

VIEWPOINT

The Panthers were not racist or evil in nature

By RICKY SHARPLESS
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Editor's note: This is the second of a five-part series seeking to uncloud the distorted image of the Black Panther Party.

"Stokely Carmichael and the Black Panthers believe, and believe profoundly, that black dignity and black liberation are not possible in the United States without profound changes in the system—changes which run so deep that only so strong a word as 'revolutionary' will do to describe them."

Many people let this revolutionary concept lead them into thinking that the Black Panthers were racist and evil in nature. Some used it as excuse to call them off as extremist. "The fact is that Stokely Carmichael and those who have come after him—the militants, 'the extremist',—are not simple white haters nor black racist nor anarchist. They are, by and large, revolutionaries, and it is one of

the tragedies of America that most of us do not know what that means."

Though it might have been easy to say that the Black Panther Party was not operating within the framework of the Constitution, we should realize, as the Panthers did, that: "Men were not created to obey laws. Laws were created to obey men. They are established by men and should serve men. The laws that officials inflict upon poor people prevent them from functioning harmoniously in society. There is no disagreement about this functioning of law in any circle—the disagreement arises from the question of which men's laws are to serve. Such lawmakers ignore the fact that it is the duty of the poor and unrepresented to construct rules and laws that serve their interest better. Rewriting unjust laws is a basic human right and fundamental obligation."

The Black Panther Party felt that all people should have the freedom to determine their own destination and should have control over their resources.

Revolution is the only way this could come about and they believe that it was possible.

In the latter decades of the eighteenth century, three great revolutions took place. In America, a colony achieved independence. In Britain, the industrial revolution turned an empire into a world market system based on the capitalistic mode of production. In France, oppressed classes rose and destroyed an oppressor class. The currents generated by these revolutions formed a revolutionary process which now has reached the entire world. All colonies demand independence to become nations. All nations seek a mode of production to give themselves wealth and power. All people who suffer oppression, exploitation, and inequality through class struggle seek liberty, equality, and fraternity. As these three currents spread outward from America, Britain, and France, they intermingled but also, thereby generated contradictions. Colonies fought for and secured independence, but then lost it again to empires armed with the weapons of capitalism. Capitalism produced immense wealth but created new class inequalities based on exploitation and oppression.

There are two main classes in a capitalistic system of which Newton was referring to. They are the bourgeoisie or capitalist class and the proletariat or working class. By bourgeoisie, I mean "the class of capitalist who own the means of producing goods and services (factories, banks, land, mass media, etc.) and employ or buy labor-power of workers for wages". By proletariat, I mean "the working class of people who own no means of production of their own and who are forced to sell their labor power for wages in order to get enough money for food, clothing, shelter, and other necessities".

With this class distinction it should not be hard to understand why the elitist group would want to do everything possible to protect its interest and maintain its position. It should also be easy to understand why the lower class would want to better its position. But it has never been the desire of a bourgeoisie class to want to lose its position. Instead, as in Algeria and other former colonized countries, it has been the duty of the oppressed people to rise up in numbers and revolt against the oppressors. Thus the Black Panther Party emerged to combat the elements of capitalism which were—exploitation, oppression, and for the black race, racism.

In my research I came to the conclusion that it depends on one's position as to how he or she views the Black Panther Party. As I stated earlier, I do not think that the organization has been given enough credit. When you look at those who discredit the Party, you have to look at their position in the system. Do they support the system? Then, from what perspective are they viewing the situation? In my research I found numerous occasions where white writers seem to be defying the Black Panther Party without every trying to get an understanding of the reasons why an organization of this type would have grounds for formulating. These writers appear to have been merely philosophizing. Here are some examples:

"The Black Panther Party in the United States are not representatives of anybody's individual worth or dignity, least of all that of Black citizens, in or out of the ghettos. The Black Panthers do not understand, accept, or live by such principles as equality or democracy. The Black Panthers are the worst enemy the black man has in America—on a par with his implacable, ignorant, bigoted foes in the Southern United States and South Africa."

Norman Podhoretz, editor of *Commentary* magazine stated: "The Panthers have forced themselves into the poignant position of abandoning any such desire to make things better would be to make things worse by perpetuating the illusion that the American Negro has something to lose. In Working toward the revolution by working to create a revolutionary situation, the only result the Panthers can be reasonably sure of attaining is damage to the people in whose name they presume to speak and death and destruction to themselves."

Other white writers saw the Black Panther Party as a dictatorship that was communistic in nature. "The Black Panther Party in the United States is a dictatorship in microcosm. Just as every other dictatorship in human experience past and present—has exercised complete candor in its public utterances, this political movement has been violently outspoken in stating its objectives and the methods through which it means to achieve them."

"The Black Panther Party is a totalitarian organization of black nationalist. It identifies completely with the Communist world movement. The Panther Party is anti-semitic. It is highly theatrical and publicity-minded, but it means business and is after power. It is a racket, but also much more," charged *Commentary*. Further: "The party's organization is strictly paramilitary, with power concentrated entirely at the top echelon."

It has never held an election of its officers or a convention, not a debate of its basic policies among its membership."

These types of accusations are commonplace in much of the literature about the Black Panther Party written by white writers. However, this is not an absolute phenomenon among all white writers. Some white writers seem to have made a conscious effort to understand the existence of the Panther Party. For instance, Robert Scott and Wayne Brockriede stated the revolutionary situation more rationally in my opinion.

"Black power is a revolutionary force in American life. The results of a revolution are never what even the most clear-eyed observers predict and certainly never what any of the most deeply involved participants want. If the forces which make history are more than anyone can understand or control, they are pervasive. Man must struggle to understand and to influence. To do less than struggle with the issues of one's own lifetime is to be less than fully human."

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Does the Black dialect matter

One Black alumns of UNC-CH was bitterly disappointed to find that he was denied a job, that dealt with communicating with the public, simply because he spoke "just like a nigger." That is, he was accustomed to and spoke Black jargon.

Inspite of his impressive resume and neat appearance, the interviewer gave him advice instead of the job. The advice in essence persuaded the young Black man to: Talk like us, boy, and you'll get the job.

Talk like a white person, act like a white person, be a white person. This cannot be the only formula to a successful career. But lets face it, when you go for job interview, and you walk into the office of the interviewer, make sure you don't make the mistake of asking, "Do you want me to close the doe?" Your chances of getting the job might become very slim.

What seems to be difficult to perceive is the negative aspects of Black jargon. There are different degrees to Black jargon, for instance, the casual Black jargon between two friends:

George: "Yo, man, what's happenin'?"

Larry: "You got it, man."

George: "Man, I saw 'dis fine hammer (pronounced hammu) at the Student Store (pronounced Sto) yesterday!"

Larry: "Whaaaaaaat? School me man."

Now, most of us realize that we have to resign ourselves in certain situations, such as job interviews, from such dialogue. We don't usually answer a question from an interviewer concerning our desire for the job with, "Yo, man, I want the gig," because there is a slight possibility, if not a ton full of possibilities that most white people would not understand us anyway.

Returning to the negative aspects of Black jargon, maybe it is alright to talk like this among ourselves, but our jargon (even unconsciously sometimes) seems to be toned down when speaking to white people. The negative connotations—ignorance, laziness and shiftlessness etc.,—often associated with the Black race since slavery—are also associated with Black jargon. This should not be the case; for Black jargon is one of the manifestations of slavery.

Even though the white man may not have been aware, the Black man uniquely used the Black jargon to his own advantage. It has been said by many that words in hymns written during slavery by Blacks, consisted of special and hidden meanings. The messages sometimes even represented ways of escape or messages of desired freedom. These words meant one thing to whites and something else to Blacks.

Another theory formulated by David Claerbaut author of "Black Jargon in white America" states that when "slaves tried to pronounce some of the words (of the English language) they often came out twisted and garbled. These mispronunciations formed the basis of a whole new communication system." He adds, "This twisting of the white man's words enabled them to communicate their feelings to one another without being understood by the oppressive slaveowners, who regarded these unusual word modifications merely as the inept attempts of a bungling group of slaves to learn the well-developed English language."

So here we have another barrier besides the color barrier to overcome: the battle of words. On becoming a successful news broadcaster (you never hear Ted Bradley on CBS saying 'doe') or a successful ambassador (you can't imagine Andrew Young saying "What's happenin' Mr. President; on becoming anything successful we have to be versatile. We have to admit that there are certain times and there are certain places that will allow us to relax and just be plain 'niggers.'

But don't let these lazy habits follow you into a job interview. If so, chances are you may never get to use them on the job . . . the job you didn't get.