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Little Bobby Hutton held as role model for African Americans

■ W. Oakland library to celebrate young Black Panthers figure killed by police

By Cecily Burt

STAFF WRITER

OAKLAND — The West Oakland library on Saturday will celebrate the life of Bobby Hutton, national treasurer of the Black Panther Party who was shot and killed by police in West Oakland 37 years ago this month, two weeks shy of his 17th birthday.

For some, Bobby Hutton's name and his association with the Panthers rekindle bad memories. They'll likely recall newspaper photographs of a sharp-dressed young man toting a shotgun in front of Oakland police headquarters or a courtroom somewhere.

Yet the more than 2,000 mourners who packed his funeral remembered him as much

Please see **EVENT**, Local 8



RON RIESTERER — Staff file

THIS FAMOUS 1968 photo of Black Panther Party member "Little" Bobby Hutton holding a shotgun in front of the Oakland Police Department jail at Seventh and Broadway was taken just a few months before he was shot and killed.



ALTHOUGH THE VIOLENT, gun-toting image of the Black Panther Party was and still is pervasive, the organization started many programs to aid poor communities. They held food and clothing giveaways, such as the one pictured here at the Oakland Auditorium, started free breakfast programs for students, opened schools and medical clinics and spearheaded efforts to test people for sickle cell anemia.

Bobby Hutton Day on Saturday

more than that, as "Little" Bobby Hutton, a self-taught young man who worked hard to help Oakland's poor and instill pride in Oakland's disenfranchised African-American communities.

"We are trying to reach out to young people and get them to participate in their communities, to tell them who Bobby Hutton was, the first Black Panther, a young man who made a difference, and look up to him as a role model," said Billy X Jennings, a former party member and historian who is organizing Saturday's event.

Bobby Seale and Huey P. Newton formed the Black Panther Party in 1966, during a turbulent, watershed era of civil rights, free speech, war protests and black power.

Hutton was 15 years old when he met Seale and Newton, who were working for the mayor's anti-poverty jobs program in North Oakland and



BOBBY SEALE, who co-founded the Black Panther Party with Huey P. Newton, speaks at a rally in Oakland in 1968.

RON RIESTERER
— Staff file

programs that turned the national spotlight on neglectful policies that left poor African-American communities behind, Jennings said.

They started free breakfast programs for students and gave away clothing, shoes and food to the needy. They opened schools and medical clinics and pushed for education and testing for sickle cell anemia, a deadly blood disorder that primarily strikes African Americans.

They fought for equality in education, housing and jobs, registered thousands of new voters and patrolled Oakland's poor neighborhoods and provided escorts for the elderly.

They even forced the city of Oakland to put a stoplight at a dangerous North Oakland intersection where three children had been killed crossing the street to school.

West Oakland City Councilmember Nancy Nadel said the free breakfast program started by the Panthers was one of their most important achievements.

As far as holding up Little Bobby Hutton as a role model for young people, as Jennings suggests, Nadel said those efforts should focus on his positive contributions and not in any way promote a return to an era of confrontation with the Police Department.

"I think his legacy as a young man who had pride in himself and his community is a very important legacy to leave," she said. "Especially as it encourages similar activism and serves as inspiration to value yourself and to help improve your community."

Saturday's event will feature live music, poetry and a Panther photo exhibit by Ilka Hartmann. Elbert "Big Man" Howard, author and the party's former national spokesman, will serve as keynote speaker.

The winner of the Little Bobby Hutton Essay and Poetry Contest will read from the entry with the theme, "Why is Bobby

Hutton an Oakland Legend?"

Melvin Dickson, a former party member and head of the Commemoration Committee for the Black Panther Party who runs the Little Bobby Hutton Literacy Program in South Berkeley, said Hutton's legacy lives on through the youngsters in the program.

"Little Bobby Hutton came from a poor economic situation like lots of people today. For instance, he couldn't read, he had to teach himself to read. It's not unique, but he was inspired by the Black Panther Party, none other than Huey and Bobby," Dickson said.

"He was reading W.E.B. DuBois, he had advanced himself, he used to know the 10-point program by heart," he said. "He's already an inspiration to the kids we work with."

Bobby Hutton Day will be held Saturday at the West Oakland Library, 1801 Adeline St., 1 p.m. For more information visit www.itsabouttimebpp.com.



RON RIESTERER — Staff file

THE BLACK PANTHER PARTY had supporters across economic and racial spectrums.

Actor Marlon Brando attended a 1968 Panther rally in Oakland and attended Hutton's funeral the same year.

asked to join the Panthers as their first member. He was so young they had to ask his mother's permission, Jennings said.

Hutton became the Panthers' first national treasurer and along with other early members helped set the bar for the party's progressive agenda, Jennings said.

Although the Black Panthers' reputation as a revolutionary black militia is the one that sticks, the organization should also receive credit for its groundbreaking social justice



RON RIESTERER — Staff file

WILLIAM LEE BRENT, a member of the Black Panther Party, at an Oakland rally in 1968. He later hijacked a plane to Cuba.

When I joined the Black Panther Party'



Big Man this Saturday, April 16, 1 p.m., at the West Oakland Library, 1801 St., Oakland, where he'll be keynote speaker for this year's Lil Bobby Hutton Day. Big Man has just published his memoir, "Panther on the Prowl."

Meet Big Man, keynote speaker at Lil Bobby Hutton Day this Saturday, 1pm, West Oakland Library, 1801 Adeline St.

by Elbert "Big Man" Howard

There were many reasons why I joined the Black Panther Party. Some are easy to explain and talk about and some are not so easy.

See BLACK PANTHER, page 5

Remember Lil Bobby Hutton this Saturday

Bobby Hutton was only 16 years old when he joined the Black Panther Party in December 1966. He was arrested in May 1967 when he led a Black Panther march in Sacramento to protest a new gun bill. The Mulford Act made it illegal to carry guns in public and was a direct response to the Panthers' police patrols in the community.

On April 6, 1968, with cities across the U.S. on fire two days after the assassination of Martin Luther King, eight BPP mem-

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Thousands paid homage to Lil Bobby Hutton at a memorial rally on the shore of Lake Merritt in 1968. That's Marlon Brando waiting to speak. How many of you can you identify?

PHOTO: ILKA HARTMANN, ILKAHARTMANN.COM

THIRD STREET
SAN FRANCISCO CA 94124
PHONE: (415) 671-0789
(415) 671-0316
EMAIL: editor@sfbayview.com

San Francisco

BayView

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