



Hazel

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The Life of a Panther

On June 15, 1969, J. Edgar Hoover and the FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation) declared "the Black Panther Party without question, represents the greatest threat to internal security of the country."

That same year 19 members from different BPP chapters across the country were killed. And BPP chapters became one of the FBI's biggest targets. Hoover's plot to dismantle the BPP was part of a program called COINTELPRO, a series of illegal projects that started in the 1950s and was aimed at infiltrating and dismantling American political organizations.

"At the time when we were formulating and joining, we were in the middle of the onslaught by J. Edgar Hoover and the FBI to destroy the party," Mack continued. "But it wasn't just the Party, they did the same thing to any organization or person that was about the business of moving our people forward. They were about killing and there was no doubt about it."

Mack said it wasn't a secret that they were being watched by the FBI and at times agents would go out of their way to let members know.

"I remember vividly walking down Liberty Street with Larry (Little) one day when the guy who was assigned to watch us rode down the street and made finger gestures as if he was going to shoot us," Mack said. "There was always this game of intimidation."

There were also times when the FBI used real guns and live ammo to try to send their message. Mack recalled one summer when the FBI and members of the Winston-Salem Police Department shot into a home on 23rd Street where several Panthers lived. Before the raid, Mack said law enforcement tried to frame members of the Party for stealing a truck full of meat.

"They sent a Black man with a meat truck to the house where people were living and who said he was donating meat to the program. He parked the truck there and left it so they said we stole that truck and they used that as pretense to shoot into that house on 23rd Street. They tore that house up with bullets; they shot in there to kill," she said.

Luckily there weren't many people in the house that day and no one was injured. Mack said there

were only two people in the house, an older gentleman they called "Papa Doc" and a teenager who law enforcement let go. Although he wasn't there at the time, the president of the local chapter, Larry Little, was arrested and charged, along with Papa Doc.

"They ended up charging Larry, Papa Doc and somebody else who wasn't even there," Mack chuckled. "The funny part is, Papa Doc couldn't even drive. So the man that they charged with driving the truck never drove, never had his license, and everybody knew he couldn't drive. So it was funny in some ways, but we had to go through a trial for that."

Another time law enforcement was openly violent. They targeted the local BPP headquarters when it was on 14th Street and Jackson Avenue. According to Mack, the headquarters on 14th Street was fortified and nearly impossible to overrun. "That was not a house that they were going to run up on because there was no way to get in, so they fire-bombed the house," Mack said.

At the time of the bombing, most of the members were in Philadelphia attending a conference hosted by the National BPP and no one was injured.

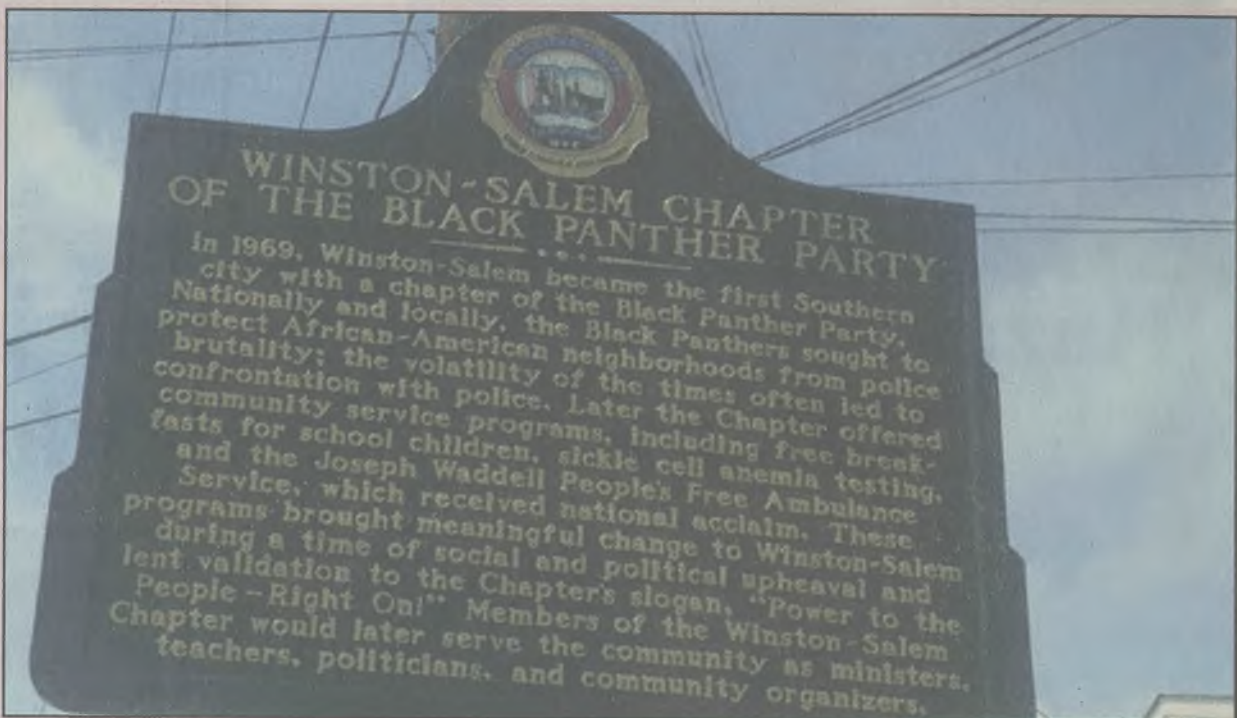
Mack said members of the Party had an understanding that they had a target on their backs and probably wouldn't live past the age of 30, but that was a sacrifice they were all willing to make.

"At that moment, to Hoover and the FBI we were the most dangerous organization in the country, which is why they had to kill certain people ... and they did have to kill us because we weren't going to stop," Mack continued. "Our goal was to stop the oppression of our people on a daily basis and nothing was going to stop that."

Life after the Party

The Winston-Salem chapter of the Black Panther Party stayed active in the community until 1978, but that didn't stop Mack and other members of the Party from continuing fighting against oppression.

Mack decided to take her fight to the courtroom and in 1980 she graduated from Temple University School of Law. In 1986 Mack started working for Legal Aid of North Carolina (LANC) where she worked for more than 30 years before retiring in 2016. While with LANC, Mack served as regional managing attorney and project director of the



Submitted photo

A marker honoring the Winston-Salem Chapter of the Black Panther Party, the first chapter in the South.

Home Defense Project.

"In my mind I was going to law school to better serve people and when I graduated law school I still wanted to serve the people, so I went into legal services first in Philadelphia, then I came back home," she said.

In fall of 1997, with the help of a group of determined people in Forsyth County, Mack opened Carter G. Woodson School, a public charter school that adheres to basic curriculum requirements of the state, but has several advantages, such as new and innovative approaches to improve on standard education practices.

Mack said she started looking into alternative learning options a few years before the school actually opened. She wasn't happy with the way her daughter was being treated in public school and she wanted to try something new. "My baby girl was not doing well in school and as I tried to get more involved, I realized it wasn't that easy. I was in the building a lot and I saw how children were being treated and I wasn't happy," she said. After home schooling her daughter for a few years, Mack said she saw other parents having the same issues and started laying the foundation for the school.

"I saw an opportunity," Mack said. "I put an announcement on a local radio station that basically asked parents to meet me at the East Winston Library on a Saturday morning and when I got there, it was standing room only and I knew I wasn't alone."

Today Carter G. Woodson serves students in grades K-12 and offers free tuition and bus transportation to and from many neighborhoods throughout the city.

Although she has officially retired, Mack is still working to uplift the community. She is the owner

of Other Suns, a multi-use business space where entrepreneurs can rent space to sell their own products and services.

For her dedication to uplift those in need, in 2016 Mack was awarded the Lifetime Achievement Award at The Chronicle's Annual Community Ser-

vice Awards.

When thinking back on her journey through life and her accomplishments, Mack said, "The best training I ever had for life was in the Black Panther Party. The best education I received in life was the years I spent in the Black Panther Party because it

taught me that I could do anything that I put my mind to," Mack continued.

"My experiences in life, with the help of Almighty God, have always been, take what you have and make what you want with it, and it all started with the Party."

WAKE FOREST UNIVERSITY FACE TO FACE SPEAKER FORUM

Connecting our campus and surrounding community with world-renowned voices of influence and change.



April 14, 2021 at 7:30 p.m.

Isabel Wilkerson

Bestselling author and Pulitzer Prize and National Humanities Award winner

Pre-programming will begin at 7 p.m. Recording is not permitted for this event. Isabel Wilkerson, the first black woman in American journalism to win the Pulitzer Prize, is celebrated for her deeply humane narrative writing. She is the acclaimed author of New York Times Best Sellers, "The Warmth of Other Sons" and "Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents." The Pulitzer Prize winner was awarded the National Humanities Medal by President Barack Obama in 2016 for "championing the stories of unsung history."

This virtual event is free for Face to Face Speaker Forum season subscribers. It is also free for Wake Forest students, faculty and staff as well as students and faculty in the Winston-Salem area.

Tickets for the general audience are \$10. Visit go.wfu.edu/facetoface to register for this event.



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