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HUEY P. NEWTON

Introduction

Huey Percy Newton (b. 1942–d. 1989) is a singular figure in African American history. Born in Monroe, Louisiana to Armelia Johnson and Walter Newton, he joined the Great Migration as a child when his family relocated to Oakland, California. He graduated from Oakland Technical High School in 1959, but forever claimed that school failed him, notably in the fact that he graduated without learning to read. Alongside self-directed learning, he then studied at Merritt College in Oakland, one of the city’s hotbeds of political discussion and activism. After joining, and becoming disillusioned by, a sequence of campus organizations, in October 1966 he formed the Black Panther Party (BPP) with his friend and fellow student Bobby Seale, who credits Newton as the principal architect of the BPP’s political philosophy and the driving force behind its early activism. The BPP initially focused on protesting police brutality in Oakland, most importantly through a sequence of patrols of police officers, which involved armed Panthers observing police activities in Oakland, informing local citizens of their legal rights during any arrest procedure and ensuring that the police conducted their duties lawfully and respectfully; and the May 1967 protest at the California State Capitol, one of the central events of the 1960s (although Newton was absent from the latter due to probation restrictions). On 28 October 1967 he was charged with the murder of Oakland police officer John Frey. The subsequent trial transformed the BPP and Newton into international phenomena. Despite a fervent “Free Huey” campaign and a bravura defense from his attorney, Newton was convicted of voluntary manslaughter. He served two years in prison, being released after his appeal revealed that the presiding judge of his original trial twice incorrectly instructed the jury and allowed disputed

evidence to be presented to the jury. Two further retrials led to deadlocked juries. Returning in August 1970 to a transformed BPP, Newton struggled to cope with the fame and expectations placed upon him. Just as important was an extensive FBI campaign of disinformation, surveillance, infiltration, and occasional violence. Newton's long-term use of cocaine did little to help. In 1974 he fled the United States for Cuba, fearing prosecution for the murder of a teenager, Kathleen Smith. He returned in 1977 to face the charges, which were eventually dropped. Following the collapse of the BPP amid accusations of financial impropriety, Newton essentially disappeared from public life. He was shot and killed in West Oakland by Tyrone Robinson, a local gang member, following an altercation over a drug deal.

Works by Newton

As the leading intellectual light of the BPP, Newton's pronouncements received considerable attention. His early writings include the still startling "In Defense of Self-Defense" and "Executive Mandate Number One," which not only established the BPP's theory of armed self-defense, but also positioned the party within a worldwide, centuries-long liberation struggle. In addition, there was the BPP's Ten Point Platform and Program, which outlined the BPP's cogent analysis of American racism. These all remain essential documents of the radical 1960s and were first published in ***The Black Panther*** newspaper. His enforced seclusion, first in prison and then in his apartment, led to a broadening of his vision that drew on the work of numerous revolutionaries whose work owes a debt to Marxism and Marxism-Leninism, most notably Frantz Fanon. Various publications collect these works. Of them, Morrison 1972 remains the authoritative source. Foner 1995 (first published 1970) offers a partial selection but is essential for an overview of the intellectual ferment of the BPP in the period between 1966 and 1970; Hilliard and Weise 2002 expands the chronology but overlooks some key documents. Erikson

and Newton 1973 is a compelling read, although more for the atmosphere of the debates it transcribes than for its intellectual qualities. Like many other key figures in the BPP, Newton published an autobiography, Newton and Blake 1973, that wove his personal history into that of the BPP. Later, he enrolled in UC Santa Cruz's famed History of Consciousness program; his 1980 thesis was published as Newton 1996.

The Black Panther. [class:periodical]

Newton's writings were published and often republished in the BPP's house newspaper (initially titled *The Black Panther Black Community News Service* and later *The Black Panther Intercommunal News Service*). An essential source for understanding the BPP, Black Power, and African American radicalism in a wider sense, *The Black Panther* offers an unparalleled view into the local, national, and international perspectives of members. Newton's writings appeared most frequently in the period prior to his conviction, at a time when the newspaper was published irregularly. Partial collections are available online.

Erikson, Erik H., and Huey P. Newton. *In Search of Common Ground: Conversations with Erik H. Erikson and Huey P. Newton*. New York: Norton, 1973. [ISBN: 9780393054835]

Heavily edited from the lengthy transcriptions of a three-day seminar at Yale conducted in 1971, and a further meeting in Oakland, at a time when Newton was outlining his theory of intercommunalism, this volume reveals Newton's keenness to be taken seriously as an intellectual, and hints at his rhetorical obtuseness.

Foner, Philip S., ed. *The Black Panthers Speak*. New York: Da Capo, 1995. [ISBN: 9780306806278]

A classic collection of material culled from *The Black Panther*, first published in 1970, with a fine introduction from Clayborne Carson in its later editions; includes a limited selection of Newton's writings prior to 1970.

Hilliard, David, and Donald Weise, eds. *The Huey P. Newton Reader*. New York: Seven Stories Press, 2002. [ISBN: 9781583224670]

In chronological terms a more capacious selection than Morrison 1972, this volume highlights Newton's later writings and thus offers a useful primer on both the development and decline of Newton's thought in the 1970s.

Morrison, Toni, ed. *To Die for the People: The Writings of Huey P. Newton*. New York: Writers and Readers Publishing, 1972.

Edited by Toni Morrison, this was the first collection of Newton's writings, and contains his most important theoretical contributions to Black Power, but take note of Blake 2012 (cited under *African American Incarceration*). The collection traces the broadening of Newton's thought, from his early entreaties to BPP members to his early-1970s inquiries into black capitalism, intercommunalism, and his long exegesis of Melvin van Peebles's film *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song*. The collection is essential for an understanding of Newton's thought.

Newton, Huey P. *War against the Panthers: A Study of Repression in America*. New York: Harlem River Press, 1996. [ISBN: 9780863162466]

Newton's PhD thesis, awarded by the University of California in 1980, is a curious read, combining autoethnography with traditional historical archival research to construct an account of the FBI's counterintelligence operation against the BPP. Subsequent works such as Ward

Churchill's entry in [Cleaver and Katsiaficas 2001](#) (cited under [*BPP Organizational Histories*](#)) offer a more authoritative and carefully evidenced view.

Newton, Huey P., with J. Herman Blake. *Revolutionary Suicide*. London: Penguin, 1973.

Written with the assistance of J. Herman Blake, much in the style of Alex Haley's work on Malcolm X's autobiography—which *Revolutionary Suicide* almost self-consciously echoes—this is best read alongside Seale [1970](#) (cited under [*Black Panther Party Participant-Observer Accounts*](#)). It offers a chronology of Newton's life, with some particularly harrowing recollections of his time in prison.

Biographical Studies

Newton has been the subject of a small number of mostly inadequate biographical studies.

[Pearson 1994](#) remains the most well known, but it demands a cautious read, supplemented by various other sources in order to interrogate both Pearson's findings (culled from a small number of interviews with former members) and his interpretation—not least his willingness to condemn the entire party based on his disgust at Newton's failings. In many respects it is the fulcrum for the entire historiography of the BPP, largely because it prompted the full flowering of BPP social histories, rather than for its intrinsic qualities. Henderson (in [Cleaver and Katsiaficas 2001](#), cited under [*BPP Organizational Histories*](#)) offers a succinct critique, but the full rebuttal involves dozens of texts spread over the subsequent thirty years. Readers seeking the roots of Pearson's analysis should begin with [Coleman and Avery 1978](#), noting that this is another problematic text. [Hilliard, et al. 2006](#) is a friendly biography of limited use, although its account of Newton's later years is considerably more valuable than Pearson's. Confirming the BPP's significance to an understanding of Black Power culture, [Morgan 2019](#) parses the deep meanings of the legendary portrait of Newton sitting on a wicker chair, spear and shotgun in hand.

Coleman, Kate, and Paul Avery. "The Party's Over." *New Times*, 10 July 1978: 23–47.

[class:newspaperArticle]

The first major exposé of criminality in the BPP, this article provided crucial foundations for Pearson 1994. Not without salacious and unverified detail, it painted a devastating portrait of Newton's criminality, authoritarianism, and general cynicism toward the BPP's rank-and-file, legacy, and organization. In this it helped to accelerate the BPP's decline and the shift of public opinion away from the organization and Newton. Coleman became a long-term critic of the BPP, reserving particular ire for Eldridge Cleaver. Republished in *Raising Hell: How the Center for Investigative Reporting Gets the Story*, Edited by David Weir and Dan Noyes (Reading MA: Addison-Wesley, 1983).

Hilliard, David, with Keith Zimmerman and Kent Zimmerman. *Huey: Spirit of the Panther*. New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 2006. [ISBN: 9781560258377]

Hilliard's second work about Newton was written in conjunction with two writers with no background in BPP studies. Tending toward hagiography, it overlooks Newton's personal flaws but offers a valuable account of his later years, in particular his 1974–1977 exile. Hilliard and Cole 1993 (cited under *Black Panther Party Participant-Observer Accounts*) offers a far more detailed and valuable account of Newton's life, with the gulf in tone between the two books an indication of the impact that Pearson 1994 had on the popular memory of the BPP.

Morgan, Jo-Ann. *The Black Arts Movement and the Black Panther Party in American Visual Culture*. New York: Routledge, 2019. [ISBN: 9781138605923]

Chapters 5 and 6 offer an important, deep reading of the famous photographic portrait of Newton in a wicker chair as part of a wider study of Black Power visual culture, with a particular emphasis on Cleaver's role in mythologizing Newton.

Pearson, Hugh. *The Shadow of the Panther: Huey Newton and the Price of Black Power in America*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley 1994. [ISBN: 9780201632781]

Without doubt the most controversial work on the BPP. Relentlessly negative, it is decidedly problematic and must be treated with caution, noting Henderson (in [Cleaver and Katsiaficas 2001, cited under *BPP Organizational Histories*](#)) and later critiques. It pathologizes the party to the extent that unwitting readers might conclude that the BPP was riddled with criminality and violence, and that the entire membership acted only according to Newton's will.

Newton's Intellectual History

Newton's contribution to African American intellectual history is only belatedly being acknowledged. [Jeffries 2002](#) is the first attempt at a complete intellectual biography, with [Anderson 2012](#) offering a succinct introduction to Newton's thought. [Hughey 2007](#) ponders Newton's understanding of the role of education in liberation struggles. [Johnson 2004](#), [Rodriguez 2006](#), and [Narayan 2019](#) analyze Newton's concept of revolutionary intercommunalism. Johnson explores its relationship with African American rhetorical traditions, whereas for Narayan, the concept is best understood with reference to developments in Marxist intellectual approaches that evolved long after Newton first outlined it. Rodriguez, meanwhile, looks to the anticolonial struggle to explain the roots of Newton's ideas. [Sowers 2017](#) and [Sowers 2020](#) consider Newton's relationship with Plato and the Bible, while [Vernon 2014](#) turns to Hegel in a deeply philosophical consideration of Newton's ideas about political will.

Anderson, Joshua. "A Tension in the Thought of Huey P. Newton." *Journal of African American Studies* 16 (2012): 249–267.

An accessible introduction to key themes in Newton's intellectual history that emphasizes the tension between Newton's ideas and the BPP's praxis, as embodied by the party's social programs.

Hughey, Matthew W. "The Pedagogy of Huey P. Newton: Critical Reflections on Education in His Writings and Speeches." *Journal of Black Studies* 38 (2007): 209–231.

This fiercely intellectual study of Newton's thought highlights the social and cultural constraints within which Newton developed his ideas, while also considering his understanding of the centrality of education to white supremacy, and thus also to the Black struggle in the United States.

Jeffries, Judson L. *Huey P. Newton: The Radical Theorist*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2002. [ISBN: 9781578064328]

A friendly and accessible intellectual biography that offers a useful primer to the main tributaries of Newton's thought.

Johnson, Davi. "The Rhetoric of Huey P. Newton." *Southern Communication Journal* 70 (2004): 15–30.

Johnson places considerable emphasis on Newton's address to the 1970 Revolutionary People's Constitutional Convention, the speech where Newton first outlined revolutionary intercommunalism to a broad audience. Positioning the speech within the African American jeremiad tradition, Johnson emphasizes Newton's analysis of the gulf between American ideals and the African American experience.

Narayan, John. "Huey P. Newton's Intercommunalism: An Unacknowledged Theory of Empire." *Theory, Culture, and Society* 36 (2019): 57–85.

Many of Newton's contemporaries dismissed his theory of intercommunalism; Narayan, however, suggests that it was ahead of its own time, anticipating critiques of neoliberal globalization such as Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's seminal *Empire*. A hugely important reconsideration of Newton's ideas that rewards a close reading.

Rodriguez, Besenia. "‘Long Live Third World Unity! Long Live Internationalism’: Huey P. Newton's Revolutionary Intercommunalism." *Souls: A Critical Journal of Black Politics, Culture, and Society* 8 (2006): 119–141.

For Rodriguez, intercommunalism is best understood in an international context, and specifically with reference to the Bandung Conference and Malcolm X's critique of colonialism.

Sowers, Brian P. "The Socratic Black Panther: Reading Huey P. Newton Reading Plato." *Journal of African American Studies* 21 (2017): 26–41.

Newton famously stated that he learned to read using Plato's *Republic* as his guide. This useful article uses Plato and Socrates to analyze Newton's autobiography.

Sowers, Brian P. "Prison Where Is Thy Victory: A Black Panther Theology of Mass Incarceration." *Harvard Theological Review* 113 (2020): 24–44.

Using the title's thinly veiled reference to the apostle Paul's epistle to the Corinthians ("Death, where is thy victory"), this article offers a close reading of Newton's critique of the penal system.

Vernon, Jim. "‘I Am We’: The Politics of Political Will in Huey P. Newton and the Black Panther Party[muse.jhu.edu/article/562828]*." *Theory and Event* 17 (2014).

While Vernon tends toward the assumption that all members of the BPP followed Newton's direction with little questioning, his approach offers some rewarding insights into Newton's

understanding of freedom and the relationship between revolution and reform in the BPP's praxis.

Black Panther Party Participant-Observer Accounts

Newton is the celestial body around which many autobiographies of BPP veterans orbit. [Seale 1970](#) is unusual as a memoir that decenters the author in favor of another individual. A key book about the BPP, and indeed the 1960s in a wider sense, it remains an essential text. Other contemporary participant-observer accounts include [Marine 1969](#) and [Major 1991](#), both written by sympathizers with a keen eye for detail. Newton's death prompted an outpouring of grief from former members, as well as two of the most important later memoirs, both written by core BPP members: [Brown 1992](#) is particularly attuned to the pressures endured by Newton following his return from prison in 1970, whereas [Hilliard and Cole 1993](#) details Newton's rise and decline in honest, often self-lacerating fashion. While these accounts position Newton at the BPP's core—an approach that reflects early, leadership-centered accounts of the party—21st-century memoirs tend toward focusing on BPP activism outside Oakland (and therefore often beyond Newton's sphere of influence). Of them, [Forbes 2006](#) has the most to say about Newton, and is particularly insightful on the rank-and-file's veneration and fear of their leader.

Brown, Elaine. *A Taste of Power: A Black Woman's Story*. New York: Pantheon, 1992. [ISBN: 9780679419440]

Somewhat selective in terms of the author's own role in certain controversial events, as detailed for example by [Pearson 1994](#) (cited under *Biographical Studies*), this book offers an intimate and finely detailed account of Newton's duality, and particularly of the tensions between his sensitive side and his more authoritarian behavior. It also offers a rewarding, if partial, account of women's experiences in the BPP.

Forbes, Flores. *Will You Die with Me?: My Life and the Black Panther Party*. New York: Atria, 2006. [ISBN: 9780743482660]

Another honest and at points disheartening autobiography, Forbes's account focuses on the author's experience of the BPP as it declined in the 1970s. It is particularly useful for Newton's authoritarianism and the behavior of the inner circle around him during this period, with some particularly pertinent observations about the Kathleen Smith trial. Its final chapters, tracing Forbes's recent life, and a highly symbolic redemptive conclusion, offer an emotional reckoning with the past.

Hilliard, David, and Lewis Cole. *This Side of Glory: The Autobiography of David Hilliard and the Story of the Black Panther Party*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1993. [ISBN: 9780316364157]

A major contribution to BPP studies, this searingly honest autobiography offers a particularly revealing account of Newton's descent into drug addiction. Hilliard emphasizes both his own struggles with addiction and Newton's similar, less successful battles. Informed by Hilliard's own memories as well as a sequence of interviews with comrades, friends, and family members, it is an essential source for understanding how the BPP transformed individuals, and how some failed to live up to its ideals.

Major, Reginald. *A Panther is a Black Cat*. Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1991.

Among the best of the early popular histories of the BPP, written by a sympathetic close observer. Like Seale 1970, it offers a keen sense of the late 1960s zeitgeist and the BPP's position within the local community.

Marine, Gene. *The Black Panthers*. New York: Signet, 1969.

Like [Major, 1991](#), an important early popular history of the BPP, this work was written by a *Ramparts* journalist with an eye toward emphasizing the BPP's affinity with the radical movement in the San Francisco Bay Area during the late 1960s.

Seale, Bobby. *Seize the Time: The Story of the Black Panther Party*. London: Arrow, 1970.

Seale's eye-popping account blurs the line between history and myth but remains an essential text for understanding the party. More than any other single text, it presents Newton as a folk hero, street philosopher, man of action, and legend-in-the-making. Its unique style—it was dictated in a series of recordings made by BPP Minister of Information Eldridge Cleaver, and then whipped into manuscript form by *Ramparts* journalist Art Goldberg—makes it an unforgettable reading experience.

BPP Organizational Histories

Most histories of the BPP spend considerable time analyzing Newton's life and contribution to the party. While none follow [Pearson 1994 \(cited under *Biographical Studies*\)](#) in arguing that the BPP was little without Newton, all acknowledge his importance as founder, theoretician, and, during his incarceration, a symbolic focal point for BPP agitation. [Newton 1980 \(cited under *Local Histories of the BPP*\)](#) was the first attempt to train a wide-angle lens on the BPP across the United States. It is an interesting and accessible read, but has been supplanted by more recent studies. Of the narrative accounts, [Bloom and Martin 2013](#) is the most comprehensive, with [Austin 2006](#) also very detailed and reliable. [Alkebulan 2007](#) emphasizes the work of the rank-and-file, and [Spencer 2016](#) looks at BPP women's activism. As [Garrow 2007](#) and [Street 2010](#) suggest, [Jones 1998](#) occupies a particularly important place in the historiography, presenting scholarly and participant-observer accounts that opened up many avenues for future studies. While more uneven, [Cleaver and Katsiaficas 2001](#) contains some important contributions,

including those of Churchill and Henderson. Studies such as [Rhodes 2007](#), [Malloy 2017](#), and [Self 2003](#) (under *BPP and [Black Power Politics](#)*) offer suggestive pointers to future approaches to the BPP that depart from a social history framework.

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

Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2007. [ISBN: 9780817315498]

At pains to emphasize the agency of the rank-and-file, this is another implicit assault on [Pearson 1994](#) (cited under *[Biographical Studies](#)*). It is especially strong on the sacrifices made and devotion offered by ordinary Panthers to the organization.

Austin, Curtis K. *Up Against the Wall: Violence in the Making and Unmaking of the Black Panther Party*. Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2006. [ISBN: 9781557288752]

A very fine interpretative study that uses violence as a prism for analyzing the BPP's rise and peak. Like [Bloom and Martin 2013](#), it offers a brief treatment of the 1970s. More critical of BPP failures than Bloom and Martin, its analytical approach is particularly useful for prompting questions about the role of violence in the party and the extent of federal and state violence directed at it.

Bloom, Joshua, and Waldo E. Martin Jr. *Black against Empire: The History and Politics of the Black Panther Party*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013. [ISBN: 9780520271852]

The most thorough of the organizational studies, this should be the first port of call for any reader seeking to understand the BPP. Its impressive command of detail is based on the authors' collection of a vast array of BPP-related primary material, and relies especially on their reading of the BPP's newspaper. Its highly valuable understanding of the BPP's relationship with Third World liberation movements should be supplemented by [Malloy 2017](#).

Cleaver, Kathleen, and George Katsiaficas, eds. *Liberation, Imagination, and the Black Panther Party: A New Look at the Panthers and Their Legacy*. New York: Routledge, 2001. [ISBN: 9780415927833]

More uneven than Jones 1998 but possessing an air of great authority courtesy of Cleaver's experience as participant-observer and scholar, this volume contains some important articles, such as Churchill's impassioned and detailed discussion of the FBI's anti-BPP counterintelligence program. Umoja, on the Black Liberation Army, perceptively interrogates the problems of using scholarly methods to uncover histories of underground, extralegal activities. Reflecting the backlash against Pearson, Newton appears fleetingly, most importantly in Henderson's forensic dismissal of Pearson 1994 (cited under *Biographical Studies*).

Garrow, David. "Picking Up the Books: The New Historiography of the Black Panther Party." *Reviews in American History* 35 (2007): 650–670.

A very useful guide to pre-2010 historical writing on the BPP. Garrow laments the absence of a reliable single-volume narrative history, a call that was answered by Bloom and Martin 2013.

Jones, Charles E., ed. *The Black Panther Party: Reconsidered*. Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1998. [ISBN: 9780933121966]

An essential collection that weaves together participant-observer and scholarly accounts in compelling fashion. Some contributors, such as Singh, expanded their findings elsewhere. Others let their contributions stand alone, while former members contributed fragments of memory that informed longer publications. The valuable debate encoded in the section on the BPP's decline and the impressive discussion of gender within the party are among this collection's many highlights.

Malloy, Sean L. *Out of Oakland: Black Panther Party Internationalism during the Cold War*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2017. [ISBN: 9781501702396]

Like Murch 2010 (cited under *Local Histories of the BPP*) and Spencer 2016, this volume offers an interpretative history of the BPP, this time focusing on the BPP's interaction with international politics and international political movements. It is particularly useful for an understanding of the BPP's relationship with Third World liberation movements.

Rhodes, Jane. *Framing the Panthers: The Spectacular Rise of a Black Power Icon*. New York: New Press, 2007. [ISBN: 9781565849617]

Undoubtedly the most authoritative account of the BPP's position as media icons, this evaluates the BPP's reception in the popular and radical press, but also spends considerable time analyzing the BPP's own newspaper. An essential read for understanding the power relations between white America and African American radicals, and particularly useful in detailing the importance of Newton's comrade-rival, Eldridge Cleaver, to the BPP's "spectacular rise."

Spencer, Robyn C. *The Revolution Has Come: Black Power, Gender, and the Black Panther Party in Oakland*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016. [ISBN: 9780822373537]

Excellent on women's experiences in the party. Like many studies of the late 2010s, it highlights the BPP's 1970s activism and uses a wealth of oral history sources. It anticipates Spencer's involvement in the Intersectional Black Panther Party History Project alongside Angela D. LeBlanc-Ernest, Tracye Matthews, and Mary Phillips. For a broader account, see Ashley Farmer, *Remaking Black Power: How Black Women Transformed an Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017).

Street, Joe. "The Historiography of the Black Panther Party." *Journal of American Studies* 44 (2010): 351–375.

Best read alongside [Garrow 2007](#), but now showing its age, this article presents Pearson as the key publication in the BPP's historiography, not for its qualities but for the response that it provoked among a new generation of BPP historians.

Local Histories of the BPP

One of the major themes of BPP scholarship in the 21st century has been the determination of scholars to uncover and publicize the work conducted by BPP members at the neighborhood level in chapters across the nation. This body of work deemphasizes the BPP's violence in favor of confirming the centrality of social projects, such as the free breakfast program, to individual branches' quotidian life. Where [Newton 1980](#) evaluates the party across the nation in book-length form, the majority of the more recent studies are short-form articles or chapters in collections. In shifting the lens to the many other BPP chapters across the nation, they implicitly encourage readers to look beyond Newton to understand the BPP. [Jeffries's](#) ongoing project ([Jeffries 2007](#), [Jeffries 2010](#), [Jeffries 2018](#)) to document the activities of the branches heightens readers' awareness of the importance of local chapter autonomy and particularly the dedication of BPP grassroots activists. Careful readers will observe [Jeffries's](#) role as mentor to a large number of budding BPP scholars. His willingness to publish alongside—and give equal credit to—his students offers an admirable model for professional scholars. Like [Jeffries's](#) collections, [Lazerow and Williams 2006](#) and [Williams and Lazerow 2008](#) offer counterpoints to Newton- or Oakland-centered analyses. [Burke and Jeffries 2018](#) and [Williams 2013](#) position their respective BPP chapters within the longer histories of liberation struggles of the respective localities. [Murch 2010](#) and [Spencer 2008](#) might focus on the location of the BPP's headquarters, but their

application of local history methodologies and emphasis on local activism both place them alongside the other local histories and offer a different perspective on Oakland compared to the more general BPP histories.

Burke, Lucas N. N., and Judson L. Jeffries. *The Portland Black Panthers: Empowering Albina and Remaking a City*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2016. [ISBN: 9780295995168]

Perhaps the most detailed local history of the BPP outside Oakland, this collaborative work positions the BPP within almost a century of African American activism in Oregon. Like many other local studies, it stresses the ability of local BPP members to use their knowledge of local circumstances (and especially of the power structure) to lead their application of BPP ideology.

Jeffries, Judson, ed. *Comrades: A Local History of the Black Panther Party*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007. [ISBN: 9780253349286]

Jeffries's first major collection of BPP local studies rests on the premise that a "more complete picture" (p. 1) of the BPP can be drawn through studying its local chapters. Witt's chapter was expanded as *The Black Panthers in the Midwest: The Community Programs and Services of the Black Panther Party in Milwaukee, 1966–1977* (New York: Routledge, 2007). Notable contributions include Nissim-Sabat on Cleveland and Jeffries on Baltimore.

Jeffries, Judson, ed. *On The Ground: The Black Panther Party in Communities across America*.

Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2010. [ISBN: 9781604734928]

Jeffries's second collection offers in-depth assessments of the BPP in Houston, Seattle, Kansas City, Detroit, Des Moines, and New Orleans (a chapter that supplements Orissa Arend's *Showdown in Desire: The Black Panthers Take a Stand in New Orleans* [University of Arkansas Press, 2009]).

Jeffries, Judson, ed. *The Black Panther Party in a City Near You*. Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2018. [ISBN: 9780820351988]

Jeffries's third collection of local studies, with excellent considerations of the BPP in Atlanta, Washington, DC, and Texas. As per Jeffries's other studies, his promotion of the work of BPP scholars from outside academia is exemplary.

Lazerow, Jama, and Yohuru Williams, eds. *In Search of the Black Panther Party: New Perspectives on a Revolutionary Movement*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006. [ISBN: 9780822338376]

This vibrant collection picks up on the challenge set by the contributors to Jones 1998 to develop complex and challenging approaches to BPP history. Of particular note are Payne's examination of the FBI operative William Cohendet—which, relying on Cohendet's slightly playful reports and wry recollections, suggests that the FBI was less competent than many analysts suggest—and Self's highly stimulating inquiry into the BPP's relationship with the “long” civil rights era.

Murch, Donna Jean. *Living for the City: Migration, Education, and the Rise of the Black Panther Party in Oakland, California*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010. [ISBN: 9780807833766]

An essential study of Oakland in the 1950s and 1960s, this peerless analysis of the world that produced Newton and the BPP demands the attention of anybody with a passing interest in the BPP. Murch is particularly astute on the impact of migration on the generation of African American Oaklanders who birthed the BPP, and impressive on the political debates that roiled Merritt College in the 1960s, many of which decisively influenced the early BPP.

Newton, Michael. *Bitter Grain: Huey Newton and the Black Panther Party*. Los Angeles: Holloway House, 1980. [ISBN: 9780870676833]

Probably the first useful history of the BPP that encompasses its activity outside the San Francisco Bay Area. Newton – no relation of the BPP founder – pioneered an approach that emphasizes the independence of the individual chapters while accommodating Newton’s importance both as inspiration and key figure in Oakland.

Spencer, Robyn Ceanne. “Engendering the Black Freedom Struggle: Revolutionary Black Womanhood and the Black Panther Party in the Bay Area, California.” *Journal of Women’s History* 20.1 (2008): 90–113.

Preparing the foundations for Spencer 2016 (cited under *BPP Organizational Histories*), this article explores the gender politics of the Oakland chapter, with particular emphasis on the Panther women who challenged the gendered assumptions of leaders like Newton and Eldridge Cleaver.

Williams, Jakobi. *From the Bullet to the Ballot: The Illinois Chapter of the Black Panther Party and Racial Coalition Politics in Chicago*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013. [ISBN: 9780807838167]

The deepest study of a key BPP chapter. Williams confirms precisely why the chapter’s charismatic and committed central figure, Fred Hampton, was so important to the vibrancy of both the chapter and the social movement in Chicago. Particularly attuned to the chapter’s work with potential rivals and Hampton’s sterling leadership, it is usefully supplemented by Jeffrey Haas, *The Assassination of Fred Hampton* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill, 2010).

Williams, Yohuru, and Jama Lazerow, eds. *Liberated Territory: Untold Local Perspectives on the Black Panther Party*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008. [ISBN: 9780822343264]

Featuring assessments of the BPP in New Bedford (Massachusetts), Alabama, Detroit, and Milwaukee, this work also offers incisive commentary on BPP historiography and a fascinating epilogue from Devin Fergus that uses the BPP's work in Winston-Salem to ponder the BPP's transition from revolutionaries to Democrats.

The BPP and Black Power Politics

Black Power is now the subject of a vast array of scholarship, running from epic narrative histories such as [Joseph 2006](#) to tightly focused case studies such as [Self 2003](#). The breadth and depth of this scholarship simply cannot be done justice in the following short bibliography.

Joseph's volume is now the standard account of what might be termed the "long" Black Power movement and is best supplemented with [Ogbar 2004](#), a shorter, more interpretative analysis.

[Williams 2014](#) offers a briefer account. [Self 2003](#) and [Brown 2003](#) offer fine case studies that position the BPP within the wider movement; [Nelson 2011](#) places the BPP in a very different—but no less important—tradition.

Brown, Scot. *Fighting for US: Maulana Karenga, the US Organization, and Black Cultural Nationalism*. New York: New York University Press, 2003. [ISBN: 9780814798782]

The BPP's FBI-abetted feud with Maulana Karenga—a former comrade of Newton in the Afro-American Association—was one of the central events in the BPP's history. This study of Karenga's organization details ~~BPP-US~~ relations between it and the BPP in Los Angeles as they deteriorated into violence and ultimately death.

Joseph, Peniel E. *Waiting for the Midnight Hour: A Narrative History of Black Power in America*. New York: Henry Holt, 2006. [ISBN: 9780805075397]

Joseph offers a counter to generations of (mostly white) scholars who insisted that the Black Power movement (and hence the BPP) emerged from the failures of the 1960s civil rights

movement. Its chronology confirms the BPP's roots in a century of Black Power activism. See also "Rethinking the Black Power Era," *Journal of Southern History* 75 (2009), and "The Black Power Movement: A State of the Field," *Journal of American History* 96 (2009).

Nelson, Alondra. *Body and Soul: The Black Panther Party and the Fight against Medical*

Discrimination. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011. [ISBN: 9780816676491]

A vivid and vital account of the BPP's health-care initiatives and their relationship with wider struggles amid the discriminatory American medical system. Nelson demonstrates the breadth of the BPP's impact on African American life.

Ogbar, Jeffrey O. G. *Black Power: Radical Politics and African American Identity*. Baltimore:

Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004. [ISBN: 9780801879579]

The best of the interpretative accounts of Black Power, this tightly focused interpretive account is a good place to begin any inquiry into Black Power.

Self, Robert O. *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland*. Princeton, NJ:

Princeton University Press, 2003. [ISBN: 9780691070261]

Brilliant on the BPP's relationship with suburbanization, this volume de-emphasizes the BPP's 1960s history—an unusual approach that reaps many rewards. Instead, Self focuses on the BPP in Oakland during the 1970s, presenting them as outcasts within the local African American political firmament, something that helped prevent the election of BPP founder Bobby Seale as Oakland mayor in 1973.

Williams, Rhonda Y. *Concrete Demands: The Search for Black Power in the 20th Century*. New

York: Routledge, 2014. [ISBN: 9780415801430]

A very fine, readable, and accessible survey of the century of Black Power.

The Police and Race Relations

The FBI's counterintelligence program against the BPP was the most extensive of all its campaigns against domestic radical organizations in the 1960s and early 1970s. The FBI's famed secrecy, abetted by the destruction of many of its [COINTELPRO](#) documents in 1970, renders any study of the vast campaign to destroy the BPP nigh on impossible (see ***"FBI COINTELPRO Black Extremist"***). [Newton 1996](#) (cited under [*Works by Newton*](#)) offers a predictably damning conclusion, which should be supplemented by Churchill's entry in [Cleaver and Katsiaficas 2001](#) (under [*BPP Organizational Histories*](#)). [O'Reilly 1989](#) remains vitally important, not only as the first major study, but also in the breadth of its coverage and the rectitude of its conclusions. Despite the FBI's attempt to erase the documentary record, numerous primary sources remain. ***"FBI COINTELPRO Black Extremist"*** positions the BPP within the campaign against other African American radicals. Newton's own [FBI file](#) (***"Huey Percy Newton"***) is even more extensive, including telephone logs detailing his every utterance. [US Senate 1976](#) revealed the extent of the FBI's perfidy to the American people, confirming the suspicions of many 1960s radicals.

Federal Bureau of Investigation. ***"FBI COINTELPRO Black

Extremist[<https://vault.fbi.gov/cointel-pro/cointel-pro-black-extremists>]*." FBI Records: The Vault. [class:dataSetItem-database]

[The extent of the surveillance can be sampled in the FBI's own \(heavily redacted and partial\) archives. Naturally, FBI evidence must be read carefully and critically, in full awareness of the organizational culture that informed the production of each and every document \(and those that were destroyed\). The FBI was extremely adept at locating people and listening to what they were saying, but far less so in understanding or reporting reliably what was being said.](#)

Federal Bureau of Investigation. “*Huey Percy Newton[<https://vault.fbi.gov/huey-percy-newton>].*” FBI Records: The Vault. [class:dataSetItem-database]

Following his 1970 release from prison, Newton was subjected to daily surveillance that extended to wiretaps, infiltration of his closest circle of friends, intimidation, and more, not to mention the FBI renting the apartment opposite his own to facilitate interference in his every activity. The extent of this again might be sampled in the FBI’s own records, some of which informed Newton’s PhD. Naturally, the above caveats apply regarding interpretation. Also available via the *ProQuest History Vault[<https://blackfreedom.proquest.com/category/civil-rights-and-black-power-movements/civil-rights-people-and-organizations/black-panther-party/>]*.

O’Reilly, Kenneth. “*Racial Matters*”: *The FBI’s Secret War on Black America, 1960–1972*. New York: Free Press, 1989. [ISBN: 9780029236819]

A monumental investigation into the FBI’s baleful but partially successful attempt to derail the African American freedom struggle, this work offers insight into not only the vast operation against the BPP, but also an array of other Black American figures, including Dr. Martin Luther King.

US Senate. **Final Report of the Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities, Supplementary Detailed Staff Reports on Intelligence Activities and the Rights of Americans, Book III*

https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/94755_III.pdf]*. S. Rep. No. 94-755. 94th Congress, 2nd Session, 1976. [class:report]

The Church Committee, as it became known, presented to the US Senate devastating findings on the extent of surveillance of ordinary Americans during the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Activities against the BPP feature heavily. As per any federal report, this source must be treated with due skepticism.

Race and the Court System

Newton's trial for the murder of Oakland police officer John Frey crystallized the BPP's relationship with the local police, the courts, and the local populace. Charles Garry's flamboyant defense of Newton, which focused attention on the institutional racism of the legal system and the racist society that produced the BPP, was a master class in courtroom advocacy. Yet aside from the highly partial [Keating 1971](#), the succinct [Tibbs 2012](#), and the lengthy [Pearlman 2012](#), it has not yet received the attention it deserves. Of the three, Pearlman offers the most authoritative and detailed account of events in the court. Meanwhile, a vast "Free Huey" campaign elevated the BPP from a minor local group to an international organization. Coordinated by Kathleen and Eldridge Cleaver, it did more than any other BPP initiative to cement the organization in the popular consciousness and is best sampled in the relevant chapters of [Rhodes 2007](#) (cited under *BPP Organizational Histories*) and the brief analysis in [Street 2019](#), with [Bae 2017](#) demonstrating the wider sympathy for Newton in the local area.

Bae, Aaron Byungjoo. "The Struggle for Freedom, Justice, and Equality Transcends Racial and National Boundaries: Anti-imperialism, Multiracial Alliances, and the Free Huey Movement in the San Francisco Bay Area." *Pacific Historical Review* 86 (2017): 691–722.

[Focused on the BPP's alliances with other local liberation movement organizations, this confirms the vivacity of Bay Area radicalism at a key moment in the 1960s.](#)

Keating, Edward M. *Free Huey!: The True Story of the Trial of Huey P. Newton for Murder*.

Berkeley, CA: Ramparts Press, 1971.

A highly partial account of the trial, written by a member of Garry's legal team, this volume offers excellent insights into the pressures faced by the team as they attempted to thwart the OPD's determined campaign to end Newton's life.

Pearlman, Lise. *The Sky's The Limit: People v. Newton, The Real Trial of the 20th Century?* Berkeley, CA: Regent Press, 2012. [ISBN: 9781587902208]

Pearlman's narrative presents the 1968 Newton trial as a key moment in American history. It offers stark proof of the lengths to which the Oakland Police Department was prepared to go in order to have Newton sentenced to death. In revealing the extent of the OPD's (over)reach, Newton's legal team emerge as heroic defenders of Newton's life.

Street, Joe. "'Free Huey or the Sky's the Limit': The Black Panther Party and the Campaign to Free Huey P. Newton[<https://journals.openedition.org/ejas/14273>]*." *European Journal of American Studies* 14 (2019).

This article presents the trial and the attendant popular "Free Huey" campaign as key moments in 1968 globally. It hints at the trial's significance as a major turning point for Black Power politics and for the criminal justice system's approach to African Americans, furthered in Street 2015 (cited under *African American Incarceration*).

Tibbs, Donald F. *From Black Power to Prison Power: The Making of Jones v. North Carolina Prisoners' Labor Union*. New York: Palgrave, 2012. [ISBN: 9780230340169]

Tibbs presents the Newton trial as a key staging post leading to the 1977 Supreme Court decision that denied prisoners the right to join labor unions, an important and often overlooked observation. Its brief account of the trial is informed by a variety of secondary sources.

African American Incarceration

There is an argument that the BPP was made and destroyed by US penal system. All of the major male Panthers and many of their comrades experienced the prison cell at first hand, some before, some during, and some after their involvement with the party. The excellent [Cummins 1994](#) details exactly how California prisons adjusted their approach to their prisoners. [Berger 2014](#) provides an impassioned account that continues the narrative while also demonstrating how African American prisoners and their lawyers conceptualized their role as political prisoners. Both offer very fine accounts of the experience of two key BPP associates in Eldridge Cleaver and George Jackson. Juxtaposing their two prison histories offers numerous insights into the prison experience of the 1960s and early 1970s. [Blake 2012](#) and [Street 2015](#) analyze Newton's experience, which was characterized by long periods of solitary confinement punctuated by occasional visits from family and Blake himself.

Berger, Dan. *Captive Nation: Black Prison Organizing in the Civil Rights Era*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014. [ISBN: 9781469618241]

[A signal work in the history of American incarceration; Berger focuses on a series of trials of BPP members and comrades such as Angela Davis and George Jackson in outlining a more aggressive attempt by the American legal system to oppress and imprison increasing numbers of African American citizens. It overlooks the importance of the Newton trial, which first revealed the tactics used to achieve such a strategy, but remains a crucial contribution to BPP historiography.](#)

Blake, J. Herman. "The Caged Panther: The Prison Years of Huey P. Newton." *Journal of African American Studies* 16 (2012): 236–248.

A vital and subtly provocative participant-observer account of Newton on ice. Blake visited Newton regularly in prison, during which time they began working on Newton's autobiography. It suggests that Blake wrote many of Newton's articles and position papers that were published during the late 1960s and early 1970s, although the evidence Blake presents suggests that he acted more as amanuensis.

Cummins, Eric. *The Rise and Fall of California's Radical Prison Movement*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994. [ISBN: 9780804722315]

Cummins expertly details California's attempt to recast the prison as a rehabilitative oasis, one that was successfully exploited by a generation of politicized inmates. Newton's BPP comrade Eldridge Cleaver emerges as a key figure (and thus Cummins offers a crucial prologue to the account of his importance to the BPP in Rhodes 2007). Newton suffered the backlash to Cleaver personally when he was imprisoned following the death of John Frey.

Street, Joe. "Shadow of the Soul Breaker: Solitary Confinement, Cocaine, and the Decline of Huey P. Newton." *Pacific Historical Review* 84 (2015): 333–363.

Using models from psychology and drug addiction, this article highlights the impact of prison on Newton, paying particular attention to his experience of solitary confinement and its deleterious impact on his lifelong mental health.