

“YOU CAN KILL THE REVOLUTIONARY, BUT YOU CAN’T KILL THE REVOLUTION”: A REFLECTION ON DEPUTY CHAIRMAN FRED HAMPTON’S LIFE AND LEGACY 50 YEARS AFTER HIS ASSASSINATION

*Jakobi Williams**

Deputy Chairman Fred Hampton of the Illinois Chapter of the Black Panther Party (ILBPP) is the most important political figure in the twentieth century that most people today have yet to learn about. Hampton believed that racism is a derivative of capitalism and that America could never live up to its democratic ideals and principles under capitalism. So, he advocated for democratic socialism¹ to unite America’s poor, underserved, and undervalued masses under a dynamic rubric of class solidarity that transcended racial/ethnic differences. Deputy Chairman Fred Hampton was murdered by the state before his ideas and advocacy could bear meaningful fruit.

I was personally drawn to Hampton precisely because of his passion to uplift the poor and his organizing skill in mobilizing both black and white people that historically have been portrayed stereotypically as polar opposites along racial and political lines. When I was a graduate student at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), David Hilliard was shopping the Huey P. Newton Papers and Archive. I was hired to excavate the files to help discern if in fact it was the definitive collection. Most of the material focused exclusively on Oakland and some parts of the east coast but very little on Chicago. UCLA lost the bid for the archive to Stanford where it is housed today, but I have since dedicated my academic scholarship to documenting the history, life and legacy of Fred Hampton and the ILBPP.

* Ruth N. Halls Associate Professor, Indiana University Bloomington. Ph.D., University of California, Los Angeles.

1. *What is Democratic Socialism?*, DEMOCRATIC SOCIALIST AM., <https://www.dsusa.org/about-us/what-is-democratic-socialism/> (Last Accessed: May 3, 2019) (“Democratic socialists believe that both the economy and society should be run democratically—to meet public needs, not to make profits for a few. To achieve a more just society, many structures of our government and economy must be radically transformed through greater economic and social democracy so that ordinary Americans can participate in the many decisions that affect our lives.”).

Fred Hampton was assassinated in his sleep nearly 50 years ago on December 4, 1969, and Mark Clark, his comrade from Peoria, Illinois, was also killed.² He was a civil rights and human rights activist who identified as a revolutionary. Born in Chicago on August 30, 1948, Fred Hampton was the youngest of three children. His parents Francis and Iberia Hampton, migrated from Haynesville, Louisiana in the 1930s and settled in a predominately black enclave in Argo, Illinois, just outside Chicago, where they both secured employment at the Corn Products Refining Company. At Corn Products, the Hamptons worked alongside John Carthan whose daughter was Mamie Till. When Fred Hampton was just a toddler, his mother Iberia used to babysit Mamie's young son Emmett. In the early 1950s, the Hamptons moved to Blue Island, Illinois before settling in Maywood Illinois in 1958, and Mamie Till moved to the south side of Chicago. Fourteen-year-old Emmett Till was lynched in Money Mississippi in August 1955.³ Historians generally believe that Till's murder was the catalyst for the classic phase of the Civil Rights Movement. Much of black America was mobilized for action—including a young Fred Hampton. The consensus among historians is that Till's murder was the catalyst for the Dr. King led Civil Rights movement and much of black America was mobilized for action including a young Fred Hampton.

Hampton attended Irving Elementary School where he served as captain of the Patrol Boys.⁴ Later he attended integrated Proviso East High School where he was elected to the Interracial Cross Section Committee and as President of the Junior Achievement Program. He exposed and led campaigns against racist conditions at the school as well as the unfair treatment of black students and athletes. Don Williams, president of the West Suburban Division of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), recruited Hampton to serve as President of the local NAACP Youth Council in 1967. Williams contends that Hampton's activism at Proviso East High School was instrumental in increasing the number of African-American teachers on the high school staff from five to sixteen. In 1966, Hampton enrolled in Crane Junior College (now Malcolm X College) as he wanted to be an attorney. He led and won campaigns to address concerns surrounding segregation of public swimming pools and recreation facilities in the community and the implementation of African-American history in the classroom at his former high school.

In the 1960s, Chicago was the most racially residentially segregated city in America with a long and recent history of racial tensions and violence. Most notably, Fred Hampton was inspired by his participation in

2. See *Hampton v. Hanrahan*, 600 F.2d 600, 605 (7th Cir. 1979); see generally, JAKOBI WILLIAMS, FROM THE BULLET TO THE BALLOT: THE ILLINOIS CHAPTER OF THE BLACK PANTHER PARTY AND RACIAL COALITION POLITICS IN CHICAGO (2013) (Detailing the assassinations of Fred Hampton and Mark Clark); see also, JEFF HAAS, THE ASSASSINATION OF FRED HAMPTON: HOW THE FBI MURDERED A BLACK PANTHER (2009).

3. See generally, TIMOTHY TYSON, THE BLOOD OF EMMETT TILL (2017).

4. "Patrol Boys" were the students who helped school crossing guards stop traffic so that students could cross streets on their way to and from school.

the Dr. King-led Chicago Freedom Movement beginning in 1966 to address open housing and segregation in the city. During a march in Marquette Park on August 5, 1966, about 700 white angry Chicagoans attacked the demonstrators by throwing bricks, rocks, and bottles. One of these objects struck King in the head. After the march, King told reporters that this particular Chicago demonstration was the first time that he actually feared for his life during the Civil Rights movement. "I've been in many demonstrations all across the South" King told reporters, "but I can say that I have never seen, even in Mississippi and Alabama, mobs as hostile and as hate-filled as I'm seeing in Chicago."⁵ Thus, Hampton organized various groups to compel the city of Maywood, another Chicago suburb, to build a swimming pool, since African Americans were barred from the whites-only pool in nearby Melrose Park. Hampton led five hundred angry integrated young people on a nonviolent march in Maywood to protest the segregation of the swimming pool on the grounds that public resources were being denied to the black community. Hampton and his young cohort approached Maywood's trustees and business leaders for assistance. The owner of Portes Drugs in Melrose Park offered around \$25,000 to build the pool. The pool was eventually completed in 1970, and the facility was named the Fred Hampton Aquatic Center and serves as a staple of the village of Maywood today.

Civil rights issues nationally and in the city of Chicago were also at the center of Hampton's activism. Under Hampton's leadership, the NAACP Youth Branch intensified organizing around civil rights issues, such as support for civil rights workers in the South, the development of local recreational facilities, equal opportunities in education and employment, and open housing. Hampton also established linkages with several key civil rights leaders. For example, he assisted Rev. Jesse Jackson and comedian/political activist Dick Gregory with various organizing campaigns and boycotts. Stokely Carmichael (later known as Kwame Ture), one of the leaders of the civil rights group the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), was invited to Maywood by Hampton to speak to the NAACP Youth Branch and to advise him on ongoing organizing operations. For a middle-class youth that lived in a suburb of Chicago, Hampton was very involved in the civil right movement to address the devastating realities of poor and underserved black folks on the south and west sides of Chicago.

An impressive orator himself, Hampton was chosen in 1967 to be one of the main speakers at an NAACP function. As a young activist he shared the stage with Richard G. Hatcher, the mayor of Gary, Indiana, and one of the first two African-American mayors elected in a major American city. At this meeting, several youth attendees recounted that Hampton told them that he and future Congressman Bobby Rush were in the early stages of opening a chapter of the Black Panther Party (BPP) in Chicago and he hoped that some of his NAACP peers would also join him

5. See *Dr. King Is Felled by Rock*, CHI. TRIB. (Aug. 6, 1966), <https://chicagotribune.news-papers.com/image/196143699/>; see generally, BERYL SATTER, FAMILY PROPERTIES: RACE, REAL ESTATE AND THE EXPLOITATION OF BLACK URBAN AMERICA (2009) (Describing the history of racial segregation in Chicago).

as a member of the Panthers. Several of Hampton's peers would go on to join the BPP. In November 1968, Bobby Rush, then a student at the University of Illinois at Chicago and a member of the local SNCC chapter and Fred Hampton founded the Illinois Chapter of the Black Panther Party (ILBPP). Rush was named Deputy Minister of Defense and Hampton was named Deputy Chairman because of his oratorical skills and grassroots organizing background. Almost all of Hampton's most famous quotes, "You can kill a revolutionary, but you can't kill revolution" for example, were plagiarized from Dr. King speeches and sermons but adapted for the fiery young audience in which Hampton targeted.⁶ Heavily influenced by both Dr. King and Malcolm X, Deputy Chairman Fred Hampton advocated for a democratic political system that valued human rights and a socialist economic system.

Hampton and the ILBPP set up numerous community service programs that it called "survival programs" throughout poor communities in Chicago and the state of Illinois. The Panthers' survival programs (community service programs that the Party hoped would ensure Black people's survival pending revolution) were designed to eliminate the profit motive from the daily human necessities that people need to survive. All of their programs provided free services and the Panthers advanced their program's self-determination resources as pragmatic and realistic. In Chicago, the most popular survival programs, free breakfast for children and free medical research health clinics, served hundreds of residents daily. The ILBPP offered a number of additional free services, including busing to prisons, day-care centers, clothing banks, and ambulance services. It also pressured landlords to ensure that furnaces and boilers were repaired and working properly during winter months. Despite Chicago's long dilemma of racial segregation, Hampton and the Panthers shared their self-determination programs with other poor and oppressed communities across Chicago.

Hampton, with the help of genius leaders like Panther Field Marshall Bob Lee and other ILBPP members, used the Party's community service programs to establish the original Rainbow Coalition—racial coalitions with other communities throughout Chicago. Confederate flag wearing Appalachian and southern white migrants in Uptown (Young Patriots), Puerto Ricans in Lincoln Park (Young Lords), and middle-class white ethnics in Logan Square (Rising Up Angry) aligned with the ILBPP to form the original Rainbow Coalition in 1968. Hampton served as *de facto* leader of the alliance, and all the groups adopted the ILBPP's community service programs. Together the coalition served more than two thousand residents daily from 1968 to 1974. In 1969, the Panthers held a press conference in Chicago to commemorate the one-year commemoration of Dr. King's assassination and to introduce the original Rainbow Coalition to the world. At this press conference, members of the Panther, Patriots,

6. See *MURDER OF FRED HAMPTON* (The Film Group 1971) (In the film, Hampton uses the quoted phrase while speaking at a rally outside of the federal courthouse in downtown Chicago, where the Conspiracy Eight Trial was held. Bobby Seale, who was one of the defendants, was gagged and chained to his chair during the trial by order of Judge Julius Hoffman.).

Lords, and Angry announced to the world that the group would no longer allow the capitalist forces of the state to divide them along racial lines. The Rainbow Coalition advocated solidarity among poor and oppressed people who were determined to eradicate capitalism and its divisive forces that pitted poor folks against one another.⁷

Due to Cold War politics, the existence of the original Rainbow Coalition, Hampton's revolutionary ideology, and the socialist agenda of the coalition, Hampton was targeted for assassination by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) via its infamous counterintelligence program (COINTELPRO) and by the Chicago Mayor Richard J. Daley's Democratic Machine. According to United Press International (UPI) reports, the FBI targeted the Black Panther Party – which it dubbed “the greatest threat to the internal security of the nation” – more than any other leftist organization during the period because the BPP's anti-capitalist survival programs were being adopted across race and class lines throughout the United States.⁸ According to sealed secret Chicago police records, the Red Squad files, Hampton was dubbed as being a greater threat than Dr. King and Malcolm X because of the original Rainbow Coalition. Fred Hampton eclipsed one of Dr. King's accomplishments by forging coalitions with a segment of society (Confederate flag wearing southern whites) that was antithetical to the civil rights movement.

Moreover, one of the FBI's COINTELPRO missions was to prevent the rise of an African-American messiah who they believed would lead an African-American revolt. As a result of the Rainbow Coalition led by Hampton, both the FBI and the Daley administration were threatened by the racial coalition and believed that it may be the first stage of an actual revolution in American. Their fear was warranted as the BPP, like Dr. King and Malcolm X, wanted a revolution to replace the capitalist economy with a socialist economy as they all advocated that America could never live up to its ideals as a democracy under a capitalist economy. Their goal was to put humanity before capital, human health and well-being before wealth, and human sustenance and survival before profit and the economic bottom line. Hampton's leadership of the Rainbow Coalition epitomized racial and class solidarity among the poor and this message would travel across the US and across the world. Like Dr. King and Malcolm X before him, Hampton believed that racism and capitalism in America was intertwined. To solve the dilemma of racism American had to divorce from capitalism. Simultaneously, America was losing hearts and minds and the Cold War, while losing a hot war in Vietnam.

7. Linn Ehrlich, *Chicago Rainbow Coalition* (Apr. 4, 1969), NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY. <https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/chicago-rainbow-coalition/7QG9KGqiTk4LFw>.

8. See *Black Panthers Greatest Threat to US Security*, DESERT SUN (July 16, 1969), <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/cgi-bin/cdnc?a=d&d=DS19690716.2.89&e=-----en--20--1--txt-txIN-----1>. UPI was founded in 1958, and served as an international news agency whose newswires, photos, news film, and audio services provided news material to thousands of newspapers, magazines, radio and television stations for much of the 20th century.

All of the aforementioned made Hampton a target for elimination by both the state and the city of Chicago.

Hampton was assassinated via the joint effort of the FBI and the Cook County State's Attorney's Office at 4:00 a.m. on December 4, 1969 as he lay asleep (he was drugged by an FBI informant) in his bed.⁹ This aim of this joint effort was to end the movement by terminating its leadership. Consequently, Hampton's death had the opposite effect, galvanizing the movement. The Rainbow Coalition transformed from a community grassroots organization on the margins of Chicago's political arena to a chief player in the city's politics. The group successfully orchestrated a campaign to vote out of office the Cook County state's attorney Edward Hanrahan, who was directly responsible for Hampton's murder and its cover-up. For the first time in over fifty years, the activists organized voters to vote Republican to oust the mayoral Democratic Machine heir apparent Hanrahan. Hanrahan's defeat subsequently ended his political career and established racial coalition politics as a viable political challenger to the Democratic machine.

As a result of the exposure of a cover-up of Hampton's political assassination, the Hampton family sued the FBI, Cook County, and the city of Chicago. Subsequently, the case took thirteen years before the Hampton's won a semblance of justice. In 1983, the U.S. Supreme Court forced the FBI, Cook County, and the city of Chicago to settle the case thus admitted guilt—that together the three government units assassinated 21-year-old Fred Hampton in his sleep because they opposed his political beliefs—and provided the Hampton family and other plaintiffs with a \$1.85 million settlement.

Fred Hampton was one of the foremost revolutionary figures of the twentieth century. In both life and death, he inspired a generation of activists across lines of race and class to create change in their communities. His influence and legacy can be found in the numerous free breakfast programs, free clinics, legal aid offices, and countless other community service initiatives that are now common programs on American society. Moreover, Hampton revolutionized politics in Chicago and American that led to Chicago first African American Mayor and American's first African American President. Hampton's legacy can be located in the 1983 election of Chicago's first African-American mayor, Harold Washington, who ran on a Rainbow Coalition platform and whose campaign and cabinet featured original Rainbow Coalition members. Rev. Jesse Jackson's Rainbow PUSH Coalition was established in 1983 after Washington's victory as a direct appropriation of the original Rainbow Coalition. And in 1983, future US President Barack Obama began his career as an outgrowth of the political consulting and community organizing surrounding Washington's election. Thus, it is not by accident that the first African American President comes from Chicago and was elected primarily due to racial coalition politics—the legacy of Hampton and the original Rainbow Coalition. Fred Hampton and the original Rainbow Coalition did not intend to put an African American in city hall or the White House.

9. See Williams, *supra* note 2.

Subsequently, their democratic socialist agenda was nevertheless adapted for political campaigns that resulted in the election of Chicago's first black Mayor and America's first black President.

Furthermore, Hampton's legacy is found in both the numerous organizations that make up the #BlackLivesMatter network and the state's continued legacy of repression and terror.¹⁰ In 2017, the FBI's counterterrorism division issued a 10-page report, entitled "Black Identity Extremists Likely Motivated to Target Law Enforcement Officers."¹¹ The report essentially targets #BlackLivesMatter activists and those who agitate against police brutality, inequality in criminal justice, and lack of inclusion as enemies of the state. The FBI's contemporary program, which is encapsulated in the designation *Black Identity Extremist*, mirrors both COINTELPRO and the Racial Matters Squad. These programs were used to target Fred Hampton and others, and repressed all activists and groups of the period that challenged state-sanctioned terrorism. Now more than ever before, it is the time to utilize Hampton's influence in our protracted struggle against the forces of white supremacy that hold our nation hostage.

Deputy Chairman Fred Hampton and the original Rainbow Coalition provide a necessary model to counter Trumpism today. If Hampton could unite folks across racial differences, the Confederate flag wearing Young Patriots for example in the 1960s, then we as activists definitely can eclipse Hampton's success in our current context—an era of extreme political/racial polarization. It was Hampton's connection to advocacy that created change in our nation, and it is the continuing nuances of the mobilized poor fused with advocacy that will connect the extremes of our time's polar opposites to establish a conduit of understanding, communication, and respect.

10. Most of the groups that make up the Black Lives Matter network such as the Chicago based Black Youth Project 100, Assata's Daughters, and We Charge Genocide, study organizers including Fred Hampton to adopt strategies for coalition building and targeting institutional racism.

11. See Hatewatch Staff, *FBI 'Black Identity Extremists' report stirs controversy*, S. POVERTY L. CTR., (Oct. 25, 2017), <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2017/10/25/fbi-black-identity-extremists-report-stirs-controversy> ("In the FBI's report, BIE is described as a conglomeration of black nationalists, black supremacists, and black separatists, among other disaffiliated racist individuals who are anti-police, anti-white, and/or seeking to rectify perceived social injustices against blacks. The FBI essentially merged these various black hate groups under one umbrella, giving it a new name, in the hopes of classifying these groups as an organized extremist movement.").

