ABSTRACT

DONG, CHERYL XUE. “Why Don’t You Die For the People?” Memory and Martyrdom in the Black Panther Party. (Under the direction of Dr. Blair L.M. Kelley).

My dissertation explores the concept of martyrdom in the Black Panther Party. It challenges established narratives of violence and the Black Panther Party by showing how the Panthers used confrontations with law enforcement as a creative force to shed light on the struggles of poor black communities. By publicly performing suffering and death nationally, the Panthers politicized not just police brutality, but a number of institutional inequalities within the criminal justice system and elsewhere. The dissertation is divided into three case studies: the assassination of Fred Hampton in Chicago, the trial of Ericka Huggins in New Haven, and the campaign against urban renewal in Winston-Salem. Together, they run the spectrum from nationally publicized trials to more localized struggles for community services. Finally, I consider issues of contested memory and memorialization of the Panthers. The various case studies draw a direct throughline between the struggles of the Panthers in the 1960s and 1970s to social movements like Black Lives Matter, enabling a longer historical view of black radicalism and protest.
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“Why Don’t You Die For the People?” Memory and Martyrdom in the Black Panther Party

by
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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty of North Carolina State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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DEDICATION

First and foremost, I want to dedicate this document to my husband, Christopher Langford, who has supported me unconditionally all of these years chasing this dream that I could be a professional historian. This is for my son, Alexander Woden Langford, who has grown up in the shadow of this project and brought much joy with his eternal optimism and passion for Star Wars. To my sister, Caterina Dong, who has shown me the meaning of true courage, passion, and grit. You all have contributed so much to my emotional and personal wellbeing on this journey.
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I want to acknowledge my fearless advisor, Blair L.M. Kelley who helped me find my voice and has supported my passion no matter where it led. This is also for Katherine Mellen Charron, whose love, criticism, time, and dedication helped make me the scholar I am today. Finally, I want to dedicate this to Alicia E. McGill, who provided crucial support and advice as a mentor and friend. You are all fearless women in the academy who have shown me so much about life professionally and personally. I can never repay what you have given me so I take Dr. Charron’s advice to heart and I will pay forward this immense debt I have to you all.
BIOGRAPHY

Cheryl Dong is a Ph.D. candidate in Public History who is writing her dissertation entitled, “Why Don’t You Die For the People? Memory and Martyrdom in the Black Panther Party.” Her work examines how the Black Panthers used their bodies to perform the consequences of police brutality on minority communities. The Black Panther Party radicalized the notion of who could or could not be considered a victim and brought the problem of police brutality to national attention. The Black Panthers’ activism has continued to shape how modern movements like Black Lives Matter have continued to deal with issues of social justice. Cheryl Dong has also collaborated with various public history organizations in the Triangle on physical and online exhibits. Her collaborations include work with the Khayrallah Center for Lebanese Diaspora Studies, the Museum of Durham History, and the Digital Innovation Lab at UNC Chapel Hill. She will be an Assistant Professor in Public History at the University of Northern Iowa in the Fall of 2020.
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Introduction: Contextualizing “Revolutionary Suicide”

At the very end of Mike Gray’s 1971 documentary, *The Murder of Fred Hampton*, the screen fades to black, and we hear muffled audio of Fred Hampton speaking while the following words flash in white across the screen in cadence with Hampton’s speech:

IF YOU EVER THINK ABOUT ME
AND IF YOU THINK ABOUT ME NIGGERS
AND IF YOU AIN’T GONNA DO
NO REVOLUTIONARY ACT
FORGET ABOUT ME.
I DON’T WANT MYSELF ON YOUR MIND
IF YOU’RE NOT GOING TO WORK FOR THE PEOPLE
LIKE WE ALWAYS SAID
IF YOU’RE ASKED TO MAKE A COMMITMENT
AT THE AGE OF TWENTY
AND YOU SAY
I DON’T WANT TO MAKE A COMMITMENT
ONLY BECAUSE OF THE SIMPLE REASON
 THAT I’M TOO YOUNG TO DIE
I WANT TO LIVE
I WANT TO LIVE A LITTLE BIT LONGER.
WHAT YOU DID IS, YOU’RE DEAD ALREADY.
YOU HAVE TO UNDERSTAND
 THAT PEOPLE HAVE TO PAY
THE PRICE FOR PEACE.
IF YOU DARE TO STRUGGLE,
YOU DARE TO WIN.
IF YOU DARE NOT STRUGGLE THEN
GOD DAMN-IT YOU DON’T DESERVE TO WIN.
LET ME SAY PEACE TO YOU
IF YOU’RE WILLING TO FIGHT FOR IT.¹

Hampton continues, evoking the cadence of a black Baptist preacher:

I BELIEVE THAT I’M GOING TO DO MY JOB
AND I BELIEVE THAT I WAS BORN
NOT TO DIE IN A CAR WRECK;
I DON’T BELIEVE THAT I’M GOING TO DIE
IN A CAR WRECK.
I DON’T BELIEVE I’M GOING TO DIE
SLIPPING ON A PIECE OF ICE;
I DON’T BELIEVE I’M GOING TO DIE
BECAUSE I GOT A BAD HEART;
I DON’T BELIEVE I’M GOING TO DIE
BECAUSE OF LUNG CANCER
I BELIEVE THAT I’M GOING TO BE ABLE TO
DIE DOING THE THINGS I WAS BORN FOR.
I BELIEVE I’M GOING TO BE ABLE
TO DIE HIGH OFF THE PEOPLE.
I BELIEVE THAT I WILL BE ABLE TO DIE
AS A REVOLUTIONARY IN THE
INTERNATIONAL REVOLUTIONARY
PROLETARIAN STRUGGLE.²

¹“Epilogue,” The Murder of Fred Hampton, Directed by Mike Gray, featuring (Fred Hampton, Bobby Rush, Edward V. Hanrahan) (Facets Media, 2007).
Ending emphatically, Hampton asks:

WHY DON’T YOU LIVE FOR THE PEOPLE.
WHY DON’T YOU STRUGGLE FOR THE PEOPLE
WHY DON’T YOU DIE FOR THE PEOPLE.³

As Hampton’s speech closes we hear voices in the background chanting in a call and response as the screen slowly fades to black, “Die for the people! Die for the people! Die for the people! Die for the people!”⁴

On first consideration, Fred Hampton’s words and the audience’s response to them might seem fatalistic. At twenty-one years of age, Hampton should have been planning for a life that was yet to come: the prospect of a family, a child, and a life together with his fiancée, Deborah Johnson.⁵ His call seems eerily prescient of his own assassination just weeks later. Yet to think of Hampton’s words only in the shadow of his death misses the true meaning and intent behind them. Hampton’s speech was not delivered in fear, sadness or resignation to his fate. He was defiant, proud of his determination, and hopeful for the future of his people. Herein lies the crux of the contradiction at the heart of how the Panthers thought about the willingness to die: At its purest, it was a call to live, to struggle, and to survive for the revolution.

This dissertation is about martyrdom—a term used to describe a religious, spiritual or political experience of public suffering and/or death for a cause. The western origins of martyrdom can be traced back to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the hagiographies of saints in the late Roman Empire and early Middle Ages. These stories served as examples for

⁵ Deborah Johnson, Hampton’s 19-year-old fiancé, was eight and a half months pregnant when he died. Deborah Johnson, Interview by Terry Rockefeller, October 19, 1988, Eyes on the Prize II Interviews, Washington University Digital Gateway Texts.
the pious and created a collective memory of persecution that was central to the formation of
early Christian identity. However, martyrdom also appears in other cultural traditions and it
was the experiences of the early black church and of Third World political revolutions that
shaped the specific context of the Panther definition. Immediate influences on the Panthers
included the tradition of activism that came out of the black church represented by figures like
Martin Luther King Jr. who drew on overt metaphors of Christian martyrdom in his famous
“Letter from Birmingham Jail.” and the famous “Mountaintop” speech given in Memphis,
Tennessee just prior to his assassination. They also took inspiration from revolutionary heroes
in contexts like the Algerian War, the Vietnam War, and the Chinese Cultural Revolution.

Studying martyrdom can be a politically charged and controversial undertaking. Yet an
close examination of Panther history demonstrates that it is central to understanding the core of
the organization’s interpretation of black power: the importance of self-defense and the

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8 To quote King: “Of course there is nothing new about this kind of civil disobedience. It was evidenced sublimely in the refusal of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to obey the laws of Nebuchadnezzar, on the ground that a higher moral law was at stake. It was practiced superbly by the early Christians, who were willing to face hungry lions and the excruciating pain of chopping blocks rather than submit to certain unjust laws of the Roman Empire.” Martin Luther King Jr., “Letter from Birmingham Jail,” August 1963.

9 Malloy, Out of Oakland, 77.
intertwined fight against police brutality. Without addressing this paramount concern of the Party, any depiction of the Panthers would be incomplete. Martyrdom is the lens through which this dissertation conducts a critical study of how the Panthers conceptualized and responded to state-sanctioned violence against black people. It challenges narratives that violence was a solely negative experience for the Black Panther Party and it reveals the Panthers’ agency in the face of state oppression. Rather than simply dying, being imprisoned, or falling into disunity and chaos because of state-sponsored violence, the Panthers channeled that energy into educating and inspiring their community to stand up to inequality. Although they meant for their suffering to be inspirational, these narratives carried the potential of destructive forces as well. The ways that the Panthers grappled with that tension reveals how violence shaped Panther ideology in complicated and unexpected ways.

After his release from prison, Huey P. Newton wrote a memoir entitled Revolutionary Suicide, fleshing out in its pages his thoughts on Black Panther martyrdom through the term, “Revolutionary Suicide.” Newton borrowed heavily on the ideas of Herbert Hendin, a renowned psychologist and expert in suicide. Hendin argued that African Americans were more prone to suicide. For Newton, this predilection reflected harsh realities that black people, especially

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10 This was a central plank of the Panthers’ ten point program, and what their initial organizing of street patrols was designed to stop. It was also the subject of their very first newspaper cover on the murder of Denzil Dowell and what first catapulted them to national attention with their protest against the Mulberry Act in Sacramento, California: Waldo E. Martin and Joshua Bloom, Black Against Empire: The History and Politics of the Black Panther Party (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016), 45-62; Donna Jean Murch, Living for the City: Migration, Education, and the Rise of the Black Panther Party in Oakland, California (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 119-168; “Why Was Denzil Dowell Killed?” The Black Panther Community News Service, April 25, 1967, 1.


black men, had to confront. Lack of economic opportunity and the daily violence of poverty and racial discrimination took a toll on the mental health of their communities. In creating the Panther conception of “Revolutionary Suicide,” Newton drew on his own personal experience with imprisonment as well as the experiences of many members of the Black Panther Party. It would be better to die with purpose, fighting the causes of black oppression than to die as a “reaction” to the harsh realities of inequality in America. For Newton, “Revolutionary Suicide” transformed that imagined suicidal tendency within black communities and harnessed that energy for revolution. In contrast to the idea of “reactionary suicide” defined by hopelessness, Newton defined “Revolutionary Suicide” as fundamentally hopeful and desirous of life.

Like all narratives of martyrdom, Newton’s ideal of “Revolutionary Suicide” walks a fine line between celebrating death as an end in itself and purposeful death for the cause of the Black Panther Party. Newton’s writings on “Revolutionary Suicide” reveal fundamental anxieties that members of the Party had taken the concept too far and had become trapped in a fatalistic struggle where they expected, and even welcomed, death by police. Newton categorized this mindset that was being championed by Eldridge Cleaver among the Panther rank-and-file as disastrous for the fate of the Party and for the communities it sought to serve. This “reactionary

15 Newton, “Revolutionary Suicide: The Way of Liberation,” 133.
16 This uneasiness with “Revolutionary Suicide” vs. “Reactionary Suicide” was present at the very first death experienced by the Panthers: that of Bobby Hutton in a raid that also led to the exile of Eldridge Cleaver. The actions of Cleaver came under special criticism in Newton’s and Seale’s memoirs because they viewed it as unnecessary antagonism that worked against the goals of the Party. For their accounts, see: Huey P. Newton, Revolutionary Suicide (New York: Penguin Classics, 2009), 354-358; Bobby Seale, Seize the Time: The Story of the Black Panther Party and Huey P. Newton (Baltimore, MD: Black Classic Press, 1970), 149-156.
suicide” would only lead to greater state oppression and ultimately threaten the very existence of the black power movement.17

Beginning in 1970, Newton’s thinking began to shift towards a more conservative understanding of “Revolutionary Suicide,” one that would come to fruition in his memoir. Newton placed the concept of survival as the highest goal of the Black Panther Party. Revolutionary change would come, but only if the people managed to survive the current onslaught by law enforcement. This impulse for community survival marked the shift of the Party towards grassroots community organizing and its survival programs.18 Under this new constellation of priorities, “Revolutionary Suicide” still had its place as a fundamental recognition that simply by being a Panther, members risked death or imprisonment. However, Party members were supposed to struggle to live and organize. If death/imprisonment came, Party members would be celebrated for their sacrifice, only if it was unavoidable.19

Newton’s measured definition of “Revolutionary Suicide” revealed the tensions that haunted the Panthers’ brushes with the deaths, imprisonment, and suffering of its members and community. On one hand, news of the Panthers’ mistreatment at the hands of state actors could galvanize the communities they sought to reach and win broad-based support.20 At the same time, the Panthers’ martyrs represented real casualties of talent and leadership in an organization under attack by state forces almost as soon as it burst onto the national scene. Highly publicized cases of Panther martyrdom could alienate the Panthers’ supporters as many communities and

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19 Newton, Revolutionary Suicide, 129-131.
20 Murch, Living for the City, 170-171; Bloom and Martin, Black Against Empire, 354-355.
allies decided that the Panthers were simply not worth the disruption and violence that seemed to follow them. The main question for the Panthers was one of audience—who did the Panthers conceive of as their main constituency and how did they use martyrdom to shape their reach to those people? As the Black Panther Party moved into the 1970s, its goals shifted towards survival. Its initial aim of radical revolution seemed further away and its understanding of martyrdom shifted to reflect those news realities. The Panthers would funnel the energy into community survival programs and grassroots electoral politics.

Yet martyrdom as defined through “Revolutionary Suicide” remained central to the Panthers’ identity despite these shifts in organizing strategy. How it thought of itself as an organization was wrapped up in its members’ stories of suffering, imprisonment and death. These stories provided a narrative of their struggle, impetus for further work, and a shared memory space to commemorate those they had lost, in short, martyrdom constituted community. The Party provided room to work through trauma caused by the shared experience of violence.

Panther martyrdom was also an active, living experience. It did not mean for commemoration to be an end to itself, but a call for action. For those martyrs who were imprisoned or trapped

21 This sentiment was referenced in Newton’s writings as well as the reason for the turn towards Community Survival and away from confrontation with the police. This move to “community survival” received special attention in Alondra Nelson’s Body and Soul and Jakobi Williams’ From the Bullet to the Ballot: Newton, “On the Defection of Eldridge Cleaver from the Black Panther Party and the Defection of the Black Panther Party from the Black Community,” 44-53; Martin and Bloom, Black Against Empire, 354; Alondra Nelson, Body and Soul: The Black Panther Party and the Fight Against Medical Discrimination (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 2011), 3-4; Jakobi Williams, From the Bullet to the Ballot: The Illinois Chapter of the Black Panther Party and Racial Coalition Politics in Chicago (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 189.
22 Murch, Living for the City, 170-171; Bloom and Martin, Black Against Empire, 354-355.
within the legal system, this meant supporting the Panthers financially and physically to make sure those people get justice.\textsuperscript{24}

This dissertation asks, how did the Black Panthers conceptualize martyrdom stories to push forward their organizing work? How did others, including the police, various state organizations, and the mainstream media perceive these stories that the Panthers were trying to tell? What does the conflict and dissonance between the two points of view tell us about how different communities conceptualized the Panthers and their struggles both then and now? This dissertation looks at how the Black Panther Party constructed images of martyrdom as a vehicle to carry forward its critiques against state control and policing in its neighborhoods. It laid the groundwork for years of activism on two of the key issues of black radical movements: policing and political imprisonment. It was not the first to make these challenges, but it successfully harnessed the power of mass media to bring these issues to a broader public. Even as the Panthers lost lives and members to state-sponsored violence, they used the full weight of that violence to launch a critique against government repression of social movements. The Panthers purposefully used their run-ins with law enforcement to create narratives that rendered visible the effects of police control in black communities.\textsuperscript{25} These images elevated their suffering to make clear the state’s role in criminalizing blackness. The Panthers’ public defense of its members in the face of negative media coverage set the stage for how black social movements


would think about humanizing victims of state violence into the twenty-first century. It fundamentally shaped the contours of the modern debate about black criminality in the late 20th and early 21st century.

The Panthers defined martyrdom expansively. They held up the suffering of ordinary people as well as their leaders and they did not limit their activism solely to confrontations with law enforcement and police brutality. In their later work on grassroots community organizing, the Panthers excavated the lives of ordinary, poor, black Americans to show the inherent violence in urban poverty in America. They revealed how issues like hunger, lack of access to healthcare, poor housing conditions, and struggles for education could have traumatic effects on their communities. They also demonstrated how many of the structures that enforced these structural inequalities operated in inherently violent ways. Thus, the Panthers’ martyrdom narratives were enmeshed with their community survival programs, even as they turned away from direct confrontation with the police.

By looking at what the Panthers said publicly about their dead and imprisoned, this dissertation argues that the Panthers created a legacy of black martyrdom that movements would continue to draw on to frame their support of or opposition to radical black freedom movements, all the way through today’s Movement for Black Lives. The Panthers demanded that poor, young black men be recognized as leaders of the movement despite their actions outside of the


boundaries of traditional respectability. In doing so, they radically changed who could be considered a legitimate activist and provided ammunition for conservative opponents of civil rights to criticize black power.\(^{28}\) Yet as they challenged the boundaries of respectability within the Civil Rights Movement, their struggle to define a clear role for women revealed blindness in how they thought about gender. Even as they supported black women and challenged narratives of respectability, their nationalist influences pushed them to consider women primarily as mothers and wives.\(^{29}\) When those perceptions clashed with white racial stereotypes of black women as “Jezebel” or “Sapphire,” they created troublesome discourses about black women, criminality, and respectability.\(^{30}\)

The Black Panther Party was a relatively short-lived organization that nonetheless enjoys a long-lived memorial legacy that extends into current political movements like “Black Lives Matter.” The Black Panther Party was officially founded in 1966 and it officially went out of existence in 1982.\(^{31}\) At its height, the Black Panther Party had some 5,000 members and distributed its weekly newspaper internationally at a rate of 300,000 copies per issue. It was the highest selling black newspaper at the time, surpassing more mainstream publications like *Ebony* and *Jet*.\(^{32}\) Targeted state persecution and in-fighting encouraged by FBI infiltration led the

\(^{28}\) This is the crux of the argument deployed against them by their conservative detractors. See: Pearson, *Shadow of the Panther;* Austin, *Up Against the Wall.*


\(^{31}\) Bloom and Martin, *Black Against Empire,* 139.

organization to become defunct as early as the mid-1970s. However, the Black Panther Party’s confrontational approach to obtaining basic rights, grounded in real material benefits for poor black communities has captured the imagination of activists and scholars since the 1960s and 1970s. Black Panther radicalism melded traditional grassroots organizing tactics like voter registration and community service programs with an armed, adversarial style that challenged and mirrored police presence in poor black neighborhoods. Its black Marxist roots made them unafraid to recruit the “brothers on the street,” gang members, and drug dealers for social change. By believing in their own power to change their communities from the ground up, the Panthers challenged mainstream perceptions of who could be civil rights workers. They fought for the right of young, impoverished children of the Great Migration to determine their own destiny. The Panthers helped inspire an entire generation of activists who carried their movement work far beyond the confines of the actual Party. This represented another legacy of the Black Panther Party.

The Panthers’ demands for food, shelter, clothing, protection against police brutality, and self-determination outlined in the Party’s Ten Point Platform have provided the themes by which historians understand the goals of black power and think about the growth of grassroots movements. Robin D. G. Kelley argued in Freedom Dreams that black intellectual radicals played an important role in pushing the boundaries of what was possible within the Civil Rights

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34 Murch, Living for the City, 190; Alondra Nelson, Body and Soul.

35 Murch, Living for the City, 210.

Movement. Even as dreams of immediate black statehood, economic independence, and social justice remained practically unachievable, radicals expanded the spectrum of possibilities through their intellectual work—both in terms of goals and tactics employed by social movements.\textsuperscript{37} The Black Panthers were the “Vanguard” of the revolution. They courted controversy then and now. However, they were foundational to modern black radicalism and their struggles shaped the political landscape on issues of race that we contend with today. This dissertation goes a little way into illuminating that lineage.

Historiography

The first period of Black Panther Party historiography emerged in the 1970s and 1980s with movement literature written by Black Panther activists. Black male leaders dominated the early years of memoir writing with Bobby Seale’s \textit{Seize the Time} and Huey Newton’s tortured, intellectual \textit{Revolutionary Suicide} leading the way.\textsuperscript{38} Memoirs closely followed the tradition of civil rights autobiography and focused on Hegelian-inspired narratives that put the spotlight on the Party’s central leadership. These early memoirs created an Oakland-centric narrative that identified the main events that historians now associate as important watershed moments in Panther history—the arrest of Huey Newton, the shootout that killed Bobby Hutton, and the split


between Huey Newton and Eldridge Cleaver. They emphasized the youth of the Black Panther Party and attempted to establish an ideological and intellectual basis for Panther radicalism.  

The publication of William L. Van Deburg’s *New Day in Babylon* in 1993 and Hugh Pearson’s *Shadow of the Panther* in 1995 pushed Black Power and Black Panther Party historiography into two different streams of thought. Van Deburg’s study of black power was the first major work that set out to define the main tenets of black power ideology and history in a methodological way. Van Deburg challenged mainstream narratives that described black power as an unfortunate epilogue to the civil rights movement and gave space for historians to explore black power thought and ideology as a revolution in its own right. Although Van DeBurg did not write specifically on the Panthers, he created a context for others to do so more sympathetically. In contrast, Pearson’s *Shadow of the Panther* relied on right wing narratives and oral histories from disaffected radicals like David Horowitz to argue that the Black Panther Party became an inherently unstable personality cult linked to its founder, Huey Newton. Pearson blamed Newton’s focus on the “lumpen proletariat” for bringing increasingly criminal and gang activity into grassroots organizing and social movement work.

Pearson polarized a generation of historiographic responses to the Black Panther Party with some scholars like Curtis J. Austin arguing that the Panthers’ violent tendencies, infiltration

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41 Pearson, *The Shadow of the Panther*, 342-347. This work has largely been discredited, largely due to the use of biased, right wing sources like David Horowitz as major primary sources.
by state informers, and criminal elements ultimately led to its demise. However, other works like Judson Jeffries’s *Huey P. Newton: The Radical Theorist* and Charles E. Jones’s collection *The Black Panther Party Reconsidered* offered more sympathetic interpretations of the Panthers. Jeffries’s intellectual biography of Huey Newton argued that Newton’s unique fusion of Marxism with Franz Fanon’s critique of postcolonial racial identity elevated racial revolutionary consciousness to new heights. In contrast, Jones’s focus on community studies and local narratives of Black Panther organizing instead of highly journalistic accounts of sensationalist events surrounding the Panthers brought increased attention to the day-to-day functioning of the organization and how the Panthers framed the idea of community service as revolutionary act.


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42 Austin, *Up Against the Wall*, 163-164.
45 Murch, *Living for the City*, 167. Murch’s inclusion of local city history and politics into her narrative of the Black Panther Party pushed scholars to consider the importance of place.
Medical Discrimination focused scholarly attention on the community building aspects of the Panthers’ work and their quiet shift into mainstream electoral politics and coalition building, especially after 1969. This body of literature helped define the Panthers as a loosely based, national coalition rooted in local communities in cities across the nation. By decentralizing the story from Oakland and looking at local communities in places like Chicago, Baltimore, New Haven, and Winston-Salem, community studies have complicated our understanding of how the Panthers operated in different geographic contexts.46

The publication of Waldo E. Martin and Joshua Bloom’s Black Against Empire in 2012 marked the beginning of a fragile agreement in the historiography on the Black Panther Party. As one of the first comprehensive and overarching narratives about the Black Panther Party, Martin and Bloom’s ambitious text set out to tell the entire history of the Black Panther Party. The book begins with a focus on the Oakland area and argued that the Panthers started out as an organization dedicated to resisting police brutality. However, that initial platform expanded as the Panthers went nationwide and they morphed into a more mainstream organization that focused on grassroots organizing, social welfare, and electoral politics.47 The Panthers never lost their radical ideology or interpretation of black power, but they adopted different tactics as the costs of their resistance to policing began to decimate their numbers and finances. Although it


47 Bloom and Martin, Black Against Empire, 139.
provides a good synthesis of the Panthers’ history, *Black Against Empire* makes no definitive statements about their larger legacy on American society.\(^{48}\)

More recent works on the Black Panther Party have explored the intellectual work it did to define black power and to shape our understanding of gender, criminal justice reform, and incarceration. They include Lisa M. Corrigan’s *Prison Power*, Simon Balto’s *Occupied Territory*, Ashley D. Farmer’s *Remaking Black Power*, and Dan Berger’s *Captive Nation*. Usually broader in scope, these works situate the Panthers as one of many black power organizations and look at the ideological contributions of the era to modern day issues by tracing their historical roots.\(^{49}\) This dissertation falls into line with this trend by looking at how an idea of martyrdom functioned to shape Panther organizing both during the black power era and in our memories since.

Despite the relatively recent profusion of literature on the Black Panther Party, few works address its complicated legacy through the lens of memory. Jane Rhodes’s *Framing the Panthers* and Jama Lazerow and Yohuru Williams’s *In Search of the Black Panther Party* are the two anthologies that look at the influence of the Black Panthers on popular culture and within the media.\(^{50}\) These books collectively argue that the Panthers engaged in a media war to define their legacy and that although they created iconic images of themselves, they could rarely outrun those same images. Even as the Panthers attempted to become more mainstream in the civil


rights conversation, their established image of angry young black men carrying guns continued to haunt them.\textsuperscript{51}

These cut-and-dry arguments about mainstream media control of Black Panther Party imagery neither cover the full scope of memory work that the Black Panthers engaged in during and after their activism. Nor does it engage in the substantive literature about memory and commemoration that has emerged within the last twenty years. The history of Black Panther Party historiography itself tells an interesting memory story about who gets to tell the history of the Black Panthers, whose voices get remembered and celebrated, and who gets forgotten or vilified. Shifts in the history and memory trail of the Panthers offer tantalizing clues to how black activists in the past several decades have thought about the issues that galvanized the Black Panthers and the possibility for further social movement.\textsuperscript{52} The methodology of the history of memory offers a unique lens with which to analyze the legacy of the Black Panthers and understand how the Panthers have influenced black movement work since the 1970s.

The modern era of historical work on memory and commemoration began with Pierre Nora’s landmark 1989 article, “Between Memory and History.” Nora argued that memory is written into historical landscapes known as \textit{lieux de memoire}, but that the modern world destroyed these landscapes at an alarming rate. As a result, modernity has created this fear of loss of memory that has led to the rise of the heritage and preservation industry. Yet the memories artificially created on our cultural landscapes are necessarily impressionistic and false,


\textsuperscript{52} Street, “The Historiography of the Black Panther Party,” 354
while real history follows logical rules that seek objective truth. Nora’s work has become the foundation of historical memory work and set up many of the assumptions that color historians’ traditional skepticism of memory studies by creating a false dichotomy between memory and history. Moreover, other memory historians have rightly noted that Nora’s framework of a heritage economy almost completely ignores the experiences of the marginalized, since African Americans and other people of color rarely had the political or economic capital to participate in the heritage industry in the first place.

For African Americans and scholars of African American history, memory has always played a more complex role than that suggested by Pierre Nora. In Genevieve Fabre and Robert O’Mealley’s *History and Memory in African American Culture*, the editors suggest that in communities that have traditionally been oppressed and had their history actively erased, memory can exist as a sort of counter-history. For African Americans, memory isn’t simply an impulsive and impressionistic mis-remembering of the past, but a tool used to actively reconstruct the past itself. Neither is history something to be held up as a truly objective. Just as memory is nothing more than an artificial reconstruction of the past swayed by the needs of the present, history bows to these same humanistic tendencies albeit in a more academically disciplined way. For instance, in the early twentieth century, the Dunning School of Thought demonized Reconstruction as an experiment in corrupt governance and helped sanctify a narrative of white supremacy that helped justify the reign of Jim Crow in the southern states and discrimination against African Americans nationally. Even as scholars like DuBois used the

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very methodology of history to disprove this narrative of white supremacy, mainstream narratives of academic history bowed to the needs of political convenience.  

Given that African American history and memory have been consistently written out of the American civic myth, more mainstream models of how societies use memory to create national civic myths ring hollow for the African American experience. At best, African American commemoration and memory can only be relegated to the realm of “vernacular commemoration” theorized by John Bodnar, but that model doesn’t even scratch the surface of how African American communities utilize memory as a repository of hidden knowledge and strength for struggle.  

If memory is the basis for identity, in the African American community, memory records the survival skills, trauma, and coping strategies that have helped them survive and flourish. These memories have preserved the history of social movements that have come and gone and served as a repository of strength. However imperfectly, it collects and

remembers truths ignored by the mainstream. It is this function of memory that I probe with my analysis of martyrdom and the Black Panther Party.

In the past forty years, African American memory work has undergone a revolution spurred on by the diversification of heritage tourism markets in the United States. Tammy Gordon’s *The Spirit of 1976* traces this partnership between commemoration and business to the American Bicentennial. As Gordon argues, the emergence of the civil rights movement fundamentally ruptured national narratives of American identity. Rather than impose one singular vision of American patriotism during the commemoration, the planning committee opened the door to many different narratives about the American Revolution specifically targeted at populations marginalized by the national civic myth. Even as capitalism can reify systems of oppression and inequality, it is also always looking for new markets.\(^{59}\) Since the 1970s, a new market for African American heritage and commemoration has emerged, mainly to commemorate the civil rights movement and the leaders it created. The more mainstream narratives have even become part of the American civic mythology, with civil rights sites, like the King Memorial in Atlanta, incorporated into the National Park Service.\(^ {60}\)

The Black Panthers have always existed on the margins of this mainstream push for civil rights commemoration and, like mainstream civil rights memorialization, their stake in commercialized heritage depends on the ability of capitalism to find new markets and communities to consume this memory.\(^ {61}\) Robin D. G. Kelley’s *Yo Mama’s Disfunktional* sheds

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\(^{60}\) Owen J. Dwyer, “Interpreting the Civil Rights Movement: Contradiction, Confirmation and the Cultural Landscape,” in *The Civil Rights Movement in American Memory*, 7.

light on how difficult it is for poor black communities that were once the main source of Panther support to find the resources to support Black Panther commemoration. When deindustrialization became widely apparent during the 1970s and 1980s, the effects of working class job loss hit black communities harder than white communities. As opportunities disappeared from inner cities and various social policies acted to isolate these communities from the rest of American society, inner-city youth had to commodify their very appearance and lifestyle as cultural capital. Even as suburbia kept the inner city at arm’s length, it avidly devoured the hip-hop culture, fashion, and lifestyle that is associated with urban blight.  

The Black Panthers’ efforts at commemoration have been wrapped up in the economic and social problems outlined by Robin D. G. Kelley. While the Panthers’ edgy, radical image has been successfully co-opted by mainstream media as an exotic representation of commodified blackness, their communities’ very alienation from mainstream America has made commemoration and memorialization much more difficult in terms of getting their social message across. In some communities, they have succeeded in getting their histories commemorated on the geographic landscape. However, these small efforts of commemoration are working against larger forces of urban renewal, gentrification, and the erasure of black communities. In Winston-Salem, North Carolina for example, the question of commemoration gets wrapped up in a larger struggle against the erasure of historical black communities while the city preserves the historical white community as a tourist attraction.

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How various communities remembered or forgot Panther narratives of martyrdom explains how different political groups perceive the same issues today. The Black Panther narrative of policing in their communities represents what James C. Scott theorized as a “hidden transcript of power.” I expand on that definition by looking at how the Panthers’ brought together groups of activists that survived the official death of the Party. These activists kept alive Panther narratives of martyrdom as hidden truths about black experience with policing that pushed their work forward. They represent an invisible force in local and national politics that shaped a tradition of resistance to later policies of “Law and Order” that led to mass incarceration. Largely ignored by mainstream media, they nevertheless continued the Panthers’ tradition of grassroots community organizing, electoral politics, and radical protest.

This dissertation illuminates Vincent E. Harding’s underground “river of resistance” and shows how the blindness of the state meant that it had little awareness of this organizing tradition. From the point of view of the state and the mainstream media, the “Black Lives Matter” movement blindsided them with a narrative that seemed so alien it could not possibly be valid. Yet seen from the view of these marginalized communities that welcomed the Panthers, these hidden activist traditions draw a direct throughline from the Black Panther Party to modern activism in the “Black Lives Matter” Movement. When black Chicagoans marched for justice in the aftermath of the shooting of Laquan McDonald, they were reacting to a buried history and

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66 I am drawing here on Vincent E. Harding’s theory of a “river of resistance” that runs through the black struggle in America: Vincent Harding, There is a River: The Black Struggle for Freedom in America (New York: Harvest Book, 1981).
memory legacy of violence against black people that stretched all the way back to Fred Hampton. Historians can take that same tradition and trace it even further back before the Panthers to cases like Emmett Till and the Chicago Race Riot of 1919.67

Sources

This dissertation brings together a wide assortment of sources, to capture both the historical reality of what happened on the ground and the contested memory legacy of emotion, unresolved trauma, and continued controversy over the work of the Black Panther Party. I reference FBI COINTELPRO files on the Chicago Illinois Chapter of the Black Panther Party and the Winston-Salem Black Panther Party.68 These files help reconstruct the day-to-day activities of the Party when local collections of Panther ephemera did not include those details. Among the things that can be recovered from the files include weekly sales estimates of the newspaper per chapter and otherwise lost transcripts of speeches given at various Panther hosted events and rallies. The files also include police reports and evidence of the FBI’s backroom tampering with the criminal justice system and the mainstream media in Panther-related cases. The files are incomplete and necessarily tell a skewed interpretation of Panther history. Nevertheless, by reading against the grain, they often provide insightful and highly suggestive evidence of how law enforcement perceived the Panther organization and how various law enforcement institutions, media outlets, and local politicians collaborated to influence the trajectory of various Panther martyrdom narratives.

This dissertation relies heavily on Black Panther Party ephemera and the published newspaper to reconstruct day-to-day activities. The ephemera can be found in local and national collections like the Huey P. Newton Foundation collection at Stanford University, the Larry Little collection at Winston Salem State University, and the Catherine Roraback papers at Yale University. Court records helped provide an inside view of the politicized nature of the courtroom and the dance between the formal, almost ritualized stance of neutrality versus the casual biases that lawyers, judges, and witnesses bring to bear every day in the courtroom. Coupled with the sensationalized media coverage of the Black Panther Party, these biases had outsized influences on the trajectory of Panther-involved trials.

Finally, published newspapers, both national and local, journalistic accounts of the Black Panther Party, documentaries, newsreels, published memoirs, and oral histories provide the context of the media storm that often engulfed the Black Panther Party and played such an important role in public perception and audience for the Party’s various martyrdom narratives. The media sources, in particular, show the interaction between local and national newspapers in developing mainstream media narratives about the Panthers and the insidious stereotypes about black criminality and sexuality that often inserted themselves into the narratives.

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69 Huey P. Newton Foundation Inc. Collection, Stanford University, Palo Alto, California, United States of America; Dr. Larry Little Manuscript Collection, Winston Salem State University, Winston-Salem, North Carolina, United States of America; Catherine Roraback Collection of Ericka Huggins Papers, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut, United States of America.

70 For some important court sources see: New Haven Black Panther Trial Transcripts, Yale Law School, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut, United States of America; 600F.2d 600, Iberia Hampton et. al., v. Edward v. Hanrahan et. al., United States Court of Appeals, Seventh Circuit, August 14, 1978;


The problem that became painfully obvious in the sources is that there is no true, unbiased version of events. Whether it was the murder of Fred Hampton or the investigation into the death of Alex Rackley, the investigations done by law enforcement were biased by preconceived notions of guilt that colored how people could possibly perceive the events. In the absence of an established timeline of events or “knowing” what had happened, a more interesting but problematic set of questions emerge. How or why did people choose to perceive events in particular ways? How did certain narratives of the lives and deaths of Panther martyrs emerge and which audiences were they for? What were the roles of individuals and institutions in shaping those narratives? These questions get at the problem of voice, authority, and narrative creation while letting go of “absolute certainty.”

Summary of Chapters

The first chapter of the dissertation provides an overarching narrative of the black power movement and situates it in time and place vis-à-vis black nationalism. I argue that black power is a strand of black nationalism that emerges from and as a direct response to the southern
nonviolent Civil Rights Movement. From this perspective, the black power movement is not an aberrant and undesirable move away from non-violent direct action, but the natural successor of the southern movement.\textsuperscript{73} This chapter examines how the Panthers conceptualized black power as their revolutionary philosophy and it explores the theoretical background of many of the themes that appear in later chapters. It uses the Black Panthers’ brush with Third-World Internationalism as a lens to look at the ways that the Party danced with the idea of nationalism as an “internally colonized minority.” Nationalist myths and martyrdom narratives coming from the Third World shaped how the Panthers thought about their own martyrs.\textsuperscript{74} In addition, this chapter puts into context the various contradictory impulses pulling the Party apart in terms of how they conceptualized gender. Finally, it looks at how the Panthers tackled the perception of black criminality through their organizing efforts.

The chapter on Fred Hampton explores the lost potentiality of Fred Hampton to become a mainstream martyr for the Black Panther Party. While Hampton’s death initially mobilized various black communities in Chicago against the Police Department, the obfuscations by the State Attorney’s Office, the FBI, and the criminal justice system delayed vindication for Fred Hampton for over a decade.\textsuperscript{75} During the course of that decade, lawyers for the Hampton family revealed the full extent of FBI involvement in the assassination of Fred Hampton. However, the


\textsuperscript{75} See Jeffrey Haas’s landmark work, \textit{The Assassination of Fred Hampton: How the FBI and the Chicago Police Murdered a Black Panther} (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 2010).
media spotlight had moved on by the time that the civil lawsuit was settled, therefore Hampton’s naysayers can still claim police innocence in his case.\footnote{66}{Although the People’s Law Office has made a concerted effort to make the public aware of the depth of COINTELPRO malfeasance, especially against the Black Panthers. However, a few independently published collections are available: Some COINTELPRO files are found in the COINTELPRO Papers book and the Church Committee Report on COINTELPRO, but these were not widely distributed. The FBI’s archives have released heavily redacted COINTELPRO files as well through the National Archives. Taylor and Haas, “\textit{Hampton v. Hanrahan} 600F 2d 600 Appellee Brief”; Churchill and Vander Wall, \textit{The COINTELPRO Papers}; Church Committee, \textit{The FBI, COINTELPRO, and Martin Luther King Jr.: Final Report of the Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations With Respect to Intelligence Activities} (St. Petersburg, FL: Red and Black Publishers, 2011); Nelson Blackstock, \textit{COINTELPRO: The FBI’s Secret War on Political Freedom} (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1988); National Lawyers Guild, “Counter-Intelligence: A Documentary Look at America’s Secret Police,” (Chicago, Ill: National Lawyers Guild Government Repression and Police Misconduct Committee - Counterintelligence Documentation Center).}

Although Hampton’s legacy has never been fully accepted in the mainstream, his political legacy and social justice legacy remains important in the city of Chicago. Various activists who worked with Fred Hampton, including Jesse Jackson, Rennault Robinson, Bobby Rush, Bobby Lee, and Cha Cha Jimenez, have been crucial to criminal justice reform in the city and in the election of Mayor Harold Washington in 1983.\footnote{67}{Renault Robinson, interviewed by Larry Crowe, July 3, 2002, The HistoryMakers Digital Archive; Madison Davis Lacey Jr. and Henry Hampton, Interview with Jesse Jackson, Eyes on the Prize II Interviews, Washington University Digital Gateway Text; Lutrelle "Lu" F. Palmer, II Interviewed by Larry Crowe, May 22, 2002, The HistoryMakers Digital Archive; Bobby Rush, May 15, 2014, The HistoryMakers Digital Archive; Jose Jimenez Video Interview and Biography, Young Lords in Lincoln Park (RHC-65), Special Collections and University Archives, Grand Valley State University.} Lawyers for the People’s Law Office, like Flint Taylor, who represented Hampton’s family during the civil suit against the city, later helped unveil the depth of police malfeasance in the Chicago police torture scandal.\footnote{68}{Flint Taylor, \textit{The Torture Machine}.} Fred Hampton’s memory also casts a long shadow over local and national race politics. The failure of Americans to fully grapple with the consequences of Fred Hampton’s death helps explain the shock of the mainstream media to events in Chicago like the 2014 death of Laquan McDonald.\footnote{69}{“‘Justice for Laquan!’ Demonstrators Chant as Chicago Officer is Convicted of Murder, \textit{The New York Times}, October 5, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/05/us/van-dyke-guilty-laquan-mcdonald.html.} Meanwhile, the anger experienced by black communities over police brutality in Chicago can be
directly linked to the city’s failure to fully acknowledge the consequences of Fred Hampton’s life and death.

The chapter on Ericka Huggins uses her experience in the New Haven Panther Trials to explore how the mainstream media, the courts, and the Party itself grappled with changing understandings of gender and race in the black power movement. The mainstream media, led by New Journalism reporters like Gail Sheehy and Tom Wolfe, repackaged old stereotypes of “Jezebel” and “Sapphire” in their depiction of black women like Ericka Huggins. In the eyes of the media, Ericka Huggins morphed into an angry, man-eating seductress who master-minded the murder of Alex Rackley. In contrast, Huggins’ lawyer Roraback along with the Black Panther Party portrayed her as a widow and mother largely stripped of her agency. This stereotype was so pernicious that it colored every aspect of Ericka Huggins’ trial, from the jury selection to the behaviors of the judge and the prosecutor. The invisibility of black women’s lives influenced the court’s ability to see Huggins as a traumatized widow and mother and to take seriously black women’s experiences of domestic abuse, both of which were crucial to understanding Ericka Huggins’ reactions during and after the torture and death of Rackley.

This chapter also looks at how Ericka Huggins leveraged her celebrity status as a martyr for the Black Panther Party to shed light on the experiences of incarcerated black women.

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Huggins, along with a network of other prominent women prisoners like Afeni Shakur and Angela Davis, helped establish a nascent black women’s prison rights movement. These women advocated for reproductive rights, health, and education in women’s penitentiaries across the nation.\(^83\) However, the death of George Jackson and the Attica Prison Riot quickly overshadowed this movement for black women’s prisoners’ rights.\(^84\) Thus, I argue that it represents a path not taken in an emerging prison rights movement that would have centered the narratives of women as well as men.

The Black Panther Party in Winston-Salem created local heroes and symbols of suffering to serve local needs and local communities. The police starred as the villain in these narratives because through harassment, degradation, and violence, officers enforced the structures that kept black people in Winston-Salem firmly under the thumb of white supremacy.\(^85\) Police officers interacted most directly with community members to sustain structural inequalities, and appeared


to activists as the most immediate enforcers of their second-class citizenship.\textsuperscript{86} Using the \textit{Black Panther Community News Service} as an outlet, the Panthers worked tirelessly to bring attention to the daily indignities suffered at the hands of police by the black residents of segregated Winston-Salem.

Seen from afar, the struggles of the Panthers of Winston-Salem against policies like the Model Cities program, urban renewal, and the centralization of urban healthcare seem almost inconsequential compared to the dramatized narratives of police raids and assassinations that dominate popular visions of Panther history. By addressing these public policies with the same urgency and radical language of genocide that appeared with high-profile cases of martyrdom, like Ericka Huggins and Fred Hampton, the Panthers in Winston-Salem showed how seemingly insignificant local policies and programs could become issues of life and death to the marginalized and heavily policed urban poor of the New South.\textsuperscript{87}

\textbf{Conclusion}

Taken together, these three case studies—Fred Hampton in Chicago, Ericka Huggins in New Haven, and the Southern Panthers in Winston-Salem—capture how the Black Panther Party operated in different local contexts across America. The Panthers were the only truly national black power organization of the 1960s. How they manifested as a movement in various locations

\textsuperscript{86} The violence inherent in evictions was also explored in Christina Greene’s book: Christina Greene, \textit{Our Separate Ways: Women and the Black Freedom Movement in Durham, North Carolina} (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 105-106.

\textsuperscript{87} This was particularly true in their fight to keep the local black hospital open and their free ambulance service, which built on community concerns about lack of access to healthcare and cost: “Reynolds Memorial Hospital,” \textit{The Black Panther Community News Service}, December 18, 1971, 4; “You Can’t Arrest Our Hospitals,” \textit{The Black Panther Community News Service}, January 1, 1972, 9, 18, 19; Hazel Mack, Interviewed by Cheryl Dong, Other Suns Community Center, Winston-Salem, NC, January 19, 2019; “Free Ambulance Service Debuted,” \textit{Winston-Salem Journal}, May 13, 1974.
shows how black power adapted to the regional differences in the United States. Black power was not geographically limited to the urban north, although it found some of its strongest support in those areas. The Black Panthers laid down roots in southern cities and more suburban areas like Winston-Salem. These case studies show that the Panthers succeeded in a variety of different cultural, social, and economic contexts by adapting the message that came out of Oakland to the specific needs of the local communities.

Martyrdom narratives had a way of taking on a life of their own outside of the control of the Party. The fight for justice for individuals could eclipse the larger goal of community survival. This happened on a number of occasions for the Panthers. Most notably, the death of Fred Hampton consumed and survived the Illinois Chapter of the Black Panther Party. Preoccupation with the legal problems facing Panthers in Winston-Salem threatened to undo the solid achievements of grassroots organizing against urban renewal. Even closer to home, the narrative arch of Huey P. Newton’s own life illustrated both the danger and potential of Panther martyrdom. Newton went to prison in 1967 as the head of a little-known organization. His imprisonment fueled the growth of the Black Panther Party, with the “Free Huey!” movement turning into the Panthers’ first truly national phenomenon. When Newton finally got out of prison in 1970, he found himself at the head of a national organization he was unprepared to lead. More importantly, his imprisonment had turned him into a black power icon.

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90 Martin and Bloom, Black Against Empire, 135-137; 354-356.
The pressure of leading the national organization that represented black power coupled with the trauma he experienced in prison fed into Newton’s self-destructive tendencies. He began to abuse some of his closest supporters while closing himself away in a penthouse apartment. Newton turned to drugs and criminal enterprise to fund his lavish lifestyle. Slowly, the Panther faithful abandoned him.91 When Tyrone Robinson shot and killed Huey P. Newton on August 22, 1989 in a drug deal gone wrong, Panther veterans struggled to understand and give meaning to Newton’s wildly chaotic existence. The symbolism of his imprisonment first catapulted the Panthers’ to national prominence. His intellectual potency fueled their rise. Yet it was the same uncontrollable traumatic forces released by his imprisonment that led to Newton’s untimely death and the Party’s demise.92

Part of how the Panthers captured the public’s imagination was through their larger than life image, their use of the gun, and their refusal to avoid confrontation with police authority. Martyrdom played a central role in the Panther ideological constellation as a rope that bound together their larger, radical vision with the everyday organizing that made up their agenda of community survival.93 It provides a lens through which to look at the two, seemingly contradictory sides of the Black Panther Party as a unified whole. By looking at how the Panthers grappled with martyrdom, this dissertation examines how the Panthers struggled to

91 Much of this slow unraveling is attested to in various Panther memoirs and in the last chapters of Bloom and Martin’s work: Bloom and Martin, Black Against Empire, 341-389; Hilliard, This Side of Glory, 369-376; Brown, A Taste of Power, 417-436; Dixon, My People Are Rising, 291-293; Ericka Huggins, Interview by Fiona Thompson, 2007, Oral History Center, the Bancroft Library, University of California: Berkeley, California.
92 Hilliard, This Side of Glory, 1-17; Ericka Huggins, Interview by Fiona Thompson, 2007, Oral History Center, the Bancroft Library, University of California: Berkeley, California; Street, “‘Free Huey or the Sky’s the Limit,’” 2-3.
balance the reality of police oppression with their everyday operations. The choices that they made were full of contingency and reflected an optimism that believed they could harness the repression they suffered to strengthen their movement. How those choices played out shape not only our modern-day perceptions of the Black Panther Party but the fragmented way that our culture deals with issues of racial inequality, police brutality, and state oppression today.
Black Power: Defining a Movement

In the movie, *Forrest Gump*, Forrest returns from receiving the Medal of Honor from President Nixon and finds himself in the middle of an anti-war protest where he meets his childhood crush, Jenny, and her boyfriend, Reuben. The three of them then go to a “Panther pad” belonging to the Black Panther Party in Washington, D.C., where he meets a caricature of a Panther named “Masai.”

Masai confronts Forrest when he shows up with Jenny, but after being assured that he’s “cool,” He launches into a stereotypical “Panther” tirade, “Our purpose here is to protect our black leaders from the racial onslaught of the pig who wishes to brutalize our black leaders, rape our women, and destroy our black communities!”

Jenny then confronts Reuben who slaps her. When Forrest gets involved, all the Panthers start brawling as he and Jenny flee the scene. He yells, “Sorry I ruined your Black Panther Party!”

The whole episode plays as a smart, pop culture reference to a moment in the late 1960s when radical politics were “chic.” The movie portrays Jenny and Reuben as typical, white hippies who are involved in a number of trendy, New Left movements but are bitter and trying to find meaning in their lives. Jenny later breaks up with Reuben and ends up on the side of the road without a ride. Jenny’s interlude with the Panthers is the start of a downward spiral in her life that leads to drug addiction, a suicide attempt, and her (implied) AIDS diagnosis. The Black Panthers are portrayed as stereotypical “scary black men” who Jenny and Forrest are lucky to

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95 *Forrest Gump*, directed by Robert Zemeckis, featuring (Tom Hanks and Robin Wright) (Paramount Pictures, 1994), DVD.

96 Robert Zemeckis, *Forrest Gump*.

escape. Gump’s innocence is juxtaposed against the Panthers’ intensity to show the supposed ridiculousness of their position just as Masai’s rant about the “pigs” is meant to be read as a parody of their revolutionary ideology. His anger can be easily dismissed, as Forrest does when he pushes past a still lecturing Masai to protect Jenny. The Black Panthers’ descent into a brawl at the end of their scene plays on the stereotype of the Black Panthers as inherently violent.98

The Black Panther Party’s cameo in Forrest Gump captures a perfect snapshot of how white mainstream culture thought about them and larger black radical movements of the 1960s in retrospect. The Black Panthers, with their leather jackets and berets, looked flashy and cool, but their edgy facade hid a dangerous ideology and an irrational propensity to violence.99 This violence becomes real in the movie with the Panthers’ acceptance of Reuben’s mistreatment of Jenny and the easiness with which they descend into a no-holds barred fight while Jenny and Forrest run out together. The movie also hints at the Panthers’ violent misogyny in their treatment of Jenny. Finally, Forrest’s role as the white knight coming to the rescue when he whisks her away into the night hints at gendered tropes of white supremacy. This movie draws on historical visions of the black male rapist to reinforce white supremacist ideology without ever having to name it as such. White supremacists have historically used the threat of violence against white women and the need to protect the purity of white womanhood as justification for violence and repression against black people.100

98 Robert Zemeckis, Forrest Gump.
100 This argument about the black male rapist is widely covered in a number of sources. It was first articulated by Jacquelyn Dowd Hall in the 1970s: Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, Revolt Against Chivalry: Jessie Daniel Ames and the Women’s Campaign Against Lynching (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979); other sources include: Crystal M. Feimster, Southern Horrors: Women and the Politics of Rape and Lynching (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2009), 5; Ibrahim X. Kendi, Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America (New York: Hatchette Book Group, 2016).
The movie, *Forrest Gump*, positions itself as a smart, insightful critique of modern America by following a naive, mentally challenged man through the turbulent decades of the latter half of the twentieth-century. Gump is the American “everyman” we are supposed to see in ourselves. He is slow and a little thick headed, but his charming naïveté plays to his favor. In this figure, centuries of American sins can be forgiven. Yet Forrest Gump as a cypher for America is inescapably a cypher of white supremacy, an ideology firmly rooted into the very heart of this nation. It is even written into his name: “Forrest” references Nathan Bedford Forrest. As Gump explains in the movie:

> Momma named me after the great Civil War hero, General Nathan Bedford Forrest...And, what he did was, he started up this club called the Ku Klux Klan. They’d all dress up in their robes and their bedsheets and act like a bunch of ghosts or spooks or something...And anyway, that’s how I got my name, Forrest Gump. Momma said that the Forrest part was to remind me that sometimes we all do things that, well, just don't make no sense.  

We, the audience, are supposed to laugh this off and accept Forrest’s innocence, which also excuses our own. In doing so, we ignore a deep heritage of violence, pain, and terror that is the hallmark of white American history and culture.

Ironically, the actual character of Forrest Gump explains the anger demonstrated by the fictional Panther “Masai” in the film, although this relationship is occluded by the very nature of Forrest himself as the ignorant naïf. If the Black Panthers portrayed in *Forrest Gump* are irrationally angry, dangerous, and violent black men, then it is the actual history of violence and

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101 Robert Zemeckis, *Forrest Gump.*
racial supremacy suggested in the name “Forrest” that is the cause of black frustration. For Forrest Gump and white America, recognizing such a connection is existentially impossible. As the most astute of American observers, James Baldwin, wrote:

This is the place in which it seems to me, most white Americans find themselves. Impaled. They are dimly or vividly aware that the history they have fed themselves is mainly a lie, but they do not know how to release themselves from it, and they suffer enormously from the resulting personal incoherence. This incoherence is heard nowhere more plainly than in those stammering, terrified dialogues which white Americans sometimes entertain with that black conscience, the black man in America. The nature of this stammering can be reduced to a plea: do not blame me, I was not there. I did not do it. My history has nothing to do with Europe or the slave trade. Anyway, it was your chiefs who sold you to me. I was not present on the middle passage. I am not responsible for the textile mills of Manchester, or the cotton fields of Mississippi. Besides, consider how the English, too, suffered in those mills and in those awful cities.\textsuperscript{103}

It is that exact connection between historical oppression and the Panthers’ anger that must be examined if we are to understand the origins of the Black Panther Party and that enormous, sometimes contradictory, oftentimes misunderstood movement, black power.

Black power and its larger umbrella, black nationalism, came from a place of deep frustration at the daily and extraordinary indignities of white supremacy in America and a desire for independence from it. Those origins were both extreme in their immediacy and timeless in their historic roots. Black power was a movement that rejected the politics of non-violence and measured, ineffective legislation. At its roots, black power centered on the black experience and connected it to that of oppressed, colonized people worldwide.\textsuperscript{104} Black power was a specific brand of black nationalism that emerged from the civil rights struggle of the 1950s and 1960s,

and involved a loosely defined coalition of ideas that sought to address the limitations of the southern-based Civil Rights Movement. These ideas included a dedication to black self-determination, a fierce pride in black identity, an embrace of black political and economic power, and a rejection of pure non-violence in favor of a politics of self-defense.  

Even as black power and black nationalism provided a necessary re-framing of the goals and strategies of the Civil Rights Movement in the late 1960s and 1970s, the renewed urgency and militancy of the movement alienated erstwhile white allies and provided a specter of fear and hate that proved useful for beleaguered white supremacists. Here, in black power, and in the Black Panther Party, white culture perceived the rebirth of the violent black man. In the white supremacist imagination, the Black Panther Party embodied its worst fears—the black man with his unapologetic manhood and his dedication to guns and direct confrontation with police brutality. Black power offered a convenient excuse to paint black people as inherently criminal and provided the basis for “Law and Order” political discourse to emerge, which fed the rise of mass incarceration and of neo-conservatism in the 1980s and 1990s. Yet blaming black power is inherently the same reasoning as blaming the victim. We must recognize that the resurgent white supremacy regime defined by southern strategy exploited black power as a specter of fear to unite white voters. How white supremacy achieved this resurgence shapes popular perceptions of the Black Panther Party and black power today.

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Mississippi Goddamn! Southern Origins of Black Power

On a shaded lawn in Greenwood, Mississippi on June 16, 1966, just hours after he had been released from prison, Stokely Carmichael, the erstwhile chairman of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, raised the call for black power. Speaking of his frustration, Stokely Carmichael declared, “This is the twenty-seventh time I have been arrested—and I ain’t going to jail no more!” It was an electric moment. Cleve Sellers would later recall that previous speeches that night had infused the crowd with a militant air and people were more than ready for what came next. Carmichael shouted, “The only way we gonna stop them white men from whuppin’ us is to take over. We’ve been saying freedom for six years and we ain’t got nothin’. What we gonna start saying now is BLACK POWER!” Caught up in the moment, the crowd roared back, “BLACK POWER!” Another activist, Willie Ricks, jumped on the stage and yelled, “What do you want?” The crowd responded in that age-old, call-and-response tradition of the black church, “BLACK POWER!”

That day under the fading sunlight of a hot Greenwood evening seemed perfect, a natural birthright of the black power movement from the womb of the traditional Civil Rights Movement. Of course, the call for black power was anything but spontaneous. The transition was a long time in coming after the disappointments and trauma of Freedom Summer and Selma. Carmichael chose the moment of the Meredith March on Fear to publicly make his call for black power because the march had brought together all the various organizations of the Civil Rights Movement, including Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and the organizers from SCLC. With the influx

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of activists came the resulting media scrutiny, and Carmichael knew that his declaration in Greenwood, Mississippi would be publicized nationwide.\footnote{Clayborne Carson, \textit{In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s} (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 208-209.}

The spontaneous un-spontaneity of the moment revealed much about its complicated history and troubled roots. Black power as Carmichael and young black activists experienced it came from their lived experiences in the southern Civil Rights Movement. Yet its origins in black nationalism drew from a long-standing tradition of radicalism as old as African American history. According to Robin D. G. Kelley, the black radical tradition helped push and shape mainstream movements by challenging perceptions of the possible in black politics and opening new avenues of movement.\footnote{Robin D. G. Kelley, \textit{Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination} (New York: Beacon Press, 2002), Intro.} Black power’s origins can be seen in everything from slave rebellions of the 18th and 19th century to the work Marcus Garvey in the early 20th century and the rise of the Nation of Islam. These early black nationalist experiments provided tradition and intellectual weight to the emerging black power movement that evolved out of the black nationalist tradition.\footnote{Mark Newman, \textit{Black Nationalism: From the Nineteenth Century to the Million Man March} (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2018).} By opening up the timeline of black power’s origins and de-centering it from the northern, urban experience, this chapter sheds light on the multitude of experiences and ideologies that shaped the Black Panther Party’s understanding of black power.

Popular narratives of the Civil Rights Movement suggest a hard break between the traditional non-violent movement of the South and the militant black power movement in the North defined by the Black Panther Party. This narrative is familiar and comforting for those dedicated to the myth of a “non-violent” southern movement versus a “violent” northern
movement.\textsuperscript{114} It serves a political purpose by implying that the strategies of the Civil Rights Movement are more important than its aim of bringing down an entrenched and violent regime of white supremacy. In this view, the southern movement was cooperative and interracial, above all else. It assured erstwhile white allies that integration would occur on their terms and that any Civil Rights Movement that did not center the feelings and leadership of white people was somehow aberrant.\textsuperscript{115} The destruction of this myth necessitates hard questions about why we, as a nation, need that myth. A new generation of scholars ask just those questions by challenging the geographic limitations of the Civil Rights Movement and by looking at how black power’s origins can be traced as much to the southern movement as to the northern urban experience.

Timothy B. Tyson’s \textit{Radio Free Dixie} and Lance Hill’s \textit{The Deacons for Defense} show that working class black people have long embraced the gun as a means of self-defense from the violence of Jim Crow. Men like Robert F. Williams and the Deacons for Defense and Justice took a pragmatic approach to the gun by recognizing the reality of racial violence in the South.


and the necessity for civil rights workers to protect themselves and their communities.\textsuperscript{116} While Robert F. Williams was ultimately thrown out of the NAACP and the United States, men like him played an integral role in the southern movement by pushing its boundaries and challenging the scope and goals of the movement. They might have accepted the effectiveness of non-violence as a tactic in some situations, but they did not embrace it as a philosophy because it did not make sense in their lived experience. Their activism revealed that civil rights was not just about sitting at a lunch counter or school desegregation. Instead, they sought to bring down an entrenched regime of white supremacy in the South that touched every aspect of social life and was undergirded by unimaginable legal and extralegal violence. That violence precluded the possibility of a solely non-violent, demonstrative movement. It necessitated people like Robert F. Williams, Charles E. Cobb, and Amzie Moore who could recognize the need for self-defense.\textsuperscript{117}

The roots of a particular black power tradition emerging in the southern Civil Rights Movement can most clearly be seen in SNCC’s last major campaign in Lowndes County. Far from being the last gasp of an organization torn apart by internal dissension, SNCC’s campaign in Lowndes County represented the culmination of SNCC’s storied tradition in local community empowerment. As Hasan Kwame Jeffries argues in his breakthrough work, \textit{Bloody Lowndes}, the Lowndes County Freedom Organization (LCFO) was a radical experiment in black power in one of the most dangerous counties in Alabama. Lowndes County boasted a population in the late 1960s that was eighty percent black, yet it sat deep in Klan territory and had resisted penetration


\textsuperscript{117} Hill, \textit{Deacons for Defense}, 29; 262.
by previous movements. In 1966, only one black man, John Hulett, was registered to vote.\textsuperscript{118} SNCC’s goal in the county was to build a lasting organization for black political power through voter registration. The year-long campaign saw a pragmatic approach to political power that privileged local self-determination over lofty philosophical debates about non-violence. The LCFO was ultimately driven by pragmatism in the same way that Wahneema Lubiano argued that pragmatism rested at the heart of the black nationalist tradition.\textsuperscript{119}

The LCFO and later the Lowndes County Freedom Party (LCFP) used the image of the snarling black panther as its logo, a logo that was later adopted by the Black Panther Party. The message of the black panther was clear, while black power would not provoke violence, it would respond to attack through self-defense. The people of Lowndes County would determine their own fate regardless of even the wishes of SNCC organizers. Black power in its purest essence offered self-determination for black communities and a pride in being black. Those qualities existed in spades in the LCFP and it represented the success of the SNCC model.\textsuperscript{120} SNCC had been founded to educate local people on how to make movement for themselves. For Ella Baker and for SNCC, power and leadership needed to come from ordinary people, not charismatic, external leaders. SNCC achieved that by finding and empowering the LCFP in Lowndes County.\textsuperscript{121}

Black power from its roots in the southern Civil Rights Movement was a discovery of black pride in having survived and resisted Jim Crow. After years of struggling in the southern

\textsuperscript{120} Jeffries, \textit{Bloody Lowndes}, 213.
movement, many black organizers had begun to question not only the strategy of non-violence, but the very goals of assimilation and integration. Black schools, black churches, and black businesses may have suffered under Jim Crow, but they were also points of community pride and activism. Desegregation ultimately threatened their loss.\footnote{Deirdre Oakley et. al., “The impact of desegregation on black teachers in the metropolis, 1970–2000,” \textit{Ethnic and Racial Studies} 32.9 (2009): 1576-1598; One of the unintended consequences of desegregation was the loss of black businesses and most recently seen in the growing threat to HBCUs: Rhonda E. Baylor, “Loss of Accreditation at Historically Black Colleges and Universities,” \textit{New Directions for Higher Education} 151 (2010): 29-38.} By letting go of the assumed goals of assimilation and integration, black power allowed those in SNCC, CORE, and the LCFP to re-examine what they meant by equality. Black power’s roots in the South also help explain the inroads that the Black Panther Party made in this region. Far from being solely an organization that existed in northern cities, the Black Panther Party had significant success in Louisiana and in North Carolina\footnote{See Judson L. Jeffries’ books: ed. Judson L. Jeffries, \textit{Comrades: A Local History of the Black Panther Party} (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007); ed. Judson L. Jeffries, \textit{On the Ground: The Black Panther Party in Communities Across America} (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2010); ed. Judson L. Jeffries, \textit{The Black Panther Party in a City Near You} (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2018).}. These erstwhile, southern Panthers would use the new horizons opened up by black power to re-define the movement’s very nature. They brought black power strategies to bear on issues like urban renewal and the fight for equal access to healthcare. Southern Panthers brought new meaning to that timeless Nina Simone lyric, “You don’t have to live next to me, just give me my equality! Everybody knows about Mississippi! Everybody knows about Alabama! Everybody knows about Mississippi Goddam!”\footnote{Nina Simone, “Mississippi Goddamn!,” track 9 on \textit{Nina Simone in Concert}, Colpix, 1963, TIDAL Streaming.}

\textbf{Black Power and Black Nationalism as Separate Movements?}

William L. Van DeBurg’s book \textit{New Day in Babylon} was a remarkable milestone in the understanding of black power and black nationalism. Published in 1994, \textit{New Day in Babylon}
cut through the demonization of the black power movement by writers like David Horowitz and Hugh Pearson, who would bemoan black power and the Black Panthers as debasing the “pure” Civil Rights Movement into unnecessary infighting, militancy, and criminality.\footnote{David Horowitz, \textit{Black Book of the American Left: The Collected Conservative Writings of David Horowitz} (New York: Encounter Books, 2015); Hugh Pearson, \textit{Shadow of the Panther}, 90.}\footnote{William L. Van DeBurg, \textit{New Day in Babylon: The Black Power Movement and American Culture, 1965-1975} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 22-23.}\footnote{Van DeBurg, \textit{New Day in Babylon}, 131.} Van DeBurg’s book celebrated black power as a liberating cultural moment that defined a separate black cultural space outside of the Eurocentric prism imposed by white America. Black power’s vast umbrella included everything from the black arts movement to Pan-African identity. He identified the foundational impulse of black power not as hate or rage, but a desire of love and reclaiming of identity.\footnote{Van DeBurg, \textit{New Day in Babylon}, 131.} Yet Van DeBurg’s theory about black nationalism as purely separatist in his conception of nationalism/separatism, pluralism, and assimilationism does not work as well. Black nationalism contained a range of impulses that included nationalist and pluralist thought.\footnote{Van DeBurg, \textit{New Day in Babylon}, 131.} I continue to define black power as a historical movement and incarnation of black nationalism as dated to Van DeBurg’s timeline of the late 1960s and early 1970s. However, I broaden the definition of black nationalism to a much larger and older umbrella that incorporates everything from black institution building to black power itself.

The black power movement was a particular phase of the Civil Rights Movement that took place from 1966 to 1974, which lined up with the most active years of the Black Panther Party. Black power was more than a phase of movement, it was a loose collection of ideologies that sought to trouble white narratives of power and culture and define blackness outside of its value systems. This search for a separate black identity meant that it embraced a spectrum of pluralistic worldviews with separatism at its extreme. Ultimately, what black power demanded
was recognition that black people did not want to simply “disappear” into assimilation.\textsuperscript{128} Black people in America had their own culture born out of centuries of struggle; a culture that was unique and worth preserving and celebrating. Black power fulfilled the need of Black activists to own their movement. That ownership allowed for alliance building with white allies and other people of color, but it recognized that each group had different needs and goals that diverged as often as they converged.\textsuperscript{129}

Black nationalism was a broad impulse among black people to find a narrative of collective identity and to build separate institutions for survival. As Wahneema Lubiano defined it, nationalism was:

> “the activation of a narrative of identity and interests. Whether or not concrete in the form of a state (or the idea of its possibility), this narrative is one that members of a social, political, cultural, ethnic, or "racial" group relate to themselves, and which is predicated on some understanding—however mythologized or mystified—of a shared past, an assessment of the present circumstances, and a description or prescription for a shared future.”\textsuperscript{130}

Most of all, black nationalism was a pragmatic response to the reality of an American nationalism, founded on and undergirded by white supremacy. Black nationalism as an alternative kind of imaginative nation-building challenges white American nationalism and allowed “the realization that the domination of the U.S. state by the interests of the most powerful (interests that have served the dominant racial group), and that dominant discourse of U.S. history has been some form or another white American nationalism.”\textsuperscript{131}

\textsuperscript{129} Huey P. Newton expresses this sentiment explicitly in his alliance building work: Huey P. Newton, \textit{Huey P. Newton Interview originally published in THE MOVEMENT} (Students for a Democratic Society, August 1968).
\textsuperscript{130} Lubiano, “Black Nationalism and Black Common Sense,” 233.
\textsuperscript{131} Lubiano, “Black Nationalism and Black Common Sense,” 234.
Black nationalism imagined what a nation and a people could be if freed from the fetters of white American nationalism. It gave black men and women the ability to perceive themselves as full-bodied citizens of the state, enjoying the panoply of economic, social, and political benefits that accrue to white citizenship at the expense of citizens of color. It shaped for black people an imagined history and narrative of their future that provided a blueprint for how to thrive despite American racism. It was a practical response to oppression that sought to solve the problem of racism from within black communities.\textsuperscript{132} Black nationalism ran along a spectrum of ideologies from pluralism to separatism in the same way as black power. Its greatest scion, Malcolm X, had embraced a kind of racial pluralism even as he remained militantly black nationalist at the end of his life.\textsuperscript{133}

Black nationalism can be broken down into several loosely connected categories: 1. territorial nationalism, 2. revolutionary nationalism, 3. cultural nationalism, 4. economic nationalism, and 5. religious nationalism. The black power moment flirted with each of these categories and they overlap as often as they came into conflict with each other.\textsuperscript{134} First, territorial nationalism is the most like traditional nationalism in that it espoused a separatist black state, either in Africa or within the United States itself.\textsuperscript{135} In contrast, revolutionary nationalists sought political self-determination and black political power without the formal structure of a separatist state and could encompass everything from grassroots political organizing to the black

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{135} Lubiano, “Black Nationalism and Black Common Sense, 234.
\end{thebibliography}
Marxist political ideology of the early Black Panther Party. Cultural nationalists engaged in the creation of a uniquely black culture through the celebration of arts, writing, and beauty. Economic nationalists sought the creation of separate businesses as a step toward the goal of black economic independence. Finally, religious nationalism encompassed the founding of black churches and religious movements like Father Divine and the Nation of Islam as institutions that supported black people and provided a safe space for their culture and activism. Black churches as a nationalist impulse emerged out of the racial separation imposed by white churches as well as a need for a separate black spirituality to combat the forces of racism within slavery and afterward.

The Black Panther Party and black power as a larger movement engaged with each of these types of nationalism in turn, sometimes in cooperation and sometimes in conflict. The Black Panther Party was an overtly revolutionary nationalist organization that sought to build substantive political structures for power within the American state. At times, it came into bitter conflict with cultural nationalism, which the Party critiqued as an extraneous form of nationalism that seemed more interested in performing blackness than in achieving real political power. The Black Panther Party as a black Marxist organization had a complicated history.

141 The fight over cultural nationalism peaked with the deaths of Alprentice “Bunchy” Carter and John Huggins. The Panthers blamed US Organization and portrayed them as “pork-chop” nationalists more dedicated to wearing their hair “black” and espousing Africanisms than fighting for real change. For an example, see: Linda Harrison, “Cultural Nationalism,” *The Black Panther Black Community News Service*, February 2, 1969, 6. During the contentious split with Eldridge Cleaver in 1971, the Panthers also portrayed the New York Panthers as “cultural nationalists” who were not dedicated to the revolution: Bloom and Martin, *Black Against Empire*, 364-365; “Enemies of the People,” *The Black Panther Community News Service*, February 13, 1971, 12.
with black businesses and economic nationalism. While it celebrated the idea of black
ownership, it believed that business owners had an obligation as members of the black
community to provide for its welfare. Thus, the Panthers lauded black businesses that
contributed to their breakfast programs and grocery giveaways while excoriating those that did
not participate as “enemies of the people.” Similarly, the Panthers had a conflicted attitude
toward the black church. The early Black Panther Party criticized the church as a bastion of
respectability politics that enriched itself on the suffering of ordinary people. Yet the Panthers
came to rely on them as stable institutions of monetary and community support, especially for
their various community survival programs. During the height of the Panthers’ persecution by
state forces, black clergy like Father George Clements in Chicago and Father Earl A. Neil at St.
Augustine’s Episcopal Church in West Oakland provided crucial sanctuary and support.

Black nationalism provided substance to the emerging black power moment from 1966 to
1974 by imposing state-like structures on the philosophy of black self-determination. Its radical
dream provided aim to the black power movement by giving it organization, goals, and a
language of shared identity. At a turning point where the Southern movement was entering a

142 Huey P. Newton, To Die for the People, 100. The Black Panther Party also conducted boycotts of grocery stores,
the most famous being the boycott of Bill Boyette in Oakland, which ended in Boyette pledging support to the
Panther survival programs: “UNITY ENDS BOYCOTT: Agreement Reached Between Bill Boyette and the Black
143 This criticism was mostly inspired by the Black Panther Party’s antagonistic attitude towards SCLC and the
Martin Luther King Jr. centered narrative of the Civil Rights Movement. Yet individual Panthers also expressed
frustration with their churches and lack of support for their community. Larry Little, the leader and co-founder of
the Winston Salem chapter of the Black Panther Party cited lack of support from black churches as one of his
reasons for leaving the Party. James Baldwin’s The Fire Next Time also contributed to defining an ambivalent
attitude towards the black church. Murch, Living for the City, 82-84; Little to the Black Panther Party, Oct 1974,
Larry Little Collection, Winston Salem State University, Collection Box 1, MC9, 1-2; James Baldwin, The Fire Next
144 Murch, Living for the City, 163; “Interview with Father George Clements,” Tape 4, History Makers Archive,
moment of crisis, black nationalism helped solidify the movement and light a new way forward through the black power movement.

The Wretched of the Earth: The Black Panthers and Third World Internationalism

Huey P. Newton used the writings of Frantz Fanon to shape a black Marxist vision of social revolution. The Black Panthers’ revolution would not begin with DuBois’s “Talented Tenth,” but with the *lumpen proletariat*: the pimps, hustlers, and “brothers on the block” that Karl Marx had written off as too oppressed and caught up in the basic act of survival to build a revolutionary base. The *lumpen* were the people that the non-violent Civil Rights Movement had not engaged with because they fell so far from the expectations of black respectability imposed by the church.¹⁴⁵ They were also the very people that Newton and Seale encountered everyday in their own communities. In basing a movement from within the *lumpen proletariat*, Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale broke through an American expectation that black people involved in social movement had to be beyond reproach. Part of the reason why the Panthers were able to challenge respectability was their flirtation with Third World, anti-colonial politics.

The Third World had been a part of black nationalist politics for most of the twentieth century. Marcus Garvey engaged with the idea of Pan-Africanism in his United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA). However, much of his fascination stemmed from a largely imagined Africa from which black people originated from than engagement with actual African nations.¹⁴⁶ Similarly, American black nation-building in Africa imbibed the Eurocentric

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¹⁴⁵ Huey P. Newton, *To Die for the People* (New York: City Lights Publisher ReIssue, 2009).
colonialist worldview that Africa was uncivilized and black colonists saw it as their duty to bring civilization and Christianity “back” to Africa. However, the tone and tenor of black engagement with Third World politics shifted dramatically with the advent of the Cold War and the decolonization of much of Africa and Asia.

The Third World refers to a collection of twenty-nine countries that gathered at the Asian-African Conference in Bandung, Indonesia in April 1955. These nations represented an immense variety of cultures, languages, and religious beliefs, but they were united by their identity as countries struggling out of the yoke of colonialism. Collectively, they created a critique of white supremacy world wide, and that connection linked them to the black struggle for freedom in the United States. The Cold War pushed these countries together as the world-wide conflict between Communism and Capitalism left Third World countries as the chess pieces in the conflict between the two superpowers. This position was both vulnerable in its exposure to geopolitics and powerful in the ability that Third World countries had to play the Soviet Union and the United States against each other. In this context, racism in the United States suddenly took on international importance as the United States struggled to win Cold War allies among the black and brown people of the world. Civil rights activists in the United States realized this vulnerability and they would exert pressure on the United Nations to denounce racism in America.

149 Malloy, Out of Oakland, 24-25.
150 An example of this would be the pressure that Robert F. Williams brought to bear on the governor of North Carolina when he petitioned the UN over the “Kissing Case”: Tyson, Radio Free Dixie, 08.
Third World internationalism played an important role in the experience of the ideological forefathers of the Black Panther Party. The Party considered itself the direct descendants of Malcolm X’s Organization for Afro-American Unity. As the driving force behind the Nation of Islam’s successful paper, *Muhammad Speaks*, Malcolm X inspired the writers and editors to include international news about the fight against American imperialism overseas.\(^{151}\) In the early to mid 1960s, *Muhammad Speaks* provided another platform for Robert F. Williams to push forward a critique of American colonial activity abroad as an expansion of American racism at home.\(^{152}\) After leaving the Nation of Islam, his international focus became more overt as a *Hajj* and tour of Africa, the Middle East, and Europe led Malcolm X to center building international relationships as a top priority for the Civil Rights Movement at home.\(^{153}\) While Malcolm’s assassination cut short his move towards Third World Internationalism, the Panthers took on the fight where he had left off.

For the Black Panther Party, the collective Third World featured most heavily in its imagination as an alternative and way out of the white American state. In the Third World, it could imagine a society that would address the call for social justice and economic equality at home. It took inspiration and lessons from the experience of Third World independence movements and applied them towards fighting the internal colonization of black people in the United States.\(^{154}\) This dream of Third World Internationalism was most fully realized when Huey P. Newton and a contingent of Panthers visited China in 1971. In the Chinese state, Huey

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\(^{152}\) *Muhammad Speaks* published a number of pieces by Robert F. Williams, including his observations on China’s first atomic bomb test: “Only American to Observe Chinese Atomic Bomb Test,” *Muhammad Speaks*, October 29, 1964.


P. Newton could see a powerful, state ally in the fight against western imperialism and the actualization of the socialist promise. The truth was more complicated. China in 1971 was still in the throes of the Cultural Revolution, and human rights abuses and mass starvation ran rampant. However, the perception of China that Mao and his Communist Party handlers let Huey P. Newton see fulfilled his dream of an international coalition against racism worldwide.\(^\text{155}\)

The Panthers did more than imagine, they achieved substantial international alliances with the opening of the Black Panther Party embassy in Algiers. The history of the Algerian branch of the Black Panther Party was short and marred by the controversy of its leader Eldridge Cleaver’s erratic and sometimes violent behavior. Nevertheless, the Algerian embassy gave the Black Panther Party a platform to practice “Third World Internationalism” by providing an international audience and sounding board for the struggle at home.\(^\text{156}\) In 1969, Emory Douglas traveled to Algiers to participate in the Pan-African Festival. Douglas displayed his artwork alongside the work of other revolutionary artists from other struggles worldwide. The experience not only influenced Douglas’s later depictions of Black Panther martyrs and heroes, but also inspired a language of revolutionary martyrology that would be key to some of the case studies examined in my subsequent chapters.\(^\text{157}\)

After his trip to Algiers, Douglas’s work began to take on the stylistic influences of Communist artists, especially in the way that he heroized ordinary people in the struggle. Douglas’s images of black women bearing arms mirrored Vietnamese depictions of female guerilla fighters. Douglas depicted ordinary black women in domestic settings picking up the

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\(^{155}\) Huey P. Newton, *Revolutionary Suicide*, 348-353.


gun. In so doing, he deliberately related their struggle to romanticized visions of female Viet Cong fighters carrying their babies on their backs while fighting against American imperialism.\textsuperscript{158} Douglas and the Black Panther Party also based its ideas about martyrdom from the national narratives of countries like Vietnam and China. Figures like Lei Feng from the early history of the Chinese Communist Party and the Trung sisters in Vietnamese mythology constructed the revolutionary hero as the martyr willing to sacrifice his/her life for the people. These figures became the center of martyrdom cults that sought to educate common people in revolutionary ideology.\textsuperscript{159} Thus, when Fred Hampton gave his speech, “To Die for the People,” he was evoking not only the black Baptist tradition but also the Third World revolutionary tradition.\textsuperscript{160}

The Black Panther Party’s Third World Internationalism helped forge its overtly black nationalist worldview in its foundational years from 1966 to 1970. It used the internationalist world view to formulate the existence of black people in America as an oppressed nation within a nation. It saw the Algerian Embassy as not only an embassy for the Black Panther Party but for all oppressed black Americans struggling under the yoke of American racism.\textsuperscript{161}

Third World Internationalism faded away when the black nationalist era of the Black Panther Party ended in 1971. The end came abruptly and publicly when Huey P. Newton and Eldridge Cleaver argued over political strategy and the issue of violent rhetoric on national

\textsuperscript{158} Douglas, \textit{Black Panther}, 99.

\textsuperscript{159} Rychetta Watkins, \textit{Yellow Power, Black Power, and the Making of Revolutionary Identities} (Jackson, University of Mississippi Press, 2012), 42.

\textsuperscript{160} \textit{The Murder of Fred Hampton}, directed by Howard Alk, featuring (Fred Hampton and Bobby Rush) (The Film Group, 1971), DVD.

television. In the aftermath, the Black Panther Party, under Huey P. Newton, turned away from nationalism of all kinds and declared an era of “Revolutionary Intercommunalism.” This movement de-centered all nationalist identities in favor of putting the interests of local communities at the heart of all Black Panther politics. “Revolutionary Intercommunalism” influenced the Panthers’ move to grassroots political organizing in the early 1970s and their emphasis on community survival programs. “Revolutionary Intercommunalism” provided a helpful critique of the position of black people in America as the Panthers saw it. Black America could not be termed a nation because it had none of the prerequisites of land and political power to be a nation. However, the interests of the United States as defined through white supremacy were unquestionably at odds with the interests of the black community writ large. “Revolutionary Intercommunalism” helped bridge the gap and imagine a different way forward through grassroots politics.

Despite the Panthers’ turn towards “Revolutionary Intercommunalism,” black nationalism, inspired and defined against Third World internationalism, had already shaped the Black Panther Party even as it struggled to change from within. The consequences of that influence included tendency to a strict, internal hierarchy and central authority, overtly masculinist hetero-normative gendered expectations, and the perception that the Panthers were militant and dedicated to guerrilla warfare with state authority. It is easy to dismiss black nationalism as a largely negative influence on the Black Panther Party. Black nationalism led to

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165 Watkins, Yellow Power, Black Power, 43-44.
some of the Panthers’ most openly separatist politics and the Panthers’ trend to authoritarianism within its own ranks. Under Eldridge Cleaver’s influence, the Panthers took the example of Viet Cong guerilla warfare and applied it to the United States by characterizing the black struggle for freedom as a guerilla conflict within American borders. American mainstream media used *Black Panther* headlines on the internal guerilla war to further criticize the Panthers as overtly violent and threatening to American internal security. However, it also taught the Panthers how to critique white American nationalism and forge international alliances in their fight for freedom at home.

**Soul on Ice: Black Power and Gender**

In one of the most controversial passages of Eldridge Cleaver’s prison memoir, *Soul on Ice*, Cleaver reflected on the power dynamic that undergirded his violent relationships with women.

*Rape was an insurrectionary act.* It delighted me that I was defying and trampling upon the white man’s law, upon his system of values, and that I was defiling his women - and this point, I believe was the most satisfying to me because I was very resentful over the historical fact of how the white man has used the black woman. I felt I was getting revenge. From the site of the act of rape, consternation spreads outwardly in concentric circles. I wanted to send waves of consternation throughout the white race.

From the perspective of the twenty-first century, such a shocking admission would be met with anger and derision. Cleaver’s memoir reads today as deeply degrading and violently

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misogynistic in its treatment of both black and white women. Yet when it was first published in 1965, *Soul on Ice* was met with largely rapturous reviews that praised the work as groundbreaking in its honesty about the plight of black men in America.\(^{168}\) *Soul On Ice*, like *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* followed in a new wave of books that centered the experiences of unapologetic black men reclaiming their masculinity while systematically dismantling the system of white supremacy that sought their emasculation. Their publication against the backdrop of a dominant discourse of black men as helpless and subservient helped explain the perception of *Soul on Ice* as a trailblazing work when it seemed so obviously problematic. Its popularity also had to do with the larger confrontation over gender relations and black power as it played out in the 1960s.

Black power served as an antidote against white supremacy through the reclaiming of black masculinity and black femininity from a centuries-old narrative of pathology and criminality. Economic, social, and political discrimination in the United States all worked to prevent black men from claiming the full rights of male citizenship. Historically, black men could not take on the traditional role of the male breadwinner because of depressed wages and racial discrimination in the work force. Under Jim Crow, whites often referred to black men casually as “boys” and called them by their first names as a way to further infantilize and subjugate black people.\(^{169}\) Jim Crow subjected black men to physical, sexual violence in the form of lynching. As Robyn Wiegman explores in her article “The Anatomy of Lynching,” whites used the specter of the black male rapist to justify extreme violence towards black men. That violence was often sexual in nature, as seen by the ubiquity of castration as part of the

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lynching ritual. By literally un-manning their victims, lynch mobs played out their domination against black people through the intimate sexual conquest of the black man.170

White supremacy denied black men the ability to be the man-of-the-house of the nuclear family that defined white manhood in the twentieth century and then used their inability to fulfill that role to pathologize the black family. In the now infamous report, *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*, Daniel P. Moynihan described what he perceived as the failure of black men to live up to white expectations of marriage and fatherhood as the root cause for inequality in America. While Moynihan acknowledged the role that structural racism and slavery played in the instability of the black family, he laid much of the blame at the feet of black women, whom he characterized as “matriarchal.” According to Moynihan, black women had been “embittered” by the black man’s failure to fulfill the role of the male breadwinner.171 Moynihan defined the black family as inherently broken in its approach to gender roles. He played into racist stereotypes in his portrayal of black women as deviant in their independence as opposed to the “natural” submission of white women. At the same time, his report reflected the deep frustration that men like Eldridge Cleaver legitimately felt as a result of white supremacy’s multiple attempts to un-man them ideologically, psychologically and physically.172

The convergence of Eldridge Cleaver and Daniel P. Moynihan on the issue of the black family and black manhood revealed the sometimes reactionary nature of black nationalism. Even as black nationalism offered an escape from white American nationalism, it often

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172 Cleaver, *Soul on Ice,*
replicated its worst tropes in the search for an alternative.\textsuperscript{173} This contradiction originated from the inescapable fact that the expectations of the dominant white culture seeped into oppressed black culture due to how black nationalism internalized the many cultural wrongs committed on black people. Moreover, modern nationalism necessitated the male-dominated family to replicate generational citizenship.\textsuperscript{174} In the 19th century, Republican Motherhood constructed women as nurturers created new generations of educated and patriotic citizens and as the ultimate gatekeepers of civic responsibility.\textsuperscript{175} During Jim Crow, the elevation of white southern womanhood to the status as protectors of the race drew on this earlier model of Republican Womanhood by conceiving of white southern women as the protectors of civilization.\textsuperscript{176} The myth of white southern womanhood served a racial function by implying that black women were aberrant and savage in all the ways that white southern women were proper and civilized.\textsuperscript{177} For the Black Panther Party, embracing conservative gender roles meant pushing back forcefully against these old tropes of black womanhood as a way to lay claim to masculine citizenship.

The demand for black women to fulfill traditional gender roles found its voice in the \textit{Black Panther Community News Service} in the way the editors chose to portray and photograph women, especially in the early years of the newspaper. In one of Emory Douglas’ covers for the

newspaper, Ericka Huggins holding baby Mai Huggins can be seen silhouetted behind an image of Bobby Seale. The cover’s imagery hints at Huggins’ role in a supportive, mothering position both because she is holding her baby and because she is positioned behind Seale with her head looming over him. She becomes his symbolic mother. Her facial expression hints at her sadness at both the death of her husband and her separation from her baby in jail.178 This image could be read from the modern point of view as trapping Ericka Huggins in traditional women’s roles.

Yet the Panthers’ depiction of her was revolutionary because black women had long been denied the right to be represented as grieving widows and mothers. Prior to the Black Panther Party, American culture rarely acknowledged black women’s grief publicly.179

The portrayal of black women as respectable mothers, wives, and widows was both reactionary and revolutionary from the 1940s into the 1960s.180 The portrayal of women like Mamie Till and Myrlie Evers as grieving mothers and/or widows helped challenge a culture of black female dissemblance during the early civil rights movement but relied on those women performing respectability politics.181 Ericka Huggins’ depiction went a step further by asserting the right of black women to be seen as such regardless of their perceived respectability. Her portrayal was a stunning rebuke to the history of "Jezebel" that actively sought to define black women historically as beyond the bounds of respectable femininity. "Jezebel" as a character

178 “It will be the people and only the people who will wrest control of the lives of chairman Bobby Seale and Ericka Huggins out of the hands of the Fascist American Administrators,” The Black Panther Communal News Service, January 30, 1971, cover.

179 Farmer makes a similar point about militant domestic workers in the early to mid 1940s: Farmer, Remaking Black Power, 85.

180 Farmer, Remaking Black Power, 119.

emerged in the antebellum South when white masters imagined her into existence as a salve for their own sexual and racial depravity. The character of the "Jezebel" imagined the black female body as dangerous and oversexualized. Popular depictions of black women emphasized the lips, breasts, and buttocks as symbols of their lascivious nature. By depicting black women as sexually uncontrolled and libidinous, white men could justify their own fears and desires. While the "Jezebel" was unclothed, unhinged in her emotions, pathologically diseased, and morally corrupting, the white woman was depicted as pure, chaste, and morally upright.\(^\text{182}\)

"Jezebel" followed black women out of slavery as a caricature that continued to justify the treatment of black women under white supremacy. As domestic work became an important avenue of employment for black women in freedom, white supremacy used "Jezebel" to justify the continued rape and sexual assault of black women in white homes.\(^\text{183}\) By denying black women their inherent respectability, their bodies continued to be criminalized and placed outside the circle of protection granted to white femininity. White supremacy had written onto "Jezebel" all of its fear, fascination, and desire of blackness. The consequences for black women were dire. They were actively denied respectability and heavily criminalized by legal, medical, and social systems. Their suffering would be trivialized and black women would have to fight to claim basic human rights in all spheres of social, economic, and political life.\(^\text{184}\) For black women in the early 20th century, fighting back against this marginalization meant embracing


\(^{184}\) This argument that institutions could not see black women as wholly formed women can be found in a number of texts and over a number of timelines: Cheryl D. Hicks, *Talk With You Like a Woman: African American Women, Justice, and Reform in New York, 1890-1935* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010); Annelise Orleck, *Storming Caesar’s Palace: How Black Mothers Fought Their Own War on Poverty* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2005); Lisa Levenstein, *A Movement Without Marches: African American Women and the Politics of Poverty in Postwar Philadelphia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010).
respectability to the extreme. Women like Mary Church Terrell and Anna Julia Cooper used the activism of black women’s clubs in a bid to show that they could be even more respectable than the white women who donated their time to charitable causes.  

The politics of black respectability proved to be a double edged sword. By embracing it, black women claimed the respect and femininity that had been denied them by a hegemonic white culture and issued a powerful rebuke to their portrayal as “Jezebel.” Yet black respectability remained outside of the reach of working class women, many of whom had to take jobs as domestic workers, sharecroppers, or seasonal laborers. Their economic and social vulnerability rendered them unable to claim the benefits of middle class women. Black respectability did not undo popular portrayals of black women as inherently pathologized or criminal. Instead, middle-class club women involved in organizations like the National Council of Negro Women (NCNW) and the National Association of Colored Women (NACW) reified the unsuitability of poor and working class black women by treating them as objects of their reform efforts. For black club women as well as for white club women, the working classes remained objects of charity, condescension, and derision. These elite women viewed the pathology and criminality of their working class peers as inherent and therefore reinforced the dominant, white supremacist stereotypes about black women’s criminality.

This particular language of respectability versus criminality led to deep social divisions within the black community that would burst to the surface within the larger shift to black power during the civil rights era. Black women demanded respect regardless of their poverty, their

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187 White, *Too Heavy a Load*, 70.
marital status, and the number of children they had in the welfare rights movement. The Black Panther Party had to navigate two divergent and sometimes contradictory impulses for the advancement of black women. On the one hand, the traditional denial of respectability to black women pushed the Black Panther Party to see women through a hetero-normative lens that expected traditional gender role conformity to a point. On the other hand, the move towards women’s liberation movement led women in the Black Panther Party to call out misogyny within the Party’s ranks and demand that their substantial contributions to the Party be recognized accordingly.

The literature on women in the Black Panther Party reflects the Janus-like nature of their status. Historians who have written on women in the Party, including Robyn Spencer, Waldo E. Martin, and Joshua Bloom acknowledge that the Party could be deeply misogynistic and that sexual harassment and abuse were sadly common experiences for women involved in its ranks. The Panthers’ adoption of free love for instance left black women vulnerable to sexual predation and pressure from male members, while freeing men in the Party from the responsibilities inherent in relationships. Ashley D. Farmer theorized the Black Panther Party as caught in a moment of transition between later movements based in intersectionality and earlier understandings of heteronormative gender roles for black women.

188 Orleck, Storming Caesar’s Palace, 225.
189 Michelle Wallace’s blistering, seminal text, Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman explores how nationalism as a concept tends towards hierarchical, heteronormative gender roles as a means of reproducing the state. Wallace’s work is a critique of misogyny within the black power/black nationalist movements of the 1960s and 1970s. While Wallace is essentially correct in her linking of nationalism and gender normativity, we must complicate the idea of black hetero-normativity by recognizing that constructing black women as mothers, wives, and widows was itself revolutionary: Michelle Wallace, Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman (New York: Verso, 2015), xxiv.
190 Bloom and Martin, Black Against Empire, 303-304.
191 Bloom and Martin, Black Against Empire, 307-308.
The Party was also a site of liberation and experimentation for black women who found empowerment in its ranks. Winston Salem Panther Hazel Mack recalled, “As a young person, I was looking for something. A way to fight back. A way to say I don’t agree. A way to say I don’t, I’m not going to acquiesce to what’s happening.” Hazel Mack’s experience illustrated how the Party drew on the pent up frustrations of young women who made space in the Black Panther Party for themselves. The Black Panther Party may have used overtly masculinist ideology to attract its initial members. However, the Party was not wedded to images of submissive womanhood and women in the Party exploited that loophole to carve out space for themselves while questioning the overtly masculine hierarchy of the Party. Women in the Party had a multitude of experiences that ran along a spectrum of possibilities that changed depending on place and rank.

**Soledad Blues: Criminality and Black Power**

The Black Panther Party’s involvement with criminal justice is perhaps the most maligned aspect of the Party’s legacy. In addition to its public demonstrations against police brutality, its confrontations with law enforcement helped cement an image of them as criminal. The “typical” Black Panther member in the mainstream media seemed to be the black criminal and rapist manifested. The Panthers’ early practice of policing the police and highlighting the

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imagery of the gun only strengthened the connection between the Panthers and the stereotype of criminal pathology within the white imagination.\textsuperscript{196} By adopting the image of the gun and the stance of forceful self-defense, the Panthers espoused a type of black power politics that originated out of the southern Civil Rights Movement and the philosophy of Malcolm X that viewed the gun as common sense politics.\textsuperscript{197} It also added to the overtly masculine image of the Party as “black men with guns” and it exposed them to the attacks of the media and “Law and Order” politicians.\textsuperscript{198}

The origins of the Black Panther Party’s association with crime have often been blamed on the Panthers’ attempts to radicalize the \textit{lumpen proletariat} and their ill-advised tactic of reaching out to the “brothers on the block,” which introduced problematic elements to the Party.\textsuperscript{199} This argument at best bemoans the naiveté of the Black Panther Party and at worst replicates the same stereotypes of black criminality that make up such a potent part of white supremacy.\textsuperscript{200} The focus on criminality elides the role of agent provocateurs in the Party by placing the blame for their actions solely at the feet of the Black Panther Party.\textsuperscript{201} It ignores the very real achievements that the Black Panther Party made in critiquing American constructions of race, class, and criminality through its radicalism. Huey P. Newton’s focus on recruiting the

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\textsuperscript{196} There are many secondary sources I could cite for the association of the Panthers with black criminality. Law enforcement made the connection intentionally as a way to destroy the Party from within with the work of agent provocateurs and to divert the Panthers’ limited resources to paying for the criminal justice system. Secondary that talk about this include: Pearson, \textit{Shadow of the Panther}, 29; Murch, \textit{Living for the City}, 124; Bloom and Martin, \textit{Black Against Empire}, 6. Perhaps the most damning piece of proof is the FBI’s own profile of the Black Panther Party, often attached as an appendix to its regular reports, which emphasizes the Panthers’ supposed propensity to violence: “Black Panther Party,” Black Panther Party, North Carolina, FBIHQ File 105-165708-6, 36.

\textsuperscript{197} Tyson, \textit{Radio Free Dixie}, 289.

\textsuperscript{198} Bloom and Martin, \textit{Black Against Empire}, 59-60.

\textsuperscript{199} Pearson, \textit{Shadow of the Panther}, 246; Black Against Empire also offers a good critique of this argument in its footnotes: Martin and Bloom, \textit{Black Against Empire}, 467.

\textsuperscript{200} Austin, \textit{Up Against the Wall}, 205.

\textsuperscript{201} A good example would be Bass and Rae’s book on the New Haven Panther Trials, \textit{Murder in the Model City}: Paul Bass and Douglas W. Rae, \textit{Murder in the Model City}:
*lumpen proletariat* allowed the Party to reach audiences and people who had been left out of the movement previously. The Panthers’ willingness to embrace the poorest elements of the black community launched a critique of white supremacy from an entirely different lens that radically humanized poor black people.\textsuperscript{202} That crucial groundwork set the stage for how we understand issues like mass incarceration and police brutality today.\textsuperscript{203} On the other hand, it gave the Black Panther Party’s opponents the opportunity to smear them with the same race-based fear mongering.

The Black Panther Party modeled its engagement with the *lumpen proletariat* on both Frantz Fanon’s foundational *Wretched of the Earth* and the experiences of its intellectual forefather, Malcolm X. *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* in particular offered a clear redemption narrative of a man who had been a hustler before coming to racial enlightenment in prison.\textsuperscript{204} The influence of Malcolm’s narrative can be seen in Huey P. Newton’s own *Revolutionary Suicide*. Newton’s account of struggling to learn to read and his essential alienation from within the education system reflected Malcolm’s own disillusionment with formal schooling, which centered the experiences of white Americans while ignoring and dismissing those of black Americans.\textsuperscript{205} Newton’s later experience in prison figured prominently with his account of time in “the hole” mirroring Malcolm’s experience in the same situation.\textsuperscript{206} Unlike mainstream civil rights organizations, the Nation of Islam engaged in heavy prison work and recruited in neighborhoods that had been deemed eminently un-respectable by

\begin{footnotes}
\item \textsuperscript{202} Berger, *Captive Nation*, 65-67.
\item \textsuperscript{203} Berger, *Captive Nation*, 274-275.
\end{footnotes}
the black bourgeoisie. The Black Panther Party adopted these same techniques of recruitment but took it a step further.\textsuperscript{207} It saw its base as deeply rooted within these dispossessed communities and sought to push its needs to the forefront. Not only did the Panthers see the people who made up the \textit{lumpen proletariat} as primed for recruitment, but also as a community worthy of its own movement.\textsuperscript{208}

The Black Panther Party’s adoption of the needs of the \textit{lumpen proletariat} may have evolved naturally out of its initial engagement with an earlier generation of activists. However, its experiences with the American incarceration system forged a new critique of American criminal justice. Beginning in 1968 with the death of Bobby Hutton, COINTELPRO and local police efforts to infiltrate and sabotage the organization kicked into high gear. The Panthers suffered numerous arrests of their top leaders. The exposure to the prison and justice system at a personal level helped refine the Panthers’ thinking on these issues.\textsuperscript{209}

Published in 1970, George Jackson’s \textit{Soledad Brother} was a breakthrough work both in how it framed the callous, casual cruelty and racism of the justice and prison experience in America and how it demanded that readers acknowledge George Jackson’s actual humanity. Jackson joined the Black Panther Party in prison. His reading of the Panthers’ foundational

\begin{footnotes}
\item[207] Murch, \textit{Living for the City}, 130; The Panthers and the NOI directly competed against each other in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The Panthers modeled their Ten Point Platform on the NOI’s \textit{What We Want, What We Believe} and they competed against each other selling newspapers sometimes on the same street corner: Bobby Seale, \textit{Seize the Time: The Story of the Black Panther Party and Huey P. Newton} (Baltimore, MD: Black Classic Press, 1991), 358.
\item[208] This is best represented in the Party by the success of Fred Hampton and his work creating a “Rainbow Coalition” of ethnic gangs to fight against the Daley Machine in Chicago: Jakobi Williams, \textit{From the Bullet to the Ballot: The Illinois Chapter of the Black Panther Party} (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 10.
\item[209] This turn can be seen in the \textit{Black Panther Community News Service} beginning with the “Free Huey!” Campaign but expanding to its coverage of the NY Panther Twenty-One, Ericka Huggins, Rachelle Magee, the Soledad Brothers, and Attica. A small sampling of headlines include: “Free Huey Now!,” \textit{Black Panther Community News Service}, June 19, 1968, cover; “Special Issue on Nationwide Harassment of Panthers by Pig Power Structure,” \textit{Black Panther Community News Service}, January 15, 1969, cover; THE FASCISTS HAVE ALREADY DECIDED IN ADVANCE TO MURDER CHAIRMAN BOBBY SEALE IN THE ELECTRIC CHAIR, \textit{Black Panther Community News Service}, March 15, 1970, cover.
\end{footnotes}
texts, including Marx, Mao, Lenin, and Fanon, helped shaped his critique of the prison system.\textsuperscript{210} His descriptions of the daily indignities he faced revealed the corruption within the prison system. It gave voice to the suffering of prisoners in a carceral state already verging on industrialization and it inspired the prison rights movement as it emerged in the early 1970s.\textsuperscript{211} The death of George Jackson’s brother, Jonathan Jackson, in the Marin Courthouse attack, the long imprisonment of sole survival Ruchell Magee, the arrest and sham trial of Angela Davis, and the subsequent murder of George Jackson himself, all cemented the Black Panther Party’s status at the fore-front of the prison rights movement.\textsuperscript{212} When prisoners at Attica State Prison rebelled in 1971, they specifically asked for Huey P. Newton to be one of the neutral observers allowed to negotiate between the state and the prisoners. The Attica prisoners’ trust in Huey P. Newton and the Black Panther Party revealed the centrality of the Panthers not only in humanizing prisoners, but questioning the logic of the prison itself.\textsuperscript{213} In demanding that prisoners be treated as fully vested human beings with all the emotions and rights of American citizens, the Panthers concluded that the prison system had to be questioned from top to bottom.

The Black Panther Party helped birth the prison rights movement of the late 1960s and 1970s. An earlier generation of activists inspired the Panthers to look towards the prisons and the\textit{lumpen proletariat} in general as a rich recruiting base. But the ideologies that the Panthers created as a result of that engagement were something new and radical. By embracing the


\textsuperscript{211}Jackson, \textit{Soledad Brother}, 84.


essential dignity of all prisoners, regardless of their past, the Panthers and their allies could advance a new critique of the prison system as a system created by white supremacy to exploit and oppress poor marginalized communities. The effect was to question the very existence of the prison and how it functioned in American society.214

Another effect of the Panthers’ work on prison reform was to threaten the hierarchy of black respectability. In his groundbreaking work, *The Condemnation of Blackness*, Khalil Gibran Muhammad argues efforts from early twentieth-century black reformers to question the logic of white perceptions of black criminality focused less on refuting the question of criminality itself, but arguing that “good” black people behaved respectably. These reformers blamed black criminality on the effects of racial oppression and started racial uplift efforts designed at reforming the black poor. The unintended consequence of framing black criminality in terms of racial uplift and reform was to reinforce the perception of an essential problem of black criminality in the first place.215 While Muhammad’s argument is correct in its essentials, Katz and Sugrue’s edited volume, *W. E. B. DuBois, Race, and the City*, suggests that DuBois was already questioning the logic of black criminality while working on his groundbreaking study, *The Philadelphia Negro*. DuBois’ sociological observations on the various exploitative structures that kept poor black people in the ghetto and his observations on the casual cruelty of police shook his perception of racial uplift even though he was unwilling to abandon it fully. The Panthers completed DuBois’s transformation on a national stage.216

The Panthers’ embrace of the *lumpen* informed their work in interracial coalition building and their potent use of street gangs as a vehicle for movement. While street gangs did introduce a criminal element, they contributed greatly to the Black Panther Party’s success. Alprentice Bunchy Carter, a founding member and leader of the Southern California chapter of the Black Panther Party, translated the incredible organizational skills he developed leading the street gang the Slausons into running a tight disciplinary ship and successful chapter in California. Unfortunately, Alprentice Bunchy Carter and John Huggins lost their lives in a shootout between US Organization and the Black Panther Party in Los Angeles. After their deaths, the L.A. Chapter of the Black Panther Party never fully recovered the same energy and dedication as it experienced under Carter’s leadership.

Fred Hampton had similar successes with organizing the “Rainbow Coalition” to combat the Daley political machine in Chicago. Hampton brought together a diverse group of political allies including street gangs like the Black P. Stone Rangers, the Young Lords, and the Young Patriots. The Panthers believed in the potential of street gangs to be the source of their own liberation and their ability to articulate the problems of the community. Like SNCC before it, the Panthers thought that movement had to originate and be led from within the communities it directly affected. While a FBI plot led to Hampton’s political assassination by the Chicago Police Department, the promise of the Rainbow Coalition and Hampton’s engagement with gangs played out in the election of Harold Washington for mayor in 1983. In addition, the

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217 Pearson, *Shadow of the Panther*, 246; Black Against Empire also offers a good critique of this argument in their footnotes: Martin and Bloom, *Black Against Empire*, 467.
219 Williams, *From the Bullet to the Ballot*, 35.
220 Williams, *From the Bullet to the Ballot*, 10.
energy that Fred Hampton imbued into the Rainbow Coalition inspired organizations like the Young Patriots and the Young Lords to continue their movement coalition building decades after Hampton’s death.\textsuperscript{221}

In retrospect, it is easy to criticize the Black Panther Party’s engagement with street gangs as an unfortunate turn that contributed greatly to the destruction of the Party. Its recruitment of the \textit{lumpen proletariat} certainly opened them up to criticism and made it easier for the FBI and local police departments to demonize and attack them. Yet the centering of its movement on the most oppressed and powerless members of the racial community was also the most radical fulfillment of the promise of black power. It was a promise of unconditional love for blackness and belief that no people were beyond redemption. The Panthers embrace of prison rights and interracial coalition building among marginalized people was powered from this unshakeable belief that the most powerless could make powerful movement if only given the right tools and education to describe their oppression. This belief in the power and love of the people tore through the trap of black respectability and its internalization of white racist perceptions of blackness.

Conclusion

In one of the most iconic scenes in Spike Lee’s 1989 classic, *Do the Right Thing*, Radio Raheem gives the following monologue to explain the significance of his two ringed fists, “LOVE” and “HATE”:

Let me tell you the story of Right Hand, Left Hand. It’s a tale of good and evil. Hate: it was with this hand that Cain iced his brother. Love: these five fingers, they go straight to the soul of man. The right hand: the hand of love. The story of life is this: static. One hand is always fighting the other hand, and the left hand is kicking much ass. I mean, it looks like the right hand, Love, is finished. But hold on, stop the presses, the right hand is coming back. Yeah, he got the left hand on the ropes, now, that’s right. Yea, boom, it’s a devastating right and Hate is hurt, he’s down. Ooh! Ooh! Left-Hand Hate KOed by Love. If I love you, I love you. But if I hate you …  

Spike Lee masterfully weaves the tension between love and hate throughout the film, which takes place over the course of the hottest day of the summer in the neighborhood of Bedford-Stuyvesant. That same tension informed the delicate balance between the best and worst impulses of black power and black nationalism. Black power was born from the anger and frustration bred from centuries of oppression and the slowness of change during the classical phase of the Civil Rights Movement. Yet it was inspired by an all-encompassing embrace of blackness that broke down traditional class and gender barriers within the black community. At its best, black nationalism offered a visionary perspective on movement building and social justice that reached out to communities and people that the traditional Civil Rights Movement did not reach. It centered community control at its heart and offered ordinary people power over their lives. Black nationalism helped disrupt white American nationalism by providing an anti-
racist framework for nation building and space for black people to imagine what black citizenship could look like.\textsuperscript{223}

At the same time, black power and black nationalism could plumb the most reactionary politics of black frustration and its militant insistence on self-defense echoed the worst fears about black criminality that white supremacy could inspire.\textsuperscript{224} The Black Panther Party carried within it the seeds of its own destruction. Its militancy, its lack of respect for established state authority, and its focus on reforming street gangs and prisoners all made it easier for a state structure threatened by the Panthers’ radicalism to smear them with the brush of black criminality. Beginning as early as 1967, the Panthers became a main target of the FBI’s illegal COINTELPRO surveillance program and Hoover’s declaration that the Panthers were public enemy number one in 1969 provided open season for local police departments to harass and destroy Panther chapters with little to no compunction.\textsuperscript{225} Law enforcement exploited both the disorganization within the Party and its tendency to autocratic leadership to further weaken it from the inside. Historians must grapple with the fact that the same dedication to black power and black nationalism that led to the Panthers’ most celebrated programs was also the same force that inspired its most maligned aspects. The two cannot be compartmentalized because they were part of the same driving ideological force.

This dissertation examines these divergent factors within the Black Panther Party inspired by black power through the lens of martyrdom. The Panthers’ attempts to consciously construct symbols out of their dead and imprisoned reveals the Panthers’ endeavors to create real


\textsuperscript{224} Lubiano, “Black Nationalism, Black Common Sense,” 232.

nationalism. Martyrdom bridges the narrative between the “good” Black Panther Party that fed free breakfast to children and the “bad” Black Panther Party that engaged in shootouts with the police. Martyrdom narratives in the Party reveal all the various contradictions, conflicts, and controversies within the Party over strategy, gender relations, and competing factions of black power. However, they also show the empowerment that black power and black nationalism brought to black people both locally and nationally. In *The Black Power Mixtapes*, John Forté when describing the Attica Prison Rebellion posed the central problem in the rebellion this way, “The violence that erupted and demanded the world pay attention, because from a human rights perspective, the question comes down to something that's very fundamental: do prisoners have human rights?”

The question that the Panthers pose in their activism is “regardless of who they are or what they have done, do people of color have human rights?”

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226 *Black Power Mixtapes*, directed by Göran Olsson (Louverture Films, 2011), DVD.
“You Can Kill the Revolutionary but You Can’t Kill the Revolution:” The Contested Death and Legacy of Fred Hampton, Chairman of the Illinois Black Panther Party

Introduction: The Enigma of the Man and the Myth

Those who knew Fred Hampton remember the power of his style and the magnetism of his words. His ability to make those reluctant to support the Panthers identify with his personal charisma threatened to overturn the power structure of a racially conservative political regime in Chicago. That charisma planted the seeds for a national interracial political alliance. As Jeffrey Haas recalled of the first time he heard Fred Hampton speak publicly:

He [Fred Hampton] then told everyone to raise his or her right hand and repeat “I am” and we responded, “I am.” He then said “a revolutionary” and some in the audience repeated “a revolutionary.” I considered myself a lawyer for the movement but not necessarily of the movement. The word revolutionary stuck in my throat. Again Fred repeated “I am,” and the audience responded in kind. This time when he said “a revolutionary” the response was louder. By the third or fourth time, I hesitantly joined in, and by the seventh or eighth time I was shouting as loudly and enthusiastically as everyone else, “I am...a revolutionary!” It was a threshold to which Fred took me and countless others. I felt my level of commitment palpably rise.

The legacy of Fred Hampton is complicated by his transformation from flesh and blood activist to contested symbol of the black power movement to a local, hidden symbol of the long

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228 Haas, The Assassination of Fred Hampton, 4.
history of police brutality in Chicago. For some, he is the missing link and the critical bridge between the traditional Civil Rights Movement and black power—a man who could have potentially reconciled the differences between the two and recaptured the spirit of unity remembered from the early 1960s.229 For others, he was a radical revolutionary who could build true interracial alliances within poor communities and put to rest the critique of racism and separatism that had hounded the Black Panthers since their inception.230 Still to some, Hampton was a dangerous criminal, a thug who got exactly what he deserved when Chicago police gunned him down on that fateful night on December 4, 1969.

Yet no other version of Fred Hampton looms as large as the vision of the lost martyr and savior of the Black Panther Party. When the Chicago Police Department (CPD) executed the raid that led to his assassination and the death of Mark Clark, the spectrum of possibilities for Fred Hampton’s legacy narrowed into various all-consuming visions of his death. His apotheosis as a Panther martyr focused media attention and scrutiny on the issue of police malfeasance, public corruption, and the black man and black body as victim. In the rush to seek justice or pass judgment on Fred Hampton, the State Attorney, the FBI, the national and local media, and the Black Panthers all strove to define their side of the story.231


231 Books and visual media were key to establishing the legend of Fred Hampton. These included historical documentaries like: *The Murder of Fred Hampton*, Directed by Mike Gray, featuring (Fred Hampton, Bobby Rush, Edward V. Hanrahan) (Facets Media, 2007); *The Black Panthers: Vanguard of the Revolution*, Directed by Stanley
The Fred Hampton assassination had the potential to open up the issue of police brutality, not just for the Panthers but for the city of Chicago as a whole. His death sparked a need for the nation to confront how society viewed the criminality and/or innocence of black men and black revolutionaries in particular. However, the focus on the particular details of the case made Fred Hampton extraordinary rather than representative. Instead of standing in for the forty-eight Black Panthers that had been killed in the two years leading up to Fred Hampton’s death and the thousands of black men incarcerated or killed by police every year, Hampton’s death became exceptional nationally. Yet even as his memory on the national level faded as a consequence of contestations over the larger controversy of Black Panther Party legacy and “Law and Order” politics, Hampton remained important to a small group of black and brown Chicago activists and a larger group of associated communities. For those people, he became part of the vernacular tradition of resistance to police brutality that was largely unrecognized by the mainstream but continued to shape the responses of marginalized communities to local politics. He was no

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232 “By lifting their hands against these revolutionaries, they lifted their hands against the best that humanity possesses,” Black Panther Community News Service, December 20, 1969. By 1969, the Panthers had lost 16 people to violence with the police. Among the dead included: Bobby Huggins, Franco Diggs, Alprentice “Bunchy” Carter, John Huggins, Spurgeon Jake Winters, Fred Hampton, and Mark Clark.


longer exclusively a Panther martyr but one of local politics. To become that local martyr however, Hampton’s legacy had to go through several convolutions, including the isolation of Hampton’s case from other cases of police brutality because of the exceptional events of his trial. Only after the trial’s end could Hampton be returned to his local communities—diminished from his earlier, national stature, but still of critical local importance.

In the immediate aftermath of his death, the Panthers did mean for the Fred Hampton case to become unique among the cases of murdered Panther activists. Their early testimony in the original criminal trial and in media statements to the public revealed a desire to tread a carefully wrought line—one that emphasized the innocence of the victims while reiterating the necessity for self-defense and the Panthers’ right to confront injustice and harassment committed by law enforcement.\(^{235}\) The Panthers stated that police actions during the Hampton raid and others like it justified their confrontational style with state authority and police brutality. For the Panthers, Hampton’s case was representative of a number of cases involving lesser known activists.\(^{236}\) However, as the civil court case evolved from the various failed criminal inquests into the late 1970s and out of the hands of the Black Panther Party, the focus shifted on the uniqueness of the Hampton case versus those of other dead or murdered Panthers. When the civil case finally came to a financial settlement in 1982, Fred Hampton had become a legend defined by his exceptional death.

The fallout of the evolution of Fred Hampton’s myth was not only to divorce him from the narrative of other Panther victims, but from all that he had achieved in life. In death he became his murder. His political legacy, the original Rainbow Coalition of interracial poor

\(^{235}\) “By lifting their hands against these revolutionaries, they lifted their hands against the best that humanity possesses,” Black Panther Community News Service, December 20, 1969.

\(^{236}\) “Interview with Bobby Rush,” in Gray, The Murder of Fred Hampton.
voters in Chicago (1968-1974), became separated from the larger Black Panther legacy. Harold Washington revived it in his campaign for mayor in 1983, Jesse Jackson used the term for his presidential run in 1984, and Hampton’s lieutenant, Bobby Rush, used the same tactics to gain election to the U.S. Congress in 1992. More recently, another famous Chicago politician drew on that same coalition to gain election as our 44th U.S. President. In making the Rainbow Coalition a mainstream reality, Harold Washington, Jesse Jackson, Bobby Rush and Barack Obama had to erase its radical roots in the Black Panther Party and ignore the man largely responsible for its creation because of the controversy of Hampton’s death. Recent debates around the death and memorialization of Fred Hampton have focused on the question of his respectability and criminality rather than his achievements as a political radical. The Rainbow Coalition is now credited as a Democratic Party invention, put together by forward thinking but mainstream liberals that elected the first black president rather than the brainchild of a Black Panther revolutionary.

Even historians of the Black Panther Party became caught up in the riddle of Fred Hampton’s death. Those who have written about him either lament his lost potential or the details of his assassination and subsequent miscarriage of justice. Fred Hampton has become a cypher of what could have been, defined not by what he said or did, but by the manner of his death, which took on an all consuming media presence. Fred Hampton is either a victim of the

237 Williams, From the Bullet to the Ballot, 9-11.
238 Williams, From the Bullet to the Ballot, 198-199. Rush has been open about Hampton’s influence on his life and times in numerous interviews. However, his entry into mainstream Democratic politics opened the door for former allies to accuse him of betraying the Panther legacy. R. Bruce Dodd, “Once a Hero, Rush Now Called a Traitor,” Chicago Tribune, May 20, 1990.
239 Some of these debates include the fight to name a swimming pool and park in Maywood, Illinois in his honor and Monroe Street to Fred Hampton street. Short, cursory accounts of these battles can be found in Kenneth Foote, Shadowed Ground: America’s Landscape of Violence and Tragedy (Austin: University of Texas, 2003), 128.
cycle of violence devouring the Black Panthers in 1969 or the lost Messiah who could have saved it.240

Yet what these histories miss is a vernacular, local memory tradition of Hampton that has indelibly shaped how black and brown communities in Chicago respond to the police and local politics. After the lights and television cameras brought by the controversies of the trial were gone, Hampton’s legacy remained deeply embedded into the psyche of these communities as an important lesson about race, politics, and violence. This tradition of radicalism inspired by Hampton remained an uncontrollable and unpredictable force in local politics that has challenged deeply entrenched powers through the election of Harold Washington to the John Burge Chicago Police Torture trials to the death of Laquan McDonald.241 Therefore, his erasure from the official landscape of Chicago is not a sign that he has been forgotten, but an admission of just how potent the narrative of Hampton’s life and death is in a city still wracked by the profound inequalities that inspired him.

This chapter traces the evolution of Fred Hampton from man to martyr to contested symbol of the black power movement and the consequences of that transformation on how we understand black criminality, police corruption, and interracial coalition building. I am concerned with understanding the process of Hampton’s transformation into martyred Panther as one of contingency and agency. Hampton’s legacy was always contested by the police, by various Panthers, by local communities, and by his family members. Understanding how those

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240 Pearson is a good example of someone who regards Hampton as a victim and a thug in an unstoppable cycle of violence. Austin sees him more as a potential savior from violence: Pearson, *Shadow of the Panther*; Curtis J. Austin, *Up Against the Wall*, 249.

241 Recent events in Chicago have all pointed to Hampton as an origin point of resistance to larger processes of policing and racial discrimination. Those processes predate Hampton’s life and death and go back to at least the Red Summer of 1919 in Chicago. However, Hampton has become a touchstone of the modern struggle since 1969, seen through the AAPL’s struggle against police discrimination and other events. Balto, *Occupied Territory*; Flint Taylor, *The Torture Machine: Racism and Police Violence in Chicago* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2019).
conflicts played out and led to the various erasures and magnifications of Hampton’s life in
collective memory helps historians understand the process of how Black Panther and black
power ideology seeped its way into mainstream politics. Marginalized people in Chicago have
used Hampton’ legacy to make demands on the city’s government for community control of
police and criminal justice reform for decades, including in the recent election of Lori
Lightfoot.242

This chapter looks at the legacy of Fred Hampton as a crucial figure in local Chicago
politics—as a founder of a movement that would challenge the conservative Democratic machine
in the city.243 In life and in death, Hampton brought together a critical network of grassroots
activists who would represent a different, underground consciousness of race, local politics, and
police reform.244 This buried network of movement people drew on the hidden consciousness of
black Chicagoans that pushed forth a third rarely recognized portrait of Hampton as a local
leader concerned with the particular racial politics of Chicago. This vision of Hampton helps
explain the local dynamics between poor black communities and police that seemingly
spontaneously re-ignited with the death of Laquan McDonald.245

242 This use of Hampton’s legacy started in the immediate aftermath of his death through calls for community
control of the police and the AAPL. Balto, Occupied Territory, 252-253; Tera Agyepong, “In the Belly of the
243 Jeffrey Hegelson, Crucibles of Black Empowerment: Chicago’s Neighborhood Politics from the New Deal to
Harold Washington (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 240; Williams, From the Ballot to the Bullet, 4.
244 A bit of this process is explored in Jakobi Williams work, From the Bullet to the Ballot in his analysis of the
legacy of the Rainbow Coalition. I expand on Williams’ work by looking at a larger body of activists including the
AAPL and the PLO Law Office. Williams, From the Bullet to the Ballot, 4.
245 McDonald’s death provided the most recent impetus for police reform with the DOJ report and the Chicago
Police Accountability Task Force. Both of these reports found historical, structural discrimination baked into the
very DNA of the CPD. They both use Hampton as a touchstone to explain marginalized communities’ historic
mistrust of the police. United States Department of Justice Civil Rights Division and United States Attorney’s Office
Northern District of Illinois, The DOJ Investigation of the Chicago Police Department: The Complete Report by the
United States Department of Justice (New York: Race Horse Publishing Kindle Edition, 2017), location 77; Police
Accountability Task Force, “Recommendations for Reform: Restoring Trust Between the Chicago Police and the
Finally, the resurgence of police brutality narratives in Chicago in connection to the John Burge Chicago Police Torture cases and the mobilization of the Black Lives Matter movement have led to a rediscovery of the importance of Hampton as a local martyr of police brutality in some mainstream circles. In both the Department of Justice’s *Investigation of the Chicago Police Department* and the Police Accountability Task Force’s report on police reform, Fred Hampton is cited as an early example of a murder that shaped popular perception of the CPD among marginalized communities and a case of police overreach that is indicative of its historic treatment of black people. The federal and local government’s acknowledgement of Hampton shows how his life and death have indelibly shaped marginalized peoples’ perceptions of policing locally. For those people, Hampton is a symbolic victim of the widespread and systemic corruption of the CPD. Hampton’s life and death became an important touchstone that challenged the city to acknowledge that police brutality was not exceptional, but central to a long history of policing in Chicago. Within the work of individual activists and marginalized communities, Hampton’s importance as a martyr of police brutality continues to shape responses to the CPD.

Fred Hampton’s life and death have become contested territory on which Americans write our unresolved conflicts over race, black agency, criminality, and political power. Efforts to memorialize him locally and nationally reflect these conflicts. Was Fred Hampton an

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246 Police Accountability Task Force, “Recommendations for Reform”; US. Department of Justice, *The DOJ Investigation of the Chicago Police Department*.  
innocent victim, a revolutionary, or a criminal? The fractured opinions on Fred Hampton represent an unresolved memory legacy of how various communities chose to remember a moment of black power that built a national political coalition. It revealed city corruption and exposed the depth of power inequalities between the various groups still contesting the importance of his legacy. Against all odds, the story of Hampton’s contested memory is ultimately one of agency, where those communities he served continue to use his life and death to educate, struggle, and inform in a decades long fight against police brutality. Although his marginalization in the mainstream and the lack of official memorialization within the city might suggest a public forgetting, in Chicago’s poor black and brown communities, Hampton’s legacy remains key to understanding how they respond to local politics and police reform.

Will the Real Fred Hampton Please Stand Up? Understanding Fred Hampton through the Lens of 1960s Chicago

Although the police raid that claimed the lives of Fred Hampton and Mark Clark resulted in the arrest of seven other Panthers, media attention quickly focused on Fred Hampton as the main victim of the attack. Later police reports also showed that the police went into the apartment with one main goal—to assassinate Hampton. How did this 21-year-old Black Panther Party member become the target of such a blatant assassination and why did his life and death loom so large for the Black Panther Party and Chicago then and now? To answer that

248 Kenneth Foote, Shadowed Ground, 3. Hampton’s case continues to be contested by the Chicago Police Department to the present day. A case to memorialize Hampton by naming a street after him in 2005 led to massive backlash from the CPD who portrayed him as a “cop killer.” Nevertheless, Balto points to a two-story high mural of Hampton as an example of informal memorialization. Balto, Occupied Territory, 231.

249 It is interesting that a board of Alderman proposal to rename a section of West Monroe Street after Hampton failed because it needed official support while the mural of Hampton became a vernacular shrine. It speaks to the unsettledness of Hampton’s memory with various communities. Balto, Occupied Territory, 231.
question, we must look at Hampton’s unique history of local civil rights activism. Fred Hampton had the extraordinary ability to bridge the two sides of the Civil Rights Movement: the non-violent tradition and the call for self-defense initiated by black power. Hampton showed the potential of black power to reach out beyond assumed stereotypes of its isolationism to forge alliances with other marginalized groups in Chicago.\textsuperscript{250} Fred Hampton’s attempts to woo poor whites, Puerto-Ricans, and the New Left to his cause flew in the face of assumed mainstream wisdom that the Black Panthers’ demand for control of their movement would lead to automatic isolation from other oppressed groups.\textsuperscript{251} Simon Balto argues that Hampton’s interracial alliance is an early experiment in intersectionality, where the Panthers navigated the various class, race, and gender marginalizations experienced by these communities to find common ground. Hampton’s interracial alliance sought to highlight the individual voices of each unique group rather than subsume them for purposes of unity.\textsuperscript{252}

Fred Hampton crossed all of the boundaries that supposedly limited the Black Panther Party and black power because of his unique upbringing and the particular racial politics of the Chicago political machine. The city government may have been Democrat controlled, but it was racially and socially conservative and initially drew most of its power from the Irish Catholic working class of the city’s South Side from whence it emerged in 1931. Even when black voters became the bulwark of the Chicago machine’s stronghold beginning in the Daley era (1955-1970) and comprised some 25 percent of the population of Chicago, the corrupt Democratic regime would use political bribes as well as threats to welfare payments to intimidate black

\textsuperscript{250} Jakobi Williams, \textit{From the Bullet to the Ballot}, 66-68.  
\textsuperscript{251} Jakobi Williams, \textit{From the Bullet to the Ballot}, 127.  
\textsuperscript{252} Balto, \textit{Occupied Territory}, 229-232.
voters. 253 The political elite were Irish mob bosses who controlled much of the city’s infrastructure, including its police force. In order to remain in power, the Daley political machine depended on black residents to remain docile and controllable by maintaining their poverty and segregation in Chicago’s slums. 254 Geographic segregation and economic distress made the black vote easier to coerce on election days. Daley’s machine was so effective that when black Independent candidate, Bernetta Howell, ran for Congress in 1964, she was defeated in a landslide by Irish Democrat Thomas J. O’Brien who had died two weeks before election day. The machine used the threat of economic punishment and violence. 255 These early examples of voter suppression exposed the function of the Chicago Police Department to control and intimidate black populations. 256 As Simon Balto argues, the CPD functioned to terrorize the city’s black population and contain it, often acting on the anxieties of the city government as it did during the Race Riot of 1919. 257

By the 1960s, living conditions for poor black people in Chicago reached crisis point with the advent of urban renewal and the building of expressways through many of the poor Italian and black neighborhoods. Attempts by black people to use civil rights legislation in the mid 1960s to agitate for desegregated housing, better job opportunities, and school desegregation led to massive crackdowns by the Daley-controlled police department and a race rebellion in 1965, just weeks after the Watts Rebellion. 258 The overt discrimination faced by African

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256 Balto, Occupied Territory, 1-12.
257 Balto, Occupied Territory.
Americans had finally come to a boiling point. For a seventeen-year-old Fred Hampton, the Chicago rebellion would be a coming-of-age into his own activism within the Civil Rights Movement and the larger ideological world of black power.\(^{259}\)

Fred Hampton was a typical child of the Great Migration. He was born August 30, 1948 in Argo, Illinois to Francis and Iberia Hampton, workers at the Argo Corn Starch Factory. Before Hampton’s birth, his parents had migrated from Haynesville, Louisiana.\(^{260}\) The family ultimately settled down in Maywood, Illinois, a suburb of Chicago and he grew up within a solidly black middle class community.\(^{261}\) Hampton became actively involved in race relations when he attended Proviso East High School, an integrated school where the student body was a quarter African American. His peers elected him to the high school’s Interracial Cross Section Committee and he became president of the Junior Achievement program. In his high school years, he organized boycotts, marches, and rallies to protest segregation in Maywood, eventually leading to the construction of a local swimming pool for black residents.\(^{262}\) In 1966, Fred Hampton became a youth member of the NAACP, and he was elected president of the Maywood Youth Branch of the NAACP in 1967. As part of this early movement work, Hampton marched with Martin Luther King Jr. and helped organize the youth wing of the Chicago Freedom Movement (CFM) campaign in 1966. Using his traditional strategy of nonviolent marches, sit-

\(^{259}\) Williams, *From Bullet to Ballot*, 54-57.
\(^{260}\) Williams, *From the Bullet to the Ballot*, 54.
\(^{261}\) Haas, *The Assassination of Fred Hampton*, 15. Haas’s seminal work, *The Assassination of Fred Hampton* is crucial to our current understanding of Fred Hampton’s assassination and its aftermath. Haas was a People’s Law Office Lawyer, first hired by the Black Panther Party and then the Hampton family to represent them in the various lawsuits following Hampton’s death. Without Haas’s work, we would not have a clear narrative of the raid or the various cover-ups that followed. Along with Mike Gray’s documentary *The Murder of Fred Hampton*, this book remains one of the most accessible and important sources for the life and death of Fred Hampton.
ins, and picketing, King’s CFM hoped to desegregate Chicago’s blatantly unequal systems.\textsuperscript{263} 

As with many of King’s other movements, the impetus of the CFM came from the black middle class and was rooted in the politics of respectability—fact that the Daley Administration targeted in its response by suggesting that King brought violence and disruption to the city.\textsuperscript{264}

Fred Hampton witnessed the limitations of the southern strategy of mass protest in the North through his experience with the CFM. Unlike in the South, the structures that enforced racial inequality and marginalization in Chicago were not codified into law, but instead existed as the result of decades of informal discrimination built into business practices, Homeowner’s Association Agreements, and city institutions, including its politics and machine. Daley pointed out (rightly) that Chicago did not have the Jim Crow laws that enforced inequality. He ordered his police to arrest protesters to avoid the violent scenes provoked by King’s marches in the South.\textsuperscript{265} At the same time, King’s presence and lack of success agitated poor black people against the brutality of the Daley Machine. On a particularly hot day on July 12, 1966, a rebellion broke out in Chicago's black West Side when the city ordered firemen to shut down fire hydrants used by local children and residents to cool down in the heat. When fighting commenced, the National Guard came to end the violence. What was hidden in the finger

\textsuperscript{263} William Hampton Interview, in \textit{Essence of Fred Hampton}, 2; Hachett interview, in \textit{Essence of Fred Hampton}, 46; Kevin Johnson interview, in \textit{Essence of Fred Hampton}, 54; Dr. Conrad Worrill interview, in \textit{Essence of Fred Hampton}, 58; John Rice, “The World of the Illinois Panthers,” in \textit{Freedom North: Black Freedom Struggles Outside the South, 1940-1980}, ed. Jeanne Theoharis and Komozi Woodard (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 50. Johnson grew up with Hampton and declared that Hampton’s activism led him to transcend a life of negativity to pursue a more positive direction. Worrill was a member of the Black United Front, and he and Hampton worked as a team on numerous civil rights campaigns when Hampton was a member of the NAACP.

\textsuperscript{264} This is an argument made by Jakobi Williams in his coverage of the CFM and he suggests that Hampton’s move towards the Black Panther Party was a direct repudiation of the class politics and limitations of the CFM. More recently, a collection of essays on the Chicago Freedom Movement including first-hand accounts have complicated our vision of the class politics of the movement. It locates a particular black power sensibility emergent within the CFM. It also challenges the notion that the CFM was a defeat, and instead points to a number of movements and organizations that sprang off of that one moment. Williams, \textit{From the Bullet to the Ballot}, 42-51; ed. Mary Lou Finley et. al., \textit{The Chicago Freedom Movement: Martin Luther King Jr. and Civil Rights Activism in the North} (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 2016).

\textsuperscript{265} Williams, \textit{From the Bullet to the Ballot}, 43.
pointing in the aftermath of the rebellion was that it was black city residents’ direct lack of access to segregated swimming facilities that caused the confrontation.\textsuperscript{266} Although fighting for swimming facilities might seem to be a mundane priority, the race rebellion shows just how important these everyday indignities were in shaping the resentment that African Americans felt on a daily basis. This was something that Hampton understood well in his fight to desegregate Maywood’s swimming pool.\textsuperscript{267}

King’s non-violent tactics, which worked so well against the blunt reactions of Jim Crow city governments, failed to garner the same response from Daley, who took the supposed high ground in the media by issuing statements publicly conceding to King’s points and putting in programs to rectify discrimination on paper. King was unable to pin Daley down on overt racial discrimination, and after failing to win the support of northern white liberals, he sat down with Daley on August 26, 1966. They signed a ten-point document known as the “Summit Agreement.” The document acknowledged that steps needed to be taken to provide affordable housing through the Chicago Housing Authority and end racial discrimination in mortgage agreements, but it failed to address the need for a timeline or any kind of official enforcement. Disguising what was essentially a defeat as a victory, King cut his losses and left Chicago’s civil rights activists more divided than united.\textsuperscript{268}

King’s defeat in Chicago left an indelible impression on the young Fred Hampton about the possibilities and limitations of real political change in Chicago. On the one hand, King’s failure stoked in Hampton a deep, burning desire to bring down the corrupt city government and

\textsuperscript{266} David J. Garrow, \textit{Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King Jr., and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference} (New York: William Morrow, 1986), 427, 431.

\textsuperscript{267} Dr. Conrad Worrill interview, in \textit{Essence of Fred Hampton}, 58.

\textsuperscript{268} Taylor Branch, \textit{At Canaan’s Edge: America in the King Years, 1965-1968} (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2006), 509-511.
to create positive social change for his people. On the other, it imbued him with a deep skepticism of King’s non-violent approach and focus on respectability tactics. For Hampton, the fire hydrant rebellion in July 1966 pointed to the necessity of organizing directly among Chicago’s poorest communities to create a sustained movement that would not be vulnerable to the public opinion of white allies and others in the mainstream media.269 Bobby Rush, Jesse Jackson, and many of Hampton’s friends and relatives located his dedication to poor black people within his initial activism for an integrated swimming pool in Maywood. Born middle class, he nevertheless “sacrificed” his class position for others. This selfless attitude can be observed in his dedication to bringing young children to the pool despite his own inability to swim.270

In the next two years after the CFM, Fred Hampton flirted with a spectrum of black civil rights ideologies including black nationalism, which put racial unity above all else. However, it was a chance meeting with Lennie Eggleston, a Panther from Los Angeles, that converted Fred Hampton to the Black Panther, Marxist-inspired point of view.271 Eggleston convinced Hampton that Marxist class solidarity could transcend racial differences and unite the poor to create a viable revolution against the U.S. power structure. The Black Panthers had always believed that poor black communities needed self-control. However, they recognized the need to build interracial alliances with like-minded political groups.272 The Black Panther Party brand of Black Marxism appealed to Hampton because of its emphasis on the lumpen proletariat, the poorest of the poor, as leaders of the revolution. Hampton and the Black Panther Party believed

269 Williams, From the Bullet to the Ballot, 60-61.
270 Williams, From the Bullet to the Ballot, 60; Rev. Jesse Jackson Interview, in Essence of Fred Hampton, 48-49; Stokely Carmichael Interview, in Essence of Fred Hampton, 49; Iberia Hampton interview and William Hampton interview, in Essence of Fred Hampton, 2-4
271 Joan Elbert interview, in Essence of Fred Hampton, 30; Rice, Up on Madison, 13.
272 Joan Elbert interview, in Essence of Fred Hampton, 30.
that in order to truly build a worker’s revolution, those who suffered the most from slum conditions and the criminal organizations and gangs that operated in those neighborhoods had to be brought on board. The difference between Hampton’s Illinois Chapter of the Black Panther Party and other Party chapters was his extraordinary success in bringing that vision to reality.\textsuperscript{273}

Between 1968 to 1974, the Illinois Black Panther Party managed to unite an unlikely alliance of political groups and gangs. These groups included the Black Liberation Alliance, CORE, SNCC, the W.E.B. DuBois Club, the Westside Organization, the Young Socialist Alliance (Socialist Workers Party), the Black Stone Rangers (black gang--South Side), Egyptian Cobras (black gang--West Side), the Young Patriots (poor white organization--Uptown), the Young Lords (Puerto-Rican gang--Lincoln Park) and the Vice Lords (black gang--West Side). In addition, the Panthers, led by Fred Hampton and Bobby Rush, successfully put the black student movements in Chicago into conversation with the Black Panther Party.\textsuperscript{274} By bringing these disparate communities together, the Panthers established a successful base from which to expand. The Chicago youth that Hampton and the Black Panther Party recruited for its rank-and-file were mostly college and high school students, while agreements made with other groups and gangs meant that the Panthers could work efficiently and safely throughout the city.\textsuperscript{275} In the two short years that Fred Hampton was chairman of the Illinois Chapter of the Black Panther Party, he worked to establish numerous social programs that benefited people in poor black

\textsuperscript{273} Huey P. Newton, “Black Capitalism Reanalyzed I,” in \textit{To Die for the People} (New York: City Lights Publisher Reissue, 2009), 100.

\textsuperscript{274} Jakobi Williams, \textit{From the Bullet to the Ballot}, 3; the Panthers in Chicago combined both high school and university students within its ranks, but Williams emphasizes the importance of high school students like Hampton. Donna Jean Murch talks about a similar alliance that helped inspire the Oakland Panthers. Donna Jean Murch, \textit{Living for the City: Migration, Education, and the Rise of the Black Panther Party in Oakland, California} (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

\textsuperscript{275} Williams, \textit{From the Bullet to the Ballot}, 85-89.
communities, including the largest Free Breakfast for Children Program in the entire Party—serving some four hundred school aged children daily.²⁷⁶

Perhaps the political project that brought the most fame and scrutiny to Fred Hampton and the Illinois Chapter of the Black Panther Party was the radical dream of the Rainbow Coalition. The Rainbow Coalition was unique in a city famous for its political coalitions because it was led by poor, black youth and included a number of ethnic groups that united the poor across race, age, sex, fraternal, and political associations. Its members achieved this remarkable cohesion among the poor at a moment of high racial tensions in the city in the wake of school and housing desegregation efforts.²⁷⁷ In a speech given in 1969 at Olivet Baptist Church, Hampton revealed some of the thinking behind the Rainbow Coalition, “I say to you White Power to white people! Brown power to brown people! Black power to black people! X Power to those we left out and the Panther Power to the Vanguard Party!”²⁷⁸ As the crowd roared their approval and repeated the refrain, Fred Hampton launched into a remarkable class analysis that challenged the very basis of Daley’s political rule in the city.

Hampton preached a unique interracial ideology that sought to unite various racial groups on the issue of class and racial discrimination in the city. The communities would work together to overthrow the political machine in a loosely based coalition while local groups specific to each community would address individual concerns. They worked through one of the least expected avenues of communication, preferring to rely on local street and ethnic gangs who knew their neighborhoods and could spread the message to disaffected youth. Just as

importantly, the politicization of gangs created politically conscious citizens in those communities with the greatest need and spun the Panthers’ dream of radicalizing the *lumpen proletariat* into reality.

The gangs and organizations that the Panthers brought into the fold in the Rainbow Coalition included the Young Lords (Puerto Rican street gang), the Young Patriots (white, “hillbilly” street gang), and Rising Up Angry (poor, white “greaser” youths). They united around common goals succinctly laid out by Fred Hampton to target three “levels of oppression”: (1) the greedy, exploiting, rich, avaricious businessman” who took advantage of the community; (2) the “misleading, lying, demagogic politician” who played on the communities’ woes; and (3) the “atrocious, murderizing, brutalizing, intimidating fascist pig cops.” The targets represented the three pillars of Daley’s power in Chicago. The Panthers encouraged the various gangs to develop social programming modeled on the Panther survival programs. Soon after, the Young Patriots and Young Lords started their own “Free Breakfast for Children” programs and free medical clinics. More importantly, the initial gangs that were recruited provided additional contacts into Chicago’s seedy ethnic underworld and influenced directly or indirectly most of Chicago’s street gangs in the 1970s to become political entities fighting against Daley.

Fred Hampton did not achieve the success of the Black Panther Party or the Rainbow Coalition in Chicago alone. He had the hard work and dedicated support of other dynamic leaders like Bobby Rush and Bobby Lee (Robert E. Lee) of the Black Panther Party, “Cha Cha” Jimenez of the Young Lords, William “Preacherman” Fesperman of the Young Patriots, and

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279 Jakobi Williams, *From the Bullet to the Ballot*, 128.
281 Williams, “We Need as Many People as Possible,” in *Civil Rights and Beyond*, 33.
Mike James and Steve Tappis of Rising Up Angry. Most importantly, the Rainbow Coalition relied on the countless rank and file members of these organizations who dedicated what little time, money, and resources they had to canvassing the streets for recruits, cooking breakfast at five o’clock in the morning for hungry school children, or participating in tense negotiations with neighborhood gangs to call ceasefires. Together, they laid the crucial groundwork for more lasting alliances across poor, ethnic communities. Nevertheless, Fred Hampton’s dynamic leadership style, his charismatic and powerful speaking, and ceaseless energy made up a large part of the success and initiative of the Black Panther Party and the Rainbow Coalition.

Fred Hampton’s Illinois Chapter of the Black Panther Party was not the only Black Panther Chapter that forged interracial alliances. In 1968, Eldridge Cleaver ran with Peggy Terry, a white New Left activist, as vice president on the Peace and Freedom Party ticket. The Black Panthers organized the Revolutionary People’s Constitutional Convention in 1970, which represented one of the largest gatherings of radical activist groups in the United States. The convention wrote and ratified an expansive platform across all of these groups and movements. Attendants included representatives of the American Indian Movement, the Asian American Movement, the Chicano Movement, the Women’s Movement, and the Gay Liberation Movement among others.

However, Chicago’s Rainbow Coalition was the only Black Panther Party interracial political alliance to achieve significant local success in an environment where other civil rights

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282 Williams, From the Bullet to the Ballot, 128.
283 Williams, From the Bullet to the Ballot, 73.
284 Peace and Freedom Party, Eldridge Cleaver for President! Peggy Terry for Vice President! (Los Angeles, CA: Peace and Freedom Cleaver for President Campaign, 1968), 1-6.
285 “The People and the People Alone were the Motive Force in the Making of the People’s Revolutionary Constitutional Convention Plenary Session!,” The Black Panther Community News Service, September 12, 1970.
greats like Martin Luther King Jr. had failed.\textsuperscript{286} The threat of the Rainbow Coalition to what had once seemed an unstoppable political machine demonstrated the potential of the Panthers to achieve the kind of political alliance nationally that they had in Chicago. The national party took notice and sent Bobby Lee on a speaking tour across various cities to form other Rainbow Coalitions.\textsuperscript{287} In two short years, Fred Hampton had become one of the most recognizable faces of the movement. He was promoted to Deputy Chairman of the National Black Panther Party and was in line to be put on the Central Committee as Chief of Staff. He showed a way for black power to achieve what the mainstream Civil Rights Movement had failed to do in the North—the potential for interracial alliance against the forces of discrimination, police violence, urban renewal, and political corruption.\textsuperscript{288} Given the danger that Hampton represented to established political power, it was no surprise that he found himself the target of the full force of the City of Chicago and the FBI in one of the most brutal assassinations in Black Panther Party history.

Up Against the Wall: Police Repression and the Assassination of Fred Hampton

The murder of Fred Hampton at 4:30 in the morning of December 4, 1969, was a political assassination by the Chicago police force led by State Attorney Edward V. Hanrahan with the cooperation of the FBI.\textsuperscript{289} The shootout at 2337 Monroe Street resulted from the careful planning of the raid through Hanrahan’s office, the behavior of the police officers led by Sergeant Daniel Groth, the real political danger that Fred Hampton posed to the Chicago

\textsuperscript{286} Williams, \textit{From the Bullet to the Ballot}, 126.
\textsuperscript{288} Williams, \textit{From the Bullet to the Ballot}, 164-166.
\textsuperscript{289} Haas, \textit{The Assassination of Fred Hampton}, 348.
Democratic political machine, and the imagined threat to national political order feared by FBI Director Edgar J. Hoover.

It is important to understand the murder of Fred Hampton as a political assassination because the claim of assassination framed the way that the Panthers, the FBI, the city of Chicago, various civil rights organizations, and the media reacted to the killing. The transformation of Fred Hampton’s death to assassination in the wake of the deaths of prominent leaders like Malcolm X, Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert F. Kennedy promised to elevate Hampton into a rarefied hall of martyrs of the Civil Rights Movement that were politically untouchable. The Panthers had adopted Malcolm X as their most important figurehead, often organizing events to commemorate the anniversary of his death. Huey P. Newton served as an important living symbol of the brutality of the carceral system. In this context, Hampton’s death created unique opportunity and unparalleled risk. The Panthers had lost a brilliant leader whose life had the potential to unseat the Daley political machine and make interracial politics feasible. His death could undo all of that groundwork. At the same time, a dead Fred Hampton provided hard evidence for the Panthers’ claims against the police in Chicago and nationally. Hampton’s death

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290 I don’t mean to say that these martyrs were not politically contested. They were contested fiercely. Instead, I point to their deaths as important moments that changed the discourse around these figures and led those who heroized them to make them untouchable in memory. This can have specific effects in the case of some martyrs like Martin Luther King Jr. who have become universal to the Right as well as the Left. However, in so doing, these figures lose their complexity and become flat, iconic images. For ex. See: Barry Schwartz, “Collective Forgetting and the Symbolic Power of Oneness: The Strange Apotheosis of Rosa Parks,” Social Psychology Quarterly 72.2 (2009): 123-142; Leigh Raiford, Imprisoned in a Luminous Glare: Photography and the African American Freedom Struggle (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011); ed. Renee C. Romano and Leigh Raiford, The Civil Rights Movement in American Memory (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2006); Jacqueline Dowd Hall, “The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past,” Journal of American History 91.4 (2005): 1233-1263.

gave legitimacy to the Panthers’ claims for the necessity of self-defense. If Hampton could be murdered in his sleep by police officers, then why shouldn’t black men and women arm themselves against law enforcement?292

The manner of Hampton’s death could unite a fractured Civil Rights Movement and black power movement around a single cause. His death led traditional civil rights activists to reach out to the Panthers in the aftermath.293 Opponents of the Panthers moved quickly to neutralize this threat and to cast doubt on Fred Hampton’s character and the events of the raid. Understanding Hampton’s death as a political assassination helps us see how and why the major players reacted in certain ways in its aftermath. I define political assassination as a deliberate killing carried out by the state or elements of the state to eliminate a perceived threat to established political authority. In the case of Fred Hampton, the slain Panthers’ stated antipathy to a pattern of police abuse in Chicago and to the Daley machine made him a legitimate target for political removal.294 The state’s direct involvement in his death and substantive evidence that

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293 This reaching out can be seen most clearly through SCLC’s work with the Panthers through Jesse Jackson, Ralph Abernathy’s speech at Hampton’s funeral, and the NAACP report, Search and Destroy. Abernathy at Fred Hampton’s Funeral,” *Chicago Sun Times*, December 10, 1969, 5; Roy Wilkins and Ramsey Clark, Search and Destroy: A Report by the Commission of Inquiry into the Black Panthers and the Police (New York: Metropolitan Applied Research Center, 1973); “Rev. Jesse Jackson Interview,” in Essence of Fred Hampton, 48-49.
294 The evidence of Hampton’s campaign against the police is sprinkled throughout the Black Panther newspaper in his various columns and editorials. Hampton framed police activity in Chicago in the larger context of capitalism and exploitation, much like the Panthers’ other writings. Hampton’s life and death was caught up in the issue of police brutality. Police arrests of Masai Hewitt and Bobby Seale in Chicago brought Hampton officially into the Party when he offered bail support. The issue of brutality also shaped the work that Hampton was doing in the Rainbow Coalition. Before his death, Hampton was putting together a proposal for community control of police, an issue later taken up by the Illinois Chapter of the BPP in 1972, several years after Hampton envisioned its debut. Balto, Occupied Territory, 225, 228, 251-252; Bobby Rush Interview, in Essence of Fred Hampton, 52; Hampton, “Chicago Panthers Busted,” Black Panther Community News Service, May 4, 1969, 6; “The Chicago Ice Cream Frame Up,” Black Panther Community News Service, June 7, 1969, 7; Fred Hampton, “Fred’s News Service,” Black Panther Community News Service, June 28, 1969, 9; Fred Hampton, “Letter from a Political Prisoner,” Black Panther Community News Service, June 28, 1969, 14.
police went to Hampton’s apartment expecting to eliminate him makes the raid a political assassination.295

The man directly responsible for Fred Hampton’s death, aside from the actual officers involved in the raid, was State Attorney Edward V. Hanrahan. Hanrahan made his career as a dogged federal prosecutor who was billed as “tough on crime” and was once thought to be the handpicked and natural successor of Richard J. Daley before his career was derailed by the death of Fred Hampton.296 Hanrahan had a reputation for being tough on organized crime. After serving as the United States Attorney for the Northern District of Illinois, he was elected as the State Attorney for Cook County by a landslide—taking both the black and white vote.297 Hanrahan’s involvement in the raid raised troubling questions about corruption in Chicago’s machine and collusion between the mayor’s office and the police force to eliminate political and racial threats within the city. Although Hanrahan has never admitted to knowingly ordering the assassination of Fred Hampton, his actions before, during, and after the raid suggest that Hanrahan not only expected the raid to lead to the death of Fred Hampton, but that he did so with the tacit approval of Richard J. Daley and the assistance of the FBI.298 Moreover, the evidence points to the fact that Hanrahan expected the press to bow to political pressure and support the police’s side of the story. When the press questioned his narrative in a news conference, he

295 Multiple official reports heavily imply that this might be the case and the appellate brief points to memos sent by the FBI taking credit for the raid to justify spending on O’Neal. See specifically: Wilkins and Clark, Search and Destroy; Flint Taylor and Jeffrey Haas, “Hampton v. Hanrahan 600F 2d 600 Appellate Brief,” People’s Law Office, Accessed March 15, 2019, https://peopleslawoffice.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/Hampton.7th-Cir-Brief.pdf.
296 Hanrahan’s “tough on crime” appeal was both local and national because of the context of Nixon’s campaign and the national fallout from the 1968 DNC riots. Moreover, “tough on crime” and “Law and Order” were politics adopted by Daley in the 1960s as part of an effort to reform the corrupt CPD. Michelle Alexander, The New Jim Crow, 46; Balto, Occupied Territory, 196.
298 Taylor and Haas make clear that they strongly suspected Daley’s involvement. However, they were unable to prove it. Taylor, The Torture Machine, 322.
reacted belligerently, claiming that they made “irresponsible statements that undermined public confidence in law enforcement.”

The argument for the assassination being a joint venture planned by the FBI and executed by the police rests on the lynchpin of William O’Neal, the FBI informant who provided the information that led to Hampton’s death. The FBI recruited O’Neal as a teenage informant when he stole a car with some friends and went joyriding. He and his friends crashed the car and abandoned the site on foot. A couple months later, FBI agent Roy Mitchell showed up on O’Neal’s doorstep with a deal—O’Neal would infiltrate the Illinois Chapter of the Black Panther Party in exchange for dropping his carjacking case. O’Neal worked his way into the trusted circle of Hampton’s closest advisors and was in charge of security for the Black Panther Party—a position that he used to funnel information and create dissension in the ranks on the orders of the FBI’s COINTELPRO surveillance program. It was in this capacity as informant and head of security for Fred Hampton that O’Neal provided the FBI with a detailed map layout of the apartment at 2337 West Monroe Street. Police and the FBI would use the information provided by O’Neal to plan the raid that killed Hampton. O’Neal also gave testimony to the FBI that the Panthers kept a stockpile of weapons at the house. Based on this information, the FBI tipped off Edward V. Hanrahan who arranged a search warrant. In the immediate aftermath of the

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299 Mike Gray, *Murder of Fred Hampton.*
300 Flint Taylor and Jeffrey Haas, “Hampton v. Hanrahan 600F 2d 600 Appellate Brief.”
301 Eyes on the Prize Interviews, “Interview with William O’Neal,” Washington University Libraries, Film and Media Archive, Henry Hampton Collection, Retrieved June 20, 2018,
http://digital.wustl.edu/e/eii/eiweb/one5427.1047.125williamo'neal.html
302 As the Appellate brief details, O’Neal’s handler, Mitchell, first tried to give the diagram of the apartment to the Gang Intelligence Unit to plan a raid. When the GIU refused to do so, Mitchell went to Hanrahan. What this evidence shows is that the FBI specifically targeted Hampton for elimination, and tried to hide its involvement by working through various CPD units. Taylor and Haas, *Hampton v. Hanrahan 600F 2d 600 Appellate Brief, 23-25.*
raid, the Panthers were not aware of FBI involvement, but Hanrahan’s office certainly was and that inside knowledge shaped Hanrahan’s decision to go on the attack in the media.

Despite denials later made to the media and in court, the fourteen police officers led by Sergeant Groth knew ahead of time that they were going to a Black Panther apartment or “pad” and they brought their own personal weapons to the raid, including a fully automatic sub-machine gun held by Officer Joe Gorman. The officers chose the early morning hours of December 4, 1969, because they knew that the Panthers would be asleep and they would have a high likelihood of catching them by surprise. What followed when the officers got to the apartment has been endlessly debated; however, the established facts are that police charged into the apartment and started shooting. They shot anywhere from 82 to 99 bullets according to an official FBI report released in 1970. Only one shot could have come from a Panther weapon, and that was most likely discharged by Mark Clark in a death spasm when police fatally shot him upon entry into the apartment. Police shot Brenda Harris and opened fire with a machine gun into the bedroom where Fred Hampton slept with three other Panthers, including Deborah Johnson, Hampton’s fiancée, who was eight months pregnant.

After failing to rouse Hampton despite the gunfire, Johnson threw herself on top of him. In the aftermath, officers pulled Johnson away from Hampton’s body; he was still alive. According to Johnson’s testimony, one of the officers said, “He’ll barely make it, but he’s breathing.” In response, an officer, either identified as Edward Carmody or Gorman, put two

304 Wilkins and Clark, Search and Destroy, 36.
306 Wilkins and Clark, Search and Destroy, 134-136.
shotgun blasts through Hampton’s head and replied, “Not anymore.”

In photographs taken of the aftermath of the raid, the fourteen officers can be seen smiling and looking congratulatory as they carried Hampton’s prone body from the apartment. The choice of weapons, the number of shots fired, and the set up for the raid all point toward a deliberate plan to attack and take out the leadership of the Illinois Chapter of the Black Panther Party. Police shot with no regard for human life and they did not give notice before firing.

Immediately following the raid, Edward V. Hanrahan announced its success to great fanfare. In a special television broadcast, Hanrahan painted the Panthers as “extremely vicious” and claimed that they had only miraculously escaped with no police casualties or injuries. In actuality, two of the officers had been shot—by friendly fire. Hanrahan played on established, mainstream stereotypes of Panthers as cop killers when he gestured at a stack of confiscated Panther weapons displayed in front of him. He claimed that when police officers asked for a ceasefire, the Panthers insisted that they “shoot it out.”

Finally, Sergeant Daniel Groth declared that, “There must have been six or seven of them firing. The firing must have gone on ten or twelve minutes. If two hundred shots were exchanged that was nothing.”

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307 “Interview with Deborah Johnson,” in Mike Gray, The Murder of Fred Hampton; Although Johnson in her interviews stated that Gorman was the one to pull the trigger, the story’s veracity cannot be conclusively established in other sources because the officers who testified in the trial were reticent about Hampton’s actual death. At least one officer, Ciszewski said that Gorman had burst into the bedroom and fired a round of shots, suggesting that Gorman was the one who fired the bullet that killed Hampton. We also know that Gorman was the one wielding the machine gun in the apartment. Despite his critical role in a raid that cost the City of Chicago millions of dollars in legal fees and reparations, Gorman remained a “celebrated” officer on the force and was one of the officers later implicated in the John Burge police torture cases: Roy Wilkins and Ramsey Clark, Search and Destroy, 129, 134, 136; Flint Taylor, Conversation with Author, October 30, 2019.


309 Wilkins, Search and Destroy, 4-5.

310 “Interview with Edward V. Hanrahan,” in Mike Gray, The Murder of Fred Hampton.


312 “Interview with Edward V. Hanrahan,” in Mike Gray, The Murder of Fred Hampton.

The State Attorney’s office and the Chicago Police Department followed a narrative already well established in Chicago and in the national mainstream media conversation. The Panthers were a terrorist group who killed police officers and hated white people in general. This message received official, public support. The director of the FBI had boldly declared in July of that year that the “Black Panthers were the greatest internal threat to national security.” These were strong words about an organization that had only 5,000 members at its peak.314 That statement by Hoover functioned as a public declaration of war on the Black Panther Party. It gave implicit approval for local police departments to increase harassment and infiltration of various chapters.315 While the Panthers at the time did not realize the extent to which the full power of the FBI and state authorities had been rallied against them, they did perceive that repression had increased, especially after the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. in 1968. In the year before Hampton’s assassination, several high profile murders of Black Panthers had occurred—including the deaths of Bobby Hutton, Alprentice “Bunchy” Carter, and John Huggins. Although members of US Organization killed Carter and Huggins, the Panthers suspected involvement by law enforcement. Those beliefs proved to be well-founded when COINTELPRO documents provided a link between the FBI and the murders at UCLA.316 The imprisonment of Huey P. Newton and the international exile of Eldridge and Kathleen Cleaver

added to the score.\textsuperscript{317} Speaking from the apartment in the aftermath of the raid, Rush directly blamed Hoover for the attack.\textsuperscript{318}

A strong counter narrative of the Black Panthers as victims of overzealous and hateful police repression developed alongside the increase in confrontations with law enforcement. Perhaps the most compelling example of police overreach and Black Panther martyrdom occurred in the city of Chicago just barely a month before the death of Fred Hampton. During the 1968 Democratic National Convention (DNC), New Left and anti-war protests became violent when Chicago police turned their bully sticks, tear gas, and paddy wagons on protestors. The aftermath divided a nation. The media roundly criticized the Chicago police and the Daley political machine for dragging bloodied protesters into paddy wagons on national television. The government-issued “Walker Report” even called what had happened a “Police Riot.”\textsuperscript{319} Nevertheless, the national fallout from the scandal swung a close presidential election in favor of Richard Nixon and his call for “Law and Order.”\textsuperscript{320}

A bizarre coda to the 1968 Democratic National Convention protests occurred when the state handed out convictions for the legendary “Chicago Eight,” who it accused of inciting a riot at the DNC.\textsuperscript{321} Among the defendants was Bobby Seale, the co-founder of the Black Panther Party. He appeared in court on October 29, 1969, gagged and bound before the judge. The searing image of a black man being literally silenced in a court of law called into question the

\textsuperscript{317} These political events are well documented in many places. For a succinct summary, please see Waldo and Martin, \textit{Black Against Empire}, 199-246.


The process of justice in the United States. Various national as well as Black Panther allied newspapers published court drawings of the scene with outraged headlines. The assassination of Fred Hampton and Mark Clark occurred in this explosive atmosphere. Coupled with Hampton’s rising star as a national leader of the Black Panther Party, the case surrounding his death became the overwhelming obsession of the Illinois chapter of the Black Panther Party.

In the immediate aftermath of the assassination, none of the Black Panthers could have predicted the way that Fred Hampton’s death would define the Illinois chapter and the national Black Panther Party. The national party used the assassination of Fred Hampton to successfully cast doubt on official police narratives of confrontations that ended in Black Panther deaths or imprisonment. However, the scale of the scandal ended up marking out the assassination as exceptional rather than representative of Panther confrontations with police. The subsequent Federal Grand Jury, criminal prosecution, and civil cases against the city of Chicago and Edward V. Hanrahan absorbed Party and media resources to the point where the other organizing activities of the Illinois chapter became eclipsed. The Panthers fought valiantly

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323 Despite the media circus around Fred Hampton’s death, the Party did attempt to move on through its organizing work. Bobby Rush was instrumental to leadership and his legacy in the city included fighting against slum housing, a bussing program to local prisons, the continued operation of a successful “Free Breakfast for Children” program that fed 3,000 children a day at its peak, and the opening of a free medical clinic on the city’s West Side. The Illinois Black Panther Party drew on the strength of the Rainbow Coalition to unseat Hanrahan in 1972. It also launched a campaign of reform in Cairo, Illinois after the local city government allied with the White Citizens Council targeted black communities with violence and repression following years of unrest. In 1973, Bobby Rush helped organize a conference in Chicago calling for community control of police to honor Hampton’s legacy. The conference was organized by The BPP with help from Operation PUSH led by Jesse Jackson Sr. and it brought together speakers like Bobby Seale, Fannie Lou Hamer, Dick Gregory, and Dr. Benjamin Spock. Nevertheless, in the public eye, the Illinois BPP continued to be associated almost exclusively with Hampton’s legacy. “On the Battlefield in Cairo, Illinois,” The Black Panther Communal News Service, November 14, 1970, 1; “No Hands for Hanrahan!” The Black Panther Communal News Service, January 15, 1972, 1; “Chicago Illinois Chapter First Program to Own a Bus for Prison Program,” The Black Panther Communal News Service, June 17, 1972, 2, 13; “Chicago Community Control of Police Conference: A Resounding Success,” The Black Panther Communal News Service, June 9, 1973, 1, 3, 14; Williams, From the Bullet to the Ballot, 191-199; Williams, Body and Soul, 109.
to make the Fred Hampton case representative of all murdered Panthers nationwide. However, the politics of Daley’s Chicago paired with a government-sponsored cover-up, overwhelming evidence of police overreach, court corruption, and the thirteen-year fight for justice made Fred Hampton a singular figure, more defined by the circumstances of his extraordinary death than his extraordinary life.

Offin’ the Pig: the Panthers’ Counter-Case and the Media Blitz

Almost as soon as Hanrahan held his televised press conference where he claimed that police officers had engaged in a shoot-out with the Panthers, cracks in his story began to appear. At this crucial juncture, the Panthers’ allies among more conservative and mainstream elements of the African American community helped establish the Panthers’ counter-narrative and the duplicity of the police. Lutrelle “Lu” F. Palmer II, a black activist and journalist who had written for the Chicago Daily News pushed the editors of the newspaper to visit 2337 Monroe Street and obtain the Panthers’ side of the story. The afternoon edition of the Chicago Daily News six days after the raid relied on an account provided by deputy-chairman Bobby Rush. Rush had taken the reporter on a tour of the apartment to prove that all the bullet holes aligned with police-fired shots while none indicated that the Panthers inside had shot back. The testimony of Rush and the physical evidence led to involvement from various black state senators, city of Maywood officials including the mayor and several members of the city council, and the NAACP. In a strongly worded letter to the Attorney General, the NAACP demanded an

327 Mike Gray, Murder of Fred Hampton.
independent civil rights investigation and promised that it would not stand by a “modern-day lynching.” Three factors led to the early breakthrough of police malfeasance in the Fred Hampton case: the overwhelming evidence that the police story of the raid didn’t add up, Hampton’s good reputation with a range of activists, and the support of local/national politicians and newspapers for Fred Hampton.

Perhaps the biggest mistake that the police made after the raid was their failure to secure the crime scene. The Panthers had access to it the morning following and upon the advice of their lawyers, they documented the state of the entire apartment using photography, video, and forensics. In a stunning video released to local news, the Black Panthers took cameras inside the apartment and filmed graphic displays of the blood stains, bullet holes, and bloodied mattress where Hampton had slept. In addition, the Panthers brought the public into the apartment by holding tours that allowed people to see the scene and judge the evidence against the police report for themselves. Bobby Rush estimated that in the aftermath of Fred Hampton’s assassination, as many as 25,000 community members toured the apartment. Finally, the Panthers publicized images of the interior in their nationally distributed Black Panther Party Community News Service and in other newspapers to promulgate their side of the story.

Crucially, the Black Panther Party’s decision to be open and transparent about the shooting played well for the media and the black community of Chicago. These parties rallied to the support of Hampton when they could have chosen to abandon the Panthers as too dangerous

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328 “Telegram to AG,” FBI Fred Hampton 44-HQ 44202 Section 1, 28.
329 Mike Gray, Murder of Fred Hampton.
to touch. In an article for the *New York Times*, John Kifner described the atmosphere of locals touring the apartment:

The crowds were a cross section of the black community: workmen in paint-stained clothes, angry young men and women, elderly people, middle-aged women in flowered hats, people in coats and ties and others in Army jackets, a smattering of whites...The reaction was particularly strong when people gathered around the blood stained mattress in the bedroom where Hampton died. “They killed him when he was asleep, he never had a chance,” was the response of a middle-aged woman.332

Fred Hampton’s ability to cross traditional political boundaries and forge alliances in life served him well in death. While mainstream political leaders had carefully tiptoed around supporting the Panthers with their other high profile martyrs, they threw their support behind Hampton within the first couple of days of his death because of the glaring inconsistencies of the police report and because of his ability to cross tightly drawn lines in the Civil Rights Movement and the larger umbrella of New Left social movements. Hampton had marched with King during the CFM and worked with NAACP leaders when addressing issues of racism at Proviso East High School where he was a student.333 On December 7, 1969, a young Jesse Jackson gave a televised sermon where he used an early version of his “I am somebody” speech. Although no evidence exists to support an explicit connection, Jackson’s speech paralleled Hampton’s “I am a Revolutionary” speech, suggesting that Jackson’s words might be an early example of mainstream adoption of Hampton’s legacy. More importantly, Jesse Jackson expressed solidarity with the Black Panther Party and Fred Hampton. Putting his arm around Bobby Rush,

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333 Iberia Hampton interview and William Hampton interview, in *Essence of Fred Hampton*, 2-4.
the new leader of the Illinois Chapter, Jesse Jackson declared, “If it happened to Fred, it could happen to us.”

Black leaders repeated these sentiments at Hampton’s funeral where Reverend Ralph Abernathy, leader of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and Martin Luther King Jr.’s right hand man, gave a eulogy in front of thousands of mourners where he declared, “If they can do this to the Black Panthers today, who will they do it to tomorrow?...We’re going to take up your torch Fred. Though my fight will be nonviolent, it will be militant. There will be no peace in this land.” The presence of Abernathy at Hampton’s funeral lent political legitimacy to the Panthers and showed how the young man had made an impression not only on the black power movement, but on traditionalist organizations like SCLC and the NAACP. In 1969, SCLC was in its own stage of transition following the death of King and rise of more black power aligned ministers both within its ranks and outside, like the Rev. Jesse Jackson Sr., Fr. George Clements, and Fr. Earl A. Neil. It tentatively reached out to the Black Panther Party in 1969 as it worked to find a new balance of activism in the black power era.

Just as importantly, the Black Panther Party got the endorsements and support from the local black elite and an older generation of activists in pursuing the case. A.A. Raynor, the

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334 Quoted in Haas, *Assassination of Fred Hampton*, 98.
336 The Panthers collaborated with a number of clergy during the late 1960s and 1970s. Among their most stalwart allies were Father George Clements and Father Earl A. Neil from Chicago and Oakland respectively. Father Neil testified as a character witness at Bobby Seale’s trial in New Haven and in Chicago as well as for Huey P. Newton. George Clements spoke at Hampton’s funeral and directly provided refuge for Bobby Rush when he was on the run from police in the immediate aftermath of Hampton’s death. The Panthers had a much more contentious relationship with SCLC associated ministers with Ralph Abernathy and Jesse Jackson Sr. being both objects of praise and derision at various times. Murch, *Living for the City*, 172-173; Haas, *The Assassination of Fred Hampton*, 108-109; Father George Clements, interviewed by Larry Crowe, March 13, 2003, The HistoryMakers Digital Archive; Joyce Harris, “Bootlicking Jesse,” *Black Panther Community News Service*, 1970, 4; “Excerpts from an Interview with Reverend Jesse Jackson on Electoral Politics,” *Black Panther Community News Service*, 1971, 15.
famous black funeral home owner who had managed Emmett Till’s funeral in 1955, arranged
Hampton’s funeral and performed a private autopsy. That examination found the presence of
barbiturates in Hampton’s blood, showing that he was drugged at the time of his death.337 Other
allies who came out of the woodwork included the mayor and trustees of the city of Maywood.338
Hampton had not always had a happy relationship with the city of Maywood, having been
arrested in his high school years. However, his passion and willingness to engage in dialogue
had impressed local politicians. The mayor and board of trustees for the city joined the call for
an investigation.339 The following year, Maywood even named its newly opened pool after Fred
Hampton, in a direct challenge to the city of Chicago’s portrayal of its native son.340

The Black Panther Party also reached out to members of the Afro-American Patrolman’s
League (AAPL) for support. Policeman Edward “Buzz” Palmer pushed the organization to take
a strong position on the Hampton case because of its own stated stance against police brutality.
Although Palmer claimed the organization was originally hesitant to do so, Renault Robinson,
speaking officially for the AAPL, came out strongly for the Black Panther Party after touring
Fred Hampton’s apartment.341 The AAPL contributed behind the scenes when Robinson was
able to get one of the black policemen involved in the raid to talk off-the-record about what

Roy Wilkins and Ramsay Clark, Search and Destroy: A Report by the Commission of Inquiry into the Black
Panthers and the Police (New York: Metropolitan Applied Research Center, 1971), 158-177. This claim that
Hampton had been drugged became a central point of contention in the inquiries and lawsuits after his death. His
lawyers and family held up the issue of drugging as incontrovertible proof that the police had meant to kill Hampton
during the raid. The state and its allies disputed the validity of the claim by pointing at their own autopsy reports
that did not find the presence of barbiturates. However, as Wilkins and Clark point out, the official testing occurred
months after Hampton’s death, when any drugs in his blood would have naturally decayed.
338 “Paul Wade Interview,” The Essence of Fred Hampton, 6-7.
339 Haas, Assassination of Fred Hampton, 99.
340 Michael Romain, “Remembering Fred Hampton’s Fight to Swim 45 Years Later,” Village Free Press, accessed
May 30, 2019, https://thevillagefreepress.org/2015/06/24/remembering-fred-hampton-fight-to-swim-45-years-
later/.
really happened in the apartment. This testimony could not be used in court against Hanrahan and the city of Chicago, but it helped confirm the suspicions of those black activists still on the fence that the police had overreached in their attack.\textsuperscript{342}

The outpouring of support for an investigation into Fred Hampton’s death did not mean \textit{carte blanche} support for the Party. The Black Panther Party was hesitant to trust the Justice Department to carry out an independent and unbiased civil rights investigation because it expected animosity from the federal government as well as possible involvement from the FBI. The Panthers did not want to give over control of the crime scene to the FBI crime lab, and a public dispute about who owned the space of 2337 Monroe Street took place on December 17, 1969, with the Panthers publicly complaining that the FBI, CIA, and local police had taken over the crime scene and were refusing admittance to Black Panther Party members.\textsuperscript{343}

The Panthers’ more conservative allies, such as SCLC, the NAACP, and local black officials, were less willing to openly question state authority.\textsuperscript{344} Daley-aligned, black Illinois State Senator Charles Chew Jr. took a personal trip to Washington, D.C. to demand an investigation, but carefully noted that he found the Panthers’ suspicion of the Justice Department to be paranoid and that all he demanded was a full, independent investigation.\textsuperscript{345} The measured support that the Party gained from these individuals and organizations served to divorce Fred Hampton from the Party. He became a martyr for a larger Civil Rights Movement, and the

\textsuperscript{343} “Memo dated December 19, 1969,” FBI Fred Hampton 44-HQ-44202 Section 2.
\textsuperscript{344} The NAACP was content to let the Grand Jury to run its course until it failed to return indictments while seemingly strongly condemning the actions of the police. The failure of the Grand Jury to indict the police officers involved in Hampton’s death was the impetus of the NAACP’s \textit{Search and Destroy} report. Roy Wilkins and Ramsey Clark, \textit{Search and Destroy}, vii-xii.
\textsuperscript{345} “Conversation with Illinois State Senator Charles Chew Jr., December 89, 1969,” FBI Fred Hampton 44-HQ-44202 Section 1.
interest of other political entities meant that the Panthers lost full control of the narrative among the larger activist coalition that formed around Hampton’s death.\footnote{346 I think this shift in Hampton becoming a martyr for more than the Black Panther Party can most clearly be seen in the eulogy given by Ralph Abernathy and the subsequent report into his death released by the NAACP. “Abernathy at Fred Hampton’s Funeral,” \textit{Chicago Sun Times}, December 10, 1969, 5; Wilkins and Clark, \textit{Search and Destroy}, vii-xii.}

As the case continued to garner national attention, it began to detract from the Black Panther Party rather than to give it momentum. In 1970 and 1971, most news articles coming out of Chicago in the \textit{Black Panther Community News Service} focused either on Hampton’s death or rumors of dissension—either within the Panther ranks or between the Panthers and members of the Rainbow Coalition. The newspaper had to print denials that the Illinois Chapter was fighting with National Headquarters and the Young Lords Organization respectively. These articles reiterated the Panther commitment to unity while lashing out at the media for false reporting.\footnote{347 “Statement by the Young Lords Party,” \textit{Black Panther Community News Service}, 1971; “Illinois BPP refutes Lie by News Media,” \textit{Black Panther Community News Service}, April 18, 1970, 6.} Rumors of dissension were most likely spread by FBI COINTELPRO and other state infiltrators. Together, they significantly hampered the Panthers’ organizational ability.\footnote{348 The scale and exact effects of FBI COINTELPRO on the Black Panthers has been widely debated. Most sources agree that it caused confusion and conflict, but cannot decide what was natural dissension and what was sowed by the FBI. That same uncertainty has seeped its way into oral histories and memoirs of BPP veterans. This is because the true scale of COINTELPRO’s operation remains unknown. Pearson, \textit{Shadow of the Panther}; Martin and Bloom, \textit{Black Against Empire}, 200-203; Robyn Spencer, \textit{The Revolution Has Come: Black Power, Gender, and the Black Panther Party in Oakland} (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 82-113; Ericka Huggins, Interview by Fiona Thompson, 2007, Oral History Center, the Bancroft Library, University of California: Berkeley, California; Ericka Huggins, Interview by Cheryl Dong, Phone Interview, December 12, 2018.} Problems with Party unity continued and it was not until 1972 that Rush resurrected Hampton’s campaign for community control of police.\footnote{349 For examples of the Panthers being put on the defense, see various news articles: “Statement by the Young Lords Party,” \textit{Black Panther Community News Service}, 1971; “Prison Bulletin, 1970,” \textit{Black Panther Community News Service}, December 1970; “Illinois BPP Refutes Lie by News Media,” \textit{Black Panther Community News Service}, April 18, 1970, 6; “The Spirits of Fred Hampton and Mark Clark Lives!” \textit{Black Panther Community News Service}, November 28, 1970, 3; “Save the Illinois 16,” \textit{Black Panther Community News Service}, April 11, 1970, 9, 17; Balto, \textit{Occupied Territory}, 225, 252-254; Williams, \textit{From the Bullet to the Ballot}, 191-193.} Between 1970 and 1972, the Illinois Chapter seemed to focus most of its on-the-ground organizing campaigns in Cairo, Illinois, only
mentioning Chicago in relation to the ongoing legal saga around the deaths of Hampton and Clark. Moreover, the involvement of Fred Hampton’s family as the major claimants in the civil suits added further conflicts of interest for the Panthers.

In December 1969, none of these conflicts of interest were clear to the Black Panther Party. The most pressing issue was to gain justice for Fred Hampton and shed light on the circumstances of the murder. Moreover, the scrutiny of the press seemed to bring unprecedented attention and bolster donations as well as support. In the two years following Hampton’s death, it made sense that the Illinois Chapter focused much of its energies into the criminal and civil cases for justice. The media attention and outpouring of public support made it easy for the Illinois Chapter to believe that it was reaching new heights. In actuality, it began to decline in membership and community support while Fred Hampton’s star continued to rise. As more evidence of Hampton’s assassination came out in the media, the Panthers’ narrative of martyrdom seemed to be vindicated. However, it was exactly because Hampton’s death was assassination, rather than incidental homicide, that the case grew outside of the control of the Black Panther Party.

An important reason for the media scrutiny into Fred Hampton’s murder was the behavior of State Attorney Edward V. Hanrahan as the police case against Fred Hampton began to unravel. On December 11, 1969, Hanrahan gave an exclusive interview to the Chicago Tribune, widely regarded as the most conservative newspaper in the city. Using carefully chosen

351 Haas, Assassination of Fred Hampton.  
352 Williams, From the Bullet to the Ballot, 191-196.
photographs of the apartment, Hanrahan attempted to prove that the Panthers had fired the first shot. Unfortunately for Hanrahan, the photographs he submitted on December 11, 1969 turned out to be doctored, with one particular photograph of “bullet holes” found to be actually a blown up photograph of a nail head, a fact reported just a day later on December 12, 1969.

To follow up his Chicago Tribune exclusive, Hanrahan created a television special that aired the same night on CBS news. His office had hired carpenters to build a set of the apartment and officers supposedly re-enacted the events of the raid for the camera. However, since officers disagreed about the events of the raid, they shot five hours of footage, including outtakes that challenged the official story of what happened, for a twenty-eight minute television spot. This footage later became a crucial piece of support for the defense in the various court cases against the city of Chicago and Hanrahan during the Grand Jury Inquest and the civil lawsuit. When reporters questioned Hanrahan about these inconsistencies, he lashed back by saying that it was “incredible and insulting to suggest or charge that there had been a murder of black persons by black police officers.” He dismissed further questions by saying they were irrelevant. Hanrahan miscalculated. Instead of seeming the authoritative executor of justice, his combative attitude toward the press only raised suspicions and opened the door for his opponents to question his narrative.

Hanrahan’s publicity blitz, the inconsistencies of the police story, and the support of mainstream politicians outside of the Black Panther Party set the stage for a long drawn out court

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356 “Bullet Holes were Nail Heads,” Chicago Sun Times, December 18, 1969; Haas, The Assassination of Fred Hampton, 105; Actual footage of the Hanrahan re-enactment can be seen in: Mike Gray, The Murder of Fred Hampton; Tayor and Haas, “Hampton v. Hanrahan 600F 2d 600 Appellate Brief.”
358 Mike Gray, The Murder of Fred Hampton.
process, one that would take thirteen years to settle. The fight for justice actually outlived the Illinois Chapter of the Black Panther Party, which officially became defunct in 1974. Still, the death of Fred Hampton opened up new avenues for the Panthers. The public inquiry into police malfeasance and public loss of trust in Chicago’s city government seemed to justify their stance on police brutality. The Panthers had an opportunity in early 1970 to turn the energy and outrage generated by Hampton’s assassination into energy for the party.

When the dust finally settled in 1982, the city of Chicago paid a settlement of $1.85 million dollars divided among the nine defendants, including the families of Fred Hampton and Mark Clark. It is not the purpose of this dissertation to go through all the details of that fight, but it is important to note the effects of these trials and the evidence presented in shaping how we remember Fred Hampton’s life as overshadowed by his death. The interest of federal judges in protecting the city government and the CPD shaped both the course of the criminal and civil trial. The civil trial of Fred Hampton had the potential to shake the foundation of public trust in the justice system. The danger and the potential of Fred Hampton’s death to make a movement meant that his death would be fought over for decades. It ensured that the dust would never be settled and that his legacy would continue to be contested. Only through casting doubt on every part of the narrative could the threat of Hampton’s death be contained. From the perspective of the criminal justice system, the process of the trials provided the perfect opportunity to do so and to dissipate the dangerous energy that his assassination provided for the

359 Jakobi Williams, *From the Bullet to the Ballot*, 192.
361 A full narrative of the legal travails of Fred Hampton’s defense team can be found in Haas, *The Assassination of Fred Hampton*. However, a more cogent summary can be found in Flint and Taylor, “Hampton v. Hanrahan 600 F 2d 600 Appellate Brief.”
Black Panther Party. The following section looks briefly at the most contested aspects of the Grand Jury and civil suits.

Stonewalling: The Long Legal Fight for Justice

The experience of the Federal Grand Jury in the civil rights violation trial was indicative of the stakes, the bias, and the debate that would consume the legacy of Fred Hampton in the decade following his death. The fight for justice would be profoundly personal and fracture the survivors into sparring camps. Most importantly, the legal tribulations suffered by Hampton’s lawyers and family would serve to undermine the public legitimacy of Hampton. Like many highly politicized and racialized court cases, Fred Hampton’s murder became as much a character trial as a fight for justice, and the city’s attorney and the judge used the Panthers’ reputation to cast doubts on every aspect of the case. The fallout from the constant media scrutiny had two wide-ranging effects for Hampton’s memory legacy. The first effect was to narrow it to his death and the fight for justice. This was an unexpected but unsurprising result of the many trials that consumed the courts and media for over a decade. The second effect was to problematize Fred Hampton as a figure worthy of martyrdom. While he continued to be a martyr for the Panther faithful and those dedicated to the black freedom movement, the civil case thrust

362 The initial case for the civil suit was brought by the families of Mark Clark, Fred Hampton, and Deborah Johnson as well as other Panthers involved in the shootout including “Doc” Satchel Harold Bell, Blair Anderson, and Louis Truelock. Over the course of the case, disagreements between those involved meant that various people sought other legal representation. A fact that is obliquely referred to in Haas’s book. Haas, The Assassination of Fred Hampton, 312-313.
363 This was a fact carefully used by the Panthers in supporting Mike Gray’s documentary, The Murder of Fred Hampton. Although it had a limited release in the U.S., it attracted significant national media attention, with a NYT review saying, “The evidence, both verbal and at the scene of the slayings, forces an impartial viewer to question the official version. Whether “murder” is the official word for the case seems a moot point.” Roger Ebert for the Chicago Sun-Times even interviewed the director, Mike Gray, obliquely criticizing Chicago’s muted reception to the film. Mike Gray, The Murder of Fred Hampton; A. H. Weiler, “The Murder of Fred Hampton,” New York Times, October 5, 1971; Roger Ebert, “Interview with Mike Gray,” Chicago Sun-Times, October 11, 1971.
his supposed black criminality to the forefront for his detractors and denied him the respectability and unquestionability of his status as a movement hero.

The failure of the Federal Grand Jury in the Fred Hampton case set the tone for how the courts, the media, and Fred Hampton’s supporters would deal with the ramifications of his death. Demand for a Federal Grand Jury trial crested with initial media attention and the Justice Department sent investigators to Chicago within a week of the 2337 Monroe Street raid. On the surface, the Federal Grand Jury seemed to be the proper carriage of justice for many civil rights groups, which tended to trust federal courts when local courts failed to deliver justice. Federal courts had handed down landmark decisions that had slowly chipped away at the foundations of legalized segregation. While state courts had failed to prosecute blatant cases of murder and/or rape, including the cases of Emmett Till and Recy Taylor, the Panthers had hope that federal courts would render a different judgment. However, the media and the Panthers both raised questions about the federal government’s ability to handle the Hampton case fairly due to irregularities that emerged in the Justice Department.

On December 15, 1969, Tom Stretter and NBC newsman Ted Ebert prepared a news statement that questioned why the Justice Department had bypassed Ausa Thomas N. Todd, who was the head of the special civil rights unit in the U.S. Attorney’s office in Chicago, when assigning a Special Prosecutor to the case. Todd was a well known and respected prosecutor in

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364 “Memo to Director: FBI from Jerris Leonard, Assistant Attorney General, Civil Rights Division, December 1, 1969, FBI Fred Hampton 44-HQ-44202 Section 1.
367 Haas, Assassination of Fred Hampton, 123.
the black community and many black leaders had wanted him to lead the Grand Jury. His sideling should have caused significant outrage and media attention. The case went to U.S. attorney Jerris Leonard, who had been in charge of the Bobby Seale case where the Panther had been bound and gagged in court a year earlier. Leonard was a Nixon appointee and loyal enforcer of the president’s “Law and Order” politics—so much so that the president promoted Leonard to be the assistant attorney general for the Civil Rights Division. The Panthers had also heard from sources within the ACLU that Leonard had made statements like, “The Panthers are a bunch of hoodlums” and “we need to get them.” In a later interview conducted in 1989, Leonard had this to say about the Panthers: “there is no doubt in my mind...the Black Panther Party had a lot of people...who were simply-stated law-violators...they were caching weapons, they were committing other, other types and kinds of crimes,” However, the decision received very little coverage in the mainstream media, with only publications in the underground press picking up on it. One reason for this media silence may have been pressure from the FBI. The news statement prepared by NBC was “delayed” by the FBI, which had a history of using its established relationships with journalists to influence stories to its benefit.

From the beginning, collusion between the Justice Department and the FBI compromised the Federal Grand Jury. These entities cooperated to protect the reputation of the integrity of the federal government and the city of Chicago. While it is unclear how much the Justice Department knew about the complicity of the FBI in the raid on 2337 Monroe Street, it knew the

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368 NR 019 CG Code, FBI Fred Hampton 44-HQ-44202 Section 1.
370 Haas, *The Assassination of Fred Hampton*, 123.
372 NR 019 CG Code, FBI Fred Hampton 44-HQ-44202, Section 1.
case was a “political football” that would require careful handling. What is known is that the city of Chicago made a deal with the Justice Department where the Federal Grand Jury would not return indictments against the police officers in exchange for the release of the Panthers still held in custody in the Fred Hampton case.\textsuperscript{373} The COINTELPRO file on Fred Hampton revealed numerous communiques between the U.S. Attorney’s Office and the FBI in how to handle the minutiae of the case. While the Justice Department demanded a full investigation of the evidence, it entrusted the FBI with conducting witness interviews and reviewing the physical and ballistics data from the raid.\textsuperscript{374} Later evidence showed that the police witnesses had been coached by lawyers who had shared the interrogation questions with the defendants beforehand and that officers had read each other’s testimony.\textsuperscript{375} The Justice system stacked the deck against the Black Panther Party from the beginning and the Panthers suspected as much. The challenge was to convince the public that the very institutions designed to ensure justice were unable to do so in this case.

The Black Panthers tried to cast doubt on the Federal Grand Jury trial in two ways: first by refusing to cooperate with the FBI and the Justice Department, and second by holding a trial of their own for Fred Hampton. While these actions helped rile up the Black Panther Party’s base supporters, it alienated their erstwhile mainstream allies. The media allies of the FBI used these actions to portray the Black Panther Party as beset by fringe elements and paranoia. On December 19, 1969, the Black Panthers reported that the FBI and the local police had entered

\textsuperscript{374} “Memo dated December 12, 1969 Subject: Sergeant David Groth et. al.,” FBI Fred Hampton 44-HQ-44202, Section 1.
\textsuperscript{375} This coaching of witnesses seemed to have been common practice in the CPD from the 1950s onwards. It was attested to in the DOJ report, in Balto’s book, and the Chicago Police Accountability Task Force report. Flint and Taylor, \textit{Hampton v. Hanrahan} 600F 2d 600 Appellate Brief,” 60-61; Balto, \textit{Occupied Territory}, 167-174; Department of Justice, \textit{The DOJ Investigation of the Chicago Police Department}, location 1488.
2337 West Monroe Street in the early hours of December 17, 1969 and blocked the Panthers from the scene. Denied the ability to observe the ongoing investigation, the Black Panthers had their reasons to not to cooperate with the joint Justice Department and FBI investigation.\(^{376}\) The decision may have seemed on the surface to be a missed opportunity to seek justice for Fred Hampton, but the Panthers had a number of rational reasons to refuse participation. First and foremost, charges against Panther witnesses were still pending and the Panthers feared that any testimony given by the Panthers at the Grand Jury hearing could be used against those still awaiting trial, given that they did not know about the deal to free the other defendants, nor would they have supported it. In addition, the testimony could be shaped to reflect poorly on the Panthers, something they considered given Leonard was the Special Prosecutor.

As an alternative, the Black Panther Party created its own “People’s Inquest” into the death of Fred Hampton and Mark Clark, held on March 8th at the First Congregational Church at Washington and Ashland. The Panthers had chosen a tribunal of six community leaders to preside over the mock trial and six of the seven surviving Black Panthers from the raid testified.\(^{377}\) The trial provided arresting testimony for *The Murder of Fred Hampton* documentary by producing video of Deborah Johnson describing Fred Hampton’s last moments.\(^{378}\) However, the overall effect of the “People’s Inquest” and the Panther boycott of the Federal Grand Jury was to alienate the court of public opinion.\(^{379}\) The Panthers’ move to

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\(^{376}\) Memo dated December 19, 1969, FBI Fred Hampton 44-HQ-44202, Section 2.


\(^{378}\) “Deborah Johnson Interview,” in Mike Gray, *The Murder of Fred Hampton*. The footage of Deborah Johnson holding her newborn son, Fred Hampton Jr. seemed calculated in its portrayal of Johnson as a grieving widow and mother. This footage is reminiscent of how the Panthers portrayed Ericka Huggins after the death of John Huggins. At that point, the Panthers celebrated Huggins as a widow and mother, making radical claims to gender roles traditionally denied to black women.

undercut the Federal Grand Jury before the trial played out as paranoid and bizarre in the eyes of uninvested bystanders who had no reason to not trust the process. The Panthers’ refusal to testify undoubtedly hurt their case in court and in the news media, which played it off as another example of the Black Panther Party’s fringe political ideas.\(^{380}\) The Panthers’ actions leading up to the Federal Grand Jury hearing on May 12, 1970 failed to win the support of a larger alliance of politicians and movement figures that had initially rallied to the cause in the aftermath of Fred Hampton’s death.\(^{381}\) The Panthers’ radical reputation allowed the Federal Grand Jury leeway to rule against Hampton’s estate as long as they provided some semblance of fairness.

The Grand Jury report walked a careful line between criticizing Hanrahan’s office and the Panthers that seemingly came down by the slimmest of margins against indictment. The report levelled serious charges at Hanrahan and the police officers involved in the raid. The Panthers capitalized on the criticism by having their lawyer, Jeffrey Haas, read out excerpts of the Federal Grand Jury report at the end the 1971 documentary *The Murder of Fred Hampton*:

> “The great variance between the physical evidence and the testimony of the officers raises the question as to whether the officers are falsifying their accounts.” Those officers fired 99 shots through the walls of an apartment where they knew people were sleeping….The Federal Grand Jury comes to its conclusions: “Unquestionably the raid was not professionally planned or properly executed and the result of the raid was two deaths, four injuries, and five improper criminal charges.” In spite of those conclusions the report goes on to say, “Physical evidence and the discrepancies in the officers’ accounts are insufficient to establish probable cause to charge the officers with the willful violation of the occupants’ civil rights.”\(^{382}\)


\(^{382}\) Mike Gray, *The Murder of Fred Hampton*. 
In another section of the Federal Grand Jury document, the authors ultimately laid the blame for not returning an indictment squarely on the Black Panther Party. The report highlighted the Panthers’ revolutionary nature and dedication to self-defense, blaming Panther provocations and hostility for the deaths as much as the actions of the police. The Grand Jury claimed that without the testimony of the Panther witnesses, it could bring no charges against Hanrahan or the CPD. The Federal Grand Jury’s statement on the Panthers reflected a public judgment of their nature, not a consideration of the specific experience of the Panthers involved in the raid:

“Given the political nature of the Panthers, the Grand Jury is forced to conclude that they are more interested in the issue of police persecution, than they are in obtaining justice. It is a sad fact of our society that such groups can transform such issues into donations, sympathy and membership, without ever submitting to impartial fact-finding by anyone. Perhaps the short answer is that revolutionary groups simply do not want the legal system to work.”

The city of Chicago and the FBI learned how to cast doubt on the Black Panther Party’s narrative of Fred Hampton’s death through experience with the Federal Grand Jury. They could rely on personal character smears of Hampton, various witnesses, and the Black Panther Party as a whole to cast doubt on the Panther story. The FBI knew that it could use its reputation and privileged status as a federal organization to withhold evidence and influence judges presiding over the continued court battles. After the failure to indict in the Federal Grand Jury trial, the People’s Law Office (PLO) pursued criminal charges against Hanrahan and the FBI. When that case was dismissed in 1972 due to “lack of evidence,” the PLO began the long civil suit that

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would ultimately end in the 1.85 million dollar payout in 1982.\textsuperscript{385} Even though the families of Fred Hampton and Mark Clark would win the civil case, the battle for the hearts and minds of the public would be much more troubled because of the tactics of the city of Chicago, the FBI, and the courts. Although this dissertation will not deal with most of the details of the trial, the case of William O’Neal warrants special attention in examining how the FBI and the city used witnesses to attack the reputation of the Panthers, sow seeds of discord between the defendants, and evoke federal privilege by withholding information.\textsuperscript{386}

As mentioned previously, William O’Neal was the informant and witness that linked the FBI to the Fred Hampton raid. He was also the witness that could prove that Hanrahan’s office and the FBI had meant to murder Fred Hampton all along. The FBI and the State Attorney’s office knew the key role that William O’Neal would play in the case long before the Panthers did, and they exploited every advantage of knowledge, media power, and court influence they had to limit the impact that O’Neal would have. By influencing the witness through cash payments during the trial, denying document requests connected to O’Neal, and downplaying his role in the raid, the FBI and the city of Chicago could trouble the narrative of Fred Hampton and the Black Panthers and cast aspersions about their criminality.\textsuperscript{387}

O’Neal left the Party in 1970, citing fear for his own safety. This meant that for an entire year after the death of Fred Hampton, O’Neal continued to influence Panther policy in the city of Chicago, but his role as an FBI informant was not revealed for another three years, until February 1973. Like many FBI informants, William O’Neal acted in the role of agent

\textsuperscript{385} Haas, \textit{Assassination of Fred Hampton}, 346.

\textsuperscript{386} For a comprehensive summary of O’Neal’s misdeeds as both an informant and agent provocateur, see: Taylor and Haas, “\textit{Hampton v. Hanrahan} 600F 2d 600 Appellate Brief.”

\textsuperscript{387} Taylor and Haas, “\textit{Hampton v. Hanrahan} 600F 2d 600 Appellate Brief,” 82.
According to Haas, the Panthers and their lawyers first discovered that O’Neal was an informant when the Chicago Tribune ran a story on O’Neal on the front page after a sympathetic state attorney leaked the information. He was the personal bodyguard of Fred Hampton and as the chapter’s head of security. In that role, he helped incite the Chicago chapter to further militarization through the acquisition of guns and military training with the full approval of his FBI handlers.

O’Neal even proved to be behind one of the most pernicious rumors that painted the Black Panther Party in Chicago as radically violent in the mainstream press. In the wake of Fred Hampton’s murder, Hanrahan claimed that the Black Panthers built an electric chair to torture informants. In actuality, O’Neal had been the main and possibly sole proponent of the plan, which was never considered seriously by Chicago’s leadership. In contrast, the CPD led by John Burge had started using electric shock torture against black victims in 1969.

Although O’Neal had been outed as an informant, the Hampton family’s lawyers still had to prove beyond a doubt that he was not only a paid FBI informant, but that he was part of COINTELPRO and critical to the raid that led to Hampton’s death. The key link became a hand-drawn diagram submitted by O’Neal to his handler, agent John Mitchell, that showed the entire layout of Hampton’s apartment, with clear labelling of the bedrooms and bed where Hampton

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388 O’Neal left the Panthers in 1970 because he feared that he would be found out. The Panthers suspected an informant in the aftermath of the raid and O’Neal tried to take the pressure off of himself by suggesting that Louis Truelock was the real informant. Taylor and Haas, “Hampton v. Hanrahan 600F 2d 600 Appellate Brief,” 72-73; Haas, The Assassination of Fred Hampton, 258.
slept. Again, this document might never have been made public except for a sympathetic State Attorney, Sheldon Waxman, who slipped the diagram into a pile of heavily redacted documents requested by the Hampton family’s lawyers. Under deposition, Mitchell accidentally admitted that he had shared the map and information provided by O’Neal with Richard Jalovec, the head of Hanrahan’s Special Prosecutions Unit. Nevertheless, O’Neal and Mitchell refused to acknowledge that the information O’Neal provided led to Hampton’s death. Later released FBI memos show that Mitchell claimed credit for the raid while asking for a bonus and a raise for O’Neal, citing the importance of the floor plan in saving police officers’ lives. The fight to prove the FBI’s complicity with Hanrahan’s raid would consume the lawsuits filed by Haas, Taylor, and the People’s Law Office from 1973 onward. By stonewalling the Hampton family’s lawyers, the city of Chicago and the FBI colluded to protect the role of O’Neal in instigating the raid that led to Hampton’s death. This stonewalling included claims that Hanrahan’s office had its own informant who provided a similar map that had been conveniently destroyed.

Furthermore, the FBI adamantly denied that its surveillance was conducted under the aegis of COINTELPRO. The initial judge in the civil rights lawsuit, Judge Joseph “Sam” Perry, a conservative supporter of the FBI, worked to protect the agency by claiming that COINTELPRO had nothing to do with the Fred Hampton case and consistently denying attempts by the People’s Law Office to obtain COINTELPRO related documents. Ultimately, it was

394 Originally, Haas and Taylor did not report this man’s name, but it was later revealed in the Appellate Brief. Haas, The Assassination of Fred Hampton, 189-190; Taylor and Haas, “Hampton v. Hanrahan 600F 2d 600 Appellate Brief,” 101.
only through luck, the support of other government committees, and the botched testimony of John Mitchell that Hampton’s lawyers obtained documents proving otherwise. These documents included payment receipts to O’Neal for 300 dollars for the information provided on Hampton’s apartment and documents claiming credit for the December 4, 1969 raid for COINTELPRO.\textsuperscript{398} Despite this evidence, Judge Perry ruled in favor of the defendants and ordered the plaintiffs to pay $100,000 to cover the defendant’s court costs. Judge Perry also found lawyers Jeffrey Haas and Flint Taylor in contempt of court, forcing the PLO to appeal the case.\textsuperscript{399}

William O’Neal had become the weak link that helped the PLO establish COINTELPRO involvement. Only through years of hard work, dogged investigating, and the defection of a senior FBI agent named Vorenberger who released information to the Panther lawyers, were they successful in filing a civil suit against the federal government.\textsuperscript{400} Yet even their most crucial victory, handed down by Judge Luther Merritt Swygert of the 7th Court of Appeals, did not convict the FBI or anyone involved in the Fred Hampton raid of a crime. The landmark Swygert decision established that there was ample evidence for Hampton’s lawyers to sue the state in a civil rights case, affirmed the bias of Judge Perry, and threw out cases against Haas and other PLO lawyers for contempt of court.\textsuperscript{401}

The stonewalling of Perry and the FBI ultimately did not stop the revelation of COINTELPRO involvement in Hampton’s death. However, the years wasted in federal court meant that when the time came for a new civil rights trial, the plaintiffs found themselves exhausted, penniless, and still facing the possibility of a hostile jury unwilling to see beyond the

\textsuperscript{399} Taylor and Haas, “Hampton v. Hanrahan 600F 2d 600 Appellate Brief,” 218, 235, 240.
\textsuperscript{400} Taylor and Haas, “Hampton v. Hanrahan 600F 2d 600 Appellate Brief,” 101.
\textsuperscript{401} 600 f.2d 600 Iberia Hampton et. al., v. Edward V. Hanrahan et. al., v. Jeffrey H. Haas v. G. Flint Taylor, United States Court of Appeals April 23, 1979; Open Jurist, https://openjurist.org/600/f2d/600/hampton-v-hanrahan.
public reputation of the Black Panther Party. By 1982, the Black Panther Party was already defunct and most surviving activists had moved on to new projects. For the family of Fred Hampton, Mark Clark, Deborah Johnson (now Akua Njeri), and other plaintiffs in the case, closure became more important than dragging out the conclusion of this painful episode. These factors led the family to settle rather than pursue legal vindication, creating an opening that Hampton’s detractors could exploit in their interpretation of his life and death.

Thereafter, the memory of Fred Hampton would continue to be contested, with organizations like the Fraternal Order of Police (FOP) using the specter of black criminality to smear Hampton’s legacy. Moreover, the extraordinary circumstances of his death—the involvement of the FBI and the cover-up afterwards—made his case seem singular in importance, rather than representative of other Panther victims. His case was unique because Hampton was an exceptional leader marked out by state authorities as a threat to their political

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402 Haas, The Assassination of Fred Hampton, 335.
403 Haas, The Assassination of Fred Hampton, 346.
404 The FOP is one of several police unions within the city of Chicago. It is the longest-serving and most conservative of these organizations. The FOP has traditionally taken a stand for “Law and Order” politics. It stridently denies any CPD wrongdoing or corruption within the city. It defeated the effort to name a street after Fred Hampton by dredging up the spectre of Hampton and the Panthers as “cop killers.” It consistently denied allegations of police torture, which later became the John Burge Chicago Police Torture cases and even helped provide Burge and his co-defendants with legal counsel after he was fired. The FOP also fought to keep Burge’s police pension even after he was convicted in a court of law for police torture. Most recently, it spoke out against both the DOJ’s report on police misconduct in Chicago and the Chicago Police Accountability Task Force headed by Lori Lightfoot. Its continued reticence to reform and open support of policies proven to have a racially discriminatory effect on policing have led Congressman Bobby Rush to label them as the “sworn enemy of black people.” Rush’s statements were taken out of context by most national organizations, which seemed to think that the Congressman was taking an incredibly radical position. However, a cursory overview of the FOP’s history and past statements will show its highly controversial position within the city. Flint Taylor, The Torture Machine, 169-170, 497-499, 355-356, 301; Balto, Occupied Territory, 160-161, 210-211; Williams, From the Bullet to the Ballot, 214-215; U.S. Department of Justice, The DOJ Investigation of the Chicago Police Department, location 1454 (Kindle Edition); Alexandra Silets, “Lori Lightfoot, Dean Angelo Come Face-to-Face on Task Force Report, WTTW News, May 2, 2018, https://news.wttw.com/2016/05/02/lori-lightfoot-dean-angelo-come-face-face-task-force-report; Fran Spielman, “FOP denounces Lightfoot-repeated rumor as ‘wholly false and offensive,’” Chicago Sun-Times, June 10, 2019, https://chicago.suntimes.com/city-hall/2019/6/10/18659945/fop-fraternal-order-police-kevin-graham-lightfoot-rumor-better-government-association; Valerie Richardson, “Rep. Bobby Rush Faces Backlash for calling police union ‘sworn enemy of black people,’” The Washington Times, April 9, 2019, https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2019/apr/9/bobby-rush-calls-national-fraternal-order-police-s/.
order. However, as Simon Balto and others demonstrate, Hampton’s death was not exceptional in that he was one of many black victims of the CPD’s use of extralegal violence. Since 1919 and well into the 2000s, the CPD used a pattern of excessive force against black neighborhoods in a reflection of white elites’ anxieties about racial and political control. These included the John Burge Chicago Police Torture cases and the fallout from them. Tactics and policies shifted over the decades but the main thrust of police discrimination remained the same. Chicago’s black communities have historically mistrusted police authority because it did not exist to serve them—a fact made explicitly clear in Hampton’s assassination. Hampton, as a martyr for police brutality, transcended the life-span of the Black Panther Party and would continue to serve as an educational tool that exposed the depth of police overreach in marginalized communities. Even as he failed to become representative of Black Panther Party martyrdom, he became locally representative of the corruption within Chicago’s city government.

On February 28, 1983, some thirteen years after the death of Fred Hampton, the families finally received 1.85 million dollars for the deaths of Fred Hampton and Mark Clark. The court victory would remain incomplete. Supporters of the FBI and the city of Chicago could still point toward the fact that the FBI, Hanrahan, and the city of Chicago had never been found

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405 Balto, Occupied Territory, 2-5, Taylor, The Torture Machine; Williams, From the Bullet to the Ballot, 92-108.  
406 Balto, Occupied Territory, 231, 250-252. Here I am thinking of the campaign for “Community Control of Police” inspired by Hampton’s activism and taken up after his death in 1972 by Bobby Rush. I am also thinking of the work done by Lisa M. Corrigan’s Prison Power, which begins to argue about the performative aspects of the Panthers’ suffering and even martyrdom and how thy created a vernacular rhetoric about police brutality. Corrigan, Prison Power, 8, 15.  
407 Taylor’s The Torture Machine, Balto’s Occupied Territory, and Williams’ From the Bullet to the Ballot, have all danced with the idea that Hampton remained an influential figure in Chicago after his death. There works together make an argument that without the Hampton assassination, Chicago’s current tradition of policing and the tradition of resistance against it would not exist as it does today. Pushing these works forward, I argue that Hampton’s legacy was only hidden to the mainstream, and that poor black and brown people never forgot Hampton’s importance, using his martyrdom to remember decades of police brutality. Taylor, The Torture Machine, Balto, Occupied Territory; Williams, From the Bullet to the Ballot.  
408 Haas, The Assassination of Fred Hampton, 347.
guilty in criminal court as justification for the state’s supposed innocence.\textsuperscript{409} Important documents that prove the link between FBI COINTELPRO and the Hampton raid have never been widely released to the public, despite efforts by the PLO to publish them.\textsuperscript{410} The complicated narrative of the numerous court cases, appeals, and ultimate settlement also hampered the distribution of information through the press. By the time that the Swygert decision got handed down in 1979, itself not heavily publicized, the Panthers nationally were in decline. The timing, the settlement, and the lack of public awareness of the end of the trial all contributed to a troublesome counter-narrative among state officials, law enforcement, and detractors of the Black Panther Party. These skeptics continued to support the story that Hampton’s death was justifiable and that he and the Panthers were dangerous criminals. For example, the FOP continued to repeat those claims, especially when the city attempted to name a street after Hampton. This lack of certainty and closure to the Fred Hampton case has consigned his legacy to mainstream obscurity even as his life and death laid the groundwork in the city of Chicago for the destruction of the Daley political machine.

In a tragic epitaph to the Fred Hampton story, William O’Neal committed suicide in 1990 by running in front of a car on the Eisenhower Expressway shortly after admitting in an

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\textsuperscript{410} Many of these documents are referred to in the court documents, including the appellate brief, but they do not appear in the Fred Hampton FBI file nor are other COINTELPRO files related to this case widely available, having been available to the attorneys do to Discovery, but not through public archives. Some COINTELPRO files are found in the COINTELPRO Papers book and the Church Committee Report on COINTELPRO, but these were not widely distributed. The FBI’s archives have released heavily redacted COINTELPRO files as well through the National Archives. Taylor and Haas, “\textit{Hampton v. Hanrahan} 600F 2d 600 Appellate Brief”; Churchill and Vander Wall, \textit{The COINTELPRO Papers}; Church Committee, \textit{The FBI, COINTELPRO, and Martin Luther King Jr.: Final Report of the Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations With Respect to Intelligence Activities} (St. Petersburg, FL: Red and Black Publishers, 2011); Nelson Blackstock, \textit{COINTELPRO: The FBI’s Secret War on Political Freedom} (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1988); National Lawyer’s Guild, “Counter-Intelligence: A Documentary Look at America’s Secret Police,” (Chicago, Ill: National Lawyer’s Guild Government Repression and Police Misconduct Committee - Counterintelligence Documentation Center).
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interview with *Eyes on the Prize* that his actions directly led to the death of Fred Hampton.\(^{411}\) O’Neal’s uncle, Ben Heard, pointed to his guilt as the reason why he had killed himself. It was O’Neal’s second suicide attempt. Speaking to the press after his nephew’s death, Heard had this to say, “I think he was sorry he did what he did. He thought the FBI was only going to raid the house. But the FBI gave it over to the State's Attorney and that was all Hanrahan wanted. They shot Fred Hampton and made sure he was dead.”\(^{412}\) Finding himself caught up in a web of blackmail, guilt, and ostracization, the FBI and the city of Chicago had claimed a final victim in O’Neal in an assassination that had taken place some twenty years before.

**Seeds in the Wind: The Rainbow Coalition and Chicago politics after the Death of Fred Hampton**

Less well known than the trial, Fred Hampton’s life and death helped bring together a diverse coalition of activists, journalists, politicians, and religious leaders in Chicago. These local people used the legacy of Hampton’s activism to propel further movement work against the Daley political machine. They included everyone from the original members of the Rainbow Coalition, including fellow Panther Bobby Rush and Bobby Lee to the Panthers’ erstwhile allies, like Young Lords leader “Cha-Cha” Jimenez, political activist and journalist Lu Palmer, a young Jesse Jackson Sr., head of the AAPL Rennault Robinson, and young lawyers for the PLO Jeffrey Haas and G Flint Taylor. Hampton’s life and death instilled in each of these people a deep sense of the corruption of the political system in Chicago and a burning desire to correct those wrongs.

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Indeed, the broader upsurge of activism after Hampton’s death fell largely out of the hands of the Illinois Chapter of the Black Panther Party. Yet it was the same structural foundations that Hampton laid during his Black Panther Party activism that led to the election of Chicago’s first Black mayor, Harold Washington, in 1983, and the destruction of the Daley political machine before its revival by Richard M. Daley, Richard J. Daley’s son.413

The great irony of Fred Hampton’s importance to Chicago is that he remains largely forgotten and un-commemorated on the public political landscape. The most striking example of this non-acknowledgment is former president Barack Obama, who leveraged many of Hampton’s political strategies on his journey to the U.S. Senate and later the White House.414 The avoidance of Fred Hampton’s legacy by Obama is understandable for a politician on the national stage. The white political imagination still perceives the Black Panther Party and Fred Hampton by extension as black criminals and “thugs” that play the black counterpart to the KKK.415 The failure to memorialize Hampton in the city of Chicago itself speaks to a deeper, public forgetting tied to the resurgence of the Daley political machine in the figures of Richard M. Daley and Rahm Emmanuel and the compromises that black politicians have had to make with the machine

413 Madison Davis Lacey Jr. and Henry Hampton, Interview with Jesse Jackson, Eyes on the Prize II Interviews, Washington University Digital Gateway Texts, http://digital.wustl.edu/e/eii/eiiweb/jac5427.0519.072marc_record_interviewer_process.html; Jesse Jackson admits in this interview with Eyes on the Prize that Harold Washington’s election was due in large part directly to Hampton’s assassination. However, he takes credit here for the choice of Washington as a candidate for Mayor when Bobby Rush and Lu Palmer both insist in their own interviews that it was Lu Palmer who brought together the initial committee to support Harold Washington: Lutrelle “Lu” F. Palmer, II Interviewed by Larry Crowe, May 22, 2002, The HistoryMakers Digital Archive; Bobby Rush, May 15, 2014, The HistoryMakers Digital Archive.

414 I bring up Barack Obama as a startling example of the reach of Fred Hampton’s legacy. Obama began his political rise in Chicago and was intimately familiar with the Harold Washington era and the Daley machine that replaced it. None of this is to suggest that Obama has any responsibility to acknowledge Fred Hampton. I am only pointing out that Obama could not recognize Fred Hampton even if he wanted to because of how much Hampton has been demonized on the national stage. Williams, From the Bullet to the Ballot, 11; Barack Obama Interview, February 16, 2001, The HistoryMakers Archive.

415 Just one example of this popular view falsely equivalating the Black Panther Party with the KKK was made by Burl Cain, the ex-warden of Angola on the case of Albert Woodfox, one of the Angola Three: Emily Lane, “State Makes Its Case to Try Albert Woodfox a 3rd Time,” TIMES-PICAYUNE, Sept. 6, 2015, A-2.
to survive in the years since Hampton’s death. These complex, entangled legacies reveal a Chicago that is just as enmeshed in the politics of black criminality, race, and state corruption as it was during Hampton’s lifetime.

Fred Hampton’s death acted as a political break and a call to action in the history of black Chicago. Many activists for social justice in the city can date their activism to that moment and others point to Hampton’s death as a turning point for themselves personally. These politicians and social activists, including Flint Taylor, Rennault Robinson, Bobby Rush, and others, became a network of community leaders and politicians who have continued to influence Chicago politics and national politics. They were not always successful in their movement making. The death of Harold Washington in 1987 ushered in another three decades of rule by political machine when Richard M. Daley became mayor. However, they continued to fight for social justice, to challenge the corruption of the local government, and to advocate for victims of police brutality. Taken together, they represent a vision of Vincent E. Harding’s “river of resistance” indelibly shaped by Fred Hampton’s life and death.

Immediately after Fred Hampton’s assassination, black policemen united under the AAPL became an unexpected wellspring of support for the Black Panther Party and its concerns about police brutality. Deeply influenced by the black power era, Robinson and the AAPL

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417 Vincent. E. Harding’s “river of resistance” has been instrumental for how I think about black resistance as a movement spanning traditional historical periodization as well as periods of frenetic activity followed by periods of seeming lull. Harding’s “river” lets us see the black struggle as continuous and always flowing, even when it seemed invisible to the larger hegemonic culture. Although Harding worked on the antebellum South, his characterization of racial resistance remains crucial to understanding the ebb and flow of the black freedom movement today: Vincent E. Harding, There is a River: The Black Struggle for Freedom in America, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).
sought to redefine policing for black communities through community control and accountability. Robinson and the AAPL paid for that support when the Chicago Police Department amped up harassment against members of the League. In 1970, Rennault Robinson and the AAPL filed a suit against the Chicago Police Department charging discrimination in hiring, promotion, assignments, and discipline of black officers. The case exposed the frustration of members of the AAPL who had hoped that the organization would help temper the racist practices of the Chicago police.\textsuperscript{418} In particular, the AAPL worried about the effects of practices like “flying squads,” where squadrons of motorcycle-mounted police would ride through a neighborhood in a show of intimidation and harassment.\textsuperscript{419} The AAPL found that black aldermen who remained indebted to the Daley political machine would not take up the issue.\textsuperscript{420} Eventually, the AAPL convinced freshman representative Ralph Metcalfe to take a stand against police brutality. But according to Robinson, Metcalfe was hesitant in his endorsement because of fear that the machine would turn against him. Metcalfe remained a Daley loyalist for the course of his political career.\textsuperscript{421}

The AAPL’s efforts to reform the Chicago Police Department on the inside and through political advocacy met with systematic discrimination and harassment. The original lawyers that


\textsuperscript{419} Balto and Robinson refer to the “roving squad” or “flying squad” as a tactic begun in 1946 that ostensibly came to an end in 1965 (according to Balto). However, the squads were an ongoing concern of Robinson’s during the AAPL suit. Balto, \textit{Occupied Territory}, 128; Renault Robinson, interviewed by Larry Crowe, July 3, 2002, The HistoryMakers Digital Archive.  


\textsuperscript{421} Renault Robinson, interviewed by Larry Crowe, July 3, 2002, The HistoryMakers Digital Archive. Balto takes a different view of Metcalfe’s political career and the impetus behind his Blue Ribbon panel on police reform. In 1975, Metcalfe even considered a primary run against Daley and while he decided against it, he endorsed Daley’s primary challenger. Balto, \textit{Occupied Territory}, 248-250; Agyepong, “In the Belly of the Beast,” 259; Adams, \textit{The Patrolmen’s Revolt}, 2.
AAPL members hired to file its suit ended up withdrawing because of threats from the Daley machine. 422 Without the timely intervention of the ACLU, which provided free legal counsel, the case would have died without ever seeing a day in court. Black policemen trying to get promotions within the police department found that their performance reports were lower across the board than those of white officers. The ethnic-based favoritism of an entrenched Irish influence within the department represented by the Sergeant’s Association perpetuated discriminatory practices in management. Policemen who spoke up about discrimination or mistreatment of the city’s black population would face re-assignment to less favorable positions and harassment from fellow officers. 423

Robinson and the AAPL were part of a larger resistance against police and civic corruption that had its roots in the work that Fred Hampton was involved in before his assassination. Hampton’s death provided a catalyst that propelled forward a tradition of community activism against police brutality that included people and organizations like Renault Robinson and the AAPL, Flint Taylor and the PLO, and Jesse Jackson and Rainbow/PUSH. Not always operating within the mainstream, these people kept alive the memory of Hampton’s death and that of other victims and helped spearhead a number of reform efforts in the decades after Hampton’s death. After 1972 and the Panthers’ initial campaign for community control of police, the impetus of reform moved towards this loose coalition rather than within the Black

Panther Party itself.\textsuperscript{424} The AAPL lawsuit against the CPD was one example of the efforts that were rooted in the death of Fred Hampton.

After Robinson filed the class-action lawsuit alleging discrimination on behalf of the AAPL, he reported that officers began to follow his children around. Robinson’s children had to receive protection from the Chicago Police Department because other policemen would place threatening calls to the school saying, “We’re gonna kill the little nigger bastards.”\textsuperscript{425} Robinson and his wife ultimately decided to send their children out of state. The police department tried to fire members of AAPL and charge them with misconduct. However, those charges became enjoined into the proceedings of the lawsuit, which prevented individual members’ termination until the court handed down its decision on the entirety of the case.\textsuperscript{426} The Chicago Police Department even enlisted the help of the FBI, which conducted illegal surveillance on the AAPL during the course of the trial (this in spite of the FBI’s repeated insistence that it had ended all illegal surveillance activities with the revelation of COINTELPRO in 1971).\textsuperscript{427}

In an eerie parallel to the Fred Hampton case, which did not reach settlement until 1982, the AAPL case against the city of Chicago dragged on until 1983. In the end, the court found in favor of the AAPL on all counts. The court case led to wide-ranging structural changes in how the Chicago Police Department approached hiring, promotion, disciplinary action, and assignment of officers.\textsuperscript{428} However, it did not root out the corruption or discrimination against

\textsuperscript{424} Balto, \textit{Occupied Territory}, 252-254; with Rush leaving the Party in 1974, momentum shifted to the AAPL and Rainbow/PUSH, both of which were partners with Father George and the Holy Angels Catholic Church in the initial push for community control of police.
civilians at the heart of the CPD, as a separate case pursued and litigated by the People’s Law Office involving allegations of torture against communities of color later proved.

In the aftermath of the Fred Hampton civil suit, PLO partner Flint Taylor went on to break open the Chicago Police Torture scandal, the roots of which may have been found in the files that AAPL lawyers found in Discovery (a formal process by which plaintiffs and defendants in a trial gather information for their case) during its lengthy case against the CPD. Robinson recounted discovering a huge cache of files relating to the CPD’s “Red Squad,” a local version of FBI COINTELPRO that had been spying on the city’s black and reformist activists for decades. The fallout from the “Red Squad” revelations led investigators and lawyers to the Chicago Police torture case.429

Ostensibly, the Chicago Police Torture scandal was the brainchild of one man, John Burge, who was hired by the CPD in 1969 where he worked as a police detective and later commander in Area 2. Burge and a small group of almost exclusively white Vietnam veterans used torture tactics learned from their wartime experience on suspects in their jurisdiction to gain a number of false convictions and artificially elevate their success rate.430 Burge’s use of torture resulted in as many as 112 false convictions, including ten death penalty cases. He and other officers continued to torture victims into the early 1990s.431 Placing the blame on John Burge

alone ignores the many systemic and institutional structures that not only enabled Burge and his allies, but encouraged them to flagrantly break the law.

Burge’s use of torture was also inspired by deep racial animus found within many members of Chicago’s Police Department. He and other officers involved directed the majority of their cases and convictions at the black community. Among his many torture tools was an electric shock device that he referred to as the “nigger box.” Victims of John Burge and his associates recount being severely beaten and electrically burned on the legs, arms, head, chest, and genitals.432 The John Burge Chicago Police Torture cases finally came to light with the trial of Andrew Wilson, one of two brothers brought into the precinct in February of 1982 on suspicion of killing two white Chicago gang unit officers. Since this case was high profile and the city’s police unions were desirous of a quick resolution, Burge must have felt pressure to expedite the investigation.433 Both Andrew and Jackie Wilson confessed to the crime after hours of torture, but Andrew’s injuries required hospitalization which prompted the Justice Department to open up a criminal case against the Chicago Police Department.434

Despite substantive evidence that police torture was a systemic and widespread problem acknowledged by Police Superintendent Richard Brzeczek, then State’s Attorney Richard M. Daley Jr. and Mayor Jane Byrne acted to obfuscate by declining to prosecute or punish Burge

and using confessions he obtained under torture to obtain a number of convictions.\textsuperscript{435} Moreover, city officials not only allowed John Burge to remain on the force despite his involvement in the Wilson case, but they also promoted him to head of the Bomb and Arson squad. In that position, Burge used his power to expand police torture outside of Area 2 into Area 3 of the city. As the DOJ report lays out, Chicago’s police forces are divided into three geographic “Areas.” The Burge cases were mostly centered on the South Side where Burge was a police commander, but they occurred in two thirds of the city’s precincts.\textsuperscript{436} Even when Andrew Wilson ultimately won his civil suit against the city of Chicago, the police department hesitated from firing Burge, suspending him only in 1991 before firing him in 1993.\textsuperscript{437} Wilson also did not succeed in overturning his conviction and he died in prison in 2007 after his sentence was commuted to life imprisonment.\textsuperscript{438} After Burge was fired, he continued to collect a pension amounting to some 851,856.88 dollars by 2017. By 2017, the city of Chicago had paid some 24,179,931.48 dollars in pension funds to twenty-nine officers involved in the Chicago Police Torture case.\textsuperscript{439}

In many ways, the city’s response to the John Burge Chicago Police Torture cases and the activists who gathered to litigate and protest against police abuse in the 1980s to the 2000s were directly shaped by Fred Hampton’s life and death. Flint Taylor and the PLO used the significant experience they gained litigating in criminal and civil court for Hampton’s family to open an investigation into the Wilson Brothers’ and others’ torture cases. After his involvement with Hampton, Taylor dedicated his legal career to fighting for justice for victims of police brutality.

\textsuperscript{435} Taylor, “The Long and Winding Road,” 5-8; Taylor, “The Long Road to Reprations, 331. 
\textsuperscript{436} DOJ, \textit{The DOJ Investigation on the Chicago Police Department}, location 696.
\textsuperscript{437} Taylor, “The Long and Winding Road,” 8.
like Hampton. The John Burge Chicago Police Torture cases represent the fruit of some four decades of work by Taylor and the PLO. On the other hand, those involved in supporting John Burge and his co-defendants were many of the same people, organizations, and systems that rallied against Fred Hampton in 1969. Like in the Hampton case, Taylor had to contend with openly biased judges whose personal and professional entanglements rendered them unable or unwilling to hear the voices of torture victims.\textsuperscript{440} In addition, The Fraternal Order of Police (FOP), who voiced vocal support for Hanrahan, helped Burge and other officers accused in the cases legally, financially, personally, and publicly.\textsuperscript{441} Moreover, the cases were directly linked by “Machine Gun” Joe Gorman, an officer accused of involvement in the John Burge torture scandal and one of the defendants in the Hampton civil case, and the officer some alleged to have fired the shot that killed Hampton.\textsuperscript{442} These interconnections show that although the cases were ostensibly separate, they came from the same lineage of struggle against police and civic corruption within the city.

The scale and cost of the John Burge Chicago Police Torture case was vast and revealed systematic, ingrained abuse of black communities by the police. This abuse could not have originated from one man, but implicated an entire system of corruption that included everyone from beat cops up to the State’s Attorney and the Mayor’s office. While John Burge, like Harahan in the Hampton assassination before him, became the face of the police torture scandal,

\textsuperscript{440} The first infamous judge that Taylor had to deal with was the biased Judge Sam Perry in the Hampton cases. That case seemed to have given Taylor, Haas, and the PLO a “difficult” reputation among conservative judges. Perry’s censure by the 7th District Court of Appeals comes up multiple times in other trials that Taylor is involved in, including with Judge Brian Duff who presided over Andrew Wilson’s first civil trial and who later resigned under a cloud of allegations of misconduct. Taylor, \textit{The Torture Machine}, 65-66, 115; Taylor and Haas, “\textit{Hampton v. Hanrahan} 600F 2d 600 Appellate Brief,” 118-175.

\textsuperscript{441} There are numerous instances of the police standing up for Burge, but the most egregious was when they planned to run a float in the Saint Patrick’s Day Parade depicting Burge and his cohort as the victims and true heroes of Chicago. Taylor, \textit{The Torture Machine}, 196-197; “Citing Race Angle in a Float, Parade Bars a Police Entry,” \textit{New York Times}, March 10, 1993.

\textsuperscript{442} Taylor, \textit{The Torture Machine}, 116.
he could not have acted and enabled a widespread level of abuse alone. Richard M. Daley Jr., who went on to become mayor of Chicago after Harold Washington’s untimely death in 1989, issued this non-apology that sums up how the city used the philosophy of highly individualistic, personal responsibility to obscure its larger guilt in the John Burge Chicago Police Torture cases:

The best way is to say, 'Okay. I apologize to everybody [for] whatever happened to anybody in the city of Chicago.'... So, I apologize to everybody. Whatever happened to them in the city of Chicago in the past, I apologize. I didn't do it, but somebody else did it. Your editorial was bad. I apologize. Your article about the mayor, I apologize. I need an apology from you because you wrote a bad editorial. You do that and everybody feels good. Fine. But I was not the mayor. I was not the police chief. I did not promote him. You know that. But you've never written that and you're afraid to. I understand.

Richard M. Daley Jr.’s bluster that he bore no personal responsibility ignores the fact that as the State’s Attorney during the time of the Wilson case, he not only had the power but the responsibility to bring charges and investigate allegations of police misconduct. Moreover, it was under his jurisdiction as mayor, that the city paid some $29,454,864 in defense fees for various officers and city officials involved in the torture cases and $82,904,500 in settlements, reparations, and judgments to victims involved in the scandal.

The John Burge Chicago police torture cases and the Hampton assassination share a common lineage. Not only was the People’s Law Office crucial in fighting for justice in both cases, but the Chicago Police Torture cases began the same year that the Chicago Police

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Department conspired with the FBI to assassinate Fred Hampton. All of these cases are linked together through a network of activists fighting police corruption on one side and a historical threat of police malfeasance on the other side. They represent the continued fight against a larger system of municipal and police corruption that defined Hampton’s legacy. In addition, the national media silence around the Fred Hampton case and the John Burge Chicago Police Torture cases revealed a larger country-wide turn away from social justice reforms beginning in the 1980s.

The rise of neo-liberal policies of “Law and Order” nationally and the rebirth of the machine locally inhibited the development of the John Burge Chicago Police Torture case as a national story. While they received attention from local journalists, a story of police overreach and abuse did not work with a national narrative that emphasized the heroic efforts of the “thin blue line” against a violent tide of “super predators” associated with blackness. In an environment where law enforcement could do no wrong, stories like that of Fred Hampton or those of the John Burge Chicago Police Torture victims got drowned out in the media because they were inconvenient to the national narratives and identities that the media associated with the

447 In juxtaposing Balto’s book with the DOJ report on Chicago and the Chicago Police Accountability Task Force report, what struck me the most was how little the structures of policing had changed since the late 1960s and 1970s in Chicago. Balto describes the professionalization of the CPD in the 1960s as streamlining certain processes for policing, like the roving squads, stop and frisk, and the roving squads. Those largely remained in place until the Laquan McDonald shooting. This is not to say that “Law and Order” funding did not have an affect on the city, but that the city’s fundamental structures of policing pre-dated “Law and Order” policies, ergo increased federal funding only strengthened, not changed, established ways of policing. Balto, Occupied Territory, Department of Justice, The Department of Justice Investigation into of the Chicago Police Department; Police Accountability Task Force, Recommendations for Reform.
448 Nathan Robinson, Superpredator: Bill Clinton’s Use and Abuse of Black America (New York: Current Affairs Inc., 2016); 13th, directed by Ava Duvernay (Netflix, 2016) Streaming video.
people involved. Both the Fred Hampton and John Burge Chicago police torture cases began in the same time period (although the torture cases only came to light in the 1980s) and both cases were subjected to the rhetoric that evolves out of “Law and Order.” In the case of the Burge torture victims, a sophisticated and politically mature rhetoric of black criminality targeted the victims with surgical precision. The reporting from the torture case of two prepubescent black boys accused of the rape and murder of an eleven-year-old white girl showed how racialized the language of the press had become by 1998. The two boys, aged seven and eight were depicted as child “super predators,” even though DNA evidence from an adult would exonerate them.\textsuperscript{449} The courts and journalists would use similar language to justify torture against the Wilson brothers because they were “cop killers.”\textsuperscript{450}

Yet even as the rhetoric of “Law and Order” constrained the ways that the national media could discuss the John Burge Chicago Police Torture cases, Flint Taylor and the PLO took the crucial lessons learned from media engagement in the Hampton case to make the local newspapers work for them in the Burge-related cases. Just one example was the relationship that developed between the PLO and the \textit{Chicago Sun-Times}. As the liberal mainstream newspaper, the \textit{Chicago Sun-Times} had been the first mainstream paper to support the Panthers’ claim that pictures that Hanrahan’s office released showing purported bullet holes created by Panther weapons were actually just blown up images of nail heads.\textsuperscript{451} From that initial interaction, the

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\footnote{Taylor, \textit{The Torture Machine}, 226; Pam Belluck, “Chicago Boys, 7 and 8 charged in brutal killing of a Girl, 11,” \textit{The New York Times}, August 11, 1998; Taylor believed that there was evidence that the “confessions” from the boys were obtained through torture, an allegation supported by reporting from the \textit{Chicago Reader}. Phoebe Mogharei, “Untrue Confessions: The Arrest of two grade schoolers for murder 20 years ago shook the city--until it became clear their admissions couldn’t be correct,” \textit{Chicago Reader}, January 16, 2019.}
\footnote{In a headline from the normally sympathetic \textit{Chicago Sun-Times} proclaimed that “Jurors Think a Retrial Useless for Cop Killer” after the PLO won Andrew Wilson a retrial for torture. Moreover, the defense in court cited Wilson’s supposed ruthlessness in his crime as reason to sustain his conviction, routinely referring to him as “evil.” Taylor, \textit{The Torture Machine}, 83, 87.}
\footnote{Joseph Reilly, “At Hampton Apartment,” \textit{Chicago Sun Times}, December 12, 1969.}
\end{footnotesize}
Chicago Sun-Times established a working relationship with Taylor and Haas, often carrying statements from the PLO. Taylor and the PLO also credited John Conroy from the Chicago Reader and his “House of Screams” exposé for re-opening the internal CPD investigation into the torture cases. In Haas’s The Assassination of Fred Hampton, the media played a pivotal role in several moments of the Hampton civil case by providing crucial information like revealing the existence of William O’Neal as an FBI informant. In the timeline of the Burge cases, the PLO had a more sophisticated relationship with the media and Taylor often used it to goad the courts to take action. Nevertheless, despite a few notable exceptions with The New York Times, Democracy Now!, and 60 Minutes, the Burge torture cases received limited national attention.

Politically, Hampton’s Rainbow Coalition helped shape the election of Harold Lee Washington to the mayorship of Chicago in 1983. Although Washington started out as a machine politician, by the 1980s, he was ready to mount his own challenge. Washington’s groundbreaking campaign for mayor not only dealt a blow to the Daley political machine, but fulfilled the original promise of the Rainbow Coalition. Washington adopted the organizing philosophy of the Rainbow Coalition by reaching out to marginalized communities of color and poor people. Key activists involved in the election of Washington included Hampton old-guards.

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452 Throughout his account, Taylor describes the Sun Times intervening at crucial times to push the courts at moments where the John Burge torture cases seemed stalled. For examples: see Taylor, Torture Machine, 182, 188-189, 264-265, 267.
455 Taylor, The Torture Machine, 249, 293-298, 337; Media was so important in the course of these cases. In one case, Aaron Patterson only got his pardon from the Republican governor after the governor and his wife went to see a play about the case.
like Lu Palmer, Bobby Rush, Jesse Jackson, and Jose “Cha-Cha” Jimenez. Each of these activists had played a significant role in the original Rainbow Coalition and, following Hampton’s death, in investigations into the city and the FBI. Their work in getting a dark horse, non-machine candidate like Washington elected represented a return to the basic grassroots organizing and coalition building pioneered by Hampton. In addition, Washington’s platform adhered closely to the original demands of the Black Panther Party in its calls for full employment, medical care, increased housing assistance, neighborhood empowerment, and wide scale police reform. Finally, Hampton’s second-in-command, Bobby Rush, experienced his first big political break when he was elected to Chicago’s City Council from the 2nd Ward in 1987, and later to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1993.

Washington’s promise and the euphoria surrounding his election as mayor of Chicago proved short lived. On November 25, 1987, Harold Washington died in his office, a few months after winning re-election to a second term. Nevertheless, the Rainbow Coalition’s grassroots organizing techniques would be adopted by Jesse Jackson who even co-opted the name “Rainbow Coalition” in his unsuccessful run for president in 1984. However, these later candidates deliberately eschewed the Rainbow Coalition’s radical political proposals as too alienating to white, middle class voters. In 1989, Richard M. Daley was elected mayor of Chicago, bringing back a revival of the machine that would survive until the 2018 election of

460 Hegelson, Crucibles of Empowerment, 274-275.
Lori Lightfoot. Rahm Emmanuel and David Axelrod worked on Daley’s campaign, and they later became important officials in the Obama administration. Emmanuel later became mayor of Chicago in 2011. These men co-opted Rainbow Coalition organizing tactics and brought that expertise to Daley’s and later Obama’s campaigns. The election of Daley and the return of the political machine provided the final collapse of the original Rainbow Coalition that had mobilized one last time around Harold Washington.

Trouble the Waters: The Contested and Murky Memory of Fred Hampton

For a historian trying to untangle the many threads of Fred Hampton’s troubled memory, there is no easy narrative to tell. On the one hand, Fred Hampton’s life and death clearly galvanized a dedicated group of local, Chicago activists, politicians, lawyers, and journalists whose involvement in police reform and the election of Harold Washington fundamentally affected local and national politics. However, those gains seemed short-lived when Harold Washington’s death ushered in the resurrection of a surprisingly resilient and corrupt political machine. That machine’s survival for the next thirty some years seems fundamentally at odds with any narrative of Fred Hampton’s legacy that celebrates the success of the Rainbow Coalition. The resurgence of the Daley political machine from 1989 to 2019, coupled with many of Hampton’s colleagues’ reluctance to talk about him later in life, seems only to cement Hampton’s legacy as largely forgotten and irrelevant. Hampton’s membership in the Black Panther Party associated him with a troublesome politics of criminality and police brutality, one

462 Williams, From the Bullet to the Ballot, 4.
that hung over the city like a pall through the ensuing decades as the torture cases played out. Those politicians who linked their legacy directly to Hampton risked the wrath of the city’s strong police unions, like the FOP. They had to work upstream against a strong political tradition that painted black men like Hampton as the architects of their own misfortunes. Even those who believed that the police had abused their power in the Hampton case sometimes justified police misconduct through the belief that it was necessary to prevent crime. As the John Burge cases divided a city already torn by “Law and Order” policing, Hampton became untouchable in the mainstream.

A close look at Hampton’s continued influence in the city long after his death shows that his legacy has not been so much forgotten as deliberately suppressed at the public level while quietly celebrated and remembered in many of the local communities in which he had lived and worked. In the city of Maywood where he grew up, the local pool that opened in 1970 continues to bear Fred Hampton’s name in recognition of his fight as a high schooler to get a local pool

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463 As Balto’s book makes clear, the CPD system does not, as a rule, hold its officers accountable for its wrongdoings. Instead, the mayor’s office and the city government have historically relied on narratives of policing poor black neighborhoods in order to control crime. This puts poor black communities in a double bind--one where because of racialization, they are simultaneously over-policed and under-served. Structural causes for crime are thus ignored, and black communities that demand the city and the police force consider poverty as a cause for crime are then depicted as “soft on crime,” which plays into black stereotypes of criminality. This thesis is also supported by the substantive evidence found in the DOJ report and the Chicago Police Accountability Task Force Report, although for a different time period from the early 2000s to today. Balto, Occupied Territory, 191-221; Police Accountability Task Force, Recommendations for Reform; U.S. Department of Justice, The DOJ Investigation of the Chicago Police Department.

464 Clearly, the FOP still plays into this narrative, as it did when it defeated the attempt to name a street after Hampton. In their reasons why, FOP president Donahue marginalized police misconduct and focused on the Panthers as alleged “cop-killers” and bringing a criminal element to the city. Worries about mainstream bias also shaped the PLO’s decision to settle with the city rather than pursue another lawsuit in the Fred Hampton case. Haas, The Assassination of Fred Hampton, 344-346; Monica Davey, “Chicago Divided Over Proposal to Honor a Slain Black Panther,” The New York Times, March 5, 2006, https://www.nytimes.com/2006/03/05/us/chicago-divided-over-proposal-to-honor-a-slain-black-panther.html; Haas, The Assassination of Fred Hampton, 325-330.
built for children in the community despite not knowing how to swim himself. In 2006, the now-expanded Aquatic center dedicated a bust of Hampton at its entrance.

The city of Maywood’s willingness to embrace Fred Hampton’s memory stands in stark contrast to Chicago’s continued reticence to memorialize Fred Hampton on its physical landscape. In 2006, the Chicago city council considered renaming the block around 2337 Monroe Street where Fred Hampton died “Chairman Fred Hampton Way.” At the time of the proposal, Representative Bobby Rush lent his full-hearted support. Rush directly attributed the election of Harold Washington to the assassination of Fred Hampton in his statements. In an interview he gave in 2014, he stated, “Again, the foundation [for Washington] had been laid with the assassination of Fred Hampton in 1969...Harold solidified the black community around his election. And he did that in a pretty brilliant way.”

However, members of the FOP issued their immediate opposition to the name change. In an official statement, President Mark Donahue declared, “It’s a dark day when we honor someone who advocated killing policemen and who took great advantage of the communities he claimed to be serving.” In its statements, the FOP resurrected the specter of Fred Hampton as a vicious, violent thug and the motion was ultimately defeated. Donahue’s vitriolic statements only make sense when we see Hampton’s legacy as a living, breathing thing that still affects policing in Chicago today. The larger context of the FOP’s rejection of “Chairman Fred Hampton Way” came in the wake of developments in the John Burge cases. In the spring of

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465 Ron Burke Interview, in *The Essence of Fred Hampton*, 5.
2006, rumors swirled that the Special Prosecutor’s report on torture was nearing completion and all signs pointed to the report confirming damning evidence against the CPD. When the report was finally released in July of that year, it declared that the Special Prosecutors had found ample evidence to charge Burge and other officers with crimes. However, they declined to do so because the statute of limitations had passed. The decision was cold comfort for both advocates against police brutality and the CPD’s allies.

The defeat of the “Chairman Fred Hampton Way” proposal says more about a city’s police department and a political machine still haunted by fear and their past (and present) misdeeds than it does on the actual local legacy of Fred Hampton. Hampton was a startling example of the CPD’s guilt in the assassination of a black leader in a city already torn apart by racial tension. Moreover, the City of Chicago’s handling of the Black Panther Party revealed the deeply racist ways that the police had criminalized black communities in the city. Fred Hampton’s case was dangerous to remember, a lesson that the city’s police department learned firsthand in its aftermath with the AAPL’s suit of racial discrimination and the ensuing John Burge Chicago Police Torture cases. Those cases tore at the very root of institutions in the city of Chicago dedicated to a northern brand of white supremacy. Chicago’s reputation for violence and its ill-earned moniker of “Chi-raq” were troubling legacies for a police department under fire for corruption and brutality, with the experience of black Chicago being compared to the American military occupation of Iraq and its blunders. While the conservative media liked to

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blame Chicago’s violence on black-on-black crime, that narrative could be reversed if Fred Hampton’s case and others like it, breached the public eye again.471

Those fears became a reality with the insurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement and cell phone footage of the death of Laquan McDonald on October 20, 2014. Officer Jason Van Dyke shot 17-year-old McDonald multiple times over thirteen seconds. The majority of the sixteen shots fired came after McDonald was lying on the street, helpless and bleeding to death.472 Despite obvious excessive use of forth, CPD did what it had routinely done for years: ruled the case as “justifiable homicide” and released Jason Van Dyke without charges.473 Only when protests erupted afterward did the police feel forced to release dash cam footage, showing McDonald’s murder. Ultimately, State’s Attorney Anita Alvarez lost her bid for re-election as a result of her handling of the case and Jason Van Dyke went to jail for second degree murder and sixteen aggravated battery charges.474 The case also revealed the complicity of other officers on the scene, all of whom initially supported Van Dyke’s contention that McDonald was charging at him with a weapon even though dash-cam footage showed that this was false. The DOJ report on the CPD speculated that the cover up was indicative of common practice within the department to collude on witness statements.475

475 Department of Justice, The DOJ Investigation of the Chicago Police Department, location 1488.

The story of Laquan McDonald should remind us all of the potency that Fred Hampton’s narrative still has over the city of Chicago and over the nation. Fred Hampton’s death has been marked out as singular in the long pursuit for justice, and in many ways, Fred Hampton was extraordinary. He was extraordinary for his youth, his brilliance, his unbound love for his people, and his political dream of the Rainbow Coalition. His death was extraordinary for different reasons: the violence with which the city and the FBI assassinated him and the scale...
and the scope of the cover up that involved local, state, and federal institutions. Hampton reminds us that a deeper and more troubling narrative associated with black Chicago is the long history of police misconduct toward poor, marginalized communities of color.

This history of brutality did not begin with the Black Panther Party, but was the impetus for its initial activism. Within that long tradition, Fred Hampton’s death is just one of thousands of cases of brutality. It marks a history that the city and the nation could not bear to grapple with because confronting that history would reveal the many ways that violence undergirded white supremacy at all levels. Confronting that history taps into a deep wellspring of rage and activism that has the potential to unseat established white power—a potential realized in the election of Harold Washington and the election of Lori Lightfoot. Fred Hampton and others like him are safer buried and forgotten, a cruel calculus that the city understood well in its attempt to cover up the death of Laquan McDonald.

What is extraordinary about Fred Hampton’s life and death is not the length that white, hegemonic culture has gone to forget him, but the survival of his memory regardless. Fred Hampton has become part of a hidden transcript, obscure and confusing to those outside of marginalized communities that revere him, but a source of inspiration and strength from within. Recently, that hidden transcript has broached the surface again with the insurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement that has increased interest in the history of the Black Panther

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479 James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990); Foote, *Shadowed Ground*. Hidden transcripts have really shaped how I think about heritage and memory studies. I want to complicate Kenneth Foote’s model of sanctification, designation, rectification, and obliteration because it ends up being too constricting a model that does not take into account the dynamic, shifting nature of memory and commemoration. It also does not offer a cogent analysis of how different memory narratives can evolve in different communities based on the power that those communities can wield. In the case of Hampton, the sites where his memory gets officially commemorated are few. However, his memory is constantly being contested in hidden ways on the vernacular landscape where it provides a language of resistance that shapes how black communities in Chicago think about city politics and the police.
Party. It revealed itself in a mural of Hampton on the West Side that functions as an impromptu shrine to the slain leader.\textsuperscript{480} Hip-Hop artists from Jay-Z to Kendrick Lamar use Hampton’s name to evoke an alternative legacy of power from which they draw their strength.\textsuperscript{481} Fred Hampton’s story also featured prominently in \textit{The Black Panthers: Vanguard of the Revolution} documentary. In addition, Van Jones referenced Fred Hampton as one of a number of leaders purposefully killed and/or driven into exile by the U.S. government as a reason for the lack of black leadership in the 1980s and 1990s in Ava DuVernay’s documentary \textit{13th}.\textsuperscript{482} These references to Hampton join an already rich documentary legacy including the award-winning 1971 documentary \textit{Murder of Fred Hampton} and the \textit{Eyes on the Prize} episode “A Nation of Law? (1968-1971).\textsuperscript{483} Even as Hampton remains un-memorialized and problematic on the official landscape of Chicago, his salience lingers as a civil rights icon whose fight is still relevant today.

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item \textsuperscript{482} Van Jones Interview, DuVernay, \textit{13th}.
\item \textsuperscript{483} DuVernay, \textit{13th}; Gray, \textit{The Murder of Fred Hampton; Eyes on the Prize: A Nation of Law? 1968-1971}, directed by Louis J. Massiah and Thomas Ott, featuring (Julian Bond, Elaine Brown, and William Brown)(PBS 1990), DVD.
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\end{footnotesize}
The Many Faces of Ericka Huggins: Gender and Martyrdom in the Black Panther Party

Just by being near Ericka, a flame arose in me that I thought had flickered out a long time ago; the flame of freedom. It was Ericka who nourished this flame, fed it, and embraced it to a point where it glowed at its peak with the fullest of intensity...When Ericka had gently breathed life into my rage, she had raised Lazarus from the dead. Ericka educated me to the fact that it was, and still is, my historical duty to raise Lazarus from the dead. If I don't succeed I must die trying. I must. Everyone who is concerned about the future of America must try. Our survival depends upon this. Lazarus my friend, come forth.--Mike Green

"Ericka was described to me quite frankly by a young black community leader," the activist woman began, speaking confidentially, "as a black Ilse Koch"--letting this penetrate--"Koshh, you know, the heartless Nazi sympathizer. The black community here is terrorized by the Panthers. And frankly, I am told by many young militant black men here that the Panther women are uncontrollably aggressive. Man haters. They take it out through the Panther movement, you see." "Ericka Huggins?" Let's put it this way," said an influential white attorney. "If you invite Ericka to a party she'll bring the boards and you supply the nails. A born martyr."--Gail Sheehy

These two divergent depictions of Ericka Huggins strike at the heart of the problem surrounding representation of black women in the Black Panther Party and in the 1960s and 1970s. Ericka Huggins was one of the most prominent leaders of the Black Panther Party. In 1969, she emerged as the face of black female suffering, first as the widow of assassinated leader of the Los Angeles Panthers, John Huggins, and then as the main defendant in the murder trial of slain Panther, Alex Rackley. Ericka Huggins became a sensation both in the mainstream news and in the underground press as either the wronged widow being sentenced to die in the electric

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chair or the dangerous black seductress capable of murder.\textsuperscript{486} Her joint trial with Bobby Seale catapulted her to a level of stardom in the Black Panther Party only rivaled by Huey P. Newton, George Jackson, Fred Hampton, and Bobby Seale himself. By the time she was set free in 1971, Ericka Huggins was unquestionably the most prominent and well-known Panther woman, surpassing the likes of Afeni Shakur, Kathleen Cleaver, and Elaine Brown.\textsuperscript{487}

The intense media scrutiny and focus on Ericka Huggins creates an opportunity to examine how both the Black Panthers and their enemies gendered narratives of martyrdom to grapple with changing understandings of black femininity. Coinciding with the beginning of the women’s liberation movement, the various depictions of Ericka Huggins give insight into how the Black Panther Party debated the meaning of gender within its ranks. It illuminates the ways Party women struggled against and at times reflected larger societal views of black women. Overriding all of the struggles over Huggins's image was the question of her own agency—to what degree did she have control over how she was depicted and what effect did that have on her later activism? During her trial in New Haven, Huggins found herself at the mercy of forces outside of her control. In those moments of helplessness, she turned to her poetry, her work with


other prisoners, and personal meditation to regain semblance of self.\textsuperscript{488} Some of this work seeped its way into the public imaginary through a published book of poetry and public letters written in the \textit{Black Panther Community News Service}, but those public words must be read as shaped by the context of her trial and larger struggles over gender relations within the Party. Her narrative interrogates the question of Panther women’s agency.\textsuperscript{489}

During the trial, Huggins had to put her life and public self in the hands of her lawyer, Catherine Roraback. Roraback’s defense built on already established depictions of her as the victim—the wife of John Huggins and mother of his daughter. This vision portrayed her as passive and left her very little room to shape and to align her private self with her public self.\textsuperscript{490} After her trial, Huggins seemed to shift the attention away from herself intentionally, preferring to act behind the scenes as the editor of the newspaper and member of the Central Committee. Unlike Elaine Brown, Huggins did not publicly take on male leadership of the Party.\textsuperscript{491} Nevertheless, Huggins had symbolic and actual power within the Party and wielded it from prison to highlight the struggles of other, less prominent incarcerated women. Even as she lost

\textsuperscript{488} Ericka Huggins and Huey P. Newton, \textit{Insights and Poems} (New York: City Lights Edition, 1975); Ericka Huggins, Interview by Fiona Thompson, 2007, Oral History Center, the Bancroft Library, University of California: Berkeley, California; Ericka Huggins, Interview by Cheryl Dong, Phone Interview, December 12, 2018; Freed, \textit{Agony in New Haven}, 64-68.
\textsuperscript{490} Catherine Roraback argued that Huggins was a woman traumatized by the death of her husband and ultimately unable to protect Alex Rackley from the violence of George Sams because she feared Sams would turn that violence on her. To make this argument, Roraback pointed to Huggins’s supposed emotional fragility in the months after John Huggins's death and Rackley’s murder and Sams’s history of domestic abuse against other Party women. “Roraback Closing Statement,” \textit{State vs. Huggins and Seale} vols. 26-35, New Haven Black Panther Trials Collection, Yale Law School Documents Collection Center, New Haven, Connecticut, 3514-3515.
control of her public image, she traded on its power to shape the trajectory of the Black Panther Party in seen and unseen ways.\textsuperscript{492}

For Ericka Huggins, becoming a public figure meant the subjugation of the private self to the Frankenstein of the public self. This chapter explores how Huggins as a public person got characterized in the media and the ramifications of those characterizations for her personally, and for how various communities perceived black women. Public portrayals of black women also informed how structures like the criminal justice system could perceive their experiences. Huggins was a shy, sensitive, and highly empathetic person. Over the course of her trial for conspiracy for the murder of Alex Rackley, she became a monster in the eyes of the mainstream media. The collision between Huggins the private person and her emerging and contested public persona created a space of personal trauma as a mother and a revolutionary. It revealed the many fault lines that the black power moment had created in how black and white Americans thought about gender and race.

The story of Ericka Huggins complicates a historiography that celebrates the role of women in the Black Panther Party as the unsung heroes of the party’s survival programs. This historiography contextualizes the issues of gender tensions as simply the reality of the late 1960s and 1970s or the typical behavior of “brothers off the block.”\textsuperscript{493} It also takes on the issue of

\textsuperscript{492} Huggins is able to do this through her work for other imprisoned women and as editor of the Black Panther Newspaper. Ericka Huggins, Interview by Fiona Thompson, 2007, Oral History Center, the Bancroft Library, University of California: Berkeley, California; Ericka Huggins, Interview by Cheryl Dong, Phone Interview, December 12, 2018; Mary Phillips, “The Power of the First-Person Narrative: Ericka Huggins and the Black Panther Party,” \textit{Women’s Studies Quarterly} 43.34 (2015): 33-47.

women in leadership in the Party, a fact acknowledged, but rarely critically studied. How did public-facing women in the Party leadership contend with issues of gender? A close study of the contradictions that governed how the Panthers constructed revolutionary womanhood reveals a richer story than has been told. Rather than gender issues being pushed to the sidelines in response to the need for party and racial unity, the debate to redefine black revolutionary womanhood often took center stage even as the party struggled in the face of state oppression and violence. These debates played out during the trial and subsequent career of Ericka Huggins through the ways the mainstream press, party publications, and other Panther veterans chose to represent her. They expose an understanding of revolutionary womanhood that was full of contradictions, opportunities, and limitations for women in the party.

Arguments about the meaning of black revolutionary womanhood reveal much about the historicity of issues of representation facing black women today. The Black Panthers openly challenged the myriad, racialized stereotypes that faced black women. Nevertheless, male leaders also replicated views of heteronormative gender relations because they sought to place black women within a larger framework of black nationalism. The result for black women in the Party was to navigate a new set of gendered assumptions that simultaneously upheld their


495 Ashley D. Farmer makes a similar argument about the tension of nationalism and respectability shaping black power’s initial approach to gendered constructions of womanhood. The historical denial of respectability caused black women in the movement to initially move towards the role of a “militant domestic.” However, BPP women challenged these initial, heteronormative constructions and the Panthers officially embraced an intersectional analysis of black women’s oppression. Far from gender being a marginal concern of the Party, it was actively debated in the pages of the BPP newspaper and Panther women succeeded in shaping themselves as prisoners and warriors as well as domestics. Farmer, *Remaking Black Power*, 101-165.

revolutionary nature while insisting they take a traditional, supportive role to men in the movement as wives, mothers, and helpmeets.\textsuperscript{497} When those traditional expectations clashed with the malicious, reborn narratives of Jezebels and Sapphires that typified white mainstream media coverage, a whole new set of experiences for black women activists became illuminated.\textsuperscript{498} This chapter explores those experiences through the life and martyrdom of Ericka Huggins.

**Motherhood and Widowhood: Understanding the Early life of Ericka Huggins**

Before the mainstream and underground press splashed Ericka Huggins's face on newspaper covers, she was an innocent young girl who family and friends knew for her sensitivity and kindness. Born Ericka Jenkins on January 5, 1948, in Washington, D.C., Ericka Huggins was a child of the Great Migration like so many other Panthers.\textsuperscript{499} Her mother’s family had come from a little town called Enfield in Halifax County, North Carolina. Ericka Huggins's mother had been the youngest daughter in a family of eleven children. After her marriage, the newly formed Jenkins family relocated to Washington, D.C. before Ericka’s birth in search of better economic opportunities.\textsuperscript{500} While Ericka was close to her mother throughout her life, she struggled with her father’s alcoholism and desire to define himself as middle class.\textsuperscript{501}

\textsuperscript{497} Farmer, *Remaking Black Power*, 101-103.


\textsuperscript{499} Ericka Huggins, Interview by Fiona Thompson, 2007, Oral History Center, the Bancroft Library, University of California: Berkeley, California.

\textsuperscript{500} Ericka Huggins, Interview by Cheryl Dong, Phone Interview, December 12, 2018.

\textsuperscript{501} Huggins's father owned property through his father. However, the land was located near Howard University and at the time was close to “the area where all the bars and the prostitutes and heroin dealers were.” Ericka Huggins, Interview by Fiona Thompson, 2007, Oral History Center, the Bancroft Library, University of California: Berkeley, California.
As a child, Ericka remembered her life to be largely segregated within the black community that developed in D.C. Although she recalled participating in Easter egg rolls at the White House, her childhood was insulated from the world of white Americans. However, she saw poverty from a very early age and she developed an understanding of how poverty, like race, seemed to be spatially segregated:

“...on the way back from the White House I would notice going through Northwest and sometimes Southwest that people were living on the street. Well, nobody was living on the street around the White House. No one seemed to be lacking, or hungry, or poorly clothed..I didn’t even talk to white people growing up because there were none to talk to except the very poor white kids, and this was disturbing too, who lived on the Maryland border...Very poor people, poor just like the people who lived up the hill from me in the projects, exact same--lack of clothing, looking hungry, this facial affect that was kind of despairing in adults, and kind of flat in the children.”

These economic contradictions shaped Ericka’s turn inward as a young teenager. She considered herself to be physically awkward and a regular wallflower at high school dances. As Ericka recounted:

I grew up in D.C. and went to parties, I was the tallest girl in my elementary school and then one of the tallest in my middle school and definitely by high school there were people when I would go out to parties who would do this who were fearful--men--who were fearful of taller women, who wouldn’t dance with me.

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503 Ericka was always very self-conscious of her physical appearance and her awkwardness, a fact addressed in multiple interviews and her poetry. Ericka Huggins, Interview by Fiona Thompson, 2007, Oral History Center, the Bancroft Library, University of California: Berkeley, California: Ericka Huggins, Interview by Cheryl Dong, Phone Interview, December 12, 2018; Ericka Huggins, “Tall, Skinny, Plain,” *Off Our Backs* 2.8 (August 1972): 15; Platt, “Two Interviews with Ericka,” 54-71.
504 Ericka Huggins, Interview by Cheryl Dong, Phone Interview, December 12, 2018.
The shy and awkward girl who had been so struck by the bitter contradictions of race and class in Washington, D.C., would become interested in the Civil Rights Movement. In 1963, at age fifteen, Ericka Huggins attended the March on Washington. As she later recalled, her mother opposed the idea of Ericka’s participation for fear of her daughter’s safety. According to Ericka:

I said, “But mama, you don’t want me to go, you’re afraid for me, but you taught me to love black people.” And she said, “I know I did.” “And you taught me to stand up for black people.” She said, “I know I did, but I didn’t mean you. I didn’t mean I want you to do it.” I said, “Well I am, and I’m going.” And I went to my father and told him I was going and he was shocked and just was quiet, I don’t know why. I told my mother and I walked out and I got on the bus and I went by myself.505

Ericka’s determination in the face of feared violence at the march shaped the choices she made. She was quiet and withdrawn, more likely to write poetry for herself than to be an outgoing person. Yet her empathy for others and concern about inequality led her toward her later activism and movement work. During her teenage years, she became interested in early childhood education because of her first boyfriend’s disabled brother, Theophilis “Jack” Jackson. Jack had to be institutionalized at the age of twelve because the family simply lacked the economic and social resources to provide the care that Jack needed. When Ericka went to visit him, she noted that he was not receiving adequate care: his clothes were dirty, and the facility seemed to be a jail for children with disabilities who were all lumped together. Jack died at an early age, and Ericka made a vow to help children like him. She hoped to open an institution

505 Ericka Huggins, Interview by Fiona Thompson, 2007, Oral History Center, the Bancroft Library, University of California: Berkeley, California.
that would be respectful of their disabilities. Ericka kept that vow by establishing the Oakland Community School in 1973.

Ericka Huggins's initial experience in college drew her further into childhood education. She attended Cheyney State Teachers College in 1966, and then Lincoln University in 1967. At Lincoln, she became involved actively in the black power movement by joining the Black Student Union where she met John Huggins, a native of New Haven, Connecticut. John had come from a black elite background and rebelled against the strictures of respectability. His father ran an elite social club at Yale University called the Fence Club, and there were whispers after John’s death that the socially conservative Huggins family did not approve of Ericka Huggins or the Black Panther Party—a fact that the FBI later hoped to exploit.

Ericka and John participated in the school’s larger cultural milieu that included everyone from Kwame Nkrumah (Stokely Carmichael), Charles V. Hamilton, to Langston Hughes. It was also at Lincoln that Ericka first picked up a copy of *Ramparts* magazine edited by Eldridge Cleaver, and read about the shooting of Huey P. Newton. That event led the free-spirited Ericka to write a note to John Huggins saying, “John, I am going to California, you comin’? - Ericka.” From there, Ericka and John packed up, told their parents they were joining the

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506 Ericka Huggins, Interview by Fiona Thompson, 2007, Oral History Center, the Bancroft Library, University of California: Berkeley, California.
508 Platt, “Two Interviews with Ericka.”
510 Ericka Huggins, Interview by Fiona Thompson, 2007, Oral History Center, the Bancroft Library, University of California: Berkeley, California; Platt, “Two Interviews with Ericka.”
511 Ericka Huggins, Interview by Fiona Thompson, 2007, Oral History Center, the Bancroft Library, University of California: Berkeley, California; “Platt, Two Interviews with Ericka.”
Black Panther Party, and headed out for the west coast with a friend. They ended up in Los Angeles instead of Oakland simply because their friend had more gas money saved up and wanted to go to Hollywood to make it in show business.  

By February 18, 1968, Ericka and John Huggins had joined the Southern California Chapter of the Black Panther Party. John Huggins would go on to become Captain of the chapter and the right-hand man of Alprentice “Bunchy Carter,” the Deputy Minister of Defense. At the time, Ericka was just twenty years old. Life for Ericka and John Huggins in Los Angeles was admittedly touch-and-go. They lived collectively in a “Panther pad” and relied on Ericka’s welfare check, Black Panther newspaper sales, as well as what groceries John could steal to put food on the table. Later when Ericka was pregnant, a sympathetic clerk at the local Safeway would help them make ends meet by ringing them up for five dollars even if they were getting 150 dollars in groceries. Ericka described the experience:

So John didn’t have to steal food anymore. But he was famous for walking around in a grocery store and eating. He wanted to make sure that I ate, he was very concerned. We shared food all the time because we didn’t have any money and we worked really hard, so he would do that to make sure that I would eat something, because it wasn’t my way to routinely steal food. But he figured nobody should have to pay for food…” Nobody should go hungry. Eat this. Safeway’s not going to struggle if you eat this food.” So that’s what we’d do. John was such a buddy. And he also was a teacher for me. He was so fearless. I had grown up in so much fear that there wasn’t—nothing seemed to make him afraid. The only thing that I think made him afraid is if he would think that his child would have to suffer.

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512 Gail Sheehy tells this story differently with Ericka as the seductress who lures John Huggins away from his bewildered, middle class family. Ericka Huggins, Interview by Fiona Thompson, 2007, Oral History Center, the Bancroft Library, University of California: Berkeley, California; Platt, “Two Conversations with Ericka”; Sheehy, Panthermania, 13-15.

513 Ericka Huggins, Interview by Fiona Thompson, 2007, Oral History Center, the Bancroft Library, University of California: Berkeley, California; Platt, “Two Interviews with Ericka.”

514 Ericka Huggins, Interview by Fiona Thompson, 2007, Oral History Center, the Bancroft Library, University of California: Berkeley, California.
John and Ericka’s life in Los Angeles was far from idyllic. However, this one year they had in Los Angeles would be the high point of their relationship. They were young, in love, and expecting their first child together. Mai Huggins was born on December 27, 1968; Ericka turned twenty-one on January 5, 1969. She became a widow by January 17, 1969, when members of the U.S. Organization, provoked by the FBI, assassinated John Huggins and Alprentice “Bunchy” Carter in a lecture hall at UCLA.515

Elaine Brown’s memoir, *A Taste of Power*, detailed the scene at Ericka and John’s shared apartment when she first learned about John’s death. As Elaine described it, Ericka was in shock:

Ericka went to stand at the kitchen sink, her long, thin body surrendered. Her eyes glazed, her artistic fingers pulling twenty-odd cups from the cupboard. Then she started to boil pots of water. “I suppose everyone is upset. I’ll make some coffee,” she said insanely.516

Before long, 150 police officers, armed with shotguns, arrived at the door. Fearing for her daughter’s life, Ericka pushed Mai under the bed and used her own body to shield her daughter from harm. The police pointed guns at the women lying on the floor of the bedroom, trying to protect the three-week-old baby. A police officer even “searched” Baby Mai for weapons and wrote out an arrest record.517 As Ericka Huggins went through this harrowing experience, police officers made jokes about her baby with comments like, “So whose baby is

that—Mao Tse Tung? She looks kind of Chinese. Or she could be Fidel Castro’s.”

After Panther supporters came to take baby Mai away from the precinct, the women arrested “were put into bathtubs, sprayed for bugs, separated, and locked into seven-by-eight-foot maximum-security cells. The morning sun was almost rising.” Huggins's arrest the night of January 17, 1969, became a stark and traumatic memory that defined how she would respond to her later arrest in New Haven.

By Huggins's own admission, the months following John Huggins's death passed by in a haze of grief, trauma, and shock. She went to New Haven for her husband’s funeral and then decided to stay so her baby could grow up near her grandparents. By February of 1969, she had become involved tangentially in the nascent Black Panther Party in Connecticut, which had moved from Bridgeport to New Haven. Huggins was the only veteran Panther on the scene and she became an unofficial leader and mentor to the New Haven group. She also began to experience national prominence within the Black Panther Party as John Huggins's grieving widow and the mother of his baby daughter.

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518 Ericka Huggins, Interview by Fiona Thompson, 2007, Oral History Center, the Bancroft Library, University of California: Berkeley, California.  
519 Brown, A Taste of Power, 170.  
523 Ericka Huggins is first mentioned in the issue addressing her husband’s assassination. A couple of weeks later, she is on the cover with Huey P. Newton pointing a gun at Karenga’s head. A few weeks after that, an article on “Black Women and the Revolution” holds up Huggins as a prime example of black womanhood. The paper also publish a poem by Alprentice “Bunchy” Carter entitled “Black Mother” in the two months after the assassination. The subject and content of the poem obliquely references the mother of his child, but also must be connected to Ericka Huggins given these events. “PANTHERS ASSASSINATED BY US ORGANIZATION,” Black Panther Community News Service, January 21, 1969, 2; Ericka Huggins, “Letter from Ericka Huggins to John Huggins Before his Death,” Black Panther Community News Service, March 13, 1969, 2; “Panthers Demand Justice,” Black Panther Community News Service, February 2, 1969; “A Tribute to Carter and Huggins,” Black Panther Community News Service, March 16, 1969, 8; Alprentice Bunchy Carter, “Black Mother,” Black Panther Community News
In a last letter to her husband mere weeks before his death published, Ericka expressed her love for and defined her own role of dutiful revolutionary wife: “...i love you—with all the terrible draining consequences that are part of loving a revolutionary...if you do not return tonight—or tomorrow night—i know that it is because you are laying the foundation so that our small and helpless little man will be able to fight one day a battle supported by the people.”

In excerpts like these, Ericka and John Huggins's relationship became three dimensional. She was a young, vulnerable woman who had set aside everything to join the Black Panther Party with her husband. She knew from the start that her life and that of her husband’s would be at risk. Looking back on her decision to become a Panther in her letter, Huggins references her child as the reason to keep fighting.

In contrast to this vulnerable depiction of Ericka Huggins, she appears as much more militant in her first newspaper cover in an illustration done by Emory Douglas, the chief artist and Minister of Culture of the Black Panther Party. In a pen and ink cover, Huggins is positioned behind Huey P. Newton holding a gun to the head of Karenga, an unidentified US member, and a police “pig” lurking in the background. The image projects strength with Huggins standing while the assassins kneel and cower in a corner, tears running prominently down Karenga’s face. Yet even in this fierce cover published February 2, 1969, Huggins takes a submissive role. While Newton’s arm is outstretched and he is pointing the gun emphatically, Huggins's arm is bent and her weapon is pointed at an angle. Newton is wearing the official

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uniform and beret of the Black Panther Party whereas Huggins wore a short, black-and-white striped dress designed to evoke a prison uniform and black, knee-high boots. Her jewelry is prominently emphasized to signal her femininity.\textsuperscript{527} The cover struck a tense balance between giving Ericka Huggins agency as an avenging warrior while emphasizing her supporting role to Newton as a bereaved mother and widow.

Unsurprisingly, the Black Panther Party used Ericka Huggins as a symbol of martyrdom alongside her dead husband. She had sacrificed her domestic happiness for their cause. In so doing, it pushed at gendered and racialized boundaries that did not traditionally recognize the motherhood and widowhood of black women. These early depictions of Ericka Huggins in the aftermath of her husband’s death straddled two paradoxical impulses within the Black Panther Party in their understanding of women. On the one hand, the Black Panthers’ pull towards nationalism led them to consider black women in heteronormative roles as mothers and wives.\textsuperscript{528} On the other, the Panthers painted black women as revolutionary warriors, just as capable of picking up the gun as their male counterparts.\textsuperscript{529} Both portrayals of black women played a role in how Ericka Huggins would be depicted in the aftermath of her husband’s death. Taken together, they show that the experiences of black women in the Party were not monolithic, but subject to lively debate that changed with time, place, and situation.

On March 2, 1969, just a couple of weeks before it published Ericka Huggins’s letter, the newspaper ran an editorial entitled “Black Women and the Revolution: Subjectivism—A Male’s

Point of View.” The anonymous author called the black community “matriarchal” and attacked the independent mindset of black women as the cause for high rates of divorce among black revolutionaries. Finally, the author criticized black women as supporting cultural nationalism, rather than the meaty revolutionary nationalism of the Black Panthers, which called for real political change. The author accused black women of only relating “to the “natural” look, the Afro dress, and “courses in Swahili.” When black men then asked for the support of “their” women, black women supposedly treated them with abuse.  

This editorial’s positioning of Panther women as cultural nationalists took on additional significance in the wake of the UCLA assassinations because the Panthers blamed the split between cultural and revolutionary nationalists for the death of John Huggins and Alprentice “Bunchy” Carter. In an article printed in the immediate aftermath of Huggins's and Carter’s assassinations, the Panthers accused Karenga and US of working with the police, “Ron Karenga is part and partial of the pigs. He is an informer for the slavemasters.” Another article on the same page denounced cultural nationalism as useless. Implicit in the editorial on “Revolutionary women” was the expectation that Ericka Huggins would continue to play the role of the good widow and not “betray” her husband’s legacy by becoming a “matriarchal” woman.

The juxtaposition of the editorial and the cover illustrated the clash of old and new ideas about black women in the Party. That conflict would create crucial social space for women to question and experiment. In addition, it created a paradox where Black Panther women could be judged by two simultaneously conflicting sets of expectations. At the same time, the creative tension between the two was also a space of opportunity where individual women could

negotiate their own way in the Party. Although it was limited in terms of hetero-normative gender expectations, the experience of Black Panther women was one in transition.  

The various contradictions in how the Black Panther Party thought about gender and race have been a focal point for historians since the 1990s. For Ericka Huggins and many women in the Black Panther Party, the question of women’s experience has always been complicated, something they feel scholars have largely ignored. According to Ericka:

Women of the Black Panther Party? We laugh about it. My friends and I laugh about [how] there was this one composite woman. Mass media used images and descriptions that were a composite of nameless, historyless African American women with Afros and a fierce gaze. We laughed because those images were not any woman we knew.

Huggins brings up a catch-22 for historians who write about women and gender in the Black Panther Party. By wanting to shed light on their particular experience as unique from that of the narratively dominant male experience, historians cannot help but make generalizations about the experience of all women. Ericka Huggins's life was not representative. She sat on the Central Committee of the Black Panther Party and she was nationally famous for the death of her husband and subsequent arrest in New Haven. Nevertheless, her experiences as a political prisoner illustrate a set of possibilities and limitations that women in the Party had to navigate.

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535 Ericka Huggins, Interview by Fiona Thompson, 2007, Oral History Center, the Bancroft Library, University of California: Berkeley, California
The Black Jezebel: Fear and the Portrayal of Ericka Huggins in the News Media

The news of Alex Rackley’s murder broke on the New York Times with the lurid headline, “8 Black Panthers Seized in Torture-Murder Case.” Alongside the mugshots of eight arrested suspects, was Ericka Huggins's photo posted underneath.536 Later that afternoon, the story made the front page of the New Haven Register with the headline “8 Panthers in Murder Plot.” The Register piece reported details of Rackley’s “burned and mutilated body.” The article also claimed that police found a direct connection between the murder in New Haven and the arrest of the New York 21 just weeks before.537 That case sensationalized claims that the New York chapter had planned to attack the police. Although an all-white jury acquitted all twenty-one defendants on all charges in 1971, the initial arrests played into a narrative of Black Panther criminality.538 Even at this early stage, one thing was clear: The Panthers in New Haven would not be on trial for the facts of the case, but for the national reputation of the Black Panther Party itself.

Since the Black Panthers exploded in the national consciousness in 1967 with their march on Sacramento, their opponents had labeled them as fringe, radical, and violent. FBI surveillance under COINTELPRO propagated that belief through the use of informers who had been trained to incite violence and criminal activity inside the Black Panther Party.539 The case of Alex Rackley’s murder on May 21, 1969 must be viewed within this larger context of law enforcement working extralegally against the Black Panther Party. Therefore it should be of no

537 “8 Panthers in Murder Plot,” New Haven Register, May 21, 1969.
539 Bloom and Martin, Black Against Empire, 210-211
surprise that law enforcement officials saw an opportunity in Alex Rackley’s case to bring down two of its top leaders—Ericka Huggins and Bobby Seale. Ericka Huggins later recalled that on the night she was arrested, an FBI agent told her, “We’ll see you burn in the chair Huggins.” While unverifiable, Ericka Huggins’s recollection of this event shows that the case was political from its inception and that it would play out in the court of public opinion. Ultimately, what was on trial was the gender and sexuality of Ericka Huggins, and what the prosecution inferred her sexuality meant in terms of the social and racial deviance of the Black Panther Party. The prosecution and the news media would do their best to portray Huggins as a particular type of black female criminal. In so doing, they drew on a deep, often hidden, and bitterly contested discourse about black women, respectability, and criminality.

For the mainstream media, Ericka Huggins embodied much that white liberal elites hated and feared about women in the Black Panther Party. Huggins was “Jezebel” incarnate and rendered more dangerous by the fact that she did not appear to fit that stereotype at all. The figure of “Jezebel” dated back to slavery and was used by slavemasters to portray black women as sexually licentious and uncontrollable. The stereotype justified rape and sexual assault against black women and survived into the Jim Crow era. After emancipation, various state institutions and popular culture used the figure of Jezebel to incarcerate and control black women. Black women were written outside the bounds of femininity defined by the perceived norm: white women. Gail Sheehy, a journalist for New York Magazine and author of Panthermania, a book about Huggins and the New Haven Panther trials, portrayed Ericka Huggins in this vein.

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540 Ericka Huggins, Interview by Cheryl Dong, Phone Interview, December 12, 2018
542 Sheehy, _Panthermania_, 3.
Sheehy defined Panthermania as an infectious disease sweeping through the black middle class that threatened to pull families apart and destroy what was left of black communities. This point took on particular significance because of John Huggins's background.\textsuperscript{543} Like many white liberals, she blamed the Panthers for brainwashing black communities into dangerous ideologies and causing more violence between themselves and black nationalist groups than the police caused in their campaign of repression.\textsuperscript{544} In one example, Sheehy recounts the story of a boy named Junius who had become radicalized against the wishes of his parents. Sheehy described Junius’s father, William listening anxiously for the sound of a gun being loaded, “And we share now with William the burden of knowing the difference between the sound of a pen and the sound of a gun.”\textsuperscript{545} She positioned “Panthermania” as a class-based threat to middle class politics of respectability and a breakdown of the non-violent values of the Civil Rights Movement.\textsuperscript{546} The most dangerous vector of Panthermania was embodied in Ericka Huggins, a black woman that Sheehy imagined as even more threatening because Huggins did not seem to outwardly fit the stereotype of “Jezebel” that she constructed.

The key paradox Sheehy imagined in Ericka Huggins's character was her role as both sympathetic mother and widow and the cold-blooded murderer of Alex Rackley. Sheehy attempted to bridge these two positions by framing Ericka Huggins as a seductress, the “black Ilse Koche” of her imagination who had somehow infiltrated a highly respectable black family

\textsuperscript{543} Sheehy, \textit{Panthermania}, 7.
and led their son astray. Ericka’s bodily appearance took center stage in Sheehy’s writing as she gushed about Ericka’s soulful eyes and light-colored skin in one passage while ranting about her icy demeanor and stiff posture in another. Despite Huggins's supposed physical awkwardness and appearance as a flower child of the 1960s, Sheehy adamantly insisted that Ericka Huggins was an emotionally unstable and violent but experienced seductress. She had taken advantage of John Huggins's naive and innocent middle-class upbringing to seduce him into the dangers of black radicalism. Sheehy blamed Ericka for John Huggins’s death. Sheehy claimed that the young, intellectual, and quiet John Huggins would never have gotten himself caught up in radicalism without the influence of his wife.

Sheehy then positions Huggins as an outsider/interloper at her own husband’s funeral. Sheehy accused Ericka Huggins of being a disruptive force by bringing other Panthers to New Haven for the burial. Moreover, Huggins arranged an overtly Panther funeral for her husband against the (unsaid) wishes of the Huggins family. Sheehy portrayed John Huggins Sr. as offended because of his role as proprietor of Yale’s elite “Fence Club.” Ericka availed herself of the hospitality of her husband’s family by using her own daughter Mai’s connection to the Huggins family to get access to New Haven and bring “Panthermania” with her to the community. For Sheehy, Ericka Huggins was an outside agitator and radical that introduced unwanted and unneeded tension into New Haven. Sheehy’s criticism neatly mirrors the criticism

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547 Sheehy, Panthermania, 36.
548 Sheehy, Panthermania, 15.
550 Sheehy, Panthermania, 39.
552 Sheehy, Panthermania, 55.
of many Jim Crow officials and Southerners, who used the same rhetoric about “outside agitators” during the Civil Rights Movement.⁵⁵³

Sheehy cemented Huggins's reputation as a homewrecker and outside agitator by claiming that she entered into a sexual relationship with a married local activist, Warren Kimbro. Warren Kimbro confessed to pulling the trigger on Alex Rackley, but Sheehy framed Kimbro as another innocent caught up in the crossfire of Ericka Huggins's overwhelming sexuality and charisma. According to Sheehy, Huggins broke up Kimbro’s family; she even took over the Kimbro family home. She subjected Kimbro’s daughter and her own daughter to the torture of Alex Rackley.⁵⁵⁴ Sheehy believed that Huggins's supposed affair with Warren Kimbro was worthy of additional condemnation because Ericka not only committed adultery, but did so just months after the death of her husband, John Huggins.⁵⁵⁵ When Kimbro later followed George Sams’ orders to kill Alex Rackley, Sheehy blamed his actions on the effects of “Panthermania” and manipulation from Ericka Huggins.⁵⁵⁶ Sheehy created a vision of Ericka colored by white liberal fear and anxiety over the rise of the Black Panther Party. She drew on deep-seated beliefs that Black Panther women bearing guns fundamentally upset the established gender and racial hierarchy in America.⁵⁵⁷

Part of what made Ericka Huggins and other Panther women so shocking for Sheehy and others in the media was the historical expectation that black women would be outwardly upstanding and respectable. As Darlene Clark Hine writes in her article, “Rape and the Inner

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⁵⁵³ For a review of books exploring the idea of the “outside agitator” see: Steven F. Lawson, “Memories of the Southern Civil Rights Movement, and Outside Agitator: Jon Daniels and the Civil Rights Movement in Alabama,” *Southern Cultures*, vol. 1.2 (1995): 262-266.
Lives of Black Women,” the reality of rape and domestic violence as a common, lived experience for black women led to the development of a culture of “dissemblance.” Black women learned to hide their inner lives from view and outwardly project a vision of respectability.\textsuperscript{558} This hiding of the personal and adoption of modesty was a response to the fear that any whisper of the true inner lives of black women “provided grist for detractors' mills and, even more ominously, tore the protective cloaks from their inner selves.”\textsuperscript{559} This dissemblance was inspired by the real danger that black women found themselves under from the criminal justice system. Black women were routinely presented in court as deviant and reports of abuse were taken not as proof of victimhood but of pathology.\textsuperscript{560}

In 1971, Ericka Huggins found herself caught between two contradictory cultural impulses that had shaped black women’s lives during Jim Crow. On the one hand, she battled against predominant white notions of black women’s promiscuity and the stereotype of “Jezebel.” On the other hand, Ericka Huggins would have been expected to keep her silence and hide her private life from public view due to the culture of dissemblance. Yet as a Black Panther symbol, Ericka Huggins would have no choice but to have her private life exposed and dissected publicly. However, since black women’s interiority had been hidden for so long, the mainstream media and the courts had no context to see her life as fully realized or complex. As Hine argues, the culture of dissemblance had created an “empty space” in the understanding of black women’s lives. That space that was easily filled by “sterotypes, negative images, and debilitating assumptions.”\textsuperscript{561}


\textsuperscript{559} Hine, “Rape and the Inner Lives of Black Women,” 916.


\textsuperscript{561} Hine, “Rape and the Inner Lives of Black Women,” 915.
Ericka Huggins in the New Haven Panther Trials represented all there was to fear in the new Panther woman. Was she the bereaved widow of John Huggins and mother of Mai Huggins? Or was she something darker—a seductress and murderess that led men to their deaths? In the hands of Gail Sheehy, Ericka Huggins embodied a new vision of “Jezebel.” Like the old version, the new one put Ericka Huggins's body on trial as proof of her insatiable sexual needs. The fact that she did not fit the dark skinned, full-figured traditional stereotype only added to her danger.562 Here was an evolved Jezebel or the modern age. She did not have the exaggerated sexual features, but she had a college education and professed interest in children. Her very cloak of respectability made her far more dangerous. Ericka Huggins was a transgressor in the middle-class black community of New Haven, Connecticut. She could look and play the part of middle-class blackness while threatening the existing social order.

While Sheehy was the most prominent journalist to write about Ericka Huggins and the Panthers in a sexualized and sensational fashion, she was not the only one. Another journalist who influenced how white liberals viewed and framed the Panthers was Tom Wolfe. Crucially, Tom Wolfe was a Yale graduate with deep roots in New Haven, and his knowledge of the Huggins trial shaped how he would write about the Panthers.563 In his landmark article, “Radical Chic, the Party at Lenny’s,” Wolfe satirized the white liberal elite fascination with the Panthers by depicting a party hosted by Leonard Bernstein for the purpose of raising money for the New

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York 21. Wolfe’s work portrayed the Panthers as objects to be collected to strengthen the radical credibility of elite donors. Wolf wrote that what the partygoers wanted were “real men” not “civil rights Negroes wearing suits three sizes too big.”564 The Panthers provided that “authenticity” as well as masculinity that the elite were searching for. They were fashionable because they were radical, and their supporters wanted to be seen on the cutting edge of leftist politics. The Panthers’ featured in Wolfe’s article existed as black bodies to be commodified:

The Panther women—there are three or four of them on hand, wives of the Panther 21 defendants, and they are so lean, so lithe, as they say, with tight pants and Yoruba-style headdresses, almost like turbans, as if they’d stepped out of the pages of Vogue, although no doubt Vogue got it from them.565

At first glance, Wolfe’s article was not concerned with the Black Panthers themselves, but their white, liberal supporters. However, the darker undertone of this article meant that the Panthers had little to add intellectually to the black freedom movement. Instead, they were famous because they presented a beautiful, seductive image, personified by the wives of the New York Twenty-One. Like Sheehy, Wolfe implied that the Panthers actual politics should be disturbing to the liberal elite if they actually studied them. Wolfe mentioned allegations of the Black Panther Party’s supposed anti-Semitism and that many of the party-goers were Jewish.566 In Wolfe’s vision, the Black Panther Party took on the gendered characteristics of the "Jezebel" and her companion, the sexualized and dangerous black man. Wolfe’s description of the women lingered on their bodies and their clothing, which were inherently seductive and enviable to their sponsors. What that body encompassed was the philosophy of the Black Panther Party. Tom

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565 Tom Wolfe, “Radical Chic.”
566 Tom Wolfe, “Radical Chic.”
Wolfe’s role as the white, male voyeur must also be emphasized. Like the white slave masters of old, Wolfe got to judge the Black Panther Party as represented by sexualized black bodies and found within it a potent mixture of desire and fear.\textsuperscript{567}

New Journalism’s use of these gendered stereotypes of black womanhood would worm its way into the very trial proceedings of the New Haven Panther Trials. Black women’s traditional response of dissemblance to their internal lives only fed into the paranoia of speculation over black women’s bodies and their sexual lives.\textsuperscript{568} Both of these responses would color Huggins's trial and the legacy it left behind.

\textit{Under the Limelight: The Ericka Huggins Trial and the “Gendered Blindness” of the Law}

The New Haven Panther trials took place over almost two years, and Ericka Huggins spent the entirety of that time in prison. From the beginning, the media circus around Huggins and Seale cast doubt over whether justice could be served. The president of Yale University, Kingman Brewster, went so far as to make the statement that he was unsure whether the Black Panther Party could get a fair hearing anywhere in America.\textsuperscript{569} The trial of these two high-profile Panthers was about the reputation of Ericka Huggins and by default, the Black Panther Party. The court’s inability to find an unbiased jury underscores the uncomfortable truth about the Panther trials in New Haven. The \textit{voir dire} took place over four months, with over 1,100 potential jurors interviewed. At the time, it was the longest jury selection process in American

\textsuperscript{567} Here, I am referring to a particular perception of black womanhood emerging from slavery powerfully argued by Winthrop D. Jordan. Jordan, \textit{White Over Black}, 462-463.
\textsuperscript{568} Hine, “Rape and the Inner Lives of Black Women,” 915.
Ultimately, the “unbiased” jury seated for the trial voted 10-2 for Huggins's acquittal. The judge, Harold Mulvey, then dismissed the charges based on his own admittance that finding a new jury would be ultimately impossible due to media sensationalism.571

The prosecutor’s case in the Huggins/Seale trial rested on the testimony of Warren Kimbro and George Sams, both of whom were the main perpetrators of the murder of Alex Rackley. Kimbro and Sams turned into state’s witnesses in return for possible leniency on their sentencing, which had not yet taken place at the time of the Huggins's trial.572 Arnold Markle used the testimony of Kimbro and Sams to attempt to establish Huggins's guilt by association. Both parties testified to Huggins's presence in and out of 365 Orchard Street on the dates of May 18, 1969 through May 20, 1969 when the torture and interrogation of Alex Rackley took place. Although they disagreed as to the extent that Huggins participated in the torture of Rackley, they both placed Huggins at the scene at various times that they beat Rackley, tied him up, or poured hot water on him.573

The problems with both Sams’ and Kimbro’s testimony seem obvious and insurmountable when examined carefully. Not only did Kimbro and Sams often disagree with

572 Bass and Rae never admit that Kimbro and Sams got “deals,” but they do admit that both Kimbro and Sams served suspiciously short sentences. Huggins also testifies to this leniency in her oral history, and it is alluded to by the lawyers in the court transcripts: Donald Freed, Agony in New Haven (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973); Bass and Rae, Murder in the Model City, 220; Ericka Huggins, Interview by Fiona Thompson, 2007, Oral History Center, the Bancroft Library, University of California: Berkeley, California; “Kimbro Testimony,” State vs. Huggins and Seale vols. 1-5, New Haven Black Panther Trials Collection, Yale Law School Documents Collection Center, New Haven, Connecticut, 365; Sam’s Cross Examination by Catherine Roraback, State vs. Huggins and Seale vols. 14-19, New Haven Black Panther Trials Collection, Yale Law School Documents Collection Center, New Haven, Connecticut, 2033-2034.
each other to the extent that Huggins and Seale participated in the torture and subsequent death of Rackley, their testimony often contradicted their previous statements to police and testimony at other trials. For instance, Roraback pointed out that Kimbro testified that Huggins had been present for the initial questioning of Alex Rackley. However, his earlier statement given to police investigators on January 12, 1970 mentioned that Ericka Huggins was not present for said questioning. Kimbro testified that Bobby Seale had never set foot into 365 Orchard Street or seen Alex Rackley, while George Sams claimed that Seale personally gave the order to kill Alex Rackley standing over his bed, an event that Kimbro would be unlikely to forget.

Another example of the inconsistency of the witnesses was George Sams’s insistence during the Huggins trial that Ericka was in charge of the Black Panther Party in New Haven. Had Huggins been unquestionably in charge, the prosecution could claim that she was ultimately responsible for Rackley’s death. However, Sams testified on two separate occasions in the earlier trial of Lonnie McLucas that he was the one who was in charge in New Haven and that he personally made the important decisions in regard to the interrogation and captivity of Alex Rackley. Sams’s later testimony that Huggins was in charge made sense only in his role as star witness for the prosecution. It would be difficult to believe that in a trial that depended on Sams’ testifying against Huggins that he would do otherwise. His earlier statement deserved careful consideration as a reflection of the type of overt masculine control that Sams exerted in New Haven. This was a man who not only expected his subordinates to obey his orders, but was

willing to use violence, especially violence against women to demonstrate his control.\textsuperscript{577} Therefore, his contention of leading the chapter in the McLucas trial seemed much more plausible than his statement to the contrary in the Huggins/Seale trial. Even a witness for the defense, Peggy Hudgins, attested to Sams’s use of violence when she recounted how he demanded Loretta Luckes, a teenage member of the Party, play records for him and then proceeded to “slap her around” whenever she played a record he didn’t like.\textsuperscript{578}

Given the impossibility of convicting Ericka Huggins on the contested and unreliable testimony of Kimbro and Sams, one has to ask what was the prosecution’s purpose in even bringing these two witnesses to the trial? The answer lay in their availability as the first-hand witnesses that the prosecution could call to testify and in the crucial role they had in establishing Ericka Huggins as the character of coldblooded murderess.\textsuperscript{579} Markle used the testimony of Warren Kimbro as an excuse to play the interrogation tape that the New Haven Panthers had made of Alex Rackley. In the introduction of the tape, Huggins can be heard calmly and clearly introducing Rackley, and explaining the situation that led to the interrogation and making of the tape. She can then be heard on the tape claiming to have kicked him and saying the words “motherfucker” and “motherfucking phoney.”\textsuperscript{580}


The tape did not provide evidence that Huggins ever conspired to murder Alex Rackley, and it did not bolster the claim that she actively participated in binding him, which were the charges under consideration. However, it did support the prosecution’s insinuation that Huggins was capable of violence because of her admission on the tape that she had kicked Alex Rackley. In addition, her use of the word “motherfucker” was something that the prosecution used to question her respectability. In fact, the tone of the tape was so crucial to Markle’s plan to call Huggins’s character into question, he insisted on playing it twice—once during the testimony of Warren Kimbro and again in his cross examination of Huggins. During that cross examination, he made sure to pause the tape after every statement of Huggins and made a point of asking her if she had made those statements. Whenever Huggins attempted to explain why she had said what she did, Markle cut her off abruptly. He even claimed that Huggins's use of curse words and her admission to violence showed her lack of womanly virtues. Markle’s use of the tape demonstrated that he built his case on the belief that a prejudiced jury would accept his implication that Huggins's admission to kicking Rackley and use of curse words made it likely that she was capable of conspiracy to commit murder. Markle’s argument played into gendered beliefs that a proper, respectable woman who was a grieving widow and mother could not make an interrogation tape. For Markle, Huggins's participation in the tape implied that she fit a pathological, criminal model of black womanhood.

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The centrality of the tape to Markle’s argument appeared most decisively in his closing statements. “The state and Alex Rackley did not bring Ericka Huggins, to put her voice on the tape, to give it a stamp of approval, to say to the poor man who’s held there… “Sit down, motherfucker and stay still.” In these statements, and others, Markle referenced what he believed to be the “callousness, the unruffled nature of this woman.” He based those claims on his reading of the tone of voice and Huggins's use of language on the tape. In his closing arguments, Markle did not place emphasis on Huggins actual actions, which he had very little proof of either way. Instead, he focused on his gendered construction of her character as a murderess who was guilty because of her inability to show the feminine characteristics that he expected. In his closing statement, Markle said, “And if you can tell me that in truthfulness, that someone could close their eyes to a man being led out by a wire hanger, with his hands tied behind him, barefoot, and didn’t know where he was going...then there’s got to be something wrong.”

In contrast to Markle, Catherine Roraback based her defense on Ericka Huggins's assumed position as a woman who had suffered great trauma at the loss of her husband and her subsequent harassment by police. According to Roraback, Huggins's youth and her troubled state of mind during the entirety of her time in New Haven, and especially during the final interrogation and murder of Alex Rackley, rendered her incapable of controlling the situation. Central to Roraback’s argument was Huggins's inability to confront George Sams. She was

intimidated by his history of violence especially, but not exclusively, toward women.\textsuperscript{588}

Roraback argued that Huggins's failure to confront Sams was rooted in her own personal fear and societal expectations that women did not question men in the deeply chauvinistic culture of the Black Panther Party. Roraback’s argument flew in the face of racially charged constructs of Black Panther women—and black women in general—as overtly aggressive and even dominating of men. She asked the court and the jury to consider Huggins as a victim, and to be sensitive to the pressures and oppression facing black women.\textsuperscript{589}

The major onus of Roraback’s argument lay in proving George Sams intimidated an emotionally fragile Ericka Huggins. To do this, she needed to show George Sams had a history of abusing women to get his way. Yet from the beginning, Judge Harold Mulvey worked to preclude this defense by arguing that previously given testimony by George Sams could not be contradicted by the defense’s witnesses because of court procedure. When Roraback asked Linda “Anjali” Young, a Panther victim of George Sams, to testify, prosecutor Arnold Markle objected to asking questions about whether Young knew Sams because he had claimed on cross examination to not knowing her. According to Mulvey, since Roraback had asked Sams and he had answered “no” she was stuck with that answer as the “truth” in the trial.\textsuperscript{590} She responded with an impassioned defense, pointing out that Linda “Anjali” Young’s harrowing story of abuse


\textsuperscript{589} It is important to note that Roraback is also making this argument in the immediate aftermath of the Moynihan Report, which argued that black women were overbearing and domineering, which led to the destruction of the black family. For a good collection of critical essays on the report, see: Douglas S. Massey and Robert J. Sampson, \textit{The Moynihan Report Revisted: Lessons and Reflections after Four Decades} (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2009).

struck at the heart of George Sams’s credibility as a witness and her own argument that Ericka Huggins feared Sams’ violence:

I would submit, your Honor, that Mr. Sams lived with this young lady for several months, that he exhibited violence towards her, that on one occasion he beat her up in a very violent manner, and that when he realized the extent of the injuries, that she had sustained,—her face was swelling and so force [sic]—that he then began to cry and became quite incoherent. It’s an example and other examples that she knows of, examples of his mental instability, his propensity to violence. 591

In response, Judge Mulvey said that if she had simply not asked whether or not Sams knew Young, she could have used the testimony. As it was, Young’s statements would now be restricted from any questions about her “acquaintance” with Sams. 592 The decision created a false set of limitations that left Roraback in the surreal position of questioning her witness by asking her about George Sams without asking about any details of her knowledge of him. For example, she could testify that she had met George Sams in May of 1968, and they had lived together in a communal Panther apartment or “pad.” However, when Roraback asked about what she thought of his mental state of mind, Mulvey shut down that line of questioning. Similarly, Young testified that she avoided Sams because he had attempted to rape her, but she was stopped from giving any details of what happened.

By enforcing seemingly random limitations on Young’s testimony, Judge Mulvey set Roraback on edge because she did not know when or why he would strike down the testimony of her witness. Regardless of the legal reasons, Mulvey clearly privileged the testimony of Young’s

attempted rapist over her own. Sams’s simple answer of “no” to the question whether or not he knew her, meant that Young was effectively under a gag order, one that she did not even fully understand the dimensions of because of the judge’s complicated legal reasoning. Mulvey forced Linda “Anjali” Young to tell her story to a group of men who seemed intent on actively silencing her and casting her narrative of abuse into doubt.

Another example of Judge Mulvey’s prejudice against the testimony of women appeared in his reaction to the testimony of Shirley Wolterding, a Black Panther woman who had been abused by George Sams. Wolterding knew Sams from his time in New York and she testified to his extremely controlling and abusive personality by using an example of Sams’ forcing her to take heroin under the threat of violence. However, Mulvey motioned for that testimony to be struck from the record on the same basis that he had used to silence Young—by noting that George Sams had testified that he had never taken heroin, and therefore Wolterding could not testify to the contrary. Later, the judge dismissed the jury when Seale’s lawyer, Charles Garry, asked Shirley Wolterding to describe an encounter and conversation with George Sams after the killing of Alex Rackley. Mulvey wanted to hear Wolterding separately to determine whether or not he would admit it or rule it as “hearsay.” In closed testimony, Wolterding described how Sams told her he had killed Alex Rackley:

...he had punched me in the face, and I was crying and he said, "You should have seen Alex's face." He said, "Bang. Bang. You should have seen that motherfucker's face." And he said he offed him because he thought he was a pig, and that if he ever suspected me of being a pig, he'd off me as well.

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When Wolterding finished her story, the judge asked, “Is that it, ma’am?” and then moved to sustain the objection, effectively silencing Wolterding by accepting Markle’s excuse that it amounted to nothing more than hearsay and salacious rumor. When Sams’s violent behavior came up again during Wolterding’s trial, Mulvey made this speech to the jury:

Let me explain to you, ladies and gentlemen. The testimony concerning somebody’s credibility or somebody’s veracity, that’s of course, admissible. But to make somebody out as being a “bad fellow,” generally is not admissible. It has nothing to do with his reputation or his capacity for telling the truth. It has nothing to do with his veracity of credibility.

Judge Mulvey’s prejudices bear further analysis. He dismissed much of the testimony of Linda “Anjali” Young and Shirley Wolterding as “hearsay,” inadmissible because Sams had testified to the contrary, or not relevant because they simply showed George Sams to be a “bad man,” not an un-credible witness. If Judge Mulvey’s definition of “hearsay” involved personal accounts of someone’s experiences, then the entirety of George Sams’ and Warren Kimbro’s testimonies could be dismissed on the same terms, especially whenever they reported having conversations with this or that individual. Mulvey did not disallow that testimony as “hearsay” despite the objections of Roraback and Garry. In one example, Mulvey allowed Warren

Kimbro to testify that George Sams had said, “This is from national, ice him,” before killing Rackley in spite of the objections of Roraback and Garry.\textsuperscript{599}

Only when presented with a female witness willing to cast doubt on the character of a key male witness for the prosecution did Mulvey accept the defense of “hearsay.” In striking testimony of Sams’ violent behavior as irrelevant to the case, Mulvey showed blindness of how evidence of violence was crucial to the case of the defense. Roraback needed to establish that Huggins could believably fear Sams. The testimony of Young and Wolterding laid the basis for that claim. Whatever his intentions, Judge Mulvey hamstrung the defense by failing to see how the testimony of women who suffered abuse at the hands of George Sams could be relevant. Mulvey’s behavior deliberately silenced black female narratives as unimportant and beneath the notice of the court. In so doing, he replicated the same systemic silence and prejudice that rooted the abuse of black women in America.\textsuperscript{600}

Where Judge Mulvey silenced the testimony of key black female witnesses for the defense, prosecutor Arnold Markle cast doubt on their characters through references to sexual innuendo and the promiscuity of black women. Responding to Young’s testimony that Sams tried to rape her, Markle asked her why she lived with George Sams and continued to live with him after the attempt. Young tried to explain that she did not live with George Sams in a romantic relationship but that they happened to live together in the same house. This was an arrangement common among Panthers trying to support their work on newspaper sales.\textsuperscript{601} Markle’s questioning reflected unsaid beliefs that Young behaved promiscuously with George


\textsuperscript{600} Hine, “Rape and the Inner Lives of Black Women,” 912-920.

Sams and her testimony of his attempted rape could not be accepted because they lived together. Her protestations that they just happened to live in the same communal house or “Panther pad” did not help silence Markle’s doubts. Instead they cast her living arrangements, and those of other Panther women as inherently unworthy of respectability and thus legal protection. The courts would not have understood the claim of sexual harassment and abuse the same way we do today. It was only after the women’s liberation movement and the case of Anita Hill in 1991 that the issue broached the mainstream. Nevertheless, it is important to note the ways that gender and race shaped how the courts could see Huggins's defense.\(^1\) Roraback’s defense of Huggins was on the frontlines of a movement against sexual harassment and abuse just starting to take shape in the early 1970s. It was all that more radical because of Huggins's blackness.\(^2\)

Markle’s dismissiveness of domestic abuse and willingness to label black women as responsible if they experienced it encompassed the larger view of the court and even law enforcement. These men did not take women’s claims as important to address, or even as problems that should be considered by the state. New Haven’s police chief, James Ahern, who positioned himself as a progressive reformer and testified in the Huggins case, summed up the position of the police on domestic abuse cases. He expressed resentment that police had to deal with domestic calls, which he saw more as a failure of the couple, particularly the woman involved. He argued that abused women needed to get help from another source. “Arrest only alienates the husband (who almost always is the one arrested) and aggravates the marital problem

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[sic] that led to it.”⁶⁰⁴ He claimed that most women ultimately regretted having their husband arrested. The state as represented by law enforcement did not understand black women’s claims to protection from domestic abuse.⁶⁰⁵ Given those attitudes, it is no wonder that neither the police, the prosecutor, nor the court took Roraback’s and Huggins’s argument about the centrality of the threat of abuse in her experience seriously. Their dismissiveness of women’s problems in general shaped how the court would view Ericka Huggins and judge her gender and race.

The court’s silencing of narratives of domestic abuse from witnesses must have added another layer of trauma for Ericka Huggins, after having her private life dissected for the court. That trauma showed in how Huggins remembered the trial. In my interview of her, she told a searing story about her testimony and cross examination by Prosecutor Arnold Markle.

According to Huggins, Markle asked her about her sexual history.

He [Markle] said, “You paint yourself, you try to make us believe, Huggins, that you are a grieving widow separated from her child.” And of course, I was. Of course I was. “How many sexual partners have you had since the death of John Huggins?” And at that moment, I fell silent. I wasn’t aware that...uhm...he could open his mouth and say that publicly. And I guess the judge couldn’t believe his ears either because he looked at Markle and saw that I was sitting there in tears. It’s okay to invoke my husband, but not to say that I was a slut. If he had been allowed to use the word, that’s what he would have said. And the judge was very cunning, I want to say that he was compassionate. He leaned over and looked at me as if he wanted to console me and he said, “Are you able to go forward with the testimony?” And I didn’t have words, I just nodded no. I’m aware that the jury were appalled. There were six women on the jury.⁶⁰⁶

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⁶⁰⁶ Ericka Huggins, Interview by Cheryl Dong, Phone Interview, December 12, 2018.
Huggins recounted a similar story of public shaming by Markle in another interview in 2007. In that story, Huggins remembered:

“Markle said, “Huggins, don’t you realize you’re just a disgrace to your husband? You sit here and talk about his death, and look at what you’ve done. You’re a disgrace.” Katie [Roraback] was on her feet in big bear mode. “Okay, okay Markle, you just have to shut up and sit down and leave my defendant alone!” The judge was hysterical and the courtroom was in an uproar and the judge hits his gavel and said, “We’ll take a recess.” I was in tears and it wasn’t because I was afraid of Markle, I just couldn’t believe anybody would be—I said to Katie, “In his chest, is there an empty space where his heart would be? I realize what he thinks I’ve done but does it help for him to do this?” And my daughter is sitting in the—of course she didn’t understand really what was happening because she was just two, but she would sit there everyday, and his mother was there.”

The two memories are so similar they almost certainly refer to the same event. However, the trial transcript does not attest to such an incident. Instead, it captured a different moment where Markle asked Huggins about her rumored sexual relationship with Warren Kimbro, which he pressed over the objections of Roraback and Garry. When Huggins characterized her relationship with Kimbro as “very friendly,” he asked, “Was he a close friend? Could you say how friendly you were? What do you mean by ‘very friendly’?” This time, Mulvey did sustain the objections of Roraback and Garry. "I will sustain the objection on the grounds that I think everybody knows what ‘friendly’ means and ‘very friendly’ means."

There are several explanations for why Huggins remembered an interrogation not reflected in the trial transcript. The transcript may not accurately or fully reflect all of the testimony. Huggins may have remembered that event from a pre-trial meeting or jury voire dire.

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607 Ericka Huggins, Interview by Fiona Thompson, 2007, Oral History Center, the Bancroft Library, University of California: Berkeley, California.
not included in the transcript. She may have remembered the moment in the trial where Markle questioned her about her relationship with Kimbro, and the exchange may have grown in importance to her over the years until it took on the aspects of the dramatic confrontation she recalled. Whatever the case, Huggins's testimony and the trial transcript revealed how her sexuality became a central focus of the case. While Roraback tried to humanize Huggins and make the court see her as the scared, traumatized young woman that she was in reality, Markle alluded to rumors of Huggins's supposed affair with Kimbro to smear her as sexually promiscuous. Markle would imply that Huggins was a bad mother to take a lover after her husband’s death and to involve her child with the Panthers. These arguments about Huggins's lack of motherly instinct and sexuality paint a picture of Huggins as a dangerous and deviant black woman, a “Jezebel.” In his closing statement Markle argued, “Ericka Huggins. What does she do? She puts her baby down, and then she comes into the living room. And she says… ‘Motherfucker, wake up, because we don’t sleep in the office, and we relate to reading or getting out.’” Markle went on to claim, “There he [Alex Rackley] was, grasping for a straw, and she cuts it right out of his hand. All the milk of human kindness, all the nurturing that womanhood is taught—she cuts it right out.”

In many assessments of Huggins trial, Judge Harold Mulvey gets remembered as an ultimately fair man who tried his best to remain impartial and administer justice to the best of his

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610 Although not discussed in-depth in this paper, Markle used Mai Huggins extensively in both his cross examination of Ericka Huggins and his closing statements. Markle insinuated that since Huggins let Mai stay at 365 Orchard Street, she was not that scared of George Sams and she was so coldblooded, she saw nothing wrong with having her child in the same house that Alex Rackley was tortured: “Huggins Testimony,” State vs. Huggins and Seale vols. 20-25, New Haven Black Panther Trials Collection, Yale Law School Documents Collection Center, New Haven, Connecticut, 3280-3291; “Markle Closing Statement,” State vs. Huggins and Seale vol. 28, New Haven Black Panther Trials Collection, Yale Law School Documents Collection Center, New Haven, Connecticut, 17-19.


Mulvey’s supporters hold up his dismissal of the charges against Seale and Huggins as a shining example of that impartiality. However, a close reading of the trial transcripts with sensitivity to issues of gender and race reveal a different story. The New Haven trial was based on rumor, innuendo, and racialized understandings of black womanhood. Mulvey, as a representative of the state, could not see or place importance on the claims of black women as victims because the state from its inception did not hear women’s cries for help and claims of victimhood. It took the women’s liberation movement for this to change, and the Huggins case asked the courts to do this before such arguments would be considered valid. Nevertheless, Mulvey’s beliefs made it impossible for the court to humanize Huggins as a traumatized young woman.

Judge Mulvey’s dismissal of the case against Ericka Huggins and Bobby Seale drew on deeply paternalistic traditions of white men showing mercy to the repentant black criminal. Mulvey noted among his reasons the impossibility of finding a jury and a desire to spare the state and the public the additional expense and bad publicity of dragging out the trial. Additionally, he commented that the behavior of Seale and Huggins as a reason for dismissal. “I have observed a rather remarkable change in the attitude of these defendants during the time they have been before me, and I don't think it's feigned.” Even as Mulvey set Seale and Huggins free, he made clear his own power and ability to pass character judgment on the defendants.

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613 This argument gets its strongest support in Bass and Rae’s book, but even the Black Panther Party Newspaper celebrated Mulvey in the aftermath of his decision to dismiss. Bass and Rae, Murder in the Model City, 205-206; “Case Against Chairman Bobby and Ericka Dismissed,” Black Panther Communal News Service, May 29, 1971, 1, 6.

614 Sarah Haley argued that black women’s mainstream depiction as “excessive, disfigured and incorrigible” allowed them to be easily incarcerated. Haley, No Mercy Here, 54.

615 I am thinking here of Kahlil Gibran Muhammad’s argument about the association of criminality and blackness and Cheryl D. Hick’s work on black women, respectability, and criminality. Muhammad, The Condemnation of Blackness, 4-5; Hicks, Talk With You Like a Woman, 125-130.

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nalism remained equally visible in his interviews immediately after the acquittal.

Reflecting back on the case, Mulvey insisted on his own certainty that Huggins and Seale were guilty of something. He stood by his decision to acquit based on his belief that the time they had already served in prison represented punishment enough for their crimes and they had genuinely reformed. Mulvey’s singular dismissal of charges and behavior to the defendants can be read as a final performance of white, male mastery over blackness and womanhood.

The Huggins case helped highlight the blindness of the state when it came to seeing black women as fully vested human beings outside of gendered and racialized stereotypes. Black women had long been silenced by courts that were never meant to carry out justice in their names. Mulvey’s acquittal followed established traditions of race and gender mastery. What was different was the willingness of the Panthers to allow these narratives of rape, abuse, and victimhood into the public eye. They did so at Roraback’s request to save Huggins's from what they believed might be a death sentence.

The Panthers did not seem interested in tackling the question of sexual abuse at large. Indeed, Shirley Wolterding’s and Linda “Anjali” Young’s narratives of trauma did not elicit a public reaction in the Black Panther Party until they became pertinent within the larger trial of Ericka Huggins and Bobby Seale. Sexual harassment and violence was a common experience

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617 Bass and Rae, Murder in the Model City, 207-208.
618 Haley, No Mercy Here, 54; Hicks, Talk With You Like a Woman, 125-126.
619 The Panthers were key to getting these women witnesses to testify at the trial. They did so knowing that it would reflect badly on them that they allowed assault and harassment to happen within their ranks. The Panther struggled publicly with sexual assault and harassment, publishing no tolerance policies. Nevertheless, assault and abuse were common enough experiences. “Young Testimony,” State vs. Huggins and Seale vols. 20-25, New Haven Black Panther Trials Collection, Yale Law School Documents Collection Center, New Haven, Connecticut, 2600; Shirley Wolterding Testimony,” State vs. Huggins vols. 20-25, New Haven Black Panther Trials Collection, Yale Law School Documents Collection Center, New Haven, Connecticut, 2639; Bloom and Martin, Black Against Empire, 78-79; Spencer, The Revolution has Come, 120.
620 Markle makes much of the Panthers’ decision to not throw Sams out of the Party in spite of well-documented claims about his violence and domestic abuse history. Yohuru Williams argues that this was largely a symptom of
in the Party and often silenced despite calls by leaders condemning it.  

Elaine Brown and Wayne Pharr both alleged to have personally seen Eldridge Cleaver abuse Kathleen Cleaver without intervention although they condemned it in their memoirs after the fact.  

As Elaine Brown wrote about chauvinism, “Did we overcome it? Of course we didn’t. Or as I like to say, ‘We didn’t get these brothers from revolutionary heaven.’” Nevertheless, Roraback’s insistence in the Huggins trial in using the fear of domestic abuse to humanize the plight of Huggins and other imprisoned women shed light on the possibilities opened by the intersection of black power and radical feminism. It also illuminated a moment in 1969 when closed-door struggles against sexual harassment and abuse in the Party broached the national consciousness.

**Ericka Huggins and the Hidden Movement for Black Women’s Prison Rights**

Over the course of Ericka Huggins trial, the Black Panther Party escalated their campaign portraying her as a martyr for their cause. Their coverage of Ericka Huggins led the Panthers to reconsider the plight of imprisoned female activists. They revealed the ubiquity of sexual and physical abuse that faced black women within the criminal justice system. This was a narrow window of opportunity that opened between 1969 and 1971 around the trials of Ericka Huggins and the New York 21. The Panthers’ willingness to tackle issues like prisoner’s rights represented a new evolution in how activists thought about prison reform. As Dan Berger argues in *Captive Nation*, the southern Civil Rights Movement fundamentally began to shift the

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discourse around imprisonment. Fannie Lou Hamer’s testimony of being beaten by southern jailers revealed a shifting sensibility around the issue of and hinted at the sexual violence that black and white women often faced behind bars. While imprisonment still represented one of the greatest fears for many in the African American community, it also became a source of camaraderie and sign of civil rights work.

Yet even as the meaning of prison began to be re-written by the southern Civil Rights Movement, it was still bound by notions of class, gender, and respectability. Women like Hamer or Diane Nash framed their prison experiences around a certain call for respectability, highlighted by the fact that southern jailers denied that respect through violence against the black female body. As Nash stated in 1961 about her decision to remain in jail rather than to be bailed out, “We in the nonviolent movement have been talking about jail without bail for two years or more...This will be a Black baby born in Mississippi and thus, wherever he is born, he is born in prison. I believe that if I go to jail now it may help hasten that day when my child and all children will be free.” In this quote, Nash framed her imprisonment as movement work and her choice to give birth in prison as an ultimate sacrifice of motherhood. The southern Civil Rights Movement made a certain type of black female imprisonment acceptable but it was still tightly constrained by the identity and actions of the imprisoned. It did not address the imprisonment of black women who were accused of crimes other than participation in civil rights activity.

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625 Berger, *Captive Nation*, 41.
626 Berger, *Captive Nation*, 31-32.
627 Quoted in Berger, *Captive Nation*, 20.
628 There is a growing historiography of black women’s imprisonment and black incarceration in general that deals with imprisonment separate from movement work. This work looks at the larger context of why certain people were imprisoned in the United States. Kelly Lytle Hernández’s *City of Inmates* argues that incarceration in Los Angeles
The Black Panther Party’s martyrdom of Ericka Huggins and other female prisoners went further in its challenge. By using Huggins’s experience, the Party excavated the experiences of working class women who did not fit the mold of respectability. Drawing on Lisa M. Corrigan’s work, I argue that women like Ericka Huggins, Angela Davis, and Assata Shakur created a vernacular discourse that connected to working class concerns of imprisonment. They rendered visible the closed-door experiences of women to show how everyday violence against female prisoners deserved recognition. In so doing, they made larger, revolutionary arguments about the role of jail in enforcing white supremacy and they issued a potent call for prison reform. The work of Ericka Huggins in prison represented a different, more personal martyrdom where she publicly exposed her private experience of imprisonment as a teaching tool. She helped shape a nationwide conversation of imprisoned black female activists. She and other women demonstrated an alternative vision of Black Panther Party prison work—one that was not always about white economic anxiety and political control over populations considered marginal or threatening to the elite. In contrast, Talitha L. LeFlouria’s *Chained in Silence* looks at the labor possibilities open to black female convicts that did not seem constrained by traditional understandings of race and gender in post-Civil War chain gangs in Georgia. She also uncovers their resistance to violence and sexual exploitation. Cheryl D. Hicks’ *Talk With You Like a Woman* looks at the impact of black women’s imprisonment on prevailing societal views of working class black women’s morality and respectability. The Panthers enter this conversation by trying to render visible a larger, more working-class based struggle for black female prisoners that moves beyond the prison work of the traditional Civil Rights Movement. Finally, *No Mercy Here* explores how white lawmakers and judges created a vision of aberrant black female sexuality and criminality through their litigation of criminal cases and the experience of imprisoned black women in late 19th century and early twentieth century Georgia. Kelly Lytle Hernández, *City of Inmates: Conquest, Rebellion, and the Rise of Human Caging in Los Angeles, 1771-1965* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017); Talitha L. LeFlouria, *Chained in Silence: Black Women and Convict Labor in the New South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015); Cheryl D. Hicks, *Talk With You Like a Woman: African American Women, Justice, and Reform in New York, 1890-1935* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010); Sarah Haley, *No Mercy Here: Gender, Punishment, and the Making of Jim Crow Modernity* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016).


630 I’m drawing here on Corrigan’s argument about how imprisoned activists performed a kind of “martyrdom” to educate and push people to movement work. Corrigan, *Prison Power*, 163.
exclusively defined by men like Eldridge Cleaver, the Soledad Brothers, or the Attica prisoners.631

The Black Panther Party’s movement to highlight the plight of black female prisoners showed that the Party did not construct the prison rights movement as exclusively male. It did so in their newspaper with health updates, writings, and letters from prisoners. Particular women who wrote often for the newspaper included Ericka Huggins, Afeni Shakur, Joan Bird, Frances Carter, and Angela Davis.632 The use of women prisoners’ voices was one of necessity—these highly capable organizers had been incarcerated and they made the best of a constraining situation by engaging in activism where they were. In the process, they created awareness of what went on behind the bars of the prison cell, especially as in regards to women.633 The Panthers often hindered their own efforts in breaking new ground through their continued support of heteronormative gender roles. Nevertheless, their decision to tackle the plight of black women in prison represented a significant foray in broadening the view of black women


633 The burgeoning of the Panthers’ jail population can be tied to increased surveillance from the FBI, which enabled local police to act against various Panther chapters. This increased harassment can be tied first to Bobby Hutton’s murder on April 6, 1968, and traces a trajectory through the deaths of John Huggins and Alprentice “Bunchy” Carter, the death of Fred Hampton on December 4, 1969, the raid on the L.A. Chapter headquarters on December 8, 1969, and other raids and shootouts in less well-known locations. Bloom and Martin, Black Against Empire, 119-122; 223-224; 237-239.
involved in black power organizing. That decision led to a significant critique of gendered respectability within state-sponsored institutions.

The imprisonment of Ericka Huggins at Niantic Women’s Correctional Facility in 1969 marked the beginning of this movement. The timing of the New Haven trials coincided with the New York Panther Twenty-One trials. The New Haven police arrested a total of six women in connection to the murder of Alex Rackley. Among them were two under the age of eighteen and three who were pregnant. Ericka Huggins had only recently given birth to Mai Huggins in December of 1968, and was nursing at the time that she began her prison ordeal. The state decided to hold all six Black Panther women without bail. The collective suffering of Black Panther women in New Haven and New York City helped galvanize the Panthers into a new realm of prison organizing.

The plight of three pregnant and/or recently post-partum Black Panther women in New Haven highlighted the issue of pregnancy in prison. On November 22, 1969, the Black Panther Communal News Service ran an article on the “Torture of Panther Women.” Among the allegations laid at the feet Niantic State Women’s Penitentiary included lack of medical care for pregnant women and the presence of prison guards during childbirth for female prisoners. Several of the Panther prisoners, including Francis Carter and Peggy Hudgins, became sick while in prison. When they asked for treatment by a medical professional, they received aspirin instead. The state’s denial of adequate health care exposed the lack of medical regard for

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635 Bloom and Martin, Black Against Empire, 213, 248.
black female bodies, not only in the prison system, but in American hospitals in general.\textsuperscript{637} Black male prisoners also experienced a similar lack of concern for health issues. However, the particular concerns of women’s reproductive health added another dimension of danger to this experience.\textsuperscript{638} The Black Panthers pointed out that the presence of guards during childbirth created a unique experience of dehumanization for mothers in prison. Their bodies became a spectacle for the onlookers and the privacy of mother and child got stripped away under the aegis of the state.\textsuperscript{639} The Black Panthers protested against the state’s policy to separate newborn babies from their imprisoned mothers. The Panthers joined women’s liberation organizations to denounce the policy as a calculated rejection of the state’s right to decide that imprisoned women were “unfit” mothers.\textsuperscript{640}

The Panthers’ decisions to protest policies that separated women and children within the prison system represented an escalation in activism against the state’s narrow definitions of black female respectability and motherhood. As authors like Rickie Lee Solinger, Cheryl D. Hicks, Lisa Levenstein, and Annelise Orleck have argued, various state and federal agencies in the twentieth century sought to police black women’s bodies through access to welfare, the criminal justice system, and medical care. For these state and federal agencies, black women’s bodies became problematic because of their refusal to fit into white dominant, gendered expectations of

\begin{thebibliography}{999}
\item Racialized medical discrimination was a particular concern of the Panthers’ organizing and numerous works have addressed this problem. The ones that have most informed my thinking, especially on women, include: Nelson, \textit{Body and Soul}, 24-26; Levenstein, \textit{Movement Without Marches}, 157-180; Orleck, \textit{Storming Caesar’s Palace}, 81.
\item Thompson, \textit{Blood in the Water}, 36-37; this was also something recognized by women’s liberation activists at the time, who took special interest in the New Haven women prisoners because three of them were pregnant.
\item “Women’s lib group to protest for release of Connecticut Five women,” \textit{Black Panther Community News Service}, November 8, 1969, 8.
\end{thebibliography}
behavior. These institutions put black women’s health and sexuality under a lens of gendered scrutiny colored by the 1965 Moynihan Report, which found black women wanting because of their inability to fit into the model of the modern nuclear family. Black women resisted these narrow definitions of respectability and sought through a variety of ways to get the state to listen to and respect their concerns as mothers. They advanced a radical understanding of black womanhood that did not criminalize their sexuality and/or their bodies. The Black Panthers in their activism for imprisoned black mothers moved these critiques a step forward by bringing them into the prisons and undermining the notion that black female inmates were beyond the pale of human rights.

The Panthers’ entry into organizing around black women prisoners seemed to be a natural outgrowth of their prison work and the charisma of certain activists. Afeni Shakur, Joan Bird, and Ericka Huggins in particular were powerful writers who the paper recruited to write stories and poems about their imprisonment, trials, and experiences as revolutionary women. In one

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641 I’m thinking here of Hicks’ research in the experience of black women in New York’s criminal justice system and the ways that the state was blind to their claims to respectability because of the racialized tropes of black “Mammy” and “Jezebel.” I am also thinking of Lisa Levenstein’s work on black women’s claims on the welfare and medical system of the city of Philadelphia which showed how the overwhelmed state resources of Philadelphia looked at black women seeking help as examples of black women’s pathology. Annelise Orleck pursues a similar line of research in her work on welfare mothers in Las Vegas who challenged the impersonal and morally judgmental local welfare administrators especially when they sought to police black women’s sexuality and respectability: Hicks, Talk With You Like a Woman, 127; Levenstein, Movement Without Marches, 182-183; Orleck, Storming Caesar’s Palace, 81; Rickie Lee Solinger, Pregnancy and Power: A Short History of Reproductive Politics in America (New York: New York University, 2005), 243-246.


illustrative example of a poem published by Afeni Shakur, she addressed a number of issues facing women:

One of these days when I've got more time
I'm gonna pick up a gun and shoot me some swine
I can't do right now cause I got three kids
And an evil husband who won't let me get involved
But don't you worry none cause I'm gonna be there when the fightin's done
And I'm gonna make you proud of me
See- I use to be a real hot mama I could out drink, out fight, and out cuss any mundymucker out there
But I got saddled down with all these children, and Lord than man just won't let me do nothing
He hits me in the head everytime I talk about going to one of your demonstrations
And I just can't take that so I stay in the house and do the best I can.
I sneak and read your paper and keep up with what's going on a little bit.
I know about Bobby and Ericka and the 21 but, I can't do nothing about it.
Hey wait a minute Sister Love-
That jive you're talking is madness, as a matter of fact that live your nigger is talking is a lot of madness!
If you go down the block you'll find another sister that's in the same position that you are in!
Why don't all you sisters get together in one crib with all the kids and get some guns?
If you stay in today and deal with all the domestic stuff, then the other sisters can get out and deal.
What you do is rotate that stuff, You take on the responsibility and the duty of a black woman, and your nigger will either be a man and stand up with you, or lazer for him.\(^{645}\)

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Shakur’s searing anger, her passion, and her conviction came through in her writing. Written from the view of a sympathetic housewife, the poem was a call to action for black women, and it established clear solidarity between the New York Twenty-One and the New Haven prisoners. Shakur’s writing was just one example of the important work that Black Panther women did in the newspaper.

Party leaders were specifically concerned about the health of various imprisoned members and that worry intersected with the reproductive health challenges of pregnant women in prison. Coupled with their own anxieties about women’s reproductive capacity as mothers of the next generation of revolutionaries, the Panthers wrote about imprisoned women’s concerns because their own were at risk.

In addition to challenging national discourse on black women’s bodies, Ericka Huggins and her fellow prisoners organized a nascent movement within the walls of Niantic State Penitentiary. While imprisoned, Ericka Huggins created the Sisterlove Collective. Initially, Huggins described the movement as coalescing around a desire among the women prisoners to

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have their hair done. In their free time, Huggins and other women would braid each other’s hair. Black hair has been central to black women’s cultural and political identity, a relationship made more potent by the black power movement. Thus braiding hair in the context of prison was a political act of resistance that challenged the prison’s denial of humanity to black women. The organization slowly evolved into a larger system of support where black and white women would share their gendered concerns of mistreatment both inside and outside of prison. As Ericka recounted, the Sisterlove Collective offered advice on everything from women being forced into sex trafficking to treating drug addiction. The Sisterlove Collective gave crucial support for women in Niantic when incoming female prisoners underwent drug addiction withdrawal by providing candy and cigarettes to take the edge away.

These efforts at organizing among women prisoners at Niantic helped inspire later prison programs for drug addiction counseling, psychological help, and even education. Just as importantly, the Sisterlove Collective created a nexus of interracial organizing that allowed the imprisoned women to develop racial, class, and gender critiques of their own oppression outside of male dominated organizations. The women of Niantic were quietly doing movement work that transcended established ideological divisions of race and gender by bringing issues of

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648 Ericka Huggins, Interview by Fiona Thompson, 2007, Oral History Center, the Bancroft Library, University of California: Berkeley, California.


650 Ericka Huggins, Interview by Fiona Thompson, 2007, Oral History Center, the Bancroft Library, University of California: Berkeley, California.

651 Ericka Huggins, Interview by Fiona Thompson, 2007, Oral History Center, the Bancroft Library, University of California: Berkeley, California.
women’s health to the fore.\(^652\) And they did so largely outside of the control of the Black Panther Party although the newspaper did shed light on conditions in the prison.\(^653\) Their relative independence and isolation within Niantic helped the women explore how the problems of the criminal justice system could be experienced by black and white women together. In addition, the publicity of the Ericka Huggins trial helped bring national exposure to these issues.

Ericka Huggins was just one of a number of women, such as Afeni Shakur, Angela Davis, Frances Carter, Rose Smith, Peggy Hudgins, and Joan Bird, who went to prison during the highly publicized crackdown on black radical activists during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Except for a few notable exceptions, scholars have often constructed imprisonment as a male experience. They reflect the attitudes of civil rights and political organizations that pushed the experience of women as prisoners and as activists on the frontlines of confrontation with state authorities to the margins.\(^654\) This masculinization of the prison experience was partly due to the anti-war movement, which positioned male bodies as the ultimate victims of the draft and military service. The prominence of radical black masculinity within the Black Panther Party also contributed to the gendering of martyrdom as male.\(^655\) However, Ericka Huggins belied the

\(^{652}\) Philips, “The Power of the First-Person Narrative,” 43.


\(^{655}\) According to Phillips, black and white women often confronted the force of the state in protecting men dodging the draft. However, their participation in the anti-draft movement was rarely acknowledged because they were not the targets. Kimberley L. Phillips, *War! What is it Good For? Black Freedom Struggles and the U.S. Military from World War II to Iraq* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 205.
image of male-only leadership on the carceral front lines of the black power movement through her prison experience.

The Black Panther Community News Service created space for black women prisoners to highlight their shared experiences as women involved in radical black politics and advance critiques of gender within the black power movement. New York Twenty-One prisoners Afeni Shakur and Joan Bird took just such a chance when they published an open letter to Ericka Huggins and other women in the Black Panther Party. In the letter, Shakur and Bird chastised male Panthers for their continued chauvinism toward women in the Party. They positioned women like Ericka Huggins on the same level as men suffering for the Black Panther cause. “Brothers knew that Ericka Huggins deserved nothing less than equal status as a warrior...They [women in the Party] endured torture that only a dedicated servant of humanity could endure, and still they fought.”

Joan Bird and Afeni Shakur used their platform to blast misogyny within the Party as the influence of American imperialism. They claimed that the continued oppression of women and their relegation to the sidelines constituted nothing less than aiding the enemy. Shakur and Bird used Huggins's position as a female martyr with the same credibility as male stars of the Party to lend weight to their attack on gendered inequality.

The publication of letters to and from female prisoners offered a network of support and a way for women prisoners like Huggins to help bring publicity to the cases of others. In the same issue that Afeni Shakur and Joan Bird wrote their open letter to Ericka Huggins, the Panthers published another letter from Ericka Huggins and Rose Smith to Angela Davis expressing

solidarity and support.657 The letters connected prison reform efforts in a fragile network nationally and exposed the abuses in women’s prisons around the country. For instance, a letter from Rose Smith published September 13, 1969, highlighted the beating of two women involved in the New Haven Panther Trials at Niantic. In the letter, Smith claims that prison guards beat the women, threw them into a damp cellar known as the “dungeon,” and then denied them medical care.658 Other letters from New Haven detailed the declining health of Peggy Hudgins brought on by childbirth, the early onset of rheumatoid arthritis, and the intentional neglect of prison authorities.659 Afeni Shakur and Joan Bird also joined forces again in January 1970 to demand that New York begin to provide women with vocational training in prison.660

These newly established national networks of communication all pointed to the development of a movement for women’s prison reform.661 However, it never had the chance to reach the same prominence as the men’s prison rights movement in the 1970s. The reason for that failure stems from deep ideological fissures within black power itself. Moreover, prison administrators at Niantic Women’s Correctional Facility soon recognized the danger that Ericka Huggins and the Sisterlove Collective posed to their authority. They worried that the Huggins trial would bring unwanted publicity to their practices. When administrators confiscated posters,

personal writings, and gifts that Huggins made for other prisoners, Huggins brought those concerns to her lawyer, Catherine Roraback. Roraback pushed for concessions for Huggins to have access to books, newspapers, and her personal diary in her cell. In response, the administrators at Niantic put five of the six Black Panther women in solitary by October of 1969. After this moment, Huggins spent the majority of her prison experience in isolation to separate her from the collective of women she had created.

In addition, the prison used informants to sow the seeds of distrust. One example was an account of a woman thrown into the same wing where Huggins lived in isolation. Huggins believed she may have been put there for the purpose of inciting Huggins to make an escape attempt since she was the only other prisoner allowed in Huggins's wing of the prison. When the new prisoner brought up her plan to escape, Huggins chose to remain in prison. She cited fear of the New England winter, legal trouble, her suspicions, and media coverage as reasons why she declined the offer. Like officials elsewhere, those at Niantic succeeded in separating the activists from the general prison population. In New York, Joan Bird and Afeni Shakur often found themselves in solitary as did Angela Davis in California. Prison officials used solitary as a tool to silence problematic prisoners and successfully shift public attention away from the internal practices of the prison by isolating the Sisterlove Collective.

662 Donald Freed, Agony in New Haven, 146.
663 Donald Freed, Agony in New Haven, 150.
664 Ericka Huggins, Interview by Fiona Thompson, 2007, Oral History Center, the Bancroft Library, University of California: Berkeley, California.
665 This particular incident was first told to me by Ericka herself, but also verified in the Bass and Rae book. Ericka Huggins, Interview by Cheryl Dong, Phone Interview, December 12, 2018; Bass and Rae, Murder in the Model City, 191-192.
Divisions within the Black Panther Party itself contributed to the destruction of the web of connections among women prisoners before it was ever fully established. In March 1971, Eldridge Cleaver and Huey P. Newton publicly quarreled about the future of the Black Panther Party on national television. The ensuing controversy split the Black Panther Party, with Cleaver’s supporters either leaving for Algiers or going underground in the Black Liberation Army. The New York Panther Twenty-One fell solidly on the Cleaver side of the split. Prior to this time, Cleaver had published his most definitive statement on women in the Black Panther Party to date. Abandoning his previous position of chauvinism established in *Soul on Ice*, Cleaver issued a call for the Panthers to embrace gender equality. He singled out Ericka Huggins as an example of how and why female activists needed to be constructed as equal to men in the movement.

“I’d like to send a very special word to sister Erica [sic] Huggins, the wife of our slain, murdered, Deputy Minister of Information, John Huggins...let it be a lesson and an example to all of the sisters, particularly to all of the brothers, that we must understand that our women are strongly and enthusiastically as we are participating in the struggle.”

How Cleaver would have acted on this statement if he had stayed within the party is unclear; however, his leaving the Party crucially stripped away support and resources for continued gender organizing and created conflict among the women themselves.

The Newton-Cleaver split cut off any further alliance building between the New York Twenty-One and women prisoners in New Haven. Nascent connections between Huggins and

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Angela Davis would also be destroyed when early agreements for Huggins and Davis to collaborate on a book of poetry together detailing their prison experience fell through due to ideological differences between the Communist Party USA and the Black Panther Party.670 Finally, the trials of both the New York Twenty-One and Ericka Huggins would come to an end in May of 1971.671 Without these specific lives on the line, the Black Panther Party quickly turned their attention to more pressing cases, including the upcoming trial of Bobby Seale, the death of George Jackson, and the Attica Massacre in September of 1971.672.

Ericka Huggins's experience at Niantic Women’s Correctional Facility gave the Black Panther Party an opportunity to explore the largely hidden plight of black women in the prison system. Huggins's publicized experience in prison also broke gendered conventions that women did not serve on the front lines of the black power movement and did not experience the full force of police brutality and criminal injustice. The women in these networks pushed forward a critique of the state’s discrimination against black women on a number of levels. They challenged the dismissive of state officials toward black women’s health and refuted traditional narratives of black women’s lack of respectability, which justified treating them harshly. They demanded respect for women prisoners and recognition of their humanity, regardless of past sexual and criminal history. This radical humanization of women prisoners laid the groundwork for further organizing in the 1970s and 1980s. As Emily L. Thuma details in her work, the Black

Panther Party was key for later coalitions around women’s and LGBTQ prison rights. Although temporarily overshadowed by Attica and events in the early 1970s, Panther women and their radical ideological descendants continued to organize on the grassroots level for prison liberation rooted in black feminist thought and intersectionality.\textsuperscript{673} Black Panther women explored the various intersections between race and gender in their organizing within the prison. For Huggins, Davis, Shakur, and Bird, isolation in prison allowed them the freedom to critique the Black Panther Party and its overtly masculinist ideologies.\textsuperscript{674} Unfortunately, the Black Panthers did not sustain this movement following the release of Ericka Huggins from prison. This failure represented a missed opportunity, one that would have changed our narrative of the later prison rights movement of the 1970s and enriched our understanding of who could be constructed as a prisoner and activist.

Repercussions: How the Martyrdom of Ericka Huggins Reverberates Today

On November 7, 1970, Emory Douglas created an iconic \textit{Black Panther} newspaper cover of Ericka Huggins. Douglas pictures Huggins with her eyes downcast, wearing a toga-like dress, and dream catcher earrings. Her shoulders were exposed, adding to a sense of vulnerability. To the side is the silhouetted face of Eldridge Cleaver speaking at a microphone. Behind her left shoulder is an illustration of Bobby Seale tied to a chair.\textsuperscript{675} Although the men existed as leaders

\textsuperscript{673} Thuma, \textit{All Our Trials}, 1-13.
\textsuperscript{675} This image originates from Emory Douglas’s work on Bobby Seale’s trial as one of the “Chicago Eight” defendants from the 1968 DNC riots. Douglas depicted Seale strapped to an electric chair with a caption declaring, “The fascists have already decided in advance to murder Chairman Bobby Seale in the electric chair.” “The fascists have already decided in advance to murder Chairman Bobby Seale in the electric chair,” \textit{Black Panther Community News Service}, March 15, 1970, cover.
suffering from state oppression, the focus is Ericka, who dominates the page. In choosing to
depict Huggins in this overtly feminine manner, Douglas played into existing portrayals of
Huggins as a flower child and hippie who always carried fresh bouquets with her into the
courthouse.  The cover emphasized her childlike innocence and summed up the portrait that
Catherine Roraback painted of Ericka Huggins during her trial. The image of Ericka constructed
by her supporters was of an innocent and childlike goddess who could not possibly be guilty of
conspiracy to murder Alex Rackley. She was the irreproachable Panther widow of John Huggins
and the wronged mother of Mai Huggins. When asked about this depiction of her as a
feminized victim, Ericka distanced herself from it, saying, “I was grateful that the Black Panther
Party knew that the newspaper existed and although those arcane terms were used and those
references to martyrdom, those are terms that came from the movement in Cuba...I didn’t think
that. I didn’t take it seriously.” Ericka’s reaction suggested that the clarity of the cover belied
the complexity of the martyrdom of Ericka Huggins and the many public faces that the Panthers
and the media presented of her.

For Huggins supporters and scholars of the Black Panther Party, she has become a more
measured version of the portrait painted of her by Emory Douglas. In her later life, Huggins
made a career for herself as an academic and activist. She helped found and lead the Oakland
Community School, sponsored by the Black Panther Party, and pioneered independent education

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676 Donald Freed’s book Agony in New Haven, which was heavily promoted in the newspaper when it came out in 1973 was the closest representation to the “Panther endorsed” view of Ericka Huggins and the trial. In the book, Freed emphasizes Huggins's femininity, her “hippie spirit,” and her desire for freedom. He does so by depicting her always carrying flowers to court and writing poetry. “Agony in New Haven by Donald Freed,” Black Panther Community News Service, May 26, 1973, 13; Freed, Agony in New Haven, 64-68.
678 Ericka Huggins, Interview by Cheryl Dong, Phone Interview, December 12, 2018.
that put the needs of marginalized and special needs children from poor backgrounds first. In the 1990s, she was on the frontlines of HIV/AIDS activism, speaking out for women and children as well as LGBTQ communities of color. Huggins has forged a life and career for herself that transcended her starring role in the New Haven Panther Trials. Yet even as she has personally moved forward, Huggins remains attached to the Black Panther Party in the popular imagination. She is remembered first and foremost as the widow of John Huggins and a defendant in the New Haven Panther trials. To her supporters, she was also a critical organizer for the Panthers’ survival programs and the Oakland Community School.

In recent years, with the release of the Stanley Nelson documentary, *Panthers: Vanguard of a Revolution*, Ericka Huggins's public profile has enjoyed a resurgence. In the documentary, Huggins talked about both her experience as an educator and working in the community survival programs. Nelson put Panther women front and center, highlighting their crucial role in the rank-and-file as well as the national leadership. The release of the documentary marked a new moment in mainstream awareness of the Black Panther Party and it debuted to strong critical reviews, a difficult feat considering the many conflicting narratives of the Black Panthers.


Bobby Seale and Ericka Huggins to date, in 2009. Unfortunately, the authors have allowed their own prejudices and personal relationships with people involved in the New Haven Panther Trials to color their interpretation of the Panthers’ guilt. Bass and Rae used their personal acquaintances with Warren Kimbro, Nick Pastore (the detective involved in the case), and Arnold Markle to weave together their narrative. Crucially, they also relied on Gail Sheehy’s *Panthermania* to inform their main argument: that Warren Kimbro and New Haven were victims of outside agitators and that Huggins was guilty but escaped justice because of the devious machinations of the Panthers.683

Like Gail Sheehy and the journalists of the past, Bass and Rae repeat rumors that Huggins and Kimbro were involved in a romantic relationship through interviews with Kimbro’s estranged ex-wife and Kimbro’s own claims.684 The implication is that although Kimbro may have been guilty of actually pulling the trigger on Alex Rackley, Huggins seduced him into it. When describing Ericka Huggins, the authors focused on her behavior and her physicality, echoing Sheehy’s portrayal:685

Ericka came across as tough in public, hard-edge. She ran party classes like a martinet...Ericka was pretty, strong, passionate, tough, yet there could be a disarming sweetness to her...Warren came to know the hippie who spoke of dropping acid in college, the astrology buff, the woman who wrote poetry. He loved her long fingers, her slender hands, her caramel skin. With her erect posture, Warren thought that Ericka looked like a model in her jeans and leather boots...In the presence of worldly, dreamy Ericka so deep beyond her twenty-one years yet youthful and sexy...686

683 A look into Bass and Rae’s bibliography and citations is enlightening. They cite Ahern, Sheehy, and Horowitz as well as many personal interviews with New Haven officials involved in the trial. Bass and Rae, *Murder in the Model City*, 306.
684 Bass and Rae, *Murder in the Model City*, 56.
686 Bass and Rae, *Murder in the Model City*, 62.
The authors juxtaposed her seeming innocence with the vision of the cold blooded murderer that interrogated Rackley on the tape:

“Most jarring of all was Ericka’s voice. It sounded cold, commanding, pitiless. The jurors saw her come to court carrying flowers, the model of earth-mother gentleness. Now her harsh rebukes flew at the ghost of Alex Rackley as he sat bound in the torture chair.”687

When the authors recounted Huggins's cross examination by Markle, they described the prosecutor’s disbelief of Huggins claim of intimidation as a trap set by Huggins and her female lawyer to paint Markle as sexist. For the authors, Markle is the innocent, righteous crusader unaware that Huggins and Roraback were about to play the “gender” card:

The moment that Roraback had hoped for. The trap she and Ericka had set, to turn one of their greatest weaknesses around on Markle. Roraback knew Markle wouldn’t let slide the contention that Ericka was a low-ranking bystander in the Panther hierarchy. There had been too much testimony to the contrary. They knew he wouldn’t accept the notion that Ericka felt inhibited in speaking her mind.688

While displaying careful research into the case, Bass and Rae’s book exposed how troubling gendered and racialized stereotypes of Ericka Huggins have continued in the public memory. As white men, they seem oblivious to their position over black women and how their assessment of Huggins's character, their insinuations about her sexuality, and their obsession with her physicality echo the assessments that slave masters made about black women in the Antebellum South. Both men acknowledge that police surveillance of the Panthers in New Haven was blatantly illegal and a prime example of police overreach. But the real crime for Bass

687 Bass and Rae, Murder in the Model City, 176.
688 Bass and Rae, Murder in the Model City, 197.
and Rae appears to be the Panthers’ attack on state authority. For Bass and Rae, questioning the
crime narrative of Huggins's involvement was a prime example of the Black Panther Party’s
willingness to shirk responsibility for violence. These narratives about the Black Panthers echo
those first pushed by their detractors like Hugh Pearson and David Horowitz, both of whom are
cited by Bass and Rae.689

Bass and Rae even cast doubt on Judge Mulvey’s decision to dismiss charges against
Ericka Huggins. They pointed to a white graduate student and juror named Marilyn Martino of
plotting privately and illegally with five black jurors to bully the rest of the jury into acquitting
Ericka Huggins. These inner-jury machinations supposedly led the jury to hang 10-2 and forced
Mulvey’s hand into dismissing the charges.690 By questioning the impartiality of the jury, they
make it impossible for Huggins to ever prove her innocence. The authors then applaud Judge
Mulvey because he had defied the Panthers’ expectations of judicial bias by dismissing the
charges. The implication was that the magnanimity of Mulvey allowed a guilty woman to get
away: someone who should have been convicted if the jury hadn’t been biased unfairly for the
Black Panther Party. This claim is questionable considering the well-documented anti-Panther
media storm in the wake of the New Haven trial.

The narrative of Huggins's guilt based on this portrait of racialized and sexualized tropes
about black women got a revitalizing kick with Stanley Nelson’s documentary. Among the
numerous reviews of Nelson’s work was one written for the Guardian by Andrew Anthony, who
decried Nelson’s positive and “cool” depiction of the Panthers. Like Bass and Rae, Anthony
echoed the “New Journalism” perception of the Panthers as “radical chic” and repeated the same

689 Bass and Rae, Murder in the City, 306.
690 Bass and Rae, Murder in the Model City, 206-208.
warnings about not being seduced by the flash and radicalism of the Panthers that defined “Panthermania.” Anthony then went on to accuse the Panthers of being cold-blooded killers, taking as fact Ericka Huggins's guilt in killing Alex Rackley despite the dismissal of charges and lack of evidence.691 For Anthony as well as a long line of journalists before him, association with the Black Panther Party seemed tantamount to admission of guilt.692 The Panther “torture” tape which had been sealed in the wake of the trial was also released in 2013 by the New Haven Independent, which recruited Murder in the Model City author Paul Bass to “contextualize” the tape. Turning Panther claims against the criminal justice system on their head, Bass calls the torture of Rackley a “kangaroo trial” and the recording as to have “chilled jurors, bystanders, law enforcement agents, everyone who heard it.” Bass’s editorializing represented another attack on Huggins's character, some forty years after the events of the New Haven trial.693

When Ericka Huggins was catapulted to fame first through her husband’s death and then in the New Haven Panther Trials, she gained power and influence in the Black Panther Party, but she also lost control of her own narrative. Beginning in April of 1969 until her acquittal in May of 1971, her life was literally in the hands of the state. Huggins could do little but watch as the

court paraded and dissected private, intimate details of her life for all to see.\(^\text{694}\) Who she was publicly was shaped by how the Panther newspaper portrayed her as a wife and mother, by media distortions of her sexuality, by the Prosecutor’s case against her, and by Catherine Roraback’s defense of her. Through it all, one gets a sense of the private person being subsumed by the public self—a process made more complicated by the fact that she was a black woman in the Black Panther Party. Those competing narratives mattered not just for Huggins personally, but for black women in general. She \emph{was} the grieving widow of John Huggins and the mother of Mai Huggins, but she also had to publicly perform those roles for the Party.

In glimpses through her oral histories and her own writings, we get a sense of what was important to her at the time beyond her own trial. She worried that her imprisonment and separation from her daughter would mean that Mai Huggins would not recognize her.\(^\text{695}\) She agonized over each weekly meeting with her child and she took up yoga and meditation on the advice of Seale’s defense lawyer, Charles Garry.\(^\text{696}\) She wrote poetry both for herself and public digestion. In a poem she wrote in prison but published later, she directly challenged media portrayals of her as a seductress and revealed the state of her own mind as to the consequences of the trial:

\begin{center}
tall
skinny
plain
\end{center}

\(^{694}\) See for example their insinuations that she was in a relationship with Warren Kimbro. “Ericka Huggins Testimony,” \textit{State vs. Huggins and Seale} vols. 26-35, 3276-3280.

\(^{695}\) Ericka Huggins, Interview by Fiona Thompson, 2007, Oral History Center, the Bancroft Library, University of California: Berkeley, California; Phillips, “Power of the First Person Narrative, 33-51.

\(^{696}\) Ericka Huggins, Interview by Fiona Thompson, 2007, Oral History Center, the Bancroft Library, University of California: Berkeley, California; Freed, \textit{Agony in New Haven}, 146-156.
Huggins insistence here on her own plainness and in defining who she was can be read as a personal taking back of her narrative. She did not see herself in the public depictions of her as a seductress, as a murderer, or as a martyr. Instead, she emphasized the simpleness of her physical features, her love for the world, and her revolutionary nature. The last lines speak to the danger she faced if she lost her trial.

Huggins has also lived an entire life outside of what had happened to her with the death of her husband. She was only 20-years-old when she married John Huggins, 21-years-old when

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697 Ericka Huggins, “Tall, Skinny, Plain,” 15,
she became a mother and was widowed, and 22-years old when she was put on trial for murder. The time between the death of John Huggins and her arrest for Rackley’s murder was only three months.\textsuperscript{698} At that age, she was still poised on the edge of womanhood, and yet her actions would be played out for the entire world to see and they would haunt her throughout her life.\textsuperscript{699} Despite all that she has done since the New Haven Trials, Huggins in the public mind continues to be defined publicly by the two most traumatic events of her life—the assassination of her husband and her own trial for conspiracy to commit murder. Although she publicly tried to draw distance from those events, Huggins had to play into some of those stereotypes during her activism. Huggins used her fame within the Party to draw attention to the plight of women prisoners like Rose Smith, Peggy Hudgins, and Frances Carter—New Haven Panther women who were imprisoned with her and might not have received life-saving health care were it not for her own notoriety.\textsuperscript{700} Yet the overarching sense one gets of Huggins is that she did not enjoy that attention. After her trial, coverage of Huggins faded from the newspaper, a decision that might have been intentional as she became its editor-in-chief.\textsuperscript{701} When she was later featured in

\textsuperscript{698} Ericka Huggins, Interview by Fiona Thompson, 2007, Oral History Center, the Bancroft Library, University of California: Berkeley, California
\textsuperscript{699} Phillips, \textit{Power of the First Person Narrative}, 33-51; Ericka Huggins, Interview by Cheryl Dong, Phone Interview, December 12, 2018; Ericka Huggins, Interview by Fiona Thompson, 2007, Oral History Center, the Bancroft Library, University of California: Berkeley, California; Phillips, “Power of the First Person Narrative, 33-51.
\textsuperscript{700} Refer back to her work trying to get healthcare for Frances Carter and Ruby Smith, two pregnant Panther women she was incarcerated with as well as work with the “Sisterlove” Collective. “Letter from Frances Carter of the New Haven Nine,” \textit{Black Panther Communal News Service}, July 18, 1970, 18; “Rose Smith and Ericka Huggins of the New Haven Nine Place Ten Demands Before Prison Authorities,” \textit{Black Panther Communal News Service}, August 8, 1970, 14; Ericka Huggins, Interview by Fiona Thompson, 2007, Oral History Center, the Bancroft Library, University of California: Berkeley, California.
\textsuperscript{701} When asked about this, Huggins denied she intentionally pulled back, citing instead the legal troubles of other Panthers that took precedence, including Bobby Seale. Nevertheless, her uneasiness about her own depiction in the public media very possibly influenced this decision. Ericka Huggins, Interview by Cheryl Dong, Phone Interview, December 12, 2018.
1973 and 1974, it was always in relation to the work she did at the Oakland Community School.\textsuperscript{702}

These early conflicts and traumas surrounding her loss of control over her public persona defined how she speaks to academics and those who write about her today. In an interview I conducted with her, she said, “I want to say that though you speak about what you know, I don’t mean to be rude, but I was there...and not everything is as simple as a book, or a film, or an article can make it.”\textsuperscript{703} Huggins went on to tell a story about her experience speaking at UCLA at the dedication of a plaque to her husband:

I do interviews with young people a lot. We’re trained especially in the 21st century to believe what we read online and elsewhere. But I’ll never forget being at UCLA and speaking there some years ago. At a memorial for John Huggins and Bunchy Carter and there was something that the Asian American Studies center put on to remember, to remember the parts of UCLA that...aren’t recognized and a young woman stood up after I told my story of January 17, 1969 of when they were assassinated on that campus. And a young woman stood up and said, “That’s not how it happened.”

And there were other, there were young women in the audience who looked at her as if they wanted to strangle her and even some of the professors were ready to lunge with words. And I looked at her and saw that something, something had--it was arrogant, it was very arrogant--but, there was something more. That is that hearing my story from me, I turned her world upside down, because I was real, and I was living a very painful part of my life, and it was hard for her to allow herself to experience that pain because then she’d have to admit, well what kind of country do I live in and who would do this and why would they do this on this campus? Why didn’t I know about it before tonight? So what I asked her was, “Okay.” And everybody was shocked that I said, “Okay, where did and what did you read or hear that was different?” And she went on to give some minute


\textsuperscript{703} Ericka Huggins, Interview by Cheryl Dong, Phone Interview, December 12, 2018.
details about what I said that were untrue! And then when I said, “So you believe the things that you read?”

And she said, “They’re in a book!” Held her hands in astonishment at me for questioning. And I said is there somewhere in your mind and heart where you can imagine that things that are in a book are not true? Unless the person who lived that particular—who lived and were present at that particular event and [unclear] that narration? And then she felt put on. I don’t know why, I wasn’t putting her on the spot, I was just asking her questions and she’s the one who stood up to tell me I was untrue. And then she got very soft, and she said, “I guess I shouldn’t believe everything I read.”

And I said, “Maybe not.” And she sat down and she came to me later when everything was over and she was in tears and she apologized. And I said, “Well, you don’t need to apologize to me, but maybe you can—depending on what you’re studying, maybe you can do some of your own homework. And I told her that’s why I travel and speak. And then she began to say, “I would never have spoken like that to one of my professors. Do you think I did that because you are a black woman?” And I said, “I don’t know. In the goodness of her own heart, you do. You know.” And she walked away and I never saw her again. She walked away thoughtful.  

Huggins spoke to the various distortions that have happened to her life in that story. She is a public figure, but she is also a private person and that creative tension in her life has informed how she interacts with scholars and people interested in the Black Panther Party. Although she recognizes the importance of her story, she is hesitant to continue living its darkest moments for others to excavate. She insists on her own personal truth, one that has deeper impact and meaning than any account written by others. Huggins's skepticism brings up ethical questions of control, ownership, memory, and accuracy that historians of the Black Panther Party have to continue to grapple with.

704 Ericka Huggins, Interview by Cheryl Dong, Phone Interview, December 12, 2018.
The New Haven trial of Ericka Huggins revealed hidden discourses about gender and race within the Party. For Huggins's detractors in the media, the case exposed long-held views of black women as “Jezebel.” Her opponents portrayed Huggins as a cold blooded seducer and murderer whose very façade of innocence concealed her pathology and criminality. Prosecutor Arnold Markle repeated these highly sexualized and racialized views of Ericka Huggins to build his case in the absence of solid evidence. Catherine Roraback built her defense by building on the Panther Party’s construction of Huggins as a grieving widow and young mother. Roraback made her seem traumatized by the death and unable to react to the bullying of George Sams.\(^{705}\) Despite his eventual acquittal, Judge Mulvey severely compromised Roraback’s defense of Huggins by refusing to acknowledge the testimony of defense witnesses who had suffered abuse at the hands of George Sams. Mulvey’s skepticism represented an act of state-sanctioned silencing that highlighted the difficulties faced by black women in garnering respect and a fair hearing within the criminal justice system.\(^ {706}\)

Finally, Huggins's experience in prison helped spark a nascent women’s prison rights movement, one that challenged later constructions of political prisoners as predominantly male and highlighted the specific challenges that women faced in prison. Her prison advocacy stemmed out of real need that she saw while incarcerated and it segued with a larger community of imprisoned women activists who worked on similar issues of women’s health and wellness.\(^ {707}\)


\(^{707}\) Refer back to her work trying to get healthcare for Frances Carter and Ruby Smith, two pregnant Panther women she was incarcerated with as well as work with the “Sisterlove” Collective. “Letter from Frances Carter of the New Haven Nine,” \textit{Black Panther Communal News Service}, July 18, 1970, 18; “Rose Smith and Ericka Huggins of the New Haven Nine Place Ten Demands Before Prison Authorities,” \textit{Black Panther Communal News Service}, August
Unfortunately, many of these complexities have been flattened by the passage of time. Two different narratives of Ericka Huggins have crystallized in the process of memory making. One emphasized her domesticity and femininity while the other painted her as an updated version of Jezebel. Then there is Ericka herself, an enigma, but one who insists and deserves to be considered a whole person and not just the distortions of her worst life experiences.

8, 1970, 14; Ericka Huggins, Interview by Fiona Thompson, 2007, Oral History Center, the Bancroft Library, University of California: Berkeley, California.
Land, Bread, and Housing: The Troubled Memory of Black Panther Martyrdom in the New South

On March 7, 1971, the Winston-Salem Black Panther Party held a rally in support of the Revolutionary Intercommunal Day of Solidarity. Among the various speeches was one by local community member, Lily Jones, who took the stage to denounce the actions of city officials.

Speaking to an audience of some 700 people, Lily Jones described recent events:

“As a member of the community of Winston-Salem, as an active sympathizer of the Black Panther Party, I have been persecuted, I have been evicted from my home. As a result of my association with the party, I think that I have been blacklisted in this city. My Constitutional rights, my human rights have been violated because of my political awareness, because of what I have learned from my association, because I have learned about the circumstances which my people are being subjected to. Because I have applied myself and because I have tried to help my people and tried to associate with my people, I am being persecuted...it is hard to fight, it’s hard to prove that a person is being persecuted because of political beliefs--They’ll keep you fighting among yourselves to keep from really looking at who’s the guilty person.”

Jones’s crime was nothing more than offering temporary housing to a couple of Black Panther members after they had been evicted from their apartment. In response, Jones’s landlord evicted her from her house on Wilson Street and she lost her job as a domestic worker. As many as one hundred policemen enforced the eviction order.

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Although the cause of and response to Jones’s eviction may seem extreme, the unusual police presence reflected a particular context of police-community relations that had developed in Winston-Salem. This context was rooted in an earlier history of Jim Crow where police could expect to intimidate black residents of the city with little opposition. Although Jim Crow had fallen as a result of the Civil Rights Movement, older traditions of policing survived even as they were being actively challenged. As Hazel Mack, a Winston-Salem Panther remembered, “[Police Chief] Tucker was a brutal, violent man. He was mean...He got real personal in his attacks and what he did was he threatened us.”\(^{710}\) In Mack’s memory, Tucker played the role of the Southern law enforcement officer typified by figures like Police Commissioner Bull Connor in Birmingham, Alabama and Sheriff Jim Clark in Selma, Alabama.\(^{711}\) Men like Tucker, Connor, and Clark used a range of legal and extralegal violence coupled with a public attitude of paternalism to enforce compliance with white supremacy in a tradition going back to antebellum slavery.\(^{712}\)

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\(^{710}\) Hazel Mack, Phone conversation with author, October 9, 2018.


\(^{712}\) I am referring here to the theoretical concept of the two faces of domination outlined in: Stephen Kantrowitz, “The Two Faces of Domination in North Carolina 1800-1898,” in *Democracy Betrayed: The Wilmington Race Riot*
In the more immediate past, Lily Jones’s eviction was only the latest in a long series of confrontations between the police and the Winston-Salem Panthers over the issue of housing. In 1970, the Panthers utilized cases of eviction to highlight the police’s role in enforcing the policies of local landlords. They evoked the language of martyrdom to describe their experiences, deliberately drawing on shared recent memory of the Civil Rights Movement and the fate of activists like Martin Luther King Jr., Medgar Evers, Malcolm X, and others. In the early spring of 1970, police used the pretext of eviction to carry out raids on Panther-rented properties. At least one such incident in High Point, North Carolina turned into a violent shootout. These local confrontations between law enforcement and Panthers explained why they reacted with such force to Lily Jones’s eviction. After Lily Jones lost her home, she found that no other landlords in Winston-Salem would rent to her. The Winston-Salem chapter experienced the same discrimination when it had to move headquarters a number of times due to violence and intimidation by law enforcement.

Lily Jones’s starring role as a Black Panther Party representative at this community event highlighted both the promise and the danger of the Black Panther Party’s use of martyrdom as a tool to galvanize community support. On the one hand, stories like that of Lily Jones’
persecution by state authorities helped garner public support by casting the Panthers as ordinary members of the community. On the other hand, those same stories could erode support if black communities grew tired of the increased state surveillance, persecution, and violence that the Panthers provoked from local authorities. In Jones’s case, her brush with open discrimination due to her political views propelled her radicalization and led to official membership in the Black Panther Party within weeks of giving the speech. For others, the Panthers brought more trouble than they were worth.

The term “martyrdom” brings to mind images of violent, direct confrontation with injustice that served to highlight the innocence of the victim while shedding light on the brutality of the perpetrators. In some of the most celebrated martyrdom narratives of the Black Freedom Movement, like Martin Luther King Jr. or Emmett Till, the process highlighted a victim’s innocence and respectability, thus subverting popular perceptions of black bodies as problematic, diseased, and criminal. Popular media and prominent civil rights activists framed these famous cases of martyrdom with white audiences in mind, targeting the sympathies of erstwhile allies of the movement. This framing laid the groundwork for the Panthers to more explicitly address the trauma of poor black communities, which often understood and experienced suffering and injustice in hidden ways, routinely endured. Many of these traditional civil

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720 Leigh Raiford, in Imprisoned Under a Luminous Glare, explores the politics of respectability and representation. She argues a particular kind of “emergent visibility” developed in photography of the traditional civil rights movement led to a politics in which some black bodies could represent the Civil Rights Movement and others could not. The Black Panther Party challenged those assumptions, while creating new stereotypes revolving around masculinity and class. More recently, the NPR podcast White Lies on the murder of Jim Reeb in Selma, Alabama provided a deep dive into issues of race, class, representation, and memory in how both the Civil Rights Movement
rights martyrs had been prominent activists in life. In death, they achieved a level of notoriety that elevated them well above ordinary people.

The Black Panther Party radically departed from the early Civil Rights Movement construction of martyrdom. Its members rejected narratives of respectability expected of traditional martyrs and, for a national white audience, remade the inherent class politics of it by centering the stories, vantage points, and experiences of poor black communities. The Black Panthers expanded upon traditional definitions of black martyrdom and redefined the experience of black suffering for black people. An examination of how the Panthers portrayed the cases of Eldridge Cleaver, Huey P. Newton, the Soledad Brothers, and the Attica prisoners demonstrated the Panthers’ commitment to challenging narratives of respectability and putting forth working class people as symbols of the movement.

Most studies of the Black Panther Party do not directly address its very public performances of confrontation, death, and suffering at the hands of state authority. Those that do argue that its fascination with violent confrontation with the police doomed them from the


Owen J. Dwyer and Derek H. Alderman’s Civil Rights Memorials and the Geography of Memory and Kenneth Foote’s Shadowed Ground offer clues on how memory scholars have thought about memory and representation of martyrdom and the civil rights movement. While neither work openly refers to martyrdom, they both discuss how figures and tragic events within the civil rights movement become commemorated or forgotten and the memory politics behind these public debates. Dwyer and Alderman look at how racial politics and power affect commemoration of civil rights on the American landscape while Foote discusses how Americans commemorate sites of tragedy. Owen J Dwyer and Derek H. Alderman, Civil Rights Memorials and the Geography of Memory (Chicago: The Center for American Places, 2008); Kenneth E. Foote, Shadowed Ground: America’s Landscapes of Violence and Tragedy (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003).

Each of these cases involves movement figures that would be untouchable to the traditional movement. They advocated self-defense, some of them were convicted criminals, and their private lives were often the case of great media speculation. Taken together, they represent a cross-section of what Huey P. Newton, Frantz Fanon, and Karl Marx termed the lumpen proletariat. Panther martyrdom was revolutionary because it commemorated people who fell more easily into this category than the black bourgeoisie. For a theoretical discussion of the Panthers and the lumpen, see: Huey P. Newton, Revolutionary Suicide (New York: Penguin Classics Deluxe Edition, 2009).
beginning and encouraged criminal elements within the ranks. This narrative of the Panthers’
descent into violence can diminish the Black Panther Party’s agency and focuses too much
attention on the role of the FBI and state law enforcement authorities in bringing an end to the
organization. It can also engage with a history of perceptions of black criminality in troubling
ways, particularly in the case of Hugh Pearson and David Horowitz. Historians who have
argued for a more positive view of the Panthers have contributed significantly to enriching our
understanding of their outreach. While these works break important new ground in providing a
full picture of the Panthers’ engagement in public health and social services, they shy away from
their legacy of death, imprisonment, and public suffering. Even when sympathetic historians
mention the celebrity of Panther martyrs like Huey P. Newton and Fred Hampton, they focus on
the way that the Panthers lost control of their narrative due to mainstream media distortion.

Yet to ignore the Panthers’ fascination with martyrdom is to skirt around a central piece
of their identity and organizing philosophy. The Panthers highlighted their suffering and
confrontation with state authority as a crucial part of their community service towards the
people, not as a detractor. At its best, the Panther tradition of martyrdom served to spur ordinary
communities and people to support their hope for radical revolution. The dead and imprisoned
became important teaching tools for the enlightenment of the people to the indignities of their
own daily lives. They were a call for further activism and an important way that the Panthers

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725 After his release from prison, Huey P. Newton struggled with the Panther conception of martyrdom which he termed “Revolutionary Suicide.” He wanted to avoid a fatalistic worldview expressed by the Cleaver faction.
raised funds and resources for the organization. Panther martyrs rose from ordinary people with failings unseen publicly in the lives of traditional icons like Martin Luther King Jr.\textsuperscript{726} They fought back and had vices. In their suffering, they convinced poor black communities that their own experiences merited justice. The Panthers’ use of poor people as martyrs challenged the rhetoric of blight, criminality, and pathological disease associated with black communities.\textsuperscript{727}

The Black Panther Party in Winston-Salem created local heroes and symbols of suffering to serve local needs and local communities. These included people like Lily Jones and other victims of police-led evictions like Polly Graham, who would be the focus of the Winston-Salem chapter’s earliest organizing.\textsuperscript{728} The Panthers framed the police in these narratives as the antagonists not just because of their personal mistrust, but because they used harassment, degradation, and violence to enforce the structures that kept black people in Winston-Salem firmly under the thumb of white supremacy. Police carried out de-facto segregation through patrols and harassment. They enacted the will of white landlords and businessmen on black communities by evicting poor people from their homes and punishing those who resisted second-


class citizenship. The Black Panthers made that pain visible through their public protest and clever use of the media. Using the *Black Panther Community News Service* as an outlet, the Panthers in Winston-Salem worked tirelessly to educate the people on how invisible social structures and impersonal public policy could do real harm.

Although there were violent incidents, the Panthers in Winston-Salem did not set out to engage in open, physical confrontations with law enforcement. Instead, they focused their organizing efforts in the areas of public health, welfare organizing, and urban renewal. By highlighting the daily indignities of poverty and sense of powerlessness imposed upon residents with the same drama and passion as the Panthers approached violent confrontations with law enforcement, they elevated the daily suffering of local people. The Panthers in Winston-Salem humanized the poor by depicting them with dignity. They showed the suffering of black communities to be the result of federal and local policies aimed at creating a racialized underclass of working poor in America’s cities. Seen from afar, the struggles of the Panthers of Winston-Salem against policies like the “Model Cities” program, urban renewal, and the

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731 Hazel Mack, Interview by Cheryl Dong, Other Suns Community Center, Winston-Salem, January 19, 2019.
centralization of urban healthcare seem almost inconsequential compared to the dramatized narratives of police raids and assassinations that dominate popular visions of Panther history. By taking on these impersonal structures and policies with the same urgency and radical language of genocide, the Panthers in Winston-Salem showed how seemingly insignificant local politics and programs were issues of life and death to the marginalized and heavily policed urban poor of the 1960s and 1970s South.

The Panthers modelled how state-sanctioned police violence and impersonal public policy were not separate problems facing poor black communities, but two sides of the same coin. It was the highly personal face of law enforcement that supported the impersonal face of urban renewal. The Panthers’ use of ordinary people as martyrs challenged the rhetoric of blight, criminality, and pathological disease associated with black communities. In Winston-Salem, it threatened to undermine the very ideology of the “progressive” government, upon which North Carolina especially prided itself.

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733 A similar movement against evictions and urban renewal policies was in progress in Durham, North Carolina, a tobacco town centered around the American Tobacco Company and Duke University. Like Winston-Salem, Durham has a long history of black radicalism going back to organizers like Pauli Murray. In the mid 1960s, poor black women started a movement against police enforcement of evictions. Christina Greene, Our Separate Ways: Women and the Black Freedom Movement in Durham, North Carolina (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 105-106.

734 The literature on the idea of black criminality and disease evolved over different historical eras and must be analyzed through the lens of gender and class: Khalil Gibran Muhammad, The Condemnation of Blackness: Race,; ed. Michael B. Katz and Thomas J. Sugrue, W.E.B. Du Bois, Race, and the City; Cheryl D. Hicks, Talk With You Like a Woman.

735 A number of historians have complicated our understanding of North Carolina as a “progressive” state by examining how state officials avoided the worst violence of the Civil Rights Movement that consumed deep South states like Mississippi and Alabama, and instead adopted a veneer of civility while working to uphold the basic structures of white supremacy. William H. Chafe, Civilities and Civil Rights: Greensboro, North Carolina, and the
The Winston-Salem Panther chapter also outlasted others in the South, surviving from 1969 to 1976. The reason for its longevity lay in how members in Winston-Salem adapted national Party policy to suit their unique needs. Their distance from national headquarters afforded them relative independence.\textsuperscript{736} When the Panthers in Winston-Salem began to de-escalate their conflicts with state law enforcement agencies, they did not abandon their core activism against racism and poverty in Winston-Salem; they simply changed tactics. Accordingly, their paradigm of martyrdom shifted to suit these new needs. In 1974, members melded the two tactics through the creation of the “Joseph Waddell Ambulance Service for the Poor.” Spurred by both the death of Panther Joseph Waddell in prison after his arrest for armed robbery on June 13, 1972 and the lack of a reliable ambulance service in the segregated communities of northern and eastern Winston-Salem, the Panthers funded and created their own ambulance service as a memorial.\textsuperscript{737} In doing so, they brought attention to the lack of justice in the law enforcement and the prison system while simultaneously modeling positive change for their community and an alternative vision of how the government could work for poor black people. Indeed, the creation of the Panther ambulance service helped spur the city government to provide its own, public ambulance service.\textsuperscript{738}

The ultimate demise of the Black Panther Party in Winston-Salem was not a foregone conclusion but the result of a confluence of factors that made the organization unsustainable on a


\textsuperscript{737} Friedman, “Picking Up Where Robert F. Williams Left Off,” 76.

\textsuperscript{738} Hazel Mack, Interview by Cheryl Dong, Other Suns Community Center, Winston-Salem, January 19, 2019.
local and national level. The cost of running community survival programs, coupled with the limited resources of the Party nationally and locally led to the death of the chapter. However, the successes of the Winston-Salem Panthers can be measured in the lasting legacy they created in that city. While they did not change the tide of urban renewal policies—such as highway construction and involvement in the Model Cities federal program—they problematized the triumphant narrative of southern progress and created important spaces for the recognition of black experience, black suffering, and black pride in the city.

Following the end of the active chapter, its legacy underwent a peculiar transformation, one away from earlier radicalism and confrontations with police and more safely contained in the realm of grassroots community organizing and poverty work. The shift to mainstream acceptability appeared especially evident the unveiling of a new historic marker by the city of Winston-Salem on October 14, 2012. The carefully worded sign highlights the Party’s community service programs like the “Free Breakfast for Children,” sickle cell anemia testing, and the free ambulance service. Speaking at the event, Larry Little, the local leader of the Panthers, re-emphasized the positive community-based work that the Panthers had done in Winston-Salem while renouncing some of his earlier, more controversial rhetoric. “If people read the sign and not the rhetoric,” he proclaimed, “people will recognize the good and the positive

739 Friedman, “Picking Up Where Robert F. Williams Left Off,” 79-82.
740 Winston-Salem was a participant in the federal Model Cities program, which was a Great Society program designed to achieve urban renewal while addressing issues of poverty and racial inequality. The original plan was modelled off of the successes of cities like New Haven, Connecticut, which in the mid 1960s seemed to achieve peaceful urban renewal. In reality, the Model Cities program gave money to cities that enforced their own vision of renewal, often to the detriment of economically and racially marginalized communities. Ruth L. Mace, Renewing Winston-Salem (Winston-Salem, NC: Redevelopment Commission of Winston-Salem, 1965); Mandi Isaacs Jackson, Model City Blues: Urban Space and Organized Resistance in New Haven (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008); Yohuru Williams, Black Politics/White Power: Civil Rights, Black Powr, and the Black Panthers in New Haven (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008); Sidney Fine, Violence in the Model City: The Cavanaugh Administration, Race Relations, and the Detroit Riot of 1967 (Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1989).
change we made in Winston-Salem.”741 This was a far cry from the fiery words of Lily Jones in 1971.

Abandoning a reflection of their work, wherein police brutality acted as a lynchpin to a larger process of racial discrimination, urban renewal, and de-industrialization, Panther veterans in Winston-Salem gained a certain amount of acceptability and political capital. However, doing so required that they bury a fraught and interesting history of resistance to local policies. In its halcyon days in the early 1970s, the Black Panther Party in Winston-Salem threatened to undermine the power structure and economy of the emerging Sunbelt South, which depended on projecting an outward image of peaceful race relations, political progressivism, and economic affordability that would attract business and industry to the region.742 Moreover, the Panthers’ radical black Marxist critique of state power and capitalism found fertile ground among the disenfranchised tobacco workers of R.J. Reynolds, who had a tradition of radical activism dating back to the 1930s and 40s.743 Decades later, the Panthers gained significant traction as well as community support for its youthful exuberance and courage in challenging the state sanctioned violence that outlasted Jim Crow.

The turn away from the Panthers’ earlier radicalism and its erasure in public memory was not a foregone conclusion, but a result of historical contingencies that led veterans like Larry Little and others in Winston-Salem to re-write the meaning of the Panthers. Social and economic forces like neoliberalism, the continued spread of urban renewal, mass incarceration and the

742 Schulman, From Cotton Belt to Sunbelt, 171-173.
arrival of “Law and Order” politics helped close the window of possibility to advance this
critique of the South that were the hallmark of their organizing.744 Left with little alternative, the
Panthers and their supporters buried an analysis of state violence that exposed supposedly benign
urban change--one that could explain continued tensions with police control and the resurgence

The Black Panthers in the Sunbelt South: Housing and Poverty.

When Lee Faye Mack moved into the Happy Hills Housing Project in 1959, she did so
with the expectation that prosperity and opportunity would be within the reach of her family in
this growing, industrial city of the postwar South. Mack participated in a larger trend of
migration from country to city of southern black agricultural workers pushed off the land due to
the mechanization of agriculture.745 Mack was born in Bishopville, South Carolina, and, having
completed the 11th grade, made a living with her husband as sharecroppers in the cotton fields.746
Years later, her daughter, Hazel Mack, one of the founding members of the Black Panther Party
in Winston-Salem, recalled, “The earliest memory of my life was sitting at the end of a cotton

744 A healthy historiography on the rise of neo-conservatism and “Law and Order” politics as emerging from white
backlash has developed. See: Michael Flamm, Law and Order: Street Crime, Civil Unrest, and the Crisis of
Liberalism in the 1960s (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005); Michelle Alexander, The New Jim Crow:
Mass Incarceration Matters: Rethinking Crisis, Decline, and Transformation in Postwar American History,” Journal
of American History 97.3 (December 2010): 703-734.
745 Mechanization of agriculture as a reason for internal and external Migration has recently caught the public
imagination, especially the issue of land dispossession and black resistance. Annelise Orleck, Storming Caesar’s
Palace: How Black Mothers Fought Their Own War on Poverty (Boston: Beacon Press, 2005), 19-31; Pete Daniel,
Dispossession: Discrimination Against African American Farmers in the Age of Civil Rights (Chapel Hill:
University of North Carolina Press, 2013); Monica M. White, Freedom Farmers: Agricultural Resistance and the
746 Hazel Mack, Interview by Katrina Walker, 5 October 1995, 13 October 1995, and 17 November 1995, J-0077, in the
Southern Oral History Program Collection #4007, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of
North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
row while Mommy and Daddy picked cotton up and down. Now I never thought I was poor, I never went hungry. But at a certain age, you realize the price and the pain that your parents paid to give you the basics in life.”

Lee Faye Mack worked in Winston-Salem as a domestic in the homes of more well-to-do whites while her husband found a job as a construction worker. However, the prosperity that the Macks sought remained elusive. Responding to the circumstances of poverty and need in her neighborhood, Mack joined a community program called “Experiment in Self-Reliance.” She worked to build the first welfare organization in Winston-Salem by knocking on doors of women in her community. These women agitated against poor living conditions, high rent values, and the refusal of landlords to address these conditions. In addition, she taught important life skills for city-living to rural transplants like herself. Lee Faye Mack’s activism spurred her daughter, Hazel Mack, toward more radical work around similar issues when she joined the Black Panther Party. The elder Mack’s community organizing represented a deeper tradition of racial self determination within the Winston-Salem black community.

The living conditions of African Americans in Winston-Salem were not the result of natural forces, but of carefully crafted economic, social, and racial policies designed to enforce a system of racial capitalism that benefited the city’s elites to the detriment of poor blacks and poor whites. In this regard, Winston-Salem was not unlike other “industrialized” cities in the

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748 Lisa Levenstein testifies to other women organizing around similar issues of poverty rights in post-war Philadelphia. These women navigated the limited services available to them to make ends meet. They developed various strategies of survival that would inform the later welfare rights movement. Lisa Levenstein, A Movement Without Marches: African American Women and the Politics of Poverty in Postwar Philadelphia (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009).
cotton belt South in that it relied on low wages and racial segregation to create an environment good for business.\textsuperscript{750} The consequences of this system of racial capitalism was the formation, and then slow destruction, of slums that acted to keep black people in Winston-Salem trapped within a cycle of poverty. White politicians then blamed those same communities for the incipient problems of crime and disease brought about by lack of access to basic services. This pattern of racial capitalism played out in a number of cities in North Carolina and nationally. Together, it drove the processes of urban crisis, urban renewal, and suburbanization.\textsuperscript{751}

African Americans who migrated to cities like Winston-Salem in the first half of the twentieth century were lured there by the promise of relatively high paying jobs at the burgeoning tobacco factories and cotton mills run by entrepreneurs like the Reynolds and Hanes families. Newcomers to Winston-Salem in the 1910s and 1920s found themselves moving into crowded slums towards the center of the city while the white working class occupied East Winston. The earliest of these black slums was known as “Monkey Bottoms,” a common derogatory name applied to many black communities in southern cities—a reference to both the racial stigma of blackness as well as the locations of these communities in low-lying, flood prone areas.\textsuperscript{752} This particular neighborhood, later renamed “11th Street Bottoms,” became one of the toughest and most dangerous neighborhoods in Winston-Salem and would generate the core of


\textsuperscript{751} Cruise, “Reynoldstown”, 6.

\textsuperscript{752} Robert Rodgers Korstad, Civil Rights Unionism, 70-73.
Panther support in the 1970s. The influx of newcomers in the 1910s and 1920s put considerable pressure to find new housing for African Americans and in the ensuing two decades, black communities spread into East Winston in neighborhoods like “The Pond” and Peters Creek.

The city had little incentive to provide city services to these so-called “blighted” areas and residents had limited access to waste disposal, sewage, and electricity. In a survey done of 294 homes owned by black tobacco workers in August of 1949, only thirteen had hot running water, thirty-four had no electricity, only forty-eight had bath tubs, and 242 had not been repaired in the last three years. Ochie Bell Little, the mother of Black Panther veteran Larry Little, experienced these conditions first-hand and her suffering, as well as that of other black tobacco workers, galvanized the black community in Winston-Salem to form Local 22 tobacco workers union at R.J. Reynolds in 1943. Local 22 became the largest interracial tobacco workers union in the South although its base remained in the black community. Ultimately, the passage of the Taft-Hartley Act in 1949 signaled the end for the union. Taft-Hartley was an omnibus bill that gutted unions’ abilities to conduct strikes and lobby for political change while beefing up employer’s rights to work against unions through investigations, de-certifying procedures, and legal intimidation. In the wake of Taft-Hartley’s passage, North Carolina passed its “Right-to-Work” law in 1953, effectively banning the union “closed shop.” Along with the failure of tobacco workers to vote to renew the union contract in 1951, such early maneuvering by conservative opponents of the New Deal led to the dissolution of Local 22.

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753 Hazel Mack, Interview by Cheryl Dong, Other Suns Community Center, Winston-Salem, January 19, 2019.
755 Korstad, Civil Rights Unionism, 311.
756 Korstad, Civil Rights Unionism, 411.
The failure of the black-led tobacco worker’s union in Winston-Salem set the stage for the later rise of the Black Panther Party. On the one hand, the union provided a breeding ground for worker’s radicalism and a new vision of civil rights that stressed economic justice and flirted with socialism and Marxist critiques of capitalism.\textsuperscript{757} On the other hand, the success of the union led local companies like R.J. Reynolds and Hanes Cotton Company to withdraw their paternalistic support for black workers as they began to turn toward mechanization to solve their labor woes. Winston-Salem’s white-owned companies needed to suppress the potent racial forces that led to successful unionization. Their solution was to chip away slowly at the jobs available to African Americans in Winston-Salem’s industrial sector. In addition, they denied crucial political and economic support to already struggling black communities.\textsuperscript{758} The economic and political reprisals of R. J. Reynolds affected many individual black families in Winston-Salem. For example, Ochie Bell Little lost her job in tobacco as retribution for her union participation. She had to work as a domestic through much of Larry Little’s childhood.\textsuperscript{759}

From the perspective of city planners, however, the result was worsening poverty that led to a new understanding of black neighborhoods as “blighted.” This, in turn, rationalized clearing such slums from the landscape to make new, desirable living spaces.\textsuperscript{760}

In 1948, an outbreak of polio in mostly white neighborhoods led the Junior Chamber of Commerce President Wallace Dunham to call for immediate action against the unsanitary conditions in “The Pond.” Like many black neighborhoods in southern cities, “The Pond” had been built in low-lying flood plains where disease ran rampant. Almost all residents who lived there rented, and they paid between four dollars to twenty-one dollars a month for housing. Out

\textsuperscript{757} Korstad, \textit{Civil Rights Unionism}, 415-416.
\textsuperscript{758} Nash, Reynoldstown, 2.
\textsuperscript{760} Todd Luck “Union Leaders Recalled as Trailblazers” \textit{Winston-Salem Chronicle,} April 25, 2013.
of 1,078 houses, 946 did not have bathrooms and 651 did not have access to running water. The neighborhood also lacked basic sanitation services and residents had taken to dumping their garbage in nearby Peters Creek. Polio had long been associated with black neighborhoods and by linking “The Pond” to the epidemic, local administrators took advantage of The Housing Act of 1949 to access public funds for “slum clearance.” Initially, some working class African Americans supported these renewal efforts because the construction of federally subsidized housing projects, like the Kimberley Housing Project and the Happy Hills Housing Project, appeared to provide a chance to move up in the world. However, further urban renewal projects in the late 1950s culminated with the arrival of U.S. 52. Building the highway through “blighted” black neighborhoods brought the destruction of “Monkey Bottoms” and the “Shakes” as well as the demolition of the historic black business section downtown.

These various urban renewal initiatives culminated in Winston-Salem’s participation in the “Model Cities” initiative—an urban renewal project conceived in 1966 by Lyndon B. Johnson’s Great Society program. While the stated goal was to provide federal funds to address housing inequality in America’s decaying cities, the way the program functioned in Winston-Salem and in many other cities was to provide money for the renewal of downtown while poor black neighborhoods remained in the hands of white landlords with political influence. The consequence of these urban renewal projects in the 1950s and of the “Model Cities” program in the 1960s and 1970s was to destroy closely-knit, historically established black communities as

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761 Nash, Reynoldstown, 18.
762 As Sugrue argues in Origins of the Urban Crisis, housing projects in Detroit were originally sources of pride for residents until lack of investment, “redlining,” and city control turned them into “blighted” areas. Sugrue, Origins of the Urban Crisis, 65-68.
763 Nash, Reynoldstown, 46.
well as the social and economic ties that supported them—all while funneling money into the very structure of white supremacy they were meant to help dismantle.\textsuperscript{765} This destruction instilled young African Americans like Larry Little and Hazel Mack with a sense of loss as well as urgency to fight for black communities under threat of erasure.\textsuperscript{766}

While the North Carolina Civil Rights Movement began with sit-ins, activists quickly adopted a more militant stance when it became clear that racial equality would not be won with the end of Jim Crow.\textsuperscript{767} One sign of just how far race relations between law enforcement and the black community in Winston-Salem had deteriorated came on Sunday morning, October 15, 1967, when two white police officers arrested 32-year-old James Eller on suspicion of being drunk. The officers maced Eller to subdue him and at the station, Patrolman W. E. Owens took a blackjack to Eller’s head. X-rays at the hospital later revealed that Eller had sustained a lumbar puncture and a fractured skull. He died on October 28, and an autopsy confirmed that his death had been caused by brain damage sustained in the attack. While police arrested Patrolman Owens on a murder warrant the day of Eller’s death, the municipal court dismissed the charge on October 30. With tensions rising, the day of Eller’s burial on November 2 sparked a rebellion in the black community with residents taking out their anger by burning down derelict buildings and looting predatory businesses that had long been targets of their simmering discontent.

\textsuperscript{765} The literature on “urban crisis” is expansive and focuses on a particular shift in the American landscape away from inner cities towards the suburbs that was the result of redlining, federal investment in highways, and white flight through suburbanization. Sugrue, Origins of the Urban Crisis; Jackson, Crabgrass Frontier; Self, American Babylon.

\textsuperscript{766} Nash, “Reynoldstown,” 72; The Panthers in Winston-Salem launched some of the most incisive attacks on Model Cities in Winston-Salem: Airtel dated 1/4/73, FBI Black Panther Party--North Carolina Files (hereafter BPP-NC), file number 105-165706-8, section 13.

Ultimately, the mayor called in the National Guard, which managed to subdue the rebellion by
November 5, 1967. 768

Urban rebellions in Winston-Salem and Greensboro, North Carolina, in the late 1960s chipped away the myth of the state’s progressivism on race and revealed the violent power structure that undergirded white southern politics. 769 Indeed, during the Civil Rights Movement, North Carolina positioned itself as a forward looking southern state that generally avoided the violent confrontations and searing images that came to define Deep South states, like Mississippi and Alabama. North Carolina’s “progressive” governors like Luther Hodges and Terry Sanford emphasized enlightened business management with slow change on race relations that prioritized stability over progress. Thus, North Carolina came up with a system that appeared to comply with Brown vs. Board of Education, but implemented a series of local and state-wide ordinances that maintained segregation. When civil rights activists complained about the slow march of progress, state officials would point to the need for slow change in order to preserve stability and economic prosperity. 770


769 In May of 1968, further rebellions occurred in Greensboro, North Carolina related to a disruption at Dudley High School and spreading to the campus of A&T when 700 student protesters started tossing bottles and rocks at school buildings and police. The National Guard mobilized, and one student, Willie Graves, was killed by police. See: Friedman, Picking Up Where Robert F. Williams Left Off,” 53; On March 13, 1969, Greensboro police again invaded A&T’s campus in response to protests, which resulted in the shooting of three students and one visitor: “Leaflet from A&T University,” FBI Black Panther Party--North Carolina Files (hereafter BPP-NC), file number 105-165706-8, section 1.

It would take the maturation of the Black Power Movement in Winston-Salem to develop a comprehensive critique of how the process of racial criminalization and urban renewal created a new system of racial violence in the South. Just two years after Eller’s death, Larry Little and his classmate, Robert Greer, succeeded in obtaining permission from the Black Panther Party headquarters in Oakland, California, to become an officially affiliated National Committee to Combat Fascism (NCCF). The NCCF designation did not grant the activists in Winston-Salem a full-fledged Black Panther Party chapter, but it did give them official recognition, support from headquarters, and a voice in the Black Panther Party Community News Service. Although the NCCF did not become an official chapter until April of 1971, the activists referred to themselves as “Panthers” throughout this time.

Larry Little, Robert Greer, and Hazel Mack were part of a nascent, loose coalition of state-wide activists situated around North Carolina’s universities, joining together students from HBCUs and state schools like the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and Duke University. These young militants, including Howard Fuller in Durham and Ben Chavis in Charlotte and Wilmington, represented a new radicalism. Both Fuller and Chavis would attempt to establish Black Panther Party chapters in North Carolina before moving on to other work. Nevertheless, they would remain key allies of the Winston-Salem Panthers and they cooperated on projects together. This coalition brought the potential threat of black power to state politics.

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771 “Memorandum from Charlotte Division-RM-BPP dated 9/30/69,” From FBI Black Panther Party--North Carolina Files (hereafter BPP-NC), file number 105-165706-8, section 3.
772 In keeping with how the Winston-Salem Panthers referred to themselves, this dissertation will call them Panthers even when they were members of the NCCF.
773 Donna Jean Murch makes a similar argument for the importance of universities and high schools in providing recruits for the Black Panther Party. Murch, Living for the City, 69-74.
774 Ben Chavis and Howard Fuller are still well-known activists today. Fuller led the formation of Malcolm X Liberation University in Durham, NC and Ben Chavis was executive director of the NAACP who worked on the
In its first significant public action, the Winston-Salem NCCF exposed the indignity of life in “blighted” neighborhoods and the state violence that enforced it. On March 4, 1970, Winston-Salem police arrived in the early morning hours on Locus Street to serve eviction notices to local residents who had failed to pay their rent on time. Several of the people they tried to evict that morning were disabled, including an elderly woman who was sick in bed and an elderly blind man. When residents Frank McMullis and Polly Graham attempted to resist eviction, law enforcement described them as “crazy” or “drunk,” using long-held beliefs that black people had loose morals to discredit their protests. The police could only perceive black residents through this limited lens because of how the politics of race fundamentally denied their humanity.

On this particular morning, the nascent Winston-Salem NCCF made a show of force by patrolling the street armed with shotguns. When the police attempted to move furniture out of Polly Graham’s apartment, the Panthers moved her furniture out of the street. The stand-off between police and activists in Winston-Salem ended in the retreat of the police and resulted in positive press for the NCCF in the Black Panther Party’s nationally published newspaper which

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776 For literature on vice and stereotypes about black women, see works like: Muhammad, The Condemnation of Blackness; Cheryl D. Hicks, Talk With You Like a Woman: African American Women, Justice, and Reform in New York, 1890-1938 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010).
ran headlines for Winston-Salem like, “ALL THE PIGS DO IS COME AROUND AND COLLECT RENT” and “PEOPLE OF THE COMMUNITY VS. THE SLUMLORDS AND FASCIST PIGS OF WINSTON-SALEM.” In this moment of confrontation, the Panthers were not only protecting local people from eviction, but elevating these struggles through the language of civil rights martyrdom to mobilize the community.

Such bold headlines reflected a deeper analysis that the NCCF made about the connections between blight, disease, poverty, and racial discrimination by law enforcement in Winston-Salem. In the spring and summer of 1970, the issue of poor housing appeared repeatedly in issues of the national Black Panther Community News Service with the NCCF running features on community members’ suffering poor housing conditions. It also shed light on a disturbing pattern in the city’s residential neighborhoods where because of housing segregation, slum landlords could charge a premium to black residents while refusing to make any improvements on their properties. If residents complained, the landlords could rely on the local police to enforce eviction orders and harass locals. One case highlighted by the NCCF was that of local resident Louise Ames, a 104-year-old grandmother who paid fifty-five dollars a month for a house that did not have a bathtub, hot water, heating, or adequate wiring. It celebrated Ames’s resilience by remarking that she was “still willing to fight,” and it exhorted readers to participate in local government hearings addressing inadequacies in housing. The

newspaper’s elevation of Ames reflected the goals of the National Headquarters in 1970 to educate the people in how their experiences were shaped by structural inequalities. It empowered local people to see and challenge the policies that created their oppression.\footnote{This emphasis on local self-empowerment can be seen in Huey P. Newton’s own writings as well as the work of Black Panther historians who emphasize the history of the Party’s community survival programs. Nelson, \textit{Body and Soul}; Williams, \textit{From the Bullet to the Ballot}; Huey P. Newton, “On the Defection of Eldridge Cleaver from the Black Panther Party and the Defection of the Black Panther Party from the Black Community,” in \textit{To Die for the People: The Writings of Huey P. Newton}, ed. Toni Morrison (San Francisco, CA: City Light Books, 2009, )45-47.}

By making martyrs out of ordinary residents like Polly Graham and Louise Ames, the NCCF demanded that local officials see black residents of Winston-Salem’s poor neighborhoods not as symptoms of blight that needed to be paved over, but as the human victims of a discriminatory system that protected white slumlords at their expense. By targeting the police, the activists also showed how basic city services—like trash pickup, water, and electricity—were often not available in these neighborhoods and what city services existed, such as law enforcement, acted not for the benefit of all local residents, but for white businessmen. Shining a light on these conditions by drawing on the language of political martyrdom helped galvanize a political response, particularly in the case of Polly Graham. After the police failed to evict her, local poverty groups suddenly took an interest in her case and paid her back-due rent.\footnote{Friedman, “Picking Up Where Robert F. Williams Left Off, 62.}

The failed evictions on Locus Street shook one local landlord and Republican candidate for mayor, Jerry Newton Jr., who registered his alarm in the \textit{Twin City Sentinel}. “It will be a darker day in Winston-Salem than a total eclipse of the sun and a most mournful time,” Newton opined, “if a small group of seeming insurgents start shooting.” He went on to place the blame for evictions on the renters, writing, “I will say that they get on the move and teach such people...to learn to budget their money, prepare proper nutritional meals for themselves, do better
housekeeping, and make themselves better citizens.”782 Newton’s analysis repeated Jim Crow “wisdom” that the troubles of black people stemmed not from institutional and personal discrimination, but their own pathological failings, the very ideology that the Panthers confronted in their activism against evictions.

The Winston-Salem NCCF challenged this language of criminality and disease by exposing the role of the state in creating poor conditions and by revealing the flawed assumptions that law enforcement agents used to categorize people of color. They were not criminals or “drunk” as the police assumed of eviction victims, but fighting for their survival in a system that did not acknowledge their basic rights. The ability of police to paint all black people who resisted as mentally unstable also legitimized their use of excessive force.783 Such thinking led to deadly consequences on the morning of August 20, 1970, when police arrived at the residence of 72-year-old Lawrence Harris on a “routine call.” Harris had a known history of mental illness and the police sent thirty-five patrol cars to respond to the situation. Upon seeing so many officers, gathered outside his house, Harris fired a shotgun out of his window, hitting a deputy who later died. In response, the police fired a barrage of bullets into the house, killing him. The activists’ outrage at Harris’s death reflected their concern with police overreach and the necessity for due process regardless of the circumstances. Harris’s death offered a tragic

There is also an important literature in how law enforcement associated criminality and mental illness with blackness. This association goes as far back as slavery but developed fully during the Jim Crow era: Muhammad, The Condemnation of Blackness; Hicks, Talk With You Like a Woman; Hernandez, City of Inmates; Elizabeth Hinton, From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime.
example of police overreaction both in how they chose to approach the residence and in their decision to return gunfire.\textsuperscript{784}

The NCCF could have chosen not to take up the cause of Harris because he shot at law enforcement. Just a few years prior, his case would have been beyond the pale for even the most militant. Yet the Winston-Salem chapter decided to advocate on his behalf because of his disability and their concern over how police treated the mentally ill:

“They called him mentally disturbed, insane, crazy nigger; but we can only see him in the true light of reality—a madman who never forgot who the real enemy is and finally decided to end his misery and kill his tormentor...everyone should take the example set by Mr. Harris, who had nothing more than a singleshot 12 gauge. He dealt righteously using what he had to get what he needed.

Their emphasis on his death as martyrdom and the language the article used of Harris as a warrior reinforced the Panthers’ belief in self-defense and the necessity for police to show restraint. The report called out police discrimination shaped by preconceived notions of blackness.

In 1970, the Winston-Salem NCCF defined the local issues that would embroil much of their local organizing efforts before and after official recognition as a Black Panther Party chapter. The early focus on urban renewal, housing issues, and welfare fit in neatly with a broader shift in the Black Panther Party, especially following the release of Huey P. Newton from prison in 1971. This move was reflected nationally in other social movements by the rising importance of the Welfare Rights Organization and other activists working on grassroots, social

\textsuperscript{784} “TUCKERS RAIDERS SHOOT, BEAT, AND MURDER LAWRENCE HARRIS, A MENTALLY DISTURBED MAN,” The Black Panther Community News Service, August 29, 1970, 3; “FBI Report September 30, 1970,” FBI Black Panther Party—North Carolina Files (hereafter BPP-NC), file number 105-165706-8, section 7, 5; It is also important to note that the police had no training in how to deal with mental health crises at the time: Elizabeth Hinton, From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime, 234.
programming.\textsuperscript{785} Led by Newton, the Panthers renounced direct confrontation with police and calls for guerrilla warfare advocated by Eldridge Cleaver. This commitment to grassroots reform and “bread and butter” issues became more pronounced following the Cleaver-Newton split in 1970. Mirroring chapters in Boston and New York, the focus on welfare rights and housing in Winston-Salem bought the NCCF much needed space in the \textit{Black Panther Community News Service} to highlight these local issues.\textsuperscript{786}

The chapter’s early construction of martyrdom using local residents tackled the human cost of the city’s urban renewal projects and shed light on the reality of its leaders’ supposed progressive attitudes toward race. More importantly, the Winston-Salem Panthers exposed a system of social, economic, and political racial inequality enforced by the state through violence and terror enacted upon poor black neighborhoods that were then blamed for these problems.

The \textit{Black Panther Party Community News Service} was the lynchpin of the party’s success in Winston-Salem, not only because selling the paper provided the NCCF’s major source of funding, but because it became the only vehicle for black residents of Winston-Salem’s communities to read about themselves in a nationally distributed newspaper.\textsuperscript{787} \textit{The Black Panther Party Community News Service} gave voice to a point of view otherwise silenced in local


\textsuperscript{787} Friedman, “Picking Up Where Robert F. Williams Left Off,” 66.
newspapers and expressed the simmering discontent of a marginalized peoples challenging the dominant, mainstream narrative of their criminality as a way to fight the forces of urban renewal threatening to pull their communities apart. In the paper, stories like that of Ernest Scales, a black man clubbed by police on a street corner close to NCCF headquarters, could be told with empathy to his essential humanity. In contrast, the story received no mention in local papers, possibly because Scales had spent fifteen years in maximum security and could be ignored as another example of black criminality.  

Through the Fire: The Importance of the Police in Shaping the Winston-Salem Black Panther Party

As elsewhere in the nation, the police featured as a central target of the Panthers’ criticism in Winston-Salem because of their role as enforcers of evictions and their sustained harassment of locals in poor black neighborhoods. Moreover, the growth of Black Panther-sponsored activity led to a new phase of harassment by law enforcement. One incident that Hazel Mack recalled vividly in several interviews was when the local Chief of Police, Tucker, rounded up all the parents of the young Black Panthers and made the announcement that their children were involved with the organization. The incident wildly backfired on Chief Tucker when Lee Faye Mack stood up for her daughter and boldly declared herself to be a member of the Black Panther Party as well. “And that rallied the whole room. And they said it was about to be a mini riot in there because he was threatening their children!”  

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788 The story also received no mention in the FBI file on the NC Black Panther Party, which is unusual considering the file’s attention to detail. “Ernest Scales was clubbed viciously for being black,” Black Panther Community News Service, August 29, 1970, 3.

moment as one of triumph and unity, her story nevertheless reveals some of the tensions even among parents of Panthers. Local police viewed the Black Panther Party as a threat, which could increase the nervousness of parents over their children’s involvement in a potentially dangerous organization. Hazel Mack even admitted that by becoming affiliated with the Black Panther Party, she did not expect to live to see her thirtieth birthday. Those tensions between the Winston-Salem Panthers and their parents clearly affected the chapter on a large scale, as demonstrated when they used the Black Panther Communal News Service to call explicitly for parental support. With the involvement of the FBI as well as local police surveillance, community goodwill for the Panthers was far from guaranteed.

The FBI field office in Charlotte had been alert to the possibility of a Black Panther Party chapter in the state since 1968. With the founding of the NCCF in Winston-Salem, it diverted much of its substantial resources to the city in an effort to stamp out the nascent organization. Operating under the aegis of the illegal FBI program COINTELPRO, the Charlotte field office conducted sophisticated surveillance and harassment of the Panthers. The FBI established connections with local law enforcement officials and fed them information regarding the

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790 Hazel Mack. Interviewed by Cheryl Dong. Oral History. Other Suns, January 19, 2019
791 “Kathy from Winston-Salem in Call for Parents of Activists to Stand Up with their Children,” Black Panther Communal News Service June 20, 1970, p. 6.
792 In 1968 and early 1969, the FBI Charlotte Division were convinced that Benjamin Chavis in Charlotte or activists in Greensboro were on the verge of establishing a Black Panther Party chapter: “Memorandum dated July 24, 1969,” FBI Black Panther Party--North Carolina Files (hereafter BPP-NC), file number 105-165706-8, section 2; “URGENT 8/21/69 MDR,” FBI Black Panther Party--North Carolina Files (hereafter BPP-NC), file number 105-165706-8, Section 5.
Panthers’ activities. Assured of the tacit support of the federal government, local law enforcement ramped up efforts to target them beginning in late 1970.793

The fallout of this campaign in 1970 and 1971 caused a shift in focus of the NCCF. Suddenly, Panther members found themselves in a life-or-death struggle for survival with law enforcement and the narrative they presented to the community changed to reflect this new reality. While previously they had criticized law enforcement as the lynchpin in a larger system of oppression built on slum conditions, they began to focus on the police almost exclusively as the major source of racial inequality in the city. This intense focus toward community conflict with law enforcement changed the types of martyrdom narratives that emerged from the party in late 1970 and 1971. No longer were ordinary people in the community the stars; increasingly members of the Winston-Salem NCCF themselves became the martyrs.794 This focus inward on the survival of the organization and toward confrontation with law enforcement nurtured a sense of alienation. Police harassment ate away at its resources and its ability to conduct other community organizing efforts. By the winter of 1971, the FBI office in Charlotte could congratulate itself on the slow erosion of community support for the NCCF.795

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793 Early evidence of cooperation between police and FBI officials can be seen in a joint raid they undertook against a USMC deserter apprehended July 8, 1970: “Memo dated July 8, 1970,” FBI Black Panther Party--North Carolina Files (hereafter BPP-NC), file number 105-165706-8, Section 6.


795 “Airtel dated November 19, 1971,” FBI Black Panther Party--North Carolina Files (hereafter BPP-NC), file number 105-165706-8, Section 27. In this document, the FBI allege that the Panthers can no longer afford a private office and are now operating out of the residence of Russell and Mary McDonald. It also allege that due to unpaid phone bills, the Black Panther Party was forced to receive phone calls at the residence of Ochie Bell Little, the mother of Larry Little. Hazel Mack tells a different story. The FBI and police apparently encouraged the local phone company to harass the Panthers and ultimately cancel their service: Hazel Mack, Interview by Cheryl Dong, Other Suns Community Center, Winston-Salem, January 19, 2019.
being stored in homes of various members and sympathizers. The group [sic] in very bad shape financially and can’t make bonds...”

Yet the story of these two years was not simply one of decline. Instead, the Panthers in Winston-Salem learned hard lessons and emerged with a more sophisticated understanding of how to use martyrdom narratives to galvanize community support.

Beginning in the spring of 1970, surveillance and harassment of the group ramped up with attempted police raids on local headquarters in July on trumped up search warrants looking for a man who was no longer affiliated with the Panther organization. In response, the members fortified the building with 2.5 feet thick sandbags placed up to armpit high on the first floor. They also boarded up windows except for small gunports and acquired thick sheet metal to barricade the doors. The NCCF publicized its fear of a police raid on its offices in the flyers that it passed out around the neighborhood encouraging people to join in self-defense efforts. One flyer read, “Pigs make another dry run on NCCF headquarters, August 18, 1970. IT IS TIME NOW FOR SELF-DEFENSE GROUPS [TO] DEFEND THE BLACK COMMUNITY!”

The Winston-Salem organizers’ fears of a police raid came to fruition on November 27, 1970 as members were leaving town for the Revolutionary People’s Constitutional Convention.

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796 “Teletype Dated February 4, 1971,” FBI Black Panther Party--North Carolina Files (hereafter BPP-NC), file number 105-165706-8, Section 19. Malloy and Fuller had been arrested for attempting to rob a meat truck, a charge that the Panthers claimed was a set-up by the police and FBI.

797 “Discharged from Marine Corps and Re-Arrested for Running Away,” Black Panther Community News Service, July 18, 1970, 8; “Memo dated July 8, 1970,” FBI Black Panther Party--North Carolina Files (hereafter BPP-NC), file number 105-165706-8, Section 6. Based on testimony from the newspaper and FBI, USMC member Bobby Stover was arrested on suspicion of affiliation with the Black Panther Party although the nominal reason for the arrest was non-payment of rent.


(RPCC) in Washington, D.C. The police chose that day because surveillance shared by the FBI indicated that the majority of Panther members would already be out of town. The Revolutionary People’s Constitutional Convention had been the main event that the Black Panther Party organized around during the late summer and fall of 1970, both locally and nationally, so it made sense for law enforcement to try to sabotage this particular event. Shortly after the raid, the headquarters at 1602 East 14th Street caught fire and it took forty-five minutes for local firefighters to get the blaze under control. An investigation by the fire department showed that the fire had been set intentionally and neighbors claimed that they saw a suspicious figure entering and exiting the building after the police raid. No one was ever arrested for the fire at Winston-Salem NCCF headquarters and the Panthers suffered significant loss of office equipment and newspapers. However, Larry Little and his compatriots had little doubt as to the perpetrators, given the timing of the raid. On December 5, 1970, the Black Panther Party Community News Service printed the following headline: “PIGS BURN WINSTON-SALEM, NC NCCF OFFICE IN AN ATTEMPT TO SABOTAGE THE RPCC.”

The NCCF soon realized that no other landlords in Winston-Salem were willing to rent to them. In addition, members faced evictions throughout the city from communal “Panther pads” that helped cut down operating costs. These evictions, lease non-renewals, and refusals to rent highlighted the way that landlords, with the encouragement of police, could exert economic and physical control over poor black communities. Yet the Panthers were unable to use these examples of personal martyrdom as effectively as they had earlier examples of evictions within

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803 Hazel Mack, Interview by Cheryl Dong, Other Suns, Community Center, January 19, 2019
the larger community. After the police and local landlords cracked down on Panther-rented properties, many in the group found themselves homeless until Hazel Mack’s father managed to buy a house for the NCCF to rent.\footnote{Hazel Mack, Interview by Cheryl Dong, Other Suns, Community Center, January 19, 2019}

This sense of being under siege in the second half of 1970 shaped the kind of stories, rallies, and pamphlets that the NCCF produced at this moment. The emphasis on the police as “PIGS” and efforts to involve the community in fighting the repression of law enforcement bore fruit in organizations like the self-defense group for black mothers sponsored by Hazel Mack’s mother, Lee Faye Mack.\footnote{“Transcript of Tape Recording of Speeches Made at the Revolutionary Intercommunal Day of Solidarity, March 7, 1971,” FBI Black Panther Party--North Carolina Files (hereafter BPP-NC), file number 105-165706-8, Section 11, 17.} The Panthers’ use of community member Lily Jones as a martyr facing persecution from law enforcement and city officials because of her support for the Panthers also attempted to bridge the gap between community support and conflict with law enforcement.\footnote{“Transcript of Tape Recording of Speeches Made at the Revolutionary Intercommunal Day of Solidarity, March 7, 1971,” FBI Black Panther Party--North Carolina Files (hereafter BPP-NC), file number 105-165706-8, Section 11, 13.} The Panthers wanted the community to take ownership of the harassment it faced and identify it as their own. Unfortunately, the connection between organization and community did not come naturally and had to be nurtured carefully, which took time. The Panthers had little left over for that while under direct attack by the state.

Moreover, the FBI spent its time working just as hard to undermine what goodwill that the Panthers had established. The Charlotte field office concocted the fictitious “Council of Twenty-Five” a supposed group of anonymous black businessmen in Winston-Salem who wrote and distributed a pamphlet denouncing the Panthers as dangerous Communists. It accused the Panthers of blackmail and putting pressure on black businesses to donate money to various
Panther causes like the “Free Breakfast for Children.” The success of the FBI’s smear campaign is hard to gauge, but the Panthers did experience a significant drop off in sales of their newspaper in November and December of 1970. The Panthers and their allies suspected from the moment that the letter appeared that it had been the work of police and voiced those beliefs loudly in the community. However, the letter from the “Council of Twenty-Five” may have eroded their support and probably reflected views that some black businessmen already held about the Panthers.

At the beginning of 1971, law enforcement dealt its two hardest blows to the Winston-Salem Panthers yet. On January 12, the city police department and the Forsyth County Sheriff’s Office used a notice of eviction to surround another Black Panther rented apartment at 1126 East 23rd street. After giving residents three minutes to come out, the police fired two tear gas canisters into a first floor window. The Panthers’ efforts at fortification paid off and the canisters bounced harmlessly to the ground at which point, police fired another tear gas canister into an upstairs window. After police heard what they took to be a gunshot from the Panther apartment, they opened fire and the Panthers returned fire in self-defense. Ultimately, the Panthers decided to surrender and two men: 19-year-old Grady Fuller and his friend, 15-year-old Willie Coe, emerged from the house and the police arrested them.

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807 FBI Black Panther Party--North Carolina Files (hereafter BPP-NC), file number 105-165706-8, Section 10, BPP 10B.
808 The FBI seemed hesitant in its own internal documents to contribute the drop-off in sales and interest exclusively to their campaign of harassment and misinformation, and brought up the cold weather as an alternative reason for a dip in sales. Report dated October 5, 1970,” FBI Black Panther Party--North Carolina Files (hereafter BPP-NC), file number 105-165706-8, Section 8a, 3. Report said that circulation of paper now down from 2,500 a week to 1,100.
809 FBI Black Panther Party--North Carolina Files (hereafter BPP-NC), file number 105-165706-8, Section 10, BPP 10B; Same letters mentioned in “Hazel Mack,” in The Black Panthers, 158.
Under testimony from Willie Coe, the police also charged Grady Fuller and Larry Little with stealing a meat truck from the Chatham Meat Company and carrying the purloined meat into headquarters, ostensibly for use in the “Free Breakfast for Children” and other food charity programs. According to FBI documents, the owner of the meat truck originated the warrant to search 1126 East 23rd Street when his truck went missing and he found it parked outside of the Panthers’ headquarters. However, a conflicting report from the FBI as well stated that the warrant on 1126 East 23rd Street was actually an eviction notice served to one Julius White Cornell Jr. Larry Little claimed that they had never stolen a meat truck, and the fact that the suspected thief, Grady Fuller, could not drive lent credence to his framing of this incident as a set up. Panthers believed that the police concocted the entire episode to discredit the group and drive them further into legal trouble. The conflicting FBI reports, coupled with Fuller’s inability to drive, suggest that the police may have forced the story from 15-year-old Willie Coe. Such claims would have also fit into a larger pattern of harassment from the police and the FBI.

Whatever the truth of the accusation, the legal problems facing the Black Panthers in Winston-Salem by the spring of 1971 ate up much of their resources and destroyed the local support that they had built. Increased police harassment of the Panthers led to heightened tensions between the community, police, and the Party. On February 10, 1971, two days before

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813 “Teletype Dated February 8, 1971,” FBI Black Panther Party--North Carolina Files (hereafter BPP-NC), file number 105-165706-8, Section 9a.
814 “WINSTON-SALEM FASCISTS INVADE BLACK COMMUNITY AND ATTACK NCCF,” Black Panther Community News Service, January 30, 1971, p 4. Also in conversation with Hazel Mack (October 9, 2018), Dr. Mack stated that the Winston-Salem Panthers would have been crazy to try and steal a meat truck given that they knew they were under heavy FBI surveillance. Hazel Mack, Phone conversation with author, October 9, 2018; Hazel Mack, Interview by Cheryl Dong, Other Suns Community Center, Winston-Salem, January 19, 2019.
815 Hazel Mack, Interview by Cheryl Dong, Other Suns Community Center, Winston-Salem, January 19, 2019.
the raid in Winston-Salem, another eviction by the Forsyth County Sheriff’s Office and the High Point police at a Panther-rented apartment in High Point turned into a shootout that resulted in the arrest of 17-year-old Randolph Jennings, 17-year-old George De Witt, and 19-year-old Bradford Lilly. During the shootout, the Panthers critically injured officer Lt. Shaw Cook and Panther Larry Medley received a superficial wound.816 When local reporters asked the High Point police chief about Larry Medley’s injury, he responded, “I hate to say it, but he is not serious and will be alright.” He later added, “I wouldn’t care if he died.”817

The Panthers publicized the raids in High Point and Winston-Salem in January and February of 1971 as additional examples of police oppression, but they had been put on the defensive.818 In contrast to the Panther narrative of police overreach, local papers generally sided with the police against the Panthers by emphasizing their supposed penchant for violence. They ran headlines throughout that questioned everything from the Panthers’ confrontations with police to alleging that the Panthers extorted money and supplies from black businesses, something that they veered into in the mid 1970s with businesses in Oakland. In so doing, they echoed a national trend in journalism towards depicting the Panthers through the lens of black criminality.819

816 “Teletype Dated February 10, 1971,” FBI Black Panther Party--North Carolina Files (hereafter BPP-NC), file number 105-165706-8, Section 11b; “Attack on Black Community Information Center in High Point, NC,” Black Panther Community News Service., February 27, 1971, 12; it is also important to note the age of the activists. The Winston-Salem NCCF, like the national Party, drew much of its recruiting from young high school and college age students. Hazel Mack, Interview by Cheryl Dong, Other Suns Community Center, Winston-Salem, January 19, 2019; Murch, Living for the City.
The police in Winston-Salem further raised the stakes by establishing a community police precinct through the “Model Cities” program that sought to replicate many of the Panthers’ good works. In an effort to improve fraught relations and further smear the Panthers, officers started handing out surplus food at these “Model Cities” precincts. They escorted youth downtown to buy new shoes and clothes while at the same time alleging that the Panthers extorted money from the community and used resources meant for survival programs to support themselves.\footnote{\textit{“Pigs of Winston-Salem,” Black Panther Party Communal News Service, July 18, 1970, 15.} Hinton makes the point in her work that as part of the Great Society, police departments benefited greatly from grants that would enable the police to provide basic social services. Departments took the money, which was part of their larger growth, but they received little to no training in how to do this work. Hinton, \textit{From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime,} 280-284.} Within a few short months, the police and the FBI had managed to flip the narrative. No longer was the Panthers’ stance on eviction associated with slum conditions and unscrupulous law enforcement, but with the Panthers’ supposed tendencies toward violent conflict and criminality. Moreover, the “Model Cities” program cast the police as prospective saviors rather than the enforcers of poverty claimed by the Panthers. The Panthers tackled exactly this point in an article attacking the police program as insincere and politically motivated:

The pigs, along with bootlicking lackeys have begun to act as though they are the ones who are truly concerned about the welfare of the people. They are attempting to win the sympathy of the people and in doing so, discredit the activities of the NCCF here in Winston-Salem. These pigs started out by sending out newsletters to the community to store owners telling them that we misuse the money and donations that they give. They accuse us of extorting money from other store owners. To further their sabotage attempts they have started what appears to be a Free Lunch Program in various areas of the community. They pass out surplus food in little shoe boxes to the people. The food consists of nothing but cold bologna, milk, a spoonful of slaw or potato salad, or something similar, but definitely nothing nourishing...Realizing the nature of these beasts, we recognize their plan of gaining the sympathy of the people and making themselves look like angels and the members of the NCCF look like devils. Once they think they have gained the sympathy of the people, they are going to attempt to rip off the
People's Community Center. Through their initiative programs they think that the people will stand idly by and endorse such actions of aggression and fascism.821

The question posed to poor, black communities in Winston-Salem through the police crackdown of late 1970 and early 1971 was whether the Panthers were worth the trouble they seemed to bring from law enforcement. Even as the Panthers bravely placed the blame for the violence surrounding them on the escalating attacks of police, the fact remained that violence and trouble followed them wherever they went. Regardless of blame, local communities had to deal with the fallout brought by their confrontational style.

Back from the Brink: Finding a Path toward Integrating Community and Martyrdom

The steady attrition of community support became clear to the Panthers during two organized events in the summer of 1971 and the summer of 1972 that persuaded the leadership in Winston-Salem to re-think how it should frame their approach to integrating martyrdom, community service, and concerns about racial inequality in North Carolina. The answer was to use the legal troubles of Panthers as a spur toward greater community engagement and to focus less on the legal problems and violence that came with martyrdom. Key was underscoring the positives that combining community service with memorialization could bring. The successes and failures of this re-imagining of martyrdom appeared in the different ways the Winston-Salem Panthers dealt with the case of the “High Point Four” and the death of Joseph Waddell.

The arrest of Randolph Jennings, George DeWitt, Bradford Lilly, and Larry Medley on February 10, 1971 led to the Panthers dubbing them as the “High Point Four” and arranging rallies locally to generate donations for their legal defense and bail.\(^{822}\) The approach of the Winston-Salem Panthers to the “High Point Four” played out similarly to the public campaigns for other jailed Panthers like Bobby Seale, the “New York Twenty One”, and Ericka Huggins but on a smaller scale.\(^{823}\) The Panthers put notices throughout the *Black Panther Party Community News Service* for donations. In addition, they planned a rally on July 25, 1971 to raise more money for bond.\(^{824}\) The day before the rally, Larry Little boasted in *The High Point Enterprise* that the Panthers expected as many as 2,000 locals to attend.\(^ {825}\) High profile features in the nationally circulated *Black Panther Party Community News Service* announced the plight of the “High Point Four” alongside prominent national cases like the trial of Ericka Huggins and Bobby Seale. In April of 1971, the Winston-Salem NCCF received official recognition as a formal Black Panther Party Chapter, boosting its profile. Yet for all the national and local media attention, the FBI noted in its surveillance that only 200 people showed up for the rally and many of the attendees seemed to be “the usual patrons who frequent the park for picnicking and

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swimming.” The failure of the High Point rally compounded the Panthers’ growing belief that for the party to survive, it had to shift its focus away from confrontation with the police and back toward a close engagement with the communities the group wished to serve.

A year later, the Panthers failed to attract enough support to stage a rally in Raleigh, North Carolina to protest conditions at the local state penitentiary following the death of Panther member Joseph Ervin Waddell in prison. Waddell or “Joe Dell” had been sentenced to fifteen to twenty years and been confined to Central Prison in Raleigh in January of 1972. Waddell had come from the incredibly troubled neighborhood of “11th Street Bottoms” and had been a drug addict before being recruited to the Party by Larry Little. As a condition of his membership, Waddell had to quit his drug habit cold turkey. He was able to do so and became one of the most loyal and dedicated members of the chapter.

On June 13, 1972, the Panthers received word that Waddell had died of a heart attack despite the fact that he was barely twenty years old and in excellent health at the time he entered prison. When they demanded his body for an autopsy, they found that the state had removed Waddell’s organs, rendering a second exam impossible. The Panthers in Winston-Salem had ample reason to suspect foul play in his death. The murder of the Soledad Brothers in San Quentin prison in August of 1971 and the Attica rebellion in September of 1971 had fueled a growing prison rights movement that the Black Panthers were intimately involved with at a national level. Huey P. Newton had hailed the deceased George Jackson as a Field Marshal of

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826 “Airtel dated August 6, 1971, FBI Black Panther Party--North Carolina Files (hereafter BPP-NC), file number 105-165706-8, Section 12a.
the Black Panther Party. The Winston-Salem Panthers were outraged by conditions in local prisons both because of their experiences with community members who had been incarcerated and because they had been personally imprisoned while the “High Point Four” and the Chatham Co. Meat Truck robbery cases were still under litigation. Moreover, local memories of the death of James Eller in police custody in October of 1967 remained fresh. The confluence of national and local events seemed to indicate the death of Joseph Waddell as a central issue that could revive the popularity of the Winston-Salem Black Panther Party chapter. According to Hazel Mack, prisoners at Raleigh Central later told the Panthers that Waddell had been killed because he had been attempting to organize inside.

Unfortunately, for the Winston-Salem Panthers, other local activists associated with black power politics in the state, including Ben Chavis and Howard Fuller, failed to show support for the event. Larry Little had billed Ben Chavis as the keynote speaker for the protest outside of Raleigh Central Prison only to receive a short response stating that Chavis would not attend the rally. Previous to this moment, Ben Chavis had been an outspoken advocate for the Panthers, even speaking at their “Intercommunal Day of Solidarity on March 7, 1971. At that rally, he had talked about the case of the “High Point Four,” “We won’t tolerate anymore attacks either in Winston-Salem or High Point or else you’re going to face the masses of black people all over

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830 In particular, the Chatham Co. Meat Truck Robbery Case led to the revelation of FBI involvement when ACLU lawyers working on behalf of the Winston-Salem Panthers sub-poenaed Agent David Martin from the Charlotte office to testify. “URGENT: Teletype Dated September 27, 1971,” FBI Black Panther Party--North Carolina Files (hereafter BPP-NC), file number 105-165706-8, Section 12a.
832 Hazel Mack, Interviewed by Cheryl Dong, Other Suns Community Center, Winston-Salem, NC, January 19, 2019.
North Carolina.” Given his previous support, Chavis’s response clearly framed a shift in the black power movement in the state. Chavis’s “Committee for Racial Justice” in Wilmington had taken off by 1972. Compounded by the arrest of the “Wilmington Ten” in 1971 for suspected arson at Mike’s Grocery in Wilmington, Chavis had other concerns to deal with. In comparison to the national fame experienced by the “Wilmington Ten,” the Winston-Salem chapter could not rally that level of activism around the death of Joseph Waddell. The Panthers were not the only black power organization in the state, nor was it necessarily the most prominent. In addition, the concerns of the national Black Panther Party had threatened to consume the local movement and they needed to re-establish core connections to ordinary people. In a moment where legal problems and harassment threatened to destroy the Black Panther Party in North Carolina, its allies sent a clear message that the Party needed to re-focus on its core mission.

By July, with newspaper sales flagging to half of the 10,000 copies a month that the Party had been moving in the spring, the Panthers could no longer afford an independent office and worked out of the home of members Russell and Mary McDonald instead. An unpaid phone bill forced the Panthers to give up their phone line and in the interim, Larry Little relied on his mother’s phone. Larry Little’s mother, Ochie Bell Little later reported that the telephone company Southern Bell had warned her not to place long distance calls to Charlotte, Greenville,

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New York City, Oakland, and Berkeley or her phone would be disconnected. With the party in Oakland undergoing a national split between the Eldridge Cleaver and Huey P. Newton factions, the Winston-Salem chapter—like every other in the nation—would have to choose sides and find the resources on its own to re-dedicate themselves to its mission.

The Panthers in Winston-Salem ultimately landed on the Huey P. Newton side of the split and opted to focus on community organizing and “survival” rather than continued and escalated confrontation with police. This decision shifted the way that the Party used martyrdom narratives in Winston-Salem. The change was not accepted unanimously and various members of the party, including Lily Jones, left in protest. However, the decision reflected the financial and organizational reality facing the Panthers, and it caused a concurrent local scaling back of harassment by law enforcement in the summer and fall of 1971. While the Chatham Co. meat truck raid had initially been an opportunity for the police to control the narrative of the Black Panther Party, subsequent revelations about FBI involvement in planning the Meat Truck Raid cast that narrative into question. The Forsyth County Superior Court trial in 1971 against Larry Little, Grady Fuller, and Julius White Cornell for armed robbery revealed the direct involvement of the FBI when ACLU lawyers for the Black Panthers subpoenaed Field Agent David B. Martin to testify. What had started as a trial against the Panthers for robbery had instead evolved into a public exposure of FBI misconduct. A further blow to the FBI came after Martin’s testimony, when Superior Court Judge Long threw out the indictments against the Panthers by arguing that

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the defense had not been granted a representative jury.\textsuperscript{841} Coupled with the national revelation of FBI COINTELPRO in April of 1971 and the death of J. Edgar Hoover, local officials stepped away from overt confrontation although the chapter still remained under close surveillance.\textsuperscript{842}

These national and local shifts in late 1971 allowed the Panthers to regroup and rediscover what it meant to serve the people in Winston-Salem. Beginning in 1972, they followed national leadership and disarmed, getting rid of firearms that had been kept in various Panther pads to the point that the FBI recorded no known Panther possession of weapons by February of 1972. Larry Little went to Oakland that spring to participate in community survival workshops at the national level that reflected the changing ambitions of the Black Panther Party. Energized by his experience, Little hosted a press conference on June 14, 1972 announcing disarmament and his goal to turn the Black Panthers into a legitimate local political party for the black community. Little revealed he had spent the last six months in Oakland learning from the various community survival programs and that the newly re-energized chapter would be undertaking sickle cell anemia testing and voter registration drives in the community as well as announcing plans to run for local office.\textsuperscript{843}

This new focus on community programming heralded a shift in the way that Winston-Salem’s Black Panthers would use martyrdom narratives. In December of 1971, Larry Little received word that the Black Panther Party in Winston-Salem had been named the beneficiary of slain Panther Joseph Ervin Waddell’s life insurance policy. The influx of a much-needed $7,000 helped the Panthers survive the lean months of the winter and planted the seed for their most

\textsuperscript{841} “Winston-Salem Judge Declares County Grand Jury to be Unrepresentative of Community,” The Black Panther Community News Service, October 4, 1971, 15.
\textsuperscript{842} Friedman, “Picking Up Where Robert F. Williams Left Off,” 71.
ambitious endeavor yet: the Joseph Waddell’s Free People’s Ambulance Service. In choosing to honor Waddell through a service dedicated to specific community needs, the Panthers re-established the importance of Waddell not just as a young radical Panther, but as an integral member of East Winston-Salem’s poor black neighborhoods and projects. The Panthers reminded local people of their dedication to the community and desire to work for something more than themselves. They went on to dedicate almost every community survival effort of the next two years to Joseph Waddell, re-writing the narrative police had fashioned for the young man. State authorities through the mainstream media had dealt with Waddell’s death by emphasizing his criminal past and insisting he had died from natural causes. By taking back the story of Joseph Waddell, the Panthers transformed him into a local hero and a symbol of the resilience of the community they had originally wished to represent. At the same time, they also abandoned a crucial chance to link the Waddell narrative to others, both nationally and locally, and thereby further opening up the issue of prisoner rights and carceral abuse in North Carolina.

The treatment of Joseph Waddell as the martyred face of newly founded survival programs reflected a national shift toward the use of deceased heroes of the party as the face of medical clinics, free breakfast programs, and other initiatives. The promise, as well as the problems, facing such an approach can be seen in an Emory Douglas illustration for the Black Panther Party newspaper from the August 10, 1971 issue. In the back cover illustration, a woman wearing a red dress and fluffy slippers carried two grocery bags full of food items, a

846 Some work on prisoner’s rights was already being done in North Carolina related to the “Wilmington Ten” and the Joan Little case: Janken, The Wilmington Ten, McGuire, At the Dark End of the Street, chapter 8.
mop, and a pail. The caption reads, “Thanks to the People’s Free Store I can go home and mop my floors and feed my children.” Small photographs on the grocery bags proclaim “FREE ERICKA” and “FREE BOBBY.”

The August 10, 1971 image represented a turning point in Emory Douglas’s art, one away from images of heroic, young men bearing guns and the symbolic language of “pigs” toward an approach that emphasized everyday people—and especially women and children—to depict the front lines of Black Panther Party activism. The woman in the image could be described by some as slovenly in appearance. Yet under the sympathetic brush and pen of Douglas, she takes on a heroic pose, her everyday struggles the object of admiration, not denigration. Douglas’s depictions of women and children on the front lines of the black freedom movement gave voice to otherwise ignored populations and subverted dominant imagery of poor black women as lazy and immoral.

In addition, the use of women and children in an image directly tied to welfare rights organizing shows a gendering of welfare concerns both within the Party and in the national welfare rights movement.

The marginalization of Ericka Huggins and Bobby Seale to tiny photographs on the grocery bags represented a new role for the party’s heroes and martyrs—the focus would no longer be on how the community should support individual struggle, but how the personal struggle of well-known members reflected and contributed to the community’s struggle. On one hand, this revolutionary use of the movement’s martyrs helped focus attention back on local

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850 Orleck, Storming Caesar’s Palace, 71-74; Nadasen, Welfare Warriors, 3; Greene, Our Separate Ways, 4-5.
communities. On the other hand, the marginalization of martyrs to namesakes of survival programs meant a slow abandonment of an earlier, potent critique of direct state violence and its effects on the lives of poor black people. Even as one opportunity closed, the association of martyrs with community survival programs created new openings for education and activism.

Success and Unsustainability: Moving Toward a Mainstream Legacy

On a sweltering day at the end of July 1972 in the Kimberley Housing Project, the new Black Panther Party of Winston-Salem made its debut at a Community Survival Rally with 2,000 people in attendance. Larry Little gave the keynote speech, dedicating the Survival Day to the memory of Joseph Ervin Waddell, but emphasizing the need to turn “guns to shoes” and focus on “land, bread, and housing” for the people of Winston-Salem.851 The rally gave away 1,000 bags of free groceries, offered free sickle cell anemia tests to 800 people, and registered some 500 new voters.852 Notably, Little stood beside Rosalind Covington, a representative of the local Welfare Rights Organization as well as local area pastors and businessmen.853

The rally, and its broader representation of community support, marked a stark transformation for an organization that had once had a notoriously difficult relationship with the black business community. The Party had earlier called for boycotts of local black businesses, including the Safe Bus Company and the Safeway Grocery store, for refusing to support the Free

852 “Memo dated August 1, 1972,” FBI Black Panther Party--North Carolina Files (hereafter BPP-NC), file number 105-165706-8, Section 14b.
853 “Memo dated August 1, 1972,” FBI Black Panther Party--North Carolina Files (hereafter BPP-NC), file number 105-165706-8, Section 14b.
Breakfast for Children Program. The Panthers still sought to challenge the “New South” policies of urban renewal that had created so much suffering in the black housing projects and slums of Winston-Salem. However, it chose to do so through collaboration and leading by example rather than using confrontation to expose the workings of corruption and oppression in the city.

By reaching out to potential allies throughout the city, the Panthers arguably saved their organization and gained an outlet for the political voice of some of its poorest and most marginalized citizens. Yet by channeling their radicalism into new avenues of organizing, the Panthers lost the sharpness and incisiveness of their critique against the everyday violence brought by these policies of urban renewal. From here on out, they would no longer publish articles about the direct violence suffered by black people because of these policies, but work to mitigate them through their community service. Their early demonstrations and use of armed resistance to challenge narratives of the city’s “progressive” urban renewal projects had given way to a new phase of organizing wherein they worked within existing political systems to direct beneficial change for the marginalized citizens. Martyrs still existed and would be commemorated through the various community service programs the Panthers implemented. However, their importance would be memorialized through food giveaways, healthcare clinics, and education initiatives.

An important example of how much the Panthers were willing to collaborate with city officials became clear when Lee Faye Mack, the mother of Panther member Hazel Mack and

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855 The naming of community survival programs after martyred Panthers and allies was a national trend, with programs adopting names like “Angela Davis,” “Fred Hampton,” and “Bobby Hutton.” Alondra Nelson mentions some of these naming choices in her book: Nelson, Body and Soul, 93, 100.
advisor to the Black Panther Party, took a job with the “Model Cities” Initiative as the Neighborhood Representative from north-east Winston-Salem, an area that was 98 percent black. Lee Faye Mack was appointed to the position by Mayor Franklin Shirley, which represented an acknowledgement of the Panthers’ ability to influence local black politics. The appointment caused much alarm in the local FBI field office, with agents speculating that she could channel federal funds to support the Panthers.856

A more immediate use of the elder Mack’s position resulted in the political direction of the Panthers’ next Survival Day rally, which took place on December 17, 1972, a week before Christmas. The December rally was smaller than the summer rally because the Panthers had not been able to solicit the same number of donations from businesses and private individuals. Still, the Panthers managed to give away various items of clothing, children’s shoes, and bags of groceries. They administered 250 sickle cell anemia shots and registered some 100 people to vote. All told, the Panthers managed to give away $2,600 worth of merchandise at the rally.857 More importantly, Larry Little used the event as a platform to launch a renewed attack on the city’s urban renewal efforts by juxtaposing photos of the revitalized downtown built with federal funds against images of decay from north-east Winston-Salem. The Panthers ended with a simple message, “The ruling class spent all its money on the ruling class and didn’t care nothing for the people.”858

Over the next two years, the Panthers started a wide-ranging number of community services including a Free Pest Control Service, an Angela Davis Day Care Center for the children of Panther members and volunteers, and several free clothing and grocery giveaways, all of which operated on an irregular basis dependent on the chapter’s finances.\textsuperscript{859} In addition, they continued to operate the “Free Breakfast for Children” during the school year and even revitalized their adult education classes by re-branding one as the George Jackson Liberation School and committing two days a week to teaching Panther ideology and self-defense.\textsuperscript{860} The Panthers achieved some semblance of permanence when they acquired a run-down house at 1333 N. Patterson Avenue for $8,500 in August of 1973. The house was bought under the name of Hazel Lee Mack and Lee Faye Mack with a $500 down payment and mortgage payments of $100 a month for five years. The Panthers quickly went to work converting the backyard into an ambulance depot, a project that would turn out to be their greatest and most memorable community service effort.\textsuperscript{861}

The plans for an ambulance service dated back to July of 1971 when the Panthers obtained an old hearse. The initial motivation came from the shooting death of fifteen-year-old “Snake” Dendy in October 1970, and the general lack of healthcare for poor black citizens of Winston-Salem. When Dendy was shot, the ambulance arrived only after half an hour under heavy police escort and police took two hours to “secure” the scene before administering aid to

\textsuperscript{859} Interview with Hazel Mack by Katrina Walker, 5 October 1995, 13 October 1995, and 17 November 1995, J-0077, in the Southern Oral History Program Collection #4007, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
\textsuperscript{861} Airtel dated August 31, 1973,” FBI Black Panther Party--North Carolina Files (hereafter BPP-NC), file number 105-165706-8, Section 14c; Hazel Mack, Interviewed by Cheryl Dong, Other Suns Community Center, Winston-Salem, NC, January 19, 2019. Although the math on the mortgage quoted here was directly from the FBI report, the total paid would only add up to $6500, not the $8500 owed. The FBI must have misquoted.
Dendy. The death shocked the neighborhood and spurred the Panthers to address the lack of emergency health care. Issues of cost and accessibility were foremost in their minds—ambulances could refuse care if patients could not pay the $25 ambulance fee up front.

Like many southern cities and towns in the early 1970s, desegregation of medical facilities moved at a slow pace and sometimes came with unprecedented costs for the black community. In Winston-Salem, desegregation of medical facilities led to the proposal in 1972 to close the emergency room at Reynolds Memorial Hospital, which would continue limited operation as an in-patient clinic while emergency patients would be directed to Forsyth Regional Hospital on the other side of downtown. The nominal reason for this shift was the financial unsustainability of Reynolds Memorial Hospital given that its mostly black population relied on the cheap services of the emergency room and could not afford to pay for higher cost services. The threatened loss of the local emergency room at Reynolds highlighted the impact of medical discrimination on poor black communities. A joint rally by the Black Panther Party and the local Concerned Citizens to Save Reynolds Memorial Hospital called for a community vote to keep emergency room closer to East Winston and they convinced city leaders to delay the closure temporarily. The victory proved to be ephemeral, and in 1973 the city demolished the
hospital. Nevertheless, the writing on the wall provided a much-needed impetus for the Black Panther Party to start its own medical programs within the community.

The Joseph Waddell Free People’s Ambulance did not come to fruition until January 1974 because it received significant opposition from the county board of commissioners, which did not want another ambulance service competing with city services. The Panthers prevailed with the help of a grant of $35,000 from the National Episcopal Church and $6,000 in private donations, which went to cover the costs of medical equipment, a real ambulance truck, operating costs, and liability insurance. The Panthers’ ability to win a substantial grant from a mainline protestant church showed that their substantial efforts to influence mainstream politics was paying off locally. When the ambulance debuted as a free 24-hour-service, it received rare positive praise from in the *Winston-Salem Journal*, which lauded it as a “real service to the city” and remarked on the Black Panthers’ move toward civic responsibility. Despite its initial success and community support, the ambulance proved too costly to run from private donations alone. A lapse in liability insurance from July 26 to August 8, 1974 pointed to difficulties in finances and caused the *Winston-Salem Journal* to criticize the service it had so recently lauded. Although the ambulance service struggled on until 1976, it ran only sporadically and became another symptom of the unsustainability of Panther success in Winston-Salem.

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The final blow to the Black Panther Party came in June of 1974 in the realm of electoral politics. Larry Little had offered himself as a candidate for a city Alderman seat, and the State Board of Elections failed to intervene in a recount in a hotly contested election. In order to support Little’s run for office, the Panthers had diverted all resources to the election, even temporarily shutting down the ambulance service in the last few weeks of campaigning in April. Nevertheless, the Panthers lost by a slim margin of 646 to 566 votes. When the Panthers demanded further investigation because they had registered 400 new voters, the Election Board Chairman admitted under pressure that Little had only lost the election by 8 votes, and claimed he had made up the 80 count deficit to head off any potential controversy. Further investigations revealed that 291 of the 400 voters that the Panthers had registered had then had their names removed from the rolls for the election. Larry Little’s loss of the Alderman’s seat was clearly shaping up as a case of voter suppression, with even the *Winston-Salem Journal* coming to the defense of the Panthers. However, the decision of the state Board of Elections to support the initial election result contributed to a loss of morale for the Party.

By the early spring of 1975, Larry Little had left the Winston-Salem chapter of the Black Panther Party that he had helped found and led through its most formative years. He was not alone. Hazel Lee Mack and Lee Faye Mack left in the fall of 1974 following FBI reports of a brutal confrontation with Huey P. Newton in Oakland’s Panther Headquarters. In retrospect, Hazel Mack framed the decision to leave the Party as consideration for the future of her son, who

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she had brought with her to Oakland. However, her reflections on tensions in Oakland when she went to work on the Bobby Seale campaign for Mayor in 1973 reveal the fatigue and stress that came with working at the National Headquarters. As Mack noted, being in Winston-Salem and off the beaten path of Panther organizing had protected her from much of the infighting over strategy that had originated with the Newton-Cleaver split but continued well after it. In addition, being at National Headquarters exposed Mack to fears of informants in new ways and she later labelled the decision to consolidate the Party nationally in Oakland as a mistake since it gave informants a bigger chance to sow the seeds of discord.876

Other notable departures included Russell McDonald and his wife Faye McDonald, Panther members who had once hosted the local headquarters in their house but who left to establish their own black power organization in Lumberton, North Carolina.877 By the end of 1974, the Black Panther Party in Winston-Salem had become almost defunct, with newspaper sales down from 10,000 a month in its heyday to some paltry 100 issues a month.878 While the party nominally struggled on until 1976, the defeat of Little for city Alderman and the Panthers’ inability to keep the ambulance functioning contributed to its slow erosion.879

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876 Hazel Mack. Interview by Cheryl Dong, Other Suns Community Center, Winston-Salem, NC, January 19, 2019. A full account of the Panthers’ decision to shutter a number of chapters nationally and bring all dedicated activists to Oakland to work on the mayoral campaign has been covered both by Donna Jean Murch and Joshua Bloom and Waldo E. Martin. These authors have largely portrayed the move towards consolidation as a last ditch gambit for political success in the birthplace of the Black Panther Party. When Seale failed to win the election despite advancing into the run-off, it led to a mass exodus from the Party. Mack’s decision to leave must be viewed from within that larger context.

877 From FBI Black Panther Party--North Carolina Files (hereafter BPP-NC), file number 105-165706-8, Section 14, Memo dated May 28, 1975.


Harassment from law enforcement officials also played a role in the demise of the Party. While confrontations significantly decreased in 1972, following the revelation of FBI COINTELPRO and the exposure of Agent David B. Martin in the Chatham Co. meat truck case, FBI and local law enforcement surveillance continued. In September 1973, an FBI informant named Wilbert Allen decided to reveal his role in ongoing illegal surveillance of the Winston-Salem Black Panther Party and its allies. He divulged the name of special agent Zachary Lowe as his supervisor to the Black Panthers. The exposure of Special Agent Lowe demonstrated the continued interest of the FBI in the Black Panther Party even after their disarmament. The role that harassment and surveillance played in bringing about the end of the Party is difficult to quantify, though the constant stress of being under watch contributed to a sense of fatigue and fear that wore on members’ morale. As Hazel Mack recalled, “All of us experienced those things with COINTELPRO. They would follow us around. That is what they did. I guess that was their job.”

From 1972 to 1974, the Black Panther Party reached a new level of success characterized by a re-dedication to community service programs and voter registration. The Panthers put down their guns and sought to work within existing government systems to fight the continued encroachment of urban renewal in the majority black communities of Northern and Eastern Winston-Salem. Their efforts resulted in day care programs, free food giveaways, free pest control, healthcare programs, and most importantly, the Joseph Waddell Free People’s Ambulance Service. These programs represented a concerted effort to bring basic services to an area of the city that officials had constructed as “blighted” and socially diseased. The Panthers’

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881 “Hazel Mack Interview,” in *The Black Panthers*, 158.
tradition of community service and organizing highlighted the potential of self-help within these communities and challenged the rhetoric of pathology, poverty, and criminality that had dogged poor black people throughout the twentieth century.

The Panthers’ shift toward community service necessitated a re-thinking of how they would use martyrdom to support their organizing efforts. The key for the Panthers’ success was to get the community to identify with Panther victims of state violence. However, direct confrontation with the police ended up alienating these activists from the very people they represented. Police and mainstream media could paint the dead and incarcerated like Joseph Waddell and the “High Point Four” as dangerous and criminal aberrations from the community rather than integral members of it. In order to reintegrate Panther interests with community interests, the group made the decision to pull focus away from the “High Point Four” and their legal troubles while honoring the deceased Joseph Waddell through community service. It did so to stop a decrease in membership and support suffered in its years of open confrontation with city authorities.  

In doing so, they gave Joseph Waddell back to the community. His legacy became important for poor African Americans in Winston-Salem because Panthers actively associated his name with positive change in the community.

Nevertheless, the Panthers also gave up an important critique of how the police influenced and enforced a policy of urban renewal and ghettoization that could look quite innocuous from the outside. Popular, national narratives of urban renewal painted the “Model

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882 Examples of the Panthers’ losing members are peppered throughout the FBI files on the North Carolina chapter. The FBI certainly took these decreases in membership as evidence of the success of their harassment campaigns. It also measured support in terms of newspaper sales, donations, and the Panthers’ ability to pay for basic services like rent and attendance at their rallies. “Report Dated April 5, 1976,” FBI Black Panther Party--North Carolina Files (hereafter BPP-NC), file number 105-165706-8, Section 32, 4; “Airtel Dated November 19, 1971, FBI Black Panther Party--North Carolina Files (hereafter BPP-NC), file number 105-165706-8, Section 27; Airtel Dated February 23, 1971, FBI Black Panther Party--North Carolina Files (hereafter BPP-NC), file number 105-165706-8, Section 25.
Cities’ programs as a beneficial model that created beautiful city spaces and got rid of “blight.” By the 1970s, a counter narrative about the effects of renewal on poor communities and communities of colored had begun to develop within the welfare rights movement, but it did not figure in mainstream awareness. Directly confronting the legacy of Waddell and the “High Point Four” by criticizing police power, the Panthers revealed how the state played a disturbingly violent role in creating urban blight and then blaming its victims for the crime and poverty that it inevitably brought. This particular critique was de-emphasized when the Panthers shifted towards community service and grassroots political activism.

The Panthers never amassed enough strength to stop the course of urban renewal in Winston-Salem. That process had wreaked their havoc on Winston-Salem’s poor black communities since the 1950s. Even earlier trends of racial segregation were brought about by Home Owner’s Loan Corporation (HOLC) maps, which banks used to determine which neighborhoods were eligible for mortgage loans, divvied up residential spaces by class and race. By the time that the Panthers in Winston-Salem began to organize around the issue of urban renewal, processes of suburbanization, white flight, and highway construction had already taken their toll on once vibrant communities. For a moment between 1969 and 1974, the Panthers mounted a challenge to these changes through their community work and through their public use of local martyrdom narratives that revealed the underlying racial violence that girded these changes. The official dissolution of the Black Panther Party in 1976 signaled the end of an

883 Orleck discusses the narrative that the welfare rights workers put forward of community empowerment, but also the backlash against it. Josh Levin’s new book on the original “Welfare Queen” Linda Taylor also explores the legacy behind associating welfare with black laziness and crime, especially during the Reagan era. Orleck, Storming Caesar’s Palace, 279-310; Josh Levin, The Queen: The Forgotten Life Behind an American Myth (New York: Little, Brown, and Company, 2019).

era of black activism against urban renewal in Winston-Salem. Nevertheless, the Panther legacy ensured that race would remain among the prime considerations of city officials as the city moved into the next couple of decades of renewal and rebuilding. The Panthers’ unsuccessful run for city Alderman in 1974 laid the ground for the famous “Panther seat” in the North Ward, later occupied by Larry Little and then Nelson Malloy for decades. The Panthers created physical and political space for African Americans in the city. Over time and with help from former members, the city insured that space would be safely contained within the realms of cultural heritage and recognition.

Toward a “New” Sunbelt South: Changing Landscapes and Re-forged Memories in Winston-Salem

In 1977, Larry Little ran again for city Alderman and won. Although he was no longer a member of the Black Panther Party, his campaign and platform reflected the core values that he had learned during his five years working with the group. His candidacy struck at corruption in city hall and called for community self-determination with the slogan “Put the People in Office.” Little ran on a platform of stricter housing codes, community control of police, and federal and local government funded welfare programs to tackle the city’s problems. He relied on his background as a Black Panther Party activist to tout his unique suitability for the role. Yet even as he referred to the Party’s achievements in Winston-Salem, he emphasized only the community survival programs like the “Free Breakfast for Children” and the “Joseph Waddell Free Ambulance Program.” He did not mention the Black Panther Party by name in his

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885 Larry Little Fliers, Election Campaign 2-29, MC 9, Box 2, Dr. Larry Little Manuscript Collection, Winston-Salem State University, Winston-Salem, NC.
preserved campaign materials. Little’s successful run for city Alderman and his fourteen-year tenure on the Board of Alderman represented a different manifestation of the Panther legacy in Winston-Salem.

As the city and the nation moved into the 1980s and the presidency of Ronald Reagan—a fierce critic and enemy of the Black Panthers during their heyday in California—crucial social and political space for radical empathy toward the poor and the racially marginalized had disappeared. For Panther veterans, like Larry Little, Hazel Mack, and Nelson Malloy, this insurgent conservatism meant a loss of space to present an entwined critique of police brutality and urban renewal as two sides of the same coin. In the face of Reagan’s presidency and national calls for “Law and Order,” Panther veterans could only go on the defensive and fight to keep what space they had created.

As Winston-Salem’s Black Panther veterans moved into the 1980s and 1990s, they divided the topics of urban renewal, poverty and criminal justice into their own separate spheres of activism. Little and Malloy, as organizers and city Alderman, took an interest in criminal justice and the issue of prisoner rights. This work had its roots in the Black Panther Party’s fight for justice for the “High Point Four,” the “Wilmington Ten,” and Joan Little, a case about a black woman convicted of shoplifting who killed a white jailer in self-defense when he tried to rape her. Little fled from the prison after the killing. Her subsequent arrest and trial for first degree murder implicated a historical legacy of rape and the perception of black women’s sexual promiscuity. Each of these cases challenged long-held notions of black criminality and

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886 Larry Little Election Flyer 1974, MC 9, Box 2, Dr. Larry Little Manuscript Collection, Winston-Salem State University, Winston-Salem, NC.
demanded radical sympathy for black defendants who did not live up to traditional standards of black respectability. In 1984, both Nelson Malloy and Larry Little helped start a movement to free Darryl Hunt, a man falsely accused and imprisoned for the rape and murder of 25-year-old Deborah Sykes, a young reporter in Winston-Salem. Little used his public position as city Alderman to establish a defense fund for Darryl Hunt after city police accused him of the murder on no physical evidence and conflicting eyewitness reports. The case hit especially close to home for Little because Hunt had been a childhood friend and member of the community.\textsuperscript{888}

The Darryl Hunt case had unnerving parallels to the more well-known case of the “Central Park Five,” later the “Exonerated Five,” that erupted several years later in 1989.\textsuperscript{889} In both cases, police charged black men in the rape of a white woman, and the ensuing media fervor brought up deeply-rooted racial fears of the black man as rapist and long held assumptions about black violence that deepened racial divisions within the respective local communities. In both cases, unreliable eye witness accounts and public pressure on police to close the case quickly led to hasty convictions that took years to undo despite the fact that DNA evidence would later prove the defendants’ innocence. Most galling in Darryl Hunt’s case was the emergence of DNA evidence showing that he was not the rapist in 1994, less than a month after he was convicted a second time for Deborah Sykes’s murder. Despite the new evidence, Hunt was denied a third trial, and it would take until 2003 for DNA evidence to exonerate him. Upon his release from


jail, Nelson Malloy declared, “Hunt is just a microcosm of a greater problem. What happened to him has happened before and it will happen again.”

The campaign led by Nelson Malloy and Larry Little on behalf of Darryl Hunt spurred the creation of a feature documentary that debuted at Sundance in 2006 and several books. This work represented an evolution of their earlier portrayals of martyrdom within the Black Panther Party. It carried on the tradition of using black victims of racial injustice to educate local communities on structural inequality. Hunt’s case, like the case of the “Exonerated Five,” struck a nerve among black communities increasingly feeling the pressure of mass incarceration, a trend that began during the late 1960s and 1970s but took off during the 1980s and 1990s. Victims of wrongful incarceration, like Darryl Hunt, became symbols of a hidden epidemic in black communities—one where increasing numbers of young black men and women received harsh prison sentences for petty crimes or wrongful convictions. Their imprisonment left untold numbers of unseen victims as families, loved ones, and friends struggled to reconstitute families and communities disrupted by incarceration.

The martyrdom of men like Darryl Hunt had its legacy in the earlier martyrs of imprisoned Panthers including the “High Point Four,” the “New York Twenty-One,” and Joseph Waddell. Yet what set this earlier generation of Panther martyrs apart from men like Darryl Hunt was the exclusive focus on incarceration and justice, rather than the social and economic structures that caused high incarceration rates for African Americans. This is not to say that

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Darryl Hunt, Larry Little, and Nelson Malloy did not understand how processes like de-industrialization, mass incarceration, and urban renewal intertwined to further marginalize poor black communities. After his release from jail, Darryl Hunt founded the Darryl Hunt Project for Freedom and Justice to help former convicts re-integrate into civilian society and respond to those problems. However, the willingness of a public to consider these deeper structural causes as interrelated had disappeared, and media coverage of Darryl Hunt focused largely on its criminal justice aspects. In a tragic epilogue to his case, police found Darryl Hunt dead in the truck of his friend, Larry Little, on March 13, 2016. He had committed suicide. Hunt’s death reflected the difficulty and trauma that many formerly incarcerated people deal with on a daily basis. Hunt had a robust support system and family and friends who loved him. Nevertheless, his experience with wrongful conviction and incarceration proved too difficult to overcome.

The singular, issue-driven activism of the post-Panther era also led to a movement for greater recognition of local black history on the physical and social public spaces of Winston-Salem to counter the actual erasure of black residential space due to urban renewal. In the last couple of decades, historic signs and monuments to celebrate African American life and history in the city have gone up through the steady work of activists in the community. Yet these signs tell a mixed tale of recognizing historical space many years after it had already disappeared. The story of two historical signs in particular, the sign for the Happy Hills community and the one commemorating the Black Panther Party are examples of the continued struggle for social, economic, and memorial space in the city.

When city officials unveiled the Black Panther Party historical marker on the corner of East 5th street and Martin Luther King Drive, they chose the location for its proximity to the original Panther headquarters located on 14th street. The celebration and the sign took note of the Panthers’ survival programs and community service as well as the achievements of individual activists like Hazel Mack, Larry Little, and Nelson Malloy. While the marker may have denoted physical space, the actual spaces and landscapes that the Panthers had inhabited in the late 1960s and early 1970s had long since disappeared or were under threat. The original 14th street headquarters had been firebombed in November of 1970, and in 2018, Hazel Mack again expressed fears that the whole area would soon be subject to another round of urban renewal. On June 9, 2017, the city Board of Alderman voted down one such proposal to rezone the district. In addition, an earlier proposal from 2002 that would have re-zoned the area as a mixed business and residential district was voted down. While renewal around the 14th street Headquarters remains a hotly debated topic within the city, Mack was pessimistic that urban renewal could be held off much longer.

In the nearby neighborhood of Happy Hills, cut off from the rest of East Winston by the construction of Highway 52 in the 1950s, a different story of deliberate erasure as well as memorialization plays out. As the Happy Hills state historical marker informs the visitor, the community had played a crucial role during Reconstruction as Winston-Salem’s oldest African American neighborhood and again in the 1950s as the site of its first public housing

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895 Hazel Mack, Interview by Cheryl Dong, Other Suns Community Center, Winston-Salem, NC, January 19, 2019.
development. However, the land that the neighborhood of Happy Hills once stood on is now nothing more than gently rolling green hills intersected by mostly vacant historical streets. Right off the highway, modern public housing apartment blocks dominate the landscape while a network of small streets at the very northern end of the area contain all that remains of the historical landscape. Here, run-down houses share land with empty plots, and a few new houses. An old freedman’s cemetery on the grounds lies buried in dead kudzu vines and a nearby community park is in the midst of being torn down and rebuilt.

Happy Hills is a physical reminder of how a city that supposedly values its historical sites and seeks to preserve them has treated landscapes that belong to its marginalized communities. Just a few miles away, Old Salem reveals the ambitions of a city that has prided itself in historic preservation and once hoped to rival Colonial Williamsburg as a site of early America tourism. The houses, businesses, and streets of Old Salem have been lovingly restored, and in many cases completely rebuilt, to project a sense of colonial authenticity that allows the city to celebrate its Moravian heritage. This sense of historical preservation has rarely extended to the city’s African American neighborhoods, largely because of their economic and political marginalization. Happy Hills may have its own historical markers, but its actual physical landscape has not been subjected to the same level of loving historical preservation or recreation. Instead, the city razed Happy Hills as a “blighted” landscape and left its residents with vague promises of future development. While the handful of houses and the rebuilding of the local park may attest to some of that construction, the uncomfortable truth remains that a large

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number of Happy Hills’ residents have been forced out of their homes by the radical “renewal” of the neighborhood.\textsuperscript{899}

Faced with an uncertain and shifting future for Winston-Salem’s black residents, many of whom are still dealing with continued urban renewal efforts, how do the veterans of the Black Panther Party remember their legacy in the city today? For Hazel Mack, the answer lies in the intangibles that the Party provided and continues to provide to the community.

We also channeled that empowerment attitude to the community and...to allow people to see that if you come together and if you act in an organized fashion together, you can affect those forces that are around you and I think that’s what we did in many ways...I think the narrative that we projected was that whenever things are affecting you, you have the right to stand up and say something about that. And so I think it empowered people around us.\textsuperscript{900}

For Mack, the Black Panther Party provided the belief that poor, marginalized, black communities could take control of their own destinies as long as they fought for what their communities needed. The “Free Breakfast for Children,” the “Free People’s Ambulance Service,” and other programs that the Panthers began were never meant to last forever. Instead, Mack claimed that the main point of community survival was to bring attention to their needs so that local government would start addressing them.\textsuperscript{901}

Mack’s analysis of the achievements of the Black Panther Party today reflects the realities of what the Panthers did and did not achieve in Winston-Salem. On one hand, Mack is correct that without the Black Panther Party, programs like free or reduced school meals would not be available. In addition, the Black Panther’s free ambulance service helped convince city

\textsuperscript{900} Hazel Mack, Interview by Cheryl Dong, Other Suns Community Center, Winston-Salem, NC, January 19, 2019.
\textsuperscript{901} Hazel Mack, Interview by Cheryl Dong, Other Suns Community Center, Winston-Salem, NC, January 19, 2019.
officials to take the ambulance service out of the hands of private companies that could deny services to those who could not pay. However, when the Panthers first initiated those programs in the 1970s, they did so with the understanding that they should remain within the black community; they also viewed government attempts to intervene as ultimately harmful to their goal of revolutionizing the people. The Winston-Salem Panthers even attacked the local police department when they tried to set up similar community service programs as a disingenuous attempt to split community support and to smear the Panthers. Mack’s present-day beliefs show how time and the participation of Panther veterans in local government positions have changed their perspectives on how black communities can use local politics to their advantage. This is a recreated view of Panther organizing that has softened its successes as well as its failures to fit a narrative of inspiration, education, and empowerment, rather than the radical black politics of direct confrontation and community survival.

On issues like urban renewal, Mack takes a more complicated view shaped by her experience working for thirty-four years in Legal Services trying to help black homeowners keep their homes. When Hazel Mack went to Temple University for law school in the late 1970s, she studied civil law because she realized that those in power had written the law to disadvantage poor, marginalized communities from obtaining or keeping accumulated property. “You are taking their houses through the construction of consumer laws that the banks, you give them rights to actually destroy people, and that’s how we got into that crisis in 2008,” she reflected in 2018. In Legal Services, Mack helped protect black homeowners in North Philadelphia, and later in eastern North Carolina after Hurricane Floyd, from the predacious practices of banks,

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903 Hazel Mack, Interview by Cheryl Dong, Other Suns Community Center, Winston-Salem, NC, January 19, 2019.
insurance companies, and property developers. Despite her work, urban renewal continued on pace throughout the state and in Winston-Salem, where neighborhoods like the Kimberley Housing Projects, “11th Street Bottoms,” and Happy Hills have all undergone comprehensive renewal efforts.

The reality of these changes have forced Mack to be circumspect about the effect of renewal on black communities. In talking about the renewal of the “11th Street Bottoms,” Mack had this to say:

So...when that whole area was changed, homes went up, the black folks, ultimately, all over the last 30-40 years, it changed the dynamics...so working people got a chance to buy houses which was not a bad thing. My mom bought a house up coming--that got her out into being a homeowner in a program that Nixon started...whatever is going to happen, you’ve gotta say, what can I do with this? Because sometimes we can affect, and sometimes we think we know where we want to go and it just doesn’t work out that way. But whatever happens, I don’t ever feel helpless, and I don’t ever feel I can’t do anything about it, and I can’t make it something that is for the betterment.904

Mack’s view reveals an acceptance to change shaped by the realities of the great upheavals that confronted Winston-Salem’s black communities in the latter half of the 20th century. With time, Mack has gained a perspective on organizing that moves away from the so-called “win” but rather a deep respect for struggle and the hope and experience to influence that change for positive impacts. Mack acknowledges that she doesn’t always win these fights, but small victories and the empowerment to know that even the most marginalized can affect change keep her energized. As she explained, “What I see is that…[young people believe] there’s some panacea that you might reach where you won’t struggle. There is no such thing...I mean a part of

904 Hazel Mack, Interview by Cheryl Dong, Other Suns Community Center, Winston-Salem, NC, January 19, 2019.
life is struggle.” Rather than looking for the ultimate victory or “panacea” for racial inequality, Mack has adopted a view of accepting each storm, each fight as it comes, without giving up ground.

For Mack and other Panther veterans, there is a sense of newfound respect for the activism of the past and for historicizing the role of the Panthers in the 1970s as part of a larger struggle for freedom in Winston-Salem. That struggle is seated in deep respect and acknowledgment for their parents, many of whom fought for Local 22. Hazel Mack’s own mother, Lee Faye Mack was an organizer for the project “Experiment in Self-Reliance” which showed black families moving to the city from rural areas how to adapt to city life. That project is still active in Winston-Salem today. The Black Panther Party represented the black power era of a longer tradition of movement making in the city and Mack sees that same energy in the youth of today. She feels that the same atmosphere of uncertainty, change, and excitement that energized the Panthers in the late 1960s continues with the Black Lives Matter movement. Whether or not that movement is sustainable in the long term remains uncertain, but Mack offers some parting words of advice, “I think that the Party today provides an example of resistance that they can look to. It cannot be literally translated. You have to find that path for yourself. That was then, this is now.”

The legacy of the Black Panther Party in Winston-Salem is a complicated, ever-changing narrative that has continually adapted to the needs of the black communities and the political possibilities of the era. As that legacy moves into the third decade of the 21st century, much of the physical, concrete achievements of the Party as well as its landscapes have changed.

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905 Hazel Mack, Interview by Cheryl Dong, Other Suns Community Center, Winston-Salem, NC, January 19, 2019.
906 Hazel Mack, Interview by Cheryl Dong, Other Suns Community Center, Winston-Salem, NC, January 19, 2019.
907 Hazel Mack, Interview by Cheryl Dong, Other Suns Community Center, Winston-Salem, NC, January 19, 2019.
drastically. These mass erasures of entire communities like Happy Hills have disrupted much of the Black Panther Party’s constituents in the city. Yet many of the people that the Panthers served remain and new generations of black activists confront the same problems that plagued the Panthers—poverty, urban renewal, and criminal justice overreach. For the Winston-Salem Panthers and their supporters, emphasizing the mainstreamed aspects of Panther organizing, including their survival programs and electoral activism, guarantee the widest possible audience for their legacy. It does so at the risk of losing an incisive narrative about the inherent violence of seemingly impersonal structural policies.
Conclusion: The Weight of Mount Tai

When Huey P. Newton visited China in 1971, he took this one important lesson away with him, “Chairman Mao says that death comes to all of us, but it varies in its significance: to die for the reactionary is lighter than a feather; to die for the revolution is heavier than Mount Tai.”908 This quote in the introduction of his autobiography, Revolutionary Suicide, is central to understanding what Newton thought about martyrdom when he titled the monograph about his life. It informed how the Black Panther Party thought about martyrdom as a revolutionary process and the ways that the Panthers commemorated their dead and imprisoned comrades.909 What Newton may not have known was that the quote originated from China’s “Grand Historian,” Sima Qian, who lived from 145 BCE to 86 BCE. It was a well-known proverb that read, “人固有一死，或重于泰山，或轻于鸿毛.” Roughly translated, “Man has but one death, it can be as heavy as Mount Tai, or as light as a feather.”910

To weigh as much as Mount Tai in the Chinese context takes on special meaning. Beyond the implication of comparing a death to the literal weight of a mountain, Mount Tai has additional significance as the cultural and spiritual birthplace of the Chinese state. Mount Tai or Taishan (泰山) has been a center of worship for Chinese folk religion and Confucianism for some three thousand years. It was the site on which the first Emperor of China, Qin Shi Huang

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Di, proclaimed the unification of his empire and it was where Emperors since the Han Dynasty conducted the Feng Shan sacrifices (封禪) that marked the official communion of the Chinese Emperor with Heaven. The Chinese worshipped at the mountain to reaffirm national identity and to proclaim the legitimacy of the government. It was the sacred place for the reproduction of the state in Chinese cultural imagination. Therefore to weigh as much as Mount Tai, is to be foundational to the state itself. By comparing the deaths of Black Panthers to Mount Tai, Newton was making a claim on the meaning of Panther martyrs to the American state—one made more audacious by the historical and fundamental alienation of black Americans from citizenship.

This is a reminder of the ways that Third World Marxist revolutions informed the style and substance of Black Panther ideology. In events including the Chinese Civil War, the Great Leap Forward, and the Cultural Revolution, state-sponsored martyrs played an important role in educating the people into proper ways of political thinking and behavior. Even as a child growing up in the 1990s, I learned references to Chinese martyrs including Lei Feng, a People’s Liberation Army soldier who died in the line of duty. These martyrs played the double role of inspiring patriotism and educating the public to the social ills that the revolution needed to address. Examples of Third World martyrdom informed how the Black Panther Party would

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911 Lewis, Writing and Authority in Ancient China, 208.
portray its own dead and imprisoned in the context of its embrace of a particular kind of Marxist-inspired black nationalism.\textsuperscript{914}

On the surface, media attention in the pages of the \textit{Black Panther Community News Service}, rallies, and other efforts to commemorate the Panthers’ who had died or suffered for the party served a simple purpose: to bring attention to their plight, to create justice, and in the cases of the imprisoned, to seek freedom.\textsuperscript{915} The Panthers used the stories of Fred Hampton, Ericka Huggins, and various activists in the Winston-Salem chapter to create public outrage and put pressure on the state to seek redress for real and perceived injustice. In so doing, the Panthers demanded that these cases of Panther suffering be given the “weight of Mount Tai” even as the American state had mobilized its authority, in the form of FBI COINTELPRO and various local police departments, against the Panthers.\textsuperscript{916}

The Panthers required that they be taken seriously as rights-bearing citizens. They did so as they criticized the very logic of the American state through their various rhetorical strategies that depicted the police as “pigs” and America as “AmeriKKKa.”\textsuperscript{917} They forced acknowledgement that their fundamental alienation from the American state was valid even as

\textsuperscript{914}There is a growing literature on the connections between Black Power and Third World Internationalism, particularly its intersection with East Asian communist revolutions. It is also a connection acknowledged by Ericka Huggins and Emory Douglas: Rychetta Watkins, \textit{Yellow Power, Black Power, and the Making of Revolutionary Identities} (Jackson, University of Mississippi Press, 2012), 42; ed. Fred Ho and Bill V. Mullen, \textit{Afro Asia: Revolutionary and Cultural Connections between African Americans and Asian Americans} (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008); Emory Douglas, \textit{Black Panther: The Revolutionary Art of Emory Douglas} (New York: Rizzoli International, 2007), 98.

\textsuperscript{915}The idea of activism around the dead and imprisoned was central to the Panthers’ DNA from their original protests around the death of Denzil Dowell. However, it took off with the “Free Huey!” movement. The Panthers’ first and foremost goal with these protests was to put pressure on the state to carry out justice. Bloom and Martin, \textit{Black Against Empire}, 50-53, 104; “Why Was Denzil Dowell Killed?” \textit{The Black Panther Community News Service}, April 25, 1967, 1; “HUEY MUST BE SET FREE!” \textit{The Black Panther Community News Service}, November 23, 1967, 1.

\textsuperscript{916}For a concise summary on COINTELPRO see: Bloom and Martin, \textit{Black Against Empire}, 200-203.

they put pressure on it to acknowledge their citizenship rights. By itself, this achievement would have been a radical use of martyrdom. Yet they also created a sense of black pride and meaning that was not tied to legitimization by the government. Black peoples’ lives and deaths could matter even if they were criminalized and discarded by the mainstream. Their experiences of suffering had meaning within a larger black nationalism that the Panthers drew on as an answer and challenge to American citizenship. By declaring that “Black Lives Matter” long before it became a popular slogan, they created an oppositional culture and “freedom dream” that imagined a way outside of the oppression of America.

The Panthers were using their suffering to educate the people on the specific injustices created by state power in America. Underneath their bombastic language, the Panthers made vernacular critiques about how the American state mobilized everything from police power to the criminal justice system to housing reform to undergird the power of white supremacy. By featuring specific stories of black suffering, the Panthers showed ordinary black people how the state was not meant to work for them, but rather to create levels of systematic inequality designed to reify existing power structures that kept the white elite and middle class prosperous. The oppressions created were often invisible because those experiences were either hidden away or so ubiquitous that they were never really questioned. The Panthers succeeded where the traditional Civil Rights Movement struggled—by putting informal systems of discrimination not

\footnotesize{
919 Here I am referencing the “freedom dreams” of black radicalism as defined by Robin D. G. Kelley. The Panthers drew on the tradition of black nationalism to imagine solutions to the problem of race in America. These were “dreams” that added to the richness of the black freedom struggle and pioneered new strategies and ways of thinking: Robin D. G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (New York: Beacon Press, 2003), 1-12.
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codified in Jim Crow law under a microscope in both the North and the South. They used narratives of martyrdom to strip back the veil on these issues and show their own communities that the conditions of poverty and brutality they suffered were not natural but the process of specific choices made by state structures. They empowered people to take their destiny into their own hands through organization and activism.

As Lisa M. Corrigan writes, the Black Panther Party’s rhetoric emphasized the basic strategy of Black Panther martyrdom:

> With nothing left to lose, Black Power vernacular intellectuals highlighted the brutality of white supremacy and created new means of unification for black activists through confrontation (particularly over police brutality), though the polarization produced by the vernacular posture demanded that black humanity had to be accepted on black terms.

It is easy to dismiss the Black Panther Party as ultimately consumed by the violence that it provoked from state authorities. In this narrative, the Panthers’ decision to bring gang members into the fold and to organize among the lumpen proletariat brought undesirable criminal elements into the Party. It opened them up to unnecessary criticism from the media and the FBI exploited that reputation for criminality in its open conflict against the Panthers. In this narrative, the FBI and various police departments certainly bear some responsibility for the

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922 This legacy of empowerment is remembered by Hazel Mack as the most important legacy of the Black Panther Party. Hazel Mack, Interview by Cheryl Dong, Other Suns Community Center, Winston-Salem, NC, January 19, 2019.


demise of the Party, but the main brunt of guilt rests on the Party itself for its confrontational style and poor organizational structure.\(^{925}\) While scholars of the Black Panther Party have systematically dismantled many of our misconceptions of the Black Panther Party, this narrative of the role of violence in destroying the Party has been largely untouched.\(^{926}\)

This dissertation demonstrates that the true role of violence in the Black Panther Party is much more complicated than previously portrayed. Although violence did have an important role in sowing seeds of discord, the Panthers responded proactively and creatively to concerted attacks by law enforcement and the mainstream media. By creating narratives of martyrdom from both their most famous leaders and from ordinary supporters, they rendered visible the various types of violence that had been mobilized against them. This was sometimes direct—as in the assassination of Fred Hampton—but it was often indirect and environmental. The Panthers showed that impersonal public policies, like access to women’s health at Niantic Women’s Correctional Facility or the denial of housing to poor people in Winston-Salem, had violent effects in its consequences for the people involved. Here, violence is defined broadly as the pain and harm inflicted on people when they are denied basic dignity and rights. The Panthers made the argument that violence in American society went far beyond the criminal justice system and that it touched every aspect of life for certain segments of black America. It

\(^{925}\) Pearson, Shadow of the Panther, 311-326; Austin, Up Against the Wall, 335-336.

was as much harassment from law enforcement as it was the rats that infested slum properties
and mauled babies.\footnote{See examples like: “OUR CHILDREN ARE BEING MURDERED IN FRONT OF OUR EYES BY THESE TORMENTING CONDITIONS,” \textit{Black Panther Party Newspaper}, June 6, 1970, COVER (Brownsville, NY chapter); “14 YEAR OLD BROTHER IN HOMEMADE PLAYGROUND KILLED IN CHICAGO,” \textit{Black Panther Community News Service}, October 24, 1970, COVER; A shift towards artwork emphasizing poor housing conditions can also be seen in the back cover illustrations that Emory Douglas drew for The Black Panther Community News Service: Emory Douglas, “It is my belief that we black people need gas and electricity on cold and dark days; doctors and medicine in times of sickness; breakfast, lunch, and dinner in times of hunger,” \textit{Black Panther Community News Service}, April 17, 1971; Emory Douglas, “Illustration of woman cooking,” \textit{Black Panther Community News Service}, May 8, 1971.}

In making such bold claims through telling stories of suffering, pain, and death, the Panthers held a mirror to America. In that reflection, a seemingly endless stream of indignities, inequalities, and terror became revealed. In that reflection, America was a state defined by the perpetuation of white supremacy and inequality suffered by a racially defined underclass of black Americans on whose labor the entire system depended.\footnote{Lubiano, “Black Nationalism and Black Common Sense,” 232-235.} The experience of violence was fundamental to the American state because it served to keep black Americans in their place.\footnote{Here, I am thinking about some of the new work that has come out on race, social justice, and law enforcement: Corrigan, \textit{Prison Power}, 4-6; Simon Balto, \textit{Occupied Territory: Policing Black Chicago from Red Summer to Black Power} (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 4-6; Kelly Lytle Hernández, \textit{City of Inmates: Conquest, Rebellion, and the Rise of Human Caging in Los Angeles, 1771-1965} (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 1-3; Sarah Haley, \textit{No Mercy Here: Gender, Punishment, and the Making of Jim Crow Modernity} (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press), 55.}

This was the sum total of the critique that the Panthers launched against the country through their martyrdom narratives. They were making the deaths and suffering of those who had traditionally been discarded as central to their own organizing and as a tool to galvanize their supporters.

The possibilities of Panther martyrdom were doomed by the rise of neo-conservatism and “Law and Order” politics.\footnote{A healthy historiography on the rise of neo-conservatism and “Law and Order” politics as emerging from white backlash has developed. See: Michael Flamm, \textit{Law and Order: Street Crime, Civil Unrest, and the Crisis of Liberalism in the 1960s} (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005); Michelle Alexander, \textit{The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness} (New York: New Press, 2010); Heather Ann Thompson, “Why Mass Incarceration Matters: Rethinking Crisis, Decline, and Transformation in Postwar American History,” \textit{Journal of American History} 97.3 (December 2010): 703-734.} However, the demise of the Party and the failure of this narrative in
the mainstream was not inevitable but the result of contingent decisions made in the moment by both the Panthers and their opposition. Even in the immediate aftermath of Fred Hampton’s assassination or during the New Haven Panther trials, they did not believe that their goals were out of reach. Although the forces arrayed against them seemed overwhelming, the Panthers succeeded in disseminating their narratives to those communities that they served. As the mainstream turned towards the rhetoric of “Law and Order” and against the Panthers, the memory of Panther organizing and the critiques they deployed against the state remained as a “hidden transcript of power” among poor black communities and activists touched by their work.

The consequences of this larger, mainstream “forgetting” of the Panthers in the 1980s and 1990s set the stage for the resurgence of “Black Lives Matter” when it appeared in the wake of Trayvon Martin’s death and the acquittal of his killer in 2013. The movement as it emerged in 2013 inherited a complicated tradition from the Black Panther Party and many of the criticisms of it from both the Right and the Left have its roots in Panther activism in the late 1960s and 1970s. When the Panthers became largely defunct in the aftermath of Seale’s unsuccessful run for mayor in 1973, the Left lost a powerful, unifying force in the fight against Law and Order politics. Although other national groups like the Third World Women’s Alliance and local

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931 See for example, the work of the Panthers and the PLO on the Fred Hampton case and the rally that the Panthers held for Ericka Huggins on Yale’s campus, which led the university to cancel classes: Mike Gray, *The Murder of Fred Hampton*, Haas, *The Assassination of Fred Hampton*, 102-104.

932 Here I draw on the work of James C. Scott to argue that the Panthers as representative of marginalized communities created certain hidden discourses and transcripts of oppression and grievances hidden to the mainstream world. They nevertheless represented political action and resistance. James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), xii-xiii.


organizations pushed forward the Panthers’ critique often with the help of Panther veterans, no coherent nationally recognized force challenged national forgetting of the hard lessons learned through black power.\(^{935}\) That forgetting was essential to the rise of neoliberalism in the 1990s.\(^{936}\)

The simultaneous nationalization of mass incarceration and increased militarization of police built on older traditions of policing and imprisonment that existed locally in many communities of color, but the policy shifts sanctified them in federal policy.\(^{937}\) While stories of police overreach managed to make local and national news—in the stories of the Central Park Five, the John Burge Chicago Police Torture cases, and in the wrongful conviction of Darryl Hunt—the overwhelming narrative was one of black criminality and the danger of “super predators.”\(^{938}\) Unsurprisingly, the mainstream failed to see a larger tradition of police brutality and miscarriage of justice that undergirded all of these cases. If it had done so, it might have understood the seemingly spontaneous outpouring of grief and rage inspired by events like the Ferguson protests.

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\(^{937}\) Although Michelle Alexander located the rise of mass incarceration as a post-Jim Crow phenomenon, historians like Simon Balto and Kelly Lytle Hernandez have complicated that narrative to show how in many locations, city and state governments were already practicing racialized policing and imprisonment as a response to demands for rights from black and brown citizens.

In inheriting the mantle of the Black Panther Party, “Black Lives Matter” has had to define itself for a new time and age. Although the struggle against police brutality then and now has parallels and similarities, they exist in different historical eras and many of the challenges they face are unique. For example, social media has transformed communication. Activists no longer have to rely on the (relatively) slow dissemination of newspapers and television as Twitter and other social media networks allow for the immediate consumption of news and video, making the awareness of incidents of violence much more immediate. In contrast, the Panthers existed on the cusp of the “video” revolution. Although they certainly understood the power of camera footage, their access to it in most situations was limited. Moreover, the Panthers did not have the context of an established “Law and Order” state to deal with. Instead, they contended with its emergence from older, Jim Crow era traditions of policing and imprisonment that were insidious in their influence, but exerted its power in mostly local contexts.

Nevertheless, many of the strengths as well as shortcomings of “Black Lives Matter” have been shaped by the Panther experience. Part of the potency of the new movement is in the sharp focus on certain victims of police brutality. The ways that Black Lives Matter has chosen to depict victims like Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, Eric Garner, and Laquan McDonald

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940 The role of media for the Panthers was addressed first by Edward P. Morgan, but he tends to see the media as trapping the Panthers into certain stereotypes. I think that the story is much more complicated than that and the Panthers also used the media to their own advantage. Mike Gray’s documentary of Fred Hampton is a great example of that relationship. Edward P. Morgan, “Media Culture and Public Memory of the Black Panther Party,” in *In Search of the Black Panther Party: New Perspectives on a Revolutionary Movement*, ed. Jama Lazerow and Yohuru Williams (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 324-361; *The Murder of Fred Hampton*, Directed by Mike Gray, featuring (Fred Hampton, Bobby Rush, Edward V. Hanrahan) (Facets Media, 2007).
941 Since Michelle Alexander’s *The New Jim Crow*, a number of historians are beginning to challenge the idea that “mass incarceration” originated out of the context of the backlash to civil rights. Historians like Kelly Lytle Hernández have shown that earlier forms of policing in America also existed to contain and even “eliminate” marginalized peoples: Simon Balto, *Occupied Territory*, 4; Hernández, *City of Inmates*, 1-3.
mirror the Panthers’ martyrdom narratives. What the movement is insisting is that these lives “carry the weight of Mount Tai” to the American state regardless of the relative respectability of the victims. Yet the mass visibility of certain figures inevitably creates silences and omissions. A popular portrait of the BLM victim has emerged—one that is overwhelmingly male. While activists like Kimberlé Crenshaw are challenging that stereotype with #SayHerName, the broader inclusivity of “Black Lives Matter” to hidden populations that also suffer from police violence and mass incarceration remains a challenge.

Like the Panthers, BLM has to contend with all of these issues and with the pernicious American belief in black pathological criminality, a belief that has evolved with the era of “Law and Order” and mass incarceration. Opponents of “Black Lives Matter” have juxtaposed the supposed pathology of victims of police brutality against the supposed heroism of police. Propagated by politicians, lobbyists, and police unions, one of the accusations leveled at activists fighting against police brutality is that criticism of the system is an attack on the “good men and women” who make up America’s law enforcement agencies. The popularization of “Blue Lives Matter” is just one example of this trend of thinking and it is one that the Panthers found difficult to argue against. For example, in the Panthers’ fight against Chicago’s Fraternal Order of Police, even blatant misconduct by the union did not undermine its credibility with mainstream

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942 A first intellectual foray into understanding the historical context of BLM can be found in: ed. Dorinda Booker Rolle, Martyrs for the Movement: Black Bodies: Civil Rights, and #BlackLivesMatter (New York: Cognella Academic Publishing, 2019).


media. The Black Panther Party has done more than just inspire the current movement, it also bequeathed onto it a rich, conflicting, and contradictory legacy to grapple with.

As the 2010s draws to a close, America sits at the edge of a renewed confrontation over historic battles fought for racial equality and for restorative, reparative justice for America’s marginalized peoples. The fundamental question facing the country is whether or not we will now publicly acknowledge black lives as having the weight of Mount Tai? The answer has become complicated because of the rise of a new brand of race-based conservatism that has led to what pundits have dubbed the “polarization” of our culture. In subsequent hand wringing, politicians have asked why we cannot return to “civility” and work together as Americans. What those worried about “polarization” have ignored is that the call for “civility” is directly tied to the silencing of voices like those of the Black Panther Party. Chairman Fred Hampton addressed the false promise of “civility” directly in one of his speeches, “Let me say peace to you if you are willing to fight for it!” As we grapple with the challenges of this new era, we must struggle with many of the same questions that animated the Panthers a half-century before. Understanding the Panthers in their context has never been more crucial to our present.

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