The Enemy Is All Around Us:
A Historical Examination of the Early Years of The Black Panther Party for Self-Defense

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By
James Thomas Jones III, B.A., M.A.

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Master’s Examination Committee:
Dr. Warren Van Tine, Adviser
Dr. William Nelson
Dr. Ahmad Sikainga

Approved by
Adviser
Department of History
ABSTRACT

Dissident political activity has been a recurring theme throughout the American existence. As distinct groups of Americans battled for limited political power and representation, the voice and activism of African-Americans could never be characterized as monolithic or stagnant. This project is principally concerns the articulation of one of African-Americans dissident streams of thought. Along with the articulation of that thought, this work also intends to illustrate the seemingly contradictory political stances that protest groups occupy, due to a plethora of internal and external circumstances, during attempts to liberate themselves. The Black Panther Party for Self-Defense is a classic example of the frenetic and schizophrenic nature of protest thought and activities.

Although this study is principally focused upon the Black Panther Party, obviously it is impossible to talk about the Panthers devoid of historical context. Consequently, the White Radical Movement, Vietnam War Protests, Black Nationalist fervor and identity politics ravaging the country during the sixties frame this story. Just as prominent as the aforementioned to the Panther narrative are the often illegal and always controversial attacks of the United States Government. So great is the role of local, state, and federal authorities in the Panther story and the sixties in general, that it would be impossible to accurately discuss any activism devoid of their presence.

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We now know that by using the Federal Bureau of Investigation’s Counter Intelligence Program (COINTELPRO), the U.S. Government undercut the infrastructure and external support network of the Panthers. The most obvious consequence of the Panthers isolation from the black community and white radical allies was an increase in vulnerability. Despite the undeniable role the U.S. Government played in subduing the Panthers, it should never be forgotten that the group was also plagued by intra-party strife. Most prominent was the fracturing of the Panthers as members lined up behind the militaristic pronunciations of Eldridge Cleaver or the community service activities of Newton loyalists. Undoubtedly, it was the combination of internal and external pressures that ultimately led to the demise of the Black Panther Party.

Despite the relatively short existence of the Panthers, particularly when held up against Civil Rights organizations such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and the Urban League, the Panther legacy has still found a prominent place on the American political and historical landscape. The Panthers prominence, despite their brief existence, is well deserved. Although the ideological undercurrents of the Panthers were as admirable and more progressive than those of the founding fathers, most Americans and scholars refuse to give the group its due. The Panther calls for America to progress beyond man made social structures and labels emanated from a deep unbending love and hope for their fellow man and nation. Despite this indomitable hope that the nation could become more egalitarian social, politically, and economically, the Panthers were also simultaneously fatalistically serious about destroying the very foundation of the nation if it refused to progress towards these lofty goals.
Consequently, the Panther legacy has become marred by and unfairly wedded to charges of illegal and highly questionable immoral behavior: drug abuse, sexism, extortion, murder, sedition, armed robbery, rape, theft, embezzlement. Hopefully, this work will serve as another stone in the path to tell the true story of the Panthers. A story that is as filled with hope and honor as the storied history of the United States of America, but one that also contains many of the same flaws and contradictions that have plagued this very land.
Dedicated to my Mother and Father
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I would first like to extend honor and thanks to my Lord and savior Jesus Christ. He knows above and beyond anyone else the trials and tribulations that I went through to reach this point in my life. Without his grace, mercies, and healing, I undoubtedly would not have lived to see this day.

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Jones, Damon Thomas, Mario Martin, Tony Quinn, John Calhoun, and Jose’ Diaz.
VITA

April 30, 1970 ....................... Born - Mansfield, Ohio

1995 .............................. B.A. Black Studies, The Ohio State University

1995 - 1996 ....................... M.A. Black Studies, The Ohio State University

1996 - 1997 ....................... Educational Policy and Leadership,
                            The Ohio State University

2000 .............................. M.A. History, The Ohio State University

2000 - Present .................... Doctoral Student, History
                            The Ohio State University

FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Field: African-American History
            African-American/African Studies

Minor Field: Labor History
            African History
            Modern American History
            Educational Policy & Leadership
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The Enemy Is All Around Us:

A Historical Examination of the Early Years of The Black Panther Party for Self-Defense

by

James Thomas Jones III
In 1919 Paul R. Brissenden, Professor of Economics at Columbia University, wrote in his pioneer study of the Industrial Workers of the World: “The public still knows but little about the organization and its members . . . The public has not been told the truth about the things the I.W.W. has done or the doctrines in which it believes. The papers have printed so much fiction about this organization and maintained such a nationwide conspiracy of silence as to its real philosophy -- especially to the constructive items of its philosophy -- that the popular conception of this labor group is a weird unreality.” If one were to substitute the words “white Americans” for “the public” and “Black Panther Party” for “I.W.W.,” Professor Brissenden’s statement could be reprinted today without any other alteration.

---Philip S. Foner---
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

During the 1950 and 1960's Civil Rights Era African-American activists and White Liberals undertook a prolonged battle against legalized segregation in the South.\(^1\) It was only after numerous hard fought battles that the nation acquiesced activists desires with legislation that was disproportionately publicized considering its minimal impact. Civil Rights Leaders, along with working-class and poor African-Americans, undoubtedly approached the new legislative measures with caution, knowing all too well the ineffectiveness of previous legislative measures. So it was with guarded optimism that African-Americans watched President Lyndon Baines Johnson sign the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

It was during a period of national optimism and rampant liberalism that politicians and civil rights activist mobilized behind the politically astute Texan Lyndon Baines Johnson in support of the aforementioned Civil Rights legislation. Although many have

charged that the passage of the Civil Rights Act (CRA) of 1964 and Voting Rights Act (VRA) of 1965 was the nation's final salute to the fallen John F. Kennedy, who was assassinated on November 22, 1963, in Dallas, Texas, the fact remains that the legislation would have never been approved without the pervasive influence and political savvy of Lyndon Baines Johnson. Unfortunately for African-Americans, this attempt at ameliorating persistent socioeconomic inequalities would eventually prove as insufficient as previous legislative measures, however, the inadequacy of the new legislation would not be evident for some time.

Almost immediately after the legislation was signed, there were two very prominent positions taken by Civil Rights Leaders and their White liberal allies. Although neither group had given the legislation a chance to impact the lives of African-Americans or change the historic inequalities that had often seemed to be a permanent fixture on the American landscape, they both took strong stands regarding the legislation. Although these two camps of thought were not divided strictly along racial lines, there composition was not thoroughly integrated either. For example, the initial school of thought that we will examine, the position that the new Civil Rights legislation guaranteed that the Negro was a first-class citizen endowed with the same rights and opportunities as any other American. It is out of this camp that a strange brotherhood consisting of white liberals,

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conservatives, and many African-American activists, united in a patriotic chorus extolling the values of American democracy and opportunity. According to these activist, it was now time for the Negro to take their new equality and actively engage the American political and economic economy to improve their collective, and individual, socioeconomic and political position.

It is in the wake of the new Civil Rights legislation that liberal thinking noticeably shifted to the right in a fast and seemingly irreversible retreat from prior liberal thoughts. The philosophy that the White left so clearly estranged themselves from was a prior critique concerning structural flaws within American economic and political institutions. Obviously, if the source of African-American problems are found within structural flaws in American society, little of the blame for the marginal socioeconomic position of African-Americans can be attributed to that population. However, the liberal migration to the right, enabled liberals, conservatives, and some African-Americans to find a new source for the continued marginalization Blacks. Liberals theorized that the new Civil Rights legislation had effectively removed any and all structural impediments from the paths of African-Americans, consequently, any future problems concerning this issue of full participation in American society were indications of personal flaws within the Black community, not an inherently unfair American society.\(^3\) President Lyndon Johnson reflects this ideological shift in his commencement address at Howard University on June

\(^3\)Martin Luther King, Jr., *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967).
4, 1965. At the opening of the address, Johnson boldly called for further correction of structural impediments. Emphasizing that

You do not take a person who, for years, has been hobbled by chains and liberate him, bring him up to the starting line of a race and then say, ‘you are free to compete with all the others,’ and still justly believe that you have been completely fair. Thus it is not enough just to open the gates of opportunity. All our citizens must have the ability to walk through those gates... This is the next and more profound stage of the battle for civil rights. We seek not just freedom but opportunity -- not just legal equity but human ability -- not just equality as a right and a theory but equality as a fact and as a result.5

However, the most salient and important aspects of Johnson’s presentation occur after these initial thoughts, it was then that the President shifted directions and unveiled a new liberal philosophy. A philosophy that would eventually propel Daniel Patrick Moynihan, a co-writer of the Howard address, to political importance. Moynihan’s importance was largely derived from the efficient manner in which he moved the problems, and consequently the solution, of Blacks from structural flaws in American society, to the black population.6 Not surprisingly Johnson’s address foreshadowed Moynihan’s later study, The Negro Family: The Case for National Action.7 Johnson told


5Ibid.

6Daniel Patrick Moynihan relates that he and Richard Goodwin were the co-authors of the speech in his work Family and Nation (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986). Amazingly, prior to the unveiling of this new liberal philosophy, the ideological shift was presented to and approved by Civil Rights Leaders Martin Luther King, Whitney Young, and Roy Wilkins. See., Allen J. Matusow, The Unraveling of America: A History of Liberalism in the 1960s (New York: HarperTorchbooks, 1986), 196.

the graduating students: “Equal opportunity is essential, but not enough.”

Men and women of all races are born with the same range of abilities. But ability is not just the product of birth. Ability is stretched or stunted by the family you live with, and the neighborhoods you live in, by the school you go to and the poverty or the richness of your surroundings. It is the product of a hundred unseen forces playing upon the infant, the child, and the man . . . Overt job discrimination is only one of the important hurdles which must be overcome before color can disappear as a determining factor in the lives and fortunes of men . . . The prevailing view among social scientists holds that there are no significant differences among groups as to the distribution of innate aptitudes or at most very slight differences. On the other hand, differences among individuals are very substantial. The extent to which an individual is able to develop his aptitudes will largely depend upon the circumstances present in the family within which he grows up and the opportunities which he encounters at school and in the larger community.⁸

President Johnson’s speech clearly signaled an abrupt departure from prior liberal attempts at correcting structural flaws within America.⁹ The liberal abandonment of critiques concerning the inherent unfairness of American economic and political

⁸Johnson’s Howard University address is reprinted in Rainwater and Yancey, The Moynihan Report and the Politics of Controversy (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1967), 125-132. The Johnson address was overwhelmingly accepted by both the Civil Rights Leadership and the Howard University graduating class. According to the Washington Evening Star (June 5, 1965), the President was interrupted eighteen times by applause. Moynihan himself later writes that he took the applause of the Howard audience as nothing less than Black approval of the new Liberal agenda. “The President and the Negro: The Moment Lost,” Commentary 43 (February 1967): 34.

⁹In due time Civil Rights Leaders would become horrified at this change in the Liberal agenda. The Civil Rights Leadership knew that the achievement of legal equality was simply the initial stage in the Movement. The subsequent steps of economic redistribution and the exercise of legal equality were undoubtedly going to be a much more difficult stage. However, White liberals abandonment of African-Americans after the initial stage caused many Civil Rights Leaders to question the wisdom of the new politics. In the midst of a congressional debate, Hubert Humphrey rhetorically asked all in attendance, “What is the value of winning access to public accommodations for those who lack money to use them?” Epstein, Richard A., Forbidden Grounds (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), 400. Bayard Rustin echoes these sentiments when he asks, “What is the value of winning access to public accommodations for those who lack money to use them?” “From Protest to Politics: the Future of the Civil Rights Movement,” Commentary 39 (February 1964): 25.
institutions and consequently the need to correct such institutions, served as the primary catalyst in bringing the reformist oriented and assimilationist aimed Civil Rights Movement to a close. The movement of White Leftist in this direction was not wholly unfamiliar to the American political landscape. In fact the Liberal position was eerily similar to the rhetoric and politics that led to the abandonment of emancipated Negroes in the hostile South and the subsequent demise of Reconstruction with the Compromise of 1877. As a result Rutherford B. Hayes’s capitulation to Southern Whites racist fears, post-Reconstruction period Negroes were ill-equipped with an often ignored legal equality, while simultaneously being denied economic and political power.\(^{10}\) In any event, 1965, the year that President Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act, serves as a critical turning point in the lives of blacks, the future of Leftist politics, and America in general.\(^{11}\)

The rightist movement of the Democratic Party and other formerly liberal political


\(^{11}\)Rainwater and Yancey echo these sentiments when they relate that, “The year 1965 may be known in history as the time when the civil rights movement discovered, in the sense of becoming explicitly aware, that abolishing legal racism would not produce Negro equality.” Rainwater and Yancey, *The Moynihan Report and the Politics of Controversy* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1967), p. 11. 1965 was also the date that the Watts Riot occurred as Californian Blacks exploded in several days of rioting. It is critically important that the Watts riot occurred days after the signing of the Voting Rights Act was signed into law. It was a clear indication that such legal amendments were having no effect upon African-American communities outside of the South. The problems facing the North and West were more sophisticated and hence much more difficult to solve. Dr. King himself remarked that the re-allocation of jobs, education, and political power would be by far the more difficult stage of the Civil Rights Movement. See., Martin Luther King, Jr., *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community*? (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), pg. 7-13.
organizations created a conservative climate that directly contributed to the end of Black integrationist dreams. Naturally, the majority of Blacks, particularly the urban poor and working-class, grew extremely pessimistic concerning this turn towards conservatism occurring nationally. However, poor and working-class Blacks were not alone in their disgust towards the false promises and half-truths that appeared to be the American politicians forte*. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. simultaneously comments on the predicament facing the black community and condemns the right-ward movement of liberals.

Negroes of America had taken the President, the press and the pulpit at their word when they spoke in broad terms of freedom and justice . . . The word was broken, and the free-running expectations of the Negro crashed into the stone walls of white resistance.12

Liberal double-talk and betrayal further exacerbated feelings of distrust that burned in many urban poor and working-class African-American hearts. Taking this latest alteration to Liberal ideology as yet another impediment to African-American progress, blacks steadily lost their allegiance to the noble principles of America and paid increasing attention to a strengthening Nationalist element. Just as the CRM had signaled the Black desire to integrate, the strengthening Nationalist movement signaled a desire of similar intensity to re-examine the goals, tactics, and direction of the African-American freedom struggle. Just as Liberals changed the ideological underpinnings of their movement, so would African-Americans as the masses steadily gravitated towards the

12King, Martin Luther, Jr. Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community? pg. 3-4.
nationalist position that advocated urgency and the accomplishment of Black advancement ‘by any means necessary.’ Not since Marcus Garvey’s Universal Negro Improvement Association in the 1920s had the nation seen African-Americans gravitate en masse to the rhetorical stylings of Nationalist leaders.\(^{13}\)

According to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., the disappointments of African-Americans, particularly African-American activists, opened the door for Nationalist to ascend to a leadership position.\(^{14}\) Clayborne Carson reveals that this capture of the African-American freedom struggle by Nationalists, all but guaranteed that the Civil Rights Movement and its tendencies toward interracial cooperation were finished.\(^{15}\) The combination of a growing conservative political climate and Black frustrations paved the way for the arrival of a new more demanding, impatient, youthful urban leadership. Civil Rights Leaders knew that unless African-Americans could immediately notice improvements in their daily lives, the former goal of integration would become

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\(^{13}\) This fact in no way diminishes the very noticeable impact that Malcolm X made upon the scene during his tenure as the national spokesman for the Nation of Islam. However, the fact remains that Malcolm X was never able to make a sizable impact upon the political culture of the times due to the reticence of the Honorable Elijah Muhammad to enter into the realm of American politics. Although many African-Americans sympathized with Malcolm’s view and statements, it can not be disputed that the leaders of the major Civil Rights organizations held the loyalties of a larger percentage of grassroots activist.


\(^{15}\) The group that signals the transformation of the Civil Rights Movement from an interracial cooperative organization to an exclusive Black Nationalist group is the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee. To gain a better understanding of the internal politics that caused members of SNCC to separate as if controlled by self-interest and identity politics, see, Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s* (Mass: Harvard University Press, 1995.)
inextricably vanquished.16 Across the board, Civil Rights Leaders warned that the only mechanism capable of extending Blacks desire to integrate was tangible improvements in their socioeconomic status. Whitney Young spoke directly to the gap between legislative equality and day-to-day practicality when he stated, "there is little value in a Negro's obtaining the right to be admitted to hotels and restaurants if he has no cash in his pocket and no job."

With the Civil Rights Movement halted, a new Black leadership cadre made their initial order of business altering movement goals to reflect their own narrow Nationalist thoughts. Ironically, the first to articulate this new politic was SNCC. Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) leaders such as Stokely Carmichael and H. Rap Brown accurately pronounced that the rise of Nationalism was equal to a vote by the masses for new direction and leadership.18 The movement of SNCC toward Black Nationalism is extremely important after one reflects that SNCC was commonly cited as the epitome of interracial solidarity and cooperation; what many hoped was America’s future. SNCC’s existence was the greatest argument against Black Nationalists racially exclusive tenets.19 SNCC members had proven in America’s most dangerous battlefield,

16Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., beautifully articulated the fears of the Civil Rights Leadership regarding both the White Liberal abandonment and the non-application of existing legal statutes. See., King, Martin Luther, Jr. Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?; See also, Bayard Rustin's feelings on this issue in “From Protest to Politics: the Future of the Civil Rights Movement," Commentary 39 (February 1964): 25.
17Whitney M. Young, Jr., To Be Equal (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1963), 54.
19For an organizational history of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, pronounced (SNICK) see., Clayborne Carson, In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s; Howard Zinn, SNCC: The New Abolitionsists; Cleveland Sellers, with Robert Terrell, The River of No Return: The Autobiography
Mississippi, that it was possible for Black and White to struggle and die side-by-side in the name of justice. Although both Black and White SNCC workers risked life and limb to register African-American voters, there was a undercurrent of interracial and gender related resentment and non cooperation festering in the group.

It was not long before most Black SNCC activists, male and female, grew weary of the numerous disappointments and pacifist position that was the trademark of the Civil Rights Movement. Consequently, SNCC’s leadership called for an examination of existing tactics, strategies, and goals. The result was a call for racial solidarity within the African-American community. For mainstream America, such a call was synonymous with racial separatism and reverse discrimination. Along with this alteration in movement ideology was a new rhetoric that predicted the black struggle would become angrier, less patient, and less accommodating than ever before. 20 Veteran activist Andrew Young relates that it was little else than pervasive disappointment with the advancement of the movement toward tangible improvements in the lives of the masses of African-Americans that led to this alteration in tactics, goals and slogan. Now instead of singing the racially inclusive ‘We Shall Overcome’, black nationalists would shout ‘Black Power’ as their mantra for change. 21

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21 Although the Nationalist concept Black Power has consistently found advocates throughout the African-American freedom struggle, the modern manifestation of the term was initially espoused by members of SNCC. After James Meredith was shot during his “March Against Fear” several Civil Rights Leaders and
In his work *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s*, Clayborne Carson reveals that most emerging Nationalist leaders regarded previous integrationist leanings passe’. Indicative of these widespread feelings was a change in long-term goals as many in the Black community lost their desire to integrate into America. African-Americans increasingly echoed James Baldwin’s famous query: ‘Who wants to integrate into a burning house?’ Consequently, Carson tells us that the first casualties of the revamped Black agenda were Liberal Whites. Although many old guard African-American leaders still considered White liberals indispensable allies, young Nationalists flippantly discarded these Whites and their prior contributions. To their credit White protesters did continue their activism to advance the cause of other protest movements.

SNCC leader H. Rap Brown is clear concerning the mood of African-American activists during this period, Brown states that activists considered the present struggle


22See., Carson, Clayborne, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s* for an account of the painful process that both Black and White activists endured prior to and during the process that led to the dismissal of Whites from Civil Rights organizations such as SNCC.

23Dr. Martin Luther King was highly critical of the new Black Power leaders who were balkanizing the African-American struggle along racial lines, but he was also very critical of White Liberals who simply dropped their African-American brethren in the post-Voting Rights Act era. See., King, Martin Luther, Jr., *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?*
facing African-Americans to be the Black man’s fight. The central flaw in this call is found when one reflects that the majority of Black Nationalist leaders had little more than rhetoric at their disposal. In his work *Black Power Ideologies*, Joseph T. McCartney reveals the chaotic atmosphere of the movement while activists attempted to define what Black Power meant for them and what it should mean for the nation. McCartney writes that although there was a plethora of nationalist organizations and ideologies created during the 1960s there were only two primary schools of thought surrounding this concept of Black power: (1) symbolic acts of physical or cultural separation from America or (2) mobilization for a later attempt at integration with power. Toward the latter goal of mobilizing power, nationalist scholars and activist turned their attention toward developing indigenous talents and skills. For instance, works such as Stokely Carmichael (Kwame Tur’e) and Charles V. Hamilton’s, *Black Power*, called for the building of parallel institutions that would allow African-Americans to exert greater influence in their daily lives.

The concept of Black Power rests on a fundamental premise: *Before a group can enter the open society, it must first close ranks.* By this we mean group solidarity is necessary before a group can operate effectively from a bargaining position of strength in a pluralistic society. Traditionally, each new ethnic group in this society has found the route to social and political viability through

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the organization of its own institutions with which to represent its needs within the larger society . . . the American melting pot has not melted. Italians vote for Rubino over O’Brien; Irish for Murphy over Goldberg, etc.\textsuperscript{27}

However, such an ideological position was rife with irony since it occurred at a time when African-Americans had unprecedented physical and economic mobility due to government intervention in the realms of housing and job discrimination.\textsuperscript{28} As many blacks jumped at the increased and plentiful material rewards to be secured through employment in major corporations and government, there was another group of blacks attempting to improve their position by organizing and consolidating available power and talents within their communities.

Despite such noble intentions, there were several flaws in this latest return to Black Nationalist thought. The primary flaw being the lack of a dominant ideological paradigm, tactic, or goal structure. Instead of uniformity, each organization, and often leaders within the same organization, espoused different philosophies regarding the idea of Black power.\textsuperscript{29} With no centralized definition, Black Nationalist organizations began a pattern of infighting similar to previous battles between rival Civil Rights groups and

\textsuperscript{27}Ibid., pg. 44-45.
\textsuperscript{29}For a sample of the variety of Nationalist thought that was manifested not only within the Black Power Era, but throughout the history of the African-American freedom struggle, see., McCartney, Black Power Ideologies
leaders for activist territory.\textsuperscript{30} The Black Panther Party for Self-Defense (BPP), the focus of this study, was one of these emerging Black Nationalist organizations jockeying for a position in the Black Power Era. However, instead of reaching for a racially based paradigm or mythological pseudo-African past, as so many others did, the Panthers grasped for the thoughts of Black Nationalist, Socialist, and Communist theoreticians and formed interracial alliances.\textsuperscript{31} What follows is the story of the most progressive organization of the Black Power Era: The Black Panther Party for Self-Defense.

\textsuperscript{30}A clear example of the type of infighting that occurred during the Civil Rights Movement can be found in Joanne Grant’s biography of Ella Baker, the mother of the Civil Rights Movement. Grant writes that Baker was highly critical of the intense rivalries that manifested itself not only between different Civil Rights organizations, but also leaders with the same group. According to Grant, Baker went so far as to question if the leadership of the Southern Christian Leadership Council’s intended to denigrate the movement into a sophomoric oratorical contest as they noticeably replaced organizational and movement information and content in favor of rhetorical flair. See., Grant, Joanne, \textit{Ella Baker: Freedom Bound}, (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.,) pg. 105-124. For a first hand account of the rivalry and propensity to protect activist territory among Civil Rights leaders, see., Walter White, \textit{A Man Called White: The Autobiography of Walter White}, (New York: The Viking Press, 1948).

CHAPTER 2

THE CREATION OF THE BLACK PANTHER PARTY FOR SELF-DEFENSE

Born in Monroe, La., on February 17, 1942, Huey P. Newton was the seventh and last child born to Armelia and Walter Newton.\(^1\) It appears that they anointed Huey at birth to be a political activist, considering he was the namesake of former Louisiana Governor Huey P. Long, a long time advocate for Negro rights during the Jim Crow period.\(^2\) The Newton family migration from Louisiana to Oakland, Ca., in 1945 was typical of African-American migratory patterns. Overall, southern-based African-Americans attempted to improve their precarious socioeconomic status by first moving from rural to urban areas within the South. Only after that initial attempt failed to produce sufficient socioeconomic advancement would they migrate from their beloved southern roots. After several stops along the way, the push of Jim Crow and the pull of increased economic opportunities during the war brought the Newton family to the Bay

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\(^1\)The placement of Huey P. Newton's birth holds some significance in African-American folklore. Legend has it that the seventh child, particularly a male child, is destined for greatness. Malcolm X was also the seventh male child born to his parents. In his auto-biography, Malcolm, formerly known as Malcolm Little, makes a special note of his placement in the birth order of the Little children. See, X, Malcolm and Alex Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1966) pg. 2.

Area of California.³

World War II labor shortages and increased demands for goods, opened many previously closed employment avenues to African-Americans. For many it was their initial engagement with American industrialism.⁴ Unfortunately, even the increased employment opportunities of the Bay Area were insufficient in ending the Newton's economic woes. However, the move to the Bay Area proved beneficial in another major way: increased educational opportunities for the Newton children. Unfortunately, Huey was the least successful in the educational arena.⁵

The youngest Newton appeared destined for educational marginality. Sadly, his problems with Oakland Public Schools commenced with his introduction to the system. According to Newton's recollection the education he received was largely irrelevant to the problems and pressures he faced daily. Newton reflects that,

during those long years in the Oakland public schools, I did not have one teacher who taught me anything relevant to my own life or experience. Not one instructor ever awoke in me a desire to learn more or question or explore the worlds of literature, science,


⁵For a detailed account of the trials and tribulations Newton faced with the Oakland public school system, see., Huey P. Newton. Revolutionary Suicide. pg 19-59.
and history. All they did was try to rob me of the sense of my own uniqueness and worth, and in the process they nearly killed my urge to inquire.\textsuperscript{6}

In due time, Huey turned away from the Oakland Public School System and sought validation in another much more dangerous arena --- the Bay Area streets.

As Newton grew, so did the influence of the streets upon his life. Despite parental attempts to guide Huey down a different path, the baby-faced child craved a life on Oakland's mean streets. Having already shown a propensity to fight against perceived enemies, such as the school system, Newton transferred such behavior toward defending his growing street reputation. Eventually, Newton would derive his self-worth by subduing rival males both verbally and physically.\textsuperscript{7} In the end however, his oratorical and pugilist skill in no way made up for lingering educational deficiencies. Indicative of Newton's skewed priorities was the fact that he simultaneously became a legend in Bay Area streets for his physical and intellectual prowess while remaining a functional illiterate.\textsuperscript{8}

Despite the contempt that Huey held for the local school system, he was still one of its more intellectually gifted students. However, as with all students his talents needed nurturing and development, a process that at times seemed impossible to Bay Area

\textsuperscript{6}Ibid. pg. 23.

\textsuperscript{7}Bobby Seale is very clear in Newton's abilities to subdue rivals either mentally or physically and offers several examples of Newton's behavior in this arena. See., Bobby Seale. \textit{Seize The Time: The Story of The Black Panther Party and Huey P. Newton} (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1991) pg. 13-19.

\textsuperscript{8}See., Huey P. Newton. \textit{Revolutionary Suicide} pg. 53-55.
educators. The catalyst for such a Herculean task came right out of Huey's own family, his brother Melvin. Melvin, a college student, displayed to Huey the power that they could wield through the cultivation of the mind and the application of such intellectual skills to the larger struggle for African-American rights. In spite of a late start at cultivating the mind, Huey began a rigorous regimen of voracious reading and studying. A path that eventually allowed Newton to graduate from high school and gain admittance to Merritt College; the local community college.

II

Bobby Seale, born in Dallas, Texas, October 22, 1936, was the son of a carpenter with only an eighth grade education.\(^9\) The father's educational level was definitely a contributing factor to the constant grip of poverty enveloping the family. Similar to so many other young people with no money for college, Seale's ticket out of poverty was the armed service. However, Seale floundered in a military environment designed to foster discipline and respect for authority. Seale could not reconcile the degradation that he and other African-American service personnel experienced on a daily basis with simultaneous calls for patriotism. Despite the relative progressiveness of the military, there were continuing patterns of racism and sexism. Seale cites such contradictions as the reason his Air Force career was filled with a myriad of discipline problems.\(^10\)

Eventually released from military duty, with a dishonorable discharge, Seale

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\(^10\)See., Ibid., pg. 7-12.
returned to the Bay Area and joined the thriving student movement. Seale’s fervor for activism resulted largely from his travels abroad. While in the military he was afforded the opportunity to see the damaging effects of racism around the world. After enrolling in Merritt College, Seale met another energetic student activist: Huey P. Newton.\footnote{Bobby Seale details his meeting with Huey P. Newton on the campus of Merritt College. Seale recollects that he was immediately impressed with the intellect that Newton displayed as he subdued an audience of rivals on the validity and wrong direction of the Civil Rights Movement, particularly the role of the African-American middle-class in the grassroots freedom struggle. Ibid., pg. 13.} By the time Newton and Seale met, Newton had become one of the areas leading theoreticians of the African-American freedom struggle, and the area’s biggest critic of the Southern-based Civil Rights Movement. Newton’s pessimism concerning the largely Southern struggle was a by-product of his perception that the movement was largely irrelevant to his urban experience.

In the Post-WWII period, Bay Area African-Americans faced problems typical of those confronting Blacks in other urban areas: high unemployment rates, housing discrimination, inequitable pay scales, and inferior educational institutions.\footnote{For specific details surrounding the Black community of Oakland’s Bay Area, see, Crouchett, Lawrence, Lonnie Bunch III, and Martha Kendall Winnaker, eds. Visions Toward Tomorrow: The History of the East Bay Afro-American Community 1851-1977} It would be in error to suggest that the problems of urban America were invisible to Civil Rights Leaders, however, the State sanctioned second-class citizenship of Southern Blacks made addressing that region more pressing.\footnote{For an excellent account of the environment that led to the urgency that Southern-based African-Americans attacked their native land with, see, John Egerton. Speak Now Against The Day: The Generation Before The Civil Rights Movement in the South (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994).} In contrast to the obvious racist enemies facing
Southern-based African-Americans, non-Southerners combated a more covert and elusive enemy. Because of the naivete' of many Southern Blacks toward the covert, yet powerful, racism of Northern and Western industrialized areas of the country, they likely viewed these areas as a balm to their problems. However, African-American urban residents knew full well that there was no salvation to be found in either increased job opportunities or the franchise.  

Because of their relatively early exposure to the harsh reality that there was no simple solution to the problems confronting Blacks, non-Southern Blacks had relinquished many of the integrationist dreams that their Southern brethren held with reverence. Urban residents had replaced such solutions with the defiant and militant rhetoric of Black Nationalist leaders who spoke directly to their working-class conditions in urban America.

III

In the mid-1960s as the quality of Black urban life continued to decline and the Civil Rights Movement crumbled along generational and racial lines, the Bay Area's Nationalist movement rose to prominence. For many years the Bay Area was home to a very successful Nationalist underground movement. However, the Black Nationalist movement was not the only protest movement mobilizing in the Bay Area during the

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14For an example of the political thought that was occurring throughout the North concerning the electoral process that Southern-based African-Americans were eager to participate in see Malcolm X's speech titled "The Ballot or The Bullet", presented on 3 April 1964 in Cleveland, Ohio. For a reprint of the speech see, George Breitman, ed., Malcolm X Speaks: Selected Speeches and Statements. New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1965. pg. 23-44.

15See., Huey P. Newton. Revolutionary Suicide. pg. 60-66; Bobby Seale. Seize The Time: The Story of The Black Panther Party and Huey P. Newton pg. 24-34.
sixties. White radicals from Berkeley were staging attacks upon domestic and foreign
governmental policies as they journeyed through Leftist politics.\textsuperscript{16} It was this interracial
protest environment that permanently imprinted both the utility of Leftist ideology and
 interracial alliances on the minds of Newton and Seale. Although the Panthers started as
a Nationalist organization, they consistently moved further Left toward Socialist thoughts
and ideologies as time passed. Having taken that into account the writer still asserts that
during the formation of the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense, the rich legacy of Black
Nationalism in the Black community was the ideology that most prominently influenced
the thinking of Newton and Seale.\textsuperscript{17}

On October 15, 1966 at the Poverty Center of North Oakland, Huey P. Newton
and Bobby Seale formed the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense. Newton dictated to
Bobby Seale ten-points off the top of his head that he thought represented “what black
people have been voicing all along for more than 100 years since the Emancipation
Proclamation and even before that.”\textsuperscript{18} The result of Newton’s brainstorming was a
reformist document, commonly called the Ten-Point Platform, that served as the

detailed account of the interplay between the White Radical Movement and the Black activists who would
serve as the advocates for the myriad of Black Nationalist ideologies manifested throughout the Black
Power Era.

\textsuperscript{17}The initial attempt of Newton and Seale into the activist arena as leaders can be best characterized as a
reformist venture. During this early stage of their ideological development, Newton and Seale concentrated
upon improving the day-to-day conditions of their Bay Area community and warding off external
 aggressors. This reformist position would eventually be amended as the organization moved further into
the realm of Leftist politics. Symbolizing the groups movement from pure reformism to revolution is the
decision to drop the words “Self-Defense” from the organizational name.

\textsuperscript{18}See., Bobby Seale, \textit{Seize The Time}... pg. 62.
ideological foundation of the organization. The document set ten goals for Blacks: #1 desire for self-determination, #2 full employment, #3 an end to economic exploitation, #4 decent housing for all citizens, #5 relevant quality education for all citizens, #6 exemption from military service for all African-American men, #7 an end to police brutality, #8 release of African-American men in the nations prisons and jails, #9 trial by a jury of one’s peers, and #10 a United Nations-supervised plebiscite in which only black colony subjects may participate in determining the will of the black national destiny.⁹⁹ Along with the Ten-Point Platform, Newton and Seale developed rudimentary rules for membership such as no use of drugs or alcohol on the premises of party headquarters nor while doing official Panther Party duties.

From the very beginning the Panthers ten-point program was scrutinized. James Boggs states that the ten-point platform and program were “more a statement of grievances and concessions demanded from the White power structure than it is a program to mobilize Black people in escalating struggle for control and power.”²⁰ Although Boggs’ criticism is accurate, one must remember that the Black Panther Party was a infantile organization created by two college students who were attempting to create an organizational philosophy. Consequently, it is erroneous to state that the Panthers were strictly reformist during their formative period. It is more accurate to state

¹⁹Along these same lines of developing the organization, Newton and Seale decided that Huey P. Newton would be considered the organizational Minister of Defense, while Bobby Seale accepted the title of Chairman. See, Bobby Seale. Seize The Time. pg. 62.

the ideological platform that the Panthers unveiled to the community was a reformist
document.

According to Manning Marable, the Panthers were neither the introducers of
Black Nationalism to the Bay Area nor the sole advocates of the idea during the mid-
sixties, however, they were the first to give class precedence over race.21 The vast
majority of Panther contemporaries propagated a race first or racial essentialist ideology
that alienated other non-Black protest groups.22 Newton and Seale intentionally sought to
create an ideology that would be simultaneously inclusive of protest groups no matter
their racial make-up and understandable to the masses of working and lower-class
African-Americans. A major step toward achieving the former goal, a racially inclusive
appeal, was to create separation between themselves and other groups emerging during
the formation of the Black Power Era.23

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The Black Panther Party and Huey P. Newton*, pg. 24-34. Marable also states that although modern day
recollections would like to place the Panthers in a position of being revolutionary, history does not support
such a view. In Marable’s mind, the Panthers were little more than a reformist organization during their
genesis. Manning Marable, *Race, Reform, and Rebellion: The Second Reconstruction in Black America,

22 In the mid-sixties, as the influence of the Civil Rights Movement dwindled, African-Americans embarked
upon an exploration of identity politics. Consequently, it should not be surprising to see organizations and
community members displaying superficial external displays of Blackness: Afros, dashiki’s, pro-Black
slogans, pseudo-African communal lifestyles.

23 There has been much debate concerning the originality of the Black Panther symbol in the African-
American freedom struggle. In fact, leaders of The Black Panther Party for Self-Defense got into a heated
battle against former SNCC leader Stokely Carmichael (Kwame Ture) concerning the Panther use of
the symbol. Carmichael charged that the Bay Area Panthers sought his permission to use the image since
SNCC had previously used the image during the voter registration drive for the Lowndes County Freedom
and Democratic Party. However, the use of the image goes back even further according to the authors of
sight the use of the symbol by Black pilots during World War II.
The militant and xenophobic rhetoric of many Nationalist leaders failed to garner the support of a large portion of the Black community due to sloppy thinking that simplified the White community into a monolithic population solidified against African-Americans. According to such theoreticians, there was no differentiation between the White socialist activist who was a supporter of the Black freedom struggle and a White racist Mississippi Sheriff totally against Black citizenship. It was not very difficult for many to conclude that the typical nationalist ideology amounted to little other than a comprehensive anti-white campaign. It was within this highly charged environment that Newton and Seale selected the Black Panther as their organizational symbol. The cofounders theorized that “the nature of a Panther is that he never attacks. But if anyone attacks him or backs him into a corner, the Panther comes up to wipe that aggressor or that attacker out, absolutely, resolutely, wholly, thoroughly, and completely.”\textsuperscript{24} Despite the Panther’s fanatical concern about creating a distinct identity for themselves, the fact remains that the vast majority of Bay Area Blacks had absolutely no idea that the organization existed in late 1966. The Black Panther Party was only one of many Black Nationalist groups forming in the Bay Area. Further compounding the plight of non-distinction was the reformist platform that the group chose as its spring board. Manning Marable echoes this position when he states that the Panthers “... political philosophy, despite their revolutionary rhetoric, was basically that of radical reform.”\textsuperscript{25}

\textsuperscript{24}Seele, Bobby, \textit{Seize The Time}. \ldots pg. 65.

In spite of general agreement among scholars such as Manning Marable, Charles E. Jones and Clayborne Carson, concerning the initial reformist politics of the BPP, Newton balks at such assertions and paints an alternative picture concerning this matter. According to Newton, the initial reformist platform was merely a tactic, not a goal, to ensure the survival of the African-American Lumpen Proletariat.\textsuperscript{26} Newton theorized that without the Lumpen Proletariat, achieving their ultimate goal, the destruction of Capitalism, would be impossible. Despite Newton's attempts to move the initial ideological position of the organization into the realm of Revolutionary Socialism, the initial ideological stance of the BPPSD was very similar to declining reformist minded Civil Rights groups.\textsuperscript{27} Ironically, the Panthers initial structure also mimicked the complex bureaucracies of many of these declining Civil Rights groups.

IV

The Panthers initial structural blueprint called for two branches: a political wing and advisory cabinet. The political wing, made up of poor and working-class Blacks, was to execute the daily operations of the party including, but not limited to, feeding community children, dispensing of free groceries to community members, and protection

\textsuperscript{26}Huey P. Newton was very clear on the matter of ensuring the survival of African-Americans through reformist programs, he referred to them as survivalist programs, so that they would be able to take the lead position in the coming Socialist revolution. For more information on Newton's belief in the validity of a two step plan of reformism and revolution see his chapter entitled raising consciousness in \textit{Revolutionary Suicide}. See., Huey P. Newton, \textit{Revolutionary Suicide}... pg. 163-170.

of the community against external aggressors. Coupled with the daily operations of the political wing was the predominantly middle-class advisory cabinet. Although membership on the advisory cabinet did not preclude one from participating in community service projects, it did require members to give the ideological development and image of the party the bulk of their time. It was Newton's hope that they could use the African-American middle class's skills to run the bureaucratically structured organization. However, the Black middle-class derailed the two-branch system that Newton envisioned from the moment of conception.

One of the unfortunate consequences of Newton and Seale's previous protest experiences was a well-developed cynicism toward the African-American middle class. Panther leaders felt confident in making several assertions concerning the African-American middle-class. First, they believed that the middle-class African-American, due to a heightened sense of self-worth, was unwilling to work with lower and working-class African-Americans. Newton charged that middle-class Blacks was too busy trying to ascend America's recently desegregated economic ladder. Secondly, Black middle-class activism was generally conservative and designed to amend the existing system. A stance that ran diametrically opposite to the long-range revolutionary goals of the Panthers. Newton theorized that the government's modest concessions during and following the CRM had been sufficient for the Black middle-class. Newton felt that such rewards had co-opted middle-class Blacks to a point that they no longer, if they had ever, saw the wisdom in overthrowing Capitalism. Their primary problem with Capitalism appeared
not to be its exploitive nature, rather their position at the bottom of the socioeconomic order.\textsuperscript{28}

In spite of these negative beliefs concerning the Black middle-class, Newton still sought to unify the entire African-American community behind the Panther program. “Black people” Newton stated, “must now move from the grassroots up through the perfumed circles of the Black bourgeoisie, to seize by any means necessary a proportionate share of the power vested and collected in the structure of America. We must organize and unite to combat by long resistance the brutal force used against us daily.”\textsuperscript{29} However, this attempt at bringing together the various talents of an increasingly class-stratified African-American community were short lived.

In the wake of Newton revealing the Panther program to area college students, they uniformly balked at aiding Newton and Seale. Most thought that the organization was extremist, because of its endorsement of guns and Socialism, and bound to be short-lived. The consequences of advocating extremist thought were well known throughout the Bay Area. Most citizens had witnessed the Oakland Police Department (OPD)

\textsuperscript{28}See., \textit{Huey Newton Talks to the Movement About the Black Panther Party, Cultural Nationalism, SNCC, Liberals and White Revolutionaries}, Movement Pamphlet. In this pamphlet Newton borrows one of the most famous metaphors ever utilized by Malcolm X, when he refers to the Panthers as Field Negroes and the Black middle-class as House Negroes. Newton characterizes the middle-class as “... pro-administration. They would like a few concessions made, but as far as the overall setup, they have a little more material goods, a little more advantage, a few more privileges than the black have-nots; the lower class. And so they identify with the power structure and they see their interests as the power structure’s interest... if the black bourgeoisie cannot align itself with our complete program, then the black bourgeoisie sets itself up as our enemy. And they will be attacked and treated as such”. Allen, Robert. \textit{Black Awakening in Capitalist America}. (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1969).

\textsuperscript{29}\textit{The Black Panther}, 20 June 1967.
subdue previous promoters of subversive doctrines.\textsuperscript{30} Although Newton had predicted this response from collegians, the blanket refusal nonetheless embittered him. In the wake of this setback, Newton and Seale turned all of their energies toward recruiting poor and working-class African-Americans; the Lumpen Proletariat. The cofounders theorized that it was the African-American Lumpen Proletariat who was both the most revolutionary population within the community and the only real hope for bringing Panther goals to fruition.

\textit{V}

With over one-thousand copies of the ten-point platform in hand, Newton and Seale ventured out to propagate their revolutionary vision. Because Oakland, Ca., was their indigenous community, Newton and Seale knew where to find their target group: street corners, bars, parties, and illegal establishments. Seale remembers that Newton’s method of propagating the organization was not simply handing out leaflets to community members and hoping they came to meetings.

"He stopped, talked, and discussed the points on the ten-point platform with all the black brothers and sisters off the block, and with mothers who had been scrubbing Miss Ann’s kitchen. We talked to brothers and sisters...who were on parole, on probation, who’d been in jails, who’d just gotten out of jail, and brothers and sisters who looked like they were on their way to jail."\textsuperscript{31}

It was Newton and Seale’s hope that by recruiting the have-nots, most of the community,

\textsuperscript{30}Newton, Huey P., \textit{Revolutionary Suicide}, 119

\textsuperscript{31}Seale, \textit{Seize The Time}. 64-65.
they could seize community loyalty and parlay that support into better things. However, Newton’s theory concerning the receptiveness of the Lumpen Proletariat to the Ten-Point Platform was false.\textsuperscript{32}

The population Newton theorized as the most radical, was just as unreceptive to Panther ideology, tactics, and goals as the African-American middle-class.\textsuperscript{33} Unable to convince even one African-American to join their ranks, save the organization’s teen-aged treasurer Bobby Hutton, Newton and Seale searched for ideological flaws within their platform to explain the failure. A perplexed Newton was absolutely sure that the goals he had outlined in the Ten-Point Platform were the very things that urban African-Americans had pursued their entire lives. Consequently, Newton reasoned, there had to be another explanation for the recruiting failures. In fact, two previously unthought-of issues doomed the Panther recruiting drives from the start: (1) the organizations’ common narrow Black Nationalist rhetoric, and (2) a community fear of law enforcement repression.

In the eyes of most African-American citizens, the Black Panther Party’s ideological position was far from distinctive, especially when one considers that there was a plethora of Black Nationalist thought and cultural expressions being articulated

\textsuperscript{32}Ibid, 72.

throughout the nation.\textsuperscript{34} Even within the relatively small confines of the Bay Area, many Black Nationalist organizations attempted to gain prominence and recruit from the same pool of potential members. One common problem affecting Bay Area Nationalist groups was a lack of ideological originality. Most groups simply regurgitated or slightly altered the ideological ideas and rhetorical style of the late Malcolm X, while simultaneously attempting to lay claim to the fallen martyr's legacy.\textsuperscript{35} Overall, the primary differences between Bay Area nationalist organizations was found in superficial cultural manifestations: dress, language, or celebrations. Despite the problems of a lack of ideological originality and competition from other Black Nationalist groups, the biggest deterrent to citizen participation in the BPP, was the seemingly omnipotent and omnipresent Oakland Police Department (OPD).\textsuperscript{36}

Citizen hesitancy was largely a by-product of the OPD's legacy of violent repression against both dissident groups and African-Americans. To say that the majority of the community existed in a position of state-induced activist paralysis is not a stretch. Most citizens had personally witnessed the destruction of previous organizations, while continuously living in fear of the vast power that local law enforcement officers held over


\textsuperscript{35}The Panthers, like so many of their contemporaries, unabashedly attempted to use the legacy of Malcolm X. On this particular topic Huey P. Newton stated that “although Malcolm’s program for the Organization of Afro-American Unity was never put into operation, he has made it clear that Blacks ought to arm. Malcolm’s influence was ever present. We continue to believe that the Black Panther Party exists in the spirit of Malcolm.” Huey P. Newton, \textit{Revolutionary Suicide} (New York: Writers and Readers Publishing, 1995), 113.

their lives. Several serious problems plagued the OPD/African-American community relationship: (1) non representation of African-American officers on the police force, (2) lethal violence unjustifiably employed by officers that went unpunished by police review boards, and (3) the subsequent differences of opinion regarding officers by Black and White citizens respectively.\(^{37}\) Let us initially examine the obvious problem of non representation of African-American officers on the force of the Oakland Police Department.\(^{38}\)

Despite the African-American community composing nearly fifty-percent of Oakland’s population, African-American officers were virtually nonexistent on the police force. White officers comprised a startling 96 percent of the force, with many recruited from the deep-South, particularly Mississippi. Although there could be a host of reasons for such recruitment practices, the fact remains that African-Americans were absent from the force. This racial composition obviously did little towards reducing frequent high pressure interactions between white officers and black citizens. Beyond this issue was a recurring problem with arbitrary, yet unpunished, violence and intimidation executed by OPD officers upon the African-American community.\(^{39}\)


As with other urban areas, Oakland experienced a constant trek of violence that greatly impacted African-American opinion of police officers. The newspaper headlines for one day illustrate this pervasive problem. On March 29, 1966, in Oakland an African-American male was paralyzed after being shot seven times in the back by an OPD officer. Around the same time in San Francisco, Matthew Johnson, a sixteen-year-old African American youth accused of car theft, was shot to death by an officer.40 Despite community outrages against such acts of lethal violence, officer actions largely went unpunished. One of the most telling results of the cumulative effects of unpunished law enforcement violence and the non-representative nature of the OPD was found in the differing perceptions of Black and White citizens regarding officers.

A Gallup poll taken in the mid-1960s revealed these differing perspectives across racial and generational lines. According to the survey, African-Americans were five-times more likely to believe in police brutality than their European-American counterparts. Even more dramatic, was the finding that African-American youth were some startling nine-times as likely to believe in police brutality than the general European-American population. Little wonder that Newton and Scale perceived police brutality to be the most pressing problem facing their community.41 Such a analysis was nothing new or remarkable, the issue of police brutality had been apparent to all community members, what was not known was if such an issue would be sufficient to


41Ibid, pg. 24.
overcome community fears concerning OPD officers.

The community displayed to all nationalist organizations that it would take more than an ideological twist or semantics to get people to enlist in any organization. During a period where so many groups appeared the same, the key to survival was distinctiveness. It was within this context that the Panthers made a major decision that would lead them down a path that guaranteed that they would continuously exist within the reach of death. The Panthers chose to make the issue of police harassment/brutality their rallying issue. This one decision insured the Panthers distinctiveness, not longevity, but most importantly foreshadowed their volatile future.

The chosen method for addressing police brutality and harassment were the Panther Patrols. The Panther Patrols consisted of armed Panthers covertly following officers around as they executed patrol duties. Once officers detained a citizen, BPP Patrol members were to emerge from their vehicles, observe the interaction between officer and citizen, with the hope of ensuring impartial and legal treatment by officers. Newton and Seale believed that the Patrols would at the least cause officers to behave in a more civil and respectful manner toward citizens. Most important of the decisions and issues Newton and Seale grappled with during Panther Patrol strategy sessions was the decision whether they should or should not carry arms while patrolling. Although shocking, the decision to carry arms while patrolling was simply a little noted extension of a legacy of African-American protest history. Jones and Jeffries remind us that Robert

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42See., Newton, Revolutionary Suicide, pg. 114-127.
Williams' *Negroes with Guns* was cited by Newton as extremely influential in the type of party that he wanted to create. Newton also reveals that another group, the Deacons for Defense and Justice, influenced his thinking on the matter of being armed. Newton states that he was honored to hear one of the members extol the virtues armed self-defense.\(^{43}\) Although attempts at patrolling Bay Area officers were not new -- the underground Black Nationalist organization Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM) had preceded the Panthers in the venture -- the activity was still cutting edge.\(^{44}\) In reaching for the gun, the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense took its first major step toward ascension out of commoner status in not only the local nationalist movement, but the entire American protest culture.\(^{45}\)

Although many organizations had postured and flirted with the idea of picking up the gun, all returned to the unfeasibility of such a move. Despite Bay Area activists often gathering and philosophizing about what should be done to help the community regarding OPD harassment and brutality, it was extremely rare for any action to occur after such sessions.\(^{46}\) Activists knew very well the consequences of reaching for the proverbial gun.


\(^{45}\)Seale., *Seize The Time*, pg. 76-77.

\(^{46}\)Although it was rare for actions to occur after such brainstorming sessions in the Bay Area, this in no way cancels out the reality that the advocating and picking-up of arms does have a long historical precedence in the African-American community. See., David Walker's *Appeal* (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1993); W. Burghardt Turner and Joyce Moore Turner, eds., *Richard B. Moore: Caribbean Militant in Harlem* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1992) 34-41; Robert F. Williams, *Negroes With Guns*
to which Malcolm X and Mao had so often alluded. All, including Newton and Seale, knew that there would be harsh, immediate, and potentially fatal consequences for any organization, or individuals, that summoned up the courage to reach for such a potentially liberating tool. To accentuate the unprecedentedness of the Panthers movement in this direction during the Black Power Era, Manning Marable contends that "remarkably few Black Nationalists and Black Powerites had advocated violence against white-owned property, the subversion of authority, or the seizure of state power." Despite a lack of movement support, Newton and Seale picked up the gun and immediately sent a message to the African-American community, organizational contemporaries, and the Oakland Police Department that they were indeed serious about alleviating this major problem plaguing their community.


47One of the central tenets of the Panthers surrounded this issue of armed self-defense. In the wake of the non-violent civil disobedience protests of the Civil Rights Movement, the picking up of the gun by the Panthers was made all the more radical. One of the indicators of the centrality of the gun to the Panther experience is forthrightly detected in the autobiographies of former Black Panther Party members. See, Bobby Seale, Seize The Time, 72-129, 134-55; Newton, Revolutionary Suicide, 101-27, 145-51; William Lee Brent, Long Time Gone: A Black Panther's True-Life Story of His Hijacking and Twenty-Five Years in Cuba (New York: Times Books, 1996), 93-98; Earl Anthony, Spitting in the Wind: the True Story Behind the Violent Legacy of the Black Panther Party (Malibu, California: Roundtable Publishing Co., 1990) 22-32; also see., Roy Wilkins and Ramsey Clark, Search and Destroy: A Report by the Commission of Inquiry into the Black Panthers and the Police (New York: Metropolitan Applied Research Center, 1973).


49See Elaine Brown's autobiography for a better understanding of the activist climate occurring within the Bay Area. She does a very good job of detailing the in fighting, contradictions, and myriad of activist ideology, rhetoric and activism. See., Brown, A Taste of Power.
in Newton and Seale’s minds, the black community’s relationship with the
Oakland Police Department was analogous to an occupying army oppressing and
ravaging an enemy land’s inhabitants. 50 Bobby Seale articulates the Panther position:

We have to arm ourselves against these racists, Birchites, and Ku
Klux Klaners infested in the police departments, the pig
departments who “occupy our communities,” as Huey P. Newton
says, “like a foreign troop.” We have to defend ourselves against
them because they are breaking down our doors, shooting black
brothers on the streets, and brutalizing sisters on the head. They
are wearing guns mostly to intimidate the people from forming
organizations to really get our basic political desires and needs
answered. The power structure uses the fascist police against
people moving for freedom and liberation. 51

Although the Panther Patrols were intended as a direct intervention on the issue of
police harassment and brutality, the activity also had another purpose. The Panther
Patrols were undoubtedly the best, arguably the only, recruiting device available to the
BPP during late ‘66. Since the organization had only two full-time members in their fold,
membership issues were of primary concern. Unless Newton and Seale were successful
in recruiting members through the Panther Patrols, the organization would in all
likelihood disband, like so many other nationalist ventures of the time. So, it was with a
sense of urgency that Newton and Seale took such a dangerous course of action. 52

As the Panthers prepared to execute their first and most dramatic community
service activity, they fully understood it could very well be their final activity. However,

50“Pig Brutality,” The Black Panther, 21 Saturday 1970, pp. 4-10.

51Seale, Seize The Time, pg. 55.

52Ibid, pg. 59-85.
Newton and Seale were determined not only to alleviate police brutality and harassment, but also lay the foundation to capture the lead position in the Black Power Era. What resulted from the Panthers initial attempt at activism contained positive and negative features for all parties involved. However, there is one certainty, as Newton and Seale set out on patrol, they had absolutely no idea what the consequences would be for them, their community, or their nation.
CHAPTER 3

THE INTRODUCTION OF PANTHER ACTIVISM

When one considers the historical socioeconomic and political outsider position of African-Americans, it is somewhat surprising that there have not been more instances of armed rebellion. The sporadic nature of African-American armed rebellion, save riots, can be attributed to many factors, probably the most creditable being the omnipresent American military, state, and local police forces. Despite the sporadic nature of armed rebellion among African-Americans there has been a general fear, residing in the recesses of many Black and White minds, that such a rebellion is imminent. It was this latent fear that caused so many to become unduly alarmed in the early months of 1967, as Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale set out to implement the Panther Patrols.¹

Contrary to pop-culture mis-conceptions, the initial Panther Patrols were far from impressive as even Newton and Seale openly questioned the viability of such a activity. The only success that Newton and Seale could truthfully claim during the initial P.P. was

their total concealment from officers. In fact, the Panthers were too successful in concealing themselves, as they ended up not only hiding from officers, but also the population they intended to serve. The consequence of such invisibility was a non-effectual activity that failed to achieve either of the groups' immediate goals: reducing police brutality/harassment or propagation of the BPP. The duo were at a very critical juncture regarding their future. They could either allow fear to hinder their actions, like many of their Bay Area contemporaries and predecessors, or summon the courage to execute the Panther Patrols in an effective manner. They chose the latter option. Once Newton and Seale began emerging from their vehicle with law books and firearms in hand, they not only had an immediate impact upon police brutality, but also received the admiration of their Bay Area community. However, even with their instant celebrity status the general citizenry had no idea of the preparation Newton and Seale engaged in to ensure the P.P. were a success.

Newton, a former law student, possessed an almost fanatical interest in the legal codes of the land. In the months preceding the implementation of the Panther Patrols,

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2Bobby Scale gives a wonderful account of the uncertainties and apprehensions that he and Newton possessed during the initial patrols. Scale states that the Panther Patrols were initially so covert that neither citizens nor community members realized that the project was being implemented. See., Scale, Seize The Time, 85-93.


4See. Newton's biography for details surrounding his fascination and desire to master the laws of the land. Ironically, this desire was borne of a desire to avoid prosecution for his numerous illegal dealings in the Bay Area. See., Newton, Revolutionary Suicide. 53-72.
Newton and Seale studied California’s legal codes on a daily basis. They focused upon areas of law they were most likely to traverse across during the Panther Patrols: gun codes, distance that a routine stop could be observed from, the most common infractions citizens were detained for and citizen options in the wake of being charged with infractions. As a consequence, the Panther Patrols rarely stepped outside of the boundaries of the law. Ironically, the civil disobedience protest activities of the Civil Rights Movement broke more laws, albeit unjust laws, than the P.P.⁵

Newton and Seales implementation of the Panther Patrols immediately achieved one of their early goals: exposing the Black Panther Party to the Bay Area African-American community. During this coming out period, Newton meticulously planned the Panther image and activities down to the smallest detail. Bobby Seale remembers that Newton “didn’t want people to see the Panthers as thuggish, gun-toting brothers without an organized agenda. He came up with the idea that all Panthers should wear a neat, polished uniform --- black slacks, ironed powder-blue shirts, black tie or turtleneck, black leather sports jacket . . .”⁶ Newton was fanatical concerning the need for the group to not only distinguish themselves, but also become the vanguard of the Bay Area protest movement.

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Although the introduction of the Panther Patrols put the community abuzz, it still did not overcome citizens well deserved fears of the Oakland Police Department. Marine tells us that in spite of the excitement and fascination surrounding the P.P., they did not immediately translate into a large membership increase.\(^7\) Despite the disappointment surrounding the impact that the Panther Patrols would have regarding increasing organizational membership, Newton and Seale did succeed in securing an office for organizational activities in the early part of 1967, a short three to four months after the BPP’s genesis. Although the office space was little more than a storefront, it was nevertheless put to good use. It would continuously serve as an educational tool for the community.\(^8\)

II

According to Fletcher, Jones, and Lotinger, the Panthers began their Political Education classes in January of 1967 after securing an office. Newton and Seale focused upon point-seven: “We want an immediate end to Police Brutality and Murder of Black People.”\(^2\) Since that was the issue on the platform that had spawned the Panthers initial community service activity, the Panther Patrols. The combination of the P.P. and the


storefront meetings persuaded a few citizens to join the Black Panther Party. This slight membership increase enabled the co-founders Newton and Seale to continue teaching the still developing organizational ideology and also launch their patrolling activities from a plethora of locations and times. Since the police had grown accustomed to only Newton and Seale executing patrols, the additional patrol teams were noticed immediately. Undoubtedly, this increase in Patrol activity was the catalyst behind local law enforcement agencies overstating the influence and size of the small organization. The appearance of new Panthers caused officers to erroneously believe that the organization was growing by leaps and bounds.\textsuperscript{10} Despite this fallacious perception, the recruitment issue remained a thorn in the side of the Black Panther Party.

The most obvious deterrent to membership in the BPP was the issue of mortality. Most citizens possessed a very real fear of death at the hands of police officers. Such a fear was the result of years of arbitrary, unpunished police violence against ordinary citizens, activist, and organizations.\textsuperscript{11} Prior to the Panthers, numerous local activist and protest groups had espoused and attempted to implement a plethora of tactics and philosophies. However, all such groups were eventually decimated by a vicious onslaught of violence.\textsuperscript{12} Most citizens predicted that it would not be long before the Panthers

\textsuperscript{10}Scale, 	extit{Seize The Time}, 147-149.


\textsuperscript{12}The group most commonly associated with the Panthers is their organizational Bay Area predecessors the Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM). RAM fell victim to the onslaught of Area officers after they attempted to implement patrol activities very similar to the Panthers. See., Stanford, Maxwell (Akbar
encountered a similar fate. Accompanying the general citizenry as prophets of doom were other contemporary Black Nationalist organizations and leaders. Their chief criticisms centered on the role of the gun in the Panther program and the reformist leanings of the Ten-Point Platform.\textsuperscript{13}

Activist contemporaries of the Panthers such as Amiri Baraka pointed out that despite the Panthers posturing with weapons and revolutionary rhetoric, their reformist goals betrayed such espousals. Maulana Karenga’s US charged that instead of attempting to destroy the existing system, the Panthers appeared to be primarily concerned with retooling and improving their position within Capitalism.\textsuperscript{14} Ironically, a criticism that the Panthers themselves had previously used against the African-American middle-class.

Criticisms of similar intensity concerning the Panthers infatuation with guns were common. Many activist publicly doubted if the Panthers even had any intention of using their weapons, charging that they utilized them as little more than props for shock value. Notable writers such as Alice Walker took their criticisms to another level when they

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\textsuperscript{13}Coming on the heels of the Civil Rights Movement and a political climate that saw Blacks participating in riotous behavior with increasing frequency, many Blacks withdrew from the option of utilizing the gun. Many mistakenly made the Panthers and their position of armed self-defense on par with white supremacist groups of yesteryear such as the Ku Klux Klan and Knights of White Camelia. See, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King’s treatment of the issues concerning the older Civil Rights Generation concerning the concept of Black Power and the use of the gun. King, Martin Luther, Jr. \textit{Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?} (New York: Harper & Row, 1967).

\end{quote}
openly questioned whether members of the Black Panther Party, with all of their machismo, were subconsciously harboring a death wish.\textsuperscript{15} Added to the resounding criticisms concerning the Black Panther Party were predictions that neither Huey P. Newton, Bobby Seale, nor anybody foolish enough to follow their suicidal tactics would experience longevity.\textsuperscript{16} Although fellow nationalists were the most outspoken critics of Panther ideology, law enforcement officers were undoubtedly the most disturbed by the Panthers.

Despite the Black Panther Party’s continuous attempts to utilize Political Education classes to light a fire of activism under the members of their neighborhood, they were not achieving phenomenal success. Despite such marginal success the Panthers still managed to draw the attention of the Oakland Police Department. Since the Panther Patrols had largely caught the OPD and other surrounding law enforcement agencies off guard, initially there was very little organized resistance to the activity. However, once officers were able to grasp their bearings they began preparations to counter the increasing Panther Patrols.\textsuperscript{17}

The fact that officers sought to disrupt a not-even-one-year-old group with a


\textsuperscript{16}The thoughts of the many detractors of the Panthers armed position was not necessarily the anti-thesis of Newton and Seale’s thinking. For instance, Huey P. Newton wrote that, “When the Party was first organized, I did not think I would live for more than one year after we began; I thought we would be blasted off the streets. But I had hoped for that one year to launch the Party, and any additional time was just a bonus”. See., Huey P. Newton, \textit{Revolutionary Suicide}, p. 184.

\textsuperscript{17}Davis, Angela, \textit{If They Come in the Morning: Voices of Resistance} (San Francisco: The National United Committee to Free Angela Davis (NUCFAD), 1971). Seale, \textit{Seize The Time}, 146-149.
membership that fluctuated between ten and twenty attests to the impact the Panther
Patrols had upon officers psyche'. Despite its paucity membership, the Black Panther
Party had quickly become the number one priority of the OPD. Consequently, officers
implemented a petty harassment campaign which entailed stopping Panther cars for
roadside inspections and minor traffic infractions. Since there were few Panthers, it was
not difficult for officers to learn who Panthers were and what vehicles they operated.
Once a "Panther car" was identified by officers that vehicle was routinely pulled over for a
meticulous inspection. Invariably such inspections revealed some infraction: missing
screws, faulty license plates, damaged headlights, faulty tail lights. Once a Panther car
was detained for inspection, two objectives were accomplished: first of all, that particular
vehicle was no longer patrolling and secondly, the resulting fines had to be paid out of the
upstart organizations meager coffers.18

Despite the financial constraints the Panthers operated under, they continuously
managed to raise monies for fines. However, the Panthers also realized that they could
not continue absorbing such financial losses. Over an extended period of time, fines
would negatively impact even the most financially stable organization, let alone the upstart
Panthers. Any monies that the Black Panther Party possessed resulted from the sporadic
work of members or the selling of an English translation of Mao Tse-Tung's Red Book on
the Berkeley campus.19 Newton realized that it would not be long before members

18Seale, Seize The Time; Newton, Revolutionary Suicide, 114-127; Marine, The Black Panthers, 35-47,
57-66.

19Seale, Seize The Time, 79-84; Pearson, The Shadow of the Panther, p. 113.
became discouraged by the officers incessant attacks and the organization floated into the realm of non-existence. The only viable option available was a counter-attack to the OPD’s harassment campaign.\(^{20}\)

Towards the goal of countering the OPD’s petty harassment campaign, Newton and Seale instructed members to boldly inform the citizenry of the underlying reasons the Panthers were singled out for such harassment. The Panthers successfully capitalized upon officers’ actions, citing them as the best evidence of the positive impact that the Black Panther Party was having on police brutality/harassment in the community. Furthermore, the Panthers charged that officers wanted the BPP destroyed so it could resume its previous patterns of harassment and brutality.\(^{21}\) With this rhetorical attack the Panthers easily won the sympathies of the community. Consequently citizens and community leaders also began to sternly criticize the OPD’s actions not only against the BPP, but also the community in general.\(^{22}\) Having gained the sympathies of many in the community, the Panthers increased their attempts at propagandizing their organizational vision by beginning Political Education (PE) classes.


\(^{22}\)The Panthers were still being criticized repeatedly for their reformist stance during this initial period. Manning Marable called this initial period of Party history both naive and reformist, a dubious critique considering the contemporary romanticized image of the Panthers as the personification of revolution. See, Manning Marable, “The Legacy of Huey P. Newton,” The Crisis of Color and Democracy (Monroe: Common Courage Press, 1992), 202-203. and James Boggs, Racism and the Class Struggle: Further Notes from a Black Worker’s Notebook (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1970), 183.
The primary purpose of PE classes was to inform members of organizational rules, weapons training, procedures to be followed during the Panther Patrols and tactics to prevent unjustified arrests. New recruits and potential members were also exposed to fundamental Party rules and organizational ideological underpinnings. For many, PE classes marked their initial engagement with the writings of Black Nationalist, Communist, and Socialist revolutionaries: Lenin, Fanon, Marx, Mao, Che’ Guevara, Malcolm X, Robert F. Williams.23

Newton and Seale themselves were relatively new to the intellectual minds behind the Leftist Movement ravaging the West Coast. Evidence of their general unfamiliarity with the vast terrain of Leftist ideology is found in the regularity that Panther ideology was amended.24 For example, when Newton or Seale encountered a new ideology, book, or theoretical principle, it was not uncommon for them to deconstruct much of what they had been earnestly building to incorporate newly acquired thoughts that may have very well contradicted former beliefs. In addition to Newton and Seales frustrations of attempting to teach a constantly evolving ideology to citizens was a similar frustration that

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23One of the problems that the Panthers would eventually run into was that many of the cadre members could not, or did not really care to grasp, the revolutionary ideology that Newton was so enamored with. For many of these ghetto youth, the allure of the party was nothing more than the Party had stood up to a police force that had been victimizing them for so long, if they knew nothing else, they knew that they would like to reverse roles with officers. This would be an increasing problem as the party progressed into more abstract revolutionary stances. See, Seale, Seize The Time, p. 373-393.

arose from Party members infatuation with the gun.\textsuperscript{25}

Fascination with the gun tainted any lessons taught to new recruits during early Political Education classes. For a few, infatuation with armaments superceded any ideological concerns. There was a group of new members who had absolutely no interest in either engaging literature informing organizational operations or serving the community beyond posturing with weapons.\textsuperscript{26} Although Newton and Seale attempted to combat such thoughts at every turn, it would remain a major issue throughout the existence of the Black Panther Party. In spite of the shallowness of some members, there were many substantive issues to be gathered from attendance at PE classes.\textsuperscript{27}

One of the most important lessons taught during PE classes was Newton's two-tiered philosophy on African-American liberation. Newton felt that those who referred to the organization as merely reformist, did not have a understanding of the difference between organizational tactics, short-term, and long-range goals. According to Newton, the reformist program of the organization was only a tactic designed to ensure the survival of African-Americans. The long-range goal of installing Socialism domestically was a mute point if African-Americans perished because of a lack of basic necessities. Newton

\textsuperscript{26}The issue surrounding the utility of weapons was such a concern for the Panthers that Newton found himself having to repeatedly touch upon the subject. For his most infamous message concerning the gun see. Newton, "The Correct Handling of a Revolution", The Black Panther 18 May 1968.

\textsuperscript{27}This subject served as one of the most divisive issues within the ranks of the Black Panther Party. Eventually, it would serve as the catalyst for disrupting the organization, with two very different outlooks upon individuals who sought the gun without any other political philosophy. See., Seale, Seize The Time for the numerous occurrences of Cleaver celebrating such behavior as Newton attempted to curb it.

\textsuperscript{27}For an example of the types of issues dealt with in the Political Education classes, see,. Foner, The Black Panthers Speak, 167-182.
emphasized that the activities so commonly referred to as reformist were in fact survival mechanisms designed to ensure both the survival and time to educate the African-American Lumpen Proletariat in revolutionary Socialism.²⁸

Despite various successes, most community members remained unsure of the Panthers and their eccentric leader Huey P. Newton. In spite of these reservations, every day that the Panthers survived on Oakland's streets, their presence served both as a refutation of the omnipotence of the OPD and the fallaciousness of predictions concerning their imminent demise. In early-'66, the greatest concern of the Black Panther Party was an extension of the OPD’s petty harassment campaign into the realm of illegality. OPD officers began utilizing a plethora of back-alley tactics to intimidate members into leaving the Black Panther Party or scaring community members considering joining the organization. Despite the futility of such efforts by the Oakland Police Department, there was a noticeable escalation of intensity surrounding the now routine conflicts between the Black Panther Party and the OPD.²⁹

The dilemma of the OPD was indeed peculiar. Officers were virtually handcuffed in preventing the Panther Patrols due to its legality.³⁰ Realizing this, the Panthers openly taunted OPD personnel. In response, officers escalated their conflicts with the Panthers moving their conflicts perilously closer to open warfare. In spite of the daily dangers

³⁸Seale, Seize The Time, 59-71; Newton, Revolutionary Suicide, 110-113.


³⁰Newton, Revolutionary Suicide, 120-127.
surrounding the Panthers they still had not been butchered in the streets of Oakland. as
many had predicted, and were slowly increasing numerically. As the Panther Patrols and
officer frustrations increased all knew that it would not be long before tensions reached a
crescendo. The events of February 21, 1967, a short four-months after the creation of the
Black Panther Party, signaled that much anticipated moment.31

The Bay Area was abuzz with excitement as the Malcolm X Memorial Day
Conference approached. Although there were several events scheduled for the weekend,
the highpoint of the conference was undoubtedly the appearance of Malcolm’s widow,
Betty Shabazz. In the wake of her beloved husband’s assassination, one of the primary
issues confronting organizers was ensuring the safety of Ms. Shabazz during her visit. It
was with this goal in mind that organizers commissioned the Black Panther Party to escort
her during the conference. Organizers expected the Panthers to receive Ms. Shabazz from
the airport, escort her to a subsequent interview at Ramparts Magazine and serve as
needed at subsequent events. Considering the pre-existing climate of tension between the
Panthers and police, it should not be shocking that the armed security mission was
confronted by the OPD even before Ms. Shabazz’s plane landed.32

As Ms. Shabazz’s plane approached the runway, an armed group of Panthers
simultaneously approached the airport entrance. The Panthers’ arrival was instantly
detected by airport security. Consequently, what was intended to be a routine operation

\[\text{31 Hilliard, This Side of Glory, 119.}\]

\[\text{32 Seale, Seize The Time, 113-132; Pearson, The Shadow of the Panther, 121-126.}\]
was transformed into a highly volatile situation. As the Panthers continued their approach, officers mobilized inside, discussing the best method to bar the Panthers entrance into the airport terminal. Although there were several areas of legality that officers would eventually attempt to use for this purpose, the primary area of contestation concerned the legality of entering the terminal with weapons. Officers took the position that it was illegal to enter the airport with weapons. However, Huey P. Newton knew different. Newton had foreseen this problem and prepared accordingly. In the days prior to the security operation, Newton studied the laws surrounding the various activities required to successfully execute the escort mission. According to Newton’s reading of the law, there was absolutely no doubt that the Panther entrance into the airport with weapons was legal. Although the law greatly bolstered their position, there was yet another reason why the Panthers refused to be intimidated or swayed from completing their duties. The patriarchal Panthers stood their ground for what they saw as the noblest cause of all, ensuring the safety of Malcolm’s widow. Ensuring the safety of Betty Shabazz during her visit was seen as one of the greatest tributes to her husband.33

Despite the Panthers having the law on their side, officers continued their menacing attempts to prevent the Party’s entrance. However, the Panthers refused all deals suggested by the officers: to leave the premises, surrender their arms, or leave the contested weapons outside of the airport. After much arguing and posturing by both groups, the Panthers entered the airport to receive Ms. Shabazz from the plane. Despite

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33 Seale, Seize the Time, 120-121.
the apparent Panther victory, officers fumed as their power was once again usurped by the very laws that they were sworn to uphold. However, they quickly planned their next confrontation with the BPP, a confrontation that would raise tensions between the two groups to an unprecedented level.\textsuperscript{34}

Betty Shabazz was in the midst of her interview at \textit{Ramparts} as officers mobilized outside of the building. Growing impatient awaiting the Panthers emergence from the building, officers attempted to enter the building and capture the organizations leadership. Officers fumbled this attempt as they seemingly had no idea who the orchestrators of the security detail were. They found themselves grabbing Panthers and questioning them about who the leaders were, a method that proved less than successful. In the face of this failure, officers returned outside and waited for the Panthers to emerge.\textsuperscript{35}

After the interview was completed, the Panthers surrounded Ms. Shabazz and exited the front door. Outside the Panthers witnessed a mobilization of both officers and citizens awaiting a seemingly inevitable confrontation. Although the safe departure of Ms. Shabazz held the most prominent place on the Panther agenda, the Panthers were not averse to a confrontation with officers; particularly if it were to occur in full view of potential members. After the Panthers secured Ms. Shabazz's safe departure from the scene, they turned their attention towards their arch nemesis. What followed was one of the most intense standoffs in Panther history. After some gesturing and harsh words

\textsuperscript{34}Seale, \textit{Seize the Time}, 125-132.

\textsuperscript{35}Ibid.
directed at each other, the Panthers, who saw this confrontation denigrate into a waste of their time, attempted to leave the area. It was at the moment of departure that, Huey saw the cops pulling the straps off of the hammers (of their guns) all of a sudden, so Huey says, “Turn around! Don’t turn your back on these backshooting motherfuckers!”...We all turned around...Huey goes, “Spread!” and jacks a shell off into the chamber of his gun...A big beefy cop moved forward. He had unhooked the strap off of the hammer of his pistol, and started shouting at Huey. “Don’t point that gun at me! Stop pointing that gun at me!” He kept making gestures as though he was going to go for his gun... “You want to draw your gun?” Huey asked him. The other pigs were calling for this one to cool it, but he didn’t seem to hear them. He was looking right at Huey, staring straight into Huey’s eyes. “OK, you big fat racist pig, draw your gun!”...The cop didn’t move. “Draw it you cowardly dog!” and with that, Huey jacked a round off into the chamber of his shotgun. “I’m waiting,” Huey said, and, man, he just stood there waiting for this pig to make a move toward his gun. All of the other cops moved back out of the line of fire. The five of us were spread out behind Huey. Finally the fat pig just gave up. He let out a great big sigh and just hung his head. Huey almost laughed in his face.36

Although not the norm, such confrontations would become more common. Obviously, Panther bravado did little to subside the bitter feelings that festered in the hearts of Bay Area officers. Possibly, the only thing the Panther display of defiance accomplished was a solidification of the growing belief that the petty harassment campaign had run its course and it was definitely time for officers to implement more stringent alternative tactics.

The OPD found themselves in a very unusual predicament. The laws that they were sworn to uphold were utilized by the Panthers to undercut their positions of authority, while said laws also prevented officers from moving against the Panthers. For

36Scale, Seize The Time, 127-130.
one of the few times in American history, legal constraints appeared to be more of a
hindrance upon protectors of the law instead of its protestors. On the surface it appeared
that the Panthers had gained an irreversible advantage upon the State. However, the State
would soon display to the Panthers and the rest of the protest community that they did
indeed possess the power to tilt the playing field to their advantage. It was with the goal
of destroying the Panthers in mind, that the State began what would eventually escalate
into a lengthy and violent campaign to destroy the Black Panther Party.37

As the OPD made plans to escalate the intensity of their attacks against the BPP.
Newton formulated a plan to help the Panthers weather such an attack. The Panther
patriarch decided that the key to surviving was to become indispensable to the community.
Newton thought that unless they were able to keep public sentiment on their side, they
were doomed to defeat. Consequently, the months following the confrontation with
officers in front of the Ramparts Magazine building were spent solidifying their position
within the African-American community, by aiding the community in forcing the city to
install stop signs at dangerous intersections, helping to create a community review board
of the OPD, and starting their own newspaper, The Black Panther.38 The first issue of the
paper, April 27, 1967, was a four-page mimeographed newspaper that ran the headline of:
“Why Was Denzil Dowell Killed”.39 Dowell, an unarmed youth from Richmond, Ca., was


38JoNina M. Abron. “Serving the People”: The Survival Programs of The Black Panther Party, in The
Black Panther Party Reconsidered, 177-192.

Newton, Bobby Seale, Eldridge Cleaver and Company Speak Out Through the Black Panther Party’s
gunned down under very questionable circumstances. As a result of the Panther inquiry into Dowell's death, the Panthers garnered community support for the Panther Patrols and the organization in general. However, such investigations did little to impact the OPD's plan to first destroy the Black Panther Party.

The initial step in the plan to declaw the Panthers was initiated by State Assemblyman Donald Mulford, a conservative Republican from Piedmont, a wealthy suburb of Oakland. Mulford, at the behest of OPD officers, introduced a Bill to remove California's longstanding unconcealed weapons laws. The potential fallout from the passage of the Mulford Bill was multifaceted for the Panthers. "Mulford" would not only remove the Panthers weapons, making the P.P. illegal, but also hamper recruiting activities. Most citizens had correctly surmised that the only factor keeping officers from arbitrarily killing Panthers were the weapons they carried. Without those arms, the Panthers would be little more than sitting ducks for the heavily armed OPD. In a worst case scenario for the Panthers, the Mulford Bill would allow officers to murder Panthers in the street, while simultaneously preventing the replenishing of the organizations membership. Without their weapons and the escalation of the confrontations with the OPD, the Panthers became the least attractive nationalist group in the Bay Area.

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40Seale, Seize The Time, 134-149; Newton, Revolutionary Suicide, 137-144.

41Newton, Revolutionary Suicide, 146

42Seale, Seize the Time, 148-149.
Unfortunately, the Panthers were at a complete loss as to how they could reverse this turn of events.

Realistically, there was nothing that the Panthers could do to prevent the passage of "Mulford". The state legislature was one arena that the Panthers were powerless to affect. In the face of this predicament Newton formulated a plan that allowed the Black Panther Party to somewhat utilize the OPD’s plan against them. Although Newton realized that any Panther protest was largely symbolic, he still formulated a plan that called for armed Panthers to appear at the State Capitol and protest the impending legislation that local papers were commonly referring to as "the Panther Bill". 43

Since the Panthers were largely a local Bay Area phenomenon, Newton sought to expand both the support base of the organization and public knowledge of their existence. In many ways the California Legislature was the perfect venue to propagate the vision of the organization beyond the relatively small confines of the Bay Area. It was with these goals in mind that Newton ordered a cadre of armed Panthers to the State Capitol in protest of the pending Mulford Bill. Members realized the immediacy of getting the Panther image to the rest of the nation, particularly when one considers that it would not be unrealistic to believe that the Sacramento protest may very well be the final appearance of the organization with their beloved arms. 44

Facing the prospect of losing their best recruiting device, Newton sought to shock

43Scale. Seize the Time, 149.
44Scale devotes an entire chapter to the events surrounding that day. See., Seale. Seize the Time, 153-165.
not only the state of California, but the nation. Newton, who would not be attending the protest, planned for a Bobby Seale led group to arrive at the State Capitol, march to the front steps of the building in military formation, read a Newton directive, Executive Mandate #1, titled "In Defense of Self-Defense" and leave Sacramento before officers could gather their bearings and execute any arrests. Newton knowing that the daily proceedings of the Capitol were covered by several news outlets, thought the Panther protest would undoubtedly be broadcast on that nights' local and national newscasts.

On the morning of May 2, 1967, thirty Panthers, six women and twenty-four men, traveled to Sacramento. From the beginning, the mission was marred with almost comical problems concerning the layout of the Capitol grounds. The initial problem was not with the Legislatures security personnel, rather the Panthers were uncertain which structure was the Capitol. Although he ran the risk of looking like the leader of a group of bumbling fools, Seale emerged from his vehicle and utilized deductive reasoning in finding the correct building. Seale headed for the building with the largest group of reporters and cameramen loitering in the front. As the Panthers continued their bold approach to a still uncertain location, one Panther commented "look at Reagan run"; referring to then Governor Ronald Reagan. The statement was more than mere rhetoric as Reagan happened to be standing on the lawn, addressing a group of 200 future youth leaders, when the Panthers emerged from their vehicles. When the armed Panthers looked Reagan's direction, they noticed that he was indeed running in the opposite direction. They simply observed his ridiculous behavior and continued their approach to what they
silently hoped was the correct location.\footnote{Seale, \textit{Seize The Time}. pg. 153-166.}

Fortunately, Seale had picked the correct building. As planned the Panthers stopped on the steps of the Capitol in front of reporters and cameramen while Chairman Seale read Newton’s Executive Mandate #1.

The Black Panther Party for Self-Defense calls upon the American people in general and the Black people in particular to take careful note of the racist California Legislature, which is now considering legislation aimed at keeping the Black people disarmed and powerless at the very same time that racist police agencies throughout the country are intensifying the terror, brutality, murder and repression of Black people... Black people have begged, prayed, petitioned, demonstrated and everything else to get the racist power structure of America to right the wrongs which have historically been perpetrated against Black people. All of these efforts have been answered by more repression, deceit, and hypocrisy... The Black Panther Party for Self-Defense believes that the time has come for Black people to arm themselves against this terror before it is too late. The pending Mulford Act brings the hour of doom one step nearer. A people who have suffered so much for so long at the hands of a racist society, must draw the line somewhere. We believe that the Black communities of America must rise up as one man to halt the progression of a trend that leads inevitably to their total destruction.\footnote{See., \textit{The Black Panther}, June 2, 1967. Newton’s initial Executive Mandate also charged that the “concentration camps” utilized to imprison Japanese-Americans during World War II were “being renovated and expanded” for use against Black people. The Panther leader further critiques the civil disobedience protest tactics of the Civil Rights Movement by stating in Malcolm X style that, “Black people have begged, prayed, petitioned, demonstrated and everything else to get the racist power structure of America to right the wrongs that have historically been perpetrated against Black people. All of these efforts have been answered by more repression, deceit, and hypocrisy... The Black Panther Party for Self-Defense believes that the time has come for Black people to arm themselves against this terror before it is too late. The pending Mulford Act brings the hour of doom one step nearer... Black communities of America must rise up as one man to halt the progression of a trend that leads inevitably to their total destruction".}

When he finished reading the mandate, Seale unexpectedly deviated from Newton’s
instruction and decided to enter the Capitol to observe the General Assembly in session. Although not uncommon for citizens to observe the proceedings, in fact there is a gallery area specifically designed for such purposes, most observers do not brandish weapons.

Once inside the Capitol Building, Seales idea quickly denigrated into the worst decision that could have been made. When one remembers the difficulty that the Panthers had in discovering the correct building, it should not be a shock that they had absolutely no knowledge of the buildings internal layout. Consequently, the Panthers had absolutely no idea where the General Assembly or gallery area where they could observe the days proceedings was located. After being directed in what they thought was the correct direction the Panthers were confronted by officers attempting to block their entrance to the assembly floor. The Panthers were erroneously at the entrance to the main floor of the General Assembly, not the gallery. After a pushing and shouting match between the Panthers and officers, the Panthers were finally directed to the appropriate area.47 With the surprise element of their appearance destroyed, each Panther was eventually arrested and placed in the Sacramento jail.48 The potential for such a mass arrest was the reasoning

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48 The Panthers’ were arrested after appearing at the Capitol on charges of conspiracy, carrying concealed weapons, brandishing a weapon in a threatening manner and possession of loaded weapons in vehicles. Those charged were Bobby Scale (30) and Mark Comfort (33) Eldridge Cleaver (31) for violation of parole, Reginald Forte (18) assault with a deadly weapon against a police officer. Most of the charges except conspiracy, were dropped. Those charged exclusively with conspiracy were Johnny Bethea (18), Ardell Butler (17), Kenneth Carter (19), Bruce Cockerhan (18), Albert Commo (21), Emory Douglas (23), George Dowell (28), James Dowell (17), Sherwin Forte (19), Truman Harris (18), Orleander Harrison, Jr., (17), Ernest Hatter (18), Mike Hall (18), Bobby Hutton (17), Lafayette Robinson (17), John Sloan (30), Willie Thompson (20), Lee Torris (22), Warren Tucker (19), Benny Yates (19). Bail was raised by Newton and Hilliard investing $500.00 in a pound of marijuana, breaking it down into nickels and selling

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behind Newton not making the trip. The Panther leadership felt that there should be someone available to raise bail.

Despite the somewhat comical geographic uncertainties that plagued the Panthers Sacramento appearance, overall the group achieved the desired goal of propagating the BPP to the nation. As the Panthers who had made the trip to the Legislature sat in the Sacramento jail, television stations beamed their image around the world. The moment that the Panthers machismo image appeared on television screens across the nation, they were instantly propelled into the lead position of the growing Black Power Era. However, as one might expect, there was definitely not a consensual approval of the Panthers or their image from either the general citizenry or African-American activists past and present. ⁴⁹ However, there was one population that applauded the Panther image.

The population most impressed by the State Capitol appearance were young urban African-American males. Dressed in their signature leather jackets, powder blue shirts, berets, and armaments the Panthers were simultaneously slick, cool, bad, and revolutionary. Unfortunately, Panther bravado was all that admirers and detractors were able to discern through the brief television appearance. What they could not have

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⁴⁹One of the most unfortunate results of the sound bite and menacing image that the Panther appearance at the State Capitol was the perception that the Panthers were eventually going to go into the streets of America and willfully kill their perceived oppressors. However, such a belief is the height of folly when held against a dispatch from the organizations Minister of Information. During which he writes, “Let us make one thing crystal clear: We do not claim the right to indiscriminate violence. We seek no bloodbath. We are not out to kill up white people. On the contrary, it is the cops who claim the right to indiscriminate violence and practice it everyday. It is the cops who have been bathing black people in blood and who seem bent on killing off black people.” The Black Panther, March 23, 1968.
comprehended was that the organization was straining under the incessant pressures of the State.

In the days following the Panther appearance, the Mulford Bill was revamped to be even more restrictive than initially proposed. Having absolutely no options in the matter, Newton and Seale shut down the Panther Patrols out of fear that members would either be continually arrested for violating the new gun laws or murdered while attempting to execute now illegal Patrols.\textsuperscript{50} However, the Panthers did manage to somewhat circumvent the new gun laws and continue their aid of the community on the still problematic issue of police brutality/harassment. The organization created a pamphlet, the "Pocket Lawyer of Legal First Aid", which outlined the proper steps for citizens to follow when detained by officers.\textsuperscript{51}

Stripped of their most popular community service project and recruiting tool, logic dictates that the BPP should have increasingly gravitated towards a defensive posture. However, the community response engendered by the "storming" of the Legislature all but ensured that the Panthers were in their most advantageous position to date. For every Panther incarcerated in Sacramento, there appeared to be dozens of young Black men throughout the nation fighting to take their place. As a direct result of the national newscasts, the Panther headquarters was inundated with requests to either join or begin

\textsuperscript{50}\textit{Newton, Revolutionary Suicide}, p. 152.

\textsuperscript{51}\textit{The Black Panther}, 15 May 1967.
branches of the BPP in communities across the nation. However, out of what on the surface appears to be one of the most positive events in the Party's history, increased popularity, grew one of its most destructive elements: agent provocateurs.

One of the issues that Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale had not considered during the creation of the Panthers were qualifications for membership. In light of the difficulties that Newton and Seale had recruiting members, it is not surprising to see that there were essentially no qualifications required for inclusion. Until the California Legislature appearance, the membership of the organization was composed of individuals that either Newton or Seale knew personally from their neighborhood. However, with the post-Sacramento explosion in popularity and the spread of the organization nationally, the membership base became increasingly composed of individuals known neither by Newton nor Seale. This blind spot in organizational ideology, the absence of a mechanism to check the backgrounds of potential members, would become the organizations achilles heel.

Despite the polished image that was broadcast on national newscasts, the fact remained that the Panthers were largely an unorganized group of young people attempting to solve problems ad hoc. One thing was certain, the Panthers were in no way ready to be

52The organization was inundated with so many requests that the Panthers eventually turned to the creation of a standard template to be utilized by branches throughout the country to help structure their ventures. However, such an attempt would eventually fail as many branches began to create organizations whose only resemblance to the Oakland Panthers seemed to be only their name. See, Foner, ed., The Black Panthers Speak, pg. 2-6

53Seale, Seize The Time, pg. 373-392.

54Hilliard, This Side of Glory, pg. 211-219.
inundated with so many membership requests. Although Newton and Seale had dreamed about one day expanding the BPP nationally, there were presently no mechanisms to aid such an expansion process. Recognizing this flaw in the organization, the Panthers created a loose organizational hierarchy to accommodate potential Panthers.

The reconstructed hierarchy of the Black Panther Party consisted of a three-tier organizational structure. At the highest-tier was the Party’s governing body, the Central Committee (Newton, Minister of Defense, Seale, Chairman, Cleaver, Minister of Information, Frank Jones, Deputy Minister of Information, David Hilliard, Chief of Staff). The second-tier was comprised of regional chapters and the lowest-tier was composed of local branches. Rank-and-File cadre would report to branch or chapter leaders concerning developments in their respective cities, states, or region. Only then would such information or problems be shared with the Central Committee. In due time, it became apparent that this plan was not completely workable. However, it was the best the Panthers could do for the time being.

When individuals inquired by telephone how they could become involved with the Panthers, the initial uniform answer was that they must re-locate to the Bay Area, secure housing and meet organizational requirements surrounding the selling of The Black Panther

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55 Although the Panthers are relatively progressive as an organization, particularly when compared to the patriarchal controlled Black activist church and other Black Nationalist ventures, it would be erroneous to assume that the group was egalitarian on the gender issue. Although the Panthers often spoke highly of women they are ominously devoid of a presence on the Central Committee unless they are married to or romantically involved and hence somewhat controlled by a male leader. See., Bukhari-Alston, Saffiya, “The Question of Sexism Within the Black Panther Party,” Black Panther Community News Service, Fall/Winter 1993. p. 3.

56 Van Peebles, Mario. Ula Y. Taylor, and J. Tarika Lewis. Panther
Panther, and learn the current organizational ideology and rules. However, even the Panther leadership realized that the re-location demand was drastic and unrealistic for the majority of Blacks. The organization's position on this issue was amended and the organization created a standard template, under the direction of the Minister of Education George Murray, to be utilized by aspiring Panther branches around the country.

Membership requirements were eventually amended to require recruits to fill out a form and give a donation of three dollars if you had it, and fifty-cents if you did not. Obviously, very few people could not meet these basic criteria. After approval of their application, new members participated in a six-week Political Education (PE) program divided into three parts: community, leadership, and cadre. New recruits were expected to learn the ten-point platform and read literature serving as the ideological underpinnings of the organization: Fanon, Marx, Malcolm X, Robert F. Williams, Mao, Che’ Guevara. The PE classes were intended to assist members in understanding that the African-American struggle was part of a global revolutionary movement. Such teachings directly contradicted the previous image that many of the members had of the southern-based Civil Rights Movement.

The vast majority of individuals seeking inclusion into the organization were...

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5The Black Panther, the literary arm of the organization, distributed its first issue on April 25, 1967 in an attempt to address the controversial issues surrounding the death of an African-American male at the hands of the police. Denzel Dowell was the first case of police brutality that the Panthers investigated. As a result of the Panthers' efforts the BPP became somewhat known as an advocate of the community against the police.

58See., Foner, ed., The Black Panthers Speak, pg. 2-6

located in America’s urban center. For many of these individuals, the machismo image of
the Panthers stood in stark contrast to the accommodationist posture of the Civil Rights
Movement.\textsuperscript{60} Most had erroneously linked the weapons and revolutionary language of the
Panthers with being more committed to the freedom of Black people than the civil
disobedience protest tactics of the Civil Rights Movement. The brief coverage of the
group “storming” the California Legislature was all that they needed to see or know about
the group. Most hoped that such acts were the next stage in the African-American
freedom struggle.\textsuperscript{61} Despite the overeagerness of some to join the Panthers, there was a
far more common response to the Panther appearance at the Legislature found among the
majority of American citizens.

Undoubtedly, the majority of Americans were horrified by the armed militant
image that the Panthers displayed in Sacramento. Critics of the BPP armaments and
revolutionary rhetoric covered a heterogeneous segment of American citizenry that cut
across not only class, but also racial and ethnic lines. In the wake of the Capitol
appearance, some of the most vociferous denunciations of weapons emanated from the
Civil Rights Community. Further antagonizing the Civil Rights Movement was the
realization that many urban African-Americans considered that movement a failure and its
goals parochial. In many ways the Civil Rights Leadership was fighting the emerging
Nationalist Leadership for center stage. However, the most interesting responses to the

\textsuperscript{60}Despite this position of many potential members of the Black Panther Party, it must be remembered that
such a view in no way impacted the official organizational ideology on revolution or activism. \textit{The Black

\textsuperscript{61}Brown, \textit{A Taste of Power}, pg. 117-131.
Panthers movement towards arms was found in the White Liberal community.

There were two very different reactions by White Liberals to the Sacramento appearance and what it meant for the African-American freedom struggle. One camp of thinkers quickly followed the lead of mainstream Civil Rights organizations in denouncing the threats of violence and implicit calls for an abandonment of integration. Most horrifying to this segment of the Liberal community was the tendency of Black Nationalist organizations to discard Liberals prior contributions. However, most Liberals fell into the same trap that the Panthers urban admirers did: taking a small news clip and filling in the remaining pieces of the puzzle themselves. They had no idea that the progressive politics of the Panthers caused the organization to be eager to form interracial alliances. It was a clever understanding of the Panthers progressive politics that allowed one group of Liberals to embrace the organization, while the aforementioned group wallowed in ignorance and reverted to latent racist fears and paranoia.

Prior to the Sacramento appearance, the Panthers were already well known to members of the strong West Coast Leftist Movement. White Leftists had assisted the Panthers in creating community service programs and possessed more knowledge of the ideological underpinnings of the organization than any other segment of the American population. They did not see the Panthers as a threat to their existence, but rather as potential brothers in arms during the coming Socialist revolution. Numerous Leftist leaders had predicted that a call to arms was integral to the success of an American
revolution. In this context, the Panthers could be considered a step ahead of others in picking up arms. The potential alliance between the Panthers and the White Leftist movement was also recognized by various law enforcement agencies in the nation, lending to an even more disapproving gaze upon the Black Panther Party by officers.

Obviously, the harshest critics of the Panthers were Bay Area police officers. OPD officers were embarrassed by being caught off-guard by the State Legislature appearance and eager to take definitive actions against the still not year-old organization. However, in the wake of their Sacramento appearance, the Panthers were no longer considered the exclusive business of Bay Area law enforcement agencies. The Panthers national appearance had propagated the organization not only to potential supporters, but also a soon to be arch-nemesis: the Federal Bureau of Investigation. As the sixties progressed, the Federal Government had steadily increased its historical pattern of surveillance activities against perceived enemies. In the wake of their visit to Sacramento, the Panthers would be added to the very long list of individuals and organizations that the Federal Government considered worthy of surveillance.

The mid-1960s was undoubtedly one of the most tumultuous periods in American

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62Huey P. Newton spoke on the issue of White Radicals at several moments of the organization. He even goes so far as to call them an “abstract thing”. Newton sees the White radicals as “...rebels, many of them from the middle class and as far as any overt oppression this is not the case...They’re looking for new heroes. They’re looking to wash away the hypocrisy that their fathers have presented to the world...I personally think that there are many young white revolutionaries who are sincere in attempting to realign themselves with mankind, and to make a reality out of the high moral standards that their fathers and forefathers only expressed. In pressing for new heroes the young white revolutionaries found the heroes in the black colony at home and in the colonies throughout the world”. See, Huey Newton Talks to the Movement About the Black Panther Party.

history. There did not appear to be a single issue on the American political landscape not
being contested by champions of identity politics: African-American rights, Women's
Rights, Gay Rights, the war in Vietnam, free speech.\footnote{See., Burnett, David, \textit{Making Peace with the 60s}, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1996).} However, the State answered all
dissenters evenhandedly. For example, the States answer to protestors at a Stop the Draft
Week Vietnam War protest at the Oakland Induction Center was eerily reminiscent of
treatment generally thought to be reserved for Black protestors. During the sit-in protest,
picketers voiced their displeasure concerning the nations' foreign policies regarding the
war in Vietnam. Despite the relatively peaceful protest, officers received an order to
disperse the crowd. The method officers utilized to disperse protestors consisted of
whipping students with billy clubs, spraying the crowd with high powered water hoses and
Mace. Officers brutalized protestors in clear view of outraged onlookers, clearly showing
that State repression has no respect of race, color, gender, or sexual orientation.\footnote{Van Peebles, Mario, Ula Y. Taylor, and J. Tarika Lewis. \textit{Panther}, p. 55.} Despite
the numerous protests occurring throughout the land in the mid-sixties, there was still a
separation between the types of causes that Blacks and Whites were most likely to
champion. Undoubtedly a by-product of identity politics was a desire to ameliorate ones
own condition before moving on to attempts to change the entire world. For instance,
while White students protested the Vietnam War, Women protested for Women's rights,
urban working-class and poor African-Americans protested against the slum conditions
they faced daily.
As its residents well knew, America's urban centers had decayed to a point of being considered a national crisis. The best support for this assertion is found in the volatile summer of 1967 when the urban centers of Cleveland, Newark, and Detroit exploded in riots which were directly linked to the twin-evils of the inner-city: socioeconomic despair and police brutality. However, government officials were hesitant to lay the cause of the urban unrest on systemic problems, instead they incredulously cited the strengthening Black Power Movement as the source of the urban unrest rocking the nation. FBI director J. Edgar Hoover attempted to persuade the country to believe this fallacious view when he espoused a law and order rhetoric designed to bring calm to middle-America and persuade urban Blacks to turn their backs on the new Nationalist fervor ravaging their communities.66

All of these issues combined to make the destruction of the Panther Party an obsession for many officers. Armed with the reconstructed Mulford Bill, officers set out to subdue the Black Panther Party by whatever means necessary. Officers increased their illegal pattern of stopping and searching Panthers on sight and often attempted to bait Panthers into violence. In this context of mounting tensions and frustrations for both officers and Panthers, it was simply a matter of time before the shedding of blood would begin.67

On October 28, 1967, in Oakland, California, Huey P. Newton and fellow Panther

66O'Reilly, Racial Matters, pg. 290-291
67Seale, Seize The Time, pg. 93-98.
Gene McKinney were stopped by officer John Frey. Although the exact events of that fateful early morning encounter are uncertain, there are details that we can be pretty certain occurred. Officer Frey recognized a “Panther car” at a late hour and decided to pull it over. Immediately recognizing whom he had pulled over, Frey radioed in the license plate of the car and awaited back-up. Officer Frey removes Newton from the vehicle and attempts to escort the Panther leader to his cruiser. Somewhere between Newton emerging from his vehicle and reaching the awaiting cruiser, gunfire erupted. Once the smoke cleared, Panther co-founder Huey P. Newton was seriously wounded by a gunshot blast, OPD officer Frey lay dead, while a second officer was wounded by gunfire. As dawn broke, Huey P. Newton was shackled to a bed in a Bay Area hospital and charged with the shootings.68

The arrest of Newton left the direction of the Panther Party to the enigmatic Eldridge Cleaver. In Newton’s absence, the Panthers would continue to expand numerically and begin to form interracial coalitions out of necessity. Despite this moment in Panther history being the height of organizational popularity, there was an ever present dark cloud hovering over the group. Two pressing issues faced the organization; saving Newton from death row, and withstanding the staggering attacks that local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies were gearing up to execute against the barely year-old Black Nationalist organization.

CHAPTER 4

FREE HUEY!!!!

The Newton shooting on October 28, 1967 came a scant six-months after the organizations first national exposure and slightly over a year past the organizations first anniversary.\(^1\) Although the publicity from the Sacramento protest had transformed the Black Panther Party into a national phenomenon, the publicity from the Newton shooting would push the Panthers to center stage of the American protest scene.\(^2\) However, there were a myriad of issues facing the Panthers as they began their second year. The most pressing being the loss of leadership in the wake of the Legislature protest and Newton shooting. As Newton was arrested for the death of Officer Frey, Seale remained incarcerated as part of a plea bargain agreement surrounding the State Capitol protest. Additionally, the Panthers fielded daily requests for national expansion. These requests were in addition to the massive influx of Bay Area residents that increased membership to

\(^1\)Newton, *Revolutionary Suicide*, pg. 171-186.

approximately two-hundred.\(^3\) Further exasperating Panther problems was the bright spotlight that both the local and national media shined on the organization.

The media coverage was relatively balanced because of the watchdog practices of the *The Black Panther* staff towards mainstream news outlet dispatches. Oftentimes it appeared that Panther writers were involved in a prolonged campaign to counter-balance erroneous information concerning the Newton trial.\(^4\) Although the staff of *The Black Panther* were fairly successful in this venture, there was a population of law enforcement officers and middle Americans who resented the voluminous, and sometimes positive, coverage that the Panthers received. To middle America, particularly middle and upper-class whites, the Panthers were little more than a military army within America's borders searching for an opportunity to execute horrendous murders throughout the U.S. Unfortunately, this would be the only image that many ever possessed of the Panthers, largely due to their inability to examine the organization and its complex political ideology independent of sensational media accounts.

It was within this climate of media frenzy that Eldridge Cleaver ascended to leadership of the Black Panther Party.\(^5\) A survey of Panther recollections reveals great uncertainty regarding Cleaver. On the whole, Panther autobiographies, memoirs, and

\(^3\)Ibid., pg. 207-213.


interviews paint a very inconsistent and oftentimes contradictory image of Cleaver.⁶ Although most accounts are positive regarding Cleaver's writing and oratorical gifts, they uniformly follow such praise with questions concerning Cleaver's mental processes. A few memoirs even assert that Cleaver was the primary factor in the Panther descent into an alienated rogue organization. Although the Panthers experienced a rise in the use of arbitrary violence during Cleaver's leadership, the underlying reasons for such an increase can not be solely attributed to Cleaver. For example, the infiltration and influence of informants and agent provocateurs who promoted such acts, can not be fairly credited to Cleaver. Despite the differing views of Party members, no one can deny Cleaver's impact upon the Party during Newton's incarceration. Most notable of his achievements was an increase in Panther membership, international expansion, and the generation of a wide base of interracial support for Newton's upcoming murder trial.⁷ Cleaver's accomplishments would simultaneously shock and dismay Newton.⁸

The Panthers' foremost concern when Cleaver took control was creating an

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⁶See, Brown, A Taste of Power; Hilliard, This Side of Glory; Seale, Seize The Time; Newton, Revolutionary Suicide.

⁷See., Seale, Seize The Time, pg. 291-210. Cleaver was the catalyst behind the Panthers implementing their theoretical framework concerning the viability of forming allies with both gay and White organizations. The feasibility of such alliances are highly uncertain if one removes Cleaver from his leadership position. He was undoubtedly the single greatest factor in making such alliances a reality.

adequate defense for Newton's approaching trial. The first step in ensuring a decent defense was the raising of a great deal of money. For an organization constantly moving further towards Socialist thought, securing and saving dollars had never been a primary issue. Consequently, as the Panthers began strategy sessions concerning the trial, they quickly realized that they were fairly limited due to the lack of capital. Fortunately for the Panthers, Cleaver had previously cultivated connections to financial backers in the White Leftist Movement, who were apparently mesmerized by the charismatic Cleaver. Their admiration was largely a result of a essay series Cleaver wrote that the White Leftist Movement immediately embraced as sheer genius. Cleaver was virtually canonized by White Radicals and anointed the next leader of the Black struggle. Some even attempted to place Cleaver on-par with the spiritual leader of the Black Panther Party, Malcolm X. These White Leftist connections would prove to be indispensable to the Panthers in organizing Newton's defense. From the very beginning, Cleaver knew that if Newton's defense had any chance of success, it must incorporate the support and financial backing of both the White Leftist Movement and African-American community.

In light of Cleavers' connections and skills, it is not a far stretch to assert that he was the only Panther capable of orchestrating the Newton defense and ushering the Panthers through this trying period. Cleaver secured the monetary support of Whites and

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9Seale, Seize The Time, pg. 201-202.

10Ibid., pg. 207-211.

his oratorical style secured the loyalties of a heterogenous population of Black and White Americans. Cleaver used a very formulaic method of shocking his audience and then smoothly persuading them to reconsider prior convictions and beliefs. By all accounts, Cleaver was absolutely mesmerizing during his speeches. A clear example of Cleaver’s oratorical genius is found in an address the Panther leader gave to a group of California Nuns. Cleaver’s address was focused upon illustrating the repressive actions of the State of California directed by Governor Ronald Reagan against not only the Black Panther Party, but the American protest scene in general. Cleaver was so persuasive during the address that he convinced his religious based audience to follow his lead in a closing chant of “Fuck Ronald Reagan, Fuck Ronald Reagan”. Future President Reagan was of course then the Governor of California. It was this controversial and brash oratorical style that caused Cleaver to be one of the most sought after speakers of the late-sixties.

From the moment that Newton was charged with murder, assault, and attempted murder, Cleaver began construction of his defense campaign. Cleaver envisioned a public relations campaign to propagate information surrounding the trial and raise funds.

\[\text{\footnotesize 12} \text{Hilliard, } This\ Side\ of\ Glory,\ pg.\ 127-129, 142.\]

\[\text{\footnotesize 13} \text{David Hilliard goes into great depths to explain the rivalry that developed between future President Ronald Reagan and Eldridge Cleaver. In addition to Cleaver, Reagan had no tolerance for any Black Nationalist leaders within the State of California. At times it appeared that the suppression of such dissident individuals and their speech was the single most important issue on Reagan’s agenda. See., Hilliard, } This\ Side\ of\ Glory,\ pg.\ 128, 143, 162, 185, 198, 210-211.\]

\[\text{\footnotesize 14} \text{Cleaver, Eldridge, “Solidarity of the People’s Until Victory or Death!” The Black Panther, 25 October 1969, pg. 12-13.}\]

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The title of the campaign was simply "Free Huey". The "Free Huey" campaign was designed around three pillars: The Black Panther, the oratorical gifts of Panther leaders, and coalitions that broadened the base of support for Newton into the White and mainstream African-American community. The Black Panther, the literary organ of the Black Panther Party served as both fund-raiser and propagation tool.

The literary arm of the Panthers, which Cleaver edited, was utilized to inform citizens of new developments surrounding the trial. These dispatches of The Black Panther were embraced by an ever growing population of American readers. During the months leading up to the Newton trial, all members were mandated to perform some action to aid Newton’s defense. For many that meant selling The Black Panther to raise funds or embarking upon rallies and paramilitary marches outside of the Alameda County Courthouse, where Newton was being held. While rank-and-file members either wrote for The Black Panther, sold the paper, or picketed the Alameda County Courthouse, Cleaver and Seale traveled the country addressing a cross-section of America concerning the trial and the Black Panther Party. The Black Panther allowed the BPP to distribute

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15 Bobby Seale’s work is particularly useful in explaining the planning and implementing of said plans concerning the Newton trial. Seale relates the view that it is he and Cleaver who were the primary organizational instruments behind raising money for the trial through fees gained for speeches around the country. Seale is particularly clear concerning the critical role that Cleaver played concerning the alliances and support the Black Panther Party received from groups such as the Freedom and Democratic Party, Honkies for Huey, and Students for a Democratic Society. See, Seale Seize The Time, pg. 201-210.

16 Although the fact that the Black Panther Party was able to develop and sustain The Black Panther throughout its existence has been applauded and admired by many, there was also a nasty undercurrent surrounding the methods utilized to ensure that the articles included in the paper were distributed in a timely manner. Elaine Brown goes so far as to relate members being beaten for late submission of items. See, Brown, A Taste of Power
their side of many contentious debates and battles that would have occurred about them, yet without them, in mainstream news periodicals and telecasts. Arch-Conservative E.D. Hirsch, Jr., even lauds *The Black Panther* in his critically acclaimed work *Cultural Literacy*.

The writers for *The Black Panther* had clearly received a rigorous traditional education . . . they also received rigorous traditional instruction in reading, writing, and spelling. I have not found a single misspelled word in many pages of radical sentiment I have examined in that newspaper.¹⁷

Undoubtedly the majority of community members agreed with the Panthers position on issues such as police brutality and community service which directly related to an increase in community support for the BPP. However, there was an intensification of a previous sticking point between the Panthers and contemporary Black Nationalist organizations looming on the horizon, marring the success of the “Free Huey” campaign.

The major point of contention between rival Black Power organizations centered on the Panther willingness, some would charge over eagerness, to form interracial coalitions. Although such criticism was never ending, it in no way swayed Panther ideology. Panther leadership rebutted such criticisms as emanating from those who did not truly understand the exploitative nature of Capitalism or the dangers of operating from a racially exclusive position.

The Black Panther Party is not a Black racist organization, not a racist organization at all. We understand where racism comes from. Our Minister of Defense has taught us to understand that we

have to oppose all kinds of racism.\textsuperscript{18}

However, there was an additional ingredient coloring this raging debate. The lack of support the Panthers received from contemporary Black Nationalist organizations regarding the “Free Huey” campaign. Although some Black Nationalist organizations simply did not desire to help in the formation of Newton’s defense, the majority were not equipped to offer the financial, administrative, or organizing skills so sorely needed. Consequently, the Black Panther Party accepted such help from whatever population it was offered.\textsuperscript{19} For Cleaver that meant forming alliances with the very prominent Bay Area White Leftist Movement.

On the surface, interracial alliances appeared to be the height of contradiction during the self-sufficiency oriented Black Power Era. However, such criticisms revealed a fundamental flaw in the rationale’ of the Black Nationalist community. Many Nationalist leaders erroneously made the concept of Black Power synonymous with separatism.\textsuperscript{20} Newton thought such beliefs to be the height of absurdity. Newton maintained that alliances were “possible as long as we controlled the programs. . . We needed allies, and we believed that alliances with young whites --- students and workers -

\textsuperscript{18}Seale, \textit{Seize The Time}, 69-70

\textsuperscript{19}Ibid, pg. 207-209.

\textsuperscript{20}One of the most forceful advocates of such flawed thinking is former Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee leader and Black Panther Party member, Stokely Carmichael (Kwame Ture’). Although the Panthers attempted to work with Carmichael in advancing the movement forward, he flat out refused to work with White activist or organizations. Fearing that they would eventually take control the lead position in such an alliance and derail the advancement of the movement. Obviously, such a belief did not find a home within the Black Panther Party, which led to Carmichael expulsion from the organization. See., Cleaver, Eldridge, “An Open Letter to Stokely Carmichael”, \textit{Ramparts}, September 1969.
-- were worth the risk.” 21 Manning Marable, explains that

“ Unlike many nationalists, the Black Panthers quickly established organizational and programmatic relations with radical whites, and sought to lead a progressive coalition of Third World and white groups to battle the “Establishment”. 22

Although the Panthers were at odds with the advocates of narrow nationalism who criticized their coalitions with radical whites, it would be mis-leading to paint a harmonious picture of the Panthers inter-racial coalitions.

Bracey, Meier, and Rudwick tell us that initially Students for a Democratic Society, the vanguard of the white activist movement, took issue with the Panther claim that they were the vanguard of the Socialist movement in America. 23 Later at the National Conference for a United Front Against Fascism, Seale makes a point of addressing the SDS position and threatening to have members of the Black Panther Party administer “disciplinary actions” against “those little bourgeois, snooty nose SDS’s” if they got “out of order”. 24 Despite such incidents the Panthers remained committed to the position that interracial alliances contradicted neither the Panther ideology nor the tenets of Black Nationalist thought.

It was obvious from the very beginning that the “Free Huey” campaign Cleaver

21 Huey P. Newton, Revolutionary Suicide, 172.

22 Marable, Race, Reform, Rebellion, p. 110.


envisioned was above and beyond anything that the Panthers could coordinate alone. On December 22, 1967 Cleaver threw the entire Black Nationalist community in a frenzy when he formed an interracial alliance. This initial coalition was forged with an upstart political party, The Peace and Freedom Party (PFP). The BPP/PFP alliance was predicated first and foremost upon a mutuality of needs. In exchange for the use of much needed office supplies and equipment for the Newton trial (a sound-system equipped van, copying facilities, monetary aid and other miscellaneous support), the Panthers’ agreed to register African-American voters for the PFP. The PFP benefitted tremendously from Panther popularity as members agreed to appear on the PFP ticket in the upcoming November ballot. Several Panthers were selected to run for office: Newton was selected for State Congressman in the 7th Congressional District of Alameda County, Bobby Seale for the 17th Assembly District, and Kathleen Cleaver for the 18th Assembly seat in San Francisco. On August 18, 1968, Cleaver was even nominated as the PFP’s Presidential candidate. Although this initial arrangement was nothing dynamic, this coalition would


27Ibid., pg. 237-239. The appearance of leaders of the Black Panther Party on ballots is still utilized as one of the greatest signs that the organization was truly reformist and not revolutionary as the organizational rhetoric states. The error in such assertions by scholars such as Manning Marable, lies in the fact that the
be a prolonged alliance. The PFP would continue to aid the Panthers in ways beyond the initial agreement, while the Panthers did likewise. For example, Cleaver wrote a statement “Revolution in the White Mother Country and National Liberation in the Black Colony” for the March 16, 1968, Peace and Freedom Party’s founding convention. However, although the Panthers were active agents in the PFP’s political mobilization agenda, their foremost concern was mobilizing people around the Newton defense.

The “Free Huey” campaign brought the African-American community, some segments of the Nationalist community, and White Radicals into a tenuous alliance. “Free Huey” bumper stickers and buttons appeared throughout the nation, while threats abounded from militants that if Newton were killed in California’s gas chamber, “The sky’s the limit”. Sympathetic white radicals formed organizations such as “Honkies for Huey” and even a White Panther Party to aid the “Free Huey” campaign. As a result of the nation’s infatuation with the Newton trial, The Black Panther increased its circulation tenfold while membership rolls expanded likewise. The entire protest community appeared to be in line as the Panthers prepared for a birthday celebration in honor of the still incarcerated Huey P. Newton. The celebration was to be held across from the Alameda County Courthouse. Organizers planned a gala affair with an impressive

Panthers were constantly evolving. Although there is little doubt that the BPP started off as a reformist organization, there is little evidence to support the belief that the organization continued to exist and operate out of a reformist paradigm.

28 Seale, Seize The Time, pg. 203-206.
rostrum of speakers to celebrate their co-founders birthday. However, as was common throughout Panther history, such a positive event in the organizations history was tinged by a negative. This time the negative being an increase in attacks from what would seem to be a natural ally; Nationalist leaders and organizations.

The underlying issue between the Panthers and rival Nationalist organizations appeared to be little other than jealousy the Panthers engendered as a result of their rise to Alpha status in the Black Power Era. However, this jealousy was cloaked in constant attacks concerning the Panthers commitment to African-Americans. Indicative of such charges was the controversy surrounding who should represent Newton at the upcoming trial. Most Nationalist pushed for the selection of an African-American attorney to represent Newton, thinking that the selection of an African-American attorney would send a message to the world. The Panthers balked at the use of such racial symbolism and instead chose the best available attorney, Charles Garry. Unfortunately as the Panthers had more dealings with White Leftists the Federal law enforcement wing of the nation took notice. J. Edgar Hoover, the head of the FBI, was particularly alarmed by the seeming ease with which the Panthers worked with white radicals. Although the

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29Hilliard, This Side of Glory, pg. 139-154.

30Seale, Seize The Time, pg. 203-206, 274-288. Bobby Seale, a big advocate of Charles R. Garry, refers to the attorney as the Lenin of the courtroom. Garry was very instrumental in several trials of movement participants and always presented a first-rate performance in the courtroom. Bobby Seale was highly critical of Black attorneys during this period in Panther history. For an example of Seale's criticisms of Black lawyers, see., Seale, Bobby, "Black Lawyers are Jiving." The Black Panther, 18 May 1968, p. 5.

31For an example of the admiration that most in the White Leftist Movement held for the Panthers, see., Jennings, Ed, "Students for a Democratic Society Resolution on the Black Panther Party", National Council Meeting, 30 March, 1969, Austin, Texas. Obviously, this is a change in attitude from the
selection of Gerry to represent Newton was problematic to Hoover, most troubling was the alliance that the Panthers had forged with the PFP. Such an alliance sounded McCarthyite alarms for the FBI leader. In the mind of J. Edgar Hoover the quickly growing Black Panther Party had begun to transcend the reformist confines of Black Nationalism and ventured into Leftist ideologies. The combination of Leftist thought and Panther popularity raised the organization, in Hoover’s mind, to being the single greatest threat to the national security of the country.

Ironically, the arrest of Newton had propelled the Panthers to heights of popularity that were not achievable with the Panther leader free. However, there was an obvious relationship between Panther expansion and State repression to curb that growth. The fact that the Panthers had sufficient numbers to spread throughout the nation gave the aforementioned refusal of SDS members to acknowledge the Panthers as the vanguard of the socialist movement.

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32 Endicott, William. “Black Panthers Controlled by Communists Senate Unit Says.” Los Angeles Times, 4 August 1970, p. 1. For many the charge that the Black Panther Party was being controlled by the Communist Party or a similar organization reverted their minds back to the post-WWI period when Black activist were accused of being little more than puppets for such groups. Obviously, a flawed argument that seemed to forget that there was no need for an external agent to make Blacks aware of their collective plight. For one of the most famous instances of a Black activist leader being labeled and denigrated as a tool of the Far Left, see., Duberman, Martin Bauml, Paul Robeson (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1988).

nation’s law enforcement personnel the perception that the organization was gaining strength and numbers daily. Consequently, it was time for officers to increase the frequency and ferocity of their attacks against the Panthers.

It was after organizational expansion that officers raided the Cleaver home under the guise of a search for illegal weapons, none were found. A month later the Seale home was raided with both Bobby and his wife, Artie, being arrested for the illegal possession of a sawed-off shotgun. At the station, officers tagged on a charge of “conspiracy to commit murder” to the illegal possession charge. Officers claimed to have overheard Bobby Seale planning to kill SNCC leader H. Rap Brown moments before they raided their home. Seale cited this charge as little more than a State inspired attempt to create divisions between Black protest groups. Lending further credit to Seale’s assertion is the fact that days before his arrest the Panthers had solicited an alliance with SNCC. The desire to join with SNCC was so great that in his second Executive Mandate, Huey P. Newton drafted SNCC-leader Stokely Carmichael into the Black Panther Party.

However, in the face of a continuing onslaught Huey dispensed from his jail cell his third

34 Although the Black Panther Party was increasing numerically largely due to the publicity surrounding the Newton trial. For many new members, Newton was a living martyr that had to be set free. However, the national expansion of the organization was not always due to the national headquarters in Oakland. Oftentimes, individuals around the nation began their own chapters of the Black Panther Party without consulting the national headquarters. Consequently, it was not unheard of for there to be chapters within the same city competing for legitimacy as the real Black Panther Party. See., Hilliard, This Side of Glory, pg. 159, 168, 236-237.

35 It was obvious to the leadership of the Black Panther Party that even with the assistance of the Peace and Freedom Party, they were lacking the necessary leadership and organizational skills to handle a national expansion. Newton’s solution to this dilemma was an alliance with SNCC, however, the police charge concerning the plot to assassinate H. Rap Brown, a SNCC leader, threatened to derail that much needed coalition.
Executive Mandate.

We will not fall victim to a St. Valentine’s Massacre. Therefore, those who approach our doors in the manner of outlaws, who seek to enter our homes illegally, unlawfully, and in a rowdy fashion, those who kick our doors down with no authority, who seek to ransack our homes in violation of our human rights will henceforth be treated as outlaws, as gangsters, as evildoers. We have no way of determining that a man in a uniform involved in a forced outlaw entry into our homes is in fact a guardian of the law. He is acting like a lawbreaker and we must make the appropriate response. We draw the line at the threshold of our doors.\footnote{Newton, Huey P. “Executive Mandate No. 3.” The Black Panther, 16 March 1968, p. 1.}

To many outsiders it appeared that the Panthers were undoubtedly the most revolutionary and resilient organization of the Black Power Era. However, police raids, 
criticism and alienation from contemporary Nationalist organizations, and internal disarray ensured that the organization remained relatively unstable. Nationalist groups continued their criticism of the pervasive involvement of Whites in the Panther program, going so far as to claim that such alliances were not egalitarian. Some leaders even charged that the Panthers were not only being influenced by their so-called white allies, but fully controlled.\footnote{Such a charge resonated throughout the entire protest movement as many Blacks were unable to reconcile the staunch oppositional position that the Panthers occupied, with their willingness to work with the very population who they perceived as their oppressor. Regardless of the socialist theory that the Panthers attempted to instill in the Black community, many were never able to get beyond the color complex that has been such an inextricable fixture in American life.}

Despite nationalists criticisms, the Panthers continued their alliance with the Peace and Freedom Party and the belief that class must supercede race in the African-American freedom struggle.
According to Panther leaders, the primary flaw in contemporary nationalists racial essentialism and narrow nationalist paradigms was that they prevented any chance of an alliance with groups traveling in the same ideological direction. Newton charged that such a restrictive ideology would eventually lead to defeat of the African-American freedom struggle and the perpetuation of American Capitalism. In the wake of Panther denunciations of the standard Black Nationalist paradigm, many Nationalists severed all ties with the group.\textsuperscript{38} However, in the midst of all of this in-fighting, Huey P. Newton remained incarcerated. Yet for some it appeared that Newton had never been jailed. Bobby Seale tells us that Newton continued to stay abreast of organizational developments as he attempted to continue his control of the organization through the dispatching of directives and other orders through his attorney.\textsuperscript{39}

Although Newton attempted to guide the organization from behind bars, he was limited in what he could accomplish. The nearly three years of incarceration would have a harmful impact upon Newton. With so much time to think and analyze the position and future of the organization, the Panther patriarch began to create bizarre ideological beliefs and concepts. Some would charge that Newton lost his mind while incarcerated. For example, Newton had figured out in his mind that the Black Panther Party had made the transition from a Black Nationalist organization, to a Revolutionary Nationalist organization. However, several Black Nationalist principles, such as nationhood and self-

\textsuperscript{38}Hilliard, \textit{This Side of Glory}, pg. 139-154.

determination, still lingered in the Party’s ideology. The Party had not abandoned belief in the primacy of nationhood and racial solidarity. According to Newton, Revolutionary Nationalism and Socialism went hand-in-hand, it was impossible to be one, without being the other. Despite this transformation from Black Nationalism to Revolutionary Nationalism, the Panthers largely operated the same. Although the theoretical principles, in Newton’s mind, had been altered, such changes found little expression in daily Party operations.⁴⁰

Undoubtedly, the numerous instances of continental Africans rising up against colonialism had given not only Newton, but the African-American protest movement in general, a much more global outlook upon their struggle. Newton asserted that they had revolutionary kin around the globe battling American Capitalism in their homelands. Such a reality had a definite impact upon Newton’s thinking as he once again altered Panther ideology. Although he retained the basic elements of Revolutionary Nationalism, Newton preferred to refer to the Panthers new position as Revolutionary Internationalism.⁴¹ In Newton’s mind, America was no longer a nation, but a global empire exploiting every corner of the earth of its natural and human resources.

⁴⁰Huey P. Newton was one of the staunchest critics of African-American Cultural Nationalism. Simply put, Newton felt that Cultural Nationalism was “...a reaction instead of responding to political oppression. The cultural nationalists are concerned with returning to the old African culture and thereby regaining their identity and freedom. In other words, they feel that the African culture will automatically bring political freedom. Many times cultural nationalists fall into line as reactionary nationalists.” Newton, To Die for the People, 92; Murray, George Mason. “Cultural Nationalism” The Black Panther, 3 March 1969, p. 4.

Newton was increasingly criticized for his apparent fascination with international studies, particularly in light of the plight of African-Americans domestically. In response, Newton called his critics parochial and informed them that Marxist-Leninism believed the bourgeoisie that must be defeated was international in character. According to Newton, "the only way we can combat an international enemy is through an international strategy, unity of all people who are exploited, who will overthrow the international bourgeoisie, and replace it with a dictatorship by the proletariat, the workers of the world."\textsuperscript{42} Newton emphasized that the true struggle for liberation had to be waged on both American soil and internationally if it was truly going to be successful. The Panther patriarch prophesied that once Nationalist realized that their interest were tied up with the interest of global colonial kin, they would realize that their numbers and power are far greater than they ever imagined.\textsuperscript{43}

Newton realized the seductiveness of an all-Black nation. However, he felt that solution was parochial if the imperialist monster was not destroyed. Furthermore the concept of a separate Black nation was not supported by history. Newton knew that oftentimes African-American revolutionaries forgot one of Fanon's most insightful lessons, that Black Nationalist must learn from other socialist revolutions, applying the lessons where applicable and altering other points to fit their particular colonial status.

We feel that Black people in America have a moral

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\textsuperscript{42} The Black Panther, 16 January 1971, 10.

\textsuperscript{43} Ibid.
right to claim nationhood because we are a colonized people. But history won’t allow us to claim nationhood, because it has bestowed an obligation upon us; to take socialist development to its final stage, to rid the world of the imperialist threat, the threat of the capitalist and the warmonger. Once he is destroyed then there will be no need for nationhood, because the nations won’t need to defend themselves against imperialism.\textsuperscript{44}

Revolutionary Internationalism, Newton’s next step of ideological development, sought the destruction of the concept of nationhood. According to Newton, the construct of nationhood set the wheels in motion for populations to lay ownership to land and resources, even in the face of harming fellow humans. Until nationhood was destroyed, there would be no true unifying of persons across geographic, racial, class, gender, or political lines. The destruction of nationhood would allow all humans to develop along non-aggressive lines, as they fostered friendship and neighborliness around the globe.\textsuperscript{45}

Hayes and Kiene relate that Newton’s thoughts at this juncture were strikingly similar to several African Marxist theorists. However, there was one critical difference between Newton’s theory and that of the Pan-Africanist community. Newton was now a fanatical critic of Nationalism and nationhood, a formulation that Pan-Africanists could not discard. Pan-Africanists felt that without an awareness of nationhood, the very thing which defined their people, they would have no rallying point. The Newton-led Panthers faced a paradox, although their African brethren were carrying on wars against

\textsuperscript{44}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{45}Floyd W. Hayes and Kiene, “All Power to the People” pg. 171-173.

-90-
imperialism in their homelands, they were simultaneously holding onto a thought to be antiquated Nationalist belief that would eventually lead them towards racial chauvinism. Consequently, the Panthers felt they had little choice but to criticize their position.46

Newton, in his vigor to support international struggles across the globe, received strong criticism from many African-American leaders. Black leaders charged that while the Black Panther Party dreamed of joining revolutionary struggles around the globe, it appeared to distance itself from the African-American community.47 Roy Wilkins of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People publicly questioned Newton’s commitment to African-Americans. Newton curtly responded to such criticism, with statements such as “we are internationalist because our struggle must proceed on many fronts. While we feed and clothe the poor at home, we must meet and attack the oppressor wherever he may be found.”48

Newton knew that theory alone was not enough to capture the loyalty of the masses, rather the application of theory was the only thing that was truly persuasive. In an attempt to put their internationalist principle in motion, the Black Panther Party opened a International Section of the Black Panther Party in Algeria during early 1969.49

46Floyd W. Hayes and Kiene, “All Power to the People”, p. 170.
47Newton offered troops to the National Liberation Front and Provisional Revolutionary Government of South Vietnam as assistance in their fight against American imperialism. Deputy commander of the South Vietnamese People’s Liberation Armed Forces, Nguyen Thi Dinh, accepted the offer, thanked Newton and promised to call for Newton’s troops when necessary. The Black Panther, 19 January 1971, 10-11.
Algeria served basically as a satellite where fugitive Panthers, most notably Kathleen and Eldridge Cleaver, issued statements of support to liberation movements in North Korea, North Vietnam, and China. 50 Newton even offered to send troops to aid in these liberation struggles, an offer which was politely turned down by the worlds Communist and Socialist leaders. 51

A largely forgotten aspect of the Panthers ideological maturation is found in the groups progressive view of not only the White radical movement, but also the organizational stance on the issue of homosexuality. As early as 1970 the Black Panther Party addressed this particular aspect of the freedom movement by placing the gay rights issue on the agenda of the Revolutionary People’s Constitutional Convention. Newton wrote,

We have not said much about homosexuals at all, but we must relate to the homosexual movement because it is a real thing. And I know through reading, and through my life experience and observations that homosexuals are not given freedom and liberty by anyone in the society. They might be the most oppressed in the society... Homosexuals are not the enemy of the people. We should try to form a working coalition with the gay liberation and women’s liberation groups. We must always handle social forces in the most appropriate manner. 52

Lane helps to contextualize the stance that Newton and the Panthers took concerning the gay movement and gay in general. She writes,


51 The Black Panther, 19 January 1971, 10-11

52 Newton, To Die for the People, 153.
It was the first time any non-gay black organization whether the mainstream, like the NAACP, or radical like Ron Karenga’s Us --- recognized the oppression of homophobia; connected that oppression to the plight of black people; and attempted --- based on that connection --- to build coalitions openly with lesbians and gay men.  

After the Revolutionary People’s Constitutional Convention the Gay Liberation Front would anoint the Panthers as the Vanguard of their contemporary protest era.  

The noted scholar Charles E. Jones states that “the Party’s commitment to the empowerment of all people, a derivative of its ideology, anchored its support for the self-determination of homosexuals.”

One of the most progressive aspects of the Panther organization surrounds the theory disseminated to members concerning the role of women in the freedom struggle. The Panthers took the position that male chauvinism was directly related to the Capitalist system that they were combating. Seale relates that the Panthers sought

to establish a system based on the goal of absolute equality, of all people, and this must be established on the principle of from each and every person, both male and female, according to their ability, and to each and every person, both male and female, according to their needs.”

However, such theoretical positions in no way absolve the Panthers from the reality that


33The Gay Liberation Front was not the first organization to call the Panthers the Vanguard group of the sixties protest era. Students for a Democratic Society were the first to take the leap in such a belief.

35Jones and Jeffries, “Don’t Believe the Hype”: Debunking the Panther Mythology, The Black Panther Party Reconsidered, 35.

36Seale, Seize The Time, 393.
during the early years, their practices were highly sexist. A position that was initially tolerated by some female members of the organization. However, there were just as many female who did not tolerate such behavior and some often left the organization due to sexist beliefs and attitudes that inevitably translated into attempts at sexual exploitation by superior ranked male members.\textsuperscript{57}

Eldridge Cleaver relates the official position of the Panthers on the woman issue during an open letter in July of 1969, to the incarcerated Ericka Huggins.

\begin{quote}
that women are our other half, they're not our weaker half, they're not our stronger half, but they are our other half and that we sell ourselves out, we sell our children out, and we sell our women out when we treat them in any other manner. . . It's mandatory, the Minister of Defense Huey P. Newton has said that it is mandatory that all manifestations of male chauvinism be excluded from our ranks and the sisters have a duty and the right to do whatever they want to do in order to see to it that they are not relegated to an inferior position, and that they're not treated as though they are not equal members of the Party and equal in all regards. And that they're not subjected to male practices.\textsuperscript{58}
\end{quote}

Further evidence of the Panthers progressive view of females is found in the rise to leadership of women in chapters around the country, with Elaine Brown even assuming leadership of the national headquarters.

The final step in the Panther Party's ideological development lay within the concept of revolutionary intercommunalism; unveiled at the 1970 Revolutionary People's


Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia. According to Hayes and Kiene, "the idea of intercommunalism grew out of the Panthers' fundamental ideological position in internationalism --- the United States was not a nation but an empire that dominated and exploited the world, and that United States imperialism had transformed other nations into oppressed communities." Newton theorized that what the world had formerly known as nations had been transformed into oppressed communities. According to Newton, instead of joining as nations peoples of the world would have to join under the banner of revolutionary inter-communalism as they sought to overthrow American imperialism.

At the conclusion of a successful inter-communalism revolution, the world would see the entire world existing cooperatively under Socialism. The idealized world that Newton created would see the removal of all class lines as each individual took their own spot in the general division of labor. As a result of Newton's new beliefs, the Panthers issued a new organizational pledge which stated, "We pledge ourselves to end imperialism and distribute the wealth of the world to all the people of the world. We


\footnote{Floyd W. Hayes and Kiene, "All Power to the People", p. 171.}


\footnote{This formulation of the Panther Party appears to be taken from Marx's 1875 Critique of the Gotha Program.}
foresee a system of true Communism where all people produce according to their abilities and all receive according to their needs."

Despite attempts to divorce himself from the concept of nationalism/nationhood, it is apparent that Newton was never quite able to abandon the principle. Nationalism crept into Newton's perfect world order of revolutionary intercommunalism, when he states that the various communities of the world were to be represented according to their proportion of the global population, an implicit call for the terms of old fashioned nationalist representation. Despite his inability to remove himself from the concept of nationalism, "revolutionary intercommunalism was the Panthers' attempt to adapt Marxism to the dynamics of the rapidly changing world of the 1970s." The final theoretical society that Newton foresaw was "a global, egalitarian community based on socialism...Newton saw the role of the Black Panther Party as exposing the imperialist antagonisms and raising the people's consciousness to the point of undertaking revolutionary social action." However, the Panther Party was largely unsuccessful in lifting the consciousness of the African-American community to the possibility of a Socialist revolution for a myriad of reasons.

The utopian constructs that Newton created surrounding future societies were largely formulations of his mind. It became increasingly apparent that no one, not even other Panther leaders, paid much attention to Newton's constant ideological alterations.

63Hilliard, This Side of Glory, 8.
64Floyd W. Hayes and Kiene, "All Power to the People", pg. 171-172.
The impact of Newton's ideological constructs were largely non-existent, as African-Americans continued to be wedded to the Capitalist society which had historically exploited and failed them. Despite all of the rhetoric spoken by Panther leaders, the Black community appeared steadfast upon reforming the existing system.

Arguably the most important conclusion that Newton came up with during his incarceration was that the Panthers were hurt by the homogenous composition of the organization. As a consequence of the overwhelming presence of working and lower-class individuals, the Panthers lacked bourgeois skills: writing, organizing, analyzing. The lack of such skills was evident in the immense difficulties the group had in operating a small local chapter and creating an adequate defense for his upcoming trial.

Consequently, Newton thought that there was no possible way the Panthers would be able to successfully manage expansion into a national organization. The Panthers needed individuals who could create Political Education curriculums, new organizational structures to accommodate the new branches and refine the weapons training and community service projects that had become a staple of the organization. It was with these goals in mind that Newton dispatched a directive for the Black Panther Party to be absorbed under The Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). In Newton's mind, SNCC, predominantly comprised of college students, possessed the very bourgeois skills absent in the Panther cadre.65

Newton's directive shocked the entire protest movement. Despite reservations by

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65Hilliard, This Side of Glory, pg. 171-172, 202-204.
both the Panthers and SNCC, the transfer of power was planned for February 17th, at the “Free Huey” celebration. Although a novel idea, the BPP/SNCC alliance was ripe with errors and misunderstandings from its inception. The reaction of rank-and-file Panthers to Newton’s directive revealed the cumulative effect that Newton’s absence was having on Party loyalties. Most new members balked at the directive, a sign that they did not hold the same reverence for Newton as veteran followers who had served with Newton. Most new members, and some veteran members, thought that if anything, they should be the one’s absorbing SNCC. They correctly surmised that SNCC’s glory days were behind them. In addition to the reluctance of the Panthers to follow Newton, similar reservations emanated from the SNCC camp.66

Ironically, the bravado and armaments that had endeared the Panthers to the African-American community and White Leftist, worked against the organization in its attempt to merge with SNCC. Many SNCC members feared that the ultimate objective of the Panthers was to seize control of their group. Thus, a majority of SNCC members thought such an association unwise. Despite the reservations of both memberships, the BPP/SNCC merger was forged. Undoubtedly, the swiftness and lack of discussion of the move by the general body of SNCC violated nearly every organizational rule surrounding alliances. Unbeknownst to Newton, SNCC was not structured to support a centralized

66Seale, Seize The Time, pg. 211-223.
head, but still reflected Ella Baker's decentralized activist philosophy. Despite these problems, Newton pushed ahead with his plan. Realizing the toll that daily confrontations with law enforcement officers were having upon the Panthers, Newton sought any method to subside the government onslaught.

However, the majority of Panthers continued their outright refusal to cooperate with such an alliance. It was becoming increasingly apparent that Newton had lost his hold on the organization, to most Newton was little more than a ideal or icon in whose name they struggled. Consequently, rank-and-file members developed a strong allegiance to Cleaver who was struggling by their side daily. In due time, there would be a substantial cadre with loyalties to only Cleaver, hence their name, the Cleaverites. With such prominent problems, there was no way to discern what would occur at the "Free Huey" celebration, the venue that Newton had chosen to unveil the BPP/SNCC alliance.

At the celebration, support came from a cross-section of American life: black, white, Socialist, civil rights workers and organizations. A crowd of over five thousand came to hear speakers and witness the unveiling of the BPP newest officers: SNCC leaders Stokely Carmichael, H. Rap Brown, and James Forman. From the moment that Carmichael appeared at the venue, it became clear that he either had his own agenda or no

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68 Seale, Seize The Time, pg. 254-273.

69 All of those mentioned above were leaders in SNCC. By admitting the trio into the Black Panther Party, Newton erroneously believed that the merger with SNCC would be complete.
idea of Panther protocol. For one, Carmichael appeared in traditional African-garb instead of the signature Panther dress. Eventually it would become clear that Carmichael’s dress was a implicit statement regarding the direction he desired to take the Black Panther Party. Yet, the cultural nationalism that Carmichael propagated was the anti-thesis of Panther ideology. Carmichael took his antics one-step further in attempting to block the white Peace and Freedom Party (PFP) delegates from addressing the crowd.  

He charged that the Peace and Freedom Party’s inclusion on the stage was counter-revolutionary and could do nothing but alienate the Panthers from the African-American nationalist community. However, Cleaver was steadfast concerning their inclusion on the stage. After the day’s activities were completed, the BPP/SNCC alliance was complete in the minds of Newton and the three SNCC leaders who accepted positions in the Black Panther Party. However, the tenuous alliance would disintegrate immediately and ties with SNCC would be severed forever.

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70Seale, Seize The Time, pg. 211-223.

71Further evidence to support the view that Stokely Carmichael was on a totally different page than Panther leadership concerning the interracial nature of their struggle is evidenced in a tape that Newton made while still incarcerated to be played at the Free Huey celebration. On the tape Newton deals specifically with the issue of whites being involved in the movement. Newton stated that, “Today should mark a new time for the TWO-REVOLUTIONARY forces in the country: the alienated white group and the masses of Blacks in the ghettos, who for years sought freedom and liberation from a racist, reaction-system. After approximately three years now that the Panthers have been organized, we have gained even closer relationship with our Latin American brothers, our Chicano brothers in the United States, and the Cuban people, and every other people who are striving for freedom... we must remember that we must never make excuses for such gatherings as this. Today we’ll use the excuse of my birthday; but the real issue is the need to come together in unity and brotherhood”. The Black Panther, March 3, 1969.

72Eldridge Cleaver a vociferous critic of Carmichael’s cultural nationalist paradigm viciously attacks the SNCC leader from exile in his open letter to Stokely Carmichael. Cleaver addressed Carmichael by stating that “Your letter of resignation as the Prime Minister of the Black Panther Party came, I think, about one year too late. As a matter of fact, since the day of your appointment to that position — February 17, 1968 —
Despite the backdrop of tension concerning the BPP/SNCC alliance and the undercurrent of negativity that Carmichael introduced to the event, the “Free Huey” celebration was a success. It raised more than ten thousand dollars for the Newton defense. Additionally, Bunchy Carter, the Minister of Defense for the Southern California Chapter, was introduced to the assembly. On the very next day the Southern California Chapter held another “Free Huey” rally. Although participants in the event were unaware of its significance, the Southern California assembly signaled the last time that the Panthers and Ron Karenga’s US organization would work in cooperation. In due time, with the covert activities of the COINTELPRO serving as an invisible catalyst the Panthers and US would be arch-rivals in a battle for supremacy in the Bay Area.73

In the wake of the “Free Huey” celebration, law enforcement officials unveiled their latest strategy of disrupting the Black Panther Party, an all out blitz on a myriad of fronts. An editorial run in the Black Panther Party newspaper dealing with the issue of political violence directly addresses the increased violence by the law enforcement wing of the nation. “The Black Panther Party recognizes, as do all Marxist revolutionaries, that the only responses to the violence of the ruling class is the revolutionary violence of the

people.” The Panthers realized that local, state, and federal officers/agents were working in collusion. A week after Newton’s birthday, officers raided the Seale house to execute warrants for Bobby Seale and Artie, his wife, on charges of conspiracy to commit murder. Although the dramatic entrance of officers into the Seale household leads one to believe that the State had a relatively strong case against the couple, all charges were subsequently dropped for lack of evidence. Immediately after the Seales arrest, there was another dramatic arrest executed against Bunchy Carter, Anthony Coltrale, Audre Hudson, and David Hilliard for carrying concealed weapons.

Reminiscent of the petty harassment campaign officers were apparently trying to turn the Panthers into a legal defense group as they intentionally mounted bail, lawyer fees, and court costs on the group. Further exacerbating the organizational plight were the dramatic methods officers utilized to execute arrests. Arrests that were largely intended largely to make citizens think twice about joining the organization. Although local and state officers were extremely effective in tying up Panther monies in the criminal justice system, for instance one month after the “Free Huey” celebration twenty-four Panthers were arrested on charges ranging from profanity to inciting a riot, they were relatively inept considering the actions that the FBI was preparing to take against the Panthers. While under attack by the FBI’s COINTELPRO, the Panthers would grow to


75As the FBI stepped-up their campaign to disrupt the Panthers through raids and arrests, the still incarcerated Huey P. Newton countered in March of 1968 by issuing Executive Mandate #3 which called for all members of the Black Panther Party to “acquire the technical equipment to defend their homes and their dependents.” Newton, To Die for the People. 13.
distrust one another, and other nationalist organizations, due to differing ideological beliefs and more importantly the Panthers primary problem would come from an inability to discern which members were informants, agent provocateurs, or law enforcement personnel.
CHAPTER 5

STATE REPRESSION

With Eldridge Cleaver firmly implanted as leader, Bay Area Panthers abandoned their community service agenda in favor of militarism. The change produced two consequences: (1) a further antagonization of a developing Newton/Cleaver schism and (2) an increase in FBI surveillance. Consequently, many Panther supporters became alienated from the group as it appeared to denigrate into little more than a paramilitary organization. It was during the Panther march towards militarism that the country was shaken by an American tragedy. Indirectly, this event would cause the schism between Newton loyalists and the Cleaverites to become irreparable.

The entire country was shook on April 4, 1968, as the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther

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King Jr., was assassinated at the Lorraine Hotel in Memphis, Tennessee. In the aftermath, America's inner-cities exploded in riots. African-Americans, along with a cross section of White Americans, were disgusted at the manner in which the American dreamer had been slain. The irony of a non-violent activist being struck down so violently was lost on no one.

In spite of the magnitude of the King assassination, Newton still did not consider it, or any other reason, justification for rioting. Newton considered riotous behavior under any circumstances reactionary and counter-productive. If any action had to be taken by the Panthers, Newton hoped that it would be forceful condemnations of unorganized urban unrest. However, the Cleaverites had a much different understanding of the utility of riots. Such thoughts were clearly displayed when the Cleaverites sought retribution in King's name.

On the night of April 6, 1968, a group of armed Panthers patrolled the Bay Area intending to honor the memory of Dr. King with a violence-laden message. Despite attempts at covertness, the Panthers every move was monitored by the Oakland Police Department. The nights' events would culminate in a gun fight between the Cleaver-led Panthers and the OPD. Four officers were wounded, while the teen-aged Bobby Hutton, the first volunteer for duty in the Black Panther Party, was shot down by officers.

According to witnesses, Cleaver and Hutton fled the gunfight, finding refuge in the home

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of an elderly couple. Once discovered by officers, the Panther duo were ordered out of their place of concealment. A disoriented Hutton emerged first. As Hutton approached officers with his hands held high, he was ordered to run to an awaiting cruiser. While following officer orders, the teen-aged Hutton was shot twenty-times.\(^5\) Moments later, Cleaver emerged stark naked from his hiding place. Cleaver reasoned such a step necessary to prevent murder under the pretext of a concealed weapon on his person. In the wake of the battle, Cleaver was arrested and charged with violating the terms of his parole agreement, a charge Cleaver would dispute and eventually cause the Panther leader to flee the country for Algeria.

Newton was livid about the death of Hutton, whom he considered as close as a younger brother. However, his emotions were not solely grief over the loss of Hutton. Newton was furious that the Panthers had once again willfully violated a directive.\(^6\) It was now obvious to Newton that the organization he had once envisioned leading a socialist revolution, was incapable of following mundane orders. Exacerbating matters further, was the exiled status of Eldridge Cleaver. Cleaver fled the US seeking political asylum in Algeria from charges incurred as the result of the shoot-out leading to the death of Bobby Hutton. With the two primary leaders of the organization in absentia the Black Panther Party would be increasingly racked by intra-party strife. A situation which would


grow worse as the FBI stepped up its campaign to create havoc and dissension inside of the organization.\textsuperscript{7}

II

It is only with hindsight that we are able to discern the tremendous impact that the Federal Bureau of Investigation’s COINTELPRO (Counter Intelligence Program) had upon the Black Panther Party. Despite having numerous “subversive” targets on their radar during the sixties, the FBI’s treatment of the Panthers was unprecedented. The only other person to receive similar attention from FBI director J. Edgar Hoover was the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. However, the FBI would eventually exceed the treatment afforded King with its plethora of subversive activities such as: phony letters, wire taps, secret agent infiltration, agent provocateurs, and informants all towards the goal of destroying the BPP.\textsuperscript{8}

The Federal Bureau of Investigation was founded in 1908 to serve the domestic security interest of the United States. In its first sixteen years, the Bureau was headed by five different directors, however, this frequent turn over rate would cease with the introduction of J. Edgar Hoover as its sixth director. Hired in 1924, Hoover would serve as FBI Director for the next forty-eight years with a legendary dictatorial grip. Whether investigating suspected Communist and Socialist during the Red Scare and McCarthy Era, the disappearance of Civil Rights Workers, or the alleged Communist infiltration of


\textsuperscript{8}Ibid.
the Civil Rights Movement, Hoover executed his duty with an extremely unusual drive and determination. It was this fanatical preoccupation with protecting American interests that led Hoover to viciously, and oftentimes illegally, attack the Black Panther Party.⁹

The primary modus operandi that the FBI utilized against the Panthers, and also the general African-American freedom struggle of the 1950 and 1960's, was the Counter Intelligence Program (COINTELPRO). The FBI concentrated upon subduing the threat presented by “a diverse group of Black organizations identified as ‘Black Nationalist Hate Groups’ by the FBI.”¹⁰ In a era that saw the anti-colonization movement on the continent of Africa lead to several concrete successes, the FBI’s COINTELPRO was designed to prevent the growth of the seed of revolution domestically. Primarily the COINTELPRO was expected to, “1. Prevent the coalition of militant black nationalist groups. In unity there is strength...black nationalist groups might be the first step toward a real Mau Mau [militant group in Kenya organized in 1951 to fight white colonial rule]. 2. Prevent the rise of a black Messiah who would unify and electrify the black nationalist movement.”¹¹ Although the FBI program was theoretically targeted at “subversive Black Nationalist organizations”, in reality the entire African-American protest movement, including the integrationist oriented Civil Rights Leadership, found itself under the FBI’s microscope.

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⁹Ibid.


Targets of COINTELPRO ran the gamut from Nationalist advocating a separatist agenda, to the integrationist principles that characterized the philosophical beliefs of the Black clergy. Before the FBI’s subversive activities would cease, they would have monitored several well known and respected leaders and organization such as: The Southern Christian Leadership Council, The Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, the Revolutionary Action Movement, the Nation of Islam, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Stokely Carmichael, H. Rap Brown, and Elijah Muhammad. From its inception, the COINTELPRO targeted the most influential and stable nationalist Black organizations and leaders. Initially, the Black Panther Party did not fit that description due to its lack of influence beyond the Bay Area. It would not be until the post-Sacramento period that the FBI considered the organization worthy of close monitoring. However, once the Panthers were considered a significant danger to domestic security, they were immediately subjected to the FBI’s COINTELPRO. Once monitoring began, the FBI’s primary goal was the introduction of chaos and distrust into the fold.

III

In the FBI’s mind, the rise of the Panthers to a level of importance was due to three events: (1) the California legislature appearance, (2) the Newton shooting, and (3) the Peace and Freedom Party alliance. By far, the final event, the coalition with the Peace and Freedom Party, was the greatest impetus for Hoover to begin maneuvers against the

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13 Van Peebles, Mario, Ula Y. Taylor, and J. Tarika Lewis, Panther: A Pictorial History of the Black Panthers and the Story Behind the Film p. 75.
Panthers. Such a catalyst is not wholly surprising. Throughout American history, the government has been afraid that the black community would fall into the hands of subversive Leftist leadership. For example, it was not uncommon for detractors to claim the Civil Rights Movement was a front for Communist groups, a charge that has on the whole not been substantiated. While little evidence links the Civil Rights Movement to subversive politics, the BPP was very public in its alliances with “Reds” and approval of not only the Leftist communities tactics, but also its goals. In light of the consistency of such charges throughout American history, it was not difficult for Hoover to justify using extraordinary means and resources to combat the Panthers.

In the months between Nixon’s Presidential victory and entrance into the Oval Office, Hoover made the Panthers the primary target of the Bureaus oftentimes illegal activities. Once Nixon entered the Oval Office it was clear to all that FBI operations would not be hindered in the least by the executive branch. Sensing this change in political terrain, James Baldwin wrote that “It is clear that for the bulk of our (nominal) countrymen we are all expendable. And Messrs. Nixon, Agnew, Mitchell, and Hoover . . . will not hesitate for an instant to carry out what they insist is the will of the people.” However, the story surrounding the FBI’s acts against the Panthers is not as clear cut as one would initially think. In fact, FBI Field Agents from Division Five, the office in charge of the Bay Area, saw absolutely no need to act against the Panthers. One agent

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14“On Establishing a United Front with Communists”, The Black Panther, 17 July 1969

publicly wondered if such a move would eventually do more harm than good.\textsuperscript{16}

Although the Panthers were well known to Division Five agents, they were not considered a threat to national security. Division Five Agents had previously witnessed Black Nationalist and Leftist groups such as the Panthers rise with a bang, only to fizzle out a short time later. It was not until weeks short of the Panthers second anniversary in mid-September of 1968, that Agents were forced, by superiors, to give the Panthers their full attention. Prior to this moment, Agents thought the Panther menace to be so insignificant that they did the bare minimum in complying with Bureau directives. Initially, the only action Agents took against the Panthers were bimonthly reports that contained “recommendations as to the best method of creating opposition to the BPP on the part of the majority of the residents of the ghetto areas,” and the names of “prominent Negroes” who would receive the anti-Panther mailings prepared by Division Five.\textsuperscript{17} Agents spent the majority of their time creating treatises dealing with the Panthers, including one entitled “the Black Klan” which was intended for “referral to appropriate news media representatives.”\textsuperscript{18} Overall, Division Five Field Agents thought that many of the orders they received from superiors regarding the Panthers were ridiculous, relative to the little influence the group held.

In May 1969, an increase in FBI surveillance was initially intended to inform the

\textsuperscript{16}ibid., p. 300.
\textsuperscript{17}ibid., p. 300.
\textsuperscript{18}ibid., p. 300.
Panthers of the futility of militant action. An Agent Bates advised his superiors in the Division and National Headquarters that the Panthers were not likely to “overthrow the Government by revolutionary means.” Bates reported that “the Panthers right now are not many people and perhaps do not represent many people, as far as most of their actions are concerned . . . However, they do represent an idea, or a voice in the ghetto, and are often called upon by Negro residents, to come quell a disturbance in a playground or talk to someone alleging police brutality.” Bates feared that the activities of the FBI’s COINTELPRO “might convey the impression that . . . the FBI is working against the aspirations of the Negro people.” Bates was warning Division Five and the FBI’s national headquarters to not become one of the organizations best recruiting tools, as the OPD had previously done. Andrew Young, an aide of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., was in general agreement with Bates on this particular point. Young states that the Panthers were at best a very marginal organization who did not have any solid foundation of community support “until they became the victims of the persecution campaign of the FBI.”

FBI leaders could not have disagreed more with this assessment. Relative to Field Agents, FBI leaders possessed a much more expansive view of the Panther threat. For example, it was their opinion that regardless of who emerged victorious in the Newton/Cleaver war ravaging the organization, the Panthers would remain a threat to domestic security. In the event that the militarism of Cleaver was victorious, the country

19 Racial 302
should fear inter-racial coalitions due to Cleavers Leftist contacts and ideological leanings. Additionally, Cleavers rhetoric alone justified the Panthers inclusion on the COINTELPRO list. On the other hand, FBI superiors thought that the community service programs of Newton were even more dangerous than Cleavers militarism. William Sullivan reasoned that if Newton succeeded in regaining his leadership position, his predisposition for community service projects (free groceries, breakfast for children, junior Panthers, free health exams and care, etc.) would garner community loyalty that signaled the Panthers “evolution into a more dangerous form and thus make them a more righteous COINTELPRO target.”

Sullivan further states that the reasoning of agents who did not perceive the Panthers as a legitimate threat was not in line with the present thinking of the FBI. “You state that the Bureau . . . should not attack programs of community interest such as the BPP ‘Breakfast for Children’. You state that this is because many prominent ‘humanitarians,’ both white and black, are interested in the program as well as churches which are actively supporting it. You have obviously missed the point. The BPP is not engaged in the “Breakfast for Children” program for humanitarian reasons . . . (they intend to) . . . create an image of civility, assume community control of Negroes, and to fill adolescent children with their insidious poison.” With this harsh denunciation of Agent Bates’ logic, Sullivan gave Division Five two weeks to “assign (their) best agents

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20ibid., p. 302

21ibid., p. 302

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to the COINTELPRO desk and get on with the task at hand: "Eradicate [the Panthers'] 'serve the people' programs."  

IV

Extremely important to the FBI's plans to destroy the connection between the Panthers and their supporters within the black and general American protest community was the attacking of the literary organ of the BPP, The Black Panther. Staff members of the paper soon learned the actions that the FBI was willing to take to undercut the periodical: suppress the delivery of the paper, preventing unionized printers from working on the paper, holding The Black Panther hostage in Post Office's throughout the nation.  

In early 1970, FBI leaders dispatched the following directive to its operative field agents.

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 is requested to submit by 6/5/70 proposed counterintelligence measures that will hinder the vicious propaganda being spread by the BPP. The BPP newspaper has a circulation in excess of 139,000. It is the voice of the BPP and if it could be effectively hindered it would result in helping cripple the BPP.  

V

During the war against the Panthers, the FBI had two primary tactics: creating

22 Ibid., p. 302


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intra-party dissension and setting up conflict with potential allies. Towards the creation of intra-party dissension and chaos, the Bureau focused upon three primary areas: further promoting factionalism among Newton loyalists and Cleaveries, falsely labeling Panther members as informants, and utilizing the Panthers poor organizational structure to create doubt in the minds of local branch members concerning the lifestyles and leadership capabilities of many national leaders. With Newton still in prison and Cleaver exiled in Algeria, the FBI’s job of utilizing their ideological schism to exacerbate intra-party havoc and distrust was made all the more simple.

The initial step in the FBI’s exploitation of the Newton/Cleaver schism was a anonymous letter informing Cleaver of a planned attempt upon his life by Newton loyalist. Obviously, when such fabricated stories are introduced into a pre-existing climate of distrust, there can be multiple repercussions. This bogus letter caused Cleaver to expel three innocent Panthers whom he suspected of being involved in the plot. Predictably, Cleaver never revealed his source of information, yet trusted its contents with the utmost confidence. However, to those not privy to the FBI’s letter, Cleaver’s actions were bizarre. Ironically, only the FBI and Cleaver knew the impetus for his dismissal of heretofore loyal Panthers. As a result of the letters success, Hoover gave “incentive awards” to its authors.25

In the wake of Cleavers’ seemingly arbitrary acts of expulsion, the FBI sent a subsequent round of bogus letters to Panther chief David Hilliard. Hilliard, the Panthers

Chief of Staff, was one of Newton’s best friends. The letter intended to discredit the rival Cleaverite faction accomplished its goal. Unbeknownst to Hilliard, and other Panther members, reactions to the letter were known by the FBI because of the numerous wiretaps the Bureau hid in the Panther office and informants who had infiltrated the organization.\textsuperscript{26} The information gained from informants and wiretaps caused FBI officials to state that the letter was successful beyond their wildest dreams. Such success only encouraged the FBI of the utility of bogus letters as an efficient tool to manipulate the inner-workings of the Party.

Although it could be argued that the Black Panther Party was irreparably split after the murder of Lil’ Bobby Hutton, the FBI did not risk the organization reconciling its differences.\textsuperscript{27} Instead, the FBI continued their phony letter campaign by sending a series of letters to Newton’s brother, Melvin, warning him of a Cleaverite plot to kill him. Simultaneously, a letter was sent to Eldridge Cleaver warning him of possible violence against his beloved wife Kathleen. One Agent revealed why the Panthers were fooled by the bogus letters. "Read the language in those letters. Would you think that was written by a bunch of white men? When you listen to them everyday for a couple of years you


\textsuperscript{27}In addition to the murder of Bobby Hutton was the Chicago gang-land style shooting of two Chicago based Panthers: Fred Hampton and Mark Clark. Hampton, the Panther leader of the area, was allegedly drugged by an undercover police operative who additionally provided a detailed layout of Hampton’s apartment for the subsequent police raid. For more information on the Hampton and Clark murders see., Wilkins and Clark, \textit{Search and Destroy} and "The Black Panthers, 1968-1969 ‘How Serious and Deadly the Game’" in \textit{Voices of Freedom: An Oral History of the Civil Rights Movement from 1950’s through the 1980’s}, eds. Henry Hampton and Steve Fauer (New York: Bantam Books, 1980), 511-38.
get to know their vocabulary. . . ."28 With the party plagued by distrust and uncertainty, the FBI continued their covert operations against the Panthers, even extending the letter writing campaign to local branch leaders of the Black Panther Party.29

VI

Although Newton had expelled Cleaver, many Panthers still possessed strong loyalties to the exiled leader. The representation of such individuals inside of the organization was the cause for alarm on many fronts. Ironically, it was a danger recognized not only by Newton loyalists, but also FBI Field Agents. "We absolutely felt Cleaver was a danger," San Francisco Panther squad agent William Cohendet explained. "Matter of fact, the (Black Panther) party should be thankful for whatever help they got (from the Bureau). Getting rid of Cleaver was a big thing; he took all those hoodlums with him. . . ."30 However, the Cleaverites were not willing to drop their agenda of immediate warfare in America's streets because of its irreconcilability with the agenda of Huey P. Newton.

In due time the Cleaverites would form their own organization, the Black Liberation Army (BLA), and attempt to capture the lead position occupied by the Newton-led Panthers. Towards this goal, the Cleaverites escalated the battle between themselves and the Newton loyalists to a level of lethal violence. According to Kenneth

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28Racial 319-320
29Racial 319
30Racial 319-320
O’Reilly, “... a gunman shot Cleaver-faction member Robert Webb while Webb was selling the party newspaper in Harlem. A few days later in Queens, another gunman shot and killed Samuel Lee Napier, the circulation manager of the Newton-faction newspaper.”\textsuperscript{31} Amiri Baraka remembers that agents would “shoot at one organization knowing that the other would get blamed, and ... retaliate in kind.”\textsuperscript{32} While the ideological war raged at the national level, there was another intra-organizational divide that seemingly grew wider with each decision the Newton controlled Central Committee made concerning the future direction of the Black Panther Party.

**VII**

Another angle that the COINTELPRO exploited against the Panthers was exacerbating developing tensions between local branches and the national chapter. Granted there were pre-existing problems between the national chapter and local branches, such as the absence of anyone but Bay Area Newton loyalists on the policy making Central Committee, these tensions were undoubtedly increased by the FBI’s COINTELPRO. Non-uniformity and communication gaps were so common within the organization that they offered plentiful opportunities for the FBI to implement an extremely successful smear campaign against national leadership.

In an attempt to capitalize upon the rapidly developing internal dissension between the national and local branches, the FBI utilized a combination of bogus letters

\textsuperscript{31}Racial 320

\textsuperscript{32}Racial 309
and anonymous phone calls. Special attention was given to exposing the lavish lifestyles that many Bay Area Panthers were allegedly living. For example, the fact that Huey P. Newton would eventually reside in a Penthouse Apartment, for security reasons, provided an opening for FBI Agents to allege the misuse of Party funds collected through sale of the newspapers, donations, and dues by national leadership. One non-Bay Area Panther remembers that,

'It seemed like they were taking everything in California. I don’t know where the money was going. We were turning in our paper money...People gave us contributions...I went to various people. We went to various well-to-do people and they gave us contributions, mostly checks or whatever. We turned everything in. We turned every dime in...Then we found out that people were living good...some local, but mostly Californians...I started hearing these rumors that they were living in penthouses...and all kinds of stuff. That makes you look like sort of a chump or a fool, when you’re going without...Nobody forced me to do any of that. I willingly gave. And I willingly did everything. And I was happy to be there to do that. But then things started breaking down. And rumors, and rumors, and rumors.'

The best illustration of non-uniformity and resulting tensions between national and local branches occurred in New York. As the following will demonstrate, it was no coincidence that New York was the location that the majority of Cleaverites and B.L.A. members would eventually call home. Many of the New York Panthers emanated from a Cultural Nationalist paradigm, in spite of the national chapters detestation of such an ideology. For example, New York Panthers balked at the traditional Panther uniform and

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opted for full length fur and leather coats, accessorized by “Panther Bullets”: chains
which held bullets on them. It appeared that the only connection between the Bay Area
and New York chapters was the Panther name. Additionally, in due time the
Newton/Cleaver schism would cause branches to divide along ideological and
geographical lines, with the majority of East Coast branches agreeing with Cleaver, while
West Coast Panthers followed Newton.34

Adding fuel to the fire of such divisions was a growing sense of frustration among
local branch personnel concerning their lack of input in the creation of ideology and
organizational policy. One of the most harmful effects of the Central Committees
exclusive composition of Bay Area Newton loyalists was the resulting lack of
consideration of the unique plights of Panther branches.35 The Central Committee
oftentimes implemented legislation intended to specifically deal with Bay Area problems
that inadvertently threatened to undercut many of the strongest aspects of other local
branches.

The Central Committee appeared to forget that developments in the Bay Area,
particularly the early confrontations with the OPD, were not necessarily consistent with
the experiences of other branches throughout the nation. The best example of such a

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of the Black Panther Party from the Black Community.” The Black Panther Intercommunal News Service,
17 April 1971, Supplemental Section, p. C.

35Although the Panthers espoused a belief in the concept of dialectical materialism, the commitment to
evaluate each situation independently of others and act accordingly, there was very little execution of such
a philosophy in Party workings.
situation arose out of the Mulford legislation introduced into the California Legislature to remove the gun from Bay Area Panthers hands. After the successful passage of the Mulford Bill, Newton order members to put down the gun and accentuate the community service aspects of the Panther program. Such a solution undoubtedly fit the needs of the Bay Area Panthers. However, Panther branches outside of California were not affected by the Mulford Bill and hence were breaking no laws with their continued Patrols. As a result, many branches balked at that directive and subsequent ones that in no way addressed the needs of their communities.

VIII

Hovering over the intra-party mistrust and COINTELPRO was the continuing ideological conflict between Newton and Cleaver. With both leaders separated from the organizational cadre, their feud denigrated into petty name calling and accusations. Cleaver continued to call for the immediate execution of a domestic revolution against Capitalism, while Newton increasingly moved towards a more reformist ideological position. Newton clearly realized that the execution of a revolution at this point in time by a largely apolitical population would result in little more than a bloodbath. As the organization continued to disintegrate before their eyes, Newton loyalists attempted to solidify their control by executing an organizational purge that would eventually expel even some avowed Newton loyalists for no apparent reason.

36Holder, “The History of the Black Panther Party, 1966-1971,” 259-261. Panthers from other chapters complained about the unrepresentative nature of the Central Committee. For New Jersey Panthers’ complaints, see the Newark Star-Ledger, 7 August, 1969, 7. In this article, Panther leader Carl Nichols noted that the Central Committee was dominated by California Panthers.
Led by Bobby Seale and David Hilliard, the organization attempted to clamp down on what was becoming routine “counter-revolutionary” behavior of Party members. The first step towards cleaning up the organization was the expansion of Party rules from ten to twenty-six. No longer would the Party support the so-called “jackanapes”. Seale describes the “jackanapes” as “a fool. He’s foolish, but he’s not scared of the police. He’s foolish in that he’ll get himself killed quicker. If you don’t straighten him out, and try to politically educate him, he will definitely bring the Party down.”

The new rules were aimed at correcting what were becoming favorite past times of Panthers: going out of their way to frustrate officers by breaking petty laws thinking they would be immediately bailed out by the Party’s coffers. Panther leadership decided that they would refuse “to bail out members arrested for possession of marijuana, riding in cars with no registrations, carrying guns without the authority of the Central Committee. . .”

The final step in the Newton-loyalist plan to clean up the organization was found in the removal of subversive elements: informants and agent provocateurs.

**IX**

The Newton-controlled Central Committee began the process of expelling and attempting to embarrass dismissed members. Embarrassment was the intended result of

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38Ibid.

publishing the names and offenses of dismissed Panthers in *The Black Panther*.

According to Taylor, over 250 members were dismissed from the organization for diverse reasons: being reactionary, renegades, counterrevolutionary, informants. However, the most troubling effect of this policy was the numerous Panthers dismissed for general suspicion. Oftentimes the mere charge that they were informants was grounds for dismissal. Declassified FBI documents reveal that the Panthers were tremendously inefficient in discovering the identity of agents and informants. They repeatedly bypassed agents in favor of expelling innocent individuals whose only offense appeared to be zealfulness or extreme loyalty to the organization.

One of the best examples of the BPP's inability to discern the identities of informants is found in the murder of the young Panther leader Fred Hampton. Hampton was undoubtedly bound for greatness as an activist. The young leader displayed an uncanny ability to maneuver his Chicago based chapter through the tricky realm of police, gangs, and informants with relative ease. However, Hampton would eventually be betrayed by a bodyguard who allegedly drugged him and supplied the Chicago police

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41 Unfortunately, it was not uncommon for those charged by the BPP as being informants were nothing of the sort. One of the most famous victims of the Panther purge was Geronimo Pratt, a former Marine who joined the Party after returning from Vietnam. Such an affiliation placed an unfavorable light on Pratt and ultimately contributed to his expulsion from the BPP. See, "On The Purge of Geronimo from the Black Panther Party." *The Black Panther*, 23 January 1971, p. 7; Hilliard, *This Side of Glory*, pg. 309-312.
with a layout of his apartment. Despite Panther attempts to tighten the reins of their fractured organization, there were some issues, most prominent of these being the suspect character and motives of many of their members, which were unalterable.

Although Newton and Seale had been steadfast in their intentions to organize the lumpen proletariat, this move was not historically supported nor without criticism. Kwame Tur’e (Stokely Carmichael) states that the Panthers “knowingly built a party on the lumpen proletariat when Marx and Engels said that they vacillate too much, have too much contact with the police, and can become spies. Stupid.” Famed poet Amiri Baraka relates that

under the sinister influence of the Bakuninist-anarchist ideology spread by Elder Eldridge Cleaver, which masqueraded as Marxism, the Panthers pushed the incorrect line that the revolutionary class base that would lead socialist revolution was the lumpen, i.e., the pimps, hustlers, dope pushers, and prostitutes; thus romanticizing an inconsistent, sometimes dangerous, class already destroyed by capitalism.

Marx and Engels are particularly damning of the Lumpen Proletariat. Referring to this class of individuals as

thieves and criminals of all kinds, living on the crumbs of society, people without [a] definite trade, vagabonds, people without a


hearth or home.45 (who) stand on the margins of the class system because they are not wholly integrated into the division of labor.46

Although the selection of the Lumpen Proletariat as the foundation of the Party can be debated as an unnecessary evil that Newton and Seale brought upon themselves. The next area of attack on the FBI’s agenda, the creation of inter-party distrust, was largely unavoidable to the Panthers and their many organizational rivals in the black and white activist communities.

X

Another area the FBI exploited in their campaign to destroy the Black Panther Party was the creation of inter-party distrust. Undoubtedly, the FBI desire to isolate the Panthers from other Black Nationalist and Leftists organizations was born of a definite fear that the Panthers could be the catalyst for a unified American protest scene. The FBI took special attention to ensure that such a coalition would be impossible. By far, the best example of FBI antagonization of potential inter-party alliances surrounds the Black Panther Party/US (as in versus them) feud.

US, a paramilitary quasi-African Cultural Nationalist organization headed by Ron (Maulana) Karenga, had worked on several community projects with the Black Panther Party, however, their relationship had been strained since the Southern California “Free Huey” rally. The Panthers primary criticism of US was its infatuation with Cultural


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Nationalism and racial exclusivity. The Panthers mocked the group and their “porkchop nationalism”. Former Student for Democratic Society member Todd Gitlin remembers that US was like “...most other black militants donn(ing) dashikis and glower(ing) at whites...”\(^{47}\)

FBI agents were extremely successful at aggravating an already antagonistic relationship with a plethora of underhanded tactics. Ironically, both organizations had personnel easily baited into senseless violence against any perceived enemy. Prior to their entrance into the Black Nationalist arena, “many of the younger brothers in Karenga’s organization were from eastside gangs. The young Panther cadre were from the same, or rival camps...and they had been gang fighters long before they were nationalists.” In their campaign to prevent the alliance of the two premier Bay Area Black Nationalist organizations, the FBI wanted action, “shootings, beatings, and a high degree of unrest,” and attained exactly that with an “imaginative and hardhitting” campaign.\(^{48}\)

Government informants who had infiltrated US discovered that the group was greatly bothered by the maligning they received at the hands of the more popular Panthers. The Panthers charged US with such things as working with the CIA or LAPD, or that the name US was a moniker that stood for United Slaves.\(^{49}\) Such petty name

\(^{47}\)Gitlin, *The Sixties*, 306.

\(^{48}\)O’Reilly, *Racial Matters*, pg. 306

calling and general dislike fostered hostility that found expression in the most lethal manner. In January of 1969, at Campbell Hall on the Westwood campus of the University of California at Los Angeles, the US group was attempting to capture the position of director for a proposed Afro-American studies program. The Panthers were asked by students to come and ensure that the meeting did not get out of hand, particularly in regards to the US contingency. By the end of the meeting four or five US members had gunned down two Panthers then attending UCLA, Alprentice (“Bunchy”) Carter and John Huggins. Subsequently, Elaine Brown and three other Panthers testified for the state at the murder trial, which resulted in two US members receiving life sentences.^{50} Noted scholar Amiri Baraka traced one of the causes of the Panther/US conflict to each organization’s leadership. Charging that, “Cleaver’s arrogance and shallow bohemian anarchism which he passes off as Marxism, plus Karenga’s Maulana complex . . . sped up the tragic collision that finally saw Bunchy and Huggins dead. From that point on, the FBI escalated their ‘intervention’ into (the) conflict.”^{51}

In the wake of the Carter and Huggins murder, the FBI began a campaign that entailed the creation of cartoons depicting US members gloating over the bodies of the two fallen Panthers. Not only were the cartoons sent to the Panthers, but also tacked up around the community on telephone poles and like structures. As expected, the Panthers attributed the mailings to Karenga and not J. Edgar Hoover. Consequently, on March 16,

^{50}O’Reilly, Racial Matters, pg. 306.

^{51}Ibid., p. 307.
the Panthers fired into the home of an US member during a retaliatory attack for the Carter and Huggins killings, only to have another Panther injured. When Panther John Savage was gunned down by an US member, the FBI repeated the exact same cartoon campaign they utilized in the wake of the Carter/Huggins murder. Later in the year, William Sullivan approved the mailing of yet another inflammatory letter under the signature of a Panther member. A short time later an US gunman shot down three Panthers, killing Sylvester Bell. As retaliation the Panthers firebombed US offices. O’Reilly tells us that, “FBI agents not only encouraged this harassment; they held ‘racial briefing sessions’ for police officers in order to increase their unwitting ‘contribution to the over-all Counterintelligence Program.’”

Regarding the Panthers and US, one former Division Five executive stated that, “our basic policy was to divide and conquer . . . But I can guarantee that nobody was saying, ‘Let’s get these guys killing each other.’” However, the surviving combatants had a much different perspective. “These motherfuckers intended to kill everyone of us,” Elaine Brown charged. Kumar recalls that the FBI “interjected the violence into it,” into the “normal rivalries of two groups struggling for leadership of the black movement. Hoover took his paranoia and imposed that as public policy. It was a violent time. Vietnam. Talk about power from the barrel of a gun. It was a time and context in which the gun was considered a political god, the ultimate arbiter of all conflicts. . . . We knew it

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wasn’t going to be a tea party, but we didn’t anticipate how violent the U.S. government would get.”

XI

Although it is impossible to recreate the feelings of paranoia and fright that followed the Panthers in the late sixties, there are several issues that can be accurately concluded. The first of which is the cumulative effects of the FBI’s COINTELPRO. In the second year of the FBI campaign an astonishingly high number of Panthers, 348 total, were arrested on charges including, but not limited to: murder, armed robbery, rape, bank robbery, drug trafficking, burglary. Although many of the agents in Division Five maintained their stance that the Panthers were in no way a threat to the internal security of the nation, there were other government officials, such as Jerris Leonard, the head of the Nixon-era Civil Rights Division, who had a somewhat different view of the Panthers. Leonard stated that he could applaud many of the Panthers community service programs that were aiding the poor. However, his admiration was tarnished by the belief that the majority of Panthers were little more than hoodlums who must be dealt with.

Although there were several officials who applauded certain aspects of the Panthers community service programs, such a position found little articulation within the Justice Department. Rather, the Justice Department set up a task force in 1969 to specifically deal with the Panther threat. The focus of the task force was “to develop a

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prosecutive theory against the BPP.” Towards this goal of destroying the Black Panther Party, the Justice Department sent five lawyers to the Bay Area to execute a special grand jury to look into the Panther organizations’ operations from top to bottom. This practice of creating grand juries to investigate the Panthers would be repeated throughout the nation.

The agenda of the Justice Department was so questionable that even government officials began to speak out against their Gestapo-like tactics. The United States Attorney in San Francisco went on record as stating that “Whatever they say they’re doing, they’re out to get the Panthers.” The grand jury process went so far as to subpoenaed Nathan Schwerner, the father of Mickey Schwerner, one of the three young men murdered outside of Philadelphia, Mississippi, and then an official of the International Committee to Defend Eldridge Cleaver. Further evidence that the FBI was out to destroy the Panthers was found in the common request of Division offices for the use of city police to raid and arrest Panthers. One such request was submitted to Seattle Mayor Wes Uhlman. However, Uhlman refused the federal request to have city police roust Panther offices by announcing, “we are not going to have any 1934 Gestapo-type raids against anyone.”

In the end, the FBI grand jury plan was successful as it “compiled hundreds of prosecutive summary reports on the on the Panthers. . . .” By June 1969, the Bureau was investigating all forty-two Panther chapters and approximately 1,200 members and sympathizers in order “to obtain evidence of possible violations of Federal and local

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laws.” This effort included the examination of every aspect of Panther affairs, from financial records to Free Huey posters. Additionally, Panther leaders were routinely arrested and charged with major crimes, only to have the charges later dismissed by a judge, but only after considerable financial resources were spent defending themselves.\textsuperscript{57} The FBI even conducted a survey to determine “how many members were currently on welfare.”\textsuperscript{58}

In the end the multi-pronged attack of the FBI’s COINTELPRO was extremely successful at creating intra-party dissension while simultaneously ensuring that the Panthers would be alone in their fight through inter-party disruptions.\textsuperscript{59} It was not long before nearly every Panther was affected by at least one of the FBI’s COINTELPRO tactics. In the event that a member was able to escape problems created by the FBI, they most surely were unable to escape federal surveillance and prosecution. Consequently, as a result of the FBI covert infiltration into the Black Panther Party and the pre-existing Newton/Cleaver schism, the Black Panther Party was weakened considerably during the early parts of the seventies.

\textsuperscript{57}“Case Against Chairman Bobby and Ericka Dismissed,” \textit{The Black Panther}, 29 May 1971, p. 6.

\textsuperscript{58}Racial 298

\textsuperscript{59}Herman, Bell, “The BPP and Political Prisoners,” \textit{The Black Panther Black Community news Service Memorial Issue}, Spring 1991, p.11.
CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

The legacy of the Black Panther Party can be characterized in a plethora of ways. However, whatever summation one assigns to the Panthers, it is undeniably going to be informed as much by personal biases as it is about the Panthers themselves. Regardless of one's position on the Panthers, there is sufficient evidence to support whatever conclusions one generates. Despite wide ranging evidence and contestations over the Panther legacy, the group remains the most progressive organization of the sixties protest era.

As this work has displayed, the Panthers are their own best evidence against pop culture misconceptions of supporters and detractors. Depending upon the perspective and political agendas of those remembering the Panthers, factual, conceptual, and theoretical errors abound. Consequently, it is common for characterizations of the Panthers to run the gamut of identities: apolitical thugs, criminals, thieves, murderers, heroes, or saviors of the Black community. It is clear that such characterizations are unable to capture the identity and agenda of the highly diverse and often contradictory Black Panther Party.

The Panthers were initially founded with the intentions of addressing many of the
problems that daily affected their urban community. Despite having their genesis in such reformist soil, in due time, the Panthers would transform and be pushed to become something that neither the founders, supporters, or detractors could have ever believed possible. At its core the story of the Black Panther Party surrounds an attempt to ready a disfranchised community to participate in the highly competitive pluralist political economy and the methods that those in power will implement to ensure the extension of their position of privilege, influence, and wealth.

The history of the Black Panther Party is a truly fascinating story, however, it is a story that is little other than another chapter in a long line of activism by African-Americans. As this work reveals, the ideological underpinnings for the creation of the Black Panther Party was found within the Black community. Those who served as inspiration to Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale during the formulation of the Black Panther Party reads almost like a who's who of Black Nationalism and militant Black activism. Names such as Malcolm X, Robert F. Williams, the Deacons for Defense, Marcus Garvey, are all quickly cited by the co-founders as inspirational during the formation of the organizations political ideology, tactics, and goals. Such ideological underpinnings encouraged the Panthers to focus solely upon empowering the masses.

It was out of a simple idea to relieve Black people of some of the suffering that they endured on a daily basis that the Panthers became endeared leaders within their
community. During this period, with the African-American community experiencing a leadership vacuum the Panthers rose to prominence. Along with the rise to prominence came a popularity that shocked even the most strident and vigorous supporters and members of the group. However, such popularity within a highly political and charged period led to several unforeseen problems. First and foremost was how a group of young disorganized people, many of whom had little to no organizing skills, were supposed to handle a national political organization.

In the wake of the Capitol protest in Sacramento, Ca., the Panthers were inundated with calls by individuals seeking to become affiliated with the Panthers in their communities. The desire to join the Black Panther Party was so strong in some communities that many individuals took it upon themselves to begin their own organizations. Although they were totally unaffiliated with the Bay Area Panthers, they still bore the name of the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense. Obviously, attempting to piggy back on the tremendous publicity and local success that the Bay Area Panthers had achieved by this time. Out of this period of immense popularity came a plethora of problems.

The problems were multi-fold. First of all, the Panthers showing an amazing lack of foresight, by not recognizing the dangers that a huge influx of new members created. Initially the Panthers were elated that citizens sought membership in the organization.
However, such exuberance in no way masked the primary problem that flowed from this membership increase. The Panthers proved unable to develop a mechanism to check the background and motives of the new recruit. A lapse that would come back to haunt the Panthers in a manner that would startle the organization's leadership. However, the tremendous amount of publicity that the Panthers received once the “Free Huey” campaign began alerted the Federal Government to the organization's presence.

Once the Panthers had run afoul of the law enforcement wing of the country through the Panther patrols and the fiery nationalist and later scathing critiques of Capitalism and American society in general, the State began measures to curb and curtail the Panther organization. The most influential of all state apparatuses utilized against the Panthers was to be found in the application of the Federal Bureau of Investigations Counter Intelligence Program (COINTELPRO). The COINTELPRO was designed to curb the fervor of political activism that had occurred throughout the entire Black protest movement. From the non-violent civil disobedience movement of the Civil Rights Movement to the fiery laced Black Nationalist ideology that was the trademark of a plethora of Black Nationalist leaders. Targets of the J. Edgar Hoover directed COINTELPRO ran the gamut of political philosophies, goals, and tactics within the Black freedom struggle/protest movement. However, there was a well thought out plan in regards to the Panthers and how they could best be destroyed.
The FBI plan to discredit the Panthers to the nation and ultimately destroy the Panthers is a plan that called for the utilization of several illegal tactics: wiretaps, bugs, illegal surveillance, phony letters, preventing the organizational newspaper from reaching its readers, any other form of sabotage that agents could think of was also to be used. FBI agents utilized a two-fold strategy towards disrupting Panther operations and eventually extinguishing the organizational fire that entire American protest movement seemingly thrived upon. They sought to isolate the Panthers by causing inter-party conflicts through sabotaging Panther relations with allies, potential allies, and already sworn enemies. This method was most easily achieved through the utilization of murder, phony letters and phone calls, however, the trump card that the FBI utilized often was their ability to recruit community members or send their very own Black agents into the organization to serve as not only the eyes and ears of the organization, but they oftentimes were members who had gained some position of authority within the organization, allowing the FBI and other local law enforcement agencies to not only know every move that the Panthers were going to make, but also cause the organization to make some moves or decisions by directing the undercover agent or informant to execute the move. More often than not, such moves were engineered and end up hurting the organization in some manner.

The second method that the FBI utilized to subdue the Black Panther Party was through the creation of intra-party strife, along two divisions. The first, and major
division, entail an ideological feud between Eldridge Cleaver and his followers and Huey
P. Newton’s followers, their only major bone of contention was predicated upon a
timetable for the organization to begin a domestic revolution, with the Cleaverites
seeking to do so immediately. This division was encouraged by the same method that the
inter-party strife was created and prolonged, the utilization of phony letters, wire taps,
informants, and murder. Eventually the subtle differences between the two warring
factions were unconquerable and each group began attacks upon the other, with numerous
murders resulting. The second intra-party division was predicated upon the gap between
the national and local branches. A relationship that was already strained due to the
Panthers inefficient method in dealing with the local branches and the lack of a coherent
workable plan that could be applied by the numerous branches that had so quickly
sprouted up throughout the nation.

Although there was a disproportionate amount of warfare that took place between
the Panthers and a plethora of law enforcement offices, one must resist the temptation to
denigrate the organization into something that is little other than a paramilitary
organization that sought out and executed battles with law enforcement officers on a daily
or consistent basis. The warfare that has been continuously attributed to the Panthers and
glamorized by contemporary pop culture was but a very small part of the organization.
The two areas that dominated the majority of the Party’s time was creating an ideology
that was simple enough to be understood by the masses of the people, yet still adequate to solve the predicament that plagued so many African-Americans. Primary to the Panther ideology was the belief that the future of Blacks must be secure before any realistic revolution could be embarked upon. Towards this end the Panthers sought to simultaneously assist the Black community with many of its daily troubles (police brutality, health care, food, protection) and simultaneously display the power that they had and the value of collective effort, all in the hope of displaying to the community that they were a mighty force with untapped power, yet their ultimate goal should not be to capture as many consumer goods and monetary resources possible, instead it should be to not only help their fellow Blacks, but their fellow man. The Panthers were attempting to institute an ideology that showed the worth and value of the collective over the individualistic Capitalist society and consumer culture. However, in the end they were largely unsuccessful in this particular endeavor for several reasons, foremost of which was the removal of many of the barriers that African-Americans faced in their attempts to join the majority culture and reap the financial benefits of such an immersion.
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