

**Neutralize and Destroy:  
The Continuing Vendetta Against the Panthers\***  
*Larry Pinkney and Gerald Sanders*

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INTRODUCTION

Perhaps no single political organization in modern US history still evokes more joy, pride, hope and debate in the hearts and minds of people than the Black Panther Party, a revolutionary, community-based, national Black political organization founded in October of 1966, which by the end of the 20th century had been physically decimated nation-wide. The Black Panthers had been “neutralized and destroyed”. Nevertheless, the ideas and programs of the Black Panther Party, for one breathless historical moment, actually shook the very foundations of the most powerful nation in the world: the United States of America. Indeed, although ultimately physically destroyed, many of the ideas and programs initiated by the Black Panther Party (BPP) survived its brutal physical decimation well into the 21st century.<sup>1</sup>

Now, in the 21st century, the principles and goals of the Black Panther Party’s Ten Point Platform and Program<sup>2</sup> remain of enormous and increasing relevance. Thus, despite the fact that the BPP was ruthlessly destroyed, its activities callously “disrupted”, many of its members viciously framed, forced into exile, railroaded to prison and/or murdered, the United States government has been incapable of destroying the ideas, hopes and aspirations of the BPP. Like the phoenix that rose from the ashes, the ideas and hopes of the BPP for Black liberation and self-determination have refused to die and continue to take root. Therefore, former members of the BPP and its very legacy are today deemed by the United States government and its many repressive forces to be a threat that is to be totally eliminated.

Our message, we believe, is a timely one, and it is hoped that you, the reader, will find our perspectives informative, important and urgent, not merely because we are both former BPP members, but because our own individual experiences in the Party started separately, from different coasts, merging in the 21st century to take up the clarion call alerting our communities to the methodical and intensifying nation-wide vendetta by the US government and its repressive agencies against the BPP, its true legacy and the Black communities from which we sprang.

Today, the situation is both urgent and critical. The sustained government vendetta against former members of the BPP and its very legacy is in reality

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\* This article is part of a series.

an attack against Black people nation-wide and is intended to frighten Black people into submission. This must be understood precisely for what it is.

### **HOW THE VENDETTA IS BEING CARRIED OUT**

The American Heritage Dictionary defines the “vendetta” as being act(s) or an attitude “motivated by vengeance [revenge]”. With the founding of the BPP in October of 1966, young Black people made a commitment to obtaining human rights that the US government deemed then, and deems now, to be “revolutionary”, including the right of Black people “to determine the destiny of our Black community” [self determination], the right to “an immediate end to police brutality”, the right to “full employment”, and the right to “land, bread, housing, education, clothing, justice and peace” (from the Ten-Point Program of the Black Panther Party, see back cover of this issue).

That the BPP demonstrated the audacity to demand these so-called “revolutionary” rights prompted then FBI Chief J. Edgar Hoover, in outlining the theme of the now infamous COINTELPRO (Counter-Intelligence Program) activities against the BPP, to declare that, “The Negro youth and moderate[s] must be made to understand that if they succumb to revolutionary teachings, they will be dead revolutionaries”.

Moreover, the BPP was scandalously labeled as “public enemy number one” and dubbed “the greatest threat to internal [US] security.” Thus began the ongoing vendetta against the BPP.

The very idea of Black people insisting upon economic, social and political justice was, in 1966 and remains today, unacceptable to the United States government and is therefore viewed as justification enough in America for taking revenge against Black people in general and former members of the BPP in particular.

The reality of extended and extensive racist vendettas against Black people is not a new phenomenon. Indeed, to this very day, the governments of the United States and Canada, in conjunction with certain European governments, harbor an active and bloody vendetta against the Black people of the island nation of Haiti, which dates back at least to the early 1800s when, during the Haitian Revolution, Black slaves under the leadership of former carriage driver and slave Toussaint L’Ouverture confounded and militarily defeated the European colonial nations of England, Spain and ultimately France and in so doing, inspired Black slaves to revolt in both North and South America.<sup>3</sup>

The active vendetta by the United States government against former members of the BPP and the concomitant distortion of its true legacy is a sustained campaign of officially sanctioned, government sponsored terror to exact revenge and destroy every vestige of the will of Black people in America in their ongoing struggle to obtain full human rights.

Individual acts of police brutality or judicial tyranny are often ascribed to obsessive mad dog behavior of this cop or that bureaucrat. But a series of these oppressive acts, begun at a specific time and carried out relentlessly through every US presidential or administrative regime, be it Democratic or Republican, clearly proves a conscious, systematic vendetta against the BPP. Out of hundreds of reported murders of members of the BPP by the police or other agents of US government repression, of at least 295 FBI operations against Black organizations, a full 233 of them were directed against the BPP. Notwithstanding the physical decimation of the Party by the US government, this vendetta continues to the present against former BPP members.

One of the most common and on-going weapons in America's vendetta against the Panthers is the use of wrongful imprisonment. Not satisfied with having physically decimated the BPP, having murdered or wrongfully railroaded its members to prison—some of whom are still imprisoned today—the US government and its many agents continue to harass former members of the BPP by attempting to have court indictments brought against them, seeking to discredit and intimidate them with bogus criminal allegations and/or threatening them or their family members with imprisonment.

### **TORTURE THE AMERICAN WAY**

While demented politicians hypocritically claim that torture does not take place in America, it is clear that not only is torture routinely practised in the United States, but that “the use of sensory deprivation as a form of behavior modification” in fact “began as an experiment with political prisoners in this country”, including first and foremost with “members of the Black Panther Party”. Indeed, among other forms of physical and psychological torture, debilitating “sensory deprivation torture” is all too common in US prisons.<sup>4</sup>

Torture inside the United States itself has been, and continues to be, an integral part of the arsenal of weapons used by the government and its surrogates against the dissidents they repress. Torture is, in fact, as American as apple pie.

US state and federal authorities have no compunction whatsoever in viciously framing and using physical, psychological and emotional torture against its own citizens, especially Black people. Thus, it should come as no surprise that American authorities today are directly and indirectly using torture against persons around the world.

As will be discussed in more detail later in this series, some forms of torture routinely used by US authorities against US citizens and most particularly against Black people included and still include being stripped naked and beaten with blunt instruments, being blindfolded while having blankets of boiling water thrown onto their bodies, being slammed into walls while blindfolded, having electric probes placed on their genitals and other body parts, having an electric cattle prod and/or other objects forced into their anus and, of course, the more blatant favorite of police departments and other government agencies nation-wide, being repeatedly punched, kicked and in general viciously beaten.

These specific forms of torture and/or judicial harassment were in fact used against former BPP members as discussed at the February 26, 2006 collective presentation entitled “How the US destroyed the Black Panther Party and continues to persecute its veterans” by John Bowman<sup>8</sup>, Ray Boudreaux, Hank Jones, Richard Brown and Harold Taylor in Oakland, California.<sup>5</sup> Black people know that there is no real question about whether the US uses torture abroad, as we are the on-going victims of its torture against us right here “at home”.

In following segments, we shall delineate some specific examples of torture and on-going harassment in the vendetta against former members of the BPP today and the impact this has on Black people nation-wide. Also, we will delve into some methods to resist and possibly even reverse some of the effects of this continuing vendetta against former members of the BPP and the necessity on the part of Black women and men of all ages throughout the United States of America to stand firm against repression.

### **NEUTRALIZE AND DESTROY: THE CONTINUING VENDETTA AGAINST THE PANTHERS**

Nothing had adequately prepared the BPP for the sustained, nation-wide, amoral, brutal onslaught unleashed against it by the US government and police. Despite the physical decimation of the BPP, these attacks upon Black Panther veterans and against the true legacy of the BPP continue in concert with corrupt and racist media.

### **NO BOUNDARIES, NO DECENCY, NO LIMITS**

To really comprehend the extent to which the vendetta against BPP veterans continues today, it is important to realize that there are absolutely no boundaries, no decency and no limits to what tactics the US government and its surrogates have used and continue to use to crush—i.e., neutralize—Black political dissent in America.

For trying to better our conditions, Black organizations and their members are investigated, harassed, illegally railroaded to jail and many times beaten or killed.<sup>6</sup>

As politically active members of the BPP, young Black men and women were “instilled with discipline and determination” and “trained to think critically”; a fact which did not and has not escaped the insidious notice of the U.S. government.<sup>7</sup> The racist, self-fulfilling fear on the part of US authorities that BPP veterans will serve to pass on “discipline”, “determination” and the art of “critical think(ing)” to yet another generation of young Black women and men is utterly terrifying to the white American establishment of today.

There can be no illusions as to the depths to which the US government and its surrogates have stooped and will continue to stoop in an effort to crush dissent and the legitimate political and economic aspirations of Black people collectively. Be clear about this: the vendetta against former members of the BPP is by no means limited to men. The BPP Party included many brilliant, determined, courageous, creative and utterly committed women. The fact is that the BPP could never have been viable without their integral and significant work, guidance and leadership. From Kathleen Cleaver to Assata Shakur, from Erica Huggins to Barbara Easley Cox, from Tarika Lewis to Safiya Bukhari to Elaine Brown, from Afeni Shakur (mother of the late rapper Tupac Shakur), the many “sisters” of the BPP Party nation-wide have incurred the spiteful ire of the US government and its surrogates for their service to Black people.

### **ASSATA SHAKUR**

Former members of the BPP are today still held in US prisons or are under continuing judicial or police assault or are in forced exile outside of the

United States. Of those in exile, perhaps the most well-known is sister Assata Shakur.<sup>8</sup> After having been critically wounded by New Jersey State Troopers and subsequently tortured in prison, former New York Black Panther Assata Shakur fled into exile in Cuba, where she was granted political asylum and remains to this day. She poignantly stated, concerning the media's depiction of the BPP that "The press always reported that the police had 'uncovered' a large arsenal of weapons. Later, when the 'arsenal' turned out to be a few legally registered rifles and shotguns, the press never printed a word."<sup>9</sup> The insidious complicity of the media with regard to disinformation, misinformation or no information was and remains self-evident.

Since April of 1995, when white supremacists committed the home-grown Oklahoma City terrorist bombing, killing 168 people and wounding and maiming numerous others, white supremacist home-grown terrorist organizations continue to run rampant in America and are coddled by a cynically racist US government and judicial system.

In stark contrast, on May 2, 2005, the US "Justice" Department, flaunting both international law and Cuban law, announced the posting of an outrageous one million dollar bounty on the head of Assata Shakur, who is living legally in Cuba.<sup>10</sup> The bounty on Assata Shakur is reminiscent of the bounties on the heads of unco-operative escaped Black slaves. It is obvious that the US government intends to re-shackle or murder Assata Shakur as part of the continuing vendetta against the Panthers.

### **MISSING THE FOREST FOR THE TREES**

What is often missed is the denial factor. The sustained viciousness of the US government towards Black people in general and former members of the BPP in particular may sometimes seem unfathomable. The insidious callousness of the counterintelligence program known as COINTELPRO, directed in large measure against the BPP, almost baffles the mind.

The response of J. Edgar Hoover's Federal Bureau of Investigation, a 'hard hitting' national counterintelligence program (Cointelpro), was of surpassing ruthlessness in its contempt for law and the civil rights of citizens."<sup>11</sup>

In coming segments pertaining to this continuing vendetta, we plan to delineate a number of cases including those of Mumia Abu-Jamal, The

Angola 3, Kamau Sadiki, Marshall “Eddie” Conway and others. The vendetta continues, but the resistance intensifies.

### ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Abu-Jamal, Mumia, *We Want Freedom: A Life in the Black Panther Party*, with introduction by Kathleen Cleaver (2005, p. 233-240).
- <sup>2</sup> Newton, Dr. Huey P., *Revolutionary Suicide* (1973, p. 116-118, New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich).
- <sup>3</sup> Bennett, Lerone Jr., *Before the Mayflower*, (Revised edition, p. 104-108).
- <sup>4</sup> Kerness, Bonnie, “Prisons and Sensory Deprivation Torture” (American Friends Service Committee, 1997).
- <sup>5</sup> Bowman, John; Boudreaux, Ray; Jones, Hank; Brown, Richard; and Taylor, Harold, “How the US destroyed the Black Panther Party and continues to persecute its veterans” (San Francisco Bay View newspaper, December 21, 2005).
- <sup>6</sup> Black Panther Intercommunal News Service (October 21, 1972, p. 6.).
- <sup>7</sup> See [http://www.itsabouttimebpp.com/Our\\_Stories/Chapter5/From\\_Larry\\_to\\_Brother\\_Billy\\_X.html](http://www.itsabouttimebpp.com/Our_Stories/Chapter5/From_Larry_to_Brother_Billy_X.html).
- <sup>8</sup> Shakur, Assata, *Assata: An Autobiography* (London: Zed Books, 1987; Westport, CT: Lawrence Hill & Co., 1988).
- <sup>9</sup> Abu-Jamal, Mumia, *We Want Freedom: A Life in the Black Panther Party* (2005, p. 152).
- <sup>10</sup> See “The Fugitive, Why has the FBI placed a million dollar bounty on Assata Shakur?” by Kathleen Cleaver. [http://www.itsabouttimebpp.com/Political\\_Prisoners/The\\_Fugitive\\_by\\_Sis\\_Kathleen\\_Cleaver.html](http://www.itsabouttimebpp.com/Political_Prisoners/The_Fugitive_by_Sis_Kathleen_Cleaver.html).
- <sup>11</sup> Thelwell, Ekwueme Michael, “H. Rap Brown/Jamil Al-Amin” (The Nation, March 18, 2002, p. 29).

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