



Interview with **Flint Taylor**

Date: October 18, 1988

Interviewer: Terry Rockefeller

Camera Rolls: 3017-3020

Sound Rolls: 309-310

Team: C

Interview gathered as part of ***Eyes on the Prize II: America at the Racial Crossroads, 1965-mid 1980s***. Produced by Blackside, Inc. Housed at the Washington University Film and Media Archive, Henry Hampton Collection.

Preferred Citation

Interview with Flint Taylor, conducted by Blackside, Inc. on October 18, 1988 for *Eyes on the Prize II: America at the Racial Crossroads, 1965-mid 1980s*. Washington University Libraries, Film and Media Archive, Henry Hampton Collection.

Note: These transcripts contain material that did not appear in the final program. Only text appearing in ***bold italics*** was used in the final version of *Eyes on the Prize II*.

[camera roll #3017]

[sound roll #309]

00:00:12:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

And mark.

Camera Crew Member #2:

Mark.

[slate]

00:00:15:00

Interviewer:

What brought you, first brought you into contact with the Panthers in '68, '69? What were you doing?

00:00:24:00

Flint Taylor:

Well, I was a law student, I was working in an office which came to be known as the Peoples' Law Office. And that summer in '69, a lot was going on between the Panthers and the police here in the city. And we as young lawyers who were involved with and, and, and interested in defending people who were involved in the, st—struggle for social change ended up being the lawyers for the Panthers. And so the first thing I did with regard to that was work on a bond petition or a, for Fred Hampton, who was in jail at the time who had been sent to jail by Ed Hanrahan for supposedly stealing seventy-one dollars worth of ice cream. So, I was going around getting statements from people in the community and, to—about what kind of a person Fred Hampton was. So, I kind of knew Fred Hampton before I ever met him, and I understood what kind of a person he was, what kind of a leader he was. And, you know, he was my contemporary, he's even younger than I was. I was probably twenty-three or something like that, a first-year law student. And he was twenty, twenty-one. And obviously he impressed me even before I had met him.

00:01:37:00

Interviewer:

Now, you really saw, sort of one step removed, the kind of police and legal harassment that these guys were facing, that, that the—what, what were some of the things that really struck you as you became involved in their legal struggles with them?

00:01:52:00

Flint Taylor:

Well, it was just one thing after another. It was people being framed, and, and sent to jail. It was people, there was shootouts between the police and the Panthers. It always seemed that the police would go by the headquarters on Madison Street and provoke something. And then there'd be some shooting, and people would be arrested, and they'd be charged with attempted murder. And people would be getting shot. And those were the kinds of things that were happening all through the summer. And there was a question even then, kind of in our minds, about was this more organized than just some kind of hit or miss type of thing with the police? Was there something bigger behind this? Because of course in the national government at that time, we had Nixon and, and Mitchell. And, and they had made no bones about what they thought about the Black liberation struggle and what, and of course Hoover, the main man, and what they were doing. So, although we didn't know then what we know now, it certainly was there right in, in our faces, what, what, the kind of repression that was going on.

00:02:52:00

Interviewer:

Now, can you think back—

Camera Crew Member #1:

Sorry, can you move to your right more?

Interviewer:

—can you—

Camera Crew Member #1:

If you, if you would—

Interviewer:

—about the first time you met Fred, the situation?

00:03:01:00

Flint Taylor:

Uh huh.

00:03:02:00

Interviewer:

And what were you doing with him, and, and what did he do that evening?

Flint Taylor:

Well, there's two things that—

Camera Crew Member #1:

One second. I'm sorry. We need a little bit [inaudible] OK.

00:03:11:00

Flint Taylor:

There's two things about when I met Fred. The first time I actually saw Fred was quite remarkable, and that was the work I was talking about of getting the bond petition together. And this is one of the ironies I think of the whole thing. *We were successful, and we got him out of jail towards the end of that summer because the Supreme Court Justice in the state of Illinois looked at what kind of a person he was, looked at the kind of case it was, and gave him appeal bond.* So, he got out towards the end of the summer. And he had been, been

in jail down state in Menard, and he came back. And there was like a celebration speech type of thing at a church on the near west side here in Chicago. And ***that's the first time I saw Fred Hampton, and I was then a young, White student in a predominantly Black church full to the rafters, welcoming Fred Hampton back.*** And this man was just so impressive, and he just, he talked about hearing the beat of the people all the way down state in Menard. And he just kind of went from a speech into like almost a song. And it was just the people were all on their feet, and, and just rising as one in kind of this, you know, unity with him and, and what he stood for. And obviously that had a very large effect on me. I didn't meet him then. I met him a month or two later. I organized, or people at Northwestern Law School where I was and I, organized him to come to speak at the law school. And I went out to pick him up. And I thought that, you know, with the Panthers, maybe there'd be a few people there at, at the law school. Picked him up. And this was a month or two before he was assassinated. And at that time, my perspective was, Wow, this man's paranoid. Because he kept talking about how the police were gonna get him, and, and talked about the FBI, and he just talked about—it was just on his mind. And not really comprehending what he was going through and what in fact was really the, the program, it seemed a little bit extreme to me at the time. Any event, we got back to Northwestern, and we walked into the hall there. And I expected to see twenty-five people, and there were three hundred and fifty people sitting out there waiting to hear from Fred Hampton. These are law students, a predominantly White upper-class place. And I was to introduce him, and it was about my first public speaking event. And I stammered my way through and got him up there. And, and then he spoke, and he made some comment about, very light but pointed comment about how I was a bit tongue-tied. And I've never forgotten that to this day. But he was just so impressive, and I, I think probably I was a good comparative point to him. And he just talked to these law students, and, for however long it was. And it was, again, very impressive. And just what kind of a leader he was and how he was able to move people and to communicate with people was remarkable. And, I mean, I wasn't very sophisticated either politically, or legally, or anything else at that point. But I knew what was happening. I had a sense of what kind of a man he was. And just, you know, twenty, twenty-one years old. So, that's how I both came in contact with him and how I—first time I met him.

00:06:39:00

Interviewer:

Now, I want to focus on December 4th.

Flint Taylor:

Mm-hmm.

Interviewer:

And where you were, when you got the news about what had happened in Monroe Street, and what you did that day.

00:06:49:00

Flint Taylor:

OK. Well, I, I was at home in bed. It was early in the morning, and we got a call probably from Skip. I don't remember now exactly who called. But Bob Rush had called Skip and said the chairman had been murdered. That probably was a direct quote. So, they, we were gathering together all the people who worked at the office to go down to the apartment. By some, I guess you could look on, look at it almost as a miracle in point of history, the police had left the apartment open. They were afraid of what the community would do if in fact they knew what they had done in that apartment. And they were also very arrogant. I think they thought they could do whatever they wanted to and get away with it as far as public opinion went. So, they didn't seal the apartment. They, they, they, they grabbed whatever evidence they thought they could use, and they ran back to the State's Attorney office and had a press conference to talk about how the vicious Panthers had attacked them and how they'd had to kill the chairman in this, in this real dog fight or, or shootout. But the miracle in a sense was that they left it open so that we could go there. And we went there. We all mobilized there early in the morning, and we went into the apartment. And we had the presence of mind, I didn't, but the people who organized it with me did to get a cameraman down there, to get someone with a 16-milimeter camera who in fact has made some of the footage, made, made the wonderful movie, *The Murder of Fred Hampton*, from some of the footage that he took that day. And we started to take the evidence. And we started to take every—we didn't know what significant what had, so we took everything. We took every bullet, and there was, every shell, and there was shells all over the place. There was, this, you got to picture this apartments. It's, it's—

00:08:39:00

Interviewer:

Why, why don't you just start and talk about walking in and describe for me what you saw.

00:08:49:00

Flint Taylor:

Well, when I walked in, it was, it's this tiny little ghetto apartment. Probably the entire apartment could be put in the front room of a lot of houses. And when I walked in, there was blood. There was, it was like a Swiss, Swiss cheese type of effect because they had ripped the apartment open with these sub machine gun and automatic weapons. So, the walls were stitched with bullet holes. So, when you first came in, you saw this one wall, which was the back living room wall there, and it had all these bullet holes along it. And as you went into the apartment, and you went towards the back then you saw there was this door. There was this door laying in, in the, the little hallway. I think they had it up to, to, to stop rats or something. It, and the back bedroom of course was Chairman Fred's and Deborah's. And so this door was right out in front of that bedroom, and at some point I think Skip picked up that

door, and there was blood all underneath it. And that is where the chairman died, and that's where they had dragged him out to after they killed him in the room. So, there was blood all over the place, and there was paint all over the floor, too, because there were some paint cans. And when they shot the place up, they also punctured all, all, all the paint cans. And a lot of it is a blur in my mind now. There are just... You know, it was so intense what was happening, what we were doing. There was, people had gone to, to, to talk to the Panthers in jail 'cause they'd taken the ones who had survived to jail. And one of them had said, Bobby Rush is next. They're gonna come back to the apartment. Rush had been not there that night, so they hadn't gotten him. So, we were working with one eye over our shoulder thinking the police were gonna come back and get us some kind of way. On the other hand, we had developed what I can only picture as some kind of underground railroad type of thing in taking the evidence. We had got in touch with some sympathetic ministers, and they had set up this secret place in the attic of some—

[rollout on camera roll]

[wild sound]

Flint Taylor:

—body's apartment. I think maybe his own apartment.

00:11:13:00

Interviewer:

You are doing terrific. We're out of our first roll of film, and we are almost halfway through my questions. You are—

[cut]

[camera roll #3018]

00:11:17:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Marker.

[slate]

00:11:21:00

Interviewer:

OK. If you can recall now how you organized after learning that Fred had been murdered and what you went down to that apartment to do.

Flint Taylor:

OK.

Interviewer:

Who'd you go with? What happened when you arrived?

00:11:32:00

Flint Taylor:

OK. Well, as I was saying, we were collecting the evidence, and just the, the emotional effect of being in there and what had happened, and what could happen to us actually or what we thought could happen was just something that really was, I think about it more now than, than then. I mean it was something that we were doing then under that kind of pressure. And, but you got into kind of a groove of doing it. And I remember at one point, the, I had stepped in some liquid on my shoe. And there was two possibilities. It could be paint, or it could be blood. And I remember looking and being somewhat relieved that in fact it was blood rather than paint because it wouldn't—and I don't know, but that sticks in my mind. It just kind of sh—makes me realize what kind of pressure it was down there. But what really snapped me back to what we were doing at one point was we went into the bedroom, or we were taking evidence in the bedroom where Fred was murdered, and we went under the bed, and we found a high heel. And the high heel was full of blood. And in the blood was a bullet. So, we took it out, and there was a high heel shoe with, full of coagulated blood with a bullet sitting in the middle.

00:12:57:00

Interviewer:

I want you to tell the story again and try looking at me. Maybe even just not look, look at me. [laughs]

Flint Taylor:

Was I telling him? [laughs]

Interviewer:

You keep looking at Phil. [laughs]

00:13:06:00

Flint Taylor:

I seem to have him so—you know how you pick somebody in the audience, and you talk to that person sometimes? There was, there were several points where, where what was happening really came back to me. And one point I really remember was when we went into the chairman's room at one point or another to take evidence, and we went under the bed, and we found a high heel shoe under the bed. And in that shoe was blood. It was up, filled to the top with blood. And in the middle of the shoe was a bullet. And that just really then, the symbolism of that was just so heavy. I mean, and it just, whatever groove you were into in, in the job you were doing and forgetting about really what the job was and what it meant, just getting it done. It was cold. It was probably fifteen degrees, and we were bundled up. There was no real heat in the place. At some point along the way, and I'm not sure it was the first night, the Panthers had organized people to come in from the community. And over the next week or ten days, maybe 10,000 people went through that apartment from all over Chicago but primarily from the Black community to see what had happened. One thing that happened in the first day or two which was very significant that we saw happen there in the apartment was that the, *the press at the beginning had taken Hanrahan's line, this was a shootout, 200 shots were fired, the Panthers fired half of them. Nobody was really challenging that except a young Sun-Times reporter by the name of Brian Boyer, who went down there, and he saw the evidence. And it, it didn't take a genius to look at what had, what was there and see that all the bullets were going in one direction, and all those bullet holes were pointing towards Fred Hampton's bedroom and the middle bedroom where, where Verlina, and Doc Satchel, and everyone was.* And so he'd written something about it. And they buried it on page forty-three of the *Sun-Times*. And so he quit. He, he quit and caused the editor of the *Sun-Times* to come down there with his girlfriend. I think it was Jim Hoge I think was his name. Marshall Field owned the *Sun-Times* at that time. And he forced them to come down. And I remember them, and they're very well dressed, coming through that apartment, [train passes] looking and, at the evidence, looking at what was there. And from that point forward, there was a turn in the press.

00:15:39:00

Interviewer:

We should cut probably. That's—

[beep]

[cut]

00:15:44:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Speed and marker.

Camera Crew Member #2:

Mark.

[slate]

00:15:47:00

Interviewer:

OK. Are there other recollections you have of the apartment that morning?

00:15:52:00

Flint Taylor:

Well, there were two other very significant pieces of evidence that we had to deal with. One was the bed on which Fred was murdered. And of course Hanrahan had a story that he was up and firing away at the, at the police in the back part of the apartment. Well, the bed that he was sleeping on had blood all over it at the head and at other places. So, obviously that totally disproved this, the, the theory that Fred was up, about, and, and firing away but rather that he was murdered in his bed, which is what our people said. So, we took the mattress, and we hid it. And we brought it back every day so that people who came through the apartment could see it on the tours so that it could be shown, and, and people could be shown the bed on which Fred was murdered. And here is how it proves that he's lying about Fred being involved in this serious shootout. The other thing was the door. Because the front door panel, they claimed that only one shot, that the Panthers had fired a shot through the door. But as we got there, we saw that there were two bullet holes in the door. And so we took the panel out of the door, took pictures so it proved that the panel was, that was the panel out of the door. And then took that to have it tested to have, to have the, the, the, the door tested by a ballistics expert to, in order to determine who fired those shots and what direction they were going. So those were two very important pieces of evidence that we dealt with. And the tours were amazing in themselves. 'Cause here we are—and we had spent a better part of a week, I think that *the police waited until the seventeenth of December to actually seal that apartment, so it was open for almost two weeks. And we spent a better part of those two weeks getting that evidence out of there*, and the Panthers spent the better part of two weeks taking people who wanted to see the place through there. *And so we would be talking to people when they went through. And so while we were working, there'd be people walking through constantly. And I'll never forget. I don't know what day it was or, or what, but I just remember some older Black woman coming through there, shaking her head and going, It's nothing but a Northern lynching.* And that really stuck in my mind, and that just really kind of put it in perspective of what really went on in, in that apartment.

00:18:10:00

Interviewer:

Now, in the immediate wake of the raid, Hanrahan starts putting out his story—

Camera Crew Member #1:

[coughs]

Interviewer

—and it really turns into something of a media war. What are your recollections of, of—

Flint Taylor:

OK.

Interviewer:

—the back and forth struggles?

00:18:22:00

Flint Taylor:

Well, I, the, two major papers were the *Sun-Times* and the *Tribune*. And they each had other, one other that I think were owned. There was the *Chicago Today* that was owned by the *Tribune*, and there was the, the *Daily News*, which was the afternoon paper for the *Sun-Times*. And they both, as I said, started out covering it the, the way, you know, the company line from Hanrahan. After Brian Boyer and the editor of the *Sun-Times* went down there then the *Sun-Times* started to, and the *Daily News* started to look at it a little bit. And the *Tribune* continued to be Hanrahan's voice. So, within days, Hanrahan set up a phony exclusive, at which time he went to the *Tribune* [train passes] and told them, gave them the police officer's version of, of the raid. And that was of course, the banner headline is Exclusive, police tell about shootout. And, but he made the mistake again of taking some pictures. And on the front page of the *Tribune*, it said, Here is the evidence of how the Panthers fired all these shots. It was one picture that showed a bunch of bullet holes, a series of bullet holes, and said, That's where the people were firing out of the middle bedroom. Then there was a, another door that had some bullet holes supposedly circled, and it said, These, this is the evidence of where Fred Hampton was shooting. This is the back door. Well, again, ***we went and took those pictures and saw they weren't what they appeared to be. The back door, the circles around the, the bullet holes, they turned out to be nail heads. We went, and we saw that they were nail heads 'cause we had possession of the apartment. As far as the door that the Panthers were really supposedly firing into, that turned out to be the bedroom door, and it was the door that the police had made into Swiss cheese with their machine-gun bullets.*** So, we again got this, I think we got the *Sun-Times* people back there and

showed them. So, the next day, the *Sun-Times* then said, Exclusive, and exposed this exclusive for what it was, which was a pack of lies. And—

00:20:26:00

Interviewer:

Now, Hanrahan also went on television.

Flint Taylor:

He did.

Interviewer:

What, describe that for me.

Flint Taylor:

OK.

Interviewer:

And how you felt, how that made you feel seeing that broadcast in your city.

00:20:35:00

Flint Taylor:

Well, I'm not sure when I first saw it because we were spending twenty-three hours a day working. I'm sure we heard about it. I don't know if I saw it at the time. But when I did see it—

00:20:47:00

Interviewer:

You need to start, just tell me what it was.

Flint Taylor:

Oh, when I did see the, the, the reenactment is what it was called. He went to the, in the same way he went to the *Tribune*, he went to the CBS affiliate here and gave them—

Interviewer:

I need you just to say "Hanrahan" instead of "he".

Flint Taylor:

OK.

Interviewer:

So, just take a deep breath and start again.

00:21:07:00

Flint Taylor:

Hanrahan went to the CBS affiliate here in Chicago a few days after the raid in the same way he went to the *Tribune* people, and he set up an exclusive TV reenactment. And that reenactment had the police officers with a mockup of the apartment reenacting what they said happened. And they just kind of coldly and methodically went through this rehearsed version of what they said happened in the, in the apartment. And so it was the TV version of the CB—f the *Tribune* exclusive. And that was maddening to see as well. And the, we later saw the outtakes and saw that it had to be rehearsed for about six or seven hours before the police officers could get it straight in what their stories were. But this was Hanrahan's attack. And at the same time, we were giving the Panther stories to the press. And so this incredible media situation was going on here, and it was just, it was on the front page of the Chic—of Chicago papers for literally a month. And it was just an incredible event. Hanrahan was on his way to being Daley's replacement as, as mayor of the city of Chicago. Fred Hampton was a very respected—

[rollout on camera roll]

[wild sound]

Flint Taylor:

—and powerful young militant leader here in Chicago—

00:22:29:00

Interviewer:

We just ran out of film again. [laughs]

[beep]

Interviewer:

You're really doing well.

[cut]

[camera roll #3019]

[sound roll #310]

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark.

[slate]

Interviewer:

OK. I want you to tell me now in the wake of the events that morning of December the 4th, what happened to the survivors, and how, how did you begin to see them thrown into the legal process? What, what was their struggle? What was happening to them?

Flint Taylor:

Well, the survivors were taken right off to jail if they weren't taken to hospital, the hospital. And—

Camera Crew Member #2:

I'm so sorry. Flint, can you get closer to the table? Move right into the table a little bit. There.

Interviewer:

Thank you.

Flint Taylor:

OK.

Interviewer:

Do we need to clap again? Or—

00:23:08:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

No, we're fine.

00:23:09:00

Interviewer:

OK.

00:23:10:00

Flint Taylor:

OK. Well, right after the raid, the, the survivors were either taken to the hospital or to jail. Deborah was taken to jail 'cause she wasn't seriously hurt, although she was almost to term with Little Fred at that point. And Doc Satchel was taken to Cook County Hospital 'cause he had five bullets in his stomach. And from that point forward, they were under siege. They were, rather than the victims, they were the people, they were the "offenders". They were the ones who were responsible for all of this. They were the ones who were going to be tried for attempted murder on these heroic police officers. So, that's what they were facing. And they were facing an incredible amount of pressure from the legal system, and also an incredible feeling that they wanted to get the real truth out. But they were under certain constrictions because of the legal case that was hanging over their head and how they were going to have to deal with getting the truth out and dealing with the enormity of the crime. And, and also they'd lost their leader, and their friend, and their associate. Two of them really. But Fred Hampton of course was from Chicago and was the leader here in Chicago. Mark Clark, who was also murdered in, in the apartment, was from Peoria. He was a leader in Peoria. There were leaders from around the state in the apartment that evening. But, so, they, they're, I mean, they were seventeen, eighteen years old, young, young people. People that were all of a sudden confronted with, with serious physical injury, with threat of long terms in prison, and, you know, having been witness to an, an assassination.

00:24:54:00

Interviewer:

What was the way in which the legal process began to unfold? Tell me how the survivors related to the legal hearings that went on? I know at one point, they elected to have this, this inquest of their own. How did that come about?

00:25:06:00

Flint Taylor:

Well, there were several proceedings that went on. First there was a coroner's inquest. The coroner's inquest was supposedly to determine the cause of death. There was a lot of evidence that was put on that inquest, but the, the jury, there wasn't, the outcome was

predetermined because it was controlled by the coroner's office, and they just picked six cronies, or, they called it a blue-ribbon panel. But nonetheless, the, the, the outcome was going to be justifiable homicide, and that's what it turned out to be. However there was a lot of cross examination of witnesses, etc., that went on. So, there was a lot of focus brought onto the case there. The victims, survivors didn't testify there. They had their own criminal charges pending against them, and then there was a federal grand jury investigation that was headed up from Washington by Mitchell, John Mitchell, and Jerris Leonard, who was the head of the Civil Rights Division under Nixon. Much in the same way as Bradford Reynolds is the head of the Civil Rights Division under Reagan. Someone who was pretty much assigned to dismantle civil rights in the name of civil rights, so he wasn't too sympathetic to the Panthers' cause to say the least. And so that was, that was caused by the uproar in the Black community in Chicago. They demanded an investigation. siren] They just wouldn't, after seeing what went on, seeing the apartment, just every Black leader from Jesse Jackson to Renault Robinson were all calling for an independent investigation and were s—were concluding that this was murder, and, and that something had to be done. So, the government responded to that. And it, of course, was a very sophisticated cover up that, that went on with regard to it. The o—

00:27:01:00

Interviewer:

What was the outcome of that federal grand jury case?

Flint Taylor:

OK.

Interviewer:

And how did it make you feel? How did you—

Flint Taylor:

OK. Well—

Interviewer:

Where, where did you feel left?

00:27:09:00

Flint Taylor:

The federal grand jury investigated for three to four months. It heard a lot of evidence. There was a decision made by the Panthers and the lawyers that the Panthers should not cooperate

with the grand jury because of who was heading it up, where it was coming from, and being part of the, the government apparatus that everybody felt at that time, strongly felt was behind the raid. Although at that time, there was no real evidence to support the, the, the feeling that the federal government, and the FBI, and the Justice Department was behind it. So, the, the Panthers didn't cooperate. They didn't testify. It appeared that nonetheless, the government's view was to indict some police officers, and that way take care of it. There was a very honest FBI ballistics expert who came to the apartment and who made the conclusion that over ninety shots were fired by the Pan—excuse me, by the police. And at most, one was fired by the Panthers.

00:28:08:00

Interviewer:

Do you want to start that again? With the ballistics expert.

Flint Taylor:

Yes. That was, that was a bad slip up there. [laughs]

Interviewer:

[laughs]

00:28:12:00

Flint Taylor:

There was, the FBI had gotten an honest FB-FBI ballistics expert to come to the apartment and to look at all the ballistics evidence, a man by the name of Zimmers. And he came to the conclusion that only one shot at most was fired by the Panthers, and all the rest, about a hundred, were fired by the police. And so from that conclusion, there was, it was hard to see how they shouldn't be indicted for murder, and attempted murder, and all sorts of various violations. But somewhere in the middle of this investigation, there was a recess. And at that point, all the, there's a big meeting in Washington with John Mitchell and, and all the federal people. And from that point forward, the whole tenor of the investigation changed. And instead of there being any indictments, federal civil rights violations indictments, there was returned a "no bill", or they never actually even voted on indictments. And that was the decision of the government. Instead they issued a report. The report was a classic cover up document. It blamed the Panthers for the lack of indictments because they didn't testify. It talked about how nasty the Panthers were. Then it outlined all of this evidence in support of the fact that this was nothing but basically an assassination, or a slaughter. And yet said there wasn't enough evidence to indict anybody. It, what really happened when you look at it is that Hanrahan, who knew and was really the, keeping the secret of the FBI and the federal involvement in this raid, and setting it up, and all that had caused them not to indict him by

saying, If you indict me, I'm going to blow the whistle on you. So, there was a deal that was struck, and then no indictments were ever returned.

00:30:06:00

Interviewer:

How did you feel at the time?

00:30:08:00

Flint Taylor:

Well, the whole process—at some point, you came not to expect anything. In the one hand, you, you felt like it was totally unjust. It was the big lie going on here, the big cover up, that was obvious. But on the other hand, you, having been hardened by what had gone on and when you're seeing what, what the truth of the matter was, and how it was being portrayed, and what was going on, and who was being prosecuted, and, and how people were being treated, you came to almost expect that result. Because you, you kind of understood that the government wasn't going to indict themselves. It was not going to call the shots the way they really happened. So, I—it was outrage as well, don't get me wrong, it was outrageous what happened, and we all felt outraged. And the community carried that outrage forward from that point forward. And I think that that outrage and that feeling of injustice, and that feeling that, that you felt that what Fred Hampton stood, stood for should be carried forward was something that drove all of us. And it drove us for the entire thirteen years of the case to, to fight, you know, the, the entire case out under the odds that we were dealing with to get the actual evidence to support what everybody believed. And it's also, I think, transformed us. Myself. I can speak for myself and my, my partners. It kind of transformed us from young kind of idealistic people who were not sure exactly what we wanted to do to the kinds of people that were committed to the kind of work that, you know for social change and justice that we've been committed to for the last twenty years. And particularly to be committed to dealing with, with, with this exposing the truth about what happened to Fred Hampton and Mark Clark.

00:31:58:00

Interviewer:

I wanna go back to one thing that there were lots of allegations about. That's whether or not Fred was drugged. What were the things that were coming out? How did you first learn about the possibilities? What did you do? What do you think?

00:32:12:00

Flint Taylor:

Well, it was always curious to us, maybe that's not the correct adjective. But that Fred, who was a strong man, who, when he preached something, he didn't run and hide from it. And the Panthers preached self-defense. If the police come to your apartment, get your gun and defend yourself. So, it was, it was curious to us or didn't make sense that Fred would have been killed in his bed. He would have defended himself, but all the evidence showed that he didn't. So, one question became was there some kind of drugging. So, when we had an independent autopsy done on, on Fred's body, because the official autopsy was, was a cover up, a, a toxicological report was done by the head of toxicology [laughs] at Cook County Hospital. And she came back with what first shocked us. That, that Fred had a large amount of secobarbital or a downer in his system at the time he was killed. And then knowing that Fred never used drugs, and there was no question about that, I think friend and foe alike would never have accused him of being any kind of drug user, it became obvious that if this toxicological report was accurate—and she was—

[rollout on camera roll]

[wild sound]

Flint Taylor:

—independent. She had, she was, had no reason to, to—

00:33:38:00

Interviewer:

Out of film. [laughs] So, I'm gonna do that, and then I'm gonna ask about—

[cut]

[camera roll #3020]

00:33:43:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Marker.

[slate]

00:33:47:00

Interviewer:

OK, what, what did you think about this very [train passes] peculiar evidence of how—

Flint Taylor:

OK.

Interviewer:

—Fred had behaved, whether or not—

Camera Crew Member #1:

[unintelligible]

Interviewer:

We're gonna wait for the train to go by. OK. Are we still rolling?

00:34:01:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

We're clear.

00:34:02:00

Interviewer:

OK.

00:34:03:00

Flint Taylor:

OK. Well, it seemed from the beginning very strange to us that, that Fred had been killed in his bed because Fred was a very active person. He practiced what he preached, and what the Panthers preached and what he prea—preached was to defend yourself. If the police came to your apartment, you defended yourself. They had guns in the apartment. And we could never quite understand, and the Panthers could never quite understand why he would have been assassinated in his bed and hadn't defended himself. But then it started to become clearer a little later on when an independent autopsy was performed. And this independent autopsy also had a toxicological exam done on the blood. And the—it was done at Cook County Hospital by the head of to—toxicology and she came back with the findings that there was a large amount of secobarbital in Fred's system at the time he was killed. Everybody knew that Fred wasn't a drug user. He didn't touch drugs, and that was uniformly understood. So, then it became a question of how these drugs got in his system. That came to the question of William O'Neal, ultimately. Although at the time it was, there must have been an informant. Everybody knew that there were informants in the party, and they knew that there was, to

quote people, someone had dropped a dime on the apartment. And so that person who had dropped the dime or who had informed on the apartment, it was assumed also had been involved in drugging Fred Hampton. Later, it was learned that O'Neal was involved with getting food for Fred earlier in the evening. And so there were a lot of questions about whether O'Neal had been involved in, in putting the drugs in Fred's system. There were two other toxicological reports done by the federal government, and one done I believe by the county. Neither of which found the, the drugs. And so it's always been a battle, a legal battle and a, and just a, a factual battle about whose toxicological report is right. But whether the, the, the—the other people of course had a reason to find what they found, particularly the federal government. So, it's, it's, it's a very big question mark in the case and in, in the, in the assassination that, to assure that they could kill Hampton did they drug him? And there is strong evidence to suggest that. When it first came out, it was shocking. I remember there was a press conference that we had with the pathologist, the independent pathologist, and when we released the results of the toxicological report. And it's, it's a very troubling, even to this day, [phone rings] question in, in the case.

00:36:52:00

Interviewer:

You've mentioned O'Neal. [phone rings] What, what are your recollections of him, and how people were dealing with him at the time. And just how active and involved he was with the Panthers, and, and what he might have been able to do.

Flint Taylor:

Well, he was very involved with the Panthers.

Interviewer:

Can you start with "O'Neal"?

00:37:10:00

Flint Taylor:

Oh, O'Neal was obviously very involved with the Panthers. He was the chief of security. He was involved in being Fred Hampton's bodyguard for a while. He seemed to always be around when things were happening. And I, I keep wanting to go into the [laughs]—

Interviewer:

[laughs]

Flint Taylor:

—and do the floor plan. I don't know if I can handle him without getting into that. I'm—

00:37:35:00

Interviewer:

Try.

Flint Taylor:

All right.

Interviewer:

Just talk a little bit around it.

00:37:38:00

Flint Taylor:

And he, he was also our client. As a Panther, he was a client of our office. So, we s—

00:37:45:00

Interviewer:

If you could start that, and say O'Neal.

00:37:46:00

Flint Taylor:

Oh, O'Neal was also a client of our office from early in '69. He was represented by some of my partners and particularly Dennis Cunningham. And so O'Neal was not only around the Panthers and important in the Panthers, but he was, seemed to be around all the cases and all, all the defense people, and he would be around the lawyers and that kind of thing. Perfect position for someone who was an informant or a provocateur. I mean most of his provocateurism we heard secondhand, but nonetheless we heard about it. And there were always rumors and feelings that he was an informant, that he wasn't playing with a full deck. But there was never enough, I think, for either the lawyers or the Panthers to decide that he should be expelled from the party and kept from coming around, so he continued to be around and be involved, and be able to have, be in a position where he could do the kinds of things that, [phone rings] that he was being ordered to do under the COINTELPRO program. [phone rings]

00:38:49:00

Interviewer:

OK, cut.

[cut]

[end of interview]

00:38:53:00

Copyright 2021 Washington University Libraries