

## **Fred Hampton**

*Ben Valore-Caplan (1994)*

*This twenty-year-old leader of the Chicago branch of the Black Panther Party organized literacy, breakfast, and drug-treatment programs on Chicago's West Side. On December 4, 1969, the Chicago police—under orders from Edward V. Hanrahan, State's Attorney for Cook County and in conjunction with the FBI—staged a five AM raid on the Black Panther headquarters on Monroe Avenue. Fred Hampton and co-leader, Mark Clark, were assassinated in their sleep.*

Fred Hampton would be forty-six now.  
Perhaps he would be a teacher,  
Lighting fires where others blind  
Had waited cold for years,  
Hoping for a human spark to warm their eyes,  
To dry the salty stick of their tears,  
To try and try and try,  
And when a child can't comprehend why  
Words are worth their weight in bullets,  
Hampton would point through a shattered window  
To Monroe Avenue,  
Covered in the slippery residue  
Of red lines, bylines, police lines,  
And the child would find  
Piles and trials of words stacked higher than  
A child's hand is allowed to reach  
Except Fred Hampton Shoulders hold her up,  
Until, asleep, they are filled with bullets.

Or maybe Fred Hampton would be a doctor,  
Mama Day for a modern America,  
Where pot, not poems fill the minds  
And even the most dreamful person finds  
On the street,  
Shards of hope cutting holes  
In philosophers and physicists  
Who might never know what they've missed  
Or how they could have kissed the clouds.  
And how he would help us now,  
Build temples where once bodies languished.  
With language real and mind of knowing,  
Doctor Hampton would be going off in search  
Of cereal and fathers  
For to break the fasts that  
Break us,  
He would find them and bind them

To our bones,  
That our homes become havens,  
Not rooms full of holes that rip us apart  
In the deadly Daly purge  
That stopped Fred Hampton's heart,  
And left ours in pieces.

He never saw past his twenty years, but he saw.  
And I don't care how  
He could have lived between then and now,  
'Cause there are no obligations.  
But he could have had such a time,  
Fred Hampton!  
Had he been allowed to be alive.