



Malcolm X ♦ The Black Panther Party ♦ Stokely Carmichael(SNCC) ♦ Malauna Karenga(US)

**The Implosion of Black Power: How the FBI Used Inter/
Intra-Organizational Conflicts to Manipulate the Destruction of the Movement**

Chenits R. Pettigrew
Exodus Final Paper
Prof. Robert Hinton
May 8, 2006

--“The enemies of black people have learned something from history even if you haven't and they are discovering new ways to divide us faster than we are discovering new ways to unite.”

Eldridge Cleaver, Minister of Information, Black Panther Party July 1969

The Black Power Movement of the 1960's has been described as one of the most electrifying times in the history of the United States. After centuries of subjugation and struggle, African descendants in America approached one of the most critical crossroads they have faced in to date. A myriad of captivating and articulate leaders, or “messiahs” as the FBI referred to them, arose in hopes of ushering their people to a quality of life they were never intended to experience in American society. Nonviolence and/or armed self-defense dominated the discourse of the day as many Black people resolved to achieve a dream of true liberation. The term “Black Power” was mainstreamed by young black activist and referred to the will of the people to be self-determining and their desire to relinquish the systematic oppression of America's white power structure. Violent and destructive riots erupted in cities across the country that expressed a rage that had been contained for too long. Black people had grown weary of marching and “turning the other cheek” as they had done during the waning Civil Rights Movement. As strength and structure grew among the people in the form of organizations like the Nation of Islam (NOI), the Student National Coordinating Committee (SNCC), the Congress on Racial Equality (CORE), the Black Panther Party (BPP), and the US organization so too did the government's determination to resist any major challenge to the status quo. In addition, the intense pressures, high stakes and differing ideologies among black leadership played into the hands of the nation's ruling authority and served to dismantle the movement from the inside out. Accordingly, while government repression played a significant role in

neutralizing the Black Power Movement of the 1960's, the conflicts within and between Black Power organizations had a greater impact on the movements demise. These divisions weakened the movement and permitted the government infiltration that ensued.

The FBI's action's to disrupt the progress of Black Liberation Movements was hardly a new phenomenon at the time of the Black Power struggles of the 1960's. Marcus Garvey's UNIA movement was severely affected by efforts orchestrated by then FBI operative J. Edgar Hoover. With the onslaught of the Civil Rights Movement and a renewed platform for black liberation, Hoover, now the director of the FBI, waged an all out, government sanctioned war of repression against the movement's leaders and organizations.

Martin Luther King, Jr. was one of Hoover's first targets at the height of his national prominence as the champion of black equality in America. A series of FBI plots were initiated to neutralize his efforts in the late 1950's and early to mid 1960's. These schemes included attempts at coercing King to commit suicide in response to falsified tapes of extramarital affairs, wiretapping all of his Southern Christian Leadership Convention (SCLC) organizational offices and using media outlets to publicly blacklist King as communist. Though malicious indeed, these tactics would prove mild in comparison to those implemented against a less passive leadership of the black liberation struggle.

Malcolm X and the Nation of Islam

Under King's leadership, the goals of the movement "had initially been merely the obtaining of such elemental rights as the ballot, equal pay for equal work, use of

public facilities and the like (Churchill, 105).” Before his untimely death on May 19, 1965, Malcolm X changed the discourse dominated by King’s rhetoric. Whereas civil rights and equality were once the focus, Malcolm X reintroduced a brand of Black-Nationalism that called for a reduced reliance on and participation in Euro-American society and a staunch intolerance for oppression and injustice against black people. The high visibility and influence he was able to wield on a platform of solidarity and self-determination produced many enemies and placed Malcolm at the center of FBI counterintelligence strategies that ultimately cost him his life.

Malcolm X’s death remains shrouded in obscurity and the truth surrounding his death has never fully been revealed. What remains clear is that a grave level of conflict arose between Malcolm and a large body of the Nation he worked so diligently to build. Though Malcolm harbored minor ideological differences with Elijah Muhammad, the NOI’s founder, in regards to actively engaging issues facing black people in America, he remained loyal and steadfast. In his autobiography he gives voice to his private thoughts:

If I harbored any personal disappointments whatsoever, it was that privately I was convinced that our Nation of Islam could be an even greater force in the American black man’s overall struggle-if we engaged in more action...It could be heard increasingly in the Negro communities: “Those Muslims talk tough, but they never do anything, unless somebody bothers Muslims.”...But beyond that single personal concern, I couldn’t have asked Allah to bless my effort any more than he had (Haley 295-6).

This was just the “tip of the iceberg” in that currents jealousy, envy and betrayal were brewing in ranks of the NOI that would set the stage for his eventual assassination. As he tells Alex Haley, “As far back as 1961...I had heard chance negative remarks concerning me. I had heard veiled implications. I had noticed other little evidences of the envy and of the jealousy...For example, it was being said that “Minister Malcolm is trying to take

over Nation,” it was being said that I was “taking credit” for Mr. Muhammad’s teaching, it was being said that I was trying to “build an empire” for myself (296).” To make matters worse, in 1963 evidence surfaced that Elijah Muhammad had been involved in adulterous affairs with his secretaries that produced several illegitimate children. This astonishing revelation severely strained Malcolm’s relationship with the Nation because of his devout reverence for the “Messenger.”

Initially, Malcolm thought the Nation should not allow such a disclosure to destroy the institution. He thought, “Loyal Muslims could be taught that a man’s accomplishments in his life outweigh his personal, human weakness (304).” Instead, this strategy backfired and dissenting voices in the Nation used it as an opportunity to foster more animosity toward Minister Malcolm. He recalls, “ I never dreamed that the Chicago Muslim officials were going to make it appear that I was throwing gasoline on the fire instead of water...The stage in Chicago even then was being set for Muslims to shift their focus off [Elijah Muhammad’s Transgressions]--and onto me. Hating me was going to become the cause for people of shattered faith to rally around (306).”

Finally, his statements surrounding the assassination of President John F. Kennedy in 1963 proved to be the agent necessary to fuel the fire to silence, isolate and eventually assassinate Malcolm X. In a speech called “God’s Judgment of White America” he gave in place of Elijah Muhammad, Malcolm spoke of the age old principal “you reap what you sow.” The speech had been written at least a week prior to Kennedy’s assassination. His focus was that divine retribution would be visited on the hypocritical American power structure. Additionally, within hours of the assassination, NOI ministers were given two directives to make no comment about the incident; however, in answering a

reporter's question about the Kennedy assassination, Malcolm basically reiterated the theme of his speech and stated that it was a case of "the chickens coming home to roost (307)." Malcolm's persona had outgrown the NOI and he was, though unintentionally, overshadowing the influence of the Elijah Muhammad as a result of his charisma and blatant honesty. This statement and its subsequent backlash gave the 'Messenger' an excuse to silence Malcolm for ninety days, which Malcolm believes was the first step in a plot to silence him permanently:

...I could not evade the obvious strategy and plotting coming out of Chicago to eliminate me from the Nation of Islam...if not from this world...Any Muslim would have known that my "chickens coming home to roost" statement had been only an excuse to put into action the plan for getting me out. And step one had been already taken: the Muslims were given the impression that I had rebelled against Mr. Muhammad. I could now anticipate step two: I would remain 'suspended' (and later I would be "isolated") indefinitely. Step three would be...to provoke some Muslim ignorant of the truth to take it upon himself to kill me as a religious duty (312)

Malcolm's subsequent split from the NOI as result of these internal conflicts set him on a path to become more domestically and internationally influential than he could have been as a minister in the NOI.

As a result of various personal epiphanies, Malcolm established the Organization of African-American Unity (OAAU), which sought to "unite African Americans 'around a non-religious and non-sectarian constructive program for Human Rights (Carson, 38).'" Such a pursuit, which was strictly against NOI doctrine, made Malcolm even more powerful and dangerous in the eyes of the FBI. In the COINTELPRO Papers, Ward Churchill presents an analysis of Malcolm's death that refers to the FBI's use of the

NOI's factionalism surrounding Malcolm X exacerbated the climate for murder. He writes:

...when Malcolm X broke away from the NOI in March of 1964 to establish a separate church, the Muslim Mosque, Inc., and a consciously political black organization, the Organization of Afro-American Unity (OAAU), the Bureau undertook concerted COINTELPRO actions to block the development of alliances...Malcolm was supposedly murdered by former colleagues in the NOI as a result of the faction-fighting which had led to his splitting away from that movement, and their "natural wrath" at his establishment of a competing entity. However, as the...January 22, 1969 memo from...Chicago, to the Directors makes clear, the NOI factionalism at issue didn't "just happen." Rather it had "been developed" by deliberate Bureau actions-through infiltration and the 'sparking of acrimonious debates within the organization,' rumor-mongering, and other tactics designed to foster internal disputes-which were always the standard fare of COINTELPRO (103).

The internal conflict that plagued the NOI in relation to Malcolm X created a high level of ambiguity around his murder. Many inquired as to who was responsible, but the lines of truth had been intentionally blurred. There is no question that Malcolm's death was an objective of the FBI; however, the animosity that openly existed between Malcolm and members of the NOI gave the false appearance that he had been murdered solely at the will and the hands of his own people. He would be the first major leadership casualty in the FBI's war on the Black Power Movement.

The Coming of Black Power

By the mid-60's, as a result of apparent stifling of King's efforts, the assassination of Malcolm X and a sentiment of unsatisfactory progress, younger leaders such as SNCC's Stokely Carmichael and H. Rap Brown began to declare a much more "militant" charge of "black power."

Moreover, in addition to segments of the leadership, the masses of people were abandoning King's banner of nonviolence. People had grown weary and skeptical of the token programs and superficial governmental efforts toward change. To save face, "the government moved to defuse the situation through a series of co-optive gestures designed to make it appear that things were finally changing for the better (Churchill, 106)." It was not enough. Throughout the sixties many urban centers with heavy black populations were erupting in rebellions that cost hundreds of lives and billions of dollars in property damage. Though this "civil unrest" presented a challenge to the *status quo*, the ruling authorities had other concerns.

The *status quo* does not fear bands of disorganized people with no cohesive force; however entities with the ability to galvanize and channel purposeful rage are a different matter. Churchill asserts:

Costly as the ghetto revolts were, real danger to the *status quo* would come only when a black organizational leadership appeared with the capacity to harness and direct the force of such anger. If this occurred, it was recognized mere gestures would be insufficient to contain black pressure for social justice. Already activist concepts and rhetoric had shifted from demands for black power within American society to black liberation from the US "internal colonialism." The task thus presented in completing the federal counterinsurgency strategy was to destroy such community-based black leadership before it had an opportunity to consolidate itself and instill a vision of real freedom among the great masses of blacks (106).

In turn, the FBI, with high-level government support, initiated an onslaught of disruption programs aimed at Black Nationalists. Cut from the same cloth as efforts enacted on earlier leaders, these strategies were identical in intent, but far more intense in practice. According to actual FBI documents, the counterintelligence campaigns were designed to "expose, disrupt, misdirect,

discredit or otherwise neutralize the activities of black-nationalist hate-type organizations and groupings, their leadership, spokesmen, membership and supporters (Blackstick, 9).” In addition to this directive, agents were given wide-ranging liberties and instructed “to take an enthusiastic and imaginative approach to this new counterintelligence endeavor (9).” In other words agents could employ whatever measures necessary to bring about the desired result. With unlimited access to federal, state and local law enforcement agency resources, no tactic was beyond reach or too extreme.

“...All of our people have the same goals, the same objective. That objective is freedom justice, equality...Our people have made the mistake of confusing the methods with the objectives.”
--Malcolm X, *The Black Revolution*, April 8, 1964

Inter-Organizational Conflict

Though the FBI often resorted to excessive means to achieve set objectives, the agency consistently used an age-old method the oppressive power structure successfully employed to keep Black people disorganized and powerless: divide and conquer. The Bureau conjectured that successful coalitions among Black Power organizations that generated a unified struggle would foster a “true black revolution.” In a memorandum from FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover reproduced in The COINTELPRO Papers, the first long-range goal of the counterintelligence program outlined in this communication was to:

Prevent the coalition of militant black-nationalist groups. In unity there is strength; a truism that is no less valid for all if its triteness. An effective coalition of black nationalists groups might be the first step toward a real “Mau-Mau” in America, the beginning of a true black revolution (110).

The FBI aimed to disrupt the goals of the movement through preexisting organizational divides. This method would cloud the appearance of the agency's clandestine involvement in such activities. This is not to say that other more vile approaches were not taken by the agency, but given the climate of the organizational relationships and ideologies, the divide and conquer tradition proved very effective. In Conflict and Competition: Studies in the Most Recent Black Protest Movements, the editors note in the introduction that:

...each black protest organization adopted one or two types of social conflict as its particular strategy in its struggle for equal rights. Partly because of such differences in tactics and strategy, and partly because organizations working for the same goal tend to be rivals, the Negro protest movement of the 1960's was characterized by a great deal of inter-organizational conflict and competition (1).

The editors go further to illuminate the fact that, "By 1966 a mood of pessimism pervaded the ranks of most black militant protest organizations; and the movement hitherto, united on goal while divided by personalities and strategies, now became rank with schisms (3)." While much of the analysis in this text refers to organizations that gained prominence during the Civil Rights Movement of the previous decade (NAACP, SNCC, CORE ect.), the same issues permeated organizations born of the Black Power movement and aided the ruling authority in subduing one of the most formidable domestic threats it has faced in its history. Some scholars may argue that this is especially true in the case of the Black Panther Party (BPP). While the Party experienced some of the most violent and vindictive attacks of any organized Black-Nationalist group to date, it was also the hub of many inter and intra-organizational conflicts that gave the FBI the

means to thwart a revolution. In one of his last speeches before his death Malcolm X warned the young revolutionaries that would soon carry his legacy of the oppressors tactics to relinquish the movement. In his speech entitled *Black Revolution* delivered on April 8, 1964, Malcolm candidly remarked:

So America's strategy is the same strategy as that which was used in the past by the colonial powers: divide and conquer. She plays one Negro leader against the other. She plays one Negro organization against the other. She makes us think we have different objectives, different goals. As soon as one Negro says something, she runs to this Negro and asks him, "What do you think about what he said?"...All of our people have the same goals, the same objective. That objective is freedom justice, equality...Our people have made the mistake of confusing the methods with the objectives (Breitman, 51).

This proved to be an ominous admonition, one that would play itself out until the fervor of the movement fizzled to a lethargic crawl.

The Black Panther Party and the FBI

Founded in October 1966 by Merrit college students Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale, the Black Panther Party became a primary target of FBI repression programs. Not only were the Panthers an ideological threat to the status quo, but they had also developed several community-based initiatives that were serving black communities across the country. The Panthers had successfully developed a free breakfast program for black children, a free health care program, community education projects and an anti-heroin campaign. These works afforded them a seemingly impeccable favor among poor people and gave them a powerful credibility for national recruitment. Couple this with their dedication to self-defense and community policing and J. Edgar Hoover deemed the Panthers what

he considered the most the most formidable threat to the maintenance of the *status quo*. According to Churchill, “By the fall of 1968, the FBI felt it had identified the organization most likely to succeed as the catalyst of a united black liberation movement in the U.S. ... On September 8, 1968, J. Edgar Hoover let it be known in the pages of the *New York Times* that he considered the Panthers “the greatest [single] threat to the internal security of the country (123).” This statement was the green light for an accelerated, multilevel government sanctioned war against the Panther organization.

The FBI offensive was administered on several fronts. The agency’s heavy use of informants and infiltrators often placed the Bureau on the inside of party dealings. This vantage point presented the opportunity to cause dissension in the ranks and disrupt coalitions with complimentary organizations. Official agency documents, included in The COINTELPRO Papers, dated September 27, 1968 reveal these strategies explicitly. The communication details, “It therefore, is essential that we not only accelerate our investigations of [the BPP] and increase our informants in the organization but that we take action under the counterintelligence program to disrupt the group. Our counterintelligence program may bring about results which could lead to prosecution of these... leaders and active members, thereby thwarting their efforts.” The same memorandum goes on to state that the agency objectives “are to create factionalism between not only the national leaders but also local leaders... to neutralize all organizational efforts of the BPP (124-5).” Abiding by the directive to be imaginative in their approach, field agents not only orchestrated intricate

infiltration plans, but also engaged in deceptive campaigns of sabotage that created mass confusion and conflict, especially when it came to coalitions and inter-organizational relations.

A Failed Alliance: the Panthers and SNCC

A powerful alliance was being constructed between the SNCC leadership and the BPP. In February of 1968, Stokely Carmichael, H. Rap Brown, and James Foreman were inducted into leadership positions in the BPP as a strong show of solidarity. This was a partnership the FBI was determined to destroy. In a paper he wrote detailing FBI efforts to repress the Panthers entitled, *“To Disrupt, Discredit and Destroy:” The FBI’s secret war against the Black Panther Party*, Ward Churchill speaks to the FBI’s concern and subsequent action. He writes, “Preventing the establishment of viable coalitions between the BPP and other radical organizations was, for obvious reasons, considered a key to containing its growth potential and political effectiveness (13).” According to FBI documents the Bureau “quickly initiated a COINTELPRO effort to ‘foster a split between...the two most prominent black nationalist extremist groups’ (Churchill, 126).” Unfortunately, despite the alliance between the BPP and SNCC, there were underlying issues that would assist the FBI in unsettling the collaboration.

The alliance was severely challenged at the outset. In his Guide to Black Power Robert Allen remarks, “It is not certain who first proposed the alliance or merger between SNCC and the Panthers, but it is known that the move was related to a power struggle going on within SNCC between Stokely Carmichael and James Forman (224).” With this sort of contention affecting one of the partners, the coalition was being

constructed on ‘shaky’ ground. Organizational differences had not yet been introduced. Those issues would soon appear.

At the point the coalition was initiated, disagreement arose regarding Black Power coalitions with white organizations. SNCC leaders took issue with alliances the BPP was engaged in with such organizations. In the forward of Black Panthers Speak, Clayborne Carson gives a context for the dispute:

...Panther leaders experienced considerable difficulties in their efforts to build lasting ties with other black militant groups. The internal and external forces that were responsible for these difficulties were evident in the ill-fated effort to build an alliance between the BPP and SNCC... Panther leaders failed to recognize that the BPP’s hierarchical leadership style contrasted sharply with SNCC’s decentralized structure. The self-conscious effort of Carmichael and other black activists in SNCC to separate themselves from former white allies also adversely affected their relation with the Panthers, who welcomed white support (xiii).

This was a seed of dissent that grew to explode as the stakes increased and the FBI intensified the pressure from its angle.

Initially, SNCC had very close ties with what Huey Newton called “white liberals;” however, as SNCC transformed its mission from one of nonviolent resistance to Black Power, the demographics of the organization were drastically augmented. In an interview with the *Movement*, Newton gave his perspective on this transition. Speaking frankly, he asserts:

I call them white liberals because they differ strictly from the white radical. The relationship was that whites controlled SNCC for a very long time. From the very start until here recently whites were the mind of SNCC... So the white liberals were not working for self-determination for the black community. They were interested in a few concessions from the power structure... Stokely Carmichael came along and realizing this started to follow Malcolm X’s program of Black Power... Whites were afraid when Stokely came along with Black Power and said that black people have a mind of their own and that SNCC would be an all black organization and that SNCC would seek self-determination for the black

community (Foner, 56-7).

In an open letter to Stokely Carmichael written more than a year after the groups joined forces, Panther's Minister of Information Eldridge Cleaver bluntly addressed this point of contention between the two organizations. According to Cleaver, "...it was clear that your position on coalitions with white revolutionary organizations was in conflict with that of the Black Panther Party (Foner, 104). He goes on to label Carmichael paranoid and to ridicule his position on matter further:

It is understandable that you can have such fears of black organizations being controlled, or partly controlled, by whites because most of your years in SNCC were spent under precisely those conditions. But the Black Panther Party has never been in that situation. Because we never had to wrest control of our organization out of the hands of whites, we have not been shackled with the type of paranoid fear that was developed by you cats at SNCC (105).

This clearly illustrates the debate that spiraled into a complete collapse in unity.

Eventually this issue manifested into a general mistrust, which split the alliance and forced open conflict between organizations. Interestingly enough, Carmichael sided with the BPP, but the tensions were too much to ease:

...the Panthers recognition that they were under deadly attack made them distrustful of and impatient with black activists who questioned their ideological orientation. By August 1968 relations between the two groups had soured to the point of open conflict. Afterwards, Carmichael decided to ally himself with the Panthers rather than remain in SNCC...[H] is advocacy of racial unity rather than interracial coalitions continued to put him at odds with other Panther leaders. The ideological and personal tensions between Carmichael and other leaders signaled the beginning of pervasive, vicious infighting within the black community (xiv).

This immense controversy gave the ruling authority a stockpile of ammunition to fuel these feuds and to wage war against Black Power alliances and the movement in general.

In an October 1968 memorandum, reproduced in The COINTELPRO Papers, it is

evident that the FBI took sharp notice of the feud between these entities and intended to strengthen it through its own clandestine tactics. The memo's purpose was to "...help neutralize extremist Black Panthers and foster splits between them and Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC)...There is a feud between the two most prominent Black Nationalist extremist groups (127)." The memo goes on to detail way in which field agents can use media channels to widen the rift. In addition to this strategy, the FBI specifically targeted Carmichael through what is called "bad-jacketing." That is the Bureau wanted to give the BPP and the Black community the false impression that Carmichael was working for a government agency. Another memo reproduced in The COINTELPRO Papers speaks directly to executing this plot. It reads, "It is suggested that consideration be given to convey the impression that Carmichael is a CIA informant...It is hoped that when the informant report is read it will help promote distrust between Carmichael and the Black community (128)." With the culmination of these elements Carmichael was expelled and resigned from his post. Moreover, he was made to fear for his life and eventually flee the country following an anonymous and ominous phone call his mother received concerning a Panther "hit team" that had him marked for death. In turn, Huey P. Newton would "...charge that Stokely Carmichael is operating as an agent of the CIA (126)." Furthermore, "Although there was absolutely no evidence whatsoever that a Panther "hit team" had been assembled to silence the accused informer, Carmichael left the U.S. for an extended period in Africa ... and the SNCC/Panther coalition was effectively destroyed (128)."

The Black Stone Rangers, the FBI and the Murder of Fred Hampton

As the alliance between SNCC and the Panthers was quickly unraveling, the FBI was hard at work attempting to worsen a minor discord involving the Panther's Chicago branch and the local street tribe called the Black Stone Rangers. Nineteen year-old Fred Hampton envisioned a coalition with the Rangers because of their influence in the community; however, these waters had to be tread very carefully to prevent misunderstanding. A bit of tension was created as the Panthers urged Ranger leadership to prevent some of the violence occurring as a result of their activity. This tension was not enough to cause broken communication between the groups, but the FBI moved to execute plans to exacerbate any issues. They intended to incite a murderous war between the Panthers and the Black Stone Rangers. In a paper he wrote detailing FBI efforts to repress the Panthers entitled, *"To Disrupt, Discredit and Destroy: The FBI's secret war against the Black Panther Party*, Ward Churchill gives more insight into this clandestine effort. Fred Hampton, a young powerful leader of the Panther's Chicago branch was working to "politicize and absorb into" the BPP a number of street tribes with sizeable memberships. Churchill writes:

...by December 1968, Fred Hampton and Bobby Rush had made considerable progress towards bringing such lesser groups as the Black Disciples, the Mau Maus, and the Conservative Vice Lords into the Party, and were conducting potentially fruitful negotiations with Jeff Fort, head of the 5,000-strong Black P. Stone Nation (formerly the Blackstone Rangers). Given that the BPP as a whole had at that time reached its peak of somewhere between three and five thousand members, consummation of the Hampton/Rush initiative would have served to double the size of the Party almost overnight (14).

The FBI immediately responded with letter forgeries that caused and exacerbated tensions between the groups.

Anonymous letters were sent to Ranger leader Jeff Fort that claimed the Panthers

were going to make an attempt on his life because he would not easily cooperate in the proposed collaboration. In his War Against the Panthers, Huey Newton affirms the claim that “[the FBI] began sending letters to the leadership of the Chicago street gang called the Blackstone Rangers, or P-Stone Nation, telling them that the Panthers wanted to take away their territory (71).” As Blackstick writes in The FBI’s Secret War on Political Freedom, “The purpose of the letter was explicitly stated. It was sent ‘in anticipation that its receipt by Fort will intensify the degree of animosity existing between these two Black extremist organizations (11).’ ” The FBI’s attempts to cultivate an environment of war between these two groups failed. For, “It seems that the Panthers and the Rangers understood very well what was happening. The Chicago office turned to some new ideas (11).” In fact, over the course of the next year, Hampton achieved a level of success in building the intended coalition that alarmed authorities. Quailing this budding partnership was so critical, the FBI moved to accomplish one of the most vicious and calculated assassinations of the period: The murder of Fred Hampton and Mark Clark. Blackstone reveals:

Perhaps the most shocking story concerns the assassination of Fred Hampton by Chicago police directed by the state attorney general’s office on December 4, 1969 in a predawn raid on a Chicago apartment. Hampton, one of the most promising leaders of the Black Panther party, was killed in bed, perhaps drugged. Depositions in the civil suit in Chicago reveal that the chief of Panther security and Hampton’s personal bodyguard, William O’Neal, was an FBI infiltrator (12).

Churchill goes a bit further to detail the attack in explaining that, “The BPP leader was thus comatose in his bed when the fourteen man police team-armed with a submachine gun and other special hardware-slammed into his home, once more-or-less slightly in the chest and then twice more in the head at point blank range

(Churchill, 140).” Hampton had been murdered in bed as he and his eight-month pregnant fiancée slept. In this case the FBI had forced its hand to achieve its objective; however more inter-organizational conflicts propelled the Panthers further into isolation and eventual oblivion.

“--The BPP [Black Panther Party] and US, two Black extremist groups, are currently feuding...It is important that Black extremist groups be kept divided so that their strength is not increased through united action.”

J. Edgar Hoover, December 27, 1969

The Panthers and US

One of the most violent Black Power Movement inter-organizational conflicts transpired between the BPP and Maulana Karenga’s US organization. The contention began as a major ideological debate. The BPP considered itself to be revolutionary nationalist. That is, as Huey Newton described, a nationalism that is, “first dependant upon a people’s revolution with the end goal being the people in power. Therefore to be a revolutionary nationalist you would by necessity have to be a socialist (Foner, 50).” The Panthers described the US organization as cultural nationalist. In the words of Newton, “Cultural nationalism, or pork chop nationalism, as I sometimes call it, is basically a problem of having the wrong political perspective...The cultural nationalists are concerned with returning to the old African culture and thereby regaining their identity and freedom. In other words they feel that the African culture will automatically bring political freedom (Foner, 50). Newton was not the only Panther on the offensive. In her essay entitled “*On Cultural Nationalism,*” Panther

Linda Harrison gave her scathing perspective of the US organization's foundational ideology:

Cultural Nationalism manifest itself in many ways but all of these manifestations are essentially grounded in one fact; a universal denial and ignoring the of the present political, social and economic realities and a concentration on the past as a frame of reference...In other words cultural nationalism ignores the political and concrete, and concentrates on a myth and fantasy (151).

Additionally, Panthers claimed that US was moving the people away from the proper political focus because its leadership was working for government agencies. In his 1997 article "*The US Organization, Maulana Karenga and Conflict with the Black Panther Party: A Critique of Sectarian Influences on Historical Discourse,*" which appeared in the *Journal of Black Studies*, Scot Ngozi-Brown gives lucid insight into this deadly feud:

Black Panther Party leaders such as Eldridge Cleaver, Huey Newton, and Bobby Seale contended that cultural nationalists were reactionary strategists intending to divert African-American masses from the class struggle. Among the worst examples of their anti-Us/Karenga campaign was the Black Panther Party unfounded claim that Karenga was an agent provocateur for the United States government (158-9).

These kinds of unfounded accusations steadily moved this disagreement from organizational competition to violence. The animosity was heightening initially without FBI involvement and came from both camps.

Though the US organization was not as publicly vocal about its discontent with the BPP, accusations and slander were still offered from their side of the fence. Ngozi-Brown contends that:

...accusations and character assassination of this sort are commonplace within the sphere of intense political rivalry, especially the historical clashes between Black Nationalist and Marxist-oriented activists.

Throughout the conflict, Karenga and Us members also held negative views of the Black Panther Party. They tended to view the Panthers as undisciplined and inordinately influenced by White Left organizations (159)

The verbal abuse continued and as had been the case in the past, the FBI took notice of an already existing conflict and used their resources to create further dissension and even violence:

Rivalry between Us and the Black Panther Party reached a peak in 1969, when the two organizations engaged in violent internecine conflict. The intensity of the conflict was exacerbated by the Federal Bureau of Investigation's systematic infiltration and disruption of radical organizations during the 1960's and 1970's via a wave of counterintelligence operations known and COINTELPRO (158).

Official FBI documents tell the full story. They wasted no time in capitalizing off this rift and aiding its fatal acceleration.

In an FBI memorandum reproduced in The COINTELPRO Papers, J. Edgar

Hoover is explicit about maximizing this conflict. He writes:

For the information of recipient offices a serious struggle is taking place between the Black Panther Party (BPP) and the US organization. The struggle has reached such proportions that it is taking the aura of gang warfare with the intended threats of murder and reprisals. In order to fully capitalize upon BPP and US differences as well as to exploit all avenues of creating further dissension in the ranks of the BPP, recipient offices are instructed to submit imaginative and hard-hitting counterintelligence measures aimed at crippling the BPP (130).

The FBI's well executed fanning of the fire between these organizations succeeded to a ridiculous extreme. As the story goes, a community and student programming position opened up at UCLA and the Black Student Union (B.S.U.) was working to fill the position with someone who had their best interest at heart. According Bobby Seale in Seize the Time: "...the US niggers wanted the job and wanted to place their puppet in control. The B.S.U. did not want them to control the program, and since the Black

Panther Party had grown to be an integral part of the black community in Los Angeles, the Black Student Union asked [Bunchy Carter] and [John Huggins] to come up to a meeting about it on UCLA campus (272).” Newly admitted students themselves, the Panthers asserted their presence undoubtedly heating the contention. Finally, as Gene Marine details in The Black Panthers:

...the BSU called a meeting for Jan 17, 1969 to discuss both the directorship and the upcoming presidency of the BSU itself, a job for which Carter appears to have been the frontrunner. The meeting, with 150 black students present, was long and emotional and ended with the principal questions unresolved; but Bunchy will never be president of BSU. During the milling around following the meeting, John Huggins and Bunchy Carter were shot and killed (209).

Churchill reports they were shot to death by US members George and Joseph Steiner and Claude Hubert (133). In the wake of this tragic incident the FBI moved to perpetuate more vendetta violence between the groups through a cartoon campaign. Unfortunately the campaign was brutally successful and aided in claiming the lives of two more Panthers, Sylvester Bell and John Savage, in San Diego at the hands of US gunmen. Following this round of death, the FBI wanted more blood. In a memo written to various field offices, reproduced in The COINTELPRO Papers, the Bureau acknowledged, “In view of the recent killing of BPP member Sylvester Bell, a new cartoon is being considered in the hopes that it will assist in the continuance of the rift between BPP and US (133).”

In the aftermath of these senseless deaths, the ruling authority was victorious, more black blood had been shed and black people were still oppressed by the power structure. By the early 1970’s the BPP was weakening as result of increased repression and FBI attacks.

The party soon folded and saw many of its dedicated members, imprisoned, disenchanted or murdered.

Conclusion

The FBI's war of repression against the black power movement of the 1960's was a vicious and brutal display of maintaining the American status quo "by any means necessary." This analysis is no way intended to minimize the intricate orchestration of the movement's demise on the part of the ruling authority; however, it is intended to give insight into the ways in which the inter and intra-organizational conflicts of Black Power organizations tremendously contributed to the fulfillment of the FBI's mission. In examining official agency documents, it becomes increasingly apparent the Bureau thought the threat of a successful mass black revolt was imminent and taken very seriously. In vying for top billing and ideological domination, many Black Power Movement leaders found themselves mired in the muck of counterproductive competition. The oppressive forces of this nation have been adamant about enforcing divide and conquer strategies to prevent insurrection among the subjugated masses of black people. To date they have been consistently triumphant in accomplishing this simple strategy. With all of our complex understandings of political theory and revolutionary organizing, we have still fallen victim to our own superficial division. In most cases, the feds were only able to take advantage of the weaknesses created by our unscrupulous actions. As aforementioned, that is not to say that their attacks were not incredibly malicious and downright evil. It is to say that even they admit this period in American history represented one in which the ruling authority saw a very real and

formidable challenge to the system on a scale unlike it had ever encountered. It is distressing that some of our best leaders and most powerful organizations were killed and destroyed behind ideological conflicts.

It is my hope that as younger generations of leaders ascend to carry the torch of the fight against the perennial oppression of black people, we will study hard and learn from our parent's and grandparent's mistakes and take the best of what they have to teach us. In light of this analysis, it became increasingly clear that as much as we suffer under the hands of a systematic power structure that serves to render black people powerless and disenfranchised, we also play a large role in assisting in the maintenance of such degradation. I look forward to the day when Black Power is realized, defined and functioning. We may not know what it looks like, but it is definitely better than our current reality. I pour libations for Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, Jr., Fred Hampton, Mark Clark, Bunchy Carter, John Huggins and all of the countless revolutionary spirits that paid the ultimate price for freedom. **BLACK POWER!!**

Works Cited

1. Allen, Robert L. A Guide to Black Power in America: A Historical Analysis. Victor Gollancz, Ltd. London, 1969.
2. Blackstick, Nelson. The FBI's Secret War on Political Freedom. Vintage Books, 1976.
3. Bracey, John H. Jr; Mier August; Elliot Rudwick. Conflict and Competition: Studies in the Recent Black Protest Movement. Wadsworth Publishing. Belmont, California. 1971.
4. Breitman, George. Malcolm X Speaks. Betty Shabazz and Pathfinder Press. New York. 1965
5. Carson, Clayborne. Malcolm X: the FBI File. Carol and Graf. New York. 1991
6. Churchil, Ward; Wall, James Vander. The COINTELPRO Papers: Documents from the FBI's Secret war against domestic dissent. South End Press. Boston, Mass. 1990.
7. Churchill Ward. "To Disrupt, Discredit, and Destroy." <http://thestee.com/Churchill.pdf>
No other information available.
8. Foner, Philip S. The Black Panthers Speak. Da Capo Press, New York, 1995 edition.
9. Haley, Alex. The Autobiography of Malcolm X. Random House Publishing Group. New York. 1964.
10. Marine, Gene. The Black Panthers. The New American Library, New York. 1969.
11. Newton, Huey P. War Against the Panthers: A Study of Repression in America. Harlem River Press. New York and London. 1996.
12. Ngozi-Brown, Scot, "The US Organization, Maulana Karenga, and Conflict with the Black Party: A Critique of Sectarian Influences on Historical Discourse," *Journal of Black Studies*, Vol. 28 No. 2. (Nov., 1997). Pp157-170.
13. Seale, Bobby. Seize the Time: The Story of the Black Panther Party and Huey Newton. Black Classic Press. Baltimore, MD. 1991 edition