

## EDITORIALS

least two of those cases, CIA did not act to verify drug trafficking allegations or information even when it had the opportunity to do so." The operating principle: See no evil.

And share no evil. The CIA kept much of its material on *contra*-drug connections from Congress: "CIA did not inform Congress of all allegations or information it received indicating that *Contra*-related organizations or individuals were involved in drug trafficking." A CIA Central America chief of station from the time told the IG, "yes, there [was] derogatory stuff [on the *contras*]...but we were going to play with these guys. That was made clear by [CIA director William] Casey and [then-Latin America Division Chief Duane] Clarridge."

George Tenet, the current Director of Central Intelligence, had his own reasons for hoping the report stirred no fanfare. In one section, the document relates the case of José Davila Membreno, an important *contra* leader. The CIA had no information linking him to drugs, but he was close to other *contras* in the drug trade. During a 1987 interview with the CIA, the report says, Davila's "denials of involvement of [*sic*] drug trafficking were highly questionable." Afterward, CIA officer Alan Fiers briefed the Senate intelligence committee and covered the Davila problem. A subsequent CIA cable reported that the committee staff had advised Fiers not to sever contact with Davila. (The agency took no further action to determine if its suspicions of Davila were well founded.) Here's the kicker: Tenet, then a staff member of the committee, was at the briefing. Was Tenet involved in giving the agency the green light to use a *contra* who was possibly drugged-up? Tenet says he doesn't remember the briefing. The paper trail, the IG report notes, does not offer a definitive answer to the question. But it requires little cynicism to wonder if Tenet's cameo role further prompted the CIA to dump this report the day after the House voted for an impeachment inquiry, when the frenzied media were intensely preoccupied.

Frederick Hitz, the now-retired CIA inspector general who supervised the report, deserves credit for forcing the document out of the bureaucracy, which would have preferred to see it kept under lock and key (go to [www.odci.gov/cia/publications/cocaine2](http://www.odci.gov/cia/publications/cocaine2)). But even Hitz concedes that his report—which apparently has not resulted in any punitive action—is merely a start. "This is grist for more work," he told the *Washington Post*, "if anyone wants to do it." But who is that going to be? Congress? The CIA? The Justice Department? An independent counsel? No, the Reagan team and the CIA got away with it. The price they paid: a scathing report that takes no toll.

DAVID CORN

## Who Killed Oliver Stone?

When ABC-TV bowed to pressure recently and canceled *Oliver Stone's Declassified*, a special scheduled to air next February, the corporate journalism establishment showed how power works in TV-land. Before the producers had even shot any footage, the show was attacked by a variety of media types, editorial writers and government officials. All complained that Stone was going to argue that TWA 800 crashed in 1996 because it had been hit by a Navy missile—an interpretation

that is apparently taboo on network TV. ABC, at least, seems loath to question the conclusion of the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) that the crash was the result of a fuel tank explosion. But Stone and his executive producers say the show's critics got the story wrong.

Officially, ABC execs said they were killing the show because viewers might have a hard time distinguishing the special, produced by the entertainment division, from news programming. "We came to believe that television viewers could find it difficult to distinguish between the two forms," the official ABC statement said, as if the network itself hasn't blurred the line between the two in its programming.

ABC News people, including Sam Donaldson, one of the hosts of *20/20*, publicly attacked *Declassified* on the grounds that the report on TWA 800 would be "typical Stone. It's like *JFK*. That was fiction. He damages the credibility of ABC News." Jeff Greenfield, the former ABC News commentator, now at CNN, chimed in with his own Op-Ed in the *New York Times*. *Time* ran a story headlined "The Conspiracy Channel?" It described what the magazine called "a stylish *X-Files*-like show exposing the bastards who blew her out of the sky."

But according to the show's co-executive producer, Coby Atlas, "the reports that we were going to conclude that a missile had taken down the plane were completely and utterly false. We were never going to say we knew what happened to TWA 800. We were looking into why the investigation was halted suddenly, and why its conclusions were accepted by mainstream media, despite lots of eyewitnesses who were never interviewed."

The co-executive producers are hardly *X-Files* types; both Atlas and her partner, Tom McMahon, are award-winning veterans of network news. Atlas won an Emmy as supervising producer of *Survivors of the Holocaust*, and McMahon won an Oscar nomination for his documentary on Hank Aaron, *Chasing the Dream*. "If we had been doing a sleazy show on UFOs and Princess Diana," Atlas added, "we'd still be in the pipeline."

So where did the pressure to kill the show come from? "I can only speculate," Stone said. "This isn't a conspiracy theory. The AP reported that 'government officials' were 'angered' by what they had heard, and cited an FBI official—which suggests that maybe the bureau was among those leaning on ABC. Maybe pressure came from military intelligence, maybe working through the NTSB. And I don't know whether the decision was made inside ABC, or by Disney, which as you know owns the network."

Stone's critics still ridicule his *JFK*, but as a result of that film, Congress in 1992 created the Kennedy Assassination Records Review Board, a citizens' commission with unprecedented power to review and release classified documents. The board completed its work in September. Even those who think Stone was all wrong about the assassination have to thank him for provoking the board's release of 4 million formerly classified pages. It's not inconceivable that an Oliver Stone TV special might prompt release of information on other interesting topics.

Although *Oliver Stone's Declassified* is dead at ABC, it still might find a home on TV. "Ironically, our best shot may be at Fox," Stone said. Atlas added, "Now we have our promo line: 'The show ABC didn't want you to see.'"

JON WIENER