

Sacramento Chapter of the Black Panther Party

Sacramento is the capital of California located 70 miles from the San Francisco/Oakland Bay area to the west. This is the place the Party members came to protest the Mulford Act in May 1967; it gained national wide attention, in 1968 brother Charles Brunson (Captain) open the Sacramento Chapter at 2941-35th St. in Oak Park section of Sacramento.

To set the stage the governor at the time of the office opening was Pat Brown (Jerry Brown, father) after the November elections it became Ronald Regan.

Back in those days most non- white people were treated badly, it was hard finding decent housing, very few blacks lived downtown and the schools were still mostly segregated. Red lining by the estabhled Banking policy. Most Blacks lived in Oak Park, where the office was open and Del Paso Heights, which was an incorpated area, north of downtown. Sacramento was a city with two major military bases, Mather and McClellan, a city in which ex-police/military people would retire.

Police Brutality was a common and at it's highest points in the late 1960's (67,68,69,). Attacks were common; Blacks were harassed for being in William Land Park, the largest park in the city and was less than 2 miles from Oak Park. The division was Hiway 99, build in 1962 it divided the White community from the Black community. Black were only admitted to attend McClatchy Park, which was located in Oak Park, which was one block from the Black Panther Party office.

The office quickly grew Brother and Sisters like James Mott, Gloria Abernathy, Melvin Whitaker, Eugene Boltaze, Links Haskins, Jeff Howe, Mark Teemer, Margo Rose, Deloris Henderson, and Jack Strivers to name a few. These new members came from many walks of life, Charles was a postal worker, James Mott, was a college student, Mark was a Viet Nam Vet, Jack worked with the Parks and Recreation services, some people held jobs and some came from the community as volunteers to help with the many social programs. All coming together for the uplifting of the community. To become a Panther one must go thought the 6 week training program, studying, political and military books assigned by the area's information officer, also military training was conducted, sell the Party newspaper, attend political education

classes, attend the Breakfast program for School Children if possible. The Breakfast Program was located at United Church of Christ.

The Black Panther office was open from 8:00 a.m.-9:00p.m.

One of the first things that were set up was political education classes on weekly basics and that included a liberation school to teach the youth the true about life in America, which included Black History.

One of the strongest programs was the Free Breakfast for School Children, feeding the youth of the community. This program was started in the spring of 1969 it was well welcome in the community it gained big support from all areas. Party members would get up in the morning at 5;30 a,m, to serve the children over 150 kids served a day. The Party also had a tutoring program-teaching people to read, they started a prison program, helping people with legal aid, helping people to get out of jail. Some party members song in choirs in churches in the area and Party members would wear their uniforms under the wodes and would organize in the church. The Sacramento chapter sold the Panther paper throughout the area, which included the campus of Sact, State, UC.Davis, and Sac. City College, and door to door in the community. The Party was strong on city college campus, some members were former students. The Sacramento office worked with local groups like the local Peace and Freedom Party, Brown Bretes, Student Organizations, Native American groups. Although the office was not in the Bay area, Sacramento Chapter took part in rallies to support Huey P. Newton at the Alameda Courthouse in Oakland as well as rallies in Bobby Hutton Park. They held rallies in front of the State Capital in Sacramento. One of the famous Pictures of that era was a photo of Women from the Sacramento Chapter (Glenn Place Photo Here)

Party members were harassed on daily basics, when out in the community selling newspapers or out organizing in the hood. Remembering we are talking about 1969 when the Police was straight up racist and only 11 blacks were on the force of 450 police officers, the theme of the day was Get a Panther.

The Party was well established in Sacramento, and the police and FBI agents used Sacramento as a target for harassment in 1969, the Black Panther Coloring Book became a focus of a investagation of the Party by some goverement committee, this was a collection of picture drawn by Mark Teermer Lieutenant of Culture for the Sacramento Chapter.

Some of the pictures showed Police being shot by people in the community, they said we were giving the Coloring Books to the Children at the Breakfast program a lie.

Under those oppressive conditions the office remained open from 1968-1970 some of the other events were the office was raided on Father's day in 1969 by State and Local police, many say the Los Angeles police Dept was teaching riot tactics to the rest of the State police The account of events reported by the Sacramento Observer newspaper:

At the height of Sunday's disturbances in the Oak Park, the Black Panther Party office was tear-gassed and fired upon. Prior to that Charles Brunson, head of the local Panthers, and others had been clearing people from the street. This group warned the very young that they must go home or they would be hurt. Some lived too far away to walk home alone. Some others didn't know the way.

Brunson unlocked the Panther office and offered it as a refuge for the children. Soon after the children were crowded into the office a patrol car went by with two officers in it. These officers claims to have been fired at from inside the office, they returned the fire. Almost immediately the police shot three canisters of teargas through the window.

This sent choking, blinding fumes throughout the building. The Panther gathered the children one by one and put them out the back door, which the police had failed to cover. Brunson said that he himself barely escaped death after he had returned to check for people left in the building. He was yanked from the path of police bullets by another Panther.

Once the teargas was in and the people out, the police entered with gas masks. Some of the officers jumped into a display case and tore Panther posters from the wall. Others turned over desk and ripped out wires. They brought out arms loads of equipment and material. When the officers left building, it was totally unusable. The teargas effects still hang over the building for 48 hours.

Another over view of the raid that day printed in the newspaper." It was really seems to us that the use of reason was suspended for the 12 traumatic hours while the city watched a drama of violence and militarism, yes militarism unfold in the heart of the Black Community.

As early as 2:30 p.m. units of the Sacramento police Dept were patrolling Oak Park cars their presents was made increasingly more dramatics. Pedestrians were warned not to stand in the street and cars, which stopped in the street, were ticketed for obstructing traffic.

As the police made endless trips down 35th street they met with an increasing amount of derision and insults. Some officers reacted to the verbal insults with verbal insults of their own, other officers made lewd hand motions. Tension began to rise.

Many people on the street felt that the police were attempting to provoke an incident. Many were vocal in their contentions that the police intended to provoke a riot and start shooting. At about 9:30 p.m. the police stopped their patrol and set up roadblocks at 33rd street and 5th Ave. They were armed with shotguns.

The police were simultaneously blocking the 35th Street and Broadway. Both groups of Sacramento police advanced toward the intersection of 35th street and 5th Ave. As the police advanced down 35th street, people were arrested for the unlawful assembly and resisting arrest. The police stopped just short of the Black Panther Party office next to the Oak Park Post office on 35th street.

Black Panthers and other concerned citizens had been urging people to leave the area immediately or seek shelter. Many left but about 40 accepted the Panther offer for refuge in their office. About midway down 35th street the police started firing tear gas and shotguns blasts into the office. The Panthers were able to hustle the people in the office out the back door.

As the police formed into the units they were met with sniper fire from many directions, this fire was answered by shotgun blasts at virtually everything. During the shooting twelve police officers were injured though none seriously. Three Black people were wounded. The shooting went on sporadically until 3:00 a.m.

Local businessman in Oak Park, many of them Black complained of police handling of the situation, some say they were nearly shot by police.

Mayor Richard Marriott and the city councilmen Sun Wong and Milton McGhee came down to the office too see the mess the Sacramento police left. The office was cleared up and was back serving the people which in days.

Other events in the history of the Sacramento office was when the Party declared Martial Law in 1969 and declared " There will be no disturbances tolerated on 35th Street, it further stated that all petty grievances would be taken outside of the community to avoid further disunity of the people. The notice went on to say that the sponsoring groups would not allow the community to become a battleground for

personal hang-ups. This action resulted in the disarming of members of the Black Souls a local poverty program group.

In May of 1970 a sniper in Oak Park section of the city killed a police officer. The case later became the Oak Park Four. Four members of the community charged with killing officer Bennett. Jack Strivers and Mark Teemer were members of Sacramento Chapter of the BPP and a Booker T. Cooke, and Ceriaco Cabrallis local community members and supporters of the BPP. The case was in the papers everyday, Panthers being called Cop killers etc. The case was based on known evidences and a deranged dope addict called Lamont "Buster" Rose. Doctors and Psychiatrist all testified that Buster Rose is incompetent as a witness and after a complete medical history review, which reported that Rose had brain damage and still the judge allowed Rose on the stand. Rose," say he over heard them plotting to kill a police in the Park earlier in the day and saw them start implementing their plan. But later on in the trial the judge refused to allow Rose testimony, and the DA dropped the charges and they were freed after 8 months in incarceration. They were set up to take the fall for something they had no part of.

There had been other examples of dirty tricks waged by law enforcement agencies, Party members were sent letters in the mail, stating that so and so is a police, or bears watching, trying to plant seeds of suspicion. We must understand COINTELPRO was in full force in the late 60's.

By 1971 the Party office members in the Sacramento had closed the doors to the office many went back into the community to organize and move on with their lives and some members moved to the Bay area too work further with the Party. But the impact of the BPP Legacy still lives on in Sacramento as a member of It's About Time committee I have tabled a number of events at McClatchy park, and have had people come up and tell me about the Sacramento Chapter, many remember the Breakfast program and a few people have told me they used to attend, and other talk of the free food, and how good the Party was for the community.