

FEATURES

BLACK POLITICS

The panther and the politician



JONATHAN FARLEY on the pitiful state of today's African-American leadership and how it got there

ACCORDING to declassified government reports, at 4.45am on December 4, a team of US-trained paramilitaries took position outside the home of a local insurgent leader.

An informant had provided them with a detailed floor plan of the house.

And evidence suggests that the insurgent leader had been given a sedative to ensure he would be asleep when the raid began.

The raid was executed flawlessly. Initial government reports stated that the US-backed paramilitaries had asked for the insurgents to surrender several times and had only reluctantly stormed the house after being rebuffed by small-arms fire.

But an NGO of independent forensics experts later concluded that the insurgents had fired at most two shots in response to the hundred or so rounds that had penetrated the building, almost all of them concentrated on the room where the insurgent leader and his partner, pregnant with their child, slept.

The insurgent leader was neutralised.

Is this Iraq?

No, this is Chicago, 1969.

The insurgent?

Black Panther leader Fred Hampton, 21 years old.

His crime?

Allegedly stealing \$71 (£43) worth of ice-cream and distributing it to poor children.

Hampton's personal bodyguard William O'Neal had drawn the floor plan of the house for the police.

"It is felt," an FBI agent wrote after the killing, "that this

FALLING SHORT: President Obama



information is of considerable value in consideration of a special payment for informant requested in the Chicago letter."

O'Neal was paid \$300 (£181) by the FBI after the Hampton slaughter.

FBI director J Edgar Hoover, a paranoid white supremacist, had branded the Panthers "the greatest threat to the internal security of the country" and initiated a counterintelligence programme to annihilate them — COINTELPRO. "Prevent the rise of a 'messiah' who could unify and electrify the militant black nationalist movement," Hoover ordered.

He then unleashed his storm troopers to conduct a vicious campaign of intimidation, sabotage, slander and murder, raiding Panther offices and arresting Panthers by the hundreds.

Not, as the media believed at the time, because the Panthers had guns, but because, as Hoover wrote in a secret memo, of

"On December 4 1969, black America lost something precious. Not the hope for change — the courage necessary to make it"

their Free Breakfasts for Children programme.

The Black Panther Party gave away free groceries and shoes, ran free health clinics and schools, assisted the elderly and fought for prisoners' rights.

Far from being violent thugs — creating this false image of the Panthers was an integral part of COINTELPRO — the Panthers were lovers of humanity who sought to realise the social gospel — to heal the sick, give sight to the blind, comfort the broken-hearted and set the prisoners free. They had to be stopped.

In 1982, the government paid the survivors of the raid and the families of its two victims, Mark Clark and Fred Hampton, \$1.85 million (£1.1m).

The cost of the raid to black America was considerably higher. Had Hampton lived, we might not have had to see such blight in Chicago and other cities today.

The police brutality that the

MISSED OPPORTUNITY: Former Panthers gather for the party's 40th anniversary reunion in 2006



DECLINE: Jesse Jackson and Harold Washington

Panthers sought to stop has led to billions of dollars in damages from riots.

The murder of Fred Hampton and the eradication of the Panthers, thanks to COINTELPRO, have led directly to the current, pitiful state of the African-American leadership.

From Jesse Jackson and Harold Washington to Barack Obama, we see a steady decline in the willingness of black leaders to stand up to racism or police abuses, to the ex-

tent that a white cop can arrest a black Harvard professor simply because the latter is in his own home, and the black president of the US all but apologises — to the cop.

On December 4 1969, black America lost something precious. Not the hope for change — the courage necessary to make it.

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Still lapping up the abuse

THE pusillanimous capitulation of the British government to its US masters (no Tiger Woods jokes please) has seldom been more evident than in recent weeks.

We have become used to the fawning adoration in which George Bush Jnr was held by Blair and further back the relationship between Thatcher and Reagan.

Those of you with a strong constitution may even just about have been able to stomach the love-in between Jack Straw and Condoleezza Rice.

But any lingering delusions that, first, there is a relationship and, second, that it is in any way reciprocal were well and truly buried by a sequence of events which has unfolded in the last few months.

Firstly we had the grotesquely coquettish courtship that is David Miliband and Hillary Clinton.

Clinton swooningly made Miliband out to be some latter-day Clark Gable recently.

Well, maybe — if it was an attempt at cloning which went horri-

The Paddy McGuffin column

cally wrong like the teleportation sequence in *The Fly*.

Clinton said, and I quote: "Well, if you saw him it would be a big crush. I mean, he is so vibrant, vital, attractive, smart. He's really a good guy. And he's so young!"

Personally I think there are two, absolutely transparent things going on there.

First it's the come-hither lure of a cobra hypnotising its prey and second it's a great way to wind up Slick Willy over his Lewinsky indiscretion.

Actually that's what Miliband resembles, an intern Foreign Secretary — if Hillary turns up with a cigar he should be very worried.

There's nothing 'special' about being a US stooge

He in turn said she was "a delight to deal with."

That's interesting — last month he was saying she was bullying him by threatening to withdraw US intelligence if he published seven paragraphs of a judge's ruling revealing CIA torture techniques used on Binyam Mohamed.

Information which had already been published by, er ... the US.

Classic sado-masochistic relationship.

There have been rocky patches, to be sure.

The release of Abdelbaset al-Megrahi, the framed Lockerbie suspect from his Scottish jail, allegedly led to apoplexy in Washington. You can understand that.

When the US frames someone they stay framed — and are quite

frequently executed into the bargain.

Yet more threats were hurled across the Atlantic, at the audacity of the Scottish government in releasing an innocent man with terminal cancer, like a toddler throwing rattles from its pram.

Lo and behold, a few months down the line another innocent, Asperger's sufferer and UFO aficionado Gary McKinnon, looks set to be handed over to the US as a blood sacrifice of appeasement.

The Spiv with the Shiv Alan Johnson knifed McKinnon and by extension the British justice system in the back.

Why would the British Home Secretary send a man who suffers from Asperger's to what in a very real sense could be his death in a

US penitentiary?

OK, as he keeps reiterating, there is no legal imperative for him to do so but what about good old fashioned decency and basic humanity?

For me and many others there is no other reason for the extradition other than the fact McKinnon is being used as a political pawn.

The so-called "special relationship" between the US and Britain is more like a textbook definition of spousal abuse than a mutual exchange of affection and parity of esteem.

Britain is bullied and cajoled into acquiescence by turn but seems unable or unwilling to break the cycle of abuse.

They don't need transatlantic summits and the UN security council — they need Relate.