

DEA Museum Lecture Series, November 6, 2014

Targeting the Mafia: FBN, Organized Crime, and Drugs.

Dr. John Coleman

Sean Fearn: Good day, ladies and gentlemen, and welcome to the third and final program in our Fall DEA Museum Lecture Series, themed this fall around the 100th anniversary of federal drug law enforcement. Now, just a quick side note. Out of courtesy to our speaker, and to our - your fellow audience members, if I could ask you to please silence your cell phones or other electronic devices.

The Godfather, The Sting, The Untouchables, Goodfellas. If the number of hit movies is any indication, America has a love affair with the Mafia. You know the scenes: Tommy Guns, fedoras, gripping the running boards on old Buicks, and inevitably someone ends up face-down in a plate of spaghetti, the victim of a Mob hit. With real names like Willie "The Creep," Tony "Ducks," Tommy "The Nose," Don Cheech, Don Vito, and, of course, "Lucky" Luciano, these individuals really did exist.

So, what role did the Mafia play, and what role did Mafia families play in early drug trafficking in this country? And how did the feds get a handle on it? What are some of the lessons learned, and are there similarities to today's drug trafficking organizations? We touched a little bit on the Mafia in our other two lectures earlier this fall, themed around the 100th anniversary. Today, we're going to go in depth as we look back at DEA, then known as the Federal Bureau of Narcotics or the FBN.

Our guest speaker today is one of the narcotic agents that was involved in investigations of the Mafia in his early years and early days on the job. Dr. John Coleman started his career with the Federal Bureau of Narcotics in 1965. His assignments in the field included Paris and Marseille, France; Boston; Chicago; Newark; New York; and Washington, D.C. He was Head of DEA Training in Quantico, Virginia, before being appointed as Assistant Administrator of Operations in 1991. Dr.

Coleman or perhaps I should say Special Agent Coleman - and maybe he will share with us today which title he likes best - retired from DEA in 1997.

He is now President of the Prescription Drug Research Center. He has a degree from Iona College; two master's degrees, one from the National College of Education and one from Rutgers; and a doctorate from George Mason University. I ask you to please hold your questions for the end. And if you are watching via our live webcast, you can submit those questions online, and we'll share them with the speaker. We will have an opportunity for questions at the end. Talking to us today, then, ladies and gentlemen, please welcome Dr. John Coleman.

[applause]

John Coleman: Good morning, and thank you all very much for being here today. And thank you, Sean, for your very generous and pleasant introduction. I first of all would like to, of course thank Michele Leonhart and the DEA Executive Staff for inviting me here today as well as, of course, the DEA Museum staff that invited me here. and I have to make a, a personal announcement that I got a call this morning from my daughter, who informed me that my three-year-old grandson will not be able to watch this webinar today because, unfortunately the time frame is in competition with Nickelodeon's Paw Patrol. [laughter] However, in keeping with that theme I, I do have to say that I, I was probably a member of one of the first real paw patrols, [chuckles] called the Federal Bureau of Narcotics. And I have a number of colleagues here in the room today who were with me in that agency.

And it's a wonderful trip down Memory Lane that we're going to make this morning. And I do encourage you to ask questions later on, because this is a topic that, even though I've got some slides with me that will depict certain iconic occurrences over the years in terms of the subject matter any one of those slides could probably consume more than an hour's discussion and we still would not be able to, you know, penetrate the surface. So we learn from each other with questions and answers, and I'll

try to answer your questions. So, think of them as we go along because, again, it's a - it's a very rich and exciting story that I have to tell. And I look forward to hearing your responses.

Now, as I learn how to manipulate this wonderful device - oh. I have to turn it on. There we go. Wonderful. That's my title slide, and that's what we're going to be talking about here this morning for, oh, maybe the next 45 minutes or so. "Targeting the Mafia: the Federal Bureau of Narcotics, Organized Crime, and Drugs."

Now, oftentimes people say, "Well, why, why New York? Why was New York selected to be a sort of birthplace, if you will, of the American Mafia?" Let's look at some of the numbers. Between 1880 and 1920, four million Italian immigrants entered the United States via Ellis Island, which is, of course, New York. three-two - 3.2 million of those were from Southern Italy many from Sicily, which figures prominently in the history of organized crime, Italian organized crime in America as well as, of course, in Italy itself.

Now, many of these people were unskilled workers. They sought employment in construction jobs trucking, or, early on teamsters with horse-drawn wagons freight movers, the docks, longshoremen, etc. These were very ideal sort of jobs for unskilled workers to take. They paid very well, and work was steady and permanent. By the 1930s, almost half of America's imports and exports passed through the Port of New York. So, New York was a, a real, - a sort of hub of economic activity in the United States back in those days.

It's hard to believe when we look at New York the way it is today and see all the skyscrapers and condominiums and entertainment centers and so forth to think that, at one time, it was a manufacturing hub and that there were enormous amount of manufacturing plants in New York making things like garments and clothing heavy equipment in some cases out in the suburb - out in the boroughs, the outer boroughs of

New York. And back in the 1930s, 1 of every 18 Americans was actually you know, living within the five boroughs of New York, New York City.

Now, although the vast majority of Italian immigrants were honest and law-abiding, and many, as you know, went on to become everything from you know, businesspeople to even Supreme Court Justices. So nonetheless, in the beginning, a number of criminals preyed upon many of those immigrant workers that came to New York. And those people who preyed upon them, we would later designate as members of the Mafia. Traditions and customs were brought with these people from their towns and villages back in Italy and also formed in some cases some of the relationships that we'll talk about later on in terms of families and people who belonged to those families, etc.

Now, to show you the sort of graphic of New York this was actually probably taken in the '30s because, as you can maybe see or not Empire State Building is missing. So, it hadn't been erected yet. But as you - the feature I want to point out in this photo of New York, Manhattan and part of Queens and Brooklyn are the docks. As you can see, there are many, many docks along the, the perimeter of Manhattan Island. And to the right of the photograph, you can see docks that are jutting out into the estuary from Brooklyn from the west side of Brooklyn. And there are even some up in Queens at that point. the docks on the east side and west side of Manhattan and the west side and the south side of Brooklyn and around Staten Island, which does not appear in this photograph, provided tens of thousands of jobs for dockworkers, longshoremen as they were called, freight movers, and truck drivers. many of these were organized and unionized by the Mafia.

Now, the Federal Bureau of Narcotics came about in 1930 under President Hoover. And it was about the same time, actually, as the Mafia in New York was really in its prime. The Mafia in New York came into its prime during the years of Prohibition, which were from 1919 to 1933. And they were running the speakeasies and the nightclubs, and they were doing the rum-running from ships at sea that would bring the

booze or alcohol into the U.S. waters within the three-mile limit or just outside the three-mile limit, where they would be met by speedboats and so forth, much the same as what we saw in the '70s and '80s with some of the marijuana smugglers and the mother ships. The rum-running was also driven through Canada, and it was off the coast of North America as well. So, essentially they did a lot of work during Prohibition in getting illicit alcohol into the country and then distributing it to their speakeasies and nightclubs and running these operations in some cases with or without the cooperation of the authorities.

Now, the Federal Bureau of Narcotics was really the first major law enforcement agency to actually recognize the threat of the Mafia's involvement in the heroin trade. Contrary to popular myths - and, again, there are quite a few myths out there, some of which were inspired by the movies and films that Sean described earlier - low-level Mafia members were involved in selling and tableting morphine and heroin pretty much since the 1914 Harrison Narcotic Tax Act. One of the results of that Act in 1914 was to criminalize in a sense the doctors who were supplying medicalized addicts, opiate addicts with heroin or morphine or codeine.

And so, as a result the - being that these registrant doctors now, who were required to register with the Internal Revenue Service, back under the Harrison Narcotic Act - they were no longer able to simply prescribe or dispense narcotics for the purpose of maintaining addiction. For the first time, they had to have a legitimate medical purpose, which is essentially where that concept derives from, that - very applicable to many cases that are even made today by, by DEA's Office of Diversion Control.

As a result, many of these people, and there were quite a few of them. A lot of them were legitimate workers and people you know, not necessarily depicted in some of the films of the time of, of drug addicts, but nonetheless they were addicted to these opiates. They were forced basically into the street to seek street supplies of drugs. And the Mafia or the people who we later call the Mafia were more than willing to supply as much as was needed by the demand in New York at the time.

And so the FBN prepared books called national list violators books and international list violators books, Mafia books. and, and these were sort of - these were given to each new agent as he came on the job. We didn't have any female agents until the late 1960s or so. But back in those days every agent that come on the job was given a copy of these books and told essentially that this was their homework, to go home and, and memorize these books.

And we did. And as young agents, senior agents would sometimes question you about "What was the nickname of 'Ducks' Corallo?" or - well, "Ducks" was the nickname. [chuckles] "What was the nickname of Joe Persico?" "Oh, 'The Snake.'" "You're right." Okay. And if you didn't know the answer, you know, you might have a problem or whatever.

Tell you a funny story about that. We, in New York we were - we used to love to on payday go to a favorite Italian restaurant to have a nice lunch. And the Italian restaurant that we would go to was in Little Italy, which was, of course, the headquarters for the Mafia at the time. And there was a restaurant called Paolucci's. And you would walk up a little flight of stairs. And it was like a tenement area, but a restaurant was carved out on the first floor. And it was a relatively small restaurant with maybe ten round tables in it.

And I remember going there, being invited by some of the senior agents, which was a, a thrill, to be invited by the senior agents. And I went with them one day for lunch. And one of the senior fellows told me - he says, "John, you see those fellows over at that table over there?" And I looked over, and there was a table and about five or six gentlemen sitting around, very well-dressed. And he said, "That's the brass of the New York City Police Department." The headquarters was on Kenmare Street about two or three blocks away. He says, "That's Deputy Chief Inspector. That's Inspector So-and-so. That's the Chief of Detectives. That's ..., " and he pointed out each and every one of these fellows. I said, "Oh."

And he says, "You see that table over there?" And I says, "Yeah." And there was another table with about five or six very nicely-dressed gentlemen. And he goes "That's the table the Mob is at. Those guys are in your national list book." [laughs] And I said, "Well, well, what are we doing here?" you know, sort of naively. Then he goes, "It's okay. It's like an oasis. All the animals are friendly in here." [laughs]

And so this was the way it was back then. And, in fact after lunch and our customary coffee with Sambuca or anisette, whatever they delivered - and they always left the bottle on the table for us, as they did with the cops and the Mob - [chuckles] I was in the men's room. And I was washing my hands, and I was looking in the mirror when a fellow walked in behind me. And he sort of like looked in the mirror, and our eyes caught each other. And I just instinctively said, "Frankie the Bug!" And he goes, "Hi, kid." [chuckles] And it was - it was, - it was Frank Caruso, "Frankie the Bug." I had just read his national list violator page the day before. [laughter]

And I came out, and I went back to the table. And I said to the guys at the table - and I was kind of nervous - and I said, "You're not going to believe what just happened." And he said, "What happened?" I said, "I ran into "Frankie the Bug" in the bathroom." He goes, "So? What happened?" [laughs] I said, "That's it." He said, "That's it? So, what?" You know, it was like this was routine. And you know, that was, - that was an interesting development, because back in those days, it was actually a level of respect between the law enforcement community and the criminal element on certain levels. And, certainly, when it came to food, that was true. [chuckles]

Now, as you can see in this particular slide - maybe you can't see it, but I'll explain it to you. We often think that DEA and FBN and BNDD's undercover work was something developed in, you know, the late '60s, '70s, or '80s. But this is actually from a 1935 newspaper article, and they were calling it a "lab," a morphine lab that was seized in the Bronx when they arrested a chemist, who actually blew up in the lab. The lab blew up. So, nothing's really changed very much from then till now in terms of how we

discover labs. Many are discovered after they blow up. And in this case, in 1935, the lab blew up, and a chemist was refining morphine.

And they had a tableting machine, and they apparently were making the morphine into morphine tablets, because that was common on the street. People were familiar with morphine tablets. There were not that many medicalized addicts, for example, who were aware of or concerned about or interested in buying a white powder, which was later on the type of heroin that was sold in New York. But back in those days, tablets were probably the most frequently-encountered form of drugs on the street. And the police at the time quoted the amount of seized drugs as \$300,000. And in terms of what that would equal today, it's \$4.3 million. So, you can see there, back in 1935, we were - we were making cases on labs and -

Now, the Mafia and the French Connection is an interesting association. The first known report that we can find at the FBN of the New York Mafia members obtaining their heroin from suppliers in Corsica, which is an island in the South of France in the Mediterranean. It's a very large island. It's a - it's a French island although the people who live there, the Corsicans as they call themselves would like to have independence from France and have for many years tried to have, you know, independence from France. It still remains a, a, a French part of metropolitan France.

In 1934, the first report was filed by FBN, indicating that heroin in New York was coming out of Corsica. Of course, World War II interrupted these connections but at the end of the war, saw a rapid expansion so that by the 1950s and 1960s, more than 80% of the heroin consumed in the United States was made in Southern France and controlled by the Unione Corse, which was somewhat the equivalent of the Corsican version or the equivalent of the Mafia, the Sicilian Mafia. There actually was a number of sort of physical connections between Corsica and Sicily. They're both islands. They're both located in the Mediterranean. And, in fact, the Corsican dialect of French is very similar to Italian, Sicilian Italian. And so it was not that difficult for members of those two islands to communicate with each other when necessary.

Now, drugs were shipped directly to New York City often via these transatlantic ships through Cuba, sometimes through Montreal, where French-speaking Unione Corse members had handled the transshipments down to New York overland by truck and car. New York, of course, remained the hub of the heroin market for most of the United States. There was some heroin being imported in those days, brown heroin from Mexico, some from Asia coming in from the West Coast, but it was fractional compared to the 80% of heroin that was coming in from France.

Now, this happy fellow was one of FBN's most satisfied customers. He was also given credit by *Life* magazine, of all sources, in January of 1962 for his outlandish outbursts against the agents. That's - although the, the audio is no longer available, [chuckles] you can imagine what he was saying in this particular picture. His name is Pasquale Fuca. Actually, his name is Joseph Fuca. His stepfather, Pasquale Fuca or "Patsy" Fuca, was I guess in a sense the somewhat beginning of the recent Mafia or the late-stage Mafia. Even though we talked about earlier, it probably - Mafia in New York probably had its origins in the 1920s and 1930s during the Prohibition era.

Weeks before the arrest of these two individuals, a tip had been received that a large shipment was coming in from Marseille, a large shipment of heroin, aboard the SS United States. This was a transatlantic steamship or, or oceangoing vessel at the time, making weekly trips between New York; La Halle, France; and Southampton United Kingdom. Two, two Frenchmen - one was a TV personality, had a television show in France, and the other was a bartender - they were onboard the ship. And the car that they were bringing with them was accompanied baggage. That's how the freight was listed. And, they were placed under surveillance when they arrived.

And FBN agents and New York City Police officers - there were very close working relationships in those days between the New York City Police Department and the Federal Bureau of Narcotics. They followed the, the car and the two Frenchmen. And eventually it led them to the Fuca brothers, who basically had been the connections

to the Mafia for that heroin shipment. And, and they seized 88 pounds of heroin, which was sizable seizure in those days. And you may - if you recall seeing the 1971 movie, The French Connection this was basically the core case about which that movie and the script was designed. The French Connection actually was a series of cases, but most of the scenes or a lot of the scenes that were depicted involving the actual shipment and concealment of the drugs occurred in, in this particular case.

Now, a year later, something very important occurred. There was a relatively low-level member of the Mafia, a fellow by the name of Joe Valachi. And he was - he was doing time behind an FBN narcotics case. And he was in prison in Atlanta, federal prison, federal correctional institution in Atlanta, Georgia. And also in prison at the time with him was Vito Genovese, the head of Genovese Mafia family in New York. Now, Genovese did not get along with the boss of Vito Genovese's group. And there was a little bit of animosity, but in the Atlanta Penitentiary they did meet up from time to time and have, have conversations about their past life and situations involving organized crime and the Mafia.

At one point, according to the report given to the Senate Valachi believed that Vito Genovese had put a - an order out within the prison for him to be hit, for him to be murdered because Genovese thought that perhaps he was cooperating with the authorities. And Valachi became very afraid that he was about to be murdered inside the prison. And one day, as he was in the prison, he noticed a man walking toward him, and he figured this was one of Genovese's people within the prison, one of his organized crime buddies, a fellow by the name of Joseph di Palermo, who Valachi believed was sent over to, to kill him. And so Valachi picked up a piece of construction material, an iron pipe that was laying nearby, and he hit this fellow with it, killing him instantly.

Well, that was a, a murder committed inside a federal prison, which generally lands somebody in, in a death sentence situation. He reached out at the time to his FBN agents in New York, the people who had arrested him, and he indicated that he would

like to talk to them and he needed, you know, some help and protection because his life was in jeopardy. he was - he was brought up to New York. And shortly after that, he was interviewed by the agents. And he agreed to what we would call, say, cooperate. Now, I don't think he would say that, but he agreed to cooperate.

Over the course of about six months or so, he was debriefed by FBN and also by the FBI because the FBI was brought in on a case as well. And ultimately the case of Joe Valachi was brought before John McClellan, who was a senator at the time and who had a - an investigative committee in the Senate Crime - Organized Crime Investigations Committee. And Bobby Kennedy who later became Attorney General Kennedy - Bobby Kennedy was a staff assistant, a staff lawyer for the McClellan Committee at the time. And he was also friends with the Head of the FBN in New York, a fellow by the name of George Gaffney.

And as a result Kennedy and - was able to get, get firsthand information about this whole Joe Valachi talking about organized crime. Valachi was a natural for the Committee, and so the Committee subpoenaed or brought Valachi before the Committee, where he testified. And it was one of the first televised - it was on radio, it was on television. And if you missed it daytime black-and-white show of Joe Valachi you, you could basically tune in to any of the network news shows at night, and they would be replaying portions of the most vivid and detailed descriptions of what was going on in the Mafia at the time. Now, although he was considered a low-level member of the Mafia, Valachi was around when a lot of the big things were happening, like murders and the assassinations of different bosses and underbosses. And he, you know, basically understood the, the function and structure of the Mafia very well, the five, five families in New York. He described them in minute detail to the Senate Committee.

Interestingly, up until the time that Joe Valachi went before the Senate Committee the FBI and J. Edgar Hoover dismissed the idea that organized crime was as organized as it was. they were willing to, to, to acknowledge the fact that there were

many hoodlums, as they called them, and that these hoodlums, many of which were, you know, of, of Italian descent, but they never acknowledged or refused, at least J. Edgar Hoover refused to acknowledge that they were organized in any sort of a cohesive association or group. However, once Valachi's testimony became public before the Senate Committee it was impossible to deny that there was an actual Mafia. And, in fact, when asked about - [clears throat] excuse me - when asked about the Mafia Joe Valachi described it as - he says, "Mafia's what you people call us. What we call ourselves is the Cosa Nostra, 'our thing.'" but nonetheless, they - you know, he understood what Mafia meant, and the Senate ultimately understood what Cosa Nostra meant.

Interestingly there's a funny story in one of the accounts by, I think it's Peter Moss, who wrote a very famous book called The Valachi Papers. It was made into a movie. And Peter Maas was an investigative reporter, spent weeks and weeks and weeks talking with Joe Valachi at the prison. And when he was - and also in Westchester County Jail when he was being held by the federal people as a cooperating witness. And Maas talks about a, a, a situation when he was in front of the Committee. And, of course, back then, just as today this was a televised Committee hearing, and every member of the Committee wanted to have their five minutes of fame on TV so that the home crowd could see that they were working that day, doing their, their job ferreting out organized crime.

And so, at one point, the questioning was handed over to the senator from Nebraska, and he asked Valachi "Mr. Valachi, what can you tell me about Mafia operations in, in Omaha?" And there was a long pause, and Valachi was seen to sort of huddle with his, his attorney and cover the mic. And the attorney covered the mic, and they were talking back and forth with each other. And so, when Valachi came back on, he said "Nothing."

Well, the member, obviously somewhat curious over the exchange between Valachi and the lawyer, said, "Well, if it was nothing, what, what was the - what was the

reason for the discussion you just had with the attorney, your attorney?" at which point the lawyer took the microphone and said to the senator from Nebraska, "with all due respect, Senator my client was asking me, 'What's in Omaha?'" [chuckles] [audience laughter] And, you know, so, so, there was a little bit of humor involved in these hearings, very little.

Now, the post-Valachi era in New York, there were a number of changes. The Mafia didn't go out of business. there were some cases made but not really as many as some people thought, because you have to realize that, back in 1963 or so, when lots of, of Valachi's information became public we did not yet have laws like the RICO Laws or what we called later on the 848, the continuing criminal enterprise statute that would allow us to really round up major conspirators and enterprises as we - as we have today and it had probably since the 1980s. back then, we pretty much had to catch, catch someone with the goods in their hands, or they, they were not able to - we were not able to convict them.

Now, as I mentioned earlier, Valachi described the inner workings of the five families in charge of the Mafia in New York City. And he did this matter-of-factly. I mean he talked about assassinations and murders like you might describe the tee times at the local golf course. He had, you know, absolutely very little emotional response to the idea that he was, you know, witnessing people being destroyed on, on the basis of, you know, maybe they had a business dispute with somebody else in a different organization.

What he did describe, however, was in total a, a, a description of what appeared to be almost an endless power structure among the top bosses and underbosses for the leadership of the different families or different groups in New York. And this, of course, was determined by all the different enterprises that they controlled, whether it was labor racketeering, union racketeering, extortion from businesses and small businesses and restaurants and bars and taverns, supplying illegal liquor to gay bars, which were outlawed in New York. And, you know, there were all kinds of like criminal enterprises

that they had along with the drugs. Of course, the drugs was also a large moneymaking proposition, but it was not the only one.

The Mafia back then had all sorts of endeavors besides selling drugs. The organizing principle, if there was one and if we can find one, was and is and always has been money. And despite some of the mythology projected by the glamorization of the Mafia in some of the later films like *The Godfather* and so forth no crime really was expressly prohibited unless - yeah, as long as it brought in money.

Discipline was very harsh and quick, and there were no appeals. It was often carried out, you know, where they might invite somebody out for dinner and have a wonderful dinner and so forth. And then, on the way out of the restaurant or when they got back to their car, there'd be somebody waiting there to kill them. It, it, it was an interesting and, and somewhat bizarre form of discipline, but it worked. It worked very well to keep somewhat, people in line, although there was a lot of individuals in one family making entrée to other families to see if they could join and bring with them certain enterprises. Of course, if that were found out they would be immediately dispatched or called before the family or the group or the Commission, and their fate would be decided.

The only universal sin, if you will, of, of, of the Mafia was talking with the authorities. That was a no-no regardless of what any other issue involved might be. And anyone who dared talk with the authorities other than give their name, rank, and serial number when they were arrested would would receive the death penalty. And it would be immediate, it would be fast, and it would be - in some cases they'd be dispatched very quickly. If, if they had somewhat an honor, they'd be simply shot in the back of the head. Otherwise, they might be tortured for some time and, and who knows? There were all sorts of atrocities committed if they were thought to have actually been informants.

There's a - [chuckles] an interesting story about the Mafia and the death penalty. When, when Joe Valachi was testifying before the Committee and he was asked about different murders, he'd claim that, you know, he, he knew about these murders but that he personally had never taken part in any of the murders. And he described the different murders, etc. And, and one of them, of course, was the, you know, wiping out Albert Anastasia. Anastasia was you know, murdered in a barbershop while he was under about, you know, ten hot towels waiting for a shave. And people from the Genovese organization came in and, and took out Albert Anastasia because he had made a move on a different gang, and apparently that was a no-no.

So, you know, these, these organizations, these different families had, - you know, they had, - they had ways of, of figuring out what was going on because they had their own informants. It's funny how they, they would not tolerate an informant in the group that talked with the police or the authorities, but the families themselves recruited informants. They recruited people to tell them what was going on in the other families, and that would be often the core - the, the, the basis for some of these rivalries and, and murders that were taking place.

Anyway, after Valachi and after the you know, sensational testimony that he rendered to the Senate, the, the Mafia adopted some tighter security both in their daily operations non-drug operations, as well as all their criminal enterprises, including, of course, the heroin trade. Now, in the 1960s and '70s, heroin continued to be sent to New York from France and mostly concealed in these cars as freight or accompanied baggage, as I described before. Or it was smuggled by individual couriers and corrupted flight personnel or hidden in shipments of consumer goods and appliances.

During the French Connection days in the 1970s I had an informant, a French informant, who was telling me about some of these things. And, and just to show you how, you know, things like mistakes happen even in the underworld, he was describing to me one day how he was, - he was given a false passport and a ticket to go to Switzerland and fly to New York from Switzerland. And he was carrying two kilos of

heroin in a smuggler's vest. That's about 4 1/2 pounds of heroin. And he got to Switzerland, and he boarded the flight for New York City. And as the flight was descending into New York, he thought it would be a good time to pull out his passport and memorize his vital statistics. In case the immigration people or customs people were to ask him things, he'd be able to answer right away.

He took out his passport, and as he was trying to memorize his date of birth, he realized that they had made it November 31, 1941, or whatever. [chuckles] There is no November 31st. And he was very worried. That was what he was worried about. He wasn't worried about the two kilos of heroin he was carrying. He was worried about the date of birth on his phony passport. And I asked him - I said, "Well, did you get in?" He says, "Yeah. They never asked me about it. They just stamped it and let me go through." I said, "Oh."

And then he, he, he described how he actually met his connection, his Mafia connection, an Italian fellow, in the men's room at the Arrivals area out at JFK. And they went to the men's room, and one went into one stall, one went into the other stall. And the two kilos were passed under the stall. And the - my informant went back outside, went back over to the Air France desk, and bought a one-way ticket to Paris for cash, and was out of - out - he, he took the night flight - overnight flight to Paris. And so he, he actually came in and went out literally the same day after delivering two kilos of heroin.

We also had pilots Portuguese Airline, TAP it was called. I don't know if it's still in business. We had an airline pilot from TAP, who had been corrupted by the organization and brought in a lot of, - a lot of drugs aboard the TAP airliners to New York. Shipments of consumer goods. We had Italian espresso makers delivered to New York full of heroin. We had oscilloscopes or scientific equipment that were delivered to New York full of heroin. we had a case - when I was in Paris, we had a case where an informant walked in and said he'd been approached by a group in Belgithat wanted to ship heroin to New York and wanted him to recruit a U.S. military member who was being transferred back to the United States.

And so we had one of our undercover agents, Jimmy Guy pose as a sergeant I think it was in the Army. And we had backgrounded him with all sorts of you know, uniform and everything else. And he was en route back to I believe it was in Georgia, a post in Georgia, a military post in Georgia. And they managed to pack in his freezer or, or whatever one of his kitchen appliances about 50 or 60 kilos of heroin, which was shipped back with him to his, - with his household effects. And then, of course, the Mob made arrangements to pick it up from him. And that's when we managed to arrest them in New York.

But essentially, there were a number of cases like that involving a, a Jaguar car that was shipped to New York. And it was a very interesting case when, Jack Cusack, who actually testified before the McClellan Commission when Joe Valachi was testifying - Jack Cusack was, the Regional Director of BNDD and FBN and then DEA in Paris. And, and Jack was notified that a shipment was due to leave France. It was an undercover shipment that we, we were involved in. And, again the undercover agent would pose as the traveler with a car - and it was a Jaguar car - and that the ship would leave La Halle, France. It would stop in Southampton, England, and then go on to New York.

Well, this was an undercover operation, and the only fly in the ointment was the fact that the ship made a stop in Southampton in the UK. And, technically, the UK customs at that point had access to the ship and, if they suspected something, could look into its cargo hold and perhaps discover the heroin that was hidden in the car. And this would really make things difficult. And so Jack flew over to London and sat down with his counterpart in Scotland Yard. And they had a discussion about, you know, whether or not the UK could just ignore this car as it went through.

And the UK said, "Well, you know, the laws here are quite difficult because we're not allowed to, to make those sorts of allowances that you are in the United States. If we know about something, we're obligated by our laws to intercept it." And Jack said,

"Well, what about if you don't know about it?" "Well, if we don't know about it, we, we don't intercept it." And Jack says, "Okay. From now on, everything I'm saying is hypothetically - hypothetical." [laughter] And so he, he, he unraveled this tremendous hypothetical discussion about who might come over, who might have a car that might be this and might be on this ship, and it might be this day.

And needless to say, the car was loaded. The ship stopped in Southampton, went on to New York. It was unloaded. We followed it to a garage. The bad guys came. We arrested all the bad guys, including the Mafia people, etc. And the case went down very nice, and it was headlines the next day in the newspapers. A telegram came in to the office in Paris from the head of Scotland Yard, a unit that we were working with, and it was, "Nice job, Jack." [chuckles] And, you know, in other words, it, it was a level of cooperation existed that perhaps was not always official.

These transatlantic ships - and there were quite a few - it's hard to believe that, back in those days, - and this is just before, you know, air traffic or air travel was, was popular. And so transatlantic ships right up until the '60s and even early '70s - and '70s were were very popular - many of the countries in Europe had ships. Holland had ships. France had ships. England had ships. Italy, Norway. Spain, I think, had a ship. Portugal. These, these countries all had transatlantic ships that went back and forth between their countries or their capitals and made a couple stops either way and would come into New York City. And so they were - they were ideal for this type of activity.

Now, U.S. Customs and BND and DEA, we made a number of cases, some of which were quite impressive, couple that I just described, for example. But evidently enough heroin was passing through this particular route to make it worthwhile, and so the Mafia continued. And, you know, throughout the '60s and into the early 1970s, the majority of heroin consumed in the United States continued to be from France. Now, to protect their end of the business, French traffickers turned to time-tested intelligence-type methods to evade detection. And let me just mention first of all about some of these French traffickers.

a, a lot of the French traffickers that we encountered later on in the so-called French Connection cases, they were originally engaged by French intelligence services to act as spies in places like French Indochina, Vietnam North Africa, Algeria, Tunisia Morocco. These were French colonies back in those days, and so these were intelligence services that were trained in certain anti-espionage type techniques. There were also convicts, and a lot of them were fugitives because a lot of them made money during the war selling things that they weren't supposed to sell. And they were wanted in France.

And in some cases, there were a couple of Italian fellows that were involved in these mobs, and they were wanted in Italy. They established a little colony down in San Paolo, Brazil, which in those days, like most of Brazil, was fairly open particularly to foreigners who had money and wanted a good time. And, you know, they had - they were coordinating shipments of heroin from the French suppliers in Marseille and Corsica to the Mafia members in New York City.

Now, this had puzzled us for a number of years because, in New York, the, the New York P.D., Customs, and BNDD and DEA people, we knew that there had to be a connection because we were picking this up on one end, and the people we were interviewing as witnesses - and occasionally, even if somebody did semi cooperate and give us some kind of information, it would - it was never enough to actually nail the bigwigs, the, the people at the top or the people connected to either the supply end or the ultimate recipient end. But we knew that there had to be something there. It was like, you know, there was a gap, and we knew there had to be something. And so this sort of suggested that there was a third party or a go-between that could arrange these shipments.

In 1972 Brazil all of a sudden rounded up these French and Italian expats and ordered them deported to France and Italy. Flights to Brazil back in those days to Europe all had to pass through the United States. So, they came northward and then

went on to, to Europe. And so they, they wound up putting a lot - some of these fugitives on flights to New York to transfer to flights to Europe. Well, as soon as they got to New York, they were stopped by Customs and Immigration and arrested because many of them were under indictment in New York for many cases and different, different things that we had on them.

Now, most of these people would eventually cooperate to avoid being sent home, because some of them were, because of their war crimes and, and situations that had occurred during wartime they were under a sentence of death and if not death, certainly lengthy, perhaps life prison sentences. And so they, they basically cooperated with us in New York rather than be sent back to France or Italy. And their combined testimony given over several months of intense interrogation filled in a lot of gaps in our understanding as to how the heroin was reaching the New York Mafia and the New York Mob from France. They became that third sort of leg in the stool.

At first, France objected to the U.S. granting somewhat like asylum these people because they were, you know, considered to be like the most wanted in their country. Eventually, however, it was a Franco-American Committee, and then it expanded to include Italian officers, and so it was like a Franco-American-Italian Commission. And it would meet two or three times a year, each time in a different country. And, in fact, I think it eventually expanded to include Canada. But over that time, it was - it was a very good, - it was a very good organization to put these kinds of issues before, because you, you would have somewhat of a - you know, a coalition type of affair in getting cooperation.

And eventually the French agreed and said, "Okay. Fine. We understand." and, and they used their legal system, which allows a magistrate in France to issue what's called a letter rogatory, which would be executed by the DEA or BNDD people, I guess, in New York collect the evidence in New York, which would be furnished back to the French magistrate and used to prosecute the traffickers in France. And so a number of letters rogatory, as they were called, were executed in the U.S.

France sent a couple of French officers, police officers to New York, where they were assigned. They had an office at the, the DEA Office in New York, and they had their own office at the French Consulate in New York. And they were excellent in, in making the liaison between what we had to do and what they needed for their court system. And this eventually led to a number of arrests in France and ultimately the demise really of the French Connection because they were - they were literally put out of business.

Now, not to be forgotten, however, is the role of Turkey. In 1972, largely as a result of a good lot - a good deal of work by Jack Cusack, the Regional Director at the time Turkey consented to go out of the opium business. Now, most of the morphine base or the morphine precursor products that were eventually transformed into heroin in France came from Turkey. And so, with Turkey out of the opium business, it dried up the supply of morphine and morphine base, which in turn led to diminution of the heroin coming out of France. And so, by the end of 1972 French heroin in the U.S. was, very difficult if possible at all to find. And the action by Turkey created a serious shortage that just could not be fulfilled by any other supplier at the time.

Now, the epilogue to all of this is, of course, that drug control always has been a hydraulic exercise, as some say, meaning that, as you press down on one location, you dissipate the pressure to emerge somewhere else. By the mid '70s, with the demise of the French Connection, many of the original Mafia bosses were either dead, retired, Joe Bananas living in Arizona, or in prison. The traffickers had to look for other heroin sources. Mexico and Asia were likely candidates at first especially Asia because it was the ending of the Vietnam War in the early '70s and a lot of those soldiers were coming back, addicted to Asian heroin, which is very potent, very powerful, very pure. And some of the traffickers over there decided to follow their consumer base back to the States, and they did. And so we began to see a good deal of Asian heroin being imported into the United States.

Mexico, of course upped the production. They always produced or for many, many years produced heroin, but it was usually an inferior quality heroin, and it was mostly available around the Southwest area. Mexico increased production to meet the demand in the U.S. And in time, Colombian cartels decided to grow opium poppies in Colombia and produce heroin there as well. Now, for years Colombia was dominant in marijuana and certainly cocaine and they had already established an infrastructure of distribution networks throughout the United States. And so it was logical and economically feasible at the time for them to just use all those existing infrastructure facilities to establish a heroin market as well. And they did that. And so they often had things like, you know, buy ten kilos of cocaine and get one kilo of heroin free or, [chuckles] you know, whatever. They had all kinds of marketing tactics to increase the market for Colombian-produced heroin.

Now, Pablo, Pablo Escobar, of course, was the most famous leader of the Medellin cartel. You can see a very nice, colorful picture of him in the Museum [chuckles] right here on, - in DEA Headquarters. He was perhaps the most ruthless and successful cartel head or kingpin, as we called them in those days. Unlike the Mafia and the French Connection traffickers that relied on spy-like communications to make drug deals, Escobar's cartel had the use of modern communications and information technology.

back in the French Connection days, you know, multimillion-dollar deals were consummated by somebody showing up in - at, at Grand Central Station. And if they had a copy of Time magazine under their left arm the deal went down that day and they would be met by the person that was sent to meet them. If they had a copy under their left arm, there would be no meet that day because they were suspicious that there might be somebody there watching them. And so this was a normal sort of spy-like routine that they had. All of a sudden the, the, the Colombian cartels had access to things like fax machines. The original mobile phones, believe it or not they actually had some rudimentary forms of mobile phone, not the cell phones that we have today, but they did have some mobile telephone communications.

A 1991 case in New York was very interesting because the New York agents followed a woman from a stash house, a Colombian stash house. And they arrested her as she was about to enter a kiosk of a subway to, to, to go someplace. And she had two shopping bags that they originally thought she might be carrying drugs. It turned out she wasn't carrying drugs, but she was carrying a lot of floppy disks and computer-type software. And eventually we, we decoded a lot of it. It was - had some encryption, but it was decoded.

And what it painted was a very sophisticated personnel system in the Colombian cartel where they actually had interviews. They would have personal interviews of people joining the organization. They would have them fill out forms. They had a form where they had to fill out everything, including where they paid their taxes, who were members of their family, where each member of their family lived, anyone in the family that had ever been arrested for any violation of any law in Colombia or anywhere else in the world. And, and these, these forms would be checked and backgrounded, and these people would be vetted before they were allowed into the organization.

It also showed that they had a very well-tiered organizational structure. There were - there were even people, for example, that we might describe as customer service agents so that, if you - if you were a valued customer of the Colombian cartel and you got a load of cocaine or heroin and it was substandard or it was weak or it wasn't up to your expectations instead of going to war, [chuckles] you would call and file a complaint. And they would send the service adjuster out, and he would review the matter and maybe look at the shipment you got and perhaps take some samples. And they would make good for it. If it was a bad shipment, you were - you were made whole. And if, if it was - if, if you were fibbing, of course, they, they didn't like that. And, again, they, they had their disciplinary systems as well. But it was a very businesslike arrangement that they had in terms of how they were running their organizations.

Now, the cartel traffickers in Colombia and elsewhere in South America, they maintained very close political and business relationships. This was also something that they, they did to sort of camouflage all their illegal enterprises. So, many of them were legitimate businesspeople, not so Escobar because he was just a ruthless thug and he never really had any sort of business acumen to begin with. And so it was difficult for him. But there were others later on, for example, in a Cali cartel who owned a chain of pharmacies throughout, Colombia and who were in the wine business and actually imported a good deal of grape and concentrates from Europe and so forth to make wines, very, very prestigious wines in South America.

And so a number of these cartel leaders had these sort of business covers to take care. Not only did they use these to camouflage the large amounts of cash that they otherwise would not be able to justify, but they used them to facilitate their entrée to the political structure and the business structure in their countries that afforded them a certain level of protection from the law.

In terms of violence, the cartels were and are - [clears throat] excuse me - far more vicious and indiscriminate in the use of violence than their Mafia antecedents. The Mafia were, no question, violent but very rarely did they go outside of the Mafia. In other words, the violence was not perpetrated against non-Mafia people. And it was generally based on some perceived or real violation of whatever the Mafia code at that time might have been for that particular family, not that there were any really hard and fast written rules on all of this. But the Mafia's use was, - the, the Mafia's use of violence was, was limited really to Mafia members mostly.

The one permanent and persistent ideology throughout all of this that basically has propelled the drug trade from those early days of the last century with the immigrants from Sicily in New York City preying upon their counterparts, their fellow immigrants all the way from then till now has been and always is and will probably be money. And that's the show. And again if you have any questions, I'd be more than happy to try to answer them because this is, of course, as you probably can imagine -

Sean Fearn: John, thank you very much. We give you a round of applause. [applause] Just a quick reminder, those that are watching on the webcast, there is the ability to submit questions to John via the online tool. If you are here in the audience and you'd like to ask a question, just ask you to raise your hand and wait for a microphone so everybody can hear your question. Thank you.

Audience Question: Good, good morning. Today's agents face very difficult challenges with the smart phones and Internet, social media, and telecommunications exploitation. Can you talk about some of the challenges that back in your day early on that you faced that were difficult to overcome?

John Coleman: Well, yeah. We had, - we, we had, for example - we had fewer restrictions in some respect, and in other respects, we had more restrictions. And I'll give you an example of that. When I was, - when I was Head of Training down at the FBI Academy for the DEA some years ago one of my functions was to talk to all the incoming classes of new agents. And I remember one day going in and saying somewhat of a routine saying that I had, which was that, you know, I was an agent. I was a narcotic agent before the Miranda decision. [chuckles] And I, I one time said to one of the agents who was teaching a course, "You know, I wonder if they knew what I was talking about when I said Miranda decision," because it's such a sort of ingrained thing that we all kind of grow up with nowadays, that when somebody's arrested, they're advised of their rights and so forth and so on.

But it wasn't always that way and certainly wasn't that way before the 1968 period or so. And so in, in those respects, we had somewhat more flexibility in the, the - in our - in our ability to be able to question people absent their attorneys and so forth. On the restrictive side we didn't have the authority to wiretap. There were some very bizarre and strange rules regarding interception of private communications. And they changed almost every year based on court decisions that went sometimes all the way to the Supreme Court. I can give you an example of that.

Back in 1965, one of the major French Connection cases we had in New York one of the major traffickers, a fellow by the name of Jean Nebbia, was staying at the Waldorf Astoria. And we had a room right next to his. And we knew that he was a major connection with the Mob and we had to follow him to put this together. And just about everybody assigned to the office was assigned to this particular case. I was a rookie agent at the time, and my job was to sit in the room next to his with a set of earphones.

And we were allowed to have a listening device penetrate our side of the wallboard, but we couldn't go to his side of the wallboard into his room. So, all we could - yeah. What, what can you hear from one side? It's like putting your ear up to the wall in a hotel room. You're not going to hear very much. But this was what we were allowed under the then existing law.

Interestingly, what I did find was, based on the movement of air through the ventilation system, whenever you - whenever he opened his door, I would hear a loud rush in my earphones because of the rush of the air in the walls. I don't know. Some - whatever it was, it caused a loud rush. And so, over a period of a couple of days, I was able to tell the guys, "I can tell you downstairs when the doors opened, when he's either coming or going." And we had a hotline between the room and downstairs - a, a phone. It was just a regular telephone to the wall. And so we were able to follow his movements without actually going out in the hall and looking at him, [chuckles] which we didn't do until the very end.

And in fact at, at the very end, when the word came out that the agents had found - they had followed somebody else and they had found the shipment of heroin - it was actually in Columbus, Georgia, I believe, that they found it - that, it, it was time now to arrest all these fellows. So, when, when he came out of his room, I came out of the room next door. And I, I telephoned down, saying, "He's on his way down." And I came out of my room, and I walked right behind him to the elevator because this was show time. This was - it was over. And we got on the elevator at the Waldorf Astoria.

And when the door opened on the main floor, there were about ten agents with their guns drawn. I was in fear that they were going to shoot me. [laughter] And the, the - Jean Nebbia, the Frenchman, was very nattily dressed with a, a beautiful cashmere dark overcoat. He had a fedora. I mean he really looked like he just stepped right out of you know, Gentlemen Quarterly or something, where I, I was sort of like the washed-up kind of rookie agent wearing a sweatshirt or something. And so, when the agents rushed into the elevator, he very coolly looked over like this to me as if I were the person that they were looking for, [chuckles] not him, [laughter] at which time I produced my badge and said, "Me too." [chuckles] [laughter]

And so he, he - when we got downtown - as, as I said, I was the rookie agent, so I was assigned to do the fingerprints. And, and when it came time to fingerprint Jean Nebbia he said to me something very strange. He had a very, very - actually, he spoke English fairly well, and he says - he says, "Would you do me a favor?" And I said, "What's that?" He says, "Could you show me what this heroin is all about? I've never seen it in my life?" And I said, "No. I don't - I can't. It's not here." And, and, you know, as - it was very interesting because, you know, I, I took his fingerprints and so forth.

And then, later on that day or the next day when we arraigned him in court, a mysterious attorney showed up with a briefcase with \$100,000 in cash because that was his bail. And the United States Attorney knew that, if he had made bail, he'd be out and back in France and we wouldn't be able to do anything about it. And so the U.S. Attorney objected. And they had a hearing in front of a federal judge. And during the hearing, the judge ruled that the government had the right to demand to know the origin of the money being put up for someone's bail in a criminal arraignment. And at that point, the offer of bail was withdrawn so that the party didn't have to expose themselves.

That forever - that was a court case that went all the way up, and it was - it was confirmed or affirmed by the Supreme Court. And it became known as a Nebbia hearing. So, whenever even to this day, if there's somebody putting up a large amount

of cash for bail or money for bail and the prosecutor is concerned about the source of that funding, they can ask the court for what's called a Nebbia hearing. And that was - that goes back to Jean Nebbia in 1965, December 1965. But, yeah, we had some restrictions like that. We were able to do certain things. Electronically, we couldn't possibly come near some of the things that are being done today. And so we were limited in that respect.

In terms of the law there was a, a professor at Notre Dame called Blakely. He was formerly a Department of Justice attorney. And he was very instrumental in 1970 in designing what we later called the RICO, Racketeering Influenced Corrupt Organization, statute. And even though Congress passed the RICO in the 1970s, it really wasn't used till about 1980. And Rudy Giuliani, when he was Mayor of New York, went after the five families and very effectively used the RICO statute to get them. And it was a, a very encompassing, conspiratorial statute.

On the drug side, we have the, - we have 848, 21 U.S.C. 848, which is the continuing criminal enterprise statute. The precedent crime are different in the sense that, in both instances, narcotic crimes can be the precedent crimes for organized or for for establishing a violation. But in the RICO, it can be a number of other things, including racketeering and so forth, whereas in the continuing criminal enterprise statute, it's mostly drugs, money laundering.

But, yeah. Those laws, those new laws that Congress gave us in the '70s and '80s certainly in the '80s, the Bank Secrecy Act with money laundering statutes those enabled us not only to go after the Mobs with the RICO statute and in some cases the continuing criminal enterprise statutes, but also to go after their assets and money with the asset forfeiture and seizure laws. Those were very important, and they essentially crippled the Mafia. They couldn't operate in the environment that those laws prevented.

Audience Question: in the last few years, we've seen a return to heroin as being the number one drug threat or one of the two - top two or three. And your conversation's

excellent overview of the history has been focused on heroin. Did you also come across other drugs? Were these Cali drug organizations - did they deal in marijuana, cocaine in the late '60s, LSD or other synthetic drugs or, or other things related to that? Thank you.

John Coleman: there's very little evidence that the organized crime people, the Mafia in particular, ever got involved on a regular basis with any of these other drugs, which is not to say that, if there wasn't money to be made in the operation, that they wouldn't get involved. For example when I was a - my last assignment was in Newark, New Jersey. When I was assigned there, there was a case we made involving a group of organized crime people who had hijacked a truckload of - I forget what it was. It was some scheduled drug. It might've been oxycodone or something, but they had hijacked an entire truckload of this stuff, and they were trying to sell it on the black market. And that's how we got wind of it.

So, yeah, the Mob was into things like hijacking trucks and so forth. Don't forget, they organized and, and had a lot of control over a lot of the drivers and a lot of the people involved in the cargo and freight industries both in the rail and trucking Teamsters Union, the International Longshoremen's Association. These were unions that were very heavily involved in - or the Mobs were very heavily involved in the unions. And so they always had the ability to find out where certain shipments of certain goods were going. And they could arrange to have certain shipments taken down or stolen, hijacked. Or they could hijack the shipment and then extort from the owner money to get it back. And not - and it would never be reported.

So, there were different ways that they had of controlling their enterprises, but actually involving themselves in marijuana - there's no, no knowledge that I have of the Mafia being involved in it. Likewise, cocaine, they probably stayed away from that because that was pretty much controlled by the Colombians and Mexicans and Cubans to a certain degree. And as far as the LSD and the psychedelic drugs and some of the synthetic drugs that we - came along in the '60s and '70s, there's, again, no evidence that they were involved in that. It was a fairly separate occurrence.

And, you know, as far as today and the heroin that we're seeing out there today, it's - as I understand it, it's mostly coming in from Mexico. And some of it's, I guess, of Colombian origin. Some of it might be Mexican. I'm sure there's some Asian still coming in. And, and there's no more French. I mean I don't - I don't think there's any more French heroin coming in. but that's basically where the heroin's coming from these days.

Now, it, it - it's interesting because Europe is being flooded with heroin from places like Afghanistan. It's - at least the opiate and morphine base is coming out Afghanistan and being transformed probably someplace in the Middle East, maybe Lebanon, Syria. But it's, it's coming out of those portions, because those areas of the world have very serious heroin addiction problems, opiate addiction problems, particularly in Iran and to some extent Syria even though the war is going on.

Audience Question: Going back to the early history, to, to what do you attribute Director Hoover's reluctance to recognize the existence of the Mafia?

John Coleman: that's a very interesting question, and it's a - it - it's a perplexing question because we, we don't really have Hoover's explanation of this. Hoover was asked several times. Now, Hoover was a very influential figure, of course, in Congress - before Congress in the 1920s and 1930s and, and, and '40s. But Hoover, Hoover seemed to be obsessed with the idea of spies and espionage and Communists and Communist Party and so forth. And he seemed like that was the overriding concerns that he had in terms of focusing the efforts of his Bureau of - Bureau of Investigation. On the other hand, his counterpart Harry Anslinger over at the FBN - which was somewhat very similar to Hoover in the sense that Anslinger lasted from, what, 1930 to 1962 as the Commissioner of the Federal Bureau of Narcotics - Anslinger was consumed mostly with the narcotics side of it and very little with anything else.

there's no really solid evidence that Hoover accepted the concept that there was an organized crime in the sense of the way we describe the Mafia today or the way the Mafia was described by Joe Valachi in the 1970 - '63 McClellan hearings. up till that time, as I said earlier, Hoover was willing to admit and then acknowledge that there were a lot of hoodlums and that a lot of these hoodlums were, were of Italian ancestry, some born in Italy, some second-, first-generation Italy - Italian in New York, and that they committed a lot of crimes and that they had their hands into a lot of different criminal enterprises: gambling, prostitution, even drugs and so forth. But he, he referred to them as hoodlums. He referred to them as being somewhat not organized.

He, he didn't see them as being monolithic in a sense that we have five families or any of that sort of thing. And it wasn't until Joe Valachi put this all together and filled in a lot of the gaps and answered a lot of questions about this and actually exposed the Mafia and their organization and the family structures, where they had bosses and underbosses and lieutenants and caporegimes and soldiers and so forth, and he described this very sophisticated structural, schema for the Mafia - it wasn't until then really that J. Edgar Hoover acknowledged that there was actually a Cosa Nostra or Mafia.

But, to his credit, once he - once, once the evidence was placed before him he, he accepted it. And, and he then put his people on it full scale. In fact he assigned a, - an agent, - several agents to the FBN office in New York to work directly with our people in debriefing Joe Valachi and finding out if they could, you know, pursue any further criminal cases against the, the individuals. Certainly some of the murder cases were pursuable because murder has no, no, no statute of limitations.

I will add - I will add, though, there's one thing about J. Edgar Hoover, that there's - there, there are a number of mythologies out there about why he didn't and so forth. Some claim that you know, he was - he was too wired to the horseracing crowd and the gambling enterprises that were involved with horseracing. Others have, have theorized that he, he didn't want anything to do with narcotics because he thought it was a dirty

business and he didn't want to have his people corrupted and so forth. So, there's a lot of sort of legends out there as to why J. Edgar Hoover was reluctant to acknowledge the existence of the Mafia. But, but, frankly, those are speculative. I don't know of any real hard evidence that would supply - you know, support them.

Audience Question: John, would you not agree that the culture of the FBN and its undercover agents gave us more information about organized crime whereas the DE - I mean the FBI didn't do that much undercover work at the time? And DEA had all the information about the Italians doing business.

John Coleman: Yeah. I would - I would agree with that. you know, looking back at the days of the FBN and the days - and the situation we had with the FBI at this time there were two completely different cultures, if you will, different sort of ethos organizational, - the way they were defined in terms of their organization. In, in the FBN, every agent, every new agent was expected to work undercover. And, you know, to, to borrow a sort of a legendary myth from the Mafia, in order to make your bones, you had to [chuckles] work undercover at least once. And, and that presented some very interesting and somewhat comical situations at times because not every agent that was hired back in the FBN days in the '60s - not every agent was really skilled or accustomed to doing this sort of thing undercover.

And, and, you know, some of them, quite frankly looked like they were, you know, a uniformed police officer without the uniform. [chuckles] And so it would be very difficult for them to do these things. And, and, and, and so, you know, we would have like a mercy mission set up to, to kind of make sure that somebody worked undercover on some guy who was like - he'd, he'd sell to anybody. I mean he'd sell to a uniformed cop. It was like ridiculous. But we would - we would establish these kinds of cases just to help these fellows make these, - make these undercover purchases so they could at least claim that they worked undercover, because it was literally a requirement.

And we also did our own surveillances. And, you know, back in those days, we didn't have government vehicles. The only cars we were allowed to have were cars that were seized. And this goes back to an old law that was passed during the Prohibition era when, in order to stop the rumrunners and the people that were assisting them, the government came out with a law that said they could seize any vehicle, vessel, or transportation unit that was used to move alcohol from one place to another illicitly. And so we were able to use the same law when it came to narcotics, that if drugs were involved, we could seize your car. And so you could imagine, given the clientele that we were working on back in those days, we had a, a variety of automobiles at our disposal. And, and some of them were, you know, unusual cars, to say the least.

And, and we, - you know, we would do the surveillances ourselves. Now, we had a few radio cars. We were about two radio cars - two or three radio cars were assigned to each group. There were about 10 or 12 agents in a group. The boss had one, the unit - the supervisor would have one, and, of course, maybe two more in the group. And if you really had a big deal, you could maybe borrow a radio car from another group.

Well, when I say radio car, I mean we're talking about you know, something like a 1963 Chevrolet whose entire trunk would be consumed with the electronics of this two-way radio that was all - you know, it was all tubes and, and, and it ran on 110 volts. It had to be transferred from your car battery, which was 12 volts. And it drained an enormous amount of energy from the car even when you pressed the Talk button. And they didn't work very well. They didn't work very far.

And so, if you followed somebody at night and you had the eyeball or you were right behind them, you made sure never to transmit while you were following them because your headlights would automatically dim as soon as you hit the button. [laughter] And the guy you were following would look in his rearview mirror and say, "Uh-oh. It's my friends from the FBN again." So, the eyeball always had to be sort of like radio silent while the rest of the people could talk in the back.

And so, you know - but we had to do our own surveillances. And it's remarkable how we were able to follow these guys. I mean we were able to follow them up and down New York City through the Garment District, out to New Jersey, sometimes over into Brooklyn, Queens, Staten Island. And, you know, you'd, you'd, you'd, you'd follow them sometimes for several days and they'd never know they - that you were on the back of them because we, we just became very good at it, I think.

Now, compare that with the FBI. The FBI had surveillance squads. And I'll give them the credit. I mean the FBI surveillance squads were well-equipped with undercover vehicles. They had the delivery vans. They had the taxicabs. They had all the trucks and different types of vehicles that they needed. They had all the necessary uniforms to pose as Con Edison workers, electrical workers, telephone company employees, etc. They had all the technical sort of things that you would love to have as an FBN agent.

Now, some of the FBN agents would carry some of that equipment in the back of their car. And it was kind of comical at times, because I remember one incidence when a real telephone guy came up to one of our agents in the street and he said, "Where the hell did you get that jacket? I haven't seen one of those [chuckles] in ten years." [laughter] And, you know, it was like it was so outdated.

Another time when we copied the FBI we got a couple undercover taxicabs, and we thought that was really cool. We'd probably be able to follow people from the airport in our undercover taxis until we got a call from the Taxi Bureau, asking us, "We understand what you're doing, but would you please change your price scale on the side of the cab? It's no longer 15 cents for the first mile." [laughter] "It hasn't been that way in ten years." So, you know, we had to learn some of the tricks from the FBI, but they did have some real good things. They could do the surveillances that we, - and they, they had surveillance squads.

But our guys had to do it all because we were small. We were very small. And we worked very closely with the New York City Police Department because even though there were certain limitations in what we could work with because they, they had their own problems they also had access to better information in some cases than we had. And it was to their advantage and our advantage to try to work together. And so we did have some very good liaisons between the two of us, New York City P.D. and FBN, whereas the FBI very rarely if ever worked with the local police back in those days.

Well, I guess it's time to get back to Paw Patrol, Nickelodeon. [laughs]

Sean Fearn: [laughs] John, thank you very much.

John Coleman: Thank you.

Sean Fearn: we have a, a small token of our appreciation. Katie Drew, if you wouldn't mind. Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for joining us. And thank you to the Museum staff for putting these programs together. John mentions that his, - was it your granddaughter that could not watch this live? And if anybody missed this program or any of our previous webcasts they are up on the DEA Museum website, deamuseum.org. Finally, if you have any suggestions for future topics of programs, please feel free to touch base with one of us at the Museum office. And thank you for joining us today.

End of recording.