

Black Panthers

Huey Newton and Bobby Seale started an organization to help Africans and stop police violence.



Bobby Seale and Huey Newton organized the Black Panther Party in Oakland, California in 1966.

In Oakland, two men met at Merritt College in 1966, to share their ideas about how to help Africans in Oakland. The two men were **Huey P. Newton** and **Bobby Seale**. They had known each other for months and one day they decided to form a new organization. They sat down for an hour and wrote the ideas for their new group - their ideas formed the "**Ten Point Plan**", and they took the name, the "Black Panther Party for Self Defense". It was no coincidence that they started just

one year after Malcolm X was assassinated. They believed they were continuing his work.

Each of them took a title, Huey Newton was the Minister for Self Defense, and Bobby Seale was the Chairman. Huey Newton was not a church minister, but "Minister" was a name they often used to identify people by their duties.

Their Ten Point Plan was printed out and distributed throughout Oakland and other cities, such as Richmond and Berkeley. Their first recruit was a 16 year old high school student named **Bobby Hutton**, who was nicknamed Lil' Bobby, and became the Party's Treasurer. Soon the three of them began sharing their information with everyone. If you were at a park or walking

in Oakland, they might stop you and begin sharing their Ten Point Plan.

TEN POINT PLAN

- 1. We want freedom. We want power to determine the destiny of our Black Community.*
- 2. We want full employment for our people.*
- 3. We want an end to the robbery by the white man of our Black Community.*
- 4. We want decent housing, fit for shelter of human beings.*
- 5. We want education that teaches us our true history and our role in the present-day society.*
- 6. We want all black men to be exempt from military service.*
- 7. We want an immediate end to police brutality and murder of black people.*
- 8. We want freedom for all black men held in federal, state, county and city prisons and jails.*
- 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.*
- 10. We want land, bread, housing, education, clothing, justice and peace.*

The members chose the panther as their symbol, because it is an animal that only attacks to protect itself. The members of

the Party dressed in all black. They wore black berets, a black leather jacket, a dark shirt and black pants, and usually had shiny black shoes. They also carried handguns and shotguns as they moved through the community, declaring with fists raised, "**Power to the People!**"

They quickly expanded beyond Oakland, and soon there were Black Panther chapters all over America in cities such as Chicago, Detroit, and New York. The chapters worked together, and shared information and programs.

The Black Panther Party included both men and women, and they established a number of programs to help Africans in cities. They started a free breakfast program, gave away bags of groceries, and opened



The Panthers recruited hundreds of young Black men.



Geronimo Pratt, a former Minister of Information, spent 27 years in prison for a crime he did not commit. The government was trying to kill or imprison Black Panther leaders.



The Panther's Free Breakfast program fed thousands of children from poor families.

free health clinics, where people could see a doctor for free. The chapter in Southern California served over 1,700 free meals each week! They started a newspaper which was run by Eldridge Cleaver, their Minister of Information. But they were best known for "policing the police".

In Oakland, and other big cities in the North and California, police would often harass and assault black people. Some Blacks were even killed by police, and nothing was done. This angered many Africans, and the Black Panthers worked to stop police brutality. Similar to the Deacons they would patrol the cities to protect the Black community. The Panthers would stop near any police officer who was attempting to harass or arrest a Black person.

The Panthers carried law books to make sure the police were following the law. Soon the police became angry at these Black men for challenging them. But it wasn't just the police who noticed them. The president, the Congress and federal law enforcement groups, such as the FBI and CIA were scared of the Black Panthers, and began a plan to attack, destroy, and kill the Panthers. The FBI wanted to destroy all Black leaders and prevent Black groups from growing.

Soon many of their leaders, such as **Huey Newton, Bobby Seale, Eldridge Cleaver, Elain Brown, Angela Davis** and others were being attacked and put in prison. One night in 1968 Eldridge Cleaver and Lil' Bobby were driving to visit a friend

when they were attacked by police. The two ran into a nearby basement, and Eldridge Cleaver was shot in the foot, but the police kept shooting and throwing tear gas. Tear gas is a weapon that is used by the police. It is contained in a can, and when it lands gas fills the room. The gas causes a person's eyes to burn, and it is painful to breathe.

Eldridge Cleaver and Lil' Bobby eventually surrendered to police. While standing next to the police cars they were ordered to run to another police car about 20 feet away. Eldridge couldn't run, so they forced Lil' Bobby to run. When he was about 10 feet away, the police began to shoot him in the back for no reason. Lil' Bobby, who was still a teenager, died on the street in Oakland, killed by police officers who were supposed to protect the community.

This continued in every city where Panthers tried to organize. Some members were falsely accused of crimes and were sentenced to long terms in prison. One Panther, **Geronimo Pratt** spent 25 years in prison. Others didn't wait to get arrested, or escaped from prison and left America.



Panther "girls" at a demonstration.

When a person moves to another country for fear of being arrested, it is called living in exile. Many moved to Cuba, and today there are former Panthers who live in other countries. If they try to return to the United States they would be arrested. So some have not seen their families in over 30 years!

The FBI would send **Black spys** to join the group. These spys would tell the FBI everything the Panthers were planning as they tried to destroy the organization. The Panther Party began to collapse as their leaders were killed, exiled or imprisoned. The few remaining Panthers disagreed about what to do next. Some thought that war against the government was the only answer, and they formed the Black Liberation Army, but most decided to try to continue their work by participating in politics.



Bobby Seale ran for mayor in 1973, and Elaine Brown ran for the City Council in Oakland. Both were defeated, but they were successful in getting more Africans to vote.

Bobby Seale ran for Mayor of Oakland unsuccessfully in 1973. After Bobby Seale resigned from the Panthers, **Elaine Brown** became the first woman to head the Black Panther Party. She continued working in local politics, and the Panthers efforts to organize Africans to vote, eventually led to the first African mayor in Oakland in 1977, **Lionel Wilson**, as well as Black mayors in other cities in America.

The Black Panther Party showed Africans that they could take care of themselves, and they could fight the police. Although it didn't end well for the Black Panther Party they demonstrated another another form of Black Power, and changed the way police treat Africans. Many of the free programs the Panthers began, later were continued by the government.

Where are they today?

What happened to the leaders and organizations that were so important to the Black Power Movement?

Deacons for Defense

After 1967 there was less need for the Deacons. They showed Africans that self-defense was necessary and other groups and people began to practice self-defense along with nonviolent strategies.

Nation of Islam

Elijah Muhammad passed away in 1975, when he was 77 years old. The Nation of Islam was eventually directed by **Minister Louis Farrakhan**, who organized the Million Man March in Washington, D.C. in 1995. There are mosques in almost every major city in America.

SNCC

SNCC began to collapse after 1967, and stopped operating around 1971. **Kwame Ture** moved to Guinea in West Africa in 1968. Kwame Ture worked to build the All African People's Revolutionary Party until his death in 1998. The party is still active today, and holds a rally every year in California.

Black Panther Party

The Black Panther Party essentially ended in the late 1970's. There have been efforts to restart a new group. **Huey P. Newton** left the Panthers, but did not do very well. He was killed in a drug dispute in Oakland. **Bobby Seale** and **Elaine Brown** are still alive. Both have written books. Elaine Brown lives in France.

Geronimo Pratt was freed in 1997 with help from attorney Johnnie Cochran. Other former Panthers, such as **Assata Shakur** still live in exile. She has been living in Cuba ever since her escape from jail in 1986.