Stanley Nelson, director. *Crack: Cocaine, Corruption, & Conspiracy*. Netflix, 2021.

Stanley Nelson is a highly acclaimed documentary filmmaker, MacArthur Fellow, Peabody Award winner, and recipient of the National Medal in Humanities. Nelson is also the founder of Firelight Media, a filmmaking company with a mission to create documentaries by and about communities of color. *Crack: Cocaine, Corruption, & Conspiracy* is an 88-minute exploration of the United States federal government's involvement in the crack epidemic of the 1980s and 1990s and the catastrophic effect the crisis had on inner-city communities. Nelson argues that the CIA had a direct role in creating the crack craze, and their actions devastated poor communities of color in major U.S. cities. The media falsely sensationalized the crack epidemic, and as a result, the federal government criminalized crack users instead of providing them with substance abuse treatment. Nelson provides evidence for his argument through interviews with journalists, politicians, academics, former crack dealers, users, and law enforcement officers. He also utilizes media from the era, as well as informational graphics. The infographics, created by ARE Creative, are animated maps and bar charts with various historical information and statistics.

The film primarily focuses on communities in Los Angeles and New York City and is presented in eight segments: Greed Is Good, They Call It Crack, Street Capitalists, The Virus, Just Say No, Media Frenzy, The Rules Have Changed, and Tougher. This structure is chronological and thematic, beginning with the developments that led to the crack epidemic and ending with the policies that devastated communities of color via mass incarceration. The creation of this crisis is a result of the CIA funding the Contras' War in Nicaragua. The CIA provided aid to the Contras by giving them weapons and money; they then smuggled the Contras' cocaine into the United States. The flood of cocaine into the U.S. significantly lowered the drug's price, making it affordable for poor communities. The increased availability of the drug prompted the creation of crack, a new, highly addictive derivative of cocaine. The Reagan Administration reacted to crack's popularity with the "Just Say No" campaign, creating the perception that drug addicts had an active choice in their

addiction. The media then sensationalized the drug problem and demonized the users. For example, they primarily targeted Black mothers by creating the myth of crack babies. Before long, Congress passed laws that punished those in possession of crack more severely than those arrested with powdered cocaine. By the 1990s, the Clinton Administration sought to become tougher on crime and drugs by instituting three strikes laws and providing funding to militarize the police. Although 60 percent of crack users were white, these policy changes resulted in a massive increase of Black and Hispanic incarceration.

The documentary's interviews and infographics complement the media from the era in a manner that is entertaining, educational, and accessible for the average viewer. The interviews with former U.S. Congressman, Charles Rangel, and former counsel for the U.S. House Judiciary Committee, Eric E. Sterling, provide insight into how and why the harmful anti-drug and crime legislation of the 1980s and '90s came to be enacted. Nelson ends his documentary with emotional and personal testimonies from former users. Additionally, he invites a Black neuroscientist to explain the damaging negative impact crack brought to communities of color. The last visual on the screen before the credits roll is a statement that includes the amount of money spent on the "War on Drugs" and the explosion in prison population totals caused by new drug laws. This statement illustrates how much of a failure the "War on Drugs" was and how it only resulted in mass incarceration.

Crack: Cocaine, Corruption, & Conspiracy provides a general overview of the crack epidemic of the 1980s and 1990s. Yet, many topics are not explored in-depth. For example, it only briefly mentions how sex was traded for drugs and how sexual abuse was rampant during this era. Still, this film educates a broad audience, ranging from pre-teens (with their parents' permission) to retirees interested in an informative 90-minute documentary feature.

Juan Calderon