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Cocaine: White Gold Rush in Peru. Edmundo Morales. Illustrations. University of Arizona Press, Tucson, Arizona 85719. 1989. 228 pp. \$24.95. ISBN 0-8165-1066-0.

This balanced evaluation of the current problem of cocaine in the world is here analyzed by a writer—combining journalistic skill and scholarship—who, as a Peruvian, is well qualified to present an authoritative survey of the complex, often inter-related aspects of the newest drug episode in the industrialized western nations. The problem is not so simple as some of the politicians would like to make it. Would that officials of our United States Department of State and our drug-enforcement officials read and appreciate many of the vital points presented in this valuable book.

The author does not consider “the medical and biological aspects of coca chewing.” He states, quite correctly, that “coca chewing is essentially identified with work situations, rituals and religious practices.” He points out that many Indian and mestizo men in the Andean highlands “chew approximately one ounce of coca [leaf] per day.”

A total of 16,906 hektars of land in Peru are dedicated to legal coca production for Indian and other users of the leaf; and the government set up an administration: “Estanco de la Coca.” Now Peru alone can supply annually, mostly in the illicit market, 3360 metric tons of coca paste or approximately 900 metric tons of cocaine hydrochloride.

The book goes in depth into the cost of legal and illegal coca cultivation in Chapter 3. In Chapter 4 the author discusses the beginnings of the underground economy and, amongst other aspects, the distribution and marketing of the products of the leaves, detailing descriptions of the “Kitchens and cooks” and “Structure and division of labour.” Chapter 5 considers “Cosmetic Development and Coca-Dollar Dependency” in which an analysis of the rush for dollars and the social impact of cocaine supply and “dollars in action” are analyzed; in the same chapter, coca-paste addiction is adequately considered. Chapter 6 is dedicated to the “politics of control and addiction,” an excellent analysis which every law-person involved in narcotics prevention should be required to read. The author’s suggestions bear serious consideration. The final chapter, No. 7, is devoted to the “Riddle of the Cocaine Sphinx” in which the author attempts, quite successfully, to separate the legitimate coca-chewing native from the illicit drug cultivation of thousands of acres of the coca plant. He further points out that the drug problem in the United States “will continue as long as there is demand” for the drug, and the “executive orders alone will not suppress the economic forces of supply and demand.”

As a botanist who has worked in the Colombian Amazon for 48 years and who believes that the Indians should not be deprived of their coca-chewing (at least until we outlaw tobacco!), I applaud the author of this book and hope that it will somehow reach our government personnel assigned to any aspect of the control of cocaine production and distribution. There are not many books on the subject so authentic as this one by Edmundo Morales.

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