Original six Black Panthers (November, 1966) Top left to right: **Elbert "Big Man" Howard; Huey P. Newton (Defense Minister), Sherman Forte, Bobby Seale (Chairman). Bottom: Reggie Forte and Little Bobby Hutton (Treasurer).**

Black Panther Theory: The practices of the late Malcolm X were deeply rooted in the theoretical foundations of the Black Panther Party. Malcolm had represented both a militant revolutionary, with the dignity and self-respect to stand up and fight to win equality for all oppressed minorities; while also being an outstanding role model, someone who sought to bring about positive social services; something the Black Panthers would take to new heights. The Panthers followed Malcolm's belief of international working class unity across the spectrum of color and gender, and thus united with various minority and white revolutionary groups. From the tenets of Maoism they set the role of their Party as the vanguard of the revolution and worked to establish a united front, while from Marxism they addressed the capitalist economic system, embraced the theory of dialectical materialism, and represented the need for all workers to forcefully take over the means of production.

Black Panther History: On April 25th, 1967, the first issue of The Black Panther, the party's official news organ, goes into distribution. In the following month, the party marches on the California state capital fully armed, in protest of the state's attempt to outlaw carrying loaded weapons in public. Bobby Seale reads a statement of protest; while the police respond by immediately arresting him and all 30 armed Panthers. This early act of political repression kindles the fires to the burning resistance movement in the United States; soon initiating minority workers to take up arms and form new Panther chapters outside the state.

In October of 1967, the police arrest the Defense Minister of the Panthers, Huey Newton, for killing an Oakland cop. Panther Eldridge Cleaver begins the movement to "Free Huey", a struggle the Panthers would devote a great deal of their attention to in the coming years, while the party spreads it's roots further into the political spectrum, forming coalitions with various revolutionary parties. Stokely Carmichael, the former chairman of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and a nationally known proponent of Black Power, is recruited into the party through this struggle, and soon becomes the party's Prime Minister in February, 1968. Carmichael is adamantly against allowing whites into the black liberation movement, explaining whites cannot relate to the black experience and have an intimidating effect on blacks; a position that stirs opposition within the Panthers. Carmichael explains: "Whites who

come into the black community with ideas of change seem to want to absolve the power structure of its responsibility for what it is doing, and say that change can only come through black unity, which is the worst kind of paternalism..... If we are to proceed toward true liberation, we must cut ourselves off from white people..... [otherwise] we will find ourselves entwined in the tentacles of the white power complex that controls this country."

In the beginning of 1968, after selling Mao's Red Book to university students in order to buy shotguns, the Party makes the book required reading. Meanwhile, the FBI, under J. Edgar Hoover, begins a program called COINTELPRO (counterintelligence program) to break up the spreading unity of revolutionary groups that had begun solidifying through the work and examaple of the Panthers — the Peace and Freedom Party, Brown Berets, Students for a Democratic Society, the SNCC, SCLC, Poor People's March, Cesar Chavez and others in the farm labor movement, the American Indian Movement, Young Puerto Rican Brothers, the Young Lords and many others. To destroy the party, the FBI begins with a program of surgical assassinations — killing leading members of the party who they know cannot be otherwise subverted. Following these mass killings would be a series of arrests, followed by a program of psychological warfare, designed to split the party both politically and morally through the use of espionage, provocatures, and chemical warfare.

U.S. Police Terror and Repression

On April 6, 1968, in West Oakland, Bobby Hutton, 17 years old, is shot dead by Oakland police. In a 90 minute gun battle, an unarmed Bobby Hutton is shot ten times dead, after his house is set ablaze and he is forced to run out into a fire of bullets. Just two days earlier, Martin Luther King is assasinated, after he had begun rethinking his own doctrines of non-violence, and started to build ties with radical unions. Two months later on the day of Bobby's death, Robert Kennedy, widely recognised in the minority commmunity as one of the only politicians in the US "sympathetic" to the civil rights movement, is also assasinated.

In January, 1969, The first Panther's Free Breakfast for School Children Program is initiated at St. Augustine's Church in Oakland. By the end of the year, the Panthers set up kitchens in cities across the nation, feeding over 10,000 children every day before they went to school.

A few months later, J. Edgar Hoover publicly states that the Panthers are the "greatest threat to the internal security of the country".

In Chicago, the outstanding leader of the Panthers local, Fred Hampton, leads five different

breakfast programs on the West Side, helps create a free medical center, and initiates a door to door program of health services which test for sickle cell anemia, and encourage blood drives for the Cook County Hospital. The Chicago party also begins reaching out to local gangs to clean up their acts, get them away from crime and bring them into the class war. The Parties efforts meet wide success, and Hampton's audiences and organised contingent grow by the day On December 4th, at 4:00 a.m. in the morning, thanks to information from an FBI informant , Chicago police raid the Panthers" Chicago apartment, murdering Fred Hampton while he sleeps in bed. He is shot twice in the head, once in the arm and shoulder; while three other people sleeping in the same bed escape unharmed. Mark Clark, sleeping in the living room chair, is also murdered while asleep. Hampton's wife, carrying child for 8 months, is also shot, but survives. Four panthers sleeping in the apartment are wounded, while one other escapes injury . Fred Hampton was 21 years old when he was executed, Mark was 17 years old. According to the findings of the federal grand jury, Ninety bullets were fired inside the apartment. 1 came from a Panther — Mark — who slept with a shotgun in his hand. All surviving Panther members were arrested for "attempted murder of the police and aggravated assault". Not a single cop spent a moment in jail for the executions.

In the summer of 1969, the alliance between the Panthers and SNCC begins ripping apart. One of the main points of dispute is the inclusion of whites in the struggle for minority liberation, a dispute which is pushed into an open gun fight at the University of California in Los Angeles against the group US, led by Maulana Karenga, which leaves two Panthers dead. In September, in the government's court house, Huey Newton is convicted of voluntary manslaughter and sentenced to 2 to 15 years in prison; by 1970 the conviction is appealed and overturned on procedural errors. On November 24, 1968, Kathleen and Eldridge Cleaver flee the US, visit Cuba and Paris, and eventually settle in Algeria. Earlier in the year Cleaver published his famous book Soul on Ice. By the end of the year, the party has swelled from 400 members to over 5,000 members in 45 chapters and branches, with a newspaper circulation of 100,000 copies.

In 1969 Seale is indicted in Chicago for protesting during the Democratic national convention of last year. The court refuses to allow Seale to choose a lawyer. As Seale repeatedly stands up during the show trial insisting that he is being denied his constitutional right to counsel, the judge orders him bound and gagged. He is convicted on 16 counts of contempt and sentenced to four years in prison. While in jail he would be charged again for killing a cop in years past, a trial that would end in 1971 with a hung jury.

In March, 1970, Bobby Seale publishes Seize The Time while still being held in prison, the story of the Panthers and Huey Newton. On April 2, 1970, in New York, 21 Panthers are charged with plotting to assassinate police officers and blow up buildings. On May 22nd, Eight members, including Ericka Huggins, are arrested on a variety of conspiracy and murder charges in New

Haven, Connecticut. Meanwhile, Chief of staff David Hilliard is on trial for threatening President Richard Nixon. The party does little to separate it's legal and illegal aspects, and is thus always and everywhere under attack by the government. In 1971, the Panther's newspaper circulation reaches 250,000.

On Huey Newton's release from prison, he devotes more effort to further develop the Panther's socialist survival programs in black communities; programs that provided free breakfasts for children, established free medical clinics, helped the homeless find housing, and gave away free clothing and food.

FBI forgery, provacation, & chemical war

In March, 1970, the FBI begins to soe seeds of factionalism in the Black Panthers, in part by forging letters to members. Eldridge Cleaver is one of their main targets — living in exile in Algiers — they gradually convince him with a steady stream of misinformation that the BPP leadership is trying to remove him from power. Cleaver recieved stacks of forgered FBI letters from supposed party members, criticising Netwon's leadership, and asking for Cleaver to take control. An example of such a forged letter, written using the name of Connie Matthews, Newton's personal secretary:

I know you have not been told what has been happening lately.... Things around headquarters are dreadfully disorganized with the comrade commander not making proper decisions. The newspaper is in a shambles. No one knows who is in charge. The foreign department gets no support. Brothers and sisters are accused of all sorts of things...

I am disturbed because I, myself, do not know which way to turn.... If only you were here to inject some strength into the movement, or to give some advice. One of two steps must be taken soon and both are drastic. We must either get rid of the supreme commander or get rid of the disloyal members... Huey is really all we have right now and we can"t let him down, reglardless of how poorly he is acting, unless you feel otherwise.

Cleaver receives similarly forged letters across the spectrum, from groups outside the Panthers, to Panthers themselves, from rank and file members to Elbert "Big Man" Howard, editor of the Black Panther. The split comes when Newton goes onto a T.V. talk show for an interview, with Cleaver on the phone in Algiers. Cleaver expresses his absolute disdain for what has happened to the party, demands that David Hilliard (Chief of Staff) be removed, and even attacks the breakfast program as reformist. Cleaver is expelled from the Central Committee, and starts up

his own Black Liberation Army. In 1973, Seale runs for mayor of Oakland. Though he receives 40 percent of the vote, he is defeated.

The destroyed remnants of the party leadership

With such great struggles, seeing the party being ripped apart by factions and internal hatred, Huey, like many members, becomes disillusioned. He no longer wants to lead the party, though so many expect and demand otherwise, while he spins into a spiral of self-doubt. He becomes heavily dependent on cocaine, heroin, and others. It is not clear this was his own doing, and very probable the work of the FBI. Huey remarked in one of his public speeches in the 1980s, where he would often have spurts of his brilliant clarity but then become entirely incoherent and rambling, that he was killing himself by reactionary suicide, through the vices of drug addiction. On August 22, 1989, Newton is shot dead on the streets of Oakland in a drug dispute.

Bobby Seale resigns from the party; while Elaine Brown takes the lead in continuing the Panther community programs. In the fall of 1975, Eldridge and Kathleen Cleaver return from exile as born-again Christians. In 1979, all charges against Cleaver are dropped after he bargains with the state and pleads guilty to assault in a 1968 shoot out with the cops. He is put on five years probation. In the dimming years of his life, Cleaver assimilates a political outlook similar to Martin Luther King, engages in various business ventures, and becomes heavily addicted to cocaine.

By the beginning of the 1980s, attacks on the party and internal degradation and divisions, cause the party to fall apart. The leadership of the party had been absolutely smashed; it's rank and file constantly terrorized by the police. Many remaining Panthers were hunted down and killed in the following years, imprisoned on trumped charges (Mumia Abu-Jamal, Sundiata Acoli, among many others), or forced to flee the United States (Assata Shakur, and others).

As Cleaver would later explain in an interview a year before his death: "As it was [the U.S. government] chopped off the head [of the Black liberation movement] and left the body there armed. That's why all these young bloods are out there now, they"ve got the rhetoric but are without the political direction... and they"ve got the guns."