

PART 3 : HISTORY OF BAYVIEW HUNTERS POINT

During the 1950s and early 1960s, the economic boycott proved to be an effective tool to ending employment discrimination in Hunters Point, in Downtown San Francisco Hotel and Banks and in stores and municipalities throughout the country. Realizing that the time was right, Black leaders across the country decided that Blacks should run for elected office. According to Brooks, the challenge was to "...prove that Blacks are qualified to hold any office in the country." Another reason for seeking elected office was that Blacks were frustrated with the inattentiveness of the city leaders like Mayor George Christopher, to problems with housing and police brutality. According to Sam X Jordan, "We as a group decided that the best way to attack a problem is to do it yourself, not look for the liberals. Just do it your own way."

Early in 1963, the Freedom Now party was organized and ran Sam X Jordan for the mayor of San Francisco. Jordan, a resident of Hunters Point since the late 1940s and a popular bar owner, was already known as "The Mayor of Butchertown." The main contenders in the race were Jack Shelly, who was serving in Congress and Harold Dobbs, a city supervisor. Of the many problems facing the campaign, one of the main ones was credibility. According to Jordan, "At first people thought it was a joke that I was running, even among many Blacks. They thought, 'oh, he just wants publicity.'" The San Francisco public was not used to seeing Black men or women running for office. Therefore, Brooks, Jordan's campaign manager made one of his main priorities to run a dignified campaign. We, "didn't let it get to a point where anyone could laugh at the campaign," he recalled.

Indeed, the Freedom Now party put forth a very serious platform. Jordan called for a 32 hour work week to reduce unemployment; He called for an integrated police department that ceased using attack dogs on peaceful demonstrators; He wanted the city to help provide decent low income housing. While Shelly and Dobbs were talking about building more freeways and getting more police dogs, Jordan was talking about housing and education and unemployment and discrimination. Despite the seriousness of the Freedom Now platform, people still questioned Jordan's qualifications for office. Brooks recalls that they embarrassed



SAM X JORDAN

alot of people at the endorsement forums attended by Shelly, Dobbs and Jordan. Ignoring the platform, voters would ask, "What makes Sam qualified?" Brooks recalls that he would respond sarcastically, "Let me see, he is the legal age and he is a citizen. It doesn't say anywhere that he has to have a PhD, does it?" Jordan would answer, "I'm a citizen and I vote. If they have created any more qualifications tell me and I will go get them." Jordan and Brooks would go on to attack Shelly and Dobbs for not dealing with the real problems of the city.

Jordan ran an active campaign, appearing constantly all over the city. He broadcast live on radio from his bar on Monday nights where, "The place was so packed people would be in the street," recalled Brooks. Brooks demanded equal time with Shelly and Dobbs. Whenever he saw them on TV he demanded that Jordan get to speak on TV. The campaign made auto caravans throughout the city. While people first thought the caravans were a publicity stunt, soon they were getting support. They held political rallies at the headquarters on Divisadero Street at-

tended by supporters like Miles Davis and Dizzy Gillespie.

The main support came from young people, especially at San Francisco State University. John Burton, later to become a congressman, was then student body president and organized the Jordan campaign on campus. While Jordan had scattered support throughout the city, he did not have the full commitment of the Black community. The "professional" Black community did not support Jordan because, "educated Blacks did not want to support uneducated Blacks," said Brooks. But Jordan did have enough support to scare the other candidates. Late in the campaign Dobbs tried to make a deal with Jordan. He offered to repay all of Jordan's campaign expenses if the Freedom Now candidate dropped out of the race. Jordan proudly refused. According to Brooks, "I was broke, everyone was broke, but there was a principal involved here."

Jordan ended up coming in third place, but not before getting almost 45,000 votes. Although the Freedom Now candidate did not become mayor, his platform has had a powerful effect on San Francisco politics. Jordan proved that a Black man could run a respectable campaign for the highest office in the city. More importantly, Jordan brought important issues to a process that usually dwells on platitudes. Jordan recently observed that, while "I didn't get elected...my platform is still being followed." Soon after the 1963 campaign the federal and city government began dealing with the issues of housing, and education and police brutality;

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issues that were the centerpieces of Jordan's campaign. These issues continue to dominate local politics today.

Due to continued Black protests for civil rights the mood of the country began to change during the late 1950s and early 1960s. For the first time since Reconstruction the Federal government used money to directly improve the economic and social situation in local communities for Black Americans. Under the guise of President Lyndon Johnson's war on poverty, money began to flow into Hunters Point. In fact, Congress required local participation in programs as a prerequisite for receiving Federal assistance. But this Federal money did not come to the community without a fight. City Hall resented Federal money going directly to the people of Bayview-Hunters Point and, in 1963-64, fought with Ron Dellums, then a clinical social worker in the area, Dr. Arthur Coleman, Osceola Washington Brooks and other community leaders for control over the funds. In 1964 Bayview Hunters Point won the battle. These Federal funds led to a blossoming of community efforts to alleviate some of the worst problems.

The centerpiece of the War on Poverty programming was the Economic Opportunities Council (EOC), formed in 1964 with money from the Economic Opportunities Act. Dr. Arthur Coleman, a longtime community leader became director of the council in Bayview Hunters Point. The EOC created new projects and adopted programs already begun by the Neighborhood Center and the Citizen's Committee. Some of the projects under the EOC included day care, head start, legal assistance, summer youth programs, and a community credit union; all aimed at giving the poor self determination. An education committee, begun under the



DR. ARTHUR COLEMAN

Citizen's Committee and adopted by the EOC, worked to change the treatment Black children received in local public schools. In the early 1960s, one school did not let Black children on the school stage during graduation ceremonies. The EOC, with the help of people like Mr. Percy Moore and Mrs. Eleanor Curry, fought this type of discrimination.

Another program was Youth for Service, which attempted to train high school drop-outs for jobs in downtown offices. The idea behind many of the programs was to give the education and the training to poor people so they could break out of the cycle of poverty. Other projects during this period included a child development center, with the help of Rosie Lee Williams, and family planning activities with Ruth Williams. While many older residents volunteered their time to lead programs, many young community leaders were paid to be community organiz-

ers and liasons between different local gangs. Between 1964 and 1971 the EOC spent \$8.6 million on poverty programs.

Another innovative community project during this period was the Hunters Point Food Cooperative at 6190 Third Street. The Coop, founded in 1965, was meant to save members money and create consumer awareness. While the Coop had 3600 members, only 15% were regular customers. The lower prices at the local Safeway discount chain proved to be too much competition. By 1971 the Coop closed its doors. According to Jordan, one of the organizers of the project, the Coop failed because they did not educate people enough about the benefits of buying non-label brand food.

The power of these local organizations were put to a critical test in the Fall of 1966. In Mid-September, 1966, a reporter for KQED asked Harold Brooks, during an interview on Hunters Point hill, about the possibility of an incident similar to the Watts riots happening in Hunters Point. Brooks prophetically responded that such a situation would only happen if a well liked youngster were killed by the police. Police brutality had long been a problem in Hunters Point. The all White police force often used attack dogs against peaceful demonstrators showing little sensitivity to the plight of minorities. The problem was so bad that Jordan made police brutality a major plank in his 1963 campaign. However, on the night of September 29, 1966, an anxious police officer fulfilled Brook's prophecy.

Mathew "Peanuts" Johnson

was a popular teenager in Hunters Point. Early in the evening of September 29 he was joyriding in a stolen car with some friends. When they were pulled over by Officer Kevin Johnson, the younger Johnson ran from the scene with the rest of his friends. The officer chased Johnson down the street and shot and killed him while he was running away. Within a few hours a crowd of young people gathered on Third Street wanting revenge. Adam Rogers, one of the youth leaders, phoned Brooks, who was then a com-

munity organizer for the EOC, and asked what he was planning to do about the situation. Brooks called a meeting at the Community center with the youth leaders to work out a response. Tensions were very high and many young people wanted to repeat the violence of Harlem, Watts and Newark. Brooks wanted to see if there was another way to respond because the police "would shoot first and ask questions later," if any rioting started.

During the planning meeting

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Tuesday night, the street outside the center was packed with young people. One teenager walked across the street from the center and threw a bottle through the Belmar Drug Store window, thus setting off a night of window smashing and random destruction by the area youth. Brooks called the mayor's office once the vandalism started to get the mayor to come to Hunters Point and address the problems causing the tension. Shelly arrived to a hostile crowd in the packed opera house. As Shelly told the crowd that the teenager could have been his own son, someone threw a brick, barely missing the mayor's head. Brooks quickly led Shelly out the back door as tensions continued to escalate. The police then imposed a curfew, ordering all people off the streets between the hours of 8:00PM and 6:00AM.

Late that night youth leaders formed the Young Men for Action committee to control tensions in the neighborhood. Led by Rogers and Sylvester Brown, the Young Men for Action negotiated a deal with the police whereby the police would stay out of Hunters Point and let local, respected youth patrol the neighborhood. On Wednesday Rogers, Brooks and others met with the Burton brothers and the chief of police to discuss the youth patrol. It was important to reduce police presence in the area because even the sight of a uniform evoked tensions. The meeting was interrupted by the news that the national guard and the police were in Hunter's Point and were fully armed.

Brooks and the others returned to the Community Center to find the police marching down Third Street to the corner

of Newcomb right outside the center. Something smashed, it could have been a bottle or a shot. At once the front line knelt down and the small army aimed their guns at the center and started firing. Many youth were in the center at the time and the fell to the floor to avoid the fusillade that engulfed the building. Brooks located an officer and told him that the center was filled with kids and no one had any weapons. The police ceased fire, leaving much structural damage, and a few people injured. Incredibly, no one was killed.

During the next few days tensions were extremely high. The Black Panthers held a demonstration on the hill, arguing that the community should get revenge on the police. Socialist groups also tried to capitalize on the tensions. Brooks, Rogers and other community leaders went to the demonstration to try to control the situation. Brooks climbed to the stand and told the groups, "This is affecting Bayview-Hunter's Point. We have committees set up. We will not let you get these kids killed out of foolish action." Brooks and other leaders wanted to get something constructive out of the violence.

The community organizations in Hunters Point proved tremendously effective in controlling the tensions in the next few days. Young Men for Action, the Johnson family, the EOC organizers and the leaders of the many block organizations all contributed to easing tensions and not letting the situation explode into the violence that engulfed other Black areas around the country. This success is a testament to the effectiveness of the leadership that had been working since the late 1940s to organize Hunters Point.

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