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*The Black Panther Party:
A Lesson in Revolutionary Politics*

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Abstract

Radicalism is not defined so much as a tactic as it is a response. A political movement is defined as radical when it proposes methods and solutions that are deemed to demand change too quickly. Adverse conditions produce radicals because adverse conditions demand change. America has a glorious history of radical groups and individuals but none so loved, hated, and nere understood as the Black Panther Party (BPP). The young men and women that fought for and organized under the BPP in essence carried a torch passed to them by older generations that they hand off to the radicals of today. For some, change happens slowly, but for the radical this statement is anathema. The radical has both a realistic understanding of oppression and an intense anger toward the system. This combination results in the demand that change be immediate. The BPP was at its time the standard to which all radicals were compared. To understand the Black Panthers and to understand the legacy they have left us we must analyze why they were started and how they were eventually destroyed. In doing so, this paper will attempt critique the party and draw lessons to be learned from its legacy.

The Black Panther Party:

A Lesson in Revolutionary Politics

By 1965 the civil rights movement was coming to an end. Through a variety of tactics ranging from sit-ins, to freedom rides, to voter registration; culminating with the historic 1963 March on Washington, organizers relying on the support of a grass roots constituency had fought to bring an end to Jim Crow segregation. By 1965 the South had been forced through non-violent civil disobedience and countless legal battles to alter its racist laws and grant equal rights to African Americans. These battles had been hard fought and not without sacrifice. Organizers had endured countless beatings, jail time, and outright executions. While groups like the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) claimed moral superiority in the face of violent repression by modeling their methodology on the ideas of Gandhi; there were those in the movement that felt non-violence to be complacent to brutality and murder. Robert Williams was one of those men.

Robert Williams was the chairman of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in Monroe, North Carolina. In 1957 a man named Dr. Albert Perry filed a suit through the NAACP regarding the desegregation of a public swimming pool. In response to the suit the Ku Klux Klan began a campaign to intimidate the black community and made threats on the life of Dr. Perry. In response to this Williams organized a group of armed Black men to stand guard at Dr. Perry's home; this group would be called the Deacons for Defense and Justice. While the local police

would do nothing to stop the KKK night riding the Deacons for Defense decided to take action. On October 5th, 1957 a group of men from the Deacons for Defense ambushed a large KKK convoy coming through Newton, North Carolina, firing their guns into the air and forcing the Klansmen to flee in fear. After that no more night rides took place in Newton (Pearson, 1994, p.26).

While meeting success with the effort to organize armed resistance to racist violence Williams became further and further disenfranchised with the NAACP's tactics of relying on the system for justice. Soon after the Deacons made their stand in Newton, Dr. Perry was arrested and convicted of performing an illegal abortion; a claim that is widely believed to be a fabrication created by a woman pressured by the KKK. That same year two Black children were arrested and sentenced to reform school for allegedly kissing a white girl their age while playing house. The NAACP refused to take their case because of their poor domestic situations. After the release of a man accused of trying to rape a pregnant black woman Williams issued the following statement; "We cannot rely on the law. We can get no justice under the present system. If we feel injustice is done, we must right then and there, on the spot, be prepared to inflict punishment on these people. Since the federal government will not bring a halt to lynching in the South, and since the so-called courts lynch our people illegally, if it is necessary to stop lynching with lynching then we must be ready to resort to that method. We must meet violence with violence." Williams was immediately suspended from the NAACP. His Deacons for Defense continued to provide support for civil rights work in Monroe as his increased radicalism distanced him from the mainstream of civil rights community. Eventually

Williams would be forced to flee the country after being charged with kidnapping relating to a disturbance that occurred outside his home in 1961.

The example set by Williams in Monroe planted the seeds of militancy in the southern civil rights movement, a militancy that would grow rapidly among younger Negro activists in the next five years. But first they had to taste more atrocity at the hands of white racists. (Pearson, 1994, p. 39).

By 1965 most of the civil rights movement had come to taste that atrocity. With the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act segregation had been legally brought to an end. The price had been high and the result was not complete. A polarization had emerged within the movement between those that accepted non-violence as a tactic and others that were tired of getting beaten or killed in the pursuit of their constitutional rights. While Martin Luther King had been the man down South; the plight of the northern ghetto resident was embodied more in the messages of men like Malcolm X. But by 1965 Malcolm X had been assassinated. The economic segregation of the North relegated Blacks to impoverished communities where lack of opportunity, affordable healthcare, and decent housing were orders of the day. Police brutality was rampant with racism no less ingrained in both the justice system and society at large.

We had seen Martin Luther King come to Watts in an effort to calm the people and we had seen his philosophy of non-violence rejected. Black people had been taught nonviolence; it was deep in us. What good, however, was nonviolence when the police were determined to rule by force? (Newton, 1973, p.110)

The response to this question was in the process of being answered.

In 1966, at a rally in Greenwood, Mississippi, Willie Ricks of SNCC dropped the slogan that would mark the transition from integration to liberation. Willie Ricks began calling for Black Power. Coinciding with the SNCC drive to register Black voter in Lowndes County; they called for Blacks to take political power and popularized the Black Panther as a symbol of that power. Calling for “black panther parties” to be created

around the country; SNCC put out a call that would be answered by many; but none so resolutely as by two students in Oakland, California.

When Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale founded the Black Panther Party for Self Defense in Oakland they were only one of many groups to take the name of SNCC's new symbol; their claim to being the official party was still about two years away (Pearson, 1994, p. 119). The initial objective of the party was to protect the black community of Oakland from the city's brutal police force. The idea pioneered by Newton and Seale was not entirely original. A group called Community Alert Patrol (CAP) had been established in Watts after the 1965 riot. CAP received calls about police activity and dispatched cars to monitor the arrests and advise people on their legal rights. Newton and Seale elaborated on this concept with a new and deadly twist; loaded guns.

By late September, Newton and Seale were sitting in the library of the North Oakland Center researching a theoretical basis for their organization, which would derive its philosophy from the socialist and communist revolutionaries Newton was fond of. They also drew on the theories of Robert Williams of North Carolina's Deacons for Defense in his book *Negro's with Guns*. Newton had discovered a little-known California law allowing a person to carry a loaded rifle or shotgun as long as it was publicly displayed and pointed at no one. (Pearson, 1994, p.109).

They wrote out a Ten Point Platform¹ and came up with a uniform; black berets, black leather jackets, and powder blue shirts. Taking their pay checks from the Anti-Poverty Center where they worked, Newton, Seale, and their first member; little Bobby Hutton, opened an office at 56th and Grove in North Oakland. Newton was named the Minister of Defense, Seale the Chairman, and Hutton the treasurer; and like that, the Black Panther Party for Self Defense was born.

What is important to understand about the beginnings of the party is the audacity of their initial actions.

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For Huey, the patrols were meant for the people, to give them a real, live demonstration of what the Party was about- and also for the police, who were used to harassing and brutalizing black citizens with impunity. While the weapons were legal under California law, he knew many of the Oakland police, who, like many of Oakland's Black community, were natives of southern states, would be livid because they no longer possessed a monopoly on violence. (Abu-Jamal, 2004, p.68)

But it went further than that. While numerous Black Nationalist organizations were talking about revolution, be it cultural-nationalism like Maulana "Ron" Karenga's United Slaves, or religious separatism like Elijah Muhammad's Nation of Islam; none were as willing to directly confront the forces of the power structure as Huey P. Newton and his Black Panther Party for Self Defense. The incidents created by this audacity would be instrumental in popularizing the image of the Black Panther Party as the nation's premier symbol of militant black resistance.

The Johnson administration had a saying in regards to the war in Vietnam. They thought the real battle was for the "hearts and minds" of the Vietnamese people and if this could be won, as would the war. It was truly the hearts and minds of the Black community that the Panthers would soon capture and one man would be instrumental in taking them to the next level. Transforming them from a California based, revolutionary oddity (still too "street" in the minds of most local movement players), this person would give them the ideological and structural apparatus they needed to convert their audacity into revolutionary legend.

Eldridge Cleaver had just been released from prison following the publishing of his national best seller *Soul on Ice*. He had aspirations of beginning his own organization modeled at least partially on Malcolm X's attempted Organization of Afro-American Unity, but all that would change the day he saw Newton back down a cop outside the Ramparts office where the BPP had been handling the security for Betty Shabazz;

Malcolm X's widow. Watching from the steps, Cleaver saw Newton wave a loaded shotgun, citing law, and daring the police to draw their weapons. In what would become one of many classic Huey Newton stand offs; the police backed down and Cleaver decided to join the party.

This writer would like to draw some practical conclusions from the beginnings of the party. Radical rhetoric was, and is, abundant on behalf of the movement. A full year before the party was even founded SNCC leaders like Stokely Carmichael and H. Rap Brown were making pronouncements of militant resistance. The edge of the radical movement has always started on what is afraid to be said and moved into the arena of what people are afraid to do. Those unwilling to translate their rhetoric into action and accept the risks this entails always fail to win hearts and minds. The BPP began its organization willing to take heavy risks and its ability to quickly expand (to approximately 42 chapters within two years of creation) was very much a result of its ability to exploit key events to project the fearless nature of the party. While it would be a serious mistake to play down Newton's intellectual contributions to the party; it was Cleaver that managed to bring the party forward into the national limelight that it enjoyed by late 1968. The triumvirate of Seale, Newton, and Cleaver set up situations like the "invasion" of the Sacramento capital building to send a very clear message to the white power structure. In doing so they made it abundantly clear that the radicals were willing to continuously "take it up a notch" each time the state found ways to come down on the party. Liberals remain forever critical of such displays of force because they feel actions like those taken by the party alienate the mainstream. While every radical must be able to accurately determine the tenor of the times; it can be argued that the actions of the

radicals propel the mainstream to take a closer look at the movement as a whole. “The actions we engaged in at the time were strictly strategic actions, for political purposes. They were designed to mobilize the community. Any action which does not mobilize the community toward the goal is not a revolutionary action.” (Foner, 1995, p.274) The tendency of the mainstream is to be overly critical of high profile/ high risk actions because they feel these actions jeopardize the long term movement goals. This could not be further from the truth. Every time the BPP backed down the police or even shot it out with them, they made groups like NAACP look all the more attractive to the power structure serving as an inspiration to the masses and a serious bargaining chip to the mainstream activists.

The accolades and bouquets of the late twentieth-century Black struggle were awarded to veterans of the civil rights struggle epitomized by the martyred Rev. Dr, Martin Luther King, Jr. Elevated by white and black elites to heights of social acceptance, Dr. King’s message of Christian forbearance and his turn-the-other-cheek doctrine were calming to the white psyche. To Americans bred for comfort, Dr. King was, above all, safe. (Abu-Jamal, 2004, p.7).

And the BPP were anything but giving the power structure a very real taste of what was going to come were real changes not to be made. On October 28th, 1967 Huey Newton engaged in an action that would insure his party the attention and support it would need to establish itself as a group very much capable of backing up its rhetoric with action. On this significant day Huey P. Newton shot and killed Officer John Frey.

That Huey Newton was capable of killing a police officer was predictable, given all his prior talk and actions. That the Oakland police were capable of inciting anyone to a desire to murder them was vividly realized by hundreds of Black people in Oakland who had felt their brutality. But it was equally vivid to whites of all persuasions on the occasion of Stop the Draft Week. (Pearson, 1994, p. 143)

Only a week before a predominantly white group of 4,000 student anti-war activists had been savagely beaten outside the Oakland draft induction center. So, when Huey P. Newton shot Officer John Frey; it was not hard for the party to paint the picture of self defense. Newton would spend the next three years in jail. During that period

Cleaver and Seale would use the Free Huey Campaign to spearhead chapters across the country and paint Huey as a revolutionary messiah.

Picking up the Gun

The original guns of the Black Panther Party were given to them by Richard Aoki, a Japanese American and self-styled revolutionary. The Black Panther Party would demonstrate throughout its existence its commitment to the ideas of armed struggle.

Fashioning themselves after third world revolutionaries like Che Guevara and Ho Chi Minh, the Panthers quickly adopted the Maoist maxim; “all power comes from the barrel of a gun.”

Organizational manifestations of the ideological imperative of “picking up the gun” abound. During the formative years (1966-68) the Party’s commitment to armed self defense was readily apparent. Panther police patrols, as well as armed members who served as body guards for Betty Shabazz at the Party’s political rallies in Richmond, California, underscored its advocacy of armed resistance. And, of course, the May 1967 Sacramento incident in which an armed delegation of Panther lobbyists protested pending legislation highlighted the saliency of armed self-defense. Further evidence that demonstrated the BPP’s paramilitary orientation include weapon-training classes, armed Panthers who openly engaged in close order drills with weapons in public parks, the guerrilla warfare propaganda printed in the Party’s newspaper, and the highly publicized armed confrontations between Panthers and police officers throughout the nation. (Jones & Jeffries, 1998, p.27).

While the Panthers were not the only political organization to have taken up arms; they were the only organization that would make it official policy, actively institute it as a directive among their members, and utilize it as a regular tactic.

On top of the initial BPP armed police patrols the Panthers also engaged in armed, uniformed patrols of predominantly white neighborhoods to let whites know what it felt like to be patrolled by a person armed, in uniform, and of another race. Their repeated confrontations with the Oakland police as well as these patrols led to the Mulford Arms Bill that would effectively end a citizen’s right to carry loaded weapons in public. This bill set the stage for the Panther “invasion” of the state capital that would give them

nation wide publicity and allow them to very publicly state their commitment to armed self defense. These armed lobbyists depicted by a sensationalist media allowed the Panthers the opportunity to spread their message coast to coast. There were of course pros and cons to the Panther tactic of “picking up the gun”.

Asserting their own right to organized violence, the Panthers began to police the police, while emphasizing their own “disciplined adherence to existing law.” Invoking the United States Constitution, employing a logic of policing and the law against the police and the law, the Panthers thus posed a stunning challenge to the legitimacy of state power in Black communities. The violent demise of the Panthers, I would suggest, is still best understood when viewed within the context of these initial acts of subversion. (Singh, 1998, p.81).

While the act of picking up the gun gave the Panthers an edge that would capture the imagination of an entire nation of disaffected, urban, black youth, strategically they were crossing a line that would bring down immense repression at the hands of the state via its internal security apparatus COINTELPRO. At no point were the Panther guns ever an *actual* threat to the power of the state. Fundamentally it was the idea of the gun more than the gun itself that both captured hearts and minds as well as terrified the power structure.

The early rhetoric of the BPP revolved very heavily on encouraging the Black community to arm itself as well as advocating the act of killing police officers (Hampton, 1995 p.144). Very much influenced by the events taking place in the third world, specifically Vietnam and Cuba; the Panthers viewed the black community as a colonized people. As the Vietnamese demonstrated increased resilience despite vast material inequity in their access to modern weapons, the Panthers felt that armed struggle for the cause of freedom was in fact an applicable strategy in America as well.

The Panthers created a certain mythology that sprang up around them. This act of picking up the gun served them more as a piece of militant street theatre than as an actual

instrument of insurgency. What kind of political conclusions were to be derived from “all power comes from the barrel of a gun” when it was obvious the other side had all the guns? (Pearson, 1994, p. 210). While the Panthers cited self defense as their rationale for arming themselves, the act of arming themselves gave the state every reason it needed to initiate attacks on Panther homes and offices, attacks in which the meager arsenals they possessed offered little protection. To this day the Panthers are best remembered by the bulk of American society as armed revolutionaries and people that admire or detract them stress the significance armed struggle played in their political development. What is important to look at is what the net result of their decision to take up arms against the state.

On a practical level armed struggle is not a strategic decision for insurrection in the United States because the state seems all too willing to use force against even a minor threat to its political hegemony. Cecile Poole, a U.S. Attorney would later comment during a grand jury investigation of the Black Panthers that, “I find it hard to believe that a group of men who succeed in getting all their men exiled, in prison, or killed, are any real danger in overthrowing this country.” From initial acts like policing the police to more aggressive actions like ambushing the police; the state was more likely terrified of the reaction the Black masses would have to such an open stance of defiance than they were of the actual possibility of an armed Negro insurrection. You can see that the state obviously overreacted to the actions of the party even going as far as labeling them “the greatest threat to the internal security of the United States” by 1968.

That such a small and poorly equipped band of urban Black youth could demand so much attention from federal and local police only attests to the tenuousness of the state itself and the degree to which it depends on controlling and even silencing those who would take its name in vain. (Singh, 1998, p. 85).

The Panther's act of picking up the gun was a double edged sword that too often flew in their direction. Huey Newton nearly got the death penalty for shooting Officer Frey in 1967 and was taken out of directly leading the party for roughly three years, but as a result the nation was exposed to the politics of the BPP and it enabled them to open chapters across the nation inspired by Huey's action. When Eldridge Cleaver ordered the Panthers to ambush the police two days after Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated in 1968, Bobby Hutton was murdered and Cleaver had to flee the country. Public calls to violence would land both Chairman Bobby Seale and Chief of Staff David Hilliard in prison.

From the fall of 1967 through the end of 1969, across the nation, nine police officers were killed and fifty-six were wounded in confrontations with the Panthers, while ten Panthers were believed killed and an unknown number were wounded. In 1969, 348 Panthers were arrested for a variety of crimes. (Pearson, 1994, p.206).

The nation followed the Panther/Police clashes intently as the radical left cheered them on from the sidelines. Yet however much of a spectacle they generated; weighed in full; the Panthers that paid a high price for their actions.

Leaders like Bayard Rustin, Martin Luther King, and other veterans of the civil rights movement watched in horror first at the rhetoric of men like Stokely Carmichael, and then at the actions of groups like the Black Panther Party. As the tactic and ideology of non-violence was abandoned; many viewed the rise of militancy as directly counter productive to the African American freedom struggle. The eruption of white supremacist violence made Rustin and other New York pacifists worry that the black community might respond in kind and unleash a race war that the oppressed were sure to lose (D'Emilio, 2003, p.226).

The Black Power ideology came hand in hand with a new desire for militancy. The 'turn the other cheek' mentality was lost in the fury of a righteous anger that was

overtaking the younger elements of the black community. It radicalized them away from 'wait and integrate' quickly pushing them further and further to the point where the Panther credo of 'picking up the gun' was soon put into practice. The Jim Crow credo of separate but equal had been turned into separate and quite possibly superior by the Nation of Islam. Black Power seemed to say separate to get equal and if you don't let us do that we'll fight back armed to the teeth.

Civil Rights leaders despaired of this new separatist ideology, which commanded considerable press coverage but fed a strong white backlash. Roy Wilkins of the NAACP called Black Power 'the father of hatred and the mother of violence' and compared it to Hitlerism. A. Philip Randolph termed it 'a menace to racial peace and prosperity. No Negro who is fighting for civil rights can support black power, which is opposed to civil rights and integration.' Bayard Rustin declared that 'Black Power was born in bitterness and frustration-has left us with a legacy of polarization, division, and political nonsense.' (Dierenfield, 2004, p.128)

In a country where the media quite literally dictates domestic opinion; Black Power was too easy to spin. Unlike their non-violent civil rights counter parts, leaders of the Black Power movement could be written off as angry and violent radicals. Most importantly they could be painted as a serious threat that had to be eliminated. Moral superiority was a powerful card in the hands of the civil rights movement depicted time and time again in Diernefield's book that ultimately led to its numerous victories. Unlike the civil rights movement; the Panthers felt they could not wait; they felt integration would never lead to equality and to defend themselves and their community they simply had to pick up the gun.

Had the Panthers not picked up arms little would have separated them from the hundreds of other Black Power formations of their time. Had the Panthers not picked up arms they probably would not

have been such a subject of inspiration and debate. As a tactic looked at in retrospect however, in regards to actually achieving points on their platform; possessing weapons did little good for the Black community or the activists that employed the tactic. With the US government so willing to respond to defiance with force, the Panthers could not claim the moral superiority that the civil rights movement had utilized through the methodology of non-violence. Possessing weapons enabled the media to demonize them. Despite an obviously stated principle that the weapons were to be used in self defense, it was too easy for the state to paint the Panthers as violent militants. Groups that seek to emulate the Panther strategy of armed resistance ought to note the reaction of the state to such a tactic. By replicating the methodology of the state the Panthers martyred themselves to bring attention to the plight of Black America. While it is easy to glamorize their struggle, one can attribute picking up the gun as a factor in their quick rise and equally sudden demise. The gun is a powerful symbol, but not necessarily a practical tactic.

Serving the People

Ironically it was not that the Panthers were armed that made the FBI consider them the greatest threat to internal security; it was their Free Breakfast Programs (Abron, 1998, p.183). The FBI was deeply concerned that the Panther programs were becoming increasingly popular in the Black communities they were established in. This was due to several factors. On the one hand, they were exposing the contradictions of extreme wealth and poverty in America. On the other, they were providing a tangible service to the community in a way that the government was not providing. In a sense they were basically saying that they could replace the government that wasn't providing adequate service to begin with.

A lot of people misunderstand the politics of these programs; some people have a tendency to call them reform programs. They're not reform programs; they're actually revolutionary community programs. A revolutionary program is one set forth by revolutionaries, by those who want to change the existing system to a better system. A reform program is set up by the existing exploitative system as an appealing handout to fool people and keep them quiet. (Seale, 1970, p. 412-413).

The programs offered by the Party were extensive. By 1968 there was a Free Breakfast Program in every chapter after Bobby Seale issued an executive mandate for their creation. More than anything else the programs showed the community that the Panthers really intended to serve the people.

Among these programs were the Intercommunal News Service (1967); the Petition Drive for Community Control of Cops (1968); Liberation Schools, later called Intercommunal Youth Institutes (1969); People's Free Medical Research Health Clinics (1969); Free Clothing Program (1970); Free Busing to Prisons Program (1970); Seniors Against Fearful Environment (SAFE) Program (1971); Sickle Cell Anemia Research Foundation (1971); and Free Housing Cooperative Program (1971). (Abu-Jamal, 2004, p.70)

The programs survived with the support of local businessmen, donations from the community, and were staffed by volunteers and Panther supporters. What the government viewed dangerous about the programs was the way they inspired the community to stand behind the Panthers.

As was addressed in the discussion of the use of arms; the Panthers real threat was not that their programs would actually replace those provided by the state; it was that they undermined the state by showing that revolutionaries could provide social services. Drawing back to the example of policing the police; it was simply audacious that the party would rail against the state and then back up their threats with alternatives.

We called them survival programs pending revolution. They were designed to help people survive until their consciousness is raised, which is only the first step in the revolution to produce a new America...During a flood the raft is a life saving device, but it is only a means of getting to higher ground. So, too, with survival programs, which are emergency services. In themselves they do not change social conditions, but they are life saving vehicles until conditions change. (Newton, 19972, p.89)

The act of setting up these programs was substantial. The programs heightened existing contradictions of American society. It was easy to demonize the BPP when they

got in shoot outs with the police and were caught on TV expounding fiery anti-government rhetoric. It was not so easy when international media praised their establishment of social services that even the American government did not seem to adequately provide. In a way, the community survival programs proved two key points. The first, was that poverty existed in the overdeveloped world and there wasn't a serious attempt made by the US government to rectify it. Second, that as revolutionaries they could directly show that working alternatives were possible. This was a serious threat to the US government in a way that use of arms could never come close to. While numerous groups were expounding socialism; only the Panthers were presenting its material benefits.

This principle of putting revolutionary ideology into practice is perhaps the best example set by the Panthers in studying their methodology. While the BPP were one of thousands of organizations of their period putting out the call for revolution; in essence they were one of the few groups that concretely went out and put in place the change they would like to see in their society. This idea of being able to truly serve the people directly was one of the legacies of the party that ought very much to be replicated in modern political formations. As a tactic it serves three basic functions. First; (using the life raft analogy) the programs serve as a means to directly serve the people and allow them to survive the conditions of poverty. Second, the programs give credibility to the ideas of the revolution. Finally, the programs enable oppressed masses to participate in the political struggle once initial material needs are met. Groups that embrace this tactic will be viewed as champions of the people, while those that do not are seen as empty rhetoricians.

Multi-Racial Alliances

With the emergence of the Black Power ideology many white activists found themselves alienated by the new politics of radical Blacks. When SNCC expelled its white members in 1966 many of the white former civil rights organizers went over and pitched their tents in the anti-war camp of the movement taking shape to stop the war in Vietnam. Despite the misunderstanding generated by this new ideology many whites were highly sympathetic to the Black liberation struggle and sought allies where they could still be relevant. While groups like SNCC, the Nation of Islam (NOI) and United Slaves (US) were either distrustful, or out right thought white people to be the enemy; the BPP was one of the few Black Power organizations that welcomed white allies. This was evident in their alliance with the Peace and Freedom Party in 1967 which enabled them to launch their Free Huey campaign. The BPP even ran Eldridge Cleaver for President on the Peace and Freedom Party ticket. While the BPP was often heavy handed with its allies, often to the point of disrupting the coalitions they were in, many accepted their terms out of a desire to work with what many believed to be the revolutionary vanguard.

The alliance, nevertheless, seemed to serve the purposes of the Black Panther Party well. It provided the necessary financial and administrative resources to mount and support the Free Huey campaign. It appears doubtful that the Panthers would have been able to make the Free Huey movement a *cause celebre* around the country without the supportive machinery and resources of the Peace and Freedom Party (Hayes & Kiene, 1998, p. 166).

While groups like United Slaves would frequently accuse the Panthers of being co-opted by their white allies, the extreme opposite was true. The BPP demanded that the Peace and Freedom Party agreed to the ten point platform. Despite some of the extreme rhetoric and tactics used by the BPP, Peace and Freedom were determined to support

their ally in the name of ending the war in Vietnam and promoting revolution at home. Groups like Students for a Democratic Society also entered into alliances with the Panthers, albeit more tumultuously (Booker, 1998, p.350).

The revolutionary solidarity embraced by the Panthers extended its influence across the racial and political spectrum. The Panther policy on multi racial alliances had both a practical foundation and an ideological one. We have discussed the practical reasons. The ideological rationalization was both a result of the socialist tendency of the party and the late realizations of Malcolm X. Although Malcolm X had spent much of his career propagating the idea of white Americans being devils; after returning from his pilgrimage to Mecca he sharply redefined his idea of who the enemy truly was. Like Malcolm upon his return; the Panthers set out to build an all Black organization that would embrace Black Power, but not turn away white allies.

It doesn't mean that we're anti-white, but it does mean that we're anti-exploitation, we're anti-degradation, we're anti-oppression. And if the white man doesn't want us to be anti-him, let him stop oppressing and exploiting and degrading us. (X, 1964, p.428)

Huey Newton felt that the 'mother country radicals' (white radicals) were seeking to realign themselves with humanity. He felt that if they were sincere revolutionaries; the color of their skin was secondary to their commitment to the struggle. Newton felt that if the mother country radicals were willing to accept the program and leadership of the BPP then they could be considered allies. Juxtaposing the BPP to their forerunners in the civil rights movement described by Dierenfeld; multi racial alliances were invaluable to both integration and the black liberation struggle. White sympathy and even more so white participation broadened the level of support for the civil rights movement. In a country

that is controlled by a white power structure; alliances with whites proved to be an asset. While groups like SNCC, NOI, and US would make arguments that whites were co-opting the movement for their own agenda; the BPP walked a fine line enjoying the benefits of white support and promoting the necessity of black self reliance. This writer is not attributing the success of the civil rights movement verses the relative inability of the BPP to accomplish their ten point program; to levels of white involvement and support. It is however important to note when looking at the time period of the 1960's to observe that the broader the range of alliances among groups and individuals that existed; the more potent were the groups that allowed these alliances in getting the changes they fought for realized. Obviously the BPP and a group like SCLC are in very different categories when it comes to tactics and ideology. Obviously a group like SCLC which was non-violent and Christian was more palatable and media friendly then the Marxist, self defense orientated BPP. Both however encouraged that it was not only an African America struggle. Looking at Karenga's US Organization verses the BPP however shows that rejecting broad based, multi-racial alliances especially when dealing with a particularly radical agenda is counter productive and only works to alienate potential allies.

Directly influenced by the BPP; a Puerto Rican gang called the Young Lords evolved into the Young Lords Party which adopted a thirteen point platform and embraced the tactics of community programs and self defense. Other groups to take on Panther tactics and ideas included the Brown Berets; a California based Chicano organization, the Patriot Party, and a short lived radical formation known as the White Panther Party. In 1970 Huey

Newton went as far as offering Panther guerrillas to fight along side the Vietcong against American forces in Vietnam.

Huey Newton and other Panther leaders felt Black supremacy was an equal evil to white racism. In line with their socialist ideals they felt that united front tactics were the logical way to make revolution in America. However, as the “vanguard party”, the Panthers felt it was they that got to call the shots. While this attitude was generally, if not begrudgingly accepted, by groups like SDS and the Peace and Freedom Party, other Black Power organizations were either put off or laughed at such a prospect. According to Mae Jackson of SNCC, “In the beginning I think SNCC thought: we’ll be the brain and they’ll be the heart. And maybe the Panthers thought we’ll be the heart and they’ll be the brain, except when you deal with a lot of street people they always have another agenda. Its like not only will I be the heart, but one day I’ll *take over* the brain.”

Although SNCC leaders were initially supportive of the BPP as they sought to propagate their political agenda of Black Power, while they always saw the relationship as a coalition but, the BPP saw it as a merger. One by one leading SNCC figures, dissatisfied with much of the BPP penchant for violence, resigned from the BPP. James Forman resigned in 1968 and Stokely Carmichael left in 1969 after helping to establish several chapters. While more lumpen elements of SNCC’s northern branches went on to join the party, with the departure of its key organizers (H. Rap Brown, Carmichael, and Forman) who left SNCC for the BPP and then left the BPP for other endeavors, SNCC folded by early 1970.

While identity politics utilized in the call for Black Power served as an exciting rallying call for many of the dispossessed ghetto youth; in alienating white allies, many

of these groups were unable to financially sustain their activities and soon petered out². The Black Panther Party relied often on the resources of its allies and contributions from white supporters. This is not to say that the BPP did not receive ample assistance from the Black community, but a substantial number of its community programs were financed and staffed with the aid of white radicals. This tactic of revolutionary solidarity served the BPP well because it allowed them to be both proponents of Black Power and create united fronts with communities other than their own. Race based organizing does not tackle the mutual reciprocity of racism because it does not spread political ideas across the color line. The leaders of the BPP understood the importance of organizing the Black community and then uniting their struggle to that of other organizations fighting oppression. While they understood their platform to be for the needs of Black people; their revolution, as a socialist revolution; was designed to bring all power to the people, regardless of the color of their skin.

Intercommunalism and Ideological Confusion

There has always been a Pan-Africanist tendency within the black freedom struggle. Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association launched an enormous back to Africa movement in the US that attached social betterment to returning to ones place of origin and reconnecting to ones roots. While the Civil Rights movement broke with Pan Africanism as a movement casting their activities and goals in creating a truly equal united states; the BPP developed an ideology that incorporated the civil rights struggle with the internationalist goal of African solidarity.

² The exception to this appears to have been the Nation of Islam which sustained itself in the opinion of this writer on its spiritual base.

Revolutionary Intercommunalism which became the official ideology of the BPP by 1972, was developed by Newton under the logic that because globalized capital had rendered the world into a single market; there were really no such thing as countries anymore, but instead communities that were either exploiters or exploited. Newton's intercommunalism declared that the exploited communities of the world should join together under the basis of mutual aid and revolutionary solidarity to overthrow the capitalist system. Under this New Perspective the blacks of Oakland were of closer relation to the Vietnamese of Hanoi than they were to the white middle class of San Francisco. In essence; Newton had realized a Pan-Africanism for the oppressed. The objective was not only solidarity with every black community of the world as well as gaining rights in countries where these communities existed; the overall objective was a global solidarity of the oppressed that did not have borders or nationalities. Newton and the BPP rejected an African orientation and the goal of returning to America. They also rejected limiting their objective to rights at home. Intercommunalism was in fact rejecting the specifics of Pan-Africanism and Civil Rights while melding them into a new tradition of radical black thought.

Intercommunalism was an ideology well suited to the BPP. Heavily influenced by the Panther's socialist doctrine it was not so much an economic theory as much as it was a modal for Newton's beliefs on the correct handling of revolution. Intercommunalism was a sort of Pan-Resistance to oppression. It was a call to think outside the cultural nationalism of his Pan-Africanist contemporaries, but break as well from the socialist reliance on the working class as the driving revolutionary force. If America was no

longer a country, but instead an empire; the struggle was a community struggle on the local level for autonomy and self determination.

The BPP rejected cultural nationalism as myopic. It rejected integration as reformist. It rejected Pan-Africanism as an immediate solution and embraced intercommunalism as a plan. Ideologically the BPP was a black sheep; it was amorphous and all encompassing in its vision almost to the point that its objectives were too radical for its time. In its short life (1966-1977) it evolved from black power to socialism, from self defense to community survival, and from violent revolution to electoral maneuvering. The BPP continuously struggled to put itself in the effective context of the world revolution; but remained confused as to what its ideology was and what its means of realizing the ten point platform would be.

Intercommunalism was in essence Pan-Africanism with a little p. Its goals were not limited to returning to Africa nor were they focused completely on the Negro race. However; their actions sought to better black Americas, promote race pride, and encourage self determinism. Without it being stated revolutionary intercommunalism plugged into a larger structure of the Pan-Africanist tradition.

In the context of building a revolutionary movement we must analyze how the importance of a unified ideology and of a tactical consistency factor into overall development. The BPP did not survive long enough to develop intercommunalism. Fluid structure remains an important element in building a movement for social change; but fluid ideology and ideology in constant flux at times make it difficult to develop an effective strategy. The Pan-Africanist movement had clear objectives and employed a variety of tactics to accomplish the goal of the African state. The Civil Rights movement

had clear objectives and tactical constancy in embracing non-violence. These two movements were for the most part successful because they were able to adapt their vision to the times. The BPP representing an example of radical black thought remained unable to accomplish their ten point program because their vision was too radical for their time and their tactics were inconsistent. To their credit the Panther's developed their program and structure under extreme duress but their demand for change proved impatient; the party remaining too radical for much of American society both white and black alike. Groups with a radical orientation need to make sure that the masses are not alienated by their tactics to the point where they refuse to hear the message.

Lumpenization

The ideological basis for the BPP was constantly in flux. While we have cited early influences to the party indicating their socialist perspective; a key element in understanding the party is to see the ideological imperative the party took in mobilizing the lumpen proletariat as a key constituency.

The Lumpen Proletariat according to Karl Marx was defined as the unproductive working class. Marx viewed this class to be inconsequential to the revolutionary process if not downright counter-revolutionary. Because this class represented the so called dregs of society not anchored in any division of labor, with no connection to the means of production; orthodox Marxists viewed this grouping to be overall irrelevant to the coming class struggle. The leaders of the BPP thought differently;

Contrary to Marxist doctrine, Newton and other Panther theoreticians viewed the lumpen proletariat as a potential leading revolutionary force. Panther strategists sought to harness the fearlessness exhibited by so called street brothers. Newton reasoned that "the brothers off the block" could play an invaluable role in the liberation struggle because of their courageousness. Party leaders were heavily influenced by the writings of Frantz Fanon on the critical role of the lumpen proletariat. Indeed, the lumpen was championed by party comrades. (Jones & Jeffries, 1998, p.44)

While the BPP would evolve from Black Nationalism to Black Internationalism then further on into Newton's theory of Intercommunalism; the party would continuously draw its members from the lumpen; especially under the direction of Eldridge Cleaver. In writing on lumpen ideology the Panthers defined this class as being far more amorphous than Marx's original depiction. Included in the lumpen, according to the BPP, were the criminals as well as the working poor. The Panthers pretty much borrowed the term and expanded its definition. This is not to say, as has been depicted by numerous party detractors, that the party was completely composed of criminal elements. Numerous members from both leadership and rank and file would come from a variety of economic backgrounds. The problem would remain however that for many that joined the party, especially those "brothers off the block" Huey Newton seemed quite familiar with; an element of criminality would be brought into the party that would meld itself to the overall structure.

In embracing the lumpen as the theoretical underpinning of their party; the BPP blurred the line at times between revolutionary practice and outright criminality. While this would vary tremendously from chapter to chapter; lumpen characteristics like misogyny and violence would become serious problems for the party rank and file. Many joined the party for status reasons or related to the gun and the power more than the concept of serving the people. While many would learn from the party's political education classes and become active organizers, scores of others had to be turned away because of lack of discipline (Seale, 1970, p.365-366).

The party created by Newton and Seale was composed of a very broad array of individuals that joined its ranks for a variety of reasons. However, the embrace of the

lumpen would play a part in its ultimate demise. The primary lesson to be drawn from this is that by embracing an element of the population known for criminality; without the appropriate means to reeducate these people; their day to day activities within the party would remain tainted with their criminality. As was stated; there were examples where the party successfully mobilized the lumpen and redirected their energies into the pursuit of people's power, but ultimately the party, especially in its rapid expansion between 1968 and 1970, did not have the internal mechanisms in place to holistically alter this mentality.

To recruit from one particular element of society while trying to create a multi-faceted resistance organization hinders the development of the formation. Without a means to reeducate new members and instill a sense of discipline the organization will ultimately reflect the elements of the society targeted for change.

Misogyny

From its original inception the BPP gave into existing gender relationships established under capitalism. While on a rhetorical basis the party would strive to eliminate these contradictions; in practice the BPP remained very much a reflection of male dominance and misogyny.

Initial manifestations of this tendency abound in early Panther organizational structures and sloganeering. An original directive stated the roles of "Panthers" and "Pantherettes" reserving for men the role of fighting and leadership and reserving for women support and community work. While this structure would be abolished by 1968; its effects would last. Another example is the Cleaver popularized slogan of "Pussy Power"; the female ability to deny sex to men who did not participate in the revolution.

Cleaver propagated this slogan in many of his public speaking appearances and even when abolished, it remained a popular Panther concept.

No single Black activist was more profoundly sexist than the celebrated ex-convict/writer of the Black Panther Party, Eldridge Cleaver. His infamous and bizarre expositions against Black women, gays, and others need no recounting here. What is most important about Cleaver's writing is that it falls squarely into the century-old tradition of viewing Black liberation first and last as the effort to assert one's manhood, in the patriarchal hegemony exhibited by the old planter class. (Marable, 1983, p.93).

Numerous accounts detail sexism and sexual harassment as an everyday phenomenon in the Party³.

A woman in the Black Power movement was considered, at best, irrelevant. A woman asserting herself was a pariah. A woman attempting the role of leadership was, to my proud black Brothers, making an alliance with the "counter-revolutionary, man-hating, lesbian, feminist white bitches." It was a violation of some Black Power principle that was left undefined. If a black woman assumed a role of leadership, she was eroding Black manhood, to be hindering the progress of the Black race. She was an enemy of Black People. (Brown, 1992, p.357).

This is not to suggest there were not numerous examples of female leadership within the party. Erica Huggins served as one of the leaders of the New Haven Chapter and Elaine Brown would serve as Chairman of the party from 1974-1977 after its decline from being a national formation. While leaders like Newton issued formal declarations against Panther misogyny in 1970 even posturing the party in support of the women's liberation movement and gay liberation movement; there would always be a fine line between rhetoric and actuality. In embracing sexist ideology in its formative years the BPP mistakenly doomed itself to replicate these capitalist gender norms for the duration of its existence.

The primary lesson to be drawn from this is that in replicating values of the society a group wishes to change within a revolutionary political structure; there is little to no hope that the group can at

³ This is a reoccurring theme in the highly critical analysis offered by Hugh Pearson as well as in Elaine Brown's autobiography.

a later date alter these norms after any hypothetical revolution. The Panthers internally struggled with the issue of sexism repeatedly, but it was very much ingrained in their structure. Compared to groups like the Nation of Islam and United Slaves; the Panthers were admirably more progressive, but fell quite short of sexual equality within their ranks.

According to the analysis offered by Joy James in *Shadow Boxing*; black women feel a dual oppression of sex and race. On the one hand they are discriminated against for being black by the society at large, but are also oppressed by their own men for being women. Often seeking to be in solidarity with their men in the face of racist oppression; the black feminist perspective is lost in an attempt to not divide the struggle.

If it is true the outcome of a revolution will reflect the manner in which it is waged, we must unremittently challenge anachronistic bourgeoisie family structures and also the oppressive character of women's role in American society in general. Of course, this struggle is part and parcel of a total revolution. Led by women, the fight for liberation must be embraced by men as well. The battle for women's liberation is especially critical with respect to the effort to build an effective black liberation movement. For there is no question about the fact that as a group, black women constitute the most oppressed sector of society (Davis, 1970, p.482).

The Black Panther Party made few serious attempts to address the issue of patriarchy. As Joy James describes in her book; Panther women faced exploitation in a variety ways. Beyond the internal oppression of the way they were treated within the party was the way history and society received them as revolutionaries. First, as revolutionaries they were measured in relation to the male revolutionaries they were closest to. Elaine Brown known for her relationship with Huey Newton, Cathleen Cleaver for her marriage to Eldridge, and Angela Davis to her correspondence with George Jackson. Judged not on their own merit, these strong women that helped shape the BPP were cast into secondary roles ascribed to them by both the movement and a history written by men. Secondly, James describes female Panther's, as well as black women in

general, exploited in media depicting them as hyper-sexual warriors devoid of the characteristics of femininity.

In numerous instances of Black Nationalist writings a reoccurring theme is the redemption of the black manhood deemed lost during the days of slavery. “Emasculated” by the slave master many saw the Black Power movement as a means to politically reassert manhood and prove the ability of the black male to better and protect his woman and race (Marable, 1983, p.76). This mentality led to the development of the revolutionary macho which fed directly into the strong elements of patriarchy within the party and other premier black nationalist formations. From all sides the ingrained sexism of the society found a voice and practice as both a reaction to the party and a manifestation of its internal operating practices and theory.

A revolutionary organization is really not revolutionary purely in rhetoric and official mandate, but rather in deed. Any political formation that does not deal directly with the issue of gender equality dooms itself to replicating the oppression it seeks to combat in society.

Leader Worship and Authoritarianism

There is a famous picture of Huey P. Newton. He is seated in a wicker chair with a spear and a shotgun. During the late 1960’s you might find this picture as a poster plastered on the walls of ghetto residencies and college dorm walls alike. This picture, taken shortly before his arrest for the murder of Officer Frey became the image of Huey Newton the Panthers, Cleaver in particular, presented to the world.

The BPP saw its most critical years without Newton at its helm. The campaign to free Huey and the emergence of extremely capable leaders in other chapters helped

transform the party into the revolutionary symbol most remember it as. As the party grew so did the legendary status of Newton. Presented as a revolutionary messiah on all sides of the movement; it was impossible that the young Huey P. Newton could live up to the expectations demanded from him.

This fed into an overall problem within the party of centralizing power and enabling only a select few among the leadership to dictate the policy and actions of the party. The structure of the party was very much modeled on top down decision making with a serious separation between leadership and rank and file. Often less qualified party members would be charged with running a chapter and more capable members would find themselves at odds with the leadership (Abu-Jamal, 2004, throughout).

As Newton degenerated further and further after his release into cocaine and self-destructive behavior, the party, with its top down structure was bound to his whims. Newton expelled key leaders who he felt were a threat to him. He turned a blind eye to abuses of leaders close to him like those of David Hilliard. Strategically he made poor decisions which enabled the numerous forces that would play a part in the party's destruction to wreak havoc in the ranks. Because of the party's lack of true democratic structure; abuse was tolerated and many would be loyal members left frustrated by decisions made by the Central Committee.

Paralleling Huey Newton of the BPP, to Martin Luther King of the SCLC as described by John D'Emilio in *Lost Prophet*; both fell victim to the cult of personality. Both became larger than life symbols of not only their organizations, but their movements as a whole. Both centralized the power of their organizations and made their

organizations completely dependant of their will and leadership. Newton and King achieved this through very different means; but the ultimate result was similar. King's charisma and Newton's Cleaver fashioned iconic status made the BPP and SCLC revolve around their leaders. Thus when King was assassinated the Poor People's Campaign in DC fell apart at the seams (D'Emilio, 2003, p.463). Thus when Newton degenerated into drugs and crime the BPP was forced to follow suit. Rather than build up a self reliant rank and file and encourage multiple leaders to assert their voice and opinion; both the SCLC and the BPP fell victim to leadership that was suddenly cut short or suddenly corrupted.

From this we can conclude several things. First; the glorification of leaders as a binding point for a political formation reduces effective participation of the general membership and creates a cult of personality that is unhealthy in any political organization. Second; any structure that creates a substantial rank and file replicates power relationships fostered in the repressive capitalist society. Finally; without proper checks on the leadership abuse will arise from positions of power rewarded with privilege.

State Repression

Thus so far we have covered the internal factors that led to the rise and fall of the Black Panther Party, but it would be a revision of history not to include the massive government campaign to destroy the BPP manifested in the form of COINTELPRO; a branch of the FBI established to infiltrate, disrupt, and neutralize dissident political formations. While numerous structural deficiencies within the BPP enabled infiltrators

and *agent provocateurs* to enter the ranks of the party; it must be noted the degree in which the US government came down on the BPP.

After the Panthers were dubbed “the greatest threat to the internal security of the United States” in 1968; the FBI quickly launched a widespread and ultimately successful campaign to destroy the party. Forged letters led to the disruption of many critical Panther alliances (notably with SNCC), groups were pitted against each other resulting in the deaths of Panther leaders Bunchy Carter and John Huggins at the hands of rival militant group United Slaves, leaders were outright assassinated like Mark Clark and Fred Hampton, and hundreds of infiltrators were planted to encourage internal discord within the party (Churchill & Vander Wall, 1988, p. 63-94).

COINTELPRO used every available avenue it could find to break apart the BPP. The culmination of their efforts, coupled with massive police raids on offices and mass arrests of key party leaders, was to break the party into two factions in 1971 by pitting Newton against Cleaver. By 1972 Panthers loyal to either leader were killing each other across America as many of the rank and file decided to pack up and jump ship. This open warfare was brought about due to internal contradictions exploited by the government to divide and conquer. The result forced many eastern members loyal to Cleaver underground into the Black Liberation Army while Newton called all loyalists back to Oakland to centralize the dying party under his control. By 1973 the party had been decimated with hundreds of its members in exile, jail, or dead.

The Black Liberation Movement exemplified by the repression of the BPP was far from the only group to be infiltrated and repressed. The state kept tabs on leaders and groups both revolutionary and reformist. The FBI deliberately let the Klan attack

Freedom Riders in 1961 even going as far as passing their itinerary onto the KKK (Dierenfeld, 2004, p.62-64). J. Edgar Hoover had Martin Luther King's phone tapped and attempted to ruin him by exposing his marital infidelity to the media (Dierenfeld, 2004, p.85). Both the civil rights movement from NAACP to SCLC and the Black Power movement from SNCC to BPP were victims of COINTELPRO. However, the damage they could do and the extremes to which they went were hand in hand with the character of each movement. While the Civil Rights movement and its supporters tasted atrocity at the hands of Southern bigots; the government could never have gotten away with what they did to the Panthers had they tried those tactics with Randolph, Bayard, and King. The Civil Rights movement had to deal with wire taps and harassment; the BPP had to deal with executions and imprisonment. There was not the national public outrage that existed in the case of King when Fred Hampton was gunned down in his bed in 1969. Nor were the numerous raids against the Panther offices and continuous imprisonment of its members met with the same public sympathy. When the media saw Southern blacks in their Sunday Best being hit with water cannons singing we shall overcome it had a much different effect than hearing Hampton urge blacks to be revolutionaries and 'off the pig'. The Civil Rights movement faced government surveillance and harassment, but it was somewhat shielded through its adherence to non violence. The BPP could be painted as violent, cop-killing, communist, revolutionaries that simply *had* to be suppressed. The outrage was lessened and COINTELPRO received a veritable carte blanche to destroy the BPP.

Although the party would continue to function as a skeletal political entity until 1982; its capacity as a revolutionary vanguard had been successfully destroyed by 1970.

Revisionist histories will attribute the death of the party on one extreme purely to COINTELPRO while on the other internal factors are cited. In reality it was a complete combination of the two. Any group that seeks to radically change the structure of the US government should never underestimate the extent to which the state will unleash its repressive forces. Any group that seeks to radically change the structure of the US government must drastically be aware of internal contradictions.

Conclusion

The Black Panther Party has left us with both an important legacy and numerous lessons on the realities of revolutionary politics in America. Rather than demonize or glorify the party we must take them for what they were; a spirited and noble attempt of young American men and women to demand justice from their society. As a new movement begins to form in the early 21st century we must more than ever assess and understand what the Panthers tried to do. “At its peak, the Panthers’ slogan, “All Power to the People,” resounded across the globe as a defiant echo of the African America determination to win a meaningful freedom and achieve genuine democracy. Future generations will inevitably build on this sentiment, and hopefully avoid the mistakes of the Black Panther Party.”(Booker, 1998, p.358). The impossibility of their struggle and the utter nobility of their message echoes today in the minds of America’s new generation of radicals ready to take action.

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Appendix

October 1966 Black Panther Party Platform and Program: What We Want. What We Believe.

1. WE WANT FREEDOM. WE WANT POWER TO DETERMINE THE DESTINY OF OUR BLACK AND OPPRESSED COMMUNITIES.
We believe that Black and oppressed people will not be free until we are able to determine our destinies in our own communities ourselves, by fully controlling all the institutions which exist in our communities.
2. WE WANT FULL EMPLOYMENT FOR OUR PEOPLE.
We believe that the federal government is responsible and obligated to give every person employment or a guaranteed income. We believe that if the American businessmen will not give full employment, then the technology and means of production should be taken from the businessmen and placed in the community so that the people of the community can organize and employ all of its people and give a high standard of living.
3. WE WANT AN END TO THE ROBBERY BY THE CAPITALISTS OF OUR BLACK AND OPPRESSED COMMUNITIES.
We believe that this racist government has robbed us and now we are demanding the overdue debt of

forty acres and two mules. Forty acres and two mules were promised 100 years ago as restitution for slave labor and mass murder of Black people. We will accept the payment in currency which will be distributed to our many communities. The American racist has taken part in the slaughter of our fifty million Black people. Therefore, we feel this is a modest demand that we make.

4. WE WANT DECENT HOUSING, FIT FOR THE SHELTER OF HUMAN BEINGS.
We believe that if the landlords will not give decent housing to our Black and oppressed communities, then housing and the land should be made into cooperatives so that the people in our communities, with government aid, can build and make decent housing for the people.
5. WE WANT DECENT 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 believe in an educational system that will give to our people a knowledge of the self. If you do not have knowledge of yourself and your position in the society and in the world, then you will have little chance to know anything else.
6. WE WANT COMPLETELY FREE HEALTH CARE FOR ALL BLACK AND OPPRESSED PEOPLE.
We believe that the government must provide, free of charge, for the people, health facilities which will not only treat our illnesses, most of which have come about as a result of our oppression, but which will also develop preventive medical programs to guarantee our future survival. We believe that mass health education and research programs must be developed to give all Black and oppressed people access to advanced scientific and medical information, so we may provide our selves with proper medical attention and care.
7. WE WANT AN IMMEDIATE END TO POLICE BRUTALITY AND MURDER OF BLACK PEOPLE, OTHER PEOPLE OF COLOR, ALL OPPRESSED PEOPLE INSIDE THE UNITED STATES.
We believe that the racist and fascist government of the United States uses its domestic enforcement agencies to carry out its program of oppression against black people, other people of color and poor people inside the united States. We believe it is our right, therefore, to defend ourselves against such armed forces and that all Black and oppressed people should be armed for self defense of our homes and communities against these fascist police forces.
8. WE WANT AN IMMEDIATE END TO ALL WARS OF AGGRESSION.
We believe that the various conflicts which exist around the world stem directly from the aggressive desire of the United States ruling circle and government to force its domination upon the oppressed people of the world. We believe that if the United States government or its lackeys do not cease these aggressive wars it is the right of the people to defend themselves by any means necessary against their aggressors.
9. WE WANT FREEDOM FOR ALL BLACK AND OPPRESSED PEOPLE NOW HELD IN U. S. FEDERAL, STATE, COUNTY, CITY AND MILITARY PRISONS AND JAILS. WE WANT TRIALS BY A JURY OF PEERS FOR ALL PERSONS CHARGED WITH SO-CALLED CRIMES UNDER THE LAWS OF THIS COUNTRY.
We believe that the many Black and poor oppressed people now held in United States

prisons and jails have not received fair and impartial trials under a racist and fascist judicial system and should be free from incarceration. We believe in the ultimate elimination of all wretched, inhuman penal institutions, because the masses of men and women imprisoned inside the United States or by the United States military are the victims of oppressive conditions which are the real cause of their imprisonment. We believe that when persons are brought to trial they must be guaranteed, by the United States, juries of their peers, attorneys of their choice and freedom from imprisonment while awaiting trial.

10. WE WANT LAND, BREAD, HOUSING, EDUCATION, CLOTHING, JUSTICE, PEACE AND PEOPLE'S COMMUNITY CONTROL OF MODERN TECHNOLOGY.

When, in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bonds which have connected them with another, and to assume, among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the laws of nature and nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed; that, whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute a new government, laying its foundation on such principles, and organizing its powers in such form as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and, accordingly, all experience hath shown that mankind are most disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But, when a long train of abuses and usurpation, pursuing invariably the same object, evinces a design to reduce them under absolute despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such government, and to provide new guards for their future security.⁴

⁴ Foner, P. (1995). *The Black Panthers Speak* (pg. 2-4) New York: De Capo Press.