

MODULE 3 - HOW DID WE GET HERE?

LECTURE 11 – FEDERAL AGENCIES – THE DEA

WORSE OFF THAN THE FBI – TOUGH STUFF

The DEA has it even worse than the FBI.⁸⁰ The DEA's main mission is to investigate drug-related crimes, which are **Victimless** crimes involving the illegal exchange of substances (in this case, drugs) between willing participants. Similar to Political crimes, drug crimes do not normally have clearly identified victims, they are generally not reported to the police, and the sources in the FUGITIVE phase are generally reluctant to provide information because of their personal involvement in crime. Therefore, the DEA must use secretive **Government Spy GOAL, STYLE and FOCUS** in order to collect and use information in the PLAN phase to prevent them from occurring, to detect them as they occur in the ACTION and ESCAPE phases, or to proactively induce people to commit them under agency control (**heh-heh, yeah, ---"induce"---, ---"control"--- wonderful!**)

DEA agents must often operate covertly and autonomously in underworld environments where it is difficult to directly supervise agents, and they are more vulnerable to charges of corruption and unethical behavior. Just as with the Government Spy, Secretive Rogue and Inquisitor Detective, their actions often generate fear and suspicion among the public, especially when the DEA targets US citizens involved in drug dealing. They also raise critical questions regarding personal privacy.⁸⁰

DEA agents are dedicated law enforcement officers who, like their counterparts everywhere since the Government Spy was invented, place their lives on the line to accomplish a mission that is often highly hazardous, almost impossible to accomplish effectively, and seemingly never-ending. They are the heroes when they do their job well against foreigners, but they are often subjected to legal and public reprobation when they investigate US citizens.

Unfortunately for the DEA, it **did not have a powerful political leader** or a significant Visible crimes mission that it could use to nurture a public perception that it was morally superior, highly ethical and idealistic like the traditional Classical Detective, or even the Hard-boiled Classical Detective. Instead, it's GOALS (prevent and detect), STYLE (proactive, covert, and often psychologically coercive), and FOCUS (offenders), aligned much more with the dreaded Government Spy image in the eyes of the public. Its investigative efforts were hard to quantify (it's hard to measure PREVENTION), many of its operations had to remain secret (they couldn't publicize DETECTION), and the only time anybody ever seemed to hear about them was when they

were reported to have either screwed up or attacked an “innocent” US citizen.⁸⁰ I often wondered when I heard the term “war on drugs,” whether it was a war on the drug criminals or DEA. And when I hear people saying we’re losing the war on drugs (if in fact we are), I wonder if it’s because we don’t provide the sufficient resources to our drug-fighting agencies because we mistrust them. Seems like if we, as citizens, really wanted to win that war, we’d go about resolving our internal misgivings about the tools and techniques needed to get the job done. But that’s just me.

“Going Undercover as a Mexican Drug Lord” Is a powerful 8-minute YouTube video is an agent insider’s view of some of the types of work DEA gets involved in. It has its graphic moments and provides a gut-wrenching perspective of the drug war. It shows some of the real-world situations DEA agents can find themselves in. This can be some pretty rough stuff. **Hats off.**

We use words like quantifying things and moral superiority and direct supervision – but the reality of these types of crimes can present **quite a challenge** to this type of language. It’s like trying to swim to safety without getting wet. Do we risk perishing for fear of getting wet, or do we get wet and risk perishing in an effort to survive? What would you do, HESITANT TRAVELER?

As a result, the DEA has historically been **viewed with suspicion** by both the public and the US Congress, because nobody can see what they are doing, and their targets (drug gangs, drug lords) are among the most vicious and corrupting groups there are. The targets seem to have no redeeming moral or social value, and associating with them in any capacity, never mind as undercover agents, just seems to be a little bit - **dirty**. Thus, the DEA has remained a relatively weak, decentralized, underfunded, and some say ineffective, agency in comparison to the FBI.⁸⁰

It’s just **not very politically popular** to give a lot of money to the DEA and then not be able to account for it or see tangible results, sometimes, especially at the national level. Granted that people who suffer and die from drugs (there’s that VICTIM thing again), and their families and friends, may view things differently. But unfortunately, like I said before, they are generally in the minority (like, poor, scared or dead). And in the media headlines regarding spectacular cases, VICTIMS often get lost or forgotten in all the **hoopla** surrounding some of the larger social issues of the day, such as racism, sexism, immigration issues, class warfare, etc.

The above discussions about the FBI and DEA continue to pound home the **age-old fears** of the citizens regarding corruption, abuse of power and injustice. They highlight the extents we are willing to go to in order

to prevent our police and investigative agencies from infringing on our individual rights, while at the same time providing social control in our communities. Sometimes it seems each generation fights the same battle between being willing to endure the harms and the staggering costs of crime, in order to protect our personal freedoms.

IN DEFENSE OF DETECTIVES

I am naturally **inclined to defend** federal and local agencies and their personnel whenever they are attacked, because I had first-hand experience with the nature of their jobs and the difficulty in doing them well. Although a stalwart defense may work well in a courtroom where it can be counterbalanced by a stalwart prosecution and scrubbed down by an even-handed judicial process, I must admit that I cannot always blindly defend investigators. After all, it is our job to fairly and professionally investigate allegations of wrong-doing and deal with facts in order to serve justice. (Recall **Peelian Principle #5**: Police seek and preserve public favour not by catering to the public opinion but by constantly demonstrating **absolute impartial service to the law**.)

That means that, for all the great things Edgar J. **Hoover** did for the FBI and our country, I cannot ignore his faults. And not all FBI or DEA agents or investigators from any agency, including mine, are perfect human beings. Sometimes our very own people can be our worst enemy (I mentioned Aldrich Ames and Robert Hanssen already). And every day in our country a local agency police officer or investigator is accused of, or even caught, doing something illegal.

Fortunately, it seems, we all don't hear about every single transgression, or we might really begin to distrust our police. For example, if just **1%** of the roughly **800,000 cops** gets **dinged** for something every year, that's like 8,000 bad-cop stories, or about 22 every day. That could be a lot of bad news to **swallow** about the people who are sworn to "protect and serve" us. But, one might retort, do you think you could do any better? Why don't you go ahead and try? Uncle CJ wants you! He'll even give you a club and a gun to help you do the job! Now that sounds like a real deal to me.

The police and investigator activities should always be subjected to at least local public scrutiny - after all, ultimately, the public is our bosses – see Sir Peel. Or better yet, you coppers check out where the money in your last paycheck came from. But it's also important to recognize that the good far outweighs the bad, and that actions really do have consequences. But sometimes, "consequences" is just a euphemism for "VICTIMS." **I'm just saying....** So are the **VICTIMS the main thing, or what?**

Well, this has all been very interesting, I must say. But where has it gotten us to? I mean, by understanding the history of policing and investigations, now I have a better feel of how we all got here. But I don't think we're quite there, or "here," yet, are we? Oh, that's right, we didn't do the Community Policing Era yet. I'll bet that's what the next lecture is about.