Panther Parley Cheers Call to Kill Authorities

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PHILADELPHIA, Sept. 5 —Nearly 5,000 cheering persons, mostly young and mostly black, were exhorted by a Black Panther leader today to get guns and kill authorities because they have "forfeited all claims" on humanity.

This was the keynote as the Black Panthers opened their "Revolutionary Peoples' Constitutional Convention" in a city already troubled by shootings between blacks and police.

Despite the rhetoric, this opening day of the meeting has been cool and no confrontations have taken place.

The police, embittered over last weekend's killing of one of their number and the wounding of six others, have adopted a low profile. No uniforms are visible around the convention hall, Temple University's new gymnasium in North Philadelphia, or the nearby church where delegates are registering. Those police on hand are dressed in the styles affected by the "revoluntaries" and come from the civil disobedience and intelligence units.

The Panthers in turn are physically frisking everyone who enters their hall for weapons and drugs.

The very authority that the Panthers and their radical allies are decrying have enforced restraint. Last night, U.S. District Judge John P. Fullam issued an injunction prohibiting the police from interfering with the constitutional rights of the Panthers and four other militant groups.

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The police are ready. After an officer was killed in Philadelphia, allegedly by "black revolutionaries," Police Commissioner Frank L. Rizzo issued a challenge:

"If they had any guts they would call me and set a showdown . . . We'll even give them odds on it. We'll send out fewer people (than they do) with fewer weapons."

The blacks are ready. After the black leader's death in Houston, posters went on sale bearing his picture with the legend, "You can kill a revolutionary, but you can't kill the revolution." And one of the youths at their "information center" declared, "We are winning more of the people every day and they can't stop us, no matter how hard they try."

From visits to Chicago, Houston, New Bedford and Asbury Park, N.J., some elements in common emerge:

• More than ever, the white policeman feels threatened and embattled. As virtually the only "outsider" to be seen in the ghetto, he has long been a target for frustrations about living conditions and joblessness and governmental indifferenee. Today he is prone to blame any such hostility on plotting and agitation by Panthers and similar militants.

• Increasingly, black youth and some older people see the police as a hostile occupying army whose mission is to seal blacks within their traditional communities and act as execution squads for violations, real or suspected, of "the white man's laws." To them, the police seem more concerned with raiding political organizations than with patrolling the streets to prevent robberies and rapes.

• Older blacks who still have faith in the orderly political process worry that the young will bring down white retaliation upon the entire black community. The young seem bent on suicide, these elders say.

". . . the suicide rate among young urban blacks would leap far higher," asserts clinical psychologist Richard Seiden, "if we included in it a significant number of deaths that are . . . homicides but that seem essentially to be suicides in which the victim arranges or demands to be killed."

Unemployment and other social problems are "driving" young blacks to this equivalent of suicide, Seiden writes in the August issue of Psychology Today.

To many young blacks, however, death in the urban struggle is not suicide but martyrdom. "It's amazing what black youths will do in defense of their dignity," says Tony Maples, 35, of the Asbury Park United Black Brothers.

The aura of warfare is particularly strong in Chicago, home of one million blacks—and of the Black P Stone Nation, biggest of the numerous gangs. The Stones say their enemy is no longer the other black gangs but the police.

Police Sgt. Julius Frazier, a Negro with 20 years' experience among the gangs, says chaotic ghetto home life contributes mightily to the gang problem.

"Economics plays a role in it one way or another," in Frazier's opinion. He says many of the youths come from homes where both parents work and leave hte children without supervision. Or neither parent works, and the youngsters turn to the gangs because they offer structure and discipline.

Police estimate the Black P Stone Nation has 20,000 members, but Lamar Bell, 25, one of the top leaders, dismisses this figure as too low. "I would say 75 per cent of the men in the community are Stones," Bell asserts. "We are the strongest thing out here. Now they are trying to destroy the Stones, and we'll die first."

During a half-hour street stroll with Bell, on at least two dozen occasions black youths and some adults hailed him with the gang salute—arms crossed on chest—and the greeting, "Stones run it."

There is a strong anti-gang movement among older Chicago blacks, and sometimes it too looks like a war.

When the Rev. Curtis Burrell of Woodlawn Mennonite Church brought Stones into his community organization, they tried to take over, he says, adding: "They'll take over anything, if you let them." His home was shot up and his church burned.

The Stones blame the uproar on the pastor's attempts to oust them, which they say was a sop to the anti-gang sentiment in Mayor Richard J. Daley's administration.

Last month, after a clash with the Stones left a detective dead from a high-powered rifle bullet, Capt. Thomas Lyons of the police intelligence unit expressed, at a press conference, the feelings of many white Chicago policemen:

"To the street gang apologists, many of whom are in the fields of social work and the news media, we say: Damn you. To the residents of the community who live in fear of gangs, we plead with you to help us rid the community of this scum."

When investigators named a gang leader as a suspect in the slaying, gang members and his family arranged for him to be turned over to police by a black columnist, out of fear for his safety otherwise.

Bell and other Stones say their conflict with the establishment stems from a need for jobs and other resources to build their own community their own way.

The official rate of unemployment in the 16-21 age group in the Southside area where the Stones are strongest is estimated at over 30 per cent. But labor experts believe the true figure may be twice that.

Also in dispute is the number of youngsters who are idle on the streets instead of going to school. The Chicago school board says the drop/out rate from Southside high schools is about 11 per school board says the dropouts, Charles Harrison Davis, 17, insists that the number who finish school may be less than half the number who begin.

The combination of persistent failure in school and nothing to do outside, Davis says, leaves Chicago black youth no choice but to "hang with the gangs and hustle any way you can."

Davis was mourning the death, three days earlier of a 17-year-old friend whose bullet-riddled body was found in a Southside doorway.

"He was shooting a little pool, some craps, stuff like that. Just trying to make it, like everyone else . . . I don't know what happened to him. Around here it could have been anything."

"Violence in the black community," says Herbert Hill, labor director of the NAACP, "is an expression of the growing alienation of black youth from the whole society.

"Young blacks who are potentially productive workers are kept out of the labor force and out of the 'opportunity structure' of the society. Their alienation is rooted in the most significant source of identity for contemporary man—work."

The black joblessness that afflicts Chicago is repeated in cities across the country. The nationwide unemployment rate among young blacks is officially computed at 29.6 per cent, contrasted with 23 per cent a year earlier. The rate measures those "actively seeking work"; experts say it might be twice as high if every person without a job were counted. (Even at the bottom of the Depression in the 1930s, joblessness among all Americans never exceeded 28 per cent.)

He didn't know when or how it would happen, but Carl Hampton told a childhood friend that organizing the Panther-style group in Houston would be the death of him.

"I ain't gonna make it, man. I know I just ain't gonna make it," the friend quotes Hampton as saying two weeks before he was shot by the rooftop police.

Yet the death of the 21-year-old activist has served to rouse much—though not all—of black Houston against police power. As the Rev. Earl Allen puts it, "Older blacks are now seeing that any black can be shot down in the street," and so he finds a new will-

ingness among the elders to listen to the arguments of the angry young.

Since the shooting, older blacks have united all but one of the city's black organizations to campaign for the ouster of Police Chief Herman Short, employing such tactics as a boycott of downtown stores.

The exception is the 5,000-member NAACP chapter. Its chairman, the Rev. C. Anderson Davis, says the "silent majority" of Houston's 400,000 blacks "don't like what the militants are doing." Yet on the first day of the boycott, the popular Foley's Department Store contained many more black salespeople than black patrons.

"This is fantastic," marveled a coalition leader. "At this hour on a Friday this place is usually jammed with black folks." Black clerks could not recall a day when so few had come downtown to shop.

If the department stores were hurting for black patrons that afternoon, the late Carl Hampton's People's Party II was not. Outside its storefront information center traffic was backed up in both directions as motorists stopped to buy the Hampton poster or the Black Panther newspaper. About 20 youths ran in and out replenishing the supply. Said one:

"The people are coming to us now. The struggle has reached a new stage in Houston."

In a simpler time, Herman Melville set off from the shores of New Bedford, Mass., in Buzzard's Bay for a date with a whaling adventure. That was before kerosene replaced whale oil and the textile mills came and changed the ecology of the waterways and the life-style of the old fishing town for good.

Now, even the textiles have gone. All that is left are a few factories that employ a fraction of the people who once were required to make the material that clothed the nation.

New Bedford is in an economic slump. The unemployment rate has doubled in a year to 8 per cent. The big old New Bedford Hotel has a "closed" sign, and the scale of affluence has been reduced in the shops along Purchase Street.

But on a sun-drenched morning, an easy wind glides over Buzzard's Bay, giving the shoppers darting in and out of the dress shops and the dime stores something cheerful to say about the weather.

Ask the white waitress about the racial trouble plaguing New Bedford all summer, however, and her smile drains away:

"I should think you would hear more about that on Kempton Street. I don't know anything about that sort of thing."

Kempton Street, its residents say, was a lovely place to live 20 years ago—charming Colonial houses, and a bright commercial stretch in the old New England style. It was white and affluent at first, black and comfortable for a time when the mills boomed.

It is less picturesque after a week of riots triggered either by black youths who barricaded the street (as the police describe it) or by police making a traffic arrest who lost their temper at hecklers (as the blacks describe it).

"It's still one of the nicest neighborhoods in town," said James Magnett, 25, who runs the Learning to Learn youth program on Kempton near Cedar. "But we are isolated from the rest of the city. They don't really care what happens to us."

Re-emphasizing this feeling of black isolation in a city of 102,000 that is 12 per cent non-white, Timothy Holland, the disenchanted black sociologist whose daughter was wounded, says:

"For years, we have been trying to tell the city fathers that we in the west end are in trouble over jobs, schools and housing. But they didn't believe us until the sky over the city was glowing like the tip of your cigarettee."

Racial alienation in a city of this size has a flavor unlike that of the large cities. It is not uncommon for older black residents to say, "I told George," meaning Mayor George Rogers, or "the trouble with Joe," meaning acting Police Chief Joseph Pelletier. The first names are spoken with the familiarity of neighbors. Yet, they speak across a wide gulf on the subject of race and its related problems.

"I went to school with a lot of these guys," Magnett says of several police officers he now refers to as "racists." He adds, "It's strange the way people grow up and go their separate ways. We used to play football together when we were kids."

Acting Chief Pelletier, seated in his small office overlooking the harbor, leans forward and speaks a police chief's litany that can be heard in every town with racial trouble.

"The police," he says "didn't create the unemployment problem. We aren't responsible for the bad housing. Yet, we get blamed for all of these things. They talk about undue force, but I don't think it's anything they've seen. Somebody told them about an incident or something."

The young blacks feel their problems with the police are more real than that. They say the city is unresponsive about keeping "racist" policemen out of the black community. Moreover, they say that unemployment among young blacks has gone over 50 per cent, and that the political process is not working.

"Guerrilla warfare might be the only way to wake these folks up," a black man says.

Asbury Park, N.J., once a fashionable shore resort for the wealthy of New York and Philadelphia, is another small city (pop. 20,000, half black) where violence in the streets appears to some older blacks to have overtones of suicide.

"These kids," says Tony Maples, "went up against those cops, who had pistols and shotguns, with bricks, bottles and even their bare hands. They were furious."

Willie Hamm, an administrator at Rutgers, New Jersey's state university, and a leader in the black community, says, "The cops were firing at those kids but they weren't afraid."

Don Hammary, a community organizer in the poverty program of Asbury Park, said the young blacks are "just so fed up with their lives that they intend to share power in the institutions that control their lives or take it."

Asbury Park blacks often call their community "the dope capital of the world." To a complete stranger in a bar along Springwood Avenue, the black community's main street, a resident said:

"I can get you anything you want. There is no form of dope that you could want that is more than 50 yards from where we are sitting—heroin, cocaine, pot, speed and a whole lot of things I bet you never heard of."

And the stories black residents tell of the victims of these drugs are unending: Young people who were bright students and good athletes. A barber who might one day have had one of the most prosperous shops. A girl gone to the streets to support a heavy heroin habit.

It was Springwood Avenue's prostitution trade that triggered the Asbury Park disorder. And it was the manner in which the young blacks fought the state police that caused several of their elders to call them "suicidal."

There was a dance in the black community that Friday night, attended by about 250 black youngsters. When the revelers from the dance hit Springwood Avenue a little after midnight, hundreds of other blacks were already on the sidewalks, in and out of the barbecue joints and bars and other whisky-dispensing places. The street was jammed with cars, many of them containing white men who visited Springwood Avenue regularly on weekends to pick up black prostitutes.

A witness remembers a youth shouting at one such white carload, "Why don't you honkies get out of here!" A beer bottle smashed their windshield. That car sped off, but there were other targets, and lots of bottles. When the police came, the disorder spread down the avenue toward Main Street. The local police were overwhelmed, the state troopers were summoned, and the battle was on.

"For months," says Tony Maples now, "we have been telling the people who run

this town, particularly the businessmen in the west side, that this town was ripe. We told them that either they solved these problems or they wouldn't have a town."

Storm warnings had gone up earlier when racial friction threatened to close Asbury Park High School. Black students demanded that Willie Hamm of Rutgers be appointed by the mayor to the school board, but another black was chosen. A basketball court was turned into a municipal parking lot.

But the big complaint in little Asbury Park is the same complaint that is heard the most in Houston, Chicago, New Bedford and dozens of other cities.

"We need jobs for these kids," says poverty helper Hammary. "I don't see any other way we can keep the lid on this town. If I lost my job today, I have three choices. I can sell dope, I can run numbers or I can go out and hit somebody on the head."

In the best of times, the summer, the available jobs for blacks are as busboys in the beachfront restaurants or chambermaids in the motels.

"For two months you hurry and for 10 months you worry," Hammary says. "The unemployment rate here must be 80 per cent for black people in the off-season. And it isn't all that good in the season. They bring white kids here from over the country to work in the concessions, doing jobs the black kids would be glad to do. The blacks get the dirty work."

Hammary cites an additional economic complaint: the average wage in a black Asbury Park household is $65 a week, and the average rent is $140 a month, "so black people work the first two weeks every month for the landlord."

Reflecting on the ravages, Tony Maples concludes: "What it came down to is that the kids feel their lives are not worth a damn as things now stand. So they fought with a fury."

The fury in a town so small is magnified for the young blacks in the larger cities. Their expression of frustration—a cry of anguish more than a call to revolution—has startled some older blacks as well as whites.

In city after where violence between young blacks and police has erupted, traditional civil rights organizations have banded together to address the issues that disturb the young. But the challenge to these older blacks will outlive this summer of violence:

Can they find ways truly to communicate with the established powers, and to reduce the role of the police as the principal establishment agency with which young blacks deal?

Dr. Spiegel of the Lemberg Center, located at Brandeis University in Waltham, Mass., would concentrate on lowering the presence of white policemen in the black community. "They proceed from such different assumptions," he says of the white police and black youth. He concludes:

"The law enforcement establishment and the young black groups are becoming less and less interested in resolving conflicts in the community through talks, bargaining or negotiation. On the contrary, each seems to be trying to establish its power through harassment and intimidation. It's tragic."