



# COCAINE

GLOBAL HISTORIES

edited by

**Paul Gootenberg**

ROUTLEDGE





"Truly international in its scope, **Cocaine** is the first historical survey of perhaps the most paradoxical of this century's major narcotics. Readers will welcome the balanced attention given to the scientific, medical, commercial, legal and cultural dimensions of the story."

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Originally a medical miracle, cocaine is now a dangerous pariah drug. **Cocaine: Global Histories** examines the rise and fall of this notorious substance.

Drawing on exciting new global perspectives, **Cocaine** analyses and rethinks the origins of the modern drug cocaine. Themes explored include:

- ✦ the early manufacture, sale and control of cocaine in the United States
- ✦ Amsterdam's complex cocaine network
- ✦ Japan and the unknown Southeast Asian cocaine industry
- ✦ export of cocaine prohibitions to Peru
- ✦ sex, drugs and race in London

**Cocaine** is essential reading for anyone concerned with the place of drugs in the modern world.

Paul Gootenberg is Professor of History at the State University of New York, Stony Brook, and author of *Between Silver and Guano* (Princeton, 1989) and *Imagining Development* (California, 1993).

## HISTORY



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# Foreword

*Ethan Nadelmann*

During the late 1980s – precisely one decade ago – cocaine became something of a national obsession in the United States. The war on drugs, rhetorically dormant since the Nixon Administration, found a new life in cocaine. TV “news” programs reported day after day on drug enforcement operations, “crack babies,” and “cocaine-related” acts of violence. News magazines put it on their covers. President Bush gave a nationally televised speech to the nation on the cocaine threat. Public opinion polls pointed to drugs – notably cocaine – as the “number one” concern of American citizens. Outside of the United States, Colombia reminded some of Chicago during Prohibition, albeit on a much more substantial and deadly scale. Bolivia and Peru were implicated as well as producers and exporters of the raw and semi-refined coca materials used to produce cocaine. Elsewhere, in Europe, Asia, Africa, and beyond, cocaine was largely a non-issue, though some cocaine “scares” were to erupt there, too.

Drug crazes typically come and go, never lasting too long. They usually focus on a single drug, one that either is new or seems new. The rapid spread of crack – a smokeable form of cocaine – was new. Cocaine itself was not, but few Americans knew anything of its history. There were, in effect, few reality checks on depictions or perceptions of cocaine. Anything could be said, and almost anything was, about the drug’s unique powers to destroy the bodies and souls of United States citizens and South American nations, or how the problem had emerged. Now the rage about cocaine has mostly passed in the United States, even as cocaine markets expand in other parts of the world.

Drug histories – particularly those of the scholarly caliber exemplified in this volume – rarely reflect well upon either contemporary drug warriors or their predecessors. Drug warriors, and the panics they stimulate, tend to focus on the drugs *per se* as a singular or at least dominant cause of multiple ills. They tend to portray all use of a particular drug as aberrant and destructive. They assume both the necessity of prohibitionist laws and the immorality of using particular drugs. And they rely heavily on simplistic caricatures of participants in drug markets. Drug histories, by contrast, tend to emphasize complexity and nuance: causal relationships become cloudier; political motivations more complicated; and drug-use patterns more diverse and interesting. Both drug use and drug



policies are analyzed in terms of the "sets and settings" (the social, cultural, and temporal contexts) in which they occur.

Paul Gootenberg's edited volume is valuable in so many ways. As the first substantial book on global cocaine history, it automatically makes a major contribution to the small but growing interdisciplinary arena of drug history, which has focused (at least as far as "illegal" drugs are concerned) largely on the opiates. The authors have all made valuable use of archives, both virgin and well worn, from around the world. They build responsibly on the extant literature, demonstrating a level of sophistication and insight that heralds a maturation of the field. And Gootenberg's talents are evident in the elegant complementarity of the diverse methodologies and perspectives displayed in the various chapters. It is a shame that no such book (aside from some journalistic attempts) was available a decade ago, when it might have provided at least a modest antidote to the ahistorical tone of political and journalistic commentary on cocaine, the cocaine trade, and the laws prohibiting cocaine. It is a healthy sign that now the drug policy reform movement, indirectly at least, has helped open doors to a new level of intellectual complexity on the origins of today's dilemmas with cocaine.

For example, Joseph Spillane's chapter on cocaine use in the United States between 1880 and 1920 is particularly useful in this regard. Spillane reminds us that cocaine was consumed in a great variety of oral concoctions, some containing modest amounts of fluid extracts of coca and others quite potent concentrations of pure cocaine. His analysis strongly suggests that the first cocaine prohibitions were most effective in suppressing the most benign forms of the drug. Today coca producers in Bolivia and Peru petition international organizations for permission to once again export products containing extracts of coca. Spillane's discussion makes one wonder if low-potency coca-based products might re-emerge as benign but profitable products in international trade.

The history of psychoactive drugs is almost inevitably a history of the regulation and prohibition of particular drugs. Gootenberg and his collaborators are highly sophisticated in their analysis, whether the focus is the political contexts and forces that resulted in cocaine's prohibition in different countries, or the impact of new regulations and prohibitions on drug markets and drug-use patterns. The editor in particular grasps that the emergence of global prohibition regimes is best understood by compiling and weaving together comparative and transnational studies anchored upon serious archival research. A new picture or story of cocaine develops. It is worth noting that no comparable volume has yet analyzed the evolution of opiate controls around the world (and indeed I know of no comparable analysis of the rise of alcohol prohibition in various parts of the world earlier in the twentieth century).

The history of cocaine in the twentieth century has not been pretty. Many millions of people have enjoyed the drug, and many with no regrets. But there is no forgetting the devastation associated with cocaine, particularly among those economically disadvantaged and socially dislocated folk who let cocaine get the better of them. Nor can we ignore the hundreds of thousands incarcerated in



jails and prisons, the tens of billions of dollars devoted to the war on cocaine, the devastating violence and corruption generated by the interplay of prohibitionist economics and morals, and the vast waste of human and economic resources devoted to "combating" cocaine. Taken together, the articles in this volume leave the reader with a set of questions worth asking before embarking on the drug crusades of the *next* century: Was all this necessary? Was the emergence of such a comprehensive global cocaine prohibition regime inevitable? Did it prevent a global epidemic of deadly cocaine abuse or did it result in more harm than good? Might coca and cocaine have been "domesticated" into contemporary societies with far fewer negative consequences than have resulted under the current regime? Is a more balanced cocaine regulatory regime possible in the *next* century? And can we learn anything from this century's experience that might help us avoid comparable disasters with different psychoactive substances in the future?

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