Like some Russian high official come to treat with Chechen rebels, CIA Director John Deutch arrived in force -- by heavily-armed motorcade, and with helicopter cover. SWAT teams swarmed over the building that was Deutch's destination.

But on November 15, 1996, Deutch's destination was in fact only the auditorium of Locke High School in the beleaguered South Central neighborhood of Los Angeles: for a U.S. public servant, not officially enemy territory at all. Still, the citizens who showed up to hear and question Deutch were searched with a metal detector in return for the privilege.

And privilege it was. The post-Cold-War world had become so threatening to the CIA that Deutch was taking the unprecedented step of showing up in public -- of walking, in fact, directly into a popular firestorm. That evening, Deutch emphatically claimed that the CIA had no involvement whatsoever with the crack-cocaine epidemic that is battering South Central. It was a message Deutch's audience wasn't buying.

This event and its aftermath are well worth reflecting upon. Unfortunately, the defense of Deutch and his agency by major U.S. media has proved far less illuminating than the narrow and ahistorical way these same media have defined and framed the relevant issues. The ability of well-paid media people to vaporize the known history of the CIA, to turn this history into a non-issue, is scary -- scarier, almost, than the long, lamentable, but extremely well-documented story of CIA involvement with drug traffickers on four continents.

This essay will attempt to say something, yet again, both about the major media and about some of the many mind-bending episodes, already on the public record, of CIA-drug-trafficker complicity.

The CIA's latest trials on this issue began in August 1996 with the now-notorious series on crack cocaine in the San Jose Mercury News. In this series, reporter Gary Webb made the case that the CIA, through the actions of several drug-dealing Nicaraguan contras it had funded, was involved in the introduction of crack into Los Angeles during the 1980s.

Parallel stories have appeared in provincial papers before, and been ignored. But San Jose isn't in Silicon Valley for nothing; the Mercury News boosted Webb's stories with its state-of-the-art website, and a popular firestorm ensued. Soon Maxine Waters of the Congressional Black Caucus was calling for an investigation, and the Senate Intelligence Committee had scheduled hearings.

Belatedly, the Washington Post, Los Angeles Times, and New York Times all recognized that, this time around, they couldn't ignore the story. But instead of investigating the CIA, they investigated their fellow journalists at the Mercury News. Quoting each other's stories to strengthen their common case, editorialists, reporters, and columnists from all three papers attacked Webb's
reporting -- or what they claimed Webb had reported -- as well as his ethics, his talk-show appearances, his book proposal, his movie deal, his editors, and even a graphic on his newspaper's website. Gary Webb, after all, is neither a Washingtonian nor a New Yorker.

There was nothing casual or accidental about this bashing. The L.A. Times had 25 reporters on the story. The Post refused to print a reasoned letter from Mercury News editor Jerry Ceppos defending the series, even after Ceppos provided a requested revision. Perhaps the low point of this campaign was a story by Tim Golden of the New York Times, which explained that African-Americans are more susceptible than their fellow citizens to conspiracy theories and paranoia.

But it's not necessarily paranoid to note what crack has done to our cities, or that the U.S. prison population has tripled over the past 14 years, or that California now spends more on prisons than it does on colleges and universities. And as the Mercury News noted: in 1993, snorters of powdered cocaine drew an average sentence of three months, whereas crack smokers got an average of three years. And 83 percent of those sent to prison for crack trafficking were African-American. If present trends were to continue for another 14 years, a majority of African-American males between the ages of 18 and 40 would be locked up.

Deutch's audience at Locke High, furthermore, had a more appropriate response than the Washington Post did to Deutch's promise that the CIA would investigate itself: hoots and howls. After all, the last internal CIA report on contras and drugs, completed in 1988, is still secret. "I don't know why [Rep. Julian] Dixon is saluting Deutch's courage for coming here today," someone from the audience complained at the floor microphone, "when everybody knows this building's got hundreds of pigs in it. There's pigs behind those curtains, there's pigs on top of the roof. We're not going to get no justice here today -- we're going to need a revolution."

And it's the major media, rather than the folks who turned out at Locke High, that are guilty of what amounts to suppression of evidence on this issue. Consider media treatment of Jack Blum, former special counsel to John Kerry's Senate subcommittee that investigated the CIA-contra-drug connection. If senators will listen to anyone who can speak authoritatively on this issue, it's Blum. On October 23, 1996, Blum told the Senate Intelligence Committee that although the CIA had not itself sold crack in the inner city, it had "ignored the drug problem and subverted law enforcement to prevent embarrassment and to reward our allies in the contra war.... A careful review of covert operations in the Caribbean and South and Central America shows a forty-year connection between crime and covert operations that has repeatedly blown back on the United States.... I would hope that this inquiry goes beyond the narrow questions posed in the San Jose Mercury News story."

Blum's statement reviewed the same history of CIA complicity with drug traffickers that will be touched on in this essay: CIA ties to the Mafia during World War II; its role in Burma in the 1950s; in Laos in the 1960s; in Argentina and Bolivia in the 1970s; and in Central America and Afghanistan in the 1980s. But Blum's 3,700 words of historical perspective raised the specter of exactly the kind of inquiry that the major media don't want. ABC's Peter Jennings crunched Blum's reflections down to a single sound bite, perversely out of context, in which Blum absolved the CIA of directly selling drugs in Los Angeles. The two sentences on CNN's U.S. News Story Page on their website were equally shameless: "Jack Blum, a former Senate investigator who looked into the matter during the 1980s, defended the CIA. 'No members of the staff of the CIA ... (were) in the cocaine business,' he said."

In fairness we may note that the media were only following the government's lead on this issue. CIA Inspector General Frederick Hitz lacks subpoena power and must produce a declassified report; for additional powers, he must petition Congress. But Congressional "oversight" over the CIA is unfortunately just that. The House Intelligence Committee is now chaired by Porter Goss (R-FL), a former CIA operations officer who still hangs out with Agency friends. Its Senate counterpart is under Arlen Specter (R-PA), whose major contribution to investigative history to date is the Warren Commission's "magic bullet" theory.
Put simply, neither the major media nor Congress has the will, perhaps not even the power, to pursue the real history of CIA activity. Maxine Waters (D-CA) fears that the investigations now in train will fade away unless public pressure is maintained. To this end, Waters plans teach-ins on California campuses this spring. A fourth contra-crack investigation is being conducted by Justice Department Inspector General Michael Bromwich, a former narcotics prosecutor. But even though Bromwich's intentions seem good, he can subpoena only Justice Department documents, and cannot compel witnesses to testify.

Jack Blum is surely right to want to pursue all CIA-drugs investigations within the framework of the larger history of the CIA -- even though one must surely question Blum's assumption that established agencies are capable of doing this. Since the 1960s, evidence of corruption and official lies has periodically made it onto the public record, but the worse the news, the more intense official resistance has become.

What follows, nevertheless, is a quick sketch of what all such investigators -- and the public -- ought to have firmly in mind. A variety of sources have been assembled here into a rough chronological narrative. But the scope of this narrative is so great that only major chapters in the CIA's long association with drugs can be mentioned. Still, as a big picture, it's better than nothing -- which is what official sources and investigations, and well-heeled publishers and producers, threaten to give us.

Back in 1936, Lucky Luciano, the boss of Mafia drug and prostitution rackets in New York City, was finally convicted as a result of Thomas Dewey's prosecution, and sentenced to thirty to fifty years. But in 1942 the Office of Naval Intelligence asked Meyer Lansky to seek Luciano's assistance in getting New York waterfront workers to watch out for enemy agents and activity. Soon Luciano's friends in Sicily, who had been severely repressed by Mussolini, were helping with the American invasion there. In 1946 the ONI appealed to Luciano's parole board. He was released from prison and deported to Italy -- where he built up a heroin syndicate.

The immediate postwar problem in places like Italy and France, from the point of view of both the CIA and entrenched interests such as the Mafia, was that many Communists had been anti-fascist Resistance fighters, and as such were attractive to voters. The Marshall Plan aimed not merely to rebuild a war-torn Europe; it aimed to rebuild Europe in such a way that no Communists could ever win an election. To this end, the CIA played a major role in administering Marshall Plan aid.

In Italy the CIA spent money to deny the 1948 elections to the Communists. By 1950 the Mafia again controlled Sicily. The CIA was also paying the Corsican Mafia in Marseilles to undermine Communist influence with striking workers. These Mafia syndicates were sufficiently well-protected that in 1951 they opened their first heroin lab. By 1965 there were two dozen labs in Marseilles, which together exported nearly five tons of heroin to the U.S. during that year.[1]

Heroin trafficking shifted in the 1960s and 1970s from the Turkey-Marseilles connection to the Asian connection. For decades until the 1950s, the opium trade was sanctioned by colonial administrations in Asia. By the early 1960s, the mountain areas of Southeast Asia -- the Golden Triangle region -- produced most of the world's opium. Northeastern Burma was particularly productive.

In the case of Burma, production before 1945 was insignificant -- as a province of India under the British, most of the opium traded in Burma was produced in India. But in 1949, Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist Forces retreated from Mao's army to the mountains of northeast Burma. The CIA helped maintain these troops, and sponsored two invasions of China. During their stay in Burma, the Nationalist Chinese exacted opium quotas from Burma's peasants; failure to pay was punished by the cutting off of fingers, hands, and feet. By the time the Nationalists fled in 1961, Burma had gone from producing about seven tons of opium per year to producing as much as a thousand tons, or about sixty percent of the world's production.[2]
In French-occupied Indochina, meanwhile, the Corsican syndicates were operating the opium trade out of Saigon under the protection of French military intelligence. When France withdrew in 1955, the U.S. inherited France's colonial politics and infrastructure. The U.S. worked with the same peoples -- the Hmong in Laos -- that the French had used. And again, the American Mafia was involved through their Corsican contacts. From Tampa, Florida, Santo Trafficante ran the Marseilles connection in Cuba during the 1950s. In 1968 he visited Saigon to meet with Corsican syndicate leaders. After 1970, Asian heroin began showing up in the U.S.

After the Cuban revolution, Trafficante's Mafia foot soldiers were mainly Cuban exiles.[3] In a 1982 interview, former CIA commando leader Grayston Lynch described what had once been the largest CIA station in the world, located south of Miami from 1961-1964. This station issued orders to 400 case officers and 2,000 exiles, dispersed in "safe houses" from Miami to Tampa. Lynch concedes that after the CIA cut off support, many of these exiles, trained in covert operations and smuggling, turned to narcotics trafficking.[4] Given that the CIA had worked with Trafficante to assassinate Castro in 1961,[5] the agency lacked sufficient ethical intelligence to worry that these Trafficante-associated exiles might pose a criminal problem. They were considered merely a "disposal problem," an institutional nuisance.

At the time all of these events were unfolding, they were secret history, unavailable in books and newspapers. Then one day in 1970, the poet Allen Ginsberg stumbled onto the CIA-heroin connection while sorting his files of clippings. He noticed that when sorted chronologically, U.S. advances into the opium-producing areas of the Golden Triangle were followed, a few months later, by clippings that reported a rise in heroin overdose deaths in American cities. The alternative press fleshed out Ginsberg's insight, and the May 1971 Ramparts magazine featured a cover story on South Vietnam's "Marshal Ky: The Biggest Pusher in the World." The major media ignored everything until Sen. Ernest Gruening, a maverick from Alaska, opened hearings. At that point the Washington Post and NBC News "discovered" this story, but soon buried it. Only the alternative press kept it alive.[6]

South Vietnam was completely corrupted by a heroin trade whose immediate origin was in Laos. The Hmong culture in Laos provided 30,000 men for the CIA's secret Laotian army under General Vang Pao. But in the process, opium production took over Hmong culture; the Hmong grew only enough rice for subsistence. To support the Hmong economy, the CIA's Air America transported raw opium out of the Laotian hills to the labs. At this point the CIA begged off, and let the syndicates and South Vietnamese officials take care of distribution. Double UOGlobe no.4 heroin, produced at a Laotian lab owned by Gen. Ouane Rattikone, became particularly famous. By mid-1971, Army medical officers estimated that fifteen percent of American GIs were addicted.

Veterans of Vietnam and Laos with intelligence connections, men such as Theodore Shackley (former chief of the Miami station), his deputy Thomas Clines, Richard Secord, Oliver North, and Felix Rodriguez, later became familiar names during the Iran-contra scandal of the 1980s. More obscure was one Michael Hand, who had been a CIA contract agent in Laos. In 1973, Hand and his partner Frank Nukan established the Nugan Hand Bank in Sydney.

A slew of top-level retirees from the CIA and U.S. military intelligence were associated with this bank; William Colby served as its attorney. Nugan Hand collapsed spectacularly in 1980. After three major investigations, Australian officials concluded that the bank had been primarily involved in laundering money for arms and drug traffickers.[7] Apparently the CIA's infamous "disposal problem" -- what to do with those nasty, well-trained former assets -- extends to its top-level former executives and administrators.

Then there is the horrible tale of Afghanistan. Heroin there was also a well-kept secret, at least until the Soviet withdrawal in 1989. Then the Washington Post was free to "discover" that Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, the CIA's favorite guerrilla leader, had commanders under him who worked with Pakistan's Inter Services Intelligence agency to run heroin labs in southwest Pakistan. "Since the
Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, U.S. narcotics policy in Afghanistan has been subordinated to the war against Soviet influence there. In 1989, Afghanistan was second only to Burma as a producer of opium, growing 650 tons, nearly all of which was intended for heroin manufacturing, a State Department report said. \[8\]

When Allen Ginsberg was sorting his clippings about heroin, his discovery of a correlation with CIA activity in the Golden Triangle must have seemed dismaying enough, almost unbelievable. Fortunately for Ginsberg, a proponent of LSD, he had no evidence that the CIA may have also been behind the expansion of LSD distribution within the counterculture. But such evidence later came to light.

Ginsberg, like most of the counterculture, saw LSD as a liberating experience. The drug was nonaddictive, although it could be dangerous in the case of an overdose. A safe dosage, however, was entirely an individual phenomenon, and could not even be objectively established. And it soon became clear that LSD dramatically amplified tendencies that were already present in the individual and the immediate environment. The exact dosage that might have seemed liberating in 1967 might have been debilitating when ingested by the same individual in 1969, a banner year for agents provocateurs and bad vibes.

In 1975, the Rockefeller Commission reported that the CIA had been testing LSD since the 1950s -- only to discover that the drug's effects were too unpredictable to make it a reliable tool for mind control. Still, given what the CIA knew about LSD at this early date, it doesn't seem inconceivable that the CIA may have hoped that greater availability of the powerful drug would undermine the political effectiveness of the student movement and counterculture.

Evidence of the possible strategic use of LSD emerged in 1979, when Italian magistrate Giorgio Floridia issued a report on the case of Ronald Stark, who had been arrested in Bologna for drug trafficking in 1975. The magistrate ordered Stark's release on the grounds that he had been working for U.S. intelligence since 1960. From 1969-1974, Stark was a major producer of LSD, with factories first in Paris, then in Belgium and California, and a pipeline into the Brotherhood of Eternal Love, the world's largest distributor.

Floridia cited Stark's frequent prison visits from Wendy M. Hansen at the U.S. consulate in Florence, "Dear Ron" letters from Charles C. Adams at the U.S. embassy in London, addressed to Stark's LSD lab in Brussels (these were seized by Italian police after his arrest), and his links with Philip B. Taylor III at the U.S. consulate in Rome. (Taylor is now in Sao Paulo, Brazil.) According to Floridia, Stark had done secret work for the Defense Department from 1960 to 1962, and had received "periodic payments to him from Fort Lee, known to be the site of a CIA office." On his release, Stark was ordered to report in to Italian police twice a week. But within days, Stark had left the country. Bologna police believe that Stark was secretly flown from a NATO air base in Pisa or Vicenza.

In 1984 an Italian parliamentary commission issued a report on domestic terrorism that included a section on Ronald Stark. They concluded that Stark was an adventurer who was used by the CIA, but were unable to determine when the association began. In 1982, Stark was arrested in Holland. Charges were dropped the following year, and Stark was deported to a San Francisco jail, where pending federal charges were dropped by the Justice Department. When Italy requested extradition in 1984, U.S. officials sent a death certificate indicating that Stark had died of a heart attack.

Way back in 1969, Stark first approached the Brotherhood, wowing them with a kilogram of pure LSD (more than they had ever seen), and claiming that he had a new, efficient production method. Stark's lab in France was already a going concern, and the Brotherhood agreed to distribute his product. When Stark shut down this lab in 1971 and opened a better one in Brussels, he boasted that he had done so because of a timely tip from the CIA. In all, Stark made 20 kilograms of LSD, enough for 50 million doses. Most of it was sold in the U.S. There's no proof that Stark was

http://www.namebase.net/news16.html
anything more than an adventurer and an opportunist. But Carl Oglesby, former national president of Students for a Democratic Society, sums up the Stark phenomenon as follows:

What we have to contemplate nevertheless is the possibility that the great American acid trip, no matter how distinctive of the rebellion of the 1960s it came to appear, was in fact the result of a despicable government conspiracy.... If U.S. intelligence bodies collaborated in an effort to drug an entire generation of Americans, then the reason they did so was to disorient it, sedate it and de-politicize it.[9]

Currently it's cocaine in the form of crack that's a major problem in the inner cities of America. Coca leaf is grown on the high Andean plateaus of Bolivia and Peru, and until 1980 it was generally refined in Colombia. After the Bolivian "cocaine coup," refinement of coca paste into cocaine became more of a local affair, while Peru and Paraguay also increased their production. New smuggling routes were established, and new strains of coca were bred that could thrive in the lowlands of the Amazon basin. Cocaine soon glutted the market. Prices dropped dramatically during the first half of the 1980s, which saw the appearance of crack -- a condensed, rock-like substance that can be produced by cooking cocaine with water and baking soda on a kitchen stove. Crack is smoked rather than snorted, a process which absorbs more of the drug into the body with less effort.

The 1980 cocaine coup in Bolivia was arranged by the Argentine military, which in 1976 seized power in Argentina and proceeded to "disappear" about 11,000 of the country's own citizens. Michael Levine, who was the DEA's country attache to Argentina and Uruguay in 1980, discovered that the high-level Argentine military officers he was trying to bust for trafficking were well-connected in Bolivia, and that the entire bunch were protected by the CIA. Some of the bloodiest coup-makers in Bolivia were recruited by Klaus Barbie, a fugitive Nazi war criminal and long-time CIA asset.[10]

Confirmation of the CIA's role came from testimony taken by the Kerry subcommittee in a closed hearing on July 23, 1987. Leandro Sanchez Reisse was assigned by the Argentine military to set up a money laundering front in Florida in 1977. He said that these fronts ran operations for and with the CIA, including weapons shipments to Argentine personnel in Central America. In 1980, funds from a major Bolivian trafficker were funneled to the Argentine military, which then sent ambulances loaded with weapons to Bolivia. These were used in the 1980 coup engineered by Luis Arce Gomez and Luis Garcia Meza, both of whom were connected to traffickers.[11]

The CIA, claiming that the Sandinistas in Nicaragua were sending arms to guerrillas in El Salvador, paid Argentina to provide military training to contras in Central America. This arrangement ended in 1982, when the military government in Argentina lost power after the Falklands debacle. Within several years, however, the contra war developed into a major CIA operation involving Cuban exiles from Miami; former Nicaraguan guardsmen who fled during the 1979 revolution and regrouped in Honduras; and assorted CIA adventurers with drug- and arms-trafficking connections.

Celerino Castillo fought in Vietnam from 1971-1972, where he saw the effects of drugs on U.S. troops. By 1975 he was a Texas cop, later a detective working drug cases. In 1980, Castillo joined the DEA and worked the streets of New York. He worked in Peru in 1984-1985, and Guatemala from 1985-1990. While stationed in Guatemala, Castillo was the DEA agent in charge of anti-drug operations in El Salvador from 1985-1987. During this period, he discovered that Oliver North's contras were running cocaine from El Salvador's Ilopango airport.

Castillo did his best to bust them, but soon learned that the traffickers were protected by the CIA. "By the end of 1988," he writes, "I realized how hopelessly tangled DEA, the CIA, and every other U.S. entity in Central America had become with the criminals. The connections boggled my mind." [12] Feeling his life was in danger, Castillo got out in a hurry in 1990. The DEA, meanwhile, was increasing the pressure with an internal investigation of Castillo. His career was over and he
resigned. Lawrence Walsh's office extensively debriefed Castillo, but when Walsh released his massive report in 1993, the narcotics connection was nowhere to be found. The combined House and Senate Iran-contra hearings in 1987 also ignored the drug issue. Instead, investigators granted immunity to Oliver North.

John Kerry's subcommittee, the "Senate Subcommittee on Terrorism, Narcotics and International Operations," began its investigations in 1987, held hearings in 1988 and 1989, and issued a 144-page report on April 13, 1989.[13] At one point, the subcommittee took testimony from the head of the Honduran DEA office, who described how it was closed down in June 1983, at a time when the CIA station was doubling in size. Honduras was a major transit station for cocaine, thanks to their corrupt military. It was clear to the CIA and Pentagon that the contra effort required the support of Honduras, and that the price for this support was to overlook the cocaine traffic.

"I watched the CIA protect drug traffickers throughout my career as a DEA agent," says Michael Levine. "I have put thousands of Americans away for tens of thousands of years for conspiracy with less evidence than is available against Ollie North and CIA people."[14] Tom Cash, a former top DEA official in Miami, agrees: "When you have those types of political upheavals and foreign policy considerations of the President to start with, and at the same time have a drug prosecution to contend with, drugs are going to be second. It is something we grappled with on a daily basis."[15]

One could, arguably, defend the mainstream press for refusing to follow up on stories as improbable, and characters as fringe, as some of those we've considered here: an iconoclast poet like Ginsberg, a shapeshifter like Stark, a low-level Serpico like Castillo. But the real indictment of the major media on the CIA-drugs question is their inability to follow up on obvious leads occurring in major stories taking place under floodlights in their own backyard.

Consider the case of Oliver North, known associate of drug traffickers. Oliver North's conviction for three felonies (lying, cheating, and stealing) was reversed in 1990 because his case was muddied by the Congressional grant of immunity. This meant that he could run for office, and in 1994 he was nearly elected to the U.S. Senate. North's infamous notebooks, however, may yet return to haunt him.

Ten months after the Kerry subcommittee subpoenaed these notebooks, they still lacked clean, unexpurgated copies. Nevertheless, these notebooks contain dozens of references to contra drug trafficking. In an e-mail message about General Jose Bueso Rosa from Honduras, who was involved in a conspiracy to import 345 kilos of cocaine into Florida, North noted that U.S. officials would "cabal quietly to look at options: pardon, clemency, deportation, reduced sentence." Even after Panama's Manuel Noriega was exposed in the U.S. press as a drug runner, North met with him because Noriega wanted help to "clean up his image." In exchange, Noriega offered North some helpful anti-Sandinista sabotage.

Or consider the decision by the Post and other major media to throw away a truly sensational story: the official declaration by Costa Rica, Central America's one shining light of democracy, that it considered a number of major U.S. officials to be drug traffickers, and as such was barring them from entering the country. The list here is nothing short of amazing: Oliver North himself, retired air-force major general Richard Secord, Reagan's former national security advisor John Poindexter, former U.S. Ambassador Lewis Tambs, and former CIA station chief Joseph Fernandez.

On July 22, 1989, the Associated Press ran this story, but they were virtually alone; some major media buried this story, and the rest resolutely ignored it. When asked why, Post reporter Walter Pincus gave a revealing response: "Just because a congressional commission in Costa Rica says something, doesn't mean it's true."[16] (Before he joined the Post in the 1960s, Pincus traveled abroad on a CIA subsidy to spy on student leaders from other countries.[17] Unsurprisingly, Pincus was out in front of the pack of reporters that attacked the recent Mercury News story.)
When the major media turn aside from stories so sensational, and so easy to pursue, it's unlikely to be an accident. And given that stories so high-profile go nowhere, it's not surprising that the same thing happens to countless lower-profile stories that lack immediately-recognizable American names. Space prevents giving even a "bullet" version of many stories that could be adduced here, but consider the following items, at least:

- Medellin trafficker Carlos Lehder testified at Noriega's 1991 trial that the Medellin cartel gave $10 million to the contras.
- FBI informant Wanda Palacio told the Kerry subcommittee that she saw cocaine being loaded onto pilot Wallace Sawyer's plane in Barranquilla, Colombia in 1985. (Sawyer and his Southern Air Transport L382, carrying guns this time, were shot down over Nicaragua one year later. The flight logs from the plane, recovered by the Sandinistas, substantiated Palacio's story.)
- George Morales, a major cocaine trafficker, offered planes and cash to the contras; when contra leader Adolfo Chamorro checked with the CIA, they said Morales was fine and to go ahead with the deal.
- Ramon Milian Rodriguez, the chief accountant for the Medellin cartel, testified to the Kerry subcommittee that he transferred money to the contras and laundered more than $3 million for the CIA, even after his indictment on drug charges in 1983.
- In what was known as the Frogman Case, the U.S. Attorney in San Francisco, Joseph Russoniello, returned $36,000 to an arrested cocaine dealer after contra leaders stipulated that the money was earmarked for weapons. The Justice Department foiled Kerry's attempts to investigate this. (Russoniello, by the way, is a member of the Association of Former Intelligence Officers.)
- Recently a Venezuelan, Gen. Ramon Guillen Davila, was indicted in Miami for smuggling tons of cocaine. This is the only instance in which the CIA has acknowledged responsibility for drugs being imported into the U.S. One CIA officer resigned and another was recalled to Washington, but no CIA officials have been charged.

Or consider the blatant attempt by the Washington Post and its corporate sibling Newsweek to bury the inconvenient results of Congressional investigations into CIA complicity with drug traffickers, and then smear the investigators. On July 22, 1987, the Post ran an article whose headline seemed perfectly clear: "Hill Panel Finds No Evidence Linking Contras to Drug Smuggling."

But Charles Rangel (D-NY), chairman of the House Select Committee on Narcotics Abuse and Control, wrote to the Post and complained, "Your headline says we drew one conclusion, while in fact we reached quite a different one." Rangel's letter ended up buried in the Congressional Record (August 6, 1987), because the Post refused to publish it. Two years later, when the Kerry subcommittee report was released, the Post buried it on a back page, and devoted most of the short article to Republican criticisms of Kerry. Newsweek called Kerry a "randy conspiracy buff."

When our major media behave more irresponsibly than Congress, and frequently only a few members of Congress deserve our support, it's easy to see that we have a problem. The 1980s were a repeat performance of the 1970s, when the stakes were larger. At that time it was a question of organized assassinations and secret wars of aggression. Both Congress and the media were interested, at least initially. But our media establishment took one look into the abyss and decided that investigative journalism was not so profitable after all. Without the support of the media, Congress quickly lost interest.[18]

Is it even necessary to write a conclusion to this tragic but also farcical story? Confronting his outraged fellow citizens in South Central, CIA Director John Deutch thought he was offering a reasonable extenuation when he remarked at one point: "Our case officers deal with bad people, very bad people." But a moment's thought reveals the utter vacuity of this remark. The Cold War is over.
For the young, even its memory is fading away. What should fade away now are the rationalizations that once led men like Deutch to justify cutting deals with tinhorn dictators and smack dealers.

Unfortunately, as Deutch's audience knew, the evil these men did lives after them -- on the streets of South Central, and all over our unhappy global village. It's still going on. Why can't our press report it?


13. The most comprehensive discussion of the details in this report can be found in Peter Dale Scott and Jonathan Marshall, Cocaine Politics: Drugs, Armies, and the CIA in Central America (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 279 pages.


For references to more information on this topic, search for the proper names found in this essay by using NameBase from our home page, a cumulative name index of 600 investigative books, plus 23 years of assorted clippings.

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