



# Baltimore's Little Caesar

**Trial lawyer Peter Angelos wins (and loses) big time.**

**P**eter Angelos had a problem. The lawyer from Baltimore was making millions with his litigation against asbestos manufacturers on behalf of clients referred to him by the local unions with which he was friendly. The asbestos manufacturers had decided to settle; it was just a matter of finding victims of "asbestos lung disease" and other related maladies. But by 1996 his hyper-litigation on behalf of more than 9,000 such victims was clogging the Baltimore courts and slowing his cash-flow.

So Angelos made a trip to the state house in Annapolis. He wanted to see about getting the legislature to approve more judgeships solely to hear the asbestos cases and process each individual settlement. Not every private citizen can persuade the legislature to pass a special bill benefiting only himself. But then again, not every private citizen has baseball superstar Cal Ripken at his beck and call to help out in a pinch.

Angelos purchased the Baltimore Orioles baseball team in 1994 with his cut from the first wave of asbestos lawsuits. Since he owned the team, he was definitely going to use it. He dragged Ripken, the future Hall-of-Famer and one of the most popular players in the game, along with him to see to it that the waves kept on coming. Ripken, as close to a mega-celebrity as the state of Maryland has, smiled and posed for photographs with giddy state legislators. Angelos got his judgeships. He knew he would.

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It wasn't the first time the legislature did exactly what Peter Angelos asked it to, and it would not be the last. The legislature only rarely defies Angelos, usually when his and his followers' actions become too brazen. He has been described as the "most powerful private citizen in Maryland." In reality, he may be the most powerful private citizen anywhere.

It was the Pittsburgh-born Angelos's good fortune that his Greek immigrant parents moved to Baltimore when he was eleven, enabling him to grow up in a state with a charming little history of political corruption. Though not as colorful as in Louisiana nor as squalid as in Rhode Island or New Jersey, Maryland's corruption was endemic enough to bring down a vice president of the United States, Spiro Agnew, who left office not for high crimes and misdemeanors in Washington but for common graft in the Old Line State. The current governor, manifestly unpopular Democrat Parris Glendening, holds his office despite evidence his 1994 election was fraudulently obtained. The episode's most scandalous aspect might be that, despite the

evidence, no one really cared. Indeed, in a much-hyped 1998 rematch, Glendening won going away.

Angelos, who declined a request for an interview to discuss this and other issues, plays this system like a finely tuned instrument for fun and profit. In pioneering the litigation of the immensely lucrative suits against asbestos manufacturers, he hit something of a trial lawyer



jackpot. The vast majority of these cases were dubious, depending on questionable expert testimony by plaintiff doctors about the perils of "asbestos lung disease," a deadly sounding moniker that confuses a benign condition with cancer caused by asbestos. Cancer deaths actually caused by asbestos were

very few in number. For the sake of trial the courts consolidated the cases, bundling the many bogus suits with the few legitimate ones. Faced with a potentially bankrupting legal fight, most of the targeted companies opted to settle. Angelos has not revealed his take from the \$75 million in settlements, but it is likely somewhere between the traditional one-third contingency fee and the up to one-half allowed in Maryland. Even a mere \$25 million is not a bad payday. But to get it he needed some help.

At many stops along his road to riches, Angelos has been aided by his minions in the Annapolis state house. Incredibly, some members of the legislature even are on the Angelos payroll, and they routinely sponsor and shepherd legislation that is exclusively in their boss's interest. These are openly referred to by legislators and in the press as "Angelos bills," and there is often at least one in the hopper at any given moment.

State Senator Norman Stone personally sponsored legislation to guarantee Angelos's asbestos windfall. A 1987 Maryland Court of Appeals ruling prohibited bringing claims on behalf of people dead for more than three years. That would have left some of Angelos's most compelling cases of deadly cancer caused by asbestos out of the consolidated group of suits, and the "asbestos lung disease" cases might have lost in court. Stone's legislation (which passed) extended the statute of limitations in asbestos cases from three to seven years after death. The manufacturers crumbled like, well, asbestos. Not long afterward, Sen. Stone officially accepted a position with Peter G. Angelos & Associates.

Angelos, not surprisingly, is one of the nation's most generous donors to Democratic candidates and causes nationwide, as well as the principal cash cow for Maryland Democrats. "He spreads money around like mulch," says Delegate Robert Flanagan, the House Republican whip. "He has been very, very good to the Democratic Party, and they have been very, very good to him." During the 1998 election cycle, Angelos gave roughly \$300,000 to Democrats. A study last summer found the Angelos family to be the fifty-fourth most generous political donors in America.

Angelos struck gold again — this time with the assistance of Governor Glendening — in 1996 when he garnered the appointment to lead the state of Maryland's litigation in the legal assault on tobacco companies. His contract with the state entitles him to one-quarter of any award. But the legislature did him an even bigger turn, rewriting the laws in the middle of the suit, as State Senate President Thomas V. Mike Miller told the *Washington Post*, "to ensure a win in

this case." Faced with no legal hopes of winning the case, the tobacco companies settled with the state for \$4 billion. The legislature's gift could mean as much as \$1 billion for Angelos when all the accounting is done. But amid howls of protest over this arrangement, it moved to cut Angelos's fee in half to 12.5 percent, a measure the pugnacious Angelos is fighting.

**A**mong the more unseemly examples of the incestuous arrangement between Angelos and state officials came during the baseball strike in 1995. As Opening Day approached, Major League Baseball toyed with the idea of fielding teams with replacement players. This was anathema to Angelos, with his working-class roots and close ties to organized labor. He would never field replacement players, he announced. But if Angelos refused to field scabs, he risked having the team seized from him by the American League. Further, he risked violating the team's lease at Camden Yards, the Orioles's stadium, requiring that he maintain the team in good standing as a member of the league.

Emergency legislation sponsored by state Senators Stone, John Pica, and Thomas Bromwell whisked through the General Assembly, making it a crime to field replacement players at Camden Yards. Gov. Glendening quickly signed the bill, giving Angelos full protection of the law and shielding him from breach of contract.

Two of the bill's good shepherds — Senators Stone and Pica — have worked for Angelos's firm. When one opponent, Del. Flanagan, suggested this might constitute a conflict of interest, an enraged Pica rushed from the Senate to the House chamber, declaring, "I'm going to knock his lights out when I see him!" (Pica never did find Flanagan.)

Senator Bromwell, no Angelos employee but a water carrier nonetheless, was defensive about his bill to help Angelos hang on to the Orioles during the tumultuous days of the players' strike. "I didn't do this for Peter Angelos, and I didn't do this for Cal Ripken," he told one reporter. "I did this for Baltimore and Maryland because enough is enough."

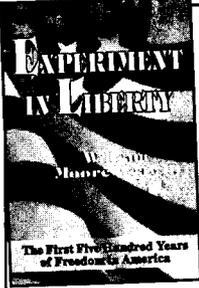
When Bromwell and Stone introduced another "Angelos bill" last year to remove monetary caps on pain and suffering damages affecting approximately 200 of their boss's asbestos suits (and worth millions of dollars to Angelos, according to the *Baltimore Sun*), Bromwell defended the move with eerie similarity: "I ain't doing this for Peter Angelos. I'm doing it for his clients."

The bill would have effectively overturned a 1995 Maryland Court of Appeals ruling. Says Del. Flanagan, "What we have here is one guy who, whenever he gets a decision he doesn't like in the courts, comes in here and gets the legislature to overturn that decision." Solons like Bromwell and Stone brazenly do that bidding, all the while issuing denials that their bills are done to help Peter Angelos.

This Pinocchio act — by dancing marionettes who have trouble telling the truth — may be wearing thin on Annapolis's capitol hill. The General Assembly's ethics committee has cautioned Stone against voting on the proposal to remove the pain and suffering caps because of the clear conflict of interest. So offended was one committee chairman by Stone's stated insistence on voting for the bill, he allowed the bill to die without ever reaching a vote.

To Peter Angelos, this is a temporary setback. "Let me assure you," he told *Business Week*, "I'm going to restore the litigation rights of Marylanders."

The likelihood is that time will prove him right. And while he figures out how to squeeze more money from asbestos and tobacco, he already has turned to



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the next target. Eight lawyers in his firm are busy drawing up suits against the lead industry, claiming the lead pigments from paints used in homes before 1978 have killed and harmed countless children. They will go after companies like Sherwin-Williams and Glidden under a novel “market-share liability” argument, with the half-dozen or so makers of lead pigment dividing up liability based upon historical market share.

Never mind that the manufacturers voluntarily took the product off the market more than 40 years ago when health risks first came to light, or that lead paint only causes problems when landlords poorly maintain their buildings. To Angelos, the facts won’t get in the way of rifling through someone else’s deep pockets.

**T**he skills that have made Angelos a successful litigant—braggadocio, chutzpah, bare-knuckle tactics—haven’t translated well to the world of sports ownership. Though he may be the most feared shark in the trial lawyer tank, Angelos’s style hasn’t worked for his baseball club, which has become something of a joke under his stewardship. The more involved Angelos gets, it has seemed, the less chance the team has to succeed.

Angelos has sunk a huge portion of his ill-gotten gains into improving the franchise, which he bought in 1994 for \$174 million (\$40 million his own). When he assumed control of the Orioles five years ago, he was hailed as the hometown hero who would spend what it takes to right a listing ship. Angelos was a fan’s owner, a Baltimorean who knew what the team meant to the average denizen of Charm City. Angelos had the common touch. Sure, he might have buckets of gold in the vault, but this son of a saloon keeper still lived in the same house he moved into three decades before, he still drove and parked his own car, and he was still married to his first wife. Peter Angelos, who really was born on the Fourth of July, was Real People.

But he has run the team like a dictator, driving out highly regarded baseball executives, managers, coaches, players, and even the radio announcer. He fired one manager he didn’t like, Davey John-

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son, the same day Johnson was named the American League’s Manager of the Year. He meddles in every area an owner typically does not. As a result, the best and brightest have fled the organization in droves, and the team with among the highest payrolls in professional sports has been dismal on the diamond. Trial lawyer Angelos, who has constructed a sorry mix of overpaid has-beens and submediocre never-weres, has been guilty of managerial malpractice.

There is an intersection where Peter Angelos’s dabbling in politics meets his dabbling in sports. It materialized this past spring when his Baltimore Orioles traveled to Havana to play the Cuban national baseball team. The strict, decades-old U.S. embargo against Cuba had prevented just such events for years. But Angelos wanted it to happen. “Peter Angelos expressed sympathy for Fidel Castro,” said Angelos friend and Pacifica radio commentator Saul Landau about a lunch the two shared. “He said, ‘For crying out loud, Kennedy tried to invade the island and tried to kill him.’”

Making the games happen, however, required a State Department waiver and permission from the White House. Here is where the hundreds of thousands of dollars in contributions—including \$75,000 in soft money to aid Democratic Senate candidates in the final week of the 1998 election, and \$100,000 after one of those calls by Al Gore in 1996—paid dividends. Angelos denies personally lobbying President Clinton, but did he really have to? Angelos did receive a White House meeting

with National Security Adviser Sandy Berger to discuss the matter, and subsequently received his waiver.

So in April, for the first time since the Communist revolution nearly forty years ago, Major League Baseball returned to Cuba. The nationally televised audience back in America saw 50,000 Cubans smiling and waving and celebrating in the warm Caribbean sun. Each man, woman, and child in the stadium had been vetted by the government. A friendly crowd ensured that no embarrassing demonstrations would ruin this moment of comity and friendship.

Then the cameras closed in, treating viewers to a remarkable and fitting sight—two left-wing dictators, nestled comfortably in their box seats, deep in friendly conversation. Bearded and clad in his trademark fatigues sat Fidel Castro, the man who for four decades has run Cuba into the ground. Beside him sat Peter Angelos, a man who over just a few years has done the same to one of the proudest franchises in sports.

The sight was in some respects rather comical. It really looked like two characters come down from the Silver Screen to bask in a surreal setting which could only have been manufactured in Hollywood: Castro as Woody Allen’s character Fielding Mellish in *Bananas*; Angelos, a dead-ringer for Edward G. Robinson, as Rico “Little Caesar” Bandello in the film *Little Caesar*.

While Mellish was dreamed up by Allen as a celluloid spoof on Cuba’s Banana Republican, Angelos has become a real-life parody of Robinson’s Rico. In both appearance and in deed, Angelos is the arrogant Cosa Nostra capo, with sycophantic minions doing his bidding, that Robinson played so brilliantly in the first great gangster film.

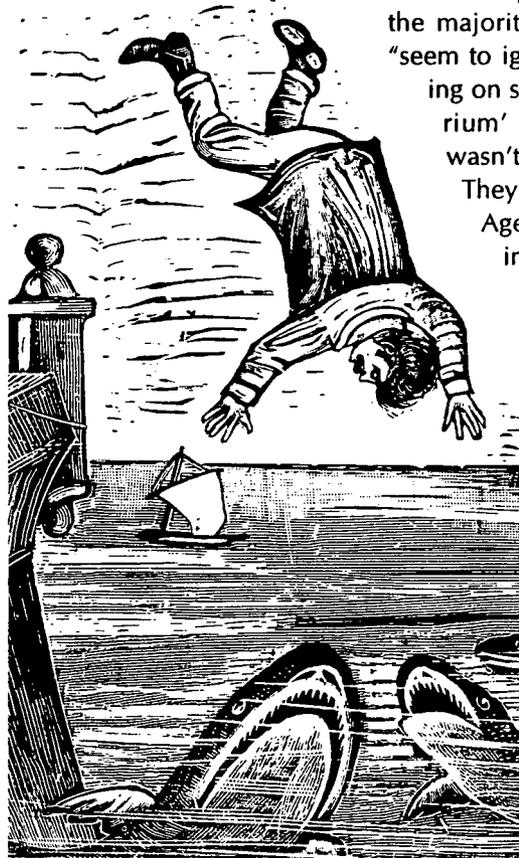
But there is one big difference. This modern-day Little Caesar doesn’t break the law to enrich himself and accumulate power, he personally *changes* the law to suit him. What is criminal is that Angelos’s rackets are perfectly legal. And just so they continue to be, he’ll continue giving to Democrats to protect him against the GOP—which, he says without the slightest hint of embarrassment, “has spent a huge portion of its time maligning the legal profession.” ❁

# The Suicide of Catholicism

We at the NEW OXFORD REVIEW get loads of mail, faxes, and phone calls from our readers, and one story we hear over and over again goes like this: "My wife and I scrimped and saved to send our six children to Catholic schools, all the way through college. We did everything we could to give our kids a solid Catholic upbringing. Now three are married (two outside the Church, one inside) and three are shackled-up. Only two of our kids show any interest in the Faith — ironically, two of the cohabiters. They take Communion without any qualms when they happen to be in church, and show no interest in straightening out their lives. All our kids are 'pro-choice' and 'pro-gay.' And, oh, we have no grandchildren."

The folks who tell us these stories are heartsick, feel betrayed, even worry about their children's souls.

What went wrong? Over the last 30 or so years many religious educators across the nation have in effect stopped teaching Catholicism and have basically been teaching religious humanism instead. Kids haven't been taught much of anything about the authority of Scripture, Tradition, and Magisterium, about sexual morality, Transubstantiation, the consequences of sin, and the reality of Hell. Instead, they have learned about tolerance of neighbor, self-esteem, and little else. They are victims of spiritual censorship — but the ACLU isn't rushing to their defense. Meanwhile, many pastors have been taking the same approach in their homilies and parish "renewal" programs.



People fed this pabulum who haven't simply dropped out of the Church now seem to constitute the bulk of Catholics in certain dioceses. Is Milwaukee one such diocese? It certainly sounds like it, given what its liberal Archbishop, Rembert Weakland, admits. He reports in an article in *America* that the majority of Catholics in his jurisdiction "seem to ignore much of the church's teaching on sexuality," and "the word 'magisterium' is not in their vocabulary" and wasn't part of their religious instruction. They perhaps "dabble a bit in some New Age thinking," but "have read nothing" written by the Pope. They want a spirituality that doesn't "put guilt trips on them" and a Church that's "more flexible" than it already is. Is Weakland troubled by this? Hardly. He regards these slothful Catholics as the "vital force" in his archdiocese, and he'd like his "pastoral leaders" to "model the flexibility" being called for by these people!

You don't have to be a rocket scientist to see a pattern: Liberal religious educators and pastors dumb down Catholics, and then liberal bishops redefine ignorance and sloth as "vitality" and call for more "flexibility" — i.e., more ignorance and sloth. This is a prescription for the suicide of Catholicism.

We at the NEW OXFORD REVIEW, an orthodox Catholic monthly magazine, are mounting an offensive to restore the full splendor of truth — and true vitality — to Holy Mother Church. Subscribe today, and we'll make your heart glad!

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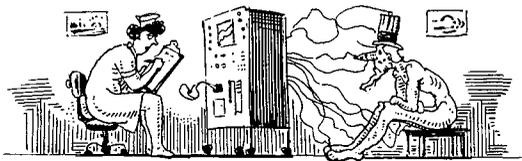
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# Waco Returns

But will John Danforth use all the new evidence?

When the House hearings on Waco ended in August 1995, many Americans believed that the Justice Department, FBI, and Clinton administration had been caught repeatedly lying about what happened to the Branch Davidians on April 19, 1993. But indifference on the part of politicians and press alike allowed the story to return to hibernation. Then last June 30, a federal judge shocked the Clinton administration by allowing wrongful death lawsuits against the feds by Davidian survivors and relatives to proceed. Private investigations, an Academy Award nominated documentary, and damning responses from Freedom of Information Act requests caused a growing surge of new information that eventually broke the dam of political and media apathy in August 1999.

News leaked out that the feds knowingly suppressed information about using pyrotechnics that might have started fires that killed scores of women and children. A shaken Attorney General Janet Reno announced: "I am very, very upset. I don't think it's very good for my credibility." Reno played the victim, lashing out at the FBI for supposedly withholding key information from her. But Reno bears responsibility for whatever she did not find out—since she orchestrated the initial Justice Department investigation to whitewash both herself and the FBI. Incriminating revelations are trickling out practically every week:

- The U.S. military was far more involved at Waco than previously admitted.

JAMES BOVARD is the author of *Freedom in Chains: The Rise of the State and the Demise of the Citizen* (St. Martin's Press).

At the press conference in July 1996 releasing the House report on Waco, I asked co-chairmen Bill Zelliff and Bill McCollum how much cooperation they had received from federal agencies. They said the cooperation had been pretty good—except for the Pentagon, which had refused to give them almost any information.

- Former CIA officer Gene Cullen told the *Dallas Morning News* in late August that Delta Force commandos were "present, up front and close" in tanks in the final day's action at Waco. Delta members bragged to him of their role when he subsequently served with them in Europe. James B. Francis, Jr., chairman of the Texas Department of Public Safety, confirmed there is evidence that the Delta Force participated in the final assault against the Davidians.

- The "national security" excuse repeatedly invoked for not turning over key files to congressional investigators is wearing thin. According to the *Dallas Morning News*, "The military has estimated that at least 6,000 pages of its documents are classified, and CIA, FBI, Treasury, ATF [Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms] and Justice Department officials have indicated that their agencies have a number of secret documents relating to the standoff." In September, the Texas Department of Public Safety blocked the release of a report listing all the evidence it collected after the fire because the information contained military secrets. If there's so much to hide, was the military testing new weapons on American citizens during the standoff?

- In early October the FBI turned over thousands of key documents to congress-

sional investigators—information previously withheld because it had supposedly been mislaid in boxes kept at Quantico, Virginia, home base of the FBI's Hostage Rescue Team. Throughout the 51-day siege, FBI spokesmen bitterly complained that none of the Branch Davidians would leave their compound. But according to these documents, in at least seven instances FBI agents threw flash-bang hand grenades at people who had left the residence, effectively driving them back into the building. Flash-bangs emit a deafening explosion and blinding flash—just the sort of weapon to strike terror into its intended target.

- Infrared footage from an FBI plane circling 9,000 feet above the Davidians' home on the final day reveals that federal agents fired machine guns at or into the back of the building—either shortly before or just after the fire had broken out. According to former Pentagon infrared expert Edward Allard, who was consulted by Rep. Dan Burton's House Government Reform and Oversight Committee, and other knowledgeable individuals who have scrutinized the footage, the film does indeed show such gunfire directed at the Davidians. Additional newly released infrared footage made by an FBI plane, featured in the just-released movie, *Waco: A New Revelation* (made by Mike McNulty, one of masterminds of the 1997 Emmy-award winning *Waco: Rules of Engagement*), shows two figures exiting from the back of a tank and then spraying the back of the Davidians' residence with automatic weapons fire. One FBI agent stated in an after-action report that he heard gunfire from the sniper post occupied by Lon Horiuchi, the same FBI agent who killed Vicki Weaver as she held her baby daughter in the cabin door of her Idaho home in 1992. Clinton declaimed on the day after the fire: "I do not think the U.S. govern-