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Ronan Goforth

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“SOMETHING WORTH BEING KILLED OVER”:
THE FBI, CULTURAL PROPAGANDA, AND THE MURDER OF FRED HAMPTON

RONAN GOFORTH

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Dr. Erin Devlin

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ABSTRACT

The 1969 murder of local Black Panther Party (BPP) leader Fred Hampton by Chicago police officers was orchestrated by the FBI field office in the city. J. Edgar Hoover, director of the FBI, authorized Hampton's murder on the grounds that Hampton and the BPP were violent extremists. Through infiltration of the Chicago chapter of the BPP and dissemination of cultural propaganda in Black and white newspapers, the FBI turned public opinion against the party. After Hampton's murder, the newspaper coverage of the subsequent trial further soured public opinion. Through careful analysis of internal FBI documents, trial transcripts, newspaper coverage, and FBI propaganda tactics including cartoons, comics, and falsified letters to the editor, this thesis demonstrates that the FBI used propaganda and infiltration tactics to spread false information and create moral panic about the BPP by murdering a man in cold blood and calling it justifiable.

Keywords: FBI, Black Panther Party, Fred Hampton, black nationalism, black power, cultural propaganda, COINTELPRO, J. Edgar Hoover, Chicago

“I believe I’m going to die doing the things I was born to do. I believe I’m going to die high off the people. I believe I’m going to die a revolutionary.”

-- Fred Hampton¹

“The road to freedom has always been stalked by death.”

-- Angela Davis

Introduction

On December 4, 1969, Fred Hampton was murdered. Chicago police officers, encouraged by collaborations with the FBI, broke down the door of the first-floor apartment at 2337 W. Monroe Street and fired warning shots. They startled eight sleeping members of the Black Panther Party awake, intent on arresting them for possession of illegal weapons. Fred Hampton, as well as his close friend and comrade Mark Clark, died in the apartment. In the days, weeks, and months that followed, the FBI, Chicago Police Department, and mainstream media outlets turned Fred Hampton from a grassroots political organizer and rising star of the Black Power movement into a violent, criminal extremist. The *Chicago Tribune* made Hampton into an object, his body into little more than a tool for shock value for white consumption and revulsion. The articles and photographs they published about the murder were pro-police, anti-Panther, anti-Hampton, and above all, anti-Black. The paper’s circulation and influence were more than helpful in influencing public opinion against the Black Panthers. In addition to newspaper coverage, the FBI used such propaganda tactics as dissemination of false information and infiltration of Hampton’s chapter of the Black Panthers in order to further turn Black and white residents of Chicago against the Panthers, thus creating a “moral panic” about their political alignments. By analyzing the FBI’s use of cultural propaganda, this thesis aims to better understand the ways in which the Bureau was able to successfully manipulate public opinion.

This work is divided primarily into linear sections with the exception of the first and second. The first section details the different methodologies of analysis and why they were

¹ *The Murder of Fred Hampton*, directed by Howard Alk (1971; Facets Multi-Media, 2007), DVD.

chosen. The second section contains enough historical background of both the FBI and the Black Panther Party to provide the reader with a primer of sorts for the following sections. The third section, which begins the thesis proper, analyzes the FBI's different motivations for murdering Hampton. It first details J. Edgar Hoover's classification of the Black Panthers as Black extremists and the Bureau's justifications for the Counter-Intelligence Program (COINTELPRO) as well as what it entailed.² It then moves to the FBI's extended collaboration with the Chicago Police Department, which was sanctioned by Edward Hanrahan, the state's attorney, as well as the subsequent infiltration of the Black Panther Party. Finally, it discusses the FBI's recruitment of William O'Neal, who would become their man on the inside.

The fourth section covers the raid of Hampton's apartment as well as the immediate aftermath and trial. It details the night before Hampton's murder and the reasons why multiple party members spent the night at the apartment. It then uses Deborah Johnson's first-hand account of the raid as told to Jeffrey Haas to provide as clear a picture of the murder and its aftermath as possible.³ A majority of this section is dedicated to the analysis of the way the raid was framed in the media, as there were stark differences in reporting by Black-owned and white-owned newspapers. The following section, which is the longest one, begins the analysis of the FBI's propaganda tactics. It uses content analysis as well as semiotics to understand the ways in which COINTELPRO agents were successful in convincing members of the public that the Black Panthers were "a force bent on evil." It then continues prior analysis of newspaper articles written about the raid, specifically looking at the ways in which Hampton was written about and applying specific methods of analysis. The final

² To remain concise, COINTELPRO will be used throughout the paper instead of Counter-Intelligence Program.

³ Deborah Johnson and Fred Hampton were engaged at the time of the raid. Johnson was eight months pregnant (Jeffrey Haas, *The Assassination of Fred Hampton: How the FBI and Chicago Police Murdered a Black Panther* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2009), 12).

section examines how the Panthers' influence and membership in Chicago and nationwide gradually declined after the conclusion of both civil and criminal trials in 1970, 1972, and 1978, demonstrating the impact of the FBI's use of cultural propaganda.

Methodology

This thesis makes use of multiple frameworks of analysis and different methodologies to make its argument. This is done to provide a more nuanced understanding of the historical background and theoretical basis for that argument. The thesis operates within a restorative justice framework, meaning that many of the theoretical sources consulted view crime primarily as a violation of community relationships. The only way to repair damage is to come together, victim and perpetrator, and make amends. Restorative justice is useful in analyzing newspaper coverage of the trial after Hampton's murder because it allows for a better understanding of which parts of society viewed his death as a preventable tragedy – as a violation of the community – and which saw it as justifiable. Restorative justice theory is not without its faults, though, as some scholars have argued it is ineffective in curbing hate crimes.⁴ While it has been criticized, it is still a useful framework in which to examine Hampton's murder and contextualize the FBI's motives and use of propaganda.⁵

Content analysis is used to examine both manifest and latent content, doing so in both qualitative and quantitative ways. The analysis of FBI memos and newspaper articles written about the raid and trial is primarily latent, quantitatively-based analysis. It is distant reading, intended to measure specific occurrences of language or framing, whether intentional or

⁴ Theo Gavrielides, *Restorative Justice Theory and Practice: Assessing the Discrepancy* (Helsinki: Criminal Justice Press, 2007), 201.

⁵ Carrie Menkel-Meadow, "Restorative Justice: What Is It and Does It Work?" *Annual Review of Law and Social Science* vol. 3, no. 1 (2007): 168; Renee C. Romano, *Racial Reckoning: Prosecuting America's Civil Rights Murders* (Boston: Harvard University Press 2014): 22.

unintentional.⁶ The use of more qualitative analysis is helpful in understanding the manifest, or explicit, messages in articles, memos, and even propaganda created by the FBI like cartoons and comics, because qualitative analysis prompts the scholar to examine the very nature of such content.⁷

Reading images is another tool of analysis for understanding manifest and latent meaning, one which is particularly useful for a thesis which addresses visual propaganda. Both indexes and symbols will be examined. For the purpose of this analysis, indexes are defined as a way to “create meaning through the physical trace of something” and symbols as both abstract representations and ways to create a narrative.⁸ By combining deduction and speculation in qualitative examination of photographs, drawings, and cartoons, it is possible to interpret images in a way beyond the superficial.

Semiotics, or the study of signs and interpretation, is used as a way to interpret overarching and underlying cultural meaning. In other words, this method of analysis is used in conjunction with both content analysis and reading images to interpret cultural texts, such as the various forms of propaganda disseminated by the FBI. Just as in the examination of images, indexes and symbols can be understood through semiotic analysis, adding a layer of socially-constructed meaning.⁹ While all methods discussed are used separately, they work best in conversation with each other, better informing scholarly interpretation of propaganda, media coverage, and public opinion.

This thesis makes extensive use of both primary and secondary sources in order to best form its argument. The primary sources consist of newspaper articles from the *Chicago*

⁶ Philip J. Deloria and Alexander I. Olson, *American Studies: A User's Guide* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017), 135.

⁷ Deloria and Olson, *American Studies*, 137.

⁸ Deloria and Olson, *American Studies*, 138.

⁹ Deloria and Olson, *American Studies*, 150.

Tribune, *Chicago Sun-Times*, *Chicago Daily Defender*, and *New York Times*, as well as transcripts of speeches given by Fred Hampton, documents from the trial, and interviews with former party members.¹⁰ The *Chicago Tribune*, *Chicago Sun-Times*, and *New York Times* were chosen for their status as “general press,” publications directed at the general populace, which publish what they perceive to be objective coverage. The *Chicago Daily Defender* was selected to represent the “Black press” – a publication that both establishes Black identity and serves the Black community at large, while also providing objective, if more targeted, coverage.¹¹ Additionally, declassified FBI documents, mostly inter-agency memoranda, provide much of the basis for the section on motives as well as the section on cultural propaganda. These memoranda were distributed to agents around the country in order to control the narrative around infiltration and propaganda dissemination. Secondary sources range from books on the Black Panther Party at large, theoretical works on Black Power, Black liberation, methods of analysis, and the FBI, and scholarly articles on Hampton, COINTELPRO, and cultural propaganda. The main secondary source utilized was *Search and Destroy: A Report by the Commission of Inquiry into the Black Panthers and the Police*, compiled by Roy Wilkins and Ramsey Clark, as well as twenty-five other civil rights activists from around the country.¹² Several of these works reference each other or are informed by each other’s arguments, making analysis of them in conjunction with the primary sources more layered and complex.

COINTELPRO and the Black Panther Party

¹⁰ G. Flint Taylor, a lawyer with the People’s Law Office of Chicago who worked on the trial, was kind enough to share trial transcripts and other documents with me, as well as pictures from his personal collection. I thank him for his generosity.

¹¹ Roland Edgar Wolseley, *The Black Press, U.S.A.*, 2nd ed. (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1990), 18.

¹² Roy Wilkins was the executive director of the NAACP at the time of the report’s publication in 1973 and Ramsey Clark was the former United States Attorney General (Thomas A. Johnson, “Report Assails Inquiry on Slaying of Black Panthers,” Mar. 17, 1972, 17).

The Federal Bureau of Intelligence, while a respected law enforcement agency, has often acted outside the scope of the law to serve the interests of the government, which have not always aligned with the interests of the American people. The modern understanding of the Bureau as an investigative and intelligence service came during J. Edgar Hoover's forty-eight-year term as its director.¹³ While the Bureau portrays itself as an impartial, apolitical agency simply used to conduct criminal investigations, the reality is far more complex. Since its beginnings, the FBI has been used as a political tool in the hands of each administration – often as a tool for domestic surveillance. Even now, its surveillance and monitoring of unsuspecting citizens is government-sanctioned and government-funded.¹⁴ Appointed director in 1942, Hoover greatly expanded the Bureau's power and scope, using wartime fears of the unknown, especially Communism, to target individuals suspected of holding “anti-American” sentiments.¹⁵ As World War II ended and the Cold War began, bringing threats of nuclear disaster with it, the Bureau used “patterns of repression” to manipulate carefully-chosen press contacts into promoting a positive image of the FBI as a watchdog of sorts keeping American citizens safe.¹⁶ As the United States government attempted to stop the spread of Communism on a global scale, the FBI worked to do the same in the domestic arena. This was done with the assistance of aforementioned sympathetic media contacts, who published articles focusing on the “scurrilous lifestyles” of the leaders of primarily

¹³ Ron Elving, “The Massive Case of Collective Amnesia: The FBI Has Been Political from the Start,” *NPR Weekend Edition*, Jan. 26, 2018.

¹⁴ Ivan Greenberg, *Surveillance in America: Critical Analysis of the FBI, 1920 to the Present* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2012), 4.

¹⁵ Katelyn Stieva, “Victory, a Loss, or a Draw?: Assessing the Efficacy of the FBI's COINTELPRO Methods Against the Black Panther Party in Chicago,” *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies* 18, no. 4 (2018): 84.

¹⁶ Greenberg, *Surveillance in America*, 85.

“communist, socialist, black power, and civil rights movements.”¹⁷ By manipulating the press, the FBI could then theoretically influence public opinion, convincing society at large that leaders such as Martin Luther King, Jr., Stokely Carmichael, and Bobby Seale were not to be trusted.

COINTELPRO, or the Counter-Intelligence Program, was used to do this on a much wider scale. It began in 1956, as a way to monitor, discredit, and disrupt persons and organizations that the U.S. government and J. Edgar Hoover felt posed a threat to national security.¹⁸ Those people ranged from left-wing and anti-war activists, civil rights organizers, Native American and Chicano/a protestors, to Black Power activists, who the FBI labelled “Black Nationalist Hate Groups” or “Black Extremists.”¹⁹ COINTELPRO divisions were created in FBI field offices across the country, with agents reporting in regularly to regional SACs and J. Edgar Hoover himself.²⁰ Agents used infiltration, surveillance, and informants to acquire intelligence. This was then used to create and distribute “derogatory and scurrilous material” such as counterfeit literature and cartoons, in order to create factions and capitalize on ideological, personal, and internecine conflicts.²¹ By cultivating relationships with local police departments and media organizations, COINTELPRO operations were able to more easily disrupt and frame their targets by generating a climate of repression and demobilization.²²

¹⁷ Greenberg, *Surveillance in America*, 107-109.

¹⁸ John Drabble, “Fighting Black Power-New Left Coalitions: Covert FBI Media Campaigns and American Cultural Discourse, 1967-1971,” *European Journal of American Culture* 27, no. 2 (2008): 66.

¹⁹ Greenberg, *Surveillance in America*, 15.

²⁰ SAC stands for Special Agent in Charge.

²¹ Drabble, “Black Power-New Left Coalitions,” 66.

²² Greenberg, *Surveillance in America*, 97.

COINTELPRO targeted Black Power organizations because the FBI had defined them as having a “propensity for violence” or “radical or revolutionary rhetoric,” which to Hoover meant anti-war protests and acts of civil disobedience, but also meant openly carrying weapons and threatening violence against the state.²³ To reinforce ideas of Black Power activists as violent, agents emphasized long-standing stereotypes of Black savagery, emotionality, and criminality in their communications about organizations like the Nation of Islam, Congress of Racial Equality, League of Revolutionary Black Workers, and the Black Panther Party.²⁴ A directive from FBI headquarters in August 1967 directed field office agents to “endeavor to establish” the “unsavory backgrounds” of the Black dissidents they were attempting to undermine.²⁵ Agents were advised to make arrests based on suspected mob involvement, financial corruption, or connections to sex workers or drug dealers.²⁶ By relying on racist discourses, COINTELPRO operations were able to manipulate and reinforce negative ideas about Black Power and Black liberation within the collective consciousness. COINTELPRO operations in Chicago were primarily intended to disrupt cooperation between organizations such as the Panthers and the Young Lords. These operations began almost immediately after the Chicago chapter was founded.

Black Power did not begin with Malcolm X; nor did it begin with the Black Panther Party. It began when Kwame Ture, formerly known as Stokely Carmichael, raised his fist at a Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) meeting in Lowndes County,

²³ Drabble, “Black Power-New Left Coalitions,” 72.

²⁴ “Memorandum from SAC, Chicago, to Director, FBI,” Jan. 22, 1969, COINTELPRO-Black Extremist Files, FBI digitized archives, <https://vault.fbi.gov/cointel-pro/cointel-pro-black-extremists>. See also Khalil Gibran Muhammad, *The Condemnation of Blackness: Race, Crime, and the Making of Modern Urban America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010) for an in-depth work on how the link between Blackness and criminality was forged from 1880-1940.

²⁵ “Memorandum from: Director, FBI, to SAC, Albany: Personal Att’n to All Offices,” Aug. 25, 1967, COINTELPRO-Black Extremist Files, FBI digitized archives.

²⁶ Drabble, “Black Power-New Left Coalitions,” 75.

Mississippi, in the summer of 1966.²⁷ It was not diametrically opposed to the Black civil rights movement; rather, it grew from the foundation laid by those organizers.²⁸ Black Power began with a desire not to assimilate, but to resist white supremacy, to celebrate Blackness and protect Black communities.²⁹ The federal government had failed to protect civil rights workers from violence, whether perpetuated by vigilantes or police. So, some of them turned to revolutionary violence in the form of self-defense. The Black Panther Party for Self-Defense, later just the Black Panther Party, founded in October 1966 by Bobby Seale and Huey P. Newton, has been mythologized in popular imagination as little more than leather jacket-wearing, armed dissidents spouting anti-white rhetoric. In reality, they were young men and women, well-read in leftist political theory and dedicated to lasting change, although they would soon be plagued by hierarchical leadership, drug problems, homophobia, and misogyny.

The party was originally founded as a way to protect the Black community and inform them of their rights during arrest.³⁰ Not quite the lawless, gun-toting criminals they would be characterized as, Newton and Seale became the “policers of the police,” carrying law books and shotguns, as was legal in California, ready to document arrests and inform Black civilians of their rights as needed.³¹ Soon, they adopted the Ten Point Program, which Newton called a “combination of a Bill of Rights and Declaration of Independence” that demanded full and

²⁷ Stokely Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton, *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America* (New York: Random House, 1967), 25.

²⁸ Jeanne Theoharis and Komozi Woodard, eds., *Freedom North: Black Freedom Struggles Outside the South, 1940-1980* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 4.

²⁹ Peniel E. Joseph, *Neighborhood Rebels: Black Power at the Local Level* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010), 35.

³⁰ Stieva, “Victory, a Loss, or Draw,” 83.

³¹ Paul Alkebulan, *Survival Pending Revolution: The History of the Black Panther Party* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2007), 4-5.

equal employment, equal access to housing and education, an end to police brutality, and the retrial of all Black defendants by juries of their peers (i.e. Black jurors).³² It is little surprise that their ideology appealed to young Black activists and the organization quickly grew to encompass thirty-three chapters in sixty cities by 1970.³³ While the Panthers were radical and their ideas exciting, they were often plagued by power struggles, hierarchical leadership models, and accusations of sexism from within the movement.³⁴ As ideological Leninists, they believed that not all violence was created equal; in their movement, revolutionary violence was self-defense, a declaration against the violence of hunger, lack of housing, and war.³⁵ For all that Newton and Seale claimed to be for self-defense, though, Newton found himself serving time for involuntary manslaughter, giving the party the lawless reputation it had tried to avoid.³⁶

Fred Hampton, one of the party's most prominent leaders, was born in August 1948 to his mother Iberia and father Francis. He grew up in Maywood, a majority-Black neighborhood just outside of Chicago. Fresh out of high school and full of righteous passion, he became a youth council president of the West Suburban Branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), recruiting five hundred members. At eighteen, he began campaigning for a community pool in Maywood, as well as other recreational facilities that he asserted should be integrated and well-maintained.³⁷ As

³² Alkebulan, *Survival Pending Revolution*, 5.

³³ Stieva, "Victory, a Loss, or Draw," 84.

³⁴ Jakobi Williams, "'Don't No Woman Have to Do Nothing She Don't Want to Do': Gender, Activism, and the Illinois Black Panther Party," *Black Women, Gender + Families* 6, no. 2 (2012): 38.

³⁵ The Panthers were certainly not strict Leninists; nor were they Marxists. However, that discussion and classification is for another paper. Simply calling them "radical leftists," though, simplifies and generalizes their ideological foundation.

³⁶ Judson L. Jeffries, *Huey P. Newton: The Radical Theorist* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2002), 49.

³⁷ Nancy Giesecke, "Maywood Pool, Park District Urged," *Chicago Tribune*, Jul. 2, 1967, Q1.

Hampton's popularity grew, so did his notoriety. He was increasingly the target of racist articles in major Chicago newspapers, and police officers seemed to take pride in arresting him on trivial charges. Having begun to advocate more confrontational measures of addressing police brutality and systemic inequality, he was arrested for the first time, at age nineteen, in late 1967 and charged with inciting mob violence after protesting the unlawful arrest of a schoolmate.³⁸ He was arrested so many times in the next two years that he stopped driving in order to avoid being stopped for traffic violations.³⁹ Unbeknownst to Hampton, the FBI had started a file with his name on it when he was just nineteen. At the time of his death in 1969, it spanned twelve volumes and more than four thousand pages, his name near the top of their "agitator's index."⁴⁰ The Bureau was afraid of Hampton, it seemed; it had labeled him a militant leader and tapped his mother's phone in an attempt to keep as many tabs on him as possible.

In 1968, two chapters of the Black Panther Party were formed in Chicago, one of the most racially segregated cities in America: one on the South side and one on the West side. After months of jostling for recognition from national leadership, they merged in November 1968, officially becoming the Illinois chapter. In spring of 1968, Hampton met Bobby Rush and Bob Brown, the founders of the South side chapter, and his mind was made up. He joined the South side chapter, and when the two groups merged, he was made spokesperson due to his extraordinary oration skills.⁴¹ Going a step further, he helped create Chicago-specific programs, like a free healthcare clinic and political education classes, as well as expanding

³⁸ Arthur Siddon, "School Melees Baffle Parents, Officials," *Chicago Tribune*, Oct. 29, 1967, 27.

³⁹ Jeffrey Haas, *The Assassination of Fred Hampton: How the FBI and the Chicago Police Murdered a Black Panther* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2009), 31-32.

⁴⁰ Ward Churchill and Jim Vander Wall, *Agents of Repression: The FBI's Secret Wars Against the Black Panther Party and the American Indian Movement* (Boston: South End Press, 1988), 64.

⁴¹ Jakobi Williams, *From the Bullet to the Ballot: The Illinois Chapter of the Black Panther Party and Racial Coalition Politics in Chicago* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013): 62-64.

the free breakfast program.⁴² He held weekly rallies in Chicago with support from the party's national chairmen, drawing crowds with his energy and eloquence. He began to appear on local news programs and spoke to student protestors at high schools and colleges in the area, encouraging them to walk out to make their demands heard.⁴³ While Black freedom and civil rights groups like the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and SNCC had gotten media coverage in Chicago in the past, the Panthers were being nationally characterized as "gun-toting thugs," making them a perfect subject for sensational news stories.⁴⁴

Perhaps the most notable of Hampton's achievements as a leader in the Panthers, though, was the launch of the Rainbow Coalition, the bringing together of the Young Patriots Organization (YPO), the Young Lords, and Rise Up Angry (RUA) to partner with the Chicago Panthers.⁴⁵ The YPO were mainly poor, white, southerners focused on economic disenfranchisement; the Young Lords were a Puerto Rican/Mexican American/Chicano-affiliated gang from northwest Chicago who faced high levels of police brutality; and RUA were white lower- and middle-class students dedicated to social revolution.⁴⁶ Structured as a partnership, all four organizations remained independent, but united around a common enemy: Mayor Richard J. Daley and his support of brutal policing and programs of disenfranchisement and displacement, as well as State's Attorney Edward Hanrahan's

⁴² Churchill and Vander Wall, *Agents of Repression*, 65.

⁴³ Williams, 68.

⁴⁴ Theoharis and Woodard, eds., *Freedom North*, 12.

⁴⁵ José "Cha Cha" Jimenéz, "The Young Lords, Puerto Rican Liberation, and the Black Freedom Struggle," *OAH Magazine of History* 26, no. 1 (Jan. 2012): 62.

⁴⁶ Gene Marine, *The Black Panthers* (New York: Signet Books, 1969): 50.

embrace of racist, violent policing of Black and brown youth.⁴⁷ The Rainbow Coalition was an organization of solidarity, representation, and alliance. In many ways, Hampton's death strengthened their resolve.⁴⁸

“The Greatest Threat to Internal Security”: FBI Motivations

In 1967, memoranda pertaining to Black Power and Black liberation groups were distributed to FBI field offices across the nation, categorizing these organizations as extremist hate groups based on their “violent rhetoric” and inclination toward anti-American revolutionary action.⁴⁹ This, then, was the beginning of COINTELPRO's coordinated, multifaceted operation to undermine the Panthers from both the inside and the outside. “The Black Panther Party, without question, represents the greatest threat to the internal security of the country,” J. Edgar Hoover asserted in an official directive from June of 1969.⁵⁰ He further declared that he would eradicate the party by the end of the year before it could find a “Messiah” for the cause, someone akin to Martin Luther King Jr. Hampton, despite Hoover's best efforts, became the messiah of sorts, almost a martyr for young Black activists across the nation. The FBI's file on him grew all the while. Even after Hampton's murder, Hoover remained obstinately opposed to the Panthers' mission, blaming them and other groups for attacks on police officers nationwide.⁵¹

⁴⁷ For a comprehensive look at Mayor Daley's policies during his time in office, see Roger Biles, *Richard J. Daley: Politics, Race, and the Government of Chicago* (Dekalb, Ill.: Northern Illinois University Press, 1995).

⁴⁸ Stieva, 102.

⁴⁹ “Memorandum from Director, FBI, to all SACs, re: Black Extremists,” Aug. 27, 1967, COINTELPRO-Black Extremist Files, FBI digitized archives.

⁵⁰ J. Edgar Hoover, “Annual Fiscal Report,” June 15, 1969, COINTELPRO-Black Extremist Files, FBI digitized archives.

⁵¹ Roy Wilkins and Ramsey Clark, *Search and Destroy: A Report by the Commission of Inquiry into the Black Panthers and the Police* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), 9.

Most of the information the FBI had on Hampton, and on the Chicago Panthers in general, had been provided by William O'Neal, whom Agent Roy Mitchell had recruited to infiltrate the Panthers in exchange for having auto theft charges dropped.⁵² O'Neal, just nineteen at the time, had been recruited to work for the FBI after stealing a car and taking it across state lines. They gave him two options: go to jail, or assist in their operations targeting the Black Panthers.⁵³ He agreed to the latter and was paid for his work. He was told to go to the chapter office and ask to join. Having believed the Panthers were little more than a group akin to the Blackstone Rangers, a notorious Chicago street gang, O'Neal quickly learned about their theoretical underpinnings and political orientations for new members.⁵⁴ As he grew closer to the leadership, O'Neal rose through the ranks of the Chicago Panthers, reporting to Agent Mitchell all the while. He then became their security captain despite being viewed with some suspicion by leadership. He pushed for more and more violent confrontations with police, urging the chapter to escalate their tactics. This was common for infiltrators, who would engage in criminal activity, create divisions in the groups they infiltrated, and work to create an unfavorable image of any and all types of protest activity.⁵⁵ Beginning in June 1969, O'Neal supplied his handlers with floor plans, diagrams, and even keys to the headquarters.⁵⁶ In an interview twenty years after the raid, O'Neal denied knowing anyone would be hurt in the Hampton raid; he claimed that the police wanted to

⁵² Robert Blau, "Panther Informant Death Ruled Suicide," *Chicago Tribune*, Jan. 18, 1990.

⁵³ William O'Neal, interview by Blackside, Inc., April 13, 1989, transcript, Henry Hampton Collection, Washington University Libraries.

⁵⁴ William O'Neal, interview by Blackside, Inc., April 13, 1989, transcript. The Blackstone Rangers, now known as the Almighty Black P. Stone Nation, are a street gang in Chicago founded in 1958. For more information, see Natalie Moore and Lance Williams, *The Almighty Black P Stone Nation: The Rise, Fall, and Resurgence of an American Gang* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2012).

⁵⁵ Greenberg, *Surveillance in America*, 23.

⁵⁶ William O'Neal, interview by Blackside, Inc., April 13, 1989, transcript.

“catch him [Hampton] with weapons and seal his conviction.”⁵⁷ Asked about his involvement in the party and whether he felt guilty for essentially leading the FBI and Chicago police to Hampton, O’Neal said:

I mean, what am I supposed to do? Feel guilty right now about it? I didn't feel guilty then, I was hurt because Fred Hampton died. I was hurt because a lot of other people died in the Panthers. There were a lot of Panthers that died in Chicago, got killed needlessly and senselessly. At this point I questioned the whole purpose of the Black Panther Party. It got a lot of people hurt, did, did [sic] very little else.⁵⁸

He also spoke about the FBI’s motivations for disrupting Panther activities, claiming his handlers were interested in tracking the movement of weapons, communications with other “militant groups,” and alignments with white radical groups such as the Weathermen and Students for a Democratic Society (SDS).⁵⁹ Despite most Chicago chapter activities being centered around free breakfast programs, medical care, and other social services, COINTELPRO agents had little time for those, preferring to focus on political education classes and distribution of leftist literature.⁶⁰

The FBI was more than willing to share information with the Chicago police. Edward Hanrahan, the Cook County State’s Attorney, authorized his Special Prosecutions Unit to work alongside the Chicago Police Department’s Gang Intelligence Unit and COINTELPRO agents. The Special Prosecutions Unit acted as an extension of the State’s Attorney’s office, with additional permissions to surveil, infiltrate, and arrest, making it the perfect collaborator for COINTELPRO agents and their operations. Mayor Daley, Hanrahan, and other city

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ SDS was a left-wing, middle-class anti-war group. The Weathermen, or Weather Underground Organization, was originally founded as an entity of the SDS. However, they were much more radical and violent in their actions, carrying out multiple bombings in the late 1960s and early 1970s (Daniel J. Wakin, “Quieter Lives for 60’s Militants, but Intensity of Beliefs Hasn’t Faded,” *New York Times*, Aug. 24, 2003).

⁶⁰ “Memorandum from SAC, Chicago, to Director, FBI: re Bureau letter dated 11/6/69 to Springfield,” Nov. 26, 1969, COINTELPRO-Black Extremist Files, FBI digitized archives. While “distribution of leftist literature” may seem trivial to a 21st century reader, it is important to keep in mind the context of both the Cold War and the Vietnam War. Leftist ideology posed a serious threat to the American government in 1969.

officials had spent most of 1969 strategizing for their “War on Gangs,” targeting Black youth in the city and publicizing it through press conferences, speeches and radio broadcasts. As the summer drew to a close, suspected gang members had been indicted on over two hundred charges, and at least eleven had been killed in altercations with police.⁶¹ Hanrahan frequently referred to gang members as “animals” and maniacs, people who had become criminals through their own personal failings and were therefore unfit for polite society.⁶² His Special Prosecutions Unit, formed specifically to hunt them down, was hated by hundreds of Black youth, many of whom had seen their siblings or parents killed by Chicago police who were never charged. Addressing a group of Black women in late summer of 1969 in an attempt to smooth things over, Hanrahan said:

Nobody in their right mind would approve that kind of conduct [gang involvement]...I wish you had an opportunity to see a dead body, some young boy shot or stabbed or clubbed. When you see a young person dead in a pool of blood, and realize the grief this means to a mother, then you know what gang warfare is all about.⁶³

The “War on Gangs” program had been well-received in its infancy, but the final days of summer found both white and Black opinion of it to be critical. Some even dared to call it racist, although never beyond closed doors. Distrust for Hanrahan, at least in the Black community, deepened.⁶⁴

Winter settled into Chicago, the FBI began communicating more frequently with the Chicago Police Department and the Cook County State’s Attorney’s office, and William O’Neal increased the flow of information to his handlers. The raid on Hampton’s apartment

⁶¹ Wilkins and Clark, *Search and Destroy*, 20.

⁶² This rhetoric of criminality as a personal failing is examined further in Khalil Gibran Muhammad’s *The Condemnation of Blackness*, previously cited in footnote 26.

⁶³ Wilkins and Clark, 20.

⁶⁴ Curtis J. Austin, *Up Against the Wall: Violence in the Making and Unmaking of the Black Panther Party* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2006), 235.

was planned by Hanrahan's office and the Chicago police department after O'Neal provided information about weapons being held in Hampton's Monroe Street apartment. It was specifically scheduled for the early morning so as to achieve the biggest element of surprise and "avoid an incident."⁶⁵ However, as mentioned in the report released by the federal grand jury assembled after the murder, the best way to avoid violence would have been to raid the apartment in the evening, when they knew it was empty. If not then, the police should have followed standard procedure and used "sound equipment, portable lighting, and tear gas" to sweep the Panthers out of the building before their search.⁶⁶ While the federal grand jury report surveyed the raid preparations and found it "ill-conceived," in reality, it was something far more more extraordinary. Everyone involved in the planning knew that it was more than just a routine police mission. The nature of the raid was kept secret, even from the Chicago police, until it was being executed and Sergeant Groth called for backup cars as they approached the apartment building. Groth would later claim that as they approached Hampton's apartment, he advised the officers who accompanied him on the raid to avoid gunfire at all costs.⁶⁷ An hour later, Groth himself having fired multiple times, that advice was moot.

"He's Good and Dead Now"

The night before Hampton's murder, he and several other members of the party had taught a political education class and then gone to the office at their headquarters to finish up some work. It was cold, as Decembers in Chicago often are, and the week had been long and slow; it was an almost melancholy evening. The Panthers, Hampton and O'Neal among them,

⁶⁵ Wilkins and Clark, 33.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 38.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 37.

walked back to the Monroe Street apartment where Hampton spent most nights. They ate a big dinner, “chili and a big pot of spaghetti,” and discussed what they had been reading and thinking about lately.⁶⁸ No one suspected a thing, except for William O’Neal. Brenda Harris, Verlina Brewer, Blair Anderson, Ronald Satchel, Deborah Johnson, Harold Bell, Louis Truelock, Mark Clark, and Fred Hampton went to sleep. Only six would wake up. The truth of what happened in the hours between peaceful, if exhausted, sleep and terrified wakefulness has been contested, concealed, and made public in many different forms.

The unit chosen to carry out the raid was formed through collaboration between the FBI, the Gang Intelligence Unit of the Chicago Police Department, and the State’s Attorney’s office’s Special Prosecutions Unit.⁶⁹ Most officers involved were “volunteers.”⁷⁰ Sergeant Daniel Groth, who led the raid, obtained a warrant for the seizure of illegal weapons, specifically sawed-off shotguns. He recruited thirteen men to carry out the raid, staked out the neighborhood and drew up plans, and scheduled the raid for the predawn hours of December 4.⁷¹ Using the information supplied to them by William O’Neal, the officers, themselves heavily armed, entered the apartment from multiple vantage points at 4:30 a.m., firing six shots. By 4:45 a.m., at least eighty shots had been fired into and throughout the apartment, riddling the walls and door frames with bullet holes. Just one shot was reciprocated: Mark Clark, who slept with a loaded gun after an attempt on his life, released the safety in his terror and confusion.⁷² By 4:50, Clark and Hampton were dead, Hampton having been shot four times. Hampton, it seemed, had never even moved from the bed he shared with his fiancée,

⁶⁸ William O’Neal, interview with Blackside, Inc., April 13, 1989, transcript.

⁶⁹ Churchill and Vander Wall, 66.

⁷⁰ Wilkins and Clark, 33.

⁷¹ Austin, *Up Against the Wall*, 236.

⁷² Wilkins and Clark, viii.

much less woken up. By some accounts, he had been drugged, most likely by O'Neal; by others, including O'Neal's, he had simply been so exhausted he was deeply asleep. Three different autopsies resulted in three different reports and three different analyses of Hampton's blood.⁷³ The Cook County chemist, Dr. Berman, found Seconal, a barbiturate, in a high enough dosage to keep him unconscious.⁷⁴ O'Neal, who was not known for his reliable testimony, said it was "fabricated" that Hampton was drugged.⁷⁵ The report by Wilkins and Clark, which analyzed all available evidence, concluded that it was highly probable Hampton was drugged. However, the FBI and federal grand jury rejected Dr. Berman's findings on insufficient grounds and declined to continue the investigation into any possible drugging because they might be implicated in such an investigation.⁷⁶ Wilkins and Clark further note that an unnamed "FBI informant" would be the most likely person to have drugged Hampton; when the commission's report was released, O'Neal's identity was yet to be disclosed. This lack of information further prevented investigators from determining who, if anyone, had drugged Hampton. Whether or not there were barbiturates in his blood, at 5:15 a.m., his and Clark's bodies were removed from the scene, a police evidence technician snapping photographs all the while.⁷⁷

At 6:30 a.m., Jeffrey Haas, a lawyer with the People's Law Office of Chicago who worked closely with Hampton and the Panthers, was woken by his partner and told to talk to the survivors at the holding pen. "Chairman Fred is dead," his partner told him.⁷⁸ Haas

⁷³ "Autopsy Refutes Slaying Reports," *Chicago Daily Defender*, Dec. 9, 1969, 4.

⁷⁴ Haas, *Assassination of Fred Hampton*, 92.

⁷⁵ William O'Neal, interview with Blackside, Inc., transcript.

⁷⁶ Wilkins and Clark, 177.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 180.

⁷⁸ Haas, 72.

reached the police station on Wood Street by 7:30 and was informed that Hanrahan had given orders to block visitors for survivors of the raid. “[The order] violates an Illinois criminal statute specifically forbidding anyone to interfere with the right of a person in custody to see their attorney,” Haas told the sergeant at the desk, pulling a paperback copy of the state Criminal Code from his rumpled suit jacket to no avail.⁷⁹ After being blocked by multiple sergeants, Haas writes, he called Hanrahan’s office directly, refusing to hang up until he was given an answer. Finally, at midmorning, he was taken to the station’s interview room and allowed to see Deborah Johnson, heavily pregnant, crying, and still in her nightgown.⁸⁰ As Haas listened, she described how she had tried to wake Hampton, finally laying on top of him to try to protect him from the bullets flying through the air. “The bed was shaking from [them],” she said. Two of the raiding officers entered the bedroom, she told Haas, and one pulled up her nightgown, yelled “We got a broad,” and dragged her into the kitchen.

Another two officers entered the bedroom. Harold Bell, who had been in the living room, corroborated Johnson’s account of what followed. “That’s Fred Hampton, that’s Fred Hampton,” one had said.

“Is he dead?”

“He’s barely alive.”

“He’ll make it.” Two shots rang out. “He’s good and dead now,” Johnson recalled the officer saying.⁸¹

Haas interviewed the other Panthers who had been taken into custody, attempting to construct a timeline of the raid and gather as much evidence as possible. What good would evidence gathering do, he wondered. If the police, working for state prosecutors, could enter

⁷⁹ Haas, 75.

⁸⁰ Haas, 77.

⁸¹ Haas, 78.

someone's home and murder them in their bed, what good could the justice system do, if any? The raid had culminated in "nothing short of deliberate murder...an assassination" in its truest form.⁸² Was there any real way to participate in the legal system and expose its unjust nature at the same time? If there was, Haas wrote, he was not sure what it was; the only thing he was sure of was that Hanrahan and his office were about to circulate a version of the raid that was almost certainly devoid of truth.

The *Chicago Tribune* and Hanrahan's telling of the story of the raid was an entirely different narrative than that of the Panthers. The *Tribune*'s front-page picture on December 8 was "Weapons Cache," a massive black-and-white spread of guns, bullets, and boxes of ammunitions labelled as having been seized from the Panthers' "secret headquarters."⁸³ The paper's leading story relied on Sergeant Groth, who had led the raid, as its main source. The sergeant claimed that the Panthers had fired back in a "wild gun battle" against the police, staging a "shotgun volley" that made the raiding officers fear for their lives.⁸⁴ It was only right to seek charges against the heavily armed Panthers, various law enforcement officials said, as Hampton himself had slept with a "loaded .45 in his hand and shotgun by his side," the article claimed. Just twenty-four hours after Hampton's murder, the media, law enforcement, and prosecutors had begun their framing of him. In a press conference held later that day by Hanrahan's office, Assistant State's Attorney Richard Jalovec characterized the Panthers as firing back at the police, with "six or seven of them firing" and "200 shots"

⁸² Haas, 82.

⁸³ "Weapons Cache," *Chicago Tribune*, Dec. 8, 1969, 1.

⁸⁴ Ronald Koziol and Edward Lee, "Attempted Murder Charges Eyed in Panthers Gun Fight," *Chicago Tribune*, Dec. 5, 1969, 3.

exchanged.⁸⁵ Said Hanrahan, showcasing the weapons seized from the apartment that had not been tagged as evidence:

The immediate, violent criminal reaction of the occupants in shooting at announced police officers emphasizes the extreme viciousness of the Black Panther Party. So does their refusal to cease firing at the police officers when urged to do so several times. We wholeheartedly commend the police officers for their bravery, their remarkable restraint, and their discipline in the face of the Black Panther attack, as should every decent citizen in our community.⁸⁶

In an attempt to counter the prevailing narrative of the raid, the *Chicago Daily Defender* ran near-constant articles on the event and subsequent civil and criminal trials. The December 8 headline, “Black Chicago Demands Truth,” questioned the police’s story as well as State’s Attorney Edward Hanrahan’s motives. “Who Polices Hanrahan?” was another story which directly asked whether or not Hanrahan and his office or the Chicago Police Department were behind the raid and Hampton’s murder, drawing connections between the nature of the raid and those responsible.⁸⁷ Photographs taken of the crime scene, both immediately after the raid and in the days following, illustrated the one-sided nature of the shooting. Almost a hundred bullet holes riddled the east walls of the apartment, directly across from where the police entered, with none on the west walls where the police claimed the Panthers had fired back.⁸⁸

The conduct of city, county, and state officials following the raid was called into question by more than just the *Defender*. Wilkins and Clark’s *Commission of Inquiry* dedicates an entire chapter to examining the actions taken by the Chicago Police Department, the State’s Attorney’s office, and the grand jury investigations of the raid. The crime scene

⁸⁵ Haas, 84.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ D. Mosby, “Who Polices Hanrahan?” *Chicago Daily Defender*, Dec. 8, 1969, 2; “Black Chicago Demands Truth,” *Chicago Daily Defender*, Dec. 8, 1969, 1.

⁸⁸ Haas, 91. Some of these photos can be seen in the Appendix, including the blood-stained bed, overturned furniture, and the number of bullet holes in the walls.

was left unguarded for thirteen days and was only sealed off on December 17 after the coroner read about “tours” of it in the *Tribune* and ordered it closed.⁸⁹ The report found that the police who carried out the raid were instructed by the State’s Attorney’s office to remove Hampton’s and Clark’s bodies before the medical examiner arrived. This not only constituted illegal tampering with the crime scene, but it undermined the coroner’s ability to perform his job of determining Hampton’s and Clark’s cause of death.⁹⁰ Two weeks after the raid, the *Defender* published an article alleging that the police had stood by while the crime scene was tampered with and evidence was altered.⁹¹ Furthermore, reports of evidence collection by police officers were conflicting. State’s Attorney’s officers claimed they allowed the police Mobile Crime Laboratory Unit (MCLU) to collect all pertinent evidence. However, testimony from the MCLU revealed that they had failed to recover vital pieces of evidence and the evidence they had tagged was only that which supported raiding officers’ accounts.⁹² In fact, evidence collection by the MCLU was not finished until twelve days after the raid, when the crime scene had been considerably compromised. This testimony, in addition with the *Tribune*’s inflammatory coverage of the raid, contributed to even more confusion about the nature of and truth behind the raid. The participating officers gave different versions of the raid to the press, starting in the afternoon of December 4. Whether the officers remembered the raid differently or were deliberately telling different versions of the story is unclear, despite extensive investigation and analysis. Many of the statements were contradictory and changed over the course of the trials and investigations, casting doubt on the officers’ credibility. Even the federal grand jury report and independent report by the Commission of

⁸⁹ Wilkins and Clark, 182.

⁹⁰ Austin, 244.

⁹¹ “Panthers Say Cops Altering Evidence,” *Chicago Daily Defender*, Dec. 18, 1969, 1.

⁹² Wilkins and Clark, 182.

Inquiry were ultimately unable to determine exactly what happened in the first moments of the raid.⁹³ Officers who oversaw the first internal investigation of the raid, which began one week later, testified that they unconditionally believed everything the raiding officers had said, with no investigative questions designed to “test the truth and veracity of these officers.”⁹⁴

When the State’s Attorney’s office officially admitted involvement in the afternoon of December 4, Hanrahan began giving elaborate, dramatic press conferences emphasizing the bravery of the police under fire and displaying “seized Panther weapons.”⁹⁵ This pretrial coverage culminated in a so-called “exclusive” given to the *Tribune* and even a television reenactment of the raid by the officers involved which was broadcast across the Chicago metropolitan area. These accounts of the raid further helped to turn public opinion about Hampton and the Panthers hostile and ruined the possibility of a fair trial. The *Tribune* even re-ran articles written after Hampton’s prior arrests in a sort of smear campaign and “history” of his criminal record, further influencing public opinion.⁹⁶

An investigation of the raid conducted in early 1969 by the police department’s Internal Inspections Division (IID) was so “seriously deficient that it suggest[ed] purposeful malfeasance,” the federal grand jury concluded in 1970. Questions asked by the IID had been discussed with the State’s Attorney’s office beforehand; raiding officers were never asked to give full statements, only to ratify the account given by Sergeant Groth; and no investigation of false accounts propagated in the press was undertaken.⁹⁷ However, the federal grand jury

⁹³ Wilkins and Clark, 61; Austin, 237.

⁹⁴ Wilkins and Clark, 185.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 183.

⁹⁶ “Why Judge Jailed Black Panther Aid: He Saw Hampton as ‘Dangerous’,” *Chicago Tribune*, Dec. 12, 1969, 3.

⁹⁷ Wilkins and Clark, 188.

itself failed to investigate whether the police officers had intentionally provided conflicting accounts of the raid and whether the State's Attorney's office, the FBI, or other agencies were implicated in falsifications. The failure of so many officials to simply do their jobs to the fullest extent is perhaps one of the most damning results of Wilkins and Clark's report.

Six weeks after the raid, the seven survivors were indicted on thirty-one counts by a Cook County grand jury, with charges ranging from attempt to commit murder to unlawful possession of firearms by a minor, all specifically related to the raid. These charges were based at least in part on the crime lab report, which was riddled with scientific errors as simple as incorrectly preserved fingerprints, and the contradictory police testimony. The survivors' attorneys advised them all to plead not guilty to all charges, and then filed motions to "compel disclosure of all information relating to the raid."⁹⁸ While waiting for a reply, members of the federal grand jury found that the police crime lab had misidentified even more evidence. The "Brenda Harris gun," which the police claimed had been fired twice during the raid, actually belonged to one of the raiding officers, making yet another piece of evidence erroneous.⁹⁹ As more evidence was re-examined and arguments became more contradictory, the State's Attorney dismissed all indictments in March 1969 with little explanation as to why.

By June 1970, six months after the raid, no official had been charged for their conduct in the raid. Chief Judge Joseph Power, of the Cook County Criminal Court, convened a special county grand jury to investigate the raid further. In December 1970, a special grand jury came together to hear evidence from four attorneys.¹⁰⁰ By April 1971, rumors started

⁹⁸ Wilkins and Clark, 196.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 197.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 199.

circulating that the grand jury was planning to indict officials, including Hanrahan and the police superintendent, for obstruction of justice and their conduct following the raid. The grand jury had not been able to come to a decision regarding charges related to conduct of police officers during the raid itself, however. The newspapers latched onto reports of disputes in the courthouse, publishing accounts of indictments and investigations. The rumor mill worked overtime that summer. In all of the indictments and grand jury investigations, the fact that two men had been murdered seemed to fall by the wayside. Officials seemed more interested in proving each other wrong than in learning whether or not Fred Hampton's and Mark Clark's murders had been justifiable. All the while, the general public had been and continued to be deliberately manipulated by fabricated statements, intentionally misleading official reports, and other measures into believing that the Panthers could not be trusted.¹⁰¹ The FBI's role in this manipulation was covert, tactical, and expertly targeted, all done through COINTELPRO operations.

Cultural Propaganda Tactics

COINTELPRO operations in Chicago primarily included letter campaigns and propaganda literature. Letters were used to create tension between the Panthers and other groups, especially gangs like the Young Lords and Blackstone Rangers. This was done by suggesting that various members of leadership were in homosexual relationships, that Panther leaders worked for "the man" or had dodged the Vietnam war draft, or that the Panthers viewed themselves as superior to leaders of street gangs.¹⁰² Propaganda literature was usually disseminated by news sources that the FBI trusted; the Chicago field office identified almost two dozen journalists sympathetic to their operations. It was also mailed to desired recipients,

¹⁰¹ "Memorandum from SAC, Chicago, to Director, FBI: re Bureau letter dated 11/6/69 to Springfield," Nov. 26, 1969, COINTELPRO-Black Extremist Files, FBI digitized archives.

¹⁰² "Memorandum from SAC, Chicago, to Director, FBI," Jan. 16, 1969, COINTELPRO-Black Extremist Files, FBI digitized archives.

often party leaders, with false originating addresses on the envelopes. These operations were again used to create divisions, although these were more on a national scale, such as dividing national leadership of the Panthers and SNCC.¹⁰³ In an era when gay and lesbian government workers had been forced into hiding by Senator Joseph McCarthy's Lavender Scare, the COINTELPRO Chicago field office seemed particularly keen on associating Panther leaders with homosexuality in order to compromise and damage their reputations. There are multiple reports and memorandums which suggest discrediting leaders by calling their sexuality into question through falsified letters.

COINTELPRO utilized stereotypes of moral depravity to sway public opinion about the Panthers and other Black nationalist and Black Power groups. Agents were authorized to prepare such false communications as letters to the editors of various newspapers and letters to religious leaders and school board officials. These letters were written to call into the question the role of the Panthers in Chicago and the motives of their leadership. Oftentimes, they were signed "from a black brother," in order to appeal to the Black community in Chicago that had not yet warmed to the Panthers' activities.¹⁰⁴ Perhaps the most notorious of these falsifications was a letter alleging that a Panther leader in San Diego had impregnated a white teenage girl, playing into post-Civil War and early-twentieth century era stereotypes of Black men as insatiable rapists preying on white women.¹⁰⁵ Other operations involved adding false, violent captions to a coloring book prepared by the Panthers and sending copies to sponsors of the Panthers' free breakfast program; forging letters from "irate Black parents" to school officials in order to get teachers to cancel their subscriptions to the Black Panther

¹⁰³ "Memorandum from SAC, St. Louis, to Director, FBI: re Bureau Letter to San Francisco, 9/30/68," Oct. 11, 1968, COINTELPRO-Black Extremist Files, FBI digitized archives.

¹⁰⁴ Stieva, "Victory, a Loss, or a Draw?" 92; "Memorandum from SAC, Chicago, to Director, FBI, re: Chicago letter dated 11/17/69," Nov. 25, 1969, COINTELPRO-Black Extremist Files, FBI digitized archives.

¹⁰⁵ Drabble, "Black Power-New Left Coalitions," 78.

newsletters; and creating racist cartoons “asserting that the white leftist movement” was the real leader of the Panthers, leading to factionalism and strife.¹⁰⁶ These cartoons often contained images of caricatured or domesticated panthers being kept as house pets or tortured with whips by white SDS members, insinuating domination and exploitation by white leftist groups.¹⁰⁷

While assassination was never an official tactic used by the FBI during the COINTELPRO era, Churchill and Vander Wall call it “murkiest of all COINTELPRO areas” for a reason.¹⁰⁸ Declassified documents do not indicate that the FBI, or Hoover himself, ever directly authorized a political assassination. However, COINTELPRO methods, as well as extensive collaboration and the sharing of information with local law enforcement agencies, created an environment in which political assassinations could be carried out. Furthermore, a memorandum from the director’s desk authorizes Hampton’s “neutralization” through any means possible, as well as the neutralization of other groups and individuals, including their “spokesmen, membership, and supporters.”¹⁰⁹ Hoover was outspoken in his hatred of the Panthers and other Black Power and Black liberation organizations, even the more moderate Martin Luther King, Jr., and devoted himself to fomenting discord among them.¹¹⁰ The memorandum was, for him, just another step in eradicating the violent, leftist extremists that had overrun the nation. This point of view is evident in a memorandum Hoover sent to Chicago after Hampton’s death, expressing his regret that the office would no longer need to

¹⁰⁶ Drabble, 80.

¹⁰⁷ “Memorandum from Mr. G.C. Moore to Mr. W.C. Sullivan,” Nov. 21, 1969, COINTELPRO-Black Extremist Files, FBI digitized archives.

¹⁰⁸ Churchill and Vander Wall, 53.

¹⁰⁹ Baxter Smith, “FBI Memos Reveal Repression Schemes,” *The Black Scholar* 5, no. 7 (1974): 43.

¹¹⁰ “Memorandum from Mr. G.C. Moore to W.C. Sullivan,” Oct. 10, 1968, COINTELPRO-Black Extremist Files, FBI digitized archives.

undertake counterintelligence activity directly related to Hampton.¹¹¹ Taking this statement into account, the FBI was complicit in activities that led to political assassinations. In some cases, it could – and should – be considered directly responsible for assassinations which were made possible by methods of propaganda, infiltration, and manipulation. Through its tactics of cultural propaganda, the FBI manipulated public knowledge and opinion about the Panthers and about Fred Hampton, changing the narrative to fit its agenda.¹¹²

The *Tribune*'s coverage of the raid was first and foremost dehumanizing of Hampton by refusing to focus on his murder and instead on his criminal record. The paper chose to frame the Panthers and Hampton as dangerous, violent deviants who posed a threat to the entire nation. The *Tribune*'s reporting failed to provide information about the party's ideology or community programs, not to mention the reasons why they might be distrustful of the police. Furthermore, no articles quoted Panther members or even members of the community, just police officers and the State's Attorney's office, who were clearly pushing a specific agenda. The paper described Hampton from one angle: as a troubled menace, someone with an extensive criminal record and a history of "disciplinary problems" beginning in high school.¹¹³ It failed to mention these disciplinary problems were such things as reading Marx and Lenin, stealing ice cream as a teenager, and advocating for equality and desegregated swimming pools. These articles drew unfounded connections between arrests that had never led to charges, national Panther-police clashes, and Hampton's work as the youth council president of the Chicago NAACP, claiming that his dedication to civil rights

¹¹¹ "Memorandum from Director, FBI, to SAC, Chicago," Dec. 10, 1969, COINTELPRO-Black Extremist Files, FBI digitized archives.

¹¹² Ivan Greenberg, *The Dangers of Dissent: The FBI and Civil Liberties Since 1965* (Plymouth, UK: Lexington Books, 2012), 52.

¹¹³ Joseph Boyce, "Friends, Relatives Tell Story of Fred Hampton," *Chicago Tribune*, Dec. 28, 1969, 8.

work was what led to his “troubles with the law.”¹¹⁴ By framing Hampton as a lawless criminal, the *Tribune* did the FBI’s work for them, inciting a moral panic among the good white people of Chicago. A number of letters to the editor were published in the *Tribune* in the days after the raid, sympathizing with the police and thanking them for risking “being killed by revolutionaries.”¹¹⁵ By publishing these letters and focusing solely on what its editors viewed as Hampton’s negative, dangerous impact on the community, the *Tribune* further dehumanized Hampton, making him into an object of revulsion and his death into an object of consumption for white residents of Chicago. This is a method still used by mainstream media in the twenty-first century to frame murdered Black men and boys, often calling them “dangerous” or referring to them as “no angel” and emphasizing arrests for things as trivial as petty theft or jaywalking.¹¹⁶

In contrast, the *Chicago Daily Defender*’s coverage emphasized the abuse of power inherent in the murder, by framing the Panthers and Hampton as “sons and neighbors” and as individuals with counter-hegemonic beliefs and concerns.¹¹⁷ The *Defender*’s reporting placed Hampton’s murder within its societal context, arguing that he was, in effect, assassinated for challenging dominant ideologies; multiple journalists at the *Defender* characterized the raid as both an “execution” and a “modern lynching.”¹¹⁸ The articles published described Hampton as a humanitarian leader, involved in his community. The *Defender* countered the *Tribune*’s reporting by humanizing Hampton, reminding the public that he was a son, brother,

¹¹⁴ Joseph Boyce, “2 Black Groups Seek Probe of Panther-Police Gun Battle,” *Chicago Tribune*, Dec. 6, 1969, 4.

¹¹⁵ P. Bryan, “Black Panthers [Letter to the Editor],” *Chicago Tribune*, Dec, 19, 1969, 24.

¹¹⁶ Adam H. Johnson, “How the Media Smears Black Victims,” *Los Angeles Times*, Mar. 30, 2017.

¹¹⁷ Todd Fraley and Elli Lester-Roushansamir, “Revolutionary Leader or Deviant Thug? A Comparative Analysis of the *Chicago Tribune* and *Chicago Daily Defender*’s Reporting on the Death of Fred Hampton,” *Howard Journal of Communications* vol. 15 (2004): 163.

¹¹⁸ “Execution,” *Chicago Daily Defender*, Dec. 11, 1969, 2; “Modern Lynching,” *Chicago Daily Defender*, Dec. 11, 1969, 23.

and friend, and detailing the programs he had established as a Panther leader, such as “free breakfast programs for young children” and a “medical center in Westside.”¹¹⁹ The *Defender* described the raid as a “modern lynching,” emphasizing the fact that Hampton had been unconscious in his bed at the time of his murder, his pregnant fiancée at his side. Its reporting categorized the police, and indeed the FBI and the State’s Attorney’s office, as tools of an oppressive power structure, unused to having their authority called into question even when they abused it. By giving the murder and the Panthers the necessary contextualization, the *Defender* made Hampton the subject of his own story, revealing a side of him ignored by the *Tribune*. The *Tribune* presented him as someone to be afraid of; the *Defender* presented him as someone with a “strong moral consciousness” and sense of right and wrong.¹²⁰ While the *Tribune*’s reporting made Hampton into “no angel,” the *Defender* instead questioned if it was not enough that he was human. “Did he not deserve to be treated fairly? Did he not deserve to live anyway?” the paper asked.

It is evident that the FBI’s use of propaganda affected not only the various investigations that followed Hampton’s murder, but public opinion about these investigations. By infiltrating the Panthers and making them out to be little more than violent extremists, rather than theoretically-informed, revolutionarily-inclined activists, the FBI and J. Edgar Hoover created fear, suspicion, and distrust around them. Despite attendance in the thousands at Hampton’s funeral, in the months that followed, residents of Chicago both Black and white were more likely to trust the police than the Panthers thanks to the FBI’s reinforcement of the *Tribune*’s biased coverage.¹²¹

Lasting Effects

¹¹⁹ D. Mosby, “Racism Killed Hampton,” *Chicago Daily Defender*, Dec. 22, 1969, 1.

¹²⁰ Jesse Jackson, “On the Case: Fred Hampton (Part I),” *Chicago Daily Defender*, Dec. 13, 1969, 1.

¹²¹ Philip Caputo, “5000 Mourners Walk Past Coffin of Hampton in Suburb,” *Chicago Tribune*, Dec. 10, 1969, 3.

In the years following Hampton's murder, the Black Panther Party suffered a decline in membership both locally and nationally. White and Black residents of Chicago no longer knew what to believe, having been led in nearly every direction by the newspapers and law enforcement agencies who controlled the narrative around the raid and murder. Bobby Rush, who had helped found the Chicago chapter, led it after Hampton's death, but Huey P. Newton later expelled him from the party at large for reasons unclear.¹²² By 1977, the Chicago chapter had less than ten members, and the office was shuttered before 1980.¹²³ As membership declined nationally, efforts to reorganize were met with resistance. The leadership, eager to stay relevant by running for local office, failed to engage with the rank and file members' disillusionment with "the leadership's apparently uncontrollable propensity for unethical behavior," including drug use and extreme violence.¹²⁴ As a result, many members across the country simply left the party, no longer able to fully dedicate themselves to an organization that did not support them.

A \$47.7 million civil suit was filed in 1970 on behalf of the survivors of the raid, as well as Hampton and Clark's relatives.¹²⁵ Twenty-eight defendants were named, including Hanrahan. The trial lasted eighteen months and was ultimately dismissed when jurors deadlocked. In 1977, the suit was brought again, but charges against twenty-one of the defendants were dismissed prior to deliberations. Edward Hanrahan, the Cook County State's Attorney, was tried for obstruction of justice in conjunction with Hampton's murder, during the special county grand jury that convened in 1971. William O'Neal, despite his direct involvement in facilitating Hampton's murder, was never called to testify during the trial, nor

¹²² Alkebulan, 56.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 120.

¹²⁵ Tim Franklin and William B. Crawford Jr., "County OKs Panther Death Settlements," *Chicago Tribune*, Nov. 2, 1982.

was it ever mentioned that he had been recruited and paid by the FBI.¹²⁶ O'Neal was admitted into the Witness Protection Program in 1973 and committed suicide in 1990 after his involvement in COINTELPRO was revealed.¹²⁷

It was not until 1982 that the City of Chicago, Cook County, and the federal government came to an agreement on a settlement.¹²⁸ In total, \$1.85 million was paid out to the survivors of the raid, as well as Hampton and Clark's mothers, the largest settlement of its kind at the time. Despite the ruling that a "government conspiracy against the party existed" and that a clear violation of the plaintiffs' civil rights had taken place, none of the defendants named were sentenced to jail time.¹²⁹ The Bureau, in its dedication to ridding the nation of the Black Panthers and their militant activities, had resorted to a by-any-means-necessary philosophy, devoid of respect for civil and human rights.

Conclusion

Portraying Fred Hampton as a saint or community hero does him a disservice, stripping a multifaceted human being of his flaws and imperfections. No one is without flaws, Hampton least of all. He was young and hot-tempered, eager to purge members from the Chicago chapter if they got on his bad side. However, his vilification and dehumanization in the mainstream media obscured his work in local communities, as well as his dedication to Black power and Black liberation. Furthermore, it wholly erased his goals of law school, expanded community programs, and national organizing. He taught political education classes, ran free breakfast programs for neighborhood children, established healthcare clinics for those with sickle cell anemia and diabetes, and worked in the neighborhood he grew up in

¹²⁶ Smith, "FBI Memos," 45.

¹²⁷ Blau, "Informant Death."

¹²⁸ Franklin and Crawford Jr., "Panther Death Settlement."

¹²⁹ Austin, 237.

to ensure that the people around him were involved in his activism. For this, he was arrested over and over again. For this, he was charged with inciting violence and disrupting the peace. For this, he was murdered.

Fred Hampton was barely twenty-one when he was shot four times at point-blank range and subsequently blamed for his own murder. His life of activism, community organizing, and education was cut short because the federal government and local law enforcement decided he was too dangerous to continue rising through party ranks. The FBI, through the extensive use of their COINTELPRO operations and collaboration with Chicago police, conspired to end Fred Hampton's life. They used varying methods and tactics of cultural propaganda, including creation and dissemination of falsified material, infiltration, and manipulation of media coverage in an attempt to public opinion about Hampton in the days, weeks, and months following his murder. This manipulation led to a decline in party membership, both locally and nationally, and a misrepresentation of their message and ideology in society at large.

Scholars and academics cannot change the tides of history. Instead, they are called to assist future generations in a more complex interpretation of it. A better understanding of the ways in which Fred Hampton and the Black Panthers challenged systemic inequality and hegemonic ideologies may lead to a more masterful conception of how they were targeted by the FBI and why Hampton was murdered. Through a multi-layered analysis of the history and background of the organization he spent the final years of his life involved in, historians can better understand both the legacy created by his assassination and the environment of propaganda and manipulation of opinion through which it was made possible.

Appendix

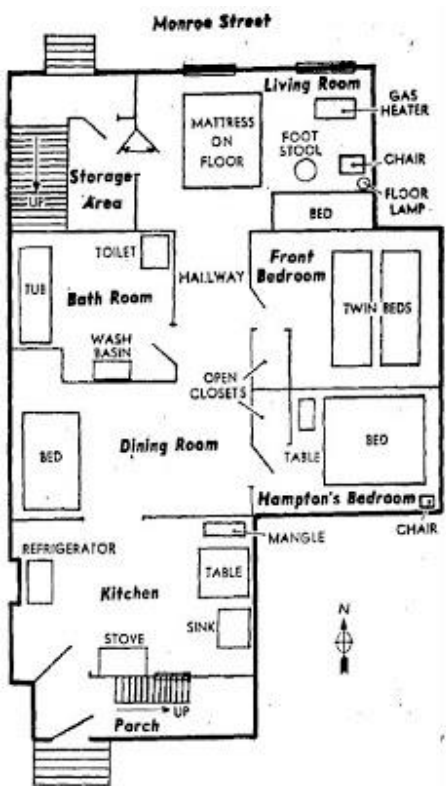


Diagram of 2337 W. Monroe Street, provided by William O'Neal, in interview by Blackside, Inc., April 13, 1989, transcript, Henry Hampton Collection, Washington University Libraries.



2337 W. Monroe Street. Photo from author's personal collection.



Photograph of 2337 W. Monroe Street

Bedroom, December 4, 1969, *Chicago Tribune* photograph archives.



Photograph of 2337 W. Monroe Street

Hallway, December 4, 1969, *Chicago Tribune* photograph archives.



Photograph of 2337 W. Monroe Street Bedroom,
courtesy of G. Flint Taylor's personal collection.

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