

7/1/70

THE NEW YORK TIMES

12 Panthers in Detroit Cleared Of Murder Charges in Gun Fight

Special to The New York Times

DETROIT, June 30—Twelve members of Detroit's Black Panther party were acquitted today of charges of murdering a black policeman and conspiracy to murder in a gun battle at the Panther headquarters last fall.

Three of the 12 — Erone Desaussure, Benjamin Fondrun and David Johnson—were convicted of felonious assault, which carries a penalty of up to four years imprisonment. Sentencing was set for July 21.

A jury of 10 blacks and two whites in Detroit Recorder's Court deliberated four and a half days before reaching a verdict this morning.

In the 18-day trial, the prosecution produced 18 witnesses who told of shots fired from the Panther headquarters at policemen.

The Defense Rests

None of the prosecution's witnesses could identify any Panther alleged to have done the shooting, Defense attorneys rested their case last week without calling a witness.

Those found not guilty on all charges were Victor Grayson, William Cunningham, Shanti Johnson, Cassandra Parker, Sylvia Robinson, Carol Smith, Diane Brown, Linda Warmesley and Beverly Fleming. The policeman, Glenn Smith,

was killed last Oct. 24, outside the Panther headquarters, an old frame house on Detroit's Near West Side.

Trouble began when policemen interfered with Panthers selling their newspaper on a nearby corner in the early evening hours. The police said that they had received complaints that motorists and pedestrians were not being allowed to pass by the corner unless they accepted the Panther literature.

The Panthers said that two patrolmen had begun beating two of their members who were distributing the newspaper.

There was a scuffle between the policemen and the Panthers, followed by a call for help over the police radio and two Panther arrests.

2 Shots Fired

When an unmarked car showed up in answer to the general call for help, a shot was fired from somewhere in the area of Panther headquarters. It wounded a plain-clothes policeman. Other police units moved in to the area, surrounding the house. Another shot was fired from the house, fatally wounding Patrolman Smith, who was black in the head.

After an ensuing gun battle, the police confiscated from the house a cache of guns, ammunition and dynamite as well as pipes and assorted literature.