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Cases disappear as FBI looks away



PART 4
**WHITEY &
THE FBI:**
**PRICE OF
PROTECTION**

At the dawn of his deal with the FBI, James "Whitey" Bulger was an angry leg-breaker at a Dedham restaurant looking to collect an unpaid loan. Leaning across a table, he gave the owner a choice: Pay, or have his ears cut off and stuffed in his mouth.

Restaurateur Francis X. Green told his story to the FBI, expecting protection and prosecution. But Bulger had an ace in the hole. He worked for the FBI.

This five-part series by the Spotlight team was prepared by editor Gerard O'Neill and reporters Dick Lehr, Mitchell Zuckoff, and Shelley Murphy. Today's installment was written by Murphy.

Looking back, the 1976 incident at the Back Side Restaurant was a turning point. An extortion witness, built on a credible, cooperative witness, might have stopped Bulger and his partner, Stephen "The Rifleman" Flemmi, from launching a 15-year crime spree.

Instead, the FBI did nothing, sending a powerful message to two of the region's most ruthless organized crime figures: As long as you're with us, we won't bother you.

As a result, Bulger and Flemmi became sanctioned career criminals while spying on the underworld for the FBI. Despite solid evidence indicating Bulger and Flemmi were involved in murders, shakedowns, and drug dealing, the FBI

looked the other way throughout the 1970s and 1980s.

It made no difference who the victims were, fellow wise guys or innocent people. And it didn't matter if the victims were willing to cooperate with the FBI or were scared silent. In some cases, the bureau even helped the gangsters by leaking information to them about ongoing investigations.

Recent court testimony shows the deflected cases ranged from the momentous to the mundane, but the consistent thread running through most of them is the involvement of Bulger's handler, former FBI agent John Connolly of South Boston.

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