Topic:

The crack epidemic was a frightening time in America. Most of the news stories during the epidemic claimed that crack infiltrated middle class neighborhoods. The media never portrayed the real prevalence of crack in America. The crack epidemic started in the Caribbean when cocaine dealers overproduced and drove down the price of cocaine. In order to counteract the overproduction, the drug dealers created crack out of cocaine and sold it at a reduced price. That marked the birth of crack cocaine and years later the drug made its way into the United States. The Atlanta Journal Constitution made the first reference to a crack epidemic on December 31, 1985 and the epidemic lasted a decade, dying out quietly in the mid 90s. The drug was cheap and the poor manufactured it with ease, which made it readily available in poor communities. The low price of the drug drew most of the inner-city populations to selling crack; which led to territory wars and produced the modern gangs. On top of all of the devastation of the communities, laws were enacted that led to an enormous incarceration rate of minorities. Laws harshly punished crack users in an attempt to rid America of the drug problem. This policy jailed a historic amount of people but did not help fight the problem. The crack epidemic produced a harsh impression on the inner-city communities and one city that felt the most from the crack epidemic was New York City. In New York crack was everywhere, shootings were a common occurrence, young men and women
were dying everyday, and each block people filed outside of apartments waiting to get their hands on the seductive drug. The topic of this thesis is on the crack epidemic and the effects of the epidemic on minorities in New York.

**Historiography:**

Thirty years after the crack epidemic scholars have produced countless research on the drug and its impact. The first research on the impact of the crack epidemic surfaced in the 1990s. During this time the commentary on the epidemic described urban life during the crack epidemic. Historians were able to speak on the impact of the epidemic so early because the apparent impact. Statistics were produced during the end of the epidemic illustrating urban populations in disarray. The news also reported on horror stories of crack babies and crack heads. During the 1990s an argument amongst historians appeared on whether the drug or the drug policies had the biggest effect. Historians like William Schwartz in “Sentencing Guidelines and Mandatory Minimums: The Need for Separate Evaluation” argued the policies made the biggest impact. Schwartz used statistics of the large prison population and the fact that many of these imamates were drug offenders to make his argument. He also pointed out that many of the drug dealers were in prison for ten plus years. The large incarnation rate as the leading contributor to the desolation of many of the minority communities was his main argument. Other Historians like Kathleen Roe, Meredith Minkler, Frances Saunders, and Gregg E. Thomson, thought different as they wrote about the impact of crack on families. In the historians joint article, “Health of Grandmothers Raising Children of
the crack cocaine Epidemic" they argued the dependency of the drug drove mothers
and daughters away from their children. They spoke on missing crack abusers on
crack binders or contributing in other crack related crimes, leaving grandparents to
raise the children. The historians showed alarming statistics of the enormous
growth of grandparents raising their grandchildren during the epidemic. The
argument by these historians was that crack shifted the makeup of the common
household during 1980s and early 1990s.

While the historians in the 1990s spoke on the effect of the communities, in
2000s the discussion moved to talk about the crime the epidemic produced. The
historians moved to talk about the impact of the epidemic on crime because
following the epidemic there was a dip in crime. In 1988-1989 the peak of the crack
epidemic the crime rate was at its highest, but a decade later crime evened out.
Historians saw the dip and immediately blamed the high crime rate on crack. Two
ways of thinking came about during this time. One way of thinking was that crack
lead to crime because there was drug dealing, which coincides with gang violence.
The other way of thinking was the drug policies were unjust and produced crime by
incarcerating large numbers. Benjamin Bowling in "The Rise and Fall of New York
Murder: Zero Tolerance or Crack Decline?" spoke on crime and New York and its
recent fall in crime. His argument was that the sudden drop in crime in New York
was not because of the policies of Rudi Giuliani, but the reduction of crack use. Peter
Reuter made the opposite side of this argument in "Why Has US Drug Policy
Changed So Little Over 30 Years?" Peter Reuter speaks on the 100 to 1, crack to
cocaine sentencing laws that came out during 1980s. This policy gave crack users
higher sentences when compared to cocaine. Many of these young men and women had only minor offenses but if arrested for possession of crack faced a serious prison sentence. The authors argued the disproportionate incarceration of minorities and increasing life sentence for crack offenders demonstrated the unjust outcome of the drug policies. As the years waned on different aspects of the crack epidemic were dissected. What remained constant was the argument over whether the problem was the people or the policies.

Research Question:
What was the effect of the crack epidemic on the minority population in New York City?

Theoretical Approach:

In creating my research question I asked the broad question of Why after fifty years the Civil Rights Act 1964 African Americans haven’t achieved as much progress as what should have been achieved? The first answer I came up with was the 1980s drug policies. When I continued my research on the 1980s drug policies I learned about the crack epidemic and its shocking impact. That’s when I created my final research question. That is how I will conduct my research for this thesis. I will learn of a certain fact and further search that topic until I understand the fact inside and out. My research will consist of books checked out from the UNCC library. I will also use the databases available through the library. Using the library I will research the history of the crack epidemic. Use newspaper articles on the crack epidemic as primary sources. I will also use government reports and state reports to get the government prospective of the crack epidemic. One city in particular I will use to
dissect the impact of the crack epidemic is New York. There is a lot of research on
the effect of crack on poor and inner city populations in New York. I will research
this using archive.org, online journals, and online government websites. While
researching on New York I will look for the epidemics affect on the families. I will
look at the parents of the children who are crack addicts and those grandparents
caring for their grandchildren whose parents neglected them. This research will be
conducted by looking at memoirs of family members and people who are affected by
the crack epidemic. Also I will look at articles by journalist reporting on the families
during the crack epidemic. My research will move to the policies during the crack
epidemic. This will include government documents describing the policies.
Furthermore it includes newspaper articles reporting on the policies enacted during
the 1980s. Then I will use online databases to understand articles looking at the
long-term impact to comprehend the lasting impression of these policies. I will use
sources from a variety of different sources from historians, criminal justice
professors, and sociologists. My topic touches each of these different subjects and I
will need remarks from all these scholars.

What my work will contribute to the field is to further explain the experience
of African Americans in America. My thesis will work to answer what the impact of
the crack epidemic on the African Americans and further answer what the epidemic
has done for the progression of African Americans in society. My topic will touch on
the impact of the crack epidemic on minorities in New York. I will describe how New
York was a microcosm of cracks impact on the nation. My work will not just answer
what impact the crack epidemic on the poor and minorities in New York; but also
how crack worked with the policies to stop the progress of African Americans and almost eliminate a generation. My research will provide a fresh answer to the question of what was the crack epidemics lasting impression. Most importantly my thesis will continue to contribute to the evolving understanding of the crack epidemic.