



Written by [Bob Adelman](#) on July 10, 2014

“Katrina Mayor” Ray Nagin Gets 10 Years on Corruption Charges

On Wednesday New Orleans’ former mayor Ray Nagin (shown in white shirt) [was sentenced](#) to 10 years in federal prison after being convicted on 20 of 21 felony charges ranging from bribery to conspiracy to wire fraud to money laundering to filing false income tax returns. Not included were charges of over-acting and hypocrisy.



In acting the part of innocence betrayed, Nagin said:

In my opinion I’ve been targeted, smeared, tarnished ... for some reason some of the stances I took after Katrina didn’t sit well with some very powerful people. So now I’m paying the price for that.

The prosecutors were fairly magical in their ability to take something that supposedly happened and paint it as reality when it didn’t really happen.

Serving as mayor of New Orleans from 2002 to 2010, Nagin generated controversy over his handling of the crisis the city faced during Hurricane Katrina, which hit the city in late August 2005. Reluctant to issue the first mandatory evacuation in the city’s history, Nagin was held responsible for at least some of the 1,800 deaths and more than \$100 billion of damage inflicted by the storm.

During his second term, his image as mayor began to unravel. In April 2009, a local paper alleged certain specific conflicts of interest with regards to trips taken by Nagin and paid for by Greg Meffert, who at the time was Nagin’s chief technology officer. Meffert was found later to be working a lucrative kickback scheme with business owners seeking city contracts to help rebuild the city. Meffert was charged with 63 felony counts of corruption.

The same paper in June 2012 unveiled more criminal behavior with its disclosure that another businessman seeking favors had not only paid Nagin \$50,000 in exchange for favorable treatment by the city but also delivered truckloads of granite — gratis — to Nagin’s sons’ countertop business, Stone Age, LLC. By the time the long list of corruption was tallied by federal prosecutors, Nagin was charged with receiving more than \$500,000 in cash payments in exchange for \$5 million worth of city contracts.

Neither before or after the trial did Nagin mention his staggering hypocrisy. Shortly after taking office as mayor in May 2002, he mounted an anti-corruption campaign within New Orleans’ city government. His efforts received national attention after television stations across the land broadcast live video of corrupt city officials being led away in handcuffs. He received additional acclaim when asked if he would order the arrest of his cousin who was implicated in one of the scandals. Responded Nagin: “If he’s guilty, arrest him.” His cousin was later arrested.

When Nagin’s sentence of 10 years behind bars was announced, it was met with outrage by the federal prosecutors who had sought a 20-year term. Said Matthew Coman, assistant United States Attorney:

[Mr. Nagin’s testimony was] a performance that can only be summed up by his astounding unwillingness to accept any responsibility....



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These repeated violations, at the expense of the citizens of New Orleans in a time when honest leadership was needed most, do not deserve leniency.

Coman added:

What Ray Nagin did was sell his office over and over and over again. The damage that Ray Nagin inflicted upon this community ... is incalculable. We as a community need not and should not accept public corruption.

Nagin is neither the first, nor the worst, of a lengthening list of mayors who have failed to resist the temptation to take advantage of their position of trust for their personal benefit. There's Patrick Cannon, who served as mayor of Charlotte, North Carolina, for less than five months before being arrested and charged with accepting more than \$48,000 in bribes from undercover FBI agents posing as businessmen seeking city contracts.

There's Kwame Kilpatrick, former Mayor of Detroit, who is now serving 28 years in a federal pen for mail fraud, wire fraud, and racketeering. There's former San Diego Mayor Bob Filner, who was in office less than a year before being charged criminally for a false arrest and battery on three unnamed females. Filner got off easy. He could have faced up to five years in jail for his indiscretions, but a plea bargain reduced it to just three months of house arrest (which ended in April).

There's Vincent "Buddy" Cianci, who not only served as mayor of Providence, Rhode Island twice, but resigned twice due to felony convictions. After serving four years in federal prison, Cianci — perhaps the master of chutzpah among the growing list of mayoral miscreants — announced in June that he would run once again for mayor of Providence.

There's Larry Langford, who served as mayor of Birmingham, Alabama. Langford is now serving a 15-year sentence in federal prison for his role in bringing the city the distinction of having the largest municipal bankruptcy in American history in November 2011. He was charged with 60 counts of corruption and fined more than \$119,000.

At the top, or perhaps the bottom, of the growing list of mayoral frauds and convictions is the on-again, off-again mayor of the District of Columbia, Marion Barry. His celebrity status was assured in January 1990 when he was videotaped smoking crack cocaine, which netted him six months in federal prison. Following his release, he was elected to the D.C. city council in 1992 and then awarded mayorship in 1995. His list of corruption events is so long that it covers almost three pages of closely-typed paragraphs at Wikipedia and so outrageous that it has drawn the vitriolic attention of the usually tolerant and forgiving *Washington Post*. In an opinion piece offered by Colbert King, the paper's Pulitzer Prize-winning columnist, he sums up Marion as the master of mayoral misdeeds:

Barry, however, is in a category of his own.

In fact, the four-term-mayor-turned-council-member is so far out there he may function in an alternate reality.

How else to explain how someone convicted of possessing crack cocaine in a federal bust seen around the world, who served six months in prison, who has been sentenced to three years' probation for failing to file and pay federal and local taxes, who has been slapped with federal liens because of unpaid taxes, who has been censured twice by the council for misconduct and who has leveled racist remarks against Asian Americans and slurs against Poles ... still functions as if his universe is so superior to ours that he is free to recidivate to a fare-thee-well.



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In perspective, then, Nagin's modest infringements of morality and federal laws when compared to his competition fade into relative insignificance, placing him near the bottom of the list. Nagin is not the first, nor the last, nor the worst. He's just the latest.

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