Defying the Image of the Black Panther Party:
The Nonviolent Power of Female Black Panthers

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Introduction

The common image of the Black Panther Party is usually quite negative. The Panthers are known for their use of violence—especially male violence—to achieve their goals, which are portrayed in the Ten-Point Program.[1] However, what the Black Panther Party stood for and what its values were is not as simple as one might assume.[2] It goes beyond the use and embrace of violence: the Panthers did not only take part in violent protests to try and achieve their goals; nonviolent activism was also common. Especially in the last ten years of the party's existence, the focus was on nonviolence; fewer members embraced violence over time, making it less of a shared value and indicating why it is so difficult to pinpoint exactly what the Black Panther Party stood for. Values, ideas and principles are, indeed, subjective, and have the habit of changing over time. This also happened with the values and identity of the Black Panther Party.

The contributions of female members are an important and understudied aspect of the Black Panther Party. Survival Programs, the Panthers' community service programs which were governed mostly by women, are a good example of nonviolent techniques carried out by the Panthers to reach some of the goals on their Ten-Point Program. This is not to say that female Panthers were never violent (Angela Davis is an example of this), but the majority of the female members helped by means of nonviolent techniques. Since the Black Panther Party consisted of mostly women for most of its existence, this indicates a difference between the common image of the Black Panther Party and the reality of it. Therefore, this thesis will answer the question "In what ways did female members defy the stereotypical image of the Black Panther Party?" In short, it will argue that not only is the significance of the nonviolent Survival Programs undervalued in the party's popular image; so is the significance and even the

[1] Ashley D. Farmer, *Remaking Black Power: How Black Women Transformed an Era*. Justice, Power, and Politics (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 58.
[2] For further information, read Peniel Joseph, "The Black Power Movement: A State of the Field," *Journal of American History* 96, no. 3 (2009).

existence of (other forms of) female involvement and crucial contributions to the Black Panther Party. Indeed, although the violent, male contributions to the movement are more known, the nonviolent techniques mostly executed by female members, such as the Survival Programs, take up a larger part of what the Party truly was and deserve more attention.

This is a qualitative study that focuses on the late 1960s and early 1970s (the time when the popularity of the Black Panther Party was at its peak). Some attention will also be paid to earlier years, since it is necessary to place (the developments of) the Black Panther Party within a larger context. This will be the case mainly in the second chapter. The arguments made in this thesis have been built upon those made in secondary sources and information to be found in primary sources. The primary sources, such as the *Black Panther* (the newspaper created by and for Black Panther members in 1967), are archival sources. This newspaper has been of great importance and relevance to the topic of this thesis, since many of its editors, as well as the artists and journalists whose work was published in the newspaper, were women. The texts in the *Black Panther* cover topics such as violence, but also topics such as femininity and what one can do for his or her community. Articles and artwork published in the *Black Panther* make visible the Panthers' goals and thoughts, as well as how they saw themselves (as opposed to how others saw them). Between 1967 and 1980, 537 issues of the *Black Panther* were printed, the majority of which are accessible online. Another relevant primary source is Safiya Bukhari's *Panther Sisters on Women's Liberation*, published in 1969. This book offers exclusively female perspectives on the Black Panther Party from the time during which its popularity was at its peak. Previous studies relevant to the topic have already concluded on the importance of women's contributions to the actions taken by the Black Panther Party.[3] In addition to these broader conclusions, this thesis focuses on the contrast between the image of the Black Panther

[3] Some examples are Peniel Joseph's essay "The Black Power Movement: A State of the Field," Ashley D. Farmer's book *Remaking Black Power: How Black Women Transformed an Era*, and Sean L. Malloy's book *Out of Oakland.*

Party and its reality, whilst paying attention to the reasons for this popular image and the multiple ways in which the image has been defied.

It goes without saying that this study has its limitations. The conclusions are largely drawn from a narrow range of primary sources due to a matter of relevance: the newspapers show the way Panthers were depicted in the media, and Bukhari's interviews show Panther women's actual concerns. Aside from this, its focus is aimed on the developments and challenges the Black Panther Party faced within the United States—although many international relations existed, these will not be discussed in this thesis. The time frame which this research has been based upon is also limited (late 1960s until the early 1970s). These limitations are partially due to a matter of relevance (the time period research also represents the peak of the party's popularity, and the primary sources are most relevant to women as opposed to men), but mostly they are due to the limited amount of time and words allowed for the thesis.

Chapter 1 focuses on historiography. The Black Panther Party and its development through the late 1960s and early 1970s has been studied by many scholars in the past 50 years. Although their points of focus differ, the research of different scholars, especially scholarship in the past 15 years, will be discussed in the literature review. The main topics which will be discussed are the party's violence (and violence used against them), female Panthers and Survival Programs, and media portrayal of the Panthers. The large number of studies on these topics show the broadness of Black Power Studies. Scholars of Black Power Studies tend to conclude on different (even contradicting) points, making this a dynamic and therefore interesting topic.

The second chapter will provide a historical background regarding the Black Panther Party. The reasons for its emergence and how it distinguished itself from civil rights movements, as well as important developments, challenges and inequalities will be discussed.

This chapter will also shed light on the popular image the Black Panther Party has had for decades, and why most people who are aware of the Black Panther Party associate it with toughness, masculinity and violence. According to Farmer, this is because initially (immediately after the party was founded by Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale) the Black Panther Party consisted largely of male values. In other words, violence and toughness represented partially what the party was about in the beginning.[4] This also accounts for the low number of female members the Black Panther Party counted during this time. Especially when the party was most active (during the late 1960s and early 1970s), the media contributed to this popular image by spreading information that was not necessarily representative of the party's actual values, actions and members. This was because of different factors. For example, although news regarding the Black Panther Party differed between states, the media mostly shared the party's violence because it created a higher shock value, and therefore made news more attractive to readers. Additionally, the division between villains and victims is often used.[5]

The third chapter includes an analysis of multiple newspapers, including the *New York Times*, *The Washington Post* and the *Black Panther* in order to provide a comparison between the portrayal of the Panthers by regular newspapers and how they depicted themselves towards the public. This chapter will also focus on what the Black Panther Party really stood for, which values it actually held as important, and the prominence of the gender division in the Panther ranks. Although the mainstream media portrayed the party as one that consisted mostly of male members whose goals and visions were not as prominent or important as their means of pursuing them (the use of violence), this could not be further from the truth. Although the party did revolve around violence, this was true to a lesser extent than the media often portrayed, especially as time went on. The values of community and nurturing were extremely important

[4] Farmer, *Remaking Black Power*, 58.
[5] Christian Davenport, *Media Bias Perspective, and State Repression the Black Panther Party* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 57-58.

to the party's identity. Female Panthers also played large roles in the party's Survival Programs: numerous programs designed to provide support (regarding themes such as education, nutrition, housing and health) for the less fortunate and oppressed (not only black) communities throughout the United States. Women most often headed these programs, or played an important part in them. However, members of both sexes helped and found importance in being part of a program that helped those who were less fortunate. This shows that the Black Panther Party, complete with its vision, values and identity, changed over time. This included the ideals of black masculinity and black femininity, which many male and female Panthers identified (or tried to identify) with. Whereas black femininity later revolved more around personal strength and confidence, both ideals eventually cherished concepts such as family, community, nurturing and helping. These changes can be seen in the growth of the Survival Programs. Additionally, contributions made by women, such as those to the *Black Panther* newspaper, have been of great importance to the identity of the Black Panther Party. Female members also brought attention to black feminism and created their own visions of what a "Black Revolutionary Woman" should be—therefore creating and supporting self-confidence not only for fellow female members, but for all black women. Ideals surrounding the concept of black femininity and the Black Revolutionary Woman were shared by the *Black Panther.* The newspaper has been of great importance, since it was the largest way of communicating news regarding the Black Panther Party, but mostly because it spread messages of support, either through articles or through art. Women's involvement in the party's newspaper, as well as the Survival Programs, is often overlooked or forgotten, because it does not coincide with the party's tough and largely male reputation.

This study will convey and analyze a more realistic image of the Black Panther Party by paying attention to female contributions and developments and by holding these against the popular image of the party in order to create a clear contrast. Instead of merely covering the

more violent and thus more noticeable events, this research paper will also pay attention to the less violent and noticeable ones, which were just as effective as (if not more effective than) the violent ones. Since the latter types of events were mostly governed by women, this research paper will focus on women and not as much on men, thereby giving female Black Panther members the attention they deserve.

Chapter 1: A Literature Review on the Field of Black Power Studies

Studies of Black Power, writes historian Peniel E. Joseph, "have grown in ambition, complexity, and breadth" within the past 15 years.[6] This branch of study, named "Black Power Studies" by Joseph, includes the study of black women's activism and that of the Black Panther movement. This chapter will give a brief overview of what scholars have concluded within the field of Black Power Studies in recent years. First, the controversial topic of violence within the Black Panther Party will be discussed. Second, the topic of black women and female Black Panthers and their often underestimated social impact will be touched upon. Finally, this chapter will focus on the negative media portrayal of the Black Panther Party. Together, these contributions show not only the broadness of the field, but also the complexity. The party's violence is usually the topic of discussion, as it was undoubtedly a large part of their identity and image for a long time. This, in turn, was also because the media portrayed the Panthers as violent killers. Black female activists, Panthers or not, are not as often a topic of discussion. Studies such as those discussed in this chapter, however, show their often unknown importance to the party's development and to overall women's rights and welfare rights development throughout the '60s and '70s. The three topics are intertwined (which can be seen in the two following chapters), although they have been studied individually.

The Black Panther Party and Violence

Scholars of Black Power Studies have been keen on investigating the Black Panther Party and other features of the Black Power movement and their relationship to violence throughout their existence. In general, the Black Power Movement (which includes the Black Panther Movement) and the civil rights movement are seen as a separate movements. Whereas some

[6] Joseph, "The Black Power Movement," 752.

believe the Black Power Movement came into being as the result of a break from the civil rights movement, others, such as historian Timothy B. Tyson, believe that the Black Power Movement is a revival of the civil rights movement. According to Tyson (as well as other historians), Black Power came into being as a means for black people to fight for the same goals they fought for during the civil rights movement, only in a more aggressive, violent and radical way, since the nonviolent ways were not effective enough.[7] In his dissertation, Christopher Strain argues against this view. According to Strain, this transformation from a nonviolent movement to a violent movement was certainly not instantaneous, and perhaps even non-existent. This is because, Strain argues, the civil rights movement was not nonviolent—it was (almost) as violent as the Black Power Movement. To support his argument, Strain uses two examples of black radicalism before 1965; the year the civil rights movement started flowing into the Black Power Movement. Firstly, he mentions Robert F. Williams, the man who "organized armed resistance in 1957 against the Ku Klux Klan in Monroe, and wrote *Negroes with Guns* (1962), an affirmation of armed self-defense by blacks."[8] Secondly, he mentions "the Deacons for Defense and Justice, an armed guard unit in Bogalusa, Louisiana, which also combated the Klan and provided protection for civil rights activists pledged to nonviolence."[9] One might argue whether these two examples, which do strongly suggest early black radicalism, are enough to claim that the civil rights movement was as violent as the Black Power Movement, but it stands clear that the former was not completely nonviolent. Therefore, the Black Panther Party might have helped the Black Power Movement grow, but it did not start a new, radical period—it simply helped increase the amount of violence black activists used during the period.

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[7] Curtis J. Austin, *Up Against the Wall: Violence in the Making and Unmaking of the Black Panther Party* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2006), 5. Quoted from Timothy B. Tyson. *Radio Free Dixie: Robert F. Williams and the Roots of Black Power* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999).
[8] Christopher Strain and Leon F. Litwack, "Civil Rights and Self-defense: The Fiction of Nonviolence, 1955–1968." ProQuest Dissertations and Theses (2000), vii.
[9] Ibid.

Additionally, historian Curtis J. Austin argues that within the Black Panther Party, violence played a large role.[10] According to Austin, violence was vital in the formation, as well as the downfall of the party. This emphasis on the importance of violence to the Black Panther Party can give the impression that violence was what carried the party through its entire existence. The party's Survival Programs (which will be discussed later in this chapter) are given relatively little attention, although they helped many. Austin's thesis statement regarding the significance of violence, however, is thoroughly explained. Although Strain's argument against a nonviolent period before 1965 holds, Austin claims that the Black Panther Party started not only to fight poverty and unequal chances, but also the actual violence against blacks by the police and hate groups such as the Ku Klux Klan.[11] Especially in the early years of the party's existence (the late '60s), the Panthers were extremely radical and also portrayed themselves to be so. Although the Panthers' words turned out to be more threatening and violent than their actions, the media pictured the Panthers as violent killers. Therefore, outsiders often feared the Panthers, as they imagined them to be violent for no reason. In reality, the Panthers used violence only out of self-defense (although the speeches and overall thoughts sometimes seemed more radical). Eventually, the party's downfall (or, decrease in popularity) was also related to violence. Indeed, a division between advocates of violence (supporters of Eldridge Cleaver) and advocates of community service programs (supporters of Huey Newton) eventually led the party to crumble apart and lose their initial radical identity.[12]

This change in identity has been further researched by historian Peer Illner.[13] According to Illner, the Panthers' ideas were radical in the beginning (the late '60s), as they preferred "revolutionary suicide" (dying whilst fighting for a cause) over "reactionary suicide" (dying by

[10] Austin, *Up Against the Wall*.
[11] Ibid, 5.
[12] Ibid, 297.
[13] Peer Illner, "Who's Calling the Emergency? The Black Panthers, Securitisation and the Question of Identity." *Culture Unbound: Journal of Current Cultural Research* 7, no. 3 (2015).

the hand of the enemy; in this case, white supremacy). This radicalism created group cohesion and an identity which the party later moved away from. This change started when civil rights activists demanded a change in American identity "qua whiteness," which they received.[14] When this changed and blacks were more included, this was a moment for joy, but also a point when "a continuous black identity" was in jeopardy. In order to maintain this identity, the Panthers' point had to be that the core of essential whiteness still excluded blacks.[15] In the early '70s, the party's radicalism started decreasing. According to Illner, this can be noticed from Newton's quotes, as he became more insecure about the "possibility of a positive black ontology."[16] In other words, the Panthers (and fellow blacks) had been associated with so much negativity for such a long time that a stigma had formed. Newton realized that violence would not help them fight this stigma, as it was engraved in people's minds. In order to fight this stigma properly, the Panthers realized they had to lose their radicalism, which had formed their identity. Illner concludes that, since stigma partially means taking away someone's humanity (or that of a group), Newton and his followers decided to steer away from radicalism and leave their identity behind, in order to possibly regain their humanity. Instead, the party's focus shifted to the community service programs.

Women and Survival Programs

Community service programs were quite popular in the United States during this period of research. The Panthers were not the only ones who created and executed them; so did Operation Life, an organization created by black welfare mothers. According to historian Annelise Orleck,

[14] Ibid, 486.
[15] Ibid, 487.
[16] Ibid, 490.

Operation Life worked because of the women's determination and personal experience with poverty, bad living conditions and an overall bad environment to raise their children.[17] Orleck emphasizes the importance of motherhood to black women, as it took over their entire life. This was because, especially for black women, birth control and tubal ligation were difficult to receive, since most doctors were either extremely religious, sexist, or racist. Therefore, most black women had a large number of children (around eight), making it difficult to work in a paid job outside the home. Those who were employed received minimum wage and unfair treatment. Due to these circumstances, welfare was the only option for many black mothers, which was exactly what the women of Operation Life fought for. They also created community service programs to help those in similar situations, which Orleck believes were extremely effective.

It is strange, however, that Orleck does not mention the Panthers or their community service programs (called Survival Programs) once. This is strange especially because the Black Panther Party was based in California, as was Operation Life, and the Panthers' Survival Programs were spread throughout the country. Additionally, the two types of community service programs had a lot in common, since they were both run (mostly) by black women, who wanted nothing more but to help poor communities. These communities were mostly black, since blacks did not get equal chances in the job market or in the housing market, but poor white families were not excluded. This suggests a different way of "fighting back" among black women (Panthers or not): caring and nurturing, as well as a hefty amount of willpower and organizational skills were used to achieve their goals as opposed to violence. According to Orleck, black mothers were, and still can be, experts in fighting for their goals in these manners, because they are "the real experts on poverty."[18]

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[17] Annelise Orleck, *Storming Caesars Palace: How Black Mothers Fought Their Own War on Poverty* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2005).
[18] Ibid, 6.

Historians Ashley D. Farmer and Judith Newton expand on the topic of Survival Programs. Farmer emphasizes the significance of the female Black Panthers, whose strength lay in their nonviolent contributions to the party.[19] Panther women empowered themselves and each other by striving for the "Black Revolutionary Woman"; a term which usually entailed strength, willpower, femininity and activity within the Black Panther Party.[20] Farmer also stresses the importance of the *Black Panther* newspaper, which spread news and motivation to Panthers and included artwork by famous Panther Emory Douglas as well as other Panther artists (many of them were female). This newspaper was headed and edited mostly by women, who hereby took on a nonviolent, yet revolutionary role. By spreading the idea of the "Black Revolutionary Woman" in this way, women hoped for male Panthers' view on gender roles to be altered, and for them to appreciate women more within the movement. Women also headed and founded new branches of the Black Panther Party, including many different Survival Programs. Since these programs really took over after 1970, this indicates a growth in female power within the Black Panther Party. The women created over 24 programs and helped a large number of poverty-stricken communities.

Another historian who studied the gender dynamics within the Black Panther Party was Judith Newton.[21] As opposed to Farmer, however, Newton focused on the male Panthers, who also underwent certain developments throughout the party's existence. The change in their idea of "revolutionary manhood" reflects the change in the Panthers' view of "revolution." Whereas at first a revolution was seen as a radical and violent one, later, this turned in to a less violent, more community-centered revolution. Farmer and Newton both mention the topic of gender roles and the changing definitions of black masculinity as well as black femininity.[22] Whereas

[19] Farmer.
[20] Farmer 91.
[21] Judith Newton, *From Panthers to Promise Keepers: Rethinking the Men's Movement* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2004).
[22] Ibid.

the Black Panther Party revolved around a tough concept of masculinity in their early years, eventually importance was placed on the members' softer, more feminine side. During this time, black masculinity and black femininity both revolved around activity within the party, but also around nurturing, caring, and a sense of community. Farmer and Newton also both agree on friction between male and female Panthers regarding employment. As women were getting more important jobs within the party, many male Panthers expressed their jealousy and anger. According to Newton, this caused insecurity to men regarding their manhood, since they were the ones who were "supposed to be" the head of the household. Newton stresses that because of this friction, female Panthers often depended on themselves or on fellow Panther women for support.

Not all scholars, however, agree on the nonviolent activism of the party's community service programs. Ricky J. Pope and Shawn T. Flanigan did research on the Survival Programs and found out that indeed, the programs were "viewed locally as acts of compassion, protection, and love,"[23] but also that some programs were related to violence, or, that the programs were often seen as ways to "revolutionize the youth."[24] The programs were suspected to be a form of coercion: in other words, those who were helped were (either implicitly or explicitly) expected to support the Black Panther Party from there on out. Regardless, most evidence has shown that this was not the Panthers' intention when setting up and carrying out their services by means of the Survival Programs. Pope and Flanigan conclude that despite these unavoidable traces of violence related to certain Survival Programs, what kept the programs going were the concepts of love, community, care, and protection. Additionally, they insist that the Survival

[23] Ricky Pope and Shawn Flanigan, "Revolution for Breakfast: Intersections of Activism, Service, and Violence in the Black Panther Party's Community Service Programs." *Social Justice Research* 26, no. 4 (2013), 445.
[24] Ibid, 457.

Programs, as well as political activism and violence were all put to use by the Panthers in order to serve similar purposes: "countering oppression and healing communities."[25]

Media Portrayal

Another important topic related to the Black Panther Party that has often been touched upon by scholars is the way Panthers were portrayed in the mainstream media. Farmer briefly discusses this as well. According to her, the Panthers' values were largely male-oriented in the beginning. The party revolved around manhood and masculinity, which outed itself in radical speeches about violence, a paramilitary structure and an intimidating appearance.[26] The Panthers often wore leather jackets, sunglasses, berets and sometimes guns, which is also how they were portrayed in the media (this tough appearance changed after their radical period, when members appeared "more like businesspeople than revolutionaries"[27]). The focus on masculinity also explains the lack of female Panthers in the mainstream media. Austin agrees, claiming that "they took the position that manhood was central to achieving black liberation." Indeed, while women were active members of the party, "the Panthers thought manhood served as a good word to illustrate their points."[28] According to Austin, manhood was used to define both men and women, "since it signified the willingness and ability to control one's own destiny," which could be owned by both sexes. Gender-wise, however, the party's ideals and outward appearance leaned far more to the masculine side; especially in the beginning.[29]

Every mistake the party made, physically or verbally, was used against the Panthers by the media. Reporters often added their own interpretations of the Panthers' statements to

[25] Ibid, 446.
[26] Farmer 58.
[27] Austin 327.
[28] Ibid, 79.
[29] Ibid.

articles, portraying them as "mad killers" and not trying to understand their struggles or real vision.[30] All in all, Austin believes the media, as well as the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the police, tried their hardest to portray the Panthers in a negative way. But, Austin admits, it was not all the media's fault, nor was it completely the fault of the FBI or the police. Such a negative reaction could have been expected, since the Panthers usually embraced their violent image and intimidating looks, and fought back against the police. This, Austin claims, virtually guaranteed its violent repression.

Peniel Joseph and most other historians agree that pictures and stories about the Black Panther Party shared by the media were often not representative of what the party stood for.[31] Joseph stresses the media's emphasis on violence used by the Panthers and the Black Power Movement in general, whilst it represses the (violent) reasons for why this often exaggerated violence came to be, such as lynching and other hate crimes against blacks. Joseph also agrees with Austin; he believes the party itself was partly at fault since "the embrace, at times, of violent rhetoric, misogyny, and bravado by black power advocates have made them and their struggles easy targets for demonization and dismissal."[32] Mistakes such as making claims which could easily be interpreted in the wrong way, as well as violent backlashes against the police, only gave the media more reason to put the Panthers in a bad light.

Historian Christian Davenport studied the framework used by the media to discuss any activity of the Black Panther Party. In order to do this properly, Davenport applied the Rashomon Effect: "the diverse accounts of … different actors and … the judgments about guilt/innocence that hang on the credibility of these competing versions of reality."[33] In other words, both sides are often interviewed in order for the reader to form a more precise opinion

[30] Ibid, 336.
[31] Joseph 751.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Davenport, *Media Bias Perspective,* 52.

on who is wrong and who is right. However, as historians such as Austin and Joseph have argued, the Panthers' words were often deliberately interpreted in the wrong way. Therefore, the reader was less likely to pick the side of the Panthers. The news shared by the Panthers' newspaper, the *Black Panther*, portrayed an image exactly opposite to this. To the Panthers, the police and others who did not agree with their opinions were seen as villains. Although the Panthers did not take the effort to interview both sides, this does not automatically make them more partial. This is due to the fact that the regular media usually remodeled the Panthers' words into some inaccurate story.[34]

According to historian Judson Jeffries, the Panthers "believed that blacks were being misinformed by mainstream media," and that therefore, the *Black Panther* (otherwise known as the *Black Panther Intercommunal News*) was formed.[35] Jeffries stresses the Panthers' willingness to educate the public (fellow Panthers or not) about factual events, by means of a newspaper or political education classes. Jeffries also points out that the more negative (and often untruthful) information the media shared regarding the Panthers, the more public opinion on them changed for the worse. As mentioned before, the negativity about the Black Panthers in the media was often posted in relation to the wish of government officials to eventually bring down the party. According to Jeffries, a large part of the public (or, those who were not familiar enough with the Black Panther Party) was not aware of this relationship, and therefore simply interpreted the Panthers as "small time gangsters."[36] As a consequence, the party lost support of both blacks and whites. Even some veterans of the civil rights movement agreed not to support the Panthers because they were too violent and reminded them of a "black Ku Klux

[34] Ibid, 58.
[35] Judson Jeffries, "Black Radicalism and Political Repression in Baltimore: The Final Case of the Black Panther Party." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 25, no. 1 (2002), 72.
[36] Ibid, 87.

Klan."[37] The party's Survival Programs were one way the Panthers tried to regain support from the public.

Strain also mentions the Panthers' media attention and how messages in the media are interpreted differently.[38] According to him, the word "violence" had different meanings to different (groups of) people. Whereas some interpreted the word as to refer to murder or the attack of whites specifically, others interpreted it as self-defense and yet others interpreted it as another word for "revolution." Because of this subjectivity regarding the interpretation of the meaning of the word "violence," the many articles which were written about the Panthers were often interpreted differently (yet almost always in a negative way). Most journalists related "violence" to the worst possible types of violence such as murder and rape, although the violence used by the Panthers was most often not this extreme. Strain hereby emphasizes the importance of subjectivity, as well as the broadness of negative opinions which kept surrounding the Panthers due to the media.

All these studies and their conclusions have contributed to the field of Black Power Studies. The field is broad, but I used these three topics to narrow the findings down in order to create a clear image of the recent discoveries related to the Black Panther Party, its female members, the Survival Programs, the violence used by the Panthers, and the media coverage (on the Panthers' violence).

Regarding violence, historians seem to agree on the fact that in many ways, the Black Panther Party was violent. However, research has shown that there is more to this topic of violence. Although the party's violence helped the Black Power Movement grow, it did not create it. The period from the civil rights movement leading up to the Black Power Movement (which includes the Black Panthers) gradually became more violent, which is partly due to the

[37] Ibid.
[38] Strain and Litwack, "Civil Rights and Self-defense," 82-83.

Panthers' contributions, but this gradualism is often mistaken for a quick change to a preference for violence.[39] The violence within the Black Panther Party, however, is usually agreed on as being a fact. Nevertheless, the role of violence within the party changed throughout time. As scholars like Austin point out, violence was important for both the party's formation and its downfall, and it also played a large role in the rest of its existence.[40] But a gradual change in identity due to a pressing stigma took the party from extreme radicalism to community-centered.[41] In other words, the party's stigma indirectly gave women more chances to contribute to the Black Panther Party, since they were usually more interested in the community service programs which the party had set up. Orleck's research shows the trait of perseverance in the fight against poverty which occurred in many black women, Panther members or not, during this time.[42] Within the Black Panther Party specifically, this trait seemed to pay off, since the female Panthers felt at home within the Survival Programs and made many contributions to the party in this way as well as by means of their work for the *Black Panther* periodical.[43]

Some disagreements between the conclusions made by scholars can be seen as well. Whereas Illner believed the change in identity had formed out of a fear of stigma, Newton believed that this change in identity happened because, gradually, the ideal of masculinity transformed from revolving around toughness to embracing the care for the community. Illner also understood the Survival Programs as being a way for the Panthers to potentially diminish or decrease their stigma. Pope and Flanigan emphasize the opposite: according to them, the Survival Programs were not at all tools to gain support. Instead, they were created out of a real concern for the poor (black) community, and a real willingness to help.[44]

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[39] Strain and Litwack.
[40] Austin.
[41] Illner, "Who's Calling the Emergency?"
[42] Orleck, *Storming Caesars Palace*.
[43] Farmer and Newton.
[44] Pope and Flanigan, "Revolution for Breakfast."

As for the party's negative portrayal in the media, most scholars seem to agree on one statement: far too often, the public was misinformed about the Panthers' intentions, ideas and actions. Farmer and Austin agree that, especially in the beginning, the Panthers' values were largely male-oriented and revolved around manhood, which was often reflected in their appearance. The Panthers' clothes and overall looks made them seem extremely intimidating and radical. Even though this extremity did not represent all of its members, and the overall degree of radicalism decreased over time, the media kept portraying the party in such a way. This, combined with the Panthers' aggressive backlash against the police (which made for even more negative media reports) and the rift within the party, eventually led to their downfall.[45] Davenport's emphasis on the media's use of the contrast between guilty and innocent, and victim and villain, along with the way journalists reworked Panthers' stories, explains the extremity with which the Panthers' use of violence was described.[46] This negativity and inaccuracy, as well as the Panthers' awareness of it, eventually led to the creation of the *Black Panther* periodical, which shows the high responsiveness of the party.

All of these developments within Black Power Studies, including many agreements as well as contrasting opinions, have shaped it into a dynamic and broad field. Yet these three elements (violence, female Panthers and Survival Programs, and negative media portrayal) can be combined into one study. Based on the recent developments discussed above, this study will elaborate on how exactly female Black Panthers defied the negative and violent media image by means of their contributions to the Survival Programs and the *Black Panther* newspaper.

[45] Joseph and Davenport.
[46] Davenport.

Chapter 2: A Historical Background

In order to achieve an accurate comparison between the Black Panther Party's image and their actions, challenges and developments, a historical analysis is necessary. This chapter will discuss the emergence of the Black Panther Party, as well as the challenges the Panthers met along the way, and how these and other factors led to their popular image which revolves largely around violence.

The Start of Black Power

Blacks had been suffering since their arrival in the area that would become the United States.[47] This suffering had always been based on the notion of inequality. After the years of slavery, discrimination, which went as far as hate crimes, remained a daily struggle for blacks all over the country. Whereas whites were protected by police forces, blacks were frequently the target of physical attacks or threats for minor crimes or crimes they had not committed.[48] Those blacks who worked rarely earned more than a minimum wage, leaving most in terrible living conditions. Since the jobs with better salaries usually went to whites, the gap between these two groups grew larger and the race difference and class difference became even more clearly divided. Black children did not receive the same quality of education (in poorly built school buildings). But presidents Truman up until Nixon largely ignored their pleas for equal treatment. Segregation continued even after its formal abolishment in 1954, as well as other forms of discrimination. In 1955, the gruesome murder of fifteen-year-old Emmett Till awoke something in the black community, and has often been seen as the last straw to many blacks.[49] Events such as this one induced the birth of the civil rights movement: blacks demonstrated, for

[47] Austin.
[48] Ibid, 336.
[49] Ibid, 6.

example, for the right of equality. Joseph describes the civil rights movement (1954 up until 1965) to have formed "the beginning of the demise of legal segregation and the acquisition of black voting rights."[50] The civil rights movement included peaceful protests as well as "sit-ins, protests, marches, beatings, and boycotts," which (according to Joseph) mark the movement's "Heroic Period."[51] The movement was mostly nonviolent, however, since the ideas which this it was built upon were largely those of Martin Luther King Jr., whose strong religious beliefs and peaceful ideologies inspired many. To him, the concept of justice "was based on the narrative of an oppressed slave people taking the initiative, insisting on freedom and carrying it through with increasingly disruptive actions until they won it."[52] In general, however, the people's way of achieving King's idea of justice was nonviolent, as opposed to the more radical ways used by Black Power activists in a later stage. Once this concept of Black Power came along, many civil rights activists were frightened by its ungraspable and unclear meaning, and what it would do to their image and that of blacks in general.[53] King's assassination in 1968 angered many, and this seemed to be the moment when radicalism truly started.[54]

The North and Far West experienced this period of aggressive discrimination differently than the South. In the North, New York especially was heavily oppressed. It was home to many blacks and jobs were scarce. Many lived in slums in surrounding areas, which were infamous for their "run-down housing, piles of refuse, abandoned buildings, and filthy streets."[55] Some politicians at the time, such as Senator Robert F. Kennedy, made an effort to diminish these problems, as well as other issues which led to them. Issues such as unemployment, which were eventually caused by discrimination, were tackled. This process was called "Restoration," and

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[50] Joseph 3.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Ray Galvin, ""Let Justice Roll down like Waters": Reconnecting Energy Justice to Its Roots in the Civil Rights Movement," in *Energy Research & Social Science* 62 (2020): 3.
[53] Wendy Conklin, *The Civil Rights Movement* (Huntington Beach: Teacher Created Materials Publishing, 2007), p. 26.
[54] Austin 168.
[55] Tom Adam Davies, "Black Power in Action: The Bedford-Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation, Robert F. Kennedy, and the Politics of the Urban Crisis," in *The Journal of American History* 100, no. 3 (2013): 736.

it is said to have been "an institutional expression of black power."[56] This was the case because the Restoration movement created, for example, businesses in order to embrace black pride and culture and help it grow.[57]

Since the South was less densely populated, urban slums and ghettoes were less common. This does not mean, however, that blacks had it easy in the South. Jim Crow laws, which enforced de facto segregation (segregation based on skin color without institutionalized legislation) and overall discrimination, were officially abolished in 1965, but afterwards discrimination remained an extreme issue.[58] Senator Kennedy helped as much as he could, but mainly in the North, and "criticized southern civil rights leaders and the black middle class for not reaching out to the growing black urban underclass."[59] This "growing black urban underclass" had to live with a white community which had thought of segregation as "separate but equal" for years, although this had never been true. Admittedly, the number of facilities for blacks had grown throughout the years, but facilities for whites still existed in far greater quality and quantity.[60]

All of these events and inequalities eventually led to the Black Power Movement: the more radical outgrowth of the civil rights movement. The first time the term “Black Power” was uttered was in 1966. Civil rights activist James Meredith had, like many other black citizens of the United States, witnessed several occasions on which he was attacked or in another way mistreated for racist reasons. For example, in 1962, Meredith was “escorted by federal marshals into his dorm room.”[61] Meredith chose to raise attention for these problems. Unfortunately, he was ambushed on the second day of his “March Against Fear”—during which he “vowed to

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[56] Ibid, 739.
[57] Ibid, 754.
[58] *Dictionary*, s.v. “de facto segregation,” accessed May 24, 2020, https://www.dictionary.com/browse/de-facto-segregation.
[59] Davies, “Black Power in Action,” 741.
[60] William E. O’Brien, *Landscapes of Exclusion: State Parks and Jim Crow in the American South* (University of Massachusetts Press, 2015), 97.
[61] Imani Perry, "All Power, All Poetry, to the People: From “Negro” to “Black” National Anthem," in *May We Forever Stand, May We Forever Stand*, Chapter 006 (University of North Carolina Press, 2018), 164.

walk across Mississippi alone" in order to inspire blacks to be hopeful and to let go of the fear of being oppressed by white society—inspiring figures such as Martin Luther King Jr. continued his march. The term "Black Power" was used to inspire and motivate fellow blacks.[62]

The civil rights movement and the Black Power Movement are often incorrectly interpreted as two distinct eras. Instead, the Black Power Movement should be seen as a more radical attempt for blacks' civil rights demands to be heard.[63] Although the civil rights movement had many achievements, a lot of demands made during the civil rights movement remained unfulfilled. As Timothy B. Tyson writes, "Black Power emerges as a revival of [the civil rights movement] rather than a break with the past that introduces something new."[64] The former movement slowly lost popularity, whilst the latter gained it. Additionally, violent protests happened before the Black Power era as well, and nonviolent protests were also common during the later era. The dividing line between the end of the civil rights movement and the start of the Black Power Movement is not crystal clear.[65]

The growth in radicalism is not the only feature that distinguishes the Black Power Movement from its predecessor. The concept of "black beauty" also started during this era. Malcolm X, who "reflects the roots of Black Power," shared this idea which quickly gained popularity among black men and women.[66] Principally, blacks were encouraged to embrace their race and their naturally "black" features, such as their natural hair type and their skin color, which whites, Malcolm X contended, had taught them to hate.[67] In 1967, Judy Hart (a female Panther) wrote that "the rise of Black Power caused black women to embrace black-centered ideals of beauty and politics and to redefine black womanhood within the context of movement

[62] Joseph 1.
[63] Ibid, 3.
[64] Tyson, as quoted by Austin, 5.
[65] Joseph 25.
[66] Ibid, 7.
[67] Austin 8.

organizing."[68] This self-love gave many blacks the confidence to start riots. It gave other, more radical blacks the willingness to lay down their lives for fellow blacks.[69]

The Start of the Black Panther Party

The people who were most motivated to make change were young black activists. Two of these young activists, Huey Newton and Bobby Seale, believed that cooperation between all blacks who felt oppressed would lead to liberation. Personal experiences and observations led them to curiosity regarding the experiences and living situations of other blacks, and once they fully realized how bad these were, they initiated the idea of the new grassroots organization.[70] The two men formed the Black Panther Party of Self-Defense in 1966, in the ghettoes of Oakland, California. Support spread quickly, as local chapters were set up throughout the country. The "self-defense" part in the party's name was included because its main principle was to only use violence or arms in the case of self-defense, such as in the case of police violence or hate crimes performed by groups such as the Ku Klux Klan. Members embraced Malcolm X's idea of black beauty and self-love, and were proud of who they were. Even Newton, who grew up often feeling inferior to whites and uncomfortable with his skin color, now radiated this sense of pride, and became a source of inspiration.[71] Newton recognized a systematic type of racism and discrimination: according to him, black children in Oakland schools were taught to be ashamed of their skin color, thereby creating a society in which blacks were not only looked down upon by whites, but also by themselves.[72] This awareness eventually caused the Panthers to find different ways to fight these inequalities.

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[68] Farmer 60.
[69] Austin 8.
[70] James A. Tyner, ""Defend the Ghetto": Space and the Urban Politics of the Black Panther Party." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 96, no. 1 (2006): 105.
[71] Austin 25-26.
[72] Newton, *From Panthers to Promise Keepers,* 54.

One of the ways in which these problems were addressed was the distribution of the party's newspaper, the *Black Panther,* which was created in 1967. An important figure related to this development is Emory Douglas, the party's Minister of Culture, as well as a graphic designer who created artwork used in the newspaper. Douglas has been described as "one of the era's most influential and controversial radical artists."[73] His art was used to raise awareness, as well as to gain members for the Black Panther Party. The Panthers preferred Douglas over civil-rights artists because they did not express radicalism the way Douglas did; his art often depicted violent scenes, and his messages really got through to the community.[74]

The Panthers wanted to achieve the goals of the civil rights movement (such as equality in terms of social treatment and payment), but chose a violent image which often (unintentionally) scared people into giving them what they believed they deserved. Especially at the start of the movement, the Panthers were in favor of putting to use their right to bear arms. Although these were solely used as a means of self-defense, they portrayed an intimidating image to outsiders (which will be discussed later in this chapter). According to historian Simon Wendt, however, the idea of self-defense "served primarily as a gendered symbol of defiance and male psychological empowerment."[75] In any case, self-defense remained important because it was often used as an acceptable "excuse" for the Panthers' occasional use of violence.

According to Peer Illner, "the Black Panthers declared American everyday life a vital threat in order to safeguard a consistent racial identity."[76] Whereas in the past blacks were often associated with slavery, they were now associated with crimes and homelessness. Thus, the Black Panther Party was not only aware of problems which were still somewhat graspable, such as poverty and unemployment, but also of the problem which regarded this racist mindset which

[73] Ayana Baltrip-Balagás, "The Art of Self-Defense," *Print* 60, no. 2 (2006), 85.
[74] Ibid., 88.
[75] Simon Wendt, "Protection or Path Toward Revolution?: Black Power and Self-Defense." *Souls* 9, no. 4 (2007): 321.
[76] Illner 480.

many Americans possessed. But not only their racial identity was in jeopardy; Newton warned fellow blacks that they were facing a threat of extermination within the United States. Although this was an exaggerated statement, it frightened and angered many blacks, who recognized a structural violence within American society "that was set to maintain the normative inferiority of Blacks."[77] In other words, they did not simply believe that violence was the answer to their problems regarding the threats mentioned before. Indeed, the Panthers believed that since nonviolent techniques were not effective enough, their only way to be heard was to not only look, but also act violent. This was the case for the entire New Left of the late 1960s, including Third World Liberation movements, led mostly by students who protested for a less Eurocentric education and more ethnic diversity within schools. Similar to the Black Panthers, the Third World Liberation Front had verbally attacked the government regarding their issues before, without many results. They realized that in order to "destroy" the government, they had to use violence, which is exactly what they did. The students protested violently until the government gave in and allowed their desired changes to universities.[78] Although the Panthers used similar techniques, they mostly proved ineffective or counterproductive. Especially in their early years, however, the Panthers only threatened violence as a manner of self-defense.

(Misperceptions Regarding) Violence

The Panthers did not strictly adhere to the rule when it came to using violence only as a means of self-defense; at times, violence was also used or threatened with when situations were not related to self-defense. Panthers were also known for being violent towards other members. For example, rivalry between different chapters (often due to acts by the FBI) was common.[79] It

[77] Ibid, 481.
[78] George N. Katsiaficas, *The Imagination of the New Left: A global analysis of 1968*. (South End Press, 1987), 27.
[79] Austin 133, 134.

must, therefore, be said that violence was an important part of the party's image and identity. So was group cohesion, but according to Pope and Flanigan, "group identity in and of itself does not motivate violence; exclusion and grievance often serve as a catalyst for violent activities."[80] This violent identity, however, is mostly true for the first years of the party's existence. During these years, many types of violence occurred in relation to the Black Panther Party. Historian Curtis Austin (mentioned in chapter 1) argues that radicalism had grown among blacks, many of whom were willing to die for their cause. For many Panthers, it was difficult to stay out of violent encounters with the police, since the violence and hatred was mutual and even nonviolent protests were unsafe. Panthers did not step back, but attacked in the name of self-defense. Growth in police violence angered blacks and thus also created a growth in the number of members.[81]

But the Panthers were more than simply violent. The party was built upon an entire hierarchical system. The Panthers put to use the idea of militancy, because they believed that they (as well as other blacks in the United States) were overly dependent on the white and rich and desired to seize power that would enable them to control their own destiny.[82] This, in addition to the training in weaponry which members received, "compelled many Americans to fear and misunderstand the party. The black berets, a popular symbol of revolution during the period, and black leather jackets made the Panthers appear much more menacing than they were in reality."[83] The Panthers figured that since police officers carried weapons, they should carry them as well, since they had the right to bear arms and this would make them equal to the police on some level.[84]

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[80] Pope and Flanigan, 448.
[81] Austin.
[82] Regina Jennings, "Poetry of the Black Panther Party: Metaphors of Militancy," in *Journal of Black Studies* 29, no. 1 (1998): 128.
[83] Austin 10.
[84] Ibid 49, 54.

It must be repeated that the weapons were rarely used, for at this point (1966 up until early 1968) the Panthers were mostly violent only when necessary by means of self-defense. To most Panthers, weapons had become a symbol rather than actual tools that were used on a daily, weekly or monthly basis.[85] The Panthers were against unnecessary danger and tried hard to keep their children safe from it.[86] The many conflicts between the Panthers and the police often only turned violent because the police showed aggression, often for the purpose of provoking a reaction.[87]

Panthers' violence usually proved inefficient or counterproductive. Between October 1968 and August 1970, Huey Newton was incarcerated for the murder of police officer John Frey. During Newton's incarceration, the Panthers shifted their focus to protesting for his release. These protests, which at times turned violent, were inefficient and were usually abruptly and aggressively ended by law enforcement. The violent encounters caused many injuries and deaths among the Panthers, and only worsened the party's reputation. Around 1971, the Panthers began disavowing violence. Their use of violence and militant rhetoric did not please moderate blacks and other outsiders of the party, which led to an even stronger feeling of isolation among the Panthers.[88] Although their intention was to only use violence out of self-defense, the Panthers "eschewed nonviolence, claiming it had not worked to improve the lives of most blacks."[89] They also recognized the counterproductivity of their violence, since by using it they repressed moderates instead of gaining support and new members.[90]

The conflicts related to Newton's incarceration, in combination with the murder of Martin Luther King (who had always praised nonviolence) caused a change in the party's view

[85] Carolyn R. Calloway, "Group Cohesiveness in the Black Panther Party," in *Journal of Black Studies* 8, no. 1 (1977): 61.
[86] Austin, 63.
[87] Ibid, 33.
[88] Nicholas O. Berry, "Theories on the Efficacy of Terrorism," in *Journal of Conflict Studies* 7, no. 1 (1987): 13.
[89] Austin, 63.
[90] Berry, "Theories on the Efficacy of Terrorism," 13.

regarding violence: the party dropped the "Self-Defense" part from its name in order to show that the Panthers' political concerns extended beyond this. Most of the party's chapters were formed during this period, and their main principles had become more radical, since "nonviolence [had] died with King."[91] Many Panthers now agreed, for example, that racist police officers should be killed; Minister of Information Eldridge Cleaver even encouraged soldiers to "stop killing the Vietnamese people" and "start killing the racist pigs who are over there with you giving you orders."[92] This could, however, still be seen as a form of (extremely radical) self-defense: that against discrimination and racism. The increase in radicalism from 1968 onwards also led to an even larger response from the FBI; starting this year, the government's "COINTELPRO-Black Nationalist Hate Groups" included all FBI field-forces.[93]

The Panthers' radical arguments were often used to justify such radical thoughts, which occurred more often than actually radical actions. The Panthers had always had a violent way of speaking; these types of speeches actually left an impression on people. Most of the aggression in the speeches, however, was "rhetorical flourish"; the words were intimidating, but the actions were less so.[94] Most blacks (including Panthers) were not willing to lay down their lives for the cause of the Black Panther Party, nor were they willing to use guns.[95] Those who did, however, left more of an impression than those who did not, hence the widespread alleged knowledge that all or most Panthers shared this way of thinking. This remained true, even when the Panthers changed their image and thus also their rhetoric from violent, aggressive and intimidating to worried yet hopeful and caring. Indeed, even when they heavily

[91] Austin, 116, 168.
[92] Ibid, 80, 100.
[93] Kathleen Cleaver and George Katsiaficas, *Liberation, imagination and the Black Panther Party: A new look at the Black Panthers and their legacy* (Routledge, 2014), 81.
[94] Austin 94, 112.
[95] Ibid, 107.

decreased their militancy, the damage had been done, and the previous image had been engraved in the minds of most Americans as well as people from other countries.[96]

When violent clashes did occur, it was often because law enforcement attacked the Panthers unnecessarily. Police officers destroyed food and equipment used by the Survival Programs, even though these programs were only brought into existence to help the black (or otherwise needy) community. This type of violence came from the idea that destroying the programs would weaken the Black Panther Party in general. The police even killed the organizer of one chapter in the hope that all programs would stop. The FBI also worked together with the media, aiming to scare the public by posting articles about the Survival Programs being "communist inspired."[97] As a response to these acts, the Panthers used Survival Programs such as the Breakfast Program as propaganda for the entire party. The FBI also targeted the Panthers, breaking in and stealing their documents, and cooperating with the mainstream media who often portrayed them as violent thugs who killed each other. Groups were also set up against each other, in order to slowly end the party's existence. An example of this is the case of Panthers Mark Clark (chair of the Illinois chapter) and Fred Hampton. After the FBI tried to set them up against each other (which proved to be ineffective), they were shot by the police.[98]

The Panthers, however, also portrayed themselves as extremely violent; especially in the early years. Cleaver had always thought in a more radical way than other influential members, and did not agree with the party's efforts to build and expand social programs. Rather, he was interested in guerrilla warfare, and did not shy away from sharing his radical thoughts with the public, which sometimes caused an exaggerated, violent image of the Black Panther Party. Former chairwoman Elaine Brown also once noted that the Panthers owned "pistols,

[96] John A. Courtright. "Rhetoric of the Gun: An Analysis of the Rhetorical Modifications of the Black Panther Party," *Journal of Black Studies* 4, no. 3 (1974): 250.
[97] Wendy Brame and J. Shriver. "Surveillance and Social Control: The FBI's Handling of the Black Panther Party in North Carolina," in *Crime, Law and Social Change* 59, no. 5, (2013): 513.
[98] Austin 261, 204.

rifles, automatic machine guns, explosive materials and devices, grenade launchers," and so on.[99] Even when the party's radicalism decreased, front pages of the *Black Panther* kept pressing on blacks' inequal treatment, and the party's fight against that.[100]

Eventually, the party started to crumble because Huey Newton's view stood directly against Eldridge Cleaver's. Whereas Newton had had enough of the violent approach of the Black Panther Party (because he had lost so many loved ones as a result of it) and wanted to focus on the Survival Programs, Cleaver was in favor of immediate and armed rebellion. Most members either chose Newton or left the party.[101] It took a while before the party completely fell apart. In the early 1980s, Newton was quoted to have said "I have no more energy. I just want to get high"—a statement which reflected the weakness of the remainders of the Black Panther Party.[102]

[99] Ibid, 77, 92.
[100] "The Black Panther Newspaper and Revolutionary Aesthetics," in *Art, Global Maoism and the Chinese Cultural Revolution*, 87 (2019): 100.
[101] Austin, 306.
[102] Huey Newton, as quoted by Joe Street, "The Historiography of the Black Panther Party." Journal of American Studies 44, no. 2 (2010): 361.

Chapter 3: The Panthers' Image and the Reality Behind It

The main reason why the Panthers are more known for their violence than for their community service (and other nonviolent actions) is because they were depicted extremely negatively by the mainstream media. In newspapers such as the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, the Panthers were usually depicted as vicious killers. Although the Panthers changed their identity in the 1970s by working hard on expanding their community service programs, their image hardly changed; whereas the headlines in the *Black Panther* started revolving around the Survival Programs and the Panthers' overall concern for community care, the mainstream media kept its focus on the Panthers' violent past.

The development which the Black Panther Party went through, however, went beyond the Panthers' focus on the Survival Programs. Although the mainstream media only mentioned male Panthers, female Panthers gained much influence and high ranks within the party. The contrast between the coverage of the Panthers in the media and the way they lived, worked and fought in reality is strong. The media portrayal of the Panthers, as well as the two developments regarding their actual views on gender division and their progress concerning the Survival Programs (two topics which have been largely ignored and understudied until recently) will be addressed in this chapter.

Media Portrayal

Panthers have been put in bad light by the media continually throughout their existence. Allegedly, they occupied buildings illegally and escaped arrest by the police on more than one occasion.[103] The 1971 *New York Times* article titled "Panthers Viewed as Ineffectual" was a clear example of how the media portrayed the Panthers, even during their later years. This

[103] Roy Reed, "25 Panthers Held in New Orleans," *New York Times*, November 26, 1970.

article claimed that Panthers "turn all too easily to guns in their rage and frustration" and that "they pose a serious physical danger to the police."[104] The nonviolent, community-focused side of the party was not mentioned, even though the Survival Programs had been growing for years at this point. "Black militant spokesmen," such as those of the Black Panther Party, were also blamed for the general rise in crime in the late '60s and early '70s. Supposedly, their "not so innocent" rhetoric had been disguised as "revolutionary slogans" which, according to the mainstream media, were actually ways to transform the black youth living in ghettoes into criminals.[105] Another article stressed how "a Black Panther leader" pressed his followers to obtain guns and kill authorities.[106]

Some titles did not fully correspond with the article they belonged to, giving readers an incorrect image on the Panthers. For example, one 1968 article was titled "Angry Panthers Talk of War and Unwrap Weapons," but in the fourth paragraph the article mentioned that "not all members of the organization talked of war," followed by an explanation.[107] This shows one of many techniques on how the media attracted the attention of readers. As mentioned before, the FBI and the media also often worked together to make the Panthers look as violent, intimidating and dangerous as possible. One example of this was an article titled "F.B.I. Brands Black Panthers 'Most Dangerous' of Extremists," posted in the *New York Times.*[108] The cooperation between the FBI and the media worked; according to one survey, "66 pct. of whites [considered] Panthers a Menace to the U.S."[109]

These statistics were also partially due to the fact that the Panthers were blamed for uprisings or riots, which were largely covered by the media. In late July, 1966, riots broke loose

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[104] "Panthers Viewed as Ineffectual," *New York Times,* August 24, 1971.
[105] Marie Syrkin, "Rhetoric That's Not So Innocent," *New York Times*, November 6, 1971.
[106] Bernard D. Nossiter, "Panther Parley Cheers Call to Kill Authorities," *Washington Post*, September 6, 1970.
[107] Earl Caldwell, "Angry Panthers Talk of War and Unwrap Weapons," *New York Times*, September 10, 1968.
[108] "F.B.I. Brands Black Panthers 'most Dangerous' of Extremists," *New York Times*, July 14, 1970..
[109] Louis Harris, "66 Pct. of Whites Consider Panthers a Menace to U.S.: The Harris Survey," *Washington Post*, May 11, 1970.

in the slums of Cleveland. According to bystanders (and the media), the Panthers had caused them. In one article about these riots in Cleveland, the Panthers were referred to as "a 200-member gang."[110] The Panthers and other blacks were most often depicted in such a negative way. The title of another article in this newspaper, posted a day later, which read "White-Hater Sees More Riots Ahead," described the prediction of a black man regarding the rise of the number of riots "in the Negro slum areas of Cleveland's eastside."[111] The title immediately captured the attention of the reader. Although there was no doubt many blacks felt some degree of hatred towards whites during this time due to their discrimination of and violence towards blacks, it seems unfair to merely depict one black man who felt this way, since many blacks' feelings towards whites were less radical or simply neutral.

Many Americans, black and white, wrongly interpreted these occurrences as expressions of frustration coming from all Panthers. Judges were even quoted to make broad statements, such as that Panthers practiced "hatred, violence and murder."[112] Often, newspaper articles showed misbehavior by the Panthers in court, worsening their image even more. Some were "[ordered] to behave in court" to even get a hearing.[113] The Panthers also allegedly acted according to "violent hatreds and naïve ideologies," and that since their ways had influenced the black majority in the United States, they had created "a dangerous fraud."[114]

Newspapers often implicitly chose the side of the white, rich, and powerful. One article in the *Washington Post* called "Inside Report: Tragedy of Black Power" blamed the Black Power Movement and the Black Panther Party for the stress it caused to white sheriffs who, as well as some black men, also participated in political elections. The white sheriffs were portrayed positively, as though they were victimized by the Black Power Movement and black

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[110] "Grand Jury Is Told 'Panthers' Planned Riots in Cleveland," *Washington Post,* July 28, 1966.
[111] "White-Hater Sees More Riots Ahead," *Washington Post,* July 29, 1966.
[112] "Angela Davis, As Attorney, Grills Judge," *Washington Post*, August 4, 1971.
[113] Edith Evans Asbury, "13 Black Panthers, Faced With Demand to Behave in Court, Plan to Reply Monday," *New York Times*, February 27, 1970.
[114] "The Panther Pathology," *New York Times,* April 25, 1971.

participants in the election.[115] Another article shared (with a surprised tone) the increase in black mayors throughout the United States, and the increase in Black Power activities that came with it.[116] This was portrayed as a negative development, and the black mayors were blamed. Many articles also emphasized the difference between black and white activism, supporting the latter. The author of one news article (and a board member in some antipoverty projects) called himself "a peaceable white voter, taxpayer and elected officeholder," and found the somewhat more radical ideas of the black board members "unthinkable."[117] In another article, the author mentioned his strong opinion regarding the social differences between the 1930s and the 1970s. According to him, New York neighborhoods used to be safer because "blacks knew their place"; they knew they had to stay out of the white neighborhoods. By making these kinds of claims, the author suggested blacks were dangerous, and whites were not.[118]

Although most articles did not look beyond the obvious violent steps taken by the Black Panther Party, one article recognized the party's disintegration: the rift between supporters of Huey Newton and Eldridge Cleaver, as well as the decline in the party's members, were noticed. The author, however, only remarked these negative points. The fact that the Survival Programs were growing at a very fast rate and helping more and more people was not mentioned. Even the party's highpoints were seen as negative, as the author found it "hard to believe that only a little over a year ago the Panthers, despite their small number, ranked as the most celebrated ghetto militants."[119]

The Black Panther Party has also been depicted as some sort of bad example which other groups such as the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) started to follow. One 1966 headline, for example, read "SNCC's Old Guard Rides Panther's Tail: Militants Turn to

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[115] Rowland Evans and Robert Novak, "Inside Report...: Tragedy of Black Power," *Washington Post,* August 5, 1966.
[116] Steven V. Roberts, "New Negro Mayors Make 'Black Power' Daily Reality," *New York Times,* May 23, 1969.
[117] John Sharnik, "When Things Go Wrong All Blacks Are Black," *New York Times,* May 25, 1969.
[118] Andrew Hacker, "The Violent Black Minority," *New York Times,* May 10, 1970.
[119] "House Report Attacks a "Myth": The Decline of the Black Panthers," *Washington Post,* August 27, 1971.

Power Game."[120] The unfair depiction of the Panthers in newspaper articles like this one is striking. The Panthers' nonviolent goals were not mentioned. Additionally, as opposed to a group whose mindset was so strong that other groups could not but follow, the Panthers were portrayed as a group which turned its followers into aggressive, white-hating people.

The two groups did indeed have similar perspectives on certain topics. For example, the SNCC as well as the Black Panther Party were opposed to the segregated school system, which led them to boycott certain schools. These boycotts were easy targets for the media, by which the boycotts were depicted as evil take-overs. The SNCC as well as the Panthers had valid reasons for their boycotts, however, since their children were growing up and learning in a discriminatory environment. In August 1966, for instance, the SNCC boycotted three schools in Harlem "to get African and American Negro history into the curriculum and Negroes into supervisory posts in Harlem schools."[121] Another article mentioned "the promotion of the neighborhood-school concept so that "the administrative structure reflects the ethnic composition" of the neighborhood."[122] Panthers also cooperated with the parents of children attending these schools. [123] They also boycotted other areas, such as shopping centers. By threatening with violence, the Panthers eventually made these boycotts work.[124]

Even though the police often started shootouts (without a justified reason), the Panthers were usually the ones blamed for it by the media.[125] According to one article, a shootout between the Panthers and the police led to two Panthers being killed. The rest of the group of Panthers were charged with attempted murder and armed violence.[126] The striking part about

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[120] Nicholas von Hoffman, "SNCC's Old Guard Rides Panther's Tail: Militants turn to Power Game," *Washington Post*, May 26, 1966.
[121] Thomas A. Johnson, "3 Harlem Schools Facing Boycotts: Protests Over Curriculum and Segregation Planned," *New York Times*, August 26, 1966.
[122] Thomas A. Johnson, "Black Panthers Picket a School," *New York Times*, September 13, 1966.
[123] Thomas A. Johnson, "Militant Negro Groups Moving To Aid Parents in School Fight," *New York Times*, September 22, 1966.
[124] "Snarls of the Black Panther," *Guardian* (London), June 28, 1968.
[125] Austin 119.
[126] "7 Panthers Indicted In Chicago Shootout," *Washington Post*, January 31, 1970.

this story is that although two Panthers were killed, only their group was charged. The article is also unclear on which group started the shootout, which leads one to believe it was the police, since they were usually protected by the media. Still, the Panthers were convicted whereas the police officers were seemingly allowed to shoot as much as they could. Another article on a similar topic depicted the Panthers involved as the villains, since the car was "rented in the name of Clark E. Squire, a defendant in the current trial of 13 Panthers."[127] Even though the shootouts obviously required two parties (in this case the police officers and the Panthers), only one was blamed and therefore put in a bad light by the media: the Panthers. The public therefore only saw the bad side of the Panthers and was made to believe that the police acted rationally, even though this was not always the case. Another article claimed that six Panthers were suspected to have been involved in the murder of a policeman—again, the Panthers' side of the story remained unclear. [128] The same goes for a group of thirteen Panthers who were "charged with attempting to kill five policemen": in a newspaper article, the story is told from the police officers' perspective in order to evoke in the reader a feeling of sympathy for the police officers and disapproval of the Panthers.[129] Other articles only mentioned deaths and wounded among policemen and did not mention those among the Panthers at all. [130] Even articles which clearly showed police brutality often seemed to defend this as they put emphasis on blacks' behavior. In one article, the death of two panthers was called a "mystery" and the police officers were defended.[131]

Other articles portrayed police officers as victims: "as the most visible symbols of authority, the police are prime targets of violence."[132] Whereas this might have been true, one

[127] Edith Evans Asbury, "Panther Linked to Shoot-out Car," *New York Times*, January 15, 1971.
[128] "Six Panthers Arraigned in Police Killing," *Washington Post*, May 30, 1970.
[129] "13 Panthers Charged in New Orleans," *Washington Post*, September 22, 1970.
[130] Donald Janson, "Panthers Raided in Philadelphia," *New York Times*, September 1, 1970.
[131] Martin Waldron, "2 Die in Clash With Police On Baton Rouge Campus," *New York Times*, November 17, 1972.
[132] Bernard McCormick, "The War Of the Cops," *New York Times*, October 18, 1970.

has to consider the context, and take causes and effects into account. As was the case with the Panthers, those who attacked the police did not do so without reason; they were intimidated and discriminated. These facts were not taken into account in most articles similar to the one mentioned.

Although most articles regarding the relationship between the Panthers and the police depicted the Panthers in a negative way, there were exceptions. One article mentioned racist Philadelphia police commissioner Frank Rizzo, whose hate for the Panthers had soon developed into a desire to have them all killed. The author of this article portrayed Rizzo as a mere reflection of the entire police force, and found it "easy to conclude that one Frank Rizzo is plenty."[133]

Only a small number of articles about the Panthers focused on something other than their violent outings, however. A few questioned the response of the police, and "whether the authorities … are engaged in a search-and-destroy campaign rather than in legitimate law enforcement."[134] Others focused on the Panthers' goals. One article stressed Huey Newton's idea for a new constitution, including "the right to decent housing for all, an end to police brutality [and] an end to conscription," as well as a proper and truthful education program.[135] Another example of a relatively objective view (as far as this is possible) would be a 1972 *New York Times* article on the same topic titled "Panthers Exchanging Guns for Ballots." The reader was first reminded of Panthers Ericka Huggins' and Bobby Seale's violent past; immediately after this, the text focused on their new political functions in what seemed to be a proud tone.[136]

It must be emphasized, however, that the number of articles which included statements like those mentioned above, is relatively small. Only a few articles attacked the behavior of the

[133] William Raspberry, "Violence Breeds Other Dangers," *Washington Post,* October 29, 1970.
[134] "Police and Panthers," *New York Times,* Dec 17, 1969.
[135] Michael Laapntan, "Black Panthers Forcing Pace in U.S. Ghetto Developments," *New York Times,* September 7, 1970.
[136] Paul Delaney, "Panthers Exchanging Guns for Ballots," *New York Times,* August 20, 1972.

police, and even fewer articles expressed support or at least a relatively objective view on the Panthers and their ideas. A 1966 article in *The Washington Press* addressed the repression which led to the Black Power Movement; a topic which was discussed during a conference where the white journalist was present. The author, among many others (blacks and whites) applauded enthusiastically.[137] Another article seemed supportive of the Panthers' involvement in the 1966 election. The author wrote that "they probably will not win the county offices they seek, but it may not matter. What matters is that they are running."[138]

Newspapers such as the *New York Times* and *The Washington Post* never posted many articles on the Survival Programs. Those articles that did focus on this subject were mostly written in a surprised and condescending tone—even a hint of objectivity was a rare find. In one article called "Panther Tactics Questioned," the author wrote about the public distrust towards the Panthers' intentions regarding the Survival Programs based on their violent past. Indeed, one man was quoted to wonder "how in the world they expected to get anything from anybody acting the way they did." The article also showed the suspicious view of the police towards the Panthers' Survival Programs. When a group of members visited supermarkets to gain support for one of their programs, law enforcement was "concerned that the Panthers may be trying to shake down local merchants." This accusation of extortion against the Panthers had been going on for a long time, although the Panthers always denied it. The tone of this article, however, suggested a strong suspicion of extortion and emphasized the Panthers' "rude manners." According to store owners, instead of asking for donations, the Panthers "demanded" money from stores. One police officer claimed that people felt threatened, although actual threats could not be proven. The article also paid attention to the intentions of the Panthers

[137] Paul Good, "Black Power: A Symbol or a Threat?" *Washington Post,* September 11, 1966.
[138] John Corry, "The Changing Times In Lowndes County: An All-Negro Ticket," *New York Times*, October 31, 1966.

regarding their Survival Programs, but their words were merely treated as statements which one may or may not trust (and, as the article implicitly suggested, one should not).[139]

Another article, also on the topic of the Panthers' change from militancy to community care, emphasized the extreme radicalism of the party before mentioning the Survival Programs with an undervaluing tone.[140] Again, the party's supposed extortion of stores for their cooperation was stressed. This article, as well as most others, severely undermined the values and successes the Survival Programs had for poor communities, black as well as white, since although the Panthers were able to help many people by means of their programs, the emphasis remained on the party's violent past, which had created a strong feeling of distrust among many Americans. Another article mentioned the reason for distrust: "clandestine ways die hard."[141]

Although only few articles came close to an objective view of the new situation, they did exist. An example would be the 1972 article "The Transformation of the Panthers." Here, the cries about extortion were explained rather than simply shared without context. According to journalist Ross Baker, the author of this *Washington Post* article, liquor store owner Bill Boyette had a feud with another chain of liquor stores and asked the Panthers to boycott the other chain. In return, Boyette would donate to the Survival Programs. When the two sides had different ideas regarding the amount of items donated, "Boyette balked and cried extortion."[142]

Whereas the mainstream media did not show a lot of change in their representation of the Black Panther Party throughout the years (with the exception of rare articles such as those mentioned above), the *Black Panther* did. In the early years of the newspaper's existence, its messages were angry and radical, often concerning the police (usually called 'pigs' by the Panthers). In October, 1968, the headline was "Pig Power Structure Uptight." In the main

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[139] Jeff Nesmith, "Panther Tactics Questioned," *Washington Post*, September 5, 1972.
[140] Adam Raphael, "Panthers Reject 'Rhetoric of the Gun'," *Guardian* (London), June 5, 1972.
[141] "The Panthers on a soft pad," *Guardian* (London), August 28, 1972.
[142] Ross K. Baker, "The Transformation Of the Panthers: The Changed Panthers," *Washington Post*, February 13, 1972.

article, Minister of Information Eldridge Cleaver wrote that past struggles were paying off, and that Panthers must continue their fight "or the pigs will rob the people of their victory and turn the hands of the clock backwards, whereas all of our struggles will end up in an inglorious defeat."[143] Other articles published by the *Black Panther* during this time also combined rhetorical techniques to scare the reader into radical thoughts and especially action. These messages were usually quoted from influential and well-known members of the Black Panther Party, such as Cleaver and Newton. The articles in the *Black Panther* also spread the message of issues such as political imprisonment (especially among Panthers). Eventually, however, most articles were somehow connected to the Panthers' hatred towards the 'pigs.' The points made in the articles were straightforward. One mentioned "it is very plain that this fascist government will do anything and everything to try and destroy those who are exposing any and every pig for what they really are."[144] Another front page was covered with a red-colored mugshot of Romaine 'Chip' Fitzgerald, a Panther political prisoner on Death Row.[145] Other headlines boldly stated "Pigs Assassinate Brother and Sister in Robbins, Illinois," and "The Black Panther Party Calls For a Mass Rally and National Press Conference to Announce Date and Place of Revolutionary Peoples Constitutional Convention"—another radical message.[146] The art usually matched the preceding article, in topic and in tone.

The Reality behind the Black Panthers' Image

In the early '70s, however, a development (which was only lightly covered by the mainstream media) started taking place: the Panthers' focus shifted to black children, whom were often

[143] Eldridge Cleaver, "Pig Power Structure Uptight," *Black Panther* (Oakland, CA), October 26, 1968.
[144] Black Panther Party, "Political Prisoners Within the Confines of U.S.A.," *Black Panther* (Oakland, CA), July 25, 1970.
[145] Black Panther Party, "Romaine 'Chip' Fitzgerald," *Black Panther* (Oakland, CA), August 3, 1970.
[146] Black Panther Party, "Pigs Assassinate Brother and Sister in Robbins, Illinois," *Black Panther* (Oakland, CA), November 21, 1970.
Black Panther Party, "Revolutionary Peoples Constitutional Convention," *Black Panther* (Oakland, CA), June 20, 1970.

viewed as "future revolutionaries," as well as their mothers whose poor living conditions meant they could barely provide their children with sufficient amounts of food or clothing. Research performed by historian John Courtright shows a clear decline in the use of violent rhetoric in the *Black Panther* in the early '70s.[147] Articles from this era sounded more hopeful as opposed to aggressive: "The world is yours … You young people, full of vigour and vitality, are in the bloom of life, like the sun at eight or nine in the morning. Our hope is placed on you."[148]

Later in the 1970s, multiple front pages were covered with large articles concerning a "black genocide": sickle cell anemia.[149] This disease is most common to blacks, and since most blacks were not able to afford testing or treatment for the disease, the Panthers set up a program which made this possible. The Sickle Cell Anemia Research Foundation was one of the party's Survival Programs, and the *Black Panther* provided awareness for the illness as well as the program created to combat it.

Many articles as well as artworks posted in the party's newspaper during this era were centered around this Survival Program as well as others, such as the Free Food Program. The Black Panther Party began revolving more and more around the role of the church and the Survival Programs; a development which had rarely been described in regular newspapers (and those articles which did mention it usually included a certain amount of apprehension).[150] When the government cut back on their funding for the Survival Programs in December 1971, the headline read "CASH-IN ON YOUR FAMILY," followed by a picture of a black family struck by poverty.[151] Although certain radical titles could still be found in later years, the party's development towards a more community-based and nurturing way of 'fighting' could clearly be seen from their newspaper articles and artworks.

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[147] Courtright, "Rhetoric of the Gun," 258.
[148] Black Panther Party, "The World is Yours," *Black Panther* (Oakland, CA), March 27, 1971.
[149] Black Panther Party, "Black Genocide – Sickle Cell Anemia," *Black Panther* (Oakland, CA), April 10, 1971.
[150] Black Panther Party, "The Role of the Church and the Survival Program," *Black Panther* (Oakland, CA), May 15, 1971.
[151] Black Panther Party, "Cash-in on your Family," *Black Panther* (Oakland, CA), December 11, 1971.

Although the *Black Panther* covered this development extensively, the mainstream media only posted a few articles concerning the Panthers' shift towards community service; almost all in a suspicious tone. Additionally, not all of what has been published by the mainstream media regarding the Black Panther Party in general is accurate. Not only does the media seem to heavily exaggerate the Panthers' use of violence (as has already been mentioned in the previous chapter), it also mostly mentions male members and rarely touches upon the party's Survival Programs. This has often left the public with a wrong interpretation of the Black Panther Party, which in reality included many female members (for long periods of time, the party included more female members than male members) and paid much attention to community care. Although male Panthers also participated in the Survival Programs, the programs were mostly headed by female Panthers, who made large contributions to the party which have not been properly recognized by most. Many influential female Panthers have been interviewed, and their experiences largely contradict the stories shared by the media. These issues have been discussed by Safiya Bukhari, a former member of the Black Panther Party who was politically active and took part in the organization and execution of several Survival Programs. In her book *Panther Sisters on Women's Liberation*, which was published in September of 1969, Bukhari includes her own opinion on these topics as well as the opinions of other female Panthers whom she interviewed. The following sections make use of this information in order to create a more accurate image of the Panthers' views and developments regarding gender division and their Survival Programs.

The Black Panthers' Gender Division in Reality

Whereas the media does not address female Panthers often, let alone their particular strengths and accomplishments, interviews and other primary sources from this time (the late 1960s and early 1970s) show that women played many significant roles within the Black Panther Party.

Women's involvement grew because of their own perseverance. According to Bukhari, the female Panthers (called 'sisters') used to do office or clerical type jobs, whereas the male Panthers (called 'brothers') had higher ranks and performed more prominent actions within the party. For example, the male Panthers were usually the ones who physically fought for their goals, with only a few exceptions for female fighters. At a certain point, the female Panthers had had enough of the lower ranks, and felt they had "to pick up guns just like brothers." They confronted the men with what was wrong with their behavior and how they needed to change.[152]

Slowly, the women started taking on "a more responsible role." This did not necessarily mean that they left their clerical type jobs behind and picked up the guns; it meant that they became more involved in making changes within the party, showing other Panthers, as well as the public, how they were capable of fulfilling more important tasks. They started writing more articles, attended more to the "political aspects" of the Black Panther Party, picked up public speaking, and started the community service programs.[153] Some women (a growing number) did participate in the fighting, whereas others were founding chapters throughout the country or worked for the General Committee. Female Panthers such as Claudia Chesson-Williams taught political education, and thereby strengthened the political motivation of many Panthers to push through.[154] These new jobs were of great importance for the growth of the Black Panther Party.[155]

The idea of women getting more significant tasks within the Black Panther Party was built on the ideal of gender equality. Bukhari and the Panther women she interviewed found gender equality within the Black Panther Party to be of great importance. Male Panthers valued their manhood, yet the definition of manhood differed to each member. Many male Panthers

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[152] Safiya Bukhari, *Panther Sisters on Women's Liberation: Including 1994 Black Panther Newspaper Perspective, On sexism within the Black Panther Party* (1994), 18.
[153] Ibid, 19.
[154] Yohuru Williams and Bryan Shih, "Claudia Chesson-Williams." *The Nation* 303, no. 15 (2016): 26.
[155] Bukhari, *Panther Sisters on Women's Liberation,* 9.

were afraid of losing their manhood to women who started getting higher ranks (often higher than the men's ranks), which caused much anger. Many men refused to take orders from these women, but according to Bukhari, all Panthers were revolutionaries and "revolutionaries had no gender."[156]

Another female Panther mentioned that manhood was not dependent upon keeping a woman subordinate to you; it was dependent on a man's revolutionary relationship with women. Women should be seen as the other half as opposed to the weaker half.[157] To avoid confrontations between male and female party members, however, it was important to keep the roles evenly divided. Once this was achieved, roles were finally "determined not by gender, but by ability."[158] This distinguished the Black Panther Party from other nationalist organizations. "In a time when the other nationalist organizations were defining the role of the women as barefoot and pregnant and in the kitchen," Bukhari writes, "women in the Black Panther Party were working right alongside the men, being assigned sections to organize just like the men, receiving the same training as the men."[159] Male chauvinism was seen as an evil, because it was bourgeois and "that's one of the things we're fighting against."[160] As historian Samuel Josephs writes, however, "contradiction existed between the Party's shift in ideology and attempts to put that ideology into practice."[161] The chauvinism and sexism that occurred within the party deprived it of "much needed energy, personnel, and resources." Austin argues that male chauvinism was especially unnecessary since women played crucial roles in sustaining the party. By public speaking, getting involved in the fighting, and taking care of the party's administration, Survival Programs, and newspaper, they had formed a contribution which was

[156] Ibid, 7.
[157] Ibid, 23.
[158] Ibid, 8.
[159] Ibid.
[160] Ibid, 20.
[161] Samuel Josephs, "Whose Revolution is This-Gender's Divisive Role in the Black Panther Party," *Geo. J. Gender & L,* 9 (2008), 425.

"clearly equal to or greater than that of the men." Austin even claims that male chauvinism within the party was the reason many female members left, which meant "a critical link was broken and the group could no longer hold itself together."[162]

The two other evils, Bukhari writes, were "female passivity" and "ultra femininity" (or, the "I'm only a female syndrome").[163] Women's participation within the party was of great importance, not only for the party's development, but also because it defined whether they won or lost the proletarian revolution—in other words, whether they were able or not to overthrow the bourgeoisie, which included the concept of male chauvinism.[164] The female Panthers took inspiration from women in (communist) Asian countries in order to form a clear and strong image of how women should act within a revolution and what roles they should take on themselves.[165] Those female Panthers interviewed by Bukhari, however, also feared female chauvinism: women as well as men were allowed to take pride in their gender, as long as they did not take it too far.[166] For this reason, the Pantherettes (a group of radical female Panthers) were not fully supported by many Panthers; the emphasis on the strength of one gender held back the unity between both genders. This unity, which was held together by the idea that all Panthers (male or female) were revolutionaries, encountered for the party's overall strength.[167] Yet masculinity remained a large part of what the party and its members stood for. According to female Panther Assata Shakur, the Panther women had to take on an arrogant, masculine attitude in order to be taken serious by male members: "we were just involved in those day to day battles for respect in the Black Panther Party."[168]

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[162] Austin 343.
[163] Bukhari 9.
[164] Ibid, 20.
[165] Benjamin R. Young, "Imagining Revolutionary Feminism: Communist Asia and the Women of the Black Panther Party." *Souls* 21, no. 1(2019), 2.
[166] Bukhari 25.
[167] Ibid, 20.
[168] Assata Shakur, interview by Tracye Matthews in *Matthews*, supra note 16, at 290, July 30, 1993.

One must keep in mind that gender dynamics differed between chapters. In some less progressive chapters sexism was a struggle which many Panther women met on a daily basis, whereas other chapters did not encounter these problems. The Illinois chapter of the Black Panther Party, for example, was much more progressive than many of its other chapters. Sexism within the leadership was tackled and those who did not commit to the rules were punished.[169]

The active way in which black women engaged with Black Power politics and the social struggle during this era created a feeling of independence, which led to black radical feminism.[170] Panther women actively worked towards a party which viewed its members as revolutionaries, as opposed to men and women. "In the process," historian Robyn Spencer writes, "they transformed themselves, the Black Panther Party, and the very idea of Black Power."[171] This also applies to the content of the Panthers' newspaper the *Black Panther,* which was largely edited by women. Although the Panthers' image was very masculine, their newspaper was thoroughly feminist. It also tried to combat the way the mainstream media represented black women. Usually, stereotypical representations were all that covered the topic of black womanhood in the mass media.[172] The *Black Panther* wanted to show how fierce, caring and strong black women really were, as well as what struggles they had to combat on a daily basis. Since the majority of the female Panthers (and many other black women in the U.S.) were mothers, they had to care for themselves as well as their children and possible lovers, which was difficult since most of them were on an extremely low budget. This was not usually portrayed realistically in the mass media. The *Black Panther*, however, did address the topic, whilst simultaneously advertising their Survival Programs.[173]

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[169] Jakobi Williams, "'Don't No Woman Have to Do Nothing She Don't Want to Do": Gender, Activism, and the Illinois Black Panther Party." *Black Women, Gender + Families* 6, no. 2 (2012), 29-54.
[170] Rhonda Y. Williams, "Black Women and Black Power," *Magazine of History* 22, no. 3 (2008), 24.
[171] Robyn Ceanne Spencer, "Engendering the Black Freedom Struggle: Revolutionary Black Womanhood and the Black Panther Party in the Bay Area, California," *Journal of Women's History* 20, no. 1 (2008), 109.
[172] Linda Lumsden, "Good Mothers with Guns: Framing Black Womanhood in the Black Panther, 1968–1980," *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 86, no. 4 (2009), 900.
[173] Ibid, 909.

By outsiders, black women, including female members of the Black Panther Party, were often interpreted as relatively masculine.[174] For the Panthers, however, femininity and masculinity changed meaning throughout time. Many conditions were applied to the ideals of both masculinity and femininity: the need for involvement with the party, strong political opinions and care for the community were included in both. For the Panthers, members needed to follow certain rules and be revolutionary, and these conditions applied to men and women. Masculinity and femininity became somewhat more fluid and alike within the Black Panther Party. This equality was part of the concept of black feminism. According to Newton, black feminism did not only grow amongst female Panthers, but also amongst male Panthers (though more slowly).[175]

Especially during the party's early years, however, female Panthers had to fight for equality between them and male Panthers. When they started getting more tasks related to the *Black Panther* newspaper, they started to post positive and supportive messages for female readers. Articles on the "Black Revolutionary Woman" encouraged female readers to strive for equality, meaning much engagement with the party and a strong opinion concepts such as racism and discrimination. It also often included motherhood, for black women realized that their strength partially lay in their ability to create and raise black children.[176] The powerful impact female Panthers had on the Black Panther Party has been largely ignored by the mainstream media, leading many people to form a wrong image of the party.

The Black Panthers' Survival Programs

Although the Survival Programs were also rarely covered by the mainstream media, they constituted a large part of what the party stood for. The programs gained real popularity after

[174] Kelsey Rae Winiarski, "Modern Painting, the Black Woman, and Beauty Ideologies: Carrie Mae Weems' Photographic Series Not Manet's Type." *Journal of Pan African Studies* (2018), 260.
[175] Newton.
[176] Farmer 84.

1970, “when all armed resistance and most overt aggression was dropped.”[177] The Survival Programs grew throughout time, but even before their peak in the early 1970s, they were an important part of the Black Panther Party. The programs were built upon the idea of helping the community and revolved around themes such as education, nutrition, housing and health. Panthers (mostly female) worked hard to help the community and keep foes such as the police and the FBI at bay.

In her book, Bukhari also addresses the Survival Programs, and so do the female Panthers whom she interviewed. Bukhari stressed the broadness of the party’s activities, and that the Survival Programs were only one branch which the Panthers put effort into. "While the Party was dealing with the issue of politically educating its ranks,” Bukhari writes, “it was also feeding hungry children, establishing liberation schools, organizing tenants, welfare mothers and establishing free health clinics." All of this was done whilst the party was under attack from the police and the FBI, so Panthers “were involved in constant struggle on all levels.”[178]

Although the Panthers tried to divide the roles evenly, the Survival Programs were mostly run by women (from within the party as well as volunteers). At the age of twenty, Panther Norma (Armour) Mtume ran a medical clinic that belonged to the Black Panther Party’s Survival Programs. Besides this job, she also served as assistant finance manager to the LA chapter. Later, she managed another free Panther clinic, and became minister of finance for the Black Panther Party.[179] Mtume served as an example of a large number of female Panthers who were able to get important and high ranks within the Black Panther Party, and how they served major as well as minor roles within the Survival Programs, since she was given a management function multiple times, yet also acquired a lot of pharmaceutical knowledge.

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[177] Illner 487.
[178] Bukhari 13.
[179] Yohuru Williams and Bryan Shih, "Norma (Armour) Mtume," *The Nation* 303, no. 15 (2016), 28.

Ericka Huggins, another highly involved Black Panther, is another example of a female Panther whose hard work allowed her to achieve high ranks within the Black Panther Party and its Survival Programs. Huggins was the leader of the Los Angeles chapter of the Black Panther Party. Later, she became director of the party's Oakland Community School. In an interview, Huggins was quoted to say that the "community-survival programs helped people to see how communities could be transformed by seeing it in their own lives, and then they would want to support that which transformed them." In other words, because the Panthers changed people's lives for the better using the Survival Programs, they gained support from these people.[180] Therefore, although the mainstream media did not fully recognize the ambitions and achievements of the Survival Programs, the Panthers themselves did. In 1971, Bobby Seale was quoted to say: "The main thing we want to get across, I want to get across, to the people is that the Party is based on Survival Programs to serve the people."[181]

The Survival Programs, however, were not simply initiated because of the Panthers' concern for their communities' wellness. Their criticism on, for example, hunger and malnutrition in black communities was built on a larger critique: according to the Panthers, this hunger was the intended result of institutional racism. The Panthers also believed that the way food distributers (white or black) did their job only helped capitalism grow, and capitalism could not coexist with freedom.[182] Later, the Panthers realized that one way to fight this racism was to show acknowledgement of it and resist its results by setting up food programs to feed the communities themselves.

Another function of the Survival Programs was education. In combination with political education classes which many Panthers took, the Survival Programs served to teach people (adults as well as children) the message and ideology of the Black Panthers. This is not to say

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[180] Yohuru Williams and Bryan Shih, "Ericka Huggins," *The Nation* 303, no. 15 (2016), 29.
[181] Bobby Seale in *Black Panther*, 1971, as quoted by Courtright, 255.
[182] Mary Potorti. "'"Feeding the Revolution": The Black Panther Party, Hunger, and Community Survival," *Journal of African American Studies* 21, no. 1 (2017), 87.

that the Survival Programs were solely created with the intention of recruiting new members, but the Panthers did not shy away from trying to inform people in order to get them on their side.[183]

The Free Breakfast Program quickly became the most popular and most influential of all Survival Programs. The main reason for this was its effectiveness. It served as the model for breakfast programs which still exist in primary schools throughout the United States.[184] The mainstream media, however, did not cover this positive news. It focused on the Panthers' alleged extortion of small store owners and other local food distributors in an effort to receive more donations for the programs. Admittedly, the Panthers distrusted and disliked shop owners at first. As mentioned before, they believed these people engaged with and contributed to capitalism, which changed when they realized these people and their businesses were necessary to properly help the community.[185] Stores owned by black people were expected to support the programs by donating items. The fear and distrust towards the Panthers among store owners, described in the newspaper articles discussed before, did exist. However, this differed for every program throughout the country.[186]

The Black Panthers soon expanded their Free Breakfast Program by adding a food program for adults, along with a free clothing program and a free shoe program.[187] The poor communities which the Panthers targeted with their programs highly appreciated the Panthers' efforts, and the diversity of the programs meant that more people could be helped with different problems. Besides the programs which focused on getting people physical necessities such as

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[183] Robert S. Oden and Thomas A. Casey. "Power to the People: Service Learning and Social Justice," *Electronic Magazine of Multicultural Education* 8, no. 2 (2006), 13.
[184] Nik Heynen. "Bending the bars of empire from every ghetto for survival: the Black Panther Party's radical antihunger politics of social reproduction and scale," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 99, no. 2 (2009), 406.
[185] Husain Lateef and David Androf, ""Children Can't Learn on an Empty Stomach": The Black Panther Party's Free Breakfast Program," *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare* 44, no. 4 (2017), 9.
[186] Ibid, 10.
[187] Ashley Chaifetz and Priscilla Murolo, "Introducing the American Dream: The Black Panther Party Survival Programs, 1966–1982," *ProQuest Dissertations and Theses* (2005), 25.

those mentioned above, the Panthers also created (dental) health clinics and programs which offered free pest control, plumbing and maintenance.[188] Indeed, the programs existed to ensure poor (black) communities of physical necessities, a stable health, and a safe living environment. This ambition and hopefulness, however, was rarely covered by the media, leading many to associate the Panthers solely with masculinity and violence.

[188] David Hilliard, *Black Panther Party: Service to the People Programs* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2009).

Conclusion

The contributions of female Panthers have been largely overlooked by the media and have only recently become a topic of discussion for scholars. By including a combination of previous research, historical information and case studies on several primary sources, this research aimed to provide a broad image on the contrast between the stereotypes which haunt the Black Panther Party versus the reality in which Panthers lived, as well as the overlooked and understudied female aspects of the Black Panther Party. The literature review showed that although scholars had previously researched the Panthers' violence, their Survival Programs and the way they were portrayed in the media, a gap could be found in the field: the clear contrast between the Panthers' media portrayal and their real interests had not yet been addressed. This study filled that gap: by involving multiple types of research, it contributed to the field of Black Power Studies by broadening the female-focused element of this field, as well as the element dedicated to media portrayal.

From the conclusions drawn in this study, we can assume that the stereotypical image of the Black Panther Party was, and still is to many, overly masculine and overly violent. This was mainly because of the mainstream media, which worked together with the FBI and warned the public against male revolutionaries which were supposedly unpredictable and dangerous because they used violence often and unnecessarily. When the Survival Programs were finally touched upon by the media, they were distrusted and rarely supported.

In reality, however, the Black Panther Party included more female members than male members at many points in time. These women fought against male chauvinism and for gender equality within the party. Many received higher ranks than men. Therefore, women were not only active in larger numbers; they also made important contributions which were largely ignored by the media. Women worked hard on the *Black Panther* newspaper, maintaining high positions and thereby taking control of much of the paper's content. From 1970 onward

especially, women also worked hard on the Survival Programs and helped them grow. This allowed for a development to take place: from 1970 onwards, the Panthers focused on community service as opposed to violence in order to accomplish their goals. Mainly because of the female efforts, the Black Panther Party was able to help as many poor communities as possible whilst also generating support for the party.

The Panthers' success was not everlasting. The rift within the Black Panther Party was one reason for its eventual collapse. The negative media coverage of the party, as well as the attacks by the FBI and the police, were another. Panther leaders were often framed, which led to even more negative and untrue media coverage. Evidence also exists that the FBI helped introducing the rift between Newton and Cleaver, and therefore partially destroyed the party from the outside and from within. By harassing members and pushing them to the brink of insanity (and beyond that), the FBI created a feeling of distrust between many members and made it difficult for them to hold things together.[189] The mainstream media also published negative news on the Panthers because President and FBI director J. Edgar Hoover demanded them to be publicly ridiculed and "not merely publicized."[190] Because the Black Panther Party was attacked from multiple angles, it lost strength and trust and eventually fell apart.

In later decades, women remained active in the field of African American activism. Especially in the late 1970s, organizations such as All-Africa Women's Confidence (AAWC), which focused primarily on African women, as well as organizations which had a broader focus such as the Congress of African People (CAP) included many female members. Their actions were globally received; worldwide, these organizations redefined black women's roles and pursued the ideal of equality between the races. The organizations held meetings and protests in an effort to fight racism as well as sexism in the United States and abroad.[191] Organizations

[189] Austin 298, 302, 322, 330.
[190] Austin 322.
[191] Farmer 127.

such as the Third World Women's Alliance critiqued the United States and its social and political order especially.[192] Organizations such as these prove black women's determination for the pursuance equality between the races and the sexes worldwide.

As mentioned before, this study had its limitations. Only a relatively narrow range of primary sources was used and the focus was on a limited time frame and a limited geographical area: the late 1960s and early 1970s in the United States. The limited time frame and geographical area were most relevant to the topic of research. Additionally, limitations were due to the limited amount of time and words that had been granted. Based on these conclusions, practitioners should consider investigating the role of female Panthers in the international relations of the Black Panther Party, since the Panthers were highly active in this area, in order to broaden the geographical area of research. Another suggestion would be to investigate this topic, yet in another time frame. Further research is also needed in order to discover women's significance during later years: the years during which the Black Panther Party changed its tactics entirely, focused solely on Survival Programs, and eventually lost many members.

From the results of this study, however, the thesis statement can be confirmed: not only is the significance of the nonviolent Survival Programs undervalued in the party's popular image—so is the significance and even the existence of (other forms of) female involvement and crucial contributions to the Black Panther Party. Indeed, Panther women fought racism as well as sexism, whilst simultaneously helping poor communities by building up community service programs. In order to efficiently battle their enemies and achieve equality on multiple levels (equality between the races as well as between the sexes), Panthers had to work together, and their motivation must still be seen as an inspiration. As Bukhari writes, the Panthers' struggle was "a collective struggle, a struggle for all of our people, men and women, and as long as one of us is oppressed, none of us is free."[193]

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[192] Ibid, 159.
[193] Bukhari 15.

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