

# Comrade Sisters

## Women of the Black Panther Party

Stephen Shames  
Ericka Huggins

DISCUSSION AND RESOURCE GUIDE



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ART  
BOOKS

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## WELCOME

Welcome to the *Comrade Sisters Women of the Black Panther Party* Discussion and Resource Guide. This is intended as a companion project to the photo journal book, coauthored by Stephen Shames and Ericka Huggins, to foster conversation and further research about the history and varied legacies of women who were members or supporters of the Oakland-based organization, conceived in 1966, which continues to have international impact. The images and voices of women throughout the book encourage us to shift our gaze and see organizing through their eyes and their lives. This guide is intended for all ages and experiences and is designed as both a source of information and a wealth of resource for further research. Enjoy!

California  
Washington  
Oregon  
Wisconsin  
Iowa  
Missouri  
Michigan  
Illinois  
Indiana  
Texas  
Louisiana  
Massachusetts  
Ohio  
North Carolina  
Pennsylvania  
New Jersey  
Maryland  
Colorado  
Washington,DC  
New York  
Connecticut  
Tennessee  
Georgia  
Virginia  
Nevada  
Alabama  
Kansas  
Nebraska  
Kentucky  
Algiers, Algeria

BPP Chapter Locations 1966-1982

# BPP FOR SELF-DEFENSE 10 POINT PLATFORM AND PROGRAM

Bobby Seale and the late Dr. Huey P. Newton founded the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense in Oakland, California, and drafted the Party's charter document in October 1966. The document included two parts for each Point: a statement of what the organization wanted and why they believed it was necessary. The chart below is a list of what they wanted (part 1) and does not include their explanation for each. (part 2) The 10 PPP received an update in March 1972, reflecting a shift in the Party's ideological framework.

**Discuss:** Read both versions of the 10 Point Platform and Program and compare and contrast the similarities and differences. Discuss the impact of the BPP 10 PPP then; the impact now.

\*Changes to the 1972 platform are in bold.

OCTOBER 1966

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

We want full employment for our people.

We want an end to the robbery by the CAPITALIST of our Black Community.

We want decent housing fit for shelter of human beings.

We want education for our people that exposes the true nature of this decadent American society.

We want all Black men to be exempt from military service.

We want an immediate end to POLICE BRUTALITY and MURDER of Black people.

We want freedom for all Black men held in federal, state, county and city prison and jails.

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 want land, bread, housing, education, clothing, justice and peace.

1

We want freedom. We want power to determine the destiny of our Black **and oppressed communities.**

2

We want full employment for our people.

3

We want an end to the robbery by the capitalist of our Black **and oppressed communities.**

4

We want decent housing fit for shelter of human beings.

5

We want education for our people that exposes the true nature of this decadent American society.

6

**We want completely free healthcare for all Black and oppressed people.**

7

We want an immediate end to police brutality and MURDER of Black people, **other people of color, all oppressed people inside the United States.**

8

**We want an immediate end to all wars of aggression.**

9

We want **freedom for all Black and poor oppressed people now held in U.S. federal, state, county, city and military prisons and jails. We want trials by a jury of peers for all persons charged with so-called crimes under the laws of this country.**

10

We want land, bread, housing, education, clothing, justice, peace **and people's community control of modern technology.**

MARCH 1972

# BPP WOMEN'S HISTORY

What happens when we believe what Black women tell us about their experiences? When we believe Black women, their deeds and words tell us everything we need to know.

The young people who became Black Panther Party members are part of a tradition of social justice workers. There was nothing superhuman about them. They were on average, 15-19 years old, with mid-late 20-year-old Party members as the outliers.

Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale co-founded the BPP in Oakland on October 15, 1966, drafted the 10 Point Platform and Program, and Artie Seale and Newton's then-girlfriend, La Verne, typed the document on stencils for reproduction and distribution. Artie eventually would become a BPP member, but at this earliest stage, the two women were using their skills to help the message reach the community.

That is only the beginning of womens' imprint on the Party's organizing history.

The women's narratives in *Comrade Sisters* reveal a variety of reasons they were drawn to the Party.

They were looking for answers to help explain what they were experiencing and observing around them. Often, they attended a meeting and were amazed to find others who were also looking to make a difference in the world around them.

BPP women were grassroots organizers and party leaders. They were elections workers and teachers. They sold newspapers and cooked meals for schoolchildren and their comrades. They edited the Party paper, designed fliers, and were speakers at community and coalition-events. They served in elected offices and used their skills alongside their male comrades to help elect politicians.

Additionally, BPP women worked in the medical clinics, as Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs) and clinic workers. They were artists, musicians, poets, dancers, and authors, newspaper editors, photographers, mothers, and public speakers.

Some also were freedom fighters, within their ranks for themselves and each other, against discrimination, sexism, and misogyny.

Black Panther Party women were not only based in the United States, they also were in the Party's international chapter in Algiers, which opened in 1969.

They were inspired by revolutionary women in other countries and inspired women in other countries. The voices of women who were in the Polynesian Panther Party in Auckland, New Zealand, in this book are an example of groups that were inspired by the Party's community work.

Women of the BPP stood shoulder to shoulder with their comrades to challenge racism, fascism, capitalism, sexism, ablism, agism, homophobia, educational and health disparities, and countless other structural challenges. The results were varied, and the fight continued.

Self-care was something with which BPP women struggled most. The advice they share is thoughtful and simultaneously haunting. Many have spent decades continuing the work they began as teenagers and young adults. Not all landed on their feet initially. There was no social security for community organizers. They had to learn to take care of themselves in order to be able to care for the people. Their fight continues.



# BPP SURVIVAL PROGRAMS

## 1966-1982

### Survival Programs Mentioned in the Text

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Community Police Patrols

Free Breakfast for  
Schoolchildren Program

Free Health Clinics

Free Sickle Cell Anemia Testing

Education Programs for  
Children and Adults

The Intercommunal Youth  
Institute (IYI)

The Oakland Community  
School Free Clothing Program

Free Shoe Program

Seniors Against a Fearful  
Environment (S.A.F.E.) Program

Free Food Program

Free Ambulance Program

Free Bussing to Prisons  
Program

Legal Aid

Child Care Centers

Teen Program

Black Panther Newspaper

Voter Registration

Women of the BPP played a critical role in implementing greater than 60 community survival programs the BPP implemented across the nation and those they inspired in other countries. They note that love for the community inspired their commitment.

Their childhood experiences, observations of or experiences with police brutality, hunger and even watching violence against students who were desegregating schools weighed on their conscious.

The most referenced community program is The Free Breakfast for Schoolchildren Program (FBSCP). The women recalled volunteering as young as age 14. Pregnant and new mothers volunteered, bundling their babies in the pre-dawn hours to travel to the breakfast program site to begin cooking so the food would be ready for the schoolchildren's arrival. The FBSCP brought communities together.

The first FBSP began at Oakland's St. Augustine Church in January 1969 and quickly spread across the country. Children of all backgrounds attended. National Headquarters required each chapter and branch office to host a FBSC Program and sell the BPP newspaper.

The FBI and local law enforcement attacked these programs, arguing the Panthers used free food as opportunities to "brainwash" and recruit the children, a charge they were never able to prove, but used to justify destroying food during raids.

### Learn more about BPP Survival Programs

David Hilliard, *The Black Panther: Intercommunal News Service, 1967-1980* (2007)

The Dr. Huey P. Newton Foundation *The Black Panther Party Service to the People Programs* (2008)

Alondra Nelson, *Body and Soul: The Black Panther Party and the Fight Against Medical Discrimination* (2011)

Andrew Witt, *The Black Panthers in the Midwest: The Community Programs and Services of the Black Panther Party in Milwaukee, 1966-1977* (2007)

BPP Community Survival Programs List, 1967-1982  
<https://iphistoryproject.org/resources/bpp-community-survival-programs/>

# TIMELINE

Women of the BPP express varied reasons for joining. They also had varied experiences while in the Party. What happens when we include the women's historical references, specific moments in history that inspired them to join the Party when they did? What are the Party events that were most memorable to them? Shames' photographs capture many of these Party moments.

## **October 15, 1966**

Bobby Seale and the late Huey P. Newton draft the 10 Point Platform and Program for their new organization, the Black Panther Party for Self- Defense.

## **April 1967**

The Black Panther Newspaper begins as a 4-page newsletter.

## **May 1967**

Several women BPP members travel to Sacramento, CA with Bobby Seale and other party members to protest the Mulford Act.

## **October 1967**

Huey P. Newton is arrested for the murder of Officer John Frey during a shootout in which Newton also was shot.

## **November 1967**

Kathleen Cleaver becomes Communications Secretary and assists with organizing Free Huey rallies.

## **April 4, 1968**

Martin Luther King, Jr. is assassinated.

## **April 6, 1968**

16 year old L'il Bobby Hutton is assassinated.

## **January 1969**

Free Breakfast for Schoolchildren Program Begins in Oakland, Ca at St. Augustine's Church and spreads across the country.

## **January 17, 1969**

BPP members Alprentice "Bunchy" Carter and John Huggins are assassinated on the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) campus.

## **July 18-21, 1969**

BPP organizes the United Front Against Fascism (UFAF) conference to develop a platform of community control of police and political prisoner release. This led to units called the National Committees to Combat Fascism (NCCF).

## **December 1969**

Deadly FBI raids against Los Angeles and Chicago Chapters; Chairman Fred Hampton and Mark Clark murdered. Other members are injured and arrested.

## **1970**

Bobby Seale's Seize the Time is published.

## **Aug 1970**

Huey Newton released from prison.

## **September & Nov, 1970**

Revolutionary People's Constitutional Conventions in Philadelphia, PA and Washington, D.C.

## **May 1971**

Ericka Huggins and Bobby Seale acquitted on conspiracy to murder charges in New Haven, CT.

## **March 29–April 1, 1972**

Black Community Survival Conference: BPP hosts sickle cell anemia testing, voter registration and 9,000+ bags of groceries.

## **June 24, 1972**

BPP Anti-War, African Liberation, Voter Registration, Survival Conference. 10,000 bags of groceries.

## **August 1972**

BPP candidates campaign for West Oakland Planning Committee (WOPC).

## **December 1972**

Chicago Model Cities Election.

## **April 1973**

Elaine Brown's candidacy for city council ends while Bobby Seale forces a runoff.

## **August 1973**

The party's Youth Institute moves into a new physical location in east Oakland and becomes the Oakland Community School.

## **August 1974**

Elaine Brown becomes the first and only woman chairperson of the BPP when Newton self-exiles in Cuba. Brown was leader until July 1977 when Newton returned to the U.S.

## **August 15, 1975**

After a five week trial, jury acquits Joan Little, an African American woman accused of murdering the white prison guard who raped her, the first woman in U.S. history to win using self-defense as a defense.

## **September 1980**

The BPP newspaper publishes its final issue.

## **1982**

The Oakland Community School closes. Though the BPP closes its offices, its legacy lives on.

# NARRATIVE THEMES

The strength of the Party lay in the individual experiences of the thousands of young people who formed the membership. Likewise, the strength of the *Comrade Sisters* text lies in the almost 55 narratives and the corresponding images that are visual representations of many of their words. Below are some themes and images that women of the BPP raise as significant to their lives. As you read the texts and study the photos, reflect on the women's words and on the images reflecting their work. Can you see or hear yourself in these photos and reflections? Initiate conversations using any of the themes below or your own.

## LOVE

This was the driving force behind BPP' members' commitment to serve their communities.

## FAMILY

What are the many meanings of family as discussed by the women?

## MOTHERHOOD

What are the various ways motherhood appears in the photos, and in the womens' narratives.

## COALITION-BUILDING

Where does coalition building arise in the narratives?

## EDUCATION

How did self-education influence members' attraction to the Party, work while in the Party, and organizing after leaving?

## COMMUNITY

Community can be defined by geography or a feeling one has. Choose one approach, inspired by the women's stories, and explore what it means for you.

## POLITICS

Some members were relocated to Oakland to work on the Bobby Seale for Mayor campaign and Elaine Brown for City Council 1973 Campaign. How do they discuss the campaign's impact on their lives?

## REPRESSION

Local, state, and federal law enforcement physically and illegally attacked the BPP, injuring, murdering, and imprisoning many. Explore the FBI's Counter-Intelligence Program (COINTELPRO) and the ways the government illegally surveilled and attacked women and men in the Party.

## SERVICE

What are the many meanings of "service" and what are the many ways that women of the BPP served their communities?

## SURVIVAL PROGRAMS

Their initial title for the community service programs was based in the quote "Survival Pending Revolution." What makes a "survival program" distinct from a community program?

## MEDIA

Television played a major role in society beginning in the 1950s. Explore how mainstream media impacts our understanding of the civil rights movement and the movements for reclaiming Black Power then and now.

## IDENTITY

Point 5 of the 10 PPP called for an education that teaches us a true history of ourselves in this society. Explore the ways BPP women defined themselves and discovered who they are and passed that legacy to their children and generations to come.

## CATALYST

Each narrator refers to the reason they became involved in the Party. Explore the entries to discover the varied and similar reasons individuals joined.

## LEGACY

The work Party members did lives on in different formats and locations. Explore the way BPP legacy appears in history, politics and culture.

# PROJECT IDEAS

Learning takes place all around us. Spend time thinking about how you can use the resources at hand to use the lessons from the women of the BPP and create your own history and capture your community in action. The motto of the BPP's Oakland Community School was "The World is a Child's Classroom." Keep that in mind as you consider the ideas listed below. Let them spark your imagination!

## Photojournalism

Grab your cellphone or a traditional camera and capture your community as you see it today.

## Mural Wall Matchmaking

Take a real or a virtual visit to the BPP women's Mural Project on Center Street in West Oakland. The images on the wall were inspired by Stephen Shames' photography. Match the images on the wall to images in the book.

## BPP Photographic History

The Black Panther newspaper (1967-1980) started as a 4-page newsletter and, at its height, was a 28-page newspaper with a 200,000 weekly circulation. Use The Black Panther newspaper to explore the many ways the Party used photos, writing, and art to reflect community.

## Match Photo with Story

Not all women whose stories are included in the book appear in photos. Read the captions for the names of identifiable women and note which of those women submitted stories.

## Artist Talk

M. Gayle Asali Dickson joined the Seattle BPP Chapter and transferred to Oakland in 1972. She was one of the graphic artists whose work was included on the back pages of The Black Panther Newspaper. Explore M. Gayle Asali Dickson's seven works of art and the different themes and styles.

## Youth Activism

One BPP phrase was "Youth Make the Movement." Explore the meaning of that phrase by using the photos and quotes where narrators reflect on their age and their activism. What was their connection to other organizations before joining the BPP?

## Comm/Unity Conversation

BPP women spent a lot of time in community and define it in various ways. Initiate a dialogue using the word "community", exploring the possibilities when we communicate in unity.

## Oral History

Everyone has a story to tell. Find an elder or other community member, who is willing to share their experiences.

## Intergenerational Activism

Explore the connections between Angela Davis, Ericka Huggins, and Alicia Garza in terms of activism and organizing experiences.

## International Impact

The BPP was inspired by international organizations and also inspired the formation of revolutionary organizations. Explore the stories of the women of the Polynesian Panther Party (PPP) and note the similarities and differences between the BPP and the PPP survival programs.

## Photographic Memory

*Comrade Sisters* is Stephen Shames' third photojournal book about the BPP. Shames' collections contain the most photos of children, families and women in a variety of settings. Compare the images in *Comrade Sisters* to images in Shames' *The Black Panthers* (2006) and *Power to the People* (2016).



# RESOURCES FOR FURTHER STUDY

Learn more about the Black Panther Party and women's critical role in the organization using the following material as a start. These resources reflect a variety of media and perspectives, including the voices of the women themselves.

## **BPP WOMEN IN THEIR OWN WORDS**

Kuwasi Balagoon (etal), *Look for Me In the Whirlwind: The Collective Autobiography of the New York 21* (1971)  
Elaine Brown, *A Taste of Power: a Black Woman's Story* (1994)  
Safiya Bukhari, *The War Before: The True Life Story of Becoming a Black Panther, Keeping the Faith in Prison & Fighting for Those Left Behind* (2010)  
Ericka Huggins and Huey P. Newton: *Insights and Poems* (1974)  
Judy Juanita, *Virgin Soul: a Novel* (2013)  
Akua Njeri, *My Life with the Black Panther Party* (1991)  
Charlotte O'Neal aka Mama C, *Homage* (2021)  
Assata Shakur, *Assata: An Autobiography* (1987)  
Angela Y. Davis, *Angela Davis: An Autobiography* (1974; reprinted 2022)  
Jasmine Guy, *Afeni Shakur: Evolution of a Revolutionary* (2004)

## **PUBLISHED WORKS BY, ABOUT AND/OR INCLUDING BPP WOMEN**

Jo Nina Abron-Ervin, *Driven By the Movement: Activists of the Black Power Era* (2011)  
Orissa Arend, *Showdown in Desire: The Black Panthers Take a Stand in New Orleans* (2009)  
Kathleen Cleaver & George Katsiaficas (eds), *Liberation, Imagination and the Black Panther Party: A New Look at the Panthers and Their Legacy* (2001)  
Suzanne Cope, *Power Hungry: Women of the Black Panther Party and Freedom Summer and Their Fight to Feed a Movement* (2021)  
Jasmine Guy, *Afeni Shakur: Evolution of a Revolutionary* (2004)  
Ericka Huggins and Angela D. LeBlanc-Ernest, "Revolutionary Women, Revolutionary Education" in Gore, Theoharris and Woodard (ed) *Want to Start a Revolution* (2009)  
Regina Jennings, *Panther Poems: Poetry of a Sister Panther* (2020)  
Charles Jones (ed), *The Black Panther Party Reconsidered* (1998)  
Robyn C. Spencer, *The Revolution Has Come: Black Power, Gender, and the Black Panther Party in Oakland* (2016)  
Suzun Lucia Lamaina, *Revolutionary Grain: Celebrating the Spirit of the Black Panthers in Portraits and Stories* (2016)  
Bryan Shihand Yohuru Williams, *The Black Panthers: Portraits from an Unfinished Revolution* (2016)  
Stephen Shames and Bobby Seale, *Power to the People: The World of the Black Panthers* (Abrams, 2016)  
Stephen Shames, *The Black Panthers* (Aperture, 2006)

## **GENERAL BPP HISTORY**

Bobby Seale, *Seize the Time* (1970)  
Huey P. Newton, *Revolutionary Suicide* (1973)  
David Hilliard, *This Side of Glory: The Autobiography of David Hilliard and the Story of the Black Panther Party* (1994)  
Judson Jeffries, *Comrades: A Local History of the Black Panther Party* (2007)  
Judson Jeffries, *On the Ground: The Black Panther Party in Communities Across America* (2011)  
Bloom and Martin, *Black Against Empire: The History and Politics of the Black Panther Party* (2016)  
Ashley Farmer, *Remaking Black Power: How Black Women Transformed an Era* (2017)  
Judson Jeffries, *The Black Panther Party in a City Near You* (2018)  
Donna Jean Murch, *Living for the City: Migration, Education and the Rise of the Black Panther Party in Oakland* (2010)

# RESOURCES (CONT.)

## POLYNESIAN PANTHER PARTY

Melani Anae, *The Platform: The Radical Legacy of the Polynesian Panthers* (2020)  
Melani Anae, Leilani Tamu, *Lautofa luli, Polynesian Panthers: Pacific Protest and Affirmative Action in Aotearoa New Zealand 1971-1981* (2015)  
Pauline (Vaeluaga) Smith, *Dawn Raid* (2021)  
Facebook: @Polynesian Panther Party Legacy Trust; Polynesian Panthers Documentary

## YOUNG ADULTS

Rita Williams-Garcia, *One Crazy Summer* (2012)  
Jil Christina Vest, *Women of the Black Panther Party: An Activity Book for All Ages* (2020)  
Kekla Magoon, *Revolution in Our Time: The Black Panther Party's Promise to the People* (2021)  
David F. Walker and Marcus Kwame Anderson, *The Black Panther Party: A Graphic Novel History* (2021)  
Jetta Grace Martin, Joshua Bloom, Waldo E. Martin, Jr., *Freedom! The Story of the Black Panther Party* (2022)

## ARCHIVAL COLLECTIONS

It's About Time: Black Panther Party Legacy and Alumni (Sacramento, CA)  
Stanford University, Green Library Special Collections (Dr. Huey P. Newton Foundation Papers)  
The University of Texas at Austin, Briscoe Center (Stephen Shames Photographic Collection)

## MUSEUMS AND MURALS

Oakland Museum of California – Black Power Exhibit  
West Oakland Mural Project and Mini Museum – BPP Women/Survival Programs

## FILM

*Keepers of the Dream: Seattle Women Black Panthers* (2020)  
*The Black Panthers: Vanguard of the Revolution* (Stanley Nelson, 2015)  
*Free Angela and All Political Prisoners* (Shola Lynch, 2012)  
*Still Revolutionaries* (Sienna McClean, 1998)

## WEBSITES

Intersectional Black Panther Party History Project  
It's About Time: Black Panther Party Legacy and Alumni  
MLK Research and Education Institute-Liberation Curriculum  
Seattle Black Panther Party History and Memory Project  
Seattle Women Black Panthers  
Women of the BPP/West Oakland Mural Project  
The Zinn Education Project

STEPHEN SHAMES



Photo © Heidi Gutman

ERICKA HUGGINS



Photo © Peggy Moore

**COMRADE SISTERS:  
THE AUTHORS**

**Stephen Shames** has authored 15 monographs, and his images are in the permanent collections of 40 museums and foundations. His work is dedicated to promoting social change and sharing the stories of those who are frequently overlooked by society. His two previous Panther books are *Power to the People: The World of the Black Panthers* by Stephen Shames and Bobby Seale (Abrams, 2016) and *The Black Panthers* (Aperture, 2006).

**Ericka Huggins** is an activist, former political prisoner, and leader in the Black Panther Party. She has devoted her life to the equitable treatment of all human beings, beyond the boundaries of race, age, culture, class, gender, sexual orientation, ability and status associated with citizenship. For the past 40 years she has lectured across the country and internationally. She spent 14 years in the Black Panther Party, and eight years as Director of the renowned Oakland Community School (1973-1981).

“

WE WERE EDUCATING THE WORLD. IT WAS LOVE THAT  
DREW US AND THAT’S WHAT KEPT US.”

– MILLICENT KIM NELSON

**Angela D. LeBlanc-Ernest, Discussion and Resource Guide Author**



Photo © Jade M. LeBlanc-Ernest

LeBlanc-Ernest is an independent scholar, documentarian, oral historian, and multi-media content creator. She began her academic career 30+ years ago as a Harvard University undergraduate researching women of the BPP. She has co-founded, founded, and directed several BPP-related research projects, including the Intersectional Black Panther Party History Project (IPHP); the Black Panther Oakland Community School: Community Archives, Activism, and Storytelling Research Cluster (UC Irvine Humanities Center); and The OCS Project. For questions about this discussion and resource guide, contact LeBlanc-Ernest via [comradesisters@angelaleblancernest.com](mailto:comradesisters@angelaleblancernest.com).

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