

Unable to change the system, the judge quits

The Bethlehem Gadfly Jacob Blake, Police August 30, 2020

👉 *Latest in a series of posts responding to the Jacob Blake shooting* 🐉

To make her point, Dantos poses a question to white friends: “How often have you been pulled over for driving away from a curb without using your turn signal?”

The judge says most white people would be surprised at how often the police narrative in the arrest of a young black or brown man begins with that offense. The next sentence on the report usually states that the arresting officer smelled marijuana. Handling these cases has left Dantos increasingly frustrated.



[See John Perez case video here.](#)

6 But then you come in here with this case
7 and proudly display to this community how you talk
8 to people. There were at least nine Allentown
9 Police officers there that night.

10 That is likely 90 percent of the
11 evening's platoon. That is a lot for a 200 man
12 department.

13 You came into that scene like angry,
14 hostile bullies from your first contact with those
15 citizens, and especially Officer Battoni.

16 For not the first time in recent history
17 I became ashamed. I was embarrassed. I was
18 ashamed of the officers and their conduct and their
19 words and actions and I was ashamed of the office I
20 spent 17 years in that they would bring this
21 prosecution.

[See complete transcript of the Judge's remarks in the Perez case here.](#)

from Laurie Mason Schroeder, "Backlash to comments about police brutality cements Lehigh County judge's decision to retire: 'I felt betrayed'," Morning Call, August 27, 2020.

Judge Maria L. Dantos is done.

But the judge is, and always has been, a woman who speaks up.

And what she's said, especially over the last few months, about police brutality and systemic racism in the justice system, has made some people very angry.

“I felt betrayed by people and institutions I had bled for,” Dantos said. “It had become all about me.”

Dantos, who turns 60 next week, said her retirement was on the books long before February, when her post-trial remarks about the prosecution of a Latino man who was accused of fighting with Allentown police officers turned her toxic in many courthouse circles.

John Perez’s violent arrest by Allentown police officers might have gone unnoticed, but for Dantos’ scathing words after his trial.

Moments after she dismissed the jurors who acquitted the 36-year-old Allentown man of resisting arrest and disorderly conduct, Dantos went on a 10-minute verbal tear, calling the cops’ conduct “shameful,” saying they lied on the witness stand and chiding them for fist-bumping each other in the courthouse hallway.

A transcript of the judge’s remarks was published in The Morning Call within hours of the verdict, touching off a fight between the judge and the Allentown Police Department that persists to this day.

“The retribution for me personally has been severe, swift, unwarranted and unacceptable, fueled not by the truth, but by an anger at the speaker of the truth,” she said.

Despite the furor, Dantos said she does not regret a single word of her speech. But there is one maddening question she can’t shake:

“Other than coming after me, what did the Allentown Police Department do about a judge telling the chief that four of your officers committed perjury in this courtroom and conducted themselves in a manner that is inappropriate for a police officer?”

Though the controversy over her comments after the Perez trial have made her last six months on the job less comfortable, Dantos said it’s also given her more freedom to discuss topics like systemic racism in the criminal justice system. A close friend of hers calls it “The emancipation of Maria Dantos.”

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Unable to change the system, Dantos says she’s getting out and making room for the next generation. As she made her final speech in the courthouse last week at the Bar Association ceremony, she urged others to do the same.

“When I started to feel complicit in the flaws in the system that I represent, I could no longer be silent. To quote my man Einstein, if I were to remain silent, I would be guilty of complicity.”