

ALL POWER TO THE PEOPLE:
THE BLACK PANTHER PARTY AS THE VANGUARD OF THE OPPRESSED

by

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A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of
The Wilkes Honors College
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Bachelor of Arts in Liberal Arts and Sciences
with a Concentration in American Studies

Wilkes Honors College of
Florida Atlantic University

Jupiter, Florida

May 2008

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This thesis was prepared under the direction of the candidate's thesis advisor, Dr. Christopher Strain, and has been approved by the members of her/his supervisory committee. It was submitted to the faculty of The Honors College and was accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in Liberal Arts and Sciences.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Author would like to thank (in no particular order) Andrew, Linda, Kathy, Barbara, and Ronald Berman, Mick and Julie Grossman, the 213rd, Graham and Megan Whitaker, Zach Burks, Shawn Beard, Jared Reilly, Ian “Easy” Depagnier, Dr. Strain, and Dr. Barrett for all of their support.

I would also like to thank Bobby Seale, Fred Hampton, Huey Newton, and others for their inspiration. Thanks are also due to all those who gave of themselves in the struggle for showing us the way.

“Never doubt that a small group of people can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.” – Margaret Mead

ABSTRACT

Author: Matthew Berman

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Institution: Wilkes Honors College at Florida Atlantic University

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Christopher Strain

Degree: Bachelor of Arts in Liberal Arts and Sciences

Concentration: American Studies

Year: 2008

The Black Panther Party was the most famous group born out of the Black Power Movement. Because of the group's inherent link to the Black Power Movement, and the group's slogan of "Black Power," many people, both black and white, believed, and continue to believe, that the Black Panther Party was a group with racial motives. However, this conceptualization of the Party was, and is, incorrect. While the Black Panther Party began as an outgrowth of the black civil rights movement, the Panthers quickly evolved into a revolutionary vanguard with a non-racial, class-oriented agenda.

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Introduction

The summer of 1966 marked the “rupture of the nonviolent integrationist-directed Civil Rights Movement.”¹ While this strategy challenged and eventually defeated segregation, the lives of the majority of the black populace remained unchanged. Although legislation designed to ease the lives of black people and provide them with equal rights was passed, the lives of blacks, especially in the urban North and West, were as brutal in the mid-sixties as they were in the years preceding it. The black community still suffered from brazen police brutality, poor housing, poorer social services, and widespread unemployment.

Amidst this crisis, a new alternative movement was born. In June, 1966, Stokely Carmichael made a speech in Greenwood, Mississippi during James Meredith’s March Against Fear calling for the use of what he termed Black Power as a forceful and direct reaction to oppression rather than the passive, seemingly indirect action of the Civil Rights Movement. Thus, the Black Power Movement was born as an offshoot of and response to the Civil Rights Movements. According to Charles Jones and Judson Jeffries, the concept of and implementation of Black Power was extremely broad:

It ranged from the Nixon presidential administration’s inspired Black capitalism, adopted by the former director of CORE (Congress of Racial Equality) Floyd McKissick in his Soul City endeavor, to the working-class based variant offered by the League of Revolutionary Black Workers in Detroit. An example of the cultural nationalist’s version of the Black power concept includes Organization US, led by Maulana Karenga in Los Angeles, while the Republic of New Africa offered the independent nation-state model. Finally, the application of Black power is evident in the

¹Robert L. Allen, *Black Awakening in Capitalist America: An Analytic History* (New York: Anchor Books, 1970), 23-28 quoted in Charles E. Jones, ed., *The Black Panther Party: Reconsidered*, (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1998), 25.

formation of Black caucuses within political bodies and professional associations.²

It was in this turbulent era that the Black Panther Party was formed in Oakland, California, on October 15, 1966.

The Black Panther Party was the most famous group born out of the Black Power Movement. Because of the group's inherent link to the Black Power Movement, and the group's slogan of "Black Power," many people, both black and white, believed, and continue to believe, that the Black Panther Party was a group that was solely motivated by race. However, this conceptualization of the Party was, and is, incorrect. Although the Black Panther Party began as an outgrowth of the black civil rights movement, the Panthers quickly evolved into a revolutionary vanguard with a non-racial, class-oriented agenda.

Panther Ideology

Though Bobby Seale and Huey Newton co-founded the Black Panther Party in 1966, Newton was the driving force behind the conceptualization of the Party's theories and ideology. Newton formed the Party when he was twenty-four and attending Merritt College; like any other young college attendee Newton's ideas and perceptions of the world were constantly changing and the Party reflected this evolution. Over its roughly sixteen-year existence the BPP underwent a variety of subtle changes in ideology. According to Judson L. Jeffries, the ideology of the Panthers "can be broken down into four phases: black nationalism, revolutionary socialism, internationalism, and intercommunalism."³

²Charles E. Jones, ed., *The Black Panther Party: Reconsidered*, (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1998), 25-26.

The Party was originally formed as a counterpoint to seemingly ineffective groups, inspired by the Civil Rights Movement, stressing peaceful social reform. While attending Merritt College, both men were members of a group called the Soul Student Advisory Council (SSAC); the impetus for the creation of the Black Panther Party was caused by a split within SSAC between “those who favored campus cultural enrichment programs and other members who advocated community mobilization.”⁴ Seale and Newton would eventually resign from SSAC after disagreements over the proper use of club funds.

Seale and Newton perceived many of the Civil Rights groups in the South in the same way that they perceived SSAC. Many Northern and Western blacks saw the Civil Rights Movement as a Southern phenomenon while racism was a national problem; blacks in the urban North and West were further frustrated by the “middle-class orientation and nonviolent integrationist [ideologies]”⁵ employed by these groups. Out of this frustration a desire for a more radical movement was born: the Black Power Movement. In his autobiography, *Revolutionary Suicide*, Newton recalls seeing Dr. King “come to Watts in an effort to calm the people and we had seen his philosophy of nonviolence 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?”⁶ Newton believed that the Civil Rights Movement was destined to fail as it was “an

³ Judson L. Jeffries, *Huey P. Newton: The Radical Theorist* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2002), 62.

⁴ Charles E. Jones, ed., *The Black Panther Party: Reconsidered*, (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 2004), 338.

⁵ *Ibid*, 159.

⁶ Huey P. Newton, *Revolutionary Suicide*, (New York: Writers and Readers Publishing, Inc., 1995), 110.

eighteenth-century revolution in the framework of a twentieth-century government.”⁷

What was needed was a twentieth-century revolution.

Thus the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense and the Black Power Movement were born out of the needs of the common people and the “by any means necessary” attitude espoused by Malcolm X. Ron “Maulana” Karenga, founder of Organization US, defined black nationalism as a “social theory and practice organized around the concept and conviction that Blacks are a distinct historical personality and they should, therefore, unite in order to gain the structural capacity to define, defend and develop their interests.”⁸ Though the idea of Black Power was seemingly simple to comprehend, black nationalist groups took a variety of stances on how to empower the black community.

Newton, with Seale’s help, conceptualized and drew up the 10-Point Panther Program and Platform in an attempt to codify the goals and beliefs of the Black Panther Party. The first rendition of the 10-Point Program was firmly based in the black nationalist perspective emphasizing black solidarity. However, it also bordered on an obsessive distrust of the American government. The platform and program called for full employment of blacks, decent housing, education, black exemption from military service, an end to police brutality, freedom for black prisoners, all-black juries, land, bread, clothing, justice, peace, and most importantly self-determination for the black community.⁹ Self-determination was not only the central goal of the Black Power Movement it is also the “essence of the concept of a nation.”¹⁰ The 1968 revisions to the

⁷Huey P. Newton, *To Die For The People*, (New York: Random House, 1972), 159.

⁸Maulana Karenga, *Kwaidia Theory: An Introductory Outline*, in Judson L. Jeffries, *Huey P. Newton: The Radical Theorist*, (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2001), 64.

⁹Phillip S. Foner, ed., *The Black Panthers Speak*, (New York: Da Capo Press, 1995), 2-3.

10-Point Program and Platform emphasized self-determination even more. In 1966, the tenth point stated “We want land, bread, housing, education, clothing, justice and peace;” in 1968, Newton added:

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 purposes of determining the will of Black people as to their national destiny.¹¹

Over time, the Program and Platform would undergo several changes as the ideology of the Panthers changed (See Appendix A).

As is to be expected since the Party was originally created and rooted in black nationalist thought, the Party was in line with early black nationalist ideas such as creating a separate, black-controlled, nation-state within America. Newton argued that “if blacks wanted to protect and preserve their own subculture, indeed to be masters of their own fate, the answer was to demand a separate nation within the continental United States.”¹² Yet, the Panthers’ naivety blinded them; they believed that it was possible to establish a new and separate nation-state in the United States, ignoring the hundreds of uprisings and rebellions with similar goals that had been quashed throughout the world. Not only were the fledgling Panthers unaware of the attempts by foreign entities such as the Catalan and Basque people of Spain to establish an autonomous state; the Panthers were not cognizant of other attempts, domestically, such as those made by Native Americans. Indian tribes and reservations existed and continue to exist as “domestic

¹⁰Charles E. Jones, ed., *The Black Panther Party: Reconsidered*, (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 2004), 162.

¹¹Phillip S. Foner, ed., *The Black Panthers Speak*, (New York: Da Capo Press, 1995), 2-3.

¹²Judson L. Jeffries, *Huey P. Newton: The Radical Theorist*, (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2001), 65.

dependant nations...in a state of pupilage”¹³ reliant and to a certain extent subservient to the federal government yet the American government had sought to terminate tribal sovereignty and assimilate Native Americans into mainstream American society. However, within a few years Newton came to the realization that the American government would never relinquish lands to blacks to form a separate nation state, and that such a demand was futile. Moreover, converse to the majority of black nationalist thought the Black Panthers asserted that black emigration to Africa was impractical and foolish. They argued that African-Americans were not properly equipped mentally, physically, or culturally and would be unwilling to leave their homeland for an unknown land.¹⁴

Though originally formed as a black nationalist group, the Panthers often found themselves at odds with other black nationalist groups, such as Organization US. The rivalry between Organization US and the Black Panther Party was fostered by the Panthers realization of the futility of the seperationist ideology of certain black nationalist factions, including Organization US; the groups’ mutual disdain for one another was further compounded by the Panthers utter disregard for cultural nationalism, another ideology espoused by Organization US. Cultural nationalism was an offshoot of black nationalism emphasizing African culture that the Panthers felt conveyed the wrong message to the black community. Linda Harrison, a member of the Oakland chapter, compared cultural nationalism to the James Brown song “I’m Black and I’m Proud.” According to Harrison, cultural nationalists and “those who believe in the ‘I’m Black and

¹³ Cherokee Nation v. Georgia, 30 U.S. 1, 17 (1831).

¹⁴ Judson L. Jeffries, *Huey P. Newton: The Radical Theorist*, (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2001), 65-66.

Proud [sic]’ theory believe that there is a dignity inherent in wearing naturals; that a *buba* makes a slave a man; and that a common language—Swahili—makes all of us brothers.”¹⁵ According to the Panthers, cultural nationalism promulgated essentially harmless and non-confrontational methods of so-called protest. Adopting African “traditions, mores, and folkways”¹⁶ was not revolutionary in any way. In a 1968 interview, Newton discussed cultural nationalism at length, noting that cultural nationalists “feel that the African culture will automatically bring political freedom.”¹⁷ At the same time, the marketing of cultural nationalist items and goods like dashikis and bubas to black people helped contribute to the Party’s perception of cultural nationalism as counter-revolutionary, as advertisement and capitalism were not the cornerstones on which revolution was built.

Three factors caused the ideological shift from black nationalism to revolutionary nationalism: a new interpretation of race and class, a more practical conceptualization of socialist thought within the party (a concept intrinsically tied to the first), and the acceptance of non-black allies. While attending school in Oakland, Newton became very well read in socialism and Marxism. In his memoirs, Newton writes that his conversion to socialism was a slow and arduous process that was not completed until after he read the works of Mao Tse-tung. Although he knew Marxists, Newton stated that “it was my life

¹⁵“On Cultural Nationalism,” *The Black Panther*, February 2, 1969, 6, quoted in Jeffrey O.G. Ogbar, *Black Power: Radical Politics and African American Identity*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 114.

¹⁶Jeffrey O.G. Ogbar, *Black Power: Radical Politics and African American Identity*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 195.

¹⁷Phillip S. Foner, ed., *The Black Panthers Speak*, (New York: Da Capo Press, 1995), 50.

plus independent reading that made me a socialist—nothing else.”¹⁸ However, though Newton “saw the link between racism and the economics of capitalism [... he also believed] that it was necessary to separate the concepts in analyzing the general situation.”¹⁹

The impetus for Newton and the Panthers’ changing views towards capitalism and racism was the oppressive, black capitalist. In March 1969, President Nixon created the Office of Minority Business Enterprise (OMBE). The department was founded “to foster the economic status and the pride of our minority groups, [and] to involve them more fully in our private enterprise system.”²⁰ However, the Panthers believed that black capitalism would be as much a hindrance to the revolution as white capitalism. They concluded that “black capitalism would replace one master with another. A small group of blacks would control the destiny of the majority of black people.”²¹ At the Revolutionary People’s Constitutional Convention in 1970, Newton stated that the Panthers “see a major contradiction between capitalism in this country and our interest. We realize that this country became very rich upon slavery and that slavery is capitalism in the extreme. We have two evils to fight, capitalism and racism.”²²

As the Black Panthers became more familiar with communist thought and revolutionary literature, capitalism and class became as important as race in their

¹⁸Huey P. Newton, *Revolutionary Suicide*, (New York: Writers and Reader Publishing, Inc., 1973), 70.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Jon Frappier, “Chase Goes to Harlem: Financing Black Capitalism,” *Freedomways* 28 (April 1977): 23, quoted in Judson L. Jeffries, *Huey P. Newton: The Radical Theorist* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2002), 70.

²¹Judson L. Jeffries, *Huey P. Newton: The Radical Theorist* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2002), 71.

²²Ibid.

revolutionary struggle. Several months before his murder in December 1969, Chairman Fred Hampton gave a speech announcing that “our ten point program is in the midst of being changed right now, because we used the word ‘white’ when we should have used the word ‘capitalist.’”²³ The major revision to the platform was in point three, which, when amended, read; “‘We want an end to the robbery by the capitalist of our black community.’ The original statement had read ‘by the white man’ as opposed to the ‘capitalist.’”²⁴ This change was important because it acknowledged that white people were not the enemy of the revolution; rather, capitalists of *any* color were the oppressors.

An additional factor that led to the Panthers’ shift in ideology was the group’s acceptance of whites. During the Black Power Era, the Panthers were the only Black Power group to accept whites in any way, shape, or form.²⁵ One of the reasons that the Black Panther Party recognized white revolutionaries as allies was because of their new comprehension of communism. Additionally, the work of Charles Garry during Huey Newton’s murder trial undoubtedly helped improve race relations between whites and the Black Panthers. Garry already had a reputation for helping minorities and oppressed people, and in 1967 the Panthers hired him as their permanent legal representative. In his book *Huey P. Newton: The Radical Theorist*, Judson L. Jeffries wrote that the Vietnam War also provided “the perfect entrée for the Black Panther Party to pursue white allies.”²⁶ Jeffries elaborated that “the war made the United States seem like an evil

²³Philip S. Foner, ed., *The Black Panthers Speak*, (New York: Da Capo Press, 1995), 143.

²⁴Judson L. Jeffries, *Huey P. Newton: The Radical Theorist* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2002), 70.

²⁵Peniel E. Joseph, *Waiting ‘Til The Midnight Hour*, (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2006), 219.

country in the eyes of many white youth.”²⁷ These disaffected youths sought out the Black Panther Party and other radical groups in an effort to make a change in the American government, the same government that the BPP was fighting against.

The American government, especially during the Vietnam War, was viewed by the Left as an imperialist nation. Revolutionary nationalism was an ideology designed to combat the imperialism apparent in the government. Newton and his colleagues theorized that “Black people in America were colonized in much the same way as the people of Africa, Asia, and Latin America, whose countries Western Europeans subjugated in the nineteenth century.”²⁸ To help throw off the imperialist yoke, the Panthers began to foster alliances with minority groups in America such as the Young Lords, the Patriot Party, the Red Guard, and the Brown Berets. In the eyes of the Panthers the only way to be able to determine their future and achieve freedom was to eliminate capitalism and replace it with socialism. To realize these lofty goals, the BPP reached out to other oppressed people including poor whites, because “the freedom struggles of oppressed people are opposed by this government because they are a threat to bureaucratic capitalism in the United States.”²⁹

When Huey Newton was released from jail in August 1970, he once again re-conceptualized the goals and direction of the Black Panther Party. The central tenet of the

²⁶Judson L. Jeffries, *Huey P. Newton: The Radical Theorist* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2002), 72.

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Charles E. Jones, ed., *The Black Panther Party: Reconsidered*, (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 2004), 165.

²⁹August Meier, Elliott Rudwick, and Francis L. Broderick, eds., “Interview with Huey Newton” in *Black Protest Thought in the Twentieth Century*, (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1971), 7 quoted in Judson L. Jeffries, *Huey P. Newton: The Radical Theorist* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2002), 73.

Party's newfound internationalism was an expansion of revolutionary nationalism to a global scale. Now, the aim of the Panthers was to advance democracy, in this instance socialist democracy as opposed to the capitalist democracy of America, and liberate downtrodden and exploited people throughout the world rather than solely in the United States. The basis for this new ideology was that America no longer existed solely as a nation; America was a monolithic, repressive empire. When asked why the Panthers became internationalists, Newton responded that "we are internationalists because we are fighting an internationalist oppressor."³⁰ In a 1971 article for *The Black Panther*, Newton wrote that "the only way we can combat an international enemy is through an international strategy, unity of all people who are exploited, who will overthrow the international bourgeoisie."³¹ The ultimate goal of revolutionary internationalism was the destruction of the concept of nationhood. The Panthers became diametrically opposed to black nationalist ideologies, as the Panthers felt:

Black people in America have a moral right to claim nationhood because we are a colonized people. But history won't allow us to claim nationhood, because it has bestowed an obligation upon us; to take socialist development to its final stage, to rid the world of the imperialist threat, the threat of the capitalist and the warmonger. Once he is destroyed then there will be no need for nationhood, because the nations won't need to defend themselves against imperialism.³²

³⁰Louis G. Heath, *The Black Panther Leaders Speak*, (Metuchen: Scarecrow Press, 1976), 219 quoted in Judson L. Jeffries, *Huey P. Newton: The Radical Theorist* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2002), 74.

³¹*The Black Panther*, 19 January 1971, 10-11 quoted in Floyd W. Hayes, III, and Francis A. Kiene, III, "All Power to the People": The Political Thought of Huey P. Newton and The Black Panther Party, in Charles E. Jones, ed., *The Black Panther Party: Reconsidered*, (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 2004), 165.

³²*The Black Panther*, 19 January 1971, 10-11 quoted in Floyd W. Hayes, III, and Francis A. Kiene, III, "All Power to the People": The Political Thought of Huey P. Newton and The Black Panther Party, in Charles E. Jones, ed., *The Black Panther Party: Reconsidered*, (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 2004), 170.

Newton began to seek out and provide aid to international groups that represented the oppressed such as the Congolese Socialist Youth Union,³³ the Korean Democratic Lawyers Association, the French Federation of Black African Students, the German Socialist Student's League (West Germany), and the Communist Party of Canada.³⁴ The Panthers even offered assistance in the form of troops to the National Liberation Front and Provisional Revolutionary Government of South Vietnam, which the Vietnamese readily accepted.³⁵ Newton's support of the South Vietnamese drew heavy criticism from all corners of the United States, including former leader of the NAACP, Roy Wilkins.

However, unlike the majority of the criticism aimed at the Panthers, Roy Wilkins' assessment of the Black Panther Party's alliance with the South Vietnamese was not driven by any sort of national fervor. Instead, Roy Wilkins critiqued the prioritization of a foreign ally over the poor blacks in America. In Newton's scathing response he accused the NAACP of being unable to protect or provide aid for black people,³⁶ and argued that "America is World-Enemy-Number-One and the military is its strong arm. We feel that it is imperative (necessary) to defend people of color when they are attacked by American troops in other lands."³⁷

Not only were the Panthers prepared to attack American imperialism, the Panthers also attempted to destroy imperialism as it existed in the former colonies of Africa. In

³³Charles E. Jones, ed., *The Black Panther Party: Reconsidered*, (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 2004), 241.

³⁴Judson L. Jeffries, *Huey P. Newton: The Radical Theorist* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2002), 77.

³⁵Huey P. Newton, *To Die For the People*, (New York: Random House, 1972), 178-186.

³⁶*Ibid*, 188.

³⁷*Ibid*, 190.

1970, The Panthers officially opened the International Section of the Black Panther Party in Algiers, Algeria. Algiers was used as the base of operations because it had become, much like Cuba earlier, a refuge for black revolutionaries; Eldridge and Kathleen Cleaver along with other members of the Black Panther Party had fled to Algiers in 1969. From Algiers the Panthers were able to communicate with other communist governments who were their allies: Vietnam, North Korea, and China.

In 1972, when Newton heard that Nixon was planning on visiting the People's Republic of China, he decided to get to China before Nixon did. The Chinese "were interested in the Panthers' Marxist analysis and wanted to discuss it as well as to show Newton the concrete application of theory in their society."³⁸ While in China, Newton was graciously received and the Chinese people carried signs of support. Judson L. Jeffries wrote that Newton's trip to China fostered the move towards intercommunalism because of several reasons:

[Primarily, it] reinforced Newton's understanding of the revolutionary process and his belief in the necessity of making a concrete analysis of real-life conditions. The visit also confirmed his conviction that an oppressed people can be liberated if their leaders persevere in raising the people's consciousness and in struggling relentlessly against the oppressor.³⁹

Intercommunalism was first publicly discussed at the 1970 Revolutionary People's Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia. As with the other Panther ideologies, intercommunalism was a shift in emphasis rather than an entirely new separate philosophy. As its name suggests, intercommunalism stressed "the existence of exploited

³⁸Judson L. Jeffries, *Huey P. Newton: The Radical Theorist* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2002), 78.

³⁹Ibid.

and oppressed global communities and their need for collective revolutionary emancipation.”⁴⁰ Capitalism on the global scale, according to Newton, had dissolved the nation-state, which made national boundaries inapplicable. More importantly, the collapse of national boundaries rendered the ideologies of revolutionary nationalism and internationalism moot; the Panthers suggested that without national boundaries, the world was comprised solely of communities. Therefore, intercommunalism represented a form of socialist thought which had been adapted to fit the radically different world of the 1970s, in which the oppressed communities were exploited and preyed upon by the imperialist government of the United States.

Intercommunalism represented a form of Marxist-Leninist theory writ large across the world, creating a utopia that had yet been seen. In a 1971 article for *The Black Panther*, Newton declared that “our hopes for freedom lie...in a future which may hold a positive elimination of national boundaries and ties; a future of the world, where a human world society may be so structured as to benefit all the earth's people (not peoples).”⁴¹ Intercommunalism was the assimilation and application of all of Newton’s political theories and philosophies. Speaking in 1971, Newton declared that intercommunalism “will produce new values, new identities; it will mold a new and essentially human culture as the people will resolve old conflicts based on cultural and economic conditions.”⁴² The Black Panther Party’s philosophy of intercommunalism cemented the

⁴⁰Charles E. Jones, ed., *The Black Panther Party: Reconsidered*, (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 2004), 171.

⁴¹ Huey P. Newton, “Uniting Against the Common Enemy,” *The Black Panther*, 23 October 1971 quoted in Besenia Rodriguez, “Long Live Third World Unity! Long Live Internationalism”: Huey P. Newton’s Revolutionary Intercommunalism, < <http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/section?content=a762477597&fulltext=713240928>>, accessed on October 14, 2007.

Party's legacy as the vanguard party of the Black Power movement; as intercommunalism sought to unite all oppressed people to overthrow the American empire and create a utopia comprised of one people, the people of the Earth.

In both theory and practice the Black Panther Party was attempting to remold itself into the Vanguard Party of the revolution and provide an example for the oppressed peoples of the world. The Panthers' ideology and rhetoric were constantly shifting as the Party was being re-conceptualized over and over again by Huey Newton. However, the changing ideology and platform were only theoretical, both had to be implemented and practiced. The coalitions formed by the Panthers with other oppressed minorities and liberal whites provide a concrete example of how Panther theory and practice were reconciled and utilized.

Panther Coalitions

Since the founding of the Party in October 1966, the white media has accused the Black Panthers of encouraging black racial superiority and racist anti-white sentiments. In 1967, the *Sacramento Bee* said, that the Black Panther Party could "accurately be described as anti-white."⁴³ Norman Hill, author and journalist, said that the Panthers are "on a par with [the Black man's] implacable, ignorant, bigoted foes in the Southern United States and South Africa."⁴⁴ Vice President Spiro T. Agnew derided the Panthers

⁴² Huey Newton, "Revolutionary Intercommunalism," in Amy Gdala, ed., *Revolutionary Intercommunalism and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination*, (Newton: Cyhoeddwr y Superscript, Ltd., 2004), 45 quoted in Besenia Rodriguez, "Long Live Third World Unity! Long Live Internationalism": Huey P. Newton's Revolutionary Intercommunalism, < <http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/section?content=a762477597&fulltext=713240928>>, accessed on October 14, 2007.

⁴³Gene Marine, *The Black Panthers* (New York: New American Library, 1969): 67, quoted in Charles E. Jones and Judson L. Jeffries, "Don't Believe the Hype": *Debunking the Panther Mythology*, in ed. Charles E. Jones, *The Black Panther Party: Reconsidered*, (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1998), 37.

as a “completely irresponsible anarchist group of criminals.”⁴⁵ The New York Times, in 1966, called the Party “an anti-integration group of articulate young militants.”⁴⁶ Yet, since the Party’s creation, cofounders Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale have stated that the Party’s greatest enemy was racism. Seale stated that the Party “[understands] where racism comes from. Our Minister of Defense has taught us to understand that we have to oppose all kinds of racism.”⁴⁷ In opposition to these accusations by the white media and America government, Seale, in his book *Seize the Time*, wrote that the Black Panther Party was a “very progressive revolutionary party.”⁴⁸ In the Party’s fledgling years, this position existed primarily in rhetoric, but as the Panthers rose to prominence their deeds matched their words.

From the Party’s conception, Newton and Seale had publicly declared that the Black Panthers were not a racist organization, calling for reverse slavery. Todd Gitlin, author of *The Sixties*, stated that unlike many other black organizations during the Black Power Era the Panthers “welcomed white allies.”⁴⁹ According to Newton, the true concept behind the Panther’s philosophy regarding whites is that the Panthers “don’t hate

⁴⁴Norman Hill, ed., *The Black Panther Menace: America’s Neo-Nazis*, (New York: Popular Library, 1971): 10, quoted in Charles E. Jones and Judson L. Jeffries, “Don’t Believe the Hype”: *Debunking the Panther Mythology*, in ed. Charles E. Jones, *The Black Panther Party: Reconsidered*, (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1998), 37.

⁴⁵Phillip Foner, ed. *The Black Panthers Speak*, (Philadelphia: Lippincott), 1970, 54 quoted in Judson L. Jeffries, *Huey P. Newton: The Radical Theorist*, (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2002), 29.

⁴⁶Thomas A. Johnson, “Black Panthers Picket a School,” *New York Times*, 13 September 1966, pg 38.

⁴⁷Bobby Seale, *Seize the Time*, (New York: Random House, 1970), 69.

⁴⁸*Ibid*, 71.

⁴⁹Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties*, 349, quoted in Charles E. Jones and Judson L. Jeffries, “Don’t Believe the Hype”: *Debunking the Panther Mythology*, in ed. Charles E. Jones, *The Black Panther Party: Reconsidered*, (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1998), 38.

white people; we hate the oppressor. And if the oppressor happens to be white then we hate him.”⁵⁰ Because the Black Panther Party was the most well known and visible Black Power group they were associated with a vehement racist attitude towards whites. Some of the reasons for these accusations were a resemblance to the Nation of Islam, a group that also advocated empowerment and self-determination, which espoused that white people were inherently evil devils and a miscomprehension of the term Black Power as it was used by the Panthers.

According to Judson L. Jeffries, the belief that the Panthers were anti-white or racist was due to a misunderstanding about the term ‘Black Power.’ He cites a survey in 1967 conducted by the University of Michigan which revealed that nearly 60 percent of whites interviewed believed “Black Power was synonymous with violence, black racism, and black domination.”⁵¹ Although construed as racist and anti-white by many, the Black Panther Party was one of the most progressive organizations of the Black Power Era. One of the Party’s most popular slogans was: “We say All Power to the People–Black Power to Black people and Brown Power to Brown People, Red Power to Red People and Yellow Power to Yellow People. We say White Power to White People”⁵² The slogan “All Power to the People” epitomizes the Panthers commitment to the empowerment of all peoples.

⁵⁰Huey P. Newton, "Huey Newton Talks to the Movement," in *Black Panthers Speak*, ed. Foner, 54, quoted in Chris Booker, *Lumpenization: A Critical Error of The Black Panther Party*, in ed. Charles E. Jones, *The Black Panther Party: Reconsidered*, (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1998), 349.

⁵¹Joel D. Aberbach and Jack L. Walker, "The Meanings of Black Power: A Comparison of White and Black Interpretations of a Political Slogan," *American Political Science Review* 64 (June 1970): 367-88, quoted in Judson L. Jeffries, *Huey P. Newton: The Radical Theorist*, (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2002), 19.

⁵² Fred Hampton, "You Can Murder a Liberator but You Can't Murder Liberation," in *The Black Panthers Speak*, ed. Phillip Foner, 145, quoted in Charles E. Jones and Judson L. Jeffries, "*Don't Believe the Hype*": *Debunking the Panther Mythology*, in ed. Charles E. Jones, *The Black Panther Party: Reconsidered*, (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1998), 39.

The leaders of the Black Panther Party quickly realized that in order to take possession of their civil rights and be treated as equals they would have to work with people of other races, with a background similar to the Black Panthers. According to Michael Newton (no relation to Huey Newton), contrary to journalistic depictions, “for a time [the] Panthers were the *only* group of radical blacks willing to accept non-black allies in their midst.”⁵³ Bobby Seale, in a 1968 speech, told young blacks:

[if] you got enough energy to sit down and hate a white person just because of the color of his skin, you’re wasting a lot of energy. You’d better take some of that same energy and put it in some motion and start dealing with those oppressive conditions [that you’re living in].⁵⁴

The BPP first joined forces with a non-black civil rights group, the Peace and Freedom Party (PFP), in 1967 in their attempt to exonerate Huey P. Newton following his alleged murder of police officer John Frey. The Free Huey movement gave whites “eager for an alliance with black radicals an entrée into Black Power.”⁵⁵ The Peace and Freedom Party, the White Panther Party, the Young Patriots, the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), the Youth International Party, the Gay Liberation Front, and the Patriot Party were just a few of the predominantly white leftist groups that the BPP worked with. The Panthers also worked with high-profile whites, the Friends of the Panthers was a group founded in 1967 by Donald Freed and Shirley Douglas Sutherland. Based in Los Angeles, members of the group included Burt Lancaster, Vanessa Redgrave, Elizabeth

⁵³Michael Newton, *Bitter Grain: Huey Newton and the Black Panther Party* (Los Angeles: Holloway House Publishing Co., 1991), 103.

⁵⁴Bobby G. Seale, “Free Huey,” in *Rhetoric of Black Revolution* quoted in Judson L. Jeffries, *Huey P. Newton: The Radical Theorist*, (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2002), 19.

⁵⁵Peniel E. Joseph, *Waiting ‘Til the Midnight Hour*, (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2006), 221.

Taylor, Jane Fonda, and Elliot Gould.⁵⁶ The Panthers were happy to work alongside white radicals, as long as they demonstrated dedication to the revolution and were genuine revolutionaries.

The Patriot Party and the White Panther Party were actually inspired by and modeled after the Black Panther Party. The White Panther Party (WPP), formed in Ann Arbor, Michigan in 1968, adopted a ten-point program that supported the Women's Liberation Movement and promoted the struggle against racism, capitalism, and institutional repression.⁵⁷ The "poor white community of Chicago"⁵⁸ was the birthplace of the Patriot Party. The background of the Patriot Party was very similar to that of the Black Panther Party as both groups were products of the ghetto and its members were the exploited and oppressed lumpen proletariat. Newton explained that because poor whites were exploited and oppressed "at the hands of the white ruling class,"⁵⁹ they were comrades with the Black Panther Party in the struggle against the fascist, capitalist American government. Furthermore, Newton believed that "no fundamental change could occur [in America] without the help of poor whites."⁶⁰

The Patriot Party was born out of the Young Patriot Organization (YPO). In a 1970 article in *The Black Panther*, Patriot Party members (Patriots) explained:

⁵⁶Donald Freed, interview by Judson L. Jeffries, July 20, 1993 quoted in Judson L. Jeffries, *Huey P. Newton: The Radical Theorist*, (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2002), 25.

⁵⁷Judson L. Jeffries, *Huey P. Newton: The Radical Theorist*, (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2002), 28.

⁵⁸Ibid.

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

[the Patriot Party] split from the Young Patriot Organization because [the YPO] was concerned with old friendships, individuals, rather than the masses of people in Uptown [Chicago]. They would rather be friends with a few people and indulge in drinking than listen to the community's cry for help.⁶¹

The YPO represented the white liberal rather than the white radical, because the YPO was more concerned with enjoying life, friends, drinking as opposed to bringing forth the revolution; therefore, the more radical members of the YPO felt that it was necessary to split from the YPO and form a new group designed to aid the revolution. The Patriot Party was dedicated to “[serving] our people’s needs.”⁶² Like the BPP, the Patriots practiced socialism, and the Patriots would eventually start community programs modeled after the Black Panthers’ own, including the Free Breakfast Program.⁶³ Although they shared similar backgrounds, ideologies, and programs, the Patriots were much more politically confrontational. In distinction to the Panthers’ progressive slogan—All Power to The People—the Patriots demanded All Power to The People Or Else.⁶⁴

Although whites helped and worked with the Black Panther Party, they were not allowed to join the official party. Members of the white left would primarily do volunteer work with the Panthers, such as helping organize rallies and other public demonstrations. According to the rank and file members of the Black Panther Party, these white groups’ major contribution to the BPP was “[organizing] and [educating] the oppressed White

⁶¹Patriot Party, “The Patriot Party Speaks to the Movement,” in Philip S. Foner, *The Black Panthers Speak*, (New York: Da Capo Press, 1995), 241.

⁶²Ibid.

⁶³Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

people about similar oppressive conditions in their communities so that there wouldn't be any divisions [between races]."⁶⁵ Working with the Black Panther Party gave the white leftist groups a sense of legitimacy in the movement among other white groups and also with black groups. These combined efforts promoted solidarity among oppressed people, and improved race relations as it became evident to the Panther leadership and theoreticians that people of all colors were being oppressed and not just one specific race. Although many Party members were, at first, against working with whites,⁶⁶ working along with whites was made a part of Party policy and refusal to work with white groups was a punishable offense. After seeing the contributions of white people not only to the Free Huey campaign, but also the revolution as a whole, more and more Panthers became comfortable working alongside whites.

Unlike Organization US and other cultural nationalist groups, the Black Panthers "actively participated in White leftist politics."⁶⁷ Prominent members of the Panthers, such as Bobby Seale, Eldridge Cleaver, and David Hilliard frequently spoke at antiwar rallies and other political gatherings. In return, white activists participated in Party-sponsored events.

Bobby Seale addressed White student radicals in Chicago prior to the "Day of Rage" at the 1968 Democratic National Convention, and on November 15, 1969, David Hilliard, the Chief of Staff, delivered a speech at the San Francisco Moratorium Demonstration, one of the largest rallies of the antiwar movement... Bob Avakian, an Oakland Bay Area White leftist, spoke at a rally sponsored by the Party to protest the death of Denzil Dowell in Richmond,

⁶⁵Charles E. Jones, *The Black Panther Party: Reconsidered*, (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1998), 149.

⁶⁶Ibid, 261.

⁶⁷Ibid, 31.

California. Other examples of joint participation between the Panthers and White radicals included the 1969 United Front Against Fascism conference sponsored by the BPP in Oakland, California, and the 1970 Revolutionary People's Constitutional Conventions.⁶⁸

Many of the Panthers' legal defense committees such as Free Huey, the New York 21, and the New Haven 14 received extensive support from the white radical community.

The continual harassment of the Black Panther Party by the local and federal law enforcement agencies only served to make white leftists and eventually white moderates more generous in support and defense.⁶⁹ The Black Panther Party even commissioned a white lawyer, Charles Garry, as the official Panther attorney and legal spokesman from coast to coast.

Co-founder of the Yippies and noted Leftist, Stew Albert noted that Eldridge Cleaver, in particular, "was the prime mover of the White-Black alliance. He made friends with everybody but retained a Yippie soft spot for Jerry Rubin, Abbie Hoffman, [and] Phil Ochs."⁷⁰ In 1968, Cleaver was selected by the Peace and Freedom Party as their candidate for President of the United States. The position of Vice President was given on an interim basis to Douglas F. Dowd, a professor of economics at Cornell University.⁷¹ Jerry Rubin was one of the many candidates that were considered for Vice Presidential nominee, but many did not consider him to be sufficiently serious. However, in 1968 Cleaver was 33 years old, two years short of the presidential requirement. A

⁶⁸Charles E. Jones, *The Black Panther Party: Reconsidered*, (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1998), 31-32.

⁶⁹Peniel E. Joseph, *Waiting 'Til the Midnight Hour*, (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2006), 248.

⁷⁰Kathleen Cleaver and George Katsiaficas, eds., *Liberation, Imagination, and the Black Panther Party*, (New York: Routledge, 2001), 189.

⁷¹John Kifner, "Freedom Party Endorses Candidates," *New York Times*, 22 July 1968, 27.

spokesman for Cleaver's 1968 campaign said that "the [goal] is not winning the election....The aim of the campaign is to use the traditional election process to win an audience and to organize for the radical movement."⁷² Cleaver himself said that the "purpose of my campaign is to organize people, to break some ground for a revolutionary movement that will unite black radicals and white radicals."⁷³ Cleaver's presidential campaign was the centerpiece of the BPP-PFP alliance that also saw Newton run for Congress and Kathleen Cleaver run for the state assembly.

However, the Black Panther Party's cooperation with whites sparked controversy and backlash throughout the black community. A majority of the black community were angry that "Huey's family and the Black Panther Party had decided that Charles Garry was the best legal technician available [for Huey's defense]."⁷⁴ Many felt that Huey needed a *black* lawyer rather than the *best* lawyer available. Black cultural nationalists attacked Garry and the BPP for the decision. The Panthers used the attacks on Garry to illuminate the racism in the black community. The Panthers believed that he was the perfect candidate for Party lawyer, citing his record and his character, and reminding his detractors that he was "a brilliant ex-Communist Party activist"⁷⁵ and that he "had been viciously attacked by cops in the past when he fought for the labor unions in San Francisco, and that a lot of corrupt people in the local power structure didn't like him."⁷⁶

⁷²Robert Benyas, "Cleaver of Black Panthers is Nominee of Leftists," *New York Times*, 19 August 1968, 32.

⁷³C. Gerald Fraser, "Cleaver Aims to Unite Black and White Radicals," *New York Times*, 12 October 1968, 22.

⁷⁴Bobby Seale, *Seize the Time*, (New York: Random House, 1970), 205.

⁷⁵Kathleen Cleaver and George Katsiaficas, eds., *Liberation, Imagination, and the Black Panther Party*, (New York: Routledge, 2001), 189.

Black Nationalist groups, in particular, criticized the Panthers for relying on whites in an era of self-empowerment and self-determination. Even Stokely Carmichael, considered by many as the Father of Black Power,⁷⁷ denounced the Black Panther Party for its cooperation with whites as unrevolutionary, because “a revolutionary is self-sufficient! [A revolutionary] depends on himself first, foremost, and last.”⁷⁸ Furthermore, he declared that if a revolutionary becomes dependant on a group, in this case white Americans, “then he accepts the ideology and/or advice of the nation that gave him aid (i.e. America).”⁷⁹ It was Carmichael’s great fear that the Panthers would become “the black shock troops of the white New Left and the ‘counterculture.’”⁸⁰ Carmichael resigned as the Party’s Prime Minister in 1969.

Newton believed that white cooperation could only help the Panthers’ struggle against the American government. In response to the criticisms of the revolutionary black community, Newton replied:

while the viewpoint (of working strictly with blacks) was understandable to [Newton and the BPP], it failed to take into consideration the limitations of our power. We needed allies, and we believed that the alliance with...whites—students and workers—was worth the risk....In a few years’ time, almost half of the American population would be composed of young people, if we developed strong and meaningful alliances with white youth, they would support our goals and work against the Establishment.⁸¹

⁷⁶Bobby Seale, *Seize the Time*, (New York: Random House, 1970), 205.

⁷⁷Peniel E. Joseph, *Waiting ‘Til the Midnight Hour*, (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2006), xiii.

⁷⁸Stokely Carmichael, *Stokely Speaks: Black Power Back to Pan-Africanism*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1971), 196.

⁷⁹Ibid.

⁸⁰Ibid, 663.

Newton elaborated:

the young white revolutionaries raised the cry for the troops to withdraw from Vietnam, hands off Latin America, withdraw from the Dominican Republic and also to withdraw from the black community or the black colony. So you have a situation in which the young white revolutionaries are attempting to identify with the oppressed people of the colonies and against the exploiter.⁸²

In Huey's eyes, a large number of white radicals were as dedicated, and possibly more dedicated to the struggle than cultural nationalists, SNCC members, and the majority of college-educated blacks.

The Black Panther Party's commitment to leftist politics and the revolution extended to working with other racial groups besides whites. The Panthers came to the conclusion that the revolution could not "be accomplished by Blacks alone, [as such] the Panthers sought to unify all disaffected and oppressed people in America to combat the imperialist monopoly of power and transfer control over the country's resources into the hands of the people."⁸³ What was first thought of as a black revolution became, in the eyes of the Panthers, a truly American revolution comprised of all of America's oppressed peoples. The Panthers worked with "the Brown Berets, a Chicano leftist organization in southern California, and the Young Lords, a Puerto Rican group residing in Chicago and New York, as well as with the Red Guard Party, a Chinese revolutionary

⁸¹Huey P. Newton, "To the RNA," *Black Panther*, December 6, 1969 quoted in Judson L. Jeffries, *Huey P. Newton: The Radical Theorist*, (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2002), 22.

⁸²Philip S. Foner, *The Black Panthers Speak*, (New York: Da Capo Press, 1995), 54.

⁸³Charles E. Jones, *The Black Panther Party: Reconsidered*, (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1998), 230.

group located in the Oakland Bay Area.”⁸⁴ Michael Newton, author of *Bitter Grain*, wrote that although the BPP worked with a variety of non-black groups, they also maintained cordial relationships with several black groups including “the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, the League of Revolutionary Workers in Detroit, and the Republic of New Africa.”⁸⁵

Not only did the Panthers work with non-black organizations, they also offered a model on how to establish and operate a group. Phillip Foner notes:

in a short time [the Panthers] built one of the significant movements in the entire history of black Americans, as well as those of men and women of other races and colors—Puerto Ricans, Mexican-Americans, Chinese-Americans, and Poor whites—who have been influenced by the Panthers to build a similar movement in their own communities.⁸⁶

The Young Lords (Young Lords Organization or YLO), in particular, had remarkable similarities to the Black Panther Party, in the same vein as the White Panther Party and the Patriot Party. Led by Cha Cha Jimenez, the Young Lords not only created community programs that provided free breakfast for schoolchildren, but the demands and platform of the Young Lords even included similar beliefs such as “armed self defense and armed struggle [as] the only means to liberation.”⁸⁷

⁸⁴Charles E. Jones, *The Black Panther Party: Reconsidered*, (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1998), 32.

⁸⁵Michael Newton, *Bitter Grain: Huey Newton and the Black Panther Party* (Los Angeles: Holloway House Publishing Co., 1991), 108.

⁸⁶Foner, Phillip, ed., *The Black Panthers Speak*, (New York: Da Capo Books, 1995), xxxix.

⁸⁷Foner, Phillip, ed., *The Black Panthers Speak*, 237, quoted in Charles E. Jones and Judson L. Jeffries, “Don’t Believe the Hype”: *Debunking the Panther Mythology*, in ed. Charles E. Jones, *The Black Panther Party: Reconsidered*, (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1998), 36.

Nearly all of the minority empowerment groups that formed in this era were inspired by the Black Panthers. While the majority of these groups did not believe in the Marxist precepts espoused by the Panthers, they did share the belief in armed self-defense. The evidence of the Panthers impact is apparent not only in this aspect, but also in the advocacy of a platform and program remarkably comparable to that of the BPP. In addition to the Young Lords' 13-Point Program and Platform the organization also wrote the Ten-Point Health Program of the Young Lords. Both programs are clearly based on the Black Panther Party's Ten-Point Platform and Program, as both the YLO and the BPP demand the ability of self-determination, control of land, and proper cultural education (Spanish culture and African-American history respectively). Additionally, in 1969, *The Black Panther* ran an article on the Ten-Point Program and Platform of the Black Student Unions⁸⁸ as more and more young blacks began empathizing with and adopting the ideas of the Black Panther Party.

Much like the BPP's white allies, the minority groups lent aid in the form of manpower and political support to the struggle against the American government. On October 13th and 15th of 1969, David Hilliard, of the Black Panther Party, Alex Hing, of the Red Guard, Alex Young, of the Students for a Democratic Society, and Fanny Lou Hamer, of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party spoke out against the Vietnam War.⁸⁹ The following year, the BPP along with the Young Lords and other organizations, both secular and religious, sponsored a pilgrimage for priests to visit American soldiers in Vietnam and political prisoners throughout America, including the recently imprisoned

⁸⁸Philip S. Foner, ed. *The Black Panthers Speak*, (New York: Da Capo Books, 1995), 246.

⁸⁹Thomas Fleming, "Thousands Gather to Protest Vietnam War," *The Sun Reporter*, 18 October 1969, Vol. XXVI, Iss. 37, 3.

Bobby Seale.⁹⁰ The political prisoners visited were comprised of “draft resisters, conscientious objectors, GIs, and those blacks and Puerto Ricans imprisoned in the struggle for justice.”⁹¹

The Panthers’ influence also spread beyond America’s borders. The Vanguard Nationalist and Socialist Party of the Bahamas, formed in 1972, was inspired by the Black Panther Party to “combat the deteriorating social and economic conditions that were occurring in the Bahamas.”⁹² Much like the Young Lords, the Vanguard Party also created their own Ten Point Program based on that of the Panthers’. However, the BPP’s impact on the Vanguard Party extended beyond a program and platform. Just like the Panthers during their formative years, the Vanguard Party implemented a uniform and a code of conduct. John T. McCartney writes that having a uniform and code of conduct was especially important because “when an organization is attempting to deal with the problems of the underclass, whose members often lack social skills, uniforms and rules of conduct are excellent means to foster discipline and a sense of pride.”⁹³ Additionally, the Vanguard Party published a newspaper, the *Vanguard*, modeled after *The Black Panther*. Eventually, the Vanguard Party established a training school similar to the Black Panthers’ liberation schools. Although the ideology of the Black Panther Party was a product of the experiences of the African-American experience in urban America, they

⁹⁰Karen Wald, “A Prison Pilgrimage at Christmas,” *The Sun Reporter*, 10 January 1970, Vol. XXVI, Iss. 48, 6.

⁹¹Ibid.

⁹²Kathleen Cleaver and George Katsiaficas, eds., *Liberation, Imagination, and the Black Panther Party: A New Look at the Panthers and their Legacy*, (New York: Routledge, 2001), 157.

⁹³Ibid.

were able to provide valuable lessons and an important model for the Vanguard Party in “its struggle against neocolonialism in the Bahamas.”⁹⁴

Historians such as David Horowitz often depict the Black Power Era (1966 to 1975) as very masculine and misogynist. Stokely Carmichael’s belief that “the only position for a woman in the movement is prone”⁹⁵ lends credence to Horowitz’s claims. Ron Karenga, Organization US’s controversial leader, espoused that “the role of woman is to inspire her man, educate their children and participate in social development.... We say male supremacy is based on three things: tradition, acceptance, and reason.”⁹⁶ Hugh Pearson, author of *Shadow of the Panther*, has described the Party’s “‘routine’ mistreatment of women as both wide-ranging and ‘flagrant.’”⁹⁷

However, many Panther women, particularly Kathleen Cleaver, condemn the critiques made by the press on Panther gender relations as hypocritical. In her essay “Women, Power, and Revolution,” Cleaver responds to the lack of female Panthers by asking “how many newspaper photographers were women? How many newspaper editors were women? How many newscasters were women? How many television producers were women?”⁹⁸ In the Party’s fledgling years, gender relations in the Party reflected the same dynamic as American society. Until the 1960s and 70s and the rise of the Women’s

⁹⁴Kathleen Cleaver and George Katsiaficas, eds., *Liberation, Imagination, and the Black Panther Party: A New Look at the Panthers and their Legacy*, (New York: Routledge, 2001), 157

⁹⁵Mumia Abu-Jamal, *We Want Freedom*, (Cambridge: South End Press, 2004), 160.

⁹⁶Clyde Halisi, ed., *The Quotable Karenga, 27-28*, quoted in Tracye Matthews, “No One Ever Asks, What a Man’s Place in the Revolution Is”: *Gender and the Politics of the Black Panther Party 1966-1971*,” in ed. Charles E. Jones, *The Black Panther Party: Reconsidered*, (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1998), 273.

⁹⁷Mumia Abu-Jamal, *We Want Freedom*, (Cambridge: South End Press, 2004), 160.

⁹⁸Kathleen Cleaver and George Katsiaficas, eds., *Liberation, Imagination, and the Black Panther Party: A New Look at the Panthers and their Legacy*, (New York: Routledge, 2001), 126.

Liberation Movement, women “suffered hostility, abuse, neglect, and assault—this was not something arising from the policies or structure of the Black Panther Party...that’s what *was* going on in the world.”⁹⁹ Charles E. Jones writes:

[from 1966 to 1968, there was] an apparent tendency of various male Party members to view female comrades as sexual objects.... Some party leaders attempted to exploit their rank to secure sexual favors from female subordinates. More than one woman left the Party because of incidents of sexual harassment, while other complained of a “macho cult” behavior which manifested in the reluctance of various male members to follow the orders of female superiors.¹⁰⁰

Years after her participation in the Party, Regina Jennings described and reflected upon one of her captain’s unsuccessful attempts to seduce her. After being spurned, her captain became progressively critical of her work and tried to get her to leave the Party. Although some men, particularly those in leadership positions, were chauvinistic and tried to manipulate women Panthers, Jennings wrote that “all men in the party were not sexist. In fact, many [men] fought with me against the foolishness of our captain.”¹⁰¹ Another former Panther, Mumia Abu-Jamal echoes Kathleen Cleaver’s sentiments that sexism in the Party was a reflection of the sexism endemic to America. While there were incidents that show that sexism did exist in the Black Panther Party, these interactions “most often had at [their] roots imbalanced power relations between the higher and lower ranks—an imbalance reflected in contemporary bourgeois life in...male-dominated

⁹⁹Kathleen Cleaver and George Katsiaficas, eds., *Liberation, Imagination, and the Black Panther Party: A New Look at the Panthers and their Legacy*, (New York: Routledge, 2001), 126.

¹⁰⁰Charles E. Jones, ed. *The Black Panther Party: Reconsidered*, (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1998), 33.

¹⁰¹*Ibid*, 263.

institutions of society.”¹⁰² Even though sexism was prevalent in the Party, the Panthers were one of the few organizations in America to consider sexism a problem and actually attempted to fight against and change male-female relationships. As a group, the Panthers endeavored to provide a unified front against sexism; however, as Jennings illustrated there were instances of chauvinism within the Party. In an effort to eliminate the chauvinistic Panthers, rules were established prohibited overt sexism with expulsion from the Party as punishment.¹⁰³ Many Panthers criticized the patriarchal systems of other less-understanding Black Power groups. Fred Hampton openly mocked the sexism of Organization US, asking if people “think we [are] scared of a few karangatangs, a few chumps, a few male chauvinists? They tell their women ‘walk behind me.’ The only reason a woman should walk behind a faggot like that is so she can put her foot knee deep in his ass.”¹⁰⁴

The demeaning perception of women changed due to the socialist egalitarian ideology of the Party and also because of the inspirational, hard-work of the Party’s female members. For reasons of solidarity and anti-sexism, the BPP abolished the male-female designations of Panther-Pantherette in late 1968. In his book, *We Want Freedom*, Abu-Jamal called the women Panthers “without question, the very best of the Black Panther Party.”¹⁰⁵ Although male Panthers first looked down on their female comrades,

¹⁰²Kathleen Cleaver and George Katsiaficas, eds., *Liberation, Imagination, and the Black Panther Party: A New Look at the Panthers and their Legacy*, (New York: Routledge, 2001), 45.

¹⁰³Charles E. Jones, ed., *The Black Panther Party: Reconsidered*, (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1998), 151.

¹⁰⁴Fred Hampton, *Power Anywhere There’s People*, 33 quoted in Jeffrey O.G. Ogbar, *Black Power: Radical Politics and African American Identity*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University, 2004), 101.

¹⁰⁵Mumia Abu-Jamal, *We Want Freedom*, (Cambridge: South End Press, 2004), xvii.

male Panthers would later consider women to be “our other half, they’re not our weaker half, they’re not our stronger half, but they are our other half and that we sell ourselves out, we sell our children out, and we sell our women out when we treat them in any other manner.”¹⁰⁶ One of the most important moments for the improvement of gender relations was the arrest of Ericka Huggins along with the rest of the New Haven 14. Eldridge Cleaver sent a letter from “somewhere in the third world”¹⁰⁷ commending Sister Ericka for her determination. Cleaver wrote that the “incarceration and the suffering of Sister Erica [sic] should be a stinging rebuke to all manifestations of male chauvinism within our ranks... We must too recognize that a women can be just as revolutionary as a man and that she has equal stature.”¹⁰⁸

The Black Panthers adopted the 8 Points of Attention for all Panthers in 1968. A major point of this new plan/system was the prohibition of “tak[ing] liberties with women.”¹⁰⁹ Former Panthers recall the new rules as a “monumental step forward in addressing the issue of the treatment of women.”¹¹⁰ Panther women believed that the mere fact that “the issue was placed in/on the books was a step forward. Now we had to

¹⁰⁶Eldridge Cleaver, “Message to Sister Ericka Huggins of the Black Panther Party,” in *The Black Panthers Speak*, ed. Phillip Foner, 99, quoted in Charles E. Jones and Judson L. Jeffries, “Don’t Believe the Hype”: *Debunking the Panther Mythology*, in ed. Charles E. Jones, *The Black Panther Party: Reconsidered*, (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1998), 33.

¹⁰⁷Eldridge Cleaver, “Message to Sister Erica Huggins of the Black Panther Party,” *The Black Panther*, July 5, 1969, in Philip S. Foner, ed., *The Black Panthers Speak*, (New York: Da Capo Press, 1995), 98.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹Jeffrey O.G. Ogbar, *Black Power: Radical Politics and African American Identity*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 104.

¹¹⁰Ibid.

make it a part of our everyday lives.”¹¹¹ The Panthers had seen that sexism and chauvinism were a part of the same society that they wanted to change, so they set out to change how sexism and chauvinism were treated within their own ranks to create an example.

In September of 1969, the Party published a leaflet titled “Panther Sisters on Women’s Liberation.” The contents of the leaflet were an “extensive interview with six anonymous women conducted at Party headquarters.”¹¹² In the interviews the Panther women discuss the changes in the positions and roles of women within the Party. The interviewees challenged the men of the Party to rethink how they defined their manhood. One of the interviewees remarked that “it’s important that within the context of the struggle that Black men understand that their manhood is not dependent on keeping their Black women subordinate to them.”¹¹³ While the women did concede that “our men have been sort of castrated,” the solution was “to be very sure that the roles are evenly divided” so that they men would not feel as if women were dominating them.¹¹⁴

According to a survey conducted by Bobby Seale “[by] 1969, two-thirds of the members of the Black Panther Party were women.”¹¹⁵ In the Party, women were seen as having the same role as men; therefore, women filled a number of roles. Women not only

¹¹¹Jeffrey O.G. Ogbar, *Black Power: Radical Politics and African American Identity*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 104.

¹¹²Anon., “Panther Sisters on Women’s Liberation,” in Heath, ed. *Off The Pigs!*, 339 in Tracye Matthews, *No One Ever Asks, What a Man’s Place in the Revolution Is”: Gender and Politics of The Black Panther Party 1966-1971*, in ed. Charles E. Jones, *The Black Panther Party: Reconsidered*, (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1998), 274.

¹¹³Charles E. Jones, ed., *The Black Panther Party: Reconsidered*, (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1998), 284.

¹¹⁴*Ibid.*

¹¹⁵Kathleen Cleaver and George Katsiaficas, eds., *Liberation, Imagination, and the Black Panther Party: A New Look at the Panthers and their Legacy*, (New York: Routledge, 2001), 125.

worked on the community programs and the newspaper; Panther women also operated in military positions and positions of leadership. Former Panther Frankye Malika Adams, disputes the belief that the Panthers were a male group. She writes:

women ran the BPP pretty much. I don't know how it came to be a male's party or thought of as being a male's party. Because these things, when you really look at it in terms of society, these things are looked on as being women things, you know, feeding children, taking care of the sick, and uh, so, yeah, we did that. We actually ran the BPP's programs.¹¹⁶

Erica Huggins, another Former Panther, agreed with Adams, stating that “women ran the Party and men thought they did.”¹¹⁷ Many former Panther members, such as David Hilliard, and historians, like Charles E. Jones, currently believe that the assumption that female Panthers were beneath male Party members and that the Party itself was sexist because of the “media images and journalistic accounts of the armed resistance efforts of male Party members”¹¹⁸

The insufficient knowledge or overt omission of female leadership is particularly galling to former Panthers, particularly because Elaine Brown became Chairperson of the Black Panther Party in 1974, following Newton's self-imposed exile to Cuba. Thirty years later, in a 2004 interview, David Hilliard remarked that the “BPP was the only civil rights organization at the time where women were actually in leadership. Audrea Jones founded our chapter in Boston; Frances Carter founded our movement in Bridgeport and

¹¹⁶Frankye Malika Adams, interview by Trayce Matthews, 29 September 1994, quoted in Trayce Matthews, *No One Ever Asks, What a Man's Place in the Revolution Is: Black Panther Party 1966-1971*, in ed. Charles E. Jones, *The Black Panther Party: Reconsidered*, (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1998), 291.

¹¹⁷Jeffrey O.G. Ogbar, *Black Power: Radical Politics and African American Identity*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 103.

¹¹⁸Charles E. Jones, ed., *The Black Panther Party: Reconsidered*, (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1998), 305.

New Haven; Ericka Huggins was the leader of our movement in LA along with Elaine Brown, who [eventually] became the foremost leader of our movement in America.”¹¹⁹ Although Elaine Brown installed a significant number of women in leading roles, prior to her ascension to power there were a number of women already in leadership positions “like Pam [Lewis, East Oakland branch coordinator] who were smart and taking on major responsibilities in the Party.”¹²⁰ While Elaine Brown, Kathleen Cleaver, and these other women are noted for their leadership roles, a number of women served among the rank and file as well, such as Assata Shakur, Afeni Shakur, Connie Matthews, Regina Jennings, JoNina M. Abron, etc. In her biography, Afeni Shakur says that when she “met [Black Panther Party members] Sekou [Odinga] and Lumumba [Shakur] it was the first time in [her] life that [she] ever met men who didn’t abuse women.”¹²¹

Not only were women serving in all facets of the Black Panther Party, the Women’s Liberation Movement was actively supported by the Party. In 1969, Eldridge Cleaver said that “the liberation of women is one of the most important issues facing the world today.”¹²² Newton explicitly stated his willingness to work with the Women’s Liberation Movement; in 1970, he wrote that women’s groups were “our friends.”¹²³ The Panthers were “one of the few Black organizations to endorse and support Shirley

¹¹⁹“Hear Our Roar: The Black Panther Party, Self-Defense, and Government Violence” The *Satya* Interview with David Hilliard, <http://www.satyamag.com/apr04/hilliard.html>, accessed on October 3, 2007.

¹²⁰Flores A. Forbes, *Will You Die With Me?: My Life in the Black Panther Party*, (New York: Atria Books, 2006), 69.

¹²¹Jasmine Guy, *Afeni Shakur: Evolution of a Revolutionary*, (New York: Atria Books, 2004), 72.

¹²²Philip S. Foner, ed., *The Black Panthers Speak*, (New York: Da Capo Press, 1995), 99.

¹²³Huey P. Newton, *To Die for the People*, (New York: Random House, 1972), 154.

Chisholm's presidential candidacy in 1972."¹²⁴ The Panthers organized and sponsored a fund-raising event for her campaign. At the same time as the Panthers were endorsing Chisholm for the presidency, Chisholm's "male colleagues in the Congressional Black Caucus questioned [her] political judgment to seek the presidency."¹²⁵ Unlike other groups who were concerned solely with race like the Congressional Black Caucus or Organization US, the BPP railed against the inequality of women in America.

The Black Panther Party saw two reasons for the subjugation of women in American society: patriarchal society's fear of women and capitalism. Newton and the Panthers likened the struggles of women to the struggles of black people, as both groups were mistreated because their oppressors were insecure and scared of the people they were attempting to suppress. Whites, especially poor whites, harbored racist attitudes because they were afraid that blacks would take their jobs and other opportunities or display "something that [whites do] not have."¹²⁶ Similarly, men were frightened that women "might castrate [them], or take the nuts that [they] might not have to start with."¹²⁷ Furthermore, the Panthers saw "male chauvinism [as being] directly related to the class society"¹²⁸ because capitalism was perpetuating the conditions that helped cause the resentment of women and blacks. As such, the struggle for women's liberation was

¹²⁴Charles E. Jones, ed., *The Black Panther Party: Reconsidered*, (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1998), 32.

¹²⁵Shirley Chisholm, *The Good Fight*, 101-2 quoted in Charles E. Jones and Judson L. Jeffries, "Don't Believe the Hype": Debunking the Panther Mythology in ed. Charles E. Jones, *The Black Panther Party: Reconsidered*, (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1998), 32.

¹²⁶Huey P. Newton, *To Die for the People*, (New York: Random House, 1972), 152.

¹²⁷Ibid.

¹²⁸Bobby Seale, *Seize the Time*, 393 quoted in Charles E. Jones and Judson L. Jeffries, "Don't Believe the Hype": Debunking the Panther Mythology, in ed. Charles E. Jones, *The Black Panther Party: Reconsidered*, (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1998), 32.

concluded as being inherently linked with the struggle against capitalism and should be “waged by men and women together.”¹²⁹

However, the assumption made by the Black Panther Party that men and women needed to solve the problem together was in stark contrast to ideology of the majority of Women’s Liberation Movement groups that women must solve their problems on their own. Many Panther women considered female separatism and anti-male attitudes as “illogical...because you can’t solve the problem apart from the problem. You can’t be liberated from male chauvinism if you don’t even deal with it—if you run away from it.”¹³⁰ Women of the Party linked the struggles of gender to the same fight for humanity that the Panthers, as a group, were waging. While many women in the Party did not view themselves as feminists or work in female-only organizations, they were as opposed to sexism and chauvinism as any member of the Women’s Liberation Movement.¹³¹

The Black Panther Party was the first major black organization, and possibly the first major organization of any kind to openly back the women’s movement and the gay liberation movement. While major religion-based organizations like SCLC and the Nation of Islam continued to advocate a strict patriarchal system and secular organizations such as the NAACP, Organization US, or the Democratic party did very little to challenge the gender dynamics in America, women flourished in the Party and rose to prominent leadership positions. Although they started out as an organization that

¹²⁹Charles E. Jones, ed., *The Black Panther Party: Reconsidered*, (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1998), 274.

¹³⁰Anon., “Panther Sisters on Women’s Liberation” in *Off the Pigs!*, ed., Heath, 348; “Sisters,” *The Black Panther*, 13 September 1969, 12, quoted in Tracye Matthews, “No One Ever Asks, What a Man’s Place in the Revolution Is”: Gender and the Politics of The Black Panther Party 1966-1971, in ed. Charles E. Jones, *The Black Panther Party: Reconsidered*, (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1998), 275.

¹³¹Charles E. Jones, ed., *The Black Panther Party: Reconsidered*, (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1998), 275.

reflected the chauvinism of American society, the Party would go on to challenge sexism in a way that no organization, governmental or otherwise had. In her essay, “Women, Power, and Revolution,” Kathleen Cleaver asks “did the U.S. Congress make any statement on the liberation of women? Did the Oakland police [department] issue a position against gender discrimination?”¹³² While the struggle against chauvinism was a daily one for the Panthers, the Party was “absolutely less sexist than society at large.”¹³³

The Black Panther Party’s struggle for equality and the rights of oppressed people put them at the forefront of several burgeoning protest movements. Chief among these movements were the women’s liberation movement and the gay rights movement. The Panthers’ attempt to help the oppressed made them one of the most progressive groups in the country if not the nation; however, for quite some time the Panthers exhibited homophobic and chauvinistic attitudes as might be expected from a predominantly male organization of this era.

Homophobia was spread throughout the Party by the belief in the “intrinsic role that maleness plays in resistance movements.”¹³⁴ In Newton’s autobiography, he discussed his father’s role in teaching courage and resistance in the face of racism; Newton concluded that his father was “teaching us how to be men.”¹³⁵ However, noted scholar Jeffrey Ogbar points out that “in this sentence, ‘us’ included his six siblings, three

¹³²Kathleen Cleaver and George Katsiaficas, eds., *Liberation, Imagination, and the Black Panther Party: A New Look at the Panthers and their Legacy*, (New York: Routledge, 2001), 126.

¹³³Elaine Brown interviewed by Jeffrey O.G. Ogbar in Jeffrey O.G. Ogbar, *Black Power: Radical Politics and African American Identity*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 106.

¹³⁴Jeffrey O.G. Ogbar, *Black Power: Radical Politics and African American Identity*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University, 2004), 100.

¹³⁵Huey P. Newton, *Revolutionary Suicide*, (New York: Writers and Readers Publishing, Inc., 1973), 30.

of whom were sisters.”¹³⁶ Rather than referring to the lessons his father taught as teaching strength, honor, or how to be better people, Newton attributes his father’s actions as lessons to become men.

Newton’s perception of resistance as manly formed the basis for his early apprehension towards homosexuals. In *Revolutionary Suicide*, Newton attributes the California Penal Colony’s “calm reputation”¹³⁷ to the homosexual population. According to his own estimates “80 per cent of the prisoners were homosexual” this figure is relevant because “homosexuals are docile and subservient; they [tended] to obey prison regulations.”¹³⁸ Derogatory terms for homosexuals were used by Panthers to refer to people in the black community and the revolutionary community, specifically members of Organization US, as people who were unwilling to participate in revolution or unwilling to properly prepare themselves for the coming revolution. Fred Hampton, of the Illinois chapter, called out members of the cultural nationalist group Organization US for dressing in cultural styles, wearing dashikis and other African fashions. The former Panther would go on to say that if Organization US founder and leader Ron Karenga is “gonna continue wearing dashikis...he oughta stop wearin’ pants. ‘Cause he’d look a lot better in miniskirts. That’s all a motherfuckin’ man needs in Babylon that ain’t got no gun, and that’s a miniskirt.”¹³⁹ It did not seem possible, at least in the eyes of the

¹³⁶Jeffrey O.G. Ogbar, *Black Power: Radical Politics and African American Identity*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University, 2004), 101.

¹³⁷Huey P. Newton, *Revolutionary Suicide*, (New York: Writers and Readers Publishing, Inc., 1973), 251.

¹³⁸*Ibid.*

¹³⁹Fred Hampton, *Power Anywhere There’s People*, 32 quoted in Jeffrey O.G. Ogbar, *Black Power: Radical Politics and African American Identity*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University, 2004), 101.

Panthers, to be gay and a revolutionary.

In 1969 the stance of the Black Panther Party toward homosexuality began to change. Nineteen sixty-nine was the year that Jean Genet, a French writer, came to the United States to interview Huey Newton and other Panther leaders. Genet, who was gay, was significantly wounded by the homophobic terms that were frequently bandied about by the Panthers.¹⁴⁰ After returning to France, Genet sent Newton a message articulating his distress about the group's use of derogatory and repressive language, equating the use of the term *faggot* to the equally reprehensible term *nigger*.¹⁴¹

Genet's message profoundly altered Newton's perceptions of homosexuality and masculinity. In 1970, Newton and the Black Panthers began making overtures to form an alliance with the Gay Liberation movement. The Party's newfound philosophy was grounded in the rationalization that revolutionary people "must gain security in ourselves and therefore have respect and feelings for oppressed people."¹⁴² Newton would go on to write that "we have not said much about homosexuals at all, but we must relate to the homosexual movement because it is a real thing....[Homosexuals] might be the most oppressed in the society."¹⁴³ As a means of showing respect to homosexuals, inspired by Genet's comments, and of showing commitment to the cause, Newton concluded that "the terms 'faggot' and 'punk' should be deleted from our vocabulary, and especially we should not attach names normally designed for homosexuals to men who are enemies of

¹⁴⁰Jeffrey O.G. Ogbar, *Black Power: Radical Politics and African American Identity*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University, 2004), 102.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid*, 103.

¹⁴²Huey P. Newton, *To Die for the People*, (New York: Random House, 1972), 152.

¹⁴³*Ibid*, 153.

the people such as Nixon or Mitchell. Homosexuals are not enemies of the people.”¹⁴⁴

In his book, *Black Power*, Jeffrey Ogbar recounts the tale of an openly gay member of the Black Panthers who operated in the Jamaica Queens branch of New York. He was accepted into the Party because “he was truly committed; people knew that.”¹⁴⁵ Though committed, some members still used unapproved, offensive language. When confronted by a newer member for his homosexuality “a fistfight broke out between the two. The offending Panther was soundly beaten, and it was the last time that homophobic remarks were made at the office.”¹⁴⁶ The defeat of a heterosexual male by a homosexual male effectively ended the thought that homosexuals were unmanly.

The Panthers were the first of any non-gay black organization to support the homosexual cause. The Panthers “connected [the oppression of homosexuals] to the plight of black people; and attempted—based on that connection—to build coalitions openly with lesbians and gay men”¹⁴⁷ David Hilliard would go on to say that “[the Panthers] were a human rights movement. It had nothing to do with race, we were trying to move mankind to a higher manifestation, to make this world a better place.”¹⁴⁸ As he said he would earlier, Newton had any terms that could be considered derogatory to homosexuals removed from the Panthers’ vocabulary, as allies in the struggle all interactions had to remain respectful.

¹⁴⁴ Huey P. Newton, *To Die for the People*, (New York: Random House, 1972), 154.

¹⁴⁵Barbour, interviewed by Jeffrey O.G. Ogbar in Jeffrey O.G. Ogbar, *Black Power: Radical Politics and African American Identity*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University, 2004), 103.

¹⁴⁶Ibid.

¹⁴⁷Alycee J. Lane, “Newton’s Law,” *BLK* (March 1991), 11.

¹⁴⁸“Hear Our Roar: The Black Panther Party, Self-Defense, and Government Violence” The *Satya* Interview with David Hilliard, <http://www.satyamag.com/apr04/hilliard.html>, accessed on October 3, 2007.

The Black Panthers soon found themselves widely supported in the gay community.

At a Panther rally at Temple University, participants began chanting “Gay, gay power to the gay, gay people! Power to the People! Black, black power to the black, black people! Gay, gay power to the gay, gay people! Power to the People!”¹⁴⁹ Much like other oppressed people, homosexual organizations began emulating the Panthers; the “newly formed Gay Liberation Front and many feminist groups...all regarded the BPP as their inspiration and vanguard.”¹⁵⁰

Although the Black Panther Party is probably most well known for their depiction in American culture as a group of black militants trying to fix the problems of the black community in a white country, the Panthers were in actuality a progressive revolutionary force willing to align themselves with any other groups who felt the yoke of oppression. The Panthers sought to establish a global community predicated on the equality of all peoples regardless of race, gender, or sexual preference.

Conclusion

The Black Panther Party was the most famous and visible group of the Black Power movement. Because of the Party’s visibility in a period of extreme racial strife which was perpetuated by the Party’s aggressive attitudes towards the American government, the famous shootouts with police officers, and highly publicized court trials, the Panthers are typically associated with the concept of Black Power, especially in its oft perceived form of reverse racism. However, a closer analysis of Panther rhetoric and

¹⁴⁹George Katsiaficas, *Organization and Movement: The Case of the Black Panther Party and the Revolutionary People’s Constitutional Convention of 1970*, <http://www.eroseffect.com/articles/Rpcc.pdf>, accessed October 1, 2007.

¹⁵⁰Ibid.

actions during the sixties and seventies provides a radically different picture. The philosophy of the Panthers followed a wide trajectory; though founded in a very strict ideology of black nationalism, the Panthers soon became driven by socialist thought. The Panthers' newfound socialism led them to form alliances with whites, both poor and affluent, along with various Latino and Asian groups. Moreover, the BPP allied itself with women and homosexuals, two highly marginalized groups in American society. Although the Black Panthers certainly began as a new type of organization determined to solve the problems racism presented in America, they soon became a radically different and never before seen vanguard party of the revolution as they sought to create a rainbow coalition in an effort to stave off the American government and create a truly egalitarian state.

Appendix A

Black Panther Party Platform and Program¹⁵¹

"What We Want, What We Believe"

October 1966 Platform

1. *We want freedom. We want power to determine the destiny of our Black Community.*

We believe that black people will not be free until we are able to determine our destiny.

2. *We want full employment for our people.*

We believe that the federal government is responsible and obligated to give every man employment or a guaranteed income. We believe that if the white American businessmen will not give full employment, then the 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 white man of our Black Community.*

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 was promised 100 years ago as restitution for slave labor and mass murder of black people. We will accept the payment as currency which will be distributed to our many communities. The Germans are now aiding the Jews in Israel for the genocide of the Jewish people.

March 1972 Platform

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 capitalist 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 over fifty million Black

The Germans murdered six million Jews. The American racist has taken part in the slaughter of over twenty million black people; therefore, we feel that this is a modest demand that we make.

4. We want decent housing, fit for shelter of human beings.

We believe that if the white landlords will not give decent housing to our black community, then the housing and the land should be made into cooperatives so that our community, with government aid, can build and make decent housing for its people.

5. 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 believe in an educational system that will give to our people a knowledge of self. If a man does not have knowledge of himself and his position in society and the world, then he has little chance to relate to anything else.

6. We want all black men to be exempt from military service.

We believe that Black people should not be forced to fight in the military service to defend a racist government that does not protect us. We will not fight and kill other people of color in the world who, like black people, are being victimized by the white racist government of America. We will protect ourselves from the force and violence of the racist police and the racist military, by whatever means necessary.

*7. We want an immediate end to **police***

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 the 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 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 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 self. If you do not have knowledge of yourself and your position in the society and 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 preventative 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 ourselves with proper medical attention and care.

7. We want an immediate end to police brutality and murder of Black people, other

brutality and murder of black people.

We believe we can end police brutality in our black community by organizing black self-defense groups that are dedicated to defending our black community from racist police oppression and brutality. The Second Amendment to the Constitution of the United States gives a right to bear arms. We therefore believe that all black people should arm themselves for self defense.

8. We want freedom for all black men held in federal, state, county and city prisons and jails.

We believe that all black people should be released from the many jails and prisons because they have not received a fair and impartial trial.

9. 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 believe that the courts should follow the United States Constitution so that black people will receive fair trials. The 14th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution gives a man a right to be tried by his peer group. A peer is a person from a similar economic, social, religious, geographical, environmental, historical and racial background. To do this the court will be forced to select a jury from the black community from which the black defendant came. We have been, and are being tried by all-white juries that have no understanding of the "average reasoning man" of the black community.

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 desires of the U.S. ruling circle and government to force its domination upon the oppressed people of the world. We believe that if the U.S. government or its lackeys do not cease these aggressive wars that 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 poor 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 U.S. 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 U.S. military are the victims of oppressive conditions which are the real cause of their imprisonment. We believe that when persons are brought to trial that they must be guaranteed, by the United States, juries of their peers, attorneys of their choice and freedom from imprisonment while awaiting trials.

10. *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.*

When in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands 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 more 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 usurpations, 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*

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 bands 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 more 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 usurpations, 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.

*This document transcribed from The Black Panther Intercommunal News Service May 13, 1972: p. B of the supplement to the newspaper.

security.

*Source: The Black Panther, 23
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