

# Preying on the Panther

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The FBI's (c)overt war against the Black Panther  
Party, 1968-1971

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## Introduction

It is safe to say that the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense was unlike any other social movement of the 1960s. While prominent civil rights leaders such as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. still believed in the Gandhian principles of non-violence, the Black Panthers preached an entirely different message. They emphasized the need for armed struggle and self-defense in the black communities of the United States. By invoking the ideals of the likes of Malcolm X, the Panthers managed to appeal to those who became increasingly disillusioned with the passivity of the civil rights movement. These people were prepared to take what was rightfully theirs, by any means necessary.

The Black Panther Party initially set out to help people to meet their daily needs. The black communities of Oakland, where the Party was founded, were confronted with various forms of social oppression on a daily basis. They suffered from poor education, housing, and health care, which the Panthers tried to remedy through the establishment of community organized “survival” programs. However, the most pressing issue of all was police brutality. The police were known to both physically and psychologically abuse people in the poorest of black communities, and so the Panthers set out to do something about it. With a gun in one hand and a book of law in the other, the Panthers began patrolling the neighborhoods in an attempt to raise consciousness in the black communities of Oakland. By showing people that they could stand up against the police, they hoped that the black communities would realize that they could determine their own fate and liberate themselves from their oppressor.

The Black Panther Party’s revolutionary ideals proved to be a formula for success, as it did not take long for the Party to rise to national prominence. While this new

popularity caused the BPP to expand drastically, it also attracted the attention of local and national law enforcement agencies. Among others, J. Edgar Hoover and the FBI were keeping a close eye on the Panthers. The Bureau was already in the process of setting up a series of counter-intelligence programs (COINTELPRO), which were designed to disrupt and neutralize so-called Black Nationalist Hate Groups. The BPP was not a part of this program at first, but when J. Edgar Hoover declared that the Party was the “greatest threat to the internal security of the country”, it became clear that he considered the BPP to be a clear threat to the status quo in the United States.<sup>1</sup> The FBI thus set out to destroy the BPP before it could realize its ideals.

This research will focus on the FBI’s (c)over t war against the Black Panther Party between 1968 and 1971. By the time the FBI’s COINTELPRO ended in 1971, the damage to the Black Panther Party had already been done. Membership was in steady decline, the public image had been ruined, and internal fragmentation was severe. However, to what extent should this decline be attributed to the FBI’s counter-intelligence programs?

The Black Panther Party has become an increasingly popular subject of scholarly analysis in recent years. Most scholars nowadays focus on a broad reconsideration of the Party, because since its inception, the BPP has been reduced to nothing more than an ordinary gang of criminals by scholars and media alike. This is largely due to the fact that very little was known and written about the Party at first. Some of the early work was written by prominent Black Panthers themselves, such as Eldridge Cleaver’s *Soul on Ice* (1968), Bobby Seale’s *Seize the Time* (1970), and Huey P. Newton’s *To Die for the People*

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Senate, Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities, *Supplementary Detailed Staff Reports on Intelligence Activities and the Rights of Americans, Book III* (Washington, D.C.: 94<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1975) 187.

(1972). These works offered a unique perspective on the Party, but, needless to say, they lacked objectivity. This could also be said about Hugh Pearson's *The Shadow of the Panther* (1994), which is considered to be the first complete history of the Black Panther Party. Pearson himself is considered to be a "traditionalist", because his portrayal of the Black Panthers as a bunch of militant, gun-toting criminals matches the traditional image of the Party. This image was later challenged by scholars who advocated a broad reconsideration of the BPP. Leading the charge was a collection of essays, edited by Charles E. Jones, entitled *The Black Panther Party Reconsidered* (1998). The essays included in this collection challenge traditional misconceptions about the Party by reinterpreting its role in the African American struggle for liberty. The contributing scholars are still critical of the Party, but their essays nevertheless construct a much more balanced account of the history of the BPP. A similar trend can be discerned in recent scholarship as well, as shown by works such as Curtis J. Austin's *Up Against the Wall* (2006), Jama Lazerow and Yohuru Williams' *In Search of the Black Panther Party* (2006), and Paul Alkebulan's *Survival Pending Revolution* (2007). All of these scholars continue to reconsider and revise the history of the BPP in an attempt to do it more justice.

Research on the connection between the FBI's COINTELPRO and the downfall of the Black Panther Party has been an important part of Panther historiography. One of the most important sources for such research has been the U.S. Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities, otherwise known as the Church Committee. This committee conducted an enormous investigation of intelligence agencies throughout the United States in the 1970s. By collecting and publishing both public and private files from numerous federal agencies, including the

FBI, the Church Committee created a report that contained a wealth of information on the true nature of operations of U.S. intelligence agencies.

The Church Committee reports detailed what the FBI had done to undermine the BPP. As a result, scholars began debating the effectiveness of the FBI's programs. That effectiveness was downplayed by sociologists such as Gary T. Marx and Anthony Oberschall in the late 1970s, who argued that FBI counter-intelligence programs had a marginal effect on the decline of "hostile" social movements. This point of view was challenged by scholars such as David J. Garrow, who argues in "FBI Political Harassment and FBI Historiography" (1988) that previous analyses of the effectiveness of FBI programs were overstated to a certain degree. According to Garrow, more research had to be done before conclusions could be drawn.

More research *has* been done in recent years, with the debate focusing on whether external or internal factors were the primary cause for the demise of the Black Panther Party. While some scholars, such as Wade Churchill and Jim Vander Wall in *Agents of Repression* (1988), emphasize the importance of the FBI's counter-intelligence programs, other scholars emphasize the importance of internal problems within the Party more. This research paper is a response to that trend. By discussing the form and effectiveness of the FBI's counter-intelligence programs in greater detail, I intend to shed some new light on the current debate. Scholars continue to either overemphasize or marginalize the role of the FBI's counter-intelligence programs in the unmaking of the Black Panther Party. The problem with this approach is that the complex dynamics of the demise of the Black Panther Party are being ignored. As Doug McAdam argues in an article entitled "The Decline of the Civil Rights Movement" (1983), 'the fate of any social movement is not simply a product of internal movement dynamics or external political

processes but the interaction of the two.’<sup>2</sup> With that in mind, I will argue that the FBI’s COINTELPRO certainly had a profound effect on the Party. However, the demise of the Black Panther Party should not be attributed to either internal or external factors alone. Instead, as I will argue, it was the interaction between internal and external factors that would eventually lead to the demise of the BPP. The BPP’s internal issues and the FBI’s counter-intelligence programs had a mutually reinforcing effect on one another. As the Party’s internal tensions grew, the FBI made sure to further exploit and exacerbate these tensions. And because of the FBI’s interferences, these internal tensions continued to grow more out of proportions. There was thus a vicious cycle of sorts, with the internal and external forces operating in tandem, which eventually caused the Black Panther Party to spiral out of control.

This research paper will be subdivided into three chapters. The first chapter will provide a general overview of the history of the Black Panther Party. Starting with the ideas of Stokely Carmichael and Malcolm X, this first chapter will trace the development of the Party from its inception up to its rise to national prominence. The second chapter will deal with the history and evolution of COINTELPRO in the context of the FBI’s war against the Black Panther Party. The discussion in this chapter will focus on the FBI’s goals and tactics (i.e. its *modus operandi*) and its rationalization of COINTELPRO. The third chapter will focus on the FBI’s role in the demise of the Black Panther Party. By discussing in greater detail the FBI’s particular involvement in the events that eventually led to the demise of the Party, this chapter will consider to what extent the demise of the BPP should be attributed to the FBI’s counter-intelligence programs.

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<sup>2</sup> Doug McAdam, “The Decline of the Civil Rights Movement,” in *Social Movements of the Sixties and Seventies*, ed. Jo Freeman (New York: Longman, 1983) 316.

## **Chapter I: A History of the Black Panther Party**

When Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale sat down at the North Oakland Service Center on October 15, 1966 to create a program for their new organization, they were ready to stir things up in America. The Service Center was an ideal place, because there were plenty of books available to draw ideas from. However, Newton and Seale did not need any books. After twenty short minutes of deliberation, a ten-point program had been drafted. Newton and Seale made sure to couch the program in simple terms, so that everyone would be able to understand its message: we want freedom, and we want it now. With the creation of this ten-point program, the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense was born.

The roots of the Black Panther Party can be traced back to the civil rights movement of the 1960s. Even though African-Americans had won major legal victories with the passing of the Civil Rights Act in 1964 and the Voting Rights Act in 1965, systematic oppression was hardly a thing of the past. Virulent racism and violence were still part of daily life for many African-Americans, especially those living in the south. Major civil rights organizations, such as the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), actively tried to solve these issues throughout the United States, but their call for freedom was mostly met with violence by the dominant white society. These organizations continued to rely on Gandhian principles of nonviolence, which increasingly frustrated those African-Americans who were confronted with violence on a daily basis. They could no longer put up with all the abuse. As a result, a split began to develop within the civil rights movement, between those who



still believed in nonviolent interracial cooperation and those who advocated a more pragmatic approach.

One of the front-runners of this new approach was Stokely Carmichael. He became the fourth chairman of SNCC in May, 1966. One month later, Carmichael surprised friend and foe alike by introducing the term “Black Power” in one of his speeches. The concept of Black Power emphasized racial and cultural awareness and pride, and articulated the belief that African-Americans had to focus on achieving self-determination. Whereas Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. advocated integration, Carmichael advocated separation. He believed that there was no place for African-Americans in white society. Therefore, if they truly wanted a place for themselves in American society, African-Americans had to create their own destinies.

Carmichael helped develop a new sense of militancy within the civil rights movement. However, it is important to note that the focus on cultural awareness and self-determination was not necessarily a new phenomenon. As Curtis J. Austin argues in *Up Against the Wall*, it was the *public* declaration of these rights that was new to people.<sup>3</sup> Civil rights leaders such as Martin Luther King Jr. chose to rely on tactics of negotiation and compromise to achieve their goals. Furthermore, they opted to rely on the Gandhian principles of nonviolence to bring about change. For the next generation of activists, however, the times had changed. They would no longer wait for the white establishment to act. It was time for Black Power.

Another important influence for many young African-Americans was Malcolm X. With his uncompromising stance towards the white oppressor, Malcolm X held the belief that African-Americans had to take what was rightfully theirs, by any means necessary. He

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<sup>3</sup> Curtis J. Austin, *Up Against the Wall: Violence in the Making and Unmaking of the Black Panther Party* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2007) 23.

did not advocate violence per se, but he did make it clear that self-defense was a top priority. According to Malcolm X, African-Americans had to arm themselves in order to be able to defend themselves and their communities. Much like the concept of Black Power, the ideas of Malcolm X became incredibly popular among young African-Americans, including Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale.

Newton and Seale met each other in 1962 at Merritt Junior College in West Oakland. At the time, Newton was a member of the Afro-American Association (AAA), whose purpose was to develop a sense of pride among blacks for their shared heritage and their contributions to American society. Newton left the Association after a while though, because he believed that Donald Warden, the leader of the AAA, was leading people “away from the truth of their situation.”<sup>4</sup> Bobby Seale was impressed with the ways in which Newton was handling himself on campus, and so he decided to try and recruit him into the Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM). Like the AAA, RAM emphasized the shared heritage of African-Americans, but it also advocated the need for armed self-defense. Both Newton and Seale were drawn to these ideas, but the members of RAM refused to let Newton join, because he was “too bourgeois.”<sup>5</sup> Shortly thereafter, Seale was suspended from RAM himself.<sup>6</sup>

What Bobby Seale did not know at the time was that Huey Newton had a hidden reputation in the black communities of Oakland. On the one hand, he was known to be a street brawler who engaged in criminal activities. On the other hand, he also got a lot of respect for his insight and his kindness. People in Oakland knew that Huey Newton was

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<sup>4</sup> Huey P. Newton, *Revolutionary Suicide* (New York: Penguin Books, 2009) 66.

<sup>5</sup> Newton, *Revolutionary Suicide*, 72.

<sup>6</sup> Austin, *Up Against the Wall*, 29-30.

not be messed with. However, Newton's reputation eventually caught up with him in late 1964, when he was found guilty of assault with a deadly weapon, for which he was sent to prison for six months. Unlike most prisoners though, Newton did not allow prison to break his spirit. Instead, he claims that solitary confinement made him stronger and allowed him to experience a higher sense of freedom.<sup>7</sup>

After Newton was released from jail, he and Seale began discussing the ideological problems of the black liberation movement in greater detail. They first had to come up with an explanation for why other black political organizations had failed to succeed. One of the few organizations that did show promise in their eyes was Malcolm X's Organization of Afro-American Unity, because of its stance on self-defense. Malcolm had a significant influence on Newton and Seale, as Newton later claimed that the spirit of Malcolm X lived on in the Black Panther Party. However, even though Newton and Seale shared Malcolm's belief that African-Americans had to take what was rightfully theirs, by any means necessary, they still had no clear conception of how to put these ideas into practice.<sup>8</sup>

Newton and Seale were actively trying to figure out how they could best reach out to the black communities of Oakland. They soon decided that they would start working through a front group of RAM, the Soul Students Advisory Council (SSAC). At the time, Soul Students was trying to establish a course on Afro-American history and culture at Merritt College, but the authorities kept resisting its implementation. Newton and Seale planned on using this opportunity to move Soul Students a step further by suggesting that they adopt a program of self-defense. According to Newton, "we wanted them to dedicate themselves to armed self-defense with the full understanding that this was

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<sup>7</sup> Newton, *Revolutionary Suicide*, 103-108.

<sup>8</sup> Idem, 111.

defense for the survival of black people in general and in particular for the cultural program we were trying to establish.”<sup>9</sup> Police brutality was a huge problem in the black communities of Oakland, and so a program of armed self-defense was deemed necessary to counteract the abuse by police forces and campus authorities alike. However, both the SSAC and RAM rejected the idea of armed self-defense. To them, the program appeared to be suicidal.<sup>10</sup>

All during this time, Newton and Seale had no plans to start an organization of their own. However, it was becoming painfully obvious that the Oakland police was trying to strike fear into the communities by carrying guns out in the open. For Newton, this proved to be the turning point. He and Bobby Seale realized that “the rising consciousness of black people was almost at the point of explosion.” They were both convinced that “our time had come.” According to Newton, “out of this need sprang the Black Panther Party.”<sup>11</sup>

Huey Newton and Bobby Seale founded the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense on October 15, 1966. Having read and discussed works such as Franz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth*, Robert Williams’ *Negroes with Guns*, and several of Malcolm X’s writings, Newton and Seale were ready to educate the so-called “brothers on the block”. However, before they could get started, they needed a party program. So, Newton and Seale sat down to create a platform that anyone could relate to. The result was the Ten-Point Program, which contained both the practical (“What We Want”) and philosophical (“What

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<sup>9</sup> Newton, *Revolutionary Suicide*, 113.

<sup>10</sup> *Idem*, 112-114.

<sup>11</sup> *Idem*, 115.

We Believe”) tenets of the Black Panther Party.<sup>12</sup> The central tenet of the program was clear: “We want freedom. We want power to determine the destiny of our Black Community.” This emphasis on freedom served as the foundation for other points in the program as well, which focused on the numerous social issues confronting black communities, such as poor education, housing, and police brutality. As the program suggests, the BPP essentially set out to assist the black community in liberating itself from its oppressor by organizing and educating the people. With Huey Newton as its Minister of Defense and Bobby Seale as its Chairman, the BPP was ready to revolutionize this community.

Even though there were many different forms of social oppression at play in the poor black communities, the Panthers correctly realized that one issue demanded their immediate and undivided attention. Police brutality was a major issue in every black community. Instead of serving the people, police forces often harassed and intimidated people in the communities. The BPP therefore decided to start patrolling the police with arms in order to keep its behavior in check. Furthermore, the patrols would also serve as a recruiting device, because the BPP hoped that these patrols would attract some attention to its cause. With a gun in one hand, and a book of law in the other, the Panthers acted as guardians of the black community. At first, the police had no idea how to respond to the situation. They were not used to being confronted by African-Americans who wielded guns and who had extensive knowledge of the law. The BPP made good use of this situation by showing the people in the communities that the police was overstepping its boundaries. However, it did not take very long for the police to adapt to the new situation. Panthers were frequently harassed, intimidated, and arrested

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<sup>12</sup> For the entire Ten-Point Program, see Appendix A.

on false charges by the Oakland police. They did everything in their power to disrupt the BPP's community organizing efforts. This worked to a certain extent, but it did not prevent the Bay Area community from gradually accepting the BPP.<sup>13</sup>

The Black Panther Party's emphasis on self-defense should be seen within a larger ideological context of survival. Newton and Seale realized that the black community had to be prepared for the inevitable revolution. When the BPP first started, the black community had not yet fully developed its consciousness. The people were convinced that they were in no position to challenge their oppressor. In order to make these people aware of their full potential, the BPP thought it would be necessary to create survival programs for the community. These community organized programs would help people to meet their daily needs, whether it be food, clothing, or medical care. The quality of these basic needs was generally very poor in the black communities, so the BPP jumped in to improve the overall quality of life. However, the survival programs were not the solution to the people's problems. The BPP often used the slogan "survival pending revolution". The survival programs were supposed to support the people until they could free *themselves* from their subordinated position in society. The survival programs were merely a tool used by the BPP to organize the community around a true understanding of its situation. Newton and Seale had thus created the BPP with only one goal in mind: "All Power to the People".<sup>14</sup>

An important thing to keep in mind is that Newton and the BPP were not racist. Even though Malcolm X had been an important source of inspiration for the Panthers,

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<sup>13</sup> Newton, *Revolutionary Suicide*, 127-135.

<sup>14</sup> The Dr. Huey P. Newton Foundation, *The Black Panther Party: Service to the People Programs* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2008) 1-4, 157-158.

they did not share his conviction that all white people were bad.<sup>15</sup> Instead, Newton believed that the struggle of the black community should be defined in terms of class, rather than race. Class exploitation under the capitalist system was the real problem, and so the BPP sought to cooperate with other communities to put an end to all forms of exploitation. As Newton puts it:

...our ultimate aim is to have various ethnic communities co-operating in a spirit of mutual aid, rather than competing. In this way, all communities would be allied in a common purpose through the major social, economic, and political institutions in the country.<sup>16</sup>

The BPP, with its community-centered ideology, thus believed in the prospect of class-based cooperation between different ethnic groups and communities.

The Black Panther Party, with its emphasis on self-defense and police patrols, became a local phenomenon in the black communities of Oakland. However, the BPP soon turned out to be more than just a local phenomenon. With the help of the media, the Party began its rise to national prominence.

As Chris Booker argues in “Lumpenization: A Critical Error of the Black Panther Party”, the Panthers’ rise to national prominence was the result of a number of crucial events that placed the BPP in a national spotlight.<sup>17</sup> The first of these events was the escorting of Betty Shabazz, Malcolm X’s widow. A Malcolm X Memorial Day Conference was being organized in February 1967, and the BPP was asked to provide security for

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<sup>15</sup> Malcolm X was known for his belief that all white people were “devils”. However, after he traveled to Mecca in 1964, he moderated his view on whites.

<sup>16</sup> Newton, *Revolutionary Suicide*, 178.

<sup>17</sup> Chris Booker, “Lumpenization: A Critical Error of the Black Panther Party,” in *The Black Panther Party Reconsidered*, ed. Charles E. Jones (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1998) 341.

Betty Shabazz. Seeing as how the Party was infused with the spirit of Malcolm X, Newton and Seale could not pass up on this opportunity. They agreed to provide Betty Shabazz with an armed escort that would lead her around San Francisco. The Panthers' first task was to bring Betty to an office of *Ramparts*, a local magazine, where she had a number of interviews lined up. Everything was going according to plan, until the police decided to confront the Panthers outside the office. While Shabazz was quickly being escorted away from the scene, Newton began taunting a cop who was ready to draw his weapon. Calling him a "big fat racist pig", Newton was ready for the cop to make a move. However, the confrontation abruptly ended when the police decided to back down.<sup>18</sup>

Even though the standoff at *Ramparts* was only a minor victory for the BPP, it had significant consequences for the Panthers' image. As Hugh Pearson argues in *The Shadow of the Panther*, the events at *Ramparts* enhanced Newton's "crazy nigger" image and made the BPP more popular among young blacks who were increasingly interested in the premise of armed confrontation.<sup>19</sup> The popularity of the BPP further increased when Eldridge Cleaver joined in early 1967. Cleaver was released on parole from Soledad prison in late 1966, after serving nine years in prison for rape. While he was in prison, Cleaver converted to Islam and became a devoted follower of Malcolm X. He also began writing articles for magazines such as *Ramparts*, which eventually led to the creation of his famous book *Soul on Ice*. This book propelled Cleaver to celebrity status, so when Huey Newton heard of Cleaver's release from prison in early 1967, he was eager to recruit him into the BPP. The Party could use someone like Cleaver, because he was a very talented author and public speaker. Cleaver, however, seemed hesitant to join the BPP at first, but

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<sup>18</sup> Bobby Seale, *Seize the Time: The Story of the Black Panther Party and Huey P. Newton* (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1991) 125-130.

<sup>19</sup> Hugh Pearson, *The Shadow of the Panther: Huey Newton and the Price of Black Power in America* (Jackson: Perseus Books, 1996) 126.



after he and Newton had some long discussions about the ideological underpinnings of the Party, he decided to join. The addition of Cleaver was an important step for the BPP, because it both enhanced the Party's prestige and could serve as an important recruiting device. Because of his celebrity status, Cleaver would be able to attract a lot of young new recruits to the Black Panther Party.<sup>20</sup>

One of Eldridge Cleaver's earliest contributions to the BPP was his involvement in *The Black Panther* newspaper, which the Party began publishing in April, 1967. The paper itself became an important vehicle for spreading the message of the BPP throughout the black communities of Oakland. After the initial startup, the paper was published every week, and was handed out to the people on the streets by the Black Panthers themselves. However, *The Black Panther* newspaper would probably not have existed were it not for the Denzil Dowell case.

Denzil Dowell was a twenty-two year old African-American male who lived in North Richmond. On April 1, 1967, he was killed by police officers who claimed that Dowell was running away from a stolen car. The police ruled his death a "justifiable homicide", because Dowell was allegedly committing a felony. However, after the BPP started an investigation of its own, it became clear that Dowell had been murdered in cold blood. As the investigation continued, the Panthers discovered that there had been a series of police shootings in North Richmond. With this new information in mind, Huey Newton decided that a rally would be held to inform the community of the need for self-defense. With both Bobby Seale and Huey Newton speaking at the rally, the Panthers impressed the community with their hands-on approach. The community became convinced that Denzil Dowell had been an innocent victim, but the police would not

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<sup>20</sup> Newton, *Revolutionary Suicide*, 136-142.

budge. There would be no official investigation into the death of Denzil Dowell.

Disappointed and angered by the outcome of the case, Seale suggested that the BPP put out a leaflet which would inform the community about the true nature of the Denzil Dowell case. This leaflet would turn out to be the first step towards *The Black Panther* newspaper. Not only did the leaflet inform people about the Denzil Dowell case, it also allowed them to learn more about the BPP and its stance on self-defense. The Denzil Dowell case thus proved to be an essential part of the development of the BPP. It both gave the Panthers national exposure and helped them with the launch of *The Black Panther* newspaper.<sup>21</sup>

The BPP became increasingly popular as a result of public events such as the escorting of Betty Shabazz and the Denzil Dowell case. The Panthers benefited greatly from this newfound popularity, because more and more people became interested in what they had to say. However, it also attracted the attention of law enforcement agencies. As the Panthers continued to spread their revolutionary message, local police forces realized that something had to be done to undermine the efforts of the BPP. One of the easiest targets turned out to be the weapons that the Panthers carried with them out in the open. Donald Mulford, a conservative state assemblyman from Oakland, informed the BPP that he would be introducing a bill into the state legislature that would make it illegal for them to carry loaded firearms in public. This Mulford Act, also called the “Panther Bill”, was seen as a violation of the Panthers’ constitutional right to bear arms, so Newton and Seale decided to go to Sacramento to oppose the bill. On May 2, 1967, a group of armed Panthers (without Newton, who was still on probation) arrived at the Sacramento State Capitol to carry across the message that the time had come for blacks

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<sup>21</sup> Newton, *Revolutionary Suicide*, 145-152.  
Seale, *Seize the Time*, 134-149.

to arm themselves. The media were present in significant numbers, so with the eyes of the nation upon him, Bobby Seale recited the mandate of the BPP for all to hear. The group of Panthers was soon arrested by the police, but their message had been heard throughout the nation. The events at the Sacramento State Capitol attracted a significant amount of national attention to the BPP. However, as Huey Newton explains in *Revolutionary Suicide*, people did not even need to hear the complete message. The image of the Panthers carrying firearms proved to be enough to convey the right message to black communities throughout the United States.<sup>22</sup>

As the nation was becoming more aware of the message of the BPP, the police began increasing its activities to undermine the Party. Most Panthers were getting used to being pulled over by the police for no apparent reason, because the Oakland police was keeping a database with license plates of cars that belonged to known members of the BPP. Huey Newton was a frequent victim of this process, seeing as how most cops wanted to meet the “legendary” Newton face-to-face. One of those cops was John Frey. In the early morning of October 28, 1967, Officer Frey ordered Newton to pull over his car. Frey asked Newton some general questions about the car, after which he walked back to another cop who had just arrived at the scene. According to Newton, the second officer ordered his passenger, Gene McKinney, to get out of the car and to follow him. John Frey did the same with Newton, and brought him to the back of the second police car. At this point, Newton reached for his book of law and told Frey that he had no right to arrest him. As Newton was opening the book, Frey allegedly told him to “take that

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<sup>22</sup> Newton, *Revolutionary Suicide*, 153-159.

book and shove it up your ass nigger”, after which he drew his service revolver and shot Newton in the stomach.<sup>23</sup>

It remains unclear what exactly happened in the early morning of October 28, 1967. John Frey turned up dead and Huey Newton lay critically wounded in the hospital. Newton was charged with first-degree murder, but he insisted that Frey was the one who shot him first. Herbert Heanes, the second officer at the scene, was also shot, but he survived. He later testified that Newton and Frey got into a fight, which resulted in Newton shooting Frey. Having seen this, Heanes decided to shoot Newton, even though he testified that he did not see Newton carrying a gun. Each side had its own story, which made it difficult to determine what had happened exactly. The long, drawn-out court case that followed made it clear that the numbers did not add up. However, the odds were stacked against Newton. After hearing all of the testimonies, the Alameda County grand jury sentenced Newton to two to fifteen years in prison for the fatal shooting of John Frey in September, 1968.<sup>24</sup>

The shooting of John Frey and the subsequent conviction of Huey Newton proved to be one of the most important, if not *the* most important events in the development of the BPP. As Hugh Pearson argues in *The Shadow of the Panther*, the events had two important consequences: Huey Newton became a national icon, and the BPP became the nation’s premier symbol of black resistance.<sup>25</sup> This was largely due to the efforts of the Party itself, however. The other members of the BPP were outraged when they heard of Newton’s conviction. Eldridge Cleaver therefore came up with a two-pronged plan to set Newton free: the BPP would hire the best lawyer it could possibly get, Charles R. Garry,

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<sup>23</sup> Newton, *Revolutionary Suicide*, 181-187.

<sup>24</sup> *Idem*, 200-265.

<sup>25</sup> Pearson, *The Shadow of the Panther*, 147.

and a Free Huey publicity campaign would be set in motion. Cleaver's plan also led the BPP to ally itself with the white leftist Peace and Freedom Party (PFP). The Panthers were thus making important organizational decisions that would decisively affect the future of the Party. Moreover, the community organized Free Huey campaign once and for all turned the BPP into a national organization. With Free Huey rallies being held both nationally and internationally, the BPP had firmly established its name. So, even though the Party had lost its leader for the time being, it was entering a new period of unparalleled growth and development.<sup>26</sup>

Huey Newton and Bobby Seale could not possibly have foreseen what happened to the Black Panther Party in little more than a year. The Party went from being a local, Oakland-based organization with a handful of members to a national organization with an (inter)national following. There were numerous setbacks, but the Panthers managed to achieve their goals one way or another. They got people to listen to what they had to say, and even convinced some of these people to pick up the gun themselves. However, the BPP's success story had also attracted some unwanted attention. From 1968 onwards, the FBI had set its sights on the Black Panther Party.

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<sup>26</sup> Pearson, *The Shadow of the Panther*, 147-165.  
Booker, "Lumpenization," 343.

## **Chapter II: COINTELPRO and the Black Panther Party**

The Black Panther Party knew what it was like to be targeted by law enforcement agencies. Being pulled over and having one's vehicle searched more or less became a daily routine for most Panthers, seeing as how the police kept track of the vehicles that were often used by Party members. Because of this, the Panthers were always appropriately prepared for the inevitable confrontation with the police. However, nothing could have prepared the Black Panther Party for what the FBI had in store for it. Starting its operations against the BPP in 1968, the FBI had only one goal in mind: "neutralizing" the Panther.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation, as it existed in the 1960s, had come a long way from its inception in the early twentieth century. At first, the Bureau of Investigation was a small-scale organization bent on reinforcing the socio-economic status quo. The FBI still served the same purpose in the 1960s, but thanks to the efforts of its director, J. Edgar Hoover, it had been transformed into one of the most controversial organizations of the United States. Under Hoover, the FBI began taking drastic measures against people and organizations that were deemed to be a threat to the United States. This was made considerably easier by the passing of legislature such as the Espionage Act (1917), Sedition Act (1918) and the Smith Act (1940), which made any form of government subversion easily punishable. Needless to say, the FBI was mostly preoccupied with

fighting communism from the 1930s onwards. But with the rise of several new subversive threats in the late 1950s and 1960s, the FBI had to begin expanding its operations.<sup>27</sup>

The FBI's primary weapon against subversive groups was COINTELPRO. An acronym for Counter Intelligence Program, COINTELPRO officially began in 1956 as a series of covert action programs designed to eliminate possible subversive threats. With this program, the FBI was no longer limited to just intelligence gathering. Instead, the FBI was authorized to "disrupt" and "neutralize" targeted groups and people. According to investigations by the Church Committee, COINTELPRO was originally created "in part because of frustration with Supreme Court rulings limiting the Government's power to proceed overtly against dissident groups."<sup>28</sup> So, instead of overt action, the FBI designed COINTELPRO to be used as a tool for covert action.<sup>29</sup>

COINTELPRO was designed with a number of goals and purposes in mind. First and foremost, it was designed to protect national security by neutralizing possible threats to the nation. The creation of COINTELPRO marked an important shift in thinking about supposed threats, because it was designed to be a domestic counter-intelligence program. The FBI and the government had focused on domestic subversive groups before, but not on a grand scale like this. Another purpose of COINTELPRO was the prevention of violence, both between and by different targets. The program specifically targeted groups which were believed to have the potential for violence. In order to dismantle this potential, COINTELPRO aimed to deter recruitment and membership in the target groups. The goal was thus to prevent violence indirectly, rather than directly. Furthermore, COINTELPRO shared the FBI's traditional goal of maintaining and reinforcing

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<sup>27</sup> Ward Churchill and Jim Vander Wall, *Agents of Repression: The FBI's Secret Wars Against the Black Panther Party and the American Indian Movement* (South End Press, 1988) 17-36.

<sup>28</sup> U.S. Senate, *Staff Reports*, 3.

<sup>29</sup> *Idem*, 3-4.

the socio-economic status quo. According to the reports of the Church Committee, this goal was never explicitly mentioned anywhere, but looking at the available documents, it is safe to say that the FBI looked upon itself as the protector of the status quo in the United States.<sup>30</sup>

The FBI was prepared to go to great lengths to enforce the socio-economic status quo. This meant that the Bureau often relied on extralegal methods to eliminate possible subversive threats. According to investigations by the Church Committee, COINTELPRO was at times in clear violation of the First Amendment. A considerable part of all approved COINTELPRO actions was meant to prevent speaking, teaching, publishing, and meeting of and by targeted groups and individuals. The FBI's counter-intelligence programs were thus clearly violating constitutional rights under the guise of national security.<sup>31</sup>

At the height of its existence, COINTELPRO was divided into five different programs: the "Communist Party, USA" program (1956-1971); the "Socialist Workers Party" program (1961-1969); the "White Hate Group" program (1964-1971); the "Black Nationalist Hate Group" program (1967-1971); and the "New Left" program (1968-1971). Not surprisingly, the first two programs were part of America's crusade against communism. The threat of Soviet infiltration and espionage was still very real in the eyes of the FBI, so the Bureau spared no effort to counter Soviet subversion. The later programs were mainly directed at groups which were considered to be part of the same ideological movement, even though this was not always the case. For example, as the Church Committee reports note, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) was labeled as a "Black Nationalist Hate Group", despite

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<sup>30</sup> U.S. Senate, *Staff Reports*, 5-7.

<sup>31</sup> *Idem*, 27-33.



the fact that King's emphasis on Gandhian principles of nonviolence can hardly be seen as the foundation for a so-called "hate group". The five main counter-intelligence programs of the FBI thus consisted of a wide array of targets.<sup>32</sup>

The Black Panther Party was not part of the "Black Nationalist Hate Group" program at first. In its early stages, the program was aimed at organizations such as the SCLC, SNCC, Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), and the Nation of Islam. The purpose of the program was to disrupt and neutralize these organizations and its members, because their revolutionary actions and rhetoric made them a threat to the United States government. In March, 1968, the program was expanded to include new long-term goals: preventing a coalition of Black Nationalist groups; preventing the rise of a "messiah" who could unify the Black Nationalist movement; preventing violence on the part of Black Nationalist groups; discrediting the leaders of Black Nationalist groups; and preventing the growth of Black Nationalist groups.<sup>33</sup> These long-term goals underline the fact that the so-called Black Nationalist Hate Groups had become a major concern for the FBI. However, the greatest concern had yet to come. Starting in September, 1968, the FBI began focusing its attention on the daily operations of the Black Panther Party.<sup>34</sup>

As noted before, the Black Panther Party was not a target of the FBI's "Black Nationalist Hate Group" program at first. When the first list of targets was sent out to FBI field offices across the United States on August 25, 1967, the BPP was still very much a local organization. Prior to this date, the BPP had received some national attention with the Denzil Dowell case and its display of force at the Sacramento State Capitol, but apparently

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<sup>32</sup> U.S. Senate, *Staff Reports*, 4, 16-27.

<sup>33</sup> *Idem*, 187.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibidem*.

these events were not yet important enough to justify the inclusion of the BPP in the FBI program. When the FBI expanded its program with new long-term goals on March 4, 1968, the BPP was still not listed as one of its targets. By this time, the shooting of John Frey had placed Huey Newton and the BPP in a national spotlight. However, even though Newton's trial quickly turned into a media spectacle, the Black Panther Party was still not a primary target of COINTELPRO.<sup>35</sup>

In September 1968, FBI director J. Edgar Hoover openly declared the Black Panther Party to be “the greatest threat to the internal security of the country.” In the same article, published in the *New York Times*, Hoover said the following about the BPP:

Schooled in the Marxist-Leninist ideology and the teaching of Chinese Communist leader Mao Tse-tung, its members have perpetrated numerous assaults on police officers and have engaged in violent confrontations with police throughout the country. Leaders and representatives of the Black Panther Party travel extensively all over the United States preaching their gospel of hate and violence not only to ghetto residents, but to students in college, universities and high schools as well.<sup>36</sup>

It is quite clear that Hoover was trying to incriminate the Black Panther Party in the national media. First, even though it is undeniable that the BPP was often involved in confrontations with the police, this was in most cases not the Panthers' own fault. Huey Newton had always emphasized the fact that the BPP kept its activities within legal bounds. Every new member was told to operate strictly by law, so that the police would have no ground to stand on.<sup>37</sup> Needless to say, the Black Panthers were no saints, but Hoover's accusation is far from being the truth. BPP members were told to never make the first move. So, in the case of “violent” confrontation, it is more likely that the police

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<sup>35</sup> U.S. Senate, *Staff Reports*, 20-22.

<sup>36</sup> *New York Times*, September 8, 1968

<sup>37</sup> Newton, *Revolutionary Suicide*, 129.

assaulted the Black Panthers, instead of the other way around. Furthermore, Hoover was completely unjustified in suggesting that the BPP was preaching a “gospel of hate and violence”. The problem at the time was that people only knew the Black Panthers as they were represented in the media. These people looked at the news and saw African-Americans standing in front of the Sacramento State Capitol wearing black berets and shotguns. A “gospel of hate and violence” would easily tie into this existing militant image, so Hoover decided to take the opportunity to publicly denounce the Black Panther Party in the national media. By doing so, the FBI kept people in the dark about the Party’s social, community-centered ideology and program.

The question remains why the Black Panther Party all of a sudden became a primary target of COINTELPRO in late 1968. One obvious answer would be that the BPP continued to grow throughout the late 1960s. By 1968, with its membership reaching an estimated 5.000 people, the Black Panther Party had established chapters in different cities throughout the United States, such as Chicago, Los Angeles, and New York. However, this alone could not have been the reason for why Hoover suddenly declared war on the BPP. Another possible reason could have been the fact that the BPP and SNCC were planning to merge. SNCC had been a target of the FBI’s counter-intelligence programs since 1967, so any type of coalition or merger could prove to be a possible threat to the status quo. In February, 1968, SNCC made clear to the BPP that it was interested in a joint coalition. SNCC was not as successful anymore as it used to be, so the BPP’s newfound popularity could provide it with some new opportunities. The Panthers were interested in a merge, because SNCC’s experience as a movement could provide them with some much-needed organizational (re-)structuring. Some of SNCC’s prominent members, such as H. Rap Brown, James Forman, and Stokely Carmichael, were drafted

into the BPP after the merger was officially announced, but the seemingly happy marriage did not last very long. Members of SNCC soon realized that they did not share the BPP's preference for armed revolution. The irreconcilable ideological differences between the two organizations eventually led to a split in August, 1968.<sup>38</sup>

There could be a number of explanations for the FBI's sudden interest in the Black Panther Party. As the BPP was expanding across the United States, it started to attract more and more national attention. Events such as the merger with SNCC and Newton's murder trial and subsequent conviction in September, 1968 all placed the BPP in a national spotlight, which seemingly also drew the attention of the FBI. However, it is very likely that the FBI was already keeping an eye on the BPP ever since it started to become popular. Hoover and the FBI must have recognized the fact that the ideological underpinnings of the BPP proved to be a clear threat to the status quo in the United States. Hoover eventually expressed this belief in September, 1968, marking the BPP as another Black Nationalist Hate Group. The FBI had set its sights on the Black Panther Party, and so by July, 1969, the Panthers had become the primary focus of COINTELPRO.

As with the other targets of COINTELPRO, the FBI had one clear goal in mind for the Black Panther Party: disrupting and neutralizing its community organizing efforts. However, the FBI's efforts to achieve this goal proved to be much more drastic for the BPP than for any of the other targeted organizations. After all, J. Edgar Hoover claimed that the BPP was "the greatest threat to the internal security of the country". The FBI therefore designed a grand strategy which was supposed to bring the BPP down.

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<sup>38</sup> Pearson, *Shadow of the Panther*, 150-164.

As noted before, one of COINTELPROs main purposes was the prevention of violence both by and between different targets. By aiming to deter membership and recruitment in the targeted groups, the FBI hoped that it could indirectly prevent violence. However, this was not the case for the Black Panther Party. Instead of trying to prevent violence, the FBI was actively promoting violence between the BPP and other known militant organizations. According to the Church Committee reports, the FBI was well aware of the fact that violent power struggles existed between the BPP and these other organizations. This provided the Bureau with the perfect opportunity to kill two birds with one stone. Moreover, it seems as if the FBI was proud of the violent confrontation it was fostering. In a FBI memorandum from the San Diego Field Office, it is said that:

Shootings, beatings, and a high degree of unrest continues to prevail in the ghetto area of southeast San Diego. Although no specific counterintelligence action can be credited with contributing to this overall situation, it is felt that a substantial amount of the unrest is directly attributable to this program.<sup>39</sup>

So, not only was the FBI actively involved in the promotion of violence between well-known militant organizations, it also took pride in what it was doing. Considering the fact that the main goal of the FBI's counter-intelligence programs was to maintain the status quo in the United States, it would make sense for the FBI to feel completely justified about what it was doing. However, being proud of the fact that US citizens are killing one another is something different. It goes to show that the FBI was prepared to cross legal boundaries in its conflict with the BPP.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Memorandum from San Diego Field Office to FBI Headquarters, 9/18/1969, 2.

<sup>40</sup> U.S. Senate, *Staff Reports*, 189-195.  
Austin, *Up Against the Wall*, 224-239.

Besides trying to foster conflict between several targeted organizations, the FBI was also aiming to foster conflict within the BPP itself. By trying to induce distrust and paranoia within the ranks of an organization, the FBI could easily destroy any such organization. This was even more so the case for the BPP, because the organizational leadership of the Party was continually being disturbed by the frequent arrests and convictions orchestrated by the FBI. One of the most significant convictions in this case was Huey Newton's, because he was considered to be both the practical and spiritual leader of the BPP. While Newton was in jail, the FBI stepped up its efforts to fracture the BPP from within. Even though most of the BPP's prominent members had been or had become good friends, their friendship was severely strained by COINTELPRO actions. This was especially the case for Huey Newton and Eldridge Cleaver. Newton and Cleaver had both developed different conceptions of the ideological future of the BPP. Newton believed that the BPP had to put down the gun and had to start focusing more on the community programs, whereas Cleaver still advocated the need for violent revolution. The ideological differences between the two eventually led to a split within the ranks of the BPP. The Party became divided in a pro-Newton faction, who advocated a moderate ideology, and a pro-Cleaver faction, who advocated a more radical ideology. Recognizing this conflict, the FBI initiated a program in March, 1970, which was supposed to drive a permanent wedge between Newton and Cleaver. Newton was still in jail at the time, and Cleaver had fled to Algeria because he had violated his parole in the United States. So, with both of these men being away from the BPP's day-to-day operations, the FBI could easily begin to drive the two further apart by spreading false rumors and information on their behalf. The Newton-Cleaver rift was but one of the ways in which the FBI attempted to pit prominent members of the BPP against each other. However, as will be discussed in the

next chapter, this particular conflict proved to be of great importance for the future of the BPP.<sup>41</sup>

The FBI furthermore went to great lengths to undermine public support for the BPP. Seeing as how the BPP was focused on organizing the community, it was only natural for the FBI to try and turn the community against the Panthers. One of the Bureau's primary targets in this context was the BPP's "Free Breakfast for School Children Program", which was set up in November, 1968. The Free Breakfast Program was the very first survival program that was implemented by the Party. As the name already suggests, the purpose of the program was to provide kids with breakfast which they would otherwise probably not get. The concept was relatively simple, but it nevertheless helped the community to meet some of its daily needs. Numbers suggest that the Free Breakfast Program was serving an estimated 50.000 children in 45 cities across the United States.<sup>42</sup> Needless to say, this program, and many of the other survival programs implemented by the BPP, made the Party incredibly popular among the people. It is therefore no surprise that the FBI tried to undermine the BPP's community organizing efforts by disrupting these programs. In the case of the Free Breakfast Program, the FBI distributed false letters and cartoons among the stores and organizations that supported the program in order to get them to withdraw their support. For example, these letters and cartoons would suggest to parents that the BPP was serving their children diseased food. If that did not have the desired effect, the FBI would sometimes send tactical units to a location

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<sup>41</sup> U.S. Senate, *Staff Reports*, 198-207.

<sup>42</sup> Ward Churchill, "'To Disrupt, Discredit, Destroy': The FBI's Secret War Against the Black Panther Party," in *Liberation, Imagination, and the Black Panther Party: A New Look at the Panthers and their Legacy*, ed. Kathleen Cleaver et al. (New York: Routledge, 2001) 11.

where free breakfast was being served to simply scare away the children, ruin the food, and destroy the building.<sup>43</sup>

Undermining support for the BPP was also done via the media. On the one hand, the FBI attempted to prevent the publication of articles by the BPP and its members in order to prevent them from expressing their views in public. The most important tool for the BPP to express its views was its newspaper, *The Black Panther*. The FBI therefore tried to come up with all sorts of ideas to both disrupt the production and distribution of the newspaper. On the other hand, the FBI could manipulate the media so that they would publish stories that were unfavorable to the BPP. By doing so, the FBI hoped that it could destroy, or at the very least damage, the Black Panther Party's public image.<sup>44</sup>

The FBI deployed a wide range of tactics in its war against the Black Panther Party. Some, if not most, of these tactics would have been labeled as extralegal methods, because the FBI was overstepping the boundaries of what it was legally allowed to do. However, because the BPP was, in the eyes of the FBI, a clear threat to the status quo in the United States, the Bureau was prepared to cross these boundaries.

The FBI's COINTELPRO tactics can be divided into a number of categories. First of all, the FBI relied heavily on manipulating information. By fabricating and distributing false information, the FBI hoped to foster tensions both within the BPP and between the BPP and like-minded organizations. One of the most commonly used techniques was the fabrication of fake letters. The FBI would send a fake letter from one Party member to the other in order to drive a wedge between the two. This specific technique was mainly directed against the Party's elite, because distrust could easily destroy an organization

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<sup>43</sup> Churchill, "To Disrupt, Discredit, Destroy," 11-13.

<sup>44</sup> U.S. Senate, *Staff Reports*, 208-220.



from within. With Huey Newton behind bars, the FBI took the opportunity to sow seeds of distrust within the ranks of the BPP. Furthermore, the Bureau also relied on the distribution of false information on behalf of the BPP with the intention of misrepresenting its goals and objectives. On the one hand, the FBI used this technique to foster inter-party tensions. The preferred method in this case was the production and distribution of cartoons, or rather caricatures, which depicted one of the targeted organizations in a degrading fashion. On the other hand, the FBI also used this technique to discredit the BPP in the national media. According to the Church Committee reports, the FBI had assembled a list of “friendly” media sources throughout the years, which agreed to both publish unfavorable articles about the BPP and leak derogatory information about its members. The FBI could thus ask its media sources to publish false information about the BPP in order to discredit the Party in the national media.<sup>45</sup>

Another category of COINTELPRO tactics could be labeled as the FBI’s efforts to induce paranoia within the Black Panther Party. The FBI maintained an impressive network of electronic surveillance, which was not only used for intelligence gathering in itself, but also to make the BPP aware of the fact that the FBI was keeping an eye on its every move. As with distrust, paranoia could potentially wreak havoc in both the upper and lower ranks of the BPP. One of the most commonly used techniques to induce paranoia was the so-called practice of “snitch-jacketing”, or “bad-jacketing”. “Snitch-jacketing” refers to the practice of discrediting a Party member by suggesting that he or she was an informant. The FBI mainly used this technique to eliminate the BPP’s organizational leadership. “Snitch-jacketing” soon became very popular among FBI agents, because the BPP was relentless in its treatment of informants. If one was

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<sup>45</sup> Churchill and Vander Wall, *Agents of Repression*, 37-53.  
U.S. Senate, *Staff Reports*, 34-40.

suspected of being an informant, the punishment could range from simply being expelled from the Party to nearly being beaten to death. This goes to show just how much of a problem informants had become in the Black Panther Party.<sup>46</sup>

Infiltration of the Black Panther Party by FBI field agents is part of the third and last category of COINTELPRO tactics that will be discussed here. Besides the distribution of false information and the inducement of paranoia within the BPP, the FBI also utilized more “practical” tactics. For example, as mentioned before, the FBI began harassing Panthers by arresting them on minor, or even false, charges. These arrests were not only meant to simply harass the BPP, but also to keep its members incarcerated, thereby draining the Party’s already scarce resources. Furthermore, the FBI made widespread use of one of its oldest tactics: infiltrating and destroying an organization from within. The FBI began the so-called “Ghetto Informant Program” in 1967 as a response to the increasing violence of the mid-1960s. According to Ward Churchill, an estimated 3300 informants were active when the FBI began its COINTELPRO actions against the BPP in 1968. Of those 3300 informants, at least 67 were active within the BPP in 1969.<sup>47</sup> These informants gathered intelligence, spread false information, and helped induce paranoia within the ranks of the BPP. Besides the “regular” informants, the FBI also made frequent use of agent provocateurs. This type of informant is especially interesting, because his goal was to engage in criminal activities, which could then be attributed to the targeted organization and its members. An agent provocateur was also much harder to detect within the ranks of the Party, because their participation in criminal activities could be perceived as a sign of dedication and loyalty.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Churchill and Vander Wall, *Agents of Repression*, 39-40, 49-51.

<sup>47</sup> Churchill, “To Disrupt, Discredit, Destroy,” 18-19.

<sup>48</sup> Churchill and Vander Wall, *Agents of Repression*, 44-48.

In light of this discussion, there is one more tactic that needs to be discussed. Even though the FBI has always denied it, it is almost certain that the Bureau was involved in the assassinations of several BPP members. According to Ward Churchill, the FBI concealed its own involvement in these assassinations by using contract personnel, infiltrators, and even police surrogates to carry out the actual killings.<sup>49</sup> The FBI was known to use some extralegal methods in its counterintelligence programs, but assassinating people outright is an entirely different thing. Needless to say, the FBI could not just go around killing Panthers whenever it pleased, because it would both draw suspicion and could possibly lead to an all-out civil war between the BPP and authorities. However, the FBI's involvement in the assassinations of members of the Black Panther Party is the ultimate proof that the Bureau was free to pursue its goals in any way it saw fit, whether it was legal or illegal.

The best way to illustrate the FBI's mode of operation and its rationalization of COINTELPRO is to give an example of a high-profile case in which both the Black Panther Party and the FBI were involved. The case that will be discussed here is the assassination of Fred Hampton. Fred Hampton joined the BPP's Chicago chapter in the beginning of 1968. Being a natural born leader, Hampton managed to climb the ranks of the Party rather quickly. His rise to prominence was stimulated by the organizational problems within the BPP, which were heavily influenced by the relentless assaults of the FBI. The Bureau, in the mean time, had taken note of Hampton's rapid ascension within the BPP, because Hampton was known to be a skillful organizer and mediator. Recognizing his potential, the FBI got William O'Neal, a small-time criminal, to infiltrate the BPP as a

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<sup>49</sup> Churchill, "To Disrupt, Discredit, Destroy," 28.

counter-intelligence agent. O'Neal managed to become Hampton's personal bodyguard, which placed him in a position of considerable power. The FBI instructed him to use this position to stimulate conflict between the BPP and other "radical" organizations in Chicago. Meanwhile, the FBI itself would try to foster inter-party conflict by distributing derogatory cartoons in the Panthers' name.<sup>50</sup>

O'Neal quickly assumed the role of agent provocateur within the ranks of the BPP's Chicago chapter. He pressed other members to engage in criminal activities, to punish alleged informants, and to arm themselves to the teeth. By doing so, the FBI would have more opportunities to arrest and convict Panthers for illegal activities. Meanwhile, Fred Hampton was working hard to establish community survival programs and police patrols in the black communities of Chicago. In order to be closer to the BPP headquarters in Chicago, Hampton rented a new apartment together with his fiancé. O'Neal relayed this information to the FBI, claiming that Hampton's apartment was a meeting place for Panthers and a storage facility for their weapons. With this information, and the news that Hampton would be appointed to the BPP's Central Committee, the FBI realized that stronger measures had to be taken to sabotage Hampton's rise to national prominence.<sup>51</sup>

William O'Neal met with several FBI agents in mid-November, 1969, to discuss plans for a raid on Hampton's apartment. O'Neal had been inside of the apartment, so he was able to share with the FBI the exact lay-out of the entire apartment. On the morning of December 4, 1969, a unit of fourteen men rushed into Hampton's apartment, shooting everything on sight. Fred Hampton, who was still asleep, was shot twice in the head at point blank range. Two other Panthers were dead as well; three others survived, who

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<sup>50</sup> Churchill and Vander Wall, *Agents of Repression*, 63-66.

<sup>51</sup> *Idem*, 67-69.

were then arrested for attempted murder on the police forces that raided the apartment. After the raid was over, a teletype was sent to the FBI headquarters to inform J. Edgar Hoover that Hampton and two other Panthers had been killed; the raid was proclaimed to be “successful”.<sup>52</sup> In a press conference, the FBI defended its actions by claiming that the deaths of Hampton and the other Panthers were “justifiable homicides”. According to official police reports, the Panthers were the ones who initiated the attack, so the raiders merely acted out of self-defense. Photographs taken at the scene were supposed to support this theory, but several reporters indicated that the photographs were fabricated. However, despite this new evidence, the case of Fred Hampton remained closed. The FBI did have to clarify its involvement in the Hampton affair during several Grand Jury proceedings, but a deal with Cook County’s State’s Attorney Edward V. Hanrahan ensured that neither the FBI nor the police would be held responsible for what had happened in Fred Hampton’s apartment.<sup>53</sup>

The story of Fred Hampton underlines the ways in which the FBI persecuted the BPP. They infiltrated the Party, stimulated inter-party conflict, pressed other Panthers to engage in criminal activities, and eventually assassinated Fred Hampton in his own apartment. They did so because Hampton was a talented leader who had the potential to effectively organize the black community in Chicago. That specific talent made him a threat to the status quo in the United States, and so Hampton became one of the primary targets of COINTELPRO. There are plenty of reports and memorandums available which clearly indicate that the FBI was involved in the assassination of Fred Hampton, but, at the time, it was relatively easy to convince people of the fact that the Black Panthers had initiated the attack. The FBI and the media used the violent image of the BPP to twist the

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<sup>52</sup> Churchill, “To Disrupt, Discredit, Destroy,” 29.

<sup>53</sup> Churchill and Vander Wall, *Agents of Repression*, 70-77.

facts of what had really happened on December 4, 1969. As a result, nobody would hear about Hampton's efforts to provide the black communities in Chicago with free breakfast and free health care. Instead, Hampton would be remembered as just another casualty in the fight against black revolutionaries.

All of the FBI's counter-intelligence programs and activities were officially suspended on April 27, 1971, due to security reasons. However, it is uncertain whether COINTELPRO-type activities continued afterwards. As the Church Committee reports note, the document that announced the discontinuation of all counter-intelligence programs also notes that "in exceptional circumstances where it is considered counter-intelligence action is warranted, recommendations should be submitted to the Bureau under the individual case caption to which it pertains."<sup>54</sup> Counter-intelligence operations thus might have continued after the program was officially terminated in 1971. The Committee actually discovered several cases in which COINTELPRO-type activities were carried out post-1971, but it seems unlikely that the FBI's counter-intelligence programs would ever return to the forefront of its operations again. Nevertheless, the future of the FBI's counter-intelligence activities always remained a grey area.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> U.S. Senate, *Staff Reports*, 13.

<sup>55</sup> *Idem*, 13-15.

### **Chapter III: The Demise of the Black Panther Party**

The Black Panther Party reached its peak popularity in the period of 1968-70. Even though Huey Newton was in jail and the FBI was continuing its relentless assaults on the Party and its members, the BPP managed to establish a foothold in most major cities throughout the United States. With Party membership reaching an all-time high of 10.000 in 1969, the BPP had enough reason to be cautiously optimistic about its future prospects. However, trouble was brewing underneath the surface. With serious ideological differences developing within the Party, and with the FBI breathing down its neck, the BPP slowly began crumbling under the pressure.

The first internal problems of the Black Panther Party developed as a result of the conviction of Huey Newton in September, 1968. With Newton in jail, someone else had to take control of the Party. Eldridge Cleaver was the ideal candidate, but he soon fled to Algeria after a judge decided that Cleaver had violated his parole. With both Newton and Cleaver being out of the picture, Chief of Staff David Hilliard took charge of the BPP. Under Hilliard's command, a clear split began to develop within the BPP between the party elite and the rank-and-file members. These rank-and-file members basically carried out all the day-to-day operations of the BPP, such as the distribution of *The Black Panther* and the organization of local survival programs, while the party elite took care of the larger organizational issues. The BPP relied heavily on its rank-and-file members, so Hilliard was concerned when it became clear that the rank-and-file was dissatisfied with the BPP's new leadership. Some of the members felt that Hilliard was favoring his friends in the party elite, and that he was somewhat too harsh in disciplining (alleged) dissidents.

Furthermore, according to Hugh Pearson, Hilliard and his friends within the BPP became increasingly corrupt. A significant part of the Party's funds began disappearing, criticism on party leadership was no longer allowed, and women were increasingly being disrespected and abused.<sup>56</sup> However, as Curtis J. Austin argues, Hilliard can and should not be blamed for all of the BPP's problems. It is important to remember that the BPP had no time to adjust to its newfound popularity and rapid growth. Furthermore, with Newton in jail and the FBI tracing the BPP's every move, it was no easy task for Hilliard to get the Party back on the right track.<sup>57</sup>

Most Panthers believed, or rather hoped, that all of the BPP's problems would vanish when Huey Newton would once again take control of the Party. While he was in jail, Newton had become a national icon as a result of Eldridge Cleaver's Free Huey campaign. He was no longer just the public face of the BPP; he had achieved a mythical status among the people in the black communities. So, when Newton received a new trial in May, 1970, those people were rooting for his release. The retrial made clear that a lot of mistakes had been made in regards to Newton's conviction. Thus, after having served only two years of his fifteen year sentence, Huey Newton was finally released from prison in August, 1970. However, what was supposed to be a glorious return to power, turned out to be a critical turning point in the life of the Black Panther Party.<sup>58</sup>

The earliest signs of decline became visible after Newton's release from prison. The BPP had not exactly flourished under Hilliard's leadership, so Newton had to get the Party back on track once again. His first course of action was to strengthen the community survival programs, because Newton had become convinced that the BPP had

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<sup>56</sup> Pearson, *The Shadow of the Panther*, 173-205.

<sup>57</sup> Austin, *Up Against the Wall*, 294-296.

<sup>58</sup> Ollie A. Johnson III, "Explaining the Demise of the Black Panther Party: The Role of Internal Factors," in *The Black Panther Party Reconsidered*, ed. Charles E. Jones (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1998) 398-399.



to put down the gun in order to focus more on the community and its needs. However, as was also discussed in the previous chapter, Eldridge Cleaver held different ideas. He believed that the BPP had to lead the community in violent revolution. As Ollie A. Johnson argues in “Explaining the Demise of the Black Panther Party,” the Newton-Cleaver rift was exemplary of the intra-party conflict that would contribute to the demise of the BPP. Johnson also argues that the ideological disagreements between Newton and Cleaver represented a deeper schism within the BPP.<sup>59</sup> Both local and state chapters of the BPP lamented the fact that they were not properly represented in the Party’s Central Committee, even though they were required to make sizeable contributions to the national Party funds. Some of these chapters also disagreed with Newton about the proper course of action for the BPP, just like Cleaver did. In response to these issues, Newton began expelling members of the party elite who he claimed were “enemies of the people”. Most Central Committee members, including Eldridge Cleaver, were not informed of Newton’s actions, so they demanded that the expelled members be reinstated. For some strange reason, Newton and Cleaver eventually decided to discuss the internal issues of the BPP during a television program on February 26, 1971. The discussion soon turned heated as Newton and Cleaver began arguing and expelling one another from the BPP. It turned out that the ideological differences between the two had driven them too far apart. Fortunately for Newton, the initial damage done to the BPP was very limited, with just Cleaver and a handful of his supporters defecting. But when Robert Webb and Samuel Napier, two respected members of the BPP, were killed as a

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<sup>59</sup> Johnson, “Explaining the Demise of the Black Panther Party,” 401.

result of the Newton-Cleaver rift, other Panthers had had enough. The BPP lost approximately thirty to forty percent of its membership due to this intra-party conflict.<sup>60</sup>

Newton and Seale managed to regain control of the BPP after the whole affair with Eldridge Cleaver. Even though the BPP had been severely weakened, its influence had barely been diminished. With Cleaver and his radical faction out of the Party, Newton could begin to shift the BPP towards a more community-centered approach. This meant that the Party would be putting down the gun, and that it would begin to focus more on cooperation and reconciliation within the black communities. Newton realized that the Party's rhetoric of violence had estranged a lot of people throughout the years, and that it also created issues within the BPP itself. It was therefore time for a change of direction. Furthermore, in a bold attempt to prevent any further form of intra-party conflict, Newton suggested that the Party should close all of its chapters outside of Oakland and focus its resources and activities in the Bay area. By doing so, Newton believed that Oakland could become an example of what the black community was capable of if its members cooperated with another. However, his best friend, Bobby Seale, rejected the idea. He was convinced that the national headquarters did not have the required resources to sustain the lives of hundreds of members within Oakland itself, and, furthermore, he argued that the Party could not just close down all of its outside chapters while they still had survival programs running throughout the United States. Most Party members outside of Oakland were not prepared to give up their lives and move away from their homes either. However, after weeks of debate, the Party's Central Committee decided that all outside chapters would be closed and dismantled within the year (1972).

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<sup>60</sup> Johnson, "Explaining the Demise of the Black Panther Party," 399-403.  
Austin, *Up Against the Wall*, 297-306.

This was a major personal victory for Newton, but the Party suffered. Members who were not prepared to move to Oakland simply left the Party en masse.<sup>61</sup>

The BPP's centralization of operations in Oakland was, according to Ollie A. Johnson, the first step in a series of strategic organizational mistakes.<sup>62</sup> With the closing of all Party chapters outside of Oakland, a significant amount of power was concentrated in the hands of Huey Newton. After the Party had firmly established itself in Oakland, Newton and Seale began focusing their attention on local politics. They decided that Seale would be running for mayor and Elaine Brown, the Party's new minister of information (Eldridge Cleaver's original position), would be running for a seat in the city council in 1973. Both the party leadership and the rank-and-file members invested a significant amount of time, energy, and money into the political campaigns of Seale and Brown. However, despite their efforts, both of them lost the elections by a narrow margin. This electoral defeat had a devastating effect on the BPP. Having invested so much resources and energy into these elections, many Panthers were severely disappointed by the outcome and resigned from the Party.<sup>63</sup>

Both the centralization of operations in Oakland and the election of 1973 proved to be critical organizational mistakes. As Ollie A. Johnson argues, the BPP steadily declined in "size, prestige, and effectiveness" because of these mistakes. However, besides this and intra-party conflict, Johnson notes another factor which contributed to the demise of the Black Panther Party: authoritarianism.<sup>64</sup> The rise of authoritarianism within the BPP can arguably be traced back to the leadership of David Hilliard. As mentioned before,

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<sup>61</sup> Pearson, *The Shadow of the Panther*, 233-236.

Johnson, "Explaining the Demise of the Black Panther Party," 403-405.

<sup>62</sup> *Idem*, 403.

<sup>63</sup> *Idem*, 405-406.

<sup>64</sup> *Idem*, 406.

Hilliard showed signs of favoritism towards his fellow members in the party elite, which sharpened distinctions between the ranks of the BPP. These issues were addressed by Newton after he was released from prison in 1970, but, at the same time, he himself began showing signs of authoritarianism as well. This was largely due to the closing of all Party chapters outside of Oakland. With all of the BPP's operations centered in Oakland, Newton decided to centralize all the money that was coming into the Party. This basically meant that nobody was able to touch the money anymore, except for Newton and the other members of the Party's Central Committee. To make matters even worse, Newton began using some of the money for his own personal interests as well. Furthermore, Newton was showing signs of increasingly violent behavior towards anyone who disrespected him or the Party. He was known to physically assault other Party members at this point in time, which alienated a lot of people. Newton's erratic behavior more than likely was the result of a serious drug addiction. Ever since he had been released from jail, Newton resorted to the use of drugs and alcohol to deal with his newfound popularity. Thus, with power being concentrated in the hands of Newton, who was showing increasingly erratic behavior, many Panthers were beginning to feel alienated from the BPP. It was not just the rank-and-file members who felt that way, however. Bobby Seale resigned from the BPP in 1974 after he and Newton had had a major argument. Seeing as how Seale had been Newton's friend and a prominent member of the Party for a long time, other members quickly realized how serious the problems must have been. As a result, many Panthers followed Seale's example and left the Party.<sup>65</sup>

The Black Panther Party officially existed until 1982, but it had lost all its influence long before that. Power abuse, financial mismanagement, and violent behavior continued

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<sup>65</sup> Pearson, *The Shadow of the Panther*, 236, 251-268.

Johnson, "Explaining the Demise of the Black Panther Party," 406-408.

to plague the BPP after 1974. Newton had fled to Cuba in August of that year to escape several criminal charges, but that did not help the Party either. The BPP's new leader, Elaine Brown, ran the Party in almost the same way as Newton did, relying on violence and intimidation to get things done. As a result, the BPP dabbled in local Oakland affairs, until it finally died an embarrassing death with the closing of its last community-organized project in 1982.<sup>66</sup>

Internal factors clearly played a significant role in the demise of the Black Panther Party, but these factors only constitute one side of the story. While the BPP was actively trying to solve its internal issues, the FBI was operating in the background, aggravating these internal issues and assaulting the Party externally. Thus, in order to get a balanced account of the demise of the BPP, it is necessary to consider the influence and effectiveness of COINTELPRO as well.

The FBI's efforts to exacerbate internal tensions within the BPP were based, for a large part, on the Bureau's ability to induce distrust and paranoia. As was discussed in the previous chapter, the FBI had a wide array of tactics available to it to sow seeds of distrust within the ranks of the BPP. The use of informants was especially popular in this regard, because the BPP did not quite know how to deal with these informants effectively. What is particularly interesting about the use of informants is that the anticipated presence of infiltrators within an organization is sometimes enough to create suspicion and paranoia. As David J. Garrow explains in "FBI Political Harassment and FBI Historiography", the question is whether the actual presence of informants is more damaging to an

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<sup>66</sup>Johnson, "Explaining the Demise of the Black Panther Party," 407-408.

organization than the expectation of informants' presence.<sup>67</sup> In the case of the Black Panther Party, it seems that the expected presence of informants within the Party caused considerably more damage than the actual operations carried out by these informants. These operations were mainly meant to assist the FBI in confiscating weapons, incarcerating BPP members, ruining the Party's public image, and exacerbating both intra- and inter-party conflict. Informants and agent provocateurs would go out of their way to foster conflict and make the BPP look bad in the eyes of the general public. Furthermore, if needed, their actions could also have more far-reaching consequences, as was the case with the assassination of Fred Hampton. Thus, from a practical point of view, the actual impact of informants operating within the BPP should not be underestimated. However, the expected presence of informants seems to have affected the BPP in a more fundamental way. It was explained before that the BPP's organizational leadership was relatively unstable because of the FBI's harassment and Huey Newton's conviction. When David Hilliard took charge, he arguably did so with a new sense of authority. Hilliard and the BPP quickly figured out that informants were operating within the Party's ranks, so they did not hesitate to take swift action against alleged informants. If a Party member was suspected of being an informant, he or she would be expelled instantly. The expected presence of informants thus created a climate of paranoia in which Panthers became more hesitant to speak their minds, because they did not want to risk the possibility of being labeled an informant. This had to do with the fact that the party elite began using the expected presence of informants within the BPP as an excuse to get rid of dissidents who openly criticized the BPP and its leadership.<sup>68</sup> By labeling these dissidents as

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<sup>67</sup> David J. Garrow, "FBI Political Harassment and FBI Historiography: Analyzing Informants and Measuring the Effects," *The Public Historian* 4 (Autumn, 1988) 17.

<sup>68</sup> Pearson, *The Shadow of the Panther*, 173-204.

informants, the BPP could blame the FBI for its internal issues. One could therefore argue that this situation helped lay the foundation for the development of authoritarianism and power abuse within the BPP. The expected presence of informants within the ranks of the BPP indirectly widened the gap between the party elite and the rank-and-file members. With the knowledge that informants were at large within the Party, the leadership of the BPP invested itself with the power to expel people as it saw fit in order to protect the Party from any form of dissention. Even though the party elite might have been convinced that this was the right thing to do at the time, it would eventually do the BPP more harm than good.

The FBI soon learned that the Black Panther Party was cracking down on internal dissention. Fostering intra-party conflict had always been one of COINTELPRO-BPP's main goals, but now the FBI had all the more reason for focusing on the promotion of dissention within the BPP. In October, 1968, J. Edgar Hoover directed his field offices to start exploiting any existing tensions between local and national leaders in order to promote factionalism within the Party. For example, the FBI would attempt to create a rift between the national BPP headquarters and local chapters by sending out anonymous letters that questioned the loyalty of these chapters. This would often create some tension, but it usually had no lasting effects. However, there is one well-known occasion in which the FBI managed to exacerbate internal tensions to the point where factional differences had become irreconcilable.<sup>69</sup>

The FBI's involvement in the Newton-Cleaver rift was one of COINTELPRO's most successful programs. By September, 1969, informants had notified the FBI of the fact that ideological differences were developing within the BPP, primarily between Huey Newton

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<sup>69</sup> Austin, *Up Against the Wall*, 322.

and Eldridge Cleaver. Realizing the potential destructiveness of this dispute, the FBI instructed several field offices to exacerbate these differences in any way possible.<sup>70</sup> The Bureau began by sending out an anonymous letter to Cleaver in Algeria, which stated that David Hilliard and several BPP leaders in California were plotting to undercut Cleaver's influence. In response to this letter, Cleaver allegedly expelled three international representatives from the Party. Needless to say, this was exactly the kind of response that the FBI was hoping to provoke. The Bureau therefore sent a new letter to David Hilliard, which suggested that he do something about Cleaver before it was too late. This kind of fabricated correspondence was typical of the ways in which the FBI tried to play the Panthers off against each other. The Bureau knew that Cleaver was no longer residing in the United States, so this was the perfect opportunity to create factionalism in the party elite. Unfortunately for the Bureau, however, both Cleaver and Hilliard had become aware of the fact that the letters were forgeries, so they managed to reconcile their differences before any serious damage was done.<sup>71</sup>

The FBI clearly failed to drive Cleaver and Hilliard apart, but it had more tricks up its sleeve. When Huey Newton was released from jail in August, 1970, the FBI got one of its informants to distribute a forged BPP directive in which Newton's leadership was openly being questioned. Realizing that Cleaver and Hilliard had reconciled their differences, the Bureau would now attempt to create a rift between the two of them and Newton. This was made considerably easier by the fact that the ideological differences between Cleaver and Newton had already split the BPP into different factions. The FBI therefore only needed to exacerbate the pre-existing tensions between the two. The

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<sup>70</sup> Churchill, "To Disrupt, Discredit, Destroy," 31.

<sup>71</sup> U.S. Senate, *Staff Reports*, 200-201.

Churchill, "To Disrupt, Discredit, Destroy," 30-31.



Bureau's directive stressed "the leadership and strength of David Hilliard and Eldridge Cleaver while intimating Huey Newton is useful only as a drawing card."<sup>72</sup> As we now know, Newton did not take lightly to people challenging his authority. He therefore began expelling Panthers who were aligned with Cleaver, believing that they were plotting to kill him. This convinced the FBI of the fact that Newton was becoming increasingly paranoid. Claiming that he was close to having a mental breakdown, the FBI decided to intensify its counter-intelligence activities against Newton.<sup>73</sup>

While Newton continued to expel people from the BPP whom he considered to be "enemies of the people" (i.e. people aligned with Cleaver), the FBI intensified its actions. In February, 1971, the Bureau asked its field offices to come up with a program to disrupt the relationship between local BPP chapters and the national headquarters. The FBI was aware of the fact that Newton was expelling prominent members of the BPP, so it believed that this was the perfect opportunity to further disrupt the Party. All sorts of letters were sent out by FBI field offices, openly challenging the leadership of both Newton and Cleaver, and warning both of them of the possibility of violence being used against them. Shortly thereafter, the two of them engaged in their infamous discussion on live television, which marked the final confrontation in their relationship. While witnessing these events, the FBI realized that its counter-intelligence program had succeeded. Therefore, on March 25, 1971, the FBI's headquarters sent out a letter to its field offices in Chicago and San Francisco, which stated that "the differences between Newton and Cleaver now appear to be irreconcilable, no further counterintelligence

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<sup>72</sup> U.S. Senate, *Staff Reports*, 202.

<sup>73</sup> Churchill, "To Disrupt, Discredit, Destroy," 31-32.

activity in this regard will be undertaken at this time and now new targets must be established.”<sup>74</sup>

The events surrounding the Newton-Cleaver rift dealt a huge blow to the BPP and its membership. By constantly aggravating the conflict between Newton and Cleaver, the FBI turned factionalism into one of the BPP’s most divisive and damaging internal issues. Not only did the Party lose a significant amount of community support because of intra-party conflict and the violence that was associated with it, but it also lost support of some of its most dedicated members. These members rightfully believed that intra-party conflict was destroying the BPP from within. They had become convinced that the Party was no longer in a position to lead the revolution. Many of them therefore decided to leave the BPP for other organizations, such as the Black Liberation Army (BLA). The BLA was founded by Cleaver loyalists, and so it was a very suitable option for those who were disillusioned with both the internecine warfare and the new ideological course of the BPP. The Newton-Cleaver rift, which was severely aggravated by the FBI, thus struck at the core of the BPP, leaving the Party in a shambles for months.<sup>75</sup>

The story of the Newton-Cleaver rift is worth telling in detail, because it is the best example of how internal and external forces coalesced in the demise of the Black Panther Party. It is obvious that the FBI’s counter-intelligence activities exacerbated the pre-existing tensions between Newton and Cleaver. The Bureau recognized the ideological differences between the two, and used this as an opportunity to fully exploit the internal tensions within the BPP. However, it would be wrong to attribute the split between Newton and Cleaver to the FBI’s efforts alone. The same goes for internal issues as well. The Newton-Cleaver rift shows that the internal and external forces affecting the BPP had

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<sup>74</sup> U.S. Senate, *Staff Reports*, 205-207.

<sup>75</sup> Pearson, *The Shadow of the Panther*, 231-233.

a mutually reinforcing effect on one another. The growth of internal tensions within the BPP led the FBI to increase its counter-intelligence activities, and this increase of activities, in turn, accelerated the growth of these internal tensions. This vicious cycle continued up to the point where the situation began to spiral out of control. In the case of the Newton-Cleaver rift, this occurred with their discussion on television, which sealed Cleaver's fate. Thus, in the end it was the combination of FBI counter-intelligence activities and intra-party conflict that drove Newton and Cleaver apart.

The FBI's efforts to damage the Black Panther Party from within operated in tandem with its efforts to damage the Party from the outside. For example, the FBI was known to actively promote violence between the BPP and other militant organizations in an effort to stimulate inter-party conflict. One of these "violent" conflicts existed between the BPP and a group called United Slaves (US). As the BPP began establishing a foothold in the major cities of California, it often came into conflict with US and its leader, Ron Karenga. Karenga was a former member of the Afro-American Association, just like Newton. Even though they were friends in college, ideological differences had driven them apart. After he left the AAA, Karenga became a strong proponent of cultural nationalism. He believed that the struggle of the black community was essentially a race struggle. This conflicted with the idea of Newton and the BPP, who defined the struggle in terms of class. These basic ideological differences created animosity between the BPP and US, and would therefore make a clash between the two organizations inevitable.<sup>76</sup>

J. Edgar Hoover had already noted back in November, 1968, that major differences existed between the BPP and US. He stated that:

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<sup>76</sup> Seale, *Seize the time*, 23.

In order to fully capitalize upon BPP and US differences as well as to exploit all avenues of creating further dissention in the ranks of the BPP, recipient offices are instructed to submit imaginative and hard-hitting counterintelligence measures aimed at crippling the BPP.<sup>77</sup>

This counter-intelligence program effectively began after a meeting between the BPP and US on January 17, 1969, got out of hand. The two organizations were arguing about who would become the director of the Black Studies program at UCLA. During the meeting, several US members drew guns and shot Alprentice “Bunchy” Carter and Jon Huggins, two leaders of the BPP’s Los Angeles chapter. After the shoot-out, the FBI began sending out derogatory cartoons to local BPP offices which indicated to the BPP “that the US organization feels that they are ineffectual, inadequate, and riddled with graft and corruption.”<sup>78</sup> Needless to say, the FBI made it appear as if US was responsible for the fabrication and distribution of these cartoons. Interestingly enough, the BPP and US actually tried to work out their differences after the shoot-out, even though the FBI was using its caricatures to further aggravate the tensions between the two organizations. They managed to establish a truce, but it was not stable enough to resist the FBI’s relentless assaults. In order to violently break the truce, the FBI instructed its informants within the BPP’s Los Angeles and San Diego chapters to initiate violent operations against US, such as shooting up the homes of some of its members. At the same time, the FBI would be distributing more cartoons as well, seeing as how the FBI’s San Diego field office had informed the FBI headquarters that the Panthers were fed up with being made fun of in cartoons.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> U.S. Senate, *Staff Reports*, 190.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>79</sup> Churchill, “To Disrupt, Discredit, Destroy,” 16-17.

The Bureau was apparently successful in its activities, as violence between the BPP and US began to escalate once again. On August 14, 1969, members of US wounded two Panthers in an ambush; the next day, they killed Sylvester Bell, another BPP member. The FBI considered this increase of violence to be a positive result of its smear campaign, and so it immediately began making plans for the future distribution of cartoons. The FBI continued its efforts to promote violence between the BPP and US throughout 1969-70, hoping that they would continue to inflict serious harm to one another. In fact, the FBI was convinced that it only had to push the two organizations in the right direction. All that was left to do was to “grant nature the opportunity to take her due course.”<sup>80</sup>

What is interesting about the conflict between the BPP and US in particular is that it clearly demonstrates the effectiveness of the FBI’s counter-intelligence programs. At first, it seemed as if the FBI’s efforts were to no avail, seeing as how the BPP and US reconciled their differences. However, by continuing to produce and distribute derogatory cartoons, the FBI managed to instigate a conflict between the two organizations once again. The truce was not very stable to begin with, but the continuation of violent conflict between the BPP and US can nevertheless still be attributed to the FBI’s counter-intelligence activities. However, in the context of the demise of the BPP, it is necessary to consider the impact of these activities on the Party’s internal dynamics as well.

Inter-party conflict such as this would eventually contribute to the demise of the BPP in several ways. First and foremost, people grew tired of all the violence that was tearing the black community apart. As was the case with intra-party conflict, excessive violence was one of the reasons why people began leaving the Party. After all, they joined

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<sup>80</sup> U.S. Senate, *Staff Reports*, 189-195.  
Churchill, “To Disrupt, Discredit, Destroy,” 17-18 .

the BPP with the concept of self-defense in mind, not fratricide. Furthermore, inter-party conflict was a major distraction from the BPP's actual goals. Instead of fighting the oppressor, the Panthers were too busy fighting within their own community.

Unbeknownst to them, this oppressor, in the form of the FBI, was largely responsible for the entire situation. The FBI's efforts to promote inter-party conflict thus took a heavy toll on the Black Panther Party.

The FBI's counter-intelligence activities were so successful in part because of the Bureau's ability to exploit and exacerbate the Black Panther Party's pre-existing internal and external conditions. This was clearly demonstrated in the case of the Newton-Cleaver rift and the conflict between the BPP and US, but it also became apparent in the FBI's media offensive. The FBI realized from the outset that it would have to limit the Party's ability to spread its message via the media. By preventing the BPP from publishing its articles and stories, the Bureau would be able to create a distorted image of the Party in the national media. The easiest way to do this was to manipulate the Party's self-created image.

In *Up Against the Wall*, Curtis J. Austin argues that the BPP's emphasis on self-defense left it open to mischaracterization and infiltration by government agencies on a local and national level. Since the beginning of the Party, the Panthers had relied on rhetoric of violence to carry across their revolutionary ideals. According to Austin, this rhetoric had two major effects on the BPP: it helped to attract a lot of young new recruits, and it placed the Party in a national spotlight. Whereas the former stimulated growth, the latter stimulated decline. This had to do with the fact that the government and the FBI made sure that the BPP's ideals would be misinterpreted. The Party's rhetoric of violence and its emphasis on self-defense had developed out of a need for the black community to

defend itself against police brutality. The Panthers never meant to unleash civil war in the United States. Rather, they were merely trying to demonstrate that they would no longer put up with the physical and psychological abuse. As Austin puts it, the BPP's emphasis on violence was "rhetorical flourish", which underlined the use of violence "in self-defense, not revolution."<sup>81</sup>

The point is that the Panthers' rhetoric of violence should not be taken literally. As D. J. Mulloy argues in an article entitled "Liberty or Death", violent language and rhetoric of revolution could be interpreted as being a strategy for those who lack both political and social influence. Furthermore, this type of language can also serve to attract attention to one's cause, whether it is positive or negative. These two interpretations clearly apply to the BPP. The black community was essentially powerless against police brutality and other forms of social oppression, because it was not organized. Being a part of this community and sharing its powerlessness, the Panthers sought to create a new political movement which was supposed to assist the black community in liberating itself. Their rhetoric of violence, as Mulloy suggests, attracted attention to their cause and served as an important recruitment tool, because people shared the BPP's desire for change. So, lacking political power, the BPP initially relied on its rhetoric of violence to mobilize the black community for change.<sup>82</sup>

Unfortunately for the BPP, the media took everything that the Panthers said literally. Slogans such as "Off the pigs!" would be turned into headlines, which generally intimidated a lot of people. The Party's emphasis on self-defense and its rhetoric of violence were easily misinterpreted, which the FBI realized all too well. By manipulating

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<sup>81</sup> Austin, *Up Against the Wall*, 89-112.

<sup>82</sup> D. J. Mulloy, "Liberty or Death': Violence and the Rhetoric of Revolution in the American Militia Movement," *Canadian Review of American Studies* 1 (2008) 6-16.

the Party's self-created image, the FBI could easily distort people's perception of the BPP. If people were made to believe that the Panthers were a bunch of gun-toting criminals, the FBI would be able to justify its counter-intelligence actions. After all, a violence-prone organization such as the BPP would have to be repressed in order to safeguard the status quo in the United States.

By carefully exploiting the BPP's militant image, the FBI hoped that it could discredit and discourage people who supported the Party in its community organizing efforts. A good example of this approach was the FBI's effort to drive a wedge between the BPP and the Peace and Freedom Party (PFP). As was discussed in the first chapter, Eldridge Cleaver had forged an alliance with the PFP after Huey Newton was sentenced to prison. This alliance proved to be an important organizational step in the development of the BPP, because it was one of the first interracial coalitions that the BPP had joined. Now that two of America's most radical organizations were cooperating, the FBI had plenty of reason to be worried. The Bureau therefore began sending letters to Ed Pearl, one of the founders of the PFP, to convince him of the fact that the BPP was a dangerous organization. The letters stated that "certain whites in the PFP who get in the way of the Panthers will be dealt with in a violent manner."<sup>83</sup> By hinting at personal violence, the FBI hoped that it could intimidate the PFP. In more extreme cases, the FBI would send out forged letters to supporters of the Party, which suggested that the BPP was an organization "which openly advocates the violent overthrow of our free enterprise system."<sup>84</sup> The FBI thus frequently drew upon the Panthers' violent image to get people to withdraw their support for the BPP.

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<sup>83</sup> U.S. Senate, *Staff Reports*, 208.

<sup>84</sup> *Idem*, 209.



The FBI's media offensive was successful in that it both prevented the Panthers from expressing their views and stimulated the media to publish articles that were unfavorable to the Party. A prime example of how this worked was the article that was published after the assassination of Fred Hampton. People were led to believe that the Panthers fired first, which would justify the police's actions. According to the newspapers, they acted out of self-defense, which is, in the context of the BPP's emphasis on self-defense, quite ironic. The media simply relied on the existing image of the violence-prone Panthers to distort the truth of what had actually occurred that night. Even when it became clear that the story had been fabricated by the police and the media, nobody was inclined to believe the Panthers. The ways in which the assassination of Fred Hampton was reported therefore shows how easily the FBI and the media could manipulate and exploit the BPP's self-created image.<sup>85</sup>

The FBI's media offensive did not necessarily contribute directly to the demise of the BPP, but it certainly made life for the Panthers much harder than it needed to be. Their goals were misinterpreted, they lost public support, and recruitment became more difficult. One could also argue that the BPP made life difficult for itself, in the early stages of its existence, by relying so heavily on its rhetoric of violence. As Curtis J. Austin argues, this rhetoric is the main reason for why the BPP has been mischaracterized throughout the years. It turned the Party into a target for local and national law enforcement agencies, which used the image of the violence-prone Panthers to intimidate people and to distort reality. With the full force of the FBI's counter-intelligence programs bearing down on the BPP, Austin claims, the Party's fate had already been sealed. All that the FBI

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<sup>85</sup> Churchill and Vander Wall, *Agents of Repression*, 63-77.

had to do was to carefully exploit the BPP's self-created image. By doing so, the Bureau ensured that the Panthers would be fighting an uphill battle from the start.<sup>86</sup>

The question that remains to be answered is how effective the FBI's counter-intelligence programs actually were. It is clear that these programs directly influenced the BPP and its members, but it is difficult to determine just how much of a difference they made. The problem in this regard is how one should measure the "effectiveness" of the programs. In the past, several sociologists have pondered this very same question.

In an article entitled "Thoughts on a Neglected Category of Social Movement Participant", sociologist Gary T. Marx makes an important differentiation between highly centralized social organizations on the one hand, and decentralized organizations on the other hand. He argues that "the protest organizations of the 1960s consisted not of highly centralized, formally organized, tightly knit groups of experience revolutionaries bent on carefully planned criminal conspiracies, but were instead decentralized, with fluid leadership and task assignments, shifting memberships, and emphasis on participation."<sup>87</sup> Marx claims that outside penetration of these "open" groups by organizations such as the FBI would have had a significantly weaker effect than it would have on "closed" groups, because the "open" groups were often optimistic, maybe a tad naïve, and generally had nothing to hide. In this context, the Black Panther Party would be considered to be a "closed" group, because of its hierarchization and formal organization. Marx's theory thus suggests that the Party, being a "closed" group, would have been more affected by

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<sup>86</sup> Austin, *Up Against the Wall*, 335-348.

<sup>87</sup> Gary T. Marx, "Thoughts on a Neglected Category of Social Movement Participant: The Agents Provocateur and the Informant," *The American Journal of Sociology* 2 (September, 1974) 424.

outside influences and infiltration, and was a more interesting target than many of the other organizations of the civil rights era.<sup>88</sup>

In a different article by Marx, entitled “External Efforts to Damage or Facilitate Social Movements”, he suggests that the effectiveness of the FBI’s counter-intelligence actions was determined in large part by the extent to which these actions damaged or facilitated the course of organizations’ growth, development and decline. According to Marx, the FBI’s programs brought about changes which would have most likely occurred without these outside influences as well. The Bureau’s counter-intelligence programs merely accelerated the rate at which these changes occurred. So, even though Marx suggested that “closed” organizations such as the BPP were more susceptible to outside infiltration, he later came to believe that the impact of the FBI’s counter-intelligence programs was marginal at best.<sup>89</sup>

In the context of the BPP, it is important to consider that Marx’s first article was published in 1974, and the second article in 1979. Seeing as how the Church Committee reports were published in 1975/1976, it is very likely that Marx would have studied these reports in order to learn more about the details of the FBI’s counter-intelligence programs. While much more was known about the internal problems of the BPP in 1979 as well, it is quite odd that Marx would so easily relativize the impact of the FBI’s counter-intelligence programs on the BPP and other social movements of the 1960-70s.

Another leading sociologist, Anthony Oberschall, reached similar conclusions in an article entitled “The Decline of the 1960s Social Movements”. In this article, Oberschall argues that the impact of government repression on social movements of the 1960s was

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<sup>88</sup> Marx, “Thoughts on a Neglected Category of Social Movement Participant,” 423-424.

<sup>89</sup> Gary T. Marx, “External Efforts to Damage or Facilitate Social Movements: Some Patterns, Explanations, Outcomes, and Complications,” in *The Dynamics of Social Movements: Resource Mobilization, Social Control and Tactics*, ed. Mayer N. Zald and John D. McCarthy et al. (Cambridge: Winthrop, 1979) 119-122.

not as important as scholars were led to believe. He claims that government repression is only effective if all authorities work together and reinforce one another's actions, which he believes was clearly not the case in the 1960s. Prosecutions on a local and state level might have been more effective, but, in general, "repression of the 1960s movements was only marginally effective in precipitating movement decline."<sup>90</sup> So, in similar fashion to Gary T. Marx, Oberschall concludes that internal weaknesses were far more important than external repression.<sup>91</sup>

The general consensus among sociologists in the late 1970s thus seems to have been that the FBI's counter-intelligence programs were only marginally effective. In more recent scholarship, however, the issue has become more complex. Now that scholars are beginning to learn more and more about the true nature of the FBI's counter-intelligence programs, it is becoming increasingly difficult to ignore the impact of these programs on the 1960s social movements. In the case of the BPP, there are still scholars who continue to emphasize either the internal factors, such as Ollie A. Johnson in "Explaining the Demise of the Black Panther Party", or the external factors, such as Curtis J. Austin in *Up Against the Wall*, but, in general, most modern scholars seem to realize that the FBI's counter-intelligence programs had more than just a marginal effect on social movements such as the BPP. The FBI's programs were part of a larger system of government repression which clearly affected the organizational development of the Party. Therefore, one cannot discuss the growth and demise of the Black Panther Party without carefully considering the influence of the FBI and COINTELPRO.

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<sup>90</sup> Anthony Oberschall, *Social Movements: Ideologies, Interests, and Identities* (New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 1993) 291.

<sup>91</sup> Oberschall, *Social Movements*, 265-300.

So how effective were the FBI's counter-intelligence programs? If one takes Gary T. Marx's argument, that the effectiveness of these programs was determined mainly by the extent to which they influenced the growth, development, and decline of the social movements, and combines this with the knowledge of the Black Panther Party and the FBI that we have now, it would not make sense to conclude that the FBI's counter-intelligence programs merely had a marginal influence on the BPP. The FBI's efforts to promote inter- and intra-party conflict, to destroy the BPP's public image, and to induce paranoia within the ranks of the Party, all clearly contributed to the demise of the BPP. These efforts resulted in an increase of authoritarianism and factionalism within the Party, defection of members, loss of public support, and a general increase of violence. In other words, the FBI's efforts certainly did precipitate the decline of the BPP. So, if one equates effectiveness to decline, it becomes clear that the FBI's counter-intelligence programs were certainly effective.

One important argument that is still being used to downplay the importance of the FBI's programs is the fact that the FBI merely capitalized on pre-existing tensions within the BPP. As Gary T. Marx also argues, the Bureau's counter-intelligence programs only served to accelerate those internal changes which would have occurred without the FBI's interference as well. The basis for this argument is the understanding that the BPP was deeply flawed in its organizational structure, and that it was therefore only a matter of time before the Party would implode on itself. On the one hand, there is some truth to this argument, because the BPP's strict hierarchy and formal organization indirectly laid the foundation for the future increase of authoritarianism and factionalism within the Party. On the other hand, however, the BPP's internal tensions would most likely not have been as intense without the FBI's counter-intelligence programs. For example, it is

difficult to imagine that the Newton-Cleaver rift would have played out exactly the same without the interference of the FBI as well. Needless to say, internal tensions and developments within the Black Panther Party had a disastrous effect on the organization and its members, but it is paramount that these internal factors always be discussed in relation to the external factors, and vice versa.

Even though this paper has examined how effective the FBI's counter-intelligence programs actually were, the role of these programs in the demise of the Black Panther Party should not be overestimated. The same goes for the role of internal factors. By claiming that either internal or external factors were more important in the demise of the BPP, or rather, by marginalizing the effects of one of them, the overall complexity of the discussion is being sidetracked. As Doug McAdam argues in "The Decline of the Civil Rights Movement," a social movement is shaped by both internal and external factors throughout its existence, and so "the fate of any social movement is not simply a product of internal movement dynamics or external political processes but the interaction of the two."<sup>92</sup> This interaction between internal and external forces is what really gives shape to a social movement. On the one hand, the internal development of a movement cannot be understood without carefully considering both the direct and indirect influence of external forces on that movement. On the other hand, the development of external forces and processes cannot be understood without carefully considering the ways in which a social movement develops internally. The keyword, therefore, is interaction.

In the case of the Black Panther Party, interaction between internal and external forces has manifested itself in several different ways. One of the clearest examples of this

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<sup>92</sup> McAdam, "The Decline of the Civil Rights Movement," 316.

interaction is the way in which internal and external forces had a mutually reinforcing effect on one another. As was discussed before, the internal development of the Newton-Cleaver rift within the BPP, and the subsequent launch of the FBI's counter-intelligence programs aimed at aggravating that rift, clearly demonstrated that effect and its results. The internal and external forces would feed off one another to the point where the conflicts would have become irreconcilable. This was clearly the case with the defection of Eldridge Cleaver, as a result of the Newton-Cleaver rift, but it also occurred in other contexts. For example, the interaction between internal and external forces in the context of inter-party conflict led to irreconcilable differences between the BPP and other organizations. Furthermore, this particular process also played an important role in the public exploitation of the Panthers' rhetoric of violence. The demise of the BPP was therefore not simply a result of internal *or* external forces. Neither should be overemphasized nor marginalized. Instead, the demise of the Black Panther Party should be considered the result of the interaction and synthesis between both internal and external forces.

## Conclusion

The Black Panther Party is arguably one of the most misinterpreted and mischaracterized social movements in recent history. Following in the footsteps of the leaders of the civil rights era, the Panthers set out to revolutionize thinking in the black communities of the United States. With its initial emphasis on armed conflict and its rhetoric of violence, the BPP created an image for itself which was easily misinterpreted by the general public. However, underneath its militant surface, the BPP was defined by its strong social ideology.

Huey Newton and Bobby Seale founded the Black Panther Party as a response to the various forms of social oppression which the black communities of Oakland were confronted with on a daily basis. Their Ten-Point Program stated in simple terms what the BPP stood for and what it hoped to achieve. Simple things, such as proper education, housing, and health care, were still unavailable to a large part of the community, and so the BPP set out to do something about this situation. By setting up a variety of community organized survival programs, the Party intended to support the people until they could free themselves from their oppressor. Supporting the people also meant protecting them, and so the Panthers took to the streets, armed with their shotguns and books of law, to protect these people from the threat of police brutality. This revolutionary approach to civil rights quickly turned the BPP into a notorious organization, both within the Bay Area and the United States as a whole. While many people celebrated the Panthers' cause, others were feeling increasingly threatened by the prospect of revolution within the black communities. So, once the Party attained national



prominence, there was no escaping persecution by local and federal law enforcement agencies.

The FBI had set its sights on the Black Panther Party in September, 1968, with J. Edgar Hoover declaring that the BPP was the greatest threat to the internal security of the United States. The Bureau's main counter-intelligence program, COINTELPRO, had been active since the late 1950s, and had been focused on so-called "Black Nationalist Hate Groups" since the mid-1960s. Hoover clearly considered the BPP to be a threat to the status quo in the United States, and so the Party was labeled a Black Nationalist Hate Group as well. As was the case with the other targets of COINTELPRO, the FBI aimed to disrupt and neutralize the BPP. In order to do so, the Bureau had set a number of goals for its operations: fostering both inter-and intra-party conflict; undermining public support for the Party; and destroying the Party's public image. The FBI had a large number of (extralegal) methods at hand to achieve these goals, such as distributing false information, inducing paranoia by placing informants within the ranks of the BPP, and even getting people to assassinate prominent Panthers. The FBI therefore had many ways to persecute the BPP and its members, a fact which constituted a considerable handicap for the Party. Besides having to deal with internal developments and tensions, the BPP also had to deal with the external pressure created by the FBI's counter-intelligence programs.

As the 1960s came to a close, problems began accumulating for Huey Newton and the Black Panther Party. The first real setback was the fact that Newton was sentenced to prison in 1968 for a murder he did not commit. With Newton no longer in charge, the Party became increasingly fractured. The rank-and-file members were not content with David Hilliard's leadership, and many longed for Newton's return. When he finally did

return in 1970, the Party began its slow and painful demise. Developments such as the Newton-Cleaver rift, the centralization of BPP operations in Oakland, the 1973 mayoral election, and the rise of authoritarianism within the Party all contributed to its eventual demise. However, these internal developments would not have had the same effect on the BPP without the influence of the FBI's counter-intelligence programs. By fostering inter- and intra-party conflict, exploiting the BPP's rhetoric of violence, destroying its public image, and discrediting and discouraging its supporters, the FBI both directly and indirectly contributed to the demise of the Party.

Scholars have been debating the influence of both internal and external factors on social movements since the late 1960s. Outside influences, such as the FBI's counter-intelligence programs, were often considered to be only marginally effective in bringing about the demise of these movements; internal factors were generally considered to be more important. However, if one measures the effectiveness of the counter-intelligence programs by the extent to which they precipitated the decline of social movements, it becomes clear that the FBI's programs had more than just a marginal effect. Even though the FBI mainly capitalized on pre-existing tensions and developments within the BPP, the impact of COINTELPRO should not be underestimated. At the same time, it should not be *overestimated* either. As I have attempted to show, the internal and external forces operated in tandem and had a mutually reinforcing effect on one another. Therefore, the interaction between these forces is what eventually led to the demise of the BPP.

While most scholars nowadays construct fairly balanced accounts of the demise of the Black Panther Party, there is still a tendency to lean towards either internal or external factors as being the primary explanation for this demise. By doing so, the complexity of this issue is often undermined. With the ideas of Doug McAdam in mind, it

is necessary to consider the demise of the BPP in the context of interaction between internal and external forces. The debate should not be focused on what has contributed more to the demise of the Party, because this will only result in a seemingly endless discussion. Instead, by focusing on processes of interaction and synthesis, the debate can be moved into new directions.

## Appendix A

OCTOBER 1966

BLACK PANTHER PARTY  
PLATFORM AND PROGRAM

WHAT WE WANT

WHAT WE BELIEVE

1. WE WANT FREEDOM. WE WANT POWER TO DETERMINE THE DESTINY OF OUR BLACK AND OPPRESSED COMMUNITIES. We believe that Black and oppressed people will not be free until we are able to determine our destinies in our own communities ourselves, by fully controlling all the institutions which exist in our communities.
2. WE WANT FULL EMPLOYMENT FOR OUR PEOPLE. We believe that the federal government is responsible and obligated to give every person employment or a guaranteed income. We believe that if the American businessmen will not give full employment, then the technology and means of production should be taken from the businessmen and placed in the community so that the people of the community can organize and employ all of its people and give a high standard of living.
3. WE WANT AN END TO THE ROBBERY BY THE CAPITALISTS OF OUR BLACK AND OPPRESSED COMMUNITIES. We believe that this racist government has robbed us and now we are demanding the overdue debt of forty acres and two mules. Forty acres and two mules

were promised 100 years ago as restitution for slave labor and mass murder of Black people. We will accept the payment in currency which will be distributed to our many communities. The American racist has taken part in the slaughter of our fifty million Black people. Therefore, we feel this is a modest demand that we make.

4. WE WANT DECENT HOUSING, FIT FOR THE SHELTER OF HUMAN BEINGS. We believe that if the landlords will not give decent housing to our Black and oppressed communities, then housing and the land should be made into cooperatives so that the people in our communities, with government aid, can build and make decent housing for the people.
5. WE WANT DECENT EDUCATION FOR OUR PEOPLE THAT EXPOSES THE TRUE NATURE OF THIS DECADENT AMERICAN SOCIETY. WE WANT EDUCATION THAT TEACHES US OUR TRUE HISTORY AND OUR ROLE IN THE PRESENT-DAY SOCIETY. We believe in an educational system that will give to our people a knowledge of the self. If you do not have knowledge of yourself and your position in the society and in the world, then you will have little chance to know anything else.
6. WE WANT COMPLETELY FREE HEALTH CARE FOR ALL BLACK AND OPPRESSED PEOPLE. We believe that the government must provide, free of charge, for the people, health facilities which will not only treat our illnesses, most of which have come about as a result of our oppression, but which will also develop preventive medical programs to guarantee our future survival. We believe that mass health education and research programs must be developed to give all Black and oppressed people access to advanced scientific and medical information, so we may provide ourselves with proper medical attention and care.
7. WE WANT AN IMMEDIATE END TO POLICE BRUTALITY AND MURDER OF BLACK PEOPLE, OTHER PEOPLE OF COLOR, ALL OPPRESSED PEOPLE INSIDE THE UNITED STATES. We

believe that the racist and fascist government of the United States uses its domestic enforcement agencies to carry out its program of oppression against black people, other people of color and poor people inside the United States. We believe it is our right, therefore, to defend ourselves against such armed forces and that all Black and oppressed people should be armed for self defense of our homes and communities against these fascist police forces.

8. WE WANT AN IMMEDIATE END TO ALL WARS OF AGGRESSION. We believe that the various conflicts which exist around the world stem directly from the aggressive desire of the United States ruling circle and government to force its domination upon the oppressed people of the world. We believe that if the United States government or its lackeys do not cease these aggressive wars it is the right of the people to defend themselves by any means necessary against their aggressors.
9. WE WANT FREEDOM FOR ALL BLACK AND OPPRESSED PEOPLE NOW HELD IN U. S. FEDERAL, STATE, COUNTY, CITY, AND MILITARY PRISONS AND JAILS. WE WANT TRIALS BY A JURY OF PEERS FOR ALL PERSONS CHARGED WITH SO-CALLED CRIMES UNDER THE LAWS OF THIS COUNTRY. We believe that the many Black and poor oppressed people now held in United States prisons and jails have not received fair and impartial trials under a racist and fascist judicial system and should be free from incarceration. We believe in the ultimate elimination of all wretched, inhuman penal institutions, because the masses of men and women imprisoned inside the United States or by the United States military are the victims of oppressive conditions which are the real cause of their imprisonment. We believe that when persons are brought to trial they must be guaranteed, by the United States, juries of their peers, attorneys of their choice and freedom from imprisonment while awaiting trial.

10. WE WANT LAND, BREAD, HOUSING, EDUCATION, CLOTHING, JUSTICE, PEACE AND PEOPLE'S COMMUNITY CONTROL OF MODERN TECHNOLOGY. When, in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bonds which have connected them with another, and to assume, among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the laws of nature and nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation. We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed; that, whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute a new government, laying its foundation on such principles, and organizing its powers in such form as to them shall seem most likely to affect their safety and happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and, accordingly, all experience hath shown that mankind are most disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But, when a long train of abuses and usurpation, pursuing invariably the same object, evinces a design to reduce them under absolute despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such government, and to provide new guards for their future security.

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