

Plunder Dome

2000–02

VINCENT A. “BUDDY” CIANCI JR. had won widespread respect for prosecuting Mob figures, including New England crime boss Raymond L.S. Patriarca. In 1974, Cianci campaigned for mayor of Providence as “the anti-corruption candidate.” At thirty-four, he became the first Italian-American chief executive in the capital city’s history. But fraud, extortion, scams, kickbacks, and conspiracies flourished in his administration. Thirty subordinates were indicted, twenty-two convicted, and sixteen sentenced to prison for state and federal crimes.¹

Cianci’s abusive behavior caused his downfall. In March 1983, he suspected his estranged wife, Sheila, was having an affair with Raymond DeLeo. With help from a uniformed Providence policeman, Cianci took DeLeo captive. For hours, he drank heavily while taunting, humiliating, and torturing his rival. Cianci eventually pled guilty to assault with a dangerous weapon, received a five-year suspended sentence, and was forced to resign.²

In 1990, despite the welter of corruption in his first administration, Cianci embarked on a comeback. “Yes, I have sinned,” he apologized. “But let he who is without sin cast the first stone. That’s what the Bible says.” In a three-way contest, he slipped between two lackluster opponents, his victory margin a mere 317 votes.³

During Cianci’s second tenure as mayor, I witnessed his magic in person. I had become president of the board of Greater Elmwood Neighborhood Services (GENS), a nonprofit community development corporation where we live on the South Side of Providence. Executive Director Irwin Becker had watched children suffer the devastating effects of lead paint in old, poorly maintained

buildings. He helped the state Health Department design a demonstration project to abate lead, obtained \$3.7 million from two federal agencies for a demonstration project, and hired Joan M. Carbone to manage the work.⁴

In 1997, the three of us went to Mayor Cianci's office in hopes of expanding the project. Becker and I said little. Carbone explained how lead paint in old wood-framed triple-deckers was causing permanent harm to children. A Health Department study showed that a third of the city's children under six had dangerous levels of lead in their blood. Carbone described the comprehensive approach we were using: homeowner education, block-by-block renewal, job training in lead-abatement, and police cracking down on drug hot spots.⁵

In his ornate office, Cianci disputed the idea that lead paint could be removed in any cost-effective way from dilapidated triple-deckers.

Carbone took him on. She joked, jostled with him, and deluged him with data. "We're making apartments lead-safe for a third less than in previous efforts. We're stopping the damage lead does to children's brains. Mr. Mayor, even if you didn't care that lead-poisoning causes irreversible harm, a simple cost-benefit analysis more than justifies abatement."

Noncommittal behind his huge desk, Cianci scribbled notes in the margin of her spreadsheet.

"Kids with lead poisoning," Carbone continued, "require extra staff in schools. Every child in special education increases your school costs by more than \$6,000 a year." She multiplied the one-year increase for one child by years of school. In two years, extra school costs surpassed the \$10,000 cost of abating the lead in an ordinary apartment. "Often," she said, "lead-poisoning harms several children in the same apartment. Abatement is way cheaper than special education. You do the numbers."

Three weeks later, Cianci led a parade through our neighborhood. The march ended on the wide lawn of Algonquin House for hot dogs, beans and rice, speeches, and music. Before an audience of dignitaries and neighborhood people Cianci joked and strutted, then got serious. "On the way here," he announced, "we marched through a block where the apartments have been made lead-safe. I want to enlarge this effort for children who deserve a brighter future. I want to abate lead for the taxpayers, too. When we prevent lead poisoning, we save huge amounts on health care and special education. I'm proud to announce that we're going to abate lead all across the City of Providence."⁶

Cianci had absorbed our data about the health hazard, its causes in dilapidated housing, the cost of special education, and the need for comprehensive abatement. He trumpeted our facts and figures as if they were his own and amplified Joan Carbone's central point: even those who cared nothing about children or thought making apartments lead-safe was not government's job must recognize the substantial savings for taxpayers.

True to his word, Cianci appointed a citywide lead task force that included Joan Carbone, and the state soon received a \$7.67 million federal block grant to follow our approach in 935 apartments.

But Cianci's memory for slights was legendary, and he never gave credit to our agency or to Irwin Becker, against whom he held an old grudge. When Cianci launched his comeback in 1990, Becker had answered a reporter's question bluntly: "This is an embarrassment. He's a criminal, and people should be afraid of him."⁷ In 1997, when the City of Providence invited proposals for funds from the federal grant, Becker submitted a request to do more of what he and Carbone had pioneered. Despite vast massive unmet needs on the South Side and our proven success, Greater Elmwood Neighborhood Services got nothing.

Many were punished for failing to support Buddy Cianci. As I left a funeral at St. Michael's Church, half way down a long flight of brown stone steps smoothed by the feet of generations of immigrant parishioners, a police officer asked to speak with me.

"Can I ask you a question?" He introduced himself as Lt. Richard Tarlaian. Despite his placid public face, I heard consternation in his voice. Tarlaian described recent police promotions. "Five of us made lieutenant at the same time," he said. "When we took the captain's exam, I got the highest score. The other four made captain, and I didn't. Why do you think that was?"

He answered his own question: "Because they each coughed up for Cianci's campaigns, and I didn't. Does anyone think it's wrong for him to shake down city employees and rig police promotions?"⁸

On April 28, 1999, fifty FBI agents swooped into offices at Providence City Hall as well as the homes and businesses of Cianci's confidants. They seized records from the tax assessor, tax collector, building inspector, Planning Department, and School Department. The head of the FBI's Providence office, W. Dennis Aiken, announced: "A number of Providence public officials accepted bribes. All were recorded on audiotape, videotape, or both." Aiken had dubbed the previously secret investigation "Operation Plunder Dome," alluding to the dome of City Hall and the routine plundering of taxpayer funds that went on beneath it.⁹

The probe had begun early in 1998. Providence air-conditioning and sheet metal contractor Antonio R. Freitas believed he had submitted the lowest bid to provide office space to the city. When he failed to get the lease, Freitas concluded that he needed to pay a bribe. He went to the office of U.S. Attorney Margaret E. Curran and offered to help root out corruption. FBI agents put him to work investigating rigged contracts, leases, and tax levies. Initially identified only as a "cooperating witness," Freitas caught Cianci subordinates on videotape as they took bribes.¹⁰

A month after FBI agents raided City Hall, prosecutors from Curran's office indicted three tax officials: Deputy Tax Assessor Rosemary H. Glancy and the top two officers of the Providence Board of Tax Assessment Review, Joseph A. Pannone and David C. Ead.

Probing Cianci's role in the scandal proved vastly more complicated than the investigation of Pawtucket Mayor Brian Sarault in 1991. An abundance of suspicious behavior did not prove that Cianci had committed any crime, and Cianci declared his innocence. "I can tell the people of the City of Providence that it absolutely will not lead to me," he said. He then alluded to President Bill Clinton's incriminating semen stain on Monica Lewinsky's dress, uttering the unforgettable phrase he would often repeat: "You're not going to find any stains on this jacket."¹¹ For the next two years, through hundreds of *Plunder Dome* media reports, the main question remained — would the evidence finally ensnare Cianci?

The FBI agents and prosecutors went by the book. They arrested minor players, tried to turn them, indicted them, and put them on trial, always seeking a chain of proof to Cianci. One Cianci defense lawyer blasted this bottom-up approach: "They teach their witnesses not only to sing, but to compose."¹²

Cianci had learned his trade by prosecuting mobsters. Since his return to the mayor's office in 1991, he had either willfully ignored his subordinates' corrupt practices or skillfully insulated himself from them. On one videotape, tax board chairman Joseph Pannone told Freitas how Cianci had instructed him: "Never talk on the phone, never get a check, but get cash when you're one on one." These were classic Mob tactics.

"Understand," Pannone told Freitas, "there's nothing for nothing. There's no free lunches. It's money that counts."¹³

With *Plunder Dome* investigators on the hunt, Cianci swaggered, announcing that he would establish a special office to investigate any city department and refer officials suspected of fraud or corruption to prosecutors. "In a city with a work force of more than 7,000 employees," he told reporters with a straight face, "there is a need to be more proactive in ensuring that all employees are aware of the parameters as they apply to ethics."¹⁴ He never followed through, and when months passed without an indictment against him, Cianci began taunting the FBI. "It's been seven or eight months and people keep waiting for things to happen," he told reporter Mike Stanton. "If what they have is substantial, then they ought to produce it."¹⁵

A week later, Pannone pleaded guilty to fourteen charges of extortion conspiracy, attempted extortion, and mail fraud. The plea bargain required him to testify about other schemes. In turn, other corrupt officials began to plead out. In January 2000, lawyer Angelo A. "Jerry" Mosca Jr. admitted facilitating a bribe to cut the tax bill for a client from \$581,000 to \$100,000. In February, David C. Ead, who had been vice chair of the Board of Tax Assessment Review, pleaded

guilty on six charges that included orchestrating bribes to a “high-ranking City of Providence executive.” In exchange for Ead’s testimony, prosecutors agreed to drop eleven previous felony charges. Assistant U.S. Attorney Richard W. Rose announced that the payments “were euphemistically referred to as ‘campaign contributions.’”¹⁶

In March, Anthony E. Annarino Jr., the retired city tax collector, pleaded guilty to taking payoffs from taxpayers to wipe out late fees for delinquent property tax payments. Cianci had appointed Annarino deputy tax collector and later promoted him to director. Annarino had contributed \$5,545 to Cianci’s campaign war chest.¹⁷

Since 1992, state law had required that campaign funds be spent only for necessary costs of “gaining or holding public office,”¹⁸ but Cianci had spent lavishly from his campaign war chest for family events. Journalists Mike Stanton and Tracy Breton investigated expenditures Cianci had reported as “political.” They described a Christmas Day party at his home for more than forty relatives and close friends. The event featured champagne and a catered six-course dinner; its printed menu was embossed with the mayor’s seal. A jazz ensemble and professional clown provided entertainment. Cianci had covered his Christmas gift list from campaign funds, but he reported the expenses as political. His “Friends of Cianci” account also funded birthday parties for his grandchildren, complete with balloons, a clown, and Barney the Dinosaur. Political columnist M. Charles Bakst reminded readers that Cianci ran “a round-the-clock fund-raising machine, constantly dunning municipal workers and those who look to City Hall for contracts.”¹⁹

In response to stories like these, both the FBI and the state Board of Elections began reviewing Cianci’s campaign finance reports. The FBI focused on expenditures that should have been reported on Cianci’s income taxes, and the elections board subpoenaed documents that might reveal cash contributions or personal use — both illegal under the law. The board concluded that the Cianci campaign had violated the law and ordered him to repay his campaign more than \$42,000 spent improperly on family gifts and travel. But Cianci claimed there was “nothing sinister or illegal or criminal” in the findings. “If they want to pick on me and this campaign, maybe they ought to look at everyone else.”²⁰

Indictments landed ever closer to the mayor’s door. In June 2000, the federal grand jury indicted Frank E. Corrente, formerly Cianci’s campaign treasurer and director of administration, for nine felonies that included extortion, bribery, mail fraud, and conspiracy.²¹

Cianci was finally indicted on April 2, 2001 — thirty felony counts that included racketeering, conspiracy, extortion, mail fraud, and witness tampering. The charge sheet alleged that Cianci and his associates took more than \$1.5 million during the 1990s in the form of cash and campaign contributions. It also charged

that Cianci and his cronies had extorted money for towing lists, jobs, promotions, contracts, leases, building permits, and tax breaks. Indicted with Cianci, several for the second time, were five subordinates: Richard E. Autiello, Joseph A. Pannone, Edward E. Voccola, Artin H. Coloian, and Frank E. Corrente. Closest to Cianci and with direct lines of authority to him were Coloian, the mayor's chief of staff, and Corrente, his director of administration.²²

The major players appeared to have operated franchises. Though Cianci's allies managed separate shakedowns, all reported through Corrente. It was classic Mob strategy.

Only one count departed from that pattern. During his first stint as mayor, Cianci had applied for membership in the elite University Club. Despite the backing of influential friends, he was turned down. When he returned triumphantly in 1991, he was spurned again, and his rejection became a joke at the exclusive club.

Cianci got even. When the University Club needed variances for costly renovations, he intervened with the Building Board of Review to block permits. Club officers went to court, but when Cianci promised to carry an appeal to the state Supreme Court, they changed tactics. Two top club officials delivered a written apology and showed obeisance. When they walked into Cianci's office, one wore a Cianci bumper sticker plastered on the back of his suit jacket. Cianci harangued them, ending with a taunt that won knowing guffaws when it was repeated: "Be careful how you act. The toe you stepped on yesterday may be connected to the ass you have to kiss today."²³

A month later, emissaries from the University Club offered him a free lifetime membership. Cianci demanded to know whether the membership was for the office of mayor or for him personally. Assured that it was for him, Cianci allowed renovations to go forward. Ironically, in this case he had revealed his machinations and reveled in them. Prosecutors could compel witnesses from the University Club and his own staff to testify about how he had bullied his way to a lifetime membership in the exclusive enclave.

Despite being indicted, Cianci kept proclaiming his innocence. "I assure you that I'm not guilty of these charges," he declared at a City Hall press conference. "I'm not afraid of this. Ninety-seven times zero is zero." He also reprised his "no stains on this jacket" refrain, adding: "I'll defend myself against these charges until the day I die."

Cianci's defense lawyer, Richard M. Egbert, added: "There are hundreds of thousands of indictments where people are acquitted every year." He reminded reporters that the last Rhode Island mayor indicted in federal court — North Providence Mayor Salvatore Mancini — had also been his client and had been cleared.²⁴

Calls rolled in for Cianci to step aside, but since the City Charter had no

provision to suspend or remove a mayor, he carried on with scheduled speeches and appearances.

His life grew more complicated when Chief U.S. District Judge Ernest C. Torres granted a restraining order that froze bank and brokerage accounts belonging to Friends of Cianci. For the first time, the mayor could not tap those funds.

Reporter Scott MacKay noted that Cianci had become the longest-serving mayor of Providence and described the character everyone knew: “The gap-toothed smile; the basset-hound eyes; the fancy wig; the rapier wit . . . running from one event to another, encircled by the scent of cologne and a nimbus of cigarette smoke.” MacKay also reminded readers of Cianci’s Clintonesque mantra: “I assure you that I’m not guilty of these charges. I said before there are no stains on this jacket, and there are still no stains on this jacket.”²⁵

Missing from Cianci’s public protestations about stains was the legendary rage he unleashed against any who fell short of his expectations. In the late 1990s, City Planning Director John F. Palmieri hosted community meetings to repave Broad Street and upgrade its businesses. With fine technical skills and a gentle manner, Palmieri smoothed our way through complex decisions. But several times neighborhood people assembled at the planning office and waited while Cianci hijacked Palmieri’s schedule. Once, we began without the planning director, only to have him rush in, visibly shaken and pale. Later, he told me privately that Cianci had badgered him.

What did it mean when a diligent department director like Palmieri performed well for the city, and Cianci bullied him? Where was Cianci’s volcanic temper when his chief of staff, his director of administration, and several trusted lieutenants were indicted? Why did a mayor famous for his outbursts sound barely perturbed when his cronies behaved like the mobsters he had prosecuted?

Cianci continued as mayor and took the drumbeat of Plunder Dome stories in stride. A performer since childhood, he was quick with one-liners, often gallows humor. Under a tent for a ribbon cutting, Cianci set up a self-deprecating joke. “Good mayors are risk takers,” he vamped. “Well, maybe not all the risks that I’ve taken.” Later, while posing with former transportation directors, he quipped: “Which one of you guys did I grab the most money from?”²⁶

From April to June of 2002, the gray Federal Courthouse across Kennedy Plaza from the Providence City Hall drew national attention. On trial with Cianci were Frank E. Corrente, Richard E. Autiello, and Edward E. Voccola. Corrente had been Cianci’s director of administration and chief fundraiser. Autiello ran a body shop and towing business while hustling campaign contributions from other tow-truck operators. Voccola, charged with paying bribes for a \$1 million

School Department lease, had Mob connections and felony convictions for insurance fraud, stolen vehicles, and assault.

In those closing weeks of a pivotal legislative session, I had no time to attend the trial, but I watched nightly summaries on TV and devoured details in the morning paper. From the start of the trial, journalists relied heavily on commentary by Daniel Small, the former federal prosecutor hired two years earlier to investigate ethics complaints against members of the Ethics Commission but denied *pro hac vice* permission to practice law in Rhode Island. Lawyers on the panel had fired Small and refused to pay his bill.²⁷ Now he returned to Providence as a nationally acclaimed expert on white-collar crime.

On April 23, lead prosecutor Richard W. Rose finally pointed his finger at Vincent “Buddy” Cianci and accused him of running what he called “the Cianci criminal enterprise.”²⁸ During his opening statement, Rose called Cianci “the head of the criminal enterprise” and derided Corrente as “the bagman.” The evidence, he said, would show that the action went through Corrente to Cianci. This enterprise “collected illegal contributions and cash in exchange for hundreds of thousands of dollars in tax breaks, jobs, leases and city contracts. Indeed, when defendant Cianci wanted a private club membership and the club said ‘no,’ he used his criminal enterprise to take one.”

Cianci’s defense lawyer Richard M. Egbert, in his opening, pounded back. He declared that the government’s witnesses were “liars, cheats, and thieves.” He told the jury: “These are people who have been committing crimes since the day they could breathe. They would con anyone. They would lie to their friends, their family. They would lie to the government, and they are people who will lie to you.”²⁹

After six weeks of testimony by prosecution witnesses, lawyers representing Cianci, Corrente, Autiello, and Voccola launched their defense on June 3.³⁰ They asked Judge Torres to acquit their clients because the prosecutors failed to prove knowing participation in a criminal conspiracy. Egbert rejected the claim that Cianci had any *quid pro quo* arrangement with tow companies that contributed to his campaigns. “You simply have an allegation without a scintilla of proof,” he insisted.

Torres mulled their motions overnight. The next day he ruled that prosecutors had failed to prove Voccola was part of a conspiracy and removed him from the case. Charges against Cianci, Corrente, and Autiello went forward. It was clear that Torres’ instructions to the jury would be crucial. Unless the judge drew the case in precise terms, he might give defense lawyers grounds for an appeal. The concepts were complicated. Conspiracy, racketeering, and extortion all had distinct legal meanings that jurors would have to apply to the impressions they gleaned from many weeks of testimony.³¹

On June 11, Richard Rose summarized the prosecution's case, stating that the evidence proved "beyond a reasonable doubt, that the city, the so-called Renaissance City, was a city for sale." He came up with a refrain that drew on a common number across Cianci's franchises. "The evidence shows that the price of admission was often \$5,000," Rose chanted. "Want a job? Five thousand. Want to be on the tow list? Five thousand. Want to grease the chairman of the tax board? Five thousand. It was a city for sale, where anything could be had for a price."³²

Rose also argued that Cianci was not in the position of "a coach who gets a team and inherits the players." On the contrary, Cianci had picked his people and placed them in positions of authority. "He picked 'em and he reappointed them," Rose declared. "Why? Because they were standup guys."

In his summation, Richard M. Egbert took a cool and calm approach. He told of strolling around downtown Providence at dawn. "I walked around, looking at some of the things — the Westin, Providence Place, the convention center, the rivers moved." Providence really was "a Renaissance City," whose mayor "was the leader, the backbone, the visionary."

Then he went on to vilify the men who testified against Cianci, imagining Providence as it had been in simpler times when people knew their neighbors personally. Egbert argued that Pannone and Ead had run their own bribery for tax break scams. They were tax officials who made corrupt deals, presented them to the mayor as sensible, and rather than paying off Cianci, kept the money for themselves. They were convicted tax officials who were not to be trusted. He called them "bums, thieves, and liars."

Corrente's attorney, C. Leonard O'Brien, took a sharply different tack, conceding his client took a bribe. "I'm not about to tell you that it was in any way acceptable. It was wrong and it shouldn't have happened. He's sorry and he's ashamed." Then O'Brien pivoted, reminding jurors that the tape showed Corrente taking a single bribe, not "managing a racketeering enterprise going back ten years."

Attorney Richard C. Bicki, portrayed his client, Richard Autiello, as a mere lobbyist who used his influence to get Joseph Maggiacomo III into the Police Department. Bicki acknowledged but minimized the fact that Autiello took the cash. "Though you may be bothered by the fact that he requested and received \$5,000," the lawyer argued, "being bothered doesn't constitute a criminal offense."

The highly charged day ended with rebuttal from the top prosecutor. Richard Rose urged jurors to use their "collective wisdom." He asked them, in their verdict, to say whether Providence was "the Renaissance City" or a "city for sale."

On June 12, Judge Torres guided the jury through the law on racketeering, conspiracy, bribery, mail fraud, and extortion. He described precisely what would be necessary for a guilty verdict on each of the charges. In a supreme

understatement, Torres said, “The law is complicated and the case is lengthy.” He added, “It is not your prerogative to decide what the law is or should be, but to follow the law as I give it to you.”³³

The jury of public opinion seemed skewed by Cianci’s roguish charm. For three years, Brown University surveys had showed him defying the drumbeat of Plunder Dome stories. Five months after the scandal exploded into public view, three-quarters of those polled statewide rated his performance “excellent or good.”³⁴ By June 2001, eighty-one percent thought corruption was a serious problem in Providence city government, forty-one percent thought the mayor was guilty of crimes, and half of them thought he was not “an honest person.” Yet, incongruously, sixty-four percent still answered that he was doing a “good” or “excellent” job.³⁵

On the day jurors began deliberations on Plunder Dome, Brown released data from its latest poll of 482 Rhode Island voters. Fifty-two percent thought Cianci guilty, but fifty-six percent thought jurors would acquit him and fifty-nine percent still thought he was doing a good or excellent job. “Half the people think he is dishonest,” political science professor Darrell M. West told the *Providence Journal*. “But the leadership number is very impressive, because leadership is a quality people really respect.”³⁶

With or without Plunder Dome, Cianci would have been up for re-election in 2002. Already the longest-serving big-city mayor in America, he remained wildly popular in segments of the population. City Council President John Lombardi told the *Providence Journal*, “I think if this guy gets acquitted, he will be a very difficult candidate to beat.”³⁷

Cianci’s fate seemed inextricably bound up with that of the city he professed to love above all else. In February, state Rep. David N. Cicilline had declared that regardless of how Cianci’s trial ended, he would campaign to become mayor. In eight years at the State House, Cicilline had sponsored separation of powers and ethics legislation that infuriated House Speaker John Harwood. In his announcement, Cicilline promised that he would not seek or accept campaign contributions from city workers and that he would make sure all projects and permits were evaluated on their merits. Without naming Cianci, he alluded to a culture of corruption. “Recently I spoke to a police officer who explained to me how demoralized he felt,” Cicilline said. “Despite the fact that he was qualified, worked hard, and played by the rules, he knew he would not be promoted because of his lack of political influence. This must end. And when I am mayor, it will end.”³⁸

In April, former Rep. Keven McKenna, who had chaired the 1986 Constitutional Convention, jumped into the mayoral race.³⁹ In early ads both candidates emphasized the need to stop corruption in the capitol city. In a radio commercial, McKenna asked: “Have you had enough of Plunder Dome?”

Cianci had countered them both with irony. “I’m on television every day,” he told reporter Scott MacKay. “These other people need to get some name recognition because nobody knows them. Everybody knows who I am.”

A week into their deliberations, the Plunder Dome jurors appeared unable to decide; they asked Judge Torres for further information about the meaning of legal definitions. Deliberations extended into a second week with no verdict. Speculation spread about a hung jury.

Finally, on June 24, the jury notified Judge Torres that they had decided most counts but were deadlocked on racketeering, extortion, and mail fraud counts involving the University Club. Torres called the jury to his courtroom and asked for the verdicts on which jurors agreed.

Forewoman Mary Dole handed the verdict sheet to Torres’s clerk, who read the results: “Count 1, racketeering conspiracy, as to Vincent A. Cianci Jr., Guilty.” Corrente and Autiello were guilty on the same charge. Reporter Bill Malinowski noted that Cianci checked off the charges on a blank verdict sheet but did not look up, his face briefly ashen. Corrente shook his head in disbelief, and Autiello showed no emotion.⁴⁰

After his guilt on racketeering conspiracy, Cianci was acquitted of all the other criminal charges. Corrente was guilty of five felonies: racketeering conspiracy, racketeering, bribery conspiracy, extortion conspiracy, and two counts of attempted extortion. Autiello was convicted for racketeering conspiracy and two counts of bribery conspiracy.

The immediate question arose whether Cianci’s conspiracy conviction could stand without guilty verdicts on any of the underlying crimes. Torres told jurors that he would study the law further and decide whether that single count against Cianci could stand. “Whatever I decide,” he said, “will be subject to further review by the Court of Appeals.”

After further deliberation, the jury declared all three defendants not guilty on the remaining counts, including extortion of a lifetime membership at the University Club.

Juror Ann Duchesne told reporter Tom Mooney her votes that Cianci was “not guilty” on many charges did not mean she believed him innocent, only that there “wasn’t enough evidence” to find him guilty. Other jurors had managed not to be dazzled by Cianci’s flamboyant persona. “You had to take the person out of it,” said one. “It didn’t make any difference to me at all. It wouldn’t matter if he was the president of the United States.” Another said: “After the first day, he was just another guy.”⁴¹

In comments to the *Washington Post*, Operation Clean Government chair Bob Arruda scoffed at Cianci’s “no stains on this jacket” refrain. He declared the racketeering conviction “one big stain.” And lest anyone doubt the depth of criminality Cianci had tolerated or orchestrated, lawyers in the office of

U.S. Attorney Margaret E. Curran released a list of kickbacks and bribes worth hundreds of thousands of dollars that Cianci was alleged to have taken during his previous terms in office.⁴²

While Cianci ignored calls for him to resign, he did not file candidacy papers to run again.

On September 5, Judge Torres peered down from the bench and spoke of “two very different Buddy Ciancis. The first is a skilled, charismatic political figure, one of the most talented Rhode Island has ever seen. Then there’s the Buddy Cianci who’s been portrayed here. That’s the Buddy Cianci who was mayor of an administration that was corrupt at all levels.” Cianci had operated the city he was supposed to serve “as a criminal enterprise to line his own pockets.”⁴³

Torres said his job was to sentence the second Buddy Cianci. He gave the rogue mayor five years and four months in federal prison for racketeering conspiracy. He sentenced Corrente to one month less than Cianci. He gave Autiello three years and ten months.

Cianci bowed to the law and resigned as mayor. On December 6, 2002, he reported to the federal prison at Fort Dix, New Jersey and on August 4, 2004, the U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals unanimously affirmed Torres’s judgment. The three appellate judges agreed that “there existed an organized structure with Cianci at the top, Corrente as a middle man facilitating and often initiating transactions, and others, including Autiello, Ead, and Pannone, that fed deals into the organization.”⁴⁴

It struck me as a story full of sad irony. The mayor who came to power by prosecuting mobsters had practiced their values. The performer who charmed and dazzled found himself hustled from the stage. The bully finally became guilty under the law he flaunted. In the end, he was not above the law, and he could not fool all the people all the time.