

# CUTTING THROUGH THE NOISE:

## How Private Investigators Can Master Open-Source Data in the Age of Misinformation



My Experience with  
AI Creation of a  
PI Caricature -  
Lessons Learned

The Growing Threat of  
AI to Family Law

The Importance of Avoiding  
Investigative Bias

And SO MUCH  
MORE!

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# CICERO'S FIRST WIN

BY **DANIEL J. DEMERS**

In ancient Rome, few crimes were regarded with greater horror than patricide—the killing of one's father. Roman society was profoundly patriarchal. The *paterfamilias* held near-absolute authority over his household, and the murder of such a figure was considered not merely a personal crime but an assault on the moral fabric of the Republic itself.

The prescribed punishment was as symbolic as it was savage. Known as the “Penalty of the Sack,” it required that the condemned be flogged and then sewn into a leather sack along with a live dog, a rooster, a viper, and a monkey. The sack was then thrown into the Tiber River or into the sea. The animals were not random additions. The Romans associated them with disorder and moral inversion—creatures thought to embody uncleanness, aggression, treachery, and a grotesque parody of human life. The punishment denied the condemned even the dignity of burial, symbolically expelling him from the human community.

It was under the shadow of this terrifying sentence that a young advocate named Marcus Tullius Cicero undertook his first major criminal defense.

Today, Cicero is remembered primarily for his philosophical and political writings—his articulation of natural law, republican government, and civic duty. His works profoundly influenced the framers of our American constitutional system. Yet before he became Rome's most celebrated orator and a statesman of the Republic, Cicero was a 26-year-old lawyer willing to risk his career—and possibly his life—by challenging powerful interests.

The case was that of Sextus Roscius of Ameria, a town in Umbria. In 80 BC, Roscius's father was murdered in Rome while Sextus himself was at the family farm, roughly 50 miles away—a significant distance in the ancient world. Under ordinary circumstances, the geographical separation alone would have raised doubts about his involvement. But these were not ordinary times.

Rome had recently emerged from a brutal civil war. The victor, Lucius Cornelius Sulla, had declared himself dictator and initiated a series of proscriptions—public lists of men deemed enemies of the state. Those whose names appeared on these lists could be executed without trial, and their property was confiscated and auctioned. The process enriched Sulla's supporters and terrorized his opponents.

Although the elder Roscius had not been proscribed during Sulla's initial purge, his name was allegedly added to the proscription lists after his murder. This administrative sleight of hand had enormous consequences. By labeling him as an enemy of the state, his substantial estates were seized and sold at a fraction of their value to politically connected buyers. Chief among them was Lucius Cornelius Chrysogonus, a powerful freedman closely associated with Sulla. Chrysogonus reportedly acquired property worth millions of sesterces for a mere pittance.

Sextus Roscius, suddenly dispossessed of his inheritance, was then charged with patricide—a crime that, if proven, would not only eliminate him but permanently silence any challenge to the dubious property transfer.

Enter Cicero.

Taking such a case in 80 BC was fraught with danger. Sulla was still dictator. His allies were powerful and ruthless. Prosecutors in the case were aligned with influential political figures. A misstep could end a young advocate's career—or worse.

Cicero's surviving defense speech, known as *For Roscio of Amerino*, reveals a carefully calibrated strategy. Rather than directly attacking Sulla, which would have been political suicide, Cicero focused on the corruption of subordinate officials—particularly Chrysogonus. He argued that the elder Roscius had been unlawfully added to the proscription list after his death and that Sextus was being framed to conceal a fraudulent seizure of property.

Cicero portrayed his client as a simple country farmer, devoted to agricultural life and far removed from the intrigues of urban politics. He contrasted this rustic image with the greed and ambition of those who stood to benefit from the conviction. The prosecution, Cicero suggested, relied not on evidence but on intimidation and political leverage.

Significantly, there was no credible proof placing Sextus at the scene of the crime.



Nor was there a convincing motive. Cicero emphasized the implausibility that a son with no demonstrated history of conflict with his father would commit so heinous a crime, especially when others clearly profited from the elder Roscius's death.

The jury—likely composed of senators serving as jurors in Rome's standing criminal courts—acquitted Sextus Roscius. The verdict was a remarkable outcome in a climate where the machinery of power often determined justice.

For Cicero, the acquittal marked the beginning of a distinguished legal and political career. It established him as a formidable courtroom advocate capable of navigating the treacherous intersection of law and politics. It also demonstrated his hallmark skill: attacking corruption without directly confronting the ultimate source of authority.

The dangers of Roman politics, however, never fully receded. Decades later, during the power struggles following the assassination of Julius Caesar, Cicero denounced Mark Antony in a series of speeches known as the *Philippics*. In 43 BC, the Second Triumvirate, which included Mark Antony, declared Cicero an enemy of the state. He was captured and executed at age 63. His head and hands—grim symbols of his eloquence—were displayed in the Roman Forum.

Cicero's first major case remains historically significant for several reasons. It offers a window into the volatility of late Republican Rome, where legal proceedings could serve as instruments of political consolidation. It illustrates how property, power, and criminal accusations were tightly intertwined. And it highlights the enduring role of skilled advocacy in confronting corruption—even when the odds appear insurmountable.

For modern investigators and legal professionals, the case of Sextus Roscius is more than ancient history. It is an early example of how evidence can be overshadowed by political influence, how financial motive often lurks beneath criminal accusations, and how courage in the face of power can alter both a man's fate and a lawyer's destiny.

Cicero's first victory was not merely an acquittal. It was a declaration that even in an age of proscriptions and political terror, reasoned argument and strategic restraint could prevail.

**PI**