

The Black Panther Party

Dr. Peniel E. Joseph

Office Hours: Thursdays, Noon-2PM

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Course Description:

This course examines the history, legacy, and controversy of the Black Panther Party (1966-1982). Founded as the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense in October 1966 by radical college students Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale, the Black Panther Party (BPP) became one of the most popular and infamous Black Power era organizations. The Black Panthers' combination of militant rhetoric and paramilitary accoutrements (which included black berets, leather jackets, guns, rifles, and at times bandoliers) turned the group in modern revolutionaries engaged in a quest for black liberation by any means necessary. Armed with guns and a ten-point program that vowed to end police abuses in black communities and demanded "bread, justice, land, and peace" the Black Panthers threatened to start a political revolution by politicizing urban dwellers (what Newton called the "lumpen") and organizing poor blacks into a potent political force. Through survival programs that included the popular free breakfast program (that would eventually be implemented by local municipalities) the Panthers offered an alternative vision to the Civil Rights Movement. Yet there was a dark underside to the group. Plagued by a lack of internal democracy, sexism, and ideological disputes the group succumbed to a campaign of systematic harassment, incarceration, and, in certain instance, murder during the late 1960s and early 1970s. This seminar examines the group's impact, origins, and legacy.

Course Objectives: To gain an in-depth historical understanding and contemporary political analysis of the Black Panthers and the larger socio-political context from which they emerged. By studying the Black Panthers, and examining their successes, failures, and shortcoming, we are better able to understand the way in which American race relations unfolded in the postwar era and why certain historical actors organized in the name of a political, social, and cultural revolution. The Panthers also exemplify the revolutionary political spirit of the 1960s and allow us to explore the complicated relationship between civil rights, Black Power, and the New Left. In so doing, students will gain a more nuanced understanding of the way in which issues of race, civil rights, and democracy were redefined by black radicals whose confrontation posture with authority would scandalize as much as it would change America.

Classes will be seminar styled discussions that rely heavily on student participation. Students will be responsible for paying close attention to assigned reading and preparing discussion notes and questions for future classes. Each student should be ready to engage in a good amount of sophisticated, yet highly readable intellectual material. Finally, students are expected to participate in classroom discussions in an informed manner regularly.

Students are responsible for coming prepared to class to engage in a robust intellectual discussion. This is a seminar, so it is not a lecture course, which means we will be engaging in a close discussion and, at times, classroom reading of course materials.

Absences: Class attendance is crucial, especially since we are meeting only once per week over the course of the spring semester. When students miss class they miss important information in lectures and critical questions and commentary contained in classroom discussions. My hope is that you learn from reading, lectures, and a critical and informed exchange of ideas with fellow students. Poor attendance will result in a failing grade for class participation.

Participation: All students are expected to read assigned reading materials. Merely showing up in class is not enough to ensure a passing grade. Students who have fears about speaking in front of others should come to me.

Requirements:

Students are expected to keep up with the reading assignments. This is imperative since this seminar is writing intensive and will be based on an understanding and conceptualization of the assigned readings. All students are expected to be prepared for class and contribute to discussion in an informed manner. Students are required to keep detailed notes of the readings and lectures. Notes based on the reading assignments will be collected periodically.

Assignments

Paper 1 30 %

Book Review of Primary Research Materials Related to BPP 20%

Participation (includes group discussion and notes) 10%

Attendance 10%

Final Research Paper 30% (due on the last day of class)

Required Readings: Available at the University Bookstore

Peniel Joseph, *Waiting 'Til the Midnight Hour: A Narrative History of Black Power in America* (2007)

Yohuru Williams and Jama Lazerow, ed., *Liberated Territory: Untold Local Perspectives on the Black Panther Party* (2008)

Huey P. Newton, *Revolutionary Suicide* (1973) and *To Die For the People* (1972; reprinted 2009)

Janes Rhodes, *Framing the Black Panthers: The Spectacular Rise of a Black Power Icon*

David Hilliard, ed., *The Black Panther Intercommunal News Service* (2007)

Stephen Shames, *The Black Panthers-Photographs* (2006)

Reserved Readings: Will consist of primary sources readings of the BPP, including articles from the group's newspaper *The Black Panther* as well as newspaper and periodical coverage of the group in *The New York Times*, *Oakland Tribune*, *Ramparts*, *National Guardian*, etc.

Recommended Readings

Additional Readings (Not Required)

Elaine Brown, *A Taste of Power: A Black Woman's Story* (1992)

Paul Alkebulan, *Survival Pending Revolution: The History of the Black Panther Party*

Jama Lazerow and Yohuru Williams, eds., *In Search of the Black Panther Party: New Perspectives on a Revolutionary Movement* (2006)

David Hilliard and Lewis Cole, *This Side of Glory: The Autobiography of David Hilliard and the Story of the Black Panther Party* (1993)

Bobby Seale, *Seize the Time: The Story of the Black Panther party and Huey P. Newton* (1970)

Charles Jones, ed., *The Black Panther Party Reconsidered* (1998)

Kathleen Cleaver and George Katsiaficas, eds., *Liberation, Imagination, and the Black Panther Party* (2001)

Yohuru Williams, *Black Politics/White Power: Civil Rights, Black Power, and the Black Panthers in New Haven* (2000)

Hugh Pearson, *The Shadow of the Panther: Huey Newton and the Price of Black Power in America* (1994)

Class Schedule

Week 1

Class 1: Introduction: The Black Power Movement

The Black Panther Party in History and Memory

Waiting 'Til the Midnight Hour, pp. 1-94

Liberated Territory, Introduction, 1-31

Framing the Panthers, chapter 1

Week 2

Class 1: Hard Times

The World that Made the Black Panthers

Waiting Til the Midnight Hour, pp. 95-204

Revolutionary Suicide

Week 3

Class 1: An Origin Story Reconsidered

Class 2: Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale before they were Panthers

Newton, Revolutionary Suicide, TBA

Newton, ToDie for the People, 3-79

Week 4

Stepping into History/From Lowndes County, Alabama to Oakland, California

Waiting 'Til the Midnight Hour, pp. 205-240

Framing the Panthers, Introduction and Chapter 3.

Hasan Jeffries, Bloody Lowndes excerpt on blackboard

Week 5

Black Power Scandalizes the Nation and Inspires the Panthers/Black Panther Icons: Huey P.

Newton, Bobby Seale, and Eldridge Cleaver

Framing the Panthers, Chapters 4-5.

Newton, To Die for the People, 80-111

BPP Intercommunal News Service, 1-100

Book Review Due

Week 6

Class 1: Black Panther Women/Rainbow Radicalism

Jones, ed., The Black Panther Party Reconsidered, book excerpt on blackboard

Week 7

Class 1: The Rank and File/ From Revolutionary Nationalism to "Intercommunalism"

To Die For the People,

Waiting 'Til the Midnight Hour, pp. 241-275

BPP Intercommunal News Service, TBA

Week 8

Class 1: All Power to the People/The Black Panthers and the New Left

Framing the Panthers, Chapter 6

Newton, Revolutionary Suicide

Barber, A Hard Rain Fell, book excerpt on blackboard

Newton, To Die For the People, 149-179

Week 9

Class 1: Neighborhood Rebels: Local Black Panther Chapters

The Black Panthers and the Prison Movement

Liberated Territory, pp. 85-135

Framing the Panthers, Chapter 7

BPP Intercommunal News Service, TBA

Week 10

Class 1: Revolutionary Suicide: The Triumph and Tragedy of Huey Percy Newton
Framing the Panthers, Chapter 8
BPP Intercommunal News Service, TBA
Newton, Revolutionary Suicide, complete book
Newton, To Die for the People, 180-236

Week 11

Class 1: The Split in the Party: Government Repression and Internal Fighting
“This Will Tide Us Over Until Liberation”: The Black Panthers and Survival Programs
Survival Pending Revolution, Chapter 6
Framing the Panthers, Chapter 9
Waiting Til the Midnight Hour, complete book.
BPP Intercommunal News Service

Week 12

American Babylon: the Black Panther Party and Electoral Politics
Framing the Panthers, Complete book
BPP Intercommunal News Service

Week 13

The Party’s Over: Debating the Legacy and Contemporary Significance of the BPP
Framing the Panthers, Chapter 1.

Week 14

The Historiography of the Black Panther Party
Peniel Joseph, “The Black Power Movement: A State of the Field,” Journal of American History
(blackboard)
David Garrow, “Picking up the Books,” (blackboard)

Notes

Any student that has documented requirements for special needs can contact me in private.

Class discussion is encouraged. As a group of intellectuals in the process of becoming a scholarly community debate and discussion is encouraged. However, these individuals must maintain civility and respect toward one another at all times.

Cheating and plagiarism are serious offense and will be dealt with according to university regulations.

Scheduling Notes:

Class 1 on the Syllabus Indicates First Day of Classes: Readings scheduled for each class should be done before the class date, with the exception being the first day of class.