

University of Nevada, Reno

**Women in the Black Panthers:
Building or Departing from Traditions of Activism in the Freedom Struggle**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in History

By

Carla L. Trounson

Dr. Greta de Jong/Thesis Advisor

May 2015

Copyright by Carla L. Tounson, 2015
All Rights Reserved

THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

We recommend that the thesis prepared under our supervision by

CARLA L. TROUNSON

entitled

**Women in the Black Panthers:
Building or Departing from Traditions of Activism in the Freedom Struggle**

be accepted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Greta de Jong, Ph.D. Advisor

Barbara B. Walker, Ph.D., Committee Member

Miriella Melara, Ph.D., Committee Member

Margaret Ferrara, Ph.D., Graduate School Representative

David Zeh, Ph.D., Dean, Graduate School

May 2015

Abstract

This thesis examines the role of African American women activists in the Black Panther Party by placing their activism in the broader historical context of black women in the freedom struggle. This thesis sheds light on the continuities and departures from earlier work that characterized black women's activism and the Black Panther Party as a whole, by analyzing how their experiences, ideologies, and activism compared with those of earlier women activists who lived during Slavery, Jim Crow, and the Civil Rights eras. My thesis examines how women, as activists, pushed past boundaries of gender, and helped to broaden the meaning of freedom. Activists like those who joined the Black Panther Party understood that there was much more work to be done before African Americans were truly free and equal to white people. Included in my analysis are black women's experiences of sexual abuse and rape, which was used to keep blacks in their place and enforce white supremacy, but which spurred activism. Many women in the Black Panther Party were activists in the civil rights movement, and they turned to the Black Panther Party because they saw a chance to serve and shape a new black community. They expanded the roles of women as leaders and revolutionaries in the continuing struggle against racism and poverty, as well as for freedom and self-determination.

Acknowledgments

First and foremost I would like to thank my advisor and committee chair Dr. Greta de Jong. I count myself fortunate because I was introduced to African American history through her lectures. Throughout my time as a graduate student she has been a constant guide and patient supporter. She has been constructive in her criticisms, patient, and encouraging throughout the many revisions of my thesis. She will always have my deepest gratitude. I would also like to thank the faculty and staff of the History Department at the University of Nevada, Reno. Learning at UNR was a joy. The courses were insightful, and I was challenged to meet the high standards of excellence. I am thankful because I learned to research, analyze, and write. I am particularly grateful for the support and encouragement of Drs. Walker and Ferrara. I want to thank my friends Geralda Miller and Chris Zamboni for our thought provoking discussions on African American history, and for our warm friendship along the way. Thank you Geralda for being the first and fearless, and I will always remember you Chris. Many thanks to Seth Flatley for being there, and to Brett Copeland for your persistent encouragement and humor. I am indebted to the people who came before me, including all the known and unknown African American women who fought for equality and dedicated their lives in the Freedom

Struggle. To those women known to me, my great-grandmother Mary Johnson, my grandmother Ida Louise Daniels, and my mother Mary Hickson, thank you for your love, and for giving me all the opportunities you never had. Finally, to my daughter Amber, my son-in-law Anthony and granddaughter Isabella, and to my sons Alex and Taylor, for your unceasing love, support, and encouragement, thank you. The struggle continues through you.

Table of Contents

Abstract	i
Acknowledgments	ii
Introduction	1
Historiography	5
Sources and methodology	17
Chapter One: From the Beginning: Slavery and Activism	20
The evolution of racism in North America	20
Racialization of class relationships	23
Enslaved people’s lives and activism	25
Unspeakable thoughts, unspoken	29
Emancipation, Reconstruction, and the rise of Jim Crow	37
Black women activists in the Jim Crow era	38
Education, mutualism, and the freedom struggle	41
Gender struggles	42
Resisting rape	47
Women in the civil rights movement	49
Chapter Two: Revolutionary Women	55
Backgrounds	55
Ideology	58
Reasons for joining the BPP and Gender Struggles	60
Chapter Three: From Revolution to Community Organizing	68
The ten point program	68
Armed self-defense	70
Police harassment and violent attacks on BPP activists	73
Capitalism, racism, and patriarchy	75
Challenging sexism within the movement	78
BPP women’s leadership and community organizing	82
Conclusion	89
Bibliography	92

Introduction

In the mid 1960's the chant "burn baby burn" could be heard in the burnt ruins of the black community of Watts, in Los Angeles California. Despite decades of civil rights activism and the passage of federal legislation mandating an end to racial discrimination, black people still lived segregated in the small towns and cities of the South, and in many ghettos and neighborhoods throughout the North. The places where they lived were tinderboxes, waiting for a spark. It was in this caldron of heightened expectations, dashed hopes, frustration, rage, and dreams denied that a group called the Black Panther Party was organized in Oakland, California, in 1966.

There is a long history of brutality and violence against black people in America. Violence was used to control black people for the economic development of the colonies, and later the United States. During slavery, black people found the means to resist, even as they sought their freedom and the opportunity to participate in the society and government that endeavored to keep them in chains. After the Civil War, the newly freed slaves experienced a short period of varying degrees of equality with white Americans. During Reconstruction they built towns, became educated, entered professions, and started farms and businesses. But after Reconstruction ended in the late 1870s,

African American progress was severely slowed down, and in some places, halted. During this period, sometimes called the Nadir, violence increased against blacks, and laws were passed instituting segregation and white supremacy.

Jim Crow laws, and the accompanying systemic violence that supported white privilege, reigned supreme from the late nineteenth century until the 1960s. Within this oppressive system, however, African Americans found ways to resist racism through subtle forms of protest and, occasionally, more organized activism. In the post-World War II era, during a time of economic prosperity and with the United States engaged in a global struggle against communism, black Americans were able to leverage these developments into a powerful movement for social change. Seeking to break free of Jim Crow laws and enjoy the benefits of being American citizens, African American activists began to organize for more direct action against this systemic oppression. Their community work in the previous decades laid the intellectual and structural foundations that made it possible for African Americans to stage the more open and organized protests of the 1950s and 1960s.

The Civil Rights Movement was the most visible phase of black political activism and part of a centuries-old organizing tradition by black people to free

and sustain themselves. This direct action movement culminated in the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, but did not eliminate white privilege, or institute full inclusion into the fabric of American economic, social, and political life. The Jim Crow signs were taken down and blacks could eat at lunch counters and travel on public transportation, but they were denied full economic, political, and social inclusion. Blacks did not get the higher paying jobs, and many still lacked the economic means or opportunities to buy the most basic necessities, like housing, and in many cases, food. Visible signs of a racialized society were banned, but racism and segregation remained.¹

This thesis examines African American women who joined the Black Panther Party and their struggles against oppression. Their activism will be placed in the context of African American women's historical struggles for freedom and equality. I will examine who they were, the reasons they joined this movement, and whether the women in the Black Panthers differed significantly in their motivations, ideology (understanding of the causes of oppression and what to do about it), programs, and roles in the freedom movement when

¹ For some overviews of black experiences during slavery, Reconstruction, and the Jim Crow era, see Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (1997); Betty Wood, *Slavery in Colonial America, 1619-1776* (2005); Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (1988); and Leon F. Litwack, *Trouble in Mind: Black Southerners in the Age of Jim Crow* (1998).

compared to earlier women activists. This thesis extends the historiography of African American women activists in the Black Panthers not only by focusing on the women, but by placing their activism in the broader historical context of black women in the freedom struggle. By analyzing how their experiences, ideologies, and activism compared with those of earlier women activists in the slavery and Jim Crow eras, this thesis sheds light on the continuities and departures that characterized black women's activism and the Black Panther Party as a whole.

My thesis examines how women, as activists, pushed past boundaries of gender, and helped to broaden the meaning of freedom. Included in my analysis are black women's experiences of sexual abuse and rape, which was used to keep blacks in their place and enforce white supremacy, but which spurred activism. I will argue that while many women in the Black Panther Party were activists in the civil rights movement, they turned to the Black Panther Party because they saw a chance to serve and shape a new black community. They expanded the roles of women as leaders and revolutionaries in the continuing struggle against racism and poverty, as well as for freedom and self-determination.

African American women have fought political, social, gender, and economic oppression from the earliest years of the country that was to become

the United States. They were agents in changing their status from chattel, and later, three-fifths of a person, to that of people with full rights of citizenship. This fight, which began during their enslavement, and continues to this very day, has not only been a fight to resist racial oppression, but it has also been a fight for gender equality between the sexes, and to eliminate class based inequities.

Historiography

African Americans' lives and struggles were inaccurately documented and sometimes invisible in early historical scholarship. White people wrote history and constructed both their own images as well as the images of African Americans and other minorities, usually based on written records created by wealthy and educated people whose perceptions were influenced by social structures that kept nonwhite Americans subordinate. More recently, social historians have used oral testimony from African Americans, as well as written records such as diaries, biographies, organizational and governmental records not previously consulted, to give agency to African American voices as they relate their history. Historians with less racial and gender bias, and who also include minorities, are contributing new scholarship on African American history, including the Black Power era. Through this process, voices of African

American women and their life experiences can inform new generations. Their witnessing deconstructs prevalent images that were handed down through history representing black women as congenitally lazy, dense, angry, and sex crazed people who needed to be controlled. These were the same images that were used against women in the Black Panther movement to disrupt and marginalize their efforts for self-determination.

My work is informed by historians such as Ira Berlin, Eric Williams, Barbara Fields, John Hope Franklin, Greta de Jong, Eric Foner, Charles Payne, David W. Blight, Jacqueline Jones, and others who have examined the connections between capitalism, racism, and African American experiences. These scholars have examined how laws, institutions, and beliefs that were developed in the colonial era to control black people's labor shaped the economy and political structures of the United States.

Berlin, Franklin, Williams, and de Jong all suggest plantation owners adopted racial slavery as the most efficient and profitable way to secure the large numbers of workers needed to produce tobacco, cotton, and other cash crops that enriched themselves and the nation as a whole. The central place of slavery in the economic life of the colonies and the United States ensured that it survived. As these scholars have shown, white supremacist ideologies were

formed in response to, and as justification for, the race and class hierarchies that grew out of slavery, and were subsequently ingrained in the nation's economic, political, and cultural systems. Slavery affected not just individual attitudes, but the entire social structure as well.²

African American resistance to this system has existed from the beginning. Activism by slaves, and later freedmen and women, took many forms, as several historians have shown. In *Black Culture and Black Consciousness* (1977) Lawrence W. Levine examines African American resistance during and after slavery. Slaves took actions to become agents of their own destiny within the confines of systemic brutality. He focuses on their utilization of folk tales, spirituals, songs, toasts, and religion to alleviate the brutality in their lives. Levine speaks of black consciousness and resistance, and the cultural ways in which blacks resisted oppression.³

One of the many forms of activism adapted by slaves and later freed African Americans was the system of mutualism. Slave communities developed

² Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1997); John Hope Franklin and Alfred A. Moss, Jr. *From Slavery To Freedom: A History of African Americans* (New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1994); Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1994); Greta de Jong, *Invisible Enemy: The African American Freedom Struggle after 1965* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010)

³ Lawrence W. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: African American Folk Thought From Slavery to Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007)

a system of mutual aid among their members in order for the community to continue and flourish. Jacqueline Jones writes, “In the quarters, the communal spirit was but an enlarged manifestation of kin relationships. Indeed, family, kin, and community blended into one another, for blood ties were often supplemented by “fictive kin” when slaves defined patterns of mutual obligations among themselves”⁴

Other subtle forms of activism have also been a part of the African American experience since slavery, where, because of their subordinate position, in the face of overwhelming power, their protests at times had to be disguised. These other forms of protest and political activism are in the realm of what Robin Kelley (drawing on the work of political anthropologist James Scott), refers to as “infrapolitics”. Infrapolitics, according to Scott is, “the circumspect struggle waged daily by subordinate groups, including theft, foot dragging, and the destruction of property”; and according to Kelly, is “the daily confrontations, evasive actions, and stifled thoughts that often inform organized political movements”⁵. Black women’s traditions of mutualism could fall into this category—a hidden form of resistance that both helped people endure the system

⁴ Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1985), p. 31

⁵ Robin Kelly, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Working Class* (New York: The Free Press, 1995), p. 8

and indicated an ideological rejection of plantation owners' individualistic, capitalist values. As Jacqueline Jones observes, "Slave women's work for other community members challenged the master's authority in direct ways. These women clandestinely fed runaways in an effort to keep them from harm's way. While the act of cooking might not differ in a technical sense when performed by blacks as opposed to whites, when carried out in such subversive ways, it assumed political significance for social relations on the plantations."⁶

Enslaved people also participated in more overt action aimed at challenging racial oppression, including violent attacks on slaveholders. Slaves and later freed African Americans knew they had to fight for their freedom, and they participated in the making of their freedom. They were not by-standers, having no say in what happened to them. Although it was very dangerous, and they knew many would die, they also took direct action to free themselves through slave revolts, including the revolts of Denmark Vesey and Nat Turner.⁷ During the Civil War, enslaved people ran away from the plantations in droves, and thousands of black men joined the Union armies that eventually eradicated slavery once and for all. As Lawrence Powell and other historians have shown,

⁶ Jones, p. 31

⁷ For an analysis of these and other slave rebellions, see Herbert Aptheker, "American Negro slave revolts," *Science & Society* (1937): 512-538

black Americans were not passive recipients in this process but active participants in securing their own freedom. Initially seeking only to preserve the Union and bring the southern states back into the nation, President Abraham Lincoln was forced to develop policies to deal with runaway slaves and eventually concluded that emancipation was a military necessity.⁸

The end of slavery did not mean African Americans were free from oppression, and the Jim Crow system ensured that most black people remained powerless and poor. In their analyses of black women's lives and activism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, scholars such as Elsa Barkley Brown, Jacqueline Jones, Stephanie Shaw, and Tera Hunter have identified a "womanist" approach to oppression that viewed class issues, violence, racism, sexism, and economic exploitation as interconnected. As Brown explains, "Womanism is a consciousness that incorporates racial, cultural, sexual, national, economic, and political considerations. Black womanism is a philosophy that concerns itself both with sexual equality in the black community and with the world power structure that subjugates both blacks and women. Many black women at various points in history had a clear understanding that race issues

⁸ Ira Berlin, et al., *Slaves No More: Three Essays on Emancipation and the Civil War* (1992); Lawrence N. Powell, *New Masters: Northern Planters During the Civil War and Reconstruction* (1980)

and women's issues were inextricably linked, that one could not separate women's struggle from race struggle."⁹

African American woman worked for social change through their families, community organizations, churches, and professional positions. Evelyn Higginbotham's work on African American women in the church describes African American's women's organizing traditions. Higginbotham chronicles the efforts of African American women during the Nadir and makes known their efforts to hold the African American community together, while continuing to make political progress (after disenfranchisement), and economic gains through the church. Their early work in the church produced a group of women who then were able to use their organizational skills in social work.¹⁰

Higginbotham's scholarship paved the way for the later works written in 1996 by Patricia Sullivan and Stephanie Shaw. These authors de-emphasize the top down (leadership) approach to the study of history, and instead chronicle the efforts of the groups and individuals who have been marginalized in written history, but whose efforts made the African American experience in the United States a more positive one. While Patricia Sullivan relates the efforts of African

⁹ Elsa Barkley Brown, *Womanist Consciousness: Maggie Lena Walker and the Independent Order of Saint Luke* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), p. 414

¹⁰ Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (1993).

Americans in the political arena, Stephanie Shaw tells the story of the efforts of African American women in the professional classes. Tera Hunter builds on this work by documenting the fight by African Americans to claim and establish homes and businesses in post-Civil War Atlanta. These historians weave together the neglected story of the masses of African American women who fought to uplift their communities through the church and other institutions, at the same time chronicling their efforts to eradicate racism through all avenues available, as they worked to effect a positive change in their world.¹¹

Violence was a central mechanism used to subjugate African Americans. Black males and many black women were subject to lynching, which is known, but the subject of the mass raping of black women has not been included extensively in studies of the freedom struggle. Danielle L. McGuire has documented cases of rape, resistance to it from the black communities, and how that resistance and activism helped to spur the civil rights movement. Documenting the long history of the rape of black women details the violence and force used to subjugate and control black people, not only during the civil rights movements, but back to slavery. As former sharecropper and civil rights

¹¹ Stephanie Shaw, *What A Woman Ought to Be and to Do: Black Professional Women Works During the Jim Crow Era* (1997); Patricia Sullivan, *Days of Hope: Race and Democracy in the New Deal Era* (1996); Tera Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors after the Civil War* (1997).

activist Fannie Lou Hamer most famously said, "A black woman's body was never hers alone"¹²

Hamer was one of hundreds of local activists who, along with better-known leaders such as Martin Luther King Jr., were instrumental in overturning the Jim Crow racial system. As Charles Payne argues in his study of the Mississippi freedom movement, Hamer and other women activists such as Ella Baker and Septima Clark reflected and inspired other activists to adopt an organizing tradition rooted in the belief that ordinary people could lead movements for social change. Like the earlier activists studied by Elsa Barkley Brown and Jacqueline Jones, these women did not separate racial, class, and gender oppression. All three were connected and they viewed participation in the civil rights movement as part of a wider fight for social justice.¹³

Lynne Olson expands on Payne's argument of ordinary black people using the organizing tradition to fight for their rights in *Freedom's Daughters* (2001). She concentrates on black women and emphasizes their participation in the struggle against not only racism, but also sexism. Similarly, Barbara Ransby's

¹² Danielle L. McGuire, *At The Dark End Of The Street: Black Women, Rape, and Resistance: A New History of the Civil Rights Movement, from Rosa Parks to the Rise of Black Power* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 2011), p. 156.

¹³ Charles Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

analysis of Ella Baker and her role in the freedom struggle focuses on Baker's life and her contribution to the movement, including her ideology of ordinary people fighting to free themselves without the need of a leader, and her fight for her gender to be heard among the black male leaders of the movement.¹⁴

In the last thirty years, many of the women have written of their experiences and historians are including women in their scholarship in this era. Books written by Lynne Olson, Charles Payne, Jeanne Theoharis, Barbara Ransby, Gerda Lerner, and Danielle McGuire explore women activists' roles, and racialized violence on women. Black women sought to empower black communities, challenge systems of oppression, and galvanize black people to fight back. Black women participated in existing organizations and helped to establish new ones during the Civil Rights movement. Women who occupied leadership positions, as well as thousands of others who worked quietly behind the scenes, were an important part of the movement, and their contributions to the struggle for freedom were not unknown at the time.¹⁵ Disillusionment with

¹⁴ Lynne Olson, *Freedom's Daughters: Unsung Heroines of the Civil Rights Movement From 1830 To 1970* (New York: Scribner, 2001); Barbara Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003)

¹⁵ Lynne Olson, *Freedom's Daughters: Unsung Heroines of the Civil Rights Movement From 1830 To 1970* (New York: Scribner, 2001); Charles Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Jeanne Theoharis, *The Rebellious Life of Mrs. Rosa Parks* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2013), Barbara Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision* (Chapel Hill: The

the limits of change in the civil rights era and the realization that many white Americans were not willing to support more fundamental reforms to the nation's political and economic structures led some activists to conclude that African Americans needed to establish institutions of their own that they could control without white interference. Much of the scholarship on the Black Power movement documents the importance activists placed on self-determination, self-defense, and the economic development of the black community, and their lived injustice. There is much written that focuses on the Black Panther Party's ten point, food, and self-defense programs, and police encounters. The role of women in the Party has only recently begun to gain attention from historians.

Lynn Olson's excellent book on women in the civil rights movement has some information on the women who would later participate in the black power movement, but her main focus is on the women who began the civil rights movement, which she explores to the year of 1970. There are books on the black power movement that enhance the scholarship on women in the Black Panther Party. In his book *Up Against the Wall*, Curtis Austin brings insight to the sexism displayed by men in the Black Panther Party and the contributions of the women

University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Gerda Lerner, ed., *Black Women In White America*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972); Danielle L. McGuire, *At The Dark End Of The Street: Black Women, Rape, and Resistance: A New History of the Civil Rights Movement, from Rosa Parks to the Rise of Black Power* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 2011)

and men to combat chauvinism. Books by Danielle L. McGuire, Gerda Lerner, and Angela Y. Davis all address violence against black people and the fight by black women for control of their bodies, as well as for gender equality. Books like *The Black Panthers Speak*, edited by Philip S. Foner, and other studies by authors like Jack Olsen, Joshua Bloom, and Waldo E. Martin, Jr. document why many women joined the BPP. They saw the rejection of black people from what should be a democratic American society, noting both the failure of mobility of the black working class, and the violence committed against black people in their communities. As Joshua Bloom writes, "Unlike civil rights activists who advocated for full citizenship rights within the United States, the Black Panther Party rejected the legitimacy of the U.S. government. The Panthers saw black communities in the United States as a colony and the police as an occupying army."¹⁶ Women in the BPP carved out new roles for themselves because they saw themselves as revolutionaries who were fighting for a completely new way of governing themselves and their community.

Sources and methodology

This thesis draws from a range of sources including the memoirs of BPP members, media accounts of the movement, scholarly writings of organizers who

¹⁶ Joshua Bloom, p. 2

went on to work in academia, newspaper articles, and government records. Many of the primary sources used are writings from the women in the Black Panthers that shed light on the ideology, roles, sexism, and tactics of the women in the movement. Kathleen Cleaver in her chapter on “Women, Power, and Revolution” in the book *Liberation, Imagination, and the Black Panther Party* provides insight into the role of woman as revolutionaries and resisters to oppression. Cleaver also gave an interview in 1998 for a *Frontline* documentary, “The Two Nations of Black America,” in which she describes why she got involved in the Black Panther Party and the class struggle that still goes on today. Black Panther Party member Regina Jennings, in her contribution to the anthology *The Black Panther Party Reconsidered*, brings a different view of sexism in the movement as she personally experienced sexual harassment by her leader. Her recollections provide vital information on male and female relationships within the organization. Elaine Brown’s book *A Taste of Power* describes her life as a Black Panther and the reactions to her ascension to the top of the Black Panther Party. This book describes the role of women in powerful positions within the black power movement and the Black Panther organization.

In addition to their memoirs, party members Kathleen Cleaver and Angela Davis have written journal articles in the *Black Scholar*. These articles

detail their own roles in the movement along with the steps taken by women activists to bring about change in their communities, while fighting the racist structure that kept African Americans imprisoned.

I have supplemented the women's own accounts with records from the federal government on the Black Panthers, particularly the information contained in the Federal Bureau of Investigation files, and newspaper articles including *Black Panther Speaks*.

Chapter One of this thesis summarizes the earlier history of activism by African American women from slavery through the Civil Rights Movement utilizing many secondary sources. It provides an overview of women's activism before the rise of the Black Panther Party, focusing especially on activists' motivations and ideologies, and how multiple systems of race, class, and gender oppression framed their roles in the early period. This will facilitate understanding of the long tradition of activism that continued with the women in the Black Panthers.

Chapter Two examines the women who joined the BPP, analyzing their motivations and ideology, and how sexism, racism, and gender roles framed their accomplishments and contributions in the organization. Women in the BPP

joined the party to serve and defend the black community, and as activists they challenged gender roles.

Chapter Three examines how the BPP changed from a revolutionary group, to organizing within the bounds of the American political structure. Examined are their expanding roles, programs, and the way legalized systemic violence continued to affect the party in an effort to decrease participation and keep black people disenfranchised.

Placing events of the late 1960s in a broader historical context enhances our understanding of the neglected story of the activist women of the Black Panthers. They worked, labored, and fought to uplift, care for, and develop their families and communities, as their ancestors had done with mutual assistance. But unlike their ancestors, these women pushed for radical change because of heightened awareness of the limitations of civil rights and the failure of economic prosperity, which was critical in their quest for self-determination.

Chapter One

From the Beginning: Slavery and Activism

The evolution of racism in North America

For over two hundred and fifty years, capitalism was the engine that sparked and maintained the institution of chattel slavery in the group of colonies that were to become the United States. With the rise of large commercial farms came the need for cheap labor. Cultivating crops like cotton and tobacco, the farmer who cut his labor costs made a very profitable return in his investment. This system required large amounts of cheap or free labor, so the planter class turned to Native Americans, white indentured servants, and then increasingly to African Americans.

Europeans arrived on a continent they viewed as available because of their perception that the indigenous people were not using the land. Europeans first tried to enslave Native Americans to work their individual properties. But there were not enough Indians that could be relied on in the large enough numbers needed for the land under cultivation. Many of them who worked cultivating crops died in large numbers because they were exposed for the first time to diseases that had been unknown to them. The planters also lost large numbers of native slaves because many ran away. Having lived on the continent

for generations they knew the land and had support systems, so they could escape back to their homes and families.

European planters also used indentured servants for a cheap source of labor. Indentured servants at that time were not categorized by skin color and could include Africans as well as white people. Indentured servants came to the new world looking for opportunities not found in the old world. There were many reasons why they left the old world. Many of them came because they were poor, and there was not enough land in the old world to labor as farmers. These new immigrants signed a contract and served for a number of years. But the growing number of free white men posed a problem for the planter class. Rebellion by the yeomen in the late 1600's encouraged plantation owners to look at African people as a permanent solution for their labor problem.

In the early colonial period some African creoles, people who were of African and European parentage, worked as indentured servants and were skilled laborers and sailors. Some knew many languages because Spanish and Portuguese traders had been coming for years to the African coast and had established communities in Africa. Many creoles settled in the colonies, buying land and starting businesses. According to Ellen Carol DuBois, "One of the first African women imported into North America was Mary in 1622, and she ended

up at the same plantation with Antonio, a Negro. The two eventually were released from indentured servitude when their contracts expired, married, bought land, and raised a large family."¹ This account speaks to the fluidity of indentured servitude and opportunities for mobility that Africans had in the early colonial period.

Africans frequently worked alongside white European indentured servants and shared their leisure time. It was the economic necessity for cheaper labor, and a population and inexhaustible supply of hearty Africans, that changed the European perception of Africans from workers into slaves. As Greta de Jong points out, "A key difference that set [Africans] apart was their ambiguous legal standing. They were not English subjects, and those who were servants often lacked written contracts setting out the terms of their employment."² Black laborers gradually lost more and more rights as colonial elites worked to set them apart from white workers and confine them to permanent enslavement. Laws were passed that increasingly restricted their freedom, including their movement, education, and political rights (such as their ability to bring cases to court), while at the same time expanding the rights of

¹ Ellen Carol Dubois and Lynn Dumenil, *Through Women's Eyes: An American History with Documents* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's Press 2005), p. 22

² de Jong, p. 9

white labor. As Eric Williams states, "A racial twist has thereby been given to what is basically an economic phenomenon. Slavery was not born of racism: rather racism was the consequence of slavery."³ Berlin also argues this point when he writes, "In short, if slavery made race, its larger purpose was to make class."⁴ Elites became the property owners and in positions of political power and economic influence.

Racialization of class relationships

Africans were not always viewed as property, and their black skin or 'color' was not always the identifying mark of slavery. The institution that slavery emerged in North America evolved slowly and it was a gradual process. The concept of race as we know it today did not exist. Barbara Fields notes, "Ideas about color, like ideas about anything else, derive their importance, indeed their very definition, from their context."⁵ The Portuguese could treat some Africans as kings, and others as slaves. This is because ideas on race are flexible. Race is not a physical entity, and is not something unchangeable or set in stone. Race cannot be defined as a biological fact, as is demonstrated by

³ Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), p. 6

⁴ Berlin, p. 5

⁵ Barbara Fields, "Ideology and Race in American History," in *Region, Race, and Reconstruction: Essays in Honor of C. Vann Woodward.*, ed. J. Morgan Kousser and James M. McPherson (New York / Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), p.143-177

varying definitions of “white” and “black” across cultures and over time in the United States. Race is, instead, an ideology that was put in place to justify the institution of slavery when the rise of Enlightenment ideals and the American Revolution called the system into question. As Christopher Lasch points out, it was "at the very point of time when large numbers of men and women were beginning to question the moral legitimacy of slavery that the idea of identifying race came into its own."⁶

In the colonial era bodily characteristics were used to determine who would belong to the enslaved, and by pointing out differences in the characteristics between peoples, a black slave class was created. When questions arose concerning the legitimacy of keeping slaves, those characteristics that determined keeping the African people as slaves in the first place were used and twisted to show how any people with physical characteristics such as those held by Africans, must also have mental defects, be without morals, and possess a childlike sensibility. These were differences that could readily be seen between whites and slaves.

In the colonial era and beyond, lower class whites who worked for wages differentiated themselves from slaves, and black people more generally, by their

⁶ Christopher Lasch quoted in Fields, p. 152

whiteness. They gained better jobs without competition from blacks and they identified with the white elites. It did not matter that they were oppressed by the same elites who owned the means of production; they saw their status as fluid since they believed all who were white could rise above their station. Whiteness became the badge of supremacy, and being white allowed privilege and status denied to blacks, even free blacks.

Enslaved people's lives and activism

Despite the harsh laws governing slavery, enslaved people struggled to assert their rights and place pressure on the system. As Berlin writes, "slavery, though imposed and maintained by violence, was a negotiated relationship"⁷ Slaves were valuable to their masters because the slaves built, produced, and maintained their master's livelihood. There was violence against slaves, but even under harsh conditions and the limiting of their rights, they still managed to maintain their culture and negotiate within the boundaries of strict laws, when they could, for more food and better conditions. Black resistance to slavery shaped their world and the world of white people, and this was reflected in the restrictions and laws governing slaves.

⁷ Berlin, p. 2

Slavery in the United States forced African American women to adapt to horrendous conditions in order to survive. It began during the middle passage when many African women were kidnapped, and a great many experienced violence including rape, or even death. The rise of capitalism and the need of the planter class for dependable cheap labor made slavery a very lucrative business. Slaves generated the wealth in the South, and the cotton they produced formed part of the basis of wealth in the North. Professor James Horton remarked in the film *The Underground Railroad*,

By 1860, the dollar value of America's slaves, there were about four million slaves by 1860, but the dollar value of those slaves was greater than the dollar value of all of America's banks, all of America's railroads, all of America's manufacturing, combined. When you look at how the economics of slavery translated into the general economy of the nation, then you can see that slavery was not just some side show in American society, it was the main event in American history.⁸

Slaves were worked very hard, and suffered many brutalities, including whippings and maiming, with some being beaten to death. Most slaves had to endure mind numbing work from sunrise-to-sunset, six days a week. Nearly all were deprived of an education, with the exception of those who were trained in the trades, because the planter class needed those skills.

⁸ *Underground Railroad: The William Still Story*. PBS website, <http://video.pbs.org/program/underground-railroad-william-still-story/>

Slaves never had enough food, and often their children died young from disease brought on by malnutrition and work. Judith Harper identifies resistance among slave women to include educating children to resistance and producing food. Harper writes, "An important part of women's resistance to their bondage before and during the Civil War was their participation in what is commonly referred to as the domestic slave economy. The slaveholders' property and goods were the most common sources of the goods traded."⁹ The women were able to feed their families, while also mitigating one of the harsher aspects of slavery, starvation. Taking food from the planters was not stealing; rather it enabled slaves to reclaim their work product, while occasionally preventing their masters from profiting from their labors. As Powell writes, "The slaves' idea of work derived from the needs of an oppressed people to resist dehumanization."¹⁰

Slaves, which included men, women and children, faced formidable conditions on both large and small plantations, including the fear of being sold from one another. Some slaves did not survive, but those who did survived by mitigating the harsher aspects of slavery. During slavery women worked together doing domestic chores and formed bonds, and were community

⁹ Judith E. Harper, *Women During the Civil War: An Encyclopedia* (New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 8

¹⁰ Lawrence Powell, *New Masters: Northern Planters During The Civil War and Reconstruction* (Conn: Yale University Press, 1980), p.79

activists, developing a system to exchange information, while trading with each other, enabling their families to survive. When families were separated by sale, extended kin networks ensured that children were cared for and grieving parents consoled. Mutualism, which survived through the centuries in the African American community, was passed down in those communities, and was evident in this author's family, who lived in the South during the 1930's through the 1960's. My maternal grandmother had an Aunt and Uncle (who were not related by blood), but who helped to clothe, and feed my mother and her sibling when money and food supplies in my grandmother's house were low.

“Beginning in the slave era, the family obligations of wives and mothers overlapped in the area of community welfare, as their desire to nurture their own kin expanded out of the private realm and into public activities that advanced the interests of black people as a group,” Jones states.¹¹ Jones also speaks of families that were not arranged in the traditional nuclear family. Jones writes, “In rural southern society, the nuclear family frequently cohabited within a larger, rather flexible household. Moreover, ties of kinship often linked neighboring households. These linkages helped to determine very specific patterns of reciprocal duties among household members, indicating kinship

¹¹ Jones, p. 3

clusters defined women's and men's daily labor".¹² Again, this speaks to patterns of mutualism, which has defined the organization of the African American community.

Unspeakable thoughts, unspoken

Slaves were often forced to marry to produce more human property for their owners, but their marriages or unions were not honored or recognized under the laws of their owners. Many slaves had to endure forced heartbreaking separations when their owners sold family members, including babies for profit, often never to see them again. Families were torn apart and new ones were formed, and not necessarily along blood lines. They dared to form families they knew they might lose.

Enslaved people tried to maintain some agency in their intimate lives, but this was difficult. Black women slaves were subject to the violence of rape by male members of the planter class and overseers, and most of the time there was little they could do to stop it, but they fought back where they could. An example of this includes a black woman who was born a slave named Harriet Jacobs. Jacobs managed to evade the attentions of her owner, eventually entering into a relationship with another powerful white man, and having

¹² Ibid, p.84

children with him. She resisted her owner's sexual advances by hiding from him in an attic for seven years, and watching over her children from a distance.

Jacobs wrote, "The mother of slaves is very watchful. She knows there is no security for her children. After they have entered their teens she lives in daily expectation of trouble."¹³ She waited until her children were bought by their father, and were taken to the north, before she escaped to the north and freedom. Her story demonstrates the hardships borne by black women in slavery, and their fight and determination to resist subjugation for themselves and their children.

Black people have always known their persons were subject to abuse, and black women's bodies have been used for centuries to violently supply new chattel, and reinforce their slave status, and later white supremacy. But the response of blacks has not been silence. There is activism in protesting sexual coercion. Another slave named Sukie was not silent, and resisted her master's advances. The story of Sukie was told by an ex-slave named Fannie Berry through the WPA narratives:

Sukie . . . used to cook for Miss Sarah Ann, but old Master was always trying to make Sukie his gal. One day Sukie was in the kitchen making soap. Had three great big pots of lye just coming to a boil in the fireplace

¹³ Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of A Slave Girl; Written by Herself* (Boston: 1861); *The Classic Slave Narratives*, ed. Henry Louis Gates. Jr. (New York: Mentor Books), p. 387.

when old Master came into get after her about something. He lay into her, but she didn't answer him a word. Then he told Sukie to take off her dress. She told him no. Then he grabbed her and pulled it down off of her shoulders. When he had done that, he forgot about whipping her, I guess, because he grabbed hold of her and tried to pull her down on the floor. Then that woman got mad. She punched old Master and made him break loose and then she gave him a shove and pushed him down into the hot pot of soap. The soap was nearly boiling, and it burnt him nearly to death. He got up holding his behind and ran from the kitchen, not daring to yell, because he didn't want Miss Sarah Ann to know about it. A few days later he took Sukie off and sold her to the slave trader.¹⁴

In her article about the slave Sukie, Janell Hobson writes that according to Fannie Berry, "Marsa "never did bother slave gals no mo."¹⁵ Another slave named Celia fought back against her master repeatedly raping her. She was 14 when her master bought her, and after years of abuse, she killed him and was put on trial. She was convicted and hanged in December 1855. Many African American women suffered from rape and violence to their person by white men. We know the stories of a few who fought back, but we also know it was in the interest of the slave owners to increase their slave holdings. Today we are beginning to learn through genetic DNA testing how many African Americans have some European ancestry.

¹⁴ Works Progress Administration, *A Slave Named Sukie Resists a Master's Advances*, HERB: Resources for Teachers, <http://herb.ashp.cuny.edu/items/show/1638>.

¹⁵ Janelle Hobson, *My Problem with Slave Rape, or why I Love the Story of Sukie*. Ms.Magazine Blog, <http://msmagazine.com/blog>

African slaves were brought from many countries and villages in Africa, each with their own language, culture, mores, and traditions. It was difficult for slaves to maintain their culture from their countries of origin because of active persecution by the dominating class to try to render them powerless. But, once in this country, and cut off from their birthplace, they adapted their many different traditions into a vibrant African American culture, which acted as a barrier to oppression, and at the same time allowed them agency and the development of an identity from which they nurtured and organized for their eventual freedom.

Songs and dances were very important to slaves. They sang songs, while doing all manner of work under terrible conditions including, cooking for their masters, taking care of their master's children and homes, and working in the fields. These songs, like the songs of their ancestral roots, contained references to each other, their behavior, their masters, their lot in life, the unfairness and harshness of slavery, and dreams of freedom. They were able to criticize and protest their masters' actions, and events that took place in their lives, without having to suffer severe retribution. These acts also formed a sense of community in the slave world, and the development of their culture, from which everyone identified. It bound them tightly together and enabled them to practice

mutualism, which allowed them to flourish as individuals and a community.

They managed to maintain their culture, and handed down to succeeding generations their religion, foods, and knowledge of farming, including cultivating crops like rice.

They also remembered and maintained parts of their language and stories, even though they were required to learn English. Levine writes, "Looking upon the past, ex-slaves and their descendants painted a picture not of a cowed and timorous black mass but of a people who, however circumscribed by misfortune and oppression, were never without their means of resistance and never lacked the inner resources to oppose the master class, however extreme the price they had to pay."¹⁶ Families often passed down stories, which Levine recounts, that told the story of black oppression, struggle, and strife. There were many stories of older ancestors reciting life under slavery, and then under Jim Crow. One story involved children feeling the back of an old woman who had been a slave and touching the one inch grooves on her back that had been left from a cat of nine tails. Slaves and their descendants remembered these stories in their oral traditions, which also served to bind them as a community, and offered a way of protest. Mocking the behavior of the planter class also enabled slaves to reject

¹⁶ Lawrence L. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery To Freedom* (London: Oxford University Press), p. 380

ideologies that the dominant class tried to impose on them. It gave them a sense of themselves and elevated their importance. They knew the importance of family and education and never lost sight of the ultimate goal of freedom and equality.

Levine goes on to write about humor, directed at both the black community and the white community. Sexual humor was also included as black folks made fun of white fears concerning black men and white women, as well as the fears white people had over the size of body parts. Levine describes black humor as directed as a political weapon and a relief from the stress of oppression and degradation.

At first, enslaved people resisted their master's religion, preferring to keep their own beliefs, but they would eventually incorporate some of their beliefs into their adopted religion. Their masters thought they were dull and lazy, but in reality slaves were intelligent and took action to ensure their survival. Slaves learned to present one face to their master and reserve their real self or face to their family and kin. Slaves were not completely robbed of their agency.

Although it was difficult, most slaves were active in loosening their chains. Their activism during their enslavement was subtle and it challenged the

system. Using “infrapolitics”¹⁷, slaves sabotaged crops, slowed work or malingered, stole food, feigned sickness, escaped, and destroyed property. They reasoned it was not wrong to steal the fruits of one's own labor, and when they slowed down their work they were not lazy, but pacing themselves.

Slaves did not always fight back indirectly. Sometimes slaves struck back violently and there was always a fear among white people of slave insurrections. Berlin writes, “The first decades of the eighteenth century were alive with rumors of insurrection and outbursts of violence, as slaves snapped back at their enslavers. Although the extent of the violence and depth of the conspiracies are difficult to measure, there can be no doubt about what happened at Stono, where a group of Florida-bound fugitives turned on their pursuers with bloody results.”¹⁸ There were many small rebellions and several large insurrections including the New York slave rebellion, Gabriel’s insurrection, Denmark Vesey’s insurrection, and Nat Turner’s rebellion.

Black women as well as men actively resisted slavery. Some of the African American women who agitated in the early and late 1800’s include Sojourner Truth and Harriet Tubman. Sojourner Truth was a poet, abolitionist, and women’s rights activist who escaped to freedom. She spent her life fighting for

¹⁷ Kelly, p. 8

¹⁸ Berlin, p. 150

the freedom of enslaved African Americans, and for women's rights. Harriet Tubman was an abolitionist who liberated herself from slavery and risked her life again and again to return to the South and rescue over 300 slaves from their masters. Men and women sabotaged war efforts in the South through overt means, such as joining the Union Army. Harriet Tubman was a spy and helped the North with maps and the location and movement of Confederate materials and men. Although most early abolitionist lecturers were men, Maria Stewart in 1833 became the first African American woman to speak before a mixed audience advocating the end of slavery and promoting women's rights. Women were active and formed benevolent societies, or like Mary Bowser, spied for the Union Army, or Mary Shadd Cary, who recruited for the Union Army and published and wrote newspaper articles.

Slaves who stayed on the plantations also contributed to the war effort through *infrapolitics*. This included taking from their southern masters their fair share of the profits and destroying crops. Slaves had been adept at negotiating work conditions with their masters, by working slowly and damaging tools and crops. During the war, they intensified these forms of resistance and added the subtle threat of leaving.

Emancipation, Reconstruction, and the rise of Jim Crow

After the Civil War ended slavery, in the period known as Reconstruction, the ex-slaves began to build lives for themselves. Black men voted, and many were elected to government. Black men and women established towns and schools, bought land and farmed, were paid for their labor, and participated in commerce. A burgeoning black middle class was established with increasing numbers of blacks joining the professional classes. Black women organized in the church and established societies, which developed their skills in social work.

Freed slaves wanted land to establish their own independence. They said they had been promised forty acres and a mule, and they wanted this promise of equality for which they had for so long worked. They were well aware of the advantages of independence, and owning their own land would enrich them as individuals and their communities. This would give them independence from white control, and give them a sense of pride. Powell writes, "Black people had ideas of their own about the meaning of freedom, or, at the very least, they intended to define their new status for themselves. They felt that if emancipation meant anything, it had to result in more material advantages, a relaxed plantation discipline, and most of all, greater personal and cultural autonomy."¹⁹

¹⁹ Powell, p. 97

Increasing violence by whites during the Redemption and Jim Crow eras limited or erased opportunities for blacks, who were disenfranchised as whites took power. During the rise of Jim Crow, black people's gains slowly eroded. Customs, then laws, were enacted to solidify racism. Radical Republicans lost power and southern whites passed laws and changed constitutions in the South, stripping or severely limiting black participation in civil discourse and freedoms. In addition, lynching became prevalent as a tool to facilitate the economic system of sharecropping. This brought political and economic power to the white dominant class. White supremacy brought cohesion between upper and lower class whites, and between whites in both the North and South. The system of Jim Crow disenfranchised African Americans, and effectively isolated and terrorized blacks to keep former slaves in their place.

Black women activists in the Jim Crow era

Even during the "Nadir," black resistance continued. Ida B. Wells was a black activist who lived during this era. She was born a slave in July 1862 in Mississippi. After the Civil War, her parents worked while she attended school at Rust College, and later Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee. But in 1878 her parents died from yellow fever and Wells had to support her brothers and sisters. She moved to Memphis and taught in the schools.

While riding on a train, Wells was forcibly ejected from her seat because she was not riding in the colored section. She fought, refused to leave, and was thrown off the train (in the same manner Rosa Parks would also later fight ejection from public transportation). She sued and won damages, but this award was later reversed. In the late 1800's and early 1900's Wells wrote newspaper articles condemning lynching. These acts terrorized blacks and were designed keep them from becoming "uppity." The price of resistance to systematic terror was over 2500 African American who were lynched. This could be by hanging, burning, cutting the body to pieces, or a combination of acts. These acts were, according to the perpetrators, directed at mainly black men who raped white women. But black women were also lynched. These acts were really against black people in the community who acquired too much wealth or property (and were therefore too uppity), or blacks who were agitating for political change. Violence through lynching and intimidation was used in this period to control black people, to prevent their activism from changing the social and political structures that supported the institution of white supremacy. In response, Wells argued, African Americans should take up guns to defend themselves. Wells was part of a lineage of black women activists, such as the enslaved women mentioned earlier, who were determined to fight back against white

violence and abuse. As Robyn Spencer relates, "This tradition included Mary "Stagecoach" Fields, who cultivated expertise with guns and who armed herself frequently and deliberately; Harriet Tubman, who guarded the lives of slaves she led north; and Ida B. Wells Barnett, an advocate of self-defense as both a personal stance and a collective strategy."²⁰

During this time, organizations became paramount in importance because by organizing as a group, black people were able to mitigate some of the effects of racism. This included organizations like the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), church societies, and groups like the Independent Order of Saint Luke, which strove to help black people in the form of loans to help them achieve a measure of independence. African Americans women's organizations became very important because black women were less threatening than black males, and through work they had economic security. Businessmen and women were able to provide a great deal of help to their communities because of their economic independence. Despite the erosion of their rights, black people were able to maintain organizational skills that would help them keep at bay some of the more terrible effects of Jim Crow.

²⁰ Spencer, p. 93

Many black men and women learned valuable political and organizing skills within their churches, which they carried into secular organizations that were working for racial equality. Higginbotham writes, "The club movement among black women owed its very existence to the ground work of organizational skills and leadership training gained through women's church societies. Missionary societies had early on brought together women with little knowledge of each other and created bonds of sisterly cooperation at the city and state level."²¹ Women would become the backbone of the movement, as they had been in the church. They brought their organizing skills, leadership, and their sense of community with them to form tight organizations which would bear up to intimidation and violence. This served them well during the nadir of African American history because these societies were part of the nucleus that would later teach the organizing tradition in the civil rights movement.

Education, mutualism, and the freedom struggle

Most black women still held jobs as domestics and worked in the fields, but many were being educated in the normal schools, extensively documented by Stephanie Shaw, who writes of the community effort to educate a child.

²¹ Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1993.), p. 17

Elderly black people always stressed the importance of education to the younger generations so that they would be in a position to change not only their lives, but also the community of black folk. Shaw writes, "Many African Americans believed that those most able to pursue formal schooling had to be prepared in the process to help those who were less able. In support of that tradition, school administrators consciously designed their programs not to give some education to a large number, but a thorough training of the most serviceable kind to a picked company who will then become examples, missionaries, and helpers to their people."²² Many blacks had subscribed to mutualism as a way to mitigate the effects of racism and its degrading consequences. This system of helping each other and thereby sustaining the community as a whole was one way slaves had flourished under the oppressive system of slavery. Black people did not have to be related to each other by blood to help one another, as the system of slavery tore apart families. Blacks adapted mutualism through time to continue to aid each other and their communities.

Gender struggles

African American women, during slavery, and later during Reconstruction and the Jim Crow era, always worked and lived in two very

²² Shaw, p. 77

different worlds. They had one world, their world of work, where they had to deal with oppression, racism, violence, and exploitation; and the world of their families and communities, where they dealt with paternalism and sexism. They viewed their struggles, which they shared with women all over the world, as all encompassing, and they lived their lives and approached this struggle in a womanist or holistic manner.

In her study of Maggie Lena Walker (who was the daughter of former slaves, and the first woman in the United States to be a bank president), Brown emphasizes the holistic approach with this point:

Using a framework that does not conceive of “racial uplift, fighting segregation and mob violence” and “contending with poverty” as women’s issues, Lois Scharf and Joan Jensen (white feminists of the 1920’s and 1930’s) succumb to the tendency to assume that black women’s lives can be neatly subdivided, that while we are both black and female, we occupy those roles sequentially, as if one cannot have the two simultaneously in one’s consciousness of being. Such a framework assumes a fragmentation of black women’s existence that defies reality. Black women like Walker who devoted their energies to securing universal suffrage, including that of black men, are not widely recognized as female suffragist because they did not separate their struggle for the women’s vote from their struggle for the black vote.²³

Through her work with the Independent Order of St., Luke, Maggie Lena Walker established a newspaper, and worked in the black community to help the sick,

²³ Brown, p. 412

buried the dead, and serve on the boards of the NAACP, the Virginia Industrial School For Girls, and as a member of the Virginia Interracial Commission.²⁴

Despite the central part that women played in the freedom struggle, male leaders often relegated them to supporting roles, as they were excluded from the pulpit and church hierarchy. In her study of gender relationships in the Jim Crow era, Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore writes that as women became more involved in political work,

Some men felt threatened by this new activity, even though most women made it clear that their goal was not to preach or to rise within the formal church hierarchy. Over the years, the debate over the power of women's organizations among North Carolina Baptists escalated. By 1917, women insisted that "it behooves us to think of and discuss the great question confronting us as citizens of this great nation," while the men reiterated that the women needed "intelligent supervision" and directed them to turn their funds over to the men's convention.²⁵

African American women organized within a male dominated hierarchy, which in many respects reflected the patriarchal society in which they lived. Ida B. Wells was also a founding member of the NAACP, but she did not stay with the organization long, after she had a disagreement with W.E.B. Du Bois. Wells was forthright in her opinions, and Du Bois was not comfortable with a woman

²⁴ Maggie L. Walker, National Park Service Website, <http://www.nps.gov/mawa/learn/historyculture/index.htm>

²⁵ Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920* (North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), p. 153-154

who did not know her place. Du Bois, although conscious of racism, was still infected with sexism that was prevalent in this patriarchal society.

This was also true during later times in the black freedom struggle. During the Civil Rights movement, black women such as Septima Clark and Ella Baker continued the fight for freedom and equality, drawing on traditions established earlier by black women activists in the Jim Crow era. But, it was still the men who were well known and who headed many of the organizations, even though many women participated directly in the movement. At one point, Septima Clark wrote to Martin Luther King Jr. to ask him “not to lead all the marches himself, but instead to develop leaders who could lead their own marches.” Clark recalled King’s response: “Dr. King read the letter before the staff. It just tickled them, they just laughed.”²⁶ Clark was interested in building a grass roots movement that led broadly from the bottom up, and Ella Baker also shared that philosophy. Both of these activists made vital contributions to the organizations they worked for, but women within the SCLC and the NAACP were not treated as equals. “Mrs. Clark idolized King, but she wasn’t blind to his limitations, including his inability to treat women as equals,” Payne notes. “Women within SCLC circles were expected to neither ask nor answer questions,

²⁶ Payne, p. 76

and that expectation applied to the wives of the leadership as well as to staff.”

As Clark explained, “Mrs. King and Mrs. Abernathy would come and they were just like chandeliers . . . saying nothing. . . . I was just a figurehead. . . . Whenever I had anything to say, I would put up my hand and say it. But I did know that they weren’t paying any attention.”²⁷

Women who occupied leadership positions as well as thousands of others who worked quietly behind the scenes were an important part of the movement, and their contributions to the struggle for freedom were not unknown at the time. During the Civil Rights movement, activists like Diane Nash worked on the front lines in protest, or like Ella Baker, behind the scenes in organizations like SNCC to establish ideas that strong people do not need strong leaders. Activist Bernice Johnson noted that after years in the movement, women were finally allowed to speak as informal leaders from the pulpit, which was progress. Referring to Bernice Johnson, Lynne Olson writes, “One of the most liberating aspects of the Albany campaign, she came to believe, was the emergence of women, including herself, as informal leaders. Before the movement came to

²⁷ Payne, p. 77

Albany, the only time women were allowed in the church pulpits was on the annual Women's Day."²⁸ As activists, women were agents of their own liberation.

Resisting rape

Documenting the long history of the rape of black women details the violence and force used to subjugate and control black people, not only during the civil rights movements, but back to slavery. There is activism in testifying against rape and sexual abuse, and an example of this activism is Fannie Lou Hamer. While she is most well known for her efforts to end the disfranchisement, segregation, and economic exploitation of black southerners, she also spoke out against the sexual abuse of black women. McGuire notes that Hamer's mother and grandmother were both victims of rape, and she herself was a victim of a severe beating with sexual indignities and forced hysterectomy²⁹. McGuire writes, "The practice was so common that blacks often called it a "Mississippi appendectomy."³⁰ Other activists also protested the fact that black women's bodies were still not their own. In the book edited by Gerda Lerner called *Black Women In White America*, an anonymous source wrote, "I remember

²⁸ Lynne Olson, *Freedom's Daughters: The Unsung Heroines of the Civil Rights Movement From 1830 to 1970* (New York: Scribner, 2001), p. 237

²⁹ Danielle L. McGuire, *At the Dark End of the Street: Black Women, Rape, and Resistance--A New History of the Civil Rights Movement, from Rosa Parks to the Rise of Black Power* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 2011), p. 156

³⁰ McGuire, p. 157

very well the first and last place from which I was dismissed. I lost my place because I refused to let the madam's husband kiss me."³¹

As a young activist Rosa Parks was sent to investigate the rape of Recy Taylor. She helped to circulate the information to organizations, unions, and newspapers. A black woman named Rosa Lee Coates reported and testified in a trial against her white rapist in Mississippi in 1965, and he was found guilty. There were many cases of white men raping black women. The rapes were made easier by law, and by myths emphasizing the false idea of the black women's moral looseness and degenerated character. The Supreme Court case of *Loving v. Virginia* in 1967 finally struck down a large pillar of legalized racial separation in intimate relationships. McGuire writes,

In 1691 Virginia legislators made "miscegenation" illegal. The antimiscegenation laws awarded white men exclusive sexual access to white women and preserved racial "purity" in property and inheritance rights. At the same time white slave masters' stolen access to black women's bodies strengthened their political, social, and economic power, partly because other colonial laws made the offspring of slave women the property of their masters. They also created a system that allowed white men to use black women as concubines and sexually abuse them with impunity.³²

Another form of violence used to maintain white privilege was lynching.

It was used by white men to maintain dominance and enforce white supremacy.

³¹ Gerda Lerner, ed. *Black Women In White America* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), p. 155

³² McGuire, pp. 199-200

Affecting predominately black men, some black women like Laura Nelson were lynched, and social, economic, and political control was maintained through intimidation and violence. Black activists, including Ida B Wells, protested lynching, and the NAACP documented cases, but the disfranchisement of most black southerners served to maintain white supremacy, and efforts in the early 1930's to pass laws against lynching were defeated. Angela Davis writes, "Nonetheless, when Billie Holiday first sang "*Strange Fruit*" in 1939, her message fell on many ears rendered receptive by mass demands that the Roosevelt administration support the enactment of a law against lynching.³³ Under the law, there was little justice for black women when raped by white men; but often, black men accused of violence or raping white women could face death by lynching.

Women in the civil rights movement

In the 1960s African Americans were finally able to take the freedom struggle out in the open, though massive direct confrontation. Women became the backbone of the movement, as they had been in the church. They brought their organizing skills, leadership, and their sense of community with them to

³³ Angela Y. Davis, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism: Gertrude "Ma" Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1998) p. 191-192

form tight organizations which would bear up to intimidation and violence. Black women sought to empower black communities, challenge systems of oppression, and galvanize black people to fight back. Black women participated in existing organizations and helped to establish new ones during the Civil Rights movement.

At the center of national leaders' ideology was the innovative tactic of non-violent direct action protest. Blacks would confront racism directly, but would not strike back, taking the blows of the attackers. This form of dissent was introduced to the movement by activists in the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) and promoted by Martin Luther King Jr. as he emerged as the preeminent spokesman for the freedom struggle in the 1950s and 1960s. King and others were inspired by Mohandas Gandhi of India, who used non-violent direct action in South Africa to protest Indian subjugation, and later to free India from British colonial rule. Non-violence worked on the attacker and the observers. Observers both in the immediate area and on television would note that blacks were praying and singing hymns. They would see how blacks were viciously beaten and bloodied because they asked for rights whites had known and enjoyed for centuries.

Although King and other male leaders were the focus of most media attention in the civil rights era, many black women are becoming better known today for the roles they played in the black freedom struggle. Pauli Murray and Diane Nash, carving a role for themselves in the movement, participated in the lunch counter sit-ins and the freedom rides. Women set up freedom schools, and despite great risk, registered blacks to vote in the South. There were also other women like Ella Baker, who encouraged younger activists to found SNCC, and strove to broaden organizational structures and its leadership base. Sullivan writes, "Her work in the South challenged the elitist bias of the national NAACP leadership, which viewed the development of local chapters primarily as a source of increasing revenue. The NAACP, as Baker viewed it, was primarily a means for supporting the participation of people in what had to be their own fight."³⁴

At its inception, SNCC was comprised of students who had some inspiration from Africa and Africans fighting for their own liberation. SNCC teams went into the Deep South and instituted voter registration campaigns, desegregation efforts, sit-ins, and struggles for better working conditions, and they were very effective in their actions. Whites, as well as blacks, were involved

³⁴Patricia Sullivan, *Days of Hope: Race Democracy in the New Deal Era* (Charlotte: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), p. 142-43

in this organization. Despite the harsh consequences, SNCC wanted to institute change within the framework of the capitalistic system, but this was to change during the black power struggle.

Septima Clark also played a key role in the freedom struggle by organizing blacks for citizenship and leadership roles in their communities. Clark had two years of college, when she was forced by economic circumstances to withdraw from school, becoming a teacher. Her activist work cost her dearly because she lost her teaching job, but she continued to educate people on their civil rights. Septima Clark directed workshops at Highlander Folk School in Tennessee, founded to inspire social justice activism by poor white and black southerners, that were to enable a generation of civil rights workers to educate the local populations in which they lived, training numerous civil rights activists. Payne wrote of the training program, "They worked with adult students on the voter registration forms, going over and over short sections of the documents and teaching students to write their name in cursive. The teaching style developed by Robinson and Clark emphasized the direct experiences of the students. Discussion emphasized big ideas—citizenship, democracy, and the powers of elected officials. They also taught critical thinking."³⁵ Among these

³⁵ Payne, p. 74

young trainees were Rosa Parks and Andrew Young. Rosa Parks would one day become a powerful symbol in the Montgomery bus boycott movement and worked with the NAACP.

Black women's activism took many forms in the civil rights era. Voting registration campaigns were conducted in the entire South at great cost in lives. For many activists, black participation in the voting process was central to the movement. Fannie Lou Hamer traveled through Mississippi conducting literacy workshops and handing out petitions. She was beaten and risked death. She became a delegate to the 1964 Democratic Convention, where as a member of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, she and her fellow members were not seated at the convention. Men, women and children marched to integrate schools, as women like Autherine Lucy integrated the University of Alabama and Daisy Bates helped black students to integrate an all-white high school in Little Rock Arkansas.

In addition to seeking legal protection and political rights, economic issues were an important aspect of the freedom struggle in the 1960s. Self-sufficiency was a high priority because blacks could determine their lives and plan for their futures. Self-sufficiency would lead to self-determination, which would in turn lead to freedom. During the Poor Peoples Campaign of 1968 Dr.

King argued, "If a man doesn't have a job or income, he has neither life nor liberty nor the possibility of the pursuit of happiness. He merely exists."³⁶ Racist signs had been removed, but the violence of poverty and white supremacy, while altered, remained. The Black Panther Party made economic freedom a central part of its platform in the late 1960s. They were aware, like Dr. King was aware as he marched in his last march with the garbage strikers in Tennessee, that lifting social and political barriers, without full economic inclusion to pursue ones dreams, would remain a dream deferred

³⁶ Mark Engler, "Dr. Martin Luther King Economics: Through Jobs, Freedom," *The Nation*, February 1, 2010

Chapter 2 Revolutionary Women

"The hard painstaking work of changing ourselves into new beings, of loving ourselves and our people and working with them to create a new reality; this is the first revolution, that internal revolution." Safiya Bukhari

African American women who joined the Black Panthers came from all strata of society, and brought with them many talents. Some of the women could have been included in what W.E.B. Du Bois referred to as the "Talented Tenth", intellectual leaders from the top ten percent of African Americans who were educated and motivated to effect social change in service of their people. But the women did not only come from the upper classes. Many of the women came from middle and lower income families. Some did not have the same opportunities for education as others, but they were intellectual leaders, who at a young age, were cognizant of the suffering around them, identified racism and how it served capitalism, and who saw the need to give their lives to serve and liberate the black community. These women made important contributions not only to the freedom struggle, but also for all women struggling in a patriarchal and class-conscious society.

Backgrounds

Women who would come to the organization reflected a range of ages, educational levels, and were from all classes. Joan Bird, for example, was from

New York City, and recalled the impoverished conditions that afflicted many black families in her neighborhood. "I grew up in the Harlem Community and attended parochial elementary school," she stated. "Growing up in the typical black ghetto community I clearly recognized the ills of poverty, embedded there among my people. We suffer day to day...trapped into hunger, disease and complete destitution, which is so actively present in our lives."¹ "Elendar Barnes was the child of parents who migrated to Oakland seeking jobs during World War II. Her involvement in the Panthers evolved out of the politics of rural resistance that she brought to Oakland from the South, and outgrowth of traditions rooted in the history of black resistance to white supremacist violence."²

In contrast to Bird's working-class background, Kathleen Cleaver came from more privileged circumstances. Cleaver's parents were educators, both were activists, and her mother, like her father, earned an advanced degree and was a professional woman. This is indicative of the women documented in Stephanie Shaw's book, *What a woman ought to be and do*. Women like her mother were brought up to believe in themselves, and they were also brought up to be morally superior in their behavior. Stephanie Shaw in her work about

¹ Philip S. Foner, ed., *The Black Panthers Speak* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Co. (1970), p.160

² Spencer, p. 95

professional black women workers during Jim Crow era notes, "Parents also hoped that extremely upright behavior would ward off dangerous attention and counteract the negative stereotypes that were common throughout the white world."³ There was always the danger of violence for black women. Parents wanted their daughters to escape the systemic boundaries inherent in institutionalized racism, and accomplish in their education more than they, or their slave ancestors ever had. Cleaver recalled in an interview with Susie Linfield, "My mother's behavior was quite proper. She's very attractive, very pleasant, and very feminine. But ambitious and talented southern women often presented themselves in a very socially correct way that may not convey the extent of their abilities."⁴

Kathleen Cleaver met her future husband, Eldridge Cleaver, at a SNCC conference at Fisk University. Though SNCC and the Black Panther Party merged for a short time, Cleaver left SNCC and joined the Black Panther Party. Like many black women activists, Cleaver would later complete her college education at Oberlin College in Ohio and Barnard College in New York. Safiya Bukhari, who was studying to become a doctor, and Judy Hart and her

³ Stephanie J. Shaw, *What a Woman Ought to Be and to Do: Black Professional Women Workers during the Jim Crow Era* (Chicago Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 1966.) p. 14

⁴ Susie Linfield, *The Education of Kathleen Neal Cleaver*, Indiana University Press on behalf of the W.E.B. Du Bois Institute. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2903207>. No. 77 (1998), p. 178

roommate Janice Garrett-Forte, were members of the Black Student Union at San Francisco State University, and were also in college. Much like their white middle class sisters, they were to be the moral guardians of the home, but unlike their white sisters, black women always had to work outside the home, and they always had to contend with issues of race. Even Johnnetta Cole, who grew up in a wealthy family in the segregated South, found that money provided little insulation from the indignities of racism. I listened to her during a lecture at the Smithsonian Museum where she said, "She was considered not worthy, but from her folk she was more than good enough."⁵ Under the segregated system of Jim Crow, a black person growing up and living in the South was often made to feel like 'the other', inferior, and were less equal than white people.

Ideology

Many women in the Black Panthers began their formal activism in the Civil Rights Movement, and quite a few were in SNCC. They identified with, and admired the older women in the Civil Rights movement who came before them. Their evolution to black power female activists took them from their towns and cities, to confront the capitalistic system on the world stage. According to

⁵ Carla Trounson, 2009, Smithsonian Museum Looks Back At Black Power Movement, Smithsonian American Art Museum and National Portrait Gallery, Washington D.C., March 2009

Joshua Bloom, "The Black Panther Party saw itself as the revolutionary vanguard advancing the interests of the black community for self-determination within a larger struggle against imperialism."⁶ Kathleen Cleaver notes, "Now, the revolutionary positions that we took were not consistent with the beliefs of the majority of the American people, because the majority of the American people believe in the system as it is. They just believe the system didn't work right, but it should work right. What we believed is, the system was fundamentally corrupt and could never work right, and had to be replaced."⁷ The women in the BPP recognized the global nature of the problems they confronted at home; and they began to correlate the structure of capitalism with their subordinate positions in the United States. In my interview with Ericka Huggins, she stated, "The BPP established chapters in Australia, New Zealand, and parts of Europe. They supported an end to the Vietnam War, the conflict in Palestine, and an end to Apartheid."⁸

On the application for membership into the Black Panther party, each applicant was asked the usual question one might expect on an application. The applicants had to state their name, age, address, gender, occupation, highest

⁶ Bloom, 312

⁷ John Simpkin, Kathleen Cleaver ,WWW.Spartacus-Eduational.Com,

⁸ Ericka Huggins, interview by Carla Trounson, December 20, 2009

grade attended, and if they were married and their spouse's name. But applicants were also asked if they were unemployed and trying to make it, if they were a skilled, semi-skilled, or a professional laborer, on parole or probation, or if they were a hustler. Under the section titled 'Important', applicants were asked if they believed in self-defense and if their answer was no, why not? Applicants were asked if they had been convicted of a felony using a firearm and their opinion of the Black Panther Party. These questions acknowledged the reality of many blacks living in America as they struggled in its white supremacist society. The application pertained to race, class, and gender, and the realities of the violence inflicted on black people living in a police state.

Reasons for joining the BPP and Gender Struggles

Women in the Black Panther Party were drawn to the party for a myriad of reasons, but like earlier black women activists they all clearly saw the need to invest and serve in the black community, to defend themselves from the violence inflicted on black people, and as black people with a shared heritage, to come together to fight for liberation. Like Rosa Parks, they were frustrated with the white power structure's gradualism, and felt they had waited long enough.

The BPP's emphasis on black autonomy and self-determination appealed to many of these activists. In an interview with the PBS series *Frontline*, Cleaver noted, "I had gotten involved with the SNCC at the same time because it articulated black power as a position. The Black Power Movement challenged all the preconceived notions of blacks not being able to determine their own destiny."⁹ This was very much a point Ella Baker had made when she espoused the position of participatory democracy. Cleaver followed in the tradition of women activists who sought to empower African Americans to lead their own fight and build lives for themselves independently of white people.

Women in the BPP insisted blacks stand up for their rights and to be treated as equals to whites, rejecting colonial legacies and advocating self-determination. When asked why she was attracted to the Black Panther Party, Cleaver's response mirrors many women who joined, "What appealed to me about the Black Panther Party was that it took the position of self-determination and articulated it to the local community structure, it had a program, it had a platform, and an implementation through the statement of how blacks should exercise community control over education, housing, business, and military

⁹ PBS online. *Frontline, Interview with Kathleen Cleaver: visiting professor at Cardoza School of Law*
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/race/interviews/kcleaver.html>

service.”¹⁰ Cleaver combined the private sphere, the space women occupy in the home, with the public sphere, the world of paid work outside the home.

The BPP’s practical programs for social change inspired many women activists. Safiya Bukhari was drawn to the struggle of community action to feed hungry children, which was made harder when the police circulated rumors about the BPP poisoning the food given out to children in their breakfast program. In the short documentary film called *Still Revolutionaries*, which premiered in 1998 at the Sundance Film Festival, the director Sienna Mclean interviewed two women who were former members of the BPP. Their names were Katherine Campbell and Madalynn Carol Rucker, and like Kathleen Cleaver, they were surprised they lived to tell their stories as party members. They said they joined the Panthers because, “they felt it was the first time they felt connected with there being an alternative to burning down our own communities and turning the other cheek. The BPP gave us back our dignity and tools to fight with.”¹¹ Joan Bird states, “I entered Bronx Community College, majoring in nursing. During this period, I felt this was not enough. I needed and wanted to become more fully aware of myself, the changing world, my people’s

¹⁰ PBS online. Frontline, Interview with Kathleen Cleaver

¹¹ Sienna Mclean, *Still Revolutionaries* (Berkeley Media LLC, documentary, short 1997)

true identity and their roles in society and the need for us to unite if we are ever going to achieve any sort of power."¹²

Ericka Huggins shared these views. She was the director of the Oakland Community School and at the age of 18 had been a leader in the BPP in Los Angeles. Like many of the women in the BPP, she dedicated her life to serve. Ericka Huggins stated, "Both parents were afraid for her, they didn't want her to be killed."¹³ In a BBC interview she notes, "I wanted to go, but my parents said no. I reminded my mother that she had always spoke of the need to step forward for our people and to make a difference. But she replied that she didn't mean for me to do it. I went anyway."¹⁴ She dropped out of college and joined the BPP because they were talking about police brutality, inadequate education, better housing, and their 10 point program made so much sense. Others who joined had the same reasons, they wanted to serve. The combination of economic and political goals, as well as the emphasis on self-defense, appealed to women who joined the party. In an interview by Emily Wilson, Ericka Huggins stated, "When I went to the March on Washington in 1963, I made a vow to serve people for the rest of my life." She found the Black Panther Party for Self Defense espoused the

¹² Philip S. Foner, ed. *The Black Panthers Speak* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Co. (1970), p.160

¹³ Huggins interview

¹⁴ BBC NEWS, *A Passion For Action*, Ericka Huggins Interviewed, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/3150491.stm>

values she held dear. "I totally understand what that meant", she said. "My sister and brother and I had grown up watching the police beat people to the ground for no reason. Then I would notice when I went to Northwest or Capitol Hill, the police weren't beating people." Ericka Huggins stated, "I was from a working class family, but growing up in D.C., I saw the lack of resources in some neighborhoods, but luxury on Capitol Hill."¹⁵

Huggins was one of the many thousands who marched on Washington in 1963 and at the age of 19, she was a widow. Her husband, John Huggins was gunned down on the UCLA campus. Many Panthers were targeted by the law and harassed constantly. Some Panthers, like John Huggins, (and Fred Hampton, who was killed in his bed under suspicious circumstances in what the police term "a shoot-out" in Chicago), were killed by law enforcement officials.

Police brutality was an often-stated reason many women joined the party. For Safiya Bukhari, who participated in the BPP breakfast and education community programs before joining the BPP, police intimidation and violence was the main reason she joined the BPP. Bukhari spoke for many women in the BPP when she said of law enforcement, "They had this authority and they had the badges and they had the guns and they abused their power. And it's what

¹⁵ Huggins interview

they say and what they do that carries more weight in a court of law than what the individual does. It was this kind of corruption that made me make the decision to join the BPP."¹⁶ Similarly, Judy Hart joined because as Robyn Spencer relates, "she felt that they were the group most serious about combating police brutality."¹⁷

The life-threatening conditions that existed in black communities afflicted by poverty, hunger, and violence were foremost in these activists' minds. It was within reason for Cleaver, Rucker, Campbell, and Huggins to expect to die in their twenties. Joshua Bloom relates, "The extreme repression the Party endured further intensified the common belief and feeling that the racial and class components of the struggle had to take priority. Elaine Brown recalled, "We clung to each other fiercely. We forgot cliques and chauvinism and any bit of internal strife."¹⁸ Ericka Huggins also related the same thing and said, " In those days [we fought to] get rid of racism so we could stay alive. We didn't even think about sexism except when it reared its head. We didn't spend our time looking at

¹⁶ Arm the Spirit, 1995 Interview with Safiya Bukhari (International Women's Day, 1995). <http://whgbetc.com/mind/bpp-safiya-bio.html>

¹⁷ Spencer, p. 96

¹⁸ Bloom, p. 308

what men and women did or didn't do because we didn't have time to think about it. We were busy living so we didn't die."¹⁹

Women joined the BPP for various reasons. They had a deep need to serve their people, and to make a difference in their lives. Many wanted to fight back against the brutality and violence they witnessed around them. They came from all walks of life, and served in all capacities in the organization. They didn't have all the answers, but they were willing to ask the difficult questions and try new methods to achieve their goals. Their work spoke to the continuity of activism among black people. Their analysis of the problems which confronted earlier generations spurred a radical departure. They no longer wanted to work within the American political and economic system to bring change and solutions to the problems in the black communities. In their view, the system was the problem. Their views shifted over time to include participation in the political process, but their idea that the system was immutably corrupt remained. Men and women worked together as a community to achieve their goals, and women were able to organize and rise within the BPP despite the sexism within the movement. As the next chapter will show, women in the BPP

¹⁹ Bloom, p. 308

challenged race, class, and gender oppression through their participation and leadership within the party.

Chapter 3

From Revolution to Community Organizing

Much of the work of black women activists, including women in the Black Panther Party, was learned through examples of earlier black activists in African American history, and much of what we know of African American women activists in the last 25 years has centered a great deal on the freedom struggle during the civil rights movement. But as this thesis has documented, the struggle for freedom did not begin with Rosa Parks refusing to give up her seat on a bus in the 1950's, and it did not end when President Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act and Voting Rights Acts in the mid-1960s. Like earlier activists, BPP members critiqued and resisted the economic structures that kept black people poor and oppressed, demanded equal treatment before the law and protection of their constitutional rights, and fought to keep black communities safe from violence.

The ten point program

In the second issue of *Black Panther Speaks*, the BPP published their ten point list and guiding philosophy, which follows:

The original ten points of "What We Want Now!"

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 men 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.¹

The Panthers were dedicated and followed their ten point program. As Clayborn Carson states, "Their list of ten demands combined basic needs, full employment and decent housing, with more radical objectives, such as exemption of black men from military service and freedom for all black men held in federal, state, county, and city prisons and jails."² Their program sought to

¹ Joshua Bloom and Waldo E. Martin, Jr. *Black Against Empire; The History and Politics of the Black Panther Party* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), p. 71.

² Clayborne Carson, forward to *The Black Panthers Speak*, ed. Philip S. Foner (New York: Da Capo Press, 1995), p. x.

expand the rights of blacks since the passing of the Civil Rights Act. Black activists had accomplished equality in public accommodations, but economic opportunity was blocked. The rights sought by black activists included defending themselves and their communities from the violence the system produced, including poverty as well as murder, and they sought greater access to the political process.

Armed self-defense

The Black Panthers were particularly vocal about their rights, including the right to arm themselves in public. They openly armed themselves and patrolled their neighborhoods, shadowing the police. They also went to the capitol of California and both women and men openly carried their weapons in the chamber of government. As indicated in Chapter 1, black women as well as black men have historically fought against violence against their families and person. Contrary to popular myths promulgated by the dominant discourse emphasizing the passive resistance ideology of the Civil Rights movement, black people throughout their history exercised their rights to defend themselves and bear arms. Party members were continuing a long tradition of fighting back against violence that reached back to individual acts of resistance and the more organized slave revolts of earlier centuries.

The Panthers were dedicated to defending themselves as individuals and collectively, which was a right blacks had exercised even before the Nadir period in the Jim Crow south where violence against blacks was a common occurrence. The systemic use of violence continued through this period to the present time. Black people in the 1960's experienced systematic violence from the police in their neighborhoods. This was part of the reason the BPP formed, to provide protection from police violence, and like earlier black activists, they were attacked and sometimes killed by the police to prevent their activism. Law enforcement is still used today to deny black people their rights to participation in the democratic process.

While there were many thousands of blacks who advocated and practiced armed self-defense, a known trailblazer of armed self-defense years before the advent of the Panthers was Robert F. Williams, who was the leader of the local chapter of the NAACP in Monroe, North Carolina. Williams, an ex-serviceman who served in the marines, and vocal in the 1940's and the 1950's, espoused armed self-defense because violence against black people happened everywhere in America, but especially in the Jim Crow south, where violence against blacks was a common occurrence. SNCC would not discourage locals from self-defense, Bob Moses said, "It is so deeply ingrained in rural southern America that we as a

small group can't affect it." SNCC staffers began to arm themselves too, but Bob Moses objected. SNCC staffers, Moses said, "have committed ourselves not to carry guns." Watson relates, "Weapons in Greenwood office would be removed. No SNCCs would be armed that summer."³

Armed self-defense was practiced by women as well as men. Robyn Spencer writes, "During the civil rights movement, some black women countered white violence with self-defense. Political activists like Gloria Richardson advocated the viability of self -defense strategies in Cambridge, Maryland; Daisy Bates guarded her home with a .45 automatic in the wake of white supremacist terrorism ranging from "incendiary bombs" to "KKK crosses" to threats of arson".⁴ One of the reasons Huey Newton and Bobby Seale organized the Panthers to patrol inner city neighborhoods in Oakland was for self-defense. The Oakland Police Department had very few officers of color and was known for their violence against black people. Black women, like Elendar Barnes and Matilaba moved to the west coast from the South and brought with them a southern tradition of black people arming themselves. The BPP appealed to these women because women took an active role with the black men of the

³ Bruce Watson, *Freedom Summer: The Savage Season That Made Mississippi Burn and Made America a Democracy* (New York: Viking Penguin, 2010.) p.70

⁴ Spencer, p. 93 & 94

organization to protect the community. For Brenda Presley the militancy appealed to her. As Robyn Spencer relates, "Televised civil rights demonstrations which showed violence being meted out to peaceful protesters pushed Presley to explore local formations: 'I wanted [the nonviolent protesters] to fight. I realize that I couldn't do that. I couldn't not fight back because I don't have the temperament for it.'"⁵

Police harassment and violent attacks on BPP activists

Black people in the late 1960s were forced to protect themselves against violence much as they had in the Jim Crow era. Many Panthers and the organization as a whole were targeted by the law and harassed constantly. The FBI had established COINTELPRO to infiltrate and police the party, and eradicate every organization they considered to be politically radical. Bloom writes, "COINTELPRO aimed to undermine the Black Panthers' ability to threaten the status quo."⁶ The head of the FBI, J. Edgar Hoover, declared the Black Panther Party to be, "the greatest threat to the internal security of the United States."⁷ The FBI infiltrated the BPP to sabotage and destroy the party from within and tried to prevent black nationalist groups from merging by

⁵ Spencer, p. 98

⁶ Bloom, p. 211

⁷ Bloom, p. 210

creating conflicts between groups. The government also used the media to discredit and isolate the party, and this was also done to discourage support from the general population. Ericka Huggins and Bobbie Seale were among many black Panthers and other black leaders, including Martin Luther King, and individual activists who were targeted. Ericka Huggins and Bobby Seale were arrested in New Haven Connecticut on conspiracy charges and spent several years in jail while enduring their trial. All these tactics would serve to increase their legal conflicts, while draining monetary and human resources. The Black Panthers and the police clashed in a few gun battles, from which some Panthers died. Huey Newton wrote, "because black people desire to determine their own destiny, they are constantly inflicted with brutality from the occupying army, embodied in the police department. There is a great similarity between the occupying army in Southeast Asia and the occupation of our communities by racist police."⁸ Police harassment of the BPP was similar to the tactics used during the lynching era. Both forms of violence were aimed at keeping black people from challenging the existing social structures and targeted militant activists for elimination. During the Nadir, myths concerning black violence mirrored the myths used by the FBI to justify their violence against the BPP.

⁸ Bloom, p. 2

Capitalism, racism, and patriarchy

One reason Hoover and others in the federal government were so concerned about the BBP was because members espoused a socialist system of government. Bloom writes, "No aspect of the Black Panther program was of greater concern to the FBI than the Free Breakfast for Children Program, which fostered widespread support for the Panthers' revolutionary politics"⁹ The BPP was not only concerned with racism, but also capitalism, as the organization did not separate the effects of the capitalistic system on the individual in the United States, and its negative long term effects on race and class. The Green Party notes, "The capitalistic system is organized to profit the owners and individuals, and most owners are white men. It controls labor to its own benefit; hence workers are pitted against each other in a desperate attempt to escape poverty. Hierarchical control is maintained for gender, race, and between classes. Women are subservient to white men, black and brown people are subservient to white people, and the poor are subservient to the rich."¹⁰

Patriarchy is an ancient ideology that oppresses women (and men), and is embraced and used to justify discrimination against women. This domination

⁹ Bloom, p. 211

¹⁰ Green Party USA. Green Party Congress (Chicago, 2000), <https://www.greenparty.org/program.rtf>

serves capitalism well because it allows the dominant class, the white males, to control all aspects of women's lives. In the *Black Panther Speaks*, Bobby Seale noted, "The fight against male chauvinism is a class struggle--that is hard for people to understand. To understand male chauvinism one has to understand that it is interlocked with racism. Male chauvinism is directly related to male domination and it is perpetuated as such by the ruling class in America."¹¹ White upper and middle class men are the voice of authority in all things, as they alone possess all the privileges of the capitalistic system.

At first, the Black Panther Party was organized like traditional organizations, with males dominating the leadership positions. The Black Panther Party evolved from a male dominated organizational hierarchy, with a parallel Pantherettes structure with all females in the leadership positions, to an integrated organization. Women participated in traditional roles, like secretary, typing, and taking care of children, but they would not be limited to traditional roles, and would expand their participation into all aspects of the organization, pushing past fixed boundaries of gender. Cleaver, as the communications director of the BPP, became the first woman on the Central Committee. She wrote articles, made speeches, and explained the party line as its press secretary.

¹¹ Bobby Seale, *The Black Panthers Speak*, ed. Philip S. Foner, p. 86

Robyn Spencer writes, "Cleaver would play a pivotal role as the first woman on the Panther Central Committee and become one of the most recognizable public faces in the BPP. Her legitimacy was not derived from her marriage to Eldridge Cleaver but from the considerable array of skills and experiences she brought to the BPP."¹² In her POV *A Panther in Africa* interview Kathleen Cleaver relates,

Lastly, the notion that women played secondary roles. Most photographs that give an image of the Black Panther Party were typically photos taken by men, selected by male editors, put in newspapers owned and run by men. The selection of images tends to be images of men because that's what these editors and publishers thought was important. There were tons of women in the Black Panther Party, but photographers never came to our meetings. They came to show a threatening image that helped justify that way law enforcement treated us. From the beginning there were women within the organization, and as Huey Newton said, we do not have any sex roles in the organization.¹³

Robyn Spencer writes, "Erica Huggins noted that as a result of men being "jailed and killed in greater numbers" and removed from formal leadership, "women rose in ranks of leadership. She quotes Huggins as saying, "Some men may have had internal unresolved things about women, but about women in leadership, we were in too much danger every day to say 'No women'. We were

¹² Spencer, p. 97

¹³ Aaron Matthews, *A Panther in Africa*, P.O.V PBS Website, http://www.pbs.org/pov/pov/2004/apantherinafrica/special_today_cleaver.html

not an intellectually-based organization. We made decisions made on need, and often, too often, we made decisions based on survival."¹⁴

Challenging sexism within the movement

Although race and class oppression may have seemed like the most urgent problems to some activists, BPP members recognized the need to confront sexism and patriarchal oppression as well. The BPP incorporated in its ideology, principles of equality for women. In 1970 Huey P. Newton, one of the founders of the BPP wrote a statement called *The Women's and Gay Liberation Movement*. In that statement he wrote, "During the past few years strong movements have developed among women and among homosexuals seeking their liberation. There has been some uncertainty about how to relate to these movements. Whatever your personal opinions and your insecurities about homosexuality and the various liberation movements among homosexuals and women (and I speak of the homosexuals and women as oppressed groups), we should try to unite with them in a revolutionary fashion."¹⁵ It should also be noted that in point 7 of

¹⁴ Spencer, 103

¹⁵ History is a weapon blog, <http://www.historyisaweapon.com/indextue.html>. (author list, p. X)

the BPP party platform, called *8 points of attention*, was the directive that women should be respected. It said, "Do not take liberties with women."¹⁶

As with all organizations, various women experienced levels of sexism, as individual experiences were mitigated, (or not), by the individuals involved, between leaders and foot soldiers, and perhaps shaped by their own family history or marital status. Some women experienced domestic violence, sexual coercion, and struggles with gender equality. Newton and the BPP would not have included point 7 if there was not a need. Joshua Bloom notes that at a conference to discuss gender issues Black Panther Roberta Alexander said, "Male supremacy, she explained, was "a true problem in our society and reflects capitalist society." In turn, she argued, it was important to acknowledge the persistence and depth of struggles over gender and sexuality with the Party: male supremacist culture demanded stalwart resistance."¹⁷ In my examination of women in the BPP, I learned that sexism and patriarchy did indeed exist in the party, as it existed in the general society in the United States at the time. As

¹⁶ Philip S. Foner, ed., *The Black Panthers Speak* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Co. (1970), p. 6.

¹⁷ Bloom, p. 303

Robyn Spenser noted, "the source of sexism within the BPP was rooted in the American society."¹⁸

At the same time, however, the organization made a conscious effort for equality for all. Elaine Brown became the leader of the BPP when Huey Newton left the country. Male chauvinism was still an issue in the BPP, as it was prevalent in American society. Elaine Brown encapsulated the new spirit of defiance by women who had been tested by the civil rights, anti-war, and women's movements. Writing in her autobiography, she recalled making the speech that established her position as the leader of the BPP in Oakland

California:

In front of me, extending all the way back of the auditorium, were several hundred other members of the Black Panther Party, a sea of predominantly male faces. They were black men and women from the party's Central Committee and they had come to Oakland at my command. I have not called you together to make threats, Comrades. I've called this meeting simply to let you know the realities of our situation. The fact is, Comrade Huey is in exile, and I'm taking his place. I'm telling you this because it's possible some of you may balk at a woman as the leader of the Black Panther Party, but if this is your attitude, you'd better get out of the Black Panther Party now, run –and fast! My leadership cannot be challenged. I will lead our party both above ground and

¹⁸ Robyn Ceanne Spencer, "Engendering The Black Freedom Struggle; Revolutionary Black Womanhood and the Black Panther Party in the Bay Area, California," *Journal of Women's History*, Vol. 20, No. 1, p. 101

underground. I will lead this party not only in furthering our goals but also in defending the party by any and all means.¹⁹

This overt political action signaled the progression of black women activists who were breaking gender boundaries. Traditional roles and leadership positions were becoming less gender specific than they had been in earlier movements.

Black women had been partners with men during slavery, the Civil War, after Reconstruction, and during the Civil Rights Movement. Most of the time women did not take 'the leader position', although they were in leadership roles both in organizations that were all female, and organizations with members of both genders. Like women activists before them, women in the BPP struggled with patriarchy, and there were women who embraced patriarchy. Safiya Bukhari notes, "In the United States sexism is part of the culture of the U.S. and this is a sexist society".²⁰ But soon, women and men in the BPP began to assert the idea that as women, they could challenge their roles. This was a process, an awakening consciousness for the women in the BPP. Joshua Bloom in his book writes,

The history of activism by revolutionary and radical women was relatively unknown at the time, which left women struggling with male interpretations of their role. As Angela Davis recalled, "Even those of us

¹⁹ Elaine Brown, *A Taste of Power; A Black Woman's Story* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1992) p.4

²⁰ Arm the Spirit. Interview with Safiya Bukhari (International Women's Day, 1995).
<http://whgbetc.com/mind/bpp-safiya-bio.html>

who were women did not know how to develop ways of being revolutionaries that was not informed by masculine definitions of the revolutionary. The revolutionaries were male. The women who became revolutionaries had to make themselves in those images.²¹

BPP women's leadership and community organizing

The Black Panther Party included women like Kathleen Cleaver and Elaine Brown in its central committee, and women who were organizational leaders like Safiya Bukhari and Erica Huggins, and foot soldiers. They, along with many women in the party, struggled to break out of the confines of gender roles, as they sought to increase black people's participation in the political process, using a bottoms up model espoused by Ella Baker. This included increasing representation of black people on local governmental boards and governing bodies. Robyn Spencer writes, "Under Brown's leadership, the Panthers prioritized electoral politics and local community organizing and became a formidable player on Oakland's political stage. Panthers were elected to key positions in local politics, including six positions on the West Oakland Model Cities Governing Board and seats on the Berkeley antipoverty board. The BPP aligned itself with the California Democratic Party, supporting liberal gubernatorial candidate Jerry Brown in his winning campaign in 1974 and Lionel

²¹ Joshua Bloom and Waldo E. Martin, Jr. *Black Against Empire: The History and Politics of the Black Panther Party* (Berkeley California: University of California Press, 2013), p. 307

Wilson's election as the first African American mayor of Oakland in 1977".²² This aligned with point one of the ten point program because they gained power to determine the destiny of people in their own communities.

The women who joined the Black Panther organization were motivated much like previous African American women activists who came before them. They brought a high level of commitment to liberate and serve people in their communities, because like their ancestors, they saw blacks chained to poverty and violence. They wanted their ten point program to bring about equality for oppressed people not only in the United States, but around the world. They wanted to break down not only racial barriers, but also class barriers, knowing that the earlier Civil Rights Movement had not brought about full equality. They took part in the survival programs including, implementing the education, health, and the breakfast program to feed hungry children in the black community, to have schools promoting education and pride in oneself, and donating food and furniture to the community. In many cities across America, breakfast programs are now standard in schools and governmental programs like Head Start. Robyn Spencer writes, "By 1973, women made up almost 50 percent of the total membership base. Their influence within the organization

²² Spencer, p. 108

was amplified by the fact that they were a highly-educated group. The Panthers' structural reorganization and new political priorities provided new opportunities for women, especially in the area of formal and informal leadership."²³

In the early 1970's the BPP founded IYI, or Intercommunal Youth Institute. In the school students learned traditional subjects like math, science, and language arts, but they also learned political education and environmental studies. This school was renamed the Oakland Community School, and Ericka Huggins ran the school until it closed in the 1980's. This school was an early charter school and a precursor to that movement, with the goal of educating the minds of African American children with a curriculum tailored to their education levels, while also seeing to their physical needs with doctor's visits, breakfast, lunch and dinner, schools supplies, books, transportation and free clothing. Robyn Spencer relates, "According to Huggins, "People from all over the globe acknowledged the school as not only a great alternative to public education, but an amazing experiment in community and a guiding force in the lives of students. It was more than a school. It was a community within

²³ Spencer, p. 103

itself...We cared for the total child."²⁴ This was a departure from traditional models in the United States of the nuclear family. Communal care for children signaled a new paradigm in how community and family were structured. Ericka Huggins said, "The BPP showered the children with love."²⁵ Robyn Spencer writes, "As Abu-Jamal pointed out, the daily reality for most of these women included: "Hard work. Hard Study. Jailed lovers. Survival. Striving. Times of promise. Times of Terror. Resistance to male chauvinism. And hope."²⁶

Activism did not end with the Black Panthers. There are black people who are activists in their communities today. Our president, Barack Obama, was a community organizer in his youth. Nightly we witness communities all across the United States organizing and marching as they protest the violence of police against people of color. 'Black Lives Matter', 'Hands Up', and 'I Can't Breathe', symbolize modern day activism against the killing of black people like Amadou Diallo, Akai Gurley, John Crawford, Trayvon Martin, Eric Garner, Michael Brown, Tamir Rice, and many others. Black people are protesting many of the same things that were protested when the Black Panthers were active. They want control of economic development of their communities, including jobs and

²⁴ Spencer, p. 15

²⁵ Huggins interview

²⁶ Spencer, p. 108

business investment, better schools, and opportunities to advance. These were the very arguments of the BPP. Dayvon Love, co-founder of Leaders of a Beautiful Struggle and member of the Baltimore United Coalition, remarked while on the *Melissa Harris-Perry Show*,

I think there's an important distinction to be made between our Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake and our city State's Attorney Marilyn J Mosby. Many people, I think, would say that our mayor is someone who has capitulated to the corporate structure of the Democratic Party, and many of the corporate interests in this city. And I think, as we see, what happens in our society writ-large is that oftentimes individual black people are put in positions of power or leadership in white-controlled, dominating institutions, which brings more black people into those institutional arrangements, which undermines our ability to develop a kind of communal, independent black institution-building as the basis of our work. I think people reduce racism to individual white folks in leadership, or black people who are succumbed to white folks, and I think Baltimore just shows the sophistication of white supremacy, and how it operates, how it takes black figures, puts them in institutional positions, to give the veneer of justice, when really the same institutional arrangement exists.²⁷

In *Frontline*, Kathleen Cleaver argues a similar point as she notes,

The one thing that is important to understand is that a capitalist form of democracy, or I like to call it the "commercial democracy", needs people like us, or needs a middle class to function smoothly. It doesn't need equality. What it needs is inequality. It needs a certain number of people at the elite level, a certain number of people in the middle level, and the rest of the people scrambling and hoping they can get there, all following the same zealous commitment to making money.²⁸

²⁷ *Melissa Harris-Perry Show*, Dayvon Love Interviewed by Melissa Harris-Perry, MSNBC Website, <http://www.msnbc.com/melissa-harris-perry>

²⁸ PBS online. *Frontline*, Interview with Kathleen Cleaver

There are many people like Mr. Love who are committed to the continuing struggle against oppression, and there are others who note (as during the era of the Black Panthers), what the media broadcasts to people. On May 2, 2012, at a press conference in the Rose Garden, President Obama remarked,

Point number four, the violence that happened yesterday distracted from the fact that you had seen multiple days of peaceful protests that were focused on entirely legitimate concerns of these communities in Baltimore, led by clergy and community leaders. And they were constructive and they were thoughtful, and frankly, didn't get that much attention. And one burning building will be looped on television over and over and over again, and the thousands of demonstrators who did it the right way I think have been lost in the discussion.²⁹

After the violence the black community came together, as they had before the violence, to help their community. They cleaned up their neighborhood, provided information for peaceful protest, and articulated a plan of action.

The problems that were evident in the black community during the era of the BPP are still visible today. Activism has continued in the black community and activists, influenced by their own history, continue the bottom up philosophy and the culture of mutual aid. They are activists who remember the ten-point program of the BPP, understand how capitalism maintains institutional

²⁹ President Obama, Remarks by Presidents Obama and Prime Minister Abe of Japan in Joint Press Conference, Office of the Press Secretary, The White House, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/04/28/remarks-president-obama-and-prime-minister-abe-japan-joint-press-confere>

racism and gender inequality, and their arguments are indicative of why it is important for black people to have control over their communities. These arguments echo the philosophy of the Black Panther Party.

Conclusion

Using "infrapolitics" during slavery, to the Nadir period when black women engaged in various forms of resistance to white supremacy through individual actions that subtly expressed their dissatisfaction with the system, through their involvement in churches, social networks, and political organizations, and finally to organizing and direct challenge to authority, African American activists have carved a space for black people in the United States, to make truer the term in the Constitution, We The People.

The Black Panther Party continued the struggle that was centuries in the making. Women in the BPP participated in their own security and faced arrest, joining men and risking incarceration, and even their lives. . They were part of an organization that was not free of sexism, but actively debated gender roles in the context of being revolutionary. They worked to liberate the black community and women from their dual oppression from gender and race discrimination, embracing the womanist philosophy. Their work took many forms,; as leaders in the organization, to working on the newspaper *The Black Panther*, to organizing marches, protests, and rallies, and establishing schools and health clinics. Like many women in the Civil Rights Movement who worked behind the scenes to effect change, there were many women in the Black Panthers who labored in the

trenches and were unsung heroes. Like earlier activists, they went to jail, served time, and remained dedicated to the struggle. Their work, creating community programs to include, schools, health clinics, and day care, returned the community to its earlier roots, a village. In this village all were part of the community and part of the communal structure.

In their new community they were demanding a place for blacks to live in the world without patriarchy, racism and poverty, hence the social programs, with women fighting beside men for their equality. They were aware of the political and legal gains for black people during the early 1960's, but they were also aware of the limitations of those gains without accompanying economic inclusion. They would embrace a Marxist view of the freedom struggle, and were dedicated to the overthrow of the capitalist system of government. They no longer wanted a seat at the table, they considered themselves revolutionaries and wanted to throw the table out and begin again. They never changed this view, but they did begin to participate in the political process, effecting change for their communities.

Women activists carved out new roles, roles that were not gender specific. During much of African American history they were perceived as supports, not leaders, and at times this was true. But our perceptions, fueled by a patriarchal

media, limited our ability to see the work of black women activists, and the important roles they played in liberating black people. We heard the speeches and viewed the photographs, but we did not think about the organizational structure supporting the big breakthrough moments. But even in those moments, black women activists were there. Black women activists have represented the bottom up philosophy, they were all leaders.

African American women activists in the BPP continued the work for equality begun during slavery, and during the dark years after slavery and Jim Crow. They were the inheritors from black people who left behind a rich legacy of their activism. This legacy is part of the history of Africans in America, passed down through the generations. The legacy they received is not only of pain and suffering, of chains and dreams denied, but it is also a legacy of resistance and hope. So the work continues.

"I'm coming to understand what the old ones meant when they sang the words, "The race is not given to the swift, nor is it given to the strong, but to him that endures to the end", It may take a little longer to do it the hard way, slow and methodical, building a movement step by step and block by block, but doing it this way is designed to build a strong foundation that will withstand the test of time and the attack of the enemy." Safiya Bukhari.

Bibliography

Primary sources

Arm the Spirit, 1995 Interview with Safiya Bukhari (International Women's Day, 1995). <http://whgbetc.com/mind/bpp-safiya-bio.html>

Austin, Curtis J. *Up Against the Wall: Violence in the Making and Unmaking of the Black Panther Party*. Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2006.

BBC NEWS, *A Passion For Action*, Ericka Huggins Interviewed, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/3150491.stm>

Brown, Elaine. *A Taste of Power: A Black Woman's Story*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1992.

Cleaver, Kathleen and Katsiaficas, George, ed. *Liberation, Imagination, and the Black Panther Party: A new look at the Panthers and their legacy*. New York: Routledge, 2001.

Davis, Angela Y. *If They Come in the Morning*. New York: The Third Press, 1971.

Davis, Angela Y. *Women, Race, and Class*. New York: Random House, 1981.

Frontline: *The Two Nations of Black America*, Interview with Kathleen Cleaver, 1998. <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline>

Forbes, Flores A. *Will You Die With Me: My Life in the Black Panther Party*. New York: Atria Books, 2006.

Hilliard, David & Cole, Lewis. *This Side of Glory: The Autobiography of David Hilliard and the Story of the Black Panther Party*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1993.

History is a weapon blog, <http://www.historyisaweapon.com/indextrue.html>. (author list, p. X)

Huggins, Ericka Interview by Carla Trounson. December 20, 2009.

Jones, Charles E. ed. *The Black Panther Party Reconsidered*. Baltimore: Black Classics Press, 1998.

Melissa Harris-Perry Show, Dayvon Love interviewed by Melissa Harris-Perry. MSNBC Website, <http://www.msnbc.com/melissa-harris-perry>

McLean, Sienna. *Still Revolutionaries*. Berkeley Media LLC, documentary short, 1997.

Trounson, Carla. *Smithsonian Museum Looks Back At Black Power Movement*. Smithsonian American Art Museum and National Portrait Gallery, Washington D.C., March 2009.

Secondary sources

Andrews, Lori. *Black Power White Power: the life and times of Johnny Spain*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999.

Aptheker, Herbert. "American Negro slave revolts." *Science & Society* (1937): 512-538.

Arlen, Michael J. *An American Verdict*. New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1974.

Baruch, Ruth-Marion & Jones, Pirkle. *Black Panthers 1968*. Los Angeles: Greybull Press, 2002.

Berlin, Ira and Rowland, Leslie S., ed. *Families and Freedom; A Documentary History of African American Kinship in the Civil War Era*. New York: The New York Press, 1997.

Berlin, Ira. *Many Thousands Gone; The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America*. Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998.

Bloom, Joshua and Martin, Waldo E., Jr. *Black Against Empire: The History and Politics of the Black Panther Party*. Berkeley California: University of California Press, 2013.

Brown, Elsa Barkley. "Womanist Consciousness: Maggie Lena Walker and the Independent Order of Saint Luke." *Sigms*, Vol. 14, No. 3 (Spring 1989): 610-633.

- Churchill, Ward, and Wall, Jim Vander. *Agents of Repression; The FBI's Secret Wars Against the Black Panther Party and the American Indian Movement*. Boston: South End Press, 1988.
- Crawford, Vicki L.; Rouse, Jacqueline Anne; and Woods, Barbara, ed. *Women in the Civil Rights Movement; Trailblazers and Torchbearers, 1941- 1965*. New York: Carlson Publishing Inc, 1990.
- Davis, Angela Y. *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism: Gertrude "Ma" Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1998.
- de Jong, Greta. *Invisible Enemy: The African American Freedom Struggle after 1965*. Oxford, U.K.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010.
- Dubois, Ellen Carol and Dumenil, Lynn. *Through Women's Eyes: An American History with Documents*. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's Press 2005.
- Engler, Mark. *The Nation*. "Dr. Martin Luther King Economics: Through Jobs, Freedom." *The Nation*, February 1, 2010.
- Fields, Barbara "Ideology and Race in American History." In *Region, Race, and Reconstruction: Essays in Honor of C. Vann Woodward*, ed. J. Morgan Kousser and James M. McPherson, 143-177, New York / Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982).
- Foner, Eric. *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877*. New York: Harper and Row, 1988.
- Foner, Philip S. *The Black Panthers Speak*. New York: Da Capo Press, 1995.
- Fox, Richard Wightman, and Kloppenberg, James T., ed. *A Companion To American Thought*. Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing Co., 1998.
- Franklin, John Hope and Moss, Alfred A. Jr. *From Slavery To Freedom: A History of African Americans*. New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1994.
- Freed, Donald. *Agony in New Haven: The Trial of Bobby Seale, Ericka Huggins, and the Black Panther Party*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973.
- Gilmore, Glenda Elizabeth. *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920*. North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1996.

Green Party USA. Green Party Congress (Chicago, 2000),
<https://www.greenparty.org/program.rtf>

Harper, Judith E. *Women During the Civil War: An Encyclopedia*. New York: Routledge, 2004.

Higginbotham, Evelyn Brooks. *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920*. Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1993.

Hobson, Janelle. "My Problem with Slave Rape, or Why I Love the Story of Sukie." *Ms. Magazine Blog*, <http://msmagazine.com/blog>

Hunter, Tera. *To Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labor After The Civil War*. Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1997.

Jacobs, Harriet Jacobs. *Incidents in the Life of A Slave Girl; Written by Herself*. (Boston: 1861). *The Classic Slave Narratives*. Ed. Henry Louis Gates. Jr. New York: Mentor Books.

Jones, Jacqueline. *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow*. New York: Basic Books, Inc.,

Joseph, Peniel E. *Waiting 'Till The Midnight Hour: A Narrative History of Black Power in America*. New York: Owl Books, 2006.

Kelley, Robin D. G. *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class*. New York: Free Press, 1995.

Lerner, Gerda, ed. *Black Women In White America*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1972.

Levine, Lawrence W. *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: African American Folk Thought From Slavery to Freedom*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.

Linfield, Susie, *The Education of Kathleen Neal Cleaver*. Indiana University Press on behalf of the W.E.B. Du Bois Institute. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2903207>. No. 77 (1998), p. 178

Litwack, Leon F. *Trouble in Mind: Black Southerners in the Age of Jim Crow*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1998.

McGuire, Danielle L. *At The Dark End Of The Street: Black Women, Rape, and Resistance: A New History of the Civil Rights Movement, from Rosa Parks to the Rise of Black Power*. New York: Alfred A Knopf, 2011.

Olson, Lynne. *Freedom's Daughters; The Unsung Heroines of the Civil Rights Movement from 1830 to 1970*. New York: Scribner, 2001.

Patricia Sullivan. *Days of Hope: Race Democracy in the New Deal Era*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996.

Payne, Charles M. *I've Got The Light of Freedom; The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995.

Pearson, Hugh. *The Shadow of the Panther: Huey Newton and the Price of Black Power in America*. Boston, Mass: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1994.

Powell, Lawrence N. *New Masters: Northern Planters During the Civil War and Reconstruction*. Hartford, Conn: Yale University Press, 1980.

Publishers. 1985.

Ransby, Barbara. *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003.

Roediger, David R. *The Wages of Whiteness; Race and the Making of the American Working Class*. London: Verso, 1991.

Santangelo, Gretchen Lemke. *Abiding Courage; African American Women in the East Bay Community*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996.

Shaw, Stephanie. *What a Woman Ought to Be and Do; Black Professional Women Workers in the Jim Crow Era*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.

Simpkin, John Kathleen Cleaver ,WWW.Spartacus-Eduational.Com.

Smith, Jennifer. *An International History of the Black Panther Party*. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1999.

Spencer, Robyn Ceanne. "Engendering The Black Freedom Struggle: Revolutionary Black Womanhood and the Black Panther Party in the Bay Area, California." *Journal of Women's History*, Vol. 20, No.1 (2008): 90-113.

Theoharis, Jeanne. *The Rebellious Life of Mrs. Rosa Parks*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2013.

Underground Railroad: The William Still Story. PBS website,
<http://video.pbs.org/program/underground-railroad-william-still-story/>

Walker, Maggie L. National Park Service Website,
<http://www.nps.gov/mawa/learn/historyculture/index.htm>

Watson, Bruce. *Freedom Summer: The Savage Season That Made Mississippi Burn and Made America a Democracy*. New York: Viking Penguin, 2010.

Williams, Eric. *Capitalism and Slavery*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1994.

Woodard, Komozi. *A Nation within a Nation: Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones) & Black Power Politics*. Chapel Hill: The University Of North Carolina Press, 1999.

Works Progress Administration, *A Slave Named Sukie Resists a Master's Advances*, HERB: Resources for Teachers,
<http://herb.ashp.cuny.edu/items/show/1638>.