

CHAPTER 7

GALFY COUNTRY

New Jersey has a reputation for organized crime, graft, and corruption. Union County, the home of lawyer Joseph Galfy, is no exception. The county features heavily in multiple incidents of mafia history. From Lucky Luciano and Meyer Lansky to the only native mafia family in the state. The DeCavalcante crime family is, according to some (including members of the DeCavalcantes) the inspiration for the crime family portrayed in the HBO series *The Sopranos*. They also have the dubious distinction of being the only wholly New Jersey-based mafia family. In 2001, in *The New Yorker*, they were referred to as the “and a half” family¹ accompanying the Five Families of New York. Union County is listed as one of the founding locations of the DeCavalcante’s criminal organization. In 2017, two Union County members of the crime family² were brought in on charges of cocaine trafficking.

From the 80s on, the cocaine route in the US was highly dependent on the Port of Elizabeth. Decades of local news stories, increasing frequency from the 70s on, involve cocaine being smuggled from Colombia via Florida to

Elizabeth.* From there, it would be distributed across the country.³

One stash house, run by Colombians, fronted as a car repair shop. This may explain some of the recurring stories of trucks and cars fitted with secret compartments to make the cocaine trafficking more discreet.⁴ Elizabeth police gang, The Family, also had a role in protecting cocaine traffickers. A source from the area spoke with me on the condition they could remain unnamed. They told me that in Union County (as well as Newark and Trenton) there are streets where the police are, in essence, enforcers of the traffickers.⁵

The situation has not been ameliorated since the 70s and 80s, however. The Newark-Elizabeth Marine Terminal is still the entry point for tons of cocaine and massive quantities of fentanyl, heroin, and other hard drugs. The overall route has changed a bit. 1.6 tons seized in 2019 came via Chile rather than Colombia,⁵ but the fact the port has the largest APM terminal^{1**} on the East Coast, (one of the largest in the USA⁶) has not.

In 2011, six Union County residents were netted in the “largest mob takedown in history.” The case dealt with the International Longshoremen’s Association. Racketeering, extortion, and illegal gambling were among the charges. Among those arrested were mafiosos with connections to the Genovese, Colombo, and Gambini crime families. New Jersey US Attorney Paul J. Fishman remarked on the bust, “Workers should be free to pursue an honest living without being worried that their own union representatives will shake them down. ... Paying tribute to the mob is not an acceptable

* During Iran Contra, Elizabeth was said to have the largest Colombian population outside of Jackson Heights in Queens, and Bogota in Columbia. Obviously, most were not involved in trafficking of any sort, but it’s undeniable a handful had a major hand in the cocaine trade. Especially throughout the 70s and 80s.

** APM Terminals are headquartered in the Netherlands and operated by Maersk which has repeatedly had issues with cocaine, heroin, and human trafficking in the past.

cost of doing business in New Jersey.”

One Genovese family associate was protected by a former Union County prosecutor multiple times on behalf of his Union County prosecutor buddy.⁷

The continued existence of waterfront-based organized crime is likely the reason why the state of New York recently had to take the unusual step of seeking support from the Supreme Court to block New Jersey’s attempt to dissolve the Waterfront Commission (which we will go into much further in the next chapter).

New Jersey state Senator Joe Cryan (also former Union County Sheriff, who is named as a defendant in motions by Kai) spoke out⁸ against the move to block dissolving the Commission founded in 1953 to prevent kickbacks and cargo theft among other instances of waterfront-based crime.

In 1969, the *New York Times* reported on Union County District Judge Ralph DeVita’s ties to the Mafia. It was noted that Gov. Richard J. Hughes had already been apprised of said connections to organized crime. DeVita was appointed in 1966 and three years later indicted on charges of bribery involving, wonder of wonders, an organized crime case.⁹

Bruce Paterson, in a letter to the editor, referred to the “corruption in real time”¹⁰ that occurs in the county of Union. Just one recent case is exemplary of how business is done in Galfy Country.

“They are running a con game with the politically connected at the taxpayer’s expense,” Paterson noted in a letter to the editor about a \$100 million+ government facility project. The practice of graft, by no means, originated with the Tammany Hall political machine. But since that process was introduced and spread throughout New Jersey, it has been near impossible to shake its influence.

As a result, we have the Waterfront Commission and statutes such as the Local Public Contracts Laws (LPCL). These are designed to make sure that contract bidding is done in the open to protect against bid rigging, (a major problem in the state of New Jersey that has resulted in multiple major FBI stings such as operation Bid Rig I, II, and III).

Just this year, Ted Sherman of *NJ Advance Media* did an investigative series about a multi-million-dollar government complex at the center of bid-rigging ignored by the Union County Improvement Authority.¹¹ Galfy acquaintance, Theodore Romankow, also had a role in the Union County Improvement Authority in addition to being a Freeholder. Like party bosses, Freeholders and Improvement Authority representatives have unique opportunities to trade on influence. Romankow, by the way, is also named in a media suppression story from The Reporter's Committee on Freedom of Speech (RCFP). RCFP reported on the case of Tina Renna's fight to keep her sources secret as is her right under the state's journalist shield law.¹²

Kai was initially denied his day due to "suicide risk." Or so the state claimed. Kai's story differs. He says he was not suicidal at the time, but after witnessing and experiencing physical and psychological abuse, he did eventually harbor suicidal thoughts due to the ceaseless abuse. Kai was seen by Dr. Rodemar Perez at Trinitas hospital in Elizabeth, New Jersey. Theodore Romankow was on the board of Trinitas Regional and also connected to local mental health and children's and sexual assault victim's initiatives. Trinitas, as has been mentioned, was made to pay out \$3 million in 2008 due to pervasive Medicare fraud at the institution.¹³

Considering how Kai was treated, including the actual felonious refusal of victim's services after he reported being raped, I can't put too much faith in Romankow's proficiency in dealing with abuse victims or the mentally ill. Romankow was also connected to The Children's Advocacy Center. It was funded by the Union County Improvement Authority and county

Freeholders, both of which Romankow was a prominent member of at the time.

Tina Renna had to fight for the privilege of asserting her right to the shield law after county prosecutors attempted to subpoena Renna to get at her sources. For what purposes, one can only guess, though retaliation and intimidation are quite likely. Romankow not only tried to get at Renna's sources. He also impugned her character claiming she may have made up the accusations.

“Personally, I believe she was caught in a lie and chose to waste time and money by hiding,” Romankow told the New Jersey's *Star-Ledger*.¹⁴ Well, two can play that game. I think the evidence is sufficient to at least note, that the many irregularities in Union County arising about or around Romankow: are signs that this former prosecutor, at the very least, doesn't have the best interests of the people of Union County at heart.

I have dealt with attempts at intimidation regarding stories I've covered. The last few years I have been investigating a con ring in Houston with a body count numbering at least four, perhaps five. A law firm alleged in some news stories to be engaged in media suppression, attempted to have me pull that story. I spent years contacting reporters; with some showing interest, before ghosting me altogether. Alissa Fleck was the only journalist willing to help me get the story shared.

I told Alissa about the law firm's threats and asked her if she would be worried in my shoes. She informed me it wasn't her first rodeo, and she wouldn't be worried about it. So I rode it out. Seeing as they never bothered to give any evidence contrary to what my sources and the evidence showed, I refused to fall prey to their petty attempts to harass me or influence my reporting. However, most of the sources I had for that story were admittedly off the record. Go figure. When you have a character who brags about

getting away with murder due to consulate connections, it tends to make people want to clam up.

Renna understands the situation just as well. “Who would talk to me if they had to worry about me having to reveal them? I believe that was their goal: to shut down our blog.”

Romankow was also quite intent on keeping the matters of Union County’s Improvement Authority under county control. Perhaps to escape the oversight of the state? In Camden for instance, extraordinary corruption led to New Jersey intervening in regard to local government matters. Romankow’s role also involved public planning projects, another potential area in which access allows for potential corruption.

I have no specific smoking gun to point to in this case; but, as Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist John Archibald said, sometimes it doesn’t come down to the number of public officials caught. In the most extremely corrupt venues it would stand to reason that more cover-up, less transparency, and accountability would lead to fewer cases of crooked officials being caught.

Just this year contracting company Dobco exposed bid-rigging in Union County facilitated by the Union County Improvement Authority. They were one of the contractors who put in a bid for the over a hundred-million-dollar government complex. Dobco’s bid was the lowest. Ordinarily, this would win them the contract. But this was no ordinary circumstance. That’s just not how business is done in Galfy Country.

Dobco Inc. sued, citing the irregularity that skirted the LPCL process. As a result, construction work in Bergen and Union County was stopped. In a 21-page ruling, judges were quite clear in their claims that Dobco had “clearly and convincingly demonstrated irreparable harm... of all taxpayers in Union County.”¹⁵

In many counties in many states that would be the end of it. But not here. After the adverse ruling against Bergen and Union Counties for wriggling their way out of the LPCL procedures, it took only three weeks for the rules to be rewritten “in real time” (as Paterson put it).

Senator Paul Sarlo of Bergen County sponsored senate bill S-1714. It would make county Improvement Authorities exempt from the LPCL. It was none other than Union County’s own Nick Scutari, the state senate president who would be responsible for advancing the legislation in the Senate. Now, how convenient for the two counties outed for avoiding laws meant to protect citizens against officials engaging in bid rigging. The timing of the new law springing up, and its being pushed by officials from the two counties in question, is no coincidence.

By the way, Scutari has a rather interesting history that may provide insight into what type of politician he is. When he was the Linden City Court Prosecutor in Union County, he was charged with an alleged theft of \$150,000 of services. He also was accused of getting paid for a “no-show” job.* That’s right, in at least one case the prosecutor didn’t even bother to show up in court. This resulted in the taxpayers being on the hook for a large payout.¹⁶

Scutari wasn’t the subject of just the one inquiry, but “several” investigations into his activities while prosecutor of Linden. The state’s Joint Legislative Committee of Ethical Standards also attempted to put the heat on him. Sadly, his corruption was not quelled. Instead, he managed to move his way up from crooked prosecutor to crooked state senate president.¹⁷

Activist Sue Altman is the director of the New Jersey Working Families

* No-show” and “low-show” jobs are mentioned in Garcia’s criminology textbook as indicators of organized crime, along with bid-rigging and “industry cartels” freezing out competitors in public works projects.

Alliance. Sue called for Scutari to be removed as chair of the Judiciary Committee, due to the obvious issues posed by such a character having his hands on the lever of the legislature.

“Being removed from the Judiciary Committee is significant because right now, he’s the arbiter of who moves up in the judicial system, and that person should have a high ethical standard,” Altman told the press. Altman was one of ten who filed an ethics complaint delivered to former New Jersey Supreme Court Justice John Wallace.

The letter read, in part, “This accusation raises serious questions as to Senator Scutari’s ability to perform his taxpayer-funded employment and threatens to undermine the public’s trust in the Legislature.” Scutari’s “serial absenteeism” is just another instance of how the now high-ranking official seemed to flout the gravity of the offices he has held. Out of 141 days absent in a two-year period from 2017 to 2018, he only reported five to his superiors.

Law firm Calcagni & Kanefsky wrote up a report on the “no-show” prosecutor. Sue Altman gained access to the scathing, 59-page report through an Open Public Records Act (OPRA) request.

“Unfortunately, we have such a culture of corruption and complicity in New Jersey that is fairly unsavory, and these things go on and on until a group of people says, ‘Hey, we need to stop this,’” said Altman.

Scutari also was accused of “widespread malfeasance” by Linden Mayor Derek Armstead on multiple occasions. Through the near-constant shadow of scandal about him, Scutari served as Linden’s prosecutor for 15 years. He was first elected to the state senate in 2003, in addition to being the chairman of the Union County Democratic Committee.

In 2019, Scutari was investigated for using a consulting firm that stuffed

his pockets with over \$147,000. His disinterest in actually showing up to work also led to serious problems in the county courts. On the days he actually did show up he would often excuse himself before the docket was up. When two cousins were brought up on disorderly charges and no prosecutor was to be found, the county had to settle for \$575,000. As you can see, even when the money doesn't end up in Scutari's pocket it still stings the residents of Union County.

“This is a criminal justice issue—folks' first entry way to the criminal justice system is often through municipal court,” said Altman. “To think we had a prosecutor whose full attention wasn't on the job at hand is extremely troubling.”

Hector Osegura, a Hudson County activist, said of Scutari's actions, “politicians... don't think the ethics rules apply to them.” He went on to say that he hoped that officials like Scutari would be held to the same scrutiny as others who abuse the system but fears that in the end it will all just be covered up as is the case so often in the county of Union.¹⁸

Union County Commissioner Bruce Bergen wants to appeal the decision claiming, irony of ironies, that the rules were being changed to their detriment despite the LPCL dating back to 1971 and the senate bill arising three weeks after the exposure of the potential bid rigging scam in Union County.¹⁹

It's so corrupt it's almost comical. Like a caricature of evil. And the fact that the people involved are under investigation a dozen times and end up floating to the top of the senate should be shocking, but I've seen this sort of thing outside of Union County, outside of New Jersey.

This is not a singular situation. And yes, the role that Union County plays as a hub in overall NJ corruption I think goes back to its geographical

location. It's that whole North Jersey Shore thing from Tammany Hall to Atlantic City and Prohibition on. It set up a system that is now so ensconced it doesn't even have to stay too hidden. All this going on out in the open meaning there's much more behind the scenes.

As we've seen, contracting, real estate, and connections to legislative bodies and the judicial system show up time and again. It's just speculation on my part, but I find it interesting that Joseph Galfy retreated from divorce law to work in real estate-related proceedings as well as buying and selling properties himself.

According to his younger brother James Galfy, Joseph also assisted him with "civil suits." The former deputy police chief of Irvington PD turned high school teacher claims he was targeted due to his "deep pockets." As for how and why a police officer generally becomes the subject of civil suits and how and why a police officer turned high school teacher would have such "deep pockets,"²⁰ these are just a couple of the many mysteries in the case.

I have considered the possibility that, in naming several parties, many of them lawyers and politicians, I might become the subject of a lawsuit myself. In such a case, considering the narrowness of my own pockets I would be forced to defend myself pro se. On the bright side, the discovery process inherent in such a defense might be just the thing to help me gain access to some of the material that might fill in some of the gaps in my research.

Besides, I had to learn a bit about pro se filing already when I was forced to subpoena *ABC7NY* to hopefully find out perhaps who it was removing... something from the active crime scene in Clark. Was this the same person who ran the dishwasher? Why did *ABC7NY* take the video off the internet? Why did the judge refuse to enter a still from the video into evidence? These are questions I ponder that, who knows, might be best answered during discovery process if I were forced to defend my work.

Speaking of having to defend one's work. Tina Renna characterized Romankow's attempt at silencing her as a "political vendetta."²² The precedent set by her becoming the first blogger to have proved herself covered by the state's shield laws is important in a state with 21 counties, 566 municipalities, and over 600 school districts. A jumble of local political groupings that is difficult to hold accountable without additional help from watchdog organizations.

Generatorgate was another major Union County scandal. Several county employees took home generators during Hurricane Sandy which rocked the northeast coast in 2012.²³ Then there were the stolen chainsaws and the missing funds from Musicfest.²⁴ It wasn't just these issues, though. Romankow was also "protecting favored employees." Instead of acting on the tips that Renna publicized, Romankow used his position to protect his friends and harass a journalist. She calls into question "Romankow's integrity and independence from political bosses" as well.

New Jersey does have strong journalist shield law protections. But the issue did not hinge on whether or not she was gathering and disseminating information clearly in the public interest. Their weak argument centered on her lack of affiliation with a traditional news media source.²⁵

Renna had already proven herself a gadfly in the eyes of some of the Union County "old guard" by 2009. That was the year she called out new employee vehicles for certain government employees, decked out with expensive voice-activated navigation systems. Then there was Musicfest 2010, a week-long festival in Union County which would inspire a five-month investigation. Unfortunately, the Union County Prosecutor's Office dropped it. They claimed there was "insufficient evidence" of criminality.

The whole snafu was just a case of "poorly executed" management, Romankow's office had decided. The investigation began with a letter by

Tina Renna to the Office of the Attorney General. After pointing out that somewhere in the neighborhood of the high six figures was missing, the Attorney General referred the case to the Union County Prosecutor's Office.

The whole thing cost taxpayers over \$1.12 million. Romankow argued that the issue stemmed from, among other things, the method used to count cars. Romankow also admitted that having county employees handle and store money raised by charities at the event (especially money that hadn't even been fully accounted for) wasn't the best idea.

Patch reached out to the national event director and press contact for the charity Love Hope Strength (whose board contains multiple local officials) with no answer. The county manager also declined to speak to *Patch*, but Tina Renna spoke up.

"It's outrageous. He holds absolutely no one accountable. It's an obvious smokescreen." Pointing out the issues inherent in such incestuous conflicts of interest, she added, "It's nothing I didn't expect. From the beginning, I said the Union County prosecutor should not be investigating the county."²⁶

With the Union County Board of Chosen Freeholders serving meals, Renna argued these should be classified as meetings as per the state's Open Public Meetings Act. In my hometown, similar issues with transparency in local politics abound. A county commissioner revealed ways in which the state's Sunshine Laws designed for transparency of local politics were being circumvented.²⁷

Renna attended meetings of the Freeholders. She brought up issues such as a former County Manager recusing himself from projects involving Birdsall Services Group. Later Birdsall would reveal a mass of illegal payouts to local politicians' campaigns. A former employee admitted this practice "regularly won contracts." To get around the issue of campaign donation limits,

Birdsall would have its employees write personal checks to candidates and reimburse them with salary bonuses. Then they lied to the state of New Jersey regarding necessary disclosures.

Christopher Baxter in the *Star-Ledger* described it as “the perfect political machine. And despite having been brought up in 2009 at a Freeholders meeting by Tina Renna, tape recordings of Birdsall employees discussing the practice didn’t go public until 2013. This would result in a full investigation into “one of the most expansive and sophisticated criminal pay-to-play conspiracies in recent history.”

Hundreds of politicians, mayors, council candidates, and county freeholders (as well as “some of the most well-known New Jersey power brokers”) had a hand in the Birdsall criminal conspiracy. From 2008 to 2012, over a million dollars was funneled in secret to candidates and political groups to curry favor and secure contracts. Contracts amounting to over \$84 million in taxpayer funds, bought and paid for by dirty political dealing. Birdsall also had ties to the George Norcross political machine.²⁸

New Jersey is mostly a one-party state. But corruption is a bipartisan affair, and Birdsall didn’t play favorites. They donated to both Democrats and Republicans. Many public officials defended using the contractor, but in the end, Birdsall and its executives would be indicted and plead guilty to campaign finance law violations. Records from March 2011 show Birdsall also spent \$2500 on the legal defense fund for Angie Devanney, wife of the former Union County manager George Devanney.

Angie denied ever receiving said funds. That very year, Union County spent several thousand dollars on legal expenses: related to a US Department of Justice investigation into George Devanney (incidentally the nephew of Union County state Senator Raymond Lesniak).²⁹

In an interview with a reporter, former Union County official, Frank Lehr, explained the extent of Lesniak's pull. "If he (Lesniak) has somebody he wants to get a job, he gets it. ...I don't think there's any question that he is the boss of Union County." Dina Matos McGreevey also spoke of Lesniak's importance. She first met him when she was twenty-two and a fresh face on the Elizabeth planning board. "If you wanted to secure a state or government contract or run for office, he was the one whose blessing you'd have to get," she revealed in her autobiography.³⁰

Lesniak, by the way, was often featured in the *Union County Directions* publication. The state comptroller called out the hefty \$1.5 million price tag this free publicity ran the public. It also tended to promote local Democrat politicians (many also Freeholders) connected to Union County's good ol' boys. Comptroller Marc Larkins warned of the self-serving newsletter:

"When a group funded almost entirely by government money, managed by government officials, carrying out a government function is allowed to operate outside of government rules and regulations, accountability disappears."³¹

George and Angie Devanney are currently running Keyword Strategies which promises to help businesses "through the maze of New Jersey politics." They tout the assistance of "several of New Jersey's most influential elected officials." Among those named is State Senate President Nick Scutari. Scutari, the former Union County Freeholder Director, despite numerous investigations, still enjoys an upward trajectory in his political career. Devanney left his career of public service the same year that the Birdsall documents were made public.

Angie Devanney presided as Berkeley Heights' Business Administrator during a "development boom." This resulted from "intensive zoning changes and economic development planning." She worked for Berkeley Heights in

a public capacity from 2005 to late 2007. During this period she claims to have assisted several area companies in “navigating to succeed.”³²

In an article about Union County’s issues with the organization, *Star-Ledger* highlights how the local political process, especially as far as bidding on public projects goes, is susceptible due to many entangling alliances, family and political and business connections:

“Indeed, politics has long been part of the DNA of the Union County Improvement Authority.”

“For more than a decade, the agency was headed by the late Charlotte DeFilippo, who also chaired the county Democratic Committee and ran the UCIA (Union County Improvement Authority) from her home and was paid \$160,000 per year.”

“Until his recent retirement, the county’s spokesman served as the authority’s chairman. A former freeholder replaced DeFilippo as executive director for a time. The Union County Improvement Authority is currently being run by Taylor, the wife of former East Orange Mayor Lester Taylor whose law firm also has contracts with the county. Also serving as the county’s finance director, she is paid an additional \$5,000 a month to serve as the Union County Improvement Authority’s ‘project manager,’ in addition to her current \$160,000-a-year county salary.”³³

Star-Ledger reported on Freeholder Daniel Sullivan in 2009. Sullivan attempted to not only make his home county safe for nepotism but also make it verboten to bring up such potential favoritism at public meetings.

When Renna brought up the fact that Sullivan had kin on the public payroll, Sullivan was adamant, “I’m going to tell you right now, do not mention my family.”

“We cannot talk about your family who are county employees?” Renna responded. “That’s right,” was Sullivan’s answer. “That’s right. You cannot mention my family.”

This rightly upset Renna. She was removed from the meeting by a security guard at the request of Sullivan, who “mockingly mimic[ked]” her according to the *Star-Ledger*. Union County spokesman, Sebastian D’Elia, claimed that Renna was thrown out for speaking over the amount of time allotted to her, but, a videotape of the meeting has Sullivan plainly threatening her: “If you mention my family I swear to you, you’ll be thrown out of here.” Bruce Paterson later utilized his time in part to ask how “all of these freeholder family members get hired.” At which time Sullivan advised him it would be best to “move on to your next point.”

How’s that for transparency?

When the *Star-Ledger* spoke to spokesman D’Elia about exactly how many Sullivan family members are being paid out by the county, D’Elia replied that they “don’t know.” It took the involvement of the ACLU of New Jersey to amend the next meeting’s opening with a disclaimer:

“Comments regarding public employees, whether or not they are related to freeholders or others, will be allowed at this and all future meetings, as protected by the First Amendment.”³⁴

Freeholders have been implicated throughout the state in various instances of corruption. Just before Christmas in 2019, 8 were arrested in New Jersey over a case of corruption that involved bags, envelopes, and a coffee cup stuffed with cash. Ten grand in the coffee cup alone.³⁵

In 2020, former freeholder John Cesaro was one of three indicted in a corruption case. Last year, the coffee cup case resulted in four indictments

described by state Attorney General Gurbir Grewal as “old-school political corruption at its worst.”³⁶

Despite the best efforts of the Union County Watchdog’s Association and reporting by Renna, time and again, instead of the guilty parties being brought to justice, they seemed protected by the system. In the 2010 MusicFest debacle, Romankow declined a criminal investigation into potential malfeasance by George Devanney. Instead, he charitably gave him time to retire. Romankow’s assistant was in attendance at Devanney’s retirement party.³⁷ A very specifically timed step-down, akin to that of Romankow on the day of Kai’s arrest.

These are just a handful of the many stories related to how business is handled in Galfy Country. As of 2022, *Politico* has been closely following the case of political consultant, Sean Caddle,³⁸ Caddle was already being investigated for charges related to misappropriation of funds from certain super PACs and non-profits. The plot thickened when he pled guilty to hiring a hit man.³⁹ Caddle hired two men to viciously murder Jersey City native Michael Galdieri, a former friend and associate, in 2014. Caddle had a notable role in developing a “web of dark money groups” that helped Union County political boss Raymond Lesniak, among others.³⁹ Caddle was allowed “home confinement” in the interim, while reportedly cooperating with federal authorities on another investigation.⁴⁰ This has sparked rumors, that he may be on the verge of setting off the actions that could potentially cause the Union County corruption house of cards to collapse under its own weight.

Equally interesting to the local political scene are the geopolitical reasons for Union County corruption. A lot of these issues go back decades to corruption on the docks and also resulted in some shocking news related to the one degree of separation between the Union County Prosecutor’s Office and the Genovese crime family.

Even in recent months, Union County has had multiple shameful stories crop up. Clark Mayor Sal Bonaccorso was called to resign after it was revealed the township had agreed to pay hundreds of thousands of dollars to a whistleblower to hush the fact that Clark mayor Bonaccorso, the police chief, and an internal affairs sergeant were using blisteringly racist language. This wasn't the first time Bonaccorso had been accused of racism, but with audio recordings, it was a little far past the point for denials.⁴¹

That said, it's quite obvious that Clark (and Union County in general) is no stranger to conspiracy and cover-up when it suits them.

"In July 2020, six months after the settlement was signed, the Union County Prosecutor's Office seized control of Clark's police department, citing 'credible allegations of misconduct.' [...]"

"Two years ago, the township concealed the allegations by quietly agreeing to pay the whistleblower and his attorney \$400,000 under a legal settlement. The whistleblower, Lt. Antonio Manata, was also allowed to remain on the payroll for more than two years without working at an additional cost of \$289,700 in salary alone. In exchange, he turned over the recordings to ensure they would not be disseminated and agreed not to file a lawsuit."⁴²

Clark's PBA called out for Bonaccorso to be removed from office in a strongly worded letter... that neglected to mention anything about the two high-ranking Union County police officers, including a former Clark PBA officer, also caught using the n-word and other racist and sexist language on the very same recording. Clark PBA was "disheartened and outraged" regarding the mayor, but silent about their brothers in blue, including a former secretary of the Clark PBA also caught on the recordings.

As happens so often in these cases, the whistleblower Lt. Antonio Manata who recorded the remarks in 2020 reports he is being punished

for embarrassing Clark, or rather for allowing the Chief of Police, internal affairs sergeant and mayor to embarrass themselves.

Manata's lawsuit argues that the prosecutor's office is now punishing him for blowing the whistle on conduct that he "believed in good faith to be illegal, unsafe, against township policy, against public policy and/or a matter of public importance," meanwhile the discrimination he collected evidence of goes unprosecuted. At the time, a spokesperson for the Union County Prosecutor's Office declined to respond to these claims, saying the office does not comment on pending civil litigation.⁴³