

My Time in the Black Panther Party of Seattle, Washington and Portland, Oregon.

In 1966 living in Brooklyn, New York, was extremely challenging, particularly for me. Upon hearing that a group of young African American men went down to the capitol in California at Sacramento carrying guns dressed in black leather jackets and black berets, I immediately thought to myself, "Are they (the young black men) still alive." Thus was my introduction to a group of revolutionaries who were to be the founding (Oakland) chapter of the Black Panther Party (BPP). Little did I know that I would later be involved in the BPP.

After I returned home to the Seattle/Portland area, I found myself involved in several ministries in the Seattle. I started selling the BPP paper, called *The Black Panther*, and became involved in the Prison Ministry and for a short time the Sidney Miller Medical FHMC.

Frequently, while selling papers for the BPP in Seattle, I and my partner would go down to China town and sell papers to the elderly Chinese men. We could not speak a word of Chinese nor they a word of English. However, we successfully communicated our honorable intentions and received many nods, smiles, and handshakes. Moreover, while selling the papers a specific issue of the paper recounted a conflict, which arose in the Oakland BPP between Eldridge Cleaver and the BPP leaders. Consequently, I refused to sell that particular edition of the *Black Panther* paper. I felt that the conflict was an in-party dispute and that it was not necessary, nor would it do any good to advertise it to the public. I felt it was more important to inform the public of our prison ministry.

During the Prison Ministry, we visited McNeil Island and I tried to communicate to the men we were privileged to speak with, who we were and why we visited them and they seem to enjoy our visitations. I still remember that fearful feeling that engulfed me when I boarded the boat to travel across the southern Puget Sound waters that took the visitors to McNeil Island; where the prison seemed totally isolated from humanity. Although I enjoyed the visitation to the brothers, I felt a sense of relief to return to Seattle.

When I returned to Seattle I had a brief connection with the Sidney Miller Medical FHMC, as it was getting off the ground and met several of the young interns from the University of Washington medical school who were eager to work in the FHMC so that could meet the needs of the African American community. However, due to personal problems and a beckoning from a friend in the Portland chapter of the BPP, I eventually moved back to Portland, sold more papers, and worked in the Fred Hampton Medical FHMC for an entire year.

Returning to Portland and working in the (FHMC) proved to be an awesome experience. Many incidents, which occurred while I was working at the FHMC, are still prevalent in my mind. However, I will mention only two of them. The first one

concerns the Sickle Cell Anemia testing of the African American Community. The Black people in the community were very hesitant to take the test. It seemed as though they were fearful of what they were getting into and several patients asked me, "What good would it (the Sickle Cell Anemia Test) do. Since I had a medical background, (I had taken several courses in Lab Technology) I told them it would reveal rather or not they had the trait or the disease and explained the difference to them. I also assured them that the needle prick to obtain their blood would cause them no harm. In addition, I informed them of all the information to date that I had on Sickle Cell anemia, such as, it is primarily an African American disease in the United States of America (USA), it is important to know if you have the disease or the trait, because it will determine the type of treated that one will receive, and medically how they could be specifically helped, if they tested positively for Sickle Cell Anemia. Usually after an endearing one-on-one conversation they would submit to the testing process. I do not remember one person refusing to take the test after I answered their questions and presented a full explanation of the procedure, which often assuaged their fears. It was such a delight to see the fear in their eyes turns to beautiful smiles on their faces.

The second was the physicians and medical help that assisted us in serving the Black community. When I became the administrator of the FHMC on Williams and Russell, it was in a defunct status. Therefore, I had to recall previous Physicians, nurses, and lab techs. This was rather difficult. Nonetheless, I learn to work well with many of the previous medical help as they returned to the FHMC. And it was tremendously rewarding and heart-warming to see the necessary care and assistance that was afforded to the Black community. I can still see the grateful faces of some elderly people and happy children as they left the FHMC after we had provided the needed medical assistance they desired. They acted as if all their medical problems had been solved.

In conclusion, the BPP ministries of selling the *Black Panther* paper, participating in the Prison Outreach, and being the medical administrator of the Fred Hampton Medical Clinic, will always be remembered as my commitment to the African American Community though the auspices of the BPP in Seattle, WA and Portland, OR in 1970-72, during a tumultuous period in this untoward, Western, capitalistic society. An all too brief period, which is historically referred to as the Black Power Movement?

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30 April 2008

