

LAW AND DISORDER: DRUG THUGS OVERRAN FIRM ATTORNEY CONVICTED OF PLOTTING WITH GANG TO MURDER WITNESS

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Timothy Crawford and Associates seemed like a normal law firm. Three partners. Secretaries. Private investigators on hand.

But then a dope gang member barged in and declared himself boss.

The question for the staff: What to do? Call the cops? Get the guy tossed?

It wasn't so simple.

Emanuel Adams was a member of the **Clifford Jones** Organization, a drug-dealing band of thugs that murdered and robbed its way to riches on Detroit's east side in the '80s and early '90s.

"Everyone was afraid," recalled Pamela McAdoo of Detroit, who worked as an investigator at Crawford and Associates.

Adams' hostile takeover in 1992 marked a turning point for the firm of about 10 people in downtown Detroit. Once a place for the law, the office soon became a place for the lawless.

And Timothy Crawford, who had no criminal record, was about to become part of a murderous plot.

Details of the transformation emerged last week in Crawford's criminal trial in U.S. District Court in Detroit.

In that case, Crawford, 47, was accused of helping Adams and other members of the **Jones** Organization plan to kill a government witness. The scheme failed when agents from the federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms picked up the plot on a wiretapped phone call.

On Thursday, a jury found Crawford guilty in the murder plot.

In court, the prosecution and defense jostled over his role, but one thing no one disputed: Other workers inside Crawford's law office were innocent bystanders.

Assistant U.S. Attorney William Soisson downplayed Emanuel Adams' effect on the law staff, suggesting members exaggerated to help Crawford look like an unwilling participant in crime. Soisson said Adams was just a pest.

But former staff members and Crawford's attorney, John Minock, disagreed.

"Pests generally don't kill or threaten to kill," Minock said. "I think that's the understatement so

far of this year."

In testimony and interviews, former staff members said Adams was much more than a nuisance.

"He came into the office and took over," McAdoo said. "Like he was the boss."

Joseph Smith, another of the firm's investigators, said of Adams: "He was like Al Capone."

A new boss

It started in November 1992 after Adams' older brother, Erie Adams, sold three kilos of cocaine to an undercover federal agent. Facing drug conspiracy charges, Erie Adams needed help.

His new girlfriend had a lawyer in the family. She introduced Erie to Uncle Tim.

As an accountant-turned-attorney, Crawford fancied estate and tax law. A recent widower, Crawford put in long hours after forming a law partnership to bring in more diverse cases.

At Crawford and Associates, a load of criminal, civil-rights and personal-injury cases kept the lawyers and staff hustling. The firm was moving from the second floor of the Marquette Building on Congress to the third floor. Bigger offices, nicer furnishings.

By then, Emanuel Adams was in the office several times a week, making sure his brother's \$100,000 in legal fees went to good use, said Soisson, the government prosecutor.

Smith, the investigator, said Emanuel Adams announced his intentions to the staff.

"He would say he's in charge," Smith said. "He's in charge of his brother's case. Anything being said about his brother's case would have to go through him."

Adams showed up whenever he felt like it, even when Crawford was not there. Former staff members said he gave orders and met in the office with sinister friends, including **Clifford Jones**, the leader of the organization. **Jones** and the gang allegedly argued loudly over their murder plot at one of those office meetings.

" **Clifford Jones** could talk about kilos of cocaine and murder like he was talking about boxes of Girl Scout cookies," Minock said.

Like **Jones**, Emanuel Adams was no Boy Scout.

One time "Adams was displeased with Crawford's refusal to follow his orders," Minock said, so Adams put a gun to Crawford's head when his back was turned and said, "It could be that easy."

With the staff on edge, Crawford told Adams not to come by unless he had an appointment, Minock said. Arguing with Crawford on the phone, Adams warned, "You don't want an appointment on the street."

Threats and charges

Because of Adams, D. Todd Williams found his job as a law clerk changing a bit. A student at Detroit College of Law, the would-be attorney enjoyed the freedom at the firm to write briefs and shape legal strategy.

But now, he took on an unexpected responsibility: security. Williams kept the door to the law firm locked.

For good reason, he said. Adams had spats with Crawford over legal tactics and followed up with threats if Adams didn't get his way, former staff members said.

One time, word came that Adams was coming over "to whack Crawford -- he's got a gun," Williams said.

That never happened. And Williams said he didn't take the threats too seriously, writing them off as the braggadocio of the drug culture.

In the end, everyone in the office survived. In late February 1993, a federal roundup of **Jones** Organization members was building steam, and agents arrested Emanuel Adams, preventing him from returning to Crawford and Associates.

He and brother Erie eventually pleaded guilty to various crimes, as did **Jones** and a long line of cohorts. Charges and sentences vary, but since 1993, the government has prosecuted more than 20 members for crimes involving drugs, weapons and violence.

The Adams brothers and **Jones** testified against Crawford last week, saying the attorney worked with them on the plot to murder the government witness. The witness, who was a fellow member of the organization, had set up the drug buy between Erie Adams and a federal agent.

Minock, Crawford's attorney, argued his client was as intimidated as anyone in the law office and had no motivation to get involved in any murder plot.

But the jury decided he was involved. Now the Adamses and **Jones** wait to see whether judges will reward them for their cooperation with trimmed sentences.

In the meantime, attorney Crawford joined the three in the prison system, where he will await what could be a term of up to 20 years. His former staff members carry on without him.

"There was a time when all of us believed that this place was going to last forever," said Williams, who went on from Crawford and Associates and joined the bar in 1995. "It was a normal flourishing law firm, and this was just a speck of the amount of business. It was just one case out of thousands ...

"It's a tragedy. It really is."

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Caption: Photo

Timothy Crawford was convicted of plotting to kill a drug witness.

Emanuel Adams had enlisted Crawford to defend his brother. **Clifford Jones** led the dope gang on Detroit's east side bearing his name.

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