

New Haven Black Panther Trials and May Day at Yale

May 19, 1969, Bobby Seale, national chairman of the Black Panther Party, comes to New Haven to deliver a speech at Yale.

May 20, 1969, 19-year-old Black Panther Alex Rackley is murdered in New Haven, CT. According to *Murder in the Model City*, Rackley had been suspected of being a police informant and had been executed by local Panther party members. Tapes and testimony now reveal that George Sams, Lonnie McLucas and Warren Kimbro were Rackley's actual executioners.

May 22, 1969, Police raid the New Haven Black Panther headquarters (365 Orchard street) and arrest a number of local panthers, including Ericka Huggins, an important leader of the local Panther party.

August, 1969, Panther George Sams swore out an affidavit implicating Chairman Bobby Seale in Rackley's murder. His testimony has since been proven to be false.

March, 1970, Chairman Bobby Seale is extradited to Connecticut, and New Haven becomes the center of Panther and Yippie protest efforts against his trial. The trials for Bobby Seale and the other Panther defendants is set for the summer of 1970.

Early April, 1970, the Panthers and other radical reform movements decide to hold a national rally in New Haven on May 1, 1970.

April 15, 1970, Harvard closes and locks its gates against a rally organized by the white radical group Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). Violence ensues between the 3,000 protestors and the 2,000 police officers summoned to protect the Harvard campus. By the end of the night, 214 people are hospitalized. White Yippie leader Abbie Hoffman vows that marchers would burn down Yale on May 1.

April 21, 1970, over 5000 Yale students gather for a rally called by the students' Strike Steering Committee (headed by the BSAY) at Ingall's Rink. Shortly after the rally at Ingall's rink, Yale President Kingman Brewster decides to keep the Yale campus open to protesters – in contrast to Harvard's choice to close their campus on April 15.

April 23, 1970, Brewster presides over a faculty meeting where academic "expectations" are suspended for the rest of the semester.

At this faculty meeting, Brewster delivers the following remarks, which are later released to the public: "I personally want to say that I am appalled and ashamed that things have come to such a pass in this country that I am skeptical of the ability of black revolutionaries to achieve a fair trial anywhere in the United States. In large part, this atmosphere has been created by police

actions and prosecutions against the Panthers in many parts of the country. It is also one more inheritance from centuries of racial discrimination and oppression.”

Brewster’s remarks are met with public criticism from politicians around the country, including the Vice President Spiro Agnew.

Two days before May Day, four thousand National Guardsmen and two thousand state troopers are dispatched to New Haven. Thousands of marines and paratroopers are on standby in nearby states.

The rally kicked off at noon on **May Day (May 1, 1970)**, with 15,000-20,000 protesters gathering on the New Haven green.

The rally proceeds peacefully, with music and speeches, until 9:30pm, when a smaller group of about 1,000 marchers collide with police and are bombarded with tear gas at the New Haven Green. A pair of bombs then go off at Ingall’s Rink. There are no major injuries. Only 21 arrests are made in total.

Henry Louis Gates, Jr., who was a sophomore at Yale College at the time, recalled that “For many of us who witnessed this exciting time, it was the most noble moment in the history of Mother Yale.”

Days later, on **May 4, 1970**, four student protesters are shot and killed by national guardsmen at Kent State, Ohio. On May 15, two student protesters are murdered by police at Jackson State, Mississippi. Strike activities continue on the Yale campus.

October 1970, Bobby Seale and Ericka Huggins go on trial. The jury remains deadlocked 11 to 1 for Seale’s acquittal and 10 to 2 for Huggins’ acquittal.

May 1971, Judge Harold Mulvey dismisses all charges against Huggins and Seale, saying, “I find it impossible to believe that an unbiased jury could be selected without superhuman efforts – efforts which this court, the state, and these defendants should not be called upon either to make or to endure.”