

Keeping a le

'35 years after father's death, Fred Hampton Jr. still fighting

by James G. Muhammad

Contributing Writer

Whenever Fred Hampton Sr.'s name is mentioned, his son wants to be there to make sure the context of the mention is right and exact.

So when he showed up at Saturday's "Revisiting Our Past For the Sake of Our Future" meeting of former Chicago chapter Black Panther Party (BPP) members at Malcolm X College, they were not surprised to hear in the son the fiery oratory of the father they were honoring.

"History has a tendency to get obliterated or maligned," Hampton Jr. told the audience comprised of many high school students. "The people know about the terrorism of 9/11, but they don't know about the terrorism of December 4."

On that date in 1969, Hampton Sr., the deputy chairman of the Chicago BPP, was killed in his sleep when Chicago Police burst into BPP headquarters on the city's West Side with guns blazing.

Deborah Johnson, now known as Akua Njeri, was eight months pregnant with Hampton Jr. and was lying in bed with Hampton Sr. at the time of the early morning raid.

Now proven to be a hit by the police and FBI wrapped in a cover-up, Hampton asked that the audience "never let it be said that Chairman Fred died."

"Chairman Fred was assassinated by the U.S. government," he said, referring to the name by which his father was known.

"Don't leave here thinking that Chairman Fred was some sort of social worker. He was a revolutionary. And you should challenge every person who mentions Chairman Fred by asking them what are they doing today."

The legacy of the BPP, he said, is it gave young people "the ability to analyze, debate, organize and educate, to see beyond the political hypocrisy of the country and change the social landscape of America."

In an interview with the *Chicago Defender*, Hampton said children of historical Black figures have a "tough act to follow," but he keeps his father's legacy alive in himself by working to forge coalitions and heading a group

whose purpose is to bring attention to the issue of political prisoners.

He recalls trying to stop his habit of talking fast and using his hands for expression — until he saw films of his father's impressive oratorical delivery.

"I don't have some sort of abstract romanticism about my father," Hampton said. "I know the reality. I've seen pictures of him with his brains literally blown out. I know the consequences of taking a position like Chairman Fred. However, our people are faced with more intense, more Machiavellian conditions."

Hampton has faced the consequences. On May 19, 1993, he was sentenced to 18 years in prison on a count of aggravated arson in what many describe as a political trial. He served nine years.

"I didn't like being locked up, but I came in contact with some of our best forces. These cats won't give you 'little chairman' respect just by the fact of being Chairman Fred's son," he said of the experience.

As chair of the Prisoners of Conscience Committee, Hampton said he does more by 10 a.m. than the Marines and elected officials do in a day. His group is involved in programs such as food giveaways, which were a staple of the BPP.

The project of most concern to him today, however, is that of former death row inmate Aaron Patterson, who recently was arrested on drug and weapons charges.

Hampton compares that case to the government's ongoing infiltration and disruption of Black organizations, citing the use of an informant to allegedly entrap Patterson. (An informant was used to deliver to police a floor plan drawing of Hampton Sr.'s home, including the location of the bed where he slept. Records also suggest Hampton was drugged by the informant, William O'Neal, so he wouldn't wake up during the raid).

Hampton notes that Patterson was arrested on the same date former Police Commander John Burge was ordered to return to Chicago to be deposed in a case of former death row inmates alleging their confessions were forced by torture. Patterson has long contended his confession to murder was coerced through torture from Burge and his officers.

Legacy intact



Fred Hampton Jr. delivers message at Chicago chapter Black Panther Party reunion at Malcolm X College.

Defender photo by James Muhammad

"This so-called case that the state says they have, we haven't seen it," Hampton said.

Hampton's organization has drafted an "African Anti-terrorism Bill" that he wants to be part of the discussion in the season of the presidential election. The bill covers such issues as prosecuting officers accused of police brutality, allowing for a "people's inspection" of city, state, and federal prisons, an immediate cease to forced medicating of prisoners and an end to the "land grab" in urban areas that come in the guises of eminent domain and gentrification.

"We want to put the protocol that goes down in Statesville and Pontiac [prisons] into political context while the discussion is going on about Abu Ghraib [prison in Iraq] and

Guantanamo [Bay, Cuba]," Hampton said.

"Our community cannot be viewed as a mistress for the Democratic Party or any other party. Our community must have an agenda."

The formula of that agenda, he said, is: no response on political prisoners plus no response on reparations plus no response to the African Anti-terrorism Bill equals no vote.

When asked how his life might be different had he known his father, Hampton said, "I've learned lessons from my father's legend, but the sky is the limit to what I would have learned had I gotten to know him. They (the government) didn't just take my father, they took one of our leaders."