

THE MOB, 9/11, AND YOUR GARBAGE

By Michael Ventura

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The years between 1966 to 1973, during which the World Trade Center was built, were the sunset years of the mob's so-called Five Families. The mob was a powerful presence on the docks, in trucking and garbage collection, and in construction – besides traditional mob businesses like brothels, illegal gambling, loansharking, money laundering, violence-for-hire, and its growing control of the dope trade. During those years, New York City was up for sale: dirty cops, judges, regulators, inspectors, prison guards. In that wild, dirty era, the wild and dirty ruled.

New York is squeaky now, right? As U.S. Attorney (1983-1989 and mayor of New York City (1994-2001), Rudy Giuliani famously cleaned up the town, and his successor, Michael Bloomberg, has kept it clean. That's the story, anyway.

Well, welcome to the New York construction in this clean era:

“A concrete-testing laboratory faked results for La Guardia Airport control tower, the new Yankee Stadium, the Lincoln Tunnel and more than a dozen other projects. ... [T]he case spotlighted the stubborn presence of concerns about fraud in an industry important to the safety of a city of skyscrapers and subways. ... [The lab's] 12 years of fraud continued even after another major lab was indicted and city officials tightened oversight... ‘The volume of fabricated tests was egregious,’ ... netting the company millions of dollars for results ‘that were no more than worthless pieces of paper,’ District Attorney Cyrus R. Vance, Jr., said” (The Associated Press online, Aug. 4).

“[N]one of the nearly 3,000 test reports that investigators seized ... contained legitimate test results (*The New York Times*, Aug. 5, p.1).”

Got that? None. Zero. Not one.

The AP report documented another company “convicted in 2010 of faking concrete and steel strength for nearly 120 projects around the city, *including ground zero's centerpiece skyscraper* [my emphasis].”

Both AP and the *Times* included lame not-to-worry notices. AP: “Prosecutors said they believed any safety concerns had been addressed by retesting, plus some upgrades in projects they wouldn't specify.” Check for yourselves what those retesting standards are; they are typically less than 1% of the questionable material.

The *Times* was cuter. Concrete cracks were found in various buildings, but “officials said they did not represent serious structural threats... because most of the concrete poured in New York is of high quality.”

Say what? Notice the “officials” are anonymous. No one is about to put his or her name to that contention.

AP added coyly that “Engineers generally design buildings to make sure they will be safe even if there are problems with some materials.” A polite way to say: Engineers and architects know this shit goes down in most cities and design accordingly.

(Do they ask themselves, “What if a jet loaded with fuel crashes into my building?” I doubt it.)

Neither report mentioned any of the outfits that have replaced the so-called Five Families, but the ever-cautious *Times* hinted: “The defendants and the company are

charged under the state's racketeering law." Also, the testing investigation grew from an investigation into labor racketeering.

Sounds like mob to this Sicilian. Same old same old in today's "clean" New York. It buggers up the mind to imagine what went down during New York's fattest skyscraper project ever – when the city was openly dirty.

September 11th conspiracy theorists point to the collapse of World Trade Center building 7 as the "smoking gun" that proves them right, but they overlook how substandard construction might be undermined by earthquakelike thuds when two across-the-court skyscrapers fall down.

Any 9/11 analysis based on blueprint specs is as questionable as any statement by architects and engineers who fail to admit that, in their professions, the price of doing business includes knowing when to look the other way. As the AP coyly noted, those professionals routinely compensate for routine corruption. They do not factor in the unusual. In Fun City, "unusual" includes earthquake stresses above a 4.01 magnitude and jets full of fuel.

As we say in Lubbock, Texas: I'm just sayin'. Stop spinning your wheels, boys, 'cause accurate data can never be known. As it can never be known if projects touched by the latest scandals are up to extreme stress. As Lenny Bruce once said, "Everybody's ass is up for grabs."

"Everybody" includes you and me. Because, as Orson Welles put it, "It's a bright, guilty world." Bright and guilty, everywhere and evermore.

How's that for a conspiracy theory? Now, let's talk about your garbage.

Why does your local mob favor control of private garbage collection?

Obvious answer: It's easy to move contraband in a garbage truck. Drugs. Weapons. Slave-girls. Whatever. (I'm not being flip. I've watched this shit since I was a kid. It's horrible. It's all around you. That's life in these United States, and it always has been. How's that for a conspiracy theory?)

In the Bronx and Brooklyn of my tender years, the dialogue went like this:

I'm a mob guy with a territory. There are 500 restaurants in my territory. I collect standard fees weekly -- \$50 off the books. And \$50 times 500 equals \$25,000 weekly, or \$1.3 million yearly. Cash flow is all. On a whim, I up it to \$100 weekly, \$5.200 a year each. (Understand, that's just one of my scams. I've got lots. I'm pulling a couple million a year off everybody's books.)

Sallie's Pizza on Jerome Avenue – Sallie balks. He'll won't go for \$100. (He'll go eventually, but he wants to be the last to agree. He's got pride.)

I tell my driver: "Sallie's Pizza – that's the best on Jerome, right?"

"If you say so. Me, I like Irish Johnny's on Tremont."

"You're a fucking heretic. I'll report you to the Pope. So – Sallie's – you can't pick up his garbage 'cause your clutch is fucked."

"How long my clutch is fucked for Sallie's?"

"Til I unfuck it."

No restaurant of any kind, high or low, can stand for a pile of garbage to stink up the joint for weeks. Sallie will cave. So will the fanciest joint in town. Cash flow will double without one knee crushed into uselessness.

Next year, me, the local boss, I double it again.

I keep 10% officially. Actually, I skim a little more, for my private stash. My boss expects that. If I skim too much, I'm replaced – gruesomely. The trick of being a long-lived wiseguy is to skim just enough. So A guy I don't even know, I guy I maybe see on the news, a guy who's name is "Bonano" or "Gotti" or "Luciano" or some friggin' un-American, Lith-uanian-fuckin' name – he gets 90% and dolls it out how pleases.

Me, I'm a small businessman – just like they talk about in Congress. I depend on my employees to steal from me – a 10% kinda thing. If they steal more, I smash their knees. If you balk, I smash yours. If I screw up, somebody smashes mine. It goes on everywhere. All the time. Bright and guilty. I'm your local boss. I get a piece of everything that's moved by truck.

I leave government stuff alone – post office, military, they're outta my league. But everything else....

That garbage bag under your sink – I got a piece of that. Know what means, you passive, ignorant muthafucka? Means I got a piece of you.

Recycling? You gotta be kidding. It's me who does that. And where it ends up is where it ends up -- you know what I'm sayin'? Those plastic containers you feel so righteous about? Well, fuck you. I know where they go. Recycle, my ass.

Please, don't look into your garbage collection too closely. I refuse responsibility for your shattered, forever useless knees. Peer all you like into conspiracies worldwide, but poke not into conspiracies profitable on your block. That gets serious.

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