



The Black Mafia: African-American organized crime in Chicago 1890–1960

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Abstract. The historical role of African-Americans in organized crime in the United States has been greatly ignored by the academic community. The research that does exist argues that black Americans played a minor role in the ethnic gambling and vice industries that existed in many American cities at the beginning of the Twentieth Century. This view is supported by the alien conspiracy theory, which argues that the participation of African-Americans and other minorities in syndicated vice and crime followed the decline of traditional Italian American organized crime groups. This research argues that sophisticated African-American organized crime groups in Chicago existed independently of Italian American organized crime and that African-Americans eventually played an important role in the activities of the Chicago Outfit, the traditional Italian American organized group in Chicago.

Introduction

The history of African-American involvement in organized crime in America is confusing to say the least. Though a number of authors have recognized black participation in the policy (lottery) gambling racket, they also argue that African-Americans lacked the political associations and organizational skills necessary to participate in criminal activity on the same level as the once prominent Italian American crime syndicates.¹ For example, Drake and Clayton report that Negroes never got more than “petty cuts” from gambling and vice protection.² In their recent book, *African-American Organized Crime* Shatzberg and Kelly add that:

Throughout the early period of white gang development, African-Americans were not visible in the structure of any significant organized criminal process. Indeed, African-American criminals who entered the twentieth century had no documented history of a leadership role or any significant active affiliation with any organized crime group.³

In a related article, Kelly goes on to state that:

There was in effect no “Mafia” or syndicate structure among these minority groups. They did not evolve around a common code of behavior or

rules governing relationships between and among various groups; the protection they paid to operate in illicit goods and services was not of a magnitude that would have significant political impact; and there were no examples of networks influencing an election, delivering a vote, funding a political candidate, or dabbling in union affairs. The scale of corruption was modest, highly localized and tied to the particular criminal activity involved.⁴

It was not until 1974 that Francis Ianni predicted the emergence of a sophisticated “Black Mafia.” Ianni argued that traditional Italian American organized crime was being displaced by African-Americans, and in some cases, Puerto Ricans.⁵ Ianni’s argument was rooted in ethnic succession theory. Ethnic succession is the process by which different immigrant groups have used the provision of illegal vice activity such as alcohol, prostitution, gambling and narcotics as a means of social mobility.⁶ The Italians, just like the Irish before them, had found jobs, educated their children and moved to the suburbs. The ethnic vice industry that they had dominated for so long was now the prerogative of America’s newest urban immigrants – minority Americans.

Ethnic succession theory, coupled with the almost complete absence of any published account of African-American criminal groups, has led to the popular belief that black Americans did not participate in what came to be known as organized crime in America’s urban centers. This analysis will explore the participation of Chicago blacks in organized criminal activity during the period between 1890 and 1960. This analysis will also demonstrate that African-American vice syndicates existed on the South Side of Chicago, just as Irish and Italian vice syndicates flourished in other segments of the city. Though they did not participate in bootlegging, African-American criminal syndicates ran speakeasies and after-hours nightclubs, and participated in illegal casino and policy gambling for almost fifty years. African-American organized crime differed from other criminal groups only in the fact that they continued to independently exist long after Chicago’s other ethnic-based criminal syndicates fell under the dominance of Italian mobsters.

The reason for the lack of a common understanding of African-American organized crime can best be attributed to the segregated nature of Chicago’s black community during this period in history. Chicago’s South Side was a “black metropolis” that had its own elected officials, business community and underworld that had little interaction with “white” Chicago. Following the example of Chicago School researchers, this analysis will begin with a brief review of black migration and settlement in Chicago.⁷ Understanding the establishment of Chicago’s black community and its relationship to the larger political, economic and social organization of the city is critical to understanding

the development of organized crime among Chicago's black population. The discussion will then center on the history of the ethnic vice industry that flourished in Chicago's African-American community during the first half of the Twentieth Century. Explaining the social history of black involvement in vice activity is essential to establishing the fact that African-Americans formed sophisticated criminal organizations rivaling those of other ethnic groups. Finally, the discussion will focus on the take over of policy gambling by the Chicago Outfit, the traditional Italian American organized crime group in Chicago, and the eventual participation of African-Americans in Italian dominated organized crime.

Black Metropolis

Though Chicago's first permanent resident, Jean Baptist Point de Sable, was Negro, there were few additional blacks in Chicago until 1840 when large numbers of runaway slaves began arriving in the "Windy City."⁸ By the time the Civil War began in 1861, there were approximately 1,000 African-Americans living in Chicago. The first blacks to settle in Chicago were concentrated in the center of the city along the banks of the Chicago River.⁹ From the center of Chicago, the African-American population expanded in all possible directions. Blacks moved southward along State Street in a narrow corridor of land between the Rock Island Railroad and the south side elevated train.¹⁰ Blacks also moved westward along Lake Street and into the Near North Side's "Little Hell" Sicilian community.¹¹ The majority of Chicago's black population moved south where rents were cheapest, near the railroad terminals and Chicago's segregated vice district.¹²

The outbreak of World War I increased African-American migration to Chicago. The war had stopped the flow of European immigrants to America. In addition, many immigrants returned home to fight for their native lands, increasing the need for workers in war related industries. In order to fill this need, Northern industrialists sent labor recruiters to the South inviting African-American workers to come north.¹³ Over 50,000 Negroes poured into Chicago between 1916 and 1920 to fill the need for labor. By 1920, 90% of Chicago's black population was concentrated on the South Side in an area bound by 12th and 39th Streets and Wentworth Avenue and Lake Michigan.¹⁴

Chicago was the midwestern focal point of a great African-American migration.¹⁵ As the terminus for the Illinois Central Railroad, Chicago was the North's most accessible city for southern job seekers from the Mississippi Delta region. The Illinois Central Railroad Station, located at Twelfth and Michigan, was near Chicago's new and expanding South Side black community. Just as Italian immigrants had settled around the Polk Street Sta-

tion, where the railroad brought Italian immigrants from Eastern ports, black migrants sought housing in the area surrounding the Illinois Central Station.

Chicago was also attractive to southern blacks because of the activities of the Chicago Defender newspaper. The Defender was widely read throughout the South and portrayed Chicago as a progressive town that supported a growing African-American community.¹⁶ In addition, Chicago exhibited other “pull” forces, which drew southern migrants including higher paying jobs, schools and an African-American “bright-light” (entertainment) district.¹⁷ Coupled with the “push” forces existing in the South such as discrimination, economic hardship and a depressed cotton market, Chicago became an attractive place for southern blacks seeking a place in the industrial economy.

Chicago’s South Side “Black Belt” grew to be the second largest Negro city in the world; only New York’s Harlem exceeded it in size.¹⁸ This black metropolis was a city within a city, seven miles in length and one and one-half miles wide, where more than 300,000 African-Americans lived. Here were colored policemen, firemen, aldermen and precinct captains, state representatives, doctors, lawyers and teachers.¹⁹ In 1928, Chicago’s black community even elected an African-American congressman. Just as other immigrants before them, blacks moving to Chicago often settled among their own kind. Unlike other immigrants, however, segregation prevented second-generation blacks from moving from Chicago’s African-American communities. In spite of racial prejudice, Chicago was truly a “house for all people” wherein each ethnic group could find advancement through political mobilization, even African-Americans.²⁰ Chicago’s highly organized “machine” politicians were willing to work with anyone who could deliver the vote and contribute financially to their political organization.

Chicago probably boasted a greater degree of black participation in politics than any other city in the nation. In the early days of machine politics, the reward for supporting a successful candidate was jobs and graft. The historical record shows that this applied to the African-American community just as it applied to any other ethnic group. Early Chicago blacks were incorporated into both the First Ward political machine of “Bathhouse” John Coughlin and “Hanky Dink” Mike Kenna and the Second Ward organization of Republican Alderman William Hale Thompson. African-Americans at this time were staunch supporters of the Republican Party – the party of Abraham Lincoln. Later, the expanding African-American community on Chicago’s South Side developed into an independent political force whose endorsement was sought by Republicans and Democrats alike. Chicago blacks learned early that the political life of the community was powerfully allied with the world of the saloon and the gambling house.²¹ And just as in other ethnic communities,

an African-American underworld developed in Chicago's black community to regulate criminal activity.

Black Gamblers and Vice Syndicates

The black community's earliest vice lord was John "Mushmouth" Johnson. Born in St. Louis, Johnson migrated to Chicago in 1875. After working as a waiter in the Palmer House Hotel and as a "floor man" in a downtown gambling hall, Johnson opened his own saloon and gambling house in 1890.²² Johnson's saloon was located in the heart of "Whiskey Row," which ran for two blocks along the west side of State Street, Chicago's main thoroughfare.²³ His gambling place was said to be unique because the players did not gamble against the house.²⁴ They gambled against one another, with the gamekeeper taking a part of every "pot." In 1906, Johnson opened yet another gambling hall, the Frotenac, near Chicago's infamous Levee red-light district. Described as the "Negro Gambling King of Chicago," Johnson never gambled himself. He believed that "a man that gambled had no business with money."

Part of Johnson's secret of success was that he reportedly contributed to both the Republican and Democrat parties alike.²⁵ This arrangement continued until "Hinky Dink" Mike Kenna and "Bathhouse" John Coughlin took control of the First Ward. Through the usual formula of payoffs and delivering votes, Johnson rose to the position of "Negro political boss" in the First Ward organization of "Hinky Dink" and the "Bath," thus ensuring immunity for his gambling operations.²⁶ Johnson was not only the patron of black gamblers, but also held the distinction of being the "man to see" in Chicago's Chinese quarter. He reportedly sold protection to over twenty Chinatown opium dens and gambling halls where *Fan Tan* and *Bung Loo* card games were played.²⁷

In 1903, Chicago Mayor Carter Harrison revoked the license of Johnson's Saloon in Whiskey Row.²⁸ Evidence collected by the city council's "graft committee" described Johnson as a "card cheat" who robbed patrons "stone blind" at his craps, hand faro and draw poker tables. Witnesses told the committee that it was impossible to win at Johnson's gambling hall. Even when a patron did win a pot, every effort was made to "skin" him of his winnings at another game before he left the resort. In spite of an unsavory reputation, Johnson began what became a long-standing tradition among African-American gangsters of contributing to blacks in need. His mother reportedly contributed money on his behalf to the Baptist Church and to help establish a home for African-American seniors.²⁹

Pony Moore was another early black gambler and saloon operator. Moore owned the Turf Exchange Saloon and the Hotel De Moore resort in the Levee district.³⁰ A member of the National Negro Business League, Moore was a

black gambler who was often referred to as the “Mayor of the Tenderloin.”³¹ Fond of wearing diamonds, including one padlocked to the front of his shirt, Moore was the “boss colored gambler and saloon keeper on 21st Street.” Though a colorful figure, who had some influence over the black vote, Moore never rose to a position of political prominence. He is best known for his involvement in one of the Levee’s most remembered incidents. Moore was involved in a scheme to charge Chicago’s infamous Everleigh sisters with the death of Marshall Field Jr., heir to the department store fortune. Though it was commonly believed that Field was killed at the Everleigh bordello, the Everleigh sisters steadfastly denied any involvement in his death.³²

During this same period, Robert T. Motts, Samuel Snowden and William Beasley also opened a tavern and gambling hall in Whiskey Row.³³ In a very short time, their saloon became the resort of choice for black sporting men from Chicago and those visiting from other parts of the country. In 1890, Motts, who had been a porter in Mushmouth Johnson’s saloon, followed the migration of Chicago’s black community and opened a tavern and gambling hall further south on State Street in the Second Ward.³⁴ Bob Motts not only became known as a good “pay-off” for the police, but also worked to organize the black vote.³⁵

Motts reportedly paid saloon patrons and local women \$5.00 a day to assist in political canvassing. In return for his activities, Motts was able to place some forty black women in jobs at the city recorders office. He also ran a theatre named the Pekin in connection with his saloon. The Pekin Theatre provided family entertainment and was the only black owned theatre of its kind.³⁶ In return for his political activities, Motts was able to obtain jobs for Chicago blacks and helped elect his protégé Edward Green to the Illinois legislature. Motts remained a political power in Chicago until his death in 1911.

Another saloonkeeper involved in politics at this time was Henry “Teenan” Jones. Born a slave in Alabama, Jones had been in the gambling business in Chicago since 1876.³⁷ In 1895, he opened a gambling house in Chicago’s prestigious Hyde Park community that included dice, roulette and poker. His Lakeside Club, as it was called, catered primarily to white Chicagoans.³⁸ Jones also ran two other gambling houses that catered primarily to blacks. One was located in the Windermere Hotel in Hyde Park and the other at the Chicago Beach Hotel. In 1910, a community organization known as the Hyde Park Protective Association, fearing that social resorts that catered to blacks would cast blight on the entire community, forced Jones to close both his saloon and his gambling halls.

After leaving Hyde Park, Jones opened two clubs in the black Second Ward known as the Elite Number One and the Elite Number Two cafes.

Lomax described the Elite Number One as one of the most famous clubs in American history.³⁹ The Elite Number One was one of the first cabarets to feature jazz music. The Elite Number Two was also well known. It became infamous as one of Chicago's most notorious "black and tan" resorts. During the mayoral administration of Carter Harrison II (1911–1915), an order was issued to close all gambling houses in Chicago except those in black communities. As a result, many whites began to frequent black taverns including those owned by Jones. Additionally, Jones ran a column in Chicago's African-American Defender newspaper entitled "Reminiscences From An Old-Timer's Scrapbook."

While in the Second Ward, Jones became involved with black Second Ward Alderman Oscar De Priest. In 1916, De Priest organized a "colored voters club" that demanded contributions from local gamblers in order to support upcoming elections.⁴⁰ "King Oscar," as the Chicago Tribune referred to De Priest, ran what was described as his "Tammany Club" from a real estate office at 35th and State. In 1917, De Priest was charged with conspiracy to permit gaming in the Second Ward by Cook County State's Attorney Maclay Hoyne.⁴¹ Under pressure from the State's Attorney, Jones became one of the chief witnesses against De Priest.⁴²

Jones told investigators that De Priest received a monthly tribute of thousands of dollars from gambling houses that he protected in the "Black Belt."⁴³ Jones also testified that he had personally paid \$2,800 in bribes to De Priest during a four-month period to protect his gambling clubs.⁴⁴ Represented by none other than the famous attorney Clarence Darrow, De Priest responded that the money he had received from Jones represented campaign contributions and not graft.⁴⁵ Chicago's black population resented De Priest's indictment and held a prayer meeting on Chicago's courthouse steps.⁴⁶ Because vice and corruption were common throughout Chicago, the black community felt that enforcement targeted at the black belt was unfair.

The trial of city councilman De Priest clearly demonstrated that an African-American vice syndicate existed in Chicago and that payoffs from vice entrepreneurs to public officials were just as common in the black community as they were in other parts of Chicago. Black officials followed the pattern established by earlier machine politicians of collecting money from illegal operations in order to fund political activities. De Priest himself testified that he had fought the opening of the Beaux-Arts black and tan club because his political enemy Dan Jackson owned it.⁴⁷ De Priest feared that Jackson would use gambling proceeds to fight him in his reelection bid.

The onset of prohibition in 1920 further intensified vice activity on Chicago's South Side just as it did in other parts of the city. Thirty-Fifth Street, between State and Calumet, the bright-light area of the black community,

became a congestion of sawdust-floored gin mills fuming with jazz music.⁴⁸ Here were found cabarets, nightclubs, gambling halls, prostitution, policy kings and black and tan clubs. Black and tan clubs provided locations for the intimate association of blacks and whites. Black men could be seen with white women and white men with black women. Though the Chicago Commission on Race Relations reported that mixed couples only accounted for 10% of the patronage, the mingling of the races was used to characterize all associations there.⁴⁹

The popularity of black nightclubs among all racial groups grew during prohibition because of the onset of the jazz age. In fact, Chicago residents could often be heard stating that they were “going slumming” referring to visiting bars and nightclubs in the black community.⁵⁰ Imported from New Orleans, the new “jass” music was renamed “jazz” when it was introduced in Chicago. This new name was reportedly derived from a slang term that was used to describe fornication in Chicago’s 22nd Street brothels. Allsop argues that the popularity of jazz was a by-product of prohibition.⁵¹ The underworld’s speakeasies, together with legitimate dance halls, thrived on customers with flasks in their hip pockets and provided a booming market for this new music.

South State Street, in the heart of the black community, was lined with cafes where jazz was played – the Elite, the Pekin, the Dreamland, the Panama, the Rose Garden, the Edelweiss, the Open Air Gardens and the Verdome and Lincoln Theaters.⁵² State Street from 26th to 39th was referred to as “The Stroll.”⁵³ African-American poet Langston Hughes described South State Street as:

A teeming Negro street with crowded theatres, restaurants and cabarets. And excitement from noon to noon. Midnight was like day. The street was full of workers and gamblers, prostitutes and pimps, church folks and sinners. The tenements on either side were very congested. For neither love nor money could you find a decent place to live. Profiteers, thugs and gangsters were coming into their own.⁵⁴

Kelly argues that white gangsters ran the better-known nightclubs in many African-American communities.⁵⁵ This was not the case in Chicago. For example, Kenny writes that a few of Chicago’s South Side clubs were owned by whites who hoped to attract a primarily white audience with African-American entertainment. However, the leading clubs in which famous black ragtime jazz musicians played were owned and/or managed by black Republican Party organizers, who used the music to attract the attention of potential black voters.⁵⁶

Using Burgess' Concentric Circle Theory as a model, Frazier argued that Chicago's South Side black community expanded southward and, through a process of residential selection, different elements became segregated in different zones within the community.⁵⁷ As such, Frazier divided Chicago's black belt into seven zones. He argued that the vice activity centered around Thirty-Fifth and State in the heart of Zone III, attracted the Bohemian, the disorganized and the vicious elements of the black world thus affecting community life. African-American community leaders stated that the attractions of South State Street were a threat to the moral fiber of the black community.⁵⁸ They also argued that the "gay life" – hanging out on street corners, throwing loud parties, dressing in the latest *risqué* fashions and enjoying the bright lights of the city's night life – was giving Chicago blacks a bad name.

Many South Side Chicago blacks lived in close proximity to the Levee, which also contributed to vice conditions in the area. After the break-up of the segregated vice district in 1912, many prostitutes continued to operate clandestinely in the near South Side, which was predominately black by this time. For example, the Chicago Daily News reported that almost 3,000 women engaged in prostitution in the area between 16th and 26th Streets, from Stewart to Lake Michigan.⁵⁹ Landesco also provides evidence that a small number of Levee regulars reestablished their saloons in the area.⁶⁰ Both vice entrepreneurs and the poor alike were attracted to slum areas where the rent was low and the community was not organized to prevent criminal activity. In addition, the corrupt power of the Second Ward allowed vice operations to continue unmolested. As a result, Chicago's black population became commonly associated with vice activity.

By 1921, Chicago's South Side black community was struggling with an epidemic of gambling and commercialized vice. An exposé by the Chicago Daily News revealed that gambling houses, disorderly resorts, booze-selling cabarets and saloons flourished in many parts of the Second Ward and were overflowing into parts of the Third and other neighboring Wards.⁶¹ The Daily News reported that all were operating under the protection of political leaders allied with city hall and that Dan Jackson was the "general manager" of Chicago's South Side black vice syndicate.

Daniel McKee Jackson was the most powerful African-American vice-king that the black community in Chicago has ever known. Jackson, a college graduate, came to Chicago from Pittsburgh in 1892. Working with his father, Emanuel and brother, Charles, he opened a funeral home in the Second Ward. Jackson, a friend of Bob Motts, married Motts' sister Lucy and inherited Bob's estate after his death. Ostensibly an undertaker, Jackson ran several gambling halls including one in his undertaking parlor and another in the

Pekin Theatre building. Jackson at one time was also a candidate for state representative, but was never elected to the office.⁶²

Jackson's vice syndicate collected an estimated \$500,000 each year from gamblers and booze sellers in the Second Ward alone.⁶³ Graft from the neighboring Third Ward and the adjoining districts was placed at an additional \$200,000. Carter Hayes, Jackson's secretary, collected the protection money, which was reportedly 40% of the net proceeds of each illicit game. In addition, many poolrooms, saloons and South Side cabarets were operating craps games, poker games and blackjack while selling illegal whiskey and gin and were all expected to contribute to Jackson's syndicate.

Jackson was reportedly summoned to Chicago's City Hall during the newspaper investigation and ordered to close all South Side gambling houses.⁶⁴ After a two month respite, Jackson began making the rounds of South Side gambling haunts assuring players and operators alike that things were getting back to normal.⁶⁵ In fact, many of the gambling houses that were listed by the Daily News were already back in business. When questioned about the crackdown, Jackson reportedly told a crowd on a South Side street that "The Daily News nor anybody else will ever stop my handbooks from operating."⁶⁶

The Chicago Daily News exposé proved the strength of black organized crime in Chicago and revealed intimate details about the connection between vice and politics. Dan Jackson told his followers that if Mayor Thompson paid any attention to the Daily News exposé, he would quit politics.⁶⁷ Jackson's Third Ward lieutenant, Sam Elliot, told police detectives who had raided the Lorraine Gardens that he "kicked in" \$3,200 to Mayor Thompson's last campaign with the understanding that he could run "wide open" if Thompson was elected. Elliot threatened arresting officers that they would be transferred "out in the sticks" before they had a chance to prosecute his people because he was "strong down in city hall."

On June 5, 1922, the Chicago Daily News reported that Dan Jackson had opened the "biggest gambling house" in Chicago.⁶⁸ The opening of this gambling hall marked the return of Jackson to power. In addition, there were at least twelve other gambling houses operating under Jackson's supervision that paid as much as 50% of their profits to Jackson's syndicate. The Chicago Daily News reported that the lawless days of the famous (Levee) red-light district, where the professional gambler prospered under the approving eye of the police, have been restored in Chicago's South Side black belt by the Thompson-Lundin political machine.⁶⁹

One of the major reasons for the success of Chicago blacks in controlling vice and gambling in their community was their political connection with William Hale Thompson, Republican mayor of Chicago. Thompson had a long history of involvement with the black community. Thompson's first polit-

ical office was that of Alderman of the Second Ward. He was elected to this position in 1900. The Second Ward, located directly south of Chicago's central business district, contained the largest concentration of blacks in the City. Blacks in 1900 comprised 16.6% of the ward's population and 1.9% of the city's total.⁷⁰ By 1919, the Second Ward was over 70% black of whom 72% were eligible to vote.⁷¹ Citywide, Thompson received 78% of the African-American vote in the 1919 mayoral election.⁷²

Thompson treated blacks more equitably than any other mayor of the era and delivered jobs to African-Americans in return for their political support. In fact, so many black Americans were appointed to city jobs during his first term as mayor that Thompson's opponents began calling city hall "Uncle Tom's Cabin."⁷³ Chicago blacks hailed Thompson as the "Second Abraham Lincoln." Deprived of the vote in the South, Chicago's new immigrants saw the ballot box as a symbol of their new life in the North and rushed to support the local Second Ward politician who had treated them in a respectable fashion. Thompson recognized the right of blacks to self-determination and assisted them in electing African-Americans to local offices. He also recognized that black gamblers supported local political officials just as their white gambling counterparts supported political leaders in other areas of the city.

The Office of the State's Attorney, at the prodding of the Juvenile Protective Association, began another investigation of vice conditions on Chicago's South Side in 1923.⁷⁴ Once again, the word was passed down from City Hall to close all disorderly resorts, illegal cabarets and gambling houses. The only one found to openly disobey the edict was Dan Jackson. His "Racetrack" resort on South State Street, one of the biggest gambling houses in the city, continued to operate without interference.

The remainder of Jackson's syndicate did not stay out of business for long. William Bass, operator of two gambling houses, complained to the Chicago Daily News upon reopening his resort that the upcoming 1923 mayoral election had caused the hand of the "graft collector" to weigh heavily on his business.⁷⁵ Bass stated that he was normally required to surrender 20% of his profits as graft. The approach of the mayoral election had caused the toll to increase to 25%. The stakes were so high in the 1923 election that Jackson himself was accused of invading several Second Ward polling places intimidating voters, election judges and police officers alike.⁷⁶

William Hale Thompson did not seek reelection in 1923. As a result, Jackson had supported William Dever against the Republican candidate at the urging of democratic politicians who believed they could intercede with Dever to protect Jackson's gambling operations. The resulting election of Dever, however, brought Jackson's protection syndicate to an end.⁷⁷ In spite of the efforts of Democratic leaders who had sought Jackson's political sup-

port, he was not allowed to conduct his rackets as long as Dever was mayor. When his advances were spurned by the Dever administration, Jackson and his supporters threatened to “put the politicians out of business,” which in fact they did when in 1927 South Side blacks helped defeat Dever and returned “Big Bill” Thompson to the mayor’s office.⁷⁸

The reelection of Thompson was the signal for the reopening of South Side gambling dens. Dr R.A. Williams, opponent of Oscar De Priest for Republican Committeeman in the Third Ward, charged that gambling and the policy racket had become a plague on the black community.⁷⁹ Men and women hardly able to support their families spent their last dimes on policy. The epidemic of policy gambling that was the scourge of Chicago’s black belt was the result of a political deal whereby Dan Jackson overwhelmingly delivered the African-American vote to William Hale Thompson. In the 1927 mayoral election, 91.7% of blacks in the Second Ward voted for Thompson.⁸⁰

Jackson had proven the power of the black vote. He had “swung” the last two elections for mayor.⁸¹ The price Jackson demanded was the privilege to operate gambling in the Second and Third Wards. Chicago’s black belt gamblers were not happy with the return of Jackson.⁸² Under Jackson, the district had been drained financially. Though gamblers were allowed to operate openly, they were compelled to pay out more, under the “iron heel” of Jackson, for political and police protection than they had taken in. Much of the money was used to support Thompson’s “America First” politicians who were running in the April 1928 primary elections.⁸³ One report indicated that as much as \$1,000,000 was collected.⁸⁴

The return of Thompson to the Mayors Office in 1927 brought back his “wide-open town” policy. The reelection of Thompson also brought Dan Jackson back to the height of power. In fact, Thompson had appointed Jackson as the Acting Republican Committeeman of the Second Ward.⁸⁵ He was formally elected to this position in 1928.⁸⁶ Governor Len Small also appointed Jackson to the Illinois Commerce Commission. Jackson died in 1929. He was remembered as being “close mouthed and canny in politics and open handed and generous to the less fortunate among his fellow Negroes.”⁸⁷ Gosnell reports that Jackson also donated money to the NAACP and other charities. After the death of Dan Jackson, no one man ever again rose to the position of leader of Chicago’s African-American underworld.⁸⁸

At the time of Jackson’s death, an indictment charging his involvement in gambling and political fraud was pending against him. Dan Jackson and Oscar De Priest, described as the “Thompson” leaders in the Second and Third Wards, were charged with accepting tribute from vice resorts in order to fund the primary campaign of State’s Attorney Robert Crowe.⁸⁹ Two members of Jackson’s political organization were also charged with alter-

ing ballots in the 60th precinct of the Second Ward in favor of Thompson's "America First" candidates.⁹⁰ According to the grand jury report, blame for the gambling ring was to be placed on the Thompson regime.⁹¹

By 1931 most Chicagoans had lost their faith in Mayor Thompson. Many Chicago communities had become rampant with prostitution, gambling, murder and flagrant lawlessness because of the mayor's "wide-open" town policy. Harry Lewis, state central committeeman from the First Congressional District, declared that Dan Jackson and his supporters had strangled the financial life of the black community through their merciless methods of syndicating vice.⁹² Though Thompson treated his black followers more fairly than they had ever been treated before, he had allowed the African-American community to be corrupted, and placed blacks, who were connected to the underworld of vice and gambling, into power.⁹³ Even so, he did not lose African-American support in the 1931 election. Thompson lost forty-five of fifty Chicago wards to Anton Cermak. The five wards won by Thompson all had a large African-American population.⁹⁴

Cermak spared no time retaliating against the Chicago's South Side black Republican stronghold.⁹⁵ On taking office, he fired 2,260 temporary city employees many of who were black.⁹⁶ Cermak also instructed the city police force to attack black controlled gambling and policy operations.⁹⁷ Cermak recognized that the black gambling overlords were the source of the money that greased the South Side Republican machine. Cermak also put enforcement pressure on the illegal activities of the Capone mob. Al Capone also had been a major supporter of Thompson.

The pressure was kept on South Side gamblers until they saw the error of their ways and left the Republican Party to join Cermak's Democratic fold. The new setup called for graft to be paid to Cermak's personal representative William R. "Billy" Skidmore. An investigation conducted by George Lambert of the Property Owners Improvement Association, which represented 1,600 African-American taxpayers, revealed that every Friday Ily Kelly, representing gamblers and the policy wheel syndicate, delivered \$9,500 to Skidmore.⁹⁸ The graft payments were made at the Lawndale Scrap Iron and Metal Company, a junkyard on Chicago's Near South Side.

Cermak traveled to Miami in February 1933 to confer with president elect Franklin D. Roosevelt. An attempt on the life of the president left Cermak mortally wounded. After the death of Cermak, Edward Kelly became Mayor of Chicago. Kelly took a different approach to Chicago's black community and allowed a return to gambling and vice on the city's South Side.⁹⁹ Evidence that the leading figures of the black underworld were supporting the Democratic Party surfaced when the Jones brothers, who were major policy gamblers, began to actively participate in Third Ward Democratic politics. In

fact, one gambling organization dispatched 1,500 policy writers to canvass for the Democratic ticket.¹⁰⁰ Kelly treated the black community much like “Big Bill” Thompson had. “Big Red,” as Chicago blacks called the mayor, appointed African-Americans to city jobs and public office and was generally known as a “friend of the race.”¹⁰¹

Mark Haller recognized the movement of Chicago blacks to the Democratic Party in an earlier study.¹⁰² Haller argued that the development of black gambling in Chicago passed through three stages that reflected the development of black politics in the city. During the first stage, blacks worked within existing political structures such as in the First and Second Wards. During the second stage, blacks gained control of the Republican Party in the Second and Third Wards and ran their own political organizations. The third stage of black politics began with the election of Cermak and the eventual migration of black political organizations into the Democratic Party in Chicago.

The historical record suggests that the nature of vice activities also changed during each of these periods. During Haller’s first period, saloon gambling appeared to be the most important type of vice activity. Black dominance of the Second and Third Wards during Haller’s next period coincided with prohibition and the jazz age. Speakeasies and jazz clubs were added to the already existing gambling racket. During the third and final period, policy gambling eclipsed the importance of all other forms of vice. Because of its popularity, policy gambling became the most important form of vice activity on Chicago’s South Side.

Policy

Policy is the name given a lottery gambling system that was once common in black communities. Players, who wager a small sum of money, select combinations of three numbers. A drum or “wheel” is used in which seventy-eight capsules containing numbers from one to seventy-eight are whirled about rapidly. A blindfolded person selects twelve numbers at each of the drawings, which are held as many as three times a day. If the holder of a ten-cent ticket found that all three of his numbers were drawn, he had a “gig” and won ten dollars. If only two of the three numbers appeared, he had a “saddle” paying forty cents or higher in ratio to the amount bet. The odds of winning were estimated to be 7,878 to one.¹⁰³

Three men are credited with bringing policy to Chicago: a white man named Patsy King, an oriental named “King Foo” and Sam Young, a black. Patsy King, who owned the Bucket Shop Saloon, was believed to be a Mississippi riverboat gambler who had migrated to Chicago at the time of the 1893 World’s Fair.¹⁰⁴ King was reportedly a genius gambler who invented

his own games of chance and had grown rich on the proceeds. He reportedly gave the idea for policy to a porter in his saloon named Sam Young. With the financial backing of King, Young opened a small policy wheel in downtown Chicago.¹⁰⁵ Young also became a bail bondsman and developed strong political ties. His ability to aid minor gamblers led to his acquiring a reputation as a political “fixer” throughout the black community.

John “Mushmouth” Johnson was probably the first important black gambler to see the potential of policy.¹⁰⁶ Johnson entered the policy racket during the late 1890’s in partnership with Patsy King and King Foo. In 1903, the Chicago Record Herald reported that Johnson and another man named Tom McGinnis owned two policy companies, the “Phoenix” and the “Union,” which were headquartered at Johnson’s Tavern.¹⁰⁷ McGinnis, a former potato peddler, also owned a saloon and gambling hall on South State Street called the Berlin Café.¹⁰⁸

Johnson reportedly earned the disfavor of gambler Bob Motts by refusing to cut Motts into the policy game.¹⁰⁹ In retaliation, Motts used his association with Illinois Congressman Edward Green to pass anti-policy legislation in 1905. This law was viewed to be exceedingly drastic in that it targeted all persons involved in the game from the policy racketeer to the caretaker of the building in which the gambling was conducted.¹¹⁰ The new pressure on policy forced Young and others to temporarily withdraw from the game.

In 1915, Young reentered the game introducing policy gambling along South State Street in the black community. His betting slips bore the name “policy” and he was his own “runner” (collector of bets). A waitress from the Pullman Restaurant at 31st and State reportedly pulled the numbers out of a derby hat while standing under the elevated train station at that location. Sam Young is remembered as the “father of the game.”¹¹¹ His policy wheel was named the Frankfort, Henry and Kentucky.¹¹² “Policy Sam,” as Young became known, later explained the idea of the numbers game to tavern owners Julius and Caesar Benvenuti, who then formed Chicago’s first well-regulated policy wheel called the Blue Racer and installed “Policy Sam” as its headman. Sam Young supplemented his policy income by supervising games of chance at street carnivals held on vacant lots and back streets in the Second Ward and picnics at Golden Gate Park in Robbins, Illinois.¹¹³

The success of policy attracted others to the game, but policy remained a small business until the beginning of the First World War.¹¹⁴ Sam Preer who operated the De Luxe Café, William “Bill” Bottoms owner of the Dreamland Café and Virgil Williams owner of the Royal Gardens all took a fling at operating the game. Williams was somewhat of a showman and the most successful. He advertised his big hits, which caught the attention of housewives who were soon trying their hand at the numbers game. The game soon caught

on and wheels were springing up everywhere throughout the South and West Sides of Chicago.

In 1923, with the financial backing of Julius Benvenuti, "Policy Sam" began another wheel titled the Interstate Springfield Policy Company, which became one of the largest operating in Chicago.¹¹⁵ The Interstate Springfield lottery employed more than 200 policy writers and solicitors who collected bets from ten cents to \$100 throughout the South Side. In 1923 the Chicago Daily News reported that Dan Jackson, "chief graft collector" of Chicago's South Side black district, had attempted to gain a monopoly on policy gambling and that Jackson had become a partner in the gambling business with Sam Young.¹¹⁶

By 1928, it was estimated that twenty independent policy operators were required to pay Jackson \$300 a week for the privilege of operating their wheels.¹¹⁷ William Dawson, black candidate for congress and a vigorous opponent of Mayor Thompson, estimated that \$1,000,000 a month was being wagered with the policy barons with less than one percent of the sum being returned to players in the form of winnings. Some of the largest policy wheels operating openly without police interference on Chicago's South Side were the Kentucky Derby, the East and West, the Monte Carlo, the Interstate-Springfield, the Black Gold, The Oriental, the Iowa and Wisconsin and The Tia Juana.

Walter Kelly, owner of the Tia Juana policy wheel, was particularly important to the policy racket in that he had taken over the position of chief graft collector after the death of Dan Jackson. Kelly maintained an office on South State Street under the auspicious name of Kelly and Washington Brokers.¹¹⁸ Policy drawings were held there three times a day. Traffic was so dense at noon in the vicinity of Kelly's office that a police officer was stationed directly in front of the building to direct traffic. Passing through the front room of the building, one recognized a normal business office. Stepping into a rear office, however, one observed a row of slot machines, a short order restaurant and rows of desks where policy writers could make out their reports.

Sometime around 1935, Walter Kelly extended his policy operations to East Chicago and Gary, Indiana.¹¹⁹ He later attempted to further extend his activities to Hammond and planned to go into the slot machine business.¹²⁰ He also became involved in Lake County, Indiana politics and had donated over \$200,000 to local political campaigns. Kelly's rising importance placed him in direct competition with the Capone mob, which also had a presence in these areas. On January 6, 1939, Kelly was murdered in Chicago. The suspect was a Capone gangster known only as "Cicero Steve." More than 5,000 people turned out for Kelly's funeral. Following the tradition of earlier black gamblers, he was eulogized as a "man who had fed the hungry and

clothed the needy.” One Christmas, he reportedly gave away over \$15,000 to those in need.¹²¹

Ily Kelly, the brother of the murdered Walter Kelly, became the new link between the political bosses and the policy fraternity.¹²² It was now Ily Kelly’s job to collect the graft from policy operators before each election. For his efforts, he was also given the privilege of operating his famous Keno (similar to bingo) game in the Royal Circle building at 51st and Michigan. Keno, as his emporium was called, was among the most extravagant gambling places ever to grace the South Side of Chicago. In addition to Keno, Kelly’s gambling hall contained roulette wheels, blackjack tables and a dice pavilion.

From his office at the Keno club, Ily Kelly reportedly gave nightly handouts to police officers who stood in line waiting for their payoffs.¹²³ He also gave generously to ward bosses, and on Election Day toured voting precincts with political leaders to see how the vote was going. Kelly remained policy’s chief graft collector until his health gave out at which time the mantle was passed to “Big Ed” Jones, owner of the Harlem, Bronx and Rio Grande policy wheel.¹²⁴ Jones also operated the Golden Tavern café at 504 E. 47th Street where he ran a racehorse book, a craps game and a Keno operation.¹²⁵

A gambler by the name of Ezra Leake reportedly sold the idea of policy to Ed Jones and his brothers, George and McKissic. The Jones brothers had ran a taxicab stand in Evanston, Illinois.¹²⁶ They had moved to Evanston from Vicksburg, Mississippi with their father who was the pastor of an Evanston Baptist church.¹²⁷ It was Ed Jones who greatly popularized the play. Jones, a Howard University graduate, hired a vast army of pick-up men and beautiful girls to operate his policy stations. His Bronx wheel lured as many as 1,000 people to its drawings.¹²⁸ Blackjack, chuck-a-luck, craps and other forms of gambling served as added attractions at these events.

“Big Ed” Jones eventually became the spokesman for twelve policy wheels operating on Chicago’s South Side. It was reported that the protection fee was \$250 per week per wheel.¹²⁹ The more than 200 handbooks operating in the area also paid \$150 a month. Police officers were given a printed slip, which listed the “Favored Few,” a group of policy wheels not to be disturbed. Vice activity had migrated south along State Street. Kelly’s Keno Club and Jones’ Golden Tavern were not in “Big Bill” Thompson’s old Second Ward but in the Fourth. In 1933, Chicago’s South Side was described as a veritable “Monte Carlo” of graft, vice and corruption. The headlines in the Defender on 24 September 1932 stated “Rackets Now Flourish in All Quarters.”¹³⁰

In 1938, the Chicago Daily News named the Kings of policy in Chicago.¹³¹ They included Julius Benvenuti who owned the Red Devil and Goldmine wheels in addition to the Interstate Springfield Lottery. Also named were the Jones Brothers who owned twelve gaming halls plus their policy wheels. Ily

Kelly was named as the owner of the Lucky Strike, Green Dragon, Old Reliable, Streamline, Cyclone and the Black and White policy wheels in addition to the Tia Juana. Charles Farrell was listed as owning the Gold Shore and North Shore wheels, and Julian Black the North and South and East and West policy companies. Other wheels owned and operated by members of the policy syndicate included the Cremo, the Prince Albert, the Airplane, the Old Gold and the Black Gold.

The Chicago Daily News estimated that \$18,000,000 a year was being bet with Chicago's 38 policy wheels.¹³² The source of these funds was believed to be salary, welfare and pension money destined for thousands of WPA workers and their children. A survey conducted by the Chicago Daily News of South Side businesses estimated that 20% of all relief money was being spent on policy.¹³³ Instead of buying food, clothing and other necessities of life, the poor were gambling away their relief money on policy.

In 1942, twenty-six key figures in Chicago's policy racket were indicted.¹³⁴ Among them were Ily Kelly, the Jones Brothers, Julius Benvenuti and West Side policy baron James "Big Jim" Martin. Just before the case was brought to trial, the Office of the State's Attorney declared that city officials would not cooperate in the investigation. The policy syndicate was critical to Chicago's Kelly-Nash machine in maintaining control over the black vote. Policy had been a source of patronage for ward politicians. Untold numbers of people were given jobs at the request of ward politicians and money rolled steadily into the coffers of the Democratic ward organizations.

Policy had become important to the black community and to black politicians in particular. An interview quoted in Gosnell regarding policy gambling describes the relationship: "It is a prize to the political party to be able to dictate to them and form a syndicate, which will support them politically.¹³⁵ They also derive a tariff which supports the political organization." Policy was so intertwined with the political structure that during a 1938 strike of policy runners, the police were called in to protect policy customers from picket-line violence.¹³⁶

According to the records of the Illinois Writers Project, many members of the policy syndicate were assigned precincts that they were required to deliver at election time.¹³⁷ "Walking writers," the persons who went from door-to-door collecting policy wagers, knew the constituency and could be used to canvass for votes. The Chicago Daily News reported in 1928 that Walter Kelly instructed 300 of his Tia Juana policy writers to boost the Thompson ticket while making their house-to-house calls.¹³⁸ Kelly had instructed his people to support white Congressman Martin B. Madden against William Dawson, an African-American congressional aspirant who was likely to be favored by black voters.

The typical attitude among policy players was that people like to gamble and that policy gave the poor man the same opportunity to test his fate that the rich man had.¹³⁹ In addition, it was argued that the money played stayed in the black community. It was estimated that policy employed as many as 7,000 people who would otherwise be on welfare. The money earned was used to support legitimate business in the black community. The paper and ink used to print policy slips was purchased from African-American companies. The Metropolitan Funeral (insurance) system was supported. Automobiles were purchased. Black owned taverns, restaurants and department stores were patronized. In fact, the Chicago Crime Commission reported that policy operators even contributed regularly to black churches.

One of the reasons that the policy racket was so important was that policy bankers were often the only members of the black community with money to invest. Nineteen policy wheel operators owned at least twenty-nine different businesses in the black community.¹⁴⁰ For example, the Jones brothers owned the Ben Franklin Department Store, four hotels and several large apartment buildings. Policy operator Dan Gaines owned the only black Ford dealership in Chicago. Policy Banker King Cole invested in the Metropolitan Funeral System. Julian Black, owner of the East and West Policy Company, was the manager of world heavyweight boxing champion Joe Louis. Matt Bivens owner of the Alabam-Georgia, the Whirlway and the Jackpot policy wheels also owned Bivens Van Lines.¹⁴¹ It was rumored that his moving vans were excellent places to print policy slips because they were always on the go.

In addition, numerous shoeshine parlors, candy stores, barbershops, beauty parlors, coal and wood stations, cleaners, taverns, groceries and laundries all benefited from increased traffic from policy customers. There were fifty-nine policy stations alone in the area between 31st and 39th Street and State to South Park. Unless the "heat" was on, there was no effort made to conceal policy gambling. Policy shops openly displayed signs reading "doin business," "all books" and the policy gig "4-11-44."¹⁴²

The policy racket was also responsible for the establishment of a fair number of quasi-legitimate but colorful enterprises such as the sale of "policy players dream books," "lucky number candles," "lucky number incense" and "sure-fire gigs," which were all used to create good luck.¹⁴³ The dream book would tell a policy player what number to bet. For example, dreaming of hiding in the woods was a signal of danger and that the "gig" number for such a dream was 4-43-58.¹⁴⁴ Lucky number candles came with a piece of paper containing three lucky numbers, one to seventy-eight. The paper was placed under the candle and the candle was burned for ten minutes daily until the lucky numbers were drawn. Sure-fire gigs were purchased from "professors" who guaranteed that they produced winning numbers.

In spite of the economic and political importance of policy to Chicago's black community, things began to change. Though Mayor Kelly was on good terms with Chicago's black community, Biles argues that the Kelly-Nash machine that ran Chicago had acquiesced control of gambling to the Outfit.¹⁴⁵ As the successor to the Capone mob, the Chicago Outfit worked tirelessly after prohibition to control all vice activities in Chicago. The one remaining racket was policy. The reason for the complicity of the Chicago Democratic organization was the estimated \$12 to \$20 million collected annually from gambling and vice activities. This association between the Kelly-Nash Machine and the Outfit set the stage for the Outfit's attack on policy.

The Takeover of Policy

After Al Capone succeeded Big Jim Colosimo as the vice lord of Chicago's Near South Side, he declared his intention of moving into the Second Ward and taking over all the illegal rackets operating there.¹⁴⁶ Capone henchmen made plans to swoop down on policy, craps and twenty-six (dice) games. The "Spigoosh," as black's called the Italian crime syndicate, first moved against a policy wheel operated by a man named Roberletto in the Entertainers Building on 35th Street near Indiana Avenue.¹⁴⁷ Sam Ettleson, a power in the Illinois State Senate from the Second Congressional District and Senator Marks of the 1st District brought pressure on Capone to give up the idea. As a result, Capone warned his men that the entire South Side black area and the policy racket was to be left to African-Americans in exchange for their staying out of the beer business. The deal made by Capone with the black underworld lasted until after World War II, when the Outfit began to move in on the policy racket.

Was Capone's agreement with South Side blacks simply part of doing business or were there other reasons? Bergreen argues that Capone was sympathetic to blacks because like Italians they were part of an outcast ethnic group.¹⁴⁸ In fact, as late as 1910, blacks were less segregated from native whites than Italian immigrants.¹⁴⁹ In addition, immigrant blacks and Italians often lived together in the slums of American cities. Burgess reports that cities like Chicago often had wards that contained over ten percent of both the Italian and black populations of the city.¹⁵⁰ This does not mean that Italians did not discriminate against blacks. Zorbaugh recorded conflicts between blacks and Italians on the Near North Side of Chicago.¹⁵¹ What it does mean is that Italians and Italian gangsters probably had a greater familiarity with African-Americans than many other ethnic groups.

In the late 1930's, Chicago mobster Anthony Giancana, past member of the 42 Gang and leader of the emerging Taylor Street faction of the Outfit,

was sentenced to four years in the federal penitentiary at Terre Haute, Indiana for operating an illegal whisky still.¹⁵² There, Giancana met “Big” Ed Jones who was serving time for income tax evasion. Jones reportedly told Giancana about the vast sums of money that he had made in the policy racket. Released from Terre Haute in 1942, Giancana began making plans for the Outfit’s eventual takeover of the policy racket. The opening salvo against black policy operators was the kidnapping of Jones upon his release from Terre Haute prison.

Jones was kidnapped on May 11, 1946 in the presence of his wife Lydia.¹⁵³ Lydia’s screams attracted the attention of a passing patrol car manned by two police officers who immediately took up the chase. The abductors, seeing the police, broke out the rear window of their auto and fired a volley of bullets at the pursuing squad car wounding one of the police officers. Having made good their escape, the kidnapers eventually released Jones following a \$100,000 ransom payment. Shortly thereafter, Ed Jones and his brother George moved to Mexico and left the policy racket to Theodore “Teddy” Roe, their partner in the Maine-Idaho-Ohio wheel.¹⁵⁴ Outraged by the shooting of the officer, Police Commissioner Prendergast directed the Chicago Police Department to stamp out the policy racket.

Jones soon received the wholesale condemnation of his fellows in the numbers racket who charged that he had destroyed the game after having made millions of dollars out of it.¹⁵⁵ Some fellow policy operators charged that Jones had made an “unholy” alliance with West Side gangsters who he had met while serving time in the federal penitentiary. On several occasions, Jones was criticized for placing too much trust in his “white friends” who had enjoyed visits to his home in Chicago and his villa in Mexico City.¹⁵⁶ Policy operators were not sorry to see the Jones Brothers exit the racket. It seems that they had a reputation of being tightwads and had contributed little to local charities or the black community.¹⁵⁷

Ed Jones violated the unwritten law of the policy fraternity. He associated with members of the Outfit. His association with Chicago mobsters resulted in his kidnapping and drew the attention of the police who had been happy to cooperate with the policy barons while it was a local racket unconnected to traditional organized crime. Contrary to popular writings, Jones may not have been simply an innocent victim of underworld extortion. According to the Chicago Defender, Jones was seen meeting with West Side mobsters on a number of occasions and was reportedly seeking to invest \$100,000 in the jukebox racket.¹⁵⁸ It appears that Jones contracted with West Side gangsters to obtain 2,000 jukeboxes to be placed in South Side taverns and restaurants. The result of Jones’ association with the Chicago mob was an assault on the policy racket by the police and the Outfit alike.

Ed Jones successor, Teddy Roe, ran his policy operations from the Boston Club on Chicago's South Side.¹⁵⁹ Described as an elaborate gambling den, the Boston Club was equipped with policy wheels, dice games and other gaming devices. The Chicago Outfit lost no time in moving against Roe. On September 7, 1946, four syndicate gangsters attempted to kidnap Roe as he left the Boston Club.¹⁶⁰ A confidential informant told the Chicago Crime Commission that four shots had been fired at Roe as he fled the gangsters. In addition, the informant predicted the end of black control of the policy racket in Chicago. Chicago was the only city left in the nation that allowed blacks to continue to control the game.

Three days after the unsuccessful kidnapping attempt of Roe, Robert Wilcox was murdered in a printing shop under the Boston Club. Wilcox was a partner with Roe in the club and held a monopoly on the manufacture of policy wheels. The Chicago Sun Times reported that Wilcox received \$700 for each policy wheel that he sold, which also included a small printing press.¹⁶¹ The Sun Times also reported that Wilcox was murdered because he had refused to sell policy equipment to mobster Paul Labriola. The Chicago Defender, however, had a different story.¹⁶² The Defender reported that Wilcox was killed by the black policy syndicate to prevent him from selling policy equipment to the Chicago Outfit.

As this discussion has shown, policy employed many people on Chicago's South Side and contributed to the area's economy, in spite of being illegal. The important thing was that the money stayed in the community. Ed Jones' association with the Chicago Outfit changed all that. The added pressure from the police forced many policy station operators, checkers, pick-up men, cashiers and the like out of work, depriving the black community of needed income. The assault on policy by Chicago gangsters also stirred police into action to wipe out the game before the Outfit could take it over by force.¹⁶³ The police believed that the attack on Jones was the initial move in the Outfit's attempt to muscle in with "gun and bomb" to take over the racket. They feared that the South Side would only be utilized for "pillage" and "plunder" with the bulk of the money leaving the black community to benefit white gangsters.

Responding to the attempted take-over of the policy racket by the Italian mob, Congressman William Dawson summed up the black communities sentiment towards policy gambling when he stated: "If anyone is going to make money out of the frailties of my people. . . it's going to be my people."¹⁶⁴ In fact, Dawson fought to protect black numbers racketeers against invasion from the mob. Once, when local police captains working with Italian gangsters were harassing black policy wheel owners, Dawson went to the Mayor of Chicago and had the offending police officers transferred out of his community. So important was policy to the black community that reform

mind Chicago Mayor Martin Kennelly reportedly lost the mayor's race in 1955 because he cracked down on policy operations in black wards and, as a result, lost the support of black politicians.¹⁶⁵

The records of the Chicago Crime Commission indicate that Congressman Dawson may have had a greater involvement in policy than protecting the interests of the black community.¹⁶⁶ In fact, numerous letters from concerned citizens and memos from confidential informants indicate that Dawson was the conduit for protection money paid to city officials. So convinced was the public that Dawson was involved in policy that on March 29, 1947 a local black newspaper, the *Chicago World*, publicly accused Congressman Dawson of participating in the numbers racket.¹⁶⁷ Congressman Dawson retaliated by filing a \$100,000 lawsuit against the *World*.¹⁶⁸ Dawson's alleged gambling activities were the subject of a grand jury inquiry in 1955, though no indictment ever resulted from the inquiry.¹⁶⁹

In an interview granted to the Crime Commission, Dawson admitted taking money from gambling operators but only for "political purposes."¹⁷⁰ Dawson, like Dan Jackson before him, led one of the most powerful political organizations in the city. The black South Side vote was tightly organized and could be directed at election time. In fact, Dawson's political organization was probably the most powerful in Chicago. The Crime Commission reports that one of the reasons that Dawson's political organization was so powerful was that policy operators were required to hire political workers to act as policy writers.

The Chicago Outfit's effort to take over policy gambling was not confined to the South Side of Chicago. A large African-American community also existed on the City's West Side. First settled at the turn of the century, over six thousand blacks lived along Lake Street by 1920.¹⁷¹ This area continued to grow until the 1970's when most of the West Side of Chicago became entirely black. "Big Jim" Martin ran policy on the West Side from his tavern in the 1900 block of West Lake Street.¹⁷² On October 1, 1940, the Outfit planted a bomb at Martin's resort and made a demand for \$20,000.¹⁷³ Martin reportedly ignored the demand because he was also the political leader of the West Side black community. Martin's operations were centered in the 28th Ward, home of Democratic powerhouse Pat Nash.

The Outfit eventually made Martin the same offer that they had made the Jones brothers. When Martin refused to switch allegiance to the Outfit, he was shot on November 15, 1950.¹⁷⁴ The assailant was future mob boss John P. "Jackie" Cerone.¹⁷⁵ Left for dead, Martin recovered and following the example of the Jones brothers left Chicago. It appears that the political protection that Martin once held was gone. George Kells, the Wards Alderman had resigned citing the ill health of his wife. His wife's problems stemmed from

the threatening telephone calls that she had received from syndicate gangsters suggesting that it was ill advised for her husband to seek reelection.¹⁷⁶

Teddy Roe was the one man left who held firm against the mob. The Defender reported that Roe knew he was marked for death, but swore that he would never let the Chicago Outfit take over the policy racket.¹⁷⁷ Roe became a hero in the black community. He was all that stood between the racket and the Outfit. Roe was also a Robin Hood figure to many people. He was the unofficial referee and supreme court of the policy game. As reported in the Chicago Defender:

One of his (Roe's) favorite stories was about the elderly woman who bet \$2 against another wheel and won but was not paid. She came to him and complained and he sought out the owner to lay down the law. There was a scene complete with name calling, but the woman got her money. This was Roe's sense of fair play. It was the kind of fair play learned when family men had to provide today's meal and next month's rent without a job or the opportunity to get one.¹⁷⁸

When Roe met Sam Giancana, he quickly knocked Giancana to the ground.¹⁷⁹ The next time Roe met Giacana, he killed gangster "Fat" Lenny Caifano and badly wounded Vince Ioli, another Gaincana gangster, in a gun battle on Chicago's South Side. The Outfit retaliated a few months later, killing Roe on August 4, 1952. Chicago's black community was filled with indignation at the death of Roe. Third Ward Alderman Archibald Carey blamed city hall for the death of Roe and their failure to stop the Outfit's assault on black gambling. Chicago Police eventually ordered the arrest of Leonard Patrick, David Yaras and William Block, three Westside gangsters in connection with the Roe murder.¹⁸⁰ After the death of Roe, it was clear that the days of the black gambling baron in Chicago were over.

Less than two weeks after the killing of Roe, mobsters Tony Accardo, Jake Guzik and Pat Manno were indicted by the Office of the United States Attorney for failure to pay income taxes on the proceeds of policy gambling.¹⁸¹ The indictments revived speculation that Theodore Roe was executed for showing the Federal government how to catch policy operators who were faking their income taxes. In fact, Roe did testify at the Kefauver hearings about policy operations on the South Side of Chicago and named prominent wheel operators including Chicago mobsters Pat Manno and Pete Tremont.¹⁸²

The importance of policy gambling to politicians and the Outfit alike was the large amount of money that it produced. The extraordinary profitability of policy was demonstrated in 1964 by an incident that occurred on the South Side of Chicago. An ambulance squad noticed a large stack of coin wrappers and a bag of money on a table in the home of Lawrence Wakefield while on

a routine inhalator call and notified the police.¹⁸³ The next day, detectives secured a warrant and searched the Wakefield home. They recovered \$809,058, two policy wheels, eleven policy presses and seven firearms. When asked why the Outfit had not muscled in on the Wakefield operation, Captain Edward Egan of the Kensington Police District observed that he had heard that the crime syndicate had thought about taking over the Wakefield wheel but decided not to bother because it was thought to be too small to be concerned about.

The Outfit's takeover of policy did not sit well with the black community. In fact, the *Crusader* newspaper became the African-American community's voice against the Outfit's takeover of the policy racket. The *Crusader* called upon black policy operators to stand firm against the mob and criticized black policy gamblers for not fighting back.¹⁸⁴ The *Crusader* also listed the names of the black policy operators who were cooperating with the Outfit.¹⁸⁵ The newspaper predicted the end of policy, reporting that blacks were shunning the game as they became increasingly aware that their wagers were ending up in the coffers of the mob, who returned nothing to the community. The *Crusader* argued that mob controlled policy was crooked.¹⁸⁶ They even asked players to boycott the mob controlled "Windy City" Wheel.¹⁸⁷

The Outfit was able to defeat "Big Jim" Martin, policy boss of Chicago's West Side, by electing their own man as alderman in the 28th Ward. The Outfit also applied this same strategy to the takeover of policy on Chicago's South Side. Dr Edward A. Welters, an African-American Illinois State Representative, announced that he was running for State Senate from the predominately black First Senatorial District. Congressman William Dawson allegedly offered Dr Welters \$15,000 to withdraw from the race.¹⁸⁸ Welters refused, but the nomination still went to someone else. Fred Roti received the nomination and was ultimately elected to the senate seat. Roti was sponsored by Peter Fosco, Democratic Committeeman of the First Ward and member of the bipartisan "West Side Bloc" of elected officials tied to the Chicago Outfit.

By 1953, traditional organized crime's take over of policy was complete. The Chicago Outfit, the successor to the Capone mob, had displaced African-American gangsters and controlled policy gambling on the South and West Sides of Chicago. The Outfit's takeover of policy gambling in Chicago did not mean the end of African-American participation in the racket. Blacks were indispensable. They were the ones who gambled and they were the ones who collected the bets. What the Outfit did was share in the profits. Votaw reports that the Chicago mob, run by Tony Accardo, keep blacks as employees but took a percentage of the policy profits. Chicago's black policy gangsters became underlings in the Chicago Outfit.¹⁸⁹

After prohibition, Capone era gangsters Murray “The Camel” Humphreys and Sam “Golf Bag” Hunt established a vast gambling empire on Chicago’s South Side.¹⁹⁰ Located in mostly white communities, the Chicago Outfit oversaw a network of wire-rooms where bets on horse races and sporting events could be called in and smaller walk-in bookmaking establishments. In addition, the Outfit oversaw a number of casino gambling operations including the Beach Club in Hyde Park, the Ambassador Club and a craps game at the famous Club De Lisa jazz emporium on South State Street.

As Chicago’s black belt expanded, Ralph Pierce, the successor to Murray Humphreys and Sam Hunt, organized a circle of black lieutenants who supervised gambling in African-American areas. Pierce was reportedly the Outfit’s overlord of the Fifth, Sixth, and Seventh Wards, which included Hyde Park, Woodlawn, Grand Crossing and other South Side communities.¹⁹¹ Pierce’s black lieutenants included Osborn Fraser, John Womack and James Robinson.¹⁹²

Chicago’s South Side black community was not only expanding but also undergoing extensive change. Working and middle-class blacks, attracted by the lure of the suburbs, began to move out of Chicago’s South Side. In addition, Chicago’s economy was undergoing a massive restructuring, which saw a tremendous decline in the number of blue-collar jobs. Wilson reports that Chicago lost 326,000 manufacturing jobs between 1967 and 1987.¹⁹³ The disappearance of work had tremendous consequences for life in the inner city. The departure of the middle-class was followed by the exit of the commercial institutions they once supported. With no jobs available, Wilson argues that young men made rational decisions to “hustle on the streets” resulting in an increase in crime.¹⁹⁴

As the crime rate soared and street gang activity increased, it became harder for white gangsters to operate in black areas. This point was brought home when one of Ralph Pierce’s top lieutenants suffered a merciless beating at the hands of street gang members who ordered him out of their turf.¹⁹⁵ Mobster Angelo Volpe, who had obtained control over the Windy City policy wheel, also found himself the victim of intimidation by black gang members and was forced to hire his own group of black gang youths to protect him on the day-to-day rounds of his policy operation.

The decline of traditional organized crime activity in the black community was underway. Changing political and social realities made it increasingly difficult for the Outfit to operate in inner city areas. Government action against policy operators and the decline of Chicago’s celebrated Black Metropolis all contributed to the decline of policy gambling. The creation of the Illinois Lottery in 1980 furthered hastened this decline. Policy, however, did not disappear entirely. Chicago Police and federal authorities were taking en-

forcement action against policy operations as late as 1989 when the U. S. Attorney's Office seized ten policy stations in a civil forfeiture action. The properties seized were part of the Reuben-Linda lottery.

Chicago Police estimated that the Reuben-Linda lottery had been in existence for six years from 1983 to 1989 and had taken in an estimated three million dollars a year in revenue.¹⁹⁶ The interesting thing about the Reuben-Linda lottery was that its writers took bets, ranging from 25 cents to fifty dollars, on the results of the daily Illinois Lottery. This allowed the bettors to see the numbers drawn on television each day, which insured the integrity of the game. In spite of persistent rumors, no evidence was ever uncovered of Outfit involvement in the Reuben-Linda operation. The Outfit had lost its control over Chicago's South Side while black organized crime continued.

The Black Mafia Revisited

This analysis has shown that African-Americans have always been part of organized crime in Chicago. They controlled gambling in black areas and formed vice syndicates that helped to organize the vote for a period of almost fifty years. They also worked with the Italian American organized crime after the Chicago Outfit gained control of the policy racket. African-American organized crime in Chicago followed the same stages of development experienced by other ethnic groups. They differed only in the fact that they were more successful than other ethnic groups in resisting the overtures of traditional organized crime. It took the Outfit an additional twenty years to gain control of the black underworld, which included a ten-year struggle to control policy gambling.

Part of the confusion over African-American participation in organized crime has been society's fixation with the so-called American Mafia. If we ignore the alien conspiracy argument that organized crime was brought to America by Southern Italian and Sicilian immigrants and concentrate on the historical record we find that Chicago at the beginning of the 20th Century contained a number of ethnically based organized crime groups made up of local gamblers, brothel keepers and politicians. The activities of Dan Jackson and his supporters in the Second Ward were no different than the activities of Big Jim Colosimo and Johnny Torrio and their Italian gangsters in the First Ward or Dion O'Banion and his Irish mobsters in the Forty-Second. They all participated in the "Big Fix" in which tribute was collected by the ruling political party from crime and vice in exchange for money and immunity from the enforcement actions of the police.¹⁹⁷ This is what organized crime was in America! Sure, the Chicago Outfit eventually consolidated all vice activity and became the supreme mediator between Chicago's underworld and the

political structure, but they had to defeat Irish, African-American and other Italian groups first.

It has been argued that African-American organized crime has not been the subject of serious inquiry by the academic community and that any new investigation has to consider the question of race in determining the lack of scholarly interest.¹⁹⁸ Though this research has not uncovered any evidence of racism on the part of academic researchers, it is apparent that the existing literature, like much of the literature on organized crime, suffers from a lack of empirical research. This research has attempted to examine African-American participation in organized crime by examining the historical record in light of what is known about other ethnic based criminal groups. Once viewed from this perspective, it becomes clear that black Americans in Chicago were once among the most powerful criminal groups ever to exist in America.

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