

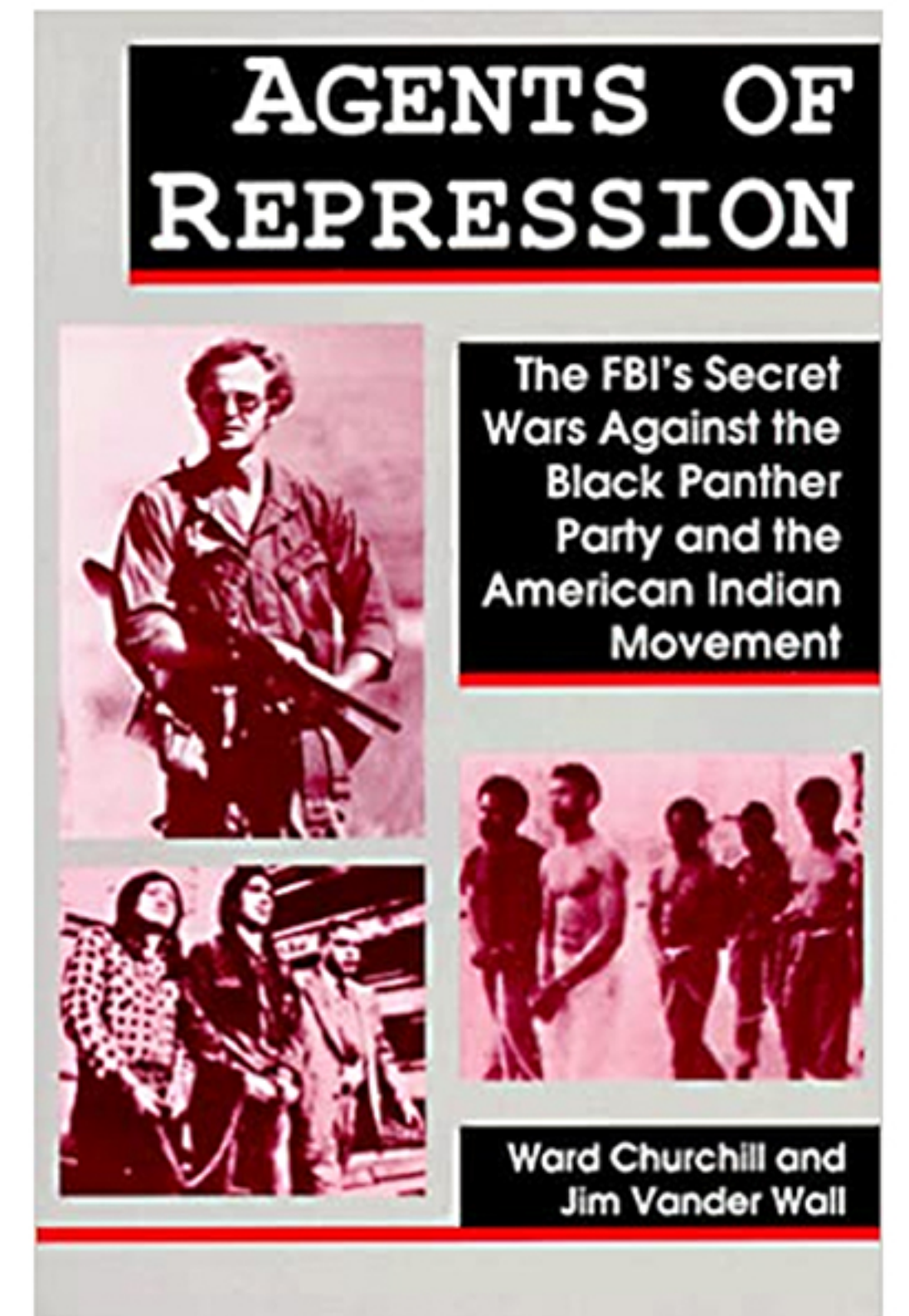
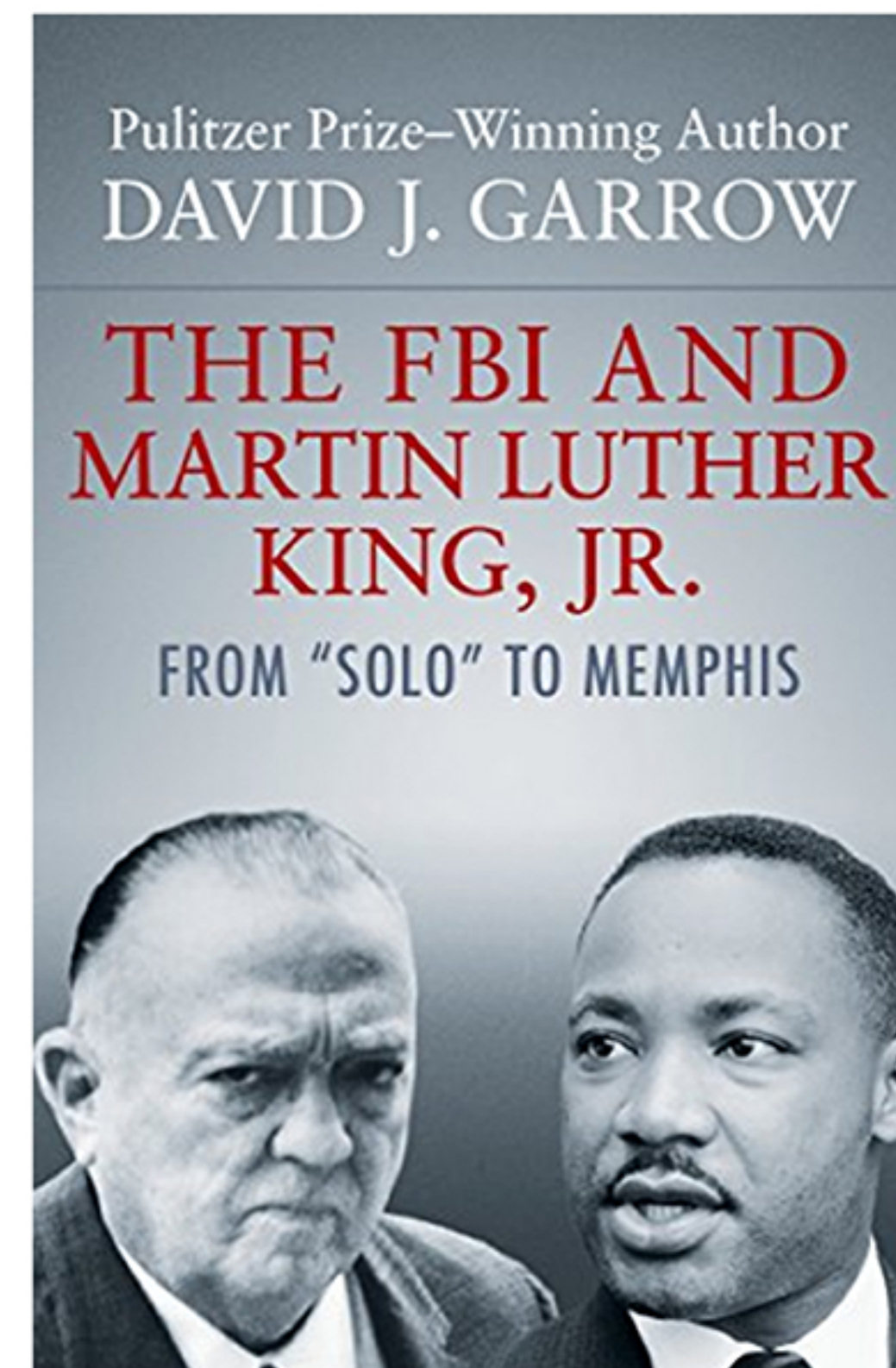
# THE ZEITGEIST\* OF REVOLUTION

## Federal, State, and Local Authorities Attack Black Organizations

Events leading up to 1974, both in the United States and abroad, meant that the call for revolution in Montgomery had to be taken seriously. The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), along with law enforcement agencies throughout the United States, worked to undermine mainstream civil rights organizations, including the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). Repressive state actions intensified in the mid-1960s with the emergence of the California based Black Panther Party for Self Defense (BPP). Despite providing community services, including free lunches, ambulance services, tuberculosis testing, and sponsoring literacy programs, law enforcement agencies used subterfuge and disinformation to destabilize not only the BPP but also SCLC, SNCC, and other civil rights organizations.



Armed Black Panthers at the California State Capitol, 1967



The BPP challenged police brutality in Oakland, California, and then lodged a protest against a proposed bill that forbade people from carrying loaded weapons in public. Opposition to the proposed law came in the form of two dozen members of the BPP armed with rifles and shotguns, showing up during a session of the California state legislature. In the aftermath of this and other demonstrations, federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies throughout the United States intensified their campaign, turning to disinformation, extortion, and even assassination to "neutralize" these groups.



## African Americans Turn to Armed Resistance

In response to the assault waged by law enforcement agencies, Black activists reorganize around armed resistance. Some members of the Black Panther Party for Self Defense spun off an underground paramilitary wing to confront repressive state action. In addition to shootouts in Oakland, Los Angeles, Chicago and New York, Black Panthers were linked to assaults, extortion, bombings, and hijackings. In 1970, members of the BPP joined other activists in the formation of the Black Liberation Army (BLA), with the goal of countering state sanctioned violence against Black people. BLA members in New York, Missouri, and Atlanta, were implicated in police killings, extortion, as well as the robberies of bank and drug dealers. Yet another group, the Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM), plotted to blow up the Statue of Liberty as they promoted Black self-determination through armed struggle.

## The Culture of Revolution

The notion of revolution was expressed throughout Black popular culture. In 1970, the New York based Last Poets released a self-titled album featuring the songs "Niggers Are Scared of Revolution," and "When the Revolution Comes." Their album reached number three on the Top R&B Albums chart in the United States. The next year spoken word performer Gil Scott Herring responded to "When the Revolution Comes" by recording the popular, "The Revolution Will Not Be Televised." On the big-screen, Melvin Van-Peebles' starred in his own breakout movie, "Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song." In this movie the main character, Sweet Sweetback, kills two corrupt police officers who attempted to frame him for murder. In the ensuing manhunt, the Black hero is not captured but successfully escapes to Mexico, beyond the reach of United States authorities. Van-Peebles Sweet Sweetback ushered in the "Black Exploitation" genre, a series of Black films with viral Black leading men, and sometimes women, dealing out violent vigilante justice.



Gil Scott-Herring

## A Bustling Downtown Montgomery

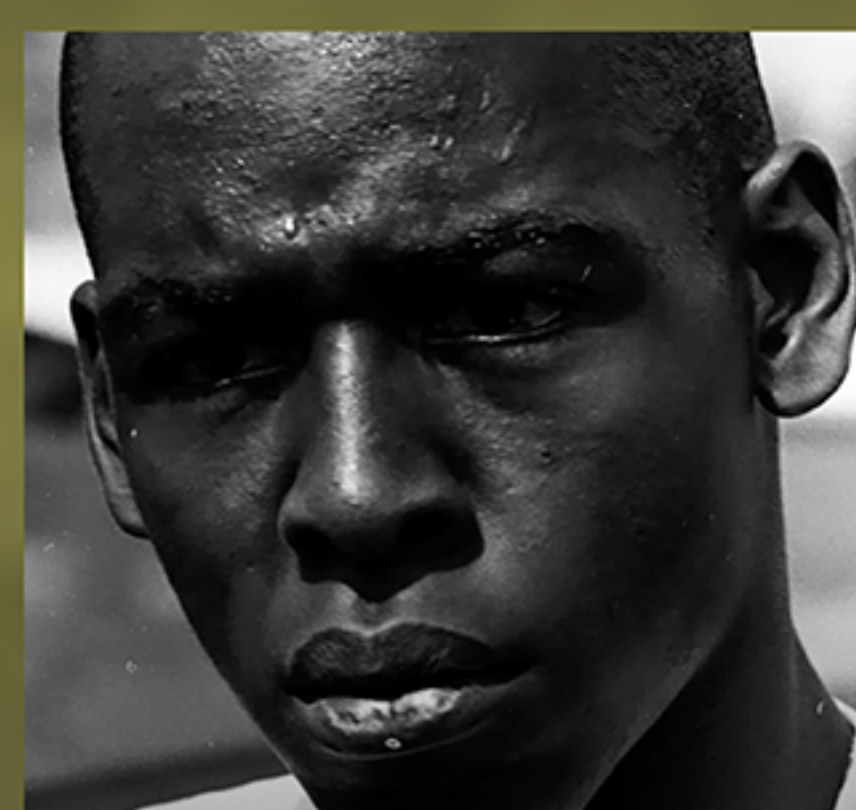
In the early 1970s, before the spread of strip shopping centers and the advent of large shopping malls redefined the urban retail landscape, downtown Montgomery was still the bustling epicenter for business and shopping in the region.



\* Mood or spirit of a particular period of history as portrayed in the ideas and beliefs of the time.

## Members of the Black Messiah Karate Club Rob the Delchamps Grocery Store and Kill an Employee

On an October evening members of the Black Messiah Karate Club planned to rob a downtown grocery store. A crime that served as a prelude to the call for revolution and a shootout on Dexter Avenue. On the night of October 9, 1974, four men armed with shotguns and pistols, including Arthur Lewis, Reginald Robinson, Julius Davis, Amos Williams, entered a downtown Delchamps Grocery store wearing ski masks and overcoats.



After entering the store, the men announced, "this is a holdup" and forced cashier Daisy Johnson to hand over \$630.00 from her register. When grocery manager Crawford Herring was unable to open another register, Arthur X announced "this White man thinks I am playing" and fired a fatal sawed-off shotgun blast into Herring's neck. After the shooting Arthur X said "Let's go," and the men ran out the front door. Cashier Johnson then shouted, "they shot Crawford," and pleaded with her co-workers to "call the police." Outside, another two men, Alfonso Davis and Charles Williams, arrived in a separate car with orders to serve as lookouts. Together, the six men fled the scene only to meet back at the apartment of Arthur X. Evidence from this robbery turned murder, including shotgun shells, would connect the men involved in the robbery to a shootout later in the week in downtown Montgomery.

# RADIO STATION TAKEOVER AND THE CALL FOR REVOLUTION

## Assault - Murder - Kidnapping

On Saturday morning, three days after the Delchamps robbery, Arthur X and his five accomplices traveled downtown in two separate cars. It was near 80° when Charlie Williams drove Alphonso Davis in a car they parked on Commerce Street. Arthur X, Julian Davis, Amos Williams, and Reginald Robinson were in a second car that they parked on the adjacent Dexter Avenue, in front of Belk Hudson's Department Store. The men got out of the cars, converged on Dexter Avenue and began walking down the street when Arthur X announced that no one better say anything to him.

The men began kicking at parking meters when a 78-year-old White man, Aldron Parham, commented to a group of White men about the Asian style dress of Arthur X and his associates. Parham asked Arthur X why he and the other fellows were destroying the meters? After a verbal exchange Arthur X drew a machete that had been strapped to his back, held it in front of Parham, and then slash the septuagenarian deeply across the face. Arthur X, Julius Davis, and Reginald Robinson retreated across the street to the automobile parked in front of the Belk Hudson store. At the same time Alfonzo Davis, Charlie Williams, and Amos Williams fled the scene and left Montgomery.



Shootout on Dexter Avenue



Arthur X

### Police Honor Slain Officer At Rites Here

Police officers wearing black hats over their badges attended the funeral of slain Officer Manford Furr this morning at St. Paul's Episcopal Church. Furr was shot by three men on Dexter Avenue in a killing that police Chief Ed Wright called today as "a deliberate, premeditated killing."

"According to eyewitness accounts a man named Arthur X, a 30-year-old man, was driving on Dexter Avenue in the opposite direction, rammed into the patrol car at the intersection of Dexter and Lawrence Street."

Those of them that got out of the patrol car, with "Parham" being Thompson, B. H. Mallory, and D. J. [unclear] in the car, and they fled the back of the back door," Wright said.

Then, he said, they ran back down the street to the radio station #275, which they shot.

Three of the group were subsequently arrested at the radio station. Of the two who escaped, one later turned himself in to local law enforcement.

All of the gang are members of what Wright called "a splinter group of the Black Muslims." There is a so-called Black Muslim mosque, established by James H. Ray, with whom Wright conferred privately.

Wright said that the splinter group is "very active in the community" and that it "has shown activity before."

All of the captured gang members in City Jail. They are refusing meals, according to warden Robert Brockhead. Several of them have asked for writing materials, he said.

The Black Muslim leader made a statement Monday that his organization had nothing to do with Saturday's terrorist activity.

Police say that the captured gang members were in a meeting in the front of Delchamps' building last night when they were shot. The men were charged with first-degree murder in the past slaying, and are being held on \$100,000 bond each.

Alphonso Davis of Montgomery was reported in intensive care at Jackson Memorial Hospital Monday.

Charles Gilmer, the radio station secretary who received a head wound in the slaying, has been taken to Jackson Hospital where a neurosurgeon reported she "had a good night."



M. C. Furr

## The Murder of Manford Furr

As news spread about the assault on Parham, retired police officer Manford Furr left his security post at H. L. Green's store. He began to approach the three remaining men who were seated in a Chevrolet Impala. Arthur X with his gun in hand got out of the car and met officer Furr in the middle of Dexter Avenue, where Arthur X shot the officer at close range. Montgomery Assistant Police Chief Roy Houlton, who was parked on Dexter Avenue in front of Belk's Department Store, witnessed the assault on Parham and the shooting of retired officer Furr. Houlton drew his weapon and fired shots at the fleeing men. Another patrol car then blocked the escaping vehicle prompting the men to flee the car firing several volleys at the pursuing officers. They managed to get back into their car and then sped-up Dexter Avenue where detective Jimmy Lisenby rammed into them head-on. The three again jumped out of the car while engaging the police in a running gunfight. A police dispatcher made individual calls asking all off duty officers to bring all the firearms and ammunition they could gather. Assistant Police Chief Houlton summoned every available officer, not only all off-duty city police officers, but officers from other agencies as well. Eventually, Sheriff's Deputies, Game Wardens, State Troopers, and even National Guardsmen showed up with weapons.

## Radio Station Takeover and Hostages

Amid flying bullets the gang ran up Lawrence Street, rounded the Alabama Power Company building on Washington Street, tried unsuccessfully to get into the back door of a bank, and then made their way back down Dexter Avenue to WAPX radio station. The men sought refuge in a Rhythm and Blues format radio station, on Dexter Avenue only three blocks from the state Capitol. Entering the front door the gang confronted station secretary Gloria Gilmore. At gunpoint Arthur X pushed his way into the station and told Alfonso Kent Dixon Jr., aka "Ugly Al," a twenty-year-old disc jockey, that if he "did not want to die," he needed to finish his broadcast, "get in there and start talking." The gang held the secretary and disc jockey as hostages while repeatedly interrupting programming to appeal for help from the Black community. They took turns imploring Black people to take up arms and join the confrontation with local law enforcement;

**"Everybody, everybody Black on the streets. You all ain't never thought nothing like this would happen in Montgomery, Alabama, did you? Yeah? Well, here it is. Right here in you all's capitol. It is going to be ours in a few days, because we are going to stand up and take it, or die trying."**

## WAPX Program Manager Al Dixon Sr. Tries to Negotiate Hostage Release



Al Dixon, Sr.

Al Dixon Sr., station program manager and father of one of the hostages, heard the broadcasts and made his way to Dexter Avenue. After arriving Dixon asked Police Chief Ed Wright to let him go inside the building to negotiate the release of the hostages. The program manager, who was actually familiar with several of the men, was not allowed to enter the building. He was able to employ a loudspeaker and request the release of his son and the secretary. Inside the station, Gilmer, while suffering from a 38-caliber gunshot, asked Arthur X if she could go to the bathroom and clean the blood from her head wound. In the bathroom, Gilmer locked the door and then made her way out a window and into a rear courtyard where she shimmied up a tree to the roof of the station. Gilmer was soon spotted and rescued after a fire truck extended a ladder to retrieve her.

## Authorities Fire Volleys into Radio Station



Outside of the radio station Montgomery Police Chief Ed Wright "was trying to make demands on the hostage takers." However, officer Brian Bodine said "all bets were off" when the sounds of additional shots interrupted the conversation. Officers showered the radio station with another façade of bullets. Police employed mattresses to protect themselves

while other officers hid behind nearby cars to shield themselves from return fire. The whole scene became even more surreal with the arrival of a helicopter and the continued sound of sporadic gunfire.

## African American Crowd Gathers on Dexter Avenue



From inside the radio station broadcasts continued for forty minutes as members of the gang called on the city's Black community to join in the "revolution." Alabama Revenue employee George Howell remembers the appeals, "Come on down brothers and sisters, the revolution has begun." Other accounts recalled the men saying "this is life. Ain't no movie... the time for unity is now. Everybody come and help us. Tulane Court, Trenholm Court, 'call them out brother," "Smilie Court, Gibbis Village, Carver Village, every village, everywhere, we need you." "Come on brothers and sisters get from under that dress tail... leave the dress tail alone and come on down here and stand up with me brother, that's all I want you to do." "Come on and fight brothers and sisters." When the hostage takers were not making appeals for help, they instructed Ugly Al to play music. And then after a few songs listeners would hear, "Yeah, they're trying to kill us all right, and don't think we ain't trying to kill them. So, come on and get you one, because I'm going to get mine."

## State Troopers Discharge Weapons to Disperse the Crowd



The on-air announcement calling for an African American revolution created a stir in Montgomery. While there were already many Black people throughout the downtown area. A crowd of African Americans gathered behind police barriers several blocks from the radio station at the Arsenian Well on Court Square.

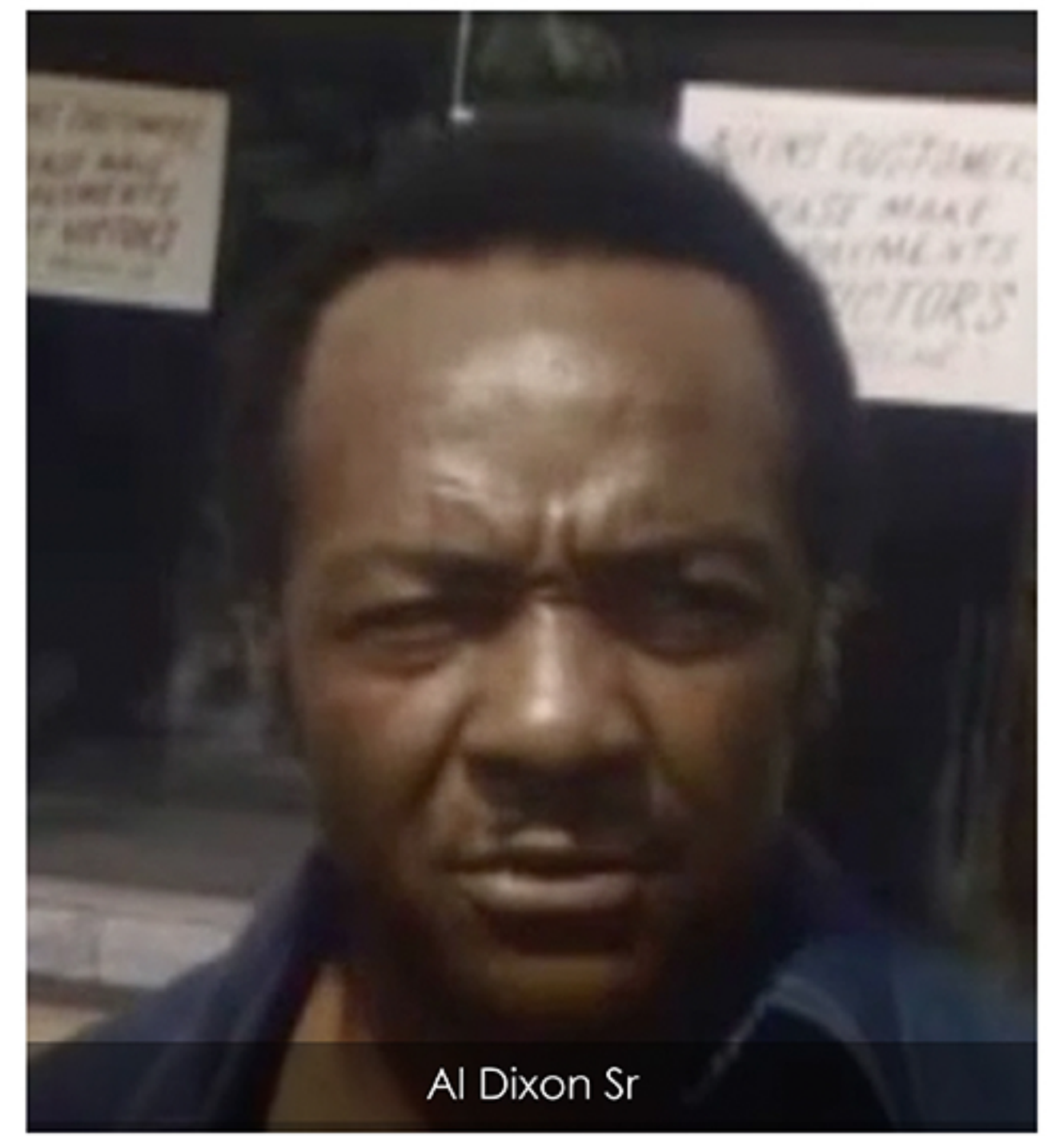
State Troopers confronted the crowd and demanded that they disperse, and when the crowd did not leave, one officer fired dozens of shots into the air. This brazen show did succeed in dissolving the crowd. But as far as the hostage takers were concerned, no one responded to their call for help. The men in the radio station expressed their disillusionment announcing that "this is the revolution... and the people must be scared of it." Local police, anxious to end the radio transmission, found station engineer Reid Spann, drove him a few miles away to North Decatur Street, where the officers ended the incendiary broadcasts by cutting the power and disabling the radio transmission.

\*Zeitgeist - Mood or spirit of a particular period of history as portrayed in the ideas and beliefs of the time.

# THE AFTERMATH

## WAPX Program Manager Al Dixon Sr. Criticizes Police for Indiscriminate Fire

During the almost three-hour standoff, Dixon, Sr. expressed disdain for law enforcement officers who fired indiscriminately on the radio station, instead of waiting-out the hostage takers. The assailants protected themselves from the constant fire by staying low and retreating into a rear courtyard. For part of the time hostage Ugly Al laid prostrate on the west side of the building, allowing him to escape the gun fire hitting the building from the front. The young Dixon then managed to establish telephone contact with the police, informing Captain Dick Reeves that he planned to escape. The D. J. ran out of the front door, rolled under a park car, and with police assistance made his way down the street away from the station.



Al Dixon Sr



## The Surrender

With both hostages safely out of the radio station, officers fired volleys of tear gas into the building. But the standoff did not end until Black Police Community Relations officer John Anderson was able to talk the three hostage takers into surrendering. The men walked out of the building with their hands raised before being arrested and driven to city jail.

## The Aftermath

While the three hostage takers emerged from the ordeal mostly unscathed, they all served lengthy prison sentences. Despite being represented by Civil Rights attorneys J. L. Chestnut and noted attorney Solomon Seay, the men who took over the radio station spent decades in prison. Arthur Lewis received three life sentences and died in prison on August 4, 2017. After several trials Reginald Robinson was sentenced to consecutive life terms but was paroled on April 3, 2000. Julius Davis was also sentenced to life for the murder of Crawford Hering but was paroled on January 25, 1993.

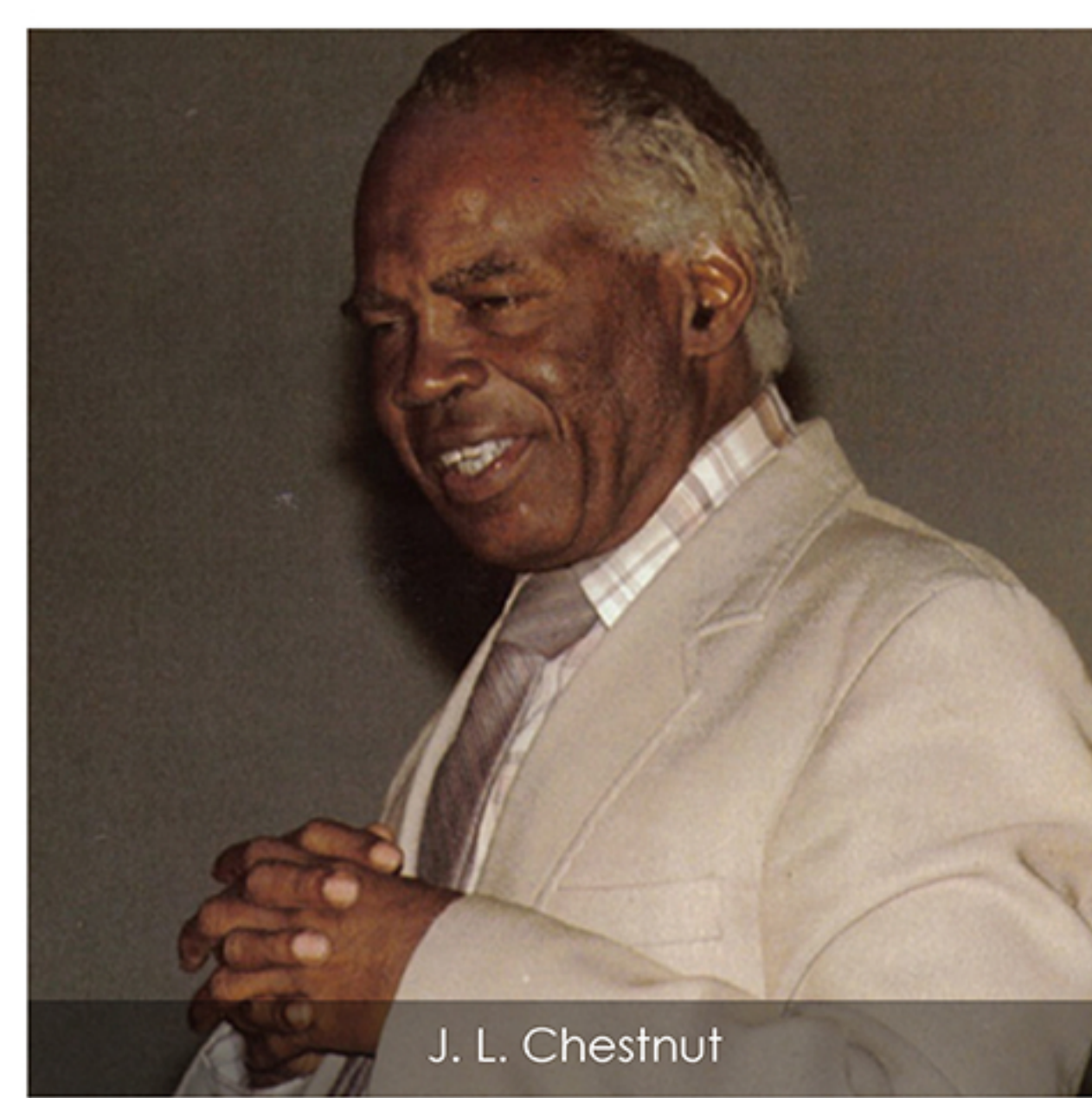
For the men who left town after the Delchamps robbery and murder, Alfonso Davis turned state's evidence, was convicted for the Delchamps robbery, and spent 15 years in prison. In 2006, Davis, a free man, died of a brain hemorrhage in Montgomery's Jackson Hospital. Charles Williams, who also turned state's evidence, was similarly convicted of the Delchamps robbery, and he spent 15 years in prison. Williams died on February 7, 1994. Amos Williams who fled the state after the Delchamps robbery was captured in Kentucky later that year, was extradited back to Montgomery where he stood trial and was sentenced to life in the penitentiary.



Solomon Seay, Jr.



Arthur Lewis, aka Peter Rabbit

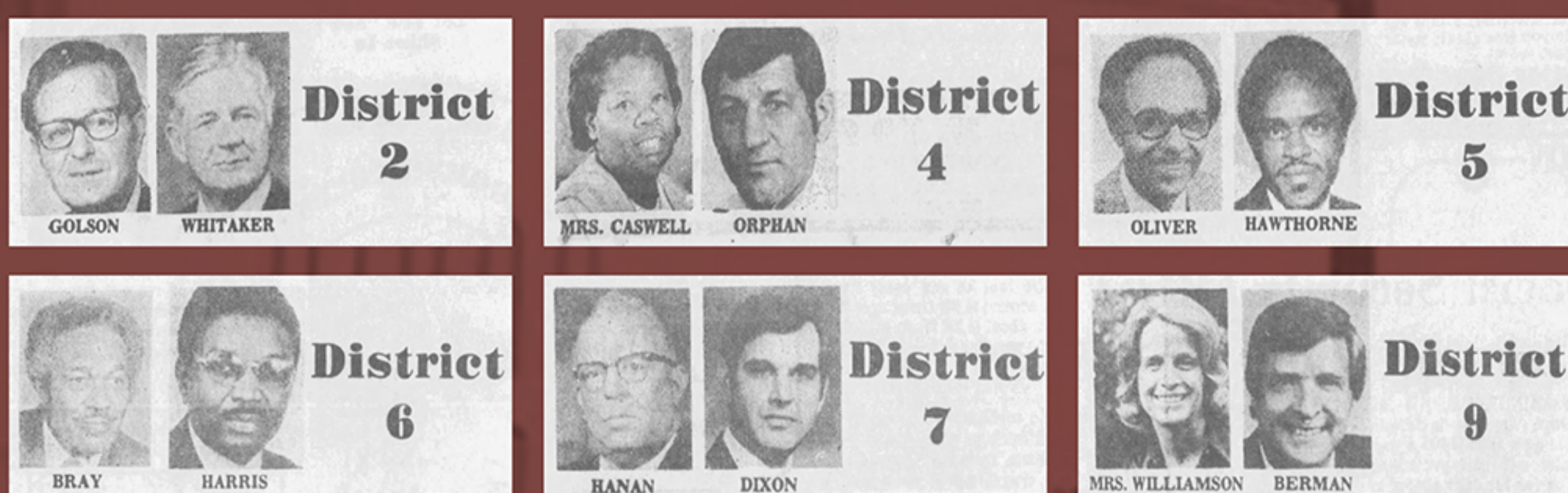


J. L. Chestnut

Solomon Seay, Jr., speaking at a conference in Montgomery, Alabama, sponsored by the Fellowship of the Concerned, the Southern Regional Council, and the Alabama Council on Human Relations, 1966. (Jim Pepler Southern Courier photograph collection, Alabama Department of Archives and History)

## The Surprise of 75

In Montgomery, the call for a Black revolution on October 12, 1974 was a desperate plea by a motley group of petty criminals. But actual revolution and acts of revolutionary violence captured both domestic and international headlines. Moreover, the theme of revolution could be heard among intellectuals and among Black nationalist alike. The action and ideas of these Americans found its way into the popular imagination through music and poetry as well as film and theater.



Montgomery Advertiser of Montgomery City Council's election in September of 1975

In Montgomery, a decade after the historic 1965 Selma to Montgomery voting rights march, African Americans in the capitol city still believed racism persisted. Black Montgomery weighed the choice of pursuing wholesale change by a violent overthrow of the government, or reforming the system to make it more responsive to the needs of Black community. In keeping with the reformist approach promoted by the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and other civil rights organizations, Black people in Montgomery pursued change through political representation. In 1975, a lawsuit forced the City of Montgomery to abandon its three-person Commission form of government. Instead, the city adopted a nine member City Council with a separate "strong" Mayor. The 1975 municipal election saw Black candidates win four of the nine City Council positions. These candidates represented the first African Americans elected to city government in a century. As members of the Black Messiah Karate Club called for armed revolution, Black citizens in Montgomery voted to challenge White supremacy through political representation.

## The Decline of Downtown



Dexter Avenue, Times Gone By

The WAPX takeover and shootout, as well as the call for revolution had a lasting impact on Montgomery. For the city's shopping public, the astonishing events made many Montgomeries afraid to venture downtown. Changing shopping habits prompted store owners to begin moving their business to shopping centers throughout the city, or to occupy space on the outer fringe of the city in one of the city's two shopping malls. The shootout also prompted the Montgomery Police Department to organize a SWAT team to give the department greater capabilities to respond in these types of rare but challenging situations.