



Women Who Lead
Black Panther Party

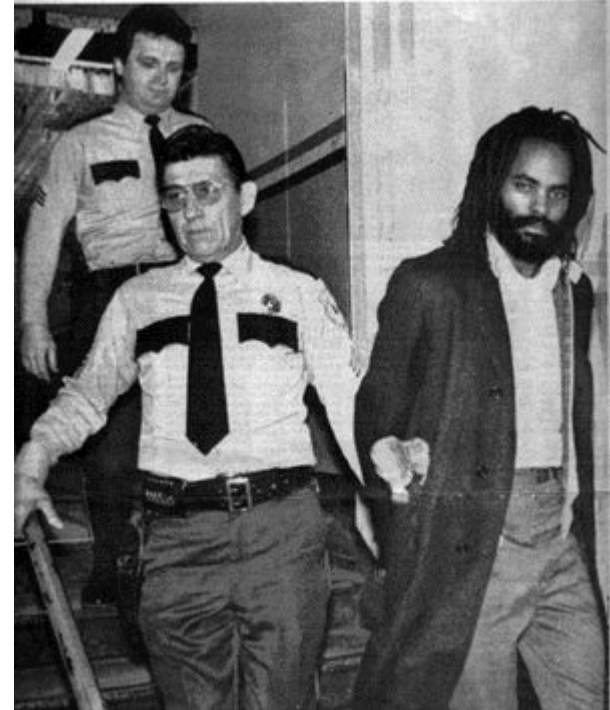
“We Want Freedom” - Mumia Abu-Jamal

Black Church model:

- “A predominantly female membership with a predominantly male clergy” (159)

Competition:

- “Black Panther Party...gave the women of the BPP far more opportunities to lead...than any of its contemporaries” (161)



“We Want Freedom” (pt. 2)

Invisibility does not mean non existent:

- “Virtually invisible within the hierarchy of the organization” (159)

Sexism does not exist in vacuum:

- “Gender politics, power dynamics, color consciousness, and sexual dominance” (167)



“Remembering the Black Panther Party, This Time with Women”

Tanya Hamilton, writer and director of *Night Catches Us*



“A lot of the women I think were kind of the backbone [of the movement],” she said in an interview with Michel Martin. Patti remains the backbone of her community by bailing young men out of jail and raising money for their defense.

“Patricia had gone on to become a lawyer but that she was still bailing these guys out... she was still their advocate... showing up when they had their various arraignments.” (NPR)

“Although *Night Catches Us*, like most “war” films, focuses a great deal on male characters, it doesn’t share the genre’s usual macho trappings—big explosions, fast pace, male bonding. Hamilton’s keen attention to minutia and everydayness provides a strong example of how women directors can produce feminist films out of presumably masculine subject matter.”

“In stark contrast, Hamilton brings emotional depth and acuity to an era usually fetishized with depictions of overblown, tough-guy black masculinity.”

In what ways is the Black Panther Party
fetishized?

What was the Black Panther Party for Self Defense?

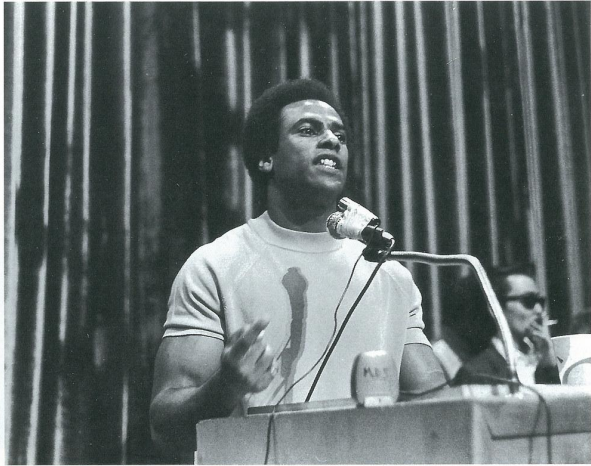


The Beginnings

- Founded in October 1966 in Oakland, Cali.
- “Fairly redistributing wealth to each member of society” (92); race-specific?
- Bobby Seale and Huey Newton co-founders
- 10-Point Program: freedom, employment, end robbery, housing, education, health care, end police brutality, end wars, freedom from prison



Who Recognizes these Individuals?



Huey Newton



Bobby Seale



Eldridge Cleaver

Who Recognizes these Individuals? (pt. 2)



Angela Davis
Honorary
Member



Elaine Brown
Chairwoman
1974-77



Kathleen Cleaver
Communication
Secretary

Elaine Brown

“A Taste of Power”



Childhood

- “I learned to speak exactly like white people” (31)
- “I did anything to belong among them” (30)

What role do parents play in socializing their children? How should they intervene?



Assumptions

- “If you don’t like the fact that I am a woman...here is your chance to leave” (5)
- “I was considered rather arrogant by my peers and somewhat rebellious and argumentative by my teachers” (52)
- **apologetic vs. bold?**



Power Dynamics and the Media

- Elaine's Brown relationship with Jay Kennedy
- Elaine Brown's relationship with Huey Newton



Sexism within in by the Party

- “A Sister has to learn to cook and be ready to back up the Brothers” (189)
- “The very leadership of a male-dominated organization was bent on clinging to old habits about women” (191)
- “Many Black Panther Brothers exploited Black Panther Sisters into having sex with them with the rhetoric that to refuse a warrior was counterrevolutionary” (123)



Tia Hick's Thesis: Centering the
Activism, Leadership, and
Experiences of Women in the Black
Panther Party

Initial thoughts? Similarities to
other readings? Anything that stood
out?

Recurring themes throughout this class:

“While the FBI was killing and jailing the men, the women stepped up into leadership positions and carried the Party well into the early 1980s” - Tia Hicks

Anything sound similar to you?



gettyimages®

Delmaine Donson

Black Panther Party

1059157466

Black Panther's most influential & sustaining programs came from Black women's leadership



Gender Dynamics within Party Membership

The Revolution Has Come: Black Power, Gender, and The Black Panther Party in Oakland (Robyn Spector)

- Unspoken understanding that women in the party were expected to date exclusively within the party whereas men could date members or nonmembers
- Newton prompted conversation on this informal policy and many Panther women responded
 - ◆ “More equal grounds could be gained and this would promote more male appreciate of the female and more female appreciation of herself”
 - ◆ Also noted extreme sexual violence from members of the party, as also seen in Elaine Brown’s book

Gender Dynamics within Party Membership

- JoNina Abron, editor of the Black Panther Newspaper, also addressed these concerns
 - ◆ “Within our Party...there are a couple of comrade brothers who still view women as sexual objects. We should have no men in the Black Panther Party who feel this way or women for that matter. It bothers me that there are a few brothers who seem unable to carry on a conversation with me once I explain to them that I am not interested in going to bed with them. It makes me feel that they feel I have no value beyond my body...I would live to see the Party seriously begin to deal with this issue. While we have a number of women in leadership positions in our Party, they are respected by the men because they are in the leadership.”

Decline of the Black Panther Party

“I Am We: The Demise of the Black Panther Party, 1977-1982”

- Huey Newton returned to Oakland on July 3rd, 1977 after fleeing to Cuba
- Frequently used the phrase “I Am We” to speak about the necessary and inherent unity between leaders and party members
- “The juxtaposition between the “I” that was Newton and the “We” that encompassed the BPP became more and more detrimental to the viability of the party as Newton continued his involvement with drugs and illegal activities”
- BPP had historically benefitted from their identification with Newton’s leadership but this came to be more harmful than helpful

Decline of the Black Panther Party

- Allegations were made that the party had become “weak” and “female”
- His increased displays of masculinity and power assertion led Brown to leave her position in the Party
 - ◆ Note of Resignation: “I’m sorry- which is sorry- for which you may hate me forever- But it seemed too much of [a] man’s world for me. After ten years of everything- that this could stop me (us).- I love you, anyway.”
 - ◆ The event that directly caused the resignation was the beating of a Panther woman as a punishment for speaking out against a Panther man
 - ◆ This event marked the beginning of greater violence and conflict within the party

Decline of the Black Panther Party

- Impact of Brown's departure from the party: "Elaine resigned from the party and the party was ineffective...without Elaine there, the party had no effective administrator"
- Reporter: "Although Newton has remained the party's guiding force and chief theoretician, it was the eloquent and attractive Brown who mingled well with local Democratic party leaders and implemented programs that transformed the Party's image from that of gun-brandishing revolutionary cadre to a politically influential, community-based organization"

Decline of The Black Panther Party

- Richmond Incident → decreased support from Bay Area Left
- Oakland Community School (arguably the flagship program) lost support and success because of stigma of criminality around Newton
- Financial crisis also caused by the Richmond Incident
 - ◆ Party was dependent on financial contributions collected in the field which suffered
- Members cited exhaustion, loneliness, desire to spend time with family, or increased financial stability as reasons for their departure from the Party
- Many resignations due to ideological weakening of the party
- OCS closed in 1982 and eventually Newton was the last Panther left

A Taste of Power: A Black Woman's Story

- Elaine Brown on her position as chairman of the Black Panther Party:
 - ◆ <https://video.alexanderstreet.com/watch/elaine-brown-speech-on-feminism>

Timeline of Elaine Brown's Leadership in the Black Panther Party

Through her involvement in the Party and rising leadership, Brown and Newton became involved

She joined the organization's Central Committee, replacing Eldridge Cleaver as Minister of Information

Ran for city council while Bobby Seale ran for mayor.
Bobby won 40% of vote

Newton fled to Cuba to evade murder charges

Head of the Black Panther Party Newspaper

A Party member named Steve was incredibly violent towards her. The party was not concerned.

Huey Newton removed Bobby Seale from the party for lack of allegiance

Elaine Brown chaired the Black Panther Party from 1974 until 1977

Timeline of Elaine Brown's Leadership in the Black Panther Party

Experienced extreme sexism and misogyny as new chairwoman of the party

Added women into the party's organization

Managed Lionel Wilson's campaign.
He won and became first black mayor of Oakland

Elaine Brown steps down as chair and leaves the party

Focused on electoral politics and community service as chairwoman

Visited Newton in Cuba

Newton ordered the beating of Regina Davis, an administrator at the school

Brown and her daughter leave Oakland for LA

A Taste of Power: A Black Woman's Story



Selected Passages from the Text: *A Taste of Power*

“Indeed, it was Huey who was promoting a line that the primary relationship between men and women in the party was as comrades. That included love and sex. To define another party member as one’s own-- “my” man, “my” woman -- was not merely taking a step backward, clinging to a bourgeois socialization. It was taking a step in the wrong direction, to support the most fundamental principle of capitalism, the private possession of property; and worse, it was to liken people to property, chattel.” (259)

Selected Passages from the Text: *A Taste of Power*

“I was not afraid of Huey in the conventional sense, not like the others in the real sense. Secure in my other world, where Huey’s fists were arms and his rage was love, I had looked away from the others. I was afraid of Huey. I was afraid of falling from grace. I was afraid of being dismissed by him into a void. Life beyond Huey and his party would not be life. Life beyond Huey was a nothing little nigger girl. I would have ridden into hell with him to avoid the abyss.” (298)

Selected Passages from the Text: *A Taste of Power*

“A woman in the Black Power movement was considered, at best, irrelevant. A woman asserting herself was a pariah. A woman attempting a role of leadership was, to my proud black Brothers, making an alliance with the ‘counter-revolutionary, man-hating, lesbian, feminist, white bitches.’ It was a violation of some Black Power principle that was left undefined. If a black woman assumed a role of leadership, she was said to be eroding black manhood, to be hindering the progress of the black race. She was an enemy of black people.” (357)

Selected Passages from the Text: *A Taste of Power*

“Oddly, I had never thought of myself as a feminist...It was an idea reserved for white women, I said, assailing the women’s movement, wholesale, as either racist or inconsequential to black people. Sexism was a secondary problem. Capitalism and racism were primary. I had maintained that position even in the face of my exasperation with the chauvinism of Black Power men in general and Black Panther men in particular...The feminists were right. The value of my life had been obliterated as much by being female as by being black and poor. Racism and sexism in America were equal partners in my oppression...Even men who were themselves oppressed wanted power over women...There would be no further impositions on me by men, including black men, including Black Panther men. **I would support every assertion of human rights by women...I would declare that the agenda of the Black Panther Party and our revolution to free black people from oppression specifically included black women.**” (367)

What do you think?

How does the case of Elaine Brown and the BPP compare to other examples we've discussed (Mandela, Garvey, etc.)?

In what ways do you see similar issues with black women in political leadership today?

Other thoughts and/or responses to the text excerpts?

Angela Davis

Freedom is a Constant Struggle:
Ferguson, Palestine and the
Foundation of a Movement



“Women have always done the work of organizing Black radical movements, so women should also be in the leadership”

Critical of individuals being the “face” of a movement



“Well, I don’t know whether Obama played a major role in developing the future of Black politics within the US.”

“...most people who are familiar with Dr. MLK - they know little more than that he had a dream. And of course all of us have had dreams.”



*“When various public figures asked, ‘Where are the leaders?’ the movement said we are not a leaderless movement, we are a leader-**full** movement.”*

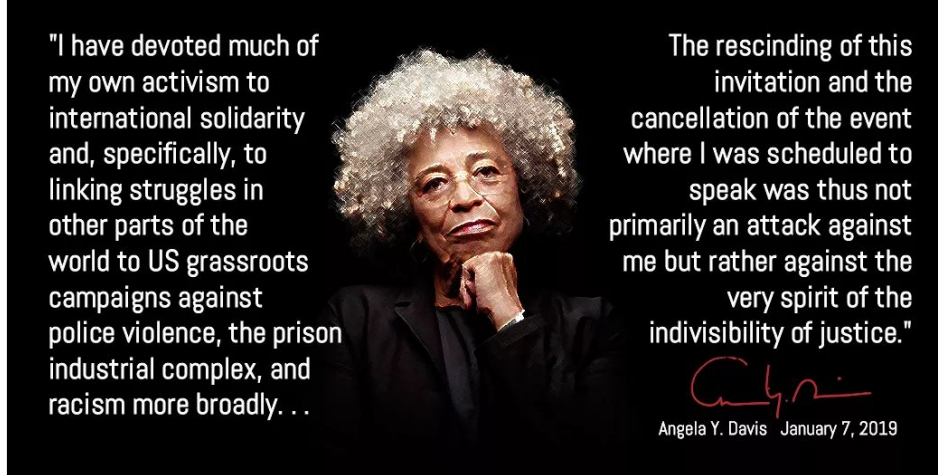
Carry it on./Pass it
down to the
children./Pass it
down. Carry it on.../
To Freedom!

Davis uses her platform to advocate and bring to light movements that she's not necessarily involved in "grandparents of these movements" but using her political leadership and power to bring to light the new generation.

What is Angela up to today? How does it fit into the context of the Black Panther Party?

In short: Prison abolition work and activism surrounding the rights of Palestinians.

In my opinion, she is working towards achieving all of the points on the BPP ten-point program and going beyond that.



The Black Panther Party Ten Point Program

1. We want freedom. We want power to determine the destiny of our Black Community.
2. We want full employment for our people.
3. We want an end to the robbery by the white man of our Black Community.
4. We want decent housing, fit for shelter of human beings.
5. We want education for our people that exposes the true nature of this decadent American society. We want education that teaches us our true history and our role in the present-day society.
6. We want all black men to be exempt from military service.
7. We want an immediate end to POLICE BRUTALITY and MURDER of black people.
8. We want freedom for all black men held in federal, state, county and city prisons and jails.
9. We want all black people when brought to trial to be tried in court by a jury of their peer group or people from their black communities, as defined by the Constitution of the United States.
10. We want land, bread, housing, education, clothing, justice and peace.

The Government

After 9/11, the War on Terror became a 21st Century project of Western Society.

- Justified anti-Muslim racism
- Militarization of local police
- Israeli occupation of Palestine
- Repression of immigrants

Racist state violence is a constant theme in the United States. Soared during the Obama Administration. (Ferguson, NYC)

Assata Shakur

Falsely charged in the 70s multiple times

Called “The mother hen” of the Black Liberation Army
the media.

Media would say the BLA were “insatiably violent
proclivities.”

Term “terrorist” was applied to US Black liberation activists
during the 60s and 70s



Assata Shakur cont.

Reinstated into an FBI list in 2015

- FBI's Most Wanted Terrorist List

This was post- war 9/11, “The War on Terror” so calling Shakur a terrorist in that context is odd

The first woman to be in the Most Wanted Terrorist List



Most Wanted Terrorists

Act of Terrorism - Domestic Terrorism; Unlawful Flight to Avoid Confinement - Murder

JOANNE DEBORAH CHESIMARD



UP TO \$2,000,000* REWARD

For information leading to the safe return of Joanne Chesimard

A.K.A. Assata Shakur

Wanted for Escaping on November 2, 1979 while serving a life term for the Murder of a New Jersey State Trooper.

DESCRIPTION

Joanne Deborah Bryan Chesimard	
A.K.A. Assata Shakur	
Sex & Race	Female, Black
DOB	1/14/57
POB	New York City, NY
Height	5'6"
Weight	115 lbs, 160 lbs
Hair	Black/Purple/Orange
Complexion	Medium-Bronze
Scars	Scar on left cheek, scar on forehead, scar on left shoulder and unscarred right arm
Build	Slender
DOB #	309-684
DOB #	17020
FPI #	AAABAB71AAAAAHC

Subject has documented her parents in Brazil. Call through various media outlets and the local FBI. Subject lives in apartment with several accomplices and other terrorists. Subject lives several hours seeking shelter from clothing.

FBI, 1010 American Legion Drive, Boston Division
(978) 792-2020
New Jersey Bureau, Trenton Division
(609) 882-7000

ARMED AND DANGEROUS



PHOTOGRAPHIC SECTION
CIRCULAR NO. 33

POLICE
CITY OF



FOLLOW AND E
JOANNE
AKA -
DOB -
8' 8538
WANTED
MEMBE
2 MEAN
SQUAD

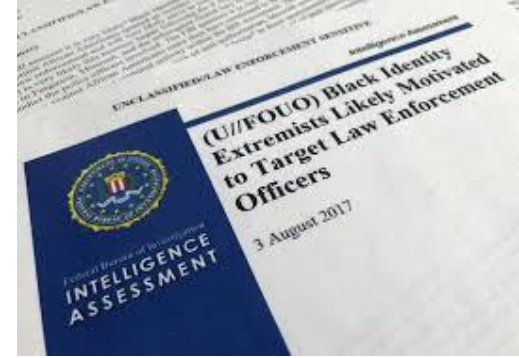
“Black Identity Extremist” Label

In October 2017 and FBI report was leaked

- “Black Identity Extremist” is a domestic threat sweeping the nation and threatening the lives of law enforcement officers

This is a distraction from the actual terrorist threat of white supremacy

“It harkens back to the dark days of our federal government abusing its power to go after civil rights activists during the heyday of the civil rights movement. There is no such thing as black identity extremism.”



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GwAKPnZh0U0>