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# And At Once My Chains Were Loosed: How the Black Panther Party Freed Me from My Colonized Mind

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University of San Francisco

And At Once My Chains Were Loosed:  
How the Black Panther Party Freed Me from My Colonized Mind

A Dissertation Presented  
to  
The Faculty of the School of Education  
International and Multicultural Education Department

In Partial Fulfillment  
For the Requirements for Degree  
of the Doctor of Education

by  
Linda Garrett, MA  
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**THE UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO**

**DISSERTATION ABSTRACT**

**AND AT ONCE MY CHAINS WERE LOOSED:  
HOW THE BLACK PANTHER PARTY FREED ME FROM MY COLONIZED MIND**

The Black Panther Party was an iconic civil rights organization that started in Oakland, California, in 1966. Founded by Huey Newton and Bobby Seale, the Party was a political organization that sought to serve the community and educate marginalized groups about their power and potential. This study examined the seminal texts about the creation of the Party that were written by the Party's founders: *War Against the Panthers: A Study of Repression in America* (Newton, 1980), *Revolutionary Suicide* (Newton, 1973/2009) and *Seize the Time* (Seale, 1970). Document analysis of these texts identified the main themes of preparation, connection, love the people, validation, serve the people, validate again, and evolve. Unifying these themes is a "recipe for revolution" that outlines the steps taken to create the Party which could provide a potential roadmap to be followed by other organizations today.

Critical Race Theory provided the theoretical framework for this qualitative study, with a focus on counter-storytelling. The importance of storytelling was central to this work. Stories allow you to present important information to people without the classroom instructional feel. In this instance, the story was used to impart information about the Black Panther Party to pique interest in the topic and stimulate the desire for a deeper study and examination of the academic texts. A narrative was created that was inspired by *My Dungeon Shook: A Letter to My Nephew*, written by James Baldwin in 1963. The narrative is used to tell the creation story of the Black Panther Party to a new generation in a creative way.

This dissertation, written under the direction of the candidate's dissertation committee and approved by the members of the committee, has been presented to and accepted by the Faculty of the School of Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education. The content and research methodologies presented in this work represent the work of the candidate alone.

<u>Linda Garrett</u>	<u>12/6/17</u>
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<u>Dr. Susan Katz</u>	<u>12/6/17</u>
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<u>Dr. Darrick Smith</u>	<u>12/6/17</u>
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## **DEDICATION**

For Dad and Jay, I love you!

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

<sup>25</sup> But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. <sup>26</sup> Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were loosed.

(Acts 16:25-26, New King James Version)

When I embarked on this doctoral journey, I interviewed a graduate of the program and was intrigued by the opportunity to combine my faith with my academic work. I just wanted the opportunity to include information about how my faith informs my practice; I never thought that my work would end up being centered around a passage of scripture. But it was, and indeed I feel like my chains are loosed.

This dissertation has been a process, for real. In the end, I have a better understanding of who I am, I am not sure that was the intended outcome but it is surely more valuable than anything else I could have attained. I could not have gotten here without the love and support of family and friends. First, my parents, who were my senior citizen chauffeurs the first two years of the program. They never complained about picking me up from school on those late Friday nights or dropping me off on those early Saturday mornings. I think they were, however, happy when I discovered Uber. To the rest of my family who never doubted my ability to complete this task, even when at times I had my own doubts. Thank you for your love and support.

To my dissertation committee, Dr. Susan Katz, Dr. Emma Fuentes and Dr. Darrick Smith, thank you for all your help and support. This has been a journey that had many twists and

turns and uphill climbs. I wanted to tell a story that was against the norm. In the end, I think the story represents the information I was trying to impart well.

To the Black Girl Magic crew that I met here at the program. You all are so dope. You make the magic look easy. We supported each other from the beginning and now I know a lot of Doctors. We will change the world. Remember like Esther 4:14 instructs, “we were saved for such a time as this”.

One of the things this work did for me was give me an appreciation for storytelling. So I would be remiss if I failed to include a story here. In the early 1990s, a new pastor was elected at a small church. The matriarch of a prominent family at the Church was ill and unable to attend services regularly. She passed away shortly after his arrival. The new pastor was charged with giving the eulogy for this beloved member of the Church who he had very little knowledge of. The title of his message was, “I didn’t know you but I love you.” He talked about how while he did not know the woman personally, he knew about her based on the work she had done in the Church and on interactions with her family. This love was based on the work the woman had done in her life and the good things she had left behind.

I don’t know Huey Newton, Bobby Seale, Eldridge Cleaver or Fred Hampton, or any of the other Black Panther Party members, but I love you. I love the work you put in to serve the community. I am appreciative of the sacrifices that you made and acknowledge the repression you suffered all in an effort to make the world better and not just for people of color but for everyone. I didn’t know you, but I love you.

## **LIST OF FIGURES**

Figure 1 – *Sacramento Bee* Newspaper Cover – May 2, 1967



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

DISSERTATION ABSTRACT .....	ii
DEDICATION .....	iv
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	v
LIST OF FIGURES .....	vii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	viii
CHAPTER I.....	1
Statement of the Problem.....	6
Background and Need for Study.....	7
Purpose of the Study .....	10
Theoretical/Conceptual Framework.....	11
Research Questions.....	15
Significance.....	15
Definition of Terms.....	16
CHAPTER II.....	18
Overview.....	18
The Black Panther Party .....	18
Storytelling.....	28
Scholarly personal narrative .....	32

Summary .....	37
CHAPTER III .....	39
Restatement of the Purpose of the Study .....	39
Research Design.....	40
Method Justification.....	42
Ethical Considerations .....	42
Data Collection and Analysis.....	42
The Counter-Narrative .....	43
Background of the Researcher .....	45
CHAPTER IV .....	48
FINDINGS .....	48
Lessoned Learned from the Story.....	50
The Recipe .....	51
Preparation .....	51
Connection .....	52
Love the people.....	53
Validation.....	56
Serve the People.....	57
Validation.....	58
Evolve .....	60

CHAPTER V .....	64
THE NARRATIVE.....	64
Introduction.....	64
It Is Well With My Soul: A Letter to My Nephew .....	66
2 Kings 7:3-4 The Message (MSG).....	70
CHAPTER VI.....	94
Discussion.....	97
Responses to Research Questions.....	100
Research question #1: .....	100
Research question #2: .....	101
Research question #3: .....	102
Conclusion .....	104
Implications of the Study.....	107
Recommendations for Future Research .....	108
Personal reflection .....	109
REFERENCES .....	112

## **CHAPTER I**

### **THE RESEARCH PROBLEM**

The Black Panther Party (BPP) is an almost mythical historical organization. Stories about what they have done abound. Unfortunately, many of the most easily accessible stories written do not focus on the truth but instead on the myths about the Party.

What comes to mind to those who have only learned about the Party from media sources is guns, berets and free breakfast; they were painted as an organization that was comprised of violent thugs who happened to serve breakfast to schoolchildren. The Party was known for openly carrying guns and advising those in the community to have arms in their homes. The Party uniform included berets. The Party is also responsible for starting the Free Breakfast for Children program that inspired public schools throughout the United States to begin serving breakfast to children. These things paint a simplistic view of a very complex organization. The Party was much more than gun-toting Black men in berets, who made breakfast. The Party was a grassroots movement that sought to empower people to make positive change in their lives. They developed programs that sought to help the community gain the power to control their own destiny.

The people who made up the Black Panther Party were everyday people who left the comforts of their own homes to become part of a movement to improve lives for oppressed communities. The founders of the Party, Huey Newton and Bobby Seale, were two regular young men who had an extraordinary commitment to the people and vision for how to serve them. They persevered through levels of government repression that no other group had ever endured. The FBI had declared war on what they termed Black Nationalist organizations, and

made the destruction of the BPP its top priority. Yet in spite of the government repression and the constant harassment of local law enforcement, people came and joined the Party. They signed up for volunteer positions where there were long hours, no pay, lots of work, political education classes, and your life was on the line. The people volunteered, some because they saw the vision of Huey and Bobby, and others because they were attracted to the media version of the Party and were anxious to get guns and fight back.

The creation story of the Black Panther Party is important because it dispels the myth that it is impossible to build such a magnificent movement without some divine endowment. While it is sure that Bobby and Huey did possess some extraordinary talent and were committed, the work they accomplished was made possible because they were in touch with the needs of the people. The creation story provides facts about what the Party did, but also highlights the path taken by the founders. The path they left can be used not to get to the same destination or mimic the original organization but to create a new movement for a new generation.

The creation story is also important because it is the words of the founders telling their own story. Too often, especially in communities of color, we do not get to tell our own stories. Others name our past and try to control how the story is told. Majoritarian sources are louder and more readily available, but that does not make them correct. There is an African proverb that says, "Until lions write their own history, the tale of the hunt will always glorify the hunter." Gleaning the creation story from the texts of Newton and Seale is an attempt at letting the lions tell the story.

This research for me is an attempt to honor those who sacrificed for me without knowing me or expecting anything in return. To honor their story, and also create something that another generation can use to learn about the sacrifices they made attempting to make the world better, is

an awesome task. To create something that, like the BPP, is created, especially for those they identified as the lumpen proletariat, the brother who's pimping, the brother who's hustling, the unemployed, the downtrodden, the brother who's robbing banks, who's not politically conscious (Seale 1970, p. 30)

bell hooks (1989) wrote, "Oppressed people resist by identifying themselves as subjects, by defining their reality, shaping their new identity, naming their history, telling their story" (p. 43). The story of the Party is my story; those are my brothers and sisters, their sacrifices warrant my respect and appreciation. They are waiting for us to pick up the mantle and tell their story and continue the journey. This is my version of telling my story.

### **Introduction**

Then I looked again at all the acts of oppression which were being done under the sun.  
And behold *I saw* the tears of the oppressed and *that* they had no one to comfort *them*;  
and on the side of their oppressors was power, but they had no one to comfort *them*.

Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor. <sup>10</sup> For if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up. (Ecclesiastes 4: 1, 9-10, *New American Standard Bible* translation)

We in the Black Panther Party, because of our dedication and understanding, went into the valley knowing that the people are in the valley, knowing that our plight is the same plight as the people in the valley, knowing that our enemies are on the mountain, to our friends are in the valley, and even though it's nice to be on the mountaintop, we're going

back to the valley. Because we understand that there's work to be done in the valley...-  
 (Fred Hampton, "Power anywhere there's people speech," 1969)

...And who will join this great standing up and the ones who stood without sweet  
 company will sing and sing back into the mountains and if necessary even under the sea ~  
 we are the ones we have been waiting for. (June Jordan, *Poem for the South African  
 women*, 1980. [www.junejordan.net/poem-for-south-african-women.net](http://www.junejordan.net/poem-for-south-african-women.net) )

The National Football League's (NFL) Super Bowl Celebration is big business in the United States. Cities compete for the chance to host the event, so that they will have the opportunity to gain the revenue the event garners because of the sheer number of attendees. In February 2016, Super Bowl 50 was hosted in the San Francisco Bay Area at the newly built Levi's Stadium in Santa Clara. The Super Bowl's half-time show included a performance by Beyoncé, that was interpreted as a tribute to the Black Panther Party for their 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. The criticism of the performance was swift. How dare she sully one of the most American of events with a tribute to cop killers and haters of all White people? To date, a search of Beyoncé and the Black Panther Party garners over 1.4 million results; most of the results are negative stories about the gall of this pop singer paying tribute to a street gang that was anti-police and anti-America.

Most of the stories include "facts" about the Black Panther Party that are, in fact, untrue. It would not have been a challenge for the writers of these stories to do the necessary research to find out what they were writing was incorrect, because really why would they have to? The Black Panther Party was bad, and that was the story they intended to tell. The NFL and the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) received complaints from across the country about Beyoncé's "racist" and political messages in her performance. Oddly, her performance was of

her current single that was not about the Black Panther Party. The only things that could even be remotely tied to the Black Panther Party were the Afros and berets that the back-up dancers were wearing. But, the complaints rolled in anyway.

The New York Police Department threatened not to protect her when she came to New York for a performance, unless she apologized (<http://www.nydailynews.com/new-york/nypd-detectives-union-head-blasts-beyonce-super-bowl-article-1.2531568> and [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-nation/wp/2016/02/19/boycott-beyonces-formation-world-tour-police-union-urges/?noredirect=on&utm\\_term=.b29882289aad](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-nation/wp/2016/02/19/boycott-beyonces-formation-world-tour-police-union-urges/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.b29882289aad)). Really. And there were stories of other police departments in cities where Beyoncé had tour stops that also threatened to not provide protection for her when she came to their cities on her tour. The dancers wore Afros and berets. The outrage was instant and continues to this day. I think they wanted her to disavow the Black Panther Party and celebrate the local police; she did neither.

The Black Panther Party was defunct in 2016; so why all the venom? The Black Panther Party centralized its operations in oppressed communities, worked with groups from other communities, provided political education, community survival programs, and protested police brutality. However, the media narrative about the Black Panther Party paints a picture of armed Black thugs hell bent on “invading” America, killing cops and breaking the law.



Figure 1



It was the end of August 1989, when I was attending City College of San Francisco. Huey Newton had just been murdered. I was in a psychology class, and the instructor, Dr. Griffin, shared a story about how he believed Huey Newton to be a hoodlum and a thug. While in graduate school, Dr. Griffin worked at San Francisco State University supervising students in the Psychology Department, including one who was a member of the Black Panther Party. During one afternoon, Huey Newton came into his class and demanded that the student be released to attend to Panther business. Dr. Griffin refused, so Huey Newton put a gun to the instructor's head, and then he acquiesced.

This story was my introduction to the Black Panther Party. It was a typical narrative told about the Black Panther Party (BPP), their members and actions. By the time I had reached college age, the Party was defunct. The media reports about the BPP usually had a negative slant. Most stories I remember painted the Party made up of gun wielding radicals and mischief makers. It was not until I read *It's Bigger than Hip Hop* (Asante, 2008) that I was introduced to the BPP Ten Point Program and Platform and the true work of the Party. Growing up in San Francisco, one would think that stories of their pivotal community programs would abound, but even after the demise of the Party, they did not.

Why is the media narrative so different from what actually happened in the Black Panther Party? Why is the public so fast to latch onto a false narrative and ignore the facts that are available? Why are the narratives from actual Party members ignored?

### **Statement of the Problem**

The Black Panther Party was an organization born out of the radical 1960's Civil Rights Movements in the United States. Faced with police repression and constant FBI harassment, while the Party had lofty goals and sought to serve oppressed communities, the weight of

government interference led to the demise of the Party. The Party's membership was composed of men and women who left their homes and families to live in poverty conditions, just for the opportunity to serve the people. Party members were mostly unpaid; they lived in communal housing and worked long hours. They endured the physical and mental strain that comes with government repression. They continued to serve the people and acted as a resource for marginalized communities, seeking to provide the aid the oppressed communities needed just to survive.

A new generation of young adults is destined to miss out on and devalue the sacrifices made by group of volunteers who put their very lives on the line trying to make life better for marginalized communities. These people deserve more than to be referenced as a violent, radical, Black Nationalist organization that carried guns and promoted hate (aside from radical, none of the other characterizations are true). The work of the Black Panther Party is deserving of some measure of respect. Stories about the work of the BPP need to be shared widely. The need for a counterstory that refutes the media narrative about the Party, that is accessible to the people, could be a valuable resource for marginalized communities. Communities of color could learn from the BPP blueprint for community organizing and the subsequent programs they developed in order to address current issues within their local settings.

### **Background and Need for Study**

In 1966, the Civil Rights Movement in the United States was raging. Throughout the United States, people were working to effect change in their communities and bring an end to racial discrimination. They also were working to build safe communities for people of color and were fighting against voter suppression, police brutality, oppression, and economic injustice. In this climate, the Black Panther Party was born.

On October 15, 1966, Huey Newton and Bobby Seale sat down at the poverty center in North Oakland, California, developed the Ten-Point Platform and Program, which became the guiding principles on which the Party was founded (see Appendix A) and gave birth to the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense (“The Party”) (Seale, 1970). The Black Panther logo was taken from a civil rights group from Lowndes County, Alabama, that chose the black panther as a mascot. According to Huey Newton, “The nature of a panther is that he never attacks. But if anyone attacks him or backs him into a corner, the panther comes up to wipe that aggressor or that attacker out, absolutely, resolutely, wholly, thoroughly, and completely” (Newton, as cited in Seale, 1970, p. 41).

One of the first programs the Party was known for was called the Community Police Patrols, where members would monitor police activities in the community. These patrols would happen every night; they would observe stops from the legal distance and advise detainees of their legal rights. They would make sure that police officers did not plant evidence on suspects or trample on their rights. As Party members carried guns and law books, the Party was beginning to make a name for themselves locally (Newton, 2009).

The Party received nationwide notoriety on May 2, 1967, when the members went to the California State Assembly to protest the Mulford Act, a bill that would make it illegal to carry guns in public. The bill was written in response to the work of the Party in Oakland. Party members, carrying guns, went to the State Capitol to read Executive Mandate No. 1 from the Party that was penned by Huey Newton (Newton, 2009). With photos of black men with guns appeared on newspapers and newscasts nationwide, it was characterized as an “invasion” (*Sacramento Bee*, May 2, 1967, p. 1). At the time, the Party had around 30 members total, but the media portrayed them as an armed militant group with plans to invade America.

The protest at the State Capitol put the Party on the map. It was this event that told the world outside of the Bay Area that they existed. After this, communities of color nationwide sought them out so that they could start chapters in other urban communities. Many young adults were fed up with the conditions in their communities and looking for an opportunity to work to make things better. They were disillusioned with the civil rights organizations that grew out of movements in the South and wanted to take action. The Party's position of self-defense was attractive, because finally there was an organization that had fighting back, instead of passive action, at the center of its program. Black Panther Party chapters were springing up nationwide.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) under the leadership of J. Edgar Hoover began a Counterintelligence Program (COINTELPRO) team (FBI Document, 1968, appendix d). COINTELPRO declared war on the Party and used their unlimited access to resources to infiltrate and take it down (Churchill, 2001). In every city where the Party was active, FBI and police departments targeted their activities and, without regard to legality, sought to shut down the Party's operations (Newton, 1980).

It was in the midst of these kinds of obstacles that the Party developed Community Survival Programs that served the community. The Party viewed itself as a grassroots organizing group that sought to serve the needs of the people. Some programs were universal, like the Free Breakfast for School Children Program and the political education classes, while some were unique at the local level, like the People's Free Ambulance Service. Party members would survey the communities in which they served and develop programs based on the needs of that community and its ability to fulfill those needs. Their grassroots organizing process was very effective at determining how to meet the needs of the people. It is important to mention that in the early days, Party programs were self-funded. Party members raised the money themselves

from community donations to the selling of the Black Panther Newspaper to cover the Party's expenses.

The work of the Party embodied grassroots organizing ideals, with relationship building at the center of their community action. The goal was to include everyone in the community in their work, even those who were discarded by the educational system and caught up in criminal enterprises just to survive (Berry & Stovall, 2013). They did not shy away from the undereducated or the formerly incarcerated; they actually sought them out and wanted to ensure they knew they could be positive forces. Party members had rules and guidelines to follow and had to partake in an educational program. Preparing people to serve was a central focus.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative study is to examine the work of the Black Panther Party, focusing on the narratives of Party founders Huey Newton and Bobby Seale. *Revolutionary Suicide* (2009) by Newton, *Seize the Time* by Seale (1970) and *War Against the Panthers* (Newton, 1980), are the most oft-cited literature and research about the Black Panther Party. Both *Revolutionary Suicide* and *Seize the Time* provide a view of how the Party was created and how the work was carried out; the two works provide different perspectives on the same events. *War Against the Panthers* was written after the demise of the party and provides a hindsight analysis by Newton on the work of the Party and on how the interference of the FBI affected the work of the Party.

This dissertation seeks to analyze these narratives in search of the actions and events that built the Black Panther Party and to identify the creation story. It also aims to provide a counter-narrative to the media narrative currently told about the Black Panther Party. The counter-narrative takes the form of a letter to my nephew; it is meant to act as accessible text that will tell

the creation story of the Party. I wanted to choose a format that would be relatable to the reader, yet still provide the facts. The purpose of the counter-narrative is not only to provide the facts about the Party, especially in terms of how they differ from the media narrative; but also to promote an interest in a deeper study of the work of the BPP.

## **Theoretical/Conceptual Framework**

### ***Critical race theory***

Critical Race Theory (CRT) grew out of the need for “a critical vocabulary for articulating an alternative account of racial power” (Cook, 2013, p. 183) Critical Race Theory centers race and racism as essential to understanding how systems of inequality, disparity, and inequity continue to function. Maintaining the centrality of race elucidates the fluid, shifting, yet consistent message of white supremacy and how it operates in the policies, practices, and everyday schooling experiences of students, teachers, and the larger community (Cook, 2013).

As a methodological frame, Critical Race Theory embodies an epistemology for how and why particular methods are chosen, with particular attention to centering the stories and lived experiences of people of color. Cook (2013) notes at least five components in Critical Race Theory methodology:

1. Recognizing the intersectionality of race and racism with other forms of oppression;
2. Confronting dominant ideology, thus intentionally deconstructing the notions of objectivity and neutrality in research;
3. Acknowledging the various ways that oppression is resisted;

4. Exposing deficit based research by centering the lived, everyday experiences of people of color; and
5. Drawing from multiple disciplines to analyze race and racism within particular historical and contemporary contexts.

Critical Race methodology generates knowledge by looking to those who have been epistemologically marginalized, silenced, and disempowered. In education, Critical Race Theory argues that race remains under-explored. Using Critical Race Theory as a lens, educational scholars have engaged race more broadly in an interdisciplinary, multi-epistemological project focused on the complex and multiple ways in which race is connected to create predictable outcomes in the education of students of color in the United States (Cook, 2013).

DeCuir-Gunby and Walker-DeVose (2013) claim that Critical Race Theory studies employ qualitative methods, focusing on the use of counter-stories. Counter-stories are the stories of those individuals and groups whose knowledges and histories have been marginalized, excluded, subjugated or forgotten in the telling of official narratives. Counter-storytelling comes from the rich storytelling traditions of African-American, Chicano, and Native American communities and is an essential tool used in qualitative research to “expose, analyze, and challenge the majoritarian stories of racial privilege” (p. 252). Solórzano and Yosso (2002) posit that the three types of counterstories: personal narratives, other people’s narratives, and composite narratives,

- a. build community between those at the bottom and margins of society;
- b. challenge the taken for granted understanding of those at the center; and

c. are pedagogical teaching and learning tools that use story to expand our understanding of reality and possibility.

Those choosing to represent oppressed people must be wary of creating a homogenized version of the marginalized that does not take account of the diversity and complexity of those at the bottom. In counter-storytelling, the narratives of personal accounts, stories of other people, and composite stories are developed into a narrative that is grounded in real-life experiences and empirical data and contextualized within a specific social setting (Cook, 2013).

The use of counter-stories allows for the telling of untold stories. In doing so, the utilization of counter-stories can open new windows into reality, showing us possibilities for life other than the ones we live. The use of narrative is an essential tool utilized by CRT to dismantle hegemonic knowledge and discourse. Narrative corresponds more closely to how the human mind makes sense of experience. Narratives that look to the bottom acknowledge that those who lack material wealth or political power still have access to thought and language as well as the development of those tools.

While there are several types of counter-story, this research utilized composite stories/narratives - a variety of data sources to create a group story regarding experiences with racism. This “group story” is “situated within historical, social, and political context and can draw from autobiographical and biographical events” (DeCruir-Gunby & Walker-DeVose, 2013, p. 253). The counter-story is a contrasting story that describes one’s experience from a different vantage point. Telling the stories can be both therapeutic and cathartic. The primary point here is that the chronicle or counter-story is about racial justice principles, not personal affront (Ladson-Billings, 2013)



Douglass-Horsford and Grosland (2013), quoting Burrell (2010), state that in the United States, the wholesale marketing and branding campaign of blacks as subhuman has reinforced white superiority and black inferiority to justify slavery within a democracy, but also perpetually “weakens the impulse to understand or help those still scorched at the bottom of America’s melting pot (p. 153).” This deficit perspective permeates the discourse around issues that plague communities of color; without regard to those systemic issues that serve to stifle growth in those communities.

According to Ladson-Billings (2013), storytelling is one of the oldest human art forms. Historically, cultures maintained their sense of self and history through those stories that are told and retold. Every culture has narratives that are shared as “means of entertainment, education, and cultural preservation and to instill moral values” (Ladson-Billings, 2013, p. 41). To cripple a culture, take away their ability to tell their own stories. This research utilized the narratives of the founders of the Black Panther Party as its data source. These stories were used to build the counter-story to the negative narratives that exists around the work of the Black Panther Party. In research, often stories from marginalized groups are discounted. When one group describes its world view or story as “real history,” “truth,” or “objective science” and others’ worldviews as myth, legend, and lore, it is validating one narrative while simultaneously invalidating the other (Ladson-Billings, 2013).

This research examined the stories of the founders of the Black Panther Party, Huey Newton and Bobby Seale. From these stories, an accessible narrative was developed to explain the creation and growth of the Party. This accessible narrative takes the form of a letter to my nephew; inspired by “*My dungeon shook; Letter to my nephew*” by James Baldwin (1963). The goal is to show how regular people with a heart to serve the people were able to create an

organization that was ahead of its time. In addition, it highlights that it is still possible to continue the work started by the Party and the need for that work to continue. This is not meant to be a call to restart the Party, but instead to take a look into the process, so that new generations can follow those steps and start something new.

The accessible narrative is not meant to provide a complete history of the Party, but instead it is meant to be a catalyst for readers to delve deeper into study of the Party. Much of the existing literature, while excellent, does not generally appeal to the average reader. The accessible narrative is a bridge to these texts, providing enough information about the Party to garner interest in further research. This newfound desire should make the existing texts more palatable for the general reader.

### **Research Questions**

1. How can the narratives of Huey Newton and Bobby Seale be used to uplift and explore the work of the Black Panther party?
2. How can the use of counter-narrative make the history of the Black Panther Party more accessible to youth and community members?
3. How can a counter-narrative about the Black Panther Party be used to disrupt the dominant discourse about the work of the Party and provide inspiration to the current generation?

### **Significance**

This study enhances the extensive previous research on the Black Panther Party by providing an accessible counter-narrative about the Party. Many earlier studies (Harris, 2000; Rhodes, 1999; Tyner 2006) have focused on the militant stances of the Party or their political leanings and/or have not been written in an accessible way as to attract the general reader. The

Black Panther Party for Self-Defense was an important part of the historical landscape in terms of what the members were able to accomplish through grassroots organizing, program development, and their ability to serve the masses with social and educational programs. While a new generation of young people could benefit from learning about the work of the Party, they tend to view them only as militant Negroes with guns, having been inundated with the media's distorted narrative about the Party and missing out on stories about the real work of the Party.

This study seeks to fill in this gap by examining the seminal texts by Huey Newton and Bobby Seale to create a counter-narrative about the Party in the form a letter to my nephew that disputes the media's false representation. The goal of the counter-narrative is to create significant interest in the Party among marginalized groups to propel them into a deeper study about the Party and its work. Hopefully, the deeper study will aid these groups to connect ways with which to address current issues in these communities. Ultimately, the significance of this study is to develop a tool (the counter-narrative) that can be used as a stepping stone by groups to garner a deeper understanding of the Party and its grassroots work. This deeper understanding can lead to these groups feeling empowered to make changes within their own communities. The counter-narrative can be used as an integral part of a classroom curriculum about the founding of a movement, specifically the Black Panther Party.

### **Definition of Terms**

This study uses various terms to identify the Party or describe their work. Therefore, it may be useful to provide explanations of the terms.

*Black Nationalist*: the advocacy of separate national status for black people, especially in the US

*BPP, the Party*: The Black Panther Party

*Repression*: the persecution of an individual or group within society for political reasons, particularly for the purpose of restricting or preventing their ability to take part in the political life of a society thereby reducing their standing among their fellow citizens

*Counter-narrative*: a method of telling the stories of people who are often overlooked in the literature, and as a means by which to examine, critique, and counter majoritarian stories composed about people of color.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

#### Overview

The purpose of this study is to examine the autobiographical narratives of Huey Newton and Bobby Seale and to provide a counter narrative to the media depiction to the work of the Black Panther Party. The chapter provides a historiography of the Black Panther Party and its evolution and ideology. It explores the existing literature on the work of the BPP and its impact on marginalized communities.

#### *The Black Panther Party*

The Black Panther Party for Self-Defense is an oft-studied organization, that is complex and simple all at once. It was founded by two men who watched the Civil Rights Movement in the South and observed the oppression happening in their own hometown of Oakland, California; they were moved to take action. As I read through the available literature about the Party, I was reminded of a sermon I heard about seven years ago. It was based on 2 Kings 7: 3-4:

It happened that four lepers were sitting just outside the city gate. They said to one another, "What are we doing sitting here at death's door? If we enter the famine-struck city we'll die; if we stay here we'll die. So, let's take our chances in the camp of Aram and throw ourselves on their mercy. If they receive us we'll live, if they kill us we'll die. We've got nothing to lose. (The Message Translation of the Bible, 2002)

The subject of the sermon was "We Ain't Got Nothing to Lose." As I read Newton's account of how he and Seale worked together to lay out the plan for the Party, I kept hearing that

refrain in my head – “We ain’t got nothing to lose.” As they began their work in Oakland, they were buoyed by the needs of the people and their desire to serve.

The Black Panther Party was founded in 1966 in Oakland, California, by Bobby Seale and Huey Newton. The two met while attending Oakland City College (now Merritt College); they had been active in several college organizations and were troubled by what was happening in communities of color and the lack of real action to improve the lives of people in those communities. They were also bothered by the occupation that those communities endured from the local police departments (Phillips & LeBlanc-Ernest, 2016) They sought to start an organization to address the needs that the community had identified in the months prior when they took the time to talk to the people and ask them what they needed.

The BPP started as a Black Nationalist/Black Power oriented organization that over time evolved into what Newton (2009) coined as Intercommunalism:

In 1966 we called our Party a Black Nationalist Party. We called ourselves Black Nationalists because we thought that nationhood was the answer. Shortly after that we decided that what was really needed was revolutionary nationalism, that is, nationalism plus socialism. After analyzing conditions a little more, we found that it was impractical and even contradictory. Therefore, we went to a higher level of consciousness. We saw that in order to be free we had to crush the ruling circle and therefore we had to unite with the peoples of the world. So we called ourselves Internationalists. We sought solidarity with the peoples of the world. We sought solidarity with what we thought were the nations of the world. But then what happened? We found that because everything is in a constant state of transformation, because of the development of technology, because of the development of the mass media, because of the fire power of the imperialist, and

because of the fact that the United States is no longer a nation but an empire, nations could not exist, for they did not have the criteria for nationhood. Their self-determination, economic determination, and cultural determination has been transformed by the imperialists and the ruling circle. They were no longer nations. We found that in order to be Internationalists we had to be also Nationalists, or at least acknowledge nationhood. Internationalism, if I understand the word, means the interrelationship among a group of nations. But since no nation exists, and since the United States is in fact an empire, it is impossible for us to be Internationalists. These transformations and phenomena require us to call ourselves “Intercommunalists” because nations have been transformed into communities of the world. The Black Panther Party now disclaims internationalism and supports Intercommunalism. (pp. 31-32)

Many scholars, and even the general population, view the BPP has a static organization, when in fact it was constantly evolving. The Black Panther Party for Self-Defense is a mythological organization. Much of what the public believes about the BPP is based on the media’s portrayal of the group, which is not based on the facts. When the BPP is mentioned, the first thing that comes to mind is the picture of several black men in leather jackets, berets, with rifles in hand. Brothers with guns must be up to no good. Period.

Much of the media narrative about the BPP and what they stood for focuses on their militant action; aside from a passing mention of the Free Breakfast Program for Children, they often are relegated to gun-toting Negroes, who wore leather jackets and berets. Much has been made of their uniforms, more so than the message and the work they did trying to improve lives in their communities. Phillips and LeBlanc-Ernest (2016) state that this public representation constructs a threatening Black manhood that fails to recognize BPP men as nurturers and

community builders. The legacy of the BPP goes unrecognized, even though they had significant impact on the Black liberation struggle in the United States (Abron, 1998; Jones & Jefferies, 1998). Contrary to the media narrative that the BPP preached hate against white people, the Party actually had many white allies and openly worked with organizations comprised of people of all races. There is no instance of the Party supporting the random murder of white people or destruction of white-owned property (Phillips & LeBlanc-Ernest, 2016).

The Party was also able to reach those in marginalized communities that had not been attracted by other social movements. The Party termed this population the “lumpen proletariat,” and they believed that this could be one of the most radically revolutionary forces of colonized people. The Panthers recast any African American ghetto dweller who lacked a secure relationship with the means of production and other institutions of capitalist society as lumpen proletariat. The Panthers concentrated, in Seale’s words, on organizing “the brother who’s pimping, the brother who’s hustling, the unemployed, the downtrodden, the brother who’s robbing banks, who’s not politically conscious – that’s what lumpen proletariat means (Seale 1970, p. 30). The Party made great progress in attracting this population and providing them with political education and empowering them to serve and make a difference in their communities.

The BPP faced the destructive forces of the United States government’s FBI Counterintelligence program (COINTELPRO), that utilized any means to “disrupt and destroy” the work of the BPP in communities (Hoover, 1968, see appendix d). The FBI had agent provocateurs who had infiltrated the Panther ranks in every chapter; these agents provided information to the FBI and at the direction of the FBI, instigated meant to discredit the work of the Party. The police, both in the Panthers’ Oakland home and on a national level, constantly suppressed the Panthers’ work and muffled their narratives. When the agents of the system



choose to react in this fashion, their conduct underscores the radical nature of the opposition's narrative. More commonly, voices of protest and even resistance are co-opted and tamed (think MLK and the I Have a Dream speech), but all political hegemonies also, in varying degrees, engage in direct suppression. Those interested in taking counter-hegemonic positions would surely benefit from a study of the Panthers' narratives, but the Panthers' ultimate fate also demonstrates the dangers of successfully articulating narratives that challenge the police and the system they serve (Papke 1994, pp. 646-647).

The BPP ran free breakfast programs, free clothing and food programs, offered bus rides for community members to visit friends and family in prison, provided community health clinics, gave legal consultation, and led community education programs (Seale, 1970). It is these programs, more than the armed self-defense, that were viewed as dangerous to the Federal Government. The FBI felt that the BPP was indoctrinating the community with free breakfast. They felt the BPP was the most dangerous element in the United States (Hoover, 1968, see Appendix D). BPP chapters were opening all across the country and internationally. The Party was garnering lots of attention and support, rapidly. A plan that was developed for Oakland was being taken up in communities nationwide. The BPP was under constant attack by the Oakland Police Department (Newton, 2009; Seale, 1970). All police received the names, addresses and photos of party members. They got listings of the cars and license plate numbers of all known BPP vehicles. Party members were under constant surveillance. It was routine for the police to ransack the homes and offices of BPP members. The harassment was constant and overt. It would appear that the police were afraid of the ideas of the Party.

Much has been written about the work of the Party. There have been examinations about the political work of the Party, its militant stances, and even the response of the FBI to the

movement (Hayes & Kiene III 1998; Davenport, 1998; Umoja, 1998; Bloom & Martin, 2013). There appears to be an effort to create a single story about what the Party was or what they did. There are several very well written anthology texts that examine the work of the Party: i.e., *Liberation, Imagination and the Black Panther Party* (Cleaver & Katsiaficas, 2001), *The Black Panther Party Reconsidered* (Jones, 1998), *In Search of the Black Panther Party* (Lazerow & Williams, 2007). Each of the aforementioned texts contains well researched, academic texts that examine the political positions of the Party, the repression faced by the Party, the violence act upon Party members, along with other topics. The texts would appear to justify the work of the Party in the face of the public narrative that paints a picture of violent thugs bent on destruction. While the texts provide valuable insight and analysis, the dense nature could act as a deterrent as use for an introductory text about the Party. While likely not purposely, the texts appear similar, not in language but in goals; present a picture of an organization that worked to serve communities across the country. But the Party was a complex organization; there is no single story. There were differences based on geography, community, and membership. The Party was composed of volunteers from the community. Many were drawn to the Party because of their self-defense stance. Others just wanted to be a part of an action oriented organization.

As mentioned earlier, the Black Panther Party garnered national attention in May of 1967 when they went to the California State Capitol to protest the Mulford Bill which was developed in response to the Party openly carrying loaded weapons (Doss, 2001). A contingent of about 30 men and women went to the capitol to read Executive Mandate No. 1 that was written in response to the Mulford Bill, whose goal was to ban the carrying of loaded weapons. This brought the Party, which was still a relatively new and developing organization, to the national stage (Doss, 2001, p. 180). Prior to this event, the Party had been active in Oakland, San

Francisco, and Richmond. They were a small band of activists who were willing to work in the community to bring about change. They were not prepared for the notoriety that the national attention would bring them (Bloom & Martin, 2013, p. 61).

The Party was forced to evolve fast since there were requests from people in cities nationwide to start chapters. The Party had to develop an on-boarding process that would train people and prepare them to serve in an expeditious manner. The Party sought to use every volunteer; there was no screening process. The Party members believed that any person who was willing to serve could make a contribution to the movement (Seale, 1970). The Party sought to empower people in the community (Newton, 2009). According to Newton (2009),

[the] main function of the party is to awaken the people and teach them the strategic method of resisting a power structure which is prepared not only to combat with massive brutality the people's resistance but to annihilate totally the Black population. If it is learned by the power structure that Black people have "x" number of guns in their possession, that information will not stimulate the power structure to prepare itself with guns; it is already prepared. (p. 15)

Poor communities of color did not have many advocates. Those communities had substandard housing, limited access to quality grocery stores, substandard schools, constant police surveillance, and brutality. Party founders had spent time talking with the people in the community to get input on what the people saw as needs in the community (this information was used to create the Ten Point Program and Platform of the Black Panther Party) (Newton, 2009; Seale, 1970). Party members acted as advocates for people in the community. They were a resource for people in the community. Party offices were busy from opening to closing (Williams, 2013; Williams, 2016; Shih & Williams, 2016, p. 58-60). They would help people in

the community find resolution to issues they faced; when no one else would stand with them they had the Party to stand with them.

The Party was a living organism that evolved as the needs of the people changed and as the work changed (Newton, 2009). There were also regional differences in how the Party operated. All chapters had political education classes, they all sold *The Black Panther* newspaper, and they all had the Free Breakfast for Children program. But each office was run a bit differently. They followed the Panther principles as well as believed in self-defense and service to the people; but how they served could vary depending on the size of the local chapter and the needs of the community they served (Williams, 2008). For instance, in some areas the Service to the People programs were quite expansive, including pest control and ambulance services; whereas some areas focused on the Free Breakfast programs, and then still others had expansive Free Medical Clinic programs. The Party was able to fund all of their programs through the sale of the *Black Panther Newspaper* and through fundraising efforts. The Party philosophy was that businesses that were in the community should support the programs (Shih & Williams, 2016, p. 112-116). If these businesses made money off the people in the community, they had an obligation to support the programs the Party was developing to help the people in the community.

The growth of these programs necessitated the ingenuity of the Panther membership. These volunteers had to learn to fundraise; they had to learn to manage the day to day operation of each of the programs, including facilities, procurement, contracts, and personnel. Many of the Panthers who were managing these programs did not realize they possessed the skills to run a program until called upon by the Party (Williams, 2013). Members learned to run medical clinics, run a newspaper from articles to printing, do the ground work for food giveaways,

tutoring programs and political education. And they were able to accomplish all this while in constant battle against police repression and FBI infiltration and interference.

The Party was constantly being bombarded by police and FBI interference. FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover identified the Party as the greatest internal threat to the United States (see Appendix D for FBI Memo). Imagine: a group of people, mostly under 30 with a large percentage of college students who made breakfast for kids and registered people to vote; they were the greatest threat. Sure, Party members had guns, but the police had more guns. The BPP was a group that was about self-defense; contrary to the media narratives about the Party, they did not call for the random destruction of property or the murder of the police. They sought the control of their own *destinies and community control*.

The FBI, by identifying the Party as the ‘greatest threat,’ sent a message to the local police departments that it was open season on Panther members. The law was no deterrent to the tactics used by the police to bring down the Party. They used means, legal and illegal, to stop Party work (Abu-Jamal, 2001, p. 48). The harassment was constant. The surveillance was constant. Every chapter of the Party was completely infiltrated. The FBI used provocateurs to instigate action and frame Party members. The FBI used local police to carry out its mission to destroy the Party (Newton, 1980). They even went as far as to murder Party members, like Fred Hampton and Mark Clark. Since they had to be unsuccessful in corrupting them, or incarcerating them, they would just eliminate them (Haas, 2010). The FBI and local police were able to carry out action against the BPP with impunity.

Aside from the direct action, the FBI operated indirectly. They controlled how the BPP was portrayed in the media; they would speak to the families of Party members and tell them that the Party was trying to overthrow the government; they even went to the members of the

community who benefitted from Party programs to dissuade them from utilizing Party services- i.e., telling parents who sent their children to the Free Breakfast program that the food had been poisoned. Some Party members would leave their families completely and sever ties, just to protect them from FBI harassment. It was a challenge for Party members who had to explain to their parents or spouse why the government would make up such stories about them; after all they were just serving breakfast or selling papers or working in the office. They used every means necessary to sow dissension among the ranks. FBI interference led to the disintegration of the Party (Newton, 1980).

The BPP mystique abounds. Party members were disciplined and stylish. They wore leather jackets, berets and powder blues shirts. They would march in formation, carrying rifles, often with their eyes hidden behind shades. They appeared fearless. Party leaders gave fiery speeches, they called for revolution and referred to crooked police officers as pigs. They were known to use profanity. They stood up to power and they served the people. As fierce as they were in protest, they were gentle when serving children breakfast before school.

Much attention is given to the police patrols that the Party had during the early stages of its evolution. However, the police patrols ceased after the Mulford Bill was passed in July 28, 1967; after that it was against the law for the Party to carry loaded weapons. Since they could no longer carry the weapons, the police patrols ceased. So, basically the patrols only lasted about one year into the Party's work. But when people speak of the Party, they always mention the police patrols.

The Black Panther Party is most often billed as a radical, violent, Black Nationalist organization that espoused the hate of white people. This is not so. The Party never preached the hate of white people (Morgan, 2007). They were about unity and they worked with people of

every race. They preached a hate of oppression and sought to free those who were being held down by the oppressor. Because they chose the Black Panther as their mascot, there are those who thought the Party was only about Black people, but the Party had a history of working with other organizations that represented different groups. This is not broadly publicized because it does not fit the media narrative. “The Black Panther Party is not a Black racist organization, not a racist organization at all. We understand where racism come from. Our Minister of Defense (Newton) has taught us to understand that we have to oppose all kinds of racism” (Seale, 1970, p. 69).

### *Storytelling*

Storytelling is an important part of any culture. Stories are a universal way that cultures share knowledge and history. According to Delgado (1989):

Stories humanize us. They emphasize our differences in ways that can ultimately bring us closer together. They allow us to see how the world looks from behind someone else’s spectacles. They challenge us to wipe off our own lenses and ask, “Could I have been overlooking something all along?”

Telling stories invests text with feeling, gives voice to those who were taught to hide their emotions. Hearing stories invites hearers to participate, challenging their assumptions, jarring their complacency, lifting their spirits, lowering their defenses. (p. 31)

The power to tell one’s own story is very important. In marginalized communities, often the residents do not feel empowered enough to name their own story/history. The dominant narratives tend to oppress them further and limit their vision for their own lives.

Humans are storytelling organisms who, individually and collectively, lead storied lives. Thus, the study of narrative is the study of the ways humans experience the world. (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 2)

Narrative is as old as the ages. Narrative is story and people tell stories. Stories were an integral part of cultures, before colleges, before books, before degrees; there were storytellers. Stories are how we can understand experience (Clandinin & Huber, 2002, p. 161). Story is an integral part of culture that shows the nature of humanity. Story is at the root of how people find meaning of their experiences of the world. Storytelling is a means of survival (Huber, et al, 2013, p. 214). Stories can build consensus, built on shared understandings and deeper ethics. Counterstories that serve to challenge “received wisdom” can also do that. They open a new view into reality, highlighting other possibilities for life other than the ones we currently live. (Delgado, 1989).

Stories are very powerful; they have a way of sharing the facts that can touch you both personally and intellectually. Story is education in its most holistic form; stories honor the knowledge of previous generations. Narrative knowing is a central act of mind. Throughout time, writing has been inherently narrative (Huber, et al 2012, p. 217). Delgado (1989) states that stories about oppression, about victimization, about one’s own brutalization far from deepening the despair of the oppressed, lead to healing, liberation, mental health. They also promote group solidarity. Storytelling emboldens the hearer, who may have had the same thoughts and experiences the storyteller describes, but hesitated to give them voice. Having heard another express them, he or she realizes, I am not alone.

Narrative research has many forms; there are a variety of ways to analyze data and it finds its roots in multiple disciplines in the social and humanities. Narrative is the assigned term



for “any text or discourse, or, it might be text used within the context of a mode of inquiry in qualitative research (Creswell, 2006, p. 54). One approach to narrative research is to determine the type of narrative research that will be employed, with “analysis of narratives” where one utilizes paradigm thinking to create descriptions of themes; or narrative analysis, where the researcher collects stories about events and then creates a story using a plot line (Creswell 2006, p. 54). This study utilizes the former method by using personal narratives by two subjects about the same events to build a secondary story.

Narrative research does not have one set way in which to approach; but more so an informal collection of topics. Creswell (2006) outlines the following procedures for conducting narrative research:

1. Determine if the research problem or question fits narrative research. Narrative research is best for capturing detailed stories.
2. Select one or more individuals who have stories or life experiences to tell, and spend considerable time with them gathering their stories through a myriad of ways, the narratives are referred to as field texts.
3. Collect information about the context of these stories. Situate individual stories within participants’ personal experiences, their culture, and their historical contexts.
4. Analyze the participants’ stories, and then restory them into a framework that makes sense. Restorying is the process of reorganizing the stories into a general framework. This framework may consist of gathering stories, analyzing them for key elements of the story, (e.g., time, place, plot, and scene), and then rewriting the stories to place them in a chronological sequence. During the process of restorying, the researcher provides a causal link among ideas.

5. Collaborate with participants by actively involving them in the research. In narrative research, a key theme has been the turn toward the relationship between the researcher and the researched in which both parties will learn and change in the encounter. Also, within the story may be epiphanies or turning points in which the story line changes direction dramatically. In the end, the narrative study tells the story of individuals unfolding in a chronology of their experience, set within their personal, social, and historical context, and including the important themes in those live experiences. Narrative inquiry is stories lived and told. (pp. 56-57)

Often storytelling and narrative are dismissed as not being viable research methods that will acquire knowledge. But, narrative has informed the world of many acts of horrendous violence and discrimination. Survivors of those events provide the most poignant information about what really happened. Slave narratives, the Holocaust, Japanese internment camps, etc., all provide a rich testimony about events that have transpired, so even though the events are in the past, the stories remind us that the events are real.

The subjects in human research are not to be treated as fixed in a static location and decontextualized. But instead, when drawing on the methodology of narrative inquiry, which explores stories, and narratives of experiences. Narrative inquirers look for a relational understanding of the roles and interactions of the researcher and the researched. Clandinin and Connelly (1994) state it is equally correct to say inquiry into narrative as it is to say narrative inquiry, meaning that narrative is both phenomenon and method. Narrative names the structured quality of experience to be studied and it names the patterns of inquiry for its study.

Quaye (2007) asks why is it that most of the current crop of legal storytellers are black or brown? Do white people tell stories, too, but deem them not stories at all, but the truth? (p. 1)

He contends that the personal is an essential part of the research process even when persons try to hide behind veils of neutrality, hegemony, and objectivity in studies. He further argues that in order to be deemed credible by academia, researchers must write in a detached way, utilize large, quantitative datasets, and ensure that their findings generalize to several groups beyond themselves. These antiquated methods are meant to eliminate bias and add to the validity of the study. But all research has bias, regardless of methodology. Every researcher brings something of themselves to the study. And the use of a quantitative method does not necessarily make the research valid or generalizable.

### *Scholarly personal narrative*

Scholarly Personal Narrative (SPN) is a relatively new genre that values the narratives of the researcher and allows the researchers own knowledge base to become important in the writing. SPN writing is composed of four components: pre-search, me-search, research, and we-search. Pre-Search is the process of choosing and narrowing down the topic and them that will be covered in the narrative. Me-Search places the personal narrative of the researcher at the center of the manuscript. Research involves “casting the pre-search net into the pool of experts and scholars and seeing what catches.” We-Search explores universalizable implications for practitioners and scholars along with further possibilities for study (Nash & Bradley, 2012, p. 4).

SPN starts with the point of view of the researcher, instead of thoughts or activities of others. The writing is self-reflective and permits the writer to ‘bear personal witness to present and past events (Nash & Viray, 2013A, p. 10). The purpose of SPN is to teach others in some way. A well-done SPN will convey intellectual meanings to readers. This type of writing is beneficial to readers touching their lives, informing their experiences and transforming the meanings of events (Nash & Viray, 2013A, p. 11). SPN writing is grounded in the writer’s own

story. The writer's own voice sets the tone and style of the manuscript; it recognizes that you are never outside of your own writing. SPN allows the writer to “penetrate what often seems like a shield of impersonal, often jargon-ridden, formulaic prose, which we use at least in part to cover up our insecurities, and to contribute substantively to the construction of new knowledge about everyday life” (p. 16) .

SPN writing is governed by 10 guidelines, as explained by Nash & Viray (2013C):

- Guideline 1 – *Know the importance of your central questions, organizing themes, and engaging hooks.* It is important to remember that all points of view start with questions. (p. 53)
- Guideline 2 – *Move from the particular to the general, from the me to the we, and from the Theory to the practice, and back again – as often as possible.*
- In an SPN, every what needs why. Actions need reflection. And they all need honest, poignant personal stories to deliver them cogently. (p. 54)
- Guideline 3 - *Try to draw larger-life implications from your personal stories.* Use your personal story hooks as a pretext for exploring bigger educational, social, cultural, and political issues. (p. 54)
- Guideline 4 – *Whether you know it or not, you possess a vast store of background knowledge and scholarship.* Use it in your writing...selectively. For oppressed people of color throughout the world, personal narrative scholarship has given them long overdue permission to insert their own authentic voices into their writing. SPN also requires the citing of ideas/studies/theories of the research experts. (p. 56)
- Guideline 5 – *Use scholarly references whenever appropriate, but studiously avoid reference overload.* The on target scholarly reference provides a context, deepens

- your writing, extends its implications, grounds its insights, and, most of all, explicitly acknowledges the contributions of others to your thinking. (p. 58)
- Guideline 6 – *Always try to tell a good story.* Your story needs to have a plot, colorful characters, suspense, a climax, a denouement, and some significant lessons to be learned. While writing, you need to remind yourself constantly that as interesting as you think your life is, you have to work very hard to make it interesting to others. The best way to do this is to tell a story with some suspense and conflict to it. Try whenever possible to add narrative tension. Keep the reader guessing for a while. You don't need to give everything away in the first few pages or even in the first few chapters. (p. 59)
  - Guideline 7 – *Show some passion, but be sure your passion is cool – not red hot – and humble.* Try to take a position on something with strong conviction and with palpable affect in your language. Allow your authorial voice to be clear, distinct, and strong. Resist the conventional academic temptation to be objective: stoical, qualified, subdued, and distant. (p. 60)
  - Guideline 8 – *The best way to get readers to consider your perspective is to tell your story in an open-ended way.* Narrate your story in such a way that it might help your reader to see the world a little differently – not to accept your view of the world, but to accept the fact that others see the world differently, and this is good. (p. 60)
  - Guideline 9 – *Remember that writing is both a craft and an art. One without the other is incomplete.* Writing is both a craft and an art. The craft of writing calls for grit and determination. It's looking for a way to organize a wealth of information into a smoothly flowing, coherent and engaging narrative.

- Guideline 10 – *Keep your language simple, clear, and to the point.* Your idea may not always be scientifically defensible, or even erudite. Keep your language somewhat simple- fresh, honest, personal, and down-to-earth – then it could get you closer to your goal of being eloquent in your writing. Powerful, fluid, graceful, and persuasive language can cover a lot of mistakes. (p. 63)

The purpose of SPN is to give voice to marginalized students, who often find themselves overlooked in the academy. SPN is meant to aid faculty, staff and students to overcome what Nash and Viray (2013) term the three metaphors of oppression to write their way into integrity, dignity, liberation and authenticity. They have identified the three metaphors as marginalization, disenfranchisement and underrepresentation. Marginalization is a metaphor to describe the phenomenon when people are socially and systemically confine to the fringes of society. They defined disenfranchisement as a metaphor equivalent to not having the right to vote; being unable to voice your convictions and deepest beliefs. Underrepresentation is a metaphor related to disenfranchisement, such as when a potential voter is denied a voice in the choice of a political candidate (pp. 26-27). SPN has the potential to liberate students. It asks the questions: What? So what? Now what? These questions have the potential to shatter the darkness of our ongoing, private stories and connect us to the stories of others (p. 34). SPN seeks to free marginalized students from the antiquated rules of the academy. Nash and Viray (2013b) posit:

We hope you will recognize the irony in these unwritten rules for marginalized outsiders. At least in principle, it is the institution of higher education that forcefully advocates for a variety of liberties: freedom of speech, freedom of expression, and freedom of thought. And yet it is the same American university that unwittingly violates these freedoms with its unquestioning loyalty to centuries old academic traditions and

practices. We believe that in higher education oppression can be especially cruel, because it is more subtle. The American university is conformist, and, in the name of academic rigor, it can often be rigid. Marginalized students who refuse to conform to its centuries old norms are often forced by the system to opt out. In this way, higher education becomes a sorting machine whereby only mainstreamers survive. The rest are silenced, or worse, eliminated. (p. 25)

The main purpose is to free students to tell their stories and recognize that their stories have value. Their testimony is scholarship. Telling a personal story about one's individual, cultural, and social history in an academic setting, is a challenge for most students. Writing one's personal story in a creative way is even more difficult. Perhaps the most difficult challenge for our students, though, is to believe deep down that, indeed, their lives do signify (Nash & Viray, 2013a, p. 11)

I was drawn to the use of SPN, not because writing a narrative sounded easy but because based on the research, I knew that I could not tell the story without including my own personal story. I believe that my own personal story would add to the narrative in a way that would make it more accessible and would allow readers to gain a deeper understanding. SPN allows the writer not to just simply share a story about what has happened to them, but instead to convey meaning about what happens to readers. SPN writing begins with a nagging need on the writer's part to tell some kind of truth. The best way to tell a truth is to tell a story. A story that is profoundly personal and unique to some degree can never be replicated in exactly the same way by anyone else. Your truth may be very different from mine, and vice versa (Nash & Viray 2013c, p. 49)

### *Summary*

The literature about the Black Panther Party is plentiful. Texts like *The Black Panther Party Reconsidered* (Jones, 1998) focus on the militant persona, the service programs, government/police repression, or the political positions of the Party. The available literature about the Party contains texts with either a positive or a negative slant, depending heavily on the author's positionality. There is a general sense that the Panther phenomenon is something worthy to be studied.

In addition to the scholarly texts, the founders' narratives about the creation of the Party provide a detailed view of the process used to start this revolutionary organization. In addition, these texts portray the same events through different perspectives. The tenets of narrative inquiry provide a framework for the analysis of these autobiographical texts. The use of Scholarly Personal Narrative allows for a look at the data through the lens of one's own personal narrative.

Much of the existing literature on the Black Panther Party is written in an academic vernacular. A dearth of texts available about the Party are accessible to those unaccustomed to the reading of academic literature. This study seeks to fill this gap in the literature; it analyzes the founders' narratives to build an accessible story about the creation of the Party that is meant to act as a springboard into a deeper study of the work of the BPP.

The Black Panther Party was not the only organization that rose up in an effort to address issues that consumed communities of color; many other organizations were around with varying levels of effectiveness. While I chose to focus on the Party, several other options were available to people from the community who banded together to serve the community and sought to create a positive change for the people in the communities they love.



Even today there are organizations that draw on things learned from the groups of the Civil Rights era. Often because groups have the word Black in the title, the thought is that they are the same, but that is not factual. The one thing that the groups do have in common is the desire to serve the people; the differences arise in how they choose to serve the people. Groups like Black Lives Matter, who purport to be students of Party history, utilize the Party's examples as guideposts for the ever-expanding BLM movement.

The decision to focus on the Party was not an effort to minimize the work of other Black Power focused organizations. The singular focus was instead because admittedly to focus on all the organizations would be too complex a task for this research. The decision came from acknowledging that while organizations may appear simple to an outsider, a deeper study will reveal a complexity that is not always obvious. I chose to focus on the Party because their work spoke to me, and many of their concepts seemed adaptable to the current context.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **Restatement of the Purpose of the Study**

This study examines the narratives of the founders of the Black Panther Party to build a story as a way to counter this deficit narrative. The created narrative is not meant to provide an all-encompassing story of the Black Panther Party, but instead serves as an accessible document with the goal of piquing the interest of young adults who would then seek further information from other sources.

When thinking of the Black Panther Party, most do not consider it as a grassroots community organizing unit. The dominant narrative (supported by media images) of the BPP has been portrayed in the mainstream as made up of violent extremists and criminals (Clark, 2016). The common images of the BPP are of Black men in berets, with guns, invading the State Capitol. The BPP is most often portrayed as a Black nationalist organization that was anti-white and wanted to take down the federal government. The truth is far from that notion. The Black Panther Party was an ever evolving entity that sought community control of oppressed neighborhoods (Clark, 2016). They were not anti-White, just pro-Black.

The purpose of this study was to analyze the narratives of the founders of the Black Panther Party, Huey Newton and Bobby Seale, and to use the information to build my own original counter-story of the Black Panther Party. This research examined the pathways laid by the Party to develop programs in the community, to highlight those paths within the counter-story. The counter-story provides only a general overview of the work of the Party; it is meant to

give an executive level description of the historical context of the Party's work and to pique the interest of the reader, galvanizing them to seek out further study about the Party.

### **Research Design**

Much has been written about the work of the Black Panther Party in books, journal articles, and the press. Many of the written works focus on the politics and militant stances of the Party. A large number of the existing works have many of the same documents as references/works cited. The most oft cited works are *Seize the Time* by Bobby Seale (1970), *Revolutionary Suicide* by Huey Newton (1973/2009) and *War Against the Panthers: A Study of Repression in America* by Huey Newton (1980). As founders of the Party, Newton and Seale are best equipped to tell the story of how the movement started.

The available literature also spends the majority of time in discussions about the militant and political stances of the Party. It seems like much of the literature is seeking to legitimize the work of the Party for those who would detract from the work. The rationale for the narrative analysis in this work is to examine the seminal texts about the Black Panther Party to create an accessible text that would ignite the interests of young adults. The Party was adept at code-switching, they adapted their speech for the audience; however, their main focus were the regular people in the community. I believe that getting the story to the target population, in whatever ways that pique their interest, would have been the Party's goal.

As a result, this research study utilized narrative analysis to examine the seminal texts created by the founders of the Black Panther Party in order to explain their experiences and processes of developing the Party's program. In addition, other available documents that can be

were examined, such as film clips, magazine articles, newspaper articles, and audio clips. These documents were also a valuable resource for this study. Did you actually use these? If not, delete.

Narrative analysis is the process whereby items are examined. The narrative analysis process was used to identify the process used by Newton and Seale to start the Black Panther Party, to identify those aspects that hindered the growth of the Party, and the obstacles the Party had to overcome to evolve their mission and serve the people.

Scholarly Personal Narrative (SPN) has been used in conjunction with narrative analysis. The SPN allowed me to include elements of my personal story to build the narrative. While the narrative was more in line with the composite stories that are built as a result of narrative analysis, elements of SPN made way for the use of my personal narrative to frame the plot of the final narrative. The Black Panther Party story is so personal to me that it is impossible for me to tell their story without including my own. Traditional scientific research calls for the researcher to be removed from the research; in contrast, SPN values the voice and the narrative of the researcher and it is central to the telling of the story.

The Party founders have done a good job of documenting their experiences, and these documents provide the data examined for this research. The study sought to identify not only the steps (the blueprint) but also the narrative accounts about how those steps were determined and evolved. Since the purpose of the narrative was to provide an executive level view of the work of the Party, the narrative focuses mainly on the works of Newton and Seale. Other sources were used to contextualize the information gleaned from the seminal texts.

### **Method Justification**

Focusing on only those seminal texts written by the Party founders allowed me to let the Party tell its own story rather than be dependent on an outsider's view of what the Party was doing. The central focus was to let the Party's words paint the picture of what processes were in place. I chose to utilize narrative inquiry and scholarly personal narrative so that I could use the words of the Party's founders to tell the story of the Party and leave room for my own personal narrative to show how the work of the Party had the power to affect everyday families. This study presents the data gleaned from the analysis as a counter-narrative in the form of a letter to my nephew that shares the Party's creation story in an accessible way to readers. The hope in using this format is to create a relatable story that readers can see themselves in, one that is personal and interesting, that will incite in readers a desire for further study on the work of the Party.

### **Ethical Considerations**

This research consisted of narrative analysis with no human interaction. Since the study was composed solely of the analysis of written narratives and no contact with human subjects, there was no need for a review by the USF Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

The documents were reviewed to identify themes and highlight reflections on similar events. The seminal texts were used to identify the creation story of the Black Panther Party. The texts were used to garner the different perspectives on identical events. From this data, a narrative counter-story was created. The narrative is intended to counter the stories told about the

BPP and also act as an accessible document for the general public. The created document is not meant to tell the whole story of the Party; the story of the BPP is far too complex to be told in a single narrative, but instead to provide enough general information to stimulate interest in the work of the BPP and an interest in delving deeper into the history of the Party.

The purpose of the analysis is to first identify how the BPP was developed. The seminal texts provided a plethora of information regarding the events that led up to the forming of the Party, in addition to the development of the Party itself. These texts also presented the personal perspectives of the founders and included information about the persecution they suffered because of their involvement with the Party. The seminal works about the Party were examined to glean the stories about similar events in the evolution of the Party. These events were used to build a counter-story about the BPP that serves to disprove the media narrative about the Party being filled with brutes and thugs bent on the destruction of the United States and the murder of random white people.

### **The Counter-Narrative**

The counter-narrative is patterned after James Baldwin's 1963 classic, *My Dungeon Shook: A Letter to my Nephew*. *My Dungeon Shook* is a letter that Baldwin wrote to his nephew on the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Emancipation about what he could expect to face in the world as a Black man in the United States. In Baldwin's brilliant treatise, he was able to provide family context, historical perspective, and encouragement for his nephew in five short pages.

The counter-narrative that I created in this work takes the form of a letter to my nephew. I chose to write to my nephew because he represents the generation I hope this work will reach. He was born in the 1990's, well after the Civil Rights Movement. He was educated in public schools. He learned about his heritage in books that compacts African American history into a

paragraph or two that starts with slavery and ends with Martin Luther King's dream. He grew up in an era that where he was bombarded with negative images of people of color. Where the television shows and music was not trying to be uplifting. While I did have him watch PBS documentaries with me, like "Eyes on the Prize" or "Africans in America," he found them dull. While he read every Harry Potter book, he had little interest in the books I would give him; they were dull, like textbooks. He was drawn to the media image of what it means to be Black in America, so the media image of the Party would have been enough. He would not have been interested in finding out more. He could tell their "story" just by looking at the picture, they were brothers with guns ready to shoot people and maybe he had heard something about a Free Breakfast for Children program. If given the book, *Black Against Empire* by Bloom and Martin (2014), he may have marveled at the cover but it is almost 600 pages long, it would not have been read. He would miss the point of the BPP. He would need something to draw him into the story first. He, like many who grew up in an instant information age, wants the facts to come swiftly and succinctly. But, he had time for stories; a good story could keep his attention, much like others his age. If drawn in, then books like *Black Against Empire* could be given a chance.

So, this is where the counter-narrative will fit in. In it, I tell a story about the development and work of the Party utilizing the information from the narrative analysis. The story also includes personal narrative features to aid in the telling of the story. The final product is meant to be an accessible introduction to the Black Panther Party story that will lead readers into further study about the work and legacy of a great grassroots organization. I chose this route because personal stories make information accessible and easy to understand. Personal stories also have the ability to draw the reader in and make them feel something. It is my desire that the reader not

only get the information but also feel something by reading the story, gain some sense of inspiration and awaken a need to know more on the topic.

### **Background of the Researcher**

I was born and raised in San Francisco in the late 1960's. I was raised in a faux middle class family, meaning I thought we were middle class but we were not. Starting around middle school, I was one of the only people in my peer group who was being reared in a two-parent home. Most of my classmates had parents who were divorced or never married.

When my parents brought me home from the hospital, it was to an apartment in the projects in Hunter's Point, a low income neighborhood in San Francisco. I don't have many memories of that apartment, except getting hit in the head by a rock and needing stitches. I was three, and I can still see the dark blue curtain on the screen that separated the treatment areas. At the time, I was the youngest child with two older sisters. My younger brother came along later. I remember growing up in those apartments as happy times. Where everybody knew each other. And all the adults seemed to be working.

That area in Hunter's Point was one of the places where the Black Panther Party was active. While not as visible there as in Oakland, they were definitely a presence. My Dad, who was not a radical revolutionary at the time, spoke well of the Party. He told me that the Panthers police patrols would make sure the police did not jam you up and would protect old people from being mugged. The only other discussion of the Panthers I can remember from childhood was a friend I had in fifth grade, who was pro-Malcolm X and anti-Martin Luther King; I thought she was crazy.



So this brings me to my current positionality as a researcher. Growing in the Bay Area during a time when the Panthers were active, I should have had more knowledge of the Party and the work they were doing in the community. I should have known it was more to the work than carrying guns. I should have been exposed to more information about them in my classes. My only discussion of the Panther legacy prior to graduate school should not have been Dr. Griffin's (see Chapter I) dismissal of an entire movement because of one incident with Huey Newton. I should have had knowledge to add to the discussion at that time that would serve not to refute his testimony but to balance the discussion.

The Black Panther Party was started by two regular guys who had a vision to serve the people and were able to bring it to fruition. They were able to share that vision in ways that drew people from all over who wanted to take part. These were not paying positions. These recruits were volunteers. They worked every day, no vacations; they endured police harassment and government repression. They were arrested. But, they still served the people. It is because of this commitment that I feel I owe a debt = a debt to every man and woman, across these United States, who left home and joined the Party. Their sacrifice deserves honor.

My goal with this research is to add something that will serve the People. It is great to add something to academic discussions, but if all it does is that, then it is not a fitting tribute to the work of the Party. It should also have an impact on the People, the ones who are still struggling in those same communities across the United States. It is my hope that this research will be an inspiration to the reader to know that two regular guys, Huey and Bobby, the intellectual and the grassroots organizer, talked to the people, got the vision and drafted the Ten Point Platform for the BPP. Then, they took that Platform back to the people to validate its contents. And from there, a revolutionary movement was born.

For me, the main goal of this research is to have readers find inspiration in the story of the founders of the Black Panther Party. And from this inspiration, to seek a deeper study into the history and work of the Party. And from the deeper study, not to try and replicate the Party, but to replicate the process - to talk to the people, to get a vision that will serve the current context, to draft a program and validate it with the people. And most importantly, it is my hope that they will serve the People.

## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS

Huey P. Newton always said unite theory with practice. Unite your ideas with practice, by applying those ideas. (Seale, 1970, p. 197)

In this section, I present the results of the analysis of the narratives of Huey Newton and Bobby Seale to extract the story of the founding of the Black Panther Party. The texts analyzed were each written by the founders of the Black Panther Party and contain their different perspectives on the Party's creation. The texts selected were used because the writers were the founders of the Party and, therefore, were the most knowledgeable about what led up to and influenced the founding of the Party and how the mission and vision of the Party was developed.

The Black Panther Party was an organization that grew from the vision of Bobby Seale and Huey Newton. The pair met while matriculating at Merritt College in Oakland. Both men had migrated to Oakland, California with their families following the second World War from the South. They were both raised in homes where both parents were present. They both had multiple siblings. Huey's father was a minister. Bobby's father was a carpenter (Newton, 2009, Seale, 1970).

While attending college both Bobby and Huey were active in college groups that wanted to discuss issues facing communities of color. They read the available literature on the plight of Negroes in the United States and around the world. They were also introduced to literature about communism and socialism. In addition, the American Civil Rights movement was in full swing so they were able to learn about those events as they were happening. At the time of the founding of the Party, Huey was attending San Francisco Law School (a private, San Francisco school that later merged with Alliant University in 2010). Bobby was working in a County program that

was part of the War on Poverty program of President Johnson. Both were troubled by what was happening in their community and wanted to be a part of the solution.

The pair was very active in groups on campus at Merritt and UC Berkeley, but they grew frustrated by the lack of action on the part of these groups. They wanted to be an active force in the community. They were frustrated by the lack of progress being made on issues that were happening in their community. Newton (2009) states: “Nothing we had done on the campus related to the conditions of the brothers on the block. Nothing helped them to gain a better understanding of those conditions” (p. 74). They spent time in the community talking to people, asking them about what they would like to see happen in their community. Seale (1970) noted we’re going to the black community and we intend to organize in the black community and organize an organization to lead the black liberation struggle (p. 33).

When reading the autobiographies of Newton (2009) and Seale (1970), the reader notices their similarities and differences. Both were reared in two parent households. Both had fathers who were the primary bread winners and mothers who took charge of the home. Newton’s father was a minister, in addition to his regular job. Seale’s father was a carpenter by trade, and passed on his skills to his son. Huey was the youngest in his family and Bobby was the oldest. Huey described himself as thus:

I was an angry young man at this time, drinking wine and fighting on the block, burglarizing homes in the Berkeley Hills, and going to school at Oakland City College. I was moving away from family and church, which had offered me so much comfort in earlier days, and was looking for something new. The questions I asked during this period were so disturbing that I acted outrageously to drive them away. I was looking for something more tangible with which to identify. I saw all my turmoil in terms of racism

and exploitation and the obvious discrepancies between the haves and have-nots. I was trying to figure out how to avoid being crushed and losing respect for myself, how to keep from embracing the oppressor that had already maimed my family and community. (Newton, 2009, pp. 61-62)

The things that Newton felt at that time are still issues today for young people in oppressed communities. The feelings of anger and hopelessness that he experienced. But the work that he undertook with the Party was his way of mitigating those feelings and finding a solution to those issues.

### **Lessoned Learned from the Story**

In beginning this analysis, the goal was to locate the pieces that would build the creation story of the Black Panther Party. Seeking the creation story was meant to provide an accessible, factual account of how the Party started to readers in story form who may not be interested in reading an academic text. The purpose of the story is also to counter the majoritarian narrative of a band of rowdy thugs who were seeking to destroy and not build. Knowing the creation story is also meant to honor and value the work and sacrifices of those who answered the call to serve in the Party. And to show the reader that people of color did plan and carry out plans to bring change and improvement, even when they knew they would be met with resistance.

In analyzing the text, I did locate the creation narrative but as I honed in on the data, the recipe came into focus. I could see the recipe for building a revolution. By following these steps, a group of like-minded individuals can build a movement if they choose.

## **The Recipe**

### ***Preparation***

Before the Black Panther Party was even envisioned, both Newton and Seale set out on a path to prepare themselves for service. They came from different directions but met at the same place – on a college campus. Seale had been in the military and had been recently discharged. Newton, the younger of the pair, had recently discovered that he liked college after years of despising the racism he experienced in the public, K-12 schools in Alameda County. The public schools were not a welcoming place for Newton. While he was noted for his intelligence, he sensed that in the public schools, “Not one instructor even awoke in me a desire to learn more or question or explore the worlds of literature, science, and history. All they did was try to rob me of the sense of my own uniqueness and worth, and in the process they nearly killed my urge to inquire” (p. 20). It was not until after high school that he discovered his love of education.

In their college classes, both Newton and Seale found the challenge of academics to be enthralling. They began a deeper study of African history, politics, philosophy and sociology. Huey later began a study of the law, he initially gravitated to the law because he wanted to be able to represent himself if he was ever arrested. The college life showed them the importance of education. Their classes exposed them to new ideas and ignited their interest in connecting and finding ways to use this new knowledge to help their own people. For Newton and Seale, college was the location that helped them find their path to their life’s work. They entered into a period of intense exploration, trying to solve some of the ideological problems of the Black movements; partly, they needed to explain to their own satisfaction why no Black political organization had succeeded (Newton, 2009, p. 111).

Preparation is key before taking on any endeavor. College may not be the path to preparation for every endeavor but there is always a way to prepare. Some kind of training is needed that will aid in making any way you choose to serve more successful. The first thing that one should do before setting out on any project is ensure you are prepared.

### *Connection*

The next step is to connect with like-minded people. In the 1960's, when Huey and Bobby were active on the college campus, there were lots of student groups around that sought to address issues that were important to people of color. The pair was active in student groups associated with Merritt College and UC Berkeley; they also were members of groups that were not affiliated with any institution. These connections gave them the opportunity to delve deeper into study about specific topics of interest to the community and discuss ideas about how to address these issues.

At this time, the Civil Rights Movement in the Southern states was very active but seemed quite removed from the residents of Oakland. The student groups were seeking options for how to make changes for people of color in their communities. They wanted to build a movement, but were unclear on what it should look like. These connections gave Huey and Bobby the opportunity to build relationships at different schools and neighborhoods. In addition, participation in these groups gave them the opportunity to discuss and debate options and explore what was working in other communities. This also gave them the opportunity to be active in the community through existing organizations and avenues. They started to talk to the people, hearing the people's needs and desires, identifying issues in their communities and seeking solutions. The information gathered as a part of these connections was integral in the development of the Party. The pair grew frustrated by the lack of action on the part of the

community groups they were active in but the relationships they built served them later on after the start of the Party.

Connecting with the community you want to serve is an important first step to building any movement. For the movement to be successful, the people have to feel a part of the action. If the people don't feel like whatever you are trying to do represents them, then the action will ultimately be unsuccessful. So, the pair set out to talk to the people in the community. The Party was not yet defined but they were ready to find out how it would be received. So, Newton states that even:

without a definite program, we were at the stage of testing ideas that would capture the imagination of the community. We began, as always, by checking around with the street brothers. We asked them if they would be interested in forming the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense, which would be based upon defending the community against the aggression of the power structure, including the military and the armed might of the police.... We went to pool halls and bars, all the places that brothers congregate and talk. (Newton, 2009, p. 120)

### *Love the people*

Loving the people that you want to serve seems obvious, but it is not. Often, especially in marginalized communities, groups come in to serve but have no respect for the people. They want to dictate the action and tell the people what is best for them. This lack of respect is an example of not loving the people. However, Newton (2009) writes:



The street brothers were important to me, and I could not turn away from the life I shared with them. There was in them an intransigent hostility toward all those sources of authority that had such a dehumanizing effect on the community. In school the “system” was the teacher, but on the block the system was everything that was not a positive part of the community. (pp. 74-75)

In contrast, Seale speaks about the purpose of the Party to serve the people:

We, the Black Panther Party, see ourselves as a nation within a nation, but not for any racist reasons. We see it as a necessity for us to progress as human beings and live on the face of this earth along with other people. We do not fight racism with racism. We fight racism with solidarity. We do not fight exploitative capitalism with black capitalism. We fight capitalism with basic socialism. And we do not fight imperialism with more imperialism. We fight imperialism with proletarian internationalism. These principles are very functional for the Party. They’re very practical, humanistic, and necessary. They should be understood by the masses of the people.

We don’t use our guns, we have never used our guns to go into the white community to shoot up white people. We only defend ourselves against anybody, be they black, blue, green, or red, who attacks us unjustly and tries to murder us and kill us for implementing our programs. All in all, I think people can see from our past practice, that ours is not a racist organization but a very progressive revolutionary party. (Seale, 1970, p. 71)

When Bobby and Huey decided that they wanted to build an organization to serve and empower the people, it was based on their love of the people. They had watched the people in

their communities suffer and struggle and deal with oppression. They wanted to create something that would be a solution to that suffering. People in oppressed communities are often portrayed as lazy even though many work multiple jobs just to survive. Newton (2009) observed:

If hard work brought success, why did we not see more success in the community? The people were certainly working hard. It seemed we were predestined to endless toil. We poor people never reached the point of having time to pursue the things we wanted. We had neither leisure time nor material good. Not only did I want to know why this was so; I want to avoid a similar fate. (p. 57)

This observation indirectly refutes the myth of pulling oneself up by your bootstraps or hard work being a guarantee of success.

The idea for starting an organization grew out of their love for the people. They were willing to put their time and their lives on the line to build something that would change their communities for the better. Initially, they sought to build something that would make the Oakland Bay Area better but as they started their vision expanded. After their protest at the California State Capitol, they had garnered nationwide notoriety. They had to develop processes for the expansion of the Party, while the Party was still evolving.

I think it is important to note that the Black Panther Party was not a huge money making operation. Basically, joining the Party was tantamount to taking a vow of poverty. But it was a love for the people that brought them to a place where they worked long hours, endured government harassment and constant repression. They had to leave their families to be active in the Party. They lived communally. But, they did all this to serve the people. According to Newton (1970), the Party became the family. He stated:

How do you solve the situation? By staying outside the system, living alone? I found that to be an outsider is to be alienated and unhappy. In the Party we have formed a family, a fighting family that is a vital unit in itself. We have no romantic and fictional notions about getting married and living happily ever after behind a white picket fence. We choose to live together for a common purpose, and together we fight for our existence and our goals. Today we have the closeness, the harmony and freedom that we sought so long. (p. 99)

The Party motto, *All Power to the People*, was an expression of their love for the people. Newton (1970) wrote “Therefore, the slogan ‘All Power to the People’ sums up our goals for Black people, as well as our deep love and commitment to them. All power comes from the people, and all power must ultimately be vested in them. Anything else is theft” (p. 178).

### ***Validation***

This step is integral to success. After Bobby and Huey penned the Ten Point Program and Platform for the Black Panther Party, they did not consider it complete until it was validated. They took their Platform back to the community. They talked about it with the people. They knew that community concurrence was necessary for the work of the Party to be effective. They did not call a meeting, but instead walked the streets and shared the Platform with people one on one. They took the time to listen to people and hear what concerns they had and what they saw as needs in their communities.

Newton (2009) wrote about the summer of 1966, prior to the formal start of the Party which happened in October of that same year that:

in addition to our patrols and confrontations with the police, I did a lot of recruiting in pool halls and bars, sometimes working twelve to sixteen hours a day. I passed out leaflets with our ten-point program, explaining each point to all who would listen. Going deep into the community like this, I invariably became involved in whatever was happening; this day-to-day contact became an important part of our organizing effort. (p. 134)

### *Serve the People*

A big part of the Black Panther Party movement is service to the people. One of the great motivators for Newton and Seale was the desire to serve the people. As they watched the injustices that were unfolding and escalating in their communities, they felt a need to serve the people. Seale (1970) remembers that Huey said:

We need a program. We have to have a program for the people. A program that relates to the people. A program that the people can understand. A program that the people can read and see, and which expresses their desires and needs at the same time, It's got to relate to the philosophical meaning of where in the world we are going, but the philosophical meaning will also have to relate to something specific. (p. 59)

The development of the Ten Point Platform and Program of the Black Panther Party was the way they planned to serve the community. It was developed based on their discussions with the people. It was written as a response to the needs identified by the people. Seale (1970) noted that it was written for the people;

this is the way the people should look at it. It puts together concisely all the physical needs and all the philosophical principles in some basic instructive thing that they can

understand, instead of a bunch of esoteric bullshit. I don't care what kind of cat is on the block – if he doesn't relate to anything else, he can relate to the Ten Point Platform and program of the Black Panther Party. (p. 6)

Their idea to serve was as a way to equip the community with the necessary tools to obtain the power to change their lives. Oppression and occupation of communities of color was routine, the people in those communities were under constant attack and control. In their opinion, the citizens of these communities only lacked the skills to obtain power. Their goals included educating the people to prepare them for revolution. They also wanted to improve the immediate conditions of people in oppressed communities.

Their love of the people led to their service of the people. They were willing to put their bodies on the line in service of the people. Newton (2009) called it “revolutionary suicide,” which was the idea that anybody who took part in revolutionary action on the side of oppressed people was putting their lives on the line. Newton himself states that he believed he would only live for one year after the start of the action and considered anything after that to be bonus time. This love of the people is not a romantic love, but a desire to serve the people in such a way as to make their lives better.

### *Validation*

Validation is the act of validating the process with the people that are being served. Letting the needs of the people dictate how and what the organization does. The BPP always had the validation of their mission as a part of their process. They were constantly talking to the people and finding out what the needs were. This constant contact with the people was an integral part of the Party's process of serving.

Seale (1970) notes:

We went off into this ten-point platform and Huey went forth to take a pulse beat of the black community, using Oakland, California where there's nearly 40 percent blacks and a as a black community typical of any other in this nation. I don't give a damn if a black brother's in the South because we have brothers from the South all the way up in Oakland, and we have brothers from New York, brothers from Chicago, what have you. Huey understood that Oakland was a typical black community, so we took the ten-point platform and program – a thousand copies of it – and went to the black community with them. He didn't just pass out the platform in people's hands. He stopped, talked, and discussed the points on the ten-point with all the black brothers and sisters off the block, and with all the mothers who had been scrubbing Miss Ann's kitchen. (p. 64).

The validation piece was important to make sure they stayed in line with the needs and desires of the people.

The pair was keenly aware of errors made by other groups who purported to work in the community but failed to actually connect with the community. Newton (2009) notes:

We started throwing around ideas. None of the groups were able to recruit and involve the very people they professed to represent – the poor people in the community who never went to college, probably were not even able to finish high school. Yet these were our people; they were the vast majority of the Black population in the area. Any group talking about Blacks were in fact talking about those low on the ladder in terms of well-being, self-respect, and the amount of concern the government had for them. All of us were talking, and nobody was reaching them. (p. 111).

The motto of the Party was “All Power to the People.” That motto was not just a slogan but a way of operating. The Party was constantly in touch with the people. One of the things that the Party provided was a place of advocacy for people in the community. The phones at Party offices rang constantly. People in the community finally had advocates who would stand with them against landlords, utilities, school administrators and most of all law enforcement. They finally had a group of people who was really on their side and the people loved it. Even if they did not understand all of what the Party was talking about (i.e., socialism, Marxism); they did understand advocacy, support, people who would speak to the police on their behalf and people who developed programs that supported their everyday needs.

So, the validation piece just ensures that the Party’s efforts were in line with the People’s desires. They made sure that the direction they were moving in was a true representation of the needs of the People. Projects like the Survival Programs were developed in response to needs identified when working in the community. The Party was working toward a revolution and wanted to ensure that the people could survive until such a time as they were ready to move toward revolution.

### *Evolve*

The last step is to evolve. Be ready for change. The Party’s process of constant evaluation was a way of ensuring that their mission continued to represent the people they were serving. In a statement about Intercommunalism, Newton (2009) says:

We believe that everything is in a constant state of change, so we employ a framework of thinking that can put us in touch with the process of change. That is, we believe that the conclusions at which we arrive will always change, but the fundamentals of the method

by which we arrive at our conclusions will remain constant. Our ideology, therefore, is the most important part of our thinking. (p. 22)

All that means is that change was a part of their process. This change or evolution was a way to keep the work of the Party relevant to the people.

Party members endured the maximum of government repression. It would have been easy for them to embark on a path they protected their humanity and placed the needs of the people on the back burner. But, in spite of the constant harassment members endured, they continued their message of revolution and service to the people. What they stood for stayed the same, but how they served was in a constant state of change.

Party chapters were in cities across the United States (and even internationally); and while some facets were similar, i.e. the free breakfast program, health clinics, advocacy, etc, there were also regional differences. These differences can especially be seen in the survival programs; not all programs were offered in every area. Chapters developed programs based on the needs of the People and the skillsets of Party members. The ability to adapt and change, especially in a large organization is key to remaining relevant. At the time the Party was active, it was no small feat to adapt but this ability is what likely kept the Party in action even with the FBI working to disrupt and destroy their work.

The Black Panther Party was an entity that grew out of the frustration of Huey Newton and Bobby Seale about the oppression faced by the vast majority of people of color in the United States. When the Party started the pair saw it as a way for them to help make life better for people in and around Oakland, California. While they felt it could be a model that could be replicated, they did not envision or even have a plan for the rapid growth experienced by the



Party after the protest at the State Capitol in Sacramento. This protest brought their movement nationwide notoriety. They adapted as rapidly as they could, even with the repression faced at the hands of government entities. One of the goals was to bring on board those people who had been left behind in oppressed communities; they actively recruited those who had been pushed out of public schools, those who had spent time in jail, those who felt disenfranchised and were looking for a way to make a difference in their communities. They sought to empower those who felt powerless to make their lives better.

The Black Panther Party was attractive to a whole group of people who were tired of waiting for things to change and wanted to be a part of movement that was making things happen. Just as Newton and Seale were tired of watching how those in the Southern Civil Rights Movement were being brutalized at the hands of law enforcement and others; and that is what led them to create a different type of movement built around the idea of self-defense (people of color protecting themselves from outside entities), there were lots of equally minded folk who were willing to also take up that mantle. They wanted to stand up for themselves, even if it meant losing their lives. The people were tired of being brutalized, they were drawn to the movement because it allowed them to stand up for themselves.

From an outsider's view of the Party, with their rhetoric and uniforms and guns, it would be quite easy to believe the media narrative of the Party – armed thugs with guns, who wanted to wreak havoc on the unsuspecting public. But, if one would take the time to actually read their literature, or listen to their speeches, they would have found a group that wanted to take responsibility for their communities. They want to help the oppressed, regardless of their race. They were not separatist but instead, were readily worked with those organizations who wanted to work with them. There were those Black Nationalists who were critical of the Panthers

process. They believed that a revolution required the shedding of blood, like Malcolm X said in his “Message to the Grassroots” speech (November 10, 1963); and in addition, they were pushing for a separate Black nation. This was different from the Party’s plan; that was not their view of revolution. While they were students of Malcolm X, they had a different view of how a revolution would take place.

In a little over a decade, even with constant government repression, the Party was able to start a movement that made a lasting impression on the U.S. psyche. Seale and Newton were able to create an organization that was ahead of its time, a movement that was able to attract those who would be overlooked by other movements. Those who did not find a place in other movements of the 1960’s found a home in the Party. The Party was a place where they were able to build skillsets and build community, where other institutions may have rejected them, the Party was a place they were able to flourish.

While I do not believe that the 1966 version of the Party would work today in its entirety, I do believe their “recipe” could be used to build a new movement to address the current needs of oppressed communities in this country. The recipe requires that one first prepares themselves, then seek a connection to the people and love the people, then validate with the people the needs that have been identified, serve the people, then go to the people again to ensure that the work that is being done is meeting the intended need, and most importantly, evolve. The willingness to evolve with the times is essential is continuing to meet the needs of the people. The Party did not outline this ‘recipe’ prior to starting their work; however, this is what they did and what makes their work still relevant today.

## CHAPTER V

### THE NARRATIVE

#### Introduction

The Black Panther Party was created to address the needs of oppressed people in marginalized communities. The organization was ahead of its time and was subjected to intense government repression. Media narratives about the Party would lead people to believe that they were violent thugs who sought to overthrow the government. The negative narrative is so prevalent, that a whole new generation of youth in marginalized communities will miss out on the truth about the work of the Party unless we begin to share the real story.

The BPP movement sought to reach out to those who had been forgotten in oppressed communities. They specifically sought to recruit them and make them a part of their movement; believing that if they did not recruit them to work with them, then they would be enlisted to work against them. The BPP was careful to make sure that the documents they created would be accessible to the people they were trying to serve. The handouts, flyers, newspaper, even the BPP Platform and Program were all written in an accessible fashion – to reach the people.

The purpose of this narrative is to make the story of the creation of the Black Panther Party accessible and easy to read. The hope being that it will pique the interest of the reader into exploring the history of the BPP further. At the very least, it will provide an account of the creation of the Party that is meant to inspire the reader. Too often, the public narratives about movements in oppressed communities seek to minimize the impact of those movements, this was especially true of the Black Panther Party. Many of the most easily accessible stories, like those in newspapers or online, have a negative slant, and one has to seek out the true stories about the party.

When I began to learn more about the work of the party, I was instantly enamored of the movement. I was awestruck by the numbers of people who were willing to leave the comfort and anonymity of their homes to be an active part of a movement that was revolutionary, and while it was welcomed by marginalized community members, it was not embraced by the greater community or law enforcement or government entities. The Party was filling a void in those oppressed communities and was acting as advocates for the people in those communities. The BPP movement was bold and dynamic.

The following narrative takes the form of a letter to my nephew, Jay. While the idea of the letter comes from *My Dungeon Shook: A Letter to My Nephew*, written by James Baldwin (1963), this letter is different in that it is a vehicle to tell the creation story of the Black Panther Party to a new generation. A generation who may not have heard of the party, or who see the pictures of Party members and think the stories about them being miscreants who were out to destroy instead of build are true. It tells the story of two regular guys who wanted to make a difference in their community and created a movement that was embraced by marginalized communities worldwide. The hope is that the narrative will inspire appreciation for the past sacrifices made by Party members and action for a new generation.

### **It Is Well With My Soul: A Letter to My Nephew**

The very time I thought I was lost, My dungeon shook and my chains fell off.

(Baldwin, 1998, pp. 291-295)

Jay –

As I begin to write this, I wonder where to start. There are so many things I want to tell you. I remember just how excited my sister was when she found out you were on the way. We all were excited. It had been awhile since we had a baby in the family. You were so full of life and excitement; your smile lit up every room you entered. You were born with this natural ability to draw people to you. You are definitely an Alpha male. I have watched you charm people with just your smile and infectious laugh.

It has not been lost to me that you being a handsome, 6-foot-tall, African-American man with this ability to garner attention in every venue you enter may not be a good thing. There are those who see you and don't see the young man who loves his Granny and PaPa or see the Mama's boy who likes his Mama to fix his plate at family dinners. They see someone who should be feared because of the color of his skin or someone who must be up to something. After all, how did you afford that car, certainly you Dad didn't buy it for you (but he did). Who are all those guys you are walking with- must be a gang of some kind- certainly not your friends from the basketball team or the football team from your college. In this time when there are those who would have the world believe we are post racial, racism abounds. It is almost worse than in the Jim Crow era because then at least people with out in the open with it and you could identify easily those who were working against you. Now, instead of presenting their bias as their

opinions, it is shown to be facts. Those who control the media, control the narrative and how the public sees people of color.

A group of young men of color is always a gang; there are always up to some kind of mischief. They can't just be on their way to an event together to have a good time- no, they must be about to rob somebody or shoot somebody. Much like everybody who speaks Spanish must be here illegally. It is a great weight for you to carry. You do not get to be you, you have a constant battle against the opinions and actions of others. Young African-American youth are constantly being asked to prove that they are not – in a gang, a thief, a rapist, a killer. They are always guilty and have to prove they are innocent. When they are being harassed by the police, if people pass by, they always think, 'they must have done something, or they police would not be bothering them. Officer Jim in my neighborhood is a really nice guy'.

In 2017, communities of color are occupied. So, even though you are taught in school that you are free; and that like every other American, you can achieve anything you want provided you are willing to work for it. And that America is a level playing field for everyone- all lies. You are constantly judged by the color of your skin more than the content of your character. When I worked at an office that was near the county welfare office, I overheard many conversations about all my children, my 'baby-daddies', my welfare checks and my EBT card. I never once heard anyone say, "I bet she has three college degrees," or even consider the fact that I do not have children or baby daddies or a welfare check or an EBT card. I was just going to work. Not that needing public assistance is bad; the notion that all African Americans are on it is what is problematic.

As your elder, I feel like the onus is on me to make the world that you come to be raised in better. But it is more than a one-person job. Period. America is complex but has the capacity

to be great. If only truth was paramount. Too often a comfortable lie is more palatable than an uncomfortable truth. You will hear that racism is dead and done, Not true- ALL LIES.

Unfortunately, you will be judged by the color of skin, daily. There are those that will assume things about you based solely on what they think they know about people of color, not on actual facts they know about you. This is unfortunate but it is definitely something that you will have to deal with, often.

I continue to believe that the keys to changing the world are in the hands of young people. They have this innate ability to believe in and grasp the possible without being weighed down by what others say is impossible. You all have grown up to Nike commercials that say “Just Do It!” and believe that it applies to every situation. Often, the push back you receive from those is unexpected, especially the force they are willing to exert just to stop you from making any changes to the status quo. Your ability to excel is weighed down by those external people who seek to limit your progress. That is not what I wanted for you. Sometimes those forces appear to be invisible, but really it is a systemic thing that is constantly working in the background to ensure that things don’t really change too much. The poor need to stay poor. The rich need to stay rich. Those in power, need to retain that power. The price for change has to be so high that people are afraid or at least extremely cautious about even suggesting making a change.

There are those roadblocks that come into your path. Those things that will hinder you and limit your progress. Those things that are designed to make you afraid. Be Fearless. I know that seems like a simple refrain, when really we know that it is a challenge. But even if you are scared, even if you don’t know the outcomes. Pass or fail, do it anyway.

I am reminded of Bobby Seale and Huey Newton. Do you know who they are? They are the founders of the Black Panther Party. They met in college. Bobby Seale was fresh out the military, and Huey Newton, who was a few years younger than Bobby, possessed an unmatched intellect. It was the mid 1960's, the Civil Rights Movement was raging in the South, but the West was a little different. Bobby and Huey were living in Oakland, California. They participated in a lot of campus groups on their college campus but also at UC Berkeley. They also interacted with other groups who wanted to discuss issues of racism, police brutality and other things that were plaguing communities of color. They grew frustrated with the groups who only wanted to talk about the issues but never actually do anything. They had made a point of talking with people in their community, getting a consensus of what the major issues were and making sure they need what the real needs were.

As they watched the activities of the Civil Rights Movement unfold on the news, they were becoming more and more disillusioned with how the system operated. Huey, by this time, was a student at the San Francisco School of Law. He noted that the demonstrators were not breaking the law; the law stated that they had the right to peaceable accessible and seek a redress of their grievances; they should not have been arrested. But they still were; for having a parade without a permit no less.

I know you are wondering why I am telling you this, but Bobby and Huey are worth you knowing. The media's narrative about the Black Panther Party paints them as thugs and hoodlums with guns, who want to overthrow the government, and kill all white people. This is not true. I feel like if I don't share this story with you, you won't know the truth. You will see the pictures of brothers with guns, and think that that is all there was to the Party. Their story is important because what they did can be replicated. They were loving the people and serving the



people and deserve to have their legacy preserved. Also, if I tell you and you tell your friends and so on, the legacy continues.

After years of studying and talking and planning, Bobby and Huey finally sat down and started to hammer out their plans for the Black Panther Party in 1966. That is long before you were born. The status of people of color in the United States was not improving and they wanted to start a movement that would improve things for the People. All oppressed people, but the work started in their own community.

### ***2 Kings 7:3-4 The Message (MSG)***

<sup>3-4</sup> It happened that four lepers were sitting just outside the city gate. They said to one another, “What are we doing sitting here at death’s door? If we enter the famine-struck city we’ll die; if we stay here we’ll die. So let’s take our chances in the camp of Aram and throw ourselves on their mercy. If they receive us we’ll live, if they kill us we’ll die. We’ve got nothing to lose.”

Much like now, Huey and Bobby found themselves at a crossroads. They could let things continue unchecked or they could take action. If they did nothing, things would stay the same or get worse; if they did something, then there was a chance that things could get better for the oppressed people they wanted to serve. They didn’t have nothing to lose. Right now, I am sure a look at your friends’ lives and opportunities may uncover some hopelessness; like everything they try just falls apart a fails. Like everything that should work, somehow, for them turns to rubbish. How do you prosper when it feels like the whole world is designed to make you feel inferior? Ill equipped? There is always somebody in your face pointing out that you are not supposed to make it. You are the descendent of slaves, the best you should ever hope for is a

position as a servant, so even though the playing field is level, as a person of color, you have not been endowed with the proper skills to really do anything great.

The history books in schools have condensed the history of African-Americans into a couple of paragraphs: Africans were brought here as indentured servants, then after the Dred Scott decision they were forced to be slaves, then Lincoln freed the slaves (despite the fact that he was already dead), then Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat, then Martin Luther King, Jr. had a dream and Barack Obama was elected President. If you fail to do any of your own research, you would believe that only four or five African-Americans have ever done anything in the history of the World. When the truth is, that Africans have been making strides since they were first brought here as indentured servants on August 20, 1619. Despite living in conditions that should have destroyed them, they survived. Since 1619, the laws in these United States were designed to keep People of Color in a lower caste and oppressed. Some of the laws were overtly racist (like Jim Crow Laws); while others didn't appear to discriminate but actually maintained a system that was designed to keep the poor and oppressed, poor and oppressed.

The BPP started with the Ten Point Platform. It was composed of all the stuff they learned from talking to the people in the community and also, all the studying they had done on their own. Man, the Ten Point Platform was simple, direct, and amazing. Newton and Seale managed to find a way to list all the community's concerns in a very succinct way. After they finished with the ten points, they chose the Black Panther as their symbol, not because the Panther was black but because they saw themselves as the Self-defense Party and the nature of a panther is not to attack but to defend itself if it feels threatened. The panther was the symbol used by an Alabama Civil Rights group <sup>1</sup>that was started by Stokely Carmichael.

After the platform was finished, they typed it up and made copies and took it to the people. They started talking to people telling them what they wanted to do, asking them about what they thought of the Ten Point Platform. It is always important not to lose sight of the people you say you want to serve. You cannot make plans for them, you have to make plans with them. So, as you look around your community and you want you notice things that you think need improving, talk to the people. Hear their concerns. I believe that like Huey, you possess this natural leadership ability, you can reach the people and organize and make your community better. You may think that you are too young but that is not the truth. Huey was in his early 20's when he founded the BPP. The first person to join the BPP was only 16 years old.<sup>2</sup>

As you look around, you can see that the police still occupy communities of color. There is this need to keep people of color contained and corralled. People from outside our communities who have different relationships with the police pretend not to understand the plight of oppressed people. But they have driven through those occupied neighborhoods, they see, they understand but they want to tell a different story. It is part of the oppressor's plan. I think part of our job is to wake them up, because this plan doesn't only oppress people of color but it oppresses them as well. They think they are not oppressed but they are just oppressed in a different way. Have you ever listened to MLK's March on Ballot Boxes speech?<sup>3</sup> In it he outlines how poor white people in these United States have be hoodwinked into thinking that whiteness in and of itself is worth something. So, even though they may be oppressed, taken advantage of and impoverished- at least they are not Black<sup>4</sup>. This blindness to their true situation makes them campaign against their own self-interest.

One of the first programs of the BPP was the Panther Armed Police patrols. Party members would drive around and follow the police. Newton<sup>5</sup> was a law student and was very

familiar with the laws of the State. He trained the members on the law and the individual rights of citizens. There was a law on the books at the time that permitted citizens to carry loaded guns in public provided they were in plain sight. So, whenever a cop pulled over somebody in the community, the Panther Patrol group would stop too. They would stand back at the legally observable distance and they would let the citizen know their rights. They would read the law from the law books they carried with them.

So, can you imagine, a group of Black men, in leather jackets and berets, carrying loaded rifles and law books? They knew their rights and would stand up to the police. The community had not seen anything like it. They never interfered with what the police were doing, they were just ensuring that it was all done in accordance with the law. Can you imagine if they would have had cell phones to video tape these stops? Wow. The police were not happy about the work the Party was doing, one would think that they would want citizens to know what their rights are but no, they were threatened by these activities<sup>6</sup>. They did not like the idea of being watched. But if you are doing the right thing it shouldn't matter, right? Party members did not interfere, they just read from law books. There are no recorded incidents where members of the Party instigated an action against the police. They have responded to police action but not started.

It was early 1967, the Party was still local, the majority of their work was being done in Oakland, sometimes San Francisco. They were building the capacity of the movement but really only had around 30 members at that time. On April 1, 1967 an unarmed black man was shot and killed in North Richmond by the police, his family reached out to the Panthers for protection from police harassment<sup>7</sup>. BPP members met with the Dowell family. They begin to investigate what happened to Denzil. In response the first issue of the Black Panther News Paper is born<sup>8</sup>.

The first issue asked the question: Why was Denzil Dowell killed? The money raised from the selling of the paper was used to support BPP programs.

The Dowell case is what led to the Party getting nationwide attention. They were virtually unknown outside of the San Francisco Bay Area at that time. Until, one day they go to demand to speak to the Alameda County Sheriff, to get answers to questions regarding the Dowell shooting. The sheriff was not interested in hearing anything they had to say and advised they take it to Sacramento. Sacramento is the capitol of California. So, in response to the actions of the Richmond police and to protest the Mulford Act which was a bill that would ban the display of loaded weapons in public, the Party planned a protest at the State Capitol. On May 2, 1967, all the members of the Party except for Huey and a couple of people who could not get of work, got into their cars and headed to Sacramento. Picture it, about 30 black men and women, in leather jackets and berets, carrying guns, walking up the capitol steps. The security guard let them in because at that time they were not breaking any laws<sup>9</sup>. They walked through the Capitol building, since they had not been there before they were not sure where to go. Today that could have googled a floor map but back then it was not possible.

They finally settled in an open room, and Bobby Seale read their statement. The statement was then read again. Then they exited the building and was headed toward their cars. They were preparing to leave but had stopped at a gas station to put water in one of the cars and they were surrounded by the police and arrested. It must have been for being black and carrying a gun because they had broken no laws. The front page of the *Sacramento Bee* the next day had a

picture of the Party members with their guns and the headline- THE CAPITOL IS INVADED.



This event took the work of the Party nationwide. Reading the press accounts, it was likely believed that the Party had thousands of members at that time, but really, they had less than 40. People from all over the United States were contacting them so that they could start a BPP chapter in their city. They managed to capture the imagination of the entire country but those who were counting on the press for information were not getting a true picture of what the BPP was really about.

The media tends to always paint a negative picture of people of color. Every story you read about a person of color generally starts from a deficit perspective. The stories will point out that the person didn't have something, or the neighborhood they grew up in was poor or they were surrounded by low performing institution, this is always mentioned to balance out whatever achievement it made by that individual. Why is that? Is it done to show what the person had to overcome to get where they are or to point out that the deficit area is where the person really

belongs, and to give a reminder to others in that same situation that they need to stay in their place; only a few are chosen to escape.

Please take every chance to tell your own stories. Name your own situations. Don't allow yourself to live down to the labels of others but live up to the visions you have for your own life. You can accomplish whatever you choose, just choose. Don't limit yourself by the opinions of others who think that as a man of color your only option is playing basketball or football or rapping; and never encourage you to step out on your own and build your own empire. There are those that think that you have to work for somebody else always, but that is not true you can do something on your own. Don't even let my over-protective spirit hold you back from spreading your wings to fly and excel.

I may always treat you like a baby but I know you are a man. I worry about how you will be treated when you are out in the world, will they know you are the sweet baby who held your great-grandmother's hand and spoke softly in her presence, will they know you are the loving grandson that stood by your grandfather and hugged his shoulder as he stood by the casket grieving the loss of his older brother, would they know that you are my sister's only child who snuggles up to her and gets his feet or shoulders rubbed after football practice, would they recognize in that smile your ability to light up a room. Or would they see a media created predator, who is there to steal, rape and kill. My overprotective side would love to lock you in a lovely penthouse apartment where you could see the sun, smell fresh air, but not go outside and be threatened by the boogey men in the streets. You wouldn't be happy but you would be safe. I know that isn't realistic. I know you have to go out in the world. I know the world needs you. I wish that the things out there waiting to harm you didn't exist; but they do. I guess it is my charge to equip you to face those things.

After the event at the State Capitol, the BPP was growing fast. Getting into the Party wasn't as simple as just signing up. There was definitely an onboarding process. Party members has a lot of stuff they were required to read and study<sup>10</sup>. You didn't just walk up and they handed you a gun and a beret. No. Being a Party member required a lot of discipline and sacrifice. In the midst of all this growth, the police actions against party members was also increasing. Police officers had pictures of party members, and license plate numbers of cars frequently driven by Party members, the Oakland police never missed an opportunity to harass Party members. It was no different early on October 28, 1967, when the police stopped Huey Newton for a traffic stop.

Members of the Party were used to these stops; they had almost become routine. This traffic stop was different, and in the end Officer John Frey was killed and Huey Newton was critically wounded. Huey was taken to the hospital, but he was under arrest. While handcuffed to a gurney at the hospital, police officers were allowed to assault him. While in the hospital he was constantly harassed, along with anyone who came to visit him. The BPP started the Free Huey campaign. There was a trial. Huey was sent to jail. It begs the question: as citizens when can we claim self-defense against unlawful police action? If the police are relentlessly bothering you and you are not breaking any laws just asserting your rights and letting your neighbors know what their rights are, and you are keenly aware of what the law says (hey, you are holding a law book)- shouldn't you be able to stand up for yourself? If you are a person of color, the answer always seems to be no. It would take a 360 video with sound, that was recording from the time you left your house until the officer pulled you over and even then there will be those that believe you did something to deserve the harassment.

You know, you really remind me of Huey Newton, y'all are similar. Like him, you are tall, handsome, people are drawn to you, you have the ability to be comfortable in any situation,



absolutely fearless. You possess this ability to be loyal and protective of your friends. One of the things that I observed from you was as an athlete, you have this fierce competitive side, but winning was most important to you, not that you made all the shots in basketball or all the touchdowns in football. You could rally your teammates to push through and get the W, so even though you had superstar moves; you did not have a superstar attitude. I saw players who were envious of your game still gravitate toward you because you believed in their abilities too and never acted like they were beneath you because you were a better athlete.

Watching in that situation, I can totally picture you as a grassroots organizer. I can see you knocking on doors charming the grannies or chatting with the fellas while walking through the neighborhood; getting them to all rally around an issue, finding out their thoughts and opinions, getting work down to make the community better. Making the lives of oppressed people better was the goal of the Black Panther Party. The founders, Bobby and Huey, wanted to build an organization that empowered the people in communities to be able to help themselves. The motto of the Black Panther Party was “All Power to the People,” regardless of color, too often the BPP has been portrayed as a group only interested in issues that were of interest to the Black community but really they saw the work as broader than that, they wanted to help all people who were being oppressed, regardless of color.<sup>11</sup> But that happens when you don't have control of your own narrative or how your story is told. The press was bent on portraying the party as miscreants who were only up to nothing good. They never took the time to take a real look at the work the Party was doing, but rushed to judgement because they carried guns.

The arrest of Huey Newton did not stop the growth of the Black Panther Party. The Party continued to grow and expand its activities. Imagine they did all this work and few were even interested in what was really going on, they were content to accept the media narrative. The BPP

was expanding with chapters in other states, the BPP newspaper increased its circulation tenfold (the funds from the sale of the newspaper were used to support the work of the party); even while expanding, the work of the Party was evolving. While the Party was growing, the FBI was doubling down on their efforts to shut down the work of the Party. The FBI used means both legal and illegal to infiltrate the Party and shut down their operations.<sup>12</sup> The FBI infiltrated every BPP chapter. They financed and planned attacks on BPP chapter offices. They roped in the local police to carry out operations to murder, setup, or arrest Party members. Party members were criminalized simply because they were criminals. The FBI along with local police forces, worked overtime coming up with plans to circumvent the rights of Party members.

Since Party members were educated about what rights they really had, it was harder to trip them up, so police forces just trampled all over their rights and were allowed to operate with impunity. Because of course all these brothas must be up to no good and deserved killing. There are documented instances of them not being able to find evidence so they would just manufacture it. Imagine, in Chicago, the FBI tried to orchestrate a gang war to shut down the work of the Chicago chapter of the BPP, and the work of the original Rainbow Coalition. (The Rainbow Coalition was a politically motivated entity in Chicago that was composed of several organizations of different races, that vowed to work together on political and community issues).<sup>13</sup>

This coming together of oppressed people was not a positive thing in the eyes of the power structure. Because what will happen if all the oppressed people realize they have power and start to work together? What if they realize that they have more in common than they recognize? They truly have the power to change how things are done, if they all registered and voted in every election, local, state and federal, reminded the politicians who they really work

for- what change can really take place? You know, you can take the lessons learned by the work of the Party and implement it today and it would slide right in, still very relevant.

You were born into a world that has been conditioned to see you as less, as something to be pathologized, with deviance and criminality ingrained in you because you are a Black male. Growing up, you were surrounded by images that told you could not control that told you that you had limited opportunity, that people that looked like you were more likely to commit a crime and be put in jail, that your job prospects were limited- hopefully you can play basketball or football, or else you will be stuck in the ghetto. And of course, anywhere a multitude of Black people live is considered the ghetto. Most things created or run by people of color are considered substandard, discounted; but the same people who discount stuff created by people of color will appropriate it and rename it and act like they created it. Moreover, they will make money on it that is never funneled down to the people who created the phenomenon.

A good example of that is rap music, it was created by Black and Latino youth in New York, it was brought to the public by this same group; but now that it is a billion-dollar industry, all of the major decision makers are White men, who dictate what music gets released and what stories get told. The musicians do make money but most of the revenue goes into the coffers of record companies. This is not to suggest that there are not White artists who have been exploited but in this case, Blacks and Latinos created a genre, and have it sold back to them. And then, the record companies regulate what messages in the music make it into the mainstream. When the music was almost entirely released by small, minority owned record companies there are many examples of music released with a more positive slant. But with the advent of “gangsta rap” and its growing popularity, the larger mainstream record companies took it over and the focused shifted to just making money. Artists were limited in what freedom they had to tell their stories.

The stories had to be the same as those that made money the last time. So the myth of the Ghetto Gangster was born.<sup>14</sup>

I often think about how many times people perceived you as guilty or criminal, just because you are Black. They did not see you as the only child of my sister, who's presence in this world made her eyes twinkle. They did not see you as a great grandson, nephew or cousin. They didn't see you as a young man who would help an old lady take her groceries to her car or carry them up the stairs for her. They look at you and saw you as a threat, someone to fear- they locked their doors and clutched their wallets. They did not see a person who has never had to worry about what he would eat or where he would sleep. Much like members of the BPP were profiled as criminals who were plotting to overthrow the US government, even though there was no proof of such activity.

The majority of the public never questioned the stories that the media were publishing about the work of the Party. They never bothered to come to a BPP rally or read a BPP newspaper. They never questioned why the local police would go by and shoot up the BPP offices, or break in the BPP offices and destroy the food for the Free Breakfast Program. Or tell the parents of children who went to the Free Breakfast Program that the Party was going to poison their children. Or harass the family members of those in the Party, telling their mothers that they were part of a treasonous plot to destroy their government and take over- even though that was not true.

What they really were was a band of men and women that varied by age and came from different economic and educational background who wanted to work together to make things better for those who were struggling under a system that did not value them. They wanted to be a part of a movement that was making things better for people who were most often silenced and

ignored. They were keenly aware of what the laws of the day were, and of what rights they had and the power of building a political network. I think it was the thought of this political network that made them so scary to those in power. And while the BPP was careful to follow the law, those in power had no trouble breaking the law just to ensure that the status quo was not changed.

I always think of the power structure as a flight of stairs, those on the top stairs do not want to lose their spot. They are willing to go up a stair but refuse to go down a stair. And those at the top of the staircase will do anything to stay at the top. And those at the middle or the bottom are constantly crushed, just trying to hold on to the railing. For this reason, when FBI agents or the local police would investigate the BPP, even when they found nothing, would make up something because they had been admonished from the top that they had to find something because of course the Party had to be up to something.<sup>15</sup> Self-preservation made them fabricate stuff on the Party because after all those Negroes did have guns.

I know you have heard the story about how your Great- Great Grandfather was born a slave and died a school teacher. When I think about all he had to go through to get to that point in his lifetime, it makes everything seem possible. You come from that stock. You have an educator on one side and then your Great Grandfather on the other side has a brilliant mechanical engineering mind. Without training of any kind, he had advanced skills. The only thing that prevented him from actually being an engineer is the color of his skin. You come from a family background of people who were able to excel in spite of the obstacles placed before them. You can do this too. You have access to everything you will need. You only need to create the opportunity to execute the plans to change the world.

The founders of the Black Panther Party created the Ten Point Program and Platform for the Party have much study and work within the community. Talking to people in the community gathering information and ideas. Most importantly, they never considered it a finished project, it continued to grow and evolve based on the needs of the people. And then after doing the work and studying even more, their beliefs grew and changed, and they used that knowledge to grow and expand the work of the Party. The BPP initially started with just one major program, the nightly police patrols, and the programs grew to 65 different programs over the life of the Party.

<sup>16</sup> And they were able to do this, and raise their own funds, with the full weight of the US government on them, trying to shut them down. They were labeled the “greatest threat to the internal security of the United States”<sup>17</sup>. They were a threat not because they had guns but because they had books. They were seeking to let the average, everyday person know that they had rights and what those rights were, they made education a central part of their mission. They sought to help all those people who felt marginalized by the structures in place that sought to maintain their oppression. You will rarely read about the work they did with organization outside of the Black Panther Party. You will have to seek out the stories of the BPP standing in solidarity with the United Farm Workers, or how the Chicago chapter worked with the Young Patriots or the Young Lords. Or how members of the Party were invited all over the world to share information about the work they were doing. There were people all over the world interested in the work the Party was doing, they had an appreciation for the Party’s ability to operate a grassroots organizing operation, raise the funds, recruit members and serve the public. The information is out there, for all to see, if only they would look for it.

The Ten Point Program and Platform was something created by Bobby Seale and Huey Newton. As a document, on the surface it would appear simple but if you really read it, in it is a

document that simply and succinctly addresses the issues of most concern to members of communities of color. The 10 Point Platform was:

1. We want freedom. We want power to determine the destiny of our Black Community.,
2. We want full employment for our people.,
3. We want an end to the robbery by the Capitalist of our Black Community,
4. We want decent housing, fit for the shelter of human beings,
5. We want education for our people that exposes the true nature of this decadent American society. We want education that teaches the true history and our role in the present day society,
6. We want all black me to be exempt from military service,
7. We want an immediate end to Police Brutality and Murder of Black people,
8. We want freedom for all black men held in federal, state, county and city prisons and jails,
9. We want all black people when brought to trial to be tried by a jury of their peer group or people from Black communities, as defined by the Constitution of the United States.
10. We want land, bread, housing, education, clothing, justice and peace. And as a major political objective, a United Nations supervised plebiscite to be held throughout the black colony in which only Black colonial subjects will be allowed to participate, for the purpose of determining the will of Black people as to their national destiny.<sup>18</sup>

I know the first question you have, what is a plebiscite? A plebiscite is the direct vote of the qualified voters of an electorate on an important public question. In this case, the call was for all Black people to be able to come together and decide their national destiny.

The 10 Point Platform was written in 1966 but the issues of concern when it was written are still issues today. Can you imagine how different things could be if the Party had been allowed to operate and continue their work in their communities and also, keep helping those other groups that reached out to them? But, they were seen as a threat, not because they carried guns but because they wanted to change the status quo and they had a plan and willingness to make it happen. Their plan included serving the people and educating them about their rights as citizens. Letting the citizenry know about what they can do to bring about the changes they sought and shifting the power back to the people. Contrary to what the media may say about the Black Panther Party only being interested in helping Black people, the truth is something different. They worked with a lot of other grassroots groups across racial lines, including their White allies. Because they had learned that oppression effects those on the bottom the most, regardless of color.

While the first Black Panther Party originated in Oakland, chapters of the Party were springing up across the US and even internationally. Marginalized people were drawn to the message of determining their own destiny. They were tired of being treated like a “colony”. They wanted to determine their own future. Men and women volunteered to work in the Black Panther Party offices, they wanted to serve the people. Even when it became obvious that the FBI and the local police were not going to stop harassing them, people still came and volunteered. The Party raised its own funds to operate the programs they developed. They were providing needed services in the community.

More often than not, people in marginalized communities did not have anybody to advocate for them in any dispute. Once Panther offices opened, they became the advocates. People in the community would come to them when they had issues with the landlord, or



utilities, or they wanted help with getting services from those agencies that were supposed to be serving them. Party members would be busy addressing these issues, from the time the doors opened at 8 until well into the night. The people were happy to finally have somebody on their side.<sup>19</sup> They were glad to have advocates to lead the way and help them with issues they had been unable to resolve themselves.

The Black Panther Party was an all-volunteer organization. People did not join the Party to get rich but to serve the people; sure there were those who sought the Party out because the sight of Black men with guns, standing up to those in power was attractive but the majority joined because they wanted to make their communities better. They wanted to be a part of a solution to those issues that faced oppressed communities. They felt a responsibility to the children that would come after them to make sure they did not have to face the same issues as generations before.

Can you imagine if the Party had been allowed to carry out their plans without interference? If they were around to be positive role models in the community? If they were able to build the programs they planned to serve the people and those programs had been allowed to thrive? If the people had truly been empowered by their work, instead being fed misinformation by the FBI and the police.<sup>20</sup> The FBI declared war on the Panthers, they did all they could think of to discredit and destroy the work the Party was doing. Party chapters were constantly harassed, Party members were shot at by police without provocation, they were set up and jailed on trumped up charges, Party chapters were infiltrated by informants who worked to make the Party look bad and provided information to law enforcement. The Party was very serious about knowing the law and ensuring that what Party chapters were doing was within the law, the FBI did not observe any such limitations. Sure, there may be those who would say that it is only some

Black paranoia at work that makes us believe that the FBI would do such a thing, but the FBI documented it all.<sup>21</sup>

I wish I could tell you that things have changed. That the world you would grow up in is very different from the one that propelled Huey and Bobby to even start the Black Panther Party. But I cannot tell you that 'cause I will not lie to you. There is this predominant lie that permeates the American narrative, one that says if you work hard, pull yourself up by your bootstraps, take responsibility for your own actions, that everything will be OK, that you will be successful. This is not true. The Party wanted to take responsibility for their own communities and show the people their true power in this society, they were met with labels of invaders, and criminals. They were met at every turn with forces that wanted to crush their movement. Lies that were spread through the media were never questioned, because of course Black people who choose to arm themselves must be up to no good. Forget what they say they are doing, they are miscreants, every last one of them.

The Party worked in their own communities, served the people in their own communities, passed out groceries, served breakfast to children, helped seniors to their appointments, helped families visit relatives in prison, opened medical clinics, gave away clothes and shoes, registered people to vote, had educational programs, and this was just the tip of the iceberg<sup>22</sup>. How could this good work be seen as sinister by those outside of the communities the Party served? It is because they were Black. Racism has a longer history in the United States than the American flag. I would do you a disservice to tell you anything any different.

Everyday there will be somebody that will judge you by the color of your skin. It is a great responsibility that you will have to endure, that was also endured by your Parents, your Grand-Parents and their Parents before them. I don't tell you this to discourage you but to let you

know that in spite of this, the family was able to thrive. In spite of this your Great-Great Grandfather was able to become a school teacher after having being born a slave. This history makes you strong, you have to know that even with the odds against them, you come from a family that is filled with people who were able to overcome. Everywhere you turn, you will see people who attended college, you will see doctors, lawyers, nurses, and military people. You also know that one of the wealthiest people in the family did not attend college but instead had his own janitorial business. You can see people who can model for you how there is more than one way to be happy and successful, even if you were to choose not to go to college. Hard work is coded in your DNA.

Racism is a bad thing. You will face it in stores when you get extra attention in the form of store workers who follow you up and down aisles (you can do what Pops used to do, put them to work, ask a lot of questions and have them look for stuff for you), you will face it with the unwarranted attention that police officers will give you, or how you will often be viewed as a suspect just because of the color of your skin. It is all bad, but I know that you have the stuff to stand up to it. We have all been through it in one form or another, although I know it is harder for you as a young man than for me as an older woman. I don't see how it will change, but we have what it takes to endure.

Racism is the main reason that the Panthers were targeted<sup>23</sup> and why the general public was not outraged. It is not the only reason they were targeted; a key reason why they were viewed as dangerous is because they questioned how power was distributed and demanded power for oppressed people. And when the government stomped all over the rights of Party members, those who should have been speaking up on their behalf were silent, because they too felt that Black men with guns was too dangerous.<sup>24</sup> Local law enforcement, with the blessing and

aid of the FBI, did all it could to eradicate the Black Panther Party. By the middle of the 1970's, they were able to neutralize large numbers of activist focused Black men and remove them from communities. This chasm was soon filled with the growth of neighborhood gangs. With the powerful role models that the men and women of the Black Panther Party and other Black community groups virtually eradicated, and the influx of drugs into communities of color, gangs began to grow and become more violent. The positive voices in communities of color were being drowned out by the destruction of drugs and the violence of gangs.<sup>25</sup>

I know you; you are wondering why I am writing this long letter to tell you about the Black Panther Party; after all, they started in the 60's but you were born in the 90's. Well, there is an old saying that if you don't know your history, you are destined to repeat it or even better, the African proverb: "Until lions have their historians, tales of the hunt shall always glorify the hunter." It is time the lion had a voice in the discussion. I want you to know about a group of young men and women, who were your age, and who set out, against insurmountable odds, to work to make life better for those in oppressed communities. Young people, who worked hard and risked their lives, and thought it was their duty to serve. Who despite evidence to the contrary believed that things could get better and that they could make a difference. I wanted to tell you about people who not only talked about it but work toward it. I wanted you to know that they had allies of every race and from every walk of life who worked with them and supported their vision.

As I sit here, writing this letter to you, I imagine what communities of color would be like had the Panther vision been allowed to flourish. If they had been able to get community control of the police, if they were able to improve educational opportunities in oppressed communities, if they were able to stop the exploitation of poor people by systems that failed to

protect them, if they were to change the visions of themselves as inferior that people in oppressed often held<sup>26</sup>. How different would things be? How would things have been different by the time you were born?

I imagine that things would have been better. The Party may not have been able to achieve all their stated goals, although the goals of the Party evolved based on the work and the needs of the people they were serving. I imagine that the schools would have been better, the job prospects would have been better, I imagine that the Party would have made it known in oppressed communities that there are more ways to prosper besides basketball, football or being a rap star. I imagine that if they were able to continue, their work would have had a positive effect on ‘him’. I imagine ‘him’ at a BPP tutoring camp as an elementary school child or being mentored by a Panther as a high school youth. Either way, ‘he’ would have been changed. ‘He’ would have known that there are other ways to prosper besides robbery, besides the dream of a rap career. See, ‘he’ would have known that ‘he’ was indeed responsible for his neighbor. ‘He’ would have had visions of ‘his’ own life that did not include taking the life of another. See, on that fateful September afternoon, ‘he’ would have been busy uplifting the community, so ‘he’ would not have been available to take you away from us.

***It is well with my soul***

Losing someone you love is hard. I will not sugar coat it. I remember a lot of things about September 14. I was sick at work, I had to leave my desk and go outside and get some air. I subscribed to Amazon Prime and watched Kevin Hart’s “Seriously Funny.” And... I got the worst phone call of my life.

In the days after that phone call, I did not sleep much. I had to leave my house and go home to my parents. My family spent lots of hours together. We talked but nobody said it.

I prayed constantly. I knew that I would not survive without serious help. And to those who don't know, the Holy Ghost is a source of serious help.

One night I had a dream about you, Jay. You were wearing a white robe, you had your signature haircut, that familiar twinkle in your eye and you were singing, "It is Well with my Soul." As I watched you, you were saying – *It is well, It is well, with my soul*. You sang the chorus a few times. I woke up when you finished singing and all I could think was "Jay don't know that song"; but the bible teaches us that the Lord will teach us a new song.

I watched a lot of Hallmark channel and TV Land in the aftermath. And so many mornings, I awoke to the "Golden Girls" (the TV would be on all night). So, one morning after I had the dream. An episode of the "Golden Girls" was on, and somebody was quoting the "It is Well with my Soul" lyrics. I noticed but did not think much of it. Then, after that it was an episode of "Parenthood," and the music track they played was "It is Well with my Soul". After that, I stopped believing it was a coincidence.

So, on the evening of the "Quiet Hour," I am sitting in the chapel feeling especially lost. Still in shock and disbelief. I am sitting on the row behind my brother. There are quite a few people there. The basketball team from Solano Community College is there. All these strong guys, trying their best to hold it together, while they sat, quietly.

The chapel had instrumental music playing, an assortment of hymns. As I sat there, not really knowing how I was going to survive. My mind is racing. Just then, *It is well with my Soul* began to play. When it clicked in my mind, all of a sudden I began to cry uncontrollably. You know, in the old Negro Spirituals, there is one that mentions "weeping and a wailing" - I was wailing. I remember reaching for my brother, who never moved. Then, my eyes were slammed shut and people were patting me on the back saying, "Just let it out". It seemed like I cried for

hours. I was just catching my breath and I could hear you Jay, in my ear laughing at me and you said “Man, Lin, you scared off the whole basketball team!” and you kept laughing. I peeled my eyes open, and sure enough the rows where the basketball team had been sitting, were now empty. I almost burst out laughing. Can you imagine if I had started to laugh? Oh boy.

In that moment, I knew the Lord had been trying to let me know something. Jay, you are alright. It is well with your soul. In that moment, which is the lowest I have ever felt in my life, to be able to even think about laughing; it lets me know that the “Holy Ghost” is really a comforter - just like the Bible says.

I know that I don’t have to worry about you anymore. I know that you are well. I know that it is left to me to work to make the world I imagine a reality.

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<sup>1</sup> The Lowndes County Freedom Organization (LCFO), also known as the Black Panther Party was started by Carmichael and the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee. The LCFO was also known as the Black Panther Party and had the panther as a symbol. Newton and Seale did contact Carmichael to get permission to use the symbol.

<sup>2</sup> Bobby Hutton was the first person to join the Party. He was only 16 years old. He had worked with Bobby Seale in a job training program.

<sup>3</sup> The March on Ballot Boxes speech was delivered by Martin Luther King, Jr. on March 25, 1965 at the conclusion of the March from Selma to Montgomery.

<sup>4</sup> In the March on Ballot Boxes speech, Dr. King shares a story from the book *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* about the Populist Movement, which sought to bring poor white and black people together in the south. And how the movement was stopped when it was made illegal for blacks and whites to work together as equal. In effect, the southern aristocracy blocked the growing movement and manufactured a false hatred between the races, just to maintain power and control the people

<sup>5</sup> Huey Newton attended the San Francisco Law School. It was an independent institution and the same school that former Governor Pat Brown attended.

<sup>6</sup> Police continually harassed BPP party members and offices the entire time they were in operation. There are well documented cases of police harassment. They were permitted to operate with impunity in efforts to destroy the Party.

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<sup>7</sup> Denzil Dowell was shot by police in an unincorporated area of North Richmond. Police claim that he was running away from them and was about to climb a fence so they were forced to shoot. Despite the family's contention that Denzil had an existing injury that would have made it impossible for him to run and climb a fence.

<sup>8</sup> The first issue of the Black Panther Party Black Community News Service was published April 25, 1967

<sup>9</sup> This event was prior to the Mulford Act passing, so it was not illegal to carry a loaded weapon in public.

<sup>10</sup> Party members were required to take part in political education classes and there was a long required reading list. There was also training and other requirements before Party members could carry guns.

<sup>11</sup> At a lecture by Bobby Seale at USF on February 24, 2011, he made this point. They were interested in serving all people regardless of color.

<sup>12</sup> The work of the FBI and their COINTELPRO operation is well documented in the COINTELPRO papers that were released to the public, and analyzed in *War On The Panthers* by Huey Newton.

<sup>13</sup> The Rainbow Coalition was formed with the Chicago BPP Chapter, The Young Lords, and The Young Patriots. It was a Civil and Human Rights organization.

<sup>14</sup> There is a good treatment of this phenomenon in *It's Bigger Than Hip Hop* by M.K. Asante, Jr. (2008)

<sup>15</sup> In an FBI document, an agent reported that while the Chicago Chapter did have guns, they were mostly occupied with setting up breakfast programs or helping old ladies get heat, he was admonished, in writing to find something or else maybe the FBI wasn't the right career choice for him.

<sup>16</sup> The Community Survival programs are documented on this website: <https://web.stanford.edu/group/blackpanthers/programs.shtml> It is the BPP Research Project based at Stanford University. Its goal was to provide a source of information for those interested in researching the BPP. It is a part of the MLK Papers project at Stanford.

<sup>17</sup> They were called this by J. Edgar Hoover, who was head of the FBI during that time.

<sup>18</sup> There lots of documents that examine the 10 Point Platform. Further reading on its creation can be found in *Seize the Time*, page 59 and *Revolutionary Suicide*, page 115.

<sup>19</sup> See Jeffrey Haas, *The Murder of Fred Hampton* (2009)

<sup>20</sup> The FBI would routinely feed misinformation to community members about what the Party was doing. Telling parents that the free breakfast program was going to poison their children, etc.

<sup>21</sup> See *War on the Panthers* by Huey Newton, *The Murder of Fred Hampton* by Jeffrey Haas, *The Ballot and the Bullet* by Yohuru Williams. (2013)

<sup>22</sup> See *The Black Panther Party Service to the People Programs* by David Hilliard (2008)

<sup>23</sup> See *War on the Panthers* by Huey Newton. The FBI under the direction of J. Edgar Hoover identified the Party as a threat and did all it could to shut down its operations. The FBI was particularly brutal on groups composed mainly of Black people, as noted in FBI documents.

<sup>24</sup> See *Dear America* by Karl Hess, pp. 145-147 (1975)

<sup>25</sup> See *City of Quartz* by Mike Davis, pp. 293-316

<sup>26</sup> See *Brainwashed* by Tom Burrell



## CHAPTER VI

### DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Because love is an act of courage, not of fear, love is commitment to others. No matter where the oppressed are found, the act of love is commitment to their cause—the cause of liberation. And this commitment, because it is loving, is dialogical. As an act of bravery, love cannot be sentimental; as an act of freedom, it must not serve as a pretext for manipulation. It must generate other acts of freedom; otherwise, it is not love. Only by abolishing the situation of oppression is it possible to restore the love which that situation made impossible. If I do not love the world—if I do not love life—if I do not love people—I cannot enter into dialogue. (Freire, 1970, pp. 89-90)

The purpose of this research study was to utilize narrative analysis and scholarly personal narrative to build a counter-story about the Black Panther Party and its effect on the local community. This study derived from a need for a counter-story about the Black Panther Party to refute the public narrative of the Party being filled with individuals who were seeking to overthrow the US government and murder random, innocent White citizens. The goal was to create an accessible document that could provide an interesting read for those not drawn to academic texts. The document provides historical information about the Party and highlight the recipe for revolution created by the Party founders, Newton and Seale. The information from the narrative analysis in conjunction with the personal narrative was used to build a story about the BPP and hopefully inspire further research into the work of the Party.

This work has been an act of love for me. Certain discussions are rooted in different parts of the brain, a discussion of say, critical pedagogy, would come from an intellectual center, but a

discussion about how much you love your Grandmother or your children is heart knowledge and comes from a different place. While I am not a student of neurology and am not sure the previous statement would be supported by brain scans, I still believe it to be true.

This study on the work of the Black Panther Party did not lead me to a place in my intellect, but to a place in my heart. Much like all that I have read about the civil rights movement and the debt I have to ALL those in made sacrifices for that movement; I am equally indebted to those in the BPP. In reality, I feel a deeper debt to the BPP because I have not always appreciated the work they have done or the sacrifices members of the party made. There was so much about the Party that was unknown to me, and how dare I be unwilling to look for the information.

This research was instrumental in helping me to free myself from a state of colonization. Prior to embarking on this study, I was not aware of how much of my perspective was influenced by white supremacist thinking and how much value I had attributed to the media perspective. Without me consenting, my mind was conditioned to believe that people of color with weapons are automatically no good, or that a group comprised mostly of people of color was substandard, haphazardly plan (because of course if it were well planned white people would participate). I had been shown by almost every textbook, television show, teacher, and newspaper that anything that was grown out of communities of color was substandard, a poor imitation of a properly run whit organization. It was not until I began this excavation, that I realized how deeply these colonizing thoughts had run. I am a native of San Francisco; I remember growing up and hearing stories about the Party, most of them negative; it never occurred to me to not take them as the whole truth. Why was it so easy for me to believe the negative things said about not just the Party but people of color as well?

When I started the work on this research, I believed I would find data about the Party, share it in a new and interesting way and that would be the end. I was looking for facts, I had hoped to find a blueprint for how the Party planned its work, a blueprint that could be replicated by new generations of young people who want to serve their community. In the end, what I found was not a blueprint (because blueprints are precise), it was more like a recipe. But more important than the recipe, I found myself. This study about the work of the Black Panther Party freed my colonized mind. It challenged me to question even those things that I had taken for granted to be fact. This work was personally life changing.

The Party believed that Black people in America lived in a “Colony.” The “Colony” was not one geographical location but instead this systemic way that laws and rules in the United States were written and enforced that worked to keep People of Color oppressed and downtrodden. This system appeared to be invisible to outsiders but very real to those who had to endure it and live through it. It, meaning this colonizing system, had a way of infiltrating one’s mind without you really being aware. While reading *The New Jim Crow* (Alexander, 2010), there is a section that asks the reader to picture a drug dealer or criminal, and when I did, I pictured somebody Black. “Oh no! I too am colonized, and I do not know when it happened.” My thoughts and perceptions had been shaped by the media, textbooks, teachers and the American narrative that fits everything contributed by African American people into one paragraph in a textbook. The vision of Black men who chose to carry guns, in my mind somehow discounted the mission of their movement. With their militant persona, their work could not be as positive and pure as I viewed the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960’s. I was definitely one of those who was in need of a counter-story.

Growing up in the San Francisco Bay Area, I had heard of the Black Panther Party before (mostly the media narrative), but had not myself taken the time to actually learn about what the Party was really about and the impact they had on communities. Aside from them serving free breakfast to children before school and carrying guns, I was clueless. It was not until I read about the 10 Point Platform and Program of the Black Panther Party for the first time that I realized what substance there was in the work they had done; at that time I was already a graduate student in a Master's degree program. It was many years after that before I undertook a deeper study of the work that had been done by the Party. As I began to unearth the story of the Party, my debt to those who sacrificed and worked across this country and the world in the Party and on its behalf has grown. Indeed, the 'interest' is accruing daily on that debt.

Members of the Black Panther Party were subjected to a tremendous amount of pressure. The Federal Government and local police forces, did not hold back in their efforts to dismantle the Party and any other organization that they deemed unacceptable. The FBI had a separate group, the Counter-intelligence Program or COINTELPRO, that was allowed to operate with impunity to disrupt the activities of civil rights groups and other social or political groups. The FBI deemed the Black Panther Party one of the most dangerous groups in America. These forces mediated the information that was released about the work the Party was doing and about the actions the government forces were taking to destroy the Party. COINTELPRO was relentless and nothing would stop them from carrying out their mission, not even the law.

### **Discussion**

If any white man in the world says, "Give me liberty or give me death," the entire white world applauds, when a black man says exactly the same thing, he is judged a criminal and treated like one and everything possible is done to make an example of this bad nigger

so there won't be any more like him. (James Baldwin on the Dick Cavett Show, cited in the *I am not your Negro documentary*, 2016)

The Black Panther Party story is a challenging one. It was a complex and ever evolving organization, that had a central goal in mind, to make life better for oppressed people. Their methods may have changed over the years but their goals were the same. As I began to research the Black Panther Party, I found much more than I expected. The BPP movement was unfamiliar to me. I had been exposed to the media narrative about the work of the Party. I am quite familiar with the Civil Rights Movement and all the key players and the work that was done in the south; but somehow I missed getting the genuine information about a movement that happened basically in my own backyard. Growing up in San Francisco, it was right near where the Party started in Oakland, California. While San Francisco and Oakland were very different cities at the time, San Francisco was very “hippie,” and Oakland was more industrial; the lives of Black residents of both cities were quite similar.

The Black Panther Party was started with the goal of serving oppressed people in oppressed communities and helping them to advocate for themselves. The goal of the Party was to help communities to govern themselves. Their theme was, “All Power to the People”, they wanted to help those in oppressed communities who had been overlooked and ignored and felt voiceless. Regardless of race, they wanted to help people to live their best lives and feel empowered in their communities. The people were the focus of the work of the Party.

As part of a class assignment, I had to create thick descriptions from a field observation. I chose to observe the crowd at a showing of *The Black Panthers: Vanguard of the Revolution* (2016), a documentary about the BPP. The documentary was shown at the Piedmont Theatre in Piedmont, California. The City of Piedmont has a population of almost 10,000 people, is over

74% White, and has a median income of just over \$134,000 per year (data from BayAreaCensus.ca.gov). The movie theatre was flanked by a high-end coffee shop and a specialty yarn store. The crowd was mostly Black and majority middle class. What stood out the most to me is that the people the Party wanted to serve were not represented in the crowd. They were not being discussed by the crowd; it appeared that these were people were around at the time the Party was active, and may have participated on some level, but now were content in their middle class lives and had forgotten those on the bottom who still needed help.

Many works have been written about the Black Panther Party. Most of the written works, aside from the narratives written by former Party members, are academic in nature and focus on the “militant” and political work of the Party. Texts like *Black Against Empire* (Bloom, 2013) which is a detailed, historical account of the Party that provides an excellent treatment of their story but it reads like a history textbook. It is a great resource but not an introduction. Many of the existing texts, are not written in an accessible format. So much so, that the people the Party would have liked to reach the most would not be interested in reading them. Written in the language of the academe, most of the available text are interesting, relevant, and well-researched; they just are not accessible. Those who could gain the most from them are turned away because the works are written like an academic textbook. I knew once I began this study, that I needed to create something accessible that could be easily understood and pique interest in further study by those interested in the subject. The Party had an exceptional ability to express complex ideas in ways that were easily understood, and so that the information reached those to which it was directed. They did everything with oppressed communities in mind; so while they could have written academic level texts, they took the time to write directly to the people.

## Responses to Research Questions

### *Research question #1:*

*How can the narratives of Huey Newton and Bobby Seale be used to uplift and explore the work of the Black Panther Party?*

Stories are powerful. According to Delgado (1989):

The stories of outgroups aim to subvert that in-group reality. In civil rights, for example, many in the majority hold that any inequality between Blacks and Whites is due either to cultural lag, or inadequate enforcement of currently existing beneficial laws – both of which are easily correctable. For many minority persons, the principal instrument of their subordination is neither of these. Rather, it is the prevailing mindset by means of which members of the dominant group justify the world as it is, that is, with whites on top and browns and blacks at the bottom. Stories, parables, chronicles, and narratives are powerful means for destroying mindset – the bundle of presuppositions, received wisdoms, and shared understandings against a background of which legal and political discourse takes place. (p. 2413).

When the people involved are allowed to tell their own stories, using their own words in their own way, it has the power to change lives. Huber (2012) posits that these stories are a collective history that shows how non-dominant groups challenge oppression and bring attention to injustice in an effort to transform it.

Narrative is the perfect way to tell the story of the Black Panther Party. Narrative allows stories to be told in an accessible way, that is easily read and understood by readers of all ages. Narrative allows the reader to see themselves in the text, so even if the activities are not ones

they have experienced themselves, they can still identify with the central characters. Also, the use of plots to carry the story holds the attention of the reader in ways that academic texts do not often do. Stories have the ability to humanize, they highlight our differences in ways that have the ability to bring us together. They allow us to see what the world is like from some else's eyes. They challenge us to consider another's point of view and ask if we have been overlooking something all along (Delgado, 2007).

***Research question #2:***

***How can the use of counter-narrative make the history of the Black Panther Party more accessible to youth and community members?***

According to Huber et al (2013), “stories are teachings of the heart: if you can remember the stories you will be all right. Just remember the stories” (p. 215). This work was approached from that point of view, that this was heart work, an act of love. Love is an action word, not a passive description of a feeling. Loving something means that you have to actually do something. A story has the power to inspire, educate, comfort, chastise, enlighten and free. An accessible story means that the story is shared in a way that people of all ages and education levels can understand it. An accessible story can reach anybody. Senehi (2002) says that while storytelling may appear simple, it has the profound ability to empower a great number of people because it is so accessible. Stories do not require special training or equipment to understand, people of all ages and economic backgrounds can understand stories. The very nature of stories makes them accessible. With stories, the balance between the storyteller and the audience is more in line and it allows for a process of meaning making.

Creating accessible narratives about the Black Panther Party makes the story of the movement easier to read. Aside from the narratives from former Party members, i.e., *A Taste of*



*Power* by Elaine Brown (1994), *My People Are Rising* by Aaron Dixon (2012) or *The Black Panthers* by Bryan Shih and Yohuru Williams (2016), much that has been written about the Party is academic in nature, the texts while thoroughly researched and well written, read like school textbooks. Books like *Living for the City* by Donna Murch (2010), *Framing the Black Panthers* by Jane Rhodes, and *To die for the people* by Huey Newton (2009) are examples of texts that provide an in depth look at aspects of the Party, in an often academic voice. This is not meant to discount these texts; they are well worth the read. However, when trying to reach an audience that has been marginalized in school, and public education has been a source of trauma for them, asking them to spend their free time reading a textbook would be a challenge. I do believe they can get there, but it really has to start with a story.

Even some of the Party's own literature is dense and not that accessible. Newton's text on *Intercommunalism* (2009), while brilliant as he describes the evolution of the Black Panther Party, is complex and not really accessible. But, if the time was taken to create accessible narratives to gain the interest of this population; then they can be used to stimulate interest in delving further into the work of the BPP.

***Research question #3:***

***How can a counter-narrative about the Black Panther Party be used to disrupt the dominant discourse about the work of the Party and provide inspiration to the current generation?***

The Black Panther Party was a movement that was ahead of its time. In spite of the constant oppressive acts of US law enforcement agencies, they managed to develop a program that if certain tenets were replicated could likely have a positive effect on marginalized communities. When discussing the BPP, two programs are often mentioned - the armed police

patrols and the free breakfast for children. The work of the Party was much deeper than those two programs.

Philips and LeBlanc-Ernest (2016) note that it is relevant to detail BPP history in this time of increasing attacks against Blacks. The Panthers faced almost identical issues that included murder, police brutality, racial, gender and sexual discrimination, educational inequities, disabled rights and economic disparities. The work of the BPP serves as a precursor to current social and political movements. As current movements form, it is paramount that the resources available include comprehensive, inclusive narratives that tell the stories of participants lives and the spirit of the Party's global perspective and humanistic approach to social change.

The BPP included in their process talking to the community and evolving their practice. Current movements can read the documentation they were careful to leave behind to build a new movement based on BPP practices. They also have at their disposal former members of the Party to provide information about how they recruited members (that they were quite successful at without the internet or email), raised funds, and developed programs. Too often current movements fail to find out about all aspects of older movements, so they emulate parts of the movement without knowing why the original group chose to operate in such a manner. Or they focus on what may have appeared glamorous about the prior movement without instituting every aspect. A good example is the New Black Panther Party, which is nothing like the original BPP. The New BPP is ultra-militant and separatist, which the BPP was not. This is why it is important that the true story of the Party is told.

## Conclusion

In America, I was free only in battle, never free to rest, and he who finds no way to rest cannot long survive the battle. (James Baldwin, *I Am Not Your Negro* documentary, 2016)

The Black Panther Party story is replete with examples of the struggle of being Black in the United States. It is also filled with examples of what lengths law enforcement will go to just to shut down any attempts made by oppressed people to break free of their oppressors. The FBI fully documented its efforts to destroy the Party and its members; those efforts were fully analyzed in *War Against the Panthers: A study of repression in America* by Huey Newton (1980), which is the doctoral dissertation of Newton from the History of Social Consciousness program at University of California, Santa Cruz.

The process of this research was very stressful. In my everyday life, I am confronted by micro and macro aggressions all the time. Being an African-American woman in the United States, even in California, is a constant struggle. But, you learn to power through and not notice on a daily basis. You learn to move forward in spite of seemingly invisible road blocks; to prosper when the deck is stacked against you. This research has been heart wrenching for me. The stories of how the FBI plotted against the Party and murdered Americans and caused mayhem at will and with impunity, all with people of color as targets. And the FBI was keen on documenting all the havoc they imposed on activist groups, so it is impossible to attribute it to Black paranoia.

At the outset, I planned to take an unbiased look at the work of the Party, to just analyze the narratives of the Party founders, read some supporting documentation, and write an academic treatise that would describe the findings of the analysis. The problem with that plan is that the

narratives are about real people who endured real things all in service to the marginalized people of their communities. The FBI infiltrated their lives so fully, it was almost impossible for them to discern what was real or fabricated. Are you paranoid if you are really being watched 24 hours a day?

While I chose to focus on Huey Newton and Bobby Seale to make the narrative cleaner, the reality is the Party was much bigger than just the two of them. The Party consisted of men and women from across the United States who latched onto the Panther vision and started BPP chapters in their own communities. The BPP had alliances with people from all walks of life. Often the Party is painted as a Black Nationalist/separatist organization, but they abandoned Black Nationalist leanings very early in the movement's evolution. Their narratives show that they had allies of every race and of all classes. They had a keen understanding of the power structure and how to obtain power.

The Party was viewed as dangerous, not because they had guns but because they were determined to have the power to determine the destiny of their own community and they were willing to share that information with any marginalized group that approached them. It was presented to the public as dangerous, Black men with guns who wanted to overthrow the government and take over, even though in the myriad of speeches made by Panthers, they never said anything of the sort. There were those who were drawn to the Party because of the guns and believed the media narrative of a bloody revolution and they broke away from the Party after realizing that when they said revolution, that is not what they meant. Because racism permeates the American system, it was easy for people to believe that these Black men with guns were dangerous and for people to remain silent while the rights of the Panthers were violated and they were systematically destroyed (Aranke, 2013).

This research introduced me to the concept of politicized looking; it was something that I was aware of that had not yet been named for me yet. In her 2013 article about the murder of Fred Hampton, Aranke (2013) coined the term. The idea of looking is conditioned by anti-black violence, such as in lynchings, which were common in the southern region of the United States. The act of lynching communicates to Black communities that their bodies were expendable. Lynching was a kind of violence that made it permissible for civil White society to murder Black bodies. Lynching was not done in secret but was a public spectacle, where White community members would take pictures or forge for remnants that could be sold. The vigilante violence of lynching was never prosecuted by the state; demonstrating that the state and White civil society shared anti-black investments (pp. 127-128).

Politicized looking invites the viewer to slow down the process of image consumption in order to see the conditions through which life, and in this case death, occurs at an uneven, disjunctive, and violent rate against Black bodies. These images lead the politicized looker to reach the conclusion: you can kill a revolutionary, but you can't kill the revolution...Politicized looking clarifies how anti-black violence is at once gratuitous and mundane. Politicized looking is a practice that destabilizes the clean division between presence and absence, memory and forgetting in order to clarify how state sanctioned murder is merely one technology of antiblack violence. (Aranke, 2013, p. 132)

The concept of politicized looking aptly describes how waves of anti-black violence are received by onlookers, even onlookers of color, it is gratuitous and mundane. We are used to it; while initially people may be upset, it is easily forgotten and almost expected and routine. When violence is perpetrated on people of color, there is often this unspoken sense that somehow they

done something to deserve such treatment especially when the violence is at the hands of law enforcement.

Aranke's (2013) article is about the documentary, "The Murder of Fred Hampton," the spectacle of the scene where he was murdered, and how his life had become an object to be viewed. The notion of politicized looking, not seeing, seems to aptly describe how the average person of color is viewed in an American context. This concept of 'looking' is why it was so easy for the FBI to murder and malign members of the Black Panther Party without fear of a public uprising. Fifty years later, the average American can be presented with copies of the FBI documents from the FBI website that clearly explain what they did and how they orchestrated it. But they would not believe it because people of color are something to be looked or acted upon but not actually seen.

### **Implications of the Study**

Woodson (2016) studied Messianic master narratives and Black youths' civic agency. Most youth in her study believed that to lead a movement a person needed some special 'messiah' - like gifting, a regular person with faults of any kind could not be a movement leader. Of course, this is patently false, perfection is not a requirement for service. Unfortunately, the belief that leaders need to be perfect is not only held by youth; so many who would like to serve stop short because they feel unworthy.

This study is an analysis of the creation story of the Black Panther Party. In the autobiographical texts written by Newton and Seale, they were very careful to provide details about their upbringing and the challenges they faced. They also were clear that they each had struggles and demons to face but they sought out opportunities to serve anyway. Newton (2009) stated, "When I look back on my early years, I see how lucky I was. Strong and positive

influences in my life helped me escape the hopelessness that afflicts so many of my contemporaries” (p. 28). To overcome the oppression that permeated their community, the pair was determined to take action, they made a conscious decision to strive for positive change.

Their story can be inspirational to youth today, who feel hopeless in their current situation and want to make change in their communities but feel overwhelmed by the seemingly unlikely odds of success. The Panther story has many facets, both good and bad, which are available with deeper study. An important facet of the Panther story is that they were not perfect but were willing servants. Their story also gives those with a desire to serve an idea of what kinds of repression they may face and how far the opposition may go to deter their progress. It is also important to note that even in spite of the near constant government interference, the Party was still able to make some progress and make an impression on the people they wanted to serve. The Party was only active for a touch over a decade, but their movement is still worthy of being studied and can have an impact on current movements.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

There is no question that the use of non-traditional research methods has been valuable in this work. The use of the personal narratives of the founders of the Black Panther Party was central to gain an understanding of the mission of the Party and how the Party evolved.

The further development of accessible narratives about every aspect of the Party and its members and their contributions would be a welcome addition to the literature about the Black Panther Party. These narratives increase the likelihood that people in marginalized communities will read them and learn about the movements that have the potential to change their communities and improve their lives.

*Personal reflection*

Free at last, free at last,  
 Thank God Almighty, I'm free at last.  
 The very time I thought I was lost,  
 Thank God Almighty, I'm free at last;  
 My dungeon shook and my chains fell off,  
 Thank God Almighty, I'm free at last,  
 This is religion, I do know,  
 Thank God Almighty, I'm free at last;  
 For I never felt such a love before,  
 Thank God Almighty, I'm free at last.  
 Free at Last! Free at Last! (*My dungeon shook*, a Negro spiritual)

The James Baldwin work that the narrative in this study is patterned after is titled “My Dungeon Shook,” based on the line from a Negro Spiritual. Interestingly, it is the same Negro spiritual that Martin Luther King quoted in his “I Have A Dream” speech at the March on Washington in 1963. The song is based on the story of Paul and Silas in prison, and they began to pray and then there was an earthquake and the chains that kept the prisoners bound fell open. Their chains were loosed. The title of this work is, “And Indeed My Chains Were Loosed;” for me it embodies what this research taught me about myself. This research process helped me recognize my colonized view of things that I was unaware I possessed. It challenged me to look at a movement with fresh eyes and truly examine my opinions about what the data showed.

The research process is meant to enable the researcher to gain knowledge about the subject studied – what I would term “head knowledge.” However, this process opened up



something new for me about this topic - “heart knowledge.” Heart knowledge reaches that space that is about who you are and what you believe and why, this heart knowledge when coupled with head knowledge can teach you about yourself. Equip you to move mountains, something that head knowledge alone cannot do. Heart knowledge will propel you forward in circumstances where head knowledge will have you stand down.

In studying the Black Panther Party, one of the things that piqued my interest was what made people join the Party. Young adults from all across the United States saw stories about the Party and were compelled to leave home and travel to Oakland and join the Party or they sought to start their own chapters in cities across the country. Most of those who left their homes to become Party members had only heard the media narrative of the Party, they had not heard directly from Party members or talked to Newton or Seale on the block but the work of the Party tugged on their heart knowledge and drew them in. This is important to consider when you consider that the media narrative about the Party had a negative slant, showed Party members being arrested and persecuted, but yet they still came. The heart knowledge is what brought them here; the head knowledge about what the Party was really about and how it actually worked is what sustained them through the trials that arose while the heart knowledge is what made them stay in spite of the repression they experienced.

This study gave me so much more than the ability to recite data regarding the activities of the Black Panther Party. It gave me more than an understanding of the “recipe for a revolution” which was gleaned from the data collected from the works of Huey Newton and Bobby Seale. It reminded me what the “love in dialogue” that Freire talked about looked like and the power that adding love into the conversation has on everything. It awakened the heart knowledge in me to silence the colonized dialogue that often plays in my head without my permission. This study

shook the chains that colonized me loose, and freed me. Freed me not to run away but to stand,  
freed me to work for the people, freed me to use the recipe and start a revolution.

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## Appendix A: The Black Panther Party for Self-Defense Ten Point Platform


**October 1966**  
**Black Panther Party**  
**Platform and Program**

# What We Want What We Believe



*Huey P. Newton, Minister of Defense  
Black Panther Party*

1. We want freedom. We want power to determine the destiny of our Black Community.  
We believe that black people will not be free until we are able to determine our destiny.
2. We want full employment for our people.  
We believe that the federal government is responsible and obligated to give every man employment or a guaranteed income. We believe that if the white American businessmen will not give full employment, then the 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 CAPITALIST of our Black Community.  
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 was 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 Germans are now aiding the Jews in Israel for the genocide of the Jewish people. The Germans murdered six million Jews. The American racist has taken part in the slaughter of over fifty million black people; therefore, we feel that this is a modest demand that we make.
4. We want decent housing, fit for shelter of human beings.  
We believe that if the white landlords will not give decent housing to our black community, then the housing and the land should be made into cooperatives so that our community, with government aid, can build and make decent housing for its people.
5. We want 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 self. If a man does not have knowledge of himself and his position in society and the world, then he has little chance to relate to anything else.
6. We want all black men to be exempt from military service.  
We believe that Black people should not be forced to fight in the military service to defend a racist government that does not protect us. We will not fight and kill other people of color in the world who, like black people, are being victimized by the white racist government of America. We will protect ourselves from the force and violence of the racist police and the racist military, by whatever means necessary.
7. We want an immediate end to POLICE BRUTALITY and MURDER of black people.  
We believe we can end police brutality in our black community by organizing black self-defense groups that are dedicated to defending our black community from racist police oppression and brutality. The Second Amendment to the Constitution of the United States gives a right to bear arms. We therefore believe that all black people should arm themselves for self-defense.
8. We want freedom for all black men held in federal, state, county and city prisons and jails.  
We believe that all black people should be released from the many jails and prisons because they have not received a fair and impartial trial.
9. We want all black people when brought to trial to be tried in court by a jury of their peer group or people from their black communities, as defined by the Constitution of the United States.  
We believe that the courts should follow the United States Constitution so that black people will receive fair trials. The 14th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution gives a man a right to be tried by his peer group. A peer is a person from a similar economic, social, religious, geographical, environmental, historical and racial background. To do this the court will be forced to select a jury from the black community from which the black defendant came. We have been, and are being tried by all-white juries that have no understanding of the "average reasoning man" of the black community.
10. We want land, bread, housing, education, clothing, justice and peace. And as our major political objective, a United Nations-supervised plebiscite to be held throughout the black colony in which only black colonial subjects will be allowed to participate, for the purpose of determining the will of black people as to their national destiny.  
When, in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands 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 effect 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 more 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 usurpations, 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.



## Appendix B:

## Recommended Reading List

## BLACK PANTHER PARTY

Bloom, J., & Martin, W. E. (2014). *Black against empire: The history and politics of the Black Panther Party*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Brown, E. (2009). *A taste of power: A Black woman's story*. Brantford, Ont.: W. Ross MacDonald School Resource Services Library.

Cleaver, K., & Katsiaficas, G. (Eds.). (2014). *Liberation, imagination and the Black Panther Party: A new look at the Black Panthers and their legacy*. New York, NY Routledge.

Dixon, A. F. (2012). *My people are rising: Memoir of a Black Panther Party captain*. Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books.

Douglas, E., & Roberts, S. (2011). *Emory Douglas: The visual history of the Black Panther Party*. San Francisco, CA: High Speed Productions.

Foundation, The Dr. Huey P. Newton, & Hilliard, D. (2010). *Black Panther Party: Service to the People programs*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.

Haas, J. (2011). *The assassination of Fred Hampton: How the FBI and the Chicago police murdered a Black Panther*. Chicago, IL: Lawrence Hill Books.

- Jones, C. E. (2005). *The Black Panther Party (reconsidered)*. Baltimore, MD: Black Classic Press.
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- Rhodes, J. (2017). *Framing the Black Panthers: The spectacular rise of a Black power icon*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press.
- Seale, B. (1970). *Seize the time: The story of the Black Panther Party and Huey P. Newton*. New York, NY: Random HouseBooks.
- Shames, S., & Seale, B. (2016). *Power to the people: The world of the Black Panthers*. New York: Abrams, an imprint of ABRAMS.
- Shih, B., & Williams, Y. R. (2016). *The Black Panthers: Portraits from an unfinished revolution*. New York: Nation Books.
- Spencer, R. C. (2016). *The revolution has come: Black power, gender, and the Black Panther Party in Oakland*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Williams, J. (2015). *From the bullet to the ballot: The Illinois Chapter of the Black Panther Party and racial coalition politics in Chicago*. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press.

## Appendix C:

## Lesson Plan Outline – Introduction to the Black Panther Party

Grades 9 -12

Unit: Two-part lesson

Time: 2 hours for each section

Subjects: English, Social Studies, History, Political Science

Purpose:

As part of a Civil Rights Movement module, this lesson would introduce the Black Panther Party. It would give an overview of the Party's history and things accomplished.

Materials

Au, W. (2004). What we want, what we believe. In D. Menkart, A. D. Murray, & J. View (Eds.), *Putting the movement back into civil rights teaching: A resource guide for K-12 classrooms* (pp. 153-158). Washington., DC: Teaching for Change and the Poverty & Race Research Action Council.

Wei, D. (2004). Black Panther Party: Legacy and lessons for the future. In A. Murray, D. Menkart, & J. View (Eds.), *Putting the movement back into civil rights teaching: A resource guide* (pp. 145-148). Washington, DC: Teaching for Change and the Poverty & Race Research Action Council.

## Part I

Utilizing the Black Panther Party: Legacy and lessons for the future by Diane Wei and selected outside sources (at the teacher's discretion) provide an overview of the Black Panther Party history beginning with the Founders of the Party, Huey Newton and Bobby Seale.

Provide an in depth review of the Party's Ten Point Program and Platform. Using the activity created by Wayne Au in "What We want, What We Believe" – Teaching with the Black Panthers' Ten Point Program, the students will create a Ten Point Platform..

### Activity:

Following the review of the Party's Ten Point Program, have students create their own Ten Point Program based on things in their own communities they feel need to be addressed. Have students explain why they selected the identified issues.

## Part 2

Read: Garrett, L. (2018). It is well with my soul: A letter to my nephew.

Now have students create their own letter to anyone (living or dead) they select. The letter should introduce the Ten Point Program they created in the Part 1 activity to the selected person. The letter should include information about the BPP and how learning about the Party influenced the creation of their own 10 points. The letter can be sent to anyone- living or dead; the letter should make clear why they selected that person.



### Debrief

The unit should end with a period of discussion that includes review/questions; information about other movements from the same era, and how current movements differ or are similar to the BPP.

Appendix D: FBI Documents

More can be found on the FBI website at <https://vault.fbi.gov/Black%20Panther%20Party%20/>

3/4/68

RA [ AIRTEL ]

1 - Mr. C. D. DeLoach  
 1 - Mr. W. C. Sullivan  
 1 - Mr. G. C. Moore  
 1 - [REDACTED]

To: SAC, Albany PERSONAL ATTENTION

REC 18

From: Director, FBI (100-443006) - 17

COUNTERINTELLIGENCE PROGRAM  
 BLACK NATIONALIST-HATE GROUPS  
 RACIAL INTELLIGENCE

MAILED 12  
 MAR 5 1968  
 COMM-FBI

Title is changed to substitute Racial Intelligence  
 for Internal Security for Bureau routing purposes.

PERSONAL ATTENTION FOR ALL THE FOLLOWING SACs

2 - Atlanta	2 - Minneapolis
2 - Baltimore	2 - Mobile
2 - Birmingham	2 - Newark
2 - Boston	2 - New Haven
2 - Buffalo	2 - New Orleans
2 - Charlotte	2 - New York
2 - Chicago	2 - Omaha
2 - Cincinnati	2 - Philadelphia
2 - Cleveland	2 - Phoenix
2 - Denver	2 - Pittsburgh
2 - Detroit	2 - Portland
2 - Houston	2 - Richmond
2 - Indianapolis	2 - Sacramento
2 - Jackson	2 - San Diego
2 - Jacksonville	2 - San Francisco
2 - Kansas City	2 - Seattle
2 - Los Angeles	2 - Springfield
2 - Memphis	2 - St. Louis
2 - Miami	2 - Tampa
2 - Milwaukee	2 - WFO

JJD: rmm (88)

ALL INFORMATION CONTAINED  
 HEREIN IS UNCLASSIFIED  
 EXCEPT WHERE SHOWN  
 OTHERWISE.

SEE NOTE PAGE SIX

5-4 MAR 18 1968

MAIL ROOM  TELETYPE UNIT

WCL  
 2/24/77  
 5-7-80  
 65

Airtel to SAC, Albany  
 RE: COUNTERINTELLIGENCE PROGRAM  
 BLACK NATIONALIST-HATE GROUPS

BACKGROUND

By letter dated 8/25/67 the following offices were advised of the beginning of a Counterintelligence Program against militant Black Nationalist-Hate Groups:

Albany	Memphis
Atlanta	Newark
Baltimore	New Orleans
Boston	New York
Buffalo	Philadelphia
Charlotte	Phoenix
Chicago	Pittsburgh
Cincinnati	Richmond
Cleveland	St. Louis
Detroit	San Francisco
Jackson	Washington Field
Los Angeles	

Each of the above offices was to designate a Special Agent to coordinate this program. Replies to this letter indicated an interest in counterintelligence against militant black nationalist groups that foment violence and several offices outlined procedures which had been effective in the past. For example, Washington Field Office had furnished information about a new Nation of Islam (NOI) grade school to appropriate authorities in the District of Columbia who investigated to determine if the school conformed to District regulations for private schools. In the process WFO obtained background information on the parents of each pupil.

The Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM), a pro-Chinese communist group, was active in Philadelphia, Pa., in the summer of 1967. The Philadelphia Office alerted local police, who then put RAM leaders under close scrutiny. They were arrested on every possible charge until they could no longer make bail. As a result, RAM leaders spent most of the summer in jail and no violence traceable to RAM took place.

The Counterintelligence Program is now being expanded to include 41 offices. Each of the offices added to this program should designate an Agent familiar with black

Airtel to SAC, Albany  
 RE: COUNTERINTELLIGENCE PROGRAM  
 BLACK NATIONALIST-HATE GROUPS

nationalist activity, and interested in counterintelligence, to coordinate this program. This Agent will be responsible for the periodic progress letters being requested, but each Agent working this type of case should participate in the formulation of counterintelligence operations.

#### GOALS

For maximum effectiveness of the Counterintelligence Program, and to prevent wasted effort, long-range goals are being set.

1. Prevent the coalition of militant black nationalist groups. In unity there is strength; a truism that is no less valid for all its triteness. An effective coalition of black nationalist groups might be the first step toward a real "Mau Mau" in America, the beginning of a true black revolution.
2. Prevent the rise of a "messiah" who could unify, and electrify, the militant black nationalist movement. Malcolm X might have been such a "messiah;" he is the martyr of the movement today. Martin Luther King, Stokely Carmichael and Elijah Muhammed all aspire to this position. Elijah Muhammed is less of a threat because of his age. King could be a very real contender for this position should he abandon his supposed "obedience" to "white, liberal doctrines" (nonviolence) and embrace black nationalism. Carmichael has the necessary charisma to be a real threat in this way.
3. Prevent violence on the part of black nationalist groups. This is of primary importance, and is, of course, a goal of our investigative activity; it should also be a goal of the Counterintelligence Program. Through counterintelligence it should be possible to pinpoint potential troublemakers and neutralize them before they exercise their potential for violence.
4. Prevent militant black nationalist groups and leaders from gaining respectability, by discrediting them to three separate segments of the community. The goal of discrediting black nationalists must be handled tactically in three ways. You must discredit these groups and individuals to, first, the responsible Negro community. Second, they must be discredited to the white community.

Airtel to SAC, Albany  
 RE: COUNTERINTELLIGENCE PROGRAM  
 BLACK NATIONALIST-HATE GROUPS

both the responsible community and to "liberals" who have vestiges of sympathy for militant black nationalist simply because they are Negroes. Third, these groups must be discredited in the eyes of Negro radicals, the followers of the movement. This last area requires entirely different tactics from the first two. Publicity about violent tendencies and radical statements merely enhances black nationalists to the last group; it adds "respectability" in a different way.

5. A final goal should be to prevent the long-range growth of militant black nationalist organizations, especially among youth. Specific tactics to prevent these groups from converting young people must be developed.

Besides these five goals counterintelligence is a valuable part of our regular investigative program as it often produces positive information.

#### TARGETS

Primary targets of the Counterintelligence Program, Black Nationalist-Hate Groups, should be the most violent and radical groups and their leaders. We should emphasize those leaders and organizations that are nationwide in scope and are most capable of disrupting this country. These targets should include the radical and violence-prone leaders, members, and followers of the:

Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC),  
 Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC),  
 Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM),  
 Nation of Islam (NOI)

Offices handling these cases and those of Stokely Carmichael of SNCC, H. Rap Brown of SNCC, Martin Luther King of SCLC, Maxwell Stanford of RAM, and Elijah Muhammed of NOI, should be alert for counterintelligence suggestions.

#### INSTRUCTIONS

Within 30 days of the date of this letter each office should:

1. Advise the Bureau of the identity of the Special Agent assigned to coordinate this program.

Airtel to SAC, Albany  
 RE: COUNTERINTELLIGENCE PROGRAM  
 BLACK NATIONALIST-HATE GROUPS

2. Submit a very succinct summary of the black nationalist movement in the field office territory. Include name, number of members and degree of activity of each black nationalist group. Also state your estimate of each group's propensity for violence. This is for target evaluation only, not for record purposes. Second, list Rabble-Rouser Index subjects who are militant black nationalists and any other militant black nationalist leaders who might be future targets of counterintelligence action because of their propensity for violence. Include a minimum of background information on each person listed; a few descriptive sentences should suffice.

3. List those organizations and individuals you consider of such potential danger as to be considered for current counterintelligence action. Briefly justify each target.

4. Submit any suggestion you have for overall counterintelligence action or the administration of this program. Suggestions for action against any specific target should be submitted by separate letter.

5. Submit, by separate letter, suggestions for counterintelligence action against the targets previously listed as field-wide. These should not be general, such as "publicize Stokely Carmichael's travel to communist countries," but should be specific as to target, what is to be done, what contacts are to be used, and all other information needed for the Bureau to approve a counterintelligence operation.

Thereafter, on a ninety-day-basis, each office is to submit a progress letter summarizing counterintelligence operations proposed during the period, operations effected, and tangible results. Any changes in the overall black nationalist movement should be summarized in this letter. This should include new organizations, new leaders, and any changes in data listed under number two above. Suggestions for counterintelligence operations should not be set out in this progress letter. Use the following captions:

1. Operations Under Consideration, 2. Operations Being Effected, 3. Tangible Results, and 4. Developments of Counterintelligence Interest. These 90-day progress letters are due at the Bureau the first day of March, June, September, and December, excepting March, 1968.

Airtel to SAC, Albany  
RE: COUNTERINTELLIGENCE PROGRAM  
BLACK NATIONALIST-HATE GROUPS

The effectiveness of counterintelligence depends on the quality and quantity of positive information available regarding the target and on the imagination and initiative of Agents working the program. The response of the field to the Counterintelligence Program against the Communist Party, USA, indicates that a superb job can be done by the field on counterintelligence.

Counterintelligence operations must be approved by the Bureau. Because of the nature of this program each operation must be designed to protect the Bureau's interest so that there is no possibility of embarrassment to the Bureau. Beyond this the Bureau will give every possible consideration to your proposals.

NOTE:

See memorandum G. C. Moore to Mr. W. C. Sullivan captioned as above dated 2/29/68, prepared by TJD:ram.