

“No One Ever Asks What a Man’s Role
in the Revolution Is”

*Gender Politics and Leadership in the
Black Panther Party, 1966–71*

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By the middle of the 1960s, young black people in the United States were growing weary of civil rights leaders telling them to turn the other cheek so that they could “overcome someday.”¹ The inspiring eloquence of Martin Luther King, Jr. had been challenged, even ridiculed, by the fiery message of Malcolm X. For black youth, who increasingly found themselves trapped in overcrowded northern ghettos, many of the old movement slogans and ideas—particularly nonviolence as a philosophy—were becoming obsolete.² In spite of the gains of the southern black freedom movement, civil rights organizations and leaders, especially King, were slowly but surely becoming aware of growing dissatisfaction among blacks with the limitations of hard-won legislation, especially its failure to ensure economic gains and tackle seemingly intractable forms of southern and northern racism. The call for “Black Power” became the order of the day.

Beginning in 1964 and continuing each summer through 1968, disillusionment, frustration, and economic discrimination fueled urban rebellions in black communities across the country.³ It was within this context that the Black Panther Party for Self Defense (BPP) formed and staked its claim for leadership of the black masses. In October 1966, Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale officially founded the Party in Oakland, California, one of many U.S. cities noted for its racist and repressive police force. The main targets of their initial organizing efforts were disaffected urban black male youth, and their activities

centered on addressing police brutality through armed self-defense. Although the actual size of their constituency and membership is open to debate, the Party had a significant impact on the ideological and political developments of the late 1960s and early 1970s both nationally and internationally.

Contemporary expressions of dissatisfaction with "traditional" political leaders, especially among young African Americans, are reminiscent of the sentiments that led to the revolutionary youth movement of the late 1960s in which the Panthers played a critical role. Yet, in spite of renewed popular interest, the political ideology and inner workings of the BPP still remain hidden from those most likely to take up the mantle of resistance in the current era. The first two years of the Black Panther Party's development have been fictionalized, romanticized, and popularized in the recent larger-than-life Hollywood film *Panther*, complete with a supporting cast that looks like a BET (Black Entertainment Television) top-forty countdown, a full line of Panther gear for the nineties, two "Panther inspired" CDs, and a "PANTHER 'Power to the People' Sweepstakes" in which the winner receives \$1,000.00 personal empowerment cash.⁴ However, the content (or lack thereof) of this and many of the other contemporary popular sources influencing our collective memory of the Panthers, including movies, hip-hop magazines and music, and mainstream newspapers, may in fact serve to reproduce rather than rectify mistakes and miscalculations of the past.

The goal of this essay is to provide a perspective on an often-ignored aspect of the history and legacy of the BPP, namely, its gender politics. The gender ideology of the BPP, both as formally stated and as exemplified by organizational practice, was as critical to its daily functioning as was the Party's analysis of race and class dynamics in black communities. Rather than the Party's gender politics being secondary to the "larger" struggle against racism and capitalism, I instead posit that the politics of gender were played out in most aspects of party activity and affected its ability to function as an effective political organization.

A comprehensive scholarly analysis of the ideology, activities, successes, and failures of the Black Panther Party has yet to be undertaken by historians. While there exist numerous first-hand accounts that were written during the late sixties, as well as several recently published autobiographies and memoirs, most of these sources are

primarily descriptive and do not attempt a sustained investigation of the race, class, or gender politics of the Party.⁵ My purpose here is to begin this process with an examination of the construction of gender ideology within the context of Panther Party politics from 1966 to 1971.⁶ Gender struggle affected the Party's political ideology and positions taken on a variety of issues, relationships with the larger black and progressive political communities, daily working and living arrangements, and the organization's ability to defend itself from state-sponsored disruption. The Party's theory and praxis with regard to issues of gender and sexuality should be viewed as an ongoing, non-linear process that was affected by factors both internal and external to the organization. This analysis of gender ideology offers insights into the internal politics of black communities, especially relations of power between and among men and women, and the myriad ways in which these dynamics influence political movements and popular perceptions of them.

Although much of the public rhetoric of the BPP and other Black Power organizations tended to center on issues usually defined (by themselves and by scholars) as race and/or class concerns, contestation around the politics of gender formed a significant component of the "hidden (and not so hidden) transcript" in the intracommunity discourse.⁷ Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham suggests that race functions as a metalanguage in Western culture and tends to subsume and obscure gender, class, and other social relations. In addition, she argues that scholarly works in women's studies and African American history that are premised on the assumption of racial, gender, and class homogeneity "preclude recognition and acknowledgment of intra-group social relations as relations of power," and overlook crucial micropolitical struggles in black communities.⁸ In this essay, I wish to show how the imagery, rhetoric, and praxis of the BPP contain components of ongoing power struggles, overt and hidden, over gender identity and sexuality. These struggles in turn complicate and disrupt romanticized notions of "nation-building" and/or black unity, both historical and contemporary, that presume the existence of a monolithic black community and privilege male authority/dominance in the family, as well as in the political and cultural arenas.

In this analysis, gender is not to be understood as a discrete category unto itself, but one of several interacting factors, such as race, class, color, age, and sexual orientation, that together make up indi-

vidual identities, as well as the social terrain upon which we experience our realities. To say that I am examining gender and the politics of the BPP does not mean that this work is solely about sexism in the Party, or women's experiences. Instead, a gendered analysis also encompasses the experiences of men; definitions of manhood and womanhood; the interconnections between gender, race, and class-based oppression; and the impact of all of these factors on the successes and shortcomings of the BPP.

The category of gender was not as fully politicized and theorized during the late 1960s as it is today, thus one must resist the temptation to impose current standards to measure the feminist, nationalist, or revolutionary credentials of the BPP. Each of these social theories and categories must be understood as being situationally and historically specific. What constitutes feminism or radicalism in one time period is not necessarily recognized as such in another. Nevertheless, it is useful to compare and contrast feminism and race-consciousness across historical periods, examining continuities and changes. In addition, it is possible to assess which theories and actions constitute a challenge to status quo relations of power in different eras, and thus to assess the merits of political organizations on their own terms and in their particular historical context.

Ideas about gender and gender roles were far from static within the BPP. As the Party spread numerically and geographically, class and gender diversity within its ranks increased. New members brought new (and old) ideas with them. Despite the initial self-conscious creation by the leadership of a masculine public identity for the Panthers, some women and men in the Party challenged the characterization of the struggle as one mainly for the redemption of black manhood, and worked within its constraints to serve the interests of the entire black community. The stories of the BPP cannot be reduced to a monolithic party line on "the woman question," or a linear progression from an overtly and overwhelmingly sexist organization to a pro-black feminist/womanist one. Instead, one must pay attention to internal conflict as well as agreement, overt as well as covert manifestations of this dialogue, change over time, diversity of individual experiences, and internal as well as external influences. While it can justifiably be argued that the BPP at various points in its history was a male-centered, male-dominated organization, this point should not negate the important ideological and practical contributions of its

female members or of the men who resisted chauvinistic and sexist tendencies. Indeed, the diversity, both in terms of geography and personnel, of an organization whose existence spanned from Oakland to Algiers and from 1966 to 1982, cannot be understood and appreciated through simplistic explanations or superficial head counts of official leadership roles. As will be shown, black women were critical players in the BPP, and the Party overall had a significant impact on the political life of many youths and adults outside its ranks.

In this essay I present an overview of the larger sociopolitical context with regard to gender ideology in which the BPP functioned. I also present some examples of BPP theory in action in an attempt to assess the day-to-day gender struggle and its implications for the lives of party members and the life of the Party.

Competing Gender Ideologies

The designation, conscious or otherwise, of specific gender-based roles for women and men within the Black Panther Party began with the Party's inception. Of course, this process did not happen in a vacuum. Thus, it will be helpful first to briefly examine the gendered context in which the Panthers operated. In addition to having their own ideas about the roles men and women should play in society and within the Party, the founders and members were also influenced by competing ideologies, and vice versa. These competing ideologies could be either supportive of or opposed to the status quo of American society. Three such ideologies that bear mentioning because of their enormous impact on the period are cultural nationalism, feminism, and the black matriarchy/tangle of pathology thesis.⁹ These three ideological discourses illustrate historian E. Frances White's contention that "counter discourse struggles against both dominant and competing oppositional discourses."¹⁰ In other words, the oppositional rhetoric of the BPP challenged and was challenged by other "alternative" as well as mainstream perspectives. There were, of course, many other important hegemonic and counterhegemonic theoretical constructs vying for prominence. These three are highlighted because of their impact on the evolving black consciousness of the period in general and on the BPP specifically.

One of the most popular proponents of black cultural nationalism,

at least on the West Coast in the late 1960s, was the Los Angeles-based US organization headed by Maulana Karenga. The US organization stressed the necessity for cultural awareness among blacks to be gained primarily through the revival of African traditions—real or invented—of dress, language, religion, and familial arrangements as well as the rejection of white supremacy. The relationship between Karenga, the US organization, and the BPP changed over time just as the Panthers' own ideological positions changed. In the early years of the Party, Karenga participated in meetings and rallies in support of the BPP.¹¹ However, over time as their respective ideologies were clarified and contradictions were exposed, the BPP became scathingly critical of the US organization. Chiefly, the Party's critique was based on the fact that Karenga's group promoted cultural nationalism and black capitalism. Drawing on the theories of Frantz Fanon, the Panthers repeatedly asserted that cultural pride was a necessary phase in black people's political development, but it did not guarantee liberation, nor did black skin necessarily identify one as an automatic ally.¹² The open conflict between the two organizations came to a head in January 1969 when two prominent Panthers, John (Jon) Huggins and Alprentice "Bunchy" Carter, were killed by US members in a shootout at a Black Student Union meeting on the UCLA campus.¹³ This incident sparked numerous articles and political cartoons in *The Black Panther* that criticized cultural nationalism in general and Karenga in particular. There were even charges leveled that Karenga himself was on the payroll of the FBI and/or various other police and government agencies.¹⁴

One major component of US rhetoric called for women's submission to traditional male "authority," and promoted the notion of complementary gender roles. According to Karenga's teachings,

What makes a woman appealing is femininity and she can't be feminine without being submissive. A man has to be a leader and he has to be a man who bases his leadership on knowledge, wisdom and understanding. There is no virtue in independence. The only virtue is in interdependence. . . . The role of the woman is to inspire her man, educate their children, and participate in social development. . . . We say male supremacy is based on three things: tradition, acceptance, and reason. Equality is false; it's the devil's concept. Our concept is complementary. Complementary means you complete or make perfect that which is imperfect.¹⁵

Karenga and other proponents of complementary gender roles for men and women rarely addressed the power imbalances between the respective roles prescribed. These theories also tended to rely heavily on biological determinism and notions of “natural order” in assessing and assigning separate roles for black women and men. In practice, complementary theory often led to ridiculous incidents between black women activists and members of US, such as when Panther Elaine Brown was told she had to wait to eat until after the male “warriors” had been fed, and, on another occasion, when Angela Davis was discouraged or prevented from taking on a leadership role because it was deemed a “man’s job.”¹⁶

E. Frances White’s important article “Africa on My Mind: Gender, Counter Discourse, and African-American Nationalism” provides a thorough critique of various strains of cultural nationalism, including Karenga’s, that “can be radical and progressive in relation to white racism and conservative and repressive in relation to the internal organization of the black community.” As White points out, Karenga and other nationalists construct “collective political memories of African culture . . . that both counter racism . . . and construct utopian and repressive gender relations.” In particular, she argues that in “building off conservative concepts of ‘traditional’ African gender relations before colonial rule, [Karenga] argues that the collective needs of black families depend on women’s complementary and unequal roles.”¹⁷

Although BPP members themselves invoked complementary theory early in the organization’s development, the unapologetic male supremacist policies and practices of the US organization exacerbated the already tenuous relationship between the two organizations.¹⁸ Bobby Seale included the issue of male chauvinism in his public opposition to cultural nationalism in a 1970 interview. He stated that “[c]ultural nationalists like Karenga, are male chauvinists as well. What they do is oppress the black woman. Their black racism leads them to theories of male domination.”¹⁹ For Seale, the link between racism and sexism was that both were practices of domination that fed upon each other through some unspecified process. He presented the BPP as a viable alternative to US and cultural nationalism on the basis of the Panthers’ ostensibly more progressive party line on “the gender question.” The timing of Seale’s statement reflected ongoing, internal Party struggles to reconcile the existence of male chauvinism within its ranks and refine its gender ideology. It may also have been

an attempt to deflect negative attention away from the Party's own contradictions on these issues.

A second ideological trend that influenced the social and political terrain of the 1960s is contained under the rubric of feminism and the predominantly white Women's Liberation Movement (WLM). Many young white women who eventually played leadership roles in the second wave of the feminist movement in the United States had been previously politically involved and developed their budding gender consciousness in the southern Black Freedom Movement and the New Left.²⁰ For example, in 1965, responding to a buildup of gender tensions within Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and a heightened recognition of their own capabilities, women in the organization pressed that group to issue a statement on women's roles in the student movement and women's liberation.²¹ The growth of various factions in the women's movement, such as radical feminism, lesbian separatism, and women of color caucuses, continued throughout the decade and into the 1970s.²² Although early proponents of the WLM professed to encompass the issues, needs, and demands of all women, its initial definition of the term *feminism*, and its strategies, ideology, tactics, and membership, were dominated by white middle-class women.

The rise in visibility of a feminist women's movement in the mid to late sixties is portrayed as the exclusive domain of white women in most historical texts. While the proliferation of explicitly feminist organizations among white women cannot be denied, some of the earliest stirrings of an incipient gender consciousness can be found in the activities of black women, especially those in the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC).²³ Black women in black (mixed-gender) organizations did not necessarily relate to the label *feminist* as defined by the theories and activities of the predominantly white WLM organizations. However, this lack of identification with the terms "feminist" or "women's lib" should not preclude the recognition that black women who organized on issues, such as police brutality, racism, poverty, imperialism, and black women's liberation, had a significant impact on the development of gender consciousness during this time.²⁴ In fact, their involvement and leadership in these arenas represented a challenge to the black community to view all of these issues as indeed black women's issues, as well as concerns for the community as a whole. Their presence in black organizations

eventually forced a recognition of the sexism in some of those organizations and of the racism and middle-class biases of many white women's groups. Historian Deborah King reminds us that "black feminist concerns . . . have existed well over a century. In other words, black women did not just become feminists in the 1970s."²⁵ Nor did they need to rely on white women's organizations and theories to define the terms of their womanhood or political interests.

The Black Panther Party came into direct contact with various predominantly white women's liberating groups. The level of these interactions differed between chapters and even varied from person to person. In some areas, local WLM groups organized fundraisers and rallies for Panther political prisoners. For example, an article in *The Black Panther* newspaper reported the attendance of more than five thousand people at a rally in support of the Panther New Haven 14 and in protest of the particularly cruel treatment of imprisoned Panther women. According to the author of that article:

Black Panther Party Chapters and Branches, and Women's Liberation groups from Massachusetts, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Washington, D.C. participated in the march and rally. Organized by the New Haven Chapter of the Black Panther party, and Women's Liberation groups mostly from New York, the action exposed the blatantly fascist acts of the Connecticut pigs . . . against the people's servants—the Black Panther Party.²⁶

The Party did not have an official position on the ideologies and tactics of WLM organizations until Huey P. Newton's statement, "The Women's Liberation and Gay Liberation Movements" in August 1970, calling for the formation of working coalitions with the revolutionary factions of both movements.²⁷ Prior to this pronouncement, individual Party members had a variety of critical perspectives. Some of the most thorough and thoughtful critiques of the WLM were forthcoming from Panther women. Panther women (and men) eventually came to the conclusion that the struggle for women's liberation was a part of the struggle against capitalism and as such should be waged by men and women together. According to one former member, there was never a position taken that women's liberation was not a part of black liberation struggle, but the Party felt the need to make more formal pronouncements on the issue in part because of the growth and visibility of the WLM.²⁸

Panther sisters stated in a 1969 interview that to the extent that women's organizations did not address themselves to the class struggle or to national liberation campaigns they were not really furthering the women's liberation movement, because in order for women to be truly emancipated in this country there would have to be a socialist revolution. This critique of various women's lib organizations grew from their basic premise that the WLM viewed "the contradictions among men and women as one of the major contradictions in capitalist society . . . and develop[ed] it into an antagonistic contradiction, when actually it is a contradiction among people. It's not a contradiction between enemies."²⁹ Panther women also acknowledged that black women's relationship to black men was qualitatively different from gender relations between whites. In a 1971 interview, Kathleen Cleaver stated that

the problems of black women and the problems of whites are so completely diverse they cannot possibly be solved in the same type of organization nor met by the same type of activity . . . I can understand how a white woman cannot relate to a white man. And I feel sorry for white women who have to deal with that type of [person].³⁰

In addition to such theoretical differences, the BPP women interviewed also questioned the structure and practice of some women's liberation organizations. One sister rejected the anti-male and female separatist structures and strategies employed by some organizations as "illogical . . . because you can't solve the problem apart from the problem. You can't be liberated from male chauvinism if you don't even deal with it—if you run away from it."³¹

Although some of the women dismissed the usefulness of women's caucuses and separatist groups outright, others agreed that they should be judged by their practice and reserved commentary until they could assess whether those types of formations furthered the struggle for socialism. Although women in the BPP generally chose not to work in female-only organizations, and most did not think of themselves as feminists, this did not necessarily mean that they accepted male chauvinism or sexism. Most expected to be treated as equals, as revolutionary comrades, by their male counterparts. And some did engage the WLM as well as the men (and other women) in the BPP on issues of gender and black women's roles in the movement.

A final important piece of the ideological landscape of this period

that influenced thinking about gender concerned the alleged structural and cultural deficiencies of the black family. Daniel Patrick Moynihan's *The Negro Family: A Case for National Action*, published in March 1965 under the auspices of the U.S. Department of Labor, became a cornerstone of intense debate in a variety of settings. Moynihan's report used sociological, historical, anecdotal, and statistical information regarding the status of black families to draw the conclusions that black families were matriarchal, that black men were unable to fulfill the roles required of men in a patriarchal society, and that the resulting pattern of female-headed households was largely responsible for the "tangle of pathology" in which black people found themselves. According to Moynihan, "the Negro community has been forced into a matriarchal structure which, because it is so out of line with the rest of the American society, seriously retards the progress of the group as a whole and imposes a crushing burden on the Negro male, and in consequence, on a great many Negro women as well."³²

The ideas presented in this report, which suggested a change in focus for the government's civil rights policies, were eventually made public. Responses to Moynihan came from all sectors of black communities, including academics, grassroots activists, politicians, service providers, artists, and independent intellectuals.³³ While the implications of the Moynihan report on the internal debate in the black community were important, this should not be considered the beginning of such discussions about a black matriarchy, black male castration, and the like. Moynihan inserted himself, and by extension, the federal government and the media, into previously existing discussions within black communities. Moynihan built upon earlier works on black family structure to buttress his claims, especially E. Franklin Frazier's *The Negro Family in the United States*.³⁴

Direct references to the Moynihan report in BPP literature are few. However, engagements of its major theses can be found in writings by Panthers on black family structure, slavery, and the sexual politics of black-white relations. In the 1967 essay "Fear and Doubt," Huey P. Newton wrote that

he [the black man] feels that he is something less than a man. . . . Often his wife (who is able to secure a job as a maid, cleaning for white people) is the breadwinner. He is, therefore, viewed as quite worthless by his wife and children. He is ineffectual both in and out of the home. He

cannot provide for, or protect his family. . . . Society will not acknowledge him as a man.³⁵

Newton was not far from Moynihan in his assessment of the dilemmas of black manhood in general, and black men's seeming inability to live up to the patriarchal norms of the larger society in particular. In this instance, Newton failed to challenge the notion of men as sole providers for and protectors of black families while corroborating the opinion that black women devalued, disrespected, and dominated black men, and were privileged with economic advantages at the expense of black manhood.

Discussions within the Party regarding gender roles and relations responded to the thesis of black matriarchy and cultural pathology in varied and sometimes contradictory ways. Panthers could condemn the racism of the larger society in its assessment of black families and reject the notion that black culture is inherently pathological, while at the same time affirming an ideal of male-dominated gender relations. To complicate matters further, Newton's own questioning of the validity and usefulness of "the bourgeois family," which he described as "an imprisoning, enslaving, and suffocating experience," eventually led the Party to experiment with communal living and communal sexual relationships. Although this challenge to traditional nuclear family structures might be perceived as radical, an acceptance of male dominance within these alternative arrangements could diminish their revolutionary potential. This point serves to further illustrate E. Frances White's analysis of the "interrelationship between dominant and counter discourse." She points out that "as part of the same dialectic, counter discourses operate on the same ground as dominant ideology."³⁶ While the BPP offered fundamental critiques of U.S. society, Party members were socialized by and accepted many of its hegemonic norms.

Although cultural nationalism, feminism, and the black matriarchy thesis were not the only prominent ideological and popular discourses in the late 1960s and early 1970s, their impact was felt nationally (and internationally). Individual Panther chapters may or may not have had direct contact with organizations or individuals espousing any of these perspectives. Yet their ideas and activities were critical threads in the cultural fabric of this period. As such, they formed a part of the larger framework of competing gender ideologies in

which the party functioned, and their impact was represented in a variety of cultural forms, including fiction, films, scholarly literature, and poetry.³⁷

It should also be noted that the official gender ideology espoused by the Panther leaders, including Huey Newton, Bobby Seale, and Eldridge Cleaver, shifted over time. Initially the emphasis was placed on linking black liberation to the regaining of "black manhood." However, by the early 1970s as one of the "8 Points of Attention" to be recited and memorized by Panther recruits, point 7 read "Do not take liberties with women."³⁸ This evolution in the gender ideology of the Panther leadership was also reflected in the statements and actions of the rank-and-file male members, who often abandoned overtly sexist and male chauvinist behaviors as a result of their interactions with Panther women, particularly those in leadership positions. While the popular image of the BPP, both in the 1960s and currently, is that of a male-dominated, macho cult, Panther rhetoric and realities deserve a more nuanced description; one must take into account the diverse individual experiences of Party members as well as the subtle ideological shifts made by the male leaders.³⁹

Observation and Participation: Quotidian Gender Struggle in Ideology and Practice

Huey P. Newton was often quoted as saying that many people learned primarily through observation and participation, a point which supports the argument that the events of everyday life were important in shaping the consciousness and practice of Party members.⁴⁰ It is critical, then, that we begin to explore the daily struggles over gender and definitions of black manhood and womanhood and not just moments of extraordinary rupture and conflict (although these, too, are important). I do not mean to suggest that the BPP was a hotbed of critical inquiry on gender issues in the academic sense. Instead, many of these dialogic interactions played themselves out in the daily acts of living and working together. In other words, the actions of Party members often represented their theory.⁴¹ A few examples drawn from the experiences of women in the Party will serve to illustrate the impact of gender politics and power dynamics on everyday life.

The late Connie Matthews, who worked in both the international chapter and Oakland headquarters, recounts that

[I]n theory, the Panther party was for equality of the sexes . . . on a day-to-day struggle with rank-and-file brothers, you got a lot of disrespect, you know. . . . Because, I mean, it's one thing to get up and talk about ideologically you believe this. But you're asking people to change attitudes and lifestyles overnight, which is not just possible. So I would say that there was a lot of struggle and there was a lot of male chauvinism. . . . But I would say all in all, in terms of equality . . . that women had very, very strong leadership roles and were respected as such. It didn't mean it came automatically.⁴²

Matthews acknowledges the existence of sexism in the Party, but at the same time highlights the existence of struggle on the part of women (and men) to grapple with the disparities between Party rhetoric and the concrete reality of daily working and living arrangements. She confirms an awareness of the influence of socialization on Party members' ideas and behavior. Yet her quote leaves some ambiguity as to whether she saw chauvinistic "attitudes and lifestyles" as being generated from within, or from outside of black communities, or both. She also hints at her opinion of the way in which class differences may have affected gender relations in her reference to the "rank-and-file" brothers as being particularly disrespectful.

Statements by Assata Shakur corroborate Matthews' acknowledgments of the daily struggles of women for respect in the Party. According to Shakur,

[A] lot of us [women] adopted that kind of macho type style in order to survive in the Black Panther Party. It was very difficult to say "well listen brother, I think that . . . we should do this and this." [I]n order to be listened to, you had to just say, "look mothafucka," you know. You had to develop this whole arrogant kind of macho style in order to be heard. . . . We were just involved in those day to day battles for respect in the Black Panther Party.⁴³

Here, Shakur presents one strategy employed by some women in the BPP to exert authority-participation by assuming supposedly masculine styles of behavior and posturing. This approach to political organizing is more authoritarian than democratic and was criticized elsewhere by Shakur.⁴⁴ However, black women's presumption of a style,

actions, and words associated with male prerogative potentially undermined the notion of men's inherent aggressiveness or innate leadership abilities that were the basis of masculinist gender ideologies, including some of the BPP's earlier formulations. While this macho posturing by women may have reinforced the notion of black women as domineering, it also challenged the idea that only black men should lead and "protect" black women. That some women had to modify their public persona in order to be respected is indicative of the extent to which gendered power dynamics pervaded the lives of Party members.

Such intracommunal struggles, which Matthews and Shakur describe, directly affected the organization's culture and ability to function, yet are hidden in analyses that fail to look at gender relations as relations of power. The ways in which women and men understood their respective roles, and the relative exercise of power they brought to bear on their relationships, were not merely personal dynamics, but also political interactions and choices made in the context of the movement. Although on a very practical level the dialogue on gender in the Party was affected by the presence of increasing numbers of women, it was, more importantly, the impact of these women's actions that demanded a certain level of respect and recognition from male members.

Female Panthers often tested and stretched the boundaries of the largely masculinized Party structure. Many of these women held low or no formal positions of rank. Yet their heroic actions thrust them into positions of prominence inside and outside of the Party. Women, such as Joan Bird, Afeni Shakur, and numerous other unnamed rank-and-file members, fought figuratively and literally for the revolutionary principles and platform of the Party. Many were involved in armed confrontation with police authorities alongside Panther men.⁴⁵ By so doing, they challenged old Party notions of community defense being a man's job. The brutal treatment of these women by police authorities made it clear to them as well as the entire black community that they could expect no comfort or benefits from stereotypes of women as fragile and weak and needing to be protected. After all, this construction of womanhood historically had never been applied to black women by the larger society (even though some nationalists adapted their own variation). Nor could the idea (propagated by Moynihan and even some Panthers), that black women somehow re-

ceived special treatment from government agencies or U.S. society in general, remain intact.

Once these black women, involved in militant organizing efforts, stepped outside of roles traditionally assigned to women or African Americans, their treatment more closely resembled the experiences of their black male comrades than those of white women. Racist and sexist government agencies and a racist and sexist mainstream polity responded to Black Panther women as black people who did not "know their place" with respect to their gender, race, or class.

The above examples attest to the ability of some black women to carve out a space for their own empowerment within the context of a formally male-dominated organization, often in the face of extreme male chauvinism and harassment from within and without. In her recognition of women as strong leaders in the Party, Connie Matthews legitimizes women's contributions as crucial to the survival of the organization. In so doing, she not only pays respect to the leadership abilities of the well-known (and higher ranking) women in the BPP, such as Ericka Huggins, Kathleen Cleaver, and Elaine Brown, but also to local female rank-and-file members.

Matthews' claim that women held key leadership roles is echoed in other accounts. Many former Panthers recall that women were responsible in terms of both leadership and personnel for key Party programs, such as the free breakfast programs, liberation schools, and medical clinics; yet the media image of the Party was and is male-centered. The Party also recruited non-Panther "welfare mothers, grandmothers and guardians in the black community" to help staff breakfast programs in particular.⁴⁶ As former Panther Malika Adams pointed out,

[W]omen ran the BPP pretty much. I don't know how it got to be a male's party or thought of as being a male's party. Because those things, when you really look at it in terms of society, those things are looked on as being woman things, you know, feeding children, taking care of the sick and uh, so. Yeah, we did that. We actually ran the BPP's programs.⁴⁷

Her assessment of the prominence of women not only provides us with the standard participatory history or "women were there too" analysis, but on an even more significant level, argues for new definitions of leadership and politics. As Adams indicates, the types of

activities prescribed in these community survival programs often represented an extension of “traditional” roles for women in the family: nurturers, caretakers of children, transmitters of morals, etc. Yet Panther men as well as women staffed the programs, thus potentially challenging narrowly defined male gender roles. These types of movement jobs are often categorized by historians and activists alike as “support work,” or “community service,” as opposed to “real” political activism.⁴⁸ These tasks were the lifeblood of the organization and as such should be understood more accurately as forms of political leadership. Given the context of state repression, these activities took on an explicitly political and public function and were often the sites of intense struggle with state authorities. Thus, public speaking abilities and formal titles were not the sole markers of leadership abilities, a point not missed by the FBI.

Panther survival programs were an ideological and practical counter to the misinformation and destruction campaign being waged against the BPP. In fact, many of the FBI’s activities against the Party were designed to undermine the free breakfast for children operations and other community based “survival programs.” An FBI memo from Director J. Edgar Hoover in 1969 described the free breakfast program as “the best and most influential activity going for the BPP and as such, is potentially the greatest threat to efforts by authorities . . . to neutralize the BPP and destroy what it stands for.”⁴⁹

The experiences of Brooklyn-branch member Janet Cyril further illuminate this point. As one of the founding members of that branch, she eventually became citywide coordinator of the free breakfast programs. In the meantime, she was expelled from the Party no less than four times. She argues that this was in part due to her generally anti-authoritarian attitude, which, in her assessment, was even less tolerable because she is a woman. One of her expulsions was for refusing to have sex with a very high-ranking member of the Central Committee of the Party: “[He] thought he was gon’ sleep in my bed with me. And uh, that was not happening. And I was given several direct orders which I disobeyed quite directly (laugh). And then to top it off, the street I lived on had alternate side of the street parking and their car got towed in the morning because they overslept.”⁵⁰

After this episode, Cyril was expelled for sabotage. She later found out through research in the FBI’s Counter Intelligence Program (COINTELPRO) files that the FBI deliberately planted misinforma-

tion by using an actual informant, which made it appear that Cyril was the informant. This particular tactic was called "bad-jacketing" or "snitch-jacketing."⁵¹ An FBI internal agency memorandum, she recalls, stated that she should be targeted for "neutralization" because of her effectiveness as an organizer.

This example points to the significance of the community service programs in lending credibility and longevity to the BPP, which was precisely why the FBI made such determined efforts to undermine them. It also gives a concrete example of the power relations embedded in sexual interactions in that Cyril was expelled at least once for refusing to participate in what some Party members referred to as "socialistic fucking," or engaging in sexual relations ostensibly as a revolutionary duty.⁵² In this case, the political impact of the attempted power play by the male leader actually served the interests of the oppressive state apparatus and helped to undermine the effectiveness of one of the Party's key local leaders and programs. Here, the contradictions between the theory and practice of the national leadership with regard to sexual relationships and sexual self-determination directly and adversely affected the Panthers' capacity to function as a viable political organization.

Conclusions

The ideological development of Party members was an ongoing process, ripe with contradiction, and shaped by the material and cultural conditions of the late 1960s and early 1970s. The increasing numbers of women in the Party as rank-and-file members and as leaders and the severity of state repression directed at all Panthers provided the pressure-cooker setting for testing out their new ideas about gender and revolution.

The members of the BPP were themselves products of the larger society. Thus, the terrain on which intracommunal debates over gender, class, and race took place was influenced by the terms of the so-called dominant culture and its agents. The Party was both critic and purveyor of American culture and politics. Panthers decried the class and gender biases of their contemporaries and the larger white society, but at the same time they re-affirmed many of those same shortcomings. A former female member of the Party's Brooklyn branch recalled,

[W]e could talk about this stuff [gender and sexism]. We could talk about it just as we talked about capitalism and imperialism. But I don't know that we internalized it. I think we saw that our Party line was that there was no difference [between men and women]. We tried to be progressive in our thinking. But I think what we didn't realize was that we were just as much victims of a social condition that perpetuated it and that we carried these traits with us.⁵³

She acknowledges that men and women engaged each other in discussions about gender issues, yet basic contradictions remained between theory and practice. Most still did not have full command of the contemporary language and theory of gender politics that was being developed, revised, and disseminated during this period. Many of their shortcomings arose from the lack of experience addressing such concerns in an explicitly political context. This was probably especially true for those who had no previous activist involvement. Their contradictions were part and parcel of the dialectic between hegemonic norms, which reinforced unequal gender roles and power relations between men and women, and intracommunal struggles, which attempted to redefine the terms of this discourse both internally and externally.

Despite their limitations (or perhaps because of them) and the generally dire circumstances in which they found themselves, the BPP was still often ahead of most other black nationalist organizations and many white leftist and mainstream organizations in their progress toward addressing (at least rhetorically) "the woman question." According to Assata Shakur,

The BPP was the most progressive organization at that time [and] had the most positive images in terms of . . . the position of women in the propaganda . . . I felt it was the most positive thing that I could do because many of the other organizations at the time were so sexist, I mean to the extreme. . . . There was a whole saturation of the whole climate with this quest for manhood . . . even though that might be oppressive to you as a human being. . . . For me joining the BPP was one of the best options at the time.⁵⁴

Thus, for Shakur and many other black women seeking involvement in the Black Power Movement and grassroots organizing, the Party presented a viable option. The programmatic focus of the Party after

1968 directly addressed the needs of poor black women, especially those who were primarily responsible for childrearing. BPP membership could also offer women and men a sense of control over their lives outside the Party. Many, probably for the first time in their lives, were able to contest directly the larger society's representations and perceptions of them and to fight for better treatment from the state apparatus that imposed its policies on their lives and their communities. Through its ideology, rhetoric, imagery, and praxis, the BPP engaged the dominant culture in a debate about the parameters of black racial and sexual identity and its impact on politics and policy. This was particularly significant given the history of struggles by black people to be recognized as respectable, fully human beings.⁵⁵ They also engaged each other and the larger black community about what it meant to be a black woman, man, comrade, revolutionary—not in the abstract—but in the heat of political struggle.

The insidious attempts by the U.S. government to destroy the organization and individual members restricted the development of a more self-reflective theory and practice by BPP members. Party members did not always have the luxury or the space to reflect and revise past errors. Nonetheless, it is somewhat paradoxical and instructive that a movement that was initially so thoroughly male centered in many ways broke ground for subsequent explicitly feminist/womanist activism by black women and, in some ways, engaged in more nuanced discussions of gender roles than those found currently in social movements, academic texts, and popular culture.

For example, the movie *Panther* fails to treat in any substantial manner the role of women in the Party, not to mention the internal struggles over gender roles and sexist/misogynistic behavior, a point made by many reviewers of the film. However, some of these same cultural critics replicate this error of omission by making summary comments, such as in the sixties "it was believed that the greatest threat to the nation was a black man with a gun,"⁵⁶ and that the film is a "stirring affirmation of black masculinity, an image of what the Panthers could have, and maybe should have, been."⁵⁷ Statements like these justify and excuse the movie's inattention to gender politics as critical to the story of the Party and, in effect, further the notion that the central actors and focus of black struggle should be black men and manhood. Through an emphasis on "gun barrel politics" in both the film and the reviews, the critical

presence and actions of female Panthers are virtually ignored, while the complexities of black masculinity are constrained by romanticized, flat images of angry, hard bodies with guns.⁵⁸

Many of the intracommunal debates raised by the Black Panther Party have resurfaced once again in the context of a resurgent cultural nationalism in black communities in the United States. Unfortunately, both the language and the content of many contemporary discussions reflect little if any recognition of the historical depth of these issues, nor of the progress made, however limited, in addressing them in the past. Black men are once again talked about and talk about themselves as castrated or as "endangered species." Black women are often cited as being complicit in this process or as succeeding at the expense of black men. The most popular formulations blame poor, working-class black women for their alleged inability to raise black boys/men, and accuse black women in general of being the willing recipients of alleged special treatment and unearned entitlements from white society. To paraphrase the official recruitment literature from the Million Man March, black men need to resume their rightful place as patriarchs of black families and communities.⁵⁹

The interrelationship between the ways black people are targeted for gender-, class-, and sexual-orientation-specific attacks are unrecognized in our acceptance of linear, "either/or" analyses of problems facing black communities as a whole. For the sake of so-called black unity, we often sacrifice or ignore the needs of some of the most oppressed and marginalized sectors of our communities to the detriment of us all. Those who dare to assert our heterogeneity and identify oppressive practices within and between black communities are silenced and assailed as divisive or assimilationist, as race traitors, or worst of all, as just not authentically, purely black enough. Witness the virtual gag order and public attacks against those within the community, particularly black women such as Angela Davis, who disagreed with the Million Man March's gender politics, focus, and agenda (or lack thereof).

We would all benefit from a closer, more complex interrogation and public discussion of historical struggles over these same issues, from slavery to the present, one that does not gloss over mistakes or internal differences, to aid us in redefining our roles and relationships in ways that can nurture and sustain the community and build a progressive black movement for the twenty-first century.

NOTES

1. An earlier version of this essay was first presented at "African American Women in the Civil Rights–Black Power Movement," a conference sponsored by the Temple University Center for African American History and Culture, on November 20–21, 1997.

2. There is a lengthy history of armed resistance among Black communities in the United States. Several studies have noted that many Civil Rights Movement participants practiced nonviolence as a strategy, not a philosophy, while at the same time engaging in armed self-defense tactics. For evidence of this, see Gene Marine, *The Black Panthers* (New York: Signet, 1969), 36; Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981); Aldon Morris, *Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change* (New York: The Free Press, 1984), 19; Akinyele Umoja, "Eye for an Eye: The Role of Armed Resistance in the Mississippi Freedom Movement, 1955–1980" (Ph.D. diss., Emory University, 1996); and Timothy B. Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie: Robert F. Williams and the Roots of Black Power* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999).

3. *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders [The Kerner Report]* (New York: Bantam Books, 1968; Pantheon Books, 1988), 35–41.

4. The film *Panther* (Gramercy), written by Mario Van Peebles and directed by his father, Melvin Van Peebles, opened to mixed reviews from critics and former Panthers alike. For sweepstakes information, see *Young Sisters and Brothers Magazine* 4,8 (May 1995): 40.

5. For examples of primary sources written in the 1960s and 1970s, see Gene Marine, *The Black Panthers*, and Huey P. Newton, *Revolutionary Suicide* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1973); G. Louis Heath, ed., *Off the Pigs: The History and Literature of the Black Panther Party* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1976); and Philip S. Foner, ed., *The Black Panthers Speak, The Manifesto of the Party: The First Documentary Record of the Panthers Program* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1970). For brief scholarly treatments, see Robert Allen, *Black Awakening in Capitalist America* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Co., 1969), and Manning Marable, *How Capitalism Underdeveloped Black America* (Boston: South End Press, 1983). There are government hearings and reports on BPP activity such as U.S. Senate, *Final Report of the Select Committee to Study Government Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities*, 94th Cong., 2d sess., 1976, S. Rept. 94–755. There are also more recently published specialized texts, such as those on FBI repression, which are cited below.

6. The time period examined in this essay does not include the period during and following the major division within the Party over matters of ideology, practice, and leadership, and its decline as a national organization. Many

important shifts occurred after the split, especially in terms of the numbers of formally recognized female leaders. Some former Panthers believe that the "original" BPP ended in 1970 or 1971; others saw themselves as being part of the BPP until 1981, when the Oakland Community School closed.

7. Most scholarly texts on the Civil Rights Movement, (White) Women's liberation movement, and Black Power movement neglect or minimize any analysis of the issues of gender politics in the Black Power movement or BPP.

8. Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, "African-American Women's History and the Metalanguage of Race," *Signs* 17, 2 (Winter 1992): 225, 274. Here she draws on James C. Scott's notions of the infrapolitics and hidden transcripts of everyday resistance in his book, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990). Higginbotham adds to this a discussion of hierarchies and power struggles within oppressed communities. See also Robin D. G. Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (New York: The Free Press, 1994), for a nuanced discussion of infrapolitics and intraracial power dynamics in black communities.

9. Daniel Patrick Moynihan, *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action* (Office of Policy Planning and Research, U.S. Department of Labor, March 1965).

10. E. Frances White, "Africa on My Mind: Gender, Counter Discourse and African-American Nationalism," *Journal of Women's History* 2, 1 (Spring 1990): 80.

11. US was a member of the Black Congress, an umbrella organization in Los Angeles organized around the principle of operational unity. The Congress supported Free Huey movement activities. See *Harambee* 11, 1 (November 17, 1967): 1-2, 8.

12. Two examples of Panther critiques of cultural nationalism are Linda Harrison, "On Cultural Nationalism," *The Black Panther*, February 2, 1969, and George Mason Murray, "Cultural Nationalism," *The Black Panther*, March 3, 1969.

13. Ward Churchill and Jim Vander Wall, *Agents of Repression: The FBI's Secret Wars Against the Black Panther Party and the American Indian Movement* (Boston: South End Press, 1988). Evidence shows that this shooting was probably instigated by FBI agents within US and through counterintelligence propaganda circulated between the two organizations. The authors quote a 1968 FBI memo from J. Edgar Hoover encouraging agents to "fully capitalize upon BPP and US differences as well as to exploit all avenues of creating further dissension within the ranks of the BPP," 42.

14. For example, see *The Black Panther*, February 2, 1969, 3; and March 3, 1969, 4; Newton, *Revolutionary Suicide*, 255; and Louis Tackwood and The Citizens Research and Investigation Committee, *The Glass House Tapes* (New York: Avon Books, 1973), 105.

15. Clyde Halisi, ed., *The Quotable Karenga* (Los Angeles: US Organization, 1967), 27–28.

16. Elaine Brown, *A Taste of Power: A Black Woman's Story* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1992), 109; Angela Davis, *Angela Davis: An Autobiography* (New York: International Publishers, 1974, 1988), 161. At the time of this incident in 1967, Davis was a founding member of the Black Student Union at the University of California at San Diego.

17. White, "Africa on My Mind," 73–77. The BPP and US subscribed to revolutionary nationalism and cultural nationalism respectively and thus had widely divergent political perspectives and programs for action. The BPP identified themselves variously as revolutionary nationalists, Marxist-Leninists, and Intercommunalists at different points in time. Despite the diversity of nationalist ideologies, aspects of White's critique are applicable to both organizations.

18. Panthers' critiques of cultural nationalism may have varied regionally. Both my own and sociologist David Murrasse's interviews with former Party members suggest that New York-based Panthers considered themselves more nationalistic or more rooted in African culture than West Coast Panthers.

19. Bobby Seale, "Bobby Seale Explains Panther Politics," *The Guardian*, February 1970, 4, US's anti-white polemics were interpreted as "black racism" by the BPP.

20. Sara Evans, *Personal Politics: The Roots of Women's Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 57, 193–95.

21. Alice Echols, *Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America, 1967–1975* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 34–35.

22. See Echols, *Daring to Be Bad*, for an excellent account of the politics and activities of white radical and cultural feminists.

23. See Robin Morgan, ed., *Sisterhood Is Powerful* (New York: Vintage Books, 1970), xxi. Several key women in the BPP were former members of SNCC, including Kathleen Cleaver and Connie Matthews.

24. Several earlier studies analyze the political activities of black women in the 1960s through an either/or framework—either they were feminists or Black Power sympathizers. This does not account for the activities of black women that incorporated race, gender, and class simultaneously. See, for example, Evans, *Personal Politics*, 101; Paula Giddings, *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America* (New York: Bantam Books, 1984), 311, 323; and Echols, *Daring to Be Bad*, 106.

25. Deborah King, "Multiple Jeopardy, Multiple Consciousness: The Context of a Black Feminist Ideology," *Signs* 14, 1 (Autumn 1988). For examples of black women's writings on the issues of gender and race in this period, see Toni Cade, ed., *The Black Woman: An Anthology* (New York: Mentor, The New American Library, 1970).

26. Cappy Pinderhughes, "Free Our Sisters," *The Black Panther*, December 6, 1969, 2. Bobby Seale and Ericka Huggins, along with twelve other New Haven BPP members, were charged with the kidnapping, murder, and torture of fellow Party member Alex Rackley, who had been falsely identified as an informant by an actual police infiltrator, George Sams. Two Panthers and Sams were convicted. For more on this case, see Ward Churchill and Jim Vander Wall, *The COINTELPRO Papers: Documents from the FBI's Secret War Against Dissent in the United States* (Boston: South End Press, 1990), 146–47, 360.

27. Huey Newton, "The Women's Liberation and Gay Liberation Movements: August 15, 1970," in *To Die for the People: The Writings of Huey Newton* (New York: Vintage Books, 1972), 152–55.

28. Kathleen Cleaver in a telephone conversation with the author, November 27, 1994.

29. Anonymous, "Black Panther Sisters Talk about Women's Liberation," pamphlet reprinted from *The Movement* (September 1969). The same interview appears as "Panther Sisters on Women's Liberation," in Heath, *Off the Pigs!*, 339–50. Quote from 344. Originally appeared as "Sisters," *The Black Panther*, September 13, 1969, 12.

30. "Black Scholar Interviews Kathleen Cleaver," *Black Scholar* 2 (December 1971): 56.

31. Anon., "Panther Sisters on Women's Liberation," in Heath, *Off the Pigs!*, 348; "Sisters," *The Black Panther*, 12.

32. Lee Rainwater and William L. Yancey, *The Moynihan Report and the Politics of Controversy* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1967), 75.

33. In this period, cultural productions by black people directly addressed gender, race, and class issues as they were manifest in all areas of black life. See Abby Arthur Johnson and Ronald Mayberry Johnson, *Propaganda and Aesthetics: The Literary Politics of African-American Magazines in the Twentieth Century* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1979, 1991), especially chapter 6; and William L. Van Deburg, *New Day in Babylon: The Black Power Movement and American Culture, 1965–1975* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); and Madhu Dubey, *Black Women Novelists and the Nationalist Aesthetic* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994).

34. E. Franklin Frazier, *The Negro Family in the United States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939, 1948, 1966).

35. Newton, *To Die for the People*, 81.

36. White, "Africa on My Mind," 79.

37. For an analysis of the cultural components and impact of the Black Power movement, see Van Deburg, *New Day in Babylon*.

38. See Appendix B, "8 Points of Attention," reprinted in Foner, *The Black Panthers Speak*, 98–99.

39. For additional information on Panther leaders and rank-and-file male

members' rhetoric on gender relations, see Tracey Matthews, "'No One Ever Asks What a Man's Place in the Revolution Is': Gender and Sexual Politics in the Black Panther Party, 1966–1971" (unpublished Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan), 1998.

40. Newton, *To Die for the People*, 15.

41. Elsa Barkley Brown, "Womanist Consciousness: Maggie Lena Walker and the Independent Order of St. Luke," in Michelene R. Malson, et al., eds., *Black Women in America: Social Science Perspectives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 194.

42. Connie Matthews, interview with the author, June 26, 1991, Kingston, Jamaica.

43. Assata Shakur, interview with the author, July 30, 1993, Havana, Cuba; Assata Shakur, *Assata: An Autobiography* (Westport, CT: Lawrence Hill and Company, 1987), 204.

44. Shakur, *Assata*, 204.

45. For specific mainstream media articles about Joan Bird, see *New York Post*, May 14, July 7, December 1970; and *New York Times*, July 7 and 15, 1970; For information about Afeni Shakur, see *New York Times*, July 15, 1970. About Ericka Huggins, see *New York Times*, December 2, 1969, and March 22, 1970.

46. Heath, *Off the Pigs!*, 100; See also *The Black Panther*, September 7, 1986, 7.

47. Frankye Malika Adams, interview with the author, September 29, 1994, Harlem, New York.

48. *Ibid.*; Adams stresses that although men also participated in these programs, women organized and led them.

49. "FBI Airtel from Director to SAC's in 27 field offices," May 15, 1969, cited in Huey P. Newton, "War Against the Panthers: A Study of Repression in America" (Ph.D. Diss., University of California, June 1980), 109.

50. Janet Cyril, interview with the author, September 29, 1994, Brooklyn, NY.

51. For additional definitions of these terms, see Churchill and Vander Wall, *Agents of Repression*, 49–51.

52. Frankye Malika Adams, interview with the author, September 29, 1994, Harlem, New York.

53. *Ibid.*

54. Assata Shakur, interview with the author, July 30, 1993, Havana, Cuba.

55. In my dissertation "'No One Ever Asks What a Man's Place in the Revolution Is,'" I explore the construction of black Civil Rights Movement participants as noble, respectable, asexual, and peaceful in juxtaposition to notions of black urban youth as a riot-prone, extremist, hypersexual menace. This is one of many oppositional dichotomies imposed by mainstream discourses and reinforced by some activists and by many academic studies of this period, such as the now almost obsolete Malcolm-versus-Martin Dyad, non-violence versus self-defense, accommodation versus resistance, theories. On

intracommunal struggle and challenges to these types of false dichotomies, see Robin Kelley, *Race Rebels*. On the topic of respectability and racialized constructions of sexuality, see Evelyn Higginbotham, "African-American Women's History and the Metalanguage of Race," *Signs* 17 (Winter 1992): 251-74.

56. Michael Eric Dyson, "The Panthers, Still Untamed, Roars Back," review of Gramercy film, *New York Times*, April 30, 1995, 17, 25.

57. Michael Robinson, "The Van Peebleses Prowl Through the Panthers' History," *American Visions*, 10, 2 (April/May 1995): 16-18.

58. The chronology of events and emphasis on guns in the Black Panther Party closely resembles the structure and content of an anti-Panther government report that summarizes House Committee on Internal Security public hearings on the BPP conducted in 1970 and gives an analysis of the origins, politics, tactics, successes, and failures of the Party. The report also details the anticapitalist ideology of the BPP, a point easily missed in the film. See House Committee on Internal Security, "Gun Barrel Politics: The Black Panther Party, 1966-1971," 92d Cong., 1st sess., 1971, H. Rept. 92-470.

59. Frightening parallels can be drawn between this strain of black thought and current reactionary discourses on the evils of affirmative action and black single motherhood.