

# Black Panthers wanted to change entire system around

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

"In 1966, the Black Panther Party marched into the California State Capitol, armed to the teeth, to demonstrate their rights to bear arms and defend their community. Almost immediately they began to symbolize the new black spirit of proud and determined resistance."

As the Black Panther Party grew into one of the most powerful Black organizations in this country, the government (particularly the FBI and local police departments) took stock and soon took action. The repression which followed almost destroyed the Black Panther Party and left some of its best-known activists dead or jailed."

The Black Panther Party is a Black organization which was founded in Oakland, California in October of 1966. It is an organization which started out with revolutionary tendencies, but has now been forced to adopt a reformist image.

When I say that the Panthers had revolutionary tendencies initially, I mean that they realized that in order to achieve their goals the system would have to be completely changed around. They wanted to do this. Huey P. Newton, the recognized leader of the Black Panther Party, stated that when they started in 1966, they were what one would call black nationalists.

"We realized the contradictions in society, the pressure on black people in particular, and we saw that most people in the past had solved some of their problems by forming into nations. We therefore argued that it was rational and logical for us to believe that our suffering as a people would end when we established a nation of our own, composed of our own people."

But after a while they saw that something was wrong with that resolution to the problem, according to Newton.

"In the past, nationhood was a fairly easy thing to accomplish. If we look around now, though, we see that the world—the land space, the livable parts as we know them—is pretty well settled.

"So we realized that to create a new nation we would have to become a dominant faction in this one, and yet the fact that we did not have power was the contradiction that drove us to seek nationhood in the first place. It is an endless circle you see 'to achieve nationhood, we needed to become a dominant force; but to become a dominant force, we needed to be a nation.'"

"Originally, as I said, we assumed that people could solve a number of their problems by becoming nations, but this conclusion showed our lack of understanding of the world's dialectal development.

"Our mistake was to assume that the conditions under which people had become nations in the past still existed. To be a nation, one must satisfy certain essential conditions, and if these things do not exist or cannot be created, then it is not possible to be a nation."

Now that the Black Panther Party is realizing its mistakes, can it now better serve the Black community? Is it a serious and dedicated part of the Black struggle? Were the old Panthers an organization that was not interested in bettering its own status, but rather in bettering the position of black people in general? Were they a bunch of renegades who were out for themselves or were they a dedicated force that lead to positive returns for the Black community?

These are the questions that prompted me to research the Black Panther Party. The problem as I see it is that the Black Panther Party has been given little or no credit at all for its continued participation in the Black struggle by the American society. The positive things they have done

and are continuing to do have been given little attention while the negative aspects have been the focal point of exposure.

My thesis in this essay is to document the fact that the Black Panther Party is a positive part of the Black struggle. In doing this I will review the Panthers' old ideology and then look at their new course of action.

Nevertheless, the theme that seems to be constant throughout the history of the Black Panther Party is dedication to the Black community. A problem may have been which course of action would accomplish this goal more fully.

The old Panthers' policy was not to ask for justice as Dr. King and other non-violent leaders had done. The Panthers sought to combat injustice by military tactics.

"The power of the oppressor rests upon the submission of the people. When Black people really unite and rise up in all their splendid millions, they will have the strength to smash injustice."

The Panthers contended that the oppression endured by Blacks was a result of the capitalistic system existing in the United States. The only way to alleviate this oppression would be to do away with the present system. This is when the Panthers were declaring themselves as Black nationalist and Black revolutionaries.

According to the old Newton, the Black Panther Party is a revolutionary vehicle made up of three elements: "A small but dedicated cadre of workers who are willing to devote their full time to the goals of the organization; an organized structure through which the cadre can function; and revolutionary concepts which define and interpret phenomena, and establish the goals toward which the political vehicle will work.

"This is one side of practice. Its other

indispensible side is the 'building of a community structure,' the development of basic survival programs for the people amongst whom the Party lives and serves and derives nourishment."

The Panthers further contended that: "Black people have no future within the present structure of power and authority in the United States under the present Constitution. For us, also, the alternatives are absolutely clear: the present structure of power and authority must be radically changed or we, as a people, must extricate ourselves from entanglement with the United States . . . We are from twenty-five to thirty million strong. And we are unafraid. Because we are our guarantee. If the American people, as a whole do not rise up, reverse the present course of the nation, which, if unchecked, holds out only fascist repression and genocide for Black people, then we, Black people, will be forced to respond with a form of War of Salvation that in the chaos of carrying it out the attempt to repress it, will gut this country and utterly destroy it.

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## Attribution

The article in last week's paper on the Fellowship page presented many ideas from an InterVarsity Press book written by Masumi Toyotome. The title of the book is 3 Kinds Of Love.

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