

You're listening to *A People's Anthology*. Produced by Boston Review, this is a new podcast that highlights and explore key texts from US history, with our first six episodes surfacing a few important documents related to the urban rebellions of the 1960s and 70s.

This is episode four, on Fred Hampton's 1969 speech, *Power Anywhere There's People!*, introduced by Asad Haider and read by Malcolm London.

Say it with me, I am a revolutionary. And you gonna have to keep on saying that. I'm proletariat. I'm not the pig, you have to make the distinction. You have to attack the pigs.

Fred Hampton was born in 1948. From an early age, he showed himself to be a talented organizer, brokering peace among street gangs in his hometown of Chicago. He strove to build a class-conscious, multi-racial movement, which he called the "rainbow coalition." It was a broad alliance of anti-imperialist groups, including the Puerto Rican Young Lords.

Poor quote here.

Of course, this work was a threat to imperialists and capitalists, who achieved their power by pitting oppressed nations against each other. Recognizing Hampton as a major threat, the FBI and Chicago police constantly surveilled him.

In his speech "Power Anywhere There Is People," Hampton describes how Huey Newton founded the Black Panthers, and the work that they were doing to engage the masses. At the point that Hampton was writing, the BPP had only been around for 3 years, but had spread to every major American city, and were keen to separate themselves from other groups.

The Black Panther Party is coming out of this idea of Black nationalism—

Black nationalism, or the project of self-determination for Black people. But the Panthers went further with *inter*-nationalism: The idea that oppressed nations should band together against the common enemy of the United States.

and you see this in the letters of Huey Newton for example, when he writes a letter to the national liberation front of south vietnam, offering Black Panthers as troops. He makes it clear for him that nationalism is a fundamentally flawed project and that the Black Panther party can no longer sustain the idea of nationalism because they exist within a primarily imperialist nation. And that demands for national self-determination around the world have legitimacy in so far as they oppose imperialism - but that the category of the nation can't be the end point of politics... that ultimately nations have to be overcome and the state itself has to be overcome as he says explicitly in this letter.

Coming out of this historical moment, Hampton is keen to emphasise that capitalism can't be fought with black capitalism — it has to be fought with socialism. Or, as he says in all-caps, INTERNATIONAL PROLETARIAN REVOLUTION.

Overall it is an extraordinary example of Fred Hampton talking as an organizer and also as a kind of political theorist talking about organization. And so first, I think, he places this emphasis on knowledge coming from practice - it doesn't come from intellectuals and it doesn't come from books, but through practice. And intellectuals and ordinary people all participate in this. And so that's the basis of knowledge and it's not like we might think now, from magazines or websites or whatever, it doesn't come from outside in that way, it comes from practice.

But it isn't automatic and this is the second thing that I think is important — his emphasis on political education. And political education is not imparting consciousness to people or imparting ideas to people, it's also a kind of practice. It's a practice that people engage in when they engage in collective study, when they reflect on actions they've taken, and for Fred Hampton what's important about political education is that it allows people to understand that there are contradictions within their communities, political contradictions, and that as the black panther party is confronting racism, they also have to confront the class divisions within their own community. And that liberation isn't when an elite of a particular group achieves dominance, liberation is when those contradictions are also overcome. And just as much, it's a matter of combatting racism by forming across racial solidarity. And this is exactly what Fred Hampton was trying to organize in Chicago with the rainbow coalition - with was a set of alliances with the young lords, the young patriots and so on.

Hampton describes how the Panthers' Free Breakfast program acted as an important educational tool.

and this practice of political education is also the way that a group of people is organize into a collective group that can engage in politics. And so hampton talks about the Breakfast for Children program, not only as a form of self-help or mutual aid, but also the way that socialist ideas are imparted to members of the community, and how a kind of

socialist collectivity is built. When people participate in the free breakfast for children program, they learn the idea that it is possible to organize themselves in an egalitarian way that's based on mutual-aid, and that there is something that can go beyond the capitalist society in which they live. These are really extraordinary ideas to help us understand what the black panther party was doing, but also ideas that remain totally relevant today.

Self-help programs were also important tools for recruitment.

There is today some suspicion from the socialist left about self-help programs, as though that is somehow incompatible with making demands of the state for social programs for welfare programs and so on. But this is a really misleading understanding of the history. If you go back to the late nineteenth century you'll see that the first socialist party, the german social democratic party, had a wide range of self-help programs. There were bicycle clubs, food buying coops and so on. Actually the recruitment of the social democratic party drew in large part from these self-help mutual aid programs — in some cases more so than through the unions. And so these have always been an important part of building a kind of socialist subculture. A kind of world in which it's useful for people to be part of a political organization - not just a chore: endless meetings and drawn-out debates are not attractive to people who are coming out of a day's work... but a bicycle club might be. And if you need to feed your children, and there's a free breakfast program, that might be something that you want to participate in.

So the key thing is not that it's charity — the key thing is that you are actually reaching people. And I think rather than thinking in abstract terms about policy, you've got to think in terms of how you actually build connections with people and how do you reach a broader population than the people who are already in your organization.

Hampton's success as a young revolutionary leader made him a top FBI target. On December 4, 1969, a little before five in the morning, a squad of heavily armed police raided an apartment where Hampton and other Panthers lived.

Here's some archive testimony of that day from Hampton's girlfriend Deborah Johnson, who was pregnant at the time of the shooting.

Someone came into the room and started shaking the chair and said "wake up, the pigs are here". And I see bullets being shot in the kitchen. We said "Stop shooting! Stop shooting! We have a pregnant woman here." I was 8 and a half months pregnant. They kept on shooting. Finally they stopped and made us face the wall. The pigs started shooting again and I heard people scream. They said "you're as good as dead now."

According to one account, police fired two hundred rounds into the apartment, killing the twenty-one-year-old Hampton as he lay in his bed, and another Black Panther, Mark Clark.

Years later, it was discovered the FBI had an informer among the Panthers who had given the police a floor plan of the apartment, including a sketch of where Fred Hampton slept.

Fred Hampton was murdered by the state at a very young age....When you look at what he says in this speech and the kinds of coalitions he was trying to build, you can see why he was so dangerous.

[You can read the full text of Hampton's speech [here](#)]

You've been listening to episode four of A People's Anthology, featuring Fred Hampton's speech "Power Anywhere There's People!"

The text was read by Malcolm London, a poet, activist and educator from Chicago. It was introduced by Asad Haider, founding editor of Viewpoint magazine and author of *Mistaken Identity: Anti-Racism and the Struggle Against White Supremacy*. Our theme music is by Marisa Anderson.

A People's Anthology is a production from Boston Review, a political and literary magazine both online and in print since 1975. Visit us at Bostonreview.net.