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Publication Date
2014

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation
Pathways of Insurgency:
Black Liberation Struggle and the Second Reconstruction,
1945-1975.

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology

by

Joshua Bloom

2014
ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Pathways of Insurgency:
Black Liberation Struggle and the Second Reconstruction,
1945-1975.

by

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Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology

University of California, Los Angeles, 2014

Professor Michael Mann, Co-chair

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After several centuries of slavery and half a century of formal caste
subordination, in the three decades following WWII, hundreds of thousands of black
people in the United States participated in insurgent social movements. In the years
immediately following WWII, Black Anti-colonialists petitioned the United Nations for
international military intervention against lynching in the U.S., and mobilized street
protests, asserting common cause with liberation struggles in Africa and Asia, challenging President Truman’s global leadership and aiming to split the Democratic Party. After a period of quiescence, in the late 1950s and early 1960s, civil rights activists, calling for equal and integrated participation in the U.S., challenged de facto disenfranchisement and physically defied the legal and customary segregation of public spaces through nonviolent civil disobedience. And in the late 1960s, revolutionary black nationalists denied the legitimacy of U.S. governance generally, mobilizing parallel government at the community level, establishing “diplomatic relations” with socialist States from China and N. Vietnam to Algeria and Cuba, and engaging in armed confrontation with police.

What were the causes and consequences of Black Liberation Struggle, 1945-1975?

When considered in terms of practices, Black Liberation Struggle 1945-1975 followed three distinct phases – Black Anti-colonialism in the late 1940s, the civil rights movement in the early 1960s, and Black revolutionary nationalism in the late 1960s. In each movement, a distinct and relatively coherent set of insurgent practices emerged, rapidly proliferated, and then subsided. Not only were the practices different, but the “indigenous institutions” and social networks upon which these movements built were largely distinct, and the political allies of one were often political enemies of another.

Building on the insights of the political process tradition, yet seeking to transcend its limitations, I advance a new, more truly processual theory of social movements which I dub “pathways of insurgency theory.” I show that when insurgents
develop a set of practices which is highly disruptive and difficult to repress in a given historic context, they open a pathway of insurgency, and mobilization proliferates in terms of those insurgent practices.
The dissertation of Joshua Bloom is approved.

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2014
PATHWAYS OF INSURGENCY:
BLACK LIBERATION STRUGGLE AND THE SECOND RECONSTRUCTION,
1945-1975.
By Joshua Bloom

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**Invited and Conference Presentations**


2013: Oregon State University; Lemeirt Park Book Fair; PEN Center USA; LA Festival of Books; IRLE; University Press Books, Berkeley; Museum of the African Diaspora, San Francisco; Eastwind Books, Berkeley; Eso Wan Books; University of California, Berkeley; Bunche Center; University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

2012: University of Connecticut; University of California, Berkeley; American Sociological Association; Junior Theorists Symposium; Bunche Center; University of Southern California; UCLA Urban Planning Department.

2011: UCLA School of Public Affairs; UCLA, Comparative Social Analysis; University of California, Santa Cruz; Loyola Marymount University.

2010: UCLA; American Sociological Association; Institute for Research on Labor and Employment.
Pathways of Insurgency:  

Introduction

After several centuries of slavery and half a century of formal caste subordination, in the three decades following WWII, hundreds of thousands of black people in the United States participated in insurgent social movements. In the years immediately following WWII, Black Anti-colonialists petitioned the United Nations for international military intervention against lynching in the U.S., and mobilized street protests, asserting common cause with liberation struggles in Africa and Asia, challenging President Truman’s global leadership and aiming to split the Democratic Party. After a period of quiescence, in the late 1950s and early 1960s, civil rights activists, calling for equal and integrated participation in the U.S., challenged de facto disenfranchisement and physically defied the legal and customary segregation of public spaces through nonviolent civil disobedience. And in the late 1960s, revolutionary black nationalists denied the legitimacy of U.S. governance generally, mobilizing parallel government at the community level, establishing “diplomatic relations” with socialist States from China and N. Vietnam to Algeria and Cuba, and engaging in armed confrontation with police.

What were the causes and consequences of Black Liberation Struggle, 1945-1975?

The effects of the Black Liberation Struggle, and perhaps even more so its causes, have been the subject of great political debate. A few, principally political conservatives (in the American sense), have asserted that the Black Liberationists had little if any historic effect – that any transformation would have occurred without their actions. Ironically, a few radicals echo that position arguing that racism persists and that little of substance was accomplished by
the reformist civil rights movement. More common is the liberal argument that the Black Liberation Struggle was a natural development of American Democracy, and that extension of that Democracy was both cause and consequence of the movement. Most published accounts celebrate the civil rights movement, that particular wave of Black insurgency that peaked in the late 1950s and early 1960s challenging legal segregation and de facto disenfranchisement in the South through nonviolence, suggesting that it was responsible for achieving civil rights for Blacks and that this was a good thing. In the American mass media, civil rights champion Martin Luther King, Jr. is the icon of progress much like Hitler, the champion of fascism, is the icon of evil.¹ Further, the civil rights movement became an important reference in cold war debates frequently cited by American cold warriors as evidence of the moral superiority of the West.²

Scholars have attributed a variety of historical consequences to the Black Liberation Struggle: Black liberationists ended formal caste subordination and garnered Black access to government hiring and elite education; they played a role in transforming the basic Party alignments in American politics; and in the context of anti-colonial movements struggling for national liberation throughout Africa and much of Asia during the period, cold war geopolitics not only shaped, but was shaped by the domestic Black insurgency.

Sociologists have mainly focused on explaining the causes of Black Liberation Struggle. In the process of explaining the Black Liberation Struggle, they tore down the prevailing social-psychological theories of social movements, and developed the political process and resource

¹ The fact that elected politicians of every stripe and much of the mainstream press hated and publicly vilified King in the years preceding his death is forgotten. Also forgotten is the earlier Black Anti-colonial movement. Still vilified are the revolutionary Black nationalists who were the center of Black insurgency by the time King was killed.

² All of this is actually pretty one-sided rather than a debate. The main story is the Liberal ideological appropriation of the civil rights movement, both in domestic and international political discourse.
mobilization theories that continue to underwrite most empirical studies of social movements today.

I agree with political process scholars that the decline of cotton economy, the northern and urban migration of Blacks, related changes in voting patterns, anti-colonial struggle internationally, and the Cold War all combined to create a sea change in race relations and the institutions of race in the U.S. in the postwar decades. But while these forces may have made change in race relations inevitable, they did not cause the widespread emergence of Black insurgent movements. Neither the fact of Black insurgency, nor the outcomes in terms of shaping racial relations, were determined by broad, impersonal, structural processes. The structural processes were, instead, a terrain upon which Black Liberation Struggle developed.

For 40 years, sociologists have been debating what causes social movements. Today, the consensus is that the prevailing theories are insufficient to answer this question. Despite the appellation “political process theory,” most applications have flattened historic context to an independently causal variable, yielding an un-testable structuralism. Critics have rightly pointed to the importance of actors and their actions, but have not been able to account for how context matters for insurgent politics. Marx wrote that people “make history, but in conditions not of their own choosing.” The question is whether the concept of insurgent social movements is sufficiently meaningful that testable propositions can be developed about how conditions matter in their development, and inferences drawn across historical cases.

Recovering lost insights from the early political process studies of Black Liberation Struggle, I conceptualize social movements as comprised by a set of insurgent practices.
When considered in terms of practices, Black Liberation Struggle 1945-1975 followed three distinct phases – Black Anti-colonialism in the late 1940s, the civil rights movement in the early 1960s, and Black revolutionary nationalism in the late 1960s. There were important continuities between these three movements, especially the promise of liberation from a shared history of racial oppression. But in each movement, a distinct and relatively coherent set of insurgent practices emerged, rapidly proliferated, and then subsided. Not only were the practices different, but the “indigenous institutions” and social networks upon which these movements built were largely distinct, and the political allies of one were often political enemies of another. Disaggregating Black Liberation Struggle by practice challenges the basic premise of classical political process theory. Given that different groups of people participated in these three movements at different times, in different places, and very different ways, there is little reason to believe that a single set of opportunities would explain why Black people generally mobilized insurgency.

Building on the insights of the political process tradition, yet seeking to transcend its limitations, I advance a new, more truly processual theory of social movements which I dub “pathways of insurgency theory.” I propose that when insurgents develop a set of practices which is highly disruptive and difficult to repress in a given historic context, they open a pathway of insurgency, and mobilization proliferates in terms of those insurgent practices.

The design of this dissertation is to apply pathways of insurgency theory to explain Black Anti-colonialism, the Civil Rights Movement, and Revolutionary Black Nationalism in turn, testing pathways of insurgency explanations against the rivals. Of course these were not the only Black insurgencies in the 20th Century U.S. For example, Garveyism, the anti-lynching
campaigns of the 1920s, Black industrial labor insurgency in the 1930s, the Double V campaign and the MOWM campaign in the early 1940s all warrant considerable attention, as do slave rebellions of earlier centuries. But these were the main black insurgencies of the postwar period which scholars have usually explained as a piece (see Jenkins et al 2003; Lawson 1991; McAdam 1999). My aim is to test the fruitfulness of pathways of insurgency theory against the prevailing social movement theories in explaining Black Liberation Struggle 1945-1975 – the case upon which the rivals were founded.

Towards a Practice Centered Theory of Insurgent Social Movements

The social movements field was founded on a group actor assumption. In seeking to explain insurgent social movements, social movement scholars have premised their studies on the assumption that social groups are the protagonists of insurgency and that shared group interests, capacities, constraints, and opportunities explain the timing and extent of insurgent mobilization. Black people in the postwar United States shared a rational group interest in their liberation as black people, a common interest historically rooted in the original kidnapping and shipment of their ancestors from Africa, hundreds of years of chattel slavery, and the persistence of formal and legal racial subordination, enforced by lynching. As the social movement field was built on the study of black insurgency in the postwar decades, perhaps shared group interest amongst blacks helped convince social movement theorists of the plausibility of the group actor assumption. But just because a rational group interest motivated black insurgency in the postwar decades does not mean that all black people participated in black insurgency in similar ways, or that group action is the most fruitful conceptual framework for analyzing and explaining insurgent mobilization generally.
No concept has proven more influential in the social movements field than “political opportunity.” The political opportunity thesis – that vulnerability in the political system confers advantage on a subordinate social group enabling insurgent mobilization – transformed the field of social movement study, emphasizing the importance of social context. The political opportunity thesis has been tremendously generative, guiding a proliferation of important studies in the last several decades (Amenta and Zylan 1991; Banaszak 1996; Brockett 1991; Costain 1992; Eisinger 1973; Jenkins and Perrow 1977; Kriesi et al. 1995; McAdam 1982, 1996, 1999; McAdam et al. 1996; McCammon et al. 2001; Meyer 1990, 1993; Tarrow 1989, 1994, 1998; Tilly 1978) and continues to guide scholarship on social movements today (Ho 2011; Kollman and Waites 2011). Since 1980, the political opportunity thesis has framed most empirical sociological studies of social movements (Goodwin and Jasper 2004: 3-4; Meyer 2004: 125; McAdam 1996a: 23; McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001: 18). Scholarly use of the term “political opportunity” has expanded rapidly.3

Even the most sophisticated and influential political opportunity analyses have assumed group actors and sought to explain the timing and extent of insurgent mobilization with reference to conditions affecting the group as an actor. For example, Doug McAdam writes: “By mid-century the growing electoral importance of blacks nationwide, the collapse of the southern cotton economy, and the increased salience of third world countries in United States foreign policy had combined to grant blacks a measure of political leverage they had not

3 Google Scholar reports 55 texts/year in the 1980s using the term “political opportunity,” 287/year in the 1990s, 1,010/year in the 2000s, and 1,160 texts in 2010. Compare flat use of term “political” across the period. Based on a January 6, 2011 search.
enjoyed since Reconstruction” (1983 p.737). The assumption here is that the political opportunities salient to civil rights mobilization accrued to blacks as a group. But constructivist writings suggest not taking the “groupness” of insurgents for granted. For example, Rogers Brubaker writes:

Participants, of course, regularly do represent ethnic, racial, and national conflict in such groupist, even primordialist terms. They often cast ethnic groups, races, or nations as the protagonists – the heroes and martyrs – of such struggles. This is entirely understandable, and doing so can provide an important resource in social and political struggles. But this does not mean analysts should do the same. We must, of course, take vernacular categories and participants’ understandings seriously, for they are partly constitutive of our objects of study. But we should not uncritically adopt categories of ethnopolitical practice as our categories of social analysis. (Brubaker 2004, p. 10)

Instead of viewing insurgent social movements as a particular kind of action by group actors, I argue that it is more fruitful to conceptualize an insurgent social movement as the diffusion of a relatively coherent set of insurgent practices. Surely, structural conditions confronting a social group can motivate members of that group to pursue political change. But as social movement scholars – including founders of the classical approach – now widely recognize, structural conditions do a poor job of explaining insurgent mobilization (Goodwin and Jasper 2004, 2012; McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001). The crux of my argument is that rather than conferring general political advantage on a group for insurgent mobilization, it is more fruitful to conceptualize opportunities as political cleavages vulnerable to particular forms of insurgent practice. When insurgents develop practices that disrupt established social relations while drawing broad allied support, they generate a novel source of power and insurgency proliferates.
The case of black insurgency provides a strenuous test of this practice centered approach to social movements. Because the classic group actor theories were founded on the study of black insurgency, if practice centered theory better explains the timing, character, and extent of black insurgency than the classical theories, it will likely prove fruitful for explaining other cases as well.

In two regards, this dissertation is written in conversation with the foundational classic work of Doug McAdam. First, most social movement scholars employ rather than explicitly theorizing political opportunity. Most build on the foundational theoretical work of Doug McAdam in their employment of the concept (especially McAdam 1982). While Tarrow, Tilly, Meyer, and others have also powerfully shaped use of the concept, no one has contributed more to the theorization of political opportunity than McAdam, and so I take McAdam as my primary point of conceptual departure. Second, between the cracks of the explicit theoretical schemes that social movement scholars have so widely adopted, McAdam’s classic empirical analysis contains lost processual insights that suggest a different, more practice centered social movement theory.

**The Group Actor Assumption**

Structural theories explain insurgent mobilization with reference to structural conditions that confront a social group. Structural theory imbues the prevailing social science explanations of the Black Liberation Struggle (Dudziak 2000; Jenkins et al 2003; Lawson 1991; Layton 2000; McAdam 1982; Piven & Cloward 1977), and for good reason. Structural theories provide a powerful framework for understanding two key aspects of the Civil Rights Movement. First, structural oppression – namely the systematic violent enforcement of racial subordination of
black people – motivated broad participation in the Civil Rights Movement. Most participants in
civil rights insurgency, black and non-black, were willing to be beaten, jailed, or killed because
of a commitment to defeating racism. It is difficult to explain the sweeping mobilization for Civil
Rights without reference to the particular form of structural oppression it challenged, formal
racial subordination enforced by lynching.

Second, structural theories help explain why the Civil Rights Movement became possible
in a way that would not have been possible early in the 20th Century. As evidenced by the Elaine
Massacre in 1919 and countless conflicts on a smaller scale, Civil Rights type mobilization
before WWII most often yielded mass lynching of insurgents and rapid repression. Something
certainly changed in the macro-structural context to make the Civil Rights Movement possible
in a way that it had not been possible before. Classical treatments argue that broad social
structural transformations in the years preceding the Black Liberation Struggle destabilized the
subordinate social position of blacks providing them with the political opportunity to mount an
effective insurgency. Piven and Cloward emphasize that agricultural industrialization and the
decline of cotton sharecropping “weaken[ed] the stakes of agricultural and industrial leaders in
the maintenance of caste arrangements,” and made them vulnerable to insurgent challenge
(1977, p. 195). Lawson argues that with the Northern migration of blacks, “the black electorate
grew in influence, [and] so too did its success in shoving civil rights to the front of the national
political agenda.” In this context, black insurgents “recognized that mobilizing blacks from
below pressured the national government to act” (1991, p. 104). Other scholars emphasize
geopolitical pressures. In the words of Layton, Cold War “international pressures on the U.S.
government to ‘put its own house in order’ … provided new opportunities for civil rights
advocates” (Layton 2000, pp. 2-3; see also Dudziak 2000; Plummer 1996; Von Eschen 1997) In his seminal political process explanation, Doug McAdam discusses the importance of all three of these factors in creating the political opportunity for black insurgency (1982, pp. 73-86 and 156-163).

While structural theories help explain important aspects of insurgent mobilization processes, they tend to over-reach – attributing actor-like qualities to groups and structures. In recent years, political opportunity theory has been widely criticized for attributing too much of the mobilization process to structural determination, obscuring rather than illuminating the vital role of social actors in generating insurgency. Goodwin and Jasper argue that political opportunity cannot explain mobilization in part because the effects of any given political opportunity on mobilization are “historically and situationally contingent” (Goodwin and Jasper 2004: 13). Even the canon leaders have become critical of this bias in political opportunity theory. Doug McAdam concurs that “the dominant analytic framework in the field has remained resolutely structuralist” (McAdam 2004: 225). McAdam, Tilly, and Tarrow begin their 2001 Dynamics of Contention by stating that they seek to transcend the “overly structural” limitations of political opportunity theory and the “classic social movement agenda” they helped to create (McAdam, et al. 2001: 18, 32 and chapter 1). In contrast to some critics, I maintain that macro-structural processes do influence insurgent mobilization in crucial ways. Structural contradictions generate grievances that motivate insurgency, and destabilize institutionalized group roles. But the effects of macro-structural processes on insurgent mobilization are indirect. In seeking to explain contextual influences on insurgent mobilization, structural theorists make two erroneous assumptions:
(1) That social groups are the protagonists of insurgent social movements;
(2) That structural processes privilege insurgent mobilization by the group.

Based on these assumptions, classical movement theorists ask: what kinds of conditions privilege insurgent action by a social group? Having formulated the question of contextual effects on mobilization in this way, scholars obstruct analysis of the more precise effects of political context on practices. Attempting to identify the salient contextual effects for a group, scholars cannot help but assign opportunity post-hoc, according to levels of mobilization, and there has been little success explaining subsequent mobilization by political opportunity. In the words of David Meyer, “Because it is often coupled with writing that suggests movements flourish during favorable or expanding opportunities and fade in times of less favorable or declining opportunities, the collective scholarship runs the risk of turning an important analytical advance into a mere tautology, defined backwards through the observation of political mobilization” (2004: 135). 4 Repeated attempts to specify how to recognize political opportunity have achieved little accord (e.g. Brockett, 1991; Kriesi et al 1992; Tarrow 1994; McAdam 1996 “Conceptual Origins, Problems, Future Directions”) and consistently fail to predict mobilization (see Meyer 2004). Predictions based on political opportunity theory have generally failed (Goodwin 2011).

The Limits and Lost Insights of McAdam’s Classical Theory
Perhaps the most influential and important sociological analysis of the black insurgency is Doug McAdam’s Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930-1970 (1982). As discussed below, even while McAdam’s schematic theorization falls prey to the

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4 In my view, the problem here is not so much that analysts identify political cleavages salient to an insurgency after mobilization has been initiated – it could be no other way – but rather that the macro conditions identified are theorized to contribute an untestable period effect of political advantage for the group. Lots of contextual developments coincide with mobilization without causing it.
group actor assumption, important aspects of his substantive analysis reach beyond these limitations. Unfortunately, it is the schematic theorizations based on the group actor assumption which scholars have most applied to other movements. So a more precise discussion of group actor theorizations in McAdam, and their limits, is warranted at this juncture.

The Group Actor Assumption in McAdam’s Political Opportunity Thesis

As classically conceptualized, political opportunities are structural conditions that confer political advantage to a group. Political opportunities “elevate the group in question to a position of increased political strength” making the political system vulnerable to challenge by that group, and enabling mobilization of that group (McAdam 1982, p. 42). According to McAdam, “opportunities for a challenger to engage in successful collective action ... vary greatly over time. And it is these variations that are held to be related to the ebb and flow of movement activity” (McAdam 1982: 40-41).

This formulation assumes a group actor. From this perspective, the group exists as a coherent and unitary political actor independent of any particular political circumstance. From this perspective, a social movement is generated by the insurgent mobilization of one such existing group actor. Social conditions, from this perspective, are salient to the development of social movements in the way that they facilitate or constrain mobilization by existing group actors. Political opportunities are the kinds of conditions that facilitate insurgent mobilization by a group, i.e. by elevating that group to a “position of increased political strength.”
Opportunities for Blacks

McAdam’s analysis of the Black Insurgency applies the political opportunity thesis to black people as a group. His assumption is that contextual influences on mobilization accrued to black people as a whole encouraging and facilitating their insurgent mobilization. McAdam summarizes the political opportunity thesis as applied to the black insurgency:

As shaped by several broad social processes, the “structure of political opportunities” confronting blacks gradually improved … thus affording insurgents more leverage with which to press their demands (McAdam 1982: 230 and see 73-86).

Opportunity is here seen as a quantitative variable characteristic of “blacks” as a social group that can increase or decrease over time. The more opportunity, the more blacks as a group actor can press their demands. Thus the more likely the group will mobilize insurgency. In this formulation, the specific character of insurgent practice is not salient because the influence of political opportunities is to provide leverage to blacks generally.

McAdam specifies opportunity for blacks as follows: “By mid-century the growing electoral importance of blacks nationwide, the collapse of the southern cotton economy, and the increased salience of third world countries in United States foreign policy had combined to grant blacks a measure of political leverage they had not enjoyed since Reconstruction” (1983 p.737). Again, the foundational assumption is that structural processes conferred political advantage on blacks as a group actor generally. McAdam assesses the importance of these political opportunities as generic apertures, generating the structural possibility for black insurgency generally, rather than destabilizing particular institutional forms, or facilitating particular insurgent practices. McAdam writes: “These factors had the effect of enhancing the political significance of the black population, thus granting organized elements within that population increased leverage with which to press their claims.” (1982: 180)
If classical social movement theory has become schematic and flat, it was not always so. The founders were grappling with how to make sense of a world transformed in front of them by the Black Liberation Struggle. The explanations that garnered great influence may have done so in part because they clearly presented generalizeable theory. But undoubtedly part of the influence of the foundational works stemmed from their passion and insight. Unfortunately it is easier to emulate the more schematic aspects of the work, harder to emulate the inspiration.

Returning to McAdam’s foundational work, I recover a lost processual insight that I believe can help extricate social movement theory from its current quagmire. In a section he labels “The Critical Dynamic,” McAdam argues that it was the ability of the civil rights activists to draw Federal intervention against the brutal repression of local whites that was crucial to the development of the civil rights movement (McAdam 1982, pp. 174-179). McAdam calls this the “critical dynamic” of the civil rights movement and explains:

The importance of this dynamic cannot be underestimated. It was, in fact, the recognition and conscious manipulation of this dynamic by insurgents that produced the particularly high rates of activism and significant victories characteristic of the years from 1961 to 1965. The dynamic can be described simply. Lacking sufficient power to defeat the supremacists in a local confrontation, insurgents sought to broaden the conflict by inducing their opponents to [violent acts of repression] to the point where supportive federal intervention was required. As a byproduct of the drama associated with these flagrant displays of public violence, the movement was also able to sustain member commitment, generate broad public sympathy, and mobilize financial support from external groups (McAdam 1982 p. 174).

The argument can be diagramed as follows:

[*** Diagram 0-1 about here. ***]

This argument has implications that contradict more schematic distillations of McAdam’s (1982) Political Process Theory. Most importantly, McAdam’s critical dynamic
centers on a particular set of insurgent practices which disrupt a particular set of established social relations. The Federal Government is not intervening because of the general political strength of blacks. McAdam is clear throughout the book that Federal intervention comes grudgingly and only when forced. Instead, the Federal Government is intervening because it specifically cannot tolerate the highly visible and violent repression of civil rights activists. Cold war foreign policy pressures, the ascendance of cold-war liberal electoral coalitions incorporating black voters, and the widely publicized commitment of the Federal Government to civil rights did not create a political opportunity for black insurgency generally. They specifically made it difficult (or impossible) for the Federal government to stand on the sidelines as white supremacist officials and vigilantes publicly brutalized nonviolent civil rights activists. A particular form of insurgent practice was crucial to this dynamic: the insurgent civil rights practice of nonviolent violation of legal segregation and de facto disenfranchisement coupled with the call for full participation in U.S. citizenship rights. Centering the practices of the civil rights insurgents makes the importance of the political context in the civil rights movement intelligible.

**Waves of Insurgent Practice**

This insight introduces the central conceptual innovation of this dissertation: insurgent social movements can best be understood as the proliferation of a relatively coherent and stable set of insurgent practices. In a given insurgent social movement, in a relatively short period of time, many people independently decide to participate in very similar insurgent practices – often at great personal risk – and that insurgent participation rapidly spreads across a large geographic area.
In his 1983 article “Tactical Innovation and the Pace of Insurgency,” McAdam develops the idea that tactical innovation is crucial to the development of insurgency. McAdam shows that the Civil Rights Movement developed through several waves distinguishable by a series of tactical innovations which each reinvigorated insurgent mobilization: from the bus boycott in the late 1950s, to the sit-ins of 1960 and 1961, the 1961 freedom rides, and the voter registration and community campaigns from 1962 through 1965. McAdam argues that, given group political opportunity and organizational strength, tactical innovation allows insurgents to create crisis, a capacity that diminishes with the waning novelty of the tactic.

McAdam’s provides powerful evidence that the pace of insurgency is driven by tactical innovation. The level of civil rights insurgent mobilization clearly develops in a series of waves following these tactical innovations. But adhering to the group actor assumption, McAdam sees the practical dynamics of insurgent mobilization in each of these waves as a side note to the larger story of propitious conditions for group mobilization by blacks generally. He artificially separates the question of why blacks mobilize insurgency from the question of the timing and extent of black insurgent mobilization. Locked into the assumption that the movement generally can be explained by the structural opportunity and organizational strength of blacks, the strength of tactical innovation is portrayed as its novelty – as if any new tactic would suffice. McAdam claims that each of these waves abated because the novelty wore off, and authorities found counter-tactics to undermine the salience of the new tactics. In general terms, he theorizes: “Lacking institutional power, challengers must devise protest techniques that offset their powerlessness. This has been referred to as a process of tactical innovation. Such innovations, however, only temporarily afford challengers increased bargaining leverage.
In chesslike fashion, movement opponents can be expected, through effective tactical adaptation, to neutralize the new tactic, thereby reinstituting the original power disparity between themselves and the challenger.” (McAdam 1983, 752)

To the contrary, the efficacy of each wave of civil rights insurgency is diminished by concessions rather than the familiarity of local authorities with the once novel tactic. The effectiveness of the bus boycott diminished because the Federal government ruled such segregation illegal, and buses were integrated in many Southern cities. The effectiveness of the sit in diminished because most lunch counters were integrated, and sit in participants were ignored if not served. The effectiveness of the freedom rides diminished because interstate travel was integrated through Federal military intervention and new legal rulings. The effectiveness of voter registration as insurgency diminished because blacks won de facto enfranchisement. In several instances, McAdam (1983) even presents evidence that concessions and redress explain the diminishing efficacy of each wave. But McAdam (1983) does not assimilate this evidence because the analysis is deeply rooted in the group actor assumption that opportunities confer to groups rather than practices.

The important theoretical point here is that a similar political dynamic drives the diffusion of each wave of insurgent practice that together constitute the Civil Rights Movement. Within this insurgent Civil Rights phase of Black Liberation Struggle, each wave consisted of nonviolent civil disobedience against legal segregation and de facto disenfranchisement coupled with claims for full citizenship rights for blacks.
Institutional Statism

McAdam’s critical dynamic suggests situating insurgent social movements within a broader, more dynamic approach to understanding political process. Institutional statism, a la Michael Mann, provides a powerful framework for doing so.

Social context is a terrain of struggle, not a cause of mobilization. Scholars have not been able to agree on what kinds of conditions cause insurgency because conditions do not create movements – people do. When people act, the social context determines the consequences of those actions. The political opportunity thesis has fallen short of explaining mobilization by advancing too structural a view of political conflict. Certainly, there are some historical situations in which large scale political divisions destabilize entire regimes, and any mobilization by insurgent challengers becomes influential regardless of its content. But more often, the particular practices of insurgents are consequential. The political context does not determine the extent of mobilization, per se, but instead affects how insurgent practices will be received.

Sociologists have begun to show how different political contexts are conducive to different forms of insurgent practice. Kitschelt (1986) argues that the political structures in France, Sweden, the U.S., and Germany differentially determine the effectiveness of particular insurgent strategies, and thus explain the different strategies employed by anti-nuclear activists in each country. In an important, and more recent intervention, Walker, Martin, and McCarthy (2008) argue that insurgent mobilizations in the U.S. tended to use different tactical repertoires depending on whether they confronted corporate, state, or academic targets, suggesting that different kinds of targets made different sorts of insurgent action efficacious. Taylor et al, in a study of same sex weddings, find that practices “matter in political contention” (2009 p. 885).
They argue that attention to practices is important to explaining why people participate in particular social movements, as well as movement trajectories. Koopmans et al (2005) find that different forms of citizenship and immigration policy differentially shape forms of immigrant mobilization in different European countries. While these works take important steps, many more steps are required to move beyond the political opportunity thesis that social context is an independent cause of mobilization.

Institutional statist political theory, as developed by Michael Mann in the Weberian tradition, provides a crucial insight. Classically, Max Weber conceptualized politics as necessarily territorial, and the state as a political organization which maintains a monopoly over the legitimate use of violence within a territory (Weber 1978 v.l: 54). Building on Weber, Mann develops a theory of institutional statism in which state power institutionalizes social relations, and through conflict, re-institutionalizes them:

Because states are essentially ways in which dynamic social relations become authoritatively institutionalized, they readily lend themselves to a kind of “political lag” theory. States institutionalize present social conflicts, but institutionalized historic conflicts then exert considerable power over new conflicts. (Mann 1993: 52)

Mann argues that rather than unitary and systemic, states are messy, and contradictory, embodying the outcomes of past struggles (1993: 88). Not only do states maintain and police historically specific social relations; but different segments of a state may separately administer capacities for organized violence, enforcing distinct standards of legitimacy.

This theory of politics suggests a more nuanced view of how political context matters for insurgent mobilization. In short, insurgent movements contest the legitimacy of target
institutions by disrupting established social processes protected by state authorities. When insurgents disrupt established social relations, they contest the legitimacy of the targeted social institution, and force a political referendum on their claims. In many instances, potential insurgents do not have the established political power to challenge a particular set of social relations. But when insurgents create social disruption, they force other powerful political actors to take sides. Because states regulate social practices, the efficacy of an insurgency depends upon the practices it employs. The determinant question is not whether various political actors support the claims of insurgents in the abstract, but whether – given insurgents’ practical actions – they will intervene on insurgents’ behalf.

This approach builds upon, but diverges from, the political opportunity thesis in two key respects. First, while political cleavages are viewed to be quite consequential for insurgent mobilization, these do not autonomously crystalize into opportunities for mobilization. Instead, insurgents advance particular practices, and the cleavages affect mobilization only indirectly – through the political reception of these insurgent practices. Second, the way that movements contest part of a political regime is seen as institution specific rather than group specific. Insurgents contest the legitimacy of a particular institution through disruptive practices, forcing a referendum on their practice and that institution. Together, these insights enable a more dynamic and meso-level study of insurgency. Scholars have not been able to independently

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5 There is extensive variation in the social movements literature about what constitutes a social movement. Many authors distinguish insurgent movements from other forms of participation in institutionalized political channels. For the purposes of this paper, I conceptualize insurgent mobilization as collective political mobilization in which the insurgent actors seek social transformation through intentional disruption of established social processes.

6 Resource mobilization theorists long ago recognized the importance of allied intervention. For example, as early as 1968, Lipsky wrote: “The ‘problem of the powerless’ in protest activity is to activate ‘third parties’ to enter the implicit or explicit bargaining arena in ways favorable to the protesters” (Lipsky 1968). The problem was that resource mobilization theory emphasized the importance of allied support at the cost of serious attention to all else. The contested legitimacy approach redresses this limitation, theorizing the importance of allied support in specific relation to insurgent practice, and political context.
identify structural “political opportunity” in the world because it does not exist as such. Instead, only once insurgency is in process, and a particular set of insurgent practices creates a referendum on a particular social institution, can the salient political cleavages be identified, and the insurgent dynamics expected to follow an explicable trajectory.

The development and demise of an insurgent movement is determined by the political vulnerability of a particular social institution to a given set of insurgent practices. My core proposition is that when insurgents develop a set of practices challenging the legitimacy of a social institution which is both highly disruptive and the repression of which is threatening to powerful allies, mobilization escalates and a movement is born.

[**Diagram 0-2 about here.**]

When insurgents develop a set of insurgent practices which is both disruptive, and the repression of which draws powerful allied intervention in a particular historic context, they generate the self-reinforcing feedback loop depicted in Diagram 0-2 above. The extent of disruptive mobilization determines the extent of repression (controlling for exogenous factors, such as the repressive tendency of authorities). But the attempted repression by authorities, in turn, generates further mobilization. When authorities cannot effectively enforce established custom and law, insurgency expands. Repressive acts by authorities, by failing to stem the insurgency and drawing broad allied resistance, increase the practical appeal of a set of insurgent practices to people who see themselves as oppressed by the social relations which

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7 While I believe a theory of objective oppression is possible and likely useful for explaining insurgent mobilization, it is beyond the scope of this paper. One starting point for such a theory might be Charles Tilly’s *Durable Inequality*. For the purposes of this paper, it is not necessary to maintain a theory of objective oppression. Oppression here only requires the subjective perception of oppression shared by many potential insurgents.
the insurgency challenges and claims to transcend. Potential insurgents see the promise of liberation in authorities’ failed attempts at repression and mobilize.

When the social disruption escalates, it eventually forces authorities to offer concessions to break the self-reinforcing cycle of insurgency and re-stabilize the political equilibrium. Concessions can undermine allied mobilization by drawing off the allegiance of allies and making insurgents more repressible. Concessions can also undermine the disruptive potential of insurgent practices by displacing the social institution which an effective insurgent practice challenges.

Overview of the Dissertation

In the pages that follow, I test and develop my “pathways of insurgency” practice-centered theory of insurgent social movements by applying it, in turn, to analyze the development and demise of each of the three main phases of postwar Black Liberation Struggle.

Part I analyzes the Black Anticolonialist insurgency which rose to influence immediately after WWII, focusing on the pivotal year 1946. This part analyzes how and to what extent Black Anti-colonialist practice compelled President Harry Truman, initially an apologist for the slow pace of racial reform in 1945-6, to become an avid advocate of civil rights. Conversely, I probe the hypothesis that Truman’s advocacy of civil rights allowed him to repress Black Anti-colonialist forms of mobilization while enabling the Civil Rights Movement to come. If correct, then shifting political alignments closed the opportunity one form of black insurgent practice while opening the opportunity for another. The methodological supplement in this part

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8 This view, suggested by Mann’s institutional statism, finds compliment in much classical social theory. See, e.g. Gramsci (1971: 180-183).
systematically develops the novel theoretically guided application of the method of Event Structure Analysis (ESA) applied to analyze Truman’s adoption of civil rights advocacy.

Part II applies pathways of insurgency theory to a quantitative analysis of the Civil Rights Movement. Building on institutional statism and constructivist insights, I propose that when insurgents contest the legitimacy of a social institution with highly disruptive practices, the repression of which is threatening to powerful allies, mobilization escalates. If so, it should be possible to retrodict subsequent levels of insurgent mobilization based on such dynamics. For a stringent test, I evaluate these competing approaches on the political opportunity thesis’s foundational case – the Civil Rights Movement. I use quantitative event history analysis of content coded event data to evaluate competing model predictions of lagged mobilization effects.

Part III applies pathways of insurgency theory to a narrative analysis of the leading revolutionary black nationalist organization, the Black Panther Party. The sections in this part analyze in turn the major phases of the political development of the Black Panther Party, tracing the “strategic genealogy” of Black Panther political practice. Rather than centering particular individuals as in biography or the organization of the Party per se, in order to uncover the political dynamics of the Party, I focus on the political practices of the Black Panthers as my main object of analysis. Tracing the history of the evolution of Panther insurgent practice, and the simultaneous ebb and flow of the Party’s influence and following, allows sustained fine grained testing and refinement of the proposition that movement influence and following depend on the disruptiveness and resilience of particular forms of practice.

In the concluding dissertation chapter, I synthesize the findings in a comparative analysis applying Pathways of Insurgency Theory to explain the three distinct phases of black insurgency in the postwar decades, showing how a practice centered approach improves explanation over
the group actor assumption in each phase. Drawing parallels and contrasts across these phases, I advance a general practice centered theory of insurgent social movements.

The dissertation cannot, by its nature, rigorously test the full scope of application of the theory. But I hope that if pathways of insurgency theory does a better job of explaining Black insurgent social movements in the United States in the post WWII decades, it can also do better elsewhere, providing a new way of thinking about the causes and consequences of social movements for further development.
Diagram 0-1: McAdam’s Critical Dynamic
DIAGRAM 0-2: TOWARDS A PRACTICE CENTERED THEORY OF INSURGENT SOCIAL MOVEMENTS
***** Part I *****

Black Anti-Colonialism
An Opportunity for a Practice: How Black Anti-colonialists Compelled Truman to Advocate Civil Rights

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Acknowledgments:
Thanks to William G. Roy, Michael Mann, Rogers Brubaker, Waldo E. Martin, Jr., Doug McAdam, Kyle Armore, Mary Bernstein, Rebecca Emigh, Yuval Feinstein, Roberto Franzosi, Pablo Gastón, Larry J. Griffin, David Heise, Wesley Hiers, Darnell Hunt, Robert Jansen, Hazem Kandil, Tamara Kay, Robin D.G. Kelley, Robert Mare, Isaac Martin, Ruth Milkman, Aldon Morris, Ido Tavory, Veronica Terriquez, Chris Tilly, Roger Waldinger, Edward Walker, Elizabeth Wang, Howard Winant, and Maurice Zeitlin for their helpful comments. Earlier drafts of this paper were presented at the USC Methodology Seminar, the UCLA Comparative Historical Analysis Seminar, and the annual meeting of the American Sociological Association.

Funding information:
Thanks to the Ralph J. Bunche Center, Mr. and Mrs. Blau, the Charles E. and Sue K. Young Award committee, the Karpf Peace Award committee, and the UCLA Department of Sociology for generously funding this research.

Total Word Count including body text, abstract text, references, notes, and title:
12,964

Online appendix word count:
8,888

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Key Words:
social movements; political opportunity; insurgency; event structure analysis; historical methodology;

For Review
July 31, 2014
An Opportunity for a Practice: How Black Anti-colonialists Compelled Truman to Advocate Civil Rights

ABSTRACT: Political opportunity theory has proven extremely generative, highlighting the importance of macro-structural shifts in making established authorities vulnerable to insurgent challenge. But as critics point out, political opportunity theory flattens both culture and agency, and has fared poorly explaining the timing of insurgency. Re-theorizing opportunity as conferring to particular practices, rather than groups, redresses these limits – revealing the proximate causes of mobilization and influence. For a strategic test, this paper revisits the forging ground of opportunity theory. Why did President Harry Truman, initially an apologist for the slow pace of racial reform in 1945-6, suddenly become an avid advocate of civil rights? Opportunity scholars argue that macro-structural forces caused Truman’s civil rights advocacy, generating the opportunity for insurgency by blacks as a group. But Event Structure Analysis reveals how Black Anti-colonialist practices seized opportunities afforded by the earlier Progressive Challenge to compel Truman to adopt civil rights advocacy. Civil rights advocacy, in turn, allowed Truman to repress Black Anti-colonialist practices even while setting the stage for the Civil Rights Movement to come. Different forms of insurgent practice seized opportunities created by different institutional cleavages, rather than the same opportunities advantaging all insurgency by a social group.

Following the Civil Rights Movement, social movement scholars broke with strain theories of irrational collective behavior to recast movement actors as social agents advancing their political interests in accord with contextual opportunities (Meyer 2004; Walker 2012). Their political opportunity thesis – that insurgency is caused, in large part, by macro-structural processes that destabilize the political order generating the opportunity for insurgent mobilization and influence by a marginalized group (McAdam 1982; McAdam, McCarthy and Zald 1996) – proved among the most influential propositions in the social movements field over the last three decades (Goodwin 2012: 277; Meyer 2004:125; McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001:18).

But classic political opportunity theory does not adequately account for the fundamental interaction of practice and structure (see Bourdieu 1990; Isaac 2008; Joas 1996; Sewell 1992; Swidler 1986). As founders, proponents, and critics alike point out, political opportunity theory
flattens both culture and agency, and has fared poorly in explaining the timing of insurgency (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001; Gamson and Meyer 1996; Goodwin and Jasper 2004, 2012).

Context effects are more realistically treated as interactive, determining the effects of particular practices rather than causing insurgency by a group (Bloom and Martin 2013; Evans and Kay 2008; Jansen 2011, 2013; Taylor et al 2009). Building on classic political sociology (Calhoun 1982; Paige 1975; Schwartz 1976; Tilly 1964) and recent social movement theory that emphasizes the multi-institutional configurations of power and the correlation of targets and tactics (Armstrong and Bernstein 2008; Walker, Martin, and McCarthy 2008), I propose that insurgents garner influence by developing practices which leverage institutional cleavages. Insurgents seize the opportunity afforded by an institutional cleavage when they advance a practice which challenges authorities on one side while drawing support from the other.

As a strategic test, I revisit the historical ground upon which the political opportunity thesis was forged: the Black Freedom Struggle. Viewed in relation to the Civil Rights Movement, sociologists have seen Federal civil rights advocacy, inaugurated by President Harry S. Truman, as preceding black insurgency. Federal opposition to Southern authorities on race policy was crucial to the Civil Rights Movement. From the classic political opportunity perspective, so long as the Federal government supported segregationist racial policy, there was little room for any form of black insurgent mobilization or influence. The opportunity did not yet exist. Sociological studies foundational to the political opportunity perspective, and some defending it, have thus explained black insurgency as dependent the on macro-structural shifts that enabled Federal advocacy of civil rights (Jenkins et al 2003; McAdam 1982; Oberschall 1973 chpt.6; Piven and Cloward 1977 chpt.4).
Truman’s adoption of civil rights advocacy is attributed to macro-structural processes – especially emergent Cold War foreign policy pressures (Dudziak 2000; Layton 2000; McAdam 1982, 1999; Plummer 1996). Fligstein and McAdam explain: “Locked into an intense political/ideological struggle with the Soviet Union for influence around the globe, U.S. foreign policy makers quickly realized what a significant liability Jim Crow was to its critical foreign policy aims. This prompted calls – first from the diplomatic corps and State Department – for civil rights reforms to counter Soviet efforts to exploit American racism for its obvious propaganda value. Truman’s civil rights initiatives were one response to these pleas.” (2012: 125)

Truman’s adoption of civil rights advocacy is seen as a key turning point, marking the opening of opportunity for insurgent politics by blacks. For example McAdam writes that Federal racial policy “symbolized, even as it contributed to, a dramatic shift in the balance of forces in American race relations.” (1999: 86). When “Truman inaugurated a period of active executive advocacy of civil rights” against the interests of southern white political leaders, he “dramatically changed the interpretive context of U.S. racial politics,” signaling the opportunity for black insurgent mobilization and influence (1999: xx-xxi).

In short, theorizing that opportunities confer to social groups and recognizing the importance of Federal advocacy of civil rights for the Civil Rights Movement, opportunity scholars assumed that Truman’s civil rights advocacy preceded and advantaged all forms of insurgency by blacks, and was caused by macro-structural processes independent of the actions of black insurgents.
The problem is that many powerful waves of insurgency by blacks preceded Truman’s adoption of civil rights advocacy. In this article, I focus on one: Black Anti-colonialism. The Black Anti-colonialist insurgency of the 1940s was quite distinct from the Civil Rights insurgency of the 1950s and the 1960s. Black Anti-colonialists mobilized anti-lynching protests, third party efforts, and UN petitions, equating U.S. racial policy with fascism and colonialism. Black Anti-colonialist practices differed from Civil Rights practices in terms of tactics, targets, rhetoric, and allies. Previous scholarship convincingly demonstrated that strong Federal advocacy of civil rights inaugurated by Truman was crucial to the Civil Rights insurgency. But viewing opportunity as generated by macro-structural processes, and as conferring advantage for insurgency on a social group, classic accounts have viewed Federal civil rights advocacy as temporally and analytically prior to the black insurgency. From this perspective, the earlier wave of Black Anti-colonialist insurgency poses an anomaly – this form of insurgency by blacks preceded the purported opportunity for insurgency by blacks as a group.

The anomaly can be addressed by considering the relationship between Black Anti-colonialism and Truman’s civil rights advocacy from an “opportunity for practice” perspective.

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9 Indeed, innumerable forms of organizing and insurgent mobilization by black people against racial oppression – going back to slave revolts – preceded and lay the foundation for Black Anti-colonialist mobilization in the mid-1940s. These included the NAACP’s grassroots legal campaigns, A. Philip Randolph’s March on Washington Movement, the Double V. campaigns during WWII, Garveyism, black labor organizing in the CIO and BSCP, numerous anti-lynching mobilizations, and many others.

10 I preserve the term “Black Anti-colonialism” because of the broader anti-colonial view that motivated these insurgents, and for consistency with the substantive literature (especially Von Eschen 1997). But as the findings below demonstrate, much of the insurgent rhetoric in crucial actions in 1946 was more properly “internationalist,” denouncing Truman’s policies as analogous to fascism, rather than narrowly “anti-colonialist.” See below for a fuller discussion of the concept “insurgent practice.”
Instead of viewing opportunity as conferring advantage to blacks as a group generally, different forms of insurgent practice are seen to take advantage of different institutionalized conflicts. Guided by this theoretical perspective, I argue that Black Anti-colonialist practices seized an opportunity that preceded Truman’s civil rights advocacy, namely the Progressive Challenge to Truman. Dovetailing their insurgency with the Progressive Challenge, Black Anti-colonialists garnered tremendous influence, compelling Truman to adopt civil rights advocacy as part of broader concessions to Progressives. Truman’s civil rights advocacy, in turn, allowed him to consolidate moderate black support as part of a Cold War liberal alliance, and readily repress the Black Anti-colonialist threat. Thus Truman’s civil rights advocacy closed the opportunity for one form of insurgent practice by blacks even as it helped create the opportunity for the Civil Rights Movement to come.

This explanation of Truman’s adoption of civil rights advocacy, and the classic one, constitute instantiations of rival theories of political opportunity. Did different forms of black insurgent practice seize opportunities offered by different institutional cleavages as I propose? Or did macro-structural shifts independently cause Truman to adopt civil rights advocacy, in turn advantaging all forms of insurgency by black people as classically theorized? I formally test these rival explanations of Truman’s adoption of civil rights advocacy utilizing the range of available documentary and archival evidence through a theoretically guided application of Event Structure Analysis (Griffin 1993; Heise 1989; see methodological appendix).

**Opportunity Theory**

Sociologists may agree that people “make history, but in conditions not of their own choosing” (Marx 1978: 595). There is less accord on how conditions affect the timing and influence of people’s efforts to make history.
**Political Opportunity Thesis**

Among the most influential propositions in the social movements field (Goodwin 2012:277; Meyer 2004:125; McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001:18), the classic political opportunity thesis advances a historical logic in which changes in the level of insurgency over time can be explained by changes in the political context: “The opportunities for a challenger to engage in successful collective action … vary greatly over time. And it is these variations that are held to be related to the ebb and flow of movement activity” (McAdam 1982: 40-41). Opportunities are theorized to “elevate the group in question to a position of increased political strength” (McAdam 1982: 42), conferring advantage for insurgency on a social group as a whole.

[*Insert Diagram 1-1 About Here*]

Scholarly use of the term “political opportunity” has grown exponentially, averaging less than 60 texts per year in the 1980s to more than 300 per year in the 1990s, and over 1,200 texts per year in the 2000s.¹¹ Such studies showed that many movements depend on macro-structural processes which make political arrangements vulnerable.

**Practices not Groups**

Despite this influence and extensive consideration (e.g. Amenta and Halfmann 2012; Broer and Duyvendak 2012; Goldstone 2004, 2012; McAdam, McCarthy and Zald 1996; Meyer 2004; Meyer and Minkoff 2004), founders, proponents, and critics agree that fundamental limitations persist (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001; Gamson and Meyer 1996; Goodwin and Jasper 2004, 2012). Ironically, theorizing opportunity for groups obscures the agency of

¹¹ Google Scholar reports 586 texts published in the 1980s containing the term “political opportunity,” 3080 texts in the 1990s, and 12,200 texts in the 2000s. Compare flat use of the term “political” over same period. Based on a June 12, 2013 search.
insurgents. It assumes that context effects on insurgency are independent of what insurgents actually do. Further, theorizing opportunity for groups assumes that conditions for mobilization are either propitious or not – that in times of quiescence, insurgency is futile. The approach encourages tautology with opportunity often “defined backwards through the observation of political mobilization” (Meyer 2004: 135). And efforts to predict insurgency based on theorizations of independent opportunity effects have fared poorly (Goodwin 2012; Meyer 2004).

One variant of opportunity theory, the “political opportunity structures” approach, does account for what insurgents do – employing a comparative logic to analyze why different forms of insurgent practice thrive in different contexts. The most influential work in this vein, Kitschelt (1986), compares anti-nuclear movements in France, Sweden, the U.S., and W. Germany, and concludes that “mobilization strategies and impacts of social movements can, to a significant degree, be explained by the general characteristics of domestic [state level] political opportunity structures” (84). This work is akin to the classical political sociology of social movements that sought to explain forms of mobilization with respect to structural context (Calhoun 1982; Huntington 1968; Paige 1975; Schwartz 1976; see Walder 2009).


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12 McAdam (1982) stands out from many classic opportunity accounts by theorizing the necessity of “cognitive liberation,” a process in which social actors must perceive opportunity to take advantage of it. McAdam (1983) emphasizes the importance of tactical innovation for explaining the timing of insurgency. And McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald (1996) bundle the opportunity thesis with other causal processes, such as framing. But like other classic opportunity scholarship, these studies still theorize opportunity effects as conferring on a group independent of practice.
practice as historically specific and consequential “cultural creations” that “emerge from struggle,” “routines that are learned, shared, and acted out” (1995: 41-42). Insurgent practices make relational claims, and apply to specific “claimant-object pairs: bosses and workers, peasants and landlords, rival nationalist factions,” etc. (2008: 14).

Adaptation by movement actors to contextual opportunity increases influence (McCammon 2012). So explaining context effects on insurgent timing and influence requires attention to what insurgents actually do, i.e. “insurgent practices.” Building on Tilly, I conceptualize insurgent practices as cultural routines, inhering historically particular forms of action and rhetoric, which promise transcendence of specified oppressive conditions by challenging an institutionalized authority.

*Meso not Macro*

One limitation of the political opportunity structures approach, including Tilly’s, is that it is too macro to provide much explanatory purchase on the timing and extent of specific social movements. Tilly theorizes relatively stable “repertoires of contention,” i.e. the compendium of insurgent practices culturally available in any given time and place. He seeks to explain the change over centuries in repertoires of contention with the development of capitalism and consolidation of state and military power in France and Britain (1977, 1986, 1995). And he argues that repertoires of contention vary with respect to the capacity and democracy of regimes generally (2006). But grouping all forms of insurgent practice into generalized repertoires, and considering context at the structural level, provides little explanatory purchase on the timing and influence of particular insurgencies.

In recent years, the opportunity structures approach has been felicitously extended to more nuanced meso-level comparisons at a smaller institutional scale than the state. Armstrong
and Bernstein (2008) argue that the field of social movement scholarship as a whole is moving beyond the premise of state as context towards a more nuanced multi-institutional conception of power in which a variety of state and non-state institutions, and cultural processes, constitute authority, and movement strategies “vary by target” (86). Comparing the varied regional deployment of identity within the lesbian and gay movement, Bernstein (1997) argues that access to the polity is a key determinant of whether or not movement activists will emphasize sameness or difference. Coding a large data-set of late 20th century U.S. movement events, Walker, Martin, and McCarthy (2008) argue that the institutional settings in which movements take action – state, corporate, or educational – largely determines protest repertoires.

Scholars have shown that different movement practices work in different local contexts (Amenta 2006: 229), and those that fit local policy contexts are more influential (Martin 2010). Even the efficacy of broadly influential insurgent practices can be expected to vary in accord with temporal and regional context differences. Meso-level institutional cleavages serve as opportunities for insurgent practices, mediating any macro-structural effects. In this sense, political opportunity is an institutional cleavage – i.e. an institutionalized conflict or sustained antagonism between routinized interests of influential social groupings or authorities.

**Interaction effects**

But even at this more nuanced meso-institutional scale, the explanatory power of theorizing context effects on repertoire is limited. Social actors try out particular forms of practice for a range of contingent reasons, cultural as well as instrumental (Clemens 1993), and frequently innovate. While modest probabilistic correlations between context and repertoire can be found in large data sets, thus far the most sophisticated of these studies illuminate little of the
specific dynamics of insurgency, capturing only the most general tendencies. Divergent practices can flourish in a single context, and innovations are by nature unpredictable.

Even more important for the purposes here, taking form of practice as the outcome to be explained, these approaches cannot explain the timing or influence of insurgency. To more fully analyze context effects on insurgency, a theoretical framework is needed that explains the timing and influence of insurgency with reference to the dynamic interaction between opportunity and practice. The ideational claims movement actors advance are crucial to attaining allied support (Van Dyke and McCammon 2010: xviii and part 2), as are tactics (see McAdam 1996). While institutional cleavages abound, insurgents rarely develop practices that take advantage of the opportunities they offer. The main influence of context on insurgency is to determine the effects of particular forms of practice.

**Opportunities for Practices**

Rather than macro-structural conditions conferring advantage for insurgency to a social group, I propose that insurgents garner influence by developing practices which leverage institutional cleavages. According to the preceding discussion, this proposition entails three revisions to the classic political opportunity thesis. First, conditions do not independently favor insurgency by a group. Analyzing context effects requires taking insurgent practices into account. Second, macro-structural effects on insurgency are mediated by meso-level institutional cleavages. Considering opportunities at the meso-level allows much more precise explanation of the timing and influence of specific insurgencies. Third, context effects are interactive rather than independent. Opportunities determine the effects of insurgent practice rather than causing insurgency directly. When insurgents advance a practice which challenges the authority on one side of an institutionalized conflict while drawing allied support from the other side, they seize
the opportunity provided by that cleavage to garner influence and following. Allies drawn to support an insurgency in this way not only provide crucial resources for mobilization. They also resist repression of the insurgent movement by the targeted authorities, making it easier for insurgents to sustain their challenge.

One key implication here is that authorities often undercut influential insurgencies by making concessions to more moderate movement allies, suturing the institutional cleavage upon which an insurgent movement depends (Haines 1988 calls this the “radical flank effect”).

[*Insert Diagram 1-2 About Here*]

In foundational political opportunity scholarship, sociologists explained Truman’s adoption of Civil Rights Advocacy as indicative of opening macro-structural opportunities for blacks, and a necessary precursor to insurgent mobilization by blacks. But earlier Black Anti-colonialist mobilization poses an anomaly. Re-theorizing opportunities for practices suggests a different explanation: Black Anti-colonialist practices seized the opportunity offered by the Progressive Challenge to garner influence and compel Truman to adopt civil rights advocacy.

**Why did Truman adopt Civil Rights Advocacy in 1946?**

The empirical crux of this paper is to explain a momentous transformation in Federal race policy in 1946 – Truman’s adoption of civil rights advocacy. As President, Harry S. Truman, the pragmatic politician from Missouri, continued in private to express racial attitudes that would make vehement white supremacists proud. Truman’s sister noted that “Harry is no more for nigger equality than any of us” (McCullough 1992: 588). But in the second half of his first term, in a dramatic departure from earlier policies, Truman adopted strong measures of civil rights advocacy. He met with anti-lynching activists in September 1946, and created the President’s Committee on Civil Rights (PCCR) in December. He became the first President to address the
National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and the first to give a speech to Congress strongly endorsing civil rights. His PCCR released the first-ever high level government report extensively documenting oppression of blacks and recommending civil rights reform. Drawing on the PCCR recommendations, he introduced amicus curiae briefs to the Supreme Court in support of desegregation, proposed legislation to abolish the poll tax and end lynching, and issued executive orders to create racial equality in Federal hiring, and to desegregate the military. While liberal Congressmen had advocated civil rights before this time and measures such as anti-lynching legislation generally earned wide support in opinion polls, previous Presidents, including Truman’s Progressive and charismatic predecessor Franklin Delano Roosevelt, never forcefully supported civil rights. Why did Truman, initially an apologist for the slow pace of racial reform in 1945-6, suddenly become an avid advocate of civil rights?

An “opportunities for practices” perspective suggests the following reading of the historical record: The Democratic Party cobbled together by FDR was, in the words of Truman advisor Clark Clifford, “an unhappy alliance of Southern conservatives, Western progressives and Big City labor.” From Missouri, a border state, Truman was selected to replace Progressive

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13 Truman’s civil rights advocacy broke with past Presidential precedent. FDR did create a temporary Fair Employment Practice Committee expanding defense industry and Federal hiring of black people during the war in response to the threatened March on Washington in 1941 that would have called attention to the hypocrisy of exclusion of blacks from good defense industry jobs, and segregation in a military “fighting fascism” abroad. FDR also occasionally, in moments of political expediency, gave lip service to support of anti-lynching legislation, and repeal of the poll tax. But FDR avoided strong advocacy for civil rights that might threaten his support from the Southern Democrats in Congress. (Hamby 1973; Lawson 1991; McAdam 1999; McCoy and Reutten 1973)

14 Clark M. Clifford to President Truman, “Memorandum for the President,” November 19, 1947: 1, HSTL.
vice-president Henry A. Wallace in 1944 to appease conservative Southern Democrats while not too greatly offending Democratic Party liberals. After FDR died in April 1945, Truman inherited the presidency and quickly embraced the conservatives. His conservative appointments replaced Roosevelt’s Progressives, alienating many members of the New Deal coalition. Truman talked strong on social programs, but his actions disappointed.

On September 12, 1946, the divisions within the Democratic Party came to a head when Wallace gave a foreign policy speech challenging Truman’s emergent Cold War foreign policy. Truman responded scathingly, and Wallace resigned as Secretary of Commerce. Many Progressives saw Wallace as the true heir of FDR, and many believed that his departure from the Truman administration made a 3rd party effort in 1948 inevitable. As an “insider activist” (Banaszak 2010), Wallace helped crystallize the Progressive Challenge, thereby generating the opportunity for Black Anti-colonialist insurgency.

Black Anti-colonialist practices in the mid-1940s powerfully linked the cause of domestic Black Freedom Struggle to the Progressive Challenge. Black Anti-colonialists argued that Truman’s silence on lynching, alongside emergent Cold War foreign policies, abandoned FDR’s anti-colonialist position and deserted the anti-racist principals for which FDR entered WWII. (For the prevalence of lynching during this period, and some of the gruesome details, see: Anderson 2003; McCoy and Ruetten 1973; Zangrando 1980). Black political leaders such as Walter White, Executive Director of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), framed their struggle in internationalist terms: “World War II has given to the Negro a sense of kinship with other colored – and also oppressed – peoples of the world … the struggle of the Negro in the United States is part and parcel of the struggle against imperialism

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and exploitation in India, China, Burma, Africa, the Philippines, Malaya, the West Indies, and South America.” The Black Press ubiquitously denounced colonialism and the Truman administration’s support of France and Britain, often making the analogy between European colonialism, Nazi Fascism, and the subjugation of blacks in the U.S. Widely reported Black Anti-colonialist protests charged Truman with hypocrisy, calling attention to racial injustice at home as the U.S. asserted world leadership. The Council on African Affairs (CAA) brought together anti-colonial leaders such as Nehru, Nkrumah and Kenyatta with black leaders from the U.S. to plan common strategy. Both the NAACP and the National Negro Congress (NNC) petitioned the UN for international military intervention to stop lynching in the United States.

Black Anti-colonialist practices differed sharply – in authority challenged, ideational claims, and tactical repertoire – from the insurgent Civil Rights practices that would prevail in the early 1960s. Civil Rights insurgent practices bodily violated particular racial caste institutions and challenged the authorities who upheld them – making moral claims on American democracy for full participation in citizenship rights. Conversely, Black Anti-colonialist practices challenged the Presidency – petitioning the U.N. for international intervention, rallying for a Federal response to lynching, and attempting to split the Democratic Party – while denouncing U.S. foreign and racial policy as analogous to Colonialism and Fascism. While Black Anti-colonialist practices proliferated in 1946, few – if any – participated in insurgent Civil Rights practice that year. And for good reason: bodily violation of Jim Crow in 1946 was likely to result in death, or at best incarceration with little hope of support.

Initially Truman ignored all demands by Black Anti-colonials to take action on lynching, standing strong with the Southern Democrats. But the Progressive Challenge gained

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momentum, threatening to rend the Democratic Party and destroy Truman’s chance for re-election. The Black Anti-colonialists effectively linked race policy to the Progressive Challenge, compelling Truman to adopt civil rights advocacy as part of broader concessions to Progressives. Alongside advocating national health insurance and promising to repeal the anti-labor Taft-Hartley act, Truman introduced anti-lynching legislation to Congress, and issued executive orders to desegregate the military. Having remade himself as a Liberal and the first President to advocate civil rights, Truman then worked with mainstream black political leaders to crush the remaining Black Anti-colonialist insurgency.

If this historical argument is correct, then different forms of black insurgent practices took advantage of distinct meso-level opportunities. Black Anti-colonialist practices seized the opportunity created by the Progressive Challenge, leveraging the conflict between Truman and Progressives to compel Truman to adopt civil rights advocacy. Truman’s civil rights advocacy, in turn, helped constitute the political opportunity for the Civil Rights Movement to come, while eliminating the opportunity for sustained Black Anti-colonialism.

**Method of Analysis**

To arbitrate between competing explanations of Truman’s adoption of civil rights advocacy requires a method of analysis that can account for the full range of historical evidence, and is systematic and explicit in its causal attribution. A theoretically guided application of Event Structure Analysis (Griffin 1993; Heise 1989) provides the ideal tool. In Event Structure Analysis (e.g. Brown 2000; Brueggemann and Boswell 1998; Dixon 2008; Eder and Enke 1991; Griffin and Korstad 1995; Isaac, Street, and Knapp 1994; Trumpy 2008; Uehara 2001), the analyst decomposes a narrative or hypothetical explanation into its component actions. The causal effect of each action on each and every subsequent action constitutes a separate
hypothesis (Griffin 1993; Heise 1989). Each hypothesis thus poses an “objectively possible”
counterfactual question – would the subsequent action have occurred if not for the preceding
action? In the tradition of Weber (1949), the analyst must critically and explicitly interrogate the
counterfactual to make a plausible causal attribution. A much more stringent criterion than
correlation, counterfactual methods of attributing causality have become standard in sociology
and a variety of social science disciplines in recent decades (Hall 2004; Fearon 1991; Heckman
2000; Lebow 2010; Manski 1995; Morgan and Winship 2007; Pearl 2000; Rubin 2005). The
ETHNO computer program facilitates organization and systematic consideration of this dense
web of hypotheses, as well as explicit presentation of the results of analysis (Griffin 1993; Heise
1989). Interaction effects proposed by general theory are also considered. Theoretically guided
application of ESA constitutes a formal method of theory testing through historical case study.
For an extended methodological discussion see the methodological appendix.

Data
The most comprehensive coverage of the public actions and statements of Black Anti-
colonialists is found in the Black Press, especially the Chicago Defender. The archives of the
NAACP provide more detail for the largest and most influential black political organization of
the period, containing countless memos, meeting notes, correspondence with other black political
organizations and with the Truman administration. I have also garnered some valuable insights
on Black Anti-colonialist actions from organizational newsletters New Africa and the Crisis,
including transcribed speeches and interviews. Memoirs from Truman, Clark Clifford, Walter
White, W.E.B. Du Bois, Paul Robeson, and Eleanor Roosevelt provide some insight as well,
although retrospective accounts always need to be handled cautiously.
The *New York Times* provides extensive detailed coverage of most of the public actions of the Truman administration, but often is of little use in specifying the intentions that underlie these actions. Fortunately, extensive documentation of the internal deliberations of the Truman Administration is available from the Harry S. Truman Library. These documents illuminate the deliberations that consumed the administration outside of public view and are invaluable in the analysis of the reasoning and competing pressures behind specific administration actions.

**Hypotheses Specification**

To probe rival explanations of Truman’s adoption of civil rights advocacy using a theoretically guided application of ESA, the next step is to specify hypotheses for testing by decomposing each explanation into its component actions. Table 1-1 identifies eight key Black Anti-colonialist actions ($BAC_{1-8}$) and eight key Truman Administration actions ($T_{1-8}$) for 1946, the year Truman adopted civil rights advocacy.

[“Insert Table 1-1 About Here”]

First, I identified actions by Truman in 1946 constituting unprecedented measures of civil rights advocacy.\(^{17}\) Second, I identified key actions of Black Anti-colonialist insurgency in 1946. These included all large\(^{18}\) public protests against lynching framed in foreign policy terms, all

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\(^{17}\) Over the course of his presidency, Truman’s civil rights advocacy exceeded that of any President since reconstruction. 1946 was the year that the Truman administration switched course from general quiescence on civil rights to adoption of a strong pro-civil rights stance culminating with creation of the PCCR. The measures of civil rights advocacy identified here are unprecedented in the sense that they exceeded previous civil rights advocacy by the Truman Administration as it changed course in the crucial year of 1946. Truman’s strongest measures of civil rights advocacy overall came later.

\(^{18}\) More than 50 people.
efforts to institutionalize Black Anti-colonialism as part of a Third Party, and all reported meetings between Black Anti-colonialists and the Truman Administration. I included the full population of observed actions of the types specified in the analysis.

To compile these observations for analysis, I combed two primary sources, the Chicago Defender and the New York Times, as well as the secondary literature (Berman 1970; Lawson 1976; Gardner 2003; McCoy and Ruetten 1973; Plummer 1996; Layton 2000; Dudziak 2000; Borstelmann 2001; Anderson 2003; Lauren 1988; Von Eschen 1997; and McCullough 1992). Further, the rival explanations of Truman’s civil rights advocacy attribute different roles to emergent Cold War pressures, and the Progressive Challenge, so those are included in the Event Structure Analysis as well.

Having identified the key actions for analysis, I then input the label for each into ETHNO, and temporally ordered them. I then analyzed each hypothesis in turn as prompted by ETHNO. See the methodological appendix for further discussion and detail.

**Findings**

This section presents the findings from the ESA. The full results are reported in Table 1-2 and key findings explicated below.

[*Insert Table 1-2 About Here*]

Truman did not suddenly create the President’s Committee on Civil Rights (hereafter PCCR). My analysis shows progressive involvement of the Truman administration in public civil rights advocacy leading up to the creation of the PCCR on December 5, 1946. Over the course of 1946, I found four significant developments in administration actions. First, in March, in a departure from the administration’s previous silence, Truman instructed the Attorney General to handle inquiries and reassure the public about lynching ($T_1$). Second, in July, Truman told the
Attorney General to hold a press conference denouncing lynching and to initiate investigations into killings in Columbia, TN ($T_2$). Third, in September, Truman himself met with two anti-lynching delegations, one led by Paul Robeson and the other by Walter White, and proposed creation of the PCCR ($T_3$, $T_4$, $T_5$). Fourth, Truman took active steps to create the PCCR in December ($T_6$, $T_7$, $T_8$). For purposes of presentation, I group results of the counterfactual analysis by these four developments.

*Truman instructions to Attorney General Clark, March 1946 ($T_1$)*

On February 26, 1946, a black woman and her son got into an argument with a white radio repair man in Columbia, Tennessee, sparking a sequence leading to the mobilization of the Tennessee National Guard and the arrest of 70 black people. Once imprisoned, police machine-gunned two of the captives to death (Zangrando 1980:172-3; McCoy and Ruetten 1973:44).

The NAACP mobilized a political response. They sent lawyers to Columbia to investigate the killing. Walter White wired President Truman about the incident and called Attorney General Tom Clark. Thurgood Marshall, special counsel of the NAACP and future Supreme Court justice, compared lynching to fascism and told the press that the killing of two blacks by police in jail was like “the action of the German storm troopers.” Truman responded by assigning Clark to handle the matter, referring all inquiries to him. A Truman aid wrote Clark instructing him to assure the public “that the federal government is doing all it can in order to protect civil rights.”

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20 D.K. Niles to Tom Clark, March 6, 1946 in Truman Papers, HSTL.
Were Truman’s public assurances of federal efforts on civil rights simply a response to emerging Cold War pressures? Or were Black Anti-colonialist actions necessary to his response? Would Truman have ordered Clark to assure the public (T1) if the NAACP had not mobilized to condemn American racial policy and assert Federal responsibility for redress (BAC1)?

The NAACP had their lawyers investigate the killings locally, publicly sent formal petitions to both President Truman and Attorney General Clark, framed the police killing of two blacks in jail as “worthy of Nazis,” made calls to their press contacts, and sent press releases to them. The results were stark as can be seen in the change in coverage of the incident by the New York Times. In initial coverage of the incident on February 27, the Times reported the incident as a public disorder and street fight, involving both whites and blacks, many inebriated. But on March 2, the Times reported the NAACP’s protest, putting their frame as the sub-header: “NAACP Tells Truman Shooting of 2 by Tennessee Troopers in Jail was Worthy of Nazis.”21 If the NAACP had not acted, there is good reason to believe the Times would not have reported the police killing. In all, 56 American blacks were lynched between June 1945 and September 1946.22 But this was the first lynching reported by the Times during that period. Further, Truman’s instructions specifically responded to NAACP charges, seeking to reassure the public.

Truman’s actions in response to the killing hardly constituted full-blown civil rights advocacy, but rather a mild preliminary indication of some movement on the issue by the Presidency. Nonetheless, we can reasonably conclude that if the NAACP had not acted to

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22 Cited in Duberman 1988: 305.
investigate, frame, and publicize the killing (BAC), Truman would not have responded as he did.

_Clark public statements and Federal investigation July, 1946 (T2)_

After stabbing Barney Hester, his white employer, Roger Malcolm was arrested. He was bailed out on July 25 by a white farmer who said he wanted Malcolm to work his fields. Malcolm, his wife Dorothy, his friend George Dorsey – recently returned to Georgia after five years in the Army – and George’s wife Mae all got in the farmer’s car to take the job. Dorothy was seven months pregnant. According to the farmer, a mob surrounded the car at a wooden bridge over the Apalachee River. He said the white mob originally didn’t plan to harm the women, but one of them recognized a member of the mob. The farmer said he didn’t recognize anyone. The sheriff found the four mutilated bodies by the river later that day.23

Hundreds of members of the National Association of Colored Women from across the country set up a week long picket in front of the White House. Their protest pressured Truman to take a stand, couching lynching as antithetical to democracy. Max Yergan, Director of the Council on African Affairs led a march of more than one thousand protestors from the Washington Union Terminal to the White House and criticized Truman’s lack of action. The black National Newspaper Publishers Association called on Truman to enact anti-lynching legislation. Organized labor supported the protests. James Carey, Secretary Treasurer of the CIO wrote Truman requesting Federal action on lynching. Labor Party Representative Vito Marcantonio of New York, an ally of Wallace and an important Progressive, publicly asked President Truman to intervene. The Negro Publishers’ Association telegraphed Truman

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requesting a Federal anti-lynching law. The American Council on Race Relations, the Civil Rights Congress, and the NAACP each offered rewards for information leading to the arrest and conviction of the killers.²⁴

Attorney General Clark announced that the President was horrified and that he was launching a Federal investigation. The Truman administration’s public condemnation and investigation of the lynching had political costs given widespread defense of Jim Crow and states’ rights by Southern Democrats, Truman’s core constituency in 1946. Why would Truman turn against those interests? Was he motivated simply by mounting macro-structural pressures? Or did Black Anti-colonialist actions influence him?

More specifically, would Clark have held a press conference denouncing the lynchings, announced that the President was horrified, and launched an investigation (T₂) if each of 5 preceding BAC actions had not occurred? For the first four actions, there is reason to suspect cumulative influence, but I could find no evidence that the NAACP’s action on lynching in March, or 3rd Party efforts by black political leaders had a direct effect. The one BAC action that did appear directly causal was the widespread mobilization protesting the lynchings in late July (BAC₅).

Attorney General Clark attributed the public character of the Administration response to the protest pressure. The attorney general reported that, due to the overwhelming outcry from labor, veterans, religious, civic, and black political organizations, “I am therefore making public” the Federal investigation.²⁵ Further, Clark’s statement to the press echoed the protestors’ theme


that the lynching was a national disgrace and “an affront to decent Americanism.” If black insurgents had not targeted Truman in widespread protests (BAC₃), it is hard to imagine the Truman administration breaking with Presidential precedent and constituent interests to publicly condemn the lynching and launch a Federal investigation.

The evidence also provides some support for the interaction hypothesis that the Progressive Challenge provided the political opportunity crucial to this effect. Most of the important political leaders who vocally supported the July protests, such as Corey and Marcantonio, were Progressives involved in preliminary exploration of a 3rd Party split in 1948. For fourteen years, the Democratic Party had dominated national politics. Democrats had won not only the Presidency, but congressional majorities in both House and Senate, in every national election from 1932 on. As late as February of 1946, 55% polled said they would vote Democrat. But as the Progressive Challenge mounted in 1946, the Democratic coalition began to unravel. As early as May 1946, 24% of registered Democrats said they supported Wallace for President in 1948 (compared to only 61% for Truman). That month a whopping 91% of registered black Democratic voters supported Wallace over Truman for President in 1948. By July 1946, public opinion showed support for Democrats slipping generally, with only 49% of respondents saying they would vote Democrat for President compared with 51% Republican in a two-way race.²⁶

In this context, the July Black Anti-colonialist actions linking lynching to the Progressive Challenge threatened Truman’s Democratic coalition.

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Truman meets with White and Robeson delegations (T₃, T₄, & T₅)

In 1946 Black Anti-colonialists mobilized in various alliances to promote an anti-colonial and anti-racist 3rd Party. These activities threatened Truman’s fragile grasp on the black vote, and secured racial reform as a central plank of the broader Progressive Challenge.

A key leader of this effort was Paul Robeson, the most acclaimed black actor in the United States, and President of the Council on African Affairs (CAA). In the spring, Robeson was elected co-chair of the “Win-the-Peace” organization, and, working with prominent liberals and labor leaders, convened a national conference in April 1946. Following Truman’s sponsorship of Churchill’s “Iron Curtain” speech in March of 1946, Robeson denounced “Anglo-American imperialism” (Duberman 1988) and the conference condemned Truman’s move towards Cold War policy as a desertion of both the New Deal and FDR’s foreign policy.

Building upon the momentum, Robeson and the CAA organized a rally at Madison Sq. Garden on June 6 turning out 19,000 to protest Truman’s foreign policy (Von Eschen 1997:103).

In May 1946, with an eye towards the 1946 mid-term elections, the preeminent black labor leader A. Philip Randolph organized a broad coalition of Liberals and Labor into the National Education Committee for a New Party – an effort to build public support to explore a break away from the Democratic Party and creation of a third party. The Committee called on the United States to support “the liberal democratic rights of people anywhere in the world” and linked economic and racial justice at home to anti-colonialism abroad. Randolph publicly decried the perils “of continuing the worn-out tradition of a two-party system in which neither party serves the interest of the people.”²⁷ (BAC₃)

In September, Walter White was a featured speaker at the Conference of Progressives called by the CIO, and leading liberal organizations to coordinate Progressive activity in the upcoming mid-term elections. The conferees urged crossing party lines to advance their platform, and linked extension of the New Deal and progressive domestic policy to anti-colonialist foreign policy in the tradition of Roosevelt. (BAC4)

Unsatisfied by Truman’s public response to lynching in July, black political organizations drew on the emerging Progressive networks to continue mobilizing pressure. In August, the NAACP convened forty civil rights, labor, and other progressive organizations as the National Emergency Committee Against Mob Violence. They mobilized over fifteen thousand to protest in both New York and D.C. (McCoy and Ruetten 1973: 46). Robeson and DuBois joined with various black organizations and influential liberals to launch the “American Crusade Against Lynching,” linking lynching to foreign affairs and the plight of domestic labor. Robeson spoke at the fateful28 liberal-labor rally on September 12, featuring Henry Wallace. Robeson declared that “The leaders of this country can call out the Army and Navy to stop the railroad workers, and to stop the maritime workers – why can’t they stop the lynchers?”29

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28 I believe I am the first to note that this Robeson speech was at the same event where Wallace gave the speech that led to the rupture with Truman. The association illustrates the threat Robeson posed to Truman in 1946 well before his highly publicized campaigning for Wallace, and helps understand Truman’s response to Robeson at their September 23 meeting.

Following a protest on September 23, 1946, Robeson led a delegation to the White House for a scheduled meeting with the President (T3). Robeson read a formal declaration to Truman asking for passage of Federal anti-lynching legislation. Truman interrupted and said that now was not an opportune time to propose such legislation. Harper Sibley, President of the United Council of Church Women, said that the American government’s refusal to punish lynchers was inconsistent with the Nuremberg principles. Truman responded that the United States and Great Britain were “the last refuge of freedom in the world.” Robeson disagreed and said that the British Empire was “one of the greatest enslavers of human beings.” Robeson asserted that if the United States could not stop the lynching, then foreign intervention would be appropriate. Truman abruptly ended the meeting. The Black Press, including such papers as the Journal and Guide and the Amsterdam News widely reported Truman’s reception of Robeson and the American Crusade as disgraceful. The Chicago Defender ran a cartoon called “Pointing Out the Resemblance” depicting Robeson instructing a defensive Truman on the similarities between Southern lynch law and Nazi fascism.

Four days earlier, Truman met with another anti-lynching delegation led by Walter White (T3). That delegation – including influential representatives of the labor-liberal coalition of which White was a part such as CIO secretary James Carey, Boris Shiskin of the AFL – and bearing a telegram of support from Eleanor Roosevelt who could not attend in person – held a

30 While some, e.g. Duberman 1988:674, claim that Robeson took the delegation to the White House unscheduled, this claim is contradicted by “To Open Crusade Against Lynching” New York Times September 23, 1946 p.16. See also McCoy and Ruetten 1973 p.48 fn 53 citing a letter from Robeson to Truman aide Niles arranging the meeting the previous week.

very different meeting with Truman. The statement presented to Truman by the delegation also connected lynching to foreign relations, but in a different way: “Unchecked mob violence can do more to injure our country at home and abroad than any other single evil,” and is “threatening to engulf all America.” The meeting was different from Robeson’s meeting with Truman in two important respects. First, White brought influential allies to the meeting from the labor-liberal coalition that was challenging Truman’s leadership. Second, White’s delegation avoided discussion of colonialism, and was careful not to imply any challenge to Truman on foreign policy concerning support of the British or the escalating polarization with the Soviets. Instead of denouncing U.S. policy, the White delegation suggested that lynching was an embarrassment to the U.S. internationally and ought to be addressed.  

At the meeting, Truman proposed creation of the PCCR (T₄), and White eagerly supported the idea. On September 26, the press reported a leaked story that Truman was considering formation of a commission to investigate lynching.  

And in October, White reported to the NAACP board of directors that he was in discussion with the President about the matter and that Truman had promised that the commission would be authorized by October 10. Yet by the time of the mid-term elections in November, nothing had been done.  

The 3 outcomes under consideration in this section are Truman’s personal meetings with the anti-lynching delegations (T₃, T₅), and Truman’s proposal of the PCCR to White (T₄). Truman had broken Presidential precedent to engage national race policy. Why?


34 White statement to the NAACP board October 1946. See McCoy and Ruetten 48 and fn.
The anti-lynching mobilizations were clearly necessary. If not for the coalition anti-lynching campaigns led by Robeson and White in September (BAC6, BAC7), Truman would have had no reason to invite delegations from those campaigns to meet (T3, T5). The high profile anti-lynching mobilizations in late July (BAC5) helped forge the September coalitions, so it is safe to say that these were also necessary. And of course if not for Truman’s meeting with the White delegation, he would have never proposed the PCCR to White (T4).

The effects of the black 3rd Party efforts, and the interaction effects with the Progressive Challenge, are more complex. Following his rupture with Wallace, Truman was deeply concerned about the Progressive Challenge. On September 20, 1946, Truman wrote his mother and sister explaining: “I had to fire Henry today,” and the Progressives “are having conniption fits.” Top Truman advisor Clark Clifford explains that Truman’s conflict with and firing of Wallace cemented Wallace as a Progressive challenger “which almost cost Truman the election.” Truman later recalled “I realized that the Progressives would cost me votes.”


Two aspects of Truman’s behavior in the September meetings suggest that this is exactly what he hoped to accomplish. First, the two delegations with which Truman scheduled meetings were representative of the two major alliance efforts by black political leaders at the time. Truman could have easily met with organizational delegations from the NAACP or the CAA, but the fact that he scheduled meetings with broad Progressive delegations instead suggests that he...
was concerned with re-consolidating the Democratic coalition. Second, Truman’s differential treatment of the delegations was also instructive. The composition of the delegations may have been important here. Robeson, although he had close ties with a number of Progressive organizations, brought mostly representatives of black political organizations to the meeting. This may have been, in part, because Robeson’s non-black political allies were further to the left than White’s, and most already strongly opposed Truman. In contrast, White’s delegation, while critical of Truman’s policies, were truly on the fence, and could be persuaded to support the Democratic Party in the mid-term elections and Truman in 1948. The Conference of Progressives White helped organize was called by the CIO and in the end actively avoided direct advocacy of a 3rd Party.

Truman’s differential treatment was likely also a response to the different kind of proposals the two delegations advanced. The Robeson delegation explicitly linked lynching to colonialism and condemned Britain. Truman, despite any earlier doubts, in pushing Wallace out of the cabinet in September explicitly broke from FDR’s foreign policy, embracing an Anglo-American alliance against the Soviets. So Robeson, by taking a strong anti-British stand similar to the speech which Wallace made on September 12, was not offering Truman any means to heal the rift with Progressives. The fact that Truman rudely dismissed the delegation shortly before the mid-term election, despite Robeson’s unparalleled fame and stature among blacks, suggests that Truman had not acted principally out of immediate interest in appealing to blacks. The news coverage of the Robeson meeting in almost all of the Black Press was extremely critical of Truman.

Conversely, Truman’s reception of the White delegation demonstrates his interest in re-consolidating long-term political support in the face of the Progressive Challenge. White’s
decision to avoid discussion of colonialism was strategic. The previous year White had condemned U.S. support of the British and French position on colonialism at the UN.\textsuperscript{36} But in September 1946, White’s delegation presented lynching as a threat to America, and its redress as a boon to America, one which he was eager to work with Truman to address: “Unchecked mob violence can do more to injure our country at home and abroad than any other single evil.” This was the kind of political message Truman was looking for. It would allow him to re-consolidate the Democratic coalition, and redress the anti-lynching mobilizations, while advancing his broader policy agenda.

In all instances of BAC influence found here, the interaction effect of the Progressive Challenge is evident. Black Anti-colonialist mobilization was so threatening to Truman because it seized the opportunity created by the Progressive Challenge, making racial policy central to the general crisis his administration faced. By targeting Truman, mobilizing for a 3\textsuperscript{rd} Party, and linking domestic race policy to Progressive foreign policy aims, Black Anti-colonial practices made common cause with Progressives. Without the broader Progressive Challenge, Black Anti-colonial efforts to organize a 3\textsuperscript{rd} Party would have appeared laughable. And without broad Progressive support, Truman likely would have ignored the September anti-lynching mobilizations as Presidents had ignored so many anti-lynching protests before. As Berman suggests (1970:51), if Wallace had not fallen out with Truman a few days earlier, it seems quite likely that Truman would not have proposed the PCCR to White.

So how do these events bear on the hypothesis that Truman’s adoption of civil rights advocacy was caused by macro-structural changes, especially emergent Cold War foreign policy pressures (CW)? In an indirect way, the conflict over Truman’s emergent Cold War policy was

an important background factor in these events. The Cold War helps set up the contours of the Progressive Challenge generally, with Truman foreign policy becoming a major point of contention. But direct support for civil rights did not come through the State Department at this time under white supremacist Secretary of State Byrnes. Cold War effects on Truman’s proposal of the PCCR were mediated by the Progressive Challenge, and its interaction with Black Anti-colonialist mobilization. I could find no direct effect.

*Mid-term election, Monday night club, and Truman forms the PCCR (T₆, T₇, T₈)*

On November 5, 1946, the Democratic Party lost both the House and Senate to the Republicans for the first time since before the Great Depression. Republicans called on Truman to step down as a “lame duck” President. Truman saw that he could not retain the Presidency in 1948 continuing to cater to conservatives. According to top Truman aide Clark Clifford, “The turning point in the battle between the liberals and the conservatives for President Truman’s heart and mind came unexpectedly; as it often occurs in politics, a major disaster led to the turnaround. It was the first postwar, post-Roosevelt election, the Congressional elections of 1946.”

By the 1946 mid-term election, Truman had replaced most of the New Dealers in the Cabinet with conservatives. Immediately after the Republican victory, Truman gave the go ahead to a group of liberal sub-cabinet members to form a secret “Monday-Night Group,” to consider crafting of a new approach to policy. On December 5, 1946, President Truman issued Executive Order 9808, creating the President’s Committee on Civil Rights (PCCR).

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Would Truman have formed the PCCR if not for Black Anti-colonialist actions? Black Anti-colonialist influence is clearly evident in Truman’s appointments to the committee. Of 15 committee members Truman appointed, 8 were close allies of Walter White and the NAACP: three were members of the delegation led by Walter White to discuss lynching with Truman on September 19th; two more were NAACP activists; and another three were recommended for appointment by White. Once Truman formed the PCCR, he hired White as a consultant to it.39 This is not to suggest that only the actions of White and his allies were of concern to Truman. To the contrary, those of Robeson, Randolph, and other groupings may have been of greater concern. But White represented the part of the black insurgent challenge – and was tied to the branch of the Progressive threat – that Truman could work with. And he did.

How important was the interaction effect of the Progressive Challenge to this influence of Black Anti-colonialists on Truman’s formation of the PCCR? Here, the timing is revealing. While Truman discussed forming a PCCR with White at their meeting in September and promised to create it by early October, he did not make good on the promise. Instead, he waited until after the mid-term defeat. If the election had gone differently and the Democrats had won handily, Truman might not have followed through with forming the PCCR at all. Or he might have made a less concerted effort to support it. Clark Clifford’s candid accounts of the dynamics inside the administration, evidence that Truman approved formation of a liberal strategy team – the Monday Night Club – in the wake of the election, and the far reaching change in his support of liberal policies, all suggest that Truman’s formation and support of the PCCR was not an isolated action, but part of a concerted policy shift toward not only civil rights, but liberalism generally.

It is conceivable that without any Black Anti-colonialist mobilization, in the wake of the mid-term elections, Truman might have approved the Monday Night Club, and turned towards liberalism. But this does not mean that the Progressive Challenge would have independently yielded the PCCR. Most Southern Democrats, Truman’s core constituency, vehemently opposed civil rights. If Black Anti-colonialists had not embarrassed Truman on lynching, and threatened to split the Democratic Party, there is every reason to believe that Truman would have marginalized consideration of civil rights for blacks as had FDR and previous Presidents.

In summary, the results of the counterfactual analysis for the actions discussed in this section are as follows. First, I could find no evidence that any BAC actions were crucial to Truman’s approval of the Monday Night Club (T₆). While black insurgents may have been a consideration for Truman, it is not clear that – had black insurgents failed to take any particular action or group of actions – he would not have approved the Monday Night Club. I also couldn’t find evidence of the direct importance of the March anti-lynching protests (BAC₁) for Truman’s work with White (T₇) or creation of the PCCR in December (T₈). If that early campaign had not happened, it is still possible that the subsequent events would have. The remaining counterfactuals all yield a common conclusion. While it is impossible to truly separate out the exact effects of one anti-lynching campaign or another 3rd Party effort, it is clear that the cumulative effect of the anti-lynching campaigns (BAC₅, BAC₆, BAC₇) and 3rd Party efforts by black insurgents in 1946 (BAC₂, BAC₃, BAC₄) were decisive in compelling Truman to work with White and create the PCCR in December. If black insurgents had not enacted these Black Anti-colonialist practices, Truman would not have created the PCCR.

Similarly, the analysis confirms the overarching importance of the Progressive Challenge as a political opportunity for this insurgent influence. As above, it appears that the conflict over
Truman’s emergent Cold War policy was important as a background factor which, in part, delineated the contours of the Progressive Challenge. But I could find no evidence that Cold War pressure was more directly crucial to Truman’s creation of the PCCR. In other words, the influence of Cold War macro-structural pressures was mediated by domestic political cleavages, and the Black Anti-colonialist practices which leveraged them, to compel Truman to create the PCCR.

*The End of Black Anti-colonialism*

Rather than fostering black insurgency, as Truman adopted civil rights advocacy and created strong alliances with Walter White, A. Philip Randolph, Max Yergan, and other key black leaders, Black Anti-colonialism was repressed and destroyed.

When DuBois vocally supported the Wallace Progressive 3rd Party campaign in 1948 on anti-colonial grounds, Walter White, now working closely with Truman, expelled DuBois from the NAACP. Max Yergan the director of the BAC Council on African Affairs (CAA) of which Paul Robeson was President, also made an alliance with Truman and attempted to take over the CAA. The battle over control of CAA raged from February-September of 1948.

Once Truman consolidated the Cold War Liberal alliance and beat back the Progressive challenge in the 1948 elections, his administration repressed the remaining BAC leadership. The Federal Government seized Robeson and DuBois’s passports and forbade them from traveling internationally. CAA was charged under the Foreign Registration Act as a foreign agent for its relationship with the South African, Kenyan, and Nigerian independence movements. Alphaeus Hunton, executive director of the CAA and a dedicated anti-colonialist, was imprisoned and eventually the CAA was crushed, unable to keep up with court costs. Du Bois was indicted in 1950 and prosecuted for his work with the Peace Information Center opposing the Korean War.
Important Black Anti-colonialist organizations, such as the CAA, collapsed, but those that remained, such as the NAACP, deserted both their anti-colonial ideas and the insurgent political practices of which they were a part. The Black Press followed. And for the next 8 years there was little progress on civil rights.

**Discussion**

Truman retrospectively explained his creation of the President’s Committee on Civil Rights as the honorable response to lynching (1955 v.2: 180). But despite widespread lynching, and steady political jockeying, as Fligstein and McAdam point out (2012: 124), Presidential tolerance of racial caste subordination prevailed in the United States from the end of reconstruction until Truman adopted civil rights advocacy in 1946. Neither individual heroism, nor normal electoral political calculation, is sufficient to explain Truman’s break from his own racist past and all Presidential precedent. Black Anti-colonialist insurgency was essential.

By threatening Truman’s efforts to hold together FDR’s Democratic Party coalition and by challenging his budding Cold War policy in alliance with the Progressives, Black Anti-colonialists compelled Truman to adopt civil rights advocacy. The ESA analysis is summarized in Diagram 1-3 below.

[*Insert Diagram 1-3 About Here*]

The analysis shows that at almost every conjuncture in 1946, when Truman took steps towards breaking the longstanding Presidential silence on civil rights, he did so in direct response to Black Anti-colonialist practice. Further, overwhelming evidence reveals that the opportunity provided by the Progressive Challenge was crucial to this effect. The one exception, Truman’s approval of the Monday Night Club, helps clarify the general tendency. Truman may well have approved the Monday Night Club in response to the Progressive Challenge and the
disastrous 1946 mid-term elections without any Black Anti-colonialist pressure. But in that case, the Monday Night Club would not have emphasized civil rights, eventually risking the break with the Southern Democrats as it did. Truman might have championed Cold War liberalism generally as a response to the Progressive Challenge without any black insurgent pressure. But he would not have made civil rights advocacy a central plank if not for the Black Anti-colonialist insurgency.

Prevailing analyses view Truman’s civil rights advocacy as determined by macro-structural, and especially Cold War, pressures (Dudziak 2000; Fligstein and McAdam 2012; Layton 2000; McAdam 1982, 1999; Plummer 1996). Cold War pressures did constitute important background factors. But Cold War effects on Truman’s race policy in 1946 were indirect, mediated by the Progressive Challenge. Even more to the point, at every conjuncture Progressive and Cold War forces proved insufficient to explain Truman’s adoption of civil rights advocacy. Despite Cold War pressures generally and the opportunity afforded by the Progressive Challenge in specific, without Black Anti-colonialist insurgent practice, Truman would not have advocated for civil rights.

**Conclusions**

Eager to explain the upsurge of the Civil Rights Movement, sociological studies foundational to and defending the political opportunity perspective explained black insurgency as dependent on macro-structural shifts (Jenkins et al 2003; McAdam 1982; Oberschall 1973 chpt.6; Piven and Cloward 1977 chpt.4). These accounts lump various forms of black insurgency together and assume that opportunities for insurgency conferred on black people as a group. Federal civil rights advocacy, inaugurated by Truman, is thus seen as conferring advantage on all

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40 This finding is consistent with Tarrow’s argument 1998:192.
forms of insurgency by blacks (see e.g. McAdam 1999: xx-xxi, 86). This view is not supported by the evidence. Alongside other liberal concessions which undermined the broader Progressive Challenge, civil rights advocacy allowed Truman to consolidate moderate black support as part of a Cold War Liberal alliance, and readily repress the Black Anti-colonialist threat. Truman’s civil rights advocacy responded to and vitiated one form of black insurgent mobilization, Black Anti-colonialism, even as it helped create the opportunity for the Civil Rights Movement that would follow.

So what do these findings reveal about how conditions affect the influence and timing of insurgency? The findings demonstrate the limitations of classic political opportunity theory and the explanatory power of theorizing opportunities for practices in three ways: First, conditions do not independently favor insurgency by a group. At stake is the question of the fundamental relationship between practice and structure (see Bourdieu 1990; Isaac 2008; Joas 1996; Sewell 1992; Swidler 1986). The classic political opportunity thesis assumes that contextual advantages for insurgency are independent from the form of practice, and confer on a group (McAdam 1982: 42). That perspective cannot explain why Federal civil rights advocacy undercut one form of black insurgency while facilitating another. Analyzing context effects requires taking insurgent practices into account.

Second, meso-level institutional cleavages mediate macro-structural effects on insurgency allowing much more precise explanation of the timing and influence of specific insurgencies. In a wide range of previous empirical tests, classic macro-structural conceptualizations of opportunity poorly predicted the timing of insurgent mobilization and influence (Goodwin 2012; Meyer 2004). Of course macro-structural conditions may loosely facilitate or constrain insurgency, and macro-structural shifts may help destabilize
institutionalized social roles. In this sense, the classic hypothesis that the Cold War helped create the opportunity for black insurgency makes a lot of sense. The analysis showed that the Cold War was an important background factor for Black Anti-colonialist influence. And the Cold War spans the period encompassing Black Anti-colonialist influence as well as the Civil Rights Movement. But for eight years during the height of the Cold War, from 1948 to 1955, there was little black insurgency. Hypothesized macro-structural processes do not temporally correlate with these variations in the influence and extent of insurgency by blacks, let alone explain it.

For similar reasons, the political opportunity structures approach (Kitschelt 1986; Tilly 1977, 1986, 1995, 2006) cannot explain the findings. Both Black Anti-colonialist insurgency, and the very different Civil Rights insurgency, thrived in the same political regime – the mid-20th century US. Macro-structural regime-type differences cannot explain the variation in practice.

As the analysis demonstrated, the influence of Black Anti-colonialist insurgency depended specifically on the Progressive Challenge. Conceptualizing opportunity as an institutional cleavage allows much more precise explanation of the timing of insurgent influence than the classic opportunity thesis. In this sense, “opportunity for practices” constitutes a sort of proximate mechanism, extending classical opportunity theory to provide more granular and testable explanation of context effects. Macro-structural shifts, like the Cold War, can destabilize established social roles. But the effects on insurgency are mediated by meso-level institutional cleavages, like the Progressive Challenge.

Third, recognizing that opportunities confer to practices rather than groups is not just a matter of granularity or unpacking proximate mechanisms. Context effects are interactive rather than independent – opportunities determine the effects of insurgent practice rather than causing insurgency directly. By theorizing conditions as an independent cause of the form of practice, the
classic political opportunity thesis treated context as independently determinant, and obscured the creative role of insurgents. Movements adopt forms of practice for cultural as well as instrumental reasons (Clemens 1993), and insurgent practices may take advantage of institutional cleavages in unpredictable ways. It was not clear a priori that the Progressive Challenge would constitute a key opportunity for black insurgent influence until Black Anti-colonialists forged a practical alliance with Progressives. It is conceivable that other forms of black insurgent practice might have been effective in the same moment had insurgents figured out how to leverage different institutional cleavages.

In this case, theorizing opportunities for practices, and hypothesizing the importance of a specific cleavage-practice match, much more precisely specified the timing of insurgent influence than the classic opportunity thesis. Black Anti-colonialist practices garnered influence by leveraging the Progressive Challenge. At the end of WWII, Black political organizations had only modest capacity to shape policy directly. But powerful American political institutions, including much of organized labor and the New Dealers, vehemently opposed Truman’s conservative turn. It was by joining Black Freedom Struggle to one side of that institutional cleavage – the Progressive Challenge – that Black Anti-colonialist practices garnered influence. Once Truman abated the Progressive Challenge, he readily repressed Black Anti-colonialist practices.

Discovering the scope of cases to which these conclusions apply will require other studies. But given the explanatory contribution for Black Freedom Struggle, the central case upon which opportunity theory was formulated, there is reason to suspect they apply widely: At the level of a specific insurgency, looking at context alone will never deliver good predictions of movement emergence, form, or influence. Such aims are chimera. Conversely, I expect that
every insurgency sustains influence by advancing practices that draw support from one side of a broad institutional cleavage. If this theory is correct, then the ebbs and flows of any given historical insurgency should predictably follow the fortunes of a specifiable cleavage-practice relationship.
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Black Anti-colonial Actions</th>
<th>Truman Actions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Key Instances of BAC Practice 1946</td>
<td>Key steps on civil rights in 1946</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>BAC1.</strong> NAACP response to Columbia killings. March 1.</td>
<td><strong>T1.</strong> Truman instruction to Clark to handle public response to Columbia killings.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>BAC4.</strong> NAACP challenges to Democratic Party. June, September.</td>
<td><strong>T4.</strong> Truman proposes PCCR to White. September 19.</td>
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<td><strong>BAC5.</strong> Anti-Lynching Protests following Monroe lynchings. Late July.</td>
<td><strong>T5.</strong> Truman meets with Robeson delegation. September 23.</td>
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<td><strong>BAC7.</strong> American Crusade Against Lynching. September.</td>
<td><strong>T7.</strong> Truman prepares PCCR with White. September- December.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>BAC8.</strong> White and Robeson delegations meet with Truman. September.</td>
<td><strong>T8.</strong> Truman creates PCCR. December 5.</td>
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</table>
Table 1-2: Explaining Truman’s Civil Rights Advocacy
Results of the Event Structure Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>PC</th>
<th>BAC 1</th>
<th>T 1</th>
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<th>BAC 3</th>
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<th>BAC 5</th>
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Note: Results of the ESA. The Black Anti-colonialist actions and Truman actions are labeled according to Table 1-1 above. The emergent Cold War is labeled (CW) and the Progressive Challenge labeled (PC). Contents of cells display findings on direct effects, and hypothesized interaction effects. Key:

- Row action did not precede column action.
- No direct evidence that row action necessary to column action.
- Row action necessary to subsequent column action.
- Interaction effect: Progressive Challenge necessary for influence of BAC action on Truman’s subsequent action.
- No evidence of hypothesized interaction effect.
**Table 1-3:** Tabular Summary of Results of the Event Structure Analysis by General Category of Action

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<th></th>
<th>PC</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>BAC</td>
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Note: Action categories labelled as per Table 1-2.

Key:
- . No instances of row action preceded instances of column action, or autocorrelation.
- 0 No direct evidence that instances of row action necessary to any instances of column action.
- 1 At least one instance of row action necessary to every instance of column action.
- # Proportion of instances of column action which required at least one instance of row action.
- (#) Interaction effect: Proportion of instances of positive effects requiring interaction.
Diagram 1-1: Political Opportunity Thesis

Macro-structural Processes

Insurgent Influence & Mobilization by a Group
Diagram 1-2: Opportunities for Practices

Macro-structural Processes → Institutional Cleavage

Insurgent Practice

Insurgent Influence & Mobilization
**Diagram 1-3:** Summary of ESA analysis

Note: Results of the ESA collapsed by theoretical category. CW indicates Cold War, PC indicates Progressive Challenge, BAC indicates Black Anti-colonialism and TaCRA indicates Truman’s adoption of civil rights advocacy. Thick arrow indicates attribution of strong effect. Dotted arrow indicates weak support for causal attribution. No arrow indicates absence of support for direct causal attribution.
Theoretically guided application of Event Structure Analysis (ESA): A Methodological Supplement

Event Structure Analysis (hereafter ESA) is a formal method of historical analysis which combines the strengths of narrative history with those of formal sociological analysis. Unlike virtually any other method, ESA can account for temporality, contingency, and all available evidence while constructing systematic, explicit, and replicable analyses of events. ESA has proven an important method in the sociological toolkit, employed in a range of studies over the last twenty years (e.g. Brown 2000; Brueggemann and Boswell 1998; Dixon 2008; Eder and Enke1991; Griffin and Korstad 1995; Isaac, Street, and Knapp 1994; Richardson 2009; Trumpy 2008; Uehara 2001).

The classic method of applying ESA most fully explicated in print (Griffin 1993; Griffin and Korstad 1998; Heise 1989) uses informal narrative to bound events for analysis. Classic applications of ESA start with a narrative explanation of an event from which key actions for counterfactual analysis are identified. By using narrative to construct an event, classic applications of ESA open analysis of an event to both contingency and the range of available general knowledge. And comparison of events-as-event-structures, inhering their complexity, advances a novel approach to generalization. Classic applications of ESA thus tap the profound capacity of narrative to bound and compare events in all their glorious contingency and temporality. Ironically, these capacities may restrict the usage of classical applications of ESA (Griffin 2007). ESA as classically applied is well suited to rigorous probing of an expert’s narrative understanding of an event, but poorly suited to targeted testing of general theories of prior concern, and thus “does not answer questions analysts might wish to ask of their data” (Griffin 2007: 5).
Conversely, many sociological analyses—and almost all variable based analyses—begin with general theoretical questions, and empirical indicators identified as representative of general theoretical concepts. Such “theoretically guided” identification of empirical indicators allows the analyst to use the empirical analysis to probe general theories of prior concern, or to test one general theory’s explanatory power against rival theories.

By using general theory to identify actions for analysis like other sociological methods, a number of important studies have employed theoretically guided applications of ESA—harnessing the capacity to formally analyze qualitative data to the standard sociological task of theory testing (Brown 2000; Dixon 2008; Eder and Elke 1991). Such theoretically guided applications of ESA serve as a complement to classic applications of ESA. They fill an important methodological gap in our discipline, using qualitative case study and the power of “deep analogy” (Stinchcombe 1978) to systematically test and refine theory of prior concern.

While important studies have applied ESA in theoretically guided ways, such application has not been fully explicated in print. Accommodating efforts at general theory building, Heise did include the capacity to assign general theoretical category labels to specific actions in the original ETHNO computer program (see Corsaro and Heise 1990; Griffin and Korstad 1998). Griffin reports extensively exploring theoretically guided applications of ESA (Griffin 2014). And Griffin and Heise began explicating such applications in a methodological paper and book project, but never published either (Heise 2013). I believe that despite widespread interest by qualitative sociologists in
formal testing of general theory, this lack of explication has obscured ESA’s capacity for theory testing, limiting its use.

For these more general reasons as well as the immediate purpose of clarifying the method employed above, this methodological supplement serves to explicate theoretically guided applications of ESA. With reference to the analysis above, the supplement begins with a discussion of ESA, how it is classically applied, and why it is useful. This is followed with an explanation of the differences between theoretically guided applications of ESA and classic applications of ESA, and an explication of how to apply ESA in a theoretically guided manner. In conclusion, the analytic strengths and limitations of theoretically guided applications of ESA are discussed.

**Event Structure Analysis (ESA)**

With Event Structure Analysis (ESA), Griffin (1993; see also Heise 1989) builds upon the strengths of historical narrative explanation in two ways: first, he follows Weber (1949[1905]) in developing and testing substantive explanations of particular historical outcomes through rigorous counterfactual analysis; second he applies systematic techniques to probe an explanation of a complex sequence of events and develop replicable and criticizable analysis.

Griffin constructs causal explanations of concrete actions through counterfactual analysis. Because the causes of historical events are so complex, they cannot be entirely explained by general theories or subsumed under causal laws. Instead, particular facts can be conceptually isolated and abstracted from a complex historical context. Then more precise questions can be considered about how particular alterations of those particular
facts would have changed the historical outcomes, a procedure called “counterfactual” analysis.

Implicitly, any explanation of how one action caused another relies on counterfactual reasoning. Elster writes that what distinguishes causation from correlation is the implied “statement that if the cause had not occurred, then the effect would not have occurred” (1978:185). Lebow writes: “Counterfactuals are fundamental to all theories and interpretations. If we hypothesize that x caused y, we assume that y would not have happened in the absence of x” (2000:561). In the last 20 years, social scientists have increasingly sought to make the counterfactual aspects of their causal analyses explicit. In an influential article, Fearon shows how counterfactuals operate implicitly in all non-experimental hypothesis testing in the social sciences. “Any non-experimental research that makes causal claims,” writes Fearon, “be it of the large-N or small-N variety, must confront counterfactuals in the form of key assumptions or in the use of hypothetical comparison cases” (Fearon 1991:194).

Counterfactual analysis has become central to a variety of disciplines in recent decades. Counterfactual methods have become common in statistics (Rubin 1990; 2005), computer science (Pearl 1995; 2000), and economics (Heckman 1989; 2000; Manski 1999; 2003). Counterfactual theories of causality, following Lewis’s (1973) seminal article on causation, have displaced regularity based metaphysics in philosophy (Collins, Hall, and Paul 2004). And counterfactual analysis has become increasingly important in sociology, psychology, and political science. Morgan and Winship explain: “The counterfactual model for observational data analysis has achieved success in the past two decades in the social sciences because it .... [provides] a framework in which to ask
carefully constructed “what-if” questions that lay bare the limitations of observational
data and the need to clearly articulate assumptions grounded in theory that is believable”

By posing counterfactual questions, causal inferences can be interrogated to
evaluate whether a particular action was causally important. Posing a counterfactual is
not a matter of loose fantasy, but requires that the analyst pose “objectively possible”
alternatives to critically interrogate hypothetical explanations (Weber 1949:175). ¹
Objectively possible counterfactuals: start from the real world; do not unwind the past but
instead pose immediate counter-facts; and do not “disturb” what is otherwise understood
(Hawthorn 1993:158). ²

Griffin (1993: 1100-4) – following Weber (1949), Thompson (1978), and others –
suggests that counterfactual questions of this type are best answered when the analyst
synthesizes both general and historically specific knowledge. According to Griffin, in

¹ Weber (1949) holds up counterfactual attribution of causality, and the concept of causality generally, as
inhering in analysis, not having any reality ontologically. He asserts not only that the world is infinitely
complex and thus not analyzable in full, but holds out the possibility that all history is predetermined in its
totality, and thus “causality” has no ontological meaning. Thus causal attribution inheres in analysis, and
an ontological view of counterfactual analysis in the social sciences. Instead, he views social science as
necessarily adhering to what Lewis (1973) has called a “metalinguistic” theory of counterfactuals. Elster
argues, “Restricting ourselves to the worlds where the laws of nature, even if different from ours, are
deterministic in form, there can be no branching off at all. When the historian, however, makes a
counterfactual assertion, I submit that it is intended as, and must be analysed as, a statement about what
could have happened (for all that we believe) to the real past. This implies the need for a genetic theory of
counterfactuals, and for a theory of assertability rather than truth.... Instead of looking for counterparts to
the actual worlds or to individuals in it, we must interpret counterfactuals about collective or individual
actors as statements about them.” (1978:218) I use counterfactuals in this tradition but with a more open
view of history. While it is possible to view history as completely predetermined, as Weber points out, it is
also reasonable to think of concrete actions as affecting others. Counterfactual analysis is then a tool for
isolating interactions from the infinite complexity of determination and getting as precise as possible in
attributing causal relations. This causal attribution itself then underwrites an interpretive process which
influences further analysis – and further action – whether history is viewed as predetermined or contested.
² This approach to counterfactuals builds on Weber’s theory of social action. Some texts (Lebow 2010;
Ferguson 2000) use counterfactuals more loosely for the purposes of stimulating broad historical
imagination rather than the tight processual analysis that I am concerned with here. See Tetlock and Belkin
(1996) for a typology of five styles of counterfactual argumentation.
order to evaluate the effects of one historically specific action on another, and assess counterfactually whether the antecedent action was a necessary cause of the subsequent action, the analyst must draw on both specific knowledge of the actors involved, and their specific concerns at the moment, and also on more general comparison to comparable actions by comparable actors in a similar time and place. Tetlock and Belkin (1996) provide an extended discussion of the criteria for assessing a counterfactual, reviewing a wide range of applications of counterfactual analysis. Like Griffin, they argue that counterfactual attributions of causality should be assessed based on both specific and general knowledge, unpacking the intention of actors in the moment, and comparing to analogous previous actions.

For example, in assessing the causal effects of Black Anti-colonial action on Truman’s adoption of civil rights advocacy, I considered both general patterns of past responses to lynching and specific evidence regarding behind the scenes political calculation within the administration. I synthesized a wide range of evidence using diverse forms of reasoning including analysis of the timing of action, and cultural interpretation (Griffin 1993:1100). Timing often provides important evidence. The fact that the Truman administration ignored earlier lynchings but in early March acknowledged the Columbia killings following large scale public mobilization by the NAACP is highly suggestive. Emulation of particular ideas, such as the New York Times changing its story on the Columbia killings to quote language from the NAACP press release in its headline, also shows influence. Direct statements by social actors attributing causal influence can also provide important evidence. Attorney General Clark’s statement that the character of Truman response to the Monroe Lynching in July was due to the
extent of public outcry strongly supports causal attribution. It is important to handle all statements by participants in events skeptically as such statements can serve various motivations. This is especially true of retrospective accounts made long after the events described. A large number of intervening motivations, plus distorted memory, make retrospective statements difficult to interpret (Golden 1992). Sometimes non-verbal cues provide the strongest evidence for interpretation. Truman’s rude dismissal of Robeson, coupled with his initiation of a working relation with the White delegation, shows he was more interested in forging a working alliance than immediate press coverage.

Thus, in the tradition of Weber (1949), ESA uses explicit counterfactual reasoning as a method for analyzing the causal relation between two specific actions. But which actions should be analyzed? Griffin embeds counterfactual reasoning within the technique of ESA to systematically probe the relationship between all the actions in a hypothetical explanation. In short, he identifies all the key actions in a hypothetical narrative explanation and systematically conducts counterfactual analysis between each action and every other action. This method allows the analyst to construct explicit, rigorous, replicable, criticizable, and generalizable causal interpretations of complex sequences of events rather than ad hoc ones (Griffin 1993: 1100-6).

Event Structure Analysis uses the ETHNO computer program developed by Heise to facilitate organization and systematic consideration of this dense web of hypotheses. ETHNO is a straightforward heuristic device. It prompts the analyst to first identify all the key actions for analysis, to label them, and to temporally order them. Once all the actions are labeled and temporally ordered, ETHNO then prompts the analyst to assess each counterfactual relation in turn, posing a customizable variant of the following
question: “If action Aᵢ or a similar action had not occurred, would action Aⱼ have occurred anyway?” ETHNO poses such counterfactual questions for every temporally possible combination of actions. It is incumbent upon the analyst to assess and substantiate each causal attribution. What ETHNO does is simply to organize consideration by the analyst of all temporally possible causal relations between actions. This is especially useful in classical applications because informal historical narratives as analyzed by Griffin (1993), and informal ethnographic ones, as assessed by Heise (1989), tacitly imply causality through narrative ordering. ETHNO assists systematic unpacking of causal attributions within such a narrative for explicit testing and presentation. Based on the analysis, ETHNO produces a graphic summary of results diagram.

*Theoretically guided application of Event Structure Analysis (ESA)*

Instead of starting ESA with a narrative account presented in common sense terms, theoretically guided applications of ESA begin with a hypothetical explanation guided by general theory. Consistent with many applications of ESA (e.g. Brown 2000; Dixon 2008; Eder and Elke 1991), the analyst identifies actions for analysis guided by general theory of prior concern. This constitutes an instantiation of the general theory and allows the general theory to be tested and refined.

In the simplest such application, the analyst identifies two sets of key actions in a hypothetical explanation. The first set of key actions are instances of the general outcome to be explained (the dependent variable or *explicandum*). The second set of key actions are contemporaneous instances of the general explanatory process (the independent variable or *explanan*). In more complex analyses, instances of covariates are also
identified as called for by the theoretical model(s) being tested. The analyst then uses counterfactual techniques to systematically analyze how and to what extent each identified action was necessary to each subsequent action in the historical sequence.

In this way, theoretically guided application of ESA also allows scholars to test rival theories. Actions representing concepts from rival theories can be included in the ESA much like variables representing concepts from rival theories are often included in regression analyses. In this way, when the analysis reveals the relationships between the

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3 An important concern in sample selection is sampling on the dependent variable. Counterfactual analysis tests hypotheses of the sort: if action x had not occurred, then action y would not have either. This is the hypothesis, in short, that action x was a necessary cause of y, implying necessary causation. Against the best instincts of statistical researchers, methodologists writing about necessary causation mostly agree that sampling on the dependent variable is appropriate, and even preferred, in analyses of necessary causation (Dion 2003; George and Bennett 2005, p.26; Mahoney 2003 p. 351; Most and Starr 2003, pp. 30-31; see also Ragin 2008 pp. 60-63 for a sophisticated treatment of these issues). The hypothesis that a particular kind of action is necessary for a particular kind of outcome can most directly and systematically be falsified by considering all instances of that outcome and analyzing whether it was caused by actions of the hypothesized type (i.e. sampling on the dependent variable). Yet theoretically guided application of ESA does not require sampling on the dependent variable, instead allowing analysis of the full range of variation. Theoretically guided application of ESA is capable of handling “eventful” variation, explaining an important historical change; “event history” type variation, using longitudinal temporal comparison of actions and many non-actions; and also more standard variable based variation where different actions are identified to represent discrete values of a general category of action.

4 Given the infinite complexity of historical causality, many important causes cannot be specified in any given hypothetical explanation, and are not included in the actions identified for explicit counterfactual analysis in ESA. This is similar to “exogenous” causes omitted from formal consideration in regression models. ESA – in both classic and theoretically guided applications – handles this limitation in two ways. First, ESA uses counterfactual analysis to assess whether a preceding action was necessary to a subsequent one, and makes no claims for sufficient causality. The assumption is that in every situation, an infinitude of co-determinants not specifically identified for analysis were also consequential. See Weber (1949) for an extended discussion of this aspect of counterfactual analysis. Second, while the number of causal relations assessed in an ESA are finite, based on the identification of finite populations of action for analysis, ESA allows consideration of all available evidence in assessing the causal relation between any two specified actions. All possible co-determinants can be considered in evaluating any specific counterfactual regardless of whether they are formally identified as part of the model or not (Griffin 1993). For example, in the analysis of Truman’s adoption of civil rights advocacy, I formally analyze the role of Black Anti-colonial actions, and interaction effects with the Progressive Challenge, and the Cold War. But other processes, such as Truman’s conflict with labor over the railroad strike, are only brought into consideration through assessment of the specified counterfactual questions. This does not mean that such processes were unimportant to the sequence of events, but rather that their effects are exogenous to the explanations being tested and so they do not receive formal assessment. In the end, we can say with confidence that Black Anti-colonial actions were necessary to Truman’s adoption of civil rights advocacy, and explain how. It is possible that the railroad strike may also have been necessary, but that relation is not assessed by this study.
general theoretical categories instantiated in the empirical actions, it provides a test of the relative explanatory power of the rival theories.

Thus, theoretically guided application of Event Structure Analysis roots ESA in the American comparative historical methodological tradition of Barrington Moore, Theda Skocpol, Michael Mann, and Charles Tilly as codified by Ragin (1987), Mahoney and Rueschemeyer (2003), and George and Bennett (2005). Like standard comparative historical methods, theoretically guided application of ESA combines two distinct methodological elements to facilitate the rigorous, explicit, and formal testing and refinement of theory.

One methodological element is comparative analysis. This comparative leverage is achieved in ESA by using general theory to identify the population of actions for analysis. While correlations cannot verify causality, they can be used to test and potentially falsify rival explanations. As King, Keohane, and Verba (1994) suggest, qualitative evidence – like quantitative evidence – can be used to arbitrate between theories by systematically selecting observations and using correlations to test hypotheses. To identify the population of actions for inclusion in analysis, the researcher must set temporal and geographic bounds of the study, and standardize a definition of each category of actions. Such a definition must be suitable for independently distinguishing an action as a member of the class, or not, regardless of preceding or subsequent actions. The analyst also needs to identify an adequate set of evidentiary source materials – such as specific archives, periodicals, or other evidentiary sources –
from which these actions will be identified. This requirement formalizes identification of a population of actions as evident within the specified sources.\(^5\)

The other methodological element is that comparative historical researchers delve into nuanced processual analysis using a wealth of detailed information to probe hypothesized causal mechanisms which link the variables (George and Bennett 2005; Goertz and Starr 2002; Mahoney and Rueschemeyer 2003).\(^6\) While theoretically guided applications of ESA draw on the American comparative historical tradition to test general theory of general concern, theoretically guided application of ESA follows Griffin (1993) to depart from standard comparative historical methods in two ways. First, theoretically guided applications of ESA – like classic applications of ESA and classic historical methods – analyze a lot of observations within a single historical sequence of events in order to develop a precise explanation, rather than making rougher comparisons across chasms of time, space, and institution.\(^7\) Theoretically guided applications of ESA utilize more precise comparisons than standard comparative methods because the “cases” compared are actions taken by particular actors within a single historical sequence of events.

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\(^5\) If an analyst seeks to conduct theoretically guided application of ESA on an unmanageably large population of actions, it may be feasible to use probability samples of the action population like is commonly done in regression analysis. But I am not aware of any efforts to do so, and the implications of such sampling would have to be thoroughly considered.

\(^6\) As Ragin suggests, even ideal typical, heavily inductive “case-oriented” qualitative comparativists begin with a general theory which they seek to refine through comparison (1987:45).

\(^7\) While “within case” comparisons are often more precise than “across case” comparisons, a more general concern is whether “within case” analysis with an “N of 1” contains a sufficient number of observations for legitimate testing and development of theory. While “within case” analysis is poorly suited to establishing scope (see discussion below), data richness is not a problem. Ragin writes: “The view that quantitative researchers look at many cases, while qualitative researchers look at only one or a small number of cases, can be maintained only by allowing considerable slippage in what is meant by “case.” The ethnographer who interviews the employees of a firm in order to uncover its informal organization has at least as much empirical data as the researcher who uses these same interviews to construct a data set appropriate for quantitative assessment of variation among employees in job satisfaction” (in Ragin and Becker 1992:4). Writing almost two decades earlier, Donald Campbell (1975) made a similar point about the data richness of “case studies” and their inherent potential for testing and developing theory.
events, so the phenomena compared are very highly analogous, more so than
comparisons across countries or epochs.

Second, as with classical applications of ESA (Griffin 1993; Heise 1989), explicit
counterfactual analysis of each hypothesized causal claim makes the historical
interpretive component of the analysis more rigorous, systematic, and refutable than the
less formal “within-case” causal attribution customarily practiced by comparative
historical researchers. While no method of analyzing social causation is irrefutable, ESA
has the strong advantage that because it is explicit and replicable, other researchers can
challenge the assumptions and analysis at any juncture, whether in the selection of
representative actions, in the assemblage of data to test the counterfactuals, or in the
analysis of the counterfactuals themselves. Thus ESA is an ideal vehicle to confront the
“messiness” of historical evidence and the challenges it poses to received theories and
conceptualizations. Further, counterfactual analysis provides a powerful means for
synthesizing data from diverse sources and bringing it consistently and coherently to bear
on causal analysis of concrete actions (Griffin 1992:403; 1993:1100).8

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8 While close counterfactual analysis of the relationship between two historical actions cannot definitively
prove anything, as the molecular foundation of ESA, counterfactual analysis transmits the strengths of
historical interpretive methods into systematic hypothesis testing in a sociological vein. It is a kind of
formalism that brings theory systematically into engagement with evidence, making the analysis explicit
and falsifiable (Tilly 2008:40), while preserving the richness of historical interpretation of a singular
historical sequence of events. One dimension of this strength is that it allows analysts to account for the
messiness of complex historical interactions. Ragin (1987) points out that variable oriented analyses often
lose the complexity of analysis of contingent interactions prized by qualitative researchers, and his Boolean
heuristics are an attempt to allow some of this complexity to be preserved in theory testing. While neither
classic nor theoretically guided applications of ESA can test scope of applicability as well as Ragin’s QCA
(see below), through molecular counterfactuals, ESA much more directly and fully preserves the
complexity of analysis achieved by historians which QCA attempts to approximate. Second, like historical
methods, ESA’s molecular counterfactuals allow the full range of available historical evidence to be
brought to bear on hypothesis testing and causal attribution unlike quantitative methods that can only use
evidence which is reducible to (and in practice reduced to) a variable value, and thereby discards all other
available evidence. Third, counterfactual analysis like historical interpretation, allows researchers to
precisely account for auto-correlation effects. In any counterfactual analysis of the relation between one
action \(y_i\) and a previous action \(x_1\), all previous actions of a similar type \(x_i\) are admissible evidence, and
their specific influences on \(y_i\) must be specifically accounted for in specifying the effects of \(x_i\). Fourth,
The analysis above illustrates theoretically guided application of ESA. To test rival explanations of Truman’s adoption of civil rights advocacy using a theoretically guided application of ESA, the first step was to identify actions for analysis. This first step illustrates the major difference between classical and theoretically guided applications of ESA. Instead of beginning with an informal narrative, and decomposing it into its component actions for ESA, I began with rival general theories. These two general theories guided identification of actions for analysis.

Guided by the proposition that insurgents garner influence by developing practices which leverage institutional cleavages, I hypothesized that Black Anti-colonial practices compelled Truman to adopt civil rights advocacy in 1946, and that the Progressive Challenge was necessary to this effect. Testing this hypothetical explanation using ESA required decomposing Black Anti-colonial practices and Truman’s adoption of civil rights advocacy into their component actions. The Progressive Challenge was identified as a covariate. Guided by the political opportunity thesis, the classic explanation of Truman’s adoption of civil rights advocacy is that it was caused by the emergence of Cold War foreign policy. This hypothesis required the further identification of the emergent Cold War as a covariate. As detailed above, I temporally bounded and defined the main categories of action, and identified instances of each kind of action as listed in Table 1-1.

Like historical interpretation, and also like quantitative event history analysis, ESA’s molecular counterfactuals allow analysts to account for the temporal near infinitude of non-events. In other words, the precise timing of when an actor took a “consequent” action can be analyzed in light of the many moments, hours, days, weeks, months, and years that that actor did not take similar actions, as well as the other precise and finite moments when that actor did take similar actions. In other words, each singular molecular counterfactual allows consideration of temporal comparisons of actions with an infinitude of actual non-actions, as well as the finitude of actions.
The second step was to organize and conduct the counterfactual analysis. Having identified the key actions for analysis, I then input the label for each into the ETHNO computer program, and temporally ordered them. The summary of results are reported in Table 1-2 above. Scholars familiar with classic applications of ESA will note that I have presented the report of the analysis in tabular form instead of the graphic ESA diagram produced by ETHNO. The identified actions are ordered chronologically, and labelled consecutively in each row and column. Each cell shows the result of the counterfactual: “Was row action or a similar action a cause of column action in the circumstances that existed?” Together, the column and row labels and basic cell contents reported in Table 1-2 are logically and empirically identical to the graphic diagram produced by ETHNO. In the analysis above, I found it useful to report the findings of the ESA in tabular rather than diagrammatic form for readability. Because the theoretically informed ESA contained many actions, most instantiations of two general categories of action, the graphic diagram produced by ETHNO was difficult to follow let alone interpret. Reporting the results in tabular form made the results easy to follow. Every specific causal hypothesis about the necessity of one particular action on another is clearly labelled, easy to find, and to read.

Tabular reporting also makes it possible to report findings concerning the hypothesized interaction effects that supplement the ETHNO analysis. Theory suggested that positive effects of Black Anti-colonial practice on Truman’s adoption of civil rights advocacy ought to require the Progressive Challenge. So after completing the analyses of direct effects as prompted by ETHNO, I counterfactually analyzed the necessity of the
interaction effect. The results of this supplemental analysis are also reported in Table 1-2, and explicated in the findings section above.

Table 1-2, while it is easier to read and follow than the graphic diagram produced for this analysis by ETHNO, it is no easier to interpret. To facilitate interpretation, I also included Diagram 1-3 above. One of the strengths of theoretically guided applications of ESA – with actions analyzed instantiating general categories of action – is that they are easy to summarize graphically. The summary graphic presented in Diagram 1-3 facilitates causal interpretation by collapsing the instantiations of each general category of action into single points in the diagram. The practical method by which I generated Diagram 1-3 follows.

Once the analysis was complete, and fully reported in Table 1-2, generating Diagram 1-3 required an interim step summarizing Table 1-2 by general category of action.

[*Insert Table 1-3 About Here*]

To generate Table 1-3, I collapsed each general category of action in Table 1-2. I collapsed each category by adding the number of instances of an outcome action which required at least one instance of the hypothesized causal action to take place, and dividing it by the total number of instances of the outcome action:

\[
Value(x \rightarrow y) = \frac{\sum_{j=1}^{n} \left\{ \begin{array}{l} 0 \text{if} \\ 1 \text{if} \left( \sum_{i=1}^{m} value(x_i \rightarrow y_j) \right) \geq 1 \end{array} \right\}}{n}
\]

For this calculation, missing values from Table 1-2 where an instance of \( y \) preceded an instance of \( x \) are treated as 0 values. The value of each cell in the summary table will be a number between zero and one, and will provide a rough indication of the strength of the general relationship \( (x \rightarrow y) \), with zero the weakest, indicating no causal
effect found, and one the strongest, indicating that instances of $x$ were necessary for every occurrence of $y$. Because this table is used to generate a graphic diagram in which all actions of a general type are collapsed into a single point, autocorrelation effects (effects of instantiations of one general category of action on other instantiations of that same general category) are reported as missing.

Table 1-3 summarizes Table 1-2, and is logically and empirically equivalent to Diagram 1-3. To generate Diagram 1-3 from Table 1-3, I simply drew a point for each general category of action. Where the value of cell (row $x$, column $y$) was greater than 0, I drew a causal arrow from $x$ to $y$ in Diagram 1-3. Where the value was less than 0.5 but greater than 0, I indicated a weak effect with a dashed arrow. To indicate the interaction effect, I pointed the causal arrow from the interaction term to the middle of the causal arrow indicating the direct effect modified.

Social scientific analysis entails substantive explanation of a slice of social life. Formal methods fix particular aspects of the analysis to simplify the infinite complexity of social life. But within the formal constraints, all social scientists iteratively revise explanation in engagement with the evidence. Successive analysis and re-analysis uncovers and progressively refines explanation through sustained engagement with the evidence. What varies between methods is not whether – but in what ways – the analysis deepens between successive iterations.\(^9\)

\(^9\) For example, historical analysis places a premium on depth of command of the available evidence. In successive stages historians work out a narrative explanation of an event until the underlying logic is clear and consistent. While other evidence is omitted, rigorous historical explanation is very difficult to falsify. Overwhelming evidence is provided to support the explanation and it is very hard to find evidence that might challenge it. Similarly, most ethnographic analysis prioritizes immersion in a site. Over time, particular patterns are identified as theoretically relevant, and studied iteratively to refine theory. Qualitative comparative sociology instead begins with theory, and cases are selected as theoretically relevant to an outcome of interest. Then iterative comparison of similarities and differences in process across the cases are used to refine theoretical concepts and assign subtypes to specify theory. In statistical
In theoretically guided applications of ESA, analysis is conducted in two stages. As described above, the first stage parallels standard comparative analysis where theory informs the coding of evidence, and observations are systematically selected for analysis to comprise representative instances of the salient theoretical concepts. It is at this stage that theoretically guided applications of ESA differ from classical applications of ESA in which narrative is decomposed into constituent actions for analysis without explicit reference to theory. In the second stage, in both theoretically guided and classical applications of ESA, the previously obscure relations between specified actions are illuminated through detailed counterfactual analysis.

Theoretically guided applications of ESA thus allow an analyst to use all available data to test how and to what extent one substantive process caused another as suggested by application of a general theory. Over the course of substantive analysis, the researcher develops a much more precise understanding of the causal relationship between the two processes. This substantive analysis suggests a refined view of the causal relationship in analogous substantive situations. Thus, theoretically guided application of ESA suggests refinements to the general theoretical concepts and propositions used to guide the analysis in the first place. Theoretically guided application of ESA is different from historical “induction” in that the actions have been identified to constitute an instance of the general theory of concern and the precise uncovering of their relation in the evidence analysis of observational data using established data sets, the available data and variables are fixed. What deepens in successive stages of analysis is understanding of the relationship between the variables. The tests reported are rarely the preliminary tests conducted. Instead, it is only after many stages of analysis – when the researcher arrives at tests the results of which are interesting, important, and robust – that the results are reported. Even experimental studies where theory, evidence, and their relationship are formally fixed require extensive preliminary iterative revision of analysis to warrant funding and execution. See Abbott (2004:15-26); Becker (1998:172-207); and Ragin (1987:164-171).
comprises a test of hypotheses. General theories provide a lens through which concrete events are viewed, and substantive analysis in turn leads to the revision of general theory to better account for those events.

The strengths and limitations of theoretically guided applications of ESA generally

Some sociological subfields today rely extensively on historical case studies for theory development. Within-case historical analysis of qualitative data comprises more than one of every three studies published in leading sociological journals for such

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10 The hypotheses tested by theoretically guided applications of ESA are substantive, following Griffin’s (1993) classic applications. Sociologists test hypotheses at different levels of generality. For example, in the first three issues of the American Sociological Review from 2010 (the most recent three issues published at the time I wrote this note), half the articles (9 of 18) employ formal hypothesis testing. Of these, three test hypotheses using substantive categories and proper nouns such as “Oscar nomination,” “Head Start,” “TANF,” and the “American Federation of Labor” (Bruch, Ferree, and Soss 2010; Stepan-Norris and Southworth 2010; Rossman and Bonacich 2010). Three further articles are demographic studies which test hypotheses using general demographic categories and abstract terms, such as “socioeconomic disparities in health,” “most likely to attend college,” “husbands,” and “long hours” (Chen, Yang, and Liu 2010; Brand and Xie 2010; Cha 2010). All three seek to test these general hypotheses considering data on only a specific part of the potential universe the hypotheses cover, e.g. health disparities in late 20th Century China, and using a representative sample – usually from survey data – to generalize to the population of that time and place. Two of the articles present hypotheses in general terms such as “rate of return on equity,” “corporation,” and “stigmatized co-workers” but restrict analysis to a relatively narrow time and place – such as Hollywood during the red scare or the top 500 U.S. corporations in 2001 – which the authors see as emblematic and for which they analyze compete data without sampling (Prechel and Morris 2010; Pontikes, Negro, and Rao 2010). The last article presents hypotheses in general terms “country,” “democracy level,” but relating to a relatively small universe of cases for which every case is analyzed (Torfason and Ingram 2010). In classic applications of ESA (Griffin 1993), hypotheses tested concern the causal relation of one substantive action to another. In theoretically guided applications of ESA, hypotheses tested concern the causal relation of all substantive actions of a particular kind to all substantive actions of another kind. In this sense, the hypotheses tested are substantive like in ESA, yet they constitute a complete sample – within the substantive case – of a general category of instances salient in the general theory.

11 ESA’s motor of theory development is thus what Stinchcombe has called “deep analogy”: “[As] conceptual profundity depends on the deep building of analogies from one case to another, we are likely to find good theory in exactly the opposite place from where we have been taught to expect it. For it is likely to be those scholars who attempt to give a causal interpretation of a particular case who will be led to penetrate the deeper analogies between cases” (1978:21-2). The logic of inquiry of theoretically guided application of ESA is highly compatible with Lakatos’s view of scientific progress. According to Lakatos (1978), a progressive research program extends and refines theory through engagement with available data to predict new content, some of which is later corroborated. See Burawoy (1989) and Zeitlin (1984) for similar uses of Lakatos (1978) and Stinchcombe (1978). ESA can be applied in different theoretically guided ways to advance what Lakatos called the “three corner fight” between rival theories and evidence. One approach is to study an anomalous “case” to extend theory in a research program in which the researcher is working, as Burawoy’s (1998) extended case method suggests. Another is to test hypotheses that show a case is compatible with a novel theory and incommensurate with prevailing theories, like Zeitlin’s (1984) critique of World Systems Theory. Another approach is subtle refinement of more general theory within a research programme, like what George and Bennett (2005) call “typological theory.”
fields. These studies generally seek to use case analysis to contribute to theoretical debates, and for good reason. As Stinchcombe once observed, because “conceptual profundity depends on the deep building of analogies from one case to another, … it is likely to be those scholars who attempt to give a causal interpretation of a particular case who will be led to penetrate the deeper analogies between cases” (1978:21-2). But most of these studies lack the well elaborated formal methods employed by the quantitative articles published in the same journals.

As Abbott writes, the “basic criteria of rigor is logical formalism” (2001:38). Tilly elaborates: “To adopt formalisms in the course of social scientific work means making the adoption of arguments explicit, serious, and consequential. It means increasing the chance of discovering that you were wrong, and therefore of learning something new” (2008:42). Formal logic of analysis is the hallmark of social scientific thinking. Formal methods make analysis explicit and replicable, allow conjectures to be tested, and aid in the systematic refinement of theory. Thus, it is not surprising that the American Sociological Association’s flagship journal, the *American Sociological Review*, publishes almost exclusively articles entailing formal methods.

Unfortunately, standard methods of historical within-case analysis lack formal rigor. Thus, while some sociological journals publish many historical case studies based on qualitative analysis of documentary data, it should come as no surprise that in 2010, 38 of 38 articles published in Mobilization in 2010.

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12 For example, in 2010 (the last year for which complete data was available when this note was written), within-case historical analysis of qualitative data comprised more than one of every three articles published in Mobilization, the leading sociological journal on social movements – 8 of 23 articles. In addition to the 8 case studies, the journal also published many small-n qualitative comparative studies and many ethnographic case studies. The eight articles utilizing within case historical analysis of qualitative data are Currier (2010), Horton (2010), Velez-Velez (2010), Kennedy (2010), Kinch (2010), Dochartaugh & Bosi (2010), Ho (2010), and Wooten (2010). This statistic includes only full articles, not reprints of award speeches, or other texts.

13 All of the historical case studies published in Mobilization in 2010, cited above, did so.

14 38 of 38 articles published in 2010.
the *American Sociological Review* did not publish a single article primarily utilizing historical within-case analysis of qualitative data. It did publish two small-n comparative historical studies.\(^{15}\) But in each, the formal logic of inquiry was comparative across case, and not in the explicit or systematic use of evidence *within-case* to test causal claims.

Theoretically guided application of Event Structure Analysis, that is application of Griffin’s (1993) Event Structure Analysis to substantive questions suggested by general theoretical concerns, has the potential to fill an important methodological gap in our discipline, harnessing the power of “deep analogy” (Stinchcombe 1978) to systematically test and refine theory of prior concern “within case.”

What theoretically guided applications of ESA do analytically that cannot be accomplished by classical applications of ESA is allow the analyst to consider a historical sequence of events systematically through a selected theoretical lens (or rival lenses if multiple theories are tested in the ESA). To the extent that the cumulated knowledge inherent in the general theory does in fact provide a powerful lens for analyzing the historical sequence of events in question, theoretically guided applications of ESA can systematically utilize this cumulated knowledge to illuminate the crucial dynamics of the

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\(^{15}\) 0 of 38 articles published by the *American Sociological Review* in 2010 were historical case studies. The small-n comparative studies published were Maher (2010) and Stamatov (2010). The journal also published several articles entailing ethnographic data and formal methods: Hallett (2010), DeSoucey (2010), Maynard, Freese & Schaeffer (2010), and Turco (2010). This statistic includes only full articles, not reprints of Presidential speeches, or other texts. While my comparison between the kinds of articles published in *ASR* and *Mobilization* is comprehensive for 2010, and is random in the sense that there is no reason to expect a different pattern in 2010 (the last year for which complete data was available at the time this note was written) than other years, the number of observations is moderate (53 articles coded in total). So to check whether the observed pattern is likely representative, or may reflect random luck, I created a 2x2 table formally comparing the incidence of historical case studies in *ASR* and *Mobilization* in 2010, and ran Fisher Exact and Pearson’s \(\chi^2\) tests for statistical significance. The null hypothesis is that the distribution of historical case studies is similar in the two journals, and that the apparent difference is a matter of chance selection. Both the Fisher Exact and \(\chi^2\) tests returned probabilities less than 0.001, so I reject the null hypothesis. The divergent rate of publication of historical case studies by these two journals is highly significant.
historical sequence in question. Of course if the theory brought to bear has little relation to the historical sequence of events in question, then theoretically guided application of ESA will not be very helpful except in demonstrating some limits of the theory.

The above analysis of how and to what extent Black Anti-colonialists compelled Truman to adopt civil rights advocacy illustrates the power of theoretically guided application of ESA. Analyzing a single case, ESA is not well suited to evaluating the scope of a theory’s applicability. But in this study, theoretically guided application of ESA accomplished two things that neither informal historical nor standard variable based regression analysis could have:

(1) Theoretically guided application of ESA provided a formal and systematic method for probing hypothesized causal relations suggested by theory within-case. We knew from the outset that Truman’s adoption of civil rights advocacy corresponded temporally with Black Anti-colonialist mobilization. But correlation is not causality. Like other formal methods but unlike informal historical interpretation, theoretically guided application of ESA brought analytic attention consistently to bear on the substantive questions of theoretical import. In analyzing a historic sequence of events, ESA exposed the hypothesized explanations to falsification at many junctures, generating systematic and explicit causal attribution. For example, after ESA it is much more certain than before that Black Anti-colonialist practices did in fact compel Truman to adopt civil rights advocacy. Further, the identification of actions for analysis, the evidence used to arbitrate the relationships, and the counterfactual reasoning that yielded causal attribution are all explicitly presented and subject to criticism, replication, or refutation.
Like classical applications of ESA allow the analyst to unpack tacit causal theories embedded in informal narrative sequences, theoretically guided applications of ESA allow the analyst to unpack general theories as instantiated in particular historical sequences. What does it mean to say that specific historical process $x_s$, an instantiation of general concept $x_g$, caused specific historical process $y_s$, an instantiation of general concept $y_g$? This may seem straightforward. But in addition to problems of generalization and causal attribution, such a historical claim also raises complexity problems. Most historical outcomes are composites of many actions. For example, Truman did not decide instantaneously to create the PCCR. Instead, a sequence of actions by Truman’s administration, over the course of 1946, culminating in creation of the PCCR constituted a rupture with past Presidential precedent. Theoretically guided application of ESA provides a means of handling this complexity by using theory to systematically isolate key actions from the historical sequence, and employing counterfactual analysis to explicitly assess the relationship between specific actions.

(2) Harnessing all the salient evidence available to analyze a substantive case, theoretically guided application of ESA suggested ways of deepening and revising the general theory that framed the study.\textsuperscript{16} Like historical interpretive methods, but unlike correlational methods, ESA allowed consideration of the full range of documentary evidence in unpacking and interpreting the causal dynamics in a complex historical juncture, unveiling the causal process within-case. Standard informal historical methods are good at exploring complex process. But unlike standard historical methods with an

\textsuperscript{16} For “casing” and the way that general theory structures cases, see Ragin and Becker 1992, especially chapters 5 and 10.
The inductive logic of inquiry, theoretically guided application of ESA systematically and explicitly probed theories of prior concern.

Before the analysis, we knew there was a temporal correlation between Black Anti-colonialism and Truman’s adoption of civil rights advocacy, but not whether, how, and to what extent it was a necessary cause. After the ESA, we know that Black Anti-colonial mobilization was essential to every step of Truman’s adoption of civil rights advocacy in 1946. Further, we now know that in almost every instance, the power of the practice derived in large part from its interaction with the broader Progressive challenge, forcing race policy onto Truman’s agenda as part of that challenge. The Progressive Challenge and mounting Cold War pressures were insufficient to generate Truman’s adoption of civil rights advocacy without Black Anti-colonial action. The findings challenge macro-structural theories of opportunity conferring to groups and suggest that other insurgencies may also sustain influence by advancing disruptive practices that seize opportunities offered by a broader institutionalized conflict, drawing support from one side.

For these reasons and in this way, theoretically guided application of ESA is suited to precise, systematic, and refutable causal analysis of a singular historical sequence of events, and to using that analysis to test, deepen, and refine general theory. Conversely, theoretically guided application of ESA is not well suited to evaluating the scope of a theory’s applicability, as it tests and refines the application of a theory in a
singular time and place.\textsuperscript{17} It remains for other methods to see how broadly the theoretical
discoveries apply.

\footnote{\textsuperscript{17} See Isaac et al “Analyzing Historical Contingency with Formal Methods” 1994:137 for a similar point about ESA. See George and Bennett 2005:31-32 and Mahoney and Goertz 2006:237-238 on scope limits of “within case” and qualitative analysis generally.}
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***** Part II *****

Civil Rights Movement
ABSTRACT: The political opportunity thesis has sensitized generations of analysts to the importance of political context, but effects on mobilization remain controversial. Building on institutional statism and constructivist insights, I propose that when insurgents contest the legitimacy of a social institution with highly disruptive practices, the repression of which is threatening to powerful allies, mobilization escalates. If so, it should be possible to retrodict subsequent levels of insurgent mobilization based on such dynamics. For a stringent test, I evaluate these competing approaches on the political opportunity thesis’s foundational case – the civil rights movement. I argue civil rights practices, by drawing brutal repression and forcing Federal intervention, created a referendum on caste subordination. I conduct graphic, OLS, and event history tests using an events dataset constructed by Susan Olzak (NSF SES-9196229). I find that dynamic retrodiction better explains the timing and level of civil rights mobilization.

The political opportunity thesis, alongside sensitivity to the importance of indigenous institutions, ideational frames, and subjective will (McAdam 1982; McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1996), emerged as the dominant theoretical framework in the social movements field over the last 30 years. The political opportunity thesis suggests that political-economic contradictions destabilize the social order giving rise to insurgency. The core of the theory is the proposition that “opportunities for a challenger to engage in successful collective action … vary greatly over time. And it is these variations that are held to be related to the ebb and flow of movement activity” (McAdam 1982: 40-41). The thesis builds on classical Marxian and Weberian imagery. Political opportunity theorists

18 Research on this project was generously funded by the Ralph J. Bunche Center, the Charles E. and Sue K. Young Award, Mr. and Mrs. Louis Blau, and the Sociology Department at UCLA. This project would not have been possible without the generosity of Susan Olzak who provided the dataset used, and to Elizabeth Stephenson for her assistance. This dataset includes coded newspaper accounts on 2,750 events of ethnic conflict in the U.S. from 1954-1992. Its development was funded by NSF, Sociology Program, SES-9196229. Thanks to Kyle Arnone, Marie Berry, Jennie Brand, Rogers Brubaker, Cameron Campbell, Yuval Feinstein, Wes Hiers, Hazem Kandil, Bongoh Kye, Ching Kwan Lee, Michael Mann, Waldo E. Martin, Jr., Doug McAdam, William Roy, Thomas Soehl, Chris Tilly, Elizabeth Wang, Andreas Wimmer, Maurice Zeitlin, the Comparative-Historical Sociology Seminar at UCLA, and the Quantitative Sociology Working Group at UCLA for their comments on earlier stages of this project.
borrow from Weber’s theory of politics to situate opportunities for insurgency in the realm of politics. For example, Tarrow elaborates the concept of political opportunity along four dimensions – openness or closure of the polity, stability of political alignments, presence of allies, and level of elite conflict – and opportunity along these four dimensions is held to explain much of the timing of mobilization (Tarrow 1989 [Democracy and Disorder]: 22). Borrowing from a Marxian tradition in which social crisis and transformation are “inevitable,” and inherent in the social structure (McAdam 1982: 37), contradictions are said to autonomously crystalize into opportunities for insurgency as social structure destabilizes. But while revolutions displace entire regimes, social movements often challenge part of society, and political opportunity theorists explain this partial character by conceptualizing opportunities as accruing to a particular social group. Political opportunities “elevate the group in question to a position of increased political strength” making the political system vulnerable to challenge by that group, and enabling mobilization of that group (McAdam 1982, p. 42; See Tarrow 1994, 18).

The political opportunity thesis has been tremendously generative, guiding a proliferation of important studies in the last several decades (Almeida 2003, 2008; Amenta and Zylan 1991; Banaszak 1996; Brockett 1991; Costain 1992; Eisinger 1973; Jenkins and Perrow 1977; Kriesi et al. 1995; McAdam 1982, 1996, 1999; McAdam et al. 1996; McCammon et al. 2001; Meyer 1990, 1993; Tarrow 1989, 1994, 1998; Tilly 1978) and continues to guide scholarship on social movements today (Ho 2011; Kollman and Waites 2011). Since 1980, the political opportunity thesis has framed most empirical sociological studies of social movements (Goodwin and Jasper 2004: 3-4; Meyer 2004:}
Scholarly use of the term “political opportunity” has expanded rapidly.\textsuperscript{19}

Yet the social movements field may be reaching an important turning point. Most social movement sociologists think in terms of the political opportunity thesis, but a broad consensus has emerged that the theoretical framework is limited. Two sets of critiques have been most influential. The first critique, advanced largely by proponents of political opportunity theory attempting to strengthen it, is that no-one can quite agree on what political opportunity is or how to recognize it. According to Tarrow, “Political opportunity may be discerned along so many directions and in so many ways that it is less a variable than a cluster of variables” (Tarrow, 1988: 430). And in the words of Gamson and Meyer, political opportunity “threatens to become an all-encompassing fudge factor for all the conditions and circumstances that form the context for collective action” (Gamson and Meyer, 1996: 276). Scholars usually assign political opportunity post-hoc, according to levels of mobilization, and there has been little success explaining subsequent mobilization by political opportunity. In the words of David Meyer, “Because it is often coupled with writing that suggests movements flourish during favorable or expanding opportunities and fade in times of less favorable or declining opportunities, the collective scholarship runs the risk of turning an important analytical advance into a mere tautology, defined backwards through the observation of political mobilization” (2004: 135).\textsuperscript{20} Repeated attempts to specify how to recognize political opportunity have

\textsuperscript{19} Google Scholar reports 55 texts/year in the 1980s using the term “political opportunity,” 287/year in the 1990s, 1,010/year in the 2000s, and 1,200 texts in 2010. Based on a January 25, 2011 search. Compare flat use of term “political” across the period.

\textsuperscript{20} In my view, the problem here is not so much that analysts identify political cleavages salient to an insurgency after mobilization has been initiated – it could be no other way – but rather that the macro conditions identified are theorized to contribute an untestable period effect. Lots of contextual developments coincide with mobilization without causing it.
achieved little accord (e.g. Brockett, 1991; Kriesi et al 1992; Tarrow 1994; McAdam 1996 “Conceptual Origins, Problems, Future Directions”) and consistently fail to predict mobilization (see Meyer 2004).

Second, political opportunity theory has been widely criticized as overly structural in its explanation of mobilization, obscuring rather than illuminating the vital role of social actors in generating insurgency. For example Goodwin and Jasper argue that political opportunity cannot explain mobilization in part because the effects of any given political opportunity on mobilization are “historically and situationally contingent” (Goodwin and Jasper 2004: 13). Even the cannon leaders have become critical of this bias in political opportunity theory. Doug McAdam concurs that “the dominant analytic framework in the field has remained resolutely structuralist” (McAdam 2004: 225). McAdam, Tilly, and Tarrow begin their 2001 *Dynamics of Contention* by stating that they seek to transcend the “overly structural” limitations of political opportunity theory and the “classic social movement agenda” they helped to create (McAdam, et al. 2001: 18, 32 and chapter 1). Classic theoretical statements (e.g. McAdam 1982) acknowledge the importance of subjective will (“cognitive liberation”), institutional strength, and ideational frames in mobilization, but preserve the idea that political structure has independent effects on the timing and extent of mobilization.

Further, in the last 15 years, constructivists have problematized the use of “social groups” as units of analysis (Brubaker 2009). Constructivist insights suggest not taking the “groupness” of insurgency for granted. For example, Rogers Brubaker writes:

Participants, of course, regularly do represent ethnic, racial, and national conflict in such groupist, even primordialist terms. They often cast ethnic groups, races, or nations as the protagonists – the heroes and martyrs – of such struggles. This is entirely understandable, and doing so can provide an important resource in social and political struggles. But this does not mean analysts should do the same. We must, of course, take vernacular categories and participants’ understandings
seriously, for they are partly constitutive of our objects of study. But we should not uncritically adopt categories of ethnopolitical practice as our categories of social analysis. (Brubaker 2004, p. 10)

This perspective raises the question of what it means for political opportunities to advantage discrete social groups, and problematizes the “groupist” assumption opportunity theorists make in accounting for the partial character of insurgency.

**Contested Legitimacy**

In my view, social context is a terrain of struggle, not a cause of mobilization. Scholars have not been able to agree on what kinds of conditions cause insurgency because conditions do not create movements – people do. When people act, the social context determines the consequences of those actions. The political opportunity thesis has fallen short of explaining mobilization by advancing too macro and structural a view of political conflict. Certainly, there are some historical situations in which large scale political divisions destabilize entire regimes, and any mobilization by insurgent challengers becomes influential regardless of its content. But more often, the particular practices of insurgents are consequential. The political context does not determine the extent of mobilization, per se, but instead affects how insurgent practices will be received.

Sociologists have begun to show how different political contexts are conducive to different forms of insurgent practice. Kitschelt (1986) argues that the political structures in France, Sweden, the U.S., and Germany differentially determine the effectiveness of particular insurgent strategies, and thus explain the different strategies employed by anti-nuclear activists in each country. In an important, and more recent intervention, Walker, Martin, and McCarthy (2008) argue that insurgent mobilizations in the U.S. tended to use
different tactical repertoires depending on whether they confronted corporate, state, or academic targets, suggesting that different kinds of targets made different sorts of insurgent action efficacious. Taylor et al, in a study of same sex weddings, find that practices “matter in political contention” (2009 p. 885). They argue that attention to practices is important to explaining why people participate in particular social movements, as well as movement trajectories. Koopmans et al (2005) find that different forms of citizenship and immigration policy differentially shape forms of immigrant mobilization in different European countries. While these works take important steps, many more steps are required to move beyond the political opportunity thesis that social context is an independent cause of mobilization.

Institutional statist political theory, as developed by Michael Mann in the Weberian tradition, provides a crucial insight. Classically, Max Weber conceptualized politics as necessarily territorial, and the state as a political organization which maintains a monopoly over the legitimate use of violence within a territory (Weber 1978 v.I: 54). Building on Weber, Mann develops a theory of institutional statism in which state power institutionalizes social relations, and through conflict, re-institutionalizes them:

Because states are essentially ways in which dynamic social relations become authoritatively institutionalized, they readily lend themselves to a kind of “political lag” theory. States institutionalize present social conflicts, but institutionalized historic conflicts then exert considerable power over new conflicts. (Mann 1993: 52)

Mann argues that rather than unitary and systemic, states are messy, and contradictory, embodying the outcomes of past struggles (1993: 88). Not only do states maintain and police historically specific social relations; but different segments of a state may separately administer capacities for organized violence, enforcing distinct standards of legitimacy.
This theory of politics suggests a more nuanced view of how political context matters for insurgent mobilization. In short, insurgent movements contest the legitimacy of target institutions by disrupting established social processes protected by state authorities. When insurgents disrupt established social relations, they contest the legitimacy of the targeted social institution, and force a political referendum on their claims. In many instances, potential insurgents do not have the established political power to challenge a particular set of social relations. But when insurgents create social disruption, they force other powerful political actors to take sides. Because states regulate social practices, the efficacy of an insurgency depends upon the practices it employs. The determinant question is not whether various political actors support the claims of insurgents in the abstract, but whether – given insurgents’ practical actions – they will intervene on insurgents’ behalf.

This approach builds upon, but diverges from, the political opportunity thesis in two key respects. First, while political cleavages are viewed to be quite consequential for insurgent mobilization, these do not autonomously crystallize into opportunities for mobilization. Instead, insurgents advance particular practices, and the cleavages affect mobilization only indirectly – through the political reception of these insurgent practices. Second, the way that movements contest part of a political regime is seen as institution

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21 There is extensive variation in the social movements literature about what constitutes a social movement. Many authors distinguish insurgent movements from other forms of participation in institutionalized political channels. For the purposes of this paper, I conceptualize insurgent mobilization as collective political mobilization in which the insurgent actors seek social transformation through intentional disruption of established social processes.

22 Resource mobilization theorists long ago recognized the importance of allied intervention. For example, as early as 1968, Lipsky wrote: “The ‘problem of the powerless’ in protest activity is to activate ‘third parties’ to enter the implicit or explicit bargaining arena in ways favorable to the protesters” (Lipsky 1968). The problem was that resource mobilization theory emphasized the importance of allied support at the cost of serious attention to all else. The contested legitimacy approach redresses this limitation, theorizing the importance of allied support in specific relation to insurgent practice, and political context.
specific rather than group specific. Insurgents contest the legitimacy of a particular institution through disruptive practices, forcing a referendum on their practice and that institution. Together, these insights enable a more dynamic and meso-level study of insurgency. Scholars have not been able to independently identify structural “political opportunity” in the world because it does not exist as such. Instead, only once insurgency is in process, and a particular set of insurgent practices creates a referendum on a particular social institution, can the salient political cleavages be identified, and the insurgent dynamics expected to follow an explicable trajectory.

The development and demise of an insurgent movement is determined by the political vulnerability of a particular social institution to a given set of insurgent practices. My core proposition is that when insurgents develop a set of practices challenging the legitimacy of a social institution which is both highly disruptive and the repression of which is threatening to powerful allies, mobilization escalates and a movement is born.

[** Insert Figure 2-1 about here.**]

When insurgents develop a set of insurgent practices which is both disruptive, and the repression of which draws powerful allied intervention in a particular historic context, they generate the self-reinforcing feedback loop depicted in Figure 2-1 above. The extent of disruptive mobilization determines the extent of repression (controlling for exogenous factors, such as the repressive tendency of authorities). But the attempted repression by authorities, in turn, generates further mobilization. When authorities cannot effectively enforce established custom and law, insurgency expands. Repressive acts by authorities, by failing to stem the insurgency and drawing broad allied resistance, increase the
practical appeal of a set of insurgent practices to people who see themselves as oppressed\textsuperscript{23} by the social relations which the insurgency challenges and claims to transcend. Potential insurgents see the promise of liberation in authorities’ failed attempts at repression and mobilize.

When the social disruption escalates, it eventually forces authorities to offer concessions to break the self-reinforcing cycle of insurgency and re-stabilize the political equilibrium.\textsuperscript{24} Concessions can undermine allied mobilization by drawing off the allegiance of allies and making insurgents more repressible. Concessions can also undermine the disruptive potential of insurgent practices by displacing the social institution which an effective insurgent practice challenges.

**Contested Legitimacy in the Civil Rights Movement**

From this perspective, it was the capacity of civil rights practices to disrupt black caste subordination in a way that was difficult to repress in the early 1960s that drew so many people to participate, often at great personal cost. In the lunch counter sit-ins, the freedom rides, municipal integration campaigns, marches, and voter registration drives of the early 1960s, insurgents peaceably violated segregationist law and de facto black disenfranchisement, and were brutally repressed by local white authorities and vigilantes. This brutality was deeply embarrassing to the Federal Government and the National Democratic Party leadership as it attempted to assert moral leadership in a de-colonizing world, and to maintain a fragile political alliance between Northern Liberals and the old

\textsuperscript{23} While I believe a theory of objective oppression is possible and likely useful for explaining insurgent mobilization, it is beyond the scope of this paper. One starting point for such a theory might be Charles Tilly’s *Durable Inequality*. For the purposes of this paper, it is not necessary to maintain a theory of objective oppression. Oppression here only requires the subjective perception of oppression shared by many potential insurgents.

\textsuperscript{24} This view, suggested by Mann’s institutional statism, finds compliment in much classical social theory. See, e.g. Gramsci (1971: 180-183).
South. While the Federal government and other potential allies were content to sit on the sidelines, civil rights insurgents forced a referendum – contesting the legitimacy of black caste subordination through nonviolent direct action which drew brutal repression. In the historic context of the early 1960s U.S. South, brutal repression of civil rights practices drew powerful allied support, which in turn fed mobilization, leading to an escalating cycle of disruption.

This “contested legitimacy” view of the civil rights mobilization is highly consistent with the movement leaders’ view of themselves. Drawing brutal repression was an intentional element of the strategy. Martin Luther King, Jr. explained: “Instead of submitting to surreptitious cruelty in thousands of dark jail cells on countless shadowed street corners, [the Southern black] would force his oppressor to commit his brutality openly – in the light of day – with the rest of the world looking on” (King 1963b: 27).

Intentional disruption, repressive action, and Federal response are evident in all the major civil rights campaigns during the movement’s heyday in the early 1960s.

On February 1, 1960, four black college students sat down at the segregated “Whites Only” lunch counter at Woolworth’s in Greensboro, North Carolina, and politely asked to be served. Word spread, and in the months that followed, tens of thousands of others followed their example at lunch counters throughout the South to be arrested by police, beaten by white mobs, and locked out by restaurant managers closing shop

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25 Not surprisingly, the most historically attuned scholars of the civil rights movement have also recognized that the ability of civil rights activists to draw Federal intervention against the brutal repression of local whites was crucial to the development of the civil rights movement, veering substantively from the constraints of the political opportunity thesis if not fully theorizing the implications of this dynamic. See, for example, McAdam (1982: 174). They have at times also touted the importance of practice, if not reconciling it with the political opportunity thesis’s period effects proposition or the belief in the independent effects of insurgent organizational strength (McAdam 1983; Morris 1984; Payne 1996).

26 King expressed similar ideas on many occasions in many different ways. For example, see also King 1963a; King 1967: 185.
(Andrews and Biggs 2006; Carson 1981; Chafe 2003). The students had arrived at an insurgent practice that, in its historical context, was neither possible to ignore, nor easy to repress. Pushed by reporters, President Eisenhower told the *Baltimore Afro-American* that he was “deeply sympathetic with the efforts of any group to enjoy the rights, the rights of equality that they are guaranteed by the Constitution” (1960).

Drawing lessons from the sit-ins, the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) organized the Freedom Rides of 1961 with the intention to provoke arrests by local authorities. The violent repression of Freedom Riders that ensued drew widespread support to the movement. James Farmer, national director of CORE explained: “Our intention was to provoke the Southern authorities into arresting us and thereby prod the Justice Department into enforcing the law of the land. We started the Freedom Rides with thirteen people. But after one bus was burned in Anniston, Alabama, and the riders on another were beaten and abused, we were deluged with letters and telegrams from people all over the country, volunteering their bodies for the Freedom Rides” (Farmer 1965: 69. See also Barnes 1983; Meier and Rudwick 1969; Meier and Rudwick 1973).

The Civil Rights campaign in Birmingham, Alabama prompted national and international outrage in early May 1963 when police under the direction of Commissioner Eugene “Bull” Connor repeatedly attacked black school children nonviolently protesting segregation with dogs and high pressure fire hoses. The Kennedy Administration intervened, sending Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights to advance negotiations (Eskew 1997; Garrow 1989; King 1963b; Manis 1999). At the signing of the Birmingham agreement, President Kennedy told Martin Luther King, Jr.: “Our judgment of Bull Connor should not be too harsh. After all, in his way, he has done a good deal for civil-
rights legislation this year” (Kennedy in King 1963b: 144). In June, Kennedy gave a major civil rights speech and introduced the Civil Rights Act to Congress.

In the 1964 Freedom Summer, a coalition of the major civil rights organizations (COFO) organized a campaign for voter rights and education in Mississippi drawing more than 1,000 white volunteers from the North to participate. In part, the strategy was based on the recognition that violence against Mississippi blacks was often ignored and intended to expose it to the world. In June, three civil rights workers Chaney, Goodman, and Schwerner (two white-Jewish, and one black) on the way to investigate the burning of a Church hosting civil rights activities, were arrested by the Deputy Sheriff of Neshoba County and released to the Ku Klux Klan who shot them and buried their bodies in an earthen dam. President Johnson responded by ordering a massive Federal search and investigation (Belfrage 1965; Cagin and Dray 2006; Dittmer 1994).

During the Selma campaign of early 1965, in a series of attempts by civil rights activists to march to Montgomery as part of a voting rights campaign, state troopers and violent white mobs blocked and beat activists, killing James Reeb, Viola Liuzzo, and Jimmie Lee Jackson in three separate attacks. Responding to the broad public outcry, Johnson sent 2,000 soldiers and 1,900 members of the national guard to protect the insurgents in March. Five months later he signed the Voting Rights Act (Cobb 2008; Garrow 1978; Stanton 1998; Zinn 2002). Martin Luther King most explicitly identified the elements of civil rights strategy in his discussion of the Selma campaign:

The goal of the demonstrations in Selma, as elsewhere, is to dramatize the existence of injustice and to bring about the presence of justice by methods of nonviolence. Long years of experience indicate to us that Negroes can achieve this goal when four things occur:
1. Nonviolent demonstrators go into the streets to exercise their constitutional rights.
2. Racists resist by unleashing violence against them.
3. Americans of conscience in the name of decency demand federal intervention and legislation.
4. The administration, under mass pressure, initiates measures of immediate intervention and remedial legislation. (King 1965: 17)
In many historical circumstances, repressive action by authorities is effective – silencing dissent. But in the context of the United States in the early 1960s, civil rights leaders discovered that nonviolent defiance of legal segregation and mobilization challenging de facto disenfranchisement was difficult to repress, drawing Liberal outrage and Federal intervention.27

**Political Opportunity in the Civil Rights Movement**

In contrast, political opportunity scholars have argued that broad social structural transformations in the years preceding the civil rights movement destabilized the subordinate social position of blacks providing them with the political opportunity to mount an effective insurgency. Piven and Cloward emphasize that agricultural industrialization and the decline of cotton sharecropping “weaken[ed] the stakes of agricultural and industrial leaders in the maintenance of caste arrangements,” and made them vulnerable to insurgent challenge (1977: 195). Lawson argues that with the Northern migration of blacks, “the black electorate grew in influence, [and] so too did its success in shoving civil rights to the front of the national political agenda.” In this context, civil rights insurgents “recognized that mobilizing blacks from below pressured the national government to act” (1991: 104). Other scholars emphasize geopolitical pressures. In the words of Layton, Cold War “international pressures on the U.S. government to ‘put its own house in order’ … provided new opportunities for civil rights advocates” (Layton 2000: 2-3; see also Dudziak 2000; Plummer 1996; Von Eschen

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27 The early sit-ins in February 1960 targeted lunch counters in cities such as Greensboro North Carolina where segregation was less entrenched, and students felt they had a chance of victory (Andrews and Biggs 2006). But by 1965, the easy battles won, civil rights activists sought the holdouts like Selma’s Sheriff Jim Clark where defying segregation was still likely to draw brutal repression by local authorities (Hubbard 1968; Garrow 1978).
1997). In his seminal political process explanation of the civil rights movement, Doug McAdam discusses the importance of all three of these factors in creating the opportunity for black insurgency (1982: 73-86 and 156-163). McAdam summarizes the political opportunity thesis as applied to the black insurgency as follows:

As shaped by several broad social processes, the “structure of political opportunities” confronting blacks gradually improved during the period from 1930 to 1954, thus affording insurgents more leverage with which to press their demands (McAdam 1982: 230 and see 73-86).

In accordance with the political opportunity thesis, McAdam here theorizes expanding political opportunity as conferring leverage on blacks and their political demands generally.

After several decades of political process research on the civil rights movement, no one has credibly demonstrated the independent effects of “political opportunities” on the level of insurgency. Students of the civil rights movement have convincingly, and somewhat consistently, demonstrated that agricultural industrialization, the growing black electorate, and geopolitical pressures removed important constraints on civil rights insurgency. But there is no evidence that broad structural changes explain the timing or level of black insurgency generally.

In part, responding to critiques that widely varying social processes are categorized as political opportunity post-hoc, and the lack of credible testing (Tarrow, 1988: 430; Gamson and Meyer, 1996: 276; See Meyer 2004), J. Craig Jenkins et al (2003) conducted the most systematic testing of the political opportunity thesis using time series data to analyze the relationship between the level of black mobilization and various exogenous processes. They argue that “divided government, strong northern Democratic Party allies, … Republican presidential incumbents responding to Cold War foreign policy” as well as the level of black political representation, black unemployment
and income inequality, and Vietnam War deaths almost fully explain the annual level of black mobilization. But the study highlights the limitations of post-hoc assignment of political opportunity rather than assuaging concerns. The regression $R^2$ of greater than 90% for various models tested appears to contradict the bulk of the substantive literature which argues in detail about how particular institutions, contingent efforts by particular individuals, and the varied responses of non-movement actors including Federal and local officials, and white violent mobs, affected the level and timing of insurgency in important ways. This tension may be explained by the authors’ method, which is to explain the variation over a relatively small number of observations (the number of black nonviolent protest events per year, N=50), using fifteen explanatory variables. Decisions about which variables to include appear less than intuitive, for example the number of Vietnam War deaths is included while Korean War deaths are excluded. One dummy variable marks years an incumbent Republican President or Vice President ran for the Presidency before 1964 while theoretically obvious variables, such as the number of black registered voters, are excluded. While the $R^2$ is impressive, any Bayesian Information Criterion would undoubtedly show the explanatory power of the model to be an artifact of the amount of data used to explain variation among relatively few observations.

The political opportunity thesis sensitized analysts to the ways in which macro social processes enabled the civil rights challenge. But it has contributed little to explaining the timing and extent of civil rights mobilization.

**Divergent Implications**

A contested legitimacy approach departs from political opportunity explanations of the civil rights movement in key respects. From the political opportunity perspective, the decline of
civil rights movement was due in large part to the declining opportunity for mobilization by blacks generally. The problem is that even as nonviolent civil rights mobilization declined in the late 1960s, other forms of black insurgent mobilization developed and expanded. McAdam acknowledges this anomaly, and the problem it poses for political opportunity explanations: “I should qualify the characterization of the late 1960s as a period of declining black insurgency. Labeling these years as ones of movement decline serves to obscure the extraordinary nature and intensity of black insurgency during the period... It would not seem an overstatement to argue that the level of open defiance of the established economic and political order was as great during this period as during any other in this country’s history, save the Civil War. It is hard to reconcile the magnitude of this “open defiance” with any simple notion of movement decline” (1982: 182). A contested legitimacy perspective resolves this anomaly by viewing the contextual advantages for insurgency as practice and institution specific, rather than accruing to blacks generally. It is completely consistent with the contested legitimacy perspective that one form of black insurgency thrived in the early 1960s, and quite another in the late 1960s. In this first sense, a contested legitimacy approach is consistent with widely acknowledged patterns of black insurgency in the late 1960s that political opportunity scholars have long had difficulty explaining.

Attention to the institutional target and practical character of insurgency suggests that the civil rights movement declined because of its own success – it began to run out of legally segregated targets to challenge. As simple as this explanation appears, it was not acknowledged by activists themselves, and has not been seriously proposed and tested in the sociological literature to date. Most movement activists and leaders saw their struggle as much broader than the challenge to Jim Crow. Believing in the general utility of civil rights mobilization, civil

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28 One exception is Robnett (2002) who does suggest this historical possibility, but doesn’t offer a developed theorization of its implications.
rights organizations expended extensive resources fighting long, expensive, frustrating, and largely fruitless battles against economic injustice and informal segregation, such as CORE’s economic campaigns in the North (Meier and Rudwick 1973) and SCLC’s Chicago Campaign (Sugrue 2009). If the civil rights movement depended upon the efficacy of nonviolent practices to contest the legitimacy of Jim Crow institutions in the early 1960s, one empirical implication is that the rate of repression of nonviolent black mobilization should quickly decline in 1965 as Jim Crow is overcome.

But stark contrasts aside, the larger problem this paper seeks to redress is that the political opportunity thesis has simply not been very fruitful in explaining the timing and extent of mobilization. The political opportunity thesis has remained too macro in concern, too insensitive to the ways that political actors respond differentially to different kinds of insurgent practice, and too prone to untestable post-hoc assignment of period effects. If indeed civil rights insurgents drew participants to their struggle by forcing a referendum on Jim Crow, then highly visible instances of untenable repression should precede and explain subsequent levels of mobilization.

I do not dispute that the decline in the cotton economy, changing U.S. political alignments, cold war politics, and Federal advocacy of civil rights—were important contextual factors contributing to the emergence and development of the civil rights movement. But these historical conditions did not create a political opportunity for black insurgency generally. They specifically made it difficult (or impossible) for the Federal government to stand on the sidelines as white supremacist officials and vigilantes publicly brutalized nonviolent civil rights activists who violated legal segregation and challenged de facto disenfranchisement. Centering the way

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29 As Bill Roy has pointed out, the Eastern Establishment’s interest in eviscerating the “solid South” may also be important here.
civil rights insurgents contested the legitimacy of Jim Crow through disruption makes the importance of the political context in the civil rights movement intelligible.

Three observable implications of this approach, depicted in Figure 2-2 below, are central to this study. First, we should see a rapid rise in the level of civil rights mobilization tightly correlated with a rise in the level of repression of nonviolent participants. Second, as legal segregation and de-facto disenfranchisement are abolished, we should see a quick falling off in the rate of repression of insurgents. Third, as the rate of repression of nonviolent participants drops, the level of mobilization should persist as people hope to continue the earlier efficacy of the civil rights insurgency. But mobilization rates will soon begin to fall off as it becomes clear that civil rights practices have lost their leverage and efficacy generally.

[** Insert Figure 2-2 About Here **]

Data

The data for this project are part of a larger data collection project which reports all insurgent events in the United States included in the New York Times. The construction of this data set began with McAdam (1982), and has been developed collaboratively by Susan Olzak, Doug McAdam, John McCarthy, Sarah Soule, and others, using the best available techniques such as double-blind coding [NSF (SBR-9709337, SBR-9709356, SES-9874000, SES-9911296, and SES-9911431)]. While historical-comparative analysis is, as James Mahoney (2003 p. 131) points out, sometimes criticized for failing to accumulate knowledge, this is an instance where multi-scholar quantitative data collection efforts have allowed ongoing refinement of theory and method. I analyze all reported events of nonviolent black mobilization and white violent mobilization in Southern SMSAs for the full range of dates available, 1954-1992, generously provided by Susan Olzk. I use variables for the specific day and year each
event occurred, the number of people participating, how many participants were arrested, and the location of the event by SMSA.\textsuperscript{30} Data derived from content analysis of Newspaper reports is widely used by social movement scholars (Isaac and Christiansen 2002; Minkoff 1997; Myers 2000; Olzak and Uhrig 2001). While some kinds of events are consistently under-reported in newspaper data, it is generally consistent in its capture of “hard” facts about events reported, such as the date, number mobilizing, and number arrested and thus reliable for analyzing movement trends (Franzosi 1987; Kriesi et al. 1995).

Methods of Analysis

To evaluate the retrodictive power of a “contested legitimacy” approach to the civil rights movement, and compare it to the political opportunity approach, I employ three tests. The first is graphic and descriptive. My argument here is that, rather than political opportunity for blacks generally, the civil rights movement quickly developed in the late 1950s and early 1960s through the effective nonviolent challenge to legal segregation and the de facto disenfranchisement of blacks. If this is correct, the elimination of legal segregation and the protection of black voter rights by the Federal Government should lead directly to a decreasing rate of repression of nonviolent black insurgents in the South.

I begin with a visual comparison of the annual rates of mobilization against repression. I collapse the number of individuals participating in nonviolent black

\textsuperscript{30} There are 123 Southern SMSAs designated by the U.S. Census Bureau comprising the District of Columbia and all metropolitan areas in the following States: Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, West Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Kentucky, Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Texas. Insurgent events within those States but outside of any SMSA boundary are extremely rare and not included in the data.
mobilization in the South by year, the number of those participants arrested, and the
number of violent white mobilizations in the South by year, and graph. I further check
this relationship with a simple logistic regression. The dependent variable is coded 1 if
black insurgents were arrested a given month, and 0 if no insurgents were arrested.
N=147, as there were 147 months between 1954 and 1992 in which blacks mobilized
nonviolently in the South. There are three explanatory variables: the number of black
nonviolent mobilizations in the South per month, the number of violent white
mobilizations per month, and a variable for period indicating whether a particular month
was before January 1965, or after.

Second, I conduct a direct test of the relative power of a contested legitimacy
approach against the political opportunity approach to explaining insurgent mobilization.
I utilized standard OLS regression with aggregate monthly data. N=475 as there were 475
months (30 day) between 1954 and 1992. The dependent variable was the number of
participants in nonviolent black mobilization in the South during the given month. There
are four covariates. Model 1 uses variables for period based on McAdam’s classic
analysis to explain the overall level of mobilization. Model 2 uses three explanatory
variables based on the contested legitimacy approach to explain the overall level of
mobilization. This model is truly retrodictive as all IVs are lagged. Expectations about
subsequent developments are derived solely from data on past events. Recent Arrest
Events is the number of black nonviolent mobilization events across the South in the last
month at which insurgents were arrested. Recent White Violent Events is the number of
violent white mobilizations in the last month. Foment is a dummy variable for whether
there was a high level of previous mobilization calibrated to maximize its explanatory

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31 For a discussion of autocorrelation, see below.
power – it reports whether there were more than 100 participants in black mobilization per week on average in the last year.

To arbitrate between models for each test I used the Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC). The BIC has several advantages over the F-test, most notably that it rewards parsimony, taking into account not only the explanatory power of a model but the amount of data used to achieve that explanation; and that unlike the F-test, it can be used to compare non-hierarchical models (Gelman and Rubin 1995; Hauser 1995; Raferty 1986, 1995a, 1995b).

My third and final test analyzes proliferation of insurgency. The proliferation of insurgency to new cities is one way of specifying the development of the civil rights insurgency and testing the theory that repression of insurgents was a crucial part of the process determining development. Can dynamics internal to a particular insurgency retrodict when people in new locations will join the insurgency? As with the contested legitimacy OLS model above, the analysis is purely retrodictive – all independent variables are lagged.

To test this hypothesis, I used discrete-time event history analysis. To conduct this analysis, I first panelized the data by SMSA-month. The dependent variable recorded 1 for the first month in which a Southern SMSA experienced nonviolent black mobilization, and 0 otherwise. Once an SMSA experienced mobilization, it was no longer at risk for proliferation, so it was removed from the comparison group; N = 35,208 SMSA months at risk of proliferation. There are eight covariates. Five substantive covariates are dummy variables (coded to one when stipulated conditions were satisfied and zero otherwise) based on the characteristics of insurgency in the 12 months preceding
any given month at risk: Very High Mobilization means the number of participants mobilizing was in the top quartile; High Mobilization means the number of participants mobilizing was above average; High Arrests means the number of events in which insurgents were arrested was in the top quartile; High White Violence means the number of white violent events was in the top quartile; High Repression means the sum of the number of event is which insurgents were arrested and the number of white violent events was above average. High Mobilization and High Repression are used only in presenting odds rather than in estimating the model. This presentation is more conservative than using the model variables – downplaying contrasts found – but more intuitive. The main baseline variable, Time Since Last Proliferation, is a continuous variable counted in months. The quadratic and cubed polynomials for the baseline are also included. To estimate the model coefficients I used a binomial logistic regression model where \( a \) and \( b_k \) are coefficients analogous to OLS regression coefficients for explanatory variables \( X_k \), and the outcome variable is the natural log of the expected odds of a proliferation at time \( t \) and SMSA \( i \):

\[
\ln \left( \frac{p_{it}}{1 - p_{it}} \right) = a + \sum_{k=1}^{k} b_k X_k
\]

Descriptive statistics for the tests are listed in Table 2-1:

[** Insert Table 2-1 About Here **]

**Rate of Repression**

I begin analysis with a graphic examination of the relationship between the rate of repression and the rate of mobilization. The following graph presents the relationships in the actual data presented hypothetically Figure 2-2 above. It displays the annual number
of participants in black nonviolent mobilization against the annual number of those participants arrested while mobilizing. The number arrested is scaled graphically 10:1 to better demonstrate the relationship.

[** Insert Figure 2-3 About Here **]

Three aspects of this relationship suggested by the graph above are crucial for the analysis that follows. The first two support the substantive theories outlined above. First, it appears that the ratio of arrests per insurgent mobilizing declined sharply after 1964. This is what we would expect based on the contested legitimacy approach to explaining the civil rights movement. The abolition of legal segregation and Federal protection of black voting rights eliminated the targets for civil rights insurgency, making nonviolent mobilization less disruptive. No longer as disruptive, nonviolent black insurgents were less intensively repressed, as can be observed in their less frequent arrest.

Second, as hypothesized, it appears that the rate of mobilizations also declined after 1964, but not as quickly. Both the decline in mobilizations and the lag in this decline support the contested legitimacy approach. The decline in mobilization is expected because we expect the level of mobilization to follow the level of repression. The lag is expected because people do not instantly lose faith in the transformative power of the insurgent practices. They do not necessarily view their challenge as a challenge to the legitimacy of particular institutions. Many people participating in nonviolent civil disobedience against Jim Crow saw this as part of a broader liberation struggle, and had no reason to expect a general decline in the efficacy of the practice once Jim Crow was defeated.\(^{32}\) The decline in mobilization is mediated by people’s perception of the potential of the insurgency, and so we expect a lag between the abolition of legal

\(^{32}\) See discussion of activist belief in sustained advocacy of civil rights practice beyond Jim Crow above.
segregation which undermined the disruptive capacity of civil rights practices and people’s loss of faith in the potential of those practices.

Third, there is an anomalous lower arrest ratio in the late 1950s. This is troubling for our substantive theory because it suggests that the civil rights movement mobilized extensively before facing significant repression. And it also suggests that civil rights practices were less disruptive before 1961, which is puzzling. If the disruptive capacity of nonviolent civil disobedience is inherent in legal segregation, why weren’t more nonviolent black insurgents arrested in the late 1950s?

It turns out that in the late 1950s, local authorities arrested very few nonviolent black insurgents because most repression of black insurgents was handled by violent white mobs. It was only beginning in 1960 and 1961 that a large percentage of black nonviolent insurgents were arrested. As arrests of black nonviolent insurgents by local authorities increased, the frequency of violent-white mobilizations decreased relative to the level of black nonviolent mobilization. The following graph adds the number of white violent mobilizations per year to the index of repression. Events are scaled 30:1 black insurgent arrested, and displayed as an increment above the arrests curve, roughly replicating OLS modeling. Incorporating violent white mob repression of blacks in the model accounts well for the anomaly above as can be seen in the following graph:

[** Insert Figure 2-4 About Here **]

This relationship can be tested quantitatively with a logistic regression using monthly aggregate data as detailed above. Controlling for the number of black nonviolent mobilizations and the number of white violent mobilization in a given month, the logistic regression shows that nonviolent black insurgents were more than 10 times more likely to
experience arrests in any given month they mobilized before January 1965 than they were in any given month they mobilized afterwards (odds ratio = .089 post 1964, p<.001, \( \chi^2 = .0000 \), pseudo \( R^2 = .266 \), BIC = -568).33

Both the graphic analysis and logistic regression provide strong support the contested legitimacy approach. While segregation was illegal and blacks were de facto disenfranchised, roughly through 1964, the rate of repression of nonviolent black insurgents was high. But as segregation was outlawed and the Federal government intervened to protect black enfranchisement, the rate of repression rapidly declined.

Explaining Mobilization

Next, I use ordinary least squares estimates of national level data to test the overall explanatory power of the contested legitimacy approach against Political Opportunity Theory and period effects. The dependent variable is simply the total number of nonviolent black insurgents mobilizing in the south in a given month. There are 475 months between 1954 and 1992, so N=475.34

Model 1 explains mobilization using variables for the periods given in McAdam’s classic political opportunity analysis. Model 2 explains mobilization based on the contested legitimacy approach. Model 3 combines models 1 & 2:

| **Insert Table 2-2 About Here **|

All of the coefficients for the contested legitimacy model and all but one of the coefficients for the period model are highly significant with p<.001. Model 1 explains 18% of the variation in the level of mobilization (\( R^2 = .181 \), BIC=-70). McAdam’s

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33 Adding 5 year periods to the model does not substantially change the model, but weakens it suggesting that it is the specific January 1965 cutoff that is important (the pseudo \( R^2 \) is slightly stronger at .306, but the BIC is weaker at -561).

34 As noted above, a month is simply a 30 day period.
periodization does remarkably well here compared to other ways of accounting for time. Using annual dummies instead throws an inordinate amount of data at the problem, yielding statistically insignificant results (BIC = 65). Using continuous variables for month polynomials does much better than annual dummies. The sixth order polynomial model $\text{Mobilization} = \alpha + \sum_{i=1}^{6} \beta_i \text{Month}^i$ yields an $R^2 = .157$ and BIC=-44. But this is still inferior to McAdam’s period model, both for $R^2$ and BIC, and none of the model coefficients are statistically significant at the p < 0.01 level. In short, McAdam has done a superior job of periodization, parmoniously capturing variations in the level of civil rights mobilization.

Model 2 does better. Just three independent variables explain 24% of the variation in mobilization with an improved BIC ($R^2 = .242$, BIC=-113).\(^{35}\) This is pure retrodiction as all three of the explanatory variables are lagged. Looking at the theorized dynamics in previous mobilization does a better job of explaining subsequent mobilization than period effects. Some of this effect is simply autocorrelation. Subsequent levels of mobilization to some extent directly follow previous levels of mobilization. This autocorrelation effect is captured by the Foment variable, calibrated to maximize explanatory power. When people are mobilizing, they will tend to continue mobilizing. The repression variables vary independently from the level of repression, and controlling for previous levels of mobilization, prove to have strong and highly significant effects. Note that both the level of recent arrests, and the level of recent white violent events have strong positive effects on the subsequent level of mobilization.

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\(^{35}\) Note: These BICs are comparable across models in this analysis because they share the same N, and the same type of estimation. They are not comparable to BICs used for analyses in other parts of the paper because the N and is not the same, and the estimation method is different (e.g. a different BIC equation is required for logistic regressions than OLS).
Combing the two models into Model 3 weakens the estimation. None of the period effects remain highly significant, one period coefficient changes valiance. Further, the coefficient for Foment, i.e. the mobilization autocorrelation effect, becomes insignificant because there is a high correlation between the mobilization dummy and the period effect. In short, much of what the period effect of Model 1 captures is autocorrelation effects. This makes intuitive sense – good periodization captures sustained patterns of mobilization over time. While the $R^2$ necessarily increases marginally, the BIC weakens substantially indicating that any additional explanatory power is a random effect of throwing more variables at the problem while muddying the model ($R^2 = .261$, BIC=-101). But it is important to note here that both repression effects remain largely unchanged, and significant at the <0.001 level.

**Movement Proliferation**

Finally, I consider the process of movement proliferation. Hypothesis 2 from above is that the more repressive action local authorities took against civil rights insurgents, the more civil rights practices were taken up by others, proliferating to new cities following periods when insurgents were heavily repressed nationally. I also expect a secondary effect based on the scale of mobilization – the more mobilization nationally, the more proliferation to new cities. To test this hypothesis, I first panelized the data by SMSA-month. A preliminary glimpse at the raw tabulations presented in Table 2-3 appears to provide very strong support for my hypothesis – almost all the proliferations of nonviolent black mobilization to new SMSAs occurs in months following a year with high repression (above average). Nonviolent black mobilization spreads to 61 out of 123 Southern SMSAs between 1954 and 1992, and a full 56 of those 61 proliferations occur
following a year of high repression, 50 following years with both high repression and high mobilization:

[** Insert Table 2-3 About Here **]

Generating proportions of proliferation by level of repression and mobilization using these raw tabulations would overstate the association for two reasons: first, not all SMSA months are at risk of proliferation. Once a SMSA has experienced mobilization, that SMSA is no longer at risk for experiencing a first mobilization, and should be removed from the comparison. The second problem is more complex, and requires accounting for the time to proliferation. Most proliferations of nonviolent black mobilization in the South occurred shortly after other proliferations. A full 49% of proliferations occurred in a month immediately following a previous proliferation. 80% occurred within 6 months of a previous proliferation. It is necessary to control for time to proliferation to account for the baseline hazard, ensuring that the association between proliferation and high rates of repression is not just an artifact of the clustering of proliferations near each other.36

It is possible to address both of these problems using discrete event history methods and a logistic regression model to estimate the odds of a proliferation occurring. To compare only SMSA-months at risk, I removed SMSAs from the comparison once they have experienced mobilization. To control for time since last proliferation, I included a continuous variable for the number of months since the last proliferation. I

36 This is the more stringent technique to control for a temporal baseline. Historical sociologists sometimes use a historical time baseline to control for period effects. But this does not account for clustering. Subsequent proliferations are much more likely to occur soon after a previous proliferation whether or not it is a general period of high proliferation. The control used here – time since last proliferation – is the more stringent if less intuitive control.
also included two higher order polynomials for this time variable in case the relationship was not linear.

[** Insert Table 2-4 About Here **]

The estimate is highly significant, with all the logits for the substantive variables significant at the $p<.001$ levels, and the $P>\chi^2 = .0000$. As expected, there is a strong mobilization effect with proliferation 6.8 times more likely following periods of very high mobilization. More importantly, there is a very strong positive effect for previous white violence. Controlling for clustering, and the mobilization effect, the odds of proliferation are a full 2.8 times more likely following periods of high white violence! But there is also an unexpected finding. Unlike retrodicting the overall level of mobilization, previous rates of arrest have a strong negative effect on subsequent proliferation. Proliferation is only .17 times as likely following periods of high arrests. Further, the finding is robust, and not simply an artifact of correlation with High White Violence. Removing High White Violence leaves the model largely unchanged, with the negative effects of High Arrests only mildly weakening (odds ratio =.222, $p<.001$). While unexpected, this finding is substantively interesting. The implication is that highly visible episodes of brutal white violent repression prompt more activists in other places to mobilize and join the movement. And further as shown above, high rates of arrest of civil rights activists encouraged sustained mobilization by those already mobilized, perhaps because arrests of nonviolent civil rights activists challenging Jim Crow reflected the continued disruptive leverage of the practices. But arrests do not positively retrodict proliferation of civil rights practices. This finding is consistent with the lessons activists drew from the Albany, GA campaign where chief of police Laurie Pritchet trained his officers to conduct themselves cordially and arrest masses of protestors without violence.
After a year of protests, police had arrested more than 1,000 activists. But the campaign encountered little violence, failed to capture national attention, won few gains, and soon petered out. Theorizing the failure of the campaign, civil rights leader Bayard Rustin surmised that “protest becomes an effective tactic to the degree that it elicits brutality and oppression from the power structure.” Arrests appear to encourage those already mobilized to continue the struggle, but unlike brutal violence, not to encourage others to join.

Using this estimate to exclude SMSA-months not at risk and control for time since last proliferation, it is possible to more accurately assess the probability of proliferation contingent on levels of repression and mobilization:

[** Insert Table 2-5 About Here **]

Note that the probability of proliferation is very low generally. That is because there are only 61 proliferations out of more than 35,000 SMSA-months at risk. Initiating nonviolent black insurgency in a city where it has not occurred before is not something that happens very often. But what is important is recognizing the conditions under which it is likely. As Table 2-5 above shows, even controlling for clustering, movement proliferation is much more likely to occur in periods of high repression than low. Secondarily, proliferation is more likely to occur in periods of high mobilization as well. This analysis provides strong support for the contested legitimacy hypothesis. *The more repressive action local authorities took against civil rights insurgents, the more civil rights practices were adopted by others, proliferating to new cities following periods when insurgents were heavily repressed nationally.*

**Discussion**
As Marx famously wrote, people “make history, but in conditions not of their own choosing” (1978: 595). Both the political opportunity thesis and the contested legitimacy approach are concerned with explaining mobilization, and both are premised on the belief that consideration of political context is crucial to this endeavor. But how do conditions matter for the way people make history? Here, the political opportunity thesis and contested legitimacy approach part ways in kinds of effects expected, and thus in method of inquiry. The findings above demonstrate that the contested legitimacy approach entails a significant advance over the political opportunity thesis in explaining: the timing of movement development and demise; the level of insurgent mobilization; and the timing of proliferation to new cities. Further, the contested legitimacy approach found interesting unexpected results concerning the effects of differential forms of repression that contribute substantively to historical understanding of the civil rights movement. Finally, the analysis suggests the utility of retrodiction as a method of inquiry in future analysis of insurgent mobilization.

**Timing of Movement Development and Demise**

The civil rights movement was not born of a general advantage accorded to blacks by autonomous structural processes. Instead, it was born of struggle, as activists developed ways of taking advantage of particular cleavages in their political environment. In particular, first with the Montgomery Bus Boycott in December 1955, and then especially with the student sit-ins beginning in Greensboro in February 1960, civil rights activists found that by nonviolently challenging legal segregation and *de facto* disenfranchisement, they could effectively contest the legitimacy of subordinate caste status. The Federal Government, as a whole, sat on the sidelines as Jim Crow persisted.
But by bodily defying caste subordination, civil rights insurgents drew brutal repression and forced a referendum on their actions, and thereby on Jim Crow. First the Eisenhower, then Kennedy, and then Johnson administrations were forced to take a stand.

What was novel to the political context was not the opportunity for black insurgency generally, but Federal and liberal alignments that potentiated strong allied intervention in response to brutal repression of civil rights practices. This intervention, in turn, encouraged further mobilization. The cycle of insurgency continued until, as the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 were implemented, legally segregated institutional targets for civil rights action become scarce. Once the institutional targets for civil rights practices had been removed, the cycle of insurgency was broken. The rate of repression of nonviolent black protest plummeted, and following a lag, as insurgents discovered that civil rights practices no longer provided political leverage, civil rights insurgency rapidly declined as well.

Three empirical implications of this explanation are strongly confirmed by the graphic and preliminary logistic analysis. First, rather than deterring civil rights mobilization, beginning in 1955, and then developing more quickly in 1960, the level of repression rises in tandem with escalating civil rights mobilization. Second, the rate of repression of black nonviolent insurgent actions rapidly declines beginning in 1965. Third, following a lag, the level of nonviolent black insurgency soon declines as well. See Figure 2-2 for hypothetical framework, and Figure 2-4 for empirical confirmation.

**Level of Insurgent Mobilization**

More generally, given broad allied support for civil rights challenges to Jim Crow, once the insurgency begins, repression stimulates further insurgency. In a context where
allied intervention demonstrates that insurgents cannot readily be beaten into submission, potential insurgents view repression as evidence of political leverage. The more insurgents are arrested, beaten, and killed in what appears to be a winning battle, the clearer it becomes that civil rights insurgency is forcing a referendum on the legitimacy of Jim Crow, and more people flock to participate. This explanation is strongly supported by the OLS regression on panelized event data. The level of arrests of civil rights insurgents and white violent mobilization strongly retrodicts subsequent levels of mobilization, controlling for the previous level of mobilization. See Table 2-2.

**Timing of Proliferation**

As the civil rights insurgency developed, it spread to new insurgents, and new cities. Given the allied support for the civil rights challenge to Jim Crow, repression was untenable. As with the general level of insurgency, repression of civil rights insurgent encouraged others to join. This explanation is strongly supported by the event history analysis. Controlling for levels of mobilization, and clustering effects, most proliferation of civil rights insurgency to new cities occurred following heavy repression. But – consistent with previous interpretations of the Albany campaign, and unlike the overall levels of mobilization – brutal violent white mobilizations retrodict the proliferation of civil rights insurgency, whereas arrests dampen proliferation. See Table 2-4.

**Unexpected Historical Findings**

The systematic quantitative analysis, guided by the contested legitimacy approach, reveals two interesting historical dynamics not previously understood by scholars. First, the form of repression of civil rights insurgents shifted over time. Initially, in the late 1950s, the overwhelming repressive response was violent white mobilization
with few arrests. By 1960, this balance shifts with arrests quickly replacing repressive white violent mobs as the standard mode of repression. Second, while the overall rate of insurgency responded positively to both sorts of repression of civil rights insurgents, proliferation of the insurgency to new cities was encouraged by white violent mobilizations, but quelled by official arrests. These findings may have generalizable implications for the form of repression in other insurgencies.

**Limits of the Political Opportunity Explanations and the Promise of Retrodiction**

Different theories propose different kinds of effects, and so suggest different methods of inquiry. The political opportunity thesis does get some empirical implications wrong, for example suggesting that the level of black insurgency generally should rise and fall as a whole – when empirically civil rights insurgency collapsed even as violent and revolutionary nationalist forms of black insurgency rapidly developed in the late 1960s (see e.g. McAdam 1982: 182). But overall, the problem with the political opportunity thesis is not that it gets the empirical implications wrong, but that it fails to advance testable empirical implications for analysis. The political opportunity thesis guides analysts to identify period effects. The problem is, during any period there are always political conditions that correspond to changes in the level of insurgency. Such correlations can always be mixed and matched to eventually provide almost complete correlation between the level of insurgency and the level of hypothesized opportunities (see, e.g. Jenkins et al. 2003). Such an explanation is not falsifiable, and advances few testable implications to deepen analysis. From any given moment in an insurgency, it is impossible to know which processes will correlate in the end, or to garner any insight into the trajectory of the insurgency.
Rather than period effects, the contested legitimacy approach suggests a retrodictive approach which is fully testable. I believe that theoretically, analyzing the way that particular insurgent practices utilize specifiable political cleavages to contest the legitimacy of specific social institutions constitutes a significant advance over searching for general structural advantages accruing to social groups. But perhaps even more importantly, the contested legitimacy approach sets up an important methodological advance. Whereas the only testable comparison the political opportunity thesis sets up is between the level of insurgency and various contextual processes, the contested legitimacy approach enables constant retrodiction in which at every given instance, a subsequent trajectory is implied. At every juncture, this retrodiction creates a range of empirical implications and falsifiable tests. In analysis of a given insurgent movement, all elements of the hypothetical explanation – the insurgent practice, the contested social institution, the repressive authorities, their repressive practices, the potential allies, and the specific political cleavages hypothesized to motivate their allegiance – can be probed, evaluated, and revised. While the fate of insurgency is never completely determined until it is over, and micro actions and contingencies always contribute to an insurgency’s unfolding, the more precise the analysis of the insurgent dynamic, the better analysts should be able to retrodict subsequent trajectories. Through successive retrodictive

37 For example, in the civil rights movement, in addition to the tests conducted above, the contested legitimacy approach suggests a whole range of testable implications regarding the civil rights insurgency that are beyond the scope of this paper. A few include: specific civil rights actions that directly violated Jim Crow custom and law drew heavier repressive response than those that did not; civil rights actions in times and places where Jim Crow was more deeply entrenched drew heavier repressive response; violent challenges to Jim Crow preceding 1955 should have met with high levels of violent repression; the rate of allied intervention in response to violent repression of civil rights practices shifted in the mid-1950s, with much higher rates of allied intervention post-1950, and lower rates before; a strong interaction effect should be observable with violent repression of civil rights insurgents in the absence of allied intervention quelling civil rights insurgency but the confluence of violent repression and allied intervention positively retrodicting escalating insurgency; and much more specific implications about event level dynamics and responses in each insurgent event.
analyses of particular insurgencies, in turn, sociologists can develop and refine a much more precise general theoretical understanding of insurgent process.
FIGURES

FIGURE 2-1: THEORETICAL DIAGRAM – CONTESTED LEGITIMACY APPROACH

Disruption of Established Social Process

Mobilization by Insurgents

Repressive Action by Authorities

Allied Mobilization vs Repression
FIGURE 2-2: HYPOTHETICAL GRAPH OF LOSS OF LEVERAGE IN CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

1960 1964 1968 1971
Figure 2-3: Mobilization vs. Arrests

Non-Violent Black Mobilization in the Southern U.S.
vs. Rate of Repression, 1954-1992

Total Protestors (in tens)
Total Protestors Arrested

- Total Protestors (in tens)
- Total Protestors Arrested


0 500

146
FIGURE 2-4: MOBILIZATION VS. REPRESSSION

Non-Violent Black Mobilization in the Southern U.S.
vs. Rate of Repression, 1954-1992

- Total Protestors (in tens)
- Total Protestors Arrested
- Violent White Mobilizations against Blacks (events x 30)
# TABLES

## TABLE 2-1: DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
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<th>SD</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
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<td>Foment</td>
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<td>346</td>
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<td>Movement Proliferation</td>
<td>58,425</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>58,364</td>
<td>58,364</td>
<td>32,472</td>
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<td>High Mobilization</td>
<td>58,425</td>
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<td>32,472</td>
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<td>43,911</td>
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<td>---------------</td>
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<td>(235)</td>
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<td>(155)</td>
<td>(154)</td>
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<td>Period 1970-1975</td>
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<td>-513*</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(156)</td>
<td>(211)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Period 1976-1992</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(124)</td>
<td>(223)</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Recent Arrest Events</td>
<td>168***</td>
<td>163***</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(38)</td>
<td>(39)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recent White Violent Events</td>
<td>156***</td>
<td>162***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(38)</td>
<td>(39)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Foment</td>
<td>633***</td>
<td>70</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>(90)</td>
<td>(194)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>1096***</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>627**</td>
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R²: .181 .242 .261
rMSE: 856 823 816
BIC: -70 -113 -101

*** p<.001 ** p<.01 * p<.05. † Reference category.
## Table 2-3: Conditions of Movement Proliferation

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<td></td>
<td>High Mobilization</td>
<td>Low Mobilization</td>
<td>High Mobilization</td>
<td>Low Mobilization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Repression</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>21,033</td>
<td>4,920</td>
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<td>Low Repression</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7,872</td>
<td>24,600</td>
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Note: Raw Tabulation.
### Table 2-4: Odds of Movement Proliferation (N=35,208)

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
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<tr>
<td>Time</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time^2</td>
<td>1.001 *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time^3</td>
<td>1.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Arrests</td>
<td>0.167 ***</td>
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<tr>
<td>High White Violence</td>
<td>2.803 ***</td>
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<td>Very High Mobilization</td>
<td>6.805 ***</td>
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<tr>
<td>LR χ^2(6)</td>
<td>117</td>
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<tr>
<td>P&gt; χ^2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pseudo R^2</td>
<td>.131</td>
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***p<.001 **p<.01 *p<.05.
Note: Logistic Regression of Movement Proliferation on previous year Arrests, White Violence, and Very High Mobilization Controlling for Time since Last Proliferation.
## Table 2-5: Probability of Proliferation

<table>
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<th>Repression</th>
<th>Probability of Proliferation</th>
<th>SMSA-Months at Risk</th>
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<td>Low Mobilization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Repression</td>
<td>.31%</td>
<td>.24%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Low Repression</td>
<td>.14%</td>
<td>.03%</td>
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</table>

Note: Probability of Movement Proliferation in SMSA-Months at Risk, Controlling for Time Since Last Proliferation
***** Part III *****

Revolutionary Black Nationalism
BLACK AGAINST EMPIRE:
THE HISTORY AND POLITICS OF THE BLACK PANTHER PARTY

By Joshua Bloom and Waldo E. Martin, Jr.
We dedicate this book to:

Hana, Mikhayla, Julius, Theodore, Eva, Emila, and Kian;
Jetta and Coral;
Che Patrice Lumumba, Darryl, Dassine, Dorian, Ericka, Fred Jr.,
Jaime, Joju Younghi, Maceo, Mai, Malik Nkrumah Stagolee,
Patrice, Romaine, Tupac, and all the cubs\textsuperscript{38};
and to young revolutionaries everywhere.

\textsuperscript{38} Here and gone.
# Black Against Empire: The History and Politics of the Black Panther Party

By Joshua Bloom and Waldo E. Martin, Jr.

## Introduction

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<td>Chapter 8: Law and Order</td>
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<td>Chapter 10: Hampton and Clark</td>
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<td>Chapter 12: Black Studies and Third World Liberation</td>
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<td>Chapter 14: International</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chapter 16: The Limits of Heroism</td>
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## Conclusion

| Conclusion | 479 |
Introduction

The Panthers shut out the pack of zealous reporters and kept the door locked all day, but now the hallway was empty. Huey Newton, and two comrades, casually walked from the luxury suite down to the lobby and slipped out of the Hong Kong Hilton. Their official escort took them straight across the border, and after a short flight, cheering throngs greeted them in Beijing.¹

It was late September, 1971, and U.S. National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger had just visited China a couple months earlier. The U.S. was proposing a visit to China by President Nixon himself, and normalization of diplomatic relations. The Chinese leadership held varied views of these prospects, and it was unclear whether they would accept a visit from Nixon.

But the Chinese Government communicated frequently with the Black Panther Party, hosted an earlier Panther delegation, and the previous year had personally invited Huey Newton, the Party’s leader, to visit. With Nixon attempting to arrange a visit, Newton decided to accept the invitation and beat Nixon to China.²

When Zhou Enlai, the Chinese Premier, greeted Newton in Beijing, Newton took Zhou’s right hand between both of his own. Zhou took Newton’s wrist with his left hand and both men looked deeply into each other’s eyes. Newton presented a formal petition that China “negotiate with ... Nixon for the freedom of the oppressed peoples of the

INTRODUCTION:
² Huey Newton, Revolutionary Suicide p. 324; Brown Taste of Power pp. 295-6.
world.” Then the two sat down for a private meeting.³ On National Day, the anniversary of the founding of the People’s Republic of China on October 1, Premier Zhou honored the Panthers as national guests. Tens of thousands of Chinese gathered in Tiananmen Square, waving red flags, and applauding the Panthers. Revolutionary theater groups, folk dancers, acrobats, and the revolutionary ballet performed. Huge red banners declared: “Peoples of the World, Unite to destroy the American aggressors and their lackeys.”⁴ At the official State dinner, first lady Jiang Qing sat with the Panthers.⁵ The New York Times editorial encouraged Nixon “to think positively about Communist China and to ignore such potential sources of friction as the honors shown to Black Panther leader Huey Newton.”⁶

***

In Oakland, California in late 1966, community college students Bobby Seale and Huey Newton took up arms and declared themselves part of a global revolution against American imperialism. Unlike Civil Rights activists who advocated for full citizenship rights within the U.S., their Black Panther Party rejected the legitimacy of the U.S. government. The Panthers saw black communities in the U.S. as a colony and the police as an occupying army. In a foundational 1967 essay Newton wrote: “Because black people desire to determine their own destiny, they are constantly inflicted with brutality from the occupying army, embodied in the police department. There is a great similarity

⁵ Newton Revolutionary Suicide, p. 326.
between the occupying army in Southeast Asia and the occupation of our communities by the racist police.”

As late as February of 1968, their Black Panther Party was still a small local organization. But that year, everything changed. By December, the Party opened offices in twenty cities, from Seattle to Chicago to New York, and from Winston-Salem to Omaha to Los Angeles. In the face of numerous armed conflicts with police, and virulent direct repression by the State, young black people continued to embrace the revolutionary vision of the Party. The Party continued to expand, and by 1970, had opened offices in sixty-eight cities. The Black Panther Party had become the center of a revolutionary movement in the United States.

Today it may be hard for many readers to imagine a revolution in the United States. But in the late 1960s, despite potentially fatal risks, many thousands of young black people joined the Black Panther Party and dedicated their lives to revolutionary struggle. Many more approved of their efforts. A joint report by the FBI, CIA, the Defense Intelligence Committee, and the National Security Agency expressed grave concern about wide support for the Party among young blacks, noting that “43 per cent of blacks under 21 years of age [have] ... a great respect for the BPP.” Students for a Democratic Society, the leading anti-war and draft resistance organization declared the Black Panther Party the “vanguard in our common struggles against capitalism and

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9 We follow Gramsci in our conception of revolutionary movements. See the conclusion for discussion.
imperialism."11 FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover famously declared that “the Black Panther Party, without question, represents the greatest threat to the internal security of the country.”12

As the Black Panthers drew young blacks to its revolutionary program, the Party became the strongest link between the domestic African American Freedom Struggle and global opponents of American imperialism. The North Vietnamese – at war with the U.S. – sent letters home to the families of American prisoners of war (POWs) through the Black Panther Party and discussed trading release of POWs for the release of Panthers from U.S. jails. Cuba offered political asylum to Black Panthers and began developing a military training ground for them. Algeria – then the center of Pan-Africanism and a world hub of anti-imperialism hosting embassies for most post-colonial governments and independence movements – granted the Panthers national diplomatic status, and an embassy building of their own, where the Panthers headquartered their international section under the leadership of Eldridge and Kathleen Cleaver.

But by the time of Newton’s trip to China, the Black Panther Party had begun to unravel. In the early 1970s, the Party rapidly declined. By mid-1972, it was basically a local Oakland community organization once again. An award-winning elementary school, and a brief local renaissance in the mid-1970s notwithstanding, the Party suffered a long and painful demise, formally closing its last office in 1982.

Not since the Civil War almost a hundred and fifty years ago have so many people taken up arms in revolutionary struggle in the United States. Of course the number

of people who took up arms for the Union and Confederate causes and the number of people killed in the Civil War are orders of magnitude larger than the numbers involved in any armed political struggle in the United States since. Some political organizations embracing revolutionary ideologies yet eschewing armed confrontation with the State may have garnered larger followings than the Black Panther Party. But in the general absence of armed revolution in the United States since 1865, the thousands of Black Panthers – who dedicated their lives to a political program involving armed resistance to State authority – stand alone.

Why in the late 1960s – in contrast to the Civil Rights Movement’s nonviolent action and demands for full participation in the U.S., and despite severe personal risks – did so many young people dedicate their lives to the Black Panther Party and embrace armed revolution? Why, after a few years of explosive growth, did the Party so quickly unravel? And why has no similar movement developed since?

Most obvious explanations do not stand up to the evidence. Some believe the Party was a creation of the media. But most of the media attention came after the Party’s rapid spread. Some assert that the Party’s success was just a product of the times. But many other black political organizations, some with similar ideologies, sought to mobilize people at the same time, and none succeeded like the Panthers. Others contend that this or that Panther leader was an unrivaled organizer, and that by force of their efforts, they recruited the Party’s vast following. But it turns out that most of the new recruits to the Black Panthers came to the Party asking to join, not the other way around. It is commonly said that the Party collapsed because it could not withstand the Federal
repression, but the year of greatest repression, 1969, was also the year of the Party’s greatest growth.  

While much has been written on aspects of the Black Panther Party, to date no rigorous overarching analysis has been produced. Instead, the Black Panther Party is usually portrayed through a small slice of its broad temporal and geographic scope, with limited historical context. Party sympathizers are as guilty of such reduction as its detractors. Commentators reduce the Party to its community service programs, or to armed confrontation with the police. They claim the Panthers espoused narrowly Marxist, or alternately Black Nationalist ideology. They say Huey Newton was a genius, or that he was overly philosophical, or that he was a criminal. They say the Party’s power came from organizing young blacks from the urban ghettos, or alternately from drawing broad support from a range of allies. Some claim that the Party was a locus of cutting edge debate on gender politics, applauding its embrace of women’s and gay liberation; others say it was sexist and patriarchal.

Occasionally, commentators have even suggested that the Black Panther Party was all of these things. But no one has made sense of the relationship among the parts, situated the varying practices of the Party in time and place, and adequately traced the historical evolution of the Party’s politics. As Pulitzer Prize-winning historian David Garrow recently pointed out in an extensive review of historical works on the Panthers, there has been no serious treatment of how the political practices of the Black Panther Party changed over the course of its history, or why people were drawn to participate at each juncture. “Panther scholarship,” Garrow observed, “would benefit immensely from a detailed and comprehensive narrative history that gives special care to how rapidly the

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13 Measured in terms of the annual number of Panthers killed in direct confrontations with the State.
BPP evolved through a succession of extremely fundamental changes.... Far too much of what has been written about the BPP fails to specify expressly which period of Panther history is being addressed or characterized, and interpretive clarity, and accuracy, will benefit greatly from a far more explicit appreciation and identification of the major turning points in the BPP’s eventually tragic evolution.”

Writing in the New York Times in 1994, Sociologist Robert Blauner commented that “because of the political mine fields,” the “complex and textured social history that the Panthers deserve” has not yet been written, and “may be 10 or 15 years in the future.” Almost twenty years have passed, but to date, as a diversity of writers continue to comment, no one has presented an adequate or comprehensive history.

It is often said that ‘history is written by the victors.’ Trying to write history that transcends preconceptions is always challenging. It takes time and perspective and endless sifting through the often contradictory evidence to test competing explanations and weigh the importance of divergent forces. But the lack of an overarching history of the Panthers and their politics, despite the great abundance of writing on various aspects of the Party, is unusual. This unusual contrast is due, in part, to the character of state repression of the Black Panther Party. State repression and the related vilification campaign have powerfully shaped public understanding of the Party.

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17 Alternately attributed to Machiavelli, Napolean, Churchill, and others.
The Federal Government and local police nationwide responded to the Panthers with an unparalleled campaign of repression and vilification. They fed defamatory stories to the press. They wiretapped Panther offices around the country. They hired dozens of informants to infiltrate Panther chapters. Often, they put down all pretense and simply raided Panther establishments, guns blazing. In one case, in Chicago in December of 1969, equipped with a map of the apartment drawn by an informant, police and federal agents assassinated a prominent Panther leader in his bed while he slept, shooting him in the head at point blank range.\textsuperscript{18}

In attacking the Black Panthers as enemies of the state, Federal agents sought to repress not just the Party as an organization, but the political possibility it represented. The Federal Counterintelligence Program (COINTELPRO) sought to vilify the Black Panthers, and “prevent” the Party and similar “black nationalist groups and leaders from gaining respectability by discrediting them.”\textsuperscript{19}

FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover emphasized time and again, in different ways, that “one of our primary aims in counterintelligence as it concerns the BPP is to keep this group isolated from the moderate black and white community which may support it.”\textsuperscript{20} Federal agents sought “to create factionalism” among Party leaders and between the Panthers and other black political organizations.\textsuperscript{21} The FBI forged documents and paid provocateurs to promote violent conflicts among Black Panther leaders – as well as

\textsuperscript{18} For an overview of the FBI counterintelligence program against the Panthers, see Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with respect to Intelligence Activities, United States Senate, [i.e. Church Committee] “Supplementary Detailed Staff Reports on Intelligence Activities and the Rights of Americans” Final Report, April 1976. For details on raids and Fred Hampton assassination, see Part IV: “Resilience,” below.
\textsuperscript{19} J. Edgar Hoover, memo to field offices, March 4, 1968. See also Memo from G.C. Moore to W.C. Sullivan, February 29, 1968.
\textsuperscript{20} Airtel Director, FBI to SAC, San Francisco, May 27, 1969.
\textsuperscript{21} Memo from G.C. Moore to W.C. Sullivan September 27, 1968.
between the Party and other Black Nationalist organizations – and congratulated themselves when these conflicts yielded the killing of Panthers. And COINTELPRO sought to lead the Party into unsupportable action, “creating opposition to the BPP on the part of the majority of the residents of the ghetto areas.”\(^{22}\) For example, agent provocateurs on government payroll supplied explosives and sought to incite Panther members to blow up public buildings, and they promoted Kangaroo courts encouraging Panther members to torture suspected informants.\(^{23}\)

One school of commentators simply took up Hoover’s program of vilification, portraying the Party as criminals, obscuring and minimizing their politics. In an influential article published in 1978, Kate Coleman and Paul Avery made a series of allegations about personal misdeeds and criminal actions committed by Panthers in the 1970s after the Party had lost influence as a national and international political organization: “Black Panthers have committed a series of violent crimes over the last several years… There appears to be no political explanation for it; the Party is no longer under siege by the police, and this is not self-defense. It seems to be nothing but senseless criminality, directed in most cases at other blacks.”\(^{24}\)

David Horowitz wrote a series of essays building on these allegations, asserting that they comprised the totality of what was important or interesting about the Panthers, and describing the Black Panthers as “an organized street gang.”\(^{25}\) Hugh Pearson, in consultation with Horowitz, then wrote In the Shadow of the Panther, a full-length book.

\(^{22}\) Memo from G.C. Moore to W.C. Sullivan September 27, 1968.
\(^{23}\) Provocateur actions such as the case of NY 21 are well documented and known, see Church Committee report. For promotion of kangaroo courts and torture by a documented agent provocateur, see William O’Neal, Captain of Security, “FBI INFORMER,” in Black Panther Newspaper, February 17, 1969 p. 9.
version of the story developed by Horowitz, telling the history of the Black Panther Party through the alleged crimes and personal misdeeds of Huey Newton. The major newspapers celebrated the book as a respectable history of the Party and its politics. The New York Times called the book “a richly detailed portrait of a movement,” and named it one of the “Notable Books of the Year.”

The storm of criminal allegations touted as movement history effectively advanced J. Edgar Hoover’s program of vilifying the Party and shrouding its politics. While many of the criminal allegations made by Horowitz and his colleagues against Huey Newton and other Panther leaders were thinly supported and almost none verified in court, these treatments omit and obscure the thousands of people who dedicated their lives to the Panther revolution, their reasons for doing so, the political dynamics of their participation, their actions, and the consequences.

One of the key aims of Hoover’s vilification was to drive a wedge between the Party and its non-black allies. Today, the popular misconception abounds that the Black Panther Party was separatist, or anti-white. Many current internet postings mischaracterize the Party in this way. In fact, the Party was deeply anti-racist and strongly committed to interracial coalitions. Even some newspapers get the basic story wrong, such as the editorial board at the Providence Journal-Bulletin that characterized

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28 E.g. comment on the original Black Panther Party posted on Yahoo Answers May 12, 2011: “It was a black version of the KKK.”
the Panthers as an “organization based on racial hostility… a mirror image of the Ku Klux Klan.” Such misconceptions have also taken root among some young activists seeking to emulate the historical example of the Black Panthers, such as the so called “New Black Panther Party,” darling of Fox News, that while claiming to carry on the legacy of the original Black Panthers, preaches separatism and racial hate.

Another influential line of attack – the argument that the Panthers primarily advanced “Black Macho” rather than a broader liberation politics – has also done more to obscure than illuminate the history of the Party. Michelle Wallace first popularized this argument in her influential 1978 book Black Macho and the Myth of Superwoman. Wallace denigrates the role of Angela Davis and other revolutionary black women as “do-it-for-your-man” selfless subservience to misogyny in the name of black liberation.

As June Jordan commented in her review, Black Macho is “a divisive, fractious tract devoid of hope and dream, devoid even of competent scholarship for the subject so glibly undertaken.” Yet the argument gained traction, perhaps in part because it built upon a kernel of truth. Stewarding a predominantly male organization in the beginning, some Black Panthers indeed asserted an aggressive black masculinity. But by misrepresenting this black masculinity as the totality of the Party’s politics, Wallace and her ilk distorted and defamed the Party. They erased the women who soon constituted a majority of the Panther membership, and the considerable struggles Panther women and men undertook.

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33 See extended discussion of Eldridge Cleaver’s Soul on Ice below.
to advance gender and sexual liberation within and through the Party, often progressing well in advance of the wider society.

If J. Edgar Hoover were alive today, he would undoubtedly take great pride in the persistence of the factionalism he sought to create among Panthers themselves. Fights that erupted between Panther factions as the Party unraveled as a national and international political force in the 1970s have long outlived the organization. Decades later, former Black Panther leaders continue to condemn each other virulently in public. These disputes distract from the politics of the Black Panthers in their heyday, and sustain the Party’s public vilification.

But in recent decades, the history of the Black Panther Party has proven irrepressible. Memoirs by former Black Panthers, as well as books, edited collections, articles, doctoral dissertations, and masters theses by scholars, have chipped away at public fallacies, clearing obscurity, and uncovering the history of the Black Panther Party piece by piece. Memoirs by, and biographies of, women and men who served as Black Panther activists in various parts of the country, and some as national leaders, including David Hilliard, Elbert “Big Man” Howard, Assata Shakur, Geronimo Pratt, Elaine Brown, Safiya Bukhari, Stokely Carmichael, Marshall “Eddie” Conway, Angela Davis, Flores Forbes, Evans Hopkins, Mumia Abu-Jamal, Steve McCutchen, Robert Hillary King, Huey P. Newton, Afeni Shakur, and Johnny Spain, provide personal perspectives, and rich accounts of life in the Party. Edited collections by Charles Jones, Judson Jeffries, Kathleen Cleaver and George Katsiaficas, Yohuru Williams and Jama Lazerow, and countless journal articles, fill out the story of local chapters in cities across the country, and develop thematic insights across them. Books on the Panthers by Donna Murch,
Christian Davenport, Jane Rhodes, Curtis Austin, Paul Alkebulan, as well as recent books that contain significant discussions of the Panthers\textsuperscript{34} build analytic perspective. A new generation of scholars has provided rigorous treatments of myriad facets of the Party’s history with an extraordinary ninety dissertations and masters theses – most written in the last decade – analyzing specific aspects of the Party’s history, such as the sickle cell anemia programs, the multi-racial alliances of the Chicago Panthers, or the artwork of Black Panther Minister of Culture Emory Douglas.\textsuperscript{35}

These treatments are invaluable, and the depth of our analysis is much richer for them. But despite the strength of many of these contributions, no previous treatment provides an overarching history of the Black Panther Party and its politics. History is always complex. The vociferous efforts of the Federal government to vilify the Party and the legacy of factional dispute have made the history of the Panthers nearly impenetrable.

Over the course of more than a decade, many people have worked with us to uncover and make sense of the history of the Black Panther Party. Much of the research was conducted through the Social Movements Project at the Institute for the Study of Social Change that we co-directed from 2000-2005. We benefited greatly from the assistance of dozens of graduate and undergraduate research assistants. Several of our graduate research assistants and advisees have gone on to complete their own dissertations and publish their own books on aspects of the Party history including Donna Murch, Paul Alkebulan, Gaidi Faraj, Lauren Araiza, Jason Michael Ferreira, and Lawrence David Barber. Undergraduate research assistants who wrote their theses on

\textsuperscript{34} Including those by Nikhil Pal Singh, Robin D.G. Kelley, Rod Bush, Laura Pulido, Robert Self, Chris Rhomberg, and Jeffrey Ogbar.

\textsuperscript{35} Abstracts for 90 dissertations and MA theses on Proquest Digital Dissertations contained the phrase “Black Panther Party” on May 23, 2011.
aspects this history include Felicia Dawn Angeja, Michael Brazeal, Douglas Corbin, Jason Luna Gavilan, Chris Hastings, Kambridge Hibrar, Keith Orejel, and Patrick Sharma.

We could never have written this book without the insight we gained talking with former Panthers who shared their memories, especially David Hilliard, former Black Panther Chief of Staff, and Kathleen Cleaver, former Black Panther Communications Secretary. We also had the opportunity of getting to know almost all of the other living former leadership of the Black Panther Party, and together with our students we also spoke with many regional leaders as well as rank and file members of the Black Panther Party, and important Party allies, including Bobby Seale, Elaine Brown, Ericka Huggins, Angela Davis, Emory Douglas, Billy X Jennings, Mumia Abu-Jamal, Geronimo ji Jaga (Pratt), Richard Aoki, Kumasi Aguila, Pete O’Neal, Alex Papillon, Melvin Newton, John Seale, Tom Hayden, and dozens of others. The hundreds of hours we spent talking about the Party and working on historical projects related to it with former members provided invaluable insight into life inside the Party and the crucial concerns of the leadership at various junctures.

In the late 1990s as we began this project, we conducted formal interviews with Bobby Seale, and a range of others, expecting that these interviews would provide a principal source of data for the project. But the more interviews we conducted, the clearer the limits of that medium became. Retrospective accounts decades after the fact — memories shaped by intervening events, interests, and hearsay — are highly contradictory. So while we did rely extensively on conversations with historical actors to test our analysis and push our understanding, we have avoided using retrospective
interviews as a principal source of evidence, preferring documentary or recorded
evidence temporally proximate to the events being analyzed. In the end, what made it
possible to uncover this history was a vast wealth of primary sources, including many
thousands of first-hand accounts by participants in the historical events shortly after they
occurred.

We early consulted the range of already available primary sources on the Party
from archives at Stanford, Berkeley, Howard, Wisconsin, the Schomburg Center for
Research in Black Culture, the New Haven Museum and Historical Society, and the
Oakland Public Library; the Black Press, underground press, and mainstream press; and
Government documents. In addition, we developed two new archival sources as part of
producing this book.

In our first major archival project, we assembled the only near complete
collection of the Party’s own periodical, the *Black Panther Newspaper*. This includes
every single issue published during the Party’s heyday from 1967-1971, and 520 of the
537 issues published over the course of the Party’s history. Chock full of first-hand
accounts of unfolding events by Party members, and programmatic statements by Party
leaders, the *Black Panther* is the source where you can find the most comprehensive
documentation of the ideas, actions, and projections of the Party day-to-day, week-to-
week. This collection was digitized, made text searchable, and published online, in
collaboration with Huey Newton’s widow and the Huey P. Newton Foundation, by
Alexander Street Press as part of their Black Thought and Culture Collection.³⁶

³⁶ Joshua Bloom, collection editor, *Black Panther Newspaper Collection*, published in Black Thought and
Culture database online, Alexander Street Press, 2009. At about 12,000 pages, this particular collection of
the *Black Panther Newspaper* is more than twice as complete as the next most complete collection.
In our second major archival project, in collaboration with the H.K. Yuen family, we recovered, preserved, and indexed (a good portion of) the H.K. Yuen collection, which contains thousands of fliers and pamphlets, and over 30,000 hours of audio recordings on the Panthers, and other social movements in the Bay Area from the 1960s and 1970s. As a doctoral student at Berkeley, in 1964 H.K. Yuen began collecting every movement flier and pamphlet circulated on the Berkeley campus, and recording every meeting and rally in the Bay Area that he could. Yuen dropped out of school and made a career of this collection for almost two decades. He also set up an apparatus to record almost all shows related to social movements broadcast on Bay Area radio stations. Working with his son Eddie Yuen, we recovered this extensive collection from boxes overflowing the Yuen family basement, preserved and indexed the collection, and facilitated donation of the collection to the Bancroft Library at Berkeley, with an audited value of several million dollars.

What is unique and historically important about the Black Panther Party is specifically its politics. So in seeking to uncover the history of the Black Panther Party, we have sought to analyze the Party’s political history. In an early proposal for this book written in 2000, we elaborated a method of “strategic genealogy” to conduct this analysis. Rather than centering particular individuals as in biography or the organization of the Party per se, in order to uncover the political dynamics of the Party, we made the decision to focus on the political practices of the Black Panthers as our main object of analysis. A key theoretical proposition explored in this analysis is that as people find effective ways of struggling for political power, others join them. One of the implications here is that the development of social movements should leave a “strategic trace.” That is to say, a
history of the genesis of movement strategy ought to reveal the increased adoption (and evolution) of demands and tactics of struggle as these demands and tactics meet with success.\(^{37}\)

**Black Against Empire**

The Civil Rights Movement of the early 1960s dismantled legal segregation in the United States. Civil Rights activists nonviolently defied legal segregation, demanding full citizenship rights. But once they defeated Jim Crow and solidified black voting rights – and there was little legal segregation left to defy – the Civil Rights Movement fell apart. For many young urban blacks, especially in the North and West, little had changed. The wartime jobs that drew the black migration had ended, much remaining industry fled to the suburbs along with white residents, and many blacks lived isolated in poor urban ghettos with little access to decent employment or higher education, and minimal political influence. Municipal police and fire departments in cities with large black populations employed few if any blacks. And many cities developed containment policing practices – designed to isolate violence in black ghettos rather than to keep ghetto residents safe. While formally full citizens, most black people remained ghettoized, impoverished, and politically subordinated with few institutionalized channels for redress.

In the mid-1960s, young blacks in cities across the country took up the call for “Black Power!” The Black Power ferment posed a question – how would black people in America win not only formal citizenship rights, but actual economic and political power?

\(^{37}\) As first author, Joshua did the majority of research, writing, and analysis. Both authors read, and discussed every section multiple times. Over many years of working together, this book emerged. For a more extended discussion of strategic genealogy, see the original book proposal, Joshua Bloom, *Power of the Panther: The History and Politics of the Black Panther Party,* unpublished manuscript, 2000.
Dozens of organizations sprung up seeking to attain Black Power in different ways. More a question than an answer – Black Power meant widely different things to different people. Despite the widespread belief among young black people that their mobilization as black people was the key to attaining political and economic power, it was not clear to anyone how actually to achieve such power.\textsuperscript{38}

Into this vacuum, Huey Newton and Bobby Seale advanced a Black Anti-Imperialist politics that powerfully challenged institutionalized politics, and yet was difficult to repress. Drawing heavily on the nationalist ideas of Malcolm X, Newton and Seale declared the Black Panther Party steward of the black community – its legitimate political representative – in revolutionary opposition to the oppressive “power structure.” But unlike most black nationalists, the Panthers made common cause with the domestic anti-war movement and anti-imperialist movements abroad. The Panthers argued that black people constituted a “colony in the mother country.” In the context of an unpopular imperial war in Vietnam, widespread anti-imperialist movements internationally, and a crisis of legitimacy in the Democratic Party, they posited a single worldwide struggle against imperialism encompassing Vietnamese resistance against the United States, draft resistance against military service, and their own struggle to liberate the black community. In the face of brutal repression, the Black Panther Party forged powerful alliances, drawing widespread support from not only moderate blacks, but also many non-blacks, and anti-imperialist governments and movements around the globe.

\textsuperscript{38} In this sense, there are many parallels with the immigrant rights “movement” today. A wide spectrum of organizations and activism abound based on the shared premise that undocumented immigrants are economically exploited and politically oppressed. But there is no movement that provides a coherent and powerful practical avenue for redress.
The Black Panthers’ crucial political innovation was not only ideational, but practical. At the center of their politics was the practice of armed self-defense against the police. While revolutionary ideas could be easily ignored, widespread confrontations between young armed black people and the police could not. The Panthers’ politics of armed self-defense created a source of political leverage, forcibly contesting the legitimacy of the American political regime. In late 1968, Bobby Seale and David Hilliard shifted the focus of the Party’s efforts to organizing free breakfast for children and other community programs. In 1969, every Panther chapter organized community services, and these programs soon became the staple activity for Party members nationwide. By that summer, the Party estimated it was feeding 10,000 children free breakfast on a daily basis. The Black Panther Party’s community programs gave members meaningful daily activities, strengthened black community support, burnished Party credibility in the eyes of allies, and vividly exposed the inadequacy of the Federal Government’s own concurrent War on Poverty. Community programs concretely advanced the politics the Panthers stood for – they were feeding hungry children when the vastly wealthier and more powerful United States government left the children to starve. The more the state sought to repress the Panthers, the more allies mobilized in their defense. The Black Panther Party quickly became a major national and international political force.

Individuals created the Black Panther Party. Without their specific efforts and actions, the Black Panther Party would not have come about, and there is little reason to believe that a powerful Black Anti-Imperialist movement would have developed in the late 1960s. That said, the Black Panther Party was also very much a product of its times.
The times did not make the Black Panther Party, but the specific practices of the Black Panthers became so influential precisely because of the particular political context. Without the success of the Civil Rights Movement that preceded it, and without its limitations, the Black Power ferment from which the Black Panther Party emerged would not have existed. Without widespread exclusion of black people from political representation, government employment, elite education, and the middle class, most black people would have opposed the Panthers’ politics. Without the Vietnam War draft and the crisis of legitimacy in the Democratic Party, few non-black allies would have mobilized resistance to state repression of the Party. Without powerful anti-imperialist allies abroad, the Panthers would have been deprived of both resources and credibility.

It was not simply what the Black Panthers did – but what they did in the conditions in which they found themselves – that proved so consequential. They created a movement with the power to challenge established social relations, and yet – given the political context – very difficult to repress. Once the Black Panther Party developed, without vast changes in the conditions under which it thrived, some form of revolutionary anti-imperialism would necessarily persist. Had government hiring and university enrollment remained inaccessible to blacks, had black electoral representation not expanded, had the military draft not been scaled back and repealed, and had revolutionary governments abroad not normalized relations with the U.S., revolutionary Black Anti-Imperialism would remain a powerful force in the United States today. While the Black Panther Party might have been repressible as an organization, the politics the Panthers created were irrepressible so long as the conditions in which they thrived persisted.
From 1968 through 1970, the Black Panther Party made business as usual impossible to maintain and participated in creating a far-reaching crisis in American society. The state responded to the destabilizing crisis the Panthers helped create with social concessions such as municipal hiring of blacks, as well as repeal of the military draft. Because different sequences of events can yield similar outcomes precisely determining what would have happened if Huey Newton, Bobby Seale, and many others had not created the Black Panther Party is impossible. But without the Black Panther Party, it is certain that we would now live in a very different world.

The first three parts of this book analyze in turn the major phases of the political development of the Black Panther Party. In Part I, Organizing Rage, we analyze the Party’s development through May of 1967. We trace the Party’s initial development of Black Anti-Imperialism, and its preliminary tactic of policing the police. We show how the Panthers’ politics of armed self-defense against the police attracts a strong local following and national attention.

In Part II, Baptism in Blood, we analyze the Party’s continued political development through 1968. As California bans the Party’s practice of carrying loaded weapons in public, the Panthers reinvent the politics of armed self-defense, championing black community self-determination, and armed resistance to the State. These politics drive the rapid ascent of the Party to national influence.

In Part III, Resilience, we analyze the Party’s development at the height of its power, through 1969 and 1970. The Black Panthers make free breakfast for children and related community service programs core membership activities nationally, complementing the politics of armed self-defense. With Nixon’s election on a “Law and

39 What methodologists call equifinality.
Order” platform, the state intensifies repressive action against the Party. But rather than crumbling, the Party continues to expand. We unpack the dynamics of repression and response in three cities: Los Angeles, Chicago, and New Haven, showing why Black Panther insurgent practices were irrepressible during this period. In each city, black and anti-war allies see federally coordinated repressive action against the Panthers as threatening their own interests, and contribute finances, political and legal support, and other resources to the Party.

Part IV, *Revolution Has Come!*, extends the analysis of the Black Panther Party at its peak. In 1969 and 1970, the Panthers help foment struggles over educational access and curriculum on campuses across the country, become the central cause of the domestic New Left, and attract support from revolutionary movements and governments abroad.

Part V: *Concessions and Unraveling*, analyzes the unraveling of the Black Panther Party’s politics in the 1970s, showing how state concessions to key constituencies undermine the resilience of the Party. Neither state repression nor internal organizational problems alone are sufficient to defang the Black Panthers’ revolutionary politics. Instead, broad social concessions undermine support among key Panther allies. Rapidly growing black electoral representation, government hiring, and expanded university access and curricula appease the black moderates. The Democratic Party turn against the Vietnam War and the winding down of the draft reassure many opponents of the War of the efficacy of mainstream politics. The U.S. normalizes relations with revolutionary governments abroad. These concessions make it more challenging for the Panthers to maintain allied support. The tension between practicing armed self-defense against the police – the source of the Party’s political leverage – and maintaining the
support of allies necessary to sustain these activities in the face of state repression become insurmountable. The Party splits along ideological lines – neither side able to sustain the politics that had driven its development – and quickly unravels.

In the concluding chapter, we present a more detailed summary of our findings, and then discuss their implications for three broader contemporary debates. The history of the Black Panther Party challenges prevailing wisdom in each debate: it reveals key limits of dominant approaches in Civil Rights and Black Power historiography; it challenges sociological theories about the effects of repression on mobilization; and it pushes contemporary sociological thinking about the relationship between political context and social movements. Finally, we assess the history of the Black Panther Party in terms of Antonio Gramsci’s theory of revolution, exploring the political dynamics by which social movements become revolutionary, and explain why there is no revolutionary movement in the United States today.
Part I. Organizing Rage

This is the genius of Huey Newton, of being able to TAP this VAST RESERVOIR of revolutionary potential. I mean, street niggers, you dig it? Niggers who been BAD, niggers who weren’t scared, because they ain’t never knew what to be scared was, because they been down in these ghettos and they knew to live they had to fight; and so they been able to do that. But I mean to really TAP it, to really TAP IT, to ORGANIZE it, and to direct it into an onslaught, a sortie against the power structure, this is the genius of Huey Newton, this is what Huey Newton did. Huey Newton was able to go down, and to take the nigger on the street and relate to him, understand what was going on inside of him, what he was thinking, and then implement that into an organization, into a PROGRAM and a PLATFORM, you dig it? Into the BLACK PANTHER PARTY – and then let it spread like wildfire across this country.

– Alprentice “Bunchy” Carter, leader of the Slauson gang and founder of the Los Angeles chapter of the Black Panther Party
Chapter 1: Huey and Bobby

On February 17, 1942, in Monroe, Louisiana, Huey P. Newton was born, the seventh and youngest child of Walter and Armelia Newton. Walter Newton was a paragon of responsibility. He held down two jobs at any given time, working in the gravel pit, the carbon plant, in sugar cane mills, in sawmills, and eventually as a brakeman for the Union Saw Mill Company. On Sundays, he served as the minister at the Bethel Baptist Church in Monroe, where he and his family lived. He preached as the spirit moved him, often promising to address his parishioners on a particular topic, then improvising an inspirational sermon salient to the moment. The rest of the time he spent with his family, the joy and purpose of his life.¹

Armelia Johnson liked to say she married young and finished growing up with her children. She was only seventeen when she gave birth to her first child. The others soon followed. Unlike most black women in the South in the 1930s and 40s, Armelia stayed at home, raising her children, seeing them through life’s challenges, and relishing in life’s humor.² The Newton family saw Armelia’s not working as a domestic servant for whites as an act of rebellion.

Walter Newton often used to say “you can take a killing but you can’t take a beating.” On one occasion, Walter Newton was working for a younger white man and they got into an argument about a detail of the job. The white man told him that when a “colored” disputed his word, he whipped him. Walter Newton replied that no man

PART I
CHAPTER 1: HUEY AND BOBBY
¹ The description of Huey Newton’s family and childhood is drawn from Huey P. Newton, Revolutionary Suicide and David Hilliard, This Side of Glory.
² Armelia Johnson paraphrased by Huey Newton in Revolutionary Suicide: 12.
whipped him unless he was a better man, and he doubted that the white man qualified. The man was shocked at this uncharacteristic response and he backed down. ³

This was just one of many times that Walter Newton defied whites in ways that often got blacks in the South lynched. He began to develop a reputation as being “crazy,” and so whites steered clear of him, gaining him powerful respect among blacks. Walter Newton’s ability to challenge whites and live is something of a mystery. One factor, according to Huey Newton, may have been his mixed race. Walter Newton’s father was the white man who raped his black mother. This meant, among other things, that local whites knew his father, cousins, aunts, and blood relatives and while they might not have hesitated to kill a black person, they may have been reluctant to shed his white family’s blood.⁴

The Newtons moved to Oakland in 1945, following the path of many black families migrating out of the South to the cities of the North and West to fill jobs in the shipyards and industries opened up by World War II. When the war ended, many blacks were laid off as wartime industry waned, and soldiers returning from the war created a labor surplus. Both new and expanded black communities in cities across the country were rapidly impoverished. While the Newtons were better off than many of the black families they knew, they were poor, with seven children to feed, and often ate cush several times a day, a dish made of fried cornbread. Making payments on the bills became Walter Newton’s constant preoccupation.

The Newton family was on the edge, and Huey looked to his older brothers for survival strategies. Each coped with ghetto life in different ways. Walter Newton, Jr., the

⁴ Huey Newton, *Revolutionary Suicide*: 11, 32.
oldest, became a hustler, working outside legal channels to keep poverty at bay. He always dressed sharp, and drove a nice car. Everyone in the neighborhood called him “Sonny Man.” Lee Edward gained a reputation as a street fighter before joining the military. He knew how “to persist in the face of bad odds, always to look an adversary straight in the eye, and to keep moving forward.” Melvin Newton took a different path. He became a bookworm, went to college, and eventually taught Sociology at Merritt, the local community college.

Huey P. Newton became all of these things – hustler, fighter and scholar. From his oldest brothers Lee Edward and “Sonny Man” he mastered the ways of the street, and learned how to fight. Through his teen years, Huey fought constantly. Unlike Melvin, Huey was not a bookworm. For years he rebelled at school. By the time he entered the eleventh grade he still could not read, and his teachers often told him he was unintelligent. But outside of school, he had been learning how to think. With Melvin, he memorized and analyzed poetry. When a counselor in his high school told him he was “not college material,” Huey made up his mind to prove him wrong. Over the next two years, through intense focus and will, he taught himself to read, graduated high school, and in 1959, enrolled in community college.

By the time Huey Newton became involved in the Afro-American Association at Oakland’s Merritt Community College, he could debate theory as well as any of his peers. Yet he had a side that most of the budding intellectuals around him lacked; he knew the street. He could understand and relate to the plight of the swelling ranks of unemployed, the “brothers on the block” who lived outside the law. Newton’s street

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5 Huey P. Newton, Revolutionary Suicide: 33-44.
6 Huey P. Newton, Revolutionary Suicide: 45-55; 60.
knowledge helped put him through college, as he covered his bills through theft and fraud. But when Newton was caught, he used his book knowledge to study the law and defend himself in court, impressing the jury and defeating several misdemeanor charges.

In 1962, at a rally at Merritt College opposing the US blockade of Cuba, Newton’s political life took a leap forward: there, Newton met fellow student Bobby Seale, with whom he would eventually found the Black Panther Party. The rally featured Donald Warden, leader of the Afro-American Association of which Newton was a member. Warden praised Fidel Castro, and voiced opposition to domestic Civil Rights organizations. After the speeches, there was an informal debate among students, during which Newton convinced Seale that the U.S. policy in Cuba was wrong, and further, made him question mainstream civil rights organizations. Newton impressed Seale with his command of the argument presented by Franklin Frazier in *Black Bourgeoisie*, a scathing critique of the black middle class that he had read with Warden. Seale soon joined Warden’s group.7

More than five years older than Newton, Bobby Seale was born in Dallas, TX on October 22, 1936, the oldest of three siblings, and raised in Oakland.8 His father worked as a carpenter, and his mother also worked, sometimes as a caterer. Besides teaching Bobby how to build things and how to hunt and fish, Bobby’s father also taught him about injustice, often beating him badly for no apparent reason.

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The arbitrary beatings filled Bobby with a rage for which he had few outlets. They also meant he had little to fear from fights; he had already tasted the worst. Rather than become a bully himself, from an early age, Bobby started to stand up for the little guy. When his family first moved to Oakland, a local bully pushed his little sister Betty off the swing. Despite being outnumbered in new territory, Bobby knocked the bully out of the swing, and then told all the kids they could share.\textsuperscript{9} Bobby had a penchant for taking on bullies, even when he had little hope of winning, once challenging a neighborhood kid twice his size who was cheating the smaller kids in marbles, and being repeatedly beaten to the ground.\textsuperscript{10}

When he was fifteen, Bobby became very close with a loner named Steve Brumfield. Steve told Bobby that the white man had stolen the land from the American Indians. The two of them escaped the pettiness and injustices at school and home by emulating Lakota warriors, running for hours every day through the Berkeley hills, dressing in moccasins and beads, and fighting each other for sport. Bobby used metalworking skills he learned in a vocational program at Berkeley High to make large knives and tomahawks that the two carried wherever they went. When they were not practicing fighting, they would climb trees and dream of moving to South Dakota, marrying American Indian women, and living off the land. Bobby never felt happier. He quickly became fast and strong, and soon the bullies tried to stay out of his way.\textsuperscript{11}

But after high school Steve joined the military and Bobby, lonely once again, drifted from city to city, job to job, and woman to woman. When things got hard, he ended up back at home with his parents. No longer willing to be pushed around by his

\textsuperscript{9} *Lonely Rage* p.19.
\textsuperscript{10} *Lonely Rage* p.26.
\textsuperscript{11} *Lonely Rage* Part III.
father – and now perfectly able to defend himself – he joined the Air Force. While developing his metalworking skills, and mastering the use of firearms, he learned to contain and channel his rage – turning his explosive temper into cold calculation. When three soldiers refused to pay back a debt and threatened to beat Bobby if he mentioned it again, he suppressed his instinct to fight, and bid his time. Later that week, Bobby attacked the main perpetrator when his defenses were down, nearly killing him with a pipe.\textsuperscript{12}

Huey and Bobby both had their first serious political experiences with Donald Warden in the Afro-American Association. Warden founded the all-black study group while he was a student at Boalt Law School at the University of California at Berkeley, creating a space for in-depth discussion of books by black authors including W.E.B. Du Bois, Ralph Ellison, Booker T. Washington, and James Baldwin. Warden asserted a black nationalist perspective inspired by Malcom X, emphasizing racial pride, and a transcontinental black identity rooted in Africa. Warden believed in the virtues of black capitalism, arguing that black people “must develop our own planned businesses where efficiency, thrift and sacrifice are stressed.” Fiesty and charismatic, Warden challenged students and professors alike, debated groups such as the Young Socialist Alliance, and gave public lectures on black history and culture. Willing to debate anyone, Warden made a strong impression on fellow students, and became an important intellectual influence on many of the future leaders of the Black Liberation Movement.\textsuperscript{13}

In addition to Newton and Seale, Association members included Leslie and Jim Lacy, Cedric Robinson, Richard Thorne, Ernest Allen, and Ron Everett, who later

\textsuperscript{12} Lonely Rage p.91 and Part IV.
changed his name to Ron Karenga – the founder of the black cultural nationalist
organization US and the creator of Kwanza. Warden also became a mentor to James
Brown in 1964, and through him became a key influence on the politicization of soul
music.14

The Association produced local radio shows debating the concerns of Black
America, regularly mobilized street-corner rallies preaching racial consciousness to
unemployed blacks, and sponsored conferences entitled “Mind of the Ghetto.” At one
conference, in September of 1963 at McClymonds High School in Oakland, Cassius
Clay, the future heavyweight boxing champion who would change his name to
Muhammed Ali and have his title stripped for resisting the draft, was the featured
speaker.15

But Newton was a man of action, and he grew dissatisfied with Warden’s
teaching. Newton felt Warden was heavy on the talk, but when push came to shove, he
could not be counted on. In Newton’s view, Warden “offered the community solutions

“Rally Will End Rights Meet Here,” in Oakland Tribune, September 28, 1963 p.1; George Draper, “The
Revolutionary Suicide: 63, 71. Robin D. G. Kelley, Freedom Dreams: 74-77. Donna Murch, Living for the
Bunche Oral History Collection item 426, Moorland-Springarn Library, Howard University. Some sources
mistakenly claim Malcolm X spoke at this conference and that Clay was already publicly a Muslim. But
none of the press accounts support these claims, as they list many speakers who participated in the
conference, but not the famous Malcolm X, and make no mention of Clay’s participation in the NOI, which
would have been big and highly controversial news. Clay’s championship fight with Liston in February
1964 was almost cancelled over rumors that he was associated with Malcolm X, and Clay only announced
his membership in the NOI and his relationship with Malcolm X after beating Liston for the championship
in February of 1964. A second conference at McClymonds could not have taken place involving the two
that Newton attended as part of the Afro American Association – Newton left the Association not long after
the conference reported. I could find no news reports of such a conference, any such appearance would
have been big news, and there were only about 4 weeks in February and March of 1964 when Ali was
publicly associated with Malcolm X before Malcolm X was expelled from the NOI.

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that solved nothing.” He was also doubtful about what could be accomplished through black capitalism, and soon split from Warden in search of a new path.\textsuperscript{16}

\textbf{Rage}

When Malcolm X was assassinated on February 21, 1965, Bobby’s rage overflowed. He gathered six bricks from his mother’s garden, broke them in half, and stood in wait at the corner, hurling bricks at the cars of any whites he saw passing by. “I’ll make my own self into a motherfucking Malcolm X,” he swore, “and if they want to kill me, they’ll have to kill me.”\textsuperscript{17}

By then the civil rights juggernaut had run its course. Throughout the early 1960s, in campaign after campaign, the civil rights movement successfully tore down the Jim Crow system of legal segregation. Activists crossed the color line with their bodies, drawing brutal repression from local white authorities and forcing the Federal Government to intervene – politically, legally, and militarily. But by the summer of 1964, the limits of civil rights political practice were becoming clear, as illustrated at the Democratic Convention in Atlantic City.

As late as 1964 the Democratic Party in Mississippi excluded all blacks, all too often doling out violence or death to blacks who attempted to register to vote. In the Freedom Summer campaign that year, leading civil rights organizations developed a parallel political party, the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP) that included blacks as well as non-blacks, and began registering blacks to vote. Three of the Freedom Summer activists – James Chaney, Michael Schwerner, and Andrew Goodman – were kidnapped, mutilated, and killed. Undaunted, the campaign continued. The MFDP held a

\textsuperscript{16} Huey P. Newton, \textit{Revolutionary Suicide}: 64-65.
\textsuperscript{17} Bobby Seale, \textit{Lonely Rage} pp. 133-136; Bobby Seale, \textit{Seize the Time} p. 3.
state convention in Jackson in early August, and selected sixty-eight delegates to attend
the upcoming Democratic National Convention in Atlantic City, NJ.18

President Johnson was determined to maintain white southern support and worked
to undermine the MFDP. On August 12, Mississippi’s Democratic Governor Paul B.
Johnson told the all-white Dixiecrat delegation that President Johnson had personally
promised him not to seat the MFDP. The President refused to discuss the MFDP with
Civil Rights leaders, and instructed FBI Director Hoover to monitor the renegade party
closely and provide regular updates on their activities to the White House.

It became clear by the start of the convention that the MFDP would not win
outright support in the Credentials Committee to seat its delegation in Atlantic City. But
MFDP leaders hoped that a strong minority report from the Committee would bring the
issue to an open vote on the floor, and under the pressure of public scrutiny, convention
delegates would at least vote to seat both delegations.

On August 22, after intensive one-on-one lobbying of the state delegations, the
MFDP presented its case to the Credentials Committee. Fannie Lou Hamer’s testimony
about the consequences of her efforts with SNCC to register Mississippi blacks vote –
how she was fired from her job and beaten in jail by black prisoners under orders of the
police – caught the nation’s attention:

18 This account of the MFDP and Atlantic City Convention drawn from 7 sources: Clayborne Carson, In
the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle, (University of
California Press: 1995); Robert P. Moses and Charles E. Cobb, Jr., Radical Equations, (Boston, Beacon:
Open Hand Publishing, 1985); Stokely Carmichael with Ekwueme Michael Thelwell, Ready for
Revolution: The Life and Struggles of Stokely Carmichael[Kwame Ture], (New York, Scribner: 2003);
Taylor Branch, Pillar of Fire: America in the King Years 1963-65, 456-476; John Dittmer, “Politics of the
Mississippi Movement, 1954-1964” in The Civil Rights Era in America edited by Charles W. Eagles,
(University Press of Mississippi, 1986).
The first Negro began to beat, and I was beat until I was exhausted … After the first Negro … was exhausted, the State Highway Patrolman ordered the second Negro to take the blackjack. The second Negro began to beat… I began to scream, and one white man got up and began to beat me on my head and tell me to “hush.” One white man – my dress had worked up high – he walked over and pulled my dress down and he pulled my dress back, back up … All of this is on account we want to register, to become first-class citizens, and if the Freedom Democratic Party is not seated now, I question America.  

The television audience responded almost instantly. Phones started to ring and the delegates began receiving telegrams urging them to support the MFDP. Quickly, President Johnson called a press conference and Hamer’s testimony was cut off so that the President’s statement could be broadcast.

Behind the scenes, the President’s staff twisted arms of credentials committee members while soon-to-be Vice President Hubert Humphrey called a meeting at the Pageant Motel across the street from the convention with Fannie Lou Hamer, Bob Moses and the other MFDP leaders to discuss a compromise. Humphrey told them that the delegation would not be seated but that NAACP activist Aaron Henry and white minister Ed King, the leaders of the MFDP delegation (educated moderates from the more establishment Civil Rights leadership) would be given seats with the Mississippi delegation. Ms. Hamer would not be part of any official delegation. “The President will not allow that illiterate woman to speak from the floor of the convention,” said Humphrey.

The MFDP had not been consulted in the compromise offer and the delegates rejected the proposal on the spot. Then someone knocked on the door and announced, “It’s over!” They turned on the TV to see Walter Mondale announcing that the MFDP had accepted the “compromise.” Apparently, the introduction of the issue on the convention floor had been timed when the MFDP leadership was meeting with

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Humphrey across the street to keep them from voicing any opposition. Feeling deeply betrayed SNCC and MFDP leader Bob Moses stormed out of the room, slamming the door in Hubert Humphrey’s face.\(^{20}\)

Civil Rights mobilization played a central role in defeating legal segregation – and the Voting Rights act enfranchised Southern Blacks – but proved incapable of generating political gains for blacks outside the South, or significant economic concessions. Even in its heyday in the early 1960s, the Civil Rights Movement never significantly challenged \textit{de facto}, or customary, economic and political exclusion in the black ghettos of the North and West. As \textit{de jure}, or legal, segregation was defeated in the South, yet economic and political empowerment lagged, Civil Rights strategies lost their punch and black activists across the country looked for other solutions. Many, including Newton and Seale, turned to Malcolm X.

In December 1964, after the Atlantic City convention, Malcolm X spoke on the same stage with Fannie Lou Hamer. In sharp contrast to the nonviolence of the Civil Rights Movement, Malcolm X’s suggested that black activists take up the revolutionary activities of the anti-colonial Mau Mau Rebels in Kenya:

\begin{quote}
In my opinion, not only in Mississippi and Alabama, but right here in New York City, you and I can best learn how to get real freedom by studying how Kenyatta brought it to his people in Kenya, and how Odinga helped him, and the excellent job that was done by the Mau Mau freedom fighters. In fact, that’s what we need in Mississippi. In Mississippi we need a Mau Mau. In Alabama we need a Mau Mau. In Georgia we need a Mau Mau. Right here in Harlem, in New York City, we need a Mau Mau… We \textit{need} a Mau Mau. If they don’t want to deal with the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, then we’ll give them something else to deal with. If they don’t want to deal with the Student Nonviolent Committee, then we have to give them an alternative.\(^{21}\)
\end{quote}

Malcolm X developed a form of revolutionary black nationalism as a Minister in the Nation of Islam ( NOI). Maintaining a central focus on black nationalist identity as

advocated by the NOI, he came to see black liberation as part of the global struggle against Western imperialism — posing a challenge not only to the integrationist politics of the Civil Rights Movement, but also to the NOI’s tradition of abstaining from political controversy: “Uncle Sam’s hands are dripping with blood,” he declared, “dripping with the blood of the black man in this country. He’s the earth’s number-one hypocrite. He has the audacity – yes, he has – imagine him posing as the leader of the free world. The free world! – and you over here singing ‘We Shall Overcome.’ Expand the civil-rights struggle to the level of human rights, take it into the United Nations, where our African brothers can throw their weight on our side, where our Latin-American brothers can throw their weight on our side, and where 800 million Chinamen are sitting there waiting to throw their weight on our side.”

When he became increasingly politically outspoken and controversial, his mentor Elijah Muhammad expelled Malcolm X from the NOI.

Malcolm X’s words resonated with many young blacks, especially those in the ghettos who had not won any noticeable change in their condition through the Civil Rights Movement. He also spoke to the activists who felt betrayed by Johnson and the Federal Government and were sick of turning the other cheek: “And now you’re facing a situation where the young Negro’s coming up,” Malcolm declared. “They don’t want to hear that ‘turn-the-other-cheek’” stuff, no…. [T]here’s a new deal coming. There’s new thinking coming in. There’s new strategy coming in. It’ll be Molotov cocktails this month, hand grenades next month, and something else next month. It’ll be ballots, or it’ll

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be bullets. It’ll be liberty, or it will be death. The only difference about this kind of death – it’ll be reciprocal.”  

In the 1960s, most black families – like the Newtons and the Seales – faced the peril of poverty. After migrating to the cities of the North and West to meet the demand for wartime jobs, thousands of black workers were left empty-handed when the war ended and the jobs evaporated. Many of the jobs that did remain followed whites fleeing to the suburbs – leaving sprawling black ghettos in their wake.

Living in substandard housing and subjected to inferior and overcrowded schools, blacks were largely excluded from a share in political power and economic opportunity. As unemployment increased, so did crime, and white urban politicians responded with strategies of containment, beefing up police patrols and attacking crime through force. While President Johnson’s Civil Rights Act and claims of the redress of black grievances were widely touted, the poverty, political exclusion, police brutality, and desperation of ghetto life had only intensified. In this context, many young urban blacks rejected Civil Rights politics as ineffectual and were drawn to the revolutionary nationalism of Malcolm X.

When Malcolm X was gunned down in the Audubon Ballroom in Upper Manhattan in February of 1965, he came to symbolize the struggle for black liberation – everything the Civil Rights Movement promised but could not deliver. In the words of historian William L. Van DeBurg, Malcolm’s “impassioned rhetoric was ‘street smart’ – it had almost visceral appeal to a young, black, economically distressed constituency. Before his assassination, Malcolm constantly urged this constituency to question the

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validity of their schoolbook – and media – inspired faith in an integrated American Dream. Many responded.” After his death, Malcolm’s influence expanded dramatically. “He came to be far more than a martyr for the militant, separatist faith. He became a Black Power paradigm – the archetype, reference point, and spiritual adviser in abstentia for a generation of Afro-American activists.”

In August 1965, six months after Malcolm X died, the Watts neighborhood in Los Angeles exploded in one of the largest urban rebellions in United States history. Black migrants had begun moving into Watts in the 1920s, creating a black island in a sea of white towns including South Gate, Lynwood, Compton, and Bell (Compton did have one black resident in 1930). Home lending regulations excluded blacks from obtaining mortgages to buy houses in white neighborhoods. By 1945, Watts was 80% black. Through the 1950s the black migration continued, and more blacks migrated to California than any other state. During this decade, the black population of New York increased almost two and a half times, and Detroit’s black population tripled -- while black LA grew eight-fold. Meanwhile, white residents fled in droves for the suburbs, taking capital and employment opportunities with them.

Tensions between Watts residents and the police ran high. While the vast majority of Watts residents in 1965 were black, only 4% of the sworn personnel of the Police Department and 6% of the Sheriff’s Department were black. Police Chief William Parker used analysis of crime data to develop and justify a policy that explicitly targeted

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Watts and other black neighborhoods for heavy police coverage, employing intrusive techniques such as routine frisking of people on the street. “I don’t think you can throw the genes out of the question when you discuss the behavior patterns of people,” Parker wrote in 1957. Officers on the force called their nightsticks “nigger-knockers.” Residents of one of the most highly patrolled precincts called their area “little Mississippi.” The local NAACP reported that “Negroes in Los Angeles never know where or at what hour may come blows from the guardians of the law who are supposed to protect them.” One activist recalled that “You just had to be black and moving to be shot by the police.”

Between January 1962 and July 1965, Los Angeles law enforcement officers (mostly police but also sheriff’s deputies, highway patrol, and others) killed at least sixty-five people. Of the sixty-five homicides by police investigated by the LA coroner’s office during this period, sixty-four were ruled justifiable homicide. These included twenty-seven cases where the victim was shot in the back by law officers, twenty-five where the victim was unarmed, twenty-three victims suspected of a non-violent crime, and four victims who were not suspected of any crime at all at the time of the shooting. The only case where the coroner’s inquest found unjustified homicide was a case in which “two officers, ‘playing cops and robbers’ in a Long Beach Police Station shot a newspaperman.”

The incident that sparked the Watts rebellion was a traffic stop. Twenty-one year old Marquette Frye was driving his 1955 Buick along 116th Street near his family’s house.

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at 6 p.m. on August 11, 1965 when he was pulled over by the California Highway Patrol. His younger brother Ronald Frye, the only passenger, had just been discharged from the U.S. Air Force. A crowd gathered, including Marquette’s mother Rena. More police arrived. Soon a crowd of more than 200 gathered and became agitated as the police reportedly slapped Rena Frye, beat her with a blackjack, and twisted her arm behind her back.\(^{31}\)

Watts exploded. On August 12, at 9:30 pm, a group identifying itself as “followers of Malcolm X” arrived on Avalon Boulevard shouting “Let’s burn … baby, burn.” The next day, at 3:30 pm, the Emergency Control Center Journal recorded “6 male Negroes firing rifles at helicopter from vehicle, 109\(^{th}\) & Avalon.” Governor Pat Brown cut short an aerial tour of South LA because of “sniper fire.” Delta Airlines rerouted flights over LA because rebels were “shooting at planes.”\(^{32}\)

By the second day of the rebellion, according to the *Los Angeles Times*, more than 7,000 people were looting stores, in particular stealing guns, machetes, and other weapons. Rebels were filling glass bottles with gasoline and hurling Molotov cocktails at cars and stores, setting them on fire. Many were also firing shots at police. Fire trucks and ambulances that attempted to enter the area were also attacked.\(^{33}\)

During the heat of battle, Police Chief Parker declared, “This situation is very much like fighting the Viet Cong … We haven’t the slightest idea when this can be brought under control.” One rebel standing on the corner of Avalon and Imperial made a

different reference to Vietnam telling an interviewer: “I’ve got my ‘stuff’ [gun] ready, I’m not going to die in Vietnam, whitey has been kicking ass too long.”

As the fires still burned, the local CBS radio station reported that “This was not a riot. It was an insurrection against all authority… If it had gone much further it would have become civil war.” The “CBS Reports” TV broadcast in December 1965 called it a “virtual civil insurrection probably unmatched since” the Civil War. Scholars David O. Sears and John B. McConahay noted that the “legally constituted authority … was overthrown.” Sociologist Robert Blauner saw the rebellions as “a preliminary if primitive form of mass rebellion against a colonial status.”

All told, the rebellion spread out over 46.5 square miles. Thirty-four people – almost all black – were killed, many by police, and more than 1,032 were wounded; 3,952 people were arrested. The rebellion caused more than $40 million in property damage to over 600 buildings, completely destroying 200.

Full of rage at ghetto conditions, chafing against police repression, and frustrated with a Civil Rights politics unable to redress their situation, the Watts rebels sought to take matters into their own hands, forcefully rejecting the old guard Civil Rights leadership. Following the rebellion, Martin Luther King, Jr. went to Watts to bring his vision of an integrated society and the tactics of nonviolence. On August 18, he spoke to a meeting of 500 at the Westminster Neighborhood Association. He began his appeal in rolling cadence: “All over America … the Negroes must join hands” – “And burn,” shouted a member of the audience. Throughout the evening the audience repeatedly

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challenged and ridiculed King’s appeal. Nonviolent activist and comedian Dick Gregory fared even worse in Watts. While the rebellion still flared, he borrowed a bullhorn from the police so that he could speak to the rebels. He attempted to calm them and pleaded for them to “go home!” The crowd did not respond kindly. A gunman in the crowd shot Gregory in the leg. The politics of nonviolence were failing.\textsuperscript{37}

Commenting on the wave of urban rebellions and the rejection of civil rights strategies by disenchanted and dispossessed blacks, Paul Jacobs and Saul Landau observed: "The masses of poor Negroes remain an unorganized minority in swelling urban ghettos, and neither SNCC nor any other group has found a form of political organization that can convert the energy of the slums into political power."\textsuperscript{38}

\textbf{Armchair Revolutionaries}

In Oakland in 1964, far away from Fannie Lou Hamer and the convention battles in Atlantic City, Huey Newton stabbed a man named Odell Lee with a steak knife at a party. He claimed it was self-defense, but the all-white jury was not convinced, and he spent six months in jail mostly in solitary confinement because he would not obey orders from the guards. Newton later recalled finding a new sense of freedom in prison. The guards could lock up his body, but they could not cage his mind. Newton emerged from jail eager to embrace the new political ideas and organizations developing in Oakland.\textsuperscript{39}

Newton soon reconnected with Seale and the two joined the Soul Students Advisory Council, founded by Ernie Allen. The council was a front group for the Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM), an anti-imperialist and Marxist black


\textsuperscript{39} Huey P. Newton, \textit{Revolutionary Suicide}.
nationalist organization based in Philadelphia. Allen had collaborated with Newton and Seale in Warden’s Afro-American Association when he was a student at Merritt College. After transferring to UC Berkeley, Allen had traveled to Cuba in 1964 on a trip sponsored by the Progressive Labor Party. The contingent also included other radical black students from Detroit and around the country. In Cuba, Allen and the others met Max Stanford, the leader of RAM. Stanford was in Cuba at the time visiting his mentor Robert F. Williams, a pioneering advocate of armed black self-defense. Williams had moved to Cuba after local authorities – in collusion with the Klu Klux Klan and backed by the F.B.I. – forced him to flee North Carolina. Allen got to know Stanford and Williams in Cuba. Through intense conversation and debate with Stanford and Williams, Allen found a way to move beyond the limits of Warden’s Afro-American Association, embracing the idea that U.S. blacks could win their freedom by participating in a global revolution against imperialism. By the time he returned to the United States, Allen was committed to organizing a chapter of RAM in California.

Ernie Allen, his brother Doug, Kenny Freeman (Mamadou Lumumba), and others began to build several front groups for RAM in the Bay Area. One project was *Soulbook: the Revolutionary Journal of the Black World*, a beautifully presented quarterly magazine. The magazine featured cultural criticism, including essays on the significance of John Coltrane, and political theory, such as analyses of the writings of Frantz Fanon.

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41 Robin D. G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams*: 75-76.
Both poetry and black revolutionary nationalist artwork graced the magazine. Another project of the Bay Area RAM was the Soul Students Advisory Council (SSAC).  

Virtual Murrell, Alex Papillion, Isaac Moore, and other friends of Newton and Seale at Merritt also joined the SSAC and helped launch a campaign to create courses in Afro-American Studies at the College. The Merritt student body was predominantly black, and there was a large demand for such courses. The demand for Afro-American Studies cut across intra-black differences and garnered support from many black individuals and organizations. The administration put up resistance, but hundreds of students turned out for meetings and protests, and the administration slowly began making concessions.

Working with RAM exposed Newton and Seale to a whole new range of writings and ideas. Both had been strongly influenced by the thinking of Malcolm X, and the readings in the Afro-American Association. But unlike the association, RAM was a revolutionary nationalist organization with a strong socialist and anti-imperialist analysis. Guided by the political ideas of Robert F. Williams, RAM exposed Newton and Seale to the key writings of revolutionary nationalism. Particularly influential on Newton and Seale were the writings of Frantz Fanon, Mao Tse-Tung, and Che Guevara, as well as RAM’s own publications on revolutionary black nationalism, including articles by Max Stanford and Robert Williams.
The Revolutionary Action Movement advanced a pivotal idea that would become central to the politics of the Black Panther Party. Drawing on a line of thought reaching back at least to mid-1940s and the Black Anticolonialism of W.E.B. DuBois, Paul Robeson, and Alpheaus Hunton, RAM argued that Black America was essentially a colony, and the struggle against racism by blacks in the U.S. was an element of the global anti-imperialist struggle waged against colonialism internationally. Max Stanford defined the politics of revolutionary black nationalism this way in 1965:

We are revolutionary black nationalist, not based on ideas of national superiority, but striving for justice and liberation of all the oppressed peoples of the world... there can be no liberty as long as black people are oppressed and the peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America are oppressed by Yankee imperialism and neo-colonialism. After four hundred years of oppression, we realize that slavery, racism and imperialism are all interrelated and that liberty and justice for all cannot exist peacefully with imperialism. 46

The politics of RAM connected the struggles of Black Americans with liberation struggles abroad. Whereas black soldiers returning from World War II helped catalyze the Civil Rights Movement by arguing, ‘If I can die fighting for my country, then I should be considered a full citizen when I return,’ RAM insisted that blacks were not full citizens in the United States. RAM viewed Black America as an independent nation that had been colonized at home. Because Black Americans were colonial subjects rather than citizens, RAM argued, they owed no allegiance to the United States government and thus should not fight in the Vietnam War.

On July 4, 1965, RAM wrote an open statement to the Vietnamese National Liberation Front declaring the independence of Black America from the United States

46 Max Stanford, “Revolutionary Nationalism and the AfroAmerican Student,” in Liberator, January 1965: 15. These ideas permeate the writings of RAM during this period. For example, see also Revolutionary Action Movement, “In Summary: A New Philosophy”, Black America, summer-fall 1965: 20; Revolutionary Action Movement, “The Relationship of Revolutionary Afro-American Movement to the Bandung Revolution”, Black America, summer-fall 1965: 11;
and asserting their allegiance with the Vietnamese struggle against American imperialism.\textsuperscript{47} In a separate statement that same day, RAM addressed blacks in the military, arguing that if blacks should be fighting against anyone, it should be the United States government for the liberation of Black America:

\begin{quote}
Why should we go “anywhere” to fight for the racist U.S. government, only to return home and be faced with murder, rape, castration, and extermination? How can the racist U.S. government talk about “freeing” anyone, when the U.S. government practices racism against Black Americans every day? If the U.S. government says it cannot protect us from local and national racists, then let your battle assignment be against those who are abusing your children, wives, mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, and loved ones.\textsuperscript{48}
\end{quote}

RAM and its front group the SSAC identified a common cause between blacks and the Vietnamese, and was on the cutting edge of early opposition to the Vietnam War. Before there was any significant draft resistance, they criticized the draft and organized a campaign “to oppose the drafting of black men” into the military, holding rallies such as the one at Merritt College on April 26, 1966 featuring local organizers Alex Papillion and Mark Comfort.\textsuperscript{49}

Through its honorary Chair-in-exile Robert F. Williams, RAM began building relationships with anti-imperialist leaders around the world. Williams had served as President of the local National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) – the pre-eminent Civil Rights organization – in Monroe, North Carolina. As Jim Crow came under growing attack by the Civil Rights Movement, the Klu Klux Klan, with the support of the local white government, increasingly relied on violence to protect racial segregation. With no support from the Federal government, Williams turned to the

\textsuperscript{47} Revolutionary Action Movement letter, “Greetings to our Militant Vietnamese Brothers,” July 4, 1965. RAM archive Reel 6, frame 0228.
\textsuperscript{48} “Message from RAM (Revolutionary Action Movement), the Black Liberation Front of the U.S.A. to Afro-Americans in the United States racist imperialist army.” July 4, 1965. RAM archive Reel 6, frame 0229.
\textsuperscript{49} Flier “Rally to Oppose the Drafting of Black Men.” H.K. Yuen Collection #313-660426-000.

Williams found asylum in Cuba and soon met Mao Tse-Tung in China. Mao was deeply impressed with Williams, and believed there was a common cause in the struggle for black liberation in the United States and the global struggle against imperialism. In 1963, Mao articulated this position in an essay he wrote at Williams’s behest asking the people of the world to recognize the Black Liberation Struggle in the United States as part of the global struggle against imperialism.\footnote{Mao Tse-Tung. “Statement calling on the people of the world to unite to oppose racial discrimination in the U.S. and support the American Negroes in their struggle against racial discrimination.” August 8, 1963. In RAM archive Reel 6, frame 0195. The statement read in part: “The speedy development of the struggle of the American Negroes is a manifestation of the sharpening of class struggle and national struggle within the United States; it has been causing increasing anxiety to U.S. ruling circles. The Kennedy Administration has resorted to cunning two-faced tactics. On the one hand, it continues to connive at and take part in the discrimination against Negroes and their persecution; it even sends troops to suppress them. On the other hand, in its attempt to lull the fighting will of the Negro people and deceive the masses throughout the country, the Kennedy Administration is parading as an advocate of the “defense of human rights” and “the protection of the civil rights of Negroes”, is calling upon the Negro people to exercise “restraint” and is proposing the “civil rights legislation” to Congress. But more and more Negroes are seeing through these tactics of the Kennedy Administration. The fascist atrocities committed by the U.S. imperialists against the Negro people have laid bare the true nature of the so-called democracy and freedom of the United States and revealed the inner link between the reactionary policies pursued by the U.S. government at home and its policies of aggression abroad. “I call on the workers, peasants, revolutionary intellectuals, enlightened elements of the bourgeoisie and other enlightened persons of all colours in the world, whether white, black, yellow or brown, to unite to oppose the racial discrimination practiced by U.S. imperialism and support the American Negroes in their struggle against racial discrimination. In the final analysis, a national struggle is a question of class struggle. In the United States, it is only the reactionary ruling circles among the whites who oppress the Negro people. They can in no way represent the workers, farmers, revolutionary intellectuals and other enlightened persons who comprise the overwhelming majority of the white people. At present, it is the handful of imperialists headed by the United States, and their supporters, the reactionaries and pretenders in different countries, who are inflicting oppression, aggression and intimidation on the overwhelming majority of the nations and peoples of the world. We are in the majority and they are in the minority. At most, they make up less than 10 percent of the 3,000 million population of the world. I am firmly convinced that, with the
Robert Williams’s life exemplified a different approach to politics than that of RAM, and William’s memoir, *Negroes with Guns*, greatly influenced Newton. The way that Williams had stood up to the lynch mobs appealed deeply to Newton, but exactly how to apply this political approach to the ghettos of the North and West was not yet clear. Newton wanted to organize poor blacks. He wanted to mobilize the “brothers on the block,” the unemployed black men seen on every street of the ghetto, the black underclass. These were the same people who faced the brutality of the expanding urban police departments. And many were the same folks who had rioted in Watts. RAM claimed to be talking for them, but it was not talking to them. Newton did not yet know how to mobilize these “brothers on the block,” but given what he knew of his brother Sonny Man, he believed that they would understand armed self-defense, that they would understand the language of the gun.\(^\text{52}\)

The Revolutionary Action Movement led the way in developing revolutionary black nationalist thought in the US in the 1960s, but the group’s practical application of these ideas was limited. RAM leaders fashioned themselves revolutionaries: They read socialist and anti-imperialist texts, and talked about the possibility of urban guerilla warfare. There is some evidence that RAM members attempted to implement these ideas,\(^\text{53}\) but RAM members were mostly intellectuals like Huey’s brother Melvin. They rarely emphasized practical action, and when they did it was oriented toward students.

\[\text{support of more than 90 per cent of the people of the world, the American Negroes will be victorious in their just struggle. The evil system of colonialism and imperialism grew up along with enslavement of Negroes, and it will surely come to its end with the thorough emancipation of the black people.}^\text{52}\]

\[\text{Huey P. Newton, *Revolutionary Suicide*: 108-112.}^\text{52}\]

\[\text{For example an alleged conspiracy by RAM members to blow up the statue of liberty, *Chicago Sun Times*, February 17, 1965.}^\text{53}\]
Huey soon became dissatisfied with the lack of appeal to the “brothers on the block,” and sought out new ways to meld theory with on-the-ground action.

Huey and Bobby wanted to challenge police brutality directly and they found some inspiration in the activities of Mark Comfort and Curtis Lee Baker, talented young organizers who emerged out of traditional Civil Rights organizations in Oakland. Both began appealing to young African Americans with militant style – Comfort, and Baker began wearing black outfits and berets in early 1966 – and challenges to police brutality. In February 1965, Comfort organized a protest “to put a stop to police beating innocent people.” A crowd of more than 200 – mostly high school students – encircled the Oakland Hall of Justice, urging Governor Edmund Brown to “make a full scale investigation” of police brutality. That August, Baker and others demanded that the Oakland City Council keep white policemen out of black neighborhoods. During that summer, Comfort organized citizen patrols of the police to monitor their behavior for brutality. When people were arrested, he would follow them to the jail and bail them out. He soon abandoned the tactic, though, because it was too costly.

On Thursday night, March 17, 1966 at approximately 9 pm, Newton and Seale and a friend they called “Weasel” were walking towards the University of California

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54 Bradford, 6 and Crowe, 199-202. Curtis Lee Baker served as the director of the West End Help Center in West Oakland, and helped found Justice on Bay Area Rapid Transit (JOBART), an effort to win employment for blacks on BART. Mark Comfort organized protests in 1964 with CORE to challenge discriminatory hiring practices at the Oakland Tribune and went on to form Oakland Direct Action Committee (ODAC).
55 “Oakland Mayor’s Angry Orders on Racial Crisis” in Oakland Tribune, April 22, 1966, p. 1/1 and Crowe, 199-200. Bradford, 6; 19. In 1966 they collaborated to bring radical Saul Alinsky to Oakland for a series of talks, and attempted to get the Oakland Council of Churches to bring Alinsky to Oakland for an extended stay.
campus on Telegraph Avenue in Berkeley, just north of Oakland. There was activity on the street, a small bohemian mecca, with students, hippies, and young people congregating, milling through the restaurants, cafes, bars, and shops. With encouragement from Huey and Weasel, Bobby stood on a chair outside the Forum restaurant near the corner of Haste and began to recite a black anti-war poem, called “Uncle Sammy Call Me Fulla Lucifer”:

You school my naïve heart to sing red-white-and-blue-stars-and-stripes songs and to pledge eternal allegiance to all things blue, true, blue-eyed blond, blond-haired, white chalk white skin with U.S.A. tattooed all over…. I will not serve.

The poem struck a chord. The war was escalating, and many students felt conflicted, scared, and angry about the draft. A crowd began to gather. Soon more than twenty-five people were cheering Bobby on and asking him to recite the poem again. George Williamson, an off-duty police officer, pushed into the crowd and grabbed Seale. A scuffle broke out. More police arrived. Newton and Seale were both arrested for disturbing the peace. Virtual Murrell withdrew $50 from the SSAC treasury and bailed them out.

A few weeks later, Newton and Seale saw a black man getting pushed around by the police for no apparent reason. The police arrested him and took him to the station. So as Mark Comfort had been doing, Newton and Seale went to the station, and they bailed the man out using money from the SSAC treasury. The brother started to cry, and it touched Bobby deeply. He was fed up with “armchair intellectualizing,” and wanted to

60 Bobby Seale, Seize the Time, p.28-29, 33.
61 Bobby Seale, Seize the Time, p.29.
stand up against the police, recalling, “I was filled with a staunch belief of the need for brotherhood and revolution and rebellion against the racist system.”

Huey and Bobby were ready to take meaningful, on-the-ground action. Seeking to emulate Robert William’s defiant stance, Newton proposed that the SSAC organize a rally for Malcolm X’s birthday in May of 1966 and wear loaded guns in the spirit of his call for armed self-defense. Newton believed this would attract the “brothers on the block” to participate. Seale supported Newton’s proposal, but Kenny Freeman and the other RAM leaders flatly rejected it.

Perhaps feeling threatened, Freeman and other RAM leaders suggested that Newton and Seale had misused money from the SSAC treasury. That was the last straw. Newton and Seale confronted Freeman and the others. Frustrated with the failure of the local RAM leadership to stand up to police brutality, their lack of support concerning the fray on Telegraph Avenue, and with RAM’s inability to organize brothers on the block, Bobby and Huey left the SSAC.

Epiphany

In the summer of 1966, Seale was hired to run a youth program through the Oakland office of the Federal Government’s War on Poverty. Through his role as a social service provider, Seale came to understand even more clearly the economic and social needs of the black community’s youth. Beyond delivering services, Bobby brought his revolutionary nationalist theory to the job, and used the opportunity to push up against the ideological bias of the government program. Rather than merely guiding young blacks into a government-prescribed path, he used his authority to help black youth stand

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64 Bobby Seale, *Seize the Time*, p.33.
up against oppressive authority, particularly police brutality. One day Seale’s boss instructed him to take a group of young black men and women to the police station for a tour. When they arrived, the police pulled out notepads, and pencils and started to interview the youths about the character of gangs in the neighborhood. Seale protested, instructing the youth to remain silent, and insisting that his program would not be used as a spy network to inform on people in the community. The police claimed that they only wanted to foster better relations with the community. In response, Seale turned the conversation around, creating an opportunity for the youth to voice their experiences with police brutality in the neighborhood. It was the first time the youth had the opportunity to look white police officers in the eye and express their anger and frustration. One teenager berated the police for an incident in which several officers had thrown a woman down and beaten her in the head with Billy clubs. “Say you!” another sixteen year old girl said, pointing at a policeman. “You don’t have to treat him like that” responded Seale. “I’ll treat him like I want to, because they done treated me so bad,” said the girl. Bobby sat back as the girl grilled the officer on whether he had received proper psychiatric treatment. The officer turned red and started to shake. “The way you’re shaking now,” she said, “the way you’re shaking now and carrying on, you must be guilty of a whole lot! And I haven’t got no weapon or nothin.”65

The poverty program provided a paycheck, some skills, and an opportunity to work with youth. But Newton and Seale were still searching for a way to galvanize the rage of the “brothers on the block.” They wanted to mobilize the ghetto the way that the Civil Rights Movement had mobilized the South. They dreamt of creating an unstoppable

65 Seale, Seize the Time: 35-56.
force that would transform the urban landscape forever. By this point, the problem was clear to Huey and Bobby, but they did not yet have a solution.

Huey and Bobby were not the only ones looking for answers. Within a year of the Watts rebellion, the younger generation of black liberation activists had widely rejected the goals of integration and the tactics of nonviolence. On June 5, 1966, James Meredith, the first black student to gain admittance to the University of Mississippi, was shot on his solo march from Memphis to Jackson. Civil Rights leaders Martin Luther King, Jr. and Stokely Carmichael flew to Memphis to take up his march. Black liberation activists from around the country as well as many local blacks joined them. As the march proceeded, a split began to emerge between the old guard Civil Rights leaders represented by King and the younger wing represented by Carmichael. The younger activists wanted the march to be black-only, and also wanted the Deacons of Defense – a militant black organization that promoted armed self-defense – to provide protection for the marchers. These were significant departures from the Civil Rights integrationist frame and nonviolent tactics.66

As the march made its way to Greenwood, Mississippi, a group of activists including Carmichael were arrested and held in jail for six hours. Upon release, Carmichael announced to a rally of supporters: “This is the twenty-seventh time I have been arrested. I ain’t going to jail no more. What we gonna start saying now is ‘Black Power.’” Willie Ricks, a SNCC activist, took up the phrase and called it out: “What do you want?” The crowd replied “Black Power!”67 The phrase caught on like wildfire. The old guard civil rights leaders soon acknowledged the shift. King even appealed to the government for help: “The government has got to give me some victories if I’m gonna

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66 Martin Luther King, Jr. Where Do We Go From Here, 1967: 27-37.
67 Manning Marable, Race, Reform, and Rebellion, 1991: 94.
keep people nonviolent... I know I’m gonna stay nonviolent no matter what happens. But a lot of people are getting hurt and bitter, and they can’t see it that way anymore.”

Black Power was not so much an answer as it was a new way of framing the quest for black liberation. No one knew quite what Black Power was or how to achieve it. But the younger generation of black activists put their minds and energies to figuring it out.

By 1966, racial tensions were rising in Oakland. Mayor John Reading called the City Council to his office for a special meeting to warn them that if communication between the city government and low-income blacks was not improved, Oakland would become “another Watts.” Amory Bradford, a Johnson Administration official sent to Oakland in 1966 to develop a Federal plan for reducing racial tensions explained that “Experts sent by the President to survey conditions in other ghettos picked Oakland as one of those most likely to be the next Watts.” Another visiting white official described Oakland as a “powder keg.” One Economic Development Administration outreach flier widely distributed in West Oakland in 1966 read:

LET’S TALK ABOUT PROBLEMS
Eugene R. Foley, U.S. Department of Commerce, President Johnson’s Troubleshooter, wants to talk to you to prevent a Watts in Oakland.

Government officials saw the ghettos of Oakland and the surrounding Bay Area as a powder keg on the verge of exploding.

That fall, word spread that Oakland police officers had beaten a black girl during the arrest of her brother. A large crowd of disgruntled youths began to gather. They soon “laid siege” to a ten block area on East 14th street, smashing windows, attacking cars, and

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68 Martin Luther King, Jr. quoted in Carson, *In Struggle*, 1981: 210.)
69 “Oakland Mayor’s Angry Orders on Racial Crisis,” *San Francisco Chronicle* Friday, April 22, 1966, 1/1.
70 Bradford, 2.
71 Quoted in Crowe, 139.
72 Flier reproduced in Bradford, 16.
throwing gasoline bombs. Sixty police officers arrived on the scene and arrested twelve people.\footnote{Fleming, Thomas C. “Wild Rioting by Oakland Youths,” \textit{Sun Reporter} 22, October, 1966 in Crowe, 196.}

On September 27\textsuperscript{th} 1966, sixteen-year old Matthew Johnson was pulled over by police in Hunter’s Point, a black neighborhood across the Bay in San Francisco. Johnson and his friends had stolen a car, and were cruising around the neighborhood. When police pulled them over, the teens panicked and fled. Matthew Johnson was shot in the back by police, and left bleeding on the ground for more than an hour. By the time ambulances arrived, he was dead. The neighborhood erupted in a rebellion that went on for several days. Using bricks and Molotov cocktails, rebels damaged or destroyed thirty-one police cars and ten fire department vehicles. The police arrested 146 people, injuring forty-two, ten with gun shots.\footnote{Sun Reporter in Crowe, 193-4 note 10. Also Bradford, 194.}

The situation was unbearable. Newton and Seale had taken all they would take of police brutality and were fed up with the disorganized and impotent attempts of the black community to resist. They were determined to find a solution.\footnote{Sol Stern “The Call of the Black Panthers” \textit{New York Times Magazine}, August 6, 1967: 10. Newton and Seale were not the only ones enraged by the incident. On September 29\textsuperscript{th}, the predominantly white chapter of the Students for a Democratic Society from the University of California campus in Berkeley held a protest on the steps of San Francisco City Hall to demand the policeman be tried for murder. A press statement by Community for New Politics (CNP) that endorsed the student demonstration argued that in the 20 years since the black neighborhood of Hunters Point had been established, “the white power structure in San Francisco has done nothing about the worsening conditions of the area. And when the residents finally rebel against these conditions they are met with a policeman and a gun.” SDS identified the National Guard as an “alien occupying force” in the ghetto and called for its immediate withdrawal from Hunter’s Point. “In the ghetto, too often police are protecting white property and serve white interests, while treating the people who live in the area as the enemy” explained an SDS spokesperson. Picketers at the rally also expressed opposition to the government policy in Vietnam. The rally became a march. As several hundred students and community members shouted “cops must go!” and “Jobs not cops!” Soon, truckloads of National Guardsmen and police started to pull up, jump out, and surround the marchers carrying rifles with bayonets affixed. Without giving any order to disperse, the police started to pull protestors out of the march, beat, and arrest them. More than 70 protestors were arrested, many charged with “inciting to riot.” Bill Crosby, “SDS: ‘Aliens’ Occupy SF Ghetto,” in the \textit{Daily Californian}, Friday, September 30, 1966: 6. “SDS Rally: ‘White Power’ Hit,” in the \textit{Daily Californian}, Monday, October 3, 1966: 3. “In Support of the}
an epiphany sparked by an article he read in the August 1966 edition of the West Coast SNCC newspaper Movement on the Community Alert Patrol (CAP) in Watts. “Brother Lennie” and “Brother Crook,” two activists from Watts, organized CAP after the rebellion in 1965 to prevent further police brutality. CAP members patrolled the police, driving around the black neighborhoods of Watts with note pads and pencils, monitoring police activities. In August, 1966, CAP began displaying a Black Panther logo on its patrol vehicles – inspired by SNCC’s use of the Panther symbol when organizing an independent black political party in Lowndes County, Alabama. The problem with CAP, however, was that they were also vulnerable to harassment and abuse by the police. One frustrated CAP member commented on the police harassment to a Movement reporter: “There’s only one way to stop all this,” he said, “and that’s to get out our guns and start shooting.”

Newton had been studying law at Oakland’s Merritt Community College and San Francisco State University, and reading on his own at the North Oakland Service Center law library. Newton discovered that California law actually permitted people to carry loaded guns in public as long as they were not concealed. He studied California gun law inside and out, finding that rifles could not be loaded while driving, and that parolees could carry a rifle, but not a handgun. In California, he learned, citizens had the right to observe an officer carrying out their duty as long as they stood a reasonable distance away.

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77 Huey Newton, Revolutionary Suicide, p. 115. Bobby Seale, Seize the Time, p.73, 89.

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Newton had finally hit upon a way to stand up to the police and organize the “brothers on the block.” He would organize patrols like the CAP in Watts. But he and his comrades would carry loaded guns.

**The Black Panther**

Following the September 27 killing of Matthew Johnson, the UC Berkeley chapter of Students for a Democratic Society decided to hold a conference on Black Power and invited Stokely Carmichael, SNCC Chairperson and the leading national proponent of Black Power, as the keynote speaker. Because of the timing, the Black Power conference to be held on October 29 in Berkeley immediately became an explosive political issue for the campus and in state politics. Republican Ronald Reagan was running a highly polarizing campaign against Democratic incumbent Edmund Brown for Governor of California. The election was to be held in early November. Given the contentious national debate on Black Power and Carmichael’s stature, the conference threatened to become an election issue. The campus administration decided to deny the campus chapter of SDS permission to hold the event.

The move echoed recent battles between students and the administration over students’ rights in the Free Speech Movement. Soon, there was a raging campus battle over whether SDS would be allowed to hold the conference. Wary of further escalation, the University capitulated. In response, Ronald Reagan criticized the conference publicly: “We cannot have the university campus used as a base to foment riots from.” Reagan sent Stokely Carmichael a telegram urging him to stay out of California. He then challenged Governor Brown to co-sign his telegram. The Governor refused, saying that he did not want to dignify Carmichael’s cause. Nevertheless, Governor Brown made

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78 See *Daily Californian*, October, 1966, multiple articles.
public statements similar to Reagan’s. “I wish Stokely Carmichael would stay out of California. I wish he’d not come in here at all. I think he’s caused nothing but trouble,” the Governor told a crowd at UC Santa Barbara. Californians, he pronounced, “don’t want black power.” The day before the conference, Governor Brown made a surprise appearance in Oakland to meet with the Alameda County Sherriff to assure that “the peace of this community will be protected.” Reagan sarcastically quipped: “I’m happy to see he has hurried north like a man of action.”79

In addition to Carmichael, speakers scheduled for the conference included Invanhoe Donaldson, the New York Director of SNCC; Brother Lennie, leader of the Watts Community Alert Patrol; Mark Comfort, leader of the Oakland Direct Action Project; Ron Karenga; James Bevel, Southern Christian Leadership Conference; Mike Parker, SDS; Mike Smith, SDS; Mike Miller, SNCC; Terry Cannon, editor of The Movement newspaper; Clay Carson, SNCC; Elijah Turner, an Oakland organizer; and, Barbara Arthur, a Cal student.80

The controversy stoked interest in the conference, not only among students. Many local black activists were also intrigued, including Huey and Bobby’s former mentor Donald Warden, and members of RAM such as Doug Allen, who spoke out against the “racist” University administration for attempting to bar the conference. On Saturday, people flooded the Greek Theater to listen to the speakers. By mid-afternoon, more than 3,000 packed into the open air theater with students standing in the aisles, sitting on the

stage, and spread out on the grass hill above the theater to hear the speeches. It is not clear whether Huey and Bobby participated in the conference, but they certainly heard about it.

The podium was black with big red letters identifying SDS. Behind the podium, a large banner, three feet wide and fifty feet long, read “BLACK POWER AND ITS CHALLENGES.” Ivanhoe Donaldson introduced Carmichael, emphasizing Carmichael’s leadership against the war and drawing an analogy between the struggle of blacks in American cities and the struggle of the Vietnamese against imperialism: “The Vietnamese are fighting the same establishment that the brothers in Oakland, Chicago and Watts are fighting.” Carmichael approached the podium wearing a dark suit, white shirt, and dark tie. He straightened his shirt, adjusted the microphone, and looked out at the predominantly white student audience.

“It’s a privilege and an honor to be in the white intellectual ghetto of the West,” Carmichael began, making common cause with the students. But the familiarity was brief. “White America cannot condemn herself,” Carmichael told the students, “so black people have done it – you stand condemned … Move on over, or we’re going to move on over you.” Carmichael talked about the limitations of integrationism and the need for Black Power in international terms. “In order for America to really live on a basic principle of human relationships, a new society must be born. Racism must die. The

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economic exploitation by this country of non-white people around the world must also die.”

Carmichael focused most of his speech on the question of Vietnam. “The war in Vietnam is an illegal and immoral war,” he argued. Carmichael compared the plight of black people in America with the plight of the Vietnamese: “Any time a black man leaves the country where he can’t vote to supposedly deliver the vote to somebody else, he’s a black mercenary. Any time a black man leaves this country, gets shot in Vietnam on foreign ground, and returns home and you won’t give him a burial place in his own homeland, he’s a black mercenary. Even if I were to believe the lies of Johnson,” said Carmichael, “if I were to believe his lies that we are fighting to give democracy to the people in Vietnam, as a black man in this country, I wouldn’t fight to give this to anybody.”

Carmichael also criticized the student peace movement and argued that in order to be relevant to most people, they needed to start organizing resist the draft:

“The peace movement has been a failure because it hasn’t gotten off the college campuses where everybody has a 2S [draft deferment] and is not afraid of being drafted anyway. The problem is how you can move out of that into the white ghettos of this country and articulate a position for those white youth who do not want to go… [SNCC is] the most militant organization for peace or civil rights or human rights against the war in Vietnam in this country today. There isn’t one organization that has begun to meet our stand on the war in Vietnam. We not only say we are against the war in Vietnam; we are against the draft… There is a higher law than the law of a racist named McNamara; there is a higher law than the law of a fool named Rusk; there is a higher law than the law of a buffoon named Johnson. It’s the law of each of us. We will not allow them to make us hired killers. We will not kill anybody that they say kill. And if we decide to kill, we are going to decide who to kill.”

The Black Power conference program featured the symbol of a Black Panther from the Lowndes County Freedom Organization (LCFO) that Carmichael was publicizing. The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee was the single organization

83 Stokely Carmichael, H.K. Yuen audio reel #044-661029-000.
84 Stokely Carmichael, H.K. Yuen audio reel #044-661029-000.
85 Stokely Carmichael, H.K. Yuen audio reel #044-661029-000.
most responsible for mobilizing civil disobedience against Jim Crow segregation in the South in the early 1960s. But by 1966, SNCC was pursuing new ways of organizing—including an effort to build an independent political party outside of the exclusive white Democratic Party in Lowndes County Alabama. Lowndes County was 80% black, but despite the 1965 Voting Rights Act, in early 1966 there was not a single black person registered to vote in Lowndes County. So on May 3, 1966, with SNCC’s help, the LCFO convened and nominated candidates for sheriff, tax assessor, coroner, and school board, and encouraged blacks to register to vote. As blacks registered, white resistance intensified. At one SNCC rally, a deputy-sheriff fired into the crowd shooting two civil rights workers and killing one, Carmichael’s friend Jonathan Daniels, a white ministerial student.

Because so many whites in Lowndes were illiterate, the ballot featured a drawing of a party mascot. The all-white Democratic Party featured a white rooster and the slogan “White Supremacy/For the Right.” The LCFO selected the black panther as their symbol, implying a fierce black political challenge. In a June 1966 interview, John Hulett, the chairman of the LCFO, explained the symbol of the Panther: “The black panther is an animal that when it is pressured it moves back until it is cornered, then it comes out fighting for life or death. We felt we had been pushed back long enough and that it was time for Negroes to come out and take over.”

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In late August 1966, SNCC had organized a rally at the Mt. Morris Presbyterian Church in New York City to promote the newly-formed Harlem branch of the Black Panther Party. The speakers included Carmichael, William Epton, head of the Harlem branch of the Progressive Labor Party, and Max Stanford, the leader of RAM, who identified himself at the time as the head of the Harlem branch of the Black Panther Party. Black Panther members came dressed in uniforms of black pants and shirts displaying the panther emblem. In front of a cheering crowd of 250, Carmichael called on blacks to unite with people of color in Vietnam and throughout the world. He also spoke in favor of armed black self-defense. “If the police and the federal government won’t protect us,” said Carmichael, “we must protect ourselves.” Both he and Stanford spoke in favor of the recent wave of ghetto rebellions. The United States, Stanford suggested, “could be brought down to its knees with a rag and some gasoline and a bottle.”

In September 1966, Carmichael wrote that organizing had begun under the black panther symbol across the country in the North as well as the South – including independent efforts in Los Angeles, New York, Philadelphia and New Jersey. “A man needs a black panther on his side when he and his family must endure – as hundreds of Alabamans have endured – loss of job, eviction, starvation and sometimes death for political activity,” Carmichael explained. “He may also need a gun and SNCC reaffirms the right of black men everywhere to defend themselves when threatened or attacked.”

The Black Power conference and the symbol of the Black Panther captured the attention of Kenny Freeman, Doug Allen, Ernie Allen, and the West Coast members of

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RAM. At this time RAM’s political analysis was fairly close to that of SNCC and Carmichael. Like the New York branch of RAM, they found compelling Carmichael’s charisma, his organizing efforts in Lowndes County, and the defiant symbol of the Black Panther. They followed the example of Max Stanford and the New York RAM and formed the Black Panther Party of Northern California.

Not only did the program for the October 1966 Berkeley Black Power conference feature the Black Panther logo of the Lowndes County Freedom Organization in recognition of Carmichael’s work there, but two days before the conference, activists distributed a pamphlet and fliers on the Lowndes County Black Panther Party on the Berkeley campus.\(^89\)

Huey Newton was among those to take notice of the bold logo and courageous organizing. Writing several years later, Newton recalled: “I had read a pamphlet about voter registration in [Alabama], how the people in Lowndes County had armed themselves against Establishment violence. Their political group, called the Lowndes County Freedom Organization, had a black panther for its symbol. A few days later, while Bobby and I were rapping, I suggested that we use the panther as our symbol.”\(^90\)

Like the West Coast members of RAM with whom they had worked in the Soul Students Advisory Council, Newton and Seale decided to form a chapter of the Black Panther Party. But guided by Newton’s epiphany, they took their party in a different direction that would have long-term political consequences.\(^91\)


\(^90\) Huey Newton, *Revolutionary Suicide*: 113.

\(^91\) Some have suggested that contrary to Newton and Seale’s assertions in their memoirs, there was originally only one Black Panther Party in the Bay Area, and that Newton and Seale only split off from RAM’s Black Panther Party of Northern California at the time of their conflict during the Shabazz incident.
The Civil Rights Movement had overturned legal segregation in the South, but with the suburban flight of jobs and whites, conditions in Northern and Western black ghettos were not improving in the mid-1960s. Chaffing against poverty, ghettoization, and containment policing, young blacks began to rebel in cities throughout the country, notably in New York in 1964 and Watts in 1965. Black Power posed a question, more than an answer, as young blacks including Huey Newton and Bobby Seale sought political ideas and practices that would mobilize power in the ghetto like the Civil Rights Movement had mobilized the black South.

Newton and Seale developed a Black Anti-Imperialist politics. Drawing largely on the ideas of Malcolm X, and their experiences with Bay Area activist Donald Warden and with the Revolutionary Action Movement, they came to see their struggle as the struggle of the black community for political self-determination. In turn, they saw this struggle for black self-determination as intrinsically linked to the struggle of the Vietnamese against U.S. imperialism, and all oppressed people for liberation. But their experiences with local organizations left them dissatisfied, and hungry for practical ways to mobilize “brothers on the block.”

Newton – with a combination of street smarts and theoretical brilliance – sought to make revolutionary ideas relevant to impoverished blacks. He recognized the rage of the ghetto against police brutality – graphically unleashed in the Watts rebellion in 1965

in February of 1967, or even later, after the action in Sacramento in May of 1967. These suggestions are incorrect. The evidence clearly supports Newton and Seale’s claims that they originally founded the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense as a separate organization from RAM, well in advance of either the Shabazz incident or the Sacramento action. See, for example, “Black Panther Close” in The Berkeley Barb Friday February 17, 1967 and “Oakland’s Black Panthers Wear Guns, Talk Revolution” in San Francisco Chronicle, April 30, 1967.
– as a powerful and largely unorganized political force. Robert Williams’s example of
armed self-defense encouraged Huey to find ways to stand up to the police. He
researched California gun law and uncovered the legal intricacies that could both enable
and constrain armed tactics. Learning of efforts to monitor police brutality by the
Community Alert Patrol in Watts, and how these had proved ineffective in the face of
armed police, led to an epiphany. Huey envisioned armed patrols of the police as a way to
stand up against police brutality and recruit Party members.

Seale was the lead organizer. Full of rage at injustice and hungry for practical
ways to redress it, he came to believe in Huey’s vision – offering unparalleled organizing
talent, fierce public speaking, and knowledge about firearms. After Stokely Carmichael
came to the Bay Area in October of 1966 promoting the example of the Lowndes
Country Freedom Organization (LCFO), Newton and Seale adopted the Black Panther
symbol of the LCFO and the Oakland based Black Panther Party for Self-Defense was
born.

Huey and Bobby would attempt to organize the ghetto by leading armed patrols of
the police ...
Chapter 2: Policing the Police

One night in early 1967, Huey Newton, Bobby Seale and “Lil” Bobby Hutton, the first recruit to their Black Panther Party for Self-Defense, were cruising around North Oakland in Seale’s 1954 Chevy. Newton was at the wheel. They saw a police car patrolling the area and decided to monitor it. As Bobby Seale later recounted the incident, Newton sped up a short residential block behind the car and kept that distance. When the officer turned right, Newton turned right. When the officer turned left, Newton turned left. Newton was armed with a shotgun, Seale with a .45, and Hutton with an M-1 rifle. A law book sat on the back seat.

After they had followed the police car for a while, the officer pulled over to the curb and stopped at the corner. There was a stop sign at the corner, so Newton pulled up to the intersection and stopped next to the police car. The three men looked over at the officer. Seale held Newton’s shotgun while he drove, and both the shotgun and Hutton’s M-1 were plainly visible through the window. The officer looked back. After a pause, Newton stepped gently on the gas and rounded the corner to the right in front of the officer. As Newton completed the turn, the officer flashed his high beams. Newton kept driving without changing speed. The officer stepped on the gas and pulled out after him. Seale could see the flashing red lights, but Newton kept moving. He told Seale, “I’m not going to stop ‘till he puts his damn siren on because a flashing red light really don’t mean nothin’, anything could be a flashing red light.” At this point the car headed north on Dover Street behind the back of Merritt Community College. Newton took a left on 58th

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CHAPTER 2: POLICING THE POLICE

1 Incident description from Seale, Seize the Time: 93-98; and Joshua Bloom tour of location of confrontation with Bobby Seale, January 19, 1999.
Street and headed down the block passing Merritt’s track field. The officer turned on his siren, and Newton pulled over, coming to a stop across the street from the back door of the college.

As soon as Newton pulled over, the officer stopped and burst out of his car hollering: “What the goddam hell you niggers doing with them goddam guns? Who in the goddam hell you niggers think you are? Get out of that goddam car. Get out of that goddam car with them goddam guns.” Having finished their evening classes and coming out of the back door at the predominantly black school, students stopped to watch. Many living on the street looked out their windows.

The officer came up to the car screaming: “Get out of that car.” Newton said: “You ain’t putting anybody under arrest. Who the hell you think you are?” At this point the officer grabbed open the car door shouting, “I said get out of the goddam car and bring them goddam guns out of there.” The officer stuck his head in the car, reached across Newton, and grabbed the barrel of the shotgun. Seale pulled back on the shotgun. Newton grabbed the officer by the collar and slammed his head up into the roof of the car. He then swiveled in his seat, kicked the officer in the stomach, and pushed him out of the car.

Newton took the shotgun from Seale, leapt out of the car, and jacked a round into the chamber. He shouted: “Now, who in the hell do you think you are, you big rednecked bastard, you rotten fascist swine, you bigoted racist? You come into my car, trying to brutalize me and take my property away from me. Go for your gun and you’re a dead pig.” The officer lifted his hands away from his gun while Seale and Hutton jumped out of the passenger side of the car. Seale pulled back the hammer on his .45.
The officer walked backwards away from Newton and toward his car and radioed for backup.

People streamed out of their houses; more students streamed out of Merritt. Seale and Newton beckoned people to come out and observe the police. A sizeable crowd soon coalesced. Seale called the police “racist dogs, pigs.” He explained to the crowd that police were “occupying our community like a foreign troop that occupies territory,” and that “Black people are tired of it.”

Several more police cars arrived, and an officer walked up to Newton and demanded: “Let me see that weapon!”

Newton said: “Let you see my weapon? You haven’t placed me under arrest.”

The officer insisted: “Well, you just let me see the weapon, I have a right to see the weapon.”

Newton refused: “Ain’t you ever heard of the Fourteenth Amendment of the Constitution of the United States? Don’t you know you don’t remove nobody’s property without due process of law? What’s the matter with you? You’re supposed to be people enforcing the law, and here you are, ready to violate my constitutional rights. You can’t see my gun. You can’t have my gun. The only way you’re gonna get it from me is to try to take it.”

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2 Bobby Seale quotations from Seale, *Seize the Time*, 1970, p. 97. While numerous first hand news accounts attest to the general character of the Panthers’ early legal armed confrontations with police, the thickest descriptions are found in retrospective accounts, especially Bobby Seale’s 1970 *Seize the Time*. Published during the height of the Free Huey! campaign, the text portrays Huey as the main person speaking to the crowd in this confrontation. But this portrayal is inconsistent with Huey Newton’s character. By many accounts, Newton was neither comfortable nor skilled at rousing public audiences. It is likely that Newton both innovated the tactic of legal armed confrontation with the police, and led the confrontations with the police in practice. But it is likely that Bobby Seale did most of the public speaking to crowds during these confrontations, as elsewhere. Seale asserts that this is the case, and that he originally credited Newton with speaking to the crowds to support the Free Huey! campaign, but that in actuality, he did most of the rallying. Bobby Seale discussion of draft manuscript with Joshua Bloom, East Side Arts Alliance, Oakland, CA, June 3, 2011.
Another officer walked up to Seale and shouted, “Come over here by the car.”

Seale said: “I ain’t going no goddam place. Who the hell you think you are? You ain’t placed me under arrest.”

“But I have a right to take you over to the car,” loudly claimed the officer.

Seale responded: “You don’t have no right to move me from one spot to another. You just got through telling me I wasn’t under arrest, so I’m not moving nowhere, I’m staying right here.”

The officer then demanded Seale’s gun, and Seale refused. Newton, Seale and Hutton would not submit to the police. Citing local ordinances as well as the Second Amendment to the Constitution, they asserted their right to bear arms as long as they were not concealed. The standoff threatened to escalate. But after tense deliberations, the police lieutenant told the other officers he did not think there were sufficient grounds for arrest. After looking around, one of the officers noticed that the license plate on Seale’s Chevy was attached with a coat hanger. He then proceeded to write Seale a ticket for not having the license plate on his vehicle securely fastened.

The police soon left, and the excited crowd gathered around Newton and Seale to hear what had happened. They explained their organization, the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense. The next day, several community members who witnessed the event signed up to join the party.

Bobby Seale provided the first guns for the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense from his personal collection, a 30-30 Winchester rifle and a shotgun. Even before his time in the military, Seale had grown up around guns, mostly used for hunting with his father. Once new recruits began joining the Party, obtaining more firearms became a
priority. Newton and Seale approached Richard Aoki, a Japanese-American radical who they knew had an impressive collection of guns. A small and energetic man with a big smile, a dirty mouth, and a generous sense of humor, Aoki was a dedicated revolutionary committed to Third World liberation. He was pleased to help the Black Panthers get started, and donated two guns to the party in support of their revolutionary cause, an M-1 Garand rifle and a 9mm pistol, both weapons designed for the military.3

Newton and Seale needed to raise money in order to purchase more guns for their Party. At the time there was a lot of news coverage on the Little Red Book, a small but influential book of quotations by Mao-Tse Tung, Chairman of the Chinese Communist Party. Newton got the idea to sell the Red Book on Berkeley’s campus to raise money. They went to Chinatown in San Francisco and bought the books at thirty cents apiece, and then sold them on the Berkeley campus for a dollar. Soon they raised enough money to buy a .357 Magnum (a pistol designed for law enforcement officers) from Aoki and a High Standard shotgun at the local department store.4

Over the course of several months patrolling the police, Newton and Seale gained a small following. Bobby got Huey a job at the War on Poverty program, and they used a portion of their paychecks to rent an office on Grove Street and 56th in North Oakland near Merritt College.5 In early 1967, the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense had only a handful of members. The organization had received no coverage in the press, and was

5 Bobby Seale, Seize the Time: 77.
known only by those with whom the Party had direct contact, or through word of mouth. By February this began to change.

That January, Eldridge Cleaver, a writer for *Ramparts Magazine* who had recently moved to San Francisco, along with playwright Marvin Jackman, poet Ed Bullins, and singer Willie Dale, founded Black House – a cultural center for the burgeoning Black Power movement in the Bay Area. Along with the RAM-affiliated Black Panther Party of Northern California run by Kenny Freeman, Doug Allen, Ernie Allen, and Roy Ballard, they decided to organize a memorial for Malcolm X on the two-year anniversary of his death, February 21, 1967. The idea came out of a plan circulated by Cleaver to create a new organization that represented the true legacy of Malcolm X and to name it after the group he had started before his death, the Organization for Afro American Unity. Cleaver’s idea was to bring Betty Shabazz, Malcolm X’s widow, as the keynote speaker to legitimize the new organization. Cleaver was new to the area, and the group appointed Roy Ballard as coordinator of the event.\(^6\)

A number of the organizers feared that Betty Shabazz could be killed like her husband, and so Roy Ballard asked Bobby Seale if the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense would speak at the conference and provide an armed escort for Ms. Shabazz. After consulting with Newton, Seale agreed, and arranged to meet Shabazz at the San Francisco Airport. In the early afternoon of February 21, eight members of Newton and Seale’s Black Panther Party for Self-Defense, dressed in uniform – waist-length leather

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jackets, powder blue shirts, and black berets cocked to the right – met up with Roy Ballard, Kenny Freeman, and several other members of the RAM-affiliated group.

At 3:05 pm the Black Panther contingent, led by Newton, entered the lobby of the San Francisco Airport displaying shotguns and pistols. San Francisco airport security chief George Nessel and his armed deputies confronted them and ordered them to wait outside the building. But Newton refused. Nessel acquiesced as the Panthers were “quite hip on the law.” The Panthers made their way in military fashion to American Airlines gate 47, where Shabazz was scheduled to arrive. According to one eyewitness, “each one, like clockwork, set themselves up at various stations at the arrival gate and waited, rifles in hand.”

From the airport, the Panthers escorted Shabazz to the office of Ramparts magazine for an interview with Eldridge Cleaver. There, the confrontation with police intensified. Chuck Banks, an aggressive reporter from KGO-TV, tried to push his way through the Panther bodyguard. When he tried to push aside Huey Newton, Newton grabbed his collar and pushed him back against the wall. Police officers reacted, several flipping loose the little straps that held their pistols in the holster. One started shouting at Newton, who stopped and stared at the cop. Seale tried to get Newton to leave. Newton ignored him and walked right up to the cop. “What’s the matter,” Newton said, “you got an itchy finger?”

The cop made no reply, he just stared Newton in the eye with his hand near his gun, measuring him. The other officers called out for the cop to cool it, but he kept staring at Newton. “O.K. you big fat racist pig, draw your gun,” Newton challenged. The

cop made no move. Newton shouted “Draw it, you cowardly dog!” He pumped a round into the shotgun chamber.

The other officers spread out, stepping away from the line of fire. Finally, the cop gave up. He sighed heavily and hung his head. Newton laughed in his face as the remaining Panthers dispersed. Shabazz had already been whisked away by other Panthers while Newton occupied the attention of the police.

Witnessing Newton stand his ground with the police, back them down, and call them cowards, Eldridge Cleaver filled with jubilation. “Work out soul brother!” his mind screamed, “You’re the baddest motherfucker I’ve ever seen.”

Cleaver was as unimpressed by Ballard and the RAM group as he was impressed by Huey Newton and the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense. He decided then that he would give his full support to Huey Newton as the legitimate heir to the legacy of Malcolm X. Word quickly spread about Huey Newton standing up to the police, and the bold new Black Power organization, the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense.

The patrols of police sparked interest in the community, but still Huey and Bobby’s following remained small. Newton was very conscious that black people were excluded from power and that the government did not represent their interests. Many blacks in Oakland saw the police as oppressive. Newton hoped that by standing up to the police, he would be able to organize black people to build political power. But even though his actions won respect, not many people were ready to join the Black Panther Party.

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Denzil Dowell
Six weeks later, at 3:50 am on Monday April 1, 1967, all this changed. George Dowell and several neighbors from North Richmond, an unincorporated all-black community near Oakland, California, heard ten gunshots. Sometime after five in the morning George came upon his older brother Denzil Dowell lying in the street, shot in the back and head. Police from the county sheriff’s department were there, but no ambulance had been called. Something did not seem right. Why had the ambulance not been called? George rushed home to tell his mother and father that their son, Denzil Dowell, a 22 year-old construction laborer, was dead.

When the newspaper came out that day, the Contra Costa sheriff’s office reported that deputy sheriffs Mel Brunkhorst and Kenneth Gibson had arrived at the scene at 4:50 am on a tip from an unidentified caller about a burglary in progress. They claimed that when they arrived, Denzil Dowell and another man ran from the back of a liquor store and refused to stop when ordered to halt. Brunkhorst fired one blast from a shotgun, striking Dowell and killing him. The other man escaped.

For the Dowell family the official explanation did not add up, and community members helped them to investigate. They knew Mel Brunkhorst. He had issued citations to Denzil in the past, and on occasion, Brunkhorst had threatened to kill Dowell. The more they probed, the more contradictory the facts appeared. No entry, forced or otherwise, had been made into Bill’s Liquors, the store Dowell had allegedly been robbing. Furthermore, the police reported that Dowell had not only run, but also jumped two fences to get away before being shot down. But Dowell had a bad hip, a limp, and the family claimed that he could not run let alone jump fences. When the coroner released

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11 *Oakland Tribune* April 1, 1967: 1.
his report, community skepticism only grew. It stated that Dowell had bled to death, but there was no pool of blood where Dowell was found. There was a pool of blood, however, twenty yards away from the site where police claimed Dowell died. The report also listed six bullet holes, apparently confirming neighbors’ reports that multiple shots had been fired. A doctor who worked on the case told the family that based on the way the bullets had entered his body, Dowell had been shot with his hands raised. Bullet holes in nearby walls also suggested alternate trajectories and a different story. The family demanded the clothes Dowell wore when he was shot, and to be allowed to take pictures of the corpse to verify how many times he had been shot. The county refused. Mrs. Dowell publicly announced: “I believe the police murdered my son.”

A few miles north of Oakland, Richmond was the site of several major shipyards during WWII. Many blacks migrated to the area for wartime jobs, but found themselves unemployed and underemployed during the postwar demobilization and de-industrialization. Much of the postwar black community lived in ghettos consisting of public housing units built by the federal government during the war. North Richmond, a town of 6,000 people stuck between a garbage dump and the toxic fume-producing Chevron Oil refinery, was almost entirely black. As an unincorporated area, the community received no public services from the city. Instead, North Richmond came under the jurisdiction of Contra Costa County, including the Contra Costa County Sheriff’s Department. Extremely isolated, the area had only three streets on which to

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enter or exit. On occasion, county police would block those streets, sealing off the entire area. ¹³

Two weeks before Christmas 1966, just a few months before Denzil Dowell died, two unarmed black men had been shot and killed in North Richmond. Bullet holes in their armpits showed that they had been shot with their hands raised. It was rumored that police were responsible. A black woman from the neighborhood had also been brutally beaten by police. ¹⁴ Denzil Dowell’s killing added insult to injury. A white jury took little time deciding that the killing of unarmed Dowell was “justifiable homicide” because police suspected that he was in the act of committing a felony. Outraged, the black community demanded justice.

The Dowell family supported a petition drive demanding the suspension of officer Brunkhorst and a full investigation of Denzil’s death. Almost one-fourth of the North Richmond community signed on – 1200 in all. Yet county officials refused. For many, this was the last straw. ¹⁵

Paralleling black anger over police brutality nationally, the rage in North Richmond over Dowell’s killing was palpable. With no sympathetic response from local government, the situation appeared headed in a clear direction: toward riot. Mark Comfort knew the Dowell family and understood how high the stakes were. As North Richmond threatened to boil over, instead of organizing a sit-in or prevailing upon the traditional civil rights organizations to act, he drove down to 56th Street and Grove in Oakland to see Huey Newton and Bobby Seale.

¹⁴ *Black Panther Newspaper*, VI n1 April 25, 1967: 2; *Oakland Tribune*, December 11, 1966.
Ruby Dowell, Denzil’s sister, called a meeting to discuss the situation at Neighborhood House, a community center in North Richmond. Newton and Seale attended. The meeting was emotional. Mrs. Dowell was still very angry, but she was also despondent and scared. Alongside her husband, who remained in the background during much of the crisis, she had worked so hard to survive in North Richmond, to support her family, and to raise her children. Now, her son Denzil had been taken from her by the very police sworn to protect him. Her appeals to the authorities had been treated with indifference at best. Who was she to look to? How could she find justice?

Newton and Seale calmly maintained that only through armed self-defense could the black community find security. Both men asked lots of questions about the case, and tried to understand what had actually happened the night Denzil Dowell was killed. George Dowell immediately saw in the Panthers the first real glimmer of hope for finding justice for his brother. “I was really impressed. They made me feel like they were really interested in the people, and they knew what they were doing… When I listened to Huey and Bobby talk, I could tell that they were talking from their hearts. A person can tell when another person is telling the truth and that’s what all our people been waiting to hear.”

The next day the Panthers began their own investigation into the killing of Denzil Dowell. They started to spend time in North Richmond, talking with George Dowell and the younger generation on the street, and sitting with Mrs. Dowell in her home. They spoke with the neighbors and other community members, sought out witnesses, talked

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17 Huey P. Newton, Revolutionary Suicide: 139.
with the coroner’s office, and spoke to forensic experts.\textsuperscript{19} They decided to do whatever they could to find justice for Denzil Dowell.

The Panthers’ first confrontation with police in North Richmond was unplanned. Newton observed that, “Policemen were constantly coming to Mrs. Dowell’s house and treating her like dirt. They would knock on the door, walk in, and search the premises any time they wanted.” One Sunday in April 1967, Newton was at the house when they came. “When Mrs. Dowell answered the knock, a policeman pushed his way in, asking questions. I grabbed my shotgun and stepped in front of her, telling him either to produce a search warrant or leave. He stood for a minute, shocked, then ran out to his car and drove off.”\textsuperscript{20} Given recent events, many locals felt vulnerable to police attack, and word about the Panthers spread rapidly throughout North Richmond.

On the following Sunday, April 16, community members met at George Dowell’s home to discuss his brother’s death. Talk soon turned to a recent rash of student beatings by teachers at the local Walter Helms Junior High School – yet another example of institutional brutality. One student’s mother asked the Panthers for help. The Panthers had stated publicly that they were there for the community’s protection, and now they were being asked to deliver. The next day, three carloads of mothers of students at Walter Helms went to the school accompanied by a carload of armed Panthers.

When the lunch bell rang, the mothers entered the school and proceeded to patrol the hallways. The Panthers remained outside in case any problems arose. The mothers informed the principal they were there to ensure their children’s safety and protect them from any brutality on the part of school officials. “We’re concerned citizens,” they told

\textsuperscript{19} Huey P. Newton, \textit{Revolutionary Suicide}: 139.
\textsuperscript{20} Huey P. Newton, \textit{Revolutionary Suicide}: 139.
him, “and we’ll whip your ass and anyone else’s that we hear of slapping our children around.”

School officials called the police, and an officer soon arrived. Upon hearing about the angry parents inside, he demanded to know what was going on. Five of the Panthers sitting in the car were openly armed, four with shotguns and one with an M-1. According to Seale, when the officer saw the guns, he began to stutter. He asked what all the guns were for, and Newton told him that they were the Black Panther Party and that the guns belonged to them. The officer asked for his driver’s license, and Newton obliged. When he saw Newton’s name, he got on the radio and called for reinforcements. Another police car arrived, but there was nothing the police could do. The Panthers acted within the law, and apparently the police did not want to inflame the situation further. The mothers patrolled the hallways until the lunch period ended.

The next morning Newton received a call. Mrs. Dowell and other community members had scheduled a meeting with a representative of the county district attorney in Richmond to discuss the Dowell case. They asked if the Panthers could come. Newton was skeptical about what could be accomplished, but to satisfy the Dowells, he took a group of Panthers to the meeting. Little progress was made with the DA, so the entire group of Panthers and community members went to see County Sheriff Walter F. Young in Martinez.

Sheriff Young was cordial and polite, but he remained unyielding. Young maintained that because Dowell had been in the act of committing a felony when Brunkhorst shot him, the killing was legally justified. While claiming he had the best

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21 Bobby Seale, *Seize the Time*: 141-142.
interests of the North Richmond community at heart, Young insisted he would neither suspend Brunkhorst nor modify the department’s policy on when to shoot and when not to shoot potential suspects. An undersheriff added: “If you want the policy changed, you should go to the legislature.”

The Dowell family had held out hope that local officials would eventually help them find justice. The meeting in Martinez left no doubt that they would have to find another approach.

Seale and Newton quickly organized a street corner rally to talk with community members about Denzil Dowell’s case and explain their program, especially their position on community self-defense. They had organized street corner rallies in the past in both Oakland and San Francisco, and the sight of armed and uniformed Black Panthers had always caught people’s attention, often getting them to listen to the Panther political program.

Most of North Richmond had no sidewalks. But there was one corner in front of a liquor store at Third and Chesley that did, and Newton and Seale planned a rally there for Saturday April 22. At 5 pm that day, fifteen Panthers showed up in uniform, most of them armed – lined up on the street on each corner, North, South, East, and West. They had effectively claimed the corner, and unofficially declared it a Panther zone.

A small crowd started to gather. Seale began talking about the Dowell case. In the past when the Panthers had organized street discussions, people noticed. But this was different. If Denzil Dowell could be killed by police with impunity, so could any young

24 Huey P. Newton, Revolutionary Suicide: 142.
person in the neighborhood. The crowd soon swelled. While the police scared many in the community, here was a group of young black men, organized and disciplined, openly displaying guns and speaking their minds. Cars stopped, and traffic began backing up. Soon over 150 people had gathered.

A police car arrived and took a post across the street from the crowd; the officer casually smoked as he observed the rally. Seale pointed out the officer, declaring that they would continue exercising their right to free speech. No “pig,” he shouted, would stop them. Four Panthers quickly surrounded the officer: Reginald Forte carrying a 9 mm pistol, Warren Tucker with a .38 pistol hanging at his side, one Panther with a .357 magnum, and another unarmed Panther. The officer quickly started up his car and drove away.

When it came time for Newton to speak, he talked about getting organized and using guns to defend the community from racist attacks. He explained that the community had to organize to patrol the police to keep them in line; everyone would have to get guns to protect their homes, even the elderly. As the rally progressed, another policeman arrived. A number of cars pulled out of the way to let his car through, but one man refused to move, and the officer got stuck amid the swelling traffic jam, and had to stay there in his car observing the rally until it ended. 25

The rally proved to be a tremendous success. Community members had been searching for ways of doing something about Denzil Dowell’s killing, and the Panthers had shown them a way. This was indeed what Newton and Seale had been looking for: a way to mobilize the black community to show them that they could take issues into their

25 Bobby Seale, Seize the Time: 138-139; Black Panther Newspaper v1 n1 April 25, 1967: 3.
own hands. A second rally was called for April 29, the following Saturday. This time, the Panthers planned to shut off a whole section of the street.

Newton and Seale had captured the community’s imagination, and others began chipping in to help organize the next rally. Eldridge Cleaver, who had been impressed with Newton during the confrontation with police at Ramparts, helped Newton and Seale publicize the rally, in the process creating the Party’s first newspaper. Emory Douglass, a student at San Francisco City College and a new Panther member, contributed his graphic arts expertise. The paper immediately became a key Party tool, running for over a decade with an international distribution and, at its height, a circulation in the hundreds of thousands. The first issue was simply two mimeographed sheets stapled together.

On April 25, 1967, the paper hit the streets. The masthead ran: “The Black Panther – Black Community News Service Volume 1 Number 1.” The headline read: “Why Was Denzil Dowell Killed.” The paper explained the facts of the case from the Panthers’ perspective. It also explained their political position, and announced the North Richmond rally for that coming Saturday: “So we’ll know what to do and how to do it.” 3,000 copies were printed, and kids from the North Richmond neighborhood helped to distribute the paper door-to-door on foot and bicycle.26

The rally got underway at 1:30 pm outside the home of a Dowell family relative at 1717 Second Street in North Richmond. The Panthers showed up armed and in uniform, and closed off the street. Word had spread and almost 400 people of all ages came. Notably, many working class and poor black people from North Richmond were there. They came to see what might be done to get some measure of justice for Denzil

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Dowell, and in turn to protect themselves and their community from police attacks. People lined both sides of the block. Some elderly residents brought lawn chairs to sit and listen. Some of the younger generation climbed on cars.

Several police cars arrived on the scene, but the reception they received was even less friendly than that at the previous rally, so they kept their distance. A Contra Costa County helicopter patrolled from above. According to a sheriff’s spokesman, they took no other action because the Panthers broke no laws, and as required, displayed their weapons openly.

Newton, Seale, and Cleaver all spoke, proclaiming that the community would not get any justice from the government, nor from its arm, the police. In outlining the Party’s program, they emphasized that black people would never be safe and secure if they depended on the police to protect them. The police were part of the problem, extensions of the oppressive power structure. Black people would only be safe if they took the situation into their own hands and defended themselves. At one point Newton explained what kinds of guns people should buy. He pointed to Panther John Sloan stationed on a rooftop. Sloan did a weapons demonstration and people cheered wildly.

That day something startling occurred that had never before happened at a Panther event. Neighbors began showing up with their own guns. Some of these people had seen the armed Panthers at the previous rally, and decided to come this time with their own guns in a gesture of support and solidarity. Others, seeing the Panthers for the first time, went home to get their guns and returned. One young woman who had been sitting in her car got out and held up her M-1 for everyone to see. The Panthers passed out applications to join their party, and over 300 filled them out. According to FBI informant Earl
Anthony, he “had never seen Black men command the respect of the people the way that Huey Newton and Bobby Seale did that day.” 27

Sacramento
As the Black Panthers’ strategy of armed self-defense became more and more effective at mobilizing members of the black community, the Panthers increasingly attracted the attention of authorities who took steps to stop them. The Oakland Police Department circulated internal memos on the Party containing information on the identities and vehicles of Panthers. 28 Assemblyman Donald Mulford, a Republican from Piedmont, the predominantly white and affluent suburb of Oakland, took particular notice.

On April 5, 1967, six weeks after the Black Panther Party’s well-publicized confrontation with police while escorting Betty Shabazz, Assemblyman Mulford introduced a bill, AB 1591, into the California legislature 29 proposing to outlaw the carrying of loaded firearms in public. In response to the “increasing incidence of organized groups and individuals publicly arming themselves,” Mulford argued that “it is imperative that this statute take effect immediately.” In short, if signed into law, the act would make illegal the armed patrols of police, and the open display of guns at “self-defense” rallies in the black community – effectively outlawing the Black Panther strategy. 30

The day after the Panthers’ big rally in North Richmond, the San Francisco Chronicle carried an extended piece on the Party. Concluding with a discussion of

28 Oakland police officer Arthur Jensen interviewed for Eyes on the Prize.
29 For AB 1591 final history, see California Legislature, Final Calendar 1967, part 2, p. 506.
30 Statutes of California, 1967 Regular Session, Chapter 960.
Mulford’s bill, the article noted: “The bill is scheduled to go before the Assembly Committee on Criminal Procedure in Sacramento Tuesday. Whether the Black Panthers will show up for the hearing is problematical.”\(^{31}\) Newton and Seale had already considered traveling to Sacramento to see what could be done to challenge the police brutality that led to the killing of Denzil Dowell. When Newton saw the article and the fact that Mulford was acting to undermine the party, he called Seale over to his house. Newton told Seale that it was to be expected that as the Panthers found a legal way to mobilize people using guns, the state would change the law to stop them. Indeed, there was little they could do to stop the state from changing the law.

Had the Mulford Act gone to a vote several months earlier, even at the time of the Malcolm X Memorial, it might have spelled the end of the Black Panther Party by forcing the Panthers to stop their armed patrols of the police.\(^{32}\) But now, after the rallies in North Richmond, everything was different. Newton and Seale had effectively challenged police brutality and government neglect. They had succeeded in organizing the rage of a black community into a potent political force. Newton decided to raise the encounter to a higher level – he would send an armed delegation to the state capitol.

On Tuesday morning May 2, 1967, thirty Black Panthers put on their uniforms, picked up their guns, and headed to Sacramento. Seale led the delegation of twenty-four men and six women, which included Emory Douglass, “Lil” Bobby Hutton, Warren Tucker, Mark Comfort, and George Dowell. Hutton carried a high standard twelve-gauge shotgun, Tucker a .357 Magnum, and eighteen of the other men were also armed. The

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\(^{32}\) David Hilliard points out that the Mulford Act made it illegal to carry loaded weapons openly, but that it did not ban carrying concealed weapons. Conversation with David Hilliard, May 3, 2011.
women were not armed. Eldridge Cleaver also went to Sacramento that day, but not as part of the delegation. *Ramparts* magazine had assigned him to cover the Panther action with the understanding that he would not take part. Consistent with their Oakland patrols, the Panthers planned to remain firmly within the laws restricting gun use. They would take care, for example, to keep their guns aimed only up or down, not to point them at anyone, an action that could be construed as displaying a weapon in a threatening manner. Newton instructed the group not to shoot unless fired upon.33

When the Panthers arrived at the Capitol building in Sacramento, they got out of their cars heavily armed, and Seale began asking bystanders how to find the Assembly. Right away, several TV cameramen took notice and ran up to the delegation to begin filming.34

By the time the delegation arrived outside the Assembly chambers on the second floor, a swarm of reporters had gathered around them, taking pictures and asking questions. Assembly sessions are open to the public, but the public is not allowed on the Assembly floor. When the Panthers got to the actual door to the Assembly floor, several of the reporters barged into the Assembly to get a better picture of the Panthers as they entered. Seale and about twelve of the Panthers followed.35 According to the *San Francisco Chronicle*, “Assembly Speaker Pro-Tem Carlos Bee (Dem-Hayward) who was facing the door saw only a gaggle of news and television cameramen in what seemed to

34 Bobby Seale, *Seize the Time*: 153-163.
be a stampede. Angrily he shouted for the sergeant-at-arms, Tony Beard, to remove the intruding photographers.”

One of the guards started telling the Panthers: “This is not where you’re supposed to be. This is not where you’re supposed to be.” While they were trying to decide whether to stay on the assembly floor or go upstairs, a police officer came up behind Bobby Hutton and grabbed the gun out of his hand. Hutton started shouting at the officer and chasing him to try to get his gun back, and the Panthers followed him out into the hallway. Assemblyman Mulford wasted no time in lobbying for his legislation. He quickly rose to inform the Assembly that it was not just reporters who had been on the Assembly floor. “A serious incident has just occurred,” he explained, “People with weapons forced their way into this chamber and were ejected.”

When the Panthers got into the hallway, the state police surrounded, grabbed, and disarmed the Panthers. Seale started to shout: “Wait a minute, now wait a minute! Am I under arrest? Am I under arrest?! Take your hands off me if I am not under arrest! If I am under arrest, I will come. If I am not, don’t put your hands on me.” Seale demanded the guns back and a chance to read their mandate. As the police pushed the Panthers into an elevator, Seale shouted “Is this the way the racist government works, won’t let a man exercise his constitutional rights?” Once downstairs, the police reviewed the situation and decided the Panthers had broken no laws, and returned their guns.

Having been expelled from the Assembly, but now having captured the attention of many reporters, Seale read the Panther statement in front of the press. With much of California and the country watching, he read Black Panther Executive Mandate #1:

The Black Panther Party for Self-Defense calls upon the American people in general and the Black people in particular to take careful note of the racist California Legislature which is now considering legislation aimed at keeping the Black people disarmed and powerless at the very same time that racist police agencies throughout the country are intensifying the terror, brutality, murder, and repression of Black people… The enslavement of Black people from the very beginning of this country, the genocide practiced on the American Indians and the confining of the survivors on reservations, the savage lynching of thousands of Black men and women, the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and now the cowardly massacre in Vietnam, all testify to the fact that toward people of color the racist power structure of America has but one policy: repression, genocide, terror, and the big stick… The Black Panther Party for Self-Defense believes that the time has come for Black people to arm themselves against this terror before it is too late. The pending Mulford Act brings the hour of doom one step nearer. A people who have suffered so much for so long at the hands of a racist society, must draw the line somewhere. We believe that the Black communities of America must rise up as one man to halt the progression of a trend that leads inevitably to their total destruction.”

Now released, with their guns again in tow, Seale read the statement to the press several times. They then walked down the Capitol steps, across the lawn, and back to their cars. But as they walked across the lawn, they passed a picnic lunch of thirty youngsters from the Valley View Intermediate School in Pleasant Hill being attended by Governor Ronald Reagan. News of the Panthers had not reached Reagan yet, and the sight of these armed black men ambling by the picnic unnerved him. He hastily deserted the youngsters from Valley View and hightailed it for the security of his offices. Shortly after the Panthers got in their cars and headed back for Oakland, a contingent of police armed with riot guns and pistols followed them, accompanied by reporters.

As soon as the Panthers pulled into a service station, the police surrounded them. A couple of officers came up behind Panther Sherman Forte and grabbed his hands, forcing them behind his back. When Seale asked if Forte was under arrest, the officers answered that he was, and Seale told Forte to take the arrest. The police proceeded to

39 Executive Mandate #1 as quoted in Philip S. Foner, ed., The Black Panthers Speak: 40.
search and arrest the remainder of the group in front of national TV on what appeared to be makeshift charges. Seale was originally arrested for carrying a concealed pistol, when in fact he openly displayed the pistol in a holster on his hip. Television footage caught officers looking for illegal weapons and comparing the length of Panther shotguns to their own. To one officer’s charge, a Panther explained: “that ain’t no sawed off, that’s a riot gun, just like yours.” Officers booked several of the Panthers on an obscure Fish and Game Code violation that prohibited loaded guns in a vehicle.\(^4^1\)

Nineteen young adults and five juveniles were arrested. This included not only armed Panthers, but also Eldridge Cleaver, covering the event for *Ramparts* carrying only a camera, as well as an anonymous black woman from Sacramento, unknown to the Panthers, who just happened to be buying gas at the time. At the police station, officials changed the charges to conspiracy to invade the assembly chambers, a felony.\(^4^2\)

Seale and Comfort were bailed out that evening, and returned with Newton for a court hearing and press conference the following day.\(^4^3\)

Extensive press coverage boosted the party’s profile exponentially. The *San Francisco Chronicle* alone printed at least twelve separate stories that week covering the Panther “invasion” of the State Capitol.\(^4^4\) The event received extensive coverage in the dailies throughout the country, from the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* to the *Chicago Tribune*, as well as widespread television coverage.\(^4^5\) The Party soon became the

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\(^4^1\) TV footage from *Eyes on the Prize*; concealed weapon charges from Gene Marine, *The Black Panthers*: 65; Forte arrest from Seale; Fish and Game Code booking from *Chronicle* May 3, 1967.


\(^4^3\) Press conference from Gene Marine, *The Black Panthers*: 65;

\(^4^4\) See San Francisco Chronicle Index, under heading “Negroes, Black Panthers armed with firearms, invade State Capitol.”

\(^4^5\) *NYT*, *Chicago Tribune*, and *Washington Post* May 3, 1967. Also articles the following days on case developments.
topic of discussion in innumerable political circles. In particular, the Party became a hot
topic in the left alternative press, garnering extensive coverage in *Ramparts* and the
*Movement*. The event also prompted more thorough investigative coverage, including a
massive story in the *New York Times Magazine*.46

The Panthers graphically introduced the public to a new vision of black politics.
Like the earlier Civil Rights Movement, the Panthers continued to focus on black
liberation. Yet, rather than appealing for a fair share of the American pie, the Panthers
portrayed the black community as an internal colony within America and the police as an
“army of occupation” from which they sought liberation.47 In their view, the racist power
structure was the common enemy of all those engaged in freedom struggles.

Newton and Seale were not deeply concerned that the Mulford act passed. They
believed that their Sacramento action would loudly proclaim the power of their vision to
the world, and that many young blacks would join them. And they were right.48

The Sacramento protest attracted a wider movement audience and established the
Black Panther Party as a new model for political struggle. Soon students at San Francisco
State University and the University of California Berkeley flocked to Panther rallies by
the thousands. Countless numbers of young blacks – looking for a way to join the
“Movement,” or just to channel their anger at the oppressive conditions in which they

spread, large photos, and a story that continued on three columns through three additional pages.
47 Jerry Belcher, “It’s All Legal: Oakland’s Black Panthers Wear Guns, Talk Revolution,” *San Francisco
48 Seale in speech February 1968 printed in the *Black Panther*: “Now I’m gonna show you how smart
Brother Huey is when he planned Sacramento. He said, now, the papers gon call us thugs and hoodlums. A
lot of people ain’t gon know what’s happening. But the brothers on the block, who the man’s been calling
thugs and hoodlums for four hundred years, gon say, ‘Them some out of sight thugs and hoodlums up
there!’ The bothers on the block gon say, ‘Who is these thus and hoodlums?’ In other words, when the man
calls us ‘nigger’ for four hundred years with all its derogatory connotations, Huey was smart enough to
know that the Black people were going to say, ‘Well, they’ve been calling us niggers, thugs, and hoodlums
for four hundred years, that ain’t gon hurn me, I’m going to check out what these brothers is doing!’”
lived – now had a political organization they could call their own. Twenty-two year-old Billy John Carr, once a star athlete at Berkeley High School who now constantly struggled to support his wife and child, joined the Party immediately after the Sacramento protest. He explained his decision to the New York Times: “As far as I’m concerned it’s beautiful that we finally got an organization that don’t walk around singing. I’m not for all this talking stuff. When things start happening I’ll be ready to die if that’s necessary and it’s important that we have somebody around to organize us.”

The Panthers knew that they were onto something historically significant. They could feel themselves becoming a viable model for black liberation. Emory Douglass recalled: “It was like being a part of a movement you had seen on TV, and now being able to share and participate in that movement … it brought a sense of pride.”

George Dowell was among those who joined in the Sacramento action, explaining later to a reporter:

We are tired of police brutality. We want something done about it. If they won’t do something we will. I know going to the Capitol was a big step and the Panthers made the first step. If we hadn’t done that first step our people would still be wishing. The Panthers took the first [step] in my brother’s investigation and [were] the first to show the world that black people need protection and that we never had it. That’s why we are arming to protect ourselves. We are just tired of living like this. We want freedom now. I hope it won’t come to bloodshed but if it does and if I die, I’ll know I did my part. That’s a good feeling because up till now there haven’t been too many men or women that could say that.

By the end of May, 1967, the Panthers were widely known and had attracted a strong following. The tactic of policing the police while legally bearing arms drove the development of their membership and influence. Early that year, Newton and Seale had

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50 Emory Douglass interview in Eyes on the Prize.
51 George Dowell interview in Black Panther v.1 n.2 May 15, 1967: 2, 4.
attracted a small following of “brothers on the block” through armed and legal confrontations with the police in Oakland. Then, unarmed 22 year old Denzil Dowell was shot in the back and killed by police in nearby Richmond, California. The Sheriff refused a proper investigation, and traditional civil rights organizations were unable to help.

Through legal and armed confrontation with the police, and a call for the black community to unite in self-defense against racist oppression, the Panthers organized hundreds of blacks reflecting all facets of the community to participate in armed street corner rallies. When the California Assembly moved to pass legislation to outlaw the Panthers’ tactic, the Panthers took their armed protest to the State Capitol in Sacramento, storming the Assembly building while legally carrying arms. By the end of May, the Panthers had a burgeoning membership dedicated to their revolutionary program.

And yet the tactic they used to build the organization had been outlawed …

**Part II. Baptism in Blood**

_The master’s room was wide open. The master’s room was brilliantly lighted, and the master was there, very calm … and our people stopped dead … it was the master … I went in. “It’s you,” he said, very calm. It was I, even I, and I told him so, the good slave, the faithful slave, the slave of slaves, and suddenly his eyes were like two cockroaches, frightened in the rainy season … I struck, and the blood spurted; that is the only baptism that I remember today._

– Aimé Césaire excerpted by Frantz Fanon in *Wretched of the Earth*¹

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¹ 1963, p. 88.
Chapter 3: The Correct Handling of a Revolution

The Black Panther leadership found itself in a most ironic situation after Sacramento. On the strength of their tactic of policing the police, the Panthers had thrust themselves into the center of the movement debate about what Black Power meant and what direction the Black Liberation Struggle would take now that Civil Rights strategy had run its course. Yet in the very same moment, the tactics so key to their impact had been taken from them. It was no longer clear how the Black Panthers would mobilize the “brothers on the block.” Further, it was unclear how they would pay for their mounting legal costs, such as the bail payments and lawyers’ fees stemming from Sacramento.

In the summer of 1967, this problem kept Newton up at night, posing both a political puzzle and a personal dilemma. How would he respond if a police officer attempted to abuse or brutalize him? Before California enacted the Mulford Act and restricted the Black Panther Party’s right to bear arms in public, the response was clear. On countless occasions, Newton had pulled out his law book and insisted, by section and point, that he be accorded his full legal rights under the law. When an officer refused to accord him these rights, he made it clear that he was prepared to peacefully accept an arrest, but that he would take the officer to court for false arrest. But if an officer attempted to unlawfully abuse or brutalize him in any way, Newton was armed, as was his legal right, and made it clear that he would not hesitate to use his weapon in self-defense.

In all of the Black Panther Party’s confrontations with police, not a single shot had been fired. But now that this tactic had been outlawed, what would Newton do – what would a Panther do?
The Legitimate Representatives of the Black Community

In the summer months following the Sacramento action, Huey Newton wrote and published a series of essays as he attempted to transcend the limitations of the tactic of legally armed patrols of police. In these essays, “Fear and Doubt,” “The Functional Definition of Politics,” “In Defense of Self-Defense” I and II, and “The Correct Handling of a Revolution,” he articulated a new politics. Drawing upon the writings of Malcolm X, Mao Tse-Tung and the psychiatrist Frantz Fanon who participated in the Algerian revolution, Newton expanded on RAM’s identification of the black community as a colony within the American empire. He linked both the conditions and the struggle for liberation in the black community to anti-colonial struggles around the world, not only in Africa, but also in Vietnam and elsewhere.

From there, Newton departs from RAM, seeking to define a politics that, like the tactic of legally armed patrols of police, would speak to and mobilize the “brothers on the block.” Newton’s first step is to take Frantz Fanon’s theory of the psychology of colonization and liberation struggle, developed in the context of the Algerian revolution, and apply it to the ghettos of the United States. Second, Newton identifies the police as an occupying force. Third, he identifies the urban riots, like the Watts rebellion, as proto-political resistance to this occupation and proposes that by arming and organizing the ghetto, black people can obtain power and channel this rage into an organized military force. Fourth, he asserts the role of the Black Panther Party in particular as the legitimate representative of the black community – the Vanguard Party – in the struggle for Black Power.

1) The first step Newton makes is to take Frantz Fanon’s theory of the psychology of colonization and liberation struggle developed in the Algerian revolution and to apply it concretely to the black ghetto.
In “Fear and Doubt,” Newton develops an analysis of the psychological dimensions of ghettoization, specifically on black men. Newton applies the theory developed by psychologist Frantz Fanon during the Algerian Revolution to the concrete and particular experience of Blackness in the American ghetto in the mid-1960s, analyzing how black men experience ghetto life. He describes how society denies black men their humanity. Newton writes that the black man blames himself for his inferior position in society. He finds himself in a double bind. On the one hand, he believes he is inherently inferior, that he lacks the “innate ability” to advance himself. On the other hand, he wants to believe that he is not innately inferior, but then blames himself for being lethargic and not trying hard enough. “Society responds to him as a thing, beast, non-entity, something to be ignored or stepped on. He is asked to respect laws that do not respect him. He is asked to digest a code of ethics that act upon him but not for him. He is confused and in a constant state of rage, of shame and doubt. This psychological set permeates all his interpersonal relationships.” Newton then goes on to analyze how this dynamic permeates all aspects of black men’s lives in America, from processing their hair to pursuing fancy cars, from the ghetto schools to unemployment, to the proliferation of illegitimate children as an attempt to demonstrate masculinity.

CHAPTER 3: THE CORRECT HANDLING OF A REVOLUTION

1 Newton’s analysis in “Fear and Doubt” is foreshadowed in an article in the first issue of the Black Panther newspaper: “The White man has instilled fear into the very hearts of our people. We must act to remove this fear. The only way to remove this fear is to stand up and look the white man in his blue eyes. Many Black people are able nowadays to look the white man in the eyes – but the line thins out when it comes to looking the white cops in the eye. But the white cop is the instrument sent into our community by the Power Structure to keep Black People quiet and under control… The BLACK PANTHER PARTY FOR SELF DEFENSE has worked out a program that is carefully designed to cope with this situation.” Excerpt from “Armed Black Brothers in Richmond Community” Black Panther v.1 n.1 April 25, 1967: 4. This article reflects the tactic and thinking developed by Huey Newton. Although the author is unlisted, it was probably written by Eldridge Cleaver given the style and tone and the fact that Cleaver was principally responsible for assembling the first issue of the paper.
2) Second, Newton identifies the police as an occupying force.

While a number of Black Power organizations at the time were reading Fanon and interpreting the psychological dimensions of racial oppression in the United States, Newton’s innovation was to focus on the police as a brutal and illegitimate occupying force, the immediate barrier to self-determination. In his essay “The Functional Definition of Politics,” Newton writes:

Because black people desire to determine their own destiny, they are constantly inflicted with brutality from the occupying army, embodied in the police department. There is a great similarity between the occupying army in Southeast Asia and the occupation of our communities by the racist police. The armies are there not to protect the people of South Vietnam, but to brutalize and oppress them for the interests of the selfish imperial power.²

By this time, the Panthers are no longer using the law to monitor the police legally and bearing arms in self-defense legally; that tactic had been outlawed. Now, Newton is taking the approach to the police to a broader political level. He is saying that the police are representatives of the imperial power, that they have no legitimate role in the black community.

3) Third, he identifies the urban riots as proto-political resistance to this occupation and proposes that by arming and organizing the ghetto, Black people can obtain power, channeling these proto-politics into an organized military force.

In his essay titled “In Defense of Self-Defense,” Newton writes:

We are continuing to function in petty, futile ways, divided, confused, fighting among ourselves, we are still in the elementary stage of throwing rocks, sticks, empty wine bottles and beer cans at racist cops who lie in wait for a chance to murder unarmed Black people. The racist cops have worked out a system for suppressing these spontaneous rebellions that flare up from the anger, frustration, and desperation of the masses of black people. We can no longer afford the dubious luxury of the terrible casualties wantonly inflicted upon us by the cops during these spontaneous rebellions…. We must organize and unite to combat by long resistance the brutal force used against us daily, the power structure depends upon the use of force without retaliation… There is a world of difference between 30 million unarmed, submissive black people and 30 million black people armed with freedom and defense guns and the strategic methods of liberation.³

³ “In Defense of Selfdefense” by Huey P. Newton, Minister of Defense. Black Panther v.1 n.3 June 20, 1967: 3-4.
Here, Newton takes a critical step – not just pinpointing the juncture of conflict between
the police and the ghettos, but identifying the riots as a proto-political resistance to, and
rebellion against, this colonial relationship. Yet unlike many Black Power advocates,
Newton does not celebrate the riots. He argues that they represent an infantile approach,
that they are unsophisticated spontaneous rebellions incapable of meeting the interests
and needs from which they arise. Newton then attempts to elaborate this rebellious proto-
politics. The tactic of policing the police having been outlawed, Newton seeks to specify
what sort of political approach would better express these riotous tendencies of political
resistance. He is arguing for arming and organizing Black America into a coherent
military force.

Newton posits that military and political power are inextricably linked: without
military power, there can be no political power. “Politics is war without bloodshed,” he
writes, and “War is politics with bloodshed.” He criticizes black politics as toothless and
thus powerless. He goes on to suggest organizing the riotous rage of the ghetto into a
disciplined military force, and argues that only by developing a force with real
destructive capacity can black people obtain political power:

When black people send a representative, he is somewhat absurd because he represents no political
power. He does not represent land power because we do not own any land. He does not represent
economic or industrial power because black people do not own the means of production. The only way
he can become political is to represent what is commonly called a military power – which the Black
Power by arming themselves from house to house, block to block, community to community,
throughout the nation. Then we will choose a political representative and he will state to the power
structure the desires of the black masses. If the desires are not met, the power structure will receive a
political consequence. We will make it economically non-profitable for the power structure to go on
with its oppressive ways. We will then negotiate as equals. There will be a balance between the people
who are economically powerful and the people who are potentially economically destructive.4

4) Fourth, he asserts the role of the Black Panther Party as the legitimate representative of the black community in the struggle for Black Power.

Finally, by late July, less than three months after the Black Panther action in Sacramento, Newton begins to assert the role of the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense as a Vanguard Party, the legitimate representative of the black community in its struggle for Black Power. This idea of a vanguard party is adapted from RAM and indirectly from Mao and the Chinese revolution. But RAM tried to play the role of vanguard party as an underground organization and their theory never became the basis for widespread politics. In developing his analysis of how to turn the riotous energy of the ghetto into an organized military -- and thus political -- force, Newton departs from RAM and articulates a concept of a vanguard party with the practical capacity to build Black Power in the United States. In his seminal essay “On the Correct Handling of a Revolution,” Newton writes:

The Vanguard Party must provide leadership for the people. It must teach the correct strategic methods of prolonged resistance through literature and activities. If the activities of the party are respected by the people, the people will follow the example. This is the primary job of the party. … When the people learn that it is no longer advantageous for them to resist by going to the streets in large numbers, and when they see the advantage in the activities of the guerilla warfare method, they will quickly follow this example. But first, they must respect the party which is transmitting this message… The vanguard party is never underground in the beginning of its existence, because this would limit its effectiveness and educational process. How can you teach a people if the people do not know and respect you?5

Stripped of the tactic of legally armed patrols of the police, Newton thus reinvents the politics of armed self-defense after Sacramento. Newton believes black people are ready to fight the police. By organizing this capacity for armed resistance, Newton seeks to build political power – leverage for redressing the interests of black people. At least at the beginning, Newton seeks to organize this capacity for armed resistance aboveground, that is, legally.

Part of what is so important in Newton’s conception of the vanguard party is the way that it relates to the people. He emphasizes from the beginning the centrality of not merely educating the people but winning their respect.\(^6\) While approvingly citing Mao Tse-Tung’s dictum that “power grows out of the barrel of a gun,” Newton understands that the respect and loyalty of the community are about much more than that. He knows that the black community will only look to and respect the Black Panther Party if they believe that the Party is centrally concerned with their needs and interests.

From the start, coupled with organizing the rage of the ghetto into a military force, the Black Panther Party asserts its role as a vanguard of Black Power by championing solutions to the pressing needs of the black community: decent housing, employment, education, and freedom. Starting with issue number two published on May 15, 1967 (less than two weeks after the Sacramento incident), every one of the 537 issues of the *Black Panther Newspaper* contained the party’s ten-point platform and program entitled “What We Want Now! What We Believe,” emphasizing the party’s commitment to advancing a revolution addressing the needs and interests of the black community.

The platform and program emphasized the nationalist character of the Party as a steward of black people’s interests. It was not just about armed action; the Party was the legitimate voice of black people, and as such, it intended to take care of the broad range of the community’s needs. The platform drew heavily from the ten-point platform that Malcolm X crafted for Elijah Muhammad’s Nation of Islam, published in August 1963. The Panther platform emulated Malcolm X’s nationalism without the Islamic flavor. For example Malcolm X’s ten-point program included the following points under “What the

Muslims Want*: 1. “We want freedom. We want a full and complete freedom.” 4. We want territory to “establish a separate state.” 5. “We want freedom for all Believers of Islam now held in federal prisons. We want freedom for all black men and women now under death sentence in innumerable prisons in the North as well as the South.” 6. “We want an immediate end to the police brutality and mob attacks against the so-called Negro throughout the United States.” 7. “[W]e demand not only equal justice under the laws of the United States, but equal employment opportunities – NOW!” 8. “We want the government of the United States to exempt our people from ALL taxation as long as we are deprived of equal justice under the laws of the land.” 9. “We want all black children educated, taught and trained by their own teachers.”

Drawing on Malcolm X’s program as a model, the Black Panthers developed their famous Ten Point Program. Most previous accounts present an October 1968 version as the original and claim it was first distributed in October 1966, but that is incorrect. The Black Panther Party’s original Ten Point Program, first publicized in May 1967, read as follows:

WHAT WE WANT NOW! WHAT WE BELIEVE

TO THOSE POOR SOULS WHO DON’T KNOW BLACK HISTORY, THE BELIEFS AND DESIRES OF THE BLACK PANTHER PARTY FOR SELF DEFENSE MAY SEEM UNREASONABLE. TO BLACK PEOPLE, THE TEN POINTS COVERED ARE ABSOLUTELY ESSENTIAL TO SURVIVAL. WE HAVE LISTENED TO THE RIOT PRODUCING WORDS “THESE THINGS TAKE TIME” FOR 400 YEARS. THE BLACK PANTHER PARTY KNOWS WHAT BLACK PEOPLE WANT AND NEED. BLACK UNITY AND SELF DEFENSE WILL MAKE THESE DEMANDS A REALITY.

WHAT WE WANT

1. WE WANT FREEDOM. WE WANT POWER TO DETERMINE THE DESTINY OF OUR BLACK COMMUNITY.
2. WE WANT FULL EMPLOYMENT FOR OUR PEOPLE.
3. WE WANT AN END TO THE ROBBERY BY THE WHITE MAN OF OUR BLACK COMMUNITY.
4. WE WANT DECENT HOUSING, FIT FOR SHELTER [OF] HUMAN BEINGS.
5. WE WANT EDUCATION FOR OUR PEOPLE THAT EXPOSES THE TRUE NATURE OF THIS DECADENT AMERICAN SOCIETY. WE WANT EDUCATION THAT TEACHES US OUR TRUE HISTORY AND OUR ROLE IN THE PRESENT DAY SOCIETY.
6. WE WANT ALL BLACK MEN TO BE EXEMPT FROM MILITARY SERVICE.
7. WE WANT AN IMMEDIATE END TO POLICE BRUTALITY AND MURDER OF BLACK PEOPLE.
8. WE WANT FREEDOM FOR ALL BLACK MEN HELD IN FEDERAL, STATE, COUNTY, AND CITY PRISONS AND JAILS.
9. WE WANT ALL BLACK PEOPLE WHEN BROUGHT TO TRIAL TO BE TRIED IN COURT BY A JURY OF THEIR PEER GROUP OR PEOPLE FROM THEIR BLACK COMMUNITIES. AS DEFINED BY THE CONSTITUTION OF THE UNITED STATES.
10. WE WANT LAND, BREAD, HOUSING, EDUCATION, CLOTHING, JUSTICE AND PEACE.

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WHAT WE BELIEVE

1. WE BELIEVE THAT BLACK PEOPLE WILL NOT BE FREE UNTIL WE ARE ABLE TO DETERMINE OUR DESTINY.

2. WE BELIEVE THAT THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT IS RESPONSIBLE AND OBLIGATED TO GIVE EVERY MAN EMPLOYMENT OR A GUARANTEED INCOME. WE BELIEVE THAT IF THE WHITE AMERICAN BUSINESS MEN WILL NOT GIVE FULL EMPLOYMENT, THEN THE MEANS OF PRODUCTION SHOULD BE TAKEN FROM THE BUSINESS MEN AND PLACED IN THE COMMUNITY SO THAT THE PEOPLE OF THE COMMUNITY CAN ORGANIZE AND EMPLOY ALL OF ITS PEOPLE AND GIVE A HIGH STANDARD OF LIVING.

3. WE BELIEVE THAT THIS RACIST GOVERNMENT HAS ROBBED US AND NOW WE ARE DEMANDING THE OVERTUE DEBT OF FORTY ACRES AND TWO MULES. FORTY ACRES AND TWO MULES WAS PROMISED 100 YEARS AGO AS RETRIBUTION FOR SLAVE LABOR AND MASS MURDER OF BLACK PEOPLE. WE WILL ACCEPT THE PAYMENT IN CURRENCY WHICH WILL BE DISTRIBUTED TO OUR MANY COMMUNITIES: THE GERMANS ARE NOW AIDING THE JEWS IN ISRAEL FOR THE GENOCIDE OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE. THE GERMANS MURDERED 6,000,000 JEWS. THE AMERICAN RACIST HAS TAKEN PART IN THE SLAUGHTER OF OVER 50,000,000 BLACK PEOPLE; THEREFORE, WE FEEL THAT THIS IS A MODEST DEMAND THAT WE MAKE.

4. WE BELIEVE THAT IF THE WHITE LANDLORDS WILL NOT GIVE DECENT HOUSING TO OUR BLACK COMMUNITY, THEN THE HOUSING AND THE LAND SHOULD BE MADE INTO COOPERATIVES SO THAT OUR COMMUNITY, WITH GOVERNMENT AID, CAN BUILD AND MAKE DECENT HOUSING FOR ITS PEOPLE.

5. WE BELIEVE IN AN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM THAT WILLgive TO OUR PEOPLE A KNOWLEDGE OF SELF. IF A MAN DOES NOT HAVE KNOWLEDGE OF HIMSELF AND HIS POSITION IN SOCIETY AND THE WORLD, THEN HE HAS LITTLE CHANCE TO RELATE TO ANYTHING ELSE.

6. WE BELIEVE THAT BLACK PEOPLE SHOULD NOT BE FORCED TO FIGHT IN THE MILITARY SERVICE TO DEFEND A RACIST GOVERNMENT THAT DOES NOT PROTECT US. WE WILL NOT FIGHT AND KILL OTHER PEOPLE OF COLOR IN THE WORLD WHO, LIKE BLACK PEOPLE, ARE BEING VICTIMIZED BY THE WHITE RACIST GOVERNMENT OF AMERICA. WE WILL PROTECT OURSELVES FROM THE FORCE AND VIOLENCE OF THE RACIST POLICE AND THE RACIST MILITARY, BY WHATEVER MEANS NECESSARY.

7. WE BELIEVE WE CAN END POLICE BRUTALITY IN OUR BLACK COMMUNITY BY ORGANIZING BLACK SELF-DEFENSE GROUPS THAT ARE DEDICATED TO DEFENDING OUR BLACK COMMUNITY FROM RACIST POLICE OPPRESSION AND BRUTALITY. THE SECOND AMENDMENT OF THE CONSTITUTION GIVES US A RIGHT TO BEAR ARMS. WE THEREFORE BELIEVE THAT ALL BLACK PEOPLE SHOULD ARM THEMSELVES FOR SELF-DEFENSE.

8. WE BELIEVE THAT ALL BLACK PEOPLE SHOULD BE RELEASED FROM THE MANY JAILS AND PRISONS BECAUSE THEY HAVE NOT RECEIVED A FAIR AND IMPARTIAL TRIAL.

9. WE BELIEVE THAT THE COURTS SHOULD FOLLOW THE UNITED STATES CONSTITUTION SO THAT BLACK PEOPLE WILL RECEIVE FAIR TRIALS. THE 14TH AMENDMENT OF THE U.S. CONSTITUTION GIVES A MAN A RIGHT TO BE TRIED BY HIS PEER GROUP. A PEER IS A PERSON FROM A SIMILAR ECONOMIC, SOCIAL, RELIGIOUS, GEOGRAPHICAL, ENVIRONMENTAL, HISTORICAL AND RACIAL BACKGROUND. TO DO THIS THE COURT WILL BE FORCED TO SELECT A JURY FROM THE BLACK COMMUNITY FROM WHICH THE BLACK DEFENDANT CAME. WE HAVE BEEN, AND ARE BEING TRIED BY ALL WHITE JURIES THAT HAVE NO UNDERSTANDING OF THE "AVERAGE REASONING MAN" OF THE BLACK COMMUNITY.

10. WHEN IN THE COURSE OF HUMAN EVENTS, IT BECOMES NECESSARY FOR ONE PEOPLE TO DISSOLVE THE POLITICAL BODIES WHICH HAVE CONNECTED THEM WITH ANOTHER, AND TO ASSUME AMONG THE POWERS OF THE EARTH, THE SEPARATE AND EQUAL STATION TO WHICH THE LAWS OF NATURE AND NATURE'S GOD ENTITLE THEM, A DECENT RESPECT TO THE OPINIONS OF MANKIND REQUIRES THAT THEY SHOULD DECLARE THE CAUSES WHICH IMPEL THEM TO SEPARATION. WE HOLD THESE TRUTHS TO BE SELF-EVIDENT, THAT ALL MEN ARE CREATED EQUAL, THAT THEY ARE ENDED BY THEIR CREATOR WITH CERTAIN INALIENABLE RIGHTS, THAT AMONG THESE ARE LIFE, LIBERTY AND THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS. THAT TO SECURE THESE RIGHTS, GOVERNMENTS ARE INSTITUTED AMONG MEN, DERIVING THEIR JUST POWERS FROM THE CONSENT OF THE GOVERNED, - THAT WHENEVER ANY FORM OF GOVERNMENT BECOMES DESTRUCTIVE OF THESE ENDS, IT IS THE RIGHT OF PEOPLE TO ALTER OR TO ABOLISH IT, AND TO INSTITUTE NEW GOVERNMENT, LAYING ITS FOUNDATION ON SUCH PRINCIPLES AND ORGANIZING ITS POWERS IN SUCH FORM AS TO THEM SHALL SEEM MOST LIKELY TO EFFECT THEIR SAFETY AND HAPPINESS. PRUDENCE, INDEED, WILL DICTATE THAT GOVERNMENTS LONG ESTABLISHED SHOULD NOT BE CHANGED FOR LIGHT AND TRANSIENT CAUSES; AND ACCORDINGLY ALL EXPERIENCE HATH SHEWN, THAT MANKIND ARE MORE DISPOSED TO SUFFER, WHILE EVILS ARE SUFFERABLE, THAN TO RIGHT THEMSELVES BY ABOLISHING THE FORMS TO WHICH THEY ARE ACCUSTOMED. BUT WHEN A LONG TRAIN OF ABUSES AND USURPATIONS, PURSUING INEVARIABLY THE SAME OBJECT, EVIDES A DESIGN TO REDUCE THEM UNDER ABSOLUTE DESPOTISM, IT IS THEIR RIGHT, IT IS THEIR DUTY, TO THROW OFF SUCH GOVERNMENT, AND TO PROVIDE NEW GUARDS FOR THEIR FUTURE SECURITY. 

8 The Black Panther May 15, 1967, v.1 n.2 p.3. emphasis in original. Despite many later issues of the Black Panther that labeled other versions of the ten-point-program the “October 1966” version, this is the earliest
Above the ten-point program, under the headline “Minister of Defense,” the *Black Panther* newspaper carried a photo of Huey that announced to the world that the vanguard of Black Power had arrived. In the photo, Huey is seated facing forward. His forehead, nose, and left cheekbone are well illuminated, the right side of his face obscured in shadow, capped by the trademark black beret tilted at a precise angle to cover the top of his right ear. His slacks, shoes, and leather jacket are also black, his pressed shirt light colored – the standard Black Panther uniform. He sits comfortably but alert, his feet positioned, ready to stand. Behind him is the ornate fan of the wicker throne in which he sits. A handful of live ammunition sets in a small pile on the ground near the butt of the rifle he holds in his right hand. Like the zebra skin rugs on the floor and the two shields behind him, the tall black spear in his left hand suggests Africa. The photo surviving version printed. It was only in subsequent issues that the demand for a UN supervised plebiscite was added, that point 3 was changed to identify the capitalist rather than the white man as the robber of the black community, that the sections on wants and beliefs were interspersed rather than listed one after the other, that the introductory paragraph was removed as discussed below, and that typos were corrected. Many of these smaller changes took place under the header “October 1966 Platform and Program” in later issues of the paper, well before the 1972 overhaul of the Platform, and were reproduced as the original Platform by others. Almost all previous renditions of the Ten Point Program actually reproduce much later versions and label them as deriving from October 1966. For example, even the great Historian Phillip Foner in his edited *Black Panthers Speak*, 1969, makes this mistake. On the very first page he dates at October 1966 a reproduction of the 10 Point Program with mention of the UN Plebiscite and other changes that did not appear until *Black Panther vIn6* in October of 1968 after the Panthers’ delegation to the United Nations. What is especially important here is that, except retrospective accounts, there is no evidence that the 10 Point Program was even written before late April of 1967. The earliest evidence we could find, suggesting the Program had been drafted by the time of the Dowell mobilizations in late April, 1967, was a brief mention of the Party’s program in the first issue of the *Black Panther Newspaper*, April 25, 1967 p.2. While it may be possible that the 10 point program was drafted earlier, it was only when the Black Panther Party attempted to promote a broader political program following Sacramento that they distributed the 10 Point Program broadly to the public. The 10 Point Program is not mentioned in various news accounts where Huey and Bobby are interviewed and describe the philosophy and program of the Party. For example, in Jerry Belcher, “It’s All Legal: Oakland’s Black Panthers Wear Guns, Talk Revolution,” *San Francisco Examiner*, April 30, 1967, p.1, Huey identifies some concerns that are generally similar to a couple of the points in the 10 Point Program. But there is no discussion of an overarching program and the quoted language is different. It is striking that, after the Sacramento action May 3, the same version of the 10 Point Program printed in the May 15, 1967 *Black Panther* was also distributed in different forms. For example, a copy was distributed on the University of California Berkeley campus three days after the Sacramento action, May 5, 1967. Black Panther Party for Self-Defense, “What We Want, What We Believe,” H.K. Yuen Collection flier 329-670505-000B. The long quotation drawn from the Declaration of Independence provided a classical political justification for its revolutionary demands, and situated the Party’s revolutionary politics in the democratic tradition of the American Revolution.
announces Huey as leader and defender of the black colony in the white motherland America.

**Engaging the Left**

Beyond re-thinking the political ideology of the Party, during the summer of 1967, the Black Panthers forged important new relations with the broader Left. Newton was both an intellectual and a man of action. He could analyze the precise emotional dynamics in a confrontation with the police and know just how to push, and just how far. He could see the implications of his actions for the moment at hand, and also keep in mind their potential for broad political resonance. But he was not much of a public relations man. He had a high-pitched voice and hated public speaking. And he was too intensely focused on the crux of the issue to worry about advertising. Newton could envision and take exemplary action, but he was not particularly talented at broadcasting these actions to the world. Bobby Seale was a much more skillful public speaker, and a true organizational craftsman, keeping the Party running day to day. Seale proved time and again, as he had in Sacramento, that he had great integrity and could stand up without wavering in the face of intense pressure. But he was not much of a public relations man either. Newton’s vanguard politics called for putting the Party front and center in the public eye. In the summer of 1967, Eldridge Cleaver turned out to have just the flamboyant edge they needed.

After Sacramento, the Panthers faced the legal challenges of raising bail and hiring lawyers. Such challenges defined an important part of the daily work of the earlier Civil Rights Movement and were not unfamiliar to the Panthers. But until this point, legal challenges were only a peripheral concern of the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense. Now, facing the courts became central. Although it was perfectly legal for the Panthers to
enter the State Capitol bearing arms, a fact that the state police acknowledged at the time, officials later charged members of the Black Panther delegation with “conspiracy to disrupt the assembly,” a felony.

*Eldridge and Beverly*

Eldridge Cleaver was among those arrested with the Black Panther entourage in Sacramento. In the months following the Sacramento action, the Panthers’ newfound fame allowed Cleaver to draw upon his connections with *Ramparts* and a broader Left in order to raise money, and help the Party face legal challenges stemming from Sacramento.

Leroy Eldridge Cleaver was born on August 31, 1935, in Wabbaseka, Arkansas, the son of Leroy Cleaver, a waiter and nightclub piano player, and Thelma Hattie Robinson Cleaver, an elementary school teacher. Like many black families from the South, Cleaver’s family had migrated west for work during World War II. They settled in Los Angeles, where Cleaver soon became involved in petty crime. He went to jail several times, and in 1954 was sent to Soledad State Prison as an adult for two-and-a-half years for possession of marijuana. The Civil Rights Movement was heating up then, and Cleaver became politicized, increasingly spending his time with a group of black inmates who “were in vociferous rebellion against what we perceived as a continuation of slavery.”

Unmarried, Cleaver was denied conjugal visits, and soon became lonely and thought often of women. “In prison,” Cleaver later wrote, “those things withheld from and denied to the prisoner become precisely what he wants most of all.” He tore a photo

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10 Eldridge Cleaver, *Soul on Ice* pp. 3-4.
of a woman out of *Esquire* magazine and pinned it to the wall of his cell – deciding that this was his bride and that he would fall in love and lavish all his affections on her. One day he returned to his cell to find the picture torn from the wall by a guard and the pieces dumped in the toilet. When he confronted the guard, the guard said “get yourself a colored girl for a pinup – no white women – and I’ll let her stay up.”

Soon after the incident, Cleaver heard the news about Emmet Till. In 1955, Till a black fourteen year old from Chicago visiting relatives in Mississippi, whistled at a white woman. That night, local whites kidnapped him from his relatives’ house and beat him brutally. They fastened a large metal fan around his neck with barbed wire, shot him in the head, and dumped his mutilated corpse in the Tallahatchie River. Witnesses identified the murderers, but they were exonerated after only an hour of deliberation by an all-white-male jury. After the case was tried (and could not be appealed), the murderers publicly confessed that they had killed Till for flirting with a white woman.

Cleaver came across a picture of the white woman that Till flirted with in a magazine and found her attractive. He saw himself in Till’s shoes, and it distressed him. “It intensified my frustrations,” Cleaver later explained, “to know that I was indoctrinated to see the white woman as more beautiful and desirable than my own black woman.” Cleaver’s emotional turmoil concerning his attraction to white women was not unusual. While white men often took liberties with black women, if a black man even mildly flirted with a white woman it was considered the gravest violation of white supremacy, and all too often punished by death. In this context it is not surprising that many black men associated a sexual desire for white women with a desire to be recognized as human and free.

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11 Eldridge Cleaver, *Soul on Ice* pp. 7-11.
Fanon graphically described the psychological dimensions of this type of desire:

Out of the blackest part of my soul, across the zebra striping of my mind, surges this desire to be suddenly white. I wish to be acknowledged not as black but as white. Now … who but a white woman can do this for me? By loving me she proves that I am worthy of white love. I am loved like a white man. Her love takes me onto the noble road that leads to total realization … I marry white culture, white beauty, white whiteness. When my restless hands caress those white breasts, they grasp white civilization and dignity and make them mine.12

Cleaver’s confrontation with the guard and his attraction to the white woman that Till was lynched for flirting with shook him to the core, and sent him seeking answers. His quest involved conversations with other inmates, and studying books such as Richard Wright’s Native Son. Through further studies Cleaver earned his high school diploma – reading Karl Marx, Rousseau, Thomas Paine, Voltaire, and W.E.B. Du Bois, Bakunin, Lenin, and Machiavelli – before his release in 1957.13

But Cleaver was still in turmoil, and within less than a year he had been arrested again, this time for assault with intent to kill. He was sentenced to two-to-fourteen years in prison. At this point, he turned to the Nation of Islam, and began to write.14 Eight years later, he was still in prison, and still writing, but the mood of the country had changed. The Civil Rights Movement had fought Jim Crow and won. The anti-war movement was building. When Cleaver’s hero Malcolm X was assassinated in 1965, he swore to take up X’s fight. He committed himself to the struggle for the liberation of black people, and to building up the association that Malcolm X had founded shortly before his death – the Organization of Afro-American Unity.

From prison, Cleaver began writing letters to progressive lawyers he saw mentioned in the newspaper in hopes of finding legal support. In an issue of the Sun Reporter, a black community newspaper in San Francisco, Cleaver came across a story

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12 Frantz Fanon, “The Man of Color and the White Woman” in Black Skin, White Masks: 63.
13 Eldridge Cleaver, Soul on Ice, pp. 6-12.
14 Eldridge Cleaver, Soul on Ice, pp. 14.
about Beverly Axelrod, a young white civil rights lawyer. The story featured a photo of Axelrod with one of her clients, a large black man who was involved in the 1964 Cadillac Row protests to win black employment. Cleaver found out all he could about Axelrod and then wrote her a letter calculated to win her support. It did. Axelrod visited Cleaver several times, and the two began to exchange letters regularly. Soon their letters became romantic.

In his letters to Beverly, Eldridge expressed a sense of hope and humanity that he found in her affection. But he went further. He also expressed a rawness, a lack of apology. It was as if he was taking off the mask. Finding legitimate love and support from a white woman seemed to confirm his humanity. He no longer had to play at being timid or make himself appear insignificant in the world:

I was 22 when I came to prison and of course I have changed tremendously over the years. But I always had a strong sense of myself and in the last few years I felt I was losing my identity. There was a deadness in my body that eluded me, as though I could not exactly locate its site…. since encountering you, I feel life strength flowing back into that spot…. I may even swagger a little, and, as I read in a book somewhere, “push myself forward like a train.”

NOW TURN THE RECORD OVER AND PLAY THE OTHER SIDE

I have tried to mislead you. I am not humble at all. I have no humility and I do not fear you in the least. If I pretend to be shy, if I appear to hesitate, it is only a sham to deceive. By playing the humble part, I sucker my fellow men in and seduce them of their trust. And then, if it suits my advantage, I lower the boom – mercilessly. I lied when I stated that I had no sense of myself…. My vanity is as vast as the scope of a dream, my heart is that of a tyrant, my arm is the arm of the Executioner…. I wish to be the Voice of Doom itself. I am angry at the insurgents of Watts. They have pulled the covers off me and revealed to all what potential may lie behind my Tom Smile.

Beverly responded in kind:

I know you little and I know you much, but whichever way it goes, I accept you. Your manhood comes through in a thousand ways, rare and wonderful. I’m out in the world, with an infinity of choices. You don’t have to wonder if I’m grasping at something because I have no real measuring stick. I accept you.

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16 For copies of early love letters between Eldridge Cleaver and Beverly Axelrod, see Soul on Ice pp. 141-151 and also commentary pp. 18-25.
17 Eldridge Cleaver, Soul on Ice: 143-4.
About the other side of the record: Did you really think I didn’t know? Another facet of the crystal might be an apter term. I have a few facets myself. I do not fear you, I know you will not hurt me. Your hatred is large, but not nearly so vast as you sometimes imagine; it can be used, but it can also be soothed and softened.¹⁸

Beverly’s reply is about more than personal love and acceptance. She is embracing Cleaver’s humanity, and in doing so, is expressing her own. She not only accepts Cleaver’s rage, but suggests it can be softened. She sees herself as righting the racial wrongs that have been done to him. By validating his humanity, she is standing up to the racism which denied it. Like Cleaver’s, her love is also political. As a civil rights lawyer, her life is about fighting for justice. In loving Cleaver and validating his humanity, she seeks to challenge the social injustices that deny him his humanity.

Eldridge understands that Beverly needs him as much as he needs her. He is aware that Beverly wants to see her love of him as politically righteous. He sees their romance as politically transformative rather than simply individual, and appeals to Beverly in these terms:

It is not that we are making each other up and it is not ourselves alone who are involved in what is happening to us. It is really a complex movement taking place of which we are mere parts. We represent historical forces and it is really these forces that are coalescing and moving toward each other. And it is not a fraud, forced out of desperation. We live in a disoriented, deranged social structure, and we have transcended its barriers in our own ways and have stepped psychologically outside its madness and repressions.¹⁹

Beverly took a keen interest in Eldridge’s writings, and since prison authorities prohibited Cleaver from distributing his essays, she smuggled the manuscripts out of prison, hidden inside legal documents. She brought them to Edward Keating, the publisher of Ramparts, an independent Catholic magazine that had become an influential

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¹⁸ Beverly Axelrod in Cleaver, Soul on Ice: 145-6.
¹⁹ Eldridge Cleaver, Soul on Ice: 150.
voice of opposition to the Vietnam War. Keating was impressed. He shared Cleaver’s writings with luminaries such as Norman Mailer, and Norman Podhoretz, who in turn praised the work. Amid these successes, Cleaver, still in prison, asked Axelrod to marry him. By the time Cleaver got out on parole in December 1966, he had a job as a writer a Ramparts magazine, a publisher for his book – and a fiancé. Published in February of 1968, Soul On Ice, a collection of Cleaver’s prison writings instantly became a sensation selling more than a million copies within months, and eventually several million.

The mid-sixties in the United States were times of intense exploration of questions of both race and sexuality. As Jim Crow crumbled, people increasingly challenged the boundaries of racial segregation, including the powerful taboos against interracial sex. In finding legitimate love from Beverly Axelrod, a white woman, Cleaver sees a powerful form of redemption – refusing to play Uncle Tom he is able to be his “terrible” true masculine self. Finding legitimate love from a white woman, Cleaver portrays himself as striking a fatal blow to white supremacy. Conversely, in Soul On Ice, Cleaver depicts Axelrod as able to help transform society through her relationship with him. Not only does she help him find “liberation,” she gets to be “a rebel, a revolutionary” – a different kind of white woman. Cleaver asserts that, through her romance with him, Beverly realizes her particular humanity, crossing over of the line from participating in the oppressive system to becoming a revolutionary. More generally,
Cleaver’s writings suggested that by embracing each other, and a shared commitment to destroying the oppressive system, black and white revolutionaries could realize their humanity.

Parts of *Soul on Ice* are deeply misogynist and sexist: a disturbing aspect of the text that received insufficient attention amid its initial embrace by a primarily masculinist literary establishment. In the essay “On Becoming,” Cleaver claims that after the Till murder, when he was back on the street, he became a rapist. He writes that after practicing on black women, he repeatedly raped white women “as an insurrectionary act.” “It delighted me,” wrote Cleaver, “that I was defying and trampling upon the white man’s law, upon his system of values, and that I was defiling his women.” Upon his return to prison, Cleaver says that he was deeply ashamed and believed that he had gone astray “not so much from the white man’s law as from being human.” 25 While it is impossible to measure Cleaver’s sincerity, this is the story with which Cleaver presented himself to the world – and the story sold.

Once out of prison, Cleaver cultivated a growing coterie of Left-Progressive friends and supporters, notably in the Bay Area. Unlike most other black nationalist organizations, the Panthers embraced cross-racial politics. In practical terms, Cleaver proved to be crucial in helping the Party to forge powerful alliances with non-black individuals and organizations.

By the time of the action in Sacramento, Cleaver was becoming increasingly involved in Panther activities. As the Panthers’ needs for legal assistance and financial support grew, Cleaver’s connections to Beverly Axelrod and *Ramparts* became increasingly important. Cleaver was still on parole, and had made a point of attending the

Sacramento action as a reporter. At the time of his arrest, he was unarmed, carrying only a camera. Cleaver had recently completed nine years in the penitentiary, and now faced a revocation of parole. Axelrod represented Cleaver in court, arguing that Cleaver was only arrested with the other Panthers because he was black. She supported the case by documenting that a black woman, who was a resident of Sacramento and had no affiliation with the Black Panthers, had also been arrested because she happened to be black and in the same place at the same time. The district attorney acknowledged that Cleaver was carrying only a camera and dropped the charges against him.

The Black Panther Newspaper
As the Panthers reached out to communicate with members, to recruit new members, and to garner support and funds for their cause, they developed the Black Panther newspaper as a key tool of their revolution. Cleaver’s connections were very helpful in this endeavor. From the start, the newspaper served as a unique and dynamic voice of the Northern and Western Black Liberation Struggle. Rank and file Black Panthers did most of the work on the paper, including writing and layout. But especially in the early period at the newspaper’s beginnings, Cleaver’s friends provided critical technical support, helping with editing and publishing.

Three days after the Sacramento action, Huey and Bobby began to work with Cleaver on the second issue of the Party’s paper, and its first full-format edition. The paper was laid out at Beverly Axelrod’s house. The cover included a postcard that Beverly contributed, featuring a woodblock picture of a fat pig with the headline, “Support Your Local Police.” Eldridge and Barbara Arthur wrote articles, and Stephen

26 Bobby Seale, Seize the Time pp. 172-173.
27 Maitland Zane, “Ugly Words at S.F. State – A Pro-Panther Rally.
28 Seale, Seize the Time: 177.
Shames, a radical white photographer, was called in to take the pictures for the issue. For the photo shoots, Eldridge brought in the zebra skin rug, rattan chair, and African shields and composed the famous picture of Huey Newton in his wicker throne. In a similar scene, Shames also photographed an unidentified Black Panther woman. She stands in striking profile with a hood covering most of her face, a heavy rifle grasped in her right hand.29

_Campus Rallies_

The Panthers also reached out on college campuses. As soon as Bobby Seale was released on bail from the arrest in Sacramento,30 Peter Camejo of the Young Socialist Alliance at UC Berkeley scheduled an event on campus to set the record straight about the Black Panther Party’s position. Twelve Panthers came to campus, and Bobby Seale was the featured speaker. Seale asked, “Why don’t cops who patrol our community live in our community? I don’t think there would be so much police brutality if they had to go and sleep there.” The audience of several thousand, composed mostly of white students, clapped loudly. Seale emphasized the point that the Black Panther Party was not racist. “You’ve been told that the Black Panthers … make no bones about hating whites,” said Seale. “That’s a bare-faced lie. We don’t hate nobody because of color. We hate oppression.”

Seale explained the Panther’s anti-colonialist politics: “We’re going to arm ourselves and protect ourselves from white racist cops. White cops are occupying our community like foreign troops. They’re there to hurt us and brutalize us, and we got to

30 After Sacramento, the Party made a deal. Bobby Seale, and a few others who didn’t have records would serve time for “disturbing the peace,” and the others would be let off. Seale and Warren Tucker would serve the most time, 6 months each. Bobby Seale, _Seize the Time_ p. 187.
arm ourselves because they’re shooting us up already.” Barbara Arthur, a Berkeley undergraduate, told the crowd, “I represent the women’s department of the Party. We believe that an education system which still teaches and preaches that white is right, black is wrong” is itself wrong. Reminding the students about the Denzil Dowell case, she added, when “black men are armed, racist cops are going to take a second thought before harassing a black man.”

On Friday, May 5, the Black Panthers held a rally at San Francisco State University to raise bail money for the Sacramento arrestees, drawing heavily on support from the burgeoning Black Power Left. Cleaver’s friend and renowned poet Le Roi Jones was the keynote speaker. He praised the Black Panthers while calling the police “killers” and President Johnson a “mass murderer.” Jones urged black people to arm themselves: “you’d better get yourself a gun if you want to survive the white man’s wrath. Those white policemen aren’t here to protect you, they’re here to kill you.” Playwright Ed Bullins also spoke and called black people a “captive nation.”

Setting the Terms of White Support
On May 3, the day after the Sacramento action, Newton went on the air and made a plea for bail support. The Panthers needed $5,000, 10% of the $50,000 bail, to get the Party members back on the street. The Party had to compete for funds with other Black Power and Left organizations. As the Black Panthers sought to attract support from the broader universe of Left activists, largely through Cleaver’s networks, they also strove to

32 Maitland Zane, “Ugly Words at S.F. State – A Pro-Panther Rally, SF Chronicle, May 5, 1967 p.8
33 Maitland Zane, “Ugly Words at S.F. State – A Pro-Panther Rally, SF Chronicle, May 5, 1967 p.8
34 Huey Newton, Revolutionary Suicide: 150.
define the character of these relationships. The Panthers’ reach was expanding rapidly. Radical groups lined up to support the Black Panthers with their legal defense, including the *Ramparts* affiliated Community for a New Politics (CNP),35 the Communist Party, and the Socialist Workers Party. Representatives from these groups – including Roscoe Proctor, a black member of the Communist Party; Peter Camejo and Bob Himmel from the Socialist Workers Party; and Bob Avakian from the CNP – formed the Black Panther Legal Defense Committee and assisted the defense of the Black Panthers arrested in Sacramento. By mid-July, however, the committee had fallen apart. Avakian, who worked as a researcher at *Ramparts*, continued to work with the Party. But as the Legal Defense Committee fell apart, the Black Panthers cut off formal ties with the Communist Party and the Socialist Workers Party, publicly condemning the patronizing attitudes of some on the white left.

Eldridge Cleaver wrote a scathing critique in the Panther newspaper entitled “White ‘Mother Country’ Radicals.” In the article, Cleaver noted that whites had historically played an important role in black independence struggles internationally, in particular supplying guns, money, and information. He argued that white radicals in America, however, had failed to live up to this standard, and instead acted as if they “are the smartest” and attempted to dominate Black Power politics. In short, Cleaver defined the kind of relationship the Black Panther Party sought with radical whites. They were encouraged to support the Party’s efforts with material contributions, information, and skills. Reflecting the continuing black demand for self-determination dating back at least to the nineteenth century roots of the African American Freedom Struggle, Cleaver

explained that whites must learn to listen to blacks and follow black leadership. Whites would not be allowed to run the show; their role was necessarily subordinate. The Black Panthers intended to direct their own Party. The Party lauded Bob Avakian as an acceptable voice of radical White America, perhaps because of his supportive role in the Legal Defense Committee. The *Black Panther* published an article by Avakian echoing Cleaver’s critique, endorsing the idea that it was the duty of white radicals in America to support the black revolution. The paper also contained photos of Avakian posing with a pistol.\footnote{Eldridge Cleaver “White ‘Mother Country’ Radicals.” *Black Panther*, v.1 n.5 July 20, 1967. p.1. Bob Avaikian. “White ‘Mother Country’ Radical Responds to Editorial” *Black Panther* v.1 n.5 July 20, 1967 p.6. Note: Cleaver is identified only by title. Avakian is not identified in a byline, but he explains his role in such a way that only he could be the author. Furthermore, another article in the same issue is explicitly written by Avakian, and another article by a “white ‘mother country’ radical” appears in the following issue contains an explicit byline identifying Avakian. See also Bob Avakian. “L.A. Gestapo Attacks Anti-War Demonstrators.” *Black Panther*, v.1 no.5 July 20, 1967, p.16.}

**Long Hot Summer**

More than any other group at the time, the Black Panther Party was highly attuned to the wave of ghetto rebellions. Following Sacramento, as envisioned in Newton’s theoretical writings, the Panthers sought to position their Party as the vanguard of this black revolt, aiming to shape its raw energy into a powerful, organized, revolutionary force. In mid-June 1967, Bobby Seale published an article about the urban rebellions in the *Black Panther* newspaper called “The Coming Long Hot Summer.” Seale predicted that the rebellions would expand explosively, creating the impetus for a black revolution:

\begin{quote}
Since July 18, 1964, the Harlem “riots”, there have been some fifty rebellions in the black communities throughout the nation. These fifty rebellions include the most recent rebellions of black people that have occurred within the last few weeks, some ten or fifteen. If one would look closely, and check this three year history, he will find that in damn near every rebellion a racist cop was involved in the starting of that rebellion. And these same pig cops, under orders from the racist government, will probably cause 50 or more rebellions to occur the rest of this year alone, by inflicting brutality or murdering some black person within the confines of one of our black communities. Black people will defend themselves at all costs. They will learn the correct tactics to use in dealing with the racist cops. … The racist military police force occupies our community just like the foreign American
troops in Vietnam. But to inform you dog racists controlling this rotten government and for you to let your pig cops know you ain’t just causing a “long hot summer”, you’re causing a Black Revolution.37

In the summer of 1967, the wave of rebellion did in fact swell. Through the early summer, most local rebellions were small, like the Hunter’s Point riot in San Francisco in response to the killing of Matthew Johnson by police the previous year. None had anything like the scope or destructive capacity of the Watts rebellion in 1965. Yet in black communities throughout the country, small rebellions continued to erupt, often triggered by incidents of police brutality. Then came Newark, and Detroit.

Newark

In 1967, the black community in Newark, New Jersey was emblematic of the ghetto isolation and containment from which rebellions grew. At that time Newark was the thirtieth largest city in the U.S. with a population of 400,000. As blacks migrated to Newark in the late 1950s and early 1960s, whites deserted the city; in 1960, Newark was still 65% white, but by 1967, it was more than 52% black and 10% Cuban and Puerto Rican. Yet whites maintained near-total political control. From Mayor Hugh Addonizio, to seven of nine City Council representatives and seven of nine Board of Education members, the city leadership was almost entirely white. Whites also dominated the city commissions. The police were almost all Italian-American. Almost all of those the police arrested, though, were black. Tensions between the black community and the police had escalated to a point where the Mayor handed over responsibility for investigating charges of police brutality to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). The FBI only heard cases

that involved a violation of federal civil rights. While apparently taking the mayor off the
hot seat, this move effectively shut down all channels for redress.

Very few black families, less than 13%, owned their own homes. They had
minimal access to education. Newark’s per capita expenditures on education were
significantly lower than the surrounding areas, and 70% of the children in the Newark
public school system were black. Almost half of Newark’s black children did not finish
high school. In 1960, more than half of the city’s adult blacks had less than an 8th grade
education, and 12% were unemployed. Newark had the highest rates of crime, venereal
disease, substandard housing, maternal mortality, and tuberculosis in the country.38
Organized crime was rampant. Most of those convicted of crimes were black, and the
majority of the victims were also black. Like the City government, organized crime – the
operation, the money and power – was run by Italian-Americans.

On Wednesday July 12, three weeks after the publication of Bobby Seale’s article
predicting a spread of urban rebellions, John Smith, a black cab driver, was pulled over
by the Newark police. Just across the street from the police station, residents from the
high-rise towers of the Reverend William P. Hayes Public Housing Projects watched as
policemen dragged John Smith, apparently beaten too badly to walk, across the pavement
and into the station. By 10 pm a crowd had gathered outside the police station, mostly
comprised of housing projects residents and cab drivers that had been notified over their
radios.

The police and “community leaders” asked the crowd to disperse. Then someone
lit a match. In a small arc, two glass bottles full of liquid capped with lit rags passed over
the crowd. Shattering against the wall of the Police Station the Molotov cocktails burst

38 According to the city’s application for Model City funding.
into balls of flame. Frenzied police scrambled out of the station. Local CORE officials tried to calm the crowd and get people to march to City Hall, but some in the crowd hurled stones, and later broke windows of several liquor stores and set a car on fire. The police put on riot helmets and moved to disperse the crowd.

The next day, a variety of Black Power groups met to talk about the clashes with police and discuss what to do. They decided to call a “Police Brutality Protest Rally” for early that evening in front of the Fourth Precinct Station. The media started to gather. At 7 pm, James Threatt, the black Director of the Human Rights Commission announced that the mayor had decided to form a citizens committee to investigate the Smith incident, and that a black man was being promoted to the level of Captain of the police force. Someone shouted “Black Power” and people started to throw rocks.

Police moved to disperse the crowd, which began looting and setting more fires. Police did not have enough officers to contain the rebellion, so they concentrated on a two-mile stretch of the commercial district on Springfield Ave. The rebellion grew. The Mayor called in help from the State Police and the National Guard.

Law enforcement did a lot of shooting over the course of the weekend. They shot looters, and also fired at random into crowds, hitting uninvolved bystanders on the sidelines and in their homes. They also shot up businesses that placed “Black owned” signs in the windows. Countless people were wounded. Twenty-three were killed, 21 of them black, including two children, six women, and a 73 year-old man.39

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Le Roi Jones (Amiri Baraka), the black nationalist poet who had spoken in support of the Black Panthers at their rally in San Francisco weeks earlier, was among those beaten and arrested by Newark’s police. “Again and again … we have sought to plead through the reference of progressive humanism … again and again our complaints have been denied by an unfeeling, ignorant, graft-ridden, racist government… [Now] we will govern ourselves or no one will govern Newark, New Jersey.”

On July 20, the Black Panthers devoted an issue of their newspaper to the Newark rebellion. Front page headlines read “The Significance of the Black Liberation Struggle in Newark” and “Police Slaughter Black People.” The cover photograph showed three police pinning down a black man, his face pressed into the sidewalk. The caption read:

How can any black man in his right mind look at this picture in racist dog America and not understand what is happening? It’s obvious that the brother on the ground is the underdog and that the arrogant Gestapo dogs on top have the advantage. What is the essential difference between the man on the bottom and the pigs on top? The gun. If the brother had had his piece with him, it is obvious that the pigs would have had to deal with him in a different way. And the brother may have gotten something down – that is, if he knew how to shoot straight.

Lower on the page was a picture of a rifle under huge type reading, “Guns Baby Guns.”

The paper featured a two-page centerfold with a photographic montage of the Newark rebellion. Each of the sixteen pictures emphasized the violent clash between heavily armed government officers and neighborhood blacks. Pictures of bloodied and brutalized black men and women accompany a large photo of several blacks lying face down on the concrete with armed officers standing over them as other officers hold back a crowd. Another photo showed a military jeep packed with officers carrying machine guns driving past a burnt-out building, and an accompanying caption that read:


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40 Le Roi Jones quoted in Robert L. Allen, p.135.
another shot, an officer is crouched behind a jeep taking aim with his rifle. The caption: “Vicious, mad, raving, racist dog, sniping at colonized black people as though at a foreign enemy.” One photo showed a crowd of unarmed black men yelling at soldiers over the points of their bayonets. The caption read “America’s black colonial subjects show contempt and a total lack of fear of the racist dog occupying troops.” The caption in the center of the page reads “Racists call it ‘rioting’, but actually it’s a political consequence on the part of black people who have been denied freedom, justice and equality.”

Detroit

On July 23, 1967, three days after the Black Panther issue on the Newark rebellions, Detroit exploded in the largest urban rebellion in the United States in the twentieth century. Most discussions of the Detroit rebellions, as well as the other urban rebellions of 1967, draw extensively on the analysis by the Kerner Commission, appointed by President Johnson. The Commission’s analysis portrayed the rebellions as apolitical and spontaneous reactions to poor conditions, and not indicative of a broader struggle over social power. As journalist Andrew Kopkind observed, though, “the Kerner Commission was designed not to study questions, but to state them, not to conduct investigations but to accept them, not to formulate policy but to confirm it.” Kopkind argued that the report’s shallow lip service to the core problem of racism bolstered rather than challenged structural racism. “Failure to analyze in any way the ‘white racism’ asserted by the commissioners in the report’s summary,” argued Kopkind, “transformed that critical category into a cheap slogan. And overall, the Report’s mindless attention to

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documenting conventional perceptions and drowning them in conventional wisdom made meaningless the commissioners’ demands for social reconstruction.”

120 social scientists and investigators hired by the Kerner Commission working under the guidance of Research Director Robert Shellow provided a much more perceptive political analysis of the rebellions that the Commission never published. In the concluding chapter of the analysis entitled “America on the Brink: White Racism and Black Rebellion,” the social scientists argued that racism pervaded all United States institutions, and that blacks “feel it is legitimate and necessary to use violence against the social order. A truly revolutionary spirit has begun to take hold … an unwillingness to compromise or wait any longer, to risk death rather than have their people continue in a subordinate status.” Shellow and his team were subsequently fired, and their analysis was removed from the report. Powerful evidence supported the Shellow team’s view that many people involved in the unrest saw it as a political challenge: that is, as a rebellion. In the Campbell-Schumann survey conducted several months after the incident, fifty-six percent of Detroit blacks questioned characterized the incident as a “rebellion or revolution” compared with only nineteen percent who chose to characterize it as a “riot.”

In the Detroit uprising, rebels not only looted, but also turned to more serious insurrectionary tactics, such as arson and sniping. Unlike looting – which offers rebels instant material benefit – these activities subjected rebels to significant risk but offered no

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45 Campbell-Schumann survey in Sidney Fine, Violence in the Model City: 351. There is some evidence to suggest that this more political interpretation of the incident was not so widely held initially but that it developed in the weeks following the rebellion as the black community sought to make sense of the conflict.
instant material benefit, thus suggesting a challenge to the social order. According to police, 552 buildings were destroyed or damaged by fires started by the rebels. Some 7,231 rebels were arrested, more than twice as many as in the Watts uprising, and four times more than in Newark. By the end of the Detroit rebellion, forty-three people had been killed, thirty-three of them black. Ten whites were also killed, a number of them government officials.  

As with other urban uprisings, the Detroit rebellion did not spring out of the blue. Racial polarization in Detroit was strong. In April of 1965, crosses were burned in front of twenty-five black residences in integrated neighborhoods of the city. In the weeks leading up to the Detroit rebellion, three incidents exacerbated racial tensions. On June 12, a mob of more than eighty whites waged a mini-riot and smoke-bombed the house of a married interracial couple – a black man and white woman – who had moved into a suburban white neighborhood. On June 23, a black couple, Mr. Thomas who worked at a local Ford plant, and Ms. Thomas his pregnant wife, went to Rouge Park in a white neighborhood. A mob of more than fifteen whites harassed them, threatened to rape Mrs. Thomas, cut the wires on their car so they could not leave, and then shot Mr. Thomas three times, killing him, and causing Ms. Thomas to miscarry. Six of the whites were arrested, but only one was charged, and he was eventually let off by a jury. In fact, at that time, no white had ever been found guilty of murdering a black in Detroit. On July 1, Vivian Williams, a young black prostitute, was killed, and rumors circulated that she had been killed by a policeman.

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47 For details of the Detroit rebellion in this section, except where otherwise noted, see Sidney Fine, *Violence in the Model City*. 

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A police raid of a “blind pig” bar on Twelfth Street had sparked the outbreak. Blind pigs were important social institutions in Detroit’s black communities dating back to the early twentieth century. When white establishment bars started admitting blacks after 1948, the blind pigs became “underground” bars mostly serving blacks after 2am when state laws forbade the sale of liquor. Police customarily took protection bribes from the operators and raided those that refused, creating resentment among many in the black community. In the early hours of July 23, the blind pig in the dingy second floor apartment at 9125 Twelfth Street hosted a raging party for two black veterans returning from Vietnam and another soldier departing for the war.

As the eighty or so patrons, almost all of them black, were arrested and brought down into the street to be loaded into paddy wagons, a crowd began to gather. Word spread, and soon onlookers greatly outnumbered the police. Several people saw the police dragging the men down the stairs. Many in the gathering crowd believed that the police were using excessive force, and tensions rose. A young black nationalist began to shout “Black Power, don’t let them take our people away; look what they are doing to our people … Let’s kill them whitey motherfuckers … let’s get the bricks and bottles going… Why do they come down here and do this to our neighborhood? If this happened in Grosse Pointe [an affluent white neighborhood], they wouldn’t be acting this way.”

Someone threw a beer bottle, and the crowd went wild.

Even before this episode, there had been a strong Black Nationalist presence in Detroit that provided an anti-colonial assessment of conditions in the black community and called for rebellion. In addition to RAM and SNCC, these included UHURU, Reverend Albert Cleage and the Black Christian Nationalist Movement, the Afro-

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48 Sidney Fine: 160.
American Unity Movement, Grace Lee and James Boggs, and the Malcolm X Society. A SNCC delegate from Cincinnati at the Second Black Arts Conference in late June said “We already had our riot and we’re here to show you how it’s done.”\textsuperscript{49} The Afro-American Unity Movement was already preparing for urban rebellion and was involved in several confrontations with police before the Detroit uprising. RAM had developed plans for seizing control of the city’s industries should a rebellion take place.

During the rebellion, representatives from the Malcolm X Society contacted the Mayor and the Governor, claiming they would bring a cessation of “all hostilities” if they met a number of key demands, including community control over the police, the school board, and urban renewal. After the uprising, several newspapers published allegations that RAM was responsible for systematic burning and sniping, but these allegations were never proven.

Unlike the young Black Nationalists whose politics coincided with those of the rebels on the streets, black political leaders who attempted to quell the rebellion were booed and chased out of the neighborhood. In a community meeting during the uprisings, this division between established leadership and young militants became increasingly clear. A young black steelworker from the Twelfth street neighborhood told the politicians, “You leaders have failed the black community … the black leadership brought it [the rebellion] on the black people.”\textsuperscript{50}

While the rhetoric surrounding the Detroit Rebellion coming from liberal politicians emphasized the poor conditions blacks faced and the need for an ameliorative response, on the ground the State response was repressive. As local police were unable to

\textsuperscript{49} Sidney Fine: 148.
\textsuperscript{50} Sidney Fine: 183.
contain the rebellion, the Mayor and the Governor called in the National Guard and State Police, and asked President Johnson to send in the Army, which he eventually did. Soon, the police were supported not only with bayonets and armored personnel carriers, but also with tanks, Army choppers, and machine guns. When the National Guard arrived on July 23, they were instructed “to shoot any person seen looting.” By that evening, the police, the Guard, and the State Police were all firing at fleeing looters. The next day, with backup from the National Guard, the police unleashed their full repressive force against the rebels, attempting to reestablish their “dominance and control” and to “teach the bastards a lesson.” Many law enforcement officers saw their job as putting blacks back in their place. “I’m gonna shoot anything that moves and that is black” said a Guardsman. White firemen shouted to Guardsmen while they frisked two blacks on July 25: “Kill the black bastards! Control those coons. Shoot ‘em in the nuts!” 51

The rebels themselves had no illusions that the government would act in their favor. Many explicitly saw their rebellion as an assertion of Black Power. One rebel confronted a cop: “You can’t do anything to me White man. Black Power!” 52 As the government brought down increasingly repressive force, the rebels responded in kind.

The height of the rebellion can best be described as an insurrection. Large crowds of looters in the early part of July 23 gave way to roving bands of looters and fire bombers, much harder to control. Some coordinated their tactics by short wave radio. Apparently, the rebels saw all government officials as the enemy, and they attacked firemen as well as police.

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By 4:40 pm on the 24th, rebels had stolen hundreds of guns from gun shops. As police began to shoot at the looters, black snipers started shooting back. Hubert Locke, Executive Secretary of the establishment Committee for Equal Opportunity, called it a “total state of war.” Police officers and firemen reported being attacked by snipers on both the east side and the west side of the city. Snipers made sporadic attacks on the Detroit Street Railways buses and on crews of the Public Lighting Commission and the Detroit Edison Company. Police records indicate that as many as ten people were shot by snipers on July 25 alone. A span of 140 blocks on the west side became a “bloody battlefield,” according to the Detroit News. Government tanks and armored personnel carriers “thundered through the streets and heavy machine guns chattered… it was as though the Viet Cong had infiltrated the riot blackened streets.” The Mayor said “It looks like Berlin in 1945.”

The black uprisings in Detroit and Newark were the largest of 1967, but by no means the only ones. Urban rebellions rocked cities large and small all across America. According to the Kerner Commission, 164 such rebellions erupted in the first nine months of the year. The urban uprisings marked a significant shift in Black America's relationship both to the Civil Rights Movement and white-controlled law enforcement. Since the urban conflicts during WWII, there had been few such disturbances until the Harlem rebellion in 1964. But by the summer of 1967, Black America was approaching full-scale violent revolt. The Civil Rights Movement had helped contain the aspirations of Black America since the war with the promise of full rights and upward mobility. In the ghettos

54 Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders: chapter 2.
of the North and West, despite the achievement of citizenship rights, black subordination not only persisted, but all too often expanded. With white flight and the desertion of the inner cities to blacks, urban governments sought to address the problems of their swelling ghettos through containment – relying increasingly on police force.

According to the Kerner Commission, the urban rebellions of 1967 responded to the “accumulation of unresolved grievances and ... widespread dissatisfaction among Negroes with the unwillingness or inability of local government to respond.” Among the factors contributing to this dissatisfaction, the commission cited: pervasive discrimination and segregation; black in-migration and white exodus; convergence of segregation and poverty in the ghettos; frustrated hopes vis-a-vis the promise of the Civil Rights Movement; violence by white vigilante groups reacting against black civil disobedience; frustration and powerlessness; a new mood of enhanced racial pride; and, police emerging as a symbol of white power – offering protection for white citizens while oppressing blacks with impunity. The Commission identified police actions as particularly important, not only in triggering the rebellions, but also in generating the tensions that preceded them.

As the censured analysis by the Commission’s Research Director Robert Shellow suggested, these conditions are best understood not as psychological factors contributing to individual responses by “rioters,” but instead as the political context of black rebellion. Rebellion re-emerged as a political avenue precisely because of the limitations of the Civil Rights victories. These victories left untouched the economic and material dimensions of black subordination. With persistent racial subordination in the face of

55 Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders: 16.
57 Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders: 120, 206.
rhetorical freedom, pressures mounted. In the summer of 1967, it was as if the floodgates had been lifted, and the dream of black nationhood poured through the channels of urban rebellion.

**Vanguard of the Black Revolution**

Despite its early influence, the Black Panther Party started as just one of many small Black Power organizations. But coupled with the attention garnered from Sacramento, the wave of urban rebellions in the summer of 1967 confirmed the Party leadership’s confidence in their political program. When Black America rebelled, Huey P. Newton and the Black Panther Party were prepared to seize the time. They were no mere ideologues giving lip service to the sentiments of the rebels. They had seen the impending wave of black revolt approaching. They had recognized its power and analyzed its character, putting themselves in the position to organize it: to become its leading force. They had begun to position themselves as the vanguard of the black revolution.

**Tentative No More**

The Party’s first assertions of its status as vanguard of black revolution were tentative. When the Black Panthers first published their ten-point Platform and Program at the beginning of the summer immediately after the Sacramento action, they included this disclaimer above it:

> To those poor souls who don’t know black history, the beliefs and desires of the Black Panther Party for Self Defense may seem unreasonable. To black people, the ten points covered are absolutely essential to survival. We have listened to the riot producing words “these things take time” for 400 years. The Black Panther Party knows what black people want and need. Black unity and self defense will make these demands a reality.\(^{58}\)

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\(^{58}\) *Black Panther* v.1 n.2, May 15, 1967: 3.
It was as if the Party was trying to explain itself, and was not yet confident of its growing influence. This disclaimer also appeared in several subsequent issues of the newspaper. Yet as urban rebellions spread, the confidence of the Party’s leadership grew.

At 1:00 p.m. on June 29, 1967, Bobby Seale called a press conference on the steps of the Hall of Justice in San Francisco. With television cameras rolling, Seale unfurled and read Minister of Defense Huey Newton’s “Executive Mandate No. 2,” drafting Stokely Carmichael into the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense, “invested with the rank of Field Marshall, delegated the following authority, power and responsibility”:

To establish revolutionary law, order and justice in the territory lying between the Continental Divide East to the Atlantic Ocean; North of the Mason-Dixon Line to the Canadian Border; South of the Mason-Dixon Line to the Gulf of Mexico.

At the press conference, Seale presented a challenge to Carmichael: “I know you have questions you want answered, but there is only one question that is pertinent at this time, and that is this: Whose Authority and Program is Stokely Carmichael going to acknowledge, that of the warmonger Lyndon Baines Johnson or Minister of Self Defense, Huey P. Newton.” The front page of the Black Panther newspaper pointed out that Carmichael was the first well known “Afro-American leader” to take a stand against the draft, and that many others had followed in his path, including Muhammad Ali and Martin Luther King.59

Although the press conference drew little coverage, it dramatically illustrated the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense’s evolving self-perception. The Party not only presented the United States as an imperialist power, but also positioned itself as the sole legitimate alternative. By presenting Carmichael with a choice between two authorities –

President Lyndon B. Johnson, or Huey P. Newton, Minister of Defense of the Black Panther Party – the Panthers implied that if Carmichael did not accept the authority of Newton, then he accepted Johnson’s authority. Further, Newton delegated Carmichael to “establish revolutionary law” for the entire United States East of the Mississippi. Notably, Newton here did not claim authority limited only to Black America, but rather posed a revolutionary challenge to America as a whole.60

In the same issue in which the Panthers enlisted Carmichael for revolutionary leadership, they removed the disclaimer from their ten-point program. They now proclaimed rather than argued the viability of the ten-point program. Carmichael would eventually join the Black Panther Party, but not until the following year. While the Party was not yet very large or influential, by the end of the summer, it had re-invented the politics of self-defense. The intense wave of summer rebellions demonstrated the Party to be highly attuned, and bolstered the leadership’s confidence in their revolutionary vision. This new confidence expressed itself in Party relations with other political organizations.61

Boot Lickers

As the Party began to take more seriously its goal of becoming the vanguard of the black revolution, it came into increasing conflict with more moderate black political organizations. In July, 1967, CORE held a conference in Oakland, bringing together a range of representatives from black political organizations: local representatives of CORE led by Wilfred Ussery, Floyd McKissick and James Farmer from the National CORE, Donald Warden, Elijah Turner, Willie Brown, H. Rap Brown, and Muhammad

60 Black Panther v.1 no.4 July 3, 1967, various articles pp. 1, 6, 7.
61 Black Panther v.1 n.4, July 3, 1967: 3.
Ali. CORE asked the Black Panthers to serve as bodyguards for the event, but refused to allow Newton to speak or to list the Black Panther Party in the program as a conference participant. They took the further step of arranging with the Sheriff of San Mateo County to telephone Newton and Seale and to inform them that they could carry guns for that day only for the purpose of serving as body guards at the event.

The Panthers were insulted and offended. Refusing to participate on these terms, their response in their newspaper articulates their developing view of their political role and how it differs from that of CORE and its allies. The Panthers argued that Black people “must develop the concept of a Foreign and Domestic Policy for Afro-America”:

We have to start viewing reactionary black leaders as BLACK AGENTS OF THE WHITE MOTHER COUNTRY. And reactionary black organizations can be viewed as BLACK FRONTS FOR THE WHITE MOTHER COUNTRY. 62

Following the conference, the Black Panther Newspaper began to critique actively not only the police and white political leaders, but also black political leaders and organizations that it viewed as counter-revolutionary. On July 20, the Black Panthers introduced their “bootlicker” column. The idea was to portray black leaders who they deemed counter-revolutionary as “bootlickers,” that is, subservient to the “White power structure.” The column launched that July was replete with photos, derogatory graphics, and articles critical of those they saw as accommodationist black leaders – not only Ussery and CORE, but also California Assemblyman Willie Brown, and the NAACP. 63

Paper Panthers

The Black Panther Party did not confine itself to criticizing mainstream black political organizations. Increasingly confident in its role as a vanguard party, the Panthers

also criticized other black nationalist organizations they saw as representing less than revolutionary politics. Particularly bitter was the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense’s deepening rift with the Black Panther Party of Northern California, led by Huey and Bobby’s former comrades from the West Coast RAM. A rift over tactics had been brewing for years, even when Huey and Bobby had worked with the Soul Students Advisory Council at Merritt College. The rift intensified as Huey and Bobby’s Black Panther Party for Self-Defense gained notoriety. Jockeying for media attention, RAM twice accepted credit for Panther activities, including the Black Panther escort of Betty Shabazz, and the action in Sacramento. The fact that RAM carried unloaded weapons, a tactic that Huey adamantly opposed, did not help matters.

David Hilliard, one of Huey Newton’s childhood friends who became active in the Party, coined the phrase “Paper Panthers” to describe the RAM group. They were armchair revolutionaries who did not know the first thing about fighting an actual revolution, argued Hilliard, who would soon rise to the rank of Chief of Staff, assuming primary leadership of the Party’s operation. The phrase stuck, and after the Newark rebellion in July 1967, the Black Panthers published a graphic of a “Paper Panther” in their newspaper replete with bullet holes and labels identifying the group as “conservative,” “misguided,” “reactionary,” and “counterrevolutionary.” The message was clear: The Black Panther Party for Self-Defense was the truly revolutionary Party, the vanguard of the Black Revolution, and no substitutes would be accepted.64

Mockery was not enough to resolve the conflict. According to Newton’s memoirs, he confronted Roy Ballard of the Black Panther Party of Northern California about the

rumor that they carried unloaded guns. Ballard reportedly admitted that he did not even own any bullets. Huey reported that a few weeks later, he and his Panthers “went to San Francisco where the “Paper Panthers” were having a fish fry, and issued an ultimatum:

they could merge with us or change their name or be annihilated. When they said they would do none of these things, we waded in. I took on one and hooked him in the jaw. It was a short battle, ending a few moments later when somebody fired a shot in the air and people scattered. After that, the Paper Panthers changed their name.65

**Gender in the Vanguard Party**

Following Sacramento, as the Black Panthers garnered influence and self-confidence, and sought to redefine their political strategy, the gender politics of the Party shifted as well. All the original Party members were men. They sought to educate and politicize the male “brothers on the block.” And the Party leadership saw its project as, in part, asserting a strong black masculinity. In his early essay “Fear and Doubt,” Newton described what he saw as a crisis of manhood facing black men: “As a man, he finds himself void of those things that bring respect and a feeling of worthiness…. he ultimately blames himself…. He may father several illegitimate children by several different women in order to display his masculinity. But in the end, he realizes that he is ineffectual in his efforts…. He is asked to respect laws that do not respect him.”66

Contrary to some critics, Newton’s position is quite distinct from the Moynihan Report that blamed the social castration of black men on the pathology of black matriarchal culture. Newton sees the problem not as a cultural problem endemic to black people, but a structural oppression imposed on black men by the social structure. An important part of Black Panther politics is to assert a revolutionary masculinity. In this view, black men become men by standing up against and seeking to destroy the oppressive system that denies them their humanity. This politics challenges both the

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65 Huey P. Newton, *Revolutionary Suicide*: 132.
Uncle Tom role of black male deference to white power, and also the Civil Rights politics of turning the other cheek in pursuit of integration.\(^67\)

Within months of its founding, the Black Panther Party attracted the participation of women who soon became trusted and invaluable members. From the start, women participated in all aspects of Party activities. This included militant activities. The Party’s initial tactic of challenging the police principally attracted men, but also attracted some women. The Panther entourage confronting the police while escorting Betty Shabazz at the San Francisco Airport in February of 1967 included women. And women Panthers participated in the “invasion” of the capital building in Sacramento. Pictures of Panther women carrying guns appeared in the earliest issues of the *Black Panther* newspaper. Early issues of the *Black Panther* represented women as valued Party members: as soldiers, poets and writers.

In the summer of 1967, as Party influence grew, more women joined the Party. With the Party’s growing confidence in its role as a revolutionary vanguard, Panther women increasingly wrote, and were written about, in the *Black Panther* newspaper. Not surprisingly, these pioneer Panther women applauded the idea of revolutionary nationhood, and the bold masculinity of the Black Panther Party. In a recruitment pitch aimed at women, Barbara Arthur emphasized the appeal of a black political organization led by and consisting of revolutionary black men. Arthur asserted: “The Black Panther Party is where the BLACK MEN are. I know every black woman has to feel proud of

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\(^{67}\) Tracye Matthews, while making an important contribution to understanding the Black Panthers based in rich research and sophisticated analysis, like Michelle Wallace, argues that Newton’s concern with society’s social castration of black males parallels the Moynihan Report. See “No One Ever Asks What a Man’s Place in the Revolution Is” in Charles Jones, *Black Panther Party [Reconsidered]*, Black Classic Press, 1998. But despite some mild parallels, Newton sharply departs from Moynihan, both in terms of analysis and proposed redress. For Newton, like Fanon, the social castration of black men is the result of imposed structural oppression rather than an internal cultural pathology. And for Newton, like Fanon, black men can only regain their humanity by destroying the society that oppresses them.
black men who finally decided to announce to the world that they were putting an end to police brutality and black genocide… Become members of the Black Panther Party for Self Defense, Sisters, ‘we got a good thing going.’”

Sister Williams not only embraced the pride and power these men exuded, but she also noted the deep appeal of the revolutionary love that Panther men embodied, notably for “their brother”:

Respect and dignity have long been abstractions to the majority of Black Men. This is no longer the case. The Black Panther Party for Self-Defense are Black Men with pride, self-respect and most of all love for their brother. These Black Men who express fervor, spirit and boldness of heart kindle in me, a Black Woman, the feeling of wanting to help plan, work, experience, and most of all share not only these feelings with him but the togetherness of wanting and now going about getting our freedom together.

Williams endorses the Party as not only attractive, but essential to the project of black liberation. She validates the claim of the Party to be the vanguard of the black revolution. Powerful images of handsome black men and beautiful black women in the Party’s newspaper projected the Party’s appeal to allies, supporters, and recruits. On occasion, the early Party imitated “Madison Avenue” blatantly exploiting black female beauty to sell the Party. Underneath an attractive photo of Panther secretary and newspaper editorial staff-person Audry Hudson, was a caption that read in part: “Besides being very beautiful to look at, (as you can see for yourself) the sister is a very beautiful person. She has gotten herself together and enlisted in the struggle for the total liberation of her people. She is a welcomed addition to the swelling ranks of the Vanguard Party of the black liberation struggle.”

Early articles in the *Black Panther* by women about issues of gender and sexuality ranged widely in tone, subject matter, and consciousness. In a complex analysis of the

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distinction between revolutionary and bourgeois black romantic relationships, Judy Hart contended:

At this stage in the black revolution the relationships between black men and black women are taking on new and crucial meanings…. With the black revolution being no more than the fusing of separate frustrations, desires, convictions, and strengths toward a common liberation, the black man and his woman cease to be simply a couple … but a fusing, a deepening of two black minds, souls, and bodies passionately involved not only in each other but in ‘the movement.’

Hart argued that within the constraints of bourgeois society, it is impossible for black women and men to work together. Hart appealed to black women to commit to the revolution and relate differently to black men. She wrote that bourgeois black women necessarily relate to black men as tools used for their own gain, and in seeking to succeed according to the dominant society’s standards, they despise black men as they are despised by the racist society. Hart decried the dysfunctional black household “in which the male can’t function unless he’s drunk, it’s the first of the month, or he’s physically asserting himself by yelling, beating, or fucking.” According to Hart, by embracing revolutionary struggle, a different kind of relationship becomes possible. “Socially, the Negro man becomes extinct, outmoded. Social barriers and distinctions disappear, replaced by a communal unity.” According to Hart, the revolutionary black man’s “total commitment … is an invitation to the black woman to join with him in the pursuit of a life together, removing the shackles of White Racist America and establishing a solid foundation of blackness from which to build.”

Even in her nuanced treatment of gender and sexuality, Hart here sees the man’s revolutionary role as central and the woman’s revolutionary role as supportive. This patriarchal male orientation of the Black Panther politics, common to most black nationalist and other movement organizations at the time, can be seen throughout the

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Party’s early actions and communications. Telling contrasts, such as the iconic representation of Huey as “Black Warrior Prince” set against the relatively obscure representation of the Panther woman as “Woman Warrior,” speak to the initial incarnation of the Party as masculine.

The Party’s founding, early history, and ongoing struggles as male-oriented affected all who subsequently joined the Party — women as well as men. Not surprisingly, therefore, making the Black Panther Party into a mixed gender organization that modeled gender and sexual equality remained a hard fought yet elusive goal. Difficult struggles around these issues hounded the organization throughout its existence. Rhetorical commitments to gender and sexual equality at all levels of the Party could not on their own overcome real and fractious gender and sexual contradictions. However, over time, as more and more black women joined the Party, their Party work and leadership increasingly helped shape the entirety of the Party’s politics. Their influence was particularly critical in shaping more positively the Party’s evolving gender and sexual politics and dynamics.

Women and some men in the Party demanded and led the Party’s often frank and difficult engagement with the increasingly wide range of issues associated with gender equality, particularly the role of black women in a revolutionary nationalist movement. The most important factor shaping the Party’s emergent gender and sexual dynamics, then, were the rank-and-file members of the Party themselves, especially the talented and audacious black women who increasingly joined the Party and who far more often than the men forced the Party to focus on critical gender and sexuality concerns.
In the summer of 1967, these intra-Party debates on gender and sexuality were just warming up. Over the course of the next several years, these debates would become increasingly intense, shaped by the increasingly intense debates around gender and sexual issues within the Black Freedom Struggle and black communities, as well as the wider context of a growing Women’s Rights Movement, Gay and Lesbian Liberation Movement, and growing Sexual Revolution.72

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In the summer of 1967, with the core Panther practice of armed patrols of the police outlawed, yet growing stature garnered from the Sacramento actions, Newton sought to build upon the success of the police patrols and articulate a revised politics of armed self-defense against the police. Couched in terms of the black community’s struggle for self-determination as part of a global struggle against oppression, two practical insights formed the foundation of this new politics. First, Newton recognized armed resistance to oppression as a source of political power that black people could harness. In the urban rebellions, he saw young blacks chafing at police brutality and ready to resist. In their violent resistance, he saw a powerful force that could not be ignored. Newton theorized that to wield power, black people needed to be able to deliver a consequence, which he proposed they could do by arming themselves: “There is a world of difference between 30 million unarmed, submissive black people,” he wrote, “and 30 million black people armed with … guns and the strategic methods of

liberation.” For Newton, the violent rage unleashed in the rebellions was a crucial source of political leverage that he sought to organize.

Second, Newton conceived of the Black Panther Party as the vanguard party that would organize this armed power by winning the respect of the black community. While recognizing the disruptive power of the urban rebellions, Newton proposed that a vanguard party must organize the power of armed resistance and advance black people’s political interests. In contrast to the Revolutionary Action Movement and other vanguardist groups, Newton argued that the vanguard party needed to earn the respect of the people. Newton opposed the idea that violent guerilla warfare-like actions alone would win popular support. Instead, drawing on Malcolm X’s Black Nationalism, Newton envisioned the Black Panther Party as an above-ground organization that would work with people and serve their interests and needs. Borrowing from Malcolm X, in May of 1967, the Black Panthers began promoting a ten point program calling for Black self-defense against the police as part of a broad agenda for black self-determination, emphasizing social and economic priorities such as housing, education, and full employment.

Attracted to Newton’s courageous politics, and building upon the Panther’s newfound fame from the Sacramento actions, new Panther recruit Eldridge Cleaver used his networks and eloquence to forge powerful alliances with other Leftists and black nationalists. As editor of the Black Panther Newspaper, chock full of Panther writings, photos, and the poignant graphics of Emory Douglas, Cleaver created a sustained public voice for the Party, and its politics of armed self-defense.

73 “In Defense of Selfdefense” by Huey P. Newton, Minister of Defense. Black Panther v.1 n.3 June 20, 1967: 3-4.
The Newark and Detroit rebellions in the summer of 1967, the largest and most violent of the period, coming just weeks after publication of some of Newton’s key theoretical writings, revealed the Panthers to be highly attuned to ghetto sentiment – and deepened the Panthers’ confidence in their own vanguard politics. As the Party developed, it attracted more women members. These new women members began to also transform the gender politics of the Party.

And then in October, this new politics was put to the ultimate test …
Chapter 4: Free Huey!

After dinner with his family on October 27, 1967, Huey Newton walked to his girlfriend LaVerne Williams’s house at 5959 Telegraph Avenue in Oakland. It was Friday night and they had plans to go out. On the way over he thought about where they might go that evening. When he arrived, she was not feeling well. He offered to stay in with her, but she insisted he enjoy himself and lent him her car.¹

Newton started up LaVerne’s tan 1958 Volkswagen beetle and drove to Bosn’s Locker, his favorite bar. After casual conversation with friends over a rum and coke, he left the bar and went to the nearby Congregational Church on Forty-second and Grove. This particular church held Afro-American history classes on Wednesday nights, and Newton knew that there would be a church social on Friday. When he arrived the social was in full swing replete with dancing and cards. There he met up with Gene McKinney. They stayed until the social ended at 2 am and then drove to a party at the home of Mrs. Verde Johnson on San Pablo Avenue near Thirty-seventh. The pair of friends stayed until sometime after 4 am when they got back in the car to drive to a restaurant on Seventh Street that served soul food all night long.

The early morning of October 28 was cool, dark, and slightly misty. Officer John Frey of the Oakland police force sat alone in his patrol car on Willow Avenue at the corner of Seventh Street. Officer Frey (pronounced “fry”) had just turned twenty-three years old. Married, though separated, Frey was a large man, over six feet tall and more

than 200 pounds. In his year and a half on the force, Frey had already developed quite a reputation. A ten-year veteran of the Oakland police department told a reporter from *Ramparts*, “Frey is not what I would categorize as a good cop.” Frey had been implicated in numerous incidents of racism. H. Bruce Byson, an English teacher who invited Frey to speak about police work to his class at Clayton Valley High School reported that Frey told the class that “niggers” in the neighborhood he patrolled were “a lot of bad types.” Elford Dunning, an accountant for Prudential Life Insurance, testified that Frey had racially harassed him during a traffic accident, and when Dunning complained that Frey was acting like the Gestapo, Frey loosened his holster, put his hand on his gun, and said “I am the Gestapo” and ordered Dunning into the police car.

Earlier on the very evening that Huey Newton and Gene McKinney were driving to get soul food on Seventh Street, Frey intervened in a dispute between a black grocery clerk named Daniel King and a white man without pants on who claimed King had stolen his pants. According to King, Frey called him a nigger and held his arms so the white man could beat him.\(^2\)

Several hours after Frey had released King, Newton and McKinney drove by his parked patrol car. Sitting on the dashboard in front of Frey was a list of twenty cars that were known to the Oakland police as Black Panther vehicles. Second to last on the list was “Volkswagen, 1958, sedan, tan, AZM489.” Frey called for backup, and pulled out after the Volkswagen. Newton saw the red beacon lights and pulled over near the corner of Seventh and Campbell.

\(^2\) Gene Marine, 100-101.
Huey Must be Set Free!

After seeing a photograph of Huey Newton in the *Oakland Tribune*, Dr. Mary Jane Aguilar wrote a letter to the Black Panther Party:

I can remember nothing in my medical training which suggested that, in the care of an acute abdominal injury, severe pain and hemorrhage are best treated by manacling the patient to the examining table in such a way that the back is arched and belly tensed. Yet this is precisely the picture of current emergency room procedure which appeared on the front page of a local newspaper last week-end. Looming large in the foreground of the same picture, so large as to suggest a caricature, was a police officer. Could it have been he who distracted the doctor in charge of the case to position the patient in this curious way?

The photo was taken on October 28, 1967 some time after Officer Frey had pulled Newton over.

There are conflicting accounts of what exactly happened near the corner of Seventh and Campbell Streets in Oakland that morning. The jury never came up with a clear and compelling account in the ensuing trial. But at some point during the early hours of the day Newton and Gene McKinney arrived at David Hilliard’s house. Newton had a gunshot wound in his abdomen, so David and his brother June Hilliard rushed Newton to the Kaiser Hospital emergency room. Soon the story was all over the news – Officer Frey was dead and Huey P. Newton, Minister of Defense for the Black Panther Party, had been arrested as the prime suspect for murder.

Well before the news stories hit the press, the Black Panther Party sprang into action. Over the course of the preceding months, a small but growing number of people had come to view Newton as the leader of the vanguard of black revolution. In the months following its action in Sacramento, the Party had increased its capacity, not only in terms of its membership and ability to organize people, but also its political analysis,

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its newspaper, and its relationships with other political organizations. Now that Newton would face capital charges and could be sent to the gas chamber for a confrontation with the Oakland police, his release became the central cause of the Party.

Beverly Axelrod introduced Newton to her mentor Charles Garry, who she felt would be the ideal lawyer for such a high profile, politically charged case. Garry, the son of Armenian immigrants, was known as a passionate trial lawyer. His raw eloquence and brilliant maneuvers were known to elicit revealing responses from witnesses under cross-examination. Former President of the San Francisco chapter of the National Lawyer’s Guild, and an avowed Marxist with a strong commitment to social justice, Garry had defended over thirty capital cases, and not one of his clients had been executed. Garry offered to represent Newton, and Newton accepted.5

From the start, Newton and the Black Panther Party viewed the trial as a political rather than merely legal project. The Party put out the sixth issue of its newspaper with the picture of Huey in his wicker throne on the front page and the bold headline: “Huey Must Be Set Free!” After explaining that Huey had been shot and arrested and that Officer Frey had been shot and killed, the editorial discussed the case in terms of racial politics:

The shooting occurred in the heart of Oakland’s black ghetto. Huey is a black man, a resident of Oakland’s black ghetto, and the two cops were white and lived in the white suburbs. On the night that the shooting occurred, there were 400 years of oppression of black people by white people manifested in the incident. We are at that crossroads in history where black people are determined to bring down the final curtain on the drama of their struggle to free themselves from the boot of the white man that is on their collective neck… Through murder, brutality, and the terror of their image, the police of America have kept black people intimidated, locked in a mortal fear, and paralyzed in their bid for freedom… They are brutal beasts who have been gunning down black people and getting away with it… Huey Newton’s case is the showdown case… We say that we have had enough of black men and women being shot down like dogs in the street. We say that black people in America have the right to

self defense. Huey Newton has laid his life on the line so that 20,000,000 black people can find out just where they are at and so that we can find out just where America is at.\textsuperscript{6}

The Panthers argued that Newton was resisting the long-perpetrated oppression of blacks by police when he was shot and imprisoned. The Party turned State accusations against Newton around, using the case to mobilize support and put America on trial.

**Stop the Draft Week**

In the weeks leading up to Newton’s arrest, the Bay Area anti-war movement had experienced its own conflict with the Oakland Police. As resistance to the Vietnam War intensified, white antiwar activists began getting their own taste of police repression -- and this would help deepen their alliances with the Panthers. By October, the draft resistance movement was gathering steam.\textsuperscript{7} No longer were the students and the anti-war activists simply Americans expressing their view within established channels. Inspired by Black Power, emboldened by the ghetto rebellions, many draft resisters saw themselves as subjects of empire seeking self-determination much like the Vietnamese. They rejected the legitimacy of the war, the draft, and the government more generally, and sought to resist by any means.

“This week,” a demonstrator wrote from Oakland at the end of Stop the Draft Week in mid-October, “the first crack appeared in the egg that will hatch white revolution in America.” Demonstrators saw themselves as emulating the radical tactics of the ghetto rebellions of July. According to Frank Bardacke, an anti-war activist who would face the heaviest charges from the Stop the Draft Week protests in Oakland, it was the draft card burning that made the general mood of resistance to authority possible: “Young men burning their draft cards on Sproul Hall steps changed the political mood of

\textsuperscript{6} Eldridge Cleaver, “Huey Must Be Set Free!” in *Black Panther* v.1 n.6 November 23, 1967: 1.

\textsuperscript{7} *Resistance*, 103.
the campus. This example and that of hundreds who turned in their draft cards gave the rest of us courage.”8 “We too are the Vietcong” Hal Jacobs of SDS told a Resistance rally in preparation for Stop the Draft Week at UC Berkeley.9

Day one, Monday, October 16 was relatively calm. Some 300 resisters turned in their draft cards at the Federal Building in San Francisco, and another 120 were arrested for a nonviolent sit-in at the Oakland induction center. But the next day, confrontations with police became more intense. While Monday had been reserved for the more pacifist groups, Tuesday’s event was organized by those ready to take the resistance to a new level, including SDS, SNCC, and the Independent Socialist Club, which instructed “those in the militant action” to “wear a hat and thick clothes, carry a handkerchief and change, and arrange for someone to have bail ready.” Speakers included George Ware, the SNCC field secretary who had recently traveled to Cuba with Stokely Carmichael.

Emboldened by the Black Power movement and what one organizer called “vicarious intoxication by the summer riots,” resisters attempted to physically shut down induction centers in Oakland and met brutal repression. Under the front page headline “Cops Beat Pickets,” The San Francisco Chronicle described the police action: “Police swinging clubs like scythes cut a bloody path through 2500 antiwar demonstrators who had closed down the Oakland Armed Forces examining Station yesterday hours … their hard wooden sticks mechanically flailing up and down, like peasants mowing down wheat.” More than twenty people were injured and twenty-five were arrested. Peaceful pickets were held the next two days and ninety-seven more were arrested.

8 Resistance, 145.
9 Hal Jacobs quoted by H.K. Yuen in his notes on the back of H.K. Yuen Collection flier #329-671013-000.

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At 6 am on Friday, 10,000 demonstrators surrounded the Oakland induction center. Many were dressed for conflict with the police, wearing helmets and shields. They painted the streets and built barricades in the streets using benches, large potted trees, parking meters, garbage cans, cars and trucks. Some of these vehicles were stolen, then positioned in the intersections and the air let out of the tires. In this way the resisters shut down many of the intersections surrounding the induction center and prevented busses from reaching it. The confrontation grew into a violent melee that soon spread over a twenty-block area of downtown Oakland.\(^{10}\)

The Panthers had claimed to be fighting an anti-colonial war all along. Now, anti-war activists increasingly saw their struggle, too, as a fight against imperialism, and the “Free Huey!” campaign became a lightning rod for the anti-imperial Left. “Free Huey!” bumper stickers appeared all over the Bay Area. White as well as black support for Huey’s immediate release from prison boomed. As *Ramparts* writer Gene Marine explained, this outpouring of support had little to do with whether Newton’s shooting and jailing was unjust. Instead, the groundswell of support reflected the increasingly widespread belief that “justice was impossible.” “Once the white radical could accept the idea that white America is the mother country and black America the colony,” wrote

\(^{10}\) H.K. Yuen Collection fliers #329-671016-007, #329-671016-008, #329-671013-001 oversize, #329-1016-004. Many other fliers from H.K. Yuen collection box 329 also provide important insights into Stop the Draft Week Oakland. One aspect of the buildup was that in an attempt to stop the induction center actions planned for Tuesday October 17, Judge Lercara issued an injunction requiring UC Berkeley to prohibit the use of campus facilities for draft resistance organizing activities. UC Berkeley Chancellor Haynes was then over-zealous in enforcing the injunction. The effect was to remind the students of the previous struggle for free speech and to further reinforce the student activists’ idea that they were being subjected to the demands of empire, and that their struggle was one for self-determination much like that of the Vietnamese, or the ghetto rebellions. See for example H.K. Yuen Collection fliers #329-671017-000 and #329-671026-000. Debenedetti, 196. Wells, 191-195. San Francisco Chronicle.
Marine, “his problem with the cry of “Free Huey!” disappeared; he was in the position of a Frenchman opposed to his nation’s colonial adventure in Algeria.”

Both Black Power organizations and New Left groups rallied in support of Huey. The day of the shooting, SNCC headquarters sent a telegram to Huey at Kaiser Hospital reading:

VIOLENT COP ATTACK AGAINST YOU IS PART OF WHITE AMERICA’S PLAN TO DESTROY ALL REVOLUTIONARY BLACK MEN BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN SNCC SUPPORT YOU ALL THE WAY WE PRAISE AND WELCOME YOUR FINE EXAMPLE OF ARMED SELF DEFENSE YOUR ACTION IS INSPIRATION FOR BLACK MEN EVERY WHERE SNCC STANDS UNITED WITH YOU AND READY TO HELP IN ANY WAY POSSIBLE

Telegrams and articles supporting Huey and demanding his release poured in from New Left allies such as the Progressive Labor Party and Bob Avakian of the Community for New Politics.

At one “Free Huey!” rally outside the trial at the Alameda courthouse, Bobby Seale got on top of a car to speak to the crowd. The police ordered him down and he willingly complied. When a young protestor challenged him for following police orders, he explained his actions: “What do you want me to do, just jump up and off some cop? That [would] do Huey a lot of good, wouldn’t it – a big shootout in front of the trial?”

Building on the political strategy they developed in facing legal challenges after the Sacramento action, Newton and the Panthers insisted on a political approach to the trial. They would follow the law to the letter and strive to exonerate Huey through legal channels, to “exhaust all legal means,” but the principal behind the case would be political. They would use Huey’s trial as a forum to put America on trial, to expose its

11 Gene Marine, Black Panthers: 106.
15 Newton and Garry would use this phrase to explain the strategy after announcement of the involuntary manslaughter verdict in the trial. See ABC News coverage, “Huey Newton Decision/Black Panthers,” September 8, 1968.
inherent racism and injustice. If confronted with a strategic choice about whether to advance the political project or Newton’s personal interests, the Panthers would prioritize the political path. Their underlying logic rested on the belief that the political system was inherently unjust, and that Huey would be put to death. Their legal approach was calculated to call attention to state repression, and to advance the Panthers’ cause. Further, the Panthers believed that only a powerful mass political campaign could save Huey’s life.

**Kathleen**

One of the first recruits to join the “Free Huey!” campaign was Kathleen Neal, who would go on to become a key player in the Panther leadership. Neal grew up in Tuskegee, Alabama, and other college towns where her father Ernest Neal worked as a professor. When Dr. Neal joined the Foreign Service, Kathleen lived for stints in New Delhi, the Philippines, Liberia, and Sierra Leone. Always an honor student in American schools abroad, she later attended boarding school in the U.S., then Oberlin College, and worked in a government internship in Washington, D.C.17

Neal’s experiences as a young black woman growing up in the South in the 1950s led her to seek ways of challenging injustice. Seeing powerful women leaders of SNCC in action made her wonder how she too might advance a revolution for black liberation. This search led her first to SNCC and then to the Black Panther Party. “I saw Gloria Richardson standing face to face with National Guard soldiers, bayonets sticking from the guns they pointed at the demonstrators she led in Cambridge, Maryland,” Neal later wrote. "I saw Diane Nash speaking at Fisk University, leading black and white Freedom

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Riders onto Greyhound buses that got set on fire when they reached Alabama. I saw Ruby Doris Robinson holding a walkie-talkie, dispatching the fleet of cars that transported civil rights workers across the state of Mississippi during the 1964 Freedom Summer. These women were unfurling a social revolution in the Deep South. Gloria Richardson, Diane Nash, and Ruby Doris Robinson all worked with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). That’s where I was determined to go.”

In 1966, Neal went to work in SNCC’s New York office, then to Atlanta as SNCC’s Campus Program Secretary. There, she helped organize a Black Student Conference held in March of 1967 at Fisk University in Nashville, TN, where she first met Eldridge Cleaver. She later recalled their first encounter:

What startled me most about him – a brilliant writer, and eloquently lucid speaker, as well as a tremendously handsome and magnetic person – was that he referred to himself as a “convict.” Seeing him at the conference as he moved about with supreme confidence, an ease that approached elegance and a dignified reserve that all combined to give him an air that could best be described as stately, it seemed hard to conceive of this powerful man as a “convict.” He exuded strength, power, force in his very physical being. To think of such a man caged up and designated for the dungheap of history was impossible.

On the plane back to D.C. from the conference, Kathleen wrote a passionate love poem to Eldridge, titling it “My King, I greet You,” in answer to “My Queen, I Greet You,” the open love poem he had written to all black women (from all black men). Three weeks after Huey Newton’s arrest, Kathleen moved to San Francisco to join the Black Panther Party. Another month and a half later, just after Christmas 1967, Kathleen and Eldridge

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were married. Alprentice “Bunchy” Carter, who had served time with Eldridge in Soledad Prison, was the witness.23

Kathleen – now Kathleen Cleaver – threw herself fully into the campaign to free Huey. She helped organize demonstrations, wrote leaflets, held press conferences, attended court hearings, designed posters, spoke at rallies, and appeared on television programs.24 She had more formal education than most Panthers, and soon was appointed to sit on the Central Committee as Communications Secretary of the Black Panther Party.

The work of Kathleen Cleaver in the Party was important in the ongoing and at times challenging process of integrating black women into an organization that had begun as a male formation. The male chauvinism that women like Cleaver all too often confronted within and outside the Party made that process all the more challenging. Over time, as issues of gender and sexuality became increasingly important to the Party’s development, women like Cleaver modeled strikingly influential and vital roles for black women in the Black Panther Party in particular and black nationalist organizations in general. The tradition of radical black women activists such as the strong black women leaders in SNCC shaped the activism of Panther women like Cleaver. However most Panther women ultimately improvised on the ground what it meant to become a revolutionary black woman precisely because there was no guidebook, no single model. As Cleaver acknowledged in a 1970 interview,

Of all the things I had wanted to be when I was a little girl, a revolutionary certainly wasn’t one of them. And now it was the only thing I wanted to do. Everything else was secondary. It occurred to

me that even though I wanted to become a revolutionary more than anything else in the world, I still didn’t have the slightest idea what I would have to do to become one.\textsuperscript{25}

On January 16, 1968, at 3:30 am police knocked down the door to Kathleen and Eldridge’s apartment without a warrant. Armed with shotguns and pistols, cursing and yelling at the Cleavers, they threw papers and furniture everywhere searching the apartment; when nothing of interest turned up, they left.\textsuperscript{26} In response, from prison Huey Newton issued Executive Mandate No. 3, ordering all members of the Black Panther Party to keep guns in their homes and to defend themselves against any police officers or others who attempt to invade their homes without a warrant.\textsuperscript{27} Accompanying the mandate, the Panthers took a bold photo of Kathleen, dressed in a long black leather jacket standing in the doorway to her apartment. In her arms she bore a large shotgun, pointed towards the camera, with the title “Shoot Your Shot!” Increasingly, the Party clarified what it had established at the outset: both women and men bore responsibility for armed self-defense.\textsuperscript{28}

**Peace and Freedom Party**

After Huey's arrest and imprisonment, Eldridge’s role became “increasingly important, especially in the Party’s collaboration with the white radicals in the Free Huey movement,” Kathleen later recalled.\textsuperscript{29} The most important early alliance was with the Peace and Freedom Party, founded by *Ramparts* editor Robert Scheer and other leaders of the Community for New Politics on June 23, 1967. The initial idea for the Party, part of a national network of anti-war political organizations, picked up momentum as the


\textsuperscript{28} See photo in *Black Panther Newspaper*, September 28, 1968 p.20.

black rebellions spread across the country that summer. After Martin Luther King, Jr. gave the keynote address to 125,000 people at an anti-war rally in New York that April, many urged King to run for President of the USA. The Peace & Freedom Party sought to promote a strong anti-war and anti-racist politics in opposition to the establishment Democratic Party that was resolutely pro-war, and that had distanced itself from the insurgent Black Liberation Struggle. The Party garnered support from a range of progressive and left wing organizations in the Bay Area and Los Angeles, including representation from the Independent Socialist Club and the Communist Party. Yet from the start debates over how to advance the party’s “ideological support for racial equality” was a source of conflict.30

On July 12, 1967, the Peace & Freedom Party voted to seek official registration for the November 1968 ballot. This would require obtaining 67,000 signatures to attain legal status in California. But a lack of consensus on the politics of race made achieving this goal a major challenge. About 2,500 PFP delegates, predominantly white, attended a National Conference for New Politics in Chicago in early September. King spoke at the convention but declined to run as a peace candidate for President. Serious conflict arose when the 300 black delegates formed a Black Caucus, and proposed that half of the posts on all conference committees be assigned to their caucus. The Conference, needing black participation to legitimate their politics, voted in favor of the proposal -- but important organizations opposed, notably members of the California Peace and Freedom Party such as Bob Avakian.31 Two weeks later, the California Peace and Freedom Party held its statewide conference to rally support for the California registration drive. Of the 150

31 Wilson: 102-103.
delegates who attended, about 10% were black. Again the black delegates formed a 
caucus and proposed that they be given 50% of voting rights. This time the proposal was 
defeated and the entire Black Caucus walked out. The Communist Party representatives 
and others followed them.32

Now almost exclusively white and desperate to salvage their anti-racist and anti-
war alliance in time for the registration deadline on January 3, the Peace and Freedom 
Party approached black organizations for support. SNCC and other black groups, 
however, rebuffed them.33 The results were disastrous. As December arrived, with less 
than a month to go before the registration deadline, the Party had collected only about 
25,000 of the required 67,000 signatures. On December 18, with less than two weeks 
remaining, the California Supreme Court rejected the Peace and Freedom Party’s suit to 
extend the registration deadline and reduce the number of signatures required.34

By then, the October 28th shooting and the “Free Huey!” campaign had thrown 
the Black Panther Party into the national spotlight. Through Avaikian, Scheer, and others, 
the Peace and Freedom Party approached the Panthers to propose a coalition. As Peace 
and Freedom organizing committee member Mike Parker recalled:

We started out as a predominantly White group based on the anti-war movement, and from the very 
beginning we had the position that there could be no peace unless it was a peace among free men – that 
you did not have a true peace just because there was no war if people were oppressed. And so we made 
our slogan “Peace and Freedom” just to make it clear that we stood not only for ending the war in 
Vietnam and other wars but also for ending oppression. We were looking for groups in the Black 
community to work with and we found that the only group in the Black community that was even 
willing to talk with us about these kinds of questions in a serious way … was the Black Panther Party 
for Self Defense.35

32 Wilson: 105-106.
34 P&F Collection Box 17, folder 1, December 3, 1967 Meeting Notes; and People’s World, “Peace and 
to Aid as Court Rebuffs,” December 29, 1967 in Wilson, 135.
The coalition was announced on December 22, 1967. The white left in Northern California, so troubled by the question of how to relate to Black Power, was surprised and enthralled. The Berkeley Barb called the coalition an “unprecedented combination of Black and white activists … the first such militant alliance since the ‘Black Power’ concept was outlined by Stokely Carmichael last year.” The coalition initially sought to ensure that Huey Newton received a fair trial, later demanding that Huey be set free unconditionally. The Peace and Freedom Party contributed $3,000 and use of their sound equipment to the Free Huey campaign.

The Black Panther Party offered much needed legitimacy to the Peace and Freedom Party’s racial politics. With the Black Panthers at the table, many of the high profile supporters who had walked out over the Peace and Freedom Party’s racial politics in September returned to endorse the registration drive, including James Vann of the Oakland CORE, Si Casady of the California Democratic Council, and the representatives of the Communist Party. The day after the announcement of the Black Panther and Peace and Freedom Coalition, new registrations in Berkeley alone jumped to more than 500 – reaching 1,200 per day by the end of the week. By the deadline on January 3, over 105,000 signatures had been gathered: the Peace and Freedom Party would be on the November ballot.

The coalition proved to be mutually beneficial. As a Black Panther newspaper editorial explained:

What we wanted and needed were people who were willing to work … The Peace and Freedom Party was willing to work. In return, we were willing to hold rallies with them, to share platforms with them, and to recommend them to Black people who had their minds set on participating in electoral politics… The Peace and Freedom Party acknowledges that we were helpful to them in gaining enough

37 Bobby Seale, Seize the Time: 208.
38 Wilson: 138-140.
signatures to get on the ballot. We are glad that they made it and that we were instrumental in the success...  

The Party also keenly understood that the black liberation movement needed non-black allies, particularly progressive white allies. The Party editorialized that “the increasing isolation of the black radical movement from the white radical movement was a dangerous thing, playing into the power structure’s game of divide and conquer. We feel that in taking the step of making the coalition with the Peace and Freedom Party, we have altered the course of history on a minor, but important level.”

From its inception, the Black Panther Party had embraced both an uncompromising commitment to black liberation and a principled rejection of a separatist black politics. Their coalition with the Peace and Freedom Party, which a number of black nationalists criticized, illustrated both. Explaining their position to their expanding black base was critical. “Because our Party has the image of an uncompromising stand against the oppression of the white power structure on Black people,” the Party explained, “we could take this step without getting shot down with the charge of selling out.”

As the Black Panther Party promoted the “Free Huey!” campaign, it built on emerging alliances with students and white anti-war activists, advancing an anti-imperialist political ideology that linked the oppression of anti-war protestors to the oppression of blacks and Vietnamese. Bobby Seale elaborated this position at a January 28, 1968 rally at UC Berkeley supporting students who had been arrested during “Stop the Draft Week.” Citing Newton’s article, “On the Functional Definition of Politics,”

Seale spoke to the UC Berkeley crowd about self-defense power and the parallels between the Vietnamese and the Black American liberation struggles. Seale pointed out that the anti-draft students were locked up right alongside Huey Newton in the Alameda County Courthouse jail. He made common cause with the students, arguing that the anti-war demonstrators faced a plight like that of the black community:

Black people have protested police brutality. And many of you thought we were jiving, thought we didn’t know what we were talking about, because many Black people in the community probably couldn’t answer your questions articulately. But now you are experiencing this same thing. When you go down in front of the draft [board], when you go over and you demonstrate in front of Dean Rusk, those pig cops will come down and brutalize your heads just like they brutalized the heads of black people in the black community. We are saying now that you can draw a direct relationship that is for real and that is not abstract anymore: you don’t have to abstract what police brutality is like when a club is there to crush your skull; you don’t have to abstract what police brutality is like when there is a vicious service revolver there to tear your flesh; you can see in fact that the real power of the power structure maintaining its racist regime is manifested in its occupying troops, and is manifested in its police department – with guns and force.42

Anti-war activists eagerly took up the analogy. Free Speech Movement veteran and Communist Party member Bettina Aptheker spoke after Seale and emphasized the escalating repression of the anti-war movement and its common cause with both the Black Liberation Struggle and the “Free Huey!” campaign. “The ghettos have become occupied territories in the United States. This peace movement should have called for the immediate withdrawal of troops in July from Newark and Detroit. It failed to do that and it should have done that just as it calls for the immediate withdrawal of troops from Vietnam," she exhorted. “For a long time the ghetto communities in this country have borne the brunt of the assault on the democratic rights of all of us, and it is now perhaps first coming home to us that to defend the rights in the ghetto is to defend our own

42 Bobby Seale at rally in support of the Oakland Seven with Bettina Aptheker, Bob Avaikian of Peace and Freedom Party and Robert Scheer of Ramparts. KPFA Radio, February 20, 1968 (Pacifica Radio Archives BB1783) 50 min.
rights.” 43 Bob Avaikian noted how Huey’s case and that of the draft resisters were “interrelated,” and together posed a fundamental challenge to “power in this society.” He explained: “The Black Liberation Movement poses that challenge. The Anti-War Movement and the Anti-Draft Movement as it moves towards resistance is beginning to pose that challenge. And they are responding the way all blind tyrants respond when their power is challenged. By brute force and by attempting to mitigate that brute force through the veneer of a court apparatus which we all know is rigged.” 44

A few weeks later the Black Panther newspaper carried a cartoon titled “It’s All the Same” by Emory Douglass, graphically illustrating the three part anti-imperialist analogy. The cartoon featured three identical drawings of a filthy pig surrounded by flies, and walking upright in uniform carrying a machine gun, napalm, mace, and a pistol. The first panel identified the pig as the local police. The second panel identified the pig as the National Guard. The third panel identified the pig as the Marines. The Peace and Freedom Party picked up and distributed the graphic, citing the Black Panthers, to bolster their argument that the oppression they faced for opposing the war was part and parcel of not only the struggle for black liberation, but also the international struggle against imperialism.45

45 Black Panther v.2 n.1 March 16, 1968: 6. Peace and Freedom Party flier “Know Your Enemy!” in H.K. Yuen Collection, 334-680517-003. Newark photo reproduced in H.K. Yuen Collection flier 321-670906-000. The use of Black Power by white anti-war activists to legitimate their struggle against imperialism was not new. In September of 1967, before Newton was arrested, the Progressive Labor Party, had issued a flier in support of anti-war protestors arrested in San Francisco. Under the title “How Much Political Freedom Do We Have?” the flier reproduced a photo of blacks confronting soldiers in the Newark rebellion taken from the July 20, 1967 Black Panther next to a photo of unarmed citizens confronting soldiers in Vietnam. The implication was clear: the anti-war protestors were part of the global struggle against imperialism. Newark photo reproduced in H.K. Yuen Collection flier 321-670906-000.
Coming of Age

On February 17, 1968, Huey Newton’s 26th birthday, the Black Panther Party came of age. In a massive predominantly black rally in the Oakland Auditorium, while Newton sat in jail, the Black Panthers announced a merger with SNCC. The terms of the merger were ambiguous; SNCC itself was in crisis, and the merger did not last long. But for the Black Panther Party, an organization that only a year earlier was barely known outside of Oakland, the event marked an important step in the maturation of its politics and its emergence on the national political stage.

In the center of the auditorium stage sat Huey’s wicker throne from the famous photograph, empty of course. In addition to Eldridge Cleaver as master of ceremonies and Bobby Seale, speakers included three of most famous leaders of SNCC, James Forman, H. Rap Brown, and Stokely Carmichael. Bob Avakian from the Peace and Freedom Party and Berkeley Councilman Ron Dellums were also on stage as was Armelia Newton, Huey Newton’s mother.

Seale focused most of his speech on standing up to police brutality and organizing to Free Huey. He also elaborated a fuller view of the Panthers’ politics. Summarizing the Panthers’ Ten Point Program, he emphasized the need to serve the community, describing a Panther campaign to erect a stoplight at 55th and Market Streets in Oakland where speeding cars had killed several children. He then delved into the question of the Party’s position on whites:

When the Man walks up and says we are anti-white, I scratch my head. I say, "...what does he mean by that?" He says, "Well, I mean, you hate white people." I say, "Me? Hate a white person?" I say, "Wait a minute, man, let's back up a little bit. That's your game. That's the Ku Klux Klan's game." I say, "That is the Ku Klux Klan's game to hate me and murder me because of the color of my skin." I say, "I wouldn't murder a person or brutalize him because of the color of his skin." I say, "Yeah, we hate something, alright! We hate the oppression that we live in! We hate cops beating black people over the heads and murdering them. That's what we hate!" If you've got enough energy to sit down and hate a white person just because of the color of his skin, you’re wasting a lot of energy. You’d better take that
same energy and put it in some motion out there, and start dealing with those oppressive conditions, and you’re going to find out just what you hate, and what you’re going to stop.\(^{46}\)

H. Rap Brown, following Bobby Seale, spoke eloquently about the importance of freeing Huey. But in contrast to Bobby, he framed this question in terms of generic opposition to whites:

Huey Newton is the only living revolutionary in this country today. He has paid his dues! He paid his dues! How many white folks you kill today? …Yes, politics IS war without bloodshed; and war is an extension of those politics. But there is no politics in this country that is relevant to us ... to black people.\(^{47}\)

Stokely Carmichael extended the point:

The major enemy is the honky... THAT's the major enemy! THAT is the major enemy! And whenever anybody prepares for revolutionary warfare, you concentrate on the major enemy. We're not strong enough to fight each other and also fight him. We WILL not fight each other today! We WILL not fight each other. There will BE no fights in the black community among black people. There will just be people who will be offed. There will be no fights, there will be no disruptions. We are going to be united! … Now then, some people may not understand brother Rap when he talked about whom we ally with. He said we have to ally with Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans, and the dispossessed people of the earth; he did not mention poor whites… Who do you think has more hatred pent up in them, white people for black people, or black people for white people? White people for black people, obviously. The hatred has been more. What have we done to them for them to build up this hatred? Absolutely nothing. Yet ... we don't even want to have the chance to hate them for what they've done to us, and if hate should be justified WE HAVE THE BEST JUSTIFICATION IN THE WORLD FOR HATING THE HONKYS! We have it! We have it! We have it!\(^{48}\)

SNCC, as much as any organization, had given birth to the idea of forming a Black Panther Party. SNCC was born in the South out of the early 1960s fight against Jim Crow. Perhaps more than any other organization it was responsible for mobilizing the nonviolent civil disobedience that brought \textit{de jure} racial segregation to its knees. From 1965 through 1967, SNCC had nurtured the shift of a militant younger generation towards Black Nationalism and the call for Black Power! As SNCC Chairman, Stokely Carmichael had initiated several Black Panther organizations in various cities in 1967. Yet even as it spread the powerful message of Black Power, SNCC had never developed a practical strategy to sustain these Black Panther organizations or the broader movement

\(^{46}\) Bobby Seale, February 17, 1968, Pacifica Radio Archive BB 5471.
\(^{48}\) Stokely Carmichael, February 17, 1968, Pacifica Radio Archive BB 1708.
politically. SNCC had no real constituency, no effective tactics, no institutional framework for advancing Black Power politics. By Huey’s birthday on February 17, 1968, SNCC was starting to collapse.

The Black Panther Party for Self-Defense filled this vacuum. Among Black Nationalists and the broader Left, Newton was now widely viewed as a political prisoner: a radical activist being railroaded to prison for his politics. Using the political framework developed following Sacramento, the Black Panther Party could now turn all of its energies toward freeing him. If SNCC was the mother and the Black Panther Party the child, then on the very stage that SNCC and the Black Panther Party announced their merger to the world, the Panthers, as every child must, left its mother behind to strike out on its own.

The SNCC leaders criticized the Panthers’ politics of aligning with white Leftists, including their decisions to hire a white lawyer and raise money from whites to defend Huey. More broadly, SNCC leaders suggested that the Black Panther Party was just good at particular tactics. SNCC, its leadership suggested, was the senior partner in the SNCC-BPP alliance with the stronger overarching political view. In his February 17 speech, Carmichael implied that the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense was principally concerned with self-defense activities, or at least ought to be.

In the next issue of the Black Panther newspaper, the Party dropped “for Self-Defense” from its name and became simply the Black Panther Party.\(^49\) While during Huey’s Birthday celebration rally the rhetoric of the SNCC leaders roused as much enthusiasm from the crowd as did the speeches by Panther leaders, it was the Panthers

\(^{49}\) *Black Panther* v.2 n.1 March 16, 1968: 1.
that had a practical program. Several thousand people left the Oakland Auditorium that
night with a shared commitment to help “Free Huey!”\textsuperscript{50}

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In October of 1967, when confronted by police, Huey had defended himself, and a
white police officer died, giving substance to the Panthers’ promotion of armed self-
defense against the police. The Panthers organized a “Free Huey!” campaign rejecting the
legitimacy of the police as imperialist troops, and demanded Huey’s freedom irrespective
of the details of the case.

The Party politicized black people’s conflicts with the police. According to the
Panthers: black communities were colonies within the mother country; the police were
not officers of justice – they were pigs, foul traducers, and foreign troops oppressing
black people; those who challenged the police were not criminals – they were anti-
imperialists. Being poor and black were not crimes, the Panthers argued. Poverty and
racism were the crimes. If you have to steal to eat, the Panthers asserted, then you are
simply liberating what is rightly yours. The imperial American State that denied black
political and economic power was oppressive and illegitimate, and according to the
Panthers, black people had no moral obligation to obey its laws. They had a moral
obligation to resist. This was the central meaning of the “Free Huey!” campaign. The
Panthers turned the charges around and put America on trial.

Building upon foundations laid after Sacramento, the “Free Huey!” campaign
drew strong support from SNCC and leading Black Power activists on the one hand, and

\textsuperscript{50} One of the many actions taken following the birthday rally was a resolution introduced to the Berkeley
City Council by Council member (and future U.S. Congressman and Oakland Mayor) Ron Dellums calling
for Huey Newton to be freed, and murder charges to be dropped given that the indictment was voted by a
grand jury not composed of his peers. Source KPFA Radio, February 20, 1968 (Pacifica Radio Archives
BB1633) 60 min.
the Peace and Freedom Party and the broader Left on the other. SNCC, which organized a large share of the direct action in the Civil Rights Movement, explored a merger with the Black Panther Party the following February, and Stokely Carmichael and other SNCC leaders joined the Panthers.

The Black Panther Party had emerged as a key model for the new Black Power politics. Then in April the living symbol of the earlier Civil Rights Movement, who for many embodied that movement’s continuing promise, was extinguished …
Chapter 5: Martyrs

On Thursday, April 4, 1968, at 6:01 pm, Martin Luther King, Jr. stepped onto the balcony outside his second floor room at the Lorraine Hotel in Memphis, Tennessee. King and his aides were in Memphis organizing support for a strike by 1,300 black sanitation workers. The effort was part of King’s turn towards issues of poverty and opposition to the Vietnam War. King’s fame brought widespread attention to the sanitation workers’ strike, and over the previous week, conflicts between police and black strike supporters had become violent.

King had returned to the hotel after a long day of organizing and was headed to dinner. He wore a black silk suit and white shirt. Jesse Jackson, one of King’s associates standing in the courtyard below, introduced Ben Branch, a musician from Chicago who was scheduled to play at the rally that evening. King took hold of the green iron balcony railing, and leaned over it to chat. “Do you know Ben?” Jackson asked. “Yes, that’s my man!” King beamed. King asked Branch to play a spiritual called “Precious Lord, Take My Hand,” at the rally. A shot rang out and the bullet tore through the base of the right side of King’s neck. An hour later, at 7:05, doctors at St. Joseph’s Hospital pronounced King dead.¹

That evening Black Memphis erupted with fires, broken windows, and sporadic attacks on police with bricks, bottles, and some gunfire. Over the next three weeks violent rebellions swept the nation, igniting communities in more than 120 cities. Black neighborhoods in Washington D.C., Baltimore, and Chicago were devastated. President

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Johnson deployed 44,000 soldiers and National Guardsmen to restore order. Police arrested 21,000 and 46 people were killed.²

By the time of King’s assassination, a wide rift had opened in the Black Liberation Struggle. On one side were moderate organizations such as the Urban League and the NAACP. As the movement successfully challenged legal segregation, these venerable groups offered vital legal and institutional support.³ But in the Civil Rights insurgency peaking in the early 1960s, these organizations played a supportive role, rather than leading the sit-ins, marches, and frontline civil disobedience. With formal segregation defeated by the late 1960s, leaders like Urban League Director Whitney Young and NAACP Director Roy Wilkins joined the establishment, seeking to consolidate the gains of formal racial equality. On the other side, young activists – frustrated with the lack of material progress, particularly in the urban areas outside the South – sought new, often more confrontational ways of advancing Black Power.

In the months before his death, King endeavored to bridge these divergent paths. More than any other individual, King was widely revered for his role in helping to destroy Jim Crow. King’s stature meant, among other things, that he could neither easily be ignored nor repressed. Further, King and his organization – the Southern Christian Leadership Conference – had a strong base rooted in the black churches of the South, and had worked closely both supporting and leading frontline civil disobedience. As the movement defeated Jim Crow and the challenge to legal segregation became moot, King increasingly championed the struggle against poverty and publicly opposed the war in

³ The NAACP in particular did much of the foundational work upon which the Civil Rights Movement built and provided crucial legal and political support for the insurgents throughout.
Vietnam – gaining the cautious respect of the radical young activists. King’s turn toward left anti-imperialism incurred the growing wrath of the establishment.

Shortly before his death King told reporters, “[O]ur program calls for a redistribution of economic power.” Blacks, he explained, must help lead the struggle “to reform the structure of racist imperialism from within.” The New York Times Magazine published right before his death explained that King had “come to believe that war and poverty are inseparable issues.” King’s “plans are calculated to disturb whatever peace of mind the President enjoys these days.” King was leading plans for an interracial Poor People’s March in the nation’s capital: a campaign mobilizing thousands of poor people and their supporters to “re-establish that the real issue is not violence or nonviolence, but poverty and neglect.” King’s persistent insurgency angered the Johnson administration, which trumpeted recent Civil Rights victories. Despite their history of working together, Dr. King and President Johnson had been “virtually out of touch since Dr. King began to condemn the Administration’s policy in Vietnam two years ago,” the New York Times explained in a front page article published just days before King’s assassination.

An establishment chorus denounced King’s Poor People’s March as well as his increasingly vigorous opposition to the Vietnam War. Robert Byrd, the Democratic Senator of West Virginia, called King a “self-seeking rabble rouser” and called for a

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4 Martin Luther King, Jr. in Jose Yglesias, “It may be a long, hot spring in the capital,” in New York Times, March 31, 1968, p. SM30.
6 Martin Luther King, Jr. in Ben A. Franklin, “Dr. King Hints He’d Cancel March if Aid is Offered,” in New York Times, April 1, 1968, p. 20.
restraining order to block the planned April demonstrations against poverty. The day before King was killed, a Federal court had issued a restraining order prohibiting him from holding a demonstration in Memphis. Angry and defiant, King called the order “illegal and unconstitutional,” and refused to obey it.

But when King died, the establishment quickly put aside its wrath and sought to claim him as a martyr for America. During the evening following King’s assassination, President Johnson addressed the nation asking “every citizen to reject the blind violence that has struck Dr. King, who lived by non-violence.” The President emphasized King’s non-violent tactics and obscured the insurgent character of his leadership. The President appropriated the symbolism of King’s death for America: “Martin Luther King stands with our other American martyrs in the cause of freedom and justice.”

The following day, on April 5, President Johnson attended a memorial for King at the Washington Cathedral. He entered the Cathedral with an entourage including Roy Wilkins; Whitney M. Young, Jr.; Thurgood Marshall, the Civil Rights lawyer appointed by Johnson as the first Black Supreme Court Justice; Chief Justice of the Supreme Court Earl Warren, who crafted the landmark Brown v. Board Civil Rights decision; Robert Weaver, Johnson’s Secretary of Housing and Urban Development and the first black member of a Presidential Cabinet; Vice President Hubert Humphrey; and Secretary of Defense Clark Clifford. The message was clear: Johnson was highlighting his

9 Martin Luther King, Jr. in Earl Caldwell, “Court Bars March in Memphis; Dr. King Calls Order ‘Illegal’,” in New York Times, April 4, 1968, p. 30.
administration’s commitment to racial equality and its support of the Civil Rights establishment.

Johnson presented King as an “American martyr” for a version of formal racial equality framed by both the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and embraced by the establishment. Every avowed Presidential candidate at the time, including former Republican Vice President Richard Nixon, Senators Robert Kennedy and Eugene McCarthy, and Vice President Humphrey, flew to Atlanta to attend Dr. King’s funeral on April 9, as did fifty Congressmen, thirty Senators, and several state governors.12 Young black activists at the funeral complained that the politicians were “vote-seeking” and crying “crocodile tears.”13

With King gone, SCLC no longer offered an effective conduit for trying to realize black political aspirations. Without King’s celebrity and credibility, SCLC had difficulty attracting participation in the Poor People’s Campaign, and its protests drew less public attention and support from allies. SCLC initiated fewer and fewer insurgent protests, and saw its membership and funding wither.14 “People had confidence in him,” explained SCLC leader Andrew Young in July of 1968, but they “have not demonstrated a willingness to take us seriously.”15

14 According to sociologist Doug McAdam, the SCLC initiated about a quarter of all black insurgent events during the 1960s through 1968, the year of King’s death. That year SCLC was responsible for fully 36% of all black insurgent events initiated by formal movement organizations. But in 1969 the percentage fell by half to only 18% and in 1970 to only 8%. McAdam’s statistics likely underestimate SCLC’s precipitous decline as they do not count the rise of spontaneous actions of black urban rebellion as events not initiated by formal movement organizations. Similarly, McAdam estimates that while SCLC attracted more than $1,000,000 annually in external income throughout 1965-1968 while King was still alive, external income plummeted to $500,000 in 1969, and 400,000 in 1970. See Doug McAdam, Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930-1970, (University of Chicago, 1982).
The rift between the Civil Rights establishment and young urban blacks became harder to bridge. Stokely Carmichael, the pre-eminent voice of the young-guard, held a press conference the day after King’s assassination and declared:

I think white American made its biggest mistake when she killed Dr. King last night because when she killed Dr. King last night, she killed all reasonable hope. When she killed Dr. King last night she killed the one man of our race that this country’s older generations, the militants and the revolutionaries and the masses of black people would still listen to. Even though sometimes he did not agree with them, they would still listen to him.16

‘Lil Bobby Hutton

On the evening of April 6, two days after King’s death, at a little after 9 pm, three carloads of armed Black Panthers pulled over to the curb on Union and 28th street in largely black West Oakland. Eldridge Cleaver was driving the lead car, an old white Ford with a Florida license plate that a member of the Peace and Freedom Party had donated to the Panthers. The entourage included David Hilliard, seventeen year-old ‘Lil’ Bobby Hutton, and six other rank and file Panthers.17 Cleaver opened the door and walked around to the passenger side of the Ford, reportedly to urinate. A moment later, several police cars pulled up and shined a spotlight on Cleaver. Words were exchanged, then gunfire. The Panthers ran for cover, police quickly cordoned off a two-block area, and neighbors gathered in the streets. An hour and a half later, Cleaver, having been shot in the foot and rear, his lungs burning from tear gas and firebomb smoke, emerged stark naked from a burning basement, surrendered, and was taken into custody. ‘Lil’ Bobby Hutton emerged from the basement unarmed. Police shot him dead.18

17 Wendell Wade, Terry Cotton, Charles Bursey, Donnell Lankford, Warren Wells, and John L. Scott – all in their late teens or early twenties.
18 Eight Panthers were arrested. Six Panthers and two policemen were wounded, none critically. Accounts differ as to how the shootout began and what the Panthers were doing there. There is also conflicting evidence as to the conditions under which Hutton was killed. Two black Oakland police officers involved in the conflict, Gwynne Peirson and Eugene Jennings, testified at the time that Hutton was outright
The following day, Bobby Seale held a press conference. Speaking quietly and carefully, he charged the police with racism, repression, and murder: “Bobby Hutton had his hands in the air, and was shot and murdered” by the Oakland police. Seale and Charles R. Garry, the Panthers’ lawyer, called for the indictment of the policemen who had killed Bobby Hutton. Seale described the shootout as an ambush by police, and explained that the Panthers bore arms in self-defense. He noted that: “a panther never attacks anyone, but when he is pushed into a corner… like the brothers were last night, he has one thing to do: to defend himself.” The Black Panthers wanted peace, he explained, but peace could only be obtained through armed self-defense. “Our brother Martin Luther King exhausted all means of non-violence.”  

At the April 12 funeral for Hutton, 2,000 people packed into Ephesian Church of God in Christ in Berkeley, with 100 uniformed Black Panthers forming the honor guard. The Reverend E.E. Cleveland called down “shame” on the powerful for failing to improve the lot of blacks. After the service, the Panthers held an outdoor rally emphasizing that Bobby Hutton had been assassinated because of his Panther politics. Now Seale was angry. “There are pigs on tops of the library behind you. They are up there on other buildings … They must know that every time these racist pigs attack us we

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19 Bobby Seale, Press conference at Oakland Hall of Justice, Pacifica Radio Archive recording BB 5543.
are going to defend ourselves.” Seale cried out, “Free Huey!” and the crowd answered: “Free Huey!”

The Black Panther leadership charged that Hutton had posed a challenge to racism, and that the police had killed him to repress this challenge. From prison, Cleaver wrote his account of the shootout, published in *Ramparts*:

[T]he Oakland Police Department MURDERED Little Bobby, and they cannot have that as a victory… we must all swear by Little Bobby’s blood that we will not rest until Chief Gains is brought to justice, either in the courts or in the streets; and until the bloodthirsty troops of the Oakland Police Department no longer exist in the role of an occupying army with its boots on the neck of the black community, with its guns aimed at the black community’s head, an evil force with its sword of terror thrust into the heart of the black community. That’s what Little Bobby would ask you to do, Brothers and Sisters, put an end to the terror – by any means necessary.

Many notables joined the Panthers in praising Hutton’s courage and contribution to Black Liberation. Stokely Carmichael said “Hutton understood that power comes out of the barrel of a gun.” Betty Shabazz, the widow of Malcolm X, sent a telegram: “Shot down like a common animal, he died a warrior for black liberation.” A group of professors from the University of California, University of San Francisco, San Francisco State, and San Jose State called for an investigation of the Police Department by the United States Civil Service Commission. Harry Edwards, professor of sociology at San Jose State, and prime mover behind the successful movement for black athletes to boycott the 1968 Olympics said “you can no longer ignore the Black Panthers,” and announced his intention to join. Marlon Brando attended Hutton’s funeral and said “that could have been my son lying there.” A letter to the editor of the *San Francisco Chronicle*, signed

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by a list of notables that included James Baldwin, Ossie Davis, Elizabeth Hardwick, LeRoi Jones, Oscar Lewis, Norman Mailer, Floyd McKissick, and Susan Sontag, compared the murder of Hutton to the murder of King: “Both were acts of racism against persons who had taken a militant stand on the right of black people to determine the conditions of their own lives. Both were attacks aimed at destroying this nation’s black leadership.”

**New Day in Babylon**

By 1968, the Civil Rights Movement had already unraveled as the defeat of formal racial subordination eliminated targets for effective Civil Rights mobilization. But more than any other figure, King embodied the promise of liberation through nonviolence and appeals to American morality. His persistence as he sought to broaden the Civil Rights struggle to address war and poverty kept hope alive. For many young activists, when King died, the promise of Civil Rights struggle died with him.

*De facto* racial subordination of black people persisted. Many schools, neighborhoods, and professions remained segregated in practice. Many police departments, fire departments, and local governments in areas with large black populations remained exclusively or predominantly white. Many black people remained locked in poverty in squalor. And in some holdout areas, such as “Bloody Lowndes” County, Alabama, enforcement of civil rights continued to prove a serious problem well past the passage of the federal 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1965 Voting Rights Act.

But by 1968, even in “Bloody Lowndes,” the political dynamic had changed. As the Civil Rights Movement dismantled Jim Crow through the mid-1960s, it ironically

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undercut its own viability as an insurgent movement. Whereas activists could sit in at lunch counters, or sit black and white together on a bus, or insist on registering to vote where they had traditionally been excluded, it was often unclear to activists how to nonviolently disrupt black unemployment, substandard housing, the lack of medical care, or police brutality. And when activists did succeed in disrupting these other social processes nonviolently, they often found themselves engaged with very different enemies and lacking the breadth of allied support that Civil Rights activists had attained when challenging formal segregation. By 1968, the Civil Rights practice of nonviolent civil disobedience against racial exclusion had few obvious targets, and could no longer generate massive and widespread participation.27

Civil Rights as an ideal remained more important than ever. Black activists continued to emulate the nonviolent direct action of the Civil Rights Movement heyday in their struggles for school bussing, economic opportunity, and affirmative action. For decades to come, countless black activists would work tirelessly in the legal and political arenas to bring the seeds of racial equality planted by the Civil Rights Movement to fruition. And many others would emulate the Civil Rights Movement for their own environmental, identity, and social causes.

But Black Liberation activists committed to continued nonviolent insurgency had no coherent alternative politics for which to claim King. Because of his fame and stature, King had remained a threat to the establishment. Actions he participated in garnered wide attention and support even when they would not have without him. But King had yet to convert that fame and stature into the viable practical basis of a new insurgency. Thus there was no viable new insurgent movement that could claim King as its martyr.

President Johnson and the American establishment sought to appropriate King as an American martyr: a powerful symbol for American democracy. The establishment quickly forgot King’s continued insurgency and his efforts to broaden the struggle. Instead, the establishment sought to make King their own, trumpeting racial progress to burnish American democratic credentials. Lacking the practical means to sustain Civil Rights insurgency, and eager to join the establishment, the moderate civil rights leadership quickly embraced this symbolism.

‘Lil Bobby Hutton became a very different kind of martyr. He was virtually unknown and ignored by the establishment. Yet while the establishment celebrated King, Hutton became a martyr for the new movement. Hutton had died standing up to the brutal Oakland police; he died for black self-determination; he died defying American empire like Lumumba and Che and hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese. Unlike King in 1968, ‘Lil Bobby Hutton represented a coherent insurgent alternative to political participation in the United States – armed self-defense against the police and the revolutionary politics of the Black Panther Party.

Eldridge Cleaver wrote: “If we understand ourselves to be revolutionaries, and if we accept our historic task, then we can move beyond the halting steps that we’ve been taking … Then there will be a new day in Babylon.” So long as King persisted in his efforts to broaden Civil Rights insurgency, many young activists held onto the hope that he would succeed. But when King and Hutton were killed, a new day arrived. As the Federal Government inched toward establishing a National holiday in honor of Martin Luther King, Jr., Hutton became the first martyr of the Panther revolution.

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Eclipsing SNCC

In the spring of 1968, together with SNCC, the Black Panthers began discussion with Third World representatives in the United Nations in order to advance their program. The Panthers sought support for the “Free Huey!” campaign and for a proposed Black Plebiscite. The goal of the Plebiscite, according to Eldridge Cleaver, was to give blacks in America the opportunity to vote “whether they want to be separated into a sovereign nation of their own, with full status and rights with the other nations of the world, including UN membership and diplomatic recognition by the other nations of the world.” Malcolm X had earlier publicized this notion. James Forman, then jointly appointed as the Chairman of International Affairs of SNCC and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Black Panthers, conducted an informal poll of key UN representatives and found some support for the Panthers’ proposed plebiscite.²⁹

Underlining the importance of the proposal, on May 4, the Black Panther Party expanded point ten of its Ten Point Platform to read:

10. WE WANT LAND, BREAD, HOUSING, EDUCATION, CLOTHING, JUSTICE AND PEACE, AND AS OUR MAJOR POLITICAL OBJECTIVE, A UNITED NATIONS SUPERVISED PLEBISCITE TO BE HELD THROUGHOUT THE BLACK COLONY IN WHICH ONLY BLACK COLONIAL SUBJECTS WILL BE ALLOWED TO PARTICIPATE, FOR THE PURPOSE OF DETERMINING THE WILL OF BLACK PEOPLE AS TO THEIR NATIONAL DESTINY.³⁰

The Panthers and SNCC developed plans for a high profile joint delegation to the United Nations in July. But by the time of the trip, tensions were building within SNCC and the organization struggled to redefine itself in the post-Civil Rights era. Stokely

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²⁹ For Cleaver’s description of the purpose of the Plebiscite and the early role of James Forman see Eldridge Cleaver “Black Paper by the Minister of Information,” in Black Panther v2n2 May 4, 1968 p.12.
³⁰ Point 10 of Black Panther Party Platform and Program as amended in The Black Panther, v2n2 May 4, 1968, p.7. Previous versions of the Platform point 10 read only: “10. We want land, bread, housing, education, clothing, justice and peace” as published in the Black Panther Newspaper through the last issue before King’s assassination, Black Panther v2n1 March 16, 1968 page 4. Philip Foner and other historians have been somewhat confused about this timing as some later issues of the Black Panther published amended versions of the 10 Point Program and Platform under the header “October 1966 Black Panther Party Platform and Program.”
Carmichael and James Forman wrestled for control, advancing different visions of SNCC’s role within the Black Power movement, and its relationship with the Panthers.\(^{31}\)

Forman and Carmichael both travelled to Oakland for the “Free Huey!” rally at the start of Newton’s trial on July 15.\(^{32}\) Then, on July 19\(^{th}\), both Forman and Carmichael traveled to New York for a Panther press conference at the United Nations, and a series of community rallies in Harlem, Brooklyn, and Newark to support the plebiscite. There, they met up with a Panther contingent including Chairman Bobby Seale, Minister of Information Eldridge Cleaver, Chief of Staff David Hilliard, Father Earl Neil, Minister of Culture George Murray, and Field Marshall Donald Cox. Fliers were printed, and a flurry of meetings called to advance the UN campaign. A Panther press statement said that in addition to support for the Free Huey Campaign and the Black Plebiscite, the Panthers “call upon the member nations of the United Nations to authorize the stationing of UN Observer Teams throughout the cities of America wherein black people are cooped up and concentrated in wretched ghettos.” After meeting with several United Nations delegations and talking with the press, the Black Panthers filed for status as an official “nongoverning organization” of the UN.\(^{33}\) While intriguing, the Black Plebiscite failed to gain traction.

Underneath the united activity, SNCC was fragmenting. It appears that the Black Panthers sided with Carmichael and against Forman. On Wednesday July 24, a delegation of Carmichael supporters and Panthers confronted Forman at his office on Fifth Ave in


\(^{32}\) Forman, p. 534.

New York City. The press reported allegations that a Black Panther stuck an unloaded pistol into Forman’s mouth, and squeezed the trigger three times.\textsuperscript{34} Forman denied the story.\textsuperscript{35} Nonetheless, shortly after the July trip to NYC, SNCC sided with Forman, passing a resolution terminating Stokely Carmichael’s position, and officially cutting off their relationship with the Panthers. The SNCC resolution claimed that Carmichael had engaged “in a power struggle both within and outside of S.N.C.C. with another organization member (Forman) which … threatened the existence” of SNCC.\textsuperscript{36}

With Jim Crow vanquished, as SNCC struggled to transition out of the south and to remain politically relevant, the Black Panther Party captured the imagination of the younger generation of black activists. Legendary SNCC founder Ella Baker, speaking in 1968, explained SNCC’s predicament: “S.N.C.C. came North when the North was in a ferment that led to various interpretations of what needed to be done. With its own frustrations, it could not take the pace-setter role it took in the South. They were unable to sense that the milieu and factors of change were more than they had dealt with before. And the frustration that came to individuals that had gone through the Southern experience rendered them unable to make a historical decision that perhaps their days were over.”\textsuperscript{37} The \textit{New York Times} noted the Panthers’ eclipse of SNCC: “The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, which emerged from the rural South eight years

\textsuperscript{34} Gerald C. Fraser, “S.N.C.C. in Decline After 8 Years in Lead: Pace-Setter in Civil Rights Displaced by Panthers,” in \textit{New York Times}, October 7, 1968.
ago to become a pace-setter in the national Civil Rights movement, is in serious decline. It has lost much of its power and influence to the northern slum-born Black Panthers.”

**Allies**

On May 14th, Kathleen Cleaver announced Eldridge’s candidacy for the Peace and Freedom Party nomination for President. Eldridge was temporarily in Vacaville Prison on a parole violation stemming from the confrontation with police in which Bobby Hutton was killed. The conflict increased Cleaver’s notoriety and the *Black Panther Newspaper* carried a full-page promotion of his candidacy for President, along with a full page spread on Kathleen Cleaver's campaign for the California State Assembly. The Panthers saw both campaigns as opportunities to build influence and broaden their base of support within the Left. Kathleen’s candidacy directly challenged Willie Brown, the popular incumbent black California state assemblyman, who had refused to support the Panthers. Eldridge Cleaver’s run for President represented disaffection with both the Democratic and Republican Parties and was, in the words of the *New York Times*, an effort “to use the traditional election process to win an audience and to organize for the radical movement.” As Eldridge explained in a “Black Paper” presented at a Peace and Freedom Party Convention, the Panthers sought to “focus attention … on a revolutionary leader with a revolutionary program within the conventional political context … In practical terms, this kind of campaign becomes another tool for political organization for black power… We want to pull people out of the Democratic Party, out of the Republican

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Party, and swell the ranks of the Black Panther Party and the Peace and Freedom Party."\(^{39}\)

After building an alliance with Latinos within the Peace and Freedom Party, a series of State primaries and much wrangling, Eldridge Cleaver emerged as the clear favorite. On August 18 he formally secured the nomination of the national Peace and Freedom Party Convention for President of the United States with 161.5 delegate votes compared to 54 for the runner up, civil rights activist and comedian Dick Gregory.\(^{40}\)

On August 25, the Panthers held a rally at De Fremery Park in West Oakland that they ceremoniously re-named Bobby Hutton Memorial Park in honor of the martyred Panther youth. The rally attracted a cross-section of Panther supporters, bringing them together to strengthen their anti-imperialist identity, binding them as one across race and social position, in a revolutionary rejection of American empire.\(^{41}\)

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The crowd gathered in the hot sun and under the cool shade of the park’s oaks to listen to the speakers and show their support for Huey Newton. Although Hutton Park is located in the heart of Black West Oakland, more than half the people who turned out that day were Whites, Latinos and Asian-Americans. The crowd was a rich tapestry of the times and vividly represented the diverse allies that increasingly supported the Black Panther Party. Hundreds sat on the grass, mostly young non-black activists. Some were older and more professional looking, such as the woman in her fifties with a striped blouse and permed blonde hair sitting behind two young activists, one wearing a leather vest and the other without a shirt. Hundreds more, mostly black, stood stretched out across the park, under the trees, near the neighboring houses, squeezing into view of the stage. There were well over a thousand people in all. A heavy set man with short cropped hair in his thirties – almost twice the age of many Panthers – wearing a checkered button down shirt leaned back with arms crossed and chewed on a cigarette butt as he listened to the speakers. Another black man, tall and muscular with a goatee and Italian felt hat, stood nearby, crossed his arms and listened. A woman in her early twenties wearing a paisley print dress and head-wrap and sandals with gold bracelets and hoop earrings held her fingers to her lips and tilted her head pensively. A heavy-set grandmother with a print dress and Malcolm X glasses held up her home-made “FREE HUEY” banner with both hands, her grand-children nearby with home-made “FREE HUEY” headbands, complete with flower ornaments. Dozens of photographers weaved through the crowd snapping photos. Uniformed Panthers stood at attention along the periphery for the crowd to see. Another Panther strode pointedly through the crowd, talking logistics into a boxy walkie-
talkie with an antenna the size of a fishing rod. Police were scattered along the park’s edges, their helicopters circled above.

At the front of the Park sat the Peace and Freedom Party bus, its roof sporting a stage platform and sound system. The bus featured a large “FREE HUEY!” sign with dozens of bumper stickers supporting Cleaver’s Presidential campaign with the Peace and Freedom Party. A Black Panther security squad of two dozen young men lined up in front of the bus facing the crowd. They wore white t-shirts emblazoned with the Panther logo and “Black Panther Party” in bold print, each wearing black pants and a black beret cocked to the right. Bobby Seale spoke, then Stokely Carmichael, and next Kathleen Cleaver. Allies Reies Tijerina – the Chicano insurgent leader, Richard Aoki, and Bob Avaikian took turns speaking.

Someone cleared the mike and all eyes turned for the main event, the speech by Eldridge, the newly anointed national candidate for President on the Peace and Freedom Party ticket. Cleaver exhorted the multiracial audience to Free Huey! He reminded them of their collective identity – their shared rejection of American power – and of the importance of their struggle: “I would love to sit around on my ass drinking wine, smoking pot and making love to my wife, but I can’t afford to be doing that while all these pigs are loose … Here I am, a convict. A whole lot of respectable people have nominated me for President. I’m not going to get elected … I’m a symbol of dissent, of rejection. Every page of American history is written in human blood, and we can’t endorse it. We cannot endorse it. Close it! Close the motherfucker and put it on the shelf.”\(^{42}\)

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\(^{42}\) Cleaver quoted in Gilbert Moore, *Rage*, p. 95.
**Origins of the New Left**

The multi-racial New Left would prove a crucial ally of the Black Panther Party. Even before the founding of the Black Panther Party, Black Power helped to spark draft resistance and the development of the New Left. The New Left’s own self-understanding evolved in relation to Black Liberation Struggle. In the wake of the Civil Rights Movement, the New Left imagined itself a revolutionary partner in Black Liberation. Stepping back and tracing the development of the New Left is key to understanding why it would so ardently embrace the Black Panther Party.

Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), the main New Left organization grew out of student involvement in the Civil Rights Movement of the early 1960s. It had a young, privileged, and predominantly white constituency. It was not anti-imperialist in the beginning. In the early 1960s, SDS spurned active draft resistance. As late as mid-1965 it had only 3000 nominal members nationally, and little influence. The major growth of the New Left came with draft resistance in 1966-1968. This draft resistance built upon SDS’s embrace of revolutionary anti-imperialism and Black Liberation Struggle.

Contrary to popular thought, draft resistance was not simply a response to high rates of military induction. The United States Government conducted a military draft continuously from before the U.S. entrance into World War II until the draft ended in 1973. Throughout this period, there was little opposition to the draft until widespread resistance began in 1967. In fact, almost ten times as many young men were drafted annually during the height of World War II compared to the Vietnam War, peaking at 3,323,970 in 1943. Yet there was relatively little resistance to the draft. Similarly, draft

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43 Sale, *SDS*. Membership figures are listed chronologically on page 663-4.

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resistance was negligible during the Korean War despite the fact that almost twice as many young men were drafted per year as during the Vietnam War – peaking at 551,806 in 1951. When wide draft resistance first erupted in 1967, annual inductions were only 228,263.\(^{44}\)

Through the first half of the twentieth century, open draft resistance was not a viable political option. To the extent that a war effort was widely considered legitimate, heavy repression could be leveraged against those who refused to fight for their country. During WWI, conscientious objectors were beaten, tortured, locked in solitary confinement, and some were sentenced to death, though never executed. During WWII, some conscientious objectors were used for live human medical testing, such as experiments subjecting them to repeated lice bites.\(^{45}\)

As the Johnson administration began to escalate the Vietnam War in 1965, most Americans still saw draft resistance as cowardly or even traitorous. A national poll that

\(^{44}\) Chart: U.S. military draft inductions per year, 1940-1973.

Draft induction statistics are from the Selective Service System, History and Records division. The Selective Service defines World War II inductions as those occurring between November 1940 and October 1946; Korean War inductions as those between June 1950 and June 1953; and Vietnam War inductions as those occurring between August 1964 and February 1973.

year found that 63% of Americans favored the draft and only 13% opposed it. Early acts of resistance were sometimes met with public violence. On March 31, 1966, eleven clean-cut white pacifists protested the draft in front of the District Courthouse in South Boston. As the protest was announced on the radio, antagonistic counter-demonstrators began to arrive. This shouting crowd of around 250 soon surrounded the pacifists, calling them “cowards.” When four pacifists took out their draft cards and lit them on fire, the hostility exploded with members of the mob shouting “Shoot them!” and “Kill them!” Members of the mob began to attack the pacifists, knocking them to the ground and beating them.46

Although popular imagery portrays draft resisters as mostly white, black SNCC activists were among the first to mobilize resistance to the draft during the Vietnam War. SNCC activists almost universally opposed the War,47 and they had good reason. In 1966, the Pentagon admitted that “proportionately more Negroes have been killed in Vietnam ground combat than other Americans.”48 SNCC activists asked why should Black Americans serve a country and a government that disrespected and mistreated them because they were black. A sense of betrayal by the federal government also fostered black anti-imperialism and draft resistance, especially among black movement leaders.49

With the emergence of “Black Power,” SNCC activists had intensified their opposition to the war, inventing the slogan “Hell no, we won’t go!” SNCC launched daily demonstrations at the Atlanta induction center. Twelve blacks were arrested. By the Fall

47 Carson, In Struggle, p. 183.
of 1966, as white students began cautiously signing symbolic “We Won’t Go
Statements,” induction refusals by blacks were already widespread. 50

Feeling politically isolated for his embrace of draft resistance, Stokely
Carmichael, SNCC’s Chairman, approached SDS for support.51 In July of 1966, at
Carmichael’s behest, SDS published a joint statement with SNCC to the House
committee on the Armed Services co-signed by Carmichael and Carl Oglesby, President
of SDS. The statement marked a crucial step in the anti-war movement. It asserted the
three part anti-imperialist analogy that would later be adopted and spread by the Black
Panther Party.52 Carmichael and Oglesby argued that blacks, Vietnamese, and draftees
shared a common oppressor, and asserted a powerful moral justification for resisting the
draft:

In a supposedly “free society” conscription is a form of legalized enslavement of the worst kind: a
slave had to serve his master’s economic interest with labor and sweat; but a draftee must serve the
“national interest” with murder and his own blood. Black men in the United States are forced to kill
their colored brothers in Vietnam for $95 a month and the risk of death, injury and disease; this is why
we oppose the draft.53

Despite signing on to the joint statement, SDS had not yet fully embraced its
implications and was still reluctant to organize draft resistance. Some smaller anti-war
organizations such as End the Draft were trying to enlist SDS in draft resistance, but
many SDSers were afraid of the repression likely to come with a serious challenge to the

50 Ferber and Lynd, Resistance, 33.
51 SDS often supported and emulated SNCC throughout the first half of the decade. In the words of the SDS
National Office at the time: “We have followed SNCC’s evolution for years, learning from it, adapting its
approaches in our own organizing efforts, and acting as allies when called upon to assist.” So the turn
towards draft resistance at SNCC’s behest was not surprising. Paul R. Booth, “Letter to SNCC” from SDS
National Office, New Left Notes, June 10, 1966 p. 3.
52 See chapter 4.
53 Stokely Carmichael, Chairman of SNCC and Carl Oglesby, President of SDS, “Joint Statement of the
Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee and the Students for a Democratic Society on the
Conscription Laws Before the House Committee on the Armed Services” reprinted in New Left Notes, July
draft. By late 1966, some white anti-war students were cautiously beginning to sign symbolic “We Won’t Go” pledges – but there was still virtually no organized SDS resistance to the draft.

This changed in October of 1966 when SDS organized the Black Power conference in Berkeley and invited Stokely Carmichael as the keynote speaker. This same conference had encouraged Newton and Seale to found their Party. Carmichael focused most of his speech on the question of Vietnam. “The war in Vietnam is an illegal and immoral war,” he said. Carmichael compared the plight of black people in America to the plight of the Vietnamese. He argued that in order to be relevant to most people, SDS needed to start organizing draft resistance: “The peace movement has been a failure because it hasn’t gotten off the college campuses where everybody has a 2S and is not afraid of being drafted anyway.”

In the months preceding the conference, while anti-war organizing was prevalent, there was little discussion of the draft on campus. The Black Power conference, however, dramatically changed the focus of the campus antiwar movement. Campus SDS, the organizers of the conference, formed an anti-draft committee and distributed a flier the day after Carmichael’s speech for a workshop that evening. The flier read:

One of the purposes of the Black Power Conference has been to stimulate new ideas and discussions as to where the Movement at Berkeley will go from here. Black Power offers a challenge to white radicals to organize themselves… STOP THE WAR! STOP THE DRAFT! … If you want to discuss possibilities of Direct Action to help stop the war and benefit yourself, come to the workshops.

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55 See chapter 1.
56 Stokely Carmichael, H.K. Yuen audio reel #044-661029-000.
57 In a sampling of 19 anti-war fliers distributed on the UC Berkeley campus from August through October 1966, not a single one emphasized the draft or resistance to it. H.K. Yuen Collection box #313. Methods note: While there is no way to construct a complete universe of anti-war fliers distributed on campus during this period, there is good reason to believe this sampling is representative. H.K. Yuen’s collection was near comprehensive, and he put most of the anti-war fliers for this period in box 313. The pre and post October 1966 variation within the fliers collected here is striking.
58 SDS Flier, H.K. Yuen Collection, #313-661119-000.
Other anti-draft activities on campus followed. A week later, the organization Campus
Community for New Politics (CNP) organized a workshop called “You and the Draft.”

An organization called “Resistance” launched on campus, and explained their position:

Today Vietnamese men, women and children will die. They will die at the end of an American
soldier’s bayonet, they will burn to death from the napalm dropped from American planes. These
executions are performed daily by ordinary American guys, most of whom are not in Vietnam by
choice. They were drafted. Our government ordered them there.

Within months, there was a deluge of meetings, organizations, conferences, and protests
on campuses across the country, all focused on the draft.59

Less than two months after the Black Power conference, as the Panthers
organized their first patrols in Oakland, SDS formally embraced draft resistance at its
National Council meeting at Berkeley.60 An accompanying report published by SDS in
January 1967 compared anti-draft resistance to “the revolt of slaves against their
masters,” and said SDS was moving into a new phase, from “protest to resistance.”61

Part of what was so compelling about the new approach to draft resistance was its
universality. The black anti-imperialism championed by SNCC compared the plight of
blacks in the U.S. with the plight of the Vietnamese, and others throughout the world who
were waging struggles against colonialism and imperialism. At SNCC’s invitation,
student anti-war activists came to see themselves as fighting for their own liberation from
the American empire. The same imperial machinery of war inflicting havoc abroad was

Draft Refusal,” H.K. Yuen Collection flier #329-670428-000; “We Won’t Go,” H.K. Yuen Collection flier
#329-670428-000; “Conference on Draft Refusal” H.K. Yuen Collection flier #329-670514-001; “Protest
Congressional Draft Hearings” H.K. Yuen Collection flier #329-670508; “Picket Oakland Induction
Center” H.K. Yuen Collection flier #329-670515-000.
60 Carl Davidson, “Anti-Draft Resolution: Adopted by the National Council, Students for a Democratic
forcing America’s young to kill and die for a cause many did not believe in. Young activists came to see the draft as an imposition of empire on themselves much like the war was an imposition of empire on the Vietnamese.  

SDS leader Greg Calvert encapsulated this emerging view in the idea of “revolutionary consciousness” at a widely influential speech at Princeton that February. Arguing that students themselves were revolutionary subjects, Calvert sought to distinguish radicals from liberals, and advanced “revolutionary consciousness” as the basis for a distinct and superior morality:

Radical or revolutionary consciousness … is the perception of oneself as unfree, as oppressed – and finally it is the discovery of oneself as one of the oppressed who must unite to transform the objective conditions of their existence in order to resolve the contradiction between potentiality and actuality. Revolutionary consciousness leads to the struggle for one’s own freedom in unity with others who share the burden of oppression.

The speech marked a watershed in the New Left’s self-conception. Coming to see itself as part of the global struggle of the Vietnamese against American imperialism and the black struggle against racist oppression, the New Left rejected the status quo as fundamentally immoral and embraced the morality of revolutionary challenge. From this vantage, the Vietnam War was illegitimate, and draft resistance was an act of revolutionary heroism.

As this radicalized draft resistance came to life, it had an explosive impact on an anti-war movement that had been weak and disoriented. In the first few months of 1967,

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62 SDS argued that students did not have to be drafted to be subjected to imperial imposition. Having called for nationwide draft resistance, in January of 1967 SDS published extensive quotes from a Selective Service System memorandum on the concept of “channeling manpower.” The idea was that the draft functioned not only to obtain soldiers for the military, but to manage human resources on a society wide basis. In short, SDS argued, whether or not they were actually drafted, students were being subjected to the interests of empire by the Selective Service System. Freedom required resistance. Even those exempted from the draft because of student deferments could resist by refusing their deferment, signing “We Won’t Go” statements, joining anti-draft unions, sitting in at induction centers, or burning their draft cards. SSS memo quoted in NLN, January 20, 1967, re-quoted in Ferber and Lynd, Resistance, p. 133.


64 Sale p. 319.
a flurry of “We Won’t Go” statements, anti-draft unions, and pickets at induction centers were instigated throughout the country, many by SDS, but some arising independently.\textsuperscript{65}

A quarter million people turned out April 15, 1967 for the Spring Mobilizations Against the War in New York and San Francisco, at that date, the largest anti-war protest in American history. Speakers included Martin Luther King, Jr., James Bevel, Floyd McKissick of CORE, Harry Belafonte, the entertainer and Civil Rights advocate, and Stokely Carmichael. As Carmichael spoke, members of the crowd shouted out “Black Power!” He called the war “brutal and racist,” and demanded an end to the draft. Many marchers took up the chant started by SNCC: “Hell No, We Won’t Go!” Some protestors displayed flags of the National Liberation Front of Vietnam, asserting that they were not just appealing for America to have a better policy, but allying themselves with the Vietnamese revolution.\textsuperscript{66} In San Francisco a contingent of Black Nationalists led the march carrying a streamer that read “The Vietnam N.L.F. Never Called Us Niggers.”

Keynote speaker Coretta Scott King, Martin Luther King’s wife, told the audience that “freedom and justice in America are bound together with freedom and justice in Vietnam.” Future Panther Minister of Information Eldridge Cleaver, at that time of the Organization of African Unity, added “We are against this racist, vicious power structure.”\textsuperscript{67}

Because of the high stakes involved – potentially five years in prison – and the lack of wider support, very few had seriously considered public burning of draft cards as

\textsuperscript{65} Ferber and Lynd, \textit{Resistance}, p. 62.
a viable tactic. But in unprecedented defiance of U.S. legitimacy, accompanying the New York rally that day, over 150 people burnt their draft cards in Central Park.\textsuperscript{68}

Two weeks later, Muhammed Ali, the heavyweight boxing champion of the world, refused induction, spreading draft resistance. Due in no small part to the influence of Malcolm X, early black resistance to the draft was widespread, not limited to SNCC. Muhammad Ali, the heavyweight boxing champion, was a member of the Nation of Islam, recruited by Malcolm X in 1963. As heavyweight champion of the world, he soon became a symbol of Black Power. Every time he stepped into the ring, much more than the title was at stake.\textsuperscript{69} In early 1966, as the demand for troops in Vietnam increased, the Selective Service System expanded its pool for draft eligibility – and Ali was re-classified as I-A – ready and eligible.\textsuperscript{70} In February of 1966 – months before SDS’s first tentative support of SNCC’s anti-draft stance – Ali told the press: “I’m a member of the Black Muslims and we don’t go to wars unless they are declared by Allah himself. I don’t have no personal quarrel with those Vietcong.”\textsuperscript{71}

Ali’s statement posed a clear challenge to the legitimacy of the war effort, and many politicians were quick to condemn him. Pennsylvania congressman Frank Clark called Ali “a complete and total disgrace to the land.”\textsuperscript{72} When Ali, then still going by his original name, Cassius Clay, refused to apologize for his remarks, Governor Kerner of Illinois, Mayor Daley of Chicago, and other political figures sought to cancel his

\textsuperscript{69} See David Remnick, King of the World, (Vintage: 1998).
scheduled championship fight in Chicago. Closed-circuit telecasts of his fights were banned in Boston, Miami Beach, and elsewhere. The government confiscated his passport.

On April 28, 1967, the day Ali was to be inducted into the Army, and two weeks after the card burning in Central Park, young black protestors including H. Rap Brown flocked to the induction center in Houston. When Ali’s name was called, he refused to step forward. “Why should they ask me and other so-called Negroes to put on a uniform and go 10,000 miles from home,” Ali explained to the press, “and drop bombs on brown people in Viet Nam while so-called Negro people in Louisville are treated like dogs and denied simple human rights?” Ali was sentenced to a maximum penalty of 5 years in jail and a $10,000 fine for refusing induction.

Ali’s actions, on the heels of the Central Park card burning, suggested that widespread draft resistance was possible. Many in government and the press worried that if the resistance grew large enough the war effort might be compromised. The influential New York Times columnist Tom Wicker explained:

The issue raised by the remarkable Ali remains, because he has made it quite clear that whether or not the courts finally rule in his favor, whether or not the Government, in both its administrative and judicial processes, has given his claims due and fair hearing – whether or not, in short, his position is legally justified, he will simply refuse to serve in the armed forces…. What would happen if all young men of draft age took the same position? … If the Johnson Administration had to prosecute 100,000 Americans in order to maintain its authority, its real power to pursue the Vietnamese war or any other policy would be crippled if not destroyed. It would then be faced not with dissent, but with civil disobedience on a scale amounting to revolt.

75 Remnick, 288.
76 Graham, 73 and 78.
77 DeBenedetti p.186.
Preparations were underway for massive anti-war protests to be held in Washington D.C. and in Oakland in October 1967. Smaller actions were organized to take place simultaneously in Los Angeles, Portland, Denver, Kansas City, St. Louis, Chicago, Des Moines, Cedar Rapids, St. Paul, Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Ann Arbor, Yellow Springs, Champaign-Urbana, Bloomington, Puerto Rico, and London.\(^7^9\) Following the ghetto rebellions in July, the National Mobilization committee announced at a press conference that they supported the urban uprisings, and said the actions planned for October would “obstruct the war machine.” They said there was “only one struggle – for self-determination – and we support it in Vietnam and in black America.”\(^8^0\)

A new spirit had swept the anti-war movement. That October, draft card burnings increased almost tenfold.\(^8^1\) Paul Lauter and Florence Howe described the spontaneous outbreak of a draft card burning at the Pentagon:

Suddenly as the daylight died two or three tiny flames burst from different places in the crowd. There was only red in the west, and the earth was black, when dozens of draft cards began to burn, held aloft, amid increasing cheers and applause. One by one, the lights flickered, burned, then went out. The burnings traveled to the other side of the Mall, beyond the soldiers that split our large group from a small one on the right, and eventually down to the grassy plains below. The sight silenced even the cheering.\(^8^2\)

Thousands of draft resisters stormed the Pentagon. MPs and US Marshals beat the demonstrators, using tear gas, and re-occupying the grounds yard by yard. 647 were arrested and 47 hospitalized.\(^8^3\) A line had been crossed. No longer were the students and anti-war activists simply Americans expressing their view within established channels. Now, inspired by Black Power and emboldened by the ghetto rebellions, many antiwar

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\(^7^9\) “The Resistance Now” H.K. Yuen Collection flier #329-671016-005 oversize.
\(^8^0\) Debenedetti, 187-188.
\(^8^1\) Resistance, 103.
\(^8^2\) Paul Lauter and Florence Howe quoted in Resistance, 136.
\(^8^3\) Wells, 194-197. Debenedetti 196-198.
activists declared themselves revolutionaries, seeking self-determination through resistance.

New Left: Free Huey!

While Black Power was a key influence on the emerging draft resistance movement, the Black Panther Party remained relatively insignificant politically until April 1968. Few on the New Left outside the Bay Area had done anything to support the Panthers. By far the largest and most influential New Left organization – Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), with 35,000 members at 300 colleges and universities – had no relationship to or position on the Panthers.84 New Left Notes, the largest New Left newsletter published by SDS, had not carried a single story on the Black Panther Party.85

This changed with the assassinations of King and Hutton. For many young activists opposed to the Vietnam War, King had embodied the hope that America had a moral conscience, and that justice would prevail through peaceful means. His assassination dashed their hopes. Following the slayings of King and Hutton, hundreds of thousands of students joined SDS-led actions on campuses from coast to coast, often in coalition with black student organizations. In Boston, 20,000 students marched on City Hall demanding that the police and National Guard “be kept out of the ghetto.” At Michigan State University in East Lansing, students took over the administration building and held a sit-in, demanding black history courses, equal hiring practices, and sanctions

84 On SDS membership estimates for April 1968 see SDS telegram April 12, 1968 reproduced in New Left Notes, April 15, 1968 p. 7; See also Sale SDS. For previous lack of relations between SDS and the Panthers, see Bernardine Dohrn, interorganizational secretary of SDS, “White Mother Country Radicals,” New Left Notes, July 29, 1968, p.1.
85 We went through all the issues of the New Left Notes from its founding in January of 1966 through April of 1968 (108 issues) and didn’t find any mention of the Black Panther Party. There was no discussion of the May 1967 event in Sacramento, no discussion of Huey’s confrontation with Frey or his arrest, no discussion of the Free Huey campaign or the birthday mobilizations in February or the merger with SNCC. There is very frequent coverage of SNCC, Black Power, and questions about race and racism, and the role of whites in mobilization throughout this period. But it is only starting in April 1968 that the BPP is significantly covered. And it is then covered a lot.
against companies that discriminated against blacks. The response to King’s death fueled SDS’s planned “Ten Days of Resistance” protesting the war and culminating with at least fifty colleges and almost a million students participating in a nationwide “student strike” on April 26.\textsuperscript{86}

After the April killings, the New Left increasingly looked to the Black Panthers for leadership. Already embracing anti-imperialism by the time of King’s assassination, SDS now made support for the Black Panther Party one of its key causes. On April 12, 1968, SDS affirmed their support for the Black Panther Party in a telegram:

Students for a Democratic Society … demands the immediate release of Eldridge Cleaver, Huey P. Newton, and all other political prisoners being detained by the state of California. The racist cops of Oakland, who have long oppressed and denied basic human rights to black people, are the real criminals loose on the streets of our country. They are the ones, along with the slumlords and politicians in the white power structure, who should be imprisoned, not Eldridge Cleaver, Huey Newton, or any other black man fighting for self-determination and freedom.”\textsuperscript{87}

On April 15, the cover of \textit{New Left Notes} featured a photo of Bobby Hutton and a long article on the Panthers under the headline “Oakland Police Attack Panthers.” The article detailed the police slaying of Hutton, and examined the Panther repression over the preceding months.\textsuperscript{88} The issue also ran a full reproduction of the Panther Ten-Point Program, and implored SDS members to combat repression of the Black Panthers. The “systematic political persecution of the Black Panther Party MUST BE RESISTED. Distribute information about the Panthers and raise money for their work and defense. Funds should be sent to our brothers.”\textsuperscript{89} In July, the SDS Convention passed a major resolution in support of the Black Panthers asserting that “HUEY MUST BE SET

\textsuperscript{86} “We Made the News Today, Oh Boy,” in \textit{New Left Notes}, April 15, 1968 p.3 cited in Barber, chp 1 p. 36. Sale, pp. 428-429.
\textsuperscript{87} SDS telegram April 12, 1968 reproduced in \textit{New Left Notes}, April 15, 1968 p. 7.
FREE!” They pledged to “give full support, in whatever manner is needed,” both to Free Huey and to support the Panthers generally.90

Monday July 15 marked the opening day of Huey Newton’s trial on charges of murdering a police officer. The Panthers argued that Newton was the one who had been attacked, and that the trial was yet another act of political repression. They brought their case to the court of public opinion, organizing a rally in front of the imposing granite Alameda County Courthouse in Oakland that morning.91

Numerous New Left organizations participated in the mobilization, including the Western Mobilization Against the War, the Brown Berets, the Peace and Freedom Party, and the Iranian Students Association. By 10 am, over 2,500 supporters had gathered, filling the courthouse plaza, surrounding the courthouse and spilling into the street. The Oakland Sheriff’s Department, wearing helmets covering their faces, and armed with billy clubs and guns, guarded every doorway to the courthouse. Reporters came from across the country, and as far away as London to cover the event.92

At the top of the courthouse steps, 250 members of the Black Panther Party lined up, the women on the top tier. The women wore simple dark colored knee length dresses with belts, their hair in naturals. The men wore the Panther uniform of black leather jackets, light turtleneck sweaters, and black berets cocked to the right in three files below.

An assigned section leader began the chant, and soon the Panthers were rocking, clapping, and singing in unison:

(Women)  No more brothers in ja-il,
(Men)    Off the pigs!
(Women)  The pigs are going to catch he-ll,
(Men)    Off the pigs!
(Women)  No more brothers in ja-il,
(Men)    Off the pigs!
(Women)  The pigs are going to catch he-ll,
(Men)    Off the pigs!

Members of the Asian American Political Alliance carried signs with Chinese lettering reading “Chairman MAO says: FREE HUEY” and “Yellow Peril supports Black Power.”93 There was a large flagpole in the middle of the Court plaza, and someone in the crowd shouted “Cut the rope! Take the fuckin’ flag down!” After brief debate amongst the Panther supporters, Bob Avakian cut the rope on the flag pole, sending the American Flag to the ground. Several demonstrators grabbed the flag and lit it on fire. A phalanx of police wearing riot helmets and thrusting night-sticks quickly beat a path through the crowd to the flagpole. The pitch of the chant intensified as uniformed Panthers pushed towards the police:

(Women)  No more pigs in our community,
(Men)    Off the pigs!

Bobby Seale told the crowd that if Huey “is going to be tried at all, he’s got to be tried by his peers – not the Negro maids working up on the hill but his peers, people on probation, people they’ve been running through their jails… Huey ain’t on trial, the black people are on trial here.” Seale argued that this was not the time or place to fight the police. But, he warned, “If anything happens to Huey P. Newton, the sky’s the limit.”

93 Howard Bingham, Black Panthers 1968, AMMO, pp. 148-149.
The Panthers then began a circular march around the courthouse, fists pumping a Black Power salute in time with the chant:

Black is beautiful,
Free Huey!
Set our leader free,
Free Huey!

SDS fully embraced the “Free Huey!” campaign, emphasizing the centrality of the Panthers to the New Left, and suggesting that mobilization to resist repression of the Panthers was necessary to its own political goals. In coverage of the Free Huey rally in Oakland, SDS declared:

The real question for the Panthers and the whole radical movement in this country remains: Can Huey be set free?94

**Cleaver at Berkeley**

By the fall of 1968, the Panthers became such a potent symbol of revolution that simply asking them to speak could become a highly disruptive act. That is exactly what happened when several undergraduate students at the University of California, Berkeley organized an experimental course on racism in America called Social Analysis 139X, “Dehumanization and Regeneration of the American Social Order.” At the time, there were few Black Studies courses available on campus, and the students sought to challenge dominant perspectives on race. They convinced several professors to facilitate the course, including sociologist Troy Duster and psychologist Edward Sampson, and invited Eldridge Cleaver to deliver ten guest lectures.95

The reaction of the political establishment political leaders was immediate and extreme. Within twenty-four hours of the public announcement of the class, California

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Governor Ronald Reagan demanded that the UC Board of Regents promptly un-invite Cleaver from lecturing and blasted the University administration, declaring that “In one single act, the Berkeley administrators would undo years of academic commitment and dedication to the highest values of the teaching profession.” Max Rafferty, the conservative state superintendent of public instruction and Jesse Unruh, Democratic leader of the State Assembly also jumped on board to condemn UC. The State Senate and Assembly both voted to censure the University.\(^96\)

While Cleaver could not be easily ignored, neither could he be easily repressed. Only a small percentage of Californians actively ascribed to the Black Panthers’ revolutionary anti-imperialist politics, but elements of their position had broad appeal. Most blacks wanted a serious treatment of black history and increased black student enrollment. It appeared unlikely that the university would provide either without a struggle. For those opposed to the war, in late 1968 it appeared neither the Democratic nor Republican Party was listening. For faculty across the state and the country, the issue of intellectual freedom loomed large: would politicians be allowed to silence controversial and provocative viewpoints and interfere in University curricula? For these reasons, suppressing Cleaver proved widely unacceptable, even to many who believed the Panthers’ revolutionary program was extreme. The op-ed pages in California

newspapers were filled with conflicting opinions on the “necessary” or “disturbing” character of Cleaver’s planned lectures.  

As he traveled from campus to campus in late September and early October, Cleaver stirred up the controversy, assailing “Mickey Mouse Ronald Reagan” and the others in front of packed meetings overflowing with cheering student activists.

Burnishing his hypermasculine image, a jocular Cleaver contended: “It is my belief that Ronald Reagan is a punk, a sissy, and a coward, and I challenge him to a duel. I challenge the punk to a duel to the death and he can choose his own weapon: it could be a baseball bat, a gun, a knife, or a marshmallow. I’ll beat him to death with a marshmallow.”

When the UC Board of Regents passed a resolution in late September to restrict Cleaver to one lecture, opposition exploded. Important segments of the black political establishment, feeling that black educational interests were being undermined, challenged the Regents. The California Negro Leadership Conference described the censorship of Cleaver as racist and warned that if Cleaver was not allowed to lecture, they would ask black legislators to deny support for UC, and seek to have federal funding for UC withheld under the Civil Rights Act. Dr. Carleton Goodlett, publisher of the black newspaper the Sun Reporter, said he would launch a campaign “in which the black middle class will disassociate themselves from all UC programs.”

More than 2,000 students turned out for an organizing meeting at UC Berkeley and voted unanimously to demand that Cleaver be allowed to give all ten lectures. The

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99 “Black Conference Threatens Campaign Against University,” in Daily Californian, October 3, 1968, p.3.
Student Senate voted overwhelmingly to demand that the Regents rescind their decision and to ask the faculty Academic Senate to reject it. The Student Senates at three other UC campuses, the National Student Association, and seven University student body presidents all announced their support for the lecture series. Student demonstrators at UC Santa Cruz heckled Reagan and disrupted a UC Regent meeting there, protesting the Cleaver policy and demanding creation of “a college dedicated to the black experience.” Students at Berkeley occupied the College of Letters and Science headquarters and the Chancellor’s office, and lit a protest bonfire on Sproul Plaza.100

Faculty members were also agitated. Responding to faculty outcry about political interference in the curriculum, the President of the University of California announced, “The faculty still has authority over courses. It has not been affected in any way.” The UC Berkeley Faculty Academic Senate, in turn, voted to repudiate the Regent’s censure by 668 to 114. Faculty Senates at both UCLA and UC San Diego voted similarly in support of UC Berkeley’s faculty. Cleaver would be allowed to hold all ten lectures, although credit would not be granted. One thousand students signed up for the 100-seat class. When the victorious Cleaver finally lectured, he was serious in tone omitting any obscenities, not once alluding to the controversy, and confined his comments to a scholarly analysis of his topic, “The Roots of Racism.”101


On April 4, 1968, the most beloved and influential black leader of the era, Martin Luther King, Jr., was assassinated. For many black people, the tenuous hope that they might nonviolently persuade America to redress their plight died with King. Many remained impoverished, largely excluded from government, denied meaningful education, and brutalized by the police hired to contain their misery. The mainstream Civil Rights leadership offered no viable movement strategy. Many young blacks now sought other routes to justice.

The Black Panther Party emerged as the leading exemplar of how to stand up to American power and oppression from within. Huey’s confrontations with the police and the storming of the Assembly in Sacramento demonstrated that American power – most immediately the power of the police in the ghettos – could be actively resisted.

On April 8, 1968, seventeen year old Black Panther ‘Lil Bobby Hutton was shot and killed in a confrontation with the Oakland police. Even as President Johnson and the political establishment appropriated King as a martyr for America, Hutton confronted the police and became a martyr for revolution.

Following the deaths of King and Hutton, the Oakland-based Black Panther Party began to eclipse SNCC and the other civil rights organizations. The multiracial New Left embraced defense of the Black Panthers providing crucial political, legal, and financial support. When Huey went to trial, brilliant lawyers defended him in court – many of them non-black. Tens of thousands of allies mobilized for Huey in the streets and for Cleaver at Berkeley.

The true litmus of the Panthers’ politics would be the response of young blacks throughout the country …
Chapter 6: Nationwide

The turning point in Ericka Huggins’s life came a week after King’s death, at the
funeral of ‘Lil’ Bobby Hutton in Oakland on April 12, 1968. This was the moment when
she committed her life to the revolution and the Black Panther Party. Huggins later
recalled:

[W]hat awakened me, what changed my life and my mind… was Bobby Hutton’s face at his funeral…
my entire life and mind was changed from that point on … I had read about the Party and I had read
about all the things in history that had been done to black people – lynching, murder, tortures, etc. –
but I was convinced when I had direct confrontation with the brutality, the cruelty, and the doggishness
of the police. His face had been entirely shot out. The entire portion of his face was gone and had been
puttied into place and made up. He was no longer the seventeen year old person he had been, not
physically or anything else. He wasn’t. And the police were in the balconies of that church. They were
everywhere. I had never seen anything like that in my life. I mean I had never been directly involved.¹

Born in 1948 to a working class family in Washington D.C., Huggins had one
younger sister and a younger brother. Among the children, she was the pensive, reclusive,
existential one. After high school she went to the historically black Cheyney State
College in Pennsylvania with dreams of becoming a teacher and working with disabled
children. But Cheyney offered no challenges, educational, political or otherwise. Huggins
found both the curriculum and the student life lacking, and in 1966 she transferred to
Lincoln University, another historically black institution in Pennsylvania. At Lincoln, her
world began to open up. Here she was turned on to the ideas of Malcolm X and joined the
black student organization. There she met John Huggins in early 1967. John had been
raised in a well-heeled black family in New Haven, CT. He had served in the Navy and
was a Vietnam veteran. John was sensitive and had shaggy hair. The two quickly fell in
love and soon married.

¹ Ericka Huggins quoted in Michele Russell, “Conversation with Ericka Huggins. Oakland, California,
4/20/77,” p. 10, Box 1, HPN Papers cited in Spencer, p. 105.
Ericka and John both immersed themselves in black student activities, but something was missing. More and more, they felt removed from the real problems faced by most black people. As the black urban rebellions spread, they felt like “armchair revolutionaries” – committed to the idea of Black Liberation Struggle, yet distant from it. Consequently, they dropped out of school and in November 1967 moved to Los Angeles, a hotbed of black politics, looking to get involved. In April 1968, at the funeral of ‘Lil’ Bobby Hutton, Ericka and John committed their lives to the revolution.

Los Angeles

One of the first people Ericka Huggins recruited to join the Black Panther Party was an articulate and striking young woman named Elaine Brown. Raised poor in a Philadelphia row house in a Jewish neighborhood, Brown was the only child in a household of adults – her single mother, her aunt, her grandmother and grandfather. After high school she enrolled in Temple University, but soon dropped out, joined the working world and moved to Los Angeles. Through intelligence, hard work, wit, and a series of affluent white lovers, Brown made her way into a world of glamour and wealth, but she could never escape racism. She reached a personal turning point in 1967 when, as the guest of an owner at a luxurious hotel in Las Vegas, she was denied service at a nearby beauty shop because of her race. The hotel owner disciplined the beauty shop manager, but the incident showed that she could not escape her Blackness. She soon started making friends with Los Angeles Black Nationalists.

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2 Ericka and John Huggins bios drawn from Donald Freed, Agony in New Haven, 62-64; Elaine Brown, Taste of Power, p. 131 and 138.
3 Elaine Brown, Taste of Power, chapters 2-5. Of Elaine Brown’s white lovers, Jay Kennedy stands out as especially influential on her life and her political development, see especially Taste of Power pp. 76-104. Kennedy was a former socialist known for working with the CIA to expose Martin Luther King’s ties to the Communist Party. According to CIA documents, “Kennedy’s position is one of complete sympathy with the Negro and the Civil Rights Movement, but holds that only through legal means and peaceful means
At the time, the Black Power ferment in Los Angeles centered on the Black Congress. After the Watts rebellion in 1965, Black Power organizations had proliferated and developed the Black Congress as a united front. One member organization was the Community Alert Patrol (CAP) led by Ron “Brother Crook” Wilkins. After Watts, Brother Crook became widely known for pioneering patrols of police, a tactic taken up and modified by Huey Newton. Members of CAP would follow the police with cameras and tape recorders to ensure that they did not commit acts of brutality against members of the black community.

Harry Truly’s Black Student Alliance was another. Truly taught sociology at California State University during the day and led the Alliance by night. He had a vision of bringing all Black Student organizations across the country into the Alliance and creating a revolutionary force. Truly was well read, and deeply committed. His compelling vision for Black Power was just one of many in the Black Congress of Los Angeles at the time. The Congress also included representatives from the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), the Freedom Draft Movement, SLANT (Self Leadership for All Nationalities Today), the Afro-American Association, the Afro American Cultural Association, Black Resistance Against Wars for Oppression, Black Unitarians for Radical Reform, Black Youth Conference, Citizens for Creative Welfare, Immanuel Church, L.A. County Welfare Rights, NAACP, Operation Bootstrap, Parent Action Council, Underground Musicians Association, and the Watts Happening Coffee House.4

should the Negro aims be accomplished.” CIA document quoted in David Garrow, The FBI and Martin Luther King, Jr: From “Solo” to Memphis Norton, 1981, p. 142, and see pp. 139-144.

4 Ray Rogers, “Alert Patrol Chairman Quits Under Pressure” in Los Angeles Times, August 12, 1967, p. 3; For CAP description, see also article in the Movement cited in chapter 2; “Partial List of Black Congress,” in Harambee November 17, 1967 p. 8 cited in Scot Brown dissertation, p. 156; Elaine Brown, Chapter 6 gives rich personal description of Harry Truly and her experiences in the Black Congress; See also Angela Davis Autobiography; and Scott Brown dissertation.
The most influential organization in the Black Congress in late 1967 and early 1968 was Ron Karenga’s US, pronounced “us,” as in not “them.” Karenga’s group sought to transform society through a cultural, rather than political, revolution. According to historian Scot Brown, “as a cultural nationalist vanguard, the US Organization saw itself as a mirror of African Americans’ progressive future.” Through the creation of an alternative and progressive culture, US held that black people would transform their own world and the larger society. Karenga and US were not adverse to political action, but they saw culture as the principal vehicle for change. For them, heightened cultural awareness was the key to social transformation. Members dressed in dashikis and ceremonial African garb. Male members shaved their heads. Karenga spoke several languages, including Swahili, which he taught widely. Within US, Karenga was the central authority and was called Maulana, or “master teacher” by his followers. US is best known today for starting the holiday “Kwanza.”

Another Black Congress member was the Black Panther Political Party led by John Floyd, a school teacher. The L.A. Black Panther Political Party started separately from the Oakland Black Panther Party, growing out of Stokely Carmichael’s efforts to proliferate the Black Panther Party originated in Lowndes County, Alabama. The fifth issue of Harambee, the Los Angeles Black Congress newsletter published November 3, 1966, and edited by Ron Karenga, popularized the Black Panther idea and symbol in Los Angeles – reproducing a Lowndes County flier, a speech by chair John Hulett, and a front page spread dedicated to the Lowndes County Black Panther Party. Soon thereafter, John Floyd started the L.A. Black Panther Political Party. When the Oakland Black Panther

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Party for Self-Defense forged an alliance with the Peace and Freedom Party in June of 1967, John Floyd supported the effort, filing documents to verify the Black Panther Party’s existence as a statewide organization, and explaining to the press: “for all intents and purposes, we are a statewide party.” But in practice, the two organizations hardly communicated. In late 1967 or early 1968, Angela Davis – at that time working on her PhD in Philosophy with Herbert Marcuse at the University of California, San Diego joined Floyd’s organization.⁶

Around this time, Elaine Brown was becoming active in the Black Congress. She began working with John Floyd to put out Harambee – Swahili for “Let’s Pull Together” – the newsletter for the Black Congress of L.A. She became particularly close with Sandra Scott of the Black Student Alliance and the leader of the Alliance, Harry Truly.⁷

Beneath the surface of Black Power unity at the Los Angeles Black Congress lay deep conflict. Black Power had posed a question, but there was no single answer. Black Power meant different things to different people and organizations in the Black Congress. Everyone in the Black Congress sought dignity and empowerment. Most rejected the integrationism and nonviolence of the Civil Rights Movement. Many organizations in the Congress viewed the black community as a colony and agreed on the need for self-determination. Black people, they agreed, needed to develop their own sources of political, economic, and cultural strength. How this would be achieved and how best to appeal to the people proved to be points of contention.

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In every insurgent movement conflicting visions compete. As movement groups challenge the legitimacy of the state and the established social order, each asserts its own vision as an alternative. The stakes appear high: especially leadership of the revolution and the potential to set the direction for the future. Certainly, the conflict in Los Angeles was intense. Organizations constantly jockeyed for control within the Black Congress, and at times, these conflicts became violent.\(^8\) Recalling a gun battle that broke out between an organization called The United Front and members of Ron Karenga’s US at the November 1967 Black Youth Conference, Angela Davis explained that “Beneath the façade of unity, under the wonderful colors of the bubas, lay strong ideological differences and explosive political conflicts, and perhaps even agents provocateurs.”\(^9\) The incident was not unique. In another incident fifteen members of US were arrested, allegedly for beating three men who interrupted a “soul session.”\(^10\)

In early 1968, the Oakland-based Black Panther Party began organizing a chapter in Los Angeles – the first outside the Oakland Bay Area – and the dynamics in the Black Congress quickly changed. The politics developed by Huey Newton, Bobby Seale, and Eldridge Cleaver resonated with young blacks in Los Angeles, providing new conduits for action. Like Ron Karenga and US, the Black Panthers had a compelling theory about the source of black peoples’ suffering, a vision for advancing black dignity and power, and had created a disciplined organization to advance that vision in tangible ways. US, however, never sought to become a mass organization, emphasizing educational and cultural activities accessible to only a few. As historian Scot Brown has observed, “US

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\(^8\) This idea is supported by Elaine Brown’s account of fights over what posters would be hung on the walls (chapter 6) and Scot Brown also suggests that shared physical space contributed to the tension, dissertation, p. 172.


leaders saw no need for a large membership. Their goal was to ideologically influence other organizations with its united-front approach, and thus direct the course of the coming 'cultural revolution.'”

Unlike US, the Black Panther Party recognized the explosive potential of Watts as a political force and had developed a program and activities to organize black folks on the street. Like Brother Crook’s community alert patrols, the Black Panther Party asserted black dignity and self-determination by holding the police accountable. But unlike Brother Crook, the Black Panthers created a proven track record of actually winning such confrontations, legally backing down police with loaded weapons, and storming the state capitol in Sacramento. When the law was changed to prevent the Panthers from engaging in these confrontations, Huey Newton had allegedly killed a policeman in self-defense. Many in the Black Congress considered Newton’s resistance heroic, and embraced the campaign to Free Huey.

In January of 1968, Eldridge Cleaver recruited Bunchy Carter to organize a chapter of the Black Panther Party in Los Angeles. Elaine Brown recalled the first time she met him:

“My name is Bunchy,” he said coolly. “Bunchy,” he reiterated “like a bunch of greens,” answering a question someone a long time ago had found the courage to ask. His face was black alabaster; his eyes, black diamonds, set off by carved eyebrows and distinct black eyelashes. His skin was as smooth as melted chocolate, unflawed, with a reddish gloss. He was the vision of Revelations, a head of soft black wool refined to an African crown. He stroked his rich mustache as he spoke, head back, feet apart, an olive-green leather coat tossed over his strong shoulders. Everybody had heard of Bunchy. 12

Cleaver and Bunchy had originally become friends at Soledad State Prison where they had joined the Nation of Islam and become politicized by Malcolm X. Before Soledad, Bunchy had a brief career as a middleweight boxer, and then joined the 5,000 member

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12 Elaine Brown, Taste of Power, p. 118.
Slauson gang and founded its most feared branch, the Slauson Renegades. Widely known as the “Mayor of the Ghetto,” many considered him the most dangerous man in Los Angeles. Bunchy was not only tough, he was also charismatic. His authority came from his intelligence and creativity as well as his street credentials. He wrote poetry, and having studied revolutionary theory during his years in prison, could fiercely debate the theories of Fanon, Che, Lenin, and Mao. 

Bunchy’s strong respect on the streets separated him from the regular participants in the Black Congress. Because of Huey Newton and the Panthers’ courageous stance against the police, Bunchy could relate to the Oakland-based Black Panther Party, as could his street protégés. When Bunchy formed a branch of the Oakland-based Black Panther Party chapter in Los Angeles, he brought many former members of the Slauson gang into the Party with him.

In January 1968, Bunchy came to a poetry reading organized by the Black Congress to announce the launching of the Los Angeles chapter of the Black Panther Party, the first outside the Oakland Bay Area. He brought twenty street-hardened soldiers dressed in black leather jackets and gloves and armed pistols and sawed-off shotguns. Uninvited, Bunchy and his “wolves” stormed the hall in mid-reading and surrounded the Congress. Conversation stopped, and someone called for Bunchy to “blow,” to recite a poem. After reciting the fierce “Niggertown,” and tender “Black Mother,” poems that he himself had written, Bunchy thanked the Congress for letting him “blow.” Next he gestured to one of the wolves, who unfurled a poster of Huey Newton on his wicker

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14 See Elaine Brown, *Taste of Power*, p. 120 for one account of Carter’s attraction to the Party.
throne. Bunchy declared that Huey Newton was the leader of the Black Liberation
struggle and announced that he was forming the Southern California chapter of the Black
Panther Party. Bunchy explained:

[Huey] set the example and showed us that we, too, must deal with the pig if we are to call ourselves
men. We can no longer allow the pig’s armed forces to come into our communities and kill our young
men and disrespect our Sisters and rob us of our lives. The pig can no longer attack and suppress our
people, or send his occupying army to maraud and maim our communities, without suffering grave
consequences … From this point forward, Brothers and Sisters, if the pig moves on this community,
the Black Panther Party will deal with him.

Bunchy then commanded that no one else, including John Floyd, was to use the Black
Panther name or logo without authorization from the Central Committee of the Party in
Oakland.16 At the suggestion of SNCC’s James Forman, Floyd changed the name of his
group to the West Coast chapter of SNCC, and helped to mobilize the Free Huey rally in
February.17

A wide array of organizations in the Black Congress, including Karenga’s US,
supported the Black Panther argument that Huey was a political prisoner. They demanded
he be set free, and many pitched in to organize the Free Huey rally to be held in Los
Angeles on February 18, 1968 (the day after the Free Huey rally at the Oakland
Coliseum).18 Amid the show of unity, though, tensions and disputes emerged in the
jockeying for authority and competing visions. In a meeting just before the rally on
February 18, an angry dispute erupted among US, the Black Panther Party, and two
factions of SNCC over whether police should be allowed to provide security at the rally.
The Panthers and Carmichael asserted that the police should be removed, but Karenga –
still the most influential voice in the Black Congress – prevailed, asserting that

16 Alprentice “Bunchy” Carter quoted, and event described in Elaine Brown, Taste of Power, p. 125. Given
how many years later the account was published, and no source is cited for the quote other than Brown’s
memory, this may be more of a paraphrase of Carter than a direct quote.
17 Angela Davis Autobiography, p. 162-167.
confrontation with the police should be avoided at that point. The February 18 rally drew at least five thousand people. Speakers included Bobby Seale, Stokely Carmichael, H. Rap Brown, James Forman, Ron Karenga, and radical Chicano activist Reis Tijerina.

In late February the Party left the Black Congress building, and opened its own office at 4115 South Central.

When Martin Luther King, Jr. was killed in April, the Black Panther Party quickly became the dominant presence in the Los Angeles Black Power scene. Hundreds of young Black Angelinos flocked to join the Panthers. People such as Elaine Brown, and Ericka and John Huggins, who had been trying to find a way to advance Black Power, found what they were looking for in the Party of Bunchy Carter and Huey Newton. Many of the smaller organizations, such as Harry Truly’s Black Student Alliance, dissipated. By early 1969, the Black Congress would be defunct.

The Black Panther Party offered black people more than an alternative, it promised dignity. By standing up to the police, Huey Newton showed that black people could break patterns of racial submissiveness and deference. Eldridge Cleaver claimed that Newton was the true heir to Malcolm X: “Malcolm prophesied the coming of the gun to the black liberation struggle. Huey P. Newton picked up the gun and pulled the trigger.” Newton had created a black anti-imperialist politics of armed self-defense that, unlike other versions of Black Power, held strong appeal for alienated and marginalized blacks. The Panthers recognized that many black people already lived in a state of war. The violence of the ghetto rebellions reflected the raw desperation of everyday life. The

21 Donald Freed, Agony in New Haven, 62-64.
23 Eldridge Cleaver, Post Prison Writings, 38.
Panthers believed these forces could be organized, and strove to channel the desperation and violence of everyday black life into powerful political resistance.

Newton’s example of armed self-defense against the police inspired many young activists in L.A., and they sought to emulate it. In the second week of August, 1968, more than 75,000 people and 70 organizations participated in the Watts Festival in South-Central Los Angeles commemorating the 3rd anniversary of the Watts rebellion.24 Tensions between police and the community were running high, and on Monday, August 5, a gunfight broke out during the festival at Will Rogers Park in Watts, and six people were wounded.25 Later that day, police pulled over four Black Panthers driving a black 1955 Ford sedan at a service station at the corner of Adams and Crenshaw. Anthony Bartholomew later reported that “the police knew we were Panthers and were following us.” The Panthers were armed and refused to submit to police. A gun battle erupted. Police killed Stephen Kenna Bartholomew, twenty-one years old, with multiple gunshots to the head and lower body; Robert Lawrence, twenty-two years old, with multiple gunshots to the head and left shoulder; and Thomas Melvin Lewis, just eighteen years old, with shots to the abdomen and left leg. In the battle the Panthers wounded two police officers; one Panther, Anthony Bartholomew, escaped.26

The funeral of Bobby Hutton transformed the life of Aaron Dixon, a student from Seattle, much as it did Ericka Huggins’s life. A member of SNCC, Dixon and his brother Elmer were in San Francisco for the West Coast Black Student Union conference, and they crossed the Bay Bridge to attend Bobby Hutton’s funeral on April 12, 1968. Aaron later recalled the overwhelming cries of Hutton’s mother. Looking into the casket “was almost like looking into a vision of the movement, and it was not what we had expected. It was not the glory and the victory we had romanticized about.” After the funeral Dixon met Warren Wells, Kathleen Cleaver, and Bobby Seale. Seale’s speech was mesmerizing. Decades later Dixon remembered sharing a drink with Seale, and could still visualize Seale’s dramatic portrayal of a black man chained up and struggling to be free.27

When the Dixon brothers returned to Seattle, they rented an office and opened the first chapter of the Black Panther Party outside of California. Within two months, more than 300 people joined the chapter, women as well as men. Some, such as Kathy Jones, were high school students; others were in their twenties. A few, such as Ron Carson who ran a local Poverty Program and carried a pistol, were over 30. Most were black, but some were Asian, such as Guy Kurose, and had grown up in the neighborhood. A few came from college, including Kathy Halley, who later changed her name to Nafasi, and became one of Aaron’s closest confidants. Others, such as Bobby White, Bobby Harding, and Mike Tagowa were Vietnam veterans. White was a dynamic poet and writer who became the chapter’s lieutenant of information. Some Seattle Panthers such as Chester Northington, John Eichelburger, and Bruce Hayes, came with experience from other Black Nationalist organizations. Others, such as Warren Myers and Steve Phillips, had

been involved in street life, and saw the Party as a way of getting back at the police while redeeming themselves in the community. Lewis Jackson was a hardened fighter from New Orleans with a thick Creole accent, who sported a tattoo of a football between his eyebrows. He carried a .45 when he joined the Party, and soon became Aaron’s bodyguard. Joyce Redman had a reputation as the fiercest sister in the neighborhood. Maud Allen was a stickler for rules.

“Since the death of Martin Luther King,” Aaron Dixon later recalled, “my life and the life of many other black youth throughout America had taken on an overwhelming sense of urgency. Suddenly it seemed that the movement had accelerated. We were now almost totally consumed with the fight for justice and the right to determine our own destiny. For me school had now taken a back seat to the emerging struggle.”

The Seattle Black Panther office became a community headquarters, and the phone was constantly ringing with people asking for help. The Panthers frequently responded to problems concerning landlords, spousal abuse, or the police. In one incident, a landlord had removed the front door when a family was late on the rent. The Panthers went to the landlord’s house, took the door, and hung it back on the hinges. In another case, parents reported frequent beatings of black children at the predominantly white Rainier Beach High School. Three cars of armed Panthers drove to the school, patrolled the hallways, and told the principal that if he did not provide security for the black students, they would. The principal quickly complied.

Like their comrades in California, the Seattle Panthers came into increasing conflict with police. In May, 1968, Buddy Yates was arrested for interference with an

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arrest. In June, Aaron Dixon was arrested for the same, and Gary Owens was charged with calling a cop “pig.” In July, Seattle Police accosted and beat Panthers Bobby Harding, Bobby White and Joe Atkins.³⁰

At seventeen years old, Seattle Black Panther Welton Armstead was tall yet slight of frame. A new father, he walked in exuberant strides, his energy infectious. He was highly intelligent, perceptive and reasonable, and many older men looked to him for answers. He quickly climbed the Party ranks, and earned authority in the Seattle chapter.

On a dreary Tuesday afternoon in Seattle, October 15, 1968, Armstead decided to tint the windows on his car. The car was parked in front of his house, and Armstead worked in the street. At about 4:20 pm a police car pulled up. Officer Erling J. Buttedahl got out and asked what Armstead was doing, and accused him of stealing the car. Armstead denied the charges. Armstead’s mother came out of the house, and later claimed that the police were harassing her son. Armstead decided that he would defend himself and his family from harassment. He got his rifle and asked the police to leave him alone. Officer Buttedahl shot Armstead dead, and arrested his mother and sister for interfering with an arrest.³¹

New York

In the weeks following King’s assassination, the Black Panther Party also opened a chapter in New York City’s Harlem. The black nationalist ferment of late 1960s New York had deep roots in Harlem going at least as far back as Marcus Garvey’s Universal Negro Improvement Association in the late 1910s and 1920s. Malcolm X achieved his

³⁰ Black Panther, special issue cataloguing conflicts with the police, February 21, 1970.
greatest impact and notoriety in Harlem in the 1950s and 1960s. SNCC had a New York City office and had even flirted with the idea of creating a New York-based Black Panther Party in early 1966. The effort collapsed long before SNCC’s partial merger with the Panthers in February of 1968. When King was killed in April, SNCC helped jumpstart the New York Panther chapter, this time under Oakland’s leadership. With the Free Huey Campaign picking up momentum as the case headed towards trial, tales of the Panthers storming the legislature in Sacramento, news of Cleaver’s presidential bid, and the martyrdom of ‘Lil’ Bobby Hutton, the Oakland-based Black Panther Party exemplified the direct enactment of Black Power that so many Black New Yorkers craved.

In April, just weeks after King’s death, Joudon Ford took the reigns as the new Captain for the New York Black Panther Party, setting up a temporary office in the SNCC headquarters in downtown Manhattan. In addition to his civil rights experience with SNCC, eighteen year-old Ford had also served in the Civil Air Patrol before joining the Panthers. He was looking for a practical way to build Black Power and was drawn to the Panthers because of their track record of militancy. “The Panther Party,” Joudon later recalled, “seemed to be the most serious black organization, but there was also the military aspect.”

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Joudon Ford was an organization man and diligently set about building the first East Coast chapter of the Party. Assisted by David Brothers – the newly assigned 40 year-old Chairman of the New York chapter – Ford organized and taught political education classes and self-defense training. He led his members into open verbal confrontations with the police. He convinced the Brooklyn campus of Long Island University to let the Panthers use an auditorium for monthly citywide meetings, and diligently hashed out internal conflicts to create order in the New York chapter. It was not easy, especially with the challenges caused by the chapter’s rapid growth. At one point Joudon called David Hilliard, Panther chief of staff in Oakland, to ask how to keep shady persons out of the party. “When I find out,” Hilliard told Ford, “I’ll let you know.”

On May 20, the Black Panther Party held a benefit performance in the East Village to help raise $200,000 bail for Eldridge Cleaver and six other Panthers arrested in the April 6 shootout in Oakland. The benefit was held at the Fillmore East, and drew 2,600 people. The benefit featured several plays and performances by Amiri Baraka (then Leroi Jones) and Ed Bullins. James Forman of SNCC was the event’s MC. Kathleen Cleaver spoke about Lil’ Bobby Hutton’s martyrdom and her husband’s case. The Party tapped the emerging consensus that the Panthers epitomized Black Power, drawing upon

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35 In the Black Panther Party, the civilian titles were subordinate to the military ones. So Newton, as Minister of Defense, held the top position in the Party whereas Seale, as Chairman, was 2nd in command. Similarly, chapter Chairmen were usually subordinate to Captains. But such titles were not systematic, and this hierarchy was not universally imposed, e.g. Deputy Chairman Fred Hampton was the top Panther leader in Chicago.
their national networks and their new relationship with SNCC to raise funds and build a strong presence in New York. 38

Two of the first New Yorkers to join the Black Panther Party were Lumumba Shakur, appointed section leader for Harlem, and Sekou Odinga, who was named section leader for the Bronx. After attending Andrew Jackson High School in Queens together, the two men were politicized in prison, joined Malcolm X’s Organization of Afro American Unity in 1964, and – dissatisfied with other black nationalist organizations – turned to the Black Panther Party after Martin Luther King’s death. 39

Lumumba’s racial politics had deep roots. His father was a Black Muslim, and his grandfather “was arch anti-white repression,” Lumumba recalled. “He would sit down and talk about white repression for days. My grandfather was a cop for three days until a white man told him no nigger was going to arrest him, and Grandpa whipped that cracker half to death.” 40

Perhaps the turning point in Lumumba’s life took place in December 1959. Lumumba – 16 years old at the time – got on the bus in Jamaica, New York with about fifteen friends after a party. He sat next to a large white man in a U.S. Navy uniform. The man said that where he came from “niggers” do not sit next to white people. Lumumba told the man that this was not the South and the man punched Lumumba in the face. “All pandemonium broke out in the bus, and that cracker was whipped mercilessly. Later I


found out that cracker was cut every place except the soles of his feet.”

Lumumba got off the bus, but was soon picked up by the police. The police took him to the hospital, and the white man said Lumumba was the one who had beat him. The police beat Lumumba badly in front of the doctors and nurses, right in the middle of Jamaica Hospital. In court, the white man admitted that he had punched and attacked Lumumba first, “because niggers aren’t supposed to sit next to white people on buses.” The judge ordered the statement stricken from the record saying it was not the issue being decided. The judge set bail at $10,000 for Lumumba and dispatched him to jail for seven months pending trial. Lumumba’s state-appointed lawyer told him to plead guilty to “attempted assault two,” and that he would get time served. Lumumba pled guilty as instructed, but it turned out his lawyer never made any deal, and he was sent to jail for five years.

In jail, prisoners had to fight continually to protect themselves or suffer the consequences – usually rape. Guards cultivated racial and gang conflicts among the prisoners and often sat as spectators at their fights, “like they were in Madison Square Garden.” Lumumba resented being used in this way, and grew increasingly politicized in prison, organizing black inmates into a united block.

In Comstock Prison, in New York, Lumumba met back up with Sekou Odinga. There in 1963, Lumumba tried to get placed in the bakery. Of 1,800 prisoners in Comstock, 1,300 were black. But none of those were allowed to work in any of the shops or jobs of the prison where they could learn a trade, such as the bakery or the auto shop.

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Lumumba asked the Deputy Warden for reassignment to the bakery, but the official told him that the bakery jobs were only for white prisoners. Sekou, and every black prisoner who requested assignment to a skilled shop or job got the same response. Consequently, Lumumba, Sekou, and a number of the black prisoners met and decided that the only way to change the situation was through violent confrontation. They secretly organized and in late September 1963, they rioted. 450 prisoners fought guards with fists, stones, and wooden planks. Twenty-three inmates were injured. New York Prison Commissioner McGinnis visited Comstock to investigate. Lumumba met with him and told him why they had rioted. Lumumba and thirteen other prisoners who organized the riot were transferred to Attica. Yet the policies in Comstock were changed, with black inmates “assigned to every professional school, shop, trade, and job in Comstock” from then onward.\(^{45}\)

When Lumumba got out of prison in December of 1964, he joined Malcolm X’s OAAU. A couple months later, Malcolm X was dead. In April, he got in touch with Sekou, his childhood friend, who also joined OAAU. Lumumba, however, was put off by the male chauvinism in OAAU and its lack of impact, so the two quit, and looked for another organization that exemplified the vision and direction of Malcolm X. They could not find anything satisfactory in New York. In 1967 they joined with other black nationalists in Jamaica Queens and organized the Grass Roots Front. “Our aim was to take the anti-poverty programs from the hands of the religious pimps and preachers and guarantee the grass-root people control of the anti-poverty programs,” Lumumba

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explained years later. “When the community people began to get more control of the anti-poverty programs, the religious pimp-preachers called OEO (Office of Economic Opportunity) and the pigs. It was a split within the Grass Root Front because Sekou, Larry Mack, and I wanted to inflict a political consequence. The other brothers did not agree with us. So we quit and told them that they were jiving.”

Sekou recalled:

We were all very young and inexperienced and got caught up in a local anti-poverty program. By 1967 I was thoroughly disillusioned with that, when I heard about the Black Panther Party (BPP) in Oakland, California… By the spring of 1968, we heard that representatives from the BPP were coming to New York and there was a possibility of organizing a chapter. I attended the meeting and decided to join and help build the BPP in New York.

In the spring of 1968, the Black Panther Party attracted many of New York’s most politically active young blacks. An experienced tenants rights activist, Kuwasi Balagoon had traveled to D.C. to protest opposition to rat control legislation in Congress, a key issue for renters in NYC. He and fellow protesters brought live rats to the demonstration in the House of Representatives and were beaten by police. Next he joined the central Harlem Committee for Self-Defense. Yet none of these efforts satisfied Balagoon’s feeling that he had to do something more serious for black people’s liberation – a feeling that only intensified with King’s assassination. Then he heard about the Black Panther Party. Balagoon later recalled:

When I heard that Huey Newton had been involved in a shootout with two pigs and one had died, I thought I’d check this brother out, as he seemed to be a sure enough leader. And when the Panthers came to New York, I checked them out, and found the ten-point program unquestionable, and the fact that it was community-based was a good thing. Digging that the cadre believed that political power stems from the barrel of a gun made me feel instant kinship. So I joined, and extended my energies and skills to the black community and mankind through the Party.

Drawn to the Black Panther’s militancy, as soon as the Party came to New York in the Spring of 1968, Afeni Shakur joined and married Lumumba.\textsuperscript{50} She was sick of turning the other cheek, and felt that the Panthers offered a real alternative. Shakur was impressed by how the Panthers responded when a policeman had tried to take one of their guns in Sacramento. The Panther had asked the policeman “Am I under arrest?” When the policeman responded that he was not, the Panther told the policeman: “Then take your hands off my motherfucking gun. I have a constitutional right to have this gun.” Shakur later recalled that “in 1967 that in itself was enough to blow anybody’s mind.”\textsuperscript{51}

From that time on, Shakur waited eagerly for the Party to spread to New York so she could join:

All I did then was wait for the Black Panther Party to come to New York. Somebody told me they were coming; you know, I knew they just had to come, they just couldn’t stay on the Coast … Nothing that strong could stay in one area. I just knew from the beginning that it would branch out into something beautiful – it had to. I just knew there were niggers all over the place that felt like I did. The Party got here around April.\textsuperscript{52}

Others joined the Party for similar reasons. David Parker, a seventeen year-old rank and file New York Panther explained the appeal to the \textit{New York Times} in 1968:

“Why am I a Black Panther? Well, I’ve been listening to Brother Malcolm’s records for a long time. I know what he said and I’ve just been waiting for the Panthers to come here.”

Paraphrasing Malcolm X, he argued that the Panthers offered change: “Change, change by any means necessary.” Bill Hampton, a twenty-seven year-old New York Panther, married father of three, and a former executive in training with the Olin Mathieson

\textsuperscript{50} Afeni Shakur is known today not only as a key leader of the New York 21, and as the mother of late rap artist Tupac Shakur. Afeni married Lumumba Shakur, and took his name, but Tupac was born in 1971 and Lumumba was not his father.


chemical company, told the *Times*, “We’re revolutionaries and we’re fighting a war” for the survival of black people. “People have to realize that ‘the man’ is not just moving on us Panthers, but he is moving on all black people… They see us as a threat and realizing this the man has to put it down. That’s why the police run around here now trying to get something started.” Hampton described police as “Gestapo forces that occupy the black community” and asserted, “They have got to be forced out of our community… their power is on their hips. Take those guns away from those pigs and they are nobodies. The only way to counteract this power is with a gun in your hand.”

Abayama Katara, still a student at Franklin High School when he joined the Panthers, recalled one of the experiences that convinced him the police were an occupying force:

One night my family was sitting in the living room and I heard what sounded like firecrackers. I looked out the window and saw a black man running down the street with what looked to be an army of cops running after him (I found out later he had tried to hold up a store and a rookie cop had fired on him.) There were people all over the street, but the cops didn’t even tell them to get down, they just kept on firing. When the brother got to 135th Street he stopped on the corner and held his hands up, but the cops just kept coming and shooting. People were shouting out of the windows at the cops telling them to stop, couldn’t they see the brother was trying to give up, and so the cops started pointing their guns at the windows, telling everybody to keep inside and mind their own business. And about then a bullet chipped a piece of brick between the window I was hanging out of and the apartment next to ours. We never did figure out whether that bullet ricocheted or whether one of those cops just wanted to see a lot of black blood, but it was sure hard to see where it could have ricocheted from. They finally caught up with the brother in the schoolyard, and you could hear him screaming all the way down the street as they dragged him to a patrol car.

When Katara heard that the Panthers were taking on police abuse, he went to a Party meeting. There, Katara found a way of thinking about the police that transformed his perspective and in turn changed his life. Panthers kept talking about “pigs,” and Katara did not know what they meant. After the meeting, he asked one of the Panthers if

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he knew what a pig was. “Man, he looked at me as if I asked him what earth was. After he finished running it down, I was souped up for a motherfucker. I left the house saying “pig” over and over again. I got on a bus and everybody must have thought I was bugged out, because all the way home I just kept on saying “pig,” because the way the brother ran it down, it fit perfectly.” More than an insult, calling the police (and other authorities) pigs rejected their legitimacy, denounced their gestapo-like behavior as inhuman, and asserted the moral superiority of the oppressed. Katara felt liberated.

As a Black Panther, Katara soon became president of the Afro-American history club at Franklin High School. His club tried to educate classmates, displaying posters in the hallway of three phases of black liberation struggle. The first phase was a black woman being beaten by Bull Connor’s police and dogs. The second phase was pictures of SNCC taking nonviolent action. The third phase showed the Black Panther Party, including a photo of Kathleen Cleaver with a shotgun. The Principal ordered them to remove the violent photos, but the students argued that there were far more violent scenes in their history books. Soon the posters became a point of contention in the ongoing struggle between black community activists and school officials over control of the school district, a struggle in which the New York Black Panther Party played an active part in late 1968.56

While the New York Panthers became heavily involved in housing, schools, welfare, and political education, it was their conflict with police that garnered media attention and mobilized allied support. On August 1, Panther members Gordon Cooke, Darrell Baines were working in the Panther office at 780 Nostrand Ave in the Bedford-Stuyvesant section of Brooklyn. A little before 2:30 pm they started a street rally. Cooke, a twenty year-old Panther, was shouting on the bullhorn and calling the police “racist,” “pigs,” and “crackers.” He attracted a crowd of about fifty people. Someone called the police. Two officers arrived on the scene, waited nearby, then walked into the store next to the Panther office and called for backup. One officer asked Cooke if he had a permit to use the bullhorn. Another asked Baines, a seventeen year-old Panther, who was in charge. Baines said he was. The officer called Baines over to the car but Baines refused, and the officer tried to grab him. Police claim Baines kicked an officer in the groin. According to Cooke, he saw the police roughing up Baines and he tried to intervene. The policeman started to beat Cooke over the head with his nightstick. Soon other police cars arrived, and several officers blocked off the other Panthers while six of them beat Cooke with nightsticks. Even after he was handcuffed and on the ground, they continued to beat him on the pretense that he was resisting arrest. Cooke was sent to Brooklyn Jewish Hospital and treated for head lacerations, and arrested for resisting arrest and interfering with an officer. Baines was arrested for assault, harassment, and resisting arrest.57

Later that afternoon, 350 Panthers turned out for the arraignment of Darrell Baines and Gordon Cooke at the Brooklyn criminal court. Judge John Furey, who had

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served for ten years in the New York criminal court, placed the two defendants on parole. The judge explained later that Baines and Cooke had no previous records, and “[u]nder the circumstances, with the group that was there and the charges that were brought, it seemed foolish to needlessly put them on bail.”

Early the next morning, two policemen came to Crown Heights, Brooklyn on a domestic dispute call. As they got out of the police car they were hit with bird-shot fired from a shotgun by one or two people hiding in the bushes thirty feet away. The shooters ran and escaped. Both police officers were wounded. The Times ran a rumor, which the police denied, that a Black Panther button was found at the scene near two shotgun shells. Panther Captain Joudon Ford denied any Panther involvement in the shooting.

Outraged that Judge Furey had treated the Panthers “lightly,” ten patrolmen from Brooklyn’s Grand Avenue station organized a petition charging Furey with allowing Panthers to wear hats and curse in his courtroom, and calling for his resignation. The petition demanded that the union – the Patrolmen’s Benevolent Association (PBA) – call for Furey’s resignation and threatened that the signatories would resign and withhold dues from the PBA if the group did not support the call for Furey’s resignation. A Brooklyn Bar Association subcommittee responded by asking the Police commissioner to investigate the charges that Furey allowed Panthers to act disrespectfully in his courtroom. The PBA launched its own investigation. Growing out of the petition, a group of officers began a new organization called the Law Enforcement Group (LEG).

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The group claimed that officers were not receiving the support they needed generally, and called for widespread changes beginning with a grand jury investigation of alleged “coddling of accused criminals by the Criminal Courts,” and including the “abolition of the Police Department’s Civilian Complaint Review Board,” prevention of “another Warren Court,” and “removal of civilians from clerical duties in police stations.”

Sensing a challenge to their customary policing practices, these officers sought to re-assert their authority by beating back what they saw as a serious challenge to that authority.

Civil liberties groups responded, calling the coddling charge “an absurdity.” These groups identified LEG as a “frightening power play to take over the judiciary” and an “undisguised declaration of war against the black militant communities.” Ira Glasser, the spokesman for the New York Civil Liberties Union said that “[if] the program they wanted was instituted we would wind up with an open police state.”

Several weeks later on August 21, as public attention faded, a group of young blacks including several Brooklyn Panthers ignited a pile of trash heaped in the street on Nostrand Avenue near the Panther office. When firemen and police responded to the rubbish fire, rebels attacked them with bottles, bricks, cans, and stones, and then began smashing storefront windows and looting stores along a 12-block commercial stretch of Nostrand Ave. Police quickly quashed the rebellion and arrested seven rebels: George

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Correa, Darrell Baines, John Martinez, Morris Holman, Ricky Fletcher, Patricia Riley, and Fremont Dunn. Some 100 police officers packed into the Brooklyn Criminal Court for a hearing on the rebels’ case later that day, and the DA asked the court to set an extra high bail: “We have reason to believe that these defendants are members of the ultramilitant Black Panther Party. We feel there is a danger that they may not reappear in court unless high bail is set. Their actions show clearly a lack of respect for authority.”

The judge proceeded to set an unusually high bail of $50,000 each for twenty-two year-old Correa and seventeen year-old Baines and $11,500 for seventeen year-old Martinez, each charged with resisting arrest and possessing stolen property. More standard bail of $1,500 each was set for the remaining 4 defendants. Rather than stifle protest, the punitive bails ignited further resistance.

While street rebellions were common amongst urban black youths in the late 1960s, these rebels were different, claiming common cause with the anti-imperialist struggles in Vietnam and the domestic draft resisters. In addition to twenty Panthers who rallied for the rebels and turned out for further court hearings the following week, the white left saw the Panthers as allies in their own anti-imperialist struggle and responded to the police repression with resistance. William Kunstler, a renowned Left-wing lawyer with ties to the CP took the Brooklyn Panthers’ case, and argued that the bail was “unconstitutionally excessive,” part of the “police vendetta against the Black Panthers in New York.” Members of the predominantly white Peace and Freedom Party, and also the Columbia Strike Committee organized demonstrations outside the courthouse protesting the unusually high bail. The protestors carried signs saying “Hands Off Black Panthers,” “White Radicals Defend Black Panthers,” and “Stop Cop Harassment of the Black

Panther Party.” The court reduced bail to $20,000 for Correa, $10,000 for Baines, and $2,500 for Martinez.66

At a September 4 preliminary hearing for Correa, Baines, and Martinez, 150 whites, many of them off-duty policemen associated with LEG, packed the courtroom. The cops positioned themselves behind the Panthers in the courtroom, poking them in the back with their nightsticks, cussing and saying “White tigers eat black panthers.” When the small group of Panthers left the courtroom and made their way to the elevator, the police beat them up, and attacked a few white Columbia SDS members who came to support the Panthers. The New York Times recounted, “About 150 white men, many of whom were off-duty and out-of-uniform policemen, attacked a small number of Black Panther party members and white sympathizers yesterday on the sixth floor of the Brooklyn Criminal Court.” Many of the off-duty police wore “Wallace for President” buttons, referring to George Wallace, the White Supremacist former Governor of Alabama who was running for President of the United States. The off-duty policemen beat the Panthers and their white supporters with blackjacks. LEG officers called the Panthers “niggers” and “motherfuckers” while beating them. Uniformed police pretended to try to stop the beating, but actually dropped their billy clubs so the off-duty officers could use them to beat the Panthers. According to the Times, two of the Panthers had blood gushing from their heads after the beating. New York Panther Chairman David Brothers, the Peace and Freedom Party nominee for the 12th Congressional District at the

time, was kicked and stomped in the back more than twenty times. Panther section leader Tom McCreary suffered a fractured skull.67

Katara, one of the Panthers in the delegation that day, recalled fleeing from the off-duty police who were beating them, with nowhere to turn. The Panthers finally got into an elevator and tried to go down, but the elevator went up. It seemed like everywhere they went, the off-duty police were waiting for them. They got out of the elevator and Joudon Ford called the mayor’s office, but could not get through. They tried to go to the Human Rights commission, and city council offices, but could not find anyone. They fled into another courtroom and asked the Judge there for help. He finally called a court guard to escort the Panthers downstairs. When they got outside, the police were waiting for them, and the Panthers split up and ran. The police chased them. Katara made it into the subway, and took off his beret and black shirt so the off duty police would not recognize him, and made it on the subway and safely home.68

The next day, Mayor John Lindsay and Police Commissioner Leary verified that off-duty policemen had been involved in the attack, and promised swift action, “including criminal prosecution if that is warranted by the facts.”69 The day after the courtroom beating, a group of Panthers and their attorneys Kunstler and Gerald Lefcourt met with representatives of Mayor Lindsay’s office and answered questions about the attack.70

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In the following days, the Panthers and their allies turned up the political and legal pressure. On September 7, the NY State NAACP called upon the District Attorney to conduct a grand jury investigation into the beating.\(^{71}\) Two weeks later, Acting District Attorney Elliott Golden ordered a “thorough grand jury investigation” into the September 4 attack on Black Panthers in the Brooklyn court.\(^{72}\) On September 10, the Black Panther Party filed a suit in Federal Court charging the New York City Police Department with systematic “violence, intimidation and humiliation,” asking for community control of the police, and seeking injunctions forbidding the police from harassing Black Panthers. The National Lawyers Guild, the National Emergency Civil Liberties Committee, and the Law Center for Constitutional Rights all sponsored the suit.\(^{73}\) The Panthers’ web of support was widening.

A couple days later at 2:05 in the morning on September 12, another ambush of police occurred in Brooklyn. Two officers were patrolling on Schenectady Avenue only a few feet from where the other two officers were ambushed on August 2. Signs nearby announced a $10,000 reward for information leading to the arrest and conviction of the gunman who shot the other officers. Two blasts from a .308 rifle burst through the front windshield, injuring both officers and shattering the windows on the right side of the car. The officers were admitted to Kings County Hospital.\(^{74}\)

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At the time of the killings of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Bobby Hutton in early April of 1968, the Black Panther Party was essentially a local organization based in Oakland, California. There was a satellite chapter being organized in Los Angeles, and there was already a strong Black Power ferment in most major U.S. cities. But the Party was by no means an influential political presence on the national scale. This quickly changed. As Kathleen Cleaver later recalled: “The murder of King changed the whole dynamic of the country. That is probably the single most significant event in terms of how the Panthers were perceived by the black community…”

Seeking effective ways to advance their communities’ interests, young blacks flocked to the Black Panther Party and its politics of armed self-defense. The Party did little recruiting. Instead, young activists from around the country contacted the Party asking how they could join – opening new Black Panther offices in Los Angeles, New York, Seattle, and at least seventeen other cities by the end of the year including Albany, Bakersfield, Boston, Chicago, Denver, Des Moines, Detroit, Fresno, Indianapolis, Long Beach, Newark, Omaha, Peekskill, Philadelphia, Richmond, Sacramento, and San Diego.

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Young blacks were drawn by the Panthers’ politics of armed self-defense against the police because it simultaneously gave them a powerful means to resist, and was difficult to repress. Facing the resistance of organized and armed young blacks, police departments could no longer maintain brutal containment policing practices with impunity. By arming and organizing, and advocating revolution, Black Panthers challenged the legitimacy of the state. Yet the Party remained aboveground, refraining from overt direction of armed struggle. For example, Newton’s Executive Mandate #3, issued from prison in March 1968, ordered all Panther members to obtain firearms, and to fire on anyone – including police – who attempted to enter their homes without peaceably producing a legal warrant. Without any offensive direction, the Party thus created the conditions under which increasing numbers of armed confrontations between Panthers and the police occurred. The Party effectively argued to potential allies that these confrontations reflected the widespread pattern of oppression of blacks, and that what had changed was simply that the Black Panthers were defending themselves.

This practice of armed self-defense against the police, couched as part of a global anti-imperialist struggle, drew broad support from both other black political organizations, and many non-blacks. Allies provided crucial financial, political, and legal support, making it possible for Panthers to mount top-notch, unprecedented, legal defenses against many charges they faced, often winning in court. The allied support the Panthers received not only enabled the Party to grow, but also demonstrated the efficacy of their politics. If the Panthers had simply been jailed and killed, with little allied support, the Party would have quickly dissolved. Instead, the Black Panther Party rapidly

expanded to become the most influential black movement organization in the United States by December 1968.

The insurgency was escalating…
PART III. RESILIENCE

First you have free breakfasts, then you have free medical care, then you have free bus rides, and soon you have FREEDOM!
– Fred Hampton

One of our primary aims in counterintelligence as it concerns the [Black Panther Party] is to keep this group isolated from the moderate black and white community which may support it. This is most emphatically pointed out in their Breakfast for Children Program, where they are actively soliciting and receiving support from uninformed whites and moderate blacks.... You state that the Bureau under the [Counterintelligence Program] should not attack programs of community interest such as the BPP “Breakfast for Children.” You state that this is because many prominent “humanitarians,” both white and black, are interested in the program as well as churches which are actively supporting it. You have obviously missed the point.
– J. Edgar Hoover to FBI Special Agent in Charge, San Francisco

You can kill a revolutionary, but you can’t kill a revolution!
– Fred Hampton

PART III
1 Fred Hampton quoted in Hilliard, This Side of Glory, 227.
Chapter 7: Breakfast

Polly Graham knew about hardship and struggle. In the 1940s she had been a part of a failed attempt to organize low-wage black workers in the R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Factory in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. But virulent anti-unionism, magnified by racism and anti-Communist hysteria, had beaten that noble and long-forgotten effort. Almost thirty years later, on March 4, 1970, she opened the door of her rented home to find police handing her an eviction notice. Because the property had already been condemned in a legal hearing, she understood that she owed no rent until the landlord made the necessary repairs. The landlord believed and acted differently. Confronted with the seemingly impregnable power of the police, Polly Graham went to the office of the local chapter of the Black Panther Party for help.

The local Panthers immediately sprang into action, sending a contingent to Ms. Graham’s home where, with two armed Panthers standing guard, they replaced belongings that had been removed from the home by eviction police. In addition to re-securing Ms. Graham in her home, armed Panthers stood guard over the nearby homes of Pauline Greer and Minnie Bellamy, preventing similar evictions of these two elderly women.

The neighborhood temperature reached a boil. A standoff ensued between the police, trying to carry out evictions, and Panthers trying to keep these elderly black women from being tossed from their homes. Other community activists joined the fray. Lee Faye Mack, emboldened by the Panther presence, encouraged the crowd to “Go get your pieces.” A co-founder of Mothers for Black Liberation and a Party adviser, Ms. Mack personified the increasingly tight bond between the poor and working class black
community of East Winston-Salem and the Panther Party. As Larry Little, the irrepressible leader of the local Panthers recalled, after Ms. Mack spoke, even little “old ladies” went home and returned with “their double-barrel shotguns” to face down the eviction cops. Only after a third party paid Ms. Graham’s rent did the standoff cool down.¹

Still, Winston-Salem’s black community remained on edge. Three months later, in June of 1970, Sara Alford seriously cut herself on a glass jar in the A&P Supermarket in the black Carver neighborhood. Ms. Alford asked store management to pay for her anticipated medical bills. They refused. When word of the store’s refusal spread, black outrage at the store’s position sparked a community-wide boycott and picket of the local A&P. Panther leader Larry Little told store officials, “Either you make the A&P relevant to the needs of the black community or get out.” A protest against the store’s disregard for Ms. Alford’s injury escalated into a broader protest against discriminatory and disrespectful treatment endured by many black patrons of A&P. Protestors demanded that the store end its discriminatory hiring practices and employ blacks in substantial positions. The Party and its supporters demanded that the store contribute to the Free Breakfast Program. Eventually, the store relented and agreed to the demands, including paying Ms. Alford’s medical bills.²


² Friedman, “Picking Up,” 64.
Re-enacted countless times in black communities across the country, similar confrontations between the Panthers and authorities helped build strong local Party chapters. Local Party chapters frequently served as community sounding board and social service agency – as black people’s stewards – deeply committed to social justice and community betterment. The Party asked the community: bring your concerns to us. And they did. A Philadelphia Panther, recalled:

The offices were like buzzing beehives of Black resistance. It was always busy, as people piled in starting at its 7:30 a.m. opening time and continuing ‘till after nightfall. People came with every problem imaginable, and because our sworn duty was to serve the people, we took our commitment seriously…. When people had been badly treated by the cops or if parents were demanding a traffic light in North Philly streets where their children played, they came to our offices. In short, whatever our people’s problems were, they became our problems. We didn’t preach to the people; we worked with them. ³

Community members brought all kinds of disputes to the local Party: job-related conflicts, evictions, rent struggles, gang violence, safety, legal, criminal justice, issues with government social services, public and private utilities, the underworld economy (numbers runners, pimps, prostitutes, drug dealers), and consumer complaints. If the local party judged redress necessary, it took action. In doing so, the Party provided community members with a vital source of remediation often unavailable from the state. These actions, in turn, attracted more members and supporters.

The Party saw itself as inextricably tied to the local black community. The most critical aspect of the Black Panther message proved deceptively simple: we are you – your problems are our problems. As one Party comrade explained, “The exploited … people’s needs are land, bread, housing, education, … , clothing, justice, and peace, and

the Black Panther Party shall not, for a day, alienate ourselves from the masses and forget their needs for survival.”

**From Guns to Butter**

By the fall of 1968, membership in the Black Panther Party was mushrooming. Local activists in cities throughout the country had heard of the Black Panther Party and contacted national headquarters wanting to join and start their own local chapters. Chief of Staff David Hilliard later recalled the deluge of calls from people “asking to start a chapter. We get calls all day long. Des Moines, Virginia Beach, Atlanta. Since we’re three hours behind the East Coast, the requests often start as early as eight A.M.” As Party membership and influence grew, so did repressive action by the state. The Party sought meaningful activities for members that would serve the community, strengthen the Party, and improve its image in the public relations battle with the state. In this context, community programs quickly became a cornerstone of Party activity nationwide.

The Black Panther community programs got their start in early 1969 under Bobby Seale’s leadership, marking an important transformation in the Party’s political practice. In the fall of 1968, Eldridge Cleaver went into exile to avoid returning to prison when his parole was revoked. With Huey Newton in prison, Seale, a staunch advocate of community programs since his days working at the War on Poverty Program in Oakland, became primarily responsible for setting Party policy.

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4 Cited in *Black Panther*, April 6, 1969, p. 14
5 David Hilliard, *This Side of Glory*, p. 159.
7 Paul Alkebulan, *Survival Pending Revolution*, chapter 2. Alkebulan provides the most insightful and thoroughly documented treatment of the founding of the community programs. See also Andrew Witt, dissertation, and also Ashley Chaifetz, M.A. thesis for additional contributions.
The Black Panther Party announced its intention to launch the Free Breakfast for Children Program (FBCP) in Oakland in September 1968. The call for volunteers and donations went out before Christmas. The Party launched its first Free Breakfast Program at Father Earl A. Neil’s St. Augustine’s Episcopal Church in West Oakland in late January 1969. Parishioner Ruth Beckford-Smith coordinated the program. Beckford-Smith first became interested in the Black Panthers teaching Afro-Haitian dance to young women at the church, including LaVerne Williams, Huey Newton’s girlfriend. When the Party decided to organize a breakfast for children at St. Augustine’s, Beckford-Smith volunteered to coordinate the program, and helped to organize it. The first day the program opened, it served eleven children. By the end of the week, the program was serving 135 children daily at St. Augustine’s. The San Francisco Chronicle covered the program, and reported the “unspoken lesson” children would learn, that “power in a community begins with people who care.”

By March, 1969, the Black Panthers opened another Free Breakfast for Children Programs at the Sacred Heart Church in San Francisco’s Fillmore district. By April the

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8 Huey Newton, Bobby Seale, Eldridge Cleaver, and David Hilliard, “Breakfast for Black Children,” Black Panther, Sep. 7, 1968, p. 7; “Volunteers Needed to Help Prepare and Serve Breakfast for School Children,” Black Panther, October 19, 1968, p.2; “Volunteers Needed to Help Prepare and Serve Breakfast for School Children,” Black Panther, November 2, 1968, p. 7; “Breakfast for School Children,” in Black Panther, December 21, 1968, p. 15. These notices announce the breakfast program, but imply that the program had not yet begun, for example, explaining that “The first of these programs will exist at Downs Memorial Church,” in Oakland, and Concord Baptist Church in Berkeley, but we could find no credible evidence that such programs were actually started in 1968, or ever at those sites.


Party reported feeding more than 1,200 children per day combined at nine separate facilities in Oakland, San Francisco, and Vallejo, California; Chicago, Illinois; and Des Moines, Iowa.\(^\text{11}\)

Seale went to prison that August and David Hilliard, Chief of Staff of the Party, took the reins of the national Party organization. Hilliard continued to prioritize development of the Free Breakfast for Children Program, and under Hilliard’s tenure, the Program spread like wildfire, becoming the most important Panther activity.\(^\text{12}\) By November, the Party reported feeding children free breakfast daily in twenty-three cities across the country from Seattle to Kansas City and New York.\(^\text{13}\) At their height between 1969 and 1971, there were at least thirty-six breakfast programs nationwide with multiple sites run by the larger chapters.\(^\text{14}\)

David Hilliard was born May 15, 1942 in rural Rockville, Alabama, to Lee and Lela Hilliard, the youngest of twelve children. David’s father always worked – often as a logger, or tapping turpentine. His mother always worked when she was not nursing. With

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\(^\text{12}\) In addition to the timing, and Hilliard’s own account in *This Side of Glory*, Father Earl A. Neil also testifies to David Hilliard’s important and early role in building the Party relationship with St. Augustine Church, even preceding creation of the first breakfast program there. See Father Earl A. Neil, “Black Panther Party and Father Neil,” personal statement produced in preparation for 2002 Black Panther reunion.

\(^\text{13}\) The twenty three cities are: Berkeley, CA; San Francisco, CA; Richmond, CA; Oakland, CA; Los Angeles, CA; Watts, CA; San Diego, CA; Seattle, WA; Eugene, OR; Denver, CO; Indianapolis, IN; Kansas City, MO; Milwaukee, WI; Chicago, IL; Boston, MA; New York, NY; Queens, NY; Peekskill, NY; White Plains, NY; Brooklyn, NY; Philadelphia, PA; Baltimore, MD; and New Haven, CT. “List of Chapters and Branches with Breakfast Programs,” in *Black Panther* November 15, 1969 p. 17. Beginning in July 1969, almost every weekly issue of the *Black Panther Newspaper* carried coverage of Panther community service programs around the country. The *Black Panther* carried no coverage of actual Panther community service programs before January 1969, and very little before July 1969.

such a large family, the Hilliards were poor, living in a four-room shack without flush toilets, and scraping together meals. As the baby of the family, David was protected. He became an independent thinker, quite stylish, and averse to drudgery. Extremely willful in his dealings with the world, he remained exceptionally loyal, and deferential to family elders.\textsuperscript{15}

Under Jim Crow, blacks were expected to kowtow to whites. The Hilliards, though, did not always comply. After a fight with a white man in the early 1950s, David’s eldest brother Bud fled to Oakland, California. David later recalled being impressed by Martin Luther King and nonviolent civil rights activists, but disagreeing with their approach: “The passivity of the civil rights demonstrators contradicts my family’s most fundamental belief: you don’t stand idly by and be kicked, you fight for yourself.”\textsuperscript{16} When David was eleven, his mother moved to Oakland to join Bud, bringing David and eventually other family members along. In Oakland, David became close friends with fellow elementary school student Huey Newton. This friendship eventually shaped the course of his life. At seventeen, he married his sweetheart Patricia, dropped out of high school, and entered the workforce. Within three years, they had three children: Patrice, Darryl, and Dorion.

David Hilliard’s ascent to Party leadership was gradual. He was first and foremost loyal to Huey, his childhood friend. As he became increasingly involved in the Party, the Panthers became his family. Until the summer of 1969 when he was thrust into primary Party leadership, Hilliard was always deferential, following the lead of Huey, then Eldridge, then Bobby. He was never eager to participate in big, head-on confrontations

\textsuperscript{15} Except where otherwise noted, this bio is drawn from David Hilliard and Lewis Cole, \textit{This Side of Glory}, 1993, and discussions with the author.

\textsuperscript{16} David Hilliard and Lewis Cole, \textit{This Side of Glory}, 1993, p.114.
with the State, and did not participate much in the early patrols of police, the armed rallies in Richmond, the armed action in Sacramento, or later confrontations, and only went along with Eldridge on the April 6, 1968 armed action under duress.

Rather than gravitating towards the military side of the Party, Hilliard saw the Party as one big extended family, building on the communal traditions he experienced in the black rural south. Hilliard later recalled: “When I think about the influences that inspired the spirit and work of the Black Panther Party … the most important members of the Party … were imbued with the moral and spiritual values of their parents; and the work that went into the Party, our dignity as an independent people, the communal ideal and practice that informed our programs, all stem in part from the civilization of which my mother and father were so representative a part.”

In addition to his communal ethic, his working man’s sense of organization, discipline, and efficiency owing to a work life that included laboring on the docks, became an important characteristic of his leadership. He turned out to be a good administrator, in constant communication with the diverse and rapidly growing local leadership of the Party in cities across the country. He worked hard to keep the local chapters around the country united under a singular program. Under Hilliard’s leadership, the Panthers’ community service programs flourished. And through the period of the greatest repression, the Party continued to grow. Hilliard’s leadership and especially the community programs he championed, contributed significantly to that growth.

Over the year Hilliard served as the senior ranking Panther not in prison or exile, from August of 1969 through August of 1970, the Black Panther Party developed an impressive array of community programs in Panther chapters throughout the country.

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17 David Hilliard and Lewis Cole, *This Side of Glory*, 1993, 27.
Panther community programs eventually included: The Free Breakfast for Children Program; Liberation Schools; Free Health Clinics; Free Food Distribution; Free Clothing Programs; Child Development Centers; The Free Shoe Program; Free Busing to Prison Programs; The Sickle Anemia Research Foundation; Free Housing Cooperatives; Free Pest Control; Free Plumbing and Maintenance; Renter’s Assistance; Legal Aid; Seniors Escorts; and The Free Ambulance Program. Larger and more established chapters tended to run the most diverse range of programs. The histories of specific programs in local chapters were often episodic, at times short-lived, depending upon the strength and viability of a given chapter at a particular moment. Virtually all chapters ran at least a Free Breakfast for Children Program at some point.

The breakfast program quickly became an important public face of the Party as well as its cornerstone activity. In 1969, the breakfast program moved front and center for the Party programatically, politically, ideologically, and publicly. The Party claimed to have fed 20,000 children in the 1968-69 school year, and hoped to feed 100,000 in 1969-70. As “the most respected and popular” of the Party’s programs, observes former Detroit Panther JoNina Abron, these breakfast services enjoyed widespread support within black neighborhoods.

The Free Breakfast for Children Programs (FBCP) employed a rigorous common routine. Members had to be at the sites early in the morning, in time to prepare the food and be ready for the arriving children before they ate and then headed off to school.

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Transporting some of the children from home to the site and then to school was another vital yet often trying logistical job. While the children ate their meal, members taught them liberation lessons: Party messages and Black History. Miriam Monges recalled that in the breakfast program at the Ralph Avenue Community Center in the Brownsville section of Brooklyn,

Party Members and students cooked and served large pots of grits and eggs. We cajoled supermarkets for donations and we fed hundreds of children. Most importantly, we also nourished their minds with Black History lessons as they ate their meals. Sometimes we fed parents of the children.21

The Brownsville breakfast program was not unique in its willingness to feed not just the hungry children but also other hungry community members.

Feeding “hundreds of kids a day and approximately 1,200 per week” as they did at one time in Los Angeles demanded strong publicity, marketing, organizational, and executive skills. In Los Angeles, Flores Forbes notes,

The organizing effort began with us going door-to-door in the projects, passing out free papers with leaflets advertising the program. We talked to parents, kids, and storeowners near the projects. We explained why we had started the program: to help the kids grow and intellectually develop because children can’t learn on an empty stomach. The breakfast program was an excellent organizing tool, helping us make friends and comrades in the projects… The response was overwhelming. All types of parents agreed to host and serve our efforts. We held the program in the homes of junkies, drug dealers, regular public assistance recipients, gamblers, and gang bangers. Store owners donated bread, eggs, bacon, sausage, milk, and paper products. In addition to our organizing activities, we cooked, served the food, knocked on doors to let the kids know which apartment the food was being served in, and on many an occasion made last-minute pick-ups of donations from stores.22

Businesses donated food and supplies to the FBCPs for a mix of reasons, including altruism and the promotion of positive community relations. Those businesses that chose not to help out faced the Party’s wrath. At times cajoling blended into harassment and strong-arming. Far more common were boycotts and pickets of

21 Monges, “‘I Got A Right to the Tree of Life,’” 139.
businesses that refused to assist the programs. Equally common was the tactic of calling out, or public shaming, those who refused to help. Lumped together with non-supportive businesses were churches and other community-based organizations that refused to help, notably those who refused to sponsor or allow FBCPs on their premises. For starters, the Panther newspaper and Panther spokespersons railed against the non-supportive businessman or community leader as a “capitalist pig.” Other epithets included “religious hypocrites,” “lying preachers and merchants,” and “avaricious businessmen.”

Multiple ideological goals linked these programs, which, broadly speaking, helped to “raise public consciousness about hunger and poverty in America.” More specifically, the free breakfast programs highlighted the fact that hunger impeded a child’s ability to learn. Politically, the breakfasts shed light on the government’s failure to address childhood poverty and hunger – pointing to the limits of the nation’s War on Poverty. The U.S. government spent only $600,000 on breakfast programs in all of 1967. Government sponsored breakfast programs grew rapidly as Panthers pioneered their Free Breakfast Program. By 1972, government sponsored breakfast programs fed 1.18 million children out of approximately 5 million who qualified for such help.

Winning the people’s hearts and minds included attacking the serious problem of childhood hunger. “While we might not need their direct assistance in waging armed revolution,” acknowledged Forbes, “we were hedging our bets that if we did, they would respond more favorably to a group of people looking out for their children’s welfare.”

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26 Flores Forbes, p. 50.
The FBI and police agreed. In Baltimore, as in other places, they castigated these programs “as a front for indoctrinating children with Panther propaganda.” As a result, the national repression apparatus went into overdrive to destroy the Free Breakfast Programs. 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. Safiya A. Bukhari discovered that participation in one of the Harlem free breakfast programs fell off after the police spread a false rumor among black parents that the children were being fed “poisoned food.” A police disinformation campaign in Richmond, California claimed that the Party used the Free Breakfast Program to spread racism and to foment school riots. Student participation began to decline, forcing local Panther leaders to combat the official disinformation.27

The police were not above raiding breakfast program locations, even while the children were being fed. The Baltimore Panther branch was comparatively small, but as Judson L. Jeffries demonstrates, the branch endured “an excessive amount of violent repression, and not even children were spared harassment by the police.” One morning the Baltimore Police disrupted the children’s breakfast, barging menacingly onto the premises. A witness recalled, “They walked around with their guns drawn and looked real mean. The children felt terrorized by the police. They were like gangsters and thugs.” The Panther newspaper explained that in Baltimore “the hired mercenary pig forces” terrorized the community, the Party, and especially the Free Breakfast for Children Program. Ronald Davis, co-coordinator of the Baltimore program, reported that “the foul

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minions of legal brutality and murder” had encircled the church sponsoring the program.

The police were, he wrote:

> Armed to the teeth with the weaponry of the fascist war machine. After holding the people in check, with guns, the pigs proceeded to force their way into the Children’s Breakfast Program under the false excuse of looking for … suspects. Once the Gestapo shock troopers left the Breakfast Hall, they kicked in the door of Sister Angeline Edison, a former member of the Party, and kidnapped her and her son from her home with guns pointed at her and surrounding her, all under the pretentious lies of justice.²⁸

**Health Care and Beyond**

The success of the Panther Free Breakfast for Children Program led the Party to initiate Free Health Clinics and a range of other community programs. Many blacks were poorly served by the health care system, and some had never seen a doctor. In spite of the health care initiatives within the federal government’s War on Poverty – particularly the newly-created neighborhood health centers targeting the needs of inner-city communities -- many residents in these communities received limited if any health care attention.²⁹

In response, the Party created a series of Free Medical Clinics across the country. These clinics relied on the volunteer services of local doctors, medical students, interns, residents, nurses, and community folk as well as donated or low rent clinic space. These public Panther-run clinics, such as those in Berkeley and Cleveland, offered services to all who came, black and non-black alike. Some evolved into local free health clinics supported by the Party in coalition with like-minded individuals and groups, as in Baltimore.³⁰

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For the Party the focus was plain and urgent: addressing within their limited resources the pressing health care concerns of poor black communities that sorely lacked adequate health care facilities and professionals. Clinic services “included first aid care, physical examinations, prenatal care, and testing for lead poisoning, high blood pressure, and sickle cell anemia.” Clinicians referred patients, if necessary, to specialists for follow-up care. There were at least eleven such clinics, including those in Kansas City (MO), Seattle, and New Haven. Chicago’s Spurgeon “Jake” Winters Free Medical Care Center was one of the best-run and most-respected Panther health clinics, serving over 2,000 in its initial two months. “Medical teams from the Winters clinic went door-to-door assisting people with their health problems,” according to Abron. “[T]he clinic’s staff included obstetricians, gynecologists, pediatricians, and general practitioners.”

Milwaukee’s People’s Free Health Center emphasized preventative medicine and health care education on “sickle cell anemia, drug abuse, children’s health and birth control” as well as free health care screenings. The clinic also sponsored discussions on black social relations, including relations between black women and men, and concerns of black youth.31

The Party’s sickle cell anemia testing program and its Sickle Cell Anemia Research Foundation made a serious contribution to black health care in America. The Party worked hard to publicize the seriousness of the disease, which afflicts about 1 in 500 African Americans.32 Before the Panthers launched a public awareness campaign in 1971, black and mainstream awareness of the disease was limited. After the Panther’s publicity offensive on behalf of battling the disease, more and more blacks learned of the

32 According to the NIH.
disease and got tested for it. In the Panther clinics, health care professionals referred those with either the disease or the sickle cell trait for further counseling and, if necessary, treatment. The Panthers’ Sickle Cell Anemia Research Foundation provided a public face to the disease, promoting pioneering work leading to advances in scientific understanding and medical treatment of the disease.\footnote{Nelson, “Black Power,” 144-206.}

The Party’s health care programs included efforts to combat drug addiction. Often led by ex-drug addicts themselves who worked with the Party, these initiatives focused on treatment and rehabilitation. In Boston’s South End neighborhood, “Project Concern” was “run by ex-addicts who have acquired a political consciousness and therefore realize the necessity of quitting drugs in order to survive.” The Party lauded the project’s ideological thrust as well as its health advocacy emphasis, and gave special praise to the brothers who ran and participated in the program. These brothers built their program “on the revolutionary ideology of capitalism plus dope equals genocide.” Dope, they argued, was part of the oppressor’s plan “to ensure our enslavement.” A similar initiative, “People For The People,” offered “drug control and education” in “the heavily drug-infested” community of Corona-East Elmhurst in Queens, New York.\footnote{“Revolutionary Drug Program Serves The People,” \textit{Black Panther}, October 31, 1970; “People For The People,” \textit{Black Panther}, November 28, 1970, p. 6.}

Despite these successes, state repression continued. Local police and the FBI worked to undermine the Party’s health clinics and the Panthers’ health care activism. In 1971 Cleveland Panthers worked hard to transform their health clinic into a larger People’s Free Health Clinic. On August 18 that year, a dynamite explosion (widely believed to the handiwork of the State, though definitive proof is lacking) severely damaged the clinic. Panther Jimmy Slater suggested that the police and FBI
counterintelligence were responsible for blowing up the clinic. “Any positive program that served and mobilized the community was attacked. It was one of the things we had going on that served a lot of people who needed free medical aid, and it was attacked to undermine the party’s efforts.”

That same summer, early Sunday morning on July 5, the Party’s Franklin Lynch People’s Free Health Center in Boston was hit by thirteen shots, causing limited damage. Local police allegedly fired the shots. Due to the loud noise of the July 4th fireworks and firecrackers, the attack went undetected until early Sunday morning. The attack outraged clinic patrons and workers, community folk, and party members. The Boston Party chapter resolved that “the strength, the love and determination of the people has built the Free Health Center up to what it is today, and the same strength, love, and devotion of the people will make the Free Health Center stand up to future attacks by Mayor White’s Gestapo pig force.”

The Party’s black public health care advocacy revealed the group’s deep commitment to a holistic view of health as both environmental and physical. For the Party, the wellbeing of individual black bodies and the collective black community reflected the overall welfare of the larger black body politic. Improving the health status of blacks thus went hand-in-hand with improving their political, economic, and social status. In the Party’s view, black political activism and black public health activism were interwoven.

Complementing its health care activism, several of the Party’s programs addressed the most basic material needs of poor black communities. Free Food Programs,

Free Clothing Programs, and Free Shoe Programs were common and extremely well received. Also popular were targeted material give-away initiatives featuring free food, clothing, and shoes, sometimes in conjunction with a Party rally. Free food rallies organized by the Winston-Salem Black Panther Party chapter inaugurated the Joseph Waddell Free Food Program to honor a beloved comrade who had died in state prison under suspicious circumstances, drawing over 2,000 people to the Kimberly Housing Project where the party gave out free food and free shoes for children.\textsuperscript{37}

A lack of adequate ambulance services was an especially galling problem in black Winston-Salem. On October 17, 1970, fifteen year old Alan “Snake” Dendy was shot and then died when the county ambulance, though present, refused to move his body, claiming they lacked authorization to do so. Responding to community outrage at the injustice, the local Panther chapter swung into action. By June of 1971 the group had acquired an “old hearse” that they retrofitted as an ambulance. Party members had already been taking Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) and first aid classes at Surry Community College, and by summer’s end, they were certified as Emergency Medical Technicians. The chapter was thus able to begin operating their own ambulance before the year was out.\textsuperscript{38}

The free emergency ambulance service was a big success, and was named the “Joseph Waddell People’s Free Ambulance Service” to commemorate their recently deceased comrade. Waddell’s $7,000 life insurance policy death benefit went to the local chapter, which used the money to help subsidize the free ambulance program. Operating for over two years, the service at its height featured twenty-four hour service and twenty

\textsuperscript{37} Friedman, “MA Thesis on the BPP in Winston-Salem, NC,” p. 84-5
\textsuperscript{38} Friedman, “MA Thesis on the BPP in Winston-Salem, NC,” 80-81.
certified Party members as Emergency Medical Technicians. The Forsyth County Commissioners granted the chapter a franchise to operate.\textsuperscript{39}

Another popular Panther effort, Free Busing to Prison, helped incarcerated blacks stay connected to their families and communities. Because so many inner-city blacks could not afford transportation to and from prisons (often located in out-of-the-way rural sites) to visit incarcerated relatives and friends, Free Busing to Prison programs proved very popular. These programs were expensive to maintain and suffered from chronic under-funding and persistent state efforts to destroy them.\textsuperscript{40} The political aims were multiple. First, they helped sustain connections between imprisoned blacks and their home community. “Just because a Brother or Sister commits a crime, is it correct for them to be cut off from their loved ones, friends and community with no communication?” asked Milwaukee’s Ronald Stark.\textsuperscript{41}

Another aim of the Free Busing to Prison Programs was to highlight the unjust incarceration of a disproportionate number of blacks, and bring attention to the wrongful imprisonment of Panthers and other black political prisoners on bogus charges. The Panthers also sought to expose the alarming racism underlying these wrongs – an entire criminal injustice system for blacks and poor people. The extreme state repression of the Party, the unjust imprisonment of so many Party members, and the devastating

consequences of both only heightened the ideological and practical significance of the Party’s Free Busing to Prison Programs.  

After becoming a member of the Detroit branch, JoNina Abron’s involvement in the Free Busing to Prison introduced her to the Party’s other community service programs. She later recalled,

I drove one of the vans that transported families to visit their incarcerated relatives at Jackson State Prison. Having grown up as the sheltered daughter of a minister and a music teacher, I was overwhelmed by my experience at Jackson State Prison, which was my first visit to a penitentiary. Another service that the BPP provided for prison inmates was the free commissary program. BPP members secured donations of personal hygiene items and non-perishable foods and sent care packages to prisoners. The party also offered attorney referral services for prison inmates.

Just as the Party’s Free Medical Clinics at times led to cooperation with local allies and became institutions that outlasted the Party’s active involvement, several of the Free Busing to Prison programs lived beyond the Party. In Cleveland, for instance, Panther JoAnn Bray’s work with the Party’s Free Busing to Prison continued after the local Party itself collapsed. With ongoing community support, and a $16,000 grant, Bray was able to keep the busses running for several years in the 1970s, changing the program’s name to the “People’s Busing Program” and charging a small fee.

Panthers at all levels and from all class backgrounds had endured the racism of public schools and knew firsthand the crying need to remake fundamentally black public school education. The Black Panther Party thus committed itself to a relevant and empowering education for black children. Point Five of the Party’s platform demanded an education “that exposes the true nature of this decadent American society,” and “teaches us our true history and our role in the present-day society.” Such an education

42 JoNina Abron, “‘Serving the People,’” 186-187.
43 Ibid., 187.
44 JoAnn Bray quoted in Nissim-Sabat, “Panthers Set Up Shop in Cleveland,” in COMRADES 126-127.
had to be probing and affirmative. It had to create highly skilled citizens dedicated to advancing the best interests of the black nation within the American nation.

Building upon the tradition of black self-empowerment, alternative black schools dotted the progressive landscape before the Panthers came on the scene. The citizenship schools of the Civil Rights Movement, led by Septima Clark, helped many master the knowledge and mechanics necessary to register to vote in the pre-Voting Rights era South. Freedom Summer 1964 in Mississippi featured a series of Freedom Schools that taught the fundamentals alongside black history and culture as well as the Civil Rights Movement’s ideology and goals. These efforts contributed to the larger social changes transforming Mississippi and the rest of the former Confederacy.45

The Panthers’ Liberation Schools extended this tradition by insisting on a Black Power revolution: the inclusion of black perspectives, experiences, and knowledge in the formal and informal curricula of public school education. The liberation schools typically functioned at the K-8 level, and included meals, social welfare help for needy students and families, and extended hours. These schools also featured black history and culture, a diverse and rich academic and political curriculum, and lessons in the Party’s ideology, goals, and activities. Where the Party saw these schools as training well-equipped citizens, sensitive to issues of class, race, and socialism, the Black Panther Party’s enemies—principally the State—saw anti-American and anti-white propaganda.

The Panthers launched at least nine liberation schools across the nation, from Seattle to the Bronx, with the first established in Berkeley in June 1969. These

institutions ranged in longevity, structure, substance, and effectiveness. Because of the Party’s emphasis on education and Panthers’ own often negative experiences with the mainstream education system, Party members labored hard and long to make these schools effective. Still, government misinformation and bad publicity led to the demise of several efforts, such as Black Panther Party-sponsored liberation schools in Des Moines and Omaha.46

Variations on the Panthers’ central thrust of education sprouted up everywhere. Building upon the Party’s broader community-based educational work, the Philadelphia chapter sponsored a People’s Free Library that featured texts by black authors. In the summer of 1970, the Cleveland chapter ran a summer liberation school with meals and ten hours of instruction for twenty-five children. In Brooklyn the local Party ran a liberation school that supplemented the basics with an Afrocentric focus. Stressing “rudimentary aspects of the Afrocentric paradigm,” noted Monges, “we taught African history lessons and sponsored African dance classes.”47

The most substantial and successful Party liberation school was the flagship Intercommunal Youth Institute (IYI) in Oakland. Founded in January 1971, the school graduated its first class in 1974, and lasted through 1982, well after the Black Panther Party had disintegrated otherwise. The IYI’s first class had twenty-eight students, mostly children of party members. At its height, the school had a waiting list of 400. Working with students from ages two-and-half to eleven, the faculty, led from 1973 to 1981 by Ericka Huggins and a strong group of mostly women teachers, taught a demanding

program to a student body with wide-ranging abilities and often challenging backgrounds.48

Adopting a pedagogy that grouped students by ability and achievement rather than age, the IYI sought to do its best by the individual student. Meals were provided, and when the school expanded to encompass a middle school, housing was provided for some of the older children. The school also at times hosted a range of other programs, including a G.E.D. program and instruction in martial arts. At its height, the school was commended by Governor Jerry Brown and the California State Assembly for “having set the standard for the highest level of elementary education.”49

Shifting Gender Dynamics

Women were a pivotal force in the Panthers, at times representing a majority of the Party’s membership. Panther women energized the local branches, and played a central role in creating the indigenous culture of struggle that gave the local chapters their resonance and distinctiveness. They kept the community programs alive and did most of the painstaking day-to-day social labor necessary to sustain the chapters. Providing informal childcare networks and daycare centers, assisting elderly and infirm community members with their housing, food, medical, and even more personal concerns, were generally the province of Panther women. The party heavily recruited women to staff programs like Free Breakfast, where women, notably mothers, garnered special praise for their work. Reflecting traditional gender norms, the Party newspaper enthusiastically

49 Ibid.
endorsed these kinds of programs as fundamentally maternalist: particularly well suited to mothers’, and by extension women’s, sensibilities and commitments.  

In its early years, especially before 1968 and the explosive subsequent growth in Party membership, the organization was largely male. The Black Panther Party got its start as “a male-centered, male-dominated organization.” The group’s initial rhetorical and programmatic emphasis on armed self-defense, organizing the “brothers on the block,” and revitalizing black manhood highlighted the Party’s masculinism. 

Even after women began to join the Party en masse in 1968 and the struggle around gender equity issues intensified, the Party never overcame what Tracye Matthews has aptly called its “masculine public identity.” Nevertheless, speaking from her experiences at the grassroots level, reflecting a widely held view among Party members, Frankye Malika Adams noted, 

[W]omen ran the BPP pretty much. I don’t know how it came to be a male’s party or thought of as being a male’s party. Because these things, when you really look at it in terms of society, these things are looked on as being women’s things,… feeding children, taking care of the sick…. We actually ran the BPP’s programs.

The gendering of the Party’s community programs as female and the public face of the Party as male became entrenched for two major reasons. First, the Party’s continuing masculinism and the society’s deeply ingrained gender norms undercut the serious battles against sexism within the Party. Second, even as women’s participation became increasingly central to the operation of the Party, and questions of gender equity loomed increasingly important, there were no formal and effective mechanisms to root


out sexism and misogyny. Consequently, despite the Panthers’ anti-sexist rhetoric and efforts, while Panther men and women actively struggled with these ongoing problems, all too often these problems persisted. Ericka Huggins recalls visiting a local chapter where women prepared the food then waited in the kitchen until Panther men had eaten to serve themselves – a dynamic she quickly ended.\(^{53}\)

Just as the lure of guns proved compelling for many recruits, women and men, community service programs brought innumerable men and women into the Party and actively engaged large numbers of Panther men and women. Indeed while women often actually ran many of the Free Breakfast for Children Programs, male participation in the programs was widespread, building and sustaining among innumerable Panther men ethics of caring, nurturance, and collective social responsibility often associated with women. Active male participation in the Breakfast Programs sensitized innumerable Panther men and women, especially innumerable Panther men, to the importance of family, children, and gender issues for the Party as well as black communities and the larger society. The Free Breakfast for Children specifically and the community service programs generally provided a powerful counter to the misleading stereotype of the Party as a bunch of gun-toting men.

Many of the party members who served black communities in programs like the Free Breakfast Programs lived in low-cost, no-frills communal living arrangements within black communities known as Panther pads, or Panther cribs. To the extent these arrangements operated along egalitarian and democratic lines, these homes worked for all involved. In part Panther pads reflected the Party’s critique of conventional familial norms. As Huey Newton once described it, the traditional nuclear family in particular and

\(^{53}\) Ericka Huggins, public lecture, Marcus Books, Oakland, CA.
conventional familial norms in general were “imprisoning, enslaving, and suffocating.”

The Party’s open and non-monogamous communal living arrangements aimed to offer freer and more fulfilling lives.

In fact, these Panther pads all too often fell into attitudes and practices that reinscribed male privilege: perpetuating the very practices such arrangements were supposedly created to alleviate. This meant women being primarily responsible for housework and bearing the brunt of the responsibility for open relationships with men. As a result, the responsibility for family planning and reproductive concerns — notably birth control and abortions — fell primarily to women themselves. Similarly, pregnancy and childcare were primarily women’s responsibility. This meant single mothers with children often being expected to pull the same load as their single and childless comrades. Rather than ushering in greater gender and sexual equality, all too often these Panther pads replicated gender and sexual inequality.

The Politics of Community Service

The Party’s community service programs were fundamentally political programs as well and thus vital to the Party’s developing political ideology and practices. Writing in 1969, Bobby Seale maintained that these programs were not “reform programs” but “revolutionary, community, socialistic programs.” For the Party’s political and ideological integrity, the distinction was crucial. These programs were part of a broader insurgency to change the existing capitalist system to a more equitable socialist one. In the Panthers’ view, then, these were socialist programs, not capitalist ones: they were revolutionary, not reformist. Seale offered that “A revolutionary program is one set forth...

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54 Newton, To Die For The People, 81.
by revolutionaries, by those who want to change the existing system to a better one.” On the contrary, “A reform program is set up by the existing exploitative system as an appeasing handout, to fool the people and to keep them quiet. Examples of these programs are poverty programs, youth work programs, and things like that.”

The Party exuded a community-based revolutionary ethos that epitomized the pervasive desire within Black Power movements to empower black communities. The party attracted large numbers of members and supporters, from various classes and races, who wanted to be part of a dynamic liberation movement rooted in the day-to-day struggles of ordinary black people, most of whom were poor and working class.

“Unlike the Niagara Movement, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, or the Urban League,” Miriam Ma’at-Ka-Re Monges reminds us, “the Party’s origins lie enmeshed among the black downtrodden. BPP offices were always located in the center of low-income areas of African American communities.” The short-lived and all-black Niagara Movement (1905-1909), the interracial NAACP (1909-present), and the interracial Urban League (1916-present) all began as middle class-led movements. As a primarily black working class- and underclass-identified movement, the Party’s historical lineage connects with movements like the Nation of Islam, Garveyism, and varieties of black worker- and black union-based activism dating back to the nineteenth century.

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56 Seale, Seize the Time, 412-413.
57 Miriam Ma’at-Ka-Re Monges, “‘I Got A right to the Tree of Life’: Afrocentric Reflections of a Former Community Worker,” in Jones, ed., The Black Panther Party, 137.
Through direct service to the community, the Panthers accomplished several pressing functions. First, the services provided concrete aid to an impressive number and cross-section of folk, white, black, and other people of color. These programs materialized the notion of service to the community. In addition to their own labor, the Panthers generated alternative bases of funding and resources to serve impoverished communities through individual and local business donations.

Second, these programs accomplished crucial educational and political work within communities, enhancing public understanding of the insufficiency of the capitalist welfare state to meet even the most basic needs of its citizens, especially its black citizens. The piecemeal yet serious efforts of these community programs thus represented a broader offensive, as Nissim-Sabat has maintained, “to compensate for the inadequate institutions of the state and to raise the consciousness of people in their local communities.” As the Chicago Chapter Deputy of Labor Yvonne King observed in the spring of 1969, “Hunger among schoolchildren illustrates one of the basic contradictions in American society. America is one of the richest nations in the world, able to send countless numbers of rockets into space at the drop of a dollar, yet people are starving.” The Free Breakfast for Children Programs in particular enabled the Party to crystallize these stark contradictions and heighten black awareness of such structural inequities. This deepening awareness pushed black communities to create other programs to ameliorate the crushing problems stemming from systemic inequalities.

Third, these programs contributed to expanding community understanding of the process of grassroots institutional development – how to create and sustain their own

much-needed institutions from the ground up. Building upon these communities’
tradition of active self-help, the Party revitalized and modeled grassroots black
community development and institution building. Through these programs the Party
provided concrete examples of Black Power’s vision of community empowerment. The
ultimate goal of these institutions was clear: self-determination. Empowering black
communities to take control of their own affairs and manage them in their best interests
was central to the Party’s social service programs.

Fourth, these programs not only kept the Party alive in spite of awesome state
repression, they also initially enabled the party to grow during these trying times. Such
arduous work with very little formal remuneration – in particular the Free Breakfast
Programs for school children and the Free Medical Clinics – won the party strong support
in black communities, and contributed substantially to the Party’s “street credibility.”
This vital work likewise had strong support from liberal and progressive blacks and
whites.

Indeed, the Party’s emphasis on direct community service aimed at advancing
black community self-determination and ameliorating the ills besetting those
communities linked the Panthers to the historic organizing tradition of the Black Freedom
Struggle. As SNCC’s extraordinary organizing work helped to galvanize the Southern
Civil Rights Movement, the Panther’s organizing efforts proved particularly vital to
galvanizing the national Black Freedom Struggle.61 The social service programs linked
the Party’s organizing work to a long tradition, including the work of organizations like
the postwar Nation of Islam, Father Divine’s 1930s’ Mission Movement, and the Garvey

University Press, 1981); Thomas J. Sugrue, Sweet Land of Liberty: The Forgotten Struggle for Civil Rights
Movement of the 1920s. The formal programs of these movements, like the Garveyite Negro Factories Corporation, constituted concrete steps to advance the best interests of the black nation within the American nation. Black Panthers saw their own community-based programs as part of their commitment to a black nation-building project, an expression of the Party’s revolutionary nationalism.

It bears reiterating that, even as the state wrenched into overdrive to decimate the Party in 1969 and 1970, the community service programs enabled the Panthers to grow by attracting new Party members and supporters. Indeed the Party’s community service programs made innumerable Party converts, and were a principal reason many folk joined. Jimmy Slater explained that he joined the Cleveland chapter because of “the many different positive programs sponsored by the party.”

Flores A. Forbes noted that “The work I most enjoyed” was the community service programs, particularly the Free Breakfast Programs for children in the four main Watts housing projects.

The state marshaled its vast and enormous powers and labored overtime to destroy the Party. In late August 1970, a series of Gestapo-like raids by the notorious Philadelphia police of several Panther headquarters proved disastrous for the Party: extensive property loss and damage and the humiliating public strip search of arrested Party members in front of the media and the community. Still, the community did not abandon the Party. Instead, in early September, ignoring police orders, community members labored to return the North Philadelphia office to a habitable state. Clarence Peterson remembered:

It was the most beautiful experience I’ve ever had in my whole life. I really cried because the people opened up our offices again…. We did not think our office would open again. The people in the community put everything back in the office. They put furniture back … they fed us for about a week … they kept our kids. It was something that I have never seen or heard of before. It was really something … it was out of sight … they told the cops that these are our Panthers, so leave them alone.\textsuperscript{64}

Precisely because the Party responded as best they could to the pressing concerns of their home communities, these communities embraced their Panthers, and the ties linking local Panthers and local communities deepened.

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In 1969, the Black Panther Party underwent a major political transformation, shifting the focus of its practical efforts to organizing free breakfast for children and other community programs. Every Panther chapter organized community services, and these programs soon became the staple activity for Party members nationwide. By that summer, the Party estimated it was feeding 10,000 children free breakfast on a daily basis nationwide. The Party still practiced armed self-defense against the state, and many members engaged in armed confrontations with the police. But the community service programs gave members a more stable daily activity to engage in. And, in the face of intense state repression, the Panthers projected a proactive and nurturing image, redressing basic needs of impoverished families where the powerful U.S. government failed to do so. These community programs deepened and broadened support for the Panthers from the black community and non-black allies alike.

This deepening support came just in time …

Chapter 8: Law and Order

On Sunday night September 8, 1968, Newton was convicted of manslaughter in the killing of Officer Frey and sentenced to two to fifteen years in prison. He was acquitted of wounding the other officer. Many Panthers and their supporters were disappointed that after all their efforts, Huey was still convicted. Newton’s lawyer Charles Garry promised to appeal the decision. According to the New York Times, many police saw the sentence differently and wanted Newton executed for the killing of Frey. About thirty hours after Newton’s conviction, at 1:30 in the morning on September 10, two white on-duty uniformed police officers shot up the windows and office of the Black Panther headquarters at 4421 Grove St. in Oakland.

Residents of the area awoke to the sound of gunfire. Witnesses who saw the shooting said that the police shot at the office from inside their car parked across four lanes of Grove Street. According to police sources, the officers fired more than a dozen bullets. From the pattern of the bullet holes left by the shooting, it appeared that the officers were aiming at a poster of Newton in the wicker throne displayed in the office front window.

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Insurgency destabilizes traditional political arrangements, forcing various constituencies to take sides on contentious issues, leading to realignments. Such realignments are often accompanied by brutal attempts by traditional authorities to repress insurgents. In the United States in 1968, just such a political realignment took place. By 1968, the broad insurgency of which the Panthers were part – encompassing the

ghetto rebellions and draft resistance – made status quo political arrangements ungovernable.

The governing Democratic coalition split along two axes – race and the War. In the 1968 Presidential election, Republican Richard Nixon seized the day with a “Law and Order” platform that attacked the Democrats by attacking the insurgents. Nixon’s victory brought increasingly virulent state repression of the Black Panthers alongside broad alienation of blacks and liberals.

Even before Nixon’s election, as the Black Panther Party mobilized young blacks in cities across the country, the Federal Government targeted the Party for concerted repressive action.

**COINTELPRO**

From its inception in 1908, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) targeted both leftists and black political organizations for covert investigation and at times disruption. Prime targets included Marcus Garvey’s Universal Negro Improvement Association, the Communist Party, the Wobblies, and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. In 1956, the FBI formalized and consolidated its disruptive (rather than intelligence gathering) activities into the first counter intelligence program, or COINTELPRO, specifically targeting the Communist Party USA.

During the early days of the Civil Rights Movement, the FBI assiduously monitored the activities of civil rights activists, but did little to protect them from illegal violence, and sometimes zealously prosecuted movement leaders. Yet through 1963, the

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3 David Cunningham, There’s Something Happening Here, University of California Press 2004, p. 6.
FBI did little to actively and directly repress the Civil Rights Movement. But this changed by the end of 1963. As the movement attained international coverage and support, the FBI undertook extensive efforts to hound and discredit King until his death five years later. These efforts involved disseminating damning information — some obtained through spying and some fabricated — to political leaders, funders, allies, churches, and journalists. In most instances, the FBI alleged King was under Communist influence, or that he was having extra-marital affairs. Sometimes the FBI alleged misappropriation of funds, or various forms of hypocrisy. Though the FBI persisted in its efforts to discredit King, the campaign against him waned from December 1964 until 1967 when he came out against the Vietnam War.

In the summer of 1967, the FBI dramatically shifted the direction and intensity of its repression of black political organizations. The black liberation struggle was entering a new phase. In the summer of 1966, Stokely Carmichael first called for Black Power. Organizations like the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and the Revolutionary Action Movement declared common cause with the Vietnamese in opposing American oppression. By the following year, the tenor of the movement had become more nationalist and more confrontational. Urban rebellions raged in ghettos throughout the country. In Newark and Detroit, participants in the rebellions proclaimed black nationalist goals and called for armed resistance against the state. Thousands of young blacks rebelled. On April 4, 1967, Martin Luther King, Jr. joined the younger

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5 Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with respect to Intelligence Activities, United States Senate, [i.e. Church Committee] “Supplementary Detailed Staff Reports on Intelligence Activities and the Rights of Americans” Final Report Book III, pages 79-184, April 1976.
6 See chapter 1.
generation of black movement leaders in publicly denouncing U.S. involvement in the war in Vietnam.\(^7\)

Many in the federal government believed the growing black rebellion constituted a threat to the internal security of the country. On August 25, 1967, FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover sent a memo to twenty-three FBI field offices around the country instructing them to initiate counterintelligence activities against black nationalist organizations:

Offices receiving copies of this letter are instructed to immediately establish a control file ... and to assign responsibility for following and coordinating this new counterintelligence program to an experienced and imaginative Special Agent well versed in investigations relating to black nationalist, hate-type organizations... The purpose of this new counterintelligence endeavor is to expose, disrupt, misdirect, discredit, or otherwise neutralize the activities of black nationalist, hate-type organizations and groupings, their leadership, spokesmen, membership, and supporters ... Efforts of various groups to consolidate their forces or to recruit new or youthful adherents must be frustrated.\(^8\)

The memo specifically targeted six “black nationalist hate-type” organizations. Most revealing was the inclusion of King’s Southern Christian Leadership Conference on the list. This was noteworthy because King and the other Christian ministers who comprised the SCLC continued to call for nonviolence and rejected black nationalism outright, advocating instead for reforms within the political framework of the United States that would address the plight of blacks and other poor and dispossessed Americans. King and SCLC re-directed their efforts and sought to heed the concerns of young blacks after the defeat of Jim Crow in the mid-1960s, calling for redress of the problems of poverty and for an end to the Vietnam War. In Hoover’s view, these political positions qualified the SCLC as a leading “black nationalist, hate type” organization and

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\(^8\) Memo from J. Edgar Hoover, FBI Director, to field offices, August 25, 1967.
a dire threat to national security. The Black Panther Party, at the time still a local organization in the Oakland Bay Area, was not mentioned.

On March 4, 1968, J. Edgar Hoover expanded the COINTELPRO against black nationalists to forty-one field offices, and in a new memo established the following five long-term goals for the program:

1. Prevent the coalition of militant black nationalist groups. In unity there is strength; a truism that is no less valid for all its triteness. An effective coalition of black nationalist groups might be the first step toward a real "Mau Mau" in America, the beginning of a true black revolution.

2. Prevent the rise of a "messiah" who could unify, and electrify, the militant black nationalist movement. Malcolm X might have been such a "messiah;" he is the martyr of the movement today. Martin Luther King, Stokely Carmichael and Elijah Muhammed all aspire to this position. Elijah Muhammed is less of a threat because of his age. King could be a very real contender for this position should he abandon his supposed "obedience" to "white, liberal doctrines" (nonviolence) and embrace black nationalism. Carmichael has the necessary charisma to be a real threat in this way.

3. Prevent violence on the part of black nationalist groups. This is of primary importance, and is, of course, a goal of our investigative activity; it should also be a goal of the Counterintelligence Program. Through counterintelligence it should be possible to pinpoint potential troublemakers and neutralize them before they exercise their potential for violence.

4. Prevent militant black nationalist groups and leaders from gaining respectability, by discrediting them to three separate segments of the community. The goal of discrediting black nationalists must be handled tactically in three ways. You must discredit these groups and individuals to, first, the responsible Negro community. Second, they must be discredited to the white community, both the responsible community and to "liberals" who have vestiges of sympathy for militant black nationalists simply because they are Negroes. Third, these groups must be discredited in the eyes of Negro radicals, the followers of the movement. This last area requires entirely different tactics from the first two. Publicity about violent tendencies and radical statements merely enhances black nationalists to the last group; it adds "respectability" in a different way.

5. A final goal should be to prevent the long-range growth of militant black nationalist organizations, especially among youth. Specific tactics to prevent these groups from converting young people must be developed.

One month later to the day, Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated.

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9 Memo from J. Edgar Hoover, FBI Director, to field offices, August 25, 1967. The other five organizations listed in the memo are: Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and Congress of Racial Equality, both leading civil rights organizations that turned nationalist after 1966; the Revolutionary Action Movement and the Deacons for Defense, both proponents of armed black struggle with significant influence on the Black Panthers, see chapter 1; and the Nation of Islam. For King and Southern Christian Leadership Conference politics post 1965, see chapter 4.

Following the assassinations of King and Hutton, the Black Panther Party quickly spread across the country and attained tremendous influence. By the fall of 1968, the Black Panther Party had clearly emerged as the nation’s leading black movement organization. The party’s rhetoric and ideology did not change significantly in this period, nor did its tactics. The party was no more militant in action or rhetoric in September 1968 than it had been in March. What changed was the party’s influence, its growing national scope, and the political challenge it now posed to the status quo. While the FBI did not mention the Black Panther Party in earlier memos establishing and expanding COINTELPRO against black nationalist organizations, the agency now began to focus its attention on the Panthers. According to an FBI internal memo issued in September 1968:

The extremist BPP of Oakland, California, is rapidly expanding … [It] is essential that we not only accelerate our investigations of this organization, and increase our informants in the organization but that we take action under the counterintelligence program to disrupt the group… The attached letter will instruct the field to submit positive suggestions as to actions to be taken to thwart and disrupt the BPP… These suggestions are to create factionalism between not only the national leaders but also local leaders, steps to neutralize all organizational efforts of the BPP, as well as create suspicion amongst the leaders as to each other’s sources of finances, suspicion concerning their respective spouses and suspicion as to who may be cooperating with law enforcement. In addition, suspicion should be developed as to who may be attempting to gain control of the organization for their own private betterment, as well as suggestions as to the best method of exploiting the foreign visits made by BPP members. We are also soliciting recommendations as to the best method of creating opposition to the BPP on the part of the majority of the residents of the ghetto areas.

The Hawk is Dead

Even as the Federal government began to focus repressive actions on the Black Panther Party in 1968, deepening cleavages in the ruling Democratic Party coalition increased the salience of the Panthers’ politics. The race cleavage in the Democratic coalition was not new. In the early 1960s, the Civil Rights Movement had forced the national Democratic Party’s hand on the question of Civil Rights for blacks. President

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11 See chapters 5 and 6.
Lyndon Johnson’s support of Civil Rights won broad support, but alienated many Southern Democrats. Johnson had won the Presidency in a landslide in 1964, winning every state but five in the deep South, and Arizona. The ongoing Black Liberation Struggle in the mid-1960s deepened the racial divide in the Democratic coalition. Liberals in the Democratic Party supported Civil Rights, but could not reconcile with calls for black self-determination by the younger generation of Black Power activists. Conversely, many traditional Southern Democrats assailed Liberals for ‘encouraging rebellion,’ and called for uncompromising repression of black activists.

The mid-1960s also brought a new divide on the Vietnam War. The public came to oppose the War with 58% polled believing the War was a mistake by October 1968.\textsuperscript{13} President Johnson’s troubles appeasing opponents of the War had first become serious in 1967 with the spread of draft resistance. Johnson could not simply ignore the draft resistance as he had earlier shrugged off more passive protests against the war; the card burning and induction refusals challenged his leadership. Consequently, the President sought to discredit the anti-war movement. He repeatedly pressed the FBI and CIA to investigate links between the anti-war movement and foreign governments. His administration leaked allegations to the press about Martin Luther King’s “communist” aides and the Communist affiliations of other leading anti-war organizers in order to discredit the protest among liberals. But these efforts failed. While many Americans said they opposed the militancy of the draft resisters, the draft resistance movement ate away at Johnson’s credibility.\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{13} Gallup Poll.
\textsuperscript{14} Small, 103, 110-113, 117.
The draft resistance movement specifically challenged the legitimacy of the war. The anti-imperialist idea that the Vietnamese were fighting for their liberation contradicted the Administration’s assertion that the NLF was unpopular and would be rapidly defeated. Like the Civil Rights Movement, the militancy of the draft resistance forced the federal government to intervene to maintain social order. Also like the Civil Rights Movement, the protests increasingly resonated with popular sympathies – by December 1967 support for the war was declining; 45% polled thought the Vietnam War was a mistake. But unlike the Civil Rights Movement, draft resistance specifically violated Federal rather than local policies.

After the Pentagon protests, with graphic challenges to Johnson’s leadership and no end of the War in sight, support for Johnson’s handling of the war fell to a low of 28%. A week later, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara told Johnson that he strongly disapproved of the President’s Vietnam policy and resigned. Criticism in the press ballooned, and challenges in Congress became bolder. In November 1967, Minnesota Senator Eugene McCarthy defied all political convention and announced that he would seek the Democratic Party nomination for the 1968 presidential election challenging the incumbent President from his own Party. McCarthy framed his campaign almost entirely in terms of opposition to the war in Vietnam.

Increasingly worried that the anti-war movement was eroding confidence in both his leadership and the war effort, Johnson launched a public relations campaign to allay public fears about the war’s progress. The handsome young General Westmoreland was

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16 Small 118-119; Debenedetti 200-202.
particularly effective, assuring TV audiences he was “very, very encouraged,” that the U.S. was “making real progress.”

Then came the Tet offensive. Without warning, on the eve of “Tet,” the Vietnamese New Year January 30, 1968, the National Liberation Front simultaneously attacked the U.S.-supported Vietnamese government in 36 of the 44 provincial capitals of South Vietnam leading to a widespread breakdown in government authority and suspension of the constitutional process by South Vietnamese President Thieu. In the capitol of Saigon NLF forces succeeded in penetrating the supposedly invulnerable U.S. embassy; the press carried pictures of American soldiers lying dead inside the compound. In four days of fighting 281 American troops were killed and 1,195 wounded. Fighting persisted in Saigon for a week. In Hue, the former imperial capital in Central Vietnam, the NLF seized power. It took three weeks of aerial bombing and the destruction of 18,000 of the 20,000 houses in Hue for U.S. allies to reclaim the city. All told, at least 12,000 Vietnamese civilians were killed, and countless refugees evacuated to restore order in South Vietnam.

In the United States, Tet exacerbated public concern that the war was wrong and that it would be long, bloody, and cost many more American lives. It belied Johnson’s assertion that American victory was near, and strengthened the claim of many in the anti-war movement that the NLF had popular support and that people were fighting for self-determination and would go to any length to resist U.S. imperialism. The “Vietcong remain adamant in their struggle to overthrow the South Vietnamese Government and

17 Small 120-123.
force the United States out of the country,” the *New York Times* reported, quoting a captured NLF soldier: “An easy victory costs little blood, a difficult victory costs much blood … Regardless, the result will be victory.”

Public approval of Johnson’s handling of the war plummeted after Tet. A February poll showed that for the first time, a majority of Americans believed that it was a “mistake” to keep U.S. troops in Vietnam. The press also turned against the war. Even Walter Cronkite, the nation’s most respected anchorman and a long-time supporter of Johnson’s policies, had a change of heart. In February, upon returning from an investigative tour of Vietnam, he reported that the President’s policies were failing there.

On March 12, Minnesota Senator Eugene McCarthy, critical of Johnson’s handling of the war, almost beat him in the New Hampshire primary with 42% of the vote to Johnson’s 49%. Four days later, with Johnson’s vulnerability clear, Robert Kennedy – the former Attorney General, younger brother of slain President John F. Kennedy, a Senator with powerful political and financial backing and widespread appeal – entered the race.

Johnson circulated a draft speech to several close advisors on March 28 taking a hard-line hawkish stance advancing the war. Clark Clifford, Johnson’s newly appointed Secretary of Defense and one of his closest advisors, said the President could not give the speech. “What seems not to be understood,” he said, “is that major elements of the

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20 Small 135.
21 Debenedetti, 211.
22 Small 138.
23 Small 137; Debenedetti, 212.
national constituency – the business community, the press, the churches, professional
groups, college presidents, students, and most of the intellectual community – have
turned against this war.” In the last days of March, Johnson re-assigned General
Westmoreland and denied the military’s request for 209,000 new troops, setting a ceiling
of 549,500 troops for Vietnam. Johnson’s advisors drafted a new speech. On March 31 he
gave this revised speech to the nation largely as drafted. He said he was moving toward
de-escalation in Vietnam, halting bombing north of the Twentieth Parallel, and hoped to
open peace talks with the communists.

Then Johnson made an announcement that surprised many of his advisors as well
as much of the Nation. Lyndon B. Johnson, who had won the 1964 Presidential election
with more than 90% of the Electoral College and the largest percentage of the popular
vote ever recorded in American history, announced he would not seek re-election in
1968. Exuberant college students poured out of dormitories across the country cheering,
“the hawk is dead!”

**Democrats Betray the Base**

Despite widespread opposition to the War, Vice President Hubert Humphrey soon
entered the Presidential race with the support of the Democratic Party establishment, and
pledging to pursue the War. On June 5, on a platform critical of the Vietnam War, Robert
Kennedy won the California Democratic Primary. Many anti-war liberals celebrated the
victory, rallying around Kennedy as the likely Democratic nominee. But at his victory

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24 Small, 147.
25 Small 132 and Debenedetti 214.
26 In 1964 Johnson took every state except those in the Deep South (Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama,
Georgia, and South Carolina) that had been alienated by his Civil Rights policies and turned towards the
Republican Party for the first time, and his opponent’s home state of Arizona.
27 Small 158.
celebration that evening at the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles, Kennedy was assassinated.

The Democratic nomination and the Party’s position on Vietnam would be decided at the Democratic National Convention that August in Chicago. The National Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam (Mobe), a coalition of ideologically diverse anti-war organizations that had organized the Pentagon protests, planned demonstrations to take place outside the Convention. Organizers also invited the Black Panthers to speak. In late August, Bobby Seale and David Hilliard flew to Chicago.

Despite widespread opposition to the war among registered Democrats, the Party leadership was not willing to concede on its Vietnam policy. Yet the vociferous resistance challenged the legitimacy of the Democratic leadership. The Democratic Party leadership attempted to repress the resistance. In preparation for the Convention, Chicago Mayor Richard Daley sealed off the convention site with barbed wire, refused many protestors permits and stalled on others, placed all 12,000 Chicago police on twelve-hour-shifts, mobilized more than 5,000 National Guardsmen and provided them with riot training, and called in 6,000 U.S. Army troops equipped with flamethrowers, bayonets, bazookas, and machine guns mounted on Jeeps.

Small but disruptive protests through the weekend of August 24 and the early part of the week met aggressive police. A troop of 150 police broke up a protestor

28 Wells 237-240 and Sale, 473.
29 “Chairman Bobby Seale and Chief of Staff David Hilliard in Chicago” in Black Panther, v2n5 September 7, 1968 p.3.
30 Gitlin, 321-323; New York Times, August 29, 1968. 60 black soldiers in Fort Hood, Texas, refused to help put down protests against the war in Chicago and 43 were taken to the stockades: “60 Negro GIs Balk at Possible Riot Control” in Los Angeles Times, August 25, 1968 p. F9.
encampment at Lincoln Park with tear gas, and nightsticks.\textsuperscript{31} Many in the black community watched the conflict with interest, remembering Daley’s “shoot to kill” orders during the black rebellion in Chicago following King’s assassination in April. Hundreds of young black people from the Chicago area joined the confrontations.\textsuperscript{32} Police removed badges and beat both protestors and news reporters with abandon.\textsuperscript{33}

Inside the Convention, the Democratic Party leadership was busy repressing another kind of challenge. During the primary election, registered Democrats had displayed overwhelming opposition to the Administration’s policy in Vietnam, and 80% had voted for candidates critical of the Vietnam War. True to the voters, a group of anti-war delegates proposed a plank to the platform committee calling for de-escalation in Vietnam along the lines proposed by McCarthy and Kennedy. But the platform committee endorsed a pro-War plank and pushed this through on the floor a few days later. Then, on Wednesday August 29, while anti-war candidates McCarthy and Kennedy had received the vast majority of the primary votes cast, convention delegates hand picked by Party machine leaders nominated pro-War Hubert Humphrey for President. Downtown Chicago exploded that night.\textsuperscript{34}

More than 10,000 people gathered for a legally sanctioned nonviolent protest at Grant Park across the street from the Hilton Hotel where many delegates were staying. When someone lowered the American flag, the police swooped in, bloodying a number of protestors. Black Panther Chairman Bobby Seale told the protestors: “[I]f you dissent,

\textsuperscript{34} Debenedetti, 227-8; Gitlin 332; Wells 279.
your heads will be whipped and your skulls will be cracked …. Every time the people disagree with the basic decisions of the power structure it sends in its arms, guns, and force to make them agree.”

Tom Hayden took the microphone and called for the protestors to shake up the city: “The city and the military machinery it has aimed at us won’t permit us to protest in an organized fashion. Therefore, we must move out of this park in groups throughout the city, and turn this overheated military machine against itself. Let us make sure that if blood flows, it flows all over the city. If they use gas against us, let us make sure they use gas against their own citizens.” The action on the street was electric as young people of various races and social classes confronted the police head on. SDS developed “affinity groups” to act in a “guerilla” fashion, avoiding police attack, and moving the melee into the busy streets of Chicago.

Now disillusioned, many of the anti-war liberal kids who had poured their hearts into McCarthy’s campaign joined the radicals confronting the police in the streets. Even those who had tried to quiet the protests earlier because they believed it would dampen McCarthy’s chances joined in. Some threw rocks at the police, who in turn stormed McCarthy’s headquarters on the fifteenth floor of the Hilton, tossing several staff members out of bed, and breaking a club over one’s head. The McCarthyites’ anger grew: “Well, from now on it’s the Battle of Algiers” one declared. Soldiers chased protestors through the streets of downtown Chicago, spraying them with tear gas through converted flamethrowers. The gas was so thick that even Democratic nominee Hubert Humphrey had trouble breathing in his suite in the Hilton many stories above the street. The carpet

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35 Seale in “Chairman Bobby Seale and Chief of Staff David Hilliard in Chicago” in Black Panther, v2n5 September 7, 1968 p.3. See also “White Radicals Vs Pigs at Chicago” in Black Panther, October 5, 1968. 36 Gitlin 332-4; Wells, 279-80.
in the hotel lobby was covered with vomit from those made sick by the gas. Out on the streets, small groups of protestors, confronted by police, dispersed, circled, and regrouped. The police lined up platoon-style, shouting “Kill, Kill, Kill” with clubs raised. Any protestor the police caught, and many news reporters and other bystanders, were knocked to the ground and beaten. One group was pushed through the plate glass window of the Hilton’s Haymarket Lounge by police.³⁷

Senator Abraham Ribicoff of CT condemned Daley for “Gestapo” tactics. Other official delegates held up signs comparing Chicago to Prague, where Soviet troops and tanks were crushing a liberal Czech movement.³⁸ All told, more than 1,000 people, including 192 police, were injured and 662 were arrested. One young man was shot to death by the police.

Panther Minister of Information Eldridge Cleaver held a press conference announcing, “We have been driven out of the political arena … We will not dissent from the American Government. We will overthrow it.”³⁹ Renowned journalist I.F. Stone declared, “The war is destroying our country as we are destroying Vietnam.” Kennedy aide Richard Goodwin said “This is just the beginning.”⁴⁰ In the revolutionary mood following Chicago, tens of thousands of young people joined the New Left. The greatest growth was in the months following Chicago. By the Presidential elections in November, SDS alone had at least 80,000 members – up from 35,000 in April.⁴¹

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³⁷ Gitlin 332-4; Wells, 279-80.
³⁸ Debnedetti, p. 228.
The Greatest Threat

The insurgents had split the governing Democratic coalition. The Democratic Party leadership was unwilling to yield to the anti-war position of the Party base. The Democrats had embraced Civil Rights, losing traditional support from the Dixiecrats. But they had failed to address the persistent poverty, lack of political representation, ghettoization, and police brutality of concern to Black Power activists.

Richard Nixon took advantage of the fractures in the Democratic coalition, seeking to unify the Republican Party behind a “Law and Order” platform. Nixon attacked the Democrats by attacking the rebels. He blamed the flagging War effort in Vietnam and the growing black and anti-war rebellions on the Democrats’ weakness.

“The long dark night for America is about to end,” Nixon pledged.42 Nixon called for tough government action to repress the rebels:

It is too late for more commissions to study violence. It is time for the government to stop it. The people of this country want an end to government that acts out of a spirit of neutrality or beneficence or indulgence towards criminals. We must cease as well the granting of special immunities and moral sanctions to those who deliberately violate public laws – even when those violations are done in the name of peace or civil rights or anti-poverty or academic reform.43

Positioning himself to capture the conservatives in the Democratic Party deeply troubled by social unrest, and as much of the white supremacist vote as he could, Nixon conflated crime, ghetto rebellion, civil rights, and student protest. The gambit worked. On November 5th, by the thinnest of margins, Nixon was elected 37th President of the United States.44

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44 White supremacist George Wallace ran as a third-party candidate, eventually winning 13 percent of the popular vote and most of the electoral votes in the Deep South. Many on the Left refused to vote. Of those in the left wing of the Democratic Party who did vote for Hubert Humphrey, most were disgusted by the Party leadership and declined to help the campaign with time or money. Humphrey was lagging far behind in the polls until, desperate to bring the Democratic base back into the election in the last few weeks of the campaign, he became critical of President Johnson’s war policy and called for a bombing halt. When
From the first days of his presidency, Nixon took a personal interest in repressing the Black Panther Party. In early 1969 he spoke with Hoover and asked him how cooperative the Justice Department was being in targeting the Party. Nixon was displeased when Hoover reported little action had been taken yet, and said he would put a word in with Attorney General John Mitchell about the importance of moving against the Panthers. In response, Mitchell’s Justice Department identified the Panthers as a “menace to national security” and set up a task force on extremism — independent of FBI activities — focused mostly on repressing the Panthers. One plan of action the department considered was wide legal prosecution of Black Panthers for “conspiring to advocate the violent overthrow of the government” under the Smith Act used to jail Communists in the 1950s.

On July 15, 1969, Hoover publicly announced that of all the black nationalist groups, “the Black Panther Party, without question, represents the greatest threat to the internal security of the country.” This statement stood in stark contrast to earlier public

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47 J. Edgar Hoover quoted by UPI in “FBI Director Blacks Black Panthers,” in *Oakland Tribune*, July 15, 1969, p. 17. This is perhaps the most famous quote from Hoover on the Panthers. Usually the 1976 Church Committee report is cited as a source. But the Church Committee report cites a *New York Times* article from September 8, 1968. No such article exists, and the timing is wrong. Hoover took no such public
statements by the FBI regarding the Panthers. In the FBI report for fiscal year 1968, which was released on October 1, 1968, the Panthers were barely mentioned. They had not appeared at all in the FBI fiscal report for 1967. But by the fall of 1968, the FBI was secretly developing what would become its most intensive program to repress any black political organization. Overall, of 295 actions initiated by the FBI’s counterintelligence program to destabilize black nationalist organizations, 233 of them — or 79 percent — targeted the Black Panther Party. Federal actions against the Panthers ranged from

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The total treatment of the Panthers in the report was: “Another such organization is the Black Panther Party, which was founded as the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense at Oakland, California in December, 1966, for the alleged purpose of combating police brutality and uniting militant black youth. The political philosophy of its leaders is based on the writings of Mao Tse-tung and black revolutionary writers. They advocate the use of guns and guerrilla tactics to end their alleged oppression.” Office of John Edgar Hoover, FBI Annual Report: Fiscal Year 1968, Tuesday PM, October 1, 1968, p. 24.

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48 The Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with respect to Intelligence Activities, United States Senate, [i.e. Church Committee] “Supplementary Detailed Staff Reports on Intelligence Activities and the Rights of Americans,” Final Report Book III, page 188, April 1976. The program was initiated in 1967, see J. Edgar Hoover memo August 1967 discussed below initiating black nationalist COINTELPRO and terminated in 1971, see David Cunningham, There’s Something Happening Here, University of California Press 2004, p. 13.
spreading false information about misappropriation of party money to fomenting marital strife, and in some cases, direct participation in planned killings of Panther leaders.\textsuperscript{50} 

COINTELPRO aimed to undermine the challenge that the Black Panther posed to the political status quo. Toward that end, COINTELPRO tried to foster divisions among the Panthers, potential recruits, and other organizations, as well as among the Black Panthers themselves.

No aspect of the Black Panther program was of greater concern to the FBI than the “Breakfast for Children” program, which fostered widespread support for the Panthers’ revolutionary politics. Hoover drove home this point in an airtel to the special agent in charge in San Francisco on May 27, 1969:

You state that the Bureau under the CIP should not attack programs of community interest such as the BPP “Breakfast for Children.” You state that this is because many prominent “humanitarians,” both white and black, are interested in the program as well as churches which are actively supporting it. You have obviously missed the point…. You must recognize that one of our primary aims in counterintelligence as it concerns the BPP is to keep this group isolated from the moderate black and white community which may support it. This is most emphatically pointed out in their Breakfast for Children Program, where they are actively soliciting and receiving support from uninformed whites and moderate blacks.\textsuperscript{51}

The FBI undertook extensive measures to undermine support for the Panthers’ Free Breakfast for Children Program. This included sending forged letters and incendiary propaganda to supermarkets to dissuade them from providing food and impersonating concerned parishioners to dissuade churches from providing space for the program.\textsuperscript{52}

Various branches of the federal government mobilized to address the political threat posed by the Panthers. In response to White House interest in Internal Revenue

\textsuperscript{50} See below.
\textsuperscript{52} Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with respect to Intelligence Activities, United States Senate, [i.e. Church Committee] “Supplementary Detailed Staff Reports on Intelligence Activities and the Rights of Americans,” Final Report Book III, pages 210-211, April 1976. See also assorted news coverage of these revelations, such as Richard Philbrick, “Panther free meals ‘threat’ to Hoover,” in Chicago Tribune, May 8, 1976, p. 5.
Service support of efforts to repress “ideological organizations,” the IRS established an “Activist Organizations Committee” in July 1969 to “collect basic intelligence data” on members of the Black Panther Party, organizations that did business with the Black Panther Party, and other “radical” political organizations. The FBI supplied the IRS with the names of individuals and organizations. The IRS, in return, supplied detailed personal financial information, and also targeted these individuals for special enforcement of tax regulations.53

In June 1970, a joint report by the FBI, the CIA, the Defense Intelligence Committee, and the National Security Administration identified the Black Panther Party as the most “active and dangerous” black nationalist threat to internal security. The report expressed particular concern about widespread grassroots support for the party, noting that “a recent poll indicates that approximately 25 percent of the black population has a great respect for the BPP, including 43 percent of blacks under 21 years of age.” The report also emphasized the large 150,000 weekly circulation of the Panther newspaper, 189 speaking engagements on college campuses in 1969, strong support from the Students for a Democratic Society and other “New Left” groups, the appeal of the Black Panthers to blacks in the military, and the Party’s international support from students in Europe, guerrilla movements in the Middle East, and the governments of Cuba, North Korea, and Algeria.54

53 Memorandum from Internal Revenue Service Assistant Commissioner D. W. Bacon to chief counsel and other officers, re: “Activist Organizations Committee,” July 24, 1969. Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities, United States Senate, “Internal Revenue Service: An Intelligence Resource and Collector,” in “Supplementary Detailed Staff Reports on Intelligence Activities and the Rights of Americans, Book III,” [Church Committee Report] pp. 876-890.
Before Nixon’s election as president, there had not been a single police raid of a Black Panther office. Police had stopped and arrested small groups of Panthers selling the *Black Panther Newspaper*. Police confronted Panthers in spontaneous conflicts outside Panther offices in New York and Denver.\(^55\) And in the Bay Area, police had raided the homes of Bobby Seale and the Cleavers, encountering minimal resistance.\(^56\)

State repression of the Panthers intensified after Nixon’s election. Following the election in November, but even before Nixon took office in January, 1969, police and federal agents began staging raids on Panther offices. It is not clear whether the wave of raids of Panther offices that followed was the independent response of local police to the victory of Nixon’s “Law and Order” campaign in the polls, or whether the FBI systematically encouraged the change in policy nationwide. In either case, no form of repression was more direct, more provocative, or more violent. In January 1968, Newton had issued “Executive Mandate No. 3,” commanding Panthers to defend their homes and offices with guns against trespass by police unless they demonstrated legal warrants. Panthers around the country took this mandate seriously, preparing for un-warranted raids by police, and in some cities fortifying their offices for attack. In this context, raids on Panther offices were essentially acts of war – usually planned confrontations in which authorities expected armed resistance.

At 8 a.m. on December 18, 1968, police and federal agents stormed the Panther office in Indianapolis, shooting tear gas canisters through the window, and arresting three Panthers. They then proceeded to ransack the office. Photos show everything in the office


tossed about and destroyed. Federal marshals claimed they were searching for unregistered weapons, but they found none.57

After a wedding reception for Lauren Watson, chair of the Denver Black Panthers, at a Panther office and cultural center in December 1968, police raided and ransacked the center. They ripped and damaged books and cultural objects. Photos taken after the raid show the center in disarray with strewn papers and broken furniture. The wedding had been attended by some of Denver’s most prominent black leaders, and the black press covered the raid. No Panthers were in the office at the time of the raid.58

On December 27, 1968, one hundred police and FBI agents – weapons drawn – knocked down the door of the Des Moines Panther headquarters. They ransacked the office, arresting two Panthers on charges of arson at a local lumber company, and confiscated various papers.59

At 4:15 in the morning on December 1, 1968, two white men dressed in police uniforms pulled up in front of the Newark Black Panther office in an unmarked vehicle and threw two small bombs at the office. The bombs shattered parts of the front wall and window, and started a fire in the office; four Panthers were injured, including Carl Nichols, who suffered a broken arm and burns on his legs. Police spokesmen alleged that the Panthers had earlier shot up the front the Newark police station with a machine gun, but denied Panther charges that the bombing was retaliation for that event.60

60 Charles Buesey, “Pigs Uptight: Bomb New Jersey Panther Office,” in Black Panther Newspaper,
Just after midnight on April 27, 1969, a bomb exploded in the Des Moines Black Panther Headquarters, demolishing one side of the building, including the bathroom, kitchen, conference room, and distribution room. Photos show half the building obliterated with large sections of the walls and roof destroyed. Six panthers were in the other half of the building at the time; miraculously, no one was seriously hurt. Police arrived less than 30 seconds later, cordoned off the building, and began seizing documents from inside the house. When some of the Panthers objected, police proceeded to use mace against them and arrested three Panthers for disturbing the peace and resisting arrest. The Panthers charged the police with bombing the office, and argued that the unnatural quickness of their arrival after the explosion showed that they knew of the bombing in advance.61

The New York chapter of the Black Panther Party was one of the largest, most active, and most effective. At 1 a.m. on April 2, 1969, based on the allegations of three paid informants, a New York grand jury indicted twenty-one Black Panthers for plotting to bomb department stores, police stations, and the Brooklyn Botanical Garden. At five in the morning New York police simultaneously raided five Black Panther houses, arresting twelve Panthers. Others were already in police custody; a few escaped capture and went into exile. Those indicted were Afeni Shakur (the mother of future rap star Tupak Shakur), Lumumba Shakur, Dharuba (Richard Moore), Sekou Odinga (Nathaniel Williams), Jamal (Eddie Joseph), Joan Bird, Cetawayo (Michael Tabor), Kuwasi

Balagoon (Donald Weems), Robert Collier, Richard Harris, Ali Bey Hassan (John J. Casson), Abayama Katara (Alex McKiever), Kwando Kinshasa (William King), Baba Odinga (Walter Johnson), Shaba Ogun Om (Lee Roper), Curtis Powell, Clark Squire, Larry Mack, Mshina (Thomas Berry), Lonnie Epps, and Mkuba (Lee Berry). While the evidence against them was flimsy the judge set bail prohibitively high: $100,000 each for most of the “Panther 21.” Most of the accused remained in jail for two years while the trial proceeded, thus incapacitating most of the New York Panther leadership. They were all eventually acquitted. The case became a major cause for further mobilization of Panthers and their allies nationally.62

On April 28, 1969, after a Panther rally to mobilize support for the Free Huey campaign, police raided the San Francisco office of the Black Panther Party. Carrying Thompson submachine guns and M16 rifles, police kicked in the front door, shooting bullets into the office and filling it with tear gas. Eleven Panthers fled through the back door, and police arrested all of them. Nine of the eleven were later released without charge; Cleveland Brooks was booked for disturbing the peace and Panther Field Marshal Donald Cox for suspicion of assault on a police officer.63

At 1 a.m. on June 5, 1969, police surrounded Panther headquarters in Milwaukee and arrested five panthers standing outside on charges of carrying concealed weapons and loitering.\textsuperscript{64}

At 9:15 p.m. on June 15, 1969, police sought to disperse a black gathering from a local park across the street from the Black Panther Party office in Sacramento. The crowd, including many women, resisted, and the confrontation became violent with police spraying mace and beating people, who in turn threw rocks and bottles at the police. Police tried to cordon off the crowd, and many of the participants retreated to the Black Panther office. Police fired dozens of shots into the office, and Panthers escaped out the back doors. Police then proceed to ransack the office, smashing windows, strewing papers on the floor, and breaking office equipment. Shooting between police and local residents continued for six hours. Fifteen people, many of them police, suffered gunshot wounds. By the end of the episode, police had arrested thirty-seven people, including several Panthers, who they beat in jail.\textsuperscript{65}

On July 14, police raided the Black Panther office in Sacramento, confiscating their weapons stash – which the Panthers claimed were all legal – overturning the desks, and strewing papers on the floor.\textsuperscript{66}

On August 9, 1969 at 9 p.m., dozens of police surrounded the Black Panther Party office in Richmond, California. The Panthers called their radio contacts, who promptly


\textsuperscript{66}“Fascist Pigs Vamp on San Diego Panther Office,” in \textit{Black Panther Newspaper}, V3n13, July 19, 1969, p.3.
made an announcement on air, and dozens of people from the neighborhood quickly turned out to observe the police. After a short while, the police got in their cars and left.67

In the early morning of September 2, 1969, police surrounded a Panther house in San Diego and ordered the occupants — two women and a baby — to leave their home. The women asked to see a warrant, which the police did not produce. The women refused to leave or to let the police in. Police fired tear gas canisters into the house through a window. Neighbors turned out and began throwing rocks and bricks at the police, who proceeded to arrest most of the crowd. Eventually, the two women came out of the house with the baby, and the police arrested them. Next the police ransacked the house, seizing Panther arms and ammunition. Police claimed they were looking for Ronald Freeman, a Panther captain, who was wanted on suspicion of murder.68

On September 23, 1969, FBI agents and Philadelphia police surrounded the Philadelphia Black Panther Headquarters. They arrested everyone inside, and confiscated the Panthers files, and an M14 rifle.69

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By the Fall of 1968, in response to the growing political influence of the Black Panthers, the Federal Government targeted the Party for concerted repressive action. Broader political realignments that year led to an intensification of State repressive action against the Panthers, while also increasing allied support for the Panthers.

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67 “Attempted Murder by the Fascist Pigs of Richmond Calif,” in Black Panther Newspaper, V3n17, August 16, 1969, p.21.
Only when challenged do authorities reveal what they are willing to compromise, and what they will do to hold onto power. In 1968, President Johnson could neither put down the draft resistance, nor win broad support for the War in Vietnam. The Tet Offensive belied his promises of ready victory. Unwilling to compromise on the War, he withdrew from the Presidential race. With other Party leaders, Johnson orchestrated the nomination of Hubert Humphrey as Democratic Party candidate for President, and a pro-War platform, over and against the will of a large majority of Democratic Party constituents.

Taking advantage of divisions in the Democratic Party coalition, Nixon called for “Law and Order,” appealing to conservatives and some white supremacists by conflating black and anti-war political resistance with criminality. On this platform, coupled with the promise that his harder and more effective use of American power would triumph in Vietnam, Nixon seized the Presidency.

This political realignment held two far-reaching consequences for the Black Panthers that would set the context for the next phase of the Party’s development through 1969 and much of 1970. First, Nixon’s “Law and Order” victory intensified state repression of the Panthers. Second, large portions of society, including many black people and opponents of the War, felt betrayed by the political establishment. For many, harsh repression confirmed the anti-imperialist view that the government did not serve the interests of the people. Even as right-wing-Nixon seized the Presidency, the Left expanded and deepened its commitment to fight imperialism.

The more the State attempted to repress the Panthers, the more influential the Party would become …
Chapter 9: 41st and Central

By January 1969, the Los Angeles chapter of the Black Panther Party had consolidated its status as a leading black nationalist organization in the city, rivaled only by Ron Karenga’s US Organization. The Los Angeles Panther chapter was not yet a large organization, but the killings of Panthers Bartholomew, Lawrence, and Lewis by police in the shootout at the gas station during the Watts festival in August 1968 had not scared everyone away either. If anything, the fact that these Panthers stood their ground and fought the police to the death strengthened the Party’s revolutionary credentials and drew new recruits, including alienated Vietnam War hero Geronimo Pratt.

In addition to a Purple Heart, Sgt. Elmer “Geronimo” Pratt – a former high school quarterback from Morgan City, Louisiana – had earned many honors in his first tour of duty in Vietnam, including the Soldier’s Medal and the Air Medal. He lost many friends in combat, and had been wounded in action several times – including once by shrapnel from a land mine. Medics reported that only the extra sandbags with which Pratt had lined the bottom of his jeep had saved his life. In the incident that earned him the Soldier’s Medal, Pratt saved the lives of fellow soldiers when their helicopter crashed.

Pratt’s citation read:

Pfc. Pratt, disregarding his own safety, entered the burning aircraft. Aware of the possibility of enemy activity in the area and the likelihood of an explosion in the helicopter, Pfc. Pratt made repeated trips into the aircraft until all five occupants had been removed and taken a safe distance from the flaming wreckage. His heroic and selfless action, at the risk of his own life, is in keeping with the highest traditions of the military service and reflects great credit upon himself, his unit and the United States of America.¹

Pratt was a committed soldier, and he later recalled that he simply saw his ordeals in Vietnam as part of the job. Pratt was ready, even eager to return to Vietnam. But in the summer of 1967, Pratt was sent to Detroit to put down the black uprising there. He later recalled, “They took away our dignity as soldiers. One month we’re risking our lives for our country, and the next we’re getting ready to fire on our own people. I knew if the order came I couldn’t obey it.”

When Pratt was sent back to Vietnam for a second tour of duty, he saw things in a new light. He began having nightmares, and became critical of the war. “After a while,” recalled Pratt,

I began to see the war as another kind of racism… all we ever heard was ‘gooks,’ ‘Buddha-heads,’ ‘slopes,’ same way our daddies heard ‘Krauts’ and ‘Japs.’ You got to make people subhuman before you kill ‘em. I saw things I don’t want to remember. I did things I don’t want to remember. That second tour was a bad time.

Martin Luther King, Jr’s assassination in April 1968 was a wakeup call for Pratt. People back home had been telling him that a race war was approaching, and that they needed him. By June, he was back in Morgan City with an honorable discharge.

In September Pratt traveled to Los Angeles where he met Bunchy Carter through a family friend. It had only been a few weeks since police killed three Panthers at the Watts Summer Festival. Pratt agreed to share his military knowledge to help Bunchy train the Black Panthers in more effective self-defense measures. According to Pratt, Bunchy gave him the honorary name “Geronimo ji Jaga,” after the fierce warriors of the Jaga people of the Congo. Geronimo became Bunchy’s right-hand man, and stayed in Los Angeles to train the Panthers.

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2 Pratt in Olsen, p. 32; 33.
3 Pratt in Olsen, p. 34.
John and Ericka Huggins and Elaine Brown shared a communal apartment that served as an informal headquarters for the Party leadership, and the Panthers rented a two-story office where they conducted political education classes, meetings, and other official Party activities. In December 1968, Ericka gave birth to baby girl, Mai Huggins. While Ericka cared for the baby, John and Elaine, along with Bunchy Carter and Geronimo Pratt, participated in a special “High Potential Program” at UCLA. Funded partly by the federal government, the program admitted black students deemed to have high potential despite lacking formal academic credentials. The Panthers took college classes and worked to organize other black UCLA students. In line with instructions from the national office, they sought to organize L.A.’s first Free Breakfast for Children Program and set up a meeting with the head of food services at a UCLA dormitory to discuss donating leftover food to the program. But before the Panthers could open the first community program, crisis struck.

In the fall of 1968, the FBI had accelerated a program to undermine the growing political influence of the Black Panthers. Taking note of the growing tension between the Black Panther Party and the US Organization in Southern California, the FBI sought to escalate the conflict. FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover sent a memo to field officers on November 25, 1968 with the following instructions:

For the information of recipient offices a serious struggle is taking place between the Black Panther Party (BPP) and the US organization. The struggle has reached such proportion that it is taking on the aura of gang warfare with attendant threats of murder and reprisals. In order to fully capitalize upon BPP and US differences as well as to exploit all avenues of creating further dissension in the ranks of the BPP, recipient offices are instructed to submit imaginative and hard-hitting counterintelligence measures aimed at crippling the BPP.

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6 Memo from J. Edgar Hoover to field offices, “Counter Intelligence Program, Black Nationalist Hate Groups, Racial Intelligence (Black Panther Party),” November 25, 1968.
Field offices quickly responded to Hoover with plans for escalating the conflict,
including the following response from the Los Angeles office:

The Los Angeles Office is currently preparing an anonymous letter for Bureau approval which will be sent to the Los Angeles Black Panther Party (BPP) supposedly from a member of the “US” organization in which it will be stated that the youth group of the “US” organization is aware of the BPP “contract” to kill RON KARENGA, leader of “US”, and they, “US” members, in retaliation, have made plans to ambush leaders of the BPP in Los Angeles. It is hoped this counterintelligence measure will result in an “US” and BPP vendetta.7

Tensions between Ron Karenga’s US Organization and the Panthers came to a head over the leadership of the Black Student Union on the UCLA campus and the direction of a new Black Studies program there. Karenga, as a formal community advisor appointed by the university administration, supported one candidate for director of the new program; the Black Panthers wanted a role in the decision-making process and opposed that candidate. The university administration planned to announce the new director of the Black Studies program on January 21. At two large and confrontational meetings of the Black Student Union on January 15 and January 17, no resolution was achieved. It appeared that most of the black students were supporting the Black Panther position. Elaine Brown and John Huggins were elected to an ad hoc committee to represent Black Student Union concerns, and John Huggins and Bunchy Carter had both emerged as leading contenders in the upcoming election for the Black Student Union presidency.

At about 2:40 p.m. on January 17 as the Black Student Union adjourned and about 150 students poured out of the meeting at Campbell Hall, the conflict became violent. Ranking members of the US Organization fired guns at Los Angeles Black Panther

leaders; they shot John Huggins in the back and Bunchy Carter in the chest, killing them both.8

Fleeing campus, Panthers gathered at the Century Boulevard home shared by John and Ericka Huggins, their three-week old daughter Mai, and Elaine Brown. When Elaine Brown told Ericka that John had been killed, Ericka’s eyes glazed over; she started making coffee for the guests. About 150 police officers surrounded the house. Brown and two other Panther women hid under the bed with Ericka Huggins and Mai wrapped in a coat as police kicked down the door. Police arrested all seventeen Panthers in the house.9

Initially, no members of US were arrested. Playwright Donald Freed, the National Lawyers Guild, and other Panther allies quickly mobilized to raise bail and activate a legal defense. Within a few days, all charges against the Panthers were dropped, and the Panthers were released. Funeral services for Bunchy Carter were held at the Trinity Baptist Church in Los Angeles on Friday, January 24. Hundreds of people attended. Bobby Seale flew down to lead the services; Kathleen Cleaver and James Baldwin also attended. While documentation of the FBI’s involvement in escalating the conflict with US would not be revealed for years to come, the Panther leadership believed from the

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start that the attack could be traced back to government plots. At Bunchy Carter’s funeral, Bobby Seale denounced Ron Karenga as a “reactionary” and a “tool of the power structure.”

The Panthers rallied around their dead as martyrs in a revolutionary war against the United States government. The front-page headlines of the Black Panther Newspaper declared “A Political Assassination.” Several articles in that issue argued that Ron Karenga and US were government pawns, and that they had been put up to murder the Panthers for the State. The evidence the Black Panther Newspaper presented to support this argument was all circumstantial, but powerful. The Panthers posited that their members had been attacked and killed by both police and the US organization, while US had never been attacked by police or the Panthers. They pointed out that US received government funding; the Panthers did not. Panthers organized programs serving masses of poor black folks; US did not. The government conducted violent raids on Panther offices and activities nationally, but had a peaceable relationship with US. US cooperated with the police to repress disturbances at high schools; the Panthers did not. Moreover, the Panthers argued that they were not especially concerned with the outcome of the conflict at UCLA, and would never have come to blows over it. The Black Panther explained that the “issue of the control of UCLA’s Black Studies Program is not an objective of the Black Panther Party. The Black Panther Party would not trade one block of Central Avenue [a low income black neighborhood] for the whole city of Westwood

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[where UCLA is located] because the Black Panther Party is based on the masses of Black people, and gets its strength from the same.”\(^{11}\)

At the time, Panther leaders had no direct knowledge of the role of the FBI in fomenting the killing, but they had a strong analytic grasp of the political dynamic at hand. The Panthers were absolutely correct in surmising that the killings were not part of the normal course of conflict between themselves and a rival black nationalist organization. Evidence would emerge later showing that the state had a hand in fomenting the conflict that contributed to the killings of John Huggins and Bunchy Carter. Yet the Panthers did not know at that time, and we still do not know today to what extent US members were working directly with the FBI or police, and whether the killings were planned and implemented under direction of the government. Police issued warrants for the arrest of the Stiner brothers, George and Larry, rank and file members of US on hand at the time of the killing. The Stiner brothers turned themselves in to police and received life sentences for conspiracy to commit murder. But US members Claude Hubert-Gaidi, whom witnesses said was the actual shooter, and Harold Jones-Tawala, who was centrally involved in the violent conflict that day, both disappeared and were never tried.\(^ {12}\)

In the months that followed, the Panthers rallied around their martyrs, drawing on the outpouring of allied support to advance their revolutionary program. L.A. Panther Gwen Goodloe attended the Los Angeles Conference of Baptist Ministers and received an endorsement for the Free Breakfast program, which the Panthers hoped would help them obtain use of church space to prepare and serve breakfast. The Seventh-Day

\(^{11}\)“A Political Assassination,” in *Black Panther Newspaper*, v2n21 pp 1, 3.

Adventist Church on Santa Barbara Avenue (now Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard) near South Budlong Avenue in South Central Los Angeles provided free facilities for the program. Donald Freed helped form a “Friends of the Panthers” group, which started holding public meetings on March 8, to help organize an L.A. breakfast program, and to raise funds from potential supporters. UCLA agreed to provide leftover cafeteria food for the program. The Panthers named the first Free Breakfast for Children Program in L.A. after John Huggins, and began serving daily breakfasts on April 29.¹³

Hollywood stars like Jean Seberg donated thousands of dollars to support Panther operations in L.A.¹⁴ At the end of October, the L.A. Panthers opened the Walter “Toure” Pope Community Center, named after a young Panther killed in a shootout with L.A. police earlier that month. The Panthers started another Free Breakfast program at the community center, where they also organized political education classes and held larger community events. One Saturday in November, about 150 adults, including forty-five soldiers from Camp Pendleton, visited to express solidarity, eat breakfast with the children, and denounce the actions of the U.S. military – comparing the injustice of the war in Vietnam to the war the Panthers were fighting at home.¹⁵ With help from the Panthers, their Chicano allies Los Siete de la Raza also opened a free breakfast program in Los Angeles at the Ramona Gardens housing project in October.¹⁶ By November,

plans were in the works to open a Bunchy Carter Free Health Clinic, and several doctors and nurses had volunteered their time to help get it organized.17

As the Southern California Panther chapter grew and became more involved in the black community, repression increased. Police regularly pulled over known Panthers, often arresting them only to turn around and drop the charges. On May 1, police raided an Adams Boulevard office of the Black Panther Party, arresting eleven Panthers and seizing three guns. Police booked two of the Panthers with charges including “suspicion of assault with a deadly weapon,” and the rest were released. The Black Panther Newspaper reported that in a single month that spring, forty-two Panthers were arrested a total of fifty-six times by L.A. police. The bail for these fifty-six arrests totaled more than $100,000, but with legal support from Panther allies, bails were reduced, and most of the charges were dropped.18

Despite growing support for the Panthers, the FBI was apparently pleased with the developments in the US-Panther conflict they had helped to create, and continued to foment tensions between the two organizations through covert counterintelligence actions, such as distributing incendiary cartoons attributed to US, which ridiculed the Panthers.19 On Friday, August 15, 1969, San Diego Black Panther leader Sylvester Bell was shot and killed by members of US as he sold copies of the Black Panther Newspaper in a shopping center parking lot in southeast San Diego.20 The FBI special agent in

19 Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with respect to Intelligence Activities, United States Senate, [i.e. Church Committee] “Supplementary Detailed Staff Reports on Intelligence Activities and the Rights of Americans,” Final Report Book III, pages 190-192, April 1976.
charge in San Diego wrote to FBI Director Hoover to celebrate the development, and propose further FBI activities in the hopes of continuing to escalate the US-Panther conflict:

Shootings, beatings, and a high degree of unrest continues to prevail in the ghetto area of southeast San Diego. Although no specific counterintelligence action can be credited with contributing to this over-all situation, it is felt that a substantial amount of the unrest is directly attributable to this program… In view of the recent killing of BPP member SYLVESTER BELL, a new cartoon is being considered in the hopes that it will assist in the continuance of the rift between BPP and US. This cartoon, or series of cartoons, will be similar in nature to those formerly approved by the Bureau and will be forwarded to the Bureau for evaluation and approval immediately upon their completion.21

The Panthers were at war, and the Panther National Central Committee placed Geronimo Pratt, the Vietnam Veteran who had won Bunchy Carter’s trust, in charge of the Southern California chapter. Pratt proceeded to fortify the L.A. offices. He assigned Panthers to dig tunnels in the basement and use the dirt to fill sandbags. Pratt recalled, “We stuffed sandbags in the panels behind our walls, below our ceilings, up under our roof. We put up tons of dirt. It was all defensive structure. No bullet was gonna penetrate three-foot walls.”22

At 5:30 p.m. on Wednesday, November 12, seventy-five police officers surrounded the L.A. Panther headquarters building on Central Avenue near 41st Street, where a meeting was under way. They positioned sharp shooters on roofs, and paddy wagons at the corners. The Panthers then called the media; and soon, reporters and many local residents gathered outside. The police left.23

Almost four weeks later, at 5 a.m. on December 8, police simultaneously raided three Panther buildings in Los Angeles – the home of Geronimo Pratt, the Toure Community Center, and the chapter headquarters on Central Avenue. At Pratt’s home,

21 Memo from San Diego SAC to Hoover, August 20, 1969.
22 Geronimo Pratt in Jack Olsen, Last Man Standing p. 59. For appointment see p. 53.

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the police knocked down the door, shot up the house, and arrested everyone inside, including Pratt, his wife Saundra; Long John and Kathy Kimbro; and Evon Carter — Bunchy Carter’s widow — and the two Carter children, Michelle, 8, and Osceola, 8 months. At 5 a.m., another police party raided the community center, shooting up the building and arresting Panthers Al Armour, Sharon Williams, Craig Williams, and Ike Houston.

At 41st and Central, it was war. The initial raid by seventy-five police officers on L.A. Panther headquarters met fortified resistance. Police and Panthers exchanged fire. Hundreds of police reinforcements arrived, as did hundreds of observers and the news media. The Panther sandbags absorbed most of the police rounds. Metal grilles the Panthers had installed over the windows prevented police from launching tear gas and smoke canisters into the building. Panthers tore filters from cigarettes and stuck them in their noses as makeshift gas masks against the tear gas that did seep in.

Pioneering the first ever Special Weapons Assault Team (SWAT), the raiding officers came dressed for war. The SWAT officers wore all black jump suits with black boots, head coverings, and flak jackets. They wore gas masks, carried M16 rifles, and bandoliers of ammunition over their shoulders. From behind the relative safety of armored cars and vehicles borrowed from the National Guard, police fired five thousand rounds of ammunition into the Panther headquarters. Panthers returned fire with rifles and submachine guns, and lobbed homemade Molotov cocktails at the police. Police attempted to penetrate the roof with a dynamite charge dropped from a helicopter, but the roof held.
The fighting went in waves. Police tried to gain position, but could not penetrate the Panther fortress. With intensive exchanges, the sky would fill with thick smog. Then, with a pause in the shooting, a breeze would clear the air. The battle raged almost five hours. Police requested use of a grenade launcher from the Army, and were granted permission from the Pentagon. Then, at 9:45 a.m., Panthers waved a white flag from a window and the shooting stopped.

Renee “Peaches” Moore, nineteen, wearing a torn and bloodied yellow dress, emerged carrying the flag. She told reporters, “We gave up because it’s not the right time. We’ll fight again when the odds are more in our favor.” Panthers Bernard Smith, Gil Parker, Wayne Pharr, Will Safford, Tommie Williams, Paul Redd, Jackie Johnson, Robert Bryan, Melvin “Cotton” Smith, Roland Freeman, and Lloyd Mims followed, and all were arrested. All of the Panthers were teenagers, except three in their early twenties, and Melvin “Cotton” Smith who was 41. All told, three Panthers and three police had been injured in the confrontation. Robert Bryan later recalled that what had kept the Panthers fighting were the lines from Bunchy Carter’s poem *Black Mother*:

A slave of natural death who dies,  
Can’t balance out two dead flies.  
I’d rather be without shame,  
A bullet lodged within my brain.  
If I were not to reach our goal,  
Let bleeding cancer torment my soul.24

Mainstream allies rallied in support of the Black Panthers in the days following the December 8 police raid. Black State Senator Mervin Dymally, in whose district the shootout took place, told reporters: “We need to raise some national voice against what is happening to the Panthers. I think it’s a national plan for police repression. One must conclude that this is not an isolated incident.” Moderately black leaders feared that if the Panthers could be so violently repressed, other blacks could as well. John W. Mack, executive director of the L.A. Urban League, said police action against the Panthers had “the potential for spreading to other blacks.” Earl E. Raines, executive secretary of the Los Angeles chapter of the NAACP told the press, “The black community is affected …. Next time it may be you.” A coalition of major black organizations in Los Angeles including the NAACP, the Urban League, the Congress of Racial Equality, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, Operation Breadbasket, and the Conference of Black Elected Officials called for a massive rally at City Hall on December 11 to protest the police raid of the Panther offices. Other allies mobilized as well. The Socialist Workers Party held a press conference in support of the Panthers. High school students organized a picket of the Hollywood police station. The ACLU volunteered to help with the Panthers’ case. ACLU attorney Fred Okrand protested the high bail set for the Panthers arrested in the raids.

On Thursday, December 11, at the rally endorsed by mainstream black leadership, about 4,000 protestors rallied at Los Angeles City Hall to protest the police raid of...
Panther Headquarters on Central Avenue. Most of the protesters were young and black. Participants held signs with slogans such as “Stop Mass Murder,” “Stop Panther Killing,” “Pigs will be Pigs,” “End Political Repression,” and “Free All Political Prisoners.”

Sharing a stage with NAACP and other mainstream black supporters, Elaine Brown told the crowd: “These young warriors … established a lesson that should never be forgotten – the power really does belong to the people.” Angela Davis said, “This is fascism; there’s no doubt about it.” The crowd moved from City Hall and took over the Hall of Justice, where one young protestor addressed the crowd from the steps: “We have done what we have done today to show that the City Hall, this building, or any other building belongs to the people. The glorious warriors arrested Monday are on the top three floors of this building … We are here to show them we will get them out … to show them that eventually we will take power and we will destroy this goddamn place.”

The Black Panther Party had become the focus of an intensive coordinated campaign of repression by the Federal Government. But the Panthers’ insurgent politics were resilient, and many Party chapters flourished in the face of repressive actions by the State. Los Angeles was home to a vibrant and very active Black Power political ferment; initially, the Panthers were a small local organization in the midst of a contest for local dominance. The Black Panther politics of armed self-defense against the police quickly set the Party apart from other groups that talked revolution but took little action. The killing of three Panthers in a shootout with police in a traffic stop in the fall of 1968, and the murders of local Panther leaders John Huggins and Bunchy Carter in January 1969

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did not scare away all potential members. To the contrary, the Panthers effectively (and it turns out accurately) portrayed the murder of Huggins and Carter as proof of a government plot to repress them, and established their revolutionary credentials among the city’s Black Power activists. It also brought support and funding from affluent allies. In the months following, the Party opened its first community programs in Los Angeles – a free breakfast for children program, and a Panther run community center, both named for fallen comrades. Plans were developed to open a free health clinic.

In 1969, repressive actions by the State did not crush the Los Angeles Panthers. Compare the nascent Los Angeles chapter in January 1969 to the larger, better resourced, and highly militarized organization police encountered in December 1969 when they tried to raid the Panthers’ offices and were held at bay in a miniature one-day urban war. Rather than weakening the Panthers, the intensive campaign of state repression over the course of the year drove more members, funding, and allied support to the Party.

In cities across the country, the pattern was similar – repressive state actions in 1969 fueled growth of the Party …
Chapter 10: Hampton and Clark

Fred Hampton was a natural leader. He dressed casually and was not flashy. But, he had a strong, bold presence. People trusted him. He had been raised in a loving and close-knit family, and attended church and Bible study throughout his childhood. He was a top athlete in high school, and an “A” student. He never used drugs or drank. Even as a young man, when he spoke, the words flowed sharp and lyrical in the best of the black church tradition. People opened their eyes and listened. And, he was fearless.¹ Born August 30, 1948, the youngest of three children in a strong family from Louisiana, Hampton grew up in Maywood, Illinois, a working class suburb of Chicago. In September 1967, he became the president of the youth council for the NAACP branch there. In that capacity he helped organize a student boycott of Proviso East High where he attended school. Black girls had been excluded from the homecoming queen’s retinue. When black students protested, white students had responded with violence, beating black students with bats and blackjacks. Hampton organized groups of black students to fight back. In response to the interracial violence, Maywood police imposed martial law and police checkpoints in the city’s black neighborhoods. Hampton brought in representatives from the national NAACP and led the boycott of Proviso East High, demanding retraction of the martial law.²

Bobby Rush was a more scholarly type activist – a sharp thinker and a good administrator, but not much of a public speaker. He had grown up in the Chicago Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee; by 1968 he co-directed the small SNCC chapter there, and had an ongoing relationship with Stokely Carmichael. As tensions heightened between Stokely and other SNCC leaders in the spring of 1968, and following King’s assassination, Stokely encouraged Rush to start a Black Panther chapter in Chicago. According to Rush, “The problem with SNCC was that it didn’t have any specific activities.” Stokely arranged for Rush to travel to California to meet Donald Cox, and through Cox to meet David Hilliard and Bobby Seale.3 The Panthers’ approach impressed Rush and he began seeking partners to build a Panther chapter in Chicago. When Rush heard Hampton speak at a black leadership conference at the headquarters of Chicago gang Black P. Stone Nation, he knew Hampton was his key to success; Rush recruited him to join the Panthers. Rush and Hampton, along with Bob Brown – Rush’s SNCC co-director – organized what would soon become the Party’s major hub in the Midwest.4

**Attempted Provocation**

In Chicago in the late 1960s, gangs were an important political force in black neighborhoods, none more so than the Blackstone Rangers. From their start in the early 1960s, the Rangers had a community building aspect, and were never solely focused on drug trafficking or extortion. Instead, they constituted a sort of parallel government in the

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4 Jon Rice, *Black Radicalism on Chicago’s West Side: A History of the Illinois Black Panther Party*, dissertation, 1998, pp. 71-72. Bobby Rush in David Hilliard, *This Side of Glory*, New York: Little Brown and Co, 1993, pp.214-215. There was also an earlier Panther chapter there composed of former members of the Disciples gang that was not very active and merged with Hampton and Rush. In *This Side of Glory*, Hilliard recalls that Masai Hewitt, as Acting Minister of Education, accidentally ended up in Chicago and helped Rush start the new chapter. But the details of the story don’t quite make sense. The chapter must have been started in 1968, because the FBI documents the preliminaries leading to the COINTELPRO with the Blackstone Rangers in late 1968. But the SF State Strike begins really in January 1969, and George Murray was minister of education until the SF State Strike ended. Hewitt was only appointed later. It may be that Hewitt played an important role in the chapter’s development once it was already established.
South Side, protecting members of their neighborhood from other gangs and the police, and providing some community services. By the late 1960s, they had swallowed up most of the smaller gangs in the area as part of the “P. Stone Nation,” and had more than 3,500 dedicated members, possibly as many as 8,000. The gang organized cultural activities, including producing a play coordinated by singer-songwriter-jazz pianist Oscar Brown, Jr., and developed a loose affiliation with Black Power politics. Just before the big Chicago rebellions in the summer of 1967, a large block of federal money was channeled to Chicago, including a $957,000 grant from the Office of Economic Opportunity earmarked for at-risk youth. The Rangers and their main gang rivals the Disciples had received the grant to help run a job training program for unemployed black youth on Chicago’s South Side. The Rangers also developed a wide range of other community and entrepreneurial activities, including a youth center and a restaurant.5

In December of 1968, having quickly built a powerful Panther base in Chicago, Fred Hampton entered discussions with Jeff Fort, leader of the Rangers, about merging the two organizations. The merger promised to boost the Panthers’ membership and street presence. The FBI saw the potential merger as a political threat, and sought to foster conflict between the two groups. The Chicago FBI field office suggested, in a memo to FBI headquarters on December 16, that spreading false rumors that Black Panther Party leadership was disparaging Fort “might result in Fort having active steps taken to exact some form of retribution towards the leadership of the BPP.” Hampton and a small entourage of Panthers went to the Rangers’ headquarters on December 18 around 10:30 p.m. to discuss the possibility of a merger. Hampton suggested to Fort that by joining

forces, they could take over all the other Chicago street gangs. According to an FBI informant, Hampton told Fort that “they couldn’t let the man keep the two groups apart.”

According to the informant, Fort was interested in a merger, but he wanted the Panthers to join the Rangers, not the other way around, and put on a show of strength. According to an internal FBI memo, Fort gave orders, via walkie-talkie, whereupon two men marched through the door carrying pump shotguns. Another order and two men appeared carrying sawed off carbines then eight more, each carrying a .45 caliber machine gun, clip type, operated from the shoulder or hip, then others came with over and under type weapons... after this procession Fort had all Rangers present, approximately 100, display their side arms and about one half had .45 caliber revolvers… all the above weapons appeared to be new.6

Fort told Hampton that he supported the Panthers, but that the Rangers were not to be considered members, and he gave Hampton a new .45 caliber machine gun to “try out.”

Over the next two weeks, discussions deteriorated, and the Chicago office of the FBI suggested to headquarters that it was the right time to provoke the Rangers to take violent action by sending a false letter to Fort. The proposed letter read:

Brother Jeff:
I’ve spent some time with some Panther friends on the west side lately and I know what’s been going on. The brothers that run the Panthers blame you for blocking their thing and there’s supposed to be a hit out for you. I’m not a Panther, or a Ranger, just black. From what I see these Panthers are out for themselves not black people. I think you ought to know what they’re up to, I know what I’d do if I was you. You might hear from me again.
[signed:] A black brother you don’t know.7

The FBI field office specifically suggested sending the letter to Fort and not Hampton because it would be more likely to provoke a violent response from Fort:

It is believed the above may intensify the degree of animosity between the two groups and occasion Fort to take retaliatory action which could disrupt the BPP or lead to reprisals against its leadership. Consideration has been given to a similar letter to the BPP alleging a Ranger plot against the BPP leadership; however, it is not felt this would be productive principally because the

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BPP at present is not believed as violence prone as the Rangers to whom violent type activity – shooting and the like – is second nature.\(^8\)

FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover approved the proposal, and the field office sent the letter to Fort.\(^9\)

The FBI’s effort may have helped prevent a merger between the Panthers and the Rangers, but it did not precipitate widespread violence between the groups. Hampton and Fort figured out that the government was attempting to create a deadly conflict between them, which may help explain its failure to do so.\(^10\)

**Ice Cream**

In early 1969, Fred Hampton initiated the Chicago Panthers’ first free food distribution. Hampton imagined himself a modern day Robin Hood and “appropriated” an ice cream truck in Maywood, passing out more than 400 ice cream bars – worth a total of $71 – to neighborhood children. The Maywood police apparently did not appreciate his sense of justice and arrested him on charges of robbery and assault.\(^11\)

In the weeks that followed, Hampton and the Chicago Panthers organized their first official program, a Free Breakfast for Children program, which opened on April 1, 1969. Within two weeks, the Panthers had fed more than 1,100 grade school children,

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\(^8\) Memorandum from Chicago Field Office to FBI Headquarters, 1/13/1969, quoted in U.S. Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities, “Supplementary Detailed Staff Reports on Intelligence Activities and the Rights of Americans, Final Report Book III,” April 1976, p. 197.


\(^10\) At a press conference in April, Hampton said: “Any enemies of the people will never be able to divide and create hostilities between class brothers, just like they tried to create conflict between the Panthers and the Stones but there is no fighting between us.” Stones is another name for the Blackstone Rangers. This statement shows that Hampton knew that infiltrators were responsible for attempts to provoke conflict years before full exposure of the COINTELPRO. Hampton quoted in Faith C. Christmas, “Black Panthers Cite ‘Persecution’” in *Chicago Daily Defender*, April 14, 1969, p.3

drawing new community support and also making it hard to ignore the political dimensions of Hampton’s case.\(^\text{12}\) During the course of his trial that April, Hampton appeared on a local television show publicizing the Free Breakfast Program, and appealing for public support for the Panthers.\(^\text{13}\)

On April 9, 1969, Hampton was convicted of robbery and assault. Maywood Police Chief Kellough attempted to prevent the court from releasing Hampton on bail pending sentencing. But in part due to the efforts of Hampton’s civil rights attorney Jean Williams,\(^\text{14}\) Hampton was released on $2,000 bail. Williams planned to appeal Hampton’s conviction on the grounds that newspaper articles about the Panthers during the trial had prejudiced the jury.\(^\text{15}\)

Following the ice cream trial and the attention it brought, Hampton called the Chicago Panthers’ first press conference. Hampton challenged the legitimacy of the state, asserting a higher morality underlying the Panthers’ revolutionary program, and calling on people to mobilize to support the Panthers against state repression. Hampton argued that the Black Panther Party, not the government, acted in the interests of the people. Hampton maintained: “Our case should be taken to the people and the people will not tolerate any oppressive system or force that attempts to jail the very people who feed their hungry children.” Hampton announced that the Chicago Panthers intended to establish a community patrol of police, open liberation schools throughout the city, and set up free health clinics. “We’re being harassed constantly by the pigs, and they’re arresting us as fast as they can on any kind of charge, such as traffic violations, smoking

\(^\text{14}\) Williams had defended notables such as Black Civil Rights activist and comedian Dick Gregory, and in 1972 would become the first black female judge in the State of Arizona.
on buses, carrying concealed weapons, just anything,” Hampton explained. “But no matter how many of us they try to lock up, force underground or even kill, the vanguard of the people’s revolution, the Black Panther Party will still go on. We are servants of the people, and any people who launch attacks against the servants of the people are enemies of the people.”

The Chicago Panthers sought to mobilize a broad New Left alliance in support of Hampton. While Hampton was out on bail, they held mock court with non-black allies enacting the trial of Fred Hampton as an educational exercise. Hampton told the New Leftists: “We gonna fight racism not with racism, but with solidarity. We not gonna fight capitalism with Black capitalism, but we gonna fight it with socialism. We not gonna fight reactionary pigs … with any reaction on our part. We gonna fight their reaction when all of us get together and have an international proletarian revolution.”

The fledgling Chicago Panthers seized the attention of the Party’s national leaders. When Panther Chairman Bobby Seale visited Chicago, he joined Hampton and Rush in a church mobilization and spoke to an audience of blacks of various classes and New Leftists of various hues, explaining the revolutionary cross-race logic of Hampton’s action:

I’m so thirsty for revolution. I’m so crazy about the people. We’re going to stand together. We’re going to have a Black Army, a Mexican American Army, an alliance in solidarity with progressive Whites, All of us. And we’re going to march on this pig power structure. And we’re going to say: ‘Stick ‘em up motherfucker. We come for what’s ours.’

On Monday, May 26, with Illinois State Attorney Edward V. Hanrahan publicly pressuring the judge, Fred Hampton was sentenced to two to five years in prison for

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17 The Murder of Fred Hampton, 29:40.
18 Bobby Seale in The Murder of Fred Hampton, 6:08.
robery and assault. In a joint press conference at the Chicago Panther headquarters,\textsuperscript{19} Robert L. Lucas, national director of the Black Liberation Alliance and a former leader of CORE, condemned the sentence, noting that Hampton’s breakfast for children program fed 3,000 children throughout Chicago, making Hampton a threat to Mayor Daley and the political establishment. “This type of program poses a devastating threat to the Daley political machine and the black lackeys who front for him in the city’s wards.”\textsuperscript{20}

As late as March 1969, the Chicago Panther chapter was still small and garnered little local influence or national attention. While Rush and Hampton teamed up in June 1968, the Black Panther national office did not officially recognize the chapter until October, and the first Chicago office was not opened until November 1, 1968.\textsuperscript{21} There was no coverage of the Chicago Panthers in the Black Panthers’ own newspaper until May 1969.\textsuperscript{22} But as the state attempted to repress the Chicago Panthers in the spring of 1969, their membership grew, and they gathered increasing attention from the national office, local blacks, and New Left allies.

On April 9, the same day Fred Hampton was convicted of robbing an ice cream truck, as Bobby Seale and the rest of the Chicago Eight were arraigned in Chicago on conspiracy charges, the Black Panthers organized a rally in downtown Chicago, co-sponsored by Students for a Democratic Society and attended by more than 500 people. The Panthers proclaimed their position as the ‘vanguard of the revolutionary struggle

\textsuperscript{19} Chicago Panther headquarters at 2350 W. Madison St.
today.’ Seale and Hampton jointly spoke of plans for a massive organizing drive in Chicago that summer in preparation for Seale’s trial in September.\(^{23}\)

Federal efforts to repress the Chicago Panthers continued. In early April, undercover Chicago police approached Panthers offering to sell them illegal submachine guns. On April 11, in what the New Left Guardian called a clear case of “provocation and entrapment,” seventy-nine federal agents and Chicago police, in a raid using hidden flood lights for PR effect, arrested three Panthers – Merrill Harvey, Michael White, and Field Secretary Nathaniel Junior – for the attempted purchase of automatic weapons. The court set bails ranging from $65,000 to $75,000 for each of the three Panthers. The same court had released two white men in January on only $4,000 bail for selling similar weapons, presumably a greater offense.\(^{24}\)

By the end of May, advancing their community programs and alliance politics in the face of overt repression, the Panthers were building a strong organization in Chicago. Energetic activists in their late teens and early twenties led many of the initiatives. Twenty-year old Panther Barbara Sankey, who grew up on the West Side of Chicago and had been drawn to the Panthers by hearing about Huey’s trial, directed the Free Breakfast for Children Program. The program served about 500 breakfasts to children every week at three Chicago sites. One meat company gave the Panthers fifty pounds of sausage every week. The Joe Lewis Milk Co. donated 500 cartons of milk to the program every week.

\(^{23}\) Clark Kissenger, Guardian Midwest Bureau, “Chicago Panthers Busted,” reprinted in Black Panther Newspaper, May 4, 1969, p. 6. This first article covering the Chicago Panthers in the Black Panther Newspaper features a photo of Chairman Bobby Seale, Field Marshal Donald Cox, and future Minister of Education Masai Hewitt meeting in the Chicago office with Hampton and Rush.

Twenty-year-old Billy Brooks, who also grew up on Chicago’s West Side, directed the “internal education cadre,” comprised of fifteen Panthers. Each member was required to closely read a dozen books – six by or about Mao, three by or about Malcolm X, and one each by Huey Newton, Frantz Fanon, and Marx. In turn, each member had to assist other Panther members in understanding these texts. The reading list reflected the Panthers increasingly explicit embrace of Marxist, and especially Maoist theory and ideology.

Deputy Minister of Information Rufus “Chaka” Walls, with a staff of twenty Panthers, was in charge of distributing the Black Panther Newspaper. Walls, 28, was older than most Panthers and was president of the Black Student Association at a local community college. By late May, the Chicago chapter was selling about 8,000 copies of the newspaper per week with plans to increase sales to 15,000 weekly. Chicago Deputy Minister of Health Ronald Satchel, who grew up in a middle class family, was only 18, and a dropout from the University of Illinois. He and a group of about ten Panthers were working to organize a medical clinic, but they were having a hard time getting doctors to donate their time. Communications Secretary Ann Campbell – with a staff of three – served as the office manager, oversaw communications within the Chapter and reports to the national office, and handled the mail. Yvonne King, in her early 20s and new to Chicago, initially organized black workers as deputy minister of labor, then took on duties as field secretary, overseeing community programs.25

The two-story Chicago Black Panther office at 2350 West Madison Street was a formidable presence in the community. Under three large bay windows on the second floor, a sign with black lettering in large hand-painted block print on a white background

read “ILL. CHAPTER BLACK PANTHER PARTY.” The sign was book-ended on the left and right by mirror life-size images of a black panther springing into action in defense of the office and against any attackers. Beneath the sign hung seven posters of the Panthers’ most famous and powerful images: Huey Newton and Bobby Seale armed in defense of the original Panther office; Eldridge Cleaver speaking; Malcolm X; an Emory Douglass painting of Bobby Hutton; and Huey on the wicker throne.26

**Raid**

As the Chicago Panthers grew in numbers and political strength, State efforts to repress them escalated. At about 5:30 in the morning on Wednesday, June 4, the FBI raided the Chicago Black Panther headquarters on Madison Street. Agents, armed with machine guns, rifles, and handguns, used sledgehammers to break down the two steel doors to the second-floor office. Without presenting search warrants, they proceeded to sack the office and arrested the eight Panthers present. The FBI told the press they had found several guns and ammunition in the office, but the weapons were not automatic and did not violate any federal regulation. Bobby Rush held a press conference later in the day decrying “illegal” FBI tactics; the Panthers, he said, planned to press charges. Rush said the FBI agents left the office in complete disarray, creating more than $20,000 in property damage, including destroying two desks and assorted office equipment, and confiscating a safe containing $3,000, which the Panthers planned to use to equip a health clinic they hoped to open in July. They also took cereal meant for the Free Breakfast Program. Rush explained the raid as part of a concerted national effort orchestrated by the FBI to crush the Panthers, citing similar raids in Detroit, New York, Connecticut, San

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Francisco, Indianapolis, Des Moines, and Denver. Michael Klonsky, area leader of the Students for a Democratic Society, joined Rush in the press conference and said that SDS supported the Black Panthers 100 percent in resisting illegal state repression.²⁷

On Tuesday June 10, 1969, a Cook County grand jury indicted Fred Hampton, his bodyguard William O’Neal, and fourteen other leading members of the Illinois Black Panther Party on charges including kidnapping and unlawful use of a weapon. The state’s Attorney Edward V. Hanrahan said that the charges stemmed from the kidnapping and torture of a woman who had stored guns for the Panthers and then hid them. Bail was originally set at $100,000 for most, but $10,000 for O’Neal. Hampton was never convicted on those charges, but William O’Neal was later exposed as a provocateur working secretly for the FBI.²⁸

On the morning of July 14, 1969, Larry Roberson and fellow Panther Grady Moore were selling the Black Panther Newspaper when they saw two police officers questioning black patrons about a suspected theft of two baskets of produce from a nearby market. According to the Panthers, the police had lined up more than a dozen people – mostly older black men – against the wall and were harassing them. According to the police, they were simply investigating a report of stolen produce when Roberson and Moore approached and asked them what they were doing. The officers said that when they told Roberson and Moore to leave, they became belligerent, calling themselves “protectors of the community.” The Panther newspaper reported that Moore and

²⁷ “Panthers, FBI Tell Views,” in Chicago Daily Defender, June 5, 1969, p.1. Tommy Picou, “Rush Says U.S. Bent on Panther Extermination,” in Chicago Daily Defender, June 7, 1969, p.1. The FBI used as a pretext for the raid the search for fugitive George Sams, a key figure in the torture and killing of Alex Rackley in New Haven, who many authors have subsequently suggested was himself working for the FBI.

Roberson were not armed, but police told the press that Roberson drew a gun and started shooting at them. Roberson was shot three times by police and taken by ambulance to the County Hospital where he was admitted in good condition. Both Moore and Roberson were arrested on charges of attempted murder. No police officers were wounded.29

Two weeks later, Chicago police raided the Black Panther office a second time. They arrived at 1:15 a.m. on Thursday July 31, following a community rally outside the Black Panther office Wednesday afternoon. Twenty-four police cars shut down Madison Street in front of the Panther office, and the officers attempted to storm the building.

Hampton was in jail on the ice cream charges, and there were no Panther leaders in the office at the time, but three rank-and-file Panthers – Joseph “Pete” Hynam, Larry White, and Alvin Jeffers, each armed with a hand gun – held off police for thirty-five minutes until they ran out of ammunition. Eventually, police shot through the steel door and made their way upstairs, beating the Panthers with rifle butts, knocking Larry White unconscious and breaking his jaw, badly injuring the others, and arresting them on charges of attempted murder. Then, according to the Panthers, the police used gasoline to burn down the upper half of the Panther office. Video footage documents the charred office and the hundreds of bullet holes riddling the building facade and front door. Police claimed that the Panthers fired first, sniping at passing police cars, and that the fire was caused by teargas canisters. Panthers reported that people on the street threw bottles and rocks at the police during the incident, and later helped with repairs.30

By this point, the Panthers and their allies understood they were under siege and prepared for further raids. Surviving video footage by concerned Panther allies shows more than a dozen rank-and-file members cleaning and readying guns in the Chicago office. One Panther, a woman, asks various members for their blood types, marking their answers on a clipboard. Another passes out cloth for people to cover their mouths and faces in the event of a tear gas attack.31

In the early morning hours of Saturday, October 4, police again raided the Chicago Panther headquarters. The raid was in many respects a repeat of the July 31 police raid. Police bullets riddled the front door and walls of the office. They set the office on fire, smashed equipment, and destroyed stores of food designated for the Free Breakfast Programs. After Panther resistance abated, police arrested six Party members on charges of attempted murder, alleging that they had tried to snipe at police from the Party rooftop. Again, Panthers alleged that the police intentionally set the fire. Neighbors carried water up to the office in buckets to help extinguish the fire. Hampton, from jail, maintained that again police took money the Panthers had planned to use for the breakfast program.32 National Chief of Staff David Hilliard sought to build support for the Panther community policing initiative, declaring that the raid provided further proof of the need for community control of the police. He said that raids like the one on October 4 in Chicago “will continue and be escalated unless we move to circulate, as soon as possible, the petition for Community Control (decentralization) of police.”33

31 Murder of Fred Hampton, about 35:00.
With the repeated raids and arrests of local Panthers that fall, many black organizations lined up in support of the Panthers. Many believed that such repression posed a threat to all black people: what could be done to the Panthers could be done to them as well. On November 3, a large coalition of black groups united to protest the government treatment of the Black Panther Party.\textsuperscript{34} The participating groups included a number of black gangs, including the P. Stone Nation and the Conservative Vice Lords, as well as representatives from other radical black groups, such as the Black Liberation Alliance. The coalition also included black political leaders such as Jesse Jackson, who had closely worked with Martin Luther King, Jr. and was the director of Operation Breadbasket. The coordinator of the rally, Reverend C.T. Vivian, another important King ally, told the press, “This is a picture of illegal court systems operating against black men.”\textsuperscript{35}

Some saw resisting the repression of the Panthers as a matter of life and death. And for good reason. In July, the ambulance had delivered Larry Roberson, the Panther who had questioned police handling of alleged theft of produce baskets and was shot three times by police, to the County Hospital in good condition. Still hospitalized and never tried for his alleged role in the July incident, he died on September 4 from some combination of injuries sustained in the shooting and improper medical care.\textsuperscript{36}

What made the stories of Panther repression so compelling to many young blacks in Chicago was not how unique they were, but how common. The summer had been filled with violence, and many young black people had died in conflicts with the Chicago

\textsuperscript{34} Press conference at the Urban Training Center on Ashland Avenue.  
\textsuperscript{36} “Revolutionary Murdered” in \textit{Black Panther Newspaper}, September 20, 1969 p. 5.
police. On October 5, police shot sixteen-year-old John Soto in the back of the head, killing him. Eyewitnesses said police, unprovoked, had fired as Soto walked away. Soto’s older brother, Michael Soto, a black community activist and a decorated Army sergeant on leave from Vietnam, helped organize rallies to protest John’s killing by police. On October 10, police fatally shot Michael Soto in what they claimed was a failed robbery attempt.\textsuperscript{37} In August, police killed nineteen-year-old Linda Anderson by firing a shotgun through her apartment door. Police claimed they sought to protect her from being raped by an acquaintance.\textsuperscript{38} In 1969 and 1970 Chicago police killed fifty-nine blacks compared to nineteen whites in a city where whites outnumbered blacks by more than two to one. A black person in Chicago was six times more likely to be killed by the police than a white person.\textsuperscript{39}

Panther Spurgeon Jake Winters, nineteen, knew Roberson, and took the police actions harder than most. Winters had received a scholarship to the Catholic Xavier University. Winters was a scrawny kid, and studious. But on Thursday, November 13, 1969, he was not thinking about school. The city was cold. Snow fell lightly on the streets. Winters’ heart was full of rage. He went with his friend and fellow Panther Lance Bell to their hideout at the abandoned Washington Park Hotel on 58\textsuperscript{th} Street at Calumet Avenue. At some point someone called the police and Bell fled, leaving Winters to stand alone. As the first police officer approached the abandoned building, Winters picked up one of two rifles, took aim, and pulled the trigger. The officer fell dead. In the ensuing


rush of police cars and sirens and volley after volley of police fire, Winters ran from room to room shooting at the police through the windows of the empty hotel. Over the next twenty minutes, in the storm of his rage, Winters wounded nine officers and totaled five police cars. One police officer and military veteran later recalled that the firefight was hotter than any he had experienced in Vietnam.

Bleeding badly, Winters escaped out of the east side of the building, and through a dark tunnel leading to King Drive and Washington Park. Instead of fleeing into the safety of his neighborhood, he climbed the nearby stairs. This was his last stand, and he waited, gun in hand. When the first officer came through the tunnel, Winters shot him knocking him to the ground. Then, as other officers rushed forward, Winters walked to the fallen officer, purposefully raised his gun and shot the officer in the face, killing him, as the remaining officers gunned Winters down.40

December 4, 1969
As directed by national headquarters, the Chicago FBI office had first established a counter intelligence program against the Chicago Black Panther Party in the fall of 1968 and began closely monitoring the Panthers, which included a warrant-less wiretap of their office. The Chicago FBI organized a special Racial Matters Squad, which was specifically responsible for actions against the Panthers. Roy M. Mitchell was a special agent in that squad, and the one responsible for hiring William O’Neal, an FBI infiltrator who managed to rise to Panther Chief of Security in Chicago. Mitchell had first contacted


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O’Neal when he was a prisoner in the Cook County Jail, and made arrangements for him to provide information for the FBI. On November 1, the first day the Chicago Black Panther office opened, O’Neal, already on the FBI payroll, went to the office and joined the Black Panther Party. As a seemingly eager early recruit, O’Neal soon was appointed Chief of Security for the Chicago Panthers.41

The Chicago FBI worked closely with local law enforcement, mostly through the offices of Edward V. Hanrahan, who was elected Cook County State’s Attorney in November 1968. Hanrahan created a Special Prosecutions Unit, putting Assistant State’s Attorney Richard Jalovec in charge. Starting in April 1969, FBI Special Agent Mitchell worked closely with Jalovec to target the Panthers. That June, as the FBI began coordinating raids on the Chicago Panther offices, a special squad of nine Chicago police officers was assigned to report directly to the State’s Attorney Special Prosecutions Unit working closely with the FBI Racial Matters Squad.42

On the night of November 13, FBI Special Agent Mitchell met with informant William O’Neal and showed him photos of the two dead police officers killed earlier that day by Spurgeon Winters. In a series of meetings in the following days, Mitchell had O’Neal help map out the exact layout of Fred Hampton’s apartment, including the specific location of his bed and nightstand. He also asked O’Neal to keep regular tabs on who was coming and going from the apartment, and to determine what weapons were kept there. The FBI and the Special Prosecutions Unit were planning a raid on Hampton’s apartment.43

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41 Hampton v. Hanrahan, 600 F.2d 600 (7th Cir. 1970) §§ 47-49. For warrantless wiretap authorization see §§ 52.
42 Hampton v. Hanrahan, 600 F.2d 600 (7th Cir. 1970) §§ 53-54.
43 Hampton v. Hanrahan, 600 F.2d 600 (7th Cir. 1970) §§ 56-65.
The raiding party of fourteen SPU officers arrived outside Hampton’s apartment at 4:30 a.m. on December 4. They did not bring standard raiding equipment as used in the previous Chicago Panther raids, such as tear gas or sound equipment; instead, they carried a Thompson submachine gun, five shotguns, a carbine, nineteen .38-caliber pistols, and one .357-caliber pistol. The assault was quick and decisive. Within 15 minutes, Fred Hampton was dead, shot twice through the head while he lay in bed. Panther Mark Clark was also dead. The seven other Panthers in the apartment – four with bullet wounds – were arrested on charges of attempted murder, aggravated battery, and unlawful use of weapons. One SPU officer was shot in the leg.44

Hanrahan told the press that the Panthers fired first and repeatedly despite warnings from police that they were at the door: “The immediate, violent, criminal reaction of the occupants in shooting at announced police officers emphasizes the extreme viciousness of the Black Panther Party. So does their refusal to cease firing at the police officers when urged to do so several times.” Panther survivors claimed the SPU never knocked, and came in shooting.45

The Chicago FBI viewed the raid as a success, attributable in part to the information provided by William O’Neal. Following the raid the Chicago field office wrote to the FBI Headquarters requesting a $300 bonus for O’Neal:

[Prior to the raid], a detailed inventory of the weapons and also a detailed floor plan of the apartment were furnished to local authorities. In addition, the identities of BPP members utilizing the apartment at the above address were furnished. This information was not available from any

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other source and subsequently proved to be of tremendous value … to police officers participating in a raid … on the morning of 12/4/69. The raid was based on the information furnished by the informant.  

The bonus was approved.  

Before sunrise on Friday, December 5, the morning after Hampton and Clark were killed, police raided Bobby Rush’s South Side apartment, but Rush was not there. Later that same day, still alive and free, Rush began conducting tours of the blood-stained and bullet-ridden apartment where Hampton and Clark had been killed. He told reporters and community residents who lined up to see the apartment for themselves: “This was no shootout. Nobody in the apartment had a chance to fire a gun and we can prove it by the fact that there are no bullet holes outside in the hallways or outside, just big gaping holes in Fred’s bedroom where they fired on him.” The New York Times reported that “Most of the rooms and walls appeared to be free of scars, pockmarks and bullet holes. There were clusters of bullet holes and the gouges of shotgun blasts in the places where the Panthers said the two men had been killed and four others had been wounded… There were no bullet marks in the area of the two doors through which the police said they entered.”

We Are All Black People  

There was an immediate outpouring of support for Hampton, Clark, and the Panthers. By early evening, three Chicago aldermen, the Afro-American Patrolmen’s League, the Illinois division of the ACLU, and a variety of black community groups

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46 Memorandum from Chicago Field Office to FBI Headquarters, 12/8/69 quoted in Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with respect to Intelligence Activities, United States Senate, [i.e. Church Committee] “Supplementary Detailed Staff Reports on Intelligence Activities and the Rights of Americans” Final Report, April 1976, p.223.
publicly called for an independent investigation of the incident. New Left attorneys Francis Andrew, Kermit Coleman, and James Montgomery stepped forward to represent the Panthers and the families of Hampton and Clark. Black Chicago Alderman and funeral home director A.A. Rayner, who viewed the Panthers as a much-needed “youth group” and had previously supported them by co-signing their office lease, offered to hold Fred Hampton’s body at his funeral home for public viewing.

Rush, working with Rayner, and Hampton’s mother and father, arranged for an independent autopsy of Hampton to be conducted at Rayner’s funeral home that evening. Dr. Victor Levine, who had served as chief pathologist for the Cook County Coroner in the 1950s, conducted the autopsy, assisted by Dr. Carl Caldwell and Dr. Quentin Young. The three doctors found that Hampton had been killed by bullets shot from above his head and behind as he was lying down. They found no powder burns on his hands, contradicting police claims that Hampton had fired at them.

On that same Friday, Rush was informed that a warrant had been issued for his arrest on charges of failing to register a gun. Rush arranged to surrender publicly to police on Saturday at a meeting organized by the SCLC’s Operation Breadbasket. An overflow crowd of 5,000 people, mostly black and many middle-class and middle-aged,

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crammed into the Capitol Theater to witness the surrender. Rev. Jesse Jackson contended that the problem was the exclusion of black people from leadership in the police department. He maintained that white police should be withdrawn from the black community, or black people should be appointed to leadership in the police department: “If we’re 42 percent of the population, then we should have 42 percent of decision-making jobs in the department.”

Fred Hampton’s brother Bill also spoke. He delivered a message from his parents asking people to maintain the peace, not to riot, but to unite. He reported that the independent autopsy conducted Friday at Rayner’s Funeral Home confirmed that Hampton had been murdered while he slept. When Rush walked on stage and embraced Jackson, the crowd cheered wildly. Rush told the audience: “I am turning myself in to black people, who will dictate my future actions.” Police then took Rush into custody. A black ACLU lawyer and the head of the Afro-American Patrolmen’s League accompanied Rush to prevent police wrongdoing.

Later that day, released on $1,500 bond, Rush appeared at a Panther rally at the Church of Epiphany. More than 3,000 people crammed into the church and more than 1,000 others were turned away. The audience was again predominantly black, but younger, less affluent, and more radical; there were about 300 whites and a number of Puerto Rican New Leftists in the crowd as well. Speakers, including city officials, a college president, a representative of the Puerto Rican Young Lords Party, a representative of the Communist Party, and various Black Panthers, paid homage to

Hampton and Clark. When Rush spoke, he told the audience that the killing of Hampton and Clark threatened them all: “Wake up and see the handwriting on the wall with your lives being threatened and murderers at your doorstep.” Someone passed him a note, which he paused to read. He looked up at the audience and reported that Ronald Satchel, the Chicago Panther Deputy Minister of Health shot five times by police in the December 4 raid, was in critical condition: “We just got word from the hospital that brother Ronald is fighting for his life.” The audience gasped. “If he dies, this beautiful brother …” Rush’s voice broke off, and two uniformed Panthers leapt to his side. Rush composed himself and continued: “Brother Ron was a former medical student, nineteen years old. He was getting ready to open the Panther’s free medical center before he was gunned down. And now he’s fighting for his life.”

Another Panther speaker angrily denounced the “pig power structure that has murdered our dear brothers.” When the speaker urged the audience to “get you some guns and defend yourselves against the pigs,” the crowd broke into a foot stomping, handclapping chant:

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All Power to the People!
Right On!
All Power to the People!
Right On!
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The Panthers used the public attention to organize support with a popular education strategy, offering more tours of the apartment where Fred Hampton and Mark Clark had been murdered. In the following weeks, thousands of people – and many journalists – flocked to the apartment to mourn the deaths and to consider the evidence

for themselves. Most who came were black, representing a wide swath of society, from high school students, to professionals in suit and tie, to “workmen in paint-stained clothes, middle-aged women in flowered hats, neatly dressed office workers, elderly people and postal workers in gray uniform,” according to *The New York Times*. “Many [gave] a clenched fist salute” as they left. Young New Leftists from across the city put on their radical political buttons and made the trip to learn about Fred Hampton. Tours of the apartment ran all day and continued until 8 p.m. each evening. Panther tour guides showed visitors unscathed walls where police entered and where they reportedly stood during the raid, and clusters of bullet holes and large pools of blood where the Panthers were shot. Tours continued until December 17 when Cook County halted them by sealing off the apartment. 59

The National Black Panther Party understood and sought to portray the killing of Hampton and Clark as political assassination and as part of a national government conspiracy to repress them. Chief attorney for the Panthers Charles Garry made a claim, widely publicized in the mainstream press, that Hampton and Clark were the twenty-seventh and twenty-eighth Panthers killed by police since January, 1968. 60 Panther Chief of Staff David Hilliard declared: “The organized attempt to destroy the B.P.P. [has] brought to the attention of the American people the atrociousness of the American Government, in terms of its subjects. People are moving for their freedom. The very fact

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that they attacked us so openly shows that they’re a very brutal people – that they are barbarous, criminal elements against society.”

While the number of people who agreed with the Black Panthers’ revolutionary politics was relatively small, many were concerned that the killing of Hampton and Clark was part of a pattern of government repression that included actions like the raid of Panther headquarters in Los Angeles and that, in turn, posed a broader threat to life and freedom. Many mainstream political organizations joined the call for an independent investigation of the killings, including the NAACP, CORE, the American Jewish Committee, the Mayor’s office of Maywood, the Chicago ACLU, and the United Auto Workers. 62

The director of the Chicago Urban League contended, “Whatever the Panthers believe in, they shouldn’t be shot down like dogs in the street.”63 On December 8, the Chicago Daily Defender, the nation’s largest black newspaper, decried the apparent government conspiracy to repress the Panthers: “Are blacks to be murdered for what they believe or what they say? Is the slaying of leaders of the Black Panthers across the nation a part of a national conspiracy to destroy their organization? These and similar questions are being asked in the black community of Chicago even by those who have little or no sympathy for the Panther Party.”64

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61 David Hilliard statement quoted on cover, Black Panther Newspaper, January 3, 1969. We slightly modified the transcriber’s punctuation for clarity.
Simultaneously, the New Left took to the streets. Sixty-five young New Leftists were arrested on Park Avenue in New York on December 9 for protesting Hampton’s killing outside an award dinner attended by President Nixon. Many were charged with breaking windows at Saks Fifth Avenue and five other upscale stores, and with assaulting police officers.\(^{65}\) And at Panther offices nationwide, young white allies – some of them lawyers – held around-the-clock vigils to prevent further raids, some bringing their bedrolls and sleeping in the Panther offices each night. Allan Brotsky, a lawyer, explained: “We feel this will be a deterrent to lawless raids by the police on Panther headquarters.”\(^{66}\)

On Tuesday, December 9, Fred Hampton’s parents, working with the Panthers and SCLC, held memorial services for their slain son. About 5,000 people jammed into a church in Maywood and crowded around loudspeakers outside. The Rev. Ralph Abernathy, a close associate of Martin Luther King, Jr. and head of SCLC delivered the main eulogy. Abernathy declared that “If the United States is successful in crushing the Black Panthers, it won’t be too long before they will crush SCLC, the Urban League and any other organization trying to make things better.”\(^{67}\) Bobby Rush asked the mourners to channel their sorrow into active support for the struggle: “We can mourn today. But if we understood Fred … that his life wasn’t given in vain, then there won’t be no more mourning tomorrow. Then all our sorrow will be turned into action.”\(^{68}\) Following the memorial for Fred Hampton, who had been born in the suburbs of Chicago, Hampton’s

\(^{68}\) Bobby Rush, historical footage in *Murder of Fred Hampton*, 53:00.
parents sent their son’s body “home” to be buried in Haynesville, Louisiana, where they had both been born.\textsuperscript{69}

Wide black support for an independent investigation continued to grow. On the day of the memorial, six black Chicago Aldermen – Wilson Frost, George Collins, Fred Hubbard, Robert Biggs, William Shannon, Kenneth Campbell, and Ralph Metcalf – submitted a resolution to the City Council calling for an independent investigation, declaring: “all of Chicago is entitled to complete clarification of every obtainable fact and circumstance surrounding the deaths of Fred Hampton and Mark Clark.”\textsuperscript{70} That same day the Afro-American Patrolmen’s League issued a statement denouncing Hanrahan’s Special Prosecutions Unit. The league announced that it would begin its own investigation into the shooting. They pointedly questioned Hanrahan’s motives, and a spokesman told the press that the shootings were “obviously political assassination.”\textsuperscript{71} That same day the Chicago Conference on Religion and Race, an alliance of Chicago’s Black Churches issued its own call for an inquiry.\textsuperscript{72} The Northern Area Conference of the NAACP issued a statement condemning the police murder of Fred Hampton and the repression of the Black Panther Party: “Although we may differ with the Black Panthers in political philosophies… WE ARE ALL BLACK PEOPLE and when these kinds of actions are held by our police departments, we feel that all Black people are being

\textsuperscript{71} “Afro Cops Begin Own Death Quiz,” in \textit{Chicago Daily Defender}, December 10, 1969 p.3.
threatened with the loss of their very lives.” The statement called on Attorney General Mitchell and President Nixon to investigate the killings.73

On December 11, Hanrahan delivered to the Chicago Tribune exclusive police photographs of Hampton’s apartment, claiming they proved the Panthers initiated the gun battle, and allegedly showing bullet holes where the Panthers had fired at police. But after further investigation, The New York Times reported that many of the photos did not represent what their subtitles claimed. One depicted nail heads in the apartment kitchen door jam rather than bullet holes. Another photo that police claimed showed bullet marks on the outside of a bathroom door actually depicted the inside of a bedroom door.74

Hanrahan’s deceit further fueled community outrage. On December 15, a coalition of more than 100 black community groups calling itself the United Front for Black Community Organizations (but with no apparent involvement of the Black Panthers, who opposed separatist measures), announced a curfew barring whites from black neighborhoods. The curfew announcement read: “Effective immediately, a 6 P.M.-6 A.M. curfew is established for all whites in the black community. No whites will be permitted to enter the black community – for any reason – during those hours and all whites inside the black community must leave by the 6 P.M. deadline.” Reverend C. T. Vivian, leader of the coalition, noted, “In recent days, the forces of power in Chicago have stepped up their campaign to oppress and repress black people… We see these atrocities not as individual or isolated incidents but as a calculated pattern, a conspiracy

by the forces of power in this city to crush the black drive toward liberation.” Prominent members of the coalition quickly denounced the curfew, saying that they had not been consulted, and the curfew was withdrawn.

National Black political figures condemned the government and praised the Panthers. New York Congressman Adam Clayton Powell charged Federal officials with conspiring to “exterminate” the Black Panthers. Jesse Jackson published a column in the *Chicago Daily Defender* endorsing the Black Panther explanation that Fred Hampton had been murdered by police while he slept, calling his murder a “crucifixion,” and calling on black people to “resurrect” his spirit for liberation. Having returned to the United States from exile, radical Robert Williams spoke publicly about the repression of the Black Panthers: “It is not just a campaign against Panthers. It is not a campaign just against the Blacks. It is a campaign against all of those who oppose what is taking place in America today. It is against the resisters, those who resist imperialism, those who resist fascism, those who are non-conformists… what is happening to the Panthers is happening to all of us… I’m proud to return to this country and to find the new spirit that now exists among the Panthers… And I’m happy to join my support.”

Even moderate national black and political leaders supported the idea of a public investigation. Whitney Young, national executive director of the Urban League, sent a telegram to U.S. Attorney General John Mitchell calling for a special investigation of the

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killing of Hampton and Clark, and the repression of the Black Panther Party nationally.\textsuperscript{80}

Roy Wilkins, executive director of the NAACP, made a similar statement.\textsuperscript{81}

Congressman Edward Koch of New York said at an anti-war rally: “I don’t agree with the goals or methods of the Black Panthers, but civil liberties transcend the issue of the Panthers’ goals.”\textsuperscript{82}

Five black U.S. Congressmen – Louis Stokes from Ohio, Charles Diggs from Michigan, Adam Clayton Powell from New York, John Conyers from Michigan, and William Clay from Missouri – toured the apartment with Bobby Rush and held a five-and-a-half hour public hearing on Chicago’s West Side to hear community concerns about the shootings. Rep. Shirley Chisolm of New York and Rep. Augustus Hawkins of California also declared their support. David Hilliard, chief of staff for the Black Panther Party and Charles Garry flew to Chicago to participate. Louis Stokes told reporters that he agreed with the Panthers’ interpretation of the evidence in the apartment: “All the physical evidence appears to be that there was shooting into the apartment but not shooting out. The wall appears to tell the story of what happened here.”\textsuperscript{83}

In explaining the outpouring of black support for the Panthers in the wake of the Hampton and Clark killings, \textit{The New York Times} quoted one protestor: “A well-dressed Negro mother summed up the feeling of the black community here as she walked with her family to a packed rally in a church a few days after the shootings. ‘They came in and

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\textsuperscript{80} “National Urban League Backs Hampton Probe,” in \textit{Chicago Daily Defender}, December 17, 1969, p.3.  \\
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killed Fred Hampton,’ she said in a soft, very even tone. ‘And if they can do it to him, they can do it to any of us.’”

On December 19, the internal Chicago police investigation found no fault on the part of Hanrahan’s SPU, a finding echoed in a report by the Cook County Coroner. In response to public pressure, the Justice Department appointed a Federal Grand Jury to investigate the killings of Hampton and Clark.

On January 6, Bobby Rush informed the press that results of a blood test of Fred Hampton in the independent autopsy revealed a heavy dose of Seconal, a drug that induces sleep. Rush charged that the killing of Hampton was a government conspiracy, and that Hampton had been drugged by an FBI infiltrator to facilitate his murder. Hampton’s fiancée, Deborah Johnson (Akua Njeri), who was eight months pregnant at the time of his killing and was arrested in the raid, later recounted Hampton’s strange behavior the night of the raid. She said that Hampton never got up from bed during the raid and remained silent. He woke up and slightly lifted his head as guns were being fired, but barely moved and never said anything. After the first wave of shooting, police arrested Johnson and pulled her out of the bedroom and into the kitchen. She said she heard a police officer refer to Hampton saying, “He’s barely alive, he will barely make it.” Then the police started shooting again. She says she heard “a sister” scream. Then a police officer said, “He is good and dead now.”

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88 Deborah Johnson, historical footage in Murder of Fred Hampton about 1:10:00.
Meanwhile, throughout 1970, national mobilizations in support of the Chicago Panthers continued. A number of New Leftists in New York City formed a group called the December 4 Movement to show “solidarity with the Black Panthers.” On March 14, 1970, they held a rally at Columbia University featuring Abbie Hoffman, French writer Jean Genet, Panthers Afeni Shakur and Sayd Shakur, and Juan Ortiz of the Young Lords. Following the rally, several hundred students marched around campus breaking windows, and took over the university’s business school building. They promised to occupy the building until Columbia agreed to pay reparations to the Black Panther Party. 89

On May 8, 1970, the State’s Attorney Edward V. Hanrahan dropped all charges against the seven surviving Panthers arrested in the December 4 raid. Hanrahan said there was no proof that any of the defendants had fired at police. 90 One week later, a federal grand jury issued a 250-page report finding that at least eighty-two bullets had been fired by the SPU officers, and only one shot appeared to have been fired by a Panther. 91

After more than a decade of legal wrangling taking the case all the way to the Supreme Court, the government eventually settled in 1982, agreeing to pay $1.85 million to the estates of Hampton, Clark, and the Panther survivors of the incident, with the federal, county, and city governments agreeing to split the bill. 92

States often kill their enemies with impunity. Fred Hampton was a revolutionary. What was so unusual was not that the state killed him, but rather the breadth of mobilization in response to his assassination. If not for this support, the Chicago Panthers initially accused of having started the shootout and thus killing Hampton would likely have been convicted. The outrageous details of the killing would never have been exposed. But the Chicago Panthers were addressing the needs of many poor Chicago blacks, and organizing them politically. While mainstream black political organizations such as the Urban League and SCLC did not support their political practices or their call for revolution, in 1969, they viewed the Chicago Panthers as an influential effort by young blacks to redress their plight. The moderate black leaders from these organizations felt threatened by the killing of Fred Hampton and Mark Clark, and they mobilized in force, backing the Panthers to expose and challenge the state.

In other cities, non-blacks provided the Panthers with the vital base of allied support …

Chapter 11: Bobby and Ericka

On January 23, 1969, Ericka Huggins – carrying her three-week-old daughter Mai – brought the body of her dead husband John, to New Haven, Connecticut, for burial. New Haven, the location of Yale University and a declining industrial city with extreme poverty and a sizeable black ghetto, was the town where John Huggins grew up, where his parents still lived and worked. Ericka and Mai moved in with John’s parents.¹ In the preceding months, there had been a preliminary effort to organize a Panther chapter in Bridgeport, Connecticut. But plans changed after John Huggins’s funeral. The Black Panther Newspaper carried Ericka Huggins’s image on the front page, and she became an important national figure. Soon, the Panther focus in Connecticut shifted to New Haven and the state’s few Panthers gathered around Ericka.

When Warren Kimbro attended John Huggins’s funeral in New Haven on January 24, 1969, he was thirty-five years old and going through a mid-life crisis. Frustrated at work and in his marriage, he was greatly impressed with the newly widowed twenty-one-year-old Ericka Huggins. He joined the Black Panther Party, and soon became infatuated with her. Kimbro quit his well-paying city job, offered his home for Panther activities, and separated from his wife and mother of his children. Ericka Huggins, while both wise and exceptionally strong by most accounts, was not only a young widow, but also a brand

new mother, and in need of emotional support. She soon succumbed to Kimbro’s advances.²

Huggins and Kimbro quickly drew about a dozen committed members to the Party, and began running the Connecticut Panther headquarters out of Kimbro’s house on Orchard Street in New Haven. They offered political education classes, tried to start a breakfast program, regularly made public speeches, and started attracting attention. In one provocative flier, they charged the city with murder for its housing policy:

Wanted for Murder by the people of New Haven for the use of lead paint in already inadequate Housing. We Charge these people: Murderer No #1 Mayor Richard C. Lee, Police Chief James Ahern … with these crimes: conspiracy with the intent to commit murder, premeditated murder. We charge all slum land lords with the same crimes.³

The FBI paid close attention to the New Haven Panthers, tapping their phones and infiltrating their ranks with several undercover informants. In March, FBI Director Hoover fiercely reprimanded the New Haven field office for not producing hard hitting counterintelligence measures for dealing with the Panthers there: “To date you have submitted no concrete recommendations under this program concerning the Black Panther Party, despite the fact this extremely dangerous organization is active in four cities in your Division.”⁴ In early May, New Haven Police Department wiretaps revealed that Bobby Seale would be speaking at Yale University later that month to raise funds for legal fees. The police passed this information onto the FBI.⁵

On Saturday, May 17, New York Panther George Sams showed up at the New Haven Panther office with Alex Rackley in tow. Rackley was nineteen years old, homeless, desperate, and eager to please. He had joined the Panthers in New York looking for a place to fit in. Sams was a bully. He was short, stocky, unkempt, and usually carried at least two pistols in his brown trench coat. Earlier expelled from the Party for stabbing another Panther in Oakland, Sams was re-instated at the request of Stokely Carmichael, who he once served as a bodyguard.6

Sams had shown up in New York earlier that spring as police began arresting most of the party leadership there in the New York 21 raids. He called himself “Crazy George,” and claimed that he was sent “to straighten out” unreliable party chapters.7 In New York, Sams openly drank and used drugs in violation of party rules, and showed off his .45 caliber pistol. One party member reported that he beat and raped a female Panther when she refused to have sex with him.8

Sams met Alex Rackley in Harlem, and “disciplined” him for looking like a “pickaninny,” beating him and ordering him to run around the block. Shortly thereafter, Sams drove Rackley to New Haven. According to New Haven Panther Francis Carter, Sams was the “kiss of death.” When he arrived, Carter observed, “the whole family cohesiveness-camaraderie we were experiencing stopped.”9

When Sams arrived in New Haven, he claimed that he had been sent by the national headquarters to weed out spies. Violent, heavily armed, and scary, he

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6 Sams stabbing other Panther and expulsion from Bobby Seale and Ericka Huggins defense brief, quoted in Donald Freed, Agony in New Haven, p.250. Bass and Rae, Murder in the Model City, pp. 22-26.
8 Yohuru Williams, Black Politics/White Power, 140.
9 Carter quoted in David Hilliard and Lewis Cole, This Side of Glory, p.249. Bass and Rae, Murder in the Model City, p. 27.
immediately took control of the fledgling New Haven chapter. He charged Rackley with being a spy, and set up a kangaroo court to interrogate him. With the help of Warren Kimbro and young new Panther recruit Lonnie McLucas, Sams tied Rackley to a chair and tortured him. They beat Rackley with a club, twisted coat hangers around his neck, and poured boiling water over him. Sams ordered Ericka Huggins to record the “proceedings” on audio cassette, and the recording captures Rackley desperately screeching for mercy.10

On the evening of May 20, three days after bringing Rackley to New Haven, Sams announced that he would drive Rackley to the bus station and let him go. With Kimbro and McLucas, Sams took Rackley to a wooded swamp in the suburbs. Sams handed Kimbro his .45 and said “Ice him. Orders from National.” Kimbro shot Rackley in the back of the head, killing him. Sams then took the gun back and handed it to McLucas, telling him to finish Rackley off. McLucas shot Rackley in the chest.11

The police and FBI had gathered extensive information on the New Haven Panther headquarters through paid informants and wiretapping. The night of May 20, Kelly Moye, a police informant, called Nick Pastore, the head of the information division of the New Haven police and told him in advance that something important was about to be transported by Sams and others in his green Buick Riviera. New Haven Police Chief James Ahern later said they suspected that the Panthers had kidnapped someone, and that the hostage was in transit. Police, however, did nothing to stop Rackley’s torture or

11 Bass and Rae, Murder in the Model City, pp. 8-10.
murder, later claiming that they did not know he was being tortured and that while they tried to follow the car that carried Rackley to his death, it had eluded them.\(^{12}\)

The next day, police recovered Rackley’s body, and late that night, conducted raids, arresting Ericka Huggins, Warren Kimbro, Lonnie McLucas, Francis Carter, and four other young female Panthers on murder charges.\(^{13}\) In early August, Sams was arrested in a gun incident that embarrassed the fledgling Panther chapter in Halifax, Nova Scotia and he was soon extradited to the U.S. for trial.\(^{14}\) Sams turned state’s evidence. Within days, the Justice Department created a special unit with the “purpose of instituting federal prosecution against the BPP.”\(^{15}\) On August 19, on the basis of Sams’ testimony, Bobby Seale, chairman of the Black Panther Party, was arrested in Berkeley, California, on capital charges of conspiracy to commit murder for allegedly ordering the killing of Alex Rackley.\(^{16}\) The state made a deal with Kimbro that he would face a light sentence and have his middle class life back in exchange for turning state’s evidence and pinning the murder on Panther higher ups. Kimbro and Sams each served four years and were released.\(^{17}\) Lonnie McLucas maintained the innocence of the Party leaders and would face trial.

Panther Field Marshall Landon Williams was also in New Haven during Alex Rackley’s torture and murder. It is clear that Sams directed the gruesome events. Yet

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\(^{15}\) Justice Department quoted in Bass and Rae, 68-69 citing “Urgent” teletype to SAC New Haven from FBI Director, August 12, 1969 and Memo from Assistant Attorney General, September 9, 1969.


Sams testified that he was taking orders from Williams, and that Williams in turn was taking orders from Black Panther national headquarters. In the end, the state found insufficient evidence to support this claim. Williams pled guilty on lesser charges of conspiracy to murder and received a suspended sentence in November 1971.18

Hoping to pin the murder on national Panther leaders Bobby Seale and Ericka Huggins, the state prosecuted a long and costly trial in an attempt to convict them. But the state’s efforts failed, and all charges against Seale and Huggins were dismissed.19

One unanswered question is to what extent the state had a role in setting up Seale and Huggins. The FBI has resisted legal requests to release records of wiretaps of the New Haven Panther Headquarters, which might reveal that the agency knew about Rackley’s kidnap and torture but did not act to prevent it.20 Even more grave are suggestions that Sams directed the torture and murder of Rackley while on FBI payroll. Sams was the only first-hand witness to name Seale or other national Panther officials in the Rackley case and authors Churchill and Vander Wall argue that “the state’s predication for charges held the basis as being material provided by ‘a trusted ten year informant’,” and that this suggests Sams was working for the FBI.21 Was it simply a coincidence that Sams showed up in New York as the New York 21 conspiracy broke and just in time to step into the power vacuum left by their arrest? Was it a coincidence that he drove Rackley to the fledgling New Haven chapter two days before Seale was scheduled to arrive?22

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22 Beyond the possibilities that Sams was taking orders from the FBI or from the Panther leadership in killing Rackley, it is also possible that Sams was acting on his own sadistic impulses. But circumstantial
On February 17, 1969, three months before Sams arrived in New Haven with Alex Rackley in tow, William O’Neal – the very FBI infiltrator who provided the information used by the Chicago Special Prosecutions Unit in the killing of Hampton and Clark – wrote in the *Black Panther Newspaper* that he used “intensive” torture methods to yield a confession from a rank-and-file Panther Derek Phemster, and that Phemster was an FBI informant. William O’Neal was one of the most valued and highly placed FBI infiltrators in the Black Panther Party. It is not credible that the FBI would be paying him to torture and expose its other informants. Instead, it appears likely that the FBI directed O’Neal to publish the article to normalize the idea of torturing suspected informants, and promote the efficacy of such torture.

When police arrested the Black Panther suspects in New Haven the day after Rackley was murdered, Sams had already left town. But Sams left behind the tape recording he had made of Rackley’s torture, and police had no trouble locating and confiscating the tape when they arrested the New Haven Panthers. After those arrests, Sams traipsed in and out of various Panther offices nationally with police and FBI raids


following but never catching him. Donald Freed writes: “As George Sams traveled around the country, spending large sums of money, certain things began to happen to the Panthers. Each city he visited was thereafter subjected to predawn raids by combinations of city, state and federal police. But Sams was never caught; he always managed to leave before the raids were made.” 25 *The New York Times* reported Sams’s unlikely narrow escape from an FBI raid of the Chicago Panther headquarters in June.26 Sams was not arrested until August when police raided Black Panthers engaged in a fledgling organizing effort in Halifax, Nova Scotia, derailing their effort. Jennifer Smith, who wrote a book on the Black Panther effort in Halifax, argues that Sam’s actions in Halifax are hard to explain unless he was seeking to undermine the Party.27

**Free Bobby and Ericka!**

Whoever was ultimately responsible for deciding to murder Alex Rackley, there was no credible evidence of Bobby Seale’s involvement. The government’s strained efforts to pin the murder on him became a rallying point for potential allies. Seale was already widely seen by many progressives as a target of government repression. Despite his minimal involvement in the protests at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago, on March 20, 1969, a federal grand jury indicted him for conspiracy to incite riots as part of the “Chicago Eight,” along with Rennie Davis, David Dellinger, Tom Hayden, Abbie Hoffman, Jerry Rubin, and Lee Weiner.

At the time, Seale’s attorney Charles Garry was undergoing surgery. When the judge refused to delay the trial, Seale insisted on representing himself. The judge denied him that right, and Seale insisted he was being railroaded. Seale refused to be silenced,

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and continued to press his constitutional right to defend himself, arguing, “You have George Washington and Benjamin Franklin sitting in a picture behind you, and they were slave owners. That’s what they were. They owned slaves. You are acting in the same manner, denying me my constitutional rights.”

On October 29, the judge – unwilling to let Seale defend himself, and unable to silence him – ordered Seale shackled to a chair and gagged. Seale continued to bang his chair and shout through his gag demanding the right to defend himself. On November 5, the judge sentenced him to four years in prison on sixteen counts of criminal contempt of court, and severed his case from the remaining seven defendants.28 Every newspaper and TV news program featured depictions of Seale bound but undeterred.

Many potential allies saw the conspiracy charges against Bobby Seale as repression of political dissent. On September 16, following Seale’s arrest in San Francisco, an interdenominational group of ministers and priests held a sit-in at the U.S. Marshall’s office in San Francisco, nonviolently taking over the office. They argued that the conspiracy charges against Seale were “designed and enforced for the purpose of suppression of political dissent,” and that “the Department of Justice is relating to the Panthers like the Department of Defense is relating to the Vietnamese.” Eight of them were arrested.29 The following month, after Seale was gagged and shackled in the Chicago court, the New Mobilization to End the War in Vietnam (New MOBE) – the largest anti-war coalition in the United States at the time – sent a telegram to the Black

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Panther Party decrying the violation of Seale’s rights and his mistreatment in court. New MOBE called for the immediate dismissal of charges against Seale, and impeachment of the judge.  

Solidarity committees in Scandinavia launched a wave of rallies, displaying signs with pictures of Seale under the headline “Kidnapped” and others reading, “Kapitalism + Racism = Fascism.” Allies flew Black Panther newspaper editor Big Man Howard to Stockholm to address Seale’s persecution at a joint anti-imperialist rally with the National Liberation Front of Vietnam. In November, Nelson Mandela’s African National Congress of South Africa (ANC) sent a letter to the Black Panther Party expressing concern for political prisoners Bobby Seale and Huey Newton. The ANC also offered a shared vision of liberation:

Our struggle like yours is part of the larger struggle against international imperialism now being conducted in Vietnam, in the Middle East and most of the Third World. We, therefore, unhesitatingly express our solidarity with you in your efforts to free Comrade Bobby and Huey. More than this we wish to express our solidarity with the Black Panther Party in its life and death struggle against our common enemy: fascist racism. It is not without significance that our demand is identical to yours… Power to the People!

After Seale’s indictment in August for alleged involvement in the Connecticut conspiracy, the Black Panther Party National Office sent Doug Miranda to New Haven to develop and lead the Panther chapter there. Miranda, nineteen, had developed a reputation as one of the most effective young organizers in the Party. National headquarters chose him for the crucial role of organizing support for Seale and Huggins.

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30 Staff and Searing Committee of the New Mobilization to End the War in Vietnam Telegram, October 30, 1969, reproduced in Black Panther Newspaper, November 8, 1969, p.8.
Miranda had joined the Black Panther Party through his involvement in the Third World Strike for Ethnic Studies at San Francisco State.\(^{33}\) Helping organize a Panther chapter in Boston, Miranda had demonstrated his range of ability. Party leaders recognized Miranda as one of their best organizers. He built trust and won loyalty. When needed, Miranda could also mete out discipline. At one Panther meeting in Boston, Miranda ordered latecomers to stand with their arms outstretched. “Repeat after me,” he commanded. “Tardiness is a hardy corrosive that would destroy the party. I would rather destroy my arms than destroy the party!” His success with Harvard students also proved he knew how to deal with privileged allies. Once in New Haven, Miranda demonstrated his intellectual acuity to Yale students, trouncing a representative of Students for a Democratic Society in a public debate on Marxism. Miranda ably raised funds to support the New Haven chapter by securing regular donations from wealthy students, an activity which the FBI closely monitored through wiretaps.\(^{34}\)

Under Miranda’s leadership, the New Haven Panther chapter quickly developed. He set up an office on Sylvan Avenue in the predominantly black neighborhood called “the Hill.” At a news conference on October 1, Miranda announced the formation of the Coalition to Defend the Panthers as a central part of their effort to mount a defense outside the courtroom. The coalition would focus on fundraising for the legal defense, and would challenge the vilification of the Panthers in the mainstream press, seeking to create a political climate conducive to the Black Panthers’ case. The Panthers wanted the

\(^{33}\) See Chapter 12 for a full discussion of the strike.
coalition to be a source of broad support encompassing progressives and liberals, and not just radicals:

The Coalition will be broad enough to include people who do not necessarily agree with the whole Panther program, but who do believe in any case that the Panthers are being persecuted for their political beliefs. The main line of the Coalition in its educational work will be that the Panther case has received such prejudicial coverage in the press that a “fair trial” is impossible, and that therefore the Panthers should be freed immediately.35

At the time of its launch, the coalition comprised fifteen organizations, including national left and progressive organizations such as SDS and the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom; black community organizations from New Haven such as the Hill Parents Association; Yale organizations such as the Yale Divinity School Association, and the Yale Black Law Students organization; and New Haven’s leading leftist organization, the American Independent Movement.36

On October 8, the New Haven Black Panthers launched the John Huggins Free Breakfast for Children program at the Newhallville Teen Lounge on Shelton Avenue. They teamed up with a welfare rights organization called Welfare Moms of New Haven to promote the breakfast program and build support for the Black Panther Party. Soon, they were feeding seventy to eighty kids each morning. On Wednesday nights, the Panthers held a popular ideology class on Columbus Avenue. They intermittently distributed free clothing, and worked with existing black community groups on lead abatement projects in black neighborhoods. Several months later an open house at the

36 “Defense of the New Haven Panther 14,” in Black Panther Newspaper, October 25, 1969, p. 6. See also “Connecticut Prisoners,” in Black Panther Newspaper, October 25, 1969, p. 6 for an example of the PR work of these allies. See “New Haven Coalition to Support B.P.P.” in Black Panther Newspaper, November 1, 1969, p.4 for statements of support from some of the organizations.
 Panther Community Information Center on Sylvan Avenue attracted hundreds of people, mostly working class and low income black residents of the neighborhood. 

A predominantly white feminist group in New Haven called Women’s Liberation planned a rally for November 22, 1969 to protest the plight of the five women Panthers incarcerated there. The group argued that, held without bail and not allowed visitors, the Panther women’s “right to interview lawyers crucial to the preparation of their defense has been denied in direct violation of their constitutional rights.” Three of the five incarcerated Panther women were pregnant. Women’s Liberation argued that the women were denied adequate diet, exercise, and health care. “To hold these women under these conditions while they’re still in pre-trial status makes a mockery of the ‘presumption of innocence’ which is their constitutional guarantee.” On the day of the rally, about 5,000 women and their male allies gathered at Beaver Pond Park and marched to the courthouse chanting, “Off Our Backs!” “Power to the People!” and “Free Our Sisters, Free Ourselves!” A group of New Haven mothers on welfare led the procession, followed by women members of the Black Panther Party, followed by predominantly white feminist organizations from several states, with men marching in solidarity behind them.

At the courthouse, Beth Mitchell, the communications secretary of the Harlem Black Panther Party, addressed the crowd:

We demand immediate freedom for the Connecticut Panthers and for all political prisoners. We demand an end to their isolation and sleepless nights. We demand adequate diet, exercise, and clothing. We demand their right to choose counsel. We demand their right to prenatal and maternity care by doctors of their choice. We demand the right for these mothers to make their

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own arrangements for the custody of the children in accordance with their wishes and the wishes of the Black Panther Party.\textsuperscript{38}

To build support for their case, Panther national leadership also sent Charles “Cappy” Pinderhughes, a former journalist, to accompany Miranda and develop a local newsletter. Titled the \textit{People’s News Service}, the newsletter captivated and informed, advancing the Panther perspective and assisting with mobilization for Seale, Huggins, and the other Panthers in New Haven. In March, J. Edgar Hoover ordered the New Haven FBI to “furnish six copies of this bulletin on a regular basis”… noting that the “paper is chock full of reports – from jail, from New Haven black neighborhoods, about police confrontations, conditions at Elm Haven [housing projects], diatribes against the system, news on national Panther cases …. [It retains] real local flavor.” \textsuperscript{39} By April 1970, the FBI noted that thirty “hard core” committed Black Panther members, supported by many more peripheral members and allies, worked around the clock to forge a strong and organized Panther presence in New Haven.\textsuperscript{40}

As the New Haven Panthers mobilized, allied support grew, albeit slowly at first. On December 18, five Yale students interrupted a large class in Harkness Hall. They read out loud a list of names of Black Panther Party members who had been killed. The students told the press they were “protesting the persecution of the Black Panther Party.” The Yale administration did not take kindly to the intrusion, and expelled all five


\textsuperscript{39} Hoover in Bass and Rae, \textit{Murder in the Model City}, p. 95.

\textsuperscript{40} Bass and Rae, \textit{Murder in the Model City}, p. 89.
students, informing them that they could re-apply for admission the following term if they wanted to return.\textsuperscript{41}

The Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, at their meeting in Philadelphia on February 14, 1970, passed a resolution in solidarity with Bobby Seale and the Black Panthers declaring:

\begin{quote}
We call upon our lawmakers and all agencies of the government to respect the human and constitutional rights of all members of society. An orderly society with freedom and justice for all will not be attained until and unless the right of each individual to live in human dignity, to be free from racial discrimination, and to express his political views without persecution is recognized and enforced. We reaffirm our support of those, like ... the Black Panther Party, who courageously assert their constitutional rights in the face of lawful and oppressive governmental interference.\textsuperscript{42}
\end{quote}

On March 2, six hundred people – many of them black – rallied in front of the American Embassy in London calling for the release of Bobby Seale and expressing solidarity with the Black Panther Party. A number of the protestors fought with police, and sixteen were arrested. On March 14, the National Student Union from Kamerun (now known as Cameroon) wrote to the Black Panthers to express its solidarity and to assert that the Panthers’ struggle in the U.S. was an extension of the international fight against colonialism, analogous to the victorious Kamerun armed struggle against French imperialism. The Black Nationalist Malcomites and the British Tricontinental Organization also extended their solidarity and support.\textsuperscript{43}

That month, as the Connecticut trial approached, the famous French author Jean Genet traveled to New Haven to support the Panthers. He took up the core Panther notion

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of black communities in the U.S. as “the Black Colony,” and argued that Bobby Seale was being persecuted for refusing to follow a docile script required of blacks generally: “Bobby Seale and his comrades have over-stepped our [white] boundaries, they speak and act as responsible political people…. Because of his exceptional political stature, Chairman Bobby Seale’s trial which just started is, in fact, a political trial of the Black Panther Party, and on a more general basis, a race trial held against all of America’s Blacks.” French filmmaker Jean Luc Goddard also travelled to New Haven to support the mobilization for Bobby Seale and the Black Panther Party. He told a packed crowd of six hundred gathered at the Yale Law School, “The outcome of this trial will very much effect the Panthers’ effort to make a class struggle instead of a race war in this country. United States political leaders are trying to destroy the liberation struggle of the people … You must all participate in the political actions in this city, not just as individuals, but as members of a society struggling against the rise of fascism.”

The Panther and the Bulldog

In mid-March, with the pretrial hearings for the New Haven Panthers approaching, the Black Panther Defense Committee opened its own office on Chapel Street in New Haven and began organizing a massive nonviolent protest for May 1 – May Day – in support of the Panthers. The lead organizer for the committee was Ann Froines, whose husband John Froines was one of the Chicago Seven. The committee built on Panther alliances with national anti-war and countercultural leaders.

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As pretrial hearings began in the case against Panther Lonnie McLucas in mid-April, Panthers and their allies in New Haven mobilized. They targeted Yale seeking to force the University to take a stand on the Panther trials. About 1,700 people, mostly Yale students, gathered in Yale’s Woolsey Hall for a Panther presentation. Artie Seale, Bobby’s wife, told the crowd, “Either you’re with us or against us.” A group entered the courthouse chanting pro-Panther slogans; police arrested two people from the group and expelled the rest from the building. The protesters rallied with Panther speakers Doug Miranda and Artie Seale across the street from the courthouse on the New Haven Green. Some students smashed windows at the nearby Chapel Square Mall and fought with police. Police arrested five people, including a Yale graduate student charged with photographing the police on the courthouse steps in violation of a local “emergency directive.”

The trial was a central concern of the Panther organization nationally, and that afternoon, David Hilliard attended the pretrial hearings accompanied by Panther Minister of Culture Emory Douglas and French author Jean Genet. At this point, Hilliard was the highest-ranking Panther leader not in jail or exile, and had been in charge of the party’s daily operation since Seale was arrested in late August. When Seale’s lawyer Charles Garry handed Hilliard a note, police grabbed Hilliard and tried to seize the paper. Douglas and Genet defended Hilliard. Police confiscated the note, arrested Hilliard and Douglas (but not Genet), and the judge sentenced each to six months in jail – the maximum sentence for one count of criminal contempt of court. In the eyes of many

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46 Bass and Rae, *Murder in the Model City*, p. 117-118.
potential supporters, this was further evidence that the government and legal system were targeting Panthers.\(^{47}\)

The incident involving Hilliard and Douglas was a turning point for Panther support in New Haven, especially among Yale students. The Panthers had argued that police in Chicago and New Haven had targeted Seale because of his political views and influence. That Hilliard – the top Panther leader not in jail or exile – was incarcerated so swiftly for a questionable infraction supported this argument. The next day, April 15, 1970, a group of 400 Yale students passed two resolutions supporting the fourteen Black Panthers awaiting trial in New Haven. One resolution called for a three-day moratorium on classes. The other called for Yale to donate $500,000 to the Black Panther legal defense fund.\(^{48}\)

Doug Miranda met with various Yale groups to build student support. At one meeting he told Yale students, “you ought to get some guns, and go and get Chairman Bobby out of jail.” After the meeting, a group of Black Yale undergraduates confronted Miranda about his incendiary tactics; Miranda said he did not actually expect the Yalies to use violence, “But they ain’t done shit yet except talk. We’re trying to get a strike going here, man! Now you can’t just tell them, ‘Strike!’ You’ve got to give them something more extreme, and then you let them fall back on a strike.”\(^{49}\)

The next day in Cambridge, Massachusetts, an offshoot of the Students for Democratic Society and Abbie Hoffman of the Chicago Seven organized a rally in support of the New Haven Panthers at Harvard University. About 3,000 people showed up, and Harvard locked the gates along their route, shutting them out of the campus.

\(^{47}\) Bass and Rae, *Murder in the Model City*, p. 118.
Protestors threw rocks and bricks through windows, lit trash fires, and fought with police. Police beat marchers – including female students from Radcliffe – with nightsticks; 214 people were hospitalized.\(^{50}\) The potential for violence in New Haven was much greater.

On April 19, about 1,500 people crammed into Yale’s Battell Chapel for a Panther teach-in. Doug Miranda spoke to the crowd and called for a student strike:

> Take your power and use it to save the institution. Take it away from people who are using it in a way it shouldn’t be used. You can close down Yale and make Yale demand release. You have the power to prevent a bloodbath in New Haven…. There’s no reason why the Panther and the Bulldog [Yale’s mascot] can’t get together! … That Panther and that Bulldog gonna move together!

Audience members jumped to their feet and gave a standing ovation. Students rushed to join the preparations, and Miranda’s imagery became a central organizing motif. Students printed graphic images of the Panther and the Bulldog on T-shirts and pamphlets organizing the strike for May Day.\(^ {51}\)

The next day, the Yale College Student Senate, the school’s formal student government, approved a resolution calling for a student strike, and asking their classmates to endorse it. That same day, the defendants from the Chicago Seven held a press conference in New York where the Rev. Ralph Abernathy, head of SCLC, was the featured speaker. He urged liberals and progressives to join the May 1 rally in New Haven to support Bobby Seale and the Black Panthers. Abernathy said that the “racist justice” that drove Martin Luther King, Jr. to the streets in the South “is now driving us to the streets of the North – New York, New Haven, Chicago, signaling the beginning of the end of the Mitchell-Nixon-Agnew-Thurmond era.” Denouncing the jailing of Hilliard and


Douglas, Abernathy declared, “Southern-style justice has come to New Haven …. This is nothing more than legal lynching.”

Despite parallels to the recent Chicago trials, the Panthers understood that political dynamics in New Haven were quite different. In Chicago, Seale was tried on charges that were, on their face, absurd. Seale had not participated in organizing the Chicago mobilizations. He was only in Chicago for a few hours, and had spoken once briefly, and little in his speech incriminated him. He had almost no discernible role in causing the rebellion outside the Democratic National Convention. The court’s decision to deny him his right to defend himself was authorized on shaky legal ground. Seale’s refusal to participate politely in a trial that appeared designed to railroad him garnered broad political support. But New Haven was a different story. Alex Rackley had been brutally murdered. And while Panthers argued that the FBI had gone to great lengths to finger Seale wrongfully, murder was a serious matter. The allegations had to be addressed carefully. Open defiance of the court proceedings would have been impolitic.

In a private meeting on April 21, the Panthers met with Judge Harold Mulvey. The Panthers wanted to establish a cordial relationship, and so did the judge. Public outcry about the jailing of Hilliard and Douglas bode poorly for the judge should the relationship with the Panthers become polarized. So he and the Panthers agreed that Seale would apologize publicly in exchange for Hilliard and Douglas’ release. That day, Seale said in court: “I respect your honor very much for allowing me to have a fair trial…. I understand that you are trying to see that we defendants have a fair trial…. We also

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understand the necessity for peaceful decorum in the courtroom.” Hilliard and Douglas were released that day.53

That evening, about 4,500 people – mostly white Yale students – gathered at Yale’s Ingalls Rink to decide whether to call a strike. Black Assistant Professor Kenneth Mills told the crowd that the plight of Bobby Seale and the accused Black Panthers symbolized the plight of blacks generally in “Racist America,” and he called for action: “In recognition of the critical emergency, in recognition of the reality of oppression, in recognition of exploitation,” he said, it was time to “close down” the university. “This is the time to say ‘classroom space is not where it’s happening.’ The struggle for justice is much more important.” The audience shouted and cheered, pumping clenched fists and chanting, “Strike, Strike, Strike!” Students organized meetings in all of Yale’s undergraduate colleges and some of the graduate schools to mobilize support for the strike.54

The following morning, April 22, 1970, for the first time in the university’s history, Yale students went on strike. They set up picket lines surrounding classroom buildings, and carried signs reading, “Don’t go to class,” and “Skip classes, talk politics.” They handed out leaflets saying, “All academic commitments must be suspended so that we all may devote our full time and attention to the situation, educate ourselves, and act accordingly.” The university cancelled all intercollegiate sports events for the week. Student referenda in Yale’s undergraduate colleges voted to support the strike and the undergraduate residence halls also voted to provide food, shelter, and first aid to Panther

53 Bass and Rae, Murder in the Model City, p. 135.
supporters rallying on May 1. A university spokesperson estimated that between 50 and 75 percent of students were participating in the strike.\textsuperscript{55}

On April 23, Yale faculty held a closed meeting to discuss the strike. About 400 professors and administrators attended. A group of black professors called for faculty to support the student strike. The faculty rejected a proposal to cancel all classes, but voted overwhelmingly to grant all professors the option to suspend normal academic activities and devote their class periods to discussions of race and politics. Further, they instructed all faculty to “take a tolerant position in regard to assignments and papers handed in late and they should make as much time as possible available for the discussion of immediate and pressing issues.” The faculty also endorsed a proposal by the Black Students Alliance to hold a national conference of black organizations at Yale, and a proposal to establish a commission on “Yale involvement with the black community.”\textsuperscript{56}

As New Haven was the location of the trial, the May 1 mobilization at Yale promised to be significantly larger than the one at Harvard a few weeks earlier. Thousands of Yale students were mobilizing for the rally and tens of thousands of supporters, many from out of town, were expected to join them. Eager to avoid disaster, Kingman Brewster, Jr., the well-respected president of Yale University, secretly met with friends from Harvard to learn from their experience. He decided that to protect Yale and his career, he would embrace the right to dissent, distinguish himself from Nixon, and distance Yale from the prosecution of the Panthers.


On April 23, at the faculty meeting called to discuss the student strike in support of the Black Panthers, Yale President Kingman Brewster pronounced that he was “skeptical of the ability of black revolutionaries to achieve a fair trial anywhere in the United States.” Later that week, U.S. Vice President Spiro Agnew called for Brewster’s ouster, accusing him of pandering to students on the “criminal left that belong not in a dormitory but in a penitentiary” and subverting the American judicial process. Yale students rallied to Brewster’s defense with more than 3,000 of them signing a petition supporting his statement.57

Seeing the government’s prosecution of Seale as repression of political dissent, thousands of Yale students had joined the Panther cause. By making the University a target, and disrupting academic activities at Yale, the Panthers forced the university to take a position on their trial in New Haven. Initially, the administration responded with systematic repression, expelling students who disrupted regular academic activities in support of the Panthers. But as support for the Panthers grew, the administration changed course. Most of the Yale faculty and the broader New Haven community did not endorse the Panthers politics, but were strongly liberal. Few supported Nixon’s “Law and Order” politics, and many felt threatened by it, seeing the repression of the Panthers as part of an overarching pattern of strong-arm repression. In this context, the administration was wary of heavily repressing Panther supporters and becoming a target of broader ire. To avoid that fate, Brewster publicly questioned the legitimacy of the United States judicial system, and accommodated a complete disruption of normal academic activities.

While Brewster sought to de-escalate the conflict, Connecticut Governor Dempsey – beholden to a more conservative electorate – expressed “shock” at Brewster’s position and readied for May Day mobilizing thousands of troops. Connecticut itself dispatched 2,000 state troopers to New Haven. Further, at the request of Governor Dempsey, U.S. Attorney General Mitchell sent 2,000 Army paratroopers and 2,000 Marines to the region to assist the National Guard if necessary. Yale spokesperson Sam Chauncey said he was “surprised” and “upset” at the decision to deploy Federal troops. White House emissaries, including Assistant Attorney General William Ruckelshaus, traveled to New Haven to monitor the situation.

Yale’s Chaplain offered a refuge for people who wanted to retreat should the May Day protests turn into violent clashes with police. John Hersey, College Master at Yale and executive of the Connecticut Bar Association, established a “Defense Trust” to raise funds for the Panthers’ legal expenses in the New Haven trial.

Before May Day even arrived, the Panthers had won Yale. With Yale now supporting their right to dissent, and Yale’s own President questioning the fairness of the American judiciary, the Party knew that violence by their supporters would hurt the New Haven trial. The Panthers called a press conference, and Assistant Minister of Defense “Big Man” Howard urged protestors to stay nonviolent. On behalf of the Black Panther Defense Committee, Ann Froines held several meetings with the New Haven chief of

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59 Bass and Rae, p. 145
police to work out logistics of crowd control for the upcoming street mobilizations. She explained to The New York Times that violent protests “would not serve the interests of the defendants.” Panther allies Ann Froines, John Froines, David Dellinger, and Tom Hayden met with Kingman Brewster to coordinate strategy in order to avoid violence. Working with the Panther supporters to stem potential violence, Kingman Brewster announced that Yale would open its gates to May Day protestors.

The Governor and U.S. Attorney General, however, prepared for war. Marines, U.S. Army troops, and CT Guardsmen surrounded downtown armed with rifles and bayonets, armored personnel carriers, and Tanks. Officers instructed soldiers: “You will not be successfully prosecuted if you shoot someone while performing a duty... There is nothing to fear concerning your individual actions.”

The next morning, about 15,000 people filled the New Haven Green for the May Day protests. The event was mostly peaceful and included marching, chanting, music, and speeches throughout downtown and Yale’s campus. After a tense long day of protest in the face of police and heavily armed troops, someone pretending to be a Black Panther, later accused of working for the FBI, grabbed the microphone and falsely claimed police had arrested three black people for walking on the Green after dark. Protestors charged out to confront the police. Doug Miranda took the microphone and encouraged the audience to stay calm, explaining that the report was false. About 1,500

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64 Taft, Mayday at Yale, p. 129.
people confronted police, a few throwing rocks. But the Black Panthers used their sound truck to urge rock throwers to disperse until peace was restored.68

The Chicago Defender ran an editorial, “Yale U. and the Panthers,” saying the relatively peaceful New Haven rallies were likely to inspire similar protests at other campuses:

The demonstrations were staged as evidence of a lack of trust in the integrity of the American courts and their capacity to conduct a fair trial, especially in cases where the Black Panthers are involved…. Yale has now become the focus for justice for the Black Panthers. With the singular exception of few isolated incidents, the New Haven institution is going peacefully and serenely about the business of transforming a sick society into a healthy consortium. Other universities are sure to follow this lead and graft the Black Panther movement into the body of their own pleading for social change. Though a new force in the political horizon, the Panthers may provide the dynamism for the reformation of American society.69

**National Student Strike**

On the eve of the May Day protest at Yale, Nixon announced the U.S. invasion of Cambodia. Nixon’s invasion of Cambodia was wrenching. Nixon’s claims of “Vietnamization” of the War effort and gradual rolling back of the military draft appeased many, and the anti-war movement had become increasingly moderate by mid-1970. The anti-imperialist activists who built the student anti-war movement were gradually marginalized. But the Cambodia invasion threw into doubt Nixon’s claims of de-escalation, shattering the fragile faith of many that the government would end the War and the draft without a fight.

Then on May 1, as Yale students mobilized support for the Panthers, Nixon publicly denounced student activists in his strongest language to date. The following morning, *The New York Times* published the President’s comments in a front page story alongside coverage of the Yale May Day mobilizations: “You see these bums, you know, blowing up the campuses. Listen, the boys that are on the college campuses today are the

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luckiest people in the world, going to the greatest universities in the world, and here they
are burning books and storming around.”70 Where the Panthers and their allies had won
cautious acceptance from Yale, pursuing “Law and Order” politics, Nixon sought to
strengthen his support by attacking the activists.

Later that day, about 2,000 Panther supporters met in Yale’s Dwight Hall to build
upon the successful New Haven mobilizations and respond to the invasion of Cambodia.
They formed a National Student Strike Committee and drew up a plan for further national
action. At an afternoon press conference on the New Haven Green, Tom Hayden
announced the call for the nationwide strike. He said students across the country should
boycott classes until three demands were met. The following day The New York Times
summarized the three demands in a front-page story about the Yale mobilizations:

- The United States must end its “systematic oppression” all political dissidents, such as Bobby
  Seale, and all other Black Panthers.
- The United States must cease “aggression” in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, and unilaterally and
  immediately withdraw its force.
- Universities must end their “complicity” in war by ending war-related research and eliminating
  Reserve Officer Training Corps activities.71

A survey of U.S. college students for the John D. Rockefeller Foundation at the
time found 79% strongly or partially agreed that “the war in Vietnam is pure
imperialism,” and a full 71% of college students surveyed said they “Definitively
believe” that Black Panthers “cannot be assured a fair trial.”72 With students across the
country feeling betrayed and angered by Nixon’s invasion of Cambodia and his insults,
and excited by the successful mobilizations at Yale, the call for a national student strike

70 Richard Nixon quoted in Juan de Onis, “Nixon Puts ‘Bums’ Label On Some College Radicals” in The
72 1970 Rockefeller Foundation survey. See Daniel Yankelovich, published in The Changing Values on
Campus by Washington Square Press, 1972, pp. 62; 64; 70.
quickly spread. By targeting their own liberal University, and making it take sides on the Panthers, Yale students had influenced national political debate. Others students sought to emulate their model. On May 3, editors from the student newspapers at eleven major Eastern colleges – including six of eight Ivy League universities – adopted the demands of the Panther allies in New Haven. Meeting at Columbia University in New York, student newspaper editors agreed to run a common editorial the following day calling for “the entire academic community of this country to engage in a nationwide university strike.”

Columbia University administrators attempted to undercut student support for the national strike by declaring a one-day moratorium on classes for Monday, May 4, and by holding a convocation to discuss possible responses to the invasion of Cambodia. At the convocation, Rich Reed, a black leader of the campus’ Third World Coalition, accompanied by a Black Panther member, seized the microphone and declared that talk of peace in Vietnam would be meaningless unless people moved “to build a mass movement against the source of imperialism and racism which is closest to us – Columbia University.” Reed criticized the School of International Affairs for assisting in the development of oppressive foreign policy strategies, and denounced the consignment of black and Latino workers to the lowest paying and dirtiest jobs on campus. That afternoon, about 3,000 students gathered in Wollman Auditorium and voted overwhelmingly to strike, taking up the three demands issued in New Haven. The following day, 3,500 students and campus workers rallied. Featured speaker William

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74 Quoted in Alan Adelson, SDS (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1972), 33.
Kunstler – a high profile lawyer for the Panthers and the Chicago Seven – called for all charges against the New York Panther 21 to be dropped. Protestors marched from Columbia to City College behind a banner declaring, “No more racist attacks on third world people. US out of Southeast Asia; Free all political prisoners now.” As the group marched through Harlem, they chanted the Black Panther slogan, “Power to the people; OFF THE PIG!”

The call for a national student strike quickly gained steam, and by May 4, student activists had gone on strike at schools across the country including Brandeis, CUNY, NYU, Notre Dame, Ohio State, Princeton, Rutgers, Sarah Lawrence, Stanford, the University of California at Berkeley, the University of Pennsylvania and the University of Virginia.

Students mobilized one of the most heated protests at Kent State University in Ohio, a campus with a history of SDS activism against the war in Vietnam and in solidarity with the Panthers. On May 2, after the mayor of Kent called in the Ohio National Guard, someone set fire to the ROTC building there. The following afternoon, the conflict escalated. Students sat-in at a downtown intersection, and the National Guard charged them, stabbing several with bayonets and arresting many others. Students pelted

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the guardsmen with stones. And then on May 4, guardsmen opened fire on the students. In a hail of bullets, the guardsmen shot thirteen students, killing four.\(^{78}\)

When the National Guard killed four student protesters at Kent State, they unwittingly fanned the flames of anti-imperialism. In the context of Nixon’s “Law and Order” rule, the Cambodia invasion, the continued Vietnam War and draft, and the heavy repression of the Black Panthers, the killings undermined the faith of many in American democracy. The killings showed that like the Vietnamese and the Black Panthers, if students challenged the interests of those in power, they too could be killed.

Inflamed by Nixon’s invasion of Cambodia and the killings at Kent State, and bolstered by widespread outrage, students across the country took up the call of the anti-imperialist Panther supporters at Yale, and went on strike. More than four million students at 1,300 colleges participated in campus protests that month. One and a half million went on strike, shutting down at least 536 college campuses – many for the remainder of the academic year. According to a survey of college presidents by the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education, 57% of the nation’s colleges experienced a “significant impact” as a result of student protest in May 1970. More than 100 colleges reported that armed officers from outside the university, including city or state police, the National Guard, Army troops or Marines, came onto campus to quell student protest that month. At Mississippi’s Jackson State College, a historically black institution, police shot eleven students on May 14, killing two of them, further fueling anti-imperialist rage.\(^{79}\)

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In New Haven, many progressive allies saw the federal government’s attempt to pin responsibility for the Rackley murder on Bobby Seale and the national party leadership as aggressive political suppression. Here, the Black Panthers managed to bolster their national and international support by mobilizing privileged white allies, including thousands of Yale students, effectively destabilizing basic political arrangements in New Haven. Targeting liberal Yale’s leadership, they forced the University to take a stand on their trial. Not only did the Panthers and their allies shut down one of the country’s leading universities, they managed to win support of University administrators. In a political context where the Nixon administration was governing through polarizing “Law and Order” politics, and liberals felt insecure in their ability to redress their interests through traditional politics, the administration of Yale University decided to make peace with the revolutionary movement and question the legitimacy of the United States judicial system rather than antagonizing the Panthers and their allies. The Panther struggle in New Haven set the stage for the nationwide student insurgency in May 1970, the largest in United States history, with more than four million participating.

The Black Panther Party proved resilient through 1969 and much of 1970. In cities throughout the country, repressive action by the state did not succeed in crushing the Black Panther Party, but instead led to greater mobilization. In Los Angeles, Chicago and New Haven, large-scale coordinated state repression efforts backfired, leading to the Party’s further growth and development. In each case, moderate black and progressive anti-war allies saw state actions against the Panthers as threats to their own interests, and
contributed finances, political and legal support, and other resources to local Panther organizations. Allied support also drew new Panther recruits because it demonstrated that the struggle was sustainable, and provided an effective avenue for their political efforts.

The political dynamics across the three cities also offer instructive contrasts, highlighting the attraction of different constituencies to the Panthers’ politics during the period. In Chicago, assassination of the charismatic Fred Hampton led to broad intervention from moderate blacks. In New Haven, repression catalyzed extensive mobilization by students and anti-war progressive allies. And in the Black Power ferment of Los Angeles, State repression of the Panthers made the Party stand out from the alternatives – militarizing activists, drawing financial support from affluent allies, and ultimately encouraging increased membership.

The Black Panthers’ politics of armed self-defense against the police were highly disruptive and impossible for the government to ignore. Coupled with their revolutionary vision, and their community service, they were also extremely difficult to subdue. The more the State took repressive action against the Black Panthers, the more the Party developed in membership, allied support, and political influence.

Where would the cycle of insurgency lead?
PART IV. REVOLUTION HAS COME!

The sharpest struggles in the world today are those of the oppressed nations against imperialism and for national liberation. Within this country the sharpest struggle is that of the black colony for its liberation; it is a struggle which by its very nature is anti-imperialist and increasingly anti-capitalist... Within the black liberation movement the vanguard force is the Black Panther Party... We must keep in mind that the Black Panther Party is not fighting black people’s struggles only but is in fact the vanguard in our common struggles against capitalism and imperialism.

– Students for a Democratic Society, National Council Resolution

You are Black Panthers, We are Yellow Panthers!

– North Vietnamese Minister of Culture M. Hoang Minh Giam

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PART IV


Chapter 12: Black Studies and Third World Liberation

In August 1968, George Mason Murray, the Black Panther Minister of Education, traveled to Cuba to represent the Black Panthers at a conference sponsored by the Organization of Asian, African, and Latin American Solidarity (OSPAAAL). The oldest son of a Presbyterian minister, Murray had grown up poor, one of thirteen children in a religious family in rural Mississippi. He became a civil rights activist and left Mississippi. In 1963, he arrived in San Francisco and enrolled in San Francisco State University. Murray was a serious student who sported short-cropped hair and a tie. He soon gained admission to graduate school in English at S.F. State and became the first black director of the undergraduate tutorial program there, enthusiastically recruiting young blacks from San Francisco to take advantage of the university’s educational resources. The program reached its peak enrollment under his direction. At SF State, the powerful tide of Black Power began to pull on Murray. He grew out his hair and began to wear a black leather jacket. He renounced Christianity and joined the Nation of Islam for a short period. He became active in the university’s Black Student Union. Soon he joined the Black Panther Party.

Murray threw himself wholeheartedly into the Black Panthers. His fiery eloquence made him an important Party spokesman and he was promoted to Minister of

CHAPTER 12: BLACK STUDIES

1 Of all the treatments of the San Francisco State Strike, one source stands out as especially detailed and insightful – Jason Michael Ferreira, All Power to the People: A Comparative History of Third World Radicalism in San Francisco, 1968-1974, Doctoral Dissertation in Ethnic Studies, UC Berkeley, Fall 2003. Unless otherwise noted, direct quotes from participants in the San Francisco State Strike are drawn from Ferreira. We also drew heavily on three other sources: William H. Orrick, Jr. Shut it Down! A College in Crisis, San Francisco State College, October 1968 – April 1969: A Staff Report to the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence (U.S. Government Printing Office, June 1969); William Barlow and Peter Shapiro, An End to Silence: The San Francisco State College Student Movement in the ’60s, (Pegasus, 1971); and Dikran Karagueuzian, Blow it Up! The Black Student Revolt at San Francisco State College and the Emergence of Dr. Hayakawa, (Boston, Gambit: 1971). The analysis, and any errors, are our own.
Education.² He believed black liberation required a global revolution against imperialism, which in turn required a cultural revolution, new ways of being black. There was widespread debate within the Black Liberation Struggle at the time about the relative importance of black culture and black politics. Murray became an important voice in this debate, articulating a Black Panther position that for black culture to be liberatory, it must necessarily be revolutionary. Murray explained:

[T]he only culture worth keeping is the revolutionary culture… Our culture must not be something that the enemy enjoys, appreciates, or says is attractive, it must be repelling to the slave master. It must smash, shatter and crack his skull, crack his eyeballs open and make water and gold dust run out…. we are changing, we are deciding that freedom means change, changing from the slaves, the cowards, the boys, the toms, the clowns, coons, spooks of the 50’s, 40’s, 30’s, into the wild, courageous, freedom fighting, revolutionary black nationalists.³

When Murray traveled to Cuba in August 1968 to promote the Free Huey campaign, leaders of anti-colonial and revolutionary movements around the globe embraced the Panthers. “The genuine freedom of Huey Newton,” declared the Executive Secretariat of the Organization of Asian, African, and Latin American Solidarity, “will be brought about as the result of the revolutionary action of the Afro-Americans and of the white people who are willing to run the same risks; as the result of new Watts, Newarks, Detroits and Clevelands. In this endeavor they will have the backing and the solidarity of the peoples and the revolutionary combatants of Africa, Asia and Latin America.”⁴ When it was his turn to speak, Murray affirmed the necessity of a global revolution against imperialism and the Black Panther Party’s commitment to solidarity with revolutionary struggles throughout the Third World:

We have vowed not to put down our guns or stop making Molotov cocktails until colonized Africans, Asians and Latin Americans in the United States and throughout the world have become free… We

² Barlow and Shapiro, 206-7; Blow it Up 32-33.
want to tell the people who are struggling throughout the world that our collective struggle can only be victorious, and the defeat of the murderers of mankind will come as soon as we create a few more Vietnams, Cubas and Detroits… The Black Panther Party recognizes the critical position of black people in the United States. We recognize that we are a colony within the imperialist domains of North America and that it is the historic duty of black people in the United States to bring about the complete, absolute and unconditional end of racism and neocolonialism by smashing, shattering and destroying the imperialist domains of North America. In order to bring humanity to a higher level, we will follow the example of Che Guevara, the Cuban people, the Vietnamese people and our leader and Minister of Defense, Huey P. Newton. If it means our lives, that is but a small price to pay for the freedom of humanity.

Illustrating his point, he argued that, “every time a Vietnamese guerilla knocks out a U.S. soldier, that means one less aggressor against those who fight for freedom in the U.S.”

Murray’s speech in Cuba achieved his goal of being “repelling to the slave master.” When Murray returned to SF State, he returned to controversy. On September 26, perhaps emboldened by the national political climate in the buildup to the 1968 presidential election, the conservative Board of Trustees of the California State University system voted 8 to 5 to ask President Smith of SF State to cancel Murray’s teaching appointment and assign him to a non-teaching position. President Smith knew he would face strong protest from faculty and students if he canceled Murray’s teaching appointment. Hoping to avoid possible protest, Smith denied the Trustees’ request that Murray be reassigned, arguing that as an instructor, Murray had a right to intellectual freedom.

In 1968, more than half of San Francisco’s youth were Black, Latino, Asian American, or Native American, but SF State’s student body was more than three quarters White. By the fall of 1968, student activists at SF State had developed a strong anti-imperialist perspective. As early as 1966, Black Student Union President James Garrett

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7 Student body composition in Ferreira, 116.
had said that the black student struggle is “no different from that of the Vietnamese… We are struggling for self-determination… for our black communities; and self-determination for a black education.”

A popular Black Student Union poster featured an Associated Press photo of an American soldier grabbing a Vietnamese woman by the hair and pressing his gun so hard against her temple that ridges of skin can be seen forming around the muzzle. The caption read, “Today the Vietnamese, tomorrow the blacks.”

Despite opposition from the administration, earlier in 1968 the Black Student Union had obtained support from the Faculty Senate for the creation of a Black Studies program and hired Nathan Hare, a radical sociologist, to establish the program. In April 1968, Hare submitted “A Conceptual Proposal for Black Studies,” asserting an anti-imperialist framework and seeking to effect more than a “mere blackening of white courses.” He argued that successful development of Black Studies required not only a substantive shift, but also a significant increase in black student enrollment, methodological innovation, and community involvement. He took an activist approach that sought to position Black Studies as part of a transformation of the black condition rather than its perpetuation. “Black studies will be revolutionary or it will be useless if not detrimental,” Hare wrote. As the Black Studies proposal had gained steam in the spring of 1968, students formed the Third World Liberation Front (TWLF), uniting the BSU with Latino and Asian American organizations. The TWLF called for “educational self-determination” and developed a proposal for Ethnic Studies to include Black, Latino and Asian studies programs to be developed along similar anti-imperialist lines. The TWLF and the predominantly white Students for a Democratic Society forged a strategic

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8 James Garrett quoted in Ferreira, 80.
9 Orrick, *Staff Report*, 96.
alliance for the joint demands of special admission of 400 freshmen of color, creation of nine minority faculty positions and elimination of ROTC. That spring brought sit-ins, confrontations with police, and some minor victories, including the firing of the college president, Smith’s predecessor.

The student movement at SF State looked to the Black Panther Party for leadership. The BSU office featured the “Free Huey!” poster, a framed picture of Kathleen Cleaver, and another of Carmichael. By the time George Murray returned from Cuba, the Black Panther Party was actively involved in helping to organize Black Student Unions throughout the state and nationally to advance black university admissions and curricula. With the help of Virtual Murrell, who had worked with Bobby Seale and Huey Newton in their days at the Soul Students Advisory Committee at Merritt College, the Black Panther Party organized a Black Students Union Statewide Convention for October 26, 1968 to discuss the national organization of black students. The promotional materials for the conference emphasized the Black Panther Party point #5: “We want education for our people that exposes the true nature of this decadent American society. We want education that teaches us our true history and our role in the present day society.” The keynote speakers were Bobby Seale, Eldridge Cleaver, David Hilliard, and George Murray. Out of the convention, the Black Student Unions formed a statewide Union and began to organize on the national level. They also adopted a Ten

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10 Dikran Karagueuzian, Blow It Up! The Black Student Revolt at San Francisco State University and the Emergence of Dr. Hayakawa, (Boston, Gambit: 1971) p. 30, 31.
Point Program and Platform that imitated the Ten Point Program and Platform of the Black Panther Party. 12

Two days before the statewide convention, Murray spoke to an audience of 2,000 at Fresno State College to promote anti-imperialist Black Student Unions. He argued that the struggle of black students was part of the global struggle against imperialism and compared it to the American Revolution. Murray blasted the Trustees for trying to have him fired “because of some so-called anti-American remarks that I was supposed to have made in Cuba, remarks like this: Every time an American mercenary is shot, that’s one less cat that’s going to be killing us in the United States. That’s the truth. That’s a fact. Dig this: in Detroit and in Newark (we can not deny it) the 101st airborne division and the 82nd airborne division of the infantry, soldiers from Viet Nam, were sent into the black community. Their ranks had been partially depleted by the victorious fighters of the National Liberation Front. So that when they came into the black community (it’s sad to say because a lot of those soldiers were brothers) their ranks had been depleted because they were criminals fighting against another people of color.” 13

On October 28, 1968, the one-year anniversary of Huey Newton’s incarceration, Donald Cox, Field Marshall of the Black Panther Party, and a contingent of five other Panthers visited San Francisco State. Murray called a BSU rally. Making circular motions in the air with his finger, he said: “I think we should have a demonstration for Huey today. He’d lay down his life for the people, and we should honor him.” As word spread, over 100 black students gathered on campus outside the BSU office. The crowd joined a

call and response in support of Huey: “Black is Beautiful” “Free Huey!” “Set our warrior Free” “Free Huey!” The black students marched around campus. By the time they arrived at the cafeteria, the group was 200 strong. Ben Stewart, chair of the Black Student Union, directed as BSU members cleared off four tables and pulled them together to create a platform for speakers.

Next George Murray called a student strike for November 6. At the same time he spoke to the black students about the need for Black Studies in revolutionary terms:

Whether you Negroes recognize it or not, there is a revolution going on. There are people using guns to defend their communities. Your lunches are not only going to be disrupted, your whole lives are going to be disrupted, from today on…. Listen, you Motherfucker Smith [President of the University], we know you’re lying … The Black Studies Department is no department at all. There are four and one-half million black and brown people in California and they all pay taxes to pay for the racist departments here, but none of their taxes go to black and brown people. There are no full-time jobs for the brothers and sisters on the faculty here. The crackers still say they have the right to say how many black and brown people will come into this school and how many will not. There are four and one-half million black and brown people in California, so there should be five thousand black and brown people at this school.14

On the heels of the conflicts in Chicago, with the November elections right around the corner, Murray’s anti-imperialist activities became the target of establishment politicians. Apparently attempting to outdo the right, San Francisco’s Mayor Joseph Alioto, a Democrat, launched an investigation to see if criminal charges could be filed against Murray for encouraging students to bring guns to San Francisco State. On October 31, Chancellor Dumke, head of the Board of Trustees of the California State system, ordered President Smith to suspend Murray, which he did that weekend.

Murray’s dismissal added fuel to the fire. Uniting behind the revolutionary anti-imperialist perspective championed by the Black Panther Party, Murray attracted and consolidated support not only from radical black students, but also radical Latino, Asian American, and White students. Because of the political establishment’s failure to address

the draft, the war, and persistent racial inequality, the Panthers also received extensive support from faculty, less radical students, anti-war liberals, and critically, moderate black leaders seeking expanded black educational access and curricula that encompassed black experiences and perspectives.

Building upon earlier demands for Black and Ethnic Studies, the Third World Liberation Front issued a set of demands in the name of educational self-determination for Third World people. This included not only the retention of George Murray and a full professorship for Dr. Hare, but creation of a full-fledged Black Studies Department and School of Ethnic Studies with fifty faculty positions; control over the hiring, retention and curriculum for the departments; power to determine the administration of financial aid; and increased enrollment of students of color. As the TWLF leadership saw racial oppression as an issue of internal colonialism distinct from the class exploitation experienced by poor whites, the TWLF also set up guidelines for white student participation in a supportive rather than a leadership capacity and created a Communications Committee to coordinate white strike support.15

On Election Day, November 5, 1968, the night before the strike was set to begin, Stokely Carmichael, Prime Minister of the Black Panther Party, addressed more than 700 students and community members at a meeting called exclusively for non-whites:

We must go now for the real control…. We want the right to hire and to fire teachers. We want the right to control … courses at San Francisco State, and once we get that then George Murray becomes irrelevant. Because George Murray is under our control, and Mayor Alioto has nothing to say about it. But if we fight over George Murray, even if we win next week, then they’ll pick somebody else.16

The student strike at SF State and most of the critical campus rebellions that followed linked Black Power with a cross-race anti-imperialist perspective, often

15 Barlow and Shapiro, 217, 224.
16 Carmichael quoted in Ferreira, 121.
explicitly linking the fight for Black Power on campus to the Vietnam War and global anti-imperialism. Losing faith in the ability or commitment of the Democratic Party and the American system to address their needs, many young Americans across race and class turned to the revolutionary anti-imperialist politics championed by the Black Panther Party. Student activists increasingly saw their struggle as being about much more than student enrollment or curricula. They defined the issue as one of global revolution against empire.

Barbara Williams, a black student at SF State, wrote about this idea of a shared Third World commitment to self-determination: “We are conscious of our blackness, brownness, redness, yellowness and are moving with that knowledge back into our communities. We intend to reveal to the world our own place in this world’s history and to mark our place in space and time. For us, it is no ‘privilege’ to be a product of your racist universities and colleges from which emerge black men with white minds. We don’t intend to reflect your destructive apathy and noninvolvement and inhumanity.”

George Murray further articulated this analysis in an opinion piece he wrote for *Rolling Stone* magazine, where he talked about the struggle at San Francisco State in revolutionary anti-imperialist and Third World terms:

To say you’re Black and you’re proud, and still go to Vietnam to fight our Vietnamese brothers or to go and entertain soldiers who are exterminating the Vietnamese people is a crime against all of us descendants of slaves in the U.S. It is reactionary and insane, and counter-revolutionary … When we talk about becoming free, we have to talk about power, getting all the goods, services, and land, and returning them equally to the oppressed and enslaved Mexicans, Blacks, Indians, Puerto Ricans, and poor whites in the U.S. and to the rest of the oppressed and hungry people in the world… a revolution will smash, shatter and destroy the oppressor and his oppressive system, return all the power, the milk, eggs, butter, and the guns to the people… Listen to this: freedom is a state not limited to a particular culture, race or people, and therefore, the principles upon which a struggle for human rights is based must be all inclusive, must apply equally for all people. Freedom, equality is not relative. For example, the struggle at San Francisco State is based upon three principles: 1) a fight to the death against racism; 2) the right of all people to determine their economic, political, social and educational destinies; and 3) the right for the people to seize power, to carry out all their goals, and to answer all their needs.

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short – *All Power to the People*. These are principles that all human beings can fight for, and the fight is being waged by Black, Brown, Red, and Yellow students, and workers, as well as progressive whites.  

Seeing themselves as engaged in a revolutionary war, the students increasingly turned to radically disruptive tactics. In the rally the night before the student strike, Benny Stewart, Chairman of the BSU, encouraged the audience that individual actions, seemingly small, would have great impact when applied persistently:

From our analysis … we think we have developed a technique … for a prolonged struggle. We call it the war of the flea. What does the flea do? He bites, he slowly sucks blood from the dog. What happens when there are enough fleas on a dog? What will he do? He moves. He moves away. He moves on… That’s the philosophy we’ve got to get into. We’ve got to wear them down… We are the majority and the pigs cannot be everywhere, everyplace all the time. And where they are not, we are … Toilets are stopped up. Pipes are out. Water in the bathroom is just runnin’ all over the place. Smoke is coming out of the bathroom. Trash cans are on fire. People are running in and out of the classrooms, letting the students know that school is out for the day. “I don’t know nothin’ about it. I’m on my way to take an exam. Don’t look at me…” When the pigs come runnin’ on the campus, ain’t nothin’ happening. Everyone has split, so the pig don’t have no heads to bust. When they split, it goes on and on and on…. We should fight the racist administration on our own grounds, you see; not theirs.

**The War of the Flea**

While few students participated directly in the “war of the flea,” those who did were highly disruptive and hard to repress because they enjoyed wide support for their demands among students, faculty, and important segments of the broader community, especially the black community and those disheartened by Nixon’s election as president. Beginning the day after the election and for five months, the San Francisco State Strike made the college ungovernable.

During the first week of the strike, small groups of Latino, Asian American and White students picketed on campus while members of the Black Student Union engaged in more disruptive tactics. They interrupted classes and asked teachers why they were not honoring the strike. Campus toilets were repeatedly stopped up, and water was left running in bathroom sinks so that it overflowed into hallways. A group of students

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targeted various administrative offices by cutting typewriter cords. Small fires were set in trashcans throughout campus. As excitement about the strike mounted, it became impossible for the college to conduct regular classes or activities, and by the end of the week class attendance was down fifty percent.\textsuperscript{19}

Students returned to school from a long weekend on November 12 to find the campus occupied by hundreds of San Francisco police officers in full riot gear, including a paramilitary tactical squad, and a police helicopter circling overhead. Subject to such close police scrutiny, the strikers transitioned away from destructive tactics and focused on strengthening the picket line. Roving groups of student activists became “educational teams,” which calmly visited classes and conducted teach-ins, appealing to others to join them. Affronted first by the firing of George Murray and now the heavy police presence on campus, the faculty called an emergency meeting, and by the end of the day had passed a motion calling for Chancellor Dumke’s resignation.

The next day, many faculty members joined the picket line. George Murray told the press that the strike represented a historic moment, marking “the first time in the country that barriers have been dissolved between black, brown, yellow, and red people.” Without warning, the paramilitary tactical squad formed two columns and pushed into the picket line, beating and arresting several targeted members of the Black Student Union and the Third World Liberation Front. News spread across campus, and soon the student picket grew from 200 to about 2,000. Tension escalated between the students and tac squad, with students chanting “Pigs Off Campus!” and throwing rocks and bottles. The tac squad responded by repeatedly charging the crowd and indiscriminately beating students. As one officer pulled out his gun and began threatening to shoot students,

\textsuperscript{19} Ferreira, 124.
faculty members intervened, stepping physically between the students and police. Eventually, the police left campus and President Smith, noting that the police presence “has moved us along farther and farther toward physical confrontation and injury” closed the campus, indicating that he would not reopen it until “reasonable stability” could be achieved.

While the liberal faculty largely supported President Smith’s decision, conservative state politicians wanted to impose “Law and Order.” Governor Ronald Reagan declared that “for a school administration to deliberately abandon the leadership invested in it by the people of this State… is an unprecedented act of irresponsibility. It is clear that the administration, in its obvious quest for what was considered an easy way out, ignored other options which were available to assure the orderly continuation of the educational process.” A reporter asked what options were available, and Reagan responded: “If it’s necessary we’ll call out the National Guard, and if that’s not sufficient, call in the federal troops.”

When Smith refused to immediately re-open the campus, the Board of Trustees held an emergency meeting Monday, November 18, and voted to give Smith until that Wednesday to re-open the campus. Faculty voted to hold a three-day convocation where students and faculty could talk rationally about the issues and asked Smith to cancel classes. Smith attempted to compromise by opening classes, but allowing those who wanted to attend the convocation to do that instead. For three days, almost no classes took place, and the auditorium where the convocation was held filled to over capacity. Several members of the Black Student Union spoke about their objectives. BSU member Leroy Goodwin said the struggle was for all or nothing. “The issues are not complex. The
objective is seizure of power. Until we size power, not visible power where a black man looks like he’s running things – but real, actual power; everything else is bullshit… Peace and order are bullshit; they are meaningless without justice.” BSU member Nesbit Crutchfield said, “It is very important to realize that we are involved in a revolution. The revolution is the attempt of black people and Third World people to reject the old reality of going to an educational institution which denies them their own humanity as people.”

The students realized that Smith did not have the power to grant their demands for the creation of Black and Ethnic Studies departments. The next morning, Crutchfield demanded an answer: “All I want to ask … is will classes be closed – yes or no?” When Smith refused to cancel classes, the students marched out of the convocation chanting “On Strike! Shut it Down!” re-igniting the disruptive student strike. Police resumed their confrontations, beating and arresting students. One officer pulled a gun on protesting students and fired two shots over their heads. Smith cancelled classes for the following day, Friday November 22, but confrontations between students and police continued. The following Monday, Governor Reagan held a press conference condemning Smith, and State Superintendent Max Rafferty declared: “If I were President of San Francisco State, there would be a lot less students, a lot less faculty, and a lot more Law and Order!” By noon Tuesday, under pressure from the Trustees, Smith had resigned.

**Community Support and the Limits of Direct Repression**

Emboldened by Nixon’s victory, conservative California politicians called for “Law and Order” and a forceful repression of dissent at San Francisco State. They found their ideal administrator in S.I. Hayakawa, a linguist and English professor of Japanese descent. Hayakawa was good at framing the issues, and was eager to use whatever authoritarian measures at his disposal to subdue dissent.
Appointed interim president of San Francisco State on November 26, Hayakawa declared a state of emergency, and said he would immediately suspend any faculty member who did not conduct class and any student disrupting campus operations. He portrayed himself as the champion of racial equality while discrediting the students who had made racial equality an issue on campus, and argued that most students did not support the strike. He distributed blue armbands to the “silent majority” and launched a campaign calling for “Racial Equality, Social Justice, Non-Violence, and the Resumption of Education.” The Third World Liberation Front continued to picket. Hayakawa promptly suspended student leaders and sent police to break up picket lines.

Moderate black leaders were upset with this response. They supported the students’ demands for increased minority enrollment, the development of black history curricula and the creation of a Black Studies Department. In September, black Assemblyman Willie Brown had told the college administration that “if the black students on this campus are asking for something, they [s]hould get it. Period! Because our society is blowing up because black people have not gotten anything. And to sit here and go through these ponderous procedures really begs the question and asks for a confrontation.”20 As repression of the students increased, black community leaders joined the student strike. On December 3, later called “Bloody Tuesday,” the TWLF called a rally assembling 2,500 students, faculty and community members. Speakers included Dr. Carleton Goodlett, editor of the Sun Reporter, a black San Francisco newspaper; Willie Brown; Berkeley City Council member Ron Dellums; the Reverend Cecil Williams; and Hannibal Williams from the Western Addition Community organization. Each spoke in support of student demands. As the crowd marched toward the administration building,

20 Brown quoted in Karagueuzian, 72.
the paramilitary tac squad, armed with special four foot long clubs, surrounded the
protestors and began beating everyone: community members, faculty, photographers,
medics and campus staff, as well as students. The students fought back for an hour. By
the end of the episode, there were countless injuries, and the police had arrested thirty-
two people.

Hayakawa’s repressive tactics backfired and galvanized black community
support. The following morning, Hayakawa met with a group of more than 200 black
community leaders at the office of the *Sun Reporter* and tried to win their support; he
failed in his appeal. Dr. Goodlett said the community would not allow black students to
be isolated. Hayakawa retorted that “Those who call themselves representatives of the
black community are in my opinion adding to the problem with their presence on the
campus. If black leaders come on tomorrow and cause trouble they will be treated like
anyone else who causes trouble.”

That afternoon, with widespread black support, more than 6,000 people
assembled to support the student demands. The NAACP, CORE, the black press, and
several churches joined the Black Panther Party in supporting the student strike. They
also adopted elements of the Panther rhetoric. Dr. Goodlett said that, if necessary, they
would take up guns in self-defense to “protect our young people from the violence of the
police.” The students also received support from the San Francisco Central Labor
Council. 

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21 In addition to supporting the students directly, the Black Panthers also maintained ongoing news,
editorial, and graphic coverage of the developments at San Francisco State in their newspaper and
couraged readers to support strike activities. E.g. see “Panthers/B.S.U. Close S.F. State College,” in
*Black Panther*, November 16, 1968, p.8; “Riots Continue at San Francisco State College,” *Black Panther*
December 7, 1968, p.4; “Panthers-B.S.U. Get it Together: Demands for George Murray’s Return Sparks
San Francisco State College Violent Chaos,” *Black Panther* December 21, 1968, p. 3; “San Francisco State
Hayakawa remained undeterred. He positioned police on rooftops to monitor every action on campus, and a police helicopter circled overhead. Hayakawa addressed the picket through the public address system: “Attention everybody! This is an order to disperse … There are no innocent bystanders … If you are found on campus in the next few minutes you can no longer be considered an innocent bystander.” The picket dispersed but promised to return.

On December 5, the conflict escalated again with police officers drawing their guns on students and community members as the picket entered the Administration building. In order to diffuse the situation, Dr. Goodlett surrendered outside, allowing himself to be arrested. After several dozen arrests and numerous injuries, the conflict subsided. Again on December 6, more than 4,000 strike supporters assembled. Because of widespread support for the student demands, direct repression was clearly failing to subdue dissent. Hayakawa took a different approach and offered the black students concessions to many of their demands, but refused to address any of the demands of the other non-black Third World students. But in the name of Third World solidarity, the BSU rejected Hayakawa’s offer outright. “He’s offering us tidbits. He’s trying to divide us” Nesbit Crutchfield said.22

Support for the student strike continued to grow. The American Federation of Teachers Local 1352, which represented SF State faculty, mobilized support for the TWLF. The newly formed Officers for Justice, a caucus of Black San Francisco Policemen, also came out in favor of the students, speaking publicly at TWLF rallies and endorsing the student demands.

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22 Crutchfield quoted in Staff Report, 60.
Momentum built for a massive showing of solidarity on December 16, which students declared “Third World Community Day,” expecting busloads of support from Latina/o, Pilipino, Chinese, Japanese, and Native American, as well as black, residents of San Francisco. December 16 was also the strike deadline for Local 1352. To thwart such a gathering, Hayakawa closed campus early for the holidays.

On January 5, 1969, Governor Reagan told reporters that San Francisco State would re-open the following day and would remain open “at the point of a bayonet if necessary.” Hayakawa banned all public assembly and banned “all unauthorized persons” from entering campus. The faculty in Local 1352 voted to hold a simultaneous strike of their own for their contractual demands, and received support from members of several unions, including the Painters Union; the International Longshore and Warehouse Union; the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees; the Social Workers Union, the Teamsters, and other American Federation of Teachers locals throughout the Bay Area.

When campus re-opened on January 6, more than 3,000 people joined a massive picket that surrounded the campus. Fewer than one in five classes were actually held. Reagan and Hayakawa denounced the protestors and obtained an injunction against the American Federation of Teachers to prohibit picketing. But the faculty decided to defy the injunction, and the statewide California Federation of Teachers declared that all California State campuses would be shut down if even one striking faculty member was punished. With labor solidarity, the strike became comprehensive, as Teamsters refused to make deliveries to campus, and custodial workers refused to pick up trash. The Third World Liberation Front even signed a mutual aid pact with striking oil refinery workers
in Richmond and Martinez, California. The students continued to use occasional
disruptive tactics such as “book ins” at the library where a group of students would check
out as many books as they could, then return them all, backing up the system and shutting
down library circulation. But the combined student-faculty picket with broad support
from both the black community and organized labor was extremely effective at shutting
down campus, so the TWLF mostly supported the picket at the perimeter of the
University.

The standoff lasted for several weeks, with largely peaceful pickets effectively
closing the campus. Then, on January 23, the TWLF called a massive on-campus rally,
the first since early December. More than 1,000 students, faculty, and community
members participated. The police responded with military precision. As the protestors
chanted “All Power to the People!,” the police drove a wedge through the crowd, splitting
it in two; they surrounding one large group and proceeded to arrest every person in it,
one-by-one. In all, 435 people were arrested, the largest mass arrest, to that point, in San
Francisco’s history. The administration cancelled final exams (which had been scheduled
for later that month) and offered students a credit/no credit option for the fall semester.

The End of the Third World Strike at San Francisco State
Unable to end the strike through mass repression, Hayakawa turned to a more
sophisticated approach of targeted repression combined with concessions that would
undermine the broad public support. Hayakawa established a disciplinary panel to
suspend and expel students involved in Third World Liberation Front activities and
appointed his faculty allies to run it. Knowing that most of the TWLF students had to
work on campus to fund their studies, he banned students who had been arrested from
working on campus. He shut down the Equal Opportunity Program that facilitated such
work-study for all students of color. He also shut down the student newspaper, the Daily Gater, and Open Process, another student publication that had supported the strike. He seized $400,000 in student funds controlled by the student government, which was friendly to the strike.23

Hayakawa and his allies spared no expense in making life difficult for the dissenting students. Conservative State Assemblyman Donald Mulford held a special meeting with Superior Court judges to inform them that if they were lenient with student demonstrators, they would face “heavily financed opposition” when they ran for reelection. Instead of holding joint trials for arrested students as is customarily done in cases of civil disobedience, in the “S.F. State Trials,” each student was tried individually leading to more than 900 civil jury cases in all. The trials lasted nearly a year, backlogging the entire civil court system. It cost the government a lot of money to try the cases in this way, but it also made it very difficult to defend the activists, tying up the movement’s resources, and serving as a significant deterrent.

Prominent and effective student leaders were targeted for the heaviest repression. No one knows exactly what happened to George Murray in jail. But as TWLF leader Roger Alvarado reflected, “once they got him in jail, I’m sure they really put the screw to him… I mean cause what was happening with the Panther Party at that time… they were just out and out getting murdered.” As part of Murray’s sentence, he was ordered to resign from the Black Panther Party, and to refrain from ever appearing or enrolling in an educational institution again without explicit permission from the court. With his mother, wife, and newborn child with him in court, Murray agreed, and dropped completely out of politics.

23 Ferreira, 166-7.
As more targeted repression of student leaders was taking its toll, Hayakawa offered concessions to the American Federation of Teachers on class load, and threatened to fire any faculty members who failed to return to work. By March 5, the AFT strike was over, and the faculty was back teaching.

On March 20, Hayakawa announced that a School of Ethnic Studies would be established composed of separate departments of Black Studies, Asian American Studies, and La Raza Studies. He also committed to take measures to significantly increase minority student enrollment. Despite the lack of commitment to student participation in the hiring and firing of new Ethnic Studies faculty, in setting Ethnic Studies curricula, and the lack of redress of Hayakawa’s repression of George Murray and firing of Nathan Hare, the TWLF agreed, and the Third World Strike at San Francisco State was over.

**Proliferation**

As the San Francisco State strike developed, the student struggle spread across California and the country. “The spin-off from San Francisco State,” predicted Ron Dellums, the black city councilmember from Berkeley, “will have implications for high schools, junior colleges, junior high schools, elementary schools as well as other colleges throughout the state and outside the state.” And he was right. From the example set at San Francisco State, black students and their allies learned that they could advance their demands for increased enrollment, curricula, and educational “self-determination” by forming broad anti-imperialist alliances and disrupting university functions. They could expect harsh repression, but also the widespread support necessary to endure it.

In early January 1969, the Black Student Union and Third World Liberation Front from San Francisco State convened a weeklong meeting attended by student

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24 Orrick, *Staff Report*, 73.
representatives from more than thirty California colleges and high schools. They called this January 6-13 meeting a “National Week of Solidarity,” during which they prepared a statement appealing for national action that read in part:

The Third World Liberation Front and the Black Student Union demands stress our human rights to self-determination according to the needs of our community and not the military-industrial-complex that controls the education of this nation. No longer must we or you put up with the psychological genocide that is called education. We must stop them from making us into ‘sophisticated slaves’ with highly developed skills. We must attack from all levels those institutions and persons that have kept us fighting with each other and forgetting the real enemy. We must come back to our ‘grass roots’ understanding that we are all brothers and sisters and extensions of our communities. We realize that the racist power structure has united to crush the strike at San Francisco State hoping to make it an exemplary defeat for Third World people as it has sought to repel the tide of Vietnamese self-determination. AN ATTACK ON ONE CAMPUS IS AN ATTACK AGAINST ALL CAMPUSES!25

As the conflict at San Francisco State grew and word spread, students at other schools launched their own struggles. Black students at Balboa High School and Polytechnic High School in San Francisco organized a walk-out demanding the creation of classes in black history and culture. More than 1,000 black students marched on the San Francisco Board of Education demanding the “right to determine our educational destiny.” Black and Latino students at Mission High in San Francisco formed an alliance and went on strike with support of parents and community activists. The city sent in the police tactical squad, and the conflict escalated as students were beaten and nearly 300 were arrested. In the broader San Francisco Bay Area, black and Third World students launched student strikes and protests at City College of San Francisco, Laney Community College in Oakland, Chabot College in Freemont, and Cal-State Hayward demanding “educational self-determination.” At the College of San Mateo, when students called a strike with demands similar to those at San Francisco State, the conflict escalated and the president of the college declared martial law, surrounding the school with armed police and limiting campus access only to those with valid student IDs whose names did not

25 Ferreira, 154.
appear on a “subversives” list. At UC Berkeley, a Third World Liberation Front called for the creation of a Third World College and released a statement of demands:

The people must be given an effective voice in the educational apparatus which either prepares or fails to prepare their children for life as it actually is. WE MUST HAVE SELF DETERMINATION!! We can no longer afford to have our tax dollars used to finance private, privileged sanctuary for a group of backward, unrealistic colonialists while our needs go unmet. We must have change and change will come by any means the colonialist make necessary.

Like those at San Francisco State, the Berkeley strikers indeed forced their concerns onto the statewide agenda. Governor Reagan declared an “extreme state of emergency,” dropped tear gas on students from helicopters, and sent in the National Guard armed with bayonets.26

As word spread, so did mobilization by black and other Third World students. Throughout the spring of 1969, demands for black and Third World enrollment and curricula ripped through campuses across the country. About a third of all student protests that tumultuous year aimed to increase Black Studies curricula.27 Many of the protests followed roughly the trajectory of those at San Francisco State: disruptive protests by a relatively radical minority could not be easily repressed because their demands spoke to the interests of a much broader constituency, including other marginalized students, black groups across a political spectrum, and liberals alienated by “Law and Order” politics. When college administrations attempted to repress the dissidents, public support for the student activists was overwhelming.

At the University of Wisconsin, Madison, where there were only 500 blacks enrolled in a student body of 32,000, several hundred black and white radicals rallied on February 8 calling for a boycott of classes until the administration created a Black Studies

26 Ferreira, 154-160.
Department. A small-scale picket persisted until the mayor of Madison called in the National Guard to repress it. By noon, the picket ballooned to 2,000 students; conflicts with the Guard intensified, and tear gas was used to disperse the students. By that evening more than 10,000 students had joined the protest and marched on the capitol carrying lit torches, precipitating a major social crisis.  

Black students at Cornell University took over a campus building in April calling for the creation of a black college and decrying recent incidents of racism on campus. The conflict over redress of black concerns almost became an armed battle as students marched in front of news media bearing seventeen rifles and shotguns and bandoliers of bullets, and refused to back down until their demands were met.  

On May 21, a movement of black students in Greensboro, North Carolina, developed into open warfare. The conflict started when a student with a Black Power platform was excluded from a ballot for student body president at the all-black Dudley High School. Police arrested student protesters, and students began throwing rocks and breaking windows. The conflict escalated. The mayor called a curfew. Angry black students took over several buildings and held them for two days at the historically black North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University in Greensboro. The National Guard was called in with tanks and sharpshooters. The black students resisted and engaged in an extended shootout with police and the National Guard. At least five

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policemen were shot, and many students were injured. More than 200 students were arrested, and sophomore honors student Willie B. Grimes was killed.\(^{30}\)

All told, in the spring of 1969, there were major protests at nearly 300 colleges across the country. One quarter involved strikes or building takeovers. One quarter involved disruptions of classes or other school functions. About 20 percent of the protests involved bombs, fires, or destruction of property. There were at least 84 incidents of bombing or arson on campus that spring; the American Insurance Association estimated that these protests incurred at least $8,946,972 in property damage alone.\(^{31}\)

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Beginning in the fall of 1968, university access and curricula became key political battlegrounds. As the Democratic Party alienated much of its base and the Right was emboldened by Nixon’s election, increasing the virulence of “Law and Order” repression, the anti-imperialist struggle broadened. The Panthers instigated the San Francisco State strike, forging broad alliances with black leaders, faculty, labor, and a multiracial coalition of radical students. As right-wing California politicians attempted to prevent Panther organizing on campus, many faculty felt that academic freedom had been undermined. While most faculty did not agree with the political vision of the Panthers, they did not believe politicians should interfere in the running of the university. Similarly, repression of the Panthers drew strong opposition throughout the black community. Black political, church, and civic leaders in San Francisco sought to ameliorate the under-representation of young blacks in higher education and government


\(^{31}\) Sale, 512-514.
employment, and redress the grievances that underlay the urban riots. In that context, black leaders saw harsh repression of promising young black activists on campus as a threat to their own interests – despite their political differences.

In addition, opposed to the educational marginalization of their own communities, anti-imperialist Latino and Asian-American students integrated their own political agenda into an anti-imperialist “Third World” alliance. Anti-imperialist white students mobilized in solidarity. Many of the students conducting direct action to disrupt normal university relations were not black. The Panthers’ anti-imperialist politics mobilized a broad alliance that would have been impossible within the confines of a narrower black nationalism. The allied defense of student insurgents and subsequent victories at San Francisco State attracted wide attention, and similar struggles for Black Studies and “Ethnic” Studies proliferated to campuses nationwide.32

In 1969 and 1970, the Black Panthers’ resilient anti-imperialist politics propelled their Party into the center of an ever-widening resistance …

32 Many anti-imperialist student activists demanded “Third World” Studies, but eventually settled for “Ethnic” Studies.
Chapter 13: Vanguard of the New Left

Yolanda Lopez and Donna Amador, activists from the San Francisco State strike, were at the Free Huey rally on May 1, 1969 along with Ralph Ruiz when, as Amador recalls: “I was standing in the back of the crowd near a police motorcycle when I heard from a crackling radio that a police officer had just been shot in San Francisco’s Mission District (my home). An all-points bulletin went out for a number of Latin men, and, coincidentally, one of the suspects [Ralph Ruiz] was standing right beside me! My priorities changed instantly. Education was important for the brothers and sisters, but the fight for freedom from the oppression and injustice of the real world suddenly took me away from SFSU.”

Earlier that day, San Francisco police officers Brodnick and McGoran, both undercover, approached a group of young Latinos moving a television from their car into an apartment. Officer McGoran, who had been drinking that morning, called the youths “wetbacks” and a number of insults were exchanged. A fight broke out, and by the end, Brodnick had been killed with McGoran’s gun. Despite evidence that four of the seven young Latino activists charged were elsewhere at the time and no clear argument as to who had actually shot Brodnick, the prosecution charged all seven with first degree murder and called for their execution. In response, San Francisco Police raided more than 150 homes in the Mission District claiming to search for the seven young men they accused of shooting Brodnick. The Black Panther asked rhetorically, “Was that pig

CHAPTER 13: VANGUARD OF THE NEW LEFT

1 Treatment of Los Siete de la Raza drawn from the Black Panther Newspaper, various issues, and Jason Michael Ferreira 2003. Except where otherwise noted, direct quotes concerning Los Siete de la Raza are from Jason Michael Ferreira 2003.
Brodnick shot by the many thousands of Brown people who live in San Francisco’s Mission District?"²

The seven Latinos charged – Tony and Mario Martinez, Nelson Rodriquez, Jose Rios, George “Gio” Lopez, Gary Lescallet, and Danilo “Bebe” Melendez – were active in student mobilization for Third World curricula and enrollment at the College of San Mateo. They came to be known as Los Siete de la Raza (roughly the seven Latinos). Many young Latinas and Latinos in San Francisco’s Mission District initially became politically active in an organization called the Mission Rebels, a federally funded program for low-income youth. Both the San Francisco State Strike and conflicts with police had radicalized many young activists in the Mission District. When Los Siete were accused of murder, the charge gave young Mission District activists a focal point for their political mobilization.

With connections to the Black Panthers through the student strike at San Francisco State, Los Siete supporters Roger Alvarado and Donna Amador approached Bobby Seale, and the Panthers immediately came to their assistance. The Panthers offered Los Siete supporters publication assistance, shared the stage at rallies, introduced them to their lawyer Charles Garry, committed $25,000 to their legal defense, and mentioned Los Siete when they were interviewed on the evening news.

On June 28, 1969, the Black Panther Newspaper headlined “Free the Latino Seven” and featured a full-page cover graphic of Mexican revolutionary Emiliano Zapata and six photos of members of Los Siete de la Raza. The paper opened to stories explaining the case and calling on readers to donate to the cause of Los Siete de la Raza, including one article that equated their struggle to the Panthers’ own: “The Black Panther

Party sees that these brothers are political prisoners the same as Huey P. Newton.”

Newton wrote a personal statement in support of Los Siete from prison, calling on Panthers to support them.³

Los Siete crafted a seven-point anti-imperialist program, titled “What We Want and What We Believe,” modeled after the Panther’s 10-point program. It read:

1) We want self determination for all people of La Raza.
2) We support all revolutionary movements at home, in Latin American, and throughout the world.
3) We want an immediate end to police brutality and murder of La Raza people.
4) We want an end to exploitation of women, male chauvinism, male supremacy. We want freedom for women.
5) We want freedom for all La Raza men and women of all ages held in federal state, county, city prison, and youth detention centers.
6) We want all La Raza men to be exempt from military service.
7) We demand a free society where the needs of the people come first: free health care, free education, full employment, and decent housing.⁴

In August, the Black Panther Party offered space in their newspaper for Los Siete de la Raza to help them get their own paper started. Donna Amador was the editor and Yolanda Lopez, after lessons from Emory Douglass, was in charge of layout. Three eight-page bilingual issues of Basta Ya! were published under the aegis of the Black Panther newspaper, while Los Siete developed the capacity for independent publication by late September.⁵

Red Guard

A Chinese-American group in San Francisco emulating the Black Panthers grew out of Leway, a federally funded program for low-income youths in Chinatown. After participating in the Stop the Draft Week and the San Francisco State Strike, many Leway members came to believe that the government was not truly interested in their problems,

⁴ Reproduced in Ferreira 307.
⁵ See Basta Ya! in the back 8 pages of the Black Panther newspaper August 16, 1969; September 6, 1969; and September 20, 1969. On Lopez and Amador roles, see Ferreira, 301.
and they sought more radical redress. Alex Hing, Warren Mar, and others participated in Black Panther political education classes and helped recruit Chinese-American youth to attend “Free Huey!” rallies. Soon, they left Leway and founded the Red Guard, named for Mao’s army in China. They saw themselves as part of a global revolutionary struggle for self-determination, in solidarity with both the Chinese Revolution and the Black Panthers. The Red Guard emulated many of the Black Panthers’ activities, including establishing community service programs and organizing against police brutality. They adopted a ten-point program very similar to that of the Panthers, but with notable exceptions. For example their tenth point read: “We demand that the United States government recognize the People’s Republic of China. We believe that Mao Tse-Tung is the true leader of the Chinese people; not Chiang Kai Shek.”

Young Lords

In Chicago, as the Black Panthers developed a powerful presence in the black community, they pioneered strong alliances with non-black anti-imperialist groups. One important ally of the Chicago Panthers was the Puerto Rican Young Lords Organization. The Young Lords originated in the 1950s as a Puerto Rican street gang in Chicago’s Lincoln Park neighborhood. Jose “Cha Cha” Jimenez joined in 1959 and rose through the ranks to become leader of the gang in 1964. Jimenez used his position to advance a social service mission in the Puerto Rican community. The Young Lords started to give food and clothing to poor families, formed a social club and began organizing community

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picnics. Eventually, Jimenez became dissatisfied with the give-aways as a means to effect real change. According to Jimenez, “the Young Lords Organization turned political because they found out that just giving gifts wasn’t going to help their people, they had to deal with the system that was messing over them.” In 1968, Cha Cha Jimenez met Fred Hampton in jail. After a long discussion about the divisions between blacks and Puerto Ricans, Jimenez embraced the Black Panther Party as the revolutionary vanguard and sought to emulate the Black Panther model. “We see and we recognize the Black Panther Party as a vanguard party, a vanguard revolutionary party. And we feel that as revolutionaries, we should follow the vanguard,” Jimenez explained. When he got out of jail, he initiated a campaign to oppose Chicago’s “urban renewal” policies that displaced many Puerto Ricans from their homes, and transformed the Young Lords into the Young Lords Organization.

The Young Lords wore purple berets, asserted their right to armed self-defense, and developed a thirteen-point platform and program modeled after the Black Panthers. The Young Lords were different from other domestic “Third World” organizations in that Puerto Rico was (and is still) a territory of the United States, subject to U.S. rule without full political representation. Led mostly by Puerto Rican youth born in the mainland United States, the Young Lords sought to link the liberation struggle in Puerto Rico to the social conditions they experienced in their urban neighborhoods in the United States.

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*Iris Morales, “¡Palante, Siempre Palante!: The Young Lords,” in Torres and Velasquez, p. 212. Jimenez quoted in “Interview with Cha Cha Jimenez, Chairman – Young Lords Organization,” in *Black Panther*, v3n7, June 7, 1969, p.17. See also “Cha Cha Jimenez Accused of Kidnapping Own Child,” in *Black Panther*, v3n7, June 7, 1969, p.17; “Pigs Block Cha Cha Jimenez,” in *Black Panther*, v3n26, October 18, 1969, p.3. Archival Materials on the Chicago Young Lords including oral histories conducted by the Lincoln Park Project and the Center for Latino Research are collected at the DePaul University in Chicago.*
Like the Black Panthers, they saw problems in their communities as a reflection of imperialism, capitalism and racism.8

On April 4, 1969, Chicago police killed Young Lord Minister of Defense Manuel Ramos, and critically wounded Young Lord Minister of Education Ralph Rivera, shooting him in the head. Less than twenty hours later, the Young Lords turned out more than 3,000 people for a protest at the police station. Allegedly, the police had tried to turn the black gangs in the area against the Young Lords. But on May 14, the Young Lords took over the McCormick Theological Seminary and invited the black gangs to talk. The Black Panthers announced their support for the Young Lords and formally declared solidarity with the group: “Regarding you, the Young Lords as our true revolutionary brothers, as our comrades, as our allies, the Black Panther Party is working jointly with you to see that aggression is thwarted and suppression is ended.” Jimenez talked about the class character of the struggle and said that “We see the United States is our enemy. And we look out for allies, you know, we look at Cuba, we look at Mao, we look at all these other countries that have liberated themselves from the monsters.”9

Recalling their earlier food and clothing giveaways and inspired by the Black Panther model, the Young Lords organized community service programs to address the basic needs of community members and to draw them to their organization. They

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organized joint free clothes distribution with the Black Panthers, distributing free new and used clothes to hundreds of families. The Young Lords also initiated a free breakfast for children program serving Chicago’s Puerto Rican neighborhoods.10

In June 1969, the Chicago Black Panther Party announced the creation of a “Rainbow Coalition” with the Young Lords and the Young Patriots, a group of poor revolutionary white youths led by William “Preacherman” Fesperman, a white seminary student who had moved to Chicago from Appalachia, wore Black Panther buttons and displayed the Confederate flag. Chicago’s Black Panther Deputy Chairman Fred Hampton announced “We got blacks, browns, and whites … we’ve got a Rainbow Coalition!” The national Black Panther Party promoted Chicago’s revolutionary coalition as a national model and speakers from the three groups were featured at events from Oakland to New York, such as a march on Fort Dix in New Jersey to protest alleged brutality against soldiers in the stockade there. Explaining the coalition, New York Black Panther leader Carlton Yearwood said that the groups shared a revolutionary commitment to class struggle across race. “We believe that racism comes out of a class struggle, it’s just part of the divide-and-conquer tactics of the Establishment and a product of capitalism. When we provide free breakfasts for poor kids, we provide them for poor whites and poor blacks.”11

As the Young Lords in Chicago emulated the Panthers, other Puerto Rican activists began to follow suit. On June 7, 1969, the *Black Panther Newspaper* ran a story on the Young Lords in Chicago and the “Rainbow Coalition.” The article caught the eye of a group of Puerto Rican student activists in New York City looking for a way to address police violence, expand educational access for Puerto Ricans, transform educational curricula, and advance Puerto Rican independence. Pablo “Yoruba” Guzmán, as a student at Columbia University, as well as David Perez and Miguel “Mickey” Melendez as students at Old Westbury College, had been involved in educational politics and social service programs. Guzmán participated in the Columbia protests. By 1969, all three were moving decidedly towards revolutionary anti-imperialist politics. The students already looked to the Black Panthers for inspiration. When they heard about the Young Lords in Chicago, they decided to emulate their example. In the words of New York Young Lords Party co-founder and Minister of Information Pablo “Yoruba” Guzman, “At first the only model we had to go on in this country was the Black Panther Party… [Then], in 1969 in the June 7 issue of the Black Panther newspaper there was an article about the Young Lords Organization in Chicago with Cha Cha Jimenez as their chairman. Cha Cha was talking about revolution and socialism and the liberation of Puerto Rico and the right to self-determination and all this stuff that I ain’t *never* heard a spic say. I mean, I hadn’t never heard no Puerto Rican talk like this – just Black people were talking this way, you know. And I said, “Damn! Check this out.” That’s what really got us started.” After reading the Panther article on the Young Lords in June, Guzman, Melendez, and Perez traveled to Chicago to ask Jimenez if their organization could become a formal chapter of the Young Lords. Jimenez told them they should merge with Juan “Fi” Ortiz
and a group of New York high school students that was trying to get a chapter going. They recruited Fi to the Central Committee, and the New York Young Lords was formed. They decorated their office with posters of the Black Panthers, Pedro Albizu Campos (leader of the Puerto Rican independence movement in the mid-twentieth century), Ho Chi Minh and Che Guevara.\(^\text{12}\)

In October of 1969, the Young Lords changed their name to the Young Lords Party and began self-publishing a mimeographed packet called *Palante* which grew to a full fledged newspaper by May of 1970.\(^\text{13}\) Like the Panthers, they saw a need to create a revolutionary culture that would allow Puerto Ricans to liberate themselves from mental slavery and stand up to oppression. “The chains that have been taken off slaves’ bodies are put back on their minds,” explained Young Lord David Perez. “To support its economic exploitation of Puerto Rico, the United States instituted a new educational system whose purpose was to Americanize us. Specifically, that means that the school’s principal job is to exalt the cultural values of the United States… What all this does is to create severe problems for our people. First it creates a colonized mentality – that means that the people have a strong feeling of inferiority, they have a strong feeling of not being as worthy as the Americans because the structure tells them that to become American is always a goal they have to attain.”

The New York Young Lords used Saul Alinsky-type direct action tactics with an anti-imperialist edge to force confrontation with the city government of New York, seeking to gain concessions for their community. Many people in the neighborhood

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\(^\text{12}\) Yoruba in Abramson, p. 74-75; Miguel “Mickey” Melendez, *We Took the Streets: Fighting for Latino Rights with the Young Lords*, St. Martin’s Press, 2003: 77-86, 103.

complained of the failure of the city to clean the streets and the mountains of piled up garbage. In August of 1969, the Young Lords went to the Department of Sanitation and requested the use of brooms to clean the streets. When the Department staff refused their request, they took the brooms by force. They organized a community work day and, using the brooms they had “liberated,” they swept the streets. Hundreds of neighbors joined them, piling up a five foot high mountain of trash blocking off the six lanes of Third Avenue. As Juan González directed people away from the pile, Yoruba screamed “burn the garbage!” and, to the cheers of the neighbors, the Young Lords doused the trash with gasoline and ignited the pile. As Yoruba explained to the *New York Times*, the Young Lords had organized the garbage dumping demonstration to show people in “El Barrio,” the Puerto Rican slums in East Harlem, that direct action was needed to force the city to meet community needs. The Mayor, attempting to de-escalate the conflict and win support in his upcoming re-election campaign, reassigned Sanitation Department personnel to clean up the pervasive garbage problems in the neighborhood and keep it clean. The victory brought a tremendous outpouring of community support for the Young Lords.14

In the fall of 1969, the Young Lords in New York approached the Reverend Humberto Carranza of the local First Spanish Methodist Church on 111th Street in East Harlem. The church was not used during the week and the Young Lords asked if they could use the basement of the church to run their free breakfast program for neighborhood children. Carranza refused, so the Young Lords went to Sunday service to ask the parishioners directly. There were approximately twenty Young Lords and thirty

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parishioners at the service. During the testimonial period, Young Lord Chairman Felipe Luciano made a plea to the religious community for the Young Lords to be able to use the space. But Reverend Carranza had warned the cops, who proceeded to storm the front of the church and beat Luciano – breaking his arm and sending him to the hospital – and to arrest all the Young Lords present. Melendez called the left-leaning National Lawyers Guild for help, and a brilliant young Latino Lawyer Jerry Rivers was sent to help get the Young Lords out of jail. Rivers came to represent the Young Lords in most of their cases. He soon changed his name to Geraldo Rivera, and eventually became a popular talk show host.15

The repression of the Young Lords brought them increased support from the community and for the following 3 months, Young Lords members regularly gave speeches as part of the testimonial period in Sunday services at the First Spanish Methodist Church on 111th Street in East Harlem often attended by eighty parishioners and 150 Young Lords supporters. The Young Lords continued to ask to be allowed to use the church space to conduct a “liberation school” and a day care and for a free breakfast program for children. But the Reverend continued to refuse their requests, and on December 28, after the Sunday service, the Young Lords and their Black Panther allies locked the doors of the church with chains and sealed them with six-inch railroad spikes. Yoruba told the press that the immediate plan was to feed hot breakfasts to fifty to seventy children out of the church each morning and that they would end the occupation if they were allowed to run the breakfast program. The Young Lords put up a sign proclaiming “La Iglesia de le Gente – People’s Church.” They served breakfasts of fruit juice, milk, and cookies in the mornings to seventy-five children, and conducted classes

for the community on Latin American history. The church takeover became a national story and thousands visited the Young Lords to offer their support including celebrities like Jane Fonda and Donald Sutherland. In the end, the National Council of Churches agreed to provide space in other churches in the neighborhood for the Young Lords’ programs.16

In early October of 1970, Young Lord Julio Roldán was sitting out on the stoop and drinking a beer with friends when police pulled up. Roldán was arrested for drinking in public, and the next morning, he was found hung in his cell. Believing that Roldán had been killed by authorities, 5,000 demonstrators carried his casket from the González funeral home on Madison Ave. and marched to the First Spanish Methodist Church on 111th Street. Again, the Young Lords took over the Church, but this time, they were armed. They held the Church refusing to move. Fearing a disaster, the Mayor negotiated with the Young Lords and granted a seat on the Board of Corrections to Young Lord ally and former light heavyweight boxing champion of the world José Torres. The mayor also granted amnesty for the Church occupiers given that no guns were found when they came out. The Young Lords agreed to the terms and then followed the example of the Algerian revolutionaries, sneaking their guns out in the bras of old women.17

On the strength of these successes, the Young Lords Party continued to spread. A Philadelphia office opened in August 1970. Another opened in Puerto Rico, one in Newark, and one in Hayward, CA. The Philadelphia Chapter was comprised predominantly of young Puerto Ricans involved with a Catholic service agency that had

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17 Guzmán, 164-5.
turned towards revolutionary politics through engagement with the Socialist Workers Party. Soon they turned towards the model of the Young Lords, adopting their platform, and achieved formal recognition as a chapter. The Philadelphia chapter focused on Free Breakfast for Children and service programs for the community. When they began organizing for community control of the police, their offices were firebombed.\(^{18}\)

Often working directly with the Black Panthers, the New York-based Young Lords’ innovative campaigns included taking over Lincoln Hospital, which had been run for twenty-five years out of a condemned building, and forcing the City of New York to build a new hospital in the South Bronx. They took over a mobile X-ray truck to force the city of New York to attend to a spreading tuberculosis epidemic in East Harlem, and seized un-utilized equipment to test for lead-poisoning in children exposed to potential brain damage by peeling lead paint in substandard housing. They challenged the Board of Corrections on prison conditions, conducted ongoing breakfast for children programs in four cities, and initiated bilingual education programs. They also turned out 10,000 people to demonstrate for an independent Puerto Rico at the UN and maintained direct alliances with independence movement organizations in Puerto Rico.\(^{19}\)

**The White New Left**

In the context of Nixon’s “Law and Order” politics, and the escalating conflict between Panthers and the State nationwide, the Black Panther Party became a model of revolutionary political action for many non-blacks. Like the Panthers, the Young Lords,


\(^{19}\) Rafael Viera, Chief Medical Cadre, Young Lords Organization, interview “The Young Lords Organization on the Move,” in *Black Panther* v4n10 February 17, 1970, p.6; Abramson, p.101; Guzmán, p. 158; Melendez, 150.
the Red Guards, and Los Siete de la Raza viewed their struggles as racial as well as class struggles. These groups sought to emulate the Black Panther Party, but in ways reflective of their own distinctive liberation struggle. Young white activists did not face racial oppression. And the Appalachian Young Patriots notwithstanding, many white New Left activists came from the middle-class, and did not personally suffer class exploitation either. Nonetheless, many looked to the Black Panther Party as a primary reference point for their own political activism.

In an interview from prison with the *Movement* newspaper, Newton explained the Black Panther position on the role of white allies in building a global revolution and emphasized the Panthers’ commitment to socialism. In contrast with Stokely Carmichael and other separatist Black Nationalists, he reinforced the Panthers’ openness to working with whites, and advanced a sympathetic assessment of the white New Left:

I personally think that there are many young white revolutionaries who are sincere in attempting to realign themselves with mankind, and to make a reality out of the high moral standards that their fathers and forefathers only expressed. In pressing for new heroes the young white revolutionaries found their heroes in the black colony at home and in the colonies throughout the world. The young white revolutionaries raised the cry for the troops to withdraw from Vietnam, hands off Latin America, withdraw from the Dominican Republic and also to withdraw from the black community or the black colony. So you have a situation in which the young white revolutionaries are attempting to identify with the oppressed people of the colonies and against the exploiter.

Newton argued that because middle-class white revolutionaries did not experience class exploitation or racial injustice, their oppression is “somewhat abstract.” Nonetheless, he insisted they had an important role to play in the global revolutionary struggle. White leftists, he said, needed to dedicate themselves to revolution, and to align themselves with the anti-imperialist liberation struggles around the world and with the Black Panther Party:

[White revolutionaries] can aid the black revolutionaries first by simply turning away from the establishment, and secondly choosing their friends. For instance, they have a choice between whether they will be a friend of Lyndon Baines Johnson or a friend of Fidel Castro. A friend of
Robert Kennedy or a friend of Ho Chi Minh. And these are direct Opposites. A friend of mine or a friend of Johnson’s. After they make this choice then the white revolutionaries have a duty and a responsibility to act.

Newton suggested that the abstract quality of white revolutionary struggle is made real—that whites prove their allegiance and become truly revolutionary—by supporting the black struggle against oppression:

Black people are being oppressed in the colony by white police men, by white racists. We are saying they must withdraw… [W]hen something happens in the black colony – when we’re attacked and ambushed in the black colony – then the white revolutionary students and intellectuals and all the other whites who support the colony should respond by defending us.

SDS published Newton’s ideas about the white New Left as a pamphlet, and distributed it nationwide that Fall, in coordination with “Free Huey!” actions.20

Heeding the call to defense, in early 1969, Students for a Democratic Society committed to work with Panthers to organize a February 16-17 birthday celebration for Huey Newton in twenty cities nationwide to mobilize support for the “Free Huey!” campaign. Calling for SDS members across the country to participate, SDS Inter-Organizational Secretary Bernardine Dohrn explained the importance of doing whatever it takes to defend the Panthers: “When an organization is rooted in the needs of the people, attacks on that organization or its leaders (frame-ups, jailing, assassination) are understood and resisted as a more visible form of the daily oppression of the entire people. The reaction is not just shock or indignation at the hypocrisy of the system, but more determined and conscious willingness to fight. The tactics of the fight are any means necessary...” Dorhn ended her appeal by quoting Newton: “The racist dog

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oppressors have no rights which oppressed Black people are bound to respect… The oppressor must be harassed until his doom. He must have no peace by day or night.”

By April of 1969, SDS had embraced the Black Panther Party as central to its own struggle. On April 4, the one year anniversary of MLK’s assassination, SDS published a resolution passed by 1,200 national representatives titled, “The Black Panther Party: toward the liberation of the colony.” The resolution linked the revolutionary core identity of SDS to resisting the State repression of the Panthers: “When the leading black revolutionary group is continually harassed, its leaders jailed, hounded out of the country and brutally assassinated, when Panther members daily face the provocations of the ruling class and its racist pigs, when their blood has been spilled and their list of revolutionary martyrs … increases daily, then the time has come for SDS to give total and complete support to their defense efforts. To do less would be a mockery of the word ‘revolutionary.’”

The SDS resolution called Newton the most important “political prisoner” in the United States, and urged SDS members to form Newton-Cleaver Defense Committees. Primarily, these committees would raise money to provide legal defense for Newton and other Panthers facing charges. These committees would also serve an educational role, teaching people about the case and providing analysis of the structural roots of racist oppression.

The resolution declared SDS’s “total commitment to the fight for liberation in the colony and revolution in the mother country,” and named the Black Panther Party the vanguard of all revolutionary struggle in the United States:

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The sharpest struggles in the world today are those of the oppressed nations against imperialism and for national liberation. Within this country the sharpest struggle is that of the black colony for its liberation; it is a struggle which by its very nature is anti-imperialist and increasingly anti-capitalist… Within the black liberation movement the vanguard force is the Black Panther Party… We must keep in mind that the Black Panther Party is not fighting black people’s struggles only but is in fact the vanguard in our common struggles against capitalism and imperialism.22

**United Front Against Fascism**

By the summer of 1969, the Black Panthers recognized that the broader New Left was turning toward their party for leadership. They seized the opportunity. In the May 31, 1969, issue of their newspaper, the Black Panther Party called for a “Revolutionary Conference for a United Front Against Fascism” to take place in Oakland, July 18-21.

The issue featured a photo of non-black New Left protestors on the cover next to a photo of Ericka Huggins with the caption “wife of the late John Jerome Huggins.” The headline read “Fascism in America.” Seven pages of the issue featured photos of crowds of non-black New Leftists confronting bayonet wielding National Guardsmen, a military

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22 SDS resolution at the Austin National Council, “The Black Panther Party: toward the liberation of the colony,” published in New Left Notes, April 4, 1969 pp.1, 3. While about 2/3 of the SDS National Convention supported the resolution, equally telling is the 1/3 that did not. Against the tenuous alliance of SDS’s dominant leadership block which was ideologically diverse, but agreed in their support of the Panthers, the opposition to the resolution was composed of a block of ideologically unified and disciplined Progressive Labor Party activists who at this time argued for the importance of class over race and other considerations. Ironically, readers may recall that the Progressive Labor Party sent members of the Revolutionary Action Movement to Cuba in the early 1960s and helped Black revolutionary nationalism build a foundation in the United States. But by 1969, the Progressive Labor Party had turned against the North Vietnamese and also against the Black Panther Party arguing that the Left in the United States should emphasize organizing workers and de-emphasize questions of race. This was a highly ironic turn of position at a time when draft resistance and the Black Panther Party based on an anti-imperialist politics were the core of a greatly expanding and influential New Left. Progressive Labor did not walk away from the anti-imperialist New Left, but sought to undermine it by fighting tooth and nail for the completely unrealistic program that the newly politicized students of the New Left who had found their identity as revolutionary actors in draft resistance and in support of the Panthers ought to stop organizing around the Vietnam War and against racism, and instead seek to organize workers. It is quite possible that this obstructionist position was due, in part, to the manipulations of the FBI. A serious study of the causes of Progressive Labor’s obstructionist turn would be invaluable for understanding the late 1960s and its repercussions. The schisms created in part by Progressive Labor’s obstructionist turn fragmented SDS and contributed significantly to the demise of the New Left. But what is important in terms of understanding SDS’s endorsement of the Panthers as the “vanguard” is exactly that the New Left could never desert the Panthers any more than they could desert the Vietnamese and still be the New Left because the alliance linking the New Left rooted in the practices of draft resistance to the political activities of the Panthers was the practical foundation for the New Left’s revolutionary morality, the basis for its identity. This was not a class basis for a superstructure in orthodox Marxist terms as much as a practical political basis for a political ideology.
helicopter gassing protestors, and graphic close-ups of wounded activists shot down by police. A photo caption featured Newton’s dictum: “Politics is war without bloodshed… War is politics with bloodshed.” The centerfold, featuring a photo of a mob of police with shotguns and riot gear shutting down a street, declared “The Black Panther Party Comes Forth. We Must Develop a United Front Against Fascism.” The text called for a broad peoples’ revolutionary alliance.23

The Panthers’ conference announcement distributed in late May linked the police killing of white Berkeley activist James Rector by police to the incarceration of Huey Newton. The conference would help develop a political program for all “poor, black, oppressed workers and people of America.” The conference would also seek ways to advance community control of the police; the freeing of all political prisoners; the expulsion of the military from campus; and community self-defense. “People! Organizations! Groups! Yippies!” the conference call beckoned, “Political Parties! Workers! Students! Peasant-Farmers! You the Lumpen! Poor People, Black People, Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans, Chinese … We Must Develop a United Front Against Fascism.”24

In their move to take greater leadership in organizing a revolutionary movement across race, the Black Panthers sought to make their class and cross-race anti-imperialist politics more explicit. They began featuring non-black liberation movements on the cover of their newspaper, starting with Ho Chi Minh and the North Vietnamese. They began widely using the word “fascism” to describe the policies of the U.S. government. Then in

23 Black Panther v3n6 May 31, 1969. Most of these images specifically depict the People’s Park campaign in Berkeley.
July 1969, two weeks before the United Front Against Fascism Conference, the Panthers changed point number three of their 10 point program from “We want an end to the robbery by the white man of our Black Community” to “We want an end to the robbery by the CAPITALIST of our Black Community.” [emphasis in original]²⁵

The Black Panther Party held the United Front Against Fascism Conference in Oakland, California, July 18-21, 1969. Some events were held outdoors in West Oakland at “Bobby Hutton Park,” others in the Oakland Auditorium. At least 4,000 young radicals from around the country attended the conference. The delegates included Chicanos, Chinese Americans, and other people of color, but the majority of delegates were whites. More than 300 organizations attended, representing a broad cross-section of the New Left. In addition to the Young Lords, Red Guard, Los Siete de la Raza, Young Patriots, and Third World Liberation Front, attendees included the Peace and Freedom Party, the International Socialist Club, Progressive Labor, Students for a Democratic Society, the Young Socialist Alliance, and various Women’s Liberation groups.²⁶

Bobby Seale set the tone for the conference, emphasizing his oft-stated challenge against black separatism: “Black racism is just as bad and dangerous as White racism.” He more explicitly emphasized the importance of class to revolution declaring simply: “It is a class struggle.” Seale spoke against the ideological divisiveness among left


organizations, arguing that such divisiveness would go nowhere. What was needed, he stressed, was a shared practical program. He called for the creation of a united “American Liberation Front” in which all communities and organizations struggling for self-determination in America could unite across race and ideology, demand community control of police, and secure legal support for political prisoners.27

Panther Field Marshall Don Cox talked about the necessity of armed self-defense. Elaine Brown, communications secretary for the Panthers from Southern California, presented a letter from Ericka Huggins, who at that time was in jail in New Haven, Connecticut, on conspiracy charges. Key Panther allies also spoke. Berkeley City Councilman and future Congressman Ron Dellums spoke about racism and politics. Father Earl Neil, Pastor at St. Augustine Church, who helped start the Panther’s first breakfast program, gave a liberation theology perspective on revolution. Jeff Jones of Students for a Democratic Society spoke about the McClellan Committee in Congress that sought to impose harsher sentencing on student activists as well as SDS’s fight against fascism. Jones pointedly identified the Black Panther Party as the vanguard of revolution in the United States. William Kuntsler spoke about community self-defense through discussion of the urban rebellions in Plainfield, New Jersey.28

A number of speakers drew parallels between their communities and the black community. These speeches emphasized organizations whose work illustrated the

applicability across race of various Black Panther political strategies. Roger Alvarado of the Third World Liberation Front at San Francisco State spoke about Los Siete de la Raza, as did Oscar Rios. The Parents of Adolfo Martinez, a member of Los Siete de la Raza, spoke about the importance of the support of the Black Panthers and Third World alliance across race in the struggle of Los Siete de la Raza. Penny Nakatsu from San Francisco State’s Third World Liberation Front spoke about Japanese internment after World War II. Preacher Man, the field secretary of the white Young Patriot Party in Chicago, spoke about the need for armed self-defense against the police in the poor white neighborhoods of Chicago. At one point, a group of rank-and-file Black Panthers and Young Patriots, all in uniform, lined up on stage, alternating black and white to demonstrate their united stand against fascism.29

**NCCFs**

The main outcome of the conference was that the Panthers formed National Committees to Combat Fascism (NCCFs) to be organized around the country. The NCCFs would operate under the Panther umbrella, but unlike official Black Panther Party chapters, would allow membership of non-blacks. In this way, the Black Panther Party could maintain the integrity of its racial politics, yet step into more formal leadership of a broader revolutionary movement across race. Initially, the NCCFs focused on two issues:

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local campaigns for community control of police; and the development of legal teams to defend political prisoners.

One of the main issues facing the various organizations at the conference was how to obtain adequate legal defense for charges stemming from radical political activities. Charles R. Garry of San Francisco and William M. Kunstler of New York, both prominent lawyers who worked with the Panthers, along with local lawyers Peter Frank and Robert Truehaft, put out a call to lawyers, legal secretaries and law students to meet to develop a plan. The National Lawyers Guild, a Left-Progressive network of lawyers, agreed to help. Garry spoke at the UFAF and explained that the Nixon administration was seeking “more oppressive” measures against political radicals such as the Panthers. He said Nixon was recommending that bail be eliminated in many political cases, and that in other cases, such as that of the New York 21 – Black Panther activists facing dubious conspiracy charges – bail was being set impossibly high. He discussed wiretapping and other surveillance measures used to repress radical politics, and outlined a program to present seminars around the country over the next sixty days to enlist “a thousand lawyers to fight this fight against racism.” The lawyers would work with the NCCFs on 200 to 300 test cases to defend Panthers and other “political prisoners” arrested for their radical political activities.30

Soon after the United Front Against Fascism conference, leftist organizations around the world sent declarations of support for the UFAF to the Panthers, including the Coordinating Committee of the Mexican Student Movement; the Tokyo Communist

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League; the Young Left League of Sweden; and the Left Wing Socialist Party of Denmark.\textsuperscript{31} The Black Panther Party was flooded with requests to open NCCF chapters throughout the country.\textsuperscript{32} By April 1970, in addition to official Black Panther chapters, NCCFs were opened and operating in at least eighteen cities around the country.\textsuperscript{33}

**Gender Revolution**

As the race and class insurgency in the United States broadened in 1969, young women and some men also sought to revolutionize gender relations. At the Panthers’ United Front Against Fascism conference, gender emerged as the most contentious issue. By that summer, the Women’s Movement was growing rapidly, and questions of gender were being seriously discussed nationally, especially in the New Left.

Women in the Black Panther Party organized a panel to discuss gender issues as part of the UFAF conference. Controversy erupted when the conference keynote speaker, renowned Communist historian Herbert Aptheker, spoke at great length. Some worried that the gender panel would not have an opportunity to present. Some went so far as to disrupt Aptheker’s speech, eventually storming out of the conference.

The gender panel did happen. Black Panther Roberta Alexander spoke at length about the problem of gender politics in the Party. She acknowledged that sexism in the Party was a problem. In particular, she emphasized that women had been denied equal access to power in the Party. She talked about gender oppression as distinct from and yet

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\textsuperscript{32} Including letters from Salt Lake City, Utah; Albany, New York; Las Vegas, Nevada; Toledo, Ohio; Sunflower, Mississippi; Keatchie, Louisiana; Erie, Pennsylvania; Richmond, Virginia; St. Louis, Missouri; and Austin, Texas, among others. “Part II, SF 157-1204,” p.15, Folder: “David Hilliard’s FBI trial,” Box 32, HPN Papers cited in Spencer, p.182.

\textsuperscript{33} Robyn Spencer dissertation, p.182.
compounding race and class oppression. In conclusion, she chastised the people who had walked out of the conference because Aptheker’s speech had dragged on. She emphasized that it was important for men and women in the Party to address these kinds of problems collaboratively and find better ways of working together rather than tolerating male chauvinism and thus letting it cause rifts.

Alexander first placed the issue of male chauvinism in its larger context, within the environment that shaped the Party. Male supremacy, she explained was “a true problem in our society and reflects capitalist society.” Second, stressing the importance of owning up to the truth, she acknowledged the persistence and depth of struggles over issues of gender and sexuality within the Party. Male supremacist culture, she insisted, demanded stalwart resistance. Third, she noted the ubiquity of daily struggles over gender and sexuality. These included women’s leadership within a male-dominated organization; as well as the arming of women and women’s engagement in what some saw as the ‘male practice’ of armed self-defense. The most explosive daily struggle, she argued, concerned the mistaken notion that part of woman’s revolutionary duty was to have sex with revolutionary men. She condemned some Panther men for seeking to use Party authority to demand sexual favors.

Alexander argued that:

Black women, interestingly enough, are oppressed as a class, part of the super-oppressed class of workers and unemployed in this country. Black women are oppressed because they are black, and then on top of that, black women are oppressed by black men. And that’s got to go. (applause) Not only has it got to go, but it is going. (applause)

Finally, she urged men and women in the Party to stay unified as they struggled over issues of gender and sexuality because “One of the most destructive aspects of male supremacy is how it divides people who should be united. …When we struggle against
male supremacy, we struggle with the brothers in the party and the brothers struggle too. Cause it ain’t the sisters that are doing all the struggle.”

All of the members of the panel emphasized the centrality of gender and sexuality in the revolutionary struggle. Dr. Marlene Dixon, an assistant professor of sociology at the University of Chicago, criticized “bad faith” white male promises of equality. Black Panther Carol Henry lamented and urged resistance to a society wherein black women have been victims of both mental and physical exploitation based “on the color of their skin and the shape of their breasts.” She concluded that “there cannot be a successful struggle against Fascism unless there is a broad front and women are drawn into it.”

While the Black Panther Party got its start as a male organization, by the time the Party expanded in 1968, women permeated all levels of the organization. Beyond the famous Panther women leaders, like Kathleen Cleaver, Ericka Huggins, and Elaine Brown, and in addition to the thousands of rank-and-file women Panthers responsible for much of the daily work of the organization, numerous women played a key role in building and leading local Party chapters around the country. According to David Hilliard, such unsung heroines as Lynn French in Chicago, and Audrea Dunham in Boston were some of the Party’s most influential and inspirational local leaders, commanding loyalty and respect from Panther men and women alike. Dunham, who organized the Boston chapter of the Black Panther Party, provided such effective leadership that the Party sent Panthers she recruited and trained to lead high priority campaigns around the country. Doug Miranda, for example, the star organizer sent to

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New Haven to lead the Party’s high priority campaign in support of Bobby Seale and Ericka Huggins, was trained by Dunham in Boston.36

Women’s agitation for gender equality within the Party pushed the national Black Panther leadership to take a stand. Eldridge Cleaver in particular had to respond to the explicit misogyny and sexism in Soul on Ice. Two weeks before the UFAF conference, in the context of women Panthers’ efforts to organize the gender panel for the conference, Cleaver released his first public statement from exile. Addressing men in the Black Panther Party in a statement dedicated to the revolutionary example set by Erika Huggins, an apparently reformed Eldridge Cleaver now called for gender equality.

[W]e must purge our ranks and our hearts, and our minds, and our understanding of any chauvinism, chauvinistic behavior of disrespectful behavior toward women… we must too recognize that a woman can be just as revolutionary as a man and that she has equal stature, along with men, and that we cannot prejudice her in any manner, that we cannot relegate her to an inferior position… [T]he liberation of women is one of the most important issues facing the world today. Great efforts have been made in various parts of the world to do something about this, but I know from my own experience that the smoldering and the burning of the flame for liberation of women in Babylon is the issue that is going to explode, and if we’re not careful its going to destroy our ranks, destroy our organization, because women want to be liberated just as all oppressed people want to be liberated. So if we go around and call ourselves a vanguard organization, then we’ve got to be the vanguard in all our behavior, and to be the vanguard also in the area of women’s liberation and set an example in that area.37

Initially, Panther leadership rooted calls for gender equality in a normative heterosexuality. In his public statement regarding Ericka Huggins, Cleaver wrote that “women are our other half, they’re not our weaker half, they’re not our stronger half, but they are our other half.”38

Similar notions rooted in patriarchal social norms were common in the Party, and black revolutionary circles more broadly, underwriting the idea of revolutionary

36 David Hilliard conversation, May 3, 2011.
motherhood: having babies for the revolution. Akua Njeri (Deborah Johnson), Fred Hampton’s widow, remarked “when you find your half that’s for real, right on, go on and make those revolutionary babies, cause the youth make the revolution.”³⁹ Panther Candi Robinson similarly argued that “Our men need, want and will love the beautiful children, that come from our fruitful wombs … We are mothers of revolutionaries, with us is the future of our people.” Indeed, “We are sisters, are mothers of revolution, and within our wombs is the army of the people …. We my sisters are revolutionary women of revolutionary men! We are mothers of revolution!”⁴⁰ In this formulation of revolutionary motherhood, the revolutionary woman made babies not just for the revolutionary nation, but for her revolutionary man. Revolutionary love, then, supported patriarchy, confirming conventional heterosexual gender norms. Malika Adams remembered, “I had three babies because I thought that it was my revolutionary duty to do that. I … wasn’t thinking of what I wanted for me.”⁴¹

In practice, such notions of revolutionary motherhood put severe burdens on some Panther women. The strains of state repression exacerbated these burdens, such as in the case of Akua Njeri, who lost the father of her child when the state assassinated Fred Hampton. Njeri later recalled the lack of support from the Party for her as a mother:

⁴¹ Matthews, “No One Ever Asks A Woman,” 293, 357.
In practice, through its heyday in the late 1960s, the Party often provided no more support for Panther mothers in handling the demands of childcare and managing the burdens of motherhood than most employers at the time did for their women employees.

As the Women’s Liberation Movement and Gay Liberation Movement gained steam, the Black Panther Party leadership sought to deepen its relationship with and thinking about struggles for gender and sexual liberation. A year after the UFAF conference, Huey Newton issued a formal Party position regarding the Women’s Liberation and Gay Liberation Movements, challenging hetero-normativity and patriarchy in the Party. With Newton’s public stance, the Black Panther Party became the first major national black organization to embrace gay rights. Newton identified “homosexuals and women as oppressed groups,” noting that “homosexuals … might be the most oppressed people in the society,” and arguing that a homosexual man “should have freedom to use his body in whatever way he wants to.”

The Black Panther Party saw black liberation as part of a global struggle against oppression, and Newton now identified women’s and gay liberation as integral axes in that global struggle. He noted the importance of building alliances with women’s liberation and gay liberation organizations: “When we have revolutionary conferences, rallies, and demonstrations there should be full participation of the gay liberation movement and the women’s liberation movement.”

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Finally, Newton acknowledged the need to confront engrained gender and sexual values and language. He noted specifically Panthers’ use of derogatory terms for homosexuals to disparage political enemies, and called to end the practice:

The terms ‘faggot’ and ‘punk’ should be deleted from our vocabulary, and especially we should not attach names normally designed for homosexuals to men who are enemies of the people, such as Nixon or Mitchell. Homosexuals are not enemies of the people.

Newton recognized that such language reflected basic social values, acknowledged that recognizing the problem of gender and sexual oppression was not solving it, and suggested that a more complete transformation of social values was required. “We haven’t established a revolutionary value system,” wrote Newton, “we’re only in the process of establishing it.”

Despite the Party’s ideology, at times quite advanced in thinking about gender and sexual liberation, because of deeply rooted sexism, struggles around gender and sexual equality were often trying and vexed. Changing Panther men’s chauvinist attitudes and practices, like changing such attitudes and practices within the broader world, were seldom easy. Nationalism has historically been a gendered project encompassing patriarchy and male privilege. The revolutionary black nationalism of the Black Panther Party began as part of that traditional project. Panther women and some Panther men fought heroically to help break the Party out of that historical mold.

A critical element of that struggle was the development of feminist consciousness among Black Panther women. Looking back on her experiences as a Party member, Malika Adams believed that “our consciousness about ourselves as women was very

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underdeveloped for the most part.” She lamented that, “One of the things we didn’t do well was talk about ourselves as women.” A key problem, she explained, was that “We didn’t see ourselves as separate from the brothers.” In effect, “I don’t know that we really saw ourselves as women.” Instead, “I think we saw ourselves in the eyes of men. The men,” she concluded, “defined pretty much what we were.”

For Angela Davis, the problem of black women’s identifications as revolutionaries lay with the overwhelmingly masculine definitions of what it meant to be a revolutionary. In spite of the history of revolutionary and radical women’s activism, that history remained relatively unknown at the time and was certainly overshadowed “by masculine definitions of the revolutionary.” Davis recalled that “Even those of us who were women did not know how to develop ways of being revolutionaries that were not informed by masculine definitions of the revolutionary. The revolutionaries were male. The women who became revolutionaries had to make themselves in those images.”

Given this masculinist context, it was imperative that women define for themselves their own identities as women and revolutionaries. Rosemari Mealy later reflected that “if you were … so male-identified, it was impossible for you to separate yourself as a woman and really internalize who you are as a woman and commit yourself as a woman to the struggle.”

Endemic and often intense Party struggles around issues of gender and sexuality yielded a richly varied, evolving, and at times highly contested gender and sexual consciousness within and beyond the Party. As Janet Cyril observed, this complex and uneven consciousness emerged over time in the context of a process of ongoing and often

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46 Malika Adams Interview. Cited in Matthews, p. 269.
difficult struggle. “It grew out of … daily living,” she recalled, “and an evolving necessity in changing relationships … over a period of time.” Cyril also noted that it “developed by … fits and starts.”

The fact that the Black Panther Party principally battled against white supremacy and capitalist exploitation meant that among many within the Party, women and men, issues of gender and sexuality took a back seat. Cyril remembered, “It was considered traitorous to deal with issues of gender in the context of the Black Revolution. I mean, people felt that strongly…. A lot of women felt like that also…. There was a lot of back and forth debate over that.” Innumerable women thought, as a result, that “you were betraying brothers if you criticized what was going on with sisters in a general way.” By extension, tackling issues of gender and sexuality, especially from women’s points of view, was to undermine race unity and thus impede the Black Liberation Struggle.

The extreme repression the Party endured further intensified the common belief and feeling that the racial and class components of the struggle took priority. Elaine Brown recalled that the hellish repression the Party experienced meant that “We clung to each other fiercely. We forgot cliques and chauvinism and any bit of internal strife.” Ericka Huggins remembered that “In those days [we fought to] get rid of racism so we could stay alive. We didn’t even think about sexism except when it reared its head.” She concluded that:

We didn’t spend our time looking at what men and women did or didn’t do because we didn’t have time to think about it. We were too busy living so we didn’t die …. A lot of people don’t understand what that means in a day-to-day interaction. We were constantly looking over our shoulders. All I wanted to know about the person next to me, be it a man or woman, was would

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48 Janet Cyril interview with Tracye Matthews, cited in Matthews, p. 271.
49 Janet Cyril interview with Tracye Matthews, cited in Matthews, 262.
50 Brown, A Taste of Power, p. 194
they back me up. If I needed to put my life in this person’s hands, would it be all right. I didn’t care whether they were man or woman, gay or straight, or any of that.51

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In 1969 and 1970, the Black Panthers were irrepressible, and they drove an ever-widening cycle of revolutionary insurgency. In San Francisco, Chicago, New York, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, and other major cities, groups of Puerto Rican, Chinese-American, and Latino youth sprung up emulating the Panthers, adapting their political approach to the specific struggles their communities faced. Many young whites also came to view the Black Panthers as a primary reference for their own political activism. The largest and most influential student movement organization nationally – Students for a Democratic Society – declared the Black Panther Party the vanguard of their common struggle.

In the summer of 1969, the Panthers aimed to formalize their emerging role as vanguard of a broad revolutionary movement, organizing what they called a “United Front Against Fascism.” Multi-racial chapters under Black Panther leadership, called “NCCFs”, proliferated throughout the country by the end of 1970.

While race and class struggle remained primary for the Party, as the movement broadened, women Panthers and some men increasingly sought to revolutionize gender and sexual relations, both within the movement and the broader society. Starting in 1970, the Party actively sought to build revolutionary alliances with the burgeoning women’s liberation and gay liberation movements as part of a global struggle against oppression, and became the first major black organization to embrace gay rights.

How broad would the revolutionary movement become?

Chapter 14: International

On Friday, November 29, 1968, 1500 delegates from throughout the Americas gathered in Montreal for the “Hemispheric Conference to End the War in Vietnam.” The opening plenary was held that evening downtown at St. James Church. The delegates were political leaders from throughout the Americas who opposed U.S. intervention in Vietnam, including Salvador Allende, at that time president of the Chilean Senate (and later President of Chile); anti-war activists from a range of organizations; Quebecois secessionists; and a delegation from North Vietnam led by the North Vietnamese Minister of Culture M. Hoang Minh Giam. The Black Panther Party sent a delegation including a dozen rank-and-file Panthers from various chapters led by Bobby Seale and David Hilliard.¹

At the opening plenary, Seale argued that peace could not be achieved without justice. He said the Vietnam War was a criminal act of U.S. aggression, and called for a worldwide struggle against imperialism. On behalf of the Black Panther delegation, he put forth a long resolution stating in part that “Our purpose in attending this conference was a reaffirmation of our commitment to concrete support of the heroic struggles of the Vietnamese people and of all People’s Liberation Struggles – it was not to hear vague resolutions passed in support of world peace.” The conference focus, he said, “should be changed from supporting world peace to supporting Third-World Liberation Struggles and the title of this conference changed from Hemispheric Conference to End the War in Vietnam to Hemispheric Conference to Defeat American Imperialism.” The conference delegates gave him a standing ovation. Brother Zeke, a Black Panther from the Baltimore

¹ Jean Tainturier “A La Conférence de Montréal”, Le Monde (France) December 3, 1968, p.3.
chapter, was elected Chairman of the conference, and the program for the weekend was revised in keeping with the Panthers’ proposed anti-imperialist theme. The French newspaper *Le Monde* reported that in speaking out about the fight against "imperialism in all its forms," the Panthers had captured the imagination of the international delegates and set the tone of the conference.²

Throughout the conference the Panthers drew the analogy between their struggle and that of the National Liberation Front in Vietnam. They compared the rapid expansion of police departments and brutalization of blacks in American ghettos with the occupation of Vietnam by the U.S. military. They asserted their right to self-defense and challenged the legitimacy of American authority in the ghettos. “We say that the oppressor has no laws and no rights that the oppressed are bound to respect. We cannot respect it.” Further, they proclaimed the universal “right to self-determination.” The Panthers said that they and the other delegates all shared a common struggle to end the wars of repression being waged against those seeking self-determination throughout Latin America and the Third World, and among the communities in the United States, “even against the white hippies and the leftists and those who are looking for much individual freedom.”³

At the end of the conference, American delegates handed their draft cards to the Vietnamese representatives. Taking to the stage, the Vietnamese delegation built a small fire and burned the draft cards as the audience cheered. In solidarity with the Panthers, the Vietn

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delegates in the audience raised their fists in the Black Panther salute and joined in the chant, “Panther Power to the Vanguard!” Their voices resonated throughout the church. Then, in front of the fifteen hundred delegates, the North Vietnamese Minister of Culture M. Hoang Minh Giam turned toward David Hilliard and proclaimed “You are Black Panthers, We are Yellow Panthers!”

Marxism and Anti-imperialism

The Black Panther Party’s anti-imperialist politics was deeply inflected with Marxist thought. Evolving Marxist thinking underwrote the Panthers’ class politics, and helped them articulate alliances with a broad range of international as well as domestic actors. Primarily committed to advancing the interests of black people in the United States as part of a global struggle against imperialism, Marxist class analysis helped build common ground with other constituencies in the U.S. and internationally. The Black Panther Party’s embrace of Marxism was never rigid, sectarian, or dogmatic. Motivated by a vision of a universal and radically democratic struggle against oppression, ideology seldom got in the way of the Party’s alliance building and practical politics.

In 1971, Huey Newton explained that the Black Panthers were “dialectical materialists,” drawing a dynamic and evolving method of political analysis from Marx, rather than any stagnant set of ideas. To emphasize this point, Newton argued that:

Marx himself said, ‘I am not a Marxist’ … If you are a dialectical materialist… you do not believe in the conclusions of one person but in the validity of a mode of thought; and we in the Party, as dialectical materialists, recognize Karl Marx as one of the great contributors to that mode of thought.

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Raymond Lewis “Montreal: Bobby Seale – Panthers Take Control” in Black Panther v.2 n.18 December 21, 1968 p.5; David Hilliard, interview 6/29/05.

 Eldridge Cleaver made a similar point. Writing in the Fall of 1969, Cleaver argued that independence struggles in Asia demonstrated that a foreign ideology should not be adopted wholesale. Specifically, any Marxist dogma notwithstanding, Cleaver asserted that unemployed Blacks were a legitimate revolutionary group, and that the Black Panther Party’s version of Marxism transcended the idea that an industrial working class was the sole agent of revolution.\footnote{Eldridge Cleaver, “We Have Found it Here in Korea,” in \textit{Black Panther}, v3n28 November 1, 1969, p. 11. To make this point, Cleaver specifically invoked Kim Il Sung’s concept of \textit{Juche}, or self reliance. Cleaver argued that the Korean experience supported the idea that a foreign ideology should not be adopted wholesale. See Kathleen Cleaver in Jones for context, 226. See also Eldridge Cleaver’s later pamphlet “On the Ideology of the Black Panther Party” circa 1970 that develops this line. Some have argued that the Black Panthers’ emphasis on the lumpen proletariat was their downfall. But this line of argument is deeply flawed. While the black underclass was a core constituency of the Party, many members and most leaders were either working class, or middle-class with educated and professional families. No narrowly working-class Marxist revolutionary formation in the United States has had nearly as transformative a historical effect as the Black Panther Party.}

From the very start, the Black Panther Party drew upon Marxist thought, and Marxist theory imbued its political statements and actions. The Party’s original Ten Point Program and Newton’s essay on the “Functional Definition of Politics,” both published in the second issue of the \textit{Black Panther Newspaper} on May 15, 1967, employed the foundational Marxist concept “means of production.”\footnote{Original Ten Point Program first published in \textit{The Black Panther} May 15, 1967, v.1 n.2 p.3. “The Functional Definition of Politics” by Huey P. Newton. \textit{Black Panther} v.1 n.2 May 15, 1967: 4.} The use and incorporation of Marxist theory by the Black Panther Party evolved greatly over time. Different Panther leaders employed Marxist theory in different ways, and to different degrees at different times. One important turning point in the development of Marxist influence in Black Panther political theory was the rise of Ray “Masai” Hewitt to Party leadership. Coming into the Black Panther Party from Los Angeles, Hewitt read deeply in Mao and Marx. He
proved to be a supreme educator, and was soon brought to serve Party National headquarters in Oakland.  

With Masai Hewitt’s involvement, the cover of the Black Panther Newspaper began featuring international non-Black liberation struggles. Ho Chi Minh and the North Vietnamese were the first in March of 1969. Such coverage was frequent thereafter. Hewitt went to Chicago, and soon the Party chapter there was teaching members to read Mao and Marx as well as Malcolm X. In July, Hewitt was appointed Minister of Education, and the Party’s engagement with Marxist thought continued to deepen. That month, the Party further integrated race and class analysis in their Ten Point Program, changing point number three from “We want an end to the robbery by the white man of our Black Community” to the Marx inflected point: “We want an end to the robbery by the CAPITALIST of our Black Community.”

The Black Panther Party hosted the United Front Against Fascism conference in Oakland in July, 1969. The Panthers invited representatives from a broad spectrum of U.S. Left organizations to participate including the Peace and Freedom Party, the International Socialist Club, the Progressive Labor Party, Students for a Democratic Society, and the Young Socialist Alliance. Non-dogmatic throughout its history, the

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8 David Hilliard, This Side of Glory, 223-226. Also, key role of Hewitt in deepening the Party’s engagement with Marx according to David Hilliard, conversation with Joshua Bloom, May 3, 2011.
Black Panther Party worked with a range of Leftist organizations with very different political ideologies.\textsuperscript{10}

The unchanging core of the Black Panther Party’s political ideology was black anti-imperialism. The Party always saw its core constituency as “the black community.” It always made common cause between the struggle of the black community against oppression, and the struggles of other peoples against oppression. From the start, Marxism and class analysis helped the Black Panthers understand the oppression of others, and make the analogy between the struggle for Black Liberation, and other struggles for self-determination. While the Marxist content deepened and shifted over the Party’s history, the basic idea held constant throughout. The Black Panther Party saw itself as the revolutionary vanguard advancing the interests of the black community for self-determination as part of a global struggle against imperialism. Huey Newton sought to more fully articulate this theory as a theory of “revolutionary intercommunalism” in 1971.\textsuperscript{11}

\textsuperscript{10} See extended discussion of United Front Against Fascism Conference above. This is not to say that the Party never took sides. To the contrary, in the Sino-Soviet split, the Party came down squarely on the side of China. See “Russia-U.S. Conspire to Trick China Into War,” in \textit{Black Panther Newspaper}, V2N27 March 23, 1969 pp.1 and 10.

\textsuperscript{11} \textit{In Search of Common Ground: Conversations with Eric H. Erickson and Huey P. Newton} Norton, 1973, from February 1971 conversations at Yale. Excerpted in David Hilliard and Donald Weise, \textit{The Huey P. Newton Reader}, Seven Stories Press, 2002, as “Intercommunalism.” Newton here suggests four phases in the Party’s ideological development, from black nationalism to revolutionary nationalism to internationalism to intercommunalism, a schema replicated by others. See Judson Jeffries, \textit{Huey P. Newton: the Radical Theorist}. But these categories are ideal types, loosely reflecting the gradual trajectory of change, and accentuating differences in what remained basically black anti-imperialist thinking, rather than corresponding to any sharp categorical shifts in the Party’s ideological history. In our view, the much sharper and more important shifts are the political – rather than narrowly ideological – ones around which we structure our book.
This line of Marx inflected anti-imperialist thinking drew on a long line of Black Anti-colonialist thinkers going back at least to W.E.B. DuBois. This anti-imperialist perspective imbued the world-changing 1955 Bandung Conference, was taken up by Malcolm X, and underwrote the Non-Aligned movement in which such international Panther allies as Algeria played important roles. The non-dogmatic, Marx inflected anti-imperialism of the Black Panthers allowed them to find common cause with many other movements around the world. It underwrote their practical political alliances with a wide range of international movements.

Scandinavia

Drawn to their synthesis of race and class politics, anti-imperialist movements from around the world came to see the Black Panthers as part of their own global cause. One of the Panthers’ early sources of solidarity and support came from left-wing movements in Scandinavia. The lead organizer in building this support was Connie Matthews, an energetic and articulate young Jamaican woman employed by UNESCO in Copenhagen, Denmark. In early 1969, Matthews organized a tour for Bobby Seale and Masai Hewitt throughout Scandinavia to raise money and support for the Free Huey Campaign. She and Panther Skip Malone worked with various left-wing Scandinavian organizations to organize logistics for the trip. Matthews appealed to the groups highlighting the class politics of the Black Panther Party. “I am only too willing time and time again to repeat to European Audiences,” Matthews told a reporter from Land and Folk, the Communist newspaper in Copenhagen, “that the BPP is speaking about a world

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proletarian revolution and recognize themselves as part of this. It is a question of the oppressor against the oppressed regardless of race.”

Bobby Seale and Masai Hewitt traveled to Stockholm, Sweden; Oslo, Norway; Helsinki, Finland; and Copenhagen, Denmark (with a brief stop in Germany) talking about the Black Panther Program, the global anti-colonial struggle, and the injustice of Newton’s incarceration. During the trip, the Panthers formed solidarity committees in each city. Seale and Hewitt’s Scandinavia trip brought funding, the prestige of formal endorsements from European organizations, and a network of support for the “Free Huey!” campaign. After the Panthers returned to the United States, Chief of Staff David Hilliard and the Central Committee of the Black Panther Party recognized the work Connie Matthews and Skip Malone were doing for the Free Huey campaign, featuring their activities prominently in the Black Panther newspaper.

Matthews continued working with the solidarity committees in Stockholm, Oslo, and Helsinki, organizing contingents to join the May Day workers demonstrations on May 1, where they passed out literature in support of the Black Panther Party and carried

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“Free Huey!” signs. In Copenhagen, the Left Wing Socialist Party was particularly active, organizing an independent march of more than 600 people that broke off from the main May Day protest and rallied at the U.S. embassy calling for Huey Newton to be released from prison. These Scandinavian solidarity committees held a series of rallies linking the Black Panther cause to the Vietnam War, disrupting speeches by Hubert Humphrey in Copenhagen, and calling for an end to Scandinavian complicity with American imperialism through NATO.

**Algiers Festival**

After he had gone underground in the late Fall of 1968, Eldridge Cleaver clandestinely traveled to Cuba where he arrived on Christmas day. Bay Area radical allies who had been involved in the Free Huey campaign obtained a commitment from the Cuban mission at the United Nations in New York to help get Cleaver into the country and provide him with political asylum.¹⁴

The week of the United Front Against Fascism conference in Oakland in July 1969, Eldridge Cleaver returned to public view at the Pan-African Cultural Festival in

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¹⁴ According to Ruth Reitan, *The Rise and Decline of an Alliance: Cuba and African American Leaders in the 1960s* (Michigan State University Press, 1999) especially pp. 104-105, relations between the Panthers and Cuba were initially strong and plans were in the works to develop a military training ground there for Black revolutionaries. But by 1969 when Eldridge Cleaver sought to develop a training program, support had weakened. In E. Cleaver’s interview with Henry Louis Gates, Jr. in 1975, he reports that the relationship with the Cuban government was strained from the time of his arrival. The terms of asylum were that he would remain a private citizen and not engage in public activities. Eventually, Cleaver became dissatisfied with the arrangement, as he could not promote Panther activities as he wished while remaining clandestine. This caused tensions with the Cuban government. Also, his wife Kathleen was pregnant and there were difficulties getting her to Cuba. An unconfirmed Reuters wire report appeared in May 1969 claiming that Cleaver was living in Havana; plans were soon made for him to leave for Algeria. He sent a message to Kathleen to meet him in Algiers through the writer Lee Lockwood, who was leaving Cuba one day before Cleaver. Eldridge Cleaver, Interview in Paris by Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Winter, 1975, transcript in author’s possession, p.28, 33, 56. Kathleen Neal Cleaver, “Back to Africa: The Evolution of the International Section of the Black Panther Party (1969-1972),” in Charles E. Jones, ed, *The Black Panther Party: Reconsidered*, (Baltimore, Black Classic Press: 1998) pp. 216-7. K.N. Cleaver discusses the following international alliances in her chapter: asylum from Algeria and Cuba; other diplomatic relations with N. Korea, N. Vietnam, China, and the People’s Republic of the Congo; and alliances with independence movements from Angola, Mozambique, Guinea Bissau, Palestine, as well as Leftist revolutionary movements from Denmark, Sweden, Netherlands, Belgium, Britain, and West Germany.
Algiers, Algeria. There the Black Panthers’ anti-imperialist politics found fertile international ground. The Party posited, as had the venerable W.E. B. Du Bois twenty-five years earlier, that Blacks in America were subjugated and oppressed, denied self-determination much like the colonies in Africa. By 1969 much of Africa had won independence from European colonialism. Yet important areas, such as South Africa, Zimbabwe, Guinea Bissau, and Mozambique were still engaged in bloody struggles for independence.

In organizing the first ever Pan-African Cultural Festival, Algeria sought to play a key role in advancing the interests of African independence. After a decade of bloody guerilla warfare, the Algerians forced the French out of their country in 1962. The socialist Algerian government sought to remain independent from Europe and the United States. Algeria had broken off formal diplomatic relations with the U.S. in 1967 during the Six-Day War involving Israel, Egypt, Syria and Jordan. Nevertheless, American companies had invested in, were staffing, and equipping the oil and natural gas industry there.

President Houari Boumediene, one of the leaders of the bloody military struggle for Algerian independence, was a fervent anti-colonialist, and sought to advance Algerian interests by promoting African unity, Arab unity, and the organization of the non-aligned nations that pursued self-determination and resisted falling under the influence of either the U.S. or the Soviet Union during the Cold War. From 1968-1969 Boumedienne served as chairman of the Organization of African Unity (OAU). From this post, he sought to strengthen Algeria’s hand in international affairs by building a pan-African alliance for independence, supporting Pan-African unity generally, and specifically supporting the
liberation struggles in African countries that had not yet gained independence. The Algerian government and the OAU organized the Pan-African Cultural Festival as part of this strategy. In particular, the Pan-Africanist leadership at the Algerian festival sought to transcend the racial, cultural, and political barriers that traditionally divided predominantly Arabic Northern Africa against predominantly black sub-Saharan Africa. The idea was to define the unity of Africa in geographic, class, and social terms. As Keita Mamadi, head of the Guinean delegation put it, the conference sought to identify culture as an “arm of economic and social liberation.”

Each of the forty-one member nations of the OAU was invited to send a delegation to demonstrate their indigenous cultures, including poets, musicians, and dancers. Liberation movements from still-colonized countries in Africa such as South Africa, South-West Africa, Rhodesia, and Angola were also invited to send delegations, as were liberation struggles from certain countries outside Africa, such as Vietnam. A contingent of black artists and political figures from the United States was also invited, including singer-pianist Nina Simone, jazz saxophonist Archie Shepp, playwright Ed Bullins, and Dr. Nathan Hare, former director of the Black Studies program at San Francisco State. The Algerians also invited Eldridge Cleaver, Bobby Seale, and a delegation from the Black Panther Party.

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16 Eldridge Cleaver- Skip Gates Interview Transcript, pp. 56-57.
18 “Cleaver and Seale Accept Algiers Bid,” in The New York Times, July 14, 1969. Cleaver also says that the Panthers were placed on the invitation list independently by the Algerian government in his 1975 interview with Gates, but this and other sources imply that his decision to relocate in Algeria had much to with his desire to overcome the political restrictions inherent in exile in Cuba.
Having only recently won independence from France, and with anti-colonial struggles sweeping the globe, the Algerian government took the liberation movements seriously. According to Cleaver, the Algerians related to the Black Panthers “as the nucleus of a future, American government.”

The New York Times explained the Algerian commitment: “The Algerians, who are only eight years removed from the end of their own war of independence, feel it is natural to support other liberation movements throughout the world… They expect to play a leadership role in a completely decolonized Africa. They are also willing to recognize any movement outside Africa, such as the Panthers, that is struggling against what they consider an imperialist or fascist state.”

In late May, Kathleen Cleaver, who was eight-months pregnant, and Black Panther Minister of Culture Emory Douglass traveled to Algiers to meet Eldridge. In Paris they were joined by Julia Hervé, the Pan African activist and daughter of the eminent black author Richard Wright. Hervé was fluent in French, knowledgeable about African cultures and politics, and served as a liaison and guide for the Panthers. On July 15, the Algerian Government reported that Eldridge Cleaver had arrived in Algiers as a government guest. Black Panther Chief of Staff David Hilliard and Minister of Education Masai Hewitt also traveled to Algiers for the festival.

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19 Eldridge Cleaver- Skip Gates Interview Transcript, p. 61.
21 Kathleen Cleaver in Jones p. 218 and Black Panther Newspaper.
22 “Cleaver Arrives for Algiers Fete” in The New York Times, July 16, 1969, p. 9. According to Cleaver, official status for the Black Panther delegation to Algeria was arranged by the National Liberation Front of Vietnam. When they arrived in Algiers they met Charles Chikarema, a Black and English speaking representative of ZAPU (Zimbabwe African People’s Union). Chikarema introduced them to Elaine Klein, a vivacious woman from New York who had supported the Algerian revolution as a student in New York and moved there immediately after independence and became a close friend of Frantz Fanon and served as a press secretary to the first President Ben Bella. At the time she was working in the Ministry of Information there. She was on the Committee to organize the Pan African Festival, and invited Cleaver and the Panthers to participate. She also introduced Cleaver to representatives of the N.L.F. who met with
The Black Panther delegation was put up in the government-run Hotel Aletti located in the center of Algiers, which became a meeting place for all the political groups there. Kathleen Cleaver recalled that “Mealtimes in the enormous dining hall turned into a lively round of reunions, meetings, connections, and spontaneous gatherings, followed by further meetings in various parts of the sprawling hotel at all times of day and night.”

On July 21, Algerian desert horsemen galloped through the capitol firing rifles to announce the beginning of the first ever Pan-African Cultural Festival. Four thousand Africans from twenty-four countries helped to kick off the twelve-day celebration and series of discussions. The independent revolutionary countries of Guinea, Tanzania, Mali, and the Congo sent large dance troupes. Museums throughout Europe and Africa lent spectacular exhibits of African painting and sculpture. Fourteen countries produced plays and sent acting troupes. Others sent poets, writers and musicians. Black faces in Algiers were a rarity, and Algerian men, accustomed to veiled women, whistled at black Senegalese singers wearing flowing, strapless gowns. Guinean swordsman performed tribal dances. Tunisian belly dancers and Moroccan tumblers lifted Algerian spirits. Drummers, jugglers, pipers, and dancers energized a two-hour-long parade through the capitol. President Houari Boumediene denounced the idea of a colonial “civilizing mission,” which the French had promoted and proclaimed that “culture is a weapon in our struggle for liberation.”

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23 Kathleen Cleaver in Jones p. 220.
24 Kathleen Cleaver in Jones, 220.
Algeria’s Minister of Information Mahammed Ben Yaya assigned the Black Panthers a chic office on Rue de Duce Mariad, the main street in downtown Algiers.\textsuperscript{26} Emory Douglass brought a colorful portfolio of revolutionary artwork to the festival, including posters of Huey Newton and Eldridge Cleaver and provocative graphics from the \textit{Black Panther} newspaper, such as one of a black woman carrying a baby with a rifle strapped on her back. He displayed the artwork in the window of the office, and crowds of Algerians gathered on the sidewalk to look at the pictures throughout the twelve days of the festival.\textsuperscript{27} The Panther delegation held a formal opening of their Afro-American Information Center on July 22, 1969. Hervé introduced the Panthers to the audience in French, explaining that when Malcolm X came to Africa, he was only one man, but that now the Black Panthers had come as a fully developed revolutionary organization representing the black liberation struggle. Largely sharing the view of American imperialism as their enemy, the Algerian audience responded enthusiastically, packing into the center to hear the speakers and asking lots of questions.\textsuperscript{28}

The Pan-African Cultural Festival placed the Black Panthers amid representatives of anti-imperialist movements and governments from around the globe, and they immediately began networking on a new level internationally. Eldridge Cleaver met with the ambassador of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (North Korea). The Koreans were particularly interested in the Black Panthers, and invited Cleaver to attend the upcoming International Conference of Revolutionary Journalists being held in Pyongyang as a formal guest of the state. Cleaver also met with leaders of Al Fatah, the

\textsuperscript{26} Eldridge Cleaver- Skip Gates Interview Transcript, p. 60. Kathleen Cleaver in Jones, p. 213.
\textsuperscript{27} See photo, \textit{Black Panther} v3n16 August 9, 1969 p.14; Kathleen Cleaver in Jones, 213.
\textsuperscript{28} Kathleen Cleaver in Jones, pp. 220-221.
most powerful Palestinian liberation organization led by Yasir Arafat, and subsequently spoke in support of the Palestinian cause in his speech at the opening of the festival.\(^{29}\)

As part of the festival, the Algerian government sponsored a meeting for representatives of all the liberation struggles there to discuss solidarity and opportunities for supporting each other. Included in the discussion were leaders from the liberation struggles of Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Haiti, Angola, and South Africa, and Black Panther Party Central Committee members David Hilliard, Eldridge Cleaver, Emory Douglass, and Masai Hewitt. The discussion, moderated by a representative of the Algerian government, was held in the courtyard of the house in the Kasbah that had served as the headquarters of the National Liberation Front during the Algerian Revolution. In line with the theme of the festival, the conversation turned to the class character of the global liberation struggle. The representative from Haiti spoke about the rule of François Duvalier:

I would like to say a few words about Duvalier who rules our country, who is Black, who has said that he is in favor of “Negritude” and is one of the worst oppressors that has been known. The experience with Duvalier shows clearly how “Negritude,” which at one point of history, de-colonization was effective and did achieve a certain amount of liberation and repersonalization of peoples, how this same concept of “Negritude” now turns back against the people. And in the case of Duvalier proves that we have to wage a class struggle. And that in the context of this class struggle, we Black people – if we begin to depend on the power of money, on the power structure and money – we also then become tyrants, dictators, or tanton macoutes as in the case in Haiti. And this is why one must destroy all the capitalist structures which create monsters, be they White, Black, or Yellow.\(^{30}\)

Eldridge Cleaver maintained that the United States “is bankrolling and arming all of the oppressive regimes around the world. The people have an interest in any amount of pressure that we can put on that government because, if we can just slow it down and force it to have to deal with us, then the other people would be able to liberate themselves

\(^{29}\) Kathleen Cleaver in Jones, pp. 213, 221.
\(^{30}\) Eldridge Cleaver and Haitian representative at Pan African Festival in “Black Panther Discussion with African and Haitian Liberation Fighters” transcribed in *Black Panther* August 23, 1969, p. 16-17. The Tonton Macoutes were Duvalier’s special paramilitary force police that maintained his control through brutality and terror.
and then in return we would expect them to come to our rescue… like Chairman Bobby Seale always said the best care package that we could send to the other liberation struggles around the world is the work we do at home.” 31

Ambassadors  
In the fall of 1969, The New York Times reported that Eldridge Cleaver had begun discussions, from Algeria, with the Vietnamese about an exchange of prisoners of war for the release of Bobby Seale and Huey Newton from prison.32 These discussions were part of ongoing relations between anti-war groups and the North Vietnamese, and were facilitated by the Panthers’ relations with the Chicago Seven. According to the U.S. House Committee on Internal Security, “During 1968 and until August 1969, the North Vietnamese government released a total of nine American POWs […] as a] propaganda gambit,” which also served to enhance the position of pro-Hanoi “peace groups in the U.S.”33 Unlike the North Vietnamese government’s unilateral release of POWs to anti-war groups, any exchange of POWs for Panthers would have required the participation of the U.S. government, and the U.S. never made such a deal. But the North Vietnamese did send 379 letters from prisoners of war home to their families in the United States through the Black Panther Party.34

In the year following the Pan-African festival, while the Algerian Government allowed the Cleavers to stay in Algiers, they did not initially extend official status to the

31 Ibid.
34 Cleaver in Jones, p. 234.
Black Panther Party. In the spring of 1970, the status of the Black Panthers in Algeria began to improve in part through the intervention of Mohammed Yazid, a powerful Algerian diplomat whose wife was American. The Algerian Government accredited Black Panthers as one of twelve liberation movements internationally meriting support in overthrowing the governments in power in their respective countries. These included liberation movements in Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, Angola, Palestine, Brazil, Rhodesia, South-West Africa, and South Africa.

The Black Panthers were the only Americans recognized by the Algerian government since it had broken off diplomatic relations with the United States. An Algerian spokesman explained the rationale for the program to a reporter: “These groups are generally involved in a clear-cut colonial situation. What right have the Portuguese got to be in Africa? It’s as simple as that.”35 The Algerian government granted the Black Panthers official status including entrance and exit visas for guests, official identity cards which made it possible to register cars and open P.O. boxes, and a monthly stipend.36

That June, the Algerians presented the Panthers with an embassy building for the International Section of the Black Panther Party. It was a beautiful Mediterranean-style white stucco and marble building with open, airy archways and whitewashed stairwells in El Biar, a suburb in the hills outside Algiers. Two-stories aboveground surrounded a courtyard garden, and a sub-level housed a maid and cook.37

In the summer of 1970, a delegation of Panthers and their allies made a trip through Asia, hosted as official guests of the governments in North Vietnam, North

Korea, and China. The eleven members of the delegation were Eldridge Cleaver and Elaine Brown from the Black Panther Party; Robert Scheer and Jan Austin from Ramparts; Regina Blumenfeld and Randy Rappaport of the Women’s Liberation Movement; Alex Hing of the Red Guard; Ann Froines of the Panther Defense Committee of New Haven; Patricia Sumi; Andy Truskier; and Janet Kranzberg.³⁸

The group arrived in Pyongyang, North Korea on July 14, 1970 and was greeted at the airport by Kang Ryang Uk, vice president of the Presidium of the Supreme People’s Assembly, and other dignitaries.³⁹ The delegation traveled the country meeting with local officials to discuss ways that anti-imperialist movements in North Korea and the United States could help each other. The official North Korean government newspaper printed a statement expressing solidarity with the Black Panther Party. The statement discussed the imprisonment and abuse of Bobby Seale, the repression of the Black Panther Party, and the plight of American Blacks generally. The statement concluded:

The Korean people send firm militant solidarity to the Black Panther Party of the U.S.A. and the American Negroes that have been shedding blood in their arduous but just struggle in the teeth of the brutal repression by the U.S. imperialists, the chieftain of world imperialism, the ring leader of world reaction and the common enemy of the world people, and they will give them active support and encouragement in the future too. The Black Panther Party of the U.S.A and the Negroes that are commanding the support and encouragement of the progressive American people and the revolutionary people of the whole world are bound to be crowned with a final victory in their just struggle.⁴⁰

After Korea, the delegation traveled to Hanoi, North Vietnam as official government guests of honor for the “international day of solidarity with the black people

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of the United States” held on August 18, 1970. In Hanoi, Phạm Văn Đồng, the prime minister of North Vietnam, gave a sake toast to the Black Panthers: “In the West, you are a black in the shadow. In Vietnam, you are a black in the Sun!”41 Like the North Koreans, the North Vietnamese saw the Black Panther Party and its allies in the United States as waging a liberation struggle against a shared enemy – U.S. imperialism. The North Vietnamese government published an editorial in its official newspaper titled “An Inevitably Victorious Cause” celebrating black liberation struggle in the United States as a common cause:

The Vietnamese people, who are now opposing the American imperialist aggressors with arms, consider the black people of the United States in the struggle for their emancipation as their natural companions in arms and allies. The more the Nixon group develops its aggression in Indochina, the more it develops its repression and terror against the black people and the forces of peace and progress in America. It sheds the blood of young blacks in Indochina while their compatriots have need of their arms and their brains to engage the struggle in the U.S.A. We follow with deep sympathy the progress realized by the black people in the United States on the difficult path of resistance and courage, similar to our own struggle against aggression.42

The North Vietnamese invited Cleaver to speak to black GIs fighting in Vietnam over the Voice of Vietnam Radio from Hanoi. He gladly accepted. After introducing himself and giving a historical overview on the war, Cleaver called on black GIs fighting in Vietnam to join the black liberation struggle. He argued that the U.S. government put them on the front line against their own interests:

[W]hat they’re doing is programming this thing so that you cats are getting phased out on the battlefield. They’re sticking you out front so that you’ll get offed. And that way they’ll solve two problems with one little move: they solve the problem of keeping a large number of troops in Vietnam; and they solve the problem of keeping young warriors off the streets of Babylon. And that’s a dirty, vicious game that’s being run on you. And I don’t see how you can go for it.43

41 Quoted in Eldridge Cleaver, Gangster Cigarettes. (Stanford, California: C.P. Times, 1984).
From Vietnam, the delegation traveled to China for a government-sponsored tour of factories, hospitals, and new housing developments. Finally, the delegation returned to Algiers.

On November 1, 1970, after seeing Algerian President Houari Boumediene off at the airport, Wei Pao Chang, the Chinese ambassador to Algeria, made his way to the villa in El Biar for a reception at the Black Panther embassy. Two bronze plaques shone as he entered the gate, each emblazoned with the symbol of a crouching panther and the words “Black Panther Party – International Section” inscribed in Arabic. Upon entering the villa, Wei Pao Chang was greeted by Eldridge Cleaver, the towering Black Panther ambassador to Algeria, who was hosting the reception. Through translators provided by the Algerian government, Cleaver told Chang about his recent government-sponsored tour of China. The discussion turned to the United States. “We are enemies to the death with the American government,” Chang told Cleaver, “because of its support of the puppet regime in Formosa [Taiwan]. But we have great sympathy for the American people. We hope you will overcome the American monopolies.” Representatives of the Vietnamese National Liberation Front, the Government of North Korea, and members of other socialist governments and liberation movements from around the world also attended the reception.

Each of the movements represented had started out nonviolently but had eventually turned to armed struggle. Johnnie Makatini, ambassador to Algeria from South Africa’s ANC, recalled that “it was the same year Albert Luthli won the Nobel Peace Prize that we opted for violence. On the day he came back from Stockholm, Dec. 15,

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1961, there were explosions all over the country.” Joseph Turpin, the ambassador to Algeria from Guinea-Bissau recalled that it was after the strike in Pijiguiti when police killed fifty longshoremen that “we decided armed struggle was the only way.” Cleaver explained the shift among American Blacks: “With us it was the death of Martin Luther King.” King’s assassination, he explained, “exhausted the myth that you could get what you want without fighting, that when the plantation foreman cracks the whip you turn the other cheek.” The conversation turned at a later point to the theories of Frantz Fanon, a key supporter and perceptive analyst of the Algerian revolution, and the Cuban revolutionary leader Che Guevara. One of the guests said he was impressed by Cleaver’s grasp of revolutionary theory. “I had nine years to study it,” Cleaver said. The guest replied: “The French say that prisons are the antechambers of cabinet ministries.” Cleaver smiled. “We’re not there yet,” he said.45

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Through 1969 and 1970, in the context of thriving global anti-imperialist struggle, the Black Panther Party began to develop powerful international alliances. As the United States government continued to pursue its campaign of brutal repression against the Black Panthers, and the Party led a widening domestic revolutionary movement, socialist governments internationally extended hospitality and offered political support. The North Vietnamese sent letters home to families of P.O.W.s and explored exchange of P.O.W.s for the release of Huey Newton and Bobby Seale from prison. The Algerian government conferred formal diplomatic recognition on the Panthers, and set up an embassy building.

for them. Cuba offered asylum and explored construction of a military training ground.

The Chinese government hosted two delegations of Panthers, conspicuously lavishing high state honors on the Party.

   Only concessions could break the insurgent cycle…
PART V. CONCESSIONS AND UNRAVELING

The Black Panther Party, as a national organization, is near disintegration.... the committee hearings document the steady decline in [party membership] during the last year. Furthermore, the feud between Eldridge Cleaver and Huey Newton threatens the start of a time of violence and terror within what remains of the Panther Party. Probably only remnants of the party will remain alive here and there to bedevil the police and enchant a few of the young, but its day as a national influence and influence in the black community seems over. It is hard to believe that only a little over a year ago the Panthers ... ranked as the most celebrated ghetto militants. They fascinated the left, inflamed the police, terrified much of America, and had an extraordinary effect on the black community. Even moderate blacks, who disagreed with their violent tactics, felt that the Panthers served a purpose in focusing attention on ghetto problems and argued that they gave a sense of pride to the black community... liberals and idealists who once sympathized with the Panthers have ... withdrawn their support.

– House Committee on Internal Security, August 1971
Chapter 15: Rupture

On November 15, 1969, Black Panther Chief of Staff David Hilliard took the stage at Golden Gate Park in San Francisco at the west coast Mobilization against the Vietnam War. As the senior Panther leader not in prison or exile, Hilliard was newly in charge of the National Party since Bobby Seale had been arrested in August. In the audience, more than 100,000 protestors rallied for peace – the largest protest ever held on the west coast to that date. Simultaneously, 250,000 protestors gathered at the Washington Monument, larger than any previous protest held in the U.S. capital – half again bigger than the 1963 march for Civil Rights. The crowds included plenty of the young radicals who had mobilized draft resistance and embraced anti-imperialism and revolution. But unlike the smaller and more radical anti-war actions of previous years, these crowds also included a large portion of moderates – waving American flags, and politely expressing their desire for peace. A variety of Democratic elected officials participated in that day’s mobilizations including U.S. Senators Eugene McCarthy and George McGovern and San Francisco Mayor Joseph Alioto.¹

When it was Hilliard’s turn to speak, he told the audience that their American flags were symbols of fascism. Feeling out of his element, angry and defiant, he shouted “We say down with the American fascist society! Later for Richard Milhous Nixon, the motherfucker.” A segment of the audience booed, and Hilliard pushed further: “We will

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kill Richard Nixon… We will kill any motherfucker that stands in the way of our freedom!” Much of the crowd reacted with chants of “Peace! Peace! Peace!” and Hilliard was eventually chanted and booed off stage, an experience that would undoubtedly shape his concerns as a Party leader in the months to follow.²

Underneath Hilliard’s rough handling of the crowd that day lay a deeper contradiction that would eventually destroy the Black Panther Party. The Party’s revolutionary politics of armed self-defense against the State had thrust it onto a national stage and won it significant political influence. But by late 1969, and increasingly into the 1970s, concessions by the political establishment to key constituencies eroded the bases of allied support for the Black Panthers’ politics.

**Purges**

Maintaining discipline and protecting the Party’s reputation had always been a challenge. In the middle of the day on November 19, 1968, while using a Black Panther newspaper delivery truck clearly marked with large Black Panther logos painted on each side, William Lee Brent held up a gas station attendant in San Francisco at gunpoint, stealing $80. Seven other Black Panthers were in the vehicle at the time, but Brent acted alone. When police pulled over the vehicle, Brent jumped out shooting at police, injuring three.³

In non-insurgent organizations, established laws and customs are assumed and largely respected. Managing organizational coherence may be challenging, but

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transgressions of law and custom are generally outside of organizational responsibility. Within insurgent organizations like the Black Panther Party, law and custom are viewed as oppressive and illegitimate. Insurgents view their movement as above the law and custom, the embodiment of a greater morality. As a result, defining and regulating acceptable types of transgression of law and custom often constitutes a serious challenge for insurgent organizations like the Black Panther Party. What sorts of violation of law and custom are consistent with the vision and aims of the insurgency? When William Lee Brent held up the gas station and shot three police, he was clearly breaking the law. But was he acting as a revolutionary or a renegade from the revolution?

From early in the Party’s history, the organization tangled with these questions, issuing specific rules for member conduct that would serve the Panthers’ political interests, with expulsion from the Party as the consequence for defiance. Early in 1968, in response to politically embarrassing raids by police of Black Panther homes without legal warrants, Newton issued “Executive Order Number 3,” which mandated that members defend their homes against unlawful raids, and that any member who fails to do so “be expelled from the Party for Life.”

By the fall of 1968, as the Party became a national organization, it had to manage the political ramifications of actions taken by loosely organized affiliates across the country. The Central Committee based in Oakland codified ten Rules of the Black Panther Party and began publishing them in each issue of the Black Panther newspaper. These rules established basic disciplinary expectations, warning especially against haphazard violence that might be destabilizing or politically embarrassing. They prohibited any use of narcotics, and the use of alcohol or marijuana while conducting

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Party activities or bearing arms. The Party insisted that Panthers only use weapons against “the enemy,” and prohibited theft from other “Black people.” But they permitted disciplined revolutionary violence, and specifically allowed participation in the underground insurrectionary “Black Liberation Army.”

About a month after the Central Committee first published these rules, William Lee Brent robbed the gas station attendant in San Francisco. Not only was Brent acting without the blessing of Party leaders, but the robbery and shooting of police was also politically embarrassing to the Black Panther Party because it appeared as if the Party was orchestrating apolitical crime – and executing it poorly. The Central Committee called a press conference to condemn Brent and purge him from the Party: “William Brent, who allegedly pulled an $80.00 holdup in our newspaper distribution truck, is considered to be either a provocateur agent or an insane man.” The Central Committee argued more generally: “The Black Panther Party doesn’t advocate roving gangs of bandits robbing service stations and taverns. Any member who violates the rules of the Black Panther Party is subject to summary expulsion.”

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5 “Rules of the Black Panther Party, Central Headquarters – Oakland, California” in *Black Panther Newspaper* September 7, 1968 p.7. When these rules were first issued, Eldridge Cleaver and Bobby Seale were in charge of the Party. David Hilliard was just emerging as the person most involved in managing the daily operations of the Party nationally. Kathleen Cleaver and Emory Douglass were also members of the Central Committee. Huey Newton had already been in jail for about a year, and it is hard to know whether Newton would have approved the rule about participation in the underground Black Liberation Army had he been directly in charge. The rule appears to run against his position in “The Correct Handling of the Revolution,” although not his broader sensibilities. In any event, it is notable that the Party began efforts to enforce strict rules and discipline member behavior in September of 1968, the very same month that the Panthers announced plans to launch their first Free Breakfast for Children Program. The initial rules and the initial announcement of the free breakfast for children were published next to each other on this same page of the *Black Panther* newspaper. As the Party quickly grew and met with increasing repressive action from the state, and as both legitimate members and agent provocateurs engaged in unsupportable actions, the Party sought to groom its public image. Panther leaders likely conceived of both the purges and the community programs as part of a concerted effort to win broad support and burnish the Party’s reputation.

At the same time, the Central Committee expanded the Rules of the Black Panther Party. The new set of twenty-six rules was first published in the *Black Panther Newspaper* on January 4, 1969. Most of the new rules emphasized organizational accountability, especially programmatic, ideological, and financial accountability to the Central Committee. The new rules stated: “All chapters must adhere to the policy and the ideology laid down by the Central Committee of the Black Panther Party.” They further stipulated that “all Finance officers will operate under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Finance.” The Central Committee, in order to keep abreast of local activities, mandated that “all chapters must submit weekly reports in writing to National Headquarters.”

In January of 1969, to manage the rapid growth of the Party and constrain impolitic actions of the new members, the Central Committee froze membership. On January 12, Bobby Seale told the press: “We now have 45 [chapters] …. We aren’t taking in any new members for the next three to six months …. We are turning inward to tighten security, [to] get rid of agents and provocateurs and to promote political education among those who have joined the Panthers but still don’t understand what we’re all about.”

The power of the Black Panther Party derived, to a large extent, from the insurgent threat it posed to the established order – its ability to attract members who were prepared to physically challenge the authority of the state. But this power also depended on the capacity to organize and discipline these members. When Panthers defied the authority of the Party, acted against its ideological position, or engaged in apolitical criminal activity, it undermined the Party, not least in the eyes of potential allies. It would

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have been impossible for the Panthers to raise funds, garner legal aid, mobilize political support, or even sell newspapers to many of their allies if they were perceived as criminals, separatists, overly aggressive, or undisciplined. The survival of the Party depended on its political coherence and organizational discipline.

As the Party grew nationally, and came into increasing conflict with the State in 1969, maintaining discipline and a coherent political image became more challenging. The tension between the anti-authoritarianism of members in disparate chapters and the need for the Party to advance a coherent political vision grew. One of the principle tools for maintaining discipline – both of individual members to their local leadership and of chapters to the Central Committee – was the threat of expulsion.

By the spring of 1969, the individual most responsible for tending to the political image of the Party was David Hilliard. With Huey Newton in jail, Eldridge Cleaver in exile, and Bobby Seale in high demand as a public speaker, Hilliard was in charge of managing day-to-day operations. These responsibilities only increased when Seale was incarcerated in August. Hilliard personally carried much of the burden of maintaining Party discipline.

In an interview concerning the New York 21 in April 1969, Hilliard sought to protect the image of the New York chapter and the Party by challenging the accusations that New York Panthers had planned to blow up department stores: “It is very absurd to think of an organization with the magnitude of the Black Panther Party, with some 40 chapters at this point, to risk the destruction of one of our most revolutionary chapters, one of our better organized chapters, by going around talking about blowing up
department stores. It is something that our Central Committee does not endorse. It is just another lie.”

Hilliard explained the importance of the purge for maintaining Party discipline:

We relate to what Lenin said, “that a party that purges itself grows to become stronger.” The purging is very good. You recognize that there is a diffusion within the rank and file of the party, within the internal structure of the party. So the very fact that you purge strengthens the party…. You will become stronger, more of a fortress…. Our doors are not open to anyone that decides that they want to join the party.\^9

Later that year, in an interview from exile, Eldridge Cleaver echoed those ideas, explaining the need for purges:

One thing that's important, a lot of people don't understand why a lot of people were purged from the Party. During the time when Huey Newton was going to trial… because of the necessity of mobilizing as many people as possible…. we started just pulling people in…. In order to maximize the number of people we pulled in, we did not argue with people if they put on a black leather jacket or black berets, or said that they were Panthers. They just walked in and said they support Huey Newton and they wanted to join our organization. We didn't have time to conduct our political education classes…. They proved to be very undisciplined … so we just came down hard.\^10

As the Party continued to expand in 1969-1970, so did conflicts between the actions of members in local chapters across the country, and the political identity of the Party – carefully groomed by the Central Committee. When members violated discipline, the Party leadership often expelled them, and frequently published these expulsions in the weekly *Black Panther* newspaper. A sampling of a few of these purges provides a sense of the ubiquity of the national Party’s efforts to restrain undisciplined, embarrassing, and “counter-revolutionary” actions by members in local chapters around the country:

- In February 1969, the Party published posthumously a statement by John Huggins declaring that “The Black Panther Party, So. California chapter, in compliance with the directive of the Central Committee of the Black Panther, has moved to purge this chapter's ranks of provocateur agents, kooks, and avaricious fools.”\^11

\^9 David Hilliard, quoted in “Interview of Chief of Staff David Hilliard,” in *Black Panther Newspaper*, April 20, 1969 p. 18.


• In March, the Party expelled 38 members of the East Oakland chapter, listing each by name.\textsuperscript{12} The Party purged 26 members of the Vallejo Chapter, listing them by name and charging them with being “Renegade, Counter-Revolutionaries, and Traitors.”\textsuperscript{13}

• In April, the Party expelled a Connecticut Panther on suspicion of being a provocateur shortly before the Rackley murder in April.\textsuperscript{14}

• In May, the Party expelled a Chicago member for speaking in the name of the Party without authorization.\textsuperscript{15}

• In June, the Party expelled two members for cooperating with a Senate investigation of the Black Panther Party,\textsuperscript{16} and purged three members of the Harlem Branch.\textsuperscript{17}

• In July, the Party purged Chico Neblett, a national Field Marshall of the Party, and 16 other members of the Boston chapter. The Party gave the following rationale: “a bunch of cultural nationalist fools lead by Chico Neblett attempted to undermine the people's revolution. These pea-brained counter-revolutionaries tried to go against the teachings of the Minister of Defense and take over the Boston Branch of the Black Panther Party. They failed in their attempt and were purged from the party. Chico joined the party with the other boot-licker Stokely Carmichael … talking about some madness he called Pan-Africanism…. By going against the teachings of Huey P. Newton, Chico has said 'fuck the people,’ fuck the Party, and the complete and total liberation of blacks here in fascist America.”\textsuperscript{18}

• In August, the Party expelled a Denver Panther for threatening other Party members.\textsuperscript{19}

• The Party expelled 3 more members from East Oakland “because of their individualistic views and aversion to discipline.”\textsuperscript{20} The Party expelled a member from Chicago because he “refused to relate to organizational discipline,”\textsuperscript{21} and two members of the Harlem Branch for “embezzling,” and “showing a disregard for the principles which guide our party.”\textsuperscript{22}

Concessions

The resilience of the Black Panthers’ politics depended heavily on support from three broad constituencies: moderate blacks; opponents of the Vietnam War; and revolutionary governments internationally. Without the support of these allies, the Black Panther Party could not withstand repressive actions against them by the State. But beginning in 1969, and steadily increasing through 1970, political transformations

\textsuperscript{13} “Vallejo Chapter Expels Reactionaries” in \textit{Black Panther} v2n28 March 31, 1969 p.17.
\textsuperscript{14} “Pig Conspiracy against Conn. Panthers” in \textit{Black Panther} v3n6 May 31, 1969 p.5.
\textsuperscript{15} On expulsion for speaking in Party name without authorization see “Chicago Panthers Serve the People” in \textit{Black Panther} v3n6 May 31, 1969 p.4.
\textsuperscript{17} “Harlem Branch Purges,” in \textit{Black Panther Newspaper}, June 14, 1969 p.7.
\textsuperscript{19} “Denver Panthers' Statement to the Press” in \textit{Black Panther} v3n16 August 9, 1969 p.22.
\textsuperscript{22} “No Longer Functioning with the B.P.P.” in \textit{Black Panther Newspaper}, October 24, 1970 p.9.
undercut the self-interests that motivated these constituencies to support the Panthers’ politics. As mainstream Democratic leaders opposed the war and Nixon scaled back the military draft, blacks won broader social access and political representation, and revolutionary governments entered diplomatic relations with the U.S. – allied support became more challenging for the Panthers to sustain.

First, major concessions by the political establishment and the Nixon administration on the Vietnam War eroded the basis of support for the Panthers politics among opponents of the War. At the disastrous Chicago primaries in August 1968, the Democratic Party leadership had pushed through a pro-War candidate and pro-War platform over the will of the Democratic Party base, and lost the Presidency. But since then, the Democratic Party leadership increasingly called for an end to the Vietnam War. In a Party caucus September 26, 1969 organized by Democratic National Chairman Fred Harris, about a dozen U.S. Senators and a dozen U.S. Representatives met to plan a strategy to “force a confrontation with the [Nixon] Administration that could lead to the withdrawal of all American troops from Vietnam.” The caucus initiated an effort to secure a Congressional resolution endorsing the nationwide antiwar “Moratorium” protests organized for October 15, and considered attempting to prevent the U.S. Senate from meeting October 15 in solidarity with the protestors.23 On October 6, in the buildup to the October 15 protests, a bi-partisan committee unveiled a resolution co-sponsored by 108 U.S. Congressmen, about one quarter of the House of Representatives, calling for withdrawal of troops from Vietnam.24 On October 9, seventeen U.S. Senators and 47 U.S.

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Representatives sent an open letter to the Vietnam Moratorium Committee endorsing their upcoming national anti-war protest.\textsuperscript{25}

Richard Nixon responded dramatically to the growing anti-war consensus. Elected President in 1968 on a “Law and Order” platform, he promised both to quell the anti-war rebellions in the streets, and to quickly end the war in Vietnam and bring the troops home. In office, he promised “Vietnamization” of the war, shifting responsibility for the War to U.S. allies in Vietnam, and allowing gradual withdrawal of U.S. troops. Even as Nixon increased repression of domestic activists, he made good on this promise to de-escalate. When Nixon took office in January 1969, U.S. troop levels were at their peak with over 540,000 in Vietnam. In the first year of his presidency, 12,214 U.S. soldiers were killed there. But by 1970, there were about 475,000 U.S. troops in Vietnam; 4,221 U.S. soldiers were killed that year, about a third the number killed the previous year. By the end of 1971, troop levels had dipped below 160,000 with 1,381 U.S. troops killed, about one ninth the level of 1969. \textsuperscript{26}

Perhaps even more important, Nixon sharply reduced the military draft that had motivated many young people to embrace revolutionary anti-imperialism. Vietnam War draft inductions peaked in the late 1960s, with more than 225,000 soldiers inducted every year from 1965 through 1969. The Nixon Administration inducted fewer than 165,000 new soldiers in 1970, and fewer than 95,000 new soldiers in 1971. Arguments against the war had been accepted by the majority of Americans. Yet as long as Nixon followed through on his de-escalation of the war, the anti-imperialist politics that generated the

\textsuperscript{26} Nixon policy, and stats on troop and battle death levels from Melvin Small, \textit{Johnson, Nixon, and the Doves}, pp. 131, 164, 179, 191, 195, 197, 203, 215.
anti-war movement was marginalized – contributing to the moderation of the anti-war movement even as it grew.27

The establishment’s embrace of anti-war consensus and concrete measures by the Nixon administration to scale back the draft and the War powerfully undercut the basis of support for the Black Panther Party’s revolutionary politics by anti-war constituencies. Once it appeared the War would be ended through institutionalized political means, those principally committed to ending the draft and War no longer shared a personal stake in radically transforming political institutions. Many now increasingly saw the Panthers’ call for revolution as unnecessary.

Second, from 1969 onward, increasing electoral representation as well as affirmative action programs and growing access to government employment and elite education weakened the basis of support for the Panthers’ revolutionary politics among blacks. From Reconstruction (1865-1877) until 1969, no more than six black people ever held a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives at once. But that quickly changed. Just two years later, black representation more than doubled, with thirteen black people holding seats in the U.S. House of Representatives by 1971. That number continued to grow throughout the decade to eighteen seats held by black people in 1981, and more than forty today.28 Following the disaster at the 1968 Democratic Party convention in Chicago, the Democratic Party reached out to black electoral activists and reformed the nominations process with the McGovern-Fraser Commission. Black representation

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27 SDS had split along ideological lines and lost much of its influence by the time of the large national protests of Fall 1969. For shift to majority poll respondents believe “War was a mistake,” see Melvin Small, Johnson, Nixon, and the Doves, pp. 130 and also 164. Draft induction statistics are from the Selective Service System, History and Records division.

among Party delegates more than doubled by 1972, to about 15%.\textsuperscript{29} Black electoral representation generally ballooned in the early 1970s. In March 1969, 1,125 black people held political offices across the U.S. By May 1975, the number had more than tripled to 3,499. This figure included 281 in state legislative or executive offices, 135 mayors, 305 county executives, 387 judges and elected law enforcement officers, 939 elected to boards of education, and 1,438 elected to other positions in municipal government.\textsuperscript{30} During this period a variety of radical black organizations embraced the project of creating a unified black electoral program across the political spectrum as promoted in the 1972 Gary Convention – what political scientist Cedric Johnson called a “shotgun wedding of the radical aspirations of Black Power and conventional modes of politics.” While the programmatic statements of the Convention contained radical rhetoric, the principal political outcome was to help establish moderate black “politicos … as the chief race brokers in the post-segregation context.”\textsuperscript{31}

While the liberal establishment sought to redress black radicalism through social spending by extending Johnson’s Great Society programs and facilitating the expansion of black electoral representation, President Nixon intensified the government’s repression of black radicals. But even the right-wing Republican President sought to appeal to moderate blacks, bringing more into the middle-class through expanding both civil service opportunities and official affirmative action outreach. Nixon had long advocated jobs programs as a way to redress black radicalism. In the summer of 1967, following the massive rebellions in Newark and Detroit, Nixon took the position that “jobs is the gut

\textsuperscript{30} Manning Marable, \textit{Race, Reform, and Rebellion}, UP Mississippi 1991, pp. 119-120.
issue” in racial unrest.32 In 1969, his first year in office, Nixon pushed through the first Federal Affirmative Action policy, the “Philadelphia Plan,” which established explicit, government-determined quotas for hiring blacks and other minorities on federally funded construction projects.33

Also during this period many top predominantly white colleges and universities expanded their enrollment of blacks and other underrepresented students of color. These institutions also developed Black Studies Programs as a response to the crisis created by campus protests. Previous scholarship emphasizes the crucial role of Black Panther Party activists at San Francisco State University in fomenting the national movement. It also emphasizes the important role of wealthy philanthropists responding to this movement – especially the Ford Foundation – in shaping the formation of Black Studies Programs as a means of social control. While less than 5% of research universities offered Black Studies programs in 1967, by 1971, more than 35% did.34

Ballooning electoral representation, government hiring, affirmative action, and reform of college and university access and curricula granted blacks greater institutional channels for participation in American society and politics. This increasing mainstream institutional access undercut the basis for support among blacks for the Panthers’ politics.

Third, as the U.S. opened diplomatic relations with revolutionary governments internationally, the international basis of support for the Black Panther Party contracted. Chinese state sponsorship of a Black Panther delegation in 1970 and then the high state

33 John Skrentny, The Ironies of Affirmative Action, pp. 177-178.
honors shown Huey Newton during his visit in 1971 indicated the extent of global support for the Party. Yet underneath the surface symbolism, the 1971 visit also indicated that the foundations of global support for the Panthers revolutionary politics were tenuous at best. Earlier that spring, China had extended hospitality to the professional U.S. table tennis team – the famous “ping-pong diplomacy.” Newton’s state sponsored visit to China also followed the visit of Henry Kissinger, and planning for a visit by President Nixon himself. During an event honoring Newton and the Panthers, Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai publicly attributed the ping-pong diplomacy to Mao Zedong himself – Chairman of the Chinese Communist Party and the top Chinese political leader. Zhou said China was ready negotiate with the U.S. or fight as the case may be.35 Apparently Chinese sponsorship of the Panthers was part of a symbolic politics intended to send Zhou’s message to the U.S. As Sino-U.S. relations improved in the 1970s, China’s support for the Panthers evaporated.

Algerian support for the Panthers also weakened as relations with the U.S. improved. The United States had recognized Algerian independence in 1962 and established diplomatic relations. But Algeria severed diplomatic relations with the United States in 1967 following the Arab-Israeli War. While challenging U.S. geopolitical hegemony, Algeria became an important locus of support for independence movements throughout Africa and the world in the late 1960s. But economic relations with the U.S. continued and the U.S. maintained an Interests Section through the Swiss embassy in Algiers. When the Cleavers arrived in Algeria in 1969, American oil companies and personnel were already heavily involved in the Algerian oil industry. The Panthers

received support from the Algerian Government but in the shifting geopolitical context, their status was never secure. Even before the Algerian Government granted the Panthers formal diplomatic status and an Embassy in Algiers, an Algerian official told the Cleavers that Algeria would eventually resume diplomatic relations with the U.S. In the 1970s, Algerian relations with the U.S. improved and support for the Panthers deteriorated. In 1972, Algeria terminated diplomatic status for the Black Panthers and expelled them from the country. So while the Panthers enjoyed strong support from Algeria as a foreign liberation movement from 1969 until 1971, in the shifting geopolitical context, this support soon dissipated.36

Cuban support for the Black Panthers also shifted over the course of the late 1960s. In late 1968 when Eldridge Cleaver fled to Cuba as a political exile, Cuba not only provided safe passage and security, but promised to create a military training facility for the Party on an abandoned farm outside Havana. This promise was consistent with the more active role Cuba had played in supporting the black liberation struggle in the United States in the early 1960s, sponsoring the broadcast of Robert Williams’s insurrectionary radio program “Radio Free Dixie,” as well as publication of his newspaper the Crusader and his book Negroses with Guns. But, as the tide of revolution shifted globally, security concerns became a more important factor in Cuban policy towards the end of the decade. Eager to avoid provoking retaliation from the U.S., Cuba shifted its stance towards black liberation struggle, continuing to allow exiles, but refraining from active support of black

insurrection. Cuba never opened a military training ground for the Panthers, instead placing constraints on the political activities of Panther exiles.\textsuperscript{37}

As the U.S. scaled back the War in Vietnam and the military draft; improved the prospects for political, educational, and employment access for blacks; and improved relations with former revolutionary governments around the world – it became harder for the Black Panthers to maintain support for politics involving armed confrontation with the state.

More comfortable and secure with the ability of mainstream political institutions to redress their concerns – especially the draft – liberals went on the attack, challenging the revolutionary politics of the Black Panther Party. On January 14, 1970, the Black Panther Party held a fundraiser at the Park Avenue duplex of Leonard Bernstein, the conductor laureate of the New York Philharmonic. The Panther delegation was led by Field Marshall Don Cox, and included members of the New York Panthers, wives of the New York Panther 21, and Party lawyers. About ninety members of New York high society attended including Cynthia Phipps, Otto Preminger, Mrs. August Heckscher, and of course Felicia and Leonard Bernstein. They discussed Panther ideology and the Panthers collected $10,000 in donations. The next day, the \textit{New York Times} published a devastating account of the event by women’s page editor Charlotte Curtis. The story ridiculed Bernstein for hosting the meeting.\textsuperscript{38} Tom Wolfe took up the parody in a major

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\textsuperscript{38} Charlotte Curtis, “Black Panther Philosophy is Debated at the Bernsteins,” in \textit{The New York Times}, January 15, 1971 p.48. By this time, a Liberal reverie was setting in. But the hypocrisy of Nixon’s Cambodia campaign re-mobilized many student activists. The killings of students at Kent State and Jackson
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The following February, the New Yorker published a long article by Edward Jay Epstein questioning the veracity of Panther claims of repression by police, specifically challenging the idea that Panther deaths “represent a pattern of systematic destruction.” Reviewing the available evidence about violent confrontations in which Panthers had been killed, Epstein argued that “the idea that the police have declared a sort of open season on the Black Panthers is based principally, as far as I can determine, on the assumption that all the Panther deaths ... occurred under circumstances that were similar to the Hampton-Clark raid. This is an assumption that proves, on examination, to be false.” At that time, documentation of FBI’s COINTELPRO coordinating national repression of the Black Panther Party was unavailable, so using detailed review of the circumstantial evidence, Epstein’s case that there was no coordinated repression of the Party seemed convincing. Epstein’s argument was widely quoted in the news media, and did a lot to undermine allied support for the Black Panthers. David Frost invited Panther

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Lawyer Charles Garry to debate Edward Epstein on his show. Frost and Epstein teamed up against Garry to attack the veracity of his claims of coordinated repression of the Panthers.42

The liberal establishment avoided such attacks on the Panthers when the Party was a small local organization. And such jabs would have found less resonance in 1968 and 1969 as black rebellions swept U.S. cities and political leaders offered no credible redress to the draft. But liberal readers of the New Yorker and New York Magazine were much more apt to embrace ridicule of the Black Panthers’ anti-imperialism once their children were not likely to be drafted and killed in Vietnam.

Simultaneously in 1970, even as it became increasingly difficult to sustain allied support, the Panthers peaked in both notoriety,43 and the level of financial support garnered from donors.44 This created a political pressure cooker. The Party was becoming more and more dependent on allied support, and yet it was getting harder and harder to maintain broad support for its revolutionary politics. In this context, the Black Panther Party faced steadily increasing pressure to defend its image among potential supporters.

**Contradictions**

The contradictory pressures of maintaining support from ever more complacent allies on the one hand – and continuing the politics of armed self-defense against the police on the other – grew ever stronger. These contradictions came to a head when Huey Newton was set free.

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43 For example, in 1970, *The New York Times* published 1,217 articles containing the text Black Panther or Black Panthers, more than twice the number published any other year. See endnote in conclusion.
44 Martin Kenner in David Hilliard, *This Side of Glory*, p. 281.
On August 5, 1970, Newton was released from prison on a technicality. By that time, the vast majority of Black Panthers had joined the Party while Newton was in prison, and almost all had worked for his release. It was a hard-fought victory, and 10,000 people gathered outside Alameda County jail to celebrate. Surrounded by a sea of supporters, Newton climbed atop the Volkswagen of his lawyer Alex Hoffman – a makeshift stage in the hot sun. David Hilliard and Geronimo Pratt, the two most influential Panthers not in prison or exile at that time, flanked Huey. Hilliard, the Party’s Chief of Staff and the highest-ranking official free before Huey’s release, was the person most responsible for the daily operations of the national organization. He wore a long black trench coat and black sunglasses. Hilliard stood behind Newton with outstretched arms, proudly announcing Newton’s freedom to the crowd. Geronimo Pratt did not have the formal rank that Hilliard did, but was widely recognized and respected. He was Deputy Minister of Defense, and the leader of the Los Angeles Chapter that had successfully withstood the onslaught of the police and Federal agents eight months earlier. Geronimo wore a stylish brimmed hat and black sunglasses, with a dark jacket, and surveyed the crowd for Newton’s protection. In the heat of the sun and the enthusiasm of the crowd, Newton began to sweat. In a symbolic gesture, signifying his liberation won by the people, Huey stripped off his shirt, displaying his prison-buffed physique to his awestruck supporters.45

45 "Huey Freed," in Newsweek, August 17, 1970. Photos in Black Panther Newspaper August 15, 1970 p. 14. In November, the Party set Newton up in a fancy high-security $650/month penthouse overlooking Lake Merritt in Oakland and the Alameda County jail where he had been held in solitary confinement. Prompted by the FBI, the San Francisco Examiner published a smear, reporting the move and emphasizing the contrast between Newton’s living conditions and those of many Panther members. As the FBI intended, the smear generated outrage among some Panthers and supporters that they were struggling so hard, and Newton was living lushly. On acquisition of penthouse by Party see Alex Hoffmann interview with Lewis Cole, transcript p. 79, available via Alexander Street Press, Black Thought and Culture collection.
Many hoped that Huey would resolve the challenges the Party faced and lead them successfully to revolution. But instead Newton’s release exacerbated the tensions the Party faced. Psychologically, some rank and file Panthers took Huey’s long-awaited release as a prelude to victory and a license to violence. Aggressive militarism on the part of members became harder to contain.\footnote{Rank and file reaction to Newton’s release according to Alex Papillon, conversation with Bloom, November 18, 2005, Berkeley, CA.} Organizationally, the Party had grown exponentially in Newton’s name, but under the actual direction of other leaders. His release forced a reconfiguration of power in the Party.

Paradoxically, Newton’s release also made it harder for the Party to maintain support from more moderate allies. Newton’s release sent a strong message to many moderates that – contrary to Kingman Brewster’s famous statement three months earlier – a Black Revolutionary could receive a fair trial in the United States. The radical left saw revolutionary progress in winning Huey’s freedom, but many moderate allies saw less cause for revolution.

When Newton first got out of prison, he presented a highly militarized and insurrectionary vision for the Party. In an interview that he gave about a week after his release, he stated:

Our program is armed struggle. We have hooked up with the people who are rising up all over the world with arms, because we feel that only with the power of the gun will the bourgeoisie be destroyed and the world transformed…. I think that [the most important inspiration for the Black Panthers is] not only Fidel and Che, Ho Chi Minh and Mao and Kim Il Sung, but also all the guerilla bands that have been operating in Mozambique and Angola, and the Palestinian guerillas who are fighting for a socialist world…. The guerillas who are operating in South Africa and numerous other countries all have had great influence. We study and we follow their example. We are very interested in the strategy that’s being used [by Marighella] in Brazil, which is an urban area, and we plan to draw on that.\footnote{Huey P. Newton, “Repression Breeds Resistance” transcript published in \textit{Black Panther Newspaper}, January 16, 1971 p.10.}
However romantic some may have found the analogy between the Black Panther Party and guerilla groups abroad, or the Party’s advocacy of guerilla type actions, the Party never directly organized guerrilla warfare. Unlike Vietnam or Cuba, guerrilla warfare was never politically practical in the U.S. In the U.S., the state capacity for violent repression was enormous, many constituencies had significant recourse through institutionalized politics and civil society, and only a very small portion of the populace supported guerilla warfare tactics. Within three months of his release, Newton had moderated his position considerably to fit the responsibilities of managing the national Panther organization, and in the interests of maintaining support from allies. In a November 18, 1970 speech at Boston College, Newton downplayed armed struggle and emphasized the role of the Party in providing community social service programs, what he now called “survival programs”:

Tonight, I would like to outline for you the Black Panther Party's program and also explain how we arrived at our ideological position and why we feel it necessary to institute a Ten-point Program. A Ten Point Program is not revolutionary in itself, nor is it reformist. It's a survival program. We feel that we, the people are threatened with genocide because racism and fascism is rampant... We intend to change all of that. In order to change it, there must be a total transformation. But until such time that we can achieve that total transformation, we must exist. In order to exist, we must survive, so, therefore, we need a survival kit. The Ten-Point Program is a survival kit, brothers and sisters. In other words, it is necessary for our children to grow up healthy, with minds that can be functional and creative. They cannot do this if they do not get the correct nutrition. That is why we have a breakfast program for children. We also have community health programs. We have a bussing program.... This too is a survival program. 48

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48 Newton speech at Boston College November 18, 1970 transcribed as “Let Us Hold High the Banner of Intercommunalism and the Invincible Thoughts of Huey P. Newton, Minister of Defense and Supreme Commander of the Black Panther Party,” in Black Panther Newspaper, January 23, 1971 supplement page B. Emphasis mine. In an article by Gwen V. Hodges, Central Headquarters, the Party perhaps first advances the phrase “survival pending revolution”: “The overthrow of one class by another must be carried out by revolutionary violence. Until this stage is achieved, we must concentrate on the immediate needs of the people in order to build a unified political force, based on the ideology of the Black Panther Party. Survival pending revolution is our immediate task and to do this we must meet the needs of the people. We have been doing this through our liberation schools, free breakfast programs, child care centers, bussing programs (people are able to visit members of their family in prison) and clothing programs. We will also move forward to institute a shoe shop.” Gwen V. Hodges, Central Headquarters Black Panther Party, in Black Panther Newspaper, January 9, 1971 p.3.
In the same speech, Newton also emphasized the idea of “revolutionary suicide.” Rather than offensive guerilla warfare, the idea was basically defensive:

We say that if we must die, then we will die the death of the revolutionary suicide. The revolutionary suicide that says that if I am put down, if I am driven out, I refuse to be swept out with a broom. I would much rather be driven out with a stick, because with the broom, when I am driven out, it will humiliate me and I will lose my self-respect. But if I am driven out with the stick, then at least I can remain with the dignity of a man and die the death of a man, rather than die the death of a dog. Of course, our real desire is to live, but we will not be cowed, we will not be intimidated.49

As Newton settled into leadership of the national Black Panther organization in late 1970, tensions between the Central Committee and some of the local chapters increased. This was especially true with the New York chapter, one of the largest and best organized. As mobilization for the New York Panther 21 became one of the highest profile campaigns in which the Party was engaged, financial and ideological tensions widened the growing gulf between the New York chapter and the Central Committee.

The financial conflict centered around who should control the money raised for the Panthers in New York. The lead East Coast fundraiser was a white-Jewish New Left ally Martin Kenner. Kenner became director of the Black Panther Defense Committee in mid-1969 and began soliciting funds from progressives, largely to support the legal defense of the New York 21. He organized the famous dinner party at Leonard Bernstein’s house, and reached out broadly to potential allies on the left. The money just

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49 Newton speech at Boston College November 18, 1970 transcribed as “Let Us Hold High the Banner of Intercommunalism and the Invincible Thoughts of Huey P. Newton, Minister of Defense and Supreme Commander of the Black Panther Party,” in Black Panther Newspaper, January 23, 1971 supplement page B. Emphasis mine. Newton gave his first major speech after release on September 5, 1970 in Philadelphia, at the Plenary Session to the People’s Revolutionary Constitutional Convention. The speech was highly abstract, and by many secondary accounts, uninspiring. But in the speech, Newton did not take a clear position on immediate guerilla warfare one way or the other. Raids and strip searches of Philadelphia Panthers by the police in the days before the convention also raised tensions. Huey P. Newton, “Huey’s Message to the Revolutionary People’s Constitutional Convention Plenary Session September 5, 1970,” transcript published in Black Panther Newspaper, September 12, 1970 p.10. See photo on cover, Black Panther Newspaper, September 5, 1970, p.1; and coverage within. See also some coverage in subsequent BPP paper, e.g. in Rosemarie, “The People and the People Alone were the Motive Force in the Making of History of the People’s Revolutionary Constitutional Convention Plenary Session!” in Black Panther Newspaper, September 12, 1970 p.3.
trickled in at first. But with the publicity of the Chicago and New Haven trials, and then the murder of Fred Hampton and Mark Clark, and the raid on the L.A. office, the money started pouring in. Kenner recalls:

Fred Hampton was murdered in Chicago. Four days later was the attack, on December 8, of the L.A. Panther[s]…. At that point … the money started coming in to our offices in unbelievable amounts. We just had some ads in the paper and we got unsolicited, huge amounts of money. Thousands and thousands of dollars…. We had people just opening envelopes all day long.

In the month of January 1970, at least $100,000 came in small donations. David Hilliard sent Masai Hewitt and Donald Cox to New York to help raise money. Soon some individuals were making single donations of $100,000 or more.50

According to Kenner, while donors contributed the funds because of the notoriety of the Black Panther Party generally, the New York Panthers thought they should be able to control the funds since most of the money was raised in New York:

There … got to be bad blood because the Panther 21 said they felt neglected or something like this, and I just was horrified by this, because I knew how strongly David [Hilliard] had fought for them, and I also knew the origin of where their support came from, which wasn’t from their own. Because later on, to jump ahead, it really pissed me off because they said “Hey, all of this was support for us.” But I knew if it was the Panther 21 we wouldn’t have been able to do anything…. If it wasn’t for the chaining of Bobby and … the notoriety … none of these things would have happened…. They totally separated themselves, and they refused to acknowledge it.51

Further, according to Kenner, “part of this had to do also with the lawyers involved.”52

Some of the lawyers working on the New York 21 case were working pro bono and not getting media attention, while others were getting both pay and media attention. As a result, some of the lawyers who were not getting paid had hard feelings. When the Central Committee used some of the money raised in New York for other purposes, such

as bailing out Panthers arrested in Los Angeles, it created tension with New York. The unpaid New York lawyers complained “How could you do this?”

On August 18, Geronimo Pratt skipped an appearance in Los Angeles Superior Court on charges of possession of a bomb and the court issued a bench warrant for his arrest. Facing multiple trials, Geronimo went underground. He later recalled that his intention was to avoid spending his time in court, and instead focus on building guerilla cadres in the South and conduct paramilitary training for Panther members so they could better defend themselves. On September 21, L.A. Superior Court revoked bail and issued a further bench warrant for Pratt’s arrest for failing to appear in court on charges of conspiracy to commit murder related to the December 8 shootout. The Party posted $30,000 bail, all forfeited when he failed to appear in court.

At first, the Party continued to support Geronimo. In an August 29 article in the *Black Panther Newspaper*, then again in a statement to the press on September 24, 1970, the Black Panther Party explained that Geronimo had gone underground. The statement explained that police were targeting Geronimo for extreme repression, that he had been unjustly jailed thirty-seven times, and also beaten and shot at by police numerous times since January 1969 when he was appointed Deputy Minister of Defense and placed in charge of the Southern California chapter of the BPP. The Party emphasized Geronimo’s illustrious military career: the fact that he had earned thirteen medals before his

55 Gaidi Faraj writes that Geronimo’s focus underground from August to December 1970 was “on building guerilla cadres,” see Faraj *Unearthing the Underground: A study of radical activism in the Black Panther Party and the Black Liberation Army* doctoral dissertation UC Berkeley, 2007, p. 148. Faraj provides the most thorough treatment available on the Black Panther underground.
honorable discharge, and argued that “due to what the U.S. knew he could do with the
very knowledge they had given him, and with his brilliant mind and devotion to his
people, he suffered the severest attacks by the local and national police from that time
on.” Geronimo went underground, the statement said, so that he would be free “to
continue his hard work for the people.”

But the harmony was not sustainable. Living underground cost money and raised
political problems. Going underground was different from going into exile. When
Geronimo went underground, he became an outlaw. Hiding out to avoid trial within the
United States was a violation of the law. It comprised an immediate refusal to abide by
the law of the land, a declaration of war on the legitimacy of the United States within its
own territory. This was a very different position from the denunciation of United States
legitimacy by an exile. Exiles posed no immediate challenge to the law. Going
underground was also difficult because it sacrificed the moral high ground of fighting in
the courts – an activity that garnered much support from allies. Furthermore, anyone who
sheltered Geronimo was also breaking the law.

Further, living underground was expensive. Because of Geronimo’s stature and
support within the Party, he felt that the Party should financially sustain him
underground. Huey Newton disagreed, and this became a point of conflict. Geronimo’s
friends recalled: “Newton stated that Geronimo demanded money. This is a half-truth.
The leadership of the Panthers had refused to help him in his underground efforts while

57 “Press Statement to the Press on Elmer Pratt, Deputy Minister of Defense Southern California Chapter
Black Panther Party,” in Black Panther Newspaper, October 3, 1970 p.5. See also Craig Williams,
Southern California Chapter, “Reflections of Geronimo … The Essence of a Panther,” in Black Panther
he and those with him were threatened with survival…. The refusal to support Geronimo made it more difficult for him to elude the pigs.”

On December 9, 1970, the FBI and local police arrested Geronimo in Dallas, Texas on charges stemming from the December 8, 1969 siege. Along with Geronimo, Panthers Melvin “Cotton” Smith, Ellie Stafford, and Roland Freeman were also arrested. David Hilliard later recalled: “G.’s underground unit self-destructs. The guys call, complaining they need money, they’re bored, they’re in trouble. They have stupid shoot-outs, lack any self-discipline, and Geronimo can’t control them. We create a telephone tree to avoid speaking to them on the bugged Central HQ lines. They use the wrong numbers anyway, saying adventurous, incriminating things. Even when we chastise them, they continue in their unrestrained ways. In early December the police capture Geronimo in Dallas.” The underground activities plus the lack of discipline, possibly instigated by agent provocateurs, threatened to seriously damage the image of the Party.

Meanwhile, from their refuge in Algeria, members of the international section of the Party promoted immediate guerilla warfare against the United States government. Eldridge Cleaver and Field Marshall Donald Cox regularly exhorted young blacks to violence in the pages of the Black Panther. In January 1971, Cox argued: “When a guerilla unit moves against this oppressive system by executing a pig or by attacking its

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60 David Hilliard, This Side of Glory, p. 318.
institutions, by any means – sniping, stabbing, bombing, etc. – in defense against the 400 years of racist brutality, murder, and exploitation, this can only be defined correctly as self-defense.” He quoted Brazilian guerilla Carlos Marighella: “Today, to be an assailant or terrorist is a quality that ennobles any honorable man because it is an act worthy of a revolutionary engaged in armed struggle against the shameful military dictatorship and its monstrosities.” Cox observed: “GUERILLA UNITS (self-defense groups) must be formed and blows must be struck against the slavemaster until we have secured our survival as a people.”62

**Defections**

Over time, as opponents of the Vietnam War found hope that the War would actually end without a revolution in the United States, and blacks garnered growing access to government hiring, affirmative action opportunities, elite educations, and electoral representation, it became harder for the Party to maintain allied support. The demands upon the national organization to maintain Party discipline increased. A swelling Party budget only exacerbated these tensions, heightening the need for Party discipline to please increasingly influential donors. Allocation of funding increasingly became a point of contention within the Party. Local leaders chafed at national Party discipline and the Party began to unravel. In the first two months of 1971, three of the most important Panther groups broke with the national organization.

David Hilliard later recalled tensions during that period between some Panthers’ call for immediate revolutionary war and the limits of allied support: "I speak to Eldridge every day and am mindful of the cadre who want to pick up the gun. But the concept of

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the Party as a liberation army overthrowing the American government is not realistic. When we begin our attack who's going to join us? Party comrades will jump off the moon if Huey tells them to. Our allies won't."63

On January 19, 1971, the New York Panther 21 published an open letter to the Weather Underground in the *East Village Other*, not so subtly denouncing their own Black Panther Party national leadership. The Weather Underground was a splinter group that broke off from Students for a Democratic Society to engage in bombings and other acts of war. They believed that they would attract a large following and help lead a revolutionary overthrow of the state, but they never attracted more than a handful of members willing to participate in guerilla warfare. Alongside a cartoonish graphic of a souped-up jeep with a semi-pornographic depiction of a woman blasting a top mounted machine gun and the words "Instant Proletarian Vengeance" stenciled on the side, the New York Panthers praised the Weather Underground for embracing guerilla warfare and decried their own Party's restraint.

The Panther 21 asserted that the Black Panther Party was not the true revolutionary vanguard in the United States, and hailed the Weather Underground as one of, if not "the true vanguard." In line with the vanguardist ideology of the Weather Underground, the Panther 21 argued that it was now time for all-out revolutionary violence that they believed would attract a broad following and eventually topple the capitalist economy and the State:

The only thing that will deal with reactionary force and violence is revolutionary counter-force and counter-violence…. The Amerikkkan machine and its economy must be destroyed – and it can only be done with intelligent political awareness and armed struggle – revolution…. as Che stated – “Armed struggle is the only solution for people who fight to free themselves” …. revolution is – in the final analysis – ARMED STRUGGLE – revolution is VIOLENCE – revolution is WAR – revolution is BLOODSHED! How long have different successful national liberation fronts fought before they have

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63 David Hilliard, *This Side of Glory*, p. 284.
won large popular support? Che stated – “A revolution is a handful of men and women with no other alternative but death or victory. At moments when death is a concept a thousand times more real and victory a myth that only a revolutionary can dream of.” Are you hip to Marighella – Carlos Marighella? .... “Revolutionary organization usually grows by two important methods: 1) grouping and training of political cadres to hold meetings and discuss documents and programs; 2) revolutionary action – its method is extreme violence and radicalization. We chose the latter because we feel it is the most convincing method and that the former leads – if not combined with the latter – to bourgeois tactics and loses initiative.” .... The object is to 1) destroy the economy – like bombing sites which will affect the economy the most; 2) rip-off money, weapons, and etc; 3) sniping attacks. Bomb factories, mine factories, gun factories, and bullet factories are needed. Let’s talk about “Large scale material damage” – this economy must fall – There is a war on. [Emphasis in original.] 64

The New York Panther 21 also criticized the gradualist approach of the Black Panther Party central committee:

We realize that this will be a protracted struggle – but when does protracted become non-movement – escapism isolation and retrogression? .... For instance, take a group, a party and its supporters with a few activists – it can move in a revolutionary manner against the pigs OR it can function – have a newspaper, hold rallies, conventions, congresses, etc. – then rhetoricians rhetoric, functionaries function, printing presses print, delegates travel, international friendships grow, “leaders” become overwhelmed with “work” – then the prospects of armed struggle – real revolution – diminish. It gets lost in the “works” – it comes to be looked upon as adventurism – always premature – it might “sabotage” the legality of the party – (which if it was effective would be illegal anyway) – it might bring down too much repression – meanwhile, the fascists snatch out the activists who are not so noisy – but deemed more dangerous. Does this not sound familiar? 65

Meanwhile, as the New York Panthers denounced their own Party's gradualism, Geronimo Pratt was still in prison in Dallas, Texas fighting his extradition to California. He tried calling Huey Newton and members of the Black Panther Party Central Committee, but could not get through.66 Then, on January 23, four days after the New York Panthers published their Open Letter, Huey Newton published another letter in the Black Panther Newspaper, purging from the Black Panther Party Geronimo Pratt -- one

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65 Panther 21, “Open Letter to Weatherman Underground from Panther 21,” in The East Village Other, January 19, 1971, p.3. More pointedly, the New York Panthers also challenged Huey Newton's program of armed "self-defensive" upon which the Party was founded, and his idea of "revolutionary suicide": "We have had too many martyrs. We desperately need more revolutionists who are completely willing and ready at all times to KILL to change conditions. Just to be ready to die does not make a revolutionist – it just makes a martyr – "revolutionary suicide" and "only those who die are proven revolutionaries" – are bullshit – a revolutionist accepts death as a natural phenomenon, but MUST be ready to KILL to change conditions."
66 “Metropolitan,” in Los Angeles Times, January 20, 1971 p. A2 records that Geronimo still fighting extradition from Dallas to face charges in L.A. Geronimo Pratt in Freedom, Humanity, Peace pamphlet containing transcripts of interviews from prison, published by the Revolutionary Peoples Communication Network c. 1971, p.13 asserts that Geronimo was being closed out by Huey and the Central Committee.
of the most famous and well respected Black Panthers -- along with his close allies Sandra Pratt, Will Stafford, Wilfred “Crutch” Holiday, and George Lloyd. Newton claimed that while trying to survive underground, before his December 8 arrest in Texas, Geronimo had demanded money from the Party and threatened to kill David Hilliard if the Party did not provide it.67

After learning that he had been purged, Geronimo signed the California extradition papers and was sent to face trial in Los Angeles. Geronimo desperately tried to reach someone in the Party headquarters to find out what was going on, but he was shut out. He then contacted Eldridge Cleaver in Algeria, and found a welcome reception. Geronimo told an interviewer later that year: “I tried to contact David, somebody to lend an ear. It was like I was already tried and convicted. When Papa [Eldridge Cleaver] contacted me, it was like a fresh breath of life. Eldridge told me that he knew what was going on, that the brothers were not expelled, that he would talk to Huey.” 68

About two weeks later, on February 8, two of the leading New York Panthers -- Dharuba Moore and Cetawayo Tabor -- did not appear for their scheduled court date as part of the New York 21 trial. In failing to appear, they forfeited $150,000 in bail money raised from Panther supporters. The Judge ordered a warrant for their arrest. The Judge

68 Geronimo Pratt in Freedom, Humanity, Peace pamphlet containing transcripts of interviews from prison, published by the Revolutionary Peoples Communication Network c. 1971, p.13. Once in court in Los Angeles on charges stemming from the December 8, 1969 shootout at the L.A. Black Panther headquarters, Geronimo was charged with the murder of a school teacher at a tennis court in Santa Monica in 1968. He had been secretly indicted on December 4, 1970, while he was in prison in Dallas fighting extradition. See Ron Einstoss, “Former Black Panther Aide Held for Murder,” in Los Angeles Times, February 17, 1971 p. D5. After many years in prison, Geronimo was released when it was proven that Julius Butler, who provided the testimony that led to Geronimo’s conviction, was a paid FBI informant, and thus not credible.
also revoked the $200,000 bail of Joan Bird and Afeni Shakur, the only two other New
York Panthers who were out free on bail, and returned them to prison.69

At the same time, Huey Newton's secretary Connie Matthews also disappeared, taking important Party records including contact information for Black Panther allies in Europe. New York Assistant District Attorney Phillips, one of the prosecutors in the Panther 21 case, announced in court that Cetawayo Tabor had married Connie Mathews in California several months earlier, and that Mathews had Algerian citizenship. He speculated that Matthews had gotten passports for Tabor and Moore and that they had fled with her to Algeria.70

Dharuba Moore explained his decision to desert the Black Panther Party as a response to the increasing moderation of Newton, Hilliard, and the Central Committee, and their efforts to appease wealthy donors. In a public statement in May, 1971, Moore wrote:

[W]e were aware of the Plots emanating from the co-opted Fearful minds of Huey Newton and the Arch Revisionist, David Hilliard. We knew of their desires to destroy, with their fear-oriented plans and bourgeois dreams, the only truly revolutionary organ of social change that Black People possessed, [the Black Panther Party].... We therefore took up completely the war against our People’s oppressor – to either win or die.... It became clear almost a year ago that David Hilliard was destroying the desire in comrades to wage resolute struggle by confining the Party to mass rallies and ‘fund raising benefits.’ Of course mass mobilization is important and money is necessary to function, but the effects that these restrictions have upon the mentality of a Brother or Sister is horrifying.... Obsession with fund raising leads to dependency upon the very class enemies of our People.... These internal contradictions have naturally developed to the Point

70 Newton statement quoted in UPI, “Panthers oust eleven,” in Chicago Daily Defender, February 11, 1971 p.10. Edith Evans Asbury, “Newton Denounces 2 Missing Panthers,” in The New York Times, February 10, 1971, p.1. Some COINTELPRO activities centered on Matthews with provocative FBI counterintelligence letters sent in her name. Some have speculated that Matthews was working with the FBI, but I have not seen strong evidence to this effect. What is clear is that Matthews was an older and well educated woman from the Caribbean who had proven quite capable. She organized early international support in Scandinavia, worked with Eldridge Cleaver in Algiers, and then was Newton's personal secretary. She absconded to Algiers just before the Cleavers' denunciation of Newton and Hilliard.
where those within the Party found themselves in an organization fastly approaching the likes of the N.A.A.C.P. – dedicated to modified slavery instead of putting an end to all forms of slavery.71

On February 9, the day after Moore and Tabor failed to appear in court, and forfeited their $150,000 bail, the Central Committee expelled most of the New York 21 from the Black Panther Party. In a mimeographed statement signed by Newton and distributed outside the courtroom at 100 Centre Street where the trial of the New York Panthers was being conducted, the Central Committee called the New York renegades "enemies of the people." The statement charged that by skipping bail, Moore and Tabor “gave the pigs an excuse to throw Joan Bird and Afeni Shakur, four months pregnant, back into maximum security,” jeopardized the possibility of bail for the other co-defendants, and “propped up the dying case” of the prosecution.72

The cover of the February 13, 1971 Black Panther Newspaper, under the headline “Enemies of the People,” featured photographs of Michael Cetawayo Tabor, Connie Matthews Tabor, and Richard Dharuba Moore. The newspaper reproduced the mimeograph distributed outside the New York courtroom expelling most of the New York Panthers from the Party.73 The Party’s official statement explained that nine imprisoned New York Panthers had already been expelled for their "Open Letter to the Weathermen" in January, but that the expulsion was being kept a quiet, intra-party matter until the trial was over. The disappearance of Tabor and Moore had forced the Party to reveal the split.

This sequence suggests that the Central Committee was concerned about the perceptions of allies and supporters, especially funders. The Central Committee’s efforts to keep the expulsion quiet suggested that they did not want to publicize intra-party strife. Their quick and high-profile expulsion of the underground New York Panthers signaled that the Party wanted to distance itself from any underground activities Moore and Tabor might undertake, and censure their forfeit of the bail money donors had provided. The Central Committee would advocate revolution, but they would also try to win in court -- not in immediate armed struggle. And they wanted allies, supporters, and donors to know that.  

On February 26, on the Jim Dunbar “A.M. Show” aired live on San Francisco’s ABC-TV affiliate, tensions in the Party exploded. Huey Newton, in the television studio, spoke with Eldridge Cleaver, connected via telephone from Algiers. Cleaver demanded that Newton reinstate the New York 21 and that Newton expel Hilliard from the Party. Newton refused to continue the discussion. After the program, in a private phone call that Cleaver secretly recorded, Newton blasted Cleaver for airing Party business publicly and expelled him and the entire Intercommunal Section from the Party. He told Cleaver he would have him cut off from the Party's international allies: "I'm going to write the Koreans, the Chinese, and the Algerians and tell them to kick you out of our embassy, and to put you in jail."  

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76 Huey Newton quoted in David Hilliard, This Side of Glory, p. 323. Hilliard provides extensive quotations from the discussion. We believe these are direct quotes from the actual recorded conversation. Hilliard once played the cassette for Bloom. He said that Cleaver secretly recorded the conversation and acted very cool while provoking Newton to anger. According to Hilliard, Cleaver then released the recording to a local Bay
Factional Nastiness

The factional dispute quickly intensified. Two days after the televised flare-up, Eldridge Cleaver and Donald Cox released videotapes to the U.S. press, accusing Hilliard of turning the Panther organization into a top-heavy and undemocratic bureaucracy serving his own personal purposes and purging those he did not favor. Cox called for the removal of David and June Hilliard from Party leadership by force: “Conditions should be created so they can’t even walk the streets … They must not be allowed to go to any office of the Black Panther Party. This machinery that they are now using was built on the blood of our comrades, like Bobby and Bunchy…. And if Huey can’t understand this and relate to this then he’s got to go too.”

The cover of the March 6, 1971 issue of the Black Panther Newspaper featured an image of Kathleen Cleaver wearing shades and the headline “Free Kathleen Cleaver and All Political Prisoners.” Inside the issue, an article written by Elaine Brown alleged that Eldridge Cleaver was beating Kathleen, preventing her from leaving Algiers, and preventing her from talking with other members of the Central Committee despite the fact that she was a member of the Panther Central Committee. Brown claimed that Kathleen was scheduled to speak on behalf of Bobby Seale on March 5, but Eldridge would not let her come. Elaine claimed that Eldridge isolated Kathleen in North Korea and confiscated letters she tried to send to Oakland. She asserted that Eldridge was having multiple affairs, but that he forbade Kathleen from doing the same. She further

Area radio station, which is how the cassette eventually came into Hilliard's possession. We do not have a copy of the tape, or a full transcript, but Bloom believed the recoding to be genuine when he heard it, and the partial transcript reported in Hilliard's book appears consistent with the tenor of the conversation as Bloom recalls it.

77 “Black Panther Dispute,” in Sun Reporter, March 13, 1971, p.2. See also Thomas A. Johnson, “Panthers Fear Growing Intraparty Strife,” in The New York Times, April 10, 1971 p.24 which dates the release almost two weeks later: March 11, 1971. The Sun Reporter article is more proximate, so the dating is likely more credible. Also, by March 11, the “Free Kathleen” newspaper had been published, and Robert Webb had been killed, and the statements reported from the video appear to have been made before these events.
charged that Eldridge murdered Clinton “Rahim” Smith in Algiers for having an affair with Kathleen. Brown argued, “Even though, if Kathleen is allowed to speak for herself, she will probably support the ravings of her personal, mad oppressor, we know that to speak otherwise at this time would be a death warrant for her.”78

Two days later, on Monday March 8, Black Panther Robert Webb was shot in the head and killed at 125th Street and Seventh Avenue in New York. In a press conference the following day, Zayd Shakur of the Cleaver-aligned New York Panthers asserted that Webb was shot while trying to “confiscate the reactionary rag sheet from two fools”: trying to take from two Panthers aligned with Newton issues of the Black Panther Newspaper calling Kathleen Cleaver a political prisoner. Shakur also alleged that Webb was killed because he had joined the call for the dismissal or resignation of David Hilliard and he referred to the Newton faction as “revisionist” or “right wing.”79 In another account of the killing, Shakur said “The six or seven mad dog assassins who took the life of our brother Robert Webb were the first ones to arrive (in New York).”80 The Panther Central Committee called this charge that they sent someone to Harlem to kill Webb “ridiculous.”81 No one was ever convicted of killing Webb.82 Nevertheless, the killing was widely viewed to be a result of the factional dispute.83

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82 Curtis Austin, Up Against the Wall, 2006 p. 314.
Samuel Napier was the national distribution manager for the *Black Panther* Newspaper. Aligned with the Party’s national leadership, Napier was based in New York City. On the afternoon of April 17, 1971, assailants shot Napier three times in the back, tied him to a bed in the headquarters of the Oakland-aligned Corona Queens Black Panther Chapter, gagged him, shot him three times in the head, then set the building on fire. Burned beyond recognition, Napier’s body was identified through his fingerprints. Following a murder trial and a hung jury, New York Panthers Dhoruba Bin Wahad (Richard Moore), Michael Hill, Eddie Jamal Josephs, and Irving Mason pled guilty to a reduced charge of attempted manslaughter in the killing.84

**Ideological Split**

Overall, relatively few Black Panther chapters defected. Most of the local Panther leadership across the country stuck with the Party. On March 20, 1971, alongside a notice about the defection of the International Section,85 the *Black Panther Newspaper* published letters proclaiming loyalty signed by crucial national leaders. One letter was co-signed by Doug Miranda, leader of the New Haven mobilizations; Masai Hewitt, Minister of Education; Big Man Howard, editor of the *Black Panther Newspaper*; Emory Douglass, Minister of Culture; and Bobby Rush, leader of the Chicago chapter. They declared their unequivocal support for Huey Newton, and claimed that the defection of some Panthers actually strengthened the Party: “[C]orrosive elements of our Party … are

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85 The Party had recently begun calling the “International Section” the “Intercommunal Section” in line with Newton’s new theory of intercommunalism. We use the original name here for clarity. “Defects” frame, plus listing Eldridge, Kathleen, DC, “and all other members of the Intercommunal Section” Central Committee Black Panther Party in *Black Panther Newspaper*, March 20, 1971 p. 16.
falling off and purging themselves. Thus, they are cleansing our Party, so that we remain
the strong invincible force we always were.”

On trial for his life in New Haven, Bobby Seale wrote condemning Cleaver: “The
Party accepts constructive criticism .... But the divisionary, counter-revolutionary actions
and jive tactics of Eldridge Cleaver are doing nothing but aiding the pig power structure
in their attempt to put in gas chambers and jails over 130 political prisoners, who are
presently, like myself and Ericka, caught up in these jails, and are being railroaded to the
gas chamber, where we’re fighting for our lives in these trials.... There is no split in the
Black Panther Party.” Another letter from the San Quentin Branch of the Black Panther
Party, headed by George Jackson, derided Cleaver and declared strong support for
Newton. On August 7, 1970, George Jackson’s younger brother Jonathan Jackson,
attempting to free George Jackson, stormed a court, kidnapping a judge, and was killed in
the process. The support of the San Quentin branch was important for Newton because
Eldridge Cleaver had widely heralded Jonathan Jackson as a martyr and his
insurrectionary act the previous August as emblematic of the kind of action that was
needed. The San Quentin branch endorsement of Newton did a lot to undermine
Cleaver’s credibility.

The number of recognized leaders who turned against Huey Newton and the
national Party leadership in early 1971 remained small. But with the killings of Robert
Webb and Sam Napier, the organizational defection became the basis of a catastrophic

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86 Emory Douglas, Masai Hewitt, Big Man, Bob Rush, and Doug Miranda “We Stand Rock Firm Behind
our Beloved and Courageous Central Committee and our Leader, Minister of Defense and Supreme Servant
88 San Quentin Branch, Black Panther Party, “TO Eldridge Cleaver and His Conspirators FROM the San
Eldridge Cleaver on Jonathan Jackson, see Eldridge Cleaver, “On the Case of Angela Davis,” in Black
ideological split. The split brought an end to the politics of the Black Panther Party as it had been constituted through its growth from a local organization in the beginning of 1968 to a considerable national political power by the end of 1970.

The politics of armed self-defense against the police drove the Black Panther Party’s three years of spectacular growth from 1968 through 1970. Newton had argued that for black people to gain power, they needed to deliver a material consequence. And the Party did. If Black Panther members had not taken up the gun and challenged state authority, the Party could have been easily ignored. But armed confrontations between Panthers and police from Seattle, to Los Angeles, Chicago to Dallas, and New York to Winston Salem made the Black Panther Party a power that had to be reckoned with.

Members were drawn to the Party’s positive vision of self-determination for the black community, its Free Breakfast for Children Program, its resistance to police brutality. Armed confrontation with the police underwrote all of these. Among a sea of would-be Black Power revolutionaries, standing up to the police gave the Panthers’ vision credibility. The politics of armed self-defense brought the resources that supported not only the Party’s legal defense, but also its community programs. Without sustained confrontation with the State, the Party would have garnered little public attention and the Black Panther Newspaper would have just been another organizational newsletter.

Through its rhetoric and the development of the politics of armed self-defense against the police, the national Party created the conditions for sustained confrontation with the State. But in practice, the national Party organization had little if anything to do with organizing or directing armed confrontations between Panthers and police. Instead, the national Party stewarded its public image, managed and coordinated social service
programs and political education classes, and cultivated allied support – both in court and
in the streets.

For three years, this was a winning recipe. Most Black Power organizations were
politically impotent relative to the Panthers. Some, like Karenga’s US Organization,
remained small, tight-knit organizations, delivered no political consequences, and
garnered a limited national following. Others, like the Republic of New Afrika, fought
the state directly and suffered heavy repression as a result, but – drawing little allied
support – were unable to sustain or expand their struggle. The Panthers’ politics of armed
self-defense tapped the wells of resistance among black youth, and the national
organization mobilized broad support from a spectrum of black, anti-war, and
international allies. This support allowed the Party to flourish in the face of government
repression, and to sustain their movement.

While this strategy was highly effective for three years from 1968 through 1970,
it created significant organizational tensions. The Central Committee had an organization
to run and a public face to maintain. As a consequence, the Central Committee
principally concerned itself with maintaining organizational coherence and allied support.
Conversely, many members and local chapters participated in the Party because they
wanted to challenge the status quo. They wanted to stand up to the police, and to the
system that oppressed them. The boundaries between revolutionary action, adventurism,
and criminal activity were not always clear, though. As a result, tensions developed
between the necessarily independent activities of the local chapters on the one hand,
sometimes bordering on insurrection, and the Central Committee on the other, attempting
to maintain allied support.
From 1968 through 1970, three factors exacerbated these tensions. First, counterintelligence activities by the federal government worked to vilify the Party. Ironically, raids and other forms of direct repression of Black Panthers tended to legitimize Panther claims and increase allied support for the Party. Recognizing this, the federal government sought to discredit the Party by sowing internal conflict through agent provocateurs who fostered unpalatable and impolitic violence. The FBI also master-minded campaigns to destroy the reputations of Black Panther leaders – such as the effort to pin the murder of Alex Rackley on Bobby Seale.

Second, the success of the Party exacerbated tensions between promoting insurrection and maintaining the Party’s image. For example Huey Newton’s release from prison suggested to many potential allies that the Panthers could get justice in court, while suggesting to many rank and file members that they could get justice through armed resistance to police. And the increased influence and budget of the Party gave Panther leaders something to lose, and something to fight over. But neither of these first two factors – repression nor success – could on their own undermine the Party’s politics, and the Black Panthers continued to grow through 1969 and 1970, the years of the Party’s greatest repression and greatest success.

The third factor – that made Black Panther politics unsustainable – was the way that political concessions to Panther allies shifted the political context, and increased the difficulty of maintaining allied support. As the establishment addressed the interests of the Panthers’ potential allies, many became less willing to support revolutionary activities. The winding down of the War and Draft made it harder for the Panthers to sustain the support of anti-war allies. Broad concessions to, and increased electoral
representation of, blacks made it harder for the Party to sustain the support of moderate black allies. Normalization of diplomatic relations between the U.S. and the Black Panthers’ international allies made it ever more difficult for the Party to sustain international support. The times were changing, and the Black Panthers revolutionary politics of armed self-defense became ever harder to sustain.

As the tensions between pleasing potential allies and sustaining the Panthers’ politics of armed self-defense increased, so did the tensions between various chapters of the Black Panther Party and the national leadership in Oakland. This tension can be seen in the growing strife between the New York Panthers, the Cleavers, and Geronimo Pratt on one side, with national Party leaders David Hilliard and Huey Newton, on the other. In each case, local leaders chafed against management by the national organization.

As internal and external pressures mounted, ideological differences began to solidify, pitting the Central Committee’s social democratic emphasis against the breakaway Party elements’ emphasis on guerilla warfare. With the defections, and especially with the deaths of Webb and Napier, this ideological split blew up.

The killings of Webb and Napier may have had nothing to do with ideological differences. They could have resulted from simple factional power struggles, and ultimately it is hard to establish with certainty who actually committed these murders. Nevertheless, the killings rendered insurrectionary rhetoric untenable for the Party and crystallized a sharp ideological distinction.

In previous cases where Panthers were accused of killing a police officer or suspected informant, the Party could recast the charges as state repression. The Party argued that Huey was defending himself against police brutality when Officer Frey was
killed, and that the FBI was attempting to send Bobby Seale to the gas chamber and that
the FBI had likely ordered Rackley’s murder. The aggressive and often explicit
repressive actions by the state in these cases, and others, such as killing Fred Hampton in
his bed, lent credibility to the Panther perspective and allowed the Party to continue
advancing insurrectionary rhetoric, while appealing to potential allies as victims of
oppression.

But in the context of vicious and heavily publicized factionalism, the brutal
murders of representatives of each faction, and widespread accusations that the rival
factions were responsible, it became impossible to simultaneously maintain broad support
and insurrectionary rhetoric. The Central Committee could not denounce Cleaver, the
NY21, and Geronimo – some of the most important former members of the Party; deny
any role in the killing of Webb; credibly appeal to black, anti-war, and international allies
for support against State repression; and at the same time glorify armed resistance against
the state.

Instead, the Central Committee renounced immediate insurrection, denounced the
defecting rival faction for reckless embrace of insurrection, and insisted the Panthers
focus exclusively on social democratic programs until a sufficient mass of people was
ready for revolution. This was a sharp departure from the rhetoric of armed resistance and
the practical politics of armed self-defense against the police that fed the Party’s
explosive growth from 1968 through 1970.

For their part, the dissidents could not continue to promote insurrectionary
rhetoric and appeal to a broad base of potential allies either. But whereas the Central
Committee had been managing relations with allies all along, the rival faction had been
chafing at the demands of such leadership. The New York 21 had already called for immediate insurrection in their open letter to the Weather Underground in January, and the deaths of Webb and Napier only cemented this position. Abroad in Algiers, the Cleavers and their group yearned for action, and felt cut off and restrained by the Oakland leadership. Eldridge Cleaver, more than anyone else, had been the architect of the Party’s insurrectionary rhetoric. For him, a pacified call for social democracy held no appeal. Geronimo had gone underground and been arrested for illegal activities, then exiled by the Central Committee. Joining up with the Cleaverites and the call for immediate insurrection was his best – if not only – option.

The politics of immediate insurrection was not completely without allied support. An extreme left best exemplified by the Weather Underground, but also by some of the lawyers who continued to defend the New York 21 and Geronimo in court, some of the alternative press, and a few wealthy funders, agreed fully and explicitly that immediate insurrection was essential. But the much broader base of allies that supported the national Panther organization in 1969 and 1970 did not support this position.

In the March 20, 1971 issue of the *Black Panther Newspaper*, alongside demonstrations of support for the national Party leadership, the back cover featured a banner headline, “Survival Pending Revolution,” and a graphic of a woman carrying various items each labeled for one of the “People’s” programs: a bag of food labeled “free food program,” shoes labeled “free shoes program,” a blouse labeled “free clothing program,” and a book labeled “liberation schools.” She wore a nurse’s cap labeled “free health clinics,” and a bus in the backgrounds was labeled “free busing program.” The graphic included a quote from Huey Newton explaining that “There must be total
transformation. But until that time that we can achieve that total transformation, we must exist. In order to exist, we must survive; so therefore we need a survival kit.”

On March 27, following the heavy denunciations of the Cleaver faction and statements of allegiance to Huey Newton, the cover of the Black Panther Newspaper featured photos of pre-school and elementary school children dressed in Panther uniforms standing in formation. A large caption read: “The world is yours as well as ours, but in the last analysis, it is yours. You young people, full of vigour and vitality, are in the bloom of life, like the sun at eight or nine in the morning. Our hope is placed in you.”

The paper featured stories about the Panther school and social programs including many photos of Panther children reading, marching, playing, studying in class, and eating free breakfast.

With the March 27 issue, the Black Panther Party implemented a sweeping demilitarization of its image, as demonstrated by a brief survey of the Black Panther Newspaper for the first half of 1971. The first twelve issues of the Black Panther Newspaper published in 1971, through March 20, included 225 graphic images depicting weapons, an average of more than eighteen images of weapons per issue. Conversely, the twelve issues published March 27 and thereafter contained a total of only five portrayals of weapons, an average of less than one image every other issue.

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89 “Survival Pending Revolution,” in Black Panther Newspaper, March 20, 1971 back cover. Newton more fully articulated this position in June. In an article called “Black Capitalism Re-Analyzed,” Newton writes “All these programs satisfy the deep needs of the community but they are not solutions to our problems. That is why we call them survival programs, meaning survival pending revolution…. We say that the survival program of the Black Panther Party is like the survival kit of a sailor stranded on a raft …. the survival programs are not answers or solutions, but they will help us to organize the community.” Huey P. Newton in “Black Capitalism Re-Analyzed,” in Black Panther Newspaper, June 5, 1971 p.A.

90 Black Panther Newspaper, March 27, 1971 p. 1, supplement, and throughout.

91 This tally includes both drawings and photographs. If a graphic image included depictions of multiple weapons, I only counted it once. The specific tally of number of images depicting weapons by date of issue is as follows: January 2 -- 13 ; January 9 -- 22; January 16 -- 20; January 23 -- 14; January 30 -- 27;
In most issues of the *Black Panther Newspaper*, the Party printed a version of its Ten Point Program near the back of the paper. Until March of 1971, the Ten Point Program layout prominently featured a photo of Huey carrying a shotgun and bandolier. Captioned “Huey P. Newton, Minister of Defense, Black Panther Party,” the top of the layout featured the Ten Point Program; the bottom featured a photo of a machine gun. On March 13, the photos were removed and from March 27 onward, the Ten Point Program featured the large bold caption, “SERVING THE PEOPLE BODY AND SOUL” alongside Newton’s new title “Servant of the People.”

This graphic change was emblematic of a sea change in Party rhetoric. From 1967-1969, 45% of political editorial articles in the *Black Panther Newspaper* advocated “revolution now.” In 1970 that rate jumped to 65%. But in 1971, it fell to 16%, and in 1972-1973, dropped to less than 1%. Conversely, advocacy of “traditional politics” in political editorial articles in the *Black Panther* greatly increased after the split. From 1967-1969, only 7% of such articles advocated “traditional politics,” and less than 4% in 1970, compared with 32% in 1971 and almost 67% in 1972-1973.

As the national Party leadership moved toward social democratic rhetoric and away from talk of insurrection, the Cleaverite faction took an insurrectionary turn. On April 3, 1971, they began publishing “Right On!,” their own newspaper advocating full...
and immediate insurrection. The paper was published with support from the Weathermen via an above-ground ally – the Independent Caucus of SDS at the State University of New York. The paper featured articles by Eldridge Cleaver and the NY 21. At the bottom of the front page, a quote summarized the Cleaverite position: “The best example that we have of an alternative way of dealing with the courts is the case of Jonathan Jackson.”

In early April, a reporter from the independent leftist newspaper the *Guardian* interviewed Kathleen Cleaver on the rift in Algiers. She railed against David Hilliard for his “right opportunism,” his “lack of militancy,” and his “bureaucratic methods” in running the Party since Eldridge Cleaver went into exile. “Nothing is wrong, per se, with breakfast programs and concentrating on building ideological consciousness, but Hilliard saw to it there was no action, no revolutionary practice. The black people wanted to move, they wanted armed action, but Hilliard is a coward. All he wanted people to do was sell copies of the [Black Panther] paper and read Marxism-Leninism. He used Marxism-Leninism to lull people.” Kathleen claimed that David re-oriented the party from “organizing violence against the pigs” to “concentrating on legal action and defending people in court,” and “consciously set about to destroy the armed underground.” She sneered: “He even ordered that guns be taken out of some Panther offices! …. The phase of legal defense is over…. Jonathan Jackson ended all that …. Now we got to break them all out.” Kathleen Cleaver asserted that the conflict between the “Hilliard clique” and the Cleaver faction had long been simmering, but that the International section had hoped that Newton “would put the party back on the right course when he got out of jail last year.” Instead he endorsed Hilliard’s stewardship.

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95 Kathleen Cleaver does not mention it, but Bobby Seale was also free until August of 1969, and Huey Newton was released in August 1970.
Kathleen Cleaver noted that the “international section” had opened a U.S. headquarters in the Bronx, and that its main focus would be armed action, sabotage, and support for a military underground. She declared:

We are through with legal action…. What is necessary now is a party to advance and expedite the armed struggle…. There’s a revolutionary war going on. The people are ready for a real vanguard, for military action…. We need a people’s army and the Black Panther party vanguard will bring that about…. The people are ready.96

On April 17, 1971, the same day that Kathleen Cleaver’s interview appeared in the Guardian, Huey Newton published an essay in the Black Panther Newspaper titled “On the Defection of Eldridge Cleaver from the Black Panther Party and the Defection of the Black Panther Party from the Black Community.” Newton explained the conflict as essentially ideological, and staked out an explicitly social democratic position. He claimed that the roots of the Party were solidly social democratic (pending sufficient support for a revolution), and criticized the advocacy of insurrection by Eldridge Cleaver:

You have to set up a program of practical action and be a model for the community to follow and appreciate. The original vision of the Party was to develop a lifeline to the people, by serving their needs…. Many times people say that our Ten-Point Program is reformist; but they ignore the fact that revolution is a process…. The people see things as moving from A to B to C; they do not see things as moving from A to Z. In other words they have to see first some basic accomplishments, in order to realize that major successes are possible…. The Black Panther Party has reached a contradiction with Eldridge Cleaver and he has defected from the Party, because we would not order everyone into the streets tomorrow to make a revolution. We recognize that this is impossible … because the people are not at that point now. This contradiction and conflict may seem unfortunate to some, but …. we are now free to move toward the building of a community structure which will become a true voice of the people, promoting their interests in many ways. We can continue to push our basic survival program. We can continue to serve the people as advocates of their true interests. We can truly become a political revolutionary vehicle which will lead the people to a higher level of consciousness, so that they will know what they must really do in their quest for freedom.97

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The politics of the Black Panther Party contained a tension. On the one hand, much of its appeal to members and political leverage derived from armed resistance to the police. On the other hand, the Party’s ability to withstand repression by the State depended to a large extent on support from more moderate allies. Through 1969 and much of 1970, the national Party was able to contain this tension, shaping the Party’s public image through the emphasis on service programs, and maintaining internal discipline through purges. But over time, concessions and redress of the interests of key Panther allies made allied support for armed self-defense ever harder to maintain. Blacks garnered greater electoral representation, government employment, affirmative action opportunities, as well as college and university access; the Vietnam War and military draft were greatly scaled back; and the United States improved diplomatic relations with China, Algeria and other international Panther allies. These changes exacerbated the contradiction the Panthers faced between practicing armed self-defense against the State, and maintaining allied support. These tensions came to a head as three key factions – the New York 21, part of the Los Angeles leadership, and the International Section – challenged the national Party leadership. As the intra-organizational struggle became violent, the Panthers split along ideological lines. The National organization called for Panthers to put down the gun and exclusively emphasize community programs until sufficient support for revolution was achieved. The secessionist factions called for immediate guerilla warfare against the state.

Stripped of the viability of the politics of armed self-defense against the police, how would these new Panther politics fare in the 1970s?
Chapter 16: The Limits of Heroism

In the months following the Panther rift in early 1971, sustained pressure from the State kept the Black Panther Party in the national spotlight. This pressure only exacerbated the tensions that now made insurrectionary activities antithetical to the national headquarters’ appeals for allied support. Newspapers widely reported the trial of the New York Panthers charged with conspiracies to kill police and bomb public buildings. The State opened its criminal case on March 18 against Bobby Seale and Ericka Huggins, charging the Panther leaders with responsibility for the murder of Alex Rackley in New Haven. In June, the State of California began a retrial of Huey Newton on charges of manslaughter stemming from the 1968 killing of Officer John Frey. That same month, the trial of David Hilliard began for charges stemming from the shootout in which Bobby Hutton was killed.¹

At the same time, Panther members in chapters around the country continued to engage in insurrectionary acts, or at least to be accused of them. In the context of the national Panther Party’s attempts to claim nonviolent service of the people pending future revolution, these actions – and accusations that the Party was responsible – were embarrassing to the Party, especially its national leadership.

Embarrassments

On April 2, 1971 police raided the Black Panther headquarters in Jersey City, New Jersey, arresting five Panthers. The police claimed they found an underground rifle

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range, sandbagging, rifles, pistols, ammunition, and various preparations for a battle with authorities. Also in April, police arrested and charged four Detroit Black Panthers – Ronald Irwin, Larry Powell, Anthony Norman, and Ronald Smith – with stealing drugs and money from residents of a “student commune” and killing one student in the process. On April 20, police announced they had found the charred, scattered remains of Fred Bennett, a Black Panther Party captain, near what they claimed was a Panther “bomb factory” replete with “149 sticks of dynamite, quantities of nitroglycerin, fuses, timing devices and dynamite caps.” On May 13, in a Chicago apartment “regarded as a Panther hangout” and “stocked with Black Panther literature,” gunmen shot three police dispatched to investigate a domestic dispute. On May 21, two New York police officers were ambushed and killed in Harlem. People claiming to be members of the Black Panther-affiliated Black Liberation Army notified the press, taking responsibility for the murders.

In early June, Richard Dhoruba Moore and Eddie Jamal Josephs – previously acquitted on all charges in the high profile Panther New York 21 case – were again arrested and charged with holding up a Bronx social club. Police claimed the submachine gun they used in the holdup was “positively identified” as the weapon used in May to shoot two police officers. In July, former Panther Melvin “Cotton” Smith testified in the trial of Geronimo Pratt and other L.A. Panthers for charges stemming from the December 1969 siege that the Panthers had attempted unsuccessfully to bomb a Los Angeles police

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station. He also claimed that one of the guns seized during the siege had been used by Panthers to kill three people. Various sources claim that Melvin Smith was working as a paid police agent both while a member of the L.A. Panthers and during his testimony. In late July, a New York grand jury indicted seven New York Panthers – including Moore and Josephs – in the brutal murder of Black Panther National Distribution Captain Samuel Napier.

Racked by internal divisions, the Party was disintegrating and rapidly losing members and allied support. The New York Times reported in March 1971 that the Party was falling apart: “A check of the Party’s chapters across the country suggests that the operation is now only a shell of what it was a year ago.” Black Panther Chairman Bobby Seale later recalled that immediately after the killings of Robert Webb and Samuel Napier, 30-40% of Black Panther members left the organization. Even the Federal Government recognized that the Party was no longer a serious threat. The House Committee on Internal Security reported in August, 1971:

The Black Panther Party, as a national organization, is near disintegration.... the committee hearings document the steady decline in [party membership] during the last year. Furthermore, the feud between Eldridge Cleaver and Huey Newton threatens the start of a time of violence and terror within what remains of the Panther Party. Probably only remnants of the party will remain alive here and there to bedevil the police and enchant a few of the young, but its day as a national influence and influence in the black community seems over. It is hard to believe that only a little over a year ago the Panthers ... ranked as the most celebrated ghetto militants. They fascinated the left, inflamed the police, terrified much of America, and had an extraordinary effect on the black community. Even moderate blacks, who disagreed with their violent tactics, felt that the Panthers served a purpose in focusing attention on ghetto problems and argued that they gave a sense of

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pride to the black community.... liberals and idealists who once sympathized with the Panthers have ... withdrawn their support.\textsuperscript{13}

\textbf{Martyrs Without a Movement}

On August 21, 1971, guards at San Quentin Prison in Marin, California shot and killed Panther leader, author, and prison activist George Jackson. Three prison guards and two white inmates were also killed in the incident; their throats slashed. Prison authorities claimed that Jackson had smuggled a gun into the prison, killed the guards with help from other inmates, and was attempting to escape when he was shot.\textsuperscript{14} The “truth” of what actually happened is still contested.

George Jackson had been an important and influential Black Panther leader. Sent to prison at the age of eighteen for a $70 theft, he organized prisoners against repression. His leadership was transracial, overriding the racial divisions that kept black, white, and Latino prisoners divided and controlled. In prison he learned to write well and became a noteworthy Marxist political theorist. His compelling collection of letters, \textit{Soledad Brother}, was widely read and quite influential, particularly in certain circles of the U.S. and international Left. \textit{Soledad Brother} confirmed Jackson’s growing influence not only as a Marxist theorist, but also as a vital spokesman for political prisoners everywhere.

Jackson founded and led the Black Panther chapter at San Quentin Prison, and organized a strong revolutionary movement among prison inmates. Jackson’s writings and leadership had thus garnered an impressive international as well as domestic audience. In effect, he became a powerful symbol for the Black Panther Party, the international human rights movement to free political prisoners, and the convergence between them.\textsuperscript{15}

\textsuperscript{13} HCIS \textit{Gun-Barrel Politics} August 18, 1971 p. 143.
\textsuperscript{15} For a biography by an ardent supporter, see Eric Mann, \textit{Comrade George}, Harper & Row, 1972.
Jackson’s death put the Black Panther Party in a difficult and revealing dilemma. A year earlier, the Party would have heralded Jackson as a martyr for revolution. In fact, the Party had heralded the efforts of Jonathan Jackson to break his brother George out of the Marin courthouse in August of 1970. If George had met death at that very moment, his death would have been touted as a great injustice perpetrated by the “pigs,” and the Party would have called for revenge, encouraging its supporters to take insurrectionary actions against the State, as the Party had done in response to the murders of John Huggins and Bunchy Clark in Los Angeles in January 1969 and the murder of Fred Hampton and Mark Clark in Chicago in December 1969.

The issue of the *Black Panther Newspaper* published on January 25, 1969 following the killings of John Huggins and Bunchy Carter at UCLA a week earlier, was filled with graphics of weapons, violent confrontation with the state, and calls to revolutionary violence. The cover called the killings “Political Assassination” and featured a photo of John Huggins holding up the poster of Huey Newton with a spear in one hand and a rifle in the other. The top story argued that the state and its stooges had assassinated Huggins and Carter because of the revolutionary threat they posed.16 The issue was filled with images advocating violent confrontations with police and armed symbols of the State. Under a series of photos of an armed Huey Newton, and a photo of a submachine gun, read the caption “Free Huey Now – Guns, Baby, Guns!” Under a photo of Vietnamese women carrying rifles and getting military training, a caption read “Hanoi’s militiawomen learn techniques for shooting down American planes.” One page featured an image of a young black man carrying a sub-machine gun in one hand, and a “Black Studies” book in the other. Another page featured a drawing of a policeman with

a bloodied head. The caption read “This pig will be back. Don’t let this happen. Shoot to kill.”

The December 13, 1969 issue of the *Black Panther Newspaper* argued that the December 4 killing of Panther leaders Fred Hampton and Mark Clark in Chicago was State-sponsored assassination and demanded revenge. The front page featured a photo of Fred Hampton in red with the caption, “He stood up in the midst of fascist gestapo forces and declared, ‘I am a revolutionary.’ Fred Hampton, Deputy Chairman Illinois Chapter Black Panther Party, Murdered by Fascist Pigs, December 4, 1969.” The article explained that Hampton was a martyr, and called on readers to take up his revolutionary struggle:

Deputy Chairman Fred Hampton ... has joined the ranks of martyrs, revolutionary heroes: Lumumba, Malcolm X, Little Bobby Hutton, Bunchy Carter, John Huggins, Che, Toure, Jake Winters and the countless other revolutionaries who have given the most precious gift that they could give in the name of the people.... These brothers and sisters gave their lives in order that you and yours may one day enjoy true freedom.... Eldridge Cleaver, Minister of Information, has stated that “it is time to intensify the struggle”, and that now is the time for “mad men”. Deputy Chairman Fred Hampton was just such a “mad man”. Reactionaries wondered why Deputy Chairman Fred waged such a resolute struggle seemingly against the greatest of “odds” .... [In] Malcolm’s words ... we are a generation that don’t give a f—k about the “odds.” .... Deputy Chairman Fred dug that vulturistic capitalists were growing fat off the flesh and blood of the toiling masses of the world. So Deputy Chairman dedicated his life to destroying the number one enemy of mankind.... By raising their hands against Deputy Chairman Fred Hampton, they lifted their hands against the best that humanity possesses. AND ALREADY OTHER HANDS ARE REACHING OUT, PICKING UP THE GUNS!!! ... The arm of the people is long and their vengeance TERRIFYING!!! [Emphasis in original.]

Illustrations further advocating armed confrontation with the state filled the rest of the issue. A full-page color graphic depicted a black man wearing a bandolier. In one hand he held a military rifle equipped with a bayonet dripping blood, and he yelled out as he thrust a grenade into the air with the other hand. Pigs in the distance fled as a grenade flew through the air after them. The large caption quoted Huey Newton: “The racist dog policemen must withdraw immediately from our communities, cease their wonton

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murder, brutality and torture of Black People, or face the wrath of the armed people.”

Beneath a photo of armed police surrounding the Southern California office after the December 8 siege, a caption read, “Fascist troops mill around after attempted massacre.”

Another picture on the same page showed young, bare-chested Panthers handcuffed and held by police with the caption “Youthful Panther Warriors.” A beautiful graphic of a black mother carrying her baby and a rifle carried the caption, “If I should return, I shall kiss you. If I should fall on the way, I shall ask you to do as I have in the name of the revolution.”

By the time of George Jackson’s death in August 1971, such a response was no longer tenable. Trying to hold onto dwindling allied support in the shifting political context meant that Party advocacy of killing police was out. Since early that year, the Party had moved definitively away from advocating insurrection.

The Black Panther Newspaper issued immediately after George Jackson’s death, heralded and mourned Jackson. But the Party’s message was essentially non-violent. The cover of the paper featured a peaceful photo of Jackson sitting contemplatively by a sunny window under the headline “George Jackson Lives!” Commemorative writings by Jackson himself, some of it promoting violence, filled the issue. Yet the Party issued no calls to insurrection, and made no suggestions that violent revenge was appropriate. The Party celebrated and supported Jackson, but the Party did not agitate for immediate violent retribution. The newspaper contained not a single image of a weapon or violent action by a revolutionary against any agent of the State. Jackson was a martyr, but without an insurrectionary movement. Stripped of its insurrectionary rhetoric and the

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politics of armed self-defense against the State, the Party no longer offered a practical outlet for the anger Panther members and supporters felt over Jackson’s killing.

While the editorial policy of the *Black Panther Newspaper* was tightly controlled, the political views of Black Panther members and supporters were not. Many of George Jackson’s admirers took his insurrectionary writings to heart and wanted vengeance for his death. A group of Black Panthers incarcerated at Folsom prison wrote to Jackson’s parents commiserating his death:

> We know, Father and Mother Jackson, that our pitifully few words fall far short in filling that vacuum created by George’s murderers; you see we feel that vacuum also. You must be strong and take consolation in the reality that George lives in all of us and we all therefore are your sons. Take pride in the fact that you have a large strong revolutionary family of budding warriors – we will not let you down. Comrade George, the battleground is defined and that split between the enemy and ourselves has become a chasm. This cruel cut can never heal; the pain is too intense.²⁰

Given the calls by the Cleaver faction for immediate armed action, the Black Panther Party national leadership could not afford to alienate those Jackson supporters who were deeply angered by Jackson’s killing and wanted revenge. To manage the complex and vast outpouring of emotions from members and supporters in response to Jackson’s murder, the Black Panther Party organized a massive funeral. Thousands participated. Huey Newton gave the keynote address. It was long and philosophical, and emphasized the strength and beauty of George Jackson’s character. “He lived the life that we must praise. It was a life, no matter how he was oppressed, no matter how wrongly he was done, he still kept the love for the people.”²¹ Bobby Seale read letters from Panther members and supporters, representing a range of perspectives on Jackson’s death, giving

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voice to those who wanted revenge as well as those simply expressing sadness at the loss.

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The next issue of the *Black Panther Newspaper* on September 4 was dedicated fully to Jackson’s funeral, and reproduced many of the letters read by Seale, statements from notables such as scholar-activist Angela Davis (a close comrade and love of George Jackson), French writer Jean Genet, and author James Baldwin, as well as a transcript of Newton’s speech. Consistent with its new editorial policy, the issue presented not a single drawing or photo of violent confrontation. The issue did contain a number of photos of the funeral, including images of the honor guard of several Panthers around Jackson’s casket. The honor guard stood by holding rifles to their chests. Dressed in fancy suits, they looked ceremonial, not at all aggressive. Aside from the guard, the issue contained not a single image of a weapon. The overriding message was one of mourning and loss. Jackson was a hero, and he had been unjustly taken away. The last article in the issue was a statement by Genet. The article ended with his words: “In these 11 years, Jackson learned to write and think. The American police shot him down.”23 As the *Black Panther* newspaper reported it, Jackson’s death was a tragic loss, but not a call to arms.

The following week, on September 9, inmates took over Attica prison in New York. They called in the Panthers to help negotiate their demands, but achieved no resolution. On September 13, Governor Rockefeller responded with force, sending in 1,000 National Guardsmen, prison guards, and police to take back the prison. The troops killed twenty-eight prisoners, while nine hostages died in the battle.24 The *New York Times* reported on its front page that prisoners had killed the nine hostages, slitting their

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throats. The paper’s editorial emphasized the brutality of the killing, and suggested that Bobby Seale and the Black Panthers were partly to blame:

The deaths of these persons by knives ... reflect a barbarism wholly alien to civilized society. Prisoners slashed the throats of utterly helpless, unarmed guards whom they had held captive through the around-the-clock negotiations, in which inmates held out for an increasingly revolutionary set of demands.... What began last Thursday as a long-foreseeable protest against inhuman prison conditions, with an initial list of grievances that many citizens could support, degenerated into a bloodbath that can only bring sorrow to all Americans.... The contribution of Black Panther Bobby Seale seems to have been particularly negative, that of an incendiary, not a peacemaker.

The charge that the Panthers had contributed to the violence at Attica had potential to alienate many of the Black Panther Party’s more moderate allies.

The next day, the Times reported on page one that the hostages had actually been killed by gunfire, and that the prisoners had no guns – implying that state troopers had actually killed the hostages as well as the prisoners. Several elected officials, including New York Congressman Herman Badillo and Assemblyman Arthur Eve from Buffalo, charged that Governor Rockefeller’s administration had fabricated the story that prisoners had killed the hostages.

The false story that prisoners had brutally killed hostages and that the Panthers had helped instigate the killing vilified the Attica insurgents and the Black Panthers. In response, the Panthers shied away from insurgent rhetoric. Rather than call for resistance to prison authorities in the spirit of Attica, the Panthers advanced a moderate stance. They dedicated the next issue of their newspaper to the uprising, with the title “Massacre at Attica” across the cover. Again, as with the killing of George Jackson, the Party’s

rhetoric mourned the loss of the prison rebels, and decried the oppression, but did not advocate an insurrectionary response. The issue contained no photos or images of revolutionary violence, no calls to armed action. This was a stark contrast to the rhetoric of the Party before the ideological split. Strategically, the Panthers were trying to hold onto allied support in a shifting political environment, and shying away from advocating insurrection. At the behest of the Panthers, a committee of eighteen official observers allowed into Attica as negotiators during the rebellion, including Seale, issued a statement supporting Seale against the charges in the New York Times editorial that he had inflamed the Attica rebels from within: “No individual on the observer committee adopted any position which prevented or hindered a peaceful resolution of the crisis.”

**Retreat**

No longer advocating armed insurrection, the Black Panthers sought to build power through other means. In addition to the service programs, the Oakland Panthers launched an extended boycott of Bill Boyette, a local black businessman who owned markets in black neighborhoods, and ran a black business association called Cal-Pak, but refused to donate to the Black Panther Party. In January 1972, the Party announced that an agreement with Boyette had been reached. His stores would now donate regularly to the Party’s programs, and the Party would call off the boycott. The Party deepened relationships with black elected politicians, including congress members Ron Dellums and Shirley Chisholm.

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32 The *Black Panther Newspaper* features support of Chisholm and Dellums on the front cover of three separate issues in late April and early May – April 15, May 6, and May 13.
On May 20, 1972, the Black Panther Party announced that it was running Chairman Bobby Seale for Mayor of Oakland, and Minister of Information Elaine Brown for Oakland City Councilmember. The Party had earlier participated in electoral politics with Eldridge Cleaver’s 1968 presidential candidacy on the Peace and Freedom Party ticket, but it had never actually sought to win. Now, the Party turned all of its national notoriety and resources to winning the Oakland elections.

Facing dwindling public support, and embarrassing violent activity by rank and file members in chapters across the country, Newton and the National Party leadership decided to cut their losses and consolidate their political strength in Oakland. Since they could never win violent confrontations with the State, and could no longer win such confrontations politically, the Party decided to use its still considerable national clout to win electoral political power in Oakland. They put out the message in July 1972, declaring Oakland a “Base of Operation,” calling on Party members to close down their local Panther chapters nationally, and bring all Party resources back to Oakland.

Instead of immediate insurrectionary activity, now the Party would consolidate its power to take over the city of Oakland, including its strategically and economically important port, through electoral struggle. Once Oakland was liberated through electoral victory, the Party would expand the revolution by taking over other cities. “In this interest, each week the Black Panther Intercommunal News Service will publish a supplement examining one aspect of the city of Oakland in the hope that this information can be used to turn a reactionary base into a revolutionary base.”

On the campaign trail, Elaine Brown explained the strategy to a supportive audience at the Merritt Community College in Oakland, where the Panthers got their start in 1966:

We’re talking about liberating the territory of Oakland … Are we ready to defend at this moment? I don’t think we are. The Oakland Police Department has got all the guns. There’s a practical problem, when you talk about liberating territory, or establishing a provisional revolutionary government. Think about those issues when you start talking about implementing a revolutionary process in the United States of America, with its super-techological weapons, where they do not have to commit a troop to take out the whole city, because they have ‘smart’ bombs, helicopters, and all kinds of things so that it doesn’t even require the entrance of one troop. Think about that. We have to start talking about how to win, not how to get killed. We can begin by talking about voting in the city of Oakland, the Oakland elections, in April 1973, for Bobby Seale, for Elaine Brown.35

Bobby Seale forced a runoff election for Mayor of Oakland, and Elaine Brown came in a close second for city council, but both lost their political bids in April 1973.36

**Unraveling**

A few Party chapters did persist. But for most practical purposes, the Black Panther Party ceased to be a national organization and became once again a local Oakland organization. Rather than move to Oakland, many Panthers simply left the Party. Bobby Rush, who inherited leadership of the Chicago Chapter when Fred Hampton was murdered, later recalled the response of Chicago Panthers: “Most people in Chicago didn’t want to go [to Oakland] because they were pretty practical folks…. They began to resent things: I remember when I sent our bus and the printing press we had acquired out to Oakland….. People just wanted to move on, wanted to do something. So they said, ‘Rather than go out to Oakland, we’re just gonna disband. We’re just gonna leave.’ One by one they began to peter out.”37

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35 Elaine Brown, October 26, 1972, quoted in “We’re talking about winning in Oakland,” in *Black Panther Newspaper*, November 9, 1972, p. 4.
37 Bobby Rush, quoted in David Hilliard, *This Side of Glory*, p.327.
No longer able to sustain allied support for insurgent politics, and lacking other sources of political leverage, the Party unraveled. Once Newton closed the Party chapters nationally and called members back to Oakland, the Panthers no longer advanced any kind of effective and replicable politics. The greatest strength of the Party after 1971 was its notoriety, and its concentration of relationships and resources in Oakland. It continued to draw members, donations, and support on a local scale because of its past actions. But despite the best aspirations of its leadership, the Panthers never again were able to advance insurgent practices that others could emulate.

Now drawing power from reputation rather than from the ability to mobilize insurgency, the Oakland Black Panther Party became increasingly cultish: a social service organization with a Mafioso bent, motivated by revolutionary ideology. Newton became heavily strung out on cocaine. Accusations abound regarding Newton’s alleged criminal activities during this period. There is little agreement on the specifics, and in most cases the accusations were never verified – Newton defeated every one of the major charges in court. Some of the most widely touted accusations come from right-wing activists such as David Horowitz and Kate Coleman who seek to vilify the Black Panther Party. Yet retrospective accounts of gangster-like criminal activities from a range of sources add some credence to these accusations.

According to these stories, for much of the 1970s, Newton ruled the Party through force and fear, and began behaving like a strung-out gangster. According to Elaine Brown, “Huey and his entourage of restless gunmen were prowling the after-hours clubs nightly.” According to Kate Coleman, Newton had various after-hours club operators,

38 David Hilliard, *This Side of Glory*, p. 6.
drug dealers, and pimps beaten, shot, and killed as part of enforcing an extortion scheme, and his attempt to control Oakland’s underworld. Coleman writes that Newton pistol-whipped Preston Callins, a “tailor” who came to his apartment to “measure him for a suit,” fracturing his skull four times. Elaine Brown recounts the story and testifies that she personally cleaned up the blood. According to Horowitz, Newton ordered the assassination of Betty Van Patter, who had worked as a bookkeeper for the Party, and had her body dumped in the San Francisco Bay. Horowitz, Coleman, and Hugh Pearson all claim that in 1974, Newton murdered Kathleen Smith, a seventeen year-old prostitute, shooting her in the head because of some perceived slight as she worked the street corner. Flores Forbes was a member of the Black Panther Central Committee in the mid-1970s. In his autobiography, Forbes testifies that he attempted to assassinate the star witness against Newton in Smith’s murder trial in 1977. Elaine Brown, who had been Chairman of the Party at the time of this attempted assassination, prominently endorsed Forbes’s book writing “This is our story … an unadulterated truth, told in a pure voice.” Newton was eventually killed by a petty crack dealer from whom he was likely trying to steal drugs.

Lore of Newton and the Party’s criminality became the worst possible enemy of the Black Panther legacy. It is hard to know to what extent federal counterintelligence

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41 Kate Coleman with Paul Avery, “The Party’s Over,” in New Times, July 11, 1978, p. 34. A friend of Newton’s who did not want to be named told us that Newton had beaten Callins, but that Callins was actually a cocaine dealer and that this was a drug deal gone sour.
42 Elaine Brown, Taste of Power, p.356.
44 Kate Coleman with Paul Avery, “The Party’s Over”; David Horowitz, Destructive Generation; Hugh Pearson Shadow of the Panther.
45 Flores Forbes, Will You Die With Me?
46 Elaine Brown “Foreword,” in Flores Forbes Will You Die With Me?
47 See David Hilliard, This Side of Glory, “Prologue.”
measures may have contributed to this unraveling of Newton and the Oakland Party in the 1970s. But the spirit of J. Edgar Hoover would have been proud of the results. Hoover had recognized by 1969 that criminalization was the best way to diminish public support for the Black Panthers and the political challenge they posed. Nothing could have done more to criminalize the Party than Newton’s alleged actions in the years following the ideological split.\footnote{Detractors such as David Horowitz, Peter Collier, and Kate Coleman, who made careers of vilifying the Panthers, simultaneously advanced the public criminalization of the entire history of the Party. These authors wrote extensively about the criminal activities of the miniscule and dying Black Panther Party and its leadership in the 1970s, and they retrospectively read the entire history of the national organization through this criminal lens, obscuring the history and politics of the Party. There are innumerable organizations in most large cities that engage in the kinds of criminal activities that some Panthers apparently did in the 1970s. The reason the Panthers are interesting historically is not that they are just like all these others. The Panthers are interesting historically precisely because they were a world apart from these petty criminal organizations in purpose and influence between 1968 and 1970. These accounts obscure rather than illuminate what is important historically about the Panthers. It is ironic that Horowitz took over \textit{Ramparts Magazine}, pushing out Robert Scheer, the leftist editor who helped the Black Panthers get their start, even as the Black Panther Party was becoming in part a petty gang. Horowitz established his credentials at Ramparts by providing strong support of Newton, and turning a blind eye to Newton’s alleged criminality. Then, in the most cynical of personal politics, Horowitz became famous by denouncing Newton and projecting the alleged criminal activities Horowitz himself helped support onto the entire legacy of the Black Panther Party.}

The Limits of Heroism: Social Democracy

By 1971 the Black Panther Party was quickly unraveling, but even as the Party’s national influence declined, a new leadership emerged that struggled to advance revolutionary aims through a social democratic politics. Under the leadership of Elaine Brown, the Party showed impressive development of this social democratic politics.

Following her trip to China, North Vietnam, and North Korea as part of the Black Panther delegation in the summer of 1970, Elaine Brown had quickly risen to national leadership in the Party. Upon her return to the United States, she was greeted at the airport by Huey Newton – newly released from prison – and that evening became his lover and soon his close collaborator. Following the split in early 1971, Brown became...
editor of the *Black Panther Newspaper*, the Party’s main voice. In October that year, Brown became Minister of Information, the position formerly held by Eldridge Cleaver. In late 1972 and early 1973, Brown was at the center of Black Panther activities, running for political office with Bobby Seale in Oakland. And later in 1973, when Newton expelled Seale from the Party, he appointed Elaine Brown Chairwoman – the number two position in the Party after himself. When Newton fled to Cuba following his indictment on allegations that he killed Kathleen Smith and pistol-whipped Preston Callins, Brown took charge of the Black Panther Party operations.49

Under Elaine Brown’s leadership from August of 1974 through June of 1977, the Party experienced something of a local renaissance as a social democratic organization.50 Elaine Brown supported the candidacy of Democrat Jerry Brown for Governor that year, and helped to bring in strong support from Oakland’s black voters, which helped Jerry Brown win the election. Governor Jerry Brown appointed his longtime friend and former Panther lawyer and ally J. Anthony Kline to an important post in his administration, cementing Elaine Brown’s access to the Governor’s office. Despite long electoral dominance by white Republicans in Oakland, Brown ran a formidable campaign for Oakland City Council in 1975. She developed strong ties to black political networks – including Congressman Ron Dellums’s political machine. These ties brought endorsements from every local Democrat and many black businesses, including Cal-Pak. Brown garnered wide support from organized labor, including endorsements from the Alameda County Central Labor Council, the United Auto Workers, the United Farm

Workers, and the Teamsters. She won 44% of the vote against the Republican candidate.\(^{51}\)

Under Brown’s leadership, the Oakland Panthers took community service to new heights. The cornerstone of the Party’s program was the Oakland Community School, an elementary school directed by Ericka Huggins with the help of Panther Regina Davis. Through their efforts the school eventually offered a top-notch education, enrolling about two hundred kids, with twice that many on the wait list. The Party began competing for and won public funding to run service programs, such as crime prevention for Oakland teenagers.\(^{52}\)

In the 1976 Democratic Presidential Primary, following the backlash against the Republican Party after Nixon’s impeachment for Watergate, Jimmy Carter emerged as an early favorite for the Democratic Party nomination. Late in the game, when Governor Brown entered the race to challenge Carter, Elaine Brown helped him win the black vote in Baltimore and thus the state of Maryland. Her efforts also contributed to his sweeping victory in the California primary. Jerry Brown went to the Democratic Convention in July with the second most delegates of any candidate, but was handily defeated by Carter in the first round of voting.

Leveraging her support, Elaine Brown elicited Governor Brown’s approval of $33 Million to extend the freeway in Oakland in exchange for a commitment from Clorox, Hyatt, Wells Fargo, Sears, and other multinational corporations to develop Oakland City Center – bringing 10,000 new jobs to Oakland. The companies wanted to develop


Oakland, and had proposed the freeway extension when Reagan was Governor, but the project had been blocked. Brown used her influence with the Governor to move the deal forward with the idea that the political prestige garnered could help Lionel Wilson, a black Oakland Judge and Panther ally, become Mayor. In return, the Black Panthers would gain significant influence over the distribution of the 10,000 jobs.53

Astonishingly, the strategy worked. The Black Panther Party did its best to keep its relationship with Lionel Wilson out of the public eye. But as Elaine Brown recounts the history, the Black Panthers were crucial behind the scenes. Not only did she get the Governor to agree to the freeway extension, unblocking plans for Oakland development, and greatly expanding her cachet in Oakland politics, but she also obtained the Governor’s endorsement, and that of much of the State Democratic machine, for Lionel Wilson for Mayor of Oakland. The Black Panther Party fielded their entire membership to work on Wilson’s Mayoral campaign, registering 90,000 new black voters. Elaine Brown and the Black Panther Party played a crucial role in Wilson’s election as the first black elected Mayor of Oakland in May 1977.54

Elaine Brown endured great personal costs to advance the Black Panther revolution through social democratic politics. She was also very effective in developing conventional political power for blacks in Oakland. Yet her hard work did little to advance the Black Panther Party as a radical movement organization. The politics of armed self-defense was no longer viable, and the Panthers had no alternate insurgent strategy for building power.

The month after Lionel Wilson’s election as Mayor, with Oakland safely in the hands of friends, Newton returned from Cuba.\textsuperscript{55} Brown had seen herself as preparing Oakland for his return all along. It soon became clear that his leadership and Brown’s continued management of the Black Panther Party were incompatible. Brown soon left the Party, and the foothold the Panthers had gained in conventional Oakland politics was lost.\textsuperscript{56}

The limits of Elaine Brown’s heroism went well beyond the problems with Newton and the particularities of Oakland politics. The source of the Party’s power under her leadership was conventional political savvy coupled with community service – an approach to grassroots politics engaged by thousands of community activists in hundreds of cities throughout the country. These political actors made inroads into political power and reform well before the Black Panther Party was organized, and continue to do so today. Black electoral representation in particular mushroomed in the 1970s during the period Elaine Brown chaired the Black Panther Party. But conventional political savvy and community service alone have never been able to mobilize a serious radical challenge to status quo arrangements of power. For insurgent social movements to expand and proliferate, they must offer activists a set of insurgent practices that disrupt established social relations in ways that are difficult to repress.\textsuperscript{57}

The Panthers stated objective for “Oakland as a Base of Operations” was to create a revolutionary stronghold – and a model of revolutionary practice – that could eventually be expanded throughout the United States and the world. But despite the

\textsuperscript{56} Elaine Brown, \textit{Taste of Power}, chapter 21.
revolutionary rhetoric, the political practices of the social democratic Panthers were very similar to the conventional politics that engaged black people nationwide in the 1970s. Unlike the Black Panther Party before the ideological split, the Oakland Black Panthers in the 1970s never provided a model for disrupting established relations of domination. They never provided political leverage or a replicable source of political power. And so, despite Elaine Brown’s savvy and exceptional talent, the social democratic Black Panther Party never proliferated.

**The Limits of Heroism: Guerilla Warfare**

Many treatments – both mainstream and radical – of the insurrectionary practices of revolutionary black nationalists seek to evaluate insurgents in ethical terms, judging them in terms of who they hurt and whether this is good or bad. Unfortunately, most accounts fail to analyze the crucial political questions. How do insurgents see themselves? Who is attracted to participate, and why? What political leverage do the practices create for insurgents in a particular historical context?

From this vantage, it is striking how central armed, insurrectionary practices were to the power and growth of the Black Panther Party from 1968-1970. Huey Newton theorized in “The Functional Definition of Politics” in 1967 that poor and politically marginalized blacks could tap a source of power through armed insurrection. By taking up arms and organizing, Newton proposed, blacks could create the capacity to deliver a violent consequence, and thereby gain political influence.\(^5^8\) As the preceding history shows, the Black Panther Party did in fact garner extensive political leverage through armed challenges to state authority. The Party’s advocacy of armed resistance and the

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practice of armed resistance by members were crucial to the Party’s influence and expansion.

But key to the success of the Panther’s politics of armed self-defense was Newton’s insistence that the Party – while advocating armed resistance – stay above-ground as long as possible, avoiding direct and explicit organization of insurrection. The Black Panther Party’s politics of armed self-defense against the State thus navigated a narrow boundary between legal participation in U.S. politics and full out war. The Party’s ability to sustain an insurgent challenge depended on its ability to stay largely within the law despite the armed resistance mounted by members. Most Party activities were incompatible with armed insurrection. Panthers who explicitly participated in armed insurrection could not participate in community programs, produce or distribute the Party newspaper, engage overtly in local organizing, work aboveground with allies, raise funds legally, live or work in known locations, or organize street mobilizations. Had the Party explicitly organized and directed armed insurrection, rather than simply advocating it, the State would have readily crushed it.

From 1971 on, as the political context shifted and the Black Panther Party stopped advocating insurrectionary activity, a significant number of former members sought to take armed politics to a “higher” level and engage the United States in guerilla warfare. In the view of these dissidents, the imperialist domination of black people in the U.S. persisted. They believed guerilla warfare was the best route to free black communities from oppression, and that committing their lives to overthrowing the imperialist system through violence was the most heroic contribution they could make to freedom. Many of
these guerilla warriors identified themselves as part of a revolutionary underground network called the Black Liberation Army (BLA).

Assata Shakur, a member of the BLA convicted of killing a New Jersey State Police officer in 1972, and who comrades helped escape in 1979, wrote from exile in Cuba offering a description of the BLA:

The Black Liberation Army is not an organization: it goes beyond that. It is a concept, a people’s movement, an idea. Many different people have said and done many different things in the name of the Black Liberation Army. The idea of a Black Liberation Army emerged from conditions in Black communities: conditions of poverty, indecent housing, massive unemployment, poor medical care, and inferior education. The idea came about because Black people are not free or equal in this country. Because ninety percent of the men and women in this country’s prisons are Black and Third World. Because ten-year-old children are shot down in our streets. Because dope has saturated our communities, preying on the disillusionment and frustration of our children. The concept of the BLA arose because of the political, social, and economic oppression of Black people in this country. And where there is oppression, there will be resistance.59

According to BLA member Sundiata Acoli, the purpose of the Black Liberation Army was to “defend Black people, and to organize Black people militarily, so they can defend themselves through a people’s army and people’s war.”60 Writing from prison in 1979, BLA member Jalil Muntaqim described the BLA as “a politico-military organization, whose primary objective is to fight for the independence and self-determination of Afrikan people in the United States. The ... BLA evolved out of the now defunct Black Panther Party.”61

A more theoretical statement by the “Coordinating Committee of the Black Liberation Army” issued in 1975 argued that for colonized and oppressed blacks American law was unfair and thus illegitimate:

The BLA has undertaken armed struggle as a means by which the social psychosis of fear, awe, and love of everything white people define as being of value, is purged from our peoples’ minds.... We must clarify revolutionary violence in relationship to our actual condition, because many of our people believe in the “law”... In a society such as exists here today, law is never impartial,

never divorced from the economic relationships that brought it about. History clearly shows that in the course of the development of modern western society, the code of law is the code of the dominant and most powerful class, made into laws for everyone. It is implemented by establishing “special” armed organs, that are obliged to enforce the prevailing class laws.62

Members of the Black Liberation Army participated in a range of insurrectionary actions, mostly against police, through the early 1970s. In a 1979 pamphlet, Jalil Muntaqim listed at least 60 violent confrontations with police for which he claimed BLA members were either responsible or suspected. A few from 1971 alone included: ambushing and killing two police officers and attacking another group of police officers with a hand grenade in New York; robbing a bank and killing a policeman in Atlanta; firing on a police car with a machine gun, and killing a police sergeant in an attack on a police station in San Francisco; robbing a bank, shooting a police officer in his patrol-car, and breaking three BLA members out of prison in Atlanta.63

In principle, guerilla activities like these were not so different from the kinds of armed resistance to the police that the Black Panther Party had advocated all along. Most members of the Party agreed that the United States government was imperialist, oppressive, and needed to be overthrown through violence. They sought to liberate black communities to govern themselves without intervention. They saw police, government officials, and capitalists alike as “pigs” and agents of oppression. Many Panthers were prepared to kill the “pigs” for their freedom.

But politically, direct organization of guerilla warfare was a world apart from the politics of armed self-defense upon which the Black Panther Party had thrived. Unlike the practices of the Black Panther Party of the late 1960s, guerilla warfare in the United States never attracted broad allied support. Most moderate blacks and anti-war activists

viewed such activity as criminal. Guerillas were highly isolated. It was difficult for them to avoid getting killed or caught, and when arrested, they received little legal, or political support from allies in court. It was difficult to obtain financial support for their activities, let alone for their basic survival. They had little means of communicating their perspective to a broad public other than through acts of violence.

Thus, while in principle many Panthers and former Panthers saw the BLA guerillas as heroic, most recognized that guerilla warfare was doomed political strategy. Most stayed away. The few that did go underground and attempt to wage guerilla warfare were heavily repressed with intensive, direct state violence that most U.S. observers believed to be warranted. “By 1974-75,” Muntaqim acknowledged, “the fighting capacity of the Black Liberation Army had been destroyed.”

On a very small scale, some Black Revolutionary Nationalist guerilla activity has persisted, even to this day. Despite the heroism of its proponents in the eyes of its adherents, the impact of such activity has remained negligible at best. Contrary to the experiences of revolutionary African anti-colonial struggles where a black majority suffered political domination by a white minority, in the United States guerilla warfare by revolutionary black nationalists has never achieved broad participation or significant political support.

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Once the Black Panthers could no longer sustain the politics of armed self-defense against the police that had driven the Party’s development, the Party quickly unraveled. In early 1971, the national Party organization deserted the politics of armed self-defense. Repressive actions by the state and violent actions by members continued to thrust the Party into the spotlight, but no longer advocating armed confrontation with the State, this attention became increasingly embarrassing to the national leadership. In 1972, the national Party sought to reign in the local chapters, and consolidate power calling all Panthers to Oakland to build a “base of operations.” Under Elaine Brown’s leadership from 1974-1977, the Oakland Party experienced something of a local renaissance, but no model for building grassroots power that could be followed nationally. Other former Panthers heroically dedicated their lives to guerilla struggle, going underground and seeking to topple the U.S. government through organized armed battle. But they never garnered broader political support, and most were quickly killed, jailed, or disheartened. Despite the heroism of members of both the social democratic and guerilla warfare wings, the Black Panther Party no longer offered a viable pathway to political power, and the organization suffered a long and painful demise, finally closing its last office in 1982.
Conclusion

WHEN IN THE COURSE OF HUMAN EVENTS, IT BECOMES NECESSARY FOR ONE PEOPLE TO DISOLVE THE POLITICAL BONDS WHICH HAVE CONNECTED THEM WITH ANOTHER, AND TO ASSUME AMONG THE POWERS OF THE EARTH, THE SEPARATE AND EQUAL STATION TO WHICH THE LAWS OF NATURE AND NATURE’S GOD ENTITLED THEM, A DECENT RESPECT TO THE OPINIONS OF MANKIND REQUIRES THAT THEY SHOULD DECLARE THE CAUSES WHICH IMPEL THEM TO SEPARATION.

WE HOLD THESE TRUTHS TO BE SELF-EVIDENT, THAT ALL MEN ARE CREATED EQUAL, THAT THEY ARE ENDOWED BY THEIR CREATOR WITH CERTAIN UNALIENABLE RIGHTS, THAT AMONG THESE ARE LIFE, LIBERTY AND THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS. THAT TO SECURE THESE RIGHTS, GOVERNMENTS ARE INSTITUTED AMONG MEN, DERIVING THEIR JUST POWERS FROM THE CONSENT OF THE GOVERNED; THAT WHENEVER ANY FORM OF GOVERNMENT BECOMES Destructive OF THESE ENDS, IT IS THE RIGHT OF THE PEOPLE TO ALTER OR TO ABOLISH IT, AND TO INSTITUTE NEW GOVERNMENT, LAYING ITS FOUNDATION ON SUCH PRINCIPLES AND ORGANIZING ITS POWERS IN SUCH FORM, AS TO THEM SHALL SEEM MOST LIKELY TO EFFECT THEIR SAFETY AND HAPPINESS.

PRUDENCE, INDEED, WILL DICTATE THAT GOVERNMENTS LONG ESTABLISHED SHOULD NOT BE CHANGED FOR LIGHT AND TRANSIENT CAUSES; AND ACCORDINGLY ALL EXPERIENCE HATH SHEWN, THAT MANKIND ARE MORE DISPOSED TO SUFFER, WHILE EVILS ARE SUFFERABLE, THAN TO RIGHT THEMSELVES BY ABOLISHING THE FORMS TO WHICH THEY ARE ACCUSTOMED. BUT WHEN A LONG TRAIN OF ABUSES AND USURPATIONS, PURSUING INVARiABLY THE SAME OBJECT EVINCES A DESIGN TO REDUCE THEM UNDER ABSOLUTE DESPOTISM, IT IS THEIR RIGHT, IT IS THEIR DUTY, TO THROW OFF SUCH GOVERNMENT, AND TO PROVIDE NEW GUARDS FOR THEIR FUTURE SECURITY.

Conclusion

When Civil Rights practices proved incapable of redressing the grievances of young urban blacks in the late 1960s, the Black Panthers armed themselves and promised to overcome poverty and oppression through revolution. They organized the rage of ghetto youth by confronting the police, and resisted repression by winning the support of moderate black, anti-war, and international allies. These allies, like the Party, recognized the limited recourse available for real change through traditional political channels. But as blacks won greater electoral representation, government employment, affirmative action opportunities, as well as elite college and university access; the Vietnam War and military draft wound down; and the U.S. normalized relations with revolutionary governments abroad – it became impossible for the Panthers to continue advocating armed confrontation with the State, and still maintain allied support. The Party, racked by external repression and internal fissures, quickly and disastrously unraveled.

There can be no doubt that individual and organizational contingencies – not least the personal flaws of Newton and Cleaver and the power struggle between them – contributed to the demise of the Black Panthers. But it was not just the Black Panther Party that died in the 1970s. All revolutionary black organizations in the United States declined at the same time.

These revolutionary nationalist organizations drew on long roots. Without the Universal Negro Improvement Association of the 1920s, the Nation of Islam, or the Communist Party, it is hard to imagine the late 1960s emergence of the Revolutionary Action Movement, the Republic of New Africa, or the League of Revolutionary Black Workers, let alone the Black Panther Party. But widespread mobilization along
revolutionary black nationalist lines was unique to the 1960s, and especially to the late 1960s. In every city with a significant black population, hundreds of young blacks took up arms, and committed their lives to revolutionary struggle. That had never happened in the United States before the 1960s. And it has not happened since.

To this day, small cadres in the United States live their lives dedicated to a revolutionary vision. Not unlike the tenets of a religion, a secular revolutionary vision provides these communities with purpose and a moral compass. Some of these revolutionary communities publish their own periodicals, maintain their own websites, collectively feed and school their children, and share housing. But none wields the power to disrupt on a national scale. None is viewed as a serious threat by the Federal Government. And none today compares in scope or political influence to the Black Panther Party during its heyday.

The power the Black Panthers achieved grew out of their politics of armed self-defense. While the Panthers had little financial capital, or institutionalized political power, armed confrontation with the state forcibly asserted their political agenda. They made the customary (and brutal) policing of black ghettos impossible, creating a social crisis. Yet drawing broad legal, political, and financial support from allies, the Party was difficult to repress. The Black Panthers’ capacity to sustain disruption legitimized their revolutionary vision, and attracted members looking to make a real impact.

The Black Panther Party did not spring onto the historical stage fully formed, but grew in stages. Newton and Seale wove together their revolutionary vision from disparate strands. By standing up to police, they found they could organize the rage of young blacks at containment policing and persistent ghettoization. Through their tactic of armed
patrols of the police, they generated a local base of support in the Bay Area by May of 1967. When the California Assembly outlawed these tactics, the Panthers reconceived themselves as a vanguard party, and began advocating violent confrontation with the State. The Detroit and Newark rebellions revealed the depth of rage at ghetto conditions, and showed that many young blacks were ready to pick up arms against the State to redress them. The Panthers had the pulse of the streets. When Newton was arrested on charges of killing a police officer in a late night confrontation in October 1967, the call to Free Huey! became a national and eventually international cause. When Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated the following spring, young people from around the country flooded the Black Panther Party with requests to open new chapters.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Central Intelligence Agency, the Justice Department, and the House Committee on Internal Security all saw the Black Panther Party as a serious threat to “internal security.” Starting in late 1968, the Federal government waged a campaign of brutal repression against the Party, coordinated with local police departments throughout the country.

In 1969, the Panthers made social service, notably feeding free breakfasts to children, the focus of their activities nationally. These programs met real needs, strengthened community support, and gave members meaningful work. They exposed the failures of the Federal War on Poverty, and burnished the image of the Party in the eyes of its allies. In the face of repression, allied support for the Panthers increased.

Nixon won the White House on a “Law and Order” platform in 1969, inaugurating the year of most intense direct repression of the Panthers. But the Party continued to grow in scope and influence. By 1970, the Party had opened offices in sixty-
eight cities. That year the *New York Times* published 1,217 articles on the Party, more
than twice as many as any other year.\(^1\) The Party’s annual budget reached about $1.2
million (in 1970 dollars).\(^2\) And the Party’s own newspaper the *Black Panther* reached a
circulation of 150,000.\(^3\)

The resonance of Panther practices was specific to the times. Many blacks
believed conventional methods were insufficient to redress persistent black exclusion
from municipal hiring, decent education, and political power. Inspired by the Civil Rights
victories, young blacks wanted to extend the Freedom Struggle to challenge black
poverty and ghettoization. As Panthers, they could stand up to police brutality, economic
exploitation, and political exclusion. As Panthers, they extended the Freedom Struggle to
break continuing patterns of racial submissiveness. Panthers would not kowtow to
anyone, not even police. As a result, Panthers inspired black self-esteem. In an
impressive show of racial unity and pride, most black political organizations fiercely
opposed the brutal repression of the Panthers. Even mainstream organizations like the
Urban League and NAACP mobilized against State repression of the Panthers.

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CONCLUSION:
\(^1\) In 1970 *The New York Times* published 1,217 articles containing the text "Black Panther" or "Black
Panthers," more than three per day on average, and more than twice the number published any other year,
according to a search on Proquest Historical Newspapers, 10/27/2010. The 2nd highest coverage was 1971
with 553 stories, and then 1969 with 488 stories. Detailed reading of a systematic sampling of these articles
shows that there is little noise – almost all do actually discuss the Black Panther Party. But many only
mention the Party in passing. A more conservative estimate of coverage, based on the narrower search for
articles in which "Black Panther" or "Black Panther Party" appear in the citation or abstract yields 421
articles for 1970. Using either measure, the findings are robust. In 1970, the Panthers received more than
double the coverage they received any other year. It is interesting to note that this level of coverage is as
high as the level of coverage of leading civil rights organizations during their height. Compare to SCLC,
SNCC, and CORE.
\(^2\) My conservative estimate based on House Committee on Internal Security data.
9-10.
Young men of every race, drafted to fight an unpopular war in Vietnam, found common purpose in the Panthers’ global anti-imperialism. The Panthers drew a line dividing the world in two. They argued that the oppression of draft resisters by the National Guard was the same as oppression of blacks by the police, and the same as the oppression of the Vietnamese by the Marines. Forced to choose sides by the State, many young draftees chose the side of the oppressed. Alienated from the mainstream political leadership that had pursued the war despite popular opposition, many of their friends and family members supported that choice.

The Panthers helped foment a widespread radical challenge in the late 1960s. From riots in the streets to the closing of campuses, challenging of gender and sexual roles, and widespread defiance of the draft, radicals destabilized established rule. The Democratic Party responded by seeking to reconsolidate its Liberal base through initiatives such as advocating an end to the War and championing black electoral representation. The Nixon administration’s response was to repress the radicals, on the one hand, and to make broad concessions to moderates on the other. It was Nixon who rolled back the draft, wound down the war, and advanced affirmative action. In the 1970s, black electoral representation and government hiring ballooned. One effect of these changes was to make broad black and anti-war support for the Panthers difficult to sustain.

By 1970, the Panthers had reached the pinnacle of their influence. The national headquarters worked hard to maintain the flow of allied support. What was once a scrappy local organization was now a major international political force, constantly in the news, with chapters in almost every major city. The thousands of recruits who flocked to
the Party in 1968 and 1969 did not all share the national leadership’s concern with Party discipline. The federal government did what it could through agent provocateurs to undermine Party discipline and alienate allies whenever it could. The countervailing pressures became ever more difficult for the national Party leadership to manage as the Party grew in influence. The eroding bases of allied support made managing these pressures untenable.

It was not the hardcore right wing that mattered here. Rather concessions to blacks and opponents of the war re-established the credibility of liberalism to key constituencies.\(^4\) It was much easier for the parents of young adults to find Tom Wolfe’s parody of Leonard and Felicia Bernstein’s Panther fundraiser funny when they believed their children would not be drafted to die in Vietnam. As long as it had appeared the government would pursue the war irrespective of the public will, killing countless young Americans, the Panthers’ concerns were not so far afield. But the more the Democratic Party fought to end the War, the Nixon Administration rolled back the draft and created affirmative action programs, the U.S. normalized relations with revolutionary governments abroad, and black electoral representation ballooned – the harder it became for the Party to maintain allied support. Eventually, the politics of armed self-defense became impossible.

Without the politics of armed self-defense that had driven the explosive growth of the Black Panther Party for three short years from 1968 to 1970, dedicated

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\(^4\) Some have advanced the formulation that revolution was “in the air” in the late 1960s, and that this was no longer true by the 1970s U.S. While we generally agree, we do not especially favor the subtler implications of this formulation. Much like the “structuralism” of the political opportunity thesis, whether revolution is “in the air” or not is seen as exogenous to movement dynamics. Conversely, in our view, the advent of effective revolutionary political practices makes revolutionary ideology more broadly appealing, putting revolution “in the air.” Thus while the broad political climate has a strong effect on the reception of political practice, it is itself contingent, and highly susceptible to change, often driven by the practices of movement activists themselves.
revolutionaries in the Party were left with a creed and mission – to overthrow capitalism and advance self-governance by communities throughout the world – but no practical avenue to pursue these ends. Despite the heroism of their advocates, neither guerilla warfare nor social democratic practices provided a viable foundation for insurgent politics in the 1970s U.S.

On the one hand, those who attempted to wage guerilla warfare were unrealistic politically. Unlike the Black Panther Party leadership from 1968-1970, they did not hold a coherent grasp of the political realities and possibilities of the times, nor practical means to build power. It is not difficult to see why some turned to guerilla warfare in the 1970s. The Panthers had built power and organization by standing up to the State and challenging the legitimacy of police violence. While the Party stopped advocating armed challenge to the police in 1971, most Panthers continued to see the use of violence by police and other armed officers of the state as illegitimate. Many Panthers were still ready to die fighting for their liberation. As allies deserted the Panthers, the guerilla faction naively sought to advance their cause through armed struggle despite the slim chance of success. After several years of losses, most were either dead or in prison.

Conversely, the social democratic practices of Elaine Brown and others were more realistic to the political possibilities. In Oakland, the Panthers did succeed in using the political clout garnered in the Party’s heyday to build local electoral power. But the Party no longer had any practical basis to build a broad insurgent movement. Unlike the viable insurgent politics of the Panthers in their heyday, the social democratic Panthers could deliver no consequence. They had limited institutionalized power, and no longer
wielded the capacity to disrupt on a large scale, so they advanced no practical basis for a national movement.

The vast literature on the Black Liberation Struggle in the post-war decades concentrates largely on the southern Civil Rights Movement. Our analysis is indebted to that literature as well as a more recent historical scholarship that enlarges both the geographic and temporal scope of analysis. Thomas Sugrue in particular makes important advances, calling attention to the black insurgent mobilizations in the North and West, and to their long durée. This work, however, fails to analyze these mobilizations on their own terms. Instead, this study seeks to assimilate these black insurgencies to a civil rights perspective, presenting the range of black insurgent mobilizations as claims for black citizenship, claims upon the state for full and equal participation. This perspective obscures the revolutionary character and radical economic focus of the Black Panther Party.

A newer generation of "Black Power Scholars," most compellingly Peniel Joseph, challenges this conflation by distinguishing Black Power activism and thought from Civil Rights activism and thought. Joseph argues that the Black Power movement, perhaps epitomized by the Black Panther Party, was distinct in crucial ways from, ran parallel to, and at times intersected with the Civil Rights Movement throughout the twentieth century. We agree that Black Power – and the revolutionary black politics of the Panthers in particular – followed a distinct and coherent logic and in fundamental

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5 Including the work of Martha Biondi, Jack Dougherty, Douglas Flamming, Patrick Jones, Matthew Lassiter, Annelise Orleck, Brian Purnell, Clarence Taylor, and others.
7 Including Matthew Countryman, Judson Jeffries, Jeffery Ogbar, Kimberly Springer, Noliwe Rooks, Rhonda Williams, Yohuru Williams, Komozi Woodard.
ways can best be understood as separate from the Civil Rights Movement. Ideologically and practically, revolutionary Black Nationalism has long roots in previous mobilizations.

Ultimately, however, both of these perspectives do not answer important political questions. What neither approach adequately explains is why revolutionary Black Nationalism – and Black Power mobilization generally – became so influential in the late 1960s, and why it unraveled so disastrously in the 1970s. The Sugrue approach obscures this question by conflating radical Black Power mobilization as part of the Civil Rights Movement. While Joseph’s important corrective acknowledges that Black Power was different in significant ways from Civil Rights, by emphasizing the roots and long durée of Black Power, he obscures and does not adequately explain why Black Power as exemplified by the Black Panther Party became the center of black politics in the late 1960s in a way it never had before or since.

Our analysis shows that, even as Jim Crow was defeated and Civil Rights practices declined in political salience, the revolutionary practices of the Black Panther Party tapped the rage of young blacks. The Panthers provided an insurgent channel for influence, drawing broad support from blacks, opponents of the war, and internationally. The ideological and practical roots of Black Power politics had long been present on the political stage. But to the extent that Panther-like practices may have appealed to young blacks throughout the twentieth century, Panther politics were impractical both before and after the late 1960s. Panther practices could only receive broad political support while the majority opposed to the Vietnam War and draft had no recourse through institutionalized political channels, and most blacks continued to face economic and
political exclusion. The political leverage Panther practices afforded could not be sustained otherwise.

The history of the Black Panther Party holds important implications for two more general theoretical debates. First, this history suggests a way out of dead-end debates on the level of repression most conducive to mobilization. It is often said that “repression breeds resistance.” From this view, when authorities repress insurgency, the repression encourages further resistance. There is a rich scholarly literature that supports this view with findings from various times and places. But conversely, it is often argued that repression discourages and diminishes insurgency. Ironically, there is also a rich scholarly literature that supports this view. A classic sociological position that seeks to reconcile this apparent contradiction proposes that the relationship between repression and insurgency is shaped like an “inverse U”: when repression is light, people tend to cooperate with established political authorities, and take less disruptive action. Conversely, when repression is heavy, the costs of insurgency are too large, and people shy away from insurgency to avoid paying them. But, according to this view, it is when authorities are moderately repressive – too repressive to steer dissenters toward institutional channels of political participation, but not repressive enough to quell dissent – that people widely mobilize disruptive challenges to authority.

The history of the Panthers defies the basic premise of this debate: that the level of repression independently explains the level of resistance. The Black Panther Party

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11 Ted Gurr writes: “the threat and severity of coercive violence used by a regime increases the anger of dissidents, thereby intensifying their opposition, up to some high threshold of government violence beyond which anger gives way to fear.” Why Men Rebel, 1970, p.238. See also Bwy 1968, “Political instability in Latin America” in Latin American Research Review.
faced heavy federally coordinated State repression at least from 1968 through 1971. For the first two years, from 1968 through 1969, our analysis shows that brutal State repression helped to legitimate the Panthers in the eyes of many supporters and fostered increased mobilization. Taken alone, that finding would appear to support the idea that repression breeds resistance. But during the second two years, 1970 and 1971, the dynamic gradually shifts. The Panthers maintain similar types of practices through 1970 and early 1971. And the State maintains a similar level and type of repressive practices. But in this later period, as the political context shifted, repression of the Panthers – coupled with the increasing difficulty of winning support for a revolutionary position – made the core Panther practices difficult to sustain, and quickly led to the Party’s demise.

The level of repression did not independently affect the level of mobilization in a consistent way across the four years. Instead, the level of repression interacted with the political reception of insurgent practices to affect the level of mobilization. In other words, the political reception of Panther insurgent practices by potential allies determined the effects of repression on mobilization. While Panther practices were well-received by potential allies in 1968 and 1969, repressive measures fostered further mobilization. But

12 The periodization is, of course, necessarily imprecise. It was not as if all repressive action by the state failed through December of 1969, and then starting in January 1970 began to work. Instead, the political context gradually shifted over the period making it ever harder for the Panthers to maintain allied support for their politics of armed self-defense against the state. The student mobilizations in May 1970 are a clear example of the limits of the periodization of 1970-1971 as years of failing resilience of the Panthers anti-imperialist politics, yet high consistent with the general analysis. The student anti-war movement had been gradually moderating by the Fall of 1969 and into 1970. But the hypocrisy of Nixon’s Cambodia invasion given promises of Vietnamization, and then especially the killing of students at Kent State in early May shattered the Liberal reverie. The broad national student mobilization in insurgent anti-imperialist terms showed how fragile the moderation of the anti-war movement was, and how important full repeal of the draft and ending of the War would be to put it to rest.
as potential allies became less open to the Panthers’ revolutionary position in 1970 and 1971, repressive actions by the State became increasingly effective.¹³

Second, our analysis suggests a way forward in stalled debates concerning the political opportunity thesis that broad structural opportunities, by conferring political advantage on a social group, generate mobilization. The political opportunity thesis has made a crucial contribution to social movements sociology in recent decades by centering the importance of political context for explaining mobilization.¹⁴ But attention to political context in isolation does not provide much explanatory power here. From the classic political opportunity perspective, the late 1960s are usually seen as the period in which the civil rights movement declined, and thus a period of contracting political opportunities for blacks generally. That perspective obscures, rather than illuminating, why even as the Civil Rights Movement fell apart, revolutionary black nationalism developed and thrived.

Recovering lost insights from early political process writings by Doug McAdam and Aldon Morris about the importance of tactical innovation for explaining mobilization,¹⁵ we designed this study to focus on the development of Panther political practice and influence. Rather than independently determining the extent of mobilization,

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¹³ More recent consideration of the relationship between repression and insurgency has also sought to transcend the narrow debate on the relationship between repression and mobilization. Davenport, Johnston, and Mueller, eds. Repression and Mobilization 2005 seek to further explore the divergence of outcomes, building on the classic works introducing new variables such as the quality of repression, and accounting for lag effects. In a still influential article Lichbach “Deterrence or Escalation?,” Journal of Conflict Resolution 1987 argues that a rational actor model which accounts for the relative return to dissent can explain whether repression will deter mobilization, or encourage it. We agree with the general point that the level of mobilization in terms of a particular set of practices depends upon its perceived efficacy by proponents. But Lichbach’s model makes a number of simplifying assumptions which limit its ability to account for the Panther case. Most importantly, Lichbach does not account for how the broader political context can affect efficacy. In our view, the receptivity of potential allies to a particular set of insurgent practices is crucial in determining the effects of repression.


our findings support the theory that political context determines the efficacy of particular insurgent practices. The stepwise history of the development of Black Panther mobilization and influence demonstrates the ways that the salience of practices depended on the political context. Panther insurgent practices – specifically armed self-defense – generated both influence and following when they were simultaneously disruptive and difficult to repress. Conversely, the Panthers became much more repressible when the political context shifted, making it harder for the Party to practice armed self-defense and still sustain allied support. This history suggests that insurgent movements develop when activists develop practices that: (1) garner leverage by threatening the interests of powerful authorities; and (2) simultaneously draw allied support in resistance to repression. Conversely, when concessions undermine the support of potential allies for those practices, the insurgency is destroyed.¹⁶

There is no movement like the Panthers today because the political context is so different. This is not to say that the core grievances around which the Panthers mobilized no longer exist. To the contrary, large segments of the black population continue to live impoverished in ghettos, subject to containment policing, sending more sons to prison than to college. Many young people in these neighborhoods very well might embrace a revolutionary political practice today if it could be sustained. But crucially, what have changed are the conditions for potential allies.

The black middle-class has greatly expanded. Its sons and daughters have achieved access to the elite colleges and universities. Black public sector employment has expanded dramatically: city governments and municipal police and fire departments hire

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many blacks. Blacks have won and institutionalized electoral power both locally and nationally. Most blacks in the U.S. today, especially the black middle-class, believe their interests can be redressed through traditional political and economic channels. Most view insurgency as no longer necessary, and do not feel threatened by State repression of insurgent challengers.

No less important, there is no military draft today, and no draft resistance. The current wars in Iraq and Afghanistan may be unpopular, but few will risk years in jail to oppose them. There is no New Left today to take a Black Panther Party as its Vanguard. Internationally, the struggles for national independence have almost all been won – the vast majority of the world’s population is no longer colonized if not yet truly free. Today, with few potential allies, it would be easy for the State to repress any revolutionary black organization that confronted it like the Panthers did in the late 1960s, no matter how disciplined and organized.

The broader question is why no revolutionary movement of any kind exists in the United States today? To untangle this question, it is useful to consider what makes a movement revolutionary. Here, the writings of the Italian theorist and revolutionary Antonio Gramsci are instructive. Gramsci writes: “A theory is ‘revolutionary’ precisely to the extent that it is an element of conscious separation and distinction into two camps and is a peak inaccessible to the enemy camp.”\textsuperscript{17} In other words, a revolutionary theory splits the world in two. It says that the people in power and the institutions they manage are the cause of oppression and injustice. A revolutionary theory purports to explain how to overcome those iniquities. It claims that oppression is inherent in the dominant social institutions. Further, it asserts that nothing can be done, from within the dominant social

\textsuperscript{17} Antonio Gramsci, \textit{Prison Notebooks}, 1971 p. 462.
institutions, to rectify the problem: that the dominant social institutions must be
overthrown. In this sense, any revolutionary theory is an element of conscious separation
into two camps. It divides the world into two: those who seek to reproduce the existing
social arrangements; and those who seek to overthrow them.

In this first, ideational sense, on a very small scale, many insurgent revolutionary
movements do exist in the United States today. From sectarian socialist groups to
nationalist separatists, these revolutionary mini-movements have two things in common:
(1) a theory that calls for destruction of the social world as it is and advances an
alternative trajectory; (2) cadres of members who have dedicated their lives to advance
this alternative, see the revolutionary community as their moral reference point, and see
themselves as categorically different from everyone else who does not.

More broadly, in Gramsci’s view, a movement is revolutionary politically to the
extent that it poses an effective challenge. In Gramsci’s view, such a revolutionary
movement must be first and foremost creative, rather than arbitrary. It must seize the
political imagination and credibly promise to address the grievances of large segments of
the population, creating a “concrete phantasy which acts on a dispersed and shattered
people to arouse and organise its collective will.”18 But when a movement succeeds at
doing this, the dominant political coalition usually defeats the challenge through the twin
means of repression and concession. The ruling alliance does not simply crush political
challenges directly through the coercive power of the state, but makes concessions that
re-consolidate their political power without undermining their basic interests.19 A

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revolutionary movement only becomes significant politically when it is able to win the
loyalty of allies, articulating a broader insurgency.\textsuperscript{20}

In this second, political sense, there are no revolutionary movements in the United
States today. There are moments of large-scale popular mobilization. Some such recent
movements, such as the mass immigrant rights mobilizations in 2006, have been
“creative,” seizing the imagination of large segments of the population. It would appear
that the housing collapse, recession, State government insolvency, and bailout of the
wealthy institutions and individuals most responsible for creating the financial crisis at
the expense of almost everyone else provide fertile conditions for a broad insurgent
politics. But as of this writing, it is an open question as to whether any broad, let alone
revolutionary, challenge will be created. Recent movements have not sustained
insurgency, have not advanced a revolutionary vision, and have not articulated a broader
alliance to challenge established political power.

In our assessment, for the years 1968 to 1970, the Black Panther Party was
revolutionary in Gramsci’s sense, both ideationally and politically. Ideationally, young
Panthers dedicated their lives to the revolution because – as part of a global revolution
against empire – they believed that they could transform the world. The revolutionary
vision of the Party became the moral center of the Panther community. To stand on the
sidelines or die an enemy of the Panther revolution was to be “lighter than a feather”: to
be on the wrong side of history. To die for the Panther revolution was to be “heavier than
a mountain”: to be the vanguard of the future.\textsuperscript{21} What distinguished the Black Panther

\textsuperscript{20} Thus making strides in what Gramsci calls the “War of Position.” Gramsci, “The State and Civil
\textsuperscript{21} Huey P. Newton, “Statement by Huey P. Newton, Minister of Defense of the Black Panther Party,
Supreme Servant of the People at the Chicago Illinois Coliseum, February 21, 1971,” reproduced in \textit{Black

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Party from countless politically insignificant revolutionary cadres was that it was creative politically. For a few years, the Party seized the political imagination of a large constituency of young black people. More than that, the Party articulated this revolutionary movement of young blacks to a broader oppositional movement, drawing allied support from more moderate blacks, and opponents of the War of every race.

Expanding black electoral representation, government employment, affirmative action opportunities, as well as elite college and university access; Democratic Party opposition to the Vietnam War; and Nixon’s rolling back of the draft and advance of affirmative action – opened institutionalized channels for redressing the interests of key Panther supporters, and undercut the political salience of Panther practices. When the political foundation of the Black Panther Party collapsed in early 1971, the practices that had won them so much influence became futile. No Panther faction was able to effectively re-invent itself.

Even as concessions drew off allied support, the state sought to vilify the Party, driving a wedge between Panthers and their allies. Ultimately, nothing did more to vilify the Panthers than the widely publicized evidence of intra-organizational violence and corruption as the Party unraveled. This made any attempt to replicate the earlier Panther revolutionary nationalism especially futile. Any such attempt was now vulnerable to provocation and vilification. The political “system” had been inoculated.22

22 Our findings generally support the Michelsian “Iron Law of Oligarchy” argument advanced by Piven and Cloward in Poor People’s Movements (Vintage 1977), but with an important difference. Piven and Cloward argue that there is an inherent tension between the power of insurgency to advance poor people’s interests, and the tendency of organizations claiming to champion these interests yet eschewing disruption and beholden to elites who fund them. This dichotomy can be readily recognized in the tension we found between the increasing impetus for the national Panther organization to maintain its reputation amongst potential allies, and the anti-authoritarianism of many Panther members. Our argument departs somewhat

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Panther Newspaper, April 10, 1971 p.2. Note that the revolutionary ideology of the Party persisted beyond its wide political influence. Newton made this statement as the Party began to collapse in early 1971.
While mini-movements abound that are revolutionary ideologically, there is no politically significant revolutionary movement in the United States today because no cadre of revolutionaries has developed ideas and practices that credibly advance the interests of a large segment of the people. Members of revolutionary sects can hawk their newspapers on college campuses until they are blue in the face, but they remain politically irrelevant. Islamist insurgencies, with deep political roots abroad, are politically significant. But they lack potential constituencies in the U.S. And ironically, at least in the terrorist variant, they tend to reinforce rather than challenge State Power domestically because their practices threaten – rather than build common cause with – alienated constituencies within the U.S.

There will not be a revolutionary movement of political significance in the United States again until a group of revolutionaries develops insurgent practices that seize the political imagination of a large segment of the people, and successively draw broad support from other constituencies, creating an insurgent alliance that is difficult to repress.

from Piven and Cloward, however, in our assessment of the way social structure affects insurgency. Piven and Cloward see social dislocation driving the emergence of insurgency. Insurgency, they write, is “always short-lived,” and “those brief periods in which people are roused to indignation” soon subsiding as the social dislocation resolves (xxi). This perspective, consistent with the political opportunity thesis discussed above, overly credits the independent role of structure and psychosocial discontent in determining mobilization. Where we revise Piven and Cloward’s “Iron Law” argument is by centering practice. Structural dislocations may generate discontent and destabilize existing roles and relations, but they do not independently generate insurgency. Insurgency requires insurgent practices that effectively leverage political cleavages. Our analysis of Black Panther history then shows why insurgency is short lived. Concessions ameliorate the political cleavages the insurgency leverages, undermining support for insurgent practices. While in the case of the Civil Rights Movement, the concessions directly redressed the targets of insurgency, and civil rights organizations became part of the establishment, the “Iron Law of Oligarchy” played out differently with the Panthers. Concessions redressed the interests of Panther allies. The costs of appeasing allies thus made continued insurgency impossible, and the national organization de-fanged itself, even as some insurgent membership threw caution to the wind and fought until dead or jailed. We don’t believe that indignation simply waned, nor that the social structure re-stabilized so forcefully as to incapacitate all insurgency. To the contrary, in many historical moments, like the late 1960s United States where Revolutionary Black Nationalism erupted even as the Civil Rights Movement declined, new forms of insurgency emerge even as old forms are incapacitated.
or appease. This has not happened in the United States since the heyday of the Black Panther Party, and may not happen again for a very long time.
***** Conclusion *****
Opportunities for Practices: The Black Insurgency Revisited

In the preceding chapters, I have tested the capacity of a practice centered theory of social movements against the prevailing theories for explaining the timing and extent of insurgent mobilization within three discrete phases of postwar Black Liberation Struggle in the United States. The analysis has demonstrated that in each wave, the timing, extent, character, and consequences of black insurgency all follow the development of powerful insurgent practices. In each wave, unique insurgent practices harnessed the power of disruption, and leveraged historically specific political cleavages to draw broad allied support. In each wave, people across the country, many with no prior relationship, emulated the effective insurgent practices, mobilizing and sustaining insurgency in the face of brutal repression.

The primary theoretical contribution of the dissertation is to advance a new practice-centered theory of insurgent social movements. The social movements field in Sociology has reached consensus that both the structuralist classical models upon which the field developed so rapidly in recent decades (McAdam 1982; McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1996; Tarrow 1994; Tilly 1978) and culturalist critiques (Jasper 1999; Goodwin and Jasper 2004) are insufficient (Goodwin and Jasper 2012; McAdam and Boudet 2012; McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001). The field has recognized the centrality of diffusion processes (Andrews and Biggs 2006; Givan, Roberts and Soule 2010) and moved towards more dynamic mid-range theories (especially following McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001). But no coherent and testable rival paradigm for analyzing insurgent social movements has yet emerged.

This dissertation has demonstrated that each wave of black insurgency was not generated by independent structural forces, nor by the strength of organizations or the talent of leaders. Instead, the development of powerful insurgent leaders and organizations follow the proliferation
of novel insurgent practices suited to leverage historically unique political cleavages in each wave. Insurgent power derives from insurgent practices that draw support from powerful allies even as they threaten the interests of institutionalized authorities. When insurgents develop such a set of practices, both disruptive and difficult to repress in a given historic context, they open a pathway of insurgency, and mobilization proliferates in terms of those insurgent practices. Concessions by authorities, in turn, reconfigured both racial and political institutions, undercutting the resilience of insurgent practices, and de-escalating each insurgency. Social movement scholars forged the prevailing social movement theories in explaining the black insurgency. This analysis demonstrates the capacity of pathways of insurgency theory to more accurately and parsimoniously account for the vast scope of historical evidence concerning this original case. Thus it advances a research program that promises to improve explanation of insurgent social movements in other times and places.

Liberation Struggle in the postwar decades. I demonstrate that each of the three waves followed a unique if parallel dynamic and trajectory. Broader black politics and organizations followed in the wake of each wave in turn, building on the power each insurgent movement harnessed.

I began work on this dissertation with a preliminary set of theoretical ideas about the limits of prevailing social movement theories, and the promise of a practice centered theory of insurgency. My theory building strategy has been to develop and extend the practice centered theory by applying and testing it against prevailing movement theories in my analysis of each phase of postwar Black Liberation Struggle. Rather than an abstract pedagogical exercise, I sought to use each step in the analysis to engage and shape scholarly debates. Towards that end, I wrote each part with the aim of making an independent scholarly contribution.

While each section of the dissertation makes its own contribution, the warrant for each case is ultimately to contribute to the development of a novel practice-centered theoretical framework for analyzing insurgent social movements. Thus while this conclusion emphasizes the overarching conclusions and theoretical contributions of the dissertation as a whole, I begin by briefly reporting in turn the specific findings of each substantive part.

Part I analyzes the Black Anticolonialist insurgency which rose to influence immediately after WWII, focusing on the pivotal year 1946. This part analyzes why President Harry Truman, initially an apologist for the slow pace of racial reform in 1945-6, suddenly become an avid advocate of civil rights. Classic treatments argue that macro-structural forces caused Truman’s civil rights advocacy, generating the opportunity for insurgency by blacks as a group. But Event Structure Analysis reveals how Black Anti-colonialist practices seized opportunities afforded by the earlier Progressive Challenge to compel Truman to adopt civil rights advocacy. Civil rights advocacy, in turn, allowed Truman to repress Black Anti-colonialist practices even while setting the stage for the Civil Rights Movement to come. Different forms of insurgent practice seized opportunities created by different institutional cleavages, rather than the same opportunities advantaging all insurgency by a social group.
The methodological supplement in this part systematically develops the novel theoretically guided application of the method of Event Structure Analysis (ESA) applied to analyze Truman’s adoption of civil rights advocacy. ESA is a formal method of historical analysis which combines the strengths of narrative history with those of formal sociological analysis. The classic method of applying ESA most fully explicated in print (Griffin 1993; Griffin and Korstad 1998; Heise 1989) uses informal narrative to bound events for analysis. ESA as classically applied is well suited to rigorous probing of an expert’s narrative understanding of an event, but poorly suited to targeted testing of general theories of prior concern, and thus “does not answer questions analysts might wish to ask of their data” (Griffin 2007: 5). Conversely, many sociological analyses – and almost all variable based analyses – begin with general theoretical questions, and empirical indicators identified as representative of general theoretical concepts. Such “theoretically guided” identification of empirical indicators allows the analyst to use the empirical analysis to probe general theories of prior concern, or to test one general theory’s explanatory power against rival theories. While important studies have applied ESA in theoretically guided ways, such application has not been fully explicated. This methodological supplement serves to explicate theoretically guided applications of ESA.

Part II applies pathways of insurgency theory to a quantitative analysis of the Civil Rights Movement. Building on institutional statism and constructivist insights, I propose that when insurgents contest the legitimacy of a social institution with highly disruptive practices, the repression of which is threatening to powerful allies, mobilization escalates. If so, it should be possible to retrodict subsequent levels of insurgent mobilization based on such dynamics. For a stringent test, I evaluate these competing approaches on the political opportunity thesis’s foundational case – the civil rights movement. I demonstrate that civil rights practices, by
drawing brutal repression and forcing Federal intervention, created a referendum on caste subordination. I conduct graphic, OLS, and event history tests using the Stanford dataset. I find that dynamic retrodiction better explains the timing and level of civil rights mobilization.

Part III applies pathways of insurgency theory to a narrative analysis of the leading revolutionary black nationalist organization, the Black Panther Party. The sections in this part analyze in turn the major phases of the political development of the Black Panther Party. Section 1, “Organizing Rage,” analyzes the period through May of 1967, tracing the Party’s development of its ideology of black anti-imperialism and its preliminary tactic of policing the police. Section 2, “Baptism in Blood,” analyzes the Party’s rise to national influence through 1968, during which time it reinvented the politics of armed self-defense, championed black community self-determination, and promoted armed resistance to the state. Section 3, “Resilience,” and Section 4, “Revolution Has Come!” analyze the period through 1969 and 1970 when the Party was at the height of its power, proliferating community service programs and continuing to expand armed resistance in the face of the state’s intensified repression. These sections unpack the dynamics of repression and response in three cities—Los Angeles, Chicago, and New Haven—showing how the Panthers attracted support from multiracial allies at home and from revolutionary movements and governments abroad and explaining why Black Panther insurgent practices were irrepressible. Section 5, “Concessions and Unraveling,” analyzes the demise of the Black Panther Party in the 1970s, showing how state concessions and broad political transformations undercut the Party’s resilience. During this period, the Black Panthers divided along ideological lines, with neither side able to sustain the politics that had driven the Party’s development.

Part III holds important implications for two general theoretical debates. First, this history suggests a way out of dead-end debates about how the severity of repression affects
social movement mobilization. One common perspective, supported by a rich scholarly literature covering various times and places, is that “repression breeds resistance”: When authorities repress insurgency, the repression encourages further resistance. But others pose the opposite argument, with equally rich scholarly support, suggesting that repression discourages and diminishes insurgency. A classic sociological position that seeks to reconcile this apparent contradiction is that the relationship between repression and insurgency is shaped like an “inverse U”: When repression is light, people tend to cooperate with established political authorities and take less disruptive action; when repression is heavy, the costs of insurgency are too large, causing people to shy away from radical acts. But, according to this view, it is when authorities are moderately repressive—too repressive to steer dissenters toward institutional channels of political participation but not repressive enough to quell dissent—that people widely mobilize disruptive challenges to authority.

Part III defies the basic premise of this debate: that the level of repression independently explains the level of resistance. The Black Panther Party faced heavy federally coordinated state repression at least from 1968 through 1971. The analysis shows that for the first two years, from 1968 through 1969, brutal state repression helped legitimate the Panthers in the eyes of many supporters and fostered increased mobilization. But during the second two years, 1970 and 1971, the dynamic gradually shifted. The Panthers maintained the same types of practices they had embraced in the previous two years, and the state maintained a similar level and type of repressive practices. But in this later period, as the political context shifted—increasing the difficulty of winning support for the Panthers’ revolutionary position—repression made the core Panther practices difficult to sustain and quickly led to the Party’s demise.

The level of repression did not independently affect the level of mobilization in a consistent way across the four years. Instead, the level of repression interacted with the political reception of insurgent practices to affect the level of mobilization. In other words, potential allies’ political reception of Panther insurgent practices determined the effects of repression on mobilization.
The analysis in Part III also suggests a way forward in stalled debates of the political opportunity thesis that broad structural opportunities, by conferring political advantage on a social group, generate mobilization. Recovering lost insights from early political process writings by Doug McAdam and Aldon Morris about the importance of tactical innovation for explaining mobilization, Part III shows that political context, rather than independently determining the extent of mobilization, determines the efficacy of particular insurgent practices. The stepwise history of the Black Panther Party’s mobilization and influence demonstrates that the relative effectiveness of its practices depended on the political context. Panther insurgent practices—specifically armed self-defense—generated both influence and following when they were both disruptive and difficult to repress. But the Panthers became much more repressible when the political context shifted, making it harder for the Party to practice armed self-defense and sustain allied support. This history suggests that insurgent movements develop when activists develop practices that simultaneously garner leverage by threatening the interests of powerful authorities and draw allied support in resistance to repression. Conversely, when concessions undermine the support of potential allies for those practices, the insurgency dies out.

Pathways of Insurgency Theory

The remainder of this conclusion draws comparatively on evidence from the three phases of postwar Black Liberation Struggle to advance a more refined practice-centered general theory of insurgent social movements. First, I synthesize and diagram the insurgent dynamics for each phase of postwar black insurgency. Then, drawing parallels and contrasts across these phases, I more fully articulate a general practice-centered theory of insurgent social movements.

Black Anti-colonialism

One of the implications of the classic political opportunity thesis, and the group actor assumption upon which it is founded, is that insurgent mobilization by a social group depends
upon earlier expansion of political opportunity for that group. In the case of the Civil Rights Movement, Presidential support for civil rights is widely seen as a telling indicator of expanding political opportunity for blacks. Harry Truman was the first U.S. President to vocally advocate civil rights for Blacks. With a focus on explaining the Civil Rights Movement, and built upon a group actor assumption, most historical accounts have viewed Truman’s actions as temporally and analytically prior to black insurgency.

Instead, Truman’s adoption of civil rights advocacy undermined one form of Black insurgency – Black Anti-colonialism – even as it made Civil Rights insurgency possible. That changes in the political context may cause the demobilization of one form of insurgency even as they facilitate another form of mobilization by a similar group suggests that the effects of political context on insurgent mobilization are practice specific – rather than conferring political advantage on a group generally as group actor analyses assume.

_Truman’s Civil Rights Advocacy_

In the second half of his first term, in a dramatic departure from earlier policies, Harry S. Truman, the pragmatic President from Missouri who continued in private to express racial attitudes that would make vehement White supremacists proud, adopted strong measures of civil rights advocacy. He met with anti-Lynching activists in September 1946, and created the President’s Committee on Civil Rights (PCCR) in December. In the following 2 years, he became the first President to ever speak forcefully to Congress and in front of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) for civil rights, his PCCR released the first ever high level government report extensively documenting repression of Blacks and recommending an extensive platform for civil rights reform. Drawing on the PCCR recommendations, he introduced amicus curiae briefs to the Supreme Court in support of
desegregation, proposed legislation to abolish the poll tax and end lynching, and issued executive orders to create racial equality in Federal hiring, and to desegregate the military. While liberal Congressmen had advocated civil rights before this time and measures such as anti-lynching legislation generally earned wide support in opinion polls, no President including Truman’s Progressive and charismatic predecessor Franklin Delano Roosevelt had actively supported civil rights. Civil rights scholars widely view federal civil rights advocacy, first established by Truman, as necessary to the emergence of the civil rights movement in the 1950s (Lawson 1976; Marable 1991; McAdam 1982).

Standard analyses have focused on the importance of broad social processes, such as the decline of the Southern cotton economy and the emergence of cold war foreign policy pressures, in explaining Truman’s adoption of civil rights advocacy. But while many authors credit the Truman administration with laying the foundation for future civil rights insurgency, the group actor assumption has obscured the ways that an earlier wave of Black Anti-colonialist insurgents compelled the Truman administration to adopt civil rights advocacy, or the effects of that policy shift on the earlier wave of insurgents. From 1945-1950, Black Anti-colonialists petitioned the United Nations for international military intervention against lynching and social subordination in the U.S., and mobilized street protests, asserting common cause with liberation struggles in Africa and Asia, challenging President Truman’s global leadership and attempting to split the Democratic Party.

How Black Anti-colonialists compelled Truman’s to adopt civil rights advocacy

Truman adopted civil rights advocacy as a concession to Black Anti-colonialism. Black Anti-colonialists appealed to the UN for international intervention against lynching, attempted to split Black voters from the Democratic Party, and organized protests publicly denouncing US
race relations in internationalist terms. These actions were especially threatening to Truman’s efforts to develop alliances with emerging national independence movements as he embarked on Cold War competition with Soviets, and his attempt to hold together FDR’s Democratic Party alliance in the face of a strong Progressive 3rd Party challenge. Black Anti-colonial insurgent practices, by disrupting Truman’s domestic and foreign policy agenda in ways that garnered broad allied support and thus were difficult to repress, compelled Truman to adopt measures of civil rights advocacy.

Black Anti-colonial insurgency preceded Truman’s civil rights advocacy in 1945-6, and it declined even as Truman’s civil rights advocacy peaked in late 1948. As WWII drew to a close, Black political leaders such as Walter White, Executive Director of the NAACP, sought to frame the Black domestic challenge in anti-colonial terms: “World War II has given to the Negro a sense of kinship with other colored – and also oppressed – peoples of the world … the struggle of the Negro in the United States is part and parcel of the struggle against imperialism and exploitation in India, China, Burma, Africa, the Philippines, Malaya, the West Indies, and South America.”

Insurgent Black Anti-colonial politics built upon the Black labor and political institutions developed during the Depression and WWII, such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) which, with its grassroots anti-lynching crusade, grew explosively from a relatively small organization before the war to a national political player with 1,509 branches and more than 580,000 members by 1947. Both the NAACP and the National Negro Congress (NNC) petitioned the UN for international intervention to overcome racist human rights abuse in the United States. Widely reported anti-lynching protests called attention to the hypocrisy of US world leadership given racial injustice at home. The Council on African Affairs (CAA) and Black Anti-Colonial conferences in London and New York brought

together anti-colonial leaders such as Nehru, Nkrumah and Kenyatta with Black leaders from the U.S. to plan common strategies. The Black Press flourished with Black controlled newspapers achieving publication in most major cities with the largest – the Chicago Defender and the Pittsburgh Courier – reaching national distributions in the hundreds of thousands after the war.

The Black Press ubiquitously denounced colonialism in these years and the Truman administration’s support of France and Britain, often making the analogy between Nazi Fascism, European colonialism, and the subjugation of Blacks in the US. Most major Black political leaders, including Walter White, A. Philip Randolph, Paul Robeson, Max Yergan, W.E.B. DuBois, and Mary MacLeod Bethune allied with progressives in labor and leading New Dealers to mobilize support for a liberal split with the Democratic Party and exploring the creation of an anti-colonial and anti-racist Progressive 3rd Party. And then, even as Truman’s civil rights advocacy reached its peak in 1948, Black Anti-colonial politics declined.

**Key Political Dynamics**

Detailed and systematic analysis shows that the way that Black Anti-colonialist anti-lynching protests dovetailed with black 3rd Party efforts was crucial to compelling Truman to advocate for civil rights. In the context of the split in the Democratic Party, these insurgent practices threatened Truman’s attempts to hold together FDRs New Deal coalition. First, the Truman administration response to anti-lynching efforts increased as the 3rd Party threat was mobilized. Second, testimony from Truman aides shows that he made a radical change in course in November and December 1946 because the 1946 mid-term elections convinced him that his conservative political strategy was not working and would cost him the Presidency in 1948. The sequence of Truman policy shifts on not only civil rights but labor and economic policy in 1947 all support this assessment. Third, it is only when Walter White and the NAACP mobilized
explicitly with his Progressive allies in the wake of Truman’s increasing tension with Wallace and the Progressives that Truman met with White and a delegation of anti-lynching Progressives including high ranking officials of both the CIO and the AFL. Truman then proceeded to appoint many of these Progressive NAACP allies to the PCCR with White’s involvement suggesting the importance to his administration of addressing specifically Progressive mobilization. Finally, Truman’s antagonistic treatment of Paul Robeson showed that he was less interested in black political perspectives on lynching or short-term publicity in the Black Press, showing instead the importance not only of White’s allies, but of his willingness to adopt a position friendly to the Cold War. In short, Truman might have championed Cold War liberalism as a response to the Progressive Challenge without any black insurgent pressure. But he would not have made civil rights advocacy a central plank if not for the Black Anti-colonial insurgency.

Rather than fostering black insurgency, as Truman adopted civil rights advocacy and created strong alliances with Walter White, A. Philip Randolph, Max Yergan, and other key black leaders, Black Anti-colonialism was repressed and destroyed. When W.E.B. DuBois vocally supported the Wallace Progressive 3rd Party campaign in 1948 on anti-colonial grounds, Walter White, now working closely with Truman, expelled DuBois from the NAACP. Max Yergan the director of the BAC Council on African Affairs (CAA) of which Paul Robeson was President, also made an alliance with Truman and attempted to take over the CAA. The battle raged from February-September of 1948.

Once Truman consolidated the Cold War Liberal alliance and beat back the Progressive challenge in the 1948 elections, his administration unleashed full repression on the remaining BAC leadership. The Federal Government seized Robeson and DuBois’s passports and forbade them from traveling internationally. CAA was charged under the Foreign Registration Act as a
foreign agent for its relationship with the South African, Kenyan, and Nigerian independence movements. Alphaeus Hunton was imprisoned and eventually the CAA was crushed, unable to keep up with court costs. Du Bois was indicted in 1950 and prosecuted for his work with the Peace Information Center opposing the Korean War.

Important Black Anti-colonial organizations, such as the CAA, collapsed, but those that remained, such as the NAACP, deserted both their anti-colonial ideas and the insurgent political practices of which they were a part. The Black Press followed. And for the next 8 years there was little progress on civil rights.

By linking their cause to the Progressive Challenge, Black anti-colonialists leveraged cleavages in the Democratic Party coalition, making their movement difficult to repress, and compelling Truman to adopt civil rights advocacy as part of forging a new Cold War Liberal coalition. Once Truman had championed civil rights advocacy, however, he was able to easily repress the Black Anti-colonial insurgency. At the same time, Truman’s civil rights advocacy generated new cleavages that would prove crucial to the Civil Rights insurgency a decade later – the split between the National Democratic Party leadership and Dixiecrats wedded to Jim Crow.

*Opportunities for Black Anti-Colonial Practices*

As group actor analysts have suggested, macro-structural processes, such as the decline of cotton sharecropping and urban migration of blacks, undoubtedly destabilized Jim Crow and powerfully shaped the political dynamics in which black insurgency developed throughout the postwar decades. Indeed macro-structural processes made some transformation in the social position of blacks inevitable. And both sets of political cleavages which the Black Anti-colonialists and the Civil Rights insurgents leveraged – the Progressive Challenge and the National Democratic Party/Dixiecrat split respectively – can potentially be seen as meso-level
expressions of the same macro-structural processes. But variation in the slow and steady rate at which such macro-structural processes developed does not correspond with, let alone explain, the ebb and flow of black insurgency over the period.

Instead, black insurgency can be better explained by disaggregating black insurgency by practice. Black Anti-colonialism expressed different claims, aimed at different targets, opposed different authorities, employed different tactics, drew support from different allies, and mobilized different constituencies than the Civil Rights Movement. And it leveraged different political cleavages as well.

It was the interaction between an insurgent practice and a political cleavage – namely Black Anti-colonial practices and the Progressive Challenge – that generated insurgent influence. The Progressive Challenge did not confer advantage on all black insurgent politics generally. Instead, it created a specific opportunity for Black Anti-colonial insurgent practice. Truman’s adoption of civil rights advocacy sutured the cleavage upon which Black Anti-colonialism depended even as it opened a new cleavage upon which Civil Rights insurgents would mobilize a decade later. Explanation of the timing and extent of insurgent influence requires attention to the ways that particular insurgent practices leverage historically specific political cleavages.

[*** Diagram 4-1 about here. ***]

It is widely recognized that Truman’s adoption of civil rights advocacy helped lay the foundation for the Civil Rights Movement to come. But the relationship between Black Anti-colonialism and Truman’s adoption of civil rights advocacy raises two serious problems for political opportunity theory. First, Black Anti-colonial insurgency preceded Truman’s civil rights advocacy so Truman’s civil rights advocacy cannot reflect the initial opening of opportunities for black insurgency generally as previous analysts have assumed. Second, if Truman’s civil rights
advocacy had contributed to the expansion of political opportunity for black insurgency generally as group actor analyses have argued, then why did Black insurgency decline even as Truman’s civil rights advocacy peaked in the late 1940s? Given that Truman’s adoption of civil rights advocacy undermined Black Anti-colonial mobilization even as it lay the foundation for civil rights advocacy, we can expect that other political changes might be conducive to one form of insurgency even as they undercut another form of insurgency by members of a similar group. Against the idea that political opportunities are conducive to insurgent mobilization by a group generally, it is more fruitful to center on historically specific practices rather than pre-configured groups and theorize political context as a terrain of struggle – conducive to some insurgent practices, and not to others.

The Civil Rights Movement
In the early 1960s, Civil Rights insurgents physically defied the legal and customary segregation of public spaces and challenged de facto disenfranchisement in the South. They drew brutal repression by local authorities and white mobs prompting Federal response. Drawing repression was an intentional element of the strategy. Martin Luther King, Jr. explained: “Instead of submitting to surreptitious cruelty in thousands of dark jail cells on countless shadowed street corners, [the southern black] would force his oppressor to commit his brutality openly – in the light of day – with the rest of the world looking on” (King 1963b, p. 27).\textsuperscript{1211} Intentional disruption, repressive action, and Federal response are evident in all the major civil rights campaigns during the movement’s heyday in the early 1960s.

On February 1, 1960, four black college students sat down at the segregated “Whites Only” lunch counter at Woolworth’s in Greensboro, North Carolina, and politely asked to be

\textsuperscript{1211} King expressed similar ideas on many occasions in many different ways. For example, see also King 1963a; King 1967, p.185.
served. Word spread, and in the months that followed, tens of thousands of others followed their example at lunch counters throughout the South to be arrested by police, beaten by white mobs, and locked out by restaurant managers closing shop (Andrews and Biggs 2006; Carson 1981; Chafe 2003). The students had arrived at an insurgent practice that, in its historical context, was neither possible to ignore, nor easy to repress. Pushed by reporters, President Eisenhower told the *Baltimore Afro-American* that he was “deeply sympathetic with the efforts of any group to enjoy the rights, the rights of equality that they are guaranteed by the Constitution” (1960).

Drawing lessons from the sit-ins, the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) organized the Freedom Rides of 1961 with the intention to provoke arrests by local authorities. The violent repression of Freedom Riders that ensued drew widespread support to the movement. James Farmer, national director of CORE explained: “Our intention was to provoke the Southern authorities into arresting us and thereby prod the Justice Department into enforcing the law of the land. We started the Freedom Rides with thirteen people. But after one bus was burned in Anniston, Alabama, and the riders on another were beaten and abused, we were deluged with letters and telegrams from people all over the country, volunteering their bodies for the Freedom Rides” (Farmer 1965, p. 69. See also Arsenault 2006; Barnes 1983; Meier and Rudwick 1969; Meier and Rudwick 1973).

The Civil Rights campaign in Birmingham, Alabama prompted national and international outrage in early May 1963 when police under the direction of Commissioner Eugene “Bull” Connor repeatedly attacked black school children nonviolently protesting segregation with dogs and high pressure fire hoses. The Kennedy Administration intervened, sending Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights to advance negotiations (Eskew 1997; Garrow 1989; King 1963b; Manis 1999). At the signing of the Birmingham agreement, President Kennedy told
Martin Luther King, Jr.: “Our judgment of Bull Connor should not be too harsh. After all, in his way, he has done a good deal for civil-rights legislation this year” (Kennedy in King 1963b, p. 144). In June, Kennedy gave a major civil rights speech and introduced the Civil Rights Act to Congress.

In the 1964 Freedom Summer, a coalition of the major civil rights organizations (COFO) organized a campaign for voter rights and education in Mississippi drawing more than 1,000 white volunteers from the North to participate. In part, the strategy was based on the recognition that violence against Mississippi blacks was often ignored and intended to expose it to the world. In June, three civil rights workers Chaney, Goodman, and Schwerner (two white-Jewish, and one black) on the way to investigate the burning of a Church hosting civil rights activities, were arrested by the Deputy Sheriff of Neshoba County and released to the Ku Klux Klan who shot them and buried their bodies in an earthen dam. President Johnson responded by ordering a massive Federal search and investigation (Belfrage 1965; Cagin and Dray 2006; Dittmer 1994).

During the Selma campaign of early 1965, in a series of attempts by civil rights activists to march to Montgomery as part of a voting rights campaign, state troopers and violent white mobs blocked and beat activists, killing James Reeb, Viola Liuzzo, and Jimmie Lee Jackson in three separate attacks. Responding to the broad public outcry, Johnson sent 2,000 soldiers and 1,900 members of the national guard to protect the insurgents in March. Five months later he signed the Voting Rights Act (Cobb 2008; Garrow 1978; Stanton 1998; Zinn 2002). Martin Luther King most explicitly identified the elements of civil rights strategy in his discussion of the Selma campaign:

The goal of the demonstrations in Selma, as elsewhere, is to dramatize the existence of injustice and to bring about the presence of justice by methods of nonviolence. Long years of experience indicate to us that Negroes can achieve this goal when four things occur:
1. Nonviolent demonstrators go into the streets to exercise their constitutional rights.
2. Racists resist by unleashing violence against them.
3. Americans of conscience in the name of decency demand federal intervention and legislation.
4. The administration, under mass pressure, initiates measures of immediate intervention and remedial legislation (King 1965, p. 17).

In many historical circumstances, repressive action by authorities is effective – silencing dissent. But in the context of the United States in the early 1960s, civil rights leaders discovered that nonviolent defiance of legal segregation and mobilization challenging de facto disenfranchisement was difficult to repress, drawing Liberal outrage and Federal intervention. The early sit-ins in February 1960 targeted lunch counters in cities such as Greensboro North Carolina where segregation was less entrenched, and students felt they had a chance of victory (Andrews and Biggs 2006). But by 1965, the easy battles won, civil rights activists sought the holdouts like Selma’s Sheriff Jim Clark where defying segregation was still likely to draw brutal repression by local authorities (Hubbard 1968; Garrow 1978).

By 1966, the civil rights movement had been largely effective at eliminating legal segregation of public spaces and winning Federal protection of the black vote. While racial segregation persisted in schooling, housing, and employment, and racial inequality persisted in myriad forms including assets, healthcare, life expectancy, judicial process, political representation, public employment, wages and working conditions, few segregated public spaces remained as targets for nonviolent civil disobedience. Many black activists turned towards other practices to pursue liberation, some abandoning nonviolence altogether.

Opportunities for Civil Rights Practices

It was the capacity of civil rights practices to disrupt widespread forms of oppression in a way that was difficult to repress in the early 1960s that drew so many people to participate, often at great personal cost. In the lunch counter sit-ins, the freedom rides, municipal integration...
campaigns, marches, and voter registration drives of the early 1960s, insurgents peaceably violated segregationist law and de facto black disenfranchisement, and were brutally repressed by local white authorities and vigilantes. Brutal repression of civil rights insurgents threatened many non-insurgent blacks and liberals, and deeply embarrassed the Federal Government as it attempted to assert moral leadership in a de-colonizing world.

In other words, U.S. Cold War foreign policy, the decline of the cotton economy, and the northern and urban migration of blacks do help to explain the political cleavage in the early 1960s between Southern Democrats and the National Democratic Party leadership on race policy, and thus did constitute a political opportunity for insurgent civil rights mobilization. But this opportunity did not confer a general political advantage upon blacks or empower black insurgent mobilization generally. Instead, this political cleavage increased the efficacy of a particular form of insurgent practice: nonviolent challenges to legal segregation and de facto disenfranchisement coupled with claims for participation in full citizenship rights – i.e. civil rights practices.

When civil rights insurgents violated legal segregation and de facto disenfranchisement, they drew brutal repression from local authorities and white supremacist mobs. This repression, in turn, was threatening to broad allied constituencies including the Federal Government, and drew intervention of these allies in turn. Seeing promise of victory in the strength of this widespread support, many other people joined the insurgency, and the insurgent civil rights practices proliferated. Thus insurgent civil rights practices in the U.S. South in the early 1960s generated an escalating cycle of disruption where insurgent mobilization fed repression which in turn fed mobilization. This political dynamic is depicted in diagram 4-2, below.

[***Diagram 4-2 about here. ***]
This political dynamic is evident across the waves of civil rights insurgency. In each wave, the tactics of civil rights insurgency shifted to find new targets where insurgent practices could exploit the political cleavages on civil rights policy. But the basic dynamic remained the same across the waves of civil rights insurgency. In each wave, the insurgents disrupted some form of Jim Crow, i.e. legal segregation or de facto disenfranchisement. Insurgent civil rights practices never provided much leverage on other forms of black subordination, such as ghettoization, lack of political representation, unemployment, lack of municipal hiring, lack of access to university education, or disproportionate poverty. In each wave, civil rights insurgent practice was met with arrests by local authorities and violence by white supremacist mobs. In each wave, Federal, black, and liberal allies intervened in response to repressive violence. And in each wave, on the heels of this allied intervention, more and more people joined the insurgency until concessions were made eliminating the aspect of Jim Crow the insurgents targeted, and necessitating further tactical innovation within the basic framework of civil rights insurgent practice to challenge remaining aspects of Jim Crow.

As depicted in the diagram above, the repressive response of local authorities and white supremacist vigilantes depend upon the disruptiveness of civil rights insurgent practices. To the extent authorities could ignore civil rights practices with little disruption, they often did. As concessions removed particular targets for civil rights practice, tactics oriented towards those tactics became obsolete. For example, a 1961 the Freedom Rides violated local ordinances against integrated travel. The level of mob violence against freedom riders became a serious threat to political stability in the target cities and U.S. foreign policy. Outrage from a range allies and preliminary interventions by the Kennedy Administration only escalated participation. Then, in September 1961, a ruling from the Interstate Commerce Commission banned interstate bus
companies from using racially segregated terminals, chipping away at legal segregation and making the Freedom Rides obsolete tactically (Arsenault 2006). Integrating interstate transport was no longer a violation of legal segregation, thus no longer disruptive, and thus no longer a viable practical basis for an escalating cycle of insurgent practice.

Also as depicted, the effect of repressive action on the incidence of insurgent practice is determined in part by the interaction effect of allied mobilization. Generally, institutionalized authorities tend to wield superior repressive capacity, so unchecked, disruptive insurgent practice is usually readily repressed. But strong allied support for a particular insurgent practice thus makes all the difference. If the only political actors were civil rights insurgents, local authorities, and white supremacists, each wave of civil rights mobilization would have been readily repressed. What made all the difference was that in each wave, large numbers of black people, liberal supporters, and Federal agents intervened against the repression of civil rights insurgents. Allied intervention then encouraged others to join the insurgency and the insurgent practice proliferated.

**Revolutionary Black Nationalism**

The civil rights insurgency rapidly demobilized in the late 1960s. The rate of participation plateaued by 1965, almost completely dissipating by 1972, and never rebounding. The insurgent cycle of the Civil Rights Movement was broken when the Federal Government firmly intervened to abolish legal segregation and protect Black voting rights with the enforcement of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the implementation of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. White supremacist repression of civil rights actions still could and in some cases did continue to elicit widespread liberal and Federal intervention. But the major targets for insurgent black civil rights practices had been eliminated and the movement de-escalated. (Bloom 2012)
If the Civil Rights Movement was simply the height of expression of a generalized black insurgency driven by the expansion of political opportunities for blacks as a group, then we would expect the Civil Rights Movement to dissipate alongside a general decline of black insurgency, driven by the general closure of political opportunity for blacks (McAdam 1982 pp. 191-192).

There are three major empirical problems with this perspective. First, the structural processes that elsewhere created expanding “political opportunities” blacks – namely the increased black electorate, the decline of the cotton economy, and cold war foreign policy pressures – persist rather than reversing. Second, throughout the late 1960s and to this day, the Federal Government remained committed to intervening against brutal repression of nonviolent challenges to segregation of public spaces and challenges to de facto disenfranchisement of blacks. Third, and most importantly, guided by the group actor assumption, sociologists have characterized the period of the decline of civil rights insurgency – the late 1960s – as a period of the decline of black insurgency generally. But this characterization is starkly contradicted by the evidence. Other forms of black insurgency expanded even as the civil rights insurgency declined, as McAdam acknowledges:

I should qualify the characterization of the late 1960s as a period of declining black insurgency. Labeling these years as ones of movement decline serves to obscure the extraordinary nature and intensity of black insurgency during the period…. It would not seem an overstatement to argue that the level of open defiance of the established economic and political order was as great during this period as during any other in this country’s history, save the Civil War. (McAdam 1982 p. 182).

Even as the civil rights insurgency declined, black urban rebellions rocked the nation in the late 1960s. The peak annual rates of participation, incarceration, and death for these insurgents exceeded those for the nonviolent black insurgency. \(^{1212}\) Growing out of these urban

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\(^{1212}\) Comparing annual sums using Olzak data.
rebellions, in the late 1960s, a range of black revolutionary nationalist organizations developed including the Revolutionary Action Movement, the Us Organization, Detroit Revolutionary Union Movement, the Republic of New Afrika, and the Black Panther Party. By various measures, the largest and most influential of these insurgent organizations, the Black Panther Party, approached or exceeded the peak scope of any civil rights organization during the heyday of the Civil Rights Movement.1213

Opportunities for Revolutionary Black Nationalist Practices

Black Panther insurgents called for black community self-determination, challenged the legitimacy of the state, and sought to organize parallel government on a local level, including free meal, health, and educational programs.1214 The Party claimed that these activities were part of the global challenge to imperialism, notably the U.S. imperialist war in Vietnam. It might have been possible for the state to ignore these activities if not for the frequent armed confrontations between Black Panther activists and police in cities across the country. Black Panther insurgents severely disrupted status quo policing practices, self-consciously creating a source of political leverage.

Insurgent Black Panther practices were difficult for the state to repress because of three powerful sources of allied support. First, while most moderate black political organizations did not support the tactics or claims of the Black Panther Party, in the late 1960s they were threatened by state repression of the Party and mobilized extensive political support against state repression. Despite the gains of the civil rights movement in combatting formal segregation, and the triumphant rhetoric on racial justice propounded by the Federal government, blacks generally

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1213 Including number of participants in insurgent action; number of insurgents arrested; number of insurgents killed; organizational budget; rate of coverage in New York Times.
still faced high levels of poverty, and were largely excluded from university education, electoral office, municipal police and fire departments, and government hiring generally. So long as widespread ghettoization of blacks persisted, the Black Panther Party was able to draw broad black support. Second, threatened by the military draft, and betrayed on this front by the Democratic Party leadership, many opponents of the Vietnam War believed their fate was linked to that of the Black Panther Party – if the state succeeded in killing Black Panthers with impunity for their efforts to govern their own communities, many believed it could do the same to draft resisters. Thus many worked hard to resist violent state repression of Black Panthers. In 1969, the largest and most influential anti-war organization, SDS, declared the Party “the vanguard in our common struggles.” Third, international revolutionary governments seeking to challenge U.S. hegemony supported the Black Panthers’ efforts. Algeria granted the Party diplomatic status and an embassy building, Cuba began developing a military training ground for the Black Panthers, and Chinese Premier Zhao Enlai hosted massive state celebrations in honor of the Party.

[***Diagram 4-3 about here ***]

For several years, violent repressive efforts by the state backfired, driving more and more participants to join the Black Panther Party. Participation in the Black Panther Party proliferated across the United States in a diffusion process that resembled the proliferation of the sit-ins in 1960 or the Freedom Rides in 1961. As late as April of 1968, the Black Panther Party was a small Oakland, California based organization with a single satellite chapter getting organized in Los Angeles. By the end of the year in at least twenty cities, dozens, and in some cases hundreds of insurgent activists had committed their lives to the Party, adopting the Party’s revolutionary claims and many engaging in armed confrontations with police. By 1970, in the face of brutal
state repression, Black Panther activists had opened offices in at least 68 cities. Almost all of these insurgent members sought out the Party asking to join, rather than the Party actively recruiting new members. Instead, the Party organization constantly turned away activists seeking to join as it sought to maintain the coherence of its insurgent politics.

Only concessions by the state were able to break the insurgent cycle. The resilience of the Black Panthers’ politics depended heavily on support from its three broad allied constituencies: moderate blacks, opponents of the Vietnam War, and revolutionary governments internationally. Without the support of these allies, the Black Panther Party could not withstand repressive actions against them by the state. But beginning in 1969, and steadily increasing through 1970, political transformations undercut the self-interests that motivated these constituencies to support the Panthers’ politics. As mainstream Democratic leaders opposed the war and Nixon scaled back the military draft, blacks won broader social access and political representation, and revolutionary governments entered diplomatic relations with the U.S. – allied support became more challenging for the Panthers to sustain. The pressures mounted eventually making the insurgent practices that had driven the diffusion of the Black Panther insurgency impossible. The Party organization, and its efforts to advance black community self-governance, collapsed. By 1972, Black Panther mobilizations in most cities had ended, and the Party became a small local Oakland based organization once again, now emphasizing community service and electoral politics rather than insurgent mobilization.

Opportunities for Practices

Most classical sociological treatments of social movements have been based on the group actor assumption. Surely broad structural concerns are important for explaining widely shared motivations for participation, and role destabilization. But group actor theorists have tended to over-reach, attributing the timing and extent of mobilization to characteristics of groups. While
classical social movement theories have been challenged in recent years, some proponents have used analyses of the black insurgency to defend classical group actor assumption.

Writing in the *American Journal of Sociology*, Jenkins et al. (2003) attempt to defend classic political opportunity theory against critics, presenting a multivariate analysis of “how political opportunities affect the frequency of African-American protest between 1948 and 1997” (278). Jenkins et al. argued that “divided government, strong northern Democratic Party allies, … Republican presidential incumbents responding to Cold War foreign policy” as well as the level of black political representation, black unemployment and income inequality, and Vietnam War deaths almost fully explain the annual level of black mobilization (277). But rather than assuaging concerns, the study highlights the limitations of attributing political opportunity to blacks as a group. The regression $R^2$ of greater than 90% for various models tested appears to contradict the bulk of the substantive literature which argues in detail about how particular institutions, contingent efforts by particular individuals, and the varied responses of non-movement actors including Federal and local officials, and white violent mobs, affected the level of insurgent mobilization in important ways. This tension may be explained by the authors’ method, which is to explain the relatively little variation in the number of black non-violent protest events per year (N=50) using fifteen explanatory variables. Decisions about which variables to include appear less than intuitive, for example the number of Vietnam War deaths is included while Korean War deaths are excluded. One dummy variable marks years an incumbent Republican President or Vice President ran for the Presidency before 1964 while theoretically obvious variables, such as the number of black registered voters, are excluded. While the $R^2$ is impressive, any Bayesian Information Criterion would undoubtedly show the explanatory power of the model to be an artifact of the amount of data used to explain relatively little variation.

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The point is not to highlight the empirical limitations of this single paper. Rather, the point is that the political opportunity thesis, as classically constituted, misconstrues how context matters for mobilization, leading scholars to ask the wrong question – even top scholars writing in the best venues. Jenkins et al get the analysis wrong because they ask an unanswerable question. There is no set of political conditions they could identify that would independently explain the temporal variation of black insurgent mobilization.

Disaggregating black insurgency by practice, the illustrations above suggest that a practice centered approach is more fruitful for explaining the effects of political context on insurgency. In all three phases of the black insurgency, political context was important for explaining the power and sustainability of the black insurgency. But different aspects of the political context mattered differently for different black insurgent practices.

At the end of the World War Two, Truman’s emergent cold-war political alliance with colonial powers France and England against the U.S.S.R., a former ally, and his alienation of labor and new deal constituents on domestic policy, were crucial to the efficacy of the Black Anti-colonial insurgency in the mid-1940s. The anti-lynching protests and calls in the for international intervention on U.S. race policy could have been ignored or repressed if they did not strengthen the Progressive challenge, powerfully threatening Truman’s policy agenda and prospects for reelection in 1948. But in context, Black Anti-colonialist practices were impossible for Truman to repress without further strengthening the Progressive challenge. Truman responded by becoming the first U.S. President to actively advocate for civil rights for black people as part of his new cold-war liberal politics. At the cost of alienating the Dixiecrats, Truman succeeded in re-consolidating the Democratic Party bloc, retaining the presidency in 1948, and then quickly and effectively repressing the Black Anti-colonialist challenge.
Presidential advocacy of civil rights, a key concession contributing to the demobilization of the Black Anti-colonial challenge, in turn became a key contextual factor helping explain the efficacy of insurgent civil rights practices in the late 1950 through the mid-1960s. The federal government and the national Democratic Party leadership by that time strongly advocated civil rights for black people, but wary of alienating the southern leadership of the Democratic Party, took little action. Civil rights insurgents, by nonviolently defying Jim Crow while calling for full participation in U.S. citizenship rights, forced the issue. Local authorities and white supremacists arrested and violently repressed the insurgents forcing the federal government to intervene politically, militarily, and legally. Over several waves of insurgency – the bus boycotts, the sit-ins, the freedom rides, the voting rights and community campaigns – civil rights insurgents chipped away at Jim Crow. Eventually, the implementation of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 overcame most legal segregation and customary disenfranchisement of black people. The defeat of Jim Crow led to the decline of insurgent civil rights mobilization because few targets for civil rights practice remained.

But this did not mean that all forms of black insurgent practice declined. To the contrary, encouraged by the powerful transformative effects of the Civil Rights Movement, many black activists sought economic and political power, experimenting with a wide range of insurgent practices. A veritable “Black Power!” ferment developed in 1966 and 1967 as black insurgent organizations proliferated seeking ways to reinvent the freedom movement to redress persistent poverty, ghettoization, and political exclusion. By late 1968, the Black Panther Party emerged as the leading organization of a new Revolutionary Black Nationalist politics, linking black insurgency to opposition to the Vietnam War and anti-colonial insurgencies abroad. Organizing parallel governance in black communities, challenging the legitimacy of the state, and engaging
in armed confrontations with police in cities throughout the country, through 1970, the revolutionary black nationalist insurgents posed a serious threat to political authorities. Revolutionary Black Nationalism combined with the black urban rebellions and the draft resistance to destabilize institutionalized politics. Revolutionary Black Nationalist insurgent practices generated a new cycle of escalating insurgency that only dissipated with the rolling back of the Vietnam War and draft, and increased black political and economic access – including incorporation of black leaders in Democratic Party machines, ballooning rates of electoral representation, municipal hiring of black police and firefighters, increased college admissions, and a range of local and federal affirmative action programs.

The level of insurgent mobilization across these three movements cannot be explained with reference to a singular set of political conditions. When considered in terms of their insurgent practices, these three movements all follow remarkably similar political dynamics and trajectories. Drawing out these commonalities across the three movements, I begin to articulate a more general practice centered theory of insurgency.

While insurgency is rare, social scientists have long recognized that relatively powerless people sometimes garner political leverage outside institutionalized channels by threatening the interests of powerful actors (Gamson 1975; Hubbard 1968; Lipsky 1968; Oberschall 1973; Piven and Cloward 1979; Wilson 1961). Wilson, in analyzing Black protest, argues that when a group is relatively powerless, “[b]argaining is not available because the excluded group has nothing the others desire...” thus they rely on “negative inducements as compensation” (1961, p.2921215). In a broad comparative study of social mobilizations, Gamson (1975, see pp. 140-142) found that such negative inducements are the most effective means “powerless groups” have at their

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disposal, and Piven and Cloward concur: “it is usually when unrest among the lower classes breaks out of the confines of electoral procedures that the poor may have some influence, for the instability and polarization they then threaten to create by their actions in the factories or in the streets may force some response from electoral leaders” (1971, p.15).

While the group actor assumption is often unfounded, this basic insight of these classic writings can be usefully applied to a practice centered approach. Insurgent movements do emerge and develop because they provide large numbers of people ways of challenging their oppression unavailable through institutionalized channels. Insurgent practice creates a source of power through disruption. The disruption of established social processes generates a novel source of power. Thus, insurgent practice, by disrupting established social processes, begins to create a self-reinforcing cycle of insurgency. Insurgents disrupt established social processes, garnering influence, and thus drawing more people facing similar conditions to participate in their insurgent practice, as depicted in Diagram 4-4.1 below.

This attraction of growing numbers of participants to particular forms of insurgent practices as they succeed in disrupting established social processes can be seen clearly in sit-ins, the freedom rides, and other waves of the Civil Rights Movement. It can be seen in the large numbers of people flocking to join Black Anti-colonialist anti-lynching rallies and petitions to the UN after World War II. And it can be seen in the rapid proliferation of Black Panther Party chapters and armed confrontations between new Party members and police in cities around the country in the late 1960s.

[*** Diagram 4-4.1 about here. ***]

If there were no constraints on this sort of disruptive influence, insurgency would be ubiquitous, and it would be impossible to maintain stable social institutions. But in the real
world, many people are invested in established social institutions, and they act to protect them against any disruptive insurgent challenge. When insurgents act to disrupt established social processes, authorities, with power and interest in these processes take repressive action to stop the insurgents. This can be seen the arrests, beatings, and murders of civil rights activists by local authorities and white supremacists in the Civil Rights Movement; the arrests, censorship, and travel bans on Black Anti-colonial leaders; and the arrests, violent raids, COINTELPRO, and state sponsored assassination of Black Panthers. In most incipient insurgencies, such repressive actions are decisive, and disruptive insurgent practices are aborted. Repression thus limits insurgency. This dynamic is represented below in Diagram 4-4.2 with the dashed arrow indicating an inverse causal effect. All else being equal, repressive action by authorities against participants in a particular set of insurgent practices tends to diminish participation.

[*** Diagram 4-4.2 about here. ***]

But repression obviously did not have that effect for many waves of black insurgency. Usually, relatively few people take the personal risks of direct participation in insurgency. Given the overwhelming institutionalized power of most established authorities, if insurgents and authorities were the only relevant actors, insurgency would never develop. But the trajectory of insurgent dynamics often is determined in interaction with third parties, rather than insurgents and authorities alone. In particular, insurgency is sustained by allied support. Allied support depends upon the particular content of insurgent practices. Allies support an insurgency because they agree with its aims, or they feel threatened by its repression. Allied support increases when authorities intensify repression because potential allies feel more threatened. Allied support strengthens and helps sustain an insurgency in two ways. First, strong allied support can reverse the effects of repressive action by authorities. When unchecked, repressive action by authorities
on insurgents usually quells insurgency because it demonstrates the high costs of insurgency and
slim chance of success. But broad allied support changes the rational calculus by which potential
insurgents evaluate their participation. The stronger the allied support available, the more likely
it appears that insurgents may make significant gains. Further, the stronger the allied support, the
less inclined authorities are to engage in repressive action that risks increasing allied
intervention. Strong allied support for a particular set of insurgent practices thus generates an
escalating cycle of insurgency. See Diagram 4-4.3 below.

[*** Diagram 4-4.3 about here. ***]

The importance of allied intervention can be seen clearly in all three movements. Strong
Progressive support for the Black Anti-colonialists initially prevented the Truman administration
from taking any repressive action despite disruptive street protests, and international actions that
could be considered treasonous. Truman was struggling to preserve major elements of FDR’s
Democratic Party coalition and could not afford strong repressive action in 1945 and 1946. Most
black political organizations joined the Black Anti-colonialist movement seeing good prospects
for influence and little risk. In the Civil Rights Movement, repressive action by local authorities
and white supremacists was threatening to local many non-insurgent blacks and liberals, and
deeply embarrassing to Federal authorities. Support and intervention by these actors in response
to repressive action encouraged others to join the insurgency. Outpourings of mainstream black,
antiwar, and international support for revolutionary black nationalist insurgents in the face of
brutal state repression broadened the fight, encouraging other young activists to join, and the
Black Panther Party emerged in the late 1960s as the main model for continued black insurgency.

Thus, the development of insurgency depends critically on political cleavages and
institutional targets that make a specific set of insurgent practices disruptive and which generate
allied support for these practices. The same set of insurgent practices may be highly disruptive in one context, and not in another. For example, black and white activists sitting together on an interstate bus was highly disruptive in Mississippi in May of 1961, but not so today. Political cleavages and institutional targets prone to disruption are ubiquitous, and do not create generic political advantages for insurgency. But particular cleavages make particular institutional targets vulnerable to sustained disruption by particular forms of insurgency. Political cleavages sustain insurgency by generating broad allied support for certain forms of insurgent practice. In short, both the disruptive effects of a particular set of insurgent practices and the capacity of insurgent practices to attract allied support are historically specific and depend upon political conditions – namely the persistence of institutional targets for disruption, and the political cleavages that make insurgent practices attractive to potential allies, and influence the attraction of allied support for the insurgency. See Diagram 4-4.4 below.

[*** Diagram 4-4.4 about here, ***]

For example, the Progressive challenge to Truman did not generate widespread support of nonviolent civil disobedience against Jim Crow, nor of revolutionary claims and armed challenges to state authority. Instead, the Progressive challenge to Truman provided powerful allies to those challenging Truman’s inaction on lynching in anti-colonial terms, and to those challenging his emergent Cold War foreign policy at the UN. Similarly, civil rights insurgent practices were disruptive specifically of Jim Crow, not all forms of black poverty and disempowerment. And federal advocacy of civil rights, and international attention to federal action on racial segregation, prompted federal intervention in support of civil rights insurgent whereas the Federal government was the main antagonist of the revolutionary nationalists. Revolutionary nationalists attracted thin support from mainstream blacks in the early 1960s.
while the more moderate civil rights insurgency was thriving, and it was only betrayal by the Democratic Party leadership in 1968 that pushed many opponents of the Vietnam War and draft to feel threatened by state repression of Black Panthers.

Once insurgents develop a set of practices that effectively leverages political cleavages to disrupt established social processes while drawing powerful allied support, they generate an escalating cycle of insurgency. In such situations, authorities cannot re-stabilize the social order through repression alone. In those situations, only concessions by authorities can de-escalate the insurgency. Concessions by authorities re-stabilize the social order by suturing the political cleavages that make insurgent practices effective. They either displace the targeted social processes that insurgent practices disrupt, or they undermine the political basis for allied support of the insurgency. Thereby, they undercut the insurgent dynamic, leading to de-escalation. See Diagram 4-4.5.

[*** Diagram 4-4.5 about here. ***]

The success of each wave of the Civil Rights Movement generated its own obsolescence as concessions to integration consecutively removed the targets for the sit-ins, the freedom rides, the community campaigns and the voting rights campaigns. Ever strengthening federal and allied support for black civil rights meant that repression of civil rights activists challenging legal and formal racial segregation would continue draw powerful allied support, and the same is true today. But authorities have mostly ceded formal racial segregation. In the other two movements, the social processes that insurgents have targeted have remained intact, but the political cleavages that motivated allied support were sutured through concessions. Truman championed a new Cold War liberalism. Making concessions to labor and liberals, he peeled off the core constituents of the Progressive challenge. Advocating civil rights, he drew mainstream black
political support away from the Progressives and undercut support for Black Anti-colonial politics. In the 1970s, ballooning black electoral representation, municipal hiring of blacks, college access, affirmative action programs, and the winding down of the Vietnam War and draft undercut broad black and anti-war allied support for insurgent revolutionary black nationalism.

In short, a practice centered approach transcends the basic limitations of the group actor assumption, and promises much more precise explanation of the ways that political context affects insurgent mobilization processes. Given that a practice centered approach proves fruitful in the black insurgency – where black people as a group shared such a strong common history and form of oppression – it is likely to prove fruitful in other times and places as well.
Diagram 4-1: Opportunities for Black Anti-colonial Practices

Threat to U.S. leadership in UN and Democratic Party Cohesion

The Progressive Challenge to emergent US Cold War Foreign Policy

Insurgent black anti-colonial practice

Progressive, labor, and mainstream black support

Travel bans, censorship, and incarceration

Truman's Civil Rights Advocacy/Cold War Liberalism

Diagrams
Diagram 4-2: Opportunities for Civil Rights Practices

- **Violation of segregation and de facto disenfranchisement**
- **Arrests, beatings, and murders**
- **Insurgent civil rights practice**
- **Federal, black, and liberal intervention**
- **Jim Crow despite cotton economy decline and international pressure**
- **Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Voting Rights Act of 1965**
Diagram 4-3: Opportunities for Revolutionary Black Nationalist Practices

Persistent black exclusion; widespread opposition to Vietnam War

Revolutionary Black Nationalist practices

Mainstream black, anti-war, and international support

Arrests, raids, killings, COINTELPR O

Armed confrontations with police

Black social and political access; repeal of draft; international diplomacy
Diagram 4-4.1: Insurgent Leverage

Disruption of Established Social Processes

Insurgent Practices
Diagram 4-4.2: Repression Limits Insurgency

Disruption of Established Social Processes

Insurgent Practices

Repressive Action by Authorities
Diagram 4-4.3: Escalating Cycle of Insurgency

Disruption of Established Social Processes

Insurgent Practices

Repressive Action by Authorities

Allied Support for Insurgents

Disruption of Established Social Processes

Insurgent Practices

Repressive Action by Authorities

Allied Support for Insurgents
Diagram 4-4.4: Opportunities for Practices

- Insurgent Practices
- Disruption of Established Social Processes
- Repressive Action by Authorities
- Allied Support for Insurgents
- Targets and Political Cleavages
Diagram 4-4.5: Concessions and De-escalation

- Disruption of Established Social Processes
- Repressive Action by Authorities
- Allied Support for Insurgents
- Insurgent Practices
- Targets and Political Cleavages
- Concessions by Authorities