

The Prince of Providence: The True Story of Buddy Cianci, America's Most Notorious Mayor, Some Wiseguys, and the Feds

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COP: “Buddy, I think this is a whorehouse.”

BUDDY CIANCI: “Now I know why they made you a detective.”

Welcome to Providence, Rhode Island, where corruption is entertainment and Mayor Buddy Cianci presided over the longest-running lounge act in American politics. In *The Prince of Providence*, Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Mike Stanton tells a classic story of wiseguys, feds, and politicians on a carousel of crime and redemption.

Buddy Cianci was part urban visionary, part Tony Soprano—a flawed political genius in the mold of Huey Long and James Michael Curley. His lust for power cost him his marriage, his family, and close friendships. Yet he also revitalized the city of Providence, where ethnic factions jostle with old-moneyed New Englanders and black-clad artists from the Rhode Island School of Design rub shoulders with scam artists from City Hall.

For nearly a quarter of a century, Cianci dominated this uneasy melting pot. During his first administration, twenty-two political insiders were convicted of corruption. In 1984, Cianci resigned after pleading guilty to felony assault, for torturing a man he suspected of sleeping with his estranged wife. In 1990, in a remarkable comeback, Cianci was elected mayor once again; he went on to win national acclaim for transforming a dying industrial city into a trendy arts and tourism mecca.

But in 2001, a federal corruption probe dubbed Operation Plunder Dome threatened to bring the curtain down on Cianci once and for all.

Mike Stanton takes readers on a remarkable journey through the underside of city life, into the bizarre world of the mayor and his supporting cast, including:

- “Buckles” Melise, the city official in charge of vermin control, who bought Providence twice as much rat poison as the city of Cleveland, which was at the time four times as large, and wound up *increasing* Providence’s rat population. During a garbage strike, Buckles sledgehammered one city employee and stuck his thumb in another’s eye. Cianci would later describe this as “great public policy.”
- Anthony “the Saint” St. Laurent, a major Rhode Island bookmaker and loan shark, who tried to avoid prison by citing his medical need for forty bowel irrigations a day, thus earning himself the nickname “Public Enema Number One.”
- Dennis Aiken, a celebrated FBI agent and public corruption expert, who asked to be sent to “the Louisiana of the North,” where he enlisted an undercover businessman to expose the corrupt secrets of Cianci’s City Hall.

The Prince of Providence is a colorful and engrossing account of one of the most tragicomic figures in

modern American life—and the city he transformed.

From the Hardcover edition.

The Prince of Providence: The True Story of Buddy Cianci, America's Most Notorious Mayor, Some Wiseguys, and the Feds Details


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From Reader Review **The Prince of Providence: The True Story of Buddy Cianci, America's Most Notorious Mayor, Some Wiseguys, and the Feds for online ebook**

Janet C-B says

I had an interest in reading this biography of a political figure, because I grew up close to Providence RI where Mayor Buddy Cianci reigned supreme for many decades. The book is written by a journalist for the major newspaper in the area, the Providence Journal. I think Mike Stanton did a good job of documenting the ups and downs of Cianci's political career. He gives credit where credit is due for Cianci's accomplishments, while at the same time describing his corrupt leadership, and giving some insight into the person. I think it is worth 3.5 stars. I found the later chapters a bit tedious, especially the description of the court room scenes and jury deliberations toward the end of the book. Overall, it was quite an eye opener of political corruption in my own back yard.

Tcbelli says

Having lived in RI for nearly 25 years--and having once been a fan of Providence's notorious mayor--this book really opened my eyes. I remember the Providence of yore--depressed, seedy, downtrodden and empty. There's no doubt that Buddy Cianci helped revive the city. But after reading Mr. Stanton's book, I can't help but think we paid an awfully high moral price for it. I also now wonder whether the deep, incestuous corruption that plagued Cianci's administration can be so easily eliminated with a few token arrests. Knowing the "big small-town" dynamics at play in this state, I have to think we may never be rid of it.

Although the writing in *The Prince of Providence* is at times dry and the cast of roguish characters sometimes hard to track, this book is an indelible read. Whether or not you live in Rhode Island, it's a fascinating look at politics and greed and the ways in which power corrupts. I definitely recommend it.

Lisa K says

3.5 stars but really... probably give yourself a break before you read this because who wants to hear another story about abuse of power right now?

Karen Zelano says

There appear to be two very different Buddy Ciancis. The first Buddy Cianci 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. That's the Buddy Cianci who committed an egregious breach of the public trust by . . . operating the city that Buddy Cianci was supposed to serve as a criminal enterprise to line his own pockets. My job is to sentence the second Buddy Cianci. Because the first Buddy Cianci wouldn't be here."

~Judge Torres, presiding over "Plunderdome "

This quote sums up the dual personality- the Dr.Jekyll and Mr. Hyde- that is Buddy Cianci.

Two thoughts:

- 1- Mike Stanton should write a sequel.
 - 2- Neither of the the Buddy Cianci's deserves your vote.
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Marsha says

As a native Rhod Islander, now living across the border, I wanted to read this book to gain an understanding of the very charismatic mayor of Providence. I found the book dull and hard to get into. A chore to read.

Well researched which but the writing style was dry and tedious. Read more like a text book then a novel.

Bill says

I found this book to be, for me, part nostalgia and part horror show about the state of politics in the city of Providence. Part horror because I, too, remember Bobo Marapese and all the Federal Hill mafia gang and horror show because I had forgotten just how awful a person Buddy Cianci could be in spite of his remarkable achievements. It should be required reading for anyone living in Rhode Island.

Steven Yenser says

Terrific reporting and pretty solid storytelling. Maybe a few too many anecdotes that seemed too good to be true.

Brendan Koerner says

I'm a sucker for well-reported accounts of civic corruption, so this account of Buddy Cianci's checkered career really hit the spot. Stanton does an excellent job of connecting the dots and describing how Cianci essentially turned Providence's City Hall into a criminal enterprise. But the notorious mayor also comes off as a somewhat sympathetic character in many places, a man whose love for his hometown was genuine, and who truly felt that he was bringing it back from its 1970s nadir.

The final act gets a little inside-baseball for anyone not intimately familiar with Providence politics or the nuances of RICO prosecutions. But don't let that deter you--"The Prince of Providence" is well worth the price of admission, especially if you're the sort who always checks the newspapers Metro section before all others.

Tim White says

Stanton is a talented writer and reporter - a wonderful history of the country's most notorious mayor and the city he loved.

Kenneth P. says

SPOILERS!

This was a difficult book to read because it documents so many crimes that went unpunished. Buddy Cianci, as a law student, raped a woman at gunpoint. He paid a settlement in response to a civil suit. In his first term as mayor of Providence he drove his Police Chief to suicide. Yes, Buddy was bummed out for a day or so, but he had a city to run. Most maddening was his burgeoning popularity, a convicted felon who served a record six terms as mayor. People actually voted for this scumbag. He was credited with the "renaissance" of Providence which showcased a flashy new waterfront, new hotels and restaurants, all of it built on bribes and extortion.

Like Buddy (famous for his toupees) the renaissance was and is flashy and superficial. When he finally went to prison on racketeering charges he left Providence with a very nice waterfront, terrible schools and crime-ridden neighborhoods.

This is a well documented piece of journalism that is a tough read only because of its disgusting main character who was, without doubt, a pig.

LATOYA JOVENA says

The author has obviously done a great deal of research and is quite proud of it. It almost seems like he's "peacocking" his brilliance. He seems to believe that there is no way you'd remember something he said 30 pages ago so he re-explains, over and over.

To top it all off the title is misleading. This isn't Buddy's story, it's the story of corruption in Providence over decades some of which Buddy played a part. No detail is overlooked, unfortunately.

Nevertheless Providence Rhode Island is quite a town. It's like housewives of where ever if all the skanky behavior was coming from super educated rich white men. The mayor was like the crazy queen bee. This would've been brilliant tv if it wasn't elected public office. *sigh*

Ryan says

This was a fun mental return to Providence for me. I used to live on Federal Hill, one block off of Atwells Avenue - next to Mediterraneo and across from Andino's - so I saw Buddy very often around the neighborhood, and have always been fascinated by him. And it was kind of disturbing and thrilling to read about all the dirty deals and other events that were going down in locations so close to me.

This is well-researched book and an almost unreal story. Buddy is a larger-than-life character, and it often felt like I was reading episodes of the Sopranos, rather than a real-life story. (Which is ironic because Buddy was one of the biggest detractors of the Sopranos when it came on air because he objected to that portrayal of Italian-Americans.) Seriously, there's characters in this tale with the names Sharky Almagno, Buckles Melise, Bobo Marrapese, and Blackjack DelSanto. Great Prosecutor and FBI tales. Undercover agents and wire-tapping. Parts of it read like a great suspense novel. And Buddy is such a great tragic figure - so capable of greatness, but so flawed in his corruption.

My one issue with the book is that the writing sometimes comes off as a little too reportorial at times (which is understandable, since the author is a reporter for The Providence Journal). I also think that the earlier years could have had better editing. The author kept trying to build suspense as to upcoming events, but then would jump around in time within the next few paragraphs, giving major things away. Also, there were way too many moments in the earlier years where the author tells these random anecdotes from people that go absolutely nowhere. I know that there are a lot of Buddy stories, but he didn't have to include absolutely every one.

That said, in the author's note at the end, he says "Everyone in Rhode Island, it seems, has a Buddy story." And yes, I just complained about too many anecdotes, but I, too, have some Buddy stories to share:

1 - It was rumored that he had 4 toupees - 1 that was a "just got a haircut" toupee, and then one for each successive week with a little more growth. Then he'd start all over again. (This was confirmed in the book - he also had a darker toupee, a "salt and pepper" toupee, and a "tousled" toupee that he wore to blizzards, fires, & crime scenes. He had to give up his toupees when he went to jail.)

2 - Buddy spoke at my college graduation about a month before he was indicted. He was enormously popular, and everyone cheered and chanted "Free Buddy," especially after he announced that all graduates' parking tickets would be forgiven. (According to the book - this is something he did every year. RISD students loved him - they made a huge Buddy blow-up sculpture on campus when I was there, and he was the honorary coach of the school's hockey team, the Nads.)

3 - About 4 years before, I was at the Providence Children's Museum. There was an interactive computer game that followed a rat through the sewer system to illustrate how it worked. At the end, the rat takes you to his "apartment" below Providence. On the wall of the apartment was a framed portrait of Buddy Cianci - and when you clicked on it, it came alive and said "Hey Kids, I'm Buddy Cianci, Mayor of Providence! Don't forget to tell your parents to buy my marinara sauce!" (The photo on the cover even shows him on a gondola, with a jar of his marinara sauce prominently displayed next to him.)

That's why I read this book. It was a very satisfying read.

Richard Wise says

Like many of the reviewers, I grew up just outside of Providence. Of course, given the state's size, any former Rhode Islander can say the same.

A good buddy of mine found the book in the remainder pile and gave it to me for Christmas. Gotta say, it's the best thing since O'Connor's, *The Last Hurrah*.

I was a community organizer working out of Providence until about a year before Cianci's ascension and have always wondered how he managed to outflank the democratic machine. He didn't and Stanton's chronicling of how he won election is fascinating.

I was particularly tickled by the story of Ted Collins. He was a lieutenant in the Providence Police and my Providence landlord. I lived in one of his apartments during my first two years in college. He spoke out of turn and Cianci had him arrested on an outstanding warrant for serious code violations in some of his properties.

The one I lived in collapsed into a pile of rubble one sunny morning a few years after I moved out. Even the

termites had moved on. A couple of days later, the one next door, also a Collins property, collapsed as well. You can still see the vacant lots on West Park Street on Smith Hill. "No one's above the law," Cianci said. He got that one right.

Colin says

A fascinating biography of a unique mayor

Buddy Cianci, former mayor of Providence, seems larger than life. I remember describing him to a friend from Ohio in the late 90s, and my friend thought that I *had* to be making it all up. Larger-than-life, mayor who brought about an unbelievable Renaissance for Providence, but whose regime was unspeakably corrupt, Buddy is a study in contrasts - and this book captures the good, the bad, and the ugly very well.

Pam says

Interesting to read about this time frame as an adult. Stanton presents a lot of information about the whole government style in Providence.
