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THE LIFE AND DEATH OF CHAIRMAN FRED

“Chairman Fred” and “Cicero March” by Mike Gray

“A Timeline for the Life and Death of Fred Hampton” and
“Behind the Scenes of the Murder of Fred Hampton” by Susan Doll,
researched from the pages of the Chicago Tribune, Chicago Defender,
Chicago Sun-Time, and other related sources.

Photos: © Paul Sequeria
In 1969, Mike Gray and The Film Group were in the midst of chronicling the activities of Fred Hampton and the Chicago chapter of the Black Panthers for a documentary. When Hampton was brutally killed in bed in his apartment by a special unit of police tied to the State’s Attorney’s Office, Gray and his partners were called in immediately by Panther lawyers to film the crime scene.

Just as they had been for *American Revolution 2*, Gray and his group were thrust in the middle of a historic event. Their footage of Hampton’s apartment became part of the evidence used to show that the official version of the Hampton raid by police and the State’s Attorney was not true.

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**INTRODUCTION**

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**CHAIRMAN FRED**

In April of 1969 *American Revolution 2* premiered in Chicago at the Playboy Theater to rave reviews. Then we turned our full attention to Fred Hampton and the Panthers.

Through the viewfinder we watched “Chairman Fred” close-up for what turned out to be the last nine months of his life, then we watched him again and again in the screening room. It finally dawned on us that the source of his magnetism was a total absence of fear. He was unable to be intimidated. A Free Man. And thus, to the Nixon administration, a threat to national security. In fact, there is a line in the FBI COINTELPRO documents unearthed by the Watergate hearings that summed it up: “We must prevent the rise of a ‘messiah’ who could unite and electrify the militant black antinationalist movement.”

At dawn on December 4, 1969, we heard Hampton had been killed in a police raid and somehow the police had left the scene unguarded. The Panther attorneys wanted us out there as fast as possible. The footage we shot that morning and the evidence the lawyers collected resulted in the indictment of several Chicago Police officers, the State’s Attorney for Northern Illinois, and two of his assistants. The cops claimed it was a desperate shootout, but the FBI crime lab finally admitted that some 99 shots had come from police weapons and there was no evidence of return fire.
In the Daley court system, of course, convictions were impossible but the public furor in the aftermath of the acquittal stunned City Hall and fatally fractured the powerful Daley Machine. The election of Harold Washington, Chicago's first black mayor, was arguably a direct result of black outrage at the Hampton assassination.

In 1972 *The Murder of Fred Hampton* premiered at the Cannes Film Festival. But another decade would pass before we knew the full story.

Although all criminal charges against the police had been dismissed, Panther attorneys from the People's Law Office relentlessly pursued the government in civil court for twelve grueling years. They endured harassment, financial hardship, and every conceivable legal obstacle the city, state, and federal authorities could put in their path. In 1983 the government lawyers finally caved and settled the wrongful death suit for $1.85 million.

Among the stunning courtroom revelations: the Panther chief of security—Fred Hampton's personal bodyguard—was an FBI plant named William O'Neal. The night of the raid he stopped by the Panther apartment for a final check and may have put something in Hampton's drink. When the raiders crashed in at 4:30 a.m., Hampton never lifted his head despite the machine gun and shotgun fire coming at him from all directions. The police team knew exactly where he would be because O'Neal had given them a map.

Though this all happened a Long Time Ago in a Galaxy Far Away, it is as relevant now as the morning paper. If you look at the headlines from 1968 and 1969, you find that you can snip them out and paste them on the refrigerator today and nobody will know the difference. The issues are the same—even some of the people are the same. A military quagmire abroad, the country split down the middle, the media swamped with jingoism, political paralysis in Washington, and over it all hovers the unspoken racism that dogs us still.

In the decades since *American Revolution 2* and *The Murder of Fred Hampton*, I have traveled an unusual trajectory as journalist and filmmaker, and it has been my privilege to meet some very famous and powerful people. I have yet to meet Fred Hampton's equal. Watching him in action in these long-ago images inevitably raises the question of where he might be now if he had not been executed just after his 21st birthday. Sometimes I imagine him running for President of the United States. And, I hear a political discourse quite unlike anything we're hearing today.

—Mike Gray, January 2007

**CICERO MARCH**

The Film Group was founded in 1966 by myself, Lars Hedman, and former *Life Magazine* photographer Mike Shea. It was Shea who taught us about documentary filmmaking. He was a brilliant, instinctive cameraman who helped invent the *cinema verite* style.

*Cicero March*, included on this DVD as an extra, was Shea's idea. In the spring of 1966, Martin Luther King had been talked out of a civil rights march through the Chicago suburb of Cicero—the death threats were too credible. But then a young black postal worker named William Lucas decided to march anyway. And Mike decided we should shoot it—from the viewpoint of the marchers.

The raw hatred of the white citizens was astounding, but Shea was oblivious to the bricks and cherry bombs coming at us. He was after the action—close-up, in focus, with the right f-stop—and rock steady. He wanted you to know what it was like to be there.

—Mike Gray
## A Timeline for the Life and Death of Fred Hampton

### July 10, 1968:
Fred Hampton is arrested for the robbery and assault of an ice-cream-truck driver in his hometown of Maywood. The theft consisted of $71 of ice cream, which ended up in the hands of neighborhood children. Hampton’s associates claim that the arrest is a frame-up.

### December 18, 1968:
The Chicago Black Panthers open an office on West Madison. The Illinois chapter quickly becomes the largest and most powerful chapter of the Black Panthers. Hampton is named chairman of the Chicago Black Panthers.

### December 1968:
Filmmaker Mike Gray and members of the Film Group meet Fred Hampton and decide to make him the subject of a documentary.

### Early Spring 1969:
The Film Group begins to follow Hampton around, chronicling his speeches and his efforts to help the people of Chicago’s South Side. Among the Panthers’ most successful efforts is a breakfast program for children. Operating from three locations on the South Side, the program was instigated so that no child had to go to school hungry. Gray and his group capture the Panthers serving breakfast and milk to children, which appears in *The Murder of Fred Hampton*.

### April 1969:
Hampton is convicted of the robbery and assault. The trial judge tells Hampton he will get probation.

### May 1969:
Hampton is released on bond, but under extreme pressure from State’s Attorney Edward Hanrahan, the trial judge reneges and hands down a two to five year sentence. Hampton is sent to prison in downstate Menard.

### June 5, 1969:
At a press conference, Bobby Rush, Deputy Minister of the Illinois Black Panther Party, accuses the FBI of using illegal tactics when they invaded the Panther office on West Madison earlier that week. According to Rush, they destroyed equipment, ruined food designed for the children’s breakfast program, and stole $3000. The FBI, who arrested eight Panthers, accuse them of hoarding guns.

### August 1969:
The Illinois Supreme Court grants Hampton appeal bond, and he returns to Chicago to a joyous welcome at People’s Church on South Ashland Avenue. In an inspiring speech, he reveals that he heard the “beat of the people” and was “high off the people” while he was locked up in Menard.

**Hampton resumes his speaking and organizing at a breakneck pace, which is captured by Mike Gray and the Film Group.**

### November 1969:
Two policemen are killed in a shootout supposedly with the Panthers.

### November 19, 1969:
Hampton’s bodyguard and Minister of Security, William O’Neal, who is an FBI agent and plant in the Panther organization, reports to the FBI with a floorplan of Hampton’s apartment. The plan shows the complete layout of the apartment, including the exact location of Fred’s bed.
**December 3, 1969:** O’Neal, the FBI plant, stops by Hampton’s apartment and allegedly spikes his drink with something to make him sleep.

**December 4, 1969:** Hampton and Mark Clark of the Peoria Black Panthers are killed in a police raid on Hampton’s apartment. The 14 police officers involved are a special detachment to State’s Attorney Edward Hanrahan’s office. Four other Panthers are wounded, including Hampton’s fiancée, Deborah Johnson, who is eight months pregnant. Police allegedly drag her into the street, beat her, and then arrest her. Two police officers suffer minor wounds: One is shot in the hand; the other is cut by flying glass. Three Panthers escape injury.

**Early Morning, December 4, 1969:** Mike Gray, Howard Alk, and Jim Dennett of The Film Group arrive on the scene at the request of the Panther lawyers Skip Andrew and Jeff Haas to film the apartment, which is unguarded. They shoot the crime scene, which includes every room of the apartment. Footage of bullet holes shows that all shots were fired from the outside in, indicating that no shots were fired by the Panthers. This appears in *The Murder of Fred Hampton*.

**9:30 AM, December 4, 1969:** CBS-TV airs a statement by State’s Attorney Edward Hanrahan in which he describes the raid as a “shootout.” He claims his office had knowledge of illegal weapons being stored at Hampton’s apartment, which was “a depot” for the Panthers’ weapons. According to Hanrahan, Police Sergeant Groth ordered a cease fire three times to ask the occupants of the apartment to come out, but they refused. The occupants supposedly yelled, “Shoot it out.” Hanrahan suggests that this proves the “viciousness” of the Black Panthers.

**December 4 - 11, 1969:** Almost 25,000 people visit the Hampton apartment to look at the crime scene.

**December 5, 1969:** The *Chicago Tribune* refers to the raid as a “wild gun battle” and states that attempted murder charges will be brought against the seven Panthers who were involved.

In a press conference, Bobby Rush and Chaka Walls dispute the official version of what happened, insisting the bullet holes prove that no guns were fired from within.

**December 6, 1969:** A memorial for Fred Hampton and Mark Clark is held at the People’s Church.

**December 7, 1969:** The *New York Times* states, “… an inspection of the five-room apartment did not square with police accounts of a torrid gun battle.”

The article also notes that the killings coincided with a series of raids and arrests at Panther offices across the country that week. Later, declassified FBI documents reveal that the raids, including the Hampton killings, were part of a counter-intelligence program called COINTELPRO.

**December 8, 1969:** In another press conference, Hanrahan claims that just before the raid, the police announced themselves to the occupants of the apartment, who then attacked them with a shotgun, shooting from the inside out. Thus, the police had no choice but to return fire. Some reporters at the press conference challenge Hanrahan about reports of evidence that contradicts his version of events.
December 8, 1969: Bobby Rush is arrested for failure to register a firearm.

The Panther lawyers and The Film Group bring in ballistics expert Herbert MacDonell to investigate Hampton's apartment.

An independent autopsy of Fred Hampton finds that he was shot at close range, probably while asleep. The Mayor of Maywood calls the killings “legitimized murder.”

December 11, 1969: In an article titled “Hanrahan, Police Tell Panther Story,” the Chicago Tribune supports Hanrahan’s version of the story. Hanrahan gives the Tribune four photos of the crime scene, but he misidentifies them. He claims one photo shows bullet holes in the back door of the apartment, suggesting that some Panthers shot at police through the back door. By this time, hundreds of visitors to the Hampton apartment have seen the back door, which has no bullet holes.

December 12, 1969: State’s Attorney Hanrahan “re-creates” the Hampton apartment on a set constructed at the State’s Attorney’s Office. He asks WBBM-TV, a CBS affiliate in Chicago, to film a re-enactment of the raid without interference. All the raiders are present for the event and those who participated in the reenactment are informed that the film could be cut as the raiders desired. To insure the production’s conformity with his previous press statements, Hanrahan visits the set during portions of the taping. The broadcast is aired the same evening.

The Film Group obtains copies of this re-creation, plus the outtakes, for a side-by-side comparison with their footage. The filmic comparison contradicts Hanrahan’s official version of events.

December 13, 1969: Hanrahan holds his final press conference. When confronted with questions from reporters that focus on the photographic misrepresentations contained in the Chicago Tribune article, Hanrahan merely reconfirms the “accuracy” of the officers’ stories without investigating the conflicting reports.

Late December 1969: Mike Gray leaves the country so that investigators cannot seize the footage shot by The Film Group or arrest him. A deal is brokered by lawyers Skip Andrew and Jeff Haas with a judge in which Gray provides the State’s Attorney’s Office with two copies of their footage but The Film Group retains the negative and all rights.

January 22, 1970: The coroner’s jury investigating the deaths of Hampton and Clark declare a verdict of justifiable homicide, clearing the police raiders. However, the verdict of the coroner’s jury is not binding on any other legal body. Investigations by the Cook County grand jury and the federal grand jury are still pending.

The Chicago Sun-Times and the Chicago Defender dispute the Tribune’s story and Hanrahan’s interpretation of the photos. The Sun-Times proves that the bullet holes in the Tribune photos were nail heads.
1970:
The outcry over the killings forces Attorney General John Mitchell and the Justice Department to begin an “investigation,” though no one wants to reveal the FBI’s involvement. The investigation produces ballistics evidence that establishes that the raiders fired over 90 bullets at the Panthers, while the Panthers fired one shot at most. They also develop evidence that Hanrahan, the raiders, and the police department lied, manufactured evidence, and mounted a cover-up. However, since an indictment of Hanrahan and his men threatens to expose the secret FBI role in the raid, a deal is struck. The Justice Department issues no indictments, but rather a report that is critical of both the Panthers and the police.

1970-1971:
The public outcry in response to this cover-up is again strong, and it ultimately forces the Chief Judge of the Criminal Courts of Cook County to appoint a special prosecutor to present evidence to a Cook County Grand Jury. This investigation ignores the federal involvement in the raid and refuses to return murder indictments, but it does bring obstruction of justice indictments against Hanrahan, his raiders, and several other police and assistant state’s attorneys. The charges are based on the falsification of ballistics and other pieces of evidence, which were partly revealed in the footage shot by The Film Group.

The Chief Judge refuses to file these indictments, and the Special Prosecutor is compelled to appeal to the Illinois Supreme Court to get the indictments filed. The Chief Judge then assigns the case to Judge Philip Romiti, whereupon Hanrahan waives his right to a jury trial.

NOVEMBER 1, 1972:
Judge Phillip Romitti drops charges brought against Hanrahan and 12 police personnel for conspiring to obstruct justice. He drops the charges as part of a quid pro quo arrangement in which the remaining charges would be dropped against the seven Panthers who survived the raid.

NOVEMBER 1972:
Hanrahan loses his re-election bid for State’s Attorney to Republican Bernard Carey.

MAY 1973:
The Commission of Inquiry Into the Black Panthers and Police, chaired by Roy Wilkins and Ramsey Clark, issues a 272-page report, characterizing the Hampton raid as a “search and destroy” mission and stating there was “probable cause to believe that Hampton was murdered” while he lay “prostrate” on the bed. The report concludes that it is “more probable than not” that Fred was drugged; that the investigations of the raid by “various local law enforcement agencies were singularly inadequate;” and “designed not to determine the facts but solely to establish the innocence of the police;” that there was “probable cause” to believe that the raid violated the Criminal Federal Civil Rights Statutes and the Constitution; and that the Federal Grand Jury “failed in its duty to proceed against violations of civil liberties.”

Around the same time, it is publicly revealed that Black Panther William O’Neal was an FBI operative, and that the FBI had a program called COINTELPRO designed to “neutralize and disrupt” black leaders and their organizations.

JANUARY 1976:
The trial begins over the civil rights lawsuit filed by the families of Hampton and Clark. Much evidence is revealed that exposes the FBI’s tactics and abuses in their COINTELPRO program.

1980:
Ballistics experts determine that only one of the bullets fired during the Fred Hampton raid was shot from a weapon belonging to one of the apartment’s occupants. In addition, the experts said, the “bullet holes” in the door, which the police said showed that shots had come from within, had actually been made by nails used by the authorities in an effort to cover up the facts of the raid. [Cf. Hanrahan v. Hampton, et al., 446 U.S. 754, 100 S.C. 1987 (1980)]. Despite this determination, not a single officer or anyone at the State’s Attorney’s office or the FBI spent a day in jail for the ambush and murders of Fred Hampton and Mark Clark.

FEBRUARY 1983:
The City of Chicago, Cook County, and the federal government enter into a settlement agreement that awards $1.85 million dollars to the nine survivors and the relatives of Fred Hampton and Mark Clark.

MARCH - APRIL 2006:
Chicago Alderman Madeline Haithcock proposes that a stretch of West Monroe Street be renamed in honor of Fred Hampton. The proposal divides the city council and angers the Fraternal Order of Police. To alleviated tension, the council keeps the proposal in committee, which means that alderman will not have a chance to vote on it—effectively tabling the proposal.
THE PEOPLE BEHIND THE SCENES

HOWARD ALK: Alk, the director of The Murder of Fred Hampton, graduated from the University of Chicago. Soon after, he cofounded the improvisational theater group Second City with Paul Sills. In addition to American Revolution 2 and the The Murder of Fred Hampton, he directed and/or edited The Cry of Jazz (Ed Bland, 1960), Maxwell Street: And This Is Free (Mike Shea, 1965), Eat the Document (Bob Dylan, 1969), A Safe Place (Henry Jaglom, 1972), and Renaldo & Clara (Bob Dylan, 1979).

RENNIE DAVIS: Born Rennard Cordon Davis, this member of the Counterculture was a prominent anti-Vietnam War protest leader during the 1960s. In 1968, he was actively involved with the demonstrations at the Democratic National Convention. Along with six others, he was arrested for violating the 1968 Anti-Riot Act. Black Panther Bobbie Seale was arrested and added to the group, though he and his trial were later separated from the others. After Seale's removal, the press dubbed the defendants the Chicago Seven. Davis was also the national director of community organizing programs, a project of the Students for a Democratic Society. He later became a venture capitalist and lecturer on meditation and self-awareness. Davis is the founder of Ventures for Humanity, a technology development and venture capital company commercializing breakthrough technologies.

JIM DENNET: Dennett served as the production manager for The Murder of Fred Hampton. He currently lives in Topanga Canyon, California, where he works in film and television production. Dennett continues to shoot documentaries with Mike Gray.

MARK CLARK: The son of a minister, Clark was the Chairman and first member of the Peoria, Illinois, chapter of the Black Panther Party. He became active in the N.A.A.C.P at an early age and demonstrated against discrimination in employment, housing and education. He was 22 years old when he was killed alongside Fred Hampton on December 4, 1969.

OFFICER JAMES "GLOVES" DAVIS: Davis was the first police officer to enter the Hampton apartment during the raid. He claimed that a woman immediately fired a shotgun at him, and he dived to the floor to escape the bullets. Davis, who was black, allegedly got his nickname because he put on gloves before beating suspects.

RENNIE DAVIS: Born Rennard Cordon Davis, this member of the Counterculture was a prominent anti-Vietnam War protest leader during the 1960s. In 1968, he was actively involved with the demonstrations at the Democratic National Convention. Along with six others, he was arrested for violating the 1968 Anti-Riot Act. Black Panther Bobbie Seale was arrested and added to the group, though he and his trial were later separated from the others. After Seale's removal, the press dubbed the defendants the Chicago Seven. Davis was also the national director of community organizing programs, a project of the Students for a Democratic Society. He later became a venture capitalist and lecturer on meditation and self-awareness. Davis is the founder of Ventures for Humanity, a technology development and venture capital company commercializing breakthrough technologies.

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MIKE GRAY: Gray worked for The Film Group during the 1960s, when the Group was making commercials for major clients. The chaos surrounding the 1968 Democratic National Convention and the shooting of Fred Hampton by Chicago police made it difficult for the Group to return to making commercials. Eventually, their advertising clients faded away, and Gray and the others continued to "film the Revolution." He left Chicago soon after the murder of Fred Hampton to study screenwriting in California. He wrote the Oscar-nominated 1979 drama The China Syndrome, developed a TV series based on the sci-fi movie Starman, and continued to do documentaries.

SERGEANT DANIEL GROTH: Groth led the 14-man police unit that raided the Hampton apartment at 2337 West Monroe. According to Groth, on the night of the raid, police announced their presence before entering the apartment. Groth then claimed a woman responded with, "Who's there," but did not open the door. According to Groth, only then did the police force the door open.

EDWARD V. HANRAHAN: The politically aggressive Hanrahan served as State's Attorney during the era of social unrest in the late 1960s. Shortly after he was elected in November 1968, he appointed Richard Jalovec as Assistant State's Attorney and made him the chief of the office's Special Prosecutions Unit (SPU). By April 1969 the primary focus of the SPU was black street gangs. Hanrahan's special 14-man detachment to the State's Attorney Office was the group responsible for the raid on Fred Hampton's apartment, which killed Hampton and Clark.

Later, Hanrahan and members of this detachment were indicted for falsifying ballistics reports and other evidence in the Hampton raid. In 1972, the charges were dropped against the group in a quid pro quo arrangement that also allowed charges to be dropped against the surviving Panthers.

DEBORAH JOHNSON: Johnson was Hampton's fiancee and was eight months pregnant on the night of the raid. She was dragged from the apartment, beaten, and then arrested for attempted murder. A few weeks later, she gave birth to Fred Hampton Jr. The charges against her were eventually dropped, along with those against the other survivors of the raid.

Later, Johnson changed her name to Akua Njeri. On the anniversary of Hampton's death each year, she arranges a vigil.

OFFICER RENAULT ROBINSON: President of the Afro-American Patrolman's League, Renault announced shortly after the Hampton raid that the group would launch their own investigation into the deaths of Hampton and Clark.

BOBBY RUSH: Rush was the Defense Minister of the Chicago Black Panthers when Fred Hampton was killed. He was not at Hampton's apartment the night of the raid.

Later, Rush began to work within the political system to enact change. He was first elected to the Chicago City Council, then became a Democratic member of the United States House of Representatives in 1993, representing Illinois's 1st congressional district. His district has a higher percentage of African Americans (65%) than any other congressional district in the nation. Shortly after his son's death in 1999, Rush became an ordained Baptist minister, founding the Beloved Community Christian Church on Chicago’s South Side. On July 15, 2004, Rush became the second sitting Congressman arrested for protesting human rights violations at the Sudanese Embassy in Washington, DC.

RONALD “DOC” SATCHEL: Deputy Minister of Health of the Illinois Black Panther Party, 19-year-old Satchel was seriously wounded by five gunshots during the raid. Satchel was arrested for attempted murder, along with the other survivors of the raid. The charges were eventually dropped.

Hampton worked tirelessly for the people, organizing breakfast programs for children and free clinics for the poor.
NOW AVAILABLE FROM FACETS

Also by The Film Group, **American Revolution 2** makes a provocative companion film to **The Murder of Fred Hampton**.