SCAPE AND CONTENT

The collection is divided into 3 series and the contents are arranged in chronological order. It consists of 4 boxes that contain: newspapers; posters; tee-shirts, badges, and ephemera.

HISTORICAL AND BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

The Black Panther Party was founded in October 1966 by Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale, two African American college students in Oakland, California. Seale, the chairman, and Newton, the minister of defense, believed that the Civil Rights Movement had not promoted the structural changes necessary to ensure Blacks meaningful economic opportunities or to attain African American equality. Therefore, they broke from the mainstream nonviolent civil rights struggle and advocated a program of self-defense and self-determination, which was anchored in their Black Nationalist philosophy.

Shifting emphasis away from Dr. King's integrationist stance, they instead advocated a nationalist and socialist ideology more closely associated with his critics. After reading the writings of Malcolm X and Franz Fanon, they adopted their ideas advocating the internationalization of the African American cause. They called for armed resistance to American oppression and destruction of the machinery of the oppressor. They were especially concerned with the treatment African Americans received from what they called racist police forces.

Later, they read works from Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, Mao Zedong, Ho Chi Minh, and Che Guevara. They adopted Mao Zedong's teachings, including his words “Power emanates from the barrel of a gun.” They emphasized the progress made by violent Black revolutionaries like Denmark Vesey, Toussaint L'Overture, Gabriel Prosser, and Nat Turner, arguing that violence in self-defense does work. The organization's name and emblem were borrowed from Stokely Carmichael's Lowndes County, Alabama, Freedom Organization, which had been founded a few years earlier.

Over time, the Black Panthers established chapters in nearly every major city and had a membership that numbered in the thousands. They were able to expand their program from the West into urban areas all over the country by emphasizing their social programs and advocating a revolutionary philosophy. They recruited several talented individuals who helped popularize the Panther ideas. Eldridge Cleaver, Bobby Hutton, Elaine Brown, Kathleen Cleaver, H. Rap Brown, Fred Hampton, and others became overnight heroes in the Black community for their radical denunciations of the White power structure. They
organized and ran in political campaigns, with Eldridge Cleaver serving as the Black Panther candidate for president in 1968 and garnering more than 200,000 votes.

Initially, the group's aim was to protect African American communities and end police brutality and oppression. The Black Panther Party developed programs and activities designed to aid the urban poor, such as free clinics to provide medical aid to the poor and food giveaways to disadvantaged schoolchildren. By 1969, each morning, the party fed more than 10,000 children breakfast. The party also organized the first ghetto-centered antidrug programs, teaching the evils of drugs, and held nutrition, parasite prevention, and oral hygiene seminars. Panther volunteers were trained by doctors and given medical supplies, such as microscopes and free medication.

The Black Panthers developed the rallying cry of “Power to the People,” which emphasized their belief in Black empowerment. They were harsh critics of the police and their treatment of African Americans, especially those locked in urban ghettos. They referred to ghettos as “exploited colonies” of the United States. In Point 7 of their ten-point program, they called for an immediate end to police brutality and murder of Black people. Panther leaders referred to the police as “pigs,” an expression that later became more widespread. To check the influence of the police in their community, they organized police patrols, which followed police officers and reported on their interactions with minorities. These patrols, by armed Black Panthers, were directly responsible for a drastic cut in cases of police brutality.

The presence of armed Black revolutionaries frightened White Californians and pushed the state to introduce a gun control measure. To protest the proposed bill, Panther leaders in full regalia marched on the California State Assembly on May 2, 1967, read a prepared statement, and then left. Their accidental appearance on the chamber floor frightened the assembled legislators, and the police arrested the Panthers for disturbing the peace and conspiracy. Seale spent 6 months in jail as a result, but the party was able to make a critical point and gain valuable publicity. This confrontational approach eventually led to a series of deadly gun battles, which left several Black Panthers and at least one police officer dead. The police responded to the Panther challenge by engaging in a systematic campaign to rid their communities of the Panther Party. Local, state, and federal officials participated in this campaign, which eventually killed or arrested or most of the Panther leadership forced them to go on the run.

FBI director J. Edgar Hoover referred to the Panthers as “the greatest threat to the internal security of the country” and directed his agents to engage in a counterintelligence campaign against the organization. He wanted to cripple the Black Panthers and destroy their influence. Working with several law enforcement agencies, his agents delivered a series of devastating blows to the Panther organization. In 1969, Fred Hampton, a member of the Panthers in Chicago, and his assistant Mark Clark, were killed in a shootout with Chicago police. The police fired more than 100 bullets, while only one shot could be traced to the Panthers. Bobby Seale was sent to prison for his involvement in rioting at the 1968 Democratic convention in Chicago. Bobby Hutton, a 17-year-old Panther, was killed in a shootout with Oakland police. Eldridge Cleaver, the organization's minister of information, was wounded in the same shootout. After the shooting, Cleaver, who had earlier spent 9 years in prison, was arrested for violating his parole. In November, he left the country, remaining abroad to avoid trial for the shootout. By 1972, twenty-four Black Panthers had been killed in shootouts with police. This caused the Panther leadership to make a controversial decision to denounce violence and instead work to organize the poor.

The Black Panther Party used Chinese leader Mao Zedong's Little Red Book to formulate many of its strategies and ideas. Leaders encouraged their followers to read his book. Working from a blueprint called the “Black Panther Party Platform and Program,” Seale and Newton outlined a ten-point plan for recapturing the lost momentum of the civil rights struggle. The plan called for self-determination for African American communities, full employment, decent housing, teaching of African American history...
in schools, exemption from military service, trial of Black defendants before a Black judge and jury, and release of all Black prisoners from jail. Seale and Newton emphasized the class struggle, borrowing much of their ideology from Maoist thought.

Though dedicated to socialism, the Black Panthers nevertheless built a wide coalition made up liberal Whites and disaffected African American youth. Expanding their base proved controversial, as Stokely Carmichael, the organization's prime minister, resigned in protest over the Panthers' coalition with White radical groups. Carmichael argued that the organization needed to continue an unremitting struggle against the White Western world.


INDEX TERMS

Individual Names
Bukhari, Safiya, 1950-2003
Cleaver, Kathleen, 1945-
Cleaver, Eldridge, 1935-1998
Davis, Angela Y. (Angela Yvonne), 1944-
Douglas, Emory, 1943-
Hampton, Fred, 1948-1969
Hewitt, Raymond (Masai), 1942-1988
Hilliard, David, 1942-
Huggins, Ericka, 1951-
Hutton, Robert James (Lil’ Bobby), 1950-1968
Magee, Ruchell, 1939-
McLucas, Lonnie
Newton, Huey P., 1942-1989
Seale, Bobby, 1936-

Institutions
Black Panther Party

Subjects
African American equality
Black empowerment
Black Nationalism
Civil Rights Movement
Exploitation
Ghettos
Maoism
Marxism
Police brutality
Racism
BLACK PANTHER PARTY NEWSPAPERS AND POSTERS COLLECTION, 1967-1973
To the memory of Aynn Elizabeth Brown and Patrick Alan Clay Brown

Revolution
Ten-point plan
White power

ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

Acquisition Information: This collection was donated to the Archives of the Charles Evans Inniss Memorial Library, Medgar Evers College, CUNY in December 2013 by Mr. Brian Brown.

Processing Information: Finding aid, collection arrangement, and processing were completed by Yelena Novitskaya, Archives and Special Collections librarian, in the summer of 2015.

Conditions on Access and Use: Access to the collection is unrestricted. It is available for research purposes. Duplication of the collection may be governed by copyright and other restrictions.

Physical Access: Appointment is required for access.

Preferred Citation: Black Panther Party Newspapers and Posters Collection, 1967-1973, CEIML.BP.004, Archives and Special Collections, Charles Evans Inniss Memorial Library, Medgar Evers College of the City University of New York, Brooklyn, NY.

COLLECTION ARRANGEMENT

The collection is divided into 3 series and the contents are arranged in chronological order.

SERIES I: NEWSPAPERS, 1967-1973


SERIES II: POSTERS, ca. 1967-1969

Contains posters created by the artist Emory Douglas.

SERIES III: TEE-SHIRTS, BADGES, EPHEMERA, ca. 2010

Contains tee-shirts with a reproduction of a poster by Emory Douglas; badges with portraits of Bobby Seale and Huey Newton; a copy of the Ten-Point Program; promotion materials for the book The War Before by Safiya Bukhari, 2010.

COLLECTION INVENTORY AND DESCRIPTION

SERIES I. NEWSPAPERS:

BLACK PANTHER PARTY NEWSPAPERS AND POSTERS COLLECTION, 1967-1973
To the memory of Aynn Elizabeth Brown and Patrick Alan Clay Brown


Folder contents


Folder contents

The Black Panther. Black Community News Service. Vol. VI, no. 6, March 6, 1971

SERIES II. POSTERS:


Folder contents

Black Studies – by Emory, n.d.
Che Guevara quotation – by Emory, n.d. (4 copies)
The Black Panther Party Newspaper – by Emory, n.d. (2 copies)
“Free Huey” – by Emory, [1967]
Mother and child with a suction cup gun – by Emory, 1967

Mother and child with a gun in his hand – by Emory, 1967 (2 copies)

“Afro-American solidarity with the oppressed people of the world” – by Emory, 1969

“Only on the bones of oppressors can the people’s freedom be founded…” – by Emory, 1969

SERIES III. TEE-SHIRTS, BADGES, EPHEMERA:

Box 4: The Black Panther Party tee-shirts, badges, ephemera.

Folder 4: The Black Panther Party tee-shirts, badges, and ephemera.

Folder contents

2 tee-shirts with a reproduction of a poster by Emory Douglas;
2 badges with portraits of Bobby Seale and Huey Newton;
a photocopy of the Ten-Point Program leaflet;