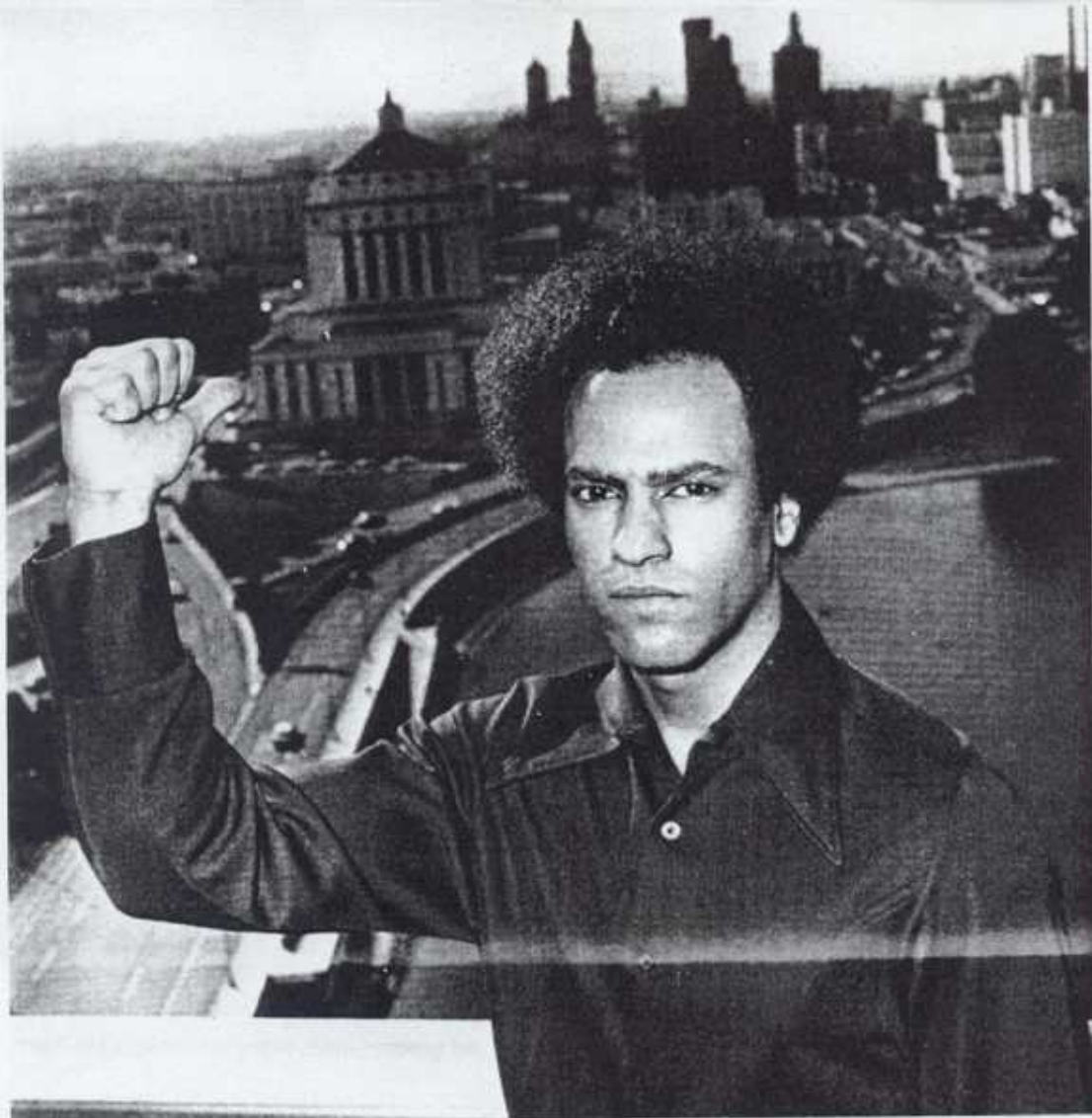




Scowling. Black Panther Party leader Huey P. Newton (l.) points at Alameda County Jail in Oakland, Calif., where he was confined (below) in 1964 after conviction for assault. Now free, Newton has written his memoirs in new book titled *Revolutionary Suicide*.

'I FOUND FREEDOM IN JAIL'

Black Panther leader recalls ordeal of solitary confinement

Locked in jail, within a jail, my mind is still free. . . . What if a person was so oriented that the loss of no material thing could cause him mental disorganization? This is the free agent.

GEORGE JACKSON,
Soledad Brother

BY HUEY P. NEWTON

JAIL is an odd place to find freedom, but that was the place I first found mine: in the Alameda County Jail in Oakland in 1964. This jail is located on the tenth floor of the Alameda County Court House, the huge, white building we call "Moby Dick." When I was falsely convicted of the assault against Odell Lee, Judge Dieden sent me there to await sentencing. Shortly after I arrived, I was made a trusty, which gave me an opportunity to move about freely. Conditions were not good; in fact, the place blew up a few weeks later, when the inmates refused to go on eating starches and split-pea soup at almost every meal, and went on a food strike. I joined them. When we were



Reprinted from *Revolutionary Suicide* by Huey P. Newton, published by Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc. © 1973. By Strengthhold Consolidated Productions, Inc.



Family pride prompted Newton to study piano (l.) and to abandon street brawls and petty theft. He poses with his relatives (below, l. to r.) Doris, Melvin, Lee Edward, Myrtle, and Leola shortly before high school graduation (bottom) in 1959. Newton's father, Walter, named him after the late Huey Long, former Louisiana governor.



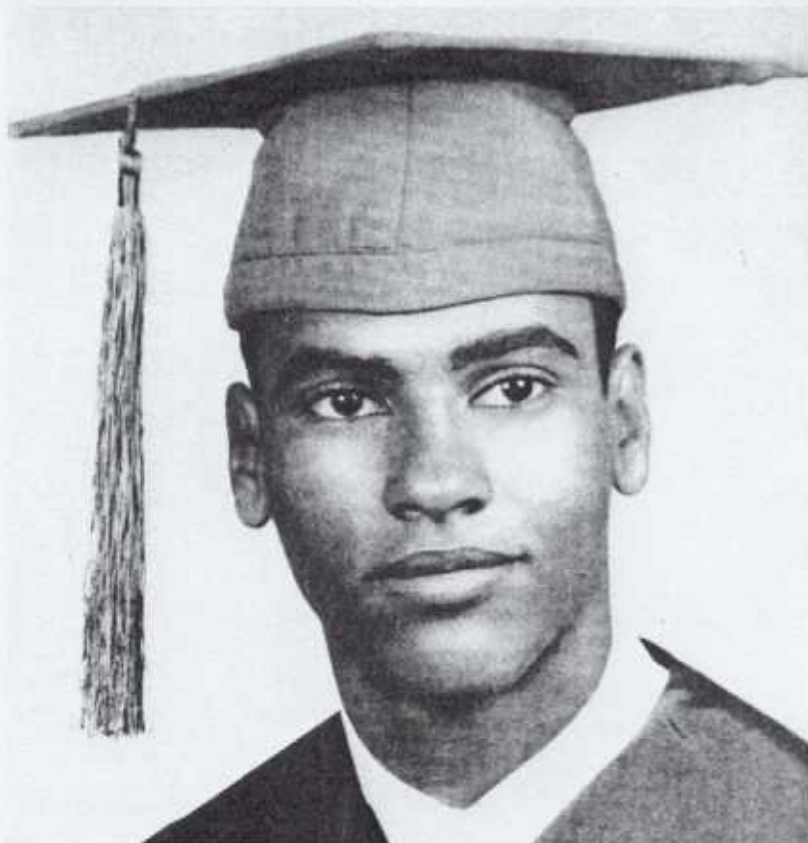
learned the secrets of survival.

One secret was the same that Mahatma Gandhi learned—to take little sips of nourishment, just enough to keep up one's strength, but never enough to have to defecate until the fifteen days were up. That way I kept the air somewhat clean and did not have the overflow. I did the same with water, taking little sips every few hours. My body absorbed all of it, and I did not have to urinate.

There was another, more important secret, one that took longer to learn. During the day a little light showed in the two-inch crack at the bottom of the steel door. At night, as the sun went down and the lights clicked off one by one, I heard all the cells closing, and all the locks. I held my hands up in front of my face, and soon I could not see them. For me, that was the testing time, the time when I had to save myself or break.

Outside jail, the brain is always being bombarded by external stimuli. These ordinary sights and sounds of life help to keep our mental processes in order, rational. In deprivation, you have to somehow replace the stimuli, provide an interior environment for yourself. Ever since I was a little boy I have been able to overcome stress by calling up pleasant thoughts. So very soon I began to reflect on the most soothing parts of my past, not to keep out any evil thoughts, but to reinforce myself in some kind of rewarding experience. Here I learned something. This was different.

When I had a pleasant memory, what was I



Continued on Next Page



Constantly in demand as speaker, Newton (above) explains relationship of ten-point Panther program to dynamics of black revolution while protected by well-trained, hand-picked body guards (right) during recent public appearance. Several anonymous threats have been made on Newton's life.





Granting rare interview from jail cell (above), Newton explains prison politics to Ensey's Louie Robinson (l.) while his attorney, Charles Garry, listens. As convict, Newton spent much of his term in solitary confinement, enduring punishment because of his "insubordinate" attitude toward prison officials.

FREEDOM IN JAIL *Continued*

to do with it? Should I throw it out and get another or try to keep it to entertain myself as long as possible? If you are not disciplined, a strange thing happens. The pleasant thought comes, and then another and another, like quick cuts flashing vividly across a movie screen. At first they are organized. Then they start to pick up speed, pushing in on top of one another, going faster, faster, faster, faster. The pleasant thoughts are not so pleasant now; they are horrible and grotesque caricatures, whirling around in your head. Stop! I heard myself say, stop, stop, stop. I did not scream. I was able to stop them. Now what do I do?

I started to exercise, especially when I heard the jangle of keys as the guards came with the split-pea soup and fruit loaf. I *would not* scream; I *would not* apologize, even though they came every day, saying they would let me out if I gave in. When they were coming, I would get up and start my calisthenics, and when they went away, I would start the pleasant thoughts again. If I was too tired to stand, I would lie down and find myself on my back. Later, I learned that my position, with my back arched and only my shoulders and tight buttocks touching the floor, was a Zen Buddhist posture. I did not know it then, of course; I just found myself on my back. When the thoughts started coming again, to entertain me, and when the same thing happened with the speed-up, faster, faster, I would say, stop! and start again.

Over a span of time—I do not know how long it took—I mastered my thoughts. I could start them and stop them; I could slow them down and speed them up. It was a very conscious exercise. For a while, I feared I would lose control. I could not think; I could not stop thinking. Only later did I learn through practice to go at the speed I wanted. I call them film clips, but they are really thought patterns, the most vivid pictures of my family, girls, good times. Soon I could lie with my back arched for hours on end, and I placed no importance on the passage of time. Control. I learned to control my food, my body, and my mind through a deliberate act of will.



Released from prison on \$50,000 bail (L.), Newton waves in response to cheers from followers while awaiting new trial on charge of voluntary manslaughter in shooting of Oakland policeman in 1967. Newton spent three years in prison before being acquitted after three long trials.

FREEDOM IN JAIL *Continued*

After fifteen days the guards pulled me out and sent me back to a regular cell for twenty-four hours, where I took a shower and saw a medical doctor and a psychiatrist. They were worried that prisoners would become mentally disorganized in such deprivation. Then, because I had not repented, they sent me back to the hole. By then it held no fears for me. I had won my freedom.

Soul breakers exist because the authorities know that such conditions would drive *them* to the breaking point, but when I resolved that they would not conquer my will, I became stronger than they were. I understood them better than they understood me. No longer dependent on the things of the world, I felt really free for the first time in my life. In the past I had been like my jailers: I had pursued the goals of capitalistic America. Now I had a higher freedom.

Most people who know me do not realize that I have been in and out of jail for the past twelve years. They know only of my eleven months in solitary in 1967, waiting for the murder trial to begin, and the twenty-two months at the Penal Colony after that. But 1967 would not have been possible without 1964. I could not have handled the Penal Colony solitary without the soul breaker behind me. Therefore, I cannot tell inexperienced young comrades to go into jail and into solitary, that that is the way to defy the authorities and exercise their freedom. I know what solitary can do to a man.

The strip cell has been outlawed throughout the United States. Prisoners I talk to in California tell me it is no longer in use on the West Coast. That was the work of Charles Garry, the lawyer who defended me in 1968, when he fought the case of Warren Wells, a Black Panther accused of shooting a policeman. The Superior Court of California said it was an outrage to human decency to put any man through such extreme deprivation. Of course, prisons have their ways, and out there right now, somewhere, prisoners without lawyers are probably lying in their own filth in the soul breaker.

I was in the hole for a month. My sentence, when it came, was for six months on the county farm at Santa Rita, about fifty miles south

FREEDOM IN JAIL *Continued*

of Oakland. This is an honor camp with no walls, and the inmates are not locked up. There is a barbed-wire fence, but anyone can easily walk off during the daytime. The inmates work at tending livestock, harvesting crops, and doing other farm work.

I was not in the honor camp long. A few days after I arrived, I had a fight with a fat Black inmate named Bojack, who served in the mess hall. Bojack was a diligent enforcer of small helpings, and I was a "dipper." Whenever Bojack turned away, I would dip for more with my spoon. One day he tried to prevent me from dipping, and I called him for protecting the oppressor's interests and smashed him with a steel tray. When they pulled me off him, I was hustled next door to Graystone, the maximum security prison at Santa Rita.

Here, prisoners are locked up all day inside a stone building. Not only that, I was put in solitary confinement for the remaining months of my sentence. Because of my experience in the hole, I could survive. Still, I did not submit willingly. The food was as bad in Graystone as it had been in Alameda, and I constantly protested about that and the lack of heat in my cell. Half the time we had no heat at all.

Wherever you go in prison there are disturbed inmates. One on my block at Santa Rita screamed night and day as loudly as he could; his vocal cords seemed made of iron. From time to time, the guards came into his cell and threw buckets of cold water on him. Gradually, as the inmate wore down, the scream became a croak and then a squeak and then a whisper. Long after he gave out, the sound lingered in my head.

The Santa Rita administration finally got disgusted with my continual complaints and protests and shipped me back to the jail in Oakland, where I spent the rest of my time in solitary. By then I was used to the cold. Even now, I do not like any heat at all wherever I stay, no matter what the outside temperature. Even so, the way I was treated told me a lot about those who devised such punishment. I know them well.



Brotherly love is displayed by Newton and Bobby Seale (above), co-founder of Black Panther Party. Both men gained prominence by justifying on right to bear arms and by policing Oakland police. Newton later dropped "gun barrel" theory in favor of changing system from within. Seale is a candidate for mayor of Oakland.

Ebony 1973