

We selected Gary Webb's investigative series and book "Dark Alliance" as our topic because it encapsulates the often-overlooked story of the U.S. Cold War foreign policy's adverse impacts, demonstrated through underprivileged domestic communities' crack affliction and the atrocities committed by the U.S.-backed Contra rebels. Beyond the controversy itself, our research underscores how the demographics most harmed by institutional failure are often the least equipped to demand accountability. These broad themes shaped our exploration of historical contexts that extended far beyond the events contained in Webb's 1996 series.

Our research began with "Dark Alliance" as it primarily inspired our original thesis. Initially, Webb's narrative led us to believe his central claims largely at face value. As we explored alternative perspectives such as newspaper articles and declassified government documents, we deepened our understanding and considered additional viewpoints which reshaped our project to reflect new findings. Major media outlets flat-out denied Webb's claims, but our findings revealed government records that notably confirmed the CIA's failure to prevent cocaine trafficking, yet did not substantiate Webb's implication that the agency had actively contributed to the crack epidemic as deliberate policy. By remaining open-minded towards sources that disputed our initial assumptions, we arrived at a more defensible conclusion. Webb's fundamental findings remained mostly viable, but rigorous analysis required that we distinguish evidence of government negligence from claims that were either overstated or insufficiently corroborated.

Before determining our topic, we had decided to create a website due to our team's previous experience in website design, translating powerfully into the visual quality of our final product. Additionally, the complexity of "Dark Alliance" required a format capable of integrating imagery with cohesive written analysis. Designing a website allowed us to employ visuals alongside concise and well-sourced text in a manner that other formats could not realistically accomplish. Throughout the construction process, we maintained maximum clarity and coherence to ensure that our argument remained accessible without sacrificing historical or analytical depth.

"Dark Alliance" directly embodies this year's theme of "Revolution, Reaction, and Reform," given that it represents a profound revolution in investigative journalism. Published online, it swiftly reached vast audiences across America, demonstrating the internet's capacity to bypass traditional media gatekeepers and deliver reporting that holds the government publicly accountable, a feat never-before-seen in investigative journalism. The reaction was sudden and multidirectional. African American communities embraced the series as evidence of the government's long-suspected complicity in their hardships, whereas major outlets including *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *The Los Angeles Times* aggressively campaigned to discredit Webb's findings, leading the *San Jose Mercury News* to publicly withdraw support for the series. Significant reform followed. The CIA Inspector General conducted groundbreaking internal investigations acknowledging negligence in their drug policy, and the story reinvigorated congressional debate over the sentencing disparities that had devastated Black communities throughout the crack epidemic. "Dark Alliance" permanently altered the national conversation regarding government transparency, affirming the efficacy of investigative

journalism, and demonstrating that determined reporting can yield institutional accountability despite powerful adversity.