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THE OP-ED PAGE

Bratton & Morgy shun hero for turf

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THERE WAS barely a dry eye at Bruno's on the Boulevard in Jackson Heights on Oct. 21 as the Concerned Alliance for Professional Policing honored Barry Brown, the mysterious "Officer Otto" who helped the Mollen Commission expose rot in Harlem's 30th Precinct.

Brown's entire family was joined by 100 friends of CAPP, an anti-corruption network of savvy former cops. Absent were Manhattan District Attorney Robert Morgenthau and Police Commissioner William Bratton, who condemn Brown's way of breaking the Blue Wall of Silence.

Introduced as truly one of the Finest who'd faced hazards both on the streets and in scandalously flawed NYPD anti-corruption programs, Brown rose to speak. All present knew that his brave efforts had brought him only pain.

Voice quavering, eyes tearing, Brown noted that his situation with Morgenthau was precarious. Days later, he would be told to leave the NYPD and admit he had "testified" in order not to blow his cover with partners who'd framed and abused defendants.

One man did go to prison on Brown's false testimony alone. But Brown says his IAD handlers waved off his concerns about trimming his stories to protect himself. And no one says he robbed or beat people, as some partners did. When Brown told the CAPP audience he would always know he'd done the right thing, some great police experts

joined in a long, moving ovation.

I've witnessed this before, at a lunch honoring Mark Marino, a truth-telling detective smeared by colleagues in Staten Island DA Bill Murphy's detective squad and by the Internal Affairs Division for blowing the whistle. Brown's case is much bigger. Now that this new Frank Serpico is being courted by Hollywood, he should make sure Bratton and Morgenthau's handling of him hits the silver screen.

And what's that handling about? Turf and image. The NYPD is upset that former Deputy Mayor Milton Mollen's investigators had to fake out the IAD to pursue Brown's reports of 30th Precinct horrors that IAD had long ignored.

And Morgenthau is very sensitive about Mollen's findings of widespread corruption the DA missed. After I wrote that here on Feb. 7, Morgenthau called me and recited every indictment he'd brought against a cop in recent memory. He and Bratton are strongly opposed to an independent monitor for police corruption. Turf and image.

It wasn't always this way. When Mollen investigators brought "Otto" to meet then-Commissioner Ray Kelly secretly in a hotel room, the NYPD supported Brown. This year, as Morgenthau, clearly upset by Mollen revelations, contemplated indicting Brown for perjury in trials, Bratton elevated Brown to Deputy Commissioner Jack Maple's office. When CAPP invited Bratton to this month's Brown award, he sent "best wishes for a successful event."

Yet this month, Bratton was shown a draft of a CAPP statement claiming the commissioner was "keenly aware of Detective Brown's contributions and has been personally supportive of Detective Brown throughout his ordeal."

Bratton wrote CAPP back immediately, saying that its statement is "false in its entirety." Why the retreat?

Perhaps Morgenthau's wheels of justice had begun to grind. He told others that Brown never sought out the Mollen people; they induced him to cut a deal to aid a brother in prison. Morgenthau also says he's found undercover cops who didn't test-lie like Brown. (But if they were effective would we have needed a Mollen Commission?)

What should Brown's departure tell other cops? "That you cannot commit perjury and falsely send people to prison," says Morgenthau. CAPP President Peter Mancuso

A cop who went undercover to expose NYPD corruption

agrees but adds: "it's extremely rare to traverse a NYPD career without violating some law or regulation. Most cops who want to report corruption can be held hostage to something in their own past performance. That is the true nature of the Blue Wall of Silence."

Brown may have twisted testimony to keep his cover and catch crooked cops. But by not crediting his courage, even if he broke the law as other cops often do, Bratton and Morgenthau strengthened the Blue Wall, not their reputation