The MURDER of POLICY KING TED ROE 57 YEARS AGO TO THE DAY!

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Born Theodore L. Roe in Louisiana to a black mother and an Italian father, and raised in Little Rock, Arkansas, “Ted’s” career in the Policy business began in 1929 when he first hit Chicago. At that time 31 years old, his reputation already preceded him, having had led a colorful life as a notorious hard-nosed bootlegger in Arkansas who was allowed to “pass as a white man” because he was too crazy for the local sheriff to deal with. After that played out, Ted landed in Detroit working for a motorcar company. When that work ran out, he beat it to Chicago’s South Side—Bronzeville, the “Policy Capitol of the World.”

The Policy game had been a staple in Chicago since Policy Sam Young first introduced the gambling game in 1885. At that time it was a simple street corner hustle turned saloon favorite little gambling game. But the game’s popularity grew in popularity and corruption to the point the State of Illinois enacted the Anti-Policy in 1905. By the time Ted Roe hit town in 1929, the game had already emerged from underground status with a life of its own and a long list of men who were getting rich from its proceeds. It was highly volatile time in a wide-open town. Al Capone had just pulled off the St. Valentine’s Day Massacre and a central figure in the Republican protection of the Policy Racket, 2nd Ward Committeeman Dan Jackson of the Jackson Funeral Home, died of heart failure. It was during the aftermath of those events when Ted hooked up with the Jones brothers, who up until this time ran the most profitable Policy station in Bronzeville, out of their ‘tailor shop’ at 4312 S. Indiana Avenue.

Ted Roe was the last reigning boss of what remained of Chicago’s infamous “Big 12 Policy Syndicate” organized in 1932 and solidified with the blessing of the black-vote-energized-Democratic Party” in 1933. The road that led to that founding was bathed in blood, dirty politics and police corruption. The road that led to Ted’s murder was much the same. Ted was the lone holdout in the Mob’s takeover scheme. Nearly every other boss gave in or “retired.” But Ted’s credo was “I’ll die before I let ‘em take me over.” He did.
By then, the Jones boys had the biggest and most profitable operation in town and it was 34-year-old Ed Jones, the eldest of the brothers, who led the charge to organize with the backing of the Democrats and fight the takeover. The problem there was that black Americans, including Policy Kings, were overwhelmingly Republican. But the local Republican Party had proven itself virtually inept at controlling the city’s murderous gang wars between the Italians and the Irish that to date had gripped the city for years. And now the whole mess was spilling over into the black community. With Capone now in prison for tax evasion and his throne up for grabs, it was anybody’s guess how any of it all would play out in this wide open town. At this point, the heads of the Democratic Party—county boss Patrick Nash and Southside boss Joe Geary—cut a deal with Ed Jones, the most influential of all the Policy Kings, to swing the black vote to the Democrats in exchange for the politically sanctioned blind eye to operate.

After consulting with several key operators, a massive voter registration drive was employed with an army of Policy Racketeers, registering new voters at the same time they took Policy bets. It was 1932 and the Great Black Migration was well underway with hundreds of new black citizens arriving in the city daily from the south. FDR was elected President and by the time he took office, Chicago Mayor Anton Cermak was dead—caused by his own betrayal of established party alliances. Ed Kelly was named Mayor, the Kelly-Nash Machine was born and Ed Jones emerged as the King of Policy Kings, head of the statewide Policy Syndicate controlled by the 12 biggest Policy Kings in town.

By now, Ted was already the man in charge of the day to day operations of the Jones organization. It was he who kept the crews in line, a virtual army of Policy racketeers—runners, writers, pickup men and women, collectors, and station operators. To them, Ted was “the judge and the jury” in settling all disputes. Through the years, Ted survived everything from gangland robberies to kidnapping attempts, a relentless string of police raids and federal investigations and held the business together when the writers went on strike. He really dodged the bullet when he became nearly invisible during Chicago’s infamous Big 26 Conspiracy Trial of 1942 in which 26 of the city’s best known Policy racketeers, including a few Outfit gangsters, walked on conspiracy charges after virtually every witness refused to testify. It was a complete embarrassment for the court system.
The Policy business in Chicago employed thousands including bookkeepers and office workers. Lou Lautier of the Negro Newspaper Publisher’s Association (NNPA) once estimated more than 10,000 people worked in “the business.” The first 12 Certified Public Accountants in the country worked in the Chicago Policy business and dozens of lawyers were kept on retainer. The revenues derived from Policy financed banks, insurance companies, restaurants, Provident Hospital, the Negro Baseball Leagues, Burr Oak Cemetery and many other black businesses. Proceeds from the Policy game were helping to create and sustain a whole new post-emancipation social identity with it’s own economic base and business infrastructure. The famous author Richard Wright once noted of the Policy Kings, “they would have been steel tycoons, Wall Street brokers and auto moguls had they been white.” In 1938, Time Magazine declared Bronzeville “the U.S. Center of Negro Business.” The Jones brothers became the richest black family in America, with substantial real estate interests in Illinois, Michigan, Paris and Mexico, and a world famous five-and-dime store of 47th Street in Chicago. But the feds were watching and in 1941 Ed took the heat for his brothers and did 18 months at Indiana’s Terre Haute Prison for tax evasion. Ted got upped to partner in the Jones business and began to play a non-voting role in the syndicate hierarchy.

By now, Ted Roe had become a true man of the people. On one occasion, an old woman ‘hit’ the number with, unfortunately, a gangster-owned wheel but when it was time to payoff, the gangsters refused to pay. Ted to the rescue. Ted and some guys drove over to where the gangsters’ did business and “persuaded” them to pay the woman. It is not known what Ted said or did but the man in question immediately forked over the dough. On many occasions Ted picked up hospital and funeral costs for people who otherwise couldn’t afford to. Rev. Cobb noted: “He fed the hungry, clothed the naked and gave shelter to those outdoors.”

In 1943, Ed returned home from prison with “new friends.” Chief among those new friends, much to the extreme displeasure of Ted, was Sam “Mooney” Giancana, AKA “Momo,” a founding member of the 42 Gang, a notorious Italian street gang that terrorized Chicago in the 1920s and 30s, in prison for bootlegging. From the beginning, Ted warned Ed not to trust Mooney and his warnings came true. With the blessing of then Outfit boss Tony Accardo, Giancana and his cronies soon began a campaign of extortion on the Policy fraternity. Ted Roe once noted: “Mooney tried to shake me down for $4,000... I wouldn't go for that. They (hoods) said they could do us some good and keep us from being exposed in the papers... They were on Jones’ neck ...Jones said they were on his neck...I guess they were trying to drain money from him... Ed Jones was hooked up with ‘em and was supposed to be a close buddy with ‘em. I think George was trying to shift ‘em off on me.”

On that occasion, a ‘physical fight’ between Ted and Giancana broke out in the backseat of George’s car. In 1946, during a period when many of Chicago’s Policy Kings retired or gave in to the Mob’s strong-arm extortion demands, Ed Jones was kidnapped and held for a week.
Bronzeville population decline linked directly to the murder of Ted Roe and the gangster takeover of the Policy business.

Ted negotiated his release for a quarter-million dollars and a supposed agreement to turn over the business. Ed was turned loose in the wee hours of an Englewood morning and days later the Jones family left for their estate in Mexico. A Jones relative once recalled: "When the Jones boys left, all they could grab to take with them was 14 million dollars."

Ted never had any intentions of turning over the business, and he didn’t. So began a war with Giancana that would span six years beginning with the murder of Ted’s partner in a casino. While longtime members of the Policy fraternity “retired” one by one, Ted and veteran crew member Cliff Davis held together what remained of the Jones organization and restored a level of calm to the neighborhood. It was during this period when Ted was named the new boss of the Policy Syndicate, politically sanctioned by Congressman William Dawson, a longtime benefactor of the Policy fraternity. With the nod came a measure of police protection. The Mob called a short-lived truce but the fact is Giancana’s people couldn’t get to Ted for years. Ted kept a full compliment of strapped bodyguards at all times and mastered the practice of switching cars quite often; legend has it that he kept several parked inconspicuously all over the neighborhood. The truce was broken when the Mob began moving in on the King’s operations in the famed Pershing Hotel on Cottage Grove, resulting in the murder of two of the hotel’s owners. Just before everything could turn into the old Capone days, the United States Senate hit town.

In 1950, a United States Senate Committee led by Tennessee Senator Estes Kefauver came to town to investigate ‘Crime and Interstate Commerce.’ The Kefauver Committee heard key testimonies from dozens of hoods, politicians, cops and Policy Racketeers including Ed Jones and Ted Roe. With that, Jones, Roe and Cliff Davis were indicted for Conspiracy to operate Policy. In October of that year, the Mob forced Westside Policy King Big Jim Martin out of business with a botched murder attempt. After that, Ted took control of Big Jim’s operations for a time, until they tried to kill him too.

On Friday June 18, 1951, Ted was driving north on South Parkway when a car with four men claiming to be State’s Attorney police curbed him at 53rd & South Parkway. Roe later told Chuck Davis of the Chicago Defender newspaper:

"When they threw a spot (light) on me about 53rd Street, I figured it might be Park cops, so I pulled over. Then I heard someone yell, 'Hey Roe'... three of them got out of the car and ran up on me yelling 'we're State’s Attorney police'... but I kept yellin' back, how do I know you're State’s Attorney’s men? ...Show me! Show me! ...When I yelled back at them, the one in front snatched open the door and grabbed my coat... Somebody opened the back of the car and tried to shove me in... then I saw the gun... I came up with mine and we started poppin' real good. ... If they want to come over here and get me, I'll take some of them along with me... They're not going to take me. I'll fight as long as I got breath."

In the melee, Ted shot and killed Fat Lenny Caifano, godfather of Giancana’s daughter and brother of Marshall Caifano, Accardo’s man in L.A. The heat that followed the Caifano killing was enormous.
Not only had Ted killed a “made” man but it was also a case of a black man killing a white man. One Chicago cop, Bill Baxter, a longtime bodyguard for the Jones Crew, was implicated and suspected of being at the scene and possibly the real triggerman. Ted eventually walked on a judge’s ruling of self-defense but not before being denied bail seven times. Nash was dead, Kelly was out and Martin Kennelly, a man with no love for the Policy Kings was the new Mayor. Plus, the conspiracy trial was coming up and prosecutors were making near-daily demands for the Policy Kings’ business records. But the King’s crack defense team, however, linked the prosecutors to the Mob causing the most damaging evidence to be thrown out. The Kings walked. Ed went back to Mexico, Ted and Cliff went back to work and Giancana called for yet another short-lived truce. Seven months later, when Ted left home just after 10PM on Monday night August 4, 1952, instead of meeting to discuss the state of play, Ted met with two gunmen who took his life with five shotgun blasts. Ted took his last breath and slumped onto the tree that still stands in front of 5239 S. Michigan Avenue today. Some say Bronzeville died that night too.

Thousands of people lined the streets for Ted’s 81-car funeral procession. At the service, Rev. Keller proclaimed, “We call men like Ted Roe, Kings. He contributed greatly to the hopes and the life of a people.”

In the wake of the Ted Roe murder, the Chicago Outfit assumed full control of the Policy game, the neighborhood and all of the King’s rackets. Black flight among those who could afford to move kicked in fast. Mooney became the “gang-star” of LaCosa Nostra and boss of the Chicago Outfit, until his own people whacked him in 1975, one year after state legislators took the Policy Racket away from the Mob and renamed it the Illinois State Lottery. State Representatives Harold Washington, Lewis Caldwell, Ike Sims (a former Lt. of Big Jim Martin) and others including Chicago City Council members Chris Cohen and Cliff Kelley, waged a strong though failed attempt to legalize Policy and use the revenue to fund public education. In 1985, all lottery proceeds were legislated to the state’s Common School Fund to benefit public schools. By 1996, however, less than a third of that money was spent on public schools and much less on schools in black neighborhoods. In March of 2009, Illinois Education Association President Ken Swanson issued a statement to Governor Quinn declaring that because of, “…the state’s broken school funding system … children in every part of the state are being denied the opportunity for a high quality education due to inadequate funding.” The Chicago Public School System is presently reporting a $475 million dollar deficit. Last year, on September 5, 2008, Illinois Lottery officials reported sales of $2.078 billion for fiscal year 2008—the highest “single-year sales” in the Lottery’s 34-year history. Six out of the top 10 zip codes with the highest lottery sales are located on Chicago’s South Side and are predominantly black populated. Lottery players in 60619 spent $26.6 million while $21.7 million came from 60628. To date, no one has ever been brought to justice for the murder of Ted Roe.

A: Oh, I met policemen that I've seen, and speak to them. I don't stay around with them very long because they're on one side of the fence and I'm on the other.

Q: Do they show any consistent efforts to catch you?

A: Pretty much… told me they were going to get me…

Q: So the point is that you are smarter than the police or you are paying off the police.

A: No, the police is trying to catch me.

Q: You mean they are just not smart enough to catch you?

A: Well, it's been a case of wits against wits so far.

POLICY KING TED ROE, 1950 SENATE HEARINGS