Shaka King, director. *Judas and the Black Messiah*. Warner Bros Pictures, 2021.

Based on true events, *Judas and the Black Messiah* is a feature film directed by Shaka King and produced by Ryan Coogler and Charles King of MACRO. William O'Neal, Judas, and Fred Hampton, the Black Messiah, are respectively played by Lakeith Stanfield and Daniel Kaluuya. In this film, Fred Hampton's story as Chairman of the Illinois chapter of the Black Panther Party (BPP) (1968-1969) is told through the lens of William O'Neal, an FBI informant who becomes an active party member and betrays Hampton's trust. Ultimately, Hampton, who preaches self-deter-mination and class consciousness to Chicago's poorest residents, is killed because his liberating ideals oppose America's estab-lished order.

The biopic sets the stage with a monologue by FBI director J. Edgar Hoover (1924-1972), whose mission is to prevent the unity of communist, anti-war, and leftist movements. Historically, COINTELPRO was a counterintelligence program that the FBI utilized to target radical political parties in the 1950s through the early 1970s. After Hoover's speech, the audience witnesses the arrest of William O'Neal after he attempts to steal a car and impersonates a cop. When he has a nonchalant reaction to the deaths of Malcolm X and Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., FBI agent Roy Mitchell determines O'Neal's eligibility to serve as an informant against Fred Hampton. While Hampton declares that his goal is to liberate all Black people from oppression, Mitchell convinces his informant that Hampton's organization is compar-able to the KKK in that they sow hatred and inspire terror. When the FBI attempts to sabotage unification between the BPP and the Crowns, a local Chicago gang, members of the party grow suspicious of O'Neal. However, he assures them of his solidarity. Hampton successfully unites the revolutionary "Rainbow Coali-tion," which consists of the Panthers and local Black, Puerto Rican, and white groups and gangs. Their unity alarms the FBI, and in a desperate effort to break up the organizations, they arrest Hampton for allegedly stealing ice cream. He is sentenced to two to five years in prison. As expected, the morale of the party dec-lines due to the absence of their leader. Mitchell tasks O'Neal with

drawing a floor plan of Chicago BPP office headquarters. One day, police surround the building, and O'Neal escapes before a shootout ensues between party members and law enforcement. The police destroy the office space after arresting several of the Panthers.

Hoover notifies Mitchell that Hampton needs to be permanently "neutralized" before his Chicago movement picks up steam. After all, Hampton's connection to Bobby Seale, co-founder of the Black Panther Party, makes him a national icon and an inspiration for budding activists. Hampton is released from prison early. Foreshadowing his demise, he increasingly lauds dying a revolutionary death, as members of his party continue to be murdered by law enforcement. O'Neal grows increasingly paranoid about his involvement with the FBI, especially after an agent gives him drugs to spike Hampton's drink. On the early morning of December 4, 1969, a Cook County tactical team raid a twenty-one-year-old Hampton's apartment and shoot him dead, as he sleeps soundly next to his fiancé Deborah Johnson, who is nine months pregnant with Fred Hampton Jr. In exchange for his services, the FBI gives O'Neal a gas station to own and operate – with the Black Messiah dead, he has fully transformed into the biblical Judas and this is payment, his thirty pieces of silver. The film ends with raw footage of the real William O'Neal in a 1989 interview, speaking about his time as an informant. The on-screen text informs the audience that he committed suicide the night the interview aired on national television.

Given the accounts of activists such as Assata Shakur and Bobby Seale, whom COINTELPRO also targeted during the Black Power era, and the 1971 documentary film, *The Murder of Fred Hampton*, *Judas and the Black Messiah* is an accurate depiction of how Fred Hampton's attempts to unify his community were a threat to the government. It further illustrates the lengths and measures law enforcement took to stop poor and working-class marginalized peoples' unification. However, what this film fails to emphasize is Fred Hampton's scathing critique of capitalism. He was not a threat solely because he wanted to unify and liberate Black Americans, as this film suggests. He was a threat because he was also a proponent of socialism when anti-communism and pro-capitalism were (and still are) central feat-

ures of the U.S. establishment. This film serves as an introduction to Fred Hampton, who was one of the most important freedom fighters of the twentieth century. While not for everyone, it can encourage politically inclined viewers to study his ideology further and guide them in their own imaginations of political, racial, and economic freedom.

Maria Ivy Esters