Herreras Among Biggest Of Cocaine Organizations

One of the biggest rings supplying the New York market with cocaine is the Herrera organization of Colombia, which has its headquarters in Cali, the flourishing city southwest of Bogotá.

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"The Herreras send out an average of 40 kilograms of cocaine a month, mostly to New York and Miami," save Octavio González, head of the Federal Drug Enforcement Administration office in Bogotá. "At wholesaie prices that adds up to a \$14-million a year business."

Like most Latin-American

Like most Latin-American criminal groups dealing in drugs, the Herrera organization has a family as its nucleus—seven brothers, two sisters, cousins and in-laws. Outsiders chosen for their professional skills bring the organization's membership to a total of 92.

A Daring Escape

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United States and Colombian authorities say the nominal head of the organization is 34-year-old Benjamin (Negro) Herrera. They say it is indicative of the organization's power that the Herreras arranged for Benjamin's successful escape from the Federal penitentiary in Atlanta, where he had been sentenced to five years in 1970 for trying to smuggle heroin into the United States.

After his escape, Benjamin

After his escape, Benjamin returned to Colombia, which is one of a number of Latin-American countries that will not extradite its own citizens. Later, however, he made the mistake of visiting Peru. At the request of United At the request of United States officials there he was arrested and expelled to the United States. He is now back in prison in Atlanta.

In Benjamin's absence, leadership of the family has been taken over by his brother Gustavo, according to the Colombian police. Ramiro, another brother, is in charge of importing coca paste from Bolivia, Peru and Ecuador.

Informants say the paste is often flown to the interna-tional airports at Cali and Bogotá in ordinary suitcases and rushed through customs

and rushed through customs without inspection by accommodating officials on the organization's payroll.

Authorities say the Herreras have several well-equipped laboratories in Colombia where, under the supervision of the organization's chief chemist, Carlos Alvarez, the coca paste is refined into cocaine. These laboratories are usually within 10 to 15 miles of Colombia's main cities—Bogotá, Medellín, Cali and Barranquilla. quilla.

quilla.

Last Dec. 16 the Colombian
police raided a laboratory
outside Cali supplying cocaine to the Herrera organization that was capable

turning out 50 kilos of co-caine in one batch. Of the eight persons arrested, one was a professor of chemistry at Santiago University in Cali and another was a captain in the Cali fire brigade. The police also found a 25-ton press used for packing the cocaine into fine sheets, 700 gallons of acetone used in the gallons of acetone used in the chemical process and other equipment and materials valued at \$800,000.

Elaborate Courier System

Although the Herreras may Although the Herreras may lose a lab once in a while, their business still expands. After Herrera laboratories process the paste, the finished cocaine is distributed to Emilio Herrera in Barranquilla, Carlos Herrera in Bogotá and David Herrera in Medellin. They, in turn, export it by "mules" (couriers) in small amounts of two to four kilograms each. Larger quantities are sent on commercial vessels through the

quantities are sent on commercial vessels through the ports of Turbo and Buenaventura to Atlantic coast harbors in the United States. Couriers for the Herreras sometimes pose as students. They are given student visas and they are supplied with books that have sheets of cocaine secreted in them. The "students" are paid from \$500 to \$1,000 plus expenses and are given new clothes for carrying the cocaine to New York.

New York.
The authorities say false The authorities say false documents for these couriers are usually procured by Aura Monsalve, a cousin of the Herreras, and Francisco Martinez, who also serves as a liaison to several of the group's North American buyers.

It is unlikely that an organization as large as the Her-rerases could function withrerases could function with-out police and political protection. Authorities say the organization's protectors include not only influential officials in the police, cus-toms and the judiciary, but also several leading members of Colombian society who have invested in the lucrative cocaine trade. cocaine trade.



Benjamin Herrera

NYT 4-21-75