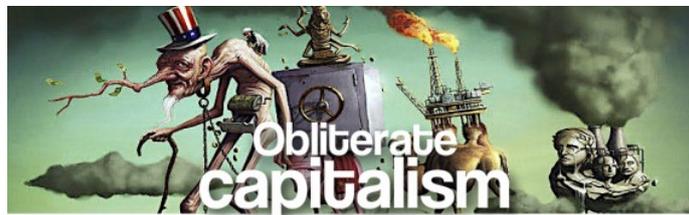


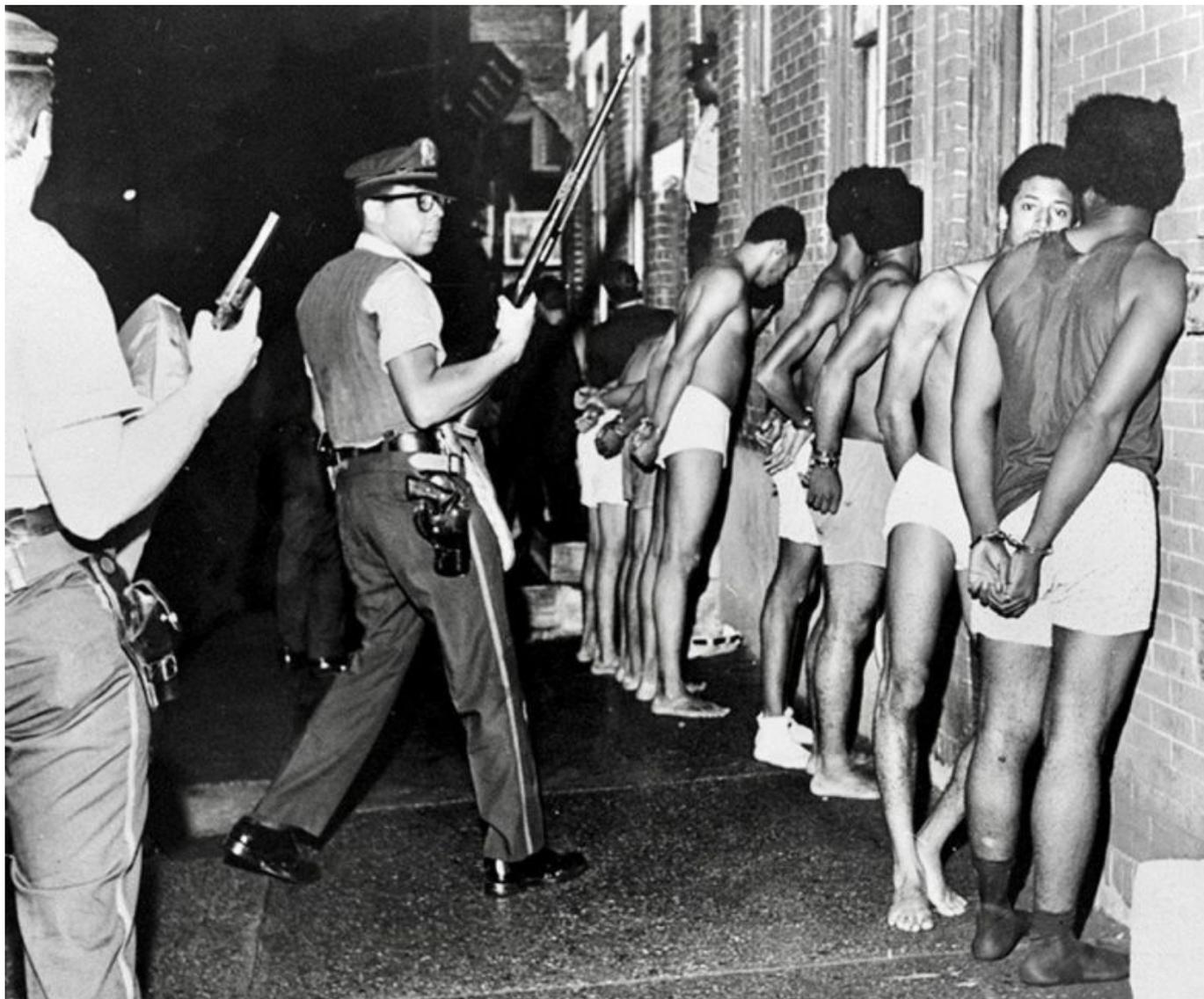
Coard: Happy 51st Birthday, Black Panther Party!

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Michael Coard
[The Philadelphia Tribune](#)



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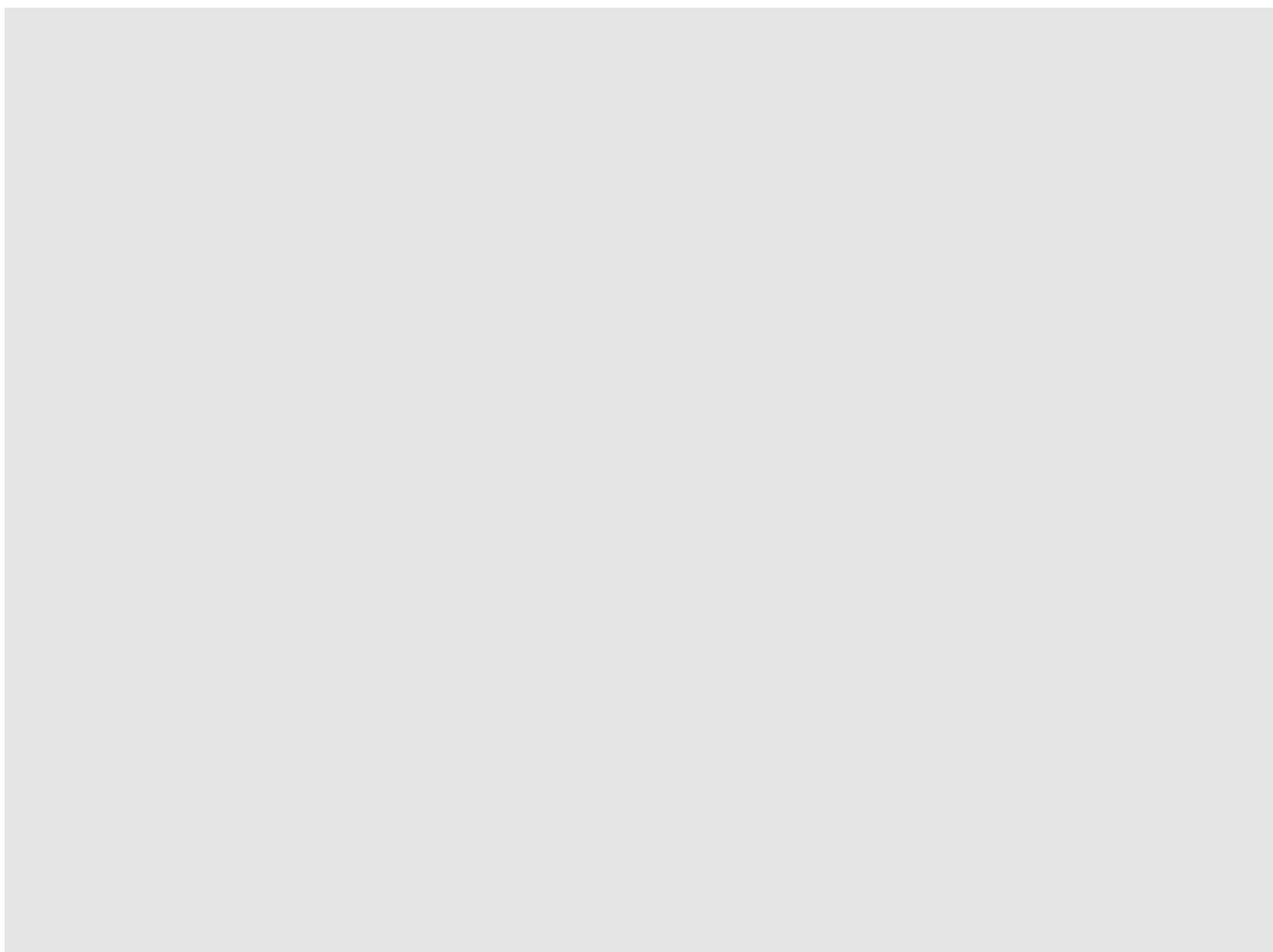


The Black Panther Party for Self-Defense (BPP) – the most important and most powerful pro-Black, class-conscious, community protection organization in American history- was born 51 years ago on October 15, 1966. It was so important and so powerful that FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover described it as “the greatest threat to the internal security of the country...” He added that its revolutionary activities, especially the children’s free breakfast program, were “potentially the greatest threat to efforts by authorities... to neutralize the BPP and destroy what it stands for.”

As bad as the FBI’s words were, its actions were even worse. As made clear in the 1976 report by the U.S. Senate Committee on Intelligence Activities, “In August... 1967, the FBI

initiated COINTELPRO (i.e., the counterintelligence program that operated from 1956-1971) to disrupt and 'neutralize'... (certain) organizations..." By July 1969, indicated the report, "the BPP had become the primary focus of the program and was ultimately the target of 233 of the total authorized... COINTELPRO actions... (targeting pro-Black groups)."

Why was the BPP such a threat to American law enforcement? Here's the answer: the BPP's laudable anti-capitalist goals of full employment, decent housing, enlightened education, fair trials, justice, and an end to police brutality.



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These goals constitute six of the points in the Ten Point Platform and Program initially drafted by Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale in Oakland on the BPP's October 15, 1966 birth

date. Shortly afterward, Newton and Seale joined with Reggie Forte, Sherman Forte, Elbert "Big Man" Howard, and "Lil" Bobby Hutton as the founders of this impressive and much needed revolutionary organization.

Within three years, it had more than 10,000 members and its newspaper, which began publication in 1967, reached a circulation of 250,000. The BPP had chapters across the country, including Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, Cleveland, DC, Dallas, Denver, Des Moines, Detroit, Indianapolis, Kansas City, LA, NYC, New Haven, New Orleans, Newark, Oakland, Omaha, Pittsburgh, Richmond, Sacramento, San Diego, San Francisco, Seattle, and Philly. In fact, the Oakland chapter had gained such public support that Seale, in his 1972 mayoral run, came close to an upset victory, garnering 40 percent of the vote.

The mainstream media's 1960s-1970s mantra, which many persons continue to foolishly believe to this very day, of the BPP as a bunch of white-hating, anarchistic urban terrorists is a myth. First of all, terrorists don't create a Free Breakfast Program for Children like the BPP did in Oakland in 1969 (which was later copied by the federal government). The BPP expanded this program to numerous cities, ultimately feeding over 10,000 children every day. Terrorists don't do that.

And terrorists don't establish and implement more than 45 social services, called Survival Programs, including free medical care, sickle cell testing, blood drives for Black and poor people, and non-violent gang dispute resolution like the BPP did.

Moreover, terrorists don't mandate that their Central Committee staffs engage in "anti-crime" behavior and promote "gun safety" like the BPP did.

But don't get it twisted; the BPP was not a group of kumbaya pacifists. It included "Self-Defense" in its name for a reason. And the reason was in direct response to relentless and officially sanctioned police brutality.

That's precisely why, on May 2, 1967, thirty visibly armed BPP members and supporters marched to the California State Capitol in Sacramento where Seale read a prepared statement opposing the Mulford Act, which was a legislative proposal that was later signed into law by Governor Ronald Reagan. It criminalized the carrying of loaded firearms in public- and did so only because Blacks had finally decided to assertively exercise their Second Amendment right and their self-defense right just like whites had always done.

However, guns weren't what the BPP was exclusively about in response to police brutality. People would be shocked to learn that the BPP, armed with law books and basic legal training, would often arrive at the scene of incidents of police brutality and stand a safe distance away reading aloud the pertinent sections of various criminal statutes and judicial decisions to inform the cops and the victims of what the law mandated in those particular situations.

But that didn't stop the bloodshed- not the bloodshed of police, but the bloodshed of innocent BPP members. On March 13, 1968, Arthur Morris became the first of many Panthers murdered by federal agents, state and local police officers, and paid provocateurs.

One of the most high-profile murders was of 21-year-old Fred Hampton who was assassinated on December 4, 1969. On that date, the Chicago police launched a raid on his home at 4:45 in the morning, shooting a sleeping and unarmed Hampton twice in the head and also assassinating 22-year-old Mark Clark. Hampton's pregnant wife, Akua Njeri (aka Deborah Johnson), was shot but fortunately both she and the baby - Fred Hampton Jr. - survived.

And just as Fred Hampton's son survived, the BPP's legacy survived- and not just nationally but locally as well. It survives in many people who are alive and well fighting the good fight for Black folks. Among many others, those people

include Mumia Abu-Jamal who, at age 15, was Philly's youngest Panther and served as its Minister of Information. They include Linda Brickhouse who, as a high school student, helped organize the Panthers' Philly free breakfast program for children.

They also include Paula Peebles who, as another high school student, was the Communications Secretary of Philly's Panther chapter. And as Sistah Paula often says, "When I first heard about the BPP as a teenager, I was thoroughly impressed with the strong Black men and strong Black women who courageously came together and rang the alarm of revolution, who heroically protected the Black community with firearms in legal self-defense, and who proudly proclaimed that Black Lives Matter long before it became a hashtag. The BPP planted the seeds of revolution yesterday and now the tree is growing big and strong today." Sistah Paula always concludes by raising her fist and saying, "Power to the people!"

And today I say, "Happy 51st Birthday to the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense!"

[su_panel color="#1d1919" border="5px dotted #24476d" padding="10" shadow="2px 0px 1px #eeeeee" radius="7" target="blank"] Michael Coard, Esquire can be followed on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. His "Radio Courtroom" show can be heard on WURD96.1-FM. And his "TV Courtroom" show can be seen on PhillyCam/Verizon/Comcast. [/su_panel]

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