.

The government war on drugs in Mexico wasn't an import from the United States, at least not in the beginning. A century ago, an authoritarian Mexican government decided to crack down on a drug that had come to be associated with poor and indigenous users. Introduced in the sixteenth century by the Spanish, who wished to grow hemp for rope, cannabis gradually gained a Mexican name, marijuana, and became a home remedy. It became the drug of choice during the Mexican Revolution. In his myth-busting and personally enjoyable history *The Dope*, Benjamin T. Smith relays one theory about where the word originated: "Juan was the name given to the average Mexican soldier. His camp wife was often named Maria. Maria-Juan became Marijuana." Mexico banned growing and selling the herb in 1923, before the United States did. Mexico also banned the importation of opium, which prompted enterprising farmers to start planting poppies in the Golden Triangle, an area of northern Mexico that now produces a healthy portion of the United States' cocaine.

Once the United States banned marijuana in 1937, raising it to one the border became good business. Mexican families smuggled alcohol, then marijuana, then cocaine. According to Smith, the Mexican government began cashing in on the trade, too. The first protection rackets emerged in northern Mexico, creating a model that persists today: policemen and politicians take regular payments to look the other way when certain people move drugs, then crack down on their rivals. Everyone is happy: there are no arrests to publicize, and those in on the arrangement make plenty of money.

Smith writes that some of the early protection rackets helped fund schools and infrastructure, especially in Ciudad Juárez and Baja

California. Later, local politicians tended to line their own pockets. But the traffickers wouldn't pay up without persuasion. If that proved violent, all the better: protection rackets could be made to look like crackdowns. That's where the "drug war" violence began. Drugs had to be made illegal; traffickers needed to learn to accept being shaken down. Smith writes of an early governor of Baja California, Esteban Cantón, who decided that imposing the change involved "an unpleasant errand. To prove his antimarijuana credentials and persuade traffickers to pay up, Cantón killed a group of established traffickers."

By the Seventies, traffickers were making money hand over fist, and the local protection rackets went national. Drug lords had some police badges. One Mexican president, José López Portillo, had his childhood friend school bus back his schoolyard bullies hand at the head of the Mexico City police. That friend, Arturo Durazo Moreno, also happened to be the head of a major protection racket helping run cocaine up to the United States. Durazo had his cronies, who had no interest in stopping trafficking but came down hard on their rivals. Unlike Zavala, Smith is more focused on the history of the trade itself than on narcoculture. But he does note that the Federal Judicial Police—later shut down because of corruption and criminal activity—developed a style of dress that one DEA agent called "Mexican federale couture": tailored leisure suits, cowboy-style cowboy boots, and gold bracelets with their names engraved in diamonds.

The book is built on archival research, interviews with former DEA officials, and various attempts at triangulating sources to estimate the size of the industry over time—though Smith does cite Peter Andreas and Kelly Greenhill's observation that "drug statistics are basically like lines of cocaine. The more you know about how they were produced, the less attractive they seem." Smith credits Mexican and foreign journalists who have told parts of this story before, but he has

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