



Kill the Messenger: How the CIA's Crack-Cocaine Controversy Destroyed Journalist Gary Webb

Nick Schou , Charles Bowden (Preface by)

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Soon to be a major motion picture starring Jeremy Renner

Kill the Messenger tells the story of the tragic death of Gary Webb, the controversial newspaper reporter who committed suicide in December 2004. Webb is the former San Jose Mercury News reporter whose 1996 "Dark Alliance" series on the so-called CIA-crack cocaine connection created a firestorm of controversy and led to his resignation from the paper amid escalating attacks on his work by the mainstream media. Author and investigative journalist Nick Schou published numerous articles on the controversy and was the only reporter to significantly advance Webb's stories.

Drawing on exhaustive research and highly personal interviews with Webb's family, colleagues, supporters and critics, this book argues convincingly that Webb's editors betrayed him, despite mounting evidence that his stories were correct. *Kill the Messenger* examines the "Dark Alliance" controversy, what it says about the current state of journalism in America, and how it led Webb to ultimately take his own life.

Webb's widow, Sue Bell Stokes, remains an ardent defender of her ex-husband. By combining her story with a probing examination of one of the most important media scandals in recent memory, this book provides a gripping view of one of the greatest tragedies in the annals of investigative journalism.

Kill the Messenger: How the CIA's Crack-Cocaine Controversy Destroyed Journalist Gary Webb Details

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From Reader Review Kill the Messenger: How the CIA's Crack-Cocaine Controversy Destroyed Journalist Gary Webb for online ebook

Brian Vargo says

Pretty good, concise...focused more on Webb and journalism then it did on government malfeasance. Could have spent more time on the crack epidemic and whatnot, but I guess that wasn't the focus of the book.

Ben says

If you want to be filled with rage at the mainstream media's shameless devotion to protecting the status quo, this is the book for you. Great stuff about the New York Times, L.A. Times, and Washington Post going after Gary Webb for daring to tie the CIA to coke-smuggling contras. The downward trajectory of Webb's life after his career was destroyed by the corporate press is heartbreaking.

This book is best read along with Alexander Cockburn and Jeffrey St. Clair's excellent Whiteout, especially the chapters on the smear campaign against Webb. Schou is a serviceable writer, but Cockburn and St. Clair are brilliant stylists and are in peak form in this book.

Roger says

This is a five-star story in a four-star book, and the primary reason I say that is grammar. Maybe I'm being too picky, but there's simply too many missing prepositions and articles.

That being said, Gary Webb's story is one that deserves telling over and over in as many ways as possible -- for many reasons. This isn't the forum to talk about all those reasons. So, I'll simply say: read the book.

Jerry Peace says

Our government that blithely and routinely operates illegally, and worse, immorally, while wallowing in the muck of "national security," our media establishment that arrogantly and self-righteously destroys a reporter's reputation and thus his journalistic future while eating the CIA's PR vomit and throwing it back up again as truth, paving the way for its ultimate lapdog experience of the Iraq invasion and occupation, and a Manichean reporter's own tainted yet admirable doggedness- all ingredients in Gary Webb's tragic yet never inevitable death. His search for the truth was messy and imperfect and stained by his own inadequacies, but at least he tried to uncover the truth rather than perpetuate the lies and brazenly deny that truth. If you still deify Ronald Reagan, read this. If you think the media is an investigative solid rather than a mere bought shadow or corporate blown piece of dust, read this.

Josephine Burks says

I was inspired by the movie about Gary Webb to read this book. It details how the mainstream media collectively assassinated the credibility and character of Webb after his expose piece on the CIA and various Nicaragua drug cartels. I'm definitely going to read Webb's book "Dark Alliance".

Kristi Bumpus says

Interesting book, if not especially well-written. I am not sure author ever really made his case, but as someone working in journalism who well remembered the situation, I enjoyed reading more about Webb and what transpired.

Ed Morawski says

"Kill the Messenger" is the story of Gary Webb, a San Jose Mercury News reporter, who broke the fantastic story of the CIA indirectly (that's a key word) creating the crack cocaine epidemic in South Central LA, and what happened to him as a consequence.

The story is interesting (since I like many other others believed this whole episode was a hoax perpetrated by the left wing) and it turns out to be mostly true! The only problem was that every interested party took it upon themselves to interpret the facts to suit whatever side of the political spectrum they happened to be on. Gary Webb never actually said or wrote or proved the CIA was directly responsible for the crack ravaging black neighborhoods, but that didn't seem to matter. It was especially sad that Webb's biggest attackers were major newspapers! They didn't want to cover the cocaine -Sandinista connections but when Webb did all hell broke loose. It's hard to say why the major rags seemed to be on the Federal government's side in this and the book never answers that or even speculates.

What he did say is recorded in this rather disjointed and often difficult to read piece by Nick Schou, who managed somehow to get it made into a "major motion picture". Since the CIA-crack connection was one brief part of Webb's life, the book naturally contains a lot of filler about the rest of Webb's life. The real problem though is that there are so many names and characters and jumping timelines, the story is hard to follow.

To me the author made the same mistakes he ridiculed others for doing: ignoring key pieces of the story. Why did the major left leaning media come down on the right wing side? And even more damning: why does Schou brush off the fact that Webb died of multiple gunshots wounds and it was ruled a suicide???? How many people kill themselves by shooting themselves in the head - TWICE?

Paige Newman says

This book was a fairly good look at what happened with Gary Webb. I think what I liked best was that Schou wasn't just an advocate for Webb. He actually does look at the story critically. I think the way the LA Times, Washington Post and NYTimes responded was pretty awful and it does make you think about how the media

chooses to tackle a story. Overall, an interesting if unspectacular book.

Curtis Miller says

Very interesting read

The book opened my eyes up to specifics about investigative reporting and the CIA's involvement in the drug trade. The book also helps depict the true nature of news reporting by large papers.

Justin Freeman says

Great read on journalist Gary Webb's life, career, downfall and suicide. An alarming amount of typos for a book about a journalist, written by a journalist. There were an extraordinary amount of quotes taken from Gary's own book "Dark Alliance" and I'm interested in reading that now and seeing the movie.

Richard says

Good, quick read about Gary Webb and the shameful way his story was handled by our "watchdog" press, most notably the Washington Post, LA Times, and New York Times. All three of them seemed more concerned about carrying water for the Federal Government than actually looking into a story, as it turns out, that had plenty of precedence.

Molly says

I rate this about 3.5 stars. I thought the story was very interesting but there were so many players involved, some of the story was a little overwhelming/confusing. I also felt some parts were repetitive. I'm left not knowing how I feel about Webb or his reporting

Deyth Banger says

"December 14, 2017 –
50.0% "1:21:54"
December 13, 2017 –
50.0% "Is a lie or moment of truth?"

...

1:08:42"
December 9, 2017 –
15.0% "45:15"
December 9, 2017 –

5.0% "30:51"

December 9, 2017 –

5.0% "This book is going to reveal a secret which makes you to ask yourself how much people do know about what's really happening behind the big walls of the government."

December 9, 2017 –

5.0% "24:15"

December 9, 2017 – Shelved

December 9, 2017 – Started Reading"

P.S. - The book deserves 5 stars out of 5 from the main reason Garry Webb was on this story up to end of his life. Which is crazy!

It sounds like typical "DON'T CARE ABOUT MY LIFE", we all knew that he was going to die all such world big deals die, nothing should make him think that he won't die.

It was revealed which means "Congrats " to Garry Webb, but after few days the whole thing was been declassified.

David says

This was part of a sale on audible and looked interesting. I hadn't followed this when it broke originally so I was kind of wondering what the deal was. Note that the book is primarily about the reporting of the story and reaction to. There is some about what was discovered, but it's not heavy with information about the CIA's activity. The book starts off a little melodramatic in its tone, but ends with some objective reflections on the events from many of the main players. Webb and his editors definitely over-played what they had in the original story, but the irresponsible reaction of the major papers was far worse than anything web did. One of the most disgusting things is that the when the CIA finally admitted that they knew about the contras supporting themselves with drug money, it was right as the Lewinsky story was breaking and so the contra-crack thing was ignored.

I know there's a movie of this now. I might watch it, but movies of this sort of book always leave out so much detail and play up the drama so much that they seem dishonest.

Rachel says

A solid 3.5 stars.

Challenge Complete: a book that became a movie

With this book, I did something I do very rarely- I watched the movie first. I enjoyed it immensely. I thought it was good, if a bit slow and in danger of taking itself too seriously at points. However, I do admit that my opinion is probably a bit biased because Jeremy Renner is one my favorite actors. So I was very interested in picking this book up.

After reading the book, my opinion, while still generally positive, was altered a great deal. As is the case with many adaptations, changes were made in hope of upping the excitement level or making the protagonist more sympathetic. The timeline was switched around, and some people were combined into one. Therefore, the movie, while well crafted, cannot be taken at face value. A more accurate film would have acknowledged more of Gary Webb's shortcomings, while still portraying the media's reaction and shaming as excessive.

Our modern media, in catering to our short attention spans, likes to paint people in caricature. There are only heroes and villains; the heroes are faultless, and the villains are scum. However, in reality, people are much more complex than that. This book, though clearly slanted in support of Gary Webb, provides a surprisingly nuanced and complex portrait of a troubled man and the biggest story of his career.

Some of the people most involved in the way that the story was edited and printed expressed regret that, in their rush to publish, so many mistakes were made. As shown by the following quotes, Webb's former editors wondered that if they and Webb had shown more restraint, would the ending have been different (and less tragic):

Dawn Garcia, Webb's former editor: "Had I to do it all over again, I would have pushed to hold the story until everything was truly ready. I would have recast parts of the series to focus on the very strong reporting Gary had done, and be much more careful about how we worded the conclusions of that reporting."

"....the core of the series was correct but the conclusions Gary drew were too sweeping."

Jonathan Krim, former *Mercury News* editor: "The zeal that helped make Gary a relentless reporter was coupled with an inability to question himself, to entertain the notion that he might have erred.... There was plenty of blame to go around. We failed as a newspaper."

A later CIA report about the allegations only partially vindicated Webb, wrote David Corn in *Nation Magazine*. "It vindicated his interest in the subject and his belief that this was important and that something terribly rotten had happened."

There are a few typos, but the book remains very readable. I recommend it.
