Engendering the Black Freedom Struggle: Revolutionary Black Womanhood and the Black Panther Party in the Bay Area, California

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Revolutionary Black Womanhood and the Black Panther Party in the Bay Area, California

Robyn Ceanne Spencer

This article explores how black women who joined the Black Panther Party, one of the leading Black Power organizations in the 1960s and 70s, were empowered to challenge racism and sexism in society, in the Panthers, and in themselves. Using oral history and archival sources, it examines such issues as formal and informal leadership, state political repression, gendered guerilla imagery, and debates around child rearing and birth control to reveal how these women were able to shape the Panthers' organizational evolution, even as they struggled against misogyny. This article contributes to historical understanding of the Black Power movement from the bottom up.

In 1970, Frances Beale, founding member of the Women's Liberation Committee of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), bluntly observed that: "Since the advent of Black power, the Black male has exerted a more prominent leadership role in our struggle for justice in this country. He sees the system for what it really is for the most part, but where he rejects its values and mores on many issues, when it comes to women, he seems to take his guidelines from the pages of the *Ladies' Home Journal*."[1] Beale identified the central paradox of the black liberation ideologies which undergirded the Black Power movement of the 1960s and 1970s—their potential to challenge the status quo on white supremacy while reinforcing it on gender issues. Beale's provocative statement highlighted the fact that Black Power advocates' argument that the restoration of black manhood was central to opposing white supremacy dovetailed with mainstream policy prescriptions, such as Daniel Patrick Moynihan's influential 1965 report *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*. The notion of black male emasculation at the hands of superpowerful black women clearly shaped the context for the emergence of Black Power. As a result, the Black Power movement has been inextricably linked to "the belief in black male dominance" and the restoration of a manhood that was "separate from [and even antagonistic to] Black womanhood" in the scholarly literature and in the popular imagination.[2] Despite the rich history contained in first–person

accounts written by movement participants and the recent outpouring of books, essay collections, and journal articles on the Black Power movement, scholarly analysis of the nuances of black women's experiences in Black Power organizations has remained limited. Black women have fallen through the analytical cracks of the frameworks scholars have used to analyze gender and Black Power. The historiography of black women's political activism, which has so aptly described how black women wielded everything from their Bibles to their pens as symbolic swords to fight against racial injustice, has remained largely silent on militant women's use of weapons to defend their person and their communities. The historiography of the black freedom movement has most often depicted black women as victims of, or combatants against, patriarchal black nationalist men. Adopting a similar focus on Black Power's misogyny, the historiography of the women's movement has located black women's agency and action during the Black Power era in autonomous women's organizations. As a result, black women have remained on the outskirts of Black Power: their marginality central to the movement's definition, but their agency and empowerment within the movement effectively obscured.

This article analyzes the gender politics of the Black Panther Party (BPP), one of the leading organizations of the Black Power movement, in the Bay Area of California, especially Oakland. Although organizational dynamics in Oakland were not representative of nationwide trends, and local chapters exercised considerable autonomy, Oakland's centrality as the organizational headquarters for much of Panther history make it a critical point of inquiry. The Panthers' gender politics were a function of official policy and ideological dictates; an outgrowth of day–to–day struggles and impromptu debates, and the result of mostly female members' demands that the organization actualize its rhetoric about gender equality. Although women initially occupied few formal leadership roles within the BPP, they played strategic leadership roles as male formal leaders increasingly faced state political repression, incarceration, or exile. As the bulk of the Panthers' rank–and–file membership, women occupied the most democratic layer of the organization and served as the public face of the organization in poor communities. In the 1970s, Panther women helped spearhead the BPP's successful foray into local politics and created organizational structures to facilitate collective childcare. Largely as a result of these women's efforts, the Black Panther Party became a place where black men and women could be radicalized around issues of gender, find tools to challenge sexism and patriarchy, and reconceptualize gender roles.

Many scholars have depicted the Panthers as the quintessential macho male organization and emblematic of the Black Power movement's misogyny. The top–down nature of current Panther historiography has ampli-

fied—and made definitive—the experiences of former Panther leaders such as Elaine Brown, who argued that many Panther men saw women in the Black Power movement as "irrelevant," and accused the women claiming leadership of "eroding black manhood" and acting in alliance with "counter–revolutionary, man–hating lesbian, feminist white bitches."[3] Brown's poignant, but blanket, condemnation belies the nuances of her experience as a leader, and obscures the experience of rank–and–file Panther women. Literary scholar Farah Jasmine Griffin has argued that "black women see room to negotiate gender roles" within the broad diversity of nationalist ideology.[4] Analyzing this negotiation centers the contested space, which black women defiantly claimed for self–expression and self–definition in the Black Power movement. Hundreds of African American women joined the Black Panther Party, seeking a place for collective action and social change. Over time, many of these women joined their commitment to struggling against racism alongside black men with a commitment to challenge sexism and patriarchy. When they confronted "multiple jeopardy," defined by sociologist Deborah King as "several, simultaneous oppressions" and the "multiplicative relationships among them," they responded by waging a formidable liberation struggle inside of the liberation struggle in the attempt to put the movement on a more egalitarian course. King warned that "by concentrating on our multiple oppressions, scholarly descriptions have confounded our ability to discover and appreciate the ways in which black women are not victims."[5] The very real lessons about black women's history embedded in these women's survival strategies, and their tenacity and skill in fashioning their womanhood out of the materials they found in even the most challenging environment, is as central to their story as the barriers they faced, the challenges they endured, and the sexism which constrained them.

"To Sell my Life as Dearly as Possible"

Huey Newton and Bobby Seale founded the Black Panther Party for Self–Defense in Oakland, California, in October 1966 as a revolutionary nationalist organization aimed at challenging police brutality, poverty, and racial injustice. Point seven of the Panthers' ten–point platform and program claimed the right to bear arms under the second amendment and demanded "an immediate end to POLICE BRUTALITY and MURDER of black people."[6] One of the Panthers' first actions was to launch community patrols of the police, armed with law books, tape recorders, and legally carried weapons.

Gender was embedded in the Panthers' initial articulation of the politics of protection. A notice in the first issue of *The Black Panther*, the Panthers' newspaper, applauded the Panthers—by then an all–male organization—as

"the cream of Black Manhood . . . there for the protection and defense of our Black community." They articulated a self–defense strategy that had at its core the assumption that men would be on the front lines, serving as protectors of the black community against white violence.[7] It is important to note that such an assumption resonated with women as well. Griffin coined the term the "promise of protection" to describe how black nationalist men's commitment to protect black women appealed to women who had been thrust outside of the bounds of protection and respectability by stereotypes, violence, and law. Although this notion of protection denied women agency and thrust them into roles as victims, black men and women embraced it as "a more progressive counter discourse to elements of misogyny in black popular culture," and a challenge to white supremacy.[8] In this Faustian bargain, black women received protection and "the man acquires a possession."[9]

However, Newton and Seale also made broader appeals to the black community for support. *The Black Panther* pointed out that "there are now strong Black men and women on the scene who are willing to step out front and do what is necessary."[10] It boldly proclaimed: "Black People have no choice but to move and move rapidly to gain their freedom, justice and all the other ingredients of civilized living that have been denied to us. This is where it is at. Check it out, Black Brothers and Sister [*sic*]! This is our Day!!!!!"[11]

This call was answered by black women who reneged on the "promise of protection" and risked the castigation of the black community by laying claim to the role of protector. African American women had a historical tradition of using weapons to protect their homes, communities, and selves. This tradition included Mary "Stagecoach" Fields, who cultivated expertise with guns and who armed herself frequently and deliberately; Harriet Tubman, who guarded the lives of slaves she led to the North; and Ida B. Wells Barnett, an advocate of self–defense as both a personal stance and a collective strategy. During the civil rights movement, some black women countered white violence with self–defense. There were countless female "expert marksmen" in the rural South who protected their homes and communities, like Melba Beals's grandmother, whose husband taught her how to use a rifle to protect herself in his absence; Mrs. Fairley, who sheltered and protected one civil rights volunteer who found her early one morning "coming down the hall from the front porch carrying a rifle in one hand [and] a pistol in the other"; and Mrs. McGhee, who slept during the day and "sat up on the porch at night with her Winchester" to protect her home from nightriders.[12] Political activists like Gloria Richardson advocated the viability of self–defense strategies in Cambridge, Maryland; Daisy Bates guarded her home with a .45 automatic in the wake of white supremacist

terrorism ranging from "incendiary bombs" to "KKK crosses" to threats of arson; and Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) activist Anne Moody armed herself, understanding that "three young women just don't live in Mississippi alone without protection."[13] This history shaped black women's involvement in, and relationship to, self–defense. The fact that the Panthers had not excluded women or overtly endorsed prevailing theories about women's subordinate place in the black liberation movement appealed to some black women who shared their political perspectives and sought an alternative to the strictly hierarchical gender roles advocated by some local nationalist organizations, such as the Nation of Islam. They began to join the organization in the spring of 1967.

Comrade Sister

Tareka "Matilaba" Lewis is widely acknowledged as the first person to demand a place within the Black Panther Party for women. As a young adult growing up in the Bay Area, Lewis witnessed Oakland's post–World War II decline, rising unemployment, housing shortages, and the socioeconomic impact of the destruction of the thriving black downtown along Seventh Street in West Oakland. Her politicization came on the heels of police misconduct. She recalled a vivid scene from her childhood: "We were all over at the Playland at the beach in San Francisco and I don't know what this child did. He must have been around eleven or twelve. I don't know what he did. But these police men were dragging him, kicking him, hitting him. . . . And, I just went off. . . . Then shortly after that my political education was on." Lewis became a student leader at Oakland Technical High School and was one of the first students to agitate for a black history club and proudly wear her natural hair in an afro. She attended forums on black history and culture with her activist older cousins, and often cut school to hang out and attend courses at Merritt College—a hub of political activity and streetcorner soapbox debates where both Newton and Seale were enrolled. One day sixteen–year–old Lewis boldly walked into the Panthers' office near Merritt College and declared: "Ya'll have a nice program and everything. It sounds like me. Can I join? 'Cause ya'll don't have no sisters up in here." When Seale responded in the affirmative, Lewis's next question was: "Can I have a gun?" The response was a momentary pause and then another firm yes. Lewis discovered that membership meant learning BPP ideology and participating in a wide range of political programs. "I had to earn it [her weapon]. . . . I learned safety, I learned to respect it, I respected other people, I never pointed a weapon at anybody and I followed the rules." [14] Lewis went on to work on *The Black Panther,* writing editorials, composing layout, typing, and drawing over forty political cartoons under

the name "Matilaba." Her prowess with weapons earned respect from some male Panthers who questioned the emerging role she began to play in the organization. She sometimes addressed challenges to her authority with invitations to "come on out to the weapons range," confident that she "could outshoot 'em."[15]

Like many early Panthers, Elendar Barnes was the child of parents who migrated to Oakland seeking jobs during World War II. Her involvement in the Panthers evolved out of the politics of rural resistance that she brought to Oakland from the South—an outgrowth of traditions rooted in the history of black resistance to white supremacist violence:

> I became very involved in that level of politics because it was an extension of what I knew, an extension of what they called the Deacons [for Defense] down South. And my grandfather wasn't necessarily a member of the Deacons but our family's stance was, you know, you protect your family by any means necessary and, you know, you use guns. My grandfather was the first person to buy land on what was considered the white part of town. I'd go visit him in the summers and I remember that the Ku Klux Klan burnt a cross on his yard because they opposed him living on that side of town. And my uncles, the males of my family came from different parts of the country and, you know, there was a conflict. It ended with cars being blown up, all that kind of stuff. . . . I came from that idea of standing up. And I think a lot of people in Oakland have these southern roots and that whole connection with the idea of protecting your own. People were used to using and keeping guns because that's what they did in the country. My grandfather always kept a gun; it was invisible but it always was in the back of the car, or up in the window in the back of the truck and they always said in the South that they were for hunting but he said it was for the white man. And it wasn't for the white man who wasn't bothering you. It was for the KKK and the others. And that's what moved me into the Panthers.[16]

Before Judy Hart joined the Panthers in the summer of 1967 at age twenty–two, she had supported the Panthers' efforts by working on the newspaper and attending rallies. Hart grew up in a middle–class neighborhood in East Oakland and her parents were shocked at her involvement because of her excellent academic record. Political activism coupled with academic excellence was no contradiction for Hart, who was involved in the Black Student Union (BSU) movement at San Francisco State University (SFSU). Growing up in Oakland, she recalled witnessing few incidents of police brutality but being aware, nonetheless, of the presence of the police as an "occupying force" in the Oakland community. She joined the Panthers

because she felt that they were the group most serious about combating police brutality. Hart recalled having weapons training both in the BSU and the Black Panther Party. Although there were times where her work on *The Black Panther* and the Free Breakfast for Children program shielded her from the military aspects of the organization, there were also times when she "carried a gun in her purse."[17]

Hart's roommate, Janice Garrett–Forte, was also active in SFSU's BSU when she first became involved in the Panthers. She had met Newton and Seale when they came to speak on campus. Garrett–Forte and her roommates provided temporary housing for a few Panthers in their apartment and soon their apartment became a meeting place. At first, she was hesitant about the Panthers' armed stance, but as she learned more she came to accept the principle of self–defense. Being a supporter heightened her political consciousness and soon she felt she had no choice but to make a stand. She officially joined later that year.[18]

Several women were part of the armed delegation of thirty Panthers, local activists, and community supporters who went to the state legislature in Sacramento on 2 May 1967 to register opposition to the Mulford Bill prohibiting the carrying of unconcealed firearms in public. This protest, made infamous by the delegation's mistaken entry onto the floor of the legislature, was one of the Panthers' first actions that garnered national and international publicity. The Sacramento incident resulted in an increase in membership, especially among college students and young people who wanted to fight police brutality. Mary Williams described the conditions in Oakland as "really terrible," pointing out that "anyone who came along who had ideas about moving ahead, people would have listened, because it was really bad. You couldn't even talk to a policeman." Williams, her husband, and her brother–in–law joined after the Sacramento incident.[19]

Women added their voices to debates over the meaning of their structural and organizational participation. Although they participated in the broad range of Panther political activities, the party created a separate category of membership for women, called the "Pantherettes," with its own all female leadership structure. Little information remains about the Pantherette status; however, the term disappeared from Panther internal documents by 1968, when women were integrated into the organizational structure under a predominantly male leadership. Like many structural transitions in Panther history, this change might have been rooted in internal debate, but it was born out of exigency and shaped by political repression. In August 1967, Seale was arrested, charged with disturbing the peace for his role in the Sacramento incident, and sentenced to six months in prison. On 28 October 1967, after being stopped by the police in the early morning hours, a melee ensued which left Newton and one police officer wounded,

and another police officer dead. Both BPP founders were in prison almost one year after the organization was launched.

Eldridge Cleaver subsequently stepped to the forefront as the Panthers' principal spokesperson. Cleaver had gained much popular acclaim after his 1968 publication of *Soul on Ice*, a collection of his writings from prison on race, sex, and black liberation in the United States. Cleaver, a convicted rapist, wrote frankly about raping black women to refine his "technique" before moving on to "white prey."[20] *Soul on Ice* concluded with an extended allegory about the emasculation of black men by slavery, the power of white men as "the omnipotent administrators," and the "ultrafeminine" white women. In this scenario, black women were described as "self–reliant Amazons."[21] *Soul on Ice*'s blatant misogyny did not hinder Cleaver's ascension to Panther leadership, although at least one local chapter would later question the contradiction between the BPP's commitment to gender equality and its endorsement of *Soul on Ice* as suggested reading.[22]

Cleaver recruited Kathleen Neal, a SNCC activist, to help organize around Newton's case. Cleaver's interest in Neal was both political and personal, and after SNCC's campus program was over in July, Neal visited Cleaver in the Bay Area. The two were married after Neal relocated in November. Kathleen Cleaver's organizing experience in SNCC made her an invaluable resource for the crisis–ridden Panthers. She found the Panthers "in a total state of collapse," with "no office, no newspaper, no meetings." She began to initiate fund–raising activities on the Panthers' behalf and planned demonstrations to raise awareness about Newton's case. She served as a contact person with the press about Panther–sponsored events. Soon she came to see herself as a Panther and described her position as "Communications Secretary" to reflect her pivotal role as Panther publicist and contact person.[23] Cleaver would play a pivotal role as the first woman on the Panther Central Committee and become one of the most recognizable public faces of the BPP. Her legitimacy was not derived from her marriage to Eldridge Cleaver but from the considerable array of skills and experiences she brought to the BPP.

Panther women and scholars have asserted that tasks within the organization were assigned by skill rather than gender.[24] Skill acquisition, however, was clearly not gender neutral, and the Panthers sometimes replicated the gender realities of U.S. society that left women disproportionately in possession of domestic and clerical skills. Evidence of gender expectations around the distribution of work was visible in a March 1968 advertisement on the back page of *The Black Panther* that announced that the San Francisco BPP office was in need of people who could "type well and want to work for black liberation." The advertisement cautioned: "Jive Sisters: Don't Read This!" Although "jive" behavior was not defined, the

placement of this caution suggested both an assumption that women would fill these positions and a sense that conflict might potentially occur (or had occurred) if a certain type of woman volunteered herself.[25] Typing was both a tedious chore and a skill that some women were proud to contribute to the cause of black liberation in an organization that did not solely understand (or limit) women's involvement in terms of clerical work. It is important to note that women's clerical work had a particular currency in the black community because racism had historically circumscribed black women's employment opportunities and relegated them to menial labor.

Brenda Presley's first involvement in the Panthers was assisting with typing tasks in the San Francisco office. She had been seeking political involvement long before she joined the BPP in 1968. Televised civil rights demonstrations which showed violence being meted out to peaceful pro-testers pushed Presley to explore local political formations: "I wanted [the nonviolent protesters] to fight. I realized that I couldn't do that. I couldn't not fight back because I don't have the temperament for it. . . . I had been to the mosque a couple of times, but I wasn't happy with the relationship between the men and women . . . Muslims at that time. And there were things I was doing in my church, but it wasn't enough." Presley became involved in one of the many African dance groups springing up around the country that reflected the popularity of African cultural forms by many African Americans. Panthers in uniform caught her eye at one event in 1967: "I liked the militancy. I liked the fact that they appeared to be disciplined and they didn't take any mess from anybody. They were really serious and that impressed me."[26] Shortly thereafter, Presley had a random encounter in San Francisco that would change her life. On the way home from get-ting a haircut, she saw a young man with a "wild natural" in front of a storefront. Presley recounted: "He said: 'Hey, hey sister.' And I look up. 'Can you type?' And I said 'yeah, I can type.' 'Well, will you come in here and type something for me?' So, I say 'no, [laughter] … I'm not typing anything for you.' He said, 'Nah, sista, you don't understand. This is for the Panthers. You gotta type for Minister Huey P. Newton, we've gotta get this stuff out.' And when I heard Huey P. Newton, I said 'Oh! I know about Huey P. Newton. What is it you're typing?'" Presley then realized that she was standing in front of a BPP office. She went inside, saw that they were trying to put material together for the newspaper, and added her typing skills to the effort. When she was asked to do more, she balked. "He said we've got to get this paper out. This is for the people. He went on and on and on." She promised to come back one day during the following week and did. Her work as a typist led to meeting other Panthers, and feeling a real sense of belonging and community. After a month or two, she was a full–fledged member.[27]

These early Panthers immersed themselves in radical protest politics to challenge police brutality and economic discrimination, and opened the doors of the organization for other women. While it is clear that their inclusion in the organization was not without contention, it is also clear that they remade the Panthers' image in a way that included them and challenged narrow notions about women's place in social protest.

Revolutionary Images?

In mid–1968, *The Black Panther* featured images that portrayed black men and women as powerful fighters battling police, who were depicted as fat, slovenly pigs, symbolically stripped of their authority, dignity, and humanity. These images were a crucial part of the language in which the Panthers communicated their gender politics to the world. Women were central in images created by graphic artists Emory Douglas, Tareka Lewis, and others, which ranged from carefully "posed" posters, to candid shots of Panthers engaged in political work, to stylized political cartoons depicting Panthers protecting the black community. The Panthers created images that valorized the armed, revolutionary black woman at a time when the dominant sociological and public policy arguments said that strong black women were detrimental to the family and therefore the community, and both liberal integrationist and conservative nationalist rhetoric promoted patriarchy. In stark contrast to the image of women spontaneously and individually engaging in self–defense, which emerged from the civil rights movement, the Panthers posited black women as proactive and organized—acting alongside men as defenders of the black community. The Panthers had been especially influenced by the popular film "The Battle of Algiers," which highlighted the role of women insurgents in guerilla warfare, and the example of Vietnamese women who were "out there fighting with their brothers . . . against American imperialism" even with their "babies on their backs."[28] They implicitly and explicitly linked the image of the female guerilla fighters in anticolonial and national liberation movements throughout the developing world with the image of black women engaged in armed insurrection.

These images are richly provocative in their demonstration of women's revolutionary agency; however, they leave the larger question of egalitarianism unanswered. Women's pivotal roles in international guerilla movements did not always translate into empowerment outside of the field of battle or after the revolution.[29] Battles for national liberation all too often reinscribed patriarchy by analyzing gender contradictions as a secondary consideration. These images thus represent the Panthers' replication of the potentials and limitations of the trope of the female guerilla fighter.

This is exemplified in one of the most striking images of revolutionary womanhood that appeared in *The Black Panther*: a full–page shot publicizing Kathleen Cleaver's candidacy for the 18th Assembly District on the San Francisco Peace and Freedom Party ticket. Cleaver posed in a doorway, wearing all black and dark glasses, and holding a shot gun under the caption: "1968: BALLOT OR THE BULLET." Her image reflected strength and power. Although Cleaver was one of the most visible and respected Panther leaders, her struggles with domestic violence in her marriage to Eldridge Cleaver were an open secret. The Panthers' gender politics created a strong empowered "public" Kathleen Cleaver and thrust the victimized Cleaver into the realm of the "private." This private realm was very much constructed. The intensity of the relationships built by BPP members, the almost round–the–clock political work they engaged in, and their ideological commitment to the personal being political, meant that there were few aspects of members' lives which were truly unseen. This is evident by the fact that the abuse of Kathleen Cleaver by her husband was outed and deployed as a weapon against Eldridge Cleaver during the early–1970s factional disputes between Cleaver and Newton. The silences around the physical abuse of Panther women were very much willful. Scholar Joy James has argued that: "The issue of female abuse and battery by male leaders and the rank and file in the Black Panther Party . . . remains somewhat of a taboo among African Americans."[30]

Sexism and Power

As women became a vital membership core within the organization, complaints about sexism became more prevalent. Panther women struggled against gender inequality without overtly identifying with the larger feminist movement. Scholars of black feminism have argued that "the combination of pressure to maintain (at least outwardly) racial solidarity with Black men and of alienation from the agenda of the predominantly White, middle–class women's movement account, historically, for Black women's reluctance to identify as feminists."[31] They utilized the language of social justice, and increasingly Marxist rhetoric, to fight against female subordination. Panther Roberta Alexander wrote an article in *The Black Panther* charging that issues such as "women leadership," "women being able to be armed, to defend themselves as well as the brothers," "whether or not the women . . . also take part in the running of the offices, not just behind the typewriters," and "whether or not the women are supposed to do so and so for the cause of the revolution" had become so "principal" that the organization thought more about "the contradictions between the women and the men, between the sisters and the brothers," than about

the "pigs."[32] At the same time, spurred by internal ideological shifts and the realities of political repression, Panther rhetoric increasingly promoted gender equality. Many Panther women struggled to bridge the distance between BPP rhetoric and reality.

Many Panther leaders acknowledged that sexism within the organization existed but argued that it was less virulent than in the larger American society and could be adequately addressed within the Panther organizational structure. Seale argued that in response to men who were violent towards women, demanded sexual favors, or used verbal intimidation, the Panthers had initiated dialogue on gender discrimination, enforced punishments, and adopted such rules as "Do not take liberties with women," one of the "8 Points of Attention" that every Panther had to memorize.[33] Kathleen Cleaver noted that the source of sexism within the BPP was rooted in American society: "When women suffered hostility, abuse, neglect, and assault—this was not something arising from the policies and structures of the Black Panther Party, something absent from the world—that's what *was* going on in the world." Cleaver argued that the Panthers uniquely "put a woman in a position when such treatment occurred to contest it."[34] Douglas concurred, noting that the Panthers provided a structure of accountability and a suggested code of conduct. He argued that there were "mechanisms in place" to "deal with" situations such as people in leadership or in the rank–and–file "who couldn't take orders from women. Or who didn't want to because of their ego." The Panthers were engaged in what he described as an "ongoing cleansing process" and an "adjustment" facilitated "by having rules and regulations and PE classes and sisters in leadership that brothers had to work under."[35]

The BPP's embrace of Marxist–Leninist ideology in the late 1960s infused their rhetoric about gender equality with socialist overtones. Seale argued that the Panthers were "moving on that principle of absolute equality between male and female: because male chauvinism is related to the very class nature of this society as it exists today."[36] In an interview published in 1969, several Panther women argued that over time women had taken leading roles in political matters and performed fewer clerical tasks because the BPP had come to realize that "male chauvinism and all its manifestations are bourgeois and . . . the success of the revolution depends upon the women."[37] They explicitly situated their activism in the context of the women's liberation movement. They argued that autonomous women's organizations were problematic and ending gender oppression would require a socialist revolution.[38]

The Panthers' organizational structure was not simply a mirror to (or a corrective for) larger trends in American society; it was a fluid terrain where gender and power were contested in new ways. The Panthers' shift

to the left included the adoption of a democratic centralist organizational structure that was rigidly hierarchical and rarely democratic. As a result, the gendered nature of organizational power dynamics became even more emphasized. Male leaders, even those most vocal about gender equality, were not held accountable to organizational codes of conduct in their intimate relationships (which were usually with Panther women). And women who did not have high organizational rank or were not tied to powerful Panther men had less recourse in addressing gender discrimination. Sexism reinforced power imbalances within the organizational hierarchy. As former Panther Mumia Abu–Jamal observed, "for men who, often for the first time in their lives, exercised extraordinary power over others, sexism became a tool of sexual dominance over subordinates."[39]

Engendering Repression

The bravery of some Panther women in the face of political repression directly challenged ideas of male supremacy within the organization. By September 1968, the FBI had focused its Counter Intelligence Program (COINTELPRO) efforts on the Panthers and classified them as the "most violence–prone organization of all the extremist groups now operating in the United States."[40] By 1969, many Panther leaders nationwide were either imprisoned, in exile, or underground; the FBI was investigating every single chapter and twelve hundred members to "obtain evidence of possible violations of federal and local laws"; and the BPP was heavily infiltrated by spies and provocateurs.[41] The arrest of Ericka Huggins after her husband, John Huggins, and another Panther, Bunchy Carter, were killed in a well–publicized shooting on the campus of the University of California, Los Angeles , opened a dialogue about gender and repression. An open letter in *The Black Panther* written by Eldridge Cleaver in the wake of Huggins's arrest counseled that her "incarceration and . . . suffering . . . should be stinging rebuke to all manifestations of chauvinism within our ranks." It challenged Panther women to speak out in the face of discrimination, arguing that they had "a duty and the right to do whatever they want to do in order to see to it that they are not relegated to an inferior business position, and that they're not treated as though they are not equal members of the Party and equal in all regards."[42] In an interview, one Panther woman pointed out that repression had transformed how some Panthers understood gender: "Ericka became a good example because the pigs realized she was a revolutionary. Maybe we didn't realize that, in the sense that we thought about it all the time or brought her up as an example of a strong woman. But, I think the pigs realize that and this outside condition has forced us to realize that we can't operate as two halves, separate, apart from each other—we have to be unified."[43]

At the same time, mainstream assumptions about gender and leadership pervaded the government campaign against the Panthers. Huggins argued that the police particularly targeted male Panthers because they assumed that they were the leaders. In reality, however, "behind the scenes women ran almost every program were involved in every level of the party, even the most behind the scenes." COINTELPRO created an organizational crisis that, ironically, provided fertile ground for women. In the context of repression and internal destabilization, women provided the organizational foundation that allowed the Panthers to withstand some of the ravages of COINTELPRO. Huggins noted that as a result of men being "jailed and killed in greater numbers" and removed from formal leadership, "women rose in the ranks of leadership." Some men "may have had internal unresolved things about women, but about women in leadership, we were in too much danger everyday to say 'No women.' It was not like that. We were not an intellectually–based organization. We made decisions made on need, and often, too often, we made decisions based on survival."[44]

By 1972, state political repression and the bitter internecine battles they fueled had led to the Black Panther Party's decline as a nationwide organization. The FBI took responsibility for the "the chaotic condition of BPP" which resulted from its "intensive counterintelligence efforts aimed at causing dissension between Newton and Cleaver and within the Party."[45] After leading Panthers were expelled, several chapters left the organization, and this factional struggle turned violent. Newton dismantled most of the remaining chapters and focused organizational resources on achieving community control, and political power, in Oakland, California, in the 1970s.

Although some scholars have argued that during this period the BPP had become deradicalized and largely defunct, recent autobiographical writing and scholarly texts have connected the Panthers' local quest for community control to a larger pattern of political reform in urban communities nationwide in the 1970s. Hundreds of Panthers from across the country relocated in the early seventies to launch the Panthers' Oakland base of operations strategy. By 1973, women made up almost 50 percent of the total membership base. Their influence within the organization was amplified by the fact that they were a highly–educated group.[46] The Panthers' structural reorganization and new political priorities provided new opportunities for women, especially in the area of formal and informal leadership.

The Personal Is Political

In their transformation from movement to organization in the 1970s, the Panthers launched "probably the largest African American participation in communal living," according to scholar Timothy Miller.[47] The permeable

borders between workplace and home space, public and private, soon became a fertile laboratory for imaginative social experimentation. Panther women made reproduction, parenting, and sexuality crucial parts of the organizational dialogue. The Panthers forged their own path between the nationalist argument that birth control was genocidal and part of the extermination of the black race, and mainstream feminist discourse which viewed motherhood as a source of women's oppression and birth control as integral to sexual freedom. Their organizational praxis around reproduction revealed both innovative possibilities for transformative gender politics, and the intractability of patriarchal beliefs about sex and parenting.

Sexual freedom, informally embraced by the Panthers, was often mediated by rank, personality, and, most importantly, gender. Some Panther women found the organization to be a place where they could celebrate and explore their sexuality. According to one Panther woman: "[Sexuality] was a very low–key thing in the Party. It was just natural that women had women lovers and men lovers at the same time. We all were sexually allowed whatever was our wish. Now, it wasn't like we were going to put this in the Party newspaper because we didn't feel it was necessary to make a political statement on the way that we lived. But we lived in a very open and collective and free realm."[48] Women, however, often faced restrictions on their sexual behavior. Some heterosexual male Panthers expected and demanded sexual favors from women. Earlier in the BPP's history, Eldridge Cleaver condoned the utilization of women's bodies as a reward for male political behavior and dubbed it "pussy power," much like the antiwar movement's popular refrain "women say yes to men who say no [to the draft]." While some women were uncritical of this designation, others felt coerced by it. One Panther woman castigated some male comrades for the "abuse and misuse" of Party women under the guise of sexual freedom. "Whithin [sic] past months a comrade slopped into bed with me and began to disrobe me and have sex, to which I firmly objected and he did finally give up. But this same comrade barely speaks to me or trys [sic] to take me out or anything like that. Its [sic] not as if this happens daily, but it happens too much. Incidents like this that dont [sic] get reported and are just thought of casually perpetuate all of the terrible misconceptions of the Black Panther woman."[49]

Literary scholar Margo Perkins has argued that "while the Party's rejection in principle of the commoditization of intimate relationships under capitalism (specifically, the ownership of one's lover/partner) was liberating in many ways, the freedom to be intimate with multiple partners predictably translated into different consequences for women than for men."[50] Women were expected to rear children born from sexual liaisons, while men "generally retained the freedom to accept or renege on parental

responsibilities."[51] Under the guidance of women, the BPP launched an internal dialogue about sexuality and created programs to be responsive to the specific needs of women and children. In a July 1972 memo on establishing an organizational birth control policy, Audrea Jones, director of the Panthers' People's Free Medical Research Health Clinic, argued that pregnancies burdened the organization with "bulk increases in financial expenses," increased responsibilities for child care, and "bulk decreases in manpower." Jones criticized the unspoken expectation within the BPP that women would take responsibility for birth control as "backwards and unprogressive." She proposed birth control education classes for both men and women to address not only "the pros and cons of various birth control devises and methods, but also, and more importantly, the responsibility and necessity for us to do so."[52] A subsequent memo by Jones to Central Body members again urged dialogue on planning parenthood within the Party, and policies for expectant mothers.[53] Panther women created institutional support for their children through the BPP's community programs. In 1971, the Panthers created the Intercommunal Youth Institute (IYI), a program begun as a response to the harassment that some Panther children were facing in school.[54] Brenda Bay directed the Institute, which taught a variety of subjects, including math, language arts, science, people's art, environmental studies, and political education. Oakland parents appreciated the academic rigor and progressive educational philosophy that the Institute provided and soon the student base of the school expanded. The Panthers renamed the IYI the Oakland Community School (OCS) and moved into a larger building. In 1973, Huggins became the Director of the OCS, working closely alongside Donna Howell, the codirector, to develop the curriculum, coordinate publicity, and run the school's day–to–day operations. OCS students, ranging in age from two to eleven years old, received full tuition and health care and lived in dorms where they received three nutritious meals a day.[55] According to Huggins, "People from all over the globe acknowledged the school as not only a great alternative to public education but an amazing experiment in community and a guiding force in the lives of students. It was more than a school. It was a community within itself. . . . We cared for the total child."[56] The OCS earned a nationwide reputation for excellence in community–based education. In February 1976, the OCS was featured on the cover of one of the most popular magazines in black America, *Jet*. By 12 May 1976, approximately 125 children attended the OCS.[57] One year later the school was recognized by the California State Legislature for its inventive student–centered curriculum.

In addition to the IYI, the Panthers created a Child Development Center (CDC) as a daycare for Panther youth. By the end of 1972, there were close to eighty children in the Panther collective: eight of whom had been

born that year, twenty–one in the CDC, and forty–eight in the IYI.[58] The Panthers adopted collective parenting, providing for the material needs of the children, and boarding them during the weekdays in dormitories. The goals of the these programs were to socialize Panther children to a collective lifestyle, parent children who might not have one or both parents present, and meet women's childcare needs. This innovative arrangement supported Panther women's commitment to being mothers and political activists. It reflected the desire of some black women not to be liberated from mother-hood but to be supported in a role they highly valued.[59]

For the men and women who staffed the IYI and CDC, taking care of the children was a work area that was central to the organizational mission and had its own unique challenges and rewards. James Abron recalled: "The Party basically took care of you from dusk to dawn if you had kids. The people who worked at the school, those were the ones who were basically in charge of your kids. You were basically given your kids on the weekends, but Monday through Friday, we would teach 'em, feed 'em, take 'em to our dormitories and wash 'em, help them with their homework, put 'em to bed, clean their clothes, wipe their butts and then [laughter] the process would start over again."[60]

Innerparty memoranda reflected the shared understanding that all Panthers, men and women, were to share in the responsibility of parent-ing Panther children, even if they did not have any biological offspring in the IYI or CDC. This was not just a reflection of their ideology, but it was also grounded in the notion of black extended–family collectivity. In these memoranda all Panthers were invited "to help out at the Center and learn methods of child development." Parents were asked to turn over their children's medical information, and instructed when to pick up their children for weekend visits and how to file an accident report if a child was injured outside of the collective care structure.[61] In November 1973 the Panthers announced that "No comrades should mistreat our children. They should be well–fed, kept clean and treated like growing, developing young people with their own specific needs and desires that must be, until they are capable, met by us. We are all their parents." Anyone who disobeyed would be punished.[62]

Scholars and activists have called for more attention to be paid to in-novative approaches to parenthood by Black Power activists. Perkins has argued that "Given the [Black Panther] Party's praise and promotion of motherhood, it is ironic that no real attention was given to this matter as part of an ongoing formulation of revolutionary strategy." Activist Toni Cade commented that the glorification of black motherhood by Black Power activists should be accompanied by concrete plans for alternative parent-ing models, including "a new vision of man and woman," both of whom

have a voice in "calling the shots about pregnancy" and the discussion of the feasibility of such support systems as "communes, day–care centers, pregnancy stipends."[63] The BPP's attempts to foster an alternative model of parenting, and institutionalize it within their organizational structure, can be understood as an innovative response to the realities that Panther women faced.

Panther Women at the Helm

Women began to hold formal leadership roles in the mid–1970s. Women had increased access to the reigns of power because of the leadership vacuum created by the absence of key male Panther leaders, and because they had acquired an impressive array of political skills, honed in less visible roles. Huggins argued that "it became apparent at one point that women should become a really viable part of the Central Committee. And some of that had to do with women asking for it, and some of it had to do with the fact that women were the ones who were running everything anyway."[64] Elaine Brown, who had served as deputy minister of information of the Southern California chapter, editor of "The Black Panther," and Panther city council candidate in 1973, was made chairperson by Newton in 1974 after he went into exile to escape criminal charges.

Brown promoted several of the most capable and efficient BPP members, many of whom were women, to Central Committee positions. The Panthers' Central committee contained five women who oversaw campaign work, organizational finances, legal defense, and the OCS. Brown's explicit embrace of feminist stances heightened the internal contradictions about gender within the organization. During her seven years in the Black Panther Party she had been confronted by male–supremacist attitudes and faced gender discrimination. Three of Brown's closest comrades, Ericka Huggins, Evon Carter, and Gwen Goodloe, joined her in her antisexist stance. According to Brown, they gained notoriety as "The Clique" and vowed, "We had no intention of rewarding any Brothers with our bodies, in the bedroom or the kitchen."[65] According to Brown, her intimate relationship with Newton and her anti–deferential attitude angered many male Panthers. Brown recalled becoming aware that: "A woman attempting leadership was, to my proud black Brothers, making an alliance with the 'counter–revolutionary, man–hating, lesbian, feminist white bitches.' It was a violation of some Black Power principle that was left undefined. If a black woman assumed a role of leadership, she was said to be eroding black manhood, to be hindering the progress of the black race. She was an enemy of black people."[66]

Brown's embrace of feminism, and her description of the struggles for gender equality within the BPP has dovetailed with the popular and aca-

demic perception of the organization, largely shielding her tenure as leader from nuanced scholarly critical analysis.[67] Although Brown is critical of the Panthers gender politics in her autobiography she depicts her embrace of the militarism that undergirded Newton's leadership, her sexual liaisons with powerful white men, and her abuse of power with an uncritical lens. James has argued that some of Brown's actions can be seen as "counter-feminist and antirevolutionary" and that "Black feminist reconstructions of Brown are often silent about her disclosures of her own sexual excess, manipulation, and deployment of physical punishment against African Americans."[68] Clearly Brown's tenure as leader challenged any gender–essentialist assumptions that female stewardship would democratize all aspects of the organizational culture.

Under Brown's leadership, the Panthers prioritized electoral politics and local community organizing and became a formidable player on Oakland's political stage. Panthers were elected to key positions in local politics, including six positions on the West Oakland Model Cities governing board and seats on the Berkeley antipoverty board. The BPP aligned itself with the California Democratic Party, supporting liberal gubernatorial candidate Jerry Brown in his winning campaign in 1974 and Lionel Wilson's election as the first African American mayor of Oakland in 1977. Newton's return to the helm of the BPP in 1977 foreshadowed the BPP's final period of decline. Internal tensions, shrinking membership base, the departure of key Panther women, waning commitment to the collective structure, debilitating audits of community programs, and accusations against Newton of illegal activities led to the BPP's demise in 1982.

Conclusion

The Black Panther Party's record on gender is complex, filled with innovative moments of gender progressiveness as well as moments of blatant misogyny and sexism. (To complicate this further, sometimes these moments overlapped, as under Elaine Brown's leadership.) Yet the BPP has been defined more by its failure to transform sexist ways of thinking and doing, than by the process that occurred within its organizational structures of empowering women and men to engage in antisexist politics. To say this is not to minimize sexism's corrosive impact on individual women and on the organization's effectiveness as a whole; however, gender discrimination was rarely the definitive aspect of Panther women's experiences. As Abu–Jamal pointed out, the daily reality for most of these women included: "Hard work. Hard study. Jailed lovers. Survival. Striving. Times of promise. Times of terror. Resistance to male chauvinism. And hope."[69]

Panther membership had empowered black women and men to visualize an egalitarian model of gender relations not in isolation, but as part and parcel of the revolutionary transformation of society. Panther Jonina Abron's comments are instructive. When Abron joined the BPP in the 1970s, she expected to be part of "an organization that believes in the equality of men and women"; however, she soon realized that many "backward ideas" remained: "Within our Party, it bothers me that there are a couple of comrade brothers who still view women as sexual objects. We should have *no* men in the Black Panther Party who feel this way or women for that matter. It bothers me that there are a few brothers who seem unable to carry on a conversation with me once I explain that I am not interested in going to bed with them. It makes me feel that they feel I have no value beyond my body. . . . I would like to see the Party seriously begin to deal with this issue. While we have a number of women in leadership positions in our Party, they are respected by the men *because* they are in the leadership." Abron acknowledged that "ultimately it will take a new and humane society to alter the ways in which men and women in America treat each other," but she displayed a deep faith in the Panthers' potential to be something more. She declared, "I know we are all products of this society, but we should expect more from each other because we are members of the Black Panther Party. Why can't we love and respect each other as human beings instead of males and female?"[70]

Abron was just one of the many Panther women at the forefront of the organization's efforts to create alternative structures, institutions, and lifestyles during its sixteen–year history. These women resisted the narrow definitions placed on them by some nationalist men, sociologists, public policy makers, the Moynihan report, and the white woman's movement. Panther women's defiant claims of strength at a time when this very attribute was being demonized as dysfunctional, and their pivotal role in the promotion and practice of community defense, was a direct rebuttal to the Moynihan Report. Alongside men, these women exercised both formal and informal leadership, worked as organizers of Panther political campaigns, staffed and directed community survival programs and *The Black Panther*, and faced arrest and COINTELPRO. They redefined mothering and family in a way that would facilitate their activism and challenged the patriarchal assumptions embedded in a notion of sexual freedom predicated on unlimited male access to female bodies. In the process, they transformed themselves, the Black Panther Party, and the very idea of Black Power.

Notes

[1]Frances Beale, "Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Female," in *The Black Woman: An Anthology*, ed. Toni Cade (Mentor: New York, 1970), 92.

[2]Cynthia Griggs Fleming, "Black Women in Black Power: The Case of Ruby Doris Smith Robinson and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee," in *Sisters in the Struggle: African American Women in the Civil Rights–Black Power Movement*, ed. Bettye Collier–Thomas and V. P. Franklin (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 207; and Angela Davis, *Angela Davis: An Autobiography* (New York: International Publishers, 1974), 181–82.

[3]Elaine Brown, *A Taste of Power: A Black Woman's Story* (New York: Pantheon, 1992), 357.

[4]Farah Jasmine Griffin, "Conflict and Chorus: Reconsidering Toni Cade's *The Black Woman: An Anthology*," in *Is It Nation Time? Contemporary Essays on Black Power and Black Nationalism*, ed. Eddie S. Glaude Jr. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 124.

[5]Deborah K. King, "Multiple Jeopardy, Multiple Consciousness: The Context of a Black Feminist Ideology," in *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African–American Feminist Thought*, ed. Beverly Guy–Sheftall (New York: The New Press, 1995), 297, 312.

[6]Bobby Seale, *Seize the Time: The Story of The Black Panther Party and Huey P. Newton* (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1991), 67–68.

[7]*The Black Panther*, 25 April 1967.

[8]Farah Jasmine Griffin "'Ironies of the Saint': Malcolm X, Black Women and the Price of Protection," in *Sisters in the Struggle* (see note 2), 216. See also Griffin, "Conflict in Chorus," in Glaude, *Is It Nation Time?* 120–21.

[9]Griffin, "'Ironies of the Saint,'" 214–17.

[10]*The Black Panther*, 25 April 1967.

[11]Ibid.

[12]Melba Beals, *Warriors Don't Cry: A Searing Memoir of the Battle to Integrate Little Rock's Central High* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1995), 61–75; Doug McAdam, *Freedom Summer* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 90; and Charles Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 204, 209.

[13]See Sharon Harley, "'Chronicle of a Death Foretold': Gloria Richardson, the Cambridge Movement, and the Radical Black Activist Tradition," in *Sisters in the Struggle* (see note 2), 190; Timothy B. Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie: Robert F. Williams and the Roots of Black Power* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 165; and Ann Moody, *Coming of Age in Mississippi* (New York: Laurel, 1968), 326–29.

[14]Tareka Lewis, interview by author, 14 July 2002, tape recording, Sacramento, California.

[15]Angela D. LeBlanc–Ernest, "The Most Qualified Person to Handle the Job": Black Panther Party Women, 1966–1982," in *The Black Panther Party Reconsidered*, ed. Charles E. Jones (Baltimore: Black Classics Press, 1998), 307–8.

[16]Elendar Barnes, interview by author, 25 September 1997, tape recording, Brooklyn, New York.

[17]Judy [Hart] Juanita, interview by author, 20 October 1997, tape recording, Oakland, California.

[18]Janice Garrett–Forte, interview by author, 9 October 1997, tape recording, Oakland, California.

[19]Mary Williams, interview by author, 21 October 1997, tape recording, Oakland, California.

[20]Eldridge Cleaver, *Soul on Ice* (London: Granada Publishing Limited, 1970), 26.

[21]See Ibid., chap. 4.

[22]See Reynaldo Anderson, "Practical Internationalists: The Story of the Des Moines, Iowa, Black Panther Party," in *Groundwork: Local Black Freedom Movements in America*, ed. Jeanne Theoharis and Komozi Woodard (New York: New York University Press, 2004), 293–94.

[23]Kathleen Cleaver, interview by author, 24 November 1997, tape recording, New York, New York.

[24]See Kathleen Cleaver, "Women, Power, and Revolution," in *Liberation, Imagination and the Black Panther Party: A New Look at the Panthers and their Legacy*, ed. Kathleen Cleaver and George Katsiaficas (New York: Routledge, 2001), 125; and LeBlanc–Ernest, "The Most Qualified Person," 308.

[25]*The Black Panther*, 16 March 1968; scholar Gwendolyn Pugh brought this advertisement to my attention.

[26]Brenda Presley, interview by author, 22 October 1997, tape recording, Oakland, California.

[27]Ibid.

[28]"Black Panther Sisters talk about Women's Liberation," *The Movement*, September 1969.

[29]For example, see Stephanie Urdang, *Fighting Two Colonialisms: Women in Guinea–Bissau* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1979).

[30]Joy James, *Shadowboxing: Representations of Black Feminist Politics* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 102.

[31]Margo V. Perkins, *Autobiography as Activism: Three Black Women of the Sixties* (Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 2000), 114.

[32]*The Black Panther*, 2 August 1969.

[33]Ibid., 9 August 1969; Seale, *Seize the Time*, 387–403.

[34]See Cleaver, "Women, Power, and Revolution," 126.

[35]Emory Douglas, interview by author, 9 October 1997, tape recording, San Francisco, California.

[36]Seale, *Seize the Time*, 394.

[37]"Black Panther Sisters."

[38]Ibid.

[39]Mumia Abu Jamal, *We Want Freedom: A Life in the Black Panther Party* (Boston: South End Press, 2004), 166.

[40]Ward Churchill and Jim Vander Wall, *The COINTELPRO Papers: Documents from the FBI's Secret War Against Domestic Dissent in the United States* (Boston: South End Press, 1990), 124.

[41]Kenneth O'Reilly, *Racial Matters: The FBI's Secret File on Black America, 1960–1972* (New York: The Free Press, 1989), 298.

[42]*The Black Panther*, 5 July 1969.

[43]"Black Panther Sisters."

[44]Ericka Huggins, interview by author, 21 October 1997, tape recording, Oakland, California.

[45]"Informative Note," 4 March 1971, box 80, HPN Papers.

[46]"Memo to Comrade June from Comrade Ericka," box 10, folder: "Central Committee Info," HPN Papers; box 10, folder: "Central Committee Info," HPN Papers.

[47]Timothy Miller, *The 60s Communes: Hippies and Beyond* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1999), 171.

[48]Name withheld, interview by author, 1997, tape recording, Oakland, California.

[49]Ibid.

[50]Perkins, *Autobiography as Activism*, 104.

[51]Ibid., 105.

[52]"From Audrea Jones, To: Responsible Members . . . Re: Establishment of Birth Control Policy for Party Members," 22 July 1972, box 6, folder: Health Cadre Reports, HPN Papers.

[53]LeBlanc–Ernest, "The Most Qualified Person," 320–21.

[54]Michele Russell, "Conversation with Ericka Huggins. Oakland, California, 4/20/77," box 1, pp. 17, 20, HPN Papers.

[55]"Montclair Article," n.d., box 5, folder: "OCS Montclarion article 1976–1977," HPN Papers.

[56]"Ericka Huggins as a member of the county education board, Trustee Area 6," box 4, folder: "OCS Brochure," HPN Papers.

[57]"Montclair Article," n.d., box 5, folder: "OCS Montclarion article," HPN Papers; and LeBlanc–Ernest, "The Most Qualified Person," 317.

[58]"From Audrea Jones, To: Responsible Members," HPN Papers.

[59]This is evident later on when women withdrew their support from the collective childcare structure because it was not meeting their desire for individual time with their children. Letter to Huey from Tommye Williams, folder: "Reports on Comrades," box 14, HPN Papers.

[60]James Abron, interview by author, 6 October 1997, tape recording, Oakland, California.

[61]"Innerparty Memorandum #9," 27 September 1972, box 14, folder: Innerparty Memorandum, HPN Papers; "Innerparty Memorandum," 14 November 1973, box 14, folder: Innerparty Memorandum, HPN Papers; "Innerparty Memorandum # 15," 8 November 1972, box 14, folder: Innerparty Memorandum #16, HPN Papers; "Innerparty Memorandum," 15 November 1972, box 14, folder: Innerparty Memorandum, HPN Papers.

[62]Ibid.

[63]Toni Cade, "The Pill: Genocide or Liberation," in *The Black Woman* (see note 1), 165.

[64]Huggins interview.

[65]Brown, *A Taste of Power*, 192.

[66]Ibid., 357.

[67]Perkins is an exception to this. See Perkins, *Autobiography as Activism,* 114–30.

[68]James, *Shadowboxing*, 103.

[69]Abu–Jamal, *We Want Freedom*, 178.

[70]"Memo To: The Servant From: Comrade JoNina Abron," box 14, folder: "Reports on Comrades," HPN Papers.