What’s at stake: Nothing less than our democracy. With whistleblowers, our investigative reporters are the front line of truth for informed teachers and citizens necessary to a democracy. Support strong protection and funding for democracy’s truth-tellers.
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BY BROOKE KROEGER — NEW YORK UNIVERSITY, pp. 20, 23-24 (full text below) IRE Journal – Kroeger – Spring 2014

TO ANYONE WHO STILL THINKS significant undercover reporting stopped in the late 1970s, when ethical concerns about the method first flared, please consider this:

From Jan. 1, 2013 to the end of April 2014, I posted 42 significant new undercover investigations to the open-access database at undercoverreporting.org. Those added in the first four months of this year include a new human trafficking exposé by Ghana’s Anas Aremeyaw Anas; the infiltration of a Wall Street secret society by Kevin Roose for New York Magazine; David Spears’ book, Exit Ramp, which chronicles his 80 hours panhandling off Interstate 205 in downtown Oregon City; a Nigerian human trafficking investigation by Tobore Ovuorie for Premium Times and a BBC “Panorama” elder care investigation that led to one firing and seven staff suspensions.

The 37 entries for 2013 include the Upton Sinclair redux by my colleague, Ted Conover, who got hired as a federal inspector to gain access to a Nebraska beef slaughterhouse. In The Jungle, Sinclair didn’t go any further than dressing the part and toting a lunch pail. Conover’s 18-page report for Harper’s was a 2014 National Magazine Award finalist.

The undercover tradition
The point is, undercover reporting has continued, ethical conundrums and all, in a steady and uninterrupted flow since at least the 1840s. That’s when reporters for Horace Greeley’s *New York Tribune* posed as auction buyers in Virginia and Louisiana to report on the evils of slavery. In another case, a reporter signed on with a Civil War infantry regiment of the Petersburg Grays to get up close and personal at the hanging of the abolitionist John Brown.

For more than 160 years since, examples of important work involving undercover reporting have numbered in the thousands.

That’s a lot, considering the time, editorial deliberations, effort, ethical consternation, expense, exertion and risk these undertakings so often demand. MORE http://brookekroeger.com/ire-journal-undercover-reporting-an-american-tradition/

COLLAPSE OF INVESTIGATION DURING NATIONAL CRISES: FINANCIAL CRISIS OF 1970- AND IMPERIAL/WAR CRISES

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**The Watchdog That Didn’t Bark: The Financial Crisis and the Disappearance of Investigative Journalism** by Dean Starkman

January, 2014, 368 pages,

In this sweeping, incisive post mortem, Dean Starkman exposes the critical shortcomings that softened coverage in the business press during the mortgage era and the years leading up to the financial collapse of 2008. He locates the roots of the
problem in the origin of business news as a market messaging service for investors in the early twentieth century. This access-dependent strain of journalism was soon opposed by the grand, sweeping work of the muckrakers. Propelled by the innovations of Bernard Kilgore, the great postwar editor of the *Wall Street Journal*, these two genres merged when mainstream American news organizations institutionalized muckraking in the 1960s, creating a powerful guardian of the public interest. Yet as the mortgage era dawned, deep cultural and structural shifts—some unavoidable, some self-inflicted—eroded journalism’s appetite for its role as watchdog. The result was a deafening silence about systemic corruption in the financial industry. Tragically, this silence grew only more profound as the mortgage madness reached its terrible apogee from 2004 through 2006.

Starkman frames his analysis in a broad argument about journalism itself, dividing the profession into two competing approaches—access reporting and accountability reporting—which rely on entirely different sources and produce radically different representations of reality. As Starkman explains, access journalism came to dominate business reporting in the 1990s, a process he calls “CNBCization,” and rather than examining risky, even corrupt, corporate behavior, mainstream reporters focused on profiling executives and informing investors. Starkman concludes with a critique of the digital-news ideology and corporate influence, which threaten to further undermine investigative reporting, and he shows how financial coverage, and journalism as a whole, can reclaim its bite.

About the Author

Dean Starkman is an editor and Kingsford Capital Fellow of the *Columbia Journalism Review*. A former reporter for the *Wall Street Journal* and other newspapers, he was part of an investigative team that won a Pulitzer Prize for the *Providence Journal*. He is working as a fellow for the Investigative Fund of the Nation Institute in New York and also holds a fellowship at the Center for Media and Communications at the Central European University, Budapest. He is also lead editor of *The Best Business Writing* anthology series and contributes to GoLocalProv.

**WAR VS. INVESTIGATION: INVASION OF IRAQ**

*A Warfare State of Mind*  
**March 18, 2013**

Many Americans forget how intimidating it was a decade ago for any U.S. citizen to speak out against President George W.
Bush’s rush to war with Iraq. For example, the Dixie Chicks got death threats and actor Sean Penn was denounced as “a stooge of Saddam,” as Norman Solomon recalls.

Read more »

What Happened to the US Press Corps?

March 18, 2013

Exclusive: As the U.S. observes the tenth anniversary of the Iraq invasion, a key question remains: Why was there almost no accountability for journalists and pundits who went along with George W. Bush’s deceptions. The answer can be found in the cover-ups of the Reagan-Bush era, writes Robert Parry.

Read more »

COMPARING CHINA: TWO REPORTS


High praise for the New York Times’ investigation of harmful working conditions in Apple’s Chinese supply chain, showing Apple’s CEO Steve Jobs to be a liar about those conditions. These conditions and Jobs’ lying were not reported by China’s media. Broadly, the article makes a case for investigative newspapers as “the lifeline of a democratic society.”

--Dick

CHINA’S CITIZEN REPORTERS


PBS, POV.

HIGH TECH, LOW LIFE follows the journey of two of China’s first citizen reporters as they travel the country – chronicling underreported news and social issues stories. Armed with laptops, cell phones, and digital cameras they develop skills as independent one-man news stations while learning to navigate China’s evolving censorship regulations and avoiding the risk of political persecution. The film follows 57-year-old “Tiger Temple,” who earns the title of China’s first citizen reporter after he
impulsively documents an unfolding murder and 27-year-old “Zola” who recognizes the opportunity to increase his fame and future prospects by reporting on sensitive news throughout China.

MAJOR NEW ONLINE INVESTIGATIVE MAGAZINE: THE INTERCEPTOR

Glenn Greenwald. $250 Million "Angel Investor" (Sunday, 20 October 2013)

By Jonathan Franklin, Truthout

Glenn Greenwald, the author and blogger behind the publication of the NSA documents obtained by former contractor Edward Snowden, announced Oct. 16, 2013, that he is leaving British newspaper The Guardian to join what he described as a "once-in-a-career dream journalistic opportunity," a new media organization designed to promote in-depth reporting.

According to news reports, a minimum of $250 million will be invested in the all-digital, no-print project. The yet-unnamed media project [the title The Interceptor was chosen. –Dick] will be bankrolled by Pierre Omidyar, the 46-year-old billionaire founder of eBay. Omidyar, who was considering buying The Washington Post this year, decided that for the same price - $250 million - he could build his own investigative journalism outfit.

In an interview with NYU journalism professor James Rosen, Omidyar said the project "brings together some of my interests in civic engagement and building conversations and of course technology, but in a very creative way." Omidyar said, "I have always been of the opinion that the right kind of journalism is a critical part of our democracy." But until the uproar over the Snowden revelations, he hadn't yet "found a way to engage directly."

Omidyar, chairman of the board at eBay, has a net worth estimated at $8.5 billion. For the past three years, he has been publisher, CEO and founder of Honolulu-based news site the Civil Beat. While Civil Beat has been run via his nonprofit Omidyar Network, the new venture will be managed separately, with revenue plowed back into journalism. Given Omidyar's initial quarter-billion-dollar financial commitment and tech credentials as eBay founder, the project is likely to reshape popular concepts of what's possible in modern journalism.

Initial hires reportedly include Greenwald, his co-reporter and documentary filmmaker Laura Poitras and Jeremy Scahill of The Nation. The project is likely to focus on privacy, surveillance and what Scahill dubbed America's "Dirty Wars" executed in secrecy by the Tampa, Florida-based Special Operations Command. But Omidyar has stressed that he wants the new organization to cover entertainment and sports news, as well.

Given the stark revelations from the Snowden documents and the dearth of resources to fund long-term reporting projects, the announcement by Omidyar is likely to resonate for years. As
for the final form of his company and the journalism to be pursued, a good bet is to look at Omidyar's brief forays into journalism at that Honolulu news site, Civil Beat. In a searing defense of Julian Assange in 2010, an editorial from Civil Beat speaks to the inherent rights of a citizenry to be informed of its government's actions. Referring to US government pressure to strangle WikiLeaks by threatening online payment services, the Civil Beat editorial board wrote "by taking the steps they have to shut down WikiLeaks, governments create a chilling effect on other publishers, making it less likely that information that sheds light on government policy and actions that citizens should know about becomes public."

It's not often those powerful statements are backed up by quarter-billion-dollar commitments. This story, I would wager, has just begun.

Jonathan Franklin is an author and reporter based in Santiago, Chile. He writes frequently for The Guardian and is author of 33 Men, the chronicle of 33 Chilean miners trapped underground. He is currently working on a book about solutions to PTSD in US war vets. He can be contacted at chilefranklin2000@yahoo.com or on twitter @FranklinBlog Copyright, Truthout.

2011 IRE Investigative Books List
IRE's annual list of investigative books can be viewed here and seen below. More than 200 books published in 2011 made the list. The annual list is compiled by Steve Weinberg. If you know of an investigative/explanatory book written by an American journalist published last year for public sale and fail to see it listed, please contact Steve Weinberg, weinbergs@missouri.edu.

Here are Weinberg's thoughts on a few of the books:

Retirement Heist: How Companies Plunder and Profit From the Nest Eggs of American Workers, by Ellen E. Schultz, Penguin/ Portfolio. The embedded lesson in Schultz ... Read more ...

“4 Slay Journalist Well Known in India.” Investigative editor for Bombay/Mumbai’s Mid-Day newspaper, Jay Dey, was shot at point-blank 6-11-11. He was known for reporting on the underworld. ADG (6-12-11), BOOKS, a Short Selection (all should be in Mullins)


John S. Friedman. The Secret Histories: Hidden Truths That Challenged the Past and
**Changed the World.** A one-of-a-kind collection of political histories that have changed the way we look at the world. Includes pieces by I.F. Stone, Seymour Hersh, Greg Palast, James Risen and others


John Pilger. *Tell Me No Lies.* 2005. This collection of investigative journalism of the past 60 years includes pieces by well-regarded reporters such as Seymour Hersh, Greg Palast, Edward R. Murrow, Jessica Mitford, Eric Schlosser.


Watchdog *Journalism: the art of investigative reporting ...*
MEDIA OFFERING INVESTIGATIVE REPORTING

I sent Ziva Branstetter, investigative reporting editor of the *Tulsa World*, this list of investigative reporting magazines (one online). Her reply follows.

JOURNALS PUBLISHING INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM

--*Columbia Journalism Review.*

--*IRE Journal.*

--*Mother Jones.*

--*The Nation.*

--*ProPublica,* started in 2008 to publish investigative journalism.

Compiled by Ziva Branstetter

There's a lot I could add to this list in all categories just based on what I see as a contest judge for Pulitzers and IRE national contest. Here are some major ones:

**Newspapers** (all have either won or placed as a finalist in the Pulitzers since 2000.)

NY Times
Washington Post
Seattle Times
Tampa Bay Times
Chicago Tribune
Sarasota Herald Tribune
Tampa Bay Times

I would also add:

Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel (great work at a smaller market)

Tulsa World (of course!)
Wire services that have won or placed in Pulitzers very recently:
AP
Reuters

Magazines are a dying breed because everything is going online now, but I would add Rolling Stone.

Online:

Center for Public Integrity (Pulitzer this year)
Center for Investigative Reporting
International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIR)
A growing contender hiring a lot of investigative reporters: BuzzFeed (really!)

Ziva Branstetter  Enterprise Editor
Tulsa World
918-581-8306 (o)
918-520-0406 (c)
@zivabranstetter

Google Search, Investigative Journalism

1. Investigative journalism - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia
en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Investigative_journalismCached - Similar
You +1’d this publicly. Undo

Investigative journalism is a form of journalism in which reporters deeply investigate a single topic of interest, often involving crime, political corruption, ...

Professional definitions - Notable Exposés - Notable Investigative ...

2. Center for Investigative Reporting
centerforinvestigativereporting.org/Cached
Jun 26, 2007 – Investigative reporting on the Web. CIR, California Watch win 2 Society of Professional Journalists awards. CHRISTA SCHARFENBERG ...

3. ProPublica
www.propublica.org/Cached - Similar
You +1’d this publicly. Undo

ProPublica was a recipient of the 2011 Pulitzer Prize in National Reporting and a 2010 Pulitzer Prize in Investigative Reporting. See a full list of our awards » ...

4. Home | Investigative Reporting Workshop
investigativereportingworkshop.org/Cached - Similar
You +1’d this publicly. Undo

Oct 19, 2011 – The Investigative Reporting Workshop at American University seeks to derive new models of supporting investigative reporting.

5. International Consortium of Investigative Journalists | A Center for ...
projects.publicintegrity.org/icij/Cached - Similar
You +1’d this publicly. Undo

Sep 28, 2011 – The International Consortium of Investigative Journalists was launched in 1997 as a project of the Center for Public Integrity to extend globally ...

6. How Investigative Journalism Is Prospering in the Age of Social Media
mashable.com/2010/11/.../investigative-journalism-social-w...Cached - Similar
You +1’d this publicly. Undo

by Vadim Lavrusik - In 11,985 circles

Nov 24, 2010 – Social tools are making the work of investigative reporters more efficient and comprehensive. Take a look at these examples on the cutting ...

7. The Fund for Investigative Journalism
fij.org/Cached - Similar
You +1’d this publicly. Undo

Click here to hear veteran investigative reporter Seymour Hersh tell how - with financial support from the Fund for Investigative Journalism - he learned about the ...

iWatch News produces original **investigative journalism** about significant public issues to make institutional power more transparent and accountable. iWatch ...

9. **Investigative Reporters and Editors**

**www.ire.org/Cached** - **Similar**

You +1’d this publicly. **Undo**

17 hours ago – The blog also covers issues of general interest to **investigative reporting**, including discussions of recent projects, new sources and reporting ...Get more results from the past 24 hours

10. **Tips from Bob Woodward on Investigative Journalism** - YouTube

- **www.youtube.com/watch?v=VVKGUctuoXE**

You +1’d this publicly. **Undo**

Jun 25, 2009 - 5 min - Uploaded by WashingtonPost
Bob Woodward explains the three ways journalists get their information and comments on the future of in-depth journalism in ...

11. News for **investigative journalism**

   Workshop on **investigative journalism** held

   Business Recorder (blog) - 1 day ago

   The initiative, known as AGAHI covered areas such as Investigative Journalism, Media Ethics, Anti-Money-Laundering and Terrorist Organisation Funding, ...

Searches related to **investigative journalism**

**history of** investigative journalism

investigative journalism **ethics**

investigative journalism **jobs**

investigative journalism **tips**

investigative journalism **definition**

investigative journalism **books**

investigative journalism **schools**

investigative journalism **degree**
Priest, Dana and Bill Arkin. “Top Secret America” series in Washington Post, 2010. Interview of Arkin on Democracy Now (7-19-10): On privatization of intelligence work on levels above top secret intelligence administration, “super-users,” from information gathering to assassination. These companies are dangerous to US security because they work for profit, not public good, and they constitute a secret police state above congressional/public oversight. Started by Bush but no change under Obama. The 5 pp. in the WP are only the tip of the iceberg of information online. This two-year investigative study involving many people and a large budget from the WP is a great achievement of IJ. Their book has been published and PBS presented their documentary. –Dick

Book review: 'Top Secret America'

Dana Priest and William M. Arkin investigate the explosive growth of the country's vast secret world since 9/11 and the staggering waste and ineptitude that have followed.

October 17, 2011|By Bob Drogin, Los Angeles Times

The CIA was nominally in charge when Navy SEALs flew deep into Pakistan in radar-evading Stealth helicopters in May to kill Osama bin Laden and when Predator drones fired missiles to kill Anwar Awlaki in Yemen last month.

But America's fabled spy service was eclipsed in both raids by a far more secretive group that flies 10 times as many drones as the CIA. Based in North Carolina, it runs its own intelligence division, flies its own reconnaissance planes and has its own satellites. Its leaders don't speak in public. It has no media spokesman or public website.

In "Top Secret America," Dana Priest and William M. Arkin, two of America's most relentless reporters, pull the curtains back on JSOC, or Joint Special Operations Command, to reveal a self-sustaining secret Pentagon army that has captured or killed more Al Qaeda militants "than the rest of the U.S. government forces combined."

This is an invaluable book, a breathtaking investigative account of America's vast new
secret world. It is not light reading, but it offers an indispensable guide to anyone who worries about the explosive growth of what the authors call America's terrorism-industrial complex since the Sept. 11 attacks a decade ago.

In their book, based on several hundred interviews, Priest and Arkin map out a largely invisible parallel universe of more than 1,300 federal agencies, nearly 2,000 private companies and 854,000 people doing "top secret" work. Spending for counter-terrorism, they note, has skyrocketed without members of Congress or anyone else really knowing what works and what does not.

A few examples: Some $81 billion is spent to gather foreign intelligence. The Homeland Security Department spends $58 billion, while the Pentagon spends untold billions more on counter-terrorism and homeland security. With so many duplicative agencies, bureaus, programs and gizmos, the counterterrorism effort is beset with "disturbing dysfunction."

Priest, who has won two Pulitzer Prizes for her reporting, is an intrepid tour guide to this uncharted world. Visiting suspect sites around the country, she shares her frustrations at chasing what she calls "buildings without addresses, offices without floors, acronyms without explanation."

Arkin is the kind of sleuth who mines impenetrable government documents to write directories of nuclear weapons, classified code names and much more. So when Priest searches for a mysterious underground bunker in rural Maryland, Arkin digs into his stash of "contracts for guard and facility maintenance services" and reports that the buried facility is 90,000 square feet and has a helicopter pad on top.

And it's hardly the biggest government bunker. In all, Arkin determines that 33 large complexes for top secret intelligence work have been built around Washington in recent years — equivalent in size to three Pentagons. That doesn't include five new buildings to house the ever-expanding CIA, a vast new complex for the National Security Agency in Utah and scores of other facilities around the country. Much of the top secret work is doled out to savvy corporate contractors, which have boomed in the recession. Some offer shiny BMWs and fat bonuses to hire away CIA analysts and others with top secret security clearances so they can then offer them back to government agencies at inflated prices.

The burden is substantial. The authors cite a recent study by the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (another group created in the last decade) which found that private contractors make up 29% of the workforce in intelligence agencies but cost 49% of personnel budgets.

Does the bloated system work? The two plots that have come closest to causing mass murder in the United States — the attempt to blow up a Northwest Airlines jet over Detroit in December 2009 and the attempt to detonate a car bomb in New York's Times Square in May 2010 — both failed because the bombers were incompetent, not because of U.S. efforts. Both were intelligence failures.
Robert Gates, the former CIA chief and Defense secretary, tells the authors that he is appalled at the constant fear-mongering about dirty bombs, killer germs, a cyber Pearl Harbor and other threats. U.S. courts have tried 46 terrorism cases involving 125 people in recent years, he points out. "So, I would say the numbers of extremists are very small. Let's stay calm."

PBS, **FRONTLINE, “TOP SECRET AMERICA”**

[Top Secret America](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/topsecretamerica/) | FRONTLINE | PBS

Sep 6, 2011 - Join us for a live chat about “**Top Secret America**: 9/11 to the Boston .... FRONTLINE Managing Editor Philip Bennett reflects on this week's film.

[Transcript](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/topsecretamerica/credits/) - [Credits](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/topsecretamerica/dvds/) - [DVDs](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/topsecretamerica/)

NARRATOR: —Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Dana Priest investigates the creation of **Top Secret America**. ALLISON STANGER, Rohatyn Center for ...

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**JAMES RISEN, PAY ANY PRICE: GREED, POWER, AND ENDLESS WAR**, Google Search, Nov. 15, 2014

“No single review or interview can do justice to **Pay Any Price**”—**Huffington Post.**


Oct 15, 2014 - In **“Pay Any Price: Greed, Power, and Endless War,” James Risen** holds up a mirror to the United States in the 13 years since 9/11, and what it ...

2. [In 'Pay Any Price,' James Risen Examines the War on Terror ...](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/10/15/opinion/sunday/james-risens-pay-any-price.html)
The New York Times

Oct 12, 2014 - In “Pay Any Price: Greed, Power, and Endless War,” James Risen, a Pulitzer Prize-winning investigative reporter for The New York Times, sets ...

3. READ: Excerpt from James Risen’s New Book "Pay Any Price"


5. New York Times Reporter James Risen Laments Lost Art Of ...

The Huffington Post

Oct 28, 2014 - NEW YORK — New York Times reporter James Risen acknowledged in his new book, Pay Any Price, that he posed in one instance as an ...

6. James Risen’s New Book - Huffington Post

The Huffington Post

Oct 14, 2014 - No single review or interview can do justice to Pay Any Price -- the new book by James Risen that is the antithesis of what routinely passes for ...

7. Speed Read: James Risen Indicts The War On Terror's ...

The Daily Beast

Oct 14, 2014 - In his new book, 'Pay Any Price,' reporter James Risen reports how billions were lost and American rights were infringed when the government ..

Jeremy Renner stars as Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Gary Webb in Kill the Messenger(Chuck Ziotnick/Focus Features).

CULTURE » NOVEMBER 20, 2014
The Reporter Who Paid a High Price for ‘Contra Crack’

A new film, *Kill the Messenger*, shows how the CIA, the *Washington Post* and the *LA Times* conspired to discredit a journalist, and destroyed a life.

BY JIM NAURECKAS

Webb’s scoop of a lifetime was drawing a connection between two major 1980s news stories so successfully that it’s almost hard now not to think of them together, 'contra crack' tripping off the tongue like 'French bread' or 'English muffins.'

In *Kill the Messenger*, Gary Webb, the investigative journalist who exposed the contra-crack connection, is portrayed by Jeremy Renner—most familiar to a mass audience as Hawkeye in *The Avengers*, but known to film buffs for appearing in gritty, based-on-real-life films like *The Hurt Locker* and *American Hustle*. *Kill the Messenger*, which Renner also co-produced, is in that docudrama genre. More specifically, it recalls films like the 2010 Valerie Plame biopic *Fair Game*, where the story is not only true, but one that corporate news media would rather you not know. *Kill the Messenger* is a story about the story that the *San Jose Mercury News* reporter gave up his career to get out.

The movie opens with historical footage of the war on drugs: presidents from Nixon to Reagan declaring it, Nancy Reagan urging us to just say no, the Partnership for a Drug-Free America comparing our drugged brains to breakfast, news outlets reporting the crack epidemic. A later montage shows footage of the other “war” of the time: speeches about the Cold War, along with shots of the contra war in Central America, in which rebels organized by the CIA attempted to overthrow the socialist government of Nicaragua. (*In These Times* was one of the few outlets to cover the story while the war was still ongoing; for most in corporate media, the cognitive dissonance was too much to handle.)

As most people who go to see the film will know, Webb’s scoop of a lifetime was drawing a connection between these two major 1980s news stories, so successfully that it’s almost hard now not to think of them together, “contra crack” tripping off the tongue like “French bread” or “English muffins.”

The montages succeed in recalling how weird—and shocking—it originally was that Ronald Reagan’s favorite foreign policy endeavor would be intimately connected with a product so universally demonized.

Having established the real-life context, the film moves on to its fictional depiction of Webb. One of the big questions you want a biopic of Webb to answer is how he nailed a story so many others missed. Renner plays him, naturally, as an old-school muckraker unable to let go of a story once he’s got his teeth into it.
But he’s also portrayed as a guy with a deep well of anger and the ability to focus it at the right targets. (“What about this doesn’t piss you off?” he asks, surveying crack’s devastating impact on an urban neighborhood.) He’s a character who’s willing to break rules—bribing his way into a Nicaraguan prison—and, when he’s frustrated, to break windows. This portrait seems plausible—Webb’s personal recklessness goes a long way toward explaining why he was the one journalist willing to go out on a limb.

His colleagues, especially Mercury News Executive Editor Jerry Ceppos, played by a perfectly cast Oliver Platt, live in a world of cost/benefit analysis: They want to get out as much truth as they can afford to. Webb does not, cannot, make that calculation. He will get the story even if it destroys him, which is why he gets the story and why he is destroyed.

Halfway through the picture, the hunter becomes the hunted: The triumphant publication of Webb’s “Dark Alliance” series in the Mercury News—which established that a key player in the spread of the crack epidemic was getting his raw material from contra-linked drug-runners—provokes a backlash from both journalistic and intelligence establishments.

Here, the film jumps away from Webb’s point of view to show the editorial discussions at two media giants scooped by a paper they would disdain to call a rival. While both the Los Angeles Times and the Washington Post bought into a CIA public affairs campaign to discredit Webb, the Los Angeles Times is portrayed as particularly motivated by stung pride. The paper dedicates a team to gutting the reporter who scored a big story on their turf, devoting more journalistic energy to bringing down Webb than they ever gave to investigating the origins of the cocaine that flooded South Central Los Angeles.

The Post comes across as more of a cat’s paw for the CIA, with one staffer—clearly modeled on longtime Post CIA correspondent Walter Pincus, who worked for the agency’s precursor early in his career—relaying to attentive editors the CIA’s views on how the story should be spun: that Webb was a conspiracy theorist, a fabricator, not to be trusted.

Lest you think this is Hollywood conspiracy-mongering, the CIA’s in house journal published an article, only recently declassified, citing the Post’s Webb takedowns as an example of how to “work with journalists who are already disposed toward writing a balanced story.” CIA public affairs gave out Pincus’ Post articles to other reporters, “helping to create what the Associated Press called a ‘firestorm of reaction’ against the San Jose Mercury News,” in the agency’s words.

Webb’s life did not have the shape of a traditional movie. The forces he antagonized were successful in driving him out of journalism and into a downward spiral that culminated, in 2004, in an apparent suicide. It’s hard to turn that into a feel-good ending.

Instead, the film ends as it begins, with real footage—home movies of Webb horsing around with his kids. It brings home that the life you’ve just seen destroyed was that of a real person—and a real hero.
Jim Naureckas is the editor of Extra!, the magazine of FAIR (Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting).

SCHOLARSHIP OPPORTUNITIES:

The Bill Moyers Travel Scholarship at the University of Arkansas-Fayetteville Journalism Dept. sends student journalists to IRE’s conferences. The scholarship is funded by professor emeritus James R. (Dick) Bennett. Students at the UofA should contact the Journalism Department.

The James R. Bennett Travel Scholarship, administered by the Investigative Journalists and Editors Center at the University of Missouri, Columbia, enables college journalism students in Mississippi, Oklahoma or Louisiana to attend IRE’s Conferences. The scholarships were established with IRE by Dr. James R. Bennett, professor emeritus of English, University of Arkansas.

Recent OMNI Newsletters
UN Children’s Day 11-20
Vegetarian Action #13, 11-12
Armistice Day #8, Part II, 11-11
Armistice Day #7, Part I, 11-11
PTSD #4, 11-10
Capitalism and Climate Change 11-4
UN Day #7, 10-24
END OF IRE NEWSLETTER #1

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Dick Bennett

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