

# timeline

DarkAlliance

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## 1974



Crack cocaine invented by accident in Northern California

Crack cocaine makes its first documented appearance in California, the same year the influential Meneses family in Nicaragua establishes relationships with Colombian drug sellers.

## 1977



MENESES

**June:** Norwin Meneses is arrested and jailed briefly in connection with the murder of Nicaragua's top Customs investigator.

## 1978

**April:** FBI reports Meneses is smuggling multi-kilo quantities of cocaine into U.S.

**August:** DEA links cocaine seized in Panama City to Meneses smuggling ring.

## 1979



BLANDON

**June:** Meneses and Danilo Blandon arrive in the United States as political refugees. Meneses goes to San Francisco; Blandon goes to Los Angeles.

**July:** Nicaraguan dictator Anastasio Somoza is overthrown by Communist rebels. He and his followers flee to U.S. *AP photo*

**November:** Meneses and his wife buy two homes in Pacifica.

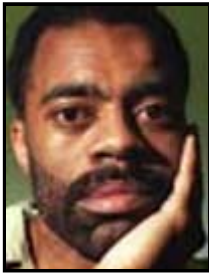


SOMOZA



One of the Meneses' houses

## 1980



ROSS

Ricky Ross begins dealing small amounts of cocaine in South Central Los Angeles.

**March:** Former Nicaraguan National Guardsmen begin forming guerrilla army in Honduras and Guatemala.

**September:** Somoza is killed in Paraguay by leftist hit squad.

**November:** Ronald Reagan is elected President.

## 1981



Contras form in Honduras and Guatemala under auspices of the CIA

**June:** Contra official Julio Zavala begins selling cocaine in San Francisco. AP photo

**August:** Press conference in Honduras announcing the formation of the Nicaraguan Democratic Force -- the FDN -- also known as the Contras.

**November:** San Francisco DEA investigation links Meneses' family cocaine dealings to Contra officials.

**December:** Reagan signs secret order allowing CIA to begin paramilitary operations against the Nicaraguan government. Blandon and Meneses fly to Honduras for meeting with Enrique Bermudez, the CIA-paid head of the Contra army, to discuss fund raising in U.S. Blandon says he begins selling cocaine for Meneses shortly afterwards.



REAGAN



BERMUDEZ

## 1982

**March:** At CIA's direction, Contras blow up two bridges leading into Nicaragua, which marks the beginning of the Contra revolution.

**June:** FBI arrests Meneses relative and accuses him of laundering \$11 million worth of drug money in three months.

**August:** Meneses sets up T-shirt company in L.A., which Danilo Blandon runs. Office is used for Contra meetings.

**October:** Meneses hosts FDN meetings in Los Angeles and San Francisco for visiting Contra leaders.

**December:** Congress votes to prohibit CIA aid to the Contras.

## 1983



Crack is mass-marketed

In response to customer demands, Ross begins marketing ready-made crack and learns how to turn a kilo of powder into three or more kilos of rock by adding an anaesthetic called procaine, a process known as "blown up." The drug network expands to other states.

**January:** Police raid Colombian freighter in San Francisco and seize 430 pounds of cocaine from frogmen unloading ship.

San Francisco Contra official and cocaine dealer Julio Zavala is given \$45,000 by Costa Rican lawyer working with the CIA to buy weapons in US.

**February:** Raids stemming from frogman arrests find cocaine, cash, and weapons catalogs in Zavala's apartment. Nicaraguan newspaper identifies people arrested in frogman case as former Somoza supporters selling cocaine for the Contras.

**June:** Contra officials meet with Colombian drug trafficker George Morales in Miami to arrange weapons shipment.

## 1984

Ross and Blandon are selling 100 kilos of Meneses' cocaine a week in Los Angeles. The drug gangs who distribute their cocaine begin buying assault weapons and communications gear from Blandon and his associates.

**June:** Meneses hosts dinners for FDN leaders in San Francisco.



A meeting of the political chief of the CIA's Contra forces and FDN supporters.

**October:** Justice Department returns \$36,000 in cash seized in San Francisco from Contra cocaine dealer. Congress cuts off all funding for Contras eight days later.

**November:** San Francisco FDN official and a Meneses nephew arrested on cocaine charges.

## 1985



CALERO

**June:** Contra leader Adolfo Calero comes to San Francisco and arranges weapons purchase with Lt. Col. Oliver North's field representative, Robert Owen.

**September:** San Francisco Contra official arrested in cocaine sting says Meneses is dealing drugs and arms for the Contras.

**October:** DEA agent assigned to El Salvador gets reports of drug smuggling at Illopango military air base.

**November:** Norwin Meneses moves to Costa Rica.

## 1986



The Rialto house

**January:** Costa Rican shrimp company owned by drug dealers gets U.S. State Department contract to deliver aid to Contras.

**June:** Costa Rican drug dealer linked to Meneses is convicted of drug charges. Evidence includes tapes of discussions with Contra commanders.

**August:** Congress approves \$100 million in aid to the Contras. Also approves new cocaine laws that punish crack offenders more severely than powder dealers.

**October:** Danilo Blandon's house and business in Rialto are raided.

**November:** Iran-Contra scandal breaks.

**December:** Blandon applies for permanent U.S. residency.

## 1987

**January:** Freeway Rick Task Force formed to shut down Rick Ross' crack operation in Los Angeles.

**February:** Blandon moves to Miami and "retires" from drug business. Buys several businesses in partnership with ex-Nicaraguan army general and an FDN lawyer.

**April:** Freeway Rick Task Force nearly catches Ross in an alley. Ross moves to Cincinnati.

**November:** George Bush elected President.

## 1988



Sandinista and Contras sign truce,  
ending civil war

**March:** Truce signed between Nicaraguan government and the Contras ending the civil war.

**September:** New Mexican police find nine kilos of cocaine on a Cincinnati-bound Greyhound and link it to Ross.

**October:** Federal officials begin Operation Big Spender, an investigation into corruption by L.A. narcotics police.

## 1989

Blandon returns to California and begins dealing cocaine in the Bay Area, Los Angeles and San Diego. The number of blacks charged with crack-related offenses soars.

**February:** Meneses secretly indicted by San Francisco grand jury for acts committed in 1984 and 1985, but is never arrested or pursued.

**June:** Rick Ross indicted on cocaine charges in Cincinnati.

**November:** Ross arrested in Los Angeles.

## 1990

**February:** Sandinistas voted from office in Nicaraguan presidential elections. U.S.-backed candidate wins.

**March:** DEA is told by informant that Blandon plans to move back to Nicaragua "due to the favorable political climate."

**June:** Blandon's car rental agency files for bankruptcy.

## 1991



ROSS

**February:** Ross is sentenced to 10 years in prison for his Midwestern drug operations.

**August:** DEA investigation of Blandon is "compromised." A few days later, Blandon and an associate are stopped at Mexican border with more than \$100,000 in undeclared travelers checks. Blandon is released.

**November:** Meneses and others are arrested in Nicaragua on cocaine conspiracy charges.

George Bush loses bid for re-election.

**December:** Blandon and others arrested in El Segundo on conspiracy and drug money charges but charges are dropped. Ross testifies in federal corruption trial of some of the police officers who once pursued him.

## 1992



MENESES

**May:** Blandon and wife arrested and jailed on cocaine conspiracy charges in San Diego.

**October:** Blandon signs plea agreement with government.

**November:** Meneses convicted of drug charges in Nicaragua and sentenced to 30 years in jail, later reduced to 12.

**December:** Blandon sentenced to 48 months in jail.

## 1993

Blacks are being sentenced to prison for crack charges in record numbers.

## 1994

**September:** Blandon is released from prison, and begins work as DEA informant.

**October:** Blandon and Ross discuss doing a cocaine deal.

## 1995



Ross crashed his truck trying to escape the DEA



Blandon helps DEA in sting operation targeted at Ross

**March:** Ross arrested by DEA agents in sting set up by Blandon.

**May:** Blandon gets \$40,000 reward from U.S. government for his work in Ross sting.

## 1996



Clinton and Congress overturn Sentencing Commission ruling on crack-related sentences

After studies show black cocaine dealers get longer sentences than whites, U.S. Sentencing Commission urges reduction of crack sentences but Congress and President Clinton refuse. Blandon is free and living in Managua. During the summer, Meneses becomes eligible for release after serving five years.

**March:** Ross convicted of cocaine trafficking.

**August 23:** Ross is scheduled to be sentenced.

