

Never forget Fred Hampton

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Fred Hampton speaks at a Chicago Black Panther Rally in 1969.

The long shadow of the Chicago race riot, Part 6

By 1960, Chicago's Black community reached 813,000 people, nearly a quarter of the city's total population. The Great Migration of African Americans continued until the mid-1970s' capitalist economic crisis.

Northern industry needed Black labor. Tens of thousands of African Americans were employed in factories like U.S. Steel's massive South Works and International Harvester.

The McCormick family fortune started with Cyrus McCormick's harvester works. Old man McCormick supported slavery and during the Civil War gave \$50,000 — worth over \$1 million today — to pro-Confederate "copperhead" terrorists.

On May 3, 1886, Chicago police killed two striking workers at the McCormick works. Some reports say six were killed. The protest rally called the next day led to the frame-up and hanging of the [Haymarket Martyrs](#).

The McCormick family bought the Chicago Tribune, which became the Midwest's biggest newspaper. The Tribune allegedly wrote some of the speeches given by Joseph McCarthy for his anti-communist witch hunt. It was notorious for its racism and attacks on any progressive struggle. One example occurred in 1968.

By that time, 60 percent of the city's bus operators were African American. These drivers paid dues to Local 241 of the Amalgamated Transit Union, yet they weren't allowed to vote in union elections. Only 3,500 retired workers, all of whom were white, were permitted to do so.

This intolerable situation led to the formation of a Black caucus, called the Concerned Transit Workers. Two wildcat strikes were called by the CTW in the summer of 1968 that shut down most bus routes. (The second one began the day before the Democratic Convention opened.)

Local newspapers, like the Tribune, called this struggle for justice “a Black Power plot.” An injunction was issued not only against the CTW but also against sympathy strikes by workers on the elevated lines.

By September, the capitalist state — and the firing of 42 drivers — forced the CTW to call off its strike. But this struggle was crucial to eventually ending what a CTW leader called “the old plantation system” in Local 241.

Shoot to kill

Months before these bus strikes, African Americans on Chicago’s West Side rebelled after Dr. King’s assassination. Mayor Daley’s response was to issue his infamous “shoot to kill” order to the police at a news conference.

Daley was so vicious that he repudiated his hand-picked police superintendent, James Conlisk, for not being bloodthirsty enough. [Nine Black people were killed by the police.](#)

For many African Americans, the “shoot to kill” order was the breaking point between themselves and the Daley machine. Even Daley felt the necessity to backtrack from his murderous statements. His press secretary then attacked the media for reporting what Daley had said, not what he later said he meant.

Black people knew very well what the pig in City Hall meant. Many responded by boycotting the November 1968 elections. Even though the number of African Americans had increased since 1964, the Black vote declined.

The Black P. Stone Nation helped this movement along and it was a reason that Abdul Malik Ka’bah — then known as Jeff Fort — was years later sentenced to 168 years in jail.

The Black Panthers

Like an awakening giant, Chicago's Black community was resuming its position at the forefront of the African American struggle. The Black Panther Party filled the political vacuum that was created by the CIA-FBI-New York police assassination of Malcolm X.

One of the many reasons that the capitalist state was eager to silence Malcolm X was the escalating U.S. war against Vietnam. [In 1965, African American GIs accounted for almost a quarter of U.S. combat deaths in Vietnam.](#)

The Black Panther Party denounced this genocidal war. Hundreds of Vietnam veterans, like Geronimo Ji Jaga, joined the Panthers.

Under the leadership of Fred Hampton, the Illinois chapter of the Black Panther Party became the largest in the country. This writer remembers attending a Chicago Free Bobby Seale rally in 1969, where six buses of supporters came from Rockford, Ill.

Fred Hampton grew up in Maywood, a Black suburb just west of Chicago. His father worked at International Harvester.

A natural leader, Hampton was quarterback of his high school football team. He became a revolutionary and infused everyone around him with his revolutionary optimism. Like Hugo Chávez, Fred Hampton had an electric-like ability to connect with the masses.

The Chicago police busted him for handing out hundreds of ice cream bars to kids. While in jail, Hampton won over the leader of a Puerto Rican gang to revolutionary politics. The group was called the Young Lords.

Millions of children have free school breakfasts today because of the Panthers' Free Breakfast for Children programs. In Chicago, the Black Panther Party also started a People's Medical Care Center. [Up to 200 people a week benefited from these](#)

[programs.](#)

“You can kill the revolutionary, but you can’t kill the revolution,” was Hampton’s best known saying. On Dec. 4, 1969—fifty years after the “race riots”—Fred Hampton was murdered in his sleep by the cops. He was only 21 years old. A fellow Panther, Mark Clark, was also killed in the early morning raid at 2337 West Monroe St. conducted by the office of State Attorney Edward Hanrahan.

The police and the capitalist media lied about these assassinations and described them as a furious gun battle between the cops and the Panthers. The Chicago Tribune printed a large picture of a door that they claimed was riddled by bullet holes created by the Panthers’ gunfire.

The bullet holes were actually nails. The truth came out because the Panthers were able to conduct tours of the blood-soaked rooms on Monroe Street.

Thousands of people, including this writer, attended Fred Hampton’s funeral at the First Baptist Church in Melrose Park, Ill. Among the speakers was Claude Lightfoot of the Communist Party.

William O’Neal was an FBI informant within the Panthers who provided information to the pigs about the Panther house. Tormented by guilt, [he committed suicide in 1990](#) by running onto the Eisenhower Expressway.

Besides Hampton and Clark, five other Panthers were killed by Chicago police. A quarter of all the Black Panther Party members who were gunned down across the country were members of its Illinois chapter.

The Daley machine and the FBI weren’t able to kill the revolution, but assassinating Fred Hampton helped delayed it.

Sources: “The Hidden Civil War, the Story of the Copperheads” by Wood Gray,

“Organized Labor and the Black Worker 1619-1973” by Philip S. Foner and “Boss, Richard J. Daley of Chicago” by Mike Royko

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