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## SERVING THE COMMUNITY: TOLEDO, OHIO'S BLACK PANTHER PARTY

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Toledo, Ohio's chapter of the Black Panther Party (BPP) was not the largest or most influential chapter. However, its presence proved to be a valuable asset to Toledo's Black community in the early 1970s. In 1970, just three years after large-scale protests in Toledo and Detroit against police violence, the 1300 block of Dorr Street became home to the Toledo chapter Black Panther Party headquarters. The Toledo chapter donned the name National Committee to Combat Fascism (NCCF) and quickly organized a Free Clothing program and Free Breakfast program, modeled on

other chapters across the country.

By this time most BPP chapters had faced the coercive power of the state. The FBI assassinated Chicago leader Fred Hampton in 1969, and other chapters had their headquarters raided and attacked multiple times. Toledo was no different. For weeks Toledo Police Officers had been monitoring the NCCF headquarters. When one of the officers assigned to observe the organization was killed, instead of treating it as a criminal investigation the Toledo police responded by with full force against the Panthers. Although the murder was blamed on chapter leader John McClellan, two different trials ended in hung juries, and no new evidence was able to be presented against him. Despite the lack of evidence, the Toledo police responded with a vicious display of state violence. Within hours, forty officers surrounded the headquarters and "riddled... [the] Panther headquarters with bullets during a five-hour battle." Sixteen-year-old Troy Montgomery was seriously wounded. When the ambulance arrived, the police refused to allow the black ambulance driver Leroy Hardnett to take the boy to the hospital. Although the boy eventually survived, Hardnett reported at the time that "They told us to leave him in the streets and die."

In spite of such violence, this event was not the end of the NCCF in Toledo. John McClellan and the Panthers continued to be respected in the Black community, despite the attacks by the press and police alike. In July 1972 the organization hosted a "Community Day of Justice." Around "6,000 people, mostly Black, attended Community Day for Justice to show support for

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Free Food Program distributed "1,000 free full bags of groceries (with a chicken in every bag)." A "massive number" of people were registered to vote.

The example of the Toledo chapter of the Black Panther Party shows that in spite of adversity and state violence, the organization continued to fulfill the needs of the Black community through its highly successful survival programs. Although the history of the Toledo chapter is less renowned than Oakland, Chicago, or other chapters, its story is also an important part of the national struggle.

#### Sources:

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