



Justice Gone Awry

The Shocking Story of
an “Expert Witness”
& Pathologist whose
Testimony Turned the
Innocent Guilty...

By Dov Levy

Operating court systems that provide justice is one of the Seven Commandments (*Sheva Mitzvos Bnai Noach*) that Hashem demands from the nations of the world. For much of its *galus* experience, *Klal Yisrael* found itself among nations where the practice of justice was all too often anything but just. In countless instances, the Jew was made the scapegoat of society’s woes and justice was the last thing he could expect.

Fortunately, the United States maintains not only a highly functional justice system, but one that tends to err on the side of caution. “Innocent until proven guilty” is not just a motto. Nevertheless, there are cracks in the system where corrupt individuals have taken advantage of a supportive state apparatus to commit miscarriages of justice with impunity and ruin the lives of innocent individuals in the process. Read about one particularly outlandish state-funded pathologist who got away with murder for so long that his behavior begs the question: Is this just the tip of the iceberg?

Cory Maye, a 21-year-old African-American father, was tired on the evening of December 26, 2001. He had put his 18-month-old daughter to bed an hour earlier while her mother commuted to work. She worked a night shift at a chicken plant an hour away. Maye himself was presently unemployed, not unusual for the small Mississippi town of Prentiss.

The seat of Jefferson Davis County, a predominantly African-American area, Prentiss has a population of 1,000. While Mississippi is one of the poorest states—in 2011, Mississippi had lowest average income in the US—Prentiss ranks below average for income and unemployment even by Mississippi's dismal standards. Therefore, it's no great surprise that drug dealing has taken hold in the neighborhood, along with all of the usual accompanying crimes.

While Maye was dozing off in his duplex on Mary Street, Officer Ron Jones of the Prentiss Police Department stopped at the home of Prentiss's judge, Ron Kruger. Jones, a white man, had been tipped off by an informant that there were large caches of marijuana stored in either side of the duplex. The north side of the house was occupied by Jamie Smith, whom Jones characterized as "a known drug dealer." Smith was already facing drug charges in court. The southern half of the duplex was occupied by "person/s unknown."

Ron Jones was the son of the town's police chief, a well-liked and respected figure in Prentiss... at least among the white community. In a county that is 60% black, Prentiss is 70% white. And the racial tensions are strong. Local African-Americans are highly distrustful of their police force and justice system. They are far more accepting of the county sheriff, who is black. Whites in the community, on the other hand, are suspicious of the sheriff's office while full of praise for the local police. Ron Jones, however, was known among locals to be somewhat obliging of the African-American community, showing up to cool down tensions when the police seemed to be treating blacks unfairly.

Judge Kruger accepted



The duplex where Maye lived in the apartment on the right.



Police diagram of the home where Cory Maye lived.

Jones's request for a search warrant without question. He did not bother asking Jones who his informant was or how reliable he was assumed to be. Nor did he question the judiciousness of raiding a duplex whose occupants were not identified, and therefore obviously could not be considered suspects in a crime. He took Jones' word at face value and signed the warrant.

With the legal paperwork in his hands, Jones returned to the police station and assembled a raiding party consisting of himself and five other officers. Usually he would hand over a drug tip to the Pearl River Narcotics Task Force. This was a SWAT team supported by a number of police precincts, all of which were too small to afford the team on their own, that was widely used for acting on drug warrants. But tonight the team was not available, possibly because they could not be brought together on short notice during the holiday season.

The Raid

The six men drove the short distance to Mary Street and split into two groups to raid both halves of the duplex. It was around 11:00 PM by the time they arrived to find a child's bicycle outside and holiday decorations hanging in front of the south side's door.

At the north side of the duplex the raid went very smoothly. Jamie Smith, his friend Audrey Davis and a 15-year-old boy named Jimmie did not resist. Police searched the apartment and found a store of drugs. Smith was taken into custody and later released (he was never tried in court).

On the south side, though, matters did not go smoothly. The police contend that they called several times to the occupants, announcing that they were police officers. They also claimed that they saw someone toying with the blinds to spy on them. Whoever was inside definitely knew that it was law enforcement officials who had come to visit, they say.

Inside, though, Cory Maye insists that all he heard was someone kicking the door so loudly that it frightened him. When the kicking shifted from the front door to the back, meaning the entranceway to the bedroom where he was sleeping with his toddler, he became terrified.

Convinced that a criminal was trying to break in, Maye ran to retrieve his handgun. He quickly loaded it, chambered a bullet, and crouched on the floor next to his daughter's bed in a defensive position. There would be a debate later in court as to whether the officers were in possession of a "no-knock warrant," permitting them entry without first identifying themselves. Altogether there was no solid legal basis for issuing them a search warrant for Maye's side of the duplex. But for now Maye knew nothing of what was going on. As the rear door crashed open, a figure dashed up the three stairs and into his room. Maye fired three times.

Only then did the shouts register: "Police! Police! You just shot an officer!"

Maye dropped the gun and surrendered. But by then Officer Ron Jones had taken a fatal hit to his abdomen—somehow the shot managed to get around his bulletproof vest—and would die of massive hemorrhaging before he arrived at the hospital. Maye insists that he acted purely in self-defense.

According to Maye and his family, he was severely beaten by police on that first night in their custody. His mug shot sports a prominently swollen and black right eye. His

family was not permitted to visit him until a full week after his arrest, long enough for the ugly wounds to clear up. Jefferson Davis County's black sheriff Henry McCullum had Maye moved to another county to ensure he survived the night.

Maye had no previous criminal record. Drugs were not found in his apartment. (Maye had occupied the apartment for no more than a few weeks at the time of the raid.) Nevertheless, his trial did not go well. The prosecution presented him as a man who had staked out the police and shot at them in cold blood, knowing he was firing on law enforcement officials.

To the objective observer, all evidence seems to point to Cory Maye's innocence. He lived next door to a known drug dealer and was constantly bothered by the unending stream of traffic at his neighbor's door at all hours of the day. He suddenly found people kicking in his door late at night while he had his baby in the room with him. Others on the scene testified that they did not hear the police announce themselves.



A home in the small, impoverished town of Prentiss.



A Mississippi SWAT team.