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POETRY OF THE BLACK PANTHER PARTY

Metaphors of Militancy

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The Black Panther Party existed as Black America's contemporary revolutionary organization for over a decade. Founded in 1966 by Huey P. Newton and Bobby G. Seale, the Black Panther Party directly formed to challenge police brutality against American Blacks. As the antithesis of nonviolence, the original Black Panther Party for Self-Defense advocated weaponry use against police aggression. To bring attention to the organization and to expose injustices against Black people, they began publishing *The Black Panther* newspaper on April 25, 1967. Along with articles on the American and international political arenas, the newspaper included poetry by Panther members and sympathizers. In this article, I plan to analyze the poetry of the *Panther*, primarily from the early years. I will determine its relationship to the Black Arts and Black Aesthetics manifestoes and its relationship to the political philosophy of the party itself.

THE BLACK ARTS MOVEMENT

During the Civil and Human Rights Movement, 1955 to 1968, Black writers deliberately created poetry inspired by the concept of revolution. Unlike writers before them, the 1960s artists were at war with America. These postmodern writers configured radically

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new poetry themes of rage, redefinition, and war. The rage exposed and blasted American racism. The redefinition urged Negro people to adopt new race names. The war imagery mocked White power and urged Blacks to fight any system, religious or political, that hindered Black advancement.

The 1960s poets, in opposition to the Harlem Renaissance (1930 to 1940) writers, such as Countee Cullen, Claude McKay, and Georgia Douglass Johnson, rejected standard form. Harlem Renaissance writers adhered to traditional poetics and sought integration into American society. For example, McKay often wrote sonnets, Cullen's famous "Heritage" is in tetrameter, and Johnson often wrote in end-line rhyme. They projected protest themes, but in traditional forms that carried anger without revenge. On the other hand, the 1960s artists signified, insulted, and sought compensation for historical injustices. Proudly disregarding customary poetics and content, they mostly wrote in free verse, distinguishing the differences between Negro and White. They sought aesthetic separation, influenced by Malcolm X. Celebrating an a priori African American culture, axiology, aesthetics, and ideology, writers such as Amiri Baraka (Leroi Jones), Sonia Sanchez, and Haki Madhubuti (Don L. Lee) created poetry to educate, enlighten, and motivate Black people. This method influenced Blacks to instigate, consider, and accept social change. The following poems by Baraka, Sanchez, and Madhubuti reveal the composition and purpose of the new 1960s pattern of poetry. I'll begin with Baraka, who writes,

Poems are bullshit unless they are
teeth or trees or lemons piled
...
We want "poems that kill."
Assassin poems, Poems that shoot
guns. Poems that wrestle cops into alleys
and take their weapons (Jones & Neal, 1968, p. 302)

Notice the profanity proudly planted in the first line. The writer in "street parlance" addresses a particular group of listeners by effectively pointing poetry at police brutality. The war language is

obvious. Here, Baraka encourages others to write active, personifying poems. In fact, he calls for “soldier poems” to counter physical attacks by the law. Such poetry challenged the assault and affront of the police and other Whites who with impunity murdered Black men for centuries (Fedo, 1979; Ginzburg, 1997; Patterson, 1971; Zangrando, 1980). To address this reality in poetry, Baraka’s tone and word choice assault previous Negro poetry, indirectly suggesting its complacency within an unjust system: “Poems are bullshit unless they are / teeth.” The metonymic relationship of “teeth” to mouth shows a new speakerly quality. This poetry is more conversational and geared to a particular segment of the Black community: young Black men. Ambiguity and subtlety are not hallmarks of the 1960s artistry. Instead, it signals the warrior mentality alive in young Blacks disenchanted with American living, the dispossessed before and after the Civil Rights Movement. Reaching another audience, Sonia Sanchez (1969) writes poetry during this time that redefines how children should picture her as both role model and historian. She writes,

look at me 8th
 grade
 I am black
 beautiful. I have a
 man who looks at
 my face and smiles.
 on my face
 are black warriors
 riding in ships
 of slavery;
 on my face
 is malcolm
 spitting his metal seeds . . .

Sanchez, addressing children, encourages a redefinition in thinking about race and racial terminology. Above, she inverts the term *black*, which was an obscene, derogatory, and evil word in the American lexicon. Sanchez couples “black” with “beautiful”—transforming its meaning. She also privileges love between men and women as she

reminds her listeners or readers of Black history “warriors” and “ships” and of Malcolm X. For many years, Malcolm X was the muse of Sanchez. Referentially, she invokes him as nurturer and creator of future generations, “spitting his metal seeds.” Haki Madhubuti also extends the redefinition of “Black” as he reconnects us to its previous negative denotation. Madhubuti (1967) writes,

like,
 if he had da called me
 black seven years ago,
 I wd've—
 broke his right eye out
 jumped into his chest (p. 19)

Madhubuti exposes the traditional and derogatory use of “black” that caused fists fights in the Negro community. Here, he analyzes his personal life for public consumption and identification. He and the other poets understood that if they were to redirect Black thinking, they would have to make Black people face personal, negative cultural assumptions. Madhubuti and the others sought through poetry to eradicate the idea of Black as evil in the collective Negro-becoming-Black consciousness. Additionally, in the above poem, Madhubuti employs ebonics, deliberately exposing how Black people normally converse. Such realism intimately relates writer to reader or listener.

All three poems incorporate some of the tenets of the Black Arts Movement: the call for turning language into weapons, the challenge of stopping police abuse, the redefining of racial names. These poems, written between 1967 and 1969, represent Negro rage, as they demonstrate the sharp shift in Black American writing and poetry presentation. Deliberately rejecting standard form, content, and style, the Black Aesthetic Poets paralleled themselves (via language) with the human rights activists inspired by Black power. Just as the poets distinguished themselves from their literary predecessors, so too did 1960s activists such as Stokely Carmichael, H. Rap Brown, and the Panthers. In demeanor and behavior, the 1960s activists differentiated themselves from, say, W.E.B. Du Bois,

Mary Church Terrell, and the Muslims. The latter were (and, in the case of the Muslims, still are) certainly freedom fighters but were using standard English and platforms already established in America. The 1960s activists broke from tradition, espousing a lethal Black nationalism coupled with new aesthetics that encouraged celebrating Africa and slaying American conformity.

The 1960s poets in a huge way transformed American culture, introducing new ideas, cultural forms, and icons through verse. They mythologized Malcolm X, for example, imitating his boldness in oratory and demeanor. This boldness in poetry struck the 1960s youth in a way that later influenced the presentation and the contour of contemporary rap music. Rap has its precedent in how the 1960s poets performed poetry. For example, the 1960s poets shouted particular lines, dramatized specific phrases, talked directly to the audience, worked their voices like instruments, and recited poetry with musical accompaniment. Confidently walking onto American stages, they released the political fire that the 1960s activists sparked throughout the Black community. Likewise, rap artists communicate directly to the audience, have musical accompaniment, dress as members of the Black community (not as leaders of the Black community), and play with language and sound. Earlier Panther poetry, like rap, relied strongly on the projection of urgent messages geared to teach and to encourage transformation.

BLACK PANTHER POETRY

The Black Panther editors promoted poetry by regularly featuring it in the newspaper. Poetry itself became a chosen art for educational entertainment on stage, in print, and in the community. For example, Bobby Seale recited atop a car in San Francisco, "Uncle Sammy called Me Fulla Lucifer" in mid 1960, and later at Panther rallies, a poet would usually "blow" a poem. Alprentice "Bunchy" Carter was known as a fierce poetry-writing Panther who recited regularly at various Panther meetings and at functions with other organizations. Poetry slammed home revolutionary messages. The adoption of poetry for revolutionary, instructional messages

existed in the Black community prior to the printing of the Panther paper. Thus, it is not surprising that in the early editions of the Panther paper, poetry appeared between articles. Three poems appear that way in the July 20, 1967 edition of the paper. The first, by an anonymous author, is a 7-line poem with a couplet closure. It reveals the military mentality of the Black Arts manifestoes as well as the political philosophy of the Black Panther Party—the poem’s title, “Guns Baby Guns”:

Army 45 will stop all jive
 Buckshots will down the cops
 P38 will open Prison gates
 Carbine will stop a war machine
 357 will win us our heaven
 And if you don’t believe in lead,
 you are already dead (p. 9)

The title may come from activist H. Rap Brown’s common slogan “Burn Baby Burn.” That slogan appears at the bottom of a popular black, gray, and White poster of H. Rap showing him holding a lighted match. With “Burn Baby Burn” turning into “Guns Baby Guns,” the poet combines weapon fire with property fire. The 1965 Watts rebellion and other later riots in Newark, Detroit, and Philadelphia signaled the “burn[ing]” of Black America. Activists theorized that setting property on fire ignited from an attitude of war with America. In the above poem, the weapon imagery exposes a military symbol in contemporary, postmodern America. Yet, the poem turns the military away from American patriotism. This military is Black nationalist. Point 7 of the Black Panther Party’s platform titled “What We Want: What We Believe” also articulates the war-romanticism alive in the above poem. It reads,

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.
(Foner, 1970, p. 3)

In "Guns Baby Guns," the poet calls for military tactics to stop the "police brutality and murder of black people." In the poet's literary imagination, he creates soldiers ready to defend and protect their own people. The Panthers themselves organized "black self-defense groups" that policed the police. Both Baraka and this poet imply that Blacks must control and protect where they live. Line 3 of the above poem, "P38 will open Prison gates," relates to another major point of the Panther platform, point 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. (Foner, 1970, p. 3)

The disproportionate amount of Blacks in prison inspired point 8. Additionally, the observation that Blacks on trial rarely have a jury of their peers underscores the impossibility of either a "fair" or "impartial" trial. The textured degree of racism in America prevents Whites from seeing Black people as equals. Therefore, how can White jurors reach an equitable decision on Black behavior? Next, the "war machine" referent could either reflect the Vietnam War or the implied war America has declared on Blacks. Scholars from Madhubuti (1978, 1984) to Robert Staples (1987) have written about the acts of war this country wages against Black people. Chronic and constant police brutality, for example, is an act of war. Restrictions of opportunity, poverty, and negative media combine to create adversarial conditions. Line 5 quietly mocks Christianity, bringing the concept of "heaven" to earth and defining a different kind of heavenly reward. "357" refers to the .357 Magnum handgun. This heaven is like the one Nat Turner envisioned centuries ago. This heaven favors technological readiness beneficial to Blacks.

The final couplet displays a prime schism between activists of the 1960s. Black power in itself failed to unify all Blacks. Moderates, extremists, and apolitical people make up the mosaic of the

Black community. In the poet's literary imagination, believing "in lead" meant believing in the right to self-defense. It further meant taking a stand against White supremacy and being willing to accept the price of liberation. If, therefore, a person is "already dead," then he or she accepts inferiority. Not believing "in lead" could also refer to members of nonviolent civil rights organizations, like those following Martin Luther King. Malcolm X had ridiculed the significance of nonviolence, although admitting later his genuine respect for Martin King. Huey Newton (1973) and Bobby Seale (1978), in their respective autobiographies, explain how the Panthers extended the revolutionary pronouncements of Malcolm X. Tiring of nonviolent protesters being kicked, maimed, and jailed while marching and praying for basic human rights, Malcolm X preached for a more equitable form of resistance. Huey Newton and Bobby Seale carried the manifestation of armed guerilla warfare forward—therefore maximizing X's pronouncements.

The Panthers also instituted a tenet that exposed education as racist and Eurocentric. The American educational system produced Negroes who were gross imitators of White America. For this reason, point 5 of the Panther Platform argues,

We want education for our people that exposes the true nature of this decadent American society. We want education that teaches us our 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. (Foner, 1970, pp. 2-3)

Thus, the educational system that teaches the "true" history of Blacks begins in Africa prior to the Europeans' arrival. Molefi Asante (1985, 1987) explicates Afrocentricity as a paradigm where people of African descent begin study in Africa not America or some other designation. His theory encourages truth, clarity, and sanity among Black people. Newton and Seale knew that Black people must have knowledge of themselves before they can "relate to anything else." In fact, writing about Africa became a favorite theme among Panther poets:

They were in the bush filled with
 Hot wild meat. They were in the bush
 Singing and stomping by sacred fires.
 Primitive fires where umbilical cords
 Lay buried beneath the earth. Tied
 Beneath the earth to Shango Gods and
 Drum language— . . . (Stowers, 1967, p. 17)

Here J. Anthony Stowers constructs a montage of stereotypical imagery of Africa. He seems to be a new poet covering too much territory in this and later stanzas, all deficiently developed. Like most new poets, he presents familiar language and images. Having lived in a country where English insults and dehumanizes Black people, the poet unknowingly imitates a Western, debilitating image of Africa. Ashley Montagu (1997) explains this imitation when he asserts that myths about people normally begin in language (p. 42). Thus, Stowers's language reflects his American education. Kariamu Welsh and Molefi Asante both teach that "the bush" is pejorative for an African area. Similarly, Eurocentric thinkers applied "wild" to communities of color particularly the African and Native American. To that extent, the state of being "wild" and "primitive" denotes and connotes a lack of civilization (Sale, 1990, pp. 74-90). As a European invention, civilization occurs once Whites clear territories through genocide or theft. Continuing, Stowers refers to African ritual as "singing and stomping." Welsh (1996) informs us of the significance of dance as a philosophical and religious concept key to the culture of African people. However, of course, Stowers is unaware of information available since African American studies became a discipline. His word choice, therefore, is a reminder of the importance of African studies and how its maintenance and expansion must be 21st century imperatives. What the poet does demonstrate is his attempt to understand an image of Africa and to bring it before a Black American audience. Introducing the burying of umbilical cords, and the relationship to "Shango" and to the "drum," offers African components unknown to a typical Black audience. Hence, he connects African culture to Black culture.

His final line cited above communicates a drum “language” central to an Afrocentric view of history. The drums could “talk.” This is why enslavers forbade drum playing, because the enslaved Africans could send messages through drumbeats. The Whites sought to kill the African identity, culture, and soul by blocking an African method of communication. Next, the poet attempts to reclaim the image of Mary, mother of Jesus:

Biblical darkness—Hail . . . Hail
 Madonna with nappie hair.
 Blessed mother, Voluptuous black tits
 And animist lips
 Be our guide even at the
 Hour of death . . . Amen. Amen. Amen. . .
 (Stowers, 1967, p. 17)

The transformation of the traditionally White holy mother to a Black one indicates symbol inversion advantageous to Black people. If we momentarily overlook his word choice, we observe his idea of African spirituality. The poet overtly rejects the prominence and the acceptance of a White celestial family. He expresses the collective neo-African need for a spirituality that reflects the aesthetics of Black people. Intellectuals from Edward Blyden to Na'im Akbar espouse the psychologically healthy need for Blacks to abandon the imagery of White Christianity.

The poet abandons White aesthetics using “nappie” to describe hair. His youth and exhilaration commingle “Blessed Mother” with “Volumptuous black tits.” Freud would have much to say about this, but I am more concerned with “animist lips.” Again, his language lexicon is traditionally racist. John Mbiti (1990) informs us that “animism” degrades African philosophical and spiritual thought (pp.7-8, 56). Stowers has read about Africa, like most at the time, from books written by outsiders who debased African culture and history. Refiguring Christianity, however, like Langston Hughes does in his poem “The Black Christ,” encourages the masses to center themselves in the aesthetics of religion.

In this same edition of *The Black Panther*, a poem by Carl Bois-siere demonstrates more care for the connotations of language. He writes in “What Goes Around Comes Around,”

He had no idea
 that our enslavement would lead
 to his living a suicide
 —he had no idea
 that our forced incest
 would lead to his
 moral debasement
 that the beatings on our
 black bodies would
 numb his capacity to feel
 that the rape of our mothers
 would lead to the
 barrenness of his daughters
 that the stud game he
 forced on our fathers
 would be the castration
 of his sons
 —he had no idea (p. 21)

This poem, with “that” clauses that continuously enjamb, starkly portrays another profile of racism. A confounding point of view of the oppressor takes center stage. The author lists with wry restraint the enslavers’ sins and the results. Slavery has often been portrayed as an institution that destroyed the Africans. In the above, slavery has destroyed the enslaver. The Panther poet upsets another popular idea whereby slavery becomes a negative system for Whites. Such reversal equalizes, in a sense, the horrific condition of chattel slavery. Another reversal concerns beating. Enslavers used whippings to control those enslaved. Yet above, we see, “the beatings on our / black bodies” numbed the enslavers’ humanity. Whites participating in the slave trade failed to consider the harmful, future consequences. Remarks from powerful racists from David Hume, to

Albert Schweitzer, to Richard Nixon and others, culminate into an ideology of racism endowing Whites and their progeny. Hume, in his major essay "Of National Characters" (1748), says that Negroes are naturally inferior to Whites and that Negroes failed to create civilization. Schweitzer calls Negroes children who need control (Kush, 1983, p. 6). Nixon says that Blacks are genetically inferior to Whites (Kush, 1983, p. 9).

The lines "that our enslavement would lead / to his living a suicide" refer to what Andrew Hacker (1995) explains as White guilt (pp. 55-72). "[T]he rape of [Black] mothers" and "the castration of his sons" couple to display the problems for Whites when Black births increase. Boissiere predicts the angst coloring White men, particularly in the 1990s: Remember the ridiculous cry of reverse discrimination. Boissiere, employing an economy of words and moved by fine repetition, presents the Black holocaust as an epoch that negatively affects the progression of White superiority.

Each of the above poems shows the democratic process involved in selecting and printing poetry in *The Black Panther*. Standard poetics was not a concern. More concerned about the material message, the paper selected poetry with immediate appeal to those unversed in, and unconcerned with, customary poetics. Some selected poets had studied language; others knew the power of short lines.

On March 16, 1968, the Black Panther Party's Communications Secretary Kathleen Cleaver had "The Black Mass Needs but One Crucifixion" printed in the newspaper. Her central theme develops a narrative that engages and encourages the readers to destroy their fear and to help free Huey P. Newton from prison. Newton was charged with killing a policeman and wounding another in 1967. The Black Panther Party understood that, in the history of America, no Black man had ever been charged with killing a policeman and set free. They recognized that the very existence of the organization, and the 10-point platform and program, were tested with the incarceration of Newton. Therefore, Cleaver wrote poetry to persuade the readers to help to "Free Huey." She writes,

Malcolm X died for us

We will have no more religious executions
 no more political assassinations
 no more murdering of black men
 in the streets of Babylon

The black mass needs but one crucifixion

And in that death

On the cross of America

We all received a new birth

For in us awoke a new life

Set afire by the cry of

BLACK POWER

That burned in Watts, that burned in Newark, that
 burned in Detroit

And that burns in Huey's soul (p.22)

In the above poem, Kathleen Cleaver positions Malcolm X as a starting point. However, she places him in relationship to a Christ figure. The spatial difference between the first and the following line allows fluid movement from the Bible, to the political arena, and to the Black community. On mentioning Malcolm X, she recalls an entire revolutionary history that prefigures the Panthers' founding. Independent African men have been murdered since their importation to the Americas. Malcolm X both assures and hinges Huey Newton to the site of resistance. Malcolm's martyrdom begins Cleaver's exhortation that Black male execution is over.

She next chooses biblical language to refigure the topography of America. "Babylon" for America appeals to the religiosity alive in American Blacks. She may have borrowed the term from her husband Eldridge Cleaver, who used it often in speeches and as editor of *The Black Panther*.

The issue of religion is ironic considering Eldridge Cleaver and his changing status in, and connection to, the Panthers. Eldridge was an atheist in the Panthers who fled America because of his parole violation. From Cuba to Africa to Paris, Kathleen joined Eldridge in exile. In Paris, after several years, he becomes a born-

again Christian. Today, America to him is no longer the “Babylon” as listed in Kathleen’s poem. In line 8, she symbolizes Black people as martyrs, a Black power resurrection with the Watts rebellion fueling its base. Watts is a major catalyst broadening the issue of Black Power. In Kathleen Cleaver’s poem, she extends this thought, because her “fire” rises from Black America informing the “soul” of Huey P. Newton. From 1967 to 1970, the prominent Black Panther Party activity was to “Free Huey” from prison: “Brought alive by Malcolm, brought awake by Stokely, / We Will be brought to motion by Huey P. Newton” (Cleaver, 1968, p. 22).

Her attempt captures an urgency of “motion” led by Newton. Panthers and supporters actively believed that a revolution, whether armed or peaceful, would occur in America under Newton’s leadership. Casting him specifically with Malcolm and then Stokely Carmichael brings attention to the dynamism of both men. Carmichael, now Kwame Toure, made the symbol and saying of “Black Power” a slogan that rang around the world. Black Power empowered Black people like never before. To shout “Black Power” repeatedly while pounding fists in the air relieved the emptiness of living in a country that hated an African ontology. Shouting “Black Power” united Africans across the Diaspora. This is what Cleaver means when she writes, “brought awake by Stokely.”

Although we are supposedly free
To go to school and give birth and get married and
drive cadillacs

But the pain involved and the struggle required
Just to live in this madness for one more day

Is more than a man can say

He must just pick up the gun
Refuse to run

Stand on his feet

And act like a man

. . . Demand that he be free (Cleaver, 1968, p. 22)

Cleaver remarks about the cardboard living of American Blacks. Negroes, grossly imitating the norms and mores of White America, lose a major part of themselves functioning according to the ideas of someone else. Negroes as White American clones developed a seething rage that Cleaver both articulates and does not articulate. In binary opposition, she begins, "Just to live in this madness for one more day." Figuring America an insane abstraction, she indirectly exposes its ritual-vacuum. Then, she describes American living as "more than a man can say." Here is a troubling silence. She lacks language to articulate American living.

Conversely, Molefi Asante points out the importance of African culture as it relates to ritual (1987, pp. 59-75). Ritual is a quantitative way to pay homage to those alive in the metaphysical realm. It sets up communication between the living and the dead. Ritual establishes meaning in life. The impassive way Cleaver presents giving birth and getting married speaks to a vacuum that disturbs how Negroes live. The poem implies that they live without purpose. For example, riding in a fine car is not a purposeful value. What cannot be spoken can be solved by action. Accordingly, Kathleen Cleaver calls for picking up "the gun."

Next to the poem in the newspaper is a drawing of a young Black male with a rifle. The poem and the picture acutely address the primal male ideology and presence pervasive in the Black Panther party. Cleaver, herself a woman, submerges her own gender in language to elevate the minds, desires, and actions of men. In the poem, "he" is the agent. The issue of sexism during this period had yet to receive the attention awaiting it years later. Panthers, like most others, assumed sexist intellectualism as normal and natural. The Panther was a man although women were Panthers, going to jail, organizing, performing identical duties as Panther men. In the literary imagination of Cleaver at that time, however, symbolically a Panther is male.

Take his freedom by any means necessary

if death in the gas chamber stare him in the face

Malcolm told us that he would be killed

And when he died his words came true

Huey told us to defend our lives

To stop the tide of genocide

The gas chamber will not be his fate

By any means necessary

HUEY P. NEWTON MUST BE SET FREE!

The black mass needs but one

crucifixion. (Cleaver, 1968, p. 22)

Cleaver's paralleling Malcolm X's prophecy with Newton's philosophy filters a new twist: Newton, unlike Malcolm X, does not have to die. People can set Huey free, she insists. Her closure signals a metaphorical death of Black hesitancy, reluctance, and fear.

As in most patriarchal societies, males equal strength. Kathleen Cleaver, when describing an image of strength, easily drew from male sources. Profound images of American power include the cowboy, gangster, gangbanger, and soldier, and all are male. Sexism knits the fabric of American culture. However, Clenora Hudson-Weems (1993) offers another perspective, which can explain Cleaver's projection of "he." In *Africana Womanism*, Hudson-Weems argues that Black women "love" Black men in a special way that reflects an African ideology. To her, the Black woman normally places the interest of the community and the family first. Therefore, the promotion of the male as leader and protector of the community may not simply refer to patriarchal thinking.

During slavery, Black men were not allowed to be "men" in the sense of heading households and making decisions. Black men were "boys" in the ideology of the power structure. This "boy" syndrome carried over and nourished in the system of segregation and

discrimination that followed legal slavery. Hence, during the 1960s, Black women were very proud of the men who stood up fiercely in a country normally bending the backs of Black men.

Elaine Brown (1970) later furthers this precept. Elaine Brown, who assumed leadership after Kathleen Cleaver, continues the pervasive male image in the following lyrics printed as a poem in the newspaper.

You're a man, you see
 And a man must be
 Whatever he'll be or he
 Won't be free.
 If he's bound up tight
 He'll hold back the night
 And then't be no light
 For day.

Well then, believe it my friend
 That this silence will end
 We'll just have to get guns
 And be men (p. 20)

Brown, a Panther singer and songwriter, rose to power once Kathleen Cleaver joined Eldridge in exile. Later, after Newton's successful release from jail and Bobby Seale's resignation from the Panthers, she became chairman. Her repetitive use of "be" in the first stanza truly speaks to the illusive propensity of maleness. The Black male does not fit the standard male image because he is not White. This is why she writes that the Black male longs to be "whatever he'll be or he / Won't be free." Brown forecasts the inevitable destruction ripe to occur because of the historically "bound up tight" Black man. She then places the male with superhuman capability. He "hold[s] back the night," which means discomfort for everyone.

The line "hold back the night" is an image occupying Black writers of the period. For instance, "And We Own the Night" is a line borrowed from a LeRoi Jones (Amiri Baraka) poem that becomes the title of a Jimmie Garret play. Black Arts West sponsored plays

in San Francisco. They joined with the Black Panther Party to present dramatic performances for bay area residents in the 1960s.

We Own the Night was the first performed as part of the 1967 Black Communications Project at the Filmore Auditorium in San Francisco, in a rally given for Huey P. Newton and the Black Panther Party for Self Defense. Speakers were LeRoi Jones, Stokely Carmichael, Rap Brown (making his initial West Coast appearance after taking over SNCC), and Bobby Seale. (Garrett, 1968, p. 69)

Brown's image of a Black man restraining the night suggests that the Black male controls the earth. This application of male Black power that inserts the human with superhuman potential begins the new mythology of the 1960s activists. Larry Neal later modified his initial explanation about Black art destroying White aesthetics. However, he and others recognized that the new mythology rested in the knowledge of African cosmology. In America during the 1960s, art, theater, poetry, and song worked in concert to influence the thinking of the Black community.

This collective thinking brought out the pervasiveness of silence and sexism. For example, in stanza 2 of Brown's poem she mentions "silence" and immediately follows with picking up "guns." Earlier, Cleaver made the same leap. This unspeakable silence, however, is not a regular void of total emptiness. It is alive like a pregnant pause in music. This silence is the block of rage, undercurrent in Black collective thought. Brown (1970) writes, "That this silence will end / We'll just have to get guns / And be men" (p. 20).

Both female artists assume male personas when urging the need for revolutionary action. This imagery demonstrates the profundity of sexism and the subconscious power of cultural roles, customs, and conditions. Panther woman worked just as hard as men, selling papers, cooking, cleaning, exercising, taking target practice, studying, and organizing. What this poetry demonstrates is that during the 1960s, in certain areas, women had not thought out their roles. They acted similarly to Anthony Stowers in his reliance on familiar African imagery. Panther sisters just stepping into revolutionary arenas wrote the oppressor's language, but certainly not its meaning.

In the January 10, 1970 edition of the paper, Verna Hampton of the New Haven chapter wrote an article from her hospital bed, and it contains poetry. Hampton was under medical incarceration at a state “farm” for women. The article’s theme described a get-well card other incarcerated Panther sisters sent to her. The sisters were arrested on conspiracy and murder charges, later dismissed. I will quote two from among the several entries. The first is from the famed Panther leader Erika Huggins, wife of the assassinated John Jerome Huggins, murdered by members of United Slaves. Erika Huggins writes,

All I can say is that you gotta
 get out of there and be well again
 cause we need you, the Panther 21
 needs you, Huey needs you, bobby
 needs you, the people need you . . .
 the struggle needs you!
 Long Live the People[’s] Struggle (p. 9)

The speakerly quality of this and the previous poems opens the first line, “All I can say.” Crafted in ebonics, the theme concerns Verna Hampton getting well. The repetition of “need” evokes why so many young people devoted themselves to the Black Panther Party. The 10-point program and platform held them together. Members bonded despite the geography. The Panther leadership is named here as “need[ing]” her. Also the “we” indicates the sisters incarcerated, as well as the Panther 21 falsely charged with plotting to blow up various New York buildings. The word “need” unifies, suggesting the interlocking relationship of the Panther hierarchy. For example, Newton was not free in July 1970; therefore, Hampton must get better to continue to work for his release. Most important, “the people”—the very reason for the forming of the Party—also required her attention. The slogan “Long Live the People’s Struggle” exposes the Panthers thinking of themselves as “servants of the people.” Although the Panthers leaned toward socialism, they more often reflected the ideology of Marcus Garvey in *Race First*.

The next entry follows:

Revolutionaries can't af-
 ford to be sick . . .
 There's too much work to
 do.
 Too many papers to
 sell
 Too many children to
 feed
 Too many battles to
 fight
 So much love to give (Hampton, 1970, p. 9)

The adverb "Too" takes prominence in explaining the huge amount of "work" Party members performed. Panthers (men and women) awoke before dawn for exercise classes, then cooked and fed breakfast to schoolchildren, then sold papers until evening, then attended either political education classes, organizing meetings, or engaged in night exercises to train the body and the mind. The verbs "do, sell, feed, fight" build an operative column illustrating the vitality and activity of the Panther cadre. Much work had to be done while submerging the pressure of police surveillance and the FBI's Counter Intelligence Program set in operation to destroy the Panthers. The above poem also tells of the tough, hard-edged behavior that was the countenance of the Panthers (Churchill & VanderWall, 1990, pp. 1-63). They could not "afford to be sick." They were warriors.

My final poem for explication is about Little Bobby Hutton. Little Bobby Hutton was the first Panther to be killed by the Oakland police, on April 6, 1968, 2 days following the murder of Martin Luther King in Memphis, Tennessee. In Panther parlance, they call him "the first to fall." In the May 4, 1968, edition of *The Black Panther*, Frank Jones eulogizes him in an "Ode to Bobby Hutton."

Bobby Hutton was a man
 Freedom was his desire.
 His love for his people
 Burned like a raging fire.

His desire was for freedom,
 In this the promised land,
 But in the wind of racism,
 His dreams scattered like sand.

He could not secure those
 Liberties he felt he was due,
 But he would not accept defeat,
 And his dream glowed anew.

He looked for leaders who,
 could help him his yearn.
 He chose Huey, Bobby, Eldridge, men,
 . . . From whom he could learn. (p.17)

This poem of 12 stanzas, separated into quartets with abcb rhyme scheme, builds the saga of Bobby Hutton, which can easily represent all Panthers. "Bloods" who became Panthers normally searched for organized outlets to release a collective and personal rage. Although metaphor is supposed to compare two dissimilar things, when Jones writes in the first line that "Bobby Hutton was a *man*" (my emphasis), he creates metaphor. As earlier mentioned, the nature of being a "man" continues to shadow, baffle, and sometimes torment Black males. Being a male of a defeated people and a male unable to gain respect in society debilitates many Black males. By Jones referring to Hutton as a "man," he gives him status, praise, and new definition. He elevates him from "boy" to man. The term man is one used often throughout Black American communities. It is a particular salutation when Black men meet and greet each other. They say, "Yo man what's happnin'." If we revisit Kathleen Cleaver's and Elaine Brown's use of "man," we can add another definition: a willingness to be revolutionary. To that extent, the term man, as used by male and female Panthers, indicates a *behavior* more than gender identification.

Frank Jones, in the second line, creates another metaphor, fusing freedom and desire. The concept of freedom infused the psychol-

ogy of Blacks. For instance, at rallies and demonstrations staged by the more conservative Southern Christian Leadership Conference and by other similar organizations, one would hear the following “freedom” song: “Oh Freedom / Oh Freedom / OhOh OhOh Freedom / Over me / And before I be a slave? I’ll be buried in my grave / And go home / To my Lord and be Free.” From the enslaved Blacks to Jones, to Hutton, the idea of freedom indeed occupies the mind of African people. Bondage is textured and contiguous. Although physical laws may have abolished chattel slavery, the barriers within racist countries continue to hamper and restrict African advancement. Notice the image of fire repeated in this poem and the other poems offered here. This “raging fire” in stanza 1, line 4, as in the other poems, is a limn of “love for [Black] people.” Fire has the capability to destroy and to renew, analogous to the erasure of the old Negro for the institution of the new Black or African.

Stanza 2 refers to the great migration of Negroes from the South to the North at the turn of the century. Millions of Blacks made the trek, populating Northern cities for the first time in history. They nicknamed the North, because of Southern vulgar racism, “The Promised Land.” However, as the poet sarcastically pens it, “racism” simply changed locations from the South to the North. This is why the notion of freedom extensively occupies the Black mind. Those back South imagined the North as a place to relocate and to stake their dreams. The tenements, slum housing, low wage jobs, and geographic isolation turned their dreams into nightmares. This nightmarish racism girded the psychological boundaries that adjust to restrictions. Limitation, therefore, becomes a way of thinking and living in Black America. Yet, as stanza 3 suggests, American “liberties” are the stuff of propaganda echoed throughout this country. Little Bobby, like most Blacks, knew that he should have equity, and, unlike assimilationists, he searched for an avenue that gained him freedom. He found his avenue in the political philosophy and platform of Huey Newton and Bobby Seale. Again, in stanza 3, line 3, Newton, Seale, and Eldridge are described and affirmed as “men.” Such continuous repetition strongly highlights that Black males remade and reaffirmed themselves often.

The first point of the Panther Platform reads, "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" (Foner, p. 2). The militancy of the members of the Black Panther Party finds root in the dependent status that Black people maintain in America. The early poetry printed in *The Black Panther* illustrates the enormous desire of Black people to seize power that will enable them to determine their own destiny. The early poetry also reveals the impact of American racism on the revolutionary Black imagination.

As *The Black Panther* continued in print, it exploded in poetry, where one, two, or three full pages contained poetry by Panthers and supporters. The themes range from racial redefinition, war cries, war readiness, victory, and love. Most important, Panther poetry demonstrates the unbroken will to resist exploitation. Like Black Arts poetry, it undermines and assaults the foundation of White racism. Unlike the poetry of Black Arts, Panther poetry had an organization behind it where individuals could join and enact a platform of principles. Black Panther poetry is an expansion of the theoretical paradigm of the 1960s Black aesthetics. All of this poetry tells America that Blacks were not simply prone to beg and to march for rights that no people should be endowed to give. Panther poetry awakens the history of resistance against oppression that started on the African continent among such greats as Queen Nzingha and King Shaiyama. From there, resistance in literature and activism extended into the Americas and continued into the 20th century. Therefore, Panther poetry informs all people that Africans brutally made into chattel slaves had progeny that dared to organize for revolution in their memory and honor.

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