As much admiration as Cobb generated, there was equally as much disdain for what he represented as a Muslim Black nationalist of the streets. Published in the Call & Post, Mrs. Marva Stein of Alcazar Hotel represented this wide-spread sentiment, especially in the White community, that morals were being attacked.

By Ryan Miday

Contributing Writer

In part 3 of the Call & Post Tonelli series, Ryan Miday continues with additional information from Cobb's friend John Drake and others. The story then follows Cobb's journey from Emmett Cobb, to Tonelli and then emerging as Brother Ahmed El.

If Tonelli had a singular passion it was the pursuit of knowledge. Drake stood up during one of our interviews in his living room, pointing to his wrists and ankles, to drive home what Cobb was unmasking: the nature of slavery had merely changed from the physical chains to chains around the mind through the indoctrination of white supremacy rhetoric. "Tonelli understood this," Drake proclaimed. "Knowledge was power to him, and he wanted to dominate. He wanted freedom."

This passion for learning coincided with the occult movement in the 1940s and 1950s. Ernest Turner, a civil rights activist in the 1960s and retired Cleveland Public School teacher after 30-years explained that Blacks began questioning what it meant to be Black in America. Traditional teachings were devoid of answers, so Blacks began seeking out nontraditional sources. Cobb began learning Moorish law from C. M. Bey and eventually became a Muslim, acquiring the name, Brother Ahmed El.

Cobb was also passionate about women. His association with pretty, upscale White women was widely known: he sought them and they sought him. Harboring a belligerent and prideful attitude that he could have what the White man desired, Cobb bragged about having many White women. Even though he didn't drink alcohol, Cobb regularly patronized the Gold Coast, the famous entertainment area of E. 105th and Euclid Avenue. His magnetic personality attracted women from all over Cleveland and its suburbs. One of the women in Cobb's criminal case, the Shaker Heights heiress, admitted to being a former mistress. She testified at trial that she had met him at the Towne Casino, a prominent jazz club located on Euclid Avenue between E. 105th and E. 107th Streets.

Opening in 1951, the Towne Casino became a hot national jazz scene, attracting stars such as Count Bessie and Sarah Vaughn. It also attracted a mixed racial crowd. Six months before it closed on August 1, 1953, Duke Ellington and the All Stars jammed out to 400 people. That night was the first of a string of bombs detonated at the club because of its interracial crowd. The Casino held out after the first two bombs but capitulated after the third, writing on the outside marquee, "Don't Bomb Us. We Quit."
Unsurprisingly, Cobb's marriage to a White woman engendered considerable consternation. His resentment at the White man for what they did to his mother was amplified by their reaction to his marriage. When White men would come into the neighborhood people showed respect,

but not Cobb. Drake exclaimed, "He gave them no air; he jumped all over them, immediately interrogating them, and Tonelli could get loud."

A month before the trial commenced, Cobb's wife told the Call & Post, during a two hour interview, the criticism leveled against them since their marriage in 1949, "may have changed his racial feelings a lot. I think they taught him a lot of hatred that he might not have had otherwise." Although Ohio struck down its anti-miscegenation law in 1887, it was taboo, an unwritten law. It wasn't until 1967 that the US Supreme Court ruled against the remaining 16 states with anti-miscegenation laws. Alabama, Cobb's birth state, was the last state to remove the law from its books, in 2000.

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Mrs. Stein was incensed over the Call & Post's coverage of Cobb's trial, writing that she anticipated reading about the Philharmonic Glee Club's Sunday performance at the Euclid Avenue Baptist Church
. Instead, she found front page reporting on "terrible Tonelli and his vicious and vulgar antics… and the first page of second section dominated by 'leggy' models at a dance."

Editor's Note: Look for Part 4 of the Tonelli story next week in the Call & Post Newspaper. In the next edition of this amazing story we examine the unforgettable drama taking place at his trial and its outcome.

Read Part 1

Read Part II

Read Part IV