

Huey: Black Community Has the Final Word

By Frances M. Beal

OAKLAND

More than 1,000 people crammed into the Allen Temple Baptist Church in East Oakland on August 28; another several thousand watched the proceedings on closed circuit TV in an auxiliary chapel or milled in the courtyard in a blazing hot sun. They had come to pay their last respects to the founder of the Black Panther Party, Huey P. Newton, but their presence was also a conscious political act.

Huey's blood had not yet dried on the street where he was gunned down in an apparent drug related incident before the mass media began its smear campaign. Huey was a "thug," a "gangster," a social misfit. It wasn't just an attack on one individual; the bourgeois propaganda machine was trying to wipe out the historical and political significance of the Black Panther Party.

But in a vivid demonstration of self-definition, the Black community and a large number of non-Black progressives turned out in force and had the final word. Rev. Don Smith summed up the feeling of many when he stated, "Huey's place in history is well secured and that movement also has a place in history that can never be denied." It was a moving point in the proceedings when former Panther leader Ericka Huggins read the Panther Ten Point Program to remind the audience that Huey had a program and that the breakfast programs, free health



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clinics, family bus service for prisoners, community school, etc. were contributions that no hindsighted and mean-spirited press corps can deny Black people.

Traveling all the way from Atlanta, someone we all knew as H. Rap Brown when he headed up SNCC, Jamil Abdullah Alamein, stood among an overflowing garden of flowers, to explain: "What [Huey] wanted was freedom and justice for all... and he gave much of himself to secure these wants. And when he did

so, he was most at peace with himself, for that is what he did best." After invoking the image of the disastrous Cointelpro operations against Huey and the party, Alamein said, "This repression took its toll on Huey and others as it was meant to do, but he never broke. He never renounced the Black Panther Party, its goals, its struggles. He did not become an apologist for the government or its repressive or callous policies."

This sentiment was underscored by the

broad spectrum of people that came to celebrate Newton's contributions. Rep. Ron Dellums (D-Calif.), Oakland city councilman and mayoral candidate Wilson Riles, Jr., Johnny Spain, recently released from prison, Angela Davis, numerous community activists and religious figures and many, many rank and file Panthers. And enough of the former leadership gathered so they could have called a central committee meeting—Elaine Brown, Emory Douglas, JoNina Abron, David Hilliard, and the most well-known of all—Bobby Seale, cofounder of the BPP who flew in from Philadelphia to pay tribute. Seale recalled, "We want freedom; we want the power to determine our own destiny." He was greeted with resounding applause when he told the gathering that this was "not just a funeral" but a "revival" of the goals and objectives incorporated in the Black Panther Program.

One of the highlights of the day was the eulogy by Pastor J. Alfred Smith, Sr. After saluting Huey's social concerns and programs, Smith reminded the audience that Huey Newton should be celebrated as a powerful intellectual as well. "But you see, they don't like to point Black men up as thinkers; we have to scratch our heads, pop our fingers, dance, it's all right for us to rap, but when we get to mapping out our own destiny, then we're in trouble again."

Three hours after the service began, many "amens" were shouted when Father Earl Neal (who had provided spiritual guidance to the Panthers) summed it all up: "Although the pharaoh FBI and the Oakland Police Department tried to give Huey a false identify, that of a gangster, you the people rose up infused by the spirit of Huey and you said a loud and resounding No!" □

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