Chapter-IV

From Black Power to Black Panthers: Rhetoric of Guns
Black Panther Song

Black Panther defy the power
Fight the violence with non violence
What good is justice?
If the scales are bent!
By a criminal government!
Think of the dead
In Vietnam.
Think of the dead
In Birmingham.
Think of freedom,
We don’t understand,
Asleep in a bed,
In a stolen land.
Responsibility to understand!
Responsibility to take a stand!
Responsibility to know your place!
In the struggle of the human race!

Martin Luther King’s concept of means and ends was subjected to ridicule by the advocates of a new Black militancy under the banner of ‘Black Power’, proponents of which argued that Passive Resistance was always difficult to practise. Several Blacks applauded in approval or listened as H. Rap Brown went from city to city apparently fanning the fires of violence during the summer of 1967 urging, as many reports noted, to ‘Stop looting and start shooting’. Despite this inclination towards violence, Martin Luther King, in his final writing, Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community, justified his own stand. He said on one occasion that even ‘If every Negro in the United States turns to violence, I will choose to be that one lone voice preaching that this is the wrong way.’ King had a long list of success stories to support nonviolent methods of struggle for justice and fairness. As he reflected:

240 This song has been written by Mason Jennings. Jennings is an American pop-folk singer and song writer. He was born in Hawaii, and moved to Pittsburg, Pennsylvania for a career in music. Birds Flying Away revealed his political activism and inclination for singing first-person narratives of imaginary rustic characters.


The 1956 Bus Boycott in Montgomery, Alabama ended segregation not only in that city, but practically every city of the south. The 1960 Sit-Ins desegregated lunch-counters in more than 150 cities within a year. The 1961 Freedom-Rides put an end to the segregation in interstate travel. The 1963 Birmingham Movement and the climatic Washington-March won passage of the most powerful civil rights law in a century. The 1965 Selma Movement brought enactment of the Voting Rights Law. Our non violent marches in Chicago last summer brought about a housing agreement, which if implemented, will be the strongest step toward open housing taken in any city in the nation. Most significant is the fact that this progress occurred with minimum human sacrifice and loss of life.243

King’s voice was, however, somewhat drowned within the new wave of youth militancy which had somewhat innocuous origins. On 1 February 1960, for example, a group of Black college students from A & T University, Greensboro, North Carolina refused to leave a Woolworth244 lunch counter when they were denied service. This event sparked off a wave of mass sit-in programmes across the South. Two months later, Students Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC: pronounced ‘snick’) was formed at Shaw University, Raleigh to coordinate and organise those sit-ins and boycotts. While these acts of resistance were shaping up, the new militancy was also fanned by a change in leadership. In 1966, for instance, John Lewis was replaced by Stokely Carmichael as chairman of SNCC.245 Stokely Carmichael was born in Port of Spain, Trinidad; his family moved to New York City when he was only eleven years old and they became naturalised citizens. SNCC’s tactics were quite in contrast with those of SCLC246, which had non-violence as its credo and Martin Luther King as its guiding light. The rise of SNCC was, in a way, a result of dissatisfaction with the politics of SCLC (Southern Christian Leaders Association)—a brand of politics that was especially unappealing to the militant youth.

244 Woolworth was an American retail company. It was initially started as an American five-and-dime store. Now the logo of the company is used by ‘Apple’, the computer giant.
246 SCLC began on 14 February 1957, initially as ‘Negro Leaders Conference on Nonviolent Integration’ and was named ‘Southern Negro Leaders Conference’. It was finally renamed as ‘Southern Christian Leadership Conference’ with Martin Luther King Jr. as president. SCLC’s emphasis on boycotts and other forms of nonviolent protests soon became controversial in the light of emergence more radical Black groups.
Oakland where the Black Panther Party was Born

SNCC, though, was not an unreflexively militant organisation—it did support tactical mobilisation and protest wherever they could be effective. It played a key role, for example, in organising the historic Washington-March in 1963 during which 2,00,000 people gathered around Lincoln Memorial, where Martin Luther King delivered his famous ‘I have a Dream’ speech. Carmichael, under the banner of SNCC, also helped convince Blacks in Mississippi to register for voting since 1964. He moved to Alabama with this campaign in 1965 and helped register voters at Selma. He realised that not a single voter was registered in 1966 at Lowndes County in Alabama. It was here, during this campaign, that he coined the term ‘Black Power’.247

Whites in the Lowndes County had a ‘White Rooster’ as a symbol of their political organisation. Carmichael thought if Whites could have a ‘White Cock Party’, Blacks should organise themselves and have their own symbol: the symbol of the ‘Black Panther’. Lowndes County Freedom Organization used this symbol to mobilise Black voters. In the same year, Black youth, who had organised themselves for ‘self-defense’ against police brutality in Oakland, California adopted this symbol of ‘Black Panther’ and named their party ‘Black Panther Party for Self Defense’. Booby Seale, who was the chairman of the party, explained:

The symbol of Black Panther is an appropriate one for Black people in America today. It is not in the panther’s nature to attack anyone first, but when it is attacked and backed into a corner, he will respond viciously and wipe out the aggressor.248

The adoption of the concept of Black Power was one of the most legitimate and healthy developments in American politics and race relations in those times. It was a call for Black people to unite, to recognise their heritage, to build a sense of community. The concept of Black Power rested on a fundamental premise: before a group could enter the open society, it must first have closed ranks. By this, they meant that group solidarity was necessary before a group could operate effectively

from a bargaining position of strength in a pluralistic society.\textsuperscript{249} Black Power rejected the old slogans and rhetoric of previous years in the civil rights struggles as meaningless. For the Black Power leadership, the language of progress, non-violence, integration, coalition was irrelevant. They sought to redefine and change these rhetoric and terms. They maintained that the tone of the 'civil rights' movement was designed to appeal to an audience of 'middle class Whites' and served as a buffer zone between that audience and the angry Black youth. It claimed to speak for the needs of a community, but it did not speak in the language of that community.\textsuperscript{250}

In \textit{Politics Among Nations}, Hans J. Morgenthau defines political power as 'the psychological control over the minds of men'.\textsuperscript{251} This control includes the attempt by the oppressor to have its definitions, conceptions and historical descriptions accepted by the oppressed. This was true in Africa no less than in the United States. The term \textit{Uhuru} means ‘freedom’, but White colonisers denied ‘native’ Africans the use of the term for a long time. Despite several attempts by activist and ideologues like W.E.B. DuBois to reconstruct and recast Black and African history, the hegemony of the White discourse, entrenched over centuries, continued to hold sway. Within this discourse, Black people were indiscriminately labelled as ‘lazy’, ‘apathetic’, ‘dumb’, ‘shiftless’, ‘good-timers’.\textsuperscript{252} Carmichael and Hamilton claimed that:

\begin{quote}
Our basic need is to reclaim our history and our identity from what must be called cultural terrorism, from the depredation of self-justifying white guilt. We shall have to struggle for the right to create our own terms through which to define ourselves and our relationship to the society, and to have these terms recognized.\textsuperscript{253}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{249} Ibid, p.44.
\textsuperscript{253} Ibid, pp.34–35.
Carmichael and Hamilton suggested that 'the term 'Negro' was invented by the oppressor; it is his image of us that he describes. Many Blacks are now calling themselves African-Americans, Afro-Americans or Black people because that is our image of us.'\textsuperscript{254} The proponents and advocates of Black Power sought to make the Whites aware that Blacks in America had a history which pre-dated their forced introduction to the country. It was absolutely essential for these activists that Black people knew this history, that they knew their roots, that they developed an awareness of their cultural heritage. For a very long time they had been kept in submission by being told that they had no culture and no manifest heritage before they were imported as slaves in America.

Carmichael has repudiated the notion of 'integration' as yet another example of a word defined according to the way the White majority saw it. It meant, to many of them, that Black men wanted to 'marry White daughters' and also implied 'race mixing'. To Black people, it represented a strategy for 'improving' their status both economically and politically.\textsuperscript{255} This strategy, however, did not challenge the basic definition of 'blackness', which remained unchanged in the White psyche. They argued further that:

Integration as a goal today speaks to the problem of blackness not only in an unrealistic way but also in a despicable way. It is based on complete acceptance of the fact that in order to have a descent house or education, black people must move into a white neighborhood or send their children to a white school. This reinforces among both black and white, the idea that 'white' is automatically superior and 'black' is by definition inferior. For this reason 'integration is a subterfuge for the maintenance of white supremacy.'\textsuperscript{256}

Carmichael and Hamilton reiterated rather forcefully that the values of American society inherently supported a racist system. They found it incongruous to ask Black people to adopt and support most of those values. But to them, a greater danger came from the middle classes within their own race. This section

\textsuperscript{254} Ibid, p.37.  
\textsuperscript{255} Ibid, p.37.  
\textsuperscript{256} Ibid, p.57.
saw itself as superior to a majority of Black folks and believed in many of the values of ‘civilised White existence’, for example ‘good governance’, ‘good education’ and so on. This class, according to them, was the backbone propping up institutional racism in the United States.\textsuperscript{257} The goals of integrationists therefore were middle class goals, articulated primarily by a small group of Blacks with middle class aspirations or status.\textsuperscript{258}

The myths of ‘coalition-theory’ were also deconstructed by the leaders of Black Power. First, they critiqued the idea of alliances with groups which never had ‘revamping of the society’ as their necessary goal. Such an approach could also be used to suggest that even the ‘liberal White’ was subjected to racism and for justification, and they used Killens and Griggs’ position as articulated in \textit{Racial Crisis in America}. Killens and Griggs suggested that:

\begin{quote}
...most White Americans, even those white leaders who attempt to communicate and cooperate with their Negro counterparts, do not see racial inequality in the same way that the Negro does. The white person no matter how liberal he may be exists in the cocoon of a white dominated society... even more important, he does not perceive the subjective inequalities inherent in the system of segregation because he does not experience them daily as a Negro does.\textsuperscript{259}
\end{quote}

Carmichael and Hamilton refused to accept that a politically and economically insecure group could collaborate with a politically and economically secure group, contending that such an alliance would always be based on shaky grounds.\textsuperscript{260} Thirdly, they exposed the falsified premises of the proposition that political conditions could be sustained on a moral, friendly or sentimental basis, or based on appeals to the conscience, emphasising rather powerfully that political relations were always based on self-interest: they entailed potential benefits that could be gained and the possible pitfalls that had to be avoided. They held that politics was determined by a conscious or subconscious evaluation of material good and evil and argued that all politics resulted from a conflict of interests and not of

\textsuperscript{257} Ibid, p.41.
\textsuperscript{258} Ibid, p.53.
\textsuperscript{259} Ibid, p.61.
\textsuperscript{260} Ibid, p.66.
consciences.\textsuperscript{261} According to this theory, since Black people lacked a majority, Black Power meant creating an environment, through whatever means where Blacks could also share the control mechanisms. It meant the creation of power bases, of a position of strength, from which black people could press to change local or nation-wide patterns of oppression. It did not mean merely putting Black faces into a middle-class office set-up. Black visibility was not co-terminus with Black Power; the latter arose from the pragmatic realisation that the ethnic basis of American politics as well as its fundamental power-oriented nature needed to be dramatically transformed. Black Power therefore, called for Black people to consolidate behind ‘their own’, so that they could bargain from a position of strength.\textsuperscript{262}

Though this theory had its origins in certain long-standing conceptions of power and political change, its advocates still had to face the charge of racism. It was argued that ‘self-identification and ‘self-determination’ of the Black community was tantamount to ‘racism in reverse’ or to the ideology of ‘Black supremacy’. This was seen as deliberate propaganda and obfuscation by the proponent of Black Power, who clarified that no analogy could be possibly found, by any stretch of the imagination, between the advocates of Black Power and retrograde beliefs of White racists: Black people of the USA had not, after all, lynched Whites, bombed their churches, murdered their children and manipulated laws and institutions to maintain oppression.\textsuperscript{263}

The leaders of this movement were extremely critical of the proponents of the civil rights leaders, who appeared to be pleading with the White majority, asking them: ‘Look, you guys are supposed to be nice guys, and we are only going to do what we are supposed to do. Why do you beat us up? Why don’t you give us

\textsuperscript{261} Ibid, p.75.
\textsuperscript{262} Ibid, p.47.
\textsuperscript{263} Ibid, p.47.
what we ask? Why don’t you straighten yourselves out? Leaders of the Black Power movement argued that this language achieved virtually nothing for the masses of Black people, least of all dignity and respect. In fact, according to them, such platitudes resulted in a worsening of the objective day-to-day conditions of the Blacks, a leading proof of which was the fact that whereas unemployment rates, condition of schools, and the housing situation amongst the Black population worsened, they improved amongst the White section of the population.

Leaders of the Black Power movement claimed that though they partly deplored the overt violence of riots, they found it more important to focus on the real cause for these eruptions. To them, it emanated from the silent and covert violence which the White middle-class America inflicted upon the victims of the inner city. They argued that:

Those of us who advocate Black Power are quite clear in our own minds that a ‘non-violent’ approach to civil rights is an approach black people cannot afford and a luxury white people do not deserve. It is crystal clear to us—and it must become so with the White society—that there can be no social order without social justice. White people must be made to understand that they must stop messing with black people, or the Blacks will fight back.

Leaders of the Black Power movement urged Black people to choose their own leaders who could be accountable to them, they had to form and run their own organisations: the first step in the struggle was, after all, to inculcate the belief that Black people could do their things themselves, that they could take charge of their own lives. Only through such pragmatic politics could a radical Black consciousness that was a source of great political strength be created. The primary goal, therefore, was to achieve self-identity and self-determination in order to meet the daily needs of the community.

264 Ibid, pp.50–51.
265 Ibid, p.53.
To many, it seemed that elements of separatist politics within such a theory could, in the long run, lead to ‘reverse-racism’. Whether they actually would do so or not was questionable, and Carmichael refused to offer any assurance about Black Power not indulging in the retrograde ideology of racism by noting that:

> We cannot and shall not offer any guarantees that Black Power if achieved would be non racist. No one can predict human behaviour. Social change always has un-anticipated consequences. If black racism is what the larger society fears, we can not help them. We can only state what we hope will be the result, given the fact that the present situation is unacceptable and that we have no real alternative but to work for Black Power. The final truth is that the white society is not entitled to reassurances, even if it were possible to offer them.\(^{266}\)

Such notions perhaps antagonised a section of the White population that was sympathetic to the cause of the African-American community. Black Power pushed for an idea that the only real path to liberation was through the politics of radical group action. SNCC, deploiring these tendencies within the movement, argued that helping Black individuals solve their problems on an individual basis did very little to alleviate the condition of large sections of Black people. It also argued that while colour-blindness was ultimately a sound ideal and goal, it had to be realised that race was an overwhelming fact of life in all of human history. Countering these arguments, Carmichael re-invoked the appallingly bleak condition of Black men in the country, arguing that there was not a single person from this community who could live ‘simply as a man’.

Martin Luther King was one of those activists and ideologues who saw Black Power as representing an implicit, to some extent, and often explicit ‘Black separatism’, though he refrained from called it ‘Black Racism’. He found it inaccurate to refer Black Power as racism in reverse as many others had done. In fact, he came to their partial defence by noting that though a few angry proponents of Black Power, in moments of heat, might have made wild statements that could

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\(^{266}\) Ibid, p.49.
have sounded racist, their leaders never contended that the White man was innately worthless. What King feared most, however, was reflected in these words:

Black Power alone is no more insurance against social injustice than white power. Negro politicians can be as opportunistic as their white counterparts if there is not an informed and determined constituency demanding social reform. What is most needed is a coalition of Negroes and liberal whites that will work to make both major parties truly responsive to the needs of the poor. Black Power does not envision or desire any such program.

King’s criticism was in sharp contrast to the views held by Charmichael. In fact, this engagement with the rhetoric of the Black Power movement led Martin Luther King to disassociate himself completely from violence, and he presented the SCLC as a viable alternative. King gradually moved towards emphasising economic and political strength, and in talking about this political strength, there was a fresh emphasis on creating a sense of pride within Negro manhood. King’s own campaign in Chicago did not aim to ‘integrate’ but to ‘end slums’. In the year that followed the turbulent summer of 1966, King merged the questions of pride and power with those of love and nonviolence.

Violence: Rhetoric of Guns

The Black Power movement also emerged partly in response to the violent anti-Black politics of the times, represented by the organisation Ku Klux Klan. Robert F. William’s *Negroes with Guns* presented a philosophical justification for the Black community’s need to arm itself in self-defence against the Ku Klux Klan. Williams, through this critique, influenced a generation of Black insurgents who helped lay the groundwork of Black Power Movement. This book also fascinated Huey P. Newton and became the most important intellectual influence for his Black Panther Party for Self Defense. Williams wrote:

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268 Ibid, p.53.
People aspire to be free. People want to be liberated when they are oppressed. No matter where the leadership comes from. The enslavement and suppression of Negroes in the American south were going on before Karl Marx was born, and Negroes have been rebelling against their oppression before Marxism came into existence. As far back as the sixteenth century, and the beginning of seventeenth century, Negroes were even rebelling on the slave ships...Negroes need not be told by any philosophy or by any political party that racial oppression is wrong. Racial oppression itself inspires the Negro to rebellion.270

Marx’s views on slavery were not static and he saw modern slavery as a system with a dynamic rise as productive forces developed followed by stagnation, decline and overthrow. Throughout Karl Marx’s long career as a philosopher, historian and social critic, he considered the enslavement of African people in America to be a fundamental aspect of rising capitalism not only in the New World, but in Europe as well.271 Newton and others also received substantial encouragement for their strategy of violent self-defence though the theoretical arguments presented by authors like Frantz Fanon, a Black psychiatrist from Martinique who went to Algeria to work with the National Liberation Front in its fight against French colonialism. Defending the validity of violence as a method to fight colonialism, he wrote:

At the level of individuals, violence is a cleansing force. It frees the native from his inferiority complex and from his despair and inaction; it makes him fearless and restores his self respect. Even if the armed struggle has been symbolic and the nation is demobilized through a rapid movement of decolonization, the people have the time to see that the liberation has been the business of each and all and that the leader has no special merit.272

Fanon became an ideologue who inspired an entire generation of activists to accept the violent mode of protest as a means to fight back oppressors across the globe. The young generation within many Third World countries resorted to this method first in their bid to fight ‘colonialism’ and subsequently in their struggle against class-enemies during the post-colonial period.

272 Frantz Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth (Suffolk: Penguin, 1963), p.74.
Highlighting and deconstructing the menace of colonialism, Fanon suggested that before taking the fight to the colonizer, one had to figure out the internal enemies; he explained to his revolutionary brethren in Africa, Asia and Latin America that a radical socialism could be the possible means of achieving victory over past or present colonial domination. In the conclusion to his classic work *The Wretched of the Earth*, he wrote:

So comrades, let us not pay tribute to Europe by creating states, institutions and societies which draw inspiration from her. Humanity is waiting for something other from us than such an imitation, which would be almost an obscene caricature. If we want to turn Africa into new Europe, and America into a new Europe, then let us leave the destiny of our countries to Europeans. They will know how to do it better than the most gifted among us. But if we want humanity to advance a step further...we must invent, we must make discoveries...we must turn a new leaf, we must workout new concepts and try to set afoot a new man.273

Martin Luther King acknowledged the courage and bravery reflected in this words; he also recognised the fact that young men and women everywhere were quoting Fanon’s words and using his books as gospels. But King saw a problem with Fanon’s attempts at ‘working out new concepts [while continuing to] imitate the old concept of violence’. He pointed towards this contradiction using Fanon’s own emphasis on creating and imagining new methods of struggle, noting that:

Violence has been the inseparable twin of materialism, the hallmark of its grandeur and misery. This is the one thing about modern civilization that I do not care to imitate. Humanity is waiting for something other than blind imitation of the past. If we want truly to advance a step further, if we want to turn over a new leaf and really set a new man afoot, we must begin to turn mankind away from the long and desolate night of violence.274

Martin Luther King’s critique of Fanon’s theories was also intended as a conscious critique of the SNCC on the question of modes of struggle. He agreed there was nothing wrong with the desire to attain power, and that this desire was one of the moving forces behind the course of human history. This power, though, was unequally distributed within America and the only true way for Blacks to redress this balance was through the strategies of love and moral suasion, despite the attempts by White Americans to seek their goals through the exercise of power

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273 Ibid., p.252.
devoid of love and conscience. King felt that a handful of extremists were advocating destructive and conscience-less power: aspects that they themselves hated in Whites. He noted that:

The proponents of Black Power argued passionately about the validity of violence and riots. They don’t quote Gandhi or Tolstoy. Their Bible is Frantz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth*...and so realizing that they are a part of that vast company of the ‘wretched of the earth’, these young American Negroes, who are predominantly involved in the Black Power Movement often, quote Fanon’s belief that violence is the only thing that will bring about liberation.²⁵

In contrast to this assertion, Carmichael maintained that the question of violence or nonviolence was virtually irrelevant as power was the only thing that could win respect and dignity and this had to be achieved at any cost. Even King accepted the need to attain power, though, as noted earlier, his differences with Carmichael and others arose on the question of the means to attain this power. In a conversation with Stokley, when asked whether other ethnic groups in America had done the same things that he was suggesting, King replied:

No one has ever heard the Jews publicly chant a slogan of Jewish Power, but they have power. Through group unity, determination and creative endeavor, they have gained it. The same thing is true of the Irish and Italian. Neither group has used a slogan of Irish or Italian Power, but they have worked hard to achieve it. This is exactly what we must do. We must use every constructive means to amass economic and political power. This is the kind of legitimate power we need. We must work to build racial pride and refute the notion that black is evil and ugly. But this must come through a program, not merely through a slogan.²⁶

It was within this charged atmosphere, where the question of dignity, respect, and Black Power were being debated by all sections of Black activists and intelligentsia that Malcolm X emerged as one of the most controversial Black Nationalist leaders of the twentieth century in the United States. A former school dropout, convict, drug peddler-turned-prophet, philosopher, and spokesperson, Malcolm himself stated that until his imprisonment and ultimate self-redemption, he had been a small-time gangster whose only sources of pride were his light skin and red hair. In prison, he turned into a voracious reader who not just copied a ‘dictionary’ page by page to improve his vocabulary, but who also read on diverse

²⁶ Ibid., pp. 36–37.
subjects ranging from history, philosophy, psychology and political theory. While in prison, he also converted from atheism to Islam, the ‘true religion of a Black man’, as taught by Elijah Muhammad. After his release, Malcolm worked in close association with Elijah and his Nation of Islam.277 His convictions were also strengthened upon reading Uncle Tom’s Cabin, which exerted a huge influence on him. Malcolm worked tirelessly to propagate the gospel of Black Nationalism, though clarifying at the same time that his intention was not to threaten the existence of any other organisation. He, in fact, did not prevent anyone from joining other organisation be it NAACP or CORE if they were also preaching and strengthening the doctrine of Black Nationalism.

Malcolm’s alliance with the Nation of Islam was not to last too long, though, and a few days before he was to officially announce his separation with Elijah in 1964, he went to meet Alex Haley and M. S. Handler to deliver some documents and had a long discussion with him about future prospects over cups of tea. Once Malcolm left, Handler noted quite significantly that the experience was the almost the same as ‘having tea with [a] Black Panther’.278 However, she intended this as a compliment, clarifying that:

[The] Black Panther is an aristocrat in the animal kingdom. He is beautiful. He is dangerous...no man in our time aroused fear and hatred in the white man sensed an implacable foe that could not be had for any price- a man unreservedly committed to the cause of liberating the black man in American society rather than integrating the black man into the society.279

Soon afterwards, on 28 June 1864 to be precise, Malcolm X started the Organization of Afro American Unity. The principal objective of the organisation was to further the fight for the promotion of human rights. It also resolved to push for Black control over every aspect of the life of the Black community. Malcolm X intended this organisation and its methods to be substantially different from those

277 Nation of Islam was found in July 1930 at Detroit, Michigan by Wallace Fard Muhammad. It was a religious organisation with a goal of resurrecting social, economic and spiritual conditions of the Black Muslims in America. They taught their followers that Wallace Fard was both ‘Messiah’ of Christianity as well as ‘Mahdi’ of Islam. Subsequently Elijah Muhammad became the leader of the Nation of Islam.
279 Ibid, p.xxv.
A Black Art at Malcolm Shabazz Center at Manhattan, New York City
of other ideologues and activists, most notably the leaders of the Civil Rights movement. On being asked about his opinion of Martin Luther King by a journalist, Malcolm X replied rather strongly and without mincing any words:

Any Black man who goes among so-called Negroes today who are being brutalized, spit upon in the worst fashion imaginable, and teaches those Negroes to turn the other cheek, to suffer peacefully, or love their enemy is a traitor to the Negro. Everybody on this earth has the right to defend themselves. Now only people who are taught to love their enemy are Negroes. The only people who are encouraged to adopt this old passive resistance or 'wait until you change your mind and then let me' philosophy is the American Negro. And any man that propagates that kind of doctrine among Negroes is a traitor to those people.280

Malcolm X's notion on the mode of protest is best reflected in his speech titled 'Ballots or Bullets', which he delivered on 3 April 1964 at Cleveland, Ohio. There he eloquently suggested that the Afro-American community needed to exercise its ballots judiciously and pragmatically so as to create a rift within the vote-banks of the White organisations: they did, after all, have the partial ability to choose the next incumbent in the hallowed White House. Simultaneously, though, he also pointed out the need to use the bullet for self defence, noting that:

All of us have suffered here, in this country, political oppression at the hands of the white man, economic exploitation at the hands of white man, and social degradation at the hands white man. Now in speaking like this does not mean that we are anti-white but it does mean we are anti-exploitation, we are anti-degradation, we are anti-oppression. And if the white man does not want us to be anti-him, let him stop oppressing, exploiting and degrading us...if we don't do something real soon, I think you will have to agree that we are going to be forced either to use ballot or the bullet...its time for Negroes to defend themselves. It is constitutionally legal to own a shotgun or rifle. This does not mean you are going to get a rifle and form battalions and go out looking for white folks.281

Despite the use of such charged words and language, a range of scholars and activists feel that Malcolm was deliberately projected as spreading hate by the White mass media; that even his 'Ballot or Bullets' speech had been misinterpreted and projected as advocating overt violence, which was fundamentally untrue. Dowoti Desir, for instance, in clarifying this position stated that:

...Malcolm X never advocated violence. What he advocated for was a Constitutional Right of bearing arms...he only talked of the black communities defending themselves. As far as violence is concerned he never killed anyone or even shot anyone. In fact his own father was killed by the hoodlums of the Ku Klux Klan. He was born in a society which was already violent...  

Despite these defences of Malcolm, it cannot be denied that he began his career as an apostle of hatred against Whites, though he did subsequently come to believe in human equality as he moved away from Elijah and became opposed to his insistence on Black supremacy. One of the turning points in his life and career was his trip to Mecca, and upon his return from the Haj, he noted how orthodox Islam had given him a new insight and perspective that he now realised that Black men and White men truly could be brothers. M. H. Handler, in the introduction to The Autobiography of Malcolm X, wrote:

Assassins’ bullets ended Malcolm X’s career before he was able to develop this new approach which in essence recognized the Negroes as an integral part of the American community—a far cry from Elijah Muhammad’s doctrine of separation. Malcolm had reached the mid point in redefining his attitude to this country and the white-black relationship. He no longer inveighed against the United States but against a segment of the United States represented by overt white supremacist in the South and covert white supremacists in the north.

There is no denying the fact that Malcolm has been portrayed as a controversial figure in the history of Black Movements. His disassociation from the Nation of Islam, and subsequently his activism with his own ‘Organization of Afro-American Unity’ for a brief period have been deliberately overplayed by mainstream American historians. His shift from ‘separatist’ ideology to ‘integrationist’ ideology after his return from Mecca has also been ignored. Malaak Shabazz, Malcolm’s son, remarks in this context that:

The work of historians has been to reinterpret my father Malcolm X. Thus, everyone has brought out their own understandings about him. I see my father to have evolved a lot, for example from a civil rights activist to a human rights activist. A lot of scholars have made mistakes interpreting him because they

282 Dowoti Desir in a personal interview conducted on 11 July 2008 at New York City. Desir is the Executive Director, ‘The Malcolm X & Dr. Betty Shabazz Memorial an Educational Center’, New York City.
remained stuck about his ideas in some selective periods of his whole life. Martin
and Malcom were not necessarily adversaries. They were both staunch advocates
for the rights of the black. To some extent their religious difference brought about
the differences in their approaches towards similar issues. Both were moving
towards a common strategy for the common goal.285

Arguing along similar lines, other scholars have extended this justification
to the politics of the Black Power movement as a whole. Robert L. Scott, for
instance, has drawn three conclusions with regard to the method of Black Power:
(i) There can be no mistake that we do hear what must be interpreted as advocacy
of violence, (ii) The rhetoric of violent Black Power is substantially justificatory.
Black violence is justified as a response to prior white violence; it is self defence, a
reaction to racism, and can be most readily identified with guerilla action to
overthrow imperialistic colonialism (iii) It tends to work in such a way as to
maximise the slender hope that may exist for a relatively peaceful, constructive
working out of the ideology of Black Power.286

This debate regarding violence and the ‘mode of protest’ has never been
easy to comprehend. Many scholars have elaborated upon the fact that the Civil
Rights Movement represented primarily a non-violent era and that the Black Power
leaders and Black Panthers heralded a break with the advocacy of the violent mode
of protest. A contemporary historian Curtis J. Austin has opined that there was
never a phase of ‘entirely-nonviolent’ or ‘only-violent’ phase in the history of
Black Movement. He stated that:

The problem is that most of us historians have got it wrong and there existed no
stage of purely non-violent movement. Christopher String’s book Purifier, Simon
Vent’s The Spearhead and the Shotgun as well as Charles Paine’s I’ve got the
light of freedom; these all tell that non-violent movement worked hand in hand
with another movement which was going on to save the civil rights protesters with
whatever like sticks, knives or firearms. There were organizations like the Black
Hats, Dickens with the friends of justice, etc. Also there were people who worked
with no organizations but used to walk at the outskirts of the marches to save the
activists and protesters.287

285 Malaak Shabazz in a personal interview conducted at Manhattan, New York City on 10 July
2008. Shabazz is youngest daughter of Malcolm X.
287 Curtis J. Austin in a personal interview conducted at Harlem, New York City on 19 July 2008.
Curtis is Director of Black History and Associate Professor at University of Southern Mississippi.
Writing in a similar vein, Ula Y. Taylor also refuses to see Black Panthers as a complete break. She chooses to see it within a continuum of struggles for self-defence being waged in different parts of the country and argues that there had been several such organisations/struggles in history which, though not organised, carried a strong element of fighting oppression using the mechanism of self-defence'. She reflected that:

First of all, it would be incorrect to say that it was exclusively a non-violent movement and later on a movement for self-defense. Since the Supreme Court decision Brown vs. Board decision in 1954 up until 1966 when Black Panther Party was formed, there were always movements of self-defense...although Rosa Parks may not have given up her seat; her husband was very active in the Scottsboro Case in the 1930s. Her husband had guns in his house. Martin Luther King had guns in his house. So that doesn't mean that just because there was a nonviolent philosophy, it did not mean that it cut off people thinking that they had the right to defend themselves. Pure Fire: Self Defense Activism in the Civil Rights Era has documented how during this period what the historians call nonviolent movement, that Black people were willing to defend themselves at the same time.

Within this entire debate, the issue that is most important and which tends to get sidetracked is that of whether 'self-defence', 'nonviolence' or 'violence' are modes that are viable and easy to sustain. In this context, it must be noted that whereas the violent mode often becomes a tool for liberation for a short while, the lessons of history suggest that it is the non-violent mode which leads to maximum participation and larger mobilisations. Megan French, researching the question of justification of the use of violence by the Black Power movement, stated that:

I think ever since there was racial violence, there was a response from the black community. Those who wanted to separate 'black power' from 'civil rights' failed to see that these things were happening simultaneously. In 1961, several Negroes with guns declared that 'if someone attacks our home we will have to retaliate.' King was always in interaction with 'more direct-action group'. But I think on the other hand there is a difference between being passive and nonviolent. Some black power scholars failed to recognize the power that non-violence had. King knew that this strategy of non-violence only can be sustained. We see 'Black Power' was extremely important but it failed. Some 726 Panthers were shot dead on the

He has written Up Against the Wall: Violence in the Making and Unmaking of the Black Panther Party (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2008).

288 The Scottsboro Boys were nine Black defendants in a 1931 rape case initiated in Scottsboro, Alabama. The case was heard by the United States Supreme Court twice and the decisions established the principles that criminal defendants are entitled to effective assistance of counsel and that people may not be de facto excluded from juries because of their race.

289 Ula Y. Taylor in a personal interview conducted at UC, Berkeley on 29th July 2008.
Bill Jennings, a Black Panther (Now Historian of Black Panther Party, at Sacramento)

Melvin Dickson, a Black Panther (Now Editor of Commemorator, Published from Berkeley)
streets by the cops. So in terms of organizing the movements for those populations
which is in minority demographically, non-violence is a necessity.290

Behind this gun-totting protest strategy, then, was a powerful sense of
having been wronged, of having been on the wrong side of history, and violence
was a symptom of the deep-seated revulsion against all oppression. It was also a
symptom of the impatience with all oppressive structures, which was sought to be
‘fixed’ through retaliatory action. This sentiment was the leading force behind the
formation of the Black Panther Party for Self Defense, whose ideology was
influenced by the writings and radical activism of Marx, Lenin, Mao, Che Guevara,
Ho Chi Minh etc. These ideologies were churned together with other leading
theories of non-colonisation, prominent amongst which were those contained in
Robert William’s *Negroes with Guns* and Frantz Fanon’s *Wretched of the Earth*,
thus producing a peculiar and potent mix. The rhetoric of guns was, in particular,
picked up by the young Black Panthers in order to defend themselves against the
police brutality and was a clear step ahead of the ideology of passive resistance.
Talking of the significance of guns, Bill Jennings, a former panther, commented
that:

> Black people never had guns. In 60s people broke out of the Negro mode. They
realized that they were black people. The Black people understood how they want
to be looked at or viewed as. It was a question of mentality. In the civil rights
movement these questions were addressed through the church. But church can be
progressive (only) up to a point...you cannot turn the other cheek when they set
their dogs on you...when they hit you on your head...when they beat your mother
up. You cannot stand by and watch that happen... the riots started...mostly as
result of police brutality...Black Panthers taught people how to arm themselves
and how to better organize themselves...291

This culture of the gun and impatience of institutionalised brutality is the
theme that we are going to focus on in the next sections, and these were reflected to

290 Megan French in a personal interview conducted at Columbia University, New York City, on 14
July 2008. Megan is a graduate student at Institute for research in African American Studies at
Columbia University and researching on ‘Black Power’. She is White and her parents were part of
the historic Civil Rights Movement in the U.S.

291 Bill Jennings in a personal interview conducted at Sacramento on 6 August 2008. Jennings was a
member of Black Panther Party. He is a panther historian and houses an achieve of the BPP, letters,
pamphlets, newspapers, art, posters etc. in the name of ‘It’s About Time’ at his residence in
Sacramento.
a large measure in the writings, activities, speeches and the eventual murder of George Jackson.

George Jackson

I woke up this morning
There were tears in my bed.
They killed a man I really loved
Shot him through the head.
Lord, Lord,
They cut George Jackson down
Lord, Lord, They laid him in the ground.

Sent him off to prison
for a seventy-dollar robbery
Closed the door behind him
and they threw away the key
Lord, Lord, they cut George Jackson down
Lord, Lord,
They laid him in the ground.

He wouldn't take a shit from no one
He wouldn't bow down or kneel
Authorities, they hated him
because he was just too real.
Lord, Lord, they cut George Jackson down
Lord, Lord,
They laid him in the ground.

Prison guards they cursed him
As they watched him from above
But they were frightened of his power
They were scared of his love
Lord, Lord, they cut George Jackson down
Lord, Lord,
They laid him in the ground.

Sometimes I think this whole world
is one big prison yard.
Some of us are prisoners,
The rest of us are guards.
Lord, Lord, they cut George Jackson down

292 George L. Jackson with his communist leaning became a member of Black Panther Party. He spent some twelve years in jail where he wrote famous Soledad Brother: Prison Letters of George Jackson. Jackson was shot and killed at San Quentin prison, California on 21 August 1971. Bob Dylan has written and sung this song hearing the news of murder of Jackson.
Lord, Lord.
They laid him in the ground.

Black Power’s advocacy for a ‘cultural-revolution’ offered a renewed sense of ‘Black-consciousness’ that influenced school curricula and introduced an element of cultural awareness programmes in arts, fashion, language, etc. It was not, according to them, enough to seek justice for the African Americans’ anguish and frustration; they also had to create a positive identity of their own. These calls were broadened by Black Panthers Party for Self Defense who employed the slogan of ‘All Power to the People’. The notion of ‘self-defence’ guided the early phase of the Black Panthers. Bill Johnson, a panther activist with Harlem chapter of the party noted that:

...Our whole goal was to change the system...to try and bring equal justice and equal rights for our people...we came a long way as an anti-thesis to Martin Luther King...if you are hurt on one cheek, you bring the other and again when you get hurt then what do you do? We never advocated to go out and attack the police but advocated amongst black people the need for self defense. Our goal therefore was to teach ‘self-defense’. Our tactics did not include anything to do with weapons...but activities like providing food to the Black children and making them feel comfortable and learn...

One of its most important functions of BPP since its inception was to provide for a number of community programmes, which included the ‘free breakfast for children’, ‘free health clinics’ and ‘liberation youth schools’ programmes. Though the Panthers sought to portray an image of being revolutionarily urban guerrillas from the very beginning, it has been pointed out by several scholars that the Panthers’ objectives, as stated in the programme, were more reformist than revolutionary. BPP leaders, however, defended community programmes as being neither revolutionary nor reformist. They noted that they were, instead, mere survival programmes, arguing that for any revolutionary transformation to occur in a society, people had to first possess the potential skills and ideas needed to eke out an existence.

293 Bill Johnson in a personal interview conducted at Harlem, New York City on 20 July 2008. Johnson was member of the Black Panther Party and currently is labour activist working for a hospital labour union at Harlem.
Free Breakfast Program for Children
by Black Panther Party

Free Food Program for People
by Black Panther Party
The Black Panther Party’s ‘Ten Point Program and Platform: What We Want, What We Believe’ is usually seen as the party’s manifesto. In it, Huey Newton noted that a major political objective would be to carry out a plebiscite under the supervision of the United Nations throughout all present or past Black colonies, in which only Black colonial subjects would be allowed to participate, for the purpose of determining the will of Black people as to their ‘national’ destiny. Despite this radical and slightly idyllic programme, it is interesting to note that prominent activists and theoreticians like Elridge Cleaver were unable to clearly state whether they supported racial integration or separation till July 1968.

One of the most significant challenges facing any political party claiming to endorse the teachings of Marx and Lenin is to translate the significant body of Marxist revolutionary literature into hard-core political action. Although within all liberal democratic societies which have attained the advanced stages of capitalistic growth, there is usually some space to mobilise masses on various questions and grievances, Marxist activists have often failed to make strategic use of this space to further their own politics and programmes. The Panthers’ emphasis on education and other seemingly ‘reformist’ activities were perhaps a ploy to ‘educate’ masses and to bring them within the fold of this politics of dissension. Bill Johnson, for example, found Community Program of the Panthers helpful in connecting with the people. He stated that:

[The] BPP used to hold Community Political Education classes to develop their understandings of the situation. The reason for this was because we knew that hungry and jobless people will not be interested in Marxist Theory lessons. So we started the education which could help them achieve a survival standard. This we called the Survival Programme. We provided free food to children so that without worrying for food they would go to school to learn education. Also we started health clinics. All this was in our view needed to first care for their needs and then bind them together to struggle for altering or abolishing the system of exploitation. Bottom line for Marxism is that it needs to understand that you need to first feed someone before you could teach them...  

294 Bill Johnson in a personal interview conducted at Harlem, New York City on 20 July 2009.

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However, although these projects were a part of the 'Ten-Point Program' which guided the initial actions of the BPP, it would be a grave mistake to consider these programmes as the ideological basis of the party. Fred Hampton, at a later point, remarked in this connection that: "Our Ten-Point Program" is in the midst of being changed right now, because we used the word "White" when we should have used the word "Capitalist". A substantial amount of Marxist ideology was always present in the programme, but the Panthers appeared to realize by 1968 that their 'nationalist outlook' was not sufficient to overturn the historic structures and processes of Black oppression.

Two crucial episodes in the short-lived history of the Black Panther Party were bringing about these transformations. One was the Panthers' audacious march with guns on the California Assembly at Sacramento which led to big stories in the mainstream media. Even though the press did not portray the story in a positive tone, it brought the party into the public eye not only in the Bay Area, but across the entire nation. The second episode was the 'Free-Huey Movement'. This campaign provided an opportunity to the BPP to deconstruct some of the images which the mainstream media had created during the Sacramento episode about the panthers being 'anti-White'. This section of the chapter will deal with both the 'Sacramento' and 'Free-Huey' episodes. The BPP although started with two pages document of 'Program and Platform', the party maintained an unending debate on its ideology and an attempt of a continuous transformation of its ideological line. The next part of the chapter will deal with 'ideology of the panthers' which will include its position from 'revolutionary-internationalism' and 'gender-questions'.
California State Assembly Hall at Sacramento where Black Panthers had marched on With Guns
THE SACRAMENTO STORY

The Revolution will not be Televised

You will not be able to stay home brother.  
You will not be able to plug in, turn on and cop out.  
You will not be able to loose yourself on skag and skip,  
  Skip out of beer during commercials,  
Because the revolution will not be televised.

The revolution will not be televised  
The revolution will not be brought to you by Xerox  
In four parts without commercial interruptions,  
The revolution will not show you pictures of Nixon  
Blowing you bugle and leading a charge by John Mitchell, General Abrams and Spiro Agnew to eat  
Hog maws confiscated from Harlem sanctuary.  
The revolution will not be televised.

There will be no pictures of pig shooting down  
Brothers in the instant replay  
There will be no pictures of Whitney Young being  
Run out of Harlem on a rail with a brand new process  
There will be no slow motion or still life of Roy Wilkins296 strolling through Watts in a Red, Black and Green liberation jumpsuit that he had been saving  
For just the proper occasion

There will be no highlights on the eleven o’clock  
News and pictures of hairy armed woman  
Liberationists and Jackie Onassis297 blowing her nose.  
The theme song will not be written by Jim Webb,  
Francis Scott Key298, nor sung by Glen Campbell, Tom Jones, Johnny Cash, Englebert Humperdinck299, or the Rare Earth  
The revolution will not be televised.

The revolution will not be right back after a message

295 ‘Revolution will not be televised’ is a poem-song written and sung by Gil Scott Heron. This song was a part of album ‘Pieces of a Man’ released in 1971.  
296 Roy Wilkins was a noted leader of NAACP. He was very active in the Civil Rights Movement.  
297 Jacqueline Lee Bouvier Kennedy Onassis was wife of John F. Kennedy, the 35th President of the United States. She is remembered for her style and elegance.  
298 Francis Scott Key (1779–1843) was a famous poet and lawyer in the United States of America who penned the ‘The Star Spangled Banner’ —the national anthem of the United States.  
299 Arnold George Dossey was born on 2 May 1936 in Madras, Tamil Nadu, India. He became famous internationally as Anglo-American singer in the 1960s and 70s. It was then that he adopted the name of famous German Opera composer Englebert Humperdinck as his stage name.
About a white tornado, white lightning or white people.
You will not have to worry about a dove in your
bedroom, a tiger in your tank, or the giant in your toilet bowl.
The revolution will not go better with coke.
The revolution will not fight the germs that may cause bad breath
The revolution will put you in the driver’s seat

The revolution will not be televised, will not be televised
Will not be televised, will not be televised,
The revolution will be no re-run brothers;
The revolution will be live.

In 1966, a statute passed in the California assembly gave permission to
individuals to carry a loaded arm in public as long as it was not concealed and did
not have a bullet in the chamber. The Panthers used this legal loophole to arm
themselves with loaded weapons, cameras, law books, tape-recorders and used
them to monitor the movement and activity of the police in the Black community of
Oakland. This patrolling by the Panthers prevented incidents of police harassment
which the Black community had been previously subjected to. Huey P. Newton
gained popularity for facing the police with guns and with his mastery of the law. 300
These actions of the leaders also served the purpose of recruiting new members for
the party.

Most Black communities in Richmond, 301 where the Black Panthers were
active, were located outside the purview of the city. It was in this area that Denzil
Dowell, a twenty-two years old Black ghetto youth was shot and killed by an
officer of Martinez Sheriff’s Department on 1 April 1967. Denzil had a minor
police record and a record of not having greeted every policeman as ‘sir’ every time
he spoke to them. Bobby Seale recalled that:

We told the people there that we are going to have a rally that coming Saturday at
the corner of Chelsea and Third Street. We said we would run down and educate...
them about the fact that we would have to start using guns to defend ourselves, because the racist pig cops were coming to our community and murdering our brothers and sisters. Brother Denzil Dowell was murdered, and we’d found information about two, three other brothers who had been shot up back in December, in north Richmond there. The brothers had been shot up in their armpits, which showed a clear cut case of murder on the part of the pigs.\(^{302}\)

Black Panther Party realised the need of to have a medium through which they could communicate such incidents of oppression to the public at large, and as a result, the party began its monthly publication. On 25 April 1967, the first issue of the BPP newspaper, *The Black Panther Community News Service* was published, and the editorial of the inaugural issue set the tone of the newspaper for the time to come. The four-page mimeograph was devoted to Denzil and the front page story read: ‘I believe the police murdered my son’, which had been stated by Denzil’s mother.\(^{303}\) This issue of the paper detailed all the questionable aspects of Denzil’s shooting, and asserted that:

The White cop is the instrument sent into our community by the power structure to keep Black people quiet and under control... it is time that Black people start moving in the direction that will free our communities from this form of outright brutal oppression. The Black Panther Party for Self Defense has worked out a program that is carefully designed to cope with the situation.\(^{304}\)

Black Panthers, as well as family members of Denzil, understood that it would require a long battle before the administration could be persuaded to re-open Denzil’s murder investigation. They also realised that it was very necessary to mount pressure on the issue of the Mulford Bill, which was soon to be introduced in the California Assembly by a Republican assemblyman called Don Mulford. The proposed bill intended to ban the display of loaded weapons within designated areas which would ultimately make the Panthers’ patrolling against police brutality illegal. This Bill was intended to subvert the state’s own famous Second Amendment to the U.S. Constitution which, since 15 December 1791, guaranteed to everyone the right to bear arms.


A Visual by Emory Doughlas
Protesting against the Bill, Bobby Seale led thirty Black Panthers outside the California State Assembly Hall on 5 May 1967 to contest the proposed Mulford Bill. The Bill was introduced after repeated urgings by the Oakland police. Twenty out of the twenty-four men who walked into the hall were armed, in addition to which there were also six women Panthers, one of whom was Artie Seal, the wife of Bobby Seal. Huey Newton himself was not accompanying the panthers as he feared for his life and because the activists did not want to make the police aware of the total number of Panthers. Also, Newton was still on probation in the Odell Lee case and perhaps he was also needed for orchestrating releases in case of the arrest of Panthers, which appeared highly likely.

These protestors all walked in to the Assembly casually in a dispersed manner. Ronald Reagan, the governor of California State, was speaking to a group of two hundred young leaders on the lawns of the Assembly building. All of a sudden, reporters, the police and cameramen who were busy covering the Reagan story started to swarm around the Panthers. Bobby Seale read out the Executive Mandate No.1 of the party while addressing the media, which read as follows:

Black Panther Party for Self Defense calls upon the American people, in general and the Black people in particular to take careful note of the racist California Legislature which is now considering Legislation aimed at keeping the Black people disarmed and powerless at the very same time that racist police agencies throughout the country are intensifying the terror, brutality, murder and repression of the Black people...Black Panther Party for Self Defense believes that the time has come for the Black people to arm themselves against this terror before it is too late. The pending Mulford Act brings the hour of doom one step nearer. A people who have suffered so much so, for so long at the hands of a racist society, must draw the line somewhere. We believe that the Black communities of America must rise up as one man to halt the progression of a trend that leads inevitably to their destruction.

Although as per the scheduled plan and Huey Newton’s instructions, the Panthers were not to enter the Assembly Hall, Bobby took a decision on the spot in

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305 The ‘Mulford Bill’ came to be popularly known as the ‘Panther-Bill’.
favour of entering the Assembly and informed the media about the plan. The crowd cleared the way for the Panthers. A noted scholar Reginald Major observed this action and wrote: 'The Legislature has witnessed sit-ins, sleep-ins, pray-ins and other protest activities but they were all eclipsed when the Panthers held a gun in.'

Seale located the place where members held the legislative sessions; reporters also directed the panthers who finally landed up on the floor of the assembly and not in the balcony of observation gallery. Bobby Hutton was always with Bobby Seale, and even entered into an argument with the police officers as a policeman tried to snatch away his arms. It has been officially reported that the guns were loaded but as Cleo Silvers, one of the former Panthers recalled, 'their guns were not concealed...they were empty guns.' Bobby Seale himself has clarified that:

The loaded rifle or shot gun meant an unexpended cartridge in the chamber. The law also read that unexpended cartridges in the magazine do not constitute a loaded gun. That is, bullets that have not been fired do not constitute a loaded gun, even if they are in the magazine. But if there is an unexpended cartridge or bullet inside the chamber of a rifle or a shotgun, then it is considered loaded.

Several White people were surprised at the show and were quite uncomprehending; the event appeared astounding to all the civilians as well as the officials on duty because it was almost unprecedented in history. All the Panthers had their guns pointed either straight up in the air or pointed straight down towards the floor; Huey had instructed them not to point the gun at anyone as it was illegal. Bobby Seale describes this episode in the imagery of Bob Dylan's Ballad of a Thin Man:

Oh this is just a gun club, and this is where Bob Dylan gets down on Mr. Jones.
"You don't know what's going on here" because this was going to be a colossal event and those people did not know what the hell was going on. Some of us did

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309 Cleo Silvers in a personal interview at Columbia University Campus, New York City on 19 July 2008.
look us at as gun club. But a lot of them looked us with an expression "what the hell are those niggers doing with these god dam rifles?".311

The Panthers did not pay any attention to those staring at them; they had gone in prepared, knowing fully well their constitutional right to carry a gun. Seale recalled in his autobiographical sketch that Huey’s idea about going to the assembly hall was based on the assumption that there would be a string of national guards and policemen on duty and that the action would, in any case, be conspicuous enough to be noticed.

Once the Panthers reached the main floor, they witnessed a long hall in front of them. When Seale asked for the way to the assembly, he realised that a pointer was showing them the way to the Senate instead. The Panthers kept walking down the hall and the press-cameramen kept flocking about and shooting. Seale once again asked for directions to the assembly and then somebody shouted that it was on the next floor. The Panthers reached there in no time. Seale recollects asking a news-reporter: ‘Could you please tell me where I go to observe the assemblymen making the laws? I want to go there. I want to see Mulford supposedly making this law against the Black people.’312

Several officers tried to confiscate their weapons, but the Panthers were alert enough to resist them. Many Panthers got into heated arguments with the policemen. While these conversations were going on, many reporters, while taking pictures, were moving towards the gate. The swarm of reporters was such that many of them, in their impatience to take pictures, knocked all policemen up against the wall.313 While Seale and others were making their way out of the assembly, Elridge Cleaver also reached there. Bobby Hutton’s gun was snatched by a policeman and he got into an argument with the policeman and wanted to know if he was under arrest. Huey had instructed everybody to ask about the arrest and then stand for their constitutional rights.

312 Ibid, p.158.
313 Ibid, p.158.
When Bobby Seale asked a cop about his arrest, he was pushed back into an elevator. Seale reacted patiently and responded that if they were arrested, they did not see any problem in it and would not oppose, except that he wanted to read out the party's mandate to the media once again. Soon, some ten Panthers with guns surrounded Seale in the elevator. They all moved back to the first floor and cleared a space in a room that had a small counter. All of a sudden, all the cameramen encircled them and Seale, yet again, read the whole mandate as drafted by Huey Newton.

Once this protest was over, the protesting Panthers hurriedly reached their cars and started off for Oakland. However, they had to stop at a gas station for water and the Sacramento police immediately encircled the Panthers' vehicle on the false premise that an officer had been assaulted on the floor of the assembly. All twenty-four male Panthers were charged with conspiracy, carrying concealed weapons, brandishing a weapon in a threatening manner and possession of loaded weapons in the vehicles. Warren Tucker wrote that:

"After we were arrested, booked and fingerprinted, we were all put into the Drunk Tank, a large room with nothing in it but us. No bed, no blankets, nothing. This kind of treatment you expect from a racist dog. Then the beast called us out, one by one, to make a statement, but all the brothers told the racist dog to go to hell. This is what I call Black UNITY."

All of the arrested Panthers were taken to the Sacramento jail. Both Seale and Cleaver took the charge of the group and Seale refused to sign any statement. One of the Panthers broke down in the face of intense questioning and signed the statement. Being imprisoned was a harrowing and fresh experience for most of those arrested, as none of them except Cleaver had ever been imprisoned before. As the Panthers had not eaten anything, they asked the authorities for food but were denied it. Bobby Seale has recorded the experience of the hunger the Panthers were experiencing that day in the following words:

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A Copy of a Newspaper Showing the Growing Popularity of Black Panther Party

A Copy of The Daily Californian
I know most of the brothers must have thought about what we said in the last point of the program. We wanted land, bread, housing, education, clothing, justice and peace. But the brothers knew that bread was food. Righteous food. I know they must have remembered that, because I remembered it. We were off in the jail there, and the man was talking about how we were not getting to eat. Shit. He must have been crazy. Burn that padded cell up, one way or the other. We had no matches or anything but we would have found something to burn it up with, and cause shit.\textsuperscript{316}

Most of the Panthers were experiencing the feeling of elation that comes with the realisation that a revolutionary task had been accomplished. However, some of the arrested Panthers could not face the prospect of imprisonment bravely. There was, for example, George Dowell who talked about having six children to be looked after, since his brother Denzil Dowell had been killed. He had joined the BPP because he felt it was the right thing to do and because the party had stood by him and his family when his brother had been killed by the racist cop.\textsuperscript{317}

However, the Panthers were soon out on bail, and though they were looked upon as heroes within their community, they were identified as hoodlums by the White press. Bobby Seale did not want to be arrested again over the protest incident as it would have hampered party activity, so he decided to go underground and shifted to Los Angeles. The District Attorney had summoned Seale and six others to plead guilty for disturbing the assembly. Seale clarified his position saying he was not guilty, as the reporters had led him astray and directed him to the floor. Artie, his comrade and wife, made him rethink his position in the larger interests of the party. Seale realised the far-reaching consequences of his action. Seale remembered Frantz Fanon’s classic statement: ‘we would go to the jail, those who are dedicated’, and decided to go back to Oakland.\textsuperscript{318}

A huge event had already taken place as per the plans of the BPP. Sacramento led to the Black Panther Party’s first national exposure. ‘US News’ and

\textsuperscript{317} Ibid, p.170.
FREE BOBBY  FREE ERICKA
FREE RUCHELL MAGEE
FREE ANGELA
FREE KATHLEEN
AND ALL POLITICAL PRISONERS

A Copy of Black Panther Newspaper
'World Report' reported that California's Capital was the scene of demonstrations by armed Negroes identified as 'Black Panthers'. They highlighted that the Panthers marched 'armed with pistols, shotguns, and rifles' through the corridors crowded with school children. Governor Ronald Reagan was reported saying, 'The incident was a ridiculous way to solve problems that have to be solved among people of good will.' Sacramento Story was canvassed across the front pages of the London Times. News of this colossal event was also flashed on television throughout the world.

The Panthers' message had been delivered. While the Sacramento episode attracted new members to the party, it also temporarily lost some key members of the party like Bobby Seale and Warren Tucker who were given sentences of up to six months. Though six months are not too long for such a struggle, Huey was saddened with temporary loss of Seale, an organiser who kept things moving. A series of court hearings, arrests, bails, incarceration for the Panther members started. An organised attempt from the state to neutralise the Black Panther movement also began by attrition. Booby Seale was imprisoned in August 1967, but it was not until June 1971 that both Seale and Newton were back on the streets together.

Role of the Mass Media

Sacramento Bee used to be California's one of the most authentic, responsible and professional newspapers. A special feature story in the Bee described the Black Panther Party as 'a spin off of the Lowndes County, Alabama, Freedom Party which used Black Panther as its emblem...the group can accurately be described as anti-White...they had an obsessed belief that the Negro community is oppressed by Whites'. Gene Marine, the editor of the Ramparts Magazine, has observed that minor inaccuracies and distortions in terms of a journalistic story can

be understood, but while talking about the charge of Panthers being anti-White, reflected that:

Some errors, of course, run deeper: the persistent identification as ‘anti-White’ of any black who insists on all the prerogatives that white men enjoy may reflect a truth more basic than superficial distortion. To racism (aware or unaware) equality is anti-white; to white culture accustomed to taking its own superiority or ‘normalness’ for granted without even thinking about it, black men who act equal but different are likely to be frightening.321

Don A. Schanche, another leading reporter, wrote an article titled ‘How the Black Panthers Preach Violence’ with a relatively sympathetic tone in an issue of *The Saturday Evening Post*. He stressed on the defensive nature of the Panthers’ insistence on the rhetoric of violence. The means of violence, he noted, had been adopted as an exercise in ‘Self-Defence’. However, the majority of mainstream reporters, such as the ones that appeared in *The San Francisco Examiner* branded them with the ‘anti-White’ tag. Bobby Seale, in reaction to this and similar stories, called them the ‘White-press’.

Two days prior to the Sacramento March, the *San Francisco Chronicle* had featured a special story about the Panthers and reported that ‘neither Newton nor Seale makes any bones about being ‘anti-White’. It further wrote that: ‘in one of the North Richmond rallies, armed guards kept away all Whites’. And the 3rd May issue of the *Chronicle* covered the story of Sacramento as an ‘invasion’ and the ‘invaders’ were described as ‘members of the militantly anti-White Black Panther Party’. Almost all the newspapers in the area echoed the same version, stressing that ‘the Panthers barged into or swarmed into the chamber of the assembly’.

*The San Francisco Examiner*, for instance, also reported the Sacramento story in a most dramatic style. They quoted a Panther asking a policeman to ‘take your hands off me’ and identified this Panther as Huey P. Newton, even though Newton was not present in Sacramento on that day. The ‘mandate’ prepared by Newton, which was read out to the press Bobby Seale, was reported to have been

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321 Ibid, p.68.
322 Ibid, p.69.
read by Newton himself and it was also noted that 'he also intended to read it to the assembly itself'. Even such biased newspapers, though, had to occasionally admit that the Panthers were right as far as the legality of carrying concealed weapons was concerned under the existing state laws.\textsuperscript{323} The \textit{Examiner} on 4 May, aware that the Panthers had not broken any laws, gave another twist to the story by turning Huey Newton into Harry Houdini.\textsuperscript{324} It tried to establish that Newton also had gone to Sacramento, but had escaped.

Writing in a similar tone, \textit{The Oakland Tribune} wrote that: 'the Black Panthers of the East Bay is a self proclaimed revolutionary party whose members are best known for their habit of dressing in black clothing and lugging pistols, rifles, and shotguns around the public.' Gene Marine, analysing these reactions in the press, wondered how a party could be revolutionary without proclaiming itself as one. He further raised the question of the White press' familiarity with the party and its programme, noting that:

> By May 1967, the Panthers were known only to the Black community and to the police and Black certainly would not have said that the Panthers were best known for black clothing and guns around. For standing up to white man maybe. Most white reporting about the panthers reflects the attitude of the police. It was reported that the panthers were similar both in name and activities to the original Black Panthers formed in the South. Despite white reporters' insistence relating the panthers of the south, there was no organization in the South which used 'Black Panther' as symbol or carry guns.\textsuperscript{325}

Gene Marine, in her introduction to the book \textit{Black Panther}, which can be seen as a primary source material, reminds readers in an apologetic manner that he was a White man along with the rest of America, who was trying to learn just what makes these young, outspoken, black-jacketed young black men and women tick, and stated that:

> I try to be sympathetic to anything I want to understand and write about. But the more I work on the subject, the more I know that sympathy is not my primary

\textsuperscript{323} Ibid, p.69.
\textsuperscript{324} Harry Houdini was an American magician, stunt performer and escapologist who lived between 1874 and 1926. He became renowned throughout the world for his feats of escapology.
feeling. Deep in my white possibly racist, probably un-revolutionary heart, I am afraid of the Black Panther Party.\textsuperscript{326}

Regarding the biased reporting about the Panthers and creating prejudiced images of them, Marine has been critical of his own \textit{Ramparts Magazine}, of which he was a senior editor. But taking both the sides into consideration, it has been realised that the audacious act of the Panthers to march on the assembly with guns was in any case difficult to be ignored. Curtis saw the event in retrospect:

Importantly, without this one event the BPP would not have gone beyond the Oakland California. This event had big media coverage. And this sent the message to the whole world that ‘Oh! This is different from the Martin Luther King’s brand of activism’. So it was this event which catapulted BPP into the public’s consciousness. BPP grew quickly from a group of about 30 to about 4000. So such brand of activism and politics drew people in large numbers and many got in for all the wrong reasons, like supporting violence to get their rights.\textsuperscript{327}

The Sacramento Story, for sure, alarmed the United States of America: African Americans were ready to die for their liberation for a long time, but now they were armed and dangerous.

\textsuperscript{326} \textit{Negro Digest}, November, 1969, p.85.
\textsuperscript{327} Curtis J. Austin in a personal interview conducted at Harlem, New York City on 19 July 2008.
A Pamphlet Issued by Black Panther Party during Free-Hue Campaign
FREE-HUEY CAMPAIGN

Summer 1968

I spat on Philadelphia
Boarded a late plane to Oakland
Oakland land of Huey Newton and Bobby Seale
I looked on the earth
Sky down
The geography a map
Like the one is Miss Somebody's class
Hating school, counselors, teachers,
and basement books
hating Black to mean
ugly, evil, dirty sub, shiftless, and slavery
I flew high wolfing at streams
Of fat clouds
Knowing I would land in San Francisco
And light up on the Golden Gate Bridge
And just like this airplane bursting through clouds
Like snow
I would burst
The bloodless murderers
of Blacks.

The Black Panther Party completed one year of its existence on 15 October 1967. In a year's time, Huey Newton had been stopped by the police more than fifty times. As a leader, he knew how to stay cool, and remembered the law and demanded that the police stick within legal bounds. On 27 October evening, Huey Newton had a date with his fiancée, Laverne Williams. As she could not accompany him due to her ill health, Newton with his friend Gene McKinney drove to an all-night restaurant. At 5 a.m. their car was stopped by police officers John Frey and Herbert Heanes and Newton was asked to show his identity. Frey exclaimed, 'Well, well what do we have? The great Huey P. Newton.' In the next five minutes, Frey was shot and killed and both Heanes and Newton were wounded. Huey Newton later recalled:

328 This poem has been written by Regina Jennings. Jennings grew up in Philadelphia. She saw videos of 'Panthers march on California Assembly' and 'Free Huey Rally' and got the calling to join the Black Panther Party.
I think I still have my book in my hand, and as I was getting up off my knee, I saw the first officer (Frey) draw a service revolver and then I felt like boiling hot soup had been spilled on my stomach, and then I remember hearing a sound, a loud sound or volley of shots or it was like an explosion to me.330

Frey was dead. Heanes wounded. Huey, shot in the stomach, was semi-conscious. Both Heanes and Newton were taken to the Emergency Room of the Kaiser Hospital. The nurse refused immediate treatment and attendance by a doctor until a particular form was filled. Newton was handcuffed to a hospital cart, his arms spread over his head. The police were hitting him on his wounded stomach and head and were all around the cart, shouting: ‘You killed a policeman and you are going to die for this.’331

When Huey was sitting in jail awaiting trial, people who were supporting his struggle to free the several Black colonies within America raised the slogan of: Free Huey! Free Huey! Let him go! They did not demand a ‘fair trial’ as they believed Huey would never get a fair trial: they were aware that he was the enemy of everything the judiciary stood for, and the courts were in any case not independent of the police. As it happened, there were eleven white members on Huey’s jury, except for one black David Harper, an executive with the Bank of America. No one except this executive seemed to know anything about ghetto life or language.

Newton told the jury that he had been shot in his stomach, that he did not know who shot Frey or how he reached the hospital. Lowell Jensen, the prosecutor, sought to establish the fact that Newton had produced false identification, that he had shot Frey and had taken Frey’s gun to shoot Heanes. Over a period of three weeks, some twenty witnesses were called, including a Black driver who supported Heanes’ claim that Newton had a gun. The jury however did not believe the driver’s version of the story as they knew Newton had also been shot, and that this might have been done by Frey himself. But as they feared Black Panthers, the jury

wanted Newton safely lodged in a jail. The jury therefore concluded, apparently that: ‘Well he probably didn’t do this but he must have done something.’ Since the charge on Newton could not be proved, the jury observed that Newton could have shot Frey in self-defence.

Newton’s lawyer Charles Garry opened the defence case on 19 August with a set of witnesses who established that Frey had been using ‘racial-epithets’ to threaten people of Afro-American origin. It was also stated by witnesses that Frey had a tendency to be headstrong, which was perhaps the reason for his death. Newton’s friend McKinney refused to answer on grounds of self-incrimination. This raised the possibility that it was McKinney who did the shooting and not Newton. Judge Friedman cited him for contempt of court and sentenced him to jail, but the California Superior Court reversed the decision and released him. Under cross examination, while Jensen sought to prove Newton loved violence and guns, Garry appealed:

White America, listen! The answer is not to put Huey Newton in the gas chamber. It is not the answer to put Huey Newton and his organization into jail. The answer is to wipe out the ghetto, so that Black brothers and sisters can live with dignity, so that they can walk down the street with dignity.

Huey Newton was served with a two to fifteen year sentence. He was sent to San Luis Obispo for imprisonment. His lawyers pleaded that he be freed on bail while the case was appealed, which could take two years. The court turned down this demand. The Judge and the District Attorney unanimously observed that Huey was ‘dangerous to the community’ even after more than thirty thousand people from the community signed a petition asking for his release. Newton’s murder trial began on 15 July 1968 in the Alameda County Court House with over five thousand demonstrators outside the court.

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The murder trial of Huey Newton became one of the biggest stories of 1968, which placed the Black Panthers on the front page for weeks at a time. The Panthers by now had fulfilled an important symbolic function as stand-ins for all disaffected African American who took the turn into radicalism. Of the numerous groups engaging in black radical politics, prominent were the Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM), the Republic of New Africa, Maulana Karenga-led US Organization and Amiri Baraka’s ‘Congress of African People’. By the year-end, the ‘Black Panthers’ became known all over and started attracting not only support from different constituencies, but also the attention of the government and intelligence agencies. The response of the crowd in front of the courthouse was both encouraging and overwhelming for the Black community in the Bay Area. The support extended by the progressive White members enhanced the cause further. David Hilliard wrote:

Huey is becoming an icon. ‘Free Huey!’ the slogan of choice along with ‘Stop the War Now!’ supporting the party is synonymous with revolutionary militancy and international solidarity. Each demonstration- we gather the troops if the state just whispers the name Huey Newton in court- has grown party members and supporters thronging the Alameda County Courthouse steps. Brothers in black leather, sisters standing on the side, naturals fluffed, fists in the air, the two groups chant slogans like we used to in church:

\[\text{Revolution has come!}\]
\[\text{Off the Pig!}\]
\[\text{Time to pick up the Gun!}\]
\[\text{Off the Pig!}\]

All the three leaders—Newton, Seale and Cleaver—were in the news for their involvement with the court battles. Cleaver also faced the charge of initiating student unrest at the U. C. Berkeley campus. Several other lesser-known Panthers were also facing assorted criminal charges including the charge of inciting protest. The whole combination of politics, demonstrations, violence, tragedy etc. proved to be an irresistible story for the mass-media.

Kathleen Neal Cleaver, Communications Secretary, Black Panther Party
Kathleen Cleaver remarked that Newton’s trial became part of the prevailing trend of Blacks being in the news. The local media had already covered the shoot-out and the arrest and in the public eye, Huey was just another Black criminal. It was therefore required to hold rallies and press conferences all during his trial as Elridge Cleaver believed that was the way to save Huey so that the police would not be able to kill him while he was in prison. They also feared that the court would convict him in a rigged trial. The headlines: ‘Panthers Back Newton’ with symbol of ‘Clenched-Fists’ translated the Panther’s popular iconic devices into language. The image created by the headline was far more compelling than the accompanying story.

In the rally, demonstrators were organised, but passionate. About two-thirds were Blacks. They shouted as they marched: ‘Huey will be set free’...‘Free Huey Now’...‘Down with Gestapo Pigs’...‘Black Power’. The Panthers built on the momentum of each event urging friends and followers to expand their numbers and make their presence felt. Another opportunity that came for the Panthers during this campaign was to deconstruct a myth of being ‘racist’ and ‘anti-White’ which had been constructed by the media since the Panthers’ march in Sacramento. The Black Panthers’ coalition with the Peace and Freedom Party conveniently did the job.

The ‘Peace and Freedom Party’ was established by Robert Scheer in San Francisco Bay Area in 1966. This party originated as the unity between those Whites who were protesting against the Vietnam War and the newly-formed militant Black Panther Party. Although the party began with an aim of ending the Vietnam War, due to its association with the BPP, it advocated for Black liberation. On 22 December 1967, Elridge Cleaver announced a coalition of the two parties BPP and PFP. One important reason why the Panthers viewed this unity as

essential was that they wanted to create a broad support base for their leader Huey Newton’s release campaign.339

The unity however was intricate to sustain as the Panthers refused to serve what they viewed as ‘White-interest’ because they regarded themselves as the vanguard of the coming socialist revolution. The Black Panthers also insisted that the alliance with the Peace and Freedom Party would cease to exist, once it no longer furthered the cause of Black liberation. The White party members also agreed not to campaign in the Black ghettos and Elridge was given complete charge of the party concerning the Black issues. The PFP leader Scheer agreed to Elridge’s conditions considering the publicity generated by running panthers for the office would generate.340

Cleaver had recognised that PFP was composed of maximum White membership. It had administrative structure, publicity mechanism as well as fund-raising capabilities. The PFP was assigned to raise the fund for Newton’s release which it did, by raising more than $ 3,000. The Black Panthers in turn agreed to help the PFP by registering the party by collecting signatures in the Black-dominated neighbourhood of Oakland, Berkeley and the adjoining Bay Area of San Francisco.341 The alliance had materialised on the understanding that BPP would control all aspects of party’s programme concerning the Afro-Americans.

The newspapers reported that there was no formal coalition between PFP and BPP, but two groups found overlapping areas of interest. The most significant development at this point was the printing of the Panthers’ ‘Ten Point Program’ for control of Black communities and an exemption of Black men from military service etc. The alliance got further cementing with PFP endorsing Kathleen Cleaver to challenge San Francisco’s Willie Brown for his State Assembly seat,

340 Ibid.
341 Ibid.
while Bobby Seale was to run for the Assembly seat in Berkeley. PFP candidate Paul Jacobs announced that the Panthers' involvement in electoral politics was a clear negation of the idea circulated by the press that they were racists unwilling to work with progressive Whites.342

Elridge Cleaver and Bobby Seale devised a plan to accommodate the radical SNCC for the Free Huey Campaign as well as enhancing the party's base. Huey Newton's birthday 17 February was scheduled for the rally at the Oakland Auditorium, where Carmichael would be the featured speaker and where the BPP-SNCC alliance would be announced. Seale was aware that the SNCC was undergoing its own political turmoil, as supporters of Carmichael, Brown and executive secretary James Forman were splitting into factions. This rally attracted over more than five thousands spectators.

This rally served many purposes. It encouraged numerous Black youths in the Bay Area come openly in defence of Huey Newton, which ultimately garnered sympathy for the Black Panther Party. The rally also helped in raising money as contribution from the sympathisers who had come to participate in the rally. According to Scale, the event raised a sum of $10,000 for Newton's Defense Fund. This event was also used as an opportunity to present a unified Black Power front with the SNCC. In the midst of the gala event, H. Rap Brown was made the Panthers' 'Ministry of Justice', James Forman the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Carmichael was announced as the Prime Minister of the party.

Thus the event played a positive role for the growth and popularity in terms of transcending the alleged 'racial-tag' mounted on the party by the media. But even as the media reported on the BPP-PFP alliance on the front pages, news of the rally was buried inside. The reporting focused on the speeches by Carmichael, Brown, and Forman all national figures, while barely mentioning Seale or Cleaver,

A March by Black Panthers

A Painting Showing Fighting Sickle Cell Anemia by Black Panther Party
indicating that the newsworthiness of the story was based on the national prominence of the leaders.

The local as well as national press was fairly clear about its allegiances and priorities. Neither the Oakland Police Department nor the City Administration wanted to see the Panthers’ glory of lawlessness and violence and its growing popularity among the Black community. In spite of the attempts of the press, the popularity of Panthers could not be restricted. James Forman of the SNCC who joined the ranks of the Black Panther Party wrote later in 1972:

...I was attracted to the Black Panthers because of the goals of the ten-point program, the group’s talk for armed self-defense, and the emphasis on recruiting street brothers, young people from the ‘ghettos’ rather than college students...\(^{343}\)

The Free Huey rally was sponsored by the Southern California Mobilization Committee on the issue of ending the War in Vietnam. The rally also got support from Ron Karenga popularly known as Maulana Karenga’s cultural-nationalist US Organization and Betty Shabazz, widow of Malcolm X. A similar rally in Los Angeles was organised. A photo illustrating the story in the newspapers featured Carmichael, Brown, Forman and some new Panther members from southern California, but the Oakland-Berkeley leadership was visibly absent. Yet as per Elaine Brown’s account, more than ten thousand people attended the event.

During the rally, the Panthers found an unprecedented unity among the people of Black community in the Bay Area. It also saw a sense of unity from the progressive sections of the White community, including Garry, Newton’s lawyer. The Panthers were solidly opposed to the spontaneous riots and had proved it several times. They understood the folly of mindless violence. There was serious concern in the Leftist literary circles for the party due to Eldridge Cleaver’s association with \textit{Ramparts} magazine and it senior editor, Gene Marine. Two

A Pamphlet issued by Black Panther Party for Bobby Hutton's Memorial Meeting. Bobby Hutton was the Youngest Black Panther to be killed by White Cops.
months before Martin Luther King was assassinated, Bobby Seale had told a crowd in Oakland:

Don’t sit down...don’t sit down and let a spontaneous riot happen in the streets. where we get corralled and a lot of us are shot up...petty crimes can jack you up. Not that I am on the side of the system but mindless violence will bring us nothing. 34

The Panthers were preoccupied with the plan of the Oakland police who were looking for an occasion to ‘fix’ them. Martin Luther King Jr. was shot dead in Memphis, Tennessee on 4 April 1968. It was assumed that this event was an ideal cover up to initiate the assault from the police side. Two days after King’s assassination, on 6 April several carloads of Panthers exchanged gunfire with the Oakland police. Booby Hutton was killed and Elridge was injured. Although the contemporary official position of the Panthers stated that it was the police who instigated the violence, later Elridge in an interview in 1998 revealed that he and other Panthers had started the fight with the police.345

The Free Huey movement attracted several new members to the party. But some key leaders of the party went missing. Hutton was dead, Huey was in jail, Elridge incarcerated. The Black Panther Party definitely was still in its nascent phase and trying to stabilise its organisational structure when it had to pay a heavy price due to the loss of its leaders. As Curtis J. Austin, a Black Panther historian, remarked:

...Free Huey campaign gave BPP a platform from which to speak. It also brought close certain white groups to blacks. Organizations like, Peace & Freedom Party, Student for Democratic Society Movement, Free Speech Party, Young Lords, etc. saw growing closeness with black movement. Huey was very charismatic, persuasive and influential and events around him gave BPP a lot of strength. But also the party lost on the other hand because with the loss of such high caliber people certain others joined in who were not as good and thus the party lost direction....346

346 Curtis J. Austin in a personal interview conducted at Harlem, New York City on 19 July 2008.
A revolutionary Pamphlet by Black Panther Party
Ideology

The Spirit of the Panther

Today, the Panther sleeps;
But one day, the spirit of the Panther
will rise again.

The spirit of the Panther will rise

When there are no homeless on our streets,
When healthcare becomes a right not a privilege,
When quality education is available for all.

The spirit of the Panther will rise

When we spend more money on education than on prisons,
When police truly serve and protect,
When our children will no longer die in wars fought for oil and greed.

The spirit of the Panther will rise

When no child wakes up or falls asleep with hungry pains,
When children no longer kill children in our mean streets,
When our society creates the new man.

The spirit of the Panther will rise

When race, color, and sex no longer matters,
When corporations no longer serve as puppet masters,
When our government becomes of the people, by the people,
And for the people.

For now the Panther sleeps,
But she will not sleep forever.
One day she will arise from the grave

To walk these mean streets.

Beware!

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\textsuperscript{347} This poem has been written by Dr. Tolbert Small. Small, once a member of the Black Panther Party, visited China as a delegation of the party. He is a physician and is famous as a peoples' doctor, who runs the Harriet Tubman Medical Clinic in East Oakland, California and treats poor Afro-Americans for free.
The revolutionary nationalist views of the BPP remained fairly intact throughout during the 'Free-Huey' campaign. This position however changed gradually upon Newton's release in August 1970. With the impact of an increasing global consciousness, Newton yet again transformed the Black Panther ideology but retained the basic elements of revolutionary nationalism as far as coalition politics was concerned. This new Panther ideology represented a transition to revolutionary internationalism. Newton held that the only way to combat an international enemy was through first supporting an international bourgeoisie, and subsequently replacing it with an international dictatorship of the proletariat.

Elridge Cleaver understood that if the Black Panthers were to be the vanguard of the American Left, attention to political economy was essential. He critiqued the separatist Black nationalists who failed to recognise the dual nature of Black Americans: that they were simultaneously part of the national body and outside it. The Black Panthers, he declared, was perhaps the only militant group to reconcile this contradiction. Writing on this issue, Huey Newton noted in party newspaper *The Black Panther* on 4 May 1968:

> The vanguard party must provide leadership for the people. It must teach the correct strategic methods of prolonged resistance through literature and activities...when people learn that it is no longer advantageous for them to resist by going to the streets in large numbers and when they see the advantage in the activities of guerrilla warfare methods, they will quickly follow this example...when the vanguard group destroys the machinery of the oppressor, the masses will be overjoyed and will adhere to this correct strategy. When the masses hear that a Gestapo\(^{348}\) policeman has been executed while sipping coffee at a counter, and the revolutionary executioners fled without being traced, masses will see the validity of this type of approach to resistance. It is not necessary to organize thirty million black people in the primary groups of two's and three's but it is important for the party to show the people how to go about a revolution.\(^{349}\)

An important aspect that needs to be examined with regard to the Black Panther Party is their stand on the issue of religion. The study of contemporary

\(^{348}\) According to the Oxford Dictionary, 'Gestapo' means Nazi secret police.

Cleo Slivers, a Black Panther (Now A Health Activist in New York City)
American social as well as political movements reveals the crucial role played by
religion in terms of both organisation and mobilisation. The era of the Civil Rights
Movement saw the role played by two major religions—Christianity and Islam—
with contesting ideologies and against each other. While Christianity-Judaism
preached for integration into the American society, organisations like the Nation of
Islam sought Pan-African Nationalism. As an activist of the time noted:

"...For the BPP it was very easy to keep the religion out of politics because they
had the Marxist-Leninist perspective. Although BPP had people from different
religious background they were driven by ideology. To some extent I believe that
keeping religion politics separate was not completely right because if you look
back at Black Spirituality since the time of slavery or the churches of the blacks
during the time of post-civil war period you will find that these served a good
cause of binding the people and even making them remain grounded when they
had nothing else to look forward to. Panthers left the churches unused for their
agenda..."

Even though there was a serious attempt to organise the party on Marxist
lines, the question of whether BPP was a Marxist party or not has been a matter of
serious debate in academic circles. They organised political classes for its cadres to
make them understand the dialectics of Marxian theory to fight against both racism
and capitalism together. There was also a serious attempt to expose the peril of
American Imperialism for its perpetual involvement in one war or another. Bill
Johnson stated:

"BPP studied Marx, Lenin, and Fanon...but we projected through dialectical
materialism's premises, back in 1960s, what is happening today. It's not a national
issue but we are a global community facing discrimination. The capitalists have
broken down the boundaries of nations. They are controlling the economy world-
wide. They are oppressing the people all across the world now. From the aspect of
action-reaction idea, the way dialectical materialism makes us understand, we
tried to find the way for our community to move towards gaining freedom."
power structure by any means necessary as propounded by Malcolm X. Huey P. Newton and Elridge Cleaver remained the Party’s chief theoreticians. Here is an attempt to look at the evolution of the Panthers’ ideology of Black Cultural Nationalism to Revolutionary Internationalism. It would be pertinent to look in retrospect why Panthers failed to accomplish in practise what they had visualised in theory.

The Panthers represented the continuation of a tradition of radical African American political thought since W.E.B. DuBois, which attempted to view the Black struggle through the prism of race and class. Historically, American scholars have attempted to analyze the relationship between the concepts of race and class in trying to understand and explain the changing character of their society. The Panthers even tried to draw the legacy from Black Nationalism their attempt of analysing and proper balancing of race and class as is well exhibited by Executive Mandate No.1 drafted by Huey Newton which read:

At the same time that the American government is waging a racist war of genocide in Vietnam, the concentration camps in which Japanese Americans were interned during World War II are being renovated and expanded. Since America has historically reserved the most barbaric treatment for non-white people, we are forced to conclude that these concentration camps are being prepared for black people who are determined to gain their freedom by any means necessary. The enslavement of black people from the very beginning of this country, the genocide practiced on the American Indians and the confining of the survivors on reservations, the savage lynching of thousands of black men and women, the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and now the cowardly massacre in Vietnam, all testify to the fact that toward people of color the racist power structure of America has but one policy: repression, genocide, terror, and the big stick. Black people have begged, prayed, petitioned, demonstrated, and everything else to get the racist power structure of America to right the wrongs which have historically been perpetrated against black people. All of these efforts have been answered by more repression, deceit, and hypocrisy. As the aggression of the racist American government escalates in Vietnam, the police agencies of America escalate the repression of black people throughout the ghettos of America. Vicious police dogs, cattle prods, and increased patrols have become familiar sights in black communities. City Hall turns a deaf ear to the pleas of black people for relief from this increasing terror.  

The first and foremost political strategy of building an ideology of 'revolutionary internationalism' is to resolve the debate between race and class. The charge on the Black Panthers of being racist and 'anti-white' had been mounting since they brought their 'Platform and Program' which was exacerbated since their march to Sacramento. The Panthers realised the potential of the Black middle class to derail their revolutionary agenda in the garb of 'civil-rights' and 'integration'. The BPP, therefore, in order to broaden their political base subjugated 'race' and 'class'. Godfrey Mwakikagile stated the position of BPP:

The Black Panthers were an embodiment of that spirit of black survival and black pride, which has sustained Black people since slavery. The leaders of Black Panther Party knew that race was a primary factor in the oppression and exploitation of Black people. But they also transcended race and incorporated class into their analysis of the Black predicament in the United States although a synthesis of the two (race and class) was and still is a theoretical nightmare they—anybody else—were not able to overcome. Yet both were important, as they still are today. Dismiss one, you lose perspective. In fact their class approach helped them to build alliances with white radicals and liberals and people of other races including Asian Americans who shared the same perspective on racial and economic oppression and exploitation in the United States.

Both Marx and Engels were doubtful about the role of the lumpen proletariat—the rogues, prostitutes, thieves, hustlers, murders, gamblers and paupers who could assist in the revolutionary transformation of capitalist society. Frantz Fanon assessed the role of this disadvantaged and highly vulnerable group rather positively and stressed on their revolutionary potential:

...The constitution of a lumpen proletariat is a phenomenon which obeys its own logic, and neither the brimming activity of the central government can check its growth. This lumpen proletariat is like a horde of rats; you may kick them and throw stones at them, but despite your efforts they will go on gnawing at the roots of the tree...the pimps, hooligans, unemployed and petty criminals urged from behind throw themselves into the struggle for liberation like stout working man...these classless idlers will by militant and decisive action discover the path that leads to nationhood...

Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale borrowed heavily from Fanon. The Black Panther Party therefore took an unconventional position on lumpen-proletariat's role which remained one of the most controversial aspects of the party's ideology both in theory and in practise. The leaders of the party understood the point Fanon

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was trying to make. They realised if they would not engage them with the party, the
power structure would organise them against the party. Bobby Seale in his
autobiographical work *Seize the Time* stated:

Marx and Lenin would probably turn over in their graves if they could see lumpen
proletarian Afro-Americans putting together the ideology of the Black Panther
Party. Both Marx and Lenin used to say that the lumpen proletariat wouldn’t do
anything for the revolution. But today in a modern, highly technological society,
with its CIA, FBI, electronic surveillance and cops armed and equipped for
overkill, here are Black Americans demanding that our basic desires and needs be
fulfilled, thus becoming vanguard of a revolution, despite all attempts to totally
wipe us out.  

The Black Panther Party’s alliance with a White leftist group ‘Peace and
Freedom Party’ materialised in December 1967. Though historians saw a narrow
interest on the part of the Panthers for seeking support to free the imprisoned Huey
Newton, it then expanded to include the larger issue of Black liberation within the
ideological context of class struggle. Other White Leftist groups with which the
Panthers had alliances include the Gay Liberation Front and Students for a
Democratic Society (SDS) which declared its support for the Black Panther Party at
their national council meeting in Austin, Texas on 30 March 1969.

The Panthers organised these partners and other radical groups into a
National Committee to Combat Fascism at a three-day conference in Oakland,
California in July 1969. Led by Panthers, there were some twenty-five hundred
participants, including SDS. At this conference, the Panthers had definitely moved
beyond a Black Nationalist orientation to a class position. At the conference Bobby
Seale stated the Panthers’ position:

We are not saying that self determination of the Black people in the Black
communities is not correct. It is necessary. But we are not saying that black people
are a nation just because they are black. We are saying that black people are a
nation because they have the same economic oppression that they are subjected to;
two, because they have a basic psychological make up in how they react to the
environment they exist in; third, they describe what is happening around them as
genocide; fourth, area where Black people are concentrated are ghettos.
Combining the four, Black people make a nation. Whether, they are split or
divided is because they are colonized. We are not basing it on racism. We

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Bill Johnson, a Black Panther (Now a Black Labour Activist at Harlem)

Malcolm X Cultural Center at Harlem, New York City

UCLA Campus, Where Black Panthers, Erica Huggins and Bunchy Carter were shot Dead
understand nationalism in terms of what nation is and we understand internationalism.\textsuperscript{356}

These alliances however brought a significant loss of credibility for the Panthers within many Black communities, particularly among those with a Black Nationalist orientation. Moreover, the Panthers’ relations with White Leftists were often turbulent and even leading to conflict. Some White radicals discouraged the intellectual and theoretical leadership of the Panthers, while others completely betrayed them. The Panthers tried their best to neutralise the influence of other Black Nationalist organisations. The first group the Panthers clashed with was the Black Nationalist Association at the Black House in San Francisco.\textsuperscript{357}

The most serious conflict was between the Panthers and a Black Nationalist outfit organisation led by community leader Ron Karenga at Los Angeles. Both organisations sought to influence the Black Student Union and its agenda at University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). John Jerome Huggins and Alprentice ‘Bunchy’ Carter, both students at the university, headed the Panthers’ wing at UCLA. As the relative influence of the Panthers on the UCLA campus increased, an unrelenting power struggle began between the two organisations. Their conflict culminated in a bloody shoot-out on January 17, 1969, when three members of US Organisation and two Panthers Huggins and Carter, were killed.\textsuperscript{358}

Huey Newton’s concept of revolutionary internationalism sought the ultimate destruction of nationhood itself so that humankind would develop a sense of mutual friendship transcending international borders. They took revolutionary inspirations from various Third World luminaries of the time who included Frantz Fanon, Mao Tse Tung, Fidel Castro, Che Guevara and Ho Chi Minh.\textsuperscript{359}

\textsuperscript{358} Ibid, p.168.
Panthers’ internationalist ideas were compatible with other internationalist views, such as those advocated by SNCC leader Stokely Carmichael who later joined the Panthers with the designation of Prime Minister.

The Black Panthers’ support for revolutionary internationalism is reflected in Newton’s offer to send troops for the National Liberation Front and the call to the Provisional Revolutionary Government of South Vietnam to assist in their fight against American imperialism. Nguyen Thi Dinh,\textsuperscript{360} Deputy Commander of the South Vietnamese People’s Liberation Armed Forces, accepted the offer in the following words: ‘With profound gratitude, we take notice for your enthusiastic proposal, when necessary; we shall call for your volunteers to assist us.’\textsuperscript{361}

In an attempt to put into practise their theory of revolutionary internationalism, the Black Panthers officially opened an International wing of the Black Panther Party in Algiers, the capital of Algeria, on 13 September 1970. Algiers had also become a refuge for fugitive Panthers ever since Eldridge Cleaver landed there in June 1969. Efforts were made subsequently to communicate with and issue statements supporting liberation movements going on in North Korea, North Vietnam and China. John O. Killens, emphasising the role of Black Americans to establish solidarity with the oppressed people of other parts of the world, observed that:

\begin{quote}
The one thing we Black American have in common with the other coloured peoples of the world is that we have all felt the cruel and ruthless heel of White supremacy. We have all been ‘nigerized’ on one level or another. And all of us are determined to ‘deniggerize’ the earth. To rid the world of ‘niggers’ is the Black Man’s Burden, human reconstruction is the grand objective.\textsuperscript{362}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{360} Nguyen Thi Dinh was a founding member of the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam. She was elected chairwoman of South Vietnam Women’s Liberation Association. After the Vietnam War and subsequent reunification of Vietnam, she served as the Central Committee Member of the Vietnamese Communist Party. She also served as the first female major general of the Vietnam People’s Army.

\textsuperscript{361} \textit{The Black Panther}, 19 January 1971, pp.10–11.

Fighting Sexism and Racism

An 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). Several young White women eventually played leadership roles in this wave of the feminist movement in the United States of America. There had been a trend of political ideology that involved and developed their gender consciousness in the southern Black Freedom Movement and the New Left. The internal debates in the Black Panther Party furthered the cause of women liberation.

When the Black Panther Party started, many other Black groups of this period linked its vision of quest for liberation as ‘regaining of Black manhood’. This was apparent in much of the Party’s early language and ideology about gender roles in general and man’s role in particular. In fact the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense was an all-male organisation at the outset. The leaders Huey Newton, Bobby Seale, and Eldridge Cleaver presented a gendered vision of the Party’s potential composition. One of the early recruitment-calls for the party published in the official mouthpiece of the party The Black Panthers read:

The BLACK PANTHER PARTY FOR SELF-DEFENSE really has something going. These Brothers are the cream of Black manhood. They are there for the protection and defense of our Black community ...BLACK MEN!! It is your duty to your women and children to your mothers and sisters, to investigate the program of the PARTY.363

The debate over designation and gender-based roles for women and men within the Black Panther Party remained since the Party’s inception. Of course, this process did not happen in a vacuum. But the gendered context in which the Panthers operated cannot be ruled out. The Panthers had their own ideas about the roles men and women should play in society and within the Party and the founders and leaders were also influenced by competing ideologies of the time on the issue. Kathleen Cleaver stated:

A BPP poster for a Public Meeting

A BPP poster for a Public Meeting
The women who filled the ranks of our organization did not have specifically designated sex roles. Some women worked with the newspaper, like Shelly Bursey, who became a grand jury resister when she was jailed because she refused to respond to one of the investigations into the Black Panther Party newspaper. Some of us like Erica Huggins saw their husbands murdered, and then were arrested themselves. In Erica’s case, she was jailed with Bobby Seale and most of the New Haven chapter on the charges of conspiracy to commit murder. She was later acquitted, but imagine! what happens to an organization when fourteen people at once get arrested on capital charges. That doesn’t leave much time to organize, or to have a family life. May be that was the kind of pressure that they hoped would force us to give up.364

It is interesting to note that according to a survey done by Bobby Seale in 1969, two-thirds of the members of the Black Panther Party were women.

The position of other black organisations on women was not much better. Ron Karenga’s US Organisation had a traditional position on the role of women in the society. Karenga and other proponents of complementary gender roles for men and women failed to address the power imbalances between the respective roles prescribed. These theories relied mostly on biological determinism in assessing and assigning separate roles for Black women and men. The prevalence of patriarchy in political ideology is reflected in Karenga’s words:

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 complimentary; Complimentary means you complete or make perfect that which is imperfect.365

But this complementary theory often led to ludicrous incidents in practise. Even the Black Panther Party could not keep itself aloof from this complementary theory which defended nothing but patriarchy. As a matter of the fact, Angela

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Davis\textsuperscript{366} was discouraged or prevented from taking on a leadership role because it was deemed ‘a man’s job’. Even Elaine Brown\textsuperscript{367} was told once that she had to wait to eat until the male ‘warriors’ had been fed. Brown later wrote:

\begin{quote}
A woman in the Black Power Movement was considered, at best, irrelevant. A woman asserting herself was a pariah. If a black woman assumed a role of leadership, she was said to be eroding black manhood, to be hindering the progress of the black race. She was an enemy of the black people... I knew I had to muster something mighty to manage the Black Panther Party.\textsuperscript{368}
\end{quote}

There is no denying the fact that BPP members themselves invoked complementary theory early in the organisation’s development and male supremacist policies and practices of the US Organisation exacerbated the already fragile relationship between the two organisations. For Bobby Seale, the link between racism and sexism was that both were practices of domination that fed upon each other. He presented the BPP as a viable alternative to organisations preaching ‘cultural-nationalism’ on the basis of the Panthers’ presumably more progressive party line on ‘the gender question’.\textsuperscript{369}

The Black Panther Party came in direct contact with various predominantly White Women’s Liberation groups. The Party however did not have an official position on the ideologies and tactics of WLM organisations until Huey P. Newton’s call in August 1970 for the formation of working coalitions with the revolutionary factions of the Women’s Liberation and Gay Liberation Movements. The Women Panthers pointed out in 1969 that women’s organisations did not address the class struggle or national liberation struggles and hence they were not

\textsuperscript{366} Angela Davis was an activist with SNCC, who later joined the Black Panther Party. She also became a member of the Communist Party of USA (CPUSA). Currently, she is an emeritus professor at University of California, Santa Cruz.


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really furthering the women's liberation movement because for women to be truly emancipated in the country, there had to be a socialist revolution.

Women Panthers also acknowledged that Black women's relationship to Black men was qualitatively different from gender relations between Whites. In a 1971 interview, Kathleen Cleaver that reflected the problems of Black women and the problems of White women are so completely diverse that they could not possibly be solved in the same type of organisation nor met by the same type of activity. She stated that she could understand how a White woman failed to relate to a White man. And it was pity that White women had to deal with those kinds of people.

Although most women who worked for the BPP generally chose not to work in female-only organisations, and most did not consider themselves feminists, this did not necessarily mean that they accepted male chauvinism or sexism. They all expected to be treated as equals, as revolutionary comrades, by their male counterparts. Huey P. Newton in an essay titled 'Fear and Doubt' wrote:

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.  

The creation of a gendered space and gender ideology in the Black Panther Party was the product of various internal as well as external dialogues with other organisations. Due to these dialogues and debate within the party in early 1968, the BPP dropped 'for Self-Defense' from their name in an effort to encourage their recognition as a political Party with a full platform that of course included, but was not limited to, self-defence and paramilitary activities.

Fanon, Cleaver, Dhasal

The activities of Black Panthers were therefore formed in relation to several leading ideologies of the time, not least of which were the ideologies of feminism, decolonisation and socialism. In this context, it must be noted that Frantz Fanon’s attempt at deconstructing and demonising colonialism provided a great inspiration to revolutionaries all over the Third World. While *Wretched of the Earth* graphically demolished the notion of the ‘civilising-mission’ by colonisers, Fanon in his *Black Skin White Mask* established how, for a coloured man, the ultimate destiny/desire is to ‘become’ a White man. He believed that the juxtaposition of White and Black races had created what he termed a ‘psycho-existential complex’. Fanon’s is a clinical study where he has attempted to analyse and destroy colonialism and its effects on nations and individuals. But the imagery used by him to portray the elation of a Black man’s conquering a White woman raises critical questions on gender issues:

> Out of the blackest part of my soul, across the zebra stripping of my mind, surges this desire to be suddenly white...I wish to be acknowledged not as black but as white...I marry white culture, white beauty, white whiteness. When my restless hands caress those white breasts, they grasp white civilization and dignity and make them mine. Some thirty years ago, a coal black negro in a Paris bed with a ‘maddening’ blonde shouted at the moment of orgasm, ‘Hurrah for Schoelcher’...when one recalls it was Victor Schoelcher who persuaded Third Republic to adopt the decree abolishing slavery, one understands why it is necessary to elaborate upon relations between Black woman and White woman.372

Elridge Cleaver was highly influenced by Fanon, though this perhaps did not have anything to do directly with his conviction as a rapist. Perhaps though, steeped as he was in Fanon’s writings, the latter’s insensitive attitude towards questions of gender might have had an influence. Cleaver’s reflections on rape in *Soul on Ice* are both illuminating and deeply disturbing. He has claimed that he refined his technique for raping White women by ‘practising’ on Black women.373 These themes, experiences, and preoccupations have pulled into focus the question of gender within the politics of the BPP. In 1968, Cleaver during his presidential

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campaign, promoted the idea of ‘pussy-power’ which he explained as women’s ability to withhold sex in order to compel men to political activism. He asked women:

Until he is ready to pick up a gun and be a man, don’t give him any sugar. Politics comes from the lips of a pussy. I don’t know how you can stand to have those faggots laying and sucking on you. You can always have a real man.\[374\]

Elridge Cleaver wrote in a letter from prison how it was real and urgent for him to elope with women as he was in his ‘bull age’. He accepted the fact that he preferred White girls over Black girls and his conclusion in this regard was clear and inescapable. He clarified this with his friends and found out that White women occupied a peculiarly prominent place within the frame of reference of most of his friends. Cleaver’s poem ‘To a White Girl’ read:

...I love you  
Because you are white  
Not because you are charming  
And bright  
...I hate you  
because you are white  
your white meat  
is a nightmare food  
white is the skin of evil  
you are my moby dick  
White witch...  \[375\]

This extremely insensitive and retrograde attitude towards the question of gender can be seen in the ideology of several other activists in other parts of the globe who were also supposedly furthering the cause of an extremely radical movement for oppressed people. Namdeo Dhasal (to whom we have had occasion to refer earlier), for instance, was a taxi driver based in Kamathipura, Bombay. He wrote poetry in Marathi and was connected with anti-establishment ‘underground’ publications like the ‘little magazine’ and other pamphlets published by individuals


\[375\] This poem ‘To a White Girl’ was written by Elridge Cleaver on 25 June 1965 while he was in Folsom Prison. This is cited from Elridge Cleaver’s Soul on Ice (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1967), p.13.
and groups who usually lacked resources, but had a desire to bring about a change in society, culture and politics through art and literature. Dhasal had the ability to write naturally, and despite his educational handicaps read Bob Dylan and Eldridge Cleaver. His famous work Golpitha was a collection of poems, where he has published poems in a language specifically spoken in the brothel areas of Bombay. He wrote:

...On the day I was born  
The one who gave me birth went to god  
I was tired of this ghost  
Haunting him on the footpath  
I spent most of my life  
washing away the darkness in that sari...  

Dhasal however, explained that ‘in the darkness of sari’ did not intend a sexual image, but implied ignorance. Mallika Amar Shaikh wrote an autobiography titled I Want to Destroy Myself in Marathi where she revealed that as soon as she was married to Dhasal, their personal and political life started worsening. Mallika was confronted with shocking facts, for example the fact that Dhasal had venereal disease. The following lines by Dhasal reflect his regular visit to prostitutes in spite of his marriage to Mallika:

...On a barren blue canvas  
Clothes ripped off, a thigh blasted open  
A sixteen year old girl surrendering herself to pain  
And a pig, its snout full of blood...  

It therefore comes as a surprise that leading radical movements that were extremely sensitive to the plight of the oppressed all over the world, and which

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377 This is a part of the poem ‘The Road to The Shrine’ originally written in Marathi by Namdeo Dhasal which was part of his first famous collection of poems Golpitha. This English translation of the poem is cited from V. S. Naipaul, India: A Million Mutinies Now (London: Vintage Classics, 1991), pp.112-13.
378 Mallika Amar Shaikh is a Marathi poet. She is the daughter of Shahir Amar Shaikh, a famous folk singer and member of the Communist Party of India.
379 This is part of the poem ‘Mandakini Patil: A Young Prostitute, My Intended Collage’ originally written in Marathi by Namdeo Dhasal as part of his first famous collection of poems Golpitha. This English translation of the poem is cited from Dilip Chitre and Henning Stegmuller, Namdeo Dhasal: Poet of the Underworld (New Delhi: Navayana Press, 2007), p.56.
sought to devise new ways of challenging all forms of domination, would have laboured under various patriarchal and indeed retrograde ideas. Elridge Cleaver's and Dhasal's personal lives are a caution to us against excessively valourising these movements, which has been a tendency in many recent accounts. What this thesis tries to do is to situate these ideas within the context of their times, not forgetting to highlight both their limitations and high points.