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THE VENTURA COUNTY PLAYBOOK: INSIDE THE COORDINATED MACHINE OF JUDICIAL ABUSE TARGETING THREE UNRELATED LITIGANTS



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In Ventura County's courthouse, a place that likes to bill itself as a model of procedural integrity and judicial professionalism, a very different system operates behind the scenes.

It's a system where judges hold secret hearings, clerks block filings on command, evidence is quietly smothered, fraudulent documents slip through unchecked, and law enforcement is deployed not for justice, but for retaliation.

Three unrelated cases, **Amir Rahnavardi**, **Anica Barbosa**, and **Sherri LaZelle,** walked into Ventura courtrooms at different times, facing different circumstances, and different adversaries. What they didn't know is that they were stepping into the same machine. Their stories are separate, yet disturbingly interchangeable, a mirrored pattern of constitutional violations that exposes a judiciary operating without oversight, without accountability, and without any regard for due process.

This isn't judicial error. It's a **systematic playbook.**

AMIR RAHNAVARDI – WHERE THE PLAYBOOK SHOWS ITS TEETH

When Amir Rahnavardi challenged the fabricated abuse narrative used against him, he assumed that facts, evidence, and hearings would matter. Instead, he collided with the Ventura courthouse's shadow system, one driven by ex parte influence and rulings crafted behind closed doors.

Judge Joann Johnson openly admitted she consulted Judge Michael Lief privately before issuing a restraining-order ruling, a confession that should have set off alarms across the county. Opposing counsel enjoyed direct, private access to the judge, a privilege Amir could never dream of as a self-represented father forced to watch rulings appear minutes after closed-door conversations.

It got worse. Supervised visitation was extended for years without a single evidentiary hearing, even though seventy-five clean monitor reports and seven monitors all confirmed there was no risk, no conduct issue, nothing to justify the restrictions. His journal, nine hundred pages, video evidence, photo timelines, digital corroboration of abuse patterns: all suppressed by Referee Leon Bennett without findings, without explanation, without record.

And then there was the "evidence" that justified a devastating custody loss, photos of minor cat scratches, presented by opposing counsel as "dog bites" from a violent attack. In

open court, Amir told Judge Lief exactly what everyone in the room knew:

"You can't tell the difference between dog bites and cat scratches – that's terrifying."

Terrifying, yes. But in Ventura County, entirely on brand.

Judge Henry Walsh, publicly admonished by the Commission on Judicial Performance for failing to disclose campaign contributions from more than 150 attorneys, had already accepted the superficial photos as proof of a "two-hour beating." No police investigation. No authentication. Just a narrative slipped neatly into the machine, processed, and stamped as fact.

ANICA BARBOSA – WHEN A SECRET HEARING BECOMES AN EVICTION ORDER

If Amir's case revealed ex parte communication as a routine operating tool, **Anica Barbosa's case revealed how far the court was willing to go to keep its decisions hidden.**

On April 23, she walked into a courtroom expecting a routine hearing, only to discover later that Judge Lief had already planned a secret one behind her back. A false 11:00 AM minute order was filed as a decoy to send her home and clear the path for an undisclosed proceeding.

Judge Denise de Bellefeuille helped set the stage by falsely claiming the court file was "missing," then clearing the courtroom under the guise of a recess. While Anica was physically removed from the process, a hearing took place without her. Her eviction, stripped of procedural rights, stripped of due process, stripped of jurisdiction, was engineered in her absence.

And when she tried to challenge the judge?

A clerk told her:

"I was told not to take any paperwork from you."

Her judicial challenge was blocked. Her filings refused. Her rights erased.

Then came the enforcement.

Attorney Stephanie White, acting less like an officer of the court and more like a bounty hunter with a badge, arrived at Anica's home with a squad of sheriff's deputies — five to ten of them — shouting from the kitchen:

"Get out now and don't come back!"

No jurisdiction. No service. No minute order. No due process.

But in Ventura County, everything was going exactly according to plan.

SHERRI LaZELLE – THE FULL BLUEPRINT OF FRAUD

If Amir exposed judicial coordination and Anica exposed secret process, **Sherri LaZelle exposed the Ventura machine in its most brazen form: forged documents, resurrected cases, fraudulent service, retaliatory warrants, and an unbroken chain of unlawful acts carried out in broad daylight.**

Sherri discovered restraining orders being enforced against her that were never signed by the petitioner, never signed by a judge, filed more than a thousand days apart, and riddled with altered pages and impossible dates. They were the legal equivalent of counterfeits, and the court treated them as gospel.

Two dismissed TROs were secretly resurrected. Unauthorized attorneys were permitted to appear without substitution. Filing clerks were instructed to block her access to the court. A judge appointed counsel after the hearing ended, a maneuver so blatantly unlawful it reads like a parody of due process.

Her federal case was derailed by criminal charges engineered inside the same courthouse she was suing, a retaliatory loop designed not to seek justice, but to silence the whistleblower at the center of it.

When she exposed an admission of child abuse, mandatory reporting laws vanished. When she reported hacking and theft, law enforcement interest disappeared. When she

challenged fraudulent documents, the court looked away.

Because in Ventura County, accountability isn't the goal. Control is.

THE PATTERN: THREE CASES, ONE PLAYBOOK

Separately, the cases look troubling. Together, they form a blueprint.

Every case encountered the same distinctive hallmarks:

Secret ex parte communications.
Hearings held without notice.
Minute orders that vanish or never existed.
Evidence suppressed or destroyed.
Filings blocked by clerks acting on private directives.
Forged or fabricated documents accepted as fact.
Law enforcement mobilized as a weapon — not for public safety, but for judicial retaliation.
Void orders treated as enforceable.
Federal lawsuits met with local retaliation.
Judges acting far outside of jurisdiction and outside the law.

Different cases.
Same judges.
Same clerks.
Same playbook.

This is not coincidence. It is **pattern and practice**, the legal threshold for systemic constitutional violations and Monell liability.

It is also the clearest window yet into a courthouse that has stopped even pretending to follow the law.

THE SYSTEM THEY BUILT — AND THE ONE ABOUT TO COLLAPSE

Ventura County has operated under the public illusion of procedural normalcy while

running a second, hidden system that substitutes legality with loyalty and oversight with improvisation. The three cases now surfacing are not outliers. They are evidence.

Courts do not commit this many identical violations against three unrelated people by accident.

This is a machine.

This is policy.

This is systemic.

THE REAL VERDICT: THIS ISN'T A BROKEN SYSTEM – IT'S A CRIMINAL ENTERPRISE

It's time to stop pretending Ventura County's judiciary is merely "flawed" or in need of a little procedural housekeeping. What these three individuals endured, the forged documents, the fabricated evidence, the secret hearings, the retaliatory warrants, the weaponized sheriffs, the clerks taking illegal directives, the judges operating with no jurisdiction and even less accountability, doesn't reflect a system that's slipping. It reflects a system that has already fallen.

A system that consistently produces the same abuses isn't malfunctioning.
It's functioning **exactly as designed**.

These aren't isolated bad actors or the occasional rogue judge. This is a coordinated network of power operating off the books and beyond the law — a structure so normalized inside Ventura County that its participants no longer bother hiding it. They don't fear consequences because, until now, there have been none.

And that is precisely why this can't be brushed aside as another "judicial reform" issue. No amount of ethics training, bench guides, or wrist-slap admonishments will fix a judiciary that behaves like a protection racket.

This demands something far more serious: a full-scale federal investigation into

whether Ventura County's judicial and clerical apparatus has crossed the line from government institution into organized criminal enterprise.

Because when judges coordinate in secret, when clerks block filings on command, when evidence disappears, when forged documents drive outcomes, when sheriffs are dispatched to enforce void orders, when retaliation replaces due process, and when the victims of this machine are the ones punished for exposing it — that's not law.

That's racketeering in robes.

The question is no longer whether the Ventura County Superior Court needs oversight. The question is whether we are witnessing the public façade of a criminal organization masquerading as a justice system.

And now that the pattern has been exposed, now that the names, dates, actions, and mechanisms have been documented, the next move belongs to the federal government.

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Cece Woods is an independent investigative journalist and Editor-in-Chief of The Current Report, specializing in public corruption, institutional accountability, and high-profile criminal and civil cases.





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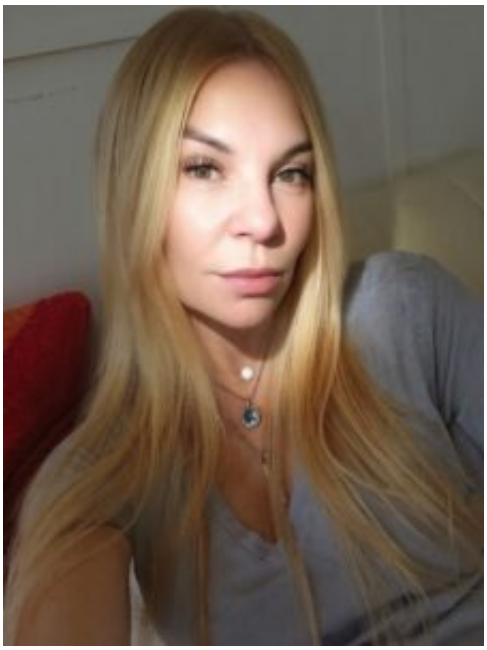
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Cece Woods is an independent investigative journalist and Editor-in-Chief of *The Current Report*, specializing in public corruption, institutional accountability, and high-profile criminal and civil cases.

She has contributed reporting and commentary to *The Epoch Times* on public safety, law enforcement, and government oversight.

In 2018, Woods exposed a two-year law-enforcement cover-up tied to the Malibu Creek State Park shootings and delivered the most comprehensive local coverage of the Woolsey Fire, reaching more than one million

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