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## BLACK PANTHER ORGANISATION

### RACISM AND BLACK PANTHER FORMATION

Racism in America has been rife from the colonial era when all members of the minority groups such as African Americans and Asian Americans were denied some of their rights. This was either due to their migratory status or color. Major groups such as the European Americans particularly Anglo Saxon were granted more privileges in matters involving voting, education, housing, land acquisition and even in the courts and jail terms. The major institutions that practiced racism included slavery, boarding schools, law making institution, American reservations, American Indian wars, and segregation.

The war against racism started in the early 19th century by Martin Delany, referred as the grandfather of Black Nationalism. In this century the theme for Black Nationalism was the repatriation of the black Americans to Liberia and Sierra Leon. In the 20th Century, the war on Black Nationalism had intensified and led to the rise of many prominent people with different ideologies. The likes of Marcus Garvey who encouraged African Americans to be proud of their pigment and to be proud of their race. Garvey championed for the unification of black people by putting all their ethnic and cultural differences aside.

Many leaders of the Black community worked in the civil right Movements so as to integrate black people to the American Life. This was during the period between 1953 and 1964. It is during this period that saw the rise of Malcolm X, an advocate for black independence. Contrary to Martin Luther King junior, Malcolm X had maintained that the independence of black people would benefit them more than the tactics employed by the civil right movement. He also believed that nonviolence was not the way to go for Black Nationalism. In 1965 Malcolm X was assassinated as he was addressing his organization in Washington heights. His death is highly attributed to a rival Black Muslim group (21 FEB: This day in history).

It is the death of Malcolm X that sparked the formation of the Black Panthers Party by young black Americans (Baggins). Their favored means of action were military, contrary the peaceful nonviolent they had already tried and tested. With the symbol of a black panther as the organization's logo, the party was formed to be protective of the black society and all those oppressed.

The choice of the leader of the Black Panther organization was rather unique. The party was formed in October 1966- in the city of Oakland, California, -by two college students. By the flip of a coin, Bobby Seale became the chairman while Huey. P. Newton became the minister of defense. The two had been members of the Revolutionary Action Movement prior to the formation of the Black Panther. The ideologies behind this epic formation were: Maoism, anti-fascism, anti-imperialism, Marxism-Leninism, revolutionary socialism, and anti-racism. Their popular slogan was 'policing the police' who, by virtue of their power was against the black community subjecting them to continuous harassment and brutality.

Their strongholds were the regions that had the largest population of blacks such as Philadelphia, Oakland, New York, Chicago, Los Angeles and Seattle. After escorting the widow of Malcolm X to San Francisco airport with armed members, the party attracted a few people. The party that had begun with only two members in 1966 grew to have over 5000 full-time workers and 45 branches spread all over America. Most of these workers were either unemployed or were immigrants. The catalyst to their mass recruitment was the fight that they had with the police due to the murder of the family of Denzil Dowell by the police. Besides their militant rules, the party offered social services to the community such as offering free breakfast and shoes for children. And free clinics.

During the first several months after the formation of the panther organization, there were legal laws authorizing carrying guns around California. In Oakland, Huey P Newton and Bobby seal used to patrol the streets with shotguns, rifles and the state's liberal gun laws. Understanding the liberal laws very well meant they had an edge over the police. The liberal laws were meant to cow the police officers who did not know much about carrying guns by civilians. Most of these patrols were actually to follow the police and monitor any incident of brutality. The first few confrontations between the panther members and police did not end up in violence. Most of the protests against cases of racism and police brutality seldom were interfered with. The police feared the backlash since most party members carried loaded guns. With the constitution then, there was no law broken. This prompted the state to change the constitution and come up with the 'Mulford' act which limited the public to access of guns. Since this was a movement against the panther organization, Seale accompanied with other group members stormed the assembly wielding loaded guns. When the smoke had settled, Seale and other five members were in police

custody and Governor Reagan had signed the act. It is this incident that catapulted the organization into the international forefront.

#### PLATFORM OF THE FOUNDATION OF THE BLACK PANTHER ORGANISATION

The organization had been found on a 10 point program. The first public view of the program was on May 15, 1967. The programs required full-time employment and hence most oppressed communities were the main targets. The ten point platform for the black panther organization was: Freedom, Full time employment for the black and oppressed communities, End to robbery by the capitalists on the oppressed black community, Decent housing for the black community, Education for the community, Free health care for the black and oppressed communities, scientific and medical information provision, the end of police brutality and the oppression against black people and the other oppressed communities, An immediate end to wars of aggression, Freedom for all the oppressed and black people held in the U.S prisons and jails and demand for land, bread, housing, education, clothing, justice, peace and people's community to control modern technology.

Huey Newton and Bobby Seale formed the party to protect the black community from the police but there were also programs that were meant to uplift the standards of the oppressed. This was due to the failure of government bodies to provide the basic human needs adequately. The community programs were 63 ranging from education, awareness programs to health services. The 8 remarkable programs (Chiles) initiated by the organization were: The morning breakfast program which was first set up in the Barkley in California. It catered for more than 20000 children living in the poverty stricken districts. The program after being dismantled by government agencies was elevated to the School Breakfast Program by the national government

and feeds more than 13 million children as of today (Collier); health facilities and clinics which were set up in 13 cities across America.

Considering that over half of the black party members were female, they are considered to pioneers the program. Some of the medical services offered were: blood screening, high blood pressure tests, tuberculosis, polio immunization, treatments from colds and influenza among others; Youth programs which were programs that were set up to diversify the minds of young blacks and to motivate them towards success. It was established in 1971 and had the first lot graduate in 1974; The SAFE program which was created to prevent the elderly from the fear of harassment and attacks. Prior to that, the Oakland police department had ignored their pleas prompting them to seek help from the organization. (Chiles); The free ambulance program which was meant to cater for the sick and injured inconsiderate of the financial capability; The program for free food was meant to provide the community, mainly the blacks and the oppressed with free food; The alliance for black students was established in 1972. It was found when a group of rebel students protested against the campus programs around Bay area. It was meant to push the school governing bodies into providing better college programs and facilities; the newspaper program which was established in 1967 and was the main propaganda item for the panther. The newspaper was meant to create awareness worldwide of the Black Panther organization.

As the Black Panther organization continued to get recognition both in the international and local front, it formed alliances with other parties of similar ideologies. Furthermore, since the party was formed for the equality of all people, sexism was considered more savage than racism. Since African-American women have had unique life experiences, their ideologies were observed to be the mechanism to catapult the organization forward. With this observation, women were put on equal terms as men with the panther newspaper casting the limelight on

them as revolutionaries. Some of the women who were portrayed as intelligent included Angela Davies, Kathleen Kleaver, and Erica Huggins. The women were portrayed as people who protect homes and equal active participants as men in the self-defense movement. Pictures on the panther newspaper elaborated this nature by showing them, with their children, holding guns. Publications on the panther newspaper from 1968 henceforth to the disintegration of the party were headed by women. After women from the party demanded better health and child care from the party, many onsite child care facilities were established throughout America. There were further effects of the demands with the party officially denouncing prostitution and promoting the reproductive rights of women such as abortion.

On equal measures, it gained enemies who were either against their radical ideologies or were against the black race. A notable enemy of this party was the Ku Klux Klan, a white oriented group. The Ku Klux Klan that was in the fight with the black panthers was the third in its line, the first having been established in the 1860s splitting up in the early 1970s. The second was established in 1915 and existed up to the late 1930s. The third was established after the second world war in 1946 whereby its popularity increased due to the emergence of the Civil rights movement. It was totally against the non-white population targeting mainly the Jews, immigrants and the black Americans.

Alliances between the Black Panther Organization grew when they went beyond racial borders to fight for the community as a whole. This was inconsiderate of the race and was towards for a common cause. They defined their enemies as the ruling class and not all whites were considered enemies during the black power era. This was also irrespective of the sexual orientation of any person and had no discriminatory views towards gay people. Some of the

groups that grew due to the influence of the Black Panther were the brown berets and the young lords, which were of Latino origin (Jones).

## F.B.I AND THE DOWNFALL OF THE PARTY

The Black Panthers Party had gained a lot of power and had a lot of influence to the United States. The party had more than 30 branches in major cities like Illinois and Washington. It is this prominence that led to their recognition by the then F.B.I director J. Edward Hoover. Hoover had initiated a program to neutralize black hate groups in 1967. It was known as COINTELPRO (Counter-Intelligence Program). The goal of the program was to primarily prevent the unification of black militants and nationalists. In 1969 the black panthers had become the primary targets for the COINTELPRO. This was after issuing a directive stating that the Black Panther Party was the greatest threat to the internal security of the country (Ray). Fred Hampton and Mark Clark who were Chicago leaders of the party were killed in a police raid in the same year. The F.B.I used propagandas, false information and harassment to foster distrust and disunity in the Black Panther party members. In 1970 the F.B.I forged letters to Eldridge Cleaver (minister of information) who was then living in Algiers. The letter fed him with lies of how the leadership of the Black Panthers party was planning of ousting him. He was later expelled by Huey Newton in a purge commonly known as the Newton-Cleaver Purge (Clayborne).

The COINTELPRO also aimed at expanding the rift between the party and its rivals by spreading propagandas. The rift between the black stone rangers and the Black Panther Party was also the work of the F.B.I. The FBI also sent letters to the US organization that were aimed to

increase the rivalry and hatred they had for the Black Panther party. Furthermore, the program also targeted programs that the party had endorsed and started. Such programs were the free breakfast for children which was started to show the people that the government had failed to address children in poverty and hunger.

The FBI criticized this program claiming that it was exposing children to the party's propaganda and it was radicalizing the children. This criticism exposed the party too often to police raids and harassments. These raids scared donors and supporters, which later led to them withdrawing their support either financially or resourcefully.

The Black Panther Party started weakening in the early 1970s due to legal problems and external attacks but mainly due to the splitting of members. The splits happened due to the ideological rift between party leaders. The FBI destroyed the party with the police arresting the members, forcing exiles and murders of the party's several members. In the late 1970s, many party members had been killed, imprisoned or had traveled from America into exile. One of the most effective methods the COINTELPRO used was propaganda through forged letters. This led to the rift between Huey Newton and Eldridge Cleaver. The change of ideologies between leaders also played a big role in the downfall of the Black Panther's party. Newton and Seale shifted their ideologies to community programs from revolutionary ideas. The two of them called for help for survival programs but later broke away from cleaver who supported black revolution than survival programs. This, in the end, led to the disintegration of the party.

## CONCLUSION

The Black Panther was a revolutionary organization which advocated for people to fight for their rights. It was started by young adolescents who were on the forefront to champion for



better living conditions from and black people empowerment. Some scholars believe that the organization's framework is still a benchmark for what revolution stands for. Due to their devotion, their influence spread across the globe and there are still groups that are still employing their ideologies. Two of these groups include the black lives matter and the new panther organization.

On matters of racism, though its effects are continually decreasing, many bodies have come out to champion for the rights of all Americans. The NACCP is such an organization. The non-profit organization champions for the rights of everyone and provides lawyers in cases where there is an aspect of racism. According to NACCP, the main goals include Economic fairness, An end to racial injustice on matters of law, Voting rights protection of all Americans and increased education quality by removal of barriers that are racial. Furthermore, the organization encourages communities to help in the fight against police brutality (NAACP).

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