

WHO 'FINGERED' CARL HAMPTON?



Carl Bernard Hampton, Black Panther leader and chairman of Peoples' Party II, was gunned down by Houston policemen who used the roof of a Negro Baptist church as the vantage point.



When the news of the assassination of Carl Bernard Hampton, Houston's powerful Black Panther chieftain and chairman of Peoples' Part II, reached the ears of Black Houstonians, the vast majority of this sector of the metropolis was saddened.

The Houston police department had once again killed a dynamic young black, one who was not afraid to challenge the racist system with revolution and one who knew well his guaranteed rights under the Constitution.

Everyone in Houston knew it was only a matter of time before the lawmen moved on the outspoken youth, the only black man in Houston who had drawn his gun on a Houston policeman, stared "The Man" down, and came out a winner, although only temporarily.

But the most distressing factor in the chain of events leading to this revolutionary's death was that everyone in black Houston knew Hampton was set up for the legal assassination.

The evidence of the "set up" remained intact, even after that tragic, hot July 26 night in the

BY THOMAS
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2800 block of Dowling Street, one of the most infamous stretches of real estate in the city.

Just who is responsible for setting Hampton up is the big question in the minds of more than 350,000 Houston blacks.

As one Young Panther said when the shooting was over, "Everyone on Dowling Street knew the assassination was coming that dark Sunday except us.

"All the beer joints were closed, 'Bootleg and Pill Alley' were not operating, the prostitutes were off the streets, hustlers were inside, and to

top it all, church services at St. John's Baptist Church turned out much earlier than usual."

St. John's Baptist Church played a major role in the assassination of Hampton, for it was from the roof of this huge building that the first police bullet was fired, striking Hampton down.

The killing was precipitated by five Houston police officers—all members of the "Red Squad," the criminal intelligence division (CID).

The Harris County grand jury took up the slaying of Carl Hampton, and during the week beginning Sept. 20 failed to return an indictment

Certain evidence shows killing of Black Panther leader was planned

Peoples' Party II area because of the "heavily armed revolutionaries," gave Police Chief Herman Short the overwhelming majority of white support he needed to "invade" Dowling Street. That controversial speech was delivered by Ovide Duncantell.

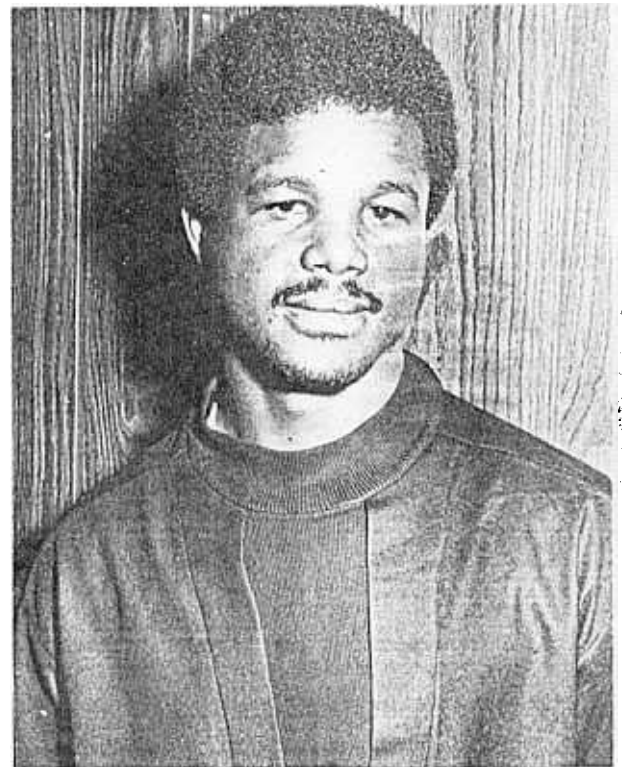
As further evidence that the death of Hampton was a planned affair, radio tapes of the CID officers' voices reveal "someone" else was on the rooftop of the church and that "someone" pointed out Hampton as the leader.

The death of Hampton, the most persuasive 21-year-old in Houston, began just 10 days before the bullet struck his stomach.

Friday, July 17, was an ordinary day on Dowling Street, but shortly after 10 p.m., the day had become one of supreme importance, a day that will be marked in the history books of black Houston.

Early Saturday morning, when the news of the armed resistance to Houston policemen by a group of black citizens reached the airwaves, black Houstonians who had never heard of Peoples' Party II listened as Chief Short branded these citizens "militants" and their actions of "self-defense" as being "clear anarchy." This was previously unheard of in black Houston.

Reports said Peoples' Party II personnel held



Members of Panthers are watching Willie "Iceman" Rudd with a suspicious eye. They believe the young AFL-CIO organizer is the informer who "fingered" Carl Hampton, but Rudd denies charges.

against the officers accused in the slaying. This means there will be no charges filed against the officers, at least at this time.

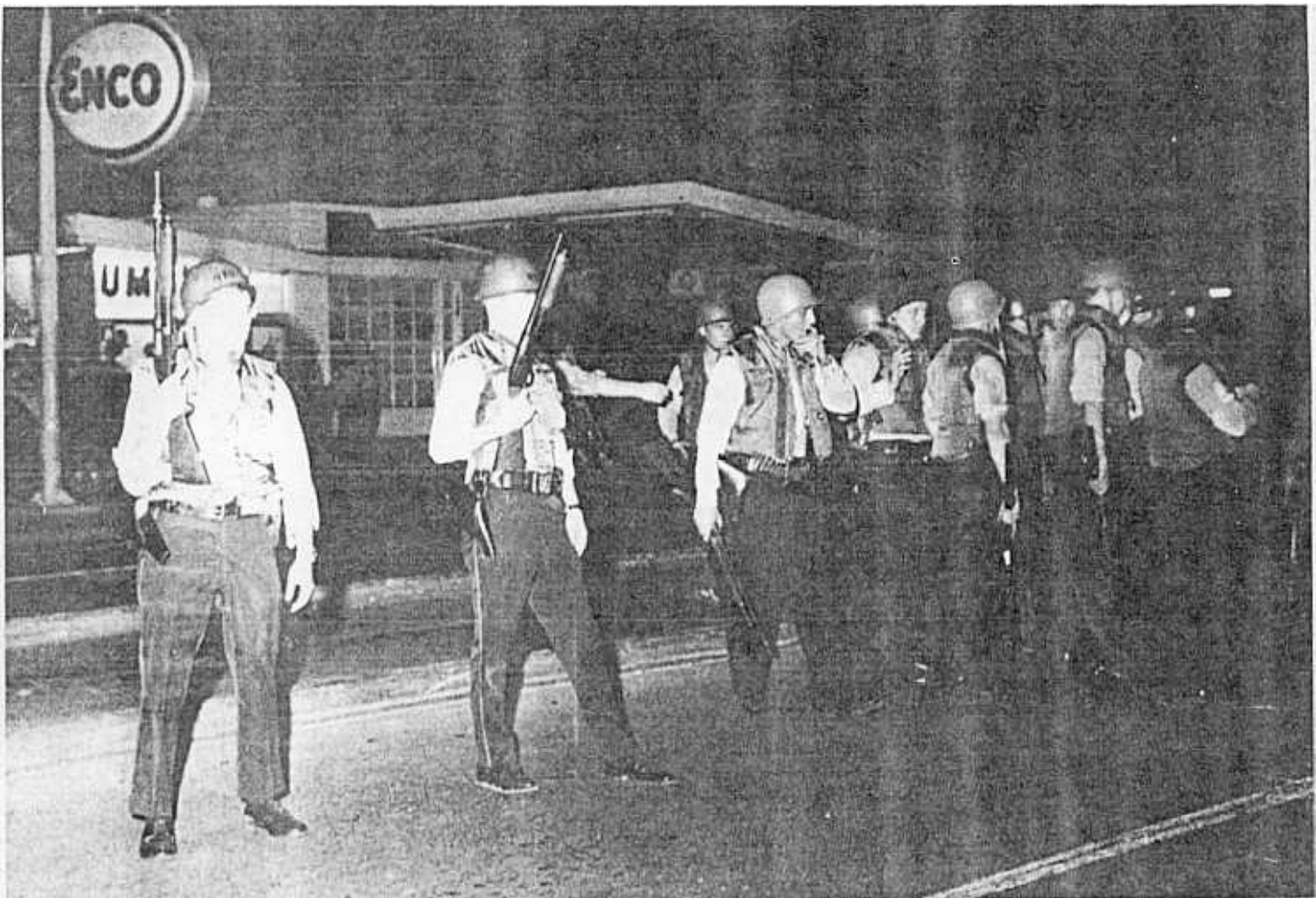
As the unpleasant odor of conspiracy, betrayal and black larceny permeated the air in this area of town, black Houstonians, in the wake of the funeral of the slain leader, began looking closer at the actions not only of the white lawmen, but also some black "militant" leaders.

It is believed a speech made before City Council four days before Hampton's death, a speech that dared lawmen to come into the

Carrying Carl Hampton's body to its final resting place are six bereted pallbearers, above. Delivering the speech which is said to have given Chief Herman Short white support needed to invade Panther headquarters is Ovide Duncantell, in photo, right, during a meeting.



continued



Houston policemen came by night and invaded the 2800 block of Dowling St. July 26. There were 300 riot-equipped officers guarding this black section.

Brandishing shotguns, submachine guns and carbines, the policemen allegedly killed 21-year-old Carl B. Hampton, then arrested more than 60 bystanders.

Lawmen were willing to invade Dowling Street and wipe out

Houston policemen at bay more than 45 minutes, and not a shot was fired as a major disorder threatened this "too calm" city:

Lawmen gave their version of the affair:

"While officers riding unit 613 were on routine patrol in the 2800 block of Dowling, they observed a Negro male suspect having newspapers while standing on the line between the first and second lanes of traffic.

"The officers stopped (to tell the subject not to sell the Black Panther paper in the streets) and when they did, the subject turned and walked north on Dowling in an obvious attempt to avoid officers.

"Officer Cantwell turned around in an attempt to intercept subject. Officer Cantwell brought the vehicle to a halt in front of what later turned out to be a Black Panther party headquarters.

"Officer Davis exited from the patrol car and attempted to reach the subject to talk to him when three suspects (including Carl Hampton) approached him in the doorway of the building.

"Officer Davis observed one of these suspects

"den of trouble-making niggers"

carrying a pistol under his left armpit in a shoulder holster. Officer Davis asked this suspect (Hampton) to come toward the patrol car. At approximately this time, two or three other suspects were standing in front of the doorway loading their guns and pointing them in the direction of the officers.

The confrontation

"The officers' No. one suspect (Hampton) was immediately in front of the officer and he placed his hand on the butt of the pistol. Officer Davis withdrew his own sidearm and held it at his leg.

"Hampton drew his weapon and pointed it at the officer. Then he jacked a round into the chamber. The two suspects to his rear also put

rounds into their weapons, one by pumping his shotgun and the other by cocking his rifle. At approximately this time, Hampton told Davis 'Come on you (obscenity) pig! I'm going to blow your (obscenity) head off!'

"Officers stood trying to determine what the situation was while the suspects were shouting obscenities at them, threatening to kill them and daring officers to shoot.

"It appears the entire incident was a 'set up' to start racial problems," the officers concluded.

More than 30 police units sired into Dowling Street that Friday night, but seeing that more than 2,000 people were congregated on the streets, the lawmen retreated.

All this happened because a black man was selling newspapers in the street, something white salesmen get away with, even on the freeways.

Of the standoff, Hampton later said he was merely exercising his constitutional right to bear arms on private property and to protect that property because he remembered what had happened at Black Panther headquarters in Oakland, Chicago, Denver, and Cleveland.



It was from the roof of St. John's Baptist Church that five CID officers killed Carl Hampton. Rev. M. Malone is the church's minister. His nephew was allegedly gunned by lawmen just eight months ago.

After the policemen backed down, two capiases, one for serious threat to take life and one for carrying a pistol, were issued and Hampton was then a fugitive.

Saturday night, officers came on duty with special weaponry — M-15s, Thompson submachine guns and other elaborate riot equipment. Some lawmen were nervous, yet the majority was willing to go down on Dowling Street and wipe out that "den of trouble-making niggers."

Short went on television the day after the backing down of his "proud" officers, saying he did not want to take any lives, but that he would not have his men "pushed around."

Hampton and his fellow Panthers promised gunfire if lawmen tried to arrest the youthful leader.

All Houston tensed, wondering who would ignite the dynamite that would leave Houston in splinters.

Diagnosis of events

The week after the Panther-police confrontation were uptight days for countless black and white Houstonians.

Motorists passed the party's headquarters and saw six, seven or eight young men and women bearing old rifles and rusty shotguns, sitting on the concrete steps, protecting their property from "police invasion."

Very few, if any, marked patrol cars dared pass through this stretch of land. This phenomenon had not so much been due to the lawmen's being afraid, but as Short said, he would not be "provoked into a shooting war with Peoples' Party II."

In the meantime, the outstanding warrant for the arrest of Hampton was still tagged to the case

in the homicide division, that elite office, while the CID actually handled the case.

Black policemen, serving as infiltrators of the block in which the party headquarters was situated, had been looking for Hampton. They left word that all they wanted to do was "shoot a mug shot and fingerprint" the now hiding leader.

To the organization, this was just a plot to get Hampton behind bars, for if they really wanted mug shots and fingerprints, city police officers could have easily gotten them, since the sheriff's office already had pictures and prints on Hampton.

Hampton believed that if he had walked through the double glass doors at the central police station, he would have never emerged alive. With that in mind, he would take his chances on the streets.

Wednesday, Duncantell, who had no official affiliation with Peoples' Party II, blew the lid off the power keg with his torrid speech in City Council.

He warned Mayor Pro Tem Frank Mancuso that something terrible was going to happen if Hampton could not go about his business unmolested.

The white newsreels caught Duncantell in action — waving his arms, pointing his finger, and hailing the black power sign (clenched fist) — and before nightfall, the electronic media played up the Duncantell challenge, "Pigs had better not come into the area because we've got guns and the area is so secure a roach can't get through without our knowing about it."

Short continued to sit back in his plush third floor office and let the media justify his pending invasion of Dowling Street.

Newsman went into the area and captured scenes of black and white youths brandishing shotguns, pistols and rifles. The newsmen termed

the youths "revolutionaries," "radicals," "militants," "subversive reactionaries" and "commies."

White Houston began to plague Short about when he was going into the area and make the streets "safe for the citizens."

Heard complaints

Short received calls from "prominent businessmen" of the Dowling Street area and heard their complaints.

Little did the white people know — but it was well known to the police chief — these "prominent businessmen" were the dope pushers, prostitutes, bootleggers, hijackers, gun runners, and Robitussen dealers whose business was slowed to a minimum. Peoples' Party II did not believe in crime and vice, and had vowed to rid Dowling Street of both."

One must understand the crime-infested atmosphere of Dowling Street. It is the street on which more murders are committed than any other; prostitution runs free; dope and whiskey are pushed out of the alley adjacent to St. John's Baptist Church without regard to lackadaisical lawmen.

Young blacks of this ghetto area grow up exposed to this element, and they idolize the pimp, hustler, prostitute and hijacker.

It was one of the planks of Peoples' Party II's platform to get rid of the vice and see that ghetto kids grow up in a healthy, crime-free environment, not one where they were destined to a reform school or the penitentiary before they were 20.

Still the people waited.

Thursday, a group of black leaders met in City Hall and it is said that out of this meeting, after the liberal leaders left, that the conspiracy was formulated to take Hampton permanently from the Houston scene. Lawyers, bondsmen and ministers were at that meeting.

Friday, a conservative black bondsman confronted Hampton and told the youth he was



After invasion of Panther headquarters, policemen read some of the party's literature. Also found in office were several shotguns and photos of leaders.

continued

working on a deal whereby he would not have to go to jail.

This bondsman, one of the most prominent in Houston, along with a city government representative, said the bond would be posted and accepted Monday if Hampton would "de-escalate" the war zone situation.

Hampton made a deadly mistake. He believed the bondsman.

The Panther leader allowed his "troops" to go home after their week-long stance. He kept only three guards around the headquarters.

To the 18- and 19-year-old militants, they had won the war without a shot.

Final message

Feeling jubilant, Hampton delivered what turned out to be his last message to black people July 26, in front of the party headquarters.



James Aaron, 18, is highest ranking Black Panther in Houston, and Field Marshal of Peoples' Party II. He is destined to become party's new leader.

In Hampton's opening remarks, he blasted the white press for its failure to print the truth. He cited the inability of the press to see the issue as the majority of blacks see it from the depths of the ghetto. He scowled at the police department, telling the audience he would never turn himself in.

He affirmed his continued support of the people who had supported the Peoples' Party, the black community and the co-workers who had placed their safety in jeopardy by their work with the party, a local black news commentator reported.

"We are a powerless people," Hampton said. "For 400 years, we have seen no peace in this country. Like Malcolm X said, we exist in stages from the fox to the wolf. Black people, get you some guns and arm yourselves! Just protect yourselves. This is all we want.

"We don't advocate death. We advocate self-defense. The people who control this country are criminals! The only thing we have to depend on is ourselves!

"The most insecure place in the world is the black community of America. I don't feel like waiting around until the police knock me off. Do you know what? They are building concentration camps all over the country."

Hampton, obsessed with a sense of fate, continued: "It's your constitutional right to defend yourself. Short called us anarchists. All the country has to do is label someone and get rid of them. The people sat around and let Bobby Joe Conner (SEPIA, June, 1970) get stomped to death. Lee Otis (Houston's first 'political prisoner') got 30 years (in the penitentiary for possessing one marijuana cigarette which was reportedly 'planted' on him).

"What do you think they are gonna try to give me — us? You've got madmen riding around this country waiting for you to step out of line so they can shoot you.

"If black people did not live in substandard housing, poor conditions or suffer all the other unequal indignities, there would be no need for Peoples' Party II.

"A revolution is a change. We need a revolution. Revolution is not necessarily a violent confrontation. If black people would organize, we would become a powerful people."

Hampton knew he must die

Hampton once again asserted that he would not turn himself in.

"A whole lot of people have placed their lives on the line for purposes and ideals I believe in. I can't turn myself in. I'm not going down there (to the police station). If they want to deal through my lawyers, okay. If not, well, I'll just be a fugitive from justice.

"I gave up the idea of being an old man a long time ago. I know they (Houston lawmen) are gonna attack this building."

Hampton was not wrong, for minutes after he delivered his speech, Duncantell told him there were some "white men perched on top of St. John's Baptist Church."

Hearing this information, Hampton, along with a white former SDS member and now a John Brown Revolutionary, Roy Barte Haile, and several black followers went to check out the situation.

Hampton carried his 12-gauge shotgun. Preparing to cross Dowling Street to get a good look at the white men, Hampton gave the expressed order there would be no shooting unless the police fired at them.

At the time, Hampton did not know the white men were lawmen — he merely suspected it.

The five CID officers, along with a radio newsman, were dressed in combat gear and were not identifiable as lawmen.

As Hampton and his group crossed the street, they crouched.

One shot rang out, Hampton fell to the ground.

Haile tried to reach the injured leader, but he was shot in the process. Three others tried to rescue Hampton, whose life was flowing from his



A black coalition was formed in Houston to protest police brutality. Judson Robinson, Jr. was elected the leader. Here, he stands and addresses a news conference. Ex-football great, Ernie Ladd, (I), and two other members of the new organization listen as Robinson asks firing of police chief.



Police questioned every person passing through the 2800 block of Dowling St. the night Carl Hampton met his death. They had little sympathy for blacks who walked this way, and turned deaf ears to their pleas. They hauled them off in paddy wagons and threw a security network around the police station.

body, but their attempts were in vain as lawmen sent a hail of high-powered bullets their way.

No one had fired a shot back at the lawmen.

A brave black youth, who to this date remains unidentified, braved the high-velocity bullets, gathered up Hampton's body and carted him to an old Volkswagen.

A bondsman told Hampton he'd be free of police harassment

When Hampton arrived at Ben Taub General Hospital, he registered under an assumed name, "John Sims," but while he was in the operating room, his wife, Maggie, arrived and identified her husband.

Shortly after 2:30 a.m. Monday, Hampton died.

It was on Monday that the prominent bondsman had promised Hampton he would be free of police harassment. The promise was kept, but not the way Hampton or his followers thought it would be.

News of Hampton's assassination spread like wildfire throughout Houston.

The big question on the minds of awakening blacks Monday morning was "What's going to happen now?"

The Panthers were licking their wounds — three were hospitalized after being hit by bullets. Arrested citizens — 64 in all — were slowly getting out of jail. Bewildered youths flocked to the defense of the "true" goals of the party. Black leaders formed a black coalition.

Headed by Operation Breadbasket's Pluria Marshall and Hope Development's Earl Allen, the coalition was formed to combat police brutality in black Houston.

by Monday. He was! He was killed by a policeman's bullet

black Houston to combat the pressing problem of police brutality.

Out of the tragic assassination of Hampton came a powerful rebirth of this community.

Riot remembered

It would have been extremely easy for these black leaders — some of whom had differences with Hampton — to let the murder of this outspoken youth pass unnoticed and to say the police were right in what they did. However, bravely, these men and women were trying to develop something relevant out of the tragedy and they recognized the hard struggle for black solidarity ahead of them.

They sat there and remembered the police riot at Texas Southern University in 1967; they

Massive crowds overflowed the large Duncan Funeral Home and prominent Panthers from all over Texas attended the services. There was no crying from party members. They stared straight ahead.

Noted was the absence of policemen who normally lead funeral processions to the graveyard. Some motorcycle officers had been at the funeral home, but Panther chiefs ordered them to leave. They did.

Out of the death of Hampton emerged a new party leader, 18-year-old James Aaron.

At first glance, Aaron, the highest ranking Panther in Houston with the rank of field marshal, one thinks "Oh, he's just a kid!" However, once he opens his mouth and begins to talk about the plight of black people and the ultimate goal of "self-controlled destiny," he becomes a responsible leader.

"He was beautiful"

"We, the members of the organization, cannot afford to mourn Carl's death," Aaron said. "He wouldn't have wanted it that way. We've got to continue to try to make revolution in this country. That was Carl's dream and we follow his teaching.

"I loved Carl. He was beautiful. He was continuously struggling to better the position of the black man, to teach the black man self-defense and to teach him to be proud and hold his head high."

A member of the Panther organization only five months, Aaron classified himself a fulltime revolutionary.

Aaron knew of the conspiracy — the set up — that took the life of his young leader.

"We have an idea who set up Carl, but we're not going to act on them until we are sure, absolutely sure. Then there'll probably be banishment or maybe an execution."

Willing to die

Nurtured in an atmosphere of revolution, Aaron was born to go against an oppressive system — like so many other black youth today.

"I'm willing to die for my people," the young leader commented. "I'm not saying I'm ready to die — who is? But if it comes to this, I'll just have to go."

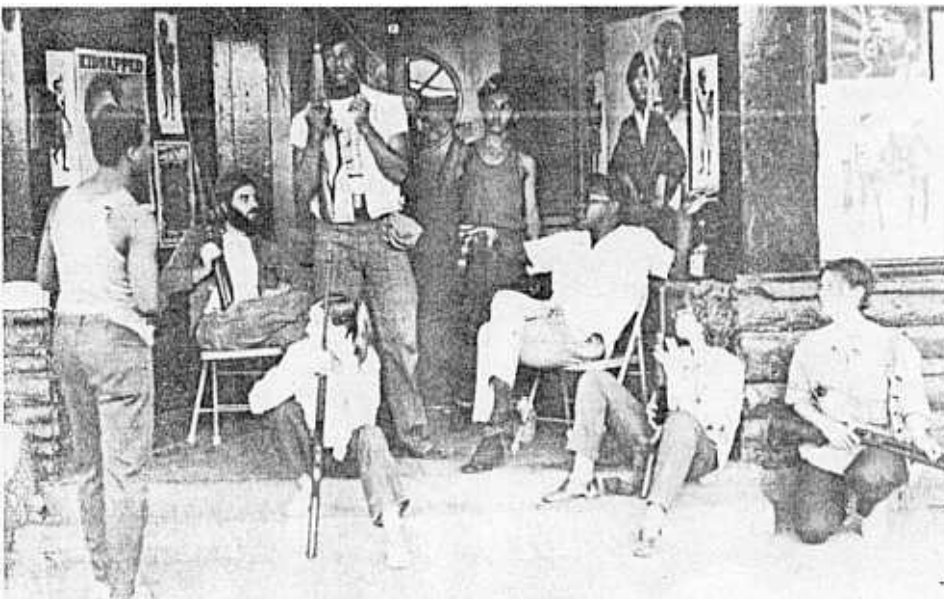
"Yes, we are revolutionaries, but all we want is a constructive change in this system which will be beneficial to all black people and we will come from under the bonds of oppression.

"All we want is the right to determine our own destinies."

Hampton, the dynamic young revolutionary leader, is dead. All black Houstonians fear he was assassinated and that he was set up to be killed by a black traitor.

Hampton was a winner and a loser; but he has been immortalized and martyred in his death.

Growing numbers of black youth have rallied behind the Panther movement, and upon canvassing the streets of Houston youth, it is doubtful one can be found who will not say Hampton is now a hero.



Armed with rusty guns and rifles, black and white youths guard the Peoples' Party headquarters. Photographs of nationally known militant leaders line outside walls of their Houston headquarters.

For the first time in Houston history, these leaders, some avowed public enemies — militants, liberals, conservatives, moderates — sat down and tried to work toward the goal of firmly unifying this community.

Unity became the key word. Black people in Houston have been so divided there was no strength. Therefore, the question was posed, "Why should 'The Man' deal with an element that has no strength, no unity?"

From this takeoff, the meeting proceeded, and from the meeting came a formally-structured organization that will have the strength of all

remembered the stomping to death in a jailhouse of Bobby Joe Conners; now they recalled the actions leading up to Hampton's killing. It seemed clear the racist Houston lawmen were out to "do away with black people."

The leaders called for an indefinite boycott of downtown merchants — those people who really control Houston. The goal of the 350,000 blacks is to force Mayor Louie Welch to come to grips with the growing problem of brutal treatment toward blacks by the firing of Short.

Hampton was laid to rest three days after he was assassinated.