ON THE PROWL:
A SOCIO-HISTORICAL EXAMINATION
OF THE BLACK PANTHER PARTY IN CLEVELAND, OHIO

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ABSTRACT

The Black Panther Party (BPP) reenergized the civil rights movement during the later part of the 1960s, as they picked up the gun to confront the systematic subjugation of Black people particularly in Oakland, California and generally throughout the country. The dominant social order negatively categorized the Party as gun-toting thugs and legitimate enemies, taking advantage of the early pictures of Panthers patrolling their Black communities to defend law-abiding citizens against the State’s police brutality. However, as the Party expanded its operations and incorporated more youths and working class people into its Ten Point Program, the BPP advanced its agenda beyond the image of the gun. Panthers throughout the country began to implement community programs, such as serving free breakfast to children and distributing clothes in their local neighborhoods, all in the name of the Party.

The story of the BPP, however, has been narrowly confined around the Panther’s bloody confrontations with the State and the activities of its national leaders. Little discussion has been devoted to the work of rank-and-file Panthers on the grassroots level and their significance within local communities. In an attempt to address these imbalances in the existing scholarship, this thesis will present a case study of the BPP in Cleveland, Ohio, assessing the particular social forces that contributed to the creation, development, and demise of the Cleveland Panthers. Particular attention will be given to the community programs instituted by the Cleveland Panthers and their relationships with established
community organizations and leaders. Furthermore, this thesis will look at the unique political environment in Cleveland, which generated one of the stronger Black Nationalist communities in the country, as well as the 1967 election of Carl B. Stokes, the first Black mayor of a major industrial city. The Cleveland Panthers will be assessed within this context to confront the limited scope of research on the BPP and the accompanying demonic images of Party members.
to that energy
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INTRODUCTION

The Black Panther Party (BPP) was arguably the first and only national revolutionary organization that consistently challenged the conditions of Black and poor people in the United States. The Panthers began their struggle in October 1966, when Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale founded the Party and drafted the Ten Point Program expressing the desires and needs of the Black community. Among these demands was Point 7: "We want an immediate end to the police brutality and murder of Black people," which Newton and Seale immediately put into action with police patrols in Oakland, California. As Point 7 suggested, the Ten Point Program signified a taking up of arms - both literally and metaphorically - that rejuvenated the struggle for Black liberation in the U.S. Unlike those that came before it, this movement would be characterized by a national commitment to militancy that was informed by revolutionary ideology.

Scholars from various backgrounds and disciplines have discussed this history of the BPP. Despite the scholarship, however, the existing literature is mostly repetitive in its focus. Thus far, work on the Panthers has almost exclusively concentrated on the activities around their central headquarters in Oakland, and on the larger chapters in Los Angeles, Chicago, and New York.¹ In particular, this literature has focused on the often bloody

¹ In the introduction to his edited collection of essays entitled The Black Panther Party Reconsidered (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1998) Professor Charles Jones identifies other factors that have contributed to a misrepresentation of the Panthers, including the limited time frame of historical focus, usually extending only to 1971; the numerous journalistic accounts of the Party rather than scholarly examinations; and the over-reliance on memoirs and biographical material.
confrontations between these chapters and law enforcement officials, including local police departments and the FBI. This narrow focus has in turn reinforced the dominant perception of the Party as a violent organization. In doing so, the existing literature has tended to de-emphasize, even ignore, the importance that the Panthers placed on community programs at the local level.

The critique suggested here is not intended to discredit the importance of the activities in the areas mentioned above, for they were in the forefront in contributing to the Panthers’ growth. It is intended, however, to highlight the effects of limited historical analysis. The fact that the current literature has focused exclusively on point No. 7 has rendered invisible the other nine Party demands which addressed the economic, social, and political situation of Black people in America. Moreover, the study of the Panthers is incomplete without a discussion of the activities and influence of the Panthers at the local level.

Note, however, that the limitations of the existing research on the Black Panthers should not come as a surprise. Historical representations are primarily byproducts of the governing codes of the hegemonic elite, and thus, the foundation of the social order. Historical records can not be separated from the intellectual framework of the recorder. As is most often the concomitant factor, if not the customary routine, historical documentation is primarily funded through the capital which has a vested interest in the dominant value system. The practical effect of this is that the results of historical explorations often leave out those involved in liberation struggles and confrontations with the power structure.

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2 Examples include the murder of Panthers John Huggins and Bunchy Carter in Los Angeles, the murder of Fred Hampton and Mark Clark in Chicago, the trial of the Panther 21 in New York, the murder trial of Central Committee members Bobby Seale and Ericka Huggins in New Haven, and the harassment of various members of the Central body by police in Oakland.
Those that are not ignored are usually negatively categorized and symbolically representative of society's other, or enemy. The representations of the BPP fit squarely within this model. With most of the emphasis placed on its violent tendencies, the BPP has been relegated to the status of gun-toting criminals. The majority of the literature on the Panthers reflects this representation.

In an attempt to address these imbalances in the existing scholarship, this thesis will present a case study of the Black Panther Party in Cleveland, Ohio. This study will analyze the particular social forces that contributed to the creation, development, and demise of the Cleveland Panthers. The direction of this study has been greatly influenced by Dr. Charles Jones, who argues that "little is known about the Party experience of rank-and-file members. Panther memoirs are primarily based on the lives and experiences of national Party leaders while the role and contributions of local Panther leaders are virtually unknown to the public." Thus, Cleveland was chosen as one example, with the hope that case studies on other local chapters and branches will soon follow. Rather than arguing that the Cleveland case is the most important study on the Panthers' rank-and-file, this thesis recognizes the necessity for a plethora of individual studies fitting within a larger critical analysis of the Party. The hope is that future scholars can extrapolate the findings documented here and utilize them in a broader comparative study.

A. METHODOLOGY AND FRAMEWORK

Through the use of archival materials, semi-structured personal interviews, primary government documentation, and secondary sources, this case study seeks to obtain an in-depth assessment of the Cleveland Panthers, as well as the specific circumstances that
influenced their development. Interview data has been collected through discussions with former Cleveland Panthers, key leaders of various Black nationalist organizations in Cleveland during the late 1960s, and prominent members of Cleveland’s Black community, including church and organizational leaders. Additional perspectives have been gathered through newspaper accounts of Panther activities and other important incidents in Cleveland. Whereas studies with a broad focus encounter inhibiting generalizations, this thesis will seek to question the stigma imposed upon all members of the BPP through an intensive analysis of the specific conditions and circumstances found in the Cleveland branch.\(^4\)

To fully grasp the significance of the BPP, it is essential to situate it within the general landscape of the ongoing civil rights struggle during the second half of the 1960s. Thus, before launching into a discussion of the Cleveland Panthers, Chapter 1 will briefly discuss the origins and development of the Black Panthers on the national level, drawing heavily from the literature that has already been produced on the BPP. This chapter will pay considerable attention to the Panthers’ ideological framework, their relationship with law enforcement, and the implementation of community programs to “meet [the] daily needs” of the working class Black community.\(^5\) In addition, Chapter 1 seeks to emphasize the importance of the Panthers’ mobilization of the “brothers on the block,” who were central to the eventual national expansion of the Party.\(^6\)

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\(^3\) Jones 10.

\(^4\) On the other hand, case studies are limited by their inability to make larger theoretical statements about particular occurrences or organizational structures.


This case study will demonstrate that there is not a single story of the BPP that can be generalized. The Black Panthers were a national movement that spanned many communities. As such, the development of local chapters and branches were dependent upon the specific social forces and conditions within their particular communities. Thus, following the first chapter's overview of the BPP, Chapter 2 will shift the focus toward the situation of Black people in Cleveland during the first half of the twentieth century. Chapter 2 provides a social history that includes an account of the housing, education, and employment conditions of Cleveland's East Side. This chapter will also provide a history of the frustration within Cleveland's inner city, which erupted in 1966 and 1968, and in turn elevated the political consciousness of Cleveland's Black community. In the midst of this heightened political consciousness, Carl B. Stokes was elected in 1967 and became the first Black mayor in a major industrial city. This chapter will highlight these dynamics as they set the stage for the emergence of the Panthers in Cleveland.

Building on this socio-historical context, Chapter 3 will document the genesis and growth of the Cleveland Panthers. After exploring the early existence of self-described Black Panthers in Cleveland, this chapter will focus on the development of the official Cleveland Panthers and their relationship with the BPP leadership at National Headquarters. Finally, this chapter will look at the composition of the Cleveland Panthers' rank-and-file membership, as they drew from Black radicals, college students, and high school teenagers in the Kinsman neighborhood.

Awareness of the Cleveland Panthers expanded beyond the Kinsman area, however, following the police raid of their office that left an officer and Panther wounded from gunfire. This incident opens Chapter 4, which will address the repression of the Cleveland Panthers at the hands of the local law enforcement. Furthermore, this chapter will highlight
the selective documentation of FBI harassment and intimidation of the BPP. Whereas the existing literature suggests that FBI disruption was confined to the larger Panther chapters and national figureheads, Chapter 4 will document the equally insidious campaign to "expose, disrupt, discredit or otherwise neutralize"^7 Panthers at the local level. Specifically, this chapter will uncover the extent to which the FBI worked to intimidate Panther leaders in Cleveland, cause dissension between the local Panthers and the BPP Central Committee, and instigate conflict with Cleveland Black Nationalists. Finally, this chapter will explore the relationship between the Black political establishment and the Cleveland Panthers, arguing that Black leaders reproduced the negative categorization of the Party through their open hostility and activity to eliminate the local Panthers.

As the literature on the BPP has often been preoccupied with the violent confrontations between Panthers and the establishment, the significance of the Panthers' community programs has been ignored. Chapter 5 will focus on the importance of these programs in Cleveland and their role in fostering strong community alliances and transforming the consciousness of those they served. This chapter will emphasize the evolution of the Cleveland Panthers' community programs and their impact on the material conditions of Black and poor people. In doing so, Chapter 5 will illustrate the importance of the Party at the local level. In addition, it will highlight the unique relationships that formed between the Panthers and local community organizations. Finally, this chapter will argue that the success of the Cleveland Panthers was dependent upon the established organizational network and resources within the Black community.

Following this in-depth discussion of the Cleveland Panthers, this thesis will conclude by illustrating the circumstances that led to their demise and the impact their closure had on the established community programs. In addition, Chapter 6 will touch on the influence the Party had on both the Cleveland community and the individual members of the Cleveland Panthers. Finally, this chapter will recapitulate the implications that emanate from the narrow representation and selective documentation of the Party. It is necessary to understand the manifestations of the negative categorization of groups such as the Panthers in order to seriously confront the system of knowledge that produces these symbolic representations within Western society. Thus, the dominant social order - or the triadic interplay between the political establishment, the economic arrangement, and the cultural belief system - continues to reproduce its foundational ideas through the historicity of oppositional movements. The Panthers were dehumanized in the 1960s through their categorization as a primary enemy of the state. The documentation of the Cleveland Panthers serves to challenge this image of the BPP, and moderate the reproduction of the dominant order's categories.
CHAPTER 1

THE BLACK PANTHER PARTY: ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT

Following the assignation of Malcolm X on February 21, 1965, the United States found itself entrenched in the most explosive period of its history. As the frustration of inner city ghettos erupted, riots ripped the cities of Harlem in 1964, Watts in 1965, Chicago and Cleveland in 1966, and Detroit in 1967. Police brutality, continued unemployment, sub-standard housing, and an unjust judicial system created the impetus for new forms of Black resistance. In addition, the beginning of the Vietnam War in 1965 rallied young white students and liberals against the authoritarian doctrines of the dominant social order. With these conditions providing the social context, militant Black organizations across the country would soon challenge the non-violent liberation philosophy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Initiated by the ideas of Malcolm X and the global movement for self-determination, fundamental change was envisioned only through direct confrontation and destruction of institutionalized white supremacy.

In October 1966, the next stage of the Black struggle found its direction through the creation of the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense, (BPP)\(^8\) organized in the “flatlands” of Oakland, California by a small group of Black Nationalists led by Huey P. Newton and

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\(^8\) The Panthers quickly dropped the “Self-Defense” from their name after people confused them with security guards or community police. Newton 1972, 49.
Bobby Seale." They adopted the symbol of the panther from the Lowndes County Freedom Organization after reading a pamphlet about "how the people in Lowndes County had armed themselves."10 Structured around Malcolm's tenet of self-defense, the Panthers established themselves as the next step beyond the fervor of Dr. King’s non-violent campaigns.11 Shortly after drawing up the Ten Point Program and Platform demanding full employment, adequate housing and food, land, proper education, freedom for all black prisoners, and an end to both police brutality and black people's involvement in the U.S. military, the Panthers began to arm themselves in defense of their community.12 Newton was "interested primarily in educating and revolutionizing the community" and wanted to make a statement that the Black community in Oakland could understand.13 Thus, after raising money by selling Mao's Little Red Book on the University of California, Berkeley campus, the BPP legally purchased a supply of firearms and initiated their first police patrol. Panthers were often seen following police and informing citizens of their rights under the law. Although historic in its political assertiveness, this initial action of the Panthers has set the tone for the continual demonization of them within the dominant social order.

The BPP remained a phenomenon primarily in the California Bay area for the first six months of their existence. On May 2, 1967, however, the BPP made waves across the

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9 The classic texts on the origins of the BPP obviously are from the founders themselves: Newton's autobiography Revolutionary Suicide (New York: Writers and Readers (1973) 1995) and Seale's personal account Seize the Time. Almost every study on the Party recites the origins of the BPP, but one of the more lucid is contained in Reginald Major's A Panther is a Black Cat (New York: W. Morrow, 1971).
11 Don Schanche, in his account of the "moral" challenges he faced after meeting and working with Panther leaders Eldridge Cleaver, Seale, and Newton, describes the strands of Black resistance as a connected movement, which he breaks down into a series of layers: "the discernable heat layers of the black revolution that descended... from the tepid legal confrontations of the Urban League and the NAACP, through the warmer but still nonviolent martyrdom of Dr. Martin Luther King's Southern Christian Leadership Conference, into the hot militancy of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, and finally down to the boiling anger of the Black Panther Party." The Panther Paradox: A Liberal's Dilemma (New York: Kinney, 1971) 23.
12 Newton 1972, 3-6.
country as Seale and a collection of armed Panthers descended upon the California Legislature in Sacramento to protest the introduction of the Mulford bill, written to end the Panthers' police patrols and their open display of weapons. Pictures of the California event were dispersed throughout the country, as the image of confident Panthers strutting on the institutions of white America quickly mobilized people. With black leather jackets, berets, sunglasses and powder blue shirts, the Panthers were fitted for commitment to the liberation of Black people. Witnessing their dedication and commitment to justice, people soon flocked to their rallies and programs. Starting with a membership of less than 100 in the first year, the Panthers soon exploded throughout the country, with operations in thirty-five cities by the fall of 1970. The Panthers advanced an ideology that fit the times and created a movement that both dazzled and frightened the American people. As reformist-minded civil rights groups began to lose their connection with the frustrated poor Black communities, specifically young urban Blacks, the Panthers stepped in to fill the void. Whereas the pious liberal institutions of reform neglected the immediate needs of the poor, the Panthers recognized the necessity of placing that struggle at the center of their movement. They had no desire to reform an institution that had been corrupt since its inception.

The BPP's initial police patrols aimed at both defending the Black community and organizing the "brothers on the block" into the Party. The difference between the Panthers and other revolutionary organizations was its commitment to these groups of the

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13 Newton 1973, 120.
16 Seale 1970; Newton, 1973, 73-76.
extremely downtrodden; in Marxist terms, the lumpenproletariat. The Panthers' ability to organize and communicate with the lumpenproletariat, the lowest tiers of the grassroots, was central to their eventual national expansion through the creation of numerous chapters and branches around the country. The BPP's unique focus on the revolutionary potential of the lumpenproletariat was grounded in the philosophy of Frantz Fanon, the Martinique psychiatrist who stated,

[t]he lumpenproletariat, once it is constituted, brings all its forces to endanger the ‘security’ of the town, and is the sign of the irrevocable decay, the gangrene ever present at the heart of colonial domination. So the pimps, the hooligans, the unemployed, and the petty criminals, urged on from behind, throw themselves into the struggle for liberation like stout working men.

The Panthers mobilized members of the Black working class and lumpen background to confront the capitalist economic arrangement and the direct causes of Black subjugation. Whereas the liberal civil rights organizations worked steadfast for voting rights and individual civil liberties, the Panthers were developing a community consciousness through their direct confrontation with the dominant order.

A. THE PANTHER IDEOLOGICAL BASE

The BPP was the only Black organization that effectively challenged the dominant social order and at the same time, organized community programs to serve the needs of the people they represented. Arguably, organizations such as the Urban League and the NAACP were

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18 Frantz Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth (New York: Grove Press, 1968) 130; Recent studies on the BPP have argued that the Panthers' primary base were not the lumpens envisioned by Fanon, but rather as Jones and Jeffries state, “a young adolescent still in search of adulthood who was likely a high school or college student.” “Don't Believe the Hype: Debunking the Panther Mythology.” The Black Panther Party Reconsidered 46; Other works have criticized the Panthers' lumpen emphasis, since “lumpen behavior made
ineffective at this time because they addressed only the symptoms of racist America. In contrast, the Panthers continuously critiqued the direct causes of brutality against Black people. The development of the Panthers’ revolutionary ideology is a testament to their ability to adjust and grow with the changing political landscape in the U.S. and throughout the world.\textsuperscript{19} Furthermore, the fact that the Panthers were resolute in their desire for a theoretical framework behind their resistance highlights the uniqueness of their organization.

From their inception and throughout their existence, the Panthers were dialectical materialists; the theory behind their resistance was to respond the present conditions of oppression. Rather than accept Marxist historical materialism, which strictly relies on history to determine future direction when it is applied rigidly, the Panthers assessed each event within its specific context. Newton states, “as dialectical materialists we emphasize that we must analyze each set of conditions separately and make concrete analyses of concrete conditions in each instance.”\textsuperscript{20} At the same time, however, the Panthers thought it was important to understand the larger context of their struggle. Thus, it was vital for Party members to be thoroughly trained and read in the history of people’s struggles throughout the world. The liberation of Black people in the United States was seen as closely connected to the global self-determination struggles of people of color. In developing a global analysis, the thoughts of Newton and the Panthers were largely centered on the writings of Che Guevara and Mao Tse-tung, who were seen as comrades and victims of the same imperialist

\textsuperscript{19} Professor Nikhil Pal Singh’s piece, “The Black Panthers and the ‘Undeveloped Country’ of the Left,” is instructive here as she discusses the ways in which the Panthers transferred the political language and struggles of the Third World to the particular situation in the U.S. \textit{The Black Panther Party Reconsidered} 57-105.

\textsuperscript{20} Erik H. Erikson, \textit{In Search of Common Ground: Conversations with Erik H. Erikson, and Huey P. Newton (New York: Norton, 1973)} 26. The conversations Newton had with Erikson and students at Yale show a different side of the revolutionary. He explores his concept of revolutionary intercommunism and discusses the history of the Panthers’ ideological changes.
powers of the United States. As Newton states, "Che and Mao were veterans of people's wars, and they had worked out successful strategies for liberating their people." Building on these models, and also greatly influenced by the philosophies of Malcolm X and Fanon, the Panthers established their fundamental objective as the liberation of oppressed people around the world, with Black people in the U.S. as the vanguard.

Equally important to this global perspective was an analysis of the particular struggle in the U.S. As Cleaver states, "Huey understood the vital importance of our people developing their own revolutionary analysis for themselves, and for their own struggle and salvation." Central to the struggle in the U.S. was the exploitation inherent in the capitalist organization of society. As Newton states, "For one of the first times since the organized slave rebellions before the Civil War, Blacks were responding to an organization that tried to build community institutions and did so under the banner of a political ideology that directly challenged democratic capitalism." The BPP's political ideology however, was one that corresponded to the changing environment, as the Panthers refused to be ideologically stagnant.

Originating as Black Nationalists or separatist Nationalists, Newton, Seale, and the Panthers soon recognized the limitations of the struggle being so narrowly focused. By the end of 1970, there was a shift in ideology that stressed the importance of revolutionary socialism. This shift came as a result of the understanding that if the Panther ideology cut off ties to other movements through a separatist agenda, the resources would not have been at the level necessary for intense insurgency. Thus, the Panthers began the stage of

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21 Newton 1973, 111.
23 Newton 1972, 34.
revolutionary nationalism, "to express our solidarity with those friends who suffered many of the same kind of pressures we suffered," said Newton.\textsuperscript{24} Organizations such as the Young Lords (Puerto Ricans), Red Guards (Chinese-Americans), Patriot Party (poor whites), and Brown Berets (Mexican-Americans) established alliances with the Panthers along this ideology.\textsuperscript{25}

After internally critiquing the limits of revolutionary socialism, specifically within a global order controlled by American capitalist interests, Newton began to develop his analysis of the world as a collection of communities, which he termed "intercommunalism."\textsuperscript{26} With the direct controller being the U.S. empire, or the reactionary intercommunalists, the Panthers saw themselves as the vanguard of the oppressed peoples of the world, the revolutionary intercommunalists, living inside the belly of the beast. Newton states, "[w]e are now in the age of reactionary intercommunalism, in which a ruling circle, a small group of people, control all other people by using their technology."\textsuperscript{27} By leading the masses to overthrow the capitalist and imperialist U.S., the next stage would be a redistribution of the world's wealth and resources based upon the particular needs of each community.

As mentioned, one of the most important aspects of the Panthers was the developmental process of their revolutionary ideology. Critics often forget or ignore this fundamental aspect of the Panthers and assess them solely through the symbolic images drawn by members of the dominant social order, and forget the foundation the Panthers laid for revolutionary struggle. It was an intellectually educated cadre of comrades, adjusting

\textsuperscript{24} Erikson 28.


\textsuperscript{26} Erikson 31.

\textsuperscript{27} Erikson 31.
their analysis as a new situation appeared. Originally centered on a Black Nationalist framework, the stages of movement progressed unlike other revolutionary movements in this country. The expansion of the Panthers nationally was fueled by the foundation of their struggle. Connecting themselves to the movements of oppressed people around the world as well as the poor communities within the U.S., the Panthers displayed their advanced philosophical analysis of the current conditions, unlike the narrow separatist cultural nationalists.

B. FBI AND PANTHER COMMUNITY PROGRAMS

The Panthers are largely understood through the FBI’s campaign to destroy them, rather than through the contributions the Party made to the community. The Panthers continually fought against the dominant order’s negative representation of the Party and the simple categorization of the BPP as a bunch of gun-toting gangsters. Surely, the Panther tactics of storming the California legislature in May 1967 with rifles, as well as the armed-patrols of their neighborhoods, instigated an ambush of violence by the local police and FBI. The agents of the state had no intention of allowing a collection of politically conscious Black people confront their base of power. Many Panthers, however, were murdered by the state in cold blood, like the assassinations of Fred Hampton and Mark Clark in Chicago, and the murder of 17-year-old Bobby Hutton in Oakland in April 1968. After FBI chief J. Edgar Hoover classified the Panthers as the greatest threat to the internal security of the United States, he moved quickly to direct the FBI’s COINTELPRO program toward “neutralizing” the Party. As the revolutionary vanguard, though, the Panthers made a commitment to give
their lives for the needs of their community. This was articulated through Newton's philosophy of 'revolutionary suicide' in which he stated, "it is better to oppose the forces that would drive me to self-murder than to endure them."\textsuperscript{29} The Panthers had an idea of a better society, and they were committed to their struggle.

With increased government harassment, the BPP recognized the need to place more emphasis on the administration of the Party's community programs. Simultaneously, the Panthers established the framework for a more humanistic society, founded on the principles of self-determination and community control.\textsuperscript{30} Panther members were serving breakfast for children, distributing free shoes and clothing, providing legal assistance, medical care, school and educational programs, free bussing to prisons, and screening for sickle cell anemia.\textsuperscript{31} The BPP utilized the resources of community members and organizations, as well as the donations from local businesses to establish the foundation for their programs. Militant Panthers and outsiders viewed the direction of the programs as part of a reformist agenda, moving away from the roots of BPP. Seale responded: "They're not reform programs; they're actually revolutionary community programs. A revolutionary program is one set forth by revolutionaries, by those who want to change the existing system to a better system."\textsuperscript{32} The concept of 'revolutionary' was narrowly defined underneath the category of violent militarism, and in turn, delegitimated other activities which struck just as hard at the state's apparatus of exploitation.

\textsuperscript{28} The report by Roy Wilkins and Ramsey Clark fully documents the chronology of events that led to the police murder and cover-up in Chicago. \textit{Search and Destroy: A Report, Commission of Inquiry into the Black Panthers and the Police} (New York: Metropolitan Applied Research Center, 1973).
\textsuperscript{29} Newton (1973) 5.
\textsuperscript{31} Aborn 1998; Angela Darlean Brown, "Servants of the People: A History of Women in the Black Panther Party," Senior Thesis Harvard University, 1992; The BPP was given the opportunity to fully discuss their
Through these community programs, the BPP increased the level of consciousness of the people they served; these were not handout programs devoid of political messages. It was this strategy that advanced the Panthers to the true revolutionary organization that they quickly became, as Newton stressed the importance of having the people behind the movement. Throughout the country, local chapters of the Panthers were responding to the basic needs of their Black communities; the programs were considered the spark for the foreseen revolution.

Historical analyses of the BPP have tended to de-emphasize these community programs in local Panther operations. Rather, the Party has been often been framed around their early emphasis on the gun, and the violent confrontations with the police. This has additionally contributed to a selective documentation of the Party on the national level, disregarding the experiences of the rank-and-file throughout the country. The local chapters and branches of the BPP were dependent upon specific local circumstances that defined their community and their access to resources. Each Panther operation had a particular context that initiated a unique application of the BPP’s Ten Point Program and Platform. As this study moves to explore the activities of the Cleveland Panthers, it is necessary to understand the social and political history of the city’s Black community. Therefore, the following chapter will explore the context of Black Cleveland and provide the framework in which the Cleveland Panthers emerged.
CHAPTER 2

SOCIO-HISTORICAL CONTEXT: BLACK CLEVELAND

The history of the BPP in Cleveland, Ohio cannot be fully understood unless one has knowledge of the conditions of Black people within the city during the preceding decades. It was the specific cultural and economic climate of Cleveland that provided the impetus for militant Black resistance during the later part of the 1960s. As documented below, a significant portion of Cleveland’s Black population was imprisoned in dehumanizing conditions, ranging from infested and wretched housing which continued to languish in overcrowded Black neighborhoods, to inadequate educational facilities and opportunities for Black children. Black people in Cleveland additionally found themselves either disproportionately unemployed or working in the most undesirable and lowest paying jobs. Yet these conditions also had a role in the development of the Black community’s consciousness; individuals are not disconnected from the social and economic relations that produce the context of their existence. Since the creation of the Americas, Black people have symbolically represented the conceptual other as white people have defined themselves as the standard human. Through these role allocations, the order of society has legitimated its brutality imposed on Black people, categorizing them as inferior, rather than as part of the larger human species. The documentation below will demonstrate the ways in which the dominant order was actualized within Cleveland’s Black community. Furthermore, these
social and institutional circumstances provided the foundation for militant resistance, namely the Black Panthers, who moved to confront the social order and reallocate the material resources.

**A. Cleveland's Black Community During the Twentieth Century**

Cleveland's growth as an industrial stronghold attracted scores of European immigrants during the first decade of the twentieth century and led to the designation of the city as the "melting pot of nationalities." Cleveland was the world's leader in the lighting industry, second in the production of machine tools, and a forerunner in the production of paints and varnishes, motor fuel, trucks and buses, electrical goods and metal products. Cleveland's position as a leader in industrial production crossed into other fields of labor as well, including copper, aluminum, brass, hardware, household appliances, and clothing, to name a few. As Rose notes, Cleveland was tapped as "the best location in the nation" in terms of industrial overlapping. Yet the distinction as the best location only panned out for members of the white community. Even with a bustling economy at the turn of the century, specifically the expanding steel industry, less than a handful of the laborers were Black.

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33 William G. Rose, *Cleveland: The Making of a City* (Cleveland: World Publishing, 1950) 966. Rose's mammoth history of Cleveland is the renowned narrative of Cleveland, and one can not talk about the city without referring to his documentation. Published in 1950, he provides excellent illustrations of Cleveland's industrial expansion and the individuals of economic and political importance. Unfortunately, that's where his usefulness ends. Rose's neglect towards the Black community in Cleveland is disturbing and renders even his monstrous work incomplete. Yet this disregard of Black people is no surprise, even among intellectuals. As the dominant order conceptualizes Blacks as the other, historical demography will likewise reflect the belief system and pay little attention to Black people's experiences.

34 Rose 967.

35 Rose 967, 970.

36 Rose 967.

37 Kenneth L. Kusner, *A Ghetto Takes Shape: Black Cleveland, 1870-1930* (Chicago: Illinois Press, 1978) 66. Kusner's work on the development of Cleveland's Black ghetto at the turn of the century is clearly unmatched. His comprehensive data is coupled with a rich analysis that digs deep into an undocumented urban history of Cleveland. Kusner explores both the dynamics between the different leaders within Cleveland's Black community and their relationship to the white power structure. In addition, he touches on the interaction between the Black community and the influential immigrant community, encompassing economic, political,
However, some historians have argued that Cleveland was a liberal city in regard to race relations and its treatment of Black people. These scholars point to the 1910 election of Thomas W. Fleming to Cleveland's City Council, the first Black to hold such a position in a major northern city, as a reflection of Northern tolerance and liberalism. Others highlight the successes of numerous Black people who held early positions as judges, state legislators, and members of local community boards. However, such achievements among an elite group of Blacks within Cleveland did not translate into progress for the larger Black population.

Of the 8,448 Black people living in Cleveland during that time span, 60 percent resided in the Central area, west of East 55th Street and north of Woodland and Cedar Avenue. The early formation of what Kusmer calls a "Black enclave," set the boundaries and zones for the location of Black people. This physical isolation transcended into the social and economic sphere as well. Typically employed within the unskilled or service sectors and denied access to the influential power of the labor unions, Black people in Cleveland continually found themselves on the bottom of the economic totem pole. Even

and social circles. Even though Kusmer provides an excellent starting point for this study, his analysis ends before the start of World War II, and thus, leaves out some important information in regards to the social conditions that birthed the Black militancy of the 1960s. His work lays the foundation, but it does not bring us full circle.

38 Rose 690.
39 There was a total population of 360,633.
40 Russell H. Davis, Black Americans in Cleveland from George Peake to Carl B. Stokes 1796-1969 (Washington: Associated Publishers, 1972) 14. Davis' documentation of Black Cleveland begins with the founding of Cleveland as a city in 1796 and concludes with the re-election of Carl Stokes in 1969. In contrast to Kusmer's analytical insight, Davis simply gives a dry chronological account of the achievements of Black people in Cleveland, which very well may have been his intent. Often focusing on the success of political and business leaders, his text serves its purpose of providing factual information on Black people in Cleveland. Furthermore, he contributes to the larger history of Cleveland through his recording of important geographical locations in Cleveland's Black community.
41 Kusmer 41.
42 Davis 1972, 15.
as theaters segregated the Black population and hotels refused to accommodate them, Cleveland was often perceived as one of the best places for "the Negro."\textsuperscript{43}

Trickle-down equality hardly resulted in economic or social parity for the Black masses. As the few digested petty rewards from the power structure, the vast majority of Black Clevelanders suffered under deplorable conditions. Furthermore, the advances and rewards of the few reinforced the dominant paradigm of the Protestant work ethic, which argued that anybody could rise above social discrimination and obtain an elite status. Aside from the economic disparity, Blacks were not seen as a threat to the resources controlled by white people, due to their small numbers. In 1910, Black people constituted a mere 1.5 percent of the entire Cleveland population.\textsuperscript{44} However, as the Black community in Cleveland grew, the hegemonic elite attempted to further safeguard their social and cultural standing, as well as their economic possessions. As such, the numerical increase in the Black community was met with a clearer articulation of the position that Blacks were to assume within the hierarchical order. In other words, the growth in population was used to justify high rates of Black unemployment, increased rents for deteriorating housing in an already overpopulated East Side, and unequal educational facilities.

The exodus of southern Blacks to northern industrial centers was fueled by a combination of factors, most notably a need for cheap labor, low wages down South, untenable land, and Southern white repression. During the years of 1915-1919, a sharp drop in European immigrants effected industrial employers who depended on their cheap labor.\textsuperscript{45} Thus, during and after World War I, the Great Migration of Blacks from the South cashed in

\textsuperscript{43} Davis 1972, 15.
\textsuperscript{44} Kusmer 10.
\textsuperscript{45} Davis 1972, 159.
on the opportunity to fill vacant job openings, mostly in unskilled labor.\textsuperscript{46} As the North highlighted an ostensibly liberal social and political environment, Blacks had very few misgivings of leaving the South. Black people searched for both employment and an escape from the white supremacist brutality. In addition, the Southern mechanization of human labor activity necessitated the search of Black workers to find other means of subsistence. The Southern transformation of cotton farming from a labor intensive economy to a capitalist machine-oriented economy, a movement initiated and subsidized by political coalitions between organized farm operators and the federal government, eliminated the need for cheap Black labor.\textsuperscript{47} Finally, migration by Southern Blacks was instigated by natural disasters such as the boll-weevil plague and the floods of 1910-1915, which paralyzed the Southern agricultural economy. Rose summarizes the movement of Blacks to the North, and specifically Cleveland, with a quote from State Senator Harry E. Davis, a lone Black legislator in the Ohio House in 1920:

\begin{quote}
War industries...induced a mass movement of colored workers into Cleveland which almost completely submerged the older elements of the colored population. Industry sent agents into the South to recruit labor, and they were brought to Cleveland in carloads. Many of them came with only the clothing they were wearing, with no preparation for housing, and with little idea of the problems they must inevitably encounter.\textsuperscript{48}
\end{quote}

There were few social institutions or organizations established to support incoming Black people, and the government fulfilled its role by squeezing the Black population into smaller colonies.

\textsuperscript{46} Kusmer 158-173.
\textsuperscript{48} Quoted in Rose 686.
Following World War II, Cleveland, like other Northern cities, saw another influx of Blacks migrating from the South. In 1930, the Black population was 72,469 people (8 percent). By 1940, the Black population had risen to 147,847 residents (16 percent) and the percentage continued to increase as whites fled to the outer suburbs. Although Blacks spread into new domains, the housing shortage remained a problem. In addition, school construction in Black neighborhoods did not keep up with the growing number of children.

During the 60s, the movement of Blacks within the city challenged the territorial possession of whites. The 1960 census reported that Cuyahoga County’s Black population increased from 87,145 in 1940, to 255,310 in 1960. As the white population continued to move outside of the city limits to the suburbs, Cleveland’s Black population was centralized within the inner city, largely around East Cleveland and the Ludlow area of Shaker Heights. In fact, ninety percent of Blacks in Cleveland resided in the eastern side of the city. Blacks increasingly began to migrate northeast along St. Clair Avenue toward East Cleveland, and southeast down Lee, Miles, Harvard, and Kinsman toward the city limits. The movement away from the dense inner city was an attempt by Black people to obtain better housing and schooling for their children. The Black middle class had the means to make the first move, migrating first to Glenville, then to Mt. Pleasant, and further into Lee-Seville and Lee-

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49 Davis 1972, 305-307.
50 Davis 1972, 46.
51 Davis 1972, 305, 329.
52 Lawrence Brisker, Black Power and Black Leaders: A Study of Black Leadership in Cleveland, Ohio Ph.D. Dissertation (Case Western Reserve University, 1977) 66.
53 Brisker 66.
54 Davis 1972, 356.
Harvard. The small group of Black people who left the inner city were middle-aged and rarely had children below the ages of 15.  

By 1960, Cleveland was the 8th largest city in the U.S. Likewise, its Black population was the 8th largest in the country, amassing 250,818 people (29 percent of the total population in Cleveland). The Urban League reported that "between 1950 and 1960, the city's white population declined from 765,300 to 622,900, that is, lost one-fifth of its 1950 total. From 1960 to 1963, an estimated 44,500 white residents left the city." Furthermore, the Cleveland Black population became more youthful as the white population grew older. Cleveland's Black population found itself increasingly segregated into the restricted areas of the East Side. Demonstrative of an American apartheid city, 98.2 percent of all Black people lived within East Cleveland. This statistic follows the pattern set in April of 1910, where 97.6 percent of Black Clevelanders lived in the inner city. The Urban League reported that "In 1963, an estimated 277,600 out of 287,00 Negro county residents lived in the eastern third of the central city in contiguous census tracts covering about 15 square miles." Segregated within St. Clair Avenue, Broadway, Corlett, Lee Road, Harvard, Miles and the eastern suburbs, Black people were relegated to a specific location, both

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55 Brisker 62.
56 The Negro in Cleveland, 1950-1963: An Analysis of the Social and Economic Characteristics of the Negro Population. The Changes Between 1950-1963 Prepared by the Research Department of the Cleveland Urban League, Roger Mitton, Research Director. (Cleveland: Urban League, 1964) 6. The Urban League's report on the condition of Black people in Cleveland contributes to an accurate depiction of the social forces that led to the emergence of the Black Panther Party during the later part of the 60s. Although their documentation is brief and rarely analytical, the Urban League does provide a wealth of statistical information on Cleveland's Black community, ranging from figures in education, employment, and housing. The Urban League's information contributes to the local data within the following narrative.
58 Census 14; Urban League 1.
59 Urban League 2.
60 This contributed to the composition of the potential work environment: unskilled Black employees vs. trained white management. Urban League 2.
61 Urban League 3.
62 Kusmer 10.
physically and ideologically. As one Black man facetiously remarked, it was as if "[w]e are liable to contaminate someone."  

The areas of Central, Hough, Glenville, Mt. Pleasant, and Kinsman contained 90 percent of Cleveland's Black population. Lost within these figures, however, is why these areas were the enclaves, the ghettos. Consistent with the dominant order, Black people were relegated to the oldest and most dilapidated sections of the city. For instance, the Hough community's development is demonstrative of the larger situation in Cleveland's Black neighborhoods. In 1950, only 3.9 percent of the Hough population was Black. By 1960, as buildings wore down, the Black population of Hough increased to 73 percent.  

As the population increased in the Black community, so did the demand for work.

B. EMPLOYMENT AND UNEMPLOYMENT

Whether employed in the most dehumanizing jobs or not employed at all, Black people were rarely given any breaks. As discussed above, the industrial expansion associated with the defense spending in World War II created increased job openings in Northern cities.  

With no other choice, employers turned to the newly arriving Southern Blacks for jobs. As Davis notes, many employers looked to the Urban League for Black workers and advice on integrating them into the organizational structure. Yet Davis again misses the philosophical stance of white employers when he states, "[t]o be sure [the Black worker] was first assigned the simple tasks of machine operation but the ice was broken and he had entry into a field.

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63 Urban League 3.
65 Urban League 15.
66 Davis 1972, 305.
67 Davis 1972, 307.
that heretofore had been denied to him.68 In actuality, Black workers were assigned those jobs because they were the least desirable and white employers needed a new pool of labor to exploit. This ice-breaking ceremony was not an attempt to be kind to Black folks; it was out of economic necessity. Furthermore, the fact that Black people were designated to the most demeaning forms of labor reaffirms the conceptual notion of the dominant order, which defined Black people as lesser human beings. In fact, some undeniably felt that Black people were lucky to even be working in a white industry.69

In addition, Davis fails to take into consideration the employer's interest in creating worker dissension rather than worker solidarity. Thus, Blacks who moved into the labor force were quickly depicted as invaders of white work as they took on less pay for the same jobs. White workers thus directed their frustration towards Black workers rather than white employers. Kusner discusses the earlier use of Black laborers as strikebreakers, hiring them on a temporary basis and paying them less.70 The perpetuation of this division within the surplus labor pool has been fundamental to the white property owner's maintenance of the cultural and economic order. Furthermore, the unions in Cleveland rarely represented Black people. For example, in 1966, statistics were given to the Civil Rights Commission in Cleveland on the numbers of journeymen and Apprentices in each union.71 Collectively, the unions had 7,122 Journeymen who were white and 51 who were Black; there were 609 white Apprentices and 4 who were Black.72

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68 Davis 1972, 326.
69 A similar argument was made during slavery debates, when Southern proponents argued that Blacks were happier enslaved and had more potential than if they were free.
70 Kusner 69.
71 The unions which responded were the Electricians Local 38, Sheet Metal Workers Local 65, Ironworkers Local 17, Plumbers Local 55, and Pipefitters Local 36.
72 Commission 443, 444.
As noted above, Black workers predominantly occupied the unskilled and undesirable labor ranks. Whereas whites often worked as managers with salaries, Black people always found themselves in the worst paying jobs. In addition, Stein noted that “[o]f employed Negro women [in 1965], 56 percent hold menial service jobs, of which half are in private households.” The Urban League confirmed the predicament, stating, “as a rule, Negroes are given jobs in the lowest occupational categories.”

Even as Black people began to make headway into industrial positions, technological advances in manufacturing quickly eliminated them from the payrolls. As the Urban League reported, “[s]ince 1953, manufacturing industries have declined in the total number of workers employed. Some 80,000 factory blue-collar jobs, mainly in heavy industry—steel mill, foundry, machinery—have disappeared from the Cleveland area, while, at the same time, some 30,000 non-factory white-collar jobs were making an appearance on the labor market.” Following World War II, the Black labor force found itself the most affected by the downsizing in the industrial employment sector. The Urban League stated, “[i]n 1960, nearly two-thirds of the Negro employed labor force worked as semi-skilled operatives (26% mostly in manufacturing), service workers (26%) and laborers (12%).” Furthermore, as increases in technological automation eliminated the need for the lowest-skilled workers, Black workers found themselves in the unemployment lines. Although Davis remarks on the advances of laborsaving machinery and the rise in unemployment in 1960, he neglects to

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73 In 1950, Black people represented 26.9% of the manufacturing jobs, 19.6% in the service industry, 18.2% of laborers (including farm), and 10.8% of private household work. By 1960, little changed, with Black workers constituting 25.9%, 18.4%, 12.1%, and 7.8% respectively. In contrast, white workers represented 22.2% of the manufacturing jobs, 6.8% in the service industry, 4.8% of laborers (including farm), and 0.9% of private household work in 1950. In 1960, they occupied 19.2%, 6.8%, 3.5%, and 0.9% respectively. Census 14.
74 Herman Stein, The Crisis of Welfare in Cleveland (Cleveland: Case Western, 1969) 50.
75 Urban League 12.
76 Urban League 12.
77 Urban League 12.
mention who was hardest hit by such measures. As construction and manufacturing jobs evaporated with the advancement of technological automation, so did employment for Blacks. A 1959 report by the Cleveland Metropolitan Services Commission on Public Welfare in Cleveland stated “automated production lines, electronic data processing machines, and similar tools have also made obsolete our need for unskilled labor.” Employment downsizing normally translated into Black people, as the unskilled laborers, losing their jobs first. This predicament was justified by the symbolic representation of Black people within the dominant order.

The corollary to Blacks having the worst jobs was that Blacks would also be paid the least. The income of Black people was considerably less than that of whites: 56 percent of the population was receiving an income of less than $3,000, whereas only 40.2 percent of the white population fell within those income brackets. Income limitations meant limited choices in housing for members of the Black community and, in turn, affected the quality of schools for Black children. Yet with no income, these choices were almost non-existent. In December 1963, Black people constituted nearly a third of the unemployed ranks, or 11,900 out of a total of 34,000. Within the Black community, 10.5 percent of the population was unemployed, as opposed to 3.2 percent of the white population.

C. HOUSING CONDITIONS

Velma Jean Woods and her husband moved into the Clevelander Apartments on East 93rd in June 1957. The Woods were only the second Black family to move into the 7 story, 72

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78 Davis 1972, 337.
79 Cleveland Metropolitan Services Commission, Public Welfare in Metropolitan Cleveland (Cleveland, OH. 1959) 8.
81 Ohio Bureau of Unemployment Compensation - Total Figures Released February 1964.
unit apartment complex. As the Cleveland Black population expanded and entered into new territories, white people first resisted, and then eventually fled. Some white families departed as quickly as the Woods moved in; others were forced out as rent escalated with the new Black tenants. Whereas the elder white tenants had a fixed rent which rarely fluctuated, the arrival of Black tenants provided the impetus for landlords to maximize profits via the exploitation of Black people. Elder white occupants disappeared and so did decent landlord service. By 1964, the Cleveland had deteriorated as rent prices continued to escalate. The elevator had not worked in two years, roaches and rats made daily appearances, and maintenance workers rarely showed their faces.  

Mrs. Woods' story was similar to the experiences of most Black people in Cleveland. Overcrowding, high rent prices and shoddy maintenance were typical of the dwellings located in the Black community. Davis notes that in one census tract of the Black community, "99 percent of the approximately 1200 dwellings had serious deficiencies in 1950." He continues, "[h]ousing fifty or more years old, occupied by a succession of families of poorer and poorer circumstances and by absentee owners." White landlords ignored the situation and refused to upgrade living facilities. The response from the City of Cleveland was to invoke programs of "slum clearance." Brisker notes that as families were forced out of one neighborhood, they would double up with relatives or friends in another community, contributing to its increasing deterioration. In addition, homeowners eagerly converted family homes into smaller apartments and profited off Black residents who had been forced out of overcrowded "slum" areas.

82 Testimony of Velma Jean Woods before the United State Commission on Civil Rights hearing held on April 4, 1966 in Cleveland 107-111.  
83 Davis 1972, 333.  
84 Davis 1972, 330.  
85 Brisker 70.
With little freedom to choose where to live, Blacks were usually segregated into Central and East Cleveland, which in turn created immense overpopulation. However, similar to the situation at the Cleveland apartments, as Blacks moved into the city, whites flocked to the suburbs. This provided some working class Black families the opportunity to purchase decent housing in areas such as Glenville and Mount Pleasant during the later 1950s. In time, the Black population would swell to where neighborhood expansion was inevitable, regardless of white resistance. The shortage of low income housing for the majority of Blacks initiated public housing construction by the Cleveland Metropolitan Housing Authority in 1944. Projects such as Carver Park and Outwaite Homes alleviated some of the shortage, but had little affect on the overall density problem.

In 1957, the Government constructed the Longwood Apartment Complex between East 33rd and East 40th Street, with 836 units. In addition, along 79th Street south of Kinsman in the Central area, the government built the Garden Valley public housing project. Davis argues that the surroundings of these public housing projects, notably poor schools and "slums," led to rapid turnover in residents. Furthermore, the establishment of public housing units contributed to the segregation of Cleveland. Frustration and hopelessness escalated as Blacks were partitioned into specific segments of the city. In combination with the social issues previously mentioned, the poorer sections of Black Cleveland were waiting for an organization to confront the resource allocation of the dominant order and challenge the status of Black inferiority.

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86 Brisker 70.
87 Davis 1972, 308.
88 Davis 1972, 308-309.
89 Davis 1972, 308.
90 Brisker 70.
91 Brisker 70.
92 Davis 1972, 331.
Overcrowding within Cleveland's residential Black communities overshadows the increase in Black homeownership during the 50s, as the Urban League reported a homeownership jump from 8,782 to 19,621.\textsuperscript{93} Far from being dispersed throughout the Black community, this growth was restricted to the older segments of the Black community, who most often only moved to the outer boundaries of the original Black Cleveland. As middle class Blacks attempted to move outside of Glenville, Hough, and Mt. Pleasant, white property owners greeted them with fierce resistance. Protest erupted in the Lee-Harvard area in 1953 as white residents stoned and smeared paint on a house being pursued by a Black purchaser.\textsuperscript{94} Likewise, one home which was constructed for a Black family in the Ludlow area was bombed in 1956.\textsuperscript{95} But not all white residents shared this hostility. Whites and Blacks united and formed the Ludlow Community Association in 1957 in support of an integrated neighborhood.\textsuperscript{96}

In general, the housing situation in Cleveland was deplorable. As F. Barnard Sellers, Program Analyst for the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, testified "[h]ousing conditions have not changed substantially since the 1960 Census and at that time 9,000 Negro families in the city lived in substandard dwellings, over 13,000 were in overcrowded houses, and among renters nearly 24,000 paid a quarter or more of their total income for rent."\textsuperscript{97} In 1960, 28.2 percent of all housing occupied by Blacks was below the minimum standard, either dilapidated or deteriorating. In contrast, only 7.4 percent of white people's housing fell within the same category.\textsuperscript{98}

\textsuperscript{91} Urban League 16.  
\textsuperscript{94} Davis 1972, 331.  
\textsuperscript{95} Davis 1972, 331.  
\textsuperscript{96} Davis 1972, 332.  
\textsuperscript{97} Commission 96.  
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D. EFFECTS OF DE FACTO SEGREGATION IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM

Glenville's Patrick Henry junior high was a typical public school in Cleveland's Black community. Over 95 percent of the school's population was Black. The facilities were inadequate to accommodate the 2,100 students. Overcrowded schools, with large classroom enrollment and insufficient library facilities, added to the second-rate education of Cleveland's Black youth. Overcrowding burdened teachers and inhibited the learning potential of the students. Mrs. Percy Cunningham, a science teacher at Patrick Henry, explained, "I teach in a science room that is in the basement. There is very little, if any, as far as facilities, as far as pictures on the wall, and microscopes and equipment that can be used." To no surprise, she continued to say that most of the student's achievement was lower than it should have been. As the Black population in Cleveland increased, so did the population within the schools. Similar to the housing situation, Cleveland's inability to effectively respond to the educational crisis laid the foundation for future community struggle.

For Blacks, experience in the Cleveland public school system was no different from the experiences in the areas of employment and housing. Allocated to the bottom of the social order, it followed that these conditions were proper for Black people. The racial polarization noted in the population figures above created an educational system for two different groups in Cleveland. The de facto segregation of schools created different facilities and resources for Blacks and whites. As the Urban League reported, "[s]ixty percent of all public elementary schools in the Cleveland school district [were] either all-white or all-

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89 Commission 296.
Negro."\textsuperscript{100} Likewise, they documented 40 percent of public junior high schools and 58 percent of public senior high schools in the city as completely segregated.\textsuperscript{101} However, these figures are extremely conservative when compared to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights' document, "Staff Report, Education, Cleveland, Ohio."\textsuperscript{102} Testifying on behalf of the Commission, Richard Bellman stated that "[i]n the 169 schools considered, it was found that 82.6 percent of the children are attending schools with a population either 95 to 100 percent white or 95 to 100 percent Negro."\textsuperscript{103} White teachers predominately taught at white schools, and vice versa, Black teachers were assigned to all Black schools.\textsuperscript{104} Furthermore, the result of the expenditure per child was different within the inner city when compared to white school districts. The ratio of teacher to student was considerably different: 60 per 1000 students in the white community; 39 per 1000 in the Black community.\textsuperscript{105} Integrationists organized around the public school arrangement to confront the institutionalized white racism.

Murray Hill, Cleveland's "Little Italy," and Collinwood were the settings for confrontation over the schooling of Black children in Cleveland during the early part of the 60's. In the summer of 1963, a new coalition was born called the United Freedom Movement, uniting Black ministers, Jewish leaders, traditional Black leaders, and the new

\textsuperscript{100} Urban League 8.
\textsuperscript{101} Urban League 8.
\textsuperscript{102} Richard Bellamy, an attorney for the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, testified that the staff study considered 135 elementary, 21 junior high, and 13 senior high schools in Cleveland. He continued to state, "Using 1963 statistics, 1965 census data, and data gathered on interviews with school officials, it was possible to determine with substantial accuracy the racial composition of the 1965 Cleveland public school population." Commission 274.
\textsuperscript{103} Commission 274.
\textsuperscript{104} Commission 276
\textsuperscript{105} Urban League 8,9.
militants of Cleveland. The UFM was solidified to protest the deployment of Black children to overcrowded Black schools while white schools had vacant spaces. The UFM also criticized the construction of two new schools within Cleveland’s rundown Black enclaves, seeing them as steps that inhibited integration. At a planned protest in Murray Hill in January 1964, Black demonstrators and passers-by were beaten by an angry mob of white residents with little police intervention. After Mayor Ralph Locher refused to intervene, he quickly became the target of a sit-in during the early part of February. Police forcibly removed Black ministers and community activists who were occupying the Board of Education building. Images of community members being dragged out by the police remained in the consciousness of the Black community.

The situation of children in public schools mirrored the larger situation of the Black community in Cleveland. Each social condition was dependent upon the others. All were interconnected to the dominant order which legitimated their existence. In opposition, Black people became increasingly militant in the second half of the 1960s. The material conditions of Black people in Cleveland created the setting for hostility and frustration. Lack of employment, inadequate housing and health care set the margins of Black people’s impoverishment. In 1964, the report by the Cleveland Urban League stated that if the disparities between black and whites were not rectified, the city was on the verge of destruction. Two years later, on July, 18 1966, Cleveland erupted.

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107 Masotti 34.
108 Masotti 34.
E. THE RISE OF BLACK MILITANCY AND POLITICAL POWER

As the student sit-ins began in the South, the Cleveland NAACP followed with a persistent picketing of white companies in the early 1960s to protest against unfair hiring practices. Out of this protest, Lewis Robinson and the demonstrators formed the Freedom Fighters in December 1960, first to monetarily assist students and communities of Black sharecroppers in the South, then focusing on discriminatory practices within Cleveland.109 Through the support of the NAACP membership, the Freedom Fighters pushed the Cleveland civil rights agenda during the early part of the 1960s, targeting the practices of Cleveland’s banks, department stores, and public offices to deny certain privileges to Black people. As Lewis Robinson described in his memoirs, “[t]hese were Freedom Fighters! A group of factory workers, not peoples with degrees; not the bourgeois, but hungry ex-southerners like me who came North looking for equality and brotherhood and discovered that you had to fight even harder than in the South.”110 Robinson and the Freedom Fighters pushed the traditional organizations fighting in Cleveland and laid the groundwork for a new militancy within the Black community.

During the early months of 1966, hostility between white and Black youths escalated to a boiling point. Roving gangs of white youths harassed Blacks walking by Cleveland’s Little Italy and initiated a tirade against local Black youths.111 As the Cleveland police made excuses for their inability to charge the perpetrators, militant organizations like Robinson’s new JFK House began to mobilize opposition. Following a series of meetings with Black youths, Robinson and fellow Black Nationalist Harllee Jones attempted to contain the

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110 Robinson 59.
111 Estelle Zannes, Checkmate in Cleveland: The Rhetoric of Confrontation During the Stokes Years (Cleveland: Case Western Reserve, 1972) 23.

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general youth frustration with the police’s inadequate response and the behavior of the white youths. Meetings, however, could not calm the response following the shooting of a Black woman on a bus in a white neighborhood. On July, 18 1966, tensions escalated and finally culminated at the Seventy-Niner’s Café on East 79th Street and Hough Avenue, when the white owner refused to serve a drink to a Black customer and then proceeded to place a sign outside reading “No Water for Niggers.”112 The crowd that had gathered in front of the café became furious, hurling rocks and initiating four nights of rebellion in Hough. The end result left four dead and ten wounded.

Cleveland’s political establishment was unable to recuperate following the aftermath of the rebellion. Thus, Hough set the stage for Cleveland’s most tumultuous political change. As the incumbent Democratic Mayor Ralph Locker lost support from his political power base, the door opened for a new political machine. After defeating Locker in the Democratic primary, Carl B. Stokes became the first Black mayor of a major industrial city, as he squeaked out a victory over the Republican Seth Taft in the 1967 election. Stokes rode the Black Power movement to a political victory, capturing 95% of the votes in Cleveland's Black wards.113 Some considered the victory as a gift from the white establishment, in hopes that Stokes would contain the ‘hostility’ of the Black youth. As City Council member Leo Jackson stated, the business community was purchasing security when they elected a Black mayor in 1967.114

With Stokes in office, sectors of the Black community looked for answers to their lack of employment, sub-standard housing, and inadequate education. In response, Stokes

112 Zannes 25.
114 Zannes 17.
initiated his Cleveland: NOW! campaign to confront the conditions of poor people in the city. The government mobilized businesses and foundations to donate over $5.5 million towards community projects such as day-care and recreation centers, drug-treatment centers, and expansions of public housing facilities. In advocating the increased expenditure of federal programs, however, Stokes perpetuated the flawed liberal ideology that government and profit-oriented enterprise could bring an end to poverty. Without seriously deconstructing the cultural system which allows for the existence of the poverty concept, as well as the structure of economic production and exchange, Stokes had no chance of arriving at the solution. Nelson further argues that Stokes refused to confront the economic structure of Cleveland, and in effect, could not alleviate the impoverishment imposed on unemployed Black workers. The election of Stokes did, however, open the door for members of the Black middle class, as they flowed into positions of government authority. Under no other administration had more Blacks been appointed to positions of official capacity.

Stokes prided himself on uniting Black militants and accommodating white conservatives. His relationship with the Afro Set leader Harlrel Jones was often noted in the criticism of his administration’s support of militants. Yet Stokes was only in support of militancy or Black Power when it directly benefited him and his base of power. If Jones could keep the Black Nationalists in line, then Stokes had room for him in his circle of friends. In addition, Stokes relied heavily on the funding of the white establishment and “couldn’t afford to do anything to aggravate the white voter.” Thus, when Dr. Martin

115 Carl B. Stokes, Promises of Power: Then and Now (Cleveland: Friends of Carl B. Stokes, 1989) 129-130.
116 Nelson 385.
117 The Afro Set, founded by Jones in 1968, was the strongest Black Nationalist organization in Cleveland and centered its activities around the Hough area. Harlrel Jones, personal interview, 18 November 1998.
118 Stokes 102.
Luther King, Jr. visited Cleveland in 1967, Stokes informed him that "if you come here with those marches and what not, you can see what the reaction will be. ... You're going to create problems that we do not have now and may not be able to handle. I would rather that you not stay." Stokes had no intention of being criticized by the nation's leading civil rights leader. Black Power simply became Stokes' personal power.

As noted earlier, the situation in Cleveland had reached a boiling point during the mid 1960s with the Hough rebellion. Likewise, as the promises of a Black mayor faded, segments of Cleveland's Black community again geared up for resistance. Black Nationalists expressed their concerns to deaf ears as the white police continued to harass political activists. Police were often perceived as an occupying army in the Black community and harassed Black residents with no repercussions. The repression meted out by the Cleveland Police Department was an additional tool of the hegemonic elite to sustain its authority over members of Cleveland's Black community. Ranging from police brutality, discriminatory arrests and detention, to inadequate police response in the Black community, the police department was never seen as an ally of Black residents. The situation that unfolded in Glenville established the tone of Black militancy and the position of Stokes.

On July 23, 1968, an abandoned Cadillac on Beulah Avenue was scheduled to be towed by the Cleveland Police Department. As two civilians dressed as police officers, William McMillan and Roy Benslay, carried forth with the operation of removing the Cadillac, shots rang out from the bushes and from the area in front of the car. Fred Ahmed Evans had supposedly initiated a rebellion. McMillan later recounted: "[t]he snipers set up the ambush and used the tow truck as a decoy to bring the police in. They had their

119 Stokes 102.
120 Masotti 43.
crossfire all planned. We were sitting ducks."\textsuperscript{121} Instantaneously, the ambush theory was accepted throughout the Cleveland area. However, Masotti and Corsi, in their government commissioned investigation, cast doubt on such a proposition after hearing additional information from individuals who had spoken with Evans that evening.\textsuperscript{122}

On the night of the shoot-out, Evans had councilman George Forbes and others at his house.\textsuperscript{123} The Cleveland Police Department had given Forbes and other Cleveland officials information from the FBI that Evans and his organization, the Black Nationalists of New Libya, were planning an attack on July 24\textsuperscript{th} in conjunction with organized riots in Akron and Canton.\textsuperscript{124} Furthermore, the report listed Stokes, Councilman Leo Jackson, William Walker (publisher of the Black newspaper the Call and Post), community activist Baxter Hill, and patrolman James Payne as assassination targets.\textsuperscript{125} Yet with shaky information from the informants, police decided to institute a mobile surveillance of Evans' apartment with Black police officers. However, when Forbes arrived at Evans' apartment, two cars full of whites were stationed in front of the building.\textsuperscript{126}

During Forbes stay, Evans expressed concern about the potential of a seemingly harmless police surveillance. He had just witnessed a police raid on a Black Nationalist headquarters in Akron, where police tear gassed and clubbed the organization's members.\textsuperscript{127} Forbes, however, was unsuccessful in removing the stationed police vehicle across the street from Evans' residence, and soon left the premises. Shortly after, shots rang out and the Glenville rebellion began. The following hour, from 8:30 PM to 9:30 PM, 22 people were

\textsuperscript{121} Masotti 44.
\textsuperscript{122} Masotti 26-34.
\textsuperscript{123} Masotti 44.
\textsuperscript{124} Masotti 44; Stokes 208.
\textsuperscript{125} Masotti 44.
\textsuperscript{126} Masotti 46.
\textsuperscript{127} Masotti 46, 49, 57.
either killed or injured.\textsuperscript{128} Masotti reconstructs the events to show that the police officers who were on surveillance were the primary targets after Evans became threatened. Rather than a planned ambush, Evans and his organization seemed to act in self-defense.

Stokes decision to take all the white members of the National Guard, police force, and non-residents out of the Glenville area, initiated an occurrence in which Black people finally had community control. The shooting halted after Stokes placed Black community leaders and police officers directly in the community.\textsuperscript{129} Stokes, however, was not interested in the grievances of the Black community who were caught in the gunfire of the Glenville rebellion.\textsuperscript{130} His primary concern was establishing law and order to the Glenville area.

The prominence of Black Nationalism and the election of Stokes in 1967 sparked an elevation in consciousness. Members of Cleveland's Black community, whose political awareness was developing, began to join a variety of Black Nationalist organizations. Others who were discontent with the ideological direction of Black Nationalism formulated plans to establish a local operation of the Black Panther Party. The following chapter will look at the evolution of the Cleveland Panthers and how the members were directly connected with the history of struggle in Cleveland's Black community.

\textsuperscript{128} Masotti 56.
\textsuperscript{129} Stokes 216.
\textsuperscript{130} Stokes was struck with a heavy political blow when it was later learned that Evans had bought his weapons with funds from a Cleveland NOW! project. Masotti 46.
CHAPTER 3

THE BEGINNINGS OF THE CLEVELAND BLACK PANTHERS

As gunshots rang in Glenville on the evening of July 23, 1968, the murder trial of BPP leader Huey P. Newton was only one week old. Newton was being tried for the alleged murder of Officer John Frey in Oakland the previous year. Just as Newton’s trial was galvanizing the consciousness of Blacks on the West Coast, the summer rebellion in Glenville elevated the consciousness of Cleveland’s Black communities, spurring greater political activity and Black militancy. The timing of the Glenville riots and the “Free Huey” campaign represents not only a symbolic convergence, but also a practical one -- one that set the stage for the growth of the BPP into a national movement.

Primarily a phenomenon in Northern California, the BPP moved to national prominence after the armed Panther march on the California legislature, the police murder of Bobby Hutton, and the “Free Huey” campaign. These “colossal events,” noted David Hillard, were instrumental in generating interest in the Party nationwide.137 These events, however, have been well documented and analyzed. What remains to be explored is the ways in which local organizers funneled the hysteria around the Panthers into something of

137 David Hillard, This Side of Glory: The Autobiography of David Hillard and the Story of the Black Panther Party (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1993) 17. One of Newton’s Lawyers, Edward Keating wrote on the “Huey event” which propelled the Panthers: “to fully understand the significance of the trial of Huey P. Newton, it is first necessary to be aware that the sudden emergence of the Black Panther Party on the
value for Black communities across the country. It is these local dynamics that is the subject of this chapter. Specifically, this section will explore the genesis of the Cleveland Panther experience, first looking at the self-labeled Black Panthers and then uncovering the course of events that led to the official establishment of a local BPP office.

A. CLEVELAND PANTHER SIGHTINGS

The initial appearance of the Panthers in Cleveland came by way of two avenues: first, through the activities of unofficial, self-declared Panthers; and second, through the activities of criminals who were labeled Black Panthers by the state. The first sightings of Panthers surfaced in late September 1968, when the Young Socialist Alliance at Case Western Reserve University (CWRU) organized a meeting with a group that called themselves the Black Panthers. Dressed in full Panther fatigues – black berets with panther emblems, black pants, and black jackets – the self-appointed Panther Marvin Wolf-Bey and five others addressed the predominately student crowd of 140 with the standard Panther rhetoric. Wolf-Bey recited the BPP 10-point platform and demanded justice for Minister of Defense Newton, stating that "Panthers will protect other Blacks by any means necessary."132 Over the course of that year, numerous newspaper articles declared Wolf-Bey the leader of the Black Panthers in Cleveland and listed their headquarters at East 78th Street and Hough Avenue.133 The Cleveland Press reported, for example, that the "Black Panthers, formerly an unrecognized group here, last week were officially chartered as a member of the national Black Panther Party."134 As will be discussed, the national BPP leadership continually denied the existence of these local organizations.

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of an official branch of the Party in Cleveland until the winter of 1970. In the meantime, Wolf-Bey's tenure as a self-styled Panther ended behind prison bars. In July 1970, he pled guilty to both the murder of James Ferguson, Jr. and shooting at firefighters.  

Despite the fact that National Headquarters never recognized Wolf-Bey as a Black Panther, Cleveland law enforcement later seized the opportunity to connect him with officially recognized Black Panthers. Assistant County Prosecutor Charles Laurie remarked, for example, that Wolf-Bey's plea was significant because it was 'the first time Black Panthers admitted shooting at safety forces.' The state's labeling of criminals as Black Panthers proved to be an effective strategy in influencing popular sentiment. Likewise, the Cleveland media's negative depiction of the Panthers influenced the public's perception of the Party. For example, the alleged shoot-out between the Afro Set and Black Panthers was publicized as a war between the two organizations. Although the individuals involved were never official members of the BPP, the Cleveland media followed the story circulated by the police and stigmatized the image of the Panther before it's local inception.

Other "Black Panthers" made headlines in the Cleveland papers, primarily for murder or other violent crimes. While these criminal activities reinforced the dominant representation of the BPP, it is also quite possible that the self-appointed Panthers saw themselves as real Party members after they dressed in the Black garb and tossed on a beret.

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136 "Wolfe Bey: Enters Manslaughter Plea," 7A.
They may have even thought that killing an alleged CIA agent was a revolutionary act.\(^{139}\) Cleveland during this time was flooded with cultural and political organizations in the various Black neighborhoods and the identity of a Black Panther commanded respect and prestige, regardless of official approval from National Headquarters. These youths were the "brothers on the block" who Newton and Seale wished to organize into political action.\(^{160}\) The BPP attempted to funnel the collective frustration of the inner city into the workings of a revolutionary political machine. Yet without a local political organization in Cleveland to coordinate the activities of Black youths, revolutionary criminal activities were sure to be met with state violence.

Lindsay Maddox proclaimed to head a separate contingency that identified themselves as the Cleveland Black Panther Party. In the summer of 1969, Maddox announced that the a group had organized during the summer and established an office at 7809 Superior Avenue with "about 500 members or applicants at one time."\(^{141}\) After continual harassment from white vigilantes and the police, their funds were drained on bail and by December, the group had disintegrated. According to Maddox, the group had applied to National Headquarters for a charter, but disbanded before hearing back from the BPP leadership.

\(^{139}\) Walter Brown and Darryl Payne, two of the 5 "admitted members of the Black Panthers," were charged with first degree murder after they allegedly stabbed Willie T. Davis, an individual they declared as a CIA agent. "Five Black Charged in Glenville Murder, Fire-Bombing," A4.

\(^{160}\) In some ways, the lumpen awe attached to the Panther mystique generated its own problems. Clarence Munfuri argues that the lumpen sector lacks the loyalty necessary to be a revolutionary force and are prone to continuing their old habits of violence in solving problems. "The Fallacy of Lumpen Ideology," Black Scholar 4 (July – August 1973): 47-51.

\(^{141}\) "Black Panther Party is Dead Here," Cleveland Press 9 December 1969.
According to *The Black Panther* newspaper, there was no official chapter or branch of the BPP in Cleveland through 1969. As will be discussed, every visit by the national Party leadership to Cleveland resulted in a denunciation of the self-styled Panther activity in Cleveland. Furthermore, as most branches of the Party reported on their community programs or police repression in the weekly issues of *The Black Panther*, the alleged Panthers in Cleveland never had an article published through 1969.

### B. THE REAL CLEVELAND PANTHERS

#### 1. THE EARLY YEARS

The emergence of the official Cleveland Panthers came after the BPP leadership established a strong alliance with the leaders of Cleveland’s anti-war movement – the “mother country radicals,” as Newton labeled them. Don Freed, a playwright who organized a group called “Friends of the Panthers” in Los Angeles to raise funds for the Party, connected the Panther leadership with white liberals in Cleveland. The BPP utilized the contacts with the progressive white movement in Cleveland to speak out on the unauthorized local Panther activities, as well as to publicize the national activities and repression of the Party.

One of Freed’s friends in Cleveland was Dr. Paul Zilsel, a professor at CWRU and head of the United Front for Political Defense. In association with Wilbur Gratton, minister

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142 The Party issued a list of all of its official chapters and branches in November 1969, without noting the activities in Cleveland. (*The Black Panther* 1 November 1969, 20).
143 Although some suggest that this void was the result of the FBI’s seizure of Cleveland Panther articles, this argument holds little merit considering the fact that two articles were written on Fred Ahmed Evans. One of these articles was written by Wilbur Gratton, a Cleveland Black Nationalist who assisted the BPP leadership in organizing speaking engagements. See Wilbur Gratton “Legal Lynching and More of the Same: Fred Ahmed Evans,” *The Black Panther* 13 September 1969: 9; “Ahmed Evans’ Story,” *The Black Panther* 18 October 1969: 5.
144 Hilliard 123.
145 In one case, Freed attempted to persuade Bobby Seale to speak in Cleveland, stating “its still 1966 to them, both black and white, but especially the blacks, and you could turn the tide.” 24 March 1969. Stanford
of state and foreign affairs for the Republic of New Africa, they organized a series of
speakers in May 1969 to focus on the state of American political prisoners. Among the
featured speakers was "Masai" Hewitt, the Minister of Education for the BPP, who made it
clear that there were no legitimate BPP chapters in Cleveland. Another progressive white
in Cleveland was Sidney Peck, a sociology professor at CWRU, who was instrumental in
organizing two visits by Hilliard in October and December 1969. During Hilliard's first
visit to Cleveland, a radio interviewer informed him about "a lot of misinformation about
the Party" in Cleveland. Hilliard took advantage of the opportunity to "counteract the bad
atmosphere caused by lies," and reiterated that there was no official branch of the Party in
Cleveland.

In addition to the denunciation of the activities of unofficial Panthers, Hilliard used
his speaking engagements to establish connections with local Black radicals who could
possibly carry on a plan to mobilize segments of the Cleveland community around the tenets
of the Party. One of those individuals was Ernest Watts. Watts was selling issues of the BPP

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University Libraries, Department of Special Collections, Newton Foundation Inc. Collection: Series 4, Box 1, Folder 20; Hilliard 285-288.


147 D. Hilliard and Emory Douglas, Minister of Culture, were originally scheduled to accompany Hewitt to Cleveland. Zilsel had purchased the tickets for all three, but after some complications at National Headquarters, only Hewitt made the trip.


149 Peck continually presented opportunities for the BPP leadership in Cleveland. Hilliard's visit to Cleveland included an appearance on the Allen Douglas Show, after Peck had suggested him to the producer Bill Baker. Stanford University Libraries, Department of Special Collections, Newton Foundation Inc. Collection: Series 4, Box 3, Folder 8.
newspaper, *The Black Panther*, with a small, integrated leadership core that included Robert Jackson, Wolf Raymer, and his wife, Debbie. In December, Hilliard promised Watts he would send some organizers from Oakland or Detroit to coordinate the framework for a Panther operation in Cleveland.

In July 1969, the BPP held a national conference from which emerged a new organizing bureau of the Party called the National Committee to Combat Fascism (NCCF). For the year following the conference, individuals interested in establishing a BPP branch were told that the only operation being authorized was in the form of an NCCF. Thus, Hilliard's promise to coordinate a Panther operation in Cleveland took the form of an NCCF in 1970. As the literature from the Cleveland Panther office later stated "[t]he NCCF Ohio Chapter is a social and political organization of the Black Panther Party. Our goals are to educate the masses of people in Cleveland as to the correct ideology of the Party." In addition to these goals, the NCCF offices were used as an instrument to incorporate white people into the direction of the BPP. For practical purposes, however, there was no difference between the two: the NCCF followed the Panther doctrine and instituted the same community programs as BPP branches and chapters.

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154 FBI Memo from SAC San Francisco to Director, 11 April 1970. Stanford University Libraries, Department of Special Collections, Newton Foundation Inc. Collection: Series 4, Box 12, Folder 3.
156 Interestingly, some of the BPP leadership were initially confused about the whole purpose of the NCCF. In October 1969, three months after the conference, Masa Hewitt asked June Hilliard "what's this stuff about "National Committees?" According to Hilliard, "David (Hilliard) wanted the new chapters to be called National Committee to Combat Fascism." The NCCF were to replace all new Panther branches and chapters.
The Panthers in Cleveland were originally given the status of an NCCF for two possible reasons. First, the BPP closed ranks in 1969 in order to "cleanse" all agents and provocateurs that had infiltrated the local branches and chapters.\footnote{157} New Panther operations were first given the title NCCF as a method of screening potential Panthers. Once they proved their worthiness to the Party, National Headquarters granted a branch or chapter. A second reason why Cleveland may have been given the status of an NCCF rather than a branch was because Hilliard was aware that Watts had connections with whites from the West Side. Although these individuals had actually left Cleveland before the spring of 1970, when the Cleveland Panthers began to make headway, it's likely that Hilliard and the BPP assumed that this leadership core was still an integrated coalition.

In any event, the distinction between the NCCF and the branches was not always maintained, particularly in the minds of local members. As one Cleveland NCCF member stated, "[Regardless of what we were called,] I always considered myself a Black Panther."\footnote{158} Given this fact, the title Cleveland Panthers will be used throughout this study to signify all official Panther activities in Cleveland, including both the early Cleveland NCCF and the later Cleveland Branch of the BPP.\footnote{159}

Despite their status as Cleveland NCCF, the early Cleveland Panthers started on rocky terrain. Early on, dissension had crept into the small core of organizers, which

\footnote{157} During an October 1969 phone conversation with Doc Cox "DC," the Field Marshall of the BPP, about a new Panther organizer in Texas, Hilliard stated, "he can work through the National Committees [NCCF] but he can't work in the Party because the Party is closed and it might not be opened again until after the revolution." Stanford University Libraries, Department of Special Collections, Newton Foundation Inc. Collection: Series 4, Box 3, Folder 51.

\footnote{158} Luke McCoy, personal interview, 24 April 1999.

\footnote{159} The Cleveland Panthers were declared an official branch of the BPP in April 1971. On the communications sheet of National Headquarters for the week of April 4 – April 8, 1971, it states, "Toledo, OH was informed that they are now a chapter of the BPP and Mike Cross is the coordinator of the entire state. establishing
included Watts, the Raymer’s, Jackson, and Jerry Lindsey. Lindsey had initiated the strife in January 1970 when he phoned National Headquarters and spoke with Hewitt about the situation in Cleveland. Lindsey was adamant about banning white people, including the Raymer’s, from participating on the steering committee in Cleveland. Hewitt’s response to Lindsay was unsupportive, however, and he went so far as to state “we control the NCCF from [Oakland] and if we can’t control it, we will shut it down.”

Lindsey’s antics continued to frustrate the BPP leadership. A week after Hewitt’s comment, Hilliard stated that “there was not going to be anything in Cleveland.” Locally, Watts and the other core were fed up with Lindsey as well. They too had contacted the National Headquarters and informed them of the fact that Lindsay had solicited funds in the Party’s name for personal use and stolen Party literature. The BPP leadership found these observations to be credible and Lindsey was soon purged from the Party.

Following the elimination of Lindsey, the Cleveland Panthers began to move in a more stable direction. Similar to other inexperienced Panther organizers, Watts visited the National Headquarters in Oakland for a short period of time to become familiar with the

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160 The early Cleveland Panthers ran their operations out of two homes it seems. One was Robert Jackson’s at 4096 E. 139th St., the other was Watts’ at 2734 Hampshire #302 (“Black Panther Party list of all recognized Chapters, Branches, and NCCFs,” The Black Panther 9 May 1970: 10).
BPP Ten Point Program and the Party's organizational structure.165 He returned to Cleveland and continued to sell The Black Panther in front of City Hall and Public Square. The paper proved to be a valuable organizing tool. In addition to serving as the Party's primary instrument of information, it gave local Panthers the opportunity to recruit new members.166 During the late winter months of 1970, Ron Robinson, a former Black Nationalist, approached Watts and stated that he was interested in instituting some of the Panthers' community programs. Soon after, Robinson introduced Watts to Norman Peery and the three began to organize a series of community meetings to solidify the direction of the Party in Cleveland.167

Initially, the group began meeting at the Friendly Inn Settlement House and then later at the Garden Valley Neighborhood Center. Although the Panthers eventually obtained office space of their own, working in these spaces provided the opportunity to interact with various other community institutions. In particular, Rev. Herman Graham, who was the Director of the Garden Valley Neighborhood Center, became impressed with the Panthers and their early organizing techniques. He stated: "We gave the NOCF office space because we looked on them as a community service agency. It didn't take long to realize they were doing something we couldn't do - reaching people we couldn't reach."168

165 Ron Robinson, personal interview, 24 April 1999. Before heading to Oakland, Watts seemed to be unsure of his ability to organize the Panthers, asking Hilliard how they could get some more people on their side. Watts ranted about the "pork chops" and Afro Set, "approved by the pigs and financed by it." Phone Log, San Francisco. 21 January 1970. page 2. Stanford University Libraries, Department of Special Collections, Newton Foundation Inc. Collection: Series 4, Box 4, Folder 47.

166 Hilliard 154.

167 Robinson and Peery had known each other for a while, working together on various community projects in the Black community. Norman Peery, personal interview, 24 April 1999.

168 "Police, Black Community Split on Panthers," Cleveland Press 24 July 1970: A1, A4. The comments of Graham demonstrate that despite the popular negative representation of the Panthers, there were still local organizations and community leaders who chose to work with the Party. The interplay between the generations in the Black community also sheds light on the uniqueness of the BPP; they mobilized young people to press an agenda that positively influenced the daily living conditions of the older generation, or the entire community at large.
By spring 1971, a collection of Panthers including Robinson, Peery, and Watts, became attracted to the idea of establishing an office in the lower Kinsman neighborhood, where Robinson had grown up. It was important to establish the Panther office in a Black neighborhood, and according to Peery, the area was ideal because there were no established organizations and plenty of work to be done. The Afro Set had dominated the political activity in Hough, and the remnants of Ahmed Evans' Black Nationalists of New Libya controlled Glenville. This left lower Kinsman wide open. Moreover, 79th street was a main thoroughfare and would provide the Panthers with plenty of traffic. By June, the Cleveland Panthers' core group of 15 had moved their office to the corner of 79th and Rawlings.

2. YEARS OF GROWTH

The new recruits for the Cleveland Panthers came from primarily three camps: (1) committed and experienced Black radical activists; (2) college students; and (3) neighborhood high school teenagers. As discussed in the previous chapter, the political consciousness of Cleveland's Black community was heightened after the rebellions in the Hough and Glenville. A number of organizations mobilized around the strong sentiments of Black Nationalism and from these organizations emerged a core group of committed radicals. However, not all politically conscious insurgents were satisfied with the ideological tenets of the popular resistance movement in Cleveland. The maturation of the Black

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169 Peery, personal interview.
170 Peery, personal interview.
171 "Panthers Tell of Play Lot, Free Breakfast Programs," Cleveland Plain Dealer 30 June 1970: 15A.
172 Similar to other BPP branches and chapters, the majority of Panthers were young college students and teenagers. Heath 1976, 133.
Panthers in Cleveland largely came as a result of this frustration, as a small cadre of Black radicals searched for a new avenue to confront the conditions in the Black community.

Peery was among this cadre. He had attended some Afro Set meetings before he committed himself to the Panther vision of self-defense.\textsuperscript{173} Uninterested in the cultural nationalist foundation of Afro Set, Peery explained that he “especially liked the fact that [the Panthers] were willing to pick up the gun and organize to defend themselves and their community.”\textsuperscript{174} The BPP’s revolutionary assertiveness gave frustrated Black radicals a different approach to confronting the social order. In addition, the BPP stimulated a new form of insurgency by blending the principles of armed self-defense with the establishment of community institutions that addressed the material needs of local Blacks.

Essex Smith, who joined the Cleveland Panthers after he graduated from Kennedy High School, was also influenced by the alternative vision of the Party. He stated: “I was disillusioned with the Black Nationalists and I was looking for an organization that was more progressive, ... that was doing some education and some teaching and also had social programs, which the Panthers did.”\textsuperscript{175} Likewise, Robinson was a former Black Nationalist who was frustrated with the limited philosophy of the movement. The BPP provided the opportunity for him to dig into the works of international thinkers.\textsuperscript{176}

Complementing the discontent Black radicals who joined the Cleveland Panthers, the Party also drew a strong base from the various local college campuses. Panthers such as Al Hayes, Fred Clark, Richard “Mike” Dowell, and Curtis Johnson were taking classes at

\textsuperscript{173} Peery, personal interview; Likewise, Luke McCoy was interested in the Panthers' attention towards the class analysis rather than the cultural nationalist tendencies of Afro Set. He lived in Hough, the stronghold of Afro Set, yet was more intrigued by the ideas and programs of the BPP. McCoy joined the Cleveland Panthers after spending some time working with CORE and the Hough Development Corporation. McCoy, personal interview.

\textsuperscript{174} Peery, personal interview.

\textsuperscript{175} Essex Smith, personal interview, 25 April 1999.
Cuyahoga Community College (Tri-C) as they participated in the daily operations of the Party. Some of these students were involved in political activities before they joined the Party. Cleveland Panther Bill Davis, for example, was active in organizing the Black Student Union at Cleveland State University and joined the Cleveland Panthers after he witnessed Bobby Seale shackled and gagged in the Chicago 7 trial. Other students were recruited into the organization after the leadership of the Cleveland Panthers made speeches at the campus meetings of Black organizations and recruited from the audience. A particularly effective member in this effort was the Deputy Chairman of the Cleveland Panthers at this time, James “Rock” Todd. One Cleveland Panther recalls, “I remember hearing Rock talk. I was so impressed with him. He could get up and rap the Party line – he was saying things I had never heard.”

As the Cleveland Panthers recruited students from the college campuses, they simultaneously mobilized the final component of their core: the teenage youth in the Kinsman and Central areas. The new Panther office quickly enticed neighborhood high school students like Allan “Red” Gaines, Danny Solomon, Daryl “Mad Dog” Harris, and the Hall brothers. Initially attracted to the confidence surrounding the Panther image, the Party was able to organize these youths into a social and political force in the community. The teens actively participated in political education classes and worked in the community programs. As Robinson recalls, “[the teens] were taught that this is part of what it means to

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26 Robinson, personal interview.
178 Before joining the Party, Davis had met David Hilliard during his speech at CWRU in December 1969. Davis, personal interview.
179 Clark, a Panther rank-and-file, was recruited at Tri-C for instance, after a Cleveland Panther attended a collective meeting of white radicals and Black revolutionaries. Clark, personal interview.
180 McCoy, personal interview.
181 Peery, personal interview; McCoy, personal interview; Robinson, personal interview.
be a part of the Black Panther Party. ... You didn't become a Panther to where a beret and a jacket. You came to work in the community to help people with the problems they had daily."

Older Panthers like Bill Davis stressed the importance of the Kinsman youth in the success of the Cleveland Panthers: "they were willing to work. They had the energy. They were willing to organize, go downtown, and stand on the corner for eight hours a day selling papers." Likewise, when the Panthers moved locations and opened the free breakfast program, it was the youth who were instrumental in these transitions. The Cleveland Panthers utilized the new recruits in the Kinsman neighborhood in a variety of community political institutions, including the free breakfast program, a reading program and basic political education classes for members and for the community.

In addition, the Cleveland Panthers carried out the first phases of their community health program, going door-to-door in the neighborhood with volunteer doctors and doing routine health checks and blood tests. As the Cleveland Panthers expanded and became more effective in the surrounding community, the local and federal law enforcement took notice and initiated their campaign to eliminate the Party's local operations.

In late June 1970, the Cleveland Panthers caught the attention of the popular media and residents outside the Kinsman area after a shoot-out with police at their office. The incident defined the context of hostility between the Cleveland Panthers and the Black political establishment, namely Mayor Stokes and his Safety Director, Gen. Benjamin Davis, Jr. As the Panthers were categorized as the threat to the established order, they swiftly

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182 Robinson, personal interview.
183 Davis, personal interview.
184 Feery, personal interview.
185 Robinson, personal interview.
became legitimate targets to be eliminated. The relationship between the Cleveland Panthers and the law enforcement agents will be discussed in the following chapter on Panther repression.
CHAPTER 4

THE REPRESSION OF THE CLEVELAND PANTHERS

When the BPP picked up the gun in October 1966, the leaders of the social order moved swiftly to label them as the primary enemy. The Panthers were stigmatized as the prophets of hate, brainwashing children, and seeking to “off the pigs.” With these public descriptions, police and federal officials could justify the force they used to squash the Party. The BPP had to symbolically represent the other in society to legitimate the national campaign waged against them. As Marable has noted, “[L]ocal police and federal marshals raided Black Panther offices across the country. By July 1969, the Panthers had been targeted by 233 separate actions under the FBI’s COINTELPRO, or Counter Intelligence Program. In 1969 alone, 27 Black Panthers were killed by the police, and 749 were jailed or arrested.”\textsuperscript{186} Among the existing literature, these instances are well documented and analyzed. However, with few exceptions, the literature does not probe the details of repression meted out against the Panthers on the local level.\textsuperscript{187}

\textsuperscript{186} Manning Marable, Race, Reform, and Rebellion: The Second Reconstruction in Black America, 1945-1990 (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 1991) 125.

\textsuperscript{187} The groundbreaking works are Ward Churchill and James Vanderwall, Agents of Repression: The FBI’s Secret Wars Against the Black Panther Party and the American Indian Movement (Boston: South End Press, 1990); and Kenneth O’Reilly, Racial Matters: The FBI’s Secret File on Black America (New York: Free Press, 1989). Their uncovering of FBI tactics and campaigns against the Black Panthers sets the tone for the COINTELPRO campaign. However, these studies are limited in that they focus primarily on the highly-publicized incidents: the assassinations of Bunchy Carter and John Huggins in Los Angeles; the trial of Ericka Huggins and Bobby Seale in New Haven; the New York 21 trial; and the assassination of Fred Hampton and
Similar to the national preoccupation discussed earlier, the analysis of FBI disruption and infiltration, as well as repression at the hands of local law enforcement, is confined to the larger Panther chapters and the national figureheads. This scholarship succeeds in uncovering what has come to be known as the FBI's most orchestrated and criminal campaign against any liberation movement. However, what results from this limited focus is a mistaken impression that the FBI's campaign to "neutralize" the Panthers was focused solely on the national headquarters and the larger chapters. In fact, there is evidence that the FBI's operation extended into the smaller Panther chapters and branches throughout the country.

This section will uncover the tactics and programs implemented by the law enforcement in Cleveland to undermine the party at the local level. Just as the FBI's campaign worked nationally to intimidate leaders of the Party, Cleveland officials attempted to create distrust within the Party and fuel confrontations between the Panthers and other Black Nationalist organizations. The unique dynamics in Cleveland again played a pivotal role in this process.

A. CLASHES WITH THE LOCAL LAW ENFORCEMENT

As previously discussed, the consciousness of Black people in Cleveland was elevated to a higher level after the Hough rebellion of 1966, which resulted in the 1967 election of Stokes. However, in July 1968, Cleveland erupted again. This time, Fred Ahmed Evans and the Black Nationalists of New Libya were involved in a shoot-out with Cleveland police

Mark Clark by Chicago police. As more FBI documents are released on their efforts at the local level, a broader study needs to be conducted.

officers. After five days of rebellion in Glenville, 7 were dead and 15 others were wounded. What resulted from this insurgency was a more repressive environment where organizations like the Panthers were subject to intensified harassment and hostility. Stokes took full advantage of the opportunity and set the stage for the eventual elimination of the Cleveland Panthers.

The Black Panthers in Cleveland never had any lofty ideas about the direction of the Black community during the mayorship of Stokes. Public speaking appearances by Cleveland Panthers usually contained fiery criticism of Stokes and his political machine. They accused him of serving the interests of the white establishment and withholding support for organizations in the poor Black communities. In Panther terms, Stokes was a “traditional white-endorsed, black-faced candidate.” In response, Stokes simply ignored the Panthers, and attempted to create the illusion that they never existed in Cleveland. The tactic of ignoring the Panthers disappeared, however, in January 1970, when Mayor Stokes appointed General Benjamin Davis, Jr. as the city’s new Safety Director. Davis immediately began a campaign against crime and “enemies of law enforcement.” The Cleveland Panthers proved to be an easy target.

It was in the early afternoon of June 29, 1970, when Cleveland Panthers Fred Clark, Mike Dowell, and Curtis Johnson and were driving over to the Panther office on 79th and Rawlings from the Cuyahoga Community College campus. Clark recalls having a nervous feeling the whole ride over, something just didn’t feel right. After the three arrived at the Panther office, Clark went upstairs in the front room and sat down at the typewriter to finish

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190 Jimmy Slater, personal interview, 31 August 1998.
some paperwork. Johnson and Dowell were downstairs and the rest of the office was empty. Clark peered out the window and saw a few white cars pass in front, but thought nothing of it. Minutes later, both sides of the street were filled with Cleveland police and federal law enforcement officials. Clark heard one shot. Then a barrage of bullets flooded the room he was in. One ricocheted and struck him in the back of the head, and Clark fell to the floor. Partially dazed, he wandered into the hallway, only to be shot again in the abdomen. Police dragged him outside, half-conscious with blood flowing everywhere.\textsuperscript{193}

The raid on the Cleveland Panther headquarters was officially to serve warrants that had been requested by Thomas Avery, the owner of Avery's Pharmacy, which was located across the street from the Panther office. Avery contended that Cleveland Panthers had threatened his life and made demands for money from him.\textsuperscript{194} He contacted the Cleveland police, who seemed to jump at the chance to instigate a confrontation. Between 50 and 75 police officers from the Cleveland Tactical Squad arrived at the Panther headquarters that afternoon to serve 'peace' warrants to Cleveland Panthers Johnson and Robert Hall.\textsuperscript{195} The Squad was dressed in full battle gear: dark steel helmets, bulletproof vests, carbines with plastic grips, and no badges. As the Panthers later stated, these are "familiar sights in the

\textsuperscript{192} Stokes incorrectly stated in his autobiography, "Afro Set, a group so strong locally that they were able to keep the Black Panthers from even establishing a local chapter" (Stokes 198).
\textsuperscript{193} Clark, personal interview.
\textsuperscript{194} Avery was the president of the Kinsman Multi-Service Corporation and received $30,000 from Cleveland NOW!, which was a project initiated by Mayor Stokes where wealthy businesses would contribute to a fund which would be used for community projects. Avery claimed to have been harassed and threatened for 6 weeks by Panthers after he refused to give them a portion of government funds to build a playground on a nearby vacant lot. Panther lawyer Frederic L. Ferrell argued that the Panthers wanted no more than $500 to build a playground on land. "One Year Later: Panthers Trial Opens in Shooting of Policeman," \textit{Call and Post} 19 June 1971: 1A, 6A; "Police, Black Community Split on Panthers," \textit{Cleveland Press} 24 July 1970: A1, A4.
\textsuperscript{195} Similar to the U.S. Park Police count of participants at the Million Man March, members of the establishment and police stated that only twelve police cars and 40-50 officers arrived on the scene. The Panthers and members of the left stated "75-100 strong." See "Policeman Shot in Raid for Weapons," \textit{Cleveland Press} 29 June 1970: A1; "Fascist Storm Troopers Wage Cowardly Attack on N.C.C.F Office... Ohio," \textit{The Black Panther} 11 July 1970: 3.
Black communities across the country of Babylon.\textsuperscript{196} The police alleged that they were greeted with gunfire upon their arrival, and had returned shots. Clark was the only Panther wounded; officer Heinrich Ortag was shot in the jaw and a resident in the area, Mary Smith, was injured when she was struck in the foot with the butt of an officer’s rifle.\textsuperscript{197}

The Cleveland Panthers denied demanding money from Avery and accused the police of using the feud as an excuse to execute a military assault on the Party. Consistent with the declaration of the BPP in \textit{The Black Panther}, “[e]ach raid that has been pulled on all of our offices and homes has been... to kill and/or jail as many Panthers as possible.”\textsuperscript{198} The police walked away with Clark, Dowell, and Johnson in handcuffs, arrested for allegedly shooting with the intent to kill a police officer. In addition, the Tactical Squad illegally confiscated tape recorders, cameras, office machines, and files from the Panther office, even though these items were not listed on the warrants.\textsuperscript{199} As they destroyed issues of \textit{The Black Panther}, the campaign against the Panthers attempted to inhibit the functioning of the entire organization.

In support of the Panthers, neighborhood residents retaliated and looted Avery’s store that evening, forcing him to move out the following week. They spray painted “Avery Killed Fred” and “Avenge Fred’s Death” on his storefront after seeing Clark carried away on a stretcher with blood flowing from his head.\textsuperscript{200} In addition, a coalition of white clergy, peace, and college groups denounced the tactics of the Cleveland Police, stating:

\begin{quote}
the police raid on the [Panthers] is consistent with the police practice in this city for the past five or six years. It is also consistent with the national wave
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{197} “Panthers Go On Trial for Gun Battle Here,” \textit{Cleveland Press} 15 June 1971; “Raid Victim?” 18A.
\textsuperscript{199} “Director Says He Wants Stop and Frisk Law,” \textit{Call and Post} 11 July 1970: 1A, 18A.
of violent political repression that is sweeping this country with national guard and police bullets.201

In a similar and surprising tone, Cleveland’s Black newspaper, Call and Post, criticized Davis and the police tactics, stating that “[s]omeone needs to answer whether or not it has become Cleveland police policy to resort to massive show of force when seeking to apprehend suspects in the Black community.”202

The force exhibited in the raid was just the beginning of a police harassment campaign against the Cleveland Panthers. Residents of the Central area and Panthers voiced complaints that police drove by day and night with their guns pointed at the Panther office.203 The Director of the Legal Aid Society’s Kinsman office, Ramon Basie, had an office a half block down from the Panthers. He asked police on numerous occasions to avoid bringing guns in the area and pointing them at the Panthers.204 As soon as the Panthers set up shop, he said there was an “increased police presence in the area. ... I heard from neighborhood youths of weekend visits by policemen, 40 strong and pointing guns at people.”205 Moreover, Basie notes that this was an area that normally got delayed or inadequate responses form the police when their assistance was requested.

Following the raid, the Cleveland Panthers were quick to demand the resignation of Davis. They also rallied protesters for the indictment hearings of Clark, Dowell, and Johnson at the Criminal Courts Building on July 21, 1970.206 Similar to the Panther tactics at the trial of Huey P. Newton, the Cleveland Panthers distributed flyers stating that they

202 “Hot or Cool?” Call and Post 11 July 1970: 10B.
203 Clark, personal interview.
204 “Panthers Claim Police Fired First,” Call and Post 4 July 1970: 1A, 16A.
206 Other organizations that united with the Panthers were the Case Western Reserve University Strike Community, Youth Against War and Fascism, United Front for Political Defense, Youth International Party,
would pack the courtroom hearing and picket the building.\textsuperscript{207} However, the hearing was canceled after Clark, Dowell, and Johnson were indicted by a County Grand Jury earlier in the morning.\textsuperscript{208} A month later, as the Cleveland Panthers organized again for the preliminary hearings, Common Pleas Judge Frank Gorman canceled the session, stating, "[u]ndercover city detectives informed us that friends of the defendants had been conducting a widespread campaign to pack the courtroom with the Black Panthers. There might have been trouble."\textsuperscript{209} In response, the Cleveland Panthers’ lawyer Frederick Ferrell informed the judge that they would plead not guilty, and have their day in court.\textsuperscript{210}

The trial against the three Panthers didn’t start until June of the following year, and Clark remained imprisoned the entire time.\textsuperscript{211} During the trial, Ferrell argued that police had harassed the Party in the weeks before the incident and had used the “peace warrants” to launch a military assault on the office. The State presented no evidence to prove that any of the five weapons in the Panther office had been fired, and in particular, never presented a clear case that the bullet in Ortage’s jaw came from a Panther gun.\textsuperscript{212} In the end, a 12-person jury of their ‘peers,’ consisting of 10 whites, convicted all three Panthers.\textsuperscript{217}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{207} In regard to the Panthers’ presence at the trial of Newton, Hilliard said, “[o]pening day- and throughout the trial, it’s part of our strategy – we pack the courtroom: we want to impress the jury that a movement, not only an individual, is in dock.” (205).
\item \textsuperscript{208} “Protestors, Panthers Jam Municipal Court Hearings,” \textit{Cleveland Press} 22 July 1970: G1.
\item \textsuperscript{210} “Trouble Feared, Panther Hearing Canceled Here,” A4.
\item \textsuperscript{211} “Panthers go on trial for gun battle here,” \textit{Cleveland Press} 15 June 1971.
\item \textsuperscript{212} “Jury Convicts 3 Panthers in Shooting of Policeman,” \textit{Cleveland Plain Dealer} 8 July 1971: 1A, 10A.
\item \textsuperscript{217} “3 Panthers Guilty of Shooting Police,” \textit{Cleveland Press} 7 July 1971: A1; As it later became clear, the Cleveland Panthers were convicted before they were even tried. Robert Horner, chief investigator of the Committee on Internal Security, testified before Congress in 1970 concerning explosives and “law enforcement officers killed or wounded by gun shots fired by Black Panther Party members.” His compilation listed one officer wounded in Cleveland, Officer Ortage. The Panthers had yet to have their day in court, at which time they argued that police gunfire wounded Ortage. Regardless, Horner and the U.S. government convicted them. As Ferrell argued in court, their crime was not firing at police, it was being a Black Panther (United States House of Representatives, Subcommittee of the Committee on Internal Security, \textit{Black Panther Party, Part 4: National Office Operations and Investigations of Activities in Des Moines, Iowa, and Omaha, Nebr.}}
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
Although the trial was successful in the eyes of Stokes and other establishment figures, the coalition of Black leaders in City Hall wasn’t as solidified as it seemed. A month after the raid on the Panther headquarters at 79th Street, General Davis resigned as Safety Director, citing Mayor Stokes’ inadequate support for his programs. In particular, Davis stated that Stokes was supporting certain “enemies of law enforcement,” including the Cleveland Council of Churches, the Call and Post, and the Friendly Inn Settlement House.²¹⁴ For the most part, the accusations were ludicrous, and the Mayor made Davis look foolish in front of the press. Stokes, however, agreed with Davis on the lawlessness of one organization, the Friendly Inn. The issue was not so much the house as it was the individuals who were using it, namely the Cleveland Panthers. As Stokes said, “I shared [General Davis’] dismay at [the Friendly Inn Settlement House] being used as the meeting place of the National Committee to Combat Fascism.”²¹⁵ After Stokes was repeatedly criticized in the Panthers’ literature, he saw no problem in declaring the Panthers an enemy, and taking the appropriate measures to eliminate them.²¹⁶

The most disturbing plan initiated by Stokes and Davis to rid themselves of the Panthers involved the controversy surrounding the dum-dum bullets. Following the raid on the Panthers, General Davis placed an order for 30,000 hollow point cartridges, or dum-
dums, which expand after they hit a target and cause serious damage to internal organs. When the issue went public, Stokes presented himself as the virtuous one. He quoted the Geneva Conference that outlawed the bullets and quickly demanded that Davis withdraw the bid. Yet the meetings Stokes had behind closed doors on the issue connects him with a larger campaign, one that uncovers his abhorrence towards the Cleveland Panthers. During an internal meeting, Stokes jotted notes down about both the ammunition and the existence of the Black Panthers in Cleveland, implying that the acquisition of the bullets would be justifiable for groups such as the Panthers. Days after rejecting Davis' idea of the police carrying dum-dum bullets, he wrote “use Super-Vel hollow-point,” right above his notes on establishing a “[f]und for informers” to infiltrate the Cleveland Panthers. Although Stokes had publicly decried the use of “any hollow point cartridges,” he appeared to have one exception. The threat presented by the Panthers was great enough for him to consider violating the same laws he was elected to uphold. As the protector of the social order, Stokes felt justified in using such violence against his citizens.

Stokes and Davis, however, were not alone in their hatred of the Cleveland Panthers. Frank J. Schaefer, President of the Fraternal Order of Police in Cleveland, also stated that “the Panthers need to be wiped out in the public interest.” Thus, despite Davis' resignation, the harassment of the Cleveland Panthers continued. Twenty-five members were arrested and charged with 40 felonies during a three-month time span in 1970. The repeated arrests and harassment of Cleveland Panthers was an obvious attempt by the local police and FBI to limit the effectiveness of the organization. As the organization devoted time and

217 “Dum-Dum Bullet Order Backfires,” Call and Post 1 August 70: 1A, 18A.
219 “Dum-Dum Bullet Order Backfires,” 1A, 18A.
resources to court hearings, numerous bail bonds, and defense strategies, the community service operations of the Party were negatively affected.

Among the many arrests were Cleveland Panther leader Tommie Carr, Danny Soloman, and Essex Smith, who were put on trial for allegedly inciting a riot. After they wrote down badge numbers and questioned an armed officer dressed in plain clothes, the police arrested the three under a new law aimed at curbing riots. As Carr recalls the incident, “I started hollering to the people of the neighborhood to look out their windows and see what the police were doing. It looked like they were headed for our office.” He didn’t want a replay of the shooting that occurred only three months earlier. Prior to the police arrival at the office, the Panthers’ medical unit was upstairs conducting laboratory tests following a week of blood sampling from the community. As the police approached, armed with their machine guns, the team quickly exited the building and neighboring residents ran for cover. One bystander called the incident a combination of “Keystone cops and Hitler’s Gestapo.” The trial of three Cleveland Panthers was again delayed for a year. After a mistrial during the first trial, Smith was finally acquitted, only to be convicted on charges stemming from another incident with police. The jury could not reach a verdict on Carr during the second trial, and he finally skipped town before the opening of the third trial. The establishment’s tactics of tying Panthers down in long court battles was successful in limiting the effectiveness of the Party.

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221 Smith, personal interview.
222 “Asks Inspector for LD, Will Face Riot Charge,” Call and Post 3 October 1970: 10A.
226 Cleveland Panthers were not always blameless for the police surveillance and fear. For instance, in October 1970, Officer Joseph F. Tracz, Jr. was killed in his cruiser and his partner, Frederick R. Fulton, was wounded by an assailant’s bullets. With Point 7 as his foundation, Charles “Amokoea” Faison described the incident in The Black Panther: “After a scuffle with this pig, the lumpen (in the correct manner) knocked the pig down, took
In another set of arrests, Cleveland Panthers Smith and Daryl Harris were charged with abduction, armed robbery, rape, and attempted murder of a Cleveland State University couple. The Cleveland Panthers set up the “N.C.C.F Political Prisoners Defense and Bail Bonds Committee” in hope of freeing their comrades who each had their bail set at $100,000. After Common Pleas Judge John T. Patton read the guilty verdict, Smith stated: “I feel I was not tried by a jury of my peers. There is no justice in America for a Black man.” During the proceedings, the Rev. Dewey Fagerburg of the East Cleveland Congressional Church, or the People’s Church, attempted to surrender the deed of the church as collateral for the excessive bail bonds of the defendants. In bringing forth the deed, Fagerburg said that his church supported black militants as a matter of policy. The court, however, refused to accept the deed as bail. Smith and Harris were eventually convicted after they were tried on three separate occasions.

B. CLASHES WITH FEDERAL LAW ENFORCEMENT

In addition to repression at the hands of local law enforcement, the Cleveland Panthers faced persecution from federal agents. As the federal campaign against the BPP thrived nationally, federal agents in Cleveland jumped on the bandwagon to institute Hoover’s

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228 “The Cleveland 2 Each Illegally Held on $100,000,” The Black Panther 17 October 1970: 17; The Cleveland Post, in its “Good Morning Judge” section, argued against the excessive bail within the terms of the Constitutional provision requiring ‘reasonable’ bail for individuals waiting for trial (17 October 1970).
229 “Two Guilty in Assault on Coed,” Cleveland Press 16 June 1971. As Point 9 of the PPP Ten-Point Program stated, “We want all Black People when brought to trial to be tried by a jury of their peer group or people from the Black communities, as defined by the Constitution of the United States.” Newton 1972.
230 “Church Deed is Refused as Bail for Panther Trio,” Cleveland Plain Dealer 17 December 1970; “People’s Church Fights White Racism,” Call and Post 21 August 1971: 8A.
mandate to “expose, disrupt, discredit or otherwise neutralize [Black Nationalist] groups and their leadership.”\textsuperscript{222} One of COINTELPRO’s priorities was the disruption and elimination the Panthers’ newspaper, which was the financial stronghold of the Party. A memo form FBI Headquarters to field offices in May 1970 stated:

\begin{quote}
The Black Panther Party newspaper is one of the most effective propaganda operations of the BPP. Distribution of this newspaper is increasing at a regular rate thereby influencing a greater number of individuals in the United States along the Black extremist lines. Each recipient submit by 6/5/70 proposed counter-intelligence measures which will hinder the vicious propaganda being spread by the BPP. ... It is the voice of the BPP and if it could be effectively hindered, it would result in helping to cripple the BPP.\textsuperscript{235}
\end{quote}

In line with these orders, papers either disappeared or were consistently delivered around the country wet, soiled, or late.\textsuperscript{234} The delivery of papers to Cleveland was no exception. For example, on March 3, 1970, the papers arrived 27 hours late. The following month, on April 17th, 2 boxes were lost and the rest of the shipment was 12 hours late.\textsuperscript{235} Keeping in mind Hoover’s request for “imaginative and hard-hitting counter-intelligence measures,” the Cleveland FBI field office came up with a proposal to send an impostor for Norman Peery, the Cleveland Panther who picked up papers at the airport.\textsuperscript{236} The memo from Cleveland to National Headquarters states:

\begin{quote}
The Cleveland Office proposes the following plan which the office believes will disrupt the Ohio Chapter of NCCP at Cleveland, Ohio, and which plan
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{233} FBI memorandum from headquarters to Chicago and seven other field offices, May 15, 1970. Quoted in Huey P. Newton, War Against the Panthers (New York: Harlem River Press, 1996) 83.

\textsuperscript{234} In San Diego, FBI Special Agents proposed spraying the newspaper printing room with a foul chemical spray. Newton 1996, 83.


\textsuperscript{236} FBI memorandums from headquarters to 14 field offices, November 25, 1968. Quoted in Newton 1996, 71. FBI AIRTEL from SAC Cleveland to Director, December 4 1970, Counter-Intelligence Program Black Extremists. Stanford University Libraries, Department of Special Collections, Newton Foundation Inc. Collection: Series 4, Box 12, Folder 14.
might also be suitable for use against the Toledo Chapter of NCCF. The plan would consist of the use of a Negro Agent in the interception of the delivery of the Black Panther Newspaper to the Ohio Chapter. Prior investigation has shown that the Panthers receive their newspapers via Air Freight through TWA, UAL or American Airlines and that the Cleveland Office had advance information concerning the arrival of the newspapers. Cleveland proposes that when such advance information concerning the arrival of the newspapers is received a Negro Agent proceed to the appropriate airline freight office with sufficient other Agent personnel in the area to assure his security and impersonate NORMAN PEERY of the NCCF who has usually picked these papers up in the past. Investigation at the airline terminals has reflected that the freight clerks are not familiar with PEERY and would not in all likelihood recognize the Negro agent as an impostor. This agent would then sign PEERY’s name to the air bill. It is felt that the above tactic will disrupt the Ohio Chapter because of prior complaints by this Chapter of not receiving newspapers and of recent arguments between National Headquarters and this Chapter regarding the payment for these papers.237

Other methods used by the FBI destroy to the Black Panthers included the distribution of false information on the activities of local Panther leaders. A popular tactic among local FBI field offices was to send anonymous letters to Panther leadership in order to create dissension within the Party. Ward Churchill describes the process of “snitch-jacketing” or “bad-jacketing,” which refers to “the practice of creating suspicion through the spreading of rumors, manufacture of evidence, etc., that bona fide organizational members, usually in key positions, are FBI/police informers, guilty of such offenses as skimming organizational funds and the like.”238 In Cleveland, these tactics were used to disrupt the relationship between the Cleveland Panther leadership and the Central Committee in Oakland. For example in March of 1971, June Hilliard, brother of Chief of Staff David Hilliard, received a phone call from Cleveland Panther Tommie Carr concerning the upcoming speaking engagement of Newton in Cleveland. Hilliard proceeded to inform Carr

237 FBI AIRTEL from SAC Cleveland to Director, December 4 1970, Counter-Intelligence Program Black Extremists. Stanford University Libraries, Department of Special Collections, Newton Foundation Inc. Collection: Series 4, Box 12, Folder 14.
that his brother "had received a letter, unsigned, accusing Carr of being a defector."\textsuperscript{239} Carr had to defend his allegiance to the Party and the legitimacy of the Cleveland Panthers. Such instances created unnecessary tension and distrust between the two offices. The distribution of false information by the FBI was to plant seeds of suspicion, so that future events would be assessed by the national leadership from a more skeptical perspective.

COINTELPRO extended its activities beyond the inner workings of the Party and worked to incite violence between Panthers and other organizations. Historically, the BPP was known to be in conflict with members of the cultural nationalist camp. This conflict was spurred by the rhetoric of national Panther leaders Bobby Seale and Eldridge Cleaver, who often noted the reactionary tendencies of "pork-chop" nationalism. The rhetoric exploded, however, in January 1969 when Black Panther leaders Bunchy Carter and John Huggins were assassinated in Los Angeles by Ron "Mulana" Karenga's United Slaves Organization (US). The confrontation had been fueled by the FBI's campaign to instigate and foster conflict between the Panthers and the US organization. The fabrication of cartoons which illustrated Karenga plotting the next murder of a Panther leader contributed to the hostility between the organizations.\textsuperscript{240} The intention was to fuel violent confrontation and then publicize the illegality of the Panthers, and it was successful in L.A.

Similarly, in Cleveland there were attempts to divide the Panthers and popular Black Nationalists. During this time, the largest Black Nationalist organization in Cleveland was

\textsuperscript{238} Churchill and Vanderwall 49.
\textsuperscript{239} FBI Memorandum from SAC San Francisco to Director, April 6, 1971, Black Panther Party-Cleveland. Stanford University Libraries, Department of Special Collections, Newton Foundation Inc. Collection: Series 4, Box 6, Folder 4.
\textsuperscript{240} In Chicago as well, FBI personnel had proposals approved in which they sent letters to Jeff Fort, leader of the Chicago street gang the Blackstone Rangers, and informed him that Fred Hampton and other Black Panthers had a hit out on him. Newton 1996, 71-78.
the Afro Set, founded by Harlil Jones in 1968. The animosity that existed between Black Nationalists and Black Panthers in L.A. was similar to the relationship between the two differing ideologies in Cleveland. The Cleveland Panthers found early resentment from Afro Set members because they were the new organization in the community. After they had moved north to 79th and Central Avenue, Afro Set members driving over from Hough started to harass them, asking if they had “permission to be in the area.”

The turf mentality and competitive atmosphere was also fueled by the Panthers, who resented the fact that Jones and the Afro Set were working so closely with Stokes and the political power structure. The tight relationship between the two instigated suspicions that Afro Set was being used to eliminate the Panthers. Cleveland Panther Essex Smith remarked, “Stokes was trying to keep the Panthers out of Cleveland because he didn’t want to have any problems.” The Cleveland Panthers considered themselves “the outcasts,” whereas the Afro Set and other Black Nationalists seemed to have a direct line of communication with the city administration. Confrontations with the Afro Set eventually escalated to the point where the Panthers felt they were fighting two battles: one with the government and the other with the nationalist community. However, the confrontations never descended into a war, as the local media attempted to portray.

News of a “power struggle” between the Afro Set and the Panthers was often noted in the press, which often received its information from police sources. For example, in early June 1969, each of Cleveland’s newspapers labeled an alleged shoot-out between Panther

241 Jones, personal interview.
242 Smith, personal interview; Peery, personal interview.
243 Smith, personal interview.
244 Peery, personal interview.
245 Peery, personal interview.
and Afro Set members as “a war” between the organizations.²⁴⁶ In response to these false and misleading stories, the two groups were forced to organize a joint press conference to explain that the incident was nothing more than a botched robbery and most importantly, that none of the individuals involved were members of either organization. Nonetheless, the illusion of an all out war that was created by the media had its effects on popular opinion of Black militancy and the eventual Cleveland Panthers.

This incident demonstrates how it was necessary for agents of the social order to represent a dis-unified Black militancy with trigger-happy, renegade members. This of course had a two-fold purpose: (1) it reduced the possibility of widespread popular support for the groups, and (2) it was used to justify the state’s methods of suppression. Despite these intentions, however, there were examples of unity among the Black militant groups in Cleveland. For instance, the Panthers marched in solidarity with a spectrum of Black Nationalists in July 1970, which marked the 2⁰ anniversary of the Glenville rebellion. Since many of the Cleveland Panthers had come from the various organizations within the Black Nationalist community, organizational contacts had already been established.²⁴⁷

In some rare cases, the “divide and conquer” strategies even backfired. One example of this occurred on August 18, 1971, when the Cleveland Panthers’ new and expanded Free Health Clinic was bombed with dynamite. Well-trained by the media, the public’s eyes immediately turned to the Afro Set, who seemed just as baffled by the incident as the Panthers. In the end, the bombing brought the two groups together. Afro Set gathered in solidarity with the Cleveland Panthers and Omar Majied, minister of Afro Set, declared a new coalition between the two organizations in order to combat the persistent

harassment of law enforcement officials. Majied stated that “[t]he Afro Set is Black and we look out at a Panther and he is Black. We have different ways of coming to a solution, but we can work together.”248 The two groups held a fund-raiser picnic and the Afro Set donated a portion of the proceeds to the rebuilding of the People’s Free Health Clinic.249

The tactics used by the local and federal law enforcement in Cleveland fit squarely within the national COINTELPRO campaign to eliminate the Panthers. This project was legitimated when the Panthers were relegated to the status as trigger-happy criminals. As the BPP was conceptualized as the primary enemy of the state and symbolically representative of society’s other, agents of the social order could move quickly to plot their destruction. This chapter has documented the extensive reach of the government’s movement against the BPP, looking at the situation in Cleveland as an example of the efforts deployed on the local levels. As the history of the Party has similarly been drawn around a narrow framework consumed with the violent aspects of the BPP, there has been little discussion on the Panthers’ establishment of community programs to meet the material needs of their particular community. The next chapter will move away from the demonic categorization of the BPP and shift towards the Panthers’ creation of alternative institutions in Cleveland.

247 Slater, personal interview.
CHAPTER 5

CLEVELAND PANTHER ALTERNATIVE INSTITUTIONS

The revolutionary character of the BPP originated in 1966 when members picked up the gun to protest the police brutality in Oakland's Black community. The struggle was initially waged against the "pigs" and their brutal practices against law-abiding Black citizens. With weapons in hand and bandoleers draped across the chests of Black men, the "brothers on the block" became the violent pariahs of the social order and a legitimate target to be eliminated. Whether it was armed Panthers storming the California legislature in Sacramento or the multitude of shoot-outs with police around the country, the image of the Party was delineated specifically within the demonic categories constituted by the dominant order. As emphasized in the previous chapter, the Panthers had to symbolically represent the other in society. This in turn rationalized the classification of them as "the greatest threat" to the stability and security of the state. Accordingly, this representation of the Panthers in the late '60s has reproduced itself in a narrow documentation of the Party. 

250 The original intent of Newton and Seale in creating the Party was "to form an organization that would involve the lower-class brothers." Newton 1973, 110. Seale reaffirmed this direction, and wrote "Huey P. Newton knew that once you organize the brothers he ran with, he fought with, he fought against, who he fought harder than they fought him, once you organize those brothers, you get niggers, you get black men, you get revolutionaries." Seale 1970, 64.

251 The exception is the recent body of essays contained in The Black Panther Party Reconsidered. As stated earlier in Chapter 1, this important work discusses untouched areas such as the gender dynamics in the Party and the experiences of rank-and-file Panthers.
The effect has been a limited historical account of the Panthers’ impact on the local community.

In the existing literature on the Panthers, the confrontations between armed Panthers and law enforcement are often invoked as evidence of the Party’s revolutionary struggle. However, what is missing from these works is a focus on the Panthers’ revolutionary struggle to improve the material conditions of Black people. In effect, the existing literature has focused almost exclusively on Point 7 of the Ten Point Program and the Panthers’ initial police patrols, and has disregarded the additional nine demands that addressed the economic, social, and political situation of the Black community. As Newton stated, “in our basic program it was not until Point 7 that we mentioned the gun, and this was intentional.” By focusing only on the Panthers’ use of weapons for self-defense, the existing literature has reinforced the social order’s categorization of the Panthers as demonic gun-toting gangsters, or as Hilliard phrased it, “niggers killing niggers.” At the same time, the significance of the Panthers’ community programs is downplayed and even ignored.

As the Panthers articulated the problems inherent in the American system of order, they also moved toward the establishment and control of just institutions that transformed the consciousness of their local communities and exposed the contradictions of the state. To borrow from Lenin, the Panthers wanted to establish a structure of “dual power,” in which their community programs competed with the institutions of the dominant power structure. Newton wrote, “If you have to set up a program of practical application and be a model for the community to follow and appreciate.” The BPP was interested in

252 Newton 1971, 49.
253 Hilliard 221.
255 Newton 1971, 45.
overthrowing the dominant superstructure of the social order and replacing it with their own forms of community institutions. As Seale described, the Panthers wanted to establish "a broad, massive, people's type of political machinery," that served the needs of their respective communities.256

The emergence of a new body of Panther studies has created a greater space in which to interrogate the historical representation of the Party. As part of this groundbreaking literature, former Panther JoNina Abron has examined the BPP's community programs. Although useful in broadening the focus on the Panthers, Abron's work is limited by its national scope; the experiences of local Panthers and their particular conditions are not fully addressed.257 She recognizes the potential of the subject, however, as she states: "Party affiliates throughout the country possessed distinct organizing styles and programs based on the qualities of the local membership and the particular needs of their respective communities."258 Thus, in furthering Abron's work, this chapter will thoroughly explore the community programs, as alternative institutions, organized and implemented by the Cleveland Panthers to confront the state's unequal distribution of resources.

In Cleveland, the Panther community programs were far-ranging and successful. They instituted a free breakfast program for children; handed out free clothing; provided free medical care; organized free trips to prisons for relatives of inmates; and conducted political education classes in the community. In addition to exploring the development of each of these programs, this chapter will highlight the interactions between the Panthers and the existing network of Black institutions, including the churches and business community.

256 Seale 1970, 412.
257 To be fair, it should be noted that Abron's work was not intended to elaborate on the activities of Panther branches and chapters, but to begin the alternative exploration of the Panther experience.
258 Abron 1998, 188.
First, however, a more thorough examination of the Party’s newspaper, *The Black Panther*, is important because this was the financial backbone of both the Party and its programs.

A. **THE BLACK PANTHER: FUNDING PROGRAMS AND DISTRIBUTING THE MESSAGE**

Despite the state repression that inhibited the development of the BPP’s community programs, the Party was successful in raising money and soliciting donations to support their agenda in the community. The cornerstone of the Panthers’ financial stability came through the distribution and sales of *The Black Panther*, “an organ which lumpen proletarian brothers and sisters produce[d].”\(^{259}\) Initiated after the April 1967 police murder of Denzil Dowell in Northern California, the weekly paper expanded and had an average distribution of 100,000 to Panther branches and chapters across the country between 1968 and 1972.\(^{260}\) In addition to providing the financial bedrock for the Party’s community programs, the paper served two additional roles: (1) it allowed Panthers to organize and recruit during their selling shifts; and (2) it educated community members about both the practices and philosophy of the Party, and the experiences of Black people throughout the country.

Although vital to the funding of programs, the Cleveland Panthers had a relatively small number of papers delivered to them in comparison to other Panther operations in Ohio. For instance, testimony by an investigator with the Committee on Internal Security reported that in 1970, Cleveland received an average of 1,500 papers a week, whereas Toledo was shipped 2,400 and Dayton an average of 2,250.\(^{261}\) The Cleveland Panthers reached their

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\(^{259}\) Hilliard wrote that “the paper, throughout my membership in the Party, remains the bedrock of the organization’s finances, and all monies [sic] go only to paying the ongoing Party costs” (154); Seale 1970, 179.


peak in July 1971 when they had over 2,350 papers delivered.\textsuperscript{262} Regardless of the number of papers received in Cleveland, it was of utmost importance to sell the entire stock in order to provide funding for local community programs or legal defense. At 25 cents a paper, the Cleveland Panthers brought in a decent weekly income which contributed directly to the advancement of the BPP's revolutionary agenda.

Beyond the financial importance of the paper, the BPP used the instrument to mobilize support for the Party. As Lenin argued, "the role of the paper is not confined solely to spreading of ideas, to political education and to procuring political allies. A paper is not merely a collective propagandist and collective agitator. It is also a collective organizer."\textsuperscript{263} The youthfulness of the Cleveland Panthers, like most branches in the Party, provided an easy avenue for organizational activities on college campuses. Al Hayes and Billy Brock, Cleveland Panthers and students at Cuyahoga Community College and Cleveland State University respectively, took papers to sell on campus and to entice students to attend a Panther political education class.\textsuperscript{264} Other Cleveland Panthers took \textit{The Black Panther} downtown to gather support from the older generation.\textsuperscript{265} Cleveland Panther Essex Smith simply stayed in the Kinsman neighborhood where the Panther office was located and

\textsuperscript{262} This was still minuscule in comparison to Chicago, Detroit, and Los Angeles, which received 15,000, 7,508, and 7,500 respectively for the July 12, 1971 issue. Stanford University Libraries. Department of Special Collections. Newton Foundation Inc. Collection; Series 2, Box 13, Folder 9.


\textsuperscript{265} This strategy had, after all, already proven effective because Ron Robinson and Norman Peery had themselves joined the Party after noticing the steady appearance of Ernest Watts selling papers downtown in front of Cleveland's Public Square. Peery, personal interview; Robinson, personal interview.
hawked the paper in the middle of 79th Street. The sales of the paper downtown or on campuses fueled the local growth of the Party.

In addition to utilizing *The Black Panther* to organize community members, the BPP also used it as an instrument for their own discourse and communication. As Emory Douglas, Minister of Culture, stated "[t]he Party needed to have a newspaper so we could tell our own story." Complementing the regular flow of information from the national level to the local branches, there were also communications moving in the other direction. Local branches and chapters throughout the country took advantage of the opportunity to write about the conditions in their specific communities or to report on the developments of their community programs. As Seale stated, "[a]ll the people who get the Black Panther Party newspaper can read about what is really happening, about the thousands of black brothers and sisters who are murdered, shot, and brutalized in the black communities and the wretched ghettos throughout the country." Among the regular contributors were the Information Officers of the Cleveland Panthers, who consistently published articles in the paper about the impoverished conditions of Black people in their community, including inadequate housing and improper health conditions, as well as issues of police brutality.

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266 Smith, personal interview; Other Cleveland Panthers, such as Fred Clark, were less productive. As Clark remembers, "[t]hey were always getting on my case because I was always messing around with the ladies down at Tri-C, instead of selling the papers." Clark, personal interview.
The Cleveland Panthers also tapped into the skills of their rank-and-file to publish their own local newsletter called the People’s Community News, which they inserted into the weekly issues of The Black Panther. Complementing the newsletter, the Cleveland Panthers also had a small transmitter radio which they used to pirate broadcasts to the community located in the two blocks around the Panther office. Davis and Smith remember how Panthers would talk all day, even though it was only heard around the block. The Cleveland Panthers recognized the importance of having the story of the Black community told from their own perspective. This emphasis could also be seen in the development of political education classes which were conducted within the Party as well as the larger community.

B. POLITICAL EDUCATION CLASSES AND THE LIBERATION SCHOOL

Panthers who hawked the newspaper were proud of the Party and image they represented. The pictures of bold Black youths confronting the agents of the dominant social order and instituting programs which addressed the needs of the various Black communities meant a great deal. There had never been a national organization of Black people who were so assertive in promoting a particular program. The BPP developed, nourished, and transformed the raw energy of Black youth through their political education classes. As an internal institution that addressed the inadequacies in the state’s educational system, every Panther was required to attend the weekly sessions. Panthers engaged the thoughts of

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270 Curtis Johnson, for instance, was an editor for The Liberator, a radical Black newspaper published at Tri-C; “Policeman, Black Militant Shot,” Cleveland Plain Dealer 30 June 1970: A1; Robinson, personal interview.

271 A Cleveland Panther named Jeffery was the wizard with electronics. He rigged the transmitter to send the Panther voice to the airwaves. Smith, personal interview; Davis, personal interview.

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Malcolm X, Frantz Fanon, Mao Tse-Tung, Che Guevara, and Robert Williams, as well as the Party leaders' weekly theoretical pieces in *The Black Panther.*

The political education classes instituted by the Cleveland Panthers were similar in structure to those of other branches and chapters: each Panther was required to read two hours a day and be familiar with the current issue of *The Black Panther.*" The political education classes were attractive to college students and local teens because they provided an alternative base of knowledge, separate from the hegemonic educational system. "These guys never would have picked up a book if it hadn't been for us," remembers Peery." For the younger adolescents below the age of 14, the Cleveland Panthers organized a Liberation School in the summer months of 1970, using the facilities at the Friendly Inn and the League Park Center." In addition to providing food for over 25 children, they conducted 10 hours of instruction during four separate classes per week." In accordance with Point 5 of the Panthers' *Ten Point Program,* the Cleveland Panthers instituted an "education that teaches us our true history and our role in the present-day society.""  

The external component of the political education classes were the general community meetings, held one night a week at the Friendly Inn and the Garden Valley Community Center, only to later move to the office on 79th and Rawlings. As Abron states, "[t]he Party's community political education classes were the educational counterpart for adults. In addition to listening to lectures about the Party's ideology, goals, and activities,

272 Davis, personal interview.  
273 Peery, personal interview.  
274 "Another Cleveland N.C.C.F. Liberation School," *The Black Panther* 4 July 1970: 14; Cleveland Panther Essex Smith said that the Panthers also had classes for the Liberation School on the roof of their office at 79th Street. Smith, personal interview.  
276 Newton 1972, 4.
community adults were taught basic reading and writing skills." Articulate Panther leaders, such as Smith or 'Rock' Todd, led the weekly discussions and mobilized the participants around the BPP Ten Point Program. The early programs had a quick effect on the surrounding community, as Rev. Herman Graham, the Director of the Garden Valley Neighborhood Community Center, stated "[w]ith less resources and in a shorter time, the Panthers have done more for the black community than we have." Complementing the general community political education classes, the BPP also had community members organize smaller sessions at their homes. Frank Stitts, a member of the St. Adalbert Church and Chair of the Cleveland Black Lay Catholic Caucus, regularly gathered a small group of community residents at his home to hear Cleveland Panther Tommie Carr discuss the politics of the Party and its local community programs. As Stitts explained, it allowed them to understand the Panthers through the voice of the Panther leadership, rather than through the sensationalism of the popular media. He recalls how militants and organizations like the BPP first intimidated him and other members:

We didn't know enough about them. All we knew was what we read in the papers and watched on TV. They were all painted as violent and vicious groups. But really, when you got to know something about their philosophy, they really weren't. ... They were doing some good things locally for people.

This was no surprise, as Cleveland Panther Essex Smith observed, "everybody associated the Panthers with guns, but they never associated the Panthers with all the

279 The Black Panther often had branches and chapters submit small advertisements for their community programs. For an example of the structure of the Northern California Community Discussion Groups, see page 14 of the 3 January 1969 issue.
280 Frank Stitts, personal interview, 13 April 1959.
281 Stitits, personal interview.
community programs."\textsuperscript{282} The establishment of alternative institutions and political education classes was successful in confronting the negative representations of the Party, as well as mobilizing the community around a political agenda. Through the combination of community discussion and active programming, the Panthers envisioned the eventual removal of the dominant institutions and agents in power.

### C. The Community Health Program

In 1969, Chairman Seale issued a directive for local Panther operations to begin the construction of free health clinics. The first institution, the Bobby Hutton Community Clinic, opened its doors in Kansas City in August 1969.\textsuperscript{283} Other Panther branches and chapters followed the example, establishing sickle-cell anemia testings, pre-natal care, and a variety of other health services. Just as the particular community needs drove the composition of the Panthers' alternative institutions generally, the health programs were no exception. The Panthers in Winston-Salem for instance, organized a free 24-hour ambulance service to meet the needs of a larger rural population.\textsuperscript{284} Likewise, the Cleveland Panthers responded to the city's closure of its health facilities in the Black neighborhoods on the East Side by devising their own institutions to meet the medical needs of the affected residents.

During the early summer of 1970, the Cleveland Panthers sent a delegation to Chicago to meet with Ronald 'Doc' Satchel, the 19 year-old Minister of Health for the

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\textsuperscript{282} Smith, personal interview.

\textsuperscript{283} Abron 1998, 184.

\textsuperscript{284} The Winston-Salem branch of the BPP received a $37,000 grant from the National Episcopal Church to run a non-emergency medical transportation service, which they named after a fallen comrade, the Joseph Waddell People's Free Ambulance Service. Stanford University Libraries. Department of Special Collections. Newton Foundation Inc. Collection: Series 2, Box 6, Folder 10. Abron 1998, 185. "Winston Salem Free Ambulance Services Open," The Black Panther 16 February 1974: 3.
Chicago chapter, and observe the functioning of the People’s Free Medical Care Center.\textsuperscript{285} Emphasizing the idea of an oppositional institution, Satchel explained that the health clinic served as “an alternative to the existing health care system.”\textsuperscript{286} Armed with the knowledge and skills to run a fully operational clinic, the Cleveland Panthers soon organized the Community Health Program in the Kinsman neighborhood surrounding their office on East 79th and Rawlings.

During the late summer of 1970, with the assistance of Richard Wright, a medical student in his first year of residency at the Cleveland Metropolitan Hospital, the Cleveland Panthers compiled a team of medical students, nurses, and doctors from both the hospital and the Medical Council for Human Rights.\textsuperscript{287} The Cleveland Panthers’ health program thus started simply with the Panthers and medical volunteers going door-to-door to inquire about the health of neighborhood residents. They quickly learned that relatively few people had even seen a doctor.\textsuperscript{288} Austin Jones, the coordinator for the Cleveland Panthers’ health program, stated “[f]or this society to deny a person medical care because he doesn’t have enough money is to deny that person the right to live... and that too is violence.”\textsuperscript{289} By responding to the needs of their community, the Cleveland Panthers had extended the revolutionary concept of self-defense to include health care. As Newton stated, “when we used the words ‘Self-Defense,’ it also meant defending ourselves against poor medical care,

\textsuperscript{288} Smith, personal interview.
\textsuperscript{289} “Black Panthers Organize Community Health Program,” 7A.
against unemployment, against poor housing and all other things that poor and oppressed people of the world suffer."²⁹⁰

Three nights a week, the Panther health team tested residents for medical conditions such as tuberculosis, diabetes, high blood pressure, and sickle cell anemia.²⁹¹ Following the free tests, the volunteers checked the samples at their respective laboratories and the Panthers reported the results to the members of the community. If a further visit was necessary, the Panthers either had an additional doctor visit the home or they arranged for transportation and accompanied the community member to a nearby clinic. In the summer of 1970, the Panthers treated close to 450 people.²⁹² Yet the programs organized by the BPP were not only intended to provide for members of the community, but also to politically organize. Former Chair of the BPP, Elaine Brown, discussed the importance of the community programs in the revolutionary process:

"We had to elevate our Survival Programs to models for alternative institutions, as the Mozambicans had. [Samora] Machel had emphasized that the mass of their people had been inspired and educated and ultimately, incorporated in their armed liberation struggle primarily because of FRELIMO's establishment of schools and hospitals. ... We had to do everything possible to embrace more and more of our people, if we were to become a serious revolutionary force in the world."²⁹³

The Cleveland Panthers utilized their community programs to meet and speak with members of the neighborhood and to educate about the philosophy of the BPP.

²⁹⁰Newton 1972, 176.
²⁹²"Black Panthers Organize Community Health Program," Call and Post 27 March 1971: 7A.
Following the positive feedback from the community, the Cleveland Panthers planned to expand their health program into the People’s Free Health Center during the summer of 1971. Despite the incessant arrests and imprisonment of the local Panther leadership, Wright continued his recruitment of medical students and doctors, amassing 20 volunteers and several physicians to operate the clinic. In addition, the Cleveland Panthers continued to obtain private donations of laboratory equipment.294 Community volunteers assisted in painting and plastering the upstairs of the Panther office in hopes of opening the clinic on August 23, 1971.295 As the Cleveland Panthers reported, “[i]t was the community that provided the labor and much needed donations and materials in order to build the clinic.”296 However, in the early morning hours of August 18th, 2 sticks of dynamite exploded, leaving the People’s Free Health Center in disrepair and nearly killing Panthers Willie Slater and Alton Delmore.297 The Panthers were quick to accuse the government, noting that the police had arrived on the scene too quickly.298 Beyond this observation, however, no evidence surfaced to support their claim.

As explained in the previous chapter, the Afro Set came to the aid of the Cleveland Panthers after the bombing. A group of 50 Afro Set members and leaders of the Federation of Black Nationalists marched to the site of the ravaged clinic and made a cash donation to assist the Panthers in their repairs.299 The Cleveland Panthers proceeded in their vision of opening a free health clinic. Three weeks following the explosion, they organized a public

297 “Panther Medical Center Bombed,” Call and Post 21 August 1971: 1A, 6A.
298 “Cleveland Racists Dynamite People’s Free Health Center,” 9, 17.
299 “Afro Set Marches to Aid Panther Clinic,” Cleveland Plain Dealer 22 August 1971: A16; The Cleveland Panthers also extended their “revolutionary appreciation and solidarity” to the Emmanuel Episcopal Church, Our Reach Community Program, The People’s Church, and the House of Israel, all who rallied to support the
picnic "to provide funds to repair and reschedule the health center services for the poor," said Davis. The Afro Set again assisted the Panthers, directing the event's traffic at the Midway Lake Park. Coalition efforts such as this, rare as they may have been, were the product of a general consensus surrounding the treatment of Black revolutionaries by the state. As Cleveland Panther leader Tommie Carr stated, the greater the repression, the greater the unity. Although the Cleveland Panthers dissolved before the clinic was instituted, their efforts exemplified the Party's program of addressing community needs.

D. BREAKFAST AND CLOTHING PROGRAMS: COMMUNITY RESOURCES AT WORK

One of the most publicized and effective programs of the BPP was the free breakfast program, which was first instituted in 1968 at several Panther branches in the Bay Area. Feeding hungry children early in the morning drew widespread community support and provided another opportunity for Panthers to establish local alliances. The government, however, took a different perspective, asserting that: "the Panthers use the free breakfast time as an opportunity to indoctrinate the youngsters with their philosophy of hate." The initial free breakfast program in Cleveland began during the early summer months of 1970 at the Friendly Inn Settlement House and on the roof of the Panthers' office at 79th and Rawlings. By November of that year, they had expanded their operation

302 "Black Panthers Here Shift Emphasis to Social Action," Cleveland Plain Dealer 12 July 1971: 1A, 16A.
303 For an in-depth look at the impact of the Party's Free Breakfast Program, see The Black Panther 27 April 1969.
305 Robinson, personal interview; Clark, personal interview; Smith, personal interview; "Panthers Tell of Play Lot, Free Breakfast Programs," Cleveland Plain Dealer 30 June 1970: 15A; The Cleveland Panthers advertised
and were serving breakfast five days a week.306 Cleveland Panthers like Gail Walters, Jimmy Slater, and Estella Smith awoke each morning before dawn to get meals on the tables for the youngsters. Walters, a program coordinator, said, "[m]any of the children would eat nothing in the morning. We serve the hot meals so the children will get the nutrition they need to learn without the distraction of an empty stomach."307 The breakfast program was feeding an average of 50 children a day, with meals consisting of eggs, grits, and ham.308 Similar to the other Cleveland Panther programs, the level of community support for the breakfast program fueled its expansion.309 As the community health program utilized the expertise of medical volunteers, the breakfast program depended on the facilities of the churches in Cleveland's Black community. According to Slater, the Cleveland Panthers "had the best relationship with the churches than any Panthers that I have been around, anyplace."310

Cleveland Panther leader Carr, who was attempting to mobilize churches to assist in the various Panther programs, contacted Father Gene Wilson one afternoon.311 Wilson was the pastor of the St. Adalbert Church, which was only a few blocks west of the Panther office.312 From the start, Father Wilson supported the free breakfast program because of the

their program and stated, "[a]ll children in grammar schools and growing young adults in junior high school can receive free, full, breakfasts in the morning before they go to school." "Cleveland Breakfast for Children Program to Expand," The Black Panther 17 April 1971: 9.
307 "Black Panthers provide eggs, grits to hungry kids," Cleveland Press 15 October 1971.
309 Even Harrie Jones, leader of the Afro Set in Cleveland, said, “one of the greatest programs of the 1960s was the Black Panthers' Free Breakfast program” (Jones, personal interview).
310 Slater, personal interview.
311 Carr often did the ‘church circuit,’ speaking at various locations to initiate support for the Party. For instance, teenage members of the Woodland Hills Community Presbyterian Church organized a Youth Sunday service that featured Carr and four other Cleveland Panthers. Carr elaborated on the programs instituted by the Cleveland Panthers and stressed the need for Black churches to open their facilities “to respond to the needs of the poor.” “Woodland Hills Church: ‘The Misery of Blackness’ is Theme of Youth Sunday,” Call and Post 6 March 1971: 8A; Gene Wilson, personal interview, 28 April 1999.
312 St. Adalbert Church, located in the Fairfax neighborhood next to Kinsman, was active beyond the boundaries of Cleveland. In September 1970, they organized the first Ohio Conference for Black Lay
obvious need in the community. He looked beyond the popular negative representation of
the Panthers, and assisted in the development of the Cleveland Panthers' programs by
providing space and support.⁴¹³ Frank Stitts, a member of the church, reaffirmed the
necessity of the Panthers' program: "[w]hen I look around our community where [the
Panthers] were feeding kids ... there was a great need, and they meet the need."⁴¹⁴ Yet
Panthers were not the only community workers "meeting the need." In fact, they
encouraged and recruited members of the community to become involved in the
maintenance and development of their alternative institutions. These interactions between
ordinary members of the community and the "supermilitants," as Stitts called the Panthers,
allowed for a breakdown of the demonic image depicted by the media and agents of the
social order.⁴¹⁵ The sharing of resources between the Panthers and local organizations, such
as the Cleveland churches, ensured the success of the community programs.⁴¹⁶

Likewise, the Party was dependent upon local businesses to donate food for the free
breakfast program. Among his other duties, Cleveland Panther Luke McCoy was
responsible for the food collection. He emptied the trunk of his own car and visited a list of
local businesses that the Panthers considered potential allies.⁴¹⁷ The markets on both the
East and West Side provided eggs, grits, cheeses, meats and other breakfast items.⁴¹⁸ Some
businesses, like the meat packaging warehouses on the predominantly white West Side,

Catholics, with 400 participants, including Bishop Harold R. Perry of New Orleans, the only Black Catholic
bishop in the U.S. "400 Attend Conference for Black Catholics," Call and Post 3 October 1970: 1A.
313 Wilson, personal interview.
315 Stitts, personal interview. Eventually, the city saw the same need. In October 1971, the Cleveland Public
Schools announced a "Free Lunch Policy" to assist families "suffering from unusual circumstances or
hardships." "Schools Announce Free Lunches for Children Unable to Pay," Call and Post 16 October 1971:
3A.
316 Seale mentions that most Free Breakfast Programs started in churches and were funded through the
donations of local businesses and members of the Black community (1970, 413).
317 McCoy, personal interview.
318 McCoy, personal interview.
provided boxes of food each week, whereas others were sporadic in their donations. Sometimes, the Cleveland Panthers experienced good fortune. Bill Davis, the Cleveland Panther Information Officer, remembers when another Panther, Danny Solomon, obtained some food for the breakfast program: “Danny pulled up to the office one time and said ‘I got a whole truck of potatoes that won’t chip.’ So we called WABQ and WJMO and they announced it on the radio ... A whole truck. A great big 40-footer full of potatoes.” As the Panthers distributed the potatoes for free, they also educated the community about the Party and its programs. Similar to the usage of *The Black Panther* newspaper to mobilize the community, the Cleveland Panthers organized the community through the implementation of their programs. Following the thoughts of Newton, the Cleveland Panthers “recognized that in order to bring the people to the level of consciousness where they would seize the time, it would be necessary to serve their interests in survival by developing programs which would help them to meet their daily needs.”

Whether it was serving food at the free breakfast program or distributing sweaters at the free clothing program, the Cleveland Panthers used the alternative institutions to politically educate and organize. The implementation of the free clothing program was less consistent, but was still supported through the efforts of members of the Kinsman community. The Cleveland Panthers again utilized the facilities of the St. Adalbert Church and distributed clothes and shoes “to all who asked for them,” said Carr. Whereas some of the clothing for the program was second-hand, the Cleveland Panthers made efforts to provide newer items. McCoy, for instance, made contacts with a business on 55th and Superior that was manufacturing sweaters. After he described the merits of the program,

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319 McCoy, personal interview.
320 Davis, personal interview.
they gave him boxes of brand new sweaters and knit dresses that did not sell in the
department stores. Similarly, the Slater brothers would visit the department stores in
Cleveland and collect discontinued lines of clothing. Merchants and community residents
donated clothes as local dry cleaners assisted in the cleaning. As Carr stated, the program
intended to "show people how successfully a so-called small organization [could] come up
with the necessities of life [while] the city, state, and Federal Governments failed." The
Cleveland Panthers intensified their creation of community institutions to challenge the
ideology and organization of the state apparatus.

E. BUSING TO PRISONS: EXPOSING THE STATE AND UNITING FAMILY

The community programs discussed thus far have been grounded in the BPP's models of
alternative institutions. In addition to cultivating the consciousness of the people directly
served, these programs were designed to transform the social order, and embody the
principles embedded in the Panthers' Ten Point Program. The free busing to prison program
added an additional feature to this design by exposing one of the state's internal mechanisms
that perpetuated the dehumanization of Black and poor people. Abron states that the BPP's
free busing to prison program was first established by the Seattle branch in July 1970. Soon after, the Cleveland Panthers drove vans of family members across the state of Ohio to
see their loved ones on the inside.

The most successful program instituted by the Cleveland Panthers was undoubtedly
the free busing to prisons program. On December 27, 1970, the Panthers organized their

321 Newton 1972, 104.
322 McCoy, personal interview.
323 In addition to Jimmy, Frank and Willie Slater were also Cleveland Panthers. Slater, personal interview.
325 "Panthers group holds giveaway," C7.
first journey to the Ohio Penitentiary for relatives and friends of inmates, in hopes of easing the "financial and transportation difficulties." Cleveland Panther Jimmy Slater discussed the development of the program:

"after so many comrades and Black Nationalists and people we knew were in prison,... we knew we had to organize something to get families out, you know, to see their loved ones. And so the busing program sort of stemmed from so many of us going to jail, really." 

As Slater suggests, the demand for the Panthers’ program grew as the incarceration of Black men increased. In three months, the Panthers expanded to Chillicothe, Marion, and Mansfield State Reformatories – this was four out of the five penal institutions in the state. A collection of primarily elderly gray-haired mothers and younger women with their children loaded onto a borrowed church bus or mini-van each Saturday and made the trek to see imprisoned friends and family members. Within a half year, Carr reported that the Cleveland Panthers had transported more than 1,000 people since the inauguration of the program.

Similar to the other community programs launched by the Cleveland Panthers, the busing program was dependent on the donations of local organizations and businesses. Luke McCoy, the initial program coordinator, stressed the importance and variety of the contributions from the community: “The churches use to give us their buses because they

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326 Abon 1998, 186.
328 Slater, personal interview.
329 As McCoy reported to the Cleveland media, “[w]e don’t have enough buses or volunteer drivers to meet the total need” (“Black Panthers still offer bus rides to Ohio Prisons,” Cleveland Press 26 May 1971).
330 “Cleveland Free Busing Program,” The Black Panther 27 March 1971: 9; “Panthers Plan Buses to Prisons,” Cleveland Plain Dealer, 1 July 1971: 7A; The Panthers added the fifth prison, the Southern Ohio Correctional Facility at Lucasville in the early months of 1973, about the same time that they added the sixth, the new London Correctional Institute (“Dynamo keeps buses to prisons running,” Cleveland Press 13 April 73).
331 “Black Panthers Here Shift Emphasis to Social Action,” Cleveland Plain Dealer 12 July 1971 1A, 16A.
thought it was a great idea. The gas station gave us gas and food. All we had to do was remember copies of *The Black Panther* so that we could read articles on the way back from the prison." Other community members who did not consider themselves "supermilitant" also had the opportunity to participate in the Panthers' programs. Volunteers, usually brothers or cousins of imprisoned inmates, drove the bus back and forth to the prisons, and became an integral part of the Panthers' alternative institution. "It was really a community-oriented program," McCoy recalls.\(^{334}\)

Again, the Cleveland Panthers used their programs to educate the community about the BPP and to possibly attract new members. For instance, McCoy was assisted in his efforts by Cecile McBride, a coworker from his earlier days at the Hough Federal Credit Union. After McBride's husband was incarcerated, she took advantage of the opportunity to work with the Panthers and to visit him.\(^{335}\) In addition, the Party got new recruits from groups of inmates freshly released from prison. With so many Cleveland Panthers imprisoned, it was inevitable that new recruits would find their ways from the cells to the Party. While he was in jail, Cleveland Panther Essex Smith remembers organizing cellmates and having classes on the BPP and then "getting word out [to the Party] when a brother was released."\(^{336}\) His dedication inside the state's penal institutions was only possible because of the support he received from the Party. The free busing to prisons program was organized not only for community members to see their family, but also for Panthers to visit imprisoned comrades. Every visiting day, Smith and fellow Panther Daryl Harris spoke with

\(^{332}\) "Black Panthers Here Shift Emphasis to Social Action," 16A: The amount of people each week depended on the particular institution. Mansfield, for instance, was for first-time offenders and usually required a large school bus. McCoy, personal interview.

\(^{333}\) McCoy, personal interview.

\(^{334}\) McCoy, personal interview.

\(^{335}\) McCoy, personal interview.

\(^{336}\) Smith, personal interview.
Cleveland Panthers. "I couldn't of asked for anything more," Smith said. 337 Even the younger Panthers like Alton Delmore, who were juveniles and couldn't visit the county jail, wrote weekly letters to Panthers on the inside. In addition, the Cleveland Panthers made sure that Smith and Harris always had money and the latest edition of The Black Panther. 338

The descent of the Panthers in Cleveland, which will be further addressed in the next chapter, can be attributed to two factors: the continual imprisonment of local members and the national movement to consolidate operations in Oakland. In 1972, Newton envisioned a Panther city, with members throughout the country closing their local offices and moving to Oakland to assist in the election of Seale for mayor and Brown for city council. Members like Jimmy Slater and Bill Davis left Cleveland, but Panther JoAnn Bray remained in her hometown.

Before the Panthers, Bray was alone in East Cleveland. She was confined to a wheelchair at the age of 15 after contracting rheumatoid arthritis when she was six. By the time Bray was 25, she lived by herself, with a lot of time to think. Most of her early education was through tutors, until she finally graduated from a predominantly white high school. Her experiences as a youth influenced her feelings toward the Black militancy of late 1960s. Bray despised the rhetoric and tactics of the Black liberation movement, as the images of Black Panthers "made her sick." 339

In the early part of 1971, however, Bray began to engage some political texts. She started with the Autobiography of Malcolm X, then Cleaver's Soul on Ice, and finally the history of the BPP in Seale's Seize the Time. After thinking about her situation and the conditions

337 Smith, personal interview.
338 Smith, personal interview.
within her community, she wrote a letter to Newton in August 1971. Bray wrote that she wanted to take advantage of her mind and donate her skills "to awaken the Black community." She wanted Newton to write her back for inspiration and guidance, but most importantly, she wanted to be a Black Panther and recruit in East Cleveland.340

A month later, Bray received a letter from Huey’s assistant, suggesting that she contact the Black Panthers in Cleveland and become active in the community programs. However, Bray had already become engaged in political action. After the execution of Panther George Jackson at the Soledad Prison, she wrote a letter to the editor of the Call and Post, and stated that "Jackson’s death is just a carbon copy of what happens to any black that refuses to compromise his integrity."341 Bray wrote Newton again three weeks later to inform him that she took his advice and had begun to work with the Cleveland Panthers’ free busing to prisons program.342 She initially organized the passenger list and made reservations with the appropriate prisons, while McCoy picked up the buses and food for the visits.343 Once McCoy left Cleveland and the local Panthers disbanded, Bray took over full operations of the program.344

Without the financial resources of the Cleveland Panthers, Bray found it difficult at first to operate the busing program. Out of necessity, Bray changed the name to the People’s Busing Program and began to charge passengers for the weekly visits.345 She still had the support of local organizations, such as the Inner City Protestant House and League Park, but without the income from the sales of The Black Panther, Bray was forced to make

341 JoAnn Bray, letter, Call and Post 4 September 1971: 3B.
342 Stanford University Archives. Department of Special Collections. Newton Foundation Inc. Collection: Series 2, Box 12, Folder 5.
343 McCoy, personal interview.
344 McCoy, personal interview.
changes. Rather than using the buses of churches, for instance, she had to acquire rental vans for liability reasons. Ironically, Bray's home was robbed while she visited the Chillicothe Correctional Institution in October 1972, and lost more than $1,000 worth of personal possessions. The community responded to her misfortune and donated a television, records and clothes to replace the stolen items. Yet the most inspirational donation came from prisoners at Lucasville, who sent cash to assist Bray and the busing program.²⁴⁶

Bray continued to provide busing services to prisons around the state, as she joined with prison rehabilitation groups and became a member of the Ohio Ministers' Penal Task Force.²⁴⁷ Bray expanded trips to the Ohio Reformatory for Women at Marysville and in 1975, acquired a $16,000 grant from the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration, which enabled her to obtain an additional minibus.²⁴⁸ Prison visits were expanded even further to include the correctional facilities in Lucasville, as well as Ohio's juvenile detention centers in Lancaster and Columbus.²⁴⁹ This increased the number of monthly riders to 300 people traveling to 9 penitentiaries.²⁵⁰ This tremendous expansion, which occurred over a span of five years, was eventually threatened in May 1976. For the first time since Bray had taken over the Busing Program, she was forced to cancel trips after being unable to meet the payments for a new insurance policy.²⁵¹ Nevertheless, Bray's maintenance of the free busing program, long after the Panthers dissolved in Cleveland, is a testament to both her

²⁴⁶ "She got more than she lost- more than money could buy," Cleveland Press 18 November 1972.
²⁴⁷ "She lost her stereo but kept her smile," Cleveland Press 14 October 1972.
²⁴⁸ Other sources of income assisted the program as well: Bray once received a watch from an inmate who told her to sell it and use the money to finance a bus ("She lost her stereo but kept her smile," Cleveland Press 14 October 1972).
dedication and the effectiveness of the Panthers' alternative institutions. The Cleveland Panthers' strong community programs depended upon durable community alliances, committed leaders, and a framework for revolutionary change.

F. Final Thoughts on the Invisibility of Panther Programs

The BPP organized their political action around the Ten Point Program, and as Elaine Brown said, the Party "was underwritten by the gun." It is undeniable that the initial program of the Panthers was carrying weapons and patrolling the police. Likewise, the image of the Panther as a revolutionary who stood against the agents of the white power structure was highly influential in mobilizing scores of young Black men and women in the Party. This study does not refute the importance of the Panthers' original purpose and the importance of their group identity construction. The problem evolves when the discussion on the Party ends with these militaristic aspects. As Newton stated, "[t]he image of Blacks armed for self-defense against police brutality catapulted the Party nationally into the public consciousness and gave an erroneous impression that it advocated armed confrontation."352 Rather than furthering the assessment of the Panthers, the literature on the Party has simply reflected the narrow categorization of the Party as mere thugs.

Yet the Panthers had a larger goal: the destruction of the American social order and the rebuilding of a society to address the needs of its community members. To that end, the Panthers initiated community programs to compete with the inadequate institutions of the state and to raise the consciousness of people in their local communities. Newton stated,

352 Newton 1996, 32.
"[a]ll these programs were aimed at one goal: complete control of the institutions in the community."\textsuperscript{353} The Cleveland Panthers were an important local contribution in the revolutionary movement of the Party. Through their programs, the Cleveland Panthers developed strong community alliances and permanently changed the consciousness of those who participated in the Party’s development. Their labor, like the work of all the other Panther operations, is too often placed on the back burner, in favor of the symbolic representation of the Panthers as a violent organization. Unless that representation is challenged, and the paradigm which parents it, there will be future revolutionaries who are targeted as legitimate enemies of the state.

\textsuperscript{353} Newton 1973, 167.
CHAPTER 6

THE DEMISE OF THE CLEVELAND PANTHERS AND FUTURE IMPLICATIONS

The demise of the Cleveland Panthers was triggered during the later months of 1971, as the leadership began to thin and rank-and-file members increasingly found themselves behind bars. Although enjoying some contact with Party members, imprisoned Panthers were disconnected from the Party’s daily community programs and their Panther experience quickly became distant memories. Others refused to sit in the state’s penal institutions. Cleveland Panther leader Tommie Carr jumped bond and left the Party during his third trial on charges of inciting to riot after he sensed a lack of support from the BPP National Headquarters.354 Carr never resurfaced and the Cleveland Panthers suffered through organizational changes and instability.

As the leadership thinned, the fate of the Cleveland Panthers ultimately rested in the hands of the BPP Central Committee. In 1972, the Party decided to gradually close all of it’s chapters and branches and consolidate Party activities in Oakland, “the base” of the next stage of the revolution.355 The new direction of the BPP was initiated by Newton, who envisioned political control in Oakland as a feasible step in the process of self-determination. This divergence from the BPP roots obviously changed the Party’s revolutionary framework, as the Panthers entered the social order’s political arena rather than continuing their


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direction of organizing alternative institutions with the community programs. Members of
the Central Committee initially resisted the plan, objecting to the removal of Panthers from
their local communities and changing the political activities of the Party.  

Newton won however, and Panthers from around the country descended upon
Oakland and began to organize around the mayoral campaign of Bobby Seale and the city
council campaign of Elaine Brown. The eventual defeats in both races demoralized the
Party. With so many Panthers investing in the elections, the empty results permanently
limited the effectiveness and prestige of the Party. As Professor Ollie A. Johnson, III
argues, “the decision to invest almost all of its political and material resources in the 1973
elections proved to be a critical strategic mistake by the Party leadership.”  
Cleveland Panthers who made the trip, like Bill Davis and Jimmy Slater, had mixed feelings on the
experience. On one level, the opportunity to work with so many Panthers from various
geographical locations was invigorating and educational. Yet it was also difficult to work
in an alien community with a different political context.

The example of the Cleveland Panthers’ demise is most likely applicable to other
branches who had established strong roots in their community. The successful local
community programs were simply ended or taken out of the Party’s name after Newton
directed all Panthers to cease their operations. Thus, the labor that went into the
development of strong community alliances and programs was simply eliminated. Local
Panthers had struggled to find their niche in the community, and the unfortunate

The Black Panther Party Reconsidered 404,405.
357 Johnson 496.
358 Davis, personal interview.
359 Slater, personal interview.
consequence of being connected to a hierarchical organization was that local experiences were second to the decisions made at the upper levels of leadership.

A. Party Impact on the Community and on Local Members

Despite the elimination of the local community programs initiated by the Cleveland Panthers, the spirit of the Cleveland Panthers existed long after they disbanded. As discussed in the previous chapter, JoAnn Bray continued the free busing program until 1976. Likewise, members of the St. Adalbert church continued to distribute free clothes to the community “with no strings attached,” directly influenced by the initial free clothing program of the Cleveland Panthers.360 As Frank Stitts stated, “one of the important things is [their] continuing influence. There are Panthers out there who need to know that what they did back in the 60’s is still influencing people today, 30 odd years later.”

The effects of the BPP extended beyond the particular local community; it also impacted the members involved. Bill Davis takes the same message of the Panthers to a different platform with a new philosophy. As a minister, he preaches to prisons and keeps the church’s commitment to the outside community strong.361 “A lot of the same principles and all, I'm still doing those, as an ordained minister,” says Davis.362 Other Cleveland Panthers remain active in the Cleveland community today, carrying on the same principles of the BPP. The experiences in the Party are ones that won’t be forgotten, as they created an idea of a better society, and a vision to keep on struggling.

This study has explored the activities of the Cleveland Panthers in an attempt to confront the narrow illustrations in the literature on the BPP. As stated, the literature on the

360 Stitts, personal interview.
361 Davis, personal interview.
BPP has reinforced and informed the symbolic representation of the Panthers as merely a violent phenomenon. The selective documentation on the national leaders and larger chapters has silenced the experiences of rank-and-file Panthers and the development of local Panther operations. To ignore those experiences is to tell an incomplete account of the Party. The story of the Black Panther Party extended beyond the confines of Oakland, New York, or Chicago, and had a tremendous impact on local communities and individuals. As Cleveland Panther Luke McCoy said, "[t]he ideas that we got as a Panther will be with us all of our lives."

362 Davis, personal interview.
363 McCoy, personal interview.
APPENDIX

PHOTOS OF CLEVELAND PANTHERS AND EVENTS OF IMPORTANCE

The photos on the ensuing pages are courtesy of the Cleveland Press Archives at the Cleveland State University, denoted as (CP), and former Cleveland Panther Luke McCoy, denoted as (LM).
(above) Fred Ahmed Evans (second from the right) and members of the Black Nationalists of New Libya speak with law enforcement officials outside their shop in Glenville. (CP)

(left) Harllef Jones (far left), leader of the Afro Set, stands outside their headquarters in the Hough. (CP)
(above) Mayor Carl B. Stokes (right) swears in General Benjamin Davis, Jr. as Safety Director. (CP)

(below) Jones (center left) and Mayor Stokes observe the Afto Set drill. (CP)
(above) Detective Ed Donovan (sunglasses) and Inspector Laurence Choura speak after the police raid on the Cleveland Panthers' office at the corner of 79th and Rawlings.

(below) Task Force Lt. Harry Leisman (kneeling on the left) calls for back-up during the police raid. Onlookers estimated 75-100 police officers on the scene.
Following the raid, the police rummage through the Panther office and destroy issues of *The Black Panther*. (CP)

The shattered window in the front room of the Cleveland Panthers' office after the shoot-out. (CP)
(above) Neighbors responded to the violent raid on the Panthers by looting Thomas Avery’s drug store. Avery initiated the raid after he called police in to arrest Panther members. (CP)

(below) Cleveland Panther Fred Clark before and after the police shoot-out. (CP)
(above) Cleveland Panthers Fred Clark (second from left), Mike Dowell (third from left), and Curtis Johnson (fifth from left), taken to jail after their arraignment. (CP)

(below) Protestors march for the release of the Cleveland Panthers pictured above and the removal of General Davis as Safety Director. (CP)
The Cleveland Panthers' office on the corner of 79th and Rawlings was an ideal location in the Kinsman community, with plenty of residents passing by each day. (CP)

The Panthers took advantage of the people traffic in front of their office by setting up a literature table and raising funds from the sales of the The Black Panther. (CP)
(right) Charles 'Amokoca' Faison worked with the Cleveland Panthers' clothing program and later headed the communications section. (LM)

(left) Austin Jones served as the coordinator for the Cleveland Panthers' health program during the late summer of 1970. (LM)

(right) Typical of the youth within the Black Panther Party, Allen 'Red' Gaines started working with the Cleveland Panthers when he was 16 years old. (LM)
Luke McCoy served as the coordinator for the Cleveland Panthers' free busing to prison program. (LM)

Bill Davis was the Cleveland Panthers' Information Officer before he moved to Oakland and served on the Party's Central Committee. (LM)

Panther Charles Faison (left) looks through the shoes with some community members during the Cleveland Panthers' free clothing program at the St. Adalbert Church. (LM)
Community members and Cleveland Panthers Tommy Tuck (far left), Allen 'Red' Gaines (second from the left), 'Sleepy' (third from the right), Diane Carr, wife of Cleveland Panther leader Tommie Carr, and Charles 'Amokoa' Faison (far right) stand in front of the St. Adalbert Church before the opening of the Panthers' free clothing program. (LM)
Cleveland Panther Curtis Johnson (standing) reads over the Party's newspaper, *The Black Panther*, with children during the Panthers' Liberation School. In addition to summer reading, the Cleveland Panthers provided a free lunch during each class. (CP)
(above) Family and friends of imprisoned inmates board a bus en route to the Mansfield Prison as part of the Cleveland Panthers' Free Busing to Prison Program. (J.M)

(left) Cleveland Panther Luke McCoy (far right) coordinator for the Free Busing to Prisons Program, poses with the family members of inmates after a trip to the Marion Prison.
(above) The Cleveland Panthers hold a press conference outside their Kinsman office. From left to right, Tommie Carr, Ron Robinson, James 'Rock' Todd, and Mike Cross, a Panther from the Toledo Chapter. (CP)

Father Gene Wilson, who assisted with the Cleveland Panthers' community programs, gives the salute with Panthers Tommy Tuck (left) and Charles Faison (right). (LM)
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