

# postscript

DarkAlliance

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## Black groups seek probe of CIA drug links

- [Editorial](#): Another CIA disgrace: Helping the crack flow
- [Gary Webb](#) on radio and television
- [Scott Willis cartoon \(34K\)](#)
- [Enter Dark Alliance](#)

**Published: Aug. 24, 1996**

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Mercury News Staff Writers

Black groups in Los Angeles and elsewhere Friday demanded a full-scale investigation of the Mercury News' recent revelations that drug dealers -- who provided cocaine and sophisticated weapons to the gangs of L.A. -- had connections to a CIA-run guerrilla army.

The Black American Political Association of California's Los Angeles Chapter took to the steps of L.A.'s City Hall and its city council chambers to demand "an immediate, full, thorough and complete investigation ... to determine not only the identities and roles of those who participated in the activity, but also those who covered it up, protected it and knowingly tolerated it."

The Mercury News, in a three-part series that ended Aug. 20, reported that Danilo Blandon, a former Nicaraguan government official, was the conduit for thousands of kilos of cocaine that flowed to the Los Angeles street gangs between 1982 and 1986. Blandon, who pleaded guilty to cocaine trafficking charges in 1992 and went to work for the Drug Enforcement Administration, testified recently that he began selling cocaine in L.A.'s black neighborhoods as a way of raising money for a Nicaraguan guerrilla army run by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency. That army was commonly known as the Contras.

Blandon has testified that he was one of the army's top civilian officials in California.

Sweet Alice Harris, a community leader who has lived in L.A.'s South-Central district for 40 years, was blunt in her reaction to the allegations.

"The worst thing you can do is hurt a mother's children, and they have killed our children," she said. "I'm as mad as I can be now. I'm real mad."

At Friday's meeting, the Los Angeles City Council approved a motion by Councilman Nate Holden that the city ask the U.S. attorney general to "conduct a complete, thorough and independent investigation of serious and credible allegations as to the ongoing sale of illegal street drugs to American citizens of African-American descent, with the apparent approval of the United States Government, on behalf of and to support the efforts of the Nicaraguan contra army."

In Nashville, meanwhile, Washington, D.C., radio talk show host Joe Madison urged reporters at the National Association of Black Journalists Convention to use their influence to push for a full investigation.

"I will challenge them to use all of their editorial influence and resources to get Congress and both presidential candidates to investigate this matter immediately, including appointing a special prosecutor," Madison said in a prepared statement issued beforehand.

"Freeway Rick" Ross, the former crack cocaine king of L.A., was Blandon's biggest customer during the 1980s and his first target when Blandon, a Nicaraguan, became an undercover operative for the DEA. Records show Blandon and the DEA set Ross up for a sting and that Blandon was the star witness during Ross' cocaine conspiracy trial last March. Ross and two other men were convicted and were scheduled to be sentenced Friday.

But sentencing was postponed after Ross' attorney, Alan Fenster, filed a motion for a new trial based on the revelations contained in the Mercury's series.

"These articles set forth the full extent of the involvement of the United States Government in supplying defendant Ross with huge supplies of cocaine for resale to African Americans throughout the United States," Fenster's motion states. "As such, these articles provide further support for defendant Ross' previously raised claim that the United States Government created and nurtured his role as a major drug dealer and ultimately created the circumstances for his arrest. As argued at trial and now supported by these articles, Ross was a victim of government corruption on a massive scale."

Assistant U.S. Attorney L.J. O'Neale would not talk to reporters and did not directly address Fenster's claim in court.

In addition, Fenster told Judge Marilyn Huff at least two people have recently told federal officials that Blandon has continued to deal cocaine while on the DEA's payroll, something Blandon denied at the trial. Huff agreed to postpone Ross' sentencing -- he faces a possible term of life without parole -- until Sept. 13 to take testimony from the two men.

One of those men, Sergio Castrillon, approached FBI agents in February 1996, records show, and told them that on three occasions in 1995 he assisted a Nicaraguan named "Oscar" in moving cocaine loads across the Mexican border into California. (Blandon's full name is Oscar Danilo Blandon Reyes.)

"Castrillon advised that Oscar claims to pay an Immigrations/Customs official at the Calexico Port of Entry to guarantee safe passage of Oscar's loads into the United States," the Feb. 21, 1996, FBI report states.

A federal official said that Blandon later turned in several Customs agents who allegedly had been accepting payoffs, and court records say he assisted in the indictment of a "corrupt U.S. government official."

O'Neale suggested in court Friday that Blandon may have been working on a sting for the DEA at the time Blandon allegedly approached the two men and tried to involve them in a drug deal.

"He has been very active in undercover investigations throughout most of the Western Hemisphere," O'Neale said.

But Fenster noted that the first time the allegations arose, at Ross' trial in March, O'Neale flatly dismissed Castrillon's statements as lies. "He (O'Neale) never said anything about a sting then," Fenster argued.

Toward the end of the hearing, O'Neale -- waving a copy of Sunday's Mercury News -- asked Judge Huff to investigate how a government picture of Blandon had wound up on the Mercury's front page.

Noting that Blandon's picture had been attached to an Immigration document that was under court seal, O'Neale -- glancing at the defense lawyers -- said, "The government believes this court's order has been contemptuously disregarded."

Huff said she would investigate the leak if asked to do so in writing by federal prosecutors.





















































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































