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Unanswered Questions Still Surround

By THOMAS A. JOHNSON

Three years ago in the dilapidated storefront headquarters of the Black Liberators in St. Louis, H. Rap Brown began a relationship with a group of local militant young blacks that ended, according to the police, with a bloody gun battle on a Manhattan street nine days ago.

The three men arrested with the man whom the police identified as Hubert Gerold Brown—Samuel Lee Petty, 23 years old, Arthur Lee Young, 26, and Levi Valentine, 24—were from St. Louis and had been associated with a group known as the Liberators.

All four are accused of holding up 25 customers of the Red Carpet Bar, at 173 West 85th Street, early in the morning of Oct. 16. Brown, wounded in the gun fight with the police that followed the holdup, is reported as in good condition in Roosevelt Hospital. The other three are being held in lieu of \$100,000 bail.

The man identified by the police through fingerprints as Brown insists that he is actually named Roy Williams. Whether the confusion is real or contrived, it is but one of several unanswered questions concerning Brown or Williams, his compatriots and their movements and activities during the last year and a half.

On 'Most Wanted' List

Brown, 28, dropped out of sight in April, 1970, and has been listed by the Federal Bureau of Investigation as one of its "most wanted" persons. He had failed to appear for his trial in Ellicott City, Md., on charges of inciting to riot and arson during racial disorders in Cambridge, Md., three years before. At the time he was free on bail pending appeal of a five-year sentence for violating the Federal Firearms Act in New Orleans in 1968.

During the last 17 months, rumors have placed Brown in St. Louis, Chicago, Washington and Algeria. According to one unconfirmed report, the Detroit police narrowly missed capturing Brown during a police raid there last October.

Reports have contended that Brown often played basketball in a Harlem courtyard and that he moved constantly from one apartment to another, settling in recent months in a West Side Manhattan church.

Far more questions have been raised, however, during the last week about Brown than have been answered.

What has been learned during several days of investigations by The New York Times, is how the alliance between the waning Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and the up and coming Liberators began in September, 1968.

Brown, who then headed the Deep South-based S.N.C.C., became the minister of justice for the armed, streetwise and urban slum-based Black Liberators.



Leroy Bryant

The Rev. Charles Koen, left, Stokely Carmichael, with glasses, and Samuel Lee Petty, center, on street in St. Louis in 1968. Petty was one of men arrested here in holdup.



Associated Press

H. Rap Brown speaking to crowds during racial disorders in Cambridge, Md., in 1967. He dropped out of sight in April of 1970.

H. Rap Brown

The Liberators' founder, the Rev. Charles Koen, then 23, was appointed the midwestern regional deputy chairman of S.N.C.C.

A similar alliance between S.N.C.C. and the Black Panther party, which made Stokely Carmichael a Panther leader, and Huey P. Newton, a S.N.C.C. official, had proved unsuccessful months before. The S.N.C.C. and Panther organizations clashed verbally for several months and in gun battles in Washington.

When the alliance with the Liberators was formed, S.N.C.C. was already on its way out of business. White youths, who had made up about half the membership, had left—as had white financial backing—during the preceding months of "black power" preachments and on the urgings that they "organize white communities."

National Attention Gained

In addition, many black and white youths had left S.N.C.C. to join the war on poverty, seeing that as an opportunity to do a job of community organizing and earn a salary at the same time.

The Black Liberators, however, were at the height of their popularity. Formed just months before by the charismatic Mr. Koen as a "protective, cultural and educational" organization, the Liberators drew national attention during a visit to St. Louis by the then-Harlem Representative, Adam Clayton Powell, when they carried guns into the streets to provide him with "security."

Arrests and confrontations with the police followed and the Liberators began to grow to more than a hundred "hard-core" members and hundreds more supporters. S.N.C.C.'s national field staff at the time was said to be about 100, with supporters numbering in the thousands.

Liberators were accused by the police of firing shots into the home of a black police lieutenant, Fred Grimes, and at a local police station. The police were accused of wrecking and pillaging the Liberators' headquarters.

After months of police-Liberator confrontations, a man named Yusuf Shabazz, 24, replaced Mr. Koen as the Liberator leader and announced, "There will be no more carrying of submachine guns, no deliberate confrontations with police and no more one-man rule."

He said the organization would have committee rule, seek peace with the police, reduce friction and "become a service center for black people."

The Liberators sagged and

collapsed under Shabazz's leadership.

Nine months after he took over, Shabazz confessed in United States District Court, where he was found guilty of the theft of \$300 worth of money orders, that he had been a spy for the police and that he had infiltrated several militant black organizations, including the Liberators. He is currently serving a three-year sentence in the Federal Penitentiary in Atlanta.

¶Petty, who was arrested last week, had been a "general" in the Liberators, and the other two men, Mr. Young and Mr. Valentine, were described here as "hangers on."

Police records show that among them, the trio had a total of 45 arrests prior to their joining the Liberator organization.

Mr. Valentine, known in St. Louis also as "El Rico," had been arrested 17 times on charges ranging from armed robbery to attempted rape.

Mr. Young had 11 arrests on charges of gambling, auto theft and assault on a policeman.

¶Petty, known in St. Louis also as "Mr. Do-right," had 17 arrests. A jury returned an "open verdict" on the charge that Petty, when he was 14, killed an 18-year-old ex-convict with a .22-caliber rifle in self-defense.

In 1965 he was sentenced to seven years for first-degree robbery with a dangerous weapon.

Some St. Louis residents, including former Liberators, moderate blacks and some black policemen, expressed a good deal of respect for the trio—especially Petty—as serious-minded young men anxious to help black people.

'A Serious Guy'

"They were not the 'revolutionary pimps' you find around," said one black policeman who asked that he not be identified. "I always felt that if I had been in trouble on the streets they would have helped me out of it."

The same views were expressed by Walter V. Lay, legislative assistant to Representative William Clay, Democrat of St. Louis, about Petty.

"He's a serious guy, anxious to help black people," Mr. Lay said. "A little over a year ago he asked me for some money to go to New York and I gave it to him. He's no thug."

The trip coincides with police speculation in St. Louis that Petty, Mr. Young and Mr. Valentine left the city apparently to join Brown, in the fall of 1970, months after Brown dropped out of sight.

Invariably, blacks in St. Louis will discount the importance of the trio's police records.

"Anybody can be arrested here," a businessman contended, "and if you're black you are very likely to be arrested."

Police Chief Eugene Camp said during an interview that the 45 St. Louis arrests for the trio was "not unusual. A man can be suspected of an offense,

arrested, investigated and released."

Mr. Camp, a career police officer who has the support of black moderates, said it was quite possible that Brown and the three St. Louis men might have been in his city within recent months.

"If he was with three local men who knew the city he could have been in and out of here," Mr. Camp said.

The police say Petty was seen driving a car in St. Louis about a month ago.

Actually, say several other black St. Louis residents, Petty had spent most of the summer in St. Louis.

"He had a short haircut—a 'quo vadis'—and he just moved around in everything," said Ralph Scales, a businessman who directs the Community Economic Development Association. "He wanted help in getting a Federal warrant against him settled."

A Federal grand jury in St. Louis had indicted Petty on May 14, 1970, on charges that he had falsely stated he had no

criminal record when he purchased a firearm from a St. Louis County dealer in early 1970.

¶Petty met with a black lawyer, Harrison Hollie of Alton, Ill., about three months ago in Mr. Hollie's office to have him "look out for a legal matter for me." He did not keep a subsequent appointment with Mr. Hollie, the lawyer said last week.

Another of the St. Louis trio, Mr. Young, reportedly telephoned his mother, Mrs. Harris Richard, three weeks ago from New York City and told her he expected to return to St. Louis soon. In addition, Mrs. Richard told a local newsman that Mr. Valentine had visited her a month ago with another man and they inquired about the whereabouts of her son, Arthur.

When newsmen visited the address given for Mrs. Richard, 2916 Dickson Street, they could not find anyone there by that name.

The general view, coming from scores of black people interviewed in St. Louis, was one

of doubt that these four men would have robbed a tavern, as the police have charged.

"Can we believe the police after George Jackson? After Attica?" a black professional man asked. "I'm getting to the place where I would find it hard to believe the police—look at those corruption hearings [the Knapp Commission hearings] going on in New York City—how can you believe the official police version of anything?"

Some black activists here were of the opinion that the four men might well have "considered it a revolutionary act" to rob a barroom, seeing bar patrons as "parasites" or "leeches" or "counter-revolutionary."

But the founder of the Black Liberators, Mr. Koen, who now heads the Black United Front in the racially tense Cairo, Ill., refused to give credence to that theory.

Mr. Koen was interviewed in the cafeteria of the Southeast Hospital in Cape Girardeau, Mo., where his wife, Clydia, had given birth moments before to an eight-pound boy, King David, their third child and first son.

"I can't see Rap or Sam involved in that kind of thing," he said. "Sam is one of the high brothers in the political education thing—I can't see him stooping to that."

"Sam's intelligence, his sincerity, his dedication to the movement would not allow him to do what the police said he did," Mr. Koen insisted.

Asked whether the need for immediate money might have forced the men to rob the bar, Mr. Koen said:

"No, they would have had too many people to contact and get money in an emergency situation. Too many people around who would help a serious brother in the struggle."