Gary Webb began his career working for newspapers in Kentucky and Ohio, winning numerous awards and building a strong reputation for investigative writing.

Webb’s first major investigative work appeared in 1980, when the Kentucky Post published The Coal Connection, a seventeen-part series by Webb and Post reporter Thomas Scheffey. The series, which examined the murder of a coal company president with ties to organized crime, won the national Investigative Reporters and Editors Award for reporting from a small newspaper.

In 1983, Webb moved to the Cleveland Plain Dealer, where he continued doing investigative work. A 1985 series, Doctoring the Truth, uncovered problems in the State Medical Board. It led to an Ohio House investigation which resulted in major revisions to the state Medical Practice Act. Webb then moved to the paper’s statehouse bureau, where he covered statewide issues, winning numerous regional journalism awards.

In 1988, Webb was recruited by the San Jose Mercury News, which was looking for an investigative reporter. He was assigned to its Sacramento bureau, where he was allowed to choose most of his own stories. As part of The Mercury News team that covered the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake, in 1990 Webb won the highly esteemed, Pulitzer Prize for General News Reporting.

Gary’s life took a complete turn when he wrote a series of three articles for the San Jose Mercury News in 1996, dubbed “Dark Alliance.”

Dark Alliance was a series which officially exposed that the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) hired Norwin Meneses, Danilo Blandon, and other drug traffickers to sell massive amounts of cocaine in the United States, in order to raise untraceable funds to finance a terrorist organization known as the Contras, who were trying to overthrow the people’s Nicaraguan (Sandinista) government.

After gaining access to secret grand jury transcripts in 1996, and following the subsequent paper trail that followed therein, Gary Webb made the shocking discovery that government informant, Oscar Danilo Blandón, was covertly selling tons of cocaine for the CIA in South Central Los Angeles, and other parts of the country. As we now know today—thanks to Gary’s brilliant research—this is what most visibly sparked the crack epidemic that swept North America during the 1980s and 90s. The drug funds were being raised to fund CIA-trained terrorists in Nicaragua who sought to overthrow the democratic and working people-focused, Sandinista government that had recently overthrown the oppressive U.S.-backed military dictatorship known as the Somoza Dynasty.
**HISTORICAL TIMELINE**

**1821:** Nicaragua and other Central American colonies gain their independence from the Spanish Crown.

**1910:** U.S. troops impose a puppet government in Nicaragua. Liberal President José Santos Zelaya is forced out of office and Adolfo Díaz is made provisional president by the U.S.

**1912:** Díaz requests U.S. military assistance to control the people’s unrest resulting from the U.S. overthrowing their democratically-elected government. Nicaraguans resist U.S. occupation and the national hero for fighting against the United States invasion, Benjamin Zeledón, is assassinated.

**1927:** Augusto César Sandino, Commander of the Army to Defend the National Sovereignty, rejects the U.S.’s new President-Elect Gen. José Moncada. Sandino launches a guerrilla war against U.S. forces in Nicaragua.

**1927-1934:** After five hundred battles fought against U.S. marines and sympathizers, Sandino successfully expels U.S. armed forces from Nicaragua.

**1934:** The U.S. withdraws, leaving Nicaraguan military officer Anastasio Somoza as Commander of the National Guard.

**1936:** Anastasio Somoza founds a brutal dictatorship fueled by U.S. funds, which is passed from father to son to brother for over 43 years.

**1980:** Somoza is assassinated in Paraguay. Once the U.S. involvement is dispelled from Nicaragua, the Sandinista government is able to truly build. The Sandinistas implement social programs, which received international recognition for their gains in literacy, health care, education, childcare, unions, and land reform. For the first time in history, Nicaraguans are called to decide their own future. Just as they struggle for increased self-sufficiency, the Reagan and Bush administrations wanted to begin funding the Contra War against the Sandinistas due to fears of the Sandinista’s relationship with the USSR, as well as the success of the people-controlled, anti-corporate, socialist government.

**1981-1991:** This ten-year war between the Sandinistas—the people-lead front—and the Contras—the U.S.-backed drug militia—was fought at the cost of 60,000 Nicaraguan lives, 178 billion dollars, and the progressive Nicaraguan
infrastructure and economy. This war was also fought at the expense of U.S. inner city communities, especially Black communities, which experienced a 20–100% increase in fetal death rates, low birth weight babies, weapons arrests, and the number of children in foster care. By 1996, approximately 60% of all inmates incarcerated in the U.S. were sentenced on drug charges, and the majority of these inmates were Black. During this time, the Black family structure and community was desecrated due to drugs, and the “War on Drugs” and the “Just Say No” movements continued the terror of harsher punishments for Black and Latino drug offenders than their white counterparts.

1995: Gary Webb starts researching the CIA’s involvement in the Sandinista-Contra War and its connection to the U.S. inner city crack epidemic.

The mainstream media vilified Gary Webb for breaking this story, and destroyed his career which also led to the destruction of his marriage, safety, and sanity. Despite the turmoil, Gary refused to back down, and stood firm against the system.

One of the major tactics of attack was to create and sell the narrative that Gary Webb himself was to blame for his downfall. It was stated on multiple media networks that, “Mr. Webb was open to attack in part because of the lurid (loud) presentation of the story and his willingness to draw causality based on very thin sourcing and evidence.” It was later revealed that Webb was under intentional attack by major media outlets, led by The New York Times, The Washington Post, and The Los Angeles Times. It was reported that The Los Angeles Times alone assigned seventeen reporters to leverage the inherent mysteries of the national security state to cast doubt on Webb’s Dark Alliance publications. Under intense pressure, Webb’s top editor abandoned him. Webb was gradually drummed out of journalism while still defending his position, his research, and his witnesses.

In 2004, at age 49, Gary was found dead with 2 bullet wounds to his head. The death was ruled a suicide.

Gary lost his life giving the world a glimpse of the truth.

CONTINUED TIMELINE

1989: Senator, John Kerry writes in a U.S. Senate Drug Law Enforcement, and Foreign Policy report stating that “there is also evidence on the record that U.S. officials involved in assisting the Contras knew that drug smugglers were exploiting the clandestine infrastructure established to support the war and that Contras were receiving assistance derived from drug trafficking. Instead of reporting these individuals to the appropriate law enforcement agencies, it appears that some officials may have turned a blind eye to these activities.”

1996: Jack Blum testified in a Senate committee hearing, “if you ask whether the United States government ignored the drug problem and subverted law enforcement to prevent embarrassment and to reward our allies in the Contra war, the answer is yes.”

2004: Webb summed it up in his last major interview conducted just days before his death.

“It’s not a situation where the government or the CIA sat down and said okay, let’s invent crack and sell it in black neighborhoods and let’s decimate black...
America. It was a situation where we need money for a covert operation. The quickest way to raise it is to sell cocaine and you guys go sell it somewhere. We don’t want to know anything about it. And you had this bad luck of them doing it right around the time people were figuring out how to make crack.”

– Gary Webb

2014: David Carr, the media critic for The New York Times, admits that the thrust of what Webb wrote about “really happened,” making passing reference to Kerry’s “little-noticed 1988 Senate subcommittee report.” Carr suggests that perhaps journalists should have better spent their energy reporting the larger story, rather than relentlessly fact-checking Webb.

2014: Nick Schou, author of Kill the Messenger, a book about Webb’s life, writes, “Much of the [Los Angeles] Times’ attack was clever misdirection, but it ruined Webb’s reputation: in particular, the L.A. Times attacked a claim that Webb never made: that the CIA had intentionally addicted African-Americans to crack.”

SOURCES


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