To Die for the People

The Murder of Fred Hampton
recalls a dark chapter in American history.

BY DAVID WALKER

By 1969, Fred Hampton, leader of the Illinois Black Panther Party, was one of the most important and influential civil rights leaders in America. The U.S. government thought he was one of the most dangerous. Under Hampton’s leadership, the Chicago-based party had grown into the largest and most powerful of all Panther chapters, operating successful programs such as Serve the People, which included a breakfast program for children, a free health clinic and political education classes.

Hampton had come dangerously close to recruiting the Blackstone Rangers into the ranks of the Panthers, which would have politicized the notorious street gang and transformed the party into a small army. And with key leaders of the Black Panthers either dead or in jail, Hampton managed to move quickly through the ranks, until he was a key figure in the national party. At age 20, Hampton was charismatic, personable and outspoken, all of which, according to FBI director J. Edgar Hoover, made him a threat to domestic security.

In 1966, producer Mike Gray and director Howard Alk began filming a documentary about Hampton and the Illinois Black Panther Party. The film began as a straightforward portrait of the dynamic leader, and the first half of it consists primarily of rare footage of Hampton speaking at rallies. Even though the grainy black-and-white footage is sometimes out of focus or overexposed, from these clips it’s easy to see the power Hampton possessed. He was part militant revolutionary, part street philosopher, and part fire-and-brimstone preacher.

But it’s what happened next, when Hampton’s life came to an abrupt, tragic ending, that turned Gray and Alk’s film into such a revolutionary document.

On the morning of Dec. 4, 1969, a Chicago police officer broke into Hampton’s apartment under the auspices of serving a warrant to confis-
SATURDAY DECEMBER 4th 6pm
on the 35th anniversary of Fred Hampton's murder
former BLACK PANTHER revolutionary & activist BILLY X
presents the LOUDER THAN WORDS photo exhibit!
It shows through stunning photography the REAL
Black Panther Party and it's survival programs.
BILLY X and former Portland Panthers will be
present to answer questions. This event is FREE!

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