



APRIL FREEDOM DAYS MOMENTS IN CIVIL RIGHTS HISTORY

By JANUS ADAMS

APRIL 11
When CORE launched the Freedom Rides in the 1960s, many thought it a new idea. It wasn't. The first Ride, called "The Journey of Reconciliation," took place in 1947, lasted two weeks, and traveled to fifteen cities in Virginia, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Kentucky.

ies promised as volume one, number one, of the *Black Panther* newspaper went on sale on April 25, 1967. Six months after founding the party, the Black Panthers launched their first cooperative business — the publication and distribution of the newspaper. Two legal-size sheets of paper, typed and printed on both sides, the *Black Panther* began with a first printing of ten thousand cop-

thers sought to rout. Who was getting the news and editing the paper? The *Black Panther's* "Minister of Information underground" — a provocative allusion to the parole status of Eldridge Cleaver. Writing for the established *Ramparts* magazine was one thing; editing the *Black Panther* was another. Cleaver knew that his work would target him for retaliation. His



Amazingly enough, as the group wound its way through Durham, North Carolina, on a Greyhound bus on April 11, 1947, while they were threatened with arrest, none was actually made. It was a first.

ies and grew to a circulation of fifty thousand copies within weeks. But the look of the newspaper only added to its credibility — here was a voice of, by, and for the people. That was its mission — as was made clear in a

would target him for retaliation. His fear was later borne out in the parole revocations of several ex-offenders who had become the paper's street vendors. The violation: "failure to maintain gainful employment." It



The *Black Panther* launched their first cooperative business — the publication and distribution of a newspaper on April 25, 1967. Their tabloid size edition was a voice of, by, and for the people.

APRIL 13
The Academy Awards ceremony is a ritual almost everyone is familiar — the glamour, the tension, the career-making voice that says "And the Oscar goes to..." On April 13, 1964, Sidney Poitier was on the hot seat with a Best Actor nomination for his performance as a handy-man upholding a reluctant vow to needy nuns in *Lilies of the Field*. He won — the first African American male actor in the forty-five-year history of the Oscars. What is it like to be there and to win? He answered eloquently in his autobiography, *This Life*.

APRIL 25
Why was Denzil Dowell killed? the handwritten headline demanded. It was just one of the ongoing inquir-

later, more sophisticated, tabloid-size edition of the paper with a masthead proclaiming "Power to the people." A major success, the *Black Panther* became increasingly important to the organization and the community as its profile heightened around the innovative night patrols that tailed police as witness and deterrent to the brutality that killed Denzil Dowell and inspired the first of many high-risk headlines and inquiries. "Denzil Dowell was unarmed" when shot by a Contra Costa County sheriff's officer, and the angle of the bullets suggests that his hands were raised, the paper reported. "So how can six bullet holes and shotgun blasts be considered justifiable homicide?" Justifiable homicide had been the frequent and official response that licensed police to kill blacks with impunity.

was a sign of the times.

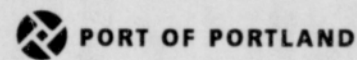
APRIL 28
Asked to comment in the press on his I-A draft status, World Heavyweight Boxing Champion Muhammad Ali tossed off the rhyme that would turn his fame into infamy: "Keep asking me, no matter how long — On the war in Vietnam, I sing this song — I ain't got no quarrel with the Viet Cong." A year later, having lost his bout for conscientious objector status on religious grounds, at 8:30 a.m. on Friday, April 28, 1967, he stood before Houston's Local Draft Board No. 61 for induction into the Army. Refusing induction could mean five years in prison. This is an excerpt from the book, *Freedom Days*. Permission for reprint is given by John Wiley and Sons, Inc.

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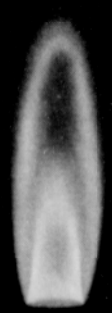


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