

SNCC Black Panthers in San Antonio

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During the 1960s and early 1970s, the San Antonio chapter of SNCC was an independent organization. It communicated very little with the National SNCC office, and instead worked independently with San Antonio's African American community. This enabled the organization to adopt methods and programs from the Black Panthers and from SNCC. This independence produced Black Panther styled Breakfast Programs, tutoring programs, a police surveillance program, a civilian review board to look at police brutality, and other survival programs that were adopted from the Black Panthers. In essence, the SNCC chapter operated as a Panther organization.

During this period of history there were several SNCC members in Texas that would eventually become Black Panther Party (BPP) members. Dallas was granted Panther status by the national Black Panther of-

fice in California, as was People's Party 2 in Houston. Austin SNCC was never granted status though they operated as a Panther Chapter. Austin seemed to have its problems with applying for official status, as Texas SNCC members never voted as a state organization for Austin application for Panther status. This was opposed because the Austin SNCC Chapter, under the direction of Larry Jackson, and according to former San Antonio SNCC members, never took a statewide vote to present an application for official status. In fact, Austin SNCC may have misrepresented the position of the Panthers, as San Antonio SNCC members were told that the Panthers did not consider Austin or San Antonio because of their lack of militancy in regard to police brutality activities. This was untrue of course, and this quote was attributed to Huey Newton, then head of the BPP, but it was never verified that he said any such thing.

This affected San Antonio SNCC, as the Austin SNCC

Chapter was the state office. It was at this point that San Antonio SNCC became a hybrid of sorts. It became part Black Panther and part SNCC. SNCC members considered themselves Panthers despite the alleged reasoning of Huey Newton. Whether or not Huey Newton actually said what was reported by Austin SNCC remains unclear to this day. Nevertheless, San Antonio SNCC members adopted the ten point program of the Black Panther Party and its rules of discipline. Members were classified as ministers (Minister of Defense for example) and rank and file cadre.

San Antonio SNCC adopted the position that since SNCC had merged with the Panthers, and H. Rap Brown had become the Minister of Justice there was no need for a formal application process. SNCC members in San Antonio became "Panthers at large," and as a result of communication breakdowns that occurred between Austin SNCC and Oakland,

the San Antonio SNCC-Panthers remained independent. As a result, it was unique in that SNCC members adopted a dress uniform that was part Black Panther and part SNCC. According to Carlos Richardson, the leader of SNCC in San Antonio between 1968 and 1974, the uniform was "blue jean pants" and "blue jean jackets with the Panther black tam and combat boots." The San Antonio SNCC Panthers, which is the term I coined, were indeed a different model that developed nowhere else in the country. Despite the historical misinformation out there, the San Antonio SNCC-Panthers were the last SNCC chapter in the United States, lasting until 1976.

The San Antonio SNCC Panthers sold the national SNCC Newspaper and the Black Panther paper on the corner of Alamo and East Houston Streets in San Antonio. There seems to be some indication that Austin never let the National Panther office know that there were

brothers and sisters fighting for the cause as Panthers in San Antonio. In any event, I called Landon Williams, a former Panther leader in California back in the 1990s, to explain what had happened. He indicated to me that there were some communications problems and that San Antonio should have been granted status.

In any event, those who fought for human rights as SNCC-Panthers will not be forgotten. Despite the lack of communications and the misunderstandings, some of which was FBI inspired, under the infamous J. Edgar Hoover, the SNCC-Panthers went on to stay in existence until 1976. In 1990, Fred Bell, of the Dallas Panthers, Marvin Crenshaw, and myself (Mario Salas) incorporated the name of the Black Panthers with the State of Texas to prevent others from using the name inappropriately. Former members later became activists in other groups that changed the face of San Antonio.*