

Introduction

The Panthers shut out the pack of zealous reporters and kept the door locked all day, but now the hallway was empty. Huey Newton and two comrades casually walked from the luxury suite down to the lobby and slipped out of the Hong Kong Hilton. Their official escort took them straight across the border, and after a short flight, they exited the plane in Beijing, where they were greeted by cheering throngs.¹

It was late September 1971, and U.S. national security adviser Henry Kissinger had just visited China a couple months earlier. The United States was proposing a visit to China by President Nixon himself and looking toward normalization of diplomatic relations. The Chinese leaders held varied views of these prospects and had not yet revealed whether they would accept a visit from Nixon.

But the Chinese government had been in frequent communication with the Black Panther Party, had hosted a Panther delegation a year earlier, and had personally invited Huey Newton, the Party's leader, to visit. With Nixon attempting to arrange a visit, Newton decided to accept the invitation and beat Nixon to China.²

When Zhou Enlai, the Chinese premier, greeted Newton in Beijing, Newton took Zhou's right hand between both his own hands. Zhou clasped Newton's wrist with his left hand, and the two men looked deeply into each other's eyes. Newton presented a formal petition requesting that China "negotiate with . . . Nixon for the freedom of the oppressed peoples of the world." Then the two sat down for a pri-

vate meeting.³ On National Day, the October 1 anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China, Premier Zhou honored the Panthers as national guests. Tens of thousands of Chinese gathered in Tiananmen Square, waving red flags and applauding the Panthers. Revolutionary theater groups, folk dancers, acrobats, and the revolutionary ballet performed. Huge red banners declared, "Peoples of the World, Unite to destroy the American aggressors and their lackeys."⁴ At the official state dinner, first lady Jiang Qing sat with the Panthers.⁵ A *New York Times* editorial encouraged Nixon "to think positively about Communist China and to ignore such potential sources of friction as the honors shown to Black Panther leader Huey Newton."⁶

FORBIDDEN HISTORY

In Oakland, California, in late 1966, community college students Bobby Seale and Huey Newton took up arms and declared themselves part of a global revolution against American imperialism. Unlike civil rights activists who advocated for full citizenship rights within the United States, their Black Panther Party rejected the legitimacy of the U.S. government. The Panthers saw black communities in the United States as a colony and the police as an occupying army. In a foundational 1967 essay, Newton wrote, "Because black people desire to determine their own destiny, they are constantly inflicted with brutality from the occupying army, embodied in the police department. There is a great similarity between the occupying army in Southeast Asia and the occupation of our communities by the racist police."⁷

As late as February 1968, the Black Panther Party was still a small local organization. But that year, everything changed. By December, the Party had opened offices in twenty cities, from Los Angeles to New York. In the face of numerous armed conflicts with police and virulent direct repression by the state, young black people embraced the revolutionary vision of the Party, and by 1970, the Party had opened offices in sixty-eight cities from Winston-Salem to Omaha and Seattle.⁸ The Black Panther Party had become the center of a revolutionary movement in the United States.⁹

Readers today may have difficulty imagining a revolution in the United States. But in the late 1960s, many thousands of young black people, despite the potentially fatal outcome of their actions, joined the Black Panther Party and dedicated their lives to revolutionary struggle. Many more approved of their efforts. A joint report by the Federal

Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the Central Intelligence Agency, Defense Intelligence Committee, and National Security Agency expressed grave concern about wide support for the Party among young blacks, noting that “43 per cent of blacks under 21 years of age [have] . . . a great respect for the [Black Panther Party].”¹⁰ Students for a Democratic Society, the leading antiwar and draft resistance organization, declared the Black Panther Party the “vanguard in our common struggles against capitalism and imperialism.”¹¹ FBI director J. Edgar Hoover famously declared, “The Black Panther Party, without question, represents the greatest threat to the internal security of the country.”¹²

As the Black Panthers drew young blacks to their revolutionary program, the Party became the strongest link between the domestic Black Liberation Struggle and global opponents of American imperialism. The North Vietnamese—at war with the United States—sent letters home to the families of American prisoners of war (POWs) through the Black Panther Party and discussed releasing POWs in exchange for the release of Panthers from U.S. jails. Cuba offered political asylum to Black Panthers and began developing a military training ground for them. Algeria—then the center of Pan-Africanism and a world hub of anti-imperialism that hosted embassies for most postcolonial governments and independence movements—granted the Panthers national diplomatic status and an embassy building of their own, where the Panthers headquartered their International Section under the leadership of Eldridge and Kathleen Cleaver.

But by the time of Newton’s trip to China, the Black Panther Party had begun to unravel. In the early 1970s, the Party rapidly declined. By mid-1972, it was basically a local Oakland community organization once again. An award-winning elementary school and a brief local renaissance in the mid-1970s notwithstanding, the Party suffered a long and painful demise, formally closing its last office in 1982.

Not since the Civil War almost a hundred and fifty years ago have so many people taken up arms in revolutionary struggle in the United States. Of course, the number of people who took up arms for the Union and Confederate causes and the number of people killed in the Civil War are orders of magnitude larger than the numbers who have engaged in any armed political struggle in the United States since. Some political organizations that embraced revolutionary ideologies yet eschewed armed confrontation with the state may have garnered larger followings than the Black Panther Party did. But in the general absence of armed revolution in the United States since 1865, the thou-

sands of Black Panthers—who dedicated their lives to a political program involving armed resistance to state authority—stand alone.

Why in the late 1960s—in contrast to the Civil Rights Movement’s nonviolent action and demands for African Americans’ full participation in U.S. society and despite severe personal risks—did so many young people dedicate their lives to the Black Panther Party and embrace armed revolution? Why, after a few years of explosive growth, did the Party so quickly unravel? And why has no similar movement developed since?

Most obvious explanations do not stand up to the evidence. Some believe the Party was a creation of the media. But most of the media attention came after the Party’s rapid spread. Some assert that the Party’s success was just a product of the times. But many other black political organizations, some with similar ideologies, sought to mobilize people at the same time, and none succeeded like the Panthers. Others contend that this or that Panther leader was an unrivaled organizer and that by the force of his or her efforts, the Party was able to recruit its vast following. But most of the new recruits to the Black Panthers came to the Party asking to join, not the other way around. One common view is that the Party collapsed because it could not withstand the government’s repression, but the year of greatest repression, 1969, was also the year of the Party’s greatest growth.¹³

While much has been written on aspects of the Black Panther Party, none of the accounts to date have offered a rigorous overarching analysis of the Party’s evolution and impact. Most writers have looked at a small slice of the Party’s temporal and geographic scope, providing limited historical context. Party sympathizers are as guilty of such reduction as its detractors are. Commentators reduce the Party to its community service programs or to armed confrontation with the police. They claim the Panthers espoused narrowly Marxist or black nationalist ideology. They maintain that Huey Newton was a genius or that he was overly philosophical, or that he was a criminal. They say the Party’s power came from organizing young blacks from the urban ghettos or that its influence stemmed from its ability to draw broad support from a range of allies. To some people, the Party was a locus of cutting-edge debate on gender politics, and they applaud its embrace of women’s and gay liberation; to others, it was sexist and patriarchal.

Occasionally, commentators have even suggested that the Black Panther Party was all of these things. But no one has made sense of the relationship among the parts, situated the varying practices of the

Party in time and place, and adequately traced the evolution of the Party's politics. As Pulitzer Prize-winning historian David Garrow recently pointed out in an extensive review of historical works on the Panthers, no one has yet offered a serious analysis of how the political practices of the Black Panther Party changed during its history or why people were drawn to participate at each juncture of its evolution. "Panther scholarship," Garrow observes, "would benefit immensely from a detailed and comprehensive narrative history that gives special care to how rapidly the [Black Panther Party] evolved through a succession of extremely fundamental changes. . . . Far too much of what has been written about the [Party] fails to specify expressly which period of Panther history is being addressed or characterized, and interpretive clarity, and accuracy, will benefit greatly from a far more explicit appreciation and identification of the major turning points in the [Black Panther Party's] eventually tragic evolution."¹⁴

Writing in the *New York Times* in 1994, sociologist Robert Blauner commented, "Because of the political mine fields," the "complex and textured social history that the Panthers deserve" has not yet been written and "may be 10 or 15 years in the future."¹⁵ More than forty years have passed since the heyday of the Black Panther Party, and almost twenty years have passed since Blauner's writing, but to date, despite comment by a diversity of writers, no one has presented an adequate or comprehensive history.¹⁶

As a popular adage suggests, "History is written by the victors."¹⁷ Writing a history that transcends preconceptions is challenging. It takes time and perspective and endless sifting through often-contradictory evidence to test competing explanations and weigh the importance of divergent forces. But the lack of an overarching history of the Panthers and their politics, despite the abundance of writing on various aspects of the Party, is unusual. We suspect that the long absence of an adequate history is due, in part, to the character of state repression of the Party. Aimed specifically at vilifying the Black Panther Party, state repression powerfully shaped public understandings and blurred the outlines of the history.

The federal government and local police forces across the nation responded to the Panthers with an unparalleled campaign of repression and vilification. They fed defamatory stories to the press. They wire-tapped Panther offices around the country. They hired dozens of informants to infiltrate Panther chapters. Often, they put aside all pretense and simply raided Panther establishments, guns blazing. In one case, in

Chicago in December 1969, equipped with an informant's map of the apartment, police and federal agents assassinated a prominent Panther leader in his bed while he slept, shooting him in the head at point-blank range.¹⁸

In attacking the Black Panthers as enemies of the state, federal agents sought to repress not just the Party as an organization but the political possibility it represented. The FBI's Counterintelligence Program (COINTELPRO) sought to vilify the Black Panthers and "prevent [the Party and similar] black nationalist groups and leaders from gaining respectability by discrediting them."¹⁹

FBI director J. Edgar Hoover emphasized time and again, in different ways, that "one of our primary aims in counterintelligence as it concerns the BPP is to keep this group isolated from the moderate black and white community which may support it."²⁰ Federal agents sought "to create factionalism" among Party leaders and between the Panthers and other black political organizations.²¹ FBI operatives forged documents and paid provocateurs to promote violent conflicts between Black Panther leaders—as well as between the Party and other black nationalist organizations—and congratulated themselves when these conflicts yielded the killing of Panthers. And COINTELPRO sought to lead the Party into unsupportable action, "creating opposition to the BPP on the part of the majority of the residents of the ghetto areas."²² For example, agent provocateurs on the government payroll supplied explosives to Panther members and sought to incite them to blow up public buildings, and they promoted kangaroo courts encouraging Panther members to torture suspected informants.²³

One school of commentators simply took up Hoover's program of vilification, portraying the Party as criminals and obscuring and minimizing its politics. In an influential article in 1978, Kate Coleman and Paul Avery made a series of allegations about personal misdeeds and criminal actions by Panthers in the 1970s, after the Party had lost influence as a national and international political organization: "Black Panthers have committed a series of violent crimes over the last several years. . . . There appears to be no political explanation for it; the Party is no longer under siege by the police, and this is not self-defense. It seems to be nothing but senseless criminality, directed in most cases at other blacks."²⁴

David Horowitz wrote a series of essays in 1994 building on these allegations, treating them as the totality of what was important or interesting about the Panthers and describing the Black Panthers as "an

organized street gang.”²⁵ Hugh Pearson, in consultation with Horowitz, then wrote *The Shadow of the Panther*, a full-length book version of the story Horowitz had developed, telling the history of the Black Panther Party through the alleged crimes and personal misdeeds of Huey Newton.²⁶ The major newspapers celebrated the book as a respectable history of the Party and its politics. The *New York Times* called the book “a richly detailed portrait of a movement” and named it one of its Notable Books of the Year 1994.²⁷

The storm of criminal allegations touted as movement history effectively advanced J. Edgar Hoover’s program of vilifying the Party and shrouding its politics. While many of the criminal allegations that Horowitz and his colleagues made about Huey Newton and other Panther leaders were thinly supported and almost none were verified in court, these treatments also omit and obscure the thousands of people who dedicated their lives to the Panther revolution, their reasons for doing so, and the political dynamics of their participation, their actions, and the consequences.

Hoover’s program aimed to drive a wedge between the Party and its nonblack allies. Today, the popular misconception persists that the Black Panther Party was separatist, or antiwhite. Many current internet postings mischaracterize the Party in this way.²⁸ In fact, the Party was deeply antiracist and strongly committed to interracial coalitions. Even some newspapers got the basic story wrong, such as the *Providence Journal-Bulletin*, whose editorial board characterized the Party as an “organization based on racial hostility . . . a mirror image of the Ku Klux Klan.”²⁹ Such misconceptions have also taken root among some of today’s young activists seeking to emulate the historical example of the Black Panthers, such as the so-called New Black Panther Party, darling of Fox News, which while claiming to carry on the legacy of the original Black Panthers, preaches separatism and racial hate.

Another influential line of attack—the argument that the Panthers primarily advanced “black macho” rather than a broader liberation politics—has also done more to obscure than to illuminate the history of the Party. Michelle Wallace first popularized this argument in her influential 1978 book *Black Macho and the Myth of Superwoman*, in which she denigrates the role of Angela Davis and other revolutionary black women as “do-it-for-your-man” selfless subservience to misogyny in the name of black liberation.³⁰ As June Jordan commented in a 1979 review, *Black Macho* is “a divisive, fractious tract devoid of hope and dream, devoid even of competent scholarship for the sub-

ject so glibly undertaken.”³¹ Yet the argument gained traction, perhaps in part because it built upon a kernel of truth. Stewarding a predominantly male organization in the beginning, some Black Panthers indeed asserted an aggressive black masculinity. But by misrepresenting this black masculinism as the totality of the Party’s politics, Wallace and her ilk distorted and defamed the Party. They erased the women who soon constituted a majority of the Panther membership and devalued the considerable struggles Panther women and men undertook to advance gender and sexual liberation within and through the Party, often progressing well in advance of the wider society.

If J. Edgar Hoover were alive today, he would undoubtedly take great pride in the persistence of the factionalism he sought to create among the Panthers. Fights that erupted between Panther factions as the Party lost its national and international political influence in the 1970s have long outlived the organization. Decades later, former Black Panther leaders continue to condemn each other virulently in public. These disputes distract from the politics of the Black Panthers in their heyday and sustain the Party’s public vilification.

But in recent decades, the history of the Black Panther Party has proven irrepressible. Memoirs by former Black Panthers, as well as scholarly books, edited collections, articles, doctoral dissertations, and master’s theses, have chipped away at public fallacies, clearing obscurity and uncovering the history of the Party piece by piece. Memoirs by, and biographies of, Black Panther activists who served in various parts of the country, and some who were national leaders—including David Hilliard, Elbert “Big Man” Howard, Assata Shakur, Geronimo Pratt, Elaine Brown, Safiya Bukhari, Stokely Carmichael, Marshall “Eddie” Conway, Flores Forbes, Evans Hopkins, Mumia Abu-Jamal, Steve McCutchen, Robert Hillary King, Huey P. Newton, Afeni Shakur, and Johnny Spain—provide personal perspectives and rich accounts of life in the Party. Edited collections by Kathleen Cleaver and George Katsiaficas, Judson Jeffries, Charles Jones, Yohuru Williams and Jama Lazerow, and countless journal articles, fill out the story of local chapters in cities across the country and develop thematic insights across them. Books on the Panthers by Paul Alkebulan, Curtis Austin, Christian Davenport, Donna Murch, Jane Rhodes, as well as more general recent books that contain significant discussions of the Panthers, build analytic perspective.³² A new generation of scholars has provided rigorous treatments of myriad facets of the Party’s history, producing the extraordinary number of ninety dissertations and master’s the-

ses—most written in the last decade—analyzing specific aspects of the Party’s history, such as the sickle-cell-anemia programs, the multiracial alliances of the Chicago Panthers, or the artwork of Black Panther minister of culture Emory Douglas.³³

These previous treatments are invaluable, and the depth of our analysis is much richer for them. But despite the strength of many of these contributions, none has presented a complete picture of the Black Panther Party, or an adequate analysis of its politics. Pinning down history is always complex. The vociferous efforts of the federal government to vilify the Panthers, and the legacy of factional dispute, made the history of the Black Panther Party nearly impenetrable.

HOW WE WROTE THIS BOOK

What is unique and historically important about the Black Panther Party is specifically its politics. So in seeking to uncover the history of the Black Panther Party, we have sought to analyze the Party’s *political* history. In an early proposal for the book in 2000, we elaborated a method of “strategic genealogy” to conduct this analysis. Rather than center our analysis on particular individuals or on dissection of the Party’s organization, we uncovered the political dynamics of the Party by studying the evolution of its political practices.³⁴

We could not have written this book without the insight we gained talking with former Panthers, especially David Hilliard, former Black Panther chief of staff, and Kathleen Cleaver, former Black Panther communications secretary. We also benefited from getting to know almost all of the other living former leaders of the Black Panther Party, and together with our students, we spoke with many regional leaders, rank-and-file members of the Party, and important Party allies, including Bobby Seale, Elaine Brown, Ericka Huggins, Angela Davis, Emory Douglas, Billy X Jennings, Mumia Abu-Jamal, Geronimo ji Jaga (Pratt), Richard Aoki, Kumasi Aguila, Alex Papillon, Melvin Newton, John Seale, Tom Hayden, and dozens of others. The hundreds of hours we spent talking about the Party and working with former members on related historical projects provided invaluable insight into life inside the Party and the crucial concerns of the leadership at various junctures.

When we began the project in the late 1990s, we conducted formal interviews with Bobby Seale and a range of others, expecting that these conversations would be the main source of data for the project. But the more interviews we conducted, the clearer the limits of that medium

became. Retrospective accounts decades after the fact—with memories shaped by intervening events, interests, and hearsay—are highly contradictory. So although we did rely extensively on conversations with historical actors to test our analysis and push our understanding, we have avoided using retrospective interviews as a principal source of evidence, preferring to consult documentary or recorded evidence that was temporally proximate to the events. In the end, what made it possible to uncover this history was a vast wealth of primary sources, including many thousands of firsthand accounts of historical events offered by participants shortly after they occurred.

We conducted much of the research through the Social Movements Project at the Institute for the Study of Social Change at the University of California, Berkeley, which we codirected from 2000 to 2005. We benefited greatly from the assistance of dozens of graduate and undergraduate research assistants. Several of our graduate research assistants and advisees have gone on to complete dissertations and publish their own books on aspects of the Party history (see our acknowledgments). We early consulted the range of primary sources on the Party already available in archives at Stanford University, the University of California, Berkeley, Howard University, the University of Wisconsin–Madison, the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, the New Haven Museum and Historical Society, and the Oakland Public Library; in articles in the black press, underground press, and mainstream press; and in government documents. In addition, we developed two new archival sources in the course of producing this book.

In our first major archival project, we assembled the only near-complete collection of the Party’s own newspaper, the *Black Panther*. This collection includes every issue published during the Party’s heyday from 1967 to 1971, and 520 of the 537 issues published overall. Chock-full of Party members’ firsthand accounts of unfolding events and programmatic statements by Party leaders, the *Black Panther* offers the most comprehensive documentation of the ideas, actions, and projections of the Party day to day, week to week. Under our editorial direction, the Alexander Street Press digitized this collection, made the text searchable, and published the documents online as part of its Black Thought and Culture collection, in collaboration with Huey Newton’s widow, Fredrika Newton, and the Huey P. Newton Foundation.³⁵

In our second major archival project, we collaborated with the H. K. Yuen family to recover, preserve, and index (a good portion of) the H. K. Yuen collection, which contains thousands of fliers and pamphlets and

over thirty thousand hours of audio recordings on the Panthers and other social movements in the Bay Area from the 1960s and 1970s. As a doctoral student at Berkeley, in 1964, H.K. Yuen began collecting every movement flier and pamphlet circulated on the Berkeley campus, and he recorded every meeting and rally in the Bay Area that he could. Yuen dropped out of school and made a career of this collection for almost two decades. He also set up an apparatus to record almost all shows about social movements broadcast on Bay Area radio stations. Working with his son, Eddie Yuen, we recovered this extensive collection from boxes overflowing the Yuen family basement and then preserved and indexed the contents and facilitated donation of the collection, which auditors value at several million dollars, to the Bancroft Library at the University of California, Berkeley.

This collaborative work thus resulted from a series of joint scholarly projects led by Bloom. As first author, Bloom did the lion's share of the research, writing, and analysis. As coauthor, Martin contributed substantially to the research, writing, and analysis. In the end, each author contributed crucially to all phases of the making of this book.

BLACK AGAINST EMPIRE

Civil rights activists nonviolently defied Jim Crow, demanding full citizenship rights. Their insurgent Civil Rights Movement of the early 1960s dismantled legal segregation and expanded black enfranchisement in the United States. The 1964 Civil Rights Act and 1965 Voting Rights Act codified their inspiring victories. But once there was little legal segregation left to defy, the insurgent Civil Rights Movement fell apart.³⁶

In the late 1960s, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and Congress of Racial Equality, two organizations that led much of the nonviolent civil disobedience, imploded. The Southern Christian Leadership Conference declined. But the broader vision of black liberation that had motivated civil rights activists remained salient. Many black people, having won a measure of political incorporation, organized to win electoral political power. Many sought economic advancement. Moderate civil rights organizations, such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and the Urban League, turned their attention to the hard work of civil rights enforcement. Countless activists continued to chip away at racial discrimination in jobs, education, and housing.

For many blacks, the Civil Rights Movement's victories proved lim-

ited, even illusory. Especially for young urban blacks in the North and West, little improved. The wartime jobs that drew the black migration had ended, much remaining industry fled to the suburbs along with white residents, and many blacks lived isolated in poor urban ghettos with little access to decent employment or higher education and with minimal political influence. Municipal police and fire departments in cities with large black populations employed few if any blacks. And many cities developed containment policing practices—designed to isolate violence in black ghettos rather than to keep ghetto residents safe. Although black people were formally full citizens, most remained ghettoized, impoverished, and politically subordinated, with few channels for redress.

Starting in 1966, young blacks in cities across the country took up the call for “Black Power!” The Black Power ferment posed a question: how would black people in America win not only formal citizenship rights but actual economic and political power? Dozens of organizations sprang up seeking to attain Black Power in different ways. More a question than an answer, *Black Power* meant widely different things to different people. Despite the belief among many young blacks that their mobilization as black people was the key, no one knew *how* to mobilize effectively.³⁷

Into this vacuum, Huey Newton and Bobby Seale advanced a black anti-imperialist politics that powerfully challenged the status quo yet was difficult to repress. Drawing on the nationalist ideas of Malcolm X, Newton and Seale declared the Black Panther Party steward of the black community—its legitimate political representative—standing in revolutionary opposition to the oppressive “power structure.” But unlike many black nationalists, the Panthers made common cause with the domestic antiwar movement and anti-imperialist movements abroad. The Panthers argued that black people constituted a “colony in the mother country.” With an unpopular imperial war under way in Vietnam, popular anti-imperialist movements agitating internationally, and a crisis of legitimacy brewing in the Democratic Party, they posited a single worldwide struggle against imperialism encompassing Vietnamese resistance against the United States, draft resistance against military service, and their own struggle to liberate the black community. In the face of brutal repression, the Black Panther Party forged powerful alliances, drawing widespread support not only from moderate blacks but also from many nonblacks, as well as from anti-imperialist governments and movements around the globe.

The Black Panthers' crucial political innovation was not only ideological but practical. At the center of their politics was the practice of armed self-defense against the police. While revolutionary ideas could be easily ignored, widespread confrontations between young armed black people and the police could not. The Panthers' politics of armed self-defense gave them political leverage, forcibly contesting the legitimacy of the American political regime. In late 1968, Bobby Seale and David Hilliard shifted the Party's focus to organizing community programs such as free breakfasts for children. In 1969, every Panther chapter organized community services, and these programs soon became the staple activity for Party members nationwide. By that summer, the Party estimated it was feeding ten thousand children free breakfast every day. The Black Panther Party's community programs gave members meaningful daily activities, strengthened black community support, burnished Party credibility in the eyes of allies, and vividly exposed the inadequacy of the federal government's concurrent War on Poverty. Community programs concretely advanced the politics the Panthers stood for: they were feeding hungry children when the vastly wealthier and more powerful U.S. government was allowing children to starve. The more the state sought to repress the Panthers, the more the Party's allies mobilized in its defense. The Black Panther Party quickly became a major national and international political force.

Individuals created the Black Panther Party. Without their specific efforts and actions, the Party would not have come about, and there is little reason to believe that a powerful black anti-imperialist movement would have developed in the late 1960s. Yet the Black Panther Party was also specific to its times. The times did not make the Black Panther Party, but the specific practices of the Black Panthers became influential precisely because of the political context. Without the success of the insurgent Civil Rights Movement, and without its limitations, the Black Power ferment from which the Black Panther Party emerged would not have existed. Without widespread exclusion of black people from political representation, good jobs, government employment, quality education, and the middle class, most black people would have opposed the Panthers' politics. Without the Vietnam War draft and the crisis of legitimacy in the Democratic Party, few nonblack allies would have mobilized resistance to state repression of the Party. Without powerful anti-imperialist allies abroad, the Panthers would have been deprived of both resources and credibility.

It was not simply what the Black Panthers did—but what they did in

the conditions in which they found themselves—that proved so consequential. They created a movement with the power to challenge established social relations and yet—given the political context—very difficult to repress. Once the Black Panther Party developed, until the conditions under which it thrived abated, some form of revolutionary anti-imperialism would necessarily persist. Had government hiring and university enrollment remained inaccessible to blacks, had black electoral representation not expanded, had affirmative action programs never proliferated, had the military draft not been scaled back and then repealed, and had revolutionary governments abroad not normalized relations with the United States, revolutionary black anti-imperialism would still be a powerful force in the United States today. While the Black Panther Party might have been repressible as an organization, the politics the Panthers created were irrepressible so long as the conditions in which they thrived persisted.

From 1968 through 1970, the Black Panther Party made it impossible for the U.S. government to maintain business as usual, and it helped create a far-reaching crisis in U.S. society. The state responded to the destabilizing crisis with social concessions such as municipal hiring of blacks and the repeal of the military draft. Because history is so complex, we cannot isolate all influences and precisely predict what would have happened if Huey Newton, Bobby Seale, and many others had not created the Black Panther Party. But we do know that without the Black Panther Party, we would now live in a very different world.

The parts of this book analyze in turn the major phases of the political development of the Black Panther Party. Part 1, “Organizing Rage,” analyzes the period through May of 1967, tracing the Party’s development of its ideology of black anti-imperialism and its preliminary tactic of policing the police. Part 2, “Baptism in Blood,” analyzes the Party’s rise to national influence through 1968, during which time it reinvented the politics of armed self-defense, championed black community self-determination, and promoted armed resistance to the state.

Part 3, “Resilience,” and part 4, “Revolution Has Come!” analyze the period through 1969 and 1970 when the Party was at the height of its power, proliferating community service programs and continuing to expand armed resistance in the face of the state’s intensified repression. We unpack the dynamics of repression and response in three cities—Los Angeles, Chicago, and New Haven—showing how the Panthers attracted support from multiracial allies at home and from revolution-

ary movements and governments abroad and explaining why Black Panther insurgent practices were irrepressible.

Part 5, “Concessions and Unraveling,” analyzes the demise of the Black Panther Party in the 1970s, showing how state concessions and broad political transformations undercut the Party’s resilience. During this period, the Black Panthers divided along ideological lines, with neither side able to sustain the politics that had driven the Party’s development.

The concluding chapter sums up our findings and explores their implications for three broader contemporary debates about the history of the Black Liberation Struggle and about social movements generally. Finally, we consider the history of the Black Panther Party in light of Antonio Gramsci’s theory of revolution, illuminating the political dynamics by which social movements become revolutionary and explaining why there is no revolutionary movement in the United States today.