



NY POST 10/18/71 P.33

Pete Hamill

ANOTHER BLAST FROM THE PAST

The ghosts of the Sixties continue to move among us with a peculiarly implacable intensity. Lyndon Johnson gurgles his bogus pieties on the front page of the New York Times. Eldridge Cleaver holds a press conference to announce his return from Algerian exile. Hubert Humphrey and Eugene McCarthy move around the edges of politics, hoping that somehow there can be re-runs of moments that were basically emotions. And on the 11th floor of Roosevelt Hospital, behind a wall of cops, with tubes running into his nose and throat, is H. Rap Brown.

* * *

And why were we always certain that people like Johnson would end up being paid hundreds of thousands of dollars for his version of the Sixties and people like Brown would end up in blood? The Sixties moved like some peculiar movie filmed by Richard Lester; the frames moving at breakneck speed, as the events crowded in upon each other. The Freedom Rides, and Martin King, and Christian songs sung in the Southern night; but on darkened roads lights would switch on in gas stations and white men would race out behind you in the night and sometimes people died, and where was Rap Brown? He was there, his friends died; some went crazy from the bitterness and despair; Rob Moses vanished; Stokely's fine mind turned into a parking lot for dead Marxist prose. Rap

Brown was there. It happened to him. It happened to all of them who moved through those years.

But it wasn't Rap Brown who shot Viola Liuzzo. It wasn't Rap Brown who shot Medgar Evers. It wasn't Rap Brown who murdered Goodman, Schwerner and Chaney and made them part of a dam. It wasn't Rap Brown who sat on all those juries, smoking Kools, wearing white socks with blue suits while white men who had killed black men were set free. Rap Brown didn't murder John Kennedy. That wasn't Rap Brown firing into the motel, blowing Martin King out of America. Rap Brown didn't snake out of the kitchen of the Ambassador Hotel to put a bullet in Robert Kennedy's skull. Rap Brown dropped no bombs on Laos or Cambodia or North and South Vietnam. Rap Brown didn't invade the Dominican Republic or plan the Bay of Pigs. He fired no bullets at Kent State. He didn't shoot anyone in Watts or Newark or Hough.

So there is no sense of relief when the cops tell you that Rap Brown was wounded and arrested after he and three other men walked into the Red Carpet Lounge at 173 West 85th St. early Saturday and pulled off a stickup. They had shotguns with them, the cops say, a carbine, three handguns and over 300 rounds of ammunition, and there will be some people who will try to say that this was a revolutionary act. But

sticking up saloons has nothing to do with revolution and nobody would know that better than Rap Brown.

Sticking up saloons does have something to do with being on the run, with spending 17 months as a fugitive, with seeing film in which a dynamited car is found on a Southern road and pieces of bodies are in it and one of them could have been yours. You stick up saloons because you're trapped. Revolution? No. Just a matter of men running out of places to move, or not being able to move at all anymore and knowing that some dreams are over. Forever.

There is no excuse for Rap Brown implied here. Guys who stick up saloons are potential murderers; they have guns because they are prepared to use guns. And people who think they can use guns on other human beings should be put in jail. I mean here that Rap Brown was one of the people from the Sixties who made it into everyone's personal Bartlett's with one sentence. "Violence," he said, "is as American as cherry pie."

* * *

He was formed by American violence, his rhetoric was shaped by American violence and now he has been captured in an act of American violence. He will go to trial and if found guilty will go away. His memoirs will not appear on the front page of the New York Times. He will not run for President. He will not enjoy the luxury of well-financed exile. The machinery of the establishment will save his life with its medicine and defend his rights with its legal system. And the running is at an end. But for Rap Brown, the Revolution is over. Stickup men never make it back from the Finland Station.