

Bomb Blast Victim Was a

By Carl Bernstein

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Ralph Featherstone, who died Monday night in the explosion of an automobile near the Bel Air, Md., courtroom where his friend H. Rap Brown is being tried, was a figure well known in the civil rights movement.

In Birmingham, in Selma, in backwater Mississippi towns, Featherstone was in the front lines during the major civil rights battles of the 1960s.

Then, with the end of the era that saw Negroes win access to public accommodations—but not the economic mainstream of America life—Featherstone turned his attention to economic development of the black community and revolution.

"He was a revolutionary," said the Rev. Walter E. Fauntroy, former vice chairman of Washington's city council and an aide to the late Dr. Martin Luther King, "because he was so bitter.

"My recollection of Ralph is as a very dedicated civil rights worker in the early days of the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee.

Then like most of the SNCC people, he became extremely frustrated at the failure of white America to respond to the basic and legitimate demands of the black community.

Idealist's Bitterness

"In my last discussions with him, I recognized the same kind of bitterness that so many of our idealistic young people have come to feel.

"Like a lot of kids who were singing 'We Shall Overcome' in Birmingham, he became extremely frustrated when it became obvious that the white man was not about to give up economic exploitation or political injustice.

"So, when they became bitter, people like Ralph looked to the more radical ways of achieving change, and they ran the gamut from planning guerilla warfare to serious efforts to overthrow the government."

Fauntroy had known Featherstone, who died at the age of 30, since the latter was a student at Roosevelt High School.

One of two sons of James S. Featherstone Sr. (James

Jr. is deputy director of the Mayor's Youth Program Unit here), Ralph went on to D.C. Teacher's College, where he majored in speech.

After his graduation, Featherstone taught speech correction in 1963 and 1964 at five elementary schools in Southeast Washington.

Meanwhile, he was becoming attracted to the civil rights movement that was beginning to gain momentum in the South.

Like other Washingtonians—among them Stokely Carmichael and Marion Barry—who had participated in demonstrations to win access to public accommodations below the Mason-Dixon line, Featherstone decided to remain in the deep South as an SNCC organizer.

Working out of the Atlanta office with Rap Brown, "Feather"—as he was known in the movement—helped establish 41 Mississippi "freedom schools" for black children, participated in voting registration drives in

Alabama and went to Selma when Dr. King began his campaign there.

Featherstone was dispatched back to Washington to help raise money and support for the Selma campaign.

With Fauntroy, Barry, the Rev. Channing Phillips (now Democratic National Committeeman from the District) and others, he helped organize the Coalition of Conscience here.

In the process, he was arrested for attempting to block traffic on Pennsylvania Avenue during a Selma support demonstration in Lafayette Square.

Originally formed to aid the Selma movement, the Coalition of Conscience joined SNCC after the Alabama campaign in organizing the Free D.C. Movement for home rule.

As chief lieutenant to Marion Barry, who directed the Free D.C. Movement, Featherstone became a controversial figure when he made allegedly anti-Semitic remarks to Jewish business-

Noted Rights Activist

men asked to support the home rule drive.

Meanwhile, Featherstone joined Brown and Carmichael in the latter stages of formulating the "Black Power" position paper, which was to alter the character of the civil rights movement. Like most of his actions in SNCC, his role was a secondary one. He was close to the leadership, but not part of it.

By then, Featherstone had been deeply influenced by L. D. Pratt, a white radical here who argued that only through control of their own economic institutions could blacks achieve political power as well.

In keeping with this view, Featherstone moved to Mississippi, where he managed a "catfish farm" where blacks caught catfish and processed them for eating, making fertilizer and other uses.

While Featherstone was in Mississippi, Rap Brown became chairman of SNCC and his old ally national chairman.

Featherstone returned to Washington about a year ago and became manager of the Drum and Spear, an Afro American bookstore here.

By then, Mr. Phillips recalled yesterday, "one could see that the bitterness had grown . . . (in Featherstone). He didn't seem very perceptive, he just seemed interested in being belligerent and irrational. The belligerence and bitterness, I accepted, but his irrationality—in terms of tactics—I couldn't deal with."

Noting that police have suggested that Featherstone and his companion might have been knowingly transporting the explosives that killed them, Mr. Phillips said:

"Regardless of what created the explosion, whether it was carried or planted, that's not the issue. The issue is that a talented guy, a former school teacher, found it necessary in being involved in fighting for big rights . . . and came to such a tragic end."



Youngsters make the black power salute outside Hartford County Courthouse in Bel Air, Md., site of the trial for H. Rap Brown.

By Bob Burchette—The Washington Post