

PICKING UP THE BOOKS: THE NEW HISTORIOGRAPHY OF THE BLACK PANTHER PARTY

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Paul Alkebulan. *Survival Pending Revolution: The History of the Black Panther Party.* Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2007. 176 pp. Notes, bibliography, and index. \$28.95.

Curtis J. Austin. *Up Against the Wall: Violence in the Making and Unmaking of the Black Panther Party.* Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2006. 456 pp. Photographs, notes, bibliography, and index. \$34.95.

Paul Bass and Douglas W. Rae. *Murder in the Model City: The Black Panthers, Yale, and the Redemption of a Killer.* New York: Basic Books, 2006. 322 pp. Photographs, notes, bibliography, and index. \$26.00.

Flores A. Forbes. *Will You Die With Me? My Life and the Black Panther Party.* New York: Atria Books, 2006. 302 pp. Photographs and index. \$26.00.

Jama Lazerow and Yohuru Williams, eds. *In Search of the Black Panther Party: New Perspectives on a Revolutionary Movement.* Durham: Duke University Press, 2006. 390 pp. Notes and index. \$84.95 (cloth); \$23.95 (paper).

Jane Rhodes. *Framing the Black Panthers: The Spectacular Rise of a Black Power Icon.* New York: The New Press, 2007. 416 pp. Notes, bibliography, and index. \$35.00.

A comprehensive review of all published scholarship on the Black Panther Party (BPP) leads to the inescapable conclusion that the huge recent upsurge in historical writing about the Panthers begins from a surprisingly weak and modest foundation. More than a decade ago, two major BPP autobiographies, Elaine Brown's *A Taste of Power* (1992) and David Hilliard's *This Side of Glory* (1993), along with Hugh Pearson's widely reviewed book on the late BPP co-founder Huey P. Newton, *The Shadow of the Panther* (1994), represented a first-generation revisiting of the Oakland-based group that sprang to life in 1966 but sputtered out of existence in 1982. Yet aside from thoughtful and

perceptive survey treatments of the BPP in two broader, more synoptic recent scholarly histories, Jeffrey O. G. Ogbar's *Black Power: Radical Politics and African American Identity* (2004) and Peniel E. Joseph's *Waiting 'Til the Midnight Hour: A Narrative History of Black Power in America* (2006), the list of truly valuable previous work concerning the Panthers is amazingly thin: Eric Cummins's unfortunately little-known *The Rise and Fall of California's Radical Prison Movement* (1994), articles by Errol A. Henderson (1997) and Erika Doss (1998), two chapters by Ollie A. Johnson III (1998) and Reynaldo Anderson (2005) in edited volumes, and a series of first-rate contributions by Scot Brown, all focusing on a rival group and culminating with *Fighting For US: Maulana Karenga, the US Organization, and Black Cultural Nationalism* (2003).¹

But the past fifteen months have witnessed the publication of six significant new books, ranging from an important memoir by the BPP's longtime head of security to a valuable study of how the media and pop culture contributed overwhelmingly to the Panthers' notoriety and fame. Paul Bass and Douglas Rae's exceptionally thorough examination of the Panthers' infamous 1969 Connecticut murder of their young colleague Alex Rackley, falsely accused of being a government informant, is more "true-crime" than academic history, but the other new titles run the university-press gamut from brief and sometimes incisive (Paul Alkebulan) to rich and discursive (Curtis Austin) to an edited volume whose chapters vary greatly in quality (Lazerow and Williams).

Panther scholarship would benefit immensely from a detailed and comprehensive narrative history that gives special care to how rapidly the BPP evolved through a succession of extremely fundamental changes. The BPP of September 1968 was dramatically different from the BPP of September 1967, and the Panthers' situation in December 1969 was radically different from what it had been a year earlier or what it would be a year later. Far too much of what has been written about the BPP fails to specify expressly which period of Panther history is being addressed or characterized, and interpretive clarity, and accuracy, will benefit greatly from a far more explicit appreciation and identification of the major turning points in the BPP's eventually tragic evolution. In particular, both Newton's initial confinement for the shooting death of an Oakland policeman in October 1967, and the explosive falling out between Newton and the BPP's incendiary Eldridge Cleaver in February 1971, need to be consistently acknowledged as points in time that marked decisive transformations—one ironically positive, and one destructively negative—in the BPP's brief life.

For non-specialists, a chronological summation is very much in order. Newton and Bobby Seale co-founded the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense in October 1966, and a few months later instituted their initial defining activity: armed patrols that closely monitored Oakland police behavior in the city's black neighborhoods. In February 1967 armed BPP members escorted Betty

Shabazz, the widow of Malcolm X, during a Bay Area visit, and in April Panthers protested the police shooting of a young black man in the East Bay north of Berkeley. On May 2, some thirty gun-carrying Panthers marched into the California state capitol in Sacramento to protest a bill sponsored by an Oakland-area legislator that would outlaw their carrying loaded firearms in public.²

The Sacramento demonstration brought the Panthers their first national news media attention, but over the ensuing five months the Party grew little if at all.³ Co-founder Bobby Seale asserted years later that there were "about seventy-five" members when Newton's October shoot-out occurred, but David Hilliard remembered the true total as being twelve and another key early officer, BPP Field Marshal Donald Cox, said the actual number was "between five and 10."⁴ Then came the October 28 shooting incident that left Oakland police officer John Frey dead and both Newton and a second officer seriously wounded.

Newton was jailed and charged with murder, but as David Hilliard later wrote, the shoot-out marked the start of "the second life of the Party" (p. 3). That ironic result was largely the handiwork of Newton and Seale's most important and influential recruit, Eldridge Cleaver, an aspiring writer who had gravitated to the Panthers in the spring of 1967 after being released from a lengthy prison sentence in December 1966. Along with his soon-to-be-wife, Kathleen Neal Cleaver, and graphic artist Emory Douglas, the BPP's Minister of Culture, Cleaver launched a "Free Huey" campaign that, by the time Newton's murder trial commenced in July 1968, became one of the iconic social protest themes of the late 1960s. The Cleavers and Douglas also were instrumental in expanding the BPP's monthly newspaper into a regularly published weekly that quickly became a mainstay of the party's public identity. Cleaver, working as the BPP's Minister of Information, also initiated outreach efforts aimed at creating alliances, or mergers, with other radical groups both white and black, most notably the Peace and Freedom Party (PFP) and the splintering Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), previously a mainstay of the southern black freedom struggle.⁵

The PFP alliance flourished, while the SNCC linkage soon foundered acrimoniously, but hardly five months after Newton's shooting and jailing, Cleaver ended up in a major police gunfight of his own, one which cost the Panthers' their first fatality, a seventeen-year-old member nicknamed Lil' Bobby Hutton. Oakland police may have intentionally killed Hutton, or Hutton may have tried to flee after purporting to surrender, but years later David Hilliard, Emory Douglas, and even Cleaver himself all admitted that Cleaver had purposely sought out an armed confrontation with the police.⁶

That shoot-out put Cleaver in jail until a judge released him in mid-June, but the "Free Huey" bandwagon continued to gain steam, with new Panther

chapters opening in cities from Seattle to New York. Newton's murder trial got underway in mid-July amidst impressive daily Panther protests in downtown Oakland, but in early September Newton was convicted of manslaughter, as opposed to murder.⁷ Three weeks later an appeals court ordered Cleaver returned to prison to await his own trial, and when California's top court refused to intercede, Cleaver fled to Cuba, and eventually to Algeria, rather than surrender.⁸

The Panthers were thus bereft of their two most heralded and influential figures just as the Party's ranks—and notoriety—reached new heights. Cleaver's autobiographical memoir, *Soul on Ice* (1968), had won widespread praise and attention following its early spring publication, and in its wake much of the coverage accorded the BPP by the nation's number one news outlet, the *New York Times*, was strikingly favorable. One front-page story called Cleaver "a very effective leader, a brilliant writer," and another reported that in the Bay Area, the BPP was "quietly building significant relationships in the Negro community," especially with churches. Reporter Earl Caldwell—whose insightful coverage of the Panthers from 1968 until 1971 is an invaluable historical resource—quoted Donald Cox as saying, "We're trying to get people over the fear that we're some kind of monsters," and the story implied they were succeeding.⁹

But further problems lay right ahead. Just before fleeing, Cleaver had told Caldwell that the Party was struggling to control what Caldwell termed "criminal types coming into the organization to serve criminal purposes." "We know there are some people that we have got to get rid of," Cleaver had said, and by January 1969 a wide-ranging internal BPP purge was underway.¹⁰ Even more dangerous was the hateful animosity that was intensifying between the BPP's Los Angeles chapter, now headed by former gang leader Alprentice "Bunchy" Carter, whom Cleaver had recruited into the BPP after befriending him in prison, and US, a well-armed cultural nationalist organization led by Ron (later Maulana) Karenga. Both Clayborne Carson and Jeffrey Ogbar have written powerfully about how Cleaver and Carter's excessive and vituperative attacks upon US fueled unnecessary tensions, and on January 17, 1969, a physical confrontation between BPP and US members at the University of California at Los Angeles culminated with an US gunman, Claude Hubert-Gaidi, shooting to death both Carter and fellow Panther John Huggins.¹¹

Scot Brown's fine scholarship remains by far the most thorough and dependable treatment of Carter and Huggins's deaths.¹² Three US members were convicted for their roles in the killings, though neither Hubert-Gaidi nor Harold Jones-Tawala, another US member involved in the confrontation, have ever been located or taken into custody. While the Federal Bureau of Investigation was already at that time moving to exacerbate the US-BPP feud, through its disruptive "Black Nationalist Hate Group" COINTELPRO initiatives, almost

all of those FBI efforts post-dated Carter and Huggins's killings. Although much sloppy and undependable writing has presumed or declared that the FBI was responsible for those two murders, the 1976 conclusion of the U. S. Senate Church Committee investigation into the FBI's anti-Panther program merits quotation: "we have been unable to establish a direct link between any of the FBI's specific efforts to promote violence and particular acts of violence that occurred."¹³

The same month that marked the tragedy of those deaths, and the start of the BPP's internal security purge, also witnessed the launch of what would become the Party's signature "survival program"—its free breakfast for children project. The program brought the BPP significant laudatory press coverage, and when the Panthers similarly soon initiated "liberation school" classes in several cities, more public attention followed.¹⁴ Paul Alkebulan observes that the "survival programs were originally instituted not only to serve the people but also to improve the party's image in the black community by providing positive, disciplined activities for the membership," yet Curtis Austin concludes that "the degree of success the programs had remains unclear" (Alkebulan, p. 29; Austin, p. 262).¹⁵

That landmark programmatic innovation did not bring an end to the BPP's burgeoning legal problems. In early April 1969, twenty-one New York-area Panthers were indicted and jailed for what prosecutors claimed was a far-reaching plot to bomb various buildings and rail lines.¹⁶ In early May Oakland Panthers firebombed a neighborhood store that had donated only one dozen eggs, rather than the requested six dozen, to the BPP's free breakfast program, and ten days after that, nineteen-year-old Panther Alex Rackley was shot to death in a Connecticut marsh by two fellow Panthers who had falsely been told that Rackley was a government informant.¹⁷

Rackley's murder was ordered and overseen by self-styled Panther enforcer George Sams, who had brought the young man up from New York City only three days earlier and then supervised a hellacious inquisition during which Rackley was beaten, burned, and scalded with boiling water. Eight New Haven Panthers were charged with murder, and in mid-August, after George Sams was arrested in Canada, BPP chairman Bobby Seale, whom Sams alleged ordered the killing, was also indicted and taken into custody.

A year later, one of the two actual gunmen, Warren Kimbro, confessed and pled guilty, and the second, Lonnie McLucas, was convicted and sentenced to twelve- to fifteen-years imprisonment. Seale was subsequently acquitted, as jurors understandably declined to credit Sams's testimony. But, as James T. Campbell memorably puts it in his chapter in the Lazerow and Williams volume, the legal charges aside, "something was clearly amiss in the political culture of an organization whose members would willingly torture a man they had just met based solely on the testimony of [Sams,] another complete stranger" (p. 101).

Far too many scholars have failed to address the issue that Campbell articulates so poignantly in highlighting what he rightly terms “a watershed in Panther history” (p. 101). Curtis Austin acknowledges that the “New Haven Panthers followed in lockstep behind Sams’s actions,” but simply remarks that “for whatever reason, no one bothered to question his antics” (p. 290). Austin also regrettably repeats the wholly unsubstantiated claim that “Sams was an FBI informer who pretended to be from [BPP] headquarters in Oakland,” an error in which other scholars are likewise complicit (p. 211).¹⁸

Mid-1969 saw the BPP struggling to alter its style and message just as it came under increasing law enforcement investigation and pressure. In late July, Earl Caldwell wrote that “great change has taken place in the Black Panther party.” Guns “are almost not seen now,” and “the four letter-words that had been so much a part of the rhetoric just a few months ago”—especially before Cleaver’s flight abroad—“were gone” too. Describing BPP headquarters as a “crisp businesslike operation,” Caldwell highlighted how “the enemy is no longer just whitey. The Panthers define the enemy now as capitalism and imperialism and racism.” Bobby Seale, he added, now declared that “Black racism is just as bad as white racism.”¹⁹

But by September the FBI had intensified its COINTELPRO efforts, and armed clashes between local police forces and Panthers included a November shootout in which two Chicago officers and one Panther were killed. Three weeks later an early-morning raid ended with Illinois Panther leaders Fred Hampton and Mark Clark dead from police gunfire. Following those deaths, Earl Caldwell wrote, the BPP’s Oakland headquarters exhibited a “siege-like atmosphere,” and Party chief of staff David Hilliard announced that the BPP now advocated “the very direct overthrow of the Government by way of force and violence. By picking up guns and moving against it,” the BPP recognized that “the only solution . . . is armed struggle.”²⁰

Panther membership was down by half from an estimated five thousand a year earlier, yet while the law enforcement clashes had sapped the BPP’s strength, Caldwell reported that “they also appear to have generated broader support—from both the black and white communities—than the Panthers were ever able to muster before.”²¹ A famous instance of that support came in mid-January 1970, when conductor Leonard Bernstein hosted a BPP fundraising party that attracted both news coverage and editorial criticism. In the next morning’s *New York Times*, the two featured Panthers, Donald Cox and Henry Mitchell, were portrayed most favorably, but an ensuing *Times* editorial rebuked “elegant slumming that degrades patrons and patronized alike.” Tom Wolfe’s lengthy account of the event did not appear in print until almost four months later, but “Radical Chic: That Party at Lenny’s” “arguably shaped the historical memory of the Panthers and their white supporters—and indeed the memory of the sixties generally—more than any other single journalistic piece,” Michael Staub has asserted.²²

But arch send-ups were the least of the BPP's problems. With Cleaver a fugitive, Newton in prison, and Seale in custody in Connecticut awaiting trial for Rackley's murder, the BPP was more bereft of leadership than ever. Donald Cox left the country in spring 1970, and in Oakland David Hilliard and his brother June functioned as the party's commanders. Publication of the party's weekly newspaper remained the BPP's defining activity, even more than the free-breakfast program, but the functional independence from national headquarters that many chapters enjoyed underscores the analytical value of James T. Campbell's suggestion in the Lazerow and Williams volume that "the BPP may not have been a single national movement at all but rather a congeries of local movements" (p. 99).

Insightful and original work can be done on the BPP and particularly its local chapters by historians who thoroughly mine often-obscure contemporaneous sources—old newspaper stories and court files plus FBI documents that are obtainable through Freedom of Information Act requests—and rigorously yet empathetically interview both surviving Panthers *and* those who covered or investigated them. Roz Payne's memorably titled chapter in the Lazerow and Williams volume, "WACing Off: Gossip, Sex, Race and Politics in the World of FBI Special Case Agent William A. Cohendet," represents a unique and highly instructive effort to probe how one San Francisco-based daily observer of the BPP perceived and portrayed the Party's activities. As Kenneth O'Reilly emphasized previously, Cohendet and his superiors in the FBI's San Francisco field office "questioned how serious was the Black Panther threat to the nation's security" before reluctantly succumbing to J. Edgar Hoover's insistence that the BPP be intensely targeted.²³ Similarly original, yet utterly different, is Jama Lazerow's own finely honed portrait of an otherwise utterly obscure Panther from New Bedford, Massachusetts, Frank "Parky" Grace. His erratic but energetic life exhibited "a porous boundary between his criminal and political activity," and Lazerow suggests that Grace exemplifies how the Panthers were "forever skirting the border . . . between radical politics and illegal activity" (pp. 134, 135).

Reynaldo Anderson's 2005 chapter on the BPP chapter in Des Moines, Iowa, is another highly suggestive example of how thorough grassroots scholarship can richly improve Panther historiography. Jane Rhodes' *Framing the Panthers* sketches how important the BPP newspaper was in the daily life of the party, particularly since the net income of \$40,000 a month made it the BPP's largest source of funds. "Selling and producing the newspaper became a concrete activity for Panther members searching for some tangible result for their often symbolic efforts" (p. 105). Anderson's interviews with former Iowa Panthers, however, reflect the friction that developed when Oakland headquarters ordered local branches to focus on selling more copies of the newspaper. "Distribution had become such a financial crutch. They were pushing paper

distribution over any other works for the party," former Panther Charles Knox told Anderson. "It was a quota kind of thing" (p. 292).²⁴

On May 29, 1970, in a surprise ruling that promised the unexpected return of the BPP's now widely lionized co-founder, a California appellate court overturned Huey Newton's conviction for the 1967 shooting of Officer Frey. Newton would not actually be freed until California's highest court considered prosecutors' appeal, but the Newton whom Earl Caldwell visited in prison in early July seemed radically different from the revolutionary image that had been immortalized world-wide—especially by a famous picture showing a seated Newton holding a spear in one hand and a shotgun in the other—during the almost three years he had been incarcerated. "We've never advocated violence," Newton told Caldwell, and "he says he is not the Huey P. Newton in the poster." Indeed, Caldwell stated that Newton "does not fit that image" and quoted Newton as saying his ambition was simply "a Democratic Socialist society free of racism."²⁵

As Peniel Joseph rightly observes in *Waiting 'Til the Midnight Hour*, the BPP "had changed dramatically" during Newton's long absence. On one hand the party had grown tremendously during 1968, and then contracted significantly during 1969. Equally if not more importantly, however, Newton and Seale's initial "rhetoric of self-defense" had been "ratcheted up toward advocacy of revolutionary violence" first by Cleaver and, since his flight abroad, by David Hilliard (p. 250). That stance and Newton's agenda stood in undeniable tension, but the most immediate problem, as Joseph again has emphasized, was that the Huey Newton who was released from custody on August 5 "proved to be a major disappointment," especially as a political speaker, when compared to his heroic public image (p. 254).²⁶

The BPP had grown from almost nothing, to a major political presence, during Newton's incarceration, yet Newton seemed unprepared—and perhaps unable—to offer meaningful leadership to the new organization he suddenly inherited. Cleaver's ideological spirit loomed large, and during the fall BPP efforts to establish a multi-racial Revolutionary Peoples' Constitutional Convention eventually came to naught.²⁷ In January 1971 Newton expelled from the BPP Elmer "Geronimo" Pratt, a mainstay of the Los Angeles chapter whose legal troubles reflected his loyalty to Cleaver's revolutionary stance. That move initiated a fundamental sundering of the Party. Two weeks later two of the leading Panthers who were defendants in the New York bombing case, plus Newton's personal secretary, suddenly fled the country, and Newton's expulsion of them from the BPP put the Panthers' internal schism on the front page of the *New York Times*.²⁸

From there matters tumbled downhill rapidly and tragically. On February 26, during a live broadcast link-up that allowed Eldridge Cleaver in Algiers and Huey Newton in Oakland to speak directly, and publicly, to each other,

the two leaders angrily criticized and attacked each other. In the wake of that call, Newton expelled Cleaver and his supporters from the BPP, and Cleaver attempted to carry on a Panther party of his own. In another front-page *Times* story, Earl Caldwell stated that the BPP "is now only a skeleton of what it was just a year ago," and San Francisco news reports that the now-reclusive Newton was quietly living in an expensive lake-front penthouse apartment created further turmoil in Party ranks. Then the schism turned deadly, with Robert "Spider" Webb, a Cleaver ally, murdered on a Harlem street corner, and William Seidler, a white Philadelphia storeowner who was a crucial Cleaver faction ally and contact, assassinated in a purported robbery. Four weeks later, Sam Napier, a Newton supporter and circulation manager for the BPP newspaper, was tortured and then executed by Cleaver henchmen in Queens, New York.²⁹

Those murders "signaled the beginning of the end of the Black Panther Party as a national organization," Peniel Joseph has rightly observed (p. 267). "Nationally, hundreds of Panthers quit or resigned, confused by the constant stream of recriminations and acts of random violence that punctuated the party's split" (p. 268). Bobby Seale returned to Oakland in May after being acquitted of involvement in Rackley's murder, but Newton's renewed emphasis on building up BPP community service programs, particularly a successful "liberation school" for elementary-age children in Oakland, masked a simultaneous concentration of all BPP power and authority in his increasingly mercurial hands.

Early in 1972 Newton ordered the BPP's entire remaining nationwide membership to move to Oakland so that all energies could be focused on winning local-level governmental power through a new stress on electoral politics. The order for Panthers to disengage from their hometown roots led to a further drop in the Party's now-modest ranks, but in Oakland almost a dozen BPP members or supporters won seats on community development and local planning councils in mid-1972. The Party geared up for a major 1973 campaign in which Seale would run for mayor of Oakland and Newton loyalist Elaine Brown for a city council seat. Neither candidacy was successful, though both won more-than-respectable vote totals. Yet "the impact of the electoral defeat was devastating on the Party because its members had invested so much time and effort in the campaigns," Ollie Johnson has written. "Shortly after the election, many Panthers resigned from the Party because of disappointment, exhaustion, and disillusionment" (p. 405).³⁰

The Oakland consolidation also marked the increasingly visible emergence of outright criminality in top BPP ranks. Both Alkebulan and Austin assert that a Party "underground" existed as early as 1967, and Flores Forbes confesses that "everything we did" from 1972 forward "was geared toward some type of futuristic belief in an armed struggle that would be waged in secret

while the Party continued to develop its political base of support through the electoral process." (Alkebulan, p. 92; Austin, p. 149; Forbes, p. 75). But while Forbes, and Newton, may have imagined in 1972 that the Party's well-armed gunmen might eventually be used for revolutionary ends, Newton's gang-like "squad" actually did little more than prey on Oakland drug dealers so as to finance Newton's late-night lifestyle and their own often-violent escapades.³¹ Both Jeffrey Ogbar and Peniel Joseph, as well as the late Hugh Pearson, have previously confronted how "Newton the revolutionary" was, in Joseph's words, "replaced by Newton the racketeer" (p. 287), but Austin addresses this dimension of the BPP's activities more directly and bluntly than any previous scholar. "There is no doubt," he writes, that Newton "and his henchmen used violence to extort money from people involved in vice in Oakland. Nor is there any doubt that Newton mistreated and abused fellow party members" in the post-1972 period (p. 339).³²

The final denouement took eight long years. Early in 1974 Newton expelled David and June Hilliard, and in July Bobby Seale left the Party. In early August witnesses saw Newton shoot and kill a seventeen-year-old black female streetwalker, and soon thereafter Newton fled to Cuba. Elaine Brown took charge in his absence, but in December the Party's bookkeeper, Betty Van Patter, disappeared under mysterious circumstances before her body was found in San Francisco Bay. Brown gave the Party significant political heft within Oakland, but soon after Newton returned to the United States in 1977 to face the pending murder charge, "Fly" Forbes and his fellow Panther gunmen botched an attempt to assassinate the key eyewitness against Newton and instead left one of their own men dead at the scene. One month later Brown quit the Party and left Oakland. By 1980 the BPP had shrunk to twenty-seven members, most of whom worked at the Party's Oakland school, and in 1982 the school, and the Party, passed from the scene. Embezzlement charges were subsequently filed against Newton for siphoning funds away from the school; soon after pleading no contest to those charges in 1989, Newton was killed by a Oakland drug dealer from whom he was demanding free goods. He was 47. Eldridge Cleaver, who had returned to the United States in 1975, become a born-again Christian and then a conservative Republican, died in 1998 at age 62.³³

Scholarly analyses of the BPP's rise and fall often cite the Party's rigidly centralized and authoritarian leadership structure as one of its most defining attributes. Since Newton and Seale from the very beginning styled the BPP as a "vanguard" or Leninist-style enterprise, some writers accept this characteristic as natural, but the most trenchant of scholars highlight it as a fatal flaw.³⁴ As Errol Henderson wrote a decade ago, "the antagonistic language of Marxism-Leninism, vanguardism, and the cult of personality allowed for purges and the excommunication of people and families in a manner unforeseen in the

Black community."³⁵ Curtis Austin makes the same point just as forcefully: "this paramilitary structure ensured individuals in leadership positions held absolute power over members of the rank-and-file. This autocratic structure eventually encouraged much of the internal violence experienced by party members" (pp. 36–7).

Historians regularly have rued the BPP's failure to develop any internal, democratic processes and have appreciated how the Party's entirely top-down decision-making in time hugely distanced the Oakland commanders from the Panthers' actual grassroots workers.³⁶ From this perspective the BPP could hardly have been more profoundly different from SNCC, whose internal decision-making was supremely intense but never left anyone believing they had been ignored or silenced. Indeed, any historian familiar with scholarly debates about the Communist Party USA will see parallels when reading about the BPP, as in Paul Alkebulan's declaration that "rank-and-file members were the heart and soul of the BPP" (p. 132). "The rank and file," he writes, "pushed the community programs uphill against the misdeeds" of the national leadership, who "seemed determined to push the party downhill" (p. 121).

Indeed, Ernest Allen Jr. put a memorable phrase to this theme some years ago when he observed that "the behavior of Party members remains stamped with a certain, intractable duality" as free-breakfast programs went arm-in-arm with violent criminality. Former Seattle Panther Aaron Dixon put it quite similarly after recounting how he had shot his rifle at a neighborhood fire station so that firemen "couldn't fight the fires we were setting around the city." "We had a split personality," he explained. "You could see us patrolling here with rifles and shotguns. And then later you'd see us over there serving free breakfasts to school kids."³⁷

This duality poses a major challenge to historians, for on the one hand, as Paul Alkebulan puts it, "rank-and-file Panthers are adamant that it was their work that kept the survival programs functioning, and they want their stories told" (p. 164). On the other, however, Curtis Austin writes that "it remains difficult and nearly impossible to get Panthers to talk about the controversial aspects of party history" (p. 304). Indeed, Austin says, "when it comes to details about certain 'actions,' whether they be bank robberies or the killing of snitches and informants, only so much can be known. None of the surviving Panthers are willing to discuss openly certain activities, since many of their comrades remain in jail" and "others, understandably, do not want to incriminate themselves" (p. 151). He adds that "murder, conspiracy to murder, and attempted murder represent no small problems for former Panthers," as they also do for historians who seek to write honest and complete accounts of the BPP and its dual realities (p. 152).

The Panthers' authoritarian structure also raises an interpretive question articulated most incisively by the writer Adam Hochschild over a decade

ago: "does the very nature of an armed, undemocratic sect make it fatally prone to influence by the reckless, whether F.B.I. spies or hotheads out for their own gain?"³⁸ Historians of the Panthers who want to carefully and critically gauge the actual effects of FBI and local police informant penetration of the BPP must first familiarize themselves with the excellent analyses of this issue that have been authored by academic sociologists, and especially with Gary Marx's insightful conclusion that the presence of such informants has significantly greater impact on hierarchical, secrecy-obsessed "closed" groups such as the Communist Party USA than upon the more "open" groups usually found in modern American social protest movements.³⁹ Most particularly, as this present writer asked almost twenty years ago, was it actually "activists' expectations of informers' presence," rather than whatever infiltration may or may not have occurred, that really had the most significant internal impact on groups such as the BPP?⁴⁰

Books as different as Forbes's memoir and Bass and Rae's account of Rackley's murder agree on that dynamic. As Forbes writes, "because of all the so-called agents, people in the Party were very paranoid," and it was that paranoia, far more than anything else, that made BPP members so willing to accept as valid so many of the fraudulent, usually-anonymous letters that COINTELPRO initiatives sent their way containing divisive and often false allegations against their colleagues (p. 37). As Errol Henderson has said, "COINTELPRO was an external manipulation that capitalized on internal weaknesses and contradictions," or as this writer put it in 1988, "widespread suspicion of informant penetration provided fertile ground for accusations of betrayal whenever movement tensions led to angry, personal recriminations."⁴¹

More explicitly than any other scholar, Jeffrey Ogbar has argued that the BPP's desire to recruit the so-called "lumpen," or criminally predisposed "brothers off the block," predestined the Party for internal violence and eventual collapse. Furthermore, "the glorification of drinking, tolerance of drugs, physical intimidation, and widespread public use of profanity ultimately isolated the Panthers from many black people," Ogbar writes (p. 122). Forbes admits that even in 1972, "we realized that we had alienated parts of the community with our rhetoric, bravado, and just outright bad behavior," but nonetheless the latter continued unabated (p. 80). As Paul Alkebulan adds, "the result was that being a Panther was no longer something that community residents routinely honored and respected" (p. 95).

Soon after Brown and Hilliard's autobiographies were published, Ellen DuBois observed that "the issue of sexuality is closely related to that of Panther militarism and violence." Some weeks earlier, the author Alice Walker, in a provocative *New York Times* op-ed essay headlined "Black Panthers or Black Punks?" had wondered publicly how the Panthers' "desperate need to demonstrate 'manhood'" should be understood relative to the fact that Cleaver and other leaders had done serious prison time and seemed acutely

sensitive to "the charge of being a punk."⁴² Walker's article suggested that the Panthers' distinct proclivity for homophobic name-calling might best be understood as masking deeper homoerotic fears, and years later Jeffrey Ogbar obliquely noted how for many Panthers, particularly those who most employed homophobic insults, guns represented "an extension of manhood itself" (pp. 100–1).⁴³

Erica Doss argued in 1998 that the BPP's "extraordinarily astute" use of visual imagery, particularly Emory Douglas's powerful drawings in the Party newspaper, emphasized "the definition and manifestation of black masculinity" above all else (pp. 489, 493). She further suggested that patronage like Leonard Bernstein's reflected "the awe that the Panthers' *image*, not their politics, held for many." Doss detailed how "many of those attracted to the Panthers were also especially enamored with the spectacle of their masculinity," and exhibited a "fixation with the exotica, and erotica, of their masculinity" (p. 509). She believed that such objectification detached the Panthers' appeal from their substantive political agenda, an argument that Edward P. Morgan echoes in part in his chapter in Lazerow and Williams. News coverage that emphasized the BPP's dramatic public behavior, as in Sacramento, and not its policy agenda, reinforced the Panthers' path toward symbolic actions rather than substantive work, Morgan argues. "In the absence of any serious consideration of radical ideas within mainstream discourse, 'radical' came to be defined, in short, by militant behavior" (p. 328).⁴⁴

Jane Rhodes's *Framing the Panthers* develops this perspective at greatest length, and carefully traces how the Panthers sprang onto television news shows and the front pages of newspapers during the course of 1968. "By the end of the year, the words 'Black Panther' would be ubiquitous in headlines across the country," and the Panthers themselves had become "an enduring part of popular culture" (pp. 117, 246). The BPP offered "a sensational scenario of guns and aggression," and the "theatricality of the Panthers' protest style," along with Party leaders' rhetorical hyperbole, represented a "symbolic deployment of violence" (pp. 82, 74, 240). Like Doss, Rhodes too emphasizes how the Panthers' "swaggering, sometimes violent, hyper-masculine aggressiveness" was central to the BPP's popular appeal (p. 94).

Rhodes writes that nowadays, "to celebrate the image of the Panthers as heroes is an act of assertion and empowerment for many black Americans," and that reclaiming the Panthers evinces "the romance of heroic black masculinity" (pp. 13, 324). BPP historiography is replete with laudatory declarations, ranging from the unduly simple—"the BPP produced an illustrious legacy"—to the downright dubious: the Party "created a vibrant movement culture that nourished and sustained members' activism."⁴⁵ Paul Alkebulan more plausibly contends that "it is nothing short of amazing that local Panthers were able to accomplish as much as they did, given their relative inexperience, resource scarcity, and government enmity," but Curtis Austin's claim that "the example

set by the BPP, despite the organization's shortcomings, faults, rivalries, and weaknesses, was essentially a good one" seems overly charitable (Alkebulan, p. 74; Austin, p. 141).

Berkeley sociologist Bob Blauner testified on Huey Newton's behalf as an expert witness during Newton's 1968 trial for the killing of Officer Frey. A quarter-century later, Blauner confessed that "in retrospect I—and others—did not take the militarism of the party seriously enough, believing that the rifles, uniforms and drilling were largely symbolic. People like me did not want to believe that such a militaristic methodology might indeed have fascistic implications. The rationale that we didn't know what was happening is lame. That excuse has been heard before. The truth is that we didn't want to know."⁴⁶

Blauner's verdict on the BPP is much harsher than any specialist Panther historians will voice, but it is far from alone among left-liberal (albeit almost entirely white) scholars. Writing in *The Nation* many years ago, political scientist Ross K. Baker declared that "both officialdom and the radical world attributed an efficacy to the Panthers which was far beyond their actual strength." Curtis Austin concedes that the BPP had "a public presence far out of proportion to its numbers," but that admission is distant indeed from Hugh Pearson's complaint about writers "paying so much attention to an organization that, arguably, in so many ways amounted to little more than a temporary media phenomenon" (Austin, p. xvii, Pearson, p. 347). Those with a special affection for the BPP may dismiss black essayist Stanley Crouch's bemoaning "our bizarrely romantic sense of the Panther years" just as quickly as they do Pearson, but the roster of respected social critics and historians who voice such sentiments is not a short one. Adam Hochschild laments that "there is something sad about this intense nostalgia for the party that once promised so much" but delivered so little, and civil rights historian Robert J. Norrell has deplored the "tendency to make heroes of people who seem to me didn't really advance black interests very far." Maurice Isserman, in the *Radical History Review*, has put it most strongly of all: "the Panthers' impact on the African-American left in the late 1960s was in my view an unmitigated disaster."⁴⁷

Perhaps the single greatest irony in Panther history is that their most hated and despised rivals, Maulana Karenga's US, ended up having a greater long-term impact on black America and U. S. society than did the BPP. Lazerow and Williams touch on this point when they note that "arguably, Panther reverberations have been greater in terms of culture than politics" (p. 9), but from this perspective Clayborne Carson stated the correct conclusion more precisely and appropriately in 2003: "cultural nationalism became the most enduring element of the Black Power movement," and cultural nationalism is what the Panthers insisted they rejected and opposed.⁴⁸

Nonetheless, BPP history has much it can teach us, if historians are willing to honestly acknowledge, and present, the full panoply of the Panthers'

multi-layered rise and fall. Errol Henderson made the most basic point a decade ago: "the transformative power of the BPP was not in taking up the gun" but "in the provision of the community with patrols and development (survival) programs in a context of political education and activism" (p. 186). Paul Alkebulan likewise concludes that "democracy, responsibility, and openness must prevail in community organizations," but Curtis Austin articulates the bottom line better than any other scholar to date: the Black Panther Party's "work and legacy should be honored. Its mistakes and foibles must likewise be understood and remembered so that the next generation of activists will know that power grows not from the barrels of guns, but from service to humanity and a willingness to provide that service despite difficulty and life-threatening obstacles" (Alkebulan, p. 132; Austin, p. 333).

1. Henderson, "The Lumpenproletariat as Vanguard? The Black Panther Party, Social Transformation, and Pearson's Analysis of Huey Newton," *Journal of Black Studies* 28 (November 1997): 171–99; Doss, "Imaging the Panthers: Representing Black Power and Masculinity, 1960s–1990s," *Prospects: An Annual of American Cultural Studies* 23 (1998): 483–516; Johnson, "Explaining the Demise of the Black Panther Party: The Role of Internal Factors," in *The Black Panther Party [Reconsidered]*, ed. Charles E. Jones (1998), 391–414; Anderson, "Practical Internationalists: The Story of the Des Moines, Iowa, Black Panther Party," in *Groundwork: Local Black Freedom Movements in America*, ed. Jeanne F. Theoharis and Komozi Woodard (2005), 282–99; Brown, "The US Organization, Maulana Karenga, and Conflict With the Black Panther Party: A Critique of Sectarian Influences on Historical Discourse," *Journal of Black Studies* 28 (November 1997): 157–70, and "The Politics of Culture: The US Organization and the Quest for Black 'Unity,'" in *Freedom North: Black Freedom Struggles Outside the South, 1940–1980*, ed. Jeanne F. Theoharis and Komozi Woodard (2003), 223–53. Jama Lazerow has accurately asserted that the Jones volume, as well as Kathleen Cleaver and George Katsiaficas, eds., *Liberation, Imagination, and the Black Panther Party: A New Look at the Panthers and Their Legacy* (2001) represent "the hagiographic tendency" in BPP historiography (as quoted in Michael C. Vazquez, "Return of the Panther: Historians and Ex-Revolutionaries Debate the Black Panther Legacy," *Boston Globe*, June 22, 2003, p. D1), but the Johnson chapter, as well as one by Chris Booker ("Lumpenization: A Critical Error of the Black Panther Party," 337–62), merit exception from that otherwise appropriate characterization. See also Lazerow and Williams, 11n12. Serious scholars need not consult the Cleaver and Katsiaficas volume.

2. On the so-called Mulford Act, which Governor Ronald Reagan signed into law on July 28, 1967, see Cynthia Deitle Leonardatos, "California's Attempt to Disarm the Black Panthers," *San Diego Law Review* 36 (Fall 1999): 947–96. See also Henry Hampton and Steve Fayer, *Voices of Freedom* (1990), 351–7, 364–70.

3. See "Armed Negroes Protest Gun Bill," *New York Times*, May 3, 1967, p. 23; and Wallace Turner, "A Gun is Power, Black Panther Says," *New York Times*, May 23, 1967, p. 66. See also Jane Rhodes, "Fanning the Flames of Racial Discord: The National Press and the Black Panther Party," *Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics* 4 (Fall 1999): 95–118.

4. See Bobby Seale, *Seize the Time: The Story of the Black Panther Party and Huey P. Newton* (1970; reprint, 1991), unpaginated introduction, 2; David Hilliard and Lewis Cole, *This Side of Glory: The Autobiography of David Hilliard and the Story of the Black Panther Party* (1993), 3; and Donald Cox, "The Split in the Party," *New Political Science* 21 (June 1999): 175. See also Sol Stern, "The Call of the Black Panthers," *New York Times Magazine*, August 6, 1967; and Yohuru R. Williams, "In the Name of the Law: The 1967 Shooting of Huey P. Newton and Law Enforcement's Permissive Environment," *Negro History Bulletin* 61 (April–June 1998): n23.

5. See Rhodes, p. 104; see also Wallace Turner, "Negroes Press Nomination of Indicted Militant," *New York Times*, February 5, 1968, p. 70; Joel Wilson, "Invisible Cages: Racialized Politics and the Alliance Between the Panthers and the Peace and Freedom Party," in Lazerow

and Williams, pp. 191–222; and Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s* (1981), 278–86.

6. See Cleaver in Hampton and Fayer, *Voices of Freedom*, 515–7; Hilliard, *This Side of Glory*, 183–93; Austin, pp. 166, 377n12; and Susie Linfield, “The Education of Kathleen Neal Cleaver,” *Transition* 77 (1998): 172–95, 187. See also Cummins who calls the April 6 shootout “the beginning of the Black Panthers’ sad descent toward political gangsterism,” *Rise and Fall of California’s Radical Prison Movement*, 120; Henderson, “The Lumpenproletariat,” 179; Steve Estes, *I Am A Man! Race, Manhood, and the Civil Rights Movement* (2005), 153–4; Alkebulan, p. 15. Despite Hilliard and others’ truth-telling, some subsequent historians nonetheless erroneously characterize the shootout as, for example, “an ambush intended for Cleaver.” See Robert O. Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (2003), 220.

Notwithstanding a pioneering piece of investigative journalism by Edward Jay Epstein, “The Panthers and the Police: A Pattern of Genocide?” *The New Yorker*, February 13, 1971, 45–8, 51–77, which rigorously examined—and debunked—claims that as many as twenty-eight or more Panthers had been killed by police, some scholars continue to misstate the historical record. Judson L. Jeffries, for example, has argued, “Between 1968 and 1971 forty Panthers were killed by local police.” Jeffries, “Black Radicalism and Political Repression in Baltimore: The Case of the Black Panther Party,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 25 (January 2002): 91. He further comments, “This number has been disputed by some who argue that the police did not kill half as many Panthers as the Panthers and their lawyers claimed” (94n5). No identification of “some” is offered. Furthermore, Michael E. Staub observes that “the number of twenty-eight murdered Panthers is today presented in history books essentially as fact,” Epstein’s corrective notwithstanding. Staub, “Black Panthers, New Journalism, and the Rewriting of the Sixties,” *Representations* 57 (Winter 1997): 58. Staub cites William H. Chafe, *The Unfinished Journey: America Since World War II* (1995), 413; and Terry H. Anderson, *The Movement and the Sixties* (1995), 327, as examples of this error.

7. See Earl Caldwell, “Black Panthers: Young Revolutionaries at War,” *New York Times*, September 6, 1968, p. 49; and Wallace Turner, “Newton Is Guilty of Manslaughter,” *New York Times*, September 9, 1968, pp. 1, 55. The most reliable review of the evidence against Newton appears in the intermediate appellate court’s subsequent review, and reversal, of his conviction, *People v. Newton*, 8 Cal.App.3d 359 (Cal.App.1.Dist.), 29 May 1970. Virtually no works on Newton or the Panthers make use of this critical and easily available resource.

8. *In re Cleaver*, 266 Cal.App.2d 143 (Cal.App.1.Dist.), 27 September 1968; Earl Caldwell, “Cleaver Presses Bid to Stay Free,” *New York Times*, November 26, 1968, p. 23; Earl Caldwell, “Cleaver Is Sought as Coast Fugitive For Defying Order,” *New York Times*, November 28, 1968, pp. 1, 62.

9. Wallace Turner, “Black Panthers, White Power: Violent Confrontation on Coast,” *New York Times*, July 20, 1968, pp. 1, 10; Earl Caldwell, “Panthers, Treading Softly, Are Winning Over Negroes on Coast,” *New York Times*, September 15, 1968, p. 70. Indeed, even Sol Stern’s long 1967 *New York Times Magazine* profile sympathized with the Panthers’ use of guns by observing that “to these young men, the execution of a police officer would be as natural and justifiable as the execution of a German soldier by a member of the French resistance.” Stern, “Call of the Black Panthers.”

10. Earl Caldwell, “Black Panthers Growing, But Their Troubles Rise,” *New York Times*, December 7, 1968, p. 65. See also Seale, *Seize the Time*, 370; Alkebulan, p. 30.

11. US stood for “us” versus “them.”; it was not an acronym for United Slaves or anything else. On attacks on US, see Clayborne Carson, “Foreword,” in Brown, *Fighting For US*, viii; Ogbar, *Black Power*, 96–7.

12. See Brown, *Fighting For US*, 94–9, 184–6, esp. 186n95. This material is also reprised in Brown, “The Politics of Culture,” 240–1 and 251–2. See also Ray Rogers, “Black Guns on Campus,” *The Nation*, May 5, 1969, pp. 558–60; Brown, *A Taste of Power*, 156–70.

13. “The FBI’s Covert Action Program to Destroy the Black Panther Party,” in U.S. Senate, Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations With Respect to Intelligence Activities, *Final Report, Book III—Supplementary Detailed Staff Reports on Intelligence Activities and the Rights of Americans*, 94th Cong., 2nd sess., No. 94–755, 1976, 187–223, 189. Scholars must use the Church Committee reports with care, however, for some citations are faulty, for example,

188n3, which asserts that a lengthy J. Edgar Hoover quotation lambasting the Panthers comes from the September 6, 1968 *New York Times*. A thorough review of the Historical *New York Times* digital edition shows that no such (or even vaguely similar) Hoover quotation appeared in the *Times* on that date or any other during 1968 and 1969. The actual source and validity of the quotation remains uncertain.

Unsubstantiated assertions that FBI informants killed Carter and Huggins are unfortunately legion. The *only* source making such a claim that merits scholars' consideration is M. Wesley Swearingen, *FBI Secrets: An Agent's Expose* (1995), in which Swearingen asserts that some years after the killings, when he was serving on the Los Angeles Field Office's racial squad, an unnamed colleague told him that another agent had instructed two of his informants in US, brothers George and Larry Stiner—who *were* two of the three US members convicted for Carter and Huggins's deaths—to kill the duo (79, 82–4). Swearingen writes, "I later reviewed the Los Angeles files and verified that the Stiner brothers were FBI informants." Leaving aside the fact that Hubert-Gaidi, not the Stiners, was the fatal shooter, how much if any reliance should be placed on Swearingen's account is uncertain. His memoir suffers from a profusion of notable factual errors—for example, he asserts that US stood for "United Slaves" (81)—the most telling of which occurs on the very same page on which he fingers the Stiners. Using italicized pseudonyms, Swearingen asserts that "United Slaves member *Bill Stark*, an FBI informer, shot and killed Panther member *Al Holt*, another FBI informer, on March 14, 1969" (83). No Panther was killed on March 14, and the one who *was* wounded in an US shooting, Ronald Freeman, was *not* an FBI informant. "Outing" informants must be done only with utterly thorough and painstaking care so as to assure absolute accuracy. Cf. David J. Garrow, *The FBI and Martin Luther King, Jr.: From "Solo" to Memphis* (1981), 35–42 (Jack and Morris Childs), 173–8 (James A. Harrison).

14. See Caldwell, "Black Panthers Growing," 65; Earl Caldwell, "Black Panthers Serving Youngsters a Diet of Food and Politics," *New York Times*, June 15, 1969, p. 57; and Charlayne Hunter, "Panthers Indoctrinate the Young," *New York Times*, August 18, 1969, p. 31. Its misleading headline notwithstanding, Hunter's story is quite commendatory. Multiple subsequent sources, including a semi-official BPP alumni website (see www.pantherstours.com/tour_map.html), all assert that the free breakfast program first began on January 20, 1969 at St. Augustine's Episcopal Church in Oakland. However, in a conflict that exemplifies the shortcomings of present-day Panther historiography, Caldwell's December 7, 1968 *Times* story reports that "In Oakland, the organization *has also initiated* [emphasis added] a program of providing free breakfast for school children as a means of improving its image while at the same time getting an opportunity to meet and talk with parents." It is difficult to imagine that Caldwell wrongly imagined the existence of the program more than six weeks before it actually commenced. See also Rhodes, pp. 250–1.

With regard to the BPP's survival programs, note also should be made of Andrew Witt, *The Black Panthers in the Midwest: The Community Programs and Services of the Black Panther Party in Milwaukee, 1966–1977* (2007). Published by Routledge, this 148-page volume is priced at \$95, and repeated efforts to obtain a review copy, a PDF copy, or even a photocopy of the book from both the publisher and the author have gone without reply. As of late summer 2007, WorldCat indicates that U. S. libraries hold a grand total of about eighty copies of the book.

15. See also Charles A. and Betty Lou Valentine, "The Man and the Panthers," *Politics and Society* 2 (Spring 1972): 273–86, 285; Daniel Crowe, *Prophets of Rage: The Black Freedom Struggle in San Francisco, 1945–1969* (2000), 5, 222–4; Self, *American Babylon*, 229–32; Jon Rice, "The World of the Illinois Panthers," in *Freedom North*, 41–64, 57. Crowe's thorough and thoughtful work is oddly seldom cited by historians who should be familiar with it. Rice's work must be used with caution, for, as Lazerow and Williams note, his assertion that the Party's Illinois membership numbered "about 1,000" by the spring of 1969 is highly unreliable (p. 4).

16. See Morris Kaplan, "Bomb Plot is Laid to 21 Panthers," *New York Times*, April 3, 1969, pp. 1, 36. No convictions ever resulted from these charges. See Peter L. Zimroth, *Perversions of Justice: The Prosecution and Acquittal of the Panther 21* (1974).

17. Pearson, *Shadow of the Panther*, 199, 380; Self, *American Babylon*, 228; John Darnton, "8 Black Panthers Seized in Torture-Murder Case," *New York Times*, May 23, 1969, p. 24.

18. According to Edward P. Morgan, Sams was “very likely a government agent.” “Media Culture and the Public Memory of the Black Panther Party,” in Lazerow and Williams, p. 338. Most extensively and regrettably, Yohuru Williams asserts at one juncture that Sams “was later revealed to have been an agent provocateur for the FBI,” while stating at another that “although he was not demonstrably a police agent, the circumstantial evidence against Sams is weighty.” Williams also wrongly and embarrassingly writes that “for the most part [Maulana] Karenga has been singled out as a police informant and agent provocateur.” *Black Politics/White Power: Civil Rights, Black Power, and the Black Panthers in New Haven* (2000), 163, 140, 122n44. Bass and Rae thoroughly analyze Sams’s status (pp. 261–63), and also identify Kelly Moye, a Party hanger-on, as the one proven—and admitted—police informant on the New Haven Panthers as of May 1969 (pp. 4–5, 101–2, 261, 263). See also Paul Bass, “After 37 Years, Spy Comes in from Cold,” *New Haven Independent*, August 4, 2006. As Bass and Rae correctly remark about informant allegations, “once someone is accused, once the suggestion is planted, it’s impossible to erase the last scintilla of doubt in people’s minds. Such charges can’t be disproven, only proven” (p. 263).

In another highly similar, but far less well-known instance of BPP torture and execution of a suspected informant, Eugene Leroy Anderson of Baltimore was murdered on July 12, 1969. Available historical sources on Anderson’s killing are seriously deficient. See Jeffries, “Black Radicalism and Political Repression”; Judson L. Jeffries, “Local News Coverage of the Black Panther Party: An Analysis of the Baltimore, Cleveland, and New Orleans Press,” *Journal of African American Studies* 7 (Spring 2004): 19–38. See also Christina Royster-Hemby, “Fighting the Power: The Black Panther Party in Baltimore,” *Baltimore City Paper*, February 1 (Part 1) and February 8 (Part 2) 2006, particularly Larry Gibson’s and Hilary Caplan’s statements in Part 2 concerning the guilt of the Panthers and the role of attorney Arthur F. Turco, Jr., who subsequently pled guilty to assault and was disbarred. Once again, some of the best historical sources, easily available court opinions, have not been cited by scholars. See *Turco v. State*, 324 F.Supp. 61 (D.Md.), 3 March 1971, affirmed sub nom. *Turco v. Warden*, 444 F.2d 56 (4th Cir.), 11 June 1971; *Turco v. Allen*, 334 F.Supp. 209 (D. Md.), 19 November 1971; *Turco v. Monroe County Bar Association*, 363 N.Y.S.2d 349 (N.Y.A.D. 4 Dept. 1975), appeal denied, 366 N.Y.S.2d 1026 (1975), appeal dismissed, 366 N.Y.S.2d 1029 (1975), cert. denied, 423 U.S. 838 (1975); and *Turco v. Monroe County Bar Association*, 554 F.2d 515 (2nd Cir. 1977), cert. denied, 434 U.S. 834 (1977); *Matter of Turco*, 579 N.Y.S.2d 610 (N.Y.A.D. 4 Dept. 1991). See also *Conway v. State*, 289 A.2d 862 (Md.App. 1972), cert. denied, 266 Md. 735 (1972), cert. denied, 413 U.S. 920 (1973).

19. Earl Caldwell, “Panthers: They Are Not the Same Organization,” *New York Times*, July 27, 1969, p. E6.

20. Earl Caldwell, “Declining Black Panthers Gather New Support From Repeated Clashes With Police,” *New York Times*, December 14, 1969, p. 64.

21. Ibid. See also Select Committee, *Final Report*, 188, 201n69; David Burnham, “F.B.I.’s Informants and ‘Bugs’ Collect Data on Black Panthers,” *New York Times*, December 14, 1969, pp. 1, 65, which wrongly dates the onset of the FBI’s interest in the BPP to “the summer of 1966”; and Hampton and Fayer, *Voices of Freedom*, 522–38. Any well-informed discussion of the Hampton-Clark killings must take into account both Epstein’s “The Panthers and the Police” and two crucial subsequent appellate court decisions, *Hampton v. Hanrahan*, 600 F.2d. 600 (7th Cir. 1979) and *Black Panther Party v. Smith*, 661 F.2d 1243 (D.C. Cir. 1981). See also C. Gerald Fraser, “F.B.I. Files Reveal Moves Against Black Panthers,” *New York Times*, October 19, 1980, pp. 1, 16; and especially Nathaniel Sheppard Jr., “Plaintiffs in Panther Suit ‘Knew We Were Right,’” *New York Times*, November 14, 1982, p. 82.

22. See Charlotte Curtis, “Black Panther Philosophy Is Debated at the Bernsteins,” *New York Times*, January 15, 1970, p. 48; “False Note on Black Panthers,” *New York Times*, 16 January 1970, p. 38; Tom Wolfe, “Radical Chic: That Party at Lenny’s,” *New York Magazine*, May 6, 1970, pp. 26–56; Staub, “Black Panthers, New Journalism,” 56.

23. Kenneth O’Reilly, “Racial Matters”: *The FBI’s Secret File on Black America, 1960–1972* (1989), 300–2.

24. Anderson also recounts Knox’s instructive account of how Iowa Panthers viewed Eldridge Cleaver. “We thought he was brilliant until when people actually read *Soul On Ice*,

then we banned the book. Because we took a position that this guy talking about raping a black woman to practice on, to deal with a white woman, I mean we thought he was a nut then." As Anderson rightly comments, the BPP "was far from one monolithic entity," "Practical Internationalists," 293, 297–8.

25. See *People v. Newton*; Earl Caldwell, "Panthers Await Newton's Return," *New York Times*, July 8, 1970, p. 28. See also John A. Courtright, "Rhetoric of the Gun: An Analysis of the Rhetorical Modifications of the Black Panther Party," *Journal of Black Studies* 4 (March 1974): 249–67, which reports that violent rhetoric in the BPP newspaper decreased greatly in June 1970 and declined to almost zero in April 1971.

26. See Earl Caldwell, "Newton is Freed on \$50,000 Bail; Black Panther Leader Met by Throngs in Oakland," *New York Times*, August 6, 1970, p. 24; John Darnton, "Newton and Seale Reunited Briefly," *New York Times*, August 22, 1970, p. 11.

27. See "Newton, at Panther Parley, Urges Socialist System," *New York Times*, September 6, 1970, p. 40; Paul Delaney, "Panther Parley Failure," *New York Times*, November 30, 1970, p. 27.

28. Edith Evans Asbury, "Newton Denounces 2 Missing Panthers," *New York Times*, February 10, 1971, pp. 1, 36. Jack Olsen, *Last Man Standing: The Tragedy and Triumph of Geronimo Pratt* (2000), is a highly compelling account of Pratt's life, but the complete absence of any source notes or bibliography, plus some obvious errors, unfortunately gives it an uncertain reliability.

29. Earl Caldwell, "The Panthers: Dead or Regrouping," *New York Times*, March 1, 1971, pp. 1, 16; Earl Caldwell, "Internal Dispute Rends Panthers," *New York Times*, March 7, 1971, p. 26; Thomas A. Johnson, "Panthers Fear Growing Intraparty Strife," *New York Times*, April 10, 1971, p. 24. Subsequent coverage of Napier's murder includes John Darnton, "7 Panthers Indicted in Slaying of a Party Official in Corona," *New York Times*, July 30, 1971, p. 30; Max H. Seigel, "Girl, 12 Describes Killing of a Black Panther Here," *New York Times*, March 25, 1972, p. 35; Robert Hanley, "Panther is Found Guilty in Slaying," *New York Times*, April 14, 1972, p. 48; and Robert D. McFadden, "4 Panthers Admit Guilt in Slaying," *New York Times*, May 22, 1973, pp. 1, 18. See also J. Herman Blake, "Is the Black Panther Party Suicidal?" *Politics and Society* 2 (Spring 1972): 287–92; Kathleen Neal Cleaver, "Sister Act," *Transition* 60 (Summer 1993): 98 (She admits that Napier was murdered "in retaliation" for Webb's killing); Henderson, "The Lumpenproletariat," 177; Donald Cox, "The Split in the Party," 172–6; Lazerow and Williams, in Lazerow and Williams, p. 146n104 ("According to at least two ex-Boston Panthers, in early 1971 the Boston chapter became a key recruiting ground for assassins by the Newton (or Oakland) Panthers"); Alkebulan, p. 90. Contrast this coverage and commentary with one scholar's repeated insistence that "the Black Panther Party was not a violent organization." Jeffries, "Local News Coverage of the Black Panther Party," 22. Blake's long-overlooked commentary underscores his crucial but little-recognized importance to any serious student of Newton and the Panthers. In Lazerow and Williams, Roz Payne quotes a May 28, 2003 e-mail to her from Blake responding to her query about Blake's role as Newton's authorial colleague: "I did write all of *Revolutionary Suicide*. As well, I wrote many of the articles Huey published in the BPP newspaper, and most of those published in the book 'To Die for the People'" (180n22). Most if not all scholarly discussions of Newton—for example, Michael E. Jennings, Jr., "Social Theory and Transformation in the Pedagogy of Dr. Huey P. Newton: A Nativist Reclamation of the Critical Ethnographic Project," *Educational Foundations* 13 (Winter 1999): 77–94, and Jeffries, *Huey P. Newton: The Radical Theorist* (2002)—make no reference whatsoever to Blake.

30. For a fuller discussion of the BPP's 1972–73 efforts in Oakland, see Robyn Ceanne Spencer, "Inside the Panther Revolution: The Black Freedom Movement and the Black Panther Party in Oakland, California," in *Groundwork*, 300–17. Also see Robert Self, "'To Plan Our Liberation': Black Power and the Politics of Place in Oakland, California, 1965–1977," *Journal of Urban History* 26 (September 2000): 759–92; and Self, *American Babylon*, 299–305. An excellent contemporary essay is Ross K. Baker, "Panthers Outgrow Their Rhetoric," *The Nation*, July 16, 1973, 47–51. On the BPP's liberation schools, see especially Daniel Perlstein, "Minds Stayed on Freedom: Politics and Pedagogy in the African-American Freedom Struggle," *American Educational Research Journal* 39 (Summer 2002): 249–77.

31. Forbes characterizes "the money the drug dealers were paying as part of a tax we levied. The going rate was constant, at 23 percent of their gross," (p. 95). See also Hilliard, *This Side of Glory*, 363. Johnson notes, "After 1972, Newton required that all money coming into the Party go directly to him," "Explaining the Demise," 406. Alkebulan reports that "a substantial portion" of funds coming into the Party "was being siphoned off for personal use by the leadership" rather than channeled into programs (p. 95).

32. The single most puzzling oddity in Panther historiography is the regularity with which scholars castigate Pearson's *Shadow of the Panther*. Austin, for example, calls it a "near slanderous critique" (p. 398). Yet they extensively articulate themes that largely mirror Pearson's emphases. It bears emphasis that *Shadow of the Panther* was widely and enthusiastically praised by scholarly reviewers who can in no way be dismissed as "anti-sixties" conservatives. For example, Leon Forrest termed *Shadow* "keenly observed, often brilliant" and said Pearson had "achieved a fine degree of detachment and analysis over his materials," "The Brain and the Heart," *Los Angeles Times Book Review*, July 3, 1994, pp. 4, 9; Michael Kazin stated that Pearson "successfully treads the line between dismissing the Panthers as a band of thugs and apologizing for their offenses by referring to the angry temper of the times," "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof," *Washington Post Book World*, July 10, 1994, p. 5; and, most notably of all, Bob Blauner, who called *Shadow* "an indispensable source for that complex and textured social history that the Panthers deserve," "The Outlaw Huey Newton," *New York Times Book Review*, July 10, 1994, pp. 1, 22-3. Christopher Lehmann-Haupt also asserted that Pearson "bends over backwards to justify Newton's cause," "On the Rise and Fall of Huey Newton," *New York Times*, June 30, 1994, p. C18.

33. See Kate Coleman with Paul Avery, "The Party's Over," *New Times*, July 10, 1978, pp. 23-47, a wide-ranging article sponsored by the long-respected Center for Investigative Reporting; "Newton Fails to Appear at Arraignment," *New York Times*, August 24, 1974, p. 10; Les Ledbetter, "Huey Newton is Released on Bail; 600 Panther Supporters Hold Rally," *New York Times*, July 24, 1977, p. 24; Wallace Turner, "Key Newton Witness is Reported in Hiding," *New York Times*, October 26, 1977, p. 18; Forbes, pp. 200, 250; Wallace Turner, "Black Panthers Set Back as a Leader Leaves Oakland and a Contributor Loses Post," *New York Times*, November 25, 1977, p. 20; Austin, p. 331; "Ex-Black Panther Chief Arrested on Fraud Charge," *New York Times*, April 17, 1985, p. A17; "Huey Newton Killed; Was a Co-Founder of Black Panthers," *New York Times*, August 23, 1989, pp. A1, B7; John Kifner, "Eldridge Cleaver, Black Panther Who Became G.O.P. Conservative, Is Dead at 62," *New York Times*, May 2, 1998, p. B8. Also see Self, "To Plan Our Liberation," 785. On Van Patter's killing, see particularly Kristin Bender, "Mother's Slaying Fuels Daughter's Devotion," *Inside Bay Area*, January 15, 2007. See also Brown, *A Taste of Power*, 363-5, and, for an important corrective, Pearson, *Shadow of the Panther*, 272, 290, 334.

34. See Jeffries, *Huey P. Newton*, 10-1, 31; and Judson L. Jeffries, "An Unexamined Chapter of Black Panther History," in *Black Power: In the Belly of the Beast*, ed. Jeffries (2006), 185-223, 194.

35. Henderson, "The Lumpenproletariat," 188.

36. See Johnson, "Explaining the Demise of the Black Panther Party," 409; Spencer, "Inside the Panther Revolution," 314; Austin, *Up Against the Wall*, 339. See also Ronald Steel, "Letter From Oakland: The Panthers," *New York Review of Books*, September 11, 1969.

37. Ernest Allen, Jr., Review of *The Black Panther Party [Reconsidered]*, *The Black Scholar* 28 (Fall/Winter 1998): 53-4; Dixon in Danny Westneat, "Reunion of Black Panthers Stirs Memories of Aggression, Activism," *Seattle Times*, May 11, 2005. See also Dixon in Austin, *Up Against the Wall*, 179, recalling a news story that said, "'Seattle was number one in firebombings and number two in sniping.' When asked what role the party or its members played in these incidents, Dixon responded, 'probably 99 percent.'"

38. Adam Hochschild, "His Life as a Panther," *New York Times Book Review*, January 31, 1993, pp. 6-7 (reviewing David Hilliard, *This Side of Glory*).

39. See especially Gary T. Marx, "Thoughts on a Neglected Category of Social Movement Participant: The Agent Provocateur and Informant," *American Journal of Sociology* 80 (September 1974): 402-42. See also Gary T. Marx, "External Efforts to Damage or Facilitate Social

Movements: Some Patterns, Explanations, Outcomes, and Complications," in *The Dynamics of Social Movements*, ed. Mayer N. Zald and John D. McCarthy (1979); Anthony Oberschall, "The Decline of the 1960s Social Movements," in *Research in Social Movements, Conflicts and Change*, Vol 1., ed. Louis Kriesberg (1978); and Andrew Karmen, "Agents Provocateurs in the Contemporary U.S. Leftist Movement," in *The Criminologist: Crime and the Criminal*, ed. Charles E. Reasons (1974).

40. David J. Garrow, "FBI Political Harassment and FBI Historiography: Analyzing Informants and Measuring the Effects," *The Public Historian* 10 (Autumn 1988): 5–18, 17.

41. Henderson, "The Lumpenproletariat," 183; Garrow, "FBI Political History," 17. Crowe concludes that "the main causes for its collapse came from within its own institutional culture," *Prophets of Rage*, 240.

42. Ellen DuBois, "Sisters and Brothers," *The Nation*, September 6–13, 1993, 252; Alice Walker, "Black Panthers or Black Punks? They Ran on Empty," *New York Times*, May 5, 1993, p. A23. Walker calls Cleaver a "psychotic opportunist" and a "political chameleon," and both her and DuBois's articles suggest the argument that it was Cleaver's beliefs and behavior, more than any other factor, that led the BPP toward destruction. Some scholars have touched upon such a perspective. For example, Ollie Johnson argues that "Cleaver failed to recognize that the emphasis on military action isolated the BPP from the community," "Explaining the Demise of the Black Panther Party," 400. Austin also may be sympathetic to such a view (pp. 116, 139, 324, 340). In tandem with the similarly underdeveloped argument that more than anyone else, it was Cleaver who, in Newton's absence, made the BPP into a rapidly growing nationwide presence between October 1967 and November 1968, such an interpretation of Panther history might prove ironically very attractive.

43. See also Lazerow and Williams, "Introduction—The Black Panthers and Historical Scholarship: Why Now?" 5; Estes, *I Am a Man!* 162–63; and Simon Wendt, *The Spirit and the Shotgun: Armed Resistance and the Struggle for Civil Rights* (2007), 2, 6, 154, 176, and especially 238n118. Wendt's careful and perceptive book is measurably superior to prior works on the same topic.

44. For other articulations of this view, see Michael A. Fletcher, "Though the Party's Long Gone, Black Panthers Still Inspire; Militant Legacy Attracts Academics, Activists," *Washington Post*, December 17, 1996, p. A1; and Crowe, *Prophets of Rage*, 248.

45. Charles E. Jones and Judson L. Jeffries, "'Don't Believe the Hype': Debunking the Panther Mythology," in *The Black Panther Party [Reconsidered]*, 37; Spencer, "Inside the Panther Revolution," 309–10. Spencer also says the BPP had "a committed cadre of rank-and-file members whose courage and vision changed the face of grassroots politics in the United States" (301–2). See also Davarian L. Baldwin, "'Culture Is a Weapon in Our Struggle for Liberation': The Black Panther Party and the Cultural Politics of Decolonization," in Lazerow and Williams, who acknowledges that many Panther aficionados want to help create "a more positive or more authentic image of the BPP with which to build a unified space of oppositional politics" (p. 294).

46. Blauner, "The Outlaw Huey Newton," 23.

47. Baker, "Panthers Outgrow Their Rhetoric," 49; Stanley Crouch, "By Any Means Necessary," review of Forbes, *New York Times Book Review*, September 10, 2006, p. 14; Hochschild, "His Life as a Panther," 7; Norrell in Peter Monaghan, "New Views of the Black Panthers Paint Shades of Gray," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, March 2, 2007, p. A12; Maurice Isserman, "Where Have All the Convict Heroes Gone, Long Time Passing?" *Radical History Review* 64 (Winter 1996): 113–17, 115. Austin acknowledges "what was really a small movement—in terms of membership," (p. 95).

48. Carson, "Foreword," x. William L. Van Deburg argues that "cultural and psychological change is the most important legacy of black power. It was the Panthers' major contribution to what black personhood could be," Monaghan, "New Views of the Black Panthers," A12.