"The Revolution Will Not Be Televised": Community Activism and the Black Panther Party, 1966–1971

Ryan J. Kirkby

Abstract: This article examines the Black Panther Party's community activism from 1966 to 1971, with two aims in mind. First, it provides an overview of the numerous "survival programs" organized by the party in human sustenance, health care, education, and criminal justice, detailing their revolutionary intentions. Second, and more importantly, it challenges scholars to start considering ways in which community activism and revolutionary violence operated in tandem as part of the same strategy for Black liberation. In this way, it emphasizes the necessity to move beyond stagnant characterizations of the party as either humanitarian do-gooders or violent street toughs to construct a more complex interpretation of the BPP's legacy.

Keywords: Black Panther Party, community activism, survival programs, revolutionary violence, human sustenance, health care, education, criminal justice

Résumé : Le présent article porte sur l'activisme communautaire du Black Panther Party (BPP) de 1966-1971, avec un double objectif. D'abord, il offre une vue d'ensemble des nombreux « programmes de survie » organisés par le BPP dans les domaines de la subsistance des populations humaines, des soins de santé, de l'éducation, et de la justice pénale, et décrit en détail leurs intentions révolutionnaires. Ensuite, et de manière plus importante, il incite les futures générations d'universitaires à commencer à tenir compte des façons selon lesquelles l'activisme communautaire et la violence révolutionnaire fonctionnaient en tandem dans le cadre de la même stratégie de libération des Noirs. De cette façon, il souligne la nécessité d'aller au-delà des caractérisations stagnantes du Party, soit à titre de faiseur de bonnes oeuvres ou de membres violents de gangs de rue, pour construire un interprétation plus complexe du legs du BPP.

Mots clés : Black Panther Party; activisme communautaire; programmes de survie; violence révolutionnaire; subsistance des populations humaines; soins de santé; éducation; justice pénale

Of all the civil rights and Black power groups to emerge from the tumultuous environment of the 1960s, the Black Panther Party (BPP) remains one of the most misunderstood and controversial. Internationally recognized for its powerful pageantry and militant rhetoric, the legacy of the BPP has been a mixture of fact and fiction, with a disproportionate amount of scholarship devoted to studying the party's violent behaviour. Recently, however, scholars have started to counter this traditional interpretation of the Panthers by highlighting the group's many community projects, or "survival programs" as they were often called, which sought to empower the Black ghetto populace clustered within America's many urban centres. From 1966 to 1971 the BPP established a variety of social programs in the areas of human sustenance, health care, education, and criminal justice.[1] These socialist-styled projects, offered free of charge to the Black community, were central to the party's identity and ideological composition, yet their importance to the revolutionary struggle has frequently gone unnoticed. This omission by scholars has led to some distortions in the telling of the Black Panthers' history, ignoring the radical objectives buttressing their community activism.

Far from representing a glorified gang of criminals, the BPP was a bold and daring organization devoted to Black liberation and wholesale revolutionary change, and the survival programs were integral to its aim. Under the banner of community activism, the Panthers worked to empower the Black underclass through consciousness-raising projects built on the theories of self-determination and political activism.[2] Out of this intellectual foundation the survival programs flourished, offering Black Americans pragmatic grassroots projects for coping with and changing their repressive realities. These projects came in the form of the Free Breakfast for Children Program, free health clinics, Liberation Schools, and legal aid seminars, all of which were designed to underline the injustices of American capitalism and stimulate the Black masses into revolting against the American government.

Despite the radicalism underwriting these programs, few scholars have assessed their revolutionary function. This deficiency is in

large part a result of the trend in Panther historiography of characterizing the party in extremes as either a band of aggressive outlaws, wedded to armed revolution, or a radical social-uplift group, committed to aiding the poor and oppressed. This pattern of emphasizing violence but not community activism, or discussing community activism and revolutionary violence as if they were separate strategies for change, is misleading, as it creates a fractured image of the BPP that prevents us from seeing the Panthers as they truly were. Violence was integral to the Panthers' program for Black liberation, but so too was community activism. In light of this erroneous trend in the literature, this paper has two aims. First, it provides an overview of the numerous survival programs organized by the Panthers in local communities across the United States. Recent BPP scholars have done a commendable job of beginning to uncover the diversity of the organization's community activity, but problems in the scholarship persist, and a synthesized account detailing the survival programs' revolutionary intentions has yet to be written. Secondly, and more importantly, this article challenges scholars to transcend the compartmentalized state of Panther historiography and begin looking at how armed struggle and community activism were part of the same revolutionary dynamic. In doing this, it stresses the importance of moving toward more inclusive assessments of BPP history that break free from the traditional "either-or" paradigms.[3]

Reformist or Revolutionary?

There are three broadly conceived interpretive schools of thought concerning the Black Panther Party. First, there is the "traditionalist" camp led by journalist Hugh Pearson and former New Left radical David Horowitz. Tapping into the early resentment directed at the party by liberals and conservatives in the 1960s, this group has demonized the Black Panthers as a group of gun-totting street thugs whose accomplishments amounted to little more than a laundry list of illegal activity. In response, a second school made up of former party members and sympathetic academics came to prominence in the late 1990s, countering the disparaging traditionalists to showcase those topics either marginalized or ignored in earlier studies. Leading the charge was Charles E. Jones's edited collection, *The Black Panther Party Reconsidered*, which was later joined by Kathleen Cleaver and George Katsiaficas's *Liberation, Imagination, and the Black Panther Party*, and Jama Lazerow and Yohuru Williams's *In Search of the Black Panther Party*. While not uncritical

of the party, these collections all sought to resuscitate the BPP's legacy by introducing such new themes of study as FBI terrorism, party ideology, gender relations, internationalism, and perhaps most significantly, community activism. Their purpose was to debunk the gangster renderings of the traditionalists and demonstrate to future scholars that the Panthers were capable of more than just shooting cops.

The shift in focus away from violence quickly ushered in a change in the way scholars began interpreting the Panthers' history. Since the publication of Jones's anthology over a decade ago, new BPP scholars have poured their energies into revealing the party's steadfast commitment to the Black community, as demonstrated through its numerous survival programs. Casting their sights beyond the party's national headquarters in the Bay Area, a new set of historians—such as Paul Alkebulan, the Dr. Huey P. Newton Foundation, Judson L. Jeffries, and Andrew Witt—began delving into individual chapter histories to explore the survival programs more fully. They also signified a growing tendency among scholars to interpret the BPP as a radical social welfare group rather than a revolutionary paramilitary organization.[4] As one historian writes, "The [BPP] was not an extremist group principally dedicated to overthrowing the government of the United States; rather it was an organization committed to providing essential community services for lower-income and working-class African American communities around the nation" (Witt, *Black Panthers* 1–2).

More recently, however, a nascent third school has emerged calling into question some of these conclusions. Led in large part by Curtis J. Austin's path-breaking monograph *Up against the Wall*, this relatively new cohort has set out to reclaim the BPP's revolutionary identity while retaining a pro-Panther spirit.[5] The BPP, they argue, was, at least until 1971, a deeply radical political organization committed to toppling American capitalism. Not surprisingly, this new focus proved extremely innovative. Scholars had discussed the Panthers' proclamations of self-defence in the past, particularly as they pertained to its interactions with the police, but few had extrapolated on their faith in Fanonian theories of "revolutionary violence" to investigate how it informed the organization's praxis of armed struggle.[6] To this end, the third school's exploration of the Panthers' underground wing—that division most responsible for devising and carrying out military strategy—has done much to bring about a new interpretation of the BPP, one that refrains

from whitewashing the realities of Panther violence but avoids slanderous polemics. Yet despite these advancements, troubles in the literature remain, particularly in the periodization of the group's history.

These problems can be traced to the volatile nature of Panther historiography. The traditionalists, for instance, have consistently portrayed the BPP as a criminal organization whose history, from its inception in 1966 to its demise in 1982, was plagued by murder, extortion, assault, and rape. Later scholars, in their efforts to legitimize the Panthers' legacy, developed a more nuanced interpretation that harmonized the group's paramilitary pageantry with its community activist identity by construing the Panthers in dualistic terms, as both a radical self-defence organization and a social outreach group. In doing this, they generally divide the party's sixteen-year history into categories that designate its "revolutionary phase" from 1966 to about 1971 and its "reformist phase" from about 1971 to 1982.[7] Among other things, this categorization is intended to denote the ascendance of the survival programs as the Panthers' chief strategy for change in 1971, and its tactical renunciation of revolutionary violence thereafter. The Panthers' history is certainly marked by a series of modifications in strategy, and categorizations are helpful for discerning these shifting trends, but the supposition that community activism became vital to the party's identity only *after* it revised its policy on violence is simply not true. Equally untrue is the growing tendency in recent studies to champion the opposite position and minimize the party's promise of revolutionary violence by arguing that the BPP operated on the singular goal of serving the needs of the people through its survival programs.[8] Scholars are correct to note that the post-1971 Black Panther Party placed a considerable premium on survival programs while de-emphasizing its calls for revolution. But they frequently fail to comment on the importance of the survival programs to the BPP from 1966 to 1971 and how they operated *in tandem* with ideas of revolutionary violence to become a central pillar of the group's plan to overthrow the American capitalist system.

Revolution involves the forcible overthrow of one system of governance in favour of another, and how it unfolds is dictated as much by the environment the revolutionaries operate in as by the revolutionaries themselves. The environment of the Black Panthers required a cautious response to an otherwise profoundly alarming situation: overwhelmed by economic destitution, political neglect,

crime, alienation, and the ubiquity of police brutality, Black neighbourhoods across the United States looked like Third World colonies at the mercy of a negligent white mother country. Conditions eventually deteriorated to the point where even members of the establishment could no longer ignore it. After the devastating 1967 rebellions in Detroit and Newark, President Lyndon Johnson appointed the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders to investigate the problem of racial disturbances in urban American. In 1968, the commission delivered its conclusion: "Our nation is moving toward two societies, one Black, one white—separate and unequal." It proposed massive spending and new taxes to correct the "disruption and disorder" caused by generations of violence and segregation (1–2). But Johnson, already squeezed by the political and economic burdens of his war in Southeast Asia, ignored the commission's recommendations.

This was the context the Black Panther Party was born into. Frustrated, impassioned, and restless, the group wanted to bring immediate change and justice to the Black community which had for the last three centuries been victim to limitless subjugation. Its members struck quickly in 1966 and 1967, confronting police abuse with law books and rifles. But the full weight of the American military-industrial complex came down on them quickly, and they turned to quieter, more cautious methods of fomenting revolution: the survival programs. Stepping into the economic and political wreckage that President Johnson refused to remedy, the BPP, armed with its community projects, filled a gap in the Black community that most others had ignored. And yet the function of the survival programs went beyond offering simple provisions. As Chairman Bobby Seale proclaimed, "The objective of the programs ... is to educate the masses of the people to the politics of changing the system" (413). Put another way, the survival programs were to guide the masses to a higher consciousness, endearing them to the party's platform, while highlighting the inequities of American capitalism. If we take the term *revolutionary* to mean involving or causing radical change, it becomes clear that the survival programs played an important revolutionary role in the party, for it was through these projects that rank-and-file members sought to lay the groundwork for the insurrection that would usher in Black liberation. Despite the evidence, however, scholars continue to define community activism as reformist and in some cases counterrevolutionary. One of the objectives of this paper is to suggest otherwise.

Understanding Panther Violence

In order for us to understand how community activism fit into the Black Panthers' strategy for liberation, we must first come to grips with their conceptualization of revolutionary violence and its role in liberation. This is especially important as violence has become the most documented and sensationalized aspect of the BPP's legacy, and the primary reason for its reputation in some circles as a criminal organization. Part of this is no doubt symptomatic of the confusion concerning where the line between rhetoric and reality begins and ends with the BPP. And there is good reason for this confusion. When rank-and-file Panthers, for instance, chanted slogans like "Off the pigs," or when BPP Chief of Staff David Hilliard threatened to a packed crowd of five thousand in San Francisco that "We will kill Richard Nixon," there is reason to believe that this violence was a rhetorical strategy designed to denigrate representatives of the white power structure to the point where African Americans would no longer be intimidated by them.[9] But when we consider the party's exaltations of armed resistance, and how some branches began reinforcing their rhetoric with real action in the realm of "offensive political violence," it becomes harder to explain such statements away as mere ghetto hyper-bole.[10] As one scholar stated, "It is important to understand that the BPP considered itself a revolutionary organization. As such, its members understood and always kept in mind that, according to them, 'revolution is illegal'" (Austin 151). In this vein, the Panthers were at war with America. Equating police presence in urban centres to "a foreign army in a conquered land," the BPP, in addition to acquiring hoards of guns and ammunition, recruited hundreds of estranged Vietnam veterans to train its underground cells in the art of guerrilla combat (Austin 99–102; Brooklyn Chapter 180). The revolution, many agreed, was an event for the next generation of Panthers, yet preparation was deemed essential to their plan of protracted warfare.

Panther violence, to be certain, was not unprovoked. Victims of systemic racism and political repression, the Panthers were in many ways responding to the environment that surrounded them. Had the conditions in urban ghettos not been so depraved, there likely would have been no need to found the BPP. Furthermore, Panther violence was frequently initiated by FBI-directed *agents provocateurs* out to discredit the party's reputation in the Black community. While such action does not exonerate the BPP completely for all acts of violence, it should prompt us to differentiate between

Panther violence and FBI sabotage. The BPP, after all, advocated controlled guerrilla warfare, not random mass destruction. In order to better appreciate this distinction, a greater effort needs to be made to situate the organization's belief in the merit of armed struggle within the larger framework of US history. As representatives of an oppressed people, Panther theoreticians understood revolutionary violence to be a legitimate tactic for liberation as exemplified by the American Revolution, the antebellum slave revolts, the Civil War, and the 1950s decolonization movements in Africa. In this way, the BPP positioned itself as an extension of, rather than anathema to, the country's long history of radical protest (Austin 140–58). Of course the vast majority of Panthers did not engage in military praxis, but instead conceived violence as either rhetorical or in self-defence. Nevertheless, as students of political struggle, they all believed in the transformative effects of revolutionary violence, regardless of how it was employed.

One way historians can begin to understand the Panthers' theory of violence is by contextualizing it alongside their community activism. Given the conditions engulfing the Back community—persistent police brutality, high unemployment, decrepit housing, and substandard education—violence was considered an essential tool for defending African Americans against state and federal authorities who systematically kept them in existential devastation. By arming the Black populace "from house to house, block to block, and community to community, throughout the nation," the Panthers believed they would be able to "negotiate as equals" with representatives of the white power structure—the police (Newton, "Functional Definition" 45–6). Collective power over the police was paramount to the philosophy of community activism, a point party co-founder Bobby Seale took great pains to emphasize. "Community control of the police," he explained, "is one of the most functional and most necessary programs to make all the other basic community programs work" (Seale 422). Armed self-defence was the most practical way the Black community could exercise power over abusive police officers and reclaim control of their neighbourhoods—a necessary precondition for both Black liberation and effective community activism. Without it, the programs and the Panthers would always be vulnerable to police harassment.

For this reason, the BPP's first (though unofficial) survival program was the controversial and highly publicized Community Alert Patrol.

Initiated in 1966 when California still allowed residents to carry unconcealed weapons in public, Panthers took their guns to the street to defend their community against questionable police conduct (Abron 180). When party members saw a young Black "brother or sister" being interrogated or arrested by a police officer, the Panther patrol car would pull to the curb and study the situation. If confrontation was deemed justifiable, the designated speaker (there was only one) would approach the scene of the dispute and inform the arrestee, as well as those in earshot, of their constitutional rights (Newton, *Revolutionary Suicide* 120–1). These showdowns with the police had a didactic function. By explicitly challenging white authority—verbally and physically—the Panthers sought to raise the consciousness of the Black underclass, teaching them that personal liberation had to come from within and would not be handed to them by the white power structure. Indeed, as John Wood notes, the BPP-Police confrontations had enormous "psychological benefits" for despondent Black youth. For a Black person to display, or observe, genuine contempt in the presence of a police officer "shattered a lifelong feeling of submission" and did much to strengthen a sense of agency and personal power (Wood 16).

Ideas of violence, to be sure, were never homogeneous in the party. The Panther leadership reflected a wide spectrum of opinions on the functional use of violence, especially among its leadership triumvirate of Huey P. Newton, Bobby Seale, and Eldridge Cleaver. For Newton and Seale, violence, and the symbolism that accompanied it, was an organizational tool, used to draw more recruits to the party by tapping into the burgeoning Black rage that had swept across America in the aftermath of Malcolm X's assassination and the failure of the Southern Freedom Struggle to address those issues pertinent to African Americans living in inner-city ghettos. Both men believed revolutionary violence was necessary to transform society, but they took a protracted two-step approach to revolution, first securing the support of the masses via consciousness-raising programs (the survival programs), and then, once the political conditions were right, wage an armed struggle against the ruling class. Cleaver, however, following Che Guevara's *foco* theory of guerrilla warfare, strongly disagreed and advocated the immediate overthrow of the American government.[11] Yet even beneath Cleaver's controversial rhetoric there is ample evidence to suggest he was not advocating an orgy of unrestricted violence. "Let us make one thing clear," he wrote in 1969. "We do not claim the right to

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indiscriminate violence. We seek no bloodbath. We are not out to kill up white people" (Minister of Information 10). According to Cleaver, the revolution he envisioned would be orchestrated by a well-disciplined vanguard party, and "the bodies on the street would be those of the oppressors: those who control the corporations that profiteer off the poor, that oil the war machine . . . and, above all, those politicians who use their public trust to kill social reform and perpetrate injustice" (Cleaver 161).

The heterogeneity of the Black Panthers' understanding of violence notwithstanding, it must be reiterated that a majority of the rank-and-file did not engage in debates over military policy. While their belief in revolution remained steadfast, they worked towards it through their participation in the community outreach projects, in large part because guerrilla warfare was frequently regarded as a strategy for the future. Just when this day of reckoning would come was a matter of conjecture, but most of the BPP seemed content with working in the survival programs until it came to pass. Indeed, despite the artificial dichotomies erected by historians, a large portion of the party never differentiated between the gun and community activism; it was never so simplistic (Rucker 55). This is not surprising when we consider how important the survival programs were to the party's revolutionary process, specifically its policy of protracted resistance. As David Hilliard explained, "We call the program a 'survival' program—survival pending revolution—not something to replace the revolution . . . but an activity that strengthens us for the coming fight, a lifeboat or raft leading us safely to shore" (Hilliard and Cole 211–12). Because they were non-violent, these grassroots services frequently proved much more effective than the gun in attaining community support. Thus, in spite of their talk about revolutionary violence and self-defence, the bulk of the BPP's public activity was actually devoted to providing radical self-help programs.

"Socialism in Action"

For the Black Panther Party, 1968 was a year of change. The party's minister of defence and chief spokesman, Huey P. Newton, was put on trial and sentenced to two to fifteen years on a manslaughter conviction after being arrested in a 1967 gun battle with the Oakland police that left one officer dead and another wounded.[12] While he was on trial, Eldridge Cleaver, Bobby Seale, Kathleen Neal Cleaver, and David Hilliard amassed a global "Free Huey"

campaign, which expanded the BPP from a local Bay Area group with thirty-three members into a national revolutionary organization with branches in sixty-one cities, and a burgeoning international cult following by 1971.[13] With this growth in size came a transformation in form. The BPP had been the subject of FBI investigation since 1967, but the bureau, under the auspices of its Counterintelligence Program, strengthened its operations against the Panthers as they grew in popularity. From 1967 to 1971, these operations led to violent confrontations, arrests, and fines that depleted the party's funds and strength. The intensification of state repression fostered a change in the leadership's mentality, one that prompted them to de-emphasize the gun and institute new non-violent programs to help carry out their revolutionary objectives.[14] Party member Gwen Hodges commented on this transformation in the organization's newspaper, the *Black Panther*:

> [R]evolution cannot be carried out by words alone. Never in the history of man has there been a successful peaceful revolution. The overthrow of one class by another must be carried out by revolutionary violence.
>
> Until this stage is achieved we must concentrate on the immediate needs of the people, in order to build a united political force, based on the ideology of the Black Panther Party. Survival pending Revolution is our immediate task and to do this we must meet the needs of the people … through our liberation schools, free breakfast programs, child care centers, busing programs … and clothing programs. (Hodges 3)

As Hodges suggests, this shift in strategy did not signify the Panthers' renunciation of revolutionary violence as a tactic for Black liberation. From late 1968 through to the mid-1970s, plans for an organized mass revolt against the ruling class remained a central ingredient in the party's recipe for socialist revolution. Despite this, scholars have viewed the 1971 split between the Newton and Cleaver factions of the party over the issue of community activism as confirmation that the group's commitment to the survival programs marked a shift in its modus operandi from revolutionary to reformist.[15] Historians are correct to note the development of a malignant inter-party strain during these debates, but all too often this conflict is characterized in extremes wherein Newton and Cleaver represent opposites, with Newton supporting community activism and Cleaver condemning it. True, Cleaver dismissed the long-term importance of the survival programs,

regarding them as counter-revolutionary, but his rejection of community activism was neither immediate nor complete. Initially, he openly supported the survival programs, even addressing their significance in his 1969 essay, "On Meeting the Needs of the People," where he expounded on the necessity of instituting a free breakfast program to expose the failures of capitalism and to feed lower-class children (Cleaver 214). Moreover, some of the chapters most closely aligned with Cleaver and his vision of "revolution in our time" were leaders in developing community projects. The New York City Panthers, for instance, offered several breakfast programs, health clinics, and political education classes throughout the five boroughs, and the Kansas City branch founded the very first free medical centre in 1969 (Shakur 217–21).

Where the Newton and Cleaver factions differed most, then, was not on whether the survival programs were needed but on their function in the revolution. For Cleaver, community activism was a short-term strategy for recruitment and financial purposes in the days immediately preceding armed rebellion, which he projected was imminent.[16] Newton, by contrast, incorporated the programs into his protracted strategy for liberation. Revolution is a process, he stated; one cannot move from A to Z "in one jump." If the people are to relate to the vanguard, he argued, "they have to see first some basic accomplishments, in order to realize that major successes are possible" (Newton, "On the Defection" 274). Survival programs represented the first phase of the revolutionary process, when procuring popular support was given precedence over violent attacks. Yet they were not intended to preclude the use of revolutionary violence as a tool of liberation. Even after Cleaver's defection from the party in 1971, there remained a strong military operation within the party called "Buddha Samaria" co-led by Flores Forbes and Ray "Masai" Hewitt. As Forbes tells it, this military cadre was "trained … to take over the city of Oakland. We were to be the shock troops that fired the first shots" of the revolution (80). Thus, for both Newton and Cleaver, community activism and violence were important to their revolutionary aims, though for Newton community activism was admittedly more significant, as he conceived the two tactics as part of the same line of attack. That all but a few chapters remained faithful to Newton after the 1971 split suggests most Panthers agreed with his approach.

Aside from this schism, the focus on community programming from 1968 to 1971 ushered in the party's most dynamic and pros-perous period, with Panther-initiated programs springing up all

over the country. These community activities became living examples of the BPP's utopian vision, offering concrete evidence of what Chicago Panther Fred Hampton called "socialism in action." Because the Panthers' socialist revolution was never realized, their community services constitute the clearest example of how they addressed the immediate concerns of the Black community in human sustenance, health care, education, and criminal justice.

Human Sustenance Programs

In 1967, California's state legislature passed the Mulford Act, which prohibited individuals from carrying unconcealed firearms in public. Though its language was inclusive, applying to everyone in the state, lawmakers designed the bill to quell the Black Panther Party and its Community Alert Patrol. No longer able to intimidate police officers with firearms on their surveillance beats, the Panthers found the effectiveness of the program diminished greatly, forcing them to explore new methods of contesting police brutality. In 1968 the Panthers launched a massive campaign in the Bay Area to decentralize the power of the police department by bringing it under the control of the community it was intended to protect. The impetus for this campaign stemmed from the BPP's supposition that "the police [were] … the main perpetrators of violence against Black people." Their status as white men steeped in racial prejudice made them ignorant of the Black community, and more likely "to deal with it through violence" instead of understanding, argued the Panthers (L.A. Chapter 178). The decentralization campaign addressed the same themes as the police patrols, except this time the BPP pursued its objectives through a more peaceable format, the ballot box. Beginning in late 1968, rank-and-file Panthers, in coalition with the Peace and Freedom Party—a white radical organization concentrated in California—were instructed to circulate the Bay Area with petitions to obtain a referendum vote on the decentralization of the police department (Heath 84). "The point of the community control of police," wrote Bobby Seale, "is that those people living in those neighborhoods will actually do the hiring and firing of the policemen who patrol the area, and policemen will be people from those neighborhoods." This meant "black police for black neighborhoods, Chinese for a Chinese neighborhood, [and] a white for a white neighborhood, etc." (420).

The structural changes proposed by the BPP were derived from its belief in self-determination. The petition campaign promised to decentralize the police force by creating autonomous departments

for all "major [ethnic] communities" of the Bay Area. "Each Department," the petition statement explained, "will be administered by full time police commissions. (Not single police chiefs.) The Commissioners are selected by a Neighborhood Police Control Council composed of fifteen members from that community elected by those who live there" ("Petition Statement" 179). This council would then retain the power to discipline and recall the appointed commissioners if they were no longer properly serving the public. The council could also be replaced if it proved unresponsive to the community's needs. In both cases, the process of recall was subject to a vote (179).

In a 1969 mandate, the campaign was turned into a nationwide program by the Panthers, but was initiated with little success. The most promising efforts were made in cities surrounding the Bay Area: Oakland, Richmond, and Berkeley. The work was exhausting and often fruitless. The only success the Panthers had in getting the issue placed on a ballot came in the 1971 Berkeley municipal election after two years of arduous campaigning. Voters, however, rejected the proposal by an approximate ratio of two to one (Heath 97–8). But despite the BPP's inability to implement a decentralized police force, we should not dismiss the value of its campaign. Because of the Panthers' efforts to counter the police department's control of the power structure, police brutality in Black neighbourhoods became a primary issue of a municipal election. Additionally, the project inspired some communities outside the Bay Area, including such distant cities as Milwaukee, where an anti-fascist group affiliated with the BPP circulated a petition in 1970 to decentralize the police department and give control to local neighbourhoods (Witt, "Picking Up" 194–5). Their attempt failed, but it was the symbolism behind the campaign that was important: community control of the police is crucial for Black liberation. Without it, African Americans could never completely emancipate themselves from the grip of the white power structure.

If decentralizing the police department was the Black Panthers' most fundamental project, its Free Breakfast for Children Program was its most popular. Established in 1968 in several lower-class neighbourhoods located around the organization's headquarters in Oakland, California, the Free Breakfast Program was quickly adopted by every BPP chapter across the country in compliance with a 1969 directive issued by Bobby Seale. Serving a hot, "no-frills" breakfast of eggs, sausage, and collard greens to thousands

of ghetto kids a day, the breakfast program had two primary functions. It focused on meeting the nutritional needs of ghetto children—Black or otherwise—and it was concerned with building greater inroads into the African-American community. As disaffected members of the ghetto themselves, the Black Panthers were aware of the dietary problems associated with lower-economic living and the government's failure to aid those in need. For this reason, Panthers assumed the responsibility of nourishing the appetites of thousands of poor children a day. In doing so, they offered the Black community a steady flow of food and demonstrated, in the words of Cleveland Panther Tommie Carr, "how … a so-called small organization [could] come up with the necessities of life [while] the city, state, and Federal Governments failed" (qtd in Nissim-Sabat 124).

Aside from the occasional lecture, the BPP generally shied away from using the Free Breakfast Program for propaganda. Instead, most Panthers used the project to create genuine relationships with the people they were serving and to establish stronger connections in the community. In the case of the Free Breakfast Program, this meant interacting with the children through games, songs, and general chit-chat. The main thing was to keep it light: "We were all dead set against cramming things in their heads or teaching them meaningless rote phrases," stated New York Panther Assata Shakur (formerly Joanne Chesimard) (220). By relating to the experiences of the people, the Black Panthers intended to "show the community we do something more than shoot it out with the cops" (Hilliard and Cole 212). This image, however, was not always easy to overcome. The L.A. Panthers, for example, had a very difficult time acquiring the permission of churches to house their breakfast program. It was not until Gwen Goodloe, a member of the Southern California Chapter, went to the Los Angeles Conference of Baptist Ministers with a presentation outlining the purpose of the survival programs that they were granted permission to use church facilities in the L.A. area (South California Chapter 3). Despite its secular beliefs, the BPP regularly requested the use of church basements and fellowship halls for its operations. Naturally, hesitation and skepticism were forthcoming from several churches, but once congregations saw the Panthers in action they usually received the radical organization with open arms.

Indeed, guns were hardly the only thing appealing about the Panthers. The pacifist Panther Sandy Turner, like so many others, was immediately drawn to the BPP's crusade of serving the people.

"I don't remember whether I heard about it on the news," she later recalled. "But it was very clear to me that one of the things I was gonna do when I moved back to the Bay Area was find out who these Panthers were, because they were feeding children breakfast, and that seemed to be something that was critically important. That certainly made a lot of sense to me" (10). Father Earl Neil, leader of the Oakland St. Augustine Episcopal Church, was equally enthralled with the Panthers' community activism:

> Black preachers have got to stop preaching about a kingdom in
> the hereafter which is "a land flowing with milk and honey"…
> We must deal with concrete conditions and survival in this life …
> The Black Panther Party from 1966 through the present has
> merely put into operation the survival program that the Church
> should have been doing anyway. The efforts of the Black Panther
> Party are consistent with what God wants. (11, 12).

Many ghetto residents echoed this sentiment, believing the survival programs "might combat racism and other problems [in the Black community] which other organizations had failed to solve" (US 82).

Support for the Panthers was always larger than its membership suggested. Had this not been the case, their community activities would have foundered instantly. The success of the Free Breakfast Program, as with all of its survival programs, depended on volunteers and charitable donations. The number of children fed each morning varied from location to location, ranging anywhere from forty to over a hundred kids daily. To meet these demands, BPP branches frequently used the party newspaper, community centres, and churches to enlist the assistance of "Mothers, Welfare Recipients, Grandmothers, Guardians and others who are trying to raise children in the Black Community," encouraging them to "come forth to work and support this needed program" ("Breakfast for School Children" 4) Volunteer duties included transporting children to and from the breakfast venue, and helping party members prepare and serve the food, a task that usually began at around six in the morning and ended before the school day began ("Statement to the Press" 3). When Panthers recruited local volunteers, they not only hoped to nourish the children's appetites, they also intended to reinvigorate the people's sense of activism to the point where they could "turn the program over to the community," and in some cases they succeeded ("To Feed Our Children" 3; US 62).

Apart from volunteers, the program required an ongoing supply of food, which was generally acquired by canvassing local merchants and using party funds. Not surprisingly, because of the Black Panther Party's revolutionary program, most chapters were unable to rely on donations from mainstream humanitarian groups to support their social activities. This led some critics to accuse the party of using strong-arm tactics to procure its funds (see Pearson 198–9, 241–2). As conscious revolutionaries who "had no respect for the laws of the United States," some Panthers resorted to robbery and petty theft when hard times hit the organization (Brown 329; McCutcheon 120–1; US 81). But such behaviour was frequently discouraged and not characteristic of the group as a whole. A congressional report on the Panthers revealed that chapters typically relied on legal methods for securing capital: hawking their official newspaper, obtaining endowments from sympathetic left-wing philanthropists, and, in some cases, giving public orations (Brown 208–9; US 81–8). As the BPP grew in popularity, high-profile leaders cashed in on their new celebrity status to meet the financial demands of their growing organization. In 1969, for instance, the Panthers made 189 appearances, charging up to $1,900 per engagement. Their fame and notoriety became most evident when BPP national headquarters received $20,000 from an individual donor to use for their causes (US 85).

Despite what these figures suggest, the life of most Panthers was marked by neither opulence nor excess. In fact, most chapters were barely solvent, as the majority of the money went to national head-quarters.[17] Members received five cents for every newspaper they sold, they resided in communal living spaces, and they donated any profits to party initiatives. They also "attempted to save money," notes Andrew Witt, "by renting poorly maintained, low-rent properties for their headquarters, which frequently doubled as their living quarters" (*Picking Up* 198). Their meagre living conditions, though not obtrusive to their lifestyle as revolutionaries, required them to persuade local merchants to donate money and food to their projects. "Initially," explained a New York Panther, the relationship between the BPP and businesses "was hostile because they did not trust us," but after seeing the Breakfast Program in action "we had them coming to us and offering us help" (qtd. in Austin 282). Still, not every merchant was charitable, and in instances where greed and skepticism precluded bene-volence, the Panthers organized boycotts to pressure Black and white businesses into supporting their program.[18]

This same practice of canvassing businesses for donations was also used in the Free Clothing and Free Shoe programs. Funding for these programs was vital, as many children in the northern states lacked clothing to keep them warm during the harsh winter months (Shakur 63). Reggie Schell, a Philadelphia Panther, recalled how he and his comrades vigorously hunted for donations from dry cleaners, local businesses, and members of the community in order to provide children with suitable winter attire. Philadelphia's Free Clothing Program became so popular that in October 1970 it expanded into a citywide campaign that lasted until the mid-1970s (Austin 282; Dyson, Brooks, and Jeffries 226, 227).

In conjunction with these formal projects, the Panthers also fulfilled an array of general ombudsman duties such as negotiating with crooked landlords, protecting welfare mothers from hostile neighbours, and reporting on the exploitative living conditions of ghetto life (Austin 178; Jeffries, "Revising" 21–2, 23; Dyson, Brooks, and Jeffries 223). The New York Panthers showed a particular interest in redressing the horrors of inner-city housing through the creation of such programs as the People's Housing Coalition and the Tenant's Grievance Committee in 1970.[19] In all cases, whether it was serving breakfast or organizing a rent strike, the longevity of the survival programs depended largely on the viability of the chapter and the support it was able to muster from the community. In some chapters, particularly those in densely populated urban areas such as Philadelphia, New York, and Chicago, the free breakfast and clothing programs lasted well into the 1970s, sometimes outliving the party itself. In other cities where strong membership rates and community support were fleeting, projects lasted only one to two years. But whether the survival programs lasted a year or longer, the Panthers' commitment to the people was always apparent.

Health Care Programs

In 1969, the same year Bobby Seale delivered a mandate for all chapters to begin operating free breakfast programs, he also called for the establishment of free health clinics. The first clinic was erected in Kansas City, Missouri. Named the Bobby Hutton Community Clinic after the BPP's "first slain martyr," the health centre quickly became a model for the free Panther clinics established in at least ten other cities including Boston, Cleveland, Seattle, and Chicago (Alkebulan 35). The party's health projects were organized

in response to the "pig-style" medical care that lower-income Blacks regularly received as a result of their lack of insurance, and the inferior resources of ghetto clinics. These substandard conditions fostered skepticism among urban Blacks about the value of seeking medical attention. The Black community's apathy became immediately apparent to the Cleveland Panthers after their medical cadre "learned that relatively few people had ever seen a doctor," and those who had, typically experienced inadequate treatment or misdiagnosed ailments (Nissim-Sabat 121). Such was also the case in Mount Vernon, New York, where, as one Panther commented, "The treatment of patients has been so bad in some cases that the people say they will relate to nursing their own wounds" instead of seeking professional help (Leo 8). In opposition to the national health care system, the BPP's free health clinics operated under the maxim "To deny health care is to deny the right to life" ("Free" 4). By addressing the derisory conditions of medical treatment in American ghettos, the Black Panther Party created alternative, grassroots facilities to eradicate institutional abuses perpetrated by the medical community.

Unlike the party's medical cadres composed of rank-and-file members with knowledge of first aid training, the free health clinics were organized by the party but directed by registered doctors and nurses who volunteered their services, free of charge. At most centres, a multiracial team of doctors, nurses, and technicians sympathetic to the BPP's philosophies worked in tandem to provide medical assistance to the community for anywhere from three to seven days a week, depending on the number of volunteers (Haynes and Laurence 2; Sheffield 174). Interns from local medical schools regularly assisted nurses and general practitioners, and, in some cases, persuaded doctors to lend their skills and equipment to the centres (Austin 263; Sheffield 174). Panther medical teams, consisting of trained party members and volunteer professionals, performed routine checkups on community members of all ages and ethnicities, administering free tests for tuberculosis, high blood pressure, vocal and hearing evaluations, immunization shots, prenatal care, and a host of other health-related services (Pennsylvania Chapter 9). To maximize the centre's impact and give the community a sense of ownership over it, health care professionals educated neighbourhood residents to assist in operating the clinics. "For example," stated one volunteer nurse, "we are training some of the young people to do laboratory urinalysis and blood tests, and teams of people from the community are organized to canvass

the neighborhood and bring the center to the people" (Sheffield 174: see also Shakur 217). Most clinics lasted until the mid 1970s before closing, while others continue to operate under the direction of non-Panther volunteers (Austin 266). But because not all party branches were able to furnish such sophisticated clinics, some chapters offered their comrades cost-efficient tips for delivering an effective medical program on a budget. In 1969, the Staten Island branch wrote an article for the *Black Panther*, encouraging all health cadres to establish a series of six-month awareness campaigns to educate the Black underclass on such topics as intestinal worm disease, malnutrition, weapons safety, and ear, throat, and eye care (Staten Island Health Cadre 14). Regardless of the type of medical services provided, the Panthers' health program provided free medical care to patients who otherwise would have never visited a doctor in their lives.

By far the BPP's most successful health-related operation was its campaign against sickle-cell anemia. Inherited from their African ancestors who developed the sickle-cell trait, sickle-cell anemia is a disease that disproportionately affects African Americans. Called "sickle cell" because the blood cells evolved from their ordinary doughnut-like shape to that of a sickle to fend off the deadly effects of malaria, this peculiarity became hazardous to those of African decent after the threat of malaria subsided (Austin 265). Sickle-cell anemia had been misdiagnosed in African Americans for decades, but because of the research conducted by such Panther-affiliated doctors as Tolbert Small, the BPP established nine free screening clinics and a Sickle-Cell Anemia Research Foundation in 1971 to treat the disease. David Hilliard pointed out that the Panthers pub-licized "the problem so successfully that Nixon himself mention[ed] sickle-cell in [his 1971] health message to Congress" (Hilliard and Cole 339). The BPP's campaign against sickle-cell anemia, along with the Free Breakfast Program, was perhaps one of its most celebrated accomplishments.

Education Programs

Education was central to the Black Panther Party. All of its survival programs had a didactic function and were implemented to expose the "avaricious" nature of American capitalism and the need for revolution. As one New York Panther stated, the survival programs represented the "educational phase of the People's struggle for liberation."[20] To complement its community programs, the BPP

created specific projects to educate the *lumpenproletariat* about their role in the revolution.[21] But first, rank-and-file Panthers needed training to ensure they provided the community with the correct "revolutionary" guidance. Thus political education (PE) classes became mandatory for all party members in 1969 (Alkebulan 38). At these classes, Panthers engaged in the works of Malcolm X, Mao Tse-Tung, Frantz Fanon, Che Guevara, and Robert Williams. The reading list for PE seminars was informed largely by the party's Marxist orientation and its affinity for anti-colonial texts by Third World revolutionaries. Although they encouraged members to be familiar with Frederick Douglass, W.E.B. Du Bois, Marcus Garvey, as well as the contemporary works of African-American novelists and academics, many PE classes, ironically, emphasized Marxism and revolutionary violence over Black history ("Black Panther Party" 14). For well-educated members like Assata Shakur, this parochialism proved frustrating: "They were reading the *Red Book* but didn't know who Harriet Tubman, Marcus Garvey, and Nat Turner were. They talked about intercommunialism but still really believed that the Civil War was fought to free the slaves. A whole lot of them barely understood any kind of history, Black, African, or otherwise" (Shakur 221).

What the Panthers lacked in historical knowledge they made up for with their prescient understanding that class, not just race, was central to African-American repression. Of course, Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale were not the first Black activists to utilize a class discourse. From the 1920s through the 1950s, countless African-American intellectuals, unionists, and artists had purported a socialist critique of American capitalism, but their class-based analysis was premature and often fell on unfertile soil.[22] The success of the Black Panther Party as an African-American Marxist organization can be attributed to the cultural dynamics of the 1960s and their astute ability to package ideology in a way that made sense to urban Black youth. The Panthers related their ideology to the needs of the people through informal community classes sponsored weekly by local branches. In these classes "Panthers explained the ten-point program and the general objectives and philosophies of the BPP as well as the various articles that appeared in the Black Panther newspaper" (Shakur 221). In addition to listening to lectures about party ideology and the concerns of the community, adults were taught the critical skills of reading and writing. These sessions made a substantial impact on the community. "With less resources and in a shorter time, the Panthers have done more

for the black community than we have," claimed Rev. Herman Graham, the director of a Cleveland community centre (Nissim-Sabat 119).

The key educational institution of the Black Panther Party was the Liberation School. Organized in June 1969 as a replacement for the Free Breakfast Program during the summer months, these schools offered children aged two to thirteen an alternative curriculum based on such topics as revolutionary history, revolutionary culture, and current events (Douglas 172). According to Chairman Bobby Seale, the project was implemented to instill in Black children a class-conscious paradigm with which to understand the world:

> We are working to show children that a person's skin color is not important, but in fact it's a class struggle against the avaricious businessman and the small ruling class who exploit us and perpetuate the racism that's rampant in our communities. When we teach Black American History, we teach it in terms of the class struggle, not in terms of a race struggle. (Seale 417)

Educating young ghetto children on the mechanics of class struggle was fundamental for nurturing and sustaining the Black community's revolutionary spirit. For this reason Liberation School teachers based their lessons on the "true experiences of revolutionaries and everyday people who the children can relate to" (Douglas 172). Teachers created classroom activities such as book reports and oral presentations to reveal the shared plight of the oppressed; they organized history lessons to convey the role of revolutionaries in society ("Revolutionaries are changers"); and, above all else, they taught students the importance of relating to one another. The most "important thing is to get the children to work with each other, because there's not going to be a Black Panther Party around all the time to set things straight," explained Val Douglas, an assistant teacher (173). Through the Liberation Schools children acquired the intellectual tools to make sense of their oppression, as well as a strong collective identity to help them endure.

Criminal Justice Programs

From 1968 to 1971 the Black Panther Party developed programs related to human sustenance, health care, and education, but one of its original purposes in 1966 was to combat legal injustices

perpetrated by the state. For this reason, the Panthers created the Community Alert Patrol and included two demands relating to criminal justice in their ten-point platform, called "What We Want, What We Believe." Point 8 stated, "We want freedom for all black men held in federal state, county and city prisons and jails" because "they have not received a fair and impartial trial." Similarly, point 9 insisted that "all black people when brought to trial ... 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" (Abron 186; "What We Want" 3). Programs addressing these demands were never created, but the Bay Area Panthers did make a concerted effort to register Black voters so they would be eligible for jury duty. "The D.A.'s will try to get all white racist juries or maybe to put one jive Uncle Tom on them," explained Seale, "but it'll be much harder if a lot of blacks are registered and are on the jury panel that they pick from" (415). For the Panthers, more Black jurists did not simply mean fairer trials, it meant "revolutionary justice."

Aside from packing courthouses with sympathetic jurors, the BPP did much to instruct Black urbanites on how to deal with police officers when being arrested. The theatrical showdowns Panthers staged against the police were conducted for this purpose (Newton, *Revolutionary Suicide* 121). Less flamboyant, but equally purposeful, were the legal aid clinics sponsored by local branches. Through them, Panthers held seminars on the Constitution, community law, and in the larger chapters provided free legal assistance for local residents seeking advice (Seale 415). Along with these formal programs, the *Black Panther*, in its early days of circulation, regularly printed a column by Huey Newton titled "Pocket Lawyer of Legal First Aid." The article offered its readers specific need-to-know facts on how they should conduct themselves if they were ever arrested:

> If you are stopped and/or arrested by the police, you may remain silent; you do not have to answer any questions about alleged crimes, you should provide your name and address only if requested ... If a police officer is not in uniform, ask him to show his identification. He has no authority over you unless he properly identifies himself ... Police have no right to search your car or your home unless they have a search warrant, probable cause or your consent ... Do not engage in "friendly" conversation with officers on the way to or at the station. Once you are arrested, there is little likelihood that anything you say will get you released. (176–7)

Although there is no way of ascertaining how successful these legal aid projects were, the apparent ignorance most African Americans had of their constitutional rights, and the law in general, suggests the information would have been helpful, especially when we recall the frequency with which Blacks were arrested during the 1960s.

In addition to providing legal assistance, the Black Panther Party made a determined attempt to assist the countless Black men and women in prison. No other Black protest organization, past or present, has shown such persistent dedication to African-American prisoners as the BPP. They composed articles on prisoner abuse, established a "correspondence network" with the outside world, and sent "care packages" filled with money, reading material, personal hygiene products, and non-perishable food to inmates (Abron 187; Brown 315–16). As Elaine Brown boasted, "The Black Panther Party provided a voice of hope for thousands of black inmates" (316).

The most effective survival program offered to prisoners was the Free Busing to Prison Program, established in Seattle in July 1970. The project was immediately picked up by other BPP chapters across the country and became an important service in many Black communities. The Seattle Panthers established the program after they "found out that many families and friends cannot afford transportation to these prisons to visit their loved ones." This isolation from the outside world, they argued, created a stifling despondency among inmates, "leaving them at the mercy of those sadistic pigs from prison" (NCCF Seattle 9). The success of the busing program, like all BPP projects, depended on the benevolence and charity of the community. Luke McCoy, the initial program coordinator for the Cleveland branch, crystallized the project's community spirit: "The churches used to give us their buses because they thought it was a great idea. The gas station gave us gas and food. All we had to do was remember to bring copies of *The Black Panther* so that we could read articles on the way back from prison" (qtd. in Nissim-Sabat 125). Beyond "establish[ing] some type of communication between the community and the prisoners," the busing project did much to endear the BPP to the non-militant members of the Black population—specifically elderly ladies and young mothers—who did not immediately identify with its revolutionary goals (NCCF Seattle 9; Nissim-Sabat 125).

More than all the other survival activities, save perhaps the Free Breakfast Program, the Free Busing to Prison Program was a community building project. The steady flow of Black men and women into the penal system had a debilitating affect on the family unit, permanently altering its dynamics for the worst. Relationships were destroyed, children were separated from their parents, economic hardships ravaged single mothers with the absence of a primary breadwinner, and the dignity of the family collapsed. In this context, the busing program related to the peoples' realities in a very authentic way. Even though it did not completely eradicate the abuse of prisoners, nor halt racial profiling, the project did subvert the nihilistic forces of the American prison system by establishing a connection between inmates and their families. This in itself was a revolutionary endeavour.

A Strategy for Revolution

In an era when a majority of African Americans were struggling for survival, where the basic necessities of life—food, clothing, education, and health care—were systematically withheld from them by an inhumane economic order, the Black Panther Party was an aberration. The Panthers were not the only organization to offer respite to Black Americans through grassroots programs, but to many they might as well have been. No Black protest group from the 1960s so concretely addressed the needs and desires of the African American polity as the BPP. Party offices, recalled Philadelphia Panther Mumia Abu-Jamal, were "always busy, as people piled in starting at its 7:30 a.m. opening time and continuing 'till after nightfall. People came with every problem imaginable," he continued, "and because our sworn duty was to serve the people we took our commitment seriously" (197). Under the banner of community activism, the Panthers came in contact with thousands of ghetto residents daily. Their visibility in the community, as well as their thirst for bold action at a time when Blacks were taught to be meek and subservient, made them heroes to their people.

This hero status would never have reached its zenith had it not been for the effectiveness of the BPP's community activism. But just how successful the Black Panther Party's survival programs were in meeting their objectives is hard to quantify. The virtual absence of these projects in the mainstream media's coverage of the Panthers, coupled with the government's myopic perception of the party as a glorified street gang, precluded substantial analysis

of their programs by outside observers (Austin 265).[23] This dearth in information makes it unclear as to whether the activities were as successful as the Panthers claimed they were. According to Newton, Seale, and the contributors to the *Black Panther* newspaper, the projects assisted several thousand ghetto residents daily—the Free Breakfast Program alone was estimated to have fed ten thousand children each morning. Exact statistics, of course, are simply conjecture, and we have no real formula for validating them. Yet even if the precise figures may never be known, this does not dismiss the fact that the survival programs had an enormously positive impact on the Black men and women who encountered them. When we consider the large number of volunteers who helped sustain these projects, their longevity in certain cities, and the debilitating realities of inner-city life (poverty, violence, and alienation), there can be little doubt that the Panthers' community activism had an ameliorating affect on their constituencies.[24]

But the survival programs provided more than just relief; they also offered a vision of a more just society based on the values of self-determination, cooperation, and social and economic equality. Tied to these values was the Panthers' belief in a socialist revolution. When stripped of the niceties that went along with serving hot breakfasts to children, teaching adults how to read, and providing free medical care, the survival programs, in their crudest form, were ultimately consciousness-raising devices to reveal the structural inequities of American capitalism and recruit the masses into the Panthers' revolutionary cause. Fred Hampton, chairman of the Illinois chapter, articulated the subversive intentions of the Free Breakfast Program in an interview just before his death in a controversial police raid on 4 December 1969: "The Breakfast for Children program. We are running it in a socialistic manner. People came and took our program, saw it in a socialistic fashion not even knowing it was socialism. People are gonna take our program and tell us to go on to a higher level. They gonna take that program and work it in a socialistic manner" (139).

For Hampton, the Free Breakfast Program had an insidious political and didactic function—to highlight the potential benefits of socialism and win African Americans over to their revolutionary cause. The Seattle chapter concurred. One intention of the breakfast project, they maintained, was to "serve as an example to the community," exposing the contradictions of capitalism and rousing the Black underclass into action (8). The Liberation Schools had a similar

objective: "We recognize that education is only relevant when it teaches the art of survival. Our role in this society is to prepare ourselves and the masses for change" ("Liberation Schools"). As determined revolutionaries, Panthers of all ranks understood that change was contingent on the people, as well as their ability to inspire them through consciousness-raising programs.

This unwavering commitment to raising the consciousness of the people through effective community activism was, in effect, what made the Black Panther Party such a threatening organization. No one understood this better than J. Edgar Hoover. In 1969, the same year Bobby Seale mandated that all party chapters implement a Free Breakfast Program in their designated localities, Hoover publicly labelled the Black Panthers "the single greatest threat to the internal security of the country." Accompanying this declaration was a mandate to fourteen FBI field officials instructing them to create "hard-hitting" counterintelligence initiatives to stunt the party's popularity and undermine its community projects (Churchill 87). What followed was one of the most sophisticated and brutal state-sponsored clandestine campaigns by a government agency to neutralize and destroy a civilian-based political organization in US history. Although every rebel group experienced the wrath of the FBI's Counterintelligence Program during the 1950s, 1960s, and early 1970s, the BPP was given special priority. As one scholar has commented, "Of the 295 counterintelligence operations the bureau has admitted conducting against black activists and organizations during the period, a staggering 233, the majority of them in 1969, were aimed at the Panthers" (83).

When we consider the party's emphasis on community activism in the late 1960s, it was perhaps no coincidence, then, that Hoover's secret war against the Panthers reached its climax in 1969. By this time, the Panthers had expanded the focus of their survival programs to include a host of services relating to human sustenance, health care, education, and criminal justice. This expansion in scope reflected the changing status of the party from a small Bay Area group to a large-scale revolutionary organization capable of fomenting real change. No longer was police brutality and armed self-defence the only concern of the Panthers. Breakfast programs, clothing drives, education classes, legal aid clinics, and free medical care became essential fixtures of the group's daily activities and some of its key instruments for liberation.

Revolutionary violence was a significant pillar of the Black Panther Party's strategy for liberation, but so too was community activism. Party members across the country, especially those who lived in the shadows of their larger-than-life leaders, spent their days tending to the needs of the people, not devising military strategies to overthrow the American government. As Mumia Abu-Jamal remembers,

> The average Panther rose at dawn and retired at dusk and did whatever job needed to be done to keep the programs going for the people, from brothers and sisters cooking breakfast for the school kids, to going door-to-door to gather signatures for petitions, to gathering clothes for the free clothing program, to procuring donated supplies from neighborhood merchants. (186)

Revolution was important to the Panthers, as *all* members believed American society could be corrected only by a "thorough-going transformation … from the ground up" (Abu-Jamal 66). That a great majority expressed their revolutionary agenda under the auspices of community activism, not just the gun, does not negate this. Through the survival programs, the Black Panthers sought to prime the masses for revolution by revealing to them the injustice of US capitalism, the apathy of public officials to the needs of the poor and oppressed, and the virtues of socialist programs. Tethered to its faith in controlled armed struggle, this mission of community activism remained a central part of the BPP's world view until its demise in 1982. If today the Black Panthers are remembered strictly for the exaggerated character assassinations launched against them by the mainstream media and FBI, the Black ghettos from which they sprang saw them for what they truly were: a radical and highly organized political organization devoted to serving the people and restructuring society on socialist principles. In this regard, rather than representing a shift in emphasis toward reform, the survival programs crystallized the true essence of the Black Panther Party's revolutionary legacy and its steadfast commitment to Black liberation.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1 This categorization is modelled after JoNina Abron's classification of the BPP's survival programs.

2 Abron 178–9.

3 It should be stated from the outset that this is not the first study to offer an overview of the Panthers' survival programs. Abron's essay was one of the first to do this back in 1998, followed more recently by Paul Alkebulan in his 2007 thematic study, *Survival Pending Revolution*. Other contributions include the essay collection of Judson L. Jeffries, which documents the community programs carried out by individual chapters, and the Dr. Huey P. Newton Foundation's *Black Panther Party*, a project-by-project summary of all twenty-plus survival programs. The significant contributions these studies have made to BPP historiography notwithstanding, another overview of the group's survival programs is still warranted because there are lingering voids in the literature. Abron's essay is a case in point. While the basic spirit of her study remains relevant, contemporary scholars could benefit from a more up-to-date assessment of community activism that incorporates the current literature and a stronger analysis. But even the more recent studies have their shortcomings. Although Alkebulan is able to line his monograph with a sophisticated examination of the survival programs' successes and failures, he neglects an entire set of projects devoted to criminal justice, including the Community Alert Patrol, creating a glaring omission that needs to be corrected. As for the investigation by Jeffries, while there are many advantages to his localized approach, future scholars looking for a broad examination of the BPP's community activism as a whole will be forced to look elsewhere because his assessment is somewhat fragmented (and at times redundant), divided among the seven essays making up his book. The Dr. Huey P. Newton Foundation's study suffers from the opposite problem: while it proves useful for identifying and summarizing the survival programs, it lacks a critical and historical analysis to elevate it beyond a mere laudatory description of Panther achievements.

In addition to these drawbacks, all four studies fail to advance a detailed discussion of the survival programs' revolutionary function and their connection to the group's more militant belief in revolutionary violence. Abron hints at this linkage but refrains from developing it more fully. Likewise, Jeffries celebrates the radical impetus behind the projects, noting their consciousness-raising potential, but is quick to disavow the party's use of offensive violence, stating its 'posture was strictly defensive in nature' (Jeffries 4). Alkebulan takes a similar position, arguing that the survival programs represented an entirely different plan for change separate from the group's initial call for guerrilla warfare in the years preceding 1969. While one can

appreciate their commitment to resuscitating a more nuanced inter-pretation of the BPP's history that highlights its legacy of community activism, one nevertheless gets the feeling that in emphasizing the survival programs these authors are (intentionally or not) white-washing Panther violence. The BPP, after all, *was* a radical political organization sincere in its desire to overthrow American capitalism, and violence was deemed vital for achieving this objective. By ignoring the party's longstanding commitment to Fanonian theories of "revolu-tionary violence" (see note 6), which persisted well into the 1970s, these scholars have created a slightly disingenuous depiction of the group, one that obscures the sincerity of its faith in organized armed struggle as part of a larger goal to debunk its gangster reputation. A more harmonized approach that mends the two positions—community activism and revolutionary violence—together under one narrative is imperative for future studies.

4 Paul Alkebulan's immensely informative *Survival Pending Revolution* is an exception to this rule. Unlike the other authors, he delineates with great success some of the tension within the rank and file over the party's dual focus on armed self-defence and community organizing; however, even he fails to explore the relationship between these two policies in substantial detail. Instead, like most scholars, Alkebulan interprets them as representing separate strategies for change, with self-defence being revolutionary and the survival programs being reformist (27–9, 126–32). Although it arrived too late to be integrated more fully into this article, Yohuru Williams and Jama Lazerow's edited collection *Liberated Territory* is another example that bucks this trend. Ahmad A. Rahman's "Marching Blind" is a particularly impres-sive contribution to the literature, as it explores the branch's paramili-tary operations while still underscoring its belief in the significance of community outreach.

5 While Austin's study is the first monograph to explore the party's paramilitary culture in substantial detail, there were a few forerunners whose contributions should not go unnoticed. See Jones and Judson Jeffries; Joel P. Rhodes, especially chapter 5; and Umoja. More recent studies of the Panthers' underground operations include Jeffries and Foley; and Rahman.

6 The term *revolutionary violence* is a concept derived from the writings of the Algerian psychiatrist Frantz Fanon, whose seminal text, *Wretched of the Earth*, offered the stirring declaration that violence, when directed towards a revolutionary cause, "is a cleansing force. It frees the native from his inferiority complex and from his despair and inaction; it makes him fearless and restores his self-respect" (94). This concept greatly informed the group's position on self-defence, justifying their belief in the necessity of an armed struggle to liberate African Americans both physically and mentally.

7   See, for example, Alkebula; Austin; Johnson III; and LeBlanc-Ernest.

8   See, for example, Dr. Huey P. Newton Foundation; Witt; and to a lesser extent Jeffries. I include Jeffries's collection here because while he and his essayists do not necessarily shy away from documenting the party's paramilitary persona, particularly as it existed in the L.A. branch, they nevertheless make only a cursory effort to interrogate it, choosing instead to define the Panthers' legacy almost exclusively by its community outreach.

9   For a brief discussion on why the Panthers utilized a "language of violence," see Mulloy (133–4). For more on Hilliard's threat to President Nixon, and his defence of it, see Hilliard.

10 Examples of offensive violence are extremely hard to come by, yet there is little doubt that select party members did engage in this sort of activity. Frequently it was the local conditions they were operating in that dictated whether or not a particular branch would take this form of action. Thus, while some chapters concentrated heavily on creating and maintaining an underground wing, it was not uncommon for others to focus almost exclusively on above-ground work such as the survival programs. These differences notwithstanding, all chapters were working toward the common goal of revolutionary change. See, for example, the essays in Williams and Lazerow, particularly Rahman; and Williams. For a discussion of the Panthers' offensive policies and the difficulties historians face trying to uncovering them, see Austin (149–58).

11 The *foco* theory of revolution put forward by Che Guevara in his manifesto *Guerrilla Warfare* (1961) posits that small cells of guerrillas could generate the preconditions for revolution on their own terms without waiting for the appropriate milieu to present itself. This conception of revolutionary warfare was composed in contrast to the vision developed by orthodox Marxist-Leninists who believed insurgencies were to be led by a specific vanguard party who, when the objective conditions coalesced, would rise up and lead the working-class movement to victory. Panther theoreticians, however, were never so rigid in their adoption of theory. They frequently mixed and matched different ideas and concepts to fit their unique situation, thereby employing a collage of revolutionary ideologies. For an interesting article on the BPP's philosophical influences, see Clemons and Jones.

12 Newton's manslaughter conviction was eventually reversed in 1970 by the California appeals court on the basis "that there was prejudicial error in the trial judge's failure to instruct the jury that unconsciousness could be a complete defense to a charge of criminal homicide." As quoted in Austin (114).

13 Structurally, the Black Panther Party consisted of a complex organizational apparatus with numerous positions and ranks, all of which were

accountable to a Central Committee. Beneath the bureaucracy of the Central Committee were a series of chapters and branches. A chapter encompassed an entire state, while a branch represented a specific city within a state. Some states, such as California and New York, had multiple branches, while others had only one or two. Exact figures on the number of chapters and branches established between 1967 and 1971, as well as specific membership rates, are difficult to discern, as the party never kept an official record. According to a congressional report commissioned by the Committee on Internal Security, by 1971 the BPP was represented in sixty-one cities and in twenty-six states, as well as the District of Columbia. Official party membership reportedly peaked at nearly two thousand members in 1968 but declined there-after as the result of a series of purges designed to rid the organization of its most undisciplined elements, including FBI informants. This decline in membership, however, should not be taken as a sign of unpopularity in the Black community. As acts of FBI subversion increased, the BPP became more reluctant to open its doors to new members. Moreover, like other radical groups in American history (the IWW, the Communist Party USA, etc.), the BPP drew its strength not simply from its official membership, but also from the support of its chief constituents, "the brothers and sisters on the block" (US 69–80).

14 The BPP inaugurated the survival programs as a way to provide greater discipline and education for Party members who engaged in petty crimes, public misdemeanours, and other "antisocial activities" that alienated them from the Black community (Alkebulan 27–8, 41).

15 For those not familiar with this part of the group's history, there were essentially two leading factions in the Black Panther Party. The first was led by the party's co-founder and minister of defense, Huey P. Newton, while the second was piloted by its incendiary minister of information, Eldridge Cleaver. Newton's was the larger of the two factions, but after his arrest in 1967 on charges of manslaughter his control over the party weakened allowing Cleaver to exercise a degree of authority he might not otherwise have been able to secure. As time progressed, the feud between the two leaders became more pronounced and a power struggle developed over strategy. The turmoil concluded in what has since been dubbed the "1971 split," leaving Cleaver and his followers expelled from the organization.

16 As the Panthers' popularity grew in left-wing circles, they received sizable donations from wealthy philanthropists to support their survival programs. On occasion, these funds were applied to issues unconnected to community activism as a means of subsidizing more pressing strategic concerns, such as bail for Minister of Defense Huey Newton (US 85).

17 One of the principal criticisms voiced by BPP chapters against national headquarters was the degree to which the Central Committee absorbed

the majority of party funds. This issue played an especially significant role in the New York chapter's estrangement from its West Coast comrades in the early 1970s. For a more detailed exploration of this inter-party conflict, see Johnson III (401–3), and Alkebulan (64–70).

18 For specific details on BPP boycotts, refer to several articles in the *Black Panther*: "Boycott" (3); Boston Chapter, "Boston Breakfast" (16); Mitchell (18); Philadelphia Chapter (16). Also see US (65–6).

19 Balagoon et al. (269–313); Bethea (1); People's Housing Coalition (3). For a sample of the literature on repressive housing conditions, in the *Black Panther*, see Boston Chapter, "South End" (3); Boston Chapter, "Urban Renewal" (2); Holley (14); "Housing Conditions" (14); "Housing Crisis" (3); Hyson (5); "In Jordan Downs" (3); C. Johnson (15). Most of the material on housing conditions was published during the 1970s, hence the absence of articles from the late 1960s.

20 Durie Bethea, "People Demand Decent Housing," *The Black Panther*, March 21, 1970, 19.

21 The term *lumpenproletariat* was coined by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels in their 1845 collaborative study, *The German Ideology*, to denote the most unorganized and degraded section of the proletariat who did nothing to advance the cause of the workers' revolution. Aside from its usage in the odd US Marxist-Leninist group, the term failed to enter the lexicon of mainstream America until the 1960s, when several New Left organizations began using it to describe the status of those dejected citizens living on the outer limits of white society, especially persons of colour.

22 Early high-profile African-American Marxist-socialists included A. Philip Randolph, Chandler Owens, Claude McKay, Langston Hughes, Cyril Briggs, W.E.B. Du Bois, and, among others, Paul Robeson.

23 For an analysis of the media's representation of the survival programs, see Rhodes (*Framing* 250–6).

24 Admittedly the Panthers' success could have been even stronger had they shown a greater interest in economic production by creating cooperative businesses like those organized in Berkeley's hippie community. As Paul Alkebulan notes, "Production and distribution are two sides of the same coin in socialism," and so by ignoring the former at the expense of the latter the BPP made a great tactical blunder which prevented the programs from reaching their "full potential" (43–4).

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