Panther Stories: A Gendered Analysis of the Autobiographies of Former Black Panther Members

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PANTHER STORIES: A GENDERED ANALYSIS OF THE AUTOBIOGRAPHIES OF FORMER BLACK PANTHER MEMBERS

by

Monica Marie White

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requirements for the
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Literature on the influences and contributions of women within the Black Panther Party has been scant. Much of the documentation is written by and is about males. This dissertation uses the autobiographies of former Black Panther members, both male and female, to explore their experiences while in the organization. Each author's political ideology and his/her perceptions of sexism and racism and distinctions in the writing style of men and women are considered. Seven single-authored autobiographies written by former Panther members were analyzed both individually and comparatively. There were similarities among all members of the group, such as their support of socialism as a political perspective that would aid in the liberation of oppressed people of color. Each author provided a vivid experience related to racism that initiated their political activism. Each also agreed on the relationship between racism and classism; they thought that to adequately address one issue would lead to addressing the other. The women differed with respect to their writing style, which did not follow a structured format, and was not consistently chronological. They addressed issues of sexism within the context of the Black Power Movement in general and the Black Panther Party in particular. The women Panther members spoke of
their relationships with fellow comrades and other activists in the struggle. The men, for the most part, wrote their life stories in a chronological order. They described the organizational structure and the events that lead to both their individual and the organization's political ideology. These life stories dismissed the notion of a monolithic Black Panther experience. Each author came to participate in the Black Panther Party by different means. Yet the use of these stories allows the reader to experience, through the author's own words, a series of historical events and that makes a contribution to the collective cultural experience. The analysis of autobiographies provides material to explore the advantages and disadvantages of participation in a revolutionary organization. They also allow us to explore issues of gender within the context of a group that sought to struggle against oppression.
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To my Father, for instilling in me a love for education, a thirst for excellence and the desire to share.

Monica Marie White
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

| CHAPTER |
|------------------|---|
| I. INTRODUCTION AND STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM | 1 |
| Introduction | 1 |
| Statement of the Problem | 2 |
| II. HISTORY OF THE BLACK PANTHER PARTY | 5 |
| Documentation | 5 |
| Historical Summary | 8 |
| Coalitions | 15 |
| Panther Influence on Other Organizations | 19 |
| Conflicts | 20 |
| External Pressures | 23 |
| COINTELPRO | 23 |
| Investigation | 25 |
| Purpose of Investigation | 25 |
| Methods of Investigation | 26 |
| Internal Pressures | 26 |
| Rifts in the Leadership Between Cleaver and Newton | 27 |
| Sexism in the Party | 33 |
| Leadership Roles | 35 |
| Women's Leadership | 36 |
| Conclusion | 38 |
Table of Contents—continued

CHAPTER

III. THEORY ................................................ 40

   Autobiography as Genre .................................. 40
       As Historical Text .................................. 42
       Sociological Autobiography ....................... 43
       Black Autobiography ................................ 45
       Women’s Autobiographies ......................... 47
       Black Women’s Autobiographies ................... 48

   Differences in the Writings of Black Women and Black Men ............. 50

IV. METHODS ............................................... 52

   Research Design ..................................... 52

V. RESULTS .............................................. 56

   Individual Analysis ................................ 56
       Elaine Brown .................................... 56
       Angela Davis .................................... 62
       Assata Shakur ................................... 70
       William Lee Brent ................................ 76
       Eldridge Cleaver ................................. 81
       Huey Newton ..................................... 83
       Bobby Seale ..................................... 90

   Comparative Analysis ............................... 95
       Similarities Within Women ....................... 95
       Similarities Within Men ......................... 100

iv
Table of Contents--continued

CHAPTER

Between Men and Women........................... 103
Perspectives of Racism.......................... 105
Perspectives of Sexism.......................... 108
Writing Style................................... 111

VI. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION..................... 113
Research Questions................................. 113
Discussion......................................... 115
Lessons Learned by Using Autobiographies........ 115
Recommendations for Further Research............. 118

APPENDICES

A. October 1996 Black Panther Party Platform and Program..... 119

BIBLIOGRAPHY............................................... 123
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION AND STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Introduction

When the intensity of the Civil Rights Movement appeared to be diminishing, the excitement of the Black Power Movement rang out in the streets of young, urban, poor and working-class black America. Things were definitely changing. Black people were no longer willing to assimilate in order to integrate. As James Brown’s song eloquently proclaimed "Say it loud, I’m black and I’m proud," the Afro hairstyle, and the black fist raised in the air, there was a black pride that symbolized this era. This black pride and announced self-acceptance had never been seen in America with such spirit, commitment, strength, and numbers.

One of the major influences of this time was the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense. This organization played a critical role in changing the image of African American people in the United States. While strongly supporting the black community’s constitutionally guaranteed rights, specifically regarding police brutality, the organization’s rhetoric proclaimed its mission as the liberation of black people. Within this message of black pride and black power, there was also a desire to destroy the image of black people as victims pleading to the white establishment to grant jobs, rights and access to adequate education. The Black Panther Party was to be the
personification of Malcolm X's dream (Foner, 1995). With the goal of ending oppression by any means, the Panthers were actively attempting to make Malcolm's dream a reality.

One of the first highly publicized and controversial appearances of the Black Panther Party took place on the lawn of the State of California Capitol building. Several armed Panther members were protesting proposed legislation that would make Panther patrols of the police illegal. This act left many shocked and bewildered. It appeared that the leadership of the Black Panthers would not be afraid of public attention.

Yet in approximately twelve years, the presence and image of the Black Panther Party had changed. They seemed to have disappeared from public existence, with the exception of occasional mention of legal troubles of the organization's leaders. Much has been written about the organization, yet little is as intriguing and revealing as the autobiographies of former Panther members.

Statement of the Problem

There has been an absence in the available literature on the influences and contributions of women within the Black Panther Party. Much of the documentation of the history and the political implications of the BPP's focus on the male leadership and membership and are written by men. Black women have been omitted and overlooked as contributors to this revolutionary organization whose focus was to fight police brutality, capitalism and racism. While there has been
a recent resurgence in interest in the organization, few sources have searched to explore the experiences of women from the women who were involved.

The analysis of black women within the organization in particular, and the experiences of black women within the larger social context in general, represent the analysis of class, race and sexual oppression. As members of oppressed groups, on the basis of sex, race and often class, black women represent and illuminate the interlocking effects of oppression on many fronts. Because of this unique position, black women are often seen as soldiers in the struggle for liberation in the Black Power movement while simultaneously involved in the struggle for women's rights. Their position allows the analysis of racism within the women's rights movement in addition to the sexism within the Black Power movement.

As a method of qualitative research, autobiographies allow the subjects to speak on the issues and concerns that are of importance to them as they describe their experiences. For those involved in the BPP, utilizing their recorded feelings and experiences provide valuable insight on the lives of those who were active in a revolutionary organization as they struggled for liberation in the American society. Plummer (1983) suggests that autobiography provides the purest source of data collection for sociological examination. It is this source that will provide the data for this dissertation.

The majority of information written on the history of the Black Panthers concentrates on the roles and impact of the predomi-
nanty male leadership. These analyses conspicuously exclude the role of women within the Black Panther Party. In order to explore the role of women within the party, it is necessary to read the personal experiences of women in the form of their autobiographies.

This dissertation provides a textual analysis of the autobiographies of both women and men who were involved in the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense. This paper will investigate these texts in search of male and female representations of the Black Panther Party's experiences, with a specific emphasis on gender relations and sexism within the Party.

Specifically, I ask the following questions:

1. What is the political ideology of the individual autobiographer?

2. What, if any, are the systematic differences between the autobiographies of men and the autobiographies of women?

3. How does the author explore or express perceptions of sexism and racism?

4. What are the similarities and differences between the life stories of the women involved in the Black Panther Party?

5. What are the similarities and differences between the life stories of the men involved in the Black Panther Party?

6. Are there distinctions in the writing style? Did the autobiographer pay attention to personal experiences or the Black Panther organizational political structure? Are there common differences between the autobiographies of women and men?
CHAPTER II

HISTORY OF THE BLACK PANTHER PARTY

Documentation

There is a considerable amount of literature on the history of the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense. The earliest documents were written in 1966 by the organization's founders, Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale. Texts were also written by other Panther members that provide descriptions of the organization and the roles within the organization that the members played. Several other documents were written from an outsider's view. These works were authored by journalists, political scientists, historians, and other scholars. According to the number of entries on First Search, there is currently a revived interest in the organization. A number of theses and dissertations have been written on various aspects of the BPP within the last three years.

This section will summarize the available information on the history of the Black Panther Party. One of the most recent texts is The Black Panther Party Reconsidered, edited by Charles Jones (1998). This text is a collection of articles written by former Panther members and Black Panther scholars and includes works that analyze the impact of the Black Panther Party. A number of pieces that explore the media portrayals of the Party, both organizational and gender dynamics, and the lessons that may be obtained by study-
Another text, which is comprehensive, is *Shadow of the Panther* by Hugh Pearson (1994). It is an historical analysis of the transition between the Civil Rights Movement and the Black Power Movement. In this book, Pearson, an African American journalist, discusses the role of the political climate from the 1950's to the start of the Black Panthers in 1966. He discusses the organization's influence on the political climate up to the late 1970's.

*The Black Panthers Speak* edited by Philip Foner (1995), is a European American who teaches African American history, provides the primary documentation, such as excerpts from the organization's newspaper, actual interviews, and letters from prominent Panther leaders. This information describes the political ideology of the organization and was distributed throughout the party.

Earl Anthony (1990), is a former Panther captain. Many of his critics claimed that he was an FBI informant. This book provides a description of his participation within the party. He explicitly describes his attraction to the party, along with the political events that took place during his tenure.

In *The Black Panthers*, Gene Marine (1969) a white journalist, sought to "explain the Black Panthers as a white reporter writing primarily for other whites" (p. 9).

*Off the Pigs: The History and Literature of the Black Panther Party*, by G. Louis Heath (1980), takes its title from a phrase that was popularized by the organization. This book presents an analysis
of the organization from a literary perspective. Heath's attempt is to provide "a complex book reflecting a complex social movement" (p. 1).

A major contribution to the existing research on women within the organization, "Comrade Sisters: Two Women of the Black Panther Party," was written by Madalynn C. Rucker and JoNina M. Abron. This article is a chapter in the book, *Unrelated Kin: Race and Gender in Women's Personal Narratives*, edited by Gwendolyn Etter-Lewis and Michele Foster (1996). The data were collected through interviews of two women, Gloria Abernethy, and Tondalela Woolfolk. Rucker and Abron are former members of the Black Panther Party, who interviewed Abernethy and Woolfolk, also former Panthers. This piece aims to provide the experiences of Black Panther women in their own words. It seeks to provide a picture of these women's lives before, during, and after their participation in the BPP, their attraction to the organization, their specific duties, the sacrifices that they made and their feelings about lessons that can be learned from the organization.

*Seize the Time*, written by organization co-founder Bobby Seale (1968), discusses some of the monumental events in the birth, life, and development of the party. Written in a conversational style, this text provides information as to the original objectives of the organization in addition to providing the members' feelings concerning the events of the organization.

*Panther: A Pictorial History of the Black Panthers and the*
Story Behind the Film, was written by Mario Van Peebles, Ula Y. Taylor and J. Tarika Lewis. Lewis is listed in this text as the Black Panther Party's first female member. This text provides historical information along with numerous pictures of the organization's members. In addition, the authors explain the connection between the actual organization and its members with the popular movie Panther, a fictional depiction of the lives and monumental events in the history of the organization.

Bitter Grain: Huey Newton and the Black Panther Party, was written by Michael Newton (1991). No information was obtained about the author and whether or not there was any relation between him and organization co-founder Huey Newton. This book provides a sympathetic look on the events of the organization from its beginning to the tragic death of Huey Newton.

Servants of the People: A History of Women in the Black Panther Party, is a senior thesis written by Angela Brown (1992), that concentrates on the events and involvement of women within the organization. Using both historical accounts gathered from various sources, in addition to the Black Panther, the organization's newspaper, and actual interviews, Brown provides an in-depth analysis of the role of women in the organization.

Historical Summary

According to Pearson, 1964 was the year of fragmentation for the Civil Rights Movement. This was the year of the passage of the
Civil Rights Act, which made the segregation of public facilities illegal. This act would also make illegal the racial segregation of "public schools, and colleges in addition to other federally funded state programs" (Abernathy, 1985, p. 486).

The remaining issue for the Civil Rights Movement was to gain the right to vote in the South. The Voting Rights Act of 1965 was aimed at southern voting policies that encouraged the refusal of the right to vote to members of various racial minorities, regardless of the "rational justification presented for the procedures" (Abernathy, 1985, p. 569). It was at this point that "former direct-action activists would divide into different philosophical camps" (Pearson, 1994, p. 61). Those camps were that of the nonviolent movement and those who had lost hope in a nonviolent solution to the nation's problems.

The Civil Rights Movement, according to Pearson, gained rights, jobs, and opportunities for the black middle-class to the exclusion of poor blacks. The social institution that served as the backbone of the Civil Rights Movement was the church. The Black Power Movement appeared more attractive to young, black, and angry and poor voices (Pearson, 1994), partially because there was a strong emphasis on uniting the masses of black people regardless of social class. This movement largely followed the military approach. These young people were also "dissatisfied with the concept of non-violence" (Pearson, 1994, p. 77). A number of organizations evolved which provided a political outlet for those who had become disen-
chanted with the non-violence of the Civil Rights Movement and the appearance of its ineffectiveness.

The Black Panther Party for Self-Defense was founded on October 15, 1966 by Huey Newton and Bobby Seale, two students at Merritt College in Oakland, California. The political climate in Oakland supported the growth of many revolutionary groups. There had been numerous incidents in which the Oakland Police Department purportedly brutalized or unjustifiably killed black citizens. One of the factors which intensified this perception was the black community's insufficient representation on the Oakland police force. Of over 600 police officers, only 19 black officers were employed in a city with an approximately 25% black population (Pearson, 1994).

Newton and Seale were involved in several student organizations that were established in conjunction with Merritt College and other colleges in the area. These militant young men, Newton and Seale, asserted that the other organizations were led by "armchair revolutionaries" (Pearson, 1994, p. 112). They set out to start an organization that would not only include revolutionary action, but would provide an education that would encourage and enable black people to liberate themselves and teach them to mobilize and to bring about an end to their oppression (Pearson, 1994).

A primary objective in the planning stages of this new organization was to involve not only young blacks from the various college campuses in the area, but also "brothers off the block" (Pearson, 1994, p. 95). There was an emphasis on recruiting frustrated,
angry youths from working-class backgrounds. By recruiting and utilizing the political and physical energy of these young people, there was an effort to "transform discontent into militant collective action" (Foner, 1995, p. ix).

There were a number of reasons why the Panthers appealed to black people. Some were attracted by the uniforms and the paramilitary stance that was exhibited when members were seen in public. The official uniform of Panther members consisted of a black leather coat, black pants, a powder blue shirt and black sunglasses. Others were attracted by the political rhetoric and liberatory action that the Panthers espoused. Still others were impressed by the courage of the Panthers that was displayed when members came to the defense of a citizen being approached by police officers. According to Earl Anthony (1970),

the Panthers were not content merely to live in the intellectual milieu of black nationalism. Unlike any other organization in the area, they were making a conscious attempt to bridge the gap between their rhetoric and their action. (p. 14)

One of the organization's first tasks was to provide protection for Betty Shabazz. Only recently a widow of Malcolm X, Shabazz was to appear as keynote speaker at the First Annual Malcolm X Grass Roots Memorial held in San Francisco. Also asked to provide protection was the Black Panther Party of Northern California, an organization led by Roy Ballard and Kenny Freeman, that was separate from Newton's and Seale's group.

Another function that was to gain the Black Panther Party for
Self-Defense to receive national publicity occurred on May 2, 1967, in the California State Legislature in Sacramento. The Black Panther organization sent thirty party members, which consisted of six women and twenty-four men that were openly armed (Seale, 1971). The destination was the Assembly of the State of California. The purpose of the Panthers was to protest the gun legislation that was being presented to the floor by California Republican state legislator Donald Mulford. This legislation, known as the Mulford Bill, was issued, according to Pearson (1994), "in response to the Panther gun activity" (p. 129). It was designed to " Restrict the carrying of loaded weapons within city limits" (Heath, 1980, p. 43) and "in public places" (Pearson, 1994, p. 129). The bill was scheduled to go before the California State Assembly Committee on Criminal Procedure on May 2, 1967. Newton was alerted and sent a cadre of members to protest the bill.

The Panthers were located in the visitors' section that was reserved for outside observers. With the media surrounding the group on the capitol's steps, Seale read the "Executive Mandate Number One," a statement by Minister of Defense, Newton, on the capitol steps. After Seale read the mandate for the first time, the group proceeded to a "restricted area on the capitol floor before they were removed by capitol guards" (Heath, 1980, p. 43).

After Seale read this mandate several times, the organization's members headed back to Oakland. En route, twenty-six of them were arrested on various charges (Hilliard, 1993).
The Mulford Bill was eventually passed and signed into law on July 28, 1967, "legally making armed patrols by the Black Panther Party a thing of the past" (Newton, 1991, p. 31)

After gaining national publicity, with Newton in the position of Minister of Defense and Seale serving as Party Chairman, the Panthers saw as their primary obligation the protection of the community from police brutality. During these Panther Patrols, on rounds of the black community, the Panthers patrolled and monitored any interaction between the police and an African American citizen. Armed with loaded guns, cameras, tape recorders, and law books, they were determined to protect the black citizenry from intimidation, brutalization, and harassment by police officers. Quite often verbal confrontations would take place between Panthers and police officers in public areas. Other passers-by would stop and witness these young, armed, black men standing up to the police. These Panther patrols served to "educate black residents about their ability to contest violations of their rights" (Foner, 1995, p. xi).

Newton was well versed in law and the criminal justice system. He had taken quite a few political science and law classes at Merritt College. He had also spent time in jail convicted of felonious assault with a deadly weapon (Pearson, 1994).

These activities made the Panthers an enemy not only of the local police department, but they also attracted the attention of the FBI's counterintelligence program (COINTELPRO). A great deal of effort was expended by FBI COINTELPRO operatives to not only disrupt
the relationships of the Black Panthers with other "militant black nationalist groups, but also to neutralize the organization" (Pearson, 1994, p. xiv).

The Panthers were able to attract attention and potential leaders from other organizations with similar views. Eldridge Cleaver was attracted to the Black Panthers' philosophy and presentation. While serving time in California's Soledad Prison for assault with intent to commit murder, Cleaver spent time exploring the politics and the oppressive conditions of African Americans. He became a writer for Ramparts, a radical leftist journal noted for its analysis of the social and political climate of Oakland. Cleaver's writing style was compared to his name, the "meat cleaver," for his unwillingness to compromise the harsh street language characteristic of his prose (Pearson, 1994, p. 107). Upon his release from prison in December, 1966, Cleaver rented a building, in San Francisco that was referred to as the Black House, which served as a cultural center for local black militant organizations. He was also well known at the time primarily because of the popularity of his book Soul on Ice. This text became required reading for the Black Panther Party members and was considered a well written expression of the black man's rage in America.

Cleaver and Newton met while both were on assignment. Cleaver was interviewing Betty Shabazz, the widow of Malcolm X, for Ramparts magazine, Newton and the Black Panthers were in charge of her protection. Newton was impressed with Cleaver's writings, whereas
Cleaver was impressed with Newton's bravery (Pearson, 1994). The Panthers accepted Cleaver and offered him the position of Minister of Information because of his writing abilities and his outspoken, militant political position.

Already making headlines because of their appearance at the California State Capitol, and their police patrols, the Black Panther Party also gained public recognition when Stokely Carmichael and Cleaver joined their ranks (Heath, 1980). Stokely Carmichael had received notoriety because of his leadership role in the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). The organization started out as a multi-racial group of students who planned protests against the segregation of public restaurants, primarily in the South. Later it adopted a more nationalist posture consistent with Malcolm X's political vision. Both the Panthers and the new SNCC (it expelled white supporters) saw themselves as revolutionary nationalists.

Coalitions

From its early days, the members of the Black Panther Party made it an organizational mandate to identify and support those groups that were working for the same objective that of liberation. In The Black Panther, the organization's newspaper, George Murray, Minister of Education of the Black Panther Party, stated, "the black liberation movement consciously identifies with and expresses solidarity with the liberation struggles of other oppressed peoples"
A few of these organizations were the Peace and Freedom Party (PFP), SNCC and Students for a Democratic Society (SDS).

There were other organizations that modeled themselves after the Black Panther Party. Some represented the interests of various ethnic and racial groups, while others were struggling against class discrimination. Some of these organizations were the Young Lords, Young Patriot Organization, the Red Guards, and the White Panther Party.

In addition to these organizations, there were those sympathizers who took up the aims and ambitions of the Party and wanted to assist even though they did not have membership in the BPP. Examples are the Honkeys for Huey and Whites for Defense of Huey Newton (WDFN). Regarding these radical whites, Hilliard (1993) suggests that "...their commitment is unquestionably genuine. Complete strangers, they present themselves as comrades to the organization, helping at the office, turning up at rallies, pledging money" (p. 145).

A common debate was the notion that the BPP was willing to accept non-blacks as allies. "For a time Panthers were the only group of radical blacks willing to accept non-black allies in their midst" (Newton, 1991, p. 103), in contrast to the cultural nationalist movement, which considered whites unwelcome allies in the struggle for liberation.

One of the first organizations to join as allies with the BPP
was the Peace and Freedom Party (PFP). A predominantly white organization, PFP began to organize on the issue of establishing a third political party. The purpose of this third party was to persuade voters to take a stand against the Vietnam War policy (Pearson, 1994, p. 149). PFP needed support in order to get on the ballot for the presidential election, and sought the support of the black community. With the alliance of the BPP, PFP members realized that they would have a better chance. PFP was considered "a viable political organization" (Newton, 1991, p. 104). The BPP needed financial support to establish and maintain a Free Huey campaign. The organizations developed an alliance. PFP asked the Panthers "to supply candidates for the party's electoral slate" (Newton, 1991, p. 105). "Huey Newton was nominated in absentia for a vacancy in the Seventh congressional district, while Bobby Seale and Kathleen Cleaver made a brave run at Bay area assembly seats" (Newton, 1991, p. 105).

Another momentous relationship was formed between the BPP and the Students Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). This organization started as an interracial group of college students that perceived themselves originally as a youth segment of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). Because of SCLC's reluctance to establish a youth branch, the youth broke off into their own organization. Active in sit-ins at establishments that refused to provide service to African Americans, SNCC members came into the national limelight because of their courage to refuse to move from restaurants, bus waiting rooms and other segregated areas (Pearson,
The BPP initially wanted to establish a merger with SNCC. The BPP believed SNCC had experience in its ability to provide structural support. As a growing organization, the BPP was receiving massive interest from African Americans across the country. The BPP looked to SNCC not only for publicity and workers but also funds (Heath, 1980).

In an effort to combine the two organizations, Huey Newton formally drafted members of SNCC. James Forman was drafted into the Black Panther Party as Minister of Foreign Affairs, H. Rap Brown as Minister of Justice and Stokely Carmichael as Prime Minister (Pearson, 1994). While the BPP considered the relationship as a merger, SNCC viewed it as a coalition. SNCC members actively worked on the Free Huey Campaign that was taking wings (Pearson, 1994). On February 17, 1968, a working alliance between the two organizations was formalized. The alliance eventually failed, due to a variety of factors (Booker, 1998).

Another organization that established a coalition with the BPP was Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). Started as a group of white students who sought to improve race relations in the Bay area, SDS members sought to organize the "deprived residents of East and West Oakland" interested in obtaining fair housing in this area (Pearson, p. 69). In its literature, the SDS vowed to support the efforts of the Newton-Cleaver Defense committees. According to Foner (1995),
SDS declares--its support for the Black Panther party and their essentially correct program for the liberation of the black colony--its commitment to defend the Black Panther party and the black community against the vicious attacks of the racist pig power structure--its commitment to join with the Black Panther party and other black revolutionary groups in the fight against white national chauvinism and white supremacy--its total commitment to the fight for liberation in the colony and revolution in the mother country. (p. 228)

Panther Influence on Other Organizations

The Young Lords was a Puerto Rican group that started out as a gang in New York City. Looking to fight for the rights of the Puerto Rican community, they became more political and established a 10 point platform which largely resembled that of the Black Panther Party's.

The Young Patriot Organization, which later broke off into the Patriot Organization, was a group of young whites who sought to organize young, impoverished whites. They were also in support of the Black Panther Party and established a coalition. "The Patriot Party recognizes the Black Panther Party as the vanguard by our practice" (Foner, 1995, p. 241).

The Red Guards, a group of Chinese Americans in California, was established to free the Chinese community from oppression. The group used the slogan "Yellow Power," similar to that of the Black Panther Party slogan "Black Power."

There was also a group called the White Panther Party, which was composed of radical whites who both supported and emulated the Black Panther Party. Seeing themselves as "white mother country
revolutionaries," they were established and organized for the purpose of "liberating America" (Heath, 1980, p. 167).

Honkeys for Huey was an impromptu group established for the sole purpose of providing support for the Free Huey movement. The aim of Honkeys for Huey was to gather additional financial and protest support from other radical or liberal whites and to help the BPP mobilize for the Free Huey Movement (Hilliard, 1993).

Conflicts

While there were groups that openly embraced and emulated the ambitions of the Black Panther Party, there were other organizations that presented not only philosophical but also physical challenges to the organization. The Black Panthers were not soft spoken about who their allies were, nor were they silent about their enemies.

During the protection of Betty Shabazz for the Malcolm X Annual Memorial event, a conflict erupted between the two Panther organizations that utilized the same name. The San Francisco area Black Panther Party of Northern California was referred to as the "Paper Panthers" by David Hilliard. It was led by Roy Ballard and Kenny Freeman. The Black Panther Party for Self-Defense, out of Oakland, led by Newton and Seale, discovered that the guns being used by the San Francisco group were not loaded. Shortly after this, Newton and other members of the Oakland group appeared at a function sponsored by the San Francisco group and confronted the group. According to Pearson (1994), the San Francisco group was
given an ultimatum of three options. They could either (1) change their name, (2) merge with Newton's group, or (3) be annihilated. When none of the options were selected, there was a melee. It was after this event that the Black Panther Party of Northern California changed its name. Not long afterward, this group disbanded.

Another group with whom the Black Panther Party had open conflict was United Slaves (US), a group headed by Ron (Maulana) Karenga. Considering themselves cultural nationalists, members of this organization dressed in traditional African clothing, adopted traditional African names and learned to speak in Swahili, an African trade language. The original conflict appeared to be a matter of who held the most power and ability to attract radical young black people, particularly in the Los Angeles area where US was based and the BPP started a chapter.

According to Foner (1995),

George Murray, minister of education of the BPP, stated, we must destroy all cultural nationalism, because it is reactionary and has become a tool of Richard Milhous Nixon, and all the United States power structure which divides the poor and oppressed, and is used by the greasy-slick black bourgeoisie to exploit black people in the ghetto. (p. 227)

Bobby Seale believed that the US organization joined with the capitalist power structure and allowed themselves to be used against black people's struggle. On the other hand, cultural nationalists believed that black people should struggle separately for their liberation. Called black racists, cultural nationalists because they hated white people not only because of their positions within the power structure, but because they believed that whites were evil
The conflict between the BPP and US eventually escalated into a deadly confrontation. In January, 1969, Alprentice Bunchy Carter and John Huggins were leaders of the Panthers in the Los Angeles area. US had been established earlier and was very popular in that area. Carter and Huggins were asked to attend a Black Student Union (BSU) meeting at UCLA on behalf of the students. US supported the hiring of a director of community and student programs, and a director of the Black Studies Program. The BPP and the BSU opposed the person that US supported (Newton, 1991).

In a conflict following the meeting Carter and Huggins were shot and killed. After the incident, the Los Angeles police arrested seventeen known Panther members because the police department wanted to avoid a retaliation effort on the part of the Panthers. Five members of US were indicted for the murder and it was alleged that Karenga was "an agent provocateur, less a black nationalist than a well-paid troublemaker submerged within the black community" (Newton, 1991, p. 96).

Contradicting the philosophy of cultural nationalists, it is alleged that Karenga owned some gas stations in the black community funded by money from the Rockerfeller family for his own personal gain (Newton, 1991). In addition, there appeared to be a connection between Karenga and the FBI. Undercover FBI agent Louis Tackwood "testified that Karenga and US had received police subsidies in the form of cash, weapons and drugs to prosecute unrelenting warfare..."
against the Black Panther party* (Newton, 1991, p. 97).

External Pressures

COINTELPRO

The impact of COINTELPRO not only on Civil Rights organizations but also Black Power organizations may never be fully realized. Established as a top secret faction of the FBI's counterintelligence program, COINTELPRO has interesting interactions with and evidence on the Black Panther Party. One cannot discuss the conflicts that existed with the Black Panther organization without looking at the role of COINTELPRO and infiltration of the organization that was established and supported by the United States government.

COINTELPRO, which stands for counterintelligence programs, was established as a subdivision of the Federal Bureau of Investigation in 1956. Its primary objective was to be in charge of internal security, monitoring individuals and organizations that were seen as internal threats to the interests of the United States. Their primary targets in the decade of the 1960's were the radical white groups like the communist organizations that were growing in popularity and the protest movement against the Vietnam war. Their concerns expanded with the increase of American internal conflict. With the resurgence of the white hate groups, and the black extremists, COINTELPRO expanded its investigation in 1967 to include these groups. Not only was the FBI interested in obtaining information as to the organizations' purposes and objectives, it was also interest-
ed in the weaknesses of the organizations and their leadership. The information that was obtained was in an effort to eradicate or neutralize those groups that posed a threat to internal national security.

J. Edgar Hoover, director of the FBI until his death in 1972, was the official who instituted COINTELPRO. He suggested that the function of the organization was essential because the United States was under both external threats from other countries, such as Vietnam, and internal threats from organizations such as white hate groups, black extremists and communists. Based on the urban unrest and riots that had taken place during the 1960's, the nature of protest in the US needed to be controlled. J. Ungar Sanford (1975) suggests that the FBI was simply afraid of revolution. COINTELPRO was an effort of the FBI to uphold structure and the values of the nation.

It appeared that the Black Panther Party was the target of much of the efforts of COINTELPRO. Hoover not only called the organization's supporters "foolish," he also referred to the group as the "greatest threat to domestic tranquillity" (as quoted in Isreal, 1986, p. 464). He also stated that the Panthers were "the most dangerous and violent of all extremist groups" (as quoted in Isreal, 1986, p. 464). As the head of the FBI, Hoover placed the investigation of the BPP at the center of COINTELPRO's surveillance and financial budget. William Sullivan, Hoover's successor, referred to the BPP as the vanguard of black extremism.
Investigation

Purpose of Investigation

African-Americans who were considered leaders in the Civil Rights Movement and more especially in the Black Power Movement were referred to by the FBI as KBE (Key Black Extremists); with this title, they were placed under continuous investigation, including their personal lives. According to Nelson Blackstock (1988), the surveillance and investigation of each KBE was to identify current activities, future plans, weaknesses, strengths and personal lives for the purpose of neutralizing the effectiveness of each KBE.

COINTELPRO sought to obtain information about the aims and membership rosters of various organizations. By cross-referencing the membership of different organizations, the FBI was able to identify those who were especially vocal and active in the Black Power Movement. All of these activities were established to disrupt and discredit Black Power groups. This was done by making them appear unattractive by limiting their mass or public appeal.

Not only was the FBI interested in the membership of these groups, it was also concerned with the kind of fiscal budget they were operating under, as well as the number and description of the weapons to which the Panthers had access.

The FBI was also in search of conflicts between members of the Panthers and other organizations. These ideological debates allowed the COINTELPRO operation to create dissension between members of a
group and between groups.

Methods of Investigation

As an organization, the FBI used a variety of methods of investigation and surveillance. Not only did they use hidden cameras, but the bureau was also known to tap telephone lines, search garbage and open mail and packages. In addition to external investigation, the FBI also used informants and agents to infiltrate the BPP. These members were sometimes known and sometimes identified as agents provocateurs. In many cases, the names of provocateurs were not known for many years.

Another technique of COINTELPRO was to falsify documents from one organization to another or falsify anonymous letters. These letters and documents were sent to leaders of organizations causing them to question others not only in the Black Panther Party but in other Black Power organizations as well. The purpose of these letters was to discredit the organization leaders and to stir up publicity about their organizations financial irresponsibilities.

Internal Pressures

With the increase in national publicity and federal observation of the Black Panther Party, they began to feel the effects of these external pressures. In response to the external pressures as well as the constant efforts to raise money and time spent on obtaining the freedom of its members from incarceration, the BPP ex-
experienced internal dissent.

The internal pressures began to weigh heavily on the organization. Eldridge Cleaver was first in exile in Cuba and later in Algeria for parole violation. Huey Newton was convicted of voluntary manslaughter of a police officer and wounding another officer. Newton was sentenced to two to fifteen years in prison. As a result, the organization's leaders were unable to resolve successfully the issues that the BPP was facing.

Rifts in the Leadership Between Cleaver and Newton

The antagonisms between Cleaver and Newton were as much regional as they were philosophical. While the California chapter had moved its focus toward the community service programs, the New York chapter was still reeling from the arrest of the New York 21, a group of 21 Panther members who were charged with "conspiracy to blow up department stores, police stations, and commuter railways," in New York City (Pearson, 1994, p. 208). During the trial, Newton expelled the group because of what he perceived as their insubordination. They were outspoken about the lack of support they received from Newton and his followers.

Differences in philosophical approach broadened the rift. While Cleaver focused on a much more direct approach including violence to achieve black liberation, Newton concentrated more on the community service aspects of the organization. He wanted to move the BPP toward a more non-violent approach to addressing social ills.
(Newton, 1995). Newton felt that Cleaver "had grown too remote and egocentric for the good of the movement" (Newton, 1991, p. 203). The more militant chapters of the organization understandably supported Cleaver, while the more community service oriented side supported Newton. Seale continued to maintain his loyalty to Newton.

While Cleaver was in Algeria to avoid trial for parole violations, he obtained information about the mishandling of organization funds, based primarily within the Oakland chapter. He was particularly concerned and critical of what he deemed as the mismanagement of funds as related to Huey Newton who moved into a penthouse apartment (Pearson, 1994). Cleaver sent an informant to report ongoings of the headquarters.

Newton claimed that Cleaver "placed too much emphasis on armed rebellion" (Foner, 1995, p. xvi). Cleaver responded from exile that the lumpen proletariat were ready for revolution. He continued to promote the militant direction of the Panther ideology. Newton felt that the party was in need of reorganization and revitalization and that it could achieve the boost needed through participation in electoral politics and concert promotions (Boyd, 1995). He feared that the organization was not living up to its stated goals.

On March 5, 1971, on Intercommunal Day of Solidarity, a rally was held to demonstrate the solidarity between the BPP and its "white radical allies." Cleaver and Newton where scheduled to converse by phone. The conversation was also televised, to promote the occasion (Pearson, 1994, p. 230). When the call went through, Clea-
ver demanded that Newton reinstate the New York 21 as Panther mem-
bers in good standing. Cleaver then voiced his opinion that David
Hilliard was mismanaging the party and demanded that Newton expel
Hilliard. Newton, shocked with the tone of the discussion, refused
to speak anymore on the air. Off-air, each expelled the other from
the party. Not only did Cleaver expel Newton from the organization,
he expelled the whole Oakland leadership. He went on to declare
that the party relocate its administration headquarters to New York
City and Algeria (Pearson, 1994, p. 231) Similarly, Newton expelled
the entire New York BPP chapter.

The New York Panthers, along with most of the East Coast Pan-
ther chapters, sided with Cleaver, while the California Panthers
maintained their leadership and sided with Newton. This was a wound
from which the ailing BPP could not heal. There were additional
episodes of conflict between the East and West coast BPP's that
ended in a several deaths. Eventually Cleaver withdrew from the

With the two external struggles behind the organization, that
included the repression from local and federal police authorities,
and internally between the leadership itself, the wounded organiza-
tion under the leadership of Newton once again channeled its focus
on the community service activities that had produced great commu-
nity support and success in its earlier years. Newton ordered that,
"all loyal Panthers must reject the earlier pick up the gun philo-
sophy, committing themselves single-mindedly to voter registration,
conventional politics and community service programs" (Newton, 1991, p. 209).

Realizing the impact of these activities in their early organizing efforts, Newton attempted to revive the organization and its image within the black community by establishing the Survival Programs. The Panthers concentrated their efforts on four major programs: (1) the petition campaign for community control of police; (2) free breakfasts for school children; (3) free health clinics; (4) and liberation schools. They would later include an ambulance service, a senior escort program, and dental and optometry programs (Pearson, 1994). These programs would serve to "meet the everyday needs of black communities while also educating black people" (Foner, 1995, p. xv.).

In addition to the reinstatement of the community service programs, the focus of the Panthers as a political organization was once again re-emphasized. Bobby Seale and Elaine Brown held leadership positions and sought mainstream elected offices. Seale ran for mayor, while Brown ran for a city council position in the 1973 Oakland city election. Although they did not win, the attempt had profound effects on city politics (Boyd, 1995).

In 1974, trouble surfaced once again in the BPP. Newton was brought up on charges in the murder of Kathleen Smith, a young girl who died of head injuries, a case in which the jury would eventually end up deadlocked in a 10-2 decision for Newton's acquittal. He was also charged, and later acquitted, of pistol whipping his tailor.
At the time, Newton, not willing to continue the legal battles, moved to Cuba in exile. It was then that Newton turned to Elaine Brown to head the organization. She was named as party chair. Michael Newton claimed that, "Brown. . . would prove with time to be the most dynamic and effective Panther leader since Eldridge Cleaver . . ." (Newton, 1991, pp. 211-212).

This effort to revive the BPP was not sufficient to bring the organization's membership to another peak. While the leadership, specifically Brown and Newton, could not agree on a political direction, the Panthers appeared confused about their objectives.

According to Pearson, the organization then turned to its more clandestine activities. There were accusations of drug abuse, fist-fights, and murders and Newton's uncertainty and emotional instability became visible after his return from Cuba. All of these actions led to the demise of the Panthers, not only in the eyes of those dedicated members who watched its fall, but also in the eyes of the community that had once supported the organization.

The initial emphasis of Newton and Seale was to begin an organization that both attracted and appealed to the brothers on the block. Not only did this statement imply their desire to recruit as members those who could not afford college education, this statement also implied the need for black men to join an organization that would assist them in regaining their manhood and self-esteem. This also reflects their efforts to organize the working and underclass black males. They noted that Civil Rights Movement had ignored them.
After further discussion of women's involvement in the Panthers, Seale (1978) states that women would be welcome in the organization. Seale states, "Of course we had to make it clear, when asked, that sisters could join the Black Panther Party. We would welcome them" (p. 158). This does not mean that women would be actively recruited as the men had been, but nonetheless, they would not be turned away.

Women joined the Panthers for various reasons. LeBlanc-Ernest (1992) suggests that there were three primary reasons that women joined the BPP. As black women they were interested in working to advance the black struggle, to participate in the community service activities and to work to repair some of the economic, political and social conditions that plagued African Americans.

The female members attended target practice and learned gun maintenance in addition to the physical training that was also required of the men. Additionally, women were expected to fill traditional women's roles like clerical, and kitchen duties and literature distribution. Panther women were also found teaching at the liberation schools; they were responsible for organizing conferences and rallies in addition to various meetings. They also participated in battlefield medicine. In a Panther newspaper article, Matthews suggests that women defined their role as providing the traditional women's positions as in the larger society such as nurturer and companion, but that they also defined their role in terms usually associated with men such as "militant, intellectual, and committed revolutionary" (Matthews, 1998, p. 287).
In 1967, the first woman to join the Panthers was J. Tarika Lewis (LeBlanc-Ernest, 1998). The significant role of women continued throughout the organization's existence. During the BPP appearance in Sacramento to protest the Mulford Bill on March 2, 1967, six of the thirty Black Panther members were women (Seale, 1978, LeBlanc-Ernest 1998). Women were also involved, side by side, with male members in armed confrontation with various police agencies (LeBlanc-Ernest, 1998, Matthews, 1998). One particular event took place on December 8, 1969. In a six hour standoff between the Los Angeles police department and the LA panthers, six of the 18 Panther members were women. Not only did the women suffer numerous injuries, they were also arrested along with their male counterparts.

Sexism in the Party

Seale (1968) suggests that as an organization, the BPP would work toward "that principle of absolute equality between male and female" (p. 394). The women involved in the black panther organization were called anything from Pantherettes (Newton, 1991) comrade sisters, and Panther women. These latter titles were most desirable by the women in the organization.

During his exile in Cuba, Cleaver wrote a letter to Sister Ericka Huggins. Not only is this letter in support of the sacrifices made by Huggins during her tenure in the Panthers, he also dismisses the value of male chauvinism within the BPP. He dis-
cusses the role of women within the organization. According to Fonder (1995),

...we must too recognize that a woman can be just as revolutionary as a man and that she has equal stature, that, along with men, and that we cannot prejudice her in any manner, that we cannot regulate her to an inferior position. (p. 98)

Not all women suffered from sexism within the organization. Kathleen Cleaver admits that while she did not suffer directly from sexist behavior while involved in the Panthers she did however notice that women's ideas were overlooked by the male members in the organization (LeBlanc-Ernest, 1998).

Seale (1968), both in his autobiography and in *Seize the Time*, describes various incidents that led to his decision to ban all gender based division of labor. Initially, women had been "regulated to typing and cook and stuff like this, we broke up those roles in the Party.

Many of the male members of the BPP believed in the notion of "socialistic fucking" (Matthews, 1998 p. 292). This term refers to the obligatory nature of sexual favors participated in by the members of the BPP. For any female who refused the sexual advances of the male members, she would hastily be reminded that it was her revolutionary duty. "Here I am in the revolution putting my life on the line and here you are denying me" (Pearson, 1994, p. 179). A woman Panther who refused to grant sexual favors would be labeled counter-revolutionary, or "harboring a petit bourgeois idealism that she needed to lose" (Pearson, 1994, p. 179).
Seale (1968) believed that Panther women should withdraw sexual favors for those who were not completing their tasks in a timely fashion or who were often late for activities. In his autobiography, Seale admitted that some of the male members in the organization used their rank in order to have the opportunity to sleep with some of the Panther women.

These sentiments are not unsupported. Eldridge Cleaver in his 1968 presidential campaign uses the term pussy power to explain the woman’s ability to refuse sexual favors to encourage men to participate in political activities (Matthews, 1998).

According to Pearson (1994), "a principal problem within the party--wanton disrespect for women by many male party members who just couldn't rid themselves of bad personal habits no matter how much they claimed allegiance to the revolution" (p. 176).

**Leadership Roles**

With the increase of repression from police agencies, the BPP male leadership was decimated. Either incarcerated, forced to go underground or assassinated during the various encounters with police, it was the women in the organization who stepped up to fill the vacant positions that were once occupied by men. According to Pearson (1994), when the organization was struggling to survive, "virtually all the concrete programs of the party, except the newspaper, were now run by party women" (p. 270). Some suggest that even the newspaper was edited by women.
The male leadership, however, defined women's role in different terms. In the section on women in *Seize the Time*, Seale relates to some of the organizations' women referring to their attractiveness and their ability to attract new male members into the organization. According to his description, he believed that Panther women should encourage men to learn the ideology of the organization in order to actually gain the attention from the women they wanted to pursue.

This leadership by women of a male-dominated organization was not without repercussions. According to Matthews (1998), women in leadership positions often used "male posturing" (p. 290). This male posturing was manifested in the "presumption of style, actions, and words associated with male prerogative. . .some women had to modify their public persona in order to be respected. . ." (Matthews, 1998, p. 290).

**Women's Leadership**

Elaine Brown (1993), perhaps is the best example of a woman in a leadership position in the BPP. She rose from the rank and file membership and eventually became party Chair of the organization from 1974-1977. As Brown assumed the position of Chair of the BPP, she looked over "a sea of predominantly male faces" (Brown, 1993, p. 3).

She held the position of Deputy Minister of Information, and served as the editor of the Panther newspaper. According to Pearson
(1994), Brown was responsible for "the greatest advances the party ever made among the Oakland establishment" (p. 270). "Brown's tenure as Panther leader would feature not only improved community relations but she was also credited with providing major political gains" (p. 271). She, and the organization, were pivotal in the election of Oakland's first Black mayor, Lionel Wilson, in the spring of 1977.

In addition to her example as party leader while Chair, Brown (1993) placed women's issues on the political agenda of the BPP.

I would support every assertion of human rights by women--from the right to abortion to the right of equality with men as laborers and leaders. I would declare that the agenda of the Black Panther Party and our revolution to free black people from oppression specifically included black women. (p. 368)

She also resented the male dominance of the group and all symbols of sexism,

I would not tolerate any raised fists in my face or any Black Power handshakes, or even the phrase Black Power, for all of it now symbolized to me the denial of black women in favor of the freedom of the black man. (p. 368)

As she was worked to end the pervasive sexism that in the party, she also placed women in several leadership positions.

Brown (1993) goes on to say

I had been able to deflect most of the chauvinism of Black Panther men. My leadership was secure. Thus, in installing Sisters in key positions, I had not considered this business. I had only considered the issue of merit, which had no gender. (p. 363)

In the early years of the Black Panther Party Kathleen Cleaver was Communications secretary. In this position, she often appeared as spokesperson on behalf of the organization. She was the first
woman to acquire a position which permitted her to sit on the Central committee. (Le-Blanc-Ernest, 1997) She also served as assistant editor of the Panther newspaper.

Other women held leadership positions mostly in local chapters. Barbara Sankey served as director of three free breakfast programs. Ann Campbell, served as communications Secretary and Yvonne King was Deputy Minister of Labor and Field Secretary; they were both involved in the Illinois chapter. Afeni Shakur was section leader in the New York chapter. Audrea Jones, who was in the Boston chapter became a Captain (LeBlanc-Ernest, 1998) Ericka Huggins actually started a chapter in New Haven, Connecticut and became the Deputy Chairman. Patricia Hilliard served as Finance Secretary. Other women in important positions were JoNina Abron, who served as Panther newspaper editor from March 1978 to 1980. Sheeba Haven held the position of party Lieutenant (Pearson, 1994). In addition, she was the director of the Panther’s George Jackson Free Clinic.

Conclusion

By the 1980's the Panthers no longer existed as a dynamic, viable organization. Huey Newton remained in the press because of drug activity, murder charges, and other acts of public self-destruction. On August 22, 1989, Newton was killed in a drug-related dispute. Many former Panthers came together for the funeral. While the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense no longer existed as it once did, many members vowed not to let its legacy disappear.
While the available historical information provides a very interesting picture of the context of the 1960's, the impact of the Black Panther Party on the political agenda of America, and the internal analysis of the organization itself, is underdeveloped. The historical analyses have been written by men, about men. The reader misses the impact and the role of women within the organization. In order to learn of the experiences of women within the organization, one has to turn to the autobiographies of women involved with Black Panther Party.
CHAPTER III

THEORY

Autobiography as Genre

Autobiographies have been analyzed from many different perspectives. They have been found to be a rich source of information depending upon the area of specialty. James Olney (1980), a well-known scholar on the topic of autobiography, suggests "what is autobiography to one observer is history or philosophy, psychology or lyric poetry, sociology or metaphysics to another" (p. 5). For example, a critic may discuss the literary content of the piece, whereas the historian is more interested in its historical accuracy. The psychologist may be concerned with the discussions of personal feelings and the author's relationships with others as this writing represents "the graphic portrayal of the mental life of their subjects" (Allport, 1940, p. 3). The sociologist can analyze autobiographies and determine the social institutions that affected a person's life in addition to the social context within which it is written. The autobiography serves as "an account of individual experience which reveals the individual's actions as a human agent and as a participant in social life" (Blumer, 1939, p. 29).

The word autobiography can be broken down into its Greek origins for its definition. Olney (1980) offers the translation, autos meaning self, bios meaning life, and graphe meaning writing. There
are other functional definitions offered by those who study them. Autobiography is defined as "one form among many in which a writer speaks of himself and the incidents of his personal experience" (Pascal, 1960, p. 2). There are some definitions that concentrate on the act of writing, such as the one presented by Plummer (1983), which states that an autobiography is "the full length book account of one person’s life in his or her own words" (p. 14). There are other definitions that suggest a deeper meaning. Olney (1972) suggests that autobiography is a "metaphor of the self as it is becoming" (p. 35).

Denzin (1989) argues that there are three central features to an autobiography: "the person’s own story of his life; the social and cultural situation to which the subject and others see the subject responding; and the sequence of past experiences and situations in the subject’s life" (p. 186). William Howarth (1980) describes the autobiography as a self-portrait, with the writer acting as both the painter and the painted, a merging of two demanding roles.

As literary genre Olney (1980) suggests that "autobiography is both the simplest of literary enterprises and the commonest" (p. 3). Described as both common and simple, autobiography is based on the notion that there are no strict rules, format or formal requirements that confine the potential autobiographer. This can be seen as difficult when attempting identify similarities or commonalities of different life stories. However, when making comparative analyses of life stories, the lack of formal structure can be seen as a
strong advantage. Life stories "focus on the experiences of a per-
son, group, or organization" (Denzin, 1989, p. 185). The literary
freedom to begin an autobiography at any point, with specific con-
centration on the organization or the self, then tells about the
author, and makes for interesting contrast in the cross analysis.

Olney (1972) suggests that an autobiography can be seen as an
dexample of symbolic meaning. This concept implies that the author,
in telling his or her life story, not only repeats past experiences,
but those experiences are also reconstructed in the process. Olney
(1990) describes the actual study of autobiography as more of a
"study of the way experience is transformed into literature, as a
study of the creative process, a humanistic study of the ways of men
(and women) and the forms taken by human consciousness" (p. 10).

Treated as literature, Olney (1980) mentions to the student of
autobiographies that they present in a "peculiarly direct and faith-
ful way the experience and the vision of a people, which is the same
experience and the same vision lying behind and informing all the
literature of that people" (p. 13). This addresses the use of auto-
bioigraphy to provide the view of the impact of historical exper-
iences from the inside out. Olney also suggests that autobiography
is another literature.

As Historical Text

Autobiographies provide an illuminating and often unique his-
torical picture. According to Cox (1989), they serve as the history
of a person's life. As a literary form, he contends, autobiographies can be considered as both fiction and history. Plummer (1983) suggests that in using life histories, there are three major modes of approaching history. In this mode, the first is the use of oral history. The issue of history becomes the primary focus. The second mode of approaching history is through interactionist writings. This approach portrays the individual as s/he moves through life and the changing meaning of her/his experiences through an "evolving historical culture" (p. 71). The third mode is a concentration on the stories of specific men and women "to show how the crises of particular historical periods can be mirrored in the crises of particular great (wo)men" (p. 71).

Sociological Autobiography

Mills (1959) suggests that the three coordinate points of the social sciences must include the analysis of history, biography and society. This would suggest that to explore thoroughly a person's existence, social scientists must value equally the role and importance of the historical events, the person's life and the social conditions into which that person is born. The autobiographical form appears to provide these three coordinate points. Not only does this allow an author to discuss history but s/he is also able to include the effects of those historical events on their own lives.

Mills (1959) contends that one of the first lessons of social science is "the idea that the individual can understand his own ex-
perience and gauge his own fate only by locating himself within his period" (p. 5). The actual documentation of these experiences and a person's analysis is autobiography.

Merton (1988) refers to the term sociological autobiography. This term was used to describe a collection of works where sociologists were asked to actually write their autobiographies and to discuss the effects of social conditions upon their lives. He goes on to say that

the sociological autobiography utilizes sociological perspectives, ideas, concepts, findings and analytical procedures to construct and to interpret the narrative text that purports to tell one's own history within the context of the larger history of one's times. (p. 18)

This term however is not isolated in its use to sociologists, "...not all autobiographies by sociologists qualify as sociological autobiography just as not all sociological autobiography is written by credentialed sociologists" (Merton, 1988, p. 21). Yet, the application of sociological perspectives and concepts within an analysis serves as an extension of this term.

Plummer (1983) suggests that in the process of analysis, the sociologist has the potential to contaminate the information that is gathered. On a continuum, Plummer discusses the degree to which the contamination affects the information gathered by the sociologist. Sociological theories are on the far end, being that which has the greatest amount of sociological contamination and the least amount of applicability to the real lives of its subjects. The autobiography is a purest source of information that can be obtained as it
provides "the subjects own rational construction of the world (and) is grasped and apprehended in its purest form" (p. 113).

For the sociologist, it is the opportunity to obtain the subject's description of the effects of various life events and experiences. It is the opportunity to hear, in the person's own words, the effects of various social institutions and social history on her/his individual life.

Black Autobiography

The autobiographies of African Americans have also been used as historical text, in quite a different way. The experiences and lives of African Americans have been omitted from traditional historical canon (Cox, 1989). Black autobiographies are used not only to present the life stories of the writers; these stories also set out to fill in gaps that exist as a result of this omission (Butterfield, 1974).

Gates (1991) suggests that the black autobiography plays a "central role" (p. 3). Additionally, autobiographies have been utilized as a focal point in various studies department. Black autobiography has made significant contributions to the curricula of Black Studies departments, and the same effect has been celebrated by the contributions of women's autobiographies to the curricula of Women's Studies (Olney, 1980).

Autobiographies have a different value in the black literary tradition than in the mainstream literary tradition; as can be evi-
denced in terms of the selections that are analyzed. In terms of gathering an accurate and articulate collective history, their value is immeasurable. These works serve as a lens of cameras that provide individuals from oppressed groups a vehicle to document their collective history and to find voice. This opportunity allows oppressed groups to discuss their unique experiences as African Americans, as women, or any other group whose story has not been told. It is through the process of telling specific historical events and the effects of these events on one's life that seems to sensitize others to the experiences of being black in a racist environment, and/or the experiences of being a woman in a sexist environment. The indirect aim is to allow the reader to empathize with these stories.

V.P. Franklin, an African American historian, contends that based on the analysis of many generations of life writing, African Americans from various periods have maintained a pattern. For former slaves, the act of writing autobiographies has been self-liberating. He suggests that the focal points for many during this era are the struggle for freedom, what freedom means and how it can be obtained (Franklin, 1995). Amongst African American intellectuals, the life stories reveal political and social conditions as a way to "reflect that larger social context for Afro-America" (Franklin, 1995, p. 11).

Seen as an inside view of the contradictions within of America in dealing with race relations, the African American autobiography

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serves as America’s raw criticism. Combining the personal, the social, and the collective struggle for freedom, these life stories have much to tell.

Women’s Autobiographies

Jelinek (1980) suggests that women have a unique writing style that leads to their autobiographies being overlooked by serious scholarship. She suggests that the mainstream literary tradition has become accustomed to the male literary style and has used this mode of to critique women’s writing. When making these comparisons in the analysis of men’s writing, terms are used which express the “heroic and exceptional” nature of their experiences. Women’s life stories are described in more “conventional terms”, for example, “heartbreak, anger, loneliness, mother, humility, confusion, and self-abnegation” (p. 5). Her contention is that using the same criteria we use to analyze men’s stories provide an unfair understanding of the richness of the women’s stories. Different criteria are needed to look at women’s writing.

Women’s writing often emphasizes their personal lives and the interpersonal connections and the people that were influential in their lives. Women expend less energy discussing the political or the professional aspects of their lives while men practice the opposite. For Jelinek (1980), she finds that “this emphasis by women on the personal, especially on other people, rather than on their work life, their professional success, or their connectedness to current
political or intellectual history clearly contradicts the established criterion about the content of autobiography" (p. 10) To explore the extent of women's writing, one must include the use of diaries, journals and notebooks as opposed to that which is determined as autobiography proper.

Another distinction made when using autobiographies is the notion that people must believe that their lives are important enough to record their life experiences. Patricia Meyers (1980) maintains that "women, for obvious social reasons, have traditionally had more difficulty than men about making public claims of their own importance" (p. 112). This could explain the dearth of women's autobiographies in the formal sense.

**Black Women's Autobiographies**

The analysis of Black Women's autobiographies has been limited. Baisnee (1997) suggests that "the autobiography, raises problems about the representation of black women in literature and in society" (p. 59).

Those autobiographical works by women that have been analyzed represent certain authors consistently. For example, those that have been included in literary critiques have been Maya Angelou, Toni Morrison, Zora Neale Hurston, and Alice Walker. It is interesting to note that all of the above listed authors are professional writers. Few autobiographical analyses have included Black women who were not known as writers. This does not mean that Black women
have not participated in writing their autobiographies.

Braxton (1989) explores the history of black women who have documented their lives. In identifying the primary point of black women's writing, Braxton contends that the process of writing their autobiographies has been a relationship with other black women who tell their life stories in different ways. For example, the blues-woman and the evangelist use their voice to document their experiences and the black woman autobiographer is a continuation of this tradition.

Braxton (1989) suggests that there is currently not only a "literary renaissance of the study of autobiography, but a renaissance of black women writing" (p. 7). With this in mind, as many attempt to understand their writing, Braxton states,

it is not necessary for one to be a black woman to understand her writing. However, for the literary critic who is not black [and a woman] they must work harder to see the black woman at the center of her own (written) experience. (p. 6)

Braxton does not speak of the distinctions between black men's and women's writing. In fact, she suggests that they both tend to have a dominate internal strategy of action rather than contemplation. . . .the autobiographer incorporates communal values into the performance of the autobiographical act, sometimes rising the function as the point of consciousness of her people. (p. 6)

Additionally, she contends that "Black women's autobiography is (also) an occasion for viewing the individual in relation to those others with whom she shares emotional, philosophical, and spiritual affinities, as well as political realities" (p. 9)

Tate (1983) suggests that both blackness and womaness provide
a unique position from which to view American society. There are two points of intersection that help to explain their realities.

One where western culture cuts across vestiges of Africa heritage, and one where male-female attitudes are either harmoniously parallels, subtly divergent, or in violent collision. Their work addresses what is means to be human, a condition not entirely determined by genetic makeup but it is also comprised of conscious volition. . . . With one penetrating glance they cut through layers of institutionalized racism and sexism and uncover a core of social contradictions and intimate dilemmas which plague all of us, regardless of our race and gender. (p. xvi)

Differences in the Writings of Black Women and Black Men

In a set of interviews, Tate (1983) asked prominent black women writers a series of questions that inquired about the social and political implications of their writing. She was interested in where they obtained their subject matter and how they felt their works were interpreted by their readers. One of the questions asked was whether or not these women writers thought there was a distinction between the writing of black men and women. When she pursued this question, the writer's responses were as varied as the writers themselves. Tate suggests that women's writing is emotional with vivid descriptions of sexual intimacy. Ntozake Shange agrees that women's writing is more descriptive of feelings, while Nikki Giovanni suggests that women are expected to deal with emotions.

Morrison (Tate, 1983) contends that women's writing is different in that men address "conflict, dominion and power" (p. 122). She suggests that she does not find that men and women write differently about intimacy. The larger discrepancy does not exist between
black men and women's writing. "It's not so much that (black) women
write differently from (black) men, but that black women write dif­
ferently from white women" (p. 122).

Morrison, (1983?) suggests however that the greatest differ­
ence between writing styles is that between black women and white
women.

It seems to me there's an enormous difference in the writing
of black and white women. Aggression is not as new to black
women as it is to white women. Black women seem able to com­
bine the nest and the adventure. They don't see conflicts in
certain areas as do white women. They are both safe harbor
and ship; they are both inn and trail. We, Black women, do
both. (p. 122)

Morrison (1983?) goes on to suggest that the "concentration
has always been on how different black men's and black women's writ­
ing differ as opposed how they are the same" (p. 123).
CHAPTER IV

METHODS

Research Design

There are currently seven single authored autobiographies written by former Black Panther members. Three of these were written by women, and four by men. All seven of these autobiographies will be analyzed for this study. The women’s books selected are Assata: An Autobiography by Assata Shakur (1987), who was active in the New York chapter of the Black Panther Party. She joined the Black Liberation Party and is currently in exile in Cuba. A Taste of Power: A Black Woman’s Story, by Elaine Brown (1993) who replaced Bobby Seale as Chairman of the Party. She was appointed by Newton while he was in exile in Cuba for murder charges. Angela Davis: An Autobiography by Angela Davis (1988) will also be included. While her membership in the Black Panthers was short, she worked very closely with the organization, specifically with the Free Huey campaign and with the Soledad Defense Committee to win the freedom of political prisoners such as George Jackson and other Soledad Brothers.

The men’s life stories that were used were Revolutionary Suicide by Huey Newton (1973) who was a co-founder of the Black Panther Party. The second, A Lonely Rage, by Bobby Seale (1978) who was the other co-founder of the organization. His text was selected because
of his contributions to the direction of the organization. Both texts *Soul on Fire* and *Soul on Ice* written by Eldridge Cleaver (1978, 1968) are included in the analysis. *Soul on Fire* (1978) was written after his involvement in the Black Panther Party and discusses his conversion to Christianity. *Soul on Ice*, was a collection of essays written while he was in prison. This book provides insight into his political views and was required reading for members in the Panthers. It drew national attention for his radical political analyses of American society. He not only served as Minister of Information in the Panthers, he also spoke often on behalf of the organization and was seen as a very influential force. *Long Time Gone*, by William Lee Brent (1996), is also included in this analysis. Brent spent more time in a Cuban prison under suspicion than he did in the Black Panther Party. He served as captain in the party in addition to serving as a body guard for top Panthers.

Based on the objectives of this study, the autobiographies will be analyzed and compared from two different perspectives. The first perspective will be the analysis of life stories individually. The second will be a comparison of both men's and women's life stories.

In the first phase, each autobiography was analyzed singularly. The analysis was based on the following questions: How did the family's economic status influence the author's life choices? Economic status was determined based on their own depiction of their family's financial condition which included the occupation, level
of education and economic conditions attained by their parents. They were either classified as upperclass, middle class or impoverished.

The second question explored the level of their own educational attainment. The third question was the autobiographical format. There were in this component two options, either chronological meaning they started with their birth and their childhood experiences, or scattered, where each autobiographer started with a particular event that affected his/her life and then continued in an order other than chronological. The fourth question explored their political outlook at various points of their lives. This question analyzed their personal political beliefs not only during their adult lives but also whatever beliefs they described as they were coming into adulthood.

The fifth question regarded political activism. This question explored the political organizations and activities in which they participated, not including their participation in the Black Panther Party. The sixth question explored their overall political ideology, their adult philosophy. The seventh and eighth questions explored their description or definition of racism and sexism. This was mostly demonstrated in terms of their explanation of particular events. They often included political explanations of particular experiences. The ninth question was their motivation to join the Panthers. In the case of Huey Newton and Bobby Seale, the question was their self-described reasons for starting the organization. The
tenth question described the positions that they held within the organization. The eleventh question explored their exposure to the criminal justice system, prior to, during and after their participation in the Panthers.

Part two was a comparative analysis of these autobiographies; both women’s and men’s life stories were included. The questions guiding this were the commonalities of political ideology, perceptions of racism, perceptions of sexism, similarities between women’s life stories, similarities between men’s life stories, similarities and differences in writing style, and concentration on the part of the writer to personal experiences or political philosophy.
CHAPTER V

RESULTS

Individual Analysis

In this section, I will provide an analysis of each individual autobiography. Specifically, I will be using the text to identify and record responses to the states questions. These questions are family's economic status, level of educational attainment, autobiographical format, political outlook at various points in their lives, political activism, political ideology, definitions of racism and sexism, motivation to join the Black Panther Party, positions held within the party and exposure to the Criminal Justice system.

Elaine Brown

Elaine Brown (1993), the author of A Taste of Power, describes her family's economic hardships. Her life story starts with her formal announcement that she has been appointed by Huey Newton to run the Black Panther Party. She then describes her life in a chronological order.

Brown's mother and father were never married. Her father never played a role in their lives. While he was wealthy, she was raised with her mother who was the sole support of the family, and they suffered from considerable financial difficulties. She often described the squalid living conditions in which she was raised. Her
mother and grandmother still worked hard to provide a middle class lifestyle for her that they never had. They worked to make sure that her clothes were top of the line and that her hair was immaculate and that her education was the best they could afford. She was sent to a private all girls' college prep high school. She graduated from high school and attended Temple University. When she moved to California, she attended UCLA. Early on as a child, Brown admitted that she wanted to be white. She envied the lifestyles of the girls with whom she attended school, and felt dissociated from the issues concerning other African Americans. She states, "issues concerning black people, were not personally relevant to me" (p. 93).

Her opinion of the rising activism within the black community was that it "was meaningless" (p. 99). She became politically active and involved, but never really states what motivated her to do so. While in California she joined the Black Congress which was an umbrella group that was composed of a group of representatives from other black political organizations. While involved with this organization, she worked on the Black Congress's newspaper. Additionally, she joined the Black Student Alliance as a part of the Black Congress.

As a member of the Black Panther Party, and as a student, she became active in the UCLA Black Student Union. She also ran for a City Council seat in the city of Oakland and became active in the Black Panther school, the Intercommunal Youth Institute, because,
she felt "our school would demonstrate how black children ought to be educated" (p. 326).

Brown believed that revolutionary action was a necessary force to change the way in which poor people and people of color lived, "that is when the people, black people and poor white people and oppressed people all over America, will rise up like a mighty tide and wash clean this beachfront of capitalism and racism, and make the revolution" (p. 5).

She came to see herself as a victim of racism, capitalism and sexism but placed them in a particular order with respect to her attention to these issues. "Capitalism and racism were primary. I had maintained that position even in the face of my exasperation with the chauvinism of black power men in general and Black Panther men in particular" (p. 367).

Brown discusses her views on the feminist movement.

I had joined the majority of black women in America in denouncing feminism. It was an idea reserved for white women, I said, assailing the women's movement, wholesale, as either racist or inconsequential to black people. . .in particular. (p. 367)

This was not to suggest that sexism was not an aspect of her life. She suggests that the feminist movement was not one where her specific concerns were included in the political agenda. "I would support every assertion of human rights by women. . .I would declare that the agenda of the Black Panther Party and our revolution to free black people from oppression specifically included black women" (p. 368).
Brown believed that a socialist revolution would be the political economic goal in the black liberation struggle. She goes on to state that

as a leading member of the Black Panther Party, I want to initiate that new arrangement. What the Black Panther Party wants is a new America. We want to diminish the power of you and yours over so many of us through the institution of a humane and egalitarian society--we could call it socialism. (p. 428)

During her campaign for Oakland City Council, she began to support the development of the survival programs. Not only did these programs expose the ways in which a socialist government would help the people to help themselves, it also provided a way to gather community support.

...our campaign was designed to inspire our people to take control of their own destinies, without reliance on the Henry Kaisers. Our campaign was to engender the idea of revolutionary change. ...our agenda was to overthrow the United States government. It was to defend the humanity of our people with armed force. It was to institute socialist revolution. (p. 323).

Brown identified her definitions of racism as being closely tied to those of class.

the urban ghettos of America had imposed something more severe than poverty. They did more than stamp out African roots and history and a sense of community in Africans lost in America. The ghetto battered and defiled the very humanity of its inmates, driven mad by the mirage of American's promise sparkling just beyond impenetrable barriers. (p. 382)

Brown was quite open about her experiences with sexist behavior, not only within the Black Panther Party, but also in her interaction with other black power organizations. She was asked to assist in the preparation of meals for the male members of an or-
ganization. On one occasion, people were asked to pool their financial resources together to order a meal. After she donated her money, she was told to wait until after the brothers were served. When she inquired about what was happening, she was told,

Sisters, he explained, did not challenge Brothers. Sisters, he said, stood behind their black men, supported their men, and respected them. In essence, he advised us that it was not only unsisterly of us to want to eat with our Brothers, it was a sacrilege for which blood could be shed. (p. 109)

The gender relations within the Black Panther Party were also another example of sexism. She was told what the women's role was in the party. It was the obligation of women to not only use their bodies as weapons but they were also expected to have children that would continue the revolution.

As women, our role was not very different from that of the men, except in certain particulars...as women we might have to have a sexual encounter with "the enemy" at night and slit his throat in the morning--at which we all groaned. She reminded us of the Vietnamese guerrilla women, who were not only carrying guns but using their very bodies against the American forces. ... Our gender was but another weapon, another tool of the revolution. We also had the task of producing children, progeny of revolution who would carry the flame when we fell, knowing that generations after us would prevail. (p. 137)

In response to the sexism that was involved in the Party, Brown wrote a poem against it and had numerous discussions with other women in the party particularly those active in the Los Angeles chapter. Because of their position protesting the sexism, they were known as the clique.

black men were our brothers in the struggle for black liberation. We had no intention, however, of allowing Panther men to assign us an inferior role in our revolution... We would not be rewarding any Brother with our bodies, in the bedroom or in the kitchen. The response to this was Smart
bitches like us, they were saying, needed to be silenced. But we would silence them in the end by our hard work and dedication; and by the specter of the fierce brothers who supported us, the leadership of Southern California, Geronimo and Masai. (p. 192)

Being involved in the organization also included a stigma of being less attractive. By their participation, they were perceived as losing up their femininity. "Panther women were hard, in a way--soldiers, comrades, not pretty little things" (p. 260).

She states her perception of women within the organization in particular and within the Black Power Movement.

A woman in the Black Power movement was considered, at best, irrelevant. A woman asserting herself was a pariah. A woman attempting the role of leadership was, to my proud black Brothers, making an alliance with the counter-revolutionary, man-hating, lesbian, feminist white bitches. It was a violation of some Black Power principle that was left undefined. If a black woman assumed a role of leadership, she was said to be eroding black manhood to be hindering the progress of the black race. She was an enemy of black people. (p. 357)

She believed that the woman's position within the organization was limited,

it was a given that the entire Black Power movement was handicapped by the limited roles the Brothers allowed the Sisters and by the outright oppressive behavior of men toward the women. ...I had been able to deflect most of the chauvinism of Black Panther men. ...in installing Sisters in key positions, I had not considered this business. (p. 363)

Brown describes her first encounter with the members of the organization, which includes her attraction and motivation to join.

They were a new generation of black men, divorced completely now from the old, the civil-rights movement. ...They were young black men no longer concerned with the business of segregation or integration. They were black men who were calling for an end, not only to discrimination, an end not only to the denial of civil rights, but to all forms of oppression of blacks--social, political, and economic--on all fronts. (p.
Brown held various positions while she was involved in the Black Panther Party. She was responsible for organizing protests and rallies against police brutality. She served as the editor of the Black Panther newspaper. She was also the Chair of the Black Panther Party.

Brown was arrested after the US-Panther confrontation that killed Bunchy Carter and John Huggins. Brown, along with other members of the Party were arrested and "held to discourage retribution." She was also arrested at the Party office and charged with conspiracy with intent to commit murder (p. 169).

Angela Davis

Angela Davis (1988) was perhaps one of the most famous female members of the Black Panther Party. Her autobiography started with the process of going underground and hiding from the FBI. Davis was being sought as an accomplice for murder, kidnapping and conspiracy. A gun registered in her name was used in a hostage situation that included the Soledad Brothers, a group of political prisoners how Davis and others attempted to have released.

Davis explains the experiences of being underground and the trial which gained her national notoriety. The campaign was known as "Free Angela Davis". With the national search for her whereabouts serving as an introduction to her life, she then tells of her childhood and development in a chronological order.
Davis was raised in a middle class family background. Her mother was a primary school teacher and pursued a Masters degree in education at New York University during a summer program. Her father earned a bachelor's degree from St. Augustine College in North Carolina. He taught history at a local high school but left teaching to buy a gas station. Her father completed graduate classes at Fisk University. Davis earned a Ph.D. in Philosophy from the University California at San Diego.

Davis was very politically active even at an early age. She discussed the impact of Jim Crow laws on her life as a young child. She recognized the inferior schools and supplies early on as she was educated in segregated schools. She began to support socialism and communism in high school, and participated in marches that protested injustice:

When I learned about socialism in my history classes, a whole new world opened up before my eyes. For the first time, I became acquainted with the notion that there could be an ideal socioeconomic arrangement; that every person could give to the society according to his ability and his talents, and that in turn he could receive material and spiritual aid in accordance with his needs. (p. 109)

She continues to tell about her attraction to the notions of equality, ideas of socialism and communism, and an end to classist oppression:

--what moved me most--was the vision of a new society, without exploiters and exploited, a society without classes, a society where no one would be permitted to own so much that he could use his possessions to exploit other human beings. (p. 111)

Davis voices a lifetime commitment she believed was necessary to bring about revolutionary change for those who have been op-
pressed. "Revolution is a serious thing, the most serious thing about a revolutionary's life. When one commits oneself to the struggle, it must be for a lifetime" (p. 162).

The next step in terms of her political development was the awareness that there exists in society many institutions that perpetuate the status quo, two of which are prisons and the judicial system. Having been a victim of police systems, she made her struggle to fight for those who were incarcerated for their political beliefs. "I became convinced that there were impending explosions behind the walls, and that if we did not begin to build a support movement for our sisters and brothers in prison, we were not revolutionaries at all" (p. 250).

At 12 years old she was 'agitated by injustice' and supported the Cuban revolution. While a college student she attended the 8th World Festival for Youth and Students in Helsinki, Finland which was actually a protest rally to discuss the struggle in Africa, Latin America, Asia, the Middle East where other revolutionary youths gathered.

Believing that black students needed representation, she organized a black student association at the University of California at San Diego, so that their voices would be heard and recognized. She also actively participated in and organized rallies and demonstrations in protest of the Vietnam war. She joined the Communist Party USA, in July 1968.

Next her involvement was felt in the political campaign
against political prisoners. When she heard about the struggles of George Jackson, Fleeta Drumgo, and John Clutchette, soon to be known as the Soledad Brothers, Davis became an active spokesperson and organizer for the Soledad Brothers Defense Committee which sought to gain their freedom. Her struggle expanded to the freedom of other political prisoners, those who are imprisoned on the basis of their political beliefs.

In an effort to discredit Davis, the UCLA Board of Regents formally inquired about her political position as a communist. They were asking for her to either confirm or deny the accusation. If she confirmed her political affiliation, the Board of Regents reserved the right to dismiss her from her teaching position because of her political beliefs. When asked whether or not she considered herself a communist, Davis refused to respond. The Board of Regents, under the leadership of then governor Ronald Reagan, terminated her position.

Davis considered herself a Marxist. She believed that socialism as it progressed to communism would be the political philosophical route that people should follow in order to create an egalitarian society. She believed that race was not the sole basis of oppression. It would be the working class that would serve as the revolutionaries, not only because of their subjugation based on class, but also because of their race.

Davis found that when African Americans perceive all whites as the target of anger because of their racist oppression, this was
actually making whites the enemy and the anger was misplaced.

Whites, all whites, could not be projected as the enemy.

Because the masses of white people harbor racist attitudes, our people tended to see them as the villains and not the institutionalized forms of racism, which, though definitely reinforced by prejudiced attitudes, serve, fundamentally, only the interests of the rulers. When white people are indiscriminately viewed as the enemy, it is virtually impossible to develop a political solution. (p. 150)

The judicial and prison systems served as the social and political institutions that maintain oppression; they were the tools of racist oppression.

Not only did Davis witness the political arm of racism in Jim Crow laws, she also was witness to the social aspects of racism. "We all knew that when a white person called a black adult by his or her first name it was a euphemism for nigger, stay in your place. When this white assault was staged, I tried to decipher the emotions on the teacher's face: acquiescence, obsequiousness, defiance, or the pain of realizing that if she did fight back, she would surely lose her job. (p. 93)

She continues,

we were demanding justice--about which black people needed to be defiant and passionate. After hundreds of years of suffering the most persistently one-sided bestiality and violence, how could we seriously assume a posture of unbiased observers. (p. 174)

Davis identifies a specific confrontation with members of another Black Liberation organization known as US (United Slaves).

Unfortunately, for Davis, it would be a frequent occurrence,

In organizing for this rally back in San Diego, I ran headlong into a situation which was to become a constant problem in my political life. I was criticized very heavily, especially by male members of Karenga's organization, for doing a man's job.
Women should not play leadership roles, they insisted. A woman was supposed to inspire her man and educate his children. The constant harangue by the US men was that I needed to redirect my energies and use them to give my man strength and inspiration so that he might more effectively contribute his talents to the struggle for black liberation. (p. 161)

Davis believed that black male political activists equated the acquisition of political rights and equality with the right for black males to serve in a superior position over black women. Her involvement in the Black Liberation movement was one wrought with struggle. She refused to accept the subservient role within these organizations and refused to accept the traditional women's role with the struggle.

I became acquainted very early with the widespread presence of an unfortunate syndrome among some black male activists--namely to confuse their political activity with an assertion of their maleness. They saw--and some continue to see--black manhood as something separate from black womanhood. These men view black women as a threat to their attainment of manhood--especially those black women who take initiative and work to become leaders in their own right. (p. 61)

There were examples where she, and other women, were expected to fulfill the stereotypical women's roles,

... on the original central staff of (LA SNCC) there had been six men and three women. The three women on the staff--Bobbie, Rene and myself--always had a disproportionate share of the duties of keeping the office and the organization running. (p. 181)

She was faced with the stereotypical image of black women, a notion that black women were emasculating the black male and were allies in white America's struggle to oppress black men. It becomes apparent in her writing that a feeling of betrayal was occurring with those she assumed were her allies in the struggle for liber-
All the myths about black women surfaced, Bobbie, Rene and I were too domineering; we were trying to control everything, including the men—which meant by extension that we wanted to rob them of their manhood. By playing such a leading role in the organization, some of them insisted, we were aiding and abetting the enemy, who wanted to see black men weak and unable to hold their own. The condemnation was especially bitter because we were one of the few organizations on the black Liberation Front in Los Angeles, and probably in the country, where women did play a leading role. It was a period in which one of the unfortunate hallmarks of some nationalist groups was their determination to push women into the background. The brothers opposing us leaned heavily on the male supremacist trends which were winding their way through the movement, although I am sure that some of them were politically mature enough to understand the reactionary nature of these trends. (p. 182)

When she and other women voiced their concerns with the national headquarters of SNCC, the problems were dismissed by James Forman, executive secretary of the organization, "He summarily dismissed our problem of male-female political relationships, saying that it was not important enough to merit a special discussion. They would be solved, he said, in the course of dealing with other problems" (p. 182).

The existence of these apparently poor gender relations weighed heavily on her desire to continue to work, "I was tired of ephemeral ad-hoc groups that fell apart when faced with the slightest difficulty; tired of men who measured their sexual height by women's intellectual genuflection" (p. 187).

Davis was originally active with the Black Panther Party of Northern California or the Black Panther Political Party (BPPP) headed by Bob Freeman. Through this affiliation she was exposed to the party by Franklin Alexander and Kendra Alexander of the Commu-
nist Party. It was suggested that BPPP would accept Marxist ideas at which time she and a few select others were issued an invitation to join. After a confrontation with Newton's Black Panther Party, BPP of NC merged with the Los Angeles branch of SNCC, where Davis continued her participation.

Her involvement with the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense was initiated because it became apparent that the tide was changing: the Panthers were able to attract many young people around the country. Davis wanted to provide her community with organizing skills and to help to attract other grass-roots people and gather community support.

She believed in the struggle against police brutality, which was one of the main proponents against which the Panthers fought. She believed that the attack on the Panthers that she witnessed being waged by the FBI was likely to continue and to spread to other politically active organizations if they were successful. Her desire was to assist in whatever way she could. She saw the Panthers as victims of the judicial system and became formally involved in releasing political prisoners. "If the government could carry out its racist aggression against them without fearing resistance, then it would soon be directed against other organizations and would finally engulf the entire community." (p. 239)

Davis was actively involved in organizing the 'Free Huey' Rally in Los Angeles. She was also a pivotal part of the Soledad Brothers Defense Committee. Because of her involvement in higher education,
she was responsible for devising and implementing plans for the Panther liberation school and she served as the school's director.

She held speaking engagements that were to raise money for Huey Newton and for the Soledad Brothers. She was asked to participate in the political education program and sessions that were held for the organizations members.

In 1967, Davis was arrested for participation in a Vietnam protest at the University of California in San Diego. After the arrest for her assumed participation in the Soledad Defense Case, she retreated underground for two months. Once she was arrested, her case lasted 20 months. She was charged with crimes of murder, kidnapping, and conspiracy.

Assata Shakur

Assata Shakur was born JoAnne Deborah Byron. Her autobiography (1987) starts with her childhood in North Carolina and explains her capture, arrest and trial and returns back to childhood. Shakur was raised in a middle class family. She was raised by her mother who was a teacher and her stepfather who was a postal worker. Her grandmother was intent on raising her to become a part of the talented tenth, the educational elite and black middle class. She attended City College of New York.

At an early age, Shakur questioned Jim Crow laws that kept her from using the public bathrooms, eating at restaurants, and attending movie theaters. As a teenager, she grew impatient with the
middle-class black community which was a growing population. She was disappointed because they were not willing to work toward the liberation of all black people.

While a college student, she became interested in and attended the meetings and functions of various student organizations such as the Black Muslims, the Garveyites, Malcolm X's Organization of Afro-American Unity (OAAU), the NAACP, in addition to various other community and cultural organizations.

She participated in a campaign and demonstration of the Ocean Hill-Brownsville section of Brooklyn, a parents' organization, who were protesting the lack of control over the schools in their communities.

They wanted say in what their children were taught, in how their schools were run, and in who was teaching their children. They wanted the local school boards to have hiring and firing power over teachers in their districts, but the city's Board of Education and the American Federation Teachers was against them. (p.181).

After the demonstration, she and the other protesters became aware of the lack of control that the black community had in relation to other social institutions. Their organization fought to obtain some power.

She believed that a revolutionary struggle must include all people of color, and that the job of white leftists who are concerned about assisting the revolution was to organize white people.

As far as I was concerned, it was the duty of black people to work in the black community and it was the job of white people to go into the white community and organize white people. . . . we also agreed that it was necessary for black, white, Hispanic, native American, and oriental people to come together
to fight. (p. 220)

She continues,

The enemy in a revolutionary struggle was capitalism, one of the most important things the party did was to make it really clear who the enemy was: not the white people, but the capitalistic, imperialistic oppressors, they took the black liberation struggle out of a national context and put it in an international context. The party supported revolutionary struggles and governments all over the world. (p. 203)

Shakur became interested in the socialist movement, but was reluctant to join organizations because she perceived that white liberal members of these organizations appeared to have a paternalistic attitude toward people of color.

During the Jim Crow era, as a child she and her sister would pretend to be from a French speaking African country, thereby allowing them to frequent clothing stores and restaurants. After they had been served or given the red-carpet treatment, she and her sister would burst into laughter and run from the store.

While in college, she joined a political organization called Republic of New Afrika (RNA) which advocated the establishment of a separate black nation within the U.S., to be composed of what is now South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana. In addition, the organization believed that the black community needed to maintain the control of its social institutions. On a collegiate level, the RNA encouraged the development of a black studies departments.

Involved in many other organizations, Shakur participated in many anti-war demonstrations, a construction worker's demonstration,
demonstrations to aid welfare mothers, rent strikes, sit-ins, and the takeover of the Harlem state office building.

Becoming active in political environments incited in her the desire to continue to fight for the rights of people.

. . .the more active I became the more I liked it. It was like medicine, making me well, making me whole. I was home. For the first time, my life felt like it had some real meaning. . .it was beautiful. I love black people, I don't care what they are doing, but when black people are struggling, that's when they are most beautiful to me. (p. 189)

Shakur wrote that while a student at CCNY, "to me, the revolutionary struggle of black people had to be against racism, capitalism, imperialism, and sexism and for real freedom under a socialist government" (p. 197).

Shakur visited California to become exposed to and more involved in revolutionary activities. As a part of first aid skills study, she assisted a doctor who volunteered at Alcatraz to provide medical attention to the Native Americans who had taken over the compound to protest unfair practices toward Native Americans.

While in California she also met with the Brown Berets, a group of Chicanos who were in support of the Chicano farmworkers' struggle and Cesar Chavez. She met members of the Red Guard, a group struggling for the rights of Asian Americans. She also met with the Black Panther Party which she joined upon her return to New York. She later joined the Black Liberation Army. Currently, she is in exile in Cuba.

Shakur is a self-professed revolutionary who has declared war on those oppressive forces that disallow black people the opportu-
nity to achieve their maximum potential. She fights against those forces that disallow people the ability to provide for themselves and for their families.

Shakur believed that freedom cannot be obtained by appealing to the moral sense of those who are in positions of power. The struggle for freedom is against those in power and the control of money.

The rich have always used racism to maintain power. To hate someone, to discriminate against them, and to attack them because of their racial characteristics is one of the most primitive, reactionary, ignorant ways of thinking that exists. (p. 139)

While on trial for kidnapping and armed robbery of a bank she served in the capacity of co-counsel and presented her own opening statement. Many of her political views can be found in this statement.

She believes the black liberation army must fight against poverty and all of its symptoms such as indecent housing, unemployment, poor medical care, and inferior education. The reason for subjugation is not based solely on race; class is also an oppressor. These reasons encourage a fight for African Americans to take control of the social, political and economic institutions within their community. This then is a step in the revolutionary direction; "taking control of our neighborhoods was the first step toward liberation" (p. 182).

It was not her belief to replace only whites in positions of power. She was also interested in changing the political and eco-
nomic structure. She began to see herself as a socialist because it seemed to provide the greatest chance for an egalitarian society.

Shakur believed that she and others were being imprisoned because of their radical political beliefs and the organizations to which they belonged, not because they actually committed the crimes which lead to their incarceration.

Shakur described of the effects of Jim Crow,

...I sure wanted segregation to end. I had grown up exposed to the degrading, dehumanizing side of segregation. I remember that when we traveled from North to South and vice versa we really felt the sting of segregation more acutely than at other times. We'd drive hours without being able to stop anywhere. Sometimes we would pull into a filthy old gas station, buy gas, and then be told that we were not permitted to use their filthy old bathroom because we were black. I can remember clearly squatting in the bushes with mosquitoes biting my bare buttocks, and my grandmother handing me toilet paper, because we could not find a colored bathroom. (p. 138)

Shakur said very little about the sexual dynamics that were involved within the party. As a woman, her experiences did not include examples of overt or covert sexual discrimination. There was one instance where Shakur discusses her feelings of respect for a male comrade who stood out as an exception as opposed to the norm as far as the men in the Party were concerned.

I also respected him because he refused to become part of the macho cult that was an official body in the Black Panthers. He never voted on issues or took a position just to be one of the boys. When brothers made an unprincipled attack on sisters, Zayd refused to participate. I knew this had to be especially hard for him because he was small and his masculinity was always being challenged in some way by the more backward, muscle-headed men in the party. (p. 224)

Her recognition of his differences continues, "Zayd always treated me and all the other sisters with respect. I enjoyed his
friendship because he was one of those rare men capable of being friends with a woman without having designs on her" (p. 224).

Shakur wanted to join an organization for whom she had a lot of respect and felt influenced her life. There were some fundamental critiques that she had about how the Black Panther Party was being run but she found that her reasons for joining began to outweigh those for not joining. "The party was more than bad, it was bodacious. The more political I became, the more I appreciated them" (p. 203).

Shakur participated in the BPP New York chapter. Early on she volunteered for secretarial work. She was eventually assigned to the medical cadre. She also worked in the breakfast program.

Shakur was arrested as a result of a shootout and confrontation in New Jersey along with other Black Liberation Army members who were stopped by State troopers. She was charged with a number of violations including resisting arrest, murder of a police officer and attempted murder of another officer. She was also accused of kidnapping and armed robbery of a bank, which eventually ended in an acquittal.

William Lee Brent

William Lee Brent, is the author of Long Time Gone (1996). He described his life story in chronological order. He spoke about them in the order in which they occurred in this life.

Brent was born into an impoverished family. In his words they
were "dirt-poor and nearly illiterate" (p. 67). Throughout his childhood there were many instances where he spoke of difficult times that the family experienced because of financial hardships. He had an estranged relationship with his father who Brent felt paid him little attention except to complain about his crying. The family, with the exception of his father, was forced to move in extended with family members in order to survive, where Brent was abused by his uncle in addition to actually viewing other incidents of violence on a regular basis. ",...we grew up in a world where poverty, physical abuse, and senseless violence prevailed" (p. 23).

Brent attended but did not complete high school. He enlisted into the Air Force but was not of age. He was granted a general discharge under honorable conditions because he presented information that he falsified his age to enlist. He eventually graduated from high school in prison.

While in exile in Cuba he enrolled in Spanish classes at the University of Havana and completed a four-year course in Spanish. He eventually graduated from the University of Havana with a B.A. in Hispanic languages. He also taught English to junior and high school students in Cuba while in exile.

At the time Brent joined the Panthers, he considered himself a "curious nonactivist" (p. 89) While in the Panthers he began to question the quality of life for those who are both impoverished and without power.

While awaiting a trial for a shoot-out at a gas station, Brent
hijacked a plane to Cuba and became very involved in the socialist government and began to work and fight for the Cuban revolution.

In the minds of millions of people the world over, the American flag has come to represent oppression, racism, injustice, invasion of other countries, murder of innocent people, genocide, and just about every other evil you can think of. In my opinion the U.S. flag no longer represents the will of the majority of the American people, and I refuse to be associated with it. (p. 223)

Brent did not speak of any other organization to which he belonged other than the Panthers, however, after his departure from the BPP, he became very involved in the Cuban revolution and spoke of the promising nature of socialism for those who are oppressed.

Brent believed that a successful revolutionary movement would have to be inclusive and involve all people who are oppressed.

I began to understand that the street people, too, wanted the same things: the right to make decision based on our own understanding of what was important to our lives; the freedom to love and live in peace and happiness; a government that did not prey on our ignorance and prejudices or sacrifice our individual growth and development on the altar of the so-called greater good; a world without fear, hatred, greed, and corruption, where differences could be resolved without resort to violence. We didn't always agree on how to go about getting these things or what we would do once victory had been won. (p. 114)

During a confrontation, Brent and his friends, who were also black, were attending a picnic when a group of white kids started shooting at them with .22 rifles. Brent and his friends caught two of the boys who were shooting and Brent and his friends, "beat the living shit out of them" (p. 42). The police were called and Brent and his friends received various charges while the group of white kids were never arrested. He questioned the role of race in the
decision to press charges against his group as opposed to the other,

I couldn't understand why the judge convicted us instead of the white boys. It seemed to me kicking a few asses wasn't nearly as bad as shooting into a group of people on a picnic. . .this incident only heightened my resentment of authority and laws in general. (p. 42)

In further analyzing this situation, he came to some realizations regarding race. He goes on to say,

My brush with juvenile court had shown me there was no justice. My experience on the streets of Oakland and Louisville had taught me to admire hustlers and look upon working people as chumps. The segregation and abuse I'd had to live with in the Army had convinced me this was a white man's world in which I had no voice. I had reached the point where I didn't believe in anything or anybody. (p. 49)

At another point in his life he questioned his existence,

Why was I born into a dirt-poor and nearly illiterate family? What had caused my father to be so withdrawn and violent? Why had we moved from state to state and always lived in the poorest neighborhoods? How come poor people worked themselves to death and never had anything to show for it? Who could explain to me why the prisons and jails were always full of young black men with the same background and problems I had? Why did I have to obey and respect laws that didn't respect me? (p. 67)

Brent did not discuss in his autobiography how he defined sexism explicitly but was able to voice discontent with the notion that the female members of the organization were expected to either provide sexual favors for the male members of the group or were asked to serve the men. "Many young girls, black and white, thought their revolutionary duty was to sleep with a Panther. Sleeping around was both accepted and expected" (p. 108).

While visiting the East Coast chapter, he witnessed the examples of sexist behavior where
the sisters were dubbed Pantherettes and had to serve the brothers without question. I didn't like what I saw, and I couldn't shake the gut feeling that one day there would be serious trouble for the Panthers in New York. (p. 112)

While attending a Free Huey Rally, Brent was "impressed by the no-nonsense way the young Panthers ran the gathering" (p. 89). It was both the party rhetoric and attitude that appealed to Brent and convinced him become involved in the organization.

The audacity of these young blacks excited me and stirred emotions I thought had died years ago. I was proud that they had armed themselves and faced the enemy on his own ground. I felt cowardly and ashamed because I was just sitting around bitching or pretending indifference about the shit going down in our communities while these young people were making history. I wanted to find out more about their cause. Maybe I could do something to help. (p. 87)

Brent served the position of captain and was assigned to be the spokesman for the Black Panther Party. He also served as a bodyguard for the top Panthers.

At 19, Brent was arrested for being caught with a stolen bike. He was convicted of a felony and sentenced to be placed in the custody of the California Youth Authority at Lancaster. He was later arrested and charged with possession of a stolen vehicle and armed robbery and was found guilty. He received a sentence of 5-10 years in prison.

While in the Panthers he was involved in a gas station incident were the clerk accused Brent of robbery. He was charged with one count of robbery and three counts of assault with a deadly weapon upon a peace officer because of the altercation and for resisting arresting.
Eldridge Cleaver

Eldridge Cleaver is the author of both *Soul on Ice* (1968) and *Soul on Fire* (1978). His real name was Leroy Eldridge Cleaver. Cleaver writes *Soul on Ice* as a collection of letters. *Soul on Fire* starts with his decision to return from exile in Algiers. He then tells his story chronologically.

Cleaver's father was a waiter and a pianist and his mother was a teacher. The family suffered financial difficulties with the move from Arizona to California such that they "barely had enough to make ends meet" (p. 51). The family was able to improve their living conditions and were relatively middle class. Cleaver does not discuss his educational background in either of the two texts.

Politically, Cleaver supported socialism, and believed that a socialist revolution would bring about liberation for the oppressed people,

> I wanted a social, political, and economic revolution along socialist lines. I wanted an end to the capitalist economic system, and for the natural resources, technology, and all information to be taken out of the control of the individuals, families, groups and corporate entities that owned them as private property. (p. 83)

While in prison, he became active with the religion of Islam. It was the solidarity and brotherhood of the organization that attracted him in addition to their political viewpoints and perspectives. It was the unity, brotherly love and solidarity.

While involved in the Panthers, Cleaver was asked to run as the presidential nominee of the Peace and Freedom Party. In his
critique of capitalism, Cleaver states,

the flower I wanted was a red rose of real revolution, a revolution that would kill all those members of the ruling class who refused to abdicate and surrender, those who continued to resist, and especially those who were actively opposed. (p. 83)

Cleaver believed in Marxism for approximately 22 years.

For a long period I believed that the Communist system was the right alternative to the American political, economic, and social system that I had been battling in the States. I had taken fully the Marxist philosophy, with its attendant beliefs and doctrine, to be the answer to what I was looking for. (p. 134)

In Soul on Ice, Cleaver (1968) defines racism as white Americans retention of power. "Everywhere the whites are fighting to prolong their status, to retard the erosion of their position" (p. 123).

Another of his examples of racism is that there is a difference in concern for white Americans that are murdered that does not exist for African Americans. "America has never truly been outraged by the murder of a black man, woman, or child" (p. 76).

Cleaver believed that the African American adage that suggests blacks must be twice as good to get half as far is an example of racist beliefs and practices in the American society.

Interestingly, in Soul on Ice he describes the Black Muslim movement as being racist because of their views on whites as the "devil", and a number of other examples.

In describing his first encounter with the Black Panther Party, Cleaver (1968) states,

I spun around in my seat and saw the most beautiful sight I
had ever seen: four black men wearing black berets, powder blue shirts, black leather jackets, black trousers, shiny black shoes—and each with a gun. In front was Huey P. Newton with a riot pump shotgun in his right hand, barrel pointed down to the floor. Beside him was Bobby Seale, the handle of a .45 caliber automatic showing from its holster on his right hip. . . who are these cats? I wondered at them, checking them out carefully. (p. 94)

Upon his release from prison, Cleaver became interested in the Black Panther Party. He believed,

organizing resistance to the repression from the occupying army of police that patrolled the black community like foreign troops. We believed that no political or social change could develop as long as the Gestapo power of the police could intimidate a speaker, writer or organization. (p. 26)

In Soul on Fire, he suggests, "our cry was (and still is) for dignity, freedom, and pursuit of happiness" (p. 26). As a member of the organization, he held the position of Minister of Information.

In total, Cleaver states that he spent fourteen years in the prison system. This would include, reform schools; adjustment, classification, and detention centers; and state prisons (1978). He also spent seven years as a fugitive in exile.

At the age of 18 he was sentenced for possession of marijuana. He was a convicted rapist, an act he viewed as an 'insurrectionary act" (p. 26).

**Huey Newton**

Huey Newton, author of Revolutionary Suicide (1973), is the co-founder of the Black Panther Party. He writes his life story in chronological order. During his childhood, Newton describes his family as a close knit group who were relatively impoverished. His
father worked a variety of blue collar jobs such as working in a gravel pit, a carbon plant, and both sugar cane and saw mills; he was also a part-time minister. Throughout the economic hardship of the family, his mother did not work outside of the home.

Newton described his educational experiences as embarrassing and humiliating. After graduating from high school as a self described "functional illiterate", he decided to teach himself to read. In direct opposition to the lack of support and low expectations of teachers he decided to pursue a college education. He primarily viewed school as a tool of oppression and wanted to supplement his educational pursuits with those of the street.

He attended Oakland City College where he was interested in and studied law both at Oakland City College and the San Francisco Law School. He did so not to pursue a career as a lawyer but to gain a greater knowledge about the legal system and to become more knowledgeable about police practices and the law. He eventually earned a Ph.D. from the University of California at Santa Cruz. This was, however, well after he organized the Black Panther Party.

It appears that early on Newton viewed school as oppressive. His acts of rebellion were in direct opposition to the school authority and proved for him to be a sense of liberation. In his early grades, it was the weight of ignorance and inferiority imposed by the system that made him feel insecure, inadequate, humiliated and ashamed of himself and who he was. "Rebellion was the only way we knew to cope with the suffocating, repressive atmosphere that under-
mined our confidence” (p. 20).

His strong participation in the church at an early age is seen as an opportunity to become politically active within a religious context. His view of the church was that it served as a "stabilizing unit in the family and in the community" (p. 38). The church provided an opportunity to play vital roles of importance that were missing in the larger society. "Taking part in church activities and leading the services gave us a feeling of importance unequaled anywhere in our lives." (p. 38)

His participation in the church also offered a supportive contrast between what he had been exposed to in school, which served as a purveyor of fear and humiliation.

Regarding his early political activism, Newton was considered a troublemaker in school. This way of being rebellious was a way to show his resistance to the system that had labeled him as uneducable. "... they never realized how much they had actually educated me by teaching the necessity of resistance and the dignity of defiance" (p. 50). It was at this point in his life that he recognized that he "was on my way to becoming a revolutionary" (p. 50).

While in high school, he became a supporter of the Cuban revolution, "initially out of a desire to contest that which was espoused by the school authorities and eventually out a genuine belief in the objectives of revolutionary struggle" (p. 50). It was while in college that he decided to become a socialist. The readings of Mao Tse-Tung helped him draw a connection between racism and capi-
Newton was involved with the Afro-American Association at Merritt College. The purpose of the organization was to encourage pride in the African American students, to expose them to their historical contributions and to expose the students to African culture. The group mostly held book discussions for the students which Newton found as "very bourgeois" (p. 63). He wanted to become involved in an organization that was geared to educating people who were not on college campuses.

He then became involved at Merritt College in SOUL--(Soul Students Advisory Council). This organization was active and successful in getting a course in Negro history into the curriculum. Yet, Newton was still very discouraged with the lack of involvement of average black people who had no contact with the college community, "The Soul Students Advisory Council, RAM, the Muslims and the Afro-American association were not offering these brothers and sisters anything concrete, much less a program to help them move against the system" (p. 73).

Newton believed that there was a interconnection between capitalism and racism. With the destruction of capitalism, there was no promise that racism would follow. He believed "...that we could not destroy racism without wiping out its economic foundation" (p. 70). He saw the government as the controlling agent of the country. Yet there were other social agencies that were partially responsible for controlling the masses. He mentions education as a
tool of oppression along with the use of the police and the judicial system. Another form of control was the abuse of history. For Newton, keeping people away from their history or failing to educate a particular community about its history was also oppressive.

At an early age, Newton considered himself a nationalist which gradually progressed to a strong belief in socialism. He strongly supported the Cuban revolution and wanted to contribute to its movement.

Newton thought it was critically important to identify the true allies and enemies in the struggle for liberation. He did not want blacks to believe that all whites were, by the nature of their birth, the enemies. He valued the notion that all of America's minority groups should and could come together to work for liberation and to avoid exploitation, equality of all in the spirit of mutual advancement. Each community should be in control of its social and political institutions.

With all of this information, Newton really wanted a concerted effort to take the rhetoric of revolution into the streets. He wanted to move the conversation about liberation from the academic environment to those in the neighborhood who would have the most to gain from it.

The ten-point platform and program that was the organization's founding document was a composition of what Newton thought a struggle for liberation would entail.

Newton believed that the inequality that existed in the school
system was one based on race. Being treated unfairly by the educators and the administrators in the Oakland school system, he felt that his subjugation was not only based on his race but also because his family was poor.

"I saw all my turmoil in terms of racism and exploitation and the obvious discrepancies between the haves and have nots. I was trying to figure out...how to keep from embracing the oppressor that had already maimed my family and community." (p. 62)

Further, he describes his view of racism, "To be white is to have power and authority, and for a Black to say anything to them is betrayal" (p. 46).

He continues,

"We were made to feel ashamed and guilty because of our biological characteristics, while our oppressors, through their whiteness, felt noble and uplifted...the rising level of consciousness within our Black communities has led us to redefine ourselves. People once ashamed to be called Black now gladly accept the label, and our biological characteristics are sources of pride." (p. 164)

"While I acknowledged the pervasiveness of racism, the larger problem should be seen in terms of class exploitation and the capitalist system" (p. 195).

Newton decided that an organization was needed to fill the gap between those who were armchair revolutionaries and those who were involved in the underground revolutionary struggle. He originally started the Black Panther Party to protest and document police brutality. It then became the vanguard for black people.

Newton's first arrest was at 14. He was beaten up by a group of boys and went back to school with a gun to protect himself. He
aimed the gun at the boys who he feared would attack him again. He was sentenced to a juvenile hall.

Newton studied law in college both at Oakland City College and San Francisco Law School.

I first studied law to become a better burglar. Figuring I might get busted at any time and wanting to be ready when it happened, I bought some books on criminal law and burglary and felony and looked up as much as possible. (p. 78)

In Newton's first judicial case, he was indicted on 16 counts of burglary which came about as a result of a short change game of local businesses. He was acquitted based on insufficient material evidence. In the second case he was accused of stealing and reselling books from a local bookstore near the school and of having burglarized a car of another student. This case ended in a hung jury.

The first case of assault was following a brawl with Odell Lee. Newton was charged with assault with a deadly weapon on Odell Lee. Lee was stabbed several times and Newton pled not guilty. The case went to jury trial and Newton was found guilty. He was sentenced to six months in county jail.

The first case that brought Newton to public attention involved Officers John Frey and Herbert Heanes. He was indicted on three felonies which included murder of Officer Frey and assault of Heanes. The first trial deliberated and Newton was found guilty of manslaughter; there was later a mistrial and a reversal of the conviction. The new trial also ended in a mistrial when the jury deadlocked with 11 voting for conviction and 1 for acquittal. In the
third trial, the jury deadlocked with six voting for conviction and
six for acquittal. It was declared a mistrial by the judge. This
entire process took 4 years, with Newton spending 33 months in jail.

Bobby Seale

Bobby Seale, also co-founder of the Black Panther Party, is
the author of A Lonely Rage (1978). Seale tells his life story in a
chronological format, which starts with his childhood.

Seale came from a family that fluctuated from middle to work­
ing class. His father was emotionally distant and only minimally
provided for the family. This contributed to the family's financial
inconsistencies.

He joined the Air Force and graduated with honors from tech
class in the service. He attended Merritt Community College where
he met Huey Newton. His desire was to study to become an engineer
draftsman.

At 15 years old, his friend Steve exposed him to the struggles
of Native Americans. In their own way, they “stood against the
norms of society and upheld an ideal of Indian life, at one with
nature, someday to rebel and fight for the land” (p. 58). He em­
pathized with the Native American experience: he changed his name,
dressed in what he believed to be clothes prepared for battle, they
trained for revolution, and he changed his name to Hanpi, which
means climbs trees.

While working in a factory he struggled against capitalism.
"I would read the chicken-shit plastic covered cost details of ex­
pensive machinery, it all made me know how rich the capitalist
owners really were* (p. 152).

He also questioned Marxism. "We would argue that Marxist views
that the lumpen never did anything but pillage and/or ignore the
revolutionary cause altogether" (p. 153).

Most of Seale's political activism took place during his time
in college. He felt responsible for establishing a black history
class at Merritt. He joined the Afro-American Association, but be­
came disheartened because he thought that these organizations were
long on talk and short on action.

With Huey Newton, he started Soul Students Advisory Council.
One of the primary purposes of this organization was to protest the
occurrence of black men being drafted to fight in the Vietnam war.
This organization was to raise bail and provide legal assistance to
those who needed it. They decided to break away from the student
association to start a community based organization which would be­
come the Black Panther Party.

Seale described himself as a black nationalist and a black
revolutionary. Seale believed that liberating the masses from op­
pression should be likened to a choice between the right to vote, or
the decision to bare and use arms. Seale believed that revolution­
ary action is the means through which black people will achieve
their freedom. He believed that African Americans really needed
more action and less talk, which was in part the basis of his dis­
like for those whom he called armchair revolutionaries. These were people who participated in college book discussion groups exploring their African ancestry yet participated minimally in activities.

In terms of political ideology, Seale believed that capitalism was a system that failed to provide a way to succeed for African Americans. He believed that Marxism refused to address the revolutionary cause. Seale supported the notion of "black cooperative socialism" (p. 160).

Seale believed it was apparent that the more immediate struggle for African Americans was to fight against a system that would not provide real justice. It was important that as an organization they should stand against the "corrupt racist power structure" (p. 159). He viewed police brutality as the pivotal cause of the African American problem.

And I looked at the brutalizing racist police as strictly being the cause of why we were revolutionaries--carrying guns ready to blow their butts away at the slightest act of police brutality we may have caught them in. (p. 166)

While running for Mayor of Oakland, he believed that his purpose was to represent those who were uneducated, those who were imprisoned and oppressed in the ghetto. As a part of his campaign, he supported the notion of the survival programs that would allow people to help take care of each other, to encourage businesses to assist those within the neighborhoods where they operated. These programs would meet the needs of the people, in terms of providing food, health care and in education.

Seale explored the interrelationships between issues of race
and class. He described racially motivated incidents when he was growing up. He also felt that Native Americans were also the victims of racist oppression. He viewed the Jim Crow laws as an example of racism, particularly while he was in the service,

Being black ain’t no phony shit. . .it’s real to niggers who live in direct oppression everyday. You so hooked up trying to look dirty and live in the nastiest rathole in the ghetto, trying to be a ghetto black; and being bourgie ain’t what you believe it is. Niggers want to get out of the filth. They want homes and nice things and cars and they always attempting to get it. In my mind the struggle is about getting this shit turned around, to clean up our houses and get homes. (p. 139)

Seale established that sex was not the grounds on which membership in the organization would be based. "Of course we had to make it clear, when asked, that sisters could join the Black Panther Party. We would welcome them" (p. 158). He believed that is was wrong to insist that a female member or comrade provide sexual favors. There were women who complained that the men within the organization designated that their revolutionary duty was to sleep with the men because the men were putting their lives in danger.

It was absurd, I found out, for a brother to be mad at a sister for not wanting him--though I had felt that rejection, those inner feelings of anger. Getting it on with a sister was more than busting my nuts; it was like fluid, like something going back and forth between us. I really got to know, get closer to sisters. (p. 177)

There were also other times when Seale would visit other Panther offices and he felt it necessary to address the gender relations within that chapter. He likened the women’s position of oppression and servitude to a class struggle. He insisted that the women eat at the table with the men and that the men help with the
clean up afterwards.

The worker deserves enjoying the product of the worker's labor. How you going to sit up here and talk about a person producing and not getting exploited? Don't nobody touch a thing. I stepped into the kitchen. Come on out of there sisters. (p. 178)

He ordered the men to clean up after the meal; however it was not without protest.

There were, nevertheless, times when he made mention of the gender breakdown of those who would participate in a particular function but used the word "men" or "brothers" to refer to the whole group. "There were no smiles on the hard mean black faces of our thirty men and women. Yet, I knew these brothers, all of them" (p. 167).

In retelling the Sacramento confrontation, he mentions the five women who attended the Sacramento scene but failed to mention them as he continues with the recollection, "I stopped in my tracks, thinking now. What would happen? Shit! That means some twenty-four brothers would go to jail for sure" (p. 173).

Seale and Newton started the organization out of the desire to have a community based organization as opposed to a college based organization. In addition, they were concerned about the lack of activity by other revolutionary organizations. They wanted to start an organization that was initiated by brothers off the block in the best interests of the brothers off the block. Instead of simply discussing the condition of black people, they wanted to start an organization that would actually take action. He felt that starting
the organization was "on the road to doing something about the situation of black people in society" (p. 152).

One of their primary interests was to document and protest incidences of police harassment within the black community. "I was filled with a staunch belief of the need for brotherhood and revolution and rebellion against the racist system" (p. 151).

Regarding his desire to involve himself in revolutionary activity, Seale states,

this native began to know and love his oppressed class brothers with an insight and a need to care and take on some responsibility in the struggle. We and our became a part of my everyday language; deep feelings of share and share alike enhanced my phrases, meanings and goals. (p. 152)

Seale was arrested early on as a teenager for stealing a purse. He was also arrested as a college student for blocking traffic while reciting a revolutionary poem. While in the Panthers, Seale was a part of the Chicago 7, which protested the Democratic National Convention in Chicago. During the protest, he and six other members were arrested and charged with conspiracy to incite riot after the convention. He was also arrested in New Haven and charged with murder and kidnapping but the charges were dismissed; the case ended in a hung jury.

Comparative Analysis

Similarities Within Women

There are similarities in the women's life stories. Some of these relate to their personal experiences, some relate to their
feelings of being involved in the struggle and those with whom they fought, while still others related to their impressions of the organization prior to their participation.

Davis' parents were college educated and owned a family business. Shakur's grandparents owned beachfront property where she spent her summers. Her grandmother was "determined that I would become part of Wilmington's talented--the privileged class--part of the so-called Black bourgeoisie." Brown's mother worked hard to both expose her to the middle class values and to make sure that her clothes and her speech set her aside from those who also lived in her impoverished neighborhood. "She spent her time on me, doting on me, fixing me up, my hair, my clothes, my shoes; making sure I always looked right. She would always tell me how beautiful I was (Brown, 1993), "the most beautiful girl in the world. I was not like the other little colored girls in our neighborhood" (p. 21).

Both Davis and Brown participated in accelerated programs in school. In addition, they both took ballet and piano lessons. For Brown (1993), her mother believed that "I was too precious for either of the public schools in our neighborhood, so when I finished nursery school, she signed me up for an exceptional elementary school which accepted only 'exceptional children' (p. 23).

Davis (1988) was accepted in two advanced educational programs. One was an accelerated medical school program offered by Fisk University at the age of 14, in which after four years she would have been fully accepted into an accelerated program at Me-
harry Medical school at Fisk University; the other was an experimental program to live with a host family in New York City and attend an integrated high school. The latter was her choice. Her mother saw this as an opportunity to receive a "fuller education" than that which she would have experienced in Birmingham (p. 104).

It is also important to note that these women were politically active before they became active and involved in the party. Both Davis and Shakur felt strongly about participating in the liberation struggle for oppressed people. While Davis was studying in Germany, she felt a strong call to go home and assist in the Black Liberation Movement. While she was torn between her academic studies and political activism, she also felt led to participate in the movement. "I wanted to continue my academic work, but I knew I could not do it unless was politically involved. The struggle was a life nerve, our only hope for survival. I made up my mind. The journey was on" (p. 145).

Shakur (1987) reflected on her feelings of being politically involved in various struggles for oppressed people. She was involved in non-violent protests as a member of the New Republic of Afrika. She says about her participation,

For the first time, my life felt like it had some real meaning. Everywhere I turned, Black people were struggling, Puerto Ricans were struggling. It was beautiful. I love Black people, I don't care what they are doing, but when Black people are struggling, that's when they are most beautiful to me. (p. 189)

For both Shakur and Davis, the Afro hairstyle was a symbol of non-conformity. It was a sign that they were involved in political
activity. Shakur (1987) states that her hairstyle provoked many stares from others. Her hair stood as a symbol that she was free, no longer attempting to look like another race of people. Her self-representation was reflective of how she felt about herself.

In a country that is trying to completely negate the image of Black people, that constantly tells us we are nothing, our culture is nothing, I felt and still feel that we have got to constantly make positive statements about ourselves. ...right now, I think it's important for us to look and feel like strong, proud Black men and women who are looking toward Africa for guidance. (p. 175)

Her Afro was a way of displaying her pride.

For Davis (1988), it was her hair that symbolized her participation with the movement. "My natural hair style, in those days still a rarity, identified me as a sympathizer with the Black Power Movement" (p. 150).

In relation to symbolic images, for Davis and Brown, the image of a revolutionary was a gendered image. Male images of the members of the organization were prevalent, not only in the United States, and these images were far reaching. Davis' (1988) first impression of members of the Black Panther Party occurred while she was in Germany.

There were young Black men in Oakland, California, who had decided that they had to wield arms in order to protect the residents of Oakland's Black community from the indiscriminate police brutality ravaging the area. ... The name of this organization was the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense. (p. 14).

For Brown (1993), this image represented a new generation of black men. ... They were young black men no longer concerned with the business of segregation or integration. They were young black men who were calling for
an end, not only to discrimination, an end not only to the denial of civil rights, but to all forms of oppression of blacks--social, political, and economic--on all fronts. (p. 126-127)

Brown goes on to suggest that this image was not only perceived by the community, but was also purported by the organization itself. "Nobody said it, but it was understood that the Panther was a man" (p. 441).

All of the women reflected on their feelings and the important relationships that had been established while they were involved in this revolutionary organization. For Davis (1988), it was a liberating experience to work with others for the end of oppression on the basis of race and class. "We experienced heights of brotherhood and sisterhood doing something openly, freely and above ground about our own people. Our stance was public and our commitment was to our people--and for some of us, to the class" (p. 170).

For Shakur (1987), she was amazed with the relationships she established. It was these relationships that made her feel even more indebted to the struggle.

One of the best things about struggling is the people you meet. Before I became involved, I never dreamed such beautiful people existed. . . . I have been blessed with meeting some of the kindest, most courageous, most principled, most informed and intelligent people on the face of the earth. . . . There was never a time, no matter what horrible thing I was undergoing, when I felt completely alone. Maybe it's ironic, I don't know, but the one thing I do know is that the Black Liberation movement has done more for me than I will ever be able to do for it. (p. 223)

The women were also descriptive about their intimate personal relationships with fellow comrades. For Davis (1988), it was her
feelings for George Jackson, one of the Soledad Brothers who was killed in a prison uprising.

The closer I felt to George, the more I found myself revealing to those who knew George a side of me I usually kept hidden except from the most intimate of friends. In the letters I managed to get to him I responded not only to the political questions he posed; I also told him that my feelings for him had grown deeper than a political commitment to struggle for his freedom; I felt a personal commitment as well. (p. 269)

For Shakur, it was Zayd to whom she had established a close relationship. "Becoming Zayd's friend was something really important. After I joined the party he would drop by my house every so often... we communicated on such an intense, honest level that afterward I wonder if it had been real" (pp. 223-224).

Most interesting was the relationship between Brown and Newton. In writing her life story (Brown, 1993), she spent considerable time describing her relationship with Newton, the co-founder of the organization.

To say that I loved Huey, however, even at that moment, would be to say too little. I loved being loved by him. I loved the protection he offered with his powerful arms and fearless dreams. I loved how beautiful he was, sinewy and sultry at once. I loved his genius and his bold uses of it. I loved that he was the vicarious dream of a man that white men hid from themselves, except when he confronted them, their rules, their world. I loved his narrow buttocks and his broad shoulders and his clean skin. I loved being queen in his world, for he had fashioned a new world for those who dared. (p. 7)

**Similarities Within Men**

The men's life stories also held some interesting similarities. These similarities ranged from their religious family background, the experience of domestic violence in their birth home to...
their juvenile behavior as delinquents.

All of the men mentioned early religious experiences. Most of them were related to ministers in some way. Both Cleaver's paternal and maternal grandfathers were ministers. Newton's and Brent's fathers were part-time ministers, and Seale mentions attending Sunday school services as a child. However, Brent spent a limited amount of time with his father. Newton even considered becoming a minister.

They also witnessed, early on in their childhood, cases of domestic violence. Seale, Brent and Cleaver witnessed their mothers being physically abused. Seale (1978) was awakened one night by a confrontation between his parents. "Then I got up out of the bed and went to the bedroom door and opened it. I saw Daddy holding up a chair up high in the air, standing over the bed, as Mama lay in the bed crying" (p. 7).

Cleaver (1978) states, "Every Saturday night, without fail, Daddy started beating Mother. There was screaming and the thunder of our feet and bodies scuffling around as we all joined in the melee" (p. 41).

Brent (1996) describes the relationship between his mother and father.

He became suspicious of her friends and accused her of messing around. Mother felt trapped. Nothing she did pleased her husband. The food didn't have enough seasoning, there was too little or too much starch in his shirts, or the house was a mess. I was a little more than a year old when, between fighting and making up with Mr. Manson [my father], Mother became pregnant again. (p. 10)
They also expressed being severely being beaten as children. As Brent (1996) describes his childhood existence he states, "we grew up in a world where poverty, physical abuse, and senseless violence prevailed" (p. 23). He goes on to describe his experience being beaten by his mother: "In a desperate attempt to bring me back into line, Mother beat me with anything she got her hands on: a broomstick, a belt, the ironing cord. Once, she even hit me with a skillet" (p. 41).

Newton (1973) viewed his physical punishments within a larger social context. "My parents never spared the rod when I was young. As I grew older, they punished me in other ways, but I knew they did it because they cared about me and wanted me to develop a sense of responsibility." (P. 44)

As a reaction to the violence they witnessed and experienced, they turned to the streets and participated in illegal activities. Brent (1996) describes his activities, "Before long, I began buying kilos and selling matchboxes and cans of weed. My street teachers taught me to shoplift, shortchange, burglarize, pimp, strong-arm, and roll drunks" (p. 49). All of them, with the exception of Seale, spent some time in the Juvenile Detention Center. Seale joined a gang and participated in petty theft but was never caught. Newton was arrested for carrying a carpenter's hammer and an old pistol to school. Cleaver was sentenced to the Nellis School for Boys at the age of 14. Brent was sent to a juvenile center after being found guilty of stealing a bike.
Seale and Newton were co-founders of the organization and never spoke of their job assignments outside of the Panther patrols that were instituted when the organization first began. Cleaver was asked to play the role of Minister of Information and was given membership within the Central Committee. He also played a role in developing the office of the International Section of the Black Panther Party.

Brent served as a member of the protection squad and was a spokesperson for the organization. He was asked to protect some of the organization’s top members and was asked to speak during various gatherings.

**Between Men and Women**

There are similarities in the political ideology amongst the autobiographies. One understandable conclusion is that they were all members of the same political organization, an organization which tied them together. For example, all of the autobiographers believed in and supported a form of socialism. Davis (1988) believed that a socialist political ideology was a way to embrace working class people.

It had been clear to me for a long time that in order to achieve its ultimate goals, the Black Liberation struggle would have to become a part of a revolutionary movement, embracing all working people. It was also clear to me that this movement must push in the direction of socialism. (p. 151)

For Shakur (1987) the movement needed to be all inclusive.

“...To me, the revolutionary struggle of Black people had to be against
racism, capitalism, imperialism, and sexism and for real freedom under a socialist government* (p. 197).

For Brown (1993), the call for socialism was one that the Black Panther Party had endorsed:

As a leading member of the Black Panther party, I want to initiate that new arrangement. What the Black Panther Party wants is a new America. We want to diminish the power of you and yours over so many of us through the institution of a humane and egalitarian society--we call it socialism. (p. 428)

Cleaver (1978) states,

I wanted a social, political, and economic revolution along socialist lines. I wanted an end to the capitalist economic system, and for the natural resources, technology, and all information to be taken out of the control of the individuals, families, groups, and corporate entities that owned them as private property. (p. 83)

Newton (1973) believed in the Black community, mere control of our own institutions will not automatically solve problems. . . . The most important element in controlling our own institutions would be to organize them into co-operatives, which would end all forms of exploitation. Then the profits, or surplus, from the co-operatives would be returned to the community, expanding opportunities on all levels, and enriching life. Beyond this, our ultimate aim is to have various ethnic communities cooperating in a spirit of mutual aid, rather than competing. In this way, all communities would be allied in a common purpose through the major social, economic, and political institutions in the country. (p. 167)

Seale (1978) claims, "I relished the thought that some time back I would refuse to read any communist ideas. But Huey pegged our philosophy as probably some future black cooperative socialism" (p. 160).

This political ideological standpoint would include the right to health care, meaningful employment and positive education. These
beliefs are consistent with the 10-point platform and program. There was a sense of communal living that was endorsed by the members of the Black Panther Party. They believed that there should not be the private ownership of goods to provide the services that are necessary for a community to survive. They endorsed the notion that all people should help provide for others as exemplified by the Survival Programs.

With respect to their political involvement, they supported the notion that people who live within a particular community must have the right to determine its development socially, politically and economically. They supported the notion that the subjugation of the American society is not solely based on race but class also. They believed in the necessity of revolutionary action that it must include the concerns of both black and poor. Therefore, the struggle against oppression must occur on the battlefields of both race and class.

Perspectives of Racism

The autobiographies were rich in descriptions of experiences of racism. There were numerous referrals to the authors' interactions with the Jim Crow laws of the south. In addition, there were other examples where the autobiographies described the effects of racism on the autobiographer, both psychologically and personally. Huey Newton (1973) spoke of his reaction to what he deemed racist experiences within the school system. He helped form a gang
of other seventh and eighth grade boys.

The Brotherhood was a direct response to white aggression at school...all the Blacks viewed each other as blood relations. We called ourselves brothers or cousins and banded together to fight racist students, faculty, and administration. Back then, white staff people and students routinely called Blacks niggers, and tension was high. (p. 26)

Assata Shakur (1987) also spoke of the effects racism involved within the school system and of her experiences with Jim Crow laws.

I remember that when we traveled from North to South and vice versa we really felt the sting of segregation more acutely than at other times. We'd drive hours without being able to stop anywhere. Sometimes we would pull into a filthy old gas station, buy gas, and then be told that we were not permitted to use their filthy old bathroom because we were Black. I can remember clearly squatting in the bushes with mosquitoes biting my bare buttocks, and my grandmother handing me toilet paper because we could not find a place with a colored bathroom. Sometimes we were hungry, but there was not place to eat. Other times we were sleepy and there was no hotel or motel that would admit us. If I sit and add up all the colored toilets and drinking fountains in my life and all of the back-of-the-buses or the Jim Crow railway cars or the places I couldn't go, it adds up to one great ball of anger. (p. 138)

Eldridge Cleaver spoke of the racist nature of the American society as a whole. Bobby Seale spoke explicitly of racist incidents within the Armed services particularly related to Jim Crow laws and the living conditions of his family and others. Brent spoke of his racist experiences as a child and in the judicial system.

Most of the stories identify the definition of racism based on the notion that the necessities of life are allocated on the basis of race. There were limited opportunities afforded to those who are African American or Hispanic. Yet, race was not the only basis upon which the dissemination of benefits was allocated. An unavoidable
point was the notion of the interconnectedness of race and class. Most of the authors believed that the struggle against oppression was not only a struggle against racism. In the words of Newton (1973), "I was never convinced that destroying capitalism would automatically destroy racism, I felt, however, that we could not destroy racism without wiping out its economic foundation" (p. 70).

Shakur (1987) supported the idea that, "Black people are oppressed because of class as well as race, because we are poor and because we are black" (p. 190).

All of the authors would agree that there is a connection between racism and capitalism, yet the amount of importance of one over the other would lead Angela Davis to separate from the Black Panther Party. Davis let it be known that her involvement with the Black Panther Party would not influence her participation in the Communist Party and vice versa. One of her comrades, was asked to make a decision between his membership in the Communist Party and the Black Panther Party. He was asked to make a decision on the organization he thought was most important. This was a question that Davis refused to answer. She was disappointed with the attention on race by those who came to speak at the various rallies and activities that were sponsored by the party. Few of these speakers spoke of the issue of class.

Overall, it was noted in most of these life stories that all allies were not black, and all whites were not enemies. This means that there were allies and enemies on both sides and one can ill-
afford to draw war lines based on the issue of race.

**Perspectives of Sexism**

Davis is quite explicit in her descriptions of sexist behavior aimed at her, not only within the party, but also within the Black Power Movement in general. There were those who believed that the role that she was playing as both an organizer and a key speaker should have been one reserved for a male. In addition to the notion that there were certain women's jobs, she was expected to adhere to the division of labor designated on the basis of sex.

Brown is also quite vocal as to those experiences she thought were sexist. These experiences relayed incidences in the party where women served men their meals. The women stayed in the kitchen and ate after the men or the warriors had eaten. She was also told that it was a role to which she should become accustomed. She addressed the notion that men expected sexual favors from the women within the party, and that their dedication to the revolution could be determined based on whether or not they would allow men to have their way. She also expressed that a woman in a leadership position was seen as a counterrevolutionary, as the objective of Black Power movement was to regain black manhood.

Brown (1993) says, "If a black woman assumed a role of leadership, she was said to be eroding black manhood, to be hindering the progress of the black race. She was an enemy of black people" (p. 357).
Shakur (1987) does not mention any examples of her perception of sexism, however, she does express shock when she encounters a male comrade who stood out as the exception to that which she had encountered,

I also respected him because he refused to become part of the macho cult that was an official body in the Black Panther Party. He never voted on issues or took a position just to be one of the boys. When brothers made an unprincipled attack on sisters, Zayd refused to participate. I knew this had this had to be especially hard for him because he was small and his masculinity was always being challenged in someway by the more backward, muscle-headed men in the party. Zayd always treated me and all the other sisters with respect. I enjoyed his friendship because he was one of those rare men capable of being friends with a woman without having designs on her. (p. 224)

Brent (1996) also did not explicitly discuss any incidences that related to how he would define sexism. Yet, he was uncomfortable with the term Pantherettes along with the treatment that he witnessed. "The sisters were dubbed Pantherettes and had to serve the brothers without question. I didn't like what I saw, and I couldn't shake the gut feeling that one day there would be serious trouble for the Panthers in New York" (p. 112).

He also discussed the expectation of sexual relations on the part of women. "Many young girls, black and white, thought their revolutionary duty was to sleep with a Panther. Sleeping around was both accepted and expected" (p. 108).

Newton (1973) never discussed the notion of sexism. Much of his writing about the beginning of the party, the people who would be involved, and to whom he appeal to the revolutionary activity, he often refers to as the brotherhood or brothers off the block or a
struggle for black manhood. There were several references to the general membership of the party as he, or brothers. A few examples are, "Bobby and I finally had no choice but to form an organization that would involve the lower class brothers" (p. 110).

A further example by Newton (1973), "People respect the expression of strength and dignity displayed by men who refuse to bow to the weapons of oppression" (p. 112).

And yet another by Newton (1973), "But here we were, proud Black men, armed with guns and a knowledge of the law" (p. 121).

There was no acknowledgment, in Newton's work, of the effect of gender politics within the party. He did not address the complaints of the several women within the organization that concerning issues of sexism.

Seale (1978) was also guilty of using the term brotherhood, brothers off the block and black men when describing those to whom the party would appeal. "I was filled with a staunch belief of the need for brotherhood and revolution and rebellion against the racist system" p. (151). He admits the importance of women in the organization stating that the "majority of the Party, sixty per cent, were sisters at this time" (p. 177). There was also an instance where he observed specific gender relations that he found were oppressive and spoke out against them. Instead of the women being the ones who cooked and cleaned, he demanded that the men also participate in the activities necessary to keep the chapter functional. "No one should be isolated doing a specific kind of work" (p. 178).
With all of this in mind, Seale (1978) did explicitly mention his sexual escapades with female members of the party, some of whom were mentioned by name and others who were nameless. He also spoke of women in very derogatory ways throughout his life story.

Out on bail, all the brothers were black heroes to all the women. A few sisters almost snatched brothers they knew inside and into the bedrooms, loving them. We were put on a pedestal as bad tough black men. We were admired to the hilt. . . . (p. 171)

**Writing Style**

Each author wrote in different ways. Seale wrote using street vernacular. It is obvious that he wanted his book to be accessible to the "brothers off the block" as he prided himself in his ability to talk the language. Cleaver did not write *Soul on Fire* with the same enthusiasm as he wrote *Soul on Ice*. There were obvious differences in tone and temperament.

Shakur (1987) appeared to be writing very cautiously. "On my FBI Wanted poster, they list my birth date as July 16, 1947, and in parentheses, "not substantiated by birth records" (p. 18).

She does not go into detail or attempt to correct the information that has been given about her. There were also times when she remarked that she would withhold the names of those who were nice to her or provided assistance because she did not want to bring any harm their way.

None of the women wrote the events of their lives in chronological order. Shakur moved back and forth from prison and her trial
to her childhood. Davis started with her experience underground and her capture, and then proceeded to use a chronological style with which to write. Brown started with her announcement of her accepting the position of Chair of the Party and then proceeded with the order of her life.

All of the men, with the exception of Cleaver, used the chronological format in telling of their lives in the order in which it occurred. Cleaver started his life story with the decision to return from exile in Algiers. Newton, Seale, and Brent started with their upbringing and told their lives in order.
CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The major purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of sexism, racism, and political ideology of the former members of the Black Panther Party through the analysis of their autobiographies. Seven single-authored autobiographies written by former Panther members were analyzed both individually and comparatively. There was particular interest in the similarities with respect to the women's autobiographies amongst themselves, the men's autobiographies amongst themselves and a comparison between the life stories of the women and the men. Additionally, there was also emphasis in the attention paid by the autobiographer to personal relationships and the attention paid to the organizational political structure.

Research Questions

There was considerable similarity between both the men and women with regard to the political ideology. Each individual appeared to support a notion of socialism as the political ideology that would allow the greatest amount of equality for all people, both on the basis of race and class. These ideas are supported by the 10 point platform and program of the organization.

In addition, along with political ideology, all of the mem-

113
bers shared a perception of racism. Each person provided a vivid experience related to racism that encouraged their political activism. The women's life stories were similar with respect to their political activity before their involvement in the Black Panther Party, with their love of being involved in an organization that fought for social, economic and political change. Their life stories were similar with respect to the perpetuation of male images of members in the party. Additionally, they spent some time discussing the personal relationships that they established both with other members in the party, and with activists involved in other organizations in general.

The men's life stories were similar with respect to the religious backgrounds of their families and their experiences with domestic violence, both as witnesses and as victims. Their life stories were similar with regard to the leadership positions and spokesperson they held within the organization.

Regarding the political or personal tone in each author's writing, Newton's life story was very political as were the other men's life stories. He stayed away from personal relationships and very rarely, with the exception of Bobby Seale, did he describe how he met people and the nature of his relationships with other members.

Brown was more personal than political. There were a few instances where she addressed the concerns of the Party or her political views as a member. However, for the most part her story,
along with the other women’s work, was a very personal and quite explicit as to her feelings about members within the party and her interactions with them, not only personally (sexually) but also professionally.

During their development however, the men appeared to manifest their anger with the American system in different ways than did the women. The men were all involved in some criminal activity and spent time in jail prior to their involvement with the Party. The women were all politically active in various organizations prior to their involvement in the Party and expressed an interest in academic pursuits in addition to their political activism.

Discussion

Lessons Learned by Using Autobiographies

As Olney states, the process of writing autobiographies is one with little preparation. There are few rules included in the process of writing one’s life story. One of the primary concerns that must be addressed is the nature of truth. The writing of a life story is done on the basis of what the author remembers in the way in which the author remembers. To look at these works on the basis of historical truth is to overlook the impact of these works on the basis of their contribution to the sociological research community. Each of these life stories allows the authors to decide what to include and in which order to tell their story. It enables each writer to present their experiences in the order of importance to the
writer. This perhaps is telling more about the author than the events of their lives.

The historical omission of African American reality is aided by the pursuit of non traditional sources of data. The autobiography helps to fill this gap. Autobiographies allow the author to place him or herself in history. Each story allows the author to tell of historical events and the effects of those events in a way that humanizes history. People tell best the stories of their own lives. Each autobiography tells of a person's life, growth and development within a social context. They tell of the social institutions that were influential in the person's life. The authors explore the effects of political and social events during their lives. It is an historical moment to begin the process of writing their life stories. Not only do we have access to the historical accounts of Jim Crow laws and of public institutional segregation, these works allow the scholarly community to explore the impact of these laws and this time in American history through these autobiographical works. It also provides validation of those who use their voices to express concerns that were a racial legacy of the time period.

Using the actual autobiographies of former Black Panther members affirms their contribution to the collective racial history. Particularly from the sociological perspective, there are many lessons that can be learned from these works. Participation in the Black Power movement in general and the Black Panther Party in
particular, was a political endeavor that wrought repression from both local and national police agencies. The Black Panther Party was organized to fight oppression not only in terms of police brutality, but also in terms of struggling for political, social, and economic equality. Panthers fought for the inclusion of people of color in the political arena. It was on these points that the members appear to agree.

Gender equality and the struggle against sexism was a topic that had an effect on the day to day functions of the organization. While not all women suffered from the humiliations of sexism, there were those who were outspoken about their treatment and the division of labor on the basis of sex. It is apparent that the men and the women saw their roles within the party in very different ways. It is on this analysis of gender dynamics within the organization that provides insight on some of the ways in which the African American community is grappling with notions of feminism and women's rights.

In these autobiographies, each author writes differently about their experiences. Based on this conclusion, it would be unfair to suggest that there is a monolithic Black Panther experience. There were instances where there were consistencies in the works of each of these autobiographies. For example, the political ideology of the individual members matched the political ideology of the organization. There were also instances of similarities in the works of the men such as those referenced by the attention given to the organizational structure and the confrontations with various police
agencies. Additionally, there were consistencies in the works of the women. Women tended to explore their reasons for being involved in revolutionary struggle along with the importance of the relationships established with their comrades.

The women's analysis provided a window to the African American community's experiences of and with race, gender and class, in an organization developed to challenge and confront issues of racism and classism.

Recommendations for Further Research

There is no question that the use of non traditional research methods is a valuable endeavor. The use of autobiographies to further explore the effects of social and historical events on the lives of those who live them has much to offer the sociological research process.

The further exploration of the impact of the Black Panther Party and other revolutionary organizations would make valuable contributions to the literature of social change and identity transformation among those who participate in them. In addition, liberatory and social change organizations provide the opportunity to discover the conflicts that existed both within the organization, government and media reactions to those who attempt to bring about social change.
Appendix A

October 1966 Black Panther Party Platform and Program
October 1966 Black Panther Party
Platform and Program

What We Want
What We Believe

1. We want freedom. We want power to determine the destiny of our Black Community.

   We believe that Black people will not be free until we are able to determine our destiny.

2. We want full employment for our people.

   We believe that the federal government is responsible and obligated to give every man employment or a guaranteed income. We believe that if the white American businessmen will not give full employment, then the means of production should be taken from the businessmen and placed in the community so that the people of the community can organize and employ all of its people and give a high standard of living.

3. We want an end to the robbery by the white man of our Black Community.

   We believe that this racist government has robbed us and now we are demanding the overdue debt of forty acres and two mules. Forty acres and two mules was promised 100 years ago as restitution for slave labor and mass murder of black people. We will accept the payment in currency which will be distributed to our many communities. The Germans are now aiding the Jews in Israel for the genocide of the Jewish people. The Germans murdered six million Jews. The American racist has taken part in the slaughter of over fifty million black people; therefore, we feel that this is a modest demand that we make.

4. We want decent housing, fit for shelter of human beings.

   We believe that if the white landlords will not give decent housing to our black community, then the housing and the land should be made into cooperatives so that our community, with government aid, can build and make decent housing for its people.

5. We want education for our people that exposes the true nature of this decadent American society. We want education that teaches us our true history and our role in the present-day society.
We believe in an educational system that will give to our people a knowledge of self. If a man does not have knowledge of himself and his position in society and the world, then he has little chance to relate to anything else.

6. **We want all black men to be exempt from military service.**

We believe that Black people should not be forced to fight in the military service to defend a racist government that does not protect us. We will not fight and kill other people of color in the world who, like black people, are being victimized by the white racist government of America. We will protect ourselves from the force and violence of the racist police and the racist military, by whatever means necessary.

7. **We want an immediate end to POLICE BRUTALITY and MURDER of black people.**

We believe we can end police brutality in our black community by organizing black self-defense groups that are dedicated to defending our black community from racist police oppression and brutality. The Second Amendment to the Constitution of the United States gives a right to bear arms. We therefore believe that all black people should arm themselves for self-defense.

8. **We want freedom for all black men held in federal, state, county and city prisons and jails.**

We believe that all black people should be released from the many jails and prisons because they have not received a fair and impartial trial.

9. **We want all black people when brought to trial to be tried in court by a jury of their peer group or people from their black communities, as defined by the Constitution of the United States.**

We believe that the courts should follow the United States Constitution so that black people will receive fair trials. The 14th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution gives a man a right to be tried by his peer group. A peer is a person from a similar economic, social, religious, geographical, environmental, historical and racial background. To do this the court will be forced to select a jury from the black community from which the black defendant came. We have been and are being tried by all-white juries that have no understanding of the "average reasoning man" of the black community.
10. We want land, bread, housing, education, clothing, justice and peace. And as our major political objective, a United Nations-supervised plebiscite to be held thought the black colony in which only black colonial subjects will be allowed to participate, for the purpose of determining the will of black people as to their national destiny.

When, in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume, among the power of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the laws of nature and nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. That, to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed; that, whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute a new government, laying its foundation on such principles, and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and, accordingly, all experience hath shown, that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But, when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariable the same object, evinces a design to reduce them under absolute despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such government, and to provide new guards for their future security.

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