LOST IN THE WHIRLWIND

The Vote...

PROMISES... PROMISES... PROMISES

DOPE
DEATH!
SMACK!
HERION
COCAINE

POLICE BRUTALITY

HOUSING
YOUR
SLUM LORD
IS A
RAT!!!

BLACK COMMUNITY

BUSSING

VIET-NAM

EXPLOITATION!!!

COURTS

NO KNOCK
LAWS!
PRISONS!
HOUSING!
BUSING!

THE NEW YORK BLACK PANTHER PARTY, POLITICAL REPRESSSION,
AND THE RISE OF THE BLACK LIBERATION ARMY
ROBERT J. HERRE
LOST IN THE WHIRLWIND:

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An honors thesis submitted to the History Department of Rutgers University, written under the supervision of Professor Donna Murch

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Acknowledgments

This thesis was the result of three semesters’ and a hard worked summer’s, worth of research and writing. My interest in this topic spawned from my curiosity of the lives my parents had while growing up in post World War II Newark, New Jersey. In my junior year of college, I took a seminar on the Black Panther Party taught by Dr. Donna Murch. I heard stories of the Newark Rebellion in 1967 from my parents and knew a Panther chapter once existed there. The lack of available resources on the Black Panther Party limited my initial research on the Jersey Panthers and I switched focus to the New York chapter. Yet, my fascination with New York City and government intelligence programs made the project worthwhile. I soon realized that Tupac Shakur, a favorite rapper of mine, was the child of one of these New York Panthers. This made the subject even more appealing. I decided to take on the challenge of writing an honor’s thesis in my senior year based on the work I conducted in my junior seminar paper. In the end I was able to uncover the strong relationships between the New York Black Panther Party and the New Jersey offices. I want to acknowledge first my advisor, Dr. Donna Murch for all her patience and her guidance. Additional help from Dr. Tom Glynn at Alexander library, Author Yohuru Williams, my honors seminar instructor Dr. James Masschaele, the Rutgers ARESTY team that provided funding for my trip to Stanford’s Huey P. Newton Collection, and historian and my secondary reader, Dr. James Reed, is greatly appreciated. The relief my friends provided me between working sessions was much needed as well. Lastly, I want to thank the support of my entire family, I could not have written this work without them.
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INTRODUCTION

This thesis tells the story of 1960s black youths working to renew their community and improve themselves. This study is a critical perspective of the series of experiences Black Panthers had growing up in urban New York City. The early lives of New York Panthers, consisting of their school and military careers while enduring the struggles of poverty, allowed for them to understand their conditions with new eyes. The contradictory federal policy of aiding the Civil Rights movement during a time of brutal oppression moved Panthers into action. They embodied the Black Power movement and found the vehicle to aiding their people in the same context the government had, through community action. This story is about the New York Black Panther Party’s (NYBPP) rough passage during a time of worldwide revolution.

By focusing on the real life of the NYBPP, unlike most other works that emphasize the rise and demise of the party, one can understand how the U.S. government counterintelligence programs, headed by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), and locally undertaken by the New York Police Department (NYPD), shaped every aspect of the NY Panthers history.¹ Most scholarship on the Black Panther Party (BPP) focuses on the national history of the organization, in some cases, reverting to unfair stereotypes and ignoring specificity of regional divisions of the Party.² This work takes an in-depth look at the New York chapter of the BPP and explores both the differences and the contributions of each office to the larger whole.³ It explores the

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¹ This work builds on previous research on the BPP. Austin, Curtis J. *Up Against the Wall: Violence in the Making and Unmaking of the Black Panther Party.* Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2006. Austin’s work states that the making and unmaking of the Panthers revolved around their commitment to violence. Austin’s argument has some validity, but ignores largely the work the NYBPP conducted during the organization’s” lifetime.

² Kempton, Murray. *The Briar Patch: The Trial of the Panther 21.* New York: Da Capo Press, 1997. It is a wonderful case study about the infamous court case of 21 members of the NYBPP. The work, however, does little to talk about the differences within the sections of the NYBPP.

³ Many other works often ignore the makeup of each office. The neighborhoods that BPP offices formed in were the most dilapidated areas populated by blacks. Each setting differed but similarly all the neighborhoods suffered from imminent housing issues.
relationship between the rank-and-file members with the NYBPP leadership, both instrumental to the success of the party. This thesis also examines the NYPD and FBI’s growth and coordination against the NYBPP.

This thesis is broken down thematically by chapter. The first chapter focuses on the early lives of the NY Panthers, introducing key individuals in the organization, and describes the dilapidated housing they were brought up in. The chapter entitled “Stop Frontin’, Start Organizin’” explains the formation of the Black Panther Party in Oakland, and its spread to New York thereafter. The next connects the influences of the NYBPP’s political ideology by their experiences with state institutions and programs and the previous history of political organizing and Black Nationalism in urban post WWII New York. Chapter five details the successful contributions of the NYBPP to their communities and why they grew as a threat to specific New Yorkers’ and U.S. leaders’ interests in Washington, and the government’s response to it. The section following chronicles the counterintelligence programs ran by the NYPD and FBI against the Panthers. The outcome can be seen in the following chapter, “The Effects of Political Repression.”

My thesis is a coming of age social history of the black youth who founded the NYBPP drawing on their shared experiences of being young and African American in America’s largest city. The violence of the NYBPP was actually reactionary and resided almost entirely in the Black Liberation Army, which was a byproduct of the governments’ counterintelligence programs. The Vietnam War and receding economy in the 1970s tightened the government

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4 In 1990, Kit Kim Holder, a former NYBPP member, wrote a dissertation, “The History of the Black Panther Party,” that gave one of the first local approaches to a BPP chapter outside of Oakland. His work on the NYBPP focused on the rank-and-file members’ active in the NYBPP, rather than the leaders or the organization that get the most attention.

5 Frank Donner wrote Protectors of Privilege which is about the repressive history of police forces in modern urban America. He argued that police, throughout their history in the United States, served as the protective arm of the economic and political interests of the capitalist system, especially when in concern with urban cities over the past century.
pressure opposing the party, as well as added militant organizing to the Black Power movement. In this context, the NYBPP transformed, and as we will see, repression bred resistance. It was not the violence of these African American radicals that was remarkable, but the systematic repression by federal, state, and local forces.

Like all other Panther chapters, the NYBPP responded to one of the black community’s most urgent crisis: housing. The cover image of this work was originally published in the NYBPP’s newspaper, Right On. This little known image, largely lost to history, displays the confronting issues of New York urban communities, including drug abuse, police brutality, war, racism, legal battles, and the issue of housing. Miserable infrastructure shaped the consciousness of a generation of young black activists in urban New York. The Civil Rights Movement that swept the 1960s and 1970s along with President Lyndon B. Johnsons’ War on Poverty gave urban African Americans a platform to organize. The result was a politically aligned population of black youth in New York and surrounding northeastern urban communities of color looking to combat the poverty induced issues in their communities.

This thesis was generated by looking at the Panthers through the lens of their children. The title of this work derives from the hook of a song written by Tupac Shakur, son of one of the Panther 21 defendants, entitled “Me and My Girlfriend.” Tupac Amaru Shakur was born with the name Lesane Parish Crooks on June 16, 1971 in Brooklyn, a month after the New York Panther 21’s acquittal. He was soon renamed by his mother, Afeni Shakur, after an eighteenth-century Incan revolutionary, with his mother’s adopted surname. Shakur, which is Arabic for “thankful to God,” was adopted by many members of the NYBPP, often Black Muslims, which this paper distinguishes. Michael Eric Dyson wrote:

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6 Right On, Volume 2, Issue 6, p 22
7 Holler if You Hear Me, p 25
8 Ibid
“Tupac was a poor, often homeless child whose growing conflicts with his mother were driven by her past and present choices: to be a black revolutionary-and thus to risk totalizing governmental repression and the vicious indifference, even ingratitude, of the black bourgeoisie-and to anesthetize the pain of her post revolutionary life, and its attendant rejections, self-destructions, and eruptions, with crack cocaine.”

Tupac was born amongst the Panther movement and was instilled with their beliefs. Panther cofounder Huey P. Newton was a voracious reader as a child and Tupac wanted to replicate that. Tupac wrote about Huey P. Newton in his poem “The Fallen Star,” and the government’s insistence of African Americans as a problem. Tupac wrote, “Can you see the pride in the Panther, toppling obstacles placed in the way of the progression of his race?”

Tupac believed in union and, while attending various performance arts schools as a youth around east coast black neighborhoods, organized like he was a Panther. Tupac said, “I grew up Pantherwise.” He set up committees in his schools to combat problems facing African American communities like AIDS, domestic violence, and drug awareness. Tupac’s first rap was about gun control. Even when he moved to Oakland, like the Panthers, he monitored police patrols with a video camera. Aside from growing up in dilapidated neighborhoods, Tupac saw repression first hand in the uncontrollable aftermath created by the FBI’s J. Edgar Hoover. Tupac witnessed his mother’s inability to obtain a job because of the criminal accusations that followed her Panther career, stranding the family financially. He needed to be taught about repression early, as the FBI also busted into his grammar schools interrogating him about the

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9 *Holler if You Hear Me*, p 33
10 *Tupac Shakur: Thug Angel*: David Hilliard, always willing to accrue attention and money on behalf of the Panthers, spoke about Tupac in the documentary, *Tupac Shakur: Thug Angel*. Hilliard talked of his mother’s consciousness socially and politically, raising her son to see things as they were; Tupac wrote *The Rose that Grew from Concrete*, a book of poetry, before his twenty-first birthday.
11 *The Rose that Grew from Concrete*, p 110; p 112
12 Ibid, p 126
13 *Tupac Shakur: Thug Angel*
14 Ibid
15 Ibid
whereabouts of Mutulu Shakur, the man that helped raise Tupac, and an escaped prisoner named JoAnne Chesimard.

“Look for Me in the Whirlwind” is a descriptive title adopted by both Marcus Garvey and the Panther 21 for their political literature, and the inspiration to the catchphrase of Tupac’s chorus. Tupac described himself as “lost in the whirlwind” in the poor and threatening environment he was raised in. He calls out, “Look for Me,” and asks for the uniting of African Americans to combat the conditions. His lyrics culminate the lessons he learned from his mother, the NYBPP and, as will be proven through this paper, explain the influence of the BLA and the efforts of government repression on his political and musical career. Tupac and his work represent the aftermath of the bloody war between the NYBPP and the U.S. government.

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16 Garvey’s writing, included in The Collective Autobiography of the New York 21 reads prior to the introduction: “Look for me in the whirlwind or the storm, look for me all around you, for with God’s grace, I shall come and bring with me countless millions of black slaves who have died in America and the West Indies and the millions in Africa to aid you in the fight for Liberty, Freedom and Life.”

17 http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/2pac/meandmygirlfriend.html
TO LIVE AND DIE IN NEW YORK

Each of the five boroughs of New York City (NYC), and surrounding urban northeastern communities, have distinctive histories, but what emerged from them was a pattern of deteriorating housing in the 1950s and 1960s that had reaching effects on its black residents. Because of this, each part of the city had its own flavor, but suffered from the same problem. African Americans in the City faced particular poverty associated challenges outside housing in each borough, neighborhood or community. Black New Yorkers suffered high levels of police brutality. The education offered to their children lacked quality.\(^\text{18}\) Their poverty brought risks to their health.\(^\text{19}\) Post World War II housing conditions fueled urban African American’s resentment toward their disabilities. The city of New York since the 1950s experienced a large increase in the visibility of African American protest with increases in their population.\(^\text{20}\) By the late 1960s, New Yorkers of color became especially conscious of the contradictions between their living conditions and the promises in American society, noticing the lacking efforts on behalf of their representative governments. In response to the shortcomings of their citizenship, Black Panther offices opened in Newark and Jersey City after forming in Harlem, Brooklyn, the Bronx, and Queens. Offices opened in other sections of the state of New York later to organize alienated African Americans like upstate in Albany.

\(^\text{18}\) The Tenants of East Harlem, Sharman, 89: In 1954, the same year Malcolm X came to Harlem to serve as the minister of Temple Number 7, the Brown vs. Board of Education case caused NYC “to struggle to come to terms with a system of de facto educational segregation that had gone uncriticized until it was deemed unconstitutional.” Schools rezoned their student bodies causing all sorts of disarray to follow in the ensuing decade.
\(^\text{19}\) The New York Times, “A Disease of Poor Is Found In Bronx; Baby Cured Of Diet Ailment Rare In Prosperous Lands,” by Jane E. Brody, February 25, 1966, p 16: A ten month old Bronx boy was diagnosed and treated for kwashiorkor, a protein deficiency that is one of the highest killers of youth in underdeveloped countries. The housing conditions in post World War II New York compared with that of third world countries.
The Social History of Black New York

Alice Faye Williams (later known as Afeni Shakur), was born in North Carolina on January 22, 1947 and raised by her church worshiping family.\textsuperscript{21} She remembered racial tensions in the South and had her own political education early in life.\textsuperscript{22} Williams and her family moved to the South Bronx when she was eleven. Williams and her sister’s expectations’ of New York went unmatched, as they found a similarly oppressive environment upon arrival. Williams recalls, “No it wasn’t no Upper West Side brownstone. It was the South Bronx. Lots of concrete.”\textsuperscript{23}

After World War II, the Bronx was the destination of thousands of southern blacks and Spanish-speaking Puerto Ricans.\textsuperscript{24} The city, already segregated by the forties, left small pockets of availability for families of color to move into. Those available pockets unfortunately were along the subway and in the low-rent part of the South Bronx, which housed African American and Hispanics.\textsuperscript{25} Over the twentieth century the South Bronx became crowded with apartment buildings.\textsuperscript{26} Alice Williams grew up in an excessively crowded apartment, similar to many other poor black families coping with the doubling of the African American population in the South.

\textsuperscript{21} \textit{Evolution of a Revolutionary}, 173: Note, Williams did not find her faith in God till later in life.
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid, 13, Williams recalled a Ku Klux Klan (KKK) rally around her tenth birthday where the KKK planned an attack on the local African Americans. The Klan moved closer to Williams’ town but was cut off by local Indians before the black community could get their own hands on them as the anticipated and seemingly wanted.
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid, 30
\textsuperscript{24} \textit{The Bronx}, Evelyn Diaz Gonzalez, p 109
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid
\textsuperscript{26} \textit{The New York Times}, “Housing for 7,401 proposed in Bronx; Huge City Project Submitted to Planning Commission--2 Public Garages Approved Proposed Housing in Bronx,” January 11, 1951, p 23: One project in 1951 was proposed to provide housing for 7,401 in the Bronx, equipped with two public garages. The city project “planned for a huge $22,000,000 low-rent housing development occupying 42.58 acres of land in the Throgs Neck section of the Bronx”; Ibid, “City Is Planning Housing Over Bronx Rail Tracks,” May 26, 1971, p 85: In 1971, the city planned for the biggest city project in 10 years to create over 1000 apartments over the Bronx railroad tracks.
Bronx. The total population of the area peaked in 1970 at close to 1,500,000 people. The calls from the black community were heard but it seemed the problem was out of many people’s hands. In the early 1950s, William S. Jackson, executive secretary of the Bronx Branch of the Urban League of Greater New York said in the *New York Times*, “We don’t want to see a ghetto for the Negro and Puerto Rican populations in the Bronx.”

The rapid growth of African American districts and culture shaped the consciousness of youth and prepared them for rebellion. Immigrants moved to Harlem, the largest black community in NYC, swiftly with the coming of the twentieth century in search of available work. The author of *Tenants of East Harlem*, Russell Leigh Sharman, wrote, “African Americans tended to take Harlem with them wherever they settled.” Harlem’s population in the 1940s more than doubled without any sort of increase in the availability of housing. A decade after World War II, the number of blacks in NYC almost doubled to 918,000. By 1960, nearly 1,500,000 blacks lived in New York. Overcrowded homes resulted in NYC concentrations of color.

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27 Gonzalez, *The Bronx*, p 4 (Census), 12 2: Another wave of white flight followed the 1970s. The Bronx’s population between 1970 and 1980 decreased by 57% largely due to the construction of the Cross-Bronx expressway and other highway and infrastructure projects. The highways served as an escape route for middle class families in a massive displacement from the dilapidated setting. The Bronx, which held roughly 400,000 for decades, now had a population of 167,000. Overall, the Bronx lost 300,000 people between 1970 and 1980, largely due to the poor housing there. By the 1980s, NYC suffered decades of heroin and cocaine abuse among its black population, only to be followed by a new drug epidemic, crack cocaine.

28 *The New York Times*, “Racial tolerance for Bronx urged; Borough Wants No ‘Ghetto’ for Negroes and Puerto Ricans, Says Urban League Head,” March 9, 1952, Page 72: Jackson had received an award for his distinguished social service by Columbia University the day before that article printed.

29 Sharman, *The Tenants of East Harlem*, 82

30 Biondi, *To Stand and Fight*, 113

31 http://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0056/tab47.pdf

32 Ibid

33 Look for Me in the Whirlwind: the Collective Autobiography of the New York 21 (referred in the future as *Look for Me in the Whirlwind*), xi: Born on December 13, 1946, in New York City, former Panther Michael Cetewayo Tabor grew up in an overcrowded home. He had to sleep with his crippled sister, who wore leg braces that would leave Tabor’s body bruised and battered in the morning.
Across the twentieth century, African Americans emigrated from the South looking for work and better lives in manufacturing centers of the northeast and west coast.\textsuperscript{35} Those looking for a brighter life often found similar hardships when moving north. As historian Donna Murch wrote, “Southern newcomers repeatedly expressed their frustration with northern cities by referring to them as ‘Up South’.”\textsuperscript{36} In 1940 the African American population in New York was close to 570,000.\textsuperscript{37} In all low-income NYC areas the post-WWII suburban boom helped foster the phenomenon of white flight. Corona, Queens, a largely middle class neighborhood, was the most ethnically diverse borough with long-established populations of white Americans, many Italian, and African Americans.\textsuperscript{38} In the 1950s, seventy percent of Corona, Queen’s white population left, resulting in a panic of houses going up for sale, many whites relocating to Long Island, Westchester, Rockland, and other New York counties.\textsuperscript{39} By the 1960s, Jamaica housed the largest African American population in the borough.\textsuperscript{40} Queens has so much land area compared to the Bronx that they could scatter their residents, while the Bronx built upward. Still, the racial makeup of NYC changed significantly after the War.

Nathaniel Burns was born in Queens on June 17, 1944 and was raised by his mother and father, with three brothers and three sisters. Burns’ roots in activism stemmed from his experiences with state institutions, specifically schools and prisons. His political education began in the tenth grade when he was kicked out of school for fighting a teacher. He claimed he used self defense when his teacher attacked him. At age sixteen he was arrested for robbery and sentenced to three years as a “youthful offender.” He spent the next thirty-two months at Great

\textsuperscript{35} Sharman, \textit{The Tenants of East Harlem}, 81
\textsuperscript{36} Murch, \textit{Living for the City}, 44
\textsuperscript{37} http://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0056/tab47.pdf
\textsuperscript{38} Ricourt and Danta \textit{Hispanas de Queens}, 17; 19: North Corona was largely African American, Corona Plaza Hispanic, and Corona heights largely Italian and Spanish; page 15: Throughout its long history Corona has been an arrival point for immigrants, and a site of multiethnic contact and interaction
\textsuperscript{39} Gregory, \textit{Black Corona}, 60
\textsuperscript{40} Copquin, \textit{The Neighborhood of Queens}, 106
Meadows Correctional Institution, also known as Comstock, in upstate New York where he finished his high school education. Burn’s political education heightened immensely by the time he got back out onto New York’s streets, and by the late 1960s, he helped create the NYBPP.

Economic and social divisions decorated as well as divided NYC communities. South Jamaica and Corona, Queens historically housed many blacks, which explains why Black Panther offices sprung up there in the 1960s. Queens advertised South Jamaica as an area for low-income families with one and two-family homes below railroad tracks and small sections of public housing.41 Corona had three distinct subareas of different ethnic groups since the 1950s. These patterns repeated across NYC with poor families moving in. Harlem labels like El Barrio and Italian Harlem did not define specific geographical locations, but rather the way “languages, music, and food seemed to change the father south or east anyone walked from 117th street.”42 Those who did not migrate to Harlem, “at least heard above 110th street as the capitol of Black America.”43 However, the black community within Jamaica and other African American neighborhoods are divided even further by a series of interlocking neighborhoods, each distinct to the families there.

Black youth’s experiences in New York public schools fostered the start of their political education. Anthony Coston was a crucial figure in the formation of the NYBPP. The experiences that motivated Coston’s political stance started early while he was still in grammar school in Atlantic City. During his tenure at Atlantic City’s Indiana Avenue Grammar School, ethnically 100% black, Coston had a stuttering problem. His third grade teacher told him to “sit down and write the answer on paper because she did not have time for stuttering students.”44

42 Sharman, The Tenants of East Harlem, 86
43 Ibid, 82
44 Ibid, 101
After the class laughed at him, Coston picked up a flowerpot and threw it at Miss Bush’s head. The school subsequently expelled him. Coston’s issues within New Jersey and New York’s public education systems continued his entire school career.

The class differences of urban New York inspired masculine competition among youth. In junior high Anthony Coston moved to South Jamaica, and as he described it, a “rural ghetto.” His first day at school, consisting of an 80% black population, twenty kids tried to gang up and stomp him out. Coston prepared himself for the challenge, but a peer, Nathaniel Burns, future friend of the young Coston, insisted on a fair fight, one on one. The social and economic disparities were not confined to New York. Coston was born on January 9, 1943 in Atlantic City, New Jersey, a popular middle-class resort. The boardwalk cycled money and opened entry level jobs offered to many African Americans. By 1950 the quality of the boardwalk had deteriorated simply from urban decay. The slums grew larger as land lay vacant and undeveloped. According to Coston, self-hatred inflicted many poor blacks in the depressed area.

In fact, Coston was not unique. A surprising number of NY Panthers came from New Jersey. Post war African American migrants and other ethnic groups flooded the metropolitan areas of Newark, the Oranges, Jersey City, and Atlantic City. The conditions in these highly

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45 Look for Me in the Whirlwind, 65: The urban contrast and racist discourse of diverse NYC communities inspired rebellion. Bronx native and Panther Eddie Jamal Joseph engaged in race wars living in the Bronx. Racial discrimination spawned street group formation. Joseph wrote, “This mix allowed for a great deal of gang wars between the whites and blacks, but at the same time the blacks in the houses’ parents discouraged them from contacting those of the lower class.” Joseph experienced a division between African Americans within his community who did not condone his subversive behavior; Murch, Living for the City, 64: “The physical contrast between public housing and single-family homes erected fault lines in the built environment that exacerbated social divisions among youth.” Joseph as a black youth felt great hostilities from his white neighbors, and felt a lack of connection with the blacks that lived in more suitable housing.

46 Look for Me in the Whirlwind, 49

47 Ibid, 122

48 For a full account of Atlantic City’s boardwalk in its “hey day” and its transition to New Jersey’s gambling center read Bryant Simon’s Boardwalk of Dreams. The area surrounding Atlantic City’s casinos and boardwalk have become legal battlegrounds for cases of eminent domain.

49 Look for Me in the Whirlwind, 101
dense urban areas of New Jersey resembled the dilapidated neighborhoods of poor-income New York communities. Newark is the largest and most prominent black population in urban New Jersey. One ex-Panther recalled his run-down home in Newark “where the kitchen was a hotplate and the toilet a five-gallon can.” The same Panther moved to Harlem and found decrepit housing similar to Newark is. Harlem residents paid more money to live in worse housing, a trend throughout the city.

The African American sections of Harlem suffered from far more economic depression then other areas of the city. Run down homes bred disease and only minimal health care was available for blacks in Harlem. The New York Times printed an article in 1953 entitled, “Violations Mount In Tenement Test; 704 More Unlawful Conditions Found in Harlem Block in Rehabilitation Project Owners To Be Notified Those Who Fail to Comply With Housing Codes Will Appear in Court at Same Time.” As we will see, these conditions inspired the Panthers to create its headquarters in Harlem, the birthplace of many of its members.

Starting in the early 1950s, drug use in low-income urban areas grew worse with every passing decade. Richard Moore (later known as Dharuba Bin Wahad), born in NYC in 1944, who would later organize the Harlem branch of the Panthers in his twenties. The problem with

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50 Ibid, xi
51 Ibid, 271
52 Malcolm X Speaks, p 166-167: Malcolm X said in a speech: “In Harlem, for instance, all of the stores are owned by white people, all of the buildings are owned by white people. The black people are just there- paying rent, buying the groceries but they don’t own the stores, clothing stores, food stores, any kind of stores; don’t even own the homes that they live in. These are all owned by outsiders and for these run-down apartment dwellings the black man in Harlem pays more money than the man down in the rich Park Avenue section. It costs us more money to live in the slums than it costs them to live down on Park Avenue. Black people in Harlem know this, and that the white merchants charge us more money for food in Harlem-and it’s the cheap food, the worst food…So black people know they’re being exploited and that their blood is being sucked and they see no way out.”
53 The Tenants of East Harlem, Sharman, 82
54 The New York Times, “Tuberculosis Rise Continues In City,” July 14, 1952, Pg. 24: In the 1950s Harlem led the City in cases of tuberculosis. In 1952, Harlem was hit with mass numbers of tuberculosis cases, flooding and overcrowding hospitals for care.
55 Ibid, “Violations Mount In Tenement Test; 704 More Unlawful Conditions Found in Harlem Block in Rehabilitation Project Owners To Be Notified Those Who Fail to Comply With Housing Codes Will Appear in Court at Same Time.” April 9, 1953, p 29.
Harlem, Moore explained, “Because it was an oppressed community, that strong tendency
toward individualism existed,” and like Coston had noticed, so did “strong self-hatred.” Many
of the Panthers smoked marijuana, but some even used the cocaine and heroin that flooded the
streets and tore at the community. Drug dens opened at social clubs servicing the addicts.
Violence inevitably followed the drug path. Drugs saturated existing youth culture. Some
gang members actually chose to use drugs in fallout of the tremendous physical abuse New York
gangs suffered.

A common disability of urban poor families is the lack of a father, but a strong sense of
community. Often, African American homes broke apart due to the stress of being poor,
lacking appropriate shelter, and not seeing attempts to break away from this trend. Coston, the
son of divorced parents, said “90 percent of the parents of all the ghetto brothers and sisters I
knew from Atlantic City to New York to Philly were separated.” Many Panthers grew up in a
matriarchal family, and though fatherless, tried to take control and play the father figure within
the NYBPP. To make up for the lack of a father in the household, black communities often
looked after their own. Richard Moore recalled in 1971 that “the Harlem community was
completely different when I was growing up from what it is now.” His mother could leave him

56 Look for Me in the Whirlwind, 93
57 Ibid, 71; 74: The oppressive environment led Cetewayo into long struggle with drug addictions although he had a
great amount of potential as a basketball player. Cetewayo’s addiction did damage to his health. He had smoked
marijuana, but his drug use became a real issue when he began blowing cocaine. He began spending a great deal of
time with drug dealers and soon became a heroin addict.
For a sobering account of the different drug waves that hit the black community in Queens, read Ethan Brown’s
book, Queens Reigns Supreme. It tells the stories of drug dealers Lorenzo “Fat Cat” Nichols and Kenneth
“Supreme” McGriff, as well as the rising dealer/rap artist 50 Cent.
59 Schneider, Vampires, Dragons, and Egyptian Kings, 229
60 Sharman, The Tenants of East Harlem, 83: Lucille, like many youth of color growing up in NYC, never knew
much of her father, the void in the family’s history, and watched her mom attend several social clubs; Look for Me
in the Whirlwind, 14: One former NYBPP member, Jamal Eddie Joseph, born on January 17, 1953, received his last
name from a false pseudonym of the father he never knew on his birth certificate
61 Look for Me in the Whirlwind, 22
62 Ibid, 93
on the street or let other parents look after him, a type of “socialist community” as he described it. For the same reason, forces of masculinity formed in low-economic urban areas.

The poor and unstable environment in NYC urban areas bonded communities closer. Someone growing up in post World War II Harlem recalled, “You couldn’t go on anyone else’s block cuz then it was fightin’ … each block you went in it was a different atmosphere, ‘cause each block was a family.” Tenants, escaping the confines of their tight living space, met in the streets to converse with their neighbors. Community members stepped forward to protect their homes, and formed neighborhood-watch organizations. Many turned to the traditional American strategy of self-help and personal improvement, but the effort had limited efficacy without organization. Youth groups formed in NYC, some gangs, all describing themselves as street families divided by economic and social divisions.

Black New York suffered not only from lack of ownership of their homes but also in their control of businesses. African American migrants owned nearly nothing and depended on work in the North. Retailers changed during the postwar years. Some Harlem factories, despite their location in the heart of the New York’s black community, would not hire African Americans. By the 1950s, “postwar economic prosperity had accelerated the emigration of middle-class residents, and the businesses and adequate housing that remained were often owned by nonblack

63 Ibid
64 The Tenants of East Harlem, Sharman, 81: Sharman told the story of a Black girl named Lucille who lived in Harlem in a tenement building on 117th street with her single mother. Lucille eventually shared a four-room railroad style apartment with two sisters, two brothers, her mother and two grandparents
65 Ibid, 84
66 Brotherton and Barrios, The Almighty Latin King and Queen Nation, 301: “Socializing with friends and taking in the dramas of a city famed for its democratic street life was not just about the lure of street culture. Rather, it was related to the traditions of the city itself, where for almost two centuries citizens young and old have participated in the social parades on urban thoroughfares that have given neighborhoods their particular cultural “feel” and residents their sense of place and interconnectedness
67 Copquin, The Neighborhood of Queens, 106: In 1960, neighborhood coalitions, such as the Dunton Block and Civic Association, formed to keep the Queens neighborhoods safe; Pritchett, Brownsville, Brooklyn, 214: By the late 1960s, the Brownsville Cadet Corps (BCC) formed to provide educational and recreational opportunities within its young population to develop self-discipline and self-esteem, very reminiscent of the BPP there.
68 The Neighborhood of Queens, 106
outsiders.” Jews owned high percentages of successful retail businesses across NYC.

Suburban strip malls became popular after World War II and long-established businesses like Macy’s stopped operations. Unemployment rose. Jamaica experienced a blow to its economic flow through the community. Jamaica, known as a “business and merchant hub”, lost the image, and the neighborhood became associated with crime.

Racial discrimination exacerbated problems in NYC housing. During WWII, the South Bronx introduced systematic rent control. NYC landlords avoided investing in their aging homes. Owners opted to burn down their buildings in the 1960s in hope of collecting insurance. Tenants had the same idea; the city had a policy that burned-out tenants had priority in public housing and could even receive money to furnish their new homes. A wave of arson followed and only ended after the policy was changed, but the damage was done over the decade’s worth of burning that stretched form the 1960s to the 1970s.

Brooklyn had a great number of immigrants move into its territory over the course of the twentieth century resulting in struggles for appropriate and affordable housing. Future Panther

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69 Sharman, The Tenants of East Harlem, 85
70 Ibid, 87: In Harlem, everyone shopped at the Jewish vending sites on 116th street; A History of Housing in New York City, Plunz 132: The same could be said about the Bronx; Ricourt and Danta, Hispanas de Queens, 17-19: All three areas of Corona are bordered by Junction Boulevard, another important commercial shopping strip filled with nonblack business owners; Copquin, The Neighborhood of Queens, 110, 101: In Jamaica, Jews lived in Jamaica Estates, and ran most of the business district which boomed.
71 Ibid, 106
72 http://www.thirteen.org/bronx/history3.html: Done to prevent rents from skyrocketing as the population maxed out the available apartments.
73 The New York Times, March 24, 1960, “4,531 Slum Violations: This article was about an inspection in Brooklyn of single-room occupancy structures. In the 132 buildings they investigated, only eighteen percent of the 755 buildings planned to search, city officials reported 4,531 housing violations. The city brought the owners of twenty-seven buildings to court and thirteen were referred to the rent commission. The violations included improper exits, overcrowding, and illegal occupancies. The violation of one building owner was most disturbing, the rental of a cellar to be used as living quarters. Most buildings were cited for poor general maintenance.
74 http://www.thirteen.org/bronx/history3.html
75 New Immigrants to Brooklyn and Queens, 138: “In the final analysis, the demand for sound and affordable housing will rely heavily on the actual size of the undocumented immigrant community in Brooklyn and Queens. These two boroughs hold the vast majority of this population component of New York City and thus require that one confront official statistics about the housing situation there with open eyes. It would be worthwhile, for instance, to make an in-depth study of each component of the housing composition of neighborhoods where immigration is more pronounced—including such matters as co-op conversion and gentrification, housing abandonment, arson for profit,
Coston compared Brooklyn and Philadelphia saying they “are urban ghettos—which I dug better because there were more blacks living there.”

The result of Brooklyn’s long developmental history created families with longstanding backgrounds to the area. The Cain family, which produced three Black Panthers, moved to Marcy Avenue in Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn at the end of the 1950s. Alfred and his two sons, Alfred Jr. and Anthony, moved to their place on Marcy Ave, a run-down housing district, and had immediate experiences with the existing gangs present. Alfred decided to join the Chaplains because the other major gang present, the Buccaneers, chased him home when he first arrived. Alfred Cain Jr. recalled that he and his brother were constantly harassed by the police, who patrolled the ganglands with caution.

The Cain family also lived on Park Place in the Brownsville section of Brooklyn, an area providing an interesting example of available yet inappropriate housing. The area was once populated by whites, but filled with blacks as housing there deteriorated. White flight directed south of Brownsville, and the northern section became integrated with the poor-income Bedford Stuyvesant neighborhood.

Chevigny wrote about the Brownsville area, “It is astonishing that any neighborhood in New York, where the housing shortage is acute, can be so blighted that it is literally being abandoned as Brownsville is. The houses once occupied by white people have in the past twenty years filled with poor black people…In May 1971, there was a riot sparked by welfare cuts, during which there were more than one hundred fires. As Joseph Francois, former president of the Brownsville Community Council, said grimly, ‘When you looked at the neighborhood afterwards, you know you couldn’t tell the difference?’

The violence in Brownsville permeated the area up through the arrival of the New York Black Panther Party. Panthers described the area, “Brownsville is a war zone, where the pigs travel in twos and fours nervously reaching for their guns at night whenever a child explodes a

in REM housing.”

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76 Look for Me in the Whirlwind, 149
77 Cops and Rebels: A Study of Provocation, Paul Chevigny (in the future referred to as Cops and Rebels), 7
78 Brownsville, Brooklyn, 121: Whites and blacks battled for available middle-income housing in the 1950s.
79 Ibid, 121
80 Cops and Rebels, 64
firecracker, or a brick is thrown their way in rage, anger or frustration...he who would match a brick with a .38 police special,” referring to returned pistol fire.  

The Panthers took pride in their “lumpen membership” but attracted many exceptional students and other active contributors of the New York black community. Mark Holder was an honors student in Stuyvesant. Curtis Powell earned his PhD studying biochemistry. Joan Bird, born on March 9, 1949 in NYC, danced in tap and ballet recitals at Carnegie Hall. After a few years, her mother could not afford to pay for her lessons, and instead invested her money in sending Bird to catholic school. The Bronx Community College accepted Joan Bird where she studied to become a nurse. Joan Bird worked as a counselor in a children’s day care as well. The work she did early in her life correlated directly with her contributions to the NYBPP. In the NYBPP, she found a medium to conduct her community work and study her culture at the same time.

New York City always juxtaposed the experiences of the rich and poor. To be poor was to live in the context of a very rich city. It is the best example of a city embodying capitalism and power in close proximity to the oppressed. 1960s’ urban New York communities of color in took rational action to improve their lives. All in all, the social history of black New York and other African American northeastern urban communities explains how their youth came to organizing against oppressive conditions. The thriving African American communities of pride,

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81 *The Black Panther*, July 4, 1970, p 5: “Yes, Brownsville is most definitely in a state of war,”  
82 People like Mark Holder are not necessarily my focus in this paper, but work should be conducted on him.  
83 *Look for Me in the Whirlwind*, p 282  
84 Ibid, 94  
85 Ibid, 102  
86 Ibid, 131  
87 Ibid, 175  
88 Ibid, 305: Joan Bird worked for the Party during the day, and took college courses at night. Studying to be a nurse, Bird found the Panther Party to be a calling for her work prior to her graduation.
Herre

creativity and contact, laid the framework for an explosively exciting and dangerous youth community renewal movement: the NYBPP.

**Meeting their Quota**

In the mid 1960s, New York youth of color took it upon themselves to police their neighborhood. As Robert Collier, a former New York Black Panther and gang member said, “We band together to survive-physically, emotionally, and naturally.”\(^{89}\) Collier wrote, “The gang concept is a basic and fundamental historical development. It is a feeling of security after being isolated from society because of group origin.”\(^{90}\) The connectivity within these street families encouraged enlistment by black youth. African American urban groups were “bounded by geographic markers,” which outlined their quasi-social clubs.\(^{91}\) Though urban African American youth attempted to control their post war NY communities by establishing territorial lines, the city and state government legally established and patrolled the social barriers.\(^{92}\) The amount of crime in the low-income areas of NYC made the NYPD’s presence seem necessary, though many racial issues erupting from it raised concerns in the already oppressed communities.

The amount of money spent on the NYPD called for a necessity to show results. Egon Bittner, critic of how police operate in modern society, wrote, “Police work is a tainted occupation.”\(^{93}\) He pointed out that if an officer has a quota to meet, then a problem exists in sense of structure.\(^{94}\) Bittner wrote, “The preferred targets of special police concerns are some

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89 *Look for Me in the Whirlwind*, 145, 147
90 Ibid, 146
91 Murch, *Living for the City*, 49
92 Panthers and other youth in the urban community described the police as a foreign-occupying army
93 *The Functions of Police in Modern Society*, 6
94 Ibid, 55: If an officer has a quota or expectations to meet, then their work is a matter of controversy, as summonses and arrests are tools to meet a number not justify the law.
ethnic and racial minorities, the poor living in urban slums, and young people in general.”

The NYPD patrolled through communities of color to achieve their own agendas. The most obvious action is an arrest, which kept courts busy and funneled money into the system. Bittner argued that in exchangeable circumstances, black youth would not receive the same treatment that a wealthy, older white person would from an officer.

All poor African American New Yorkers knew of the NYPD’s brutality and largely influenced radicalization of youth. A former policeman wrote:

“One rule I learned was that any suspect who assaulted a police officer in any way was never supposed to be able to walk into the station house on his own... If you did bring a prisoner in who had assaulted you or another officer and he was still standing, you were admonished by your colleagues, sometimes by supervisors.”

The empire city created an environment which called for precautious safety measures and hands-on protective forces. A policeman by title and occupation is licensed to commence actions from which other citizens are barred. Frank Donner, director of the American civil liberties project on political surveillance that worked on state and federal levels of police repression wrote, “What is especially compelling is that specialized police units have openly performed such functions.”

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95 Ibid, 10-11: JQ Wilson wrote as Bittner interpreted, “the patrolman believes with considerable justification that teenagers, negroes, and lower-income persons commit a disproportionate share of all reported crimes; being in those population categories at all makes one, statistically, more suspect than other persons; but to be in those categories and to behave unconventionally is to make oneself a prime suspect.”

96 Ibid, 11
97 Ibid, 55
98 Ibid

99 Ibid, 15: The first police stations in America formed around heavily populated cities like New York and Boston in the 19th century. The first police department established in the United States was in NYC, modeled after London’s facilities in accordance with recommendations made by English committees.

100 Nelson, *Police Brutality*, 173

101 Note: Police are put in charged of public order and when receiving a call to a disorder, are unwilling to compromise in the situation as a threat to their control.

102 *The Functions of Police in Modern Society*, 73

103 Donner Protectors of Privilege, 1; Nelson, *Police Brutality*, 173: A former NYPD officer said, on several occasions, he would not accept a prisoner that was beaten that badly while handcuffed and got in trouble for it. It was common to see officers take advantage of being police officers, abusing power, “because that’s what the informal leadership structure demanded.”
The NYPD believed they had “stringently punitive discipline” for officers that acted outside of legal parameters. Yet, in order to keep their records clean, police had an incentive to arrest the people they harassed. Often officers redefined an event into an unregulated situation and avoided punishment. Many lawyers would take the deal of a lesser sentence even with their client’s innocence. The courts accepted the word of an officer far ahead of a lower class African American. For at least some part, the belief that police officers risked their lives for the communities they guarded served in protecting them from most scrutiny.

Cronyism permeated the NYPD for years. It was a premiere, well-paying position for New Yorkers with little room for job growth outside of the department. Any promotions happened within it. Bittner wrote, “Contrary to the case of the social worker, teacher, or nurse, a policeman out of employment is merely an ex-policeman. In fact, the projection of a career in police work means virtually always spending one’s working life in a single department.”

The brutalization of an urban black youth by an officer met acceptance and backing by others wearing the badge.

In 1943, tensions came to fore in Harlem, resulting in the second major race riot in the city. A rumor that a white police officer shot an African American serviceman who was protecting his mother initiated the rebellion. Although the facts differed slightly, the rumor seemed credible because of a previous series of shootings in Harlem by undercover police

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104 The Functions of Police in Modern Society, 56
105 Ibid, 56-57
106 Ibid, 57: Chevigny said, “many lawyers think it a triumph for a felony to be reduced to a mere offence, but the truth is that it requires only two simple ingredients: guiltless clients and infinite patience.”
107 Ibid, 73: This meant that police officers looking to move up in their divisions needed to conduct good work along with a “heavy admixture of regard for interpersonal relations with one’s peers and superiors…The realization of aspirations involves recourse to a ramified network of empire building, collusive arrangements, and informal politicking.”
109 Vampires, Dragons, and Egyptian Kings, 59
Author Eric Schneider wrote about the rebellion, “Harlemites anger at police abuse, at discrimination, at their higher rents for shoddier apartments, and at the color line in general exploded in attacks on white owned stores and on police.” However, business owners and city officials believed the rebellion was as simple as an unjust riot.

The police formally could not use deadly force freely, maliciously, or frivolously. Yet, the NYPD had few guidelines or limitations prescribing what a police officer could say or do throughout the 1960s and 1970s. Police could administer powerful force under the instructions of their duties. It was “exceedingly rare that police actions involving the use of force were actually reviewed and judged by anyone at all.” Contemporary analysts of NYPD training wrote in 2008, “The force applied may be as trivial as pushing or as consequential as using deadly force. However, whatever force is used, it is expected to be reasonable for the situation at hand.”

Racial rebellions across 1960s New York displayed the diminishing patience poor people had for their living conditions. Rebellions in Harlem and Bedford-Stuyvesant erupted in 1964, race wars in east New York two years later, and riots in east Harlem in 1967. African American and Puerto Rican youth “vented their hostility toward a political and economic system that excluded them.” Youth councils proved their usefulness in avoiding serious destruction or losses of life in these events. Schneider wrote, “There is no evidence of organized gang involvement in these riots; they were spontaneous explosions in which gang and non-gang

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110 They had intentionally looked vulnerable, and then shot their attempted muggers.
111 Ibid, 59
112 The New York Times, “Factors in Harlem Riots,” by J.K. Clark, Aug 13, 1943: The author of this 1943 editorial believed that the city’s investigation of housing and poverty related issues was invaluable and that they belonged looking at hoodlumism as being the main factor of the 1943 Harlem Riots.
113 Bittner, The Functions of the Police in Modern Society, 37
114 Ibid
115 Firearm Training, xxv
116 Vampires, Dragons, and Egyptian Kings, Schneider, 223
members alike participated and united against a common foe, much as had occurred in the Harlem riot of 1943.”

Post war New York urban communities had surprising access to guns. New York redesigned its factory lines during the War to build firearms and ammunition. Criminal activity spread the weapons onto the street. Anthony Coston believed that some of the gangs in NYC “were better equipped militarily than some African and Latin American states were when they first got so-called independence.” In 1965 the Law Enforcement Assistance act added military type-arms to the police force. The department acquired assault rifles, personnel carriers, and other military technology. The impetus for this development in arms partly resulted from riots in Harlem in 1964. The knowledge of weapons on the streets made both officers and gang members more anxious. The murders of young black members in urban areas especially influenced NYBPP membership.

The pistol was a symbol of power for policemen in America. Bittner wrote, “The use of force not involving firearms is almost entirely unchartered.” Unlike other countries, U.S. police departments taught no fire-arm training marksmanship of non-vital areas up through the 1970s. Lethal force had formal limitations in virtually all areas of the country yet the lack of practical consequences made poor urban areas vulnerable. No differentiation could be made

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117 Ibid, 224
118 *Look for Me in the Whirlwind*, 148: Coston said, “All gangs in New York knew where to rip off guns.”
119 Ibid
120 Winston Grady Willis, “State Repression and Political Prisoners,” 365
121 Ibid
122 *Firearm Training*, xxv; This review in the 21st century recommended placing officers in positions to hear gunshots as to get more comfortable with the occurrence to prevent a reflexive action to return fire.
123 Bittner, *The Functions of the Police in Modern Society*, 101
124 Ibid, 102
125 *Firearm Training*, xxiv; 87: The brute force NYPD officers used and bragged of caused social uproar from oppressed Black communities. Often, in a retaliatory fashion, New York Blacks of all ages, including youth and gang members, faced deadly confrontations with the NYPD.
between reflexive, contagious, or intentional shootings. No scale existed to judge the appropriateness of police actions.

Though the entire black community acted in these rebellions, former youth gang members became Panthers. Richard Moore joined a gang as a youth. Moore wrote, “Let it suffice to say that my joining a gang or a club or whatever was a turning point in me because before then I wasn’t really involved in hanging out too tough.” Moore chose to transform his character in response to home and street conditions. He had spent years in prison, like his father, by the time he helped establish Harlem’s first BPP office. His political awakening came after serving time for criminal activity.

The NYBPP grew out of a pre-existing network of black youth culture centered in “street families,” that was encouraged by the government system. Though apolitical, Anthony Coston remembered of the structuring of 1950s gangs on the East coast, “The gangs were organized in a paramilitary manner with a president, vice-president, and warlord. Street families certainly had an agenda and put members in specific positions for specific reasons, speaking to the advancement and establishment of gang life in New York and close areas.

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126 Vampires, Dragons, and Egyptian Kings, 222: “Some gang members chose to become revolutionaries. Gangbangers were natural recruits for revolutionary activity since they were accustomed to defying police and other authorities, and political organizing offered an appropriately masculine alternative to the self-defeating violence of gang conflict.”
127 Look for Me in the Whirlwind, 144
128 Ibid, 69, 24, 26: His father had migrated North with his father in the late 1920s, and settled in Harlem, described as a lively finger-popping neighborhood. Moore’s father dealt drugs and ran with a gang called the Slicksters, and carried the nickname “Cokey.” Moore’s father during the 1940s joined the army, but went AWOL to go back to hustling, and started using heroin.
129 Ibid, 192: Panther Richard Harris said, “In both my fields, the Mafia and the police were good customers and partners,” talking about breaking and enterings and stealing and selling cars. Dirty cops saw opportunities to obtain illegal money and took them; Look for Me in the Whirlwind, 303: Joan Bird She recalled dirty police officers taking extortion money from black businessmen, while “collecting graft from the numbers game, collecting money for dope, from pushers there on the street, arresting brothers and sisters on the street and actually beating them with clubs, seeing them thrown into pig cars and carted away like animals.”
130 Look for Me in the Whirlwind, 148: Coston added, “I had a knack for being the warlord.”
Anthony Coston said, “It was a bad-nigger-kill-bad-nigger process and it was encouraged by the police and the power structure.”

Police responded slowly when hearing of violence between black gangs. If the Bishops and Chaplains fought, the police would come after the fighting ended because of their reputations. In the mid-1950s these Brooklyn gangs, the Sinners in Jamaica, and others in NYC were apolitical, closely-knit armies with memberships of ten thousand. Street families varied by location, race, and status in NYC, producing a high number of gangs. The networking of gangs was immense, as some would ally themselves with gangs of similar characteristics across the east coast. Coston said, “If the street-gang brothers and sisters were ever politicized to the point where they knew who their real enemy was, the American system would be in danger of collapse.”

The relationship poor New Yorkers had between gangs and police brutality spawned NYBPP membership. The NYBPP looked to cure the gang problem in their communities.

Coston, who went to prison before becoming a Panther, wrote:

“Gangs were the only symbols of masculinity in the ghettos of America. I experienced gang fighting in Philly, New York City, and Atlantic City. In all three states the phenomenon was the same: the animosity and hostility of the blacks, created by

131 Ibid
132 Vampires, Dragons, and Egyptian Kings, 63: Schneider wrote about gang activity in the Bronx, “Public officials reacted skeptically to citizens’ complaints about gangs. They rejected evidence either by disparaging the credibility of witnesses or using the turn of the century gang studies to reinterpret the meaning of what people were reporting.”
133 Look for Me in the Whirlwind, 149
134 Ibid, 148; 150
136 Look for Me in the Whirlwind, 147: In the 1950s, when Anthony Coston lived in Atlantic City and attended junior high school there, he and his friends organized a gang they named the Syndicate. They allied with the Syndicate in North Philly. When he joined they all took on street names, as he said “typical in all street gangs from Philly to New York to Atlantic City,” and Coston took the name Shotgun; Vampires, Dragons, and Egyptian Kings, 24: Gangs and other black groups often affiliated with similar organizations, whether of related name, status, family, or friendship in the Northeast. Some gangs from the Bronx and Brooklyn, like the Black Spades, Savage Nomads, and the Ghetto Brothers made associations with each other; These alternate names gang members assumed played in this character transformation when trying to run their own respective streets. When gang members joined they were to personify the roles they took on, often adding more masculinity to the equation.
137 Look for Me in the Whirlwind, 150
hundreds of years of white repression, and created by the conditions in the white-created ghetto, were directed against each other instead of against the system that created the repression and hostilities.”

The NYBPP believed, “This gang problem, involving drugs and senseless violence, has turned into a nightmare for citizens and police in almost every city, large and small, in America.”

The NYBPP gave a channel for gang members to exert their energies in positive ways.

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138 Ibid, 148
139 Ibid, ix
STOP FRONTIN’, START ORGANIZIN’

Far away from New York, on the West Coast the Black Power movement spurred action in urban cities. Rioters in the mid 1960s helped create the split between the Long Civil Rights Movement in the South and the Black Power Movement in the North. In the aftermath of the Watts Rebellions, Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale formed the Black Panther Party for Self Defense (BPPSD) in 1966, specifically to combat the abusive police treatment of African Americans.\(^{140}\) The two Merritt College students had participated in African American studies at school, forging a network of allies and opponents before taking this armed revolutionary stance.\(^{141}\) Historian Donna Murch wrote, “The spontaneous uprisings in Watts called attention to the problems faced by California’s migrant communities and created a new urgency about police violence and the suffocating conditions of West Coast cities.”\(^{142}\) The issue of police brutality, common in poor oppressed communities, led as the most pressing issue in Oakland up through the 1960s, which was why the Seale and Newton made it their first targeted obstacle.

The Black Panther Party, Oakland, California, 1966

Newton’s access to the law library at the North Oakland Service Center, a poverty program where Seale worked, gave the fresh BPP an opportunity to directly aid their community.

\(^{140}\) Murch, *Living for the City*, 126: The BPPSD name came from the Lowndes County Black Panther Party that had organized voters in the South. The Lowndes County BPP had formed in 1965, with the aid of the reputable Stokely Carmichael and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). The name the Black Panther Party had been given to the organization by the local white media. They operated under the original name the Lowndes County Freedom Organization with a large, crouching black cat emblem. The panther was an animal that would attack with fierce force after being backed into a corner, and symbolized African American’s situation in the U.S. The emblem was important for the illiterate black population there. Newton and Seale had often expressed their interest in merging with SNCC and had even named Carmichael Honorary Prime Minister of the BPPSD.

\(^{141}\) Ibid, 122: In 1966, Newton was twenty-five, occasionally employed, and a parolee, where Seale was several years older and worked part time as a stand-up comic.

\(^{142}\) Ibid
Newton had studied law and was well versed in California penal codes.\textsuperscript{143} He came across an old statue that legalized carrying unconcealed weapons. The young Panthers’ direct confrontational style shocked 1960s Oakland.\textsuperscript{144} Newton trailed calls, observed the proceedings, and informed the victims of any violations, as he recited penal code from memory.\textsuperscript{145} All was done legally with weapons in their arms.\textsuperscript{146}

Although Newton and Seale were college men, they “downplayed their student origins and on-going campus support, in favor of ‘brothers off the block’ who they celebrated as their base.”\textsuperscript{147} The troubled street youth they targeted felt left out of traditional civil rights movements like those in the South. They were also the ones who suffered the worst blows by Oakland police. Routine traffic stops frequently ended violently and created dangerous situations.\textsuperscript{148} Newton and Seale realized the importance of having the most disgruntled and active youth of color as a part of their organization for the revolutionary rigor. As historian Donna Murch has argued, “Through focusing on the issue of police brutality, Huey Newton tapped an immense reserve of anger, especially among teenagers and young adults.”\textsuperscript{149}

Newton and Seale realized that before they could conduct the police patrols on a larger scale they needed to raise attention in their neighborhood. They needed a political platform to clearly explain their stance and their objectives. In less than twenty minutes, Newton and Seale drafted the Ten Point Program in the North Oakland Poverty Center. The document demanded the rights of a full citizen for African Americans, including an immediate end to police brutality.

\textsuperscript{143} Ibid, 131
\textsuperscript{144} Murch, \textit{Living for the City}, 133
\textsuperscript{145} Ibid: Newton had begun police patrols “informally by purchasing a police radio and tailing dispatches to West Oakland.” These police patrols grew out of a larger movement following Watts by a variety of groups that emerged to confront the issue.
\textsuperscript{146} Ibid: Newton even maintained the required distance from the working officer.
\textsuperscript{147} Ibid, 122
\textsuperscript{148} Ibid, 136
\textsuperscript{149} Ibid
Richard Aoki, a Japanese American activist affiliated with Merritt College, gave Newton his first weapon donation. The Panthers patrolling police now had “a shotgun, revolver, a .45, one or two smaller pistols and an M1 carbine.”\(^{150}\) Although the patrols did deter some Oakland brutality, they ended with the passage of a California law restricting pedestrians’ rights to carry a weapon, directly a result of the Panthers’ efforts.

The BPP formed in 1966 to do what Malcolm X intended had he lived. Newton said: “A new militant spirit was born when Malcolm died. It was born of outrage and a unified Black consciousness, out of the sense of a task left undone.”\(^{151}\) Malcolm believed in the right of self-defense. Newton adopted this, but the Panthers’ claims to arms intensified the situation and made the party vulnerable. Newton said, “When the Party first organized, I did not think I would live for more than one year after we began; I thought I would be blasted off the streets.”\(^{152}\)

Newton’s beliefs were not farfetched. A year after the formation of the Oakland Panthers, on October 28, 1967, Newton was pulled over by Oakland officer John Frey. Frey called for backup, and Herbert Heanes responded. The events following are still debated, but a confrontation ensued and ended with Newton shot in the stomach, Frey dead, and his companion wounded. Newton fled and collapsed in the emergency room at Kaiser Hospital. Murch wrote, “A photograph taken the next day showed Newton prone in agonizing pain manacled to a hospital gurney,” suffering from being handcuffed in a way where he had to arch his back to take pressure off his awkwardly cuffed wrist.\(^{153}\)

The Party was in disarray. At the time, Seale was also in legal trouble. Seale marched on Sacramento’s capital in May of 1967 to declare their political platform and was thrown in

\(^{150}\) Ibid, 134  
\(^{151}\) Hilliard, Huey: Spirit of the Panther, 88  
\(^{152}\) Ibid  
\(^{153}\) Murch, Living for the City, 149
prison. This allowed for other members in the Oakland party to step up into leadership positions. One of these Panthers, David Hilliard, a childhood friend of Newton's, assumed the responsibility and began to run the Party how he saw fit, ignoring criticisms from lower ranked members.

With Newton in jail, recently released Soledad Prison inmate Eldridge Cleaver put forth a strong effort in a “Free Huey” campaign. Eldridge Cleaver’s book, *Soul on Ice*, made him a national figure, “replacing Stokely Carmichael and Rap Brown as the most highly publicized African American militant spokesman.” Cleaver had been published by Ramparts, a newsletter that printed prisoners and other black activist works, for several years while serving his twelve year conviction for rape. In prison, he experienced organizational teachings amongst Black Muslim prisoners. He then attempted to revive Malcolm X’s OAAU in the Bay area unsuccessfully upon release. The Panthers had attempted to recruit the significantly older Cleaver on numerous occasions without any luck, but Newton’s armed-confrontation with police outside a Ramparts office made Cleaver change his mind. While Newton faced the death penalty for the murder of Officer Frey, the BPP shifted from a local bay-area organization in Oakland to a national organization with Panther offices across the country. The New York branch, as well as others across the nation, developed and ran under the leadership of those in Oakland, the national headquarters. Cleaver’s popularity in New York City preceded him.

Before reaching the NYBPP, Cleaver conducted political work on behalf of the Oakland BPP and earned himself the nickname “Papa Rage.” On April 6, 1968, Cleaver planned an

154 http://www.ahueypnewtonstory.com/people/people_seale.html: Seale would continue to be an easy target for police forces because of his orator skills and commitment to organizing masses. In 1968, Seale's trip to the Democratic National Convention earned him a 1968 conviction of an attempt to incite a riot. Denied a lawyer, Seale on numerous occasions rose to defend himself and the judge ordered him bound and gagged. Repeated legal battles took Seale away from the Black Panther scene and would fall out of leadership focus.
155 *Crime, Dissent and the Attorney General*, 124
156 *Murch, Living for the City*, 145
157 *Murch, Living for the City*, 145
offensive attack two days after the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. They were on route to
make a move when Cleaver had to urinate.158 Cleaver, and three other Panthers, pulled the car
over, and Cleaver proceeded about his business till he saw a police officer spot him from a
distance. The police officer spotting Cleaver moved to run the plates of the vehicle, and was
shot.159 Police returned fire with thirteen gunners piercing 157 bullets through the Panther car.160

Cleaver along with the BPP’s first official member, “Lil” Bobby Hutton, fled together
and engaged in a near hour long shootout with Oakland police after fleeing the previous
gunfight. The police threw smoke canisters into the bullet-riddled basement the two were
cornered in. One canister caught fire, endangering Cleaver and Hutton. Cleaver came up with a
plan for the two of them to come out completely nude, to shock the police into a simply awkward
arrest. Hutton, seventeen years old at the time, was shy to strip down, and only took off his shirt.
He walked out with Cleaver, but was pushed by an officer and stumbled. The police gunned him
down, making him the first, martyr of the BPP. An autopsy report showed at least six bullets hit
him from close range.161

Three officers were wounded that night. Many officers involved were split on what they
felt about that night. One of the officers taking Hutton into said, “They murdered my
prisoner...it was first degree murder.”162 Cleaver served a reduced sentence of one year of
community service.163 Officials knew they could not pursue the persecution of Cleaver because
of how they handled Hutton.


158 Austin, _Up Against the Wall_, 165
159 Ibid, 166
160 Ibid 167
161 Ibid
162 _Leaving Cleaver_
163 _Leaving Cleaver_
The New York Black Panther Party (NYBPP) differed from the Oakland party in significant ways. All Panther chapters formed against their respective vexing community issues. Curtis Powell wrote, “It was beautiful. We worked on problems like community control of schools and hospitals, and welfare problems.” The NYBPP portrayed an image different then the black leather-jacket, black beret, gun toting Oakland Panthers. Many Oakland BPP members were born in the South. Yet, “in contrast to the older generation, they remained too far removed from their previous lives to have them serve as templates for the new.” New York African Americans had a rich connection with the blacks in the South as well as back in Africa. Murch wrote, “Many New York Panthers chose African-inspired names and sewed cowrie shells into their uniforms to signify their identification with black diasporic culture.”

Still, the NYBPP adopted the Oakland Panther’s platform to their shared tradition of revolutionary Black Nationalism. The NYBPP would stay true to these teachings through their organizational career. The creation of the BPP in New York resulted from hard work of several key individuals, most influential for their leadership. Membership in New York quickly rose to eight hundred within the first few months of official formation.

When Anthony Coston came home from prison, drugs filled his community. It bothered Coston that everyone outside the prison still talked about what they did before he went away without action. Coston compared them with the politically conscious prisoners he had

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164 Note from the Author: The founding date of the NYBPP has not been established. The assassination of Martin Luther King Jr., and Cleaver’s attack afterward, marked the era of the NYBPP creation. Kings death convinced some African American youth that non-violent methods were not feasible. In 1968, the national headquarters recognized the formation of the NYBPP after sending Oakland members to help organize on the east coast; Vampires, Dragons, and Egyptian Kings, Schneider, 221: Named 1967 as the founding date of the NYBPP.

165 Look for Me in the Whirlwind, 283

166 Visibly carrying a weapon in New York was illegal and quite alarming.

167 Murch, Living for the City, 45

168 Ibid, 240

169 Crime, Dissent, and the Attorney General, 125

170 Look for Me in the Whirlwind, 264
come to know. From 1966 to 1967, Coston and Burns investigated every Black Nationalist
group in NYC, but failed to connect with one. The two of them, as Coston said, “Got together
with some nationalists in Jamaica, Queens, and organized the Grass Root Front. Our aim was to
take the anti-poverty programs from the hands of the religious pimps and preachers and
guarantee the grass-root people control.” The group split up, however, after the older members
did not want to add political goals to their agenda, as the youth in the organization did.

The organizations in New York prior to the BPP lacked the revolutionary program
capabilities to attract youth. Burns said, “By 1967 I was thoroughly disillusioned… I heard
about the BPP in Oakland, California…along with some of my closest comrades, we decided this
was the type of organization we wanted to be a part of.” Burns, Coston, and others took a trip
to California to investigate the organization. They heard back from the Oakland BPP in the
spring of 1968 that the possibility of organizing a chapter in New York existed. In April 1968,
Burns and Coston met Ron Pennywell, sent from Oakland, to organize a BPP in NYC.

The NYBPP was founded on social principals by politically astute individuals. Coston
described Pennywell as “a very grass-root brother, who would always ask the cadre for
suggestions.” Coston, named Section Leader of Harlem by Pennywell, held section meetings
at his house on 117th street. They established a Harlem office at 2026 7th Ave. The Harlem
office was the center of all original operations, the one that attracted the most blacks to start,
including Alice Williams. Alice Williams said when she met Coston and Burns, “It was the
first time in my life that I ever met men who didn't abuse women. As simple as that. It had

171 Ibid
172 Ibid, 265: The two looked for an organization that resembled the direction Malcolm X headed.
173 http://www.prisonactivist.org/prisoners/sekou-mgobogi-abdullah-odinga
174 Look for Me in the Whirlwind, 295
175 Look for Me in the Whirlwind, 295
176 Ibid
177 Cleaver and Katsiaficas, Liberation, Imagination, and the Black Panther Party, p 44
nothing to do with anything about political movements.”

Williams joined the party and within months married Coston. Coston’s younger brother, Anthony, eventually became spokesman of the New York Chapter. The NYBPP did not tamper with religious ideology as a part of their political platform. This made the organization more clear and adaptable for black youth confused by the teachings of the Nation of Islam (NOI) and other groups.

The original organizers became the leaders of the party. Pennywell made the man who introduced Coston to him, Belal Sunni Ali, Section Leader of the Bronx. He worked under that title until being forced underground, with Burns stepping into the position. Richard Moore helped organize the South Bronx section as well. An office at 1370 Boston Road in the Bronx located the East Coast Ministry of Information where networking and organizing of all east coast chapters occurred. Later an office of information would be established nearly in every Black Panther section.

The Panthers then organized a section at 108-60 New York Boulevard, in Jamaica with the help of Omar Barbour. Barbour was a high school dropout, who turned political after following Malcolm X’s teachings. The Panthers opened a chapter with an office on Northern Boulevard in Corona that same year. Corona Panthers drew membership from the youth of working-class families, some members of the street gang the Enchanters.

Panthers created offices in all the major black neighborhoods throughout New York, including Brooklyn. The office in Bedford-Stuyvesant at 1808 Fulton Street, unlike the Student

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178 Ibid
179 Evolution of a Revolutionary, 71: By this time, Anthony Coston had changed his name to Lumumba Shakur, and Nathaniel Burns became Sekou Odinga. Because the chapters of this work are written thematically they will still be referred to as Coston and Burns until the transition is further detailed in the following chapter. After joining the party and dating Coston, Williams changed her own name to Afeni Shakur. Lumumba introduced Afeni to Muslim teachings and gave her the first bean pie she ate, a celebrated Black Muslim dish.
180 Cops and Rebels, 115
181 Ibid
182 http://itsabouttimebpp.com/Chapter_History/images/New_York/nyork1_1.html
183 Jeffrey Ogonna Green Ogba, Black Power: Radical Politics and African American Identity, 108
184 Gregory, Black Corona, 83
Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) office set in a “petit bourgeois” section of New York, was located within the oppressed black community it represented. In the fall of 1968, the Panthers opened another office in the Brownsville section of Brooklyn at 180 Sutter Avenue, home to another community of low-income housing. This office happened to be the last standing Panther office in Brooklyn in 1971. The Cain’s added a militant backbone to the Brooklyn office. Alfred Cain Jr. wrote, “At the time I joined, you had a lot of brothers and sisters in the party who had no political direction. In a sense the activities of the party were, more or less, to a lot of the brothers, like a throwback to the jitterbugging era, except now they were jitterbugging against the pigs.” Cain believed an oppressed black revolutionary like himself needed to do anything possible to survive, as long as it did not hurt African Americans.

Offices formed in New Jersey in similar ways they did in New York. Newark and Jersey City had Panther offices. Malcolm X, teaching as a minister in Newark, opened political doors to the toughest crowds in New Jersey. One Panther, Richard Harris, made the comparison between him and Malcolm, “From the free-and-easy existence of a hustler to one of the strictest religions there is, from indifference toward black people to the service of black people!” The areas were known for gang fighting but the groups gathered politically and focused on their community problems. The New Jersey chapter was one of the most militant of all the Panther chapters, and made significant contributions to black underground activities as well as to their community. The same problems in the dense city of New York troubled those in heavily populated urban areas in New Jersey. The New Jersey Panthers fought battles over housing

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185 *Cops and Rebels*, 109
186 Ibid, 58
187 Ibid, 59
188 *Look for Me in the Whirlwind*, 239
189 Ibid, 240
projects, like the Kawaida Towers or Stella Wright Housing Project in Newark.\textsuperscript{190} The New Jersey Panthers often collaborated with the NYBPP.

Jamal Joseph, a fifteen year old tenth grader, joined the NYBPP in October of 1968. He hustled out of Brooklyn’s Evander Childs High School everyday to work around the Panther office.\textsuperscript{191} He had tried running with a high school group, but after reading Malcolm’s autobiography Jamal spoke constantly of revolution.\textsuperscript{192} Joseph, concerned at first with the fate of the Panthers being a “totally suicidal movement,” believed that the Panthers gave a knife, gun, and beret to anyone who joined.\textsuperscript{193} He avoided the party until a friend convinced him to check it out, and when he heard the different programs the party offered, Joseph became interested and joined after attending their community meetings.\textsuperscript{194} After the Harlem office opened, Panthers transferred Joseph there to help Coston set up the bare and undeveloped workspace.\textsuperscript{195}

Many African Americans posed as official Panthers in the NYBPP, but were either apart of another organization working under the popular name, or just fronting. In October 1968, Robert Collier had a confrontation between two motorcycle gangs, and members claimed to have been Panthers. He then found out the Panthers had no office in the Lower East Side area from some real Panthers. Collier called the bikers out on their lie which they folded to.\textsuperscript{196} Collier said, “You get to realize that there are a lot of people who say they are Panthers who aren’t.”\textsuperscript{197}

The Oakland Panthers claimed to be Revolutionary Black Nationalists, but never got along well with other Black Nationalists nor did they reflect all of its ideology. The Oakland Panthers never saw eye to eye with the Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM) chapter in the

\textsuperscript{191} Look for Me in the Whirlwind, 299
\textsuperscript{192} Ibid
\textsuperscript{193} Ibid
\textsuperscript{194} Ibid
\textsuperscript{195} Ibid, 300
\textsuperscript{196} Look for Me in the Whirlwind, 302
\textsuperscript{197} Ibid, 303
Bay area, a group operating under the Black Nationalists title, while the NYBPP enjoyed its relationship with the New York RAM. *Right On*, the NYBPP newspaper that formed years after the founding date of the group, supported revolutionaries and poor masses in various places like Yemen, Palestine, Brazil, Puerto Rico, and even Australia.\textsuperscript{198}

The NYBPP emerged in an environment that had many local gangs present, in a mass grouping of diverse people. The Bay Area Central Committee consisted of mostly college students, where many New York members came from the streets. They formed community programs with the help of former gang members, of any color. Richard Moore remembered after the NYBPP was created, he joined and maintained a good working relationship with the Young Lords, who were Puerto Rican, and the Young Patriots, who were White but shared a low socioeconomic status.\textsuperscript{199}

The biggest contrast between the Oakland Panthers and the NYBPP was that the Bay Area party evolved out of their initial claim to arms into the programs to aid their community, where as the NYBPP worked vice versa. Alfred Cain Sr. wrote, “There was bound to be confusion in organizing a New York branch of the Oakland-based Panthers. “Picking up the gun” is usually an offense in itself in New York.”\textsuperscript{200} The NYBPP opened with Community Action Programs (CAPS) and fell away from them as they were transformed by repression. The Oakland Panthers formed CAPS after their patrols, and shifted only after the gun laws were passed in California.

The New York Panthers advocated self defense. John Casson (later known as Ali Bey Hassan), said, “self defense doesn't mean that you go out and attack somebody it means you have


\textsuperscript{199} *Still Black, Still Strong*, p 30

\textsuperscript{200} *Cops and Rebels*, 56
a right, if someone attacks you unjustly, you got a right to put your arms up, everyone has that right, and when it came to us, it seemed like we didn't have that right."\textsuperscript{201} Malcolm believed, “If the leaders of the nonviolent movement can go into the white community and teach nonviolence, good. I’d go along with that. But as long as I see them teaching nonviolence only in the black community, we can’t go along with that.”\textsuperscript{202} The African American community responded positively to the efforts by the group to combat violence by the police. Joseph remembered, “What the Panthers did was bring into focus the feelings that the community had about the police anyway, the police had always been perceived in the black community as an occupying army.”\textsuperscript{203}

An early event in the history of the NYBPP spurred a rapid increase in new memberships. Like many other interested New York youth of color, Joan Bird read the \textit{Daily News} article about the Panthers in the Brooklyn Criminal Court being viciously assaulted by on and off-duty New York police officers.\textsuperscript{204} The event embodied the African American community’s concerns. In a trend that became central to the NYBPP’s evolution, the NYPD arrested two leaders of the Brooklyn Panther Party, David Brothers and Joudon Ford, along with the instigator of the charges that brought them to court that day.

The case revolved around a group of Panthers who cleaned out the basement of their Nostrand Avenue office on August 21, 1968 while they recited political rhetoric to African Americans from the doorway of the basement through a bullhorn.\textsuperscript{205} The NYPD reported that they dispatched two officers to protect firemen being pelted with rocks and bottles while putting

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{Ibid}
\footnote{Malcolm X Speaks, p 139}
\footnote{Passin’ It On}
\footnote{Look for Me in the Whirlwind, 282: In October of 1968, after moving away from his mother in New Jersey back to the Lower East Side, Curtis Powell worked with SNCC but did not see them going far. After the attack on Panthers by police officers in the Brooklyn Courthouse, he thought he would check them out and then joined in January 1969, another example of a NYBPP members joining after the incident; Ibid, 303.}
\end{footnotes}
out a fire nearby. The officers approached the Panthers speaking out into the street and asked if they had a permit to use the bullhorn. One Panther replied that they did but did not comply with the officer who wanted to see it. An argument ensued and two policemen beat one Panther and arrested Brothers and Ford for assault of an officer.206

Ford led a brigade of Panthers calling for the de-centralization of the NYPD in Harlem in a federal court lawsuit.207 They demanded community control of policing Harlem. On September 4, 1968, the trial for the August event took place. About one-hundred and fifty white men, most alleged to be NYPD officers, beat on the defendants in the courtroom. Some of the off-duty cops wore former governor George Wallace buttons.208 The three Panther defendants were targeted, and their interracial entourage, of less than fifteen, received the missed blows dealt by the courtroom brawlers. A separate security intervention squad pulled the group to the elevator to finally escape the chaos. Cheers of “White Power” rung in the courtroom. No arrests were made that day. Brothers said, “I’ve been all over the South and for something like this to happen in a court is unbelievable.” Joan Bird went down to the office in Harlem and joined after hearing about their programs.209

208 Ibid
209 Look for Me in the Whirlwind, 303
**IMPRESSING MILITANCY**

We often think of gangs and military service as opposites, but in the early lives of Panthers, they went together. Besides conditions between police and youth in the streets, another important channel for future party members came from incarcerated populations. Understanding the prison conditions for African American youth in post World War II New York can help explain how many of these individuals found a calling in a militant, anti-government, armed, self-defense movement. New York built its prisons to match the most secure and strict penitentiaries known in the United States during the twentieth century. Anthony Coston said, “In New York State there is no iota of difference between a prison, correctional institution, or reformatory.”\(^{210}\) African American inmates suffered worse than white prisoners in any part of the correctional system in New York. Malcolm X said, “If you're black you were born in jail.”\(^{211}\)

**Imprisoned Youth of Color**

Anthony Coston said that in December 1959, his experience in Jamaica with a white man in a United States Navy uniform changed his life. He recalled, “At this time I was about 5 feet 6 inches, 140 pounds. The cracker was about 6 feet 2 inches and 200 pounds. The cracker told me that where he came from niggers didn’t sit next to white people on buses. I told the cracker that he wasn’t in the South now. The cracker punched me in the face and we started fighting: all pandemonium broke out in the bus, and that cracker was whipped mercilessly. Later I found out that cracker was cut every place except on the soles of his feet.”\(^{212}\) Walking home with a friend, police spotted them and took them to Jamaica hospital, where the man told police they assaulted

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\(^{210}\) *Look for Me in the Whirlwind*, 183

\(^{211}\) Ibid, 326

\(^{212}\) Ibid, 175
him. Coston said, “The pigs beat us mercilessly in Jamaica Hospital in front of the doctors and nurses.”

Acts of self-defense sometimes led to criminal records for youth of color. During the trial for the assault, the man Coston fought said that “he punched attacked me first because niggers aren’t supposed to sit next to white people on buses.” The judge then asked for that testimony to be taken off the record, took a recess, and had the victim testify again just saying Coston and his friend attacked him. The judge set each of the defendants’ bail at $10,000, and they spent about seven months in jail for that.

NY Panther Richard Harris, born on April 21, 1940 in East Orange, New Jersey, grew up in Newark during a time of rising gang organization. By his sixteenth birthday, Harris and his companions stole handguns and cars. On his route to a party in North Newark, police singled out his car, one of the several stolen cars him and his friends’ road to the location, and arrested him after he ran out of gas right in front of the police station. Harris recalled:

“I got beat for two days before my family missed me, and got me released in their custody to await trial. One week later I split open a dude’s head for his $50 and left Newark with some friends. We went stickup crazy on liquor stores, drugstores, and insurance men.”

When facing trial for all his criminal acts, the judge decided to send Harris in for mental evaluation. Harris fought and cursed those involved and then the judge sent him to Annandale Reformatory at age sixteen.

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213 Look for Me in the Whirlwind, 176
214 Ibid
215 Ibid
216 Ibid, 140
217 Ibid, 141
218 Ibid, 169
219 Ibid, 171
The reformatory system of New York throughout the twentieth century did not aid in the rehabilitation of its prisoners.\textsuperscript{220} At Annandale Reformatory, Harris said he fit right in and learned violence all over again from the inside.\textsuperscript{221} It did however, as will be discussed later, make them more politically conscious and focused. Urban environmental consequences on African American youth left many labeled as “juvenile delinquents,” in which arrests and detention tied them to a life enmeshed in the legal system.\textsuperscript{222}

New York prisons treated African American prisoners poorer than white inmates. Coston remembered Woodbourne Correctional Institution, a New York State prison, “If you got caught fighting a black inmate, you got 5 days in the hole. If you got caught fighting a white inmate, you got 30 days in the hole.”\textsuperscript{223} Coston, a Bishop, placed in a dorm full of Chaplains, fought quite often in prison. He still attested that other prisoners, even from past rival gangs, “were some beautiful get-down brothers.”\textsuperscript{224} The black prisoners, after a matter of time spent around Coston, began to ease hostilities and get along. They were able to do this despite the prison staff’s attempts to create tension between blacks and Puerto Ricans.\textsuperscript{225} Prison officials did not allow black prisoners to work with food in the mess hall, play on any of the twelve handball courts, or work in any of jobs that could teach an inmate a profession.\textsuperscript{226} When these men were released, they could not get stable employment without experience in a line of work.\textsuperscript{227}

\textsuperscript{220} Ibid, 192: Richard Harris, after his release from reform school lived with his father, but after his father had drank and an ensuing argument followed, he kicked his son out. Harris’ broken home life continued and he got pushed further into gang and criminal activity. After getting some money from a liquor-store robbery, he had found a job and began to settle in before losing it. He had a probation officer that Harris felt nagged him, and turned him off from playing by his rules.
\textsuperscript{221} Look for Me in the Whirlwind, 171
\textsuperscript{222} Murch, Living for the City, 50
\textsuperscript{223} Ibid, 178
\textsuperscript{224} Ibid
\textsuperscript{225} Ibid
\textsuperscript{226} Look for Me in the Whirlwind, 180-181
\textsuperscript{227} Ibid
Many African Americans, like Malcolm X converted to Islam in prison. Many, especially during its height under the teachings of Malcolm X, joined the Nation of Islam. As Donna Murch has shown, “The connections between ‘The Muslim Program’ and the BPP’s Ten Point Program revealed the wide reach of the Nation and the diffusion of its ideas and political strategies.”

Eldridge Cleaver, future NYBPP chapter leader, “after a series of religious experiences in prison, the young cleaver became a Muslim convert, then a Muslim preacher of extraordinary eloquence and conviction, and then a firm follower of Malcolm x.” In prison, Cleaver united the militant black resistance movement in the United States and became a best selling prisoner author. Eldridge taught “the currents of world revolution in a way which may come as a shock to many white Americans of liberal persuasion and spiritual good will.”

In fall of 1961, the State of New York transferred Coston to Comstock, which he described the racism as “naked.” In the summer of 1962, Coston’s father visited him and told him he converted to Islam, which Anthony had been learning about and they embraced this religion affectionately between one another. He changed his last name to Shakur. At this time everyone in prison still called Coston “Shotgun,” but he searched for “a bad African first name.” He picked Lumumba. His friend who concurrently served time in Comstock with Lumumba, Nathaniel Burns, changed his name as well to Sekou Odinga when he converted to the teachings of Elijah Muhammad. James F. Coston became Zayd Malik Shakur, and Alice Williams became Afeni with the surname of Zayd’s brother. Lumumba attested that the youth

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228 Murch, *Living for the City*, 132
229 Cleaver, *Soul on Ice*, xiii; Murch, *Living for the City*, 145: Murch wrote, “Particularities of Cleaver’s personal history combined with the conservative forms of racial Islam practiced by inmates left a strong imprint on his emerging consciousness.” Eldridge had a unique, to some disturbing, outlook on life, but often rationalized in a grasping fashion the need for black organization with militant ideology. Cleaver produced a masculine aura, writing in his fame-claiming novel about the possibilities of “rape as revolution.”
230 Cleaver, *Soul on Ice*, xiii
231 *Look for Me in the Whirlwind*, 183
232 Ibid, 241
233 Ibid, 242
234 Ibid
acted militant much more so then the older black prisoners, still practicing outdated nonviolent acts of the southern civil rights movement, often called “Uncle Toms.”

Black Nationalistic militancy excited young prisoners of color. Lumumba Shakur said, “In 1962, African American inmates became aware of the so-called civil rights movement.” Coston liked Martin Luther King, Jr. but not his ideas, advocating that Malcolm truly appealed to prisoners, “telling it like it is.” Many of the prisoners involved themselves in militant struggle on the New York streets. In prison, like Malcolm, many found political direction with plenty of time to examine their own lives. Shakur said Comstock prisoners became very African-oriented.

Prison officials targeted learners of Islam and Nationalism. Lumumba Shakur said 99% of all black inmates in solitary confinement were in there due to their beliefs. On the last Friday in September 1963, about four hundred and fifty Muslim and Nationalist prisoners organized one of the most dangerous race riots in any New York State prison. Shakur remembered, “The correctional officials made their decision on who the riot leaders were, and we were all transferred to Attica State Prison.” The next day prison guards locked everyone in their cells and beat them systematically. Interestingly, the State Correction Department said the rebellion was a “reflection of tensions outside prison walls,” as opposed to the prisoners attributing the riot to their prison conditions. This same event educated Sekou Odinga as it did.

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235 Ibid, 241
236 Ibid
237 Ibid
238 Ibid, 244
239 Ibid
240 Ibid
241 Ibid, 261
Shakur.\textsuperscript{243} Shakur found out after he left Comstock of the riot’s success, as many black inmates attained professional jobs and education in the prison.\textsuperscript{244}

The prison systems were rough on African Americans. Black delinquent youth were often punished as adults. The officials illegally transferred Lumumba Shakur to a New York State Prison before he turned twenty-one.\textsuperscript{245} In 1963, Lumumba Shakur went before the New York State Parole Board. They asked him if he felt sorry for what he done, to which Shakur responded that the man should not have hit him in the first place.\textsuperscript{246} In February 1964, while Coston sat in solitary confinement at Attica Prison, he read in a law book that the maximum sentence for the crime attempted assault in the second degree, for which he had been serving a five year sentence, was two and one half years.\textsuperscript{247} The State used the reasoning that because the law pertained to twenty-one year olds, Coston could be an exception.\textsuperscript{248} In December 1964, after being imprisoned for five years, nearly twenty-two years old, Lumumba Shakur left prison with twenty-two dollars.\textsuperscript{249}

\textbf{Get Respect and a Chance at Mobility}

Many members of the NYBPP were also the marginal young men the government employed in the U.S. armed services. The conditions of Black New York made its members contemplate joining the U.S. military. Richard Moore was arrested at the age of fifteen for a burglary next to his home without evidence. As Moore put it, “Seems that the police are the only people in the world who go to school just to learn how to lie.”\textsuperscript{250} His conviction sent him to the

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{243} http://www.prisonactivist.org/prisoners/sekou-mgobogi-abdullah-odinga
\textsuperscript{244} \textit{Look for Me in the Whirlwind}, 263
\textsuperscript{245} Ibid, 244
\textsuperscript{246} Ibid, 243
\textsuperscript{247} Ibid, 185
\textsuperscript{248} Ibid, 186
\textsuperscript{249} Ibid, 264
\textsuperscript{250} \textit{Look for Me in the Whirlwind}, 172
\end{footnotesize}
Within a year or two, Moore’s gang affiliation created several enemies of his in the Bronx and Manhattan. He decided to join the army. He remembered “although I did feel somewhat gung-ho at the time of my enlistment…” he had no “patriotic obligation,” and only did so out of social necessity.”

Youth of color obsessed over making money. They wanted well-paying work, no the “dead-end service sector employment held by their parents and friends.” Some resorted to stealing and gang activities. Some sold drugs that killed their African American communities. Many had criminal records and could not afford to get arrested again with long sentences awaiting them. Vietnam spurred the economy for war production. In many cases, black youth with few options entered the armed services to find different means to obtain money, respect, power, or profession.

Racism permeated the U.S. military. Robert Collier joined the Air Force in April 1954. Soldiers often found the worst racism on U.S. armed service bases. Collier remembered how the Air Force kept all meetings, including the day room, the dances, and the mess halls segregated. Panther Donald Weems, who changed his name to Kuwasi Balagoon, served as a field soldier in the U.S. Army in Germany. Balagoon learned quickly of the strong racism in the Army. He recalled that if a white soldier beat an African American soldier, they would receive a shorter sentence and smaller punishment if it happened vice versa. One Panther that was a former marine in 1962 said, “During that time the attitude of the black marines was not so

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251 Ibid, 171
252 Ibid, 191, 194-198
253 Vampires, Dragons, and Egyptian Kings, 226
254 Ibid, 228
255 Look for Me in the Whirlwind, 217: Panther William King was in the U.S. Marines. On the base, ironically, is where he said he found himself “in the middle of a race war.” He described a time when he had to deliver a white prisoner across the state, and in doing so found much resistance from white bystanders to make his job even harder.
256 Ibid, 196
257 Ibid, 200
much one of dislike for their function as marines, but disgust as having to take orders from racist
sergeants and officers.”

Balagoon and a group of African American infantry formed a clandestine direct-action
group called De Legislators, which set out to punish racist soldiers with beatings or worse.
The De Legislators instilled their own, “fair laws.” If someone within the U.S. Army acted
racist, the De Legislators might follow them, start a riot to hide within, then attack, club, and
stomp out the perpetrator. Like most gangs, the De Legislators took on pseudonyms.
Balagoon’s name was “De Prophet.” Balagoon said, “Guys apart of it were really moral,
social students, smart and serious about the struggle.”

The employment conditions of African Americans in post World War II armed services
differed from the opportunities Caucasian men received. Collier recalled being handed a mop
five minutes after walking through the Air Force reception center. The U.S. military did not
like to give technical training to blacks. Collier wanted to attend radio and radar school in
Mississippi, but the Air Force denied his claim and sent him to Montgomery, Alabama to be a
part of the medical corps. Though he worked hard, the ability to achieve a higher ranking was

258 Look for Me in the Whirlwind, 194: In 1962, William King (Kwando Kinshasa) joined the U.S. Marines.
Kwando took classes in the marines, and noted how his supervisors never examined or discussed the tactics used by
the Japanese in the Pacific in WWII, or those used by North Koreans. They ignored tactics that could defeat them.
259 Balagoon, A Soldier’s Story, p 4
260 Look for Me in the Whirlwind, 202
261 Ibid, 222
262 Ibid, 203
263 Ibid, 194
264 Ibid, 196; Ibid, 208: In the navy, Ali Bey Hassan repeatedly took a seamen’s rating exam, in which he thought he
did well often, but kept being told he had failed. He remembered one time, “someone told me I passed this one, but
it was posted on one bulletin board that I had failed and on another that I had passed…I gave up.”
265 Ibid, 195
slimmer for a black soldier. After more than twice the time it normally took a Caucasian soldier to achieve platoon leader, Collier earned the position.

The armed services offered New York African American youth the opportunity to travel abroad. Their experiences exposed them to radical ideas and “revolutionary cultural exchange,” speaking to internationalism. Robert Collier remembered children in Germany touching his skin, not out of racism but because they had not seen a man with different skin than their own. One Panther that spent time in Panama, as well as Guatemala said, “I entered the country a very apolitical Negro marine, and came out a dedicated black revolutionary.” In those countries he realized how much oppressed and exploited countries hated the U.S. Another Panther stationed in Cuba noted how poor they lived, like those in New York, except there they had a lot of land. He said, “Oppressed people sold their bodies to survive, and the rich endorsed that way of life to avoid taking any responsibility for the society.” Many connections between third-world nations of color and the oppressed conditions African American New Yorkers faced were made in the military.

The U.S. military trained African American youth in armed militancy. Richard Harris joined the U.S. Marines in 1959 after taking the test jokingly, though his mother and girlfriend believed it would keep him out of trouble. He said the Marine Corps, riddled with prejudice, taught him numerous things, including a lot about guns, judo and how to build self confidence. He began stealing weapons with peers and got caught by Marine officials. Veterans of Vietnam

266 Ibid, 203
267 Ibid, 197
268 Ibid, 222; 225: Balagoon met people in Spain with whom he had “revolutionary cultural exchange.”
269 Look for Me in the Whirlwind, 198
270 Ibid, 219
271 Ibid, 221
272 Ibid, 215
273 Ibid, 193: On his first break, Harris got drunk, mugged a white person and went AWOL
274 Ibid
and armed service supplied leadership, tactics, and weapons to the gangs that began reorganizing in the 1970s. 275

Dishonorable discharges plagued African Americans in the armed services.276 Before going to court, Harris went AWOL for the second time and turned up in Newark. The FBI caught Harris and he received a bad conduct discharge before being sent home.277 In 1961, Moore received an undesirable discharge from the army. Though he did not receive the dishonorable discharge, the awkward wording kept him from getting a job. The few Panthers who received an honorable discharge felt it only made them naïve to their treatment.278 Many carried grudges and bad records from their respective service.

The abrupt and bitter ending to the military careers of future Panthers made them fall into unacceptable behavior.279 Embarrassed to go home to his mother, Moore resorted to “wheeling and dealing some smoke, and hanging out and sticking up, you know,” opening the door for the legal system to run his reputation to shame.280 Some became knowledgeable about the links between law enforcement and the armed services. Ironically, serving in the U.S. military

275 Vampires, Dragons, and Egyptian Kings, 228
276 Look for Me in the Whirlwind, 174, 200: Collier and a white friend in service with him, Jerry, went to celebrate their time off on the outskirts of London at a dance. The white man, Jerry, got into an argument that turned violent. A scuffle broke out and Jerry got stabbed. Collier, devoted to his friend, quickly maneuvered Jerry out of the riot that opened up in the dance hall, and got him back to base. A trial ensued, and no one backed up Collier. He recalled, “The first thing they tried to do was separate Jerry from my case.” Jerry refused and said he should be tried with anything Collier would be. Collier finished the story: “The trial only lasted a few hours. They denied me the right to try to get friendly witnesses, and tried to deny me the right to speak in my own defense. They even tried to say I stabbed Jerry. In all this they were aided and abetted by the shyster lawyer, who obviously had no intention of working to get me off. When the trial was over I was fined court costs, damages, and hospital fees for the punks Jerry and I had banged up.” After three years of service, he received a discharge under other than honorable conditions.
277 Ibid
278 Balagoon, A Soldier’s Story, p 29
279 Look for Me in the Whirlwind, 174: The Air Force, after three years of service, released Collier not under dishonorable charge, but “it had a jive wording of ‘discharged under other than honorable conditions.’ This prevented him from keeping a job, if he told them they would not hire them or they would eventually find out. He started smoking marijuana, which then led to using snorting cocaine.
280 Look for Me in the Whirlwind, 154, 156
radicalized these young men who later joined a revolutionary leftist, armed self-defense movement.

The Previous History of Black Nationalism in NY

While the military helped politicize African American youth of the 1960s, black New York had a long and rich history of political organization. The impetus of these movements always resided within the participants’ poor quality of life. The social conditions in Black New York produced political groups. Specific influential African American leaders that influenced the NYBPP include Marcus Garvey and Malcolm X. The strength of Garveyism in post World War II New York carried his teachings to the Black Power movement in the late 1960s. Also, the Panthers considered themselves the “Heirs of Malcolm.”

The assassination of Malcolm X gave African American New Yorkers political visibility and set the stage for the NYBPP to pick up where he left off.

Marcus Mosiah Garvey was born in St. Ann’s Bay, Jamaica in 1887. Garvey’s movement influenced many Black Power groups decades after his deportation from America in 1927. His fiery speeches preached a revolutionary gathering of black masses internationally to maintain their own communities. Author Eric Arnesen wrote, “The name Marcus Garvey is perhaps most associated with the new, more militant, “race-conscious” spirit among African Americans in World War I and in the immediate postwar era.”

In 1914, Garvey created the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) in Jamaica, with the slogan, “One God! One Aim! One Destiny!” The UNIA’s views meshed with new aims and ideologies he learned, specifically after moving to London where he wrote for two militant publications. Like the

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281 Newton, “In Defense of Self Defense.” Essays from the Minister of Defense, 2-15
282 Arnesen, Black Protest and the Great Migration, p 24
283 Manning Marable. Freedom on My Mind, p 225: One was named African Times, and the other entitled Orient Review.
BPP, the UNIA branched to other continents, but it found its strongest force in the U.S. urban areas.\footnote{Judith Stein, \textit{The World of Marcus Garvey}, p 1}

Garvey taught radicalism as necessary for the advancement of the black race.\footnote{Garvey, Marcus. \textit{Philosophy and Opinions of Marcus Garvey}, p 18: Garvey had said that Jesus Christ was the greatest radical of all time. He used George Washington as another example of people revolting against unfair conditions, all revealing a conservative state. He said, “All men who call themselves reformers are perforce radicals… I am therefore, satisfied to be the same kind of radical, if through radicalism I can free Africa} Garvey wanted to reform everything and anything detrimental to the African communities. He described in a writing of his, entitled “The Fall of Governments,” that a social revolution is necessary when one class deprives essentials of life to the opposing class.\footnote{Garvey, \textit{Philosophy and Opinions of Marcus Garvey}, p 34} For the first UNIA convention in 1920 in Harlem, Garvey “led a massive parade down Lenox Avenue…he drew 25,000 African Americans to Madison Square Garden.”\footnote{Marable, \textit{Freedom on My Mind}, p 225} The NYBPP wanted to radically recast the governing structure over their black community, and addressed the issue through the teachings of Garvey.

The African American population in New York had strong holdings to pan-Africanist ideas and Black Nationalism rhetoric. The Nation of Islam (NOI) provided a new organization to transition the strength and pride in the African-American community that Garvey taught. Elijah Poole, a Georgia born sharecropper who moved to Detroit in the 1920s, preached and elaborated his own theology for over forty years, until his death in 1975.\footnote{Nelson, \textit{Police Brutality}, 103} In 1931 Minister Louis Farrakhan met Poole in Detroit, and for over three years Farrakhan taught Poole the “profound Secret Wisdom of the Reality of God,” which included the teachings of self-independence for people of color.\footnote{http://www.noi.org/history_of_noi.htm} He chose Poole to be his Divine Representative, who took the name the Honorable Elijah Muhammad. For the next forty years Muhammad and the NOI would convert urban African Americans to become Black Muslims.
Garvey’s passionate speeches were reincarnated in Malcolm X. Malcolm spoke with intellectually calculated meaning and popularized the movement. Malcolm had access to joining the Black Nationalist movement early, both parents being members of the UNIA, yet his political ideology would not be instilled until he was imprisoned. Clayborne Carson noted that Little’s Black Nationalism derived from his “exclusion of social and cultural mainstream, and not the memories of a nurturing African-American household.” The autobiography of Malcolm emphasized the “white forces that destroyed his family,” while his “childhood experiences did not connect him to the enduring institutions of black life.”

Malcolm dropped out of school at the age of fifteen and began a life of crime. On February 27, 1946, Malcolm went to prison for armed robbery and breaking and entering. Officials transferred him to Concord Reformatory, a transitional period in his life, where he converted to the teachings of the honorable Elijah Muhammad. Malcolm Little became Malcolm X, with the surname signaling his lack of knowledge of his true history. By this time, the educated Malcolm had transformed from a lost youth of color criminal into a fierce orator of African history and devoted Muslim advocating against the oppressive American government. In 1952 Malcolm was released from prison. Muhammad made Malcolm’s primary function as a Muslim minister to present Muhammad’s religious views and recruit new members rather than advocate a political program.

290 Malcolm X: The FBI Files, 20
291 Ibid; Ibid, 58: On September 28, 1931, a streetcar ran over Earl Little, killing him on the tracks. Malcolm heard that the Black Legion, a local white supremacist group, murdered him. This ultimately led to Louise having a mental breakdown, and in 1939 labeled insane.
292 Malcolm X Speaks, vii; Ibid, 59: Malcolm began working in 1943 working on the railroad occasionally, but ultimately thrived as a crook, nicknamed “Big Red,” “pushing dope, playing the numbers, peddling bootleg whiskey, and hustling.” This led him to his 1944 indictment for larceny, receiving a three month suspended license and placed on probation for a year. That did not stop him; in 1945 he went on a Christmas stealing spree in Boston with five others, resulting in an arrest the following year while trying to reclaim a stolen watch he left for repair. Three days later, the courts indicted Malcolm for carrying firearms, and then for larceny and breaking and entering.
293 Ibid, 60
294 James, Imprisoned Intellectuals, 48
295 Malcolm X: The FBI Files, 31
Malcolm’s popularity and reach grew exponentially upon release from prison. On December 4, 1963, Muhammad suspended Malcolm from commenting of President John F. Kennedy’s assassination. Malcolm had said, “JFK never foresaw that the chickens would come home to roost so soon,” even though Muhammad gave a directive to NOI members not to comment about the event. Author Alex Haley wrote when examining the Nation of Islam in the early 1960’s,

“The general feeling among Harlemites, non-Muslims, with whom I talked was that Malcolm X had been powerful and influential enough a minister that eventually he would split the mosque membership into two hostile camps, and that in New York City at least, Elijah Muhammad’s unquestioned rule would be ended.”

Malcolm publically stated political agenda and beliefs, creating tension with the jealous Muhammad.

Malcolm gradually shifted his national perspective from Muhammad’s “politically inert racial separatism towards a Pan-African perspective that brought him closer to the increasingly militant African-American political mainstream.” The New York Times on March 8, 1964, printed the article, “Malcolm X splits with Muhammad,” and wrote that Malcolm intended to create a Black Nationalist party that “will cooperate with local civil rights actions in order to heighten political consciousness of Negros.” After leaving the NOI, Malcolm formed the Muslim Mosque Inc., and then the non-religious Organization of Afro-American Unity.

The culture that followed Malcolm X immensely influenced the NYBPP. Sekou Odinga wrote, “By 1965, I had joined the organization of African American Unity. I began to move with and among many young African Nationalists. My political consciousness was growing daily. I

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296 Ibid, 70
297 Haley, 410
299 Ibid, 28
300 Ibid, 72
301 http://foia.fbi.gov/foiaindex/malcolmx.htm; Malcolm X Speaks vii
was reading and listening to many Afrikan Nationalists from Africa and the U.S. and became convinced that only after a successful armed struggle would New Afrikans gain freedom and self-determination. I also became convinced that integration would never solve the problems faced by New Afrikans.”

Malcolm said, “Oh, when things get bad enough, everybody gets into the act. And that’s what is coming-in 1965.” Whether he knew it or not, 1965 served as a monumental year for Black Panther ideology and mourning.

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302 http://www.prisonactivist.org/prisoners/sekou-mgobogi-abdullah-odinga
303 Malcolm X Speaks p 207
ACTION AND RESISTANCE

The history of government repression of Black Nationalists predating the NYBPP could be traced through the targeting of Garvey, the NOI and Elijah Muhammad, and Malcolm X. Garvey brought an early face to organized black politics in New York and was targeted because of it. The prosecution of Garvey started John Edgar Hoover’s career in FBI intelligence. Hoover organized the FBI and expanded their capabilities while hunting communists and other leftist organizations. The heightened repression the NYBPP faced resulted from the coordination of FBI practice against these movements.

The growth of the FBI stemmed largely from the work of J. Edgar Hoover. Because of his impact on the organization, the FBI reflected a great deal of his values and interests. One man working with Hoover described his speech with “machine-gun delivery, softened by the peculiarities of a Washington accent.” Hoover said, “If we could only have all the law enforcement agencies in America working together along new lines, and public opinion banked behind them, the true criminals could not exist.” Hoover believed: “Crime eradication is more than a task of man-hunting…Certainly the criminal must be taught that they cannot get away with it.” Hoover, from his inception in the Department of Justice, had ambitions to build the American enforcement army greater than any famous European bureau, like the notorious Scotland Yard.

304 Malcolm X: the FBI Files, 26: Carson wrote, “Hoover’s career in the Justice Department began during the era of “New Negro” militancy after World War I, and, as an official of the General Intelligence Division and the Bureau of Investigation, he soon became involved in counterintelligence efforts aimed at Marcus Garvey and A. Philip Randolph.”
305 Ibid
306 Ibid, ix
307 Ibid, 4: He made great analysis of criminal identification and the usefulness of photographic identification combined with the use of fingerprinting.
308 Hoover, Persons in Hiding, vii
Counterintelligence Coordination

In the summer of 1919, Marcus Garvey made a speech at New York City’s Carnegie hall that particularly distressed J. Edgar Hoover. During the speech the black leader advocated retaliatory violence in the response to lynchings in the South. Hoover “believed that black Americans were flirting with Bolshevism.” Hoover got an African American social reformer named Dr. Arthur U. Craig, to report on Garvey’s activities. For the first time in its ten year history, the Bureau hired an African American special agent to investigate Garveyites. Hoover successfully had Garvey convicted by an all-white jury of mail fraud on June 21, 1923 in New York City, the same year Craig resigned. Through prosecution, Hoover created the idea that Garvey stole from the UNIA, hurting his relationship with misinformed followers even though he “did not profit a penny from the entire venture.” In 1927, the U.S. government deported Garvey and labeled him a “dangerous agitator.”

From its inception, the FBI prided itself on covert action and innovative domestic protection. It had been admitted within the Bureau that while rounding up and incarcerating suspects, “if you resort to torture, you admit your victim is a better man.” The FBI enjoyed efficient, calculated blows, and looked to foster the manipulation of local law enforcement's physical efforts by applying them in more strategic areas. Local police had aggressive tactics that often ended in gunfire, while the FBI contrasted them with coordinated efforts. Yet, the Bureau of Investigation, when Hoover took over in 1924, was a “national disgrace.”

309 Grady Willis, “State Repression and Political Prisoners,” 364
310 Jones, The FBI, a History, 73
311 Ibid
312 Ibid, 74
313 Grady Willis, “State Repression and Political Prisoners,” 364
315 Birnbaum and Taylor, Civil Rights Since 1787, p 276
316 Johnson, Street Justice, p 146
317 The FBI Pyramid from the Inside, 61
Hoover made physical fitness a requisite.\textsuperscript{318} A former agent recalled, “Those agents who couldn’t keep their weight down, forfeited overtime pay and certain job opportunities. Even those with doctor’s notes, that said any more weight loss would be bad for health, were not excluded.” Local and state policing began by targeting indoor meetings and activities, focusing on groups as well as individual targets. The raid was done so in “a confrontational manner intended to maximize intimidation.”\textsuperscript{320} Their cover for early police repression was “peacekeeping, a blanket excuse for a virtually unbounded range of activities, and the enforcement of such common law offenses as “unlawful assemblage,” “incitement to violence” and “riotous conduct.”\textsuperscript{321}

Hoover added science to the counterintelligence of the FBI. Focusing on the same methods of detective work in Europe, Hoover organized criminal identification for the Bureau. While working for the U.S. Department of Justice, he wrote a guide to criminal identification and the functions of the identification division, which led to the creation of a crime laboratory.\textsuperscript{322} Hoover established the fingerprint bureau shortly after he became director.\textsuperscript{323} The FBI influenced police forces to use informants. Private detective agencies formed as a separate arm of police force. Intelligence gathering pushed tactics further, and out of them grew the techniques like the police raid.

The shift in policing between the 1930s and 1960s reflected the national conscious of the time. Police departments in New York and other major urban cities increased their “Red

\textsuperscript{318} Ibid, xiii: Soon after their athletic teams began to win trophies.
\textsuperscript{319} The FBI Pyramid from the Inside, 54
\textsuperscript{320} Protectors of Privilege, 2
\textsuperscript{321} Ibid
\textsuperscript{322} Hoover, Criminal Identification, 1: Hoover wrote: “Criminal identification is indispensable in combating crime. It is the most potent factor in obtaining the apprehension of the fugitive who might otherwise escape arrest and continue his criminal activities indefinitely. Likewise, it results in the imposition of equitable sentences by the judiciary, as more severe punishment of the individual who violates the law repeatedly or even life imprisonment for the habitual offender becomes significant only when it is possible to determine accurately the number of previous convictions.”
\textsuperscript{323} Hoover, Persons in Hiding, xiii
Squads,” tactical teams assembled to dissolve social and political groups with communist tendencies. Donner labeled the location of the NYC Red Squads (BOSS) as their impetus for growth. They were positioned in the “center of a rich diversity of political movements, the site of the headquarters of the Community Party, of the largest black community in the United States (Harlem), and of the United Nations and delegations.” According to a report in 1963, BOSS was served by a “nearly 300,000 man effort…pursuing subversion.” Hoover had long standing ties in New York as well because it housed the greatest concentration of Communist Party members, as well as surrounding areas like New Jersey.

The NYPD facilitated immense levels of intelligence gathering. John A. Lyons, Chief of the New York Radical Bureau, said the underground network of BOSS “was responsible for the compilation of dossiers on communist party leaders, members, and supporters both in New York City and elsewhere. It cooperated with federal agencies to pinpoint illegal immigrants among strikers and exchanged files with police in other cities.” The Law Enforcement Intelligence unit of the NYPD established a network of information sharing on activists with over one hundred and fifty local and state police agencies initiated in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

The funding the FBI and NYPD received allowed for their immense intelligence capabilities. Hoover’s persuasive abilities worked American presidents and legislative bodies

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324 *Protectors of Privilege*, 155: Donner wrote, “A claim to professionalism dominated the self-image of the NYC Red Squad. Within the department, the squad’s agents bore a distinction akin to that of Green Berets; the department’s press releases touted them as ‘the finest of the finest’, as ‘total professionals’ whose achievements were ‘the greatest story ever untold’”

325 Ibid
326 Ibid, 1
327 Hoover, *Masters of Deceit*, 141
328 Donner, *Protectors of Privilege*, 47; 158: BOSS compiled a four-hour log book listing every event considered important upcoming for that time, including demonstrations, arrivals and departures of dignitaries, and other events which was then made available to other agencies. The agencies receiving this information ranged from other police departments to even army military intelligence. Donner wrote, BOSS boasted that by the time a subject was twenty years old, it could readily assemble a dossier of over sixty items relating to his or her personal history: criminal record, family background, social records, and related matters.” By 1968, the BOSS master index had more than one million entries.

329 Grady Willis, “State Repression and Political Prisoners,” 365
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into feeding his Bureau with American dollars. William Sullivan, the former number three man in the FBI, was fired by Hoover in 1971. After he was fired, he wrote that Hoover knew that crime costs called for a budget of eleven-billion but still wanted his programs to have doubled the funding.\(^{330}\) BOSS kept secret their budget as carefully as the CIA did.\(^{331}\) No one had a price tag on the intensive political investigations of dissident groups and subversives, numbering in average of one thousand a year in the sixties.\(^{332}\)

In 1963, Hoover took advantage of expanding wiretapping activities. That year, Attorney General Robert Kennedy showed interest in wiretapping Martin Luther King Jr.\(^{333}\) Hoover ignored Kennedy’s demand to have a review following up the information gathered in a month, and took the liberty to interpret the authorization as permission to bug King around the country, against Kennedy’s wishes.\(^{334}\) At the beginning of Malcolm X’s political career, the FBI tracked him because of their enormous budget more so than because of their worry of him as a threat to the internal security of the country.\(^{335}\) The FBI began to heavily track Malcolm as soon as he received parole from prison. They then placed him on the Communist Index Card.\(^{336}\) Carson pointed out, “Malcolm, even more than King, was willing to modify his views in order to bridge the nationalist-integrationist ideological conflict.”\(^{337}\) He continued, “The FBI closely observed the shift in his ideological orientation and increasingly saw him an important element in an upsurge of racial militancy.”\(^{338}\)

\(^{330}\) Sullivan, The Bureau, 272-273
\(^{331}\) Protectors of Privilege, 157
\(^{332}\) Ibid
\(^{333}\) From the Secret Files of J. Edgar Hoover, 87
\(^{334}\) Ibid
\(^{335}\) Malcolm X: the FBI Files, 60: The FBI on September 23, 1952, received confidential informant reports providing three letters that Malcolm wrote as early as 1950, one stating that “he had always been a communist.”
\(^{337}\) Malcolm X: the FBI Files, p 25
\(^{338}\) Ibid
The Bureau wanted to add Muslims to the Attorney General’s list of subversive organizations in 1952. The Department of Justice concluded in 1953 after great debate that the Nation of Islam would not be prosecuted under the anticommunist Smith Act. They did believe, however, the group could be a serious threat to American national security under specific circumstances. The FBI’s interests in the NOI resulted largely from the group’s opposition to military service. In 1954, the government chose not to prosecute the NOI for conspiracy to violate the Selective Service Act, yet gave the go-ahead to continue wiretapping Muhammad and Malcolm. Hoover angrily received news in 1960 that “Black Muslims could not be automatically barred from government employment.” In September the Justice Department sent a memo to J. Edgar Hoover saying the NOI is a legal organization and cannot be prosecuted for anything. Yet, despite its findings, the Justice Department allowed the FBI to continue its investigation of the group, more so then any other NY African American organization.

Because Malcolm’s primary job in the NOI was to promote the organization and Muhammad’s teachings, the government did not feel threatened by the NOI or Malcolm originally. The FBI believed Elijah Muhammad’s teachings alienated a great core of black followers, and his old age made him a less prioritized target. Hoover’s insistence of the threat Black Nationalists posed to American capitalistic interests prolonged the surveillance of both the

339 Ibid, 27
340 Ibid: During this period domestic surveillance of “waning Black Nationalist activism” was outshined by the communist threat to the U.S
341 Ibid; Nelson, Police Brutality, 102: Elijah Muhammad was targeted in the NOI prior to Malcolm. Nelson wrote, “In a variety of disturbing ways, the illegal wiretapping and surveillance of Elijah Muhammad and the Nation of Islam constitutes one of the most egregious denials of constitutional rights and Police Brutality in the twentieth century.” The FBI established strong links with the Chicago Police Department who led lengthy surveillance on Muhammad.
342 Malcolm X: the FBI Files 27
343 Cointelpro, Blackstock, 108-109: The memo, printed in Blackstock’s COINTELPRO, had a scribbled handwritten comment written by Hoover, “Just Stalling!” displaying his displeasure with the department.
344 Nelson Police Brutality, 108: Nelson wrote, “During the early 1960s, the names of 673 Muslims appeared in the FBI’s security index, a blacklist that categorized the ‘degree of dangerousness’ of targeted individuals and organizations. Of the 1497 African Americans in the index, NOI members made up the largest organizational contingent followed by 476 communists, 222 ‘Black Nationalists’ and an assortment of others.”
NOI and Malcolm. As Malcolm’s reputation grew, the FBI made initiatives to both harass Malcolm and split him further from the NOI.

From 1963 until his death, the repression against Malcolm heightened exponentially. In a FBI letter sent on September 19, 1963, to Hoover:

“Are we doing anything to curb the activities of Black Muslim leader “Malcolm X”? Aren’t his ideas somewhat on a parallel with those of Adolph Hitler? Isn’t “Malcolm X” in the category of traitors to our country in that what he is advocating in black supremacy is the same as plotting overthrow our government? Why isn’t this hate-full man stopped now before it’s too late”\(^{345}\)

Malcolm’s family received death threats daily after splitting with the NOI.\(^{346}\) In February of 1964, a former assistant of Malcolm’s at Mosque No. 7, the Harlem Temple Malcolm taught at, informed him that a mosque official asked him to wire Malcolm’s car with a bomb.\(^{347}\) Malcolm reported to the NYPD attempted assaults on him, and later an attempt at murder.\(^{348}\) On February 11, 1965, Malcolm X’s home was firebombed. The next day, on February 15, Malcolm raged on the stage of the Audubon Ballroom to a crowd of six hundred in New York about his patience wearing thin with all forms of government’s treatment of Black Americans, and how the Muslims bombed his home.\(^{349}\)

Intelligence operations planted information collectors, whether human or electronic, at the highest levels of all of Malcolm’s organizations.\(^{350}\) This spurred Malcolm’s paranoia growth tremendously in his final days.\(^{351}\) On February 21, 1965, Malcolm suffered multiple gun shots

\(^{345}\) Malcolm X: the FBI Files, 241-242
\(^{346}\) Haley, 421: Threats were phoned to his home in Elmhurst, the OAU office, various newspapers, and even the local police station; Malcolm X: the FBI Files p 13: Spike Lee, who wrote the introduction for the book, Malcolm X: The FBI File, said that he sees “the FBI, CIA, and the police departments around this country as one and the same. They are all in cahoots and along with the Nation of Islam they all played a part in the assassination of Malcolm X.
\(^{347}\) Malcolm X: the FBI Files, 71
\(^{348}\) Ibid, 78
\(^{349}\) Haley, 428
\(^{350}\) Ibid, p 14
\(^{351}\) Ibid; Malcolm X: the FBI Files, p 422: Malcolm told a close associate that, “I have been marked for death in the next five days. I have the names of five Black Muslims who have been chosen to kill me.” Malcolm X said, because he was going to be a witness in the paternity suits against Elijah, “if these cases are not hurried, I’ll never be
wounds at 3:10 PM. Spike Lee said, “The Bureau knew Malcolm’s every move, knew he was being hunted down, but stood back and let him and Elijah fight it out in public (a dispute which they encouraged no doubt).” On March 25, 1965, an FBI report indicated that “Robert 35X and Charles 26X, on guard at the Audubon, left their posts, an act in violation of both NOI and MMI rules.” The ensuing trial put three men behind bars, though one confessed that he worked with different people then two other found guilty.

The advancements in technology of television, wiretapping, and videotaping, revolutionized surveillance in counterintelligence operations. New York City and surrounding NJ cities used street surveillance by closed circuit television cameras regularly. Since 1940, FBI agents have broken into private residences installing microphones or collecting information by copying important documents illegally. Hoover knew this was illegal, so he created a “Do Not File” system to cover up his agents and his own tracks. The system was not indexed or serialized in FBI’s central records for easy disposal and to obtain the classification an agent needed to convince Hoover of its worthiness and risk.

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352 Ibid
353 Ibid, p 14
354 Ibid, 85
355 Ibid, 86, 407, 421: The trial for the shooting of Malcolm X began on January 12, 1966. During the lengthy trial, the courtroom needed to be cleared so a confidential witness could testify that they turned the murder weapon into the FBI. Hayer testified that someone hired him and three others to murder Malcolm, but assured the court of Butler and Johnson’s innocence. Still, the courts found Hayer, Butler, and Johnson guilty of murder in the first degree, and Judge Charles Marks sentenced them to life imprisonment. Carson called the case against Butler and Johnson “thin at best.” Reuben X Francis jumped bail, “so he could not be tried for his alleged shooting of Hayer.”
356 Protectors of Privilege, 68
357 From the Secret Files of J. Edgar Hoover, 127
358 Ibid
Hoover believed controlling public opinion smoothened FBI operations.\textsuperscript{359} One directive under COINTELPRO, the counterintelligence program that crippled the BPP, called for agents to flood local media with letters from “‘A Concerned Citizen’ and ‘An Angry Taxpayer.’”\textsuperscript{360} Hoover demanded media providers to rebut potentially critical stories of the FBI’s work aggressively, “by pressuring Justice Department or FBI officials to defend the Bureau’s carefully crafted reputation of high professionalism and efficiency.”\textsuperscript{361} He also leaked selected information to reporters, editors, and columnists of his choice that would promote positive images of the FBI.\textsuperscript{362} FBI aides prepared for Hoover a list of reporters to be contacted in specific situations, “special correspondents,” and a list of those not to be contacted.\textsuperscript{363} These informers ranged from reporters, conservative activists, and organizations that allowed him to monitor political targets, including developments within the “federal government, the candidacies of prominent liberal politicians, and, more disturbing, the personnel, orientation, and decisions of the US Supreme Court.”\textsuperscript{364}

The FBI manipulated government structure, elections, and agendas under Hoover’s nation-wide network of informers. As far back as February 1941, Hoover installed two recording devices in his office. They provided records of sensitive requests between presidents, attorneys generals, and others. This allowed Hoover to protect himself and the Bureau from criticisms.\textsuperscript{365} Hoover also used FBI resources to track rumors of potential plans to dismiss his power or limit the FBI’s actions. Hoover “never hesitated to raise questions about any rival and thus neutralize any challenge.”\textsuperscript{366} Historian Manning Marable had aligned this situation in a

\textsuperscript{359} Protectors of Privilege, 65: In 1963, Hoover banned communists from speaking at universities.  
\textsuperscript{360} Inside Hoover’s FBI, Welch and Marston, 156-157  
\textsuperscript{361} From the Secret Files of J. Edgar Hoover, 303  
\textsuperscript{362} Ibid  
\textsuperscript{363} Ibid  
\textsuperscript{364} Ibid, 265  
\textsuperscript{365} Ibid, 330  
\textsuperscript{366} Ibid
bigger schema, saying that Richard Nixon’s presidential election allowed for acceptance and encouragement of racial inequality.\footnote{Marable, Race, Reform, Rebellion, p 113} Nixon gave Hoover unlimited authority in matters of national security. This only exacerbated the worsening environment of inner-city communities.

Federal and local intelligence needed to modernize in the sixties to face the new political opposition characterized by “highly mobile and anonymous young people who tended to be hostile to formal organization and leadership.”\footnote{Protectors of Privilege, 65} The NYPD ran its operations, including those under the Red Squads, while enjoying “extraordinary autonomy during the sixties and was more independent in its functioning than other major urban police intelligent units.”\footnote{Ibid, 155} Still, there existed a mutual dependency between the FBI and NYPD because of their accessibilities and capabilities. Donner wrote:

“The social remoteness of the new radicals concentrated in tribal, self-contained groups made it more difficult to identify them. An additional difficulty was presented by ghetto unrest and riots, which seemed, in most cases, spontaneous and unplanned.”\footnote{Ibid, 65}

The 1965 report of the President’s Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration, \textit{The Challenge of Crime in a Free Society}, called for higher prioritized organization of intelligence units within police departments.\footnote{Ibid, 77} The Kerner Commission, the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorder, examined Newark and other urban rebellion areas and found that police were unprepared for the riots.\footnote{Protectors of Privilege, 77}

The connection between the FBI and the NYPD grew, creating a vicious team to oppose the Black Panthers. On August 25, 1967, the FBI sent a memo to its offices nation wide that read, “Offices receiving copies of this memo should immediately establish a control file,” and
read instructions on how to disrupt Black Nationalist Hate Groups. Their correspondence clearly showed the FBI's coordination with local offices during the expansion of the Black Panther Party to cities across the country.

Richard Moore, who changed his name to Dharuba Bin Wahad, explained the difference in strategies between the NYPD, and the national leadership of the FBI:

“The national government has access to a greater amount of information, and greater resources, therefore its tactics could be more subtle and have a greater impact. Also they served as a clearing house which passed on certain information to the local police, which enabled them, of course, to manipulate the local police to do certain things, as in the murder of Fred Hampton and Mark Clark.”

The FBI orchestrated the violent and direct actions the NYPD took against the New York Panthers. The local police worked closely with the FBI on how to improve measures of such for some time. Hoover and others advocated local officers to leave behind their violent efforts and using their “fists” in police enforcement, and encouraged using your “wits”, becoming more professionalized.

The NYPD and FBI were both competitive and egotistical, which is why their relationship was bitter. In New York, enough cooperation was made because of their mutual dependency, but both took pride in their autonomy and production. The forces did operate on the overriding rule, however, “no one tells anybody else more than he absolutely has to.” The FBI often came and stepped ahead of NYPD hierarchy. FBI Special Agents in Charge (SAC) led NYPD forces during operations. Assistant Director Sullivan wrote, “Many police departments don’t like the FBI, ‘it’s a one way street’.” Sullivan felt the Bureau only cared about them, saying they were “too inbred.”

373 Right On, May 1974, “FBI Files”
374 Still Black, Still Strong, p 48
375 Johnson, Street Justice. A History of Police Violence in New York City, p 145-146
376 The Functions of Police in Modern Society, 64
377 Sullivan, The Bureau, 269
378 Ibid, 271
Community Action Programs

From its inception, the NYBPP focused on serving the oppressed communities it represented. Malcolm said, “You’re out of your mind if you think that this government is ever going to back you and me up in the same way that it backed others up. They’ll never do it. It’s not in them.”\textsuperscript{379} The NYBPP CAPS, similar to what the government offered, that directly helped the confronting issues of poor urban neighborhoods in New York. The Panthers listened to their community’s needs. The NYBPP took pride in raising the funds themselves.\textsuperscript{380} The most pressing issues revolved around the decrepit housing that produced the ranks and supporters of the NYBPP. So, that was where the Panthers focused their attention, along with police brutality, drugs, and gang tensions.

The New York City Youth Board, which formed in 1947 as a program to reach out to youth gangs, published a book in 1960 in which they had a future outlook for what their programs would encompass. The publication, which took in all causes and essences of gang life in New York, read:

“As the foregoing chapters have indicated, the lack of a single cause for the problem of anti-social teenage gangs precludes a solution based on a single method. Therefore, in addition to its plans toward working through conflict situations, it is integrating its services on an internal, departmental and community basis to provide more help for the young people it serves.”\textsuperscript{381}

\textsuperscript{379} Malcolm X Speaks p 211; p 45: Malcolm held The Militant as “one of the best newspaper anywhere.”; p 55: On April 8, 1964, Malcolm X gave the speech “The Black Revolution” at a meeting sponsored by the Militant Labor Forum in New York, which had connections to a socialist-militant newspaper, named The Militant. Malcolm said: “We can see that it is nothing but a government conspiracy to continue to deprive the black people in this country of their rights. And the only way we will get these rights restored is by taking it out of Uncle Sam’s hands. Take him to court and charge him with genocide, the mass murder of millions of black people in this country-political murder, economic murder, social murder, mental murder. This is the crime that this government has committed, and if you yourself don’t do something about it in time, you are going to open the doors for something to be done about it from outside sources.”

\textsuperscript{380} Gregory, Black Corona, 96: Activism without government funding made the organizations autonomous and respected like the NAACP and other civic associations

\textsuperscript{381} NYC Youth Board, Reaching the Fighting Gang, 254
Ironically, the government wasted time and money putting down the organization that did what
the Board intended to without being paid.

The NYBPP listened to community members’ issues and concerns. 382 Jamal Joseph
remembered the Harlem office getting numerous calls in distress caused by poor New York
housing for the urban poor. He recalled occasions where children needed hospital attention after
a roach crawled in their ear, or being bit by a rabid rat. 383 Kuwasi Balagoon worked with the
Community Council on housing. 384 He remembered “Rats...rats falling out of the ceilings giving
old people heart attacks and biting children was common indeed.” 385 Joseph attended a funeral
for a young African American child who died from lead poisoning, caused by pieces of paint
chipping from his apartment wall and falling into his food, another avoidable death caused by the
atrocious housing conditions in the City. 386

The rat issue was very serious. Tenants bought chicken or beef for the rats in their
apartments to eat to deter them from eating their flesh. The NYBPP made posters, handed out
leaflets, and even presented a play about the issue to the community. They organized tenants,
giving them traps they either made or bought. 387 President Lyndon B. Johnson designed a bill to
eliminate the rat problem, but it got laughed at as it was voted down. The NYBPP went to the
U.S. House of Representatives in 1967 and demonstrated with a rat, resulting in a scuffle and
their arrests. 388 They were charged as disorderly persons and raised bail. 389 The persistence of

382 *Look for Me in the Whirlwind*, 271: NYBPP member Ali Bey Hassan described Harlem as a place with “nowhere
to run and nowhere to live.” After joining the party, he felt like his running ended. Hassan recalled, “I attended
community meetings about welfare, school conditions, housing, hospitals, found out from the people what their
needs were, and brought information back to the Party. We would study the information, and then bring our
answers back to the people, attempting to help them in their struggles against such thins as the welfare cuts and the
racist United Federation of Teachers

383 Ibid

384 Balagoon, *A Soldier’s Story*, 9: Balagoon served Harlem as a tenant organizer in his first act of political activity.

385 *Look for Me in the Whirlwind*, 257

386 Ibid, 300

387 *Look for Me in the Whirlwind*, 258

388 Balagoon, *A Soldier’s Story*, 28

389 *Look for Me in the Whirlwind*, 258
the NYBPP raised their popularity within the community. The NYBPP printed in the *Black Panther* its contact number and location of the Ministry of Information office for anyone in poor housing in NYC in need of pest control. Their free extermination service organized a crew to rid apartments and deteriorating housing of rats, mice, or roaches.390

Another accomplishment of the NYBPP was its free health clinics. Harlem Hospital carried the nickname in urban NY as “the butcher shop,” because many believed the African Americans who went in did not come out.391 That is why the NY Panthers formed a health clinic there. The Brooklyn Branch then opened the New York Panther 21 Community Health Center.392 Chevigny wrote, “Sutter Avenue became a clinic on Saturday from about nine to one.”393 The health services included complete physicals, blood tests, urinalysis, pap-smears, x-rays, and immunizations for children.394 The Panthers organized with medical students, pediatricians, gynecologists, surgeons, internists, nurses, technicians, and people out of the community to combat the problem. They even offered house visits upon request.395 The Jersey Panthers did the same, opening a free health clinic in Jersey City.396 The NY Panthers established a free ambulance service in response to a close member dying after slow transportation to the hospital.397

391 *Look for Me in the Whirlwind*, 3; Ibid, 7: Panther Michael “Cetewayo” Tabor remembered a bad-humored joke New York natives would tell other New Yorkers born in Harlem Hospital, saying “What! You were born in that butcher shop? No wonder your face is so fucked up.”
393 *Cops and Rebels*, 67; http://itsabouttimebpp.com/Chapter_History/images/New_York/nyork8a_10.html: The Brooklyn office’s free health clinic also ran on Tuesday and Thursday evenings during the week
394 *Cops and Rebels*, 67: The NYBPP also offered tests for tuberculosis, diabetes, high blood-pressure, sick cell anemia, lead poisoning, venereal disease, and heart trouble.
395 Ibid
396 *Right On*, Volume 1, Issue 1, April 3, 1971, “People’s free health clinic,” p 15
397 *The Black Panther*, Dec 25, 1971, p 2, “Her living was not in vain”: Irene Johnson, known to NYBPP members as Moms, worked hard in all the CAPS, often cooking for the breakfast programs, and loved by all Panther members. She was the mother of a younger Panther working for the NYBPP. On December 10, she fell to the ground in her home and stopped breathing. The NYBPP formed a free ambulance program in her honor
The NYBPP made great contributions in the development of the Lincoln Detox Center in the South Bronx. The detoxification center was a hospital-based rehabilitation center for drug addicts. The center used acupuncture rather than methadone maintenance and showed results in their treatments. Dharuba Bin Wahad led in organizing the clinic, which was one of the earliest examples of the work of the Rainbow Coalition, which included the Young Lords in East Harlem and the Young Patriots, curtailing drug abuse in their city.\textsuperscript{398} Bin Wahad wrote, “People didn’t really know that abandoned city buildings could be taken over, that they could go to court and get the property just by developing it and living on it.”\textsuperscript{399} The slogan behind the idea was “Think Lincoln.”\textsuperscript{400} One Panther who worked with the New York and Philadelphia chapters, Mutulu Shakur, formerly Jerald Wayne Williams, began his career as an acupuncturist and health care worker at the detoxification hospital.\textsuperscript{401} In 1978, Mutulu earned a doctor of acupuncture degree from the Quebec Institute of Acupuncture as well as cofounded the Black Acupuncture Advisory Association of North America (BAAANA) and the Harlem Institute of Acupuncture.\textsuperscript{402}

The NYBPP especially aimed to help the youth in their communities. The NYBPP ran a free breakfast program from the inception of the party. They fed school children and other that could not afford to eat at any open venues, often a church.\textsuperscript{403} The Panthers got contributions from an array of donors, but often found shortages and looked for all businesses in the neighborhood to contribute. The NYBPP told unwilling contributors, “all right, if this is the way

\begin{footnotes}
\item[398] Imprisoned Intellectuals, 94
\item[399] Still Black, Still Strong, 30
\item[400] Ibid
\item[401] Imprisoned Intellectuals, 187
\item[402] Ibid
\item[403] http://itsabouttimebpp.com/Chapter_History/images/New_York/nyork5_7.html: The Brooklyn section ran free breakfast programs at the Messiah Baptist Church on Sutter and Jerome Avenue, as well as at the Good Shepherd Church on Hopkinson and Sutter.
\end{footnotes}
you feel, we’re going to have the community deal with you, because you are taking money out of the community the least you can do is to put money back into the community.”

The Panthers looked to educate their youth. Preceding the Black Power movement in New York, school systems had “the tendency to view black migration to northern cities as a national crisis, which fueled a retrenchment of municipal services and an increasingly disciplinary stance of schools and law enforcement toward black youth.” The NYBPP also offered “Liberation Classes” in all its’ chapters, to educate about true African American history and Panther ideology. Getting a black principal at a school in Harlem proved a huge victory for the NYBPP. The NYBPP even worked with community organizers and the NAACP in their fight with districts over dangerous intersections and the need for traffic lights in school zones.

One of the greatest accomplishments of NYBPP programs was the creation of the Langston Hughes Library and Cultural Center in 1969. The cultural center located in Queens on Northern Boulevard holds the largest circulating black heritage reference collection in NYC. The center was created at the site of the former Woolworth department store building after repeated resistance from the building’s owners. They were hesitant to lease it to the black community. The work of the NYBPP and the strong coalitions it built by grass-root organizing paid off. With the coordinated work of the NYBP, the NOI, and the Library Action Committee, the Langston Hughes Library and Cultural Center became a reality.

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404 Cops and Rebels, 67
405 Murch, Living for the City, 45: During the late 1960s and 1970s, urban schools with majority African American populations often had trouble giving an appropriate education to its kids. In most cases, the school faculty was white and protected by the Teachers’ Union.
406 Look for Me in the Whirlwind, 295; Right On, April 3, 1971, “Hosto’s Community College,” p 15: The South Bronx section of the NYBPP attempted to get a community college established on principals friendly to the students to attend. Other scenarios like this occurred.
407 Gregory, Black Corona, 83
408 Copquin, The Neighborhood of Queens, 33
409 Gregory, Black Corona, 97
410 Ibid
The NYBPP had some success in combating police brutality. The NYBPP contributed to the Central Harlem Committee for Self-Defense. After the September 4th Brooklyn Criminal Courthouse brawl the Panthers had a series of meetings with New York government officials to express their grievances with the NYPD and their need for community control. Bin Wahad wrote, “We were struggling to petition to get on the ballot for the 1969 question of the decentralization of the NYPD.” The NYBPP organized the disgruntled citizens of their black community that had been beaten and mistreated by police for years. The NYBPP’s main contributions to the fight against NYPD brutality was in bringing attention to the issue to outside sources as well as give Black New Yorkers examples of how to organize against it.

The NYBPP gave communities inspiration in community-electoral politics. They stated, “The primary objective of the BPP is to establish revolutionary political power for black people.”

The NYBPP made a local coalition with the Welfare Rights Organization, and assigned Panthers to welfare centers in Harlem, the Bronx, Queens, and Brooklyn. The NYBPP organized the People’s Housing Coalition to fight for people suffering from poor housing. The Rainbow Coalition gave New York minorities a medium to which get attention for their ideas. The NYBPP also fought against state enforced laws on abortion, like the 1970 decision to make abortions between 2-4 months of pregnancy illegal.

The NYBPP’s CAPS were the number one reason they were targeted by the FBI. Chevigny wrote about the NYBPP’s CAPS:

“The only shocking thing about the work was that it was not already being done on a neighborhood basis by some charitable organization, and that it had not been

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411 Look for Me in the Whirlwind, 258
413 Right On, Volume 2, Issue 6 Nov-Dec 1972, p 23
414 Look for Me in the Whirlwind, 296
415 The Black Panther, “Charter of the People’s Housing Coalition”
continuously in operation for ten years. Law enforcement officials later claimed that community work was only a cover for criminal conspiracies. This of course, misses the Party’s diversity of aims; the Panthers worked hard and sincerely to overcome their inexperience in community work.”

The government realized they needed to act quickly. The Panthers’ popularity grew and threatened state officials.

\[417\]  
\[Cops and Rebels, 79\]
Top photo is a picture of advertising outside a NYBPP office.

Bottom photo is a picture of a Brooklyn Panther office, burnt to the ground by unknown causes.

Both pictures are from itsabouttimebpp.com
The top photo is a picture of supporters rallying outside the Panther 21 trial.

The bottom strip is a picture of the original sixteen New Yorkers arrested in the Panther 21 case.

Both Pictures are from itsabouttimebpp.com
Front Cover of *Right On*, the first issue on April 3, 1971.
This is an image on the last page from the first issue of Right On. The text above the picture that is cut off reads, “If I go forward, follow me, if I should hesitate push me, if I should stop, kill me.”
Top image is from *Right On*, Volume 2, Issue 9, on the last page, the strong panther a symbol of George Jackson, an infamous BPP member/political prisoner.

The bottom image is from the documentary, *Tupac Shakur: Thug Angel*. 

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*Herre* 81
**Repression against the Panthers**

The opportunistic FBI crippled the NYBPP. The vulnerability of the Panthers resulted from the large scope of problems inherit in their project of renewal. The FBI and NYPD wanted to make examples of the NYPP to interested rebellious youth. On March 4, 1968, the FBI sent out a memo designed to coordinate an effective counterintelligence program against Black Nationalist groups that would prevent coalitions between them.\(^{418}\) Hoover set long range goals in the message:

> “Prevent the rise of a ‘messiah’ who could unify and electrify the militant Black Nationalist movement. Malcolm X might have been such a “messiah”; he is the martyr of the movement today. Martin Luther King, Stokely Carmichael and Elijah Muhammad all aspire to this position.”\(^{419}\)

In the late 1960s Hoover began to worry about his “Do Not File” system’s discovery, and ordered a stop to the break-ins. Hoover realized he would need to control the larger framework to make the illegal surveillance acceptable. On August 25, 1967, Hoover sent out a memo that made effective Black Nationalist hate groups as targets of COINTELPRO.\(^{420}\) It announced that the purpose of the new disruption program was “to expose, disrupt, misdirect, discredit, or otherwise neutralize” the African American movement.\(^{421}\) Congress adopted “ill-conceived legislation” to allow for harsh punishment of riot agitators, opening the doors for preventive measures.\(^{422}\)

Hoover’s racism permeated the Bureau. Author Nelson Blackstock pointed out that “the only blacks even called special agents were J. Edgar Hoover’s black personal chauffeurs, whom

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\(^{418}\) Ibid, p 17; *Malcolm X: the FBI Files*, 30: The FBI targeted the Communist Party of the USA since 1956 using aggressive tactics, “including extensive recruitment of informers and efforts to exacerbate factionalism.”

\(^{419}\) Ibid

\(^{420}\) Blackstock, *Cointelpro*, 30

\(^{421}\) Ibid

\(^{422}\) *Crime, Dissent and the Attorney General*, 85
he dubbed ‘honorary special agents’.*423 In the 1970s, only 1.2% of African Americans existed in the entire FBI’s force.*424 Agents accused of racism were told to give one of the few stories in which the FBI’s work helped an African American.*425 Sullivan wrote to Hoover at the end of his career, “For good reason we used to be referred to as the ‘lily white’ FBI. We should have hired Negro agents and clerks many years ago but Hoover absolutely refused.”*426 The NYPD employed few African Americans in comparison with whites over its history as well.*427

A US Senate Investigating Committee in 1976 stated that by July 1969, 233 of the 295 authorized Black Nationalist COINTELPRO actions targeted the BPP.*428 Historian Robyn Spencer wrote, “COINTELPRO created a climate of suspicion and paranoia among party members—it compromised personal relationships and political alliances, and fostered a siege mentality within the organization.”*429 In all scenarios, the counterintelligence campaigns looked to take out the leaders in the Party and to attack their most influential medium, the CAPS. Hoover released a memorandum warning of the strong threat of the CAPS, which were “the best and most influential activity going for the BPP and, as such, potentially the greatest threat to efforts by authorities.”*430 Black Panther offices suffered from leadership imprisoned by counterintelligence.*431 The FBI coordinated these counterintelligence programs with help in

423 Ibid
424 Ibid, 84
425 Olsenstad, Inside the FBI, 69: Hoover’s work on the Bertillon criteria early in his career, which was used to identify a criminal by physical measurements and advocacy of implication by fingerprint, freed a black man that had been found guilty by the Bertillon system
426 Sullivan, The Bureau, 268: Sullivan continued quoting Hoover, “there will never be a negro special agent as long as I am director of the FBI.” The Department of Justice had to push Hoover to hire Negros.
427 Nelson, Police Brutality, 172: Arthur Doyle, a former Black member of the NYPD, gave insight to the racial standing of the department. After spending time in the Marine Corps, he took the police examination in 1963, passing the written part of the exam, but failing the physical part. He said he had been in great shape from the Marines, but the department told him he failed, giving the reason that he was missing a tooth. Appalled, he went to the naval dentist who said his teeth were excellent, and his captain wrote a letter on his behalf that finally got him into the department. He would eventually spend 29 years with the department, learning a variety of things.
428 Alkebulan, 88
429 Spencer Dissertation, 139
430 Murch, Living for the City, 181
431 The Black Panther, Oct 17, 1970, “Jamaica office destroyed by mysterious fire”: State repression allowed for the Jamaica office to burn down. The key organizers in the NYBPP were not present to watch over the office.
specific areas from the NYPD. The FBI served as the head, and the NYPD acted as the violent arm being directed.

**Formation of the Rift**

COINTELPRO’s greatest achievement was forcing the split between the Oakland Headquarters with most of the NYBPP and other East Coast chapters. What made this possible was the preexisting rift in difference of opinions on the party’s direction and political ideology between the two very diverse groups of Panthers. After Huey P. Newton was released from prison he retreated from his previous positions on urban warfare. He made an example of loyal Panther, Geronimo Pratt, an advocate of urban guerrilla warfare, and expelled him from the party. Under Cleaver's leadership, the New York Party moved towards ultra leftism, denouncing the Central Committee’s exploitation of their positions and calling for a more hands approach in defense of their civil rights. 432 In New York, “many looked to Cleaver as their leader because of his consistent exhortations to armed struggle.”433 It must be noted that the NYBPP resorted to this offensive violence only after the psychological and physical abuse of state repression.

The Oakland headquarters of the BPP never got along with other Black Nationalists groups.434 The BPP claimed to be revolutionary Black Nationalists from its inception. Huey Newton would later repudiate this stance, in a somewhat ignorant fashion, and claim that the BPP worked for intercommunalism. The BPP had seen African-Americans as a lost colony of blacks in America.435 In early 1971, Newton argued that the struggle for national self-determination was no longer relevant.436 Assata Shakur put it simply about the Oakland

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432 Spencer Dissertation, p 17
433 Alkebulan, p 73
434 *Black Power*, 238: They had specific issues with the Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM).
435 Ibid
436 Ibid, 238
headquarters, and most of the NYBPP would agree, “Politically, I was not at all happy with the direction of the Party.”

A distinct hierarchy plagued the BPP. The Party’s split stemmed not only from the ideology of armed self-defense and underground violence but also from members dissatisfaction over the Central Committee staff. For some time, rank-and-file, as well as leaders of the New York Party, felt neglected and exploited, as they provided for one-third of the entire Black Panther's newspaper profits, but there articles appeared in the weekly less and less. Bin Wahad had upset David Hilliard by calling him collect. He defended himself saying “we don't have money for a phone.” Hilliard repeatedly put off Bin Wahad and ignored complaints from members saying that he would look into the paper concerns, but he never did. In Hilliard's autobiography, he said that he was uneasy about New York's organizational security, as well as their penchant for members taking on African names.

The location of the NYBPP hindered the successfulness of the group by opening many opportunities to agent provocateurs. Many members of the NYBPP were militant youths of color that needed direction and focus to become successful political activists. Chairman Bobby Seale said about directing the work of these individuals still needing to be molded:

“A jackanape generally works from an opportunistic position. He centers things only around himself; he's still selfish. He thinks his pot and his wine are above the party. He thinks the gun is something he can use at will…to rip off stuff for himself. He can be politically educated, that's definite. But if you've got agent provocateurs running around sent in by the CIA and the FBI, black guys running around talking one thing and doing another thing, then it makes it much harder, because they misled the jackanapes into doing all kinds of jive things to destroy the party.”

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437 Ibid
438 Murch, Living for the City, 240
440 Right On, April 3 1971 p2, “About the Split”
441 Spencer Dissertation, 145
Hilliard criticized the NYBPP arguing that the New York chapter was the biggest obstacle to strengthening the organization because they were so undisciplined.\footnote{442 Hilliard, \textit{This Side of Glory}, p 159, 236}

Other problems the NYBPP had with the Central Committee were also evident. One of the most important contributing factors to the split was the housing situation. As mentioned earlier, inadequate housing plagued the NYBPP and the larger African American community. The NYBPP accused Newton and Hilliard of using funds from the \textit{Black Panther} newspaper to pay for their luxurious homes. While many NYBPP members lived in decrepit buildings, Huey Newton exploited women in his penthouse that cost $650 a month. Hilliard purchased a $650,000 home soon after.\footnote{443 \textit{Right On}, April 3, 1971, “Editorial”}

Issues over party funds spurred calls for new leadership. The NYBPP believed Newton spent $30 and up to $60 on any meal and shipped his rugs for his apartment from Paris.\footnote{444 \textit{Right On}, April 3, 1971, “On the Assassination of Comrade Robert Webb,” p 3; “On Contradictions within the BPP,” p 13} The NYBPP stated, “Each speaking engagement was done at a minimum of $2000 apiece and none of that money was going to any of the local branches and chapters, the troops were starving to death.”\footnote{445 Ibid} As early as 1969, Party members complained about the authoritarian, self-serving leadership. Regional leaders like Geronimo Pratt, Fred Hampton, and NYBPP leaders including Dhoruba Bin Wahad and Jamal Joseph, met in Harlem to discuss their dissatisfaction of the central staff and their control over chapters organizational priorities, and the growing cliquish behavior of those in Oakland.\footnote{446 Holder Dissertation, p 268} The NYBPP thought the clique in Oakland reaped benefits that should have been redistributed back into party chapters. Lack of party democracy laid the groundwork for the split, and provided a fertile environment for FBI manipulation.
The Panther 21 Trial

In 1969, the threat of the BPP tightened the connection between FBI and NYPD forces in local prosecutions of the Party. Historian John T. Elliff wrote, “Attorney General Mitchell’s prior decisions to prosecute Bobby Seale and to permit electronic surveillance of the Panthers as a threat to national security indicated to New York, officials that their move would be consistent with national law enforcement policy.” NYPD infiltration put undercover agents in position to cripple the party. In New York, the Panther influence was so large that District Attorney Frank Hogan’s office decided to move on the Panther 21. The Panther 21 case was the biggest reason the Justice Department created a special unit to coordinate federal action against the BPP.

The founding members of the New York Black Panther Party naturally became immediate targets of the FBI operations in New York. Beginning in the early morning of April 2, 1969, the NYPD went door to door of the leaders’ apartments and arrested them on a range of conspiracy charges. Many were asleep before being awoken to shotguns and bullet proof vests, being accused of attempted arson, murder, and conspiracies to blow up police stations, school buildings, and the Bronx Botanical Garden. The arrests of the New York leadership, soon after the Party’s founding, transformed them from revolutionary leaders into political prisoners. Ali Bey Hassan said about the accusations of attempting to blow up the Botanical Garden, “It was a joke, we got together to go through all of this here stuff, put our life on the line of trying to serve the people to blow up some flowers?” Regardless of how ridiculous the charges seemed to the party leaders, they were thrown in prison for two years by

447 Crime, Dissent, and the Attorney General, 132
448 Ibid, 137
449 Ibid, 132
450 Ibid
452 Passin’ It On
the time their trial came to a close. Twenty one Panthers were arrested under these charges, which was where their nickname came from.\footnote{The Panther 21 included: Lumumba Shakur, Dharuba Bin Wahad, Sekou Odinga, Afeni Shakur, Ali Bey Hassan, Michael “Cetewayo” Tabor, Jamal Joseph, Abayama Katara (Alex McKeiver), Baba Odinga (Walter Johnson), Joan Bird, Robert Collier, Clark Squire, Lonnie Epps, Curtis Powell, Kuwasi Balagoon, Richard Harris, Lee Berry, Lee Roper and, Kwando Kinshasa (William King), Thomas Berry, and Larry Mack. Only sixteen of the members were jailed, however.}

The Panther 21 arrests resulted from NYPD informants guided by FBI counterintelligence. Former FBI head William Sullivan said the Bureau must have spent a million dollars maintaining informants in the late 1960s and early 1970s.\footnote{Sullivan, \textit{The Bureau}, 129} Shaun Dubonnet, a former Brooklyn Panther with a history of mental illness, informed police about Panther operations. His testimony led to the indictments and wiretap orders on the NYBPP, though he later admitted some of them to be fabrications.\footnote{\textit{Cops and Rebels}, 100} Chevigny believed at least six African American undercover agents of the NYPD infiltrated the Manhattan section of the NYBPP, resulting in the Panther 21 arrests.\footnote{Ibid; \textit{Look for Me in the Whirlwind}, 283: “I did some work in security, too. I found one FBI pig who had infiltrated-a slimy cat. I took all the data on this pig and sent it to national headquarters so that we could expose him-now he will be a ‘witness’ against us in our trial as a ‘co-conspirator.’ Dig that: an FBI pig infiltrator that hardly anybody knew, whom I met while investigating him, is a ‘co-conspirator’ in a case against us!”}

The arrests greatly drained NYBPP funds. The Panther 21 were being held at $100,000 bail each.\footnote{\textit{The Briar Patch}, p 9-10} Afeni Shakur, a former NY Panther, said of the case, “What was really so fanatic about it is that that's when it really occurred to me that I didn't understand the pigs at all, because that's when they started calling us murderers. Joan Bird-of all people- they called a murderer.” Afeni defended Joan Bird after she was beaten by the NYPD. The police arrested Joan Bird the first time in her life on January 17, 1969. That was just a season after her joining in the fall of 1968. Bird was arrested twice again after released on bail in February, and then again along with the Panther 21 in that April. Each time Bird was arrested, the Party produced thousands of

\footnote{\textit{Look for Me in the Whirlwind}, p 294.}
dollars worth of bail money and suffered from seeing her beaten and tortured.\textsuperscript{459} Sekou Odinga, Thomas Berry, and Larry Mack managed to escape arrest and went underground.\textsuperscript{460} Odinga said he went underground earlier that year when Bunchy Carter and John Huggins were murdered in California in January.\textsuperscript{461} The Algerian government granted Odinga political asylum in 1970, and he helped Eldridge Cleaver operate the International section of the BPP.\textsuperscript{462}

By targeting the key leaders and organizers of the Panther organization, COINTELPRO and later FBI programs crippled the successes of the NYBPP and elevated rank-and-file members into higher positions. Jamal Joseph described the situation as, “the leadership was targeted first under the old theory that if you kill the head the body will die.”\textsuperscript{463} Instances like this called forward other members, like Afeni Shakur, to take up responsibilities in leadership.\textsuperscript{464} Shakur explained, “I didn’t feel ready. I didn’t feel competent, but they told me I had to do it. I had to step up. There wasn’t anyone else to do it.”\textsuperscript{465} This followed leading members of her section being arrested in November of 1968. Repression left the Panther leadership inexperienced and more vulnerable.

One of the Panther 21, Lee Berry, fought in Vietnam where he contracted malaria and had other war-related injuries, ultimately leaving him an epileptic.\textsuperscript{466} Berry’s epilepsy brought on a series of serious attacks, forcing him to leave Vietnam to enter the Veteran Administration

\textsuperscript{459} Look for Me in the Whirlwind, 303-306.  
\textsuperscript{460} The Briar Patch, 10-12  
\textsuperscript{461} http://www.prisonactivist.org/prisoners/sekou-mgobogi-abdullah-odinga  
\textsuperscript{462} Liberation, Imagination, and the Black Panther Party, Kathleen Cleaver and George N. Katsiaficas, p 19; Crime, Dissent, and the Attorney General, 125-126: In September the court decision that released Cleaver was overturned, “on the ground that the probation agency had not exceeded its discretionary authority in revoking parole.” Cleaver, with orders to return to jail in a couple months, fled the country. The two weeks it took to get a search warrant for Cleaver allowed him to withdraw $33,000 from a local bank, flying to New York with the money.  
\textsuperscript{463} Passin’ It On  
\textsuperscript{464} Wolfe, Radical Chic and Mau Mauing the Flak Catchers, p 8: Author Tom Wolfe described Afeni, like many other Panther women, as lithe.  
\textsuperscript{465} Evolution of a Revolutionary, 82  
\textsuperscript{466} The Black Panther, February 28, 1970, p 5, “Lee Berry…Dead or Alive”
Hospital for treatment on April 1, 1969. That same week the state of New York brought in Berry charging him with these irrational conspiracies. Berry’s exposure in Vietnam made him a fitting target and he was labeled a bitter black militant. They used his recently acquired government training in weaponry as evidence he was aiding the NYBPP in these attacks. Authorities ignored his medical condition and lack of contact with the NYBPP. Prison officials threw him in solitary confinement for five days after having a severe epilepsy attack without calling a medical official. Panther 21 lawyers fought Berry’s maltreatment in prison with little success. His conditioned worsened as trial dates were numerous and lengthy. He finally was brought into an intensive care unit with a 106 degree fever. A few days later, doctors found a blood clot in his groin, and the night after, diagnosed one in his lung. The other members of the Panther 21 found themselves in similar situations, luckily without medical conditions comparable to Berry’s.

The courts prepared to try the Panther 21 wrongly. District Attorney Phillips told the media he was expecting disruptions from the defendants, and sure enough he accused them multiple times of that during the length of the trial. Judge Murtagh made objections on behalf of the prosecution as well. The repression called for extended jail time of the Panther 21, to keep them off the streets and away from the communities they aid. The courts accomplished this with multiple trials and prison incarcerations of the defendants for two years. At times they applauded their defense attorney’s objections to Murtagh’s continuous overruling in favor of the prosecution.

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467 Ibid
468 Radical Chic, Wolfe, p 18
469 The Black Panther, February 28, 1970, p 5, “Lee Berry…Dead or Alive”
470 Ibid
472 Ibid
On May 13, 1971, two years after the arrest of the Panther 21, all twenty-one were acquitted of every count against them. Bin Wahad, in a light manner, recalled the situation of the trial he had missed while underground:

“The courtroom was packed with people that loved us, environmentalists were there because they believed we wouldn't destroy flowers...we had a broad spectrum of support...they figure that if they can indict us for destroying nature, all the blacks and nature freaks will come out and say you should hang em’.”

The Panther 21 case was the most expensive and longest in New York's history. Any intelligence that the Panthers actually had weapons or bombs would have compelled immediate preventive action. It turned out to be an embarrassment for the FBI and the NYPD when all the defendants were acquitted.

The Split

In March 1971, the Panther 21 wrote an “Open Letter to the Weathermen” from prison. In it, the Panthers declared the armed faction of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) as the “true vanguard for revolutionary change in the United States,” and also criticized the Oakland headquarters. The Weathermen had conducted numerous bombings throughout NYC in a radically political attack on American capitalistic buildings and symbols. The NYBPP believed the Weathermen represented Malcolm’s revolutionary requirements of “whites who were really fed up.” The Panther 21 also accused the Oakland Panthers of ignoring messages from the rank-and-file members in the letter, an important aspect of the Panthers socialistic revolution. The Oakland headquarters, under the leadership of Newton and Hilliard, expelled the Panther 21. Several weeks later, the Oakland faction expelled the entire International Section of the BPP.

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473 Passin’ It On
474 Crime, Dissent, and the Attorney General, 136
475 Murch, Living for the City, 238
which included three Central Committee members, D.C. Cox, Kathleen Cleaver, and Eldridge.\textsuperscript{477} Objections arose on both sides but the two factions grew further apart from here.

The FBI took credit for the Party's split. They released a statement, “Analysis indicates the chaotic condition of the BPP and the split between BPP leaders Huey P. Newton and Eldridge Cleaver was possibly a direct result of our intensive counterintelligence efforts aimed at causing dissension between Newton and Cleaver and within the party.”\textsuperscript{478} The FBI had various tactics to continue pushing the wedge that separated the two factions of the Black Panthers. The FBI sent Eldridge Cleaver letters stating that the Party was using him for his name and his image.\textsuperscript{479} Continuing after the split, the FBI's New York Office notified J. Edgar Hoover that it “will in the immediate future submit counterintelligence proposals against the Cleaver faction of the BPP designed to widen the existing rift within the Party.”\textsuperscript{480}

The effects of this split left local chapters of the Party across the nation declaring their alliances. A definitive split literally cut the organization in half, with an East and West Coast faction. The split left the New York Party vulnerable because the Central Committee controlled Party funds and legal representation. Some NY Panthers stayed loyal to the Oakland headquarters. Others did not have a choice, with the Central Committee taking direct control over offices like in Brooklyn.\textsuperscript{481}

The danger from the repression created by the FBI and NYPD caused Bin Wahad to go underground in fear for his life. By this time, the FBI had been circulating false letters between

\textsuperscript{477} Murch, \textit{Living for the City}, 238
\textsuperscript{478} Spencer Dissertation, p 246-247
\textsuperscript{479} Ibid, p 230
\textsuperscript{480} Willis, “State Repression and Political Prisoners;,”, p 376; Spencer dissertation, 210: One memo from the director of the FBI to the office in New York stated, “New York has submitted three excellent anonymous letters which, with some revisions, should have the three pronged effect of creating divisiveness among BPP members concerning Newton, treat him in a flippant and irreverent manner, and insinuate that he has been cooperating with police to gain his release from prison.”
\textsuperscript{481} \textit{Cops and Rebels}, 56
the Oakland headquarters and the NYBPP. On February 13, 1971, the front cover of *The Black Panther* read “Enemies of the People,” with picture of NY members Bin Wahad and Tabor. These leaders in New York were considered a priority for the Oakland faction. Bin Wahad, fearing the death threats from the West Coast along with the threat of an unfair trial, moved underground with Tabor after posting bail.\(^{482}\) Their failure to appear in court put the Panther 21 in jeopardy. It caused members who were out on bail to be put back in prison and created confusion for other rank and file members. The NY chapter could not diffuse what had happened at the time, but this instance gave the national headquarters the opportunity to cast their frustrations on party members who challenged them.

The same month Bin Wahad went underground Eldridge Cleaver called for the expulsion of David Hilliard and said that Newton needed to stand trial to determine his revolutionary dedication. A meeting took place on February 1971, in New York, marking the point where the split could no longer be fixed, and this group of disgruntled Panthers named New York as the new central headquarters of the BPP, proclaiming they would reinstate anyone wrongfully expelled from the party by the Oakland faction.\(^{483}\) As historian and former Panther Paul Alkebulan wrote, “Dissidents on the East Coast began to style themselves as the ‘real Black Panther Party.’”\(^{484}\)

On March 8, Deputy Field Marshall Robert Webb of the NYBPP was murdered on 125\(^{\text{th}}\) street in Harlem. This occurred a week after the FBI warned Webb’s mother that the West Coast faction was sending hit men to kill Panthers on the east coast. The day before the murder the NYBPP received information from the FBI that Newton and Hilliard sent “75 robots that are

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\(^{482}\) Still Black, Still Strong, p 13: The destruction of the Black Panther Party, the splitting of the Black Panther Party into hostile factions, is what led to that particular development of the black underground in the United States. These activists who could no longer function safely above ground, had to flee for their survival.

\(^{483}\) Holder Dissertation, p 245-248; Spencer Dissertation, p 218

\(^{484}\) Alkebulan, p 74
wired up on their madness to come to NYC to murder Panthers there.” The FBI told the NYBPP they felt it was their duty to tell them, though the Panthers had no idea of their much larger goals. Webb had been sent from San Francisco to help organize on the East Coast, where he NY Panthers accepted him. Soon after, the first issue of the NYBPP’s paper, Right On, was released.

The front page of Right On proclaimed that Webb was “Slain by Huey's Assassins.” The first issue of Right On was very upfront and demanding. The first article in the paper was entitled, “A Call to Dissolve the Central Committee.” It called for at least the reformation of the Oakland headquarters, if not a complete end to it. The article, like so many more in this specific issue and others, blamed David Hilliard for many of the BPP's issues. A few pages in, the paper gave their account of what happened to Webb:

“On Monday, March 8, 1971, at approximately 3:00 PM, three of our brothers were walking east of 125th street and 7th Ave in Harlem when they encountered two fools (who are aligned with the Huey P. Newton and David Hilliard clique) selling the Black Panther newspaper. As one of our comrades moved closer to confiscate the reactionary rag sheet, he was struck in the back of the head with a forty five. Brandishing 45’s, 9MM’s and 357 magnums, several other people emerged from out of nowhere. One person, whose name we do not know, shot a round from a 45 or 357 magnum into the back of Robert Webb’s head. The bullet entered the back of his head and exited through his mouth. The velocity of the bullet shattered the brother’s brains.”

That night, the Central Headquarters of the NYBPP received a call form Harlem Hospital informing them of the death of Webb.

Nobody knew for sure who actually murdered Robert Webb. In February 1970, the FBI informed Field Lt. Mark Holder’s mother that the Oakland faction sent gunmen to the East Coast. Mark Holder, a close friend of Webb, was with him when he was murdered. Family member and former Panther, historian Kit Kim Holder stated:

486 Ibid, 1
487 Right On, April 3, 1971, p 2
488 Right On, April 3, 1971, p 3
“Webb's death did not come from California but from the Northeast...and that the FBI had surveillance on these Oakland gunmen but no one was arrested or even questioned for Webb's death...as a matter of fact, directly following the incident Holder became the target of the FBI/NYPD investigation. From the moment Holder became the target of the states investigation he went underground, not in fear of the Oakland faction, but in fear of the FBI/NYPD.”

The NYBPP, as they wrote in *Right On*, felt simply about the situation that, “the only central committee the west could be on is the FBI.” They also noted that on March 1, the same day Holder's mother was warned about the planned murders, Webb had called for the resignation and dismissal of David Hilliard and his wife. The NYBPP believed this was a debt that can only be paid in blood.

The NYBPP reported that Newton told Eldridge Cleaver on a videotaped telephone conversation, “I'd like a battle brother. We'll battle it out.” Just over a month after the Webb murder, Newton had received what he had asked for. On April 17, Sam Napier, the *Black Panther* circulation manager in New York “was found in the Corona, New York newspaper distribution office of the party, having been beaten, tied to a chair and shot to death. The building in which he was found had been burned beyond repair.”

The *Black Panther*, interestingly, reported that the FBI was behind the murder and that west coast-loyal New Yorkers were falsely imprisoned for it. They accredited the assassination as an attempt to destroy the newspaper and divide the black community. The Oakland faction possibly avoided the confrontation and looked to maintain the positive support they had established on the east coast. Regardless, Napier's death pushed the two factions further apart and raised more suspicion of FBI

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489 Holder, p 314-315.
492 Ibid
494 *The Black Panther*, May 29, 1971, “Pigs Intensify Attempt to Stifle the Voice of the People,”
counterintelligence. Mark Holder was found guilty in 1972 for the murder.\textsuperscript{495} The courts tried Richard Moore for the murder but ended with the judge declaring a mistrial.\textsuperscript{496}

*Right On* gave the NYBPP the opportunity to address the issues that were confronting them. The paper came out while the Panther 21 were still in prison. In the article, “Message to the Third World from the NY Panther 21,” the Panther 21 wrote about the repressive forces protecting white capitalist interests, “We are potentially dangerous because we have decided to align our behavior with our beliefs, and that does in actuality make us potentially dangerous to racist and oppressive AmeriKKKa.”\textsuperscript{497} The NYBPP wrote articles about the NYPD’s role in pushing drugs into the black communities, and profiting off it in various ways with arrests and drug seizures, though it generally deteriorated the already oppressed homes. *Right On* raised awareness of these issues. Sections like the Community Bulletin Board gave a place for the New York Party to explain the programs that the Panthers ran to serve their community. After losing complete access in reaching black communities and readers through the *Black Panther*, the NYBPP created *Right On*.

The tactics used by the FBI and the local police transformed the nature of both factions newspapers. Instead of being able to unite the African American masses, a key principle in a revolution, both the Central Committee and the NYBPP used their papers as weapons in an intended civil war. The *Black Panther* criticized New York members. The NY Panthers overwhelmingly filled *Right On* with insults of the Oakland Panthers, hindering its ability to reach African American audiences.\textsuperscript{498} The newspaper criticized the *Black Panther* paper as

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\textsuperscript{495}Christenson, *Political Trials: Gordian Knots in the Law*, p 186  \\
\textsuperscript{496}Christenson, *Political Trials: From Antiquity to the Present*, p 351  \\
\textsuperscript{497}Right On*, April 3, 1971, “Message to the 3rd World from the NY Panther 21,” p 5  \\
\textsuperscript{498}Ibid, “Huey at Princeton, NJ”: *Right On* printed an article about Huey Newton speaking to a predominately black crowd of about 8,000 in the wealthy town of Princeton, New Jersey. It stated that Newton showed up and wanted the money offered to him up front. When Bill Wheatley, the organizer of the event, only had $2200 on hand but assured Newton that the $3500 offered to him would be available shortly after, Newton angrily criticized him.
\end{flushright}
being a “filthy slander sheet, used by David Hilliard and Huey P. Newton to vent vicious attacks against Eldridge, Cet, and countless other revolutionary brothers and sisters throughout the world.” It left a notion for readers that division was their intentions. Historian Robyn Spencer wrote that the Black Panther, like Right On, became centered on “legal defense,” which was their attempts to counteract COINTELPRO and other forms of state repression. With countless arrests, the NYPD and FBI filled Right On with court dates, trial outcomes, and other distractions from positive community-focused actions.

The split led to the deaths of Panther members on both sides. Like Malcolm X’s assassination, the actual physical role of the FBI in the murder is questionable. There is no argument, however, that the FBI stood by and witnessed if not orchestrated the murders of BPP members. The first issue of Right On’s last page had a cartoon image of a Black Panther holding a gun smiling at a police officer with a quote under it that read, “In the spirit of Robert Webb we have no hang ups about revolutionary violence.” Police repression forced this split, as well as transformed the nature of the NYBPP.

**NYPD Repression-A Vague but Effective Case**

Chevigny gave an in-depth case study of the failure to implicate a group of New York Panthers on attempted murder charges after the Panther 21 arrests in Cops and Rebels. The supposed target in the case was a police officer at the New Dunston Hotel in Harlem. Those on trial were Alfred Cain, Jr., Ricardo De Leon, and Jerome West, all members of the NYBPP. Chevigny, the defense lawyer of these Panthers opened his book, “This is a complex and subtle story, a human document of extraordinary drama as well as a true crime story that is all the more

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499 Ibid, “Editorial”
500 Spencer Dissertation, 161
501 Right On, April 3, 1971, p 20
502 Cops and Rebels, xi
compelling as we discover that the criminals are not the accused, but the police themselves."

This particular case displayed NYPD repression and the lengths to which the police would extend attacking, in this case the Brooklyn chapter of the NYBPP. Officer Wilbert Thomas was the leading undercover agent building the case against Cain, De Leon, and West.

The most critical BOSS activity, and its greatest contribution to the growth of NYPD intelligence, was undercover surveillance. BOSS operatives were untrained recruits not filed on official rosters or salary chart, and had no influence on the NYPD’s budget. Members with unique skills and an undeniable commitment to the NYPD made the Tactical Patrol Force, a group consisting of several BOSS members. The FBI always got most of its valuable information from informants, and local intelligence agencies modified their departments to suit and facilitate this technique.

At the beginning of 1969, the Brooklyn chapter was still loosely organized, and easily infiltrated. In January 1969, Wilbert Thomas joined the NYPD and immediately put to work attending any black gathering in Brooklyn. Thomas received no formal training, a customary practice in BOSS, intended to preserve the nature of an average African American New Yorker outside the legal force. Within a month, he was attending NYBPP meetings, which filled his BOSS files. Under the code name “Rene” he reported to the NYPD, but while in the groups he infiltrated, uncharacteristic of BOSS agents, he used his real name. Thomas one time told

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503 Ibid, cover
504 Protectors of Privilege, 157
505 Ibid, 156
506 Welch and Marston, Inside Hoover’s FBI, 59: Informants off the street often provided the FBI with most of their answers, either out of fear or for some monetary or revenge sort of payment.
507 Cops and Rebels, 100
508 Ibid, 101
509 Ibid
510 Ibid, 101-102
Panthers in his office that he could get pistols, provoking them into armed resistance rather than focusing on their CAPS.\textsuperscript{511}

Thomas’ undercover work came at an interesting time in the NYBPP’s history. After the arrest of the Panther 21, other NYBPP leaders were cautious of violent acts and repudiated anyone who acted against their policies.\textsuperscript{512} Yet, “the party ideology of violent socialist revolution and the policies of appealing to the lumpen-proletariat raised the question over and over.”\textsuperscript{513} Thomas did not spend too much time at the NYBPP offices after this, but still hung around in close-proximity. The Panthers closed its doors to new recruits to curtail infiltration, but Thomas was readmitted on July 30.\textsuperscript{514} The next day, Thomas claimed he heard the beginnings of a plot that led to the arrests of Cain, de Leon, and West.\textsuperscript{515}

The plot revolved around the stealing of cash from the Dunston Hotel, of 142 West 131 Street, NYC. Before these Panthers could reach their supposed destination, they were picked up by the NYPD and therefore the charges for murder remained attempted. The Panthers were in possession of a loaded sawed-off shotgun, and a loaded U.S. Carbine M-1 rifle.\textsuperscript{516} The police said they found a blueprint of the businesses premises drawn on the back of a Free Huey Newton campaign handout on one of the suspects.\textsuperscript{517} When asked their addresses after being arrested, all four men, including Thomas, responded 1808-A Fulton Street, Brooklyn.\textsuperscript{518} Cain denied they were on their way to commit a robbery, but the weapons were still in the car.\textsuperscript{519} The adherence to armed expropriations of Cain and other NYBPP put these three Panthers in a position to be

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{511} Ibid, 103
\textsuperscript{512} Ibid, 98
\textsuperscript{513} Ibid, 98; 109: On June 20, 1969, Thomas entered an entry from Alfred Cain, “BPP members will have to relate to stickups because living off the few cents from the Black Panther newspaper will not make it.”
\textsuperscript{514} Ibid, 110
\textsuperscript{515} Ibid
\textsuperscript{516} Ibid, 114
\textsuperscript{517} The New York Times, August 17, 1969, p 50, “Four Panthers Here Held for Conspiracy”
\textsuperscript{518} Ibid
\textsuperscript{519} Cops and Rebels, 115
\end{footnotes}
harassed. The truth of the story was that Thomas organized the Panthers to get the weapons they were charged with having, and organized the arrest.\(^{520}\)

The arrests, like all other counterintelligence programs against the NYBPP, took leadership away from the Party. The *New York Times* printed an article quoted Zayd-Malik Shakur, saying that with these arrests, the three Panthers were expelled from the party. Ricardo Deleon was 33 years old at the time, Alfred Cain was 23, and Jerome West was 18. Zayd-Malik Shakur said that Wilbert Thomas was “a member in good standing,” until his arrest.\(^{521}\) He continued, “The Panthers are not robbers and hoodlums...We do not go around robbing stores. We are servants of the people.”\(^{522}\) This speaks to the complexity of the Panthers ideology. It also suggests that, though many Panthers felt that expropriations were justified, they would not allow illegal slip-ups to tamper with their goals.

The House Committee on Internal Security saw these specific Panthers as a political force that needed to be eliminated, but were cautious to avoid making them out to be martyrs.\(^{523}\) The two trials it took to come to a decision took strong leaders away from the Brooklyn section for over a year, and used party funds for defense. While in trial, the prosecutor asked Cain what his occupation was and he said he was in “The Tombs” for the last thirteen months.\(^{524}\) He followed with the career title of a revolutionary.

The role of Thomas in the plot was disputed between the prosecution and the defense.\(^{525}\) The prosecution argued that Thomas merely cooperated with the defendants once they had settled on their plot. The defense counsel held that the policeman not only planned the alleged

\(^{520}\) Ibid, 110


\(^{522}\) Ibid

\(^{523}\) *Cops and Rebels*, 98-99

\(^{524}\) *Cops and Rebels*, 200: Tombs was a nickname for New York State Prison.

crime, but also manipulated the defendants into committing the robbery. One of the three defense attorneys, Conrad Lynn, said, “Was it a scenario run off by the Police Department to knock off what they considered dupes?” The prosecution believed the plan was to rob the landlord of the Dunston Hotel as means to pay for Panther operations, with instructions to shoot anyone who “made a funny move” during the operation, equipped with a rifle, sawed-off shotgun, and knife. The trial began on April 29, just doors away from where the dragged out Panther 21 trial was being conducted.

The trial ended in a hung jury on May 22, 1970 after four weeks in State Supreme Court. Justice Harold Birns dismissed the jury after they said they were at a deadlock. The defense argued that Wilbert Thomas entrapped them. The case was too vague on several areas to implicate the three Panthers on the more severe charges. A former police officer said the story was too unbelievable to be true. On September 26, 1970, all four defendants were found not guilty of conspiracy charges and of unlawful possession of the rifle and knife. All, however, were found guilty of possessing a loaded shotgun and Cain found guilty for defacing it. Cain and de Leon were found guilty of possessing a canister of spray, but had no criminal intent attached to that charge. Jerome West, because of his previous record, received an indefinite sentence of up to three years. De Leon had a long record, so he received the maximum penalty, a term not to exceed seven years. Cain had a letter sent on his behalf about his

526 Ibid
527 Ibid
528 Ibid
530 Ibid
531 Ibid
532 Cops and Rebels, 204
533 Ibid
534 Ibid
535 Ibid, 201
536 Ibid
outstanding work in the community and received probation for five years, being set free after more than a year in prison and two tense trials.\textsuperscript{537}

The NYPD threw this repressive campaign together to tie up the Panthers’ time and funds. Undercover agents working for the NYPD that Thomas did not know infiltrated the NYBP, showing the disorganization that perhaps the FBI would not have shown.\textsuperscript{538} Chevigny wrote of the irony of Thomas’ lack of training which led to the acquittal of the murder charges. It was deliberately done by his superiors but made him less credible to the jury.\textsuperscript{539} The reason that the State’s repression failed to implicate the Panthers on all charges was because the courts could not connect the political purpose to the robbery.\textsuperscript{540} Chevigny wrote, “In this case, the political police were willing to take enormous risks, to expend manpower and money, on the chance that they might be able to convince the public that some Black Panthers were authentic gangsters.”\textsuperscript{541}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Ibid
\item Ibid, 109
\item Ibid, 207
\item Ibid, 208
\item Ibid, 305
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The Effects of Political Repression

On May 13, 1971, the Panther 21 were acquitted of all charges. Because of the repression the NYBPP faced, the Black Liberation Army formulated offensive attacks to counter the violence. On May 19, less than a week after the Panther 21’s acquittal, two police officers stationed outside District Attorney Hogan’s home, Thomas Curry and Nicholas Binetti, suffered a barrage of bullets from a machine gun. The wounds were not lethal, but the two were severely injured on Malcolm X’s birthday. Two days after the shooting, two packages were delivered, one to a radio station, WLDB, and the other to the New York Times. The packages contained a license plate, a bullet, and a note from the BLA claiming responsibility for the shooting. This was the first time the government had become aware of the clandestine group, which operated at their own will at this time. Two days after, on May 21, NYPD officers Joseph Piagentini and Waverly Jones were murdered in Harlem. Police believed three suspects of the BLA snuck up behind them, struck Jones in the back of the head, and shot Piagentini thirteen times. The NYPD and FBI did not know which BLA members committed the murders, but knew someone had to pay for their crimes for closure within and outside the department.

Making Someone Accountable

The violence heightened on both ends of the spectrum. The NYPD understood that offensive attacks were being conducted. Edward Kiernan, former president of the Patrolmen's Benevolent Association (PBA), addressed the public after the murders, “I instructed every

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542 Ibid
543 Right On, Volume 2 Issue 7, “Trial News”: The NY Panthers recalled that these two officers were murdered while they “were in the process of making their pickup in the black community.”
544 http://www.mathaba.net/0_index.shtml?x=622223
member of the police department, if they draw their gun under any conditions for here on in, they are out there to shoot to kill.**545** Kiernan continued, “If we have to be involved in a war it’s going to be an all out war on both sides and we’re not going to be the only casualties.”**546** Those who caused the repression the Panthers faced in the first place declared they welcomed the fight. President Nixon, Attorneys General Mitchell, FBI Director Hoover, and others met at the White House in a meeting on May 28, 1971. The purpose of the meeting was to launch a new counterintelligence campaign called NEWKILL (New York Police Killings), “ostensibly aimed at securing indictments for a number of recent police killings.”**547**

Bin Wahad continued his political work underground after skipping bail for the Panther 21 trial. He, along with Jamaal Joseph and others, aimed to specifically take drugs off the streets. They would go into places of drug use, destroy the drugs and if needed, punish the dealer. Bin Wahad targeted the Triple O Social Club, an after-hours dope den for drug peddlers in the South Bronx on June 4, 1971. Bin Wahad and Joseph held up the social club at gunpoint, clearing the pockets and stripping the addicts and dealers naked.**548** Word came in that the police surrounded the building, and they began to move the crowd outside with guns pointed into the backs of drug dealers. Those being held up pointed out Bin Wahad and along with his companions, was beaten and arrested. The police tied his hands above him in his cell to make him suffer. Bin Wahad was jailed for doing the job that police should have been doing.

A day after the arrest, a report came out that the gun used by Bin Wahad, a machine gun, was directly linked to the Curry and Binetti shootings. Bin Wahad had been a target for his abilities as a speaker for the impending black revolution. The courts tried Bin Wahad for the

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**545** *Passin’ It On*

**546** Ibid

**547** Charles Earl Jones, *The Black Panther Party Reconsidered*, p 380

**548** It must be noted that everyone inside was African American, showing that their intentions were to clean up any mess and did not specifically aim at attacking whites.
attempted murders of the two officers, Curry and Binetti. They testified first, setting the tone in
court that somebody had to pay.\textsuperscript{549} The prosecution produced faulty evidence that Bin Wahad
had the weapon the night of the shooting and that he was one that shot them. The police got a
patron from the drug den to testify, Pauline Joseph, who was applying to be a corrections officer.
Ballistics expert confirmed the bullets returned in the packages to WILB and the NY Times
came from that machine gun.

To seal their conviction, the police turned to Joseph. She had called into the police
department saying, “The men you are holding did nothing till the social club shootout,” giving
them an alibi and said she would call again.\textsuperscript{550} She was diagnosed in March of 1970 as a
paranoid schizophrenic and was receiving medication for it. The police knew they could mold
her into giving the testimony that they wanted. They checked her into the Commodore Hotel, a
luxurious hotel in Manhattan, and over several weeks, convinced her to testify against Bin
Wahad. Juror Frank Treau said there were enough inconsistencies in her three days of testimony
for her not to be a credible source, but the rest of the panel was convinced otherwise. Bin Wahad
also had another alibi of where he was that night, but was unwilling to come forward. The
prosecution supposedly had fingerprints on a page of the \textit{New York Post} that was used to wrap
one of the bullets delivered after the shooting. The police, however, said they needed to destroy
the actual document.\textsuperscript{551} Bin Wahad, after two mistrials, had shockingly been convicted in forty-
five minutes. Despite a substantial amount of evidence stating Bin Wahad could not have
committed the shooting, he was convicted on April 28, 1973, and sentenced to twenty five years
to life.

\textsuperscript{549} \textit{Passin It On}
\textsuperscript{550} Ibid
\textsuperscript{551} Ibid
The FBI and NYPD found closure on the Curry-Binetti case, but still needed to find someone to punish for the murders of Jones and Piagentini. Herman Bell, Jalil Abdul Muntaqim (Anthony Bottom), and Albert Nuh Washington made up the Panther 3, the nickname they earned while being convicted for these BLA murders. On August 28, 1971, Muntaqim and Washington were arrested in San Francisco for the Harlem murders. In 1973, Bell and brothers, Francisco and Gabriel Torres, were added to the list of suspects. This combination earned the five the nickname the Panther 5, until the Torres’ brothers’ acquittal in 1975, solidifying the name, the Panther 3. The Panther 3 were convicted because of the coordination of the NYPD and FBI in this specific case. The FBI claimed Herman Bell’s fingerprints were at the crime scene. Muntaqim and Washington were in possession of a .45 caliber automatic, supposedly the weapon that murdered Jones.

The Panther 3 fought for a new trial since their 1975 conviction. The Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) indicated that prosecutors suppressed evidence within COINTELPRO and NEWKILL. A ballistics expert hid test results proving the supposed murder weapon used by the Panther 3 did not match the one that killed the officers. Also, it was reported that the prosecution’s “star witness” was tortured into testifying against the Panther 3 with cattle prods. Washington died in prison in 2000. Muntaqim was denied parole in 2009, and Bell is still incarcerated as well.

552 http://www.mathaba.net/0_index.shtml?x=622223
553 Ibid
554 Ibid
555 Ibid
556 Grady Willis “State Repression and Political Prisoners,” 382
557 Ibid
558 Ibid
559 Ibid
560 http://www.mathaba.net/0_index.shtml?x=622223; http://www.freedomarchives.org/Nuh.html
The repression the NYBPP suffered set the party on a path for destruction. The most talented organizers transformed their work to fit their needs, overall, damaging the effectiveness of the Panther’s community work. The NYBPP became more violence oriented in reaction to state repression and therefore became detached from their community. On January 15, 1973, Right On produced its seventh issue of their second volume. Over the next year and a half they would produce two more papers, although they were obviously devastated. The issues of the paper by this time were completely filled with trial updates, advocacy of urban guerilla warfare to combat FBI tactics, and praise to foreign militant struggles like those in the Arab/Palestinian resistance.\(^{561}\)

**The Black Liberation Army**

The Black Liberation Army (BLA) formed as an underground wing under the direct authority of the Black Panther Party's aboveground leadership. In his 1963 speech, “Message to the Grass Roots,” one of his last before leaving the NOI, Malcolm said “There’s no such thing as a nonviolent revolution.”\(^{562}\) The *Black Panther* on March 31, 1969 read, “The Black Panther Party is the Black Liberation Army.”\(^{563}\) From the beginning of the Panther Party, the BLA was utilized for armed aggressive actions, in a clandestine fashion, that BPP members and other black radicals did not want to perform aboveground. Huey P. Newton had released an executive mandate that read, “No party member could join any other militant group other than the BLA,” in 1968.\(^{564}\) This shows the respect the headquarters had for the BLA. The BLA “was composed

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\(^{561}\) *Right On*, May 1974, “International News: The Cuba of the Middle East”

\(^{562}\) *Malcolm X Speaks*, p 9

\(^{563}\) *The Black Panther*, March 31, 1969, “To all the People in the Black Community”

\(^{564}\) Ibid, March 16 1968, Huey Newton, “Executive Mandate No. 3”
of independent cells equipped with false identification, small arms, and a romantic concept of urban warfare.”

Bin Wahad wrote:

“According to the Church Committee on Terrorism, the BLA grew out of the Black Panther Party. The way it’s portrayed is that the Black Liberation Army represented the hardcore militants within the Black Panther Party who were dissatisfied with legitimate struggle, with legitimate protests. Of course that's not true. The racist repression of the Black Panther Party is what motivated the Black Liberation Army.”

The government ignored the fact that their repression spawned the potent growth and organization of the BLA. The BLA did not establish an infrastructure completely separate from the aboveground BPP, a major detriment to the Black Underground as Muntaqim believes.

The fact the BLA was an underground force makes it difficult to state the complete history of the loose organization. Geronimo Pratt believed the BLA was a “movement concept that predated and was broader than the BPP.” The BLA consisted of several black revolutionary organizations collectively known as the BLA. JoAnne Chesimard, a former NY Panther, said the BLA was not a “centralized, organized group with a common leadership and chain of command. Instead there were various organizations and collectives working together out of various cities and in some larger cities there were often several groups working independently of each other.”

Alkebulan wrote, “Their primary goal was to make the United States ungovernable as the primary means to achieve national liberation for black people.”

A significant number of the more militant Panthers became BLA members. They believed they were “mandated by the BPP to engage in war against the government to achieve self-determination for black people.”

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565 Alkebulan, p 72
566 Still Black, Still Strong, p 13
567 Imprisoned Intellectuals, 108
568 Black Power 224
569 Ibid, 224
570 Alkebulan, 72
571 Ibid, 73
Many revolutionary clandestine African American organizations existed prior to the BLA. Muntaqim traced the “direct lineage of the BLA to late 1968. At that time, throughout the South and Southwest, armed units of revolutionary black soldiers formed and began military training as well as maintaining weapons caches.” RAM organized in 1962, and went underground in 63 “owing to political repression,” eventually organizing youth of color under the title the Black Guards. For all the reasons stated previously, RAM had a strong organizational history in New York. RAM ran a document entitled “On Organization of Ghetto Youth,” a project referring to the development of the Black Liberation Army. After Malcolm’s assassination, RAM played a crucial role in developing revolutionary nationalism in New York, fostering the network for the BLA.

The split that divided the BPP by coasts also transformed the BLA. Bin Wahad believed that the destruction, the splitting of the BPP into “hostile factions,” led to the further development of the BLA. Bin Wahad’s stance is very feasible. When Newton shifted his ideology to intercommunalism he changed his stance on armed revolution. Alkebulan wrote, “any attempt by Newton, no matter how rational, to redirect policy was viewed by the militants as a betrayal of principles and comrades who were risking their lives fighting for self determination.” Even prior to the split, when the BPP purged members and stopped enlistment to deter infiltration, many found a more suitable home working under the BLA. Many found a

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572 *Black Power*, 225-226: The African Blood Brotherhood in 1919 organized in secret before dissolving in the 1920s into the American Communist Party. The 1950s and 1960s had several Southern clandestine networks battling white supremacy. The Deacons for Defense were one of these groups that used selective recruiting with organizational secrets.


574 Jeffries, *Black Power*, 226

575 Ibid

576 Ibid, 229; 238

577 *Still Black, Still Strong*, p 13

578 Alkebulan, 73

579 *Imprisoned Intellectuals*, 107
more suitable leader in Cleaver, who stayed committed to armed struggle. Cleaver’s idea of
guerilla warfare “was you sneak up in the bushes, fire, and run like hell...Newton said that was
terrorism.” The split in the BPP surrounded the Panther 21 arrests, and reflected the BLA.
While the Panther 21 were in prison, they called for an underground guerilla offensive because
“racism, colonialism, sexism and all other pig ‘isms...can only be ended by revolution.”

The split in 1971 marked the period where it was more common to be a BLA member
then a NYBPP member. At that time, tensions within the Party caused many Panthers who could
no longer function safely aboveground to move underground. These people moving
underground sought survival. Odinga reentered the U.S. sometime around 1973 to help develop
the BLA. The federal government believed the BLA collapsed with the BPP, but underground
radicals revitalized the organization. The BLA’s goals transformed from protecting the
aboveground political interests of the BPP, to advancing a larger group toward the liberation of
black people through any means necessary. Muntaqim stated that by the time of the split, “the
Black Underground was becoming rich in experience in the tactics of armed expropriations,
sabotage, and ambush-assaults.”

Certain NYBPP members went underground for urban guerrilla warfare to combat
repression. Alkebulan wrote, “These members went underground with the explicit purpose of
inspiring the black community to rise against the government. They believed that the
community would assist them because they had convinced themselves that a state of war

580 Alkebulan, 73
581 *Leaving Cleaver*
582 *Black Power*, 232
583 *Black Power*, 227: The BLA in New York differed from the West Coast. The BPP in Southern California had
an underground wing from its inception, thanks to Bunchy Carter, who happened to spend time in prison with
Eldridge Cleaver.
584 *Liberation, Imagination, and the Black Panther Party*, p 19
585 Hayes seminar paper, 10
They chose to live a life in the shadows than to jeopardize their guerrilla warfare goals. Federal prosecutors blamed the BLA for the formation of the Revolutionary Armed Task Force (RATF), which was a group conducting armed expropriations for the South Bronx acupuncture clinic and included Odinga, Jamal Joseph, and Weather Underground members. Alkebulan continued, “The possibility that the community would not agree there was a state of war never occurred to them.” Members underground lost connections to funds and easy contact with the general population of their African American communities that they worked for.

Many Panthers went underground for their own protection. Some BLA members believed that they could no longer carry out their plans because of infiltration. Many former Panthers faced a dual threat, one internal and one external. Some thought that other undisciplined members would give them up if they had the opportunity. Others believed that the BPP was too vulnerable to repression, and imagined a safer life underground. They feared shootouts with police and FBI agents, and could not imagine a fair trial if they happened to be caught. Underground Panthers also served as a railroad to conceal fellow radicals being chased by federal and state police.

The BLA lacked a clear political ideology, but understood their purpose of achieving liberation of blacks. The BLA did not have any true political ideology, and certainly did not follow up on the NYBPP’s example of Black Nationalism. The BLA “held that friends and enemies of black liberation have all shades of skin.” The political ideology of the BLA did grow after the collapse of the BPP. Muntaqim wrote, “The political determination of the BLA

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586 Alkebulan, 73
587 Liberation, Imagination, and the Black Panther Party, p 19
588 Alkebulan, 73
589 Hayes seminar paper, 9
590 Black Power 227
591 Hayes seminar paper, 16
evolved out of the now-defunct BPP." As early as 1969 the BPP really began to fall apart. As the BPP deteriorated many politicized African Americans left the organization for the BLA, resulting in a more politicized underground group. In late 1971, the BLA ordered for a strategic retreat to organize nationally, though the call was too late. Muntaqim wrote, “By late 1975, the BLA established a Coordinating Committee, essentially comprised of imprisoned members and outside supporters who had emerged during the years of political prosecution in the courts.” The Coordinating Committee was to let all know their political goals, and eventually created a BLA newsletter. Yet, the BLA’s fighting capacity by that time had been squashed.

By late the 1970s, the BLA had some key individuals working in the organization, but the nature of their work took a toll on their lives. The BLA disbursed its members into prisons, other radical groups, altered lives, or even coffins. Many politicized BLA members united with the political objective of the Provisional Government of the Republic of New Afrika (PGRNA). The PGRNA led the Republic of New Afrika (RNA), which was founded in 1968 in Detroit. The NYBPP had worked with the PGRNA and even printed their writings in their newspaper. The RNA wanted to form a black nation-state in Mississippi, Louisiana, South Carolina, Georgia, and Alabama. The RNA demanded the territory as “reparation for the oppression of

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592 *Imprisoned Intellectuals*, 107
593 The *New York Times*, August 17, 1969, p 50, “Four Panthers Here Held for Conspiracy”: The office on Fulton Street closed in 1969 stemming largely from the arrest of Alfred Cain Jr. and other NYBPP leadership. This trend could be seen across all the sections on the NYBPP chapter.
594 *Imprisoned Intellectuals*, 109
595 *Imprisoned Intellectuals*, 110
596 [Black Power](#), 238
597 Klehr, *Far Left of Center: The American Radical Left Today*, p 117
598 *Black Power* 238; *Right On*, Volume 2 Issue 6, 1972, p 22
599 [Black Power](#) 238; *Far Left of Center*, p 117; Garvey, *Philosophies and Opinions*, p 337: Garvey spoke of a United States of Africa, the formation of a nation which would look over interests of Africans domestically and internationally. With that said, blacks should pledge to Africa first and foremost. In his work entitled, “The Dream of a Negro Empire,” he wrote, “What we want is an independent African nationality, and if America is to help the Negro peoples of the world establish such a nationality, then we welcome the assistance.” He strongly declared Black Nationalistic rhetoric. *Authors of Civil Rights since 1787*, p 275, Jonathan Birnbaum and Clarence Taylor point out how segregation put limits on African-Americans, but no one could have known what they would do with the conditions. Garvey encouraged the Black masses, “Up, you might race; you can accomplish what you will.” His nationalism called for Blacks to have their own country, where they could protect themselves and not have a
blacks in America.” However, the Black Underground lost connection with white radicals, becoming bigger targets of counterintelligence, and eventually phased out.⁶⁰⁰

One former Panther, JoAnne Chesimard (Assata Shakur), personified the BLA.⁶⁰¹ Chesimard left the BPP when the Central Committee expelled the Panther 21 in 1971. She feared attacks from Newton’s crew or from the FBI and NYPD. When the BLA attacked Curry and Binetti, her photograph made the front cover of the *Daily News* and was wanted by the NYPD.⁶⁰² She worked under the BLA between 1971 and 1973, and remembered the BLA as “courageous and intelligent, but their inexperience made them weak.”⁶⁰³ Chesimard went on to symbolize the BLA with one of the worst prison experiences of all the Panther members.

Chesimard had been charged with crimes such as armed robbery, kidnapping, and murder six times. Each case was either dismissed or acquitted. That was until March 25, 1977, when she was convicted for being an accomplice in the murder of a state trooper on the New Jersey Turnpike in 1973. She had been labeled a clear participant of BLA activities when she left the Panthers.⁶⁰⁴ The murder occurred in a shootout between New Jersey State troopers and Sundiata Acoli and Zayd Shakur, though both sides argue who initiated fire. Chesimard, who did not hold a weapon that day, suffered three bullet holes to her chest, a broken clavicle, a punctured lung, and a nearly paralyzed arm in what “is now clearly a carefully orchestrated counterintelligence campaign conducted by the FBI designed to criminalize, defame, harass, and intimidate Chesimard,” a popular and documented Panther.⁶⁰⁵ Within the shootout, a state trooper was killed along with former Panther leader Zayd Shakur.

leadership that enslaves its own unjustly.

⁶⁰⁰ *Imprisoned Intellectuals*, 109
⁶⁰¹ Alkebulan, 85
⁶⁰² Ibid
⁶⁰³ Ibid
⁶⁰⁴ *Assata*, p XIX
⁶⁰⁵ Ibid, p 17; p XIII
The FBI’s coordination of New Jersey State police tormented Chesimard. The most interesting thing about her injuries that day on the NJ Turnpike was that they would have only been sustainable with her hands above her head, in a surrendering manner. She was accused of such things as resisting a lawful arrest and fleeing the scene of the incident, although her injuries almost definitely demobilized her. She was handcuffed to her bed in the Middlesex County Hospital, where she was repeatedly tortured physically and mentally. When the time came that the overlooking guards could no longer leave marks on her body with high surveillance on her, they opted to gauge her eyes with a burning substance. Chesimard wrote in her autobiography, *Assata*, how a guard, more than once, told her a long, depressing story while holding a gun to her head. At the end, he would pull the trigger to reveal that there was no bullet in the chamber.

While awaiting trial, Chesimard remained incarcerated for four years and spent another two years in prison after her conviction. Sundiata Acoli was convicted along with Shakur, being sentenced to life plus 36 years in prison. During this time, authorities deprived Chesimard of proper medical attention and exercise, and constantly punished her for minor inflictions. No physical therapist in Middlesex County would come to work with her. African American physical therapists offered to help, but officials would only allow one from within the largely white county. She was put in a maximum security prison with two guards outside twenty four hours a day between two gun towers with rifles aimed at her. Prison guards told her she was in the Yardville Unit for Women although she was the only woman there.

606 Ibid, p 8
607 The full horrendous account of her treatment by government officials during her arrest can be seen in her autobiography, *Assata*.
608 *Assata*, p 49
609 *Assata*, p 46: She remembered walking into her holding cell, isolated from the others, and seeing the other inmates which seemingly all were black.
610 *Eyes of the Rainbow*, film, Gloria Rolando
While facing life imprisonment she was transferred on April 8, 1978 to the maximum security prison for women in Alderson, West Virginia, “the federal facility designed to hold the most dangerous women in the country.”\textsuperscript{611} From there she was moved to Clinton Prison in New York, which would be the last place she would allow to be held in captivity. On November 2, 1979, three BLA members went to visit Chesimard with concealed weapons. They seized two guards as hostages, and got Chesimard outside into a van from where they drove off.\textsuperscript{612} Prison authorities stated that the prison escape was well planned and arranged.\textsuperscript{613} Chesimard soon left the country, fleeing to Havana, Cuba, where she received protection from the then Castro government and where she still remains. That same week, demonstrators on behalf of Black Solidarity day in New York marched in the thousands from Harlem to the United Nations building carrying signs stating “JoAnne Chesimard is Welcome Here.”\textsuperscript{614} They marched under the slogan of “human rights and self determination for the black nation,” and even read a BLA statement at the rally.\textsuperscript{615}

The government hunted Chesimard. Countless BPP members were arrested by joint FBI/NYPD task forces for questioning.\textsuperscript{616} They held one NYBPP member, Sekou Hill, for three weeks. The police forces could not bring Chesimard back. Time passed, and all government forces began to believe the BLA truly collapsed. Little did they know the effects of their repression, and on October 20, 1981, an armed robbery led by the BLA of a Brinks armored truck took place near suburban Nyack, New York. This group of BLA members worked under

\textsuperscript{611} Assata, p 253
\textsuperscript{613} Black Power 239
\textsuperscript{614} Ibid
\textsuperscript{615} Ibid
\textsuperscript{616} Ibid, 240
the pseudonyms of “The Family” and the RATF, which included white anti-capitalistic activists from the Weather Underground along with BLA members.\textsuperscript{617}

The robbery was detailed in \textit{Times Magazine} on November 2. The clever title of the article encapsulated the event, “Bullets from the Underground: A Bloody Robbery Attempt Brings a Roundup of ‘60s Fugitives.”\textsuperscript{618} The armored Brink's truck arrived at the Nanuet National Bank, shortly before rush-hour. Two guards loaded $1.6 million in cash when three armed men in ski masks hopped out of a van and opened fire on them. One of the witness recalled that the three robbers and their accomplice “Did'n even ask them to hand over the money, they just blasted away.”\textsuperscript{619} The robbers changed vehicle to a u-haul van at a nearby shopping mall before running into a police blockade. The two Nyack police offices that stopped the vehicle were shot at, killing one and critically wounding the other. One group of robbers allegedly split off and jumped into a third vehicle, a tan Honda, and sped off. The vehicle crashed three miles away and four suspects were apprehended with all the money. Three of those in the Honda were Weather Underground members. One was Katherine Boudin, one of the leaders of the Weather Underground and once on the FBI's Most Wanted List.

The other group of robbers supposedly took off in a white Oldsmobile that was later found abandoned.\textsuperscript{620} The police traced the plates of the vehicle to East Orange, New Jersey, a fertile ground for BLA coordination. The car was registered to someone living in an apartment in NYC. A six hour search there discovered a cache of weapons and explosives. Police also found a manual for making bombs and hand-drawn floor plans of six NYC police stations. Similar evidence was supposedly found in a Bronx apartment, along with a newspaper dated a

\textsuperscript{617} http://www.assatashakur.org/forum/shoulders-our-freedom-fighters/3085-black-liberation-army-europeans-view.html
\textsuperscript{618} \textit{Times Magazine}, November 2, 1981, “Bullets from the Underground”
\textsuperscript{619} Ibid
\textsuperscript{620} Ibid
day after the robbery, which meant the robbers or someone else had been there since the shootouts. The Bronx apartment was expected to hold Marilyn Jean Buck, another white radical who police believed was the only white member of the BLA. Police had a lead on a vehicle associated with the robbery. They found two men in it in Queens, Samuel Smith and Sekou Odinga. The police unloaded their weapons when closing in on the car and killed Smith. Sekou Odinga ran from police as they fired more shots at him. He managed to return a few shots while retreating from the heavy fire before being captured.

By the end of 1982, many former NYBPP members, including Kuwasi Balagoon, Sekou Odinga, Mutulu Shakur, and Jamal Joseph, were captured and charged with acts linked to the robbery. Odinga was tortured to give information about Chesimard’s location and the Black Underground. He had been a fugitive since January 1969, and police did not hesitate to use violence to extract leads from him. They beat, kicked, burned his body with cigars, ripped his finger nails off, and flushed his head repeatedly in a urine-filled toilet. His pancreas was severely damaged and he was fed through an intravenous for three months after. Mutulu Shakur was alleged to be the mastermind of the robbery. Joseph, after the Panther 21 trial, tried to go back to school. The Board of Education, along with his parole officer, denied him attempts to rehabilitate himself into society, still at a young age and found innocent of his charges. One can imagine the lengths of the effects of political repression.

Marilyn Jean Buck and Mutulu Shakur went to multiple trials for the armed robbery. They were accused of being “significant players” in the escape of Assata Shakur and the Brinks robbery and faced charges of kidnapping and murder. The prosecutor said in court, “They

621 Black Power 242
622 Liberation, Imagination, and the Black Panther Party, p 17
623 Ibid, p 17
were part of a planned, premeditated course of conduct by a criminal enterprise called the Family." He also added the description of “The Family” as “a highly organized enterprise that used safe houses as headquarters and hideouts.”

Mutulu Shakur was targeted as the master planner as well as the person who physically carried out the $1.6 million. Shakur’s defense attorney stated, “The evidence will show that the government is in trouble here,” with no physical evidence linking Shakur to any of the alleged crimes. Buck was referred to as a “progressive white” and “a master of disguise,” renting cars and houses under fake names. She was accused of driving the escape vehicles.

Odinga faced six counts of attempted murder of police for shooting over his shoulder while police chased and shot at him. Sekou Odinga testified that “a revolutionary task force” led by “soldiers of the BLA” conducted the Brinks robbery. He argued the robbery was an expropriation on behalf of the BLA in aid of its war against American fascism and imperialism. The BLA continued the Panther’s path, planning the robbery to fund an acupuncture clinic in Harlem. The BLA also supported the Lincoln Detox Center strongly and operated on its behalf. Odinga also believed that this premise of war justified the killings.

While Odinga testified in court, his crowd of supporters chanted “Free the Land,” the most popular RNA slogan. Although they tried in two separate trials, both Mutulu Shakur and Odinga argued the acts “were political acts, not criminal offenses.”

\[626\] Ibid
\[627\] Ibid.
\[628\] Ibid.
\[629\] Ibid.
\[630\] http://www.prisonactivist.org/prisoners/sekou-mgobogi-abdullah-odinga
\[631\] Far Left of Center, p 116
\[632\] Ibid
\[633\] Ibid
\[634\] Liberation, Imagination, and the Black Panther Party, p 110
\[635\] Far Left of Center, p 117
\[636\] Black Power 243
“The captured and confined BLA members were labeled terrorist, criminal, racist-but never revolutionaries, never humanitarians, never political activists.”637 A federal trial found Odinga not guilty of the Brinks charges.638 However, Odinga was later found guilty of another robbery charge and conspiracy in the Chesimard case.639 He received twenty five years for both charges running consecutively.640 Buck and Mutulu Shakur were found guilty of all eight charges they faced after six months of trial and a week of deliberations in Manhattan’s Federal District Court in 1988.641 Joseph received twelve and a half years as an accessory along with another BLA member Cecil Ferguson, whom both had convictions for manslaughter and armed robbery in their pasts. Balagoon had escaped from a New York prison where he served time for an armed robbery charge prior the Brink robbery, and received a lengthy prison sentence for it.642

In November 1993, Odinga, Muntaqim, Geronimo Ji Jaga, Mutulu Shakur, and Sundiata Acoli called out to revolutionary Nationalist organizations and individuals to form a New Afrikan Liberation front.643 Demonstrations and mobilization within African American and liberal groups followed, though many political prisoners are still incarcerated.644 In 1998, New Jersey governor Christine Todd Whitman raised the state's reward for the capture of Chesimard from $25,000 to $100,000. Chesimard had words to respond to Whitman's actions, accusing her as an “opportunist bent on trying to score points with white conservatives.”645 She also added, ”Either Governor Whitman is completely unfamiliar with the facts in my case, or her sensitivity

637 *Imprisoned Intellectuals*, 110
638 *Far Left of Center*, p 116
639 Ibid
642 Ibid
643 *Liberation, Imagination, and the Black Panther Party*, p 19
644 Ibid
to racism and to the plight of black people and other people of color in the United States is at a subzero level.” Alkebulan wrote in 2003 that “Chesimard is the only publicly known remnant of the BLA still free today.”

**Uncovering the Truths of Two Government Forces**

J. Edgar Hoover played the major role in planning the coordination of intelligence within police departments and the FBI. Hoover created a monster that grew out of control of any official in government. Political prisoners, interested liberals, and radicals made known the horrible effects of political repression. The harm done by government agencies was in large part due to the ruthless and illegal nature of their programs. Often, the FBI got away with actions that stripped citizens of their rights. If one of their programs were in question, the FBI would hide behind their wall of privacy. Exposure of their misbehavior was largely the hard work of activists trying to uncover these truths.

Activists knew government misconduct took place. On March 8, 1971, the “Citizen’s Commission to Investigate the FBI” broke into the FBI office in Media, Pennsylvania and stole thousands of pages of secret documents. The mission uncovered the codename COINTELPRO and exposed the nature of the operation. The group sent copies of these files to members of the U.S. Congress and to the news media. Hoover quickly became aware of this mishap and on April 28 ordered the termination of COINTELPRO operations. This, however, did not end the repressive efforts of the FBI against the NYBPP.

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646 Ibid
647 Alkebulan, 86
648 *Malcolm X: the FBI Files*, 86-87: On May 29, 1980, New Jersey congressman W. Hughes wrote to the FBI director asking the Bureau look into the assassination of Malcolm, but received a message back a month later from the assistant director saying the FBI had no new information about the case and would not look into it
649 [http://www.pr-secretfiles.net/programs_chronology.html?detail=7](http://www.pr-secretfiles.net/programs_chronology.html?detail=7)
The counterintelligence programs directed against the NYBPP caused public unrest in urban New York. In March of 1972 in Jamaica, two white officers gunned down one of two African American men involved in an altercation on the street. The man shot, William Capers, was a fifteen year NYPD detective. The Queens jury found that the white officer that shot him committed no crime.650 Tensions on the street were so high that New Yorkers expected something to be done about the NYPD. A study of NYPD firearm training read:

“In 1972, the NYPD, in response to what was perceived at the time as a ‘relatively high number of firearms incidents involving police officers,’ produced a new set of ‘enhanced’ shooting guidelines. The new guidelines substantially limited the situations in which officers were allowed to use deadly force and established the Firearms Discharge Review Board to investigate each discharge and to determine whether the discharge was consistent with the new policy. If the discharge were ‘out of policy’, even if it met the legal requirements of the NYPL, the officer would be subject to departmental discipline.”651

This was a direct effect of the NYPD’s relationship with the NYBPP.

NBC reporter Carl Stern made strong efforts to uncover the full truths of COINTELPRO. He filed a Freedom of Information Act request, which was made available to the American public by Lyndon B. Johnson in 1966, on March 20, 1972, and was denied, but filed an appeal.652 A few months after his appeal request in May, Hoover died, but left instructions for his administrative assistant, Helen Gandy, to start destroying his “Personal and Confidential File” consisting of thousands of documents.653 Time would pass, but the files would be released to the public, shocking liberal Americans.

Hoover in the early 1970s grew more paranoid as well as less able to control the machine of the FBI he built. Dissidence was bound to happen in the enormous, extremely private

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650 Right On, Volume 2 Issue 6, 1972 , p 6, “This Could Happen to You,”
651 Firearm Training, xix
652 http://www.pr-secretfiles.net/programs_chronology.html?detail=7
653 Ibid
The enormous reach of FBI operations made it impossible for Hoover to track every follow-up on every mission. The number of operations the FBI ran was merely uncountable. Some agents believed that Hoover was equally unwilling and unable to stop COINTELPRO excesses, complicated by the amount of paperwork filed at headquarters and its variation with the “propriety of the project.” Many times, Bureau records simply did not exist. Hoover may have missed some of the things going on in the field, but he arguably manifested this vicious cycle. All COINTELPRO directives came from Hoover and only initiated with his signature. Frequently, a program with an added follow-up order came from a whisper down from someone that may have spoken to Hoover. Through this phenomenon of enormous filing and actions and then needed follow-up, a “B System” was created, which served as an extension of Hoover’s influenced goals and thinking.

Members of Hoover’s FBI remembered Hoover’s death in 1972, “Agents had no difficulty imagining him looking down at the FBI, still somehow dominating his Bureau.” One Hoover advocate said, “The man, stood for everything an agent should be.” Hoover’s biggest contribution to the Bureau was his advocacy and success in funding personnel and his projects. Sullivan remembered catching up with an agent that worked in the FBI after he was fired. When Hoover died, everyone in the office knew, and a young agent had brought a stack of

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654 Welch and Marston, Inside Hoover’s FBI, 63: A former FBI agent recalled: “It was standard practice for agents with sagging arrest statistics to attend arraignments at New York City’s night felony court. After the charges were read, if there was any conceivable federal connection (a simple robbery, for example, might become a theft from interstate shipment) the agent would rise and advise the court that the FBI wished to assert jurisdiction over the offender, a request with which the beleaguered New York City police would happily concur. An alert agent could pick up multiple arrests and likely convictions on a good night.” Like earlier stated in concern of state level law enforcement, an agent bringing up charges to meet a quota is far from legal. Also, this particular FBI agent felt the NYPD would be delighted to pass on this prisoner; Ibid p 63: Former FBI agents remembered one New York agent listing his neighbors in his car pool on a wanted list under one FBI operation to meet the pressures of his informant quota.

655 Ibid, 157

656 Ibid

657 Welch and Marston, Inside Hoover’s FBI, 1

658 Ollestad, Inside the FBI, 151
memos to be signed by Hoover to Sullivan’s friend’s office. Sullivan’s friend explained Hoover’s death and how the signature would not happen, but the young agent ran up to his office anyway in fear of being wrong.659

During the collapse of the NYBPP and the potential uncovering of the FBI, government forces began to dissipate its overly sized special units, but focused their work into more effective areas. The NYBPP obviously encompassed everything the protectors of white capitalistic interests would want to fight against. In February of 1973, the NYPD publicly announced its purging of BOSS records with deletions of close to one million individuals from the intelligence index, still leaving a quarter of a million on the list.660 They also reduced the list of subversive organizations to 25,000, 100,000 less than it was.661 However, the NYPD and FBI still looked to take what they could get, and wrap up any mishaps the public was willing to side with them on. The majority of America saw JoAnne Chesimard as a major criminal after her prison escape. The FBI and NYPD continued their coordination and combination of resources in 1980, when they formed the Joint Terrorist Task Force (JTTF). The JTTF “served as the coordinating body in the search for Chesimard and the renewed campaign to smash the BLA.”662

The FBI could only cover up so much, however, as the FOIA called for the release of the information. Stern’s work to get the files paid off in December 1973 and March 1974, when he was able to obtain many COINTELPRO documents.663 Most of the files had been forced out of the arms of the FBI by lawsuits against the government.664 The documents were very revealing. They verified the fact the government set up, framed, and sabotaged specific organizations of color and individuals in combating the black liberation struggle in America. The FBI, when

659 Sullivan, *The Bureau*, 249
660 *Protectors of Privilege*, 158
661 Ibid
662 *Black Power* 240
663 Blackstock, *Cointelpro*, ix
664 Ibid, v
finally turning over the files to the public, had censored the names of important figures within
the program. In May of 1974, *Right On* condemned the NYBPP’s failures to their lack of
response or ability to recognize the existence of COINTELPRO.

The truths of the FBI uncovered by radicals did not impact the nation immediately.
NYBPP attorney William Kunstler wrote that the *New York Times*, “which has just successfully
upset a court imposed gag rule, should be the first to acknowledge the value of unfettered
freedom-including the freedom to point out the terrible lessons of violence taught to us by some
of our leaders-however revered they may have been.” The instilled propaganda and
brainwashing of the FBI on the American public upheld the incarceration of many political
prisoners. Many Americans did not understand the full capacity of these counterintelligence
programs.

The lives of political activists were greatly disrupted as a direct effect of government
forces. Despite their beliefs, Author Jill Nelson wrote, Hoover and government organized
intelligence “were responsible for causing more national insecurity than any of their targets
had.” The revelations of the abuse of power caused the FBI to undergo significant changes in
the 1970s. Though the government does its best to look past this dark period in history, it is still
sobering to the American public. The release of political prisoners of COINTELPRO and
other counterintelligence programs also raise more knowledge about the ugliness behind national
security ran to preserve the interests of white capitalistic ideology.

Richard Moore had asked for documents while sitting in jail about his case. He was
denied over and over by government officials for seven years before they admitted they even had
the files. Finally, the FOIA uncovered 350,000 pages of FBI documents that indicated Moore

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665 Kunstler, *The Emerging Police State*, 49
666 Nelson, 124
667 *The Reform of FBI Intelligence Operations*, p 3
was the victim of a sophisticated program of political repression. It uncovered information that the FBI seized a machine gun in August of 1971 that matched the May 19th bullets, even though the evidence was never disclosed at any of his trials. Richard Moore appealed his conviction in 1988. His basis was prosecutorial misconduct, stemming from the COINTELPRO and NEWKILL programs. One of his attorneys, Elizabeth Fink, addressed the court, “This court ruled on a narrow basis and it took all that other evidence and put it in a bay and it never gave us a public forum, and granted this rift, but now you must release this man from jail.”

Bin Wahad was released in March of 1990 after sitting in prison for close to twenty years. The State initiated a series of appeals after his conviction was overturned. In February of 1995, all charges against him were dropped. He was then able to address the public about black political prisoners in a speech in Harlem, New York. He praised a hero of his own, standing next to him, South African prisoner and politician Nelson Mandela. Bin Wahad began the chant, “We will not give up the fight!”

Many political prisoners continued their fight while incarcerated, as repression builds a stronger resistance. Ricardo De Leon, of the New Dunston Hotel case, organized prisoners just as he would organize community members to fight unlivable conditions. Along with six others in New York’s “Tombs,” he was labeled as an instigator and organizer in the prison riots, earning the name, the “Tomb’s 7.” In 1976, Jalil Muntaqim and other BLA members petitioned to the United Nations the conditions of U.S prisons and the treatment of political

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668 Jones, the Black Panther Party, p 380; Passin’ It On
669 Passin’ It On
670 Grady Willis, “State Repression and Political Prisoners,” 380
671 http://www.itvs.org/external/PIO/interviews.html
672 Passin’ It On
673 The Panther 21 organized prisoners in New York, including one man that led to forming the Angola chapter of the BPP, the only official prison chapter.
674 Right On, “The Tombs’ 7: Victims of Political Persecution,” p 17
Muntaqim also organized the first revolutionary prisoners’ national newspaper, *Arm the Spirit*. Muntaqim, like many other political prisoners, wrote political books and essays concerning their struggle, making it more known to only a select audience.676

Kuwasi Balagoon of the Panther 21 was convicted for the Brinks robbery. In his history with the BLA, Balagoon had been shot while freeing a political prisoner, other than Chesimard, and was caught. In another scenario five years later, he escaped from a maximum security prison. After his capture for the Brinks robbery, “He didn’t go back for his comrade or reconnect that unit of the BLA out of any personal desperation. It was purely a commitment to the struggle, to new Afrikan liberation, to freedom for all oppressed people.”677 Balagoon died in prison in 1986 from an AIDS related disease. Panther 3 member Albert “Nuh” Washington and BLA member died of cancer on April 28, 2000.678

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675 *Imprisoned Intellectuals*, 111; http://www.mathaba.net/0_index.shtml?x=622223
676 http://www.mathaba.net/0_index.shtml?x=622223
677 Balagoon, *A Soldier’s Story*, 9; Ibid 27, Kuwasi Balagoon took his name from the Yoruba tribe language. Kuwasi means born on Sunday. Balagoon translates to “warlord.”
678 Ibid, 1
Members of the NYBPP underwent a series of transformation in their lives. The NYBPP encompassed the beauty of Black New York, offering to its people what the government could not. The Panthers combated poverty issues and looked to cure the needs of the poor to the best of their ability. They aimed at offering, protection, shelter, food, healthcare, and other necessities before the party became crippled by repressive forces. The NYBPP grouped individuals striving to change the lives of African American youth in the generations following them. The mobilization of the NY Panthers was both needed and justified. These individuals grew up with next to nothing, but found it in them to try and provide for the next generation of urban poor in New York.

The state acted as the primary actor for internal dynamics of the party. The political repression directed by J. Edgar Hoover, the FBI, and the NYPD attacked the Panthers when they were vulnerable. The scope of problems inherent in the Panther’s flawed project of renewal made opportunism. In a reflective fashion to the repression they faced, the NYBPP members became more militant, moving further away from what made the Panthers so successful in poor African American communities, into the images of what government officials thought the Panthers to be. Repression created more violence and problems then the NYBPP ever could have created without it. Federal and local law enforcement effectively orchestrated their repressive programs. However, many Panthers and supporters paid the cost of their freedom to expose the deceitful ways of the FBI and NYPD. This did not stop both the FBI and NYPD from trying to cover up their illegal ways, and further brainwashed unknowing Americans into believing the NYBPP housed criminals.
Political repression transformed the ranks of the NYBPP into the Black Liberation Army. The BLA had a romantic love affair with urban warfare that completely shifted the mindset of Panthers. The BLA lacked enough clear ideology and contact with its black community to organize the masses into the revolution they were looking for. Political repression left many dead, many as political prisoners, and ingrained the general masses of America with the belief that BLA activity represented the NYBPP. The time spent in prison and other bad associations created by government propaganda blacklisted many individuals for the remainder of their lives.

One of the most influential leaders of the NYBPP, Richard Moore, released after being wrongfully imprisoned for decades, recently was evicted from his home. This man who put everything in his life aside to help the greater cause has troubles finding a place to sleep today. Political repression ruined the lives of many Panthers, but the courage to step forward and their accomplishments in the late 1960s and early 1970s should never be forgotten. The Black Panthers deserve the sustained attention of scholars who seek to understand the promise of youth renewal movements and the powerful obstacles they faced from bigots employed by the state.

Panthers who escaped the confines of prison and persecution by the courts suffered other great personal costs as side effects of political repression. Afeni Shakur’s legal history and defamation of her name by the NYPD and FBI prevented her from obtaining work. She spent years in disarray, still confined to the oppressed living atmosphere she fought against in her Panther days.679 Shakur chose to smoke crack-cocaine, adding more struggles to the lives of her

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679 Holler if You Hear Me, p 33; Tupac Shakur: Thug Angel: When Tupac was thirteen, Afeni moved the family to White Plains, New York, and had a friend set her up in the White Plains homeless system. Tupac was bitter about growing up poor. He said, “Rich people should live like poor people and poor people should live like rich people and they should change every week
family. Her deteriorating health and home life continued the vicious cycle of repression onto her children.

Political repression affected not only the people themselves but generations to come. One of best examples of the effects of repression against the BLA is Tupac’s father, Mutulu Shakur. Although he is not Tupac’s birth parent, he was recognized as his true father figure. Mutulu, who sits in prison for a 60 year sentence for the accusation of liberating JoAnne Chesimard as well as an armed heist bank robbery, said:

“I was a man in Tupac’s life who had a commitment. I was a man in Tupac’s life who probably had a commitment to the struggle more than to the fact. He learned a lot from the people, not from what was said by the people, he hung around with dope fiends, he hung around wit gangsters, he hung around wit oppressed people, he hung around wit struggle, people struggling, he listened to the meetings, he was at all the meetings we was at.”

Tupac was the fully loaded cost of the far reaching effects of the carceral state imposed by government forces.

On various occasions the FBI and NYPD intelligences forces persecuted Tupac Shakur as a child over the whereabouts Mutulu Shakur. They went as far as disrupting Tupac’s classes in grammar school to interrogate him. Mutulu, who still advocates he had nothing to do with either crime, spent many years of Tupac’s life behind bars, being convicted in 1986. To add to Tupac’s whirlwind while being raised, Anthony Lumumba Shakur, Afeni’s ex-husband and adopted brother of Mutulu, was found murdered shortly before Mutulu’s conviction in Louisiana.

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680 Afeni’s crack-cocaine addiction, according to Evolution of a Revolutionary, was by choice. Afeni became pregnant after Tupac and his sister. The father was an inmate Afeni regretted having sex with, and not wanting to bring another child into a life of oppression, decided to use crack-cocaine to kill the fetus.
681 The actual father of Tupac Shakur has been disputed much to the reason that Afeni does not give accredit the man of being his father for not being there, William Garland.
682 Tupac Shakur: Thug Angel
Lumumba Shakur’s murder is not well documented, but Mutulu believes someone, perhaps an informant, murdered him when trying to find his whereabouts so close to his capture.\textsuperscript{684}

Tupac’s “Me and My Girlfriend” provides his answer to the whirlwind. He speaks of the governmental structures that oppress him, and how his weapon, which he describes as his girlfriend, is the only solution he finds successful. The song reads, “Fuck them all, watch them fall screamin’, automatic gunfire exorcisin’ all demons.” He says he “fell in love with the struggle,” but it was all he knew. He adds in the song how his mother was the only girl that he ever adored, but draws this image of her within the context of his love for armed-resistance.

Tupac was quoted in an interview:

“You can’t survive out here by yourself, the police ain’t nothin’ but a gang, the National Guard is a gang, the Amy is a gang. We learn all our gang shit from the government. We learn everything from the government, you know what I’m sayin’, we learn all this gun shit from the government, you know somebody gets a gun, the government gets a bigger gun.”\textsuperscript{685}

Finally, the last verse in “Me in My Girlfriend” ends with, “Never leave a nigga alone, I love you black or chrome, turn this house into a happy home, me and my girlfriend.”\textsuperscript{686} Like the BLA, his song expresses the commitment to armed resistance and urban rebellion as the means for change.

On September 13, 1996, Tupac was murdered in a drive-by fashion by unknown hit-men.

Questions about the violent descriptions in his music surrounded the shooting, and many made the connection to Tupac’s upbringing.\textsuperscript{687}

\textsuperscript{684} http://www.2pac2k.de/mother.html
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