

Accusations Of C.I.A. Ties To Drug Ring Are Renewed

By STEVEN A. HOLMES

New York Times (1923-Current file); May 15, 1997;

ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times with Index

pg. B15

Accusations
Of C.I.A. Ties
To Drug Ring
Are Renewed

By STEVEN A. HOLMES

WASHINGTON, May 14 — Even though the editor of The San Jose Mercury News has said an internal review found serious flaws in his newspaper's "Dark Alliance" series of reports, people who believed the articles' implication of a direct link between the C.I.A. and the crack epidemic continue to press for a Congressional investigation.

Representative Maxine Waters, Democrat of California, said the newspaper's criticism of its series, in an unusual Sunday column by the executive editor, Jerry Ceppos, had not convinced her that the articles were fundamentally unsound.

"It doesn't change anything," Ms. Waters said of the column, which stated that re-reporting by a news-room team had found unsupported conclusions in the articles. "Basically, he said there are things they could have done better. They could have described things better."

But, she added, "the basic story has not changed."

Mr. Ceppos also made that argument in the column, writing: "Does the presence of conflicting information invalidate our entire effort? I strongly believe the answer is no, and that this story was right on many important points."

After the column appeared, Joseph Madison, a Washington radio talk show host who had led efforts to persuade Congress to investigate the accusations, renewed his call for hearings and called upon the newspaper's editors to publish follow-up articles by the same reporter.

"It validates what I've been saying all along," Mr. Madison said.

Ms. Waters, along with Mr. Madison, the comedian Dick Gregory and the Rev. Jesse Jackson, have asked Congress to investigate whether the C.I.A. knew about accusations that members of the C.I.A.-backed Nicaraguan rebels, or contras, were selling cocaine in the United States in the early 1980's to raise money for their cause.

The accusation has been around since the 1980's but was given renewed currency by the three-part series in The Mercury News, which added the explosive suggestion that the C.I.A. knew about the drug trafficking. That led the C.I.A. and the

Blocked due to copyright.
See full page image or
microfilm.

Scott Robinson for The New York Times

Representative Maxine Waters continued to demand an investigation of the C.I.A. Ms. Waters attended a committee meeting yesterday.

Justice Department to begin their own investigations.

Since the articles, written by an investigative reporter, Gary Webb, appeared last August, Ms. Waters has turned the accusations of C.I.A. involvement into a cause célèbre, speaking to groups across the country and tapping into a vein of suspicion that many blacks harbor toward the Government. The articles also prompted accusations that the mainstream press had been ignoring the story, mainly because it was too cozy with intelligence agencies, a theme Mr. Webb repeated today.

"This is a situation where the press has gone from being a watchdog to being a guard dog," he said on Mr. Madison's program.

The articles said that a Los Angeles drug dealer, Ricky Donnell Ross, was supplied cocaine by Oscar Danilo Blandon Reyes, a former leader of the contras.

Based largely on court testimony by Mr. Blandon, the Mercury News articles declared that the profits from drug sales in inner-city Los Angeles were used to help finance the contras in their war against Nicaragua's leftist government. They then went on, however, to make or imply several even more explosive assertions.

They said the trafficking by Mr. Blandon and Mr. Ross had helped "spark a crack explosion in urban America." They said the ring had funneled "millions" in drug profits to the contras. And, perhaps most ex-

plosively, they implied that the C.I.A. had been aware of what was going on.

In his column on Sunday, Mr. Ceppos, the editor, said none of these assertions had been proved.

But, some say, the central accusation alone is enough to warrant a Congressional inquiry.

"I've never cared how much was sold," Ms. Waters said. "I've only cared that some profits did support the contras from the sale of drugs, and that shouldn't have happened in America."

Among some of the more extreme voices among African-Americans, the articles validated a belief that the crack epidemic was part of a shadowy genocidal plot involving the Federal Government. "What has happened, I feel, is that we have been declared war against," said a caller to Mr. Madison's show on Tuesday.

But some more conservative blacks have asserted that some traditional civil rights groups are too willing to promote conspiracy theories without proof.

"Instead of investigating and weighing the facts, they will use these theories to extract concessions from the Government," said Gerald Reynolds, president of the Center for New Black Leadership, a research group in Washington. "They get what they want, but it has an effect on the general public. People tend to believe these stories when they have the imprimatur of the civil rights organizations."