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Ralph Moore biographical sketch

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Ralph Moore

Written by Justin Turner.

Ralph Moore was a civil rights activist and editor for the Black United Front, a black power newsletter during the 60s and early 70s. His affiliations with the local Black Panther Party and his radical writings in the newsletter, he exposed and fought racial injustice and systemic racism.

Moore was born in 1940 and died in 2019. He was a Chattanooga native and grew up during the Jim Crow era. His active involvement during the Civil Rights movement came to a halt when he served in the army during the Vietnam War. After coming back from Vietnam and reading the autobiography of Malcolm X, he returned to the Civil Rights movement. Moore would go on to join the Black Knights, a local chapter of the Black Panther Party. Alongside Craig Hadd, he launched the Black Fist newsletter that would become the Black United Front. The most lasting and significant accomplishment was successfully fighting against local real estate companies advertising segregating housing in the 1970s.¹

Through his newsletter, Moore criticized systemic racism in Chattanooga's housing. In the 1969 issue of the "Black Fist" newsletter, Moore discussed injustices in local housing that affected the black community in Chattanooga. Moore explained, "And they know that the racist white leadership in Chattanooga has gone all these years and fixed up white communities without giving black communities a second thought."² Moore lamented how the city's white leadership barred giving black residents proper access to decent housing.

In a Black United Front issue in 1970, Moore attacked the police force. The cover of the newsletter shows a man peacefully sitting with caricatures of policemen as pigs pointing guns at the man, saying "Looks like a protest to me, commissioner."³ The cover of this newsletter illustrates Moore's critiques of the police force in Chattanooga and in America in general, showing how the police harmed peaceful protestors—a message that still resonates with many Black Americans today.

Moore also lamented the lack of desegregation of local schools. In a 1970 issue of the Black United Front, Moore wrote on racism at Brainerd High School in Chattanooga. He wrote, "The white people, involved, including Von Schaaf, the faculty, the students, all must admit their racist tendencies before the Brainerd crisis can be smoothed out."⁴ Moore described how school officials and white students created unequal conditions for black students to learn.

In the "Letters to the Editor" section of an article of the UTC's University Echo criticized the negative reception of the Black United Front newsletter. In this article student writers asserted, "Not only was the Black United Front grossly misrepresented but there were three, yes count them, three negative articles concerning Wednesday's step down."⁵ The University Echo had covered the incorrect portrayal of

¹ Kamau S. "Special Edition Part I: Power To The People" (blogpost), February 3, 2013
<http://villagereport.blogspot.com/2013/02/special-edition-part-i-power-to-people.html>

² Moore, Ralph, "The Black Fist" vol.8, October, 1969

³ Moore, Ralph, "Black United Front" vol. 1 May 9, 1970

⁴ Moore, Ralph, "Black United Front" vol.1, no.18, May 2, 1970

⁵ Tiffany, Baker, "Student feels African Americans Misrepresented" The University Echo, Nov. 16, 1995

African American students at the time. This article, while not focusing on Moore himself, does convey how important his newsletter was to black students at UTC.

Moore's advocacy for civil rights through the Black United Front provides us a window through which we can better understand his views on racial issues at important moments in American history, but more specifically in Chattanooga history. Moore's activism on behalf of the black community made visible systemic oppression in Chattanooga.

Credit

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