CrossMark

The Black Panther Party: a Virtuous Alignment with an African Worldview

Michael Tillotson[1]

Abstract This work will locate the Black Panther Party as resistance against the final vocabulary as articulated by philosopher Richard Rorty (1989) in his book, Contingency, Irony and Solidarity, on two fronts. The first front is a re-articulation of his idea of the final vocabulary, and the second front is the language of resistance and discursive interventions put forth by the Black Panther Party. This paper will explore the actions of the Black Panther Party and its relationship to an African-Centered communal orientation in terms of its organizational activities and service/survival programs. Lastly, this research will explore the theoretical construction Afrocentricity to analyze the Black Panther Party's resistance role against the machinations of the state.

Keywords Final vocabulary · African-worldview · Afrocentricity

Introduction

This research will locate the Black Panther Party as resistance against the *final vocabulary* as articulated by philosopher Richard Rorty (1989) in his book, *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*, on two fronts. The first front is a re-articulation of his idea of the final vocabulary and the second front is the language of resistance and discursive interventions put forth by the Black Panther Party. This essay does not use European thought to define the Black Panther Party but will employ it as a backdrop for analysis. Since the beginning of European reality circa the fifth century BC (not all of human time), there has been pushback against ideas that were not considered in the best interests of the empire. Consequently, we examine the Frankfurt School of critical theory (i.e., the egalitarian social and political movement founded in Germany) or the Marxist ideational framework (i.e., class relations and societal conflict); there have been historical moments of human and intellectual resistance against

✉ Michael Tillotson
  mtillots@pitt.edu

[1] Department of Africana Studies, University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, PA, USA

ideas that were considered anti-egalitarian in European life. Suffice it to say that in terms of egalitarianism, European rules and so-called objectivity have always been a subjective enterprise when it comes to equality, but for the work at hand, it will be alluded to as a presumptive goal.

This essay chose Rortys' premise of the final vocabulary, because of its insistence on egalitarianism. One of the central thrusts of this article will be to establish the Black Panther Party as an organization of egalitarian purpose whose raison d'etre was to resist the anti-egalitarian de facto and de jure limitations placed at the doorstep of Black America in the last third of the twentieth century. To be clear, this research will explore the words "final vocabulary" in terms of the meaning of words and actual language used. In addition, this article will also look at the actions of the Black Panther Party and its relationship to an African-centered communal orientation in terms of its organizational activities. In addition, this work will re-imagine and re-purpose Rorty's *final vocabulary* to assess how the public sphere has ensconced and misunderstood the Black Panther Party as an organization that was known by some for possessing very negligible connections to the culture or worldview of the African continent. Lastly, this paper will explore the theoretical construction Afrocentricity to analyze the Black Panther Party's resistance role against the machinations of the state. This research will argue through an Afrocentric lens that one of the primary roles of the Black Panther Party was to establish (to the state) the firm position that Black Americans were to be recognized as *subjects and not objects* in the sphere of human reality.

Literature Review

The interest in this research grew out of an interest with the erroneous assumption that the Black Panther Party was not concerned with or did not adhere to African cultural practices or principles (Yahweh, 2005). When one examines the service/survival programs of the Black Panther Party, a different reality emerges. Looking at the work of Shih and Williams (2016), where they write through the voice of Ericka Huggins, "But the programs were the light of everybody's experience who had anything to do with them" (p. 87). After absorbing that information, I began to think more fully about the reality that the Black Panther Party was in fact placing duty before self and operating with deep congruence with an African worldview and Cosmology, specifically the basic tenet (communalism). As Black Panther Party co-founder Huey P. Newton states in the book, *Power to the People: The World of the Black Panthers* (2016), "All of our survival programs are free. We have never charged the community a dime to receive the things they need from any of our programs and we will not do so" (p. 76). It is with this clarity that this essay sought to illuminate the deep connection between the Black Panther Party's survival programs communal orientation as a form of collective agency; as Spencer (2016) writes, "They envisioned a blueprint for the type of organization, they felt was needed to transform black people's conditions" (p. 29). This work seeks to highlight the alignment with African ways of being (worldview/communalism) that is understood as "virtuous" in the sense that it is located as an act of caring for the well-being of Black Americans and all of humanity. Clearly, the Black Panther Party instituted its service-survival programs as a means of community service and outreach. However, the linkage of the Black Panther Party's survival programs and an African worldview must be clearly stated in the context of not confusing it with Huey P. Newton's idea of intercommunalism. While the two ideas are not in conflict, they do not stand on the

same theoretical and ideological footing. In the book, *Huey P. Newton: The Radical Theorist*, Jeffries (2002) offers a clear understanding of Newton's project; he writes, "The notion of Intercommunalism is perhaps Newton's most important theoretical contribution" (p. 78). Jeffries posits, "Intercommunalism pushes for egalitarianism and argues for the abolition of divisive class distinctions" (p. 80). The clarity that Jeffries's analysis provides extends further; he writes, "Intercommunalism refers to the relationship of one oppressed people to the worldwide oppressed community in the larger quest for a just democratic order" (p. 80). The distinctions between an African worldview and its central tenet (communalism) and intercommunalism both promote African agency, but in different contexts and terms. African worldview and cosmology grew out of African peoples' indigenous life principles and practices, while the concept of intercommunalism developed out of Huey P. Newton's wide expansive reading and his newly developed theoretical configurations that he offered to the world; as Jeffries (2002) writes, "Much like Marx, Engels and Lenin, Newton saw the future communist world as a stateless one" (p. 82).

In addition, this research looks at the Black Panther Party's rhetorical platforms as they addressed the idea that Africana people were somehow less than others and could be treated as objects through a final vocabulary (Rorty, 1989). The Black Panther Party engaged in responsive language that placed the anti-egalitarian power structure at that time on notice that Black Americans are indeed subject beings who demanded their own type of autonomy and sovereignty. This article explores the Black Panther Party's anti-establishment language not simply as emotive reflections but as oratorical egalitarian push-back against all forms of systematized oppression whether it was de facto or de jure. Additionally, through the lens of the theoretical construction Afrocentricity (Asante, 1998, 2006), this paper will look at the centrality of subject position vis-à-vis human agency in accordance with the Black Panther Party's organizational initiatives. It is with this volition that this research will move forward.

The Ironists

Richard Rorty (1989) sees the world as a set of things that describe. He states,

> All human beings carry about a set of words which they employ to justify their actions, their beliefs, and their lives. These are the words in which we formulate praise of our friends and contempt for our enemies, our long term projects, our deepest self-doubts and our highest hopes. They are the words in which we tell, sometimes prospectively and sometimes retrospectively, the story of our lives. I shall call these words a person's "final vocabulary." (p. 73).

It has been argued that the Black Panther Party had no concern or ties to the cultural and life principles and practices of Africa and African people. As Yahweh (2005) posits, "First and foremost the Black Panther ideology generally ignored spiritual and cultural advancement" (p.1). Yahweh makes the claim that the ten-point program was not in line with any cultural elements of Africa. I challenge that assertion as I take on the role of the "ironist" per Rorty's (1989) operationalization of the term; he writes, "She has radical and continuing doubts about the final vocabulary she currently uses and because she has been

impressed by other vocabularies, vocabularies taken as final by people or books she has encountered… " (p. 73). In this regard, I will argue that the some of the Black Panther Party organizational activities were representative of an African-based communal orientation.

The Twenty-First Century and the Black Panther Party

The all too common twenty-first century understanding of the Black Panther Party's relevance is unfortunately located in the consciousness of some Americans by their knowledge of the New Black Panther Party's alleged attempt to block (with the threat of violence) white senior citizens from voting in Philadelphia in 2008. The Black Panther Party is also now understood by individuals who have no knowledge of its history in this contemporary moment as the backdrop for the 2016 National Football League's Super Bowl halftime spectacle. In the anti-egalitarian sphere, there are those who believe that the Black Panther Party is the ideological counterpart to the Knights of the Klu Klux Klan. These realities are a long way from the original role, mission, purpose, and function of the organization in its origins. As Jeffries and Sabat (2010) posit, "We can think of no organization that was or is more maligned, misrepresented, or misconstrued than the BPP" (p. ix).

A full appreciation of the mission of the BPP can be gained by bringing forth a very brief overview of historical events that took place in the USA (post-reconstruction) long before the BPP came into existence. Choosing post-reconstruction as a launch point for analysis provides illumination of the epic failures of American society that roughly 100 years later the BPP would seek to address.

America's Reality 100 Years before the Black Panther Party Emerged

The amendments of reconstruction produced the following: 13th (abolishment of the enslavement of African people), 14th (citizenship), and the 15th (the right to vote). However, despite these amendments, Black Americans were still without fully actualized human agency. Consequently, because of the challenges and failures of reconstruction, Black Americans were confronted more and more with southern white bias, discrimination, mob rule, imprisonment, and violence, although technically, vis-à-vis the 13th amendment, they were "free." What the world had come to know through the lesson of American reconstruction is that it is clearer how to change laws than it is to change the hearts and minds of men and women. By 1896, the court case of Plessy vs Ferguson (the doctrine of separate but equal) and Jim Crow, understood as the racialized manifestation of how black and white Americans would engage in human interactions in public spaces, was the law of the land (Wilkerson, 2010). American society had now summarily moved to a system of legal doctrines codified by the legal separation of black and white Americans.

After the Supreme Court sanctioned Plessy vs Ferguson, Black Americans were excluded from voting, jobs, unions, and ultimately a shared democracy. At the turn of the twentieth century, Jim Crow American society benefitted from the aid of enforcement mechanisms, such as the Knights of the Klu Klux Klan, which insured the continuation of exclusion and subordination for Black Americans through brutal violence and domestic terrorism. In addition, southern patterns of racial ideology were shaping public opinion in

the north, east, and the west as well, not just the American south (Wilkerson, 2010). The national temperament of Black Americans as second class citizens was strongly shaping America. Consequently, the doctrine of Black American inferiority was robustly supported intellectually by a large collection of theologians, anthropologists, historians, and philosophers, who reinterpreted progressive activities as against the interest of the status quo (Kendi, 2016).

Consequently, this is how the twentieth century greeted Black Americans, who were treated as refugees in a land built by their ancestors. The start of the twentieth century was the culmination of centuries of struggle for people of African descent in an American context. This population had endured forced migration in the Atlantic trade of African people, the dehumanization of enslavement, the destruction of their historical memory, the attack on their worldview, and the debasement of their rights as American citizens in everyday life. This reality was supported by the highest courts in the land as well as the ever-occurring spectacle of public lynchings for Black American chastisement and public entertainment of some segments of the dominant culture (Allen, 2000).

Consequently, the twentieth century would distinctly be the age of quest for Black Americans. Technically, this was the first time that Black Americans could remotely envision a sense of collective agency post-enslavement. However, at the same time, rarely in the history of the world had authorized citizens of a land had to face the idea of being aliens in a land where the riches and opportunity for prosperity (that their labor developed) had been denied. Sixty-plus years later, this is the historical backdrop that the BPP found itself facing in the 1960s.

The Black Panther Party and the 1960s

As Sitkoff (2008) writes, "Black and white, few paid much attention to the rumblings of discontent within the black ghettoes as the nation celebrated Independence Day in 1965" (p. 184). However, an alternative reality was growing underneath the radar as the winds of human and political change were blowing robustly in America, and the social and societal struggles in the USA could no longer be ignored by American citizens. The hard-fought body of work of the Civil Rights Movement led by Dr. Martin Luther King and the erstwhile legislative activities of the Lyndon Johnson administration, which produced the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, did not protect the black citizens in Oakland, California, among many cities across the country, from the continued onslaught of rampant abuses of power by local law enforcement. As Jones and Jeffries (1998) posit,

> The summer of 1966 was marked by the rupture of the nonviolent integrationist directed Civil Rights Movement. Although the movements strategies proved successful in dismantling the vestiges of *de jure* segregation, the life chances of African American people nonetheless remained unchanged. Blatant acts of police brutality, inadequate housing, inferior social services and rampant unemployment still plagued the African American community. By this stage, it was clear that the traditional civil rights organizations were unable to alter the systemic forces that adversely impacted the lives of African American people, particularly in northern urban settings. (Kindle Location 434).

The uprising in the Watts section of Los Angeles and the resistance activities in places like Detroit and Chicago set the climate for urban struggle. Black Americans in major cities were responding to the abysmal disparities in jobs, income, housing, healthcare, life expectancy, education, and a host of quality of life differences between themselves and most white Americans. Therefore, the development of the BPP in the tradition of resistance of Africana people was a necessary idea in the black world.

Challenging Abuses of Power

In Bloom and Martin's book *Black Against the Empire* (2013), after a traffic altercation with police, BPP minister of defense, Huey P. Newton, declared to a crowd of black citizens that police were "occupying our community like a foreign troop that occupies territory" (p. 46). This was one of the issues that would eventually lead to a nationwide thrust for autonomy, sovereignty, and authority in black communities throughout the USA. The reality of resistance was understood by the BPP's interpretation of the Declaration of Independence which offers a window into the mandate that drove the organization in 1967:

> But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably 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. (July 4, 1776).

The BPP understood, just as in a similar vein literary icon James Baldwin had prophesized, that if things continued in American society against the interests of the black world as business as usual, there would always be *A Fire Next Time* (Baldwin, 1963). Baldwin believed that if America did not come to terms with its structural, institutional, and systemic abuses of Black Americans, then there would always be civil disturbances in the USA.

Similarly, the Declaration of Independence as understood by Danielle Allen (2014) in her book, *Our Declaration: A Reading of the Declaration of Independence*, writes, "What's more, in the last half century, our public discourse has focused on burnishing the concept of liberty, not equality" (p. 22). Allen's assessment rings a tone of congruence to the BPP exposure of the hypocrisy in America's treatment of Black Americans because in the 1950s, Negroes were told to salute the flag and ordered to get in the back of the bus simultaneously. This was reflected with some young Black Americans' exhaustion with the gradualism of the main stream Civil Rights Movement. Allen (2014) posits, "Because we have accepted the view that there is a trade-off between equality and liberty, we think we have to choose" (p. 22). Because the BPP refused to choose between equality and liberty, this work maintains that the BPP was a revolutionary project of human freedom. The BPP must be understood as more than a collection of individuals emboldened with cursory philosophical readings and the vigor of youth. The BPP must be chronicled and appreciated as a stalwart organization dedicated to the highest principles of humankind and egalitarian ideals in the face of totalitarian racialized opposition.

The Black Panther Party and the African Worldview's Virtuous Alignment

The BPP has been widely misunderstood historically for not embracing African culture; even though it was deeply involved in the idea of "black is beautiful." It is also incorrectly analyzed as a narrowly focused organization, which contained no observable African cultural values or realities (Yahweh, 2005). BPP member George Murray in 1968 once spoke of the type of culture the organization must aspire to; as written by Bloom & Martin (2014),

> The only culture worth keeping is the revolutionary culture… Our culture must not be something that the enemy enjoys, appreciates, or says is attractive, it must be repelling to the slave master. It must smash, shatter and crack his skull, crack his eyeballs open and make water and gold dust run out… We are changing, we are deciding that freedom means change, changing from the slaves, the cowards, the boys, the toms, the clowns, coons, spooks, of the 50's, 40's, 30's, into the wild, courageous, freedom, fighting, revolutionary black nationalists. (p.12).

The work at hand is not set to investigate or examine the position of George Murray. However, this paper will explore the communal work done by the BPP and posit that the BPP service programs were in *virtuous alignment* with an African worldview, specifically the tenet (communalism). While the BPP did not put a lot of energy into the sartorial splendor of Africa, the continent was clearly in its soul as it sought to help people of African descent in America. It would be very difficult to not see the BPP's cosmological alignment with Africa as Beatty (2002) maintains:

> African people fundamentally understand the world in terms of we, in terms of the interrelatedness and interconnectedness of the Creator, cosmos, society, and the person. This view determines what we see as truth, how we see truth, and act upon the world with this truth. (p. 213).

In its nascent stages, one of the central ideas of the BPP was to be a stop gap measure to end police abuses in black communities in Oakland, California. However, as the organization evolved, a practical framework emerged and the BPP began to develop a community-based self-help agenda with a fully actualized African emphasis

Table 1 BPP service to the people programs

Intercommunal Youth Institute	People's Free Employment Program
Community Learning Center	People's Cooperative Housing Program
Seniors Against a Fearful Environment (SAFE)	Child Development Center
People Free Medical Research Health Clinics	People Free Shoe Program
Sickle-Cell Anemia Research Foundation	Peoples Free Clothing Program
People Free Ambulance Service	Free Plumbing and Maintenance Program
Free Breakfast for Schoolchildren Program	Peoples Free Pest Control Program
Free Food Program	Legal Aid and Educational Program
	Landbanking

on communalism vis-à-vis its survival and service programs. To understand this proposition, it is important to consider the overarching idea of the service component of the BPP. Without an understanding of the outreach programs that helped to define the service wing of the BPP, it is difficult to have an authentic appreciation of the full compass of the BPP and its alignment with pre-colonial African ways of being.

The list in Table 1 is representative, but not exhaustive, of the entire corpus of the service to the people programs of the BPP located in the book, *The Black Panther Party: Service to the People Programs* (2008), edited by David Hilliard.

The most well-known service to the people program was the Free Breakfast for School Children Program. As Hilliard (2008) articulates, "The Free Breakfast for Schoolchildren Program was the first survival program implemented by the Black Panther Party. Initiated in Oakland, California, the breakfast program provided a free hot, and nutritionally balanced breakfast for any child who attended the program" (p. 30). Giving children a hot meal in the morning would contribute to their overall wellbeing both in and out of school. Jeffries & Jones (1998) write, "Feeding hungry school-age children, the Party's free breakfast program constituted the cornerstone of the BPP's survival programs" (p. 29). As per Hilliard (2008), this program was the catalyst for the breakfast programs that exist today. Another vital, but not as well-known, service program was the Free Food Program. Hilliard (2008) posits,

> The intent of the Free Food Program is to supplement the groceries of Black and poor people until economic conditions allow them to purchase good food at reasonable prices. The Free Food Program provides two basic services to the community: 1) An ongoing supply of food to meet their daily needs 2) Periodic mass distribution of food to reach a larger segment of the community than can be reached from the ongoing supply. (p. 36).

These two examples of the BPP service to the people programs are reflective of the many programs (see Table 1) that qualify by any standard of self-help/self-determination initiatives that fit clearly into a communal ideological orientation vis-à-vis a distinct framework of an African worldview and value systems. In addition, these two programs demonstrate full alignment with the original idea of the collective fully expressed in African Cosmology. It is important to note that the BPP had a communal commitment to the welfare of all Americans as many so-called minorities including Hispanics, Filipinos, and some whites, took part in and benefitted from the various service-survival programs and community centered initiatives in northern California.

In the twenty-first century, it is appropriate to trace how the BPP, an African worldview, and the principles of the collective have *virtuous alignment* for future generations to understand the holistic egalitarian operational ethos of the BPP. As BPP scholar Charles Jones writes, in Judson L. Jeffries (2010) volume titled: *On the Ground: The Black Panther Party in Communities across America*, "By 1970 the Black Panther Party (BPP) mushroomed from a locally based California group into an international phenomenon with official units in twenty-eight states and the District of Columbia" (p. 3). On a much larger scale, the BPP party's service components as well as its charitable and egalitarian sacrifices for Black Americans and others gave powerful illumination to what America proclaimed. This reality is

best understood in the words inscribed on the Statute of Liberty by Emma
Lazarus:

> Give me your tired, your poor,
> Your huddled masses, yearning to breathe free,
> The wretched refuse of your teeming shore,
> Send these, the homeless, tempest tossed,
> I lift my lamp beside the golden door (1886).

Examining the words of Emma Lazarus helps provide the understanding that the
BPP through its service programs was also a symbol of Black Americans' quest for
liberty in an American context eight decades later.

The Black Panther Party and Subject Position

In 1967, the role of the state and its machinations were challenged by the BPP not only when
its members found themselves on the floor of the California statehouse fully armed but also
in how the organization approached and used the constitution to remind the status quo that
Black Americans were subjects and not objects of human reality. The agenda and platforms
of full participatory American citizenship brought forth by the BPP clearly pre-date but are in
concert with the Afrocentric idea of bringing black people from the margins to the center of
analysis of all phenomena concerning people of African descent. In 1980, scholar Dr. Molefi
Asante, building on the work of Dr. W.E.B. Dubois and Dr. Carter G. Woodson, wrote the
book, *Afrocentricity: The Theory of Social Change.* In response to American and global
exclusion of people of African descent, Asante (2006) addressed this reality; he states:

> The Afrocentric Idea is essentially about location. Because Africans have been
> moved [off] our own cultural and historical terms, decentered by the conditions of
> oppression, it is important that any assessment of the African condition or
> analysis of African phenomena be made Afrocentrically. (p. 152).

The BPP as an organization was in constant Afrocentric revolutionary dialog
(through its service programs) with the state to force the status quo to recognize the
subject position of Black Americans. The BPP was dedicated to granting Black Amer-
icans their rights to human agency and forging a clear path to collective advancement.
As a theoretical construction, Afrocentricity refuses to submit to the voice of oppression
vis-à-vis an anti-egalitarian final vocabulary. Mazama (2003) illuminates this point
about the nature of the Afrocentric idea; she maintains:

> The Afrocentric idea rests on the assertion of the primacy of the African
> experience for African people. Its aim is to give us our African, victorious
> consciousness back. In the process, it also means viewing the European voice
> as just one among many and not necessarily the wisest one. (p. 5).

Any revolutionary movement must have a launch point at its core to bring forth change,
and this article maintains that the agency of Black Americans was the core issue that drove
the engine of the BPP. This research argues that the BPP's ideational framework must be
included by scholars, along with Nat Turner, Marcus Garvey, Dr. W.E.B. DuBois, Paul

Robeson, and a list too long for the purposes here, when the subject of Afrocentric thought is discussed in the twenty-first century because of two realities: *agency and subject position*. This is a legacy of the BPP that must extend into scholarly circles when discussing African-centered social and political thought in the current intellectual climate. As an agent of Black American agency, through its messaging of black consciousness, the BPP served a crucial role in the development of an agentive forward thrust for Africans in America. The BPP represented a long-awaited reality in that part of America in terms of its ability to take matters into its own hand as Seale (1970) posits, "What the Black Panther Party has done in essence is to call for an alliance and coalition with all of the people and organizations who want to move against the power structure" (p. 70). The organization had grown tired of depending on the system to provide the day-to-day items of citizenship that most Americans could enjoy and take for granted.

The Black Panther Party's Resistance to an Anti-Egalitarian Final Vocabulary

Richard Rorty's term the final vocabulary is of service in understanding what the BPP was in opposition to on a grand scale. Rorty (1989) writes, "The opposite of irony is common sense. For that is the watchword of those who unselfconsciously describe everything important in terms of the final vocabulary to which they and those around them are habituated" (p. 74). The term *habituation* is of importance as it is generally understood to mean to become accustomed to something. Rorty writes, "To be commonsensical is to take for granted that statements formulated in that final vocabulary suffice to describe and judge the beliefs, actions and lives of those who employ alternative final vocabularies" (p. 74).

The final vocabulary about Black Americans which was put forth by many members of the dominant majority in the late 1960s was wide ranging and vast. There existed a final vocabulary that located this population as inherently criminal, shiftless, lazy, dependent, mentally deficient, but physically gifted and many others. The BPP defended Black Americans (and others who could not defend themselves) agentive rights to create their own vocabulary by deeply embracing an entirely new understanding of themselves that emerged from a new oppositional discourse and an emerging black esthetic. Resistance-driven rhetorical stances such as black is beautiful, and a new form of protest music, such as, "Say it loud I'm black and I'm proud," by James Brown took center stage. This crafted a new foundation for the Black American mirror of self as Rorty (1989) writes, "Simultaneously, we revise our own moral identity by revising our own final vocabulary" (p. 80). Clearly, the BPP was also a project of de-habituating Black Americans from the final vocabulary of racialized oppression and self-doubt. This public process of de-habituation is a way of looking back at the BPP as they (and other groups not mentioned here) became the architects of agency for the Black American, even in their use of oppositional language. What the BPP understood clearly was the reality that discursive communities set the climate for the acceptance of ideologies as Fiske (1996) maintains, "Discourse, then is always a terrain of struggle, but the struggle is never conducted on a level field. The dominant discourses, those that occupy the mainstream, serve dominant interests, for they are products of the history that has secured their domination" (p. 5). How the BPP put forth resistance through language was vital as Fiske (1996) maintained, "We use discourse, then, both to form

our sense of the social world and to form the relations by which we engage in it" (p. 6). As Seale (1970) posits,

It is the power structure who are the pigs and hogs, who have been robbing the people; the avaricious, demagogic ruling class elite who move the pigs upon our heads and who order them to do so as a means of maintaining their same old exploitation. (p. 70).

Consequently, the resistance platforms and rhetorical mantras that the BPP put forth was critical, such as pigs, picking up the gun, power to the people, and others; they re-directed many Black Americans toward an understating of law enforcement as the "Other" and to re-invent how they saw their agency and possibility in the world. Just like the BPP in its origins, the Afrocentric idea is opposed to hegemonic ideational forces.

The BPP must be understood for their attempts to destabilize the status quo's entrenched final vocabulary and studied for their dedication to thrust Black Americans into an understanding of their potential for being agentive agents in their pursuits of collective advancement. In retrospect, an Afrocentric analysis of subject position makes this a duty-bound reality of the BPP as it fought against the machinations of the state. Locating Black Americans as subject and not object allowed the BPP to engage in righteous struggle with a divine sense of mission and purpose in militant affirmation of black humanity. As Dr. W.E. B Du Bois (1903) once wrote, "…this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (p. 2). It would be difficult to look at the BPP with pity because of the ways in which they represented Black America with strength, resolve, and an emboldened sense of egalitarian optimism. I see the BPP as an egalitarian project because it stood for and put forth a platform that demanded equal rights and equal opportunity for Black Americans and all people forced to the margins of American society. An Afrocentric analysis of the BPP would yield a fitting answer to the question "What is the black agenda?" Put another way, "Why is a black agenda necessary?" Malcolm X once said, "A race of people is like an individual man; until it uses its own talent, takes pride in its own history, expresses its own culture, affirms its own selfhood, it can never fulfill itself" (Sitkoff 2008, p.184). In this congruent vein of analysis and clarity, Asante (1998) writes,

If we have lost anything, it is our cultural centeredness; that is, we have been moved off our own platforms. This means that we cannot truly be ourselves or know our potential since we exist in a borrowed space. But all space is a matter of point of view or interpretation. Our existential relationship to the culture that we have borrowed defines what and who we are at any given moment. By regaining our own platforms, standing in our own cultural spaces, believing that our way of viewing the universe is just as valid as any, we will achieve the kind of transformation that we need to participate fully in a multicultural society. (p. 8).

Malcolm X was clear in his analysis of the state of the Black America at that time in American history. While the BPP was moving in the 1960s as their historical location, the notion of the saliency of Black collective efficacy must not be overlooked no matter what the time period is in question. The Afrocentric focus on agency does not presuppose a time limit and does not go in and out of style like a pair of shoes. In its time, the BPP was clear in its response to the anti-egalitarian forces in American society. This organization can clearly be understood looking forward through the Afrocentric ideational framework of human agency. If we understand agency to be the ability to actualize oneself in the world,

the BPP's steadfast approach against (at that time) a totalitarian society rooted in inequality is worthy of the world's interest and understanding of it as an egalitarian enterprise. In his book, *Why We Can't Wait*, Dr. Martin Luther King (1964) writes in the section titled "Letter from Birmingham Jail,"

> You deplore the demonstrations taking place in Birmingham. But your statement, I am sorry to say, fails to express a similar concern for the conditions that brought about the demonstrations. I am sure none of you would want to rest content with the superficial kind of social analysis that deals merely with the effects and does not grapple with the underlying causes. It is unfortunate that demonstrations are taking place in Birmingham, but it is even more unfortunate that the city's white power structure left the Negro community with no alternative. (p. 79).

History has documented the angst that Dr. King wrote about detailing the lack of empathy and action of many of America's power holders in the south. As fate would have it, this same existential angst would inhabit the soul of the BPP. However, the BPP sought not only a methodology of resistance but also a new approach to structural, institutional, and systemic abuse and neglect in how they stood dignified and defiant in ways America was surprised by. A new generation of black activism, black spirit, black energy, and black power was now carved into the human landscape of America.

Conclusion

The long-standing efforts of American society to subjugate, define, and reduce the full humanity of people of African descent (Black Americans specifically) has a long and determined shelf life in human history. In the late 1960s, the BPP had grown tired of being strangers in their own house. The BPP understood that Black Americans were not illegal aliens, refugees, undocumented workers, or people seeking political asylum in America. This population represented fully actualized American citizens who were due the full rights and privileges under the US constitution.

As the organization's 50th year is in full review, the BPP's legacy depends on the scholarly agenda and intellectual trajectory of the individual researcher. Therefore, this organization must be considered by all as a project of human agency. In terms of historical analysis, it is time that as much energy and attention be given to the totality of the platforms of the BPP and their alignment with African principles, as well as the vast amount of time and attention allotted to the examination of individual personalities within the BPP. Historical consideration must include attempts to illuminate the meaningful attempts by the BPP at developing its survival-service component for the black world, in addition to highlighting its development of oppositional language and discourse. As an organization that was fighting both the debilitating effects of a racialized worldview in American society and the focused determination of the full apparatus of the state to orchestrate its demise, the BPP must also be considered as a project that will forever have influence and impact on the imagination of egalitarian thinkers.

The popular imagination may perhaps know about the BPP through information that emphasizes the heroic philosophies and personalities of the founding icons of the movement which they deserve; however, I believe that equal time and attention to

the BPP as it relates to African principles is in order and timely as the 50-year anniversary is at hand. The BPP served many purposes in the historical realities of collective efficacy and collective agency initiatives of the Black American. In the final analysis, the BPP sought to break Black America's unsolicited and unsigned social/racial contract with the USA. Unfortunately, in this contemporary moment, the observation exists that locates the BPP as an idealized, romantic vision of blackness. The BPP was much more than is understood in the current popular imagination. In January 2016, after the movement was embraced as the halftime diversion by a popular R&B singer who termed it "formation," strange articulations of the movement emerged. A plethora of clothes, hairstyles, and so-called militant oratorical stances became the flavor of the month in much the same way Che Guevara has become a t-shirt or a hat at wealthy private colleges for progressive students. One would hope that the BPP at some point does not become symbolic imagery as it adorns a plastic coffee cup at McDonalds during the month of February.

The lasting historical legacy of the BPP movement deserves much more than corporatization by a new generation of Americans who have not been introduced to the BPP from an intellectual and scholarly systematic analysis in a structured setting, whether that be in a classroom or at the organic level. What this work sought to do was to bring attention to the pedestrian, perfunctory interpretations of the BPP as an organization that has no appreciable amount of connection to an African worldview or praxis. One cannot authentically speak of the BPP as a self-defining, self-determining organization and at the same time suggest that because this organization was geographically located in America and fought its wars in the USA that its programs served no African interests vis-à-vis Black Americans. It should be noted here that in reality, an African worldview was a sine qua non in the community outreach initiatives of the BPP. The future of the BPP rests in the hands of responsible egalitarians that write and engage in the proper narratives about this multifaceted, multidimensional movement. The BPP was more than perfectly coiffed Afros, gloved black fists, and youthful angst directed wantonly. It was the manifestation of a concentrated holistic ancestral memory of what was a duty-bound responsibility to engage in recovery and transformation. In this the 50th year of the celebration of the BPP, questions remain about what the organization's legacy should be. Future generations will determine the place for the BPP in history like all things in human time, but it is hoped that the full compass of the ideas and attempts by this organization must be judged *not* by what it did not accomplish but by the things the BPP tried to do.

References

Allen, J. (2000). *Without sanctuary: lynching photography in America.*

Allen, D. (2014). *Our declaration: a reading of the declaration of independence in defense of equality.* New York NY: Liveright Publishing Corporation.

Asante, M. K. (1998). *The Afrocentric idea (rev. ed.).* Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Asante, M. K. (2006). Afrocentricity and the Eurocentric hegemony of knowledge: contradictions of place. In J. Young & J. E. Braziel (Eds.), *Race and the foundations of knowledge: cultural amnesia in the academy* (pp. 145–154). Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press.

Baldwin, J. (1963). *The fire next time.* New York: The Dial Press.

Beatty, M. H. (2002). Maat: the cultural and intellectual allegiance of a concept. In J. H. Carruthers & L. C. Harris (Eds.), *African world history project: the preliminary challenge* (pp. 211–244). Los Angeles: Association for the Study of Classical African Civilizations.

Bloom, J., & Martin, W. E. (2014). *Black against empire: the history and politics of the black panther party*. Los Angeles CA: University of California Press.

Du Bois, W. E. B. (1903). *The souls of black folk*. New York: Dover Pubications.

Fiske, J. (1996). *Media matters: race and gender in U.S. politics (rev. ed.)*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Hilliard, D. (2008). *The black panther party: service to the people programs*. Albuquerque NM: University of New Mexico Press.

Jeffries, J. L. (2002). *Huey P. Newton: the radical theorist*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi.

Jeffries, J. L., & Sabat, R. N. (2010). The second installment. In J. Jeffries (Ed.), *On the ground: the black panthers in communities across America (pp.ix)*. Jackson: University of Mississippi Press.

Jones, C. E. (1998). *The Black Panther Party (reconsidered)*. Baltimore: Black Classic Press.

Jones, C. E. (2010). Arm yourself or harm yourself: People's party II and the black panther Party in Houston, Texas. In J. L. Jeffries (Ed.), *On the ground: the black panthers in communities across America* (p. 3). Jackson: University of Mississippi Press.

Jones, C.E. & Jeffries, J.L. (1998). Don't believe the hype: Debunking the panther mythology. In C. Jones (Ed.), *The Black Panther Party reconsidered* (Retrieved from Amazon, Kindle Location 434).

Kendi, I. X. (2016). *Stamped from the beginning: the definitive history of racist ideas in America*. New York: Nation Books.

King, M. L. (1964). *Why we can't wait*. New York: Harper & Row.

Mazama, A. (2003). *The Afrocentric paradigm*. Trenton: Africa World Press, Inc..

Murray, G. (1968). "For a revolutionary culture", *Black Panther. September, 7*(1968), 12.

Rorty, R. (1989). *Contingency, irony and solidarity*. New York NY: Cambridge University Press.

Seale, B. (1970). *Seize the time: the story of the Black Panther Party and Huey P. Newton*. New York: Random House.

Shih, B., & Williams, Y. R. (2016). *The black panthers: portraits from an unfinished revolution*. New York: Nation Books.

Sitkoff, H. (2008). *The struggle for black equality, 1954–1980*. New York: Hill and Wang.

Spencer, R. C. (2016). *The revolution has come: black power, gender, and the Black Panther Party in Oakland*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Wilkerson, I. (2010). *The warmth of other suns: the epic story of America's great migration*. New York: Random House.

Yahweh, B.L. (2005) Critique of the Black Panther 10 point program: contradictions to African agency. African Holocaust, Retrieved from http://www.africanholocaust.net/news_ah/critiqueblackpanther.html