

two canny vantage points: The leadership and assassination of Fred Hampton, chairman of the Illinois Black Panther Party, in 1969, and Bill O'Neal, the young man who fed the FBI much of the information that made that assassination possible. The film is not a biopic, in the usual sense, and it doesn't try to be a definitive account of the Black Panther Party or the Black Power movement—we've got way more stories to explore. But the angles they have chosen, aided by two stunning lead performances and excellent supporting work, open the way to long-overdue curiosity about how the Party and its best leaders were viewed and targeted, and the way the cards were stacked against them, even inside the black community. This film both educates and, if we let it, helps us begin to realize how little we know.

The focus here, wisely, is on a brief window of time, about the last year-and-a-half of the short life of Fred Hampton. Murdered by law enforcement at age 21, he had managed to rise to leadership of the Illinois chapter of the Party, and was a charismatic visionary. Like the



Martin Luther King Jr. speaks after a Dec. 3, 1963 meeting with President Lyndon B. Johnson to discuss civil rights. The new documentary MLK/FBI explores the FBI's obsession with King. (National Archives photo)

older and more famous Martin Luther King Jr. (killed the year before he was), Hampton was clear in his politic, clear in his concern for the crushing and senseless poverty and violence that plagued the black community, and also clear that the black community was not meant to find its natural allies. He saw these problems as solvable, but requiring a revolution.

A focus here is the intensity of the FBI's obsession with

bringing down this young man, who was viewed (as King had been) as one of the most dangerous men in America. The film doesn't shy away from the violent rhetoric that was part of the politic of the Black Panthers and of Hampton himself, but subtly and without simplifying, it offers context for that rhetoric. Hampton spoke from a heightened awareness that the stakes for black people and indeed for all people

were much higher than popularly imagined, that a complete overhaul—indeed, a revolution—was demanded. That sense of the stakes is perhaps the most important contrast between movement leaders and the rest of the country—and also between Hampton and O'Neal.

Importantly, the film also conveys a sense that Hampton's use of violent rhetoric was not the real, main, or only reason that he was targeted by

law enforcement. As brilliantly embodied by Daniel Kaluuya, aided the canny choices of King and the creative team, a picture emerges of a young man motivated by love and prophetic vision, prepared to prioritize "the people" even at the cost of his own interests. Shortly before his death, Hampton elects to put collected resources into a medical clinic rather than into an exile that would have saved his life, ending debate with the simple question, "Is the party about me, or is it about the people?" Now that, friends, is dangerous—and it suggests why the Party's breakfast programs and medical clinics were perceived by law enforcement to be insidious and intolerable. The prevailing argument was that those efforts—getting done what white supremacy did not attempt to do, and with few resources to work with—were not a sign of ingenuity and resourcefulness but rather only a trick to lure people into becoming radicals. But looked at another way, those actions put freedom into the hands of the people and pointed the way to a liberation that was treated

CONTINUED ON PAGE 19

Pacific Northwest + iQ Credit Union =
**A uniQue way to live,
 work and bank.**

Bank less, Credit Union more. Join the adventure today!

iQcu.com | 800.247.4364 | Insured by NCUA **iQ**
 CREDIT UNION.