Unless otherwise noted, all illustrations and designs were made by Emory Douglas for *The Black Panther* between 1968 and 1971, in marker, pen and ink, gouache, and Format textures and type. All images are the sole property of Emory Douglas and cannot be reproduced without the express written permission of the artist.
Left: *Death to the Fascist Pigs.*
Facing page, bottom: Front page of *The Black Panther,* April 25, 1970.

the art of self-defense

IN 1967, THE MOST RADICAL GRAPHIC EXPRESSION IN SAN FRANCISCO APPEARED NOT IN PACIFIST PSYCHEDELIA BUT IN THE REVOLUTIONARY DESIGN OF EMORY DOUGLAS AND THE BLACK PANTHER PARTY.

By Ayana Baltrip-Balagás

Surrounded by Pantone markers, tubes of gouache, Liquitex acrylics, and an airbrush with inks, Emory Douglas sits at his drawing table in his home studio in San Francisco, beaming over a new illustration he has made of one of his four granddaughters for her sixth birthday. As a young graphic artist in the late 1960s, Douglas might not have seen himself down the road as a proud, gentle grandfather creating family portraits. A generation ago, as the Black Panther Party's Minister of Culture, Douglas was one of the era's most influential and controversial radical artists.

Since a 1934 labor strike put it on the activist map, the Bay Area has symbolized radical political thought in the U.S. The emergence of the Beats—including writers Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Allen Ginsberg, and Bob Kaufman—in the 1950s preceded the mid-'60s free-speech movement, born at the University of California at Berkeley, and the counterculture movement, which grew from San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury district. Both movements espoused freedom of speech, civil justice, and an end to the war in Vietnam. At that time, African-American students at San Francisco State College and City College of San Francisco were also organizing events to combat injustices in the Bay Area's black communities. Douglas, then a young

graphic-arts student, designed and illustrated these events' posters.

Black leaders and activists had established several groups that blended politics and arts. An early mentor and close friend of Douglas, LeRoi Jones (later Amiri Baraka), taught theater workshops at San Francisco State and enlisted his student to design his workshops' props. Jones was a member of the radical Black Arts Movement. On Broderick Street in San Francisco's predominantly black Western Addition neighborhood, another BAM member, Marvin X, founded the Black House, a hub for the movement's artists and activists, including Eldridge Cleaver, who lived on an upper floor, and actor Danny Glover, as well as Baraka and Douglas.

One day in January 1967, a group of community organizers met to talk about the possibility of hosting a speech by Dr. Betty Shabazz, widow of Malcolm X. Douglas was there to discuss designing the event's poster and flyers; Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale, who had recently formed the Black Panther Party for Self Defense, were there to discuss providing security for the event and to introduce their party's 10-Point Plan, addressing such issues as employment and freedom from oppression. Douglas, then 23, was impressed with the party's platform, and he joined the following month.

The party's official newspaper, the weekly *Black Panther*, became its vehicle for debating issues critical to African-American communities—hunger, fair housing, education, the brutality of "the pigs" (Newton and Seale's term for the

> **"It was about getting Huey's and the party's messages to the people. Showing what was really going on."**

police, later adopted by other sympathetic radical groups). The publication, produced by the party's Ministry of Information (headed by Eldridge Cleaver), also publicized free-breakfast programs for schoolchildren, escort services for senior citizens, and protection from harassment by the police. As Bobby Seale attempted to lay out the first issue in April 1967, Douglas offered his commercial-art skills and materials. Seale, impressed with Douglas's commitment, imme-

graphic-arts student, designed and illustrated these events' posters.

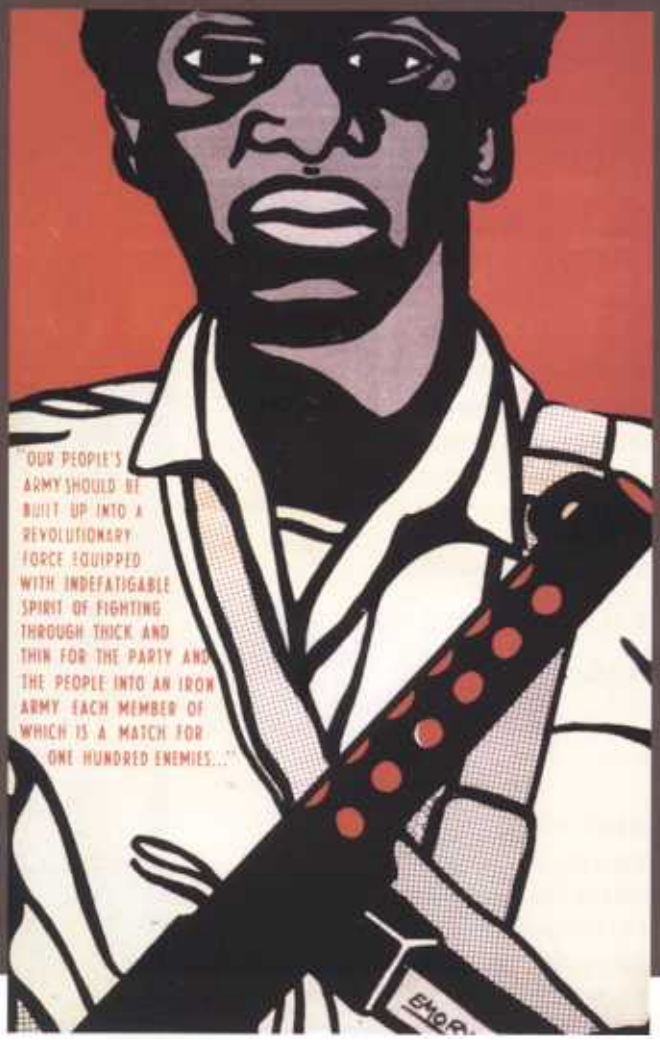
Black leaders and activists had established several groups that blended politics and arts. An early mentor and close friend of Douglas, LeRoi Jones (later Amiri Baraka), taught theater workshops at San Francisco State and enlisted his student to design his workshops' props. Jones was a member of the radical Black Arts Movement. On Broderick Street in San Francisco's predominantly black Western Addition neighborhood, another BAM member, Marvin X, founded the Black House, a hub for the movement's artists and activists, including Eldridge Cleaver, who lived on an upper floor, and actor Danny Glover, as well as Baraka and Douglas.

One day in January 1967, a group of community organizers met to talk about the possibility of hosting a speech by Dr. Betty Shabazz, widow of Malcolm X. Douglas was there to discuss designing the event's poster and flyers; Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale, who had recently formed the Black Panther Party for Self Defense, were there to discuss providing security for the event and to introduce their party's 10-Point Plan, addressing such issues as employment and freedom from oppression. Douglas, then 23, was impressed with the party's platform, and he joined the following month.

The party's official newspaper, the weekly *Black Panther*, became its vehicle for debating issues critical to African-American communities—hunger, fair housing, education, the brutality of "the pigs" (Newton and Seale's term for the

> **"It was about getting Huey's and the party's messages to the people. Showing what was really going on."**

police, later adopted by other sympathetic radical groups). The publication, produced by the party's Ministry of Information (headed by Eldridge Cleaver), also publicized free-breakfast programs for schoolchildren, escort services for senior citizens, and protection from harassment by the police. As Bobby Seale attempted to lay out the first issue in April 1967, Douglas offered his commercial-art skills and materials. Seale, impressed with Douglas's commitment, imme-



Facing page, from left: *Hallelujah! Hallelujah! . . .* and *I've Lived Through Some Hard Times . . .*
This page, right: *Our People's Army Should Be Built Up . . .*
Far right, top: *Listen to Them Pigs Banging on My Door . . .*
Far right, bottom: *All Power to the People/Death to the Pigs.*

diately named him the party's Revolutionary Artist, and by the early 1970s, Douglas was made responsible for *The Black Panther*'s management, art direction, layout, and production. The paper's first issue was composed on a typewriter, with headlines set in Douglas's own Letraset and Format transfer-type versions of Caslon, Futura, Univers, and Bodoni, and printed on a mimeograph. The party purchased a type compositor for the publication several months later. In 1969, circulation peaked at 400,000.

Perhaps more significant than Douglas's design and production of *The Black Panther* were his powerful, distinctive illustrations. Drawn with markers, pen and ink, gouache, and graphite, Douglas's *Black Panther* images were redistributed throughout America's black communities on tens of thousands of posters, which reflected his frustration with the plight of African Americans, and which he signed "Emory, revolutionary artist," or simply "Emory." "It was about getting Huey's and the party's messages out to the people," Douglas says. "Showing what was really going on."

The illustrations, rendered entirely in markers and transfer type, told visual stories. In one piece, published in *The Black Panther* in August 1970, a woman stands defiantly, looking toward an unseen door, wielding an automatic rifle and knife. The text: "I know one thing them pigs had better stay from my door trying to kick it in talking about they don't need no search warrant." An illustration from November 1970, advocating "All power to the people death to the pigs," depicts a revolutionary choking one "pig" while regarding another he has impaled on a bayonet. Douglas also drew satirical caricatures in the paper, he says, to "make people aware of the character of those who oppressed us." In 1968, he wrote, "Through the Revolutionary Artist's observations of the people, we can picture the territory on which we live (as slaves): project maximum damage to the oppressor with minimum damage to the people."

Douglas was raised in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and moved to the Bay Area at age 8, in 1951. His earliest artistic inspiration was Charles White, the renowned Harlem Renaissance painter and graphic artist, who created many illustrations for the civil-rights movement.

As a boy, Douglas became aware of black artists when he noticed White's artwork on the free wall calendars his aunt received from her insurance company. But while White and other civil-rights artists addressed social inequities, their pacificist work did not incite the radical thinking that Douglas and the Black Panthers later felt necessary to effect meaningful change.

Staying atop independence movements worldwide through news articles, bulletins, and graphics mailed to the newspaper twice a week by the fledgling Liberation News Service from New York, Douglas was particularly struck by artwork from Vietnam, Cuba, and the Middle East, where artists had long provoked social change through depictions of public struggles. One Cuban organization in 1968 incorporated a Douglas illustration into a poster promoting "Solidarity With the African American People." "Party members

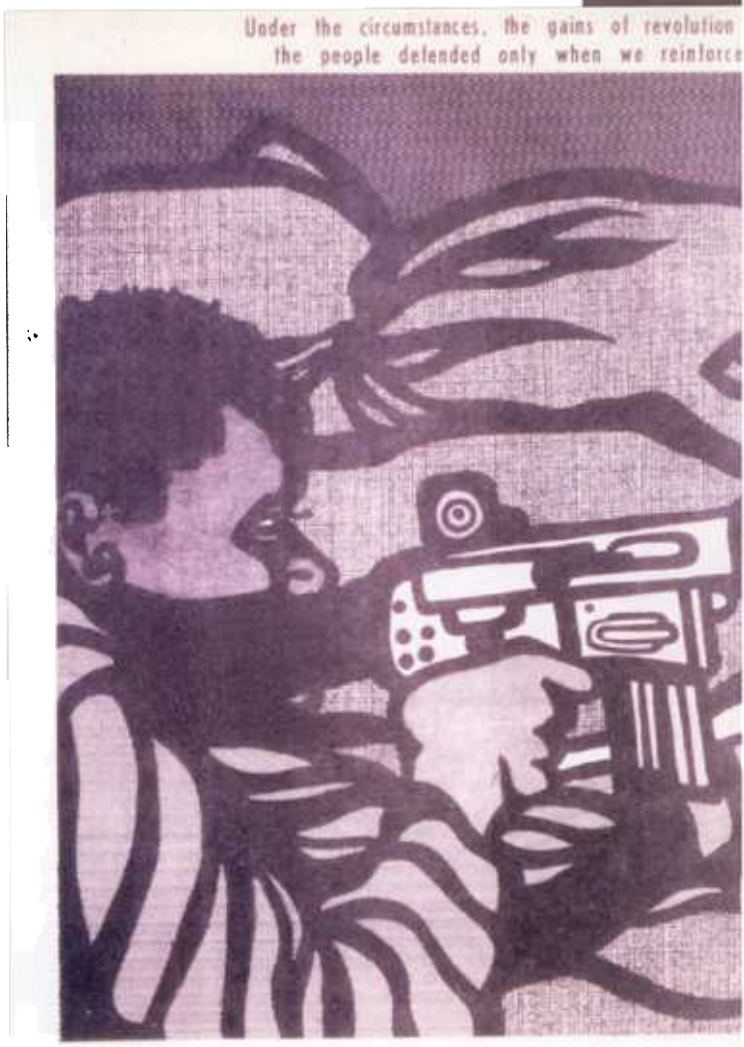
Civil-rights artists addressed social inequities, but their pacifism did not incite the radical thinking that the Black Panthers felt was necessary.

who traveled to Vietnam and Cuba took my work with them," Douglas says. *The Black Panther*'s January 9, 1971, front page featured an illustration commissioned by the South Vietnamese People's Liberation Armed Forces along with one by Douglas.

Rather than merely employing his art as a "tool for liberation," Douglas advocated using the commercial-art model to sell revolution and change. "We have to take the structure of commercial art and add a brand new content to it, a content that will serve the interests of black people," Douglas said in a 1972 talk at Fisk University, a black college in Nashville.

Both the party and the paper came to an end in 1979, following a period of internal strife and the party's infiltration and dismantling by the FBI. Until that time, Douglas oversaw the Black Panthers' printing service, Emory's Community Printing and Graphics, which produced campaign posters for such local candidates as Lionel Wilson, the first black mayor of Oakland. Douglas continued to create illustrations and graphic design projects commercially through the mid-1990s, particularly for clients in the black community who could not afford standard design and printing prices.

With Douglas now regarded as an important figure in 20th-century radical art and design, his work has become highly prized by collectors. In the catalog of "The Art of Emory Douglas," a 2004 show at San Francisco's Sargeant Johnson Gallery, African American Art & Culture Complex, collector Alden Kimbrough wrote: "This art is in truth, art as propaganda, it is art to create and sustain our national heroes, to glorify historical and contemporary events." Kimbrough, who with his sister Mary has collected Douglas's work since 1986, added: "It is art to dignify a people, and perhaps more important, to serve as a catalyst for action, to motivate people to take a stand against racism, imperialism and police brutality, and to sustain free



clinic and breakfast-for-children programs."

Today, Douglas speaks throughout the U.S., at such venues as the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles and such events as TypeCon (where I interviewed him before an audience in San Francisco in 2004). He continues to work as a production artist for the *Sun-Reporter*, San Francisco's oldest African-American newspaper, as he has off and on since the Black Panthers dissolved. In 2007, Rizzoli plans to publish an as-yet-untitled monograph, written by Sam Durant and edited by Douglas, to coincide with an exhibition of Douglas's work at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles.

"The social concerns of the day still inspire me," Douglas says, "and I like to illustrate the need to address these issues in my work in some way. The work I do is always for the people and the cause, not for personal gain or profit." P

Facing page, top left: *Under the Circumstances, the Gains of Revolution . . .* **This page, top right:** *One of Our Main Purposes is to Unify Our Brothers and Sisters . . .* **Bottom left:** Front pages of *The Black Panther*, January 23, 1971, and December 13, 1969. **Above:** Emory Douglas in 1970. Photograph courtesy of William (Billy X) Jennings/It's About Time and Ducho.

Facing page, top left: *Under the Circumstances, the Gains of Revolution . . .* **This page, top right:** *One of Our Main Purposes is to Unify Our Brothers and Sisters . . .* **Bottom left:** Front pages of *The Black Panther*, January 23, 1971, and December 13, 1969. **Above:** Emory Douglas in 1970. Photograph courtesy of William (Billy X) Jennings/It's About Time and Ducho.

print

DESIGN CULTURE YOUTH

MAR/APR 2006 US$12.95/CAN$15.95

New Visual Artists 2006

China's Secret Script

Black Revolutionary Graphics

Brodovitch's Unsung Partner

Student Cover Competition Winners