

“All Power to the People”: The Influence and Legacy of the Black Panther Party,
1966 – 1980

by

Lisa Vario

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Master’s of Arts

in the

History

Program

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

December, 2007

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Lisa Vario

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Signature:

Lisa Vario, Student

Date

Approvals:

Anne York, Thesis Advisor

Date

David Simonelli, Committee Member

Date

Donna DeBlasio, Committee Member

Date

Peter J. Kasvinsky, Dean of School of Graduate Studies & Research

Date

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	iv
Abstract.....	1
Introduction: “Educate the Masses”.....	2
Chapter One: “The Roots of the American Black Power Movement”.....	9
Chapter Two: “The Black Panther Party: 1966 – 1973”.....	21
Chapter Three: “The Black Panther Party: 1974 – 1980”.....	47
Chapter Four: “The summer of 1967 Race Riots”.....	53
Chapter Five: “Black Power in Britain and the British Black Panther Party”.....	63
Conclusion: “You can Kill a Revolutionary, but you can’t Kill a Revolution”...	81
Bibliography.....	85

Acknowledgements

There are many individuals to whom I owe my sincerest appreciation. I would like to start out by thanking my parents, Tony and Mary Jane Vario, for introducing me to the most intriguing period in American history, the 'Vietnam War Era.' From a young age, I became obsessed with the culture and politics that made this period so fascinating. Thank you for making me listen to not only the music of the era, but all the memorable stories as well.

My sincere appreciation is extended to the History Department at Youngstown State University, especially Dr. David Simonelli, Dr. Donna DeBlasio, Dr. Martha Pallante, Dr. Diane Barnes, and Bonnie Harris, who were always there to listen and offer words of encouragement. My most profound gratitude is extended to Dr. Anne York, my mentor and friend, who pushed me when I wanted to give up, encouraged me throughout my graduate studies, and generously listened to me during all of my 'freak-outs.' Dr. York, without your help, I could not have completed this thesis. I sincerely appreciate everything you have done for me, both in my undergraduate and graduate studies.

Finally, I would like to thank my family, friends, and fellow peers (Victoria, Tammy, Greg, Shannon, Rachel, Cate, Jarret, Becky, Vince, Ashley, Barb, Trish, Jen, Jessica, Laura, and Paul) and anyone else I may have forgotten! Thank you all so much for the constant words of encouragement and support.

Abstract

The Black Panther Party, an African-American political and self-defense organization formed in 1966, promoted the idea of black power through its Ten Point Program, which advocated ten basic rights for black citizens. Its mixture of Maoist-inspired politics ultimately served to scapegoat the Party for white America's interpretation of black power. The Party is one of the most misunderstood organizations in American history. Founded in Oakland, California in October 1966 by Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale, the Black Panther Party formed in protest to police brutality. As the Party's popularity grew, factions of the organization quickly spread across the United States, and even across the Atlantic, where the Party's ideology and politics had a tremendous influence on black Brits. Although their popularity grew, the Party became known as a militant organization that was against 'the white man.' While some members of the Party committed acts of violence, the organization strongly advocated the use of violence only when necessary. The Party, as stated by Newton, was not anti-white, but rather against individuals who sought to condemn 'the black man.'

The ideology of the Black Panther Party put the welfare of 'the people' above all else; the organization simply strived to better the community. The organization fully supported the black power movement, as one of the Party's original members, Stokely Carmichael, was one of the earliest individuals to write and preach on the subject. Through the Party's literature, the concept of black power spread rapidly across the nation, and the Atlantic, and made a particularly strong impact on blacks who lived in inner-city ghettos and projects.

Introduction

“Educate the Masses”

Founded in Oakland in October 1966, the Black Panther Party formed as a militant black organization determined to improve the social and economic conditions of impoverished blacks. Heavily inspired by the writings of Mao Tse-tung, Ché Guevara, and Malcolm X, the Black Panther Party adopted a revolutionary stance against oppressive white authority figures who sought to condemn the black population based on the color of its skin. Like a panther lurking in the shadows, the Party ‘attacked’ only when provoked, and without equivocation, Party members adhered to this principle. The Party had strict rules, which it sternly enforced:

- No party member can have narcotics or weed in his possession while doing party work
- Any party member found shooting narcotics will be expelled from this party.
- No party member can be DRUNK while doing daily party work.
- No party member will violate rules relating to office work, general meeting of the BLACK PANTHER PARTY, and meetings of the BLACK PANTHER PARTY ANYWHERE.
- No party member will USE, POINT, or FIRE a weapon of any kind unnecessarily or accidentally at anyone.
- No party member can join any other army force other than the BLACK LIBERATION ARMY.
- No party member can have a weapon in his possession while DRUNK or loaded off narcotics or weed.
- No party member will commit any crimes against other party members or BLACK people at all, and cannot steal or take from the people, not even a needle or piece of thread.
- When arrested BLACK PANTHER MEMBERS will give only name, address, and will sign nothing. Legal first aid must be understood by all party members.
- The Ten-Point Program and platform of the BLACK PANTHER PARTY must be known and understood by each party member.
- Party Communications must be National and Local.

- The 10-10-10-program should be known by all members and understood by all members.
- All Finance officers will operate under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Finance.
- Each person will submit a report of daily work.
- Each Sub-Section Leaders, Section Leaders, and Lieutenants, Captains must submit Daily reports of work.
- All Panthers must learn to operate and service weapons correctly.
- All Leadership personnel who expel a member must submit this information to the Editor of the Newspaper, so that it will be published in the paper and will be known by all chapters and branches.
- Political Education Classes are mandatory for general membership.
- Only office personnel assigned to respective offices each day should be there. All others are to sell papers and do Political work out in the community, including Captains, Section Leaders, etc.
- COMMUNICATIONS – all chapters must submit weekly reports in writing to the National Headquarters.
- All Branches must implement First Aid and/or Medical Cadres.
- All Chapters, Branches, and components of the BLACK PANTHER PARTY must submit a monthly Financial Report to the Ministry of Finance, and also the Central Committee.
- Everyone in a leadership position must read no less than two hours per day to keep abreast of the changing political situation.
- No chapter or branch shall accept grants, poverty funds, money, or any other aid from any government agency without contacting the National Headquarters.
- All chapters must adhere to the policy and the ideology laid down by the CENTRAL COMMITTEE of the BLACK PANTHER PARTY.
- All Branches must submit weekly reports in writing to their respective Chapters.

8 Points of Attention

- 1.) Speak politely
- 2.) Pay fairly for what you buy.
- 3.) Return everything you borrow.
- 4.) Pay for anything you damage.
- 5.) Do not hit or swear at people.
- 6.) Do not damage property or crops of the poor, oppressed masses.
- 7.) Do not take liberties with women.
- 8.) If we ever have to take captives do not ill-treat them.

3 Main Rules of Discipline

- 1.) Obey orders in all your actions.
- 2.) Do not take a single needle or a piece of thread from the poor and oppressed masses.

3.) Turn in everything captured from the attacking enemy.¹

The Party had a strong influence on blacks, particularly those in the inner-city. The Party educated blacks to free themselves from the shackles of oppressive governmental and police rule and to defend themselves when attacked by authority figures. The Party was not a racist organization, and did not believe that hating whites would solve the black population's problems.

The image of the Black Panther Party has suffered over the years because most people, both black and white, refuse to accept the fact that the organization was not racist. Many people continue to view the Party as 'blood-thirsty' and 'destructive.' Negativity is often associated with the Party, and many individuals are unaware of the Party's profoundly positive influence on blacks and the black power movement. The Party implemented a number of community programs – such as the 'Free Breakfast for Children' Program and free clinics – which served the impoverished, regardless of their skin color. The Party also fought for those who were wrongfully imprisoned and/or political prisoners.

The Black Panther Party has long been the subject of white America's campaign against racial tolerance. For more than forty years, the Black Panther Party has been bashed by white conservatives as a group of malicious thugs determined to take control of the U.S. government and discard all white positions of power. During its existence, the Party was berated by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and particularly by its leader, J. Edgar Hoover. At Hoover's request, the Party was infiltrated numerous times throughout its duration. Single-handedly, the FBI was responsible for deaths of a handful

¹ "Rules of the Black Panther Party" in *The Black Panthers Speak*, 2nd ed. ed. Philip S. Foner (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2002), 5 – 6.

of Party members. Whites feared the Black Panther Party because they did not understand the organization's mission, nor did they care to understand. Just as the majority of white America feared the concept of communism, they feared the idea of blacks living equal to whites.

Sources

Historical scholarship concerning the Black Panther Party is incredibly limited. Perhaps the subject is too new, in historical terms; or perhaps the subject is far too complex. Either way any credible, scholarly work concerning the Party is considered a rare find.

Where historical scholarship is lacking in secondary sources, primary sources make up for the lack with abundance. Nearly every prominent member of the Black Panther Party has released either an autobiography or a work concerning the Party, its principals, and its influence on the black community. Particularly important are Huey P. Newton's *Revolutionary Suicide*, Bobby Seale's *Seize the Time*, and Eldridge Cleaver's *Soul on Ice*. Also available are countless court documents, FBI files, and congressional reports which detail the Party's activities. There are also a handful of documentaries about the Party which include interviews and speeches. The most valuable documentary concerning the Party is Howard Alk and Mike Gray's "The Murder of Fred Hampton."

Chapter by Chapter Analysis

Chapter one focuses on the American black power movement. It would be impossible to discuss the Black Panther Party without discussing an important motivator behind the Party's formation. The roots of the American black power movement are debatable, but are undeniably embedded in the eighteenth and nineteenth century slave

revolts. Stemming from the abolishment of slavery in 1865 came the Jim Crow laws in 1876, which maintained 'separate but equal rights' for blacks. During Jim Crow's eighty-nine year juncture, many blacks spoke out against the system, as well as the importance of black history, black culture, and black identity, with Marcus Garvey and Malcolm X among the leading proponents of the movement. As turbulence contrasted with peace and love during the mid and late 1960s, a new breed of American activists preached the importance of black power through self-defense. From about 1967 onwards, the majority of black activists favored a militant approach to black power. Armed with knowledge, literature, and unconcealed weapons, black activists intimidated white Americans by threatening to use violence if necessary. Aside from the Black Panther Party, the Deacons for Defense and Justice are discussed in considerable detail.

The core of the book can be found in chapter two. After examining the roots of the American black power movement, an in-depth history of the Black Panther Party from 1966 to 1973 is discussed. During this seven year period, the Party experienced a considerable amount of ups and downs. The author breaks down the examination of the Party during this period in three ways. First, the backgrounds of founding members Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale are examined. It is of utmost importance for the reader to have a working knowledge on the backgrounds of Newton and Seale, including their political views. If one cannot understand and accept the philosophies and ideologies of Newton and Seale, then one cannot fully grasp the motive of the Black Panther Party.

The second step in examining the Party from 1966 to 1973 is to detail the formation, philosophy, and goals of the organization. The author paid close attention to detail when discussing the events that made the Black Panther Party a nationwide

sensation. In accordance, the spread of Party factions across the United States played a tremendous role in defining the Party as *the* most influential black revolutionary organization in American history.

Finally, the Party's long-standing bout with the FBI must be addressed.

Throughout the Party's existence, it endured numerous, devious plots and schemes orchestrated by the FBI. Central to the Party's legacy are the FBI bouts concerning the Black Panther Party/United Slaves Organization feud and the premeditated murders of Fred Hampton and Mark Clark. These two cases will be examined in great detail. While these are the two most famous cases, there are several other notable Black Panther Party/FBI bouts. While important, the cases of George Jackson and Geronimo Pratt will not be examined due to time constraint and the complex nature of each case.

Chapter three deals with the Party from the years 1974 to 1980. During this time, membership began to rapidly decline and before long, the Party disintegrated. Internal conflict within the Party affected the purpose and scope of the organization. While little is documented on this time period, the cause for decline, internal schisms, and the fate of prominent members are analyzed.

The summer of 1967 Race Riots comprise the fourth chapter. It is important to examine the causes and effects of the riots because they affected inner-city blacks across the United States. While the Party was not involved in either the Newark or Detroit riots, its philosophy and rhetoric played an influential role on inner-city blacks.

The fifth and final chapter focuses on the Black Panther Party's influence on the British black power movement. It is important to include a history of race relations in Britain, as it mostly parallels with the history of race relations in America. Stokely

Carmichael's 1967 visit to Britain had a positive influence on blacks, some of whom formed a branch of the Black Panther Party in London. Most black Brits found solace and encouragement in the black power movement and looked towards American radicals as heroes and mentors. Aside from the positive impact of Carmichael on black Brits, the negative impact of Britain's notorious faux black power advocate Michael X will be examined.

The true history and legacy of the Black Panther Party is revealed as the thesis argues that the organization promoted the idea of black power through its Ten Point Program, which advocated ten basic rights for black citizens, ultimately serving as the scapegoat for white America's interpretation of black power. The thesis examines the trials and tribulations which the Party and its members faced, including various run-ins with state and federal law enforcement. Aside from the organization's structure, discipline, politics, and philosophies, the Party's influence on blacks plays a major role in the thesis. The Black Panther Party's influence on blacks proved immeasurable, as its ideologies quickly spread around the world.

Chapter One

The Roots of the American Black Power Movement

On June 5, 1966, the University of Mississippi's first black student, James Meredith, led a solo march from Memphis to Jackson, Mississippi in protest to racism. During the second day of his journey, which he called 'The March Against Fear,' a sniper shot Meredith, critically wounding the young activist. After hearing the news, Civil Rights activists Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Stokely Carmichael marched alongside hundreds of demonstrators through the entire state of Mississippi in honor of Meredith. On June 16, Carmichael, then leader of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), lashed out at police by yelling 'black power' in response to police harassment.²

According to Peniel Joseph, a prolific scholar of African American studies:

The national media seized on Carmichael's words as the signpost of a new militancy. Martin Luther King Jr. distanced himself from the slogan and a triumphant Carmichael emerged as the spokesman for an entire generation of black radicals. For many journalists and political analysts the Meredith March represented a stark line between civil rights and the coming Black Power Movement.³

Carmichael did not create the movement, nor the principles which it encompassed. In fact, this was not the first time Carmichael used the term 'black power.' However, he gained national attention by becoming the first individual to openly and publicly use the term 'black power.'

In his book *Stokely Speaks: Black Power Back to Pan-Africanism*, Carmichael argued that "We [blacks] cannot be expected any longer to march and have our heads

² Peniel Joseph, ed. *The Black Power Movement: Rethinking the Civil Rights-Black Power Era* (New York: Rutledge, 2006), 2.

³ Joseph, *The Black Power Movement*, 2.

broken...”⁴ Carmichael favored a new approach towards black equality, a more intense approach, unlike the peaceful method associated with Dr. King. This approach towards black equality defined the black power movement, which demanded not only an end to racial injustice towards blacks, but also the promotion of black culture and black pride.

Carmichael continued:

Black Power can be clearly defined for those who do not attach the fears of white America to their questions about it. We should begin with the basic fact that black Americans have two problems: they are poor and they are black. All other problems arise from this two-sided reality: Lack of education, the so-called apathy of black men. Any program to end racism must address itself to that double reality.⁵

Black power demanded that black people unite as a whole and “speak their needs.”⁶

While there is no single definition of black power, the concept incorporated historical ideals which promoted black self-interest. Blacks were encouraged to embrace their African roots – from religion to music and everything in between. As Charles V. Hamilton, a black power advocate contended, “Black power has many different definitions and connotations in the rhetoric of race relations today. To some people, it is synonymous with premeditated acts of violence to destroy the political and economic institutions of this country...The concept is understood by many to mean hatred of and separation from whites...”⁷ Hamilton defined the basic elements of the black power concept:

Black Power must (1) deal with the obviously growing alienation of black people and their distrust of the institutions of this society; (2) work to create new values and to build a new sense of community and of belonging; and (3) work to

⁴ Stokely Carmichael, *Stokely Speaks: Black Power Back to Pan-Africanism* (New York: Random House, 1965), 18.

⁵ Carmichael, *Stokely Speaks*, 18-19.

⁶ Carmichael, *Stokely Speaks*, 21.

⁷ Charles V. Hamilton, “An Advocate of Black Power Defines It” in *Black Protest in the Sixties* by The New York Times Company (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1970), 154.

establish legitimate new institutions that make participants, not recipients, out of a people traditionally excluded from the fundamentally racist processes of this country. There is nothing glamorous about this: it involves persistence and hard, tedious, day-to-day work.⁸

As indicated by Hamilton, black power meant different things to different people.

However, the concept of black power strongly advocated the advancement of blacks in a positive way, a way which sought to improve the social, economic, and political status of blacks.

Just as there is no definitive definition of black power, there is no definitive link to any one particular event that sparked the idea of black power. Since the concept of black power is a relatively new academic topic, many scholars link the black power movement to either Malcolm X or Carmichael. However, one can easily go as far back as the American slave revolts to find early elements of the black power movement.

Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Roots

The Stono Rebellion, one of the earliest American slave revolts, occurred in 1739. South Carolina slaves congregated at the Stono River and led an armed march towards St. Augustine, Florida.⁹ While the slaves did not necessarily revolt in the name of black power, mainly because it was a then-unknown concept, direct correlations can be drawn concerning black power and the Stono Rebellion. The slaves revolted with the hopes of achieving emancipation so that they could live their lives according to their cultural background and beliefs. Several other important slave revolts occurred during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; they included the New York Insurrection (1741), Gabriel's Rebellion (1800), and Nat Turner's Revolt (1831).

⁸ Hamilton, "An Advocate of Black Power Defines It" in *Black Protest in the Sixties*, 156.

⁹ Kenneth Morgan, *Slavery in America: A Reader and Guide* (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 2005), 277.

Slavery officially ended with the passing of the Thirteenth Amendment in 1865, but tense race relations between blacks and whites still lingered within American society. From 1876 to 1965, the United States abided by the ludicrous Jim Crow system which maintained ‘separate but equal’ rights for blacks.

Another early example of American black power stemmed from black “self-help” organizations.¹⁰ Richard Allen and Absalom Jones’ Free African Society, founded in Philadelphia in 1787, sought to “help the sick and bury the dead among free blacks in the city.”¹¹ The Free African Society promoted the well-being of blacks as a united people, which led the organization to be considered as the earliest established proprietor of the concept of black power.

In 1875, Alexander W. Crummell emerged as “the leading black intellectual of his day.”¹² Crummell contended that blacks should embrace their cultural heritage and strive to learn as much as possible about their African roots. Crummell preached insistently on the importance of education and self-ownership. Booker T. Washington followed in Crummell’s footsteps. In 1881, the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute (later Tuskegee University) granted Washington a leadership position. The leadership position signified that blacks, particularly former slaves such as Washington, had not only the potential, but the ability to hold powerful and prominent employment positions.

The concept of black power existed during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries essentially without a title. Prominent blacks such as Washington and Dr. W.E.B. DuBois paved the way for twentieth century figures such as Marcus Garvey and Malcolm X, who took a more radical, militant approach to the concept of black power.

¹⁰ Edward Peeks, *The Long Struggle for Black Power* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1971), 8.

¹¹ Peeks, 8.

¹² Peeks, 8.

Marcus Garvey

Prior to the First World War, a young Jamaican-American by the name of Marcus Garvey founded the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), an organization dedicated to the rights of blacks. In his Carnegie Hall speech on February 23, 1923, Garvey contended:

We of the Universal Negro Improvement Association are determined to unite 400,000,000 Negroes for their own industrial, political, social and religious emancipation. We of the Universal Negro Improvement Association are determined to unite the 400,000,000 Negroes of the world to give expression to their own feeling; we are determined to unite the 400,000,000 Negroes of the world for the purpose of building a civilization of their own.¹³

Garvey's words suggested that blacks unite and embrace their cultural roots, which proved to be the backbone of the Harlem Renaissance.

Born in 1887, Garvey emigrated to Harlem in 1916, just one year prior to the start of America's involvement in the Great War. The UNIA had its roots in the Jamaican Improvement Association (JIA), founded by Garvey while he lived in Jamaica. The UNIA strongly supported the Back-to-Africa movement, which encouraged blacks to return to the African motherland. Using the Back-to-Africa movement as a catalyst for his UNIA, Garvey sought to "restore to the black man the masculinity stolen from him during the centuries of slavery."¹⁴ Garvey declared that the colonies of Africa belonged to blacks, and alluded that the black man needed to do whatever necessary to regain control of the colonies.¹⁵

¹³ Marcus Garvey, "Aims and Objectives of the UNIA," 23 February 1923, <http://www.marcusgarvey.com/wmview.php?ArtID=556> (10 October 2007).

¹⁴ Theodore G. Vincent, *Black Power and the Garvey Movement*, 5th ed. (San Francisco: Ramparts Press, 1976), 19.

¹⁵ Vincent, 20.

Garvey's strict belief in the Back-to-Africa movement rendered the way in which he chose to operate the UNIA. Due to his rigorous thoughts, philosophies, and ideals, he gained both loyal followers and hardened foes. One foe who strongly disagreed with Garvey's ideology was Dr. W.E.B. DuBois. DuBois strongly disagreed with Garvey's "interpretation of the racial situation in the United States, the 'unreality' of the Back-to-Africa idea, UNIA business methods, the pomp and pageantry of UNIA conventions, Garvey's dogmatic animosity toward the American labor movement, and the Jamaican's apparent dislike for light-skinned Negroes – a group which included Dr. Du Bois."¹⁶ Different ideals and values plagued a feud between Garvey and DuBois, which lasted indefinitely.

In 1923, the FBI charged Garvey with mail fraud. After his trial, Garvey spent roughly two years in an Atlanta prison. When released, Garvey fled the United States and never returned. To this day, speculation surrounds Garvey's alleged mail fraud trial. Similar to the tactics practiced during the FBI's Counter Intelligence Program (COINTELPRO), which began in the 1950s, the FBI spied on Garvey for years before finally charging him with mail fraud. It appeared as though the FBI sought to discredit Garvey by any means necessary, since mail fraud was the only charge the bureau could find after years of continuous spying.

Malcolm X

Garvey's words continued to influence blacks long after the Harlem Renaissance fizzled away. As Peniel Joseph contended, "many of the [black] activists who had come of age during the war years, such as the members of the Harlem Writers Guild, formed

¹⁶ Vincent, 59.

relationships with Malcolm X.”¹⁷ It would be impossible, and therefore erroneous, to discuss black power and fail to mention Malcolm X, the first media-radicalized black activist.

Born Malcolm Little in 1925, Malcolm joined the Nation of Islam while incarcerated on burglary charges.¹⁸ Always a controversial organization, the Nation of Islam, founded after the First World War, “preached a mélange of racial pride, personal discipline, and economic uplift as part of an unorthodox interpretation of the Islamic faith.”¹⁹ According to the Nation of Islam’s mission statement, members “are taught cleanliness inwardly and outwardly with the practice of good manners and respect to one and all.”²⁰ Despite this claim, former Nation of Islam leader Elijah Muhammad often referred to whites as “devils.”²¹ In any case, Malcolm found solace within the Nation of Islam and his role as a primary promoter of the organization provided the media with an opportunity to dub the organization as a militant black nationalist group that hated whites.

Malcolm embraced the concept of black power with a straight-forward approach. His riveting and hard-hitting speeches shocked white America to their core. In his June 1963 speech entitled “The Black Revolution,” Malcolm lashed out against peaceful Civil Rights leaders by asking:

How can the so-called Negroes who call themselves enlightened leaders expect the poor black sheep to integrate into a society of bloodthirsty white wolves, white wolves who have already been sucking on our blood for over four hundred years here in America? Or will these black sheep also revolt against the “false shepherd,” the handpicked Uncle Tom Negro leader, and seek complete

¹⁷ Peniel E. Joseph, *Waiting ‘til the Midnight Hour: A Narrative History of Black Power in America* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2006), 7.

¹⁸ Joseph, *Waiting ‘til the Midnight Hour*, 15.

¹⁹ Joseph, *Waiting ‘til the Midnight Hour*, 16.

²⁰ Tynetta Muhammad, “A Brief History on the Origin of the Nation of Islam in America: A Nation of Peace and Beauty,” n.d., http://www.noj.org/history_of_noj.htm (10 October 2007).

²¹ Joseph, *Waiting ‘til the Midnight Hour*, 16.

separation so that we can escape from the den of the wolves rather than be integrated with wolves in this wolves' den?²²

Although Malcolm was not the first black individual to speak of black unification and appreciation of black culture, he was one of the first individuals to publicly speak of the 'radical' ideas and philosophies of nineteenth century black nationalists such as Bishop Henry McNeal Turner and Dr. Robert Love. Of course, Malcolm was able to do this through the guidance and support of Elijah Muhammad.

Malcolm X preached insistently between 1960 and 1965 on the need for immediate black nationalism. After a falling out with Elijah Muhammad and the Nation of Islam, Malcolm continued to center his speeches on black nationalism and the Islamic faith. On February 21, 1965, while giving a speech at the Audubon Ballroom in Harlem, Malcolm was shot several times in the chest by assassins suspected to be linked to the Nation of Islam. Malcolm died en route to the Vanderbilt Clinic in Manhattan.

The death of Malcolm X did not signify the end of black power or of black nationalism. During the months that followed Malcolm's death, the black power movement gained national attention through the media. In August 1965, riots erupted in Los Angeles' Watts Ghetto. After police stopped a black man during a routine traffic stop, residents revolted against the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) and conditions in the Ghetto. Due to the strong influence of the black power movement, particularly on inner-city youth and young adults, blacks within the Watts Ghetto rebelled against the white man with the hopes of reclaiming their black identity and improving living conditions in the Ghetto.

²² Malcolm X, "The Black Revolution," June 1963, http://www.malcolm-x.org/speeches/spc_06_63.htm (10 October 2007).

Militant vs. Nonmilitant

A persistent problem amongst black revolutionaries during the black power movement was the question of whether to adopt a nonmilitant or militant approach. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. advocated nonviolent resistance through marches and speeches. Malcolm X favored a militant approach through armed resistance.

One of the earliest examples of black militancy during the black power movement was the Deacons for Defense and Justice. Founded in Jonesboro, Louisiana in 1964, members of the organization donned unconcealed weapons such as rifles and pistols with the hopes of curbing “anti-black violence.”²³ During the summers of 1965 and 1966, the Deacons protected Civil Rights workers and members of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) as they went about their business in the small town of Bogalusa, Louisiana. During this time, Bogalusa was regarded as ‘Klanstown USA,’ as anti-black violence was the norm. The presence of the Deacons scared racist whites due largely to the organization’s use of weapons and its militant approach.²⁴

As Simon Wendt alluded:

White supremacists soon learned that Bogalusa’s defense squad meant business. When several carloads of Klansmen shot into the Hicks residence at the beginning of April, fifteen armed Deacons repelled the attack with several volleys of disciplined gunfire. Sometimes, white hooligans who entered the black section of town suddenly found themselves surrounded by a dozen armed Deacons, quietly emerging from bushes and dark driveways. Few whites dared to enter the black neighborhood after news of the black defense group’s existence had spread.²⁵

Unquestionably, the Deacons made a distinct impact on the heavily racist town of Bogalusa. In true self-defense fashion, the Deacons firmly believed that “as a Deacon,

²³ Simon Wendt, “The Roots of Black Power?” in *The Black Power Movement*, 147.

²⁴ Wendt, “The Roots of Black Power?” in *The Black Power Movement*, 148 – 149.

²⁵ Wendt, “The Roots of Black Power?” in *The Black Power Movement*, 148.

you cannot fire on a man unless you've been attacked.”²⁶ As the Civil Rights movement faded away in the late 1960s, so did the Deacons. By 1968, the Deacons for Defense and Justice ceased to exist. Although the organization had only three branches (all in Louisiana), and only a dozen or so members in each branch, the Deacons had a tremendous influence not only on the black power movement, but on southern whites as well. The Deacons did not gain national attention like the Black Panther Party, but southern whites, particularly in Louisiana, were made well aware of the Deacons' presence.

With the 1966 formation of the Black Panther Party, the organization followed the Deacons' example by bearing unconcealed weapons and advocating 'violence when necessary.' Often referred to as a militant, anti-white organization, the Black Panther Party firmly believed in the Maoist principle, 'political power grows out of the barrel of a gun.' The Party believed in self-defense above all, and particularly favored resistance against law enforcement when necessary. During the height of the black power movement, police brutality against blacks skyrocketed. The Party felt that if law enforcement favored excessive brutality towards blacks, blacks should be able to fight back with self-defense tactics. Party founder Huey P. Newton contended:

The literature of oppressed people and their struggles for liberation in other countries is very large, and we pored over these books to see how their experiences might help us to understand our plight. We read the work of Frantz Fanon, particularly *The Wretched of the Earth*, the four volumes of Chairman Mao Tse-tung, and Ché Guevara's *Guerrilla Warfare*...Mao and Fanon and Guevara all saw clearly that the people had been stripped of their birthright and their dignity, not by any philosophy or mere words, but at gunpoint...the only way to win freedom was to meet force with force.²⁷

²⁶ Quote by Charles Sims in "The Roots of Black Power."

²⁷ Huey P. Newton, *Revolutionary Suicide* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1973), 111.

Newton's statement, "the only way to win freedom was to meet force with force," clearly emphasized the idea of violence when necessary.

Through the works of revolutionaries such as Mao and Guevara, the Party sought to promote the advancement of blacks in accordance with the black power movement. During its existence, the Party preached black power in its truest form: as a positive movement meant to teach blacks of their African roots and their importance and place in society, something they had been deprived of since the beginning of trans-Atlantic slavery. The Party experienced countless bouts with law enforcement, particularly FBI. Had former head of the FBI J. Edgar Hoover focused his attention on the Vietnam War rather than the Black Panther Party, the Party more than likely would have disbanded much earlier than 1980.

Black Power and the Black Panther Party

Like the Deacons for Defense and Justice, the Black Panther Party chose to accessorize itself with unconcealed weapons in case it needed to 'meet force with force.' Sadly, the Party is often remembered only for its militant apparatus rather than its profound influence on blacks during one of the most turbulent times in American history. With its roots deeply embedded in the writings of Mao, Guevara, and Malcolm X, the Party desired a 'united working front,' a main component of Maoism, which would create a single working class in which all ethnicities would become equal.

The Black Panther Party preached the importance of black power and the importance of self-defense. In a time when police brutality plagued mostly inner-city ghettos, blacks needed both protection and support. That positive reinforcement was the Black Panther Party. Through literature and speeches, the Party educated blacks about

the works of Mao and Guevara, and also the works of Marcus Garvey and Malcolm X. The Party emphasized racial tolerance, but advocated violence when necessary.

The idea of ‘violence only when necessary’ is often overlooked when discussing a militant organization like the Deacons or the Black Panther Party. To this day, many white Americans assume that because a black organization arms itself for self-defense, the organization must be hateful and violent. This assumption is as old and tiring as the undying race war that still thrives today in the United States.

Chapter Two

The Black Panther Party: 1966 – 1973

The Black Panther Party is one of the most notable revolutionary organizations in all of American history. After the passing of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and after the horrific 1965 assassination of Malcolm X, the Black Panther Party emerged in the city of Oakland, California. Founded by Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale in October 1966, the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense abided by an organizational constitution known as the ‘Ten Point Program.’ The Ten Point Program read as follows:

- We want freedom. We want power to determine the destiny of our Black Community.
- We want full employment for our people.
- We want an end to the robbery by the capitalist of our Black Community.
- We want decent housing, fit for shelter of human beings.
- We want education for our people that exposes the true nature of this decadent American society. We want education that teaches us our true history and our role in the present-day society.
- We want all Black men to be exempt from military service.
- We want an immediate end to POLICE BRUTALITY and MURDER of Black people.
- We want freedom for all Black men held in federal, state, county, and city prisons and jails.
- We want all Black people when brought to trial to be tried in court by a jury of their peer group or people from their Black communities, as defined by the Constitution of the United States.
- We want land, bread, housing, education, clothing, justice, and peace. And as our major political objective, a United Nations-supervised plebiscite to be held throughout the Black colony in which only Black colonial subjects will be allowed to participate, for the purpose of determining the will of Black people as to their national destiny.²⁸

Despite the Ten Point Program’s seemingly anti-white overtone, the Party was not anti-white. Seale, among other Party members, preached that the organization promoted

²⁸ Newton, *Revolutionary Suicide*, 116 – 118.

black power and black identity; the goal of the Black Panther Party was not to “fight racism with racism.”²⁹

Huey P. Newton

Born February 17, 1942 in Monroe, Louisiana, Huey Pierce Newton migrated to Oakland in 1945 when his father decided to move West in hopes of finding a decent job. During Newton’s childhood, Oakland consisted of two distinct areas: the flatlands and the hills. The hills were home to the upper-middle and the upper classes. The flatlands were home to the rest of Oakland’s population: the lower class. According to Newton, “Here [the flatlands] the majority of Blacks, Chicanos, and Chinese people struggle to survive.”³⁰

Despite poverty, Newton had a happy childhood.³¹ Newton was close with both of his parents and his brothers and sisters, as he contended:

We were not taught to fight by our parents, although my father insisted that we stand our ground when attacked. He told us never to start a fight, but once in it to stand fast until the end. This was how we grew up – in a close family with a proud, strong, protective father and a loving, joyful mother. No wonder we came to feel that all our needs – from religion to friendship to entertainment – were met within the family circle.³²

Newton and his family moved around the city of Oakland several times, which allowed for Newton to attend various primary and secondary schools. According to Newton, as a young boy he felt “uncomfortable and ashamed” of being black because of Oakland’s racist education system.³³

²⁹ Bobby Seale, *Seize the Time: The Story of the Black Panther Party and Huey P. Newton* 3rd ed. (New York: Random House, 1970),

³⁰ Newton, *Revolutionary Suicide*, 15.

³¹ Newton, *Revolutionary Suicide*, 16.

³² Newton, *Revolutionary Suicide*, 17.

³³ Newton, *Revolutionary Suicide*, 19.

Growing up poor and akin to his parents' financial strife, Newton vowed to not be plagued by money or bills. As a teenager, Newton became obsessed with a 'career' in gang-banging. The young Newton saw the potential to make a decent amount of money, which would allow him to live debt-free. Although a dangerous path to choose, Newton continued to gang-bang well into his young adult years.

During his junior year, Newton walked out of Oakland Technical High School. Due to constant clashes with teachers, principals, and fellow peers, Newton moved in with his sister in Berkeley, California and transferred to Berkeley High School. Things did not become easier for Newton in Berkeley. Newton's first criminal activity occurred when he chased a foe with a hammer, hitting him repeatedly.³⁴ Newton was accustomed to fighting because he was constantly picked-on due to his small frame and child-like looks. Shortly after the hammer incident, Newton transferred back to Oakland Technical High School and obtained his high school diploma. Newton declared:

My high school diploma was a farce. When my friends and I graduated, we were ill-equipped to function in society, except at the bottom, even though the system said we were educated. Maybe they knew what they were doing, preparing us for the trash heap of society, where we would have to work long hours for low wages. They never realized how much they had actually educated me by teaching the necessity of resistance and the dignity of defiance. I was on my way to becoming a revolutionary.³⁵

Although Newton graduated from high school, he was nearly illiterate. At this time,

Newton taught himself to read works by Plato, which prepared him for college.

Determined, Newton armed himself with his new views on education and life in general.

In 1959, he enrolled at Oakland City College.

³⁴ Newton, *Revolutionary Suicide*, 46 - 47.

³⁵ Newton, *Revolutionary Suicide*, 50.

While in college, Newton familiarized himself with African history. He joined the Afro-American Association where he and his peers eagerly read the works of DuBois, Ralph Ellison, Washington, and James Baldwin.³⁶ During this time, Newton became immersed in African history and the modern-day black struggle. Newton credited extensive reading and studying for his socialist views.³⁷ With his new-found views on race, society, and politics, Newton became a supporter of Malcolm X and the Nation of Islam; he even started attending Mosque. Always shifting in a different direction, Newton became “unsatisfied” with Islam and continued to soul search.³⁸ Newton’s constant open-mindedness to religion and politics shaped him into the revolutionary leader he would later become. Newton never stopped questioning or learning, which proved to be a valuable asset several years later.

Aside from constant soul-searching, Newton continued to commit petty crimes throughout Oakland and Berkeley. Burglary seemed a favorite pastime of Newton’s, as he wrote about his adventures uninhibitedly in his autobiography, *Revolutionary Suicide*. In 1964, Newton served time in Oakland’s Alameda County Jail on assault charges. According to Newton, he and another man, Odell Lee, got into an altercation at a dinner party. Newton was in the process of cutting a steak with a steak knife when Lee grabbed Newton’s shoulder, spinning him around and causing the knife to end up near Lee’s face. A squabble ensued and Lee charged at Newton, who still had the knife in hand. The knife penetrated Lee, who, two weeks after the incident, decided to press charges against Newton. At the trial, Newton admitted to stabbing Lee, but only in self-defense. Lee instigated the argument and the fight; Newton was merely protecting himself. He served

³⁶ Newton, *Revolutionary Suicide*, 63.

³⁷ Newton, *Revolutionary Suicide*, 69.

³⁸ Newton, *Revolutionary Suicide*, 71.

one year in prison and after his 1965 release, teamed up with Bobby Seale on the streets of Oakland.

Bobby Seale

In contrast to Newton, Bobby Seale grew up in a different environment. Born October 22, 1936 in Dallas, Seale lived with his mother, brother, sister, and cousin. Although not around much, Seale did have a relationship with his father, who was a carpenter. The family was very poor, especially when they moved from Dallas to Berkeley, then to Oakland.

In his book, *Seize the Time: The Story of the Black Panther Party and Huey P. Newton*, Seale skimmed over his childhood and focused the majority of his autobiography on his college years. Before college, Seale served with the United States Air Force. He did not adjust well while in the service, as he found it difficult to take orders.

Like Newton, Seale became fascinated with his African roots and the Pan-African movement while attending Merritt Junior College in Oakland. Seale first met Newton during a street rally in Oakland.³⁹ According to Seale, Newton had a tremendous influence on students at Merritt Junior College:

Huey was a large influence on the whole campus. I got to know where Huey was on campus. I wasn't a running part of Huey's then, but I was catching him on the streets. We would all wig out behind brother Huey, and I guess everybody respected Huey's mind and also Huey's guts. He had something about him, that he didn't drive over people, but he would never let anyone drive over him. Especially in a violent and rowdy fashion because – I didn't know it at the time but I learned later – Huey had a kind of hidden reputation on the block with the brothers.⁴⁰

³⁹ Seale, 13.

⁴⁰ Seale, 14 – 15.

It is important to note that, as Seale stated, Newton was not an advocate of unnecessary violence.

As his thirst for revolutionary knowledge continued, Seale joined the Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM), which was a popular college radical organization at the time. Frustrated by RAM's lack of demonstration, Seale teamed up with Newton and formed the Soul Students Advisory Council (SSAC).⁴¹ The main objective of SSAC was to "serve the black community in a revolutionary fashion."⁴² To make SSAC known on campus, Newton and Seale suggested staging a demonstration on May 19, 1966, (Malcolm X's birthday), that consisted of several "black brothers off the block, openly armed, on to the campus...to show them [both blacks and whites]...that Malcolm X had advocated armed self-defense against the racist power structure and show the racist white power structure that we [members of SSAC] intend to use the guns to defend our people."⁴³ To both Seale and Newton's surprise, members within SSAC rejected the demonstration because they felt it was too radical. Shortly after the botched attempt to bring armed resistance onto the campus of Merritt Junior College, Seale and Newton disbanded SSAC. Seale became employed at the North Oakland Neighborhood Anti-Poverty Center and Newton took a job as a community organizer. Five months later, the Black Panther Party would be formed.

Formation of the Black Panther Party

After the drafting of the Ten Point Program, Seale and Newton brought copies of the platform to workers and residents at the poverty center. When questioned why the organization chose a panther as its emblem, Newton answered, "The nature of a panther

⁴¹ Seale, 26.

⁴² Seale, 27.

⁴³ Seale, 30 – 31.

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.”⁴⁴ Again, Newton’s philosophy, in which he strictly abided by, reiterates the fact that the Party was not an extremist organization. In *Seize the Time*, Seale dedicated an entire section to the Party’s anti-racist beliefs. Seale contended:

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, Huey P. Newton, has taught us to understand that we have to oppose all kinds of racism. The Party understands the embedded racism in a large part of white America and it understands that the very small cults that sprout up every now and then in the black community have a basically black racist philosophy.

The Black Panther Party would not stoop to the low, scurvy level of a Ku Klux Klansman, a white supremacist, or the so-called “patriotic” white citizens organizations, which hate black people because of the color of their skin...The black man’s mind was stripped by the social environment he was subjected to in slavery and in the years after the so-called Emancipation Proclamation...

What the Black Panther Party has done in essence is to call for an alliance and coalition with all of the people and organizations who want to move against the power structure. It is the power structure who are the pigs and hogs, who have been robbing the people; the avaricious, demagogic ruling-class elite who move the pigs upon our heads and who order them to do so as a means of maintaining their same old exploitation.⁴⁵

The Black Panther Party understood and accepted that not all white people were racist nor sought to ‘bring the black man down.’ The organization also understood that there was a difference between black radicals and black extremists. Black radicals, such as the Panthers, demanded an end to the racist hierarchy that plagued many cities and states. Black radicals wanted to see the advancement of black people in all aspects of society, socially, politically, and economically. Black radicals were against racism, as they understood that attempting to combat racism with racism would defeat the initial purpose. As Seale profoundly stated:

⁴⁴ Seale, 65.

⁴⁵ Seale, 69 – 70.

It's obvious that trying to fight fire with fire means there's going to be a lot of burning. The best way to fight fire is with water because water douses the fire. The water is the solidarity of the people's right to defend themselves together in opposition to a vicious monster. Whatever is good for the man, can't be good for us. Whatever is good for the capitalistic ruling-class system, can't be good for the masses of the people.⁴⁶

An important aim of the Party was to educate blacks across the United States about the concepts of black power. The Party sought to bring the true history of the black struggle to the masses, and did so by distributing pamphlets, newsletters, and other forms of propaganda.⁴⁷ Throughout the pages of the organization's newsletter, the *Black Panther*, one could find articles on black power and black history, stories of racial injustice, posters promoting Black Panther propaganda, letters to the editor, and special commentaries from various Panther members.

As the organization became more popular with black youth, the Party expanded its boundaries. The death of a Richmond, California youth named Denzil Dowell on April 1, 1967 allowed the Party to formally introduce itself to authorities. The Party investigated the death of Dowell, who was shot by a cop after he supposedly ran and resisted arrest. The Party alleged that Dowell, who had a bad hip, could not have outran the cop and that Dowell did not collapse at the given location.⁴⁸ Dowell's killer was never apprehended and an official investigation was never held. The black community was outraged and Richmond became home to the second chapter of the Black Panther Party.⁴⁹ The Party's protests in the streets of Richmond gained the organization its "first

⁴⁶ Seale, 71.

⁴⁷ Huey P. Newton, *To Die for the People* (New York: Stronghold Consolidated Productions, Inc., 1972), 15 – 16.

⁴⁸ Reginald Major, *A Panther is a Black Cat* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1971), 73.

⁴⁹ Major, 74.

national exposure.”⁵⁰ The death of Dowell and the success of the Black Panther Party stirred anxiety amongst local law enforcement.

Oakland police experienced the Black Panther Party first hand in October 1967. A police officer approached and taunted Newton and a comrade while they sat in their parked car on Seventh Street in Oakland. The officer forced Newton out of the car and then searched and humiliated him by running his hands down Newton’s legs and around his genitals. After the search, the officer stood up, punched Newton in the face, and shot him in the stomach. Newton was transported to Kaiser Hospital where he was handcuffed by police and accused of the murder of Officer John Frey.⁵¹ During the arrest, officers and bystanders exchanged gunfire, which resulted in the death of Frey. After a long drawn-out trial, Newton was convicted of voluntary manslaughter on September 8, 1968.⁵²

The Spread of the Black Panther Party across the United States

The false imprisonment of Newton sent blacks across the country into an uproar. As a result of Newton’s conviction, Black Panther chapters emerged across the United States in cities like Detroit, Philadelphia, New York City, Des Moines, and Chicago. Chapters across the country promoted the ‘Free Huey Campaign’ which angered police. Police raided and bombed many headquarters across the nation in retaliation for the murder of Frey. One officer in particular, Michael O’Brien, went as far as to sport a ‘Gas Huey’ button while on duty.⁵³

⁵⁰ Newton, *Revolutionary Suicide*, 143.

⁵¹ Newton, *Revolutionary Suicide*, 174 – 186.

⁵² Newton, *Revolutionary Suicide*, 242.

⁵³ Major, 26.

During the same month that police accosted Newton, the Chicago chapter of the Black Panther Party formed. The head of the Chicago chapter, Fred Hampton, a young, charismatic revolutionary, made many contributions to the city of Chicago. During the late 1960s, Chicago experienced heavy gang activity. Chicago gangs were ultra-violent, and members had little or no regard for themselves or people in general. Hampton implemented a ‘non-aggression pact,’ which ceased the violence amongst rival gangs. In addition to the non-aggression pact, Hampton and crew taught educational classes to the poor, offered the ‘Free Breakfast for Children’ Program, and worked to make the ghettos of Chicago safe for women and children. As did the various other Party chapters, the Chicago chapter operated with the best intentions for the city and the people.

The Los Angeles chapter, headed by Alprentice “Bunchy” Carter, focused on the ‘Free Breakfast for Children’ Program. The chapter focused on the poverty-stricken areas of Los Angeles, including South Central. Both the Los Angeles and the Chicago chapters served blacks living below the poverty line. Many chapters operated in big cities with a predominantly black population. There were some chapters, however, that operated in rural settings such as Des Moines and Peekskill, N.Y.

Des Moines was, and still is, a predominantly white city. The formation of a Party chapter in the city caused disarray among many white community members and law enforcement. Little is known about the Des Moines faction; police raided the Party’s office in 1968 and a year later a bomb destroyed the headquarters.⁵⁴ After the bombing, Des Moines police officers arrested several Panthers and charged them with the bombing.⁵⁵ Although little is known about the chapter, the idea of a Panther office

⁵⁴ Major, 300.

⁵⁵ Major, 300.

located in the conservative mid-west city of Des Moines proved radical. Although the impact that the Des Moines faction had on the city is not concrete, it did bring the idea of black power to the city.

Due in part to the Black Panther Party, the concept of black power spread quickly throughout the United States, influencing inner-city blacks. Growing acutely aware of the black power movement, police lashed out by harassing Party members in cities such as New York, Los Angeles, Jersey City, Berkeley, San Francisco, Denver, Des Moines, San Diego, Philadelphia, Indianapolis, and Detroit.⁵⁶ In New Haven, Connecticut, police infiltrated the city's Party headquarters by placing undercover agents within the organization.⁵⁷

Cities across the United States became breeding grounds for the black power movement. While the idea of black power spread quickly throughout the United States, the Black Panther Party spread mostly in the northern United States. The Party concentrated itself in black ghettos, such as the Watts Ghetto. Cities like New York, Newark, Chicago, Detroit, Philadelphia, and Los Angeles experienced the greatest impact of the Party. New York City hosted an important Party chapter; it dominated the east coast followed by the Philadelphia and Newark chapters.

The Party impacted cities in different ways, from fashion to politics. The signature attire for the Party consisted of black pants, black leather jacket, blue shirt, and black beret; black youth eagerly imitated the Party's hip, but militaristic style.⁵⁸ The

⁵⁶ Norbert Finzsch, "Picking up the Gun: Die Black Panther Party zwischen gewaltsamer Revolution und sozialer Reform, 1966-1984," *Amerikastudien* 44, no. 2 (1999): 223 – 254.

⁵⁷ Finzsch, 230.

⁵⁸ Finzsch, 228.

Party hung posters on buildings to promote itself; many posters portrayed images of Party members running for mayoral and other political positions.⁵⁹

Many churches in cities such as Los Angeles opened their doors to the Black Panther Party. The Party used church halls to hold their breakfast programs and other community-based programs. Los Angeles also became a city of demonstration. The Party demonstrated mainly against police brutality, which was a major problem in the city. According to long time Panther Elaine Brown, the Party established a free medical clinic and a “busing to prison” program which helped those who wanted to visit relatives serving prison sentences.⁶⁰

Black communities benefited from the Party. The Party offered protection and safety on the streets. Since police brutality was a horrible trend throughout black inner-cities, the Party saw no choice but to protect the streets of *their* neighborhoods. According to Newton, black citizens often joined the Party right after their release from prison. This trend helped decrease police brutality, especially in Oakland.⁶¹

The Party established ‘police patrols’ designed to keep a close watch on the police. Panthers would follow police around cities such as Oakland, San Francisco, Richmond, and Berkeley with unconcealed weapons.⁶² The purpose of the patrols was to let the police know that brutality was no longer an option. Ordinary citizens also followed police and took pictures and sound recordings of acts of police brutality.⁶³

⁵⁹ *The Black Panther*, 1968 (on microfilm at Maag Library).

⁶⁰ Elaine Brown, *A Taste of Power: A Black Woman’s Story* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1992) 181.

⁶¹ Newton, 121.

⁶² Newton, 121.

⁶³ Newton, 120.

A Feud Provoked by the FBI

On April 6, 1968, two days after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., police shot and killed “Little” Bobby Hutton, one of the earliest members of the Black Panther Party and its first treasurer. According to Newton, who awaited trial in Alameda County Prison at the time of Hutton’s murder, the deaths of Dr. King and Bobby Hutton turned the streets of Oakland into a battleground; authorities feared race riots in black communities across the country.⁶⁴ Late in 1968 J. Edgar Hoover declared, “The Black Panther Party is the single greatest threat to the internal security of the United States.”⁶⁵

In January 1969, the Party lost two prominent members, Alprentice “Bunchy” Carter (“Deputy Minister of Defense”) and John Huggins, to senseless violence caused by the FBI.⁶⁶ Initially, the Panthers blamed Ron Karenga’s (the founder of Kwanzaa) black nationalist group, the United Slaves Organization (US).⁶⁷ The Panthers later believed that the FBI assassinated Carter and Huggins, not the US.

In 1956, the FBI implemented its Counter Intelligence Program (COINTELPRO), a series of obscure programs, with the hopes of sabotaging the Communist Party U.S.A. In 1967, FBI director J. Edgar Hoover focused COINTELPRO on what he deemed ‘Black Nationalist Hate Groups,’ including the Black Panther Party and the US. Entitled *The FBI’s Covert Action Program to Destroy the Black Panther Party*, FBI agents, along with the aid of Hoover, invoked a feud between the Party and the US. The Party and the US did not have similar platforms, nor did the two organizations agree with the way in

⁶⁴ Newton, *Revolutionary Suicide*, 196.

⁶⁵ Brown, 156.

⁶⁶ Carter and Huggins were murdered in Campbell Hall on the campus of the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA).

⁶⁷ Seale, 269 – 273.

which the black power movement was going. Despite their differences, the two organizations co-existed in a taut, yet relatively peaceful manner.

The seemingly peaceful existence soon turned violent as the FBI began to send cartoons to the Party and the US, negatively depicting each organization. The FBI, of course, alluded that the Panthers created and sent the US cartoons and the US created and sent the Panther cartoons.⁶⁸ Shortly after the January murders of Carter and Huggins, the FBI issued a memorandum (dated February 20) which stated that more cartoons depicting the US as an inferior, weak organization needed to be administered on behalf of the Party.⁶⁹ On August 14, US members murdered Party member Sylvester Bell and wounded two other Panthers. Days after the murder of Bell, the San Diego field office sent a memorandum to FBI headquarters suggesting the disbursement of more cartoons to the US.⁷⁰

Sources regarding the Panther/US feud are limited. There is great speculation that Karenga cooperated with FBI officials to induce a feud. Whether or not Karenga assisted the FBI in its attempt to sabotage the Party is not the issue. The issue is that the FBI intentionally concocted a feud which resulted in the deaths of three human beings. Regardless of their political beliefs, three men lost their lives due to capitalistic greediness. The COINTELPRO operation used to create a rift between the Panthers and

⁶⁸ Ward Churchill and Jim Vander Wall, *Agents of Repression: The FBI's Secret Wars against the Black Panther Party and the American Indian Movement* (Boston: South End Press, 1988), 42; It should be noted that the author is fully aware of the controversy surrounding Ward Churchill and his research. However, in his research concerning the Black Panther Party, he merely condensed the COINTELPRO papers dealing with the Black Panther Party/United Slaves Organization feud, the murders of Fred Hampton and Mark Clark, and the conspiracy surrounding the Soledad Brothers. Churchill provided no new theories or hypothesis. The author is using *Agents of Repression* merely as a guide to the COINTELPRO papers, as the original documents were inaccessible at the time this thesis was written.

⁶⁹ Churchill and Vander Wall, 42.

⁷⁰ Churchill and Vander Wall, 42.

the US was just one of the over two thousand programs implemented by the FBI throughout COINTELPRO's existence.

1969

The January murders of Bunchy Carter and John Huggins proved to be the beginning of a traumatic year for the Black Panther Party; one event manifested after the next. Throughout the year, police raided and bombed Party headquarters from Seattle to Peekskill. In April, New York City authorities charged twenty-one Party members with conspiracy to bomb (and commit murder) the New York Botanical Gardens and several large department stores throughout the city. At the beginning of June, thirty Party members from the Chicago chapter were falsely accused and charged with aiding and abetting a fugitive, even though no fugitive was ever found. During the last week in June, Stokely Carmichael resigned from the Black Panther Party.⁷¹ In early September, armed officers raided the Party's 'Free Breakfast Program' held in Los Angeles's Watts Ghetto. On October 29, authorities chained and gagged Bobby Seale during the Chicago 8 trial and, to complete the year, on December 4 the FBI illegally entered the home of Chicago Panther leader Fred Hampton ("Deputy Chairman") and Mark Clark ("Defense Captain") and murdered them as they lay half-asleep.⁷²

In the case of the twenty-one Party members charged with conspiracy to bomb and commit murder in businesses throughout the city of New York, only thirteen stood trial. According to Edwin Kennebeck, who served as juror number four during the trial,

⁷¹ Stokely Carmichael left the Black Panther Party due to an FBI plot. FBI agents sent anonymous letters to Newton and Seale, depicting Carmichael as a CIA informer. Although Carmichael had no ties to the FBI/CIA, irrational fear hit Newton, who ultimately fell for the FBI's scheme. Carmichael resigned due to tensions within the group caused by the CIA allegations. The FBI also attempted to instigate a feud between Carmichael and prominent Party member H. Rap Brown. In an FBI memorandum (dated April 1, 1968), agents suggested sending a letter to Brown stating that Carmichael and James Forman, a member of the Party and influential Civil Rights activist, wanted him [Brown] dead.

⁷² Major, 299 – 302.

the evidence brought to trial by Gene Roberts, a black man ordered by the FBI to infiltrate the New York chapter of the Black Panther Party, proved highly sketchy.⁷³

Kennebeck declared that tape recordings submitted to the court by Roberts were not only insignificant, but more importantly, did not give the impression that the New York Party intended to commit murder. As Kennebeck contended, a select few Party members joked about bombing various establishments throughout the city, but no Party member at any given time actually suggested following through with the bombings.⁷⁴

As the trial evolved it became known that Roberts also infiltrated Malcolm X's 'association,' and even served as one of Malcolm's bodyguards on February 21, 1965, the day of his assassination at the Audubon Ballroom in Harlem. As Kennebeck alluded, Roberts' testimony lacked any real substance. As the defense's main witness, Roberts contradicted himself numerous times before admitting that he had no solid proof that there was ever a plan to bomb any business in the Manhattan area. Kennebeck contended:

Roberts said that no one was ever told to attack subway stations. He was never given an assignment to bomb anything. He never knew Afeni [female Party member] to go to Virginia to get dynamite. He was the only one of the group to acquire aerosol cans for making bombs. No one ever got the five-gallon gasoline cans that King [male Party member] asked for.⁷⁵

Furthermore, Roberts admitted that, during a car ride from New York City to Baltimore with three dedicated Party members (William King, Richard Moore, and Michael Tabor), not one word was spoken about the supposed bombing of the New York Botanical

⁷³ Edwin Kennebeck, *Juror Number Four: The Trial of Thirteen Black Panthers as seen from the Jury Box* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1973), 73 – 80.

⁷⁴ Kennebeck, 81.

⁷⁵ Kennebeck, 84.

Gardens, the subway system, or any affluent business.⁷⁶ In May 1971, eight months after the start of the trial, the jury acquitted all thirteen Party members charged with conspiracy to commit murder – Afeni Shakur, Lumumba Shakur, Michael Tabor, Richard Moore, Walter Johnson, Ali Bey Hassan, Lee Roper, Joan Bird, Robert Collier, Curtis Powell, William King, Alex McKeiver, and Clark Squire.

Prior to the start of the trial, officials set bail at \$100,000 for each of the thirteen Panthers who faced conspiracy charges. One Party member, whose name remains unknown, suffered for seven months without proper medical treatment for his epilepsy.⁷⁷ Perhaps bail was set at an excruciatingly high amount because it was a Panther who faced conspiracy charges. Whatever the case, one thing was clear: law enforcement feared the Panthers.

Fear of the Panthers was evident in the 1969 trial of Bobby Seale. As part of the original ‘Chicago Eight,’ Seale, along with antiwar protesters Abbie Hoffman, Jerry Rubin, David Dellinger, Tom Hayden, Rennie Davis, John Froines, and Lee Weiner, faced charges of conspiracy and inciting to riot at the 1968 Chicago Democratic National Convention. In the early stages of the trial, which began on September 24, Seale became bitter enemies with the presiding judge, Julius Hoffman (no relation to Abbie Hoffman). When denied a request to postpone the start of the trial, Seale began to speak out, in court, against Judge Hoffman. Among other names, Seale insulted the judge by calling him a ‘fascist pig’ and a ‘racist.’ In response to Seale’s outbursts, Judge Hoffman ordered Seale bound and gagged in the courtroom. The humiliating punishment gained Seale and his fellow defendants a considerable amount of support from the public.

⁷⁶ Kennebeck, 87.

⁷⁷ Major, 205.

Unable to compete with Seale's verbal assaults and the public's increasing amount of hostility, Judge Hoffman ordered Seale to be tried separately from the rest of the Chicago Eight. Hoffman found Seale guilty of contempt of court and sentenced him to four years in prison, the longest sentence given for contempt of court at that time. Because of Seale's inappropriate courtroom behavior, Judge Hoffman seemingly based his ruling out of spite. Seale's words were enough to install fear in the honorable judge, ultimately leading to an unfair sentence.⁷⁸

Nearly two-and-a-half months after the start of Seale's trial, police officers stormed into the home of Chicago Party leader Fred Hampton and Party member Mark Clark, shooting both men to death. Police were able to successfully kill Hampton and Clark because they placed an informer, William O'Neal, within the Chicago faction. O'Neal provided information to authorities, such as floor plans to the home and the types of weapons that were in the home. Police also received information from COINTELPRO. J. Edgar Hoover praised COINTELPRO and stated that the program would successfully put an end to "black nationalist" and "hate-type organizations."⁷⁹ Furthermore, organizations like the Black Panther Party and the Nation of Islam, as well as individuals such as Malcolm X and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., were among COINTELPRO's top priority.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ On February 18, 1970, Judge Hoffman found the remaining Chicago Eight not guilty of conspiracy. Froines and Weiner were acquitted on all charges while the other five were convicted of crossing state lines to incite a riot. On February 20, Judge Hoffman sentenced the remaining five to five years in prison and ordered each of them to pay a five-thousand dollar fine. In November 1972, the United States Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit reversed the convictions, ruling that Judge Hoffman ruled with a 'cultural' and 'racial' bias.

⁷⁹ Finzsch, 229.

⁸⁰ Finzsch, 229.

Fred Hampton and Mark Clark

Founded in late 1967 by SNCC member Bob Brown, the Chicago faction of the Black Panther Party became headed by Fred Hampton in mid-1969.⁸¹ Hampton, a young charismatic leader who was heavily involved with the NAACP, preached insistently throughout Chicago about the importance of ‘liberation.’ Hampton strongly believed in liberation from capitalistic oppressors, for individuals of all colors. Due to his outspokenness and his determination, Hampton immediately became an FBI target. Hoover and his men feared Hampton because of his political beliefs and his determination to rid the streets of Chicago from violence. Hampton successfully combated violence between the notorious street gang the Blackstone Rangers and the Black Panther Party. The FBI and local Chicago law enforcement did not appreciate Hampton’s gesture because peace between the two gangs met less violence – less violence meant less murder – and less murder meant fewer black deaths.

According to then Illinois State’s Attorney, Edward V. Hanrahan, “The immediate, violent, criminal reaction of the occupants in shooting at announced police officers emphasizes the extreme viciousness of the Black Panther Party, so does their refusal to cease firing at the police officers when urged to do so several times.”⁸² A known liar and manipulator, Hanrahan was determined to end gang violence in Chicago. He targeted two organizations in particular, the Blackstone Rangers and the Black Panther Party. Although members of the Blackstone Rangers overwhelmingly outnumbered members of the Party, Hanrahan focused much of his attention on the Black Panther Party and particularly, Hampton.

⁸¹ Bob Brown left the Black Panther Party along with Stokely Carmichael.

⁸² “The Murder of Fred Hampton,” prod. by Mike Gray, 88 minutes, The Film Group – Chicago, 1971, DVD.

Hanrahan had a love/hate relationship with the FBI. During the last months of 1968, the FBI had successfully placed an informant, William O'Neal, in the Party. O'Neal, a convicted thief, took the job in exchange for extra cash and a clean slate.⁸³ O'Neal was well-accepted by the Party; he quickly rose from a member to Hampton's 'number three man.' O'Neal informed the FBI of Hampton's negotiations with Jeff Fort, founding member of the Blackstone Rangers. Once hearing of a possible merger between the two organizations, J. Edgar Hoover ordered letters to be sent to Fort depicting a Panther 'hit' on Fort.⁸⁴ The letters worked and negotiations between Hampton and Fort ceased. In March 1969, the FBI sent incriminating letters to Hampton, warning him of a possible hit. One letter read:

Brother Hampton:

Just a word of warning. A Stone friend tells me [name deleted] wants the Panthers and is looking for somebody to get you out of the way. Brother Jeff [Fort] is supposed to be interested. I'm just a black man looking for blacks working together, not more of this gang banging.⁸⁵

O'Neal's role as instigator did not end with the Panther/Ranger dispute. During the same month, O'Neal was ordered to cause a disturbance between the Party and the Chicago faction of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). Around this time, FBI officials informed Hanrahan of their 'agent provocateur.'

In May and June 1969, Hoover ordered the Chicago FBI field office to "destroy" the Party's 'Free Breakfast for Children' Program, something that obviously benefited poor children.⁸⁶ The attempts made by FBI officials to destroy the program were ineffective. Over the course of the next several months, FBI officials worked with

⁸³ Churchill and Vander Wall, 65.

⁸⁴ Churchill and Vander Wall, 65.

⁸⁵ Churchill and Vander Wall, 66.

⁸⁶ Churchill and Vander Wall, 68.

Harnahan to bring down the Party any way possible. In November, O'Neal provided FBI officials with a detailed drawing of Hampton's apartment, including furniture placement in all rooms.⁸⁷ On December 2, a meeting was held between FBI officials and police. During the meeting, strategies and tactics were discussed for the raid on Hampton's apartment. On December 3, Hanrahan obtained an illegal weapons search warrant to be used as basis for the raid.⁸⁸

In a 1971 documentary entitled "The Murder of Fred Hampton," filmmakers Howard Alk and Mike Gray accurately depicted the events that occurred at 2337 West Monroe. Prior to the slaughter, Alk and Gray wanted to produce a documentary about Fred Hampton and his positive impact on the city of Chicago. During the filming, the major theme of the documentary shifted from Hampton's life to Hampton's death. Used as evidence during the trial of the fourteen officers, the film proved to be one of the most valuable primary sources concerning the premeditated murders of Hampton and Clark.

Around 4:30 a.m. on the morning of December 4, police knocked on the door at 2337 West Monroe. When the occupants refused to answer, the officers busted in, spraying bullets throughout the tiny apartment. Fourteen officers participated in the fifteen minute shootout that ultimately left Hampton and Clark dead. Three women were in the apartment, one eight months pregnant.⁸⁹ Although the occupants had several guns and rifles throughout the apartment, it has not been proven that any were fired on behalf of the occupants.

One officer insisted that a woman (Brenda Harris) who was lying on a bed shot at him. To protect himself, he fired at her. The officer testified that a bullet grazed his

⁸⁷ Churchill and Vander Wall, 69.

⁸⁸ Churchill and Vander Wall, 70.

⁸⁹ The woman who was eight months pregnant, Deborah Johnson, was Hampton's fiancée.

shoulder and punctured the wall behind him. Upon closer investigation of the crime scene, it became evident that no bullet holes were found in the wall.⁹⁰ In a scene from “The Murder of Fred Hampton,” the director panned over the wall, only to find no evidence of any bullet hole. Hanrahan contended that the officers shot at the occupants because the occupants shot at them first. Harris was adamant that the officers opened fire on the occupants as soon as they entered the apartment.

Officer Phillip “Gloves” Davis shot Mark Clark directly in the heart. Davis insisted that a struggle ensued between he and Clark, after Clark was shot.⁹¹ During the trial that followed the December 4 raid, a Dr. Constantino testified that there was no way Clark could have struggled after being shot directly in the heart.⁹² Davis lied again when he testified that he did not shoot Hampton during the raid. An autopsy of Hampton revealed that a bullet recovered from his body matched the bullet specific to Davis’ gun, which he testified to using during the raid.⁹³ Lying was common throughout the trial of the officers and Hanrahan contradicted himself on several occasions.

Hanrahan ordered the conservative *Chicago Tribune* to publish his version of the raid, complete with a grainy photograph supposedly depicting bullet holes on the inside of a door, which would indicate firing from the occupants. Upon further investigation, the ‘bullet holes’ proved to be nothing more than nails.⁹⁴ When confronted about the inaccurate claims in the newspaper story, Hanrahan agitatedly stated that he was “unfamiliar with the picture.”⁹⁵ The *Chicago Tribune* also published a photograph of

⁹⁰ “The Murder of Fred Hampton”

⁹¹ “The Murder of Fred Hampton”

⁹² “The Murder of Fred Hampton”

⁹³ “The Murder of Fred Hampton”

⁹⁴ “The Murder of Fred Hampton”

⁹⁵ “The Murder of Fred Hampton”

three smiling police officers removing Hampton's body from the apartment. Hampton was shot numerous times including twice in his head. His body was dragged from his bed and dropped into the bedroom doorway.⁹⁶

The murders of Fred Hampton and Mark Clark outraged Americans from all walks of life. Illinois Councilman Tom Streeter contended:

This blatant act of legitimized murder strips all credibility for law enforcement. In the context of other acts against militant blacks in recent months, it suggests that official policy of systematic repression. The pious statements of State's Attorney Hanrahan concerning the brave response of the police against the vicious Panther attack and his allusion to the grace of God concerning the sparing of policemen only makes the situation more macabre and terrifying.⁹⁷

Protests and demonstrations were held across the United States. As the story unraveled, it became known that Hanrahan worked with the FBI in planning and executing the raid. United States Attorney General John Mitchell ordered an investigation concerning the actions of Hanrahan and the officers. All fourteen officers stood trial, but none were convicted for their actions on the morning of December 4.

In April 1971, a group called the Citizens Committee to Investigate the FBI raided the FBI field office in Media, Pennsylvania. The group found several boxes of documents that detailed various COINTELPRO operations. Determined to show the corrupt politics of the FBI, the group released the documents to the media. The public criticized the practices and beliefs of Hoover and the FBI after learning of the organization's fifteen year secret. In 1983, Judge John F. Grady ruled that a governmental conspiracy hindered the civil rights of Hampton, Clark, and the other

⁹⁶ Churchill and Vander Wall, 73.

⁹⁷ "The Murder of Fred Hampton"

occupants at 2337 West Monroe. The judge awarded \$1.85 million dollars to the survivors and the families of the deceased.⁹⁸

Clearly, Hanrahan and Hoover feared Hampton. Rather than viewing Hampton for his optimistic attitude and constructed views on society and politics, Hanrahan and Hoover regarded Hampton as a thug. Neither men considered the fact that Hampton was a productive member of society; the only fact they considered was that Hampton was a threat – a threat because he had the ability to entertain the public with the facts of black power and of white politicians' appetite for power and greed. Hampton firmly believed, and rightfully so, that the 'pigs' who controlled the government were only out for themselves. Poor whites were viewed the same as poor blacks; the government shunned those who did not have money and a high economic status. Hampton preached wholeheartedly on this principle, which highly upset the 'capitalistic swine.'

Fred Hampton is often viewed as a martyr in the struggle for black power. In one of his most famous speeches Hampton declared:

So we say, we always say in the Black Panther Party, that they [pigs] can do anything they want to us. We might not be back, I might be in jail, I might be anywhere, but when I leave, you'll remember I said that the last words on my lips [were] that "I am a revolutionary."

Hampton was willing to die for the liberation of the oppressed. In all senses, Hampton was a true revolutionary who genuinely believed in the Black Panther Party, the black power movement, and the abolishment of racism.

1970 - 1973

After the death of George Jackson, the Party started to steadily decline.⁹⁹ In early 1972, a split emerged within the Party due to Newton and Eldridge Cleaver's clash over

⁹⁸ Churchill and Vander Wall, 77.

the direction of the Black Panther Party. According to Newton, Cleaver “refused to abandon the position of destruction and despair...underestimated the enemy and took on the role of the reactionary suicide.”¹⁰⁰ Newton also criticized Cleaver for not identifying with the people.

Born August 31, 1935 in Wabbaseka, Arkansas, Eldridge Cleaver experienced a rough childhood. In his teens, Cleaver sold drugs and committed robberies, ultimately leaving him with a bad rap. In 1954, Cleaver served time at Folsom Prison on a charge of possession of marijuana.¹⁰¹ In 1957, he returned to prison, this time at San Quentin, on a charge of assault with attempt to murder. While in prison, Cleaver wrote a series of essays which detailed his life, his views on the black struggle, and his various crimes – particularly rape. In 1968, he published his essays in a book entitled *Soul on Ice*.

Cleaver admitted to being a rapist. He viewed rape as an “insurrectionary act” and admitted that prison made him rethink his actions.¹⁰² While incarcerated, Cleaver educated himself about black power and contended that “The price of hating other human beings is loving oneself less.”¹⁰³ In 1966, after his release from prison, Cleaver joined the Black Panther Party. He served as the organization’s “Minister of Information.”

As a very active member of the Party, Cleaver attempted to run for president in the 1968 presidential election. He ran under the Peace and Freedom Party, founded in

⁹⁹ George Jackson was a member of the Black Panther Party who joined the organization while incarcerated. Serving a one year to life sentence for robbing a gas station of seventy dollars, Jackson was active in the black power movement from behind bars. In January 1970, Jackson (along with two other inmates) was charged with the murder of a corrections officer in supposed retaliation for the murder of three black inmates. In August 1971, Jackson attempted to escape Soledad Prison with a gun that his lawyer smuggled to him. He was shot and killed after fatally shooting a prison guard. There is great speculation surrounding Jackson’s death, as many believe that Huey P. Newton ordered the hit. The tension between Jackson and Newton escalated due to differing views about the leadership and direction of the Black Panther Party.

¹⁰⁰ Newton, *Revolutionary Suicide*, 331.

¹⁰¹ Eldridge Cleaver, *Soul on Ice* (New York, Delta Publishing Company, 1968), 3.

¹⁰² Cleaver, *Soul on Ice*, 14.

¹⁰³ Cleaver, *Soul on Ice*, 17.

1967. Amongst his campaigning, Cleaver was severely wounded during a shootout with Oakland police. Charged with attempted murder, Cleaver immediately fled the United States and sought refuge in Cuba, Algeria, North Korea, China, and France. Through his wife Kathleen, Cleaver was able to stay active in the Party until the 1972 split. Cleaver returned to the United States in 1975 with a right-wing approach to governmental affairs and denounced the Black Panther Party.¹⁰⁴ The 1968 attempted murder charges were dropped, and Cleaver was placed on probation.

The 1972 split devastated the Black Panther Party. From 1972 onward, the Party began to rapidly disintegrate. Noticeably, the Party's 'heyday' lasted roughly seven years. Many factors contributed to the decline of the Party: internal conflict, constant FBI/police harassment, and new attitudes towards violence all crippled the Party.

¹⁰⁴ Eldridge Cleaver, interview by Bill Kauffman and Lynn Scarlett, *Reason* (February 1986): 23 – 28.

Chapter Three

The Black Panther Party: 1974 – 1980

Information concerning the Black Panther Party between the years 1974 and 1980 is extremely limited and difficult to come across. For reasons unknown, many Party members have neglected to write about these harrowing years, and many scholars seem to focus solely on the early years. There is no exact date when the organization ended, but it is known that the Party existed until roughly 1980.

Shift in Power

In 1974, police arrested Huey P. Newton for the murder of a seventeen-year-old prostitute named Kathleen Smith.¹⁰⁵ While temporarily out on bail, Newton fled the United States and sought refuge in Cuba. He officially resigned from the position of “Minister of Defense” and appointed it to then girlfriend Elaine Brown, who led the Party until its demise.

In her autobiography, *A Taste of Power: A Black Woman’s Story*, Brown divulged information about the oppression of women in the Party. Until her rule as “Minister of Defense,” no woman had held a leadership position within the organization. Brown described her inauguration:

They [members of various Party chapters] had come to Oakland this August of 1974 at my command... “I haven’t called you together to make threats, Comrades...I’ve called this meeting to simply let you know the realities of our situation. The fact is, Comrade Huey is in exile. The fact is, I’m taking his place until we make it possible for him to return...I’m telling you this because it’s possible some of you may balk at a woman as the leader of the Black Panther Party...If this is your attitude, you’d better get out of the Black Panther Party. Now. I’m saying this also because there may be some individuals in our ranks who have private ambitions and, in Comrade Huey’s absence, may imagine

¹⁰⁵ Brown, 356 – 357.

themselves capable of some kind of coup...If you are such an individual, you'd better run – and fast!”¹⁰⁶

Brown's strong will and fearless attitude symbolized a change within the Black Panther Party. Since women were viewed by many male Party members as inferior, Brown's words spoke for every woman dedicated to the organization. During her rule as “Chairwoman” of the Black Panther Party, not one individual challenged her role or conspired to overthrow her position.

Under Brown's direction, the Party became heavily involved in Oakland politics. Prior to the shift in power, Brown and Bobby Seale ran in the 1973 Oakland city council and mayoral elections, respectively. Although Brown and Seale lost, the duo managed to receive forty percent of the vote.¹⁰⁷ According to Brown, the Party's ideologies appealed to Oakland's black population.¹⁰⁸ At the time of Seale and Brown's campaigns, no black man or woman had ever held a powerful position within the city's government.

Serving the Community

From 1974 to 1977, the Party focused mainly on serving the community. The Party's biggest achievement was a primary school founded in the early 1970s. The Party also built housing for the impoverished, created an estimated ten thousand new jobs for the poor, and worked vigorously to restore the city of Oakland. In 1978, the Panthers assisted Lionel Wilson in his campaign to become the first black mayor of Oakland.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶ Brown, 3 – 4.

¹⁰⁷ Brown, 327.

¹⁰⁸ Brown, 327.

¹⁰⁹ Brown, 436.

Women and the Black Panther Party

Throughout its existence, the Black Panther Party attracted young, inner-city black women. A devout communist and active member of the SNCC, Angela Davis became one of the most recognizable revolutionaries of the 1960s and 1970s. As a long time supporter of the black power movement, Davis identified with the Party's politics and stance on revolutionary violence. She brought media attention to the Party in 1970 when she became heavily involved with the movement to free the Soledad Brothers. In her autobiography, Davis stated that "It was so wrong that they [Soledad Brothers] should be the ones to wear these clanging chains. Whatever the time it took, whatever the energy, these chains would be broken."¹¹⁰ In August 1970, Davis was charged with conspiracy to commit murder after a shotgun used to kill Judge Harold Haley, who presided over the Soledad Brothers case, turned out to be registered in Davis' name.

After the incident, Davis became regarded as a true revolutionary leader. Along with Brown and Kathleen Cleaver, she was identified as one of the most celebrated female Party members. They represented the ideal female revolutionary – strong, independent, and charismatic. It is interesting to note that some of the most notable and revolutionary women of the time belonged to the Black Panther Party even though the organization did not view women as equal to men.

Regina Davis (no relation to Angela) would find out first hand that male members of the Party did not view female members as equal. Regina Davis was in charge of the Party's primary school for children. When she openly criticized certain male members of the Party for not doing work to benefit the organization, several of those males viciously

¹¹⁰ Angela Davis, *Angela Davis: An Autobiography* 2nd ed. (New York: International Publishers, 1988), 264.

beat her, ultimately breaking her jaw.¹¹¹ When Brown reported the assault to Newton, he condoned the beating. Astonished, Brown contended:

The women were feeling the change...The beating of Regina would be taken as a clear signal that the words “Panther” and “comrade” had taken on gender connotations, denoting an inferiority in the female half of us. Something awful was not only driving a dangerous wedge between Sisters and Brothers, it was attacking the very foundation of the party.¹¹²

In the case of Regina Davis, it is clear that the Black Panther Party’s philosophies and ideologies concerning the treatment of women had drastically fallen by the wayside.

According to the Ten Point Program, the very basis and foundation of the organization, the Party called for an immediate end to the beating and harassment of ALL black individuals. This time, instead of the ‘pigs’ being responsible, it was the Black Panther Party itself.

Greed

By the early 1970s, Huey P. Newton had metamorphosed from a revolutionary leader into a paranoid maniac. In 1974, while at Newton’s house, Newton accused Seale of being a ‘traitor’ after learning that Seale did not physically assault his own cousin after a disagreement involving Newton. Newton ordered his body guard, Big Bob, to ‘bullwhip’ Seale twenty times for his supposed disloyalty to Newton. After the whipping, Newton revoked Seale’s position as “Chairman” and later denounced him as a member of the Black Panther Party.¹¹³ Newton was so outraged by Seale that he demanded Seale move out of Oakland. Always a loyal follower, Seale obliged.

Shortly after Seale’s expulsion, Newton ordered David Hilliard, a powerful Party member and close friend of Newton, expelled from the organization. Next, Newton

¹¹¹ Brown, 444.

¹¹² Brown, 445.

¹¹³ Brown, 349 – 353.

expelled Hilliard's brother June, and Seale's brother John, from the Party. Newton continued to isolate himself from his comrades by ousting members of the Party, some of whom had been involved with the organization since its foundation. Newton helped create the downfall of the most revolutionary organization in twentieth century American history. Although he was quick to blame his former comrades, particularly Seale and Cleaver, Newton can easily be viewed as the biggest internal threat to the Black Panther Party. By continuing to push those loyal to him away, credibility for the organization quickly began to dwindle as the question was posed, "How can an organization dedicated to the concept of black power, which emanated the importance of black unity, succeed if its members hate each other?"

Destruction and Demise

Newton regularly used drugs and alcohol, although a main rule of the Black Panther Party advocated against the use of drugs. Newton's unfortunate demise represented the internal struggle that all individuals – both black and white – eventually face in their lifetime: accede to temptation or stay true to moral beliefs. Newton had it all; perhaps he had too much. He organized *the* number one revolutionary organization of the twentieth century, which produced thousands upon thousands of loyal followers throughout the world. Newton created *the* premier vanguard for the black power movement, which brought him fame and notoriety. However, he succumbed to fame and greed, ultimately disbanding his role as a revolutionary leader, something of which he so blatantly accused Cleaver.

There is no question that Newton wholeheartedly believed in the black power movement and the Black Panther Party. His poor decisions, stubborn attitude, and

surrender to temptation prevented the Party from thriving throughout the 1970s. Elaine Brown proved to be a tremendous leader, but ultimately could not contend with the declining membership and disbandment of Party chapters. Had Newton remained in control of the Black Panther Party and continued as a stable, strong willed individual, the Party could have had the potential to last. With the emergence of crack cocaine, which consumed a large number of inner-city blacks, the Party could have served as the antidote. Perhaps the Party would have shifted its focus from black power, which had faded by the late 1970s, back to its roots – serving the community.

Conflict within the Party ultimately crippled the organization. Newton returned to the United States in 1977 and was acquitted on the murder charge of Kathleen Smith. Newton and Brown differed on the direction of the Party and eventually, as he did with all of his confidants, Newton expelled Brown from the Party and from his life. Fearing for her life, Brown fled Oakland in 1977.

Chapter Four

The summer of 1967 Race Riots

The Black Panther Party had a tremendous influence on blacks in cities across the United States. In the summer of 1967, violent race riots erupted in large cities throughout the country; two cities in particular, Detroit and Newark, experienced the most violent rioting. Although the Party was in no way responsible for the riots, its philosophy and ideology unquestionably influenced black rioters.

During the summer of 1967, often referred to as the 'Summer of Love,' the brutal Detroit and Newark race riots offset the gentle west-coast campaign for peace and love. In May, Scott McKenzie's pinnacle west-coast anthem, 'San Francisco (Be Sure to Wear Flowers in Your Hair), flooded radio stations across the United States. In June, Monterey, California hosted the pre-eminent Monterey Pop Festival, featuring over thirty bands/artists including The Jimi Hendrix Experience, Simon and Garfunkel, and Big Brother and the Holding Company. Gaining nation-wide media coverage, the festival served not only as a musical oasis, but as a promoter of peace and love, elements fundamental to the counterculture lifestyle.

Barely one month after the Monterey Pop Festival, the streets of Newark erupted into a vicious race war. A ticking time bomb waiting to explode, the city of Newark, located in the northern portion of New Jersey about five miles west of New York City, had the country's "highest percentage of bad housing, the most crime per 100, 000 people, the heaviest per capita tax burden, the highest rates of venereal disease, maternal

mortality, and new cases of tuberculosis.”¹¹⁴ Within the black community, nearly fifteen percent were unemployed. According to the New Jersey Governor’s Select Commission on Civil Disorder, the majority of blacks felt that equal opportunity employment in Newark did not exist.¹¹⁵

In 1967, the city of Newark faced monumental problems, both socially and politically. Mayor Hugh Addonizio’s primary concern did not rest with fixing the problems in the city’s ghetto. Rather, Mayor Addonizio sought funding for programs such as “urban renewal, highways, downtown development, and a 150-acre Medical School in the heart of the ghetto.”¹¹⁶ According to then-political activist and co-founder of Students for a Democratic Society Tom Hayden, the mayor’s plan for a medical school in the middle of the ghetto symbolized nothing more than an attempt to force out the ‘rapidly growing’ black community, a significant majority of the city’s population.¹¹⁷ In 1964, Hayden and members of his Michigan-based organization, Students for a Democratic Society, moved to Newark in an effort to help improve housing conditions.¹¹⁸

In the weeks leading to the race riots, Mayor Addonizio denied a prominent job to a fully qualified black candidate. As Hayden noted, Mayor Addonizio “became mayor of Newark with heavy Negro support.”¹¹⁹ This bigoted action on the mayor’s part caused considerable upheaval within the black community.¹²⁰ Reciprocating the mayor’s

¹¹⁴ Tom Hayden, *Rebellion in Newark: Official Violence and Ghetto Response* (New York: Random House, 1967), 5.

¹¹⁵ New Jersey Governor’s Select Commission on Civil Disorder, *Report for Action: An Investigation into the Causes and Events of the 1967 Newark Race Riots* (New York: Lemma Publishing Corp., 1972), 2.

¹¹⁶ Hayden, 6.

¹¹⁷ Hayden, 6.

¹¹⁸ New Jersey Governor’s Select Commission on Civil Disorder, 9.

¹¹⁹ New Jersey Governor’s Select Commission on Civil Disorder, 7.

¹²⁰ Hayden, 7.

attitude was the Newark Police Department. On Saturday, July 8, Newark police responded to an altercation between a group of Black Muslims and East Orange Police.¹²¹ As the Black Muslims lay on the ground, rendered defenseless, both police departments savagely beat the men. When word of the beatings reached Newark's black community, tensions increased. With tension high and emotions on edge, the city of Newark was on the verge of a full-scale race riot.

Four days after the altercation between the Black Muslims and the Newark Police Department, police arrested a black taxi-cab driver named John W. Smith. On Wednesday evening, July 12, police stopped Smith in what they described as a 'routine stop.'¹²² Patrolmen John DeSimone and Vito Pontrelli, the arresting officers, testified before the New Jersey Governor's Select Commission on Civil Disorders that Smith closely followed the patrol car for a block or so and maniacally swerved in front of the patrol car, before turning down a side street, all while driving on the wrong side of the road.¹²³ The patrolmen pursued Smith, eventually pulling him over on South Ninth Street. According to the patrolmen, Smith refused to cooperate with police orders; he ignored the patrolmen's request to see valid identification and used explicit words. Patrolman DeSimone contended that when Smith learned that he would be arrested, Smith opened his car door and punched DeSimone in the stomach and face. Patrolman Pontrelli concluded that he subdued Smith and placed the driver in the patrol car.¹²⁴ On the way to the Fourth Precinct Station, both patrolmen contended that Smith, while

¹²¹ East Orange borders the city of Newark. The Newark Police Department was called for back-up.

¹²² The New Jersey Governor's Select Commission on Civil Disorders, 105.

¹²³ The New Jersey Governor's Select Commission on Civil Disorders, 105.

¹²⁴ The New Jersey Governor's Select Commission on Civil Disorders, 105.

restrained, became ultra-violent, ultimately “striking” Pontrelli as he drove. But, as is evident, there are always two sides to a story.

John W. Smith’s story differed from that of the patrolmen. Smith alleged that, after passing the officers’ double-parked patrol car, DeSimone and Pontrelli pulled him over. When confronted by the patrolmen, Smith inquired as to why he had been pulled over. The patrolmen informed Smith that he “popped an intersection,” meaning that he drove thru an intersection going west in the eastbound lane.¹²⁵ According to Smith, he told the officers to “do what they had to do,” because he knew that the officers stopped him simply because he was black. The officers placed Smith under arrest, giving him no just cause as to why he had just been arrested. Smith denied Pontrelli’s claim that he had physically assaulted him on the way to the police station. In fact, Smith declared that one of the patrolmen struck him in his groin, rendering him unable to walk from the patrol car to the police station. The patrolmen dragged Smith from the patrol car and down the street until bystanders became vocal. Furthermore, Smith contended that he was beaten by several officers once he entered the police station. “He said that a policeman threw water from a toilet bowl over him, and another – one of the arresting policemen – struck him in the head with a gun butt and in the right side with a blunt instrument.”¹²⁶ At this point, one question lingered: Who fabricated the arrest – Smith or De Simone and Pontrelli?

Rumors began to surface around the Hayes Projects that a black man had been beaten to death by two white police officers.¹²⁷ Shortly after Smith’s arrest, a group of nearly two hundred fifty black activists surrounded the police station, demanding an

¹²⁵ The New Jersey Governor’s Select Commission on Civil Disorders, 106.

¹²⁶ The New Jersey Governor’s Select Commission on Civil Disorders, 106.

¹²⁷ The Hayes Projects were in close proximity to the Fourth Precinct.

explanation as to why Smith suffered mercilessly at the hands of law enforcement.

Around 11:30 p.m., an unidentified individual hurled a Molotov Cocktail at the precinct; subsequently, this incident started a black riot in Newark.

Violence erupted in the streets of Newark nearly two hours after the arrest of John W. Smith. Stores were vandalized, cars were set ablaze, and homes were ransacked. Word of Smith's arrest and of rioting in the Hayes Projects spread quickly throughout the city. By Thursday, July 13, "violence spread from the predominantly black neighborhoods of Newark's Central Ward to Downtown Newark; the New Jersey State Police were mobilized."¹²⁸ During the next forty-eight hours, New Jersey National Guard troops entered the city of Newark.

Rioting, looting, and protest lasted for six days before ceasing Sunday night, July 16. A total of twenty-five individuals died as a result of the riots, twenty-three of them black.¹²⁹ Seven hundred twenty-five individuals were injured, while over fifteen hundred were arrested.¹³⁰ Eddie Moss, the youngest fatality, was shot by National Guardsmen as he rode in the backseat of his family's car. He was ten years old. Guardsmen opened fire on the vehicle after Eddie's father stopped at a traffic barricade.¹³¹

The murders were senseless. The Newark Police Department and the National Guard proved careless in their efforts to combat the riots by opening fire on crowds, apartment complexes, and vehicles.¹³² As Hayden contended:

...military forces killed people for the purposes of terror and intimidation. Nearly all the dead were killed by police, troopers, and Guardsmen. The 'crimes' of the

¹²⁸ No author, "The Newark Riots – 1967," n.d., http://www.67riots.rutgers.edu/n_index.htm (29 October 2007).

¹²⁹ Hayden, 75 – 84.

¹³⁰ No author, "The Newark Riots – 1967," n.d., http://www.67riots.rutgers.edu/n_index.htm (29 October 2007).

¹³¹ Hayden, 81.

¹³² Hayden, 50.

victims were petty, vague, or unproven. None were accused by police of being snipers; only one so far is alleged to have been carrying a gun. The majority were observers; ten in fact, were killed inside or just outside their homes.¹³³

The media became caught up in the whirlwind of events which occurred over a five day period. *Life* magazine donned a photo of a slain black youth on its cover while news stations across the United States projected images of police brutality for the general public's viewing pleasure. White America was forced to face the truth concerning police brutality towards blacks. Inspired by the Newark riots and the message of black power, blacks in inner-city Detroit launched a riot of their own.

Detroit's Twelfth Street is best characterized by Van Gordon Sauter and Burleigh Hines as "an ugly neon scar running up the center of a four-block Negro slum."¹³⁴ Brothels, strip clubs, and run down apartment buildings lined Twelfth Street. In the early morning hours of Sunday, July 23, police sergeant Arthur Howison and his patrolmen cruised up and down Twelfth Street looking for after-hours drinking establishments and, in particular, the individuals who frequented them. Around 3:30 a.m., Sergeant Howison ordered Patrolman Charles Henry, a black officer in plainclothes, to enter the United Civic League for Community Action, a 'blind pig,' a place suspected of serving after-hours alcoholic drinks. If Patrolman Henry did not reappear to the police cruiser within ten minutes, it was to be presumed that the plainclothes officer had been served an alcoholic drink, which, according to Sergeant Howison, was immediate grounds for entering the place and making arrests. Around 4:00 a.m. the sergeant and his men invaded the Civic League, using a sledgehammer to break through the door. Sergeant Howison and his men raided the club, placed all eighty-plus patrons under arrest, and

¹³³ Hayden, 50.

¹³⁴ Van Gordon Sauter and Burleigh Hines, *Nightmare in Detroit: A Rebellion and its Victims* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1968), 1.

called for back-up assistance. The eighty-plus patrons were celebrating the return of two black Vietnam veterans.¹³⁵

As back-up officers arrived, crowds began to emerge in front of the Civic League. According to Sauter and Hines, the relationship between the police and “Twelfth Street regulars” could best be described as “edgy.”¹³⁶ Tension brewed daily between both sides, and it was not uncommon for “rumors, gossip, and charges” to be taken as “fact.”¹³⁷ As the crowd grew larger, a woman provoked onlookers by shouting “Brutality!” in response to hearing a rumor that police roughhoused a black woman.¹³⁸ Shortly after the last of the eighty-two individuals were loaded into the paddy wagon, onlookers began to throw bottles at the patrol cars as well as at buildings. These actions signified the beginning of the Detroit race riots, commonly referred to as the ‘Twelfth Street Riot.’

According to the Rutgers University research project concerning the race riots, the first act of vandalism came when several men broke the windows of an adjacent clothing store.¹³⁹ Assumed to be homeless, the men were upset that they were forced to leave the only place on Twelfth Street that provided them cool relief from the summer heat. From that point on, rioting and looting became the norm on and around Twelfth Street.

By the early morning hours of the second day of the riot, Mayor Jerome P. Cavanagh and Governor George Romney secured five thousand federal troops to be sent

¹³⁵ No author, “The Detroit Riots – 1967,” n.d., http://www.67riots.rutgers.edu/d_index.htm (29 October 2007).

¹³⁶ Sauter and Hines, 4.

¹³⁷ Sauter and Hines, 4.

¹³⁸ Sauter and Hines, 4.

¹³⁹ No author, “The Detroit Riots – 1967,” n.d., http://www.67riots.rutgers.edu/d_index.htm (29 October 2007).

to Detroit.¹⁴⁰ It should have been evident to both the mayor and the governor that, due to the increased level of violence during the Newark riots, which occurred only one week prior, bringing in military forces would only provoke rioters. As distinguished professor Hubert Locke contended, the addition of military forces into the city of Detroit did nothing but ‘add fuel to the fire.’¹⁴¹ Rioters set fires throughout the Northwest and East sides of the city, looting became out of control, and fighting erupted nearly on every street corner. On the fourth day of the riot, “the National Guard was mobilized...followed by the 82nd airborne... As police and military troops sought to regain control of the city, violence escalated. At the conclusion of 5 days of rioting, 43 people lay dead, 1189 injured and over 7000 people had been arrested.”¹⁴²

The Race Riots and the Black Panther Party

Shortly after the race riots, Party chapters were established in Jersey City, New Jersey and Detroit. By the summer of 1968, a Paterson, New Jersey Party chapter emerged, which made itself available to inner-city blacks in cities and towns along the east coast of New Jersey. The Paterson chapter also made itself known in the local political arena, often willing to peacefully negotiate with white politicians.¹⁴³

Above all, the Party emphasized the need for “community control of police.”¹⁴⁴ Undoubtedly, both the Newark and the Detroit riots began because of social and economic issues. Although President Johnson passed the Civil Rights Act in 1964, guaranteeing blacks the same rights as whites, racism still dominated politics in cities

¹⁴⁰ Hubert G. Locke, *The Detroit Riot of 1967* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1969), 36.

¹⁴¹ Locke, 36 – 41.

¹⁴² No author, “The Detroit Riots – 1967,” http://www.67riots.rutgers.edu/d_index.htm.

¹⁴³ David Boesel, Louis C. Goldberg, and Gary T. Marx, “Rebellion in Plainfield,” in *Cities Under Siege: An Anatomy of the Ghetto Riots 1964 – 1968* eds. David Boesel and Peter H. Rossi (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1971), 83.

¹⁴⁴ The Black Panther

across the United States. In 1967, Carmichael published his major work, *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America*. It was with this book that the average black American could read about the history of the black power movement as well as grasp its concept.

According to David Boesel, a former affiliate of the Johns Hopkins University, “an increasingly evident collective rationality” was apparent amongst blacks.¹⁴⁵ It would be illogical to maintain that the Black Panther Party did not promote the concept of black power, nor influence blacks into following the concept, because the Party’s popularity and philosophies had spread so rapidly across the United States.

The ideologies and philosophies expressed and practiced by the Black Panther Party were apparent in the race riots. The Party emphasized the importance for the black man to ‘stand up’ to the oppressive white authority figure and that is exactly what black rioters did. Although the Party did not initiate the riots, its repertoire had a profound influence on the riots. Black power was more than a statement; it was both a social and political movement. In an undated pamphlet entitled, “Defend the Ghetto,” the Party preached:

In our struggle for national liberation, we are now in the phase of community liberation, to free our black communities from the imperialistic control exercised over them by the racist exploiting cliques within white communities, to free our people, locked up as they are in Urban Dungeons, from the imperialism of the white suburbs.

Ours is a struggle against Community Imperialism. Our black communities are colonized and controlled from outside, and it is this control that has to be smashed, broken, shattered, by whatever means necessary.

The politics in our communities are controlled from the outside, the economics of our communities are controlled from outside, and we ourselves are controlled by the racist police who come into our communities from outside and occupy them, patrolling, terrorizing, and brutalizing our people like a foreign army in a conquered land.

¹⁴⁵ David Boesel, “An Analysis of the Ghetto Riots,” in *Cities Under Siege*, 331.

THE BLACK PANTHER PARTY IS THE REVOLUTIONARY ORGANIZATION STRUGGLING TO FREE OUR PEOPLE FROM OPRESSION, BY POLITICAL AND PHYSICAL MEANS. WE HAVE TO GET ORGANIZED, AND WE HAVE TO DEFEND OURSELVES.¹⁴⁶

The pamphlet clearly depicted the Party's stance on violence in ghettos. The Party supported ghetto residents defending themselves against oppressive white authority, but it also acknowledged that the oppressive white authority was predominantly 'racist white cliques.'

The Party appealed to Newark and Detroit residents because of the organization's stance against police brutality and its desire to defend the black community. While the Party seemingly condoned the race riots, it did not cause them. Many factors decided the need for a black revolt, including social and economic conditions, and the influence of the black power movement. With an underground newsletter (the *Black Panther*), several vocal public lecturers, and its militant apparatus, the Black Panther Party was able to gain nationwide attention as the premier black power organization. Its politics and ideologies were so well accepted by blacks that chapters quickly emerged in both Newark and Detroit and in surrounding cities. Due to lack of records, it is difficult to pinpoint exactly when each chapter formed, but it is known that the chapters formed as a result of the race riots.

¹⁴⁶ "Defend the Ghetto," in *The Black Panthers Speak*, 180.

Chapter Five

Black Power in Britain and the British Black Panther Party

Just as it did in America, the black power movement became a staple in mid twentieth century Britain. The black power movement promoted black culture – including art, literature, and history – as well as the advancement of black people as a whole. At a time of universal racial strife, it was no real surprise that the concept of black power inspired blacks around the world. From 1964 to 1976, black power influenced British society and the way in which blacks thought, spoke, and dressed. Many black Brits became heavily involved in politics and the black power movement with the hopes of achieving not only racial justice, but an elevated conscience regarding their own identity.

The black power movement in Britain provided an outlet for animosity and captivated blacks from all backgrounds and walks of life. Due to the success of promoting black culture in a time of racial strife, it is surprising that little is documented about the British black power movement and in particular, British black power organizations. Many academic sources compare the British black power movement to the American black power movement; a wealth of information is available about the American movement. It would be impossible to discuss the British movement without discussing the American movement and it would be absurd to call the black power movement ‘radical.’

Often times, the terms ‘radical’ and ‘radicalism’ are misused. For an idea or philosophy to be considered radical, it would have to mean that a particular idea or philosophy had never previously been conceived. Black power was not a radical concept in twentieth century Britain, nor was it a radical concept in twentieth century America. The goal of black power was simply to promote black awareness within the black community. In theory, the concept of black power was driven by nothing more than common sense and a desire within blacks to exalt their cultural heritage. The roots of British black power can be traced to the island of Trinidad, a former British colony.

Black Power in Trinidad

Trinidad, a large island just east of the Venezuelan coast, played a significant role in the British black power movement. Colonized by Britain in 1797, Trinidad, along with several other islands, formed the British West Indies. Social structure in Trinidad during the early part of the twentieth century consisted of the elite – wealthy, white property owners; the middle class – native whites and Western European immigrants; the working class – mulattoes; and the lower class – blacks.¹⁴⁷

One of Trinidad’s earliest radical organizations was the Trinidad Workingmen’s Association (TWA), founded in 1897.¹⁴⁸ Formed to ensure the rights of Trinidadian workers, the TWA quickly shifted its agenda to include the support of political reform on the island. In 1919, just one year after the end of the First World War, the TWA organized a massive fourteen-day strike that shocked white Trinidadians.

The 1919 Longshoremen’s Strike was one of the earliest documented black power demonstrations in twentieth century Trinidad. Black dock-workers launched a strike that

¹⁴⁷ Selwyn D. Ryan, *Race and Nationalism in Trinidad and Tobago: A Study of Decolonization in a Multiracial Society* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972), 19 – 20.

¹⁴⁸ Ryan, 26.

resulted in a massive upheaval against white business owners.¹⁴⁹ In theory, black dockworkers staged the monumental strike in response to a denied request for an increase in wages. In actuality, the strike was about much more than a pay increase; it was about the oppression black workers endured at the hands of white business owners.

Having served during the Great War on the side of their British overseers, many blacks felt that they paid their dues to their motherland and should no longer be subjected to working for white racists for a measly pay. Blacks were still outcasts in the eyes of whites, even after many courageously fought for their country in a war in which they reaped little benefits. For many black veterans, extreme bitterness and hostility towards unappreciative white men became the norm. In Port-of-Spain, tensions reached exorbitant levels and as a result, the TWA organized the strike.¹⁵⁰

On December 1, led by members of the TWA, longshoremen “invaded shipping warehouses, forced scabs off the premises, then marched through Port-of-Spain, causing commercial establishments to close down.”¹⁵¹ The violent terrorizing of Port-of-Spain lasted for several days. On December 4th Trinidadian governor John Chancellor declared Port-of-Spain a “disaster.”¹⁵² The short yet effective demonstration sparked a new political movement amongst blacks throughout the British West Indies: the black power movement. Although protests like the 1919 Longshoremen’s Strike promoted black solidarity, black power would not have influenced black Britain if not for the American black power movement. Certainly instances like the 1919 Longshoremen’s Strike

¹⁴⁹ W.F. Elkins, “Black Power in the British West Indies: The Trinidad Longshoremen’s Strike of 1919,” *Science & Society* 33, no. 1 (1969): 71.

¹⁵⁰ Ryan, 29.

¹⁵¹ Elkins, “Black Power in the British West Indies,” 73.

¹⁵² Tony Martin, “Revolutionary Upheaval in Trinidad, 1919: Views from British and American Sources.” *The Journal of Negro History* 58, no. 3 (1973): 322.

influenced black Brits, but the biggest influence for the British black power movement was the American black power movement and its charismatic participants.

American Black Power Influence

Among the many participants in the American black power movement, Stokely Carmichael made a profound impact on British radicals. A native Trinidadian, Carmichael was born in Port-of-Spain twenty-two years after the notorious 1919 Longshoremen's Strike. As a young adult, Carmichael became heavily involved with the SNCC, the Civil Rights Movement, and the Black Panther Party. Carmichael was one of the first radicals to publish writings concerning the black power movement. Released at a time of moral panic in the United States, *Black Power* allowed Carmichael to travel abroad and preach the philosophies of black power to Britain, a nation that faced the same racial tensions as the United States. Carmichael's 1967 visit to Britain signified the beginning of the British black power movement.

In July, Carmichael presented a paper regarding black power at the International Congress of Dialects of Liberation. The gist of Carmichael's paper focused on white oppression towards blacks in third world countries.¹⁵³ Carmichael argued that the white man had demoralized the black man for far too long; he called for a revolutionary change in the form of black power. Carmichael confidently declared black power as "the coming together of black people to fight for their liberation – by any means necessary."¹⁵⁴ Carmichael's words electrified black Brits; no figure in British history had ever spoken so passionately about blacks or black power.¹⁵⁵ Carmichael's references to Niccolo

¹⁵³ Dilip Hiro, *Black British, White British* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1971), 64.

¹⁵⁴ Derek Humphry and David Tindall, *False Messiah: The Story of Michael X* (London: Hart-Davis, MacGibbon Ltd., 1977), 63.

¹⁵⁵ Humphry and Tindall, 63.

Machiavelli and Mao Tse-Tung proved his genius and shocked white Brits. Prominent newspapers such as *The Times* and *The Daily Mirror* labeled Carmichael as a dangerous intellectual.¹⁵⁶ According to Obi Egbuna, a staple in the British black power movement, Carmichael's words rang true to the overwhelming majority of black Brits.¹⁵⁷

Carmichael exuberantly declared, "I have something against England, I really do, because when I was young I had to read all that rot about how good England was to Trinidad, while she was raping us left and right!"¹⁵⁸ Carmichael aroused the black community, appalled whites, and scared the hell out of British government – he was banned from Britain for life.

Black Power in 1960s Britain

Prior to a post Second World War migration boom, Britain was a predominantly 'white country.'¹⁵⁹ The influx of immigrants from the Caribbean, India, and Africa caused Britain to become a 'multi-cultural' and 'multi-racial' society.¹⁶⁰ It is not to say that blacks were never present in Britain, but rather never before had there been such an increase within Britain's black population. Afro-Caribbean/West Indians comprised the overwhelming majority of Britain's newest immigrants.

Due to the new wave of British immigrants, racial tensions heightened across the country. Adequate housing and employment were scarce for immigrants.¹⁶¹ Immigrants lashed out on government officials and policymakers, which inevitably caused the

¹⁵⁶ Humphry and Tindall, 63.

¹⁵⁷ Obi Egbuna, *Destroy this Temple: The Voice of Black Power in Britain* (New York: William & Morrow Company, Inc., 1971), 18.

¹⁵⁸ Carmichael, *Stokely Speaks*, 85.

¹⁵⁹ Harry Goulbourne, *Race Relations in Britain since 1945* (New York: St. Martin's Press, Inc., 1998), 25.

¹⁶⁰ Goulbourne, 26.

¹⁶¹ Goulbourne, 78.

already intense racial tension to escalate. Just as it was in America, by the early 1960s, Britain found itself at the center of a race war.

In an effort to combat immigration, Parliament passed the 1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Act. The Act prohibited Commonwealth immigrants, except for those with employment vouchers, from settling in Britain.¹⁶² Disgusted by Parliament's blatant discrimination, a small group of individuals led by Mrs. Marion Glean formed The Campaign Against Racial Discrimination (CARD) in late 1964.

The goal of CARD was to "energize and unify disparate groups of coloured immigrants at the same time that it presented a united front in pressing for the alteration of national policy."¹⁶³ In January 1965, CARD officially commenced its duties and activities. CARD's first act of business was to propose an anti-discrimination law which would overturn the 1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Act.¹⁶⁴ Although it had decent intentions, CARD simply simulated the white perspective on race relations rather than the black perspective, since most members of the organization were white.¹⁶⁵

In spring 1965, Parliament passed the Race Relations Act. "The 1965 Act made it unlawful (a breach of *civil* rather than *criminal* law) to refuse anyone access, on racial grounds, to public places such as hotels, pubs, restaurants, cinemas, public transport or any place run by a public authority. Stirring up racial hatred ('incitement') became a criminal offence at the same time."¹⁶⁶ The 1965 Act was nothing more than a 'starting point' towards the end of racial discrimination in Britain. The 1965 Act did not prevent

¹⁶² Benjamin W. Heineman, Jr., *The Politics of the Powerless: A Study of the Campaign Against Racial Discrimination* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), 17 – 19.

¹⁶³ Heineman, Jr., 1.

¹⁶⁴ Heineman, Jr., 23 – 24.

¹⁶⁵ Chris Mullard, *Black Britain* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1973), 140.

¹⁶⁶ No author, "1965: Britain's First Race Relations Act," n.d., http://www.cre.gov.uk/40years/act_one.html (30 April 2007).

discrimination in employment or housing; two important areas of concern amongst immigrants.

During the same year, Britain witnessed its first experience with black power. In 1965, black radical Michael X formed the Racial Adjustment Action Society (RAAS). RAAS was responsible for the first racial strike in Britain. As Trinidadian longshoremen struck in 1919 for pay increase, workers at a Preston textile factory struck under the same condition. RAAS supported the strike and named itself the official advisors of the monumental strike.¹⁶⁷ Just as RAAS wanted, the strike captivated Brits, both white and black. Press and media coverage was limitless; Michael engaged Brits with his claims that RAAS was a powerful militant organization and that RAAS had over sixty-thousand members nationwide.¹⁶⁸

Michael was not a stranger to controversy. Born near Port-of-Spain Trinidad in 1933 with the name Michael de Freitas, Michael migrated to the Notting Hill district of London in 1957. In Notting Hill, he hustled women and pushed illegal drugs. He was a well-known, well-recognized local pimp who was often in trouble with the law. Until his involvement in the British black power movement, Michael spent his years avoiding the law by voyaging back and forth between Britain and Trinidad.

Michael gained enormous press coverage because of his involvement in the Preston textile strike as well as his adamant stance against white men. Michael assumed the name Michael X after a friend suggested that Michael was the British version of the great American black power leader Malcolm X.¹⁶⁹ Rather than focusing on the plight of the British black power movement, Michael became absorbed in himself and caught up in

¹⁶⁷ Humphry and Tindall, 49.

¹⁶⁸ Humphry and Tindall, 50.

¹⁶⁹ Humphry and Tindall, 55.

the whirlwind of media attention. Although Michael preached against the role of whites in black organizations, RAAS, with its heightened popularity, began to accept whites as “associate members.”¹⁷⁰

Although terribly disorganized and lacking stable leadership, RAAS helped to advance the black power movement. Michael’s boisterous and flamboyant persona helped deliver black power into mainstream British society. However, the story of Michael X is two-fold. Michael did help promote black power in Britain and he was important to the movement. However, Michael created his own prison for himself because of his dual-personality and scatterbrained ideas.

Michael was an individual who was quick to ‘jump on the bandwagon.’ Michael became intrigued by the American ‘flower power’ movement in 1967. He saw a great opportunity to gain public notoriety: endorsing the legalization of marijuana.¹⁷¹ Shifting his attention from the black power movement, Michael abandoned his militant-like clothing (black pants, black shirt, black beret) for Edwardian-inspired threads (paisley trousers, satin shirt, and white shoes).¹⁷² Decked out in his new apparatus, Michael gave a black power speech in Reading on July 24th. In his speech, Michael attacked the entire white populace, including whites who favored black power. *The Times* published Michael’s speech with the headline: “Bitter Attack on Whites.”¹⁷³ Shortly after the publication, Michael was charged and convicted on the grounds of inciting racial hatred. He served a one year imprisonment.

¹⁷⁰ Michael Abdul Malik, *From Michael de Freitas to Michael X* (Great Britain: Andre Deutsch Limited, 1968), 165 – 166.

¹⁷¹ Humphry and Tindall, 59.

¹⁷² Humphry and Tindall, 60.

¹⁷³ Humphry and Tindall, 65.

British authors and activists Gus John and Derek Humphry said it best: “What America has today, Britain so often copies tomorrow.”¹⁷⁴ Shortly after the mainstream explosion of Pantherism in the United States, Britain experienced an underground explosion in Pantherism. Adhering to original Panther principles, British Panthers did not seek unnecessary violence or ill-will towards whites. Instead, British Panthers maintained that they were amicable until attacked – just like a panther.¹⁷⁵

Little is documented about the British faction of the Black Panther Party. Formed in 1967, the British Panthers operated under the same basic principals as the American Panthers. Obi Egbuna, a founder of the British Black Panther Party contended:

We began the Panthers with only three or four members, but we had learnt from the old UCPA that what really mattered was not the number of beginners, but the ideological unity, mutual trust and solidarity of purpose which would cement the core together and the discipline and maturity with which they were prepared to implement it.

Though we were so few we could have held our meetings in a telephone box if we had wished, the degree of solidarity between us was so great we felt that, had we actually done so, we should not have attracted attention because it would have been like one man standing there. I worked like magic. Our ideological oneness and unflinching dedication to the cause became so infectious that Pantherism soon began to spread like wild-fire.¹⁷⁶

As did the American Panthers, the British Panthers launched their own monthly newsletter entitled *Black Power Speaks*. Distributed in and around London, the newsletter forced black Brits to wake up and face the countless instances of racial injustices across Britain. *Black Power Speaks* was cancelled after just three issues; according to Egbuna, it was too powerful.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁴ Gus John and Derek Humphry, *Because They're Black* (England: Penguin Books, Ltd., 1971), 134.

¹⁷⁵ John and Humphry, 135.

¹⁷⁶ Egbuna, 21 – 22.

¹⁷⁷ Egbuna, 23.

Even with the cancellation of *Black Power Speaks*, the British Black Panther Party gained an eclectic group of supporters. Blacks were not the only individuals attracted to the Panthers. Indians, Pakistanis, and even whites were drawn to the militant apparatus of the Party.¹⁷⁸ At an early Panther rally in London, blacks and whites protested together against the charges filed against American Panther Bobby Seale.¹⁷⁹ The camaraderie between blacks and whites showed that the Black Panther Party was not an ‘anti-white’ group like Michael X’s Black House. Instead, the Black Panther Party promoted the spread of black power and black equality.

In 1968, Parliament passed its second Race Relations Act. The Act coincided with the 1965 Act, but included that “it was unlawful to discriminate on racial grounds in new areas such as employment, providing goods, facilities, or services, housing, and trade unions. It also covered advertising.”¹⁸⁰ The 1968 Act still had its faults – it still permitted racial discrimination in, amongst other provisions, small residential habitats (where a landlord or family members lived on the premises) and in small businesses (fewer than twenty-five persons). It would not be until 1976, that a Race Relations Act would be passed that guaranteed equal rights and liberties to all British citizens.

Black Power in 1970s Britain

In 1969 and 1970, Michael X reemerged in the black power movement. After his stint in a British prison, Michael changed his name from Michael X to Michael Abdul Malik, in honor of his ‘Muslim brothers.’ Michael released his autobiography *From Michael de Freitas to Michael X*, but it flopped. The autobiography contained little about

¹⁷⁸ John and Humphry, 134.

¹⁷⁹ John and Humphry, 146.

¹⁸⁰ No author, “1968: Britain’s Second Race Relations Act,” n.d., http://www.cre.gov.uk/40years/act_two.html (30 April 2007).

his involvement with RAAS, nor did it examine his own role in the black power movement.

Michael did, however, create the Black House, a radical black power organization that flourished from late 1969 to late 1970. The purpose of the Black House was to “end the suffering of blacks caused by whites.”¹⁸¹ In reality, the Black House was nothing more than a ‘wanna-be’ Cosa Nostra. Michael tricked black youth into joining his gang: “After sharing his marijuana with a select group [black youth] he would tell them that they were merely latter-day slaves, being exploited by modern industrial society instead of the old plantation masters, and that they had every right to make the white man repay his debts.”¹⁸² Clearly, Michael’s agenda lacked common sense. Michael took something positive, the black power movement, and turned it into something negative. He falsely told his followers that influential leaders like Malcolm X and Stokely Carmichael would want them to hunt and kill the white man.¹⁸³

By 1970, Michael’s Black House grew completely out of control. Tensions escalated between Michael and Marvin Brown, a businessman associated with the Black House. Determined to make a mockery of Brown, Michael ordered his bodyguards to beat Brown and affix a spiked slave collar around his neck.¹⁸⁴ One year later, in 1971, Michael was charged with extortion. He fled Britain to his native Trinidad and while there, he formed another black power organization called the Black Liberation Army. In 1972, Michael was charged with the murder of two of his Black Liberation Army members. He was hanged in 1975.

¹⁸¹ Humphry and Tindall, 74.

¹⁸² Humphry and Tindall, 81.

¹⁸³ Humphry and Tindall, 81 – 82.

¹⁸⁴ Humphry and Tindall, 88 – 89.

Michael X's hypocrisies, lies, and questionable motives damaged the British black power movement. His out of control racist views made little to no sense, since he dated white women and accepted monetary donations from whites. Compared to other British black power organizations, RAAS and the Black House were the most radical and violent because their leader preached violence. It is important to note that just because Michael felt that violence was the only answer to ending racial inequality, does not mean other organizations followed suit. There is an immense difference between 'violence is *always* necessary' and 'violence when *only* necessary.' Michael should not be compared to Carmichael or any Black Panther for the sole fact that he was not dedicated to the black power movement. Michael X exploited the black power movement and American leaders like Malcolm X and Huey P. Newton, who both placed a positive emphasis on the movement.

Besides the Black House and the Black Panther Party, other black power organizations were widespread throughout 1970s Britain. In 1975, two prominent organizations, the Black Parents Movement and the Black Youth Movement, gained popularity within the black community. Both organizations were formed in response to a brutal police attack on a black London youth.¹⁸⁵ The goal of both the Black Parents Movement and the Black Youth Movement was to "organize defense of Black youth who found themselves without proper reason on the wrong side of the law."¹⁸⁶

Another way for blacks to promote black power and honor their cultural roots was through music, dress, and language. In 1970s Britain, reggae music became extremely popular due in part to Bob Marley, a Jamaican. Marley's lyrics preached the basis of Jah

¹⁸⁵ Brian W. Alleyne, *Radicals against Race: Black Activism and Cultural Politics* (Oxford: Berg, 2002), 51.

¹⁸⁶ Alleyne, 52.

and Rastafarianism, which undoubtedly had a tremendous impact on black Brits.

Although reggae came from the Caribbean islands, its impact on black Brits proved tremendous.¹⁸⁷ Black Brits identified with reggae's soulful lyrics about black pride and black history so much that some black Brits destined to make reggae music. Black power, protests, and race riots were the subject of these and many other reggae songs.¹⁸⁸

Opposition to British Black Power

For every one black revolutionary organization, there were numerous anti-black organizations. Some of Britain's more notable anti-black groups included the Monday Club, the National Front, and the Racial Preservation Society. Formed in the early 1960s, The Monday Club printed pamphlets that promoted the return of immigrants to their native lands. The Club's most provocative pamphlet 'Who Goes Home?' demanded that Commonwealth immigrants be sent 'home' and that a proper official be placed in charge of the "return home programme."¹⁸⁹ While some members of the Monday Club held positions in the House of Commons and the House of Lords, no such program ever came into place.

Like the Monday Club, the National Front advocated the return of immigrants to their native lands. The National Front campaigned against immigration and sought to create even greater racial tensions between whites and blacks. Formed in the mid 1960s the Racial Preservation Society, like the National Front, encouraged disunity between whites and blacks. The Racial Preservation Society had two distinct goals: to condemn

¹⁸⁷ Paul Gilroy, *'There Ain't no Black in the Union Jack': The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 171.

¹⁸⁸ Gilroy, 193.

¹⁸⁹ John and Humphry, 161.

blacks and to harass white liberals.¹⁹⁰ To fulfill their goals, the Racial Preservation Society distributed numerous forms of propaganda which declared that Britain would experience “national suicide” as long as whites and blacks interacted in unity.¹⁹¹

Among all of the anti-black organizations and affiliates, Enoch Powell stood out as the ultimate hate monger. In 1968, Powell made his infamous “Rivers of Blood” speech in Birmingham, where he lashed out at the influx of Commonwealth immigrants. Among a number of immoral and degrading statements regarding immigrants, Powell asserted:

It almost passes belief that at this moment twenty or thirty additional immigrant children are arriving from overseas in Wolverhampton alone every week - and that means fifteen or twenty additional families of a decade or two hence. Those whom the gods wish to destroy, they first make mad. We must be mad, literally mad, as a nation to be permitting the annual inflow of some 50,000 dependants, who are for the most part the material of the future growth of the immigrant-descended population. It is like watching a nation busily engaged in heaping up its own funeral pyre.¹⁹²

Powell’s speech received a lot of criticism the Labour Party. However, ‘Rivers of Blood’ also received staunch support from the Conservative Party. ‘Rivers of Blood’ was so popular amongst ultra-conservatives that after the passing of the 1968 Race Relations Act, supporters sported buttons that read ‘Enoch was Right!’ Opposition to immigrants and blacks was apparent throughout Great Britain.

Police harassment and brutality became a growing trend in 1970s Britain. In 1971, at a South East London festival, a race riot broke out between white skinheads and black youth. When the police arrived, only the black youth involved in the debacle were

¹⁹⁰ John and Humphry, 166.

¹⁹¹ John and Humphry, 167.

¹⁹² Enoch Powell, “Rivers of Blood,” 20 April 1968, <http://theoccidentalquarterly.com/vol1no1/ep-rivers.html> (30 April 2007).

arrested even though the white skinheads started the fight.¹⁹³ During the same year, a black woman named Aseta Simms was murdered by police in a Stoke Newington jail cell.¹⁹⁴

All blacks had the potential to become victims of police harassment and brutality. Black youth, however, were almost guaranteed to fall victim of police harassment. The black power movement instilled fear in police all over Britain. Police began raiding black youth events such as carnivals, bonfires, and parties and even closing down black youth nightclubs and dancehalls.¹⁹⁵ The reasons for doing so were sketchy; this made many blacks believe that it was just another means of racial discrimination. Black youths were unable to walk along the streets or gather in groups on the streets – these were causes for immediate arrest.¹⁹⁶ In 1975, Brixton police “terrorized” the black community and made numerous frivolous arrests; in the same year Lewisham police stopped over fourteen thousand blacks on the streets and made approximately four hundred arrests. Police departments across Britain followed suit.¹⁹⁷

Aside from the dramatic increase in police harassment and brutality, the black power movement remained stable throughout the 1970s. The Black Panther Party remained a constant staple in British society until its demise somewhere between the late 1970s and early 1980s. While British black power organizations lacked in comparison to the number of American political-based black power organizations, black Brits still expressed their culture and heritage through music, dress, language, and literature.

¹⁹³ Mullard, 131.

¹⁹⁴ Mullard, 131 – 132.

¹⁹⁵ A. Sivanandan, *A Different Hunger: Writings on Black Resistance* (London: Pluto Press Limited, 1982), 33 – 34.

¹⁹⁶ Sivanandan, 34.

¹⁹⁷ Sivanandan, 34.

Why Black Power in Britain?

Black Brits have long searched for their own identity – not a predisposed identity mandated by whites. In order to find their true identity, black Brits had to focus on positive elements of their heritage – black literature, black music and dance, black culture, black religion, and most importantly black history. These elements combined to form the basis of black power. John and Humphry argued:

Though British born they [blacks] are expected by white society to deny themselves, to accept second place and to be grateful for it; to accept the burden of the new modern-day post-colonial slavery in its liberal cloak, to accept the definition of blackness and of black people to which their forebears were expected to answer; expected to deny blackness if they are to be accepted by and in white society.¹⁹⁸

John and Humphry's bold argument superlatively defined the post-war situation that overwhelmed black Brits.

The true essence of black power was necessary not just for Britain, but for countries all over the world. As largely oppressed peoples, blacks across the globe had been beat down, trampled upon, and demoralized for far too long. It is repugnant that black power did not gain a hold in Britain until the visit of Stokely Carmichael in 1967. Although Michael X's RAAS formed in 1965, it was Carmichael's visit that truly launched the black power crusade.

What is even more repugnant is the fact that Britain did not pass an Act that guaranteed complete equal rights and liberties to blacks until 1976. The 1976 Act forbade discrimination "in housing, education, employment, vocational training, residential and commercial tenancies, and in the way that goods and services are provided. It widened the grounds of unlawful racial discrimination to include nationality.

¹⁹⁸ John and Humphry, 171.

For the first time it defined two forms of discrimination: direct and indirect.”¹⁹⁹ Direct discrimination referred to ostentatious discrimination based solely on racial terms while indirect discrimination referred to subtle discrimination of a person within a particular racial group.

The British black power movement would not have been as successful if it were not for the American black power movement. Although the Trinidadian Longshoremen’s Strike of 1919 occurred nearly forty years before the dawning of the American black power movement, black Brits did not grasp its concept until the 1967 visit of Stokely Carmichael. Carmichael’s visit paved the way for a cultural uprising. His words provided hope and courage for black citizens who would later be hailed as revolutionaries.

Black power culminated the same principles in both Britain and America. Black power encompassed black culture and the things that defined it: art, music, literature, history, and dance. It also promoted the advancement of black people and black heritage. Black power was not a radical concept; it was merely common sense. Any group of oppressed peoples desires to function as their culture sees fit.

Black power provided a revolutionary change in Britain. The movement abled young black Brits (mostly male) to voice their opinions about white hegemony and white suppression. It also abled all black Brits to establish a connection with their true African culture and heritage. When black power is discussed academically, it usually refers to the American black power movement. Without a doubt, the black power movement was a successful endeavor in Britain, but little is documented about the movement and the black

¹⁹⁹ No author, “1976: Britain’s Third Race Relations Act,” n.d., http://www.cre.gov.uk/40years/act_three.html (30 April 2007).

power organizations, particularly the British Black Panther Party, which made the black power movement successful.

Conclusion

“You can Kill a Revolutionary, but you can’t Kill a Revolution” – Fred Hampton

A Philadelphia Party member said, “The Black Panther Party saved my life personally. I was a nigger, a cold-blooded nigger, and the Black Panther Party gave me a new lease on life and helped me to further define myself and help me make that transition from a nigger to a human being.”²⁰⁰ The Party’s influence on blacks throughout the world was, and still is, immense. The Party taught young blacks, both male and female, to grow and give back to their communities. The Party provided an array of programs to the needy, and even opened its own free clinic. To deny the fact that the Party was more than a conglomeration of militant blacks would be erratic and moronic. It is time that the Black Panther Party is remembered and regarded as one of the most important and prolific radical organizations that ever emerged on American soil.

Where are they now?

While the Party’s legacy lives on, many members are still active – both politically and socially, including co-founder Bobby Seale, who travels across the United States giving lectures at various colleges and universities; Kathleen Cleaver, who also travels across the United States lecturing on the topics of black power and the Black Panther Party; Emory Douglas, the Party’s “Minister of Culture,” who maintains the website ‘It’s About Time: Black Panther Party Legacy and Alumni,’ which has a wealth of information about the Party and current campaigns against racial injustice; Angela Davis, who is a Professor of History of Consciousness at the University of California at Santa

²⁰⁰ “What We Want, What We Believe: Black Panther Party Library Disc 1,” prod. by Roz Payne, 159 minutes, AK Press, 2006.

Cruz; and Elaine Brown, who lectures across the United States. These are just a handful of members who remain in the public sphere. Other members, such as Huey P. Newton, Eldridge Cleaver, and Stokely Carmichael have been deceased for a number of years.

Newton proved to be his own worst enemy. Although fueled by the Black Panther Party and its Ten Point Program, Newton ascended into a world filled with drugs and alcohol. In 1985, he was charged with embezzling state and federal funds to support his drug and alcohol addiction. Newton voluntarily checked himself into rehab, but left early due to a newspaper story that surfaced about his drug and alcohol addiction. In August 1989, a young drug dealer fatally shot Newton over drugs. Huey P. Newton did not live up to the standards he himself set forth in the Black Panther Party platform, but he should not be discredited in his role as a black revolutionary.

Like Newton, Eldridge Cleaver became heavily addicted to drugs in the 1980s. In the mid-1990s he kicked his addiction and moved to Miami where he hosted a talk radio program. Cleaver's life changed tremendously. He enjoyed local fame and living a healthy lifestyle. Unlike Newton, Cleaver successfully dug himself out of a downward spiral. His destructive behavior burdened him his entire life, as he is often remembered for his brutally honest autobiography, *Soul on Ice*. Although he played an important role in the Black Panther Party, Cleaver's barbaric demeanor and abuse towards women overshadowed his revolutionary persona. In 1998, Cleaver died from complications due to prostate cancer.

Also deceased from complications due to prostate cancer is Stokely Carmichael. After moving to Guinea, Carmichael changed his name to Kwame Ture and founded the All-African Revolutionary Party. Unlike his former Party members, Carmichael rejected

the idea of an alliance between black and white revolutionaries. While in Guinea, Carmichael continued to preach about black power and the Islamic faith. He died in 1998.

While some members are still politically active, some are living out their lives in prisons across the United States. H. Rap Brown (now Jamil Abdullah Al-Amin) and Wesley Cook (now Mumia Abu-Jamal) are both serving life imprisonment sentences for the alleged murders of police officers. Evidence surrounding both murders is highly debatable, as many activists feel that both Brown and Cook are innocent. Geronimo Pratt, a member of the Party, served a twenty-seven year prison sentence for the murder of a young woman. No solid evidence ever proved that Pratt was the killer. In 1997, he was released from prison after his conviction was overturned due to lack of evidence.

Influence and Legacy

Although limited, scholarship concerning the black power movement is becoming easier to find. With a push from scholars like Peniel Joseph, the black power movement is being recognized as a pivotal event in twentieth century American history. The emergence of the black power movement as a scholarly topic will hopefully encourage the study of the individuals who made black power a worldwide movement.

Organizations like the Deacons for Defense and Justice and the Black Panther Party played too big of a role during the turbulent 1960s to simply be regarded as ‘groups of youths with no real purpose or direction.’

Concerning the Black Panther Party, it was much more than a revolutionary organization. It thrived on helping the black community, doing so by offering a vast number of social programs. Former Panther JoNina Abron acknowledged the Party for

its social programs, preventive health care, and efforts to combat police brutality.²⁰¹ The organization influenced politics within the black community and promised the election of blacks to city council. The Black Panther Party also influenced fashion amongst black youth.²⁰² The Party's signature black pants, black leather jackets, blue shirts, and black berets were common amongst black youth. Despite the often negative approach towards the Panthers, the organization truly served the community.

Although some members of the organization, particularly Newton, did not live up to the philosophies and ideologies that encompassed the Party's rules, the Black Panther Party should not be discredited as *the* revolutionary vanguard for the black power movement. The Party should also not be discounted as an organization dedicated to the oppressed. The Black Panther Party thrived on militant reaction to the somber capitalistic oppressor – whether government or police – based on the oppressor, not the color of his skin. The Black Panther Party was not a racist organization, as it fought for the 'oppressed.' In the words of Bobby Seale:

The Black Panther Party is a revolutionary party...we got to get down to the nitty gritty and change this situation that we're in...When you stop racism, you stop brutality and murder of black people by the racist, occupying army in our black community, that's what we're gonna stop."²⁰³

²⁰¹ JoNina M. Abron, "The Legacy of the Black Panther Party," *The Black Scholar* (November/December 1986): 33 – 37.

²⁰² Finzsch, 228.

²⁰³ *The Black Panther*, March 16, 1968, 9.

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