

Historical
Former Black Panthers Honor Attorney Bobby Caldwell
By
Mario Marcel Salas

Recently, former members of the Black Panther Party, People's Party II, SNCC, and a host of civil rights leaders and community people joined together in celebrating and paying tribute to African American lawyer Bobby Caldwell. Bobby Caldwell, known as the "people's lawyer," who began his legal practice in 1962, was praised by Black Panther Party alumni in Houston, Texas to an overflow crowd at the Riverside Restaurant. Brother Boko, a surviving member of People's Party II, and a former Houston Black Panther Party member, told of the attack on the People's Party II office by a murderous Houston Police Department in which Carl Hampton was assassinated on Dowling Street. Brother Boko told of the unwavering legal support given to the Black Panthers and civil rights workers by attorney Bobby Caldwell, and expressed his heart filled thanks to the man known as the "people's lawyer. "

Attorney Bobby Caldwell received praises from people who had been victims of political oppression under the infamous regime of FBI director J. Edgar Hoover. The FBI operated an illegal spy operation called COINTELPRO which was used as part of a government conspiracy to attack, intimidate, and kill leaders of various organizations, most specifically the Black Panther Party for Self Defense. Bobby Caldwell's wife and family members were also present and were treated to good food and festivities in honor of this giant Texas legal warrior for civil and human rights. Perhaps Bobby Caldwell's sister who now resides in Dallas gave one of the most stirring speeches. In her heart felt

remarks she said that she had never thought of her brother in the light of a civil rights warrior, and was warmed by the spirit of those who testified to his dedication to defend political activists. She said she would never look at him the same way and was proud of her brother's contributions. Also in attendance were well-known playwright Thomas Meloncon, and political activist Jewdon Bony.

Attending the event were young brothers sharply dressed in the spirit of the Black Panther Party and People's Party II, and were referred to as brothers from People's Party III. Though the FBI and various law enforcement agencies attempted to destroy the Black Panther legacy, it lives on in the hearts and minds of thousands of people who will not let the important contributions made by the Black Panther Party disappear. The Panthers gave African American men and women pride and hope in their commitment to the struggle to end racism, colonialism, classism, and other forms of oppression against people of all "races."

The program also included an unveiling of a portrait of Bobby Caldwell that drew a large round of applause as Bobby Caldwell came forward to receive the beautifully drawn picture. It was during this time that attorney Caldwell thanked the crowd for the warm tribute and drew an even bigger applause when he said that he still had some fight left in him if needed. Testimony from the audience at large revealed the legal skill that brother Caldwell had when he questioned a Houston Police officer on the stand in the 1970s who was attempting to falsely charge political activists. This reporter was able to bring greetings from the San Antonio SNCC-Panthers who thanked Brother Caldwell for his

spirit and dedication to the cause of human dignity. Brother Boko perhaps summed up the evening best when he said that it's about time we honored Bobby Caldwell, but that it was the right time for things to come together.