

# Pratt

(Continued from Page 4)

informant," said Sacramento Talavera, a spokesman for the Partisan Defense Committee, a legal activist group which supports Pratt. Given that Dickey's ruling has now raised anew the problem of Butler's testimony, Talavera said, "there will be a great chance of acquittal" if Pratt is tried again.

Pratt, an outspoken radical in the ranks of the Los Angeles Black Panthers at a time when the group espoused armed rebellion against the police, was convicted of the 1968 murder of teacher Mary Olsen. Until the voiding of his conviction on

Thursday, May 29, 1997, he had been denied parole 16 times, although his case has won the attention of dozens of human rights groups and labor unions, many of whom contend that he was targeted by the FBI's anti-leftist Counter-Intelligence Program (COINTELPRO).

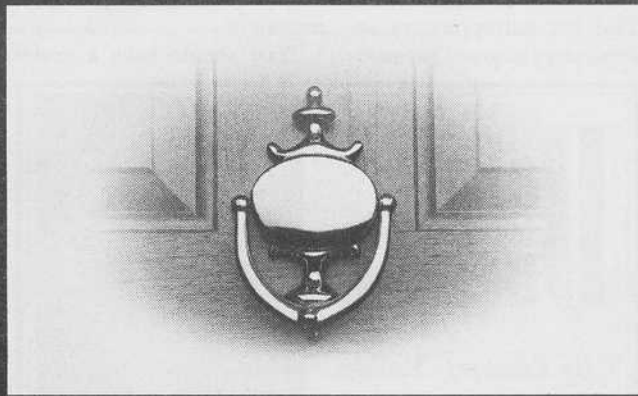
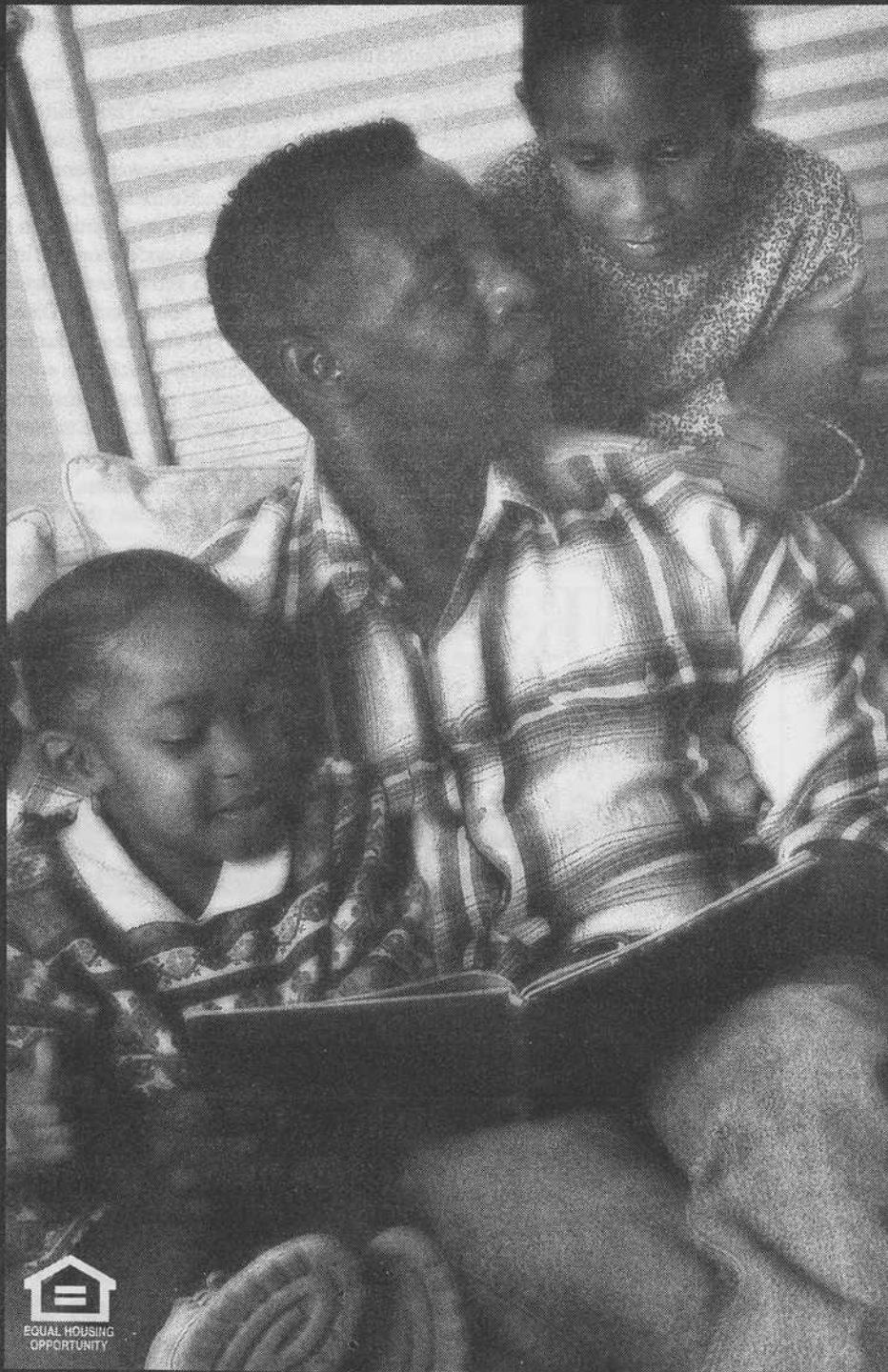
"Never in our discussions did we ever talk about the FBI," former juror Jeanne Hamilton said last year. "We had no clue as to their involvement...the jury was never informed that Julius Butler was an FBI informant." If the jury had known such facts, Hamilton has testified, "there is no doubt in my mind that we

would not have reached a guilty verdict."

Other problems also surfaced in the state's case. One retired FBI agent, Wesley Swearingen, said that he worked with an FBI "racial squad" that focused on black radical groups which, he now claims, handled Pratt's case. Swearingen also has argued that FBI wiretaps which would prove that Pratt was 400 miles away when Olsen was killed in Santa Monica disappeared.

"It's a real victory for justice," Hanlon said of Dickey's verdict. "I think it's a repudiation of illegal government tactics that were used to persecute many people."

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