

advisory board. To combat police brutality, the advisory board obtained 5,000 signatures in support of the City Council's setting up a police review board to review complaints. Newton was also taking classes at the City College and at **San Francisco Law School**. Both institutions were active in the North Oakland Center. Thus the pair had numerous connections with whom they talked about a new organization. Inspired by the success of the **Lowndes County Freedom Organization** and **Stokely Carmichael's** calls for separate black political organizations,^[10] they wrote their initial platform statement, the Ten-Point Program. With the help of Huey's brother Melvin, they decided on a uniform of blue shirts, black pants, black leather jackets, black berets, and openly displayed loaded shotguns (in his studies, Newton had discovered a California law that allowed carrying a loaded rifle or shotgun, as long as it was publicly displayed and pointed at no one).^[11]

The Ten Point Program

[edit]

The Ten Point Program was as follows:

1. We want power to determine the destiny of our black and oppressed communities' education that teaches us our true history and our role in the present day society.
2. We want completely free health care for all black and oppressed people.
3. We want an immediate end to police brutality and murder of black people, other people of color, all oppressed people inside the United States.
4. We want an immediate end to all wars of aggression.
5. We want full employment for our people.
6. We want an end to the robbery by the capitalists of our Black Community.
7. We want decent housing, fit for the shelter of human beings.
8. We want decent education for our people that exposes the true nature of this decadent American society.
9. We want freedom for all black and oppressed people now held in U. S. Federal, state, county, city and military prisons and jails. We want trials by a jury of peers for all persons charged with so-called crimes under the laws of this country.
10. We want land, bread, housing, education, clothing, justice, peace and people's community control of modern technology.^{[12][13]}

Action

[edit]

Survival programs

[edit]

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

Other survival programs were free services such as clothing distribution, classes on politics and economics, **free medical clinics**, lessons on **self-defense** and **first aid**, transportation to upstate prisons for family members of inmates, an emergency-response **ambulance** program, **drug and alcohol rehabilitation**, and testing for **sickle-cell disease**.^[14]

The BPP also founded the "Intercommunal Youth Institute" in January 1971,^[15] with the intent of demonstrating how black youth ought to be educated. Ericka Huggins was the director of the school and Regina Davis was an administrator.^[16] The school was unique in that it didn't have grade levels but instead had different skill levels so an 11 year old could be in second-level English and fifth-level science.^[17] Elaine Brown taught reading and writing to a group of 10 to 11 year olds deemed "uneducable" by the system.^[18] At the school children were given free busing; breakfast, lunch, and dinner; books and school supplies; children were taken to have medical checkups; and many children were given free clothes.^[19]

Political activities

[edit]

The Party briefly merged with the **Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee**, headed by the fiery **Stokely Carmichael** (later Kwame Ture). In 1967, the party organized a march on the California state capitol to protest the state's attempt to outlaw carrying loaded weapons in public. Participants in the march carried rifles. In 1968, BPP Minister of Information **Eldridge Cleaver** ran for Presidential office on the **Peace and Freedom Party** ticket. They were a big influence on the **White Panther Party**, that was tied to the Detroit/Ann Arbor rock band **MC5** and their manager **John Sinclair**, author of the book *Guitar Army* that also promulgated a ten-point program.

Conflict with law enforcement

[edit]

As the Black Panther Party was beginning to gain a national presence, police began a crackdown on the party and their activities. **Huey P. Newton** was arrested for an alleged murder, which sparked a "free Huey" campaign, organized by **Eldridge Cleaver** to help Newton's legal defense. Newton was convicted, though his conviction was overturned in the 1970s.

In April 1968, the party was involved in a gun battle, where **Bobby Hutton**, a Panther, was killed. Cleaver later said that he had led the Panther group on a deliberate ambush of the police officers, thus provoking the shoot-out.^[20] In Chicago, two Panthers were killed in a police raid.^[3]

One of the central aims of the BPP was to stop abuse by local police departments. When the party was founded in 1966, only 16 of **Oakland's** 661 police officers were African American.^[21] Accordingly, many members questioned the Department's objectivity and impartiality. This situation was not unique to **Oakland, California**. Most police departments in major cities did not have proportional

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1970 BPP pamphlet combining an anti-drug message with revolutionary politics.

membership by African Americans. Throughout the 1960s, **race riots** and civil unrest broke out in impoverished African-American communities subject to policing by disproportionately white police departments. The work and writings of **Robert F. Williams**, **Monroe, North Carolina NAACP** chapter president and author of *Negroes with Guns*, also influenced the BPP's tactics.

The BPP sought to oppose police brutality through neighborhood patrols (an approach since adopted by groups such as **Copwatch**). Police officers were often followed by armed Black Panthers who sought at times to aid African-Americans who were alleged victims of police brutality and perceived racial prejudice. Both Panthers and police died as a result of violent confrontations. By 1970, 34 Panthers had died as a result of police raids, shoot-outs and internal conflict.^[22] Various police organizations claim the Black Panthers were responsible for the deaths of at least 15 law enforcement officers and the injuries of dozens more. During those years, juries found several BPP members guilty of violent crimes.^[23]

From 1966 to 1972, when the party was most active, several departments hired significantly more **African-American** police officers. Some of these black officers played prominent roles in shutting down the Panthers' activities. In Chicago in 1969 for example, Panthers **Mark Clark** and **Fred Hampton** were both killed in a police raid (In which five of the officers present were **African American**) by Sergeant James Davis, an **African American** officer.^[citation needed] In cities such as New York City, black police officers were used to infiltrate Panther meetings. By 1972, almost every major police department was fully integrated.

Prominent member **H. Rap Brown** is serving **life imprisonment** for the 2000 murder of Ricky Leon Kinchen, a **Fulton County, Georgia** sheriff's deputy, and the wounding of another officer in a gunbattle. Both officers were black.^[24]

Conflict with COINTELPRO

In August 1967, the **Federal Bureau of Investigation** (FBI) instructed its program "**COINTELPRO**" to "neutralize" what the FBI called "black nationalist hate groups" and other dissident groups. In September of 1968, FBI Director **J. Edgar Hoover** described the Black Panthers as "the greatest threat to the internal security of the country."^[25] By 1969, the Black Panthers were the primary target of COINTELPRO. They were the target of 233 of the 295 authorized "**Black Nationalist**" COINTELPRO actions. The goals of the program were to prevent the unification of militant black nationalist groups and to weaken the power of their leaders, as well as to discredit the groups to reduce their support and growth. The initial targets included the **Southern Christian Leadership Conference**, the **Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee**, the **Revolutionary Action Movement** and the **Nation of Islam**. Leaders who were targeted included the Rev. **Martin Luther King, Jr.**, **Stokely Carmichael**, **H. Rap Brown**, **Maxwell Stanford** and **Elijah Muhammad**.

Although COINTELPRO was commissioned ostensibly to prevent violence, it used some tactics to foster violence. For instance, the FBI tried to "intensify the degree of animosity" between the Black Panthers and the **Blackstone Rangers**, a Chicago gang. They sent an anonymous letter to the Ranger's gang leader claiming that the Panthers were threatening his life, a letter whose intent was to induce "reprisals" against Panther leadership. In **Southern California** similar actions were taken to exacerbate a "gang war" between the Black Panther Party and a group called the **US Organization**. Violent conflict between these two groups, including shootings and beatings, led to the deaths of at least four Black Panther Party members. FBI agents claimed credit for instigating some of the violence between the two groups.^[26]

On January 17, 1969, Los Angeles Panther Captain **Bunchy Carter** and Deputy Minister **John Huggins** were killed in Campbell Hall on the **UCLA** campus, in a gun battle with members of US Organization stemming from a dispute over who would control UCLA's **black studies** program. Another shootout between the two groups on March 17 led to further injuries. It was alleged that the FBI had sent a provocative letter to US Organization in an attempt to create antagonism between US and the Panthers.^[27]

One of the most notorious actions was a Chicago Police raid of the home of Panther organizer **Fred Hampton** on December 4, 1969. The raid had been orchestrated by the police in conjunction with the FBI. The FBI was complicit in many of the actions. The people inside the home had been drugged by an FBI informant, **William O'Neal**, and were asleep at the time of the raid. Hampton was shot and killed, as was the guard, **Mark Clark**. The others were dragged into the street, beaten, and subsequently charged with assault. These charges were later dropped. The Chicago Police and FBI were never investigated or charged for their role in the event.^[28]

In May 1969, party members **tortured** and murdered **Alex Rackley**, a 19-year-old member of the New York chapter of the Black Panther party, because they suspected him of being a police informant. Three party officers — **Warren Kimbro**, **George Sams, Jr.**, and **Lonnie McLucas** — later admitted taking part. Sams, who gave the order to shoot Rackley at the murder scene, turned state's evidence and testified that he had received orders personally from **Bobby Seale** to carry out the execution. After this betrayal, party supporters alleged that Sams was himself the informant and an **agent provocateur** employed by the FBI.^[29] The case resulted in the **New Haven, Connecticut** Black Panther trials of 1970. The trial ended with a hung jury, and the prosecution chose not to seek another trial.

Widening support

[\[edit\]](#)

Awareness of the group continued to grow, especially after the May 2, 1967 protest at the California State Assembly and the arrest of Newton in the fall of 1967. On February 17, 1968, a large rally was held for Huey in the Oakland Auditorium. The speakers included Stokely Carmichael, H. Rap Brown, and James Forman. After this event, membership grew rapidly. The structure of the group became more defined. New members had to attend a six-week training program and political education classes (largely based on Mao's *Little Red Book*).^[30]

In 1968, the group shortened its name to the Black Panther Party and sought to focus directly on political action. Members were encouraged to carry guns and to defend themselves against violence. An influx of college students joined the group, which had consisted chiefly of "brothers off the block." This created some tension in the group. Some members were more interested in supporting the Panther's social programs, while others wanted to maintain their "street mentality". For many Panthers, the group was little more than a type of gang.^[31]

Panther slogans and iconography spread. At the **1968 Summer Olympics**, **Tommie Smith** and **John Carlos**, two American medalists, gave the black power salute during the playing of the American national anthem. The **International Olympic Committee** banned them from the Olympic Games for life. Some **Hollywood** celebrities, such as **Jane Fonda**, became involved in their leftist program. She publicly supported Huey Newton and the Black Panthers in the early 1970s. The Black Panthers attracted a wide variety of left-wing revolutionaries and political activists, including former *Ramparts Magazine* editor **David Horowitz** and left-wing lawyer **Charles R. Garry**, who often acted as their counsel. Survival Committees and coalitions were organized with several groups across the United States. Chief among these in Chicago was the first Rainbow Coalition formed by Fred Hampton and the Black Panthers which included Young Patriots and Young Lords.

Criticism

[\[edit\]](#)

Violence

[\[edit\]](#)

From the beginning the Black Panther Party's focus on militancy came with a reputation for violence. They often took advantage of a California law which permitted carrying a loaded rifle or shotgun as long as it was publicly displayed and pointed at no one ^[32]. Carrying weapons openly and making threats against police officers, for example, chants like "The Revolution has co-ome, it's time to pick up the gun. Off the pigs!",^[33] helped create the Panthers' reputation as a violent organization. The greater part of the reputation was earned in particular incidents such as the following.

In October 1967, Oakland police officer John Frey was shot to death in an altercation with Newton during a traffic stop. In the stop, Newton and backup officer Herbert Heanes also suffered gunshot wounds. Newton was convicted of voluntary manslaughter at trial. This incident gained the party even wider recognition by the radical American left, and a "Free Huey" campaign ensued^[34]. Newton was released after three years, when his conviction was reversed on appeal.

On May 2, 1967, the California State Assembly Committee on Criminal Procedure was scheduled to convene to discuss what was known as the "Mulford Act", which would ban public displays of loaded firearms. Cleaver and Newton put together a plan to send a group of about 30 Panthers led by Seale from Oakland to Sacramento to protest the bill. The group entered the assembly carrying their weapons, an incident which was widely publicized, and which prompted police to arrest Seale and five others. The group pled guilty to misdemeanor charges of disrupting a legislative session^[35].

On April 7, 1968, Panther Bobby Hutton, who held the title Minister of Defense, was killed, and Cleaver was wounded in a shootout with the Oakland police. Each side called the event an ambush by the other. Two policemen were shot in the incident^[36].

From the fall of 1967 through the end of 1969, nine police officers were killed and 56 were wounded in confrontations with the Panthers. The confrontations were believed to have resulted in ten Panther deaths and an unknown number of injuries. In 1969 alone, 348 Panthers were arrested for a variety of crimes ^[37].

Death of Betty van Patter

[edit]

When Panther **Betty Van Patter** was murdered in 1974, **David Horowitz** became certain that Black Panther members were responsible and he denounced the Panthers. When **Huey Newton** was shot to death 15 years later, Horowitz characterized Newton as a killer. ^[38] When a former colleague at *Ramparts* alleged that Horowitz himself was responsible for the death of van Patter by recommending her for the position of BP accountant, Horowitz counter-alleged that "the Panthers had killed more than a dozen people in the course of conducting **extortion**, **prostitution** and drug rackets in the **Oakland** ghetto". He said further that the organization was committed "to doctrines that are false and to causes that are demonstrably wrongheaded and even evil."^[39]

Decay and disintegration

[edit]

While part of the organization was already participating in local government and social services, another group was in constant conflict with the police. For some of the Party's supporters, the separation between political action, criminal activity, social services, access to power, and grass-roots identity became confusing and contradictory as the Panthers' political momentum was bogged down in the **criminal justice system**. A significant split in the Party occurred over disagreements among its leaders over how to confront these challenges. Some Panther leaders, such as **Huey Newton** and **David Hilliard**, favored a focus on community service coupled with self-defense; others, such as **Eldridge Cleaver**, embraced a more confrontational strategy. A schism was made inevitable when Cleaver publicly criticized the Party as adopting a "reformist" rather than "revolutionary" agenda and called for Hilliard's removal. Cleaver was expelled from the Central Committee but went on to lead a splinter group, the **Black Liberation Army**, which had previously existed as an underground **paramilitary** wing of the Party. ^[40]

The Party eventually fell apart due to rising legal costs and internal disputes. Its final leader was **Elaine Brown**, a longtime Panther and the first and last woman to lead it where she addressed issues of **sexism** within the party and attempted to stave off its disintegration.

Legacy

[edit]

The National Alliance of Black Panthers was formed on July 31, 2004. It was inspired by the grassroots activism of the original organization but not otherwise related. Its chairwoman is **Shazza Nzingha**.

In October 2006, the Black Panther Party held a 40-year reunion in **Oakland, California**. ^[41]

In January 2007, a joint California state and Federal task force charged eight men with the 1971 murder of a California police officer.^[42] The defendants have been identified as former members of the **Black Liberation Army**. Two have been linked to the Black Panthers. ^[43] In 1975 a similar case was dismissed when a judge ruled that police gathered evidence through the use of **torture**.^[44]

New Black Panther Party

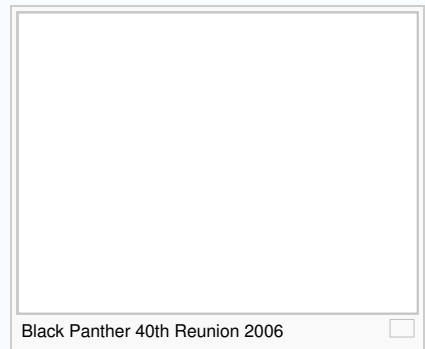
*See also: **New Black Panther Party***

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

The **Anti-Defamation League** has identified the New Black Panthers as a **hate group**. Members of the original Black Panther Party have insisted that this New Black Panther Party is illegitimate and have strongly objected that there "is no new Black Panther Party".^[45]

See also

[edit]



- 1960s counterculture
- Black anarchism
- Black feminism
- Black Liberation Army
- Brown Berets
- Gay Liberation Front
- Gray Panthers
- I Wor Kuen
- List of former members of the Black Panther Party
- Maoism
- Marxism
- MC5
- Nation of Islam
- New Black Panthers
- New Communist Movement
- New Left
- Huey P. Newton
- The Patriot Party
- Protests of 1968
- Red Guard Party (United States)
- Red power
- Rice/Poindexter Case
- Bobby Seale
- John Sinclair
- Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee
- Students for a Democratic Society (1960 organization)
- Symbionese Liberation Army
- US Organization
- Up Against the Wall Motherfuckers
- Weather Underground
- White Panther Party
- World communism
- Young Lords

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- ↑ Lowndes County Freedom Organization | The Black Past: Remembered and Reclaimed
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- ↑ Pearson 1994, 129
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- ↑ Pearson 1994, page 206 discusses many of these events, including a partial list from the summer of 1968 through the end of 1969
- ↑ David Horowitz's claim about van Patten's death is often discussed on blogs. It is mentioned in anAmerican Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research book review of Horowitz's *Radical Son: A Generational Odyssey* called *All's Left in the World* . Horowitz's credibility as a critic of the left and especially of the Black Panther Party is called into question in Elaine Brown's *The Condemnation of Little B: New Age Racism in America*. Beacon Press (February 15, 2003) pg. 250-251.
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Influences	Black Power, Robert F. Williams
Programs	Free Breakfast for Children
Panthers accused of murder	H. Rap Brown, Warren Kimbro, George W. Sams, Jr., Lonnie McClucas, Mumia Abu-Jamal
Panthers killed by police	Bobby Hutton, Mark Clark, Fred Hampton
Other notable members	Betty Van Patter, David Hilliard, Eldridge Cleaver, Elaine Brown, Robert Trivers, Billy Garland, Afeni Shakur, Malik Rahim, Bobby Rush, Nile Rodgers, Assata Shakur, Geronimo Pratt, Pete O'Neal, Chaka Khan, Jamal Joseph, George Jackson, Larry Pinkney, Lorenzo Kom'boa Ervin, Aaron Dixon, Angela Davis, Kathleen Neal Cleaver, Bunchy Carter, Stokely Carmichael, William Lee Brent, Charles Barron, Richard Aoki, Ashanti Alston
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