

Southern Injustice and Radical Discontent:  
The Black Panther Party in the Post-Civil Rights South

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*“We are threatening the oppressors with the power of the people. One of the things that people in this country forget about, white people, is that they founded this country on overthrowing their oppressor. They made a revolution. And they forget completely what that revolution meant. They forget that we are carrying on a struggle in which they began.”<sup>1</sup>*

*Angela Davis*

The black freedom struggle exploded in the mid-twentieth century United States to challenge violent oppression woven into the fabric of the nation and historically inflicted upon the African American community. The struggle taking on different forms and methods, encompassing the North and the South, reached uncompromising extremes with the Black Panther Party (BPP) demands not only for black self-determination, but also a radical change in the structures of American society and power. The BPP's revolutionary mission spread throughout different parts of the nation prompting the government response to obliterate the organization at all costs.

To fully understand why the black freedom struggle developed to begin with, United States history, especially concerning the African American community, must be considered and certain questions must be asked. What does physical and psychological violence evident in the kidnapping and three centuries of enslavement do to the souls of a people? What is freedom and citizenship when you don't have civil rights and are locked out of opportunities of economic and social advancement both on an institutional and societal level? Furthermore, why can't the African American community be protected from white vigilante violence and the police whose job is to protect? These questions

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<sup>1</sup> Angela Davis, “We’re Threatening the Oppressors,” on *Liberation Music: Spiritual Jazz and the Art of Protest on Flying Dutchman Records 1969-1974* (London: Ace Records Ltd BGP Records, 2013).

must be acknowledged if one is to understand why the black freedom struggle arose and evolved to militant extremes echoing the circumstances faced by the African American communities living in this nation.

Reflecting upon the history of violence and neglect endured by black citizens in American life, and by activists through the nonviolent southern civil rights struggle, it is not illogical that a distrust of white society and government developed with the BPP representing the ultimate militant expression. After all, how would Anglo-Americans react if confronted with the same realities and history? The American Revolution, fought to shake off unrepresentative government, did not alter the slaves' reality, and once freedom was attained, African Americans were disproportionately and unconstitutionally left out of the spoils of democracy. In 1966 Oakland, enter the BPP and the ultimate black revolutionary expression determined to uplift the African American community and rewrite centuries of bitter wrongs.

To be clear, the BPP was certainly far from being a perfect organization, having very significant problems in leadership, ideology, and actions throughout their sixteen-year existence. The government, notably through the FBI and COINTELPRO, must be acknowledged as playing something of a lead role in much of the turmoil that encapsulated the party's leadership and direction. Under COINTELPRO, various modes of unconstitutional methods were used against the BPP, including wire-tapping, extensive infiltration, overt and legalistic repression, and targeted assassinations.<sup>2</sup> The

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<sup>2</sup>For detailed studies of repression carried out by the FBI and their COINTELPRO, especially regarding the BPP, see Ward Churchill and Jim Vander Wall, *Agents of Repression: The FBI's Secret Wars Against the Black Panther Party and the American Indian Movement* (Boston: South End Press, 1988); and Ward Churchill and Jim Vander

FBI also fabricated division within BPP ranks, creating insurmountable rifts in leadership and pitting the BPP against rival groups, further destabilizing the organization. For internal reasons and from the effects of intense repression, the organization suffered on many levels throughout their existence and reached their end in 1982, leaving behind a legacy romanticized by some, lambasted by most others, but their meaning and purpose still widely misunderstood.

It is too easy to write off the BPP as an unnecessarily violent organization, both in rhetoric and display, bent on overthrowing the United States government. In their earliest incarnation, the BPP openly advocated for armed revolution against the United States government and this exacerbated law enforcement repression against the organization. Reacting to the intensified repression, the BPP in 1969 made efforts to rid their organization of undisciplined members, halting new membership and chapter development, while shifting their efforts to focus more on community survival programs and later, participation in electoral politics. Organizing continued through National Committees to Combat Fascism (NCCF) and community information centers that operated within BPP guidelines and ideology.<sup>3</sup> While never fully scrapping their revolutionary politics, the BPP made great strides in helping their local communities that had been historically subjected to debilitating poverty, crumbling infrastructure and lack

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Wall, *The COINTELPRO Papers: Documents from the FBI's Secret Wars Against Domestic Dissent* (Boston: South End Press, 1990).

<sup>3</sup> As a result of the United Front Against Fascism Conference held in spring 1969, the BPP formed NCCFs. The NCCF developed into “a quasi-B.P.P. affiliate” and served as organizing agents of the BPP. Over time, NCCFs could become official BPP chapters. According to Holder, the only difference between an NCCF office and a BPP office was that the NCCF was established following the 1969 purge. Kim Kit Holder, “The history of the Black Panther Party, 1966-1971: A curriculum tool for Afrikan-American studies” (PhD. diss., University of Massachusetts, 1990), 126-129.

of resources, and police brutality. Within three years of their founding the BPP had spread from coast to coast and faced repression on local, state, and national levels, but the South had remained practically unchartered until 1970.<sup>4</sup>

Being the last bastion of slavery in the United States and the birthplace of the Ku Klux Klan, the South is a region historically notorious for violent treatment of the African American community. With Emancipation and the failures of Reconstruction, African Americans in the South faced the vicious Jim Crow system of segregation, including the stripping of civil rights and opportunities for social and economic advancement. Southern whites enforced this racist system using extreme violence most forcefully exemplified in the lynchings of thousands of African Americans. White supremacy remained steadfast as nonviolent civil rights activists of the 1950s and 1960s faced brutal resistance from citizens and government in challenging Jim Crow.<sup>5</sup> Prior to the civil rights era, armed self-defense had been used by African Americans to deflect the

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<sup>4</sup>According to the 1971 congressional report *Gun Barrel Politics*, within two years the BPP grew from being a local Oakland operation to an organization of between to “1,500 and 2,000 members scattered in 25 chapters across the nation.” The report says that from October 1966 to early 1971, the BPP, at one time or another, had official or associated chapters in at least 61 cities in 28 states, including the District of Columbia, but “most of the chapters functioned in large urban centers outside the South.” In March 1971, FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover reported that approximately 48 affiliated organizations were currently operational, commonly as NCCFs or community information centers, and “had appeared in the South for the first time in 1970.” A list of known affiliates as of winter 1970 can be found on pages 88-89 of the report. Congress, House Committee on Internal Security, *Gun-Barrel Politics: The Black Panther Party, 1966-1971. Report, Ninety-Second Congress, First Session* (Washington: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1971), 69.

<sup>5</sup> The United Klans of America recruitment of over thirty thousand members by 1965 and their propensity for violence made them a “near-perfect replica” of the brutal vigilante group founded by Confederate veterans in 1866. Simon Wendt, *The Spirit and the Shotgun: Armed Resistance and the Struggle for Civil Rights* (Gainesville: The University Press of Florida, 2007), 47.

dangerous and demoralizing conditions in the South, but “only a minority of blacks was able to put such militant appeals into organized action.”<sup>6</sup>

Coinciding with the southern nonviolent civil rights actions, individuals such as Robert F. Williams, a NAACP leader from North Carolina, and later, the Deacons for Defense and Justice, openly advocated for armed self-defense as protection against white vigilantism and police brutality.<sup>7</sup> The Oakland BPP had deep southern roots that tapped into this militant tradition as their core leadership, and their rank and file, “consisted of recent migrants whose families traveled north and west to escape the southern racial regime, only to be confronted with new forms of segregation and repression.”<sup>8</sup> The hard-fought, blood-drenched successes of the nonviolent civil rights struggle, did little to alter the combustible social environment existing in the post-civil rights South. With police and vigilante violence rampant, and wretched poverty and living conditions a regular reality for most African Americans, the BPP entered the southern scene in the attempt to rip out the bloody roots of centuries of racialized injustice.

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Moving forward, the purpose of this paper is not to untangle the complex history, ideologies, and influences of the BPP, nor is it to justify the validity of the organization’s aims. Numerous works exist that attempt to accomplish this task and they receive

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<sup>6</sup> Wendt, *The Spirit and the Shotgun*, 12.

<sup>7</sup> For more information on Robert F. Williams, see Timothy B. Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie: Robert F. Williams & the Roots of Black Power* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999); for a history of the Deacons for Defense and Justice see Lance E Hill, *The Deacons for Defense: Armed Resistance and the Civil Rights Movement* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

<sup>8</sup> Donna Jean Murch, *Living for the City: Migration, Education, and the Rise of the Black Panther Party in Oakland, California* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 6.

treatment in the historiography that follows. The historiography also shows attempts made to present localized chapter histories of the BPP to highlight unique conditions inherent in each locale and the challenges faced by rank and file members that ultimately determined the BPP's local reception and overall success. This paper falls into the latter realm of the historiographical survey focusing on the BPP presence in four different states in the post-civil rights South.

In examining BPP operations in Kentucky, Tennessee, Georgia, and Texas, this paper provides a general overview of the localized development and challenges faced by members, both internally and as a result of repression, and also their contributions to their southern communities. By no means an exhaustive treatment of these areas, this is instead an exploration intended to open up new, or expand upon existing avenues of local BPP research. As will be shown, community conditions, chapter development, and government response varied by location, and while every locale may not have had dependable leadership or members that always conducted themselves honorably, each undeniably encountered intense forms of repression from law enforcement agencies and the courts.

## HISTORIOGRAPHY

“All Power to the People!”<sup>9</sup> This declaration, delivered with uncompromising militancy and resolve by the Black Panther Party for Self Defense (BPP), symbolizes the ideological mission and programs designed to radically alter the makeup of American society and the world. The history of the United States is one of troubled race relations, and the African American community bears many scars. Having endured centuries of slavery, African American “freedom” has consisted of various forms of racism, discrimination, and violence. In confronting injustices, the civil rights struggles of the 1950s and 1960s centered on the Jim Crow South, while the Black Power movement, emphasizing “black pride and black self-determination,” gained traction across America.<sup>10</sup> Founded in Oakland, CA in 1966 by Huey Newton and Bobby Seale, the BPP rose as a revolutionary Black Power organization determined to confront the challenges faced by African American communities with the goal of radically transforming America.

A “radical nationalist movement calling for political autonomy,” the BPP advocated for armed self-defense against police brutality and they quickly gained the government and nation’s attention.<sup>11</sup> The BPP experienced impressive national growth, but their rhetoric of armed self-defense and revolution, and confrontations with the police led FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover, in 1968, to proclaim the BPP to be “the greatest [single] threat to the internal security of the country” justifying greater government

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<sup>9</sup> JoNina Abron, “Raising the Consciousness of the People: The Black Panther Intercommunal News Service, 1967-1980,” in *Voices From the Underground: Insider Histories of the Vietnam Era Underground Press*, ed. Ken Wachsberger (Tempe: Micas Press, 1993), 344.

<sup>10</sup> Jeffrey O.G. Ogbar, introduction to *Black Power: Radical Politics and African American Identity* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2004), 2.

<sup>11</sup> Paul Alkebulan, *Survival Pending Revolution: The History of the Black Panther Party* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2007), 10.

infiltration efforts, attacks, and repression that inevitably took a tremendous toll on the BPP locally and at headquarters.<sup>12</sup> In response to intense repression and growing internal conflicts, the BPP's political stance evolved, somewhat toning down on revolutionary rhetoric, and directing more organizational energy into their community programs. However, attacks by the government and law enforcement agencies did not cease, significantly contributing to the eventual demise of the organization.

Some of the earliest historical accounts of the BPP, many written while the organization still existed, tend to focus on national headquarters, leadership, and the sensational, commonly forwarding a limited, sometimes skewed, view of the BPP. A significant shift has been made since the mid-to-late 1990s as historians have taken different angles in examining the complex history of the BPP, including the utilization of compiled essay works featuring some of the most notable researchers in the field of BPP scholarship attempting to address the many layers of the organization. Even more recently, some historians have noted the gap in local and regional coverage and the limits this presents in building a more accurate and nuanced BPP historical narrative. While gains have been made in this area, certain regions, notably the South, have been significantly understudied. As is well documented in the historical survey, the BPP found political and ideological inspiration from various individuals and organizations existing in the South, but the BPP's presence is relatively understudied in the region.

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<sup>12</sup> Ward Churchill and Jim Vander Wall, *The COINTELPRO Papers: Documents from the FBI's Secret Wars Against Domestic Dissent* (Boston: South End Press, 1990), 123; Judson L. Jeffries and Ryan Nissim-Sabat, "The Second Installment," in *On the Ground: The Black Panther Party in Communities Across America*, ed. Judson L. Jeffries (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2010), ix. Jeffries and Nissim-Sabat note that the BPP chartered some forty branches, chapters, or National Committees to Combat Fascism with an estimated 5000 members at the organization's height.

Historical accounts of the BPP appeared well before the organizations demise and while these accounts may present useful information about BPP ideology and events as they unfolded, they unfortunately lack the time frame necessary for well-rounded historical analysis.<sup>13</sup> In the 1990s, BPP scholarship experienced a significant resurgence and Hugh Pearson's 1994 book, *The Shadow of the Panther*, offers an ambitious history of the BPP focusing largely on leader Huey Newton, party turmoil, and violence. In Pearson's view, the BPP was not an admirable enterprise in terms of conduct and the party ultimately created violent repercussions for the black community. Pearson downplays the BPP's community survival programs and does not place enough emphasis on the role of the FBI and local law enforcement in the organization's ultimate extinction, instead providing overwhelming attention to Newton's destructive behavior. Pearson's biased and single-minded interpretation of the BPP and Newton, as well as significant factual mishaps present in *The Shadow of the Panther*, have drawn a great deal of criticism from historians, activists, and former BPP members, highlighting the need for, and helping to instigate, more robust and balanced analysis of the group.<sup>14</sup>

Fostering a new wave of BPP scholarship, Charles E. Jones compiled a series of diverse essays in the 1998 book, *The Black Panther Party [Reconsidered]*, a notable first

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<sup>13</sup> For early historical accounts of the BPP, see Gene Marine, *The Black Panthers* (New York: New American Library, 1969); Reginald Major, *A Panther is a Black Cat* (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1971); and Gail Sheehy, *Panthermania: The Clash of Black Against Black in One American City* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971). Marine and Major's work focus primarily on BPP headquarters, while Sheehy gives a narrative of the New Haven, CT chapter.

<sup>14</sup> For a critical analysis challenging Pearson's position on the BPP, see Errol Anthony Henderson, "Shadow of a Clue," 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), 197-207.

step instrumental in “reconstructing the history” of the BPP.<sup>15</sup> The essays in *[Reconsidered]* provide detailed attention to the controversial and often misunderstood, multi-faceted history and legacy of the BPP by addressing the mythology used to vilify the group, the oft-neglected importance of the rank-and-file, evolving organizational and gender dynamics, and organizational decline. Negative elements of BPP history are not withheld in *[Reconsidered]*, but neither are the important, more positive elements of community outreach and goals for a transformed America. *[Reconsidered]*, while primarily focused on an overarching view of the BPP operations, is an important contribution in facilitating the evolving approach to a quality and relatively balanced interpretation of the BPP.

Jones’ reliance on essay contributions compiled into a cooperative, unified work is an effective formula for addressing the many aspects of the BPP’s history and is used throughout the resurgence of BPP scholarship. The 2001 *Liberation, Imagination, and the Black Panther Party*, edited by George Katsiaficas and former BPP member, Kathleen Cleaver, continues the systematic process of examining the BPP historical narrative. The editors assert that the BPP, as just one of numerous groups dedicated to radical and revolutionary change in 1960s America, distinguished itself as the only organization able to build a large following that appealed to broad segments of the population. Like Jones’ *[Reconsidered]*, Cleaver and Katsiaficas bring together numerous essays from scholars and activists, expanding the historical record, sources, and interpretation, illustrating how

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<sup>15</sup> Charles E. Jones, “Reconsidering Panther History: The Untold Story,” in *The Black Panther Party [Reconsidered]*, ed. Charles E. Jones (Baltimore: Black Cat Press, 1998), 11.

the BPP gave organizational expression to “the idea that the entire system is corrupt and needs to be reconstructed.”<sup>16</sup>

Interpretation of Black Power groups and self-defense advocates of the American South are crucial to understanding the BPP’s ideological and political development as a revolutionary organization. The 2006 book *Black Power in the Belly of the Beast*, edited by Judson Jeffries, covers ground in exposing the diverse organizations, active in different regions of America, that were “dynamic, eclectic, serious, and interested in one overarching goal: to achieve what their predecessors failed to do in bringing about a fully democratic way of life” for African Americans.<sup>17</sup> Any true historical work covering the BPP should certainly cover the organization’s influences, but Jeffries’ compiled work goes further in illustrating the local conditions, development, intersections, and occasional clashes of Black Power organizations.<sup>18</sup> Noting that “little interrogation has been made of the inner workings of the Black Panther Party as an organization,” Jeffries’

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<sup>16</sup> George Katsiaficas, “Introduction,” 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), vii.

<sup>17</sup> Judson L. Jeffries, “The Fall and Legacy of the Black Power Movement,” in *Black Power in the Belly of the Beast*, ed. Judson L. Jeffries (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 298.

<sup>18</sup> For detailed attention of southern influences including the Deacons for Defense and Justice and former NAACP leader and self-defense advocate Robert F. Williams, see Judson L. Jeffries, ed., *Black Power in the Belly of the Beast* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006); Timothy B. Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie: Robert F. Williams & the Roots of Black Power* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999); and Lance E. Hill, *The Deacons of Defense: Armed Resistance and the Civil Rights Movement* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

work ushers in a new approach to BPP scholarship with an essay, drawing attention to the BPP on a local level, covering several cities, including Baltimore and New Orleans.<sup>19</sup>

While diversely compiled essay collection works make up a large portion of modern BPP historiography, some sources focus on more singular ideas, drawing pieces of BPP history together to round out their arguments. In the 2006 book *Up Against the Wall*, author Curtis J. Austin offers another perspective on the BPP in his thorough examination that considers the significant role that violence, real or perceived, whether internal or external, played in the building, growth, organizational platform, and ultimately, the organization's violent destruction. Curtis' work is a critique of the BPP's first six years and he asserts that, during this period, violence "constituted the central element driving the group's decision-making processes."<sup>20</sup> He includes some analysis of BPP activity in the South and East. Concerning the South, he mainly focuses on National Committees to Combat Fascism (NCCF) and chapters in New Orleans and North Carolina illustrating how BPP retaliatory violence against law enforcement in these areas "gave authorities the justification they needed to rid black communities of the Panther menace" as seen in "the rest of the Panther chapters established below the Mason-Dixon line."<sup>21</sup>

The media also played an over-arching role in BPP history helping to publicize the organization while also shaping public perception and response from the point of view of law enforcement. Jane Rhodes, in her ironically titled 2007 book, *Framing the*

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<sup>19</sup> Judson L. Jeffries, "An Unexamined Chapter of the Black Panther History," in Jeffries, *Black Power and the Belly of the Beast*, 187.

<sup>20</sup> Curtis J. Austin, introduction to *Up Against the Wall: Violence in the Making and Unmaking of the Black Panther Party* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2006), xxi.

<sup>21</sup> Curtis J. Austin, *Up Against the Wall*, 266.

*Black Panthers*, describes how the BPP used the media as a tool to “create, manipulate, and subvert mass culture,” frequently taking an intentionally provocative stance in drawing attention to their organization and the needs of the black community, predictably leading to repression by law enforcement agencies.<sup>22</sup> Well-publicized accounts of BPP militancy, legal troubles, and confrontations with law enforcement, reaffirmed by repression and denigration by the state, have assisted in framing the BPP as an illegitimate menace to society. Rhodes analyzes various sources in examining the development, actions, and evolution of the BPP, including their community outreach efforts, challenging the claims of some scholars and critics that the BPP’s historical legitimacy stems from media-created curiosity and overexposure.

The BPP’s sixteen-year existence is frustratingly complex and difficult to pin down, and since the BPP dramatically changed politically, ideologically, and organizationally during its existence, awareness of certain periods and years is necessary to make sense of it all. Paul Alkebulan’s text *Survival Pending Revolution*, published in 2007, seeks to untangle this mixed legacy by breaking the BPP history into three time frames to further clarify the shifts in ideology and goals, internal struggles, and response from government and law enforcement.<sup>23</sup> *Survival Pending Revolution* also provides brief, yet necessary insight into BPP regional development, including the South.

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<sup>22</sup> Jane Rhodes, *Framing the Black Panther: The Spectacular Rise of a Black Power Icon* (New York: The New Press, 2007), 310.

<sup>23</sup> Alkebulan breaks the BPP’s history into three periods (1966 to 1971, 1971 to 1974, and 1974 to 1982) highlighting the BPP’s founding as “self-proclaimed revolutionaries advocating autonomy for black America,” including control of the police and the goal of changing the American political system to a “socialist entity,” to their unsuccessful foray into electoral politics, internal fissures, power struggles, and demise. The BPP began community service programs in 1969. Paul Alkebulan, introduction to *Survival Pending Revolution* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2007), xiii-xv.

According to Alkebulan, NCCFs served as the “first attempt by the Panther Party to establish a foothold in the South” and he gives a brief, yet informative glimpse into a few southern chapters.<sup>24</sup>

The historical approach of diving deeper into the BPP’s local and regional chapters has opened up new avenues of interpreting the organization. Judson Jeffries 2007 book, *Comrades*, begins the extended project of exploring the BPP’s chapters, noting the unique history, community concerns, and challenges each locale faced. Jeffries’ *Comrades*, greatly influenced by Charles E. Jones’ work, attempts to add to the limited available knowledge concerning the organizations’ rank and file.<sup>25</sup> As a compilation of scholarly essays analyzing different chapters in America, the work has obvious limitations concerning length and breadth, but does showcase local operations, community programs, and the FBI harassment and police repression faced by the BPP. Chapters devoted to the Winston-Salem and Baltimore areas serve as southern representations in *Comrades* and expand upon existing knowledge of BPP operations in the South.

Taking a similar approach to Jeffries’ work, Yohuru Williams and Jama Lazerow compiled five essays on local BPP chapters incorporating them into their 2008 book *Liberated Territory*. Williams’ reinforces the need for local interpretation of the BPP as

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 54. Southern chapters covered include Houston, Winston-Salem, and New Orleans.

<sup>25</sup> Judson L. Jeffries and Ryan Nissim-Sabat, “Painting a More Complete Portrait of the Black Panther Party,” in *Comrades: A Local History of the Black Panther Party*, ed. Judson L. Jeffries (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 7.

the group “began as a local organization and functioned often as a local organization.”<sup>26</sup>

According to Williams, “to understand the party’s internal dynamics, we need to look closely at how it functioned at the local level,” further stressing the need for individual historical accounts of local chapters to formulate a more historically accurate representation of the BPP.<sup>27</sup> While these essays focus on local chapters, offering an important glimpse into the BPP organization and structure, they again have limitations in depth and in incorporating a rounded interpretation of the BPP, locally and nationally, into a single work.

Orissa Arend’s *Showdown in Desire*, published in 2009, offers one of the most ambitious historical accounts of a local southern chapter to date. One of the largest BPP chapters, New Orleans gained local support through their community programs, but like other chapters, fell victim to violent repression from law enforcement and government agencies. In the book’s foreword, Charles E. Jones notes that the South is “an important yet understudied region within Panther scholarship” and he makes note of twelve other chapters that existed in the region.<sup>28</sup> *Showdown in Desire* represents an important step in the treatment of local chapter history providing great resources and history to help analyze the story of the BPP in New Orleans and the South.

Again, standing at the forefront of modern historical interpretation of the BPP is Judson Jeffries. In his 2010 book, *On the Ground*, Jeffries realizes the need for a

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<sup>26</sup> Yohuru Williams, “From Oakland to Omaha, Historicizing the Panthers,” in *Liberated Territory: Untold Local Perspectives on the Black Panther Party*, ed. Yohuru Williams and Jama Lazerow (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 24.

<sup>27</sup> Williams, “From Oakland to Omaha,” 25.

<sup>28</sup> Charles E. Jones, foreword to *Showdown in Desire: The Black Panthers Take a Stand in New Orleans*, by Orissa Arend (Fayetteville: The University of Arkansas Press, 2009), xiii.

“comprehensive and exhaustive” study of the BPP, especially as the organization still suffers from a “distorted and warped image.”<sup>29</sup> Expanding upon his project of detailing local chapter histories, Jeffries’ compilation of well-sourced essays covers various branches of the BPP in different cities across America, including Houston and New Orleans.<sup>30</sup> The essays are loaded with sources relative to the South and are useful in gauging the development, challenges, and significance of the BPP in that region.

The local and regional histories of the BPP are essential in interpreting the organization’s historical legacy, but the essay form that currently appears to be most popular has clear limits of length and depth, and lacks cohesive elements necessary in linking the complexities of the BPP story. Joshua Bloom and Waldo E. Martin, Jr., in their 2013 book *Black Against Empire*, ambitiously undertake building a comprehensive history of the BPP by analyzing the organization’s political and party evolution, helping to explain why people were drawn to the group, and the elements that led to the groups’ demise. There is no one size fits all explanation to the BPP’s rise, influence, and decline, as Bloom and Martin state that “most obvious explanations do not stand up to the evidence.”<sup>31</sup> Moving away from the localized approach of BPP history, while acknowledging the existing scholarly interpretations available, *Black Against Empire* seeks to present a complete picture of the BPP, emphasizing the major phases of their political development in unfolding the organization’s history.

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<sup>29</sup> Judson L. Jeffries and Ryan Nissim-Sabat, “The Second Installment,” ix-x.

<sup>30</sup> For an essay on the BPP in New Orleans, see Orissa Arend and Judson L. Jeffries, “The Big Easy was Anything But for the Panthers,” in Jeffries, *On the Ground*, 224-272; For an essay covering the BPP in Houston, see Charles E. Jones, “Arm Yourself or Harm Yourself,” in Jeffries, *On the Ground*, 3-40.

<sup>31</sup> Joshua Bloom and Waldo E. Martin, Jr., introduction to *Black Against Empire: The History and Politics of the Black Panther Party* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 4.

In the four decades since the organization developed, the historical legacy and significance of the BPP continues to be an area of contention in the minds of scholars and the public. It is clear that the BPP cannot be painted with only one brush as many critics and scholars have attempted to do. BPP historical research has evolved by taking a more holistic approach to the organization, giving focus to the rank-and-file in different communities that ultimately define the BPP's commitment to influencing radical change in America. The local and regional interpretations of the BPP may currently remain limited, especially concerning their influence in the South, but it is clear that the history and lessons of the BPP continue to be of importance, ensuring that the BPP historiography will only continue to grow.

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## KENTUCKY

### Louisville

The initial effort to establish a Black Panther Party chapter in Louisville began in 1969, but did not materialize as the organizers could not afford to send someone to California for training and to pick up the charter per instructions from national party leaders.<sup>32</sup> As an outgrowth of the local organization Black Committee for Self-Defense (BCSD), the Panthers successfully established themselves in Louisville in spring 1972.<sup>33</sup> The Louisville Panthers instituted survival programs included running a well-known free breakfast program, establishing a sickle cell anemia testing clinic, providing shuttle bus

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<sup>32</sup> Tracy E. K'Meyer, "Empowerment, Consciousness, Defense: The Diverse Meanings of the Black Power Movement in Louisville, Kentucky" in *Neighborhood Rebels: Black Power at the Local Level*, ed. Peniel E. Joseph (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 164.

<sup>33</sup> "In Louisville: Panthers Are Jailed," *Southern Patriot*, May 1972, microfilm, p. 6.

service for family members to visit inmates at the state prison and transportation to medical offices, and also working with other Black Power organizations in fighting to eliminate drugs from the community.<sup>34</sup> Despite the successful implementation of the noted survival programs, trouble hit the organization early and had a crippling effect on the group.

In late May 1972, during Derby Weekend, police arrested four Panther members along with three others in connection to an alleged armed robbery at a tourist home in Louisville's black community.<sup>35</sup> Heavily armed with submachine guns, shotguns, and pistols, the city police made multiple arrests without police warrants and held the suspects under high bonds.<sup>36</sup> Months prior to the arrests, the BCSD and Panther's offices purportedly received repeated visits from local police and in February 1972 shots had been fired into their office windows.<sup>37</sup> The Panthers and their supporters viewed the framed-up charges as retribution for the Panther's work in "waging a high-powered campaign against drug addiction" in Louisville's black community, focusing their energies on drug pushers and their relationship with local police.<sup>38</sup> These arrests were seen by some residents to be an example of "the annual summer sweep of militants to keep the city cool," and organizing efforts developed to challenge the arrests of the Louisville Seven.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Tracy E. K'Meyer, "Empowerment, Consciousness, Defense," 164.

<sup>35</sup> "In Louisville: Panthers are Jailed," *Southern Patriot*, May 1972, microfilm, p. 6.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> Anne Lancellotti, "Louisville Panther Case: Story of a Frame-up," *Southern Patriot*, November 1972, microfilm, p 1, 8.

<sup>39</sup> "In Louisville: Panthers Are Jailed," *Southern Patriot*, May 1972, microfilm, p 6.

The Louisville Seven Defense Fund (LSDF), made up of the Southern Conference Educational Fund (SCEF) and other organizations and people from the black and white communities, organized picketing, leafleting, and petitioning in defense of the Louisville Seven. The SCEF, under the directorship of Carl and Anne Braden since 1966, moved their national office to Louisville and immediately supported Louisville's black community in protesting police brutality and fighting to improve housing. Advocating for "interracialism," the SCEF frequently shared its office and printing press with black organizations. As a clear indication of support in their time of need, SCEF lawyer William Allison represented the Louisville Seven.<sup>40</sup>

Through the organized efforts of supporters, the Louisville Seven defendants had their bail reduced from \$67,500 to \$5,000 each.<sup>41</sup> Within six weeks, four of the seven had been released, but the other three, unable to post the reduced bail, were held under maximum security at the state prison until the September trial. Since the case had been submitted to a grand jury without a preliminary hearing, allowing for the withholding of case information from the public and defendants, the accused could be indicted and held in jail for a long pre-trial period without the prosecution needing to present any evidence. When the trial date did arrive, the LSDF picketed the courthouse and filled the courtroom.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Irwin Klibaner, "The Travail of Southern Radicals: The Southern Conference Educational Fund, 1946-1976," *The Journal of Southern History* 49, no. 2 (May, 1983): 195-198, accessed March 11, 2014, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2207502>.

<sup>41</sup> "News Briefs," *Southern Patriot*, October 1972, microfilm, p. 5.

<sup>42</sup> Anne Lancellotti, "Louisville Panther Case: Story of a Frame-up," *Southern Patriot*, November 1972, microfilm, p. 1, 8.

On September 26, the second day of the four-day trial, Judge Rush Nicholson dismissed charges against five of the seven because of lack of evidence. Despite there being fifty victims of the robbery, not a single prosecution witness could identify the five, and the questionable identifications for the other two defendants were seen by Defense Attorney William Allison to be “inconsistent, contradictory, and incredible.”<sup>43</sup> The *Southern Patriot* reported that Assistant Prosecutor Robert Zollinger attempted to make up for lack of evidence by “appealing to racist myths” telling the jury that the defendants traveled in a dangerous “pack” and emphasized that some of the men had been unemployed. Zollinger went on to characterize the defendants and their supporters as a “desperate gang” that needed to be stopped and the Panthers as a group of “vengeful people.”<sup>44</sup>

The jury of 11 whites and one black returned a split verdict finding William Blakemore guilty and sentenced to ten years in prison while acquitting Ben Simmons of the charges.<sup>45</sup> In light of the Blakemore verdict, SCEF Executive director Helen Greever declared that “white people must wake up to the fact that every time members of the black community challenge the real problems in the city, the police try to squash them with charges of criminal offenses” and demanded that they “must help put a stop to this abuse of justice—otherwise they will be next.”<sup>46</sup> The federal authorities quickly moved in and charged Blakemore with possession of a sawed-off shotgun, a charge he denied. In

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid. Defense Attorney William A. Allison produced two witnesses that testified that Simmons and Blakemore were somewhere else on the night of the robbery.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid; “Six of ‘Louisville 7’ cleared of robbery rap,” *Afro-American*, October 14, 1972, accessed February 20, 2014, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/532281852?accountid=14784>.

January 1973, an all-white jury found him guilty and he received another ten-year sentence, but the U.S. Court of Appeals overturned the charge in 1974.<sup>47</sup> Organizational differences regarding legal direction and the results of the trial ended up creating more problems for the Louisville Panthers who sucked the SCEF into the whirlwind.

During the trial, differences surfaced between SCEF attorney William Allison's handling of the case and what the Panthers wanted the case to represent. While Allison focused on familiar radical legal tactics emphasizing civil liberties against law enforcement, the Panthers wanted to "broaden the defense into a revolutionary nationalist campaign" that benefitted all blacks, since they viewed all African Americans as political prisoners in the continuing conflict between the "submerged black nation" in America and the "white oppressor."<sup>48</sup> These differences continued to play out after the trial and took on personal animosities. The tension burst in April 1973 when acquitted Panther Ben Simmons broke into and ransacked SCEF offices, threatening his wife Judi, a SCEF loyalist, at gunpoint, and locking SCEF members in a closet. Simmons, eventually subdued by others who entered the building, was committed to a mental hospital on a medical inquest warrant requested by SCEF officials Helen Greever, Mike Welch, and attorney William Allison. The three SCEF officials did not want to involve the police in the incident, but the Panthers viewed the actions as "conclusive evidence" that the white SCEF radicals were attempting "to destroy the mind of a brother." The Panthers circulated a leaflet denouncing and positioning the SCEF against the black community.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> "News Briefs," *Southern Patriot*, February 1973, microfilm, p. 3; "News Briefs," *Southern Patriot*, January 1974, microfilm, p. 6.

<sup>48</sup> Irwin Klibaner, "The Travail of Southern Radicals," 198.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 198-199.

In July 1973, three Panthers went to SCEF headquarters to demand \$29,000 as “compensation” for Ben Simmon’s mental hospital commitment. When SCEF staff refused the demands, the three Panther members kidnapped Helen Greever and her husband, Earl Scott, at gunpoint driving them to a remote location just outside Louisville. Scott, faking a heart attack, persuaded one of the kidnappers to alert a police patrol car. Scott and Greever were taken to a hospital and immediately contacted SCEF members who obtained warrants for the Panthers’ arrests. Two of the Panthers were arrested, while the third had left for New York only to later return to give testimony for the prosecution. Helen Greever later claimed that the police had attempted to create division between the two organizations with the goal of disrupting the SCEF who they viewed as a Communist organization. The SCEF’s turn to the police caused bitter disagreement and Anne Braden vocally opposed Panther prosecution “no matter what the circumstances.” The events that transpired certainly did not positively reflect either the Louisville Panthers or the SCEF and both organizations no doubt suffered in the long run.<sup>50</sup>

The Louisville BPP, while not necessarily disappearing, never recovered from the trials and turmoil with the SCEF and “no strong Black Power organization arose to take their place.”<sup>51</sup> Still around in 1975, the Louisville BPP fought alongside moderate civil rights groups and interracial organizations in resistance to anti-busing forces, including the Ku Klux Klan, during the push for school integration. The mobilization for school integration showed that community groups were still very active in Louisville, but also

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 199.

<sup>51</sup> K’Meyer, “Empowerment, Consciousness, Defense,” 165.

that the establishment and white supremacy groups never lost their determination to influence and enforce their racist agendas.<sup>52</sup>

## TENNESSEE

Memphis, Nashville, Chattanooga

The state of Tennessee historically represented another southern stronghold of poverty, injustice, and repression against the African American community. The state also has a notable history of efforts at organized resistance against white dominated power structures. The Memphis NCCF, established in late 1970 by members of the defunct black militant group the Invaders, “represented a new day in Memphis Black Power radicalism.”<sup>53</sup>

The Memphis NCCF played a strong role in the community through their survival

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<sup>52</sup> “Anti-Racists Mobilize in Louisville,” *Southern Patriot*, September 1975, microfilm, p. 8; “1,000 Marching for Busing,” *Southern Patriot*, October 1975, microfilm, p. 1, 6; Terry Hendrickson, “People Resist Racist Anti-Busing Movement,” *Southern Patriot*, December 1975, microfilm, p. 8; “2,000 in Louisville for Busing,” *Southern Patriot*, February 1976, microfilm, p. 3; “Louisville Racism Linked to City Officials,” *Southern Patriot*, April 1976, microfilm, p. 4, 5; “Racist Terror Increases as Government Promotes Segregation,” *Southern Patriot*, September 1976, microfilm, p. 6.

<sup>53</sup> Kinchen notes that The Memphis division of the FBI kept tabs on militant groups monitoring the organizations inner workings primarily with the help of Memphis photographer Ernest Withers who photographed many moments during the civil rights movement. Kinchen adds that according to the FBI, the Invaders ceased to exist and two different organizations developed, the People’s Revolutionary Party (PRP) being one of them. The PRP became the Memphis NCCF sometime after the September 1970 BPP-sponsored Revolutionary People’s Constitutional Convention held in Philadelphia. Shirletta Jeanette Kinchen, “We Want What People Generally Refer to as Black Power: Youth and Student Activism and the Impact of the Black Power Movement in Memphis, Tennessee, 1965-1975” (PhD diss., University of Memphis, 2011), 249, 253, accessed February 20, 2014, <http://search.proquest.com/professional/docview/894122387?accountid=14784>; see also Invaders, “FBI Memo, Racial Matters, 157-1067-1502A” (Memphis, Tennessee, August 26, 1969); Invaders, “FBI Memo, Racial Matters, 157-1067-2020” (Memphis, Tennessee, September 16, 1970).

programs, efforts to address heinous housing conditions, and in combating police brutality. The Memphis branch's survival programs included a free breakfast program, free clothing and shoes programs, and a busing to prisons program that helped provide families transportation to visit incarcerated loved ones. The free breakfast program had been so successful that the city started their own breakfast program in an effort to diminish the Party's influence.<sup>54</sup> The NCCF also played a militant role in addressing the inadequate housing situation that plagued the black communities in Memphis.

The city's urban renewal projects, underway in several lower income areas, created a housing crisis involving lack of adequate dwellings, long queues on public housing lists, and appalling living conditions detrimental to human health. Many people faced filthy, crowded, and unsafe conditions in the limited residential structures available to low income people. On January 16, 1971, approximately twenty NCCF members accompanied several families in staging a live-in at a Memphis Housing Authority (MHA) field office to dramatize the need for decent housing.<sup>55</sup> After only one night, the MHA arranged for a better apartment for one of the families and promises of housing for the other family involved.<sup>56</sup> The success of the live-in encouraged the NCCF members to move forward with more housing actions, providing the police pretext for confrontation.

On January 18, the NCCF members moved ten poor black families into vacant units in the Texas Court Apartments. MHA director Orelle Ledbetter agreed to hold negotiations with the members, but instead, the police surrounded the building and ordered the Panthers to surrender. The police arrested thirteen Panthers on site, and later

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<sup>54</sup> Kinchen, "We Want," 255.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 256.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 257.

three more, charging fifteen with “conspiracy to interfere with interstate commerce” and two with “assault to commit murder.”<sup>57</sup> No assaults had been made on the police and the Panthers claimed that the six firearms found during the arrest belonged to the families. Thanks to the Panthers’ actions, all ten families were placed in low cost housing, but the MHA admitted that an astounding 2923 Memphis families still waited for public housing.<sup>58</sup> For their part, the Memphis 16 were held in jail on peace bonds while the other NCCF organizers faced varying levels of police harassment, threats, and arrests.<sup>59</sup> Over a year later, the state dropped the peace warrants and conspiracy charges since the MHA decided not to prosecute further.<sup>60</sup> Shortly after the live-in, the NCCF became a recognized BPP chapter.

The Tennessee Chapter of the BPP expanded operations, opening community information centers in Nashville and Chattanooga, while the Memphis branch served as state headquarters.<sup>61</sup> Increases in membership, and community support and participation,

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<sup>57</sup> “News Digest,” *Bay State Banner*, July 29, 1971, accessed March 5, 2014, <http://search.proquest.com.offcampus.lib.washington.edu/docview/371292636?accountid=14784>. The conspiracy law, dating back to 1858, had originally been used for the capture of runaway slaves.

<sup>58</sup> “News Digest,” *Bay State Banner*.

<sup>59</sup> According to *The Black Panther*, peace bonds, or warrants, had not been used in Tennessee since the 1800s and was used to deal with “hillbilly feuds.” One party reported to law enforcement on another party for endangering their lives, or “peace.” A warrant was issued and the recipient had to pay a sum of money to guarantee that they would keep the peace. Each Memphis NCCF member arrested was expected to pay a \$1000 peace bond on top of regular bail set at \$2000. Tennessee State Chapter Black Panther Party, “Black Panther Party Not Needed: Tennessee Racists’ Year-Old Prediction Yet to Appear,” *The Black Panther*, January 29, 1972, microfilm, p. 8, 16; Mike Honey, “Memphis: Crisis in Housing,” *Southern Patriot*, September 1971, microfilm, p. 6.

<sup>60</sup> “Memphis 16 Case Ending in Victory,” *Southern Patriot*, February 1972, microfilm, p. 6. The assault to murder charge was also reduced to common-law assault. Roger Williams plead guilty and spent three days in jail to finish off the seven-month sentence.

<sup>61</sup> Tennessee State Chapter Black Panther Party, “Black Panther Party Not Needed,” p. 17. Chattanooga and Nashville began as distribution centers for the *Black Panther*

helped the Memphis branch expand their Survival Programs.<sup>62</sup> Police repression and violence also coincided with the expansion. According to the Panthers, police worked to “intimidate and frighten” the black youth into “staying away from the Party and its ideas,” often resorting to extreme violence against the youth.<sup>63</sup>

In Memphis, the October 15, 1971 brutal beating of three African American youths by twenty-eight policemen, resulted in the death of seventeen year-old Elton Hayes and the attempted cover-up by law enforcement sparked the “most violent race riot in the city since the 1866 race riots.”<sup>64</sup> In Nashville, local police shot and killed sixteen year-old Donald Wayne Huddleson on their way to another call. Residents vowed that “this is not the end, but the beginning of a People’s struggle” and they will “fight endlessly to see that other Black Youth are not gunned down at the will of Fascists.” The community began their fight with a rent strike to pressure the Nashville Housing

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*Intercommunal News Service* newspapers only to expand to become community centers with survival programs.

<sup>62</sup> Kinchen, “We Want,” 260.

<sup>63</sup> Tennessee State Chapter Black Panther Party, “Black Panther Party Not Needed,” 8, 16, 17.

<sup>64</sup> Kinchen, 261-263; Tennessee State Chapter Black Panther Party, “Memphis Ignites: ‘Nobody was Hurt Until the Police Officers Got There,” *The Black Panther*, October 30, 1971, microfilm, p. 14-15; Mike Honey, “Mother Seeks Answer...Police Killing of Youth Questioned Jesse James Allegedly Shot 10 Times here,” *Tri-State Defender*, September 28, 1974, accessed March 7, 2014,

<http://search.proquest.com/docview/370637855?accountid=14784>.

The beating took place after a high-speed chase and involved multiple officers. The officers on the scene reported that Hayes had died from as a result of a traffic accident, but when the truth got out that Hayes had been beaten to death, Memphis erupted. Although nine officers were tried for Hayes’ death, no one was convicted. For a detailed account of the 1866 Memphis race riot, see Stephen V. Ash, *A Massacre in Memphis: The Race Riot that Shook the Nation One Year After the Civil War* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2013).

Authority to remedy the “deplorable conditions” in their community.<sup>65</sup> Upon inspection, there are many more questionable instances of police repression, brutality, and violence against the African American community in these Tennessee cities.

On November 15, 1972 an explosion demolished the house occupied by members of the Memphis BPP Branch. The police refused to make any inquiries into the explosion because the Memphis Fire Department reported that a faulty gas furnace had been the cause. Contradicting this version of events, the Memphis, Light, Gas, and Water Co. ruled out the furnace as the cause of the explosion, noting that photographs taken reveal that the furnace was still intact.<sup>66</sup>

## GEORGIA

The Black Panther Party presence in Georgia dates back as early as September 1969 in the city of Augusta. On May 11, 1970, following the death of a black youth in the city jail, Augusta exploded in violence and Governor Lester Maddox dispatched a National Guard unit to the city and ordered police to shoot anyone seen looting. According to Maddox, the responsibility for the looting, fires, millions of dollars in property damage, injuries, and the police killing of six black men, shooting them in the back, fell on the Black Panther Party and "other militants" engaged in community

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<sup>65</sup> Memphis Branch Black Panther Party, “Southern Justice Changes Style,” *The Black Panther*, June 26, 1971, microfilm, p. 6.

<sup>66</sup> “News Briefs,” *Southern Patriot*, December 1972, microfilm, p. 3; “News in Brief: Explosion Probe Demanded,” *Afro-American*, Dec 30, 1972, accessed February 27, 2014, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/532527387?accountid=14784>; “Panther House Bombed.” *New Pittsburgh Courier (1966-1981)*, Jan 06, 1973, accessed March 10, 2014, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/202591247?accountid=14784>.

organizing in the city.<sup>67</sup> As the Georgia State Black Panther Party built solid relationships in the communities they served, Maddox' attitude toward the group signaled the repression to come.

### Atlanta

Early references to the Panthers activity in Atlanta are notably reflected in Huey Newton's September 8, 1971 press conference at the Georgia State BPP main office announcing to reporters that Atlanta would become the future site for the organization's national headquarters. Newton viewed the South as a "logical" endpoint for a dramatic move since African Americans still represented a numerical majority in many locales and because "this is where the contradiction of slavery started."<sup>68</sup> While Ralph Abernathy, president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, remarked that "we would be delighted to have our black brothers come to Atlanta, an all-America city," Governor Maddox responded to the news saying the BPP "is licensed to steal, destroy and kill and wage war upon our society . . ."<sup>69</sup> While the headquarters move to Atlanta never happened, the Panthers did manage to establish a significant presence in the city.

The BPP in Atlanta operated a main office out of the Kirkwood neighborhood and community centers in Vine City, Summerhill, on English Avenue, and in the Fourth

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<sup>67</sup> Winston Grady-Willis, "A Changing Tide: Black Politics and Activism in Atlanta, Georgia, 1960-1977" (PhD diss., Emory University, 1998), 262-262, accessed February 27, 2014, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/304472180?accountid=14784>.

<sup>68</sup> Winston Grady-Willis, "A Changing Tide," 263; Huey Newton, WSB-TV, "WSB-TV newsfilm clip of Huey P. Newton, co-founder of the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense, at a press conference announcing the move of the Panther's headquarters to Atlanta, Georgia, 1971 September 8," original format 16mm, 1 minute, September 8, 1971, [http://crdl.usg.edu/do:ugabma\\_wsbn\\_64008](http://crdl.usg.edu/do:ugabma_wsbn_64008). Atlanta won out over Dallas and New Orleans as the projected new BPP headquarters.

<sup>69</sup> Winston Grady-Willis, "A Changing Tide," 264-265.

Ward.<sup>70</sup> Sales from *The Black Panther* newspaper, as seen with most BPP chapters, provided the most consistent source of revenue for the group.<sup>71</sup> The party instituted a very successful free breakfast program, and worked with willing churches and professionals in organizing programs for bussing to prisons, pest control, a day care center, and a mobile medical clinic, all at no charge to community residents.<sup>72</sup> The BPP made appeals to local businesses to offer support to the programs and a handful of companies willingly donated perishables for the breakfast program.<sup>73</sup> Although the BPP won many allies within the Atlanta community through their grassroots organizing efforts and survival programs, local, state, and federal law enforcement and government never had any intention of tolerating the group and in late 1972 they made their move.<sup>74</sup>

In August 1972, the Atlanta BPP issued a six-point press release condemning police tactics and activities in the black community and harassment against newspaper sellers, while advocating for more community control.<sup>75</sup> The police offensive began on August 23 following Panther spokesperson Kouson Oliver's apparent announcement that

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 265.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 267.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 268. The Panther's goal in launching the respective programs is that at some point in the future neighborhood residents would manage each of them.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 267.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 277-278. Winston Grady-Willis identified three reasons for the intensified attacks on the Atlanta Panthers. First, in the Deep South Panther activity of any kind had been perceived of as more of a threat. Second, violent confrontations between local police and members of the underground Black Liberation Army (BLA) in 1971 directed more attention to the Georgia BPP. Grady notes that the BLA was an armed underground group of former Panther activists. The BLA had left their base of New York because of growing pressure from the police and, in August 1971 came to for Atlanta. Georgia's Fulton County authorities associated BLA members in the November 3, 1971 murder of policeman James Richard Greene. Third, the Panthers' grassroots organizing had proven successful as demonstrated by its survival programs and outspoken stance against the unrelenting police presence in African American neighborhoods.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 278-279.

the BPP had demanded fifty thousand dollars in cash, food, and other services from three area grocery chains. Referring to the grocery chains, Oliver claimed "we have asked in a very nice way for some money to support our food program because our people are the ones who support them." Store officials confirmed that no threats had been made, but that the Panthers had indicated that boycott action could be used against non-participating stores.<sup>76</sup> Police Chief John Inman suggested that the BPP actions may have been in violation of several city ordinances requiring permits for solicitation of services and that if threats accompanied the demands, Panther activists could be charged with extortion.<sup>77</sup>

The following week, Clayton Powell, a Georgia Republican and black supporter of President Richard M. Nixon, claimed that he had received warnings that the Panthers had issued a fifteen hundred-dollar contract to have him killed because of his support for certain political figures.<sup>78</sup> To make matters worse, the FBI, on September 15, announced a "fully preliminary investigation" to determine if the BPP was guilty of extortion, a federal offense in violation of the Hobbs Act.<sup>79</sup> The BPP fiercely denied the Powell-related allegations and extortion claims. Around this time revelations also surfaced that the Atlanta Police Department had issued an internal report with "shoot-to-kill overtones" targeting ten local organizations, the BPP topping the list, along with nine individual

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<sup>76</sup> Kroger Food Markets Vice President Charles Thomas noted "I personally don't view it as extortion, but it is not something we can agree to." Ibid., 279; "Panther extortionists?," *Chicago Daily Defender*, August 28, 1972, accessed March 6, 2014, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/494348162?accountid=14784>.

<sup>77</sup> Grady-Willis, 279. Local Panther leaders Ron Carter, Sam Lundy and Oliver met with Inman on August 28 only to find out that the city required such permits.

<sup>78</sup> "Panthers deny threat to Republican," *Afro-American*, September 16, 1972, accessed March 6, 2014, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/532457837?accountid=14784>.

<sup>79</sup> Grady-Willis, 280.

activists, all African American.<sup>80</sup> The mounting pressure took an increasingly powerful toll on the capacities of the Georgia BPP.

In late October 1972, behind two months in rent, the Atlanta BPP was evicted from the apartment serving as their headquarters. On November 9, local and federal authorities, including agents from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, raided the English Avenue office recovering guns, explosives, a deactivated hand grenade, and made several arrests. The authorities supposed reasoning for the action had been to locate one automatic pistol used in the wounding of a police officer the previous week, but the authorities did not recover the weapon in question, nor had it been clear that the Panthers had any involvement in the shooting.<sup>81</sup> Authorities charged the arrested Panthers with possession of explosives and stolen goods as the case went to court.

The trial, attended by dozens of Panther supporters, showed the makings of a true frame-up as Panther Attorney Al Horn insisted that the search warrant used had “zero probable cause.”<sup>82</sup> According to police and federal officials, the warrant had been attained on the grounds that markings on the spent cartridge found at the scene of the October officer shooting matched those on cartridges at the Kirkwood center.<sup>83</sup> Municipal Court Judge Robert E. Jones barred Horn from "eliciting testimony" concerning the validity of the warrant and freed all arrested except Panther leaders Ron Carter and Alton

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 281. Chief Inman denied the existence of the report, but attorneys from the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) claimed that the BPP and Atlanta Peace Action Coalition topped the list, and that the nine activists named in the report were African American.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 281-282. Officer Daniel Smith had been wounded during a routine traffic stop a week prior to this incident.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 282.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 282.

DeVille.<sup>84</sup> Although the charges proved groundless, local police and federal authorities claimed a partial victory by removing two of its leading activists and disrupting Panther activities. The attacks continued on December 5 as authorities again raided the Panthers arresting six and finding a pound of marijuana that the Panthers insisted had been planted on them, thus rounding out a very difficult year for the Georgia Panthers.<sup>85</sup>

The Atlanta Police Department continued a concerted attack on the Georgia BPP and the black community into 1973. In June, Ron Carter was arrested twice in one week, the first related to New Jersey extradition charges stemming from an arms violation, and the other, that included him receiving a beating from Atlanta police officers, was from his selling of *The Black Panther* on an Atlanta street.<sup>86</sup> The Georgia State BPP remained active along with other Atlanta community groups in calling for changes in city government, including challenging police brutality, and concerted efforts were made to have Atlanta Police Chief Inman fired.<sup>87</sup> Despite efforts to keep going, the Georgia Panthers' struggles with repression only continued and internal problems grew from the demoralized ranks.

Internal difficulties became clearly evident by summer 1973 as several ex-Panthers, recently purged by Atlanta leadership for drug involvement, attempted armed robbery on the Kirkwood center during a weekend BPP freedom school session. Jean

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 282.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 283.

<sup>86</sup> "Atlanta Party Member Arrested Twice in One Week," *The Black Panther*, July 28, 1973, microfilm, p. 6.

<sup>87</sup> "Atlanta Calls for Change in City Gov't," *The Black Panther*, May 19, 1973, microfilm, p. 4, 14; "Furor Mounts Over Racist Police Chief: \$20 Million Suit Filed By Black Patrolmen's League," *The Black Panther*, May 12, 1973, microfilm, p. 6, 14; "Police Murders Plague Black Community," *The Black Panther*, September 8, 1973, microfilm, p. 7, 14, 16.

Murch, a female member of the Atlanta BPP was one of the individuals held hostage. Luckily, neighborhood residents, tipped off by a young pupil who had escaped, gathered outside the Atlanta headquarters. A supporter contacted Oakland Headquarters and Huey Newton ordered the immediate release of the hostages and the ousted Panthers complied.<sup>88</sup> Having had a fairly impressive presence in Atlanta, the intense repression faced and internal conflicts that surfaced took an exacting toll on the Georgia BPP.

As a result of repression, legal problems, and infighting amongst the Georgia State BPP branches, the Panther programs suffered and neighborhood involvement began to decline.<sup>89</sup> Reflecting upon the Panther's presence in Atlanta while considering the continued struggles of the black community, Atlanta activist Columbus Ward commented that "it's really kinda sad that the Panthers went out of business, because they were one of the few groups that I think had some type of significant role in our community; that might be what we need as an awakening now, something that Black people can identify with again to bring about some changes."<sup>90</sup>

## TEXAS

### Dallas and Denton

The history of the BPP in Texas is symbolic of many of the same issues faced by chapters nationwide in dealing with repression and threats of infiltration. In 1969, Dallas became the first BPP organization in the state. After several members traveled to Los

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 286-288. Jean Martin had been one of the female members held by the ex-Panthers. The ex-Panthers released the remaining children and instructed the women members to explain the situation as a misunderstanding. Following the incident, Ron Carter and Sam Lundy met with Newton in Oakland and the national leadership supported the Atlanta purge of the individuals responsible for the armed robbery and hostage attempt.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 288.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 312.

Angeles to secure a BPP charter, then Minister of Defense Geronimo Pratt gave approval for the NCCF's establishment and acted as supervisor in the group's development.<sup>91</sup>

According to former member Leroy Haynes, the group immediately faced struggles with the police.<sup>92</sup>

In 1970, *The Black Panther* ran a few articles detailing incidents of police harassment against Dallas NCCF members. On September 15, police stopped member Charles Henderson for an alleged traffic violation and held him on investigation of car theft even though the vehicle's owner confirmed permission for the vehicle's use.<sup>93</sup> On September 27, police pulled over, arrested, and supposedly beat Jennifer Kelly, a pregnant NCCF member, before charging her with assault on a police officer.<sup>94</sup> While police harassment certainly presented setbacks for the NCCF, infiltration within their ranks threatened the organization's very existence.

In February 1971, *The Black Panther* announced the disbanding of the Dallas

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<sup>91</sup> According to Dr. Leroy Haynes, former Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) members worked with members of the Student Organization for United Liberation (SOUL) at El Centro Community College in organizing the initial Dallas NCCF. Ava Wilson, "Left in an Unmarked Grave: Unearthing the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements in Dallas, Texas" (master's thesis, Temple University, 2010), 85-86, accessed February 20, 2014,

<http://search.proquest.com/professional/docview/758365828?accountid=14784>.

<sup>92</sup> "Interview with Dr. Leroy Haynes-2003: A History of the Development of the BPP in Texas," It's About Time, last modified February 20, 2014, [http://www.itsabouttimebpp.com/our\\_stories/Where\\_Are\\_They\\_Now/Dr\\_Leroy\\_Haynes.html](http://www.itsabouttimebpp.com/our_stories/Where_Are_They_Now/Dr_Leroy_Haynes.html).

<sup>93</sup> Candi Robinson, "Pigs Kidnap Dallas Community Worker," *The Black Panther*, September 26, 1970, microfilm, p. 10. According to police, Henderson made an illegal turn. Jennie Turner, owner of the vehicle, confirmed that Henderson had permission to use the vehicle. According to the newspaper article, the police refused to allow Turner to retrieve the bill of sale from the car to confirm ownership and refused to return her car.

<sup>94</sup> Phoebe, "Dallas Pigs Beat and Kidnap Pregnant Sister," *The Black Panther*, October 10, 1970, microfilm, p. 8. Police justified the traffic stop by saying the Kelly changed lanes without signaling. Since Kelly did not have identification on hand, police arrested her.

NCCF and expulsion of several of its members as “individualists and opportunists.” The article also exposed NCCF leader Curtis Gaines as an informant working for the FBI.<sup>95</sup> These actions coincided with the February arrest of Geronimo Pratt in Dallas and the ongoing East-West, Newton-Cleaver feud that Pratt unknowingly got mixed into. The feud stemmed from the 1971 party “split” that revolved around differences in ideology between Eldridge Cleaver, who advocated for a continuation of armed revolutionary tactics, and Huey Newton who wanted to instead focus on social services for the African American community and affecting change through the existing political system.<sup>96</sup> The BPP’s Central Committee in Oakland, California purged the Dallas chapter because they provided aid to Pratt and had given him refuge at a safe house.<sup>97</sup> Despite the action taken against the NCCF, members built separate organizations and continued to do community work through the survival programs.

Members from the purged wing of the NCCF organized Grassroots, Incorporated led by Curtis Gaines.<sup>98</sup> Gaines apparently acquired funds from wealthy white women to

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<sup>95</sup> Central Headquarters Black Panther Party, “Dallas, Texas N.C.C.F. Disbanded,” *The Black Panther*, February 20, 1971, microfilm, p. 9. Other members noted to be purged from the Party include Beverly Gaines, Cornelius Jackson, and Don Lister.

<sup>96</sup> Alkebulan, *Survival Pending Revolution*, 77.

<sup>97</sup> Jack Olsen, *Last Man Standing: The Tragedy and Triumph of Geronimo Pratt* (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 71-73, 83, 472. Pratt, the Deputy Minister of Defense for the BPP, had gone underground under instructions from Huey Newton. A meeting had been planned with Newton and another individual in Dallas, but Newton never showed up and was unreachable. Three days later, Newton instructed Pratt to a safe house in Dallas, but on arrival Pratt was arrested on federal charges of unlawful flight to avoid prosecution warrants. Newton purged Pratt from the BPP. Pratt was sent back to Los Angeles and faced trumped-up charges from a 1968 murder. Pratt, charged with the murder, served a prison sentence until 1997 when the charges were reversed.

<sup>98</sup> Dallas police arrested Gaines in October 1972 charging him with extortion and noting an association with a “Black Mafia-type” operation meant to fund the black militant organization Vanguard that he apparently founded. Ava Wilson, “Unmarked Grave,” 101-102; “Jail Ex-Panther for Shakedown,” *Chicago Daily Defender*, Oct 09, 1972,

carry on the survival programs and a house built with the funds served as headquarters. Allegations of illegal activity drew the attention of the police leading to a raid in April 1973. Donald Lister, sentenced to prison for wounding one police officer in the raid, believed that Gaines “precipitated a bust on the house” and uncovered “substantial evidence for pinpointing Gaines as the chief informant or agent provocateur of this phase of the movement.”<sup>99</sup> Although Grassroots, Incorporated had serious issues and questionable motives, the other organization founded in the Dallas NCCF split fared much better.

Following the NCCF purge, Skip Shockley, Leroy Haynes, and others started recruiting and developing cadres statewide. Shockley began organizing a group and instituting Panther community programs at El Centro Community College in Dallas. Haynes went to North Texas University in Denton and organized a small group that by summer 1972 attracted Shockley and the others.<sup>100</sup> The Denton group, known as the Black Intercommunal Party and located in the Dreamland neighborhood, followed Huey Newton’s philosophies and maintained several survival programs essential in the BPP nationally.<sup>101</sup> In 1973 the group ran candidates for the City Council, but this also marked the organization’s decline that Haynes noted to be between 1973-1975.<sup>102</sup> Perhaps

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accessed March 6, 2014,

<http://search.proquest.com/professional/docview/494391670?accountid=14784>.

<sup>99</sup> Wilson, “Unmarked Grave,” 101-102, 104. Lister was originally sentenced to a minimum of fifty years in prison, but according to Ava Wilson, he served only eleven years in federal and state prisons due to a reversible error in his case, which he researched and appealed.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 97-98. Denton is located on the northern outskirts of Dallas.

<sup>101</sup> “People’s Perspective: Black Intercommunal Party Serves the People,” *The Black Panther*, November 30, 1972, microfilm, p. 6. The group formed coalitions with many other organizations to effectively carry out community programs and recruit.

<sup>102</sup> Wilson, “Unmarked Grave,” 100-101. The Denton group had a free breakfast

because of the successes of the Dreamland group, efforts began to revive a Black Panther chapter in Dallas.

In summer 1973, Fahim Minkah and Hasan Khalif traveled to BPP headquarters in Oakland and successfully attained a charter to become the first official BPP chapter in Dallas.<sup>103</sup> Interestingly, Minkah and his comrades are remembered by SCLC organizer Peter Johnson in their work in rallies, marches, picket lines, and in guarding organizers to ensure the safety of non-violent leaders.<sup>104</sup>

### Houston

The Black Panther Party activities in Houston, as defined by Charles Jones, can be divided into three different periods taking place between 1968 and 1974.<sup>105</sup> While the vast majority of civil rights organizations had not been noticeably active in Houston, black student groups “became incubators of black militancy” that created opportunities for the development of Black Power organizations.<sup>106</sup> Resistance from law enforcement

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program, a free grocery program, liberation School, and a sickle cell anemia program. They also advocated for community control.

<sup>103</sup>Ibid., 106-107. Fahim Minkah, original name Fred Bell, was a former SNCC member charged with robbing a bank in Ladonia, Texas, but was absolved of his charges after appealing his case several times. Hasan Khalif, originally named Charlie Paul Henderson, was a former NCCF member.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 107.

<sup>105</sup> Charles E. Jones, “Arm Yourself or Harm Yourself: People’s Party II and the Black Panther Party in Houston, Texas” in *On the Ground: The Black Panther Party in Communities Across America*, ed. Judson L. Jeffries (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2010), 3.

<sup>106</sup> Charles E. Jones, “Arm Yourself,” 9-10. The Organization of Black Student Unity, African Americans for Black Liberation, and Friends of SNCC had a strong militant presence. The University of Houston and Texas Southern University were hotbeds of student protest for desegregated facilities and many other issues. The TSU riot, involving students and heavily armed police and CID members, marked the most explosive event of student unrest and overt police response.

stood as the primary obstacle for black militancy and attempts to establish and run Panther-oriented formations in Houston.

The city of Houston's political culture reflected a strong conservative base rooted in laissez-faire governmental rule that prized anti-Communist sentiment, white supremacy, and staunchly resisted politics of redistribution.<sup>107</sup> Police brutality fit naturally into the Houston political machine, as Herman Short headed the Houston Police Department continuing "a long tradition of pervasive police abuse and mistreatment of black Houstonians."<sup>108</sup> The Criminal Intelligence Division (CID) served as Short's most effective tool of handling "politically subversive activities."<sup>109</sup> The city's policies that limited opportunities in the black community, and police use of heavy-handed force against student activists and other dissenters, reaffirmed the need for a Black Power organization to come into town.

The first Black Panther formation in Houston was established in May 1968, but would be short-lived. Willie "Iceman" Rudd, a Teamster union steward and ice truck driver met BPP leadership during a trip to Oakland and received authorization to establish a BPP affiliate in Houston.<sup>110</sup> Rudd approached Organization of Black Student Unity (OBSU) members about becoming involved with the Houston BPP affiliate and

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 6-7. Jones points out that in the 1950s, Houstonians voted to limit public housing and the school board rejected federal aid for subsidized lunches into the late 1960s.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 7. The CID was initially established during World War II, but Short enhanced its scope and authority to combat organized crime and to monitor and disrupt political activists.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 13. The BPP leadership inquired about the TSU riot and Rudd gained more credibility with the leadership because he was acquainted with Lee Otis Johnson's wife. Johnson, a member of Friends of SNCC, had been very politically active and was involved in the TSU riot.

they enthusiastically joined making up the initial membership mainly comprised of students. The group operated limited programs including political education classes and a liberation school, but problems soon arose as several members believed that Rudd was a police informant. Within two months, many members left the group, but BPP cofounder Bobby Seale's visit to Houston in November 1968 stamped the group's fate. Seale, invited to town to give campus and community lectures, publicly disbanded the Houston BPP chapter after a fight broke out between different factions of OBSU members serving as security for the speaking engagements.<sup>111</sup> The second installment of Black Panther activity in Houston came in 1970 with Carl Hampton's People's Party II.

By late 1969, BPP national leadership, in an effort to minimize government repression, closed ranks and did not admit new members, but young Houstonian Carl Hampton could not be deterred from becoming involved with the organization. While touring with a soul band, Hampton volunteered at the Oakland BPP national headquarters, attended political education classes, and sold *The Black Panther* newspaper.<sup>112</sup> Upon returning to Houston, he fervently attempted to organize and attract the city's black activists to his People's Party II (PPII) organization. As attempts to recruit militant college students largely failed, Hampton recruited black youth from his old neighborhood Pleasantville making most of the early members of PPII young, male, and undereducated. PPII was not officially affiliated with the BPP, but did adopt the organization's platform and survival programs, held political education classes, sold *The Black Panther*, and implemented multiracial coalitions modeled after the Chicago

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 13-14.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 16.

Panthers' Rainbow Coalition.<sup>113</sup> In July 1970, the PP II established headquarters in Houston's Third Ward and attracted increased attention from local and national law enforcement agencies.<sup>114</sup>

The FBI and Houston Police CID stepped up their monitoring of PP II activities especially after the group moved into the Third Ward and openly carried weapons.<sup>115</sup> The Houston police were well into a scandalous year of brutality directed at young black men, including the April 1970 beating-to-death of 24 year-old Bobby Joe Conner while in police custody.<sup>116</sup> On July 17, Houston police officers harassed David Hines for selling *The Black Panther* near PP II headquarters. Carl Hampton, carrying a .45 pistol in a shoulder holster, and a few other PP II members, arrived and inquired about the interrogation. When questioned on the scene, Hampton confidently asserted his constitutional rights to carry the weapon, but the situation escalated when an officer pulled for his own gun. The ensuing standoff led the police to call for reinforcements and

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 16-18. Robert E. Lee, Jr., a former Chicago Panther, introduced Hampton to rainbow politics, or developing multiracial coalitions with progressive organizations. Hampton established coalitions with Students for a Democratic Society, the Young Lords, the John Brown Revolutionary League, and the Mexican American Youth Organization.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 17, 19. The PP II initially operated out of Hampton's home on Isabella Street before their move to 2828 Dowling Street in the Third Ward.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>116</sup> On December 11, 1969, 17 year-old William Eugene Dockins was shot at point blank with 12-gauge shotguns by two policemen. In January 1970, 14 year-old Michael Swanson was shot in the back by a Houston police officer. On April 4, 1970, Bobby Joe Conner, 24 years old, was stomped to death by two policemen at a Houston police station. Facing charges of murder, the policemen involved in Conner's death were found "not guilty." On June 27, 1970, 31 year-old Michael O'Neill was shot at point black inside a Houston police squad car. Thomas A. Johnson, "Houston Blacks Denounce Police: Say They Deliberately Drew Fire in Fatal Shooting," *New York Times*, July 29, 1970, accessed February 26, 2014, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/118860122?accountid=14784>; Texas Chapter Black Panther Party, "Two Years to Justify Homicide: Bobby Joe Conner's Murderers 'Not Guilty'," *The Black Panther*, July 8, 1972, microfilm, p. 4, 13-14.

Hampton and the others retreated to their headquarters. Thirty heavily armed police arrived and surrounded the PP II headquarters, but were soon met by black sympathizers, some carrying weapons, intending to block the police assault. After a forty-minute standoff, the police withdrew and momentarily postponed violent action against the PP II.<sup>117</sup>

The intensity of the standoff carried on for another ten days as PP II members and their allies secured a one-block area around their headquarters in an effort to prevent the arrest of Hampton on charges of assault with attempt to murder a police officer. Incendiary newspaper headlines and violent rhetoric from members of the community stoked the intense atmosphere surrounding negotiations for Hampton's surrender.<sup>118</sup> On July 26, the tense situation met its violent conclusion.

Following a fundraising rally for two arrested allies, three black women reported to PP II members that there were white men stationed on the rooftop of the church adjacent to PP II headquarters. Hampton, armed with an M-1 carbine rifle, went outside to investigate the reports and was shot twice in the abdomen. Rushed to a hospital, Hampton died shortly after from the wounds sustained. The gunfire intended for Hampton precipitated a gun battle between police and armed groups with nearly 100 shots exchanged. Four more people were wounded in the battle and fifty-two were arrested as over 100 policemen raided the PP II headquarters.<sup>119</sup> On July 28, leaders of the city's Black Coalition publically challenged the police version of events insisting that

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<sup>117</sup> Jones, "Arm Yourself," 20-21. The PP II was apparently lucky that the police did not attack on July 17 because the headquarters housed significantly less ammunition than police had at their disposal and the headquarters was not fortified to withstand an assault of that caliber.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 21-22.

the police created a situation “to draw fire” against the militants.<sup>120</sup> The coalition of thirty organizations also threatened a “massive selective buying campaign” by the black community if demands were not met for the resignation of Police Chief Herman Short, the establishment of a police civilian review board, and an FBI investigation.<sup>121</sup> On September 23, a grand jury absolved the police of any guilt instead placing the blame on “militant leaders trying to drive a wedge between blacks and whites.”<sup>122</sup> With the tragic loss of their leader and isolated from Houston’s mainstream black political establishment, PP II members faced the heavy burden of resurrecting their shell-shocked organization.

The day after the police assault, PP II members Charles Freeman and James Aaron assumed leadership and moved the organization forward. Hampton’s death by Houston CID police officers surprisingly brought in new members to the organization, including women who had been previously absent from PP II membership.<sup>123</sup> The PP II devoted their efforts to combating police brutality and supporting legal defense campaigns.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Thomas A. Johnson, “Houston Blacks Denounce Police”; Alkebulan, *Survival Pending Revolution*, 51. Alkebulan notes that the coalition also charged police with killing twenty blacks accused of robbery in the preceding seven months.

<sup>121</sup> Jones, “Arm Yourself,” 23. The Black Coalition’s demands did not find much action with black Houstonians. The NAACP and several prominent black ministries opposed boycott action.

<sup>122</sup> “Police in Houston Cleared of Slaying,” *New York Times*, September 24, 1970, accessed February 26, 2014,

<http://search.proquest.com/docview/117878291?accountid=14784>.

<sup>123</sup> Jones, “Arm Yourself,” 22-24. Ruby Morgan was the first woman to join the PP II ranks and within a year-and-a-half, approximately six women joined including Annie Harris, Veronica Campbell, Loretta Freeman, Tanganyika Hill, and Carolyn Cooper.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 24. The PP II publicized police misconduct, organized rallies, and continued to advocate for armed self-defense. They also organized a first-year anniversary of the death of Bobby Joe Connor. James Aaron and Johnny Coward faced charges stemming from the July 17 armed standoff. Aaron served two years in county jail for aggravated assault on a police officer.

Throughout their existence, the PP II faced political repression, most commonly seen in legalistic repression as demonstrated by the sixteen warrants issued to PP II members on a variety of charges.<sup>125</sup> Frequent arrests took a toll on the organizations' financial and physical capacities to carry out survival programs. The police also raided the PP II headquarters at least two more times in less than six months including a raid involving twenty-five heavily armed officers and the use of a hovering helicopter that resulted in the arrest of nine members and the confiscation of eight weapons, ammunition, and two gas masks.<sup>126</sup> Monitoring the intense repression and challenges faced by the PP II, an FBI official anticipated in a November 30, 1970 COINTELPRO memorandum that "the PP II will continue to be neutralized in the Houston area."<sup>127</sup>

The PP II continued their efforts in Houston and attempted, unsuccessfully, to establish the Carl Hampton Free Health and Medical Center. In summer 1971, the PP II launched a free pest control program, its first and only outreach program since Hampton's death approximately a year before. Despite their struggles, the PP II's dedication and commitment to "serving the people" won them official status from the national BPP leadership.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Alan Wolfe defines legalistic repression as "the use of laws and/or the legal system for the purpose of stifling dissent." The warrants apparently ranged from performing automobile repairs on a public street to assault with intent to murder a police officer. During an arrest, police planted marijuana on Charles Freeman, but an all-white jury acquitted him of the charges. *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 25. The police justified the raid by saying they were acting on information that the PP II was in possession of a weapon taken during a burglary.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 26-27. Houston, Texas Branch Black Panther Party, "Houston Branch Implements People's Free Pest Control Program," *The Black Panther*, September 25, 1971, microfilm, p. 8.

John “Bunchy” Crear, a former Houston resident living in Los Angeles, came back to Houston for a family funeral and never left. While in California, Crear had done community work for BPP, but the “unprovoked police harassment” he faced in Houston crystallized his decision to stay in the city and join the PP II.<sup>129</sup> Crear and a few others soon drove out to Oakland to secure authorization to start a BPP chapter in Houston. The new formation marked the most effective period for BPP related groups in Houston.

Beginning in October 1971, the Houston BPP had approximately twenty-five members, male and female, representing the largest membership out of the three formations.<sup>130</sup> The new formation also deemphasized armed self-defense in favor of electoral politics and litigation in line with national BPP leadership’s new stance. In 1972, three Houston members won elections on community board of directors for the Fourth Ward opening the door for other posts to be held.<sup>131</sup> The group also implemented survival programs including a free breakfast program, free food giveaways, and sickle-cell anemia and other preventative health testing.<sup>132</sup> They also moved their headquarters from the storefront Dowling location to a residential neighborhood in the Fourth Ward following a Newton directive intended to minimize police raids.<sup>133</sup> Although the group still faced police repression on many levels, they now had a renewed support from many in the Fourth Ward community.

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 27-29. According to Crear, he was arrested in Houston during a traffic stop because his driver’s license was not a Texas issued license.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 29-30. Jones provides a list of names of Houston BPP members during this period.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 30. Houston BPP members secured several different posts through elections.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 31-32. The Houston Panthers held at least two survival-day rallies in 1972 and 1973 giving away hundreds of bags of groceries.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 32.

BPP activism in Houston ended in August 1974 with the BPP national leadership ordering the Houston party members to cease local operations and relocate to Oakland. In all three periods of activity in Houston, black militants faced serious hardships notably linked to police repression, but they continued their struggle to help their community combat poverty, oppression, and police brutality. Nearly all of the Houston BPP members went to Oakland, closing out the final formation and ending “one of the rare moments of sustained black radicalism” in Houston.<sup>134</sup>

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Significant problems existed for those attempting to organize BPP chapters in the South and everywhere else in America. Overt and legalistic repression represented the overwhelming obstacles for the building of BPP organizations, but bad leadership and undisciplined membership also posed problems in some locales. In part, this reflected problems stemming from conflicts with national leadership involving party ideology and high-profile legal battles.<sup>135</sup> These problems seriously undermined the organization’s capacities and stability, but were far from strictly BPP-related, as law enforcement, the FBI, and government no doubt played a role in the internal conflicts and problems that engulfed the organization locally and nationally.

Considering the obstacles that the BPP faced in their first few years of existence, it is incredible that they continued to spread and organize in different regions. There

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 34-35.

<sup>135</sup> As demonstrated in the 1971 leadership split between Huey Newton and Eldridge Cleaver based on differences in party direction. Newton wanted less emphasis on armed revolutionary activity against the United States government that Cleaver continued to advocate for. Instead, Newton wanted to focus on community survival programs and electoral politics for change. Some chapters, especially in the Northeast, sided with Cleaver, and these chapters, as well as Cleaver were expelled by Newton from the BPP causing a huge rift felt in every facet of the BPP organization.

ability to remain viable, despite being constantly riddled with conflict, is a resounding indication of their needed role in addressing the historic and lasting realities of abuse faced by African American communities in America. Overt and hidden racism touches every mile and institution on the American landscape, but the South can easily be recognized as the most obstinate in harboring and perpetuating injustice.

Along with the four southern states surveyed in this paper, the BPP also had southern operations in Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Virginia, and Louisiana.<sup>136</sup> Other organizations existed that were affiliated with the BPP on varying degrees, but not necessarily officially recognized as chapters.<sup>137</sup> Not surprisingly, each of these chapters, NCCFs, and affiliates faced intense overt and legalistic repression. Like in Houston, armed shootouts between the BPP and law enforcement occurred in numerous locations including New Orleans, Winston-Salem, and High Point, North Carolina. Infiltration of BPP organizations also occurred in many of the southern locations much like in other chapters nationwide. Efforts to organize in Cleveland, Mississippi were severely undermined by the work of the Mississippi Sovereignty Commission, an intelligence agency paralleling the FBI, determined to undermine civil rights activities in Mississippi. Despite the inherently violent obstacles that stood in the way, the BPP and other organizations in the South and in the nation, continued efforts to build African American political consciousness and to improve social and economic conditions in their communities.

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<sup>136</sup> Charles E. Jones, foreword in *Showdown in Desire*, xiii.

<sup>137</sup> Examples of the BPP-associated fringe groups include the Alabama Black Liberation Front (BLF), the Arkansas BLF, and Georgia BLF. For more on the Alabama BLF, see Robert W. Widell Jr., “‘The Power Belongs to US and We Belong to the Revolutionary Age’: The Alabama Black Liberation Front and the Long Reach of the Black Panther Party,” in Williams and Lazerow.

It has been nearly half a century since the BPP dramatically entered the scene sending ripples through the halls of American power and casting light on the shadows of injustice. There is much work left to be done in the pursuit of BPP history, especially on a local level. It is important to remember previous generational movements that influenced the BPP and other organizations. Where the BPP did develop a presence, it usually built off of the work previously done by other individuals and organizations in the given locale. Calculating the events occurring in the nation and world during the 1960s and 1970s, and the preceding generations, is also important to understanding the explosion of activism and the extreme response to government power during this period. The history and perpetuation of racism, indifference to poverty and injustice, and unrestrained governmental force in undercutting organized movements for social and economic justice must be acknowledged and critically studied in the assessment of purported democracy in America. Only in taking a critical look at all aspects of American life, history, and government will we ever fully understand the existence of regenerative organic radicalism bent on challenging a society entrenched in injustice and inequality.

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## APPENDIX

In conducting research for this paper, names of specific individuals involved in local BPP operations in the South have been noted and listed below. The purpose of listing the names of those involved is to provide a starting point for those interested in further exploring the BPP. This is by no means a complete list for any of the locales covered, but is the product of consultation with noted research materials.

### GEORGIA

#### Atlanta

Carter, Ronald	Lundy, Sam
Deville, Alton	Martin, Emma Jean
Ferguson, Gene	Oliver, Kouson
Freeman, Thomas	Scruggs, Frank
Gilliam, Sam	Scruggs, Patricia
Gordon, George	Termon, Jennifer
Lester Philip	

Sources: Winston Grady-Willis, "A Changing Tide," 262-267, 277-288; "Where is Sam Gilliam?," *The Black Panther*, August 14, 1971, microfilm, p. 12.

### KENTUCKY

#### Louisville

Alexander, G.T.	Howard, Jackie
Baines, Larry	Jones, Herb
Blakemore, William	Simmons, Ben
Gaynor, Gary	

Source: Anne Lancellotti, "Louisville Panther Case: Story of a Frame-Up."

### TENNESSEE

#### Memphis

Dungee Gaines, Ester Cybil	Lewis, Maurice Edwards
Greer, Jerry	McNairy, Tyrone Josa
Henry, Brenda	Moore, Tyrent
Henry, Jr., William L.	Payne, Janice
Hines, Prince	Smith, John Charles
Holmes, Benjamin Franklin	Warford, Willie Lee
James, Jr., Wilbert	Williams, Elgie
Lewis, Belva	Williams, Roger

Sources: Larry Stone, "The Memphis Chapter of the Black Panther Party," It's About Time, last modified March 26, 2014, accessed March 26, 2014, [http://www.itsabouttimebpp.com/Chapter\\_History/Memphis\\_Chapter\\_BPP.html](http://www.itsabouttimebpp.com/Chapter_History/Memphis_Chapter_BPP.html);  
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## TEXAS

### Dallas and Denton

NCCF and Grassroots, Inc.:

Gaines, Beverly	Kambui, Odinga
Gaines, Curtis	Kelly, Jennifer
Harris, Eddie	Lister, Don
Henderson, Charles Paul	Woods, James
Jackson, Cornelius	

Dallas BPP (1973):

Hasan Khalif (formerly Charles Paul Henderson)  
Minkah, Fahim (formerly Fred Bell)

Denton-Black Intercommunal Party:

Foster, Carl	Ransom, Paula
Haynes, Leroy	Shockley, James "Skip"
Kambui, Odinga	Smith, Bernie
Lewis, Anice	Stoker, Welton
Lewis, Janice	Walton, Marvin
Lewis, Malik	

Source: Ava Wilson, "Left in an Unmarked Grave," 84-107.

## Houston

## Houston BPP Chapter (1968):

Fitzgerald, Barbara	Nichols, Floyd
Hunter, Jack	Rudd, Willie
Jackson, Larry	Wright, Stan
King, Ester	

## People's Party II and Houston BPP Chapter (1970-1974):

Aaron, James	Hill, Tanganyika
Ade, Ayanna	Hines, David
Benton, Veron	Jones, Willie
Butler, Kenneth	Martin, Charles
Campbell, Veronica	Morgan, Ruby
Castilow, Lavaugh	Nichols, Floyd
Cooper, Carolyn	Reed, Bobby
Coward, Johnny	Roberts, Icles James
Crear, John	Sparkman, Fred
Edwards, Steve	Smith, Joy
Fagan, Clifford	Sutton, Aliya
Freeman, Charles	Taylor, Harry
Freeman, Loretta	Taylor, Shirley
Frost, Claude	Wallace, Robert
Hampton, Carl	Williams, Kenneth
Harris, Annie	Wright, Stan
Hatton, Ronald	

Source: Charles E. Jones, "Arm Yourself or Harm Yourself," 3-40.