

Ruby Dowell

You lived in North Richmond, a few miles north of Oakland, California. It was a small town of 6,000—nearly all Black. The Contra Costa Sheriff's Department, in charge of policing North Richmond, killed your brother Denzil Dowell. They claimed that after attempting to rob a liquor store, Denzil ran from the back of the store and refused to stop. According to the police he ran and jumped two fences before they shot him down. But you knew this was a lie. Denzil had a bad hip and could not run, and certainly couldn't jump fences.

There was no sign that anyone had entered the liquor store. The police officer who shot Denzil had it out for him and had threatened to kill him. A doctor who worked on the case told your family that from the way the bullets went into his body, Denzil was shot with his hands up. The police department had a history of shooting unarmed Black men, but a white jury decided that your brother's murder was "justifiable homicide."

One-fourth of the North Richmond community signed your petition demanding the suspension of the officer and a full investigation into your brother's death, but county officials refused to investigate. You called an organizing meeting to demand justice for Denzil at the local community center. Huey Newton and Bobby Seale from the newly formed Black Panther Party attended and the Panthers began their own investigation into Denzil's case. The headline of the first issue of the *Black Panther* newspaper was titled "Why Was Denzil Dowell Killed?" and you helped distribute them all over North Richmond. The Panthers began organizing street rallies and arguing that people needed to take up arms and defend our communities against racist police. Hundreds of people came to these rallies and began bringing their own guns. When the Panthers passed out applications to join the party, 300 people filled them out. You became a leader of the new chapter in Richmond.

Ericka Huggins

Attending Black Panther Bobby Hutton's funeral in April 1968 changed your life. You dropped out of Lincoln University in Pennsylvania and moved to Los Angeles in 1967 to join the movement. Los Angeles had gained a reputation for being at the forefront of the Black liberation struggle. As you later recalled, "I had read about all the things in history that had been done to Black people — lynching, murder, tortures, etc. — but [at Bobby Hutton's funeral] I was convinced when I had a direct confrontation with the brutality, the cruelty of the police. His face had been entirely shot up. He was no longer the 17-year-old person he had been. And the police were in the balconies of that church. They were everywhere." After the funeral, you continued to work in the Los Angeles chapter and committed your life to revolution. In 1969, you and Panther co-founder Bobby Seale were arrested and accused of conspiracy with the intent to commit murder. The bogus charges, manufactured by the FBI, were dropped after two years, but prison was very difficult especially because you were separated from your 3-month-old daughter.

You always believed in complete equality between men and women and understood this as a central belief of the Black Panther Party. You challenged sexist practices that occurred in some chapters of the party like women doing all the cooking and not being placed in positions of leadership. As you've pointed out, "It was women who ran all of the day-to-day operations and programs of the party." Black men in leather jackets holding guns did not reflect the everyday work of the community survival programs. In fact, you and a group of mostly female educators led the Panthers' most successful community elementary school from 1973 to 1981. The Oakland Community School in Oakland, California, grouped students by ability and achievement rather than by age. It became so popular that at one point it had a waiting list of 400.

Aaron Dixon

You grew up in Seattle and marched with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. when he came to your city to fight against housing discrimination. You attended Stokely Carmichael's speech at Garfield High School. These events helped to inspire you to join the struggle against racism. While still a teenager, you helped form the Black Student Union and Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee at the University of Washington. In the spring of 1968, while attending the funeral of teenager Bobby Hutton in Oakland, California, you met Bobby Seale who, along with Huey P. Newton, co-founded the Black Panther Party. They were impressed with your initiative and you were appointed captain of the Seattle chapter of the Black Panther Party at the age of 19 — starting the first chapter of the Panthers outside of California.

You and the Panthers created free breakfast programs for schoolchildren, a free medical clinic, the first free food bank in Seattle, a prisoner visitation program, and free legal aid service. You volunteered in the medical clinic, which provided free medical care to those who could not afford it and is still in operation to this day. The Seattle Panthers were known as one of the most dedicated chapters of the party in the organizing of the "survival programs." The party also responded to calls from the community regarding police brutality and harassment. You once showed up with an armed entourage of Black Panther Party members and confronted the principal of a Seattle high school after a Black mom pleaded with you to help her son who was repeatedly beaten by white students. You told the principal, "If you don't protect these Black kids, then we will do it, understand?" The principal promised he'd make sure nothing happens again.

One unique aspect of the Seattle chapter was its multiracial makeup. As you wrote, "It was not unusual that a handful of the new recruits were Asian. . . . These guys had all grown up in our neighborhood and identified with young Blacks in many ways." During your time as captain of the Seattle Panthers, there were multiple assassination attempts on your life, which you suspect were initiated by the police or federal government.

J. Edgar Hoover

You were the director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) from 1924 to 1972. You spent your career gathering intelligence on people and organizations that you believed were radical and subversive. You began the Counterintelligence Program (COINTELPRO) in 1956, originally to monitor the Communist Party. As the Civil Rights Movement grew, COINTELPRO's surveillance expanded to individuals and organizations participating in the movement. The goal was to prevent the rise of a "Black messiah," and therefore Martin Luther King Jr., Stokely Carmichael, and Elijah Muhammed were all targets. In addition, COINTELPRO aimed to "expose, disrupt, misdirect, discredit, or otherwise neutralize the activities" of Black radical groups. This included King's Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, and the Nation of Islam. But increasingly, the main target became the Black Panther Party, which you believed was "the greatest threat to the internal security of the country." In particular, you were concerned that the Panthers' Breakfast for Children Program was helping to win people over to its revolutionary ideas. You ordered the FBI to "eradicate [the Panthers'] serve the people programs," which also included providing free medical care, legal aid, and clothing to poor communities.

You ordered the police and the FBI to do whatever it took to break up the Panthers, including making fake leaflets and pamphlets that portrayed the Black Panthers as anti-white and extremely violent, forging correspondence between Panthers that increased infighting within the organization, sending anonymous letters and phone calls to allies in an effort to spread misinformation, hiring informants inside the organization and even sending police to raid Panther offices and programs. Although several Panthers and occasionally police were killed in these raids, you think it was all worth it. Your efforts contributed to splits in the Black Panther Party and the eventual collapse of the organization.

Donald Mulford

From 1957 to 1970 you served Piedmont, a wealthy, largely white suburb of Oakland, as a Republican assemblyman for the California State Legislature. In 1967, you began hearing reports of Black Panther Police Patrols in Oakland. The Panthers would listen to police scanners to find out where arrests were happening. They would then go to the scene of the arrest, get out of their cars with guns, and remind the suspect of his or her legal rights while intimidating police officers. In fact, on the two-year anniversary of his death, Malcolm X's wife Betty came into town to speak and the Black Panthers provided an armed escort for her—bringing guns to the San Francisco airport! They argued their way past airport security and police officers because — incredibly — what they were doing was perfectly legal. In California at the time, people could carry loaded guns in public as long as the weapons were not concealed, and the Panthers exploited this. You introduced a bill to the state Legislature to outlaw this. As you declared on the news, “We've got to protect society from nuts with guns!” But when the Legislature began to hold hearings on the bill, the Black Panthers sent an armed delegation to Sacramento. These crazy Panthers with weapons forced their way onto the assembly floor.

Luckily, this incident helped encourage the assembly to pass the Mulford Act — barring the Panthers from holding loaded guns in public. But your trouble with the Panthers didn't end there. One year later they helped influence students and teachers at San Francisco State to go on strike demanding Black and ethnic studies programs and increased enrollment of students of color. When the police arrested more than 400 people during the strike, you encouraged judges to be harsh on the student demonstrators and warned them they would face “heavily financed opposition” when they ran for reelection if they were too lenient.

Eventually through a mix of repression and concessions the university president was able to end the strike.

Huey Newton

You did not like the dismissal of your intelligence in local public schools, and by the time you entered the 11th grade in Oakland, California, you still couldn't read. When one counselor said you were "not college material," you decided to prove him wrong. You taught yourself to read, graduated high school, and went to Merritt Community College where you met Bobby Seale. In 1966, Oakland police officers beat an innocent Black girl while arresting her brother. In response, Black youth began smashing windows, attacking cars, and throwing gasoline bombs. Later that year, the police shot an unarmed 16-year-old Black boy in the back. The neighborhood again erupted in rebellion. You wanted to find a way to organize these "brothers on the block."

You began studying law and discovered that California permitted people to carry loaded guns in public as long as the weapons weren't concealed. When you read a pamphlet about a voter registration drive in Lowndes County, Alabama, you discovered that the people there had armed themselves for protection against racist violence and they used the Black Panther as their symbol. You and Bobby decided to also use the symbol and created the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense. With guns, you began following and monitoring policemen. You asserted your rights and cited the law, but that made you a target.

After a gun battle with police in 1967, you were shot in the stomach, jailed, and accused of killing a police officer. For many, your arrest was symbolic of what happened in America when Black people asserted their right to self-defense and the "Free Huey!" campaign began almost immediately. You were convicted of manslaughter, but after two years — and a massive international campaign for your release — you were freed on appeal in 1970.

One of the Panthers' central beliefs was that the Black liberation struggle was part of a global struggle against all oppression. In 1970, you issued a formal party position about the Women's Liberation and Gay Liberation movements. You stated that homosexuals might be the most oppressed group in society. By taking this position, the Black Panther Party became the first major national Black organization to call for gay rights.

Luke Tripp

In 1967, you and other Black radicals who had participated in study groups at Wayne State University began a radical Black newspaper. You wanted to use the paper to organize Black workers. Detroit was the home of the Big Three automakers: General Motors, Ford, and Chrysler. Safety conditions in auto factories were so bad that workers regularly died or lost limbs. While the automakers exploited all workers, Black workers also had to deal with institutional racism. Almost all the higher-level positions were reserved for whites.

When whites did have difficult jobs, there would be two of them assigned to a job that Blacks did alone.

When in 1968 workers went on strike at Chrysler's Dodge Main plant, Chrysler responded by firing and disciplining mostly Black workers even though workers of all races took part in the strike. As a result, the Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement (DRUM) was born and the paper you helped start became linked to an organization. By the time young people began talking about forming a Detroit Black Panther Party, DRUM had already been organizing Black workers. You and other members of DRUM wanted to protect Detroit youth against dangerous police confrontations and harness their energy into the worker's movement. DRUM declared itself the Black Panther chapter and met with Panther leaders to make it official. For a time, members of DRUM could have a dual membership in the Panthers.

Both the Panthers and DRUM had a central belief that racism could not be eliminated without getting rid of capitalism — an economic system where a few people own all the wealth while the rest struggle to get by. But DRUM believed that workers were the key to getting rid of capitalism. You were trying to organize Black workers because you saw their power in their ability to strike. The Panthers were mostly organizing disaffected Black youth and the unemployed. You felt it was important to keep membership in a revolutionary organization undercover and you wanted to present workers with images of revolutionaries that were realistic. The leather jackets, black berets, and gun-toting confrontational tactics of the Panthers may have been great for media attention, but they were not great for organizing workers. But some of the youth involved wanted to be more like the popular image of the Panthers and complained. Eventually DRUM leaders decided the Panther tactics were too dangerous and the two organizations separated. You continued to organize Black workers, forming the League of Revolutionary Black Workers with chapters in workplaces across Detroit.

Bobby Seale

You met Huey Newton in 1962 at a rally opposing the U.S. blockade of Cuba. You and Huey quickly became good friends and joined a Black revolutionary study group together. You set out to try to organize the ghetto community in the way that civil rights activists had organized Blacks in the South. Together you formed the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense and began monitoring the Oakland, California, police, which had a history of brutality against Black people. You would show up when they were arresting people, guns in hand, to make sure those being arrested knew their rights and the police didn't violate them.

By 1969, Huey was in jail accused of murdering a police officer, Martin Luther King Jr. had been killed, and membership in the Black Panther Party was growing all over the country. You helped oversee the beginning of the Panthers' survival programs. This included the Breakfast for Children Program, Liberation Schools, free health clinics, and many other services you felt that the Black community needed.

One of the Panthers' central beliefs was that the anti-war movement and the Black liberation movement should make common cause. Not only did you see a connection between the oppression of Black people at home and the oppression of the Vietnamese people abroad, but you also saw a connection in the way police treated Black people and anti-war demonstrators. Anti-war protesters at the 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago invited you to speak. After police attacked a demonstration of 10,000 nonviolent people, you told the crowd, "Every time the people disagree with the basic decisions of the power structure it sends in its arms, guns, and force to make them agree." Instead of condemning the police, the state put you and seven other white activists on trial for conspiracy to incite a riot. When the judge denied you the right to represent yourself you declared, "You have George Washington and Benjamin Franklin sitting in a picture behind you, and they were slave owners. . . . You are acting in the same manner, denying me my constitutional rights." Unable to silence you, the judge ordered you to be shackled and gagged to the chair. You continued to shout through the gag, but the judge sentenced you to four years in prison.

Eldridge Cleaver

Since the age of 18, you served time in Soledad State Prison for various crimes and became politicized behind bars. While in prison, the Civil Rights Movement fought and won against Jim Crow segregation and the anti-war movement was taking off. Your hero, Malcolm X, was assassinated in 1965 and when you got out of prison the following year, you vowed to take up his fight. In 1967, you joined the Black Panther Party and became the minister of information. You edited the *Black Panther* newspaper. You helped forge an alliance between the mostly white Peace and Freedom Party and ran as its presidential candidate in 1968. The Peace and Freedom Party was an attempt at offering an anti-war and anti-racist electoral alternative to the Democrats.

After Martin Luther King Jr.'s death in 1968, tensions were running high. You ended up in a shootout with police and went to jail. When released on bail, you fled the country. You left for Cuba and then to Algeria, where you became head of the International Section of the Panthers. The Algerian government had recently won independence and had broken off diplomatic relations with the United States for siding with Israel during the 1967 Arab-Israeli War. The Algerian government officially recognized the Black Panther Party as a liberation movement worth supporting and presented the Panthers with a beautiful two-story embassy in which you lived.

From Algeria, you organized delegations of Panthers to meet with communist countries, including North Korea, China, the Soviet Union, and North Vietnam. The North Vietnamese invited you to speak on the radio to Black soldiers fighting them in Vietnam.

While abroad, however, you became increasingly critical of the Panther leadership in Oakland — a critique that led to your expulsion and a split within the party.

Organizationally, you felt that the leadership had become increasingly undemocratic, kicking out whoever disagreed with it. Politically, in response to the police attacks on the Panthers, the leadership backed down. Party leader Huey Newton announced the Panthers would focus exclusively on social programs until the people were ready for revolution. But for you, the Panthers were more than just a social service provider; the Panthers were for overthrowing the U.S. government.

Los Angeles Police Officer Pat McKinley

You were 24 and still pretty new to the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) when the Watts riot broke out in 1965. The riot was chaos. In the aftermath, the LAPD created the first Special Weapons Attack Team (SWAT), a police unit that could be equipped with military-style gear for situations that ordinary police couldn't handle. When the Los Angeles chapter of the Black Panthers formed, the police department took an active stance in combating what you considered a terrorist organization. It was scary how influential the Panthers' ideas became in the Black community in Los Angeles. You remember patrolling and saying hi to a little Black girl who replied, "F*** you, pig." For you, it was clear that the Panthers were ruining the relationship between the police and the community. The LAPD cooperated with the FBI in sending anonymous threatening letters to the Panthers and organizations competing with them in Los Angeles. You were able to create so much tension that one organization ended up shooting and killing two leading members of the Panthers.

On Dec. 8, the SWAT team went on its first mission — to raid the Los Angeles Panther headquarters. Seventy-five police officers surrounded the building and fired 5,000 rounds of ammunition into the Panthers' headquarters. Incredibly though, the Panthers had fortified their building with sandbags, an idea that came from Geronimo Pratt, a Vietnam war veteran turned Panther. Despite that you came dressed for war — gas masks, M16 rifles, bandoliers of ammunition, armored cars borrowed from the National Guard — the Panthers fought you off for five hours with rifles, machine guns, and homemade Molotov cocktails. You eventually arrested most of the Panther leadership, but the raid backfired. The Panthers were able to get all of their liberal allies — the NAACP, Martin Luther King Jr.'s SCLC, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), and many others to back a protest against the raid a few days later. Protesters carried signs stating "Pigs Will Be Pigs" and "Stop Panther Killing."

Kathleen Cleaver

As a young Black woman growing up in Alabama, Georgia, in the 1950s, you wanted to challenge injustice. You were inspired by powerful women leaders of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) — Gloria Richardson facing off against National Guard soldiers pointing their bayonets and guns at her, Diane Nash leading Black and white Freedom Riders onto Greyhound buses that were set on fire by white mobs, Ruby Doris Robinson dispatching a fleet of cars to transfer civil rights workers across Mississippi during 1964's Freedom Summer. These women were creating a social revolution in the Deep South and all worked with SNCC, so that's where you were determined to go. In 1966, you went to organize in SNCC's New York office and then to Atlanta. You had joined SNCC at the time it took up the slogan "Black Power," and you saw the Black Panther Party as taking the positions SNCC was headed toward. The Black Panther Party started as an all-Black organization, whereas SNCC was in the process of becoming an all-Black organization. SNCC was focused on rural areas but attempting to begin projects in the cities, whereas the Black Panther Party was an urban organization.

After meeting and falling in love with Eldridge Cleaver, you decided to move to San Francisco and join the Panthers. You immediately threw yourself into the campaign to free Panther leader Huey Newton. You helped organize demonstrations, wrote leaflets, held press conferences, attended court hearings, designed posters, spoke at rallies, and appeared on television programs. You were appointed as communications secretary of the Black Panther Party. At times, during the question-and-answer session following a speech you'd given, someone would ask, "What is the woman's role in the Black Panther Party?" You never liked that question. You'd give a short answer: "It's the same as men. We are revolutionaries," you'd explain. You didn't understand why they wanted to think of what men were doing and what women were doing as separate.

Lil' Bobby Hutton

At age 16 you became the first recruit and youngest member of the Black Panther Party. You joined because you believed in the 10-point platform that Huey Newton and Bobby Seale had drafted to organize the Oakland, California, Black community. You went on the initial patrols of the police with Huey and Bobby and were part of the Panther delegation that went to Sacramento to protest the Mulford Act — a law proposed in direct response to the Panthers' patrolling of the police to take away your right to carry guns in public.

On April 6, 1968, two days after Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated and less than one year after you had joined the Panthers, three carloads of armed members, including you, pulled over to the curb in West Oakland. Within minutes, you were ambushed by several police cars. After words were exchanged, gunfire followed and you and other Panthers ran for cover. An hour and a half later, you found yourself in a basement with Eldridge Cleaver, who had been shot. Eldridge said that you should both surrender to the police but to take off all of your clothes so they know you are unarmed and wouldn't shoot you.

Eldridge left naked and was taken into custody, but you were too embarrassed. You took off your shirt and left the basement in your underwear. The police shot you more than 12 times, killing you.

A letter to the editor of the *San Francisco Chronicle*, signed by several significant people of color, compared your death to King's: "Both were acts of racism against persons who had taken a militant stand on the right of Black people to determine the conditions of their own lives. Both were attacks aimed at destroying this nation's Black leadership." While Martin Luther King Jr. became a martyr for civil rights, you were the first martyr for the Panther Revolution.

JoNina Abron

You led a relatively sheltered life as the daughter of a minister and a music teacher. But the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. in April of 1968 affected you a lot. You were in college at the time and when he was assassinated, you felt like it was suddenly obvious that his way — working within the system, nonviolently — was not going to work. Right after he was assassinated, you went with some other students to Rhodesia (today known as Zimbabwe). You were naive back then, and thought that African people controlled Africa. But in Rhodesia you were out in the countryside and saw a Coca-Cola sign. You began to understand the role of the United States and Western imperialism around the world. When you came back to the United States you finished college, went to graduate school, and joined the Black Panther Party.

While most people remember the big confrontations between the Panthers and the police, for you the Black Panthers were an organization that fed hungry children, escorted senior citizens to banks to cash their checks, administered a model elementary school, and tested people for the rare blood disease sickle cell anemia. As a member of the Detroit Black Panthers, you worked to give free hot breakfasts to children. J. Edgar Hoover, head of the FBI, at one point said that out of everything the Panthers do, the Breakfast Program was the most subversive. Subversive! You were feeding kids!

You also participated in the party's Free Busing to Prison Program. Many poor white and Black people got involved in crime and were sent to state prison. These state prisons were always far away from cities. If families didn't have transportation, they couldn't visit. You drove one of the vans that transported families to visit their incarcerated relatives in Jackson State Prison. You also helped pack and assemble care packages for prisoners and the party helped connect inmates to attorneys.

David Hilliard

Born in Alabama, you grew up in poverty. You lived with your parents and your 12 brothers and sisters in a four-room shack without flush toilets and by scraping together meals. You were impressed by Martin Luther King Jr. and nonviolent civil rights activists but you disagreed with their approach. You were taught that you don't stand idly by and get kicked; you fight for yourself. When you were 11, you moved to Oakland, California, and became close friends in elementary school with Huey Newton. All around you was social unrest — it was the spirit of the time. There was the Civil Rights Movement, with children being bombed in the church in Birmingham and women being beaten during the freedom marches. Malcolm X was killed in 1965, and you witnessed the Watts Rebellion in Los Angeles. There was a war raging in Vietnam. So, it wasn't a hard decision when Huey Newton asked you to join the new self-defense organization to counter rampant police abuses such as murder and brutality in Black communities. The Constitution guaranteed you a right to defend yourself against unjust violence, and a right to human dignity. So you were responding in self-defense to the United States' violence of bombings and killings, but also to the violence of poverty and institutional racism.

You became chief of staff of the Black Panther Party. You looked at the party a little different from the other leaders. You weren't eager to participate in big head-on confrontations with police and didn't participate much in the early patrols. You saw the party as one big extended family. It was your job to maintain communication between the central committee in Oakland and the rapidly growing local leadership party chapters that were opening in cities across the country. From August 1960 to 1970, you served as the senior ranking Panther leader, who was not either in prison or exile. Under your leadership, the party's community programs took off. These included the Breakfast for Children Program, liberation schools, free health clinics, the Free Food Distribution Program, the Free Clothing Program, the Free Busing to Prison Program, legal aid, and several others. The programs that chapters ran depended on their size and strength, but nearly all chapters ran at least a Free Breakfast for Children Program, feeding more than 10,000 poor children across the United States hot, nutritious breakfasts before they went to school. This program helped to pressure the federal government to create its own breakfast program for poor students.

Roberta Alexander

You grew up in a family that was politically engaged and socially conscious. Your father was the son of a former slave, a member of the Industrial Workers of the World, and later a union organizer with the Congress of Industrial Organizations. Growing up during the Civil Rights era, it felt natural to get involved in the struggles around you. As a young woman, you were arrested during the Free Speech Movement at the University of California, Berkeley in 1964. The protests, unprecedented in their enormous size, were aimed at getting the university administration to lift the ban of on-campus political activity — in support of civil rights struggles and against the war in Vietnam — and acknowledge students' right to free speech. You later became active in the Black Panther Party. You came to the conclusion early on that poor and working people didn't get their rights unless they fought for them and you saw the Panthers doing that.

By the summer of 1969, the Women's Liberation Movement was growing rapidly. You participated on a panel at a Panther conference on the problem of gender politics in the party. You felt that sexism in the party was a real problem. For you, the sexism in the party reflected the sexism of capitalist society. You argued that women should have the same responsibilities as men. You felt that women who were in the party at the time you were did not participate equally in leadership positions. You argued, "Black women are oppressed as a class, part of the super-oppressed class of workers and unemployed in this country. Black women are oppressed because they are Black, and then on top of that, Black women are all too often oppressed by Black men. And that's got to go." You urged men and women in the party to stay united and struggle together against sexism. "When we struggle against male supremacy, we struggle with the brothers in the party and the brothers struggle, too. Cause it ain't the sisters that are doing all the struggle." You believe that the leadership of the party agreed with you because after your participation in that panel, you were sent to represent the party at various U.S. universities, and on an international visit to Japan.

Stokely Carmichael

During your first year in college, students began a series of sit-ins at segregated restaurants across the South. By the end of your freshman year, you joined the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and headed down south on the Freedom Rides. In 1964, you organized with SNCC during Freedom Summer and were a part of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP), an attempt to win official recognition from the Democratic Party and challenge the all-white Mississippi delegation. When the Democratic Party refused to seat the MFDP, it confirmed for you that there was no hope for Black people inside existing political institutions. You applied these lessons in Lowndes County, Alabama, where you helped organize an independent political party to challenge the Democratic Party. The Lowndes County Freedom Organization chose a black panther as its logo.

In 1966, you became chairman of SNCC and led a march with Martin Luther King Jr. across Mississippi. On the march, you announced SNCC's new slogan: "Black Power!" Black Power signaled a new direction from nonviolent resistance to Jim Crow laws in the South to a focus on institutional racism across the country. SNCC began organizing in the North, but internal conflicts increasingly weakened it as an organization. As SNCC struggled, the Black Panther Party was capturing the imagination of a new generation of Black activists. When the Panthers announced you as their honorary "Prime Minister of Afro-America" in 1968, you accepted and joined the growing campaign to free Panther leader Huey Newton. For a brief but important time, during which Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated, SNCC and the Panthers forged an alliance and you helped fundraise and build Panther chapters across the country.

But your experiences in the Civil Rights Movement left you skeptical of white people's ability to recognize Black humanity. You encouraged white people to organize in their own communities. You grew increasingly uneasy of the Black Panthers' belief that their struggle would benefit from building alliances with white people. In 1969, you left the United States for Guinea, resigned from the Black Panther Party, and changed your name to Kwame Ture.

Jose “Cha-Cha” Jimenez

You joined the Young Lords, a Puerto Rican street gang, in 1959 and rose through the ranks to become its leader by 1964. You pushed the organization to provide social services for Chicago’s Puerto Rican community, giving food and clothing to poor families. But over time you realized giving gifts wasn’t going to help your people. You needed to deal with the system that was messing with them. In 1968, you met Fred Hampton, a leader of the Chicago Black Panther Party. For you, the Black Panthers were the leaders of the revolution — a model for all revolutionaries to follow. Like the Panthers, you saw the problems in the Puerto Rican community as the result of imperialism, capitalism, and racism. You began transforming the Young Lords into a revolutionary party. You wore purple berets, asserted your right to self-defense, and developed a 13-point platform modeled after the Black Panthers’ program. Your platform demanded self-determination for Puerto Rico and all Latinos, community control of institutions and land, a true education of your culture and the Spanish language, equality for women (“Machismo must be revolutionary . . . not oppressive”), opposition to the “Amerikkkan” military, and socialism in opposition to capitalism. You used the demands of the platform as a guide to organize in your community.

In June 1969, the Chicago Black Panther Party announced the “Rainbow Coalition” with the Young Lords and the Young Patriots, a group of poor revolutionary white youth. The Panthers promoted the coalition as a national model. After reading about the Young Lords in the Panther newspaper, a group of young Puerto Ricans in New York started a chapter of the Young Lords. The New York chapter quickly began organizing their community through direct action. After listening to complaints from community members about the mountains of piled-up garbage as a result of the city’s failure to clean the streets, the Young Lords organized the community to pile a 5-foot-high mountain of trash blocking off six lanes of Third Avenue. They doused the trash with gasoline and set the pile on fire. The demonstration forced the city to reassign sanitation department employees to the neighborhood to keep it clean.

Elaine Brown

After being denied service at a beauty shop because of your race, you decided to join the growing Black empowerment movement in Los Angeles. You participated in the Black Congress — a united front of Black organizations that formed in the aftermath of the 1965 Watts Rebellion. After the death of Martin Luther King Jr. and Bobby Hutton in 1968, you joined the Black Panther Party. You helped set up some of the initial Panthers' community programs, including a Free Breakfast for Children Program, a Free Bussing to Prisons Program, and a Free Legal Aid Program. One of the Panthers' demands was to free all Black prisoners. The bussing and legal aid programs gave life to that demand. You published articles about prisoner injustices, set up a correspondence network between inside and outside, sent reading materials, money, and other things necessary to survive life in prison.

In 1971, you became editor of the party newspaper, the *Black Panther*. As the national base of the party was shrinking, the national leadership decided to consolidate its political strength in Oakland, California. You ran for city council and Bobby Seale ran for mayor. Although you both narrowly lost, you won huge support from an electrified Black population. From 1974 to 1977, you were the chairwoman of the Black Panther Party and used the party's base to help elect the first Black mayor of Oakland in 1977.

You ultimately left the party because of hostility toward its female leadership. You became increasingly critical of the sexism inside the party. As you wrote, "A woman in the Black Power movement was considered, at best, irrelevant. A woman asserting herself was a pariah. . . . If a Black woman assumed a role of leadership, she was said to be eroding Black manhood, to be hindering the progress of the Black race. She was an enemy of Black people." During most of your time in the Panthers you had always thought of sexism as a secondary problem to getting rid of racism and capitalism, but you came to see your oppression as a woman as an essential part of the struggle for liberation.

Emory Douglas

You served as the minister of culture for the Black Panther Party from 1967 until the party was disbanded in 1982.

As a teenager, you did time in a youth detention facility in Ontario, California, and ended up working in the prison's printing shop. Later you studied graphic design at San Francisco City College. While there, you joined the college's Black Students Union and became politically active.

When you joined the Black Panther Party in February of 1967, you soon began doing the layout and artwork for the party's *Black Panther* newspaper. Your bold ink drawings and collages that appeared on the front and back cover of most issues of the newspaper grabbed people's attention like those of no other revolutionary artist before. You worked with other party members to help develop their artistic skills and incorporate their art into the paper as well.

At its height, the *Black Panther* had a circulation of 140,000 copies every week, distributed all over the country and around the world. Revolutionaries from coast to coast — and from Vietnam to Tanzania — were inspired by your fearless artwork that ridiculed the police and the powerful, and provided images of strong Black people fighting back against oppression. Your art memorialized Black people killed by the police, built support for party members on trial, depicted the war crimes of the U.S. government in Vietnam, and relentlessly scorned corrupt politicians and greedy business owners.

As co-founder of the Black Panther Party, Bobby Seale said of your work, "It was largely Emory's images that communicated and helped the average protester and grassroots organizer define the phenomena of who and what our oppressors were." Your art was part of the broader Black Arts Movement of the mid-1960s and 1970s and has been widely recognized as some of the most creative and lasting art of the time.

William “Preacherman” Fesperman

You were one of the first recruits to the Young Patriots, a group of poor Appalachian whites inspired by the Black Panther Party. Appalachia stretches from Pennsylvania to Alabama and is home to some of the poorest white communities in the country. The collapse of the coal industry during the late 1940s and early 1950s led to devastating poverty in the region, and many Appalachians, including you, left the South in search of better opportunity.

You studied theology in North Carolina but later moved to Chicago, where you met the Young Patriots. The Patriots released their own 10-Point Program, modeled after the Black Panthers’, that called for full employment, good housing, and an end to racism. The Patriots were frustrated by the typical view in the North of white Southerners as hopelessly backwards and racist. You called yourselves “hillbilly nationalists” and argued that poor white Appalachians constituted a separate nation within a nation — the same way Blacks and American Indians were oppressed nationalities. You encouraged Southern pride and vowed that “The South will rise again, only this time in solidarity with our oppressed brothers and sisters.”

The organizations’ newspaper, the *Patriot*, published page after page demanding the release of political prisoners, including many Panthers, and encouraged whites to abandon racism and unite with organizations like the Black Panthers to “fight the real enemy.” When the Black Panthers in Chicago began building a “rainbow coalition” to unite revolutionary groups in a common struggle, you invited Panther Bob Lee to a meeting at a North Chicago Church where you and Lee spent the meeting trying to convince poor whites to ally with the Black Panthers. When Bob Lee was arrested outside the church after the meeting, all of the people who attended — without hesitation — surrounded the police car and demanded Lee’s release. The police let Lee go and the alliance between the Patriots and the Panthers began.

Lumumba Shakur

You grew up in Queens, New York, and your father was a Black Muslim, like Malcolm X. When you were 16 years old you boarded a bus with friends after a party. You sat next to a white man in a Navy uniform who told you that where he came from, “niggers” don’t sit next to white people. When you told him that he wasn’t in the South, he punched you in the face. Others on the bus then beat him up but he told the cops you beat him. You were sent to jail. When you got out in 1964, you joined Malcolm X’s Organization of Afro-American Unity, but were put off by the sexism and started looking for another organization. After Martin Luther King Jr.’s assassination, you organized the Black Panther Party chapter in New York. Within a year, the New York chapter became one of the largest and most active in the country.

But soon the police arrested you again and a grand jury indicted you and 20 other Black Panthers — the entire leadership of the New York chapter — for plotting to bomb several buildings. The only evidence was the testimony of three FBI informants, and although the Panther 21 were found “not guilty,” you spent two years in prison while the trial proceeded. You organized prisoners to fight for better living conditions, and at one point took control of the jail from the prison guards. You demanded and received bail hearings for every prisoner. Hundreds of prisoners were released as a result of the new hearings.

While in prison, many of you also developed a critique of democracy within the Black Panther Party. The New York City branch raised more money for the organization than any other chapter, but received only a small fraction of that money. The central committee of the party was all based in Oakland, California, and you couldn’t elect local leaders to the national leadership. Yet the central committee could kick local leaders out of the party who disagreed with decisions. As the Panther 21 grew more critical of the leadership, you were kicked out of the Black Panther Party. You learned later that the FBI made all the tensions between Oakland and New York worse by sending fake letters back and forth.

Assata Shakur

As a student at the City College of New York, you became involved in the Black liberation struggle and the anti-Vietnam War movement. One summer, you decided to go to California and meet with members of the Black Panther Party. You heard about Black Panthers walking onto the California Senate floor with rifles, demanding that Black people have the right to self-defense. You were impressed by the Panthers and you decided to join the party when you returned to New York. In New York City, you worked on various Panther community programs, including a Saturday liberation school, teaching children in Harlem Black history, and the Free Breakfast for Children Program.

Over time, you grew critical of the Panthers. For you, the basic problem was that the party had no systematic approach to political education. Without an adequate education program, many Panthers became parrots, simply repeating slogans and phrases without understanding their complete meaning. The party had some of the most politically conscious sisters and brothers as members, but it failed to spread that consciousness to the average member. Part of the problem was that the party had grown so fast and there wasn't a lot of time to come up with step-by-step approaches to things. You also felt like criticism wasn't encouraged, and the little that was given was not taken seriously. Without constructive criticism, people tend to drown in their mistakes.

As the violent police repression against the Panthers grew, you were forced underground. You joined the Black Liberation Army, an underground, military wing of largely East Coast Panthers that split from the Black Panther Party in 1971. You were captured in New Jersey in 1973. During a shootout with state troopers, you were shot several times. You survived, but were charged for the death of a state trooper and sentenced to life in prison by an all-white jury, with five members who had personal ties to state troopers. It was a legal lynching. After two years in prison you escaped and received political asylum in Cuba. In 2013, you became the first woman to be added to the FBI's Most Wanted Terrorists List and the reward for your capture was doubled to \$2 million.

Fred Hampton

“You can kill a revolutionary but you can never kill the revolution!” You shouted these words to a roaring gathering of supporters of the Black Panther Party. You served as the leader of the Illinois chapter of the Black Panther Party and deputy chairperson of the national party. In December of 1969, the Chicago Police Department and the FBI led a raid on your home and assassinated you while you slept. You were killed because of your powerful speaking abilities and unmatched ability to draw people into a revolutionary struggle against racism, capitalism, and war.

You first became involved in the Civil Rights Movement by joining the local branch of the NAACP, and your charismatic leadership helped you achieve the position of Youth Council president. With this position, you helped organize hundreds of Black and white youth to force city officials to provide academic and recreational facilities for Black youth.

In November of 1968, you helped found the Chicago chapter of the Black Panther Party. One of your first initiatives as a Panther was to establish free breakfasts for schoolchildren and a free medical clinic. In May of 1969, you were able to get the biggest gangs in Chicago to call a truce and instead join together with others in a “Rainbow Coalition.” The Young Lords, a radical Puerto Rican organization, and the Young Patriots Organization, an anti-racist group of young white people, joined the Rainbow Coalition. This multiracial solidarity was a powerful threat to the institutions of racism, and many officials feared that the unity forged by the Rainbow Coalition had the potential to change the social order of the country.

In an early morning police raid of the Chicago Panthers headquarters, you and your comrade Mark Clark were killed when 12 officers shot up your room while you slept. People all over the country were outraged at what they called a politically motivated assassination. More than 5,000 people attended your funeral. Years later, law enforcement officials admitted wrongdoing in the killing of Hampton and Clark, and eventually the Chicago City Council passed resolutions commemorating Dec. 4 as Fred Hampton Day.

Angela Davis

President Richard Nixon called you a “dangerous terrorist.” FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover placed you on the Ten Most Wanted Fugitive List. But to millions of people around the world, you were a freedom fighter against racism, sexism, homophobia, and capitalism.

You grew up in Birmingham, Alabama, and lived in the neighborhood called “Dynamite Hill” because of the frequent bombings of Black homes and institutions. You finished your last year of high school in New York City and went on to study philosophy and French in Paris. In 1969, you became a professor in the philosophy department at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). However, you were fired later that year, at the urging of then-Governor Ronald Reagan, because of your membership in the Communist Party.

You were known as a close ally of the Black Panther Party and a supporter of one of their members, George Jackson, who was serving a harsh sentence for a \$70 robbery. George Jackson was one of the Soledad Brothers — the name given to three inmates of Soledad Prison who were accused of killing a prison guard. On Aug. 7, 1970, George’s 17-year-old brother, Jonathan Jackson, along with two others, burst into the courtroom where the Soledad trial was taking place and took the judge hostage. In the ensuing shootout with the police, the judge and the three Black hostage-takers were killed. When the FBI found out that you owned the guns Jonathan Jackson used, they placed you on the Most Wanted List, and you became a fugitive. Eventually, FBI agents captured you. You were charged with “aggravated kidnapping and first-degree murder,” but thousands of people around the country, and around the world, began organizing in your defense. The power of this massive campaign encouraged an all-white jury to return a not guilty verdict, finding that the fact you owned the guns used in the crime was not sufficient to prove responsibility.

You continue to dedicate your life to struggles for social justice though your teaching, organizing, writing, and activism.

Gloria Arellanes

You were born in East Los Angeles, but your first memories are after you moved to the mostly white city of El Monte, California. Early on, your father gave you a sense of ethnic identity. You came home from school one day declaring, “I’m an American,” and your father responded, “No, you’re a Chicana.” Chicana/o became a widely used term as a form of solidarity and identity among Mexican Americans. In high school, you and your friends were often called “beaners” and “dirty Mexicans,” and the schools often tracked Chicana/o students into vocational classes. Racial tensions at school boiled over into fights between whites and Chicanos. When these fights broke out, the teachers and the principal never tried to stop them and usually just called the police. On one occasion, the police drove their motorcycles through the school and into the hallways. Mostly, they arrested only the Chicanos, handcuffing them in class and taking them to jail.

These experiences led you to become more politically active. In 1967, you joined the Young Chicanos for Community Action. Within a year, the group had changed its name to the Brown Berets. The Berets wore a uniform and had a 10-point platform similar to the Black Panthers. You admired the Panthers, and in Los Angeles, you developed good relations with the local chapter. You supported their struggles, and they supported you. You knew that you both especially hated the cops and the cops hated you. Part of the informal relationship that you had with the Panthers consisted of a mutual pact that if you found yourselves in Black neighborhoods such as Watts or South Central Los Angeles, the Panthers would protect you, and if the Panthers came to East L.A., you would do the same.

As a Brown Beret leader, you participated in the massive 1968 student walkouts — a series of protests by Chicano students angered at unequal conditions in the school and helped to organize the 1970 Chicano Moratorium — the largest anti-Vietnam War demonstration by any minority group in the United States.

Richard Aoki

When you were 3 years old, your family and every other Japanese American on the West Coast — more than 100,000 — were arrested without trial, taken from your homes, and put into internment camps. After World War II, your family moved to Oakland and you joined the Army. In the Army Reserves you worked several working-class jobs, began to see the advantages of being in a union, and started to read labor history. By the time your eight years in the reserve was over, you had developed a moral opposition to the Vietnam War and decided to leave the Army and attend Merritt Community College.

There you joined the Socialist Workers Party and the Young Socialist Alliance. You also met Black Panther co-founders Huey Newton and Bobby Seale. You helped Huey and Bobby write the Panthers' 10-Point Platform, joined the organization, and became the most prominent non-Black member of the party. You provided the Panthers with some of their first guns and firearms training.

One month after the formation of the Black Panther Party you transferred to UC Berkeley. There, you became the spokesperson for the Asian American Political Alliance and the Third World Liberation Front (TWLF) — a coalition of various ethnic groups on campus. In 1968, the TWLF led strikes at UC Berkeley and San Francisco State University. During the strike, you and other students were arrested and sometimes beaten by police for blocking the entrances to campus. The strikes lasted several months and resulted in the creation of the first Ethnic Studies departments in the United States.

You stayed politically active even after the Panthers fell apart, but after your death in 2009, the FBI released documents that reveal you were an informant. To the shock of many activists who knew and admired you, the documents show that you gave the FBI information on a variety of activists and political groups, including the Black Panther Party. There is still debate, however, about why you did this. Some claim you were stringing the FBI along, providing mostly public knowledge and that your loyalty was ultimately still with the Panthers.

Afeni Shakur

Although now you're mostly known for being the mother of the legendary rap artist Tupac Shakur, you were well known in the late 1960s as a leader of the New York Black Panther Party.

Unlike others in the party who came to the Panthers from college, you were in a gang after high school. You started getting political after hearing speeches, including Bobby Seale's, on the Harlem street corners. You were further impressed by a newspaper article you read recounting the Panthers' confrontation with police in Sacramento. One Panther asked if he was under arrest, and when the policemen replied he wasn't, the Panther exclaimed, "Then take your hands off my motherf***ing gun. I have a constitutional right to have this gun." After reading that, you just waited for the Panthers to open a chapter in New York. You joined as soon as it started in 1968.

As a member of the Harlem Black Panther section, you organized tenants to have rent strikes, you organized parents and progressive teachers in Harlem schools, and worked in the Panthers' Breakfast for Children Program. Despite the important organizing you were doing in New York City, there was probably nowhere else in the country where the Panthers faced so much repression. The NYPD began going door-to-door arresting leaders of the party. With so many of the original Panther leaders in jail, you became the Harlem section leader. You felt like you weren't ready, but there wasn't anyone else to do it.

Within a few months, you were arrested too.

The 21 leaders of the New York Black Panthers who were arrested were accused of attempted arson, murder, and conspiracies to blow up police stations, school buildings, and the Bronx Botanical Garden, but the police had no evidence. The Panther 21 case was the most expensive and longest in New York's history, but all of you were acquitted. It was an embarrassment to the NYPD and the FBI, and an important victory for the Panthers.

Madonna Thunder Hawk

You grew up attending Bureau of Indian Affairs Boarding Schools in the 1940s and '50s. Signs in your school read "Speak English." All your teachers were white. Teachers used corporal punishment to keep children from speaking their language or "acting" Indian. At school, you were in constant rebellion.

In the 1960s you moved to San Francisco as part of the government's Relocation program meant to get Indian folks off their land and blended into the cities. It was the time of the Civil Rights and anti-war movements and you were drawn into the struggle.

In Minnesota in 1968, a group of Indians formed the American Indian Movement (AIM) to fight back against the widespread unemployment, poverty, and police brutality that Native people faced. Like the Black Panthers, AIM conducted police patrols appearing anywhere a fellow Native was having trouble with police. AIM worked for Indian civil rights by monitoring police to prevent harassment and brutality, and by creating free breakfast programs, free legal aid, and other social service programs. You joined AIM and shortly afterwards participated in the occupation of Alcatraz Island. According to an 1868 treaty between the United States and the Lakota, any federal land that was not being used was supposed to be returned to the Native people from whom it was taken. Since Alcatraz Federal Penitentiary had been closed since 1963, you and fellow Red Power activists thought that it should be reclaimed.

The occupation of Alcatraz lasted for 19 months, with an average of 100 occupiers on a regular basis — but more than 56,000 Indians took part as occupiers, visitors, or sending assistance. Although Alcatraz did not remain under Indian control, the incredible publicity the occupation generated dramatized modern injustices and empowered American Indians. The tactic of occupying unused federal lands was repeated by AIM several times in the '60s and '70s. You participated in every major occupation: Mount Rushmore, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and Wounded Knee.

In 1978, you co-founded Women of All Red Nations, which worked on issues affecting American Indian women. Similar to the Panthers' Liberation Schools, you helped establish the "We Will Remember Survival School" for Indian kids pushed out of and deeply alienated from the public school system. You continue your activism today as part of the Standing Rock resistance movement — working to ensure oil companies that are polluting the planet aren't allowed to build pipelines through Indian land.