

Post 7/26/78

Evidence Against Black Panther Called Conjecture

By Dan Hall
Associated Press

NEW HAVEN, Conn., Aug. 25—Black Panther Lonnie McLucas is charged in a crime that "came out of the sadistic, demented mind" of someone else, McLucas' lawyer told a Superior Court jury today.

Pleading for acquittal of the 24-year-old McLucas, attorney Theodore I. Koskoff attributed the torture, abduction and shooting of Alex Rackley 15 months ago to George Sams Jr., who has pleaded guilty to second-degree murder in the case.

While the jury prepared to decide McLucas's fate, between 500 and 1,000 persons, most of them white, rallied across the street in his support.

John Froines, one of the Chicago Seven conspiracy defendants, told the gathering, "I don't see myself as a supporter of the Panthers. I see myself as a comrade in their struggle."

He urged the crowd to remain throughout the jury deliberations.

"No matter what happens, we have to be prepared to free Lonnie McLucas," the University of Oregon physics professor said.

The defense argument before the jury followed the state's hour-long presentation on the 24th day of the trial. In it, state's attorney Arnold Markle called for McLucas' conviction on all four charges stemming from what he called "an outright brutal, crass murder."

McLucas was the first of eight Panthers facing charges in the Rackley slaying to come to trial. He was charged with kidnaping resulting in death, conspiracy to kidnap and to murder and binding.

The charge of kidnaping resulting in death is a capital offense, but the state said it would not seek the death penalty. The maximum penalty for conspiracy to kidnap is 30 years; conspiracy to murder, 15 years; and binding, 20

years.

Sams, one of three defendants who pleaded guilty, testified that McLucas assisted in Rackley's torture at Panther headquarters here and in his subsequent removal to a rural spot about 20 miles away, where he was shot.

Sams also gave police a statement that led to the arrest of national Panther chairman Bobby G. Seale on murder and conspiracy charges.

"I believe that the whole series of events came out of the demented mind of George Sams," Koskoff told the jury of two blacks and 10 whites. Koskoff called the case against McLucas "a tissue of speculation and conjecture based on the activities of other people."

Markle said in his argument

that McLucas committed "the final act of indignity" when he fired a shot into the apparently lifeless body of Rackley.

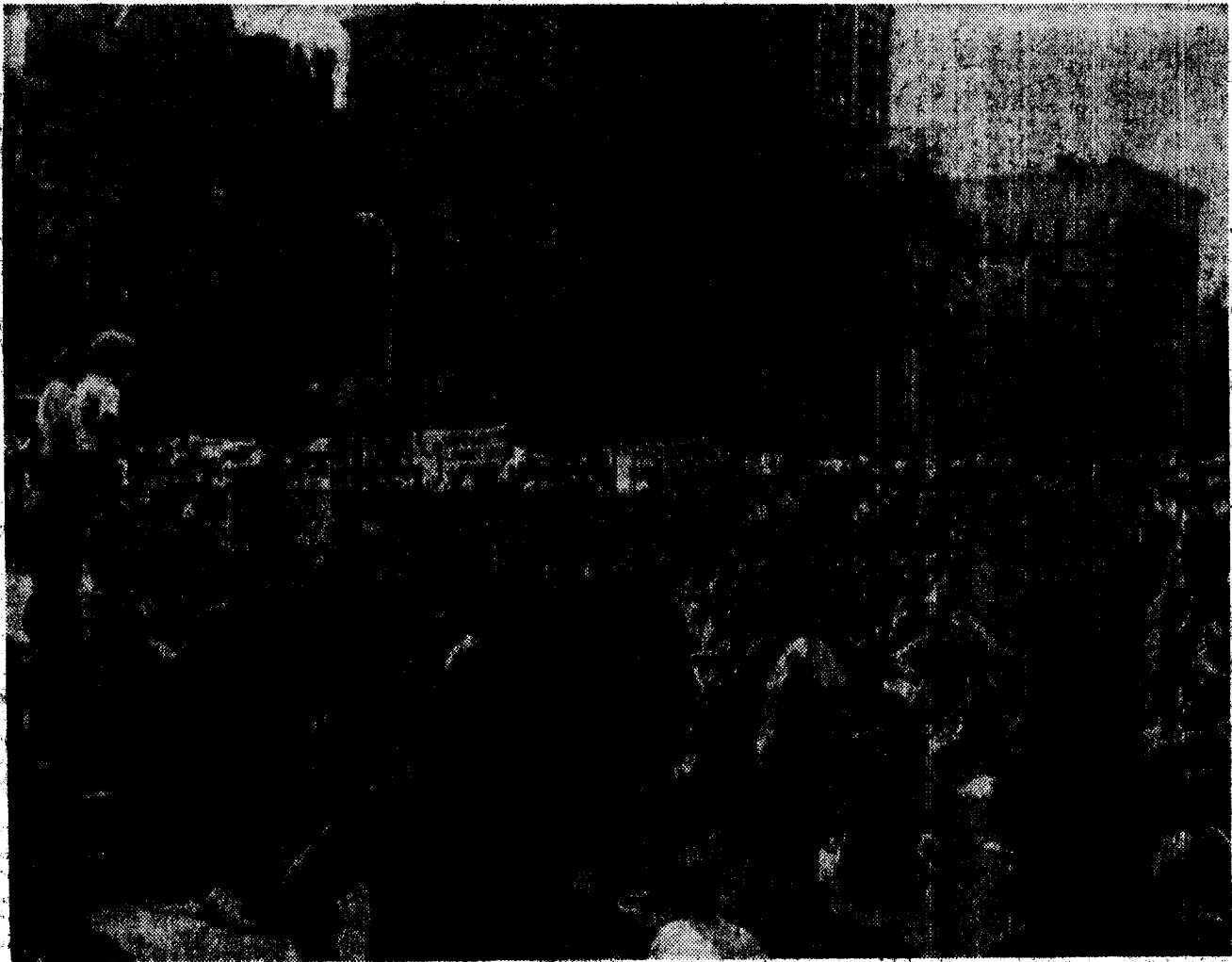
McLucas and others testified that Warren Kimbro, who has pleaded guilty to second-degree murder in the case, fired the first and apparently fatal shot. McLucas testified that he went back under orders from Sams and fired a shot into Rackley's body.

"I don't care which bullet caused death," Markle said in asking for a guilty verdict.

The defense rested its case Friday, after Seale testified he did not order the slaying of Rackley.

The defense tried to show, with the help of 18 witnesses, that McLucas participated in the handling of Rackley without realizing what was planned for the victim. They also tried to show, through testimony by McLucas and others, that the defendant was afraid of being killed himself if he did not follow orders.

In prosecution testimony, Markle concentrated on developing an alleged Panther plot to get rid of Rackley because he was suspected of being a police informer.



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Demonstrators rally on New Haven Green in support of Lonnie McLucas, a Black Panther on trial in nearby court.