

The Global Appeal of the Black Panther Party

By Elbert “Big Man” Howard

The Black Panther Party was founded in October, 1966 in Oakland, California. It was first named The Black Panther Party for Self Defense because, at the time of its inception, neither Black people nor their communities, had any voice or organization to take a stand against the brutal treatment and oppression they suffered on a daily basis. The Black Panther Party was first organized around those issues and the Ten Point Platform and Program was designed to address them.

In the beginning, the Party followed the teachings of Malcolm X, which centered at the time on Black Nationalism. However, as the Party grew in size and as the members studied and learned, the Party’s vision and perspective changed, as did Malcolm’s. Malcolm X taught Black people to broaden their view of the world, and showed them how, by doing so, they would see that other so-called nations of people were suffering exploitation and oppression at the hands of the same racist oppressors who murdered and exploited them here in the US of A.

Because of their political stand against racism, war, and oppression, the Black Panther Party, quickly became known world-wide, and began receiving invitations to speak. One of the first of these came from an anti-war group to attend a Moratorium on the Vietnam War. This was held in Montreal, Quebec, Canada in 1968 and Bobby Seale, Big Man, David Hilliard, and Karen Wald attended. Bobby Seale spoke and he not only expressed The Black Panther Party’s opposition to the war, but also took the opportunity to explain how there was a war of oppression going on against Black and poor people in America. There was a large and diverse group of people present at the Moratorium and they pledged their support of The Black Panther Party, and demanded the complete and unconditional withdrawal of U.S. troops from Vietnamese soil.

In 1969, there were certain organizations in Japan who also opposed the Vietnam War. They knew of the BPP’s stands against the war and America’s racist and oppressive policies, and they invited the BPP to come to Japan to speak at rallies and demonstrations. Big Man and Roberta Alexander were assigned to go to Japan in order to represent the Black Panther Party. The people of Japan got much information and a true picture what the Black Panther Party was all about through the many speaking engagements, press conferences, and meetings organized for Roberta and Big Man.

Upon leaving Japan, Big Man was directed to fly to Sweden and work with one of the Solidarity Committees which had been previously established by Bobby Seale and Masai Hewitt on their visits to Denmark, Norway, Finland, and Sweden. These Committees and other organizations in many cities arranged demonstrations in support of the Panthers’ demand that Huey Newton be set free.

While still abroad, as International Spokesperson for the Black Panther Party, Big Man was invited to West Germany by the German Students for a Democratic Society. He was supposed to give speeches about the Vietnam War, the racial conflict in America, and the

goals of the Black Panther Party. However, American agents had spoken to the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs and they decided to close the country's borders and seize any Black Panther who attempted to enter, their reason being that this entry would be "a clear and present danger to public security". So Big Man was not allowed to enter Germany, which then angered some 2,000 anti-Vietnam War demonstrators who had wanted to see him and hear him speak. In Frankfurt, throughout that day and evening, groups of demonstrators wandered through town and threw stones at American businesses. The President of the Federated German Students Unions protested to the Minister of the Interior about the deportation of Big Man.

Meanwhile, due to the increased repression of police in America and the US Justice Department's desire to return BPP member and Minister of Information Eldridge Cleaver to prison, Eldridge had left the USA and established residence in Cuba. From Cuba, communication was established with the revolutionary government of Algeria. The way was then cleared so that Eldridge and his family had been able to move there, establish residence, and, as a result the first International Chapter of the Black Panther Party was born.

This soon resulted in Panthers going to Algiers to attend and participate in the Pan-African Cultural Festival. Spear-headed by Eldridge Cleaver, the BPP was represented by a Black Panther Party Cultural Center, which featured a vast display of African American art produced by BPP Minister of Culture, Emory Douglas. This turned out to be the center of attraction in Algiers.

During this event, representatives of the African liberation movements from many countries met and became acquainted with members of America's Black liberation movements. The Black Panther Party had been heard of, and it was known that the Party supported their struggles against imperialism. The BPP had printed accounts in the Black Panther Party Newspaper of the struggles of freedom fighters in Mozambique, Angola, Algeria, Zimbabwe, Guinea Bissau, and the Congo and it was clear to all that the BPP stood in solidarity with the freedom fighters of Africa.

Because of the stance that the Black Panther Party took against American imperialism in the world, delegations of Panthers were invited to visit Korea, China, Vietnam, and Africa, places where no US officials were welcome. The Black Panther Party became a world-wide phenomenon, an international voice against injustice, racism, and oppression.

Although the Black Panther Party was founded 44 years ago, and does not exist today as such, its influence is still felt and seen around the world. There are groups in existence today whose members still call themselves Panthers and many groups have adopted Panther programs and policies. There are Panthers in Israel, England, Ireland, New Zealand, India, and the South Pacific Islands. The legacy of the Black Panther Party continues. Amongst many others, keeping this legacy alive is Emory Douglas, with his art, and Billy "X" Jennings, with his historical collection and his world-wide web-site, "It's About Time".

“Those who make Art and History may die but the Art and History will never die.”
The struggle continues.
All Power belongs to the People.

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