

The legitimacy of the black panther party history essay

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Legitimacy of the Black Panther Party

The Black Panther Party (BPP) was perhaps the most powerful black social movement in the US in the late 60s and in the 1970s. Led by Huey Newton, the party was formed in the 1966 shortly after the assassination of Malcolm X, a human rights activist for the blacks from the oppressor and a time when the civil war was at its peak. For a long time blacks had been oppressed and brutally beaten by the police and denied the social amenities in public utilities. They were neither allowed to form parties that were meant to liberate them nor were they allowed to take part in building the nation. They did not know their position in the land of slavery where most of them had come to know as home. Apart from the civil rights movement, most of the movements earlier formed had the primary objective of liberating them. The civil war partly succeeded in its quest led by the diplomatic leader Martin Luther king Jr. He saw to the abolition of the slavery, abolition of the Montgomery bus system, racial segregation and the right to education and to vote for the African Americans who never had these rights. However, even after the abolition of slavery in 1964, the Civil Rights Act that was against any kind of discrimination of the minority, police brutality was still evident, as was proven by the video footage displayed in the television of brutal police beatings, water hosed spat and jailed by the police. This brutality by the police was the main reason for the formation of the Black Panther Party initially known as the Black Panther Party for self defense. The party's chief role was to protect the Blacks from the police harassment and oppression. They sought equality, justice and freedom (Blank Panther 43)

The US constitution advocated for democracy in all the

states. However, the democracy of states raised many questions; what was the meaning of democracy if there was racial discrimination, no human rights or civil rights, brutal killings by the police, unfair jailing of the blacks, unfair judgment at the courts, no education for the blacks, and poverty among the black community? The unfair treatment of the blacks by the whites clearly showed that democracy was meant for the majority, but not the minority. The Constitution clearly states that everybody has the right to life, liberty and pursuit of happiness. However, this was not the case as the same government that made the law turned a blind eye to the merciless killings and oppression. The unfair treatment against blacks was well known to the government. In fact, they supported them by giving the police power to arrest the blacks if they breached one of these unfair laws. For instance, the ordeal that led to the abolishment of the Montgomery bus system; when Rosa Parks was arrested for refusing to give up her seat for a white man. There were no laws that protected the minority only those by laws that made them perfect victims of discrimination. Therefore, it was necessary for the radical politics initiated by social movement groups and people to criticize the democracy of the US. Democracy stresses freedom and liberty; the blacks needed to be free and they needed to be heard and therefore needed a voice and the best way they could do this was through the formation of a social party movement. The BPP's core objectives were freedom and stopping the police brutality towards the blacks. They made several appeals to the US government in their October 1966 ten points program. They sought freedom and power for the blacks so that they could be able to determine their destiny. It appears they believed that in order for them to be fully

liberated, they had to first determine their destiny- a destiny full of hope and dreams for a better world for the minorities. They demanded full employment for the blacks; by insisting that if the whites could not employ the blacks it was up to the government to take away the means of production from the businesses men and handing it over to the community hence the community would be responsible for employing them (Smith 19). They wanted to end the robbery as they called it, by the white. They wanted decent housing and education for their people. They protested for freedom of all black men held captives in the federal prisons with no fair and impartial trials. In addition, they wanted the end of police brutality and merciless killings of the blacks by the police and demanded that all blacks should be exempted from the military services especially those recruited to fight in the Vietnam. They compared themselves to the Vietnamese, subjected to the brutality of the whites and killings just like them. It was ironical to fight for a white man who subjected the same treatment to them. They did not see why they should protect an authoritarian and race-propelled government that did nothing to protect them. The Black Panther Party's main objective was to protect the needs of the minority, especially the blacks in the US; they advocated for land, food, justice, and peace for the blacks, things that had they had been denied way before the revolution in the 1770s. For the movement to effectively criticize the failings of the government failure to protect their rights and the failings of democracy in the US, they needed a large number of people to join in the movement. Several sub constituents of the party were formed across all the states. The FBI Chief J. Edgar Hoovers called it the record threat to internal security. This growth was necessary for

the revolution of social change. It was necessary for the inclusion of the blacks in the building of the nation and power. The NPP was prepared to use any means possible to protect the rights of the blacks in the US. They echoed Malcolm X's ideology, freedom by any means possible. They were prepared to use arms against the police who brutally attacked them. For instance, at one time, Huey Newton was detained and charged with the murder of a white police officer during a protest. He however was released after the television covered mass killings of innocent children in the ongoing Vietnam War. Both white and blacks took to the street in protest of these killings and demanded Newton's release. In March 1967, some of the leaders of the party and members marched to the California Legislature to protest against the gun control bill that was aimed at denying the blacks the ownership of arms. This was against the constitution because the constitution allowed the acquiring of arms and if the blacks were denied this right they could hence not be able to protect themselves from the brutality of the police. Therefore, radical politics of the BPP were necessary and legitimate to effectively criticize the failings of a democratic society. BPP was concerned with the needs of the black people and they believed that they could not fully liberate them if they did appeal to their need for basic needs. The political philosophy they adopted was that of a communist society and it was against the capitalist society they were living in. They believed that equality would liberate them fully. The blacks were poverty stricken, they lived in housing not fit for human shelters and the society was unjust to them. The party therefore started a communist philosophy; they needed to tend to the people and their needs. They started free breakfast all over the

states for the poor children (Hilliard 123). The movement ensured that they fed the children with free breakfast provided by the party. In addition, they provided free medical services to the poor. This was aimed at criticizing the government that had shunned these needs. If people lived in a democratic society, why then why were children dying of hunger and of curable diseases simply because they could not afford the medical fee or food? The party provided good housing for the blacks in Oakland, something the government had failed to do for a long time. Their philosophy was to protect the people's needs of the community. One major event was the installation of the street lights in the south and market street. The African American students had been for a long time fallen victims to hits and runs and the party leaders Newton and Seale told the Oakland power structure that if they did not install the lights the party members would block all the roads heavily armed so that the children could cross safely; eventually the lights were installed. The US government being a capitalist state, believed in the concentration of power in the hands of a few individuals. The means of production were owned by the land owners who were primarily the whites. A capitalist state advocating for democracy for all its citizens yet, the inhumanity subjected to the blacks was untold. With their political ideology being against the government, the communist party did what the government had failed to do for a long time; feeding the poor, offering free medical services to them, and provided good housing structures. The government felt the pressure and started free meal programs in all the public schools after the free breakfast program. With the continued growth and spread of the social movement, the government felt threatened. The fact that the party owned arms was

threatening. With the continued growth the party became more and more powerful. The FBI chief then said that the party was the biggest threat to internal security and that it aimed at overthrowing the government. The party believed that the ownership of arms was legitimate since they only used them for self-defense. In addition, the party was attracting more supporters and sponsors this was a big threat to the government. Similarly, the demand for full employment and the insistence that if the whites did not employ the blacks then land to be taken away from them and given to the community so that it was distributed equally among all the people was against the government political ideology of capitalism. The party advocated for communist society. In 1969, Southern California Chapter John Huggins was assassinated together with his colleague. The FBI together with the local police destroyed the BPP offices in California (Douglas & Emory 43).

However, that did not stop the movement as its growth led to the election of Lionel Wilson the first black in power as a mayor. Nevertheless, the CONTELPRO saw to the final fall of the party. The FBI used informants, agents' provocateur and covert activities that involved causing mayhem and murder (Spinner-Halev 23). The movement had succeeded in most of the objectives they had initiated including free groceries giveaways, shoes, education programs, free bussing for elderly persons and prisoner support. It is therefore true to say they were protesting for a legitimate cause and their actions were legitimate and necessary to ensure that the blacks were fully liberated from the unjust treatment they had been subjected to for long.

Definition of words: Legitimate: According to Spinner, legitimate is being in accordance with the law abiding by the rules and standards of a particular

society. Illegitimate: Means unlawful, illegal act that is against the law. If certain laws are unjust and are against the right to a person human rights, then breaching them is deemed necessary. Martin Luther King at one time when he was jailed wrote a letter to his supporters entitled, letter from Birmingham jail. He urged his followers to continue with the boycotts and that they should not fear to disobey the unlawful laws imposed on them. 'Breaking of laws is deemed necessary if the laws are unjust and infringe people's rights.