

FOIA MARKER

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Re: CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] Introducing Crack Cocaine to black America 10/96

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10/10/96

[On Charges Regarding the CIA]

When I first heard that there were news accounts alleging the CIA was involved in introducing crack cocaine to black America in the 1980s (to raise money to fund an army in Central America) was remarkably *not* surprised. One, because however unfair, there are few charges made against the CIA that *would* surprise me – both because the CIA has a long history of having conspiracy charges leveled against it and because one or two of them have turned out to be true. Two, because as an African-American, I'd heard this charge before – that is that the government was involved in introducing illegal, immoral or otherwise destructive forces into black communities.

Somehow, though, I didn't think this story had "legs" as they say. But it has turned from a story in the press to calls for congressional and other investigations to rising temperatures in African-American communities, particularly in California. Before this story gets off in a direction that could lead to even greater division between the races, let's, all of us, consider a few things:

On October 16, 1995, President Clinton delivered a speech on race in America. He said a lot of important things in that speech but none so important than when he said "[i]n recent weeks, every one of us has been made aware of a simple truth – white Americans and black Americans often see the world in drastically different ways – ways that go beyond and beneath the Simpson trial and its aftermath...."

He was talking, of course, about the fact that some polls showed most African-Americans believed O.J. Simpson was innocent and most white Americans believed he was guilty. A similar division seems to be emerging now. Commentary on this issue has found little middle ground. Either African-Americans are injudiciously overreacting to a self-generated paranoia without substantiation or support (as some commentary goes) or the United States government under the Reagan Administration was covertly involved in a scheme to introduce crack cocaine into black neighborhoods in a deliberate effort to kill them off. I am in no position even to speculate on the detailed accounts of interviews and documents reported on in various newspapers. Besides, I have confidence in General McCaffrey's commitment "[i]f there is wrongdoing there, it should and will be punished." But I also think an unchecked manipulation of either potential reality is dangerous and unproductive. Worse, we may be missing the point.

However unhappy a truth this may be to some, *all* Americans must consider that the basis upon which concerns have risen over this issue – and caused African-American leaders like Maxine Waters and Jesse Jackson to call for investigations – is real. By that I mean African-Americans were borne to this nation as a giant state-sponsored "conspiracy" to be denied their basic human rights – that was called slavery. After slavery was abolished, schemes to undue what Mr. Lincoln had done abounded, in law and later in fact. Thus, the fact that African-Americans might: (1) believe charges that the CIA may have sponsored or supported the introduction of destructive elements into black communities in an attempt to undermine their communities, and (2) demand an investigation into such

charges, shouldn't have come as a surprise to anyone, really. Neither, however should African-Americans be surprised by incredulity on the part of an America that desires or chooses to believe we've overcome our dismal history.

It is manifestly important to examine charges that an entity representing the United States of America was engaged in something so horrific, either deliberately or inadvertently. According to interviews by Gary Webb, his *Mercury News* series doesn't actually say the CIA knew anything about the drug trafficking. But now the charge is out there. It is also critical that whatever the reality, we still need to address an undeniable reality – the belief as Courtland Malloy describes – “that drugs and alcohol are the way out of the afflictions that so many are so desperately seeking to escape.”

But what I'm concerned about is that we may be missing a bigger picture – not that this one isn't big enough. That is that race relations in America are still raw and bitter and fragile. The wounds are deep and formidable. That's what President Clinton attempted to address last year when he said to white American “[we] must clean our house” and to black America “[w]e must be one.” Maybe we should have paid better attention.

So, I have a suggestion. In his September 4, 1996 letter to Congresswoman Waters, CIA Director Deutch said he asked his agency's Inspector General report to be completed within sixty days. Let's try to get through this now unavoidably difficult time keeping in mind the following:

1) The rifts between blacks and whites that still exist today – the fact that “white Americans and black Americans often see the same world in drastically different ways” - as President Clinton has said, “rooted in the awful history and stubborn persistence of racism.” For many African-Americans a story like this will not only be real – it will be true, whatever an investigation ultimately reveals. Thus, the resulting complications are the same: cocaine use is a huge problem in the black community, as are other problems of substance abuse, and racial tensions persist. However tempting it must be for some to be dismissive of all three, we need to fix all three problems, as a community, or suffer the cost of continued division.

2) Thus, it does little good to continue to go back and forth about whether readers read more into the *Mercury News* story than the writer intended. The House Intelligence committee, the CIA Inspector General, and the Attorney General Inspector General offices have all launched their own investigations. We will know more when these investigations are concluded. But we don't have to wait to remember what Clinton said a year ago. In the past “[w]hen divisions have threatened to bring our house down, somehow we have always moved together to shore it up.” These divisions still exist today and we can't expect a congressional investigation to solve them – we need to move together to shore up our house.

Leslie T. Thornton