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Whites Dominating Panther Hearings

By DOUGLAS ROBINSON

"What are you whiteys doing here—this is a trial for black people," shouted an angry black woman yesterday at a group of white students filing from the courtroom where pretrial hearings for 13 Black Panthers are being held.

The students, one of whom had just been sentenced to 30 days for contempt of court, looked baffled and embarrassed.

In a voice that might well cut sheet steel at 10 paces, the woman continued to berate the youngsters, saying: "You radicals will be the Establishment in 20 years."

The students walked by her, hearing but not looking at her. As they entered elevators and vanished, the woman, her anger spent, subsided into hostile-sounding mutters.

The woman, who was accompanied by an elderly man, was unhappy because she could not get into the hearing. All the seats had been taken by whites.

The incident, which perhaps illustrates the tenuous alliance between black militants and radical whites, also served to point up the slowly changing character of the spectator section at the Black Panther hearings.

Whites Growing in Number

Since the hearings began on Feb. 2, the audiences have been predominantly black with only a sprinkling of whites. This week, however, the number of whites has grown while black ranks have thinned.

Yesterday, for the first time, there were far more whites, in this case students from City College, Hunter College and a few high schools, than blacks.

The outpouring of whites was a reaction to the conviction of five white antiwar militants in the so-called Chicago 7 trial, a City College student explained. "We wanted to show

white support for the Panthers," she said, adding that the Panthers, too, were against the Vietnam war.

There are seats for 77 spectators in Room 1536, Part 38, of the Criminal Division of State Supreme Court on the 13th floor of the Criminal Courts Building, at 100 Centre Street. At the front of the spectator section by a wooden railing leading to the courtwell and the judges' bench sit about 20 news representatives.

Ranged about the wood-paneled walls and the defendant's table is a 37-man detail of blue-uniformed Supreme Court officers who are charged with maintaining order and the security. They are under the com-

mand of Capt. Robert Fauerbach.

Every spectator and newsman is searched before entering the courtroom, a careful, thorough search that includes examination of every pocket item. Women are searched by matrons, who also go through their pocketbooks.

The two front rows on the left side of the courtroom are reserved for members of the defendant's families. Often there are young children who silently point at their fathers or brothers when they enter.

The spectators are, by and large, made up of sympathizers, although a few perennial courtroom buffs are always in attendance. Those who look as though they might be hostile to the defendants or the spectators are carefully weeded out in the corridor.

"It's not hard to spot a longshoreman," said Captain Fauerbach.

Ever since the 30-day sentence for contempt handed out by Justice John M. Murtagh to a white woman during the first week of hearings, the black spectators have grown quieter with each passing day. No longer do they shout "All power to the people" in response to the defendants' shouts when the defendants enter the court.

The hostility, however, is still there. Convinced that a Black Panther cannot receive a fair trial, the Panthers have taken their anger to the corridor. The black court officers, of whom there are about 15, get the brunt of the attack.

"Tell me, why do you take sides, brother?" a young black woman asked a black court officer as she left court recently. She smiled pleasantly as she spoke.

"I don't take sides, sister," he replied just as pleasantly. "I'm here to keep order."

The woman's face hardened. "You're a pig," she snarled.