

Charles “Boko” Freeman: *The Eternal Panther*

Charles “Boko” Freeman was born and raised in Houston, Texas. In 1967, Charles left Houston for New York. In New York Charles attended Andrew Jackson High School where he was active in the Black Student Union. He was introduced to the speeches of Malcolm X and later became active as a community worker with the Queens chapter of the Black Panther Party. Charles returned to Houston in 1969 with plans of organizing a chapter of the Black Panther Party in Houston. Surprisingly he met another young activist with the same idea. His name was Carl Hampton. He and Charles would become fast friends and close comrades.

Like Charles, Carl Hampton was encouraged to return to Houston, Texas to establish a chapter there. Hampton had worked with the Black Panther Party in Oakland, California where he, like Charles, was inspired by the philosophy and activity of the BPP.

By the spring of 1970, Charles Freeman, Carl Hampton and others formed a community group modeled after the Black Panther Party. However, they were not permitted to become an official. The explosive growth of the Black Panther Party overwhelmed the management capabilities of central leadership and a freeze was issued to suspend the founding of new chapters for a time.

Undaunted by this order, the group named itself **People’s Party II** in recognition of the Black Panther Party as the ‘*first People’s Party.*’ Within eight weeks after the opening of the People’s Party II (PPII) an armed standoff occurs between PPII members and the Houston Police Department (HPD). On July 26, 1970, the Houston Police Department in collusion with federal authorities carried out the assassination of Carl Bernard Hampton, who

was recognized as one of the most dynamic young revolutionary Black leaders in America.



Boko (right) and other Panthers carry Hampton’s Body

The tragic loss of Carl Hampton was felt by the fledging organization and the community at large. Nevertheless, the community work continued under the guidance of Charles Freeman and James Aaron. In the tradition of Black Panther community programs across the country, the PPII provided free breakfast for children, food for families, clothing, medical screening and pest control services for the community.

In recognition of Carl Hampton’s supreme sacrifice the central committee of the Black Panther Party granted chapter status to People’s Party II and officially it became known as the Houston Texas Chapter of the Black Panther Party. The Houston chapter continued its activities until 1974 when all members were summoned to central headquarters in Oakland, California in a move to consolidate Panther operations to one location.

After a few weeks of life as a Panther in Oakland Charles left the Party citing growing ideological differences and concerns for his personal safety. He resettled in LA to establish himself. He made several attempts to re-activate his membership but was rebuffed by new Panther leadership.

In 1978, Bob Kwaku Duren, a Black Panther spearheaded the reopening of the southern California chapter to re-establish

panther community services and programs. Charles joined this effort and quickly became a skilled organizer of mass food giveaways, public events, rallies, forums and festivals. The southern California chapter of the Black Panther Party is believed to be the last chapter in the country to disband not realizing that the central headquarters has ceased to exist.

Disappointed and disillusioned by the demise of the Black Panther Party, Charles devoted the following years to his family, his spiritual life and development of his commercial art business in the Los Angeles area. Still, his innate desire to serve his community remained foremost in his heart. As the result of his spiritual studies and eventual initiations Charles Freeman became known as 'Boko Abar'.

The Black Panther Party had been defunct for over a decade when Boko called B. Kwaku Duren to share his idea of a re-birth of the organization. Surprisingly, Kwaku, another veteran Panther Shareef Abdullah were thinking along the same line and had been meeting with a small group in Compton for several weeks. In 1994, after continued discussion and contemplation the three men, all veterans of the original Black Panther Party, founded the "New African American Vanguard Movement." The name was later changed to the "New Panther Vanguard Movement" The official inauguration was set for October 1994 to coincide with the October founding date of the original Black Panther Party twenty-eight years earlier.

The rebirth of the Black Panther Party as the New Panther Vanguard Movement was publicly introduced in Leimert Park at Marla Gibbs Vision Theatre. Over 700 people attended the festive celebration that included live entertainment, public speakers and the giveaway of one thousand bags of groceries.

The New Panther Vanguard Movement (NPVM) headquarters is located at 1470 Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard in

south central Los Angeles. In 1996, a new quarterly edition of the famous Black Panther Newspaper was republished to inform the public of international freedom movements, the needs of political prisoners, as well as the revised Ten Point Platform and Program of the NPVM and ongoing programs.

The growth of the NPVM continued steadily until 2002 when the headquarters suffered an explosion and fire that closed the building for a time. Renovation of the building became problematic and proved detrimental to the continuation of the organization's base of operation. Today, the future of the NPVM is in limbo as the Black Panthers experience yet another setback.



In 1997, Boko returned to Houston to commemorate the life of fellow activist Carl Bernard Hampton with a festival and free food giveaway for the needy of Houston. Houston Police assassinated Hampton, the founder of the Peoples' Party II on July 26, 1970. It was Boko's desire to insure the memory of a young Black revolutionary that without fear confronted injustice is not forgotten by Houston and the world.

***Long Live the Revolutionary Spirit of Carl
B. Hampton!
All Power to the People!***