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BRINGING THE VANGUARD HOME: THE ROLE OF CHILDREN, HOME, AND FAMILY IN THE BLACK PANTHER PARTY

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ABSTRACT

Kiran K. A. Garcha

Bringing the Vanguard Home: The Role of Children, Home, and Family in the Black Panther Party

This dissertation explores the role of young people in the Black Panther Party in history, legacy, and memory. By 1970, in the midst of a failed War on Poverty, children and youth assumed a major presence in the Party's consciousness. On the one hand, the conditions of children and youth in low-income neighborhoods lent credence to Panther critiques of what they recognized as a dysfunctional national welfare system. At the same time, Panther activists celebrated young people's capacity to be full participants in the organization's revolutionary movement. Thus, young people represented a paradox: they were figures who simultaneously underscored the absence of a socialist present and the promise of its future existence. How did children and the category of childhood spur adults to imagine the future? How did young people themselves understand and navigate their relationships to the Panthers' project at the time? And finally, how do members of the filial generation remember and make sense of their childhoods today?

While much has been written about how Black Panther radicalism operated as a spectacular politics, fewer studies have explored the more intimate domains in which Party members engaged ideas about racial and class equity. I trace how children and youth operated in Panther discourse and grassroots mobilizations in Party chapters throughout the country, and the Bay Area in particular. By examining the BPP's history through the lens of intergenerational relations, this dissertation helps broaden our understanding of the Party's sites of racial and class struggle and provides a more

nuanced analysis of the BPP's gender theories and practices. Further, my work helps underscore how the organization's campaign to extend social welfare to working-class families was necessarily entangled with government attempts to create vulnerabilities within these same families.

For many in the Party, life unfolded at the intersection of family, community, and the pursuit of a new social order. I argue that a full accounting of the role of children, and ideas about children, within the BPP's community services reveals that these programs went beyond providing temporary relief for contemporary social ills to constitute a revolutionary vision for long-term transformations. As the descendants of Party members look back on their childhoods roughly fifty years later, their reflections are met with a mixture of pride, nostalgia, confusion and frustration. In large part their coming-of-age narratives and personal testimonies elucidate a generation characterized by degrees of political inheritance. Today, their professional endeavors range widely, including in the areas of education, law, social work, and entertainment among others. While few are as involved in radical organization-based activism as their parents had been during the Black Power era, most engage in formal and informal activities that deeply resonate with the BPP's visions for eradicating social, economic, and political oppression.

DEDICATION

To my parents and first teachers, Pearl Sidhu and Ajit Singh Garcha.

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This project and my larger graduate journey came out of the collective energy, sacrifices, and dedication of many mentors, visionaries, friends, and family members. While it is impossible to properly thank everyone who made this project possible, I offer this as a token of my deepest gratitude. First and foremost, I will be forever grateful to the members of my dissertation committee for their tireless support, guidance, and encouragement throughout the development of this project. Over the course of eight years David Brundage wore many hats, as my advisor, mentor, and friend. I am forever thankful to him for the countless hours he spent reading, rereading, and providing meticulous feedback on my writing. When my visions for this project wavered, assumed tangential paths, or came to complete standstills, Professor Brundage always helped me get back on track. He has been and will continue to be a tremendous source of intellectual and pedagogical inspiration to me. My deepest appreciation also goes to Bettina Aptheker for sharing her scholarly and personal insights about activist childhoods. She also introduced me to the Black Panther community, initiating my oral history research and the unforgettably powerful conversations it produced. I owe much appreciation to Eric Porter and Kate Jones, both of whom spent countless hours reading and providing detailed feedback on multiple chapter drafts under what I can only imagine were unprecedented time constraints. I thank them for their help in shaping the final dissertation draft and for their suggestions for future manuscript possibilities.

The nuts and bolts of this study came from three years of research, including archival work in Oakland and Palo Alto, California, and Harlem, New York. Funding

provided by the History Department and the (formerly named) Institute for Humanities Research at UC Santa Cruz allowed me to spend three crucial summers at archives in the Bay Area where I was able to search through countless issues of the Black Panther Party's official newspaper, and official party documents, respectively. The archivists and staff at the African American Museum and Library at Oakland, especially Sean Heyliger, made an intimidatingly substantial newspaper collection incredibly easy to access and navigate. Without their hospitality and generous assistance, I would have been completely lost at sea as a novice researcher. The Special Collections staff at Stanford University's Green Library similarly provided much appreciated guidance during my visits and engagement with the Huey P. Newton Foundation Collection. The UC Humanities Research Institute, and the UC Consortium for Black Studies in California provided additional research opportunities through grants and fellowships, which resulted in a trip to the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. The staff at the center's archives graciously accommodated my Californian scheduling proclivities during a busy week, and for that, I am truly thankful.

This project could not have been possible without the tremendous generosity, kindness, and hospitality of the history makers themselves. I am forever grateful to those in the Black Panther community for welcoming an unknown and naïve history student into their homes, commemorative gatherings, and neighborhood libraries, coffee shops, and cafes. I owe a very special thank you to Ericka Huggins, Tureeda Mikell, Katherine Campbell, Bobby McCall, Theresa Shoatz, Keith Jenkins, Aaron Dixon, Emory Douglas, Billy X Jennings, Gail Shaw, Tarika Lewis, Barbara Easley Cox, Mary Williams, Nefertiti Jackmon, and Suzun Lucia Lamania. There is no way to adequately thank

everyone who extended their trust to me- the topic of family is inherently delicate, and in many ways I am an outsider to this particular history. I only hope that the narrative presented here is received as an earnest exploration into the Party's legacy. I am especially grateful to Ericka Huggins for sharing her insight—in the early days of this project, lucky for me—that the Black Panther Party was never a monolithic group. I found myself returning to these words many times throughout the making of this dissertation, and I am thankful to have them as a guide for my future research endeavors. As my journey into this history is young, I take full responsibility for any mistakes or misinterpretations I may have made in the study's conclusions.

Graduate school is a wild adventure involving constant (and often unpredictable) moments of learning, self-reflection, and growth. My training in research, writing, teaching, and job navigation came through the time, energy, and generosity of many graduate colleagues, faculty mentors, librarians, and departmental staff members, among many others. A special thanks to David Brundage, Matthew Lasar, David Anthony III, Bettina Aptheker, Alan Christy, Alice Yang, Dana Frank, Noriko Aso, Kiva Silver, and Greg O'Malley for their pedagogical inspiration. The generous funding and training provided by The Humanities Institute at UCSC and the team of educators at The National Humanities Center provided me the opportunity to further develop my curricular and pedagogical skillset in the final year of my graduate career. The countless recommendation letters written by my dissertation committee members, and the wisdom of Gail Hershatter, Matt O'Hara, Juned Shaikh, Maya Peterson, and Alma Heckman collectively helped me navigate the trials and tribulations of the job market, and prepare for a career in teaching and research. The generosity of Annette Marines and Kenneth

Lyons allowed me to better navigate UCSC's library holdings, and the time and opportunities provided by Elisabeth Remak-Honnef, Kate Dundon, Rachel Deblinger, Teresa Mora, Alex Norton, and crystal nelson allowed me to introduce my work to the broader UCSC campus community. Finally, I owe much of my progress in the History Program to the tireless assistance and incredible patience of Cindy Morris, Kayla Ayers, Rose Greenberg, Stephanie Hinkle, and Stephanie Sawyer.

Many peers and friends made my time in and completion of the graduate program possible. I am especially thankful for the counsel and camaraderie provided by my graduate writing group in the early stages of my dissertation. I owe a great debt of gratitude to those who lifted me up when my commitment to my graduate work and degree waned, especially Judy Gonzalez and Doris Donoghue. A very special thank you to Xiaofei Gao, M&M, Jackie Schultz, Taylor Kirsch, Lisa Jackson, Evan Grupsmith, Delio Vasquez, and Patrick King for nourishing my spirit with your friendship, rich conversations, nature walks, and jokes that only history students would laugh at. Much appreciation to Ana Maria Candela, Sara Smith, Dustin Wright, Jeff Sanceri, and Alicia Romero for their graciousness and for making my introduction to reading seminars and TAships less frightening. I am forever grateful to Malkia Hutchinson, Xiaofei Gao, Cathy Thomas (my SFAM), and Rohan DaCosta for their love and life-long friendships.

My family has been a tremendous source of love and support from the beginning. My navigation of graduate school was made possible by the discipline and focus I learned from my father's example, and the much-needed reminders from my mother to not take life too seriously. Vindy has been a pillar of strength and support during our family's darkest moments. Naseem has and will always be a profound source of intellectual and

creative inspiration to me. I am honored to be their sister. I dedicate this dissertation to my parents, with love and infinite gratitude.

INTRODUCTION

In the lead up to his 2001 biography of musical artist Tupac Amaru Shakur, sociologist Michael Eric Dyson sat down with Afeni Shakur—Tupac's mother and former member of the "New York 21" contingent of the Black Panther Party—to talk about navigating life in the post-Black Power era.[1] As an activist whose young adulthood coincided with both a staggering national rate of African American male unemployment, and a social zeitgeist propelled by grassroots demands for economic justice at the federal level, reconciling the tensions between her past ideals and present realities proved nothing less than challenging. Ironically, however, the former Panther highlighted how reflecting on her and her son's disparate lifestyles helped her make sense of the Party's unfulfilled promises roughly twenty years later. While the celebrity and wealth generated by Tupac's career as a world-renowned musician necessarily placed him outside the strictures of the Party's radical politics, Afeni linked her son's life choices to his early observations about the limits of revolutionary life. She recalled how he often reminded her not only that, "[the] revolution was not paying the bills, but it was causing a great deal of disaster for me."[2] In the same breath, the former Panther noted that her son

[1] The interview between Michael Eric Dyson and Afeni Shakur took place after Tupac's death in September 1996, however, the exact date is unclear. Michael Eric Dyson, *Holler If You Hear Me: Searching for Tupac Shakur* (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2001), 24. On April 2, 1969, a New York grand jury indicted 21 members of the BPP's New York chapter—one of the most sizable and active chapters nationally—for allegedly conspiring to bomb local police stations, the Brooklyn Botanic Garden, and local department stores. Three paid informants provided the allegations to the jury and additional evidence was flimsy. While all 21 individuals were eventually acquitted, a few went into exile while most others spent two years in prison as the trial unfolded. The Panthers involved became known as the New York 21. Afeni Shakur was pregnant with Tupac while incarcerated, nearly giving birth in prison. See Joshua Bloom and Waldo E. Martin Jr., *Black Against Empire: The History and Politics of the Black Panther Party* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 213-214.

[2] Dyson, *Holler If You Hear Me*, 58.

"would challenge the [things] that I held sacred. He would make me think about them."[3] She attributed her ability to make peace with money two decades after the Party's demise to these earlier conversations, concluding that, for the first time in her life, "I am learning how to live in a capitalist society."[4] What did the Black Panther Party mean for Tupac Shakur and his peers as they grew into adulthood, and how do members of the Panther vanguard make sense of this history in the twenty-first century?

This dissertation explores the role of young people in the Black Panther Party in history, legacy, and memory. At its core, this study is a meditation on how social values and ideas get transmitted across generations and the spaces in which this process takes place. Specifically, I undertake a historical examination of the domestic and familial sites of Black Panther radicalism, and the organization's generational legacy, from 1966 to today. By 1970, in the midst of a failed War on Poverty, children and youth assumed a major presence in the Party's consciousness.[5] As the daughters and sons of active volunteers, beneficiaries of the Panthers' social welfare programs, and subjects of government scrutiny, young people factored centrally in the organization's efforts to

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[3] Dyson, *Holler If You Hear Me*, 58.
[4] Dyson, *Holler If You Hear Me*, 58.
[5] In defining "childhood" and "youth," this dissertation draws heavily from Rebecca de Schweinitz's use of the terms in her 2009 monograph, *If We Could Change the World: Young People and America's Long Struggle for Racial Equality*. Like de Schweinitz, I contend that the category of age, like gender, has always been a historically shifting social construct. The social meanings attached to the categories of childhood and youth have historically been applied to individuals across a range of ages. In the context of the BPP, age functions in complex ways, as many Panthers were themselves in their mid teen years—and thus, not yet legal adults—when they joined the Party. While acknowledging the fluidity of these categories, this dissertation focuses on elementary- and middle-school-aged individuals, as it was members of these age groups to which the Party regularly referred as the "next generation" of social changers. Rebecca de Schweinitz, *If We Could Change the World: Young People and America's Long Struggle for Racial Equality* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 5-6. For a broader conversation about age as an analytical category for historical practitioners, see the inaugural issue of the *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth. Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 1, no. 1 (2008).

build a society free of racial and economic inequality. On the one hand, the conditions of children and youth in low-income neighborhoods lent credence to Panther critiques of what they recognized as a dysfunctional national welfare system. At the same time, leaders and rank-and-file activists celebrated young people's capacity to better their own conditions and that of their communities, that is, to be full participants in the organization's revolutionary movement. In this sense, for the Panthers, young people represented a paradox: they were figures who simultaneously underscored the absence of a socialist present and the promise of its future existence. In looking at Party discourse and material engagement with young people from 1966 to 1982, and by mapping out how members of the filial generation, now in adulthood, make sense of their childhoods, I contend that young people both shaped, and were shaped by, the BPP's movement towards a post-capitalist future.

Animated by questions of intergenerational relations in social movements, and engaged with the concept of historical memory, this study examines both the historical role of young people in the Party's organizational politics, and the impact of this legacy in the lives and memories of those same individuals today. I trace how the categories of children and childhood operated in Panther discourse and on-the-ground mobilizations in Party chapters throughout the country, with a particular emphasis on the organization's Oakland headquarters and surrounding Bay Area branches. The dissertation has three major goals: 1) to center the quotidian, everyday living practices within Panther households in the broader political history of the Black Power Movement; 2) to shed light on how children and ideas about childhood shaped the ways in which Panthers thought about and mobilized for socio-economic change, and 3) to reflect on how the children of

former Black Panthers remember and make sense of their childhoods in the present. In developing these themes, several key questions have organized my analysis: what symbolic or material significance, if any, did conceptions of parenthood, childrearing practices, and familial living arrangements have for those invested in the movement, and for those bent on its demise? How did children and the category of childhood spur adults to imagine the future? And finally, how did young people themselves understand and navigate their relationships to the Panthers' project, and how have these processes developed over time?

For many in the Party, life unfolded at the intersection of family, community, and the pursuit of a new social order. And for some more than others, the facets of domesticity and commitment to revolution were inextricably linked in both theory and practice. The supplanting of capitalism with socialism would necessarily secure the health and wellbeing of the filial generation, notably those raised in Panther households. As the descendants of Party members look back on their childhoods roughly fifty years later, their reflections are met with a mixture of pride, nostalgia, confusion and frustration. In large part their coming-of-age narratives and personal testimonies elucidate a generation characterized by degrees of political inheritance. Today, their professional endeavors range widely, including in the areas of education, law, social work, and entertainment among others. While few are as involved in radical organization-based activism as their parents had been during the Black Power era, most engage in formal and informal activities that deeply resonate with the BPP's visions for eradicating social, economic, and political oppression.

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In privileging the historical role of children, childhood, and family in the Black Panther Party, this dissertation works to bridge three historiographical conversations: studies on the history of the Black Panther Party, literature on the Black Power and independent black school movements, and scholarship on young people in twentieth-century social movements. While much has been written about how Black Panther radicalism operated as a spectacular politics, few studies have fully explored the more intimate domains in which Party members engaged ideas about racial and class equity. This historiographical omission has led to an incomplete portrayal of the organization's gender politics and sites of class struggle, and has rendered many of its key players invisible. By exploring the Party's history through the lens of family and home, this dissertation helps broaden our understanding of the Black Power Movement's spatial politics and provides a more nuanced analysis of the BPP's gender theories and practices. Further, by focusing on Party members' filial relations, my work helps underscore how the organization's campaign to extend the government's promise of social welfare to working-class families was necessarily entangled with government attempts to create vulnerabilities within these same families.

The growing body of literature on the BPP is relatively young, and scholarly works that situate the organization within the story of the long Civil Rights Movement and the field of African American history more broadly have been produced mostly within the past twenty years. The same is true of studies focused on the role of gender in Panther discourse and practice, as well as academic interpretations of the group's grassroots programs. The first comprehensive synthesis of the BPP's political history, by Joshua Bloom and Waldo Martin (2013), reinvigorated an earlier wave of scholarship

produced at the turn of the century, which collectively represented a corrective to 1990s renderings of the group as a quasi-criminal organization.[6] *Black Against Empire: The History and Politics of the Black Panther Party* underscores the coherence and social and political influence of the BPP, as the authors posit the Panthers' activism as "part of a broader insurgency to change the American capitalist system to a more equitable socialist one."[7] Largely a project of recuperation, the study challenges earlier portrayals of the Panthers' radical project as ephemeral and unfulfilled. Bloom and Martin contend that unlike its Black Power contemporaries, the BPP demonstrated an unparalleled understanding of American and global politics. To date, *Black Against Empire* offers the most thorough account of the BPP from its Oakland beginnings in 1966 to its social and political resonance today.[8] However, the text curiously lacks a nuanced analysis of the

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[6] Bloom and Martin, *Black Against Empire*. The most notable and controversial study to provoke this set of rebuttals was Hugh Pearson's biography of Huey Newton, *The Shadow of the Panther: Huey Newton and the Price of Black Power in America*. Drawing on journalistic accounts of Newton and fellow Party leaders by journalist Kate Coleman—in collaboration with former BPP ally, David Horowitz—Pearson's text pathologized Newton as a street-hustling drug addict. Situating Newton at the center of the BPP, Pearson further attributed the decline and ultimate demise of the organization to Newton's own battles with the criminal justice system and substance abuse. According to historian, Joe Street, *The Shadow of the Panther* initiated the second major phase of BPP historiography. Hugh Pearson, *The Shadow of the Panther: Huey Newton and the Price of Black Power in America* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1994); Joe Street, "The Historiography of the Black Panther Party," *Journal of American Studies* 44, no. 2 (2010): 351-375, doi: 10.1017/S0021875809991320. For other historiographies of the BPP see, David J. Garrow, "Picking up the Books: The New Historiography of the Black Panther Party," *Reviews in American History* 35, no. 4 (2007): 650-670, url: http://www.jstor.org/stable/30031608.

[7] Bloom and Martin, *Black Against Empire,* 195.

[8] For literature that situates the BPP within the broader history of the Black Power Movement and black freedom struggle, see Jeffrey O. G. Ogbar, *Black Power: Radical Politics and African American Identity* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004); Peniel E. Joseph, *Waiting 'Til the Midnight Hour: A Narrative History of Black Power in America* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 2006); Peniel E. Joseph, ed., *The Black Power Movement: Re-thinking the Civil Rights-Black Power Era* (NY: Routledge, 2006). Joseph's work is heavily shaped by Jacqueline Dowd Hall's 2005 article, in which she complicates earlier narratives that framed the Black Power Movement as a product of a failed Civil Rights Movement. See Jacqueline Dowd Hall, "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past," *The Journal of American History* 91, no. 4 (March 2005): 1233-1263, doi: 10.2307/3660172; Works that

role of gender in the Party's theoretical and practical development, a dimension of the Party that substantially shaped the organization's internal structure over time and served as a vital avenue through which the BPP built coalitions. Similarly, while the authors delineate a range of factors that led to the Party's ultimate disbanding in 1982, they provide only a brief discussion of the effects of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and police repression on Panther families, even while agents in the Bureau's Counterintelligence Program (COINTELPRO) regularly targeted BPP collectives and

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contextualize the BPP within the history of California's postwar urbanization comprise a substantial portion of recent studies of the BPP. For these histories, see Robert Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003). Self posits the rise of the East Bay's Black Power Movement as a critical response to the city's urban decline in the 1970s, a project that, Self contends, was necessarily linked to a simultaneous process of postwar suburbanization. The Black Power Movement developed as an alternative to the city's neopopulist conservative fight for private property, limited taxation, and the avoidance of a welfare state. See also James Tyner, "'Defend the Ghetto': Space and the Urban Politics of the Black Panther Party," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 96, no. 1 (2006): 105-118, url: http://www.jstor.org/stable/3694147. Tyner builds on *American Babylon* by contending that efforts to control urban terrain were central to Oakland's Black Power Movement. With a focus on what he terms the Panthers' "territoriality politics," he explores how "public" domains – such as street corners, parking lots, and parks – represented key sites of contestation between the BPP and the state. See also Donna Murch, *Living for the City: Migration, Education, and the Rise of the Black Panther Party in Oakland, California* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010). Murch provides a transregional study of the organization's Oakland branch in *Living for the City*. Whereas previous scholars situated the BPP as a product of the political and economic shifts in 1970s Oakland, Murch underscores the contributions of southern migrants and their experience with working-class activism in the South to the era's radicalization of the Bay Area. If Oakland's college campuses provided key venues for the city's burgeoning culture of black radicalism, so too was the Black Power Movement informed by a southern black diaspora steeped in a history of labor activism. While *Living for the City* offers much in the way of broadening our understanding of the Party's geographical origins, Murch's text is less concerned with the role of gender in this history. For histories of Party chapters outside of Oakland, see Judson Jeffries, ed., *Comrades: A Local History of the Black Panther Party* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007); Judson Jeffries, ed., *On the Ground: The Black Panther Party in Communities Across America* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2010); Yohuru Williams and Jama Lazerow, *Liberated Territory: Untold Local Perspectives on the Black Panther Party* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008); Lucas N. N. Burke and Judson L. Jeffries, *The Portland Black Panthers: Empowering Albina and Remaking a City* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2016); Judson L. Jeffries, ed., *The Black Panther Party In a City Near You* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2018). For global histories of the BPP, see Sean Malloy, *Out of Oakland: Black Panther Party Internationalism During the Cold War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Press, 2017).

other domestic spaces in their efforts to destabilize the organization. This study works to flesh out these dimensions of the history.[9]

With her 2016 monograph, *The Revolution Has Come: Gender, Black Power, and the Black Panther Party in Oakland*, Robyn Spencer significantly added to literature on women and gender in the BPP, which had previously existed in the form of autobiographical accounts, scholarly articles, dissertations and theses, and conference papers.[10] Like Bloom and Martin, Spencer seeks to challenge narratives that associate the organization with criminality and violence. She demonstrates the ways in which federal efforts to curb the growth of the BPP intersected with changes in the Party's engagement with women and discourses about gender. Under J. Edgar Hoover's directorship, FBI agents worked hand in glove with local law enforcement agencies to imprison and execute an increasing number of Panther men, while many others fled the United States to become political exiles. According to Spencer, the consequent demographic shift to a woman-dominated BPP, combined with Panthers' support for the concurrent Women's and Gay Liberation movements, brought new opportunities for women Panthers across

[9] For literature on the role of the FBI in the history of the BPP, see Ward Churchill and Jim Vander Wall, *Agents of Repression: The FBI's Secret Wars Against the Black Panther Party and the American Indian Movement* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1990); Jeffrey Haas, *The Assassination of Fred Hampton: How the FBI and the Chicago Police Murdered a Black Panther* (Chicago, IL: Chicago Review Press, 2010).

[10] Robyn C. Spencer, *The Revolution Has Come: Black Power, Gender, and the Black Panther Party in Oakland* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016). For earlier key writings by and about Panther women, and gender, see Robyn C. Spencer, "Communalism and the Black Panther Party in Oakland, California," in *West of Eden: Communes and Utopia in Northern California*, eds. Iain Boal, Janferie Stone, Michael Watts, and Cal Winslow (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2012), 92-121; Robyn C. Spencer, "Engendering the Black Freedom Struggle: Revolutionary Black Womanhood and the Black Panther Party in the Bay Area, California," *Journal of Women's History* 20, no. 1 (2008): 90-113, doi: 10.1353/jowh.2008.0006; Steve Estes, *'I Am a Man!': Race, Manhood, and the Civil Rights Movement* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), Chapter 7; Tracye Matthews, "'No One Ever Asks, What a Man's Role in the Revolution Is': Gender and the Politics of the Black Panther Party, 1966-1971" in *The Black Panther Party Reconsidered*, ed. Charles E. Jones (Baltimore, MD: Black Classic Press, 1998), 267-304.

organizational ranks.[11] With her focus on the effects of Party membership on individuals' daily lives, the connection Spencer draws between FBI repression and the Party's gender politics leaves more to be explored about how external forces, such as the FBI, shaped the ways in which Party members developed and sustained families and raised children. My work speaks to Spencer's text with its focus on family development, childrearing, and how children and youth responded to omnipresent government surveillance.

This study further speaks to a more recent body of literature on the black independent school movement of the 1960s and 1970s. In his groundbreaking assessment of Black Nationalist and Pan-Africanist educational initiatives, Russell Rickford (2016) identifies these programs as the foundation of a Black Power "submovement" in which children were prepared to contribute to the cause of "national development" within the African world.[12] I extend this line of inquiry by tracing BPP ideas about children and youth for what they tell us about the group's increasing engagement with socialism.

Finally, with its temporal focus from the mid-1960s to the present, this dissertation contributes to the historiographical conversation about the role of young people in twentieth-century social movements. In *Growing Up Jim Crow: How Black and White Southern Children Learned Race* (2006), Jennifer Ritterhouse investigates how young people in the Jim Crow South learned the rules of race and developed a racial

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[11] Spencer, *The Revolution Has Come*, 89.

[12] Russell Rickford, *We Are an African People: Independent Education, Black Power, and the Radical Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 2, 4. For histories of the BPP's alternative education programs, see Ericka Huggins and Angela D. LeBlanc-Ernest, "Revolutionary Women, Revolutionary Education: The Black Panther Party's Oakland Community School," in *Want to Start a Revolution? Radical Women in the Black Freedom Struggle*, eds. Dayo F. Gore, Jeanne Theoharis, and Komozi Woodard (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 161-184. For contextualizations of the Panthers' liberation schools in relation to the Bay Area's educational reform movements in the 1960s, including the movement for Ethnic Studies, see Murch, *Living for the City*; William Watkins, ed., *Black Protest Thought and Education* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2005), chapters 2 and 6.

consciousness through practices of racial etiquette.[13] She complicates the historiographical tendency to privilege the "public" realms of southern segregation and racial learning by tracing how power relations played out in southerners' everyday personal interactions.[14] Relying heavily on oral histories and autobiographical accounts written by both black and white informants, Ritterhouse avers that in order to more fully gauge "continuity and change in southern race relations," historians must look at the nature of both public *and* private life. Whereas children factor into Ritterhouse's focus on racial learning and the development of racial identity in the Jim Crow South, my research draws from her treatment of domestic sites as important spaces in which children are socialized. I give particular attention to Panther households as key sites for organizational planning and development. More often than not, Party members' children were exposed to conversations about the state of black America and strategies for mitigating racism and poverty, in members' homes.

In 2009, Rebecca de Schweinitz furthered Ritterhouse's discussion of youth and race relations in the twentieth-century U.S. South by examining the role of children and

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[13] Jennifer Ritterhouse, *Growing Up Jim Crow: How Black and White Southern Children Learned Race* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006). For additional works on the history of childhood and race, see Wilma King, *African American Childhoods: Historical Perspectives from Slavery to Civil Rights* (NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); Mary Niall Mitchell, *Raising Freedom's Child: Black Children and Visions of the Future After Slavery* (NY: New York University Press, 2008); Robin Bernstein, *Racial Innocence: Performing American Childhood from Slavery to Civil Rights* (NY: New York University Press, 2011).

[14] In her telling of the nature of the Jim Crow South, children and adults alike made conscious decisions about how and when they would engage with socially prescribed codes of racial behavior. Ritterhouse's definition of "racial etiquette" is largely shaped by John F. Kasson's *Rudeness and Civility: Manners in Nineteenth-Century Urban America*, and James C. Scott's *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*. She draws from both authors' notion of "etiquette" as a process that necessarily involves coercion, as well as their focus on how power hierarchies are enforced and perpetuated through social performance, often through quotidian interpersonal activities. See Ritterhouse, *Growing Up Jim Crow*, 3; John F. Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility: Manners in Nineteenth-Century Urban America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1990); James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).

conceptions of childhood in the long Civil Rights Movement. In *If We Could Change the World: Young People and America's Struggle for Racial Equality*, de Schweinitz situates the Civil Rights Movement, and *Brown v. Board of Education* in particular, within the context of postwar public discourses about children and youth.[15] In addition to young people's activism in the 1950s and 1960s black liberation struggle, the movement also gained momentum because of its timing; *Brown* transpired in an era when sentimental notions of children took precedent over economic conceptions, and when national ideas of family life, which promoted rigid norms of domestic order, permeated U.S. political culture.[16] While the author attends to the relationship between young people's activism and national conversations about youth and childhood, I build on her recognition of children as important agents of change in order to develop new insights into the BPP.[17]

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[15] Rebecca de Schweinitz, *If We Could Change the World.*

[16] de Schweinitz, *If We Could Change the World,* 4. For important studies on the role of children and youth in the Civil Rights Movement, see also, Cynthia Levinson, *We've Got a Job: The 1963 Birmingham Children's March* (Atlanta, GA: Peachtree Publishers, 2011); Charles Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995), Chapter 7; Doug McAdam, *Freedom Summer* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1988); Lynne Olson, *Freedom's Daughters: The Unsung Heroines of the Civil Rights Movement from 1830 to 1970* (NY: Scribner, 2001); John Dittmer, *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1994); Harvard Sitkoff, *The Struggle for Black Equality, 1954-1980* (NY: Hill and Wang, 1981). Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981); Anne Moody, *Coming of Age in Mississippi* (NY: Dial Press, 1968). For studies on the role of visual media representations of young people during the Civil Rights Movement, see Diane McWhorter, *Carry Me Home: Birmingham, Alabama: The Climactic Battle of the Civil Rights Revolution* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001), Chapters 15-16; Katherine Capshaw, *Civil Rights Childhood: Picturing Liberation in African American Photobooks* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014); Martin Berger, *Seeing Through Race: A Reinterpretation of Civil Rights Photography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).

[17] de Schweinitz, *If We Could Change the World*, 1. For an important oral history-based study of the children of various leaders of the Civil Rights Movement and the Black Power Movement, see John Blake, *Children of the Movement: The Sons and Daughters of Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, Elijah Muhammad, George Wallace, Andrew Young, Julian Bond, Stokely Carmichael, Bob Moses, James Chaney, Elaine Brown, and Others Reveal How the Civil Rights Movement Tested and Transformed Their Families* (Chicago, IL: Lawrence Hill Press, 2004).

As much as this is a study of how the BPP navigated its relationship with young people, so too is it an exploration of how young people responded to Party activity as social actors in their own right. The second half of this dissertation attempts to make sense of children's agency in this history and explores how these same individuals remember their childhoods now in adulthood. I have found scholarship on the history of children of the American Left to be particularly useful for this portion of my research. In their anthology, *Red Diapers: Growing Up in the Communist Left* (1998), Judy Kaplan and Lynn Shapiro identify five major themes in the retrospective narratives of individuals born into families of the political left before the 1960s.[18] While I outline their findings in Chapter 4, it is worth mentioning here the relevance of their study to my analysis of children of Black Panther activists. The editors' discussions of the degree to which left-wing politics permeated the most quotidian and intimate realms of everyday life for Red Diaper Babies is, I argue, an especially important historical parallel to the experiences of those born to Black Panther activists. Similarly, Kaplan and Shapiro point to the commonality within Red Diaper Baby memories of their early awareness of their parents' social and political activities as being in tension with mainstream beliefs and discourses. My analysis of the recollections of the daughters and sons of Black Panthers reveals strikingly similar themes of oppositional identities in the collective memory of this cohort.[19] While the context and nature of the Black Power Movement necessarily differs from that of leftist labor movements prior to the 1960s, I argue that the recollections of

[18] Judy Kaplan and Lynn Shapiro, eds., *Red Diapers: Growing Up in the Communist Left* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998). For additional studies on the history of family, children, and youth in the U.S. Left, see Paul C. Mishler, *Raising Reds: The Young Pioneers, Radical Summer Camps, and Communist Political Culture in the United States* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).
[19] Judy Kaplan and Lynn Shapiro, *Red Diapers*, 9.

Red Diaper Babies about their childhood experiences serve as a key point of comparison to the stories of their Black Panther counterparts. Both sets of retrospective sources elucidate the paradoxes of early life in social and political movements; that is, for many, childhood unfolded at the confluence of normalcy and complete aberrance.[20]

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I next offer a brief history of the organization in order to provide necessary context for the activities by and about youth that I address in this dissertation. In October 1966 college students Huey Newton and Bobby Seale founded the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense in north Oakland, California. As was the case in cities in other parts of the country at the time, rampant and often unchecked anti-black police violence prompted local residents to initiate community-led actions aimed at mitigating misconduct by local law enforcers. In fact, self-determination through self-defense against unlawful police practices comprised the Party's earliest defining action when Newton, Seale, and "Lil'" Bobby Hutton—the Party's first recruit—organized armed caravans to monitor illegal police practices in Oakland's predominantly black neighborhoods. With aims of attending law school, Newton's and Seale's college training in constitutional law and legal theory provided an apt foundation for community-control initiatives. Their politics of armed self-defense gained greater visibility in February 1967 when eight members of the BPPSD escorted Betty Shabazz during her visit to the Bay Area as the keynote speaker at the memorial conference in honor of her husband, Malcolm X, who had been assassinated two years prior. Media coverage of the group dressed in waist-length black

[20] Here I borrow James Laxer's description of growing up in the sphere of Canada's Labour-Progressive Party, as it fittingly applies to the common tensions evident in the Panther cub testimonies with which I engage in Chapter 4. James Laxer, *Red Diaper Baby: A Boyhood in the Age of McCarthyism* (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 2004), 1.

leather jackets, black berets, with pistols on display helped catalyze an unknown local group with only a handful of members to national attention. Three years later the BPP would become an organization with thousands of members in cities across the country.

On May 2, 1967, in one of the Party's earliest public demonstrations, Seale, Emory Douglas, Bobby Hutton, and twenty-seven other early Panther recruits stormed California's state capitol in efforts to prevent the passage of proposed legislation that directly threatened the future of the Party's practice of armed self-defense. Six weeks prior to the Panthers' demonstration, on April 5, 1967, Assemblyman John Mulford introduced a bill to the California legislature intended to legally prohibit the carrying of loaded firearms in public spaces.[21] On the day of the bill's vote, surrounded by fellow Panthers, Seale read a prepared statement before a slew of state representatives and local news reporters, as he called on Americans—and black Americans in particular—to defend their communities from police brutality. He further situated the contemporary trend of government-sanctioned violence against African Americans within the nation's broader history of colonial rule. The U.S.'s extermination of indigenous peoples, its massacres in Vietnam, and its violent confrontations with black America "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…"[22]

Under its early Black Nationalist posture, the BPP's practice of self-determination moved beyond the scope of armed self-defense. In order to address the expressed needs

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[21] Bloom and Martin, *Black Against Empire*, 57-58.

[22] Executive Mandate No. I as quoted in Philip Foner, ed., *The Black Panthers Speak* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1970; repr. New York: Da Capo, 1995), 40. The Mulford Act ultimately passed. Years after the demonstration at the capitol in Sacramento, Seale argued that by October 1967, roughly 75 activists comprised the Party. Former BPP Chief of Staff, David Hilliard and BPP Field Marshal, Donald Cox, however, offer more conservative estimates closer to ten. Taken from David J. Garrow, "Picking up the Books," 652.

of Bay Area neighborhoods, Party members announced the organization's famous Ten Point Program in May 1967.[23] Identifying the Panthers as stewards of African Americans' interests, the program enumerated a range of civil and human rights—in the areas of employment, education, housing, and nutrition, among others—which, the Party argued, the federal government had failed to provide through social welfare programs. In the same document, the BPP made it its goal to provide local residents with basic resources and services in order to help mitigate such disparities in the Bay Area.[24]

Inequalities in America's criminal justice system quickly became a focus for the Party as well. According to Seale, the BPP experienced a sort of rebirth when Newton was arrested on charges of killing Oakland police officer, John Frey on October 28, 1967.[25] Party leaders including Minister of Information, Eldridge Cleaver, Minister of Culture, Emory Douglas, and Kathleen Neal, subsequently joined forces to launch the organization's "Free Huey!" campaign in the months leading up to Newton's trial set for July the following year.[26] Both Douglas and Cleaver had joined the Panthers in February 1967, just months after Cleaver's own release from a nine-year prison sentence at Folsom

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[23] Bloom and Martin, *Black Against Empire*, 70.
[24] Bloom and Martin, *Black Against Empire*, 70-73.
[25] Garrow, "Picking Up the Books," 652. The altercation resulted in Newton suffering a gunshot wound in his abdomen. Hours later, the BPP's soon-to-be Chief of Staff, David Hilliard, and his brother Roosevelt "June" Hilliard, rushed Newton to Oakland's Kaiser Hospital. The following day news of the incident spread throughout the Bay Area when local newspapers featured a photograph of the wounded Party co-founder manacled to a hospital gurney, feet away from a police officer. After being hospitalized for two weeks, authorities relocated Newton to San Quentin Prison's medical ward and finally to the Alameda County Jail in Oakland's downtown. Nearly two weeks after the death of Frey, Newton was indicted for three felonies and faced the death penalty. See Spencer, *The Revolution Has Come*, 56-57; Bloom and Martin, *Black Against Empire*, 166.
[26] Garrow, "Picking Up the Books," 652; Spencer, *The Revolution Has Come*, 59. With the help of Newton's family, campaign organizers established the Huey Newton Fund to collect monetary donations intended to cover Newton's legal fees. For context on the Party's recruitment of Eldridge and Kathleen Neal, and Emory Douglas, see Spencer, *The Revolution Has Come*, 44-45, 58-59.

State Prison on charges of rape.[27] While organizing around Newton's case, Cleaver attended a black student conference at Fisk College in Nashville, Tennessee where he met Kathleen Neal, one of the conference organizers and the secretary of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee's (SNCC) campus contingent. A witness to her organizing expertise, Cleaver invited Neal to contribute to the "Free Huey!" campaign, and she agreed. The two were subsequently married and after officially joining the BPP, Kathleen would ultimately serve as its Secretary of Communications.[28] A new focus for organizational activity, the movement to free Newton helped grow the Party by garnering attention and support from residents in low-income neighborhoods in regions throughout the country.

The BPP's official newspaper, the *Black Panther*, became a critical platform for publicizing the campaign and the BPP's other community initiatives, first to residents in the Bay Area and subsequently beyond. With its first issue published on April 25, 1967, the paper's editorial staff documented accounts of police misconduct, local and international news, as well as Panther grassroots programs.[29] As BPP chapters in other regions of the country started duplicating the organization's activities in northern

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[27] Spencer, *The Revolution Has Come*, 44; Bloom and Martin, *Black Against Empire*, 76-78. While in prison Cleaver became inspired by the Nation of Islam and began writing essays on the state of black manhood and the black freedom struggle more broadly. With the help of white civil rights attorney, Beverly Axelrod, and the publisher of *Ramparts* magazine, Edward Keating, Cleaver was released on parole in December 1966. He soon became a writer for *Ramparts* and in February 1968, published *Soul on Ice*, a collection of his prison writings, which collectively presented his critique of white supremacy and a vivid chronicle of his political evolution. Though highly misogynistic to the point of condoning the rape of women, the book received enthusiastic praise by black and white radical circles and sold over a million copies in the months immediately following its publication. See, Eldridge Cleaver, *Soul on Ice* (New York, NY: Dell, 1968).

[28] Spencer, *The Revolution Has Come*, 58-59.

[29] Billy X Jennings, "Remembering the Black Panther Party Newspaper, April 25, 1967-September 1980," *San Francisco Bay View* (May 2015), url: http://sfbayview.com/2015/05/remembering-the-black-panther-party-newspaper-april-25-1967-september-1980/. See Chapter 2 for a more detailed history of the *Black Panther*.

California, the editorial staff—under Eldridge Cleaver's direction—increased the paper's production from monthly to weekly issues in January 1968, and now boasted a national and global readership.[30]

As the *Black Panther* helped publicize the Party's work in local communities, the late 1960s also presented opportunities for organizational growth through coalition building with other radical and multi-racial groups. In Newton's absence, Eldridge Cleaver assumed new organizational responsibilities, playing an instrumental role in the Panthers' outreach and public relations efforts. He helped build alliances with the Peace and Freedom Party (PFP) and SNCC, the latter of which would serve as a model for the Panthers' future education initiatives.[31] The BBP's collaborations with groups of the U.S. Left and the Civil Rights Movement in the South not only exemplified the Panthers' early rejection of racial separatism, but also set a precedent for future partnerships with movement groups outside of the black radical tradition, including those representing the Women's and Gay Liberation movements.

By 1968, increased public awareness of the Panthers, along with the organization's development through inter-group alliances, brought with it increased surveillance by local and national state agencies and consequently a shift in the organization's membership dynamics. Heightened efforts by local police departments and COINTELPRO to monitor the Panthers counterbalanced the group's growing popularity

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[30] Linda Lumsden, "Good Mothers with Guns: Framing Black Womanhood in the Black Panther Party, 1968-1980," *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly* 86, no. 4 (2009): 903, url: http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/107769900908600411.

[31] Garrow, "Picking up the Books," 652. Daniel Perlstein, "Minds Stayed on Freedom: Politics and Pedagogy in the African American Freedom Struggle," in *Black Protest Thought and Education*, ed., William Watkins (New York: Peter Lang, 2005), 43-45. Scholars including Robyn Spencer credit Cleaver with enhancing the Party's focus on class inequality at this particular juncture in the Party's development. See Spencer, *The Revolution Has Come*, 57.

and grassroots development. In the wake of Newton's arrest the Party found itself in crisis. Cleaver was sent to jail after a deadly shootout with Oakland police on April 6, which resulted in the death of seventeen-year-old Hutton. He was the Party's first member and became its first casualty at the hands of local police.[32] Hutton's death became the first of many violent attacks against the group. As more Panther men fell victim to police-led killings, incarceration, or political exile, the Party's core membership declined from roughly 75 to less than 30 committed members, the majority of whom were women.[33] Less than two years after the Party's first woman recruit, Tarika Lewis in spring 1967, women outnumbered men and became the backbone of the Panthers' rank-and-file base.[34]

As the Party's gender makeup shifted so too did its size. The organization attracted young men and women from many different paths and social and political circles. Early membership consisted of an amalgamation of the unemployed, formerly incarcerated, gang members, and local Bay Area student activists, among others. Similarly, people demonstrated varied reasons for joining, including aspirations to change the material conditions of their respective neighborhoods, interest in the Party's ten-point program, as well as attraction to the group's politics of armed self-defense. Many early recruits joined the group for all three of these reasons.[35] In April 1968, Seattle became the

[32] Garrow, "Picking Up the Books," 652. See also Bloom and Martin, *Black Against Empire*, 118-119. Other scholars, including Tracye Matthews, contend that Hutton was only sixteen years old at the time of his assassination. Matthews, "No One Ever Asks," 309-310.
[33] Spencer, *The Revolution Has Come*, 58.
[34] Spencer, *The Revolution Has Come*, 47, 89. Tarika Lewis was also known as Joan Lewis and as Matilaba. Tracye Matthews, "No One Ever Asks," 307. According to Spencer, by 1969 women comprised the majority of the group's membership.
[35] Spencer, *The Revolution Has Come*, 42.

first city outside of California to open a chapter.[36] Weeks later, eighteen-year-old SNCC activist, Joudon Ford helped establish the first East Coast chapter in Harlem, New York.[37] Even with new chapters opening across the U.S., the BPP remained an essentially Oakland-based organization in early 1968. According to Kathleen Cleaver, the Party's grassroots programs would not achieve national recognition until the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. on April 4 the same year. As black youths sought new leadership and strategies for meeting their communities' needs in the wake of his death, many turned to the Panthers' self-determination strategies, including armed self-defense.[38] Activists from around the nation contacted the Oakland office with inquiries about gaining membership, obviating the organization's recruitment efforts. In response, by the end of the year the Party opened chapters in at least seventeen additional cities throughout the country, including Albany, Detroit, Philadelphia, and San Diego.[39]

With new auxiliary chapters emerging throughout the United States, leaders in Oakland—now the site of the Black Panther Party National Headquarters—implemented a three-tiered organizational structure as a way of streamlining Party communications, programming efforts, and organizational policies within and among local chapters and Oakland's central office. The Central National Committee represented the highest tier and was comprised of "the minister of defense, chairman, minister of information, chief of staff, communications secretary, and the field marshals."[40] Below the Central Committee were additional ministerial positions, including the minister of education and

[36] Bloom and Martin, *Black Against Empire*, 146-147.
[37] Bloom and Martin, *Black Against Empire*, 149.
[38] Taken from Bloom and Martin, *Black Against Empire*, 159.
[39] Bloom and Martin, *Black Against Empire*, 159. For other estimates of the BPP's geographical scope, see Blake, *Children of the Movement*, 171-172.
[40] Spencer, *The Revolution Has Come*, 69.

the minister of culture. Members of the rank-and-file and Panthers in training comprised the hierarchy's third tier. Similar models were proposed for state and local chapters. Advisory cabinets existed at all three levels, through which participants addressed the organization's major community-based issues, including police misconduct and unemployment, as well as internal issues such as public relations and fundraising.[41]

Beyond the organizational uniformity that Newton and others hoped would result from the Party's new tiered system, the reconfiguration also represented a direct response by leaders to escalating tensions between the BPP and state and federal government agencies. During 1968 and 1969 alone, 739 Panthers faced arrests and the BPP as a whole paid nearly $5 million in bail fees.[42] By mid-July 1968, the "Free Huey!" campaign was in full swing. Less than two months later, however, organizers faced a significant obstacle when Newton's case resulted in a manslaughter conviction on September 27. He was sentenced to two to fifteen years.[43] A few weeks later, a California appeals court ordered Cleaver to return to jail in the lead up to his own trial related to the April 1967 police shootout. The Minister of Information responded by fleeing to Cuba and later, Algeria, leaving the Party bereft of two of its most influential figures.[44] The stresses imposed by a crippled Panther leadership were compounded by COINTELPRO's concurrent campaign to undermine the Party's remaining leaders. These tactics

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[41] Spencer, *The Revolution Has Come*, 69-71.
[42] Spencer, *The Revolution Has Come*, 89.
[43] Spencer, *The Revolution Has Come*, 75. Newton hired San Francisco lawyer, Charles Garry as his defense attorney. Garry played a critical role in helping to shape the discourse around the case by focusing on Oakland's epidemic of anti-black police violence.
[44] Garrow, "Picking Up the Books," 652-653; Spencer, *The Revolution Has Come*, 76. At the time of Cleaver's departure, Seale was dealing with his own probation restrictions related to his involvement in the 1967 Sacramento protest, leaving him vulnerable to arrest at any moment. With Cleaver in exile, Newton in prison, and Seale on probation, the Panthers were forced to assign leadership duties to other members, giving them little time to prepare for their new tasks. See Spencer, *The Revolution Has Come*, 76-77.

manifested in a series of carefully orchestrated raids of branch offices in New York, and by June, Panther sites in cities throughout the country. In one of the deadliest FBI-orchestrated attacks, Bureau officials worked with the Chicago Police Department in December 1969 in a deadly raid that resulted in the deaths of Chicago Panther leaders Fred Hampton and Mark Clark.[45] The degree to which the FBI targeted Panther activists became nationally apparent on July 15, 1969 when Bureau director, J. Edgar Hoover, publicly announced that, "the Black Panther Party, without question, represents the greatest threat to the internal security of the country."[46]

While Panther officials in Oakland aimed to both mitigate threats of external violence and help increase cohesiveness within and between its expanding national chapters by institutionalizing a new hierarchical order, the tactical reconfiguration was not without limitations and inconsistencies. In many instances, members' political histories, regionalism within and between chapters, and social conditions eclipsed the structural frameworks established by Oakland officials.[47] Relatedly, some Panthers outside of Party leadership circles responded to the tiered system with dissent and criticism, arguing that it afforded the Oakland headquarters too much latitude in monitoring the activities of branches outside of the Bay Area. Amidst the opposition and as a way of tightening Party ranks against potential FBI infiltration, Panther officials initiated a massive security purge in early 1969. Members who transgressed organizational rules, individuals who were suspected of being government informants, and those who prioritized paramilitarism over other aspects of the Party were often targets of dismissal. In March 1969, Oakland Party officials ousted twenty-eight branch

[45] Garrow, "Picking Up the Books," 655.
[46] Quoted in Bloom and Martin, *Black Against Empire*, 210.
[47] Spencer, *The Revolution Has Come*, 71.

members, causing a ripple effect in many chapters and branches across the country.[48] By the end of 1969, Party membership had declined by fifty percent from an estimated 1968 base of 5,000.[49]

Paradoxically, the period of peak governmental repression against the BPP was also a time of significant programmatic innovation for the Party. In late January 1969, the Party launched its first—and what would become its signature—survival program, the Free Breakfast for School Children Program, in West Oakland.[50] Soon after, the organization established "liberation schools" for children and youths in the Bay Area and subsequently in cities as far away as New York.[51]

This programmatic expansion elicited continued surveillance by the federal government as well as growing support by residents in chapter cities. With Seale now leading the group's grassroots projects, by the end of the decade and into the early 1970s, the Black Power organization amassed significant support from working-class communities across racial lines.[52] Organizational growth can in part be attributed to the Party's production and circulation of the *Black Panther*, which, according to scholars including David Garrow, became the group's defining activity by spring 1970.[53]

By the early 1970s, the organization's investments in community service programs in cities around the country reflected changes in the group's politics at the

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[48] By this time, David and June Hilliard assumed greater influence in the organization. Both men oversaw the disciplinary measures and expulsions that many Panthers faced during this period. Spencer, *The Revolution Has Come*, 90-91. See also, Garrow, "Picking Up the Books, 653.
[49] Garrow, "Picking Up the Books," 655.
[50] Bloom and Martin, *Black Against Empire*, 182.
[51] Garrow, "Picking Up the Books," 654; "Liberation Means Freedom," *Black Panther*, July 5, 1969, 3; Val Douglas, "Vallejo Liberation School," *Black Panther*, August 9, 1969, 19; Bloom and Martin, *Black Against Empire*, 192.
[52] Bloom and Martin, *Black Against Empire*, 181-182; Garrow, "Picking Up the Books," 655.
[53] Garrow, "Picking Up the Books," 656.

theoretical level. While the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense exhibited Black Nationalist leanings, perhaps most obviously through its practice of armed self-defense, the group's amplified focus on local welfare programs reflected what many scholars describe as its transition into revolutionary nationalism.[54] In the years following the group's establishment of nutrition and education programs, the BPP continued to organize free welfare services in areas as wide-ranging as health care, senior citizen support, legal aid, and pest control, among many others.[55] In large part, the Party's programmatic growth reflected its increasingly global approach to the class struggle. When his conviction was overturned on August 5, 1970, Newton was released on bail and returned to full-time organizing work.[56] At this juncture, Seale and other leaders joined Newton with reinvigorated plans for coalition building. They encouraged alliances with white and Third World revolutionary groups in the U.S., and officials such as Newton, Seale, and Elaine Brown, among others brought word of the BPP's local work to leaders of anti-colonial and socialist movements in places including China, South Korea, and Vietnam.[57] While Black Nationalist sensibilities infused the early politics of the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense, by the 1970s leading members recognized the usefulness of solidarity with international groups in building an anti-capitalist movement. To put it

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[54] Spencer, *The Revolution Has Come*, 78. While scholars have categorized the BPP's ideological development in different ways, most identify the group's focus on community programs at the turn of the decade as reflective of a politics of revolutionary nationalism. In his 2006 study on the Black Panther Party's spatial politics, James Tyner suggests that the organization developed through four main ideological phases including revolutionary nationalism, revolutionary internationalism, intercommunalism, and finally socialism. See Tyner, "Defend the Ghetto," 110.
[55] David Hilliard, *The Black Panther Party: Service to the People Programs* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2008).
[56] Spencer, *The Revolution Has Come*, 96; Bloom and Martin, *Black Against Empire*, 353. According to Spencer, Newton's release resulted from months-long grassroots organizing, legal appeals, and efforts made by Newton's legal defense team to humanize Newton.
[57] Bloom and Martin, *Black Against Empire*, Chapter 14; Spencer, *The Revolution Has Come*, 102-103.

another way, Newton and others found new prospects in the fight for economic justice for black America by turning to global alliances and increased investment in local programs that benefited working-class Americans across racial lines.

As the organization expanded its alliances globally, and maintained active community programs, the early 1970s also marked the beginning of the BPP's ultimate dissolution. Not surprisingly, growth in Panther programs brought with it heightened attention from local media outlets and federal agencies. As COINTELPRO intensified its collaborations with local police departments as part of its continued attack on individuals and groups associated with the Civil Rights and Black Power movements, Panther leaders responded in a number of ways. In one of the most drastic organizational restructuring measures the Party had yet seen, in 1972 Newton ordered all chapters outside of Oakland to close and called upon members across the U.S. to relocate to the Bay Area.[58] The consolidation represented a strategic measure by Party officials to deal with increased federal surveillance on the one hand, and navigate waning financial resources on the other. Jane Rhodes demonstrates that while early media coverage of the BPP's survival programs was generally positive, by the mid-1970s, the FBI's amplified efforts to curb Party activity both fueled and was fueled by negative press coverage.[59] Collectively these destructive forces continued to weaken the organization's vitality until its dissolution in 1982.

Focusing energies on one location further afforded the Party new opportunities for mobilizing local communities. For the first time in its history the Party turned

[58] Bloom and Martin, *Black Against Empire*, 380; Aaron Dixon, *My People Are Rising: Memoir of a Black Panther Party Captain* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2012), 218.
[59] Jane Rhodes, *Framing the Black Panthers: The Spectacular Rise of a Black Power Icon* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2017), 293, 305-306.

strategically to electoral politics, running its own candidates for local offices. As early as 1972, nearly a dozen Party members and allies in Oakland ran successful campaigns for positions on local planning and community development councils.[60] In March of the following year, Seale ran for mayor of Oakland, and Elaine Brown—the leader of the BPP from August 1974 to June 1977—ran her own campaign for city council.[61] While neither candidate secured a majority vote, both campaigns garnered impressive polling results, with Brown securing a close second place. The depletion of financial resources and energy resulting from the Party's investments in each race undoubtedly took a toll on the organization's reserves. As a result, many Panthers relinquished their membership, walking away from the Oakland organization both disappointed and disillusioned.[62]

If the political campaigns of Bobby Seale and Elaine Brown represented a harbinger for the BPP's decline, the group's final denouement unfolded over a prolonged nine additional years. The combination of persistent FBI and police surveillance, scant financial resources, and a dwindling membership base significantly weakened group cohesion. Some members' criminal pursuits exacerbated this trend. According to Paul Alkebulan and Curtis Austin, an "underground" Panther contingent had existed as early

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[60] Spencer, *The Revolution Has Come*, 148. In May 1972 Ericka Huggins, Audrea Jones, William Roberts and Herman Smith campaigned for and won four seats on the Berkeley Community Development Council. The same year, a handful of other Party members won seats on the West Oakland Planning Committee, a committee responsible for organizing community involvement in Oakland's Model Cities urban renewal project.

[61] Brown and Seale announced their joint campaigns on March 5, 1973. Spencer, *The Revolution Has Come*, 151; Garrow, "Picking Up the Books,"658; Bloom and Martin, *Black Against Empire*, 383. Newton asked Brown to lead the BPP after facing new legal troubles. On August 17, 1974, he was charged with pistol-whipping an Oakland resident in his apartment, and around the same time, Newton was additionally charged with the August 6 shooting of seventeen-year-old sex worker, Kathleen Smith. Smith died a few months after the shooting. Worried about the unlikelihood of receiving a fair trial, Newton skipped his court hearing scheduled for August 23, 1974, and fled to Cuba. Upon his invitation, Brown stepped into the BPP's lead position. See Spencer, *The Revolution Has Come*, 170, 172-173.

[62] Garrow, "Picking Up the Books," 658; Bloom and Martin, *Black Against Empire*, 381.

as 1967, partly comprised of members especially interested in the idea and practice of armed revolution.[63] Yet, Newton's increasing legal transgressions, largely related to his battle with drug addiction, not only brought renewed negative media attention to an already struggling organization, but further led many remaining members to distance themselves from the Party co-founder and his supporters by the mid-1970s. Newton's engagement in violence in and outside of the Party, money extortion, and his embezzlement of funds from the Party's Oakland Community School culminated in insurmountable hardships for the organization. By 1980 only twenty-seven members remained. Two years later, the Oakland Community School—the last remaining survival program—closed its doors, and the Black Panther Party officially dissolved.[64]

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This dissertation is comprised of four chapters. In Chapter 1, I expand on scholarship that examines the role of gender and sites of organizing in the BPP by exploring the quotidian routines of everyday life in Panther households and Panther communes in particular. With a focus on collective childrearing practices, this chapter highlights how men and women contributed to the Party's processes of social reproduction, while further underscoring the informal arenas in which members dialogued about the status and development of the organization. Through a critical

[63] Paul Alkebulan, *Survival Pending Revolution: The History of the Black Panther Party* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2007), 92; Curtis J. Austin, *Up Against the Wall: Violence in the Making and Unmaking of the Black Panther Party* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2006), 149.

[64] Garrow, "Picking Up the Books," 658-659. In the midst of both the Party's decline and his personal battles with drug addiction and extralegal activities, Newton also turned his sights to higher education. In 1974 he received a B.A. from the University of California, Santa Cruz, and would go on to complete his doctorate in the university's History of Consciousness Program in 1980. His graduate research focused on the BPP's political development and contentious relationship with the federal government.

analysis of the Party's official newspaper, the *Black Panther*, Chapter 2 investigates how Party members were thinking and writing about young people and their relationship to the race and class struggle throughout the BPP's lifespan from 1966 to 1982. I posit that the penury experienced by many children and youth in low-income communities helped legitimize Party claims about the dereliction of federal and state governments. The BPP further celebrated young people's potential as change agents. Building on an exploration of Party discourse, in Chapter 3 I analyze how Panther leaders and members of the rank-and-file were mobilizing children and youths in the organization's various community service programs, including its free meal programs, alternative schools, and movement to free political prisoners. Finally, Chapter 4 turns to the legacy of the Black Power Movement as it exists in individual and collective memory. With special focus on historical memory, and by employing oral history methodology, the dissertation's final chapter offers a glimpse into how the youngest contemporaries of the BPP—the children of Party members—remember and make sense of their childhoods today.

This dissertation culminated from research I conducted over six years, through critical engagement with a wide breadth of primary and secondary source material. While this dissertation is historically based with heavy reliance on archival, oral history, and government materials, I supplemented these core sources with visual and literary evidence where I deemed it important. I relied most heavily on the Black Panther Party's official newspaper, the *Black Panther*, oral history interviews with former Party members and the children of former Panthers, autobiographies, and organizational documents. While no complete and publicly accessible collection of the *Black Panther* exists to date, substantial print collections are held at the African American Library and Museum at

Oakland in Oakland, California (AAMLO). I spent much of the early stages of my research at the AAMLO archive as I searched through the periodical's weekly issues. My work with official Party documents brought me to the Huey P. Newton Foundation collection housed at Green Library's Special Collections department at Stanford University, the largest collection of official Party documents and ephemera in the nation. This repository proved to be key in my search for primary documentation of the BPP's children's programs, especially its Oakland Community School (OCS). A smaller, but equally useful collection of Panther ephemera is held at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, where I found information about interactions between the FBI and the BPP's New York chapters. Here, I accessed organizational ephemera demonstrating Party members' knowledge of the Bureau's surveillance of the families and children of active members, materials that few other scholars have fully used.

In order to examine how Black Panthers thought about young people's social positions and their relationship to the Party's radical agenda, the single most important and fruitful source I analyzed is the *Black Panther*. While I provide a more thorough contextualization of the paper in Chapter 2, a note about the periodical's function, readership, and limitations as a historical source is warranted here. Originally called *The Black Panther Community News Service*, the paper operated from April 25, 1967 to September 1980, and serves as the most comprehensive source of information on the Party's ideological and on-the-ground politics.[65] Under the direction of Eldridge Cleaver, the *Black Panther*'s first editor, early issues primarily functioned to document and raise awareness about cases of police misconduct in the Bay Area. The newspaper expanded in tandem with the organization, and by January 1968, the editorial board began publishing

[65] Bloom and Martin, *Black Against Empire*, 10.

weekly issues from their distribution center in San Francisco. Sold for twenty-five cents apiece to local residents in locations with Party activity, the periodical was a major source of funding for the Panthers' community service programs and other organizational endeavors.[66] Over time the paper boasted an impressive quantitative and geographical scope; former Panthers and scholars provide varied estimates of the size of the periodical's readership, however, many posit that from 1970 to 1971 the *Black Panther* reached its highest weekly circulation of between 139,000 and 400,000, making the paper one of the most widely-read black newspapers in the country.[67] Subscriptions stretched to readers as far away as China, East Germany, and Cuba.[68]

Like all sources, print media has particular limitations as a category of historical evidence. The *Black Panther* does not provide a detailed account of all Party members' viewpoints or organizational contributions. Due in part to the precarious nature of Party membership, the paper experienced frequent changes in its editorial staff. According to BPP scholars, the periodical's dynamic content reflected these changes in editorship. According to Linda Lumsden, while the theme of gender is present from the paper's earliest issues, under Elaine Brown's position as editor from 1970 to 1972, the number of features written by and about women rose, reflecting the paper's transition to a Marxist feminist bent. Expanding on Brown's editorial direction, David Du Bois—the stepson of

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[66] Jennings, "Remembering the Black Panther Party Newspaper;" Lumsden, "Good Mothers with Guns," 903. According to one source, by 1970 the *Black Panther* produced $40,000 in monthly revenue. See Rhodes, *Framing the Black Panthers*, 105.

[67] Lumsden denotes 1970 as the paper's peak circulation year, with 139,000 weekly issues. Jennings provides a more liberal estimate, contending that between 1968 and 1971, the Black Panther was the most widely-read black newspaper, with 300,000 copies sold every week. Lumsden, "Good Mothers with Guns," 903; Jennings, "Remembering the Black Panther Party Newspaper." For other estimates, see Sam Durant, ed., *Black Panther: The Revolutionary Art of Emory Douglas* (New York: Rizzoli, 2007), 96.

[68] Elaine Brown, *A Taste of Power: A Black Woman's Story* (New York: Anchor Books, 1992), 16.

African American scholar and activist William Edward Burghardt Du Bois—enhanced the paper's coverage of international movements during his role as editor from 1973 to 1975.[69] Even with its sizeable number of staff contributors, however, the newspaper overwhelmingly reflected editorial choices made by Party leadership, and therefore underrepresents the voices and experiences of rank-and-file members. Despite these caveats, however, the paper remains an invaluable source of information about the organization's community service programs, engagement with young people, writings (though scarce) by students of the BPP's free schools, as well as lifestyles of particular Panther families. Further, the *Black Panther* offers key insights into how FBI agents and local police departments monitored Party activity through their interactions with the children of Party members, and how these same individuals navigated these precarious situations.

In addition to the BPP's newspaper, this study relies heavily on retrospective sources, notably oral history interviews, autobiographies, and memoirs. Over the course of six years I conducted eleven interviews with nine individuals, including former members of the BPP and individuals born to Black Panther activists. Six of these interviews were conducted in-person, either in public settings such as local coffee shops and cafes, or at interviewees' homes. Five interviews were conducted over the phone. All interviews used in this study were audio recorded with the consent of their subjects. As historical evidence oral histories pose their own distinct set of problems. As products of memory, a highly constructed and often faulty process, oral testimonies warrant careful reading by the researcher. I acknowledge that the stories produced through the interviews used in this dissertation were shaped by many factors, including the storytellers'

[69] Lumsden, "Good Mothers with Guns," 904, 906, 908.

subjective experiences and temporal proximity to the events being described, as well as the storytellers' sense of self at the time of recollection. David Thelen's work on historical memory has been especially useful for my reading of interview sources.[70] Thelen, among many others, emphasizes the synthesized nature of individual and collective memories, arguing that all memories are necessarily fashioned through the narrator's relationship to larger social dynamics and community contexts.[71] Equally important, my positionality as an outsider also necessarily influenced the ways in which my interviewees recalled and narrated their pasts; I am not a contemporary of the Black Power era nor am I African American. Additionally, when I began my research I had no Black Panther connections in my social network. In order to navigate this, I was able to contact a former member of the BPP with the help of a mentor. After interviewing this individual, I used the snowball effect to locate additional potential collaborators. Given that the timing of my research coincided with the fiftieth anniversary of the organization's founding, I attended multiple commemorative events in the Bay Area and Los Angeles. When possible, I met with my interviewees at least once, sometimes

[70] David Thelen, "Memory and American History" *The Journal of American History* 75, no. 4 (1989): 1117-1129, http:///www.jstor.org/stable/1908632. The scholarship on oral history theories and methods and historical memory is vast. For a detailed genealogy of the literature, see Anna Green, "Individual Remembering and 'Collective Memory': Theoretical Presuppositions and Contemporary Debates," *Oral History* 32, no. 2 (2004): 35-44, url: https://www.jstor.org/stable/40179797. For key individual studies, see Paul Thompson, "Community and Individual Memory: An Introduction," *The Oral History Review* 36, no. 2 (2009): i-v, url: https://www.jstor.org/stable/20628065; Alon Confino, "Collective Memory and Cultural History: Problems of Method," *The American Historical Review* 102, no. 5 (1997): 1386-1403, url: https://www.jstor.org/stable/2171069. See also, Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson, eds., *The Oral History Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1998).

[71] Thelen, "Memory and American History," 1119.

multiple times, and in some cases while conducting off-the-record pre-interviews, in order to develop a level of trust between myself and the interviewee.[72]

Autobiographies and memoirs comprise a significant source base in this study as well. The retrospective nature of these texts presents challenges similar to those of interview-based sources. At the same time, however, written life narratives often provide some of the richest available evidence of family life for families affiliated with the BPP, particularly regarding the routines of everyday life in Panther households, childrearing practices, and the ways in which Panther households functioned as sites of socialization for the children of Party members. Very few individuals raised by Black Panthers have gone on to write about their life histories in the form of a memoir. Therefore, when I could find these sources I used them as fully as possible. In critically analyzing life narratives as sources of historical evidence, I use the approaches employed by Jennifer Ritterhouse in *Growing Up Jim Crow* as a methodological guide. Like her, I treat autobiographical accounts as highly crafted texts shaped by the storyteller's subjective experiences, constructed memories, and their inevitably dynamic sense of self. Particularly useful to my engagement with life narratives is Ritterhouse's understanding of stories of racial learning as "dramas of socialization."[73] By treating Black Panther and filial autobiographies as literary narratives containing tropes of intergenerational

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[72] On the role of the interviewer in shaping narrators' responses, see Thelen, "Memory and American History," 1118-1119. Throughout this dissertation I have used pseudonyms for those interviewees that requested them.

[73] Ritterhouse, *Growing Up Jim Crow*, 112, 133-134. For additional discussions on autobiographies as historical sources, see Jennifer Jenson Wallach, "Building a Bridge of Words: The Literary Autobiography as Historical Source Material," *Biography* 29, no. 3 (2006): 446-461, url: https://www.jstor.org/stable/23540526; Jennifer Jenson Wallach, "Remembering Jim Crow: The Literary Memoir as Historical Source Material" (PhD dissertation, University of Massachusetts Amherst, 2004), url: https://search-proquest-com.oca.ucsc.edu/docview/305178002?accountid=14523.

relations, and as sources shaped by both memory and processes of identity formation, we can at once investigate how BPP families navigated their political and familial lives, and probe the operational nature of identity itself.[74] Finally, in dealing with memoir accounts by those who were born into Black Panther families, I argue that the unforgettable nature of incidents of racial and class learning in childhood, as recalled by the author, points to their power as core identity-shaping moments and, thus, as "further evidence of the link between the experiencing child and the remembering autobiographer."[75]

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In October 2016, former Black Panthers, Black Power contemporaries, and others from around the world gathered in Oakland to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the Black Panther Party. Through panel discussions, artwork, music, and informal reflections, individuals across three generations coalesced to remember the activists who propelled the movement forward, and to contemplate the meaning of the Party today. In the twenty-first century America's call to dismantle systemic anti-black racism has assumed many iterations, locally and nationally, perhaps most notably in mass politics through emphatic affirmations that Black Lives Matter. More recently, as the nation mourns the tragic deaths of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, Rayshard Brooks and many others, the efficacy of the criminal justice system in the U.S. has once again assumed the public spotlight. As the call for racial and economic justice continues across new platforms, new technologies, and a new language, the legacy of the

[74] Ritterhouse, *Growing Up Jim Crow*, 112.
[75] Ritterhouse, *Growing Up Jim Crow*, 7. For additional works on how to critically read adult recollections of childhood, see Anna Mae Duane, ed., *Child Slavery before and after Emancipation: An Argument for Child-Centered Slavery Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

Black Panther Party reverberates loudly, and a new generation carries on its own vision for creating a social and political landscape built on equity.

CHAPTER 1

"home, headquarters, embassy": Black Panther Activism in Daily Life

By the summer of 1968, less than two years after its inception, Oakland's Black Panther Party was running out of space. Signs of the organization's rapid growth were especially evident at its Grove Street office, which, by this time, was "busting out at the seams," with "piles of newsletters, leaflets, buttons, [and] flags" overflowing into members' homes.[76] Not surprisingly, the FBI and local law enforcement were equally privy to the Party's increasing popularity among local residents; recall that during the same year, increased rates of incarceration, police-led murders, and the political exile of Panther men resulted in a predominantly female membership.[77] In the midst of heightened government repression, BPP Chief of Staff, David Hilliard, recalled that by September, he no longer felt safe in his home or the Party office.[78]

Thus, the search was on for a new base of operations. With the help of friends and the pooling of organizational funds, Hilliard quickly located an ideal site at the border of Berkeley and Oakland. Aside from the buffer that the college town's businesses would afford Hilliard's family against "the marginally more civilized Berkeley police," Hilliard envisioned additional benefits to purchasing the property:

> We could hold meetings, press conferences, and store the paper in the wide space on the ground floor. Upstairs in front we can put out the paper;

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[76] David Hilliard, *This Side of Glory: The Autobiography of David Hilliard And The Story of the Black Panther Party*, (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 2008), 201.
[77] Huggins and LeBlanc-Ernest, "Revolutionary Women, Revolutionary Education," 165.
[78] Hilliard, *This Side of Glory*, 208. Hilliard notes that he and fellow Panthers felt increasingly vulnerable to police infiltration after Party co-founder and Minister of Defense, Huey Newton, was found guilty of killing Oakland police officer, John Frey, and sentenced to two to fifteen years in prison. Newton's conviction took place on September 8, 1968. Bloom and Martin, *Black Against Empire*, 199.

> in back are plenty of rooms, including the kitchen. From the basement we can build tunnels to the backyard of a friend of Eldridge's who lives nearby, escape routes in case of attack.[79]

Aware of the house's ample size, Hilliard further proposed the idea of withdrawing his children from Oakland's public schools and homeschooling them at this residence. His plans quickly materialized and during the Hilliard family's relocation, their new home—and the Party's new center of operations—was outfitted with "bunk beds, a dining table, telephones on every desk…steel sheets over the windows," and sandbags along the walls.[80] Soon, "the chatter of people working, the chaos of last-minute details, some nonsense about the kids upstairs, some members sacked out on the floor in sleeping bags," filled the house with an atmosphere that, according to Hilliard, felt "familiar, natural, right."[81] He called the new domain, "home, headquarters, embassy."[82]

What do we make of the tripartite function that Hilliard describes? Beyond what it suggests about the central role that the organization's Chief of Staff played in the BPP's early years, the image is telling on at least one additional level; it offers us a key window through which we can more fully examine the organization's spatial history. While Hilliard may have been one of only a few Party members to actualize plans for building an underground escape route in his backyard—and he might have been successful, had the city's underground subway system not backed up the water level, causing the tunnels to flood—the residence he depicts was not unique. In fact, accounts of Panther households outlined in memoirs and biographies of former members, organizational

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[79] Hilliard, *This Side of Glory*, 208. Here, Hilliard refers to Eldridge Cleaver, who initially served as the organization's Minister of Information and ultimately led the BPP's international chapter until his departure from the Party in 1971. See Eldridge Cleaver, *Target Zero: A Life in Writing*, ed. Kathleen Cleaver (New York: Palgrave McMillan, 2006), Introduction.
[80] Hilliard, *This Side of Glory*, 208-209.
[81] Hilliard, *This Side of Glory*, 209.
[82] Hilliard, *This Side of Glory*, 209.

documents, and FBI files suggest that for numerous Black Panthers, the home existed as a fluid space, at the nexus of family, community, and work life.

While a growing body of scholarship illuminates the myriad public arenas in which the BPP mobilized—in the streets, in front of government buildings, and in parks—few scholars have fully explored the more intimate realms in which the group's activism unfolded. If Hilliard's account is any reminder, Panther households blurred the borders between Party work and family life for much of the group's membership, and in many cases, acted as staples of the organization's infrastructure. As venues for organizational meetings and newspaper production, spaces for cooperative living, and safe havens from FBI and police repression, Panther homes shed light on the myriad ways in which BPP activists resisted racist and capitalist structures. Drawing from a range of sources including autobiographies by former Party members, newspaper articles, and FBI files, this chapter examines the relationship between Black Panther activism and the quotidian routines of everyday life. Focusing on the role of the domestic in the story of the BPP, I contend, broadens our understanding of the informal mechanisms and localities of the Panthers' racial and class struggle and the Party's contentious relationship to local, state, and federal government agencies; that is, how the organization sustained itself in the midst of police and FBI efforts to destroy it.[83]

The BPP's official engagement with collective domestic structures occurred at a particular moment in the Party's history. Recall that by 1972, increased infiltrative tactics

[83] It should be noted that the following is not an exhaustive overview, nor does it account for the nuances of individual experiences within and among Panther families. Importantly, not all BPP members participated in shared housing arrangements. Secondly, due to the skewed nature of source material – most memoirs and biographical accounts reflect the perspective of prominent members who held some kind of leadership position in the Party – and the spatial constraints of this chapter, I will focus on only a handful of Panther families.

by COINTELPRO, coupled with ongoing internal tensions in chapters throughout the country coming to a head, ultimately resulted in the decision by BPP leadership to centralize the national Party in Oakland. As Panthers in branches across the country relocated to the Oakland headquarters, many found refuge and accommodations in shared housing arrangements as they witnessed their own chapters come to a close. As the Party was confronted with the challenges of intensified governmental repression and a dwindling national membership, the decision among Party leaders to institutionalize its collective structure helped foster a greater level of commitment among rank and file members.[84]

In many ways, the cooperative domestic arrangements adopted by Black Panther activists is part and parcel of a centuries-long history of African Americans' participation in kinship systems. In his groundbreaking study, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750 – 1925*, Herbert Gutman traces the myriad ways in which African Americans worked to protect family structures from the threats imposed by slavery's violent institution and white supremacist forces in the post-emancipation era. The author's major findings revealed that throughout the slave South, the adaptability and collective nature of black families led to their resilience as institutions. Enslaved blacks often integrated their immediate kin into extended biological and social networks and in doing so, created "a coherent social and cultural repertoire" upon which women and men could draw during and after their enslavement.[85] These cooperative systems—often held

[84] Spencer, "Communalism and the Black Panther Party in Oakland," 99.
[85] Herbert Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750 – 1925* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1976), 303. Gutman demonstrates that naming practices played a particularly important role in African Americans' efforts to sustain biological family units. In many cases, newly emancipated black Americans rejected the surnames imposed on them by their white enslavers, and instead, chose to keep the names that their families had used for generations, which

together by grandparents, aunts, and uncles—made it possible for black Americans to meet their basic living needs, and further, provided a crucial mechanism through which black culture and family ties could be sustained across generations. Predicated on domestic cooperation and resourcefulness, these kin and social networks augmented the survival of black family units in the midst of tremendous strains caused by forcible separations and in many cases, death.

While the Panthers' domestic collectives grew out of a tradition of kinship-based social relations dating back to the eighteenth century if not earlier, how Party members operated at the day-to-day level also resonated with a contemporary movement that by the 1960s had gained vital traction in California. Though the BPP never officially identified itself as an intentional community, its practices in communal living drew from and contributed to a rising commune culture that had spread nation-wide by the mid-twentieth century, and for which the Bay Area served as a major hub. A recognition of the Panthers' temporal, geographic, and political proximity to this movement is important for understanding the socio-political climate in which the Party developed, and the alliances it created.

In their (2012) study of California's history of alternative modes of living, Iain Boal, Janferie Stone, Michael Watts, and Cal Winslow demonstrate that the wave of

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often honored a father or a more distant ancestor. See Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom*, 200. Elsa Barkley Brown, among others, has importantly expanded on Gutman's work. Her research on African Americans' political practices in the U.S. South during Reconstruction reveals similar patterns of social support networks. In Virginia in particular, black Americans engaged in electoral politics through what Brown calls an "ethos of mutuality." Specifically, she contends that many black Virginians conceptualized suffrage as a collective possession. The idea of community responsibility, then, significantly shaped how individuals voted, according to Brown. See Elsa Barkley Brown, "To Catch the Vision of Freedom: Reconstructing Southern Black Women's Political History, 1865-1880," in *African American Women and the Vote, 1837-1965*, eds., Ann D. Gordon, Bettye Collier-Thomas, John H. Bracey, Arlene Voski Avakian, and Joyce Avrech Berkman (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997), 66-72, 82-85.

communitarian projects that surged in the 1960s grew out of the U.S. Left's rejection of dominant modes of consumption and representation that materialized in the wake of a post-war capitalist boom. Comprised of a mix of racial and ethnic groups, and often improvised, northern California's communes served multiple functions for those eschewing the clutches of the state; as sites for the building of solidarity networks, and as safe havens from government entities including law enforcement agencies.[86]

Resonant with other 1960s collectives, the BPP's experimentation with communal living represented a commitment to individual and societal transformation.[87] More specifically, the Panthers' sharing of goods and resources was in part shaped by the group's Marxist-Leninist foundations, as well as members' sense of comradeship.[88] And even while theirs was an urban communalism that existed in close proximity to capitalist structures, it is important to recognize that the Panthers' mutual aid practices and collective engagement in reproductive labor was a manifestation of their movement to abolish class disparity.

On a practical level, households provided the Party—most of whose members were young and unemployed—with a convenient, more affordable alternative to

[86] Boal, "Prologue," xiii-xiv, xvii, xxiv.
[87] Even while the BPP shared many of the same motivations and applications of communal living with other 1960s collective societies, the Black Power organization has been largely omitted from scholarship on the history of California communes. While much has been written on the BPP's collectivist practices, Robyn Spencer's essay in *West of Eden* is one of the few works that bridges literature on commune culture and the Black Power movement. "Communalism and the Black Panther Party in Oakland, California" serves as a corrective to historical works that have associated 1960s communalism with the U.S. counterculture movement – and thus, outside the scope of the Black freedom struggle - as well as scholarship on the Black Power Movement that has not fully explored its cross-pollination with concurrent socio-political movements. Arguing that the BPP's experimentation with communal living represented one manifestation of its pursuit of individual and societal transformation, Spencer calls for a reconceptualization of the 1960s and 1970s that highlights the counterculture's mutualities with radical politics, the feminist movement's belief in the personal as political, and the Black Power Movement's redefinition of self. See Spencer, "Communalism and the Black Panther Party in Oakland."
[88] Spencer, "Communalism and the Black Panther Party in Oakland," 96.

organizing venues that may otherwise have required monthly rent. Therefore, group leaders readily utilized domestic quarters for Party business. During the BPP's early years, for example, before the Hilliards relocated to the Shattuck Avenue residence in 1968, Hilliard and Bobby Seale offered their homes to hold group meetings and manage Party finances. The Hilliards' living room functioned as a counting office, while their kitchen served as an all-night diner for fellow Panthers.[89] For the Hilliards, then, workplace and home were one in the same.

The meshing of Party resources and daily life for many Panthers also meant that Party leadership held latitude in determining how resources might be distributed, and how individuals in the Party collectives would allocate their time between organizational tasks and personal respite. For much of the rank-and-file, Central Committee funds for individual living expenses were supplemented by material goods that members themselves donated.[90] With the financial support of the Party, those in shared housing attempted to meet a variety of needs, including food, clothing, shoes, and rental fees. In some households, residents also worked to meet individuals' health care needs through the creation of health cadres. Members of these informal committees attempted to prevent the spread of illnesses within households by keeping track of flu rates and other epidemics in local communities, and by caring for Party members and children who may have fallen ill.[91]

In addition to looking at how BPP leadership distributed resources to provide for the health and wellbeing of its members, analyzing how members spent their time on a day-to-day basis further demonstrates the common entanglements Party and personal life.

[89] Hilliard, *This Side of Glory*, 164.
[90] Spencer, "Communalism and the Black Panther Party in Oakland," 97.
[91] Spencer, "Communalism and the Black Panther Party in Oakland," 99.

Memoirs, official Party documents, and oral interviews suggest that for much of the Party's ranks, daily life represented a mix of camaraderie and regimentation. After leaving the Philadelphia chapter during the Party's centralization in 1972, Bobby McCall joined a Panther collective in Oakland, began working for the Free Breakfast for School Children Program, and became fully integrated in organizational life.[92] He recalls:

> We ate together. We slept together. We did everything together like a family…We were a bunch of disciplined, organized young brothers and sisters who were determined to uplift the black community. We had fun with each other because we loved each other. We had a lot of family affairs. We always celebrated each other's birthdays…in a big way. We didn't celebrate holidays but we did celebrate life with each other.[93]

The sharing of meals, the honoring of individual milestones, and the collective participation in the conventions of daily life suggests a level of kinship-like support among those living in shared housing. The lack of holiday celebrations in Panther communes is perhaps further indicative of the Party's embrace of socialist principles, as the Party as a whole explicitly rejected displays of national patriotism, and to a lesser extent, religious rituals.

Yet, while communalism may have afforded its participants a degree of companionship and mutual support, implementing socialism at the domestic level also shaped how those in shared living arrangements divided the hours in any given day. Co-founder of the BPP's Seattle branch, Aaron Dixon, recalls the degree to which organizational obligations consumed his time. In one instance, he and his colleagues found themselves exhausted after a long season of campaigning for Bobby Seale's bid for Oakland mayor, and Elaine Brown's race for City Council in 1973. Through a collective

[92] Bobby McCall, interview by author, 27 February 2016, tape recording, San Francisco, California.
[93] Taken from Spencer, "Communalism and the Black Panther Party in Oakland," 105.

decision, Dixon along with his housemates and fellow Panthers, loaded up the Chicago branch's Greyhound bus and all of the Party's vehicles—with children in tow—for a two-day trip to Clear Lake in northern California. He remembers, "It was the first time – ever – that we had taken a break from our work to do nothing but take it easy."[94]

It was not long until the Central Committee officially responded to the general wave of exhaustion among Party cadre that had resulted from an intense several months of campaigning, a decision that led to an increase in members' individual autonomy. Soon after the campaign—at which point Dixon returned to Oakland to assist the central branch with remaining tasks—the Committee decided to give most Party members Sundays off. Dixon remembers this as a significant relief, stating, "Many of us had been working seven days a week for five or six years straight, and the idea of having a day off each week was happily embraced by everyone."[95] Dixon's testimony reveals not only the level of dedication among organizers to the group's cause, but also the degree to which individual Panthers' time was regulated by the Central Committee. For many, the Committee's decision to afford its members agency in scheduling half of their weekend was a luxury.

A look at how BPP leaders regulated members' time and material resources sheds further light on the existence of intra-Party tensions between individuals inspired by the communal ethos of Panther collectives and those who more firmly adhered to the regimentation characteristic of democratic centralism.[96] Internal Committee documents

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[94] Dixon, *My People Are Rising*, 239.
[95] Dixon, *My People Are Rising*, 242. While Dixon notes that the Central Committee implemented this decision shortly after the 1973 campaigns of Bobby Seale and Elaine Brown, it is unclear exactly when the policy took effect.
[96] The BPP's internal tensions in many ways reflected its position within the broader culture of 1960s grassroots organizing. For works on the limits of democratic centralism and organizational

suggest that the logistical needs and organizational agenda of BPP leadership significantly shaped officials' decisions about when and how much free time would be granted to rank-and-file workers (and in some cases Party leaders as well). For instance, the Central Committee's institutionalization of Sunday as a non-work day was short-lived, as leaders saw the increasing need to revitalize its political education (PE) classes for rank-and-file members. What had recently developed into a day of football and basketball games at the local park was replaced by a reestablishment of adult education programs. According to a November 14, 1973 Committee memo, officials now mandated members to attend PE classes every Sunday at 8:30 a.m.[97] On top of this, an earlier memo, dated August 8, 1973, called on all members to attend services at the BPP's newly acquired Son of Man Temple, every Sunday. Those who arrived late to the weekend service would face a $5 fine. Those who chose not to attend without official permission would be forced to pay an even steeper fee of $10.[98]

Not all Panthers willingly embraced the constraints of collective living, however. Central Committee officials met bimonthly, often at Newton's Oakland apartment, to discuss issues concerning political strategies and organizational procedures, and for the

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factionalism among New Left organizations including the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, see Francesca Polleta, *Freedom Is An Endless Meeting: Democracy in American Social Movements* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (New York: Bantam Books, 1987).

[97] Dixon, *My People Are Rising*, 242; Spencer, "Communalism and the Black Panther Party in Oakland," 103.

[98] Taken from Spencer, "Communalism and the Black Panther Party in Oakland," 103-104. In October 1973, the Black Panther Party founded the Son of Man Temple, which was housed in the Oakland Community School's auditorium. The BPP used the space for community building and what Dixon describes as, "revolutionary worship" services. In addition to hosting talks by community leaders and political speakers, the temple also served as a venue for musical performances, including choir performances by Party members and the Charles Moffett Band. See Spencer, "Communalism and the Black Panther Party in Oakland," 103; Dixon, *My People Are Rising*, 222.

most part, rank-and-file members were excluded from these decision-making processes.[99] Further, funds that were to be used for the daily needs of those living in shared housing did not always trickle down to collective houses. According to Panther Janice Garrett-Forte, organizational funds were the only source of income for many Panther communards, and in certain moments, "There wasn't money filtered down to the ones who were doing the righteous legwork."[100] Panther Bobby Bowen shared a similar sentiment noting that while some Party leaders donned "gater shoes" and had easy access to cars, many in the rank and file "were sleeping on top of each other in Panther houses."[101]

Changes brought by the end of the election and the organization's shift to a more centralized structure led to official dictations of other realms of everyday life as well. With the end of Seale's mayoral bid, the Party's Chief of Staff implemented a series measures meant to increase the level of regimentation and discipline within the group. With four years of experience in the U.S. Air Force, Seale felt that the Party could benefit from some of the disciplinary methods used in the armed forces. Dixon recalled being summoned to the school auditorium with his colleagues as the BPP chairman issued his orders:

> at 3 a.m., the security person on duty at Central Headquarters would receive a call from June Hilliard or John Seale, informing them of the location of the morning exercise session. Security would in turn call all the Panther houses with the designated location where all party members were to report at 6 a.m. for calisthenics, followed by a two- to three- mile run.

[99] Spencer, "Communalism and the Black Panther Party in Oakland," 104.
[100] Taken from Spencer, "Communalism and the Black Panther Party in Oakland," 97.
[101] Taken from Spencer, "Communalism and the Black Panther Party in Oakland," 97. It is important to note that not all BPP leaders were financially stable. Director of the Oakland Community School, Ericka Huggins, relied on welfare benefits during some of her time in the Party. See Ericka Huggins, interview by author, 24 June 2013, tape recording, Oakland, California.

> Then we were to return to our living quarters to clean up and shower. Beds had to be made military-style. Clothing, including socks was to be folded neatly, and an inspection team would come by to check on the tidiness of the sleeping quarters, the cleanliness of the bathrooms, and whether socks and clothing were folded to military standards.[102]

Dixon's depiction of the newly implemented daily regimen illustrates a moment when the organization's paramilitarism seeped into the more quotidian routines of personal life. Everything from fitness to the amount of sleep to the level of cleanliness among Panther activists was now heavily managed for the greater good of the collective.

Black Panther Collectives and the Federal Bureau of Investigation

The Black Panther Party's attempts to shape the organization through its domestic politics never occurred in isolation from similar state projects. FBI files, as well as memoirs by former Party members, offer some of the most abundant documentation of the myriad ways in which Panther households served key as sites through which the Bureau enforced its logic of national security. FBI agents and local police officers often worked, sometimes in coordination, to create instability within Panther families. These efforts assumed multiple forms, from police-led raids on Panther homes, to Bureau efforts aimed at preventing Panthers from establishing residential roots, to creating

[102] Dixon, *My People Are Rising*, 243. Interestingly, Seale's policy measures came four years after a shift away from organizational paramilitarism in the Seattle Branch. Dixon notes that after the Party's participation in the National Conference for a United Front Against Fascism in July 1969, the Seattle chapter focused on strengthening its relationship with the surrounding community. In addition to developing the branch's community service programs, chapter leaders believed that much of this could occur by jettisoning the Party's characteristic military garb. Not only did the Panther uniform make members more visible to police forces, and potential police violence, but, according to Dixon, the Party's distinct sartorial style also alienated the organization from the larger community, as many outside the Party were unclear of its meaning. Dixon, *My People Are Rising*, 178.

marital disturbances among Panther couples. As FBI records attest, state authorities maintained intelligence on the most private details of Panther life and rarely hesitated to use this information to curb community support for the Party. A fuller understanding of Party-state relations, then, warrants an examination of those moments of government presence in the less publicly visible realms of BPP activity.

From its beginnings in 1908, the Federal Bureau of Investigation actively tracked groups of the U.S. Left and African American political organizations through covert and at times violent measures. Some of the agency's most well-known targets included the Communist Party of the United States of America (CPUSA), the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the Industrial Workers of the World (Wobblies), and Marcus Garvey. Initially focused on gathering intelligence on these groups and their respective organizational leaders, the FBI consolidated its subversive tactics in 1956 by launching its CounterIntelligence Program (COINTELPRO), which directed its efforts more narrowly on the CPUSA. In its first few years COINTELPRO continued the Bureau's efforts to closely monitor the day-to-day activities of Communists and civil rights workers, but made little effort to protect vocal leftists from reactionary violence.[103]

In fact, according to Joshua Bloom and Waldo Martin, it was not until the end of 1963, that COINTELPRO exerted more active repressive force against Civil Rights Movement leaders. By this time the movement had garnered widespread support and significant international attention, placing the U.S. and its racial conflict in the global spotlight. Martin Luther King Jr. became a prime target in the Bureau's mission to discredit both the movement and its figureheads. Hoover and his colleagues readily

[103] Bloom and Martin, *Black Against Empire*, 200.

collected and disseminated damaging—sometimes fabricated—information on King to journalists, churches, allies, political leaders, and funders by linking him to the Communist Party. At other times the FBI director leaked sensitive information concerning King's extramarital romantic relationships.[104]

But with the emerging call for "Black Power" and the movement's revitalization of nationalist and radical tactics in 1966, as well as its increased focus on the Vietnam War, the FBI once again intensified its grasp on organizations associated with the black freedom struggle. Amidst a tide of racial rebellions in cities across the country, some of whose participants publicly advocated armed warfare against the state, many federal authorities identified the decade's manifestation of black radicalism as a direct attack on national security. In an August 26, 1967 memo distributed to twenty-three FBI field offices throughout the U.S., Hoover carefully instructed Bureau officials to intensify COINTELPRO operations against Black Nationalist organizations specifically. Honing in on six specific "black nationalist hate-type" groups, he relayed to his colleagues that COINTELPRO was now to "expose, disrupt, misdirect, or otherwise neutralize the activities of Black Nationalist, hate-type organizations and groupings, their leadership, spokesmen, membership, and supporters."[105] Then, on March 4, 1968, Hoover redoubled his efforts to eradicate Black Nationalism by releasing a more detailed neutralization plan. Sent to forty-one field offices, the new memorandum delineated five long-term goals, which the FBI's counterintelligence wing was to fully prioritize. Hoover now directed COINTELPRO to "Prevent the coalition of black nationalist groups," "prevent the rise of a 'messiah' who could unify, and electrify, the black nationalist movement,"

[104] Bloom and Martin, *Black Against Empire*, 200.
[105] Quoted in Martin and Bloom, *Black Against Empire*, 200-201.

"prevent violence on the part of black nationalist groups," "prevent militant black nationalist groups and leaders from gaining respectability, by discrediting them to three separate segments of the community," and finally, "prevent the long-term growth of militant black nationalist organizations, especially among youth."[106]

By the time Hoover released his five-point agenda the BPP had already been operating for nearly one-and-a-half years, but surprisingly, the Oakland-based organization had not yet been mentioned in COINTELPRO memoranda. According to Bloom and Martin, this did not happen until the fall of 1968 when the Party had assumed the position as the movement's leading political group. The Panthers' new visibility was not a result of any significant shift in political ideology, tactics, or rhetoric. Rather, the group's grassroots community programs, which by this point were being carried out in cities across the country, helped lead to its steady influence within local neighborhoods, and at the same time, placed it squarely on the FBI's radar as a force with the potential to threaten the status quo.[107]

By September 1968, Hoover's call to protect the internal safety of the nation from black organizations manifested in a new COINTELPRO agenda that exclusively targeted the BPP. And like the FBI's earlier campaign to neutralize Martin Luther King Jr., the Bureau's new plan to effectively dismantle the Party was wide-ranging in both its tactics and the domains through which it would operate. In an internal memo dated September 27, 1968, the Bureau's headquarters called on field agents to submit recommendations that would aid in the manufacturing of:

> factionalism between not only the national leaders but also local leaders, steps to neutralize all organizational efforts…as well as create suspicion

[106] Quoted in Bloom and Martin, *Black Against Empire*, 202.
[107] Bloom and Martin, *Black Against Empire*, 203.

> 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.[108]

The document's identification of marital relationships as a source of FBI penetration is particularly notable, as it underscores domestic sites as primary avenues through which COINTELPRO operated in its dealings with Party members.

On many levels, the FBI's increased interaction with Panther homes grew out of the agency's aforementioned directive to quell, and in many cases, extinguish Panther leadership. This was especially evident in the Bay Area. In December 1968, after Eldridge Cleaver refused to appear in court to settle his April arrest police placed his San Francisco home and nearby Panther facilities under close surveillance. By the end of the month, law officials surrounded his house to force his surrender. Unbeknownst to the police department, the Minister of Information had already fled the U.S. and was now living as a political exile in Cuba.[109]

Panther leaders in chapters outside of northern California were certainly not immune to confrontations with the police in residential spaces. One of the most well-known and violent actualizations of Hoover's directive to stunt the BPP's growth took place in Chicago in December 1969. By the fall of 1968, state officials were well aware of the branch's steady growth under the charismatic leadership of twenty-year-old Fred Hampton. Under the direction of FBI headquarters, and with the help of special agent

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[108] Quoted in Bloom and Martin, *Black Against Empire*, 203.

[109] Recall that the charges stemmed from Cleaver's arrest following the Oakland Police shootout and killing of "Lil" Bobby Hutton, on April 6, 1968. Cleaver was among seven Panthers arrested. On Christmas day, he disguised himself as a Cuban soldier and disembarked from a freighter in Havana. This migration initiated a seven-year period of refugee status for Cleaver. See Brown, *A Taste of Power*, 186; Bloom and Martin, *Black Against Empire*, 149; Cleaver, *Target Zero,* xix-xx.

Roy M. Mitchell, the Bureau's Chicago auxiliary established its own counterintelligence program specifically designed to target the city's Panther chapter. Employing tactics such as wiretapping the chapter's headquarter, Chicago's COINTELPRO closely monitored the local BPP auxiliary.[110]

Over the next year, Chicago's FBI office worked closely with local law enforcement, through Cook County's Assistant State's Attorney Richard Jalovec, to surveil the Party's daily activities. But when Mitchell hired William O'Neal to work as an informant in the BPP, the FBI intensified its mission. Appointed as Chicago Panthers' Chief of Security, O'Neal quietly funneled private information concerning Hampton's residence to Mitchell, including the floor plan layout of the activist's apartment. O'Neal went so far as to document the specific location of Hampton's bed and nightstand, intelligence that Mitchell and the Chicago Police Department exploited to fatal ends. At 4:30 a.m. on December 4, 1969, fourteen officers under Jalovec's supervision arrived at Hampton's apartment with a slew of assault weapons and opened fire. Within fifteen minutes Hampton—asleep in bed next to his eight-month-pregnant partner, Deborah Johnson—and Mark Clark, leader of the Peoria, Illinois BPP chapter, were dead. In the aftermath of the raid, Chicago field officers requested from FBI headquarters a $300 bonus for O'Neal for his furnishing local authorities with a meticulously "detailed weapons inventory…and detailed floor plan of the apartment."[111]

While police raids of Panther homes became common by the late 1960s, government regulation of Panthers' residential quarters was not always carried out with

[110] Bloom and Martin, *Black Against Empire*, 237-238.
[111] Bloom and Martin, *Black Against Empire*, 238. Police raids of Panther homes were common even before the assassination of Fred Hampton and Mark Clark. The BPP newspaper abounds with instances of police officers and FBI agents forcing their way into the homes of various leaders, often times without warrant.

the intent to kill. As local and federal government officials increased their attacks on the Party's storefront offices many local BPP chapters began using members' households to hold group meetings, and Bureau agents were privy to this. In his memoir, Aaron Dixon notes that after hosting the National Conference for a United Front Against Fascism in September 1969, BPP leaders declared its storefront offices too vulnerable to police raids, and therefore, ineffective organizing spaces. Dixon further recalls that, "Houses or duplexes in residential neighborhoods were safer and better suited for working with the community."[112]

Cognizant of the fact that domestic spaces were pivotal to the continuation of the Party, FBI officials worked to engender instability within them, sometimes going as far as precluding Panthers from establishing residential roots. Perhaps more than any archival source, FBI files demonstrate in painful detail the extent to which the Bureau monitored Panther evictions. A February 12, 1971 FBI memo outlined one particularly violent scene involving the forced removal of Panthers who had been living at the Charlotte, N.C. headquarters. After Mendenhall-Moore Realtors ordered the eviction of the occupants in early February, 1971, between 35 and 40 police officers from the local police department and the Guilford County Sheriff's Office arrived at the residents' front porch at 6:30 a.m. on February 10. The officers proceeded to demand the full evacuation of the premises within ten minutes. When nineteen-year-old Diane Mock was the only resident to emerge from the house, officers launched tear gas through the front windows. Shots were subsequently exchanged resulting in the injuries of officer Shaw Cook and sixteen-year-old Panther, Larry Medley. The officers confiscated a number of weapons

[112] Dixon, *My People Are Rising*, 178. In fact, Aaron Dixon and Geronimo Pratt were among a team of Panthers who, as early as September 1968, travelled to Panther offices in branches across country to fortify them against police invasion.

from the house—ultimately sending them to the FBI—and charged Mock with disturbing the peace and the remaining residents with conspiracy to commit murder. Luckily, based on a tip Party members had received hours earlier about the possibility of a police raid, at midnight the night before the raid the residing Panthers relocated the twenty children who had been living in the house at the time.[113]

A March 8, 1971 airtel—a high-priority FBI memorandum sent via airmail—sent from the Charlotte FBI division to Hoover similarly underscores the precarious circumstances that the Charlotte BPP branch found itself in by that time. The document indicates that the Charlotte Panthers:

> were evicted from their headquarters at 1386 Wilson Street, Winston-Salem, N.C. Sources report that with lack of finances and lack of space they will be unable to maintain their activities and at High Point are attempting to continue their breakfast program in a house at 305 Loflin Street; however, this is meeting with little success.[114]

For the FBI, the Panthers' inability to secure permanent housing served as a testament to the effectiveness of its campaign against the Black Power group. As the airtel notes, long-term residential spaces were key to Party efforts to accumulate and manage organizational funding, sustain the BPP's survival programs when commercial spaces

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[113] Report, FBI, Charlotte, NC Office, February 12, 1971, "Black Panther Party— Charlotte Division—Racial Matters," 1-3, url: https://vault.fbi.gov/Black%20Panther%20Party%20. This and all other FBI documents cited in this dissertation are available online at http://vault.fbi.gov. Interestingly, the Chief of Police that partook in the raid was Laurie Pritchett. Pritchett amassed national notoriety for his use of violent and oppressive tactics against African Americans while he served as Chief of Police in Albany, Georgia during the heyday of the southern Civil Rights Movement. He played a central role in Georgia's efforts to prevent Martin Luther King Jr. and fellow civil rights activists from advancing the Albany movement between 1961 and 1962. See Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954-1963* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988), Chapters 14 and 16.

[114] Airtel, SAC [Special Agent in Charge], Charlotte, NC to FBI Director [J. Edgar Hoover], February 4, 1971, "Black Panther Party (BPP)—National Committee to Combat Fascism (NCCF)—Winston-Salem, N.C.—Charlotte Division Monthly Summary—Racial Matters," 4, url: https://vault.fbi.gov/Black%20Panther%20Party%20.

were inaccessible or unavailable, and to accommodate members' communal living arrangements. It is not surprising, then, that the Bureau maintained such detailed records of the Panthers' movements.

At other moments, FBI officials played a more direct role in generating domestic instability for Party members. In some cases, federal officials collaborated with local realtors to create disturbances for local chapter leaders looking to rent property. In a September 25, 1968 COINTELPRO memo addressed to Hoover, agents of the Los Angeles Bureau division informed Bureau headquarters of its efforts to subvert Party attempts to maintain usage of the LA chapter headquarters. The document notes, "Contact has been made with the owner of the building wherein the BPP has its headquarters and it has been determined that the owner is cooperative to the Bureau." The memo further states that "Consideration has been given to formulate a program to disrupt the BPP through this contact. Appropriate recommendations will be submitted to the Bureau."[115] Local realtors' cooperation with COINTELPRO agents sheds light on the Bureau's effectiveness in discrediting the BPP within local communities. For the FBI, local property owners represented important potential allies in the Bureau's mission to stunt the Party's growth. With no permanent spaces in which to organize or live cooperatively, the BPP, like other radical organizations, would be short-lived.

The FBI's campaign to delegitimize the BPP within local communities led to negative repercussions for Party allies as well. The case of a New Jersey City tenant, Margaret Goldberg, is a telling example. As public supporter of the BPP Goldberg openly displayed posters of Huey Newton and the New York 21 in the front window of her

[115] Memo, SAC, Los Angeles, to FBI Director, September 25, 1968, "Counterintelligence Program—Black Nationalist Hate Groups—Racial Intelligence," 2, url: https://vault.fbi.gov/cointel-pro/cointel-pro-black-extremists.

home, visible to passersby. On July 3, 1970, after becoming aware of the displayed images, her landlord tried to forcibly enter the premises without her permission, demanding that she remove the ephemera, and ultimately threatened her with eviction. When Goldberg refused to comply, local police officers and FBI agents arrived at her home. They were quickly met by neighbors, members of the local National Committee to Combat Fascism (NCCF), and other community residents who rallied in her defense.[116] As the state authorities retreated the landlord told Goldberg he would initiate eviction proceedings the following Monday. In a *Black Panther* article released two weeks later, members of the local NCCF chapter publicized their support for Goldberg and all tenants, and proposed plans to hold a rent strike along with other organizing activities.[117] Goldberg's case highlights how mere affiliation with the BPP put one at risk of being the target of unlawful housing practices. Eager to quell the growth of the Party in local communities, police and federal authorities worked with property owners to undermine residential stability among Party members and allies alike. Without permanent roots, the BPP's ability to amass a large support base and continue as a viable organization would prove difficult.

At other moments, government officials employed more covert methods of surveillance and disruption that penetrated the most intimate domains of everyday Panther life. The case of Faye Annette Switzer is insightful here. While working as the

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[116] In July 1969 the BPP established National Committees to Combat Fascism (NCCFs) in cities around the country in an effort to expand its alliance network with non-black groups. The NCCFs focused on two main efforts in their early years: developing legal defense support for political prisoners, and mobilizing for community control of local police. See Bloom and Martin, *Black Against Empire*, 301-302.

[117] James Cherry, "Slumlord Evicts Sister for Having Panther Posters in Window," *Black Panther*, July 18, 1970. This and all other *Black Panther* newspaper sources cited in this dissertation are available at the Black Panther Black Community News Service Collection, African American Museum and Library at Oakland, Oakland, California.

financial secretary for the Winston-Salem branch of the NCCF in the 1970s, Switzer's political ties to black civil rights groups placed her squarely on Hoover's radar. A March 1, 1971 FBI memo reveals that Bureau agents tracked everything from the location of the NCCF "pad" in which she resided, to the frequency of her visits to the organization's headquarters. The memo further indicates that on one particular evening, Switzer and other NCCF activists met at the group's headquarters to screen a film, which Bureau agents claimed to be titled "Off the Pigs."[118] The FBI, then, documented any activity it deemed remotely antithetical to government entities, and in the process, afforded Panthers and their allies little to no privacy.

The FBI left no terrain untouched in its program to debilitate, and ultimately, extinguish the Party and its support base. To be sure, familial and marital relationships were no less exempt from the possibilities of government disruption. As outlined in COINTELPRO's program to eradicate black radicalism, at various moments in the Party's development FBI agents enacted a range of measures to create and exacerbate tensions within marital and romantic unions among Party members. Agents of the New York FBI division provide one the earliest documented cases of Bureau attempts to subvert activists' marital relations as part of its larger program against the BPP. On October 10, 1968, local field agents expressed to headquarters that while they had uncovered no evidence of extramarital infidelity among Panther spouses in the Party's New York branches, they advised, "it must be assumed that this group is generally a low moral outfit and general misconduct might be rampant." The memorandum went on to suggest that:

[118] Report, FBI, Charlotte, NC Office, March 1, 1971, "Faye Annette Switzer—Racial Matters—Black Panther Party," 1,
url: https://vault.fbi.gov/Black%20Panther%20Party%20.

> when the individual members of the BPP have been investigated and their home addresses, consideration can be given to placing discreet pretext phone calls, using a Negro accent, to the spouse suggesting various things concerning her husband. This can easily be accomplished utilizing the minimum of investigation time.[119]

The rhetoric employed by FBI officials in describing black sexuality as immoral and deviant was nothing new by 1968. As Patricia Hill Collins demonstrates, popular tropes of black promiscuity date back to the institution of chattel slavery and the founding of U.S. capitalism. As Anglo Saxon slave owners attempted to regulate their labor force, they relied heavily on racialized and gendered notions of black individuals' bodies, producing what Collins calls "controlling images" that have persisted in various manifestations to this day. The sexual exploitation of black women's reproductive capacities by Anglo Saxon men—through their objectification as "breeders" and targeting as sexual slaves—helped to codify the Jezebel archetype; the sexually fertile and wanton black woman.[120] Supporters of slavery spared Black men no immunity from similar hypersexualized stereotypes. According to Collins, enslaved black men's physical and sexual exploitation by elite whites operated through the image of the buck, whose perceived violent and sexual proclivities could only be tamed through the discipline and control of the supposedly more civilized slave owner.[121]

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[119] Memo, SAC, New York, to FBI Director, September 30, 1968, "Counterintelligence Program—Black Nationalist Hate Groups—Racial Intelligence—(Black Panther Party)," 4, url: https://vault.fbi.gov/cointel-pro/cointel-pro-black-extremists.

[120] Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990), 77-78. For a nuanced history of the relationship between the institutionalized rape of enslaved black women and white discourses about black women's sexuality, see Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

[121] Collins, *Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender, and the New Racism* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 56-57.

Iterations of both the Jezebel and buck reemerged over the next four centuries, and by the 1960s, unemployed and working-class black women often found themselves particularly vulnerable to a new controlling image: the "Black welfare queen." Reminiscent of Daniel Patrick Moynihan's notion of the black matriarch, the "Black welfare queen" figure was typically a young woman whose life in poverty led to her multiple pregnancies, her single-parent status, and her parental negligence. Mainstream national discourses often posited this figure as a threat to the sanctity of the nuclear family unit, the home, and white femininity. Specifically, her deviant parenting, as exemplified by her perceived inherent laziness and failure to subscribe to the American family ideal, burdened the federal government by draining its social welfare resources.[122] Thus, the FBI's depiction of Black Panthers—most of whom came from working-class communities and joined the Party in their late teens—as sexually promiscuous stemmed from a long history of U.S. capitalism, a system that depended on the literal and symbolic exploitation of black individuals' physicality.

The day after the Bureau's New York office released its memo to central headquarters, FBI officials in El Paso Texas drafted similar recommendations for ways to destabilize Party members' intimate relationships. Like the suggestions put forth by New York authorities, those posed by agents in El Paso also drew upon conceptions of Black Panthers as lascivious. After receiving a tip in early October 1968 of the possible establishment of a BPP chapter in El Paso, local Bureau officials sent a memorandum to headquarters with suggested counterintelligence tactics that could be employed at the local or national levels to prevent the growth of the organization. Of the nine

[122] Taken from Robin D. G. Kelley, *Yo' Mama's Disfunktional!: Fighting the Culture Wars in Urban America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997), 91-92. See also, Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 76-77.

recommendations listed, two specifically targeted Panther families. El Paso agents called on headquarters to "Have a female call the wife of a Black Panther member or official, asking for the husband by first name." Another suggestion would have an agent "Write a letter or make a telephone call to the wife of the member demanding that her husband stay away from the writer's wife, lest there be trouble."[123]

And at the same time that Hoover's colleagues in New York and El Paso drafted tactical recommendations aimed at subverting the BPP, Bureau agents in other regions of the country targeted specific Panther couples and families. For example, an October 10, 1968 memo addressed to FBI headquarters by San Francisco Bureau officials pointed to "suspicion between spouses" as a potential avenue for COINTELRPO disruption. After identifying Eldridge and Kathleen Cleaver as being of "principal interest," the memo stated:

> KATHLEEN appears to have a genuine feeling for ELDRIDGE and if it could be shown [that] he was interested in another female, a split might ensue. There have been indications of 'spats' between the two, but nothing definite as to the cause is known.[124]

Hoover quickly pursued the issue and just three weeks later, on October 31, prompted the FBI's San Francisco division to submit "concrete recommendations

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[123] Memo, SAC, El Paso, to FBI Director, October 11, 1968, "Counterintelligence Program—Black Nationalist Hate Groups—Racial Intelligence—(Black Panther Party)," 1-3, url: https://vault.fbi.gov/cointel-pro/cointel-pro-black-extremists.

[124] Memo, SAC, San Francisco, to FBI Director, October 10, 1968, "Counterintelligence Program—Black Nationalist Hate Groups—Racial Intelligence—(Black Panther Party)," 2, url: https://vault.fbi.gov/cointel-pro/cointel-pro-black-extremists. It is unclear what the author meant by "a genuine feeling", as the Cleavers had been married for nearly one year by the time of the memo's release. See Cleaver, *Target Zero*, xiv.

to the Bureau to exploit the sensitivities of BPP members in this regard and to sow the seeds of suspicion concerning the fidelities of the Cleavers."[125]

As COINTELPRO files and Panther memoirs indicate, the federal government's exploitation of marital and familial tensions between the Cleavers represented a larger trend of local and federal authorities utilizing family relationships as points of subversion and disruption. Bureau agents were well aware that precluding Panther families and collectives from establishing stable home roots would only threaten the viability of the Party itself. As such, the home became one of the most monitored BPP sites by COINTELRPO. Collectives, Party headquarters, individual households, and conjugal relationships all became key domains of government interference, sometimes to fatal ends. And as the second half of this dissertation will demonstrate, the children of Black Panthers were no less spared from state-sanctioned surveillance or violence. As members of Panther households and beneficiaries of Party programs, children represented key gateways into the daily workings of Panther radicalism, and Bureau agents wasted no time in exploiting their own vulnerabilities in its dealings with the Black Power group.

On many levels, looking at the home and family is instructive for more fully understanding the Black Panther Party's larger liberatory project. Existing at the nexus of the Party's organizing efforts and its more quotidian engagements with egalitarianism, Panther collectives help highlight the myriad ways in which the personal was political for many Party members, relatives, and allies. For many Panthers, cooperative living, the sharing of resources, and the use of residential spaces for programming and planning provided the Party an avenue for radical anti-capitalist politics. Equally important, the

[125] Memo, FBI Director, to SAC, San Francisco, October 31, 1968, "Counterintelligence Program—Black Nationalist Hate Groups—Racial Intelligence—(Black Panther Party)," 2, url: https://vault.fbi.gov/cointel-pro/cointel-pro-black-extremists.

home and family unit became critical to the Party's self-preservation when state officials formed its Counterintelligence Program, mounting a direct attack on the Black Power organization. Serving as both places of refuge and targets of state violence, residential sites afforded the Party more discretion than did commercial offices. At the same time, households were never free from government interference. And as chapters Two and Three will demonstrate, the children of Black Panthers were no less spared from state-sanctioned surveillance or violence.

CHAPTER 2

"Another Problem for the Fascists": Children and Childhood in Party Thought and Discourse

Introduction

On September 26, 1970, members of the Southern California chapter of the Black Panther Party launched the organization's first ever Revolutionary Youth Conference in Los Angeles, California. Over the course of two days, children and youth coalesced from around the state to participate in a range of activities, including workshops on collective organizing strategies and the sharing in song with the Party's band, The Lumpen. Aimed at training young people "in the correct methods of resisting the power structure," the conference resulted from a week-long plenary session organized by the Party three weeks earlier in preparation for the BPP's drafting of a Revolutionary People's Constitution.[126] Of the fifteen items listed on the plenary session's agenda, "the rights of children" ranked as number four. In the midst of strategizing the constitution's objectives and in a moment of self-reflection, the Panthers publicly declared the welfare of children and youth as "an area in our struggle for liberation that has been lightly looked at and grossly neglected."[127]

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[126] "Our Hope is Placed in Our Youth," *Black Panther*, Oct. 10, 1970, 14; "In Preparation for the Revolutionary People's Constitutional Convention Schedule for Plenary Session, Sept. 4-7, 1970," *Black Panther*, Sept. 15, 1970, 11.

[127] "In Preparation for the Revolutionary People's Constitutional Convention." The BPP's Plenary Session in preparation for the Revolutionary People's Constitutional Convention took place from September 4-7, 1970. "The rights of children" ranked just below "self determination" for "nation[al] minorities," "women," and "street people." Other panel themes included community regulation of the police and military, distributions of political power, and internationalism.

How did the BPP imagine the position of children and youth in society, and how did it envision its own relationship to these particular social groups? While scholars such as Robyn Spencer have contributed to the rise in historical studies on the Black Panther Party, and the role of children in twentieth-century social movements, children and youth comprise a relatively under-studied cohort of the Black Power era.[128] Yet, as the pages of The *Black Panther* newspaper demonstrate, young people held anything but a marginal presence in Party discourse and practice. Children served as key figures in the daily workings of the Party; as the daughters and sons of Black Panther activists, as students of the group's political education classes, and as subjects of government surveillance. I argue that a full accounting of the role of children, and ideas about children, within the BPP's community services reveals that these programs went beyond providing temporary relief for contemporary social ills to constitute a revolutionary vision for long-term transformations.

Against the backdrop of a nationwide War on Poverty, conversations about young people afforded the BPP a means to forefront the discrepancies between national ideals and lived realities. Particularly in the areas of housing, education, and nutrition in low-income communities, children functioned as a metric of racial capitalism's deleterious effects, and thus, as tangible proof of the necessity of the Party's social welfare initiatives.[129] At the same time, Party leaders envisioned young people as vital players in these programs, both as beneficiaries and agents who would contribute to their function and development. Especially evident in the Panthers' liberation schools, Party leaders recognized young people as perceptive thinkers with a class consciousness strong enough

[128] Spencer, *The Revolution Has Come.*
[129] For the BPP's survival programs, see Hilliard, *The Black Panther Party*.

to enhance the Party's socialist measures and in turn radically transform society. In this light, I posit that viewing the BPP's theoretical engagement with children and youth in the context of the Party's ideological and practical approach to the lumpen proletariat serves as a useful framework.[130] Notably, the organization's views about young people mirrored the group's understandings of the lumpen proletariat in two key ways; first, children and youth in low-income neighborhoods existed on the societal periphery and the destitution they faced resulted directly from a lack of government attention and remediation. Secondly, as the Party saw it, through their proper training in grassroots organizing and education about America's racial and class inequities, young people held the ability to realize their agential power and develop the skills necessary to improve their lives and futures.

The *Black Panther*

In order to trace how young people factored into the Party's visions for revolutionary change, this chapter primarily draws from the BPP's newspaper, the *Black*

[130] Huey Newton's and Bobby Seale's understanding of the lumpen proletariat in the context of the black freedom struggle was acutely shaped by the writings of Frantz Fanon. While Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels posited the lumpen proletariat as an undermining force to the working-class struggle, Fanon highlighted the revolutionary potential of the lumpen proletariat in within an anticolonial framework. Drawing from Fanon's work, particularly *The Wretched of the Earth*, the BPP cofounders recognized how race and racism affected the working class. Through a process of theoretical innovation, Newton and Seale built much of the Party's rank-and-file base by recruiting street hustlers, prostitutes, and other dispossessed black Americans in their movement to end racial and class oppression in the United States. See Floyd W. Hayes, III and Francis A. Kiene, III, "All Power to the People": The Political Thought of Huey P. Newton and the Black Panther Party," in *The Black Panther Party Reconsidered*, edited by Charles E. Jones (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1998), 159-161. See also, Chris Booker, "Lumpenization: A Critical Error of the Black Panther Party," in *The Black Panther Party Reconsidered*, edited by Charles E. Jones (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1998), 337-362.

Panther, specifically by focusing on the paper's news articles and visual representations of young people in local communities. Recall that the periodical—originally named *The Black Panther Community News Service*—operated as the official organ of the BPP from April 25, 1967 to September 1980, and, in the words of Waldo Martin and Joshua Bloom, "offers the most comprehensive documentation of the ideas, actions, and projections of the Party day to day, week to week."[131] Printed every Wednesday at its distribution center in San Francisco, the newspaper began as a four-page newsletter with information about events and activities both internal and external to the Party.[132] Over time the *Black Panther* grew into a full newspaper with a vast audience. Black Panthers and community residents—sometimes the children of Party members—sold the periodical in local community streets, barbershops, progressive bookstores, bars, shopping malls, and other public gathering areas.[133] During its peak years from 1970 to 1971, circulation hit between 139,000 and 400,000, with reader subscriptions stretching from the Bay Area to China, Cuba, North Korea, East Germany and beyond.[134] The geographical breadth of its readership was in part due to the importance the editorial staff placed on the accessibility

[131] Martin and Bloom, *Black Against Empire*, 10. On name change see Lumsden, "Good Mothers with Guns," 17. For more detailed information about the paper's editorial board and content focus, see Hilliard, *The Black Panther Party*, 47; Billy X Jennings, "Remembering the Black Panther Party Newspaper." For other estimations of the newspaper's dates of operation, see Durant, ed., *Black Panther*, 95.

[132] Jennings, "Remembering the Black Panther Party Newspaper." Howard Quinn Printers in San Francisco originally printed the paper, and according to Hilliard, at a certain point the periodical's main distribution center moved to Oakland. See Hilliard, *The Black Panther Party*, 48.

[133] Hilliard, *The Black Panther Party*, 48-49. Local residents and members of community organizations were regularly (and voluntarily) involved in the production process, undertaking various duties including submitting eye-witness accounts of police brutality, writing articles, providing photographs, and helping to distribute the paper.

[134] In January 1968, the BPP began producing weekly issues of the *Black Panther*. By 1978, scarce finances forced the Party to reduce its production to once a month. See Lumsden, "Good Mothers with Guns," 903. For a discussion on the paper's circulation scope, refer to the dissertation's "Introduction." For geographical scope of readership, see Brown, *A Taste of Power*, 16; Rhodes, *Framing the Black Panthers*, 295-296. The *Black Panther* ran on funds acquired through sales, subscriptions and donations. See Hilliard, *The Black Panther Party*, 48.

of the *Black Panther*'s language. The prose of Mozambican poet, Jose Rebelo, served as a useful model for the paper's editors on the importance of writing to a wide audience: "Forge simple words that even the children can understand. Words which will enter every house like the wind, and fall like red hot embers, on our people's souls."[135] The Party's application of Rebelo's message sheds light on the ways in which the Panthers imagined young people as an important contingent of the newspaper's audience, as valued thinkers capable of receiving and being moved by the BPP's call for racial justice.

First and foremost, the periodical functioned as one of the organization's chief consciousness-raising tools, simultaneously promoting the Panthers' 10-Point Program and galvanizing public support for class-based and anti-colonial freedom struggles in the U.S. and abroad.[136] The attention such movements received from mainstream media outlets, Party leaders averred, was often reactionary or cursory at best.[137] Through a combination of news-based articles, editorial writings, visual rhetoric, and "fun features" (including comic strips), the *Black Panther* provided readers with information on the grassroots work of BPP chapters throughout the nation, analyses of the conditions of domestic and international working-class communities, and the theoretical writings of Party ideologists.[138]

Shifts in the organization's movement politics were often reflected in the newspaper's textual content and visual imagery.[139] Relatedly, the *Black Panther*

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[135] Taken from Hilliard, *The Black Panther Party*, 51. Jose Rebelo was a writer and during the Mozambican revolution he worked as a member of the Mozambican anti-Portuguese guerrilla group, Frelimo.
[136] Hilliard, *The Black Panther Party*, 48; Jennings, "Remembering the Black Panther Party Newspaper."
[137] Hilliard, *The Black Panther Party*, 48.
[138] Hilliard, *The Black Panther Party*, 47, 51-53.
[139] Durant, *Black Panther*, 21, 104.

underwent a relatively high staff turnover, in part a consequence of the precariousness of Party membership itself. As editorships changed, so too did the paper's overall tone and focus. After founding the publication, Huey Newton and Bobby Seale recruited Eldridge Cleaver and Elbert "Big Man" Howard as its first editors. According to scholars such as Linda Lumsden, early issues were often characterized by an inflammatory and militant rhetoric—exemplified by the Panthers' notorious calls to "Off the pigs!"—that shed graphic light on the extent of anti-black police violence in poor communities.[140]

From 1968 to 1970, during Newton's imprisonment related to the death of Oakland police officer, John Frey, the *Black Panther* pivoted much of its attention to the Party's campaign for Newton's release.[141] A rise in organizational coverage of the Party's growing community service programs unfolded in tandem with the paper's sharp decline in militaristic rhetoric under Elaine Brown's tenure as editor from 1970 to 1972.[142] It was also at this juncture in the *Black Panther*'s history when the organ featured an increasing number of pieces by and about Panther women, many of which, according to Lumsden, reflected a Marxist feminist perspective.[143] Finally, as the BPP turned its attention and resources toward reform through institution building and participation in electoral politics, documentation of the Panthers' community service programs continued

[140] Lumsden, "Good Mothers with Guns," 903.
[141] Lumsden, "Good Mothers with Guns," 904. During this time Eldridge Cleaver was living in exile, after fleeing to Algeria to avoid murder charges related to a 1967 police shootout. While in exile, however, the *Black Panther* continued to publish essays by the Minister of Information while the periodical changed directorships between a handful of male editors from 1968 to 1970. See Lumsden, "Good Mothers with Guns," 904.
[142] Lumsden, "Good Mothers with Guns," 904.
[143] Lumsden, "Good Mothers with Guns," 906. The periodical's focus on the work of rank-and-file women continued for at least the next two years when Brown served as the head of the BPP. Ericka Huggins worked with and briefly succeeded Brown as editor, from 1971 to 1972. See Lumsden, "Good Mothers with Guns," 904. It is also worth noting that the Party's increased literary focus on women by 1970 was perhaps also a reflection of the organization's collaborations with the era's emerging women's liberation movement and new conversations within the Party itself about the relationship between gender and organizational labor.

alongside coverage of a handful of members' bids for political office, including those of Brown, Seale, and Ericka Huggins.[144] In line with the Panthers' growing internationalist politics at this time, too, and under the editorship of David Du Bois from 1973 to 1975, the periodical also increasingly informed its readers of revolutionary movements in Africa, Latin America, and southeast Asia.[145] JoNina Abron served as the newspaper's final editor from March 1978 to 1980.[146]

For the purposes of this chapter, it is additionally important to note that Party coverage of the social and economic lives of young people was not limited to the textual format of articles or editorials. Rather, the group's literary pieces were regularly augmented by the prolific artwork of BPP Minister of Culture, Emory Douglas. Over the course of his tenure from 1967 to the early 1980s, Douglas produced hundreds of visual compositions for the periodical, building what became the face of Black Panther, and to a large extent, Black Power iconography.[147] Like the paper as a whole, his aesthetic contributions were simultaneously informative and empowering, operating as a political space through which the Party could present and contest lived realities. According to Sam

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[144] Lumsden, "Good Mothers with Guns," 909; Spencer, *The Revolution Has Come*, 148, 151.
[145] Lumsden, "Good Mothers with Guns," 904, 908; Hilliard, *The Black Panther Party*, 50. During his time as editor of the Black Panther, David Du Bois—the stepson of W.E.B. Du Bois—insisted on collective decision making concerning both the content and tone of the paper. This strategy, Lumsden avers, "helped ensure that female staffers' voices were heard." Lumsden, "Good Mothers with Guns," 904. Du Bois joined the BPP in 1972, after working in Cairo as a journalist during the 1960s and early 1970s. During his time in Egypt, Du Bois served as editor and reporter for the Arab Observer, the Egyptian Gazette, and the Middle East News and Feature Agency. In addition to his career in journalism, he also taught American literature at Cairo University and worked as a writer and announcer for Radio Cairo. See Elaine Woo, "David Graham Du Bois, 79; Professor, Journalist, and Stepson of Famed Scholar," *Los Angeles Times*, Feb. 10, 2005,
url: https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2005-feb-10-me-dubois10-story.html.
[146] Lumsden, "Good Mothers with Guns," 904.
[147] Emory Douglas and Colette Gaiter, "The Revolution Will Be Visualized: Black Panther Artist Emory Douglas," in *West of Center: Art and the Counterculture Experiment in America, 1965-1977*, eds. Elissa Auther and Adam Lerner (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 241.

Durant, Douglas's artwork served two main purposes: "to illustrate conditions that made revolution a reasonable response and to construct a visual mythology or power for people who felt powerless and victimized."[148]

More significantly for this chapter, children were among Emory Douglas's favorite subjects.[149] Through a range of compositional techniques and styles, the Minister of Culture's work revealed a powerful visual spectrum of black working-class childhoods in the 1960s and 70s U.S., depicting life in its most concrete and abstract iterations. His pieces portray young people as members of loving families, as the bearers of national disparities in wealth, and as active individuals with the potential to change the conditions in which they lived. I posit that in order to more fully understand how young

[148] Durant, *Black Panther*, 96. While the former helped augment the organization's socialist imperatives, the latter effort—the construction of a "visual mythology of power"—spoke more directly to the era's contemporary Black Arts Movement (BAM), an aesthetic outgrowth of the Black Power Movement aimed at promoting African American-produced visual depictions of black pride and solidarity. Douglas was among many BAM artists that emphasized children as subjects of their aesthetic productions. In her (2014) study of depictions of children in African American photobooks, Katherine Capshaw differentiates the role of the child subject in BAM works as compared to photographic documentation of young people in the earlier years of the southern Civil Rights Movement. Whereas mainstream media outlets in the 1950s and 1960s regularly published photographs that situated children and youth in passive, vulnerable, and victim-like roles, BAM photographers and writers intervened by foregrounding young people with agentive power. According to Capshaw, BAM artists regularly represented childhood "as an icon of both the black nation and that nation in generative process of development." See Capshaw, *Civil Rights Childhood*, xxiv. Capshaw's work builds on Martin Berger's (2011) study on the role of race in civil rights photography. Berger outlines what he calls a "restricted menu of narratives" told through the visual imagery of white mainstream media coverage of the black freedom struggle. He contends that the white press was deliberate in choosing which images it would release to the public, as such visuals "performed reassuring symbolic work." According to Berger, "Most of the photographs that northern whites deemed representative of the struggle showed whites in charge," and in some cases, "presented story lines that allowed magnanimous and sympathetic whites to imagine themselves as bestowing rights on blacks." In the context of photographic of young people, he avers, the white press was attracted to those images that rendered black children as passive and tranquil over those that depicted black youth in active resistance or the victims of white-sanctioned violence. See Berger, *Seeing Through Race*, 6, 7, 113-125.

[149] Douglas and Gaiter, "The Revolution Will Be Visualized," 242.

people factored into the Party's socialist imagination, we must also explore the powerful medium of Panther artwork.

Family and Parenthood in Black Panther and Contemporary Discourses

The BPP never adhered to a static, monolithic gender politics, as scholarship by Robyn Spencer, Tracye Matthews, and others has demonstrated, and the group's ideas about parenthood and children were similarly protean and varied.[150] While the group never released an official statement articulating the significance of family and children for the fight against racism and wealth inequality, conversations about motherhood, fatherhood, and family structure figure prominently in the pages of the *Black Panther* throughout the newspaper's lifespan.[151] The political meanings the Party attached to childrearing and to the categories of children and childhood were responsive to, and at times, in tension with an amalgam of contemporary forces. Notably, these included public debates about black male unemployment, resurgent Black Nationalist projects, black feminist mobilizations and the 1970s women's liberation movement, and finally, shifts in the Party's own political ideology from the mid-1960s to the early 1980s.

On the one hand, the Party formed at a particular moment in the federal government's efforts to assess and mitigate disturbing trends of racial violence and socio-economic disparity in cities across the country. By 1964, a black male unemployment rate five times that of white men prompted Lyndon Johnson's administration to lead a

[150] For gender see Spencer, *The Revolution Has Come*; Spencer, "Engendering the Black Freedom Struggle"; Matthews, "'No One Ever Asks."
[151] Billy X Jennings, "Remembering the Black Panther Party Newspaper."

federal investigation into the causes of urban inequity.[152] What began as an ameliorative endeavor, however, ultimately resulted in a condemnation of low-income black families, and black mothers in particular. Published in 1965 by Assistant Secretary of Labor, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, what became widely-known as the "Moynihan Report" posited that black mothers and female-headed households hindered the socio-economic progress of their male counterparts, particularly in the realms of employment and education.[153] With its set of prescriptive policy measures aimed at bringing "the structure of the Negro family in line with the rest of our society," the study delegitimized black mothers as incapable of cultivating healthy families.[154] In doing so, Moynihan further normalized a standard of manhood that was gauged in patriarchal terms, and by extension, a standard of family that depended on the income-earning capacities of the husband.[155]

Formed roughly one year after the publication of the Moynihan Report, the BPP made few specific references to the study, yet, Party leaders regularly engaged with the report's major themes early on, notably in Panther writings on the state of black manhood and the black family. In his 1967 essay, "Fear and Doubt," for example, Huey Newton lent credence to Moynihan's normalization of the nuclear family with his depiction of the

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[152] These figures represent unemployment among black and white men living in U.S. cities, between the ages of 18 and 24. See Estes, *"I Am a Man!"* 108-109.

[153] Estes, *"I Am a Man!"* 111. The report measured what it deemed as familial dysfunctionality in urban areas by looking at the number of infants born to couples out of wedlock and the proportion of households run by women. See Daniel Patrick Moynihan, *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action* (U.S. Department of Labor Office of Policy, Planning and Research: Greenwood Press, 1981).

[154] Quoted in Estes, *"I Am a Man!"* 108.

[155] For a detailed history of the relationship between race, gender, and class in the context of black families in the post-emancipation era, see Hannah Rosén, *Terror in the Heart of Freedom: Citizenship, Sexual Violence, and the Meaning of Race in the Postemancipation South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

"lower socio-economic black male."[156] A product of both government neglect and feelings of an inability to support his wife and children, the figure Newton described ultimately "withdraws into a world of invisibility."[157] Implicit in Newton's meditation was not only a notion of family bound by the strictures of a male breadwinner paradigm, but one that also underscored the vulnerable position of children; the well-being of children depended on a familial hierarchy run by the productive labor of the father.

While Newton's early call on black men to ensure the welfare of their families reinforced Daniel Patrick Moynihan's advocacy of a male-headed family structure, it also signified the Party's formative Black Nationalist posture.[158] When Newton and Bobby Seale founded the organization—originally and tellingly named the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense—they did so with a keen awareness that African Americans in urban spaces were under siege.[159] As a challenge to the disproportionate rates at which black Americans fell victim to police surveillance and violence early Party members organized armed caravans to monitor police actions. An iteration of the group's early politics of self-determination, community control of police, Newton and Seale believed, would in turn help ensure the development and stability of families in city neighborhoods.[160]

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[156] Huey Newton, *To Die for the People: The Writings of Huey P. Newton* (New York: Random House, 1972), 80-81.
[157] Newton, *To Die for the People*, 80-81.
[158] While scholars of the BPP have offered varying categorizations of the Party's political development, most have identified its early years, up to roughly 1968, as reflective of Black Nationalism. See Joshua Bloom and Waldo Martin, *Black Against Empire*; Spencer, *The Revolution Has Come*; Tyner, "Defend the Ghetto."
[159] On the organization's name change, see Bloom and Martin, *Black Against Empire*, 114.
[160] Bloom and Martin, *Black Against Empire*, Chapter 2. Natalie Margo Crawford contends that while Black Power advocates and Moynihan concurred that the quality of life for working-class black Americans was in crisis, and both advocated similar visions of the ideal family, the two groups were differently motivated in reaching this ideal. Whereas Moynihan prescribed the nuclear family model as a mechanism for economic mobility, Black Power advocacy for male-headed households stemmed from concrete anxieties about black genocide, and the political inclination for black self-determination. Natalie Margo Crawford, "'Must Revolution Be a Family

While initial Party conceptions about fatherhood were rooted in the call on black men to protect the domestic sphere from financial insecurity and state-sponsored violence, the organization's nascent understandings of women's parental duties were similarly circumscribed to some degree by heteronormative discourses about women's perceived inherent maternalism. Some early Party recruits understood revolutionary motherhood in a way that reified a heteronormative brand of sexuality, one that was characteristic of Black Nationalist gender politics. In a meeting on April 7, 1968, Ericka Huggins, known at the time as the "captain of the women," addressed a group of pioneer Panther women to discuss what she perceived to be some of the primary differences between men's and women's vanguard roles. Unlike their male counterparts, women "had the task of producing children, progeny of the revolution who would carry the flame when we fell, knowing that generations after us would prevail."[161] Even months later, women in other leadership positions mirrored Huggins' sentiment. In an August 9, 1969 issue of the *Black Panther*, member of Oakland's Ministry of Information, Candi Robinson offered a similar vision for women in the revolution, claiming:

> 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…within our wombs is the army of the people…We my sisters are revolutionary women of revolutionary men! We are mothers of revolution![162]

Affair?': *Revisiting The Black Woman*," in *Want to Start a Revolution?: Radical Women in the Black Freedom Struggle*, eds. Dayo Gore, Jeanne Theoharis, and Komozi Woodard (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 190.

[161] This description of Huggins's talk at the April 1968 meeting is provided by Elaine Brown in her memoir. Brown, *A Taste of Power*, 132-137.

[162] Quoted in *Black Against Empire*, 305. For Robinson's title, see Bryan Shih and Yohuru Williams, *The Black Panthers: Portraits from an Unfinished Revolution* (New York, Nation Books, 2016), 106.

She portrays the activist mother in dual terms, as both the literal and symbolic cultivator of revolution. Working behind the front lines, Robinson's figure is able to both support her male counterpart and sustain the next generation of the movement by bearing children. To some degree, then, the revolutionary woman occupied a peculiar position; while the preservation of the Black race—and the revolution itself—depended on her, her participation in the movement was necessarily circumscribed by her reproductive capacities.

Assertions about the inherent maternal role of women in community building efforts have a long history in Black Nationalist movements. As both the bearers and caretakers of children, black mothers figure prominently in the history of nationalist imaginings of peoples of African descent. One of the most vocal and prolific writers of the early twentieth-century Back-to-Africa Movement, Amy Jacques Garvey, proposed a gender politics that in many ways reinforced the standard her husband set for all wives in the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), which posited women as supportive, selfless, and compromising helpmates.[163] At the same time, however, Jacques Garvey recognized the ramifications of home life for nation building, urging her readers to foster a complementarity between the familial and public spheres. Situating women at the nexus of family life and community uplift, Garvey contended that racial betterment depended on the proper upbringing and educational development of children, and that mothers were paramount to this process.[164]

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[163] Ula Taylor, *The Veiled Garvey: The Life and Times of Amy Jacques Garvey* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 29.

[164] Taylor, *The Veiled Garvey*, 75-77. Taylor importantly notes that Jacques Garvey's ideas about family and childrearing resembled and were shaped by the politics of respectability characteristic of contemporary Black club culture. It should be noted that while the Black Panther Party may have mirrored some of UNIA's ideologies about the role of family and parenthood, the Party's

Perhaps it is not surprising, then, that organizational rhetoric on government repression that tied the state of black America to young people filled the pages of *The Black Panther*. In a March 15, 1970 article emphasizing the importance of community investment in the healthy upbringing of children, Panther, D.C. asserted, "One thing is for sure, we're in a long struggle and our wealth and reserves is manifested in our children." He underscored the pivotal role of youth in helping to advance "the struggle for self-determination and national salvation."[165] The author's rhetorical linkage of children, "self-determination," and "national salvation" highlighted an understanding of young people's political significance in dual terms. While children held the potential to transform society by enhancing black social institutions, they also signified—materially and symbolically—the survival of the black nation.

The young subjects of Emory Douglas's artwork similarly made the principles and stakes of the black freedom struggle especially palpable for Panther communities.[166] Children situated within family units and domestic settings, for example, was a regularly occurring image in the Party's iconography. A drawing in an October 1967 *Black Panther* issue, for instance, features a home setting, where a smiling mother looks down at her unclothed child who holds a rifle across his right shoulder (Figure 1).[167]

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working-class and socialist politics necessarily influenced its divergence from heteronormative family models. Whereas much of early twentieth-century Black Nationalist ideas about motherhood and fatherhood developed within middle-class notions of black racial progress, members of the Black Panther Party ultimately recognized the two-parent, male-headed household as antithetical to their vision for a society void of class disparity.

[165] D.C., "Towards a Revolutionary Morality," *The Black Panther*, March 15, 1970, 14.

[166] Capshaw, *Civil Rights Childhood*, 167.

[167] Image taken from Durant, *Black Panther*, 1.

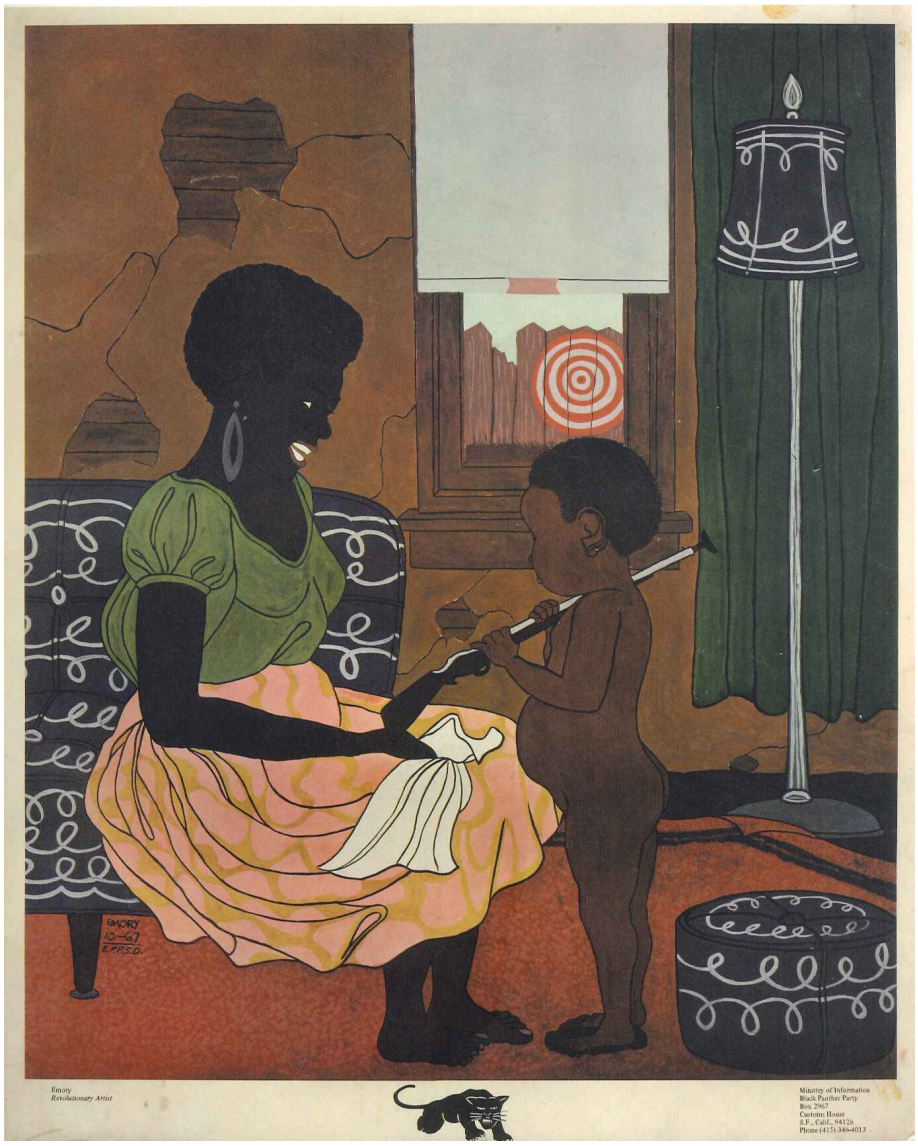


Figure 1. Taken From Sam Durant, *Black Panther: The Revolutionary Art of Emory Douglas*, 1.

The two figures are centered against a backdrop of the interior of a house, its cracked walls set against a soot-filled rug. A broken fence painted with the red and white rings of a bull's eye appears in the distance through the half-covered window. On the one hand, the image speaks to the organization's belief in young people's capacity to secure their own futures. Produced at a time of heightened police violence against, and FBI surveillance of Party members, the image was among several of Douglas's early

drawings featuring children and youth as viable practitioners of the organization's early politics of self-defense. With rifle in hand and at the side of his supportive mother—a figure who has invested in his well-being through self-defense training—the child bears the skills to protect himself, his family, and his home.

The centrality of mother and son in Figure 1 additionally spoke to the organization's broader discourse concerning black familial structures. It is perhaps no coincidence that at a time when public defamations of low-income black families, such as those outlined in the Moynihan Report, captured the nation's attention, Douglas regularly produced visual narratives of loving parents whose commitment to their children's safety and well-being manifested in a variety of ways. Whereas Moynihan's *Negro Family* castigated working-class black fathers as negligent and lazy, and black mothers as disempowering their male counterparts, Douglas's pieces told the story of parents and kin who enabled children to become self-sufficient in their own struggles against state violence, and parents who provided their daughters and sons with food, clothing, and shelter. In the BPP's iconography too, then, we see an organizational attempt to legitimize working-class black families and black parenthood.[168]

Documentation of specific Panther families more directly illustrated Party beliefs about the significance of young people as a potential challenge to repressive state forces. On August 2, 1969, when *The Black Panther* announced the birth of Maceo Cleaver—the son of Kathleen and Eldridge Cleaver—the headline read, "Another Problem for the Fascists," followed by the author's encouragement to the Panther couple to "do it again,

[168] In fact, Capshaw contends that the pathologizing impulses of the Moynihan Report incensed many participants of the Black Arts Movement, which in part spurred an aesthetic focus on black children, childhood, and family. See Capshaw, *Civil Rights Childhood*, xix. For a gendered analysis of Douglas's drawing in Figure 2, see Lumsden, "Good Mothers with Guns," 908.

create two, three, many problems for the pigs."[169] On one level, the author's recognition of Maceo and his peers as "forces" who would carry on the organization's resistance efforts against state surveillance and infiltration of the Party spoke to a broader organizational discourse about the viability of young people as change agents. Moreover, and perhaps less explicitly outlined by the paper's announcement, the likely participation of children like Maceo in the BPP's survival programs had potentially embarrassing ramifications for the federal government. The success of such programs, evidenced by the tens of thousands of young local residents who arrived daily at BPP community centers nationwide with empty stomachs, laid bare the state's dereliction in implementing and monitoring its own aid programs.[170]

In addition to contemporary and traditional Black Nationalist discourses regarding parenthood, the Black Panther Party's ongoing self-reflections about how gender and family might operate in the group's larger liberatory project were not completely divorced from other forces that contributed to the era's social and political milieu. In her pivotal 1998 essay, "'No One Ever Asks What a Man's Place in the Revolution Is': Gender and the Politics of the Black Panther Party 1966-1971," Tracye Matthews suggests that in addition to dominant, and Black Nationalist gender discourses, the emerging women's liberation movement also played a major role in the way Panther men and women conceptualized and engaged with the relationship between gender and labor. By the early 1970s, a growing number of women and men, including Newton, recognized the potential usefulness of an alliance with the women's movement in the fight against

[169] "Another Problem for the Fascists," *Black Panther*, August 2, 1969, 2.
[170] Hilliard estimates that by 1969 the Panthers had organized hundreds of Free Breakfast for School Children programs throughout the country. The FBI demonstrated full awareness of the Panthers' growth and popularity in local communities, as one high-ranking government official noted, "The Panthers are feeding more kids than we are." Hilliard, *The Black Panther Party*, 30.

capitalism, going so far as to argue that the dissolution of class exploitation depended on full emancipation, including that of women.[171]

In many ways, the collaboration between the 1970s feminist movement and the BPP grew out of a gendered critique of the New Left and the civil rights movement in the decade prior. By the 1960s, an increasing number of women vocalized their concerns about the contradiction between the self-proclaimed liberatory politics of organizations such as SNCC and the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), and the overt—and at other times, subtle—organizational patterns of chauvinism within these same groups. In 1965 a cohort of women in SDS prompted the group to issue an official statement on women's liberation and women's roles in the New Left after being excluded by male leaders from participating in certain tasks because of their gender. Beyond its effects in shaping the political development of the SDS, the statement represented a broader, critical conversation among leftists about the problematics of the anti-war and civil rights movements' political praxes; that is, the deprioritization of gender issues as a result of these groups' focus on anti-imperialism and racial equity.[172]

Like its Black Power contemporary, second-wave feminism was neither ideologically nor strategically monolithic in its approach to a gendered revolution. Rather, the Women's Liberation movement of the 1970s encompassed a range of factions including those formed by black women activists, radical feminists, lesbian separatists, and women of color more broadly. While many African American women may not have labeled themselves "feminists" due to the white middle-class movement's failure to fully grapple with the notion of intersectional oppression, black women who participated in

[171] Taken from Matthews, "No One Ever Asks," 274.
[172] Matthews, "No One Ever Asks," 273.

campaigns to counter police brutality, colonialism, and poverty significantly shaped contemporary conversations about gender.[173] In 1974, a group of Black lesbian activists, including Barbara Smith, convened to form the Combahee River Collective. In its published statement, the Collective rendered visible the multiple oppressions of black women, critically questioning the efficacy of both the Black Power and Women's Liberation movements. The authors averred that while the former failed to regard black women as equals to their male counterparts, the latter eschewed issues concerning race.[174] The Collective ultimately called on both movements to adopt a more intersectional politics, one that would bridge issues concerning gender and race.

By the early 1970s, feminist discourses on the economy of family helped catalyze academic critiques of Moynihan's "tangle of pathology" thesis, deeming it an uncritical and ahistorical evaluation of black working-class families. Through racial and class analytics, scholars including Angela Davis, Herbert Gutman and Carol Stack, among others, challenged Moynihan's depiction of female-headed families as dysfunctional by asserting, to the contrary, that these family structures represented a "healthy adaptation" to the pressures of poverty and racism prevalent in many low-income cities.[175] Davis's 1971 article, "Reflections on the Black Woman's Role in the Community of Slaves," published in *The Black Scholar*, specifically took to task Moynihan's contention that the so-called black matriarch represented an unfortunate by-product of slavery. Through a

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[173] Matthews, "No One Ever Asks," 273-274.
[174] Kimberly Springer, "Black Feminists Respond to Black Power Masculinism," in *The Black Power Movement: Rethinking the Civil Rights-Black Power Era*, ed. Peniel Joseph (New York: Routledge, 2006), 108.
[175] Estes*, I Am a Man*, 125-126. See also Angela Davis, "Reflections on the Black Woman's Role in the Community of Slaves," in *The Black Scholar* 3, no. 4 (1971), 2-15; Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom*; *Carol Stack, All Our Kin: Strategies for Survival in the Black Community* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974).

historical meditation on forms of resistance among enslaved African American women, Davis pointed to Moynihan's obfuscation of black matriarchal and matrifocal families. She called the former term "a cruel misnomer," as it was predicated on the fallacious inference that enslaved black women held a degree of structural power.[176] Davis further averred that where African American women were stripped of their personhood, they found in living quarters the most viable space in which they could develop strategies of sabotage against their white enslavers, and thus to a degree, salvage black autonomy and the black community as a whole. At a time when the federal government had failed to provide for its unemployed and low-income citizens, Davis argued that Moynihan's demonization of black mothers as castrating figures represented "an open weapon of ideological warfare."[177]

Finally, Black Panther conversations about children and family were also heavily shaped by an emerging national conversation about women's reproductive rights. In both theory and practice, the BPP's stance on birth control was dynamic throughout the organization's existence. Late-1960s and early-1970s Panther writings, however, often employed a language that cast abortion and contraception as further manifestations of the federal government's attempt to curb the growth of African America. While the Party formed roughly six years before federal legalization of abortion with the landmark U.S.

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[176] Davis, "Reflections," 4-5. Davis wrote the article while detained at the Marin County Jail in San Rafael, California on charges of murder, kidnapping, and conspiracy in connection with Jonathan Jackson's armed takeover of the Marin County Hall of Justice the year prior. It is also worth mentioning that while Davis was never a member of the Black Panther Party, her communist affiliations and activist work in California necessarily positioned her within Black Panther circles. In fact, her October 1971 text, *If They Come in the Morning: Voices of Resistance*, contained pieces by Ericka Huggins, Huey Newton, Bobby Seale, as well as other leftists including Bettina Aptheker, James Baldwin, and the Soledad Brothers. See, Angela Davis, ed., *If They Come in the Morning: Voices of Resistance* (New York: The Third Press, 1971).
[177] Davis, "Reflections," 6-7, 15.

Supreme Court decision *Roe v. Wade* in 1973, Party leaders openly rejected its earlier decriminalization at the state level. Three days after New York legalized abortion on July 1, 1970, the *Black Panther* published a response that unapologetically addressed what they saw as the racial and class implications of government regulation of family planning. Questioning those who hailed the law as a victory for the women's liberation movement, New York Panther Brenda Hyson called it an achievement for middle-class white mothers alone. Whereas the law augmented white middle-class mothers' prerogative to spend more time outside of the domestic sphere, Hyson averred that for Black mothers on state aid "it is an announcement of death before birth."[178] In essence, state legalization of abortion allowed state governments to eschew the responsibility of assisting black mothers who otherwise worked to ensure that their children "do not have to starve" or "be ashamed of having to wear improper clothing."[179]

Party literature at the turn of the decade offered similar assessments of women's contraception. A May 31, 1970 *Black Panther* article warned its readers to be "vigilant to all plots [aimed] at our destruction be they racist pig cops or a small seemingly harmless pill." Questioning the disproportionately high placement of Planned Parenthood clinics in low-income communities of color, the author identified birth control as "part and parcel of the anti-human practices of the fascist, racist U.S. government, and their genocidal war effort." The author ultimately called on fellow revolutionaries to "speak out against all practices that invariably suggest an end to Black people."[180]

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[178] Brenda Hyson, "New York City Passed a New Abortion Law Effective July 1, 1970," *Black Panther*, July 4, 1970, 2.
[179] Hyson, "New York City," 2.
[180] "Concerning Birth Control," *Black Panther*, May 31, 1970, 5.

The authors' deeming of abortion and birth control as part of a federal scheme to regulate economically disadvantaged communities was not unsubstantiated, but instead, pointed to a disturbing trend of coerced sterilization that many welfare recipients experienced in the 1970s. In her study of the U.S. Welfare Rights Movement, Premilla Nadasen highlights that beneficiaries of public assistance—many times women of color—were often given hysterectomies and other irreversible forms of sterilization under the threat of losing their state aid.[181] In fact, by the mid-1970s, mothers with three children, receiving welfare benefits were sterilized at a rate 67 percent higher than that of women off public assistance with the same number of children.[182] The BPP was privy to this phenomenon, as many Panthers were themselves enrolled in welfare programs and the Party as a whole actively allied itself with the era's Welfare Rights Movement, a campaign that publicly opposed the coerced sterilization of women.[183]

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[181] Nadasen situates the Welfare Rights Movement's stance on birth control within a broader history of black opposition to forced sterilization. She contends that in the wake of a racialized slave economy premised on the destruction of African and African American families, and Progressive era social reform campaigns that sought to "limit the fertility of so-called 'lower-races'…many African American men and women had historically identified birth control with the eugenics movement. Attempts in the 1930s and 1940s to introduce birth control in the black community were unsuccessful because of fears that such methods would be used as a form of genocide." Premilla Nadasen, *Welfare Warriors: The Welfare Rights Movement in the United States* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 216. For additional studies on the history of the forced sterilization black and other women of color, see also Patricia J. Williams, *The Alchemy of Race and Rights: Diary of a Law Professor* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991); Dorothy Roberts, *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1997), Chapter 2; Linda Gordon, *Woman's Body, Woman's Right: Birth Control in America* (New York: Penguin, 1974), Chapter 14.

[182] Thomas Shapiro, *Population Control Politics: Women, Sterilization and Reproductive Choice* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1985), 103-104.

[183] Not all women in the Black Power Movement wholly opposed birth control. In *The Black Woman*—what many scholars have labeled as one of the most vivid contemporary accounts of black feminist thought—writer and activist Toni Cade Bambara resisted the notion of birth control as a form of genocide, calling instead for a "healthy" approach to family. Taken from Capshaw, *Civil Rights Childhood,* 158-159. See also Crawford, "'Must Revolution Be a Family Affair?'"

Children and the War on Poverty

While the Panthers worked to secure the development of a future generation, Party leaders and members of the rank-and-file were also confronted with the reality that young Americans in cities across the country continued to endure impoverished conditions by the close of the 1960s. By 1968, mitigating the plight of young people assumed a new meaning for Party members. In what scholars including Robyn Spencer and others have identified as a political shift in the BPP towards revolutionary nationalism, by the end of the decade the group moved beyond the parameters of armed self-defense by increasing its investment in community aid programs.[184] This transition reflected the organization's response to both a rise in the number of infants born to Panthers and the increasingly visible limits of Johnson's Great Society programs. Evident in the Party's internal structural changes, program development, and documentation of the relationship between childhood and poverty, the BPP's imperative to provide for the wellbeing of young people assumed a new language and new on-the-ground mobilizations.

As part of the so-called War on Poverty, Congress passed the Economic Opportunity Act (EOA) in 1964, ultimately leading to the creation of the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO). A federal umbrella agency with a one billion-dollar budget, the OEO was tasked with funding and developing a number of programs intended

[184] Spencer, *The Revolution Has Come*, 78. As Spencer notes, unlike other Black Nationalist groups, the BPP never adhered to a politics of racial separatism. Even before its more blatant adoption of socialism by the mid-1970s, the Panthers' earlier nationalist politics were guided by class analysis rather than a "blanket condemnation of the white community." Spencer, *The Revolution Has Come*, 78.

to reduce unemployment, substandard housing, and poor school performance in low-income urban and rural communities. The Job Corps initiated local job training centers for residents looking to acquire basic and advanced employment skills. The OEO's Head Start program aimed to enhance the learning skills of preschoolers from economically disadvantaged families in order to close the performance gap between them and their economically better off peers. Perhaps most importantly, a key component of the War on Poverty programs was community participation. Specifically, the primary objective of the OEO's Community Action initiatives was to empower low-income neighborhoods by involving local residents in policy decision-making processes and by giving them important administrative positions.[185]

Yet, if Johnson's measures were well-intentioned, the actualization of his vision fell short on many levels. After its establishment in 1970, the BPP's Portland branch took to task the region's Model Cities program—one of many such programs funded by the OEO—by demanding local representation in the city's revitalization project. As Panthers Kent Ford and Tommy Mills soon discovered, however, city officials often granted local residents only token representation in public forums and the allocation of federal funds was precarious.[186] For all that the OEO had sought to fix, low-income cities throughout the country remained riddled with dilapidated housing, high rates of child malnutrition, and poor public schools. Children and youth, asserted the Panthers, represented poverty's primary victims.

During the late 1960s and early 70s, the Party regularly documented the extent to which Johnson's initiatives had failed to reach young people, particularly focusing on

[185] Burke and Jeffries, *The Portland Black* Panthers, 152.
[186] Burke and Jeffries, *The Portland Black Panthers*, 152.

their plight in the areas of housing, nutrition, and education. In both its iconography and use of descriptive language, the Party made explicit the toll of substandard housing on children and youth in a bid to draw attention to the scope of the issue and to engender community responses. The June 6, 1970 issue of *The Black Panther*, the first in a series documenting Ocean Hill-Brownsville, New York's abysmal housing crisis, ran the headline, "Housing Conditions: Capitalism and Our Children." The issue's cover photograph depicted three boys standing in front of two apartment buildings, both with discolored walls, broken windows, and siding overgrown with weeds. Behind the young residents lay a pile of loose debris reminiscent of a junkyard. The article goes on to describe the city—an area with significant Puerto Rican and African American populations—as a "giant death trap" where "children play among charred wood and broken glass." According to the author, conditions in Brownsville were indistinguishable from the horrors to come out of places like Cape Town, South Africa and Poland's Warsaw Ghetto, the epitome of what one caption called "Contradictions in the land of plenty." In a plea for community action the author averred, "Our children…are most affected by this sickness. This cancer is called capitalism."[187]

Party critiques of capitalism's effects in the area of housing were similarly evident in articles that juxtaposed impoverished children and negligent, profiteering landlords. Panther writings often depicted situations in which infants were subjected to the potentially fatal threats of lead paint, vermin, and freezing temperatures. A June 20, 1970 BPP report on "Substandard Housing in America" described one Harlem apartment building in which "mice and roaches run amuck…as if they also pay rent." With an

[187] D. Jenkins, "Housing Conditions: Capitalism and Our Children," *Black Panther*, June 6, 1970, cover, 2.

unfixed broken window, the Jones family used one room in their unit as a refrigerator during the winter, while flakes of lead paint fell from the ceiling forcing the Jones's eight children to sleep fully clothed at night.[188] Hazel Mack's accompanying article in the same issue emphasized similar circumstances among renters in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. Low wages coupled with a high cost of living forced some parents to steal food from local grocers in order to feed their families. Commenting on unequal distributions of wealth as a product of capitalism, Mack asked, "which is more fundamentally correct, a man who takes some from those who have plenty to feed his kids, or a man who keeps people in unfit houses with rats, leaky faucets…and high rents so that he (the slumlord) can live in luxury?" She concluded, "Which is more important—a child eating, or a man being able to own billions. Who is the real criminal?"[189]

While much of Emory Douglas's work situated children and youth in familial settings, his images of young people isolated from kin more often than not included traces of the BPP somewhere in the illustrations. One might read this common occurrence in Douglas's work as a Party statement about the BPP's collective investment in the wellbeing of young people who may have otherwise been neglected by government aid programs, or children whose parents struggled to provide for their family while searching for stable employment. In a drawing published in the *Black Panther*'s February 19, 1969 issue (Figure 2), Douglas depicts a barefoot boy standing in front of a sack of food, clothed in torn pants and a "Free Huey" button on his jacket. A rifle appears strapped around his shoulder.

[188] P. Frye, "Substandard Housing in America," *Black Panther*, June 20, 1970, 4.
[189] "Hazel Mack, "Actions—Not Notices," *Black Panther*, June 20, 1970, 4.



Figure 2. Untitled, *Black Panther*, Feb. 17, 1969, unpaginated.

Former San Francisco Black Panther, Katherine Campbell, reflects on the significance of the image in relation to the work of the Party:

> He's got holes in his pants, he's crying because he knows that without Huey, where are we gonna go? What are we gonna do? A child just learned that Huey's party brought his mother some food who wasn't able to feed her children. Huey's party is the one that had the big food giveaway. Huey's party is the one that came to his house and brought him some clothes. He may have met Huey *himself* and he embraced him.[190]

[190] Untitled, *Black Panther*, February 17, 1969, unpaginated.

She concludes stating that those outside of the boy's socio-economic world "forgot about him, forgot about a whole black community."[191] Campbell's analysis sheds important light on a frequent trend in the Party's visual portrayals of children. Even while the BPP sought to produce an iconographic narrative of strong, nurturing black family units, the young orphaned and isolated subjects in Douglas's portfolio never existed beyond the Party's purview. The boy in Figure 2 has suffered the consequences of his family's economic instability. Yet, his "Free Huey" pin and rifle serve as evidence of the Party's awareness of his plight, implications that the BPP is willing to act as a caregiver and dependable resource in order to ensure his well-being.

The Party similarly confronted the inadequacy of state aid programs, particularly as they pertained to the misallocation of federal funds. With the U.S. firmly entrenched in a Cold War during the late 1960s, the BPP was one of many radical organizations to publicly oppose military spending on and U.S. involvement in proxy wars abroad. Identifying the U.S.-Soviet "Space Race" as especially troubling, the Panthers regularly commented on the meaning of federal investments in technological development for the country's poorest citizens. On May 4, 1969, Deputy Minister of Labor of the Panthers' Chicago chapter, Yvonne King, pointed to the nation's epidemic of child hunger as an ongoing byproduct of federal spending priorities. King noted, "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."[192] With a similar sentiment and perhaps less concision, other Panther articles reinforced this basic contradiction, demonstrating that

[191] Katherine Campbell and Bobby McCall, interview by author, 27 February 2016, tape recording, San Francisco, California.
[192] Skip Bossette, "A Basic Contradiction in Affluent America: Hunger in the Land of Plenty," *Black Panther*, May 4, 1969, 14.

while elementary students with empty stomachs sometimes fainted in class from hunger, Richard Nixon used food funds to send "astro-pigs to the moon."[193]

In the same breath, the Panthers joined a chorus of leftist and civil rights organizations in their denunciation of the United States' involvement in the Vietnam War, highlighting the domestic and international costs. Formed roughly two years after the passage of the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution in August 1964—expanding America's participation in the Vietnam War—the BPP foregrounded the hypocrisies inherent to African American military service abroad. In Point 6 of the Party's original 10-Point Program Party officials called for Black America's exemption from military service, directly asserting, "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."[194]

As America's presence in Vietnam escalated into 1970, so too did the Panthers' open condemnation of the federal government's disproportionate deployment of black youths to the region as members of the U.S. armed forces. In August 1970 Eldridge Cleaver and Elaine Brown joined a delegation of Panthers and allies that had been invited by North Vietnam's prime minister, Pham Van Dong, as part of an official celebration of the political solidarities between North Vietnamese and black Americans—groups the prime minister had recognized as allies in a shared liberation struggle against U.S. imperialism.[195] During their stay Cleaver gave a speech to African American GIs in

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[193] Marsha, "Feeding Hungry Children vs. Men of the Cloth," *Black Panther*, Oct. 25, 1969, 8; Sister Beverlina, "Chicago: We Still Serve Free Breakfast for Children," *Black Panther*, Oct. 11, 1969, 5.

[194] Taken from Martin and Bloom, *Black Against Empire*, 72.

[195] The Hanoi visit was part of a larger tour of North Korea, North Vietnam, and China, as the delegates had been invited to speak with government officials from these respective countries. The nine other delegates included "Robert Scheer and Jan Austin from *Ramparts*; Regina Blumenfeld and Randy Rappaport of the Women's Liberation Movement; Alex Hing of the Red

Vietnam from the Voice of Vietnam radio station in Hanoi. He underscored implications of their military labor for both black Americans in the U.S. and for North Vietnamese:

> What 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 large numbers of troops in Vietnam; and they'll solve the problem of keeping young warriors off the streets of Babylon.[196]

Cleaver's call on black GIs to abandon their positions abroad and join the black freedom struggle at home spoke to the federal government's simultaneous devaluing of black lives on the battlefield and efforts to abate a growing wave of black radicalism in the U.S.

Guard; Ann Froines of the Panther Defense Committee of New Haven; Patricia Sumi of the Movement for a Democratic Military; Andy Truskier of the Peace and Freedom Party; and Janet Kranzberg." Martin and Bloom, *Black Against Empire*, 319.

[196] Taken from Bloom and Martin, *Black Against Empire*, 320-321. Cleaver publicly condemned the exploitative nature of the U.S. military's recruitment of black Americans even earlier. In his *Black Panther* article, "The Black Man's Stake in Vietnam," published on September 20, 1969, Cleaver juxtaposed the disproportionately high percentage of black troops in Vietnam with the Georgia state Legislature's refusal to seat former SNCC leader Julian Bond as an elected representative—due to his public anti-war politics. The concurrent examples revealed, according to Cleaver, "the very intimate relationship between the way human beings are being treated in Vietnam and the treatment they are receiving here in the United States." Taken from Philip S. Foner, *The Black Panthers Speak* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1995), 100. While the BPP's opposition to the war in Vietnam unfolded amidst a rising anti-war movement propelled by the New Left, it also developed in the wake of Martin Luther King Jr.'s increasing political attention toward the war and its relationship to domestic poverty. In many ways, Cleaver's message to black GIs in Hanoi in 1970 echoed King's assertion in 1967 that it was precisely young black men from America's poorest cities that were providing the "cannon fodder" for Vietnam. Further, and more pointedly than Cleaver discussed in the years following King's death, the SCLC reverend underscored the intimate correlation between the war and the disintegration of Johnson's Great Society plan, stating that, "A few years ago…there was the shining moment in [our] struggle. It seemed as if there was a real promise of hope for the poor—both black and white—through the poverty program. There were experiments, hopes, new beginnings. Then the buildup in Vietnam and I watched the program broken and eviscerated as if it were some idle political plaything of a society gone made on war." Taken from Nick Katz, *Judgment Days: Lyndon Baines Johnson, Martin Luther King Jr., and the Laws That Changed America* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2005), 372, 374. For a discussion of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee's objections to Johnson's prioritization of the Vietnam War over the War on Poverty—which took place just months before the founding of the BPP, see Katz, *Judgment Days*, 358. See also David Garrow, *Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1999), 472-473.

Importantly, it was members of this latter cohort who were also citizens of an American polity that had become increasingly disenchanted by Johnson's divestment from domestic social welfare programs and poverty his divestment produced.

"Little Changers": Young People and the BPP's Community Programs

In addition to raising awareness about American penury the BPP was also deeply invested in grassroots mobilizations as exemplified by the group's myriad survival programs. While I more fully explore the role of children and youth in the Party's on-the-ground mobilizations in Chapter Three, it is worth briefly noting here that in addition to understanding children as indices of national wealth disparities, the Panthers also recognized young people as political actors in their own right. Importantly, Party leaders envisioned young people as central players in the existence and development of their community initiatives. Particularly evident in the Panthers' liberation schools, children, the Party believed, were not passive victims of the ills of capitalism, but rather, individuals who were aware of their stakes in the class struggle and held the potential to improve the conditions of themselves and their communities. "We don't treat the children as little babies, and pet them. We relate to them as comrades who need to be politically educated," said Panther Val Douglas when describing his students at the BPP's newly opened Vallejo school in August 1969.[197] *Black Panther* writings even a year later applied similar language, labeling youth as "fellow human beings," members of a

[197] Douglas, "Vallejo Liberation School," 19.

"functionable unit to fight for our freedom.[198] Such language notably sheds light on an important parallel in how the Party understood the nature of young people and that of the lumpen proletariat more broadly. While the potential of children to effect change would not be hindered by the brevity of their years, they—like the lumpen proletariat—would cultivate their political identities through their lived experiences and exposure to the Party's education programs.

On an ideological level, Party formulations of children's agential capacities and transformative potential can in part be attributed to the Panthers' political preoccupations with the writings and teachings of Mao Zedong—a leading Communist figure who wrote regularly about the revolutionary power of children and youth. Born at the heyday of what scholars such as Robin Kelley and Betsy Esch have referred to as Black Maoism, the BPP was one of several black radical groups in the late-1960s and early 1970s that looked to Mao—along with Marx and Lenin, among others—in crafting their respective visions for the liberation of black and working-class America. According to Kelley and Esch, "China offered black radicals a 'colored,' or Third World, Marxist model that enabled them to challenge a white and Western vision of class struggle—a model they shaped and reshaped to suit their own cultural and political realities."[199]

Indeed, Mao and China's Communist Party factored into BPP discourse and organizational activities on many levels. In its recruitment efforts, Party leaders readily distributed and assigned readings from *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-Tung*, also

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[198] "Our Hope is Placed in Our Youth, *Black Panther*, October 10, 1970, 14.
[199] Robin Kelley and Betsy Esch, "Black Like Mao: Red China and Black Revolution," *Souls: Critical Journal of Black Politics and Culture* 1, no. 4 (1999): 7-8, doi: 10.1080/10999949909362183.

known as the "little red book."[200] Additionally, Panther officials in the 1970s, including Elaine Brown, Newton and Seale, made occasional trips to China to meet with Communist Party leaders in hopes of fostering international collaborations between the two countries. Upon her arrival in Beijing in the fall of 1970, Brown lauded the Chinese revolution as a boon to the country as a whole: "Old and young would spontaneously give emotional testimonies, like Baptist converts, to the glories of socialism."[201]

Yet, more importantly for the purposes of this study was the BPP's enthusiasm for Mao's belief in the importance of young people's participation in revolutionary movements. In his *Quotations*—which would become obligatory reading for all Panther recruits—Mao devoted an entire chapter to youth, outlining his vision of their contributions in shaping China's socialist future.[202] In the section's brief six pages he placed great emphasis on China's young socialists as "the most active and vital force in society," further declaring them "the most eager to learn and the least conservative in their thinking."[203] With more detailed instruction, he called for the close collaboration of the Communist Party and its auxiliary Youth League.[204]

More than with any other leftist intellectual at the time, the BPP readily engaged with Mao's political beliefs about young people, and throughout its lifespan, the *Black Panther* frequently quoted sections of the "little red book," often from the text's chapter on youth. More often than not, these excerpts appear in articles that documented the

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[200] Mao Tse-Tung, *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-Tung* (Peking: Foreign Language Press, 1966).
[201] Taken from Kelley and Esch, "Black Like Mao," 7.
[202] Notably, Mao's chapter on youth preceded his chapter on women, the latter of which, according to Kelly and Esch, was likely the least read section of *Quotations* among black radical men of this period. Kelley and Esch, "Black Like Mao," 21.
[203] Mao, *Quotations*, 290.
[204] Mao, *Quotations*, 290-291.

incarceration of Party members, and with clear foresight delineated the ramifications of state repression of the BPP for young people. In the wake of BPP field marshal Landon Williams's arrest in July 1969, fellow Panther Marsha published a letter in the *Black Panther*, demonstrating both her support for Williams and validation that his activism would continue even in his physical absence:

> Mao says, the youth will make the revolution; that they make and keep it. Through correct examples we know this to be true. 'Young people are most sensitive to new things and most willing to learn; they are the least conservative in their thinking'…The swines [*sic*] are such fools not to notice that whenever revolutionaries are jailed or murdered, a revolutionary child is born.[205]

Through her application of *Quotations*, the author underscored what she believed to be a basic contradiction in the way law enforcement agents and the BPP recognized children's political agency. While the former underestimated—or perhaps, wholeheartedly dismissed—young people's capacity to perpetuate the aims of the Party in the face of state repression, the latter placed great faith in children's political abilities.

In other instances the *Black Panther* merged Mao's treatises on youth with iconographic representations of BPP Minister of Defense, Huey Newton. During his imprisonment from 1967 to 1970, the Party documented the status of his impending trial to garner public support for his release. Newspaper accounts of Newton and black incarceration more broadly provided the Party an important discursive space to engage with Mao's writings on youth and adolescents. A December 20, 1969 issue, for instance,

[205] Marsha, "A Letter to Landon," *Black Panther*, July 5, 1969, 9. The author is quoting from Mao, *Quotations from Mao*, 290.

includes a drawing of an armed Newton surrounded by a group of children, their eyes towards him and fists raised in Black Power salutes (Figure 3).[206]

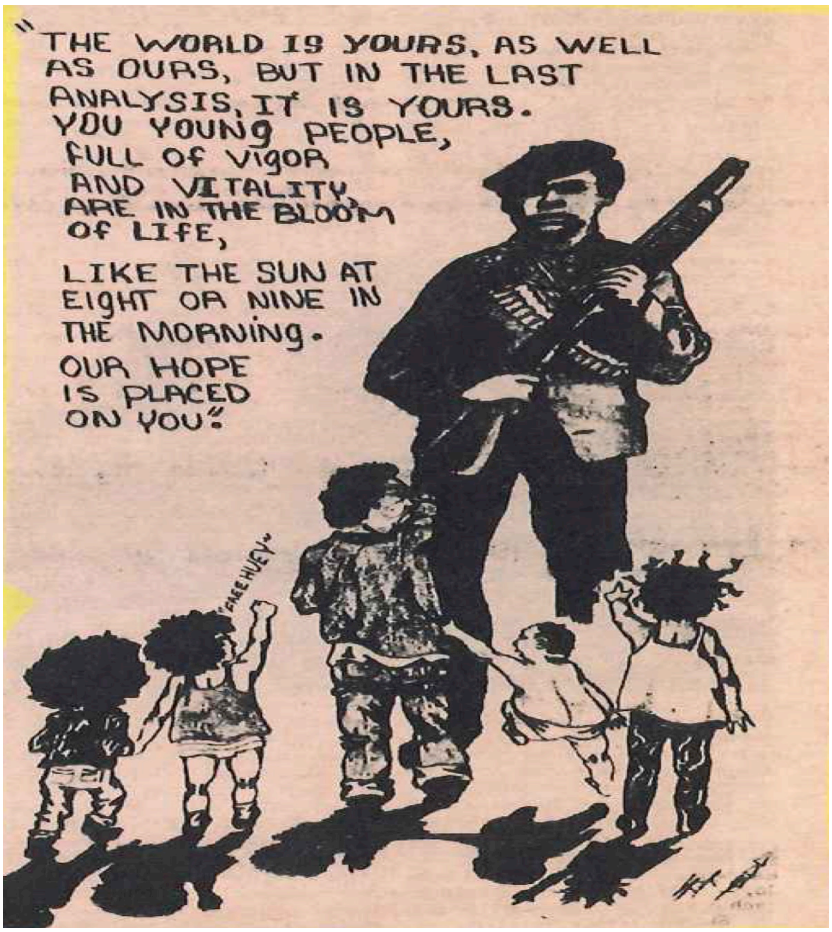


Figure 3. Untitled, *Black Panther*, Dec. 20, 1969, 4.

One of the children is depicted chanting "Free Huey!" The drawing is supplemented with one of Mao's most well-known proclamations about young people, and what was the opening salvo of his Youth chapter in *Quotations*: "The world is yours, as well as ours, but in the last analysis it is yours. You young people, full of vigor and vitality, are in the bloom of life, like the sun at eight or nine in the morning. Our hope is placed on you."

[206] Untitled, *Black Panther*, Dec. 20, 1969, 4. Recall that from 1967 to 1970, Newton served prison time on charges related to the shooting of Oakland Police officer, John Frey.

The periodical's coupling of Mao's assertion with the imagery of Newton helped reinforce organizational beliefs about young people's agentive power. In the face of tremendous state repression, children held both the physical energy and political potential to carry on the Party's movement to free political prisoners, and continue the class struggle more broadly.

The Panthers incorporated Mao Zedong's emphasis on young people's political agency into their program development as well. While Chapter Three more fully explores the position of children in the establishment and development of the organization's community survival programs, it is worth briefly noting here that in pedagogy and curriculum, the Party's early children's education initiatives rested on the notion of young people as purveyors of socialist practice. The BPP's first liberation school for elementary school students—which opened in Berkeley, California on June 25, 1969 as an alternative to what the Party recognized as a white-washed public school system—for example, formed as a "socialistic program," where the daughters and sons of Party members could be guided "in their search for revolutionary truths and principles."[207]

Further, Berkeley students were afforded opportunities to reflect on the political significance of the school and the stakes of their role as beneficiaries of its curriculum. The first published account of the school's opening pointed to the level of students' social awareness, noting, "The youth understand the struggle that's being waged in this society…They understand that we're not fighting a race struggle, but in fact, a class struggle. They recognize the need for all oppressed people to unite against the forces that are making our lives unbearable."[208] Lessons on the nature of the class struggle were

[207] "Liberation Means Freedom," 3.
[208] "Liberation Means Freedom," 3.

further augmented by a particular programmatic language; if "change" was synonymous with "revolution," Berkeley students could learn to understand themselves as "little changers."[209] At a curricular and pedagogical level, then, the Panthers' alternative schools underscore the importance of young people to the BPP's political thought and vision.

In addition to the Party's coverage of the liberation schools, the *Black Panther* rendered young people as conduits of social change through its references to other Panther mobilizations. An image published on August 9, 1971 foregrounds a young boy holding a sign with the proclamation, "Don't Support the Greedy!" (Figure 4).[210]

[209] "Liberation Means Freedom," 3.
[210] Image taken from Durant, *Black Panther*, 113. As noted earlier, the *Black Panther* offers scholars of the BPP a window into the Party's political trajectory. Whereas the armed child in Figure 2 spoke to the Party's early politics of self-defense, the young rally participant in Figure 3 reflected the BPP's new investment in community programs, coalition building, and electoral politics by the late 1960s and early 1970s. See Durant, *Black Panther*, 21, 104.

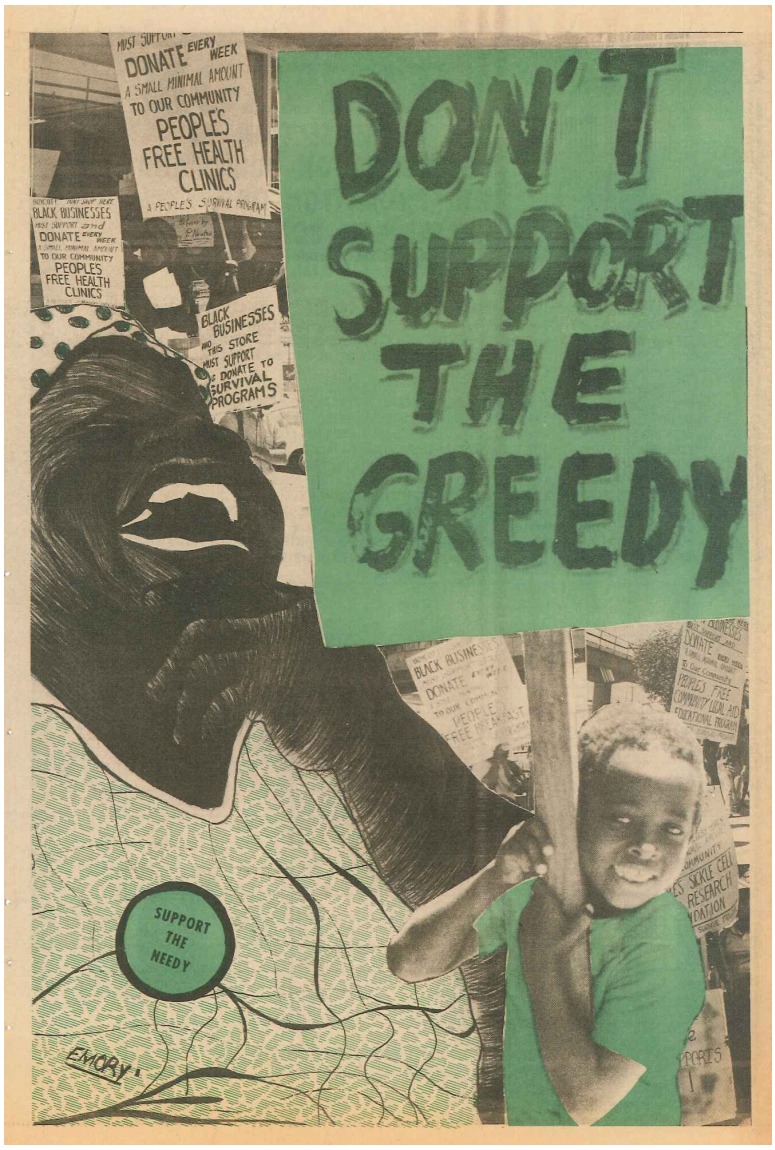


Figure 4. Taken From Sam Durant, *Black Panther: The Revolutionary Art of Emory Douglas*, 113.

A woman, beaming in smiles and wearing a corollary pin that reads, "Support the needy," is drawn to the left of the young activist. Both figures are superimposed against a photographic collage of what appears to document past Panther rallies, as signs of the BPP's various survival programs create a visual backdrop against which the two Panther supporters stand. Here we see the young subject as an active supporter of the

organization's initiatives. The sign's message further hints at the child's class awareness, reflected by his realization that money in the pockets of the wealthy is money diverted from working-class communities. Finally, the juxtaposition of the two generations creates a tone of hope with the suggestion that the young will continue the working-class movement.

If young people personified what a brighter future could look like they also made clear the material realities of 1970s low-income neighborhoods. Amidst his visuals of children boycotting local businesses in the streets, Douglas just as often portrayed young people as the subjects of a visual dialectic of present and future societal conditions. In the center of a May 13, 1972 drawing, a young girl appears in torn and unwashed clothes (Figure 5).[211]

[211] Image taken from Durant, *Black Panther*, 159. According to Sam Durant, the BPP's Minister of Culture often played with scale in his illustrations in order to emphasize particular socio-economic phenomena, or to present his subjects in a particular light. Like the cases in which Douglas featured rats the size of human infants, the exaggerated size of the cockroach in Figure 3 similarly works to shed light on the plight of families dealing with unemployment, poor housing, and food scarcity. See Durant, *Black Panther*, 101.

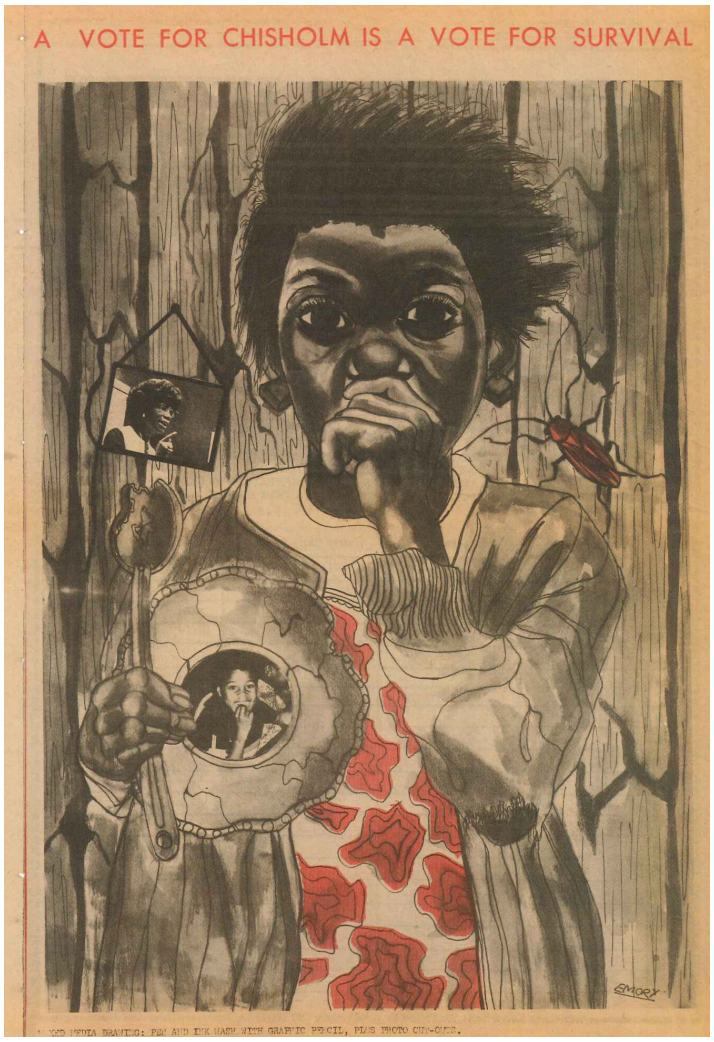


Figure 5. Taken From Sam Durant, *Black Panther: The Revolutionary Art of Emory Douglas*, 159.

In her right hand she holds a broken spoon and an empty cracked plate, while a large cockroach crawls on the fissured wall behind her. To her right a photograph of Shirley Chisholm (the black New York congressperson, then seeking the Democratic nomination for president) hangs from a nail on the wall, supplemented by a second photograph in the center of the dish, capturing a boy enjoying a meal from the Panthers' Free Breakfast Program. Through the image's temporal logic we see evidence of the Party's work in progress, as well as individuals yet to benefit from it. The two young figures—one fed,

the other hungry—represent a temporal dichotomy; signs of socialism and its incomplete realization.

Centralization and Collectivization: New Conversations About Children and Family Structure

In terms of the group's political ideology and practice, the late 1960s and early 1970s marked a pivotal moment in the way Party leaders approached both systemic poverty and the organizational apparatus of its own cadre. As Newton and his supporters sought to develop the group's social aid programs such as its Free Breakfast for Children Program and liberation schools, external forces led to the consolidation of the Party as a whole. Recall that by 1972, increased FBI repression of the BPP and waning public support led Newton, Seale, and other members of the Central Committee to close several of its non-California branches and establish Oakland as the organization's headquarters.[212] The migration of branch members from across the country to northern California led to a rise in communal Panther households, and subsequently, a greater integration of organizational and familial domains.[213]

The organization's Bay Area centralization notably affected members' personal lives on a deeply intimate level, particularly for those with children and couples intending to build families. With hundreds of Panthers from chapters throughout the country now concentrated in Oakland—many of whom now lived in shared housing—the Party faced new questions about the possibilities of family development within its ranks. Perhaps it is not surprising that in the wake of the decision by Party leaders to establish Oakland as the new national headquarters, the number of infants born to Panthers notably increased.

[212] Dixon, *My People Are Rising*, 218; Bloom and Martin, *Black Against Empire*, 380.
[213] Spencer, "Communalism and the Black Panther Party in Oakland," 99.

While the majority of Black Panthers were childless, by the end of 1972 at least eight members had given birth, adding to the 21 preschoolers and 48 children attending the Party's Intercommunal Youth Institute.[214]

The rise in Panther families grew out of a convergence of multiple factors. On the one hand, more members now shared their living spaces with their peers. Additionally, the BPP's open sex policy, coupled with the daily stresses associated with Party membership created the conditions for an increase in sexual relations among Party members. While the FBI's unrelenting attack on, and infiltration of the organization resulted in the closing of chapters across the country, many Panthers recognized sex as a welcomed release from the precariousness of revolutionary life. Aaron Dixon of the Seattle chapter recalls:

> On any given day you could suddenly be on your way to prison or to another party assignment across the country, with no guarantee of returning. You might be sent underground, or worse, you might be killed. Life for us was so uncertain that we wanted to enjoy love when the opportunity came.[215]

In this sense, as members faced mounting police-sanctioned violence, poverty, and the traumas of monthly Panther deaths, sex served as a tool for individual and collective survival.

And like other realms of the personal, issues of family development and reproductive health never existed completely outside the purview of Party leadership. In fact, some Panther officials who remained conscious of the realities of Party resources

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[214] Taken from Angela LeBlanc-Ernest, "'The Most Qualified Person to Handle the Job': Black Panther Party Women, 1966-1982," in *The Black Panther Party Reconsidered*, ed. Charles E. Jones (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1998), 319.

[215] Dixon, *My People Are Rising*, 227. Dixon further notes that, "This phenomenon has repeated throughout history - during times of war and great stress, humans have sought comfort and release through sex."

and the demands of individual commitment to the movement, responded to the budding second generation with the establishment of a combination of birth control policies and organizational institutions. A 1972 position paper written by Boston branch leader, Audrea Jones, sparked one of the earliest official conversations about the implications of pregnancy and family development among members. Written after her relocation to Oakland, Jones' document proposed a four-step program that would require all Panther couples to communicate with "Responsible members" of the Party's Review Committee – comprised of the Finance Secretary, Personnel, and Ministry of Health – about their intentions to have children. After assessing the "objective conditions" of the couples under review, the Review Committee would present a recommendation to the Central Committee, which held the final say regarding whether or not a given couple should proceed with plans to start a family.[216]

Audrea Jones's proposed directive resulted in part from her concern that the reproductive health of Party members should be central to the BPP's institutional obligations. An organization that left women solely responsible for the acquisition of contraceptives and prenatal resources, according to Jones, was "backward and unprogressive."[217] In a bid to further institutionalize a family development program, she proposed that women and men attend informational classes on birth control, which would be sponsored by the BPP's Free Health Clinic. These sessions, Jones outlined, would address the benefits and risks of various forms of contraception. In an a meeting on

[216] Jones's proposals never became official organizational policies. LeBlanc-Ernest, "The Most Qualified Person to Handle the Job," 319-320. After travelling to China as part of a Panther-led delegation to discuss the possibilities for building transnational anti-colonial networks, Jones remained in Oakland, became the co-director of Bobby Seale's electoral campaign, and assumed the directorship of the Party's Bay Area George Jackson Free Health Clinic. See LeBlanc-Ernest, "The Most Qualified Person to Handle the Job," 319.
[217] Quoted in LeBlanc-Ernest, "The Most Qualified Person to Handle the Job," 320.

August 16, 1972, the Central Committee collectively discussed Jones's concerns, considered the possibility of implementing a Planned Parenthood policy in the Party, and entertained the idea of granting new mothers a postpartum period of recuperation.[218] Beyond what they highlight about 1972 as a moment when the BPP took on family planning at the institutional level, Central Committee documents also reveal that women officials were at the forefront of efforts to provide reproductive healthcare for their peers. Whether as a product of increased state repression or the Party's policy of non-monogamy, the increased birthrate among Panther couples in the early 1970s officially marked family planning and women's reproductive health as organizational issues.

At the same time, however, the Party's consideration of institutionalizing family-related issues also raised new questions about the degree to which the Party would extend itself when it came to women's reproductive choices. While it is unclear exactly when the policy began, at some point in 1972, as a response to the increased childbirths within the Party, BPP officials implemented a "sexual freeze" policy which prohibited all members from having children until further notice. Women who became pregnant during the period of the "freeze" were required to receive an abortion from a private doctor. The freeze remained Party policy for six years, during which time the BPP made only one exception, granting Ericka Huggins and party member James Mott permission to have a child. In 1974, Huggins gave birth to their son, Rasa.[219]

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[218] LeBlanc-Ernest, "The Most Qualified Person to Handle the Job," 320-321. These recommendations never became official Party policies.

[219] Dixon, *My People Are Rising*, 228; Ericka Huggins, interview by author, 27 January 2016, telephone. While the BPP's free health clinic provided its members with testing for sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), it did not provide abortion services, thus, women were required to seek these services from physicians outside of the Party. Importantly, the second facet of the "sexual freeze" required members to practice abstinence when cases of sexually transmitted

The BPP's family planning policies and members' responses to them shed important light on the tensions involved in leaders' gendered approach to balancing Party commitments with Panthers' individual autonomy. In response to the new mandate, one woman asserted, "I think a sister who don'nt [*sic*] have any children should be able to have one. I hated to write this one down because I know it is selfish feeling this way. If 10 women got pregnant it would really slow down the work, but maybe if two got pregnant at a time."[220] In one sense, her response points to the lack of democratic decision-making involved in the Party's sexual mandate. She further underscores the implications of parenthood for the BPP as a whole and for its individual members. For the organization, an individual's decision to raise a child and engage in reproductive obligations necessarily meant a loss in organizing labor. At the same time, an institutionalized ban on sexual activity represented a tremendous sacrifice for members who desired to build families. Equally important, not all women subscribed to the birth control mandates. Party head Elaine Brown remembers that like many of her Panther peers, she never adhered to the policy, and when she chose to use contraceptives, she acquired them through her own means. Revealing the fluidity in the Party's enforcement of the "sexual freeze," Brown adds that ultimately, "having or not having an abortion was left as an individual decision."[221] Brown's testimony suggests that as Party leaders attempted to regulate one of the most intimate realms of personal life, many women continued to exercise agency in decisions concerning their bodies and their desires to become parents.

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infections presented themselves within Panther collectives. Not until an infection was stamped out were members permitted to resume sexual relations. See Dixon, *My People Are Rising*, 227.
[220] Taken from Spencer, "Communalism and the Black Panther Party," 114.
[221] Taken from LeBlanc-Ernest, "The Most Qualified Person to Handle the Job," 321.

Even while some Black Panther leaders advocated for an organizational infrastructure designed to meet the health care needs of Party members, Audrea Jones's policy recommendations were also propelled by real financial imperatives and an expressed desire to create support networks for new parents. She emphasized that Panther collectives with infants required funds to purchase basic necessities including food, clothing, and medical care. On top of the material resources required of childrearing, Jones further contended that childcare diverted critical time and energy from the Panthers' grassroots programs, and further, added stress on the parents themselves, as they attempted to balance their parental and activist obligations.[222] Reflecting on the experiences of her Party colleagues, Elaine Brown recalls:

> Those who did come into the Party with children found it very difficult to manage home life with life in the Party. Hindsight suggests that most members of a settled family might have considered it untenable to join…in the late Sixties, given the kind of commitment required: every day of one's life and one's life itself.[223]

Chicago Panther, Akua Njeri expressed similar sentiments about the difficulty of raising children while in the Party. With no organizational body in place to assist Party organizers with childcare, Njeri found it nearly impossible to carry out her work at the local Breakfast Program or selling the *Black Panther* newspaper.[224] The transition into motherhood as a full-time activist was significant. She noted that before having children, "you could really sleep anywhere and you could work all night."[225] Upon becoming a

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[222] LeBlanc-Ernest, "The Most Qualified Person to Handle the Job," 319-320.
[223] Quoted in LeBlanc-Ernest, "The Most Qualified Person to Handle the Job," 319.
[224] LeBlanc-Ernest, "The Most Qualified Person to Handle the Job," 319. At the time of becoming a mother in the late 1960s, Njeri was one of the first Party members to have a child. At the time, there was no organizational body in place to provide new parents with childcare support. See Bloom and Martin, *Black Against Empire*, 306.
[225] Quoted in LeBlanc-Ernest, "The Most Qualified Person to Handle the Job," 319.

parent, she concluded, this type of activist lifestyle was no longer feasible. After receiving childcare support from her mother while she continued to contribute to the BPP's grassroots services, Njeri ultimately decided to leave the Party.[226]

In addition to implementing measures intended to reduce the number infants born into the Party, Panther officials also responded to needs of Panther parents by creating organizational entities focused on providing families with support. In March 1972, the BPP established the Child Development Center (CDC) in Oakland, which provided free childcare to Panther cubs from the infant level to age two.[227] Staffed exclusively by Party members, many of whom relocated to Oakland from other national branches, the CDC afforded Party members the opportunity to more fully commit themselves to the revolutionary cause. A November 1973 Party memo underscored leaders' call for collective childrearing at the CDC and the Party's support networks for older children, proclaiming, "No comrades should mistreat our children. They should be well-fed, kept clean and treated like growing, developing young people with their own specific needs and desires that must be, until they are capable, met by us. We are all their parents."[228]

For children ages three and older who attended the Party's liberation schools, the Party established dormitories to house students during the week. In addition to the dorms

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[226] LeBlanc-Ernest, "The Most Qualified Person to Handle the Job," 319.
[227] The CDC ultimately relocated to Berkeley. Dixon, *My People Are Rising*, 228. According to Spencer, The Panthers' children center and similar Party programs exemplify the ways in which women spearheaded an internal dialogue about issues such as sexuality, parenthood, and the alternative family models. She argues that these programs can be understood as "an innovative response to the realities that Panther women faced." See Spencer, "Engendering the Black Freedom Struggle," 107. Spencer draws on Margo Perkins's assertion that the Party's socialist understandings of marriage and family, as exemplified by the Party's collective parenting model, often played out differently for women than for men, and in some cases, reinscribed patriarchal patterns. See Margo V. Perkins, *Autobiography as Activism: Three Black Women of the Sixties* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2000), 104-105.
[228] Taken from, Spencer, "Communalism and the Black Panther Party," 100.

located in two neighboring houses in Berkeley, a third was located in Oakland on Santa Rosa Street, which housed students, school staff, and members of the Central Committee. A fourth, large residence on 29th Street in Oakland also housed a handful of children and the Panther parents. Dixon explains that at these dorms, "The staff cooked, cleaned, washed clothes, took kids on field trips, helped with homework- everything a parent would provide and more…In the morning, vans picked up the kids for school. On weekends, the kids in the dorms went home to their parents."[229] At the age of four, Dixon's son, Aaron Patrice, was one of the many Panther cubs to reside in the dorms during the week, before returning to his father's house on the weekends. Dixon recalls, "It was an extremely difficult arrangement for both parent and child, but it worked to some degree."[230]

On an ideological level, the institutionalization of the group's collective structure reflected new conversations within the Party about the economic implications of domestic arrangements for parents and children. With the publication of his autobiography, *Revolutionary Suicide*, in 1973, Newton's reflections on his own upbringing in many ways belied his earlier explications about the role of black fathers in the wake of the Moynihan Report. If, in 1967, Newton called on black men to provide for and protect their wives and children, by 1973 he questioned the utility of the nuclear family hierarchy, calling it "imprisoning, enslaving, and suffocating."[231] With its foundations in capitalistic modes of property ownership, the nuclear family stood in direct opposition to the more equitable dynamics of socialistic formations.

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[229] Dixon, *My People Are Rising*, 228.
[230] Dixon, *My People Are Rising*, 228.
[231] Specifically, Newton refers to the "bourgeois family." Huey Newton, *Revolutionary Suicide* (New York: Harcourt Brace Janovich, 1973), 91.

Even before the publication of *Revolutionary Suicide*, the Party dialogued about the economic and psychological impacts of male-centered households on children specifically. Roughly four weeks after facilitating its Youth Conference in Los Angeles in the Fall of 1970, the Party published a piece by a New Haven, Connecticut Panther, Rosemari, underscoring the social crisis nuclear families posed for their youngest members:

> When we talk about children, when we relate to children, we must also see and understand that they, too, are oppressed. From the beginning, the society places on the child the whole idea that he is the personal property of his mother, his family. H[is] daily struggles are ones of challenging his rights as an individual trying to careen through the obstacles that private ownership entails.[232]

The system of kinship relayed by the author illuminates a child victimized by the preclusion of his autonomy and ownership of his own person.

As the Party became more collectively run—evidenced in part by its growth in communal housing and children's institutions, which Chapter Three explores—Panther literature increasingly posited patriarchal family structures as stifling to young people's social and intellectual growth. By the same token, by the time the BPP had more fully adopted anti-colonial and intercommunal approaches to revolution, *Black Panther* textual and visual rhetoric increasingly provided narratives of childhood and youth that explicitly located young people in community settings. In many cases, these collectives represented vanguard formations.

Throughout its years of production, the *Black Panther* offered its readers a wide narrative record of black childhood from the mid-1960s to the early-1980s. To Douglas and his Panther colleagues, children and youth held a significant social and political

[232] Rosemari, Untitled, *Black Panther*, Oct. 3, 1970, 11.

presence, and as rhetorical subjects, became an effective medium through which the BPP could make clear the stakes of the movement. In the context 1970s America, children—and children from black low-income communities in particular—represented survival and futurity. Their place in society was one challenged by the limits of a broken welfare state, yet, enhanced by their own capacity for social and intellectual development. They may have existed outside the bounds of government attention, but they were not lost on the BPP. As Douglas's illustrations suggest, they were both independent thinkers, and members of a broader collective that worked to challenge the very systems that sustained young people's socio-economic oppression. In both the Panthers' textual and visual imagery, young people worked at the core of this movement of resistance.

Conclusion

While much has been written on the Black Power Movement, few scholars have fully explored the role of children in the Black Panther Party's political imaginings. As the Party's newspaper underscores, young people factored centrally in the organization's consciousness, operating simultaneously as symbols of societal transformation and socialism's unfulfilled realization. While the Panthers' understandings of the social significance of children shifted throughout the Party's sixteen-year existence, analyzing the BPP's ideas about them in the context of its self-defined relationship to the lumpen proletariat may broaden our understanding of the organization's approach to revolutionary change. Like the lumpen, children's existence outside the purview of the

state could be remedied by their political education and engagement in collective organizing. Foregrounding young people in the history of the Party's political discourse and artwork, I argue, sheds further light on the nature of the era's class struggle and the Panthers' visions for building a mass movement to upend the unequal distributions of wealth wrought by capitalism. For, as the Panthers believed, children "are the ones who will make the new constitution a reality."[233]

[233] Untitled, *Black Panther*, Oct. 3, 1970, 11.

CHAPTER 3

The Politics of Children and Youth

Introduction

When a group of eight- to fifteen-year-olds gathered for a weekend in Los Angeles, California to attend the Black Panther Party's first ever Revolutionary Youth Conference in the Fall of 1970, they wasted little time in tackling the event's main objective. After receiving the opening remarks of Elaine Brown—the then Deputy Minister of Information of the BPP's Southern California Chapter—the participants quickly formed discussion groups centered on what they identified as the most pressing socio-economic problems facing children. Specifically, their concerns invoked the limits of the U.S. public education system and the ramifications of these limits for the growth and development of young Americans. In addition to compiling a list of grievances based on their own experiences as public school students, the conveners outlined a set of collective actions intended to serve as potential solutions to their grievances. One group vocalized its disaffection with public school curricula, noting, "they don't teach us what we want. They teach us what they want to teach us," while members of a second group collectively expressed their concern over the spoiled milk, stale bread, and non-refrigerated meat they were regularly fed for lunch at their respective schools. The solutions were clear and deliberate. "We can get together a group of people and make signs and march around the school. Half the school will probably end up joining us and they can throw away their books and they can't flunk everybody like that." The second

group proposed a similar, economic boycott: "We could go on strike on the snack bar…they'll get tired of no one buying food and they not making money."[234]

As much as their discussions reveal about the nature of the Black Panther Party's youth programs, the children's observations further highlight their keen awareness of both the nation's crumbling education system and their relation to it. Unhindered by the brevity of their years, the conference participants understood their right to learn from a curriculum that acknowledged the histories of people of color, just as they understood the government's responsibility to nourish its young citizens with proper nutrition. Equally important for the purposes of this chapter was their recognition of their agency in bringing about change—in this case, through the power of collective organizing.

As children of Party members and as beneficiaries of the organization's services, young people helped concretize the BPP's long-term visions for socio-economic change. In both the Panthers' grassroots programs and the more intimate routines of everyday domestic life, children engaged the Party's anti-capitalist cause, and deeply and regularly reflected on their own relationship to it. Particularly in the Panthers' political education and nutrition programs, young people read some of the same writings on political theory as the Party's full-fledged members, learned first-hand the physical manifestations of wealth disparity symptomatic of capitalism and, in many cases, provided the logistical support needed to sustain the Party's community programs. At home too, through the regimented routines so characteristic of Black Panther life, and in the more private conversations with parents and relatives, many Panther cubs lived the movement.

Necessarily limited by the inherently restrictive nature of childhood and youth—most obvious in their brief education, as well as their lack of resources, mobility and

[234] "Our Hope is Placed on the Youth," *Black Panther*, October 10, 1970, 14.

control over the use of their own time—young people in Panther communities nevertheless exercised degrees of agency and political awareness in their social activism and daily life. A child holding a sign at a Panther-led rally, for instance, may have been too young at the time to read the sign's message, but old enough to sense the vulnerable and precarious position of the protestors amidst the presence of Oakland police officers.[235] Children's agency sometimes most explicitly surfaced in spaces outside the purview of the Party, particularly in moments of interaction with FBI agents. Often the target of FBI and police surveillance and interrogation, children, sometimes as young as five, frequently defended and protected the Party through a variety of means—both by withholding information about the whereabouts of certain Panthers, and by holding FBI and police agents legally accountable.

I argue that young people gave meaning to the movement, and their participation in BPP activities did not unfold without their own reflections on the meaning of their organizational labor or their relation to the social and economic problems they sought to fix. At times they questioned the judgment and actions of their adult counterparts. Perhaps most importantly, however, at the end of the day, for those who existed beyond the reach of federal welfare provisions—and many did—they understood, while waiting in line for the doors of the Free Breakfast Program to open, that their health and survival depended on the existence of these programs. And when given the choice, they regularly

[235] From 1973 to 1981, Keith Jenkins attended the BPP's Oakland Community School and regularly attended Party events with his mother and Party member, Bettye Johnson. He remembers one occasion in which he attended a rally that had been organized by the Party to celebrate Huey Newton's release from prison in 1978. Jenkins was about seven years old at the time. He recounts how the organizers of the event asked everyone to lock arms and form a pathway for Newton to walk through. Jenkins remembers thinking at the time, "He ain't walking through this. This is way too dangerous…if anyone wants to get through they can get through." Keith Jenkins, interview by author, 19 February 2017, tape recording Oakland, California. On the details of Newton's imprisonment, see Spencer, *The Revolution Has Come*, 200.

came back for their next meal. Whereas Chapter Two explored how children and youth factored into Party discourses and theories about revolutionary change, this chapter focuses more explicitly on the grassroots work and socialization of young people in Panther communities. At its core, this chapter aims to provide a descriptive overview of young people's involvement in the BPP's survival programs on a day-to-day level. The first section offers a glimpse into the routine operations of the Panthers' Free Breakfast programs and Bay Area children's schools. The subsequent section traces what daily life looked like inside the Oakland Community School's dormitories, with a particular emphasis on the social interactions between its youngest residents and its staff caretakers. The final section pivots to an exploration of the FBI's deliberate encounters with the beneficiaries of the BPP's welfare programs, and the ways in which young people navigated these perilous moments.

Children and Black Panther Party Programs

In late January, 1969 the Party launched its first survival program, the Free Breakfast for School Children Program at St. Augustine's Episcopal Church in West Oakland.[236] Recall from Chapter Two that the Panthers' new investment in program development by the late 1960s marked a strategic philosophical and practical shift in the organization's call for self-determination. Like many of their contemporaries in the Black

[236] Bloom and Martin, *Black Against Empire*, 182. Other Panther accounts, including those of Elaine Brown and Mumia Abu-Jamal, chronicle the BPP's involvement in free breakfast services differently. Brown claims that Sacred Heart Church hosted the Party's first free breakfast program. Elaine Brown, *A Taste of Power*, 156. Abu-Jamal identifies the Seattle chapter's food program—which began in late 1968—as the original model that ultimately led to the organization's national implementation of the free service. as early as 1967 and 1968. Mumia Abu-Jamal, *We Want Freedom: A Life in the Black Panther Party* (Cambridge: South End Press, 2004), 69.

Freedom Struggle, the Panthers grew increasingly disillusioned and frustrated by the slow pace—and in some cases, complete ineffectiveness—of federal assistance programs in the areas of housing, education, and nutrition. Local and national conversations about child hunger made clear the need and desire among poor Americans for constructive alternatives. A 1967 study conducted by the University of California helped concretize Oakland's own local battle against malnutrition when it found that one in ten East Oakland residents reported having recently gone without food of any kind for several days.[237] A national study organized by the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) Research Committee reported similarly egregious findings at the national level. According to the SCLC's study, "approximately 1/3 to 1/2 of the nation's very poor experience hunger, with resulting psychological damage."[238] The context of child hunger in the U.S. only added insult to injury, according to the SCLC, when the organization found in the same year that the federal government had been diverting its annual funds for food stamps and the National School Lunch Program to subsidize the war in Vietnam.[239]

Joining the Left's outright condemnation of the nation's failed Great Society programs, and its involvement in Vietnam, the Panthers put forth their own rhetorical and

[237] Mary Potorti, "Feeding the Revolution": the Black Panther Party, Hunger, and Community Survival," *Journal of African American Studies* 21, no. 1 (2017): 90, doi: 10.1007/s12111-017-9345-9.
[238] Quoted in Potorti, "Feeding the Revolution," 90.
[239] Taken from Potorti, "Feeding the Revolution," 90. In her essay on the Panthers' food programs, Potorti further contextualizes specific federal child nutrition programs such as the School Breakfast Program (SBP) for poor children, initiated in 1966 as a two-year pilot program under the Child Nutrition Act. From the get-go, however, the initiative missed its mark. Though the federal government allocated $7.5 million toward the program, Congress appropriated only $2 million for the project during its first year. Further, the state's slow pace in directing the funds to local school districts limited the ability of these schools to use the funds throughout the year. Making matters worse, the schools with the greatest need for the SBP were not always its primary recipients, as program overseers prioritized the availability of kitchen facilities over student need when selecting trial sites. See Potorti, "Feeding the Revolution," 90-91.

practical response to child hunger. In the months following the opening of the Party's breakfast program, *Black Panther* headlines continued to cast sharp criticism of Congress's dereliction in the area of nutrition, while in the same breath highlighting the Party's organizing efforts.[240] To be sure, the BPP's project proved instantly popular among Oakland residents. By the end of the initiative's opening week more than 135 elementary and middle school children filled their stomachs with scrambled eggs, bacon, and milk before heading off to school.[241] By April 1969 Panther volunteers in nine cities across the country—including Chicago and Des Moines, Iowa—replicated the Oakland initiative, providing meals to over 1,200 students per day.[242]

It is important to note that food constituted one element of the Breakfast program. Meals were supplemented by political education. As children waited for their helpings they received revisionist history lessons from Party members that underscored poverty, especially among black Americans and other minorities, as characteristic of America's socio-economic structure.[243] In this way, recipients were given the tools to reflect on their own social positions and the meaning of their participation in the Panthers' food program.

In addition to benefiting from the Party's daily provisions, children in local communities—often times the children of Black Panthers—also importantly helped facilitate and sustain the programs. In Harlem, for instance, recipients helped serve the food and were expected to clear tables. A delegated section leader—usually an older student—supervised the distribution of meals and clean up, while adult volunteers

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[240] "A Basic Contradiction in Affluent America: Hunger in the Land of Plenty," *Black Panther*, May 4, 1969, 14. The Black Panther similarly questioned the legitimacy and efficacy of what some Party members called "white liberal" food programs. See Shirley Hewitt, "Free Food or Fairytales???" *Black Panther*, Sept. 13, 1969, 19.
[241] Bloom and Martin, *Black Against Empire*, 182; Hilliard, *The Black Panther Party*, 30.
[242] Bloom and Martin, *Black Against Empire*, 182.
[243] Potorti, "Feeding the Revolution," 94.

circulated tables talking to students about the Party's ten-point program.[244] In other instances, young people assisted Party members and local volunteers to solicit neighborhood businesses and grocery stores for material and cash donations.[245] Sometimes these experiences helped reinforce the program's lessons on class struggle and wealth disparity in real time. As one *Black Panther* article put it, through their dealings with "the big fat greedy businessman who refused to donate nare [*sic*] an egg" to the BPP's programs, children could more clearly relate to workers as class allies and "monopoly capitalists"…as "our main enemies."[246] Through their own political practice, then, breakfast recipients learned early on the logistical labor involved in implementing and sustaining grassroots projects, as well as the tangible need for such services.

In other locations with newly formed Panther chapters, young people played pivotal roles in helping to get local branches off the ground, particularly by spreading the word about the organization's budding community service programs. In the weeks after the Party launched its White Plains, New York chapter in the summer of 1969, ten-year-old Jimmy and his eight-year-old younger brother took up the job of selling the *Black Panther* to city residents. Earning five cents for each 25-cent copy sold, the two boys were deliberate in the way they carried out their weekly operations. Arriving at the printing station at 5pm, the two would head for the corner of Main St. and Mamaroneck Ave. to begin their evening's work. Jimmy solicited readers directly on a nearby sidewalk while his younger brother stood guard near the stack of remaining papers. Their tactics

[244] "Harlem Breakfast for School Children," *Black Panther*, September 6, 1969, 19.
[245] Potorti, "Feeding the Revolution," 100.
[246] Mad, "Youth Make the Revolution," *Black Panther*, August 9, 1969, 19.

were successful, as the two boys sold an average of ten issues per day, sometimes boasting sales as high as fourteen copies in one night.[247]

In thinking about the organization's early engagement with children, we might read the story of Jimmy and his younger as more than a simple anecdote about the early work experience of two young siblings in 1960s New York. On the one hand, at a time when the White Plains branch membership fluctuated between ten and thirty, the boys' distribution of the *Black Panther*—with its solicitations for business donations—undoubtedly helped garner community support for the chapter and its emerging Children's Breakfast program. At the same time, it is also important to note the symbiotic nature of children's labor under the Party's supervision. As the organization worked to expand its ranks, its children's programs were not immune to criticism from those skeptical of the Party's political intentions. Local and national critics regularly lambasted the Breakfast program—particularly its political education component—as a project of indoctrination, propagandizing, and further, as a ploy to recruit new members.[248] While White Plains residents with little knowledge of the Party may have questioned the meaning of the young boys' work in selling the periodical, however, Party leaders were clear from the beginning that their grassroots projects were first and foremost developed as responses to the most pressing needs of poor Americans. Members of the Mount Vernon, New York chapter suggested as much, declaring in 1970 that "we fight not so

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[247] "Panthers in Print," *Black Panther*, July 12, 1969, 8.

[248] Potorti, "Feeding the Revolution," 95. In the late 1960s when the BPP worked to establish and develop its survival programs, some issues of the *Black Panther* explicitly called on the help of children and youth to sell the periodical. An ad in the March 16, 1969 issue, for instance, showcases a photograph of a young boy sitting on a bicycle holding up an issue of the paper, while an adjacent caption reads, "The young man in the picture earned enough money in 3 weeks to buy the bike on which he is sitting. You can do the same or better." According to the ad, young people could earn as much as 25 cents per copy sold. "Young People Wanted to Sell the Black Panther," *Black Panther*, March 16, 1969, 7.

much for ourselves but because we want our children and their children to live in a society free from exploitation and oppression."[249] Thus, if Jimmy and his brother were not themselves participants in the White Plain's breakfast program at the time of selling copies of the *Black Panther*, their peers certainly benefitted from the boys' efforts.

Young residents in Panther communities developed their taste for local organizing as the BPP expanded its programmatic efforts. Aware of the need and desire among local residents for family meal supplements, Newton, Hilliard, and fellow Panther officials extended the Party's nutritional provisions to the realm of education. Recall that on June 25, 1969, just six months after initiating the Breakfast Program, the Party opened its first children's liberation school in Berkeley, California.[250] An outgrowth of the children's nutrition program, the Panthers' alternative schools represented a realization of the organization's broader concern with the state of public education, particularly as it existed in low-income communities of color. Point Five of the Party's Ten-Point Program called for the provision of quality education to black youth and adults. The educational directive aimed to correct the public school system's curricular void of information on black history and culture.[251] Public schools in poor districts were further compounded by substandard facilities and a lack of credentialed teachers. By 1971, roughly five years after the dispersal of Great Society monies into public schools, the Oakland Unified School District stood as one of the poorest performing districts in the country. African

[249] Quoted in Potorti, "Feeding the Revolution," 95.
[250] Liberation Means Freedom," 3.
[251] Murch, *Living for the City*, 178-179. For a history of the BPP's Oakland Community School, see Ericka Huggins and Leblanc-Ernest, "Revolutionary Women, Revolutionary Education." For works that situate the Panthers' educational initiatives within the broader history of the rise of ethnic studies programs and the community control movement of the 1960s, Watkins, ed., *Black Protest Thought and Education*, Chapters 2 and 6.

Americans and other non-white students comprised roughly sixty percent of the district's student population, of which nearly fifty percent lived at the poverty level.[252]

Thus, following its experimentation with adult political education classes, the BPP established alternative pedagogical spaces for elementary and middle school children, primarily the daughters and sons of Party members.[253] The Berkeley school served as a site where young people could march to songs of "pigs running amuck and Panthers fighting for the people."[254] In its first published account of the school, the *Black Panther* situated the program within the organization's broader belief that "education is only relevant when it teaches the art of survival."[255] The article further pointed to students' collective consciousness of their own social positions and their relation to those forces that the Party identified as antagonistic to socialism: "Their understanding manifests itself…by their collective view of themselves as being part of a BIG FAMILY working, playing, and living together in the struggle."[256]

Shortly after the opening of the Berkeley school the Panthers established similar after-school programs in other Bay Area cities. Part-time elementary and middle schools commenced in San Francisco and East Oakland just five days after the Berkeley program began.[257] By August 1969, San Jose and Vallejo, California would host after-school programs for Panther children, followed by Brownsville, New York three months later.

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[252] Huggins and LeBlanc-Ernest, "Revolutionary Women," 162-163

[253] Adult education often manifested as informal reading groups where new recruits discussed the works of Karl Marx, Mao Zedong, Frantz Fanon and other radical intellectuals. At one point in 1970 Newton suggested the creation of a more formal "Ideological Institute," but with little success, as many saw the assigned literature as too abstract for material movements. Kelley and Esch, "Black Like Mao," 23.

[254] "Liberation Means Freedom," 3; Val Douglas, "The Youth Make the Revolution," *Black Panther*, August 2, 1969, 19.

[255] Liberation Means Freedom," 3.

[256] Liberation Means Freedom," 3.

[257] "Liberation Means Freedom," 3.

Before its closure in 1982 the BPP established at least nine children's schools in cities throughout the U.S.[258]

In both curriculum and pedagogy, early iterations of the Panthers' children's schools functioned as both an extension of the Breakfast program and an auxiliary to the political education classes that Party members themselves received. The Party's pilot programs introduced students to the theory, rhetoric, and practice of its own cadre. In its first two days of operation, children at the Vallejo liberation school learned about the origins of the Party, its leaders, and the anti-capitalist basis of its cause. By the end of the school's opening week, students could identify "pigs, avaricious businessmen, and demagogic politicians" as the "three enemies of the People."[259]

Students of the East Bay Liberation School engaged Panther theory through local fieldtrips, documentaries, and regimented physical exercises. During the school's opening week in late June, 1969, between 25 and 30 students, ranging in age from four to ten, partook in activities organized around daily themes. One of the earliest documentaries shown on "Film Day" focused on the protest activity at the 1968 Democratic National Convention. Students learned about the history of the BPP's contentious relationship with the FBI and local police departments on "Field Day," which occurred every Friday.

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[258] Douglas, "Vallejo Liberation School," 19. The exact start date of the Brownsville school is unclear, however, *Black Panther* articles documenting the school's operations appear as early as October 1969. Frankye Adams, "Brownsville Liberation School," *Black Panther*, Oct. 25, 1969, 8. See also, Bloom and Martin, *Black Against Empire*, 192. The BPP was one of many Black Nationalist groups to organize educational programs for children and youth. By the 1930s, the Nation of Islam established schools for the daughters and sons of its members, while black cultural nationalist groups in the 1960s, including the U.S. organization, formed their own children's programs. For the Nation of Islam schools, see Martha Frances Lee, *The Nation of Islam: A Millenarian Movement* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1996), 22. For the US School of Afroamerican Culture, see Scot Brown, *Fighting for US: Maulana Karenga, the US Organization, and Black Cultural Nationalism* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 40-42.

[259] Douglas, "Vallejo Liberation School," 19.

Within the first month of the schools opening, East Bay students visited the site of the April 1968 police killing of Bobby Hutton, an original Panther recruit. Finally, students supplemented classroom learning with physical exercise, taking turns led their classmates in what might amount to 30 jumping jacks "and one for Huey!"[260]

At certain moments, exercises in students' collective organizing unfolded through their participation in the Party's movement to support political prisoners. In August 1969 when Oakland Panther Charles Bursey stood trial on accusations of the attempted murder of an Oakland police officer, twenty to thirty students from the Panthers' Fillmore alternative school arrived at the courthouse to support him. When the bailiff prohibited their observance of the proceedings the students carried on undeterred and organized an impromptu rally on the building's front steps, collectively chanting, "Free Bursey!" Days later, the *Black Panther* published a handful of student letters written to Bursey as both demonstrations of their support for his situation and reflections of their political organizing experience. Daphne Dessler's reflections on her experience at the courthouse poignantly underscored her awareness of the inequities in the U.S. judicial system:

> Dear Charles, Today we talked about why you were in Jail [*sic*]…we went to see your trial but a pig kicked us out. I got to see your Jury [*sic*]. It sure wasn't your peer group. They were all old and white…I am sorry you are in jail. I know the reason the fascist pigs put you in jail but I don't know how even the jury could believe all thoughs [*sic*] lies the pigs told. I hope you get lots of letters from your comrades so you can get your mind on something.[261]

In more detail than those of her classmates, Dessler's letter sheds important light not only on the pedagogy and curriculum of the Party's early children's education programs, but also on how she processed this knowledge. In a city with a significant African American

[260] "Liberation School from a Mother's Point of View," *Black Panther*, July 12, 1969, 3.
[261] Daphne Dessler, "Letters to Charles," *Black Panther*, August 16, 1969, 11.

population, Dessler observed, Bursey's all-white jury epitomized the city's lack of equal representation in court proceedings. Her characterization of local police as "fascist pigs" further hints to her use of Party language and her keen recognition of the police department's antithetical relationship to the Party.

In 1971 the Party opened its first full-time elementary school, and what would become its longest-lasting survival program, the Intercommunal Youth Institute (IYI), in Oakland. Under the directorship of Brenda Bay, a former New York Panther, the IYI welcomed twenty-eight enrollees in its first year. Students ranged in age from two to twelve, and like those of the prior San Francisco and Berkeley schools, almost all IYI students came from Panther families.[262] In curriculum and pedagogy the school functioned as a continuation of the earlier Bay Area models. Four to twelve year-olds, for example, developed writing skills by penning poetry and letters to incarcerated Panthers. In other instances, faculty combined Panther doctrine with progressive teaching methods by encouraging students to sell the *Black Panther* to local residents, by enabling students to attend the trials of political prisoners, and by helping students distribute food at BPP-sponsored food giveaways. IYI students were not only imbued with a sense of community service, a central tenet of the Party's agenda, but also gained valuable knowledge about the world.[263] Further, the nature of student learning activities underscored the school's central mission to "expose the children to a great deal of information and direct experience with the world so they can receive a more realistic education."[264]

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[262] Huggins and LeBlanc-Ernest, "Revolutionary Women," 168.
[263] Huggins and LeBlanc-Ernest, "Revolutionary Women," 169.
[264] As quoted in Huggins and LeBlanc-Ernest, "Revolutionary Women," 169.

In 1973 a rise in the number of infants born to Party members combined with a growing interest among school administrators to reach youth outside of the BPP led to the IYI's relocation to East Oakland and a renaming of the institute to the Oakland Community School.[265] On one level, the school's expansion signified the Party's increasing commitment to coalition building, and perhaps, a loosening of the institute's adherence to a Panther aesthetic and terminology. What the Party had described in June 1969 as "vanguard elementary students," by 1973, attendees of the OCS learned from a curriculum that coupled progressive pedagogy with core courses including math, science, and language arts.[266] Whereas IYI students donned school uniforms resembling the Party's paramilitary style, OCS students were assigned no dress code. Further, members of the Curriculum Committee such as Ericka Huggins and Bettye Johnson worked with local educators—some of whom came to the OCS from the OUSD—to develop a program that would serve as an educational model not only for Panther chapters outside of California, but also for local public school boards and teachers abroad.[267]

Even as the OCS expanded to reach a broader community of Bay Area residents, however, the Party's mark remained on much of the school's curriculum and pedagogical practice until its closure in 1982. Equally important, even those students who enrolled in

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[265] Huggins and LeBlanc-Ernest, "Revolutionary Women," 170.

[266] Here, the author refers to recipients of the BPP's breakfast program. "San Diego Breakfast Moves Ahead Despite Continued Harassment," *Black Panther*, July 26, 1969, 15.

[267] Interestingly, in a 1976 (reprinted) article in *Jet Magazine*, Brown reflected on the purpose of the school, asserting, "…this is not a Black Panther Party School per se…and it's not a 'freedom school' or a 'liberation school' in the sense that we teach the children rhetoric. The idea is to produce a model along the lines that Black, poor children are educable." Huggins corroborated Brown's sentiment in the same article, noting, "We're unique in that we serve all children, but still are concerned with the individual child." Bob Lucas, "East Oakland Ghetto Blooms With Growth of Black Panther School," *Jet Magazine*, reprinted February 5, 1976, series 2, box 16, folder 2, Huey P. Newton Foundation Papers, Special Collections, Green Library, Stanford University (hereafter HPN Papers), accessed Sept. 20, 2013.

the OCS in the mid-1970s were often times able to discern both the institute's connection to the Party and distinguish its progressive curriculum from that of nearby public schools. Keith Jenkins, an OCS student from 1973 to 1981, recalls that as a young beneficiary of the program "it was very clear that it was run by the Panthers….it was still very much upfront because they were teaching us…history and politics and social justice."[268] He continues, elaborating on the types of history lessons taught at the school: "we'd learn history, like…the Europeans went to Africa, found libraries that had been around for thousands of years and burned them…you're not gonna learn that in the public school down the street."[269] For Jenkins, these lessons, coupled with the posters of Huey Newton and other Panther insignias adorning the campus classrooms, helped elucidate the school's organizational and radical foundations. Jenkins concludes, "it was clear…what we were doing and who was teaching us and who wasn't teaching us."[270]

Dormitory and Home Life

The growth of the Oakland Community brought new considerations about the logistics of student accommodations, and consequently, new questions about the intersections of liberatory education and home life. Recall from Chapter Two that by the

[268] Keith Jenkins, interview by author, 11 February 2017, tape recording, Oakland, California.
[269] Keith Jenkins, interview by author, 11 February 2017, tape recording, Oakland, California.
[270] Keith Jenkins, interview by author, 11 February 2017, tape recording, Oakland, California. Jenkins recalls other class activities that highlighted faculty efforts to de-center whiteness in the Oakland Community School's curriculum. In one class, Jenkins remembers being tested on African countries and their respective capitals. Students were given the option to respond with either the African or Anglicized names. Jenkins cites this as an example of the school exposing its students to "different truths."

early 1970s, Party leaders including Ericka Huggins began establishing dormitories to house students of its liberation schools during the week. Interviews with the daughters and sons of former Party members reveal that the daily activities and practices within the children's dormitories in many ways mirrored the regimentation characteristic of the adult Panther communes discussed in Chapter One. Staff regularly stressed, in both word and practice, the importance of discipline and a consciousness of the collective to those living in the dorms. In many ways the values behind Panther school curricula translated into the everyday living practices of children at home, even for Panther cubs that lived outside of the dorm system. In this section I explore aspects of children's daily lives for what they reveal about the necessarily unique nature of Panther cub childhoods. I examine the more intimate sites of children's socialization; that is, how children learned about themselves—their relation to both the society in which they lived and to the Party itself—through their home life and in the early-life conversations they engaged in with their caretakers.

When Keith Jenkins was two years old, his mother, Bettye Johnson, decided to join the Party, volunteer her services as a cook at the Oakland Community School, and enroll Keith and his older sister as full-time students. The year was 1973 and for the next seven years, his home life would be divided between various housing arrangements including his mothers' and fathers' respective Oakland apartments, and the BPP's Bay Area student dormitories.

Jenkins admits that in the early years of his mother's volunteerism his knowledge of the political significance of her work and the Party itself was limited. As her organizational responsibilities changed and as he simultaneously grew into childhood, the

atypicality of his boyhood became clearer to him. In large part, the insularity of dorm life contributed to his growing knowledge of his mother's ties to an organization. He notes:

> I was with the same people all day every day…they would have busses on the school grounds that would take you to a house, and you would get out of the bus and go into the house. So when you're on the bus you can look out the window, you can see the world that you never interact with. So you realize that you're kind of in this own entity. You can figure that out by five, but you can't figure out political justice at five.[271]

If at age five Jenkins was not fully aware of the BPP's political project or his mother's role in it, he certainly understood that his family belonged to a larger social group and that his own familial association involved, perhaps ironically, a degree of separation from Oakland's broader population.

Other children of Party members recall similar degrees of awareness, as children, about their respective families' involvement in political organizing and the simultaneous feelings of community, protection, and separation from public life that were part and parcel of Party membership. Dorion Hilliard, the son of David and Patricia Hilliard, remembers spending much of his childhood moving from state to state as a result of his parents' deep involvement in the movement. Ironically, although his was a childhood of constant relocation, Dorion remained fully surrounded by Black Panther culture. Nearly twenty of his relatives belonged to the Party, adding a sense of normalcy to his engagement in learning political songs and writing to incarcerated Panthers – activities that might otherwise have been considered strange and "un-American" by his non-Panther peers.[272]

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[271] Keith Jenkins, interview by author, 11 February 2017, tape recording, Oakland, California.
[272] Patricia Hilliard worked as the Party's financial secretary. Sandra Davis, "Rebel Fruit: Children of Black Militants," *YSB* 3, no. 5 (1994): 76, url:http://search.proquest.com.oca.ucsc.edu/docview/206298163?accountid=14523.

While the daughters and sons of Black Panthers were conscious of the communal nature of the Party as children, the regimentation and discipline of daily routines was similarly evident to many Panther cubs in their early development. Jenkins recounts his experience growing up in the BPP's Berkeley dorms with OCS staff:

> You see them all day. They help you brush your teeth in the morning, get you dressed, get you in the bus to go to school, get you to school, sit you down at a table, bring food out to you and make sure that you eat…now let's go to class…And at the end of the day…let's get all your stuff, get in the bus…go to the dorm…[273]

For students living in the Party's communal housing, such quotidian practices unfolded at the nexus of personal life and organizational practice. For many young people like Jenkins, no sharp boundary demarcated where Party life ended and home life began. And in the context of reproductive labor and childrearing, the Party's members to a large degree participated collectively.

Expectations about dormitory cleanliness and order in many ways mirrored the protocol that Party leaders outlined for adult Panther communes. On the one hand, the sheer number of OCS students sharing any one particular living space meant that prescribed structure helped mechanize daily routines. Jenkins recalls living in one Berkeley house that had been converted into a dorm for OCS students where each bedroom contained three to four bunk beds, and consequently, six to eight students per room; the boys shared one room and the girls another. This meant that twice a day, "you could have five kids sitting around the sink brushing their teeth."[274] In the mornings,

[273] Keith Jenkins, interview by author, 11 February 2017, tape recording, Oakland, California.
[274] Keith Jenkins, interview by author, 11 February 2017, tape recording, Oakland, California.

dorm staff would visit the rooms to ensure not only that each student fixed her or his own bed, but also that every bed exhibited the same degree of tidiness.[275]

In other areas, the uniformity of dorm residents' daily practices was perhaps less symptomatic of the logistics of collective living, but rather, a function of the BPP's paramilitary style. Like Party members living in communes, young dorm residents were assigned daily callisthenic exercises. In the third and last dormitory he resided in, Jenkins recalls practicing jumping jacks, push-ups, stretches and arm twirls every morning at six o'clock, only to be followed by an afternoon repeat of the same routine at school after lunch.[276]

Reflecting on the meaning behind the Party's implementation of such exercises with young people, nearly fifty years later, Jenkins offers a few theories. As a child living in the Party's dormitories, Jenkins admits, "you kind of learned to not ask so many questions."[277] He posits that the routines may have allowed staff members with a large student load to accomplish multiple tasks at once. Perhaps most obviously, the exercises worked as an efficient mechanism to prepare the fifteen or so boys and girls for the day by energizing their minds and bodies. Jenkins further proposes that Party officials may have recognized an additional, long-term value in the exercises. Learning how to function without rest, relaxation or comfort as a child, he avers, may prove to be a useful skill later in life.[278] As we have seen from our discussion of Party theories about young people in Chapter Two, if "the youth make the revolution," strong minds and bodies could only augment such a task.

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[275] Keith Jenkins, interview by author, 11 February 2017, tape recording, Oakland, California.
[276] Keith Jenkins, interview by author, 11 February 2017, tape recording, Oakland, California.
[277] Keith Jenkins, interview by author, 11 February 2017, tape recording, Oakland, California.
[278] Keith Jenkins, interview by author, 11 February 2017, tape recording, Oakland, California.

Though at the time Jenkins may not have fully understood the meaning of the workout routines he and his peers engaged in, he recognized connections between his own participation in calisthenics and broader trends in the organization to which his family belonged. As an elementary school student he was conscious that certain organizational figures with limited degrees of freedom also found use in the same exercises. He remembers:

> I commented one day…I'm like, 'Wow, Huey can do these exercises in the jail cell, cuz we're not moving around'…as small as a jail cell is, as long as you can stand up and bend over and touch your toes…and stretch out your arms to your sides…you have enough room to do calisthenics…keep your body in shape.[279]

If at the time Jenkins understood the antagonisms between the Party and local police and FBI agents, perhaps his recognition of calisthenics as prison exercises elucidated, or at least raised questions for him about the Party's investment in young people's futures. If children's ties to a heavily monitored group meant uncertainties for their future adulthoods, these same children may have found some comfort in Party efforts to prepare them for such challenges.

For other children, the rigor and discipline that epitomized the Party's brand of black radicalism manifested itself in additional ways. Dorion Hilliard's Black Panther lineage was evidenced by what was deliberately absent from his family's home: TV, nursery rhymes, and G.I. Joes.[280] His parents' decisions regarding what they would and would not expose their children to are revealing on at least two levels; on the one hand, their banning of television viewing suggests a level of regulation and discipline within the Hilliard household. Secondly, David's and Patricia's prohibition of G.I. Joe toys may

[279] Keith Jenkins, interview by author, 11 February 2017, tape recording, Oakland, California.
[280] Davis, "Rebel Fruit," 76.

be understood as their unwillingness to accommodate symbols of the country's armed forces in their home; a possible indication of the Party's firm rejection of the U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War—a conflict the Party understood as an exercise in U.S. imperialism.

By the late 1970s, mounting financial pressures coupled with Newton's increasing legal troubles led to major shifts in both the Party's programing and modes of living for many Panther families. Unbeknownst to the students at the time, the Bay Area children's collectives, like the Party itself, inched nearer to their operational limits by the end of the decade. By 1978 sales of the *Black Panther*—one of the organization's main sources of income—began declining at the same moment that key Party figures issued their membership resignations. On October 13, 1977 Elaine Brown announced in a brief written note to Newton that she would be leaving the Party, and consequently, her role as an OCS administrator.[281] Negative media coverage of violent incidents linked to particular Panthers in the days after Brown's resignation only exacerbated the public's waning support for the organization as a whole.[282]

While local support for the Oakland Community School continued, administrators struggled to sustain the program amidst the decline in both staff and funding. By 1979 the school maintained a student enrollment of 146, a staff size of 24, and a waiting list of more than 450 students.[283] The following year student enrollment stood at 94 while

[281] Brown notes that her decision to leave the organization was crystalized when Newton—against Brown's vocal opposition—ordered the beating of one Panther woman as who supposedly conveyed unpleasant statements against a fellow male Party member. Spencer, *The Revolution Has Come*, 180.
[282] Spencer, *The Revolution Has Come*, 180, 191.
[283] Spencer delineates the staff as six salaried, 15 cadre, and three volunteers. Spencer, *The Revolution Has Come*, 200.

school administrators faced a $130,000 deficit.[284] To make matters worse, by 1982 Newton and three others were charged with unlawfully manipulating the collection and distribution of federal funds for the OCS. These and eleven additional charges Newton faced gravely compromised the school's integrity and its potential for future funding.[285] As the Party's final members walked away from the organization, the Oakland Community School—the BPP's only remaining community program—officially closed in 1982.[286]

Children, Youth, and the State

While the categories of children and childhood help to shed light on the BPP's grassroots movement and its leaders' visions for the abolition of a class hierarchy, examining the Party through the lens of young people provides additional insight into the nature of the group's relationship with state agencies, particularly its often contentious interactions with COINTELPRO and local police departments. In concurrent, and often oppositional ways, the Panthers' efforts to ensure first-class citizenship to the country's economically marginalized populations were inextricably linked to state endeavors to create insecurities within low-income families. More often than not, children and youth stood at the center of these competing projects. If the Party found in children both hope for a better future and reminders of the work yet to be done, COINTELPRO agents saw in young people the potential to measure the popularity and growth of Panther radicalism in local communities, as well as avenues through which the FBI could obtain intelligence

[284] Spencer, *The Revolution Has Come*, 200.
[285] These charges included gaining state funds for the OCS under false pretenses, using school funds for personal activity, and inflating enrollment numbers between 1980 and 1982 in order to receive larger state allocations. Spencer, *The Revolution Has Come*, 201.
[286] Spencer, *The Revolution Has Come*, 201.

on individual Party members. A more nuanced understanding of Party-state relations, then, warrants an analysis of the points of contact between those for whom the Party mobilized, and those with which the BPP worked in tension. The Bureau's subversive tactics ranged from non-violent subterfuge—in the form of threatening exchanges with local landlords and business owners who might have been called on by the Party for support—to outright violent attacks on key Panther sites. More often than not, young people were keen to the FBI's view of the Party, and in many cases, exercised their own defensive methods to protect the programs from which they benefitted.

John Edgar Hoover and his COINTELPRO colleagues engaged with children and youth in poor neighborhoods to monitor the BPP's status in local communities well before the initiation of the group's welfare initiatives. In some cases, recommendations that the Bureau solicit the help of children in its surveillance of black radical groups came from FBI agents stationed in branch offices. On July 25, 1968, as part of the Bureau's attempt to interview former leader of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), James Forman, special agents of the Bureau's New York office sent a memorandum to Hoover, proposing specific actions in the event that Forman refused to cooperate. Specifically, New York agents suggested to Hoover the production and distribution of 5,000 copies of a flyer intended to discredit both SNCC and the BPP. In handwritten font, and supplemented with a graphic cartoon depicting two hands around the neck of a black cat, the flyer warned its readers to steer clear of the two groups,

claiming that the national leaders of both organizations worked as paid government informants to spy on black communities.[287]

In addition to the flyer's content, the manner in which New York officials envisioned its distribution is equally significant. Bureau officials intended to pay "'on the spot' local Negro boys (ages 10 through 13)" in the areas of Harlem and Bedford Stuyvesant to circulate the leaflets. Importantly, the youth would be instructed to "hand them out on 'busy street corners', in the area of Negro youth clubs, neighborhood playgrounds and at main intersections in the Negro areas." As for compensation, Bureau agents estimated, "$2.00 or $3.00 to each boy will do the trick."[288] The memorandum underscores the ways in which Bureau officials recognized black children and youth in working-class communities as simultaneously useful to the FBI's mission, and viable candidates for the Black Power Movement's potential recruitment. If the agency could reach young people before organizations such as SNCC and the BPP, the FBI could effectively curb these groups' community coalitions, and ultimately, weaken black radicalism in its organizational forms.

The initiation and development of the Panther programs continued in tandem with federal surveillance of the organization and confrontations with the Party's youngest beneficiaries. Just five months after the BPP launched its Free Breakfast for Children Program, Hoover alerted his San Francisco staff to the Breakfast program's rapid growth, going so far as to label it a primary threat to national security.[289] Fueling local skepticism

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[287] Memorandum, SAC [Special Agent in Charge], New York to FBI Director [J. Edgar Hoover], July, 25 1968, "Counterintelligence Program—Black Extremist Group," 1,2, unpaginated flyer, url: https://vault.fbi.gov/cointel-pro/cointel-pro-black-extremists.
[288] Memorandum, SAC [Special Agent in Charge], New York to FBI Director [J. Edgar Hoover], July, 25 1968, "Counterintelligence Program—Black Extremist Group," 1.
[289] Bloom and Martin, *Black Against Empire*, 181-182, 211.

of the relatively new organization, particularly among economic, legal, and political authority figures, Hoover's vilification of the program undoubtedly bolstered conservative claims that Party officials established the community service to "create a veneer of respectability to distract from illegal or otherwise illicit activity."[290] Even as hundreds of young people in cities across the country received daily meals within the initiative's opening months, Hoover drafted Bureau reports that situated the program within what he claimed to be a broader black radical organizing tradition of using community development programs to garner African American support for otherwise militant and anti-statist causes. One FBI official concretized this sentiment in May 1969 when speaking to a group of San Francisco agents, noting "The BPP is not engaged in the 'Breakfast for Children' program for humanitarian reasons [but for others], including their efforts to create an image of civility, assume community control of Negroes, and to fill adolescent children with their insidious poison."[291]

Wasting little time, the Bureau, along with local police departments, employed extensive measures to preclude the program's development, and in some locations, exhibited a degree of success. In November 1969 the *Black Panther* reported that police officers in Richmond, California traveled door-to-door advising neighborhood families to keep their children away from the local Breakfast Program, which, according to the officers, was used by the Party to promote racism and endorse riots.[292] While many—parents and children alike—involved in such encounters recognized the officers' motives

[290] Potorti, "Feeding the Revolution," 98.
[291] Taken from Potorti, "Feeding the Revolution," 98.
[292] Taken from Potorti, "Feeding the Revolution," 98.

as racist, a significant portion of the community heeded the officers warnings, resulting in a forty to sixty percent decline in program attendance that year.[293]

In other moments, FBI agents and local police officials actively sought out liberation school students in order to track school operations as well as extract information on the whereabouts of Party members. In many instances, children were keen to solicitations by state authorities and at times recognized these interactions as opportunities to test the accountability of law enforcers. On November 6, 1969, a nine-year-old student of the Panthers' Peekskill, New York school left one FBI agent baffled and perhaps embarrassed after he asked her what she thought about the school she attended. She simply told him, "Five Pig." When he asked her for clarification, the girl asserted, "You[']r[e] not doing your job if you don't know what the fifth amendment is."[294]

Following the example of the federal agents, officers from the Los Angeles Police Department exercised similarly intrusive and more manipulative tactics with recipients of the city's Breakfast Program roughly one year later. On October 1, 1970, the morning after Huey Newton visited the Stockwell Community Center in Compton where the program operated, two officers arrived at the venue with more than a simple set of questions. As six boys including Freddie, Paul and Frank Ovalle, Angel, Arthur, and David Dominguey exited the center after finishing their breakfasts, Officer Adams and a second officer-in-training approached the group. When Angel refused to answer their

[293] Potorti, "Feeding the Revolution," 98. State and federal officials did not limit their on-the-ground interactions to local residents or Party members but instead, sometimes targeted other community domains that were vital to the BPP's daily operations. In some cases, Bureau officials sent forged letters to local supermarkets to dissuade businesses from donating food and materials to the Panthers. See Bloom and Martin, *Black Against Empire*, 211.
[294] "F.B.I. Terrorizing the People," *Black Panther*, Nov. 29, 1969, 4.

questions about what the boys had eaten for breakfast, Adams offered to pay each boy one dollar in return for information regarding Newton's whereabouts. With a shrewd declination of the officer's bribe, the six asserted, "We don't want your dirty money," turned around, and walked back to the Center.[295]

For many young people in Panther communities, knowledge of the state, its many faces, and its hostile relationship to the Party unfolded in a few ways. For children like the six boys in Los Angeles, direct exchanges with state agents often led to conversations with Party members and parents about the meanings of those encounters, and strategies for navigating similar future situations. For others, markers of the physical annihilation of Panther property spurred similar questions by inquisitive youth who may also have felt insecure in certain Party spaces.

As a child Keith Jenkins developed an understanding of the Cointerintelligence Program and its allies through a combination of conversations with his family and first-hand observations throughout the 1970s. He remembers, "My mom was...very honest with us and I mean, we were smart." He continues, "We…had been trained in what COINTELPRO was without calling it COINTELPRO for years. So we knew that the government didn't approve of this organization nor the [Oakland Community] school, and they would do anything they could to take it down."[296] He had heard about the bullet-ridden posters of Huey Newton at the OCS—tangible and violent reminders of the Oakland Police Department's disproval of the group's work. Further, he understood the hierarchical relationship between particular state powers. "We knew that the police were

[295] "Pigs Offer Blood Money to the Children," *Black Panther*, October 10, 1970, 16.
[296] Keith Jenkins, interview by author, 11 February 2017, tape recording, Oakland, California.

a *function* of the state. They were the local strongarms…the grunts. They weren't making any big decisions—not any strategy decisions."[297]

Even as Jenkins was conscious of the position of local police departments within a tiered structure, his own childhood experiences with the Party's external opposition prompted his own questioning about the extent of police surveillance and violence. He recalls one incident at around age five when he and his older sister were staying at their mother's apartment in Oakland. The residence typically housed multiple Party members, but on this occasion the three were alone. When his mother heard someone attempting to break in through the front door, she alerted her children. Jenkins's recalls his first thought at the time: "is it a bad guy or is it a cop?"[298] If the former was true, calling the latter was not the best option. Regardless of who attempted to enter the premises, Jenkins's response provides insight into young people's knowledge about the oppositional relationship between the BPP and law enforcement. Even at the age of five he understood that safety from police violence, or conversely, police protection from outside threats, could not be guaranteed in the Party's most intimate spaces such as family residences.

Conclusion

Even before the Black Panther Party's community initiatives developed into fully established programs, children and youth played important roles in their growth and

[297] Keith Jenkins, interview by author, 11 February 2017, tape recording, Oakland, California.
[298] Keith Jenkins, interview by author, 19 February 2017, tape recording, Oakland, California. Jenkins recalls having a similar response after finding a stick of dynamite on the Oakland Community School campus grounds. He quickly alerted his teacher. Looking back on the incident he notes, "I knew there were two kinds of people that would do that: racists and cops."

survival. While their organizational labor ranged from the solicitation of funds from community donors to the vocal cheers outside of local courthouses in support of imprisoned Panthers, young people gave voice and meaning to the BPP's on-the-ground mobilizations. As the childhoods of those with family ties to the Party varied in nature and proximity to Party activity, I contend that even from the time of their earliest encounters with Black Power radicalism, many young people served as conduits of social change as the organization gained traction. Equally important, many developed and maintained practices of self and collective reflection, regularly questioning the meaning of their labor and their own relation to the communities in which they lived. Further, I aver that while local, state, and federal officials readily recognized young people as potential avenues into the Party's daily operations, children and youth established deliberate boundaries between their Panther communities and the officials seeking to penetrate those boundaries. In these instances, and in the Party's organizational spaces, children and youth exercised degrees of agency in the context of BPP theory and practice. In the wake of the Party's disintegration in 1982, the coming of age of the daughters and sons of Panther cadre would bring new questions about the organization's legacy and new choices regarding its trajectory.

Chapter 4

The Black Panther Party in Memory and Legacy

> *Tupac the son of the Black Panther and Tupac the rider. Those are the two people that's inside of me. Like, my mom and them envisioned this world for us to live in, and they strove to make that world. So I was raised off those ideals, to want those. And in my own life, I saw that that world was impossible to have. It's a world in our head. It's a world that we think about on Christmas and at Thanksgiving. And it's a world that we pass on to our children to make. So I had to live in this world like it is today. She taught me how to live in that world that we have to strive for. And for that, I'm forever grateful. She put heaven in my heart.*[299]
>
> Tupac Shakur, November 1995

Introduction

When *Vibe* senior staff writer, Kevin Powell, interviewed Tupac Shakur in an interview for the magazine's February 1996 issue, he asked the rapper and son of New York Black Panther, Afeni Shakur, about how his Black Power genealogy shaped his professional identity. Shakur pointed to the historical shifts his generation witnessed, as the tangible signs of a collectively run society in the 1970s morphed into utopian ideals by the 1990s. Shakur's words closely mirror the generational task experienced by many children of the American Left. In their anthology on Red Diaper Babies, Lynn Shapiro and Judy Kaplan succinctly describe this responsibility as "The need to adapt the socialist values of childhood to capitalist adult reality, to walk a fine line between individual fulfillment and social responsibility."[300]

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[299] "Tupac Shakur, by Kevin Powell," *The Vibe Q: Raw and Uncut* (New York: Kensington Books, 2007), 115.
[300] Kaplan and Shapiro, *Red Diapers*, 11.

While there is no prototypical experience of children born to Black Panther Party activists—and Tupac Shakur is in many ways an atypical member of his Panther peer cohort—the rapper's response importantly underscores how he and his mother came of age in two distinct social, political, and economic climates. To a large degree, the activism that was quintessential to 1970s Oakland represented part of a much broader response to troubling national shifts. As Martin Luther King Jr. amplified his campaign for economic justice in the late 1960s, black freedom fighters were met with a conservative backlash against the movement's recently won civil rights legislation. A new national agenda to get "Tough on Crime" proved to be a useful mechanism for members of the political establishment who were bent on challenging the federal government's outlawing of racial segregation and disenfranchisement.[301] Now focused on criminalizing drug use and other non-violent behaviors—including civil disobedience—America's criminal justice system gave new life to a nascent prison industrial complex. All of these trends were mutually compounded by a decline in manufacturing jobs that devastated America's working-class cities writ large. People of color, particularly working-class black families, bore the brunt of these changes.[302]

Scholars of post-war African American history, such as Robin Kelley and Michael Eric Dyson, demonstrate the ways in which the 1970s witnessed the emergence of obstacles much of black America would face over the subsequent two decades. As Shakur and other children of Black Panther families matured politically in the 1980s and 1990s, they did so in a landscape that differed from that of their parents. If the early phases of deindustrialization under monopoly capitalism crippled American workers in

[301] Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: The New Press, 2012), 38-47.
[302] Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, Chapter Two.

the 1970s, the neoliberalization of the political economy under global capitalism in the 1990s debilitated labor on a drastically larger scale. A federal disinvestment in social welfare programs and a renewed public stigmatization of state aid recipients only exacerbated the decade's high rates of black unemployment.[303] Even as African Americans assumed a greater foothold in electoral politics during the 1990s, Kelley highlights that these gains came at the heels of black nationalism's conservative turn under the Reagan Administration. This contingent of the black freedom struggle now placed its energy in mainstream politics and institution building through its promotion of "good capitalism."[304] Speaking about the implications of this shift for Tupac and his political peers specifically, Kelley asserts that black nationalism's "newfound direction…confused many children of 1970s black revolutionaries who still measured their effectiveness by earlier standards. Tupac's split conscience reflected that confusion."[305]

In reflecting on their personal journeys into adulthood at the turn of the century, many Panther cubs point to the same structural inequities that their parents fought to eliminate half a decade ago, as well the continued need for institutional and economic reform. Their testimonies collectively illustrate the twenty-first century as an era of epidemics, including massive wealth disparity, high rates of homelessness, racialized police violence, and excessive rates of incarceration. Importantly, this generational acknowledgement of the persistence of American poverty should not be mistaken for a collective belief in the Black Power Movement as a futile project. On the contrary,

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[303] Clarence Lusane, "To Fight for the People: The Black Panther Party and Black Politics in the 1990s," in *The Black Panther Party Reconsidered*, edited by Charles E. Jones (Baltimore, MD: Black Classic Press, 1998), 445-446.
[304] Taken from Dyson, *Holler If You Hear Me*, 66.
[305] Quoted in Dyson, *Holler If You Hear Me*, 66-67.

Shakur's message, like the testimonies of many of his Panther peers, signals a sense of urgency, hope, and a belief in the continued need for the types of community organizing work that Panther activists wholly engaged in fifty years ago.

This chapter is a meditation on memory and identity. In detailing the personal life stories of two children born into families actively involved in the Black Panther Party, I attempt to explore the history of the BPP through the lens of its youngest contemporaries. I examine the ways in which Panther cubs have made sense of their political inheritance as adults. Roughly fifty years after the inception of the Black Power Movement, former movement participants, scholars, and public humanities institutions have organized events, programs, and conversations around the country to once again recall the triumphs and challenges of the 1960s Black Power organization. In engaging with this collective memory, teachers, and students of the BPP have necessarily underscored its legacy today as a new generation of change agents picks up the proverbial baton and confronts new (and familiar) social ills in the early twenty-first century.

Among the key questions I ask in this chapter: how do Panther children remember their childhoods? What routes did their lives take in the years following the Black Power era? How do Panther children make sense of their Black Power lineage in adulthood? How do they conceptualize some of the same categories their parents grappled with fifty years ago, such as revolution, citizenship, and political identity? And finally, what about their familial histories of activism, if anything, have they departed from, rejected, forgotten, or chosen to leave behind? Through a comparative case study of Keith Jenkins

and Mary Williams, I explore the extent to which the history and legacy of the Party have shaped their political and professional lives today.[306]

This chapter does not attempt to posit that the children of former Party member are bearers a homogenous group identity or producers of a monolithic collective memory. Rather, by focusing on two main individuals, and where possible, substantiating their narratives with anecdotes from other Panther cubs, I point to themes, patterns, and areas of divergence in the array of Panther cub stories.

I draw here from scholarship on the history of children of the American Left. In their anthology, *Red Diapers: Growing Up in the Communist Left*, Judy Kaplan and Lynn Shapiro elucidate five common themes in the stories of various children of American communists, members of the Socialist Party (SP), and members of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), as they recall their early associations with the CPUSA and describe their relationship to this history in adulthood. Kaplan and Shapiro identify the following patterns as the major components of the collective memory of Red Diaper Babies: "(1) the centrality of left-wing politics to everyday life, (2) an oppositional identity, (3) a heightened historical awareness, (4) a feeling of connection to an international community of people working for social change, and (5) a belief that one person's actions can make a difference and that by working together people can radically change society."[307]

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[306] It is important to note that this chapter does not attempt to provide an exhaustive account of the life stories of individuals born to Panther activists. Because of the scarcity of source material as well as time and space constraints, among other factors, this chapter offers a small glimpse into this history by juxtaposing two individuals, and where possible, supplementing their stories with examples from others who held with early ties to the BPP.

[307] Kaplan and Shapiro, *Red Diapers*, 9. The editors acknowledge that the Communist Party of the United States of America (CPUSA) held no official line on childrearing, but the organization wrote regularly about parenting practices and family relations in ways that reflected the Party's

While the conditions, nature, and context of the Black Power Movement necessarily shaped the experiences of its participant families in ways distinct from those of families of earlier left-wing projects, I contend that Red Diaper Babies serve as a useful historical parallel for thinking about Panther cubs. Like many of their left-wing predecessors, Panther cubs illustrate their early years as a confluence of dichotomies. Many of their recollections point to their early awareness that routines of everyday life in the Panther milieu were at once commonplace and aberrant.[308] Many point to the sense of normalcy and belonging that came with the insularity and security of Panther spaces. At the same time, many acknowledge that as children, they recognized a dissonance between their intimate networks and the broader public environment in which these networks existed. The sense of pride and honor that many young people felt in serving others regularly came at the expense of opportunities to develop more intimate and informal relationships with their biological parents, a learning process that many would experience later in life. Finally, the full transition into public life as families relinquished their membership was often abrupt and traumatic, and demanded of Panther cubs immediate strategies for adapting to life without the Party.

As much as the childhood experiences of those born to Panther families represent a spectrum of heterogeneity, the same is true of their coming-of-age stories. In making sense of their relationships to this history today, Panther cubs, I argue, demonstrate degrees of inheritance. Vestiges of the BPP have surfaced at various moments in their

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ideology and practices. For example, a 1946 CPUSA publication titled "How to Bring Up Communist Children," contended, in the words of Kaplan and Shapiro, that " the path to good parenting lay in being a good communist." Party-sponsored social institutions such as youth summer camps further exemplify an organizational effort to provide parents with collective networks for child care support. Kaplan and Shapiro, *Red Diapers*, 5-6.

[308] For an example of this by a Red Diaper Baby, see Laxer, *Red Diaper Baby*, 1.

post-Black Power lives, at times in the language they employ in everyday conversations, and similarly, in their geographical proximity to BPP's birthplace. Some have spent most of their adult years hundreds to thousands of miles removed from the Bay Area yet unequivocally claim Oakland as home. Others lost touch with their Panther schoolmates when their relatives left the Party in the early 1980s yet live a short bus ride away from the very site where they received free breakfast from the Panthers every weekday morning roughly forty-five years ago.

Section 1: Keith Jenkins

Keith Jenkins looks out the window of his high-rise apartment, which, on a clear afternoon boasts an impressive view of Oakland's cityscape. Looking eastward, he pinpoints Mount Diablo amidst the rolling hills of the East Bay. To the west, he draws an invisible line that runs adjacent to the historic Tribune Tower and over the Port of Oakland's iconic white cranes before it finally reaches San Francisco's Financial District—a vista that represents not only one of his favorite Bay Area panoramas, but also his preferred method of receiving the city's daily weather forecast. With a look downward the bustle of Grand Avenue comes into clear focus. Just on the other side of the residential complex, not visible from his living room window, sits Lake Merritt.

In the most literal sense, now at the age of forty-seven, Jenkins has not moved far from the community in which he grew up, the birthplace and heart of the Black Panther Party. The vestiges—some more visible than others—of the Black Power Movement surround him from nearly every angle. A fifteen-minute walk to the opposite side of the lake, for example, brings you to the building that once hosted Huey Newton's infamous

penthouse, as well as the Alameda County Superior Courthouse—two embattled sites during the Minister of Defense's highly publicized 1970s trial.[309] A short bus ride down Martin Luther King Jr. Way relocates you to what is now the It's All Good Bakery, the original headquarters of the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense.[310]

Perhaps it is no surprise, then, that when asked how often his mother's prior activism crosses his mind today, he responds without ambivalence: "Every day," clarifying, "it's not possible to not think about it."[311] What is less unequivocally relayed in the same conversation, however, is Jenkins's explanation of how the daily reminders of his familial inheritance have translated into how he identifies politically today. He grapples with the phrase, noting, "I don't know that I have a political identity."[312] When the topic resurfaces later in the interview his confusion about the question itself becomes more apparent. Working through his answer he states, "I guess I don't really know what that phrase means, 'political identity,' because when I think politics, I think politicians. When people start and try to argue with me about their politician or which politician is

[309] Newton's arrest on charges of the murder of Oakland police officer, John Frey, on October 28, 1967, marked the beginning of a prolonged period of incarceration, including time in solitary confinement at the Alameda County jail. Upon Newton's release from the county jail on August 5, 1970, the Black Panther Party immediately transferred him into a high-security residential unit at the top of an apartment complex overlooking Lake Merritt, the county jail, and the Alameda County Superior Courthouse. He was retried by the State of California in June 1971. Martin and Bloom, *Black Against Empire*, 99-101, 352-353, 372, 474 n.41.

[310] By early 1967, after garnering a small following of supporters for their police patrol program, Newton and Seale began searching for a stable meeting place. With Seale's help, Newton acquired a job at the War on Poverty youth program where Seale was employed. Using a portion of their paychecks, the two subsequently rented an office on Grover St. (now Martin Luther King Jr. Way) and 56th St. in North Oakland. Today, a yellow sign posted on a street lamp outside of the bakery's entrance commemorates the site as the organization's first official base. Against a yellow background sits the iconic Black Panther logo, under the caption in black font, "On January 2, 1967, the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense opened the Party's first office at this location." Bloom and Martin, *Black Against Empire*, 48.

[311] Keith Jenkins, interview by author, 27 January 2019, tape recording, Oakland, California.

[312] Keith Jenkins, interview by author, 27 January 2019, tape recording, Oakland, California.

better, my response is, 'Well, all politicians are liars'…and they usually want to change the subject, which I appreciate."[313]

In thinking through how Jenkins positions himself in society in 2019, nearly forty years after his mother left the Party, how might we make sense of his words? Coupled with his admitted distrust of elected officials—a sentiment that was regularly and loudly articulated by the BPP in the weekly issues of the *Black Panther*—is his preference for avoiding political talk in general. Equally important for the purposes of this chapter, however, is his seeming discomfort with the phrase "political identity." It is interesting that while Jenkins relays that the work of the Party—part of a movement whose perfervid calls for "Black Power!" reverberated over much of Oakland's landscape in the 1960s and 1970s—factors centrally in his daily consciousness, he struggles to settle on a definition of political identity. What might his seeming variance from Panther rhetoric suggest when we think about memory and identity as co-constructions? In this section I briefly trace the roughly four decades since Jenkins's departure from the Oakland Community School in order to provide insight into his own political and professional development into adulthood. Through critical engagement with a series of oral histories conducted in his home, this section examines the ways in which Keith has maintained proximity to the BPP's history and legacy, and how, if at all, he has existed outside of it.

Unlike his response to the question regarding his current worldview, Keith describes his memory of his final days at the Oakland Community School as "*very* clear." It was 1981 and the school had closed for its two-week-long Easter break. Coincidentally, Baba Muktananda, the meditation leader of the nearby ashram, which had previously collaborated with the OCS to implement meditation in the school, was hosting a retreat in

[313] Keith Jenkins, interview by author, 27 January 2019, tape recording, Oakland, California.

Santa Monica, California. Bettye Johnson was among a small group of OCS staff who regularly attended Muktananda's ashram, and when she learned of the retreat she decided to send Keith and his sister with family friends to the event. She remained in Oakland. By this time, with only a handful of remaining members and strained by unresolved factionalism, depleted funds, and intensified federal surveillance, the BPP had all but disintegrated. Newton's drug addictions, mounting allegations of fraud and other activity, along with his antagonistic—in some cases, violent—relationships with some of the Party's leading members, only exacerbated the organization's anemic condition.[314]

Despite the weekly efforts of the group's remaining volunteers, the Party's local programs would not survive the culmination of internal and external stresses, and by April 1981, the Oakland Community School stood as the BPP's only remaining community program. Feeling increasingly unsafe amidst these tensions, Johnson and a few other women decided to exit the Party. In the days leading up to the school's reopening, without alerting other Party members or school administrators, they collected their belongings from the school and left meticulous instructions for those who would resume its operation the following week. Keith explains, "they were all leaving at the same time so they closed up the school and left it in a way that whoever showed up on Monday could still operate and function. They wouldn't have to worry [about] where stuff was."[315] The notes outlined everything from the school's partnering book and food vendors to instructions on how to pay for the facility's weekly waste collection. After tying up the loose ends, Johnson quietly left the school and the organization for which she had worked for nearly a decade.

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[314] In 1978 Newton was sentenced to prison for two and a half years after being convicted of possessing a weapon as an ex-felon. Spencer, *The Revolution Has Come*, 199-201.
[315] Keith Jenkins, interview by author, 11 February 2017, tape recording, Oakland, California.

The news of his mother's departure, and consequently his and his sister's withdrawal from the OCS hit Keith with a jarring force. Upon the children's return from the two-week event in southern California, Johnson informed them of the news. Jenkins recalls the rather abrupt disclosure: "she's like, 'The bus is not coming to pick you up and you're not going back to that school on Monday…You're never going back to that school,'" he recalls with a chuckle.[316] When he asked her when he would see his school friends again, he recalls her response: "'You're probably not going to see them again either.'" She further informed him that within one week's time she would enroll him and his sister in the public school down the street.[317]

For the sake of her children's protection, Johnson chose not to explain the reason for their withdrawal from the Oakland School until after her own departure from the Party. Whether he understood the safety risks that Newton's recent violent episodes posed for members like his mother at the time, looking back at the moment in adulthood Jenkins exhibits a clear understanding of his mother's decision to not alert her children ahead of time. He notes, "Kids talk. Loose lips sink ships." Then, referencing some of the organization's approaches to child discipline, he concludes, "what does disciplinary action towards *adults* look like in a militant organization?"[318]

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[316] Keith Jenkins, interview by author, 11 February 2017, tape recording, Oakland, California.
[317] Keith Jenkins, interview by author, 11 February 2017, tape recording, Oakland, California.
[318] Keith Jenkins, interview by author, 11 February 2017, tape recording, Oakland, California. Parental censorship within families is a common trope in the history of radical left-wing movements. The Communist Party of the United States (CPUSA) serves as an especially useful example. Particularly at the height of the McCarthy era, members and allies of the CPUSA were keenly aware that their left-wing allegiances placed them at grave risk of lost employment, blacklisting, state-sanctioned testimonies before the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), prison time, exile, or more drastically, execution. To many members, children heightened this risk. Born to communist parents in Baltimore in 1949, Roberta Wood recalls how McCarthyism shaped intergenerational interactions within families of the left, noting, "some parents were afraid a child might repeat a remark in an inappropriate place, so they would limit the dinner table discussions to family matters." At the same time, however, she underscores that

One week later, at the age of nine, Jenkins transferred into the fifth grade class at Lakeview Elementary School, a public school just east of downtown Oakland. He remembers the transition into the new learning environment as difficult on multiple levels. The switch from the OCS student cohorts, which had been organized by student ability, to the public school system's age-based grades left Keith feeling intellectually unchallenged. He recalls, "I went from doing algebra and pre-calculus at nine years old to long arithmetic in a matter of three weeks."[319]

In addition to the task of navigating curricular changes as a now public school student, Jenkins also recalls dealing with related challenges that were symptomatic of the Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) in general. Larger class sizes and low funding translated into new, and at times discouraging, teacher-student dynamics. He recalls moving from the OCS environment where he had become "accustomed to being around adults that know you and care about you individually" to "a whole new system of survival with the kids and a whole new system of adults…a place where they don't really care about any of the kids. It's a paycheck," adding, "most people in the Party didn't get paid."[320] On the one hand, Jenkins's words reflect a sense of loss in his transition into a public school setting. Whereas the OCS practiced a pedagogical emphasis on nurturing the whole child, students of the OUSD learned to emotionally and psychologically support themselves. Relatedly, he attributes the respective differences in teachers' methodologies and motivations in the two school systems to their starkly different

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party members adopted varied approaches to the question of parental censorship. Her father, for example, "had great disdain for those who hushed up when a child entered the room 'as if their own kid was going to be a stool pigeon on them.'" Roberta Wood, "Proud to Be Working Class," in *Red Diapers*, 296.

[319] Keith Jenkins, interview by author, 11 February 2017, tape recording, Oakland, California.

[320] Keith Jenkins, interview by author, 19 February 2017, tape recording, Oakland, California.

historical foundations. While the founders of the OCS established the school as a student-centered educational space for children of color whose racial and ethnic histories were absent from public school curricula, the OUSD exhibited a more conventional model of education.

Public schools have historically existed as highly contested sites of knowledge transmission, particularly in the context of dissident social and political movements in the United States. From the inception of CPUSA, American communists exercised great caution and prudence in their dealings with the pedagogues and curriculum through which government-run educational spaces functioned. Dick Levins, the son of two New York CP members recalls the conversations he had with his parents and his early distrust of New York City's schools growing up in the 1940s. He notes, "School was a problem: I was a good student and loved reading, but knew that schools were an organ of the State set up to mislead us. Their textbooks were 'poison' that I had to be protected against."[321]

Likewise, the Black Panther Party's engagement with alternative pedagogies in the late 1960s and1970s resulted from organizational beliefs about the biased nature of the American educational system. David Hilliard and Bobby Seale were among the first Panthers to transfer their children from the Oakland Unified School District to the Party's nascent children's programs. They did so with the intention of exposing their daughters and sons to a curriculum that included lessons on black history and culture.[322] According to Rodney Gillead, an instructor at the OCS from 1974 to 1976, teacher training at the Panther school involved engagement with the writings of Paulo Freire, and South

[321] Dick Levins, "Touch Red," in *Red Diapers*, 260.
[322] Huggins and LeBlanc-Ernest, "Revolutionary Women," 168.

Carolina activist and educator, Septima Clark.[323] Though direct Party references to Freire are minimal if nonexistent, Party members and the Brazilian educator were contemporaries of the same anti-colonial milieu of the 1970s. Specifically, the Panthers' emphasis on the dialectical relationship between education and class consciousness resonated with Freire's advocacy for experiential learning—that is, as valuing life experience as a form of knowledge. His belief that transformative education necessitated "the action and reflection of [people] upon their world in order to transform it" resonated with Intercommunal Youth Institute's curricular focus on children's self-reflective learning.[324] Both Freire and the Panthers stressed the importance of providing young people with analytical resources that would help them recognize their own positionalities as local and global subjects in a world experiencing rapid transformation.[325]

Jenkins continued to adapt to the curricular differences between his Panther-run elementary education and his public schooling as he transitioned into junior high. After completing his schooling at Lakeview in the late 1970s, he transferred into Westlake Middle School about one mile northeast of downtown Oakland. If his elementary math classes failed to intellectually challenge him, his junior high history lessons led to his increased aversion to the subject. He recalls "hating history" at the time because "it was very siloed and they had their blinders on for what they…wanted to talk about and how

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[323] Rodney Gillead, "The Black Panther Party School" (panel, 50th Anniversary of the Founding of the Black Panther Party, Oakland Museum of California, October 20, 2016). Septima Clark organized Citizenship Schools in the U.S. South during the Civil Rights Movement. Rooted in traditions of civic activism, these schools helped increase black southern voting by preparing adults to pass the literacy tests required by southern states to register to vote. See Rickford, *We Are an African People*, 79. See also, Perlstein, "Minds Stayed on Freedom," 34-60.

[324] Quoted in Christopher F. Petrella, "Resurrecting the Radical Pedagogy of the Black Panther Party," Black Perspectives, July 3, 2017, url: https://www.aaihs.org/resurrecting-the-radical-pedagogy-of-the-black-panther-party/.

[325] Petrella, "Resurrecting the Radical Pedagogy of the Black Panther Party."

they wanted to indoctrinate the kids they were addressing."[326] One teacher spent nearly the entire year discussing the history of World War Two.[327] Jenkins's description of his middle school history curriculum as "siloed" and a form of indoctrination underscores the challenges he faced adjusting to a more Euro-centric education. While he had once won the history bee as a student at the OCS—taking home the prize of a small red record player and a recorded speech by Martin Luther King Jr.—by his middle-school years his interest in history began to fade.[328]

His entrance into high school soon after his time at Westlake brought with it a renewed interest in the social sciences and humanities, and new learning opportunities. He enjoyed the small class sizes afforded by private school and performed well, receiving mostly A's and B's. In addition to the more focused teacher attention he received, he recalls a class trip to Europe as one of the highlights of his high school years. In January 1988, the winter of his senior year, Jenkins was among a group of students from his world history class to visit Austria. By this time he and his classmates had already spent much of the year learning about the Austro-Hungarian Empire and both world wars. The visit not only concretized his knowledge of the geography through first-hand exposure, but also represented the start of his recognition of world travel as a mechanism for personal and intellectual growth.

Coincidentally, while Jenkins's high school experience introduced him to life outside of the United States, it was also the site of one of his earliest and most memorable experiences of racial bigotry as a young adult. He recalls one particular incident when a substitute teacher handed back her comments on a graded essay he had submitted earlier.

[326] Keith Jenkins, interview by author, 11 February 2017, tape recording, Oakland, California.
[327] Keith Jenkins, interview by author, 11 February 2017, tape recording, Oakland, California.
[328] Keith Jenkins, interview by author, 11 February 2017, tape recording, Oakland, California.

To his surprise, next to the words "This is perfect" was the letter "B," with no explanation for the incompatible evaluation. In reflecting on the experience, Jenkins posits the teacher's behavior as an exercise in implicit racial bias. He states, "Some people exert it intentionally, some people exert it accidentally," concluding that often times people are unaware of the racial implications of their behaviors.[329]

In June 1988, at the age of sixteen, Jenkins became one of the youngest in his high school class to graduate, entering a new life chapter unbound by the strictures of full-time schoolwork. The following years would expose him to a combination of minimum-wage jobs, college, and more international travel. During his senior year of high school he had picked up weekend shifts at a local furniture retailer and after graduating began working full-time.[330] Within a year he had accumulated enough savings to plan his second departure from the U.S. In late December 1989, he accompanied his mother and stepbrother on a trip to India, where the three lived and worked at an ashram in Ganeshpuri for three weeks. He spent his days studying meditation under the tutelage of Gurumayi Chidvilasananda and in return for the lessons and the ashram's lodging accommodations, Jenkins learned the art of cooking French fries and pasteurizing milk in the region's one hundred-degree summer heat. When he was not "standing over pots of boiling oil, dropping in potatoes" he sought refuge in a nearby shaded area.[331]

Beyond what the ashram taught him about the practice of meditation, the time Jenkins spent in India may also be understood as a key moment in the development of his class awareness. He recalls a particular moment during his arrival in Bombay that brought into sharp focus the significance of his American working-class identity and his

[329] Keith Jenkins, interview by author, 19 February 2017, tape recording, Oakland, California.
[330] Keith Jenkins, interview by author, 19 February 2017, tape recording, Oakland, California.
[331] Keith Jenkins, interview by author, 19 February 2017, tape recording, Oakland, California.

relative privilege as a minimum wage worker in the U.S. As he prepared to exit the airport a young girl—whom he recalls may have been ten or eleven years old—carrying an infant approached him asking for spare rupees. "And that's when I realized I was rich. I have a car at home that cost me a hundred dollars, with no gas pedal, no emergency brake, the regular brakes barely work but I'm still rich because I have a car that kinda works and…I can afford to fly halfway across the planet."[332]

In the years following his time at the ashram in Ganeshpuri, Jenkins would return to the daily routine of school and work in Oakland. When the furniture retailer he had worked for during and just following high school went out of business in the early 1990s he began receiving unemployment benefits, which today he describes nonchalantly as him "doing the socialist thing."[333] Not long after, he picked up a gig as a cook at a local restaurant and enrolled in a range of evening courses in the Peralta Community College District. With an interest in pursuing a career in photojournalism, he enrolled in a photography course and began working for Laney College's student newspaper as the staff photographer. He supplemented his focus on photography with more practical courses including Spanish, auto mechanics, CPR, and cooking. He also enrolled in a course titled "Administration of Justice" at Merritt College, in which he learned how to load, operate, and disable firearms by Oakland police officers and members of the Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) unit. Whereas his friends have often assumed he took the course through a desire to learn how to handle firearms, Jenkins clarifies his motives as preventative. By the early 1990s, he contends, public gun sightings were not

[332] Keith Jenkins, interview by author, 19 February 2017, tape recording, Oakland, California.
[333] Keith Jenkins, interview by author, 27 January 2019, tape recording, Oakland, California.

uncommon in Oakland, and consequently, nor were accidental shootings.[334] Even while he sought to preclude gun casualties, however, there is an irony in his receiving firearm training by agents of the Oakland Police Department when roughly thirty years prior, Huey Newton and Bobby Seale—both Merritt College students at the time—co-founded the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense to counter Oakland's epidemic of anti-black police violence.

If his years as a student at Merritt College positioned Keith in the center of the Party's spatial legacy, his encounter with the organization's living history would unfold outside of the U.S. while volunteering for the Venceremos Brigade in Cuba in 1993.[335] Beginning in 1960 as part of Fidel Castro's efforts to develop the agro-economy of the newly independent country, the Brigade brought in hundreds of volunteers from multiple nations to supplement the aid Cuba was receiving from the Soviet Union. The disintegration of the USSR in 1991 all but eliminated the aid it had been providing its Cold War ally, exacerbating Cuba's food scarcity and forcing Castro to implement more self-sustaining measures. As such, he called for a revamping of the country's national harvesting programs, including the Venceremos Brigade.

Now in his early twenties and with a few years of college under his belt Jenkins once again found himself wanting to step outside the United States. By 1993 he was somewhat familiar with the Brigade and its history, and had been entertaining the idea of moving to Cuba to continue his education. After inquiring about the program with its co-founder, a man who also happened to be a family friend, Jenkins signed up and soon

[334] Keith Jenkins, interview by author, 27 January 2019, tape recording, Oakland, California.
[335] Keith Jenkins, interview by author, 27 January 2019, tape recording, Oakland, California.

found himself on a plane to Mexico where he would meet about seventy fellow volunteers from throughout the United States.[336]

Over the span of roughly three weeks the group divided its time between farm labor, touring the island, and meeting with political activists representing anti-racist and working-class movements in other countries. During the first half of the program, Jenkins found himself working on a local farm learning how to plant, trim, and fertilize banana trees. Signs of Cuba's food crisis were evident not only in the worked fields but also in residents' homes and along street corners. The "Special Period" brought with it a transformation in Cubans' daily life, as Keith notes, "where people had planters outside their office window where they used to have plants and flowers, now they're growing yucca. Any plot of dirt, they're growing food."[337] Yucca became a staple crop at the time, and comprised the main dish—along with sausage, spam and rice—with which the volunteers nourished themselves for the duration of the program.[338]

In addition to learning the basics of banana cultivation, Jenkins also witnessed the less-than egalitarian realities of Cuban socialism, some of which mirrored the structural inequalities Keith had been exposed to first-hand in the United States. He recalls one excursion during the second half of his stay as particularly eye-opening. One afternoon, the Brigade visited a museum in Havana, the hosting city of the Pan American Games just two years prior. During the group's lunch break Jenkins and Spike, a volunteer from Chicago Jenkins had befriended, decided to explore a nearby beach. As they approached the ocean, instead of sand they were met by large, unwelcoming rocks. He remembers,

[336] Keith Jenkins, interview by author, 27 January 2019, tape recording, Oakland, California.
[337] Keith Jenkins, interview by author, 27 January 2019, tape recording, Oakland, California.
[338] Keith Jenkins, interview by author, 27 January 2019, tape recording, Oakland, California.

"That's where we found the shanty towns. That's where we found the darkest Cubans."[339] He recalls Spike and himself commenting on the parallels between Havana's residual racial disparities and those in other parts of the world: "this country is just like my country. The darkest people get the worst. No matter what country you go to—it doesn't change a whole lot."[340]

If the neighborhood in Havana underscored for Jenkins Cuba's pitfalls in preventing a class hierarchy, his meeting with Assata Shakur concretized his ultimate decision against relocating to the country. Shakur was among a few leading activists the Brigade met with during the two-week program. By 1993 she had been living in exile in Cuba for nearly a decade after being granted political asylum by the Cuban government in 1984. When he met her Jenkins was already familiar with her history of political activism in the United States as a member of the Black Panther Party and later, the Black Liberation Army. He told her of his interest in moving to the country and asked about her own experience living there. Her response, according to Jenkins, was not what he had expected: "She wasn't impressed with the Americans that moved to Cuba," perceiving them as "lazy bums that wanted a free ride." He concluded, "She basically talked me out of it."[341]

With a new perspective on socialism as it existed in Cuba, Jenkins returned to the United States no longer with the vision of pursuing a more permanent life there. Instead, he decided to continue his schooling in the U.S., and over the next few years found himself once again moving between college programs and part-time employment. In the mid-1990s he moved to Colorado to attend the University of Colorado, Boulder where he

[339] Keith Jenkins, interview by author, 27 January 2019, tape recording, Oakland, California.
[340] Keith Jenkins, interview by author, 27 January 2019, tape recording, Oakland, California.
[341] Keith Jenkins, interview by author, 27 January 2019, tape recording, Oakland, California.

ultimately began studying finance while working a part-time job writing mortgage loans.[342] After one semester of finance courses, however, he found a renewed interest in the field of technology—having taken multimedia courses at Laney College just before moving to Colorado—and left the finance program before completing the degree. He returned to Oakland in the late 1990s and in 2018 earned an associate degree, which ultimately led him to his current career in voice and data networking. Reflecting on the path to his current employment, Jenkins jokes, "My office is across the street from Laney College, so in 25 years, I made it across the street."[343]

Making Sense of the Past: A Childhood in Memory

While Jenkins has sustained a close geographic proximity to the Panthers' historical legacy, its presence in his political consciousness and memory has manifested itself in various ways, and at times, unexpectedly. As Jenkins illustrated earlier, the city itself carries ubiquitous reminders of his family's past activism. Coupled with his engagement with particular aspects of this past has been a clear departure from other elements. On the one hand, in his adult years, Keith has been deliberate in visiting museum exhibitions and other public history collections commemorating the organization. Further, his efforts in providing nuanced histories of the BPP have developed through informal conversations with local college students. At other moments, Keith's interaction with this legacy has unfolded through internal meditations on his childhood experiences. On the other hand, signs of his movement away from his Panther past can be seen in the fact that he has maintained relationships with none of his fellow

[342] Keith Jenkins, interview by author, 27 January 2019, tape recording, Oakland, California.
[343] Keith Jenkins, interview by author, 27 January 2019, tape recording, Oakland, California.

Oakland Community School classmates aside from his sister. In the following section I explore Jenkins's current relationship to his own past and to the legacy of the BPP. I investigate the position of this history in his present worldview and offer space for him to discuss how he would like the Party to be remembered.

On one level, Jenkins's efforts to maintain a connection to his past have unfolded through his reflections on the historical continuities and changes in Oakland's race and class dynamics since the 1970s. He cites one instance as a particularly noteworthy moment of rumination during a family visit with his aunt and cousin in 2010. The three decided to take an excursion to the Oakland Museum of California where they quickly found an installation of the iconic wicker chair, which would become associated with Huey Newton's leadership and one of the most circulated images of the Party's iconography.

For Jenkins, however, the chair caused him to pause not on the organization's leadership, but instead on a specific assignment he completed as a student of the Oakland Community School. Around the age of six or seven, he and his classmates were asked to write letters to their local congressional representatives regarding a topic of their choice. Jenkins chose to inquire about the issue of anti-black police violence, asking specifically, "Why do cops beat up black people for no reasons?" Upon seeing the chair roughly thirty years later, he remembers conveying to his aunt the continued relevance of his question, stating to her, "that question still applies…I still have the same question, you know, 30, 40 years later."[344]

In the context of Jenkins's relationship to his family's history of activism, perhaps we can understand his museum anecdote on two key levels. On the one hand, his memory

[344] Keith Jenkins, interview by author, 19 February 2017, tape recording, Oakland, California.

of contacting his local elected official as a child illustrates the importance of the Oakland Community School for Jenkins in helping to foster his critical questioning of the legitimacy of America's self-proclaimed democratic principles. Additionally, even in light of his earlier claim that he does not hold a clear political identity as an adult, the connection he drew to anti-black police violence in the twenty-first century suggests that this has remained an issue of social import for him. Jenkins has not strayed far from the Party's 1960s and '70s ideas about police misconduct. He notes that as an adult, he has often felt hesitant to leave his house because of the possibility of being the victim of police violence. He clarifies, "That's my politics: don't die by a cop. Don't get beat up by a cop…My relationship to politics is politicians are liars and cops are violent, and I have to pay taxes."[345] His comments stem from both his observations of, and personal experiences with police officers' use of excessive force, having "had cuffs taken off of me at least three times."[346] According to Jenkins, police officials' effectiveness lies both in their practices and performances of power. He concludes, "That's part of the strategy that people don't know about, navigating cops because cops always want whoever they're talking to to know that the cops are the top dog, [that] they're in power."[347]

Along with Jenkins's observation that police brutality against people of color has persisted at alarming rates throughout his lifetime is his insight that the production of new technologies since the 1960s has changed how communities work towards police accountability. The 2009 murder of twenty-two-year-old Oscar Grant serves as an illustrative example. Officer Johannes Mehserle's fatal shooting of unarmed Grant at an Oakland BART station resulted in a national outpouring of collective action and media

[345] Keith Jenkins, interview by author, 27 January 2019, tape recording, Oakland, California.
[346] Keith Jenkins, interview by author, 27 January 2019, tape recording, Oakland, California.
[347] Keith Jenkins, interview by author, 27 January 2019, tape recording, Oakland, California.

attention largely because of the ability of many of the bystanders to record the killing on their smartphones. Not surprisingly, however, local police officers have found ways to navigate civilians' uses of recording devices through various means such as the confiscation of personal property, as was the case with Grant's killing. Keith offers a strategy for handling such circumstances: "carry two phones. Give them the one without the recording. Make a DVD of the other one and then send it to the local news."[348]

Yet, even as the past decade has witnessed the democratization of new technologies as tools for community control of police, Jenkins emphasizes that these new mechanisms have been produced during a period when young people's ideas about, and commitment to, social change have experienced a marked shift away from what the 1960s radical left represented. He emphasizes that in the twenty-first century, discursive critiques of racial and class inequality have superseded on-the-ground efforts to combat such disparities. According to Keith, this shift has created a social climate characterized by what he calls "armchair revolutionaries," adding, "I don't even know if being a revolutionary is possible these days."[349]

Jenkins attributes what he understands as a political deradicalization over the past fifty years to two phenomena: a decline in young people's willingness to engage in the harsh demands required of drastic societal change, as well as the increased use of surveillance tools by state officials to regulate mass politics. Articulating his notion of revolution, Keith asserts, "I heard someone say once that…with any social change there's violence, and with any revolution there's death. And if you're going to call yourself a

[348] Keith Jenkins, interview by author, 19 February 2017, tape recording, Oakland, California.
[349] Keith Jenkins, interview by author, 27 January 2019, tape recording, Oakland, California.

revolutionary, whose blood is going to be on the ground when you're there?"[350] He adds, "You have to be willing to give up everything that you have and know, including most of the people in your life. And if you're not willing to give up everything, then you're probably not [a] revolutionary."[351]

In addition to a person's willingness to risk bodily injury or life, Jenkins underscores the more quotidian functions required to bring about major societal transformation. Along with the possibility of bloodshed, revolution consists of collective organizing around food provisions, housing, and the requisite supplies for basic human survival. He develops his conception of revolutionary change agents as those who, in the day after a revolution, "know how to feed 100 people…know how to take care of the feces of 100 people…know how to communicate to 100 people," adding:

> Most of these armchair revolutionaries don't want to do a single thing. If their toilet doesn't flush, what are they going to do? If there's a revolution, is the plumbing going to work tomorrow? Is the sanitation department going to be running tomorrow? Is your electricity going to be working tomorrow?[352]

Here, he emphasizes the importance of ordinary workers in carrying a revolution to completion and in the subsequent process of societal rebuilding. Societal transformation will result not from the work of a gun maker—"We have enough guns on this planet to last a thousand years. We don't need any more guns"—but instead through the work of a baker: "If you don't have a bread maker, how are you going to feed 100 people?"[353]

Finally, Jenkins highlights that even while twenty-first-century digital tools have allowed for innovative approaches to community-led police reform, advancements in

[350] Keith Jenkins, interview by author, 27 January 2019, tape recording, Oakland, California.
[351] Keith Jenkins, interview by author, 27 January 2019, tape recording, Oakland, California.
[352] Keith Jenkins, interview by author, 27 January 2019, tape recording, Oakland, California.
[353] Keith Jenkins, interview by author, 27 January 2019, tape recording, Oakland, California.

technology have also predictably created new outlets for state surveillance and the regulation of community organizing. Importantly, social media platforms such as Facebook, which have undoubtedly helped catalyze mass politics have also functioned as key sites for federal authorities to monitor organizational meetings, discourse, and strategies of activists across the political spectrum. Underscoring his distrust of technology and concerns about its potential uses, he concludes, "There's just too much control these days, too much technology."[354]

If youth activism on the left has markedly declined since the 1960s, as Jenkins argues, perhaps his concurrent belief that the general public has failed to fully engage with the history of 1960s black radicalism is no coincidence. He posits that in the context of national memory, most Americans know little about the organization for which his mother worked. Few Americans are aware of the Party's original title, the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense, and consequently, lack knowledge about the group's antagonistic relationship with the police, he contends. On a basic level, "People don't even have that understanding."[355]

Other descendants of the Black Power Movement have expressed similar agnosticism about the feasibility and likelihood of a twenty-first-century revolution. Ericka Abrams ascribes the general abatement of black activism since the 1970s to three main national phenomena: the persistent severity of racism, a preoccupation among her African American peers with making money, and a general decline in knowledge about the history of the Black Panther Party and its leaders. In her 2004 interview—at the age of thirty-four—Abrams draws a clear distinction between herself and her mother—the

[354] Keith Jenkins, interview by author, 27 January 2019, tape recording, Oakland, California.
[355] Keith Jenkins, interview by author, 27 January 2019, tape recording, Oakland, California.

former leader of the BPP—expressing her lack of conviction in the revolution. Whereas the Panthers' project of societal restructuring provoked feelings of optimism in her as a child, today she identifies as a pessimist. She notes that while her mother remains confident that "if people pay attention, people will change the world," Abrams's vision for radical change dissolved in tandem with the Party.[356]

In addition to the general public's minimal knowledge about the Party's history, however, is the persistence of reactionary narratives, even as the past twenty years have experienced a rise in revisionist scholarship. Jenkins recalls one particularly memorable illustration of this in 2007. When the police recovered his car after it had been stolen, he went to downtown Oakland to sign the release form to recover the vehicle. As he exited the building he overheard two Oakland police officers talking about Huey Newton, and more specifically, referring to Newton as a "thug." Keith recalls feeling jarred not only by the officers' reference to Newton but additionally by the fact that nearly two decades after his passing, the Oakland Police Department still engaged in uncritical and condemnatory rhetoric concerning the former BPP leader.[357]

The persistence of negative discourse about the Party in the twenty-first century is in many ways a remnant of literature published in the 1990s that painted the organization and its leadership in less-than-flattering terms. One of the Panthers' most vocal critics, David Horowitz, published a series of essays in 1994 through which he historicized the BPP as "an organized street gang." That year, Horowitz collaborated with author, Hugh Pearson, to adapt the essays into a book titled, *The Shadow of the Panther*. Pearson's text reinforced Horowitz's narrative by locating Newton's alleged criminal activity at the

[356] Blake, *Children of the Movement*, 178-179.
[357] Keith Jenkins, interview by author, 19 February 2017, tape recording, Oakland, California.

center of the organization's story. According to scholars Joshua Bloom and Waldo Martin, major newspapers lauded the book as "a respectable history of the Party and its politics." The *New York Times* celebrated Pearson's text as "a richly detailed portrait of a movement," heralding it as one of the periodical's Notable Books of the Year 1994.[358]

It is important to note, however, that Jenkins's response to the officers' conversation went one step further. He remembers emphatically, "I came *this* close to starting one of the chants…'The revolution will come. Off the pigs! Time to pick up the gun. Off the pigs!'"[359] The chant was a popular unifying call among Party members during public demonstrations, and it was also one that Jenkins participated in as a child. "We were chanting that by the time I was five years old," he states.[360] In a 2017 interview, he reflected on the reason for his initial reaction to the police officers' conversation, stating, "that's what I knew," demonstrating Jenkins's continued belief in the organization's grassroots work as vital.[361]

Another encounter with uncritical historicizations of the Party occurred roughly twelve years ago when Keith's friend sought his assistance when her cousin's college professor described the Panthers "as just criminals basically doing nothing positive or useful." Jenkins's friend asked him to speak with her cousin "so that they could have a retort to their professor."[362] He reminded his friend of the Panthers' Free Breakfast for School Children Program, informing her that the program served as a precursor for current government-sponsored student meal programs. He added, "So are they spreading that news at breakfast time in every school that provides breakfast? Absolutely not…So

[358] Quoted in Bloom and Martin, *Black Against Empire*, 6-7.
[359] Keith Jenkins, interview by author, 19 February 2017, tape recording, Oakland, California.
[360] Keith Jenkins, interview by author, 19 February 2017, tape recording, Oakland, California.
[361] Keith Jenkins, interview by author, 27 January 2019, tape recording, Oakland, California.
[362] Keith Jenkins, interview by author, 27 January 2019, tape recording, Oakland, California.

what would I like people to know? That their kid is getting fed because of the Panthers."[363]

To a large degree, Jenkins attributes persistent public misconceptions about the BPP to the mainstream media's production of skewed and false representations of the Black Power era, further highlighting the scarcity of people of color in high-powered positions within the media industry.[364] With African Americans constituting roughly thirteen percent of the U.S. population as a whole, their presence in the film and television industry remains far scarcer. Even in the twenty-first century, Jenkins contends, there persists a narrative of the BPP as a violently anti-cop organization. He identifies this particular historicization as problematic on two levels. On the one hand, he asserts, the Panthers

> weren't anti-cop, they were anti-foot-in-neck…People don't understand that…if somebody punches you in the stomach every day, you just want them to stop punching you in the stomach every day…And if it requires a shotgun to inspire you to stop punching me in the stomach, then guess what? Somebody's gonna go buy a shotgun.[365]

Here, Jenkins alludes to the community control tactics studied by the Party's founding members even before the formation of the BPP itself. By early 1966, Oakland's escalating rate of anti-black police violence catalyzed Newton's and Seale's interest in the self-determination politics of black radical projects in other regions of California and the country. The soon-to-be founders of the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense (BPPSD) found great inspiration in the tactics employed by the Community Alert Patrol (CAP) in Watts following the 1965 rebellion, in their efforts to help mitigate the city's police violence. Like the CAP organizers, Newton, Seale, and Little (Lil') Bobby

[363] Keith Jenkins, interview by author, 27 January 2019, tape recording, Oakland, California.
[364] Keith Jenkins, interview by author, 27 January 2019, tape recording, Oakland, California.
[365] Keith Jenkins, interview by author, 27 January 2019, tape recording, Oakland, California.

Hutton—the BPPSD's first recruit—formed caravans to monitor police conduct in Oakland's African American neighborhoods. Unlike those in Watts, however, the Oakland caravans would be armed.[366]

Jenkins avers that such media portrayals of the Party preclude a more nuanced understanding of the BPP as an anti-racist group. The group's original demands underscored the need for African American equity in key the domains of social, economic, and political life. The BPP Ten Point Program enumerated the need for basic provisions for black America--which the organization identified as a colony within a racially oppressive nation—including adequate housing, employment, and quality education, alongside its call for an end to anti-black police violence.[367] To the chagrin of Jenkins, the public's historical association of the Oakland group with resistance against law enforcement has continued to obscure the Party's history of grassroots organizing.

Even while Jenkins has, at certain moments, sustained a connection to his mother's past through informal conversations with friends about the history of the BPP, in other ways, he has exercised deliberateness in how he engages with this past, at times distancing himself from it. On the topic of raising social awareness of the Party's history, he admits that he tends not to initiate these conversations. He states, "This is not a topic

[366] Bloom and Martin, *Black Against Empire*, 39, 45. As aspiring law school students, Seale and Newton engaged their knowledge of the U.S. constitution when witnessing excessive and unlawful police force as a method of holding police officers accountable. After the Party's official establishment the caravans were ultimately replaced by other actions that similarly focused on police accountability, such as news coverage of police misconduct in the BPP's weekly newspaper, the *Black Panther*. Finally, Robert Williams and the anti-colonial work of the Revolutionary Action Committee in North Carolina served as ideological inspiration for the BPP's early politics of self-defense against Oakland's police force. More locally, Newton and Seale also drew from the sartorial style promoted by Oakland activists, Mark Comfort and Curtis Lee Baker. Young organizers of Oakland's traditional civil rights movement, Comfort and Baker donned black berets and black clothing while encouraging local youths to challenge police violence. See Bloom and Martin, *Black Against Empire*, 33-34.

[367] See the Party's original Ten Point Program in Bloom and Martin, *Black Against Empire*, 70-72. The organization revised the document over time.

that I broach in public," adding, "Most people's minds just can't handle…intelligent conversation."[368] In this sense, he suggests that in an era characterized by a notable shift away from the political radicalism characteristic of the 1960s and early 1970s, the average American lacks a basic knowledge of the language and concepts that stood at the core of the Black Power Movement. As his comments suggest, he has not tasked himself with the role of educating the public about the movement's foundations, arguing that such a history is outside the scope of what a younger generation of Americans could imagine.

Section Two: Mary Williams

In fall 2011, after nearly thirty years of living hundreds to thousands of miles outside of Oakland's city limits, Mary Williams decided to reunite with her biological family and the city in which she was born. From the age of sixteen, after having been adopted by Jane Fonda—a well-known actress, philanthropist, and ally of the Black Panther Party—Williams spent her years as a young adult out of touch with her birth family, even while anecdotes of her childhood and her parents' service in the BPP remained clear in her memory. In 2013, while in her mid-forties, Williams recounts her unique life history in her memoir, *The Lost Daughter: A Memoir*.[369] In vivid detail, she outlines her transition from a childhood enveloped by the excitement and unpredictability characteristic of Panther "pads" in the 1970s, to her self-described semi-reclusive adulthood today.

While Williams's memoir is not an explicit meditation on her childhood or her family's Black Power legacy, it is an important source for more fully understanding the

[368] Keith Jenkins, interview by author, 27 January 2019, tape recording, Oakland, California.
[369] Mary Williams, *The Lost Daughter: A Memoir* (New York: Blue Rider Press, 2013).

range of experiences of children of BPP activists, and the enduring effects of the socio-economic ills of the 1970s across three generations. Whereas Jenkins offers a more direct reflection on the role of Oakland itself in shaping his development into adulthood, I use Williams's text as a source for providing a more nuanced discussion of the personal histories of this second generation, highlighting, where possible, her connection to the story of 1970s black radicalism.

Williams wastes little time in introducing herself to her reader, painting a picture of her current life and bringing the reader up to speed on some of the most dramatic moments of her recent years, all in the memoir's first three paragraphs. With no hesitation, she recounts that "six years ago, I quit my job, left my fiancé and sold my three-bedroom home in Atlanta, abandoning a life of materialism and attachment to pursue one that included solitude, travel, and adventure."[370] Now in her mid-forties, she adds, her time is divided between employment opportunities with federal parks across the country, as well as non-profit work. As for her downtime, she "enjoys the self-imposed exile in my tiny Arizona condo, happiest when left alone to hike, read, or watch YouTube."[371]

Williams was born in Oakland on October 13, 1967 as Mary Lawanna.[372] By this time, both of her parents were active members of the BPP. Her mother and namesake, Mary Williams, cooked meals at the local community center during Party meetings and sold copies of the *Black Panther*.[373] At the time of Mary's birth, her father, Louis Randolph Williams, had been volunteering his time as a member of the Party's armed

[370] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 1.
[371] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 1.
[372] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 3.
[373] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 4.

citizens' patrol and in 1970 rose to the rank of captain within the BPP's paramilitaristic hierarchy.[374] In April of that year, while on duty with the armed patrol, Louis and two fellow Panthers witnessed a group of police officers arresting four African Americans on suspicion of marijuana use. When three Party members ambushed the officers, thirty backup law enforcement officials were called in. When Louis and his two friends fled the scene, a high-speed car chase ensued throughout downtown Oakland. Mary's father was ultimately captured and charged with assault and intent to murder. For the next seven years, Mary would come to know her father through family visits to Soledad State Prison until his release in 1977.[375]

It is important to note that Mary Williams was born at a particular moment in the BPP's lifespan when J. Edgar Hoover and his Federal Bureau of Investigation intensified their surveillance and regulation of the Black Power Movement. And like Jenkins, Williams's young age did not always insulate her from the threat of police attacks on the organization as a whole. In fact, one of her earliest memories involved a turbulent Party confrontation with the Oakland Police Department in 1970 when Mary was three years old. She recalls hiding in the basement of a Party member's house amidst sounds of breaking glass, shouting, and heavy footfalls coming from the floor above. During the disturbance, a woman unknown to Mary—presumably a Panther—sat cradling Williams while attempting to provide a sense of comfort to the group of children present at the time.[376] In writing about the raid over forty years later, Williams describes her memory of the experience as one devoid of feelings of fear. She adds, "I actually liked the uncertainty, the presence of bodies in the damp darkness, the feeling of tenseness in the

[374] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 4.
[375] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 6, 32.
[376] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 5-6.

air," concluding, "It's a good memory."[377] On the one hand, we might extrapolate from Williams's recollection that many children raised in the Party felt a sense of insularity and protection by the organization, even amidst a precarious and hostile external environment. At the same time, her memory of not feeling scared, as well as her account of the moment's uncertainty and tenseness as an almost exciting experience may also hint at the group's effectiveness in shielding children and youth from the realities of COINTELPRO's mission.

Particularly at a time of the FBI's amplified crackdown on the BPP, it was not uncommon for members to withhold information from their children about the Party's vulnerable existence as a way of both providing a sense of security among young people, and to help prevent the spread of classified information about the Party's internal affairs beyond the organization's network. For some children, then, hushed conversations among adults translated into vivid imaginings about Party developments. Williams illustrates this case when describing her response as a child in the late 1960s upon hearing whispers about certain members going underground: "all kinds of crazy images would form in my head. I'd daydream of Panther members living in candlelit dirt tunnels, shivering in the dark, feeding on dangling root vegetables like a frightened Bugs Bunny hiding out from Elmer Fudd."[378]

The varying degrees of knowledge among Panther children concerning organizational stability mirrors the historical dynamics of other groups of the American Left. Shapiro and Kaplan point to fear as a common motivator among American communists who chose to withhold potentially harmful knowledge from younger family

[377] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 6.
[378] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 6.

members. Other leftists, however, recognized full transparency as an important part of their broader political project. In her writings at the apogee of the Cold War, one of the most prominent women leaders of the Communist Party, Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, encouraged Party families to be open with their children about the position of the CP within national politics. She posited seemingly protective measures as detrimental to young people and to the larger cause, as "an excuse to divorce children from all progressive ideas and to deprive them of all antidotes to the daily poison poured into them."[379]

For some children, a lack of awareness about the gravity of state efforts to curb the BPP's growth extended into other dimensions of family relations. In the first few years of Mary's father's incarceration at Soledad State Prison in the early 1970s, her mother would organize regular visits to the prison with Mary and her five siblings. For Mary, the realization of her father's imprisonment and the family visits to see him afforded her a sense of certainty, stability, and consistency. She notes that learning of her father's imprisonment "came as a relief" for her, after wondering for some time "if my father, who seemed to be around the house less and less, was actually underground."[380] She continues, "Prison seemed like a fine place to me. I knew exactly where my daddy was at all times."[381] For Mary, then, the regularity and predictability of these visits obscured her knowledge of the destructive implications of her father's confinement at Soledad.

COINTELPRO's all-out attack on radical political dissidence in the 1970s had devastating effects on the families involved in the era's insurgent movements, and the

[379] Taken from Kaplan and Shapiro, *Red Diapers*, 6.
[380] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 6.
[381] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 6-7.

Williams family was no exception. By the 1970s, the rise in incarceration, exile, and state-sanctioned executions of Black Panthers created insurmountable personal and economic pressures for many Panther families, often times leading to the disintegration of biological family units. As the sole caretaker of five children by 1970, Mary's mother found herself financially strapped. In part to alleviate her monthly housing payments she moved her family into shared Panther housing and took on new roles within the Party, including cooking at the Panther headquarters and for the local Free Breakfast for School Children Program.[382] Ultimately, however, her husband's incarceration coupled with the lack of a steady income among other factors took a toll of Mary's mother and by the early 1970s the two divorced.[383] In 1973 she decided to withdraw from the BPP altogether.[384] Mary would not see her father for another seven years.[385]

As Mary's mother acquired work as a welder, Mary's father, Louis Randolph, maintained his ties to the Party and their children continued their education at the Oakland Community School.[386] In 1974 at the age of eleven, Deborah, the eldest of the six Williams children became the school's first graduate and was named mistress of ceremonies at that year's graduation. Standing adjacent to the school's director, Ericka Huggins, Deborah delivered her speech from behind the podium, announcing her appreciation to her teachers and staff for preparing her to overcome "the evils of the racist public school system" where she would complete her education.[387] In a *Black Panther* article covering the school's inaugural graduation, Deborah was quoted as

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[382] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 8.
[383] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 26.
[384] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 8.
[385] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 32. Louis Randolph Williams was incarcerated at Soledad from 1970 to 1977. Mary did not see him for the majority of this time.
[386] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 8.
[387] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 29.

declaring that "One of the most important things I have learned at the Institute is what freedom means."[388] Over the next three years three more of Mary's sisters would graduate from the Oakland School, yet, as Williams notes, "none with the fanfare and promise of the first."[389]

Recall that as the 1970s came to a close, the Black Panther Party faced mounting internal and external pressures resulting in a decline in the Party's membership, and shifts in the way local communities related to their organizational chapters. Like many children of Panther activists, Mary and her siblings attempted to make sense of their fragmented knowledge of the organization's weakening and consequently, their family's changing relationship to the group. For Mary, the years of 1976 and 1977 brought with them drastic changes in her family dynamics and her own relationship to the Party. Now at the age of nine, she recalls that by fall 1976 she "noticed an increase in the amount of whispered conversations between Party members."[390] When she quickly realized that the discussions entailed "Grown Folks' Business," Williams resorted to a range of tactics, including listening under open windows or pretending to be engrossed in a book while her mother conversed with fellow Panthers, in order to gather and discern as much information as possible. Her ploys were relatively successful. She relays, "From what I gathered from stolen bits of conversation I hoarded like a pack rat, the Party was under a lot of external and internal stress."[391]

The organizational strife seeped into other realms of Mary's familial life and by 1977, translated into drastic life changes for the now ten-year-old. Upon Louis

[388] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 29-30.
[389] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 30.
[390] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 38.
[391] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 38.

Randolph's release from Soledad State Prison, Mary met her father for the first time in seven years.[392] Perhaps it was no surprise to her that with the end of his incarceration, his involvement in the Party declined.[393] While Mary's mother had already relinquished her membership four years prior, by the late 1970s she effectively cut off all ties to the group as she witnessed many of its members openly contribute to a pattern of sexual abuse against women by male leaders, which was by this time exacerbated by some members' descent into drug and alcohol addiction. Williams relays, "With five female children to care for, my mother turned her back on an organization that was created to protect and empower but in the end would leave many of its members traumatized, disillusioned and beholden to a new master that was slowly taking over the bodies and minds of the community: cheap cocaine."[394]

Even as Mary witnessed signs of the Party's deterioration alongside her parents' respective departures from the group by 1977, she could not have predicted her own removal from the Panther school and the community in which she had been raised. Similar to Keith Jenkins's own withdrawal from the Oakland Community School, Williams's final day came abruptly and without warning. She recounts the moment, while sitting in the middle of math class when school director, Ericka Huggins "stuck her head in the room and beckoned me to join her in the hall."[395] With no explanation, according to Williams, Huggins handed her a brown sack lunch, informed her that she was not to return to the OCS, and sent her on her way. The disoriented ten-year-old proceeded to walk through the campus gate. After turning around to take a final look at her school she

[392] Williams, *The Los Daughter*, 32.
[393] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 40.
[394] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 40.
[395] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 40.

opened the brown paper bag and one by one threw its contents over the fence before running home.[396]

Not unlike Jenkins's experience, Mary's transition into the public school down the street brought with it a handful of challenges, and consequently, a moment of reflection about her own identity, her family's past, and her future outside the Party. As mentioned earlier, up until this time the BPP played a prominent role in how she understood herself and her surrounding community. She asserts, "Despite the unrest that was brewing, I never believed I would leave the Party. It was all I knew and had become a strong part of my identity."[397] As an OCS student, she remembers how her father's political prisoner status served as a badge of honor for her, and she sometimes proudly informed her classmates of his service to the Party and local community, and his subsequent unjust fate as a prisoner. In step with her four older sisters, she "fully expected to be the fifth person in my family to graduate from the Intercommunal Youth Institute."[398]

Williams describes her new status as a public school student as nothing short of jarring, upending and difficult. On the one hand, she found the new curriculum repetitive, unchallenging, and devoid of the types of hands-on activities she had become accustomed to at the OCS. Whereas her OCS classes often involved field trips and outdoor explorations, she found little in the way of community learning opportunities in

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[396] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 40.
[397] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 40.
[398] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 40. By this time the Intercommunal Youth Institute had changed its name to the Oakland Community School. Honor in party membership serves as a common theme in many Red Baby narratives, including that of Bettina Aptheker, the daughter of historian and labor activist, Herbert Aptheker. Raised in Brooklyn, New York, she recalls spending evenings at Camp Wyandot—a children's camp for allies of the CPUSA—at the age of nine or ten, huddled in bunk beds "comparing parental status, outranking each other." Bettina Aptheker, "The Weight of Inheritance," *Red Diapers*, 283-284.

Oakland's public school system. Her new science class was limited to book-based learning and classroom discussions alone.[399]

On a more personal level, the incongruence of Mary's self-ascribed Panther identity as it existed outside the organization's social network compounded the challenges of intellectual boredom. For the first time in her life, the signifiers of her Party affiliation and working-class status became a liability. She outlines the harsh transition from "being loved by my teachers and respected by my classmates to being bullied…for being a Panther…"[400] Williams had grown to develop a sense of pride in her family's activism and involvement in the Black Power organization. Yet, her public school teachers and peers alike reacted with hostility and disproval after she relayed her excitement about her Panther legacy and her father's sacrifice as a "revolutionary prisoner" at Soledad State Prison.[401] "Instead of being impressed, the teachers looked at me with pity in their eyes and my classmates teased me for being the daughter of a jailbird," she remembers.[402] Even at the level of aesthetics, in a sea of girls with relaxed hair, Mary's afro and second-hand clothes became additional targets of ridicule by her girl classmates, and reason enough for the boys at the school to distance themselves from her.[403]

In an important moment in *The Lost Daughter*, the author illustrates the dissonant experience of navigating her two disparate and seemingly incompatible worlds. She explains, "Though my new school was just a few blocks from the Panther school, it might as well have been [on] another continent," likening her experience of entering public

[399] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 40-41.
[400] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 43-44.
[401] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 43.
[402] Williams, *The Lost daughter*, 43.
[403] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 41.

school to "culture shock," a feeling of "disequilibrium."[404] Ultimately she admits, "I didn't know how to interact in the community outside of the Panthers…I'd lived a sheltered life in the Party."[405] Through her testimony Williams underscores a contradiction prevalent in the narratives of more than a few children of Black Panthers, that is, a feeling of separation from the same communities for which the Party mobilized.

The antagonism embedded in Williams's description of her intersecting political and public lives is not an aberration in the stories of those born into the American Left. For many young members of leftist families, adolescence unfolded in dichotomous ways, through feelings of normalcy and difference, honor and fear, as well as pride and resentment. In many cases, public and private life coexisted like oil and water. In his memoir, *Red Diaper Baby: A Boyhood in the Age of McCarthyism*, James Laxer elucidates in intimate detail a childhood in which the fight to abolish class hierarchy was life, a righteous and necessary world project. Born on December 22, 1941 to two active members of Canada's Labour-Progressive Party (LPP), Laxer spent his early life in the communist circles of Ottowa and later, Toronto. The lifestyle that came with party organizing was the central framework of his early years. His father's full-time commitment to the LPP, the author recalls, "did not strike me as peculiar. I was born in the midst of my parents' political struggles, and I accepted them as the way things were."[406] Like children of Panther activists, Laxer understood the daily routines of party organizing and the rituals of communist culture as a standard part of life.

At the same time, however, Laxer and other children of the Left underscore an early sense of virtue and nobility in their ties to the communist cause. On the one hand,

[404] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 43.
[405] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 43.
[406] Laxer, *Red Diaper Baby*, 22.

Laxer recalls his tendency to differentiate himself from his neighborhood peers. He admits that as a child he doubted his public school classmates read the news, noting that when the Korean War broke out in 1950, he and his younger brother joked that they "were the only kids on our street to cheer for North Korea."[407] While he recognized his peers to be generally uninformed of national and world events, by the age of six, Laxer spent evenings with his father learning about theories and practices of revolutionary politics.[408] He felt honor in his role as the eldest sibling and the seeming parental expectations attached to his position. He recalls, "I held a special place in this household where so much emphasis was put on changing the world. It was obvious that my father had selected me as his chief disciple."[409] At the time he understood that his father took their nightly conversations seriously "and that their goal was to enlist me in his struggle," concluding, "It swelled my head to feel I had such an important role to play."[410]

In remembering the pride with which he felt as an active participant in his family's activism, Laxer also points to the simultaneous challenges of navigating his imbibed radicalism in an unaccepting public environment. Not unlike the "disequilibrium" Mary Williams experienced upon entering Oakland's public schools, particularly when peers and teachers who questioned and at times criticized her ties to the Panthers, Laxer learned of his family's fragile position within the Toronto's larger social and political landscape. Describing his father as "our guide in an alien world," he further explains the significance of his parents in his childhood noting, "We were part of a tiny, vulnerable group, and they were my guardians against the dangers that threatened to close

[407] Laxer, *Red Diaper Baby*, 31.
[408] Laxer, *Red Diaper Baby*, 27.
[409] Laxer, *Red Diaper Baby*, 27.
[410] Laxer, *Red Diaper Baby*, 27.

in on us at any moment."[411] He describes honing his ability to perform as a way of balancing his dual identities and preventing the collision of the two worlds he inhabited. He notes, "The idea I got hold of first in life was that you had to be a different person in each of these worlds. My truest early talent was my unerring knack for sliding from role to role, playing each one with complete sincerity."[412]

In addition to the dramatic adjustment to Oakland's public school system, the late 1970s also marked major changes in Williams's family dynamics and personal life. In 1978 Mary's eldest sister, Deborah, now fifteen, ran away from home.[413] According to Mary, with Deborah's teenage years came full-on rebellion. Not long after, making matters worse, Deborah struggled with an addiction to crack cocaine. Tensions in the family were compounded when Mary's older sister, Donna, became a mother at the age of fifteen and soon after left Oakland to raise her daughter with her boyfriend in Texas.[414]Around this time, Mary's mother succumbed to her own battle with drugs and alcohol. One source of refuge came for Mary when her third sister, Teresa, earned an early admissions scholarship to the University of California, Berkeley. Mary remembers on occasion visiting Teresa with their sister, Louise. According to Mary, the campus visits provided temporary relief from the turbulence at home.[415]

With the ensuing family divisions Mary could not have predicted that her life would assume a new direction, outside of Oakland for the first time. In the summer of 1979 Landon Williams, Mary's uncle and Black Panther Party member, visited Mary's mother to invite Mary, Louise, and their brother to attend the Laurel Springs Children's

[411] Laxer, *Red Diaper Baby*, 2.
[412] Laxer, *Red Diaper Baby*, 5.
[413] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 54.
[414] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 54-55.
[415] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 56.

Camp in Santa Barbara. The camp was owned by Jane Fonda and her husband, Tom Hayden—both friends of Landon's and BPP allies.[416] The summer camp exposed children and youth of varied races and socio-economic backgrounds to theater arts and self-esteem-building activities. After Fonda approached Landon with the idea of inviting a handful of Panther children to attend the camp, Landon agreed.[417] Unknown to Mary at the time, that summer would mark the beginning of many visits to southern California, a life-long relationship with Fonda, and a young adulthood surrounded by the white Left.

Between her summers in southern California, Williams maintained communication with her camp counselors and Fonda, as the tensions within her own family continued. Through letter correspondence, Williams relayed to Fonda the details of her family upheaval, and further confided that when she was fifteen she was raped by a man in Oakland after responding to his newspaper advertisement, which called for local actors for an upcoming play.[418] Fonda responded with an offer of support: if Williams could raise her school grades over the next academic year she would be welcomed to live with Jane and her family in Santa Monica for as long as Mary needed. Fonda additionally encouraged Williams to inform her family of her rape. Williams agreed to the outlined terms, and over the ensuing year the two continued to send letters back and forth. Williams informed her mother of her plans to move to Los Angeles in a year's time and live with Fonda. In the summer of 1984, at the age of 16, Mary left the city in which she grew up and headed south.[419]

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[416] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 63.
[417] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 63.
[418] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 81-84.
[419] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 85.

Upon Mary's arrival in Los Angeles, Fonda wasted little time in identifying a school in which to enroll Williams. Initially, Happy Valley Boarding School, located midway between Santa Monica and Santa Barbara appeared promising. When Williams complained to Fonda that she felt academically unchallenged, however, Fonda transferred her to Santa Monica Community College (SMCC), where she would receive her high school diploma in the summer of 1985 at the age of seventeen.[420] The following fall she began courses at SMCC as a college freshman, ultimately transferring to Pitzer College, a small liberal arts school located in Claremont, roughly an hour outside of Los Angeles.[421]

The mid-1980s marked an important moment in Williams's personal, social, and political development. On the one hand, her growing familiarity with Jane Fonda and her family necessarily exposed Williams to some of the same political causes she had grown up around as a child of Oakland's Black Panther community. Williams soon learned that the prominent actress was also a vocal critic of the United States' participation in the Vietnam War, a lesson that was at times made manifest when Vietnam veterans would picket the production of her films in protest of her anti-war activities.[422] For decades Fonda's tours through conflict zones such as North Vietnam sparked national controversy.[423] In extreme cases, on more than one occasion Fonda received death threats for what many of her contemporaries deemed as anti-American behavior.[424] As Williams—who by this point Jane referred to as "daughter"—witnessed the heightened security that such threats provoked, Fonda continued with her work, relatively unfazed.

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[420] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 101, 104.
[421] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 105.
[422] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 114.
[423] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 130.
[424] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 114.

She states, "I admired her fearlessness and her refusal to let her detractors disrupt her life."[425]

Living with Fonda and her successive romantic partners further exposed Williams to the workings of electoral politics and philanthropy. When Mary began living with Jane in 1984, the actress was married to Tom Hayden, a nationally recognized social and political activist. As president of the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) in 1962, Hayden co-authored the organization's Port Huron Statement, a political manifesto calling for participatory democracy, reforms within the Democratic Party, and a revised national Cold War defense strategy. The statement would catalyze what activists and academics alike would term the "New Left." Eventually, Hayden transitioned his work into the arena of electoral politics, and when Williams moved into his and Fonda's home in 1984, Hayden had been elected to a position as a California state assemblyman.[426] Coincidentally, Hayden's office was located in the state capitol, the precise building that made national headlines seventeen years earlier when thirty members of the Black Panther Party stormed its concrete steps in protest of the proposed Mulford Act, a bill that ultimately successfully banned the carrying of loaded firearms in public spaces.[427] On the occasions when Williams and her stepbrother, Troy, visited Hayden in his office, they spent their time playing Frisbee in adjacent hallways—a scene far removed from the Black Power zeitgeist that had filled the same building's corridors less than two decades prior..[428]

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[425] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 114.
[426] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 98.
[427] Martin and Bloom, *Black Against Empire*, 57-58.
[428] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 98.

The end of Jane Fonda's marriage to Tom Hayden in 1989 led to changes in Williams's adoptive family, introductions to new father figures, and exposure to more philanthropic forms of civic engagement.[429] In 1991, Fonda married philanthropist and media mogul, Ted Turner, a marriage that would expose Williams to new iterations of societal benevolence.[430] Mary recounts that on the one hand, Turner supported Fonda in her anti-war activism, and on occasion, publicly demonstrated his own opposition to the proliferation of nuclear weapons.[431] Further, his charitable practices with foundations such as the Captain Planet Foundation, coupled with Fonda's work in the non-profit sector, left an impression on Williams, intensifying her desire to engage in the same type of work.[432]

In looking back on her life in southern California, Williams makes a telling comparison between her adoptive and biological families. She underscores that while "The Black Panthers, the Fondas and the Turners are as different as families can be, they all had one crucial thing in common: they were not shy about acting on their political beliefs."[433] To be sure, the BPP's doctrine of anti-racism and anti-capitalism—campaigns in line with their visions for a complete restructuring of the state itself—necessarily situated the Party far from the principle of philanthropy as a sustainable solution to wealth inequality. Further, even while all three groups vocally opposed U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War, the Panthers' anti-war stance was firmly rooted in a tradition of anti-colonialism. In making sense of Fonda's and Turner's anti-war politics, Williams

[429] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 115-116.
[430] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 125.
[431] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 130.
[432] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 128-129.
[433] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 130.

contends, "For them, the highest form of patriotism was dissent."[434] Even with their ideological variance, however, Mary insists that on a broad level, her Panther family and her adoptive parents similarly fought "in the spirit of trying to make the world a better place."[435]

Even before her exposure to the charitable efforts of Fonda and Turner, Williams had already been thinking critically about the nature of structural inequalities within the United States, and the implications of U.S. foreign policy abroad. She details one particularly enlightening moment in her ideological development while enrolled in a sociology course her senior year at Pitzer College around 1989. The professor, whom Williams describes as "equally radical" to her adoptive parents, had been born and raised in East Los Angeles and organized field trips to the region in order to expose his students first-hand to the area's wealth disparity. During one perhaps extreme fieldtrip, Williams and her classmates slept overnight amongst the houseless population in downtown Los Angeles's infamous skid row. From the experience, students were to gain a "real-world understanding of the role of the Reagan administration's policies that played in increasing the nation's homelessness."[436] The exercise undoubtedly left a mark on Williams. In addition to expanding her understanding of domestic issues, the course also provided her with greater insight into the "oppression of women and minorities and the misery derived from American foreign policy in other parts of the world, like Latin America, Asia, and Africa."[437]

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[434] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 130.
[435] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 130.
[436] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 130.
[437] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 130.

Her curiosity about the limits and contradictions of U.S. democracy continued as she neared the completion of her bachelor's degree at the close of the decade. By this time, she recounts, her "disdain for the nation's domestic and foreign policy had reached a high point."[438] After the two-term presidency of Reagan, only to be followed by George Bush Sr.'s Republican agenda, Mary recalls unequivocally, "I'd had enough."[439] At this point, she remembers, "I started wearing dashikis, head wraps and a huge leather necklace shaped like the continent of Africa. The Michael Jackson poster came down and the Marcus Garvey poster went up."[440] Coupled with her developing Black Cultural Nationalist sensibilities, and perhaps with an ironic nod to the Black Panther Party, she enrolled in a course on African American literature and was soon consumed with classics such as Eldridge Cleaver's *Soul on Ice*, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, the writings of Langston Hughes, Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*, and Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*.[441]

These courses, perhaps bolstered by Williams's familial proximity to community activism, compounded her sense of disillusionment about the state of American capitalism, ultimately leading to her desire to leave the country, perhaps for good. She admits that by the end of her senior year at Pitzer College, she "entertained the idea of renouncing my U.S. citizenship and moving full-time to an African nation."[442] For her, anywhere in Africa would suffice. And although she had never set foot outside of North America, her idea of what lay ahead was clear: "I envisioned myself hanging out with African poets and intellectuals, standing on the shoulders of their ancestors who reached

[438] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 130-131.
[439] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 131.
[440] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 131.
[441] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 131.
[442] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 131.

back in time before maps, nations, language, race, and Ronald Reagan."[443] Thus, she enrolled in the school's study abroad program and decided to carry out the final months of her college career in Morocco.[444]

Rather than reinforce her yearning for an ex-pat life in Africa, the months she spent in Morocco undermined her preconceived notions about the continent and her earlier held visions about her own relationship to it. Further, her long-term stay with a host family in Rabat amplified her awareness of her African American racial identity, and paradoxically so. She relays that in a sea of olive-skinned Moroccans, her darker complexion led to her host mother's expressed disappointment about not receiving "a real American" host student.[445] To her chagrin, Williams realized that the conflation of American citizenship with "whiteness" was not solely a U.S. phenomenon. If the skepticism about her self-prescribed identity frustrated Williams, her realizations about the levels of poverty in Morocco bolstered her desire to return to the U.S., and according to Williams, "reignited my patriotism." She remembers that by the end of the trip, "I was proud to be an American again."[446]

Even while the six months spent in Rabat complicated her understanding of her own relationship to Africa, and afforded her a new appreciation for the United States, Williams's return to California and subsequent completion of her bachelor's degree in history and literature marked only the beginning of a handful of experiences abroad, particularly in the education and non-profit sectors. In the weeks leading up to her graduation from Pitzer College around 1989, Williams secured a position as a program

[443] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 131.
[444] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 131.
[445] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 133.
[446] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 134-135.

counselor at a homeless shelter in the Ocean Park Community Center in Santa Monica.[447] Her specific duties at the center involved working with houseless women battling mental illnesses, a career she continued for two years.[448] In 1991 she completed a certification program in order to teach English. With new teaching credentials she returned to Rabat to work as an English teacher at the American Language School.[449] Though her time at the school lasted only six months, Williams remained in Rabat for a year and a half. With the help of Fonda, Williams transitioned into an internship program with the United Nations Education, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in the same region, which she held until 1993.[450]

Both experiences in Rabat proved ephemeral, and ultimately led Williams yearning to return to the United States. She recalls that while the teaching position and internship challenged her in different ways, neither dampened her desire to continue working in Africa. These plans would be put on hold, however. Upon her departure from UNESCO in 1993, Williams decided to return to school to further her education. Before leaving Morocco altogether, she applied for and was accepted into a master's program in public health at Boston University.[451] Her return to the U.S. in the early 1990s would bring with it new and intimate realizations about the implications of socio-economic inequality in her home country and her hometown.

Just days after her return to the United States, while on a brief summer vacation in Montana, Williams's transition back into her American routine would be jarred by the chilling news of her sister Deborah's passing. Her sister's violent murder in Oakland

[447] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 145.
[448] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 142, 144.
[449] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 145-148.
[450] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 149.
[451] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 149.

represented a culmination of a life of economic hardships confounded by the precarious nature of sex work. Deborah had been a single mother of three children, and for years her income was consumed by her chronic battle with drug addiction.[452] In the subsequent pages of Mary's description of her sister's tragic end, however, she returns the reader to Deborah's achievements as a student of the BPP's Oakland alternative school. Amidst an adulthood of financial hardships, Mary highlights, Deborah carried with her the *Black Panther* newspaper article documenting the speech she delivered in 1974 as a member of the Oakland Community School's inaugural class. Yellowed and tattered by years of Deborah's homelessness, the article, Mary writes, "stayed carefully wrapped in plastic."[453] Williams's reference to the Panthers' alternative school as a significant institution in her sister's life exemplifies the lasting impact that the organization's community service programs had on its beneficiaries. Even while Deborah struggled to overcome the micro-level effects of structural inequality—including inadequate housing, employment, and social welfare at the macro-level—she would not forget the education she received through the BPP's community service programs.

Not long after her time in Oakland for her sister's funeral services, Williams returned to her pursuit of graduate education, initiating the Public Health master's program at Boston University. While Mary's continued interest in international development work prompted her to pursue a graduate degree, her subsequent stint as an employee with the Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta led her to more critically think about some of the major systemic social problems within the United States. Her position at the CDC from 1993 to 1994 presented a mixed bag of experiences. On the one hand,

[452] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 206.
[453] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 207.

the work was enjoyable. However, she remembers feeling "frustrated by the government's apathy toward gun regulation," which she believed "was contributing to our nation's death and injury rates, particularly in poor communities and communities of color."[454]

Her growing concern about America's epidemic gun-related violence, however, did not divert her long-time interest in international development, however. Upon completing her year-long position at the CDC in 1995, Williams fulfilled her ambition of returning to Africa, this time carrying on projects in Tanzania with various governmental and non-governmental agencies, including the United Nations. Through her affiliation with the UN she learned to speak Swahili.[455] She left sub-Saharan Africa with the belief that self-help is the most effective method of combating poverty. She explicates that, "In the end I came to believe that many of the world's ills cannot be solved solely by outsiders who believe that their wealth and degrees make them the most qualified."[456] She advocates instead that wealthy nations and individuals "use their resources to empower people to help themselves."[457] While it is unclear whether her early exposure to the Panthers' Black Nationalist posture influenced her conception of economic survival, Williams's description echoes the Party's firm belief in collective self-determination.

International development work has proven a mainstay in Mary Williams's professional pursuits over the past two decades. In 2000 Williams returned to Atlanta and in the coming years founded her own agency in Atlanta intended to help with the transition of Sudanese civil war refugees. Established in the summer of 2001, The Lost

[454] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 153.
[455] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 171.
[456] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 177.
[457] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 177.

Boys Foundation worked as a mechanism within a larger effort by the U.S. federal government to accommodate the nearly 20,000 refugees who had been orphaned and displaced by the country's ongoing civil war. Atlanta became a key destination among the 38 U.S. cities that the U.S. government assigned as settling points for the roughly 3,800 refugees to cross U.S. national borders.[458] Specifically, The Lost Boys Foundation in Atlanta worked to raise awareness about the impact of the war on the country's youngest generation, while also securing scholarships and other resources for the children and youth. Exemplifying her belief in the efficacy of self-help, Williams ultimately sought to transfer the organization to its beneficiaries after they had completed college degrees.[459] She concludes, "The worst thing I could envision was for these young men to survive all the horrors of war only to fall through the cracks in America."[460]

Her work in Atlanta with The Lost Boys Foundation continued for several years, but by 2007 Williams's proclivity for travel resurfaced, this time, with new motivations. Nearly fifteen years had transpired since the passing of her sister, Deborah Williams. Now in her forties, Mary found herself increasingly contemplating her relationships with her adoptive and biological families.[461] Not fully ready to reunite with her relatives in Oakland, she decided to allow herself time to reflect on her personal relationships, in part, by combining her affinity for science, travel and nature. Her new adventure would relocate her to the furthest geographic distance from North America she yet traveled: Antarctica. For five months she worked with a team of scientists as part of the United States Antarctic Program. Her tasks involved assembling survival bags and scheduling

[458] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 186.
[459] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 188-189.
[460] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 189.
[461] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 209.

training sessions that focused on strategies for navigating the continent's harsh tundra to help the researchers prepare for their fieldwork.[462] And while the geographical distance situated the Bay Area native far beyond the scope of the Panthers' historical legacy, the organization's literature remained in her thoughts during her five months "on the world's highest, driest, windiest and coldest continent."[463] She recounts amusing Jane Fonda with her monthly email updates, which she titled "Soul on Ice," a humorous nod to Eldridge Cleaver's 1968 national best-selling memoir of the same name.[464] Yet, the same literature that had significantly influenced her ideological development in college would be insufficient to comfort her through the continent's nearing winter climate. January 2008 marked the end of her Antarctic adventures.[465]

The following years brought with them an amalgamation of additional travel—this time, within the United States—personal reflection, and a renewed focus on her birth city. Between 2008 and 2011, Mary explored the far more inhabitable natural terrain of the American west coast, North Dakota, and Alaska.[466] These explorations culminated in Williams's resolution to return home. In the final chapters of her memoir, she explains that by that moment in her life, "After years obsessively traveling everywhere, except Oakland, the pull of home became a little too strong to resist."[467]

Returning Home: Specters, Legacy, and a New Generation of Youth

[462] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 209, 211-213.
[463] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 211.
[464] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 216.
[465] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 231.
[466] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 232.
[467] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 232.

The final pages of *The Lost Daughter* offer a return to 1970s Oakland and the author's attempt to make sense of its vestiges across three generations. In many ways, we might understand Mary Williams's self-proclaimed homecoming for a family reunion in March 2012, and her narration of this moment, as a story of convergence. On the one hand, the co-constructions of history and memory saliently unfold. The ways in which she attempts to make sense of her relationships with her biological family—most notably her mother and father—and their parental pasts are perhaps the most telling illustrations of this process. In the most literal sense, the two realms of her childhood intersect in book's epilogue when for the first time, Williams's biological mother and namesake meets Williams's adoptive mother, Jane Fonda. In these final pages we see the author detail the introduction among her two mothers—one tied to her coming-of-age years and the other representing the familial legacy into which she was born—as she claims both figures as shapers of her current self.

On another level, in ending her memoir the author proffers the simultaneous narrative tropes of continuity and change. Most poignantly this becomes evident through Williams's reflections on the Bay Area today—both the transformations in landscape the city has endured and its residual socio-economic trauma. Less explicitly the themes of change and continuity appear in the author's discussion of the third generation of Williams children; that is, the daughters and sons of her siblings. While she posits no explicit connection between the life trajectories of her nieces and nephews and the Black Power movement, she importantly and tellingly highlights how their lives have been shaped by their parents' experiences as long-time Oakland residents. To Williams, the

livelihoods of this generational cohort can in part be understood through their temporal ties to the city's history of urban decline, particularly in the decades succeeding the Black Power Movement.

Williams's return to Oakland and her reconnection with her all but estranged family began in 2011 while employing social media to contact a childhood friend and former Oakland Community School classmate, Neomi Banks. The two women met as student peers during the school's heyday in the mid-1970s. According to Williams, their nascent friendship developed over daily hot breakfasts, "followed by calisthenics, classes and afterschool activities" sponsored by the Party.[468]After both families split from the Party, the girls maintained their connection, which ultimately grew into what Williams's remembers as her first genuine friendship.[469]

In addition to Williams's reciprocated interest in reconnecting with her former classmate, Banks, the conveniences of social media technologies also served as avenues to reconnect with her Bay Area family. After quickly learning that Banks had maintained an online connection to her sister, Teresa Williams, Mary easily followed suit. "Just like that" she explains, "we closed the void."[470] Mary learned that the Oakland Community School graduate ultimately pursued a career in education and was now working as a college professor. In her personal life, Teresa raised a daughter in addition to co-parenting--along with Mary Williams Senior—both of Deborah's children after her passing.[471]

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[468] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 233.
[469] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 233.
[470] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 233-234.
[471] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 234.

The rekindled communication with her older sister catalyzed Mary's interest in reconnecting with her biological mother, after a thirty-year estrangement. Prior to her physical journey in 2012 to meet with her namesake, Williams describes the fall of 2011 as a period of reflection on her dynamic and complicated relationship with her birth mother during their years together in Oakland from 1967 to 1984. Processing her adolescence and youth three decades later, Mary depicts a familial past that stood at the intersection of competing forces: care and neglect, love and dysfunctionality, instability and kinship. It is important to note, however, that Mary's description of the Williams family unit extends beyond the personal. In a telling meditation she explains, "It took years for my pent-up anger to drain away enough to free me to reconnect with my birth mother."[472] After a thirty-year lapse in communication, by the fall of 2011, she notes:

> I was for the first time able to remember her clearly and not through the haze of my pain and anger. My mother was not a monster who failed me but a woman who did her best in the face of poverty, addiction and social injustice to raise her children. My anger was gone and in its place a newfound respect for the woman I'd hated for most of my life. I was finally ready to go back.[473]

A letter she wrote to her sister, Teresa, around the same time echoes the sentiment provided in her memoir. She writes, "While life was far from rosy she made sure we were fed and clothed and had a roof over our heads."[474]

Williams's interpretation of her family dynamic and her mother's parental history in particular underscores two simultaneous narratives: one of individual grief and emotional growth, and another of a city wrestling with the ramifications of deindustrialization, a dwindling welfare state, and a growing crack cocaine epidemic. In a

[472] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 241.
[473] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 241.
[474] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 242.

salient reflection, the author underscores a correlation between the personal and political; that is, government policy and social inequity at the structural level, and the material realities of everyday life for many of Oakland's low-income residents at the micro level. For Williams, the socio-economic conditions of her mother and the Williams children from the late 1960s to the early 1980s were inextricably linked to growing shifts in Oakland's political economy and social landscape during the last quarter of the twentieth century.

After three decades of geographic and social separation from her birth family, Williams actualized her intention of returning to her hometown, a homecoming that for the author bore testament to the historical continuities and changes that the deindustrialized city had endured since her departure as a teenager. Describing the train ride from Oakland International Airport to her hotel accommodations in San Francisco, the author renders a city in despair. Whirling past streets lined with signs of municipal dereliction: dilapidated housing structures and struggling residents. She concludes "…even the graffiti was sad and pathetically executed."[475] Amidst the neglect, however, other domains of the city continue to thrive. "Oakland, like any ghetto worth its salt, can boast robust exponential growth in several businesses: organized crime, churches, liquor stores and fast-food joints. It is a rare block that is not inhabited by one. Many host all four."[476] The amalgamation of social and economic activity the author describes upon returning to Oakland in 2011 evokes images of an environment ripe for a new socio-political zeitgeist; an institutional landscape not unlike the one in which Black Power groups organized at times with the support of local church leaders, at times without the

[475] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 246.
[476] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 246.

support of local business owners, and consistently against a corrupt city police department.[477]

While symptoms of Oakland's decades-long battle with industrial decline characterized much of the city's spatial landscape in 2012, Williams confronted unfamiliar territory upon reconnecting with her biological mother, as she learned for the first time about epochs within her family's history. A wall lined with family photographs bore visual evidence of the personal stories of her siblings and documentation of a new generation of Williams children. The framed images and plastic-covered album photographs told the story of a growing family tree; all of Mary's siblings had become parents, some claiming grandparent status.[478]

The piecemeal family timeline represented a complicated mix of individual growth and challenges for the second youngest Williams sibling. While the author posits no explicit connection between the life circumstances of any of her siblings to Oakland's economic downturn in the last quarter of the twentieth century, I argue that in order to more fully understand the life trajectory of her sister Deborah—one of four Williams children who graduated from the Panthers' Oakland Community School in the mid-1970s—it is important to acknowledge the broader historical shifts that unfolded at the local and national levels as she and her siblings grew into adulthood. As noted earlier, Deborah's battle with drug addiction unfolded during the heyday of America's "War on Drugs," a national campaign initiated by Nixon and drastically amplified during a

[477] Churches played an important role in the Black Panther Party's grassroots organizing, often serving as venues for the group's community service programs. For example, the group's first survival program, The Breakfast for School Children Program, functioned out of St. Augustine's Episcopal Church in west Oakland beginning in January 1969. See Bloom and Martin, *Black Against Empire*, 182.
[478] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 248-250.

national shift toward political conservatism under Ronald Reagan's administration.[479] Tragically, Deborah's two children would not be isolated from the drug's effects, as both were born during her addiction, her first-born suffering severe birth defects as a result.[480]

In chronicling the biographies of Deborah and her children Williams offers no clear statement on the causes of her sister's ultimate fate nor of her children's health conditions. Instead, the author provides a nuanced depiction a family navigating hardship through the bonds of kinship. In narrativizing this particular conversation in her mother's living room in March 2012, she concludes, "I stared at all these faces staring at me from the wall. I didn't know how they could bring my mother comfort. All I could think about when I stared into these faces was how much many of them suffered."[481] In the same section of *The Lost Daughter*, the author couples the theme of personal tragedy with an acknowledgement of familial solidarity and support. Specifically, in narrating this meeting with her birth mother, she informs the reader that Mary Senior and Teresa raised Deborah's children for a span of time after Deborah's passing.[482] Through this framework she historicizes the Williams family through complex and at times, contradictory motifs, including both trauma and mutual care. To put another way, hers is not a story of victimization, but rather one of adaptation and survival.

To a degree, the pull of Oakland and vestiges of its Black Power history were evident in Williams's extended family as well. The author describes reuniting with her uncle, Landon Williams, whom, like Williams's parents, had spent his early years as a community organizer with the BPP, and a relative who provided support to Williams and

[479] Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, Chapter 2.
[480] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 250.
[481] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 250.
[482] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 250.

her siblings at various moments during their parents' dealings with substance addiction and incarceration. Landon had organized the Williams family reunion in March 2012 and after collecting his niece from the Fruitvale Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) station for the event, the two filled in the gaps of their respective past years. Now at the age of sixty-eight, Landon informed Mary that for several decades after his departure from the Party he had continued a life of community organizing, for a period in New Orleans as part of the effort to rebuild the city in Hurricane Katrina's wake.[483] Three of Landon's four children had remained in the Bay Area, attending college, and raising families respectively. Mary's fourth cousin had ventured the furthest from her hometown, establishing a life with her husband in the Pacific Northwest.[484]

In addition to underscoring the importance of Landon Williams and his daughters in Mary's childhood, the author's narration of her extended family might also be understood as a mechanism for the co-construction of memory and identity. On the one hand, it is not surprising that Williams dedicates several pages of *The Lost Daughter*'s final chapters to chronicle the life experiences of her paternal uncle and his children, as they grew into adulthood in the years following the Black Panther Party's dissolution. As noted earlier, Landon's house at times afforded Mary and her siblings an outlet during moments of familial hardship. Further, Williams acknowledges spending a significant amount of time as a young child with her cousins—particularly Landon's eldest daughters, Kim and Kijana—during her father's incarceration.[485] As demonstrated at various moments in her text, Mary's social and physical proximity to her uncle and

[483] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 253.
[484] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 254-255.
[485] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 264-265.

cousins during her early years undoubtedly represents an important component of her personal history and her recognition of her own proximity to the BPP's legacy.

At the same time, Williams's narrative acknowledgement of her ties to Oakland's Black Power era becomes equally evident in her description of relatives she spent less time with as a child. A salient example of this appears in the memoir's final chapters when Mary describes another cousin, Petik Williams, the daughter of her Aunt Virginia and Uncle Al, and one of the attendees at the family reunion. Here, the author notes that unlike the case with Uncle Landon's children, Mary had few encounters with Petik growing up, attributing the distance to Virginia's and Al's minimal involvement in the BPP.[486] In a key moment of self-reflection the author contrasts her childhood with that of her cousin's, admitting, "As a small child, I identified strongly as a Panther before anything else, before being American or even female. So to have a family member not in the Party was puzzling. I thought of Petik as a tragic princess."[487] Williams continues, describing her cousin as an only child with living arrangements comparable those of the child characters in the television show *Leave It to Beaver*.[488] The author's dichotomous construction is clear as she underscores two near-opposite childhoods. One the one hand, Williams characterizes Petik's early years through images of a nuclear family structure, social isolation, and a noted degree of separation from the BPP. In contrast, Mary's telling of her own past situates the Black Power organization at the center of her identity, superseding all other self-defined characteristics of her person. To Williams, Petik's youth represented an aberration, a life devoid of community.

[486] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 265.
[487] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 265.
[488] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 265.

If the author's recollections of her extended family serve as a space through which she associates positive memories of her Black Panther past, her articulation of reconnecting with her birth mother after a thirty-year separation presents a temporal dissonance between her visions of the past, present, and future. The setting of her mother's Oakland home underscores this tension for Williams. On the one hand, she describes the encounter in rather anticlimactic terms, noting, "She reached for me and we hugged. It was a hug I had been waiting for a very long time. There was no emotional preamble. In my imaginings this hug took place in slow motion accompanied by a sound track worthy of a 1940s melodrama. In reality it felt more like two acquaintances meeting after a brief absence as I rested briefly in Mama's arms."[489] Here the passage presents both temporal and spatial paradoxes, as the intimacies of biological kinship translate into a casual familiarity between daughter and mother. In the same excerpt, time becomes distorted through Williams's characterization of a thirty-year estrangement as a "brief" separation. The reader is subsequently left with contradictory sentiments as the author claims both distance from and proximity to signifiers of her early years.

The setting of Mary Williams Senior's home in the final pages of *The Lost Daughter* presents an additional key set of incongruences, specifically, between past and present, and memory and identity. Upon entering her mother's living room the author is met with a gallery of family photographs, manifested in walls and bookshelves lined with framed images. For Williams, the encounter represented both an introduction to and reminder of a personal and familial past. Perusing the visual archive she encountered images she had never before seen, documentary glimpses of a particular 1970s childhood. Juxtaposed to scenes of the eldest Williams children as infants were snapshots of Mary's

[489] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 248.

own adolescence, including one of her and her brother situated on the floor of Soledad State Prison with their father during one of their family visitations. Others captured moments from her school days as an elementary student at the Panthers' alternative school. In describing the living room repository, the author tellingly admits, "We never displayed photos in my childhood home."[490] Thus, we might understand this particular moment in Mary's adulthood as both a nostalgic return to her early years and a reflexive navigation of her own identity as an adult. Through the photographs Williams is for the first time confronted with a new iteration of her family tree as she unearths a history to which she is inextricably linked.

The process of reconnecting after three decades was not without interpersonal tension, an additional narrative theme that further underscores the author's attempts to make sense of her early life in Oakland. In a pivotal moment in *The Lost Daughter* we witness Williams Senior's ongoing battle with alcoholism through a tense phone exchange between Mary and her inebriated mother after their in-person visit. A sequence of heated accusations, defensive statements regarding Mary Williams's parenting history, and proclaimed frustrations concerning the seeming lifestyle disparities between mother and daughter ends with the author articulating a new interpretation of her past and a new vision for her future. Describing the peak of the argument, Williams explains:

> My heart was breaking for her. Breaking for the young girl living her life saddled with so much abuse and responsibility. Straining under the stress of being marginalized because of her sex, race and class. I finally had a crystal-clear view of the woman who was more than just my mama. She was a woman with hopes and dreams of her own. An amazing, flawed and spirited survivor born into circumstances that deprived her of being something even more extraordinary.[491]

[490] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 249.
[491] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 262.

Again we see the author transition from the personal to the political as she locates her mother's parental choices and livelihood as a young mother within a broader socio-economic environment founded on structural inequities. At this moment in *The Lost Daughter* the author posits her young mother as both goal-oriented yet bound by the social and economic limitations that many low-income black women were forced to navigate during the nation's era of industrial decline. Her life choices were necessarily curbed by scarce opportunities for social mobility. Ultimately, the author concludes, "If she wanted to remember her child-rearing years as all sunshine and lollipops, who was I to deny her? I didn't want to make her see things as I experienced them. I came to Oakland to share the future with her, not the past."[492]

While the memoir's ending chapters highlight the author's newfound resolve to build a future devoid of the familial turbulence she experienced as a young girl, the text's conclusion simultaneously reveals a woman unable to fully dissociate herself from the specters of 1970s Oakland. This is perhaps most evident when she describes her journey to Samuel P. Taylor State Park in Marin County for the Williams family reunion. The route from Mary's San Francisco hotel room to the campsite involved a stretch over the Richmond-San Rafael Bridge, bringing into clear focus San Quentin Prison. She recounts the dramatic and ironic juxtaposition of the facility and its dispossessed inhabitants as they overlooked the picturesque north side of the San Francisco Bay. On a more personal level, the scene provoked memories of the Black Panther Party's movement to free

[492] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 262.

political prisoners "who had been locked up here and in places like Soledad."[493] More intimately, she recounts, "I felt a hollow ache in my chest for my daddy."[494]

Beyond what the current movement to free political prisoners demonstrates about the persistence of the Party's historical impact, contemporary manifestations of the Black Power organization's legacy are more literally embodied by its youngest descendants, that is, by the grandchildren and great grandchildren of former Party members. In the memoir, Mary Williams's niece, Latasha, provides a salient example of the degree to which the more intimate aspects of Oakland's political history have factored into the lives of some members of this younger generational cohort. Latasha is the daughter of Mary's sister, Donna Williams, the second of the Williams siblings to graduate from the Oakland Community School. In the second-to-last chapter Mary recounts visiting her niece, now a thirty-four-year-old mother of seven, at her home in Houston.[495] Like the case of their eldest sister, Deborah, Donna's experiences as a young mother in the late 1970s and 1980s resulted in separation from her children, including her first-born, Latasha, and Latasha's younger brother. In fact, in the late 1970s, on the eve of Latasha's first birthday, Donna—now sixteen—decided to leave Oakland for Texas after an altercation with her mother. Four years later she gave birth to her second child, Latasha's brother. Donna remained with her two children for the next several years, raising them with the assistance of a great aunt. In an abrupt moment around 1992 when Latasha was fourteen years old, Donna left her children with her great aunt, never to return.[496]

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[493] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 266-267.
[494] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 267.
[495] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 280.
[496] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 54, 280.

During their visit the conversation between Mary and her niece further illuminates the ways in which Latasha navigated her how history of familial trauma after Donna's departure from the family. Throughout her teenage years Latasha made several attempts to reconnect with her birth mother, but to no avail. Only after a brief in-person encounter with Donna—Latasha now in her twenties and the mother of four—did she learn that she had half-siblings. As Mary explains, even upon this realization, Latasha held no anger towards her mother. Rather, she understood the situation to signify Donna's (actualized) desire to sever ties to her Oakland past, to begin a new life far removed from the Bay Area.[497] In many ways this severance has persisted, as Mary notes, at the time of the memoir's publication Latasha's seven children had never met their grandmother.[498]

Finally, for Mary, the figure of Latasha serves as a source of strength, independence, and hope. Even while the two knew little about each other for nearly three decades—aside from the news that Mary had been "adopted by a rich movie star"—the author identifies similarities in their upbringings, while highlighting differences in the how they each navigated adversity in their respective personal lives.[499] Williams posits, "I was amazed at how much Tasha and I had in common. We were both abandoned (she literally, me emotionally), both taken in by another family and cared for…"[500] Yet, she argues, she and her niece dealt with family estrangement in distinct ways. Likening herself to her sister Donna, Mary asserts that in coping with her unstable relationship with her mother she "wiped the slate clean and started over with a new family."[501] Over the years this tactic would be supplemented with travel. Latasha, on the other hand, also

[497] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 289.
[498] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 289.
[499] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 284.
[500] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 290.
[501] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 290.

embraced family as a way of dealing with her own sudden separation from her mother, but in different terms. The author asserts, "To erase the trauma of her past, she became the mother she always wanted to be."[502] In a telling ending to her own story, Mary finds encouragement in Latasha's loving and intimate relationship with her children. The author concludes, "Women who have been dealt the cards she has rarely turn out to be pillars of the community. But I was happy to see that my niece was well and that she was raising intelligent, kind and interesting children. She was a wonderful example of how one need not look to the rich and famous for inspiration. I found it in refugees from Africa and now from a single mother of seven living in the projects."[503]

Conclusion

As the oral and written testimonies of Keith Jenkins and Mary Williams demonstrate, the children of Black Panther families represent an array of childhood experiences. While Williams and Jenkins both attended the Oakland Community School in the 1970s, their respective journeys into adulthood—and their recollections of their life histories—diverge in many key ways. On the one hand, Williams is more overt than Jenkins in how she makes sense of her childhood. On more than one occasion in her memoir she asserts that as a young girl she proudly claimed her family's Party status above all other aspects of her identity. Equally notable, and again unlike Jenkins, her upbringing by an adoptive wealthy white family in southern California, and later in the U.S. South, necessarily removed her from the spatial, class, and racial characteristics of

[502] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 290.
[503] Williams, *The Lost Daughter*, 291.

the Party. Further, her professional work more closely resembles the BPP's historically community-focused labor.

At the same time, however, we can identify common themes in the two coming-of-age stories. Both recall early childhoods characterized by feelings of organizational security and insularity, and in other moments, precariousness. Importantly, both Williams and Jenkins underscore the challenges of navigating two worlds—one enveloped by radical social organizing, and the other by the mainstream sensibilities of a national public—which were constantly at odds with one another. And finally, while neither maintained robust social connections to Panther cub networks, both Williams and Jenkins identify Oakland, the site of their earliest memories, as home.

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