

Drug war theme of new play

By Kwasi Akwamu

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The story began in the mid-1990s. A Los Angeles drug dealer, Ricky Ross, had been busted. In a feeble effort to avoid a life sentence to prison, he turned over on some of his cocaine connections. Following an in-depth investigation, news reporter Gary Webb published a series of stories in the San Jose Mercury News revealing ties of governmental agencies, led by the Central Intelligence Agency, to the urban crack cocaine epidemic.

After the conclusion of an internal investigation by the CIA in 1998, a select committee from Congress held a two-hour hearing, after which the agency's inspector general denied the charges posed by Webb's expose series.

"There were a lot of very transparent lies and dubious statements that comes through loud and clear at that hearing," says John Alpeda.

Alpeda is one of 14 actors who will appear in a play arranged by the Los Angeles Poverty Department to be held in Detroit this week. *Agents & Assets* uses the congressional hearings to educate people about the war on drugs and government indifference to the impact it has on poor communities.

"*Agents & Assets* is a transcript from a congressional hearing the day that the CIA lawyer brought in the results of his own investigation and presented to the select committee in Congress," said Alpeda. "So, all the words said either are those that were said by the CIA lawyer or the congress people."



Photo by Kwasi Akwamu

Cast members with *Agents & Assets* are using theatre to educate about the government's war on drugs. Pictured (L-R) are Alexander Henderson, Henriette Brouwers, John Alpeda, Tony Parker, Rickey Mantley, and Melina Bielefelt.

Following the play, whose cast is a mix of Los Angeles and Detroit residents, there will be panel discussions regarding the drug war and government drug policy. Panelists include Jeff Edison, attorney; JoAnn Watson, Michigan Drug Reform; Deborah Small, Drug Policy Alliance; Maureen Taylor, Welfare Rights Organization; Alfred McCoy,

drug war historian; Dawud Muhammad, Nation of Islam, among others.

Performances of Agents & Assets will be held at First Universalist Unitarian Church, 4605 Cass Ave., on Oct. 17-19 at 8 p.m. and Oct. 20 at 4 p.m.

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