

2015

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### Recommended Citation

Keiser, Sam (2015) "The Blackstone Rangers and the Civil Rights and Black Power Movement in Chicago," *North Alabama Historical Review*: Vol. 5 , Article 5.

Available at: <https://ir.una.edu/nahr/vol5/iss1/5>

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# **The Blackstone Rangers and the Civil Rights and Black Power Movement in Chicago**

Sam Keiser

When you think of the Civil Rights Movement in the states north of the Mason-Dixon Line, the last people thought of would be gang members. In our minds, Martin Luther King, James Bevel, Jesse Jackson, and Stokely Carmichael are the people credited with spreading the Movement to the North. Because of this view, the roles local organizations and gangs played in the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements is often glossed over. Nowhere is this more apparent than in Chicago in the late '60s during the Chicago Freedom Movement of 1966 and the subsequent rise of the Black Power Movement of 1968. This marked a period when gang involvement in the Civil Rights Movement would not only grow; it would actively be sought after. In the '60s, Chicago based gangs became more numerous and more organized than the previous iterations. Their involvement in the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements enabled them to become players not only locally, but on the national stage as well.

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“The Blackstone Rangers,” who would also be known as the “Black P. Stones” and “El Rukn,” were co-opted into the Civil Rights Movement in Chicago. They were able to extend their influence beyond the Civil Rights Movement and into the Black Power Movement, as well. The Rangers and their leader Jeff Fort became the most notorious gang in Chicago. Their rise to prominence and community activism made them a unique force in the ‘60s. The relationships they formed with prominent Civil Rights and Black Power leaders such as, Martin Luther King Jr., Jesse Jackson, and Fred Hampton showed their willingness to fight the inequalities in Woodlawn neighborhood. To understand the Blackstone Rangers and how they became such a prominent gang in Chicago, their beginnings must be considered. The man most associated with the Rangers who came to be the eventual leader of the Blackstone Rangers was Jeff Fort. He was born on February 20, 1947, in Aberdeen, Mississippi, he and his family would later take up residence in Chicago’s “South Side” in the mid-fifties. At a young age, Jeff Fort had a penchant for getting in trouble with the law. He began popping in and out of juvenile detention centers and it was here that he met Eugene “Bull” Hairston, who would eventually become the leader of the Blackstone

Rangers. They took the name Blackstone from Blackstone Avenue, the street they lived on. The exact year that the gang was formed varies from source to source, but the gang was officially formed sometime in the late '50s to early '60s. However, the most likely year of the gang's formation occurred in 1959. Originally, Eugene Hairston assumed leadership of the gang with Jeff Fort as his second in command. This gang, like many others, was formed to protect their neighborhood from rival gangs like the Devil's Disciples, Imperials, Conservatives, FBIs, Drexel Casanovas, and the Gangsters.<sup>1</sup> During the gang's early years, they adhered to their original goals, protecting their neighborhood from the encroachment of these gangs on their territory.<sup>2</sup>

Beginning with their inception in 1959, the Blackstone Rangers were engaged in street battles with rival gangs, mainly the Devil's Disciples. However, things began to change in 1965. The Rangers shifted their focus away from the street violence and began working on organization. The shift that occurred was mainly due to the arrival of Reverend John Fry in Woodlawn. Through the outreach efforts of

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<sup>1</sup> Natalie Moore, and Lance Williams. *The Almighty Black P Stone Nation: The Rise, Fall, and Resurgence of an American Gang* (Chicago, Ill: Lawrence Hill Books, 2011), 32.

<sup>2</sup> Tom Brune, and James Ylisela JR, "The Making of Jeff Fort." *Chicago magazine*, November 1998. <http://www.chicagomag.com/Chicago-Magazine/November-1988/The-Making-of-Jeff-Fort/>.

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Chuck LaPagila, who was a member of the church, Fry began to engage with the Rangers. Reverend Fry wanted to help shape the Rangers into a political youth organization. It was Fry, before anyone else, who recognized the Rangers' potential to be a political organization if they directed their energies in a more positive direction. In an effort to foster better relations between the church and the Rangers, Fry began to allow the Rangers to make use of the First Presbyterian church as a space for them to gather as a group. However, trying to form a relationship between the church and the Rangers had its share of difficulties. In Reverend Fry's book, *Fire and Blackstone*, Reverend Fry described the community's reaction to the church working with the Rangers by saying, "Please understand. The Blackstone Rangers had a terrible reputation. Almost without exception Woodlawn residents hated and feared them. The organization was known to be armed and quick to use firearms and other instruments of violence. Woodlawn residents thus believed the Church must at least be sanctioning and even participating in these activities."<sup>3</sup> Despite the community's uneasiness over the situation

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<sup>3</sup> John Fry, *Fire and Blackstone*, 1st ed (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1969), 8.

with the Rangers, it does seem as though Reverend Fry was able to steer the Rangers towards a more positive direction.

Eventually, the church became the *de facto* headquarters of the Blackstone Rangers. It was here under the tutelage of the Reverend John Fry that the Blackstone Rangers began to organize their gang into one of the most influential organizations on Chicago's "South Side." In this respect, the Blackstone Rangers were unique. Unlike many other gangs, the Blackstone Rangers had a strong central chain of command that allowed them to act in concert. They achieved this organization by incorporating the smaller gangs that had joined up with them directly into the overall Ranger command structure.

This led to the creation of what the Rangers called the "Main 21." The Main 21 was essentially the governing body of the Blackstone Rangers. It included all of the gang leaders who had joined up with the Rangers in the early sixties and it was presided over by Eugene Hairston and Jeff Fort. The Main 21 had two very distinct roles that helped organize the Rangers into one of the most organized gangs of its time. The first role of the Main 21 was to make decisions for the gang as a whole. The second role of the Main 21 was that the gang leaders who joined the Rangers still had control of their gang's

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day-to-day operations.<sup>4</sup> By 1966, they became what John Hall Fish described as, “a supergang.”<sup>5</sup> Unlike many Black gangs, the Rangers had risen in numbers while still maintaining their command structure. Shortly after the formation of the Main 21 the Blackstone Rangers renamed themselves as the Black P. Stones. Their rise from a lowly neighborhood street gang made up of only a few members to an organized gang of three thousand members brought them a lot of attention from both the local and national level.

One of the most telling signs of the Rangers’ potential to be a powerful force for not only the community, but for Blacks across the nation occurred when noted Civil Rights activist James Bevel came to Woodlawn meet with them in 1966. Bevel was a prominent member of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) that was led by Martin Luther King Jr. This was an attempt by the SCLC to organize the gangs in Chicago and redirect their efforts into helping what would soon become officially known as the “Chicago Freedom Movement”. To this end, Bevel pleaded with the Rangers to give up violence as a means to increase their influence in the streets. He even showed them

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<sup>4</sup> Moore and Williams, *The Almighty Black P Stone Nation*, 34-35.

<sup>5</sup> John Fish, *Black power/white control; the struggle of the Woodlawn Organization in Chicago*, (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1973), 118.

a film that detailed the events of the Watts Riots.<sup>6</sup> The Watts Riots occurred in 1965 in Watts, California. The riot was sparked by ongoing police brutality, unemployment and housing. The Rangers showed a large amount of indifference to Bevel's presentation. While this is certainly not what Bevel or the SCLC had hoped for, it did not mean that they could not use the Stones during the Chicago Freedom Movement.

The Chicago Freedom Movement was very different from what is now viewed as the traditional Civil Rights Movement in the South. The movement was largely inspired in the wake of the riots that broke out in Watts in 1965. The Watts Riots forced Civil Rights leaders to shift from the needs of Blacks in the South to the needs of those in the Chicago. One of the main differences between the Chicago Freedom Movement and the Civil Rights Movement of the South was that Civil Rights leaders were now trying to fight against poverty, *de facto* segregation, unfair housing, and unequal employment. This was a far cry from fighting *de jure* segregation in the South. The biggest problem facing Blacks in the North was the use of *de facto* segregation. *De facto segregation* is an informal form of segregation

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<sup>6</sup> Fry. *Fire and Blackstone*, 5.

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that is not placed into law. Instead it was an unspoken practice that is mostly driven by the attitudes of the white majority. Essentially, Blacks and whites would be segregated as a matter of fact and not law. *De facto* segregation was also employed in the job market resulting in a lower number of Blacks being hired by numerous businesses. Both unfair housing practices along with discrimination in the job market contributed heavily to Black poverty. This segregation occurred even though there were no laws in place that barred Blacks from housing or employment. These factors would present a noticeably different challenge for a movement that had largely fought against legal discrimination in the South.

King announced the start of the Chicago Freedom Movement in 1966. It quickly became apparent that he wanted to harness the Black youth to help with his campaign. After King moved into the Lawndale area in 1966, he began meeting with some of the local gang leaders in the Lawndale area after a three-day riot between the police and citizens of Lawndale. In the wake of this riot, King set up a meeting between the SCLC and local gangs in Lawndale. Among the gangs that King reached out to were the “Vice Lords”, “Roman

Saints,” and the “Cobras.”<sup>7</sup> These meetings had a dual purpose; on one hand, King did want to end the violence caused by gang members. On the other hand, King understood the value that these gangs could bring to his movement. David Lewis, author of *King: A Biography*, described the meeting between King and the gang leaders: “Martin listened patiently to a four-hour outpouring of anti-white, anti-city hall vituperation, allowed that he understood their indignation, and persuaded the youth leaders to agree to try non-violence experimentally. It was to be an experiment of brief duration.”<sup>8</sup> This tactic of meeting with the gang leaders and members seemed to work for King. King used the same approach when trying to steer the Blackstone Rangers towards non-violence. For all intents and purposes, this approach seemed to work. Many of the larger and more visible gangs would refrain from violence and become active participants in the Chicago Freedom Movement.

So how do the Blackstone Rangers fit into the narrative of the Chicago Freedom Movement? The easy answer would be to just say that they showed up to a few marches. However, that would diminish some of their most influential works during the Chicago Freedom

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<sup>7</sup> David Lewis. *King: A Biography* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1978), 336.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid* 336.

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Movement. According to several sources, the Rangers were first sighted at King's rally at Soldier Field in 1966. While they were not in support of non-violence, they did add numbers to the march on city hall. It is also important to note that according to these sources that they were actively chanting "Black Power"<sup>9</sup>. This should be unsurprising as "Black Nationalism" fit with their values more than the non-violence of the Civil Rights Movement. After making it known that some of their number intended to be a force for the Chicago Freedom Movement, their involvement only increased. In addition to taking part in the rally at Soldier Field, the Rangers took part in various marches throughout the city. One of the more prominent marches they were involved in was the infamous march on Marquette Park. Reportedly the Blackstone Rangers acted as bodyguards for King after he was struck by a brick.<sup>10</sup> The Rangers showed their capacity for restraint by not lashing out in the wake of this attack. Gang members also featured prominently in the "Open Housing" marches in 1966. Dr. King recalled, "I remember walking with the Blackstone Rangers [one of the Woodlawn areas most notorious

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<sup>9</sup> Liam Ford, *Soldier Field a Stadium and its City* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 210; Moore, and Williams, *The Almighty Black P Stone Nation*, 41.

<sup>10</sup> John Hagedorn, "Race Not Space: A Revisionist History of Gangs in Chicago" *Journal of African American History* 91, no. 2 (2006): 202.

gangs] while bottles were flying from the sidelines, and I saw their noses being broken and blood flowing from their wounds; and I saw them continue and not retaliate, not one of them, with violence.”<sup>11</sup>

The common theme of the Chicago Freedom Movement is that the Rangers were a major part of “Operation Breadbasket”. Operation Breadbasket was another movement in Chicago that was headed up by Reverend Jesse Jackson. The goal of the operation was to target businesses that did not employ or underemployed Blacks. The goal was to get the company either to negotiate with the protestors or to stage a boycott of the store or company until they were forced to come to the bargaining table. According to several sources such as, *Up Against The Wall* and *Shakedown: exposing the real Jesse Jackson*, the Black P Stones supported this movement in two extremely different ways. The first way they supported the movement was through participating in the boycotts and the picket lines. Some sources alleged they even worked with other large gangs such as the Vice Lords and the Black Disciples to picket and boycott businesses.<sup>12</sup> According to

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<sup>11</sup> Poverty and Race Research Action Council, "Launching the National Fair Housing Debate: A Closer Look at the 1966 Chicago Freedom Movement." prrac.com.

<sup>12</sup> Curtis Austin, *Up against the wall: violence in the making and unmaking of the Black Panther Party* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2006), 200;

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John Hagedorn, who wrote a journal article on the subject, “The three major gangs—“Lords, Stones, and Disciples” or “LSD”—formed a coalition to “take Chicago on a trip” and fight for jobs and civil rights. C. T. Vivian, Jesse Jackson, and other civil rights leaders worked with the gangs in their campaign for jobs in the construction industry, though the alliance was tenuous at best.”<sup>13</sup> This coalition was formed in 1969 and was instrumental in helping Jackson make Operation Breadbasket successful. Some of their most notable efforts included: halting construction work at the Woodlawn YWCA, Woodlawn Gardens, Madden Park Homes, and the new Dr. Martin Luther King High School. Members of the Stones staged a sit-in inside of the Building Trades Unions Council. The Stones also halted construction work at the University of Illinois.<sup>14</sup> Because of the large numbers of protestors, many of the businesses had no choice but to come to the bargaining table. The influence of the street gangs involved in the boycotts helped make it possible to bring enough pressure on the companies targeted by Operation Breadbasket.

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Kenneth Timmerman, *Shakedown: exposing the real Jesse Jackson*. (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Pub 2002), 27.

<sup>13</sup> Hagedorn, “Race Not Space”, 202.

<sup>14</sup> Angeliki Panagopoulos, “LSD: gangs and UIC” April 8, 2014, <<http://gangresearch.net/ChicagoGangs/lSD/lSD.htm>>.

So did the Rangers and by extension any other street gangs make an impact on the Chicago Freedom Movement? Well, the answer is both yes and no. First off, the Rangers and other large gangs, such as the Black Disciples, made an impact due to the ability to bring in large number of members to marches and rallies. It also seemed that their ability to bring in large numbers of Black youth served them well when they participated in boycotts. Whether or not they engaged in underhanded tactics such as extortion, intimidation, or threats of violence against any of the businesses during Operation Breadbasket is not as clear. However, it needs to be understood that while projects such as Operation Breadbasket were a success. The Chicago Freedom movement as a whole did little to make lasting changes. Mayor Daley and the bigoted sentiment that pervaded the white neighborhoods of Chicago proved too much for the leaders of the Chicago Freedom Movement to handle. King and other Civil Rights leaders called a summit with Mayor Daley on August 26, 1966. However, the agreement that came out of the summit meeting failed to quickly implement the proposed changes. The lack of a deadline for the changes as well as there being little to no evidence that city officials would actually implement these changes led many to believe that this

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was a failed movement. While this failure cannot be blamed on any one individual person or group, it does not diminish the influence and power of gangs during the Chicago Freedom Movement.

While the Chicago Freedom Movement may have not been a success, it did open the door for the Black Panther Party to take center stage in Chicago in the late sixties. The perceived failure of the Chicago Freedom Movement contributed to many turning towards Black power movements to offer a solution to northern inequality. The Vietnam War also contributed to the rise of Black Nationalism in cities such as Chicago. The man who would become the symbol of the Black Power Movement was Fred Hampton. Fred Hampton is the key to understanding the impact that the gangs of Chicago had on the Black Power Movement. However, this impact may not have been the kind that people expected. To understand the impact of gangs like the Black P. Stones on the Black power movement, it is necessary to talk about J. Edgar Hoover's FBI.

The FBI played a direct role in the Civil Rights Movement of Chicago. The causes of this aggression stemmed from both the Fred Hampton and the Chicago based Black Panther Party and their desire to form a coalition with the large numbers of gangs that controlled the

streets. Because of this attempted coalition the FBI got involved and effectively ended the Black Power Movement in Chicago. What is very important to note is that the Stones influence on the Black Power Movement is defined more by the efforts of the FBI and police attempting to take down their organization than by the actual cooperation between the two organizations.<sup>15</sup>

The first thing to address when talking about the role of gangs such as the Blacks P. Stones on the Black Power movement is the rise of Fred Hampton to a leadership role in the Chicago chapter of the Black Panthers. Fred Hampton was born on August 30 1948, in the southwest area of Chicago. Many prominent Black leaders such as Marcus Garvey, Malcolm X, and W.E.B Dubois inspired Hampton.<sup>16</sup> Even at a young age his abilities to speak, mobilize and organize and would serve to help him become an activist as early as his high school years.

Among some of the various examples of Hampton's activist leanings involved campaigning for the inclusion of more Black teachers in the school system, a student organized boycott due to the

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<sup>15</sup> Austin, *Up Against the Wall*, 200.

<sup>16</sup> Jeffrey Haas, *The Assassination of Fred Hampton how the FBI and the Chicago police murdered a Black Panther* (Chicago, Ill.: Lawrence Hill Books/Chicago Review Press, 2010), 18.

fact that only white girls were nominated for homecoming queen, and a seat on a student council that dealt with racial issues. Charles Anderson, a former dean at Hampton's high school, had this to say about his efforts, "Fred was the reason I was hired at Proviso East High School as dean in charge of attendance," he said, "Until that time, I had been applying for six years and never had been given an interview."<sup>17</sup> Hampton was so well regarded that the teachers relied on him to help calm tensions between the Black and white students of the school. Eventually, Fred's actions and leadership both at school and his community earned the attention of the NAACP who offered him a job. This would officially mark the beginning of his career as an activist.

However, Hampton's time with the NAACP would eventually come to an end due to the Vietnam War. Unlike many in the mainstream organizations, Hampton was fervently opposed to the war. Hampton would then go on to say that, "he was not just for "Peace in Vietnam," but "Victory in Vietnam" for the Vietnamese."<sup>18</sup> This attitude would lead Hampton on his journey into the growing Black Power Movement. Hampton was recruited to join the newly formed

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid, 19.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 27.

Chicago chapter of the Black Panther Party in 1968. From there he quickly rose through the ranks to become its leader. Hampton began organizing many outreach programs for the community. Probably the most prominent program was a free breakfast program for school aged kids. This program would eventually expand to several different areas across the city.

Hampton developed “Rainbow Coalition”; his plan was to incorporate all of the street gangs of Chicago, regardless of race, into the Black Panther Party. This was a first for the Panther’s organization, as none of the other branches of Panthers went out to recruit entire gangs into their ranks. On the surface, this seemed like a very well thought out idea. For one, if he were to be successful in convincing the gangs to join him he would drastically increase the number of Panthers in Chicago.

This was not the only advantage to reaching out to the gangs. Gangs also offered the opportunity for Black Panthers to move freely through gang-controlled territory. It was also no secret the Black youth in Chicago were becoming more and more influenced by the Black Power Movement, especially in the face of the Vietnam War. Hampton wasted no time trying to make peace with various gang

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leaders around the city, and in 1969, Hampton was able to secure peace with the Black Disciples, the main rivals of the Black P. Stones. This was a favorable outcome for Hampton and the Panthers as they had managed to add one of the largest gangs in Chicago to their movement.

Hampton showed a particular interest in trying to form a coalition with the Stones. For one, the Stones were heavily involved with local community projects through the Woodlawn Organization. They also were the largest and most organized gang in Chicago at the time. There was one reason in particular that drove Hampton to actively court the Stones. If the Black P. Stones were incorporated into the Black Panther Party, Hampton would be able to consolidate all of the other gangs in Chicago. However, Hampton's plan to add the Stones into his coalition did not go as smoothly as he might have imagined. These negotiations between the two groups almost led to all-out open warfare between the Panthers and the Rangers.

It is important to note the many similarities between the Stones and the Panthers. The Black P. Stones shared with both the Disciples and Panthers a strong sense of Black Nationalism. The fact that Black nationalism influenced Stones is evident in their colors of red, green,

and, Black, which are reminiscent of the colors of Marcus Garvey's movement, which was the first major movement in America that centered on Black nationalism. In McPherson's article "Chicago's Blackstone Rangers," he described the Rangers' take on Black power by saying, "If they believe in any form of Black power at all, it's the physical energy which they are attempting to harness in the Black community and the economic power which, they believe, will come through constructive uses of that energy."<sup>19</sup> The Stones and the Panthers both distrusted the police. Both groups felt that the authorities had unfairly targeted them since their inception. All of these factors would lead point to an alliance between the Panthers and the Rangers. This would not be the case. In fact, an alliance between the Rangers and the Panthers had many difficulties. One of the main problems between these two groups revolved around each side wanting the other to join them. Both sides valued the other's numbers and organization and wanted to add those strengths to their own. Because of this, these meetings usually devolved into a show of force by either side. Haas described the scene, "One face to face meeting took place at the Rangers headquarters in Chicago's Woodlawn neighborhood. Fred and

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<sup>19</sup> James McPherson, "Chicago's Blackstone Rangers" *The Atlantic*, June 1969, 96.

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several other armed Panthers went to the meeting but were quickly surrounded by many better armed Rangers including Jeff Fort, their leader and other representatives of the Main 21.”<sup>20</sup> The meeting came very close to erupting into an open conflict between the two groups. However, Hampton managed to talk his way out of the situation without resorting to violence. Both groups went their separate ways without starting an all-out war. Above all, the tension between the two groups never faded.

The reason for these tensions stemmed from none other than the FBI. When Fred Hampton began actively courting the Black Panthers to join forces with their organization, the FBI took notice. According to an agent in Chicago, the FBI’s main fear was that, “This large Negro youth gang [might] develop Black Nationalism and align themselves [sic] with the extremist BPP.”<sup>21</sup> To the FBI, a merger between the Panthers and the Stones could lead to a revolutionary group bent on overthrowing America within its own borders. Much of this fear was influenced by the growing discontent in the Black community over the conflict in Vietnam. Fearing an armed uprising

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<sup>20</sup> Haas, *The Assassination of Fred Hampton*, 43-44.

<sup>21</sup> Kenneth O’Reilly, *Racial matters: the FBI's secret file on Black America, 1960-1972* (New York: Free Press, 1989), 303.

led by the Panthers and the Stones, the FBI closely monitored the talks between the Stones and the Panthers. As it turns out J Edgar Hoover himself had a vested interest in monitoring the Stones. This becomes evident in one of his letters written to his men stationed in Chicago.

The youth gang problem in your area is acute. It is difficult to say whether youth gangs such as the Blackstone Rangers or Disciples are interested in racial militancy or merely exploiting the racial situation for the impetus it gives their programs for extortion in the ghettos. The Bureau feels that this area of your work needs further in-depth probing to determine the youth gangs' involvement in racial matters. Accordingly, if you have not already done so, you should open cases on youth gangs in your area such as those mentioned above as well as their leaders to resolve the extent that these gangs and their leaders may be involved in racial militancy. These investigations should receive your prompt attention and the results should be submitted in form suitable for dissemination.<sup>22</sup>

This letter only served to show the fear of what a large and highly organized gang could do if they turned to Black Power Movement.

At first, it did not seem like there was much to fear from either side joining the other. The talks between the Stones and the Panthers

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<sup>22</sup> Moore and Williams, *The Almighty Black P Stone Nation*, 92.

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had broken down into trying to intimidate the other through a show of force. The continued meetings failed to bring about any meaningful cooperation between the two groups. The FBI then decided to get involved to try and sow seeds of discontent between the Stones and the Panthers. In order to drive the two groups apart, the FBI began sending letters to the respective leaders of the groups in order to spread mistrust among the organizations.

Brother Jeff

I've spent some time with some Panther friends on the west side lately and I know what's been going on. The brothers that run the Panthers blame you for blocking their thing and there's supposed to be a hit out for you. I'm not a Panther, or a Ranger, just black. From what I see, these Panthers are out for themselves not black people. I think you ought to know what they're up to. I know what I would do if I was you. You might hear from me again.<sup>23</sup>

This is just one example of the types of letters that the FBI sent to the leaders of the Stones and the Panthers in order to bring them into conflict. Admittedly, these letters would not have the desired effect. However, letters were not the only weapon available to sow distrust between the Panthers and the Stones.

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<sup>23</sup> Austin, *Up Against the Wall*, 205; O'Reilly, *Racial matters*, 304-305.

The FBI further tried to fuel the violence between the Stones and their longtime rivals, the Black Disciples. If they succeeded in this attempt to cause open warfare between the gangs, it would guarantee that Hampton's proposed merger would fail. In order to achieve this goal, the FBI wrote letters to the Stones and Disciples much like the ones that they had sent out to the Stones and the Panthers in an effort to increase tensions between the three groups. The FBI also used its considerable resources to keep the Stones under heavy surveillance. In order to keep tabs on the Stones, the FBI recruited Stones as informants.

For all of the initial animosity between the Stones, Panthers, and Disciples none of them wanted to go to war with each other. The Stones, while still a powerful organization, had to deal with an internal crisis after its leader Eugene Hairston was sentenced to prison on charge of soliciting a murder. This led to Jeff Fort taking over as the official head of the gang.. Then in May of 1969 the worst-case scenario occurred for the FBI.<sup>24</sup> The Stones along with the Black Disciples and the Panthers announced a truce between the three groups. The truce essentially ended the possibility of a street war

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<sup>24</sup> Austin, *Up Against the Wall*, 206.

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between the Panthers and Stones. Though, none were officially affiliated with the other. The truce allowed the Panthers to sell their newspapers in Stone territory however, the Panthers decided against this. This truce was the high point of the Stones involvement with the Panthers. While it was not an outright alliance between both groups, it did signal future collaboration between the two sides. Understandably the FBI and governmental agencies were very alarmed by this sudden turn of events. Due to the truce between the three most powerful Black organizations in Chicago, the FBI decided to increase their efforts to destroy the Panthers and their new allies.

After failing to start a gang war between the Stones and Panthers, the FBI began using informants to infiltrate the ranks of the Black Panthers nationwide. One of the most prominent informants for the FBI was William O'Neal. O'Neal was coerced into becoming an FBI informant after he and a friend stole a car. It would not be long before he was contacted by an FBI agent by the name of Roy Mitchell and asked to join the Panthers with the sole purpose of finding incriminating evidence against them. O'Neal described his role as an informant and his relationship with agent Mitchell in an interview:

Well, I think Mitchell, the relationship between I and Mitchell concentrated on the local activities. We talked very, very little about what was going on nationally early on in the game. Later on, when Bobby Seale and the guys would come to town, it took on a national scope, but right then and there we were concentrated on the local chapter. And later on I understood that his thinking, in that regard. He wanted me to build up some credibility within the Black Panther Party, so he gave me a lot of room, a lot of leash at that point. He let me become a Panther before I became an FBI informant.<sup>25</sup>

In addition to acting as a spy for the FBI, O'Neal was also encouraged to do everything possible to influence the Black Panthers to engage in criminal acts. He was also asked by his handlers to sabotage many of the Panthers community outreach programs. However, O'Neal did not become such a well-known informant merely by spying on the day-to-day activity of the Panthers. O'Neal' is mostly known for his role in the deaths of both Fred Hampton and Mark Clark. In the days before the deaths of Hampton and Clark, it

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<sup>25</sup> "Interview with William O'Neal", conducted by Blackside, Inc. on April 13, 1989, for *Eyes on the Prize II: America at the Racial Crossroads 1965 to 1985*, Washington University Libraries, Film and Media Archive, Henry Hampton Collection, <http://digital.wustl.edu/cgi/t/text/text-index?c=eop;cc=eop;rgn=main;view=text;idno=one5427.1047.125/>.

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was found out that O'Neal had stolen the floor plans to Hampton's apartment a day before the apartment was raided. After he gave the plans to the FBI, a special police task force conducted a raid on the apartment the next day. After allegedly being shot at, the police unit opened fire on the apartment door. Over ninety shots were fired into the apartment leaving Fred Hampton and Mark Clark dead. Over twenty panthers that were also present in the apartment that night were arrested.<sup>26</sup>

The death of Fred Hampton and Mark Clark sparked community outrage against the police forces. Many prominent members of the community came forward to condemn what they viewed as cold-blooded murder. This public outcry would lead to a trial of the police officers that were involved in the raid as well as the State Attorney Edward Hanrahan. The officers involved and the State Attorney General were indicted by a federal jury on the charges of

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<sup>26</sup> Hanrahan's Indictment For Bad Lying" *The Black Panther*, September 16, 1971, [http://www.itsabouttimebpp.com/BPP\\_Newspapers/pdf/Vol7\\_No4\\_1971\\_Part1.pdf](http://www.itsabouttimebpp.com/BPP_Newspapers/pdf/Vol7_No4_1971_Part1.pdf); , [http://articles.chicagotribune.com/1990-01-18/news/9001050412\\_1\\_fbi-agents-medical-examiner-death; O'Reilly, Racial matters, 311-312](http://articles.chicagotribune.com/1990-01-18/news/9001050412_1_fbi-agents-medical-examiner-death; O'Reilly, Racial matters, 311-312)

obstruction of justice. However, very little was done to secure real justice for Mark Clark and Fred Hampton.<sup>27</sup>

The deaths of Hampton and Clark were a huge setback for the Black Power movement in Chicago. Hampton's death effectively ended the truce between the Stones and the Panthers. Without Hampton, the hopes to eventually politicize the gang and bring them into the fold of the Black Panther Party failed. Fort would eventually go to jail on fraud charges. After he was let out of jail in 1976, the Black P. Stones would not have the same influence that they had once enjoyed on Chicago's South Side. After Fort's eventual release from prison, he would go on to turn the Black P. Stones towards the Islamic faith. He would eventually rename the gang the El Rukns and change his name to Chief Malik. The gang would once again reach prominence after it was discovered that they had conspired with Libyan President Muammar Gaddafi to sneak a missile into the United States for a terrorist attack. This marked the end of Jeff Fort as he was sentenced to a maximum-security prison.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup>“Hanrahan's Indictment For Bad Lying” *The Black Panther*, September 16, 1971, [http://www.itsabouttimebpp.com/BPP\\_Newspapers/pdf/Vol7\\_No4\\_1971\\_Part1.pdf](http://www.itsabouttimebpp.com/BPP_Newspapers/pdf/Vol7_No4_1971_Part1.pdf)

<sup>28</sup> Biography.com Editors, “Jeff Fort Biography” *The Biography.com*, <http://www.biography.com/people/jeff-fort-578620>

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The role and influence of the Stones on both the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements of the mid to late '60s cannot be discounted. The Stones and their various other counterparts were able to play a positive role during the Chicago Freedom movement. Instead of using violence, the Stones participated in rallies, marches, and picket lines. They, along with other gangs, were able to secure better opportunities for jobs for the urban Black population of the city. In order to achieve this they were able to put aside old rivalries and cooperate not only with the various Civil Rights Organizations but other gangs as well. Although they were able to positively influence what would widely be known as a failed movement, they did make their mark on history. The Stones went on to influence the Black Power movement in Chicago. However, the true extent of their influence will never be known due to the machinations of the FBI in conjunction with local police forces. The fact that a truce had been called between the Stones and the Panthers was what mobilized the FBI to bring down the Panthers only shows how much people in power feared them. It is unclear whether or not they would have eventually been a positive force for the Black power movement; however, there is no question that they influenced it. Had Hampton not been killed there

was a chance that he would have been able to bring about a powerful movement dedicated to Black Power. With the increase in numbers that would have been brought about by the merger, Hampton may have well been able to affect serious change, not just in Chicago, but also across the rest of the country.