

Black Panther Party

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Black Panther Party

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- *Party contractions continued throughout the 1970s, and by 1980, the Black Panther Party had just 27 members.*
- *The Black Panther Party (BPP), originally the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense, was a political organization founded by Bobby Seale and Huey Newton in October 1966 in Oakland, California.*

The Black Panther Party (BPP), originally the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense, was a political organization founded by Bobby Seale and Huey Newton in October 1966 in Oakland, California. The party was active in the United States from 1966 until 1982, with chapters in numerous major cities, and international chapters operating in the United Kingdom in the early 1970s, and in Algeria from 1969 until 1972.

At its inception on October 15, 1966, the Black Panther Party's core practice was its armed citizens' patrols to monitor the behavior of officers of the Oakland Police Department, a practice later known as copwatching, and challenge police brutality in the city.

In 1969, community social programs became a core activity of party members. The Black Panther Party instituted a variety of community social programs, most extensively the Free Breakfast for Children Programs, to address issues like food injustice, and community health clinics for education and treatment of diseases including sickle cell anemia, tuberculosis, and later HIV/AIDS.

Black Panther Party members were involved in many fatal firefights with police: Huey Newton allegedly killed officer John Frey in 1967, and Eldridge Cleaver led an ambush in 1968 of Oakland police officers, in which two officers were wounded and Panther Bobby Hutton was killed. The party suffered many internal conflicts, resulting in the murders of Alex Rackley and Betty Van Patter.

In 1967, the Mulford Act was enacted by California legislature, and signed into law by governor Ronald Reagan, which put into effect strict gun laws that stripped legal ownership of firearms from Black Panther members and prevented any citizens, black or white, from carrying firearm weapons in public.

In 1969, Federal Bureau of Investigation Director J. Edgar Hoover described the party as "the greatest threat to the internal security of the country." He developed and supervised an extensive counterintelligence program (COINTELPRO) of surveillance, infiltration, perjury, police harassment, and many other tactics, designed to undermine Panther leadership by incriminating and assassinating party members, discredit and criminalize the Party, and drain organizational resources and manpower. The program was accused of assassinating Black Panther members, including Fred Hampton.

Government oppression initially contributed to the party's growth, as killings and arrests of Panthers increased its support among African Americans, and on the broad political left, who both valued the Panthers as a powerful force opposed to de facto segregation and the military draft. The party enrolled the most members and had the most influence in the Oakland-San Francisco Bay Area, New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, Seattle, and Philadelphia. There were active chapters in many prisons, at a time when an increasing number of young African-American men were being incarcerated.

Black Panther Party membership reached a peak in 1970, with offices in 68 cities and thousands of members, it began to decline over the following decade. After the leaders and members were vilified by the mainstream press, public support for the party waned, and the group became more isolated. In-fighting among Party leadership, caused largely by the FBI's COINTELPRO operation, led to expulsions and defections that decimated the membership. Popular support for the Party declined further after reports appeared detailing the group's alleged involvement in illegal activities, such as drug dealing and extortion schemes directed against Oakland merchants. By 1972 most Panther activity centered on the national headquarters and a school in Oakland, where the party continued to influence local politics. Though under constant police surveillance, the Chicago chapter also remained active and maintained their community programs until 1974. The Seattle chapter lasted longer than most, with a breakfast program and medical clinics that continued even after the chapter disbanded in 1977. Party contractions continued throughout the 1970s, and by 1980, the Black Panther Party had just 27 members.

The history of the Black Panther Party is controversial. Scholars have characterized the Black Panther Party as the most influential black movement organization of the late 1960s, and "the strongest link between the domestic Black Liberation Struggle and global opponents of American imperialism". Other commentators have described the Party as more criminal than political, characterized by "defiant posturing over substance". The Black Panthers certainly could claim to be protecting the rights of black people from racism, in the words of Malcolm X, "By any means necessary".

History

Origins

- *Young black people in Oakland and other cities developed a rich ferment of study groups and political organizations, and it is out of this ferment that the Black Panther Party emerged.*
- *Black Panther Party membership "consisted of recent migrants whose families traveled north and west to escape the southern racial regime, only to be confronted with new forms of segregation and repression".*

During World War II, tens of thousands of blacks left the Southern states during the Second Great Migration for Oakland and other cities in the Bay Area to find work in the war industries such as Kaiser Shipyards. The sweeping migration transformed the Bay Area as well as cities throughout the West and the North, altering the once white-dominated demographics. A new generation of young blacks growing up in these cities faced new conditions, new forms of poverty and racism unfamiliar to their parents, and they sought to develop new forms of politics to address them. Black Panther Party membership "consisted of recent migrants whose families traveled north and west to escape the southern racial regime, only to be confronted with new forms of segregation and repression". In the early 1960s, the Civil Rights Movement had dismantled the Jim Crow system of racial caste subordination in the South with tactics of non-violent civil disobedience, and demanding full citizenship rights for black people. However, not much changed in the cities of the North and West. As the wartime and post-war jobs which drew much of the black migration "fled to the suburbs along with white residents", the black population was concentrated in poor "urban ghettos" with high unemployment, and substandard housing, mostly excluded from political representation, top universities, and the middle class. Northern and Western police departments were almost all white. In 1966, only 16 of Oakland's 661 police officers were African American, representing less than 2.5% of the force.

Civil rights practices proved incapable of redressing these conditions, and the organizations that had "led much of the nonviolent civil disobedience" such as SNCC and CORE went into decline. By 1966 a "Black Power ferment" emerged, consisting largely of young urban blacks, posing a question the Civil Rights Movement could not answer: "how would black people in America win not only formal citizenship rights, but actual economic and political power?" Young black people in Oakland and other cities developed a rich ferment of study groups and political organizations, and it is out of this ferment that the Black Panther Party emerged.

Founding the Black Panther Party

- *Newton and Seale decided to adopt the Black Panther logo and form their own organization called the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense.*

- *He had an epiphany that would distinguish the Black Panther Party from the multitude of organizations seeking to build Black Power.*
- *In late October 1966, Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale founded the Black Panther Party (originally the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense).*

In late October 1966, Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale founded the Black Panther Party (originally the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense). In formulating a new politics, they drew on their experiences working with a variety of Black Power organizations. Newton and Seale first met in 1962 when they were both students at Merritt College. They joined Donald Warden's Afro-American Association, where they read widely, debated, and organized in an emergent black nationalist tradition inspired by Malcolm X and others. Eventually dissatisfied with Warden's accommodation-ism, they developed a revolutionary anti-imperialist perspective working with more active and militant groups like the Soul Students Advisory Council and the Revolutionary Action Movement. While bringing in a paycheck, jobs running youth service programs at the North Oakland Neighborhood Anti-Poverty Center allowed them to develop a revolutionary nationalist approach to community service, later a key element in the Black Panther Party's "community survival programs."

Dissatisfied with the failure of these organizations to directly challenge police brutality and appeal to the "brothers on the block", Huey and Bobby sought to take matters into their own hands. After the police killed Matthew Johnson, an unarmed young black man in San Francisco, Newton observed the violent rebellion that followed. He had an epiphany that would distinguish the Black Panther Party from the multitude of organizations seeking to build Black Power. Newton saw the explosive rebellious anger of the ghetto as a force, and believed that if he could stand up to the police, he could organize that force into political power. Inspired by Robert F. Williams' armed resistance to the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) and Williams' book *Negroes with Guns*, Newton studied gun laws in California until he knew it better than many police officers. Like the Community Alert Patrol in Los Angeles after the Watts Rebellion, he decided to organize patrols to follow the police around to monitor for incidents of brutality. But with a crucial difference: his patrols would carry loaded guns. Huey and Bobby raised enough money to buy two shotguns by buying bulk quantities of the recently publicized Little Red Book and reselling them to leftist radicals and liberal intellectuals on the UC Berkeley campus at three times the price. According to Bobby Seale, they would "sell the books, make the money, buy the guns, and go on the streets with the guns. We'll protect a mother, protect a brother, and protect the community from the racist cops."

On October 29, 1966, Stokely Carmichael – a leader of SNCC – championed the call for "Black Power" and came to Berkeley to keynote a Black Power conference. At the time, he was promoting the armed organizing efforts of the Lowndes County Freedom Organization (LCFO) in Alabama and their use of the Black Panther symbol. Newton and Seale decided to adopt the Black Panther logo and form their own organization called the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense. Newton and Seale decided on a uniform of blue shirts, black pants, black leather jackets, black berets. Sixteen-year-old Bobby Hutton was their first recruit.

Late 1966 to early 1967

Chronology

- *January 1967: The BPP opens its first official headquarters in an Oakland storefront, and published the first issue of The Black Panther: Black Community News Service.*

October 15, 1966: The BPP is founded. A few months later, they began their first "police" patrols.

January 1967: The BPP opens its first official headquarters in an Oakland storefront, and published the first issue of The Black Panther: Black Community News Service.

February 1967: BPP members serve as security escorts for Betty Shabazz.

April 1967: Denzil Dowell protest in Richmond.

May 2, 1967: Thirty people representing the BPP go to state capitol with guns, and achieve the Party's first national media attention.

Oakland patrols of police

- *Between the end of 1966 to the start of 1967, the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense's armed police patrols in Oakland black communities attracted a small handful of members.*
- *The initial tactic of the party utilized contemporary open-carry gun laws to protect Party members when policing the police.*

The initial tactic of the party utilized contemporary open-carry gun laws to protect Party members when policing the police. This act was done in order to record incidents of police brutality by distantly following police cars around neighborhoods. When confronted by a police officer, Party members cited laws proving they have done nothing wrong and threatened to take to court any officer that violated their constitutional rights. Between the end of 1966 to the start of 1967, the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense's armed police patrols in Oakland black communities attracted a small handful of members. Numbers grew slightly starting in February 1967, when the party provided an armed escort at the San Francisco airport for Betty Shabazz, Malcolm X's widow and keynote speaker for a conference held in his honor.

The Black Panther Party's focus on militancy was often construed as open hostility, feeding a reputation of violence even though early efforts by the Panthers focused primarily on promoting social issues and the exercise of their legal right to carry arms. The Panthers employed a California law that permitted carrying a loaded rifle or shotgun as long as it was publicly displayed and pointed at no one. Generally this was done while monitoring and observing police behavior in their neighborhoods, with the Panthers arguing that this emphasis on active militancy and openly carrying their weapons was necessary to protect

individuals from police violence. For example, chants like "The Revolution has come, it's time to pick up the gun. Off the pigs!", helped create the Panthers' reputation as a violent organization.

Rallies in Richmond, California

- *Police seldom interfered at these rallies because every Panther was armed and no laws were broken.*
- *The black community of Richmond, California, wanted protection against police brutality.*
- *Dowell's family contacted the Black Panther Party for assistance after county officials refused to investigate the case.*

The black community of Richmond, California, wanted protection against police brutality. With only three main streets for entering and exiting the neighborhood, it was easy for police to control, contain, and suppress the majority African-American community. On April 1, 1967, a black, unarmed twenty-two-year-old construction worker named Denzil Dowell was shot dead by police in North Richmond. Dowell's family contacted the Black Panther Party for assistance after county officials refused to investigate the case. The Party held rallies in North Richmond that educated the community on armed self-defense and the Denzil Dowell incident. Police seldom interfered at these rallies because every Panther was armed and no laws were broken. The Party's ideals resonated with several community members, who then brought their own guns to the next rallies.



Black Panther convention, Lincoln Memorial, June 19, 1970.

Protest at the Statehouse

- *Awareness of the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense grew rapidly after their May 2, 1967, protest at the California State Assembly.*

Awareness of the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense grew rapidly after their May 2, 1967, protest at the California State Assembly. On May 2, 1967, the California State Assembly Committee on Criminal Procedure was scheduled to convene to discuss what was known as the "Mulford Act", which would make the public carrying of loaded firearms illegal. Eldridge Cleaver and Newton put together a plan to send a group of 26 armed Panthers led by Seale from Oakland to Sacramento to protest the bill. The group entered the assembly carrying their weapons, an incident which was widely publicized, and which prompted police to arrest Seale and five others. The group pleaded guilty to misdemeanor charges of disrupting a legislative session.

Ten-point program

- *The Black Panther Party first publicized its original Ten-Point program on May 15, 1967, following the Sacramento action, in the second issue of The Black Panther newspaper.*
- *We want power to determine the destiny of our Black Community.*
- *We want an end to the robbery by the Capitalists of our Black Community.*

The Black Panther Party first publicized its original Ten-Point program on May 15, 1967, following the Sacramento action, in the second issue of The Black Panther newspaper. The original ten points of "What We Want Now!" follow:

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

We want full employment for our people.

We want an end to the robbery by the Capitalists of our Black Community.

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

We want education for our people that exposes the true nature of this decadent American society. We want education that teaches us our true history and our role in the present day society.

We want all Black men to be exempt from military service.

We want an immediate end to POLICE BRUTALITY and MURDER of Black people.

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

We want all Black people when brought to trial to be tried in court by a jury of their peer group or people from their Black Communities, as defined by the Constitution of the United States.

We want land, bread, housing, education, clothing, justice and peace.

Late 1967 to early 1968

Chronology

- *August 1967: The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) directs its program "COINTELPRO" to "neutralize" what they call "black nationalist hate groups".*
- *April 6, 1968: A team of Panthers led by Eldridge Cleaver ambushes Oakland police officers.*
- *Panther Bobby Hutton is killed.*
- *At this time there were fewer than one hundred Party members.*

July 1967: the United Front Against Fascism conference is held in Oakland.

August 1967: The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) directs its program "COINTELPRO" to "neutralize" what they call "black nationalist hate groups".

October 28, 1967: Huey Newton allegedly kills police officer John Frey. At this time there were fewer than one hundred Party members.

Early Spring 1968: Eldridge Cleaver's *Soul on Ice* is published.

April 4, 1968: Martin Luther King is assassinated. Riots break out nationwide.

April 6, 1968: A team of Panthers led by Eldridge Cleaver ambushes Oakland police officers. Panther Bobby Hutton is killed.

United Front Against Fascism

- *In July 1969 the BPP organized the United Front Against Fascism conference in Oakland, which was attended by around 5,000 people representing a number of groups.*

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SAC, Los Angeles (157-4054) 5/6/70
 Director, FBI (100-448005) -1766 1 - [REDACTED]

COUNTERTERRORISM PROGRAM
 BLACK NATIONALIST HATE GROUPS
 RACIAL INTELLIGENCE - BLACK PANTHER PARTY

Reurairtel 4/27/70.

Reairtel requests Bureau authority to forward a letter from a fictitious person to Hollywood, California, gossip columnists to publicize the pregnancy of Jean Seberg, well-known white movie actress, by [REDACTED] BPP. [REDACTED] to possibly cause her embarrassment and tarnish her image with the general public. Information from [REDACTED] indicated that Seberg was four months pregnant by [REDACTED].

To protect the sensitive source of information from possible compromise and to insure the success of your plan, Bureau feels it would be better to wait approximately two additional months until Seberg's pregnancy would be obvious to everyone. If deemed warranted, submit your recommendation at that time.

1 - San Francisco

JFM:drl
 (5)

NOTE:

Jean Seberg has been a financial supporter of the BPP and should be neutralized. Her current pregnancy by [REDACTED] while still married affords an opportunity for such effort. The plan suggested by Los Angeles appears to have merit except for the timing since the sensitive source might be compromised if implemented prematurely. A copy is designated to San Francisco since its sensitive source coverage is involved.

Tolson _____
 DeLoach _____
 Mohr _____
 Bishop _____
 Casper _____
 Callahan _____
 Conrad _____
 Felt _____
 Gale _____
 Rosen _____
 Sullivan _____
 Tavel _____
 Soyars _____
 Tele. Room _____
 Holmes _____

MAILED 24
 MAY 6 1970
 COMM-FBI

97 MAY 8 1970

COINTELPRO document outlining the FBI's plans to 'neutralize' Jean Seberg for her support for the Black Panther Party, by attempting to publicly "cause her embarrassment" and "tarnish her image".

COINTELPRO

- By 1969, the Black Panthers and their allies had become primary COINTELPRO targets, singled out in 233 of the 295 authorized "Black Nationalist" COINTELPRO actions.
- In Southern California similar actions were taken to exacerbate a "gang war" between the Black Panther Party and a black nationalist group called the US Organization.

In August 1967, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) instructed its program "COINTELPRO" to "neutralize" what the FBI called "black nationalist hate groups" and other dissident groups. In September 1968, FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover described the Black Panthers as "the greatest threat to the internal security of the country". By 1969, the Black Panthers and their allies had become primary COINTELPRO targets, singled out in 233 of the 295 authorized "Black Nationalist" COINTELPRO actions. The goals of the program were

to prevent the unification of militant black nationalist groups and to weaken the power of their leaders, as well as to discredit the groups to reduce their support and growth. The initial targets included the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, the Revolutionary Action Movement and the Nation of Islam. Leaders who were targeted included the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., Stokely Carmichael, H. Rap Brown, Maxwell Stanford and Elijah Muhammad.

Part of the COINTELPRO actions were directed at creating and exploiting existing rivalries between black nationalist factions. One such attempt was to "intensify the degree of animosity" between the Black Panthers and the Blackstone Rangers, a Chicago street gang. They sent an anonymous letter to the Ranger's gang leader claiming that the Panthers were threatening his life, a letter whose intent was to induce "reprisals" against Panther leadership. In Southern California similar actions were taken to exacerbate a "gang war" between the Black Panther Party and a black nationalist group called the US Organization. It was alleged that the FBI had sent a provocative letter to the US Organization in an attempt to increase existing antagonism between the two groups.

COINTELPRO also aimed to dismantle the Black Panther Party by targeting the social/community programs they endorsed, one of the most influential being the Free Breakfast for Children Program. The success of the Free Breakfast for Children Program served to "shed light on the government's failure to address child poverty and hunger—pointing to the limits of the nation's War on Poverty". The ability of the Party to organize and provide for children more effectively than the U.S. government led the FBI to criticize the program as a means of exposing children to Panther Propaganda. In response to this, as an effort of disassembling the program, "Police and Federal Agents regularly harassed and intimidated program participants, supporters, and Party workers and sought to scare away donors and organizations that housed the programs like churches and community centers".

Huey Newton charged with murdering John Frey

- *In his book Shadow of the Panther, writer Hugh Pearson alleges that Newton, while intoxicated in the hours before he was shot and killed, claimed to have willfully killed John Frey.*
- *On October 28, 1967, Oakland police officer John Frey was shot to death in an altercation with Huey P. Newton during a traffic stop.*

On October 28, 1967, Oakland police officer John Frey was shot to death in an altercation with Huey P. Newton during a traffic stop. In the stop, Newton and backup officer Herbert Heanes also suffered gunshot wounds. Newton was convicted of voluntary manslaughter at trial, but the conviction was later overturned. In his book Shadow of the Panther, writer Hugh Pearson alleges that Newton, while intoxicated in the hours before he was shot and killed, claimed to have willfully killed John Frey.

Free Huey! campaign

- *For example, the Black Panther Party collaborated with the Peace and Freedom Party, which sought to promote a strong antiwar and antiracist politics in opposition to the establishment democratic party.*
- *The Black Panther Party provided needed legitimacy to the Peace and Freedom Party's racial politics and in return received invaluable support for the "Free Huey" campaign.*

At the time, Newton claimed that he had been falsely accused, leading to the "Free Huey" campaign. This incident gained the party even wider recognition by the radical American left. Newton was released after three years, when his conviction was reversed on appeal.

As Newton awaited trial, the Black Panther party's "Free Huey" campaign developed alliances with numerous individuals, students and anti-war activists, "advancing an anti-imperialist political ideology that linked the oppression of antiwar protestors to the oppression of blacks and Vietnamese". The "Free Huey" campaign attracted black power organizations, New Left groups, and other activist groups such as the Progressive Labor Party, Bob Avakian of the Community for New Politics, and the Red Guard. For example, the Black Panther Party collaborated with the Peace and Freedom Party, which sought to promote a strong antiwar and antiracist politics in opposition to the establishment democratic party. The Black Panther Party provided needed legitimacy to the Peace and Freedom Party's racial politics and in return received invaluable support for the "Free Huey" campaign.

Founding of the L.A. Chapter

- *In 1968 the southern California chapter was founded by Alprentice "Bunchy" Carter in Los Angeles.*

In 1968 the southern California chapter was founded by Alprentice "Bunchy" Carter in Los Angeles. Carter was the leader of the Slauson street gang, and many of the LA chapter's early recruits were Slausons.

Killing of Bobby Hutton

- *On April 7, 1968, sixteen-year-old Panther national treasurer Bobby Hutton was killed, and Eldridge Cleaver, Black Panther Party Minister of Information, was wounded in a shootout with the Oakland police.*
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Bobby Hutton was born April 21, 1950 in Jefferson County Arkansas. At the age of three, he and his family moved to Oakland, California after being harassed by racist vigilante groups associated with the KU Klux Klan. In December of 1966, he became the first treasurer and

recruit of the Black Panther Party at the age of just 16 years old. He became the first member of the party that was killed by police. On April 6, 1968, two days after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and with riots raging across cities in United States, Hutton was traveling with Eldridge Cleaver and other BPP members in a car. The group confronted Oakland Police officers and during the confrontation, two police officers were shot. Hutton and Cleaver fled to an apartment building where they engaged in a 90-minute gun battle with the Oakland Police Department.

Ultimately, Cleaver was wounded, and Hutton voluntarily surrendered. According to Cleaver, although Hutton had stripped down to his underwear and had his hands raised in the air to prove that he was unarmed, Oakland Police shot Hutton more than 12 times, leading to his death. On April 7, 1968, sixteen-year-old Panther national treasurer Bobby Hutton was killed, and Eldridge Cleaver, Black Panther Party Minister of Information, was wounded in a shootout with the Oakland police. Two police officers were also shot. Although at the time the BPP claimed that the police had ambushed them, several party members later admitted that Cleaver had led the Panther group on a deliberate ambush of the police officers, provoking the shoot-out.[76][77][78][79][80] Seven other Panthers, including chief of staff David Hilliard, were also arrested. Hutton's death became a rallying issue for Panther supporters.[81]<https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/hutton-bobby-1950-1968/>

On April 7, 1968, sixteen-year-old Panther national treasurer Bobby Hutton was killed, and Eldridge Cleaver, Black Panther Party Minister of Information, was wounded in a shootout with the Oakland police. Two police officers were also shot. Although at the time the BPP claimed that the police had ambushed them, several party members later admitted that Cleaver had led the Panther group on a deliberate ambush of the police officers, provoking the shoot-out. Seven other Panthers, including chief of staff David Hilliard, were also arrested. Hutton's death became a rallying issue for Panther supporters.

Late 1968

Chronology

- *Curtis Austin states that by late 1968, Black Panther Party ideology had evolved to the point where they began to reject black nationalism and became more a "revolutionary internationalist movement":*
- *With the Ten-Point program, "What We Want, What We Believe", the Black Panther Party expressed its economic and political grievances.*
- *In 1968, the group shortened its name to the Black Panther Party and sought to focus directly on political action.*

April to mid-June 1968: Cleaver is in jail.

Mid-July 1968: Huey Newton's murder trial commences. Panthers hold "Free Huey" rallies outside the courthouse daily.

August 5, 1968: Three Panthers were killed in a gun battle with police at a Los Angeles gas station.

Early September 1968: Newton is convicted of manslaughter.

Late September 1968: days before he is due to return to prison to serve out a rape conviction, Cleaver flees to Cuba and later Algeria.

October 5, 1968: a Panther is killed in a gunfight with police in Los Angeles.

November 1968: the BPP finds numerous supporters, establishing relationships with the Peace and Freedom Party and SNCC. Monetary contributions are flowing in, and BPP leadership begins embezzling donated funds.

November 20, 1968: William Lee Brent and two accomplices in a van marked "Black Panther Black Community News Service" allegedly rob a gas station in San Francisco's Bayview district of \$80, resulting in a shootout with police.

In 1968, the group shortened its name to the Black Panther Party and sought to focus directly on political action. Members were encouraged to carry guns and to defend themselves against violence. An influx of college students joined the group, which had consisted chiefly of "brothers off the block". This created some tension in the group. Some members were more interested in supporting the Panthers' social programs, while others wanted to maintain their "street mentality".

By 1968, the party had expanded into many cities throughout the United States, among them, Atlanta, Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, Cleveland, Dallas, Denver, Detroit, Kansas City, Los Angeles, Newark, New Orleans, New York City, Omaha, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, San Diego, San Francisco, Seattle, Toledo, and Washington, D.C. Peak membership was near 5,000 by 1969, and their newspaper, under the editorial leadership of Eldridge Cleaver, had a circulation of 250,000. The group created a Ten-Point Program, a document that called for "Land, Bread, Housing, Education, Clothing, Justice and Peace", as well as exemption from conscription for black men, among other demands. With the Ten-Point program, "What We Want, What We Believe", the Black Panther Party expressed its economic and political grievances.

Curtis Austin states that by late 1968, Black Panther Party ideology had evolved to the point where they began to reject black nationalism and became more a "revolutionary internationalist movement":

Panther slogans and iconography spread. At the 1968 Summer Olympics, Tommie Smith and John Carlos, two American medalists, gave the black power salute during the playing of the American national anthem. The International Olympic Committee banned them from the Olympic Games for life. Film star Jane Fonda publicly supported Huey Newton and the Black

Panthers during the early 1970s. She actually ended up informally adopting the daughter of two Black Panther members, Mary Luana Williams. Fonda and other Hollywood celebrities became involved in the Panthers' leftist programs. The Panthers attracted a wide variety of left-wing revolutionaries and political activists, including writer Jean Genet, former Ramparts magazine editor David Horowitz (who later became a major critic of what he describes as Panther criminality) and left-wing lawyer Charles R. Garry, who acted as counsel in the Panthers' many legal battles.

The BPP adopted a "Serve the People" program, which at first involved a free breakfast program for children. By the end of 1968, the BPP had established 38 chapters and branches, claiming more than five thousand members. Eldridge and Kathleen Cleaver left the country days before Cleaver was to turn himself in to serve the remainder of a thirteen-year sentence for a 1958 rape conviction. They settled in Algeria.

By the end of the year, party membership peaked at around 2,000. Party members engaged in criminal activities such as extortion, stealing, violent discipline of BPP members, and robberies. The BPP leadership took one third of the proceeds from robberies committed by BPP members.

Survival programs

- *The Free Breakfast For Children program was especially significant because it served as a space for educating youth about the current condition of the Black community, and the actions that the Party was taking to address that condition.*
- *"While the children ate their meal[s], members [of the Party] taught them liberation lessons consisting of Party messages and Black history."*

Inspired by Mao Zedong's advice to revolutionaries in The Little Red Book, Newton called on the Panthers to "serve the people" and to make "survival programs" a priority within its branches. The most famous of their programs was the Free Breakfast for Children Program, initially run out of an Oakland church.

The Free Breakfast For Children program was especially significant because it served as a space for educating youth about the current condition of the Black community, and the actions that the Party was taking to address that condition. "While the children ate their meal[s], members [of the Party] taught them liberation lessons consisting of Party messages and Black history." Through this program, the Party was able to influence young minds, and strengthen their ties to communities as well as gain widespread support for their ideologies. The breakfast program became so popular that the Panthers Party claimed to have fed twenty thousand children in the 1968-69 school year.

Other survival programs were free services such as clothing distribution, classes on politics and economics, free medical clinics, lessons on self-defense and first aid, transportation to upstate prisons for family members of inmates, an emergency-response ambulance program, drug and alcohol rehabilitation, and testing for sickle-cell disease. The free

medical clinics were very significant because it model an idea of how the world might work with free medical care, 13 clinics were established across the country. These clinics were involved in community-based health care that had roots connected to the Civil Rights Movement, which made it possible to establish the Medical Committee for Human Rights.

Political activities

- *They were a big influence on the White Panther Party, that was tied to the Detroit/Ann Arbor band MC5 and their manager John Sinclair, author of the book Guitar Army that also promulgated a ten-point program.[who?]*
- *In 1968, BPP Minister of Information Eldridge Cleaver ran for Presidential office on the Peace and Freedom Party ticket.*

In 1968, BPP Minister of Information Eldridge Cleaver ran for Presidential office on the Peace and Freedom Party ticket. They were a big influence on the White Panther Party, that was tied to the Detroit/Ann Arbor band MC5 and their manager John Sinclair, author of the book Guitar Army that also promulgated a ten-point program.[who?]

1969

Chronology

- *Panther membership is down significantly from the late 1968 peak.*
- *April 1969: Members of the New York chapter, known as the Panther 21 are indicted and jailed for a bombing conspiracy.*
- *November 13, 1969: A Panther is killed in a gunfight with police in Chicago.*
- *January 14, 1969: The Los Angeles chapter was involved in a shootout with members of the black nationalist US Organization, and two Panthers are killed.*

Early 1969: In late 1968 and January 1969, the BPP began to purge members due to fears about law enforcement infiltration and various petty disagreements.

January 14, 1969: The Los Angeles chapter was involved in a shootout with members of the black nationalist US Organization, and two Panthers are killed.

January 1969: The Oakland BPP begins the first free breakfast program for children.

March 1969: There is a second purge of BPP members.

April 1969: Members of the New York chapter, known as the Panther 21 are indicted and jailed for a bombing conspiracy. All would eventually be acquitted.

May 1969: Two more southern California Panthers are killed in violent disputes with US Organization members.

May 1969: Members of the New Haven chapter torture and murder Alex Rackley, who they suspected of being an informant.

July 17, 1969: Two policemen are shot and a Panther is killed in a gun battle in Chicago.

Late July 1969: The BPP ideology undergoes a shift, with a turn toward self-discipline and anti-racism.

August 1969: Bobby Seale is indicted and imprisoned in relation to the Rackley murder.

October 18, 1969: A Panther is killed in a gunfight with police outside a Los Angeles restaurant.

Mid-to-late 1969: COINTELPRO activity increases.

November 13, 1969: A Panther is killed in a gunfight with police in Chicago.

December 4, 1969: Fred Hampton and Mark Clark are killed by law enforcement in Chicago.

Late 1969: David Hilliard, current BPP head, advocates violent revolution. Panther membership is down significantly from the late 1968 peak.

Shoot-out with the US Organization

- *Violent conflict between the Panther chapter in LA and the US Organization, a black nationalist group, resulted in shootings and beatings, and led to the murders of at least four Black Panther Party members.*

Violent conflict between the Panther chapter in LA and the US Organization, a black nationalist group, resulted in shootings and beatings, and led to the murders of at least four Black Panther Party members. On January 17, 1969, Los Angeles Panther Captain Bunchy Carter and Deputy Minister John Huggins were killed in Campbell Hall on the UCLA campus, in a gun battle with members of the US Organization. Another shootout between the two groups on March 17 led to further injuries. Two more Panthers died.

Black Panther Party Liberation Schools

- *Huggins is noted as saying, "I think that the school's principles came from the socialist principles we tried to live in the Black Panther Party.*
- *Paramount to their beliefs regarding the need for individual agency in order to catalyze community change, the Black Panther Party (BPP) strongly supported the education of the masses.*
- *Funding for the Intercommunal Youth Institute was provided through a combination of Black Panther fundraising and community support.*

Paramount to their beliefs regarding the need for individual agency in order to catalyze community change, the Black Panther Party (BPP) strongly supported the education of the

masses. As part of their Ten-Point Program which set forth the ideals and goals of the party, they demanded an equitable education for all black people. Number 5 of the "What We Want Now!" section of the program reads: "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." In order to ensure that this occurred, the Black Panther Party took the education of their youth in their own hands by first establishing after-school programs and then opening up Liberation Schools in a variety of locations throughout the country which focused their curriculum on Black history, writing skills, and political science.

Intercommunal Youth Institute

The first Liberation School was opened by the Richmond Black Panthers in July 1969 with brunch served and snacks provided to students. Another school was opened in Mt. Vernon New York on July 17 of the subsequent year. These schools were informal in nature and more closely resembled after-school or summer programs. While these campuses were the first to open, the first full-time and longest-running Liberation school was opened in January 1971 in Oakland in response to the inequitable conditions in the Oakland Unified School District which was ranked one of the lowest scoring districts in California. Named the Intercommunal Youth Institute (IYI), this school, under the directorship of Brenda Bay, and later, Ericka Huggins, enrolled twenty-eight students in its first year, with the majority being the children of Black Panther parents. This number grew to fifty by the 1973-1974 school year. In order to provide full support for Black Panther parents whose time was spent organizing, some of the students and faculty members lived together year around. The school itself was dissimilar to traditional schools in a variety of ways including the fact that students were separated by academic performance rather than age and students were often provided one on one support as the faculty to student ratio was 1:10.

The Panther's goal in opening Liberation Schools, and specifically the Intercommunal Youth Institute, was to provide students with an education that wasn't being provided in the "white" schools, as the public schools in the district employed a eurocentric assimilationist curriculum with little to no attention to black history and culture. While students were provided with traditional courses such as English, Math, and Science, they were also exposed to activities focused on class structure and the prevalence of institutional racism. The overall goal of the school was to instill a sense of revolutionary consciousness in the students. With a strong belief in experiential learning, students had the opportunity to participate in community service projects as well as practice their writing skills by drafting letters to political prisoners associated with the Black Panther Party. Huggins is noted as saying, "I think that the school's principles came from the socialist principles we tried to live in the Black Panther Party. One of them being critical thinking- that children should learn not what to think but how to think ... the school was an expression of the collective wisdom of the people who envisioned it. And it was ... a living thing [that] changed every year. Funding for the Intercommunal Youth Institute was provided through a combination of Black Panther fundraising and community support.

Oakland Community School

In 1974, due to increased interest in enrolling in the school, school officials decided to move to a larger facility and subsequently changed the school's name to Oakland Community School. During this year, the school graduated its first class. Although the student population continued to grow ranging between 50 and 150 between 1974-1977, the original core values of individualized instruction remained. In September 1977, the school received a special award from Governor Edmund Brown Jr. and the California Legislature for "having set the standard for the highest level of elementary education in the state.

The school eventually closed in 1982 due to governmental pressure on party leadership which caused insufficient membership and funds to continue running the school.

Killing of Fred Hampton and Mark Clark

- *A federal investigation reported that only one shot was fired by the Panthers, and police fired at least 80 shots.*
- *Hampton was shot and killed, as was Panther guard Mark Clark.*
- *In Chicago, on December 4, 1969, two Panthers were killed when the Chicago Police raided the home of Panther leader Fred Hampton.*

In Chicago, on December 4, 1969, two Panthers were killed when the Chicago Police raided the home of Panther leader Fred Hampton. The raid had been orchestrated by the police in conjunction with the FBI. Hampton was shot and killed, as was Panther guard Mark Clark. A federal investigation reported that only one shot was fired by the Panthers, and police fired at least 80 shots. The only shot fired by the Panthers was from Mark Clark, who appeared to fire a single round determined to be the result of a reflexive death convulsion after he was immediately struck in the chest by shots from the police at the start of the raid.

Hampton was sleeping next to his pregnant fiancée, and was subsequently shot twice in the head at point blank range while unconscious. Coroner reports show that Hampton was drugged with a powerful barbiturate that night, and would have been unable to have been awoken by the sounds of the police raid. His body was then dragged into the hallway. He was 21 years old and unarmed at the time of his death. Seven other Panthers sleeping at the house at the time of the raid were then beaten and seriously wounded, then arrested under charges of aggravated assault and attempted murder of the officers involved in the raid. These charges would later be dropped.

Former FBI agent Wesley Swearingen asserts that the Bureau was guilty of a "plot to murder" the Panthers. Hampton had been slipped the barbiturates which had left him unconscious by William O'Neal, who had been working as an FBI informant. Cook County State's Attorney Edward Hanrahan, his assistant and eight Chicago police officers were indicted by a federal grand jury over the raid, but the charges were later dismissed. In 1979

civil action, Hampton's family won \$1.85 million from the city of Chicago in a wrongful death settlement.

Torture-murder of Alex Rackley

- *The case resulted in the New Haven Black Panther trials of 1970.*

In May 1969, three members of the New Haven chapter tortured and murdered Alex Rackley, a 19-year-old member of the New York chapter, because they suspected him of being a police informant. Three party officers—Warren Kimbro, George Sams Jr., and Lonnie McLucas—later admitted taking part. Sams, who gave the order to shoot Rackley at the murder scene, turned state's evidence and testified that he had received orders personally from Bobby Seale to carry out the execution. Party supporters responded that Sams was himself the informant and an agent provocateur employed by the FBI. The case resulted in the New Haven Black Panther trials of 1970. Kimbro and Sams were convicted of the murder, but the trials of Seale and Ericka Huggins ended with a hung jury, and the prosecution chose not to seek another trial.

International ties

- *Activists from many countries around the globe supported the Panthers and their cause.*
- *At each destination along the tour, the Panthers talked about their goals and the "Free Huey!"*

Activists from many countries around the globe supported the Panthers and their cause. In Scandinavian countries such as Norway and Finland, for example, left-wing activists organized a tour for Bobby Seale and Masai Hewitt in 1969. At each destination along the tour, the Panthers talked about their goals and the "Free Huey!" campaign. Seale and Hewitt made a stop in Germany as well, gaining support for the "Free Huey!" campaign.

1970

Chronology

- *He encouraged them to join the Black Liberation Struggle by arguing that the United States government was only using them for its own purposes.*
- *Eldridge Cleaver was invited to speak to Black GIs by the North Vietnamese government.*
- *The cultural festival allowed Black Panthers to network with representatives of various international anti-imperialist movements.*

January 1970: Leonard Bernstein holds a fundraiser for the BPP, which was notoriously mocked by Tom Wolfe in *Radical Chic & Mau-Mauing the Flak Catchers*.

Spring 1970: The Oakland BPP engages in another ambush of police officers with guns and fragmentation bombs. Two officers are wounded.

May 1970: Huey Newton's conviction is overturned, but he remains incarcerated.

July 1970: Newton tells The New York Times that "we've never advocated violence".

August 1970: Newton is released from prison.

In 1970, a group of Panthers traveled through Asia and they were welcomed as guests of the governments of North Vietnam, North Korea, and China. The group's first stop was in North Korea, where the Panthers met with local officials in order to discuss ways in which they could help each other fight against American imperialism. Eldridge Cleaver traveled to Pyongyang twice in 1969 and 1970, and following these trips he made an effort to publicize the writings and works of North Korean leader Kim Il-sung in the United States. After leaving North Korea, the group traveled to North Vietnam with the same agenda in mind: finding ways to put an end to American imperialism. Eldridge Cleaver was invited to speak to Black GIs by the North Vietnamese government. He encouraged them to join the Black Liberation Struggle by arguing that the United States government was only using them for its own purposes. Instead of risking their lives on the battlefield for a country that continued to oppress them, Cleaver believed that the black GIs should risk their lives in support of their own liberation. After leaving Vietnam, Cleaver met with the Chinese ambassador to Algeria in order to express their mutual animosity towards the American government.

When Algeria held its first Pan-African Cultural Festival, they invited many important figures from the United States. Among the important figures invited to the festival were Bobby Seale and Eldridge Cleaver. The cultural festival allowed Black Panthers to network with representatives of various international anti-imperialist movements. This was a significant time, which led to the formation of the International Section of the Party. It is at this festival that Cleaver met with the ambassador of North Korea, who later invited him to an International Conference of Revolutionary Journalists in Pyongyang. Eldridge also met with Yasser Arafat, and gave a speech supporting the Palestinians and their goal of achieving liberation.

1971

Chronology

- *Newton focuses the BPP on the Party's Oakland school and various other social service programs.*
- *In early 1971, the BPP founded the "Intercommunal Youth Institute" in January 1971, with the intent of demonstrating how black youth ought to be educated.*
- *Newton expels Cleaver and the entire international section from the party.*

- *Mid-to-late 1971: nationally, hundreds of Party members quit the BPP.*

January 1971: Newton expels Geronimo Pratt who, since 1970, had been in jail facing a pending murder charge. Newton also expels two of the New York 21 and his own secretary, Connie Matthews, who flee the country.

February 1971: a fall-out between Newton and Cleaver ensues after they argue during a live broadcast link-up. Newton expels Cleaver and the entire international section from the party.

Spring 1971: the Newton and Cleaver factions engage in retaliatory assassinations of each other's members, resulting in the deaths of four people.

May 1971: Bobby Seale is acquitted of ordering the Rackley murder, and returns to Oakland.

Mid-to-late 1971: nationally, hundreds of Party members quit the BPP.

Late-September 1971: Newton visits and stays in China for 10 days.

Newton focuses the BPP on the Party's Oakland school and various other social service programs. In early 1971, the BPP founded the "Intercommunal Youth Institute" in January 1971, with the intent of demonstrating how black youth ought to be educated. Ericka Huggins was the director of the school and Regina Davis was an administrator. The school was unique in that it did not have grade levels but instead had different skill levels so an 11-year-old could be in second-level English and fifth-level science. Elaine Brown taught reading and writing to a group of 10- to 11-year-olds deemed "uneducable" by the system. The school children were given free busing; breakfast, lunch, and dinner; books and school supplies; children were taken to have medical checkups; many children were given free clothes.

Split

- *Cleaver was expelled from the Central Committee but went on to lead a splinter group, the Black Liberation Army, which had previously existed as an underground paramilitary wing of the Party.*
- *Certain members felt that the Black Panthers should participate in local government and social services, while others encouraged constant conflict with the police.*

Significant disagreements among the Party's leaders over how to confront ideological differences led to a split within the party. Certain members felt that the Black Panthers should participate in local government and social services, while others encouraged constant conflict with the police. For some of the Party's supporters, the separations among political action, criminal activity, social services, access to power, and grass-roots identity became confusing and contradictory as the Panthers' political momentum was bogged down in the criminal justice system. These (and other) disagreements led to a split.

Some Panther leaders, such as Huey Newton and David Hilliard, favored a focus on community service coupled with self-defense; others, such as Eldridge Cleaver, embraced a more confrontational strategy. Eldridge Cleaver deepened the schism in the party when he publicly criticized the Party for adopting a "reformist" rather than "revolutionary" agenda and called for Hilliard's removal. Cleaver was expelled from the Central Committee but went on to lead a splinter group, the Black Liberation Army, which had previously existed as an underground paramilitary wing of the Party.

The split turned violent, as the Newton and Cleaver factions carried out retaliatory assassinations of each other's members, resulting in the deaths of four people.

Delegation to China

- *At every airport in China, Huey was greeted by thousands of people waving copies of the Little Red Book and displaying signs that said "we support the Black Panther Party, down with US imperialism" or "we support the american people but the Nixon imperialist regime must be overthrown".*

In late September 1971, Huey P. Newton led a delegation to China and stayed for 10 days. At every airport in China, Huey was greeted by thousands of people waving copies of the Little Red Book and displaying signs that said "we support the Black Panther Party, down with US imperialism" or "we support the american people but the Nixon imperialist regime must be overthrown". During the trip the Chinese arranged for him to meet and have dinner with a DPRK ambassador, a Tanzanian ambassador, and delegations from both North Vietnam and the Provisional Revolutionary Government of South Vietnam. Huey was under the impression he was going to meet Mao Zedong, but instead had two meetings with the first Premier of the People's Republic of China Zhou Enlai. One of these meetings also included Mao Zedong's wife Jiang Qing. Huey described China as "a free and liberated territory with a socialist government".

1972-74

Chronology

- *Both lose, and many Party members resign after the losses.*
- *Early 1972: Newton shuts down chapters around the country, and calls the key members to Oakland.*
- *December 1974: Accountant Betty van Patter is murdered, after threatening to disclose irregularities in the Party's finances.*
- *Early 1974: Newton embarks on a major purge, expelling Bobby and John Seale, David and June Hilliard, Robert Bay, and numerous other top party leaders.*

Early 1972: Newton shuts down chapters around the country, and calls the key members to Oakland.

Mid-1972: BPP members or supporters win a number of minor offices in the Oakland city elections.

1973: The BPP focuses nearly all of its resources on winning political power in the Oakland city government. Seale runs for mayor; Elaine Brown runs for city council. Both lose, and many Party members resign after the losses.

Early 1974: Newton embarks on a major purge, expelling Bobby and John Seale, David and June Hilliard, Robert Bay, and numerous other top party leaders. Dozens of other Panthers loyal to Seale resigned or deserted.

August 1974: Newton murders Kathleen Smith, a teenage prostitute. He flees to Cuba. Elaine Brown takes over the leadership in his absence.

December 1974: Accountant Betty van Patter is murdered, after threatening to disclose irregularities in the Party's finances.

Newton solidifies control and centralizes power in Oakland

- *In 1972, the party began closing down dozens of chapters and branches all over the country, and bringing members and operations to Oakland.*
- *Newton expelled Hewitt from the party later in 1972, but the security cadre remained in operation under the leadership of Flores Forbes.*
- *The party developed a five-year plan to take over the city of Oakland politically.*

In 1972, the party began closing down dozens of chapters and branches all over the country, and bringing members and operations to Oakland. The political arm of the southern California chapter was shut down and its members moved to Oakland, although the underground military arm remained for a time. The underground remnants of the LA chapter, which had emerged from the Slausons street gang, eventually re-emerged as the Crips, a street gang who at first advocated social reform before devolving into racketeering.

The party developed a five-year plan to take over the city of Oakland politically. Bobby Seale ran for mayor, Elaine Brown ran for city council, and other Panthers ran for minor offices. Neither Seale nor Brown were elected. A few Panthers won seats on local government commissions.

Minister of Education Ray "Masai" Hewitt created the Buddha Samurai, the party's underground security cadre in Oakland. Newton expelled Hewitt from the party later in 1972, but the security cadre remained in operation under the leadership of Flores Forbes. One of the cadre's main functions was to extort and rob drug dealers and after-hours clubs.

Newton indicted for violent crimes

- *In 1974, Huey Newton and eight other Panthers were arrested and charged with assault on police officers.*

In 1974, Huey Newton and eight other Panthers were arrested and charged with assault on police officers. Newton went into exile in Cuba to avoid prosecution for the murder of Kathleen Smith, an eighteen-year-old prostitute. Newton was also indicted for pistol-whipping his tailor, Preston Callins. Although Newton confided to friends that Kathleen Smith was his "first nonpolitical murder", he was ultimately acquitted, after one witness's testimony was impeached by her admission that she had been smoking marijuana on the night of the murder, and another prostitute witness recanted her testimony. Newton was also acquitted of assaulting Preston Callins after Callins refused to press charges.
[clarification needed]

1974-77

The Panthers under Elaine Brown

- *In 1974, as Huey Newton prepared to go into exile in Cuba, he appointed Elaine Brown as the first Chairwoman of the Party.*
- *The Party supported Lionel Wilson in his successful election as the first black mayor of Oakland, in exchange for Wilson's assistance in having criminal charges dropped against Party member Flores Forbes, leader of the Buddha Samurai cadre.*

In 1974, as Huey Newton prepared to go into exile in Cuba, he appointed Elaine Brown as the first Chairwoman of the Party. Under Brown's leadership, the Party became involved in organizing for more radical electoral campaigns, including Brown's 1975 unsuccessful run for Oakland City Council. The Party supported Lionel Wilson in his successful election as the first black mayor of Oakland, in exchange for Wilson's assistance in having criminal charges dropped against Party member Flores Forbes, leader of the Buddha Samurai cadre.

In addition to changing the Party's direction towards more involvement in the electoral arena, Brown also increased the influence of women Panthers by placing them in more visible roles within the previously male-dominated organization.

Death of Betty van Patter

- *There was insufficient evidence for police to charge anyone with van Patter's murder, but the Black Panther Party leadership was "almost universally believed to be responsible".*
- *Van Patter had previously served as a bookkeeper for Ramparts magazine, and was introduced to the Panther leadership by David Horowitz, who had been the editor of Ramparts and a major fundraiser and board member for the Panther school.*

Panther leader Elaine Brown hired Betty Van Patter in 1974 as a bookkeeper. Van Patter had previously served as a bookkeeper for Ramparts magazine, and was introduced to the Panther leadership by David Horowitz, who had been the editor of Ramparts and a major fundraiser and board member for the Panther school. Later that year, after a dispute with

Brown over financial irregularities, Van Patter went missing on December 13, 1974. Some weeks later, her severely beaten corpse was found on a San Francisco Bay beach.

There was insufficient evidence for police to charge anyone with van Patter's murder, but the Black Panther Party leadership was "almost universally believed to be responsible".

Huey Newton later allegedly confessed to a friend that he had ordered Van Patter's murder, and that Van Patter had been tortured and raped before being killed.

1977-82

Return of Huey Newton and the demise of the party

- *In 1977, Newton returned from exile in Cuba, and found that some men in the party were concerned about the increased power delegated to women, who now outnumbered men in the organization.*
- *Brown resigned from the party and fled to LA.*
- *By 1980, Panther membership had dwindled to 27, and the Panther-sponsored school closed in 1982 after it became known that Newton was embezzling funds from the school to pay for his drug addiction.*

In 1977, Newton returned from exile in Cuba, and found that some men in the party were concerned about the increased power delegated to women, who now outnumbered men in the organization. According to Elaine Brown, Newton authorized the disciplining of school administrator Regina Davis as punishment for reprimanding a male coworker. Davis was hospitalized with a broken jaw. Brown said "The beating of Regina would be taken as a clear signal that the words 'Panther' and 'comrade' had taken a gender on gender connotation, denoting an inferiority in the female half of us." Brown resigned from the party and fled to LA.

Although many scholars and activists date the Party's downfall to the period before Brown became the leader, an increasingly smaller cadre of Panthers continued to exist through the 1970s. By 1980, Panther membership had dwindled to 27, and the Panther-sponsored school closed in 1982 after it became known that Newton was embezzling funds from the school to pay for his drug addiction.

Panthers attempt to assassinate a witness against Newton

- *In October 1977 Flores Forbes, the party's assistant chief of staff, led a botched attempt to assassinate Crystal Gray, a key prosecution witness in Newton's upcoming trial who had been present the day of Kathleen Smith's murder.*
- *One of the two surviving assassins, Flores Forbes, fled to Las Vegas, Nevada, with the help of Panther paramedic Nelson Malloy.*

- *Newton denied any involvement or knowledge and said the events "might have been the result of overzealous party members".*

In October 1977 Flores Forbes, the party's assistant chief of staff, led a botched attempt to assassinate Crystal Gray, a key prosecution witness in Newton's upcoming trial who had been present the day of Kathleen Smith's murder. Unbeknownst to the assailants, they attacked the wrong house and the occupant returned fire. During the shootout one of the Panthers, Louis Johnson, was killed and the other two assailants escaped. One of the two surviving assassins, Flores Forbes, fled to Las Vegas, Nevada, with the help of Panther paramedic Nelson Malloy. Fearing that Malloy would discover the truth behind the botched assassination attempt, Newton allegedly ordered a "house cleaning", and Malloy was shot and buried alive in the desert. Although permanently paralyzed from the waist down, Malloy recovered from the assault and told police that fellow Panthers Rollin Reid and Allen Lewis were behind his attempted murder. Newton denied any involvement or knowledge and said the events "might have been the result of overzealous party members". Newton was ultimately acquitted of the murder of Kathleen Smith, after Crystal Gray's testimony was impeached by her admission that she had smoked marijuana on the night of the murder, and acquitted of assaulting Preston Callins after Callins refused to press charges.

Women and womanism

- *At its beginnings, the Black Panther Party reclaimed black masculinity and traditional gender roles.*
- *:2 In 1968, the Black Panther Party newspaper stated in several articles that the role of female Panthers was to "stand behind black men" and be supportive.*
- *:6 A notice in the first issue of The Black Panther, the Panthers' newspaper, applauded the Panthers—by then an all-male organization—as "the cream of Black Manhood ... there for the protection and defense of our Black community".*

At its beginnings, the Black Panther Party reclaimed black masculinity and traditional gender roles.:6 A notice in the first issue of The Black Panther, the Panthers' newspaper, applauded the Panthers—by then an all-male organization—as "the cream of Black Manhood ... there for the protection and defense of our Black community". Scholars consider the Party's stance of armed resistance highly masculine, with the use of guns and violence affirming proof of manhood.:2 In 1968, the Black Panther Party newspaper stated in several articles that the role of female Panthers was to "stand behind black men" and be supportive.:6 The first black woman to join the party was Joan Tarika Lewis, in 1967.

Nevertheless, women were present in the party from the early days and expanded their roles throughout the life of the party. Women often joined the party because they were trying to fight against gender unequal gender norms. By 1969, the Black Panther Party newspaper officially stated that men and women are equal:2 and instructed male Panthers to treat female Party members as equals,:6 a drastic change from the idea of the female

Panther as subordinate. That same year, Deputy Chairman Fred Hampton of the Illinois chapter conducted a meeting condemning sexism.² After 1969, the Party considered sexism counter-revolutionary.⁶

The Black Panthers adopted a womanist ideology in consideration of the unique experiences of African-American women, affirming the belief that racism is more oppressive than sexism. Womanism was a mix of black nationalism and the vindication of women,²⁰ putting race and community struggle before the gender issue.⁸ Womanism posited that traditional feminism failed to include race and class struggle in its denunciation of male sexism²⁶ and was therefore part of white hegemony.²¹ In opposition to some feminist viewpoints, womanism promoted a gender role point of view that men are not above women, but hold a different position in the home and community,⁴² so men and women must work together for the preservation of African-American culture and community.²⁷

From this point forward, the Black Panther Party newspaper portrayed women as revolutionaries, using the example of party members such as Kathleen Cleaver, Angela Davis and Erika Huggins, all political and intelligent women.¹⁰ The Black Panther Party newspaper often showed women as active participants in the armed self-defense movement, picturing them with children and guns as protectors of the home, the family and the community.²

Police killed or incarcerated many male leaders, but female Panthers were less targeted in the party for much of the 1960s and 1970s. By 1968, women made up two-thirds of the party, while many male members were out of duty. In the absence of much of the original male leadership women moved into all parts of the organization. Roles included leadership positions, implementing community programs, and uplifting the black community. Women in the group called attention to sexism within the Black Panther Party, and worked to make changes from within.

From 1968 to the end of its publication in 1982, the head editors of the Black Panther Party newspaper were all women.⁵ In 1970, approximately 40% to 70% of Party members were women,⁸ and several chapters, like the Des Moines, Iowa, and New Haven, Connecticut, were headed by women.⁷

During the 1970s, recognizing the limited access poor women had to abortion, the Party officially supported women's reproductive rights, including abortion.¹¹ That same year, the Party condemned and opposed prostitution.¹²

Many African-American women Panthers began to demand childcare in order to be able to fully participate in the organization. The Black Panther Party responded to the women by establishing on-site child development centers in multiple chapters across the United States. "Childcare became largely a group activity", the children would be raised collectively during the week. This was following the Panther's commitment to collectivism and an extension of the African-American extended family tradition. Childcare allowed women Panthers to still be able to embrace motherhood, while at the same time allowing them to

fully participate in the Party. Creating Childcare to the Party allowed women Panthers to not to have to make the choice between motherhood and activism.

The Black Panther Party experienced significant problems in several chapters with sexism and gender oppression, particularly in the Oakland chapter where cases of sexual harassment and gender division were common.:5 When Oakland Panthers arrived to bolster the New York City Panther chapter after twenty one New York leaders were incarcerated, they displayed such chauvinistic attitudes towards New York Panther women that they had to be fended off at gunpoint. Some Party leaders thought the fight for gender equality was a threat to men and a distraction from the struggle for racial equality.:5

In response, the Chicago and New York chapters, among others, established equal gender rights as a priority and tried to eradicate sexist attitudes.:13

By the time the Black Panther Party disbanded, official policy was to reprimand men who violated the rules of gender equality.:13

Gender dynamics

- *Her goal in joining was "smashing racism" because she viewed herself as Black before she was a woman.*
- *In the beginning, recruiting women was not at the forefront to Huey Newton's and Bobby Seale's minds.*
- *She grew up around police brutality, so it was nothing new.*

In the beginning, recruiting women was not at the forefront to Huey Newton's and Bobby Seale's minds. In an interview with Seale, he stated that Newton targeted "brothers who had been pimping, brothers who had been peddling dope, brothers who ain't gonna take no shit, brothers who had been fighting the pigs". Also, they didn't realize that women could help the fight until one came into an interest meeting asking about "female leadership." Regina Jennings recalls that many men in leadership positions had an "unchecked" sexism problem and her task was to "lift the bedroom out of their minds." She even remembers overhearing a conversation between some Panthers when she was being recruited: "Some concluded that the FBI sent me, but the captain assured them with salty good humor that, 'She's too stupid to be from the FBI.' He thought my cover and my comments too honest, too loud, and too ridiculous to be serious." She recalls her days in Oakland, California as a teenager looking for something to do to add purpose to her life and to her community. She grew up around police brutality, so it was nothing new. Her goal in joining was "smashing racism" because she viewed herself as Black before she was a woman. In her community, that identity is what she felt held her back the most.

Women's accomplishments

- *From the beginning of the Black Panther Party education was a fundamental goal of the organization.*

- *The Black Panther Party was involved in many community projects as part of their organization.*

The Black Panther Party was involved in many community projects as part of their organization. These projects included community outreach, like the breakfast program, education, and health programs. In many cases women were the ones primarily involved with administering these types of programs.

From the beginning of the Black Panther Party education was a fundamental goal of the organization. This was highlighted in the Ten Point Platform, the newspaper that was distributed by the party, and the public commentary shared by the Panthers. The newspaper was one of the primary and original consciousness raising and educational measures taken by the party. Despite the fact that men were out distributing the newspaper, women like Elaine Brown and Kathleen Cleaver were behind the scenes working on those papers.

Elaine Brown

- *In 1974 Elaine Brown took the seat of chair for the Black Panther Party in Oakland.*

Elaine Brown rose to power within the BPP by filling the position of minister of information, after Eldridge Cleaver fled the country. In 1974 Elaine Brown took the seat of chair for the Black Panther Party in Oakland. She was appointed by Huey Newton, the previous chair, while Newton and other high-ranking members were dealing with legal issues. From the beginning of her tenure as chair, she faced opposition within the party and warned against a coup. During her time as chair she appointed many female officials, and faced backlash for her policies focused on equality within the organization. When Huey Newton returned from exile and approved of the beating of one of the female leaders of a panther school, Brown decided to leave the organization.

Gwen Robinson

- *She dropped out of high school in the 12th grade because at this point she had a good standing with the Party and the environment of her high school education wasn't the best for black folks at the time.*
- *In an interview conducted by Judson Jeffries, Gwen Robinson reflects and relays stories and her experiences before and during her time in the Black Panther Party Detroit Division.*

In an interview conducted by Judson Jeffries, Gwen Robinson reflects and relays stories and her experiences before and during her time in the Black Panther Party Detroit Division. She explains that she joined the Party in October 1969 with a little push back from her mother, who participated in a march with Martin Luther King Jr., in the early part of the decade. She chose the Black Panther Party (BBP) because "[She] felt a closeness and a bond with them" that she didn't feel with other organizations around at the time, like the "SNCC, NAACP, the

Urban League, the Nation of Islam, Shrines of Madonna, Eastside Voice of Independent Detroit (ESVID), the Republic of New Africa, and the Revolutionary Action Movement."

She dropped out of high school in the 12th grade because at this point she had a good standing with the Party and the environment of her high school education wasn't the best for black folks at the time. She attended Denby High School in Detroit. "There were some students who would use the N word freely" and "a P.E. instructor accused [her] of stealing her keys." She was also "shoved" into the pool when she refused to swim in fear of getting her hair wet and her White teacher who taught Afro-American history would kick people out of the class "if you challenged his position on certain Black leaders." In conclusion, dropping out of school was a means to an ends.

She continued her work in the BBP and "was living as part of a collective" where all the work was shared and she enjoyed her time selling newspapers all day long. She climbed the ranks and became the branch's Communications Secretary for the next to the last year of her membership in January 1971. She was placed in this position after the former left due to "some issues related to sexism". In this branch, unlike the average BBP divisions, the ways of thinking of the "brothers" never turned violent or physical. She claims, "that kind of thing didn't take place in Detroit." She left the organization in 1973, but she still had a link to the group through her husband. He was their Circulation Manager. The legacy she wishes to leave behind is collective work can take you anywhere. When asked, "what is the legacy of the Detroit branch, in your opinion?" She answers, "It's crucial that people realize that the strength of the organization was rooted in discipline, deep commitment, and a genuine love for the people."

Aftermath and legacy

- *In October 2006, the Black Panther Party held a 40-year reunion in Oakland.*
- *Two have been linked to the Black Panthers.*
- *There is considerable debate about what impact the Black Panther Party had on the wider society, or even on their local environment.*
- *The Black Panther Party is featured in the exhibits and curriculum of the National Civil Rights Museum.*

There is considerable debate about what impact the Black Panther Party had on the wider society, or even on their local environment. Author Jama Lazerow writes:

Professor Judson L. Jeffries of Purdue University calls the Panthers "the most effective black revolutionary organization in the 20th century". The Los Angeles Times, in a 2013 review of *Black Against Empire*, an "authoritative" history of the BPP published by University of California Press, called the organization a "serious political and cultural force" and "a movement of intelligent, explosive dreamers". The Black Panther Party is featured in the exhibits and curriculum of the National Civil Rights Museum.

Numerous former Panthers have held elected office in the United States, some into the 21st century; these include Charles Barron (New York City Council), Nelson Malloy (Winston-Salem City Council), and Bobby Rush (US House of Representatives). Most of these officials hold positive assessments of the BPP's overall contribution to black liberation and American democracy. In 1990, the Chicago City Council passed a resolution declaring "Fred Hampton Day" in honor of the slain leader. In Winston-Salem in 2012, a large contingent of local officials and community leaders came together to install a historic marker of the local BPP headquarters; State Representative Earline Parmone declared "[The Black Panther Party] dared to stand up and say, 'We're fed up and we're not taking it anymore'...Because they had courage, today I stand as ... the first African American ever to represent Forsyth County in the state Senate".

In October 2006, the Black Panther Party held a 40-year reunion in Oakland.

In January 2007, a joint California state and Federal task force charged eight men with the August 29, 1971, murder of California police officer Sgt. John Young. The defendants have been identified as former members of the Black Liberation Army. Two have been linked to the Black Panthers. In 1975 a similar case was dismissed when a judge ruled that police gathered evidence through the use of torture. On June 29, 2009, Herman Bell pleaded guilty to voluntary manslaughter in the death of Sgt. Young. In July 2009, charges were dropped against four of the accused: Ray Boudreaux, Henry W. Jones, Richard Brown and Harold Taylor. Also that month Jalil Muntaquim pleaded no contest to conspiracy to commit voluntary manslaughter becoming the second person to be convicted in this case.

Since the 1990s, former Panther chief of staff David Hilliard has offered tours of sites in Oakland that are historically significant to the Black Panther Party.

Groups and movements inspired and aided by the Black Panthers

- *Memphis Black Autonomy Federation*
- *Assata's Daughters, an all-black activist group in Chicago, was founded in 2015 by Page May; the group is named after Black Panther Assata Shakur and has objectives similar to the Black Panther's 10-Point Program.*
- *The French Black Dragons, a black antifascist group closely linked to the punk rock and rockabilly scene.*
- *Huey P. Newton Gun Club, a gun club named after the Black Panther Party's founder.*

Various groups and movements have picked names inspired by the Black Panthers:

Assata's Daughters, an all-black activist group in Chicago, was founded in 2015 by Page May; the group is named after Black Panther Assata Shakur and has objectives similar to the Black Panther's 10-Point Program.

Gray Panthers, often used to refer to advocates for the rights of seniors (Gray Panthers in the United States, The Grays – Gray Panthers in Germany).

Polynesian Panthers, an advocacy group for Māori and Pacific Islander people in New Zealand.

Black Panthers, a protest movement that advocates social justice and fights for the rights of Mizrahi Jews in Israel.

White Panthers, used to refer to both the White Panther Party, a far-left, anti-racist, white American political party of the 1970s, as well as the White Panthers UK, an unaffiliated group started by Mick Farren.

The Pink Panthers, used to refer to two LGBT rights organizations.

Dalit Panthers, an Indian social reform movement, which fights against Caste Oppression in Indian Society.

The British Black Panther movement, which flourished in London in the late 1960s and early 1970s, was not affiliated with the American organization although it fought for many of the same rights.

The French Black Dragons, a black antifascist group closely linked to the punk rock and rockabilly scene.

The Young Lords

Huey P. Newton Gun Club, a gun club named after the Black Panther Party's founder.

Memphis Black Autonomy Federation

In April 1977 Panthers were key supporters of the 504 Sit-In, the longest of which was the 25-day occupation of the San Francisco Federal Building by over 120 people with disabilities. Panthers provided daily home-cooked meals and support of the people that proved essential to the protest's success, which in turn inspired a movement that was instrumental in getting the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) passed thirteen years later.

New Black Panther Party

- *In 1989, a group calling itself the "New Black Panther Party" was formed in Dallas, Texas.*
- *The Huey Newton Foundation, former chairman and co-founder Bobby Seale, and members of the original Black Panther Party have insisted that this New Black Panther Party is illegitimate and they have strongly objected to it by stating that there "is no new Black Panther Party".*

In 1989, a group calling itself the "New Black Panther Party" was formed in Dallas, Texas. Ten years later, the NBPP became home to many former Nation of Islam members when its chairmanship was taken by Khalid Abdul Muhammad.

The Anti-Defamation League and the Southern Poverty Law Center include the New Black Panthers on their lists of designated hate groups. The Huey Newton Foundation, former chairman and co-founder Bobby Seale, and members of the original Black Panther Party have insisted that this New Black Panther Party is illegitimate and they have strongly objected to it by stating that there "is no new Black Panther Party".

See also

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- *"Reconsidering the Black Panthers Through Photos"*.
- *UC Berkeley Social Activism Online Sound Recordings: The Black Panther Party*
- *Seattle Black Panther Party History and Memory Project The largest collection of materials on any single chapter.*

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