

The required reading of the book widened the rift between the Des Moines chapter and the national BPP. According to Knox, other members of the Des Moines chapter predicted that Cleaver's psychological behavior as represented in his book would later lead to a division in the BPP and Cleaver's ultimate exit from the party. The reaction of the heartland chapters to *Soul on Ice* represented the cultural conservatism of many of the members. Knox explained:

The Midwest was almost like very conservative. We were all opposed to fornication. It almost got to that level with us we said wait a minute *you don't do women like this*. We were always up into this, well, *why would you do women like this?* This doesn't make sense to us.³⁸

The ultimate demise of the Des Moines BPP resulted from the combined forces of attempted assassination and repression, incarceration, and dissension with the national committee BPP members. The attempted assassination of the Des Moines BPP leadership occurred when the Panther headquarters was bombed on April 27, 1969. The bombing of the Des Moines Panther headquarters was the last in a series of bombings that had taken place in the black community that month, beginning in a power substation, an interracial community program called "Soul Village," and finally the BPP's house.³⁹ The chapter had faced increasing hostility from the Minutemen, a paramilitary organization that operated in the Midwest similar in style to their Southern manifestation, the Ku Klux Klan. According to Rem, it was not unusual to receive death threats from the Minutemen via local media, particularly the radio. Thus the Des Moines BPP suspected that the police, along with the Minutemen, were part of the bombing assassination attempt because of comments made by officers who arrived on the scene within seconds of the explosion and because of the types of plastic explosives used. Charles Knox recalls:

Because the police walked in there, and the reason we felt they had something to do with it, and believe it or not, not because we want to talk about the police not none of that. But here are the words that they uttered when they walked into the house, "We know, we know all the nigga's up in here are dead," that's how we knew. Otherwise we could speculate, but when that policeman said, uttered those words, I then knew that they were involved with the bombing.⁴⁰

According to the *Des Moines Register*, forty-eight homes in the black community were damaged as a result of the explosion and three other homes were destroyed. Fortunately no one was injured by the blast, although three officers were injured following the explosion in scuffles with Panther members and rock-throwing black youth.⁴¹ The Des Moines Panthers were forced to relocate to another house and establish a new headquarters. The Des Moines chapter of the BPP faced mounting legal problems in order to stay active because of the incarceration of its leader, Mary Rem, and its cadres Archie Simmons, David Colton, and Mike Smith, who were collectively referred to as the Des Moines Four in the national Black Panther paper the week of May 31, 1970. According to the Black Panther paper, the Des Moines Four were incarcerated for allegedly blowing up a police station, and Archie Simmons was held for allegedly blowing up the Panther's own headquarters. The Des Moines imprisonment, along with the incarceration of many members around the country, decimated the ranks of the party. The plight of the Des Moines Four was symptomatic of what was going on in the national organization around the country. By May 1970 the effectiveness of the FBI's COINTELPRO program (a program initiated by the federal government to neutralize and eliminate black activists) and internal dissension within the BPP were decimating the ranks of the party and reducing its effectiveness. Also, the repression of the BPP hampered its ability to raise funds for the legal defense of incarcerated members.

The Des Moines BPP, along with the heartland chapters of Omaha and Kansas, broke away from the national BPP in the fall of 1970 largely over ideological differences but also for not adhering to the rules and regulations of the national party. Knox recalls the split and the chapter's commitment to continue the struggle:

We decided to leave the Panther Party and just do something else because we felt that they were misguided, that they were not putting theory into practice as it relates to the whole dialectical material and thus we formed the Black Revolutionary Party. That was associated with Marxism and all that kind of stuff. We sort of like elevated ourselves from the, as you say from the party.

After the Des Moines chapter of the BPP left the national organization in the fall of 1970, Knox and other cadre members of the heartland chapters founded the Black Revolutionary Party (BRP) in January of 1971. The