

Rap Brown Mystery Deepens

By Richard M. Cohen

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NEW YORK, Oct. 24 — In Philadelphia, despite newspaper reports to the contrary, police intelligence officers say they know nothing about the man ever being in that city.

In St. Louis, where he was reported spotted several weeks ago, the police say the report was untrue.

And the police here say they don't care about all that. They have their man in custody for the crime they say he committed here, and where he's been recently is no concern of theirs. Why not try the FBI?

The FBI, which sought the man in vain for 1½ years, has refused to comment.

The man is H. Rap Brown. His presence had been reported nearly everywhere, confirmed nowhere. The mystery that has surrounded him since he dropped from sight in Maryland has, if anything, deepened with his capture here a week ago. And his friends and sympathizers, who say they do not know where Brown has been and would not tell even if they did, are puzzled and disillusioned by his reported involvement in the gunpoint stickup of a Manhattan taproom.

The man himself, inaccessible to the press in a guarded 10th-floor room in Roosevelt Hospital, denies to his lawyer that he is Brown. He says he is Roy Williams, born in Alabama and lately of the state of Mississippi.

Print Testimony

His fingerprints say otherwise. Three sets have been taken and they testify that the man is Brown. Accordingly, the suspect was arraigned as Hubert Geroid Brown, age 28, charged by the people of the state of New York with robbery and attempted murder.

His lawyer, William M. Kunstler, who has known and represented Brown in his varied legal troubles for years, says the man in the hospital does not look like Brown. Until he hears confirmation from the man himself or from a member of Brown's family, Kunstler says he will say the man is not Brown. Members of Brown's family, including his wife, have visited the hospital but have said nothing publicly about what they found. Kunstler says all he has heard from the man in the hospital is that he does not want him as his lawyer.

Among dozens of police-

men, lawyers and black activist leaders interviewed here last week, however, there appears to be little doubt that the suspect is in fact Rap Brown.

It is under that name that his case will be presented to a grand jury next month by Assistant District Attorney Stephen Sawyer. Brown is charged with being one of four persons who held up the tavern and its customers.

Brown was shot and seriously wounded, police said, when pursuing officers cornered him on the roof of an apartment building near the tavern and saw that he was armed.

The man who once said that "violence is as American as cherry pie" had a chance to fire but did not, the police report says. Two policemen had been wounded earlier when the robbers came out of the tavern firing.

Variety of Theories

Almost immediately after his capture, reports began to surface about where Brown

had been and what he had been doing in the 17 months since he jumped bail and failed to appear for trial in Bel Air, Md., on charges arising from a 1967 racial disturbance in Cambridge, Md. Brown, who had made a strongly worded speech to the people of Cambridge's black community just before the disorders broke out, was charged with arson, counselling to arson, riot and inciting to riot.

Brown lived in Harlem, attracting less and less attention, despite other criminal charges in other jurisdictions, between the time of the Cambridge incident and the time of his scheduled Maryland trial in 1970. He did not appear for that trial and had not been seen in public since, at least not so the FBI or police officers were aware of it.

One theory about his whereabouts that was floated after his capture was that he had been in St. Louis. This appears to have been based on the fact that the three other men ar-

rested with him — Samuel L. Petty, 23, Levi Valentine, 24, and Arthur Young, 26 — were all at one time associated with a St. Louis militant organization called the Black Liberators. All three men were wanted in St. Louis and had been arrested there a combined total of 45 times.

With Capture

But according to Capt. Earl Halveland of the St. Louis police department's intelligence division, none of the three have been in St. Louis recently. There are constant reports that Petty, identified as a former bodyguard for Brown, had been in town, Halveland said, but it usually turned out to be his brother.

If Brown himself had been in St. Louis, Halveland said, the police would have known it and he would have been arrested.

The next report had Brown in Philadelphia, where he was allegedly part of a stickup ring that included the three men he was arrested with. A check with the district attorney's office there and with the police intelligence squad produced denials.

At police headquarters here, Sgt. Ed Powells, a spokesman for the department, said the New York police have no real interest other than curiosity. Brown is held here on several charges, which is all they need, he said.

Besides, the police here have other things to worry about. The department is suffering through a highly publicized investigation into reports of systematic corruption, which has driven the Brown case out of the newspapers and out of many people's minds.

At the 20th detective squad, which is handling the robbery case, they say they have no interest in where Brown has been and know nothing about it.

Only FBI Probing

And so it goes with the FBI, the district attorney's office, and even Brown's old friends. Of them all, only the FBI appears to be conducting an investigation.

The most persistent rumor here is that Brown has spent much of his time as a fugitive living in Harlem. Confirmation is difficult for an outsider to obtain because anyone who admits knowing where Brown was could possibly be charged by the FBI with harboring a fugitive. One person said he declined an invitation to play in a football game in Central Park when he heard that Brown would be there.

Like all of those interviewed who were former friends of Brown or associated with him from the civil rights movement, the man asked that his name not be published. Other persons communicated only through reputable third parties.

One man who frequently joined the Central Park football games where Brown played before he went underground, said that if Brown was in Harlem he had made no effort to contact his friends. He said it would be uncharacteristic of Brown to participate in a robbery, adding cryptically that money was available if Brown needed it.

"I can say with great certainty that the cat I knew would not have done this," he said. "I knew him too well to believe that he could have done that."

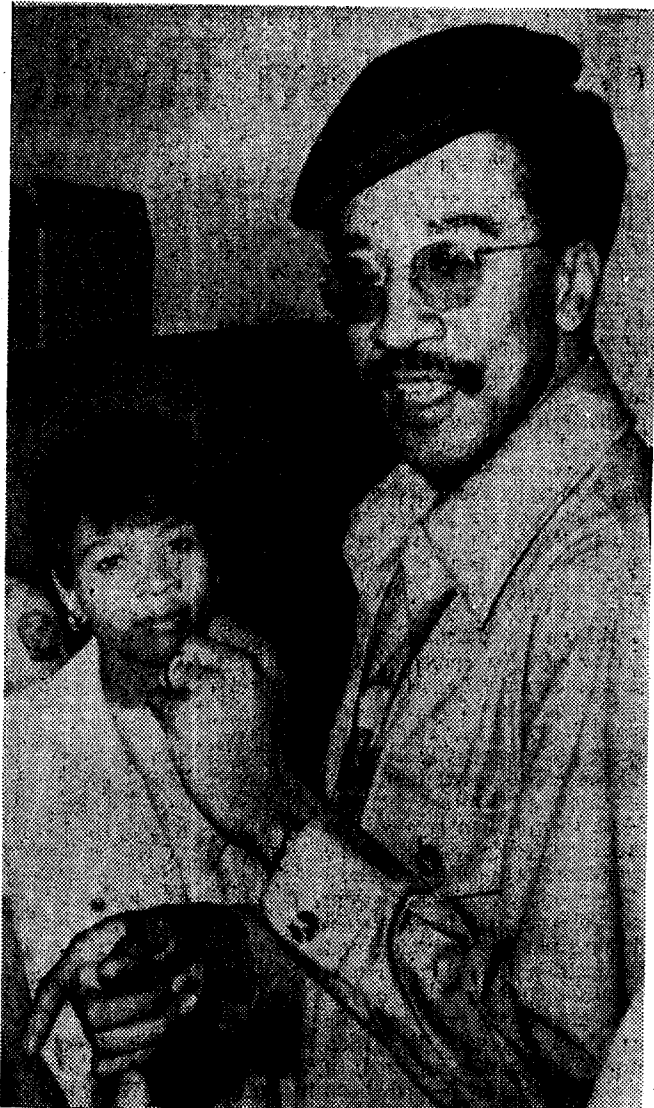
Still, many of those interviewed feel that the man in the bed is indeed Brown and if the police are right about the holdup, then Brown has shamed the civil rights movement with an act of handiwork.

Proposes Tribunal

One former colleague of Brown's from the old Harlem civil rights days put it this way: "I would set up a tribunal of black people. I would ask him if what the police say is really true. If he says he was in on the stickup, then it would bust him . . ."

There appears to be little inclination to view Brown as a martyr to the movement or a victim of a police conspiracy, like George Jackson or Angela Davis.

But there are those who call for understanding, who recall that Brown had lived in underground America for



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H. Rap Brown at his 1968 trial in New Orleans.

nearly two years, pursued, unable to see his wife, knowing that old friends might turn out to be informers.

Gerald Lefcourt, the white lawyer who handled the defense of 21 Black Panthers here last spring, called Brown an "important symbol" and "the most persecuted man of the 1960s."

He acknowledged that a possible "save Rap Brown" movement has not yet surfaced, if only because the man in the hospital denies he is Brown. Moreover, Lefcourt says, there are many who feel that if Brown did commit the stickup, he has become unworthy of support."

This view is shared by some Harlem activists who question whether Brown was important to their movement to begin with.

Some of those contacted described Brown as a creation of the media, a man who lacked a real base of support in the black community and whose only claim to leadership was the fact that Stokely Carmichael named him his successor as chairman of the Student Nonviolent (now National) Coordinating Committee.

In the spring of 1970—about the time Brown was scheduled to be tried—Time magazine asked pollster Louis Harris to survey the attitudes of black Ameri-

cans. A list was compiled of organizations and persons respected by blacks. Brown, who was then making the FBI's 10-most-wanted list, failed to make the list compiled by Harris.

Sources close to the Brown case say that a group is being formed to raise money for the defense. Meetings have been held to discuss what one source with close ties to the defense describes as the "political line."

"A political position will be made clear in the future," this source said, re-

questing anonymity. "There is a political group forming around him—people who know to whom they have to appeal.

"There will be a political line."



This 1967 picture of Brown was taken at a black power rally in New York.

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