

Acosta The Man Who Let Jeffrey Epstein Walk Free. Why?

Alex Acosta Freed a Sexual Predator and Went to Washington as a Cabinet Secretary. Only in Trump World.



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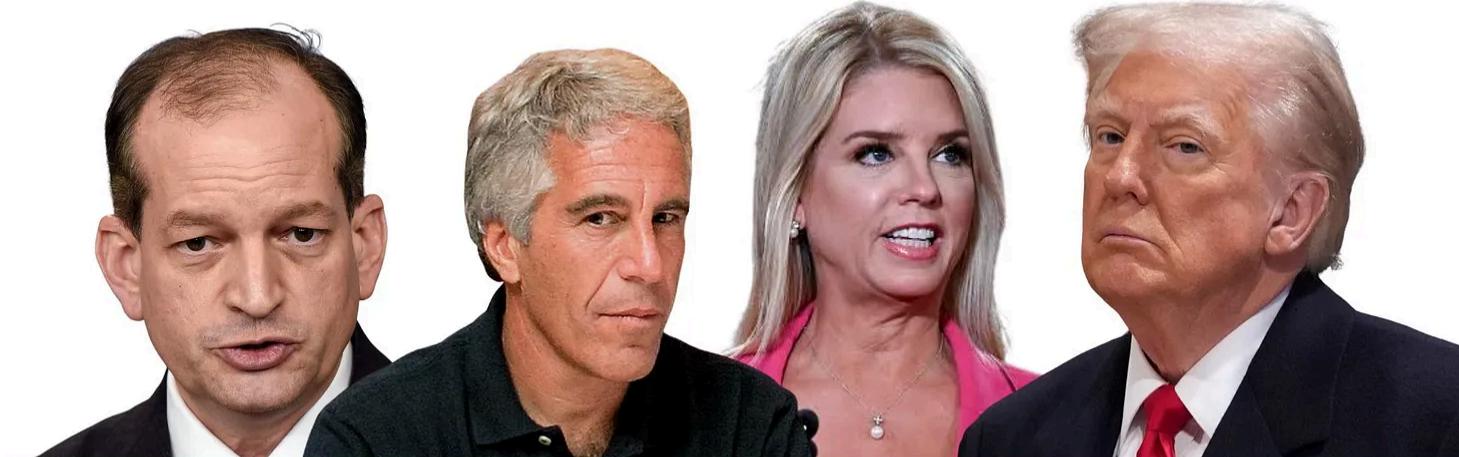
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The fall of Alexander Acosta is like a Greek tragedy, or it is just another Trump guy suffering the fate of many who do his bidding – either or I guess. Here was a man who had scaled every height American meritocracy could offer—Harvard undergraduate, Harvard Law, clerk to a Supreme Court justice, the first Hispanic Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights. The golden boy of the Republican legal establishment, blessed with the kind of immigrant success story that politicians invoke in their most soaring speeches about American opportunity. His parents had fled Castro's Cuba with nothing; their son would become the 27th Secretary of Labor of the United States.

And then there was Jeffrey Epstein and Trump and Bondi - the career equivalent of a car pileup.

It's hard to imagine now, in our post-#MeToo world where predators are finally being held accountable, just how different things were in 2008. The financial crisis was imploding, Obama was ascending, and in Palm Beach, a federal prosecutor named Alexander Acosta was about to make a decision that would haunt him for the rest of his life. He was going to let a serial child rapist walk free.

But I'm getting ahead of myself. To understand how Acosta became the man who gave Jeffrey Epstein the deal of the century, you have to understand how power really works in America—and in Pam Bondi's Florida—and how the very qualities that make someone rise to the top can become the instruments of their destruction.

Acosta's story begins in Miami in 1969, born to parents who had fled the Castro regime with little more than their dreams. His father worked construction; his mother cleaned houses. Alexander was the first in his family to attend college, a scholarship kid who blazed through Harvard's economics program before conquering Harvard Law School. It was a trajectory so perfect it could have been scripted by Frank Capra.

After law school came the requisite power moves: a clerkship with Samuel Alito (telling) when he was still on the Third Circuit, then into the George W. Bush Justice Department as a young prosecutor with serious ambitions. When Bush needed someone to head the Civil Rights Division, Acosta was tapped—the first Hispanic to hold the job, a milestone that seemed to promise even greater things ahead. Supreme Court material, whispered the Federalist Society types who traffic in such predictions.

In 2005, at just 36, Acosta landed the plum assignment: U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of Florida. Miami was a glamorous posting, a place where a young prosecutor could make his name on high-profile cases involving drug cartels, political corruption, and international crime. It should have been his launching pad to even greater heights. Instead, it became the site of his greatest failure.

The case that would define Acosta's legacy began prosaically enough in March 2005, when Palm Beach police received a complaint from the parents of a 14-year-old girl. Their daughter, they said, had been paid by a wealthy financier named Jeffrey Epstein for what he called a "massage." It was the kind of tip that could have gone nowhere—a single allegation against a well-connected man with expensive lawyers. But Detective Joe Recarey of the Palm Beach Police Department was thorough, and what he uncovered was monstrous.

This wasn't a single incident of inappropriate behavior. This was an operation. Epstein, investigators discovered, had created a sophisticated machine for the sexual exploitation of children—and they were children, not teenagers, not young women, but girls so young that in any rational society the evidence alone should have put him away forever. Some were as young as 13 years old, eighth-graders recruited from local high schools, shopping malls, and trailer parks. Others were 14, 15, 16—children who should have been worried about homework and first dates, not being trafficked by a billionaire pedophile.

The recruitment process was as calculated as it was predatory. These girls—and let's be clear about what they were, children whose voices had barely changed, who needed permission slips for field trips—were told they could make \$200 for giving a "massage" to a wealthy man. Two hundred dollars was rent money for some of these families, grocery money, the difference between staying in school and dropping out to work.

Epstein knew exactly what he was doing when he targeted the most vulnerable girls from the poorest communities in South Florida.

Once there, these children—and the evidence shows this in meticulous, horrifying detail—were coerced into sexual acts by a man old enough to be their grandfather. Those who complied were asked to recruit friends, creating a pyramid of abuse that spiraled outward through South Florida's most desperate communities. Imagine being 14 years old and being asked to bring your classmates into this nightmare. The psychological manipulation was as sophisticated as it was evil.

The FBI took over in July 2006, dubbing their investigation "Operation Leap Year." What they found was even worse than local police had imagined, and they had already uncovered enough evidence to fill a warehouse. By 2007, federal investigators had identified more than 30 alleged victims across multiple states—30 children whose lives had been shattered by this man. They had documented a pattern of behavior that stretched back years. They had financial records showing payments to children. They had witness testimony from victim after victim. They had physical evidence, phone records, flight logs, employment records of the recruiters, testimony from staff who had seen the girls coming and going.

They had, in short, everything they needed for what prosecutors call a slam dunk case against a man who had systematically raped children for years. The evidence was so overwhelming that any competent prosecutor could have put Epstein away for life without breaking a sweat.

The federal charges that were being prepared against Epstein were devastating in their scope and severity. The crown jewel was a violation of 18 U.S.C. § 1591—sex trafficking of children. This is the statute federal prosecutors use when they really want to put someone away forever. It criminalizes anyone who "knowingly recruits, entices, harbors, transports, provides, obtains, advertises, maintains, patronizes, or solicits a person under 18 years of age" for commercial sex acts. The maximum penalty is life imprisonment.

But that wasn't all. Prosecutors were also preparing conspiracy charges under 18 U.S.C. § 371, which would have added another 20 years to any potential sentence. Then there were the coercion and enticement charges under 18 U.S.C. § 2422(b) for using interstate facilities to entice minors for illegal sexual activity—another potential decade behind bars.

The 53-page federal indictment that was prepared in June 2007 detailed a criminal enterprise that spanned years and multiple states. It documented how Epstein had built a machine for the abuse of children, with staff who knew exactly what was happening, a network of recruiters who targeted the most vulnerable girls, and a systematic process for exploiting them. When the Southern District of New York finally charged Epstein in 2019 for similar conduct, they described in clinical legal language what amounted to industrial-scale child abuse: "Between 2002 through 2005,

EPSTEIN sexually exploited and abused dozens of underage girls by enticing them to engage in sex acts with him in exchange for money." The 2019 charges carried a maximum combined sentence of 45 years imprisonment.

This was the case that Alexander Acosta decided not to pursue. Think about this. This was a man where the evidence was established that he had systematically abused children—not teenagers who looked older than their years, not young women who might have been able to consent, but middle school children, eighth and ninth graders, girls who were closer to their first period than their eighteenth birthday. Girls so young you'd wonder how they boarded a plane alone, how they got past hotel security, how any adult could look at them and not immediately realize something was terribly wrong.

Instead, in what can only be described as one of the most generous plea agreements in modern American legal history, Acosta negotiated a deal that was so favorable to Epstein it bordered on parody. Rather than life in federal prison for the systematic rape of children, Epstein would plead guilty to two state charges of soliciting prostitution—one involving a minor. Even the language of the charges was a lie: these weren't prostitutes, they were children, and calling them prostitutes was another violation, another way of blaming the victims for their own abuse.

The sentence: 18 months in county jail, of which he served only 13 months. But here's the kicker—he was granted work release, meaning he spent his days at his Palm Beach office and returned to jail only to sleep. So a man who had raped dozens of children was allowed to leave jail every morning and return to the same community where he had found his victims, free to continue building his network, free to continue his predatory behavior.

The federal component of the deal was even more outrageous. Acosta agreed to grant Epstein complete immunity from all federal charges. Not just him, but also "any potential co-conspirators"—a blanket get-out-of-jail-free card that effectively ended the FBI's investigation into what was clearly a network of enablers and participants. Think about what this means: there were people who helped Epstein find these children, people who transported them, people who facilitated their abuse, people who covered it up afterward. All of them walked free because Alexander Acosta decided that protecting Jeffrey Epstein was more important than protecting children.

Perhaps most unconscionably, the deal was kept secret from Epstein's victims—these children who had already been victimized once—until after it was finalized, denying them any opportunity to object or provide input. These girls, some of whom were still children when the deal was struck, had no voice in the process that would determine whether their abuser faced justice. This wasn't just morally reprehensible—it was illegal. The Crime Victims' Rights Act explicitly requires prosecutors to confer with victims about plea agreements. In February 2019, a federal judge would rule that Acosta's office had violated this law, but by then it was too late. The damage was done.

But why? Why would a prosecutor with everything to gain from a high-profile conviction of a wealthy predator instead choose to let him walk? Why would a man who had built his career on civil rights enforcement decide that the civil rights of child rape victims didn't matter? The official explanation, provided years later by the Department of Justice's Office of Professional Responsibility, was that Acosta had concerns about the strength of the evidence and wanted to ensure Epstein served some time rather than risk an acquittal.

This explanation is laughable on its face. The evidence against Epstein was overwhelming—more than 30 victims, financial records, witness testimony, physical evidence, a pattern of behavior documented across multiple states and several years. This wasn't a he-said-she-said case with credibility issues. This was a mountain of evidence against a man who had systematically abused children. No competent prosecutor would have worried about losing this case.

The unofficial explanations are more troubling. According to investigative reporting by Vicky Ward, when Acosta was being vetted for a position in the Trump administration, he allegedly told transition officials that he had been instructed to "leave it alone" because Epstein "belonged to intelligence." Acosta later denied having any knowledge of Epstein being an intelligence asset, but the comment suggests there may have been pressure from above to go easy on the billionaire financier.

There's also the uncomfortable fact that Acosta negotiated directly with Jay Lefkowitz, a partner at Kirkland & Ellis—the same white-shoe law firm where Acosta had previously worked. The appearance of impropriety was unmistakable, the kind of revolving-door favor-trading that makes ordinary Americans lose faith in the justice system.

Whatever the reason, the deal was done, and Epstein was free to continue his predatory behavior for another decade. The children he had already abused were left to struggle with the trauma of not only what had been done to them, but the knowledge that their government had decided their pain didn't matter. Meanwhile, Acosta's career continued its upward trajectory. After leaving the U.S. Attorney's office in 2009, he became Dean of Florida International University's College of Law, a comfortable perch that kept him in the conservative legal establishment while maintaining a relatively low profile.

It's worth noting that during this period, another ambitious Florida prosecutor was climbing her own ladder of success. Pam Bondi became Florida's Attorney General in 2011, just two years after Acosta left his federal post. Her timing was either spectacularly bad or deliberately obtuse. During her tenure from 2011 to 2019, evidence against Epstein continued to mount. The girls he had abused as children were now young women, and they were filing lawsuit after lawsuit challenging the secret plea deal. Flight logs from Epstein's private jet became public, revealing a

network of powerful passengers. New evidence surfaced regularly about the scope of his criminal enterprise.

Yet Bondi's office never pursued charges against Epstein, despite having clear authority to do so under state law. "The federal government and the state government are two different political entities, and both have the power to try the same person for the same crime," explained legal scholar Robert Jarvis. But Bondi, like Acosta before her, chose inaction over justice. She chose to protect a child rapist rather than seek justice for his victims.

For nearly two years, Acosta served competently in a role that kept him largely out of the spotlight. He implemented Trump's deregulatory agenda, rolled back Obama-era labor protections, and generally avoided controversy. It seemed as though he had successfully escaped the shadow of his prosecutorial past.

Then came Julie K. Brown.

The Miami Herald reporter spent months investigating the Epstein case for a series she would call "Perversion of Justice." Published in late 2018, Brown's reporting was devastating in its thoroughness and moral clarity. She tracked down victim after victim—women now, but who had been children when Epstein abused them. She documented the violations of their rights, and laid bare the corruption that had allowed Epstein to escape justice. She let these women tell their stories in their own words, stories of being recruited as children, abused as children, and then abandoned by the justice system that was supposed to protect them.

Most damagingly, she made clear that Acosta hadn't just made a mistake—he had actively worked to conceal the deal from victims and the public. He had prioritized the comfort of a child rapist over the rights of the children he had raped.

The series triggered a cascade of consequences that would end Acosta's career. Public outrage mounted as Americans finally understood what had been done in their name. Victims who had been silenced for a decade suddenly had their stories told with the full weight of serious journalism behind them. Congressional Democrats began calling for investigations. Even some Republicans expressed discomfort with the arrangement.

But it was what happened next that sealed Acosta's fate. On July 6, 2019, federal prosecutors in the Southern District of New York arrested Jeffrey Epstein on sex trafficking charges. The indictment was everything Acosta's 2008 case should have been—detailed, comprehensive, and carrying the kind of penalties that would have ensured Epstein never hurt another child.

The message was unmistakable: Acosta's non-prosecution agreement only bound the Southern District of Florida. Other federal prosecutors were free to bring charges based on the same conduct, and they were prepared to do exactly that. Within days,

calls for Acosta's resignation became deafening. On July 12, 2019, he announced he was stepping down as Labor Secretary.

"I do not think it is right and fair for this Administration's Labor Department to have Epstein as the focus rather than the incredible economy we have today," Acosta said in his resignation statement. Even in defeat, he couldn't bring himself to acknowledge what he had done to those children.

Today, Alexander Acosta remains largely out of public view. The man who once seemed destined for the Supreme Court now serves mainly as a cautionary tale about the consequences of putting institutional loyalty above the protection of children. He has not returned to high-profile practice or government service. The Epstein case appears to have effectively ended his career in public life.

Jeffrey Epstein died by suicide in federal custody on August 10, 2019, just over a month after his arrest. His death ensured that many questions about his network of enablers and participants would never be answered. But it did not end the reckoning for those who had protected him.

As Pam Bondi now serves as Attorney General—a position that gives her oversight of the very Justice Department that once failed Epstein's victims—the connections between past failures and present power become impossible to ignore. The system that allowed Epstein to flourish was not an aberration. It was the system working exactly as designed, protecting the wealthy and connected while abandoning the most vulnerable among us: children who needed protection and got betrayal instead.

Alexander Acosta's legacy is not just one man's catastrophic failure of judgment. It's a window into how power really works in America, and how the very qualities that elevate someone to positions of authority—the willingness to play by the rules, to protect institutional relationships, to prioritize stability over justice—can become the instruments of their moral destruction.

The Harvard-educated prosecutor who once embodied the American Dream has become instead a symbol of American justice deferred and ultimately denied. In choosing to protect Jeffrey Epstein and his network of enablers, Acosta didn't just fail dozens of children who deserved better. He failed the very ideals that had elevated him from the son of Cuban refugees to the heights of American power.

That failure haunts us still. And somewhere, the women who were once those children are still waiting for someone in power to say that their pain mattered, that they deserved protection, that justice should have been done. They are still waiting.

But perhaps the most disturbing pattern emerging from this sordid tale is not the individual failures of Acosta or Bondi, but the common thread that connects them all: Donald Trump. Look at the timeline, and a troubling picture emerges of a man who

has spent decades cultivating relationships with people who would later protect him—and by extension, his associates—from accountability.

In 2013, Trump's foundation makes an illegal \$25,000 donation to Pam Bondi's PAC just as her office is considering whether to investigate Trump University. Bondi drops the investigation. In 2008, Alexander Acosta gives Jeffrey Epstein—a man who would later be described as having a close relationship with Trump—a sweetheart deal that defies all logic and legal precedent. Both Acosta and Bondi later find themselves in Trump's administration or under consideration for top Justice Department positions.

This is not conspiracy theory—this is pattern recognition. Trump has spent his career surrounding himself with prosecutors and law enforcement officials who have demonstrated a willingness to look the other way when it matters most. When he needed protection from fraud allegations, Bondi was there. When his friend Jeffrey Epstein needed protection from child sex trafficking charges, Acosta delivered. When he needed an Attorney General who had already proven her loyalty by covering up for a child predator's enablers, Bondi was available.

The questions this raises are profound and deeply troubling. How many other cases has Trump's network of loyalists buried? How many other victims have been silenced by prosecutors more interested in protecting the powerful than seeking justice? What other crimes have been covered up by people who understood that their careers depended on serving Trump's interests rather than the public good?

Trump's relationship with Epstein is well-documented—the parties, the flights, the mutual praise, the falling out that conveniently preceded Epstein's legal troubles becoming public. But perhaps more significant than their personal relationship is the institutional protection Trump provided through his network of captured prosecutors. He didn't need to pick up the phone to protect Epstein—he had already cultivated a system of loyalists who understood what was expected of them.

Now, with Bondi as Attorney General, that system has reached its logical conclusion. The woman who failed to prosecute Epstein when she had the chance, who took Trump's money and dropped her investigation, now runs the very Justice Department that could finally expose the full scope of the Epstein network and Trump's role in protecting it. She has the power to release files, pursue investigations, and seek accountability for decades of institutional failure. She also has every reason in the world to ensure that never happens.

The Epstein case was never just about one predator and his crimes. It was about a system that protects the wealthy and connected while abandoning the vulnerable. It was about prosecutors who prioritize their careers over justice, politicians who sell their integrity for campaign contributions, and a justice system that works differently for different classes of people.

Donald Trump didn't create this system, but he understood it better than most and exploited it more effectively than anyone. He saw that prosecutors could be bought, not with briefcases full of cash, but with promises of political advancement and the implicit understanding that loyalty would be rewarded while integrity would be punished.

As America grapples with the full scope of institutional failure revealed by the Epstein case, one question looms above all others: What happens when the very people responsible for that failure are now the ones in charge of the justice system? What happens when the Attorney General who failed to prosecute a child rapist is now tasked with overseeing the investigation into that same rapist's network of enablers and co-conspirators?

The children who were victimized by Jeffrey Epstein deserved better from Alexander Acosta. They deserved better from Pam Bondi. They deserved better from a system that was supposed to protect them but instead protected their abuser. Now, as that same system consolidates power under the man who benefited from their failures, those children—now women—are still waiting for justice.

The question is whether they will ever get it, or whether Trump's network of loyalists will continue to protect each other while the victims of their institutional failures remain forgotten. The answer will say everything about who we are as a country and what kind of justice system we're willing to accept.

That failure haunts us still. And it should.

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I have little hope things will change until Americans understand just how the duopoly protects the status quo and has no interest in actually solving problems as it would make their particular brand of power politics obsolete.

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