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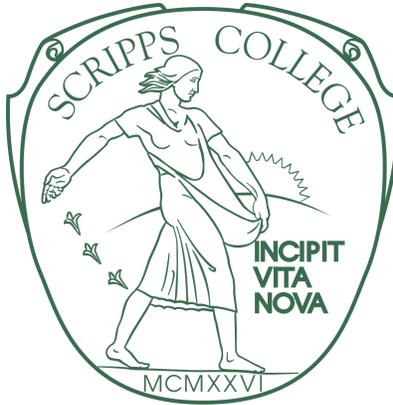
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**Black Maoism, but Make It Fashion:
How the Black Panther Party Utilized Mao Zedong's Marxist
Interpretations in Conjunction with Fashion to Redefine
US Militarism**

By

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**Submitted to Scripps College in Partial Fulfillment of
The Degree of Bachelor of Arts
Major in Organizational Studies
Concentration in Economics**

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Professor Jeff Lewis**

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I will forever miss the adventures and memories made in California. Thank you to the state, too, for granting me escape when I needed it.



Poster by Rashad Johnson, Minister of Defense for the New Afrikan Black Panther Party, depicting the Black Panther Party's mascot defending a communist, anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist, anti-colonialist Africa. Shields (n.d.)

Abstract

This thesis explores the intersections present between the multifaceted, sociopolitical institutions of Marxism and communism with a highlight on their seedling Maoism; the revolutionary organization that is the Black Panther Party; and the art of fashion and processes that create modes of dress, that emblazon dress with identity, meaning, and purpose. The lenses with which these complex topics will showcase themselves and intersect are through militarism and militarization. These lenses and topics of intersection work in tandem to produce an examination of the Black Panther Party's subversion and redefinition of the practices of militarism and militarization. Specifically, the main point of knowledge production occurring in this thesis lives in how the Party utilized a major focus on dress aesthetics or fashion to form dress behaviors inspired by the impact of the civil rights and art movements of the 1960s and 1970s. The framework wherein this thesis develops exists vested in analyzing and employing quotations that aided in the formation of the institution of Maoism: quotations housed in *Mao's Little Red Book*, one of the Black Panther Party's principal guiding muses.

Introduction

Fashion teaches empathy, sympathy, self-confidence, self-accountability, and, as cliché as it sounds, love in the form of acceptance as trends and styles differ across cultures. The art of fashion embraces the nuances of humanity, that there lay more to a person behind the clothing one dons. Fashion gifts the ability to receive the history hidden behind a human being—this in and of itself is a breathtaking art: to be able to convey even a minute part of oneself via cloth, a solid and external form--a form to which I, Chiugo Akujuobi, am eternally indebted. A magnanimous love, the catalyst to my creativity. Fashion is history.

The Black Panther Party founded by Huey P. Newton, aged 24, and Bobby Seale, aged 30, contributed a great deal more to the world beyond revolutionary history. While the Party was known for existing as a political organization, the deep political effects and influences present in the Panther's clothing and uniform choices do not frequently present themselves in discussions of the Black Panther's impact. Their clothing choices are mentioned in terms of their connections to Black Power and not necessarily discussed in tandem with their overt political stances and economic decisions--they are not recognized for the totality of ways, or the intersections in which, they made an impact in the arts, in culture, and in political and economic philosophy solely through their clothing choices. The Black Panthers were in a brave and deadly fight against neoliberalism and saw the need to utilize all of the tools available to them. The art of fashion became one such vehicle for change as the Panthers' modes of dress expressed the "Black Cool"¹ needed to connect youths who, time and time again, placed themselves at the forefront of social change within liberatory revolutions. The Black Panther Party utilized the fact that fashion holds vast parts in forming identity with its powerful imagery. In doing so, they

¹ According to author, essayist, and activist Rebecca Walker, Black Cool is defined as the audacity, resistance, authenticity community, intellectual engagement and rigor, and spiritual engagement on top of other traits, that the black community possesses (Bandeled, 2012, para. 8).

further defined their revolutionary identities through the art, whether intentionally or unintentionally.

In the same way in which the Black Panther Party vehemently rejected capitalism, neoliberalism, liberalism, imperialism, and any “-ism” that led to the destruction of the black community, college took the torch of self-discovery that ignited within me in my hometown of Houston and amplified the extent to which I similarly rejected individualistic materialism. Here, at Scripps College, the classes taken in the first semester of my collegiate career tumbled my presuppositions of how the world works down a hill of critical analysis. Notably, my Core 1 class, *Histories of Present: Community*, centered on the notion of *communitas*, or the concept of an unstructured community in which all people live in egalitarian societies. While the class had its incredible, traumatizing failings, it held a plethora of readings that illuminated the social issues I had the privilege of never pondering; our class discussions catapulted me to recognize my positionality as a middle-class Black person at an elite predominantly white institution. As the classes solely presented us with the problems of the world without a framework to solve them, I began my search to realize this concept of *communitas*.

My search took me to travel to Cuba on Witness for Peace’s Maroon Roots and Revolutionary Delegation, a program focused on uniting the African diaspora. On the trip, we studied Cuba's revolutionary history and how their collectivist values inspired the socialist programs that sprouted from the Revolution. I inadvertently had first-hand experience with the Cuban brand of *communitas* that permeated the island’s society: I landed myself in a 4 day stay at Clínica Central Cira García, one of Cuba’s tourist hospitals, with gastritis. My stay cost me a grand total of \$0 even with the numerous tests my round-the-clock doctors and cardiologists ran. After my stay, I returned to my friends and fellow delegates and heard the story of my friend

Shaquan complimenting a random man's t-shirt. They relayed that with Shaquan's compliment fresh in the air, the man took the shirt off his back and gifted it to Shaquan. This absolutely did not sound real to me as in a country where resources were scarce --due to the US embargo-- the culture of community-care remained. I was changed.

My desire to study the Black Panthers exists as an extension of my change in mindset, a change in orientation to a more anti-capitalist mindset. The Party's work is especially important to never lose sight of because, due to the nature of being a marginalized person living under a capitalist system—daily bombardments to the psyche, socioeconomic struggle, discrimination—the energy to participate and erupt a communist revolution is often non-existent. However, the Black Panther Party chose to rage against the machine. The Panthers choosing resistance while undergoing a bombardment of the psyche is integral to my arguments in order to truly reflect the impacts of the Party. Due to this, I call upon Africana Studies scholar Cedric J. Robinson's (1983) words in *Black Marxism*: “Neither Marx nor Engels were unaware of the proletariat's failure to become a universal class... The universalistic nature of the proletariat does not disappear in Marx's later writings,” (p. 42). Here, Marx and Engel's assumptions that the proletariat condition impacts all laborers to the same degree is countered as a faculty according to Robinson; Marx and Engels did not account for the present realities in which the pressure placed on individuals in the proletariat class vary when race, gender, ability, and other marginalized identities are factored into the equation of oppression. Due to these differing levels of oppression and the emotional labor required by those living with marginalized identities to continuously advocate for themselves, many debate whether those with these identities should be responsible for “fighting the good fight” and participating effectively in movements that work towards liberation from systems of subjugation. One of the reasons that erupted this debate

consists of the belief that the creators of these systems of oppression should be responsible for dismantling the systems that they created. The Black Panther Party decided against waiting for those who were oppressing them to fight for them. They made their own way in efforts to create Black Liberation for black people led primarily by black people.

The Party and specifically Black Panther Huey P. Newton were inspired by Mao Zedong's *Little Red Book* and the Maoist adherence to freeing those of the "third world" with direct action. The Black Panther party clung to this ideology as discussed by Robert Kelley and Betsy Esch (1999) in *Black Like Mao: Red China and Black Revolution*:

Newton was steeped in Mao Zedong thought as well as the writings of Che Guevara and Frantz Fanon. "Mao and Fanon and Guevara all saw clearly that the people had been stripped of their birthright and their dignity, not by a philosophy or mere words, but at gunpoint. They had suffered a holdup by gangsters, and rape; for them, the only way to win freedom was to meet force with force." The Chinese and Cubans' willingness 'to meet force with force' also made these revolutions attractive to black radicals in the age of nonviolent passive resistance. (p. 13)

Newton observed the raw and unmissable ineffectiveness of these nonviolent revolutions and movements of his time. He witnessed the nonviolent sects of the Civil Rights Movement lose at the hands of their imperialist state, the United States; there existed no tangible result which included a countrywide overthrow of capitalism. Newton took it upon himself to explore the ways in which this goal, this manifesto, could come to fruition for not only his countrypeople but for those of the "third world" or less developed and increasingly robbed countries. Maoism provided those results in his and the Black Panthers' eyes. The Panthers represented their commitment to Black Liberation and liberation for all oppressed peoples through the Ten-Point

Program. The initiative contained 10 commandments and driving forces for the existence of the Black Panther Party. They are illustrated below by Eldridge Cleaver, the Panther's Minister of Information in *On the Ideology of the Black Panther Party*:

October 1966 Black Panther Party Platform and Program

What We Want What We Believe

1. We want freedom. We want power to determine the destiny of our Black Community.

We believe that black people will not be free until we are able to determine our destiny.

2. We want full employment for our people.

We believe that the federal government is responsible and obligated to give every man employment or a guaranteed income. We believe that if the white American businessmen will not give full employment, then the means of production should be taken from the businessmen and placed in the community so that the people of the community can organize and employ all of its people and give a high standard of living.

3. We want an end to the robbery by the CAPITALIST of our Black Community.

We believe that this racist government has robbed us and now we are demanding the overdue debt of forty acres and two mules. Forty acres and two mules was promised 100 years ago as restitution for slave labor and mass murder of black people. We will accept the payment in currency which will be distributed to our many communities. The Germans are now aiding the Jews in Israel for the genocide of the Jewish people. The Germans murdered six million Jews. The American racist has taken part in the slaughter of over fifty million black people; therefore, we feel that this is a modest demand that we make.

4. We want decent housing, fit for shelter of human beings.

We believe that if the white landlords will not give decent housing to our black community, then the housing and the land should be made into cooperatives so that our community, with government aid, can build and make decent housing for its people.

5. We want education for our people that exposes the true nature of this decadent American society. We want education that teaches us our true history and our role in the present-day society.

We believe in an educational system that will give to our people a knowledge of self. If a man does not have knowledge of himself and his position in society and the world, then he has little chance to relate to anything else.

6. We want all black men to be exempt from military service.

We believe that Black people should not be forced to fight in the military service to defend a racist government that does not protect us. We will not fight and kill other people of color in the world who, like black people, are being victimized by the white racist government of America.

We will protect ourselves from the force and violence of the racist police and the racist military, by whatever means necessary.

7. We want an immediate end to POLICE BRUTALITY and MURDER of black people.

We believe we can end police brutality in our black community by organizing black self-defense groups that are dedicated to defending our black community from racist police oppression and brutality. The Second Amendment to the Constitution of the United States gives a right to bear arms. We therefore believe that all black people should arm themselves for self-defense.

8. We want freedom for all black men held in federal, state, county and city prisons and jails.

We believe that all black people should be released from the many jails and prisons because they have not received a fair and impartial trial.

9. We want all black people when brought to trial to be tried in court by a jury of their peer group or people from their black communities, as defined by the Constitution of the United States.

We believe that the courts should follow the United States Constitution so that black people will receive fair trials. The 14th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution gives a man a right to be tried by his peer group. A peer is a person from a similar economic, social, religious, geographical, environmental, historical and racial background. To do this the court will be forced to select a jury from the black community from which the black defendant came. We have been, and are being tried by all-white juries that have no understanding of the "average reasoning man" of the black community.

10. We want land, bread, housing, education, clothing, justice and peace. And as our major political objective, a United Nations-supervised plebiscite to be held throughout the black colony in which only black colonial subjects will be allowed to participate, for the purpose of determining the will of black people as to their national destiny.

When, in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume, among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the laws of nature and nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. **That, to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed; that, whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute a new government, laying its foundation on such principles, and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness.** Prudence, indeed, will dictate that governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and, accordingly, all experience hath shown, that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. **But, when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same object, evinces a design to reduce them under absolute despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such government, and to provide new guards for their future security.**

From their beginnings, the Panthers showcased a will to attain freedom through any means necessary and their methodological plan, their “Liberation Bible” leaves readers without a doubt of their systemic and militarized organizing. Tara Donaldson (2021) of *Women's Wear Daily* and essayist and activist Michaela Angela Davis corroborate the military aesthetics presented by the Panthers:

The Black Panther Party, a political organization founded by Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale in 1966, adopted a uniform for the fight to challenge police brutality: blue shirts, black pants, black leather jackets and black berets.

“It was an evolution of the respectability,” Davis said. “It was rebellious but also very, very intentional.”

The look tapped into the toughness and counter culture connotation that came with leather, and drew on the beret’s history as a component of military uniforms. (para. 17-19)

As with any organization, growth in membership is the goal and dress presented an interesting opportunity for the party to tap into the growing popularity of the Black Arts Movement and counterculture rising in the 1960s and 70s. Additionally, Tara Donaldson (2021) of *Women's Wear Daily* writes on the power of dress:

That sense of dressing for dignity was part of the Black experience, both inside and outside of a protest or movement.

“Black folks just like to look good in general,” Davis said, “There’s this inherent sense of style, because your body was probably the one small piece of real estate, you had some

kind of faculty over and some kind of agency. And even then, you didn't, because your body could be beaten and pummeled.”

What the collective community understood, as well, she said, was how powerful their appearance would be in shaping the narrative around what was happening in America.

(para. 9-11)

The Black Panther Party, both their leaders and members, witnessed the cultural significance of dress within the black community and utilized its power. The Panthers worked to declare their strength, declare their army, and declare the fortified Maoist ideologies backing their plight. In such a fight between anti-capitalists and capitalist, hegemonic states such as the United States, art in the form of fashion proved to be a worthy adversary against the oppressions that plagued the black community. The Party harnessed the utility fashion holds in aiding in the formation of individual identity, in forming group identity, and in forming larger societal identity. The ways in which the Black Panther Party absorbed the power that fashion holds does not end merely at identity formation but also encompasses the fact that the Party went a step further and cultivated their style to display the identity of a new age of militarism and militarization. This age was characterized by a focus on redefining the scope of what a military is and can exist as. Fashion showed itself to stand as an unlikely vehicle for recruiting members into the Black Panther Party, nevertheless, the art served as an effective tool for growing their numbers and in redefining the nature and aesthetics of US militarism and militarization. Additionally, they employed the greatest tool of all: education with the lessons to be found at the intersections of Maoism, dress, politics, history, and Black Liberation. Although fashion and dress are often used interchangeably, the distinction between the two must be made with respect to the institution of

Fashion Studies. According to Andrew Reilly (2014) , author of *Key Concept for the Fashion Industry* , fashion and dress are defined as the following:

Fashion is (a) an intangible force (b) that is manifested in tangible products, (c) that represent newness relative to prior fashion products, (d) are adopted by a group of people, and (e) are reflections of society and culture. Using this perspective, we can apply the concept of fashion to different products and industries.

Dress includes three elements: (1) any item worn on the body (e.g., clothing, accessories); (2) any modification to the body (e.g., tanning, dieting, tattooing, hair styles); and (3) anything appended to the body (e.g., handbags, crutches, dog leashes, fans). (p. 12-13)

Fashion exists as the material creations of mind such as fashion designs made into clothing using textiles. Dress encompasses fashion as well as extracurricular means of identity and self expression such as tattoos and nail polish. While the definitions of dress and fashion differ academically, I will employ them within this thesis synonymously for the sake of ease of understanding for my audience as the two express the same idea colloquially.

Fashion Made Political

Art and artists have often inspired social movements and influenced masses of people. This can be seen through massive fan bases for popular artists of each era of humanity, such as Fieda Kahlo who pushed feminism in her home country of Mexico, to more isolated artists who make waves in their own communities. Fashion designers and designers dabbling in other aspects of dress--notedly black designers--embody and showcase the political nature of fashion and dress similarly to the aforementioned artists; fashion designers employ such a ubiquitous and inescapable medium such as clothing to address issues ranging from racism to sexism to xenophobia. Clothing as a medium presents itself as the perfect channel for certain activisms. This is due to the fact that, in western societies-- in which these artists find their audiences--wearing clothing exists as an enforced social norm. Clothing lives at the forefront of our lives thus any messages presented on them shall transmit to the intended audience.

Designers such as Brandon Blackwood and his "End Systemic Racism" bag, Pyer Moss with his bloodied combat boots fitted mournfully and covered with names of black people who have lost their lives to police brutality, and designer Mowalola Ogunlesi's halter dress detailed with a singular bullet hole to raise awareness for the way in which respectability politics do not aid black people all illustrate the notion that fashion is in fact political. Moreso, fashion and dress display the capability of holding and transmitting political messages.



Photo by Hsiang-Hsi Lu depicting designer Brandon Blackwood's bags emblazoned with "End Systemic Racism". Ware (2020)



Photo by Joshua Lott depicting Pyer Moss' bloodied combat boots in memoriam to black lives lost at the hands of police brutality. Friedman (2020)



Supermodel Naomi Campbell donning Nigerian designer Mowalola Ogunlesi's bulletproof dress at Campbell's annual Fashion for Relief event in the midst of London Fashion Week. Davies (2019)

These 21st century examples of art and fashion providing a vehicle for political promotion do not stop there; Henry Navarro Delgado (2018), assistant professor of fashion at Ryerson University, states:

Dress expression ranges the full political gamut from conformity to rebellion. Simply put, dress style that challenges -- or is perceived as challenging, or offering an alternative to the status quo -- spontaneously acquires political meaning.

Hence the social power of dress and the political impact of seeing many people dressed in an agreed-upon mode. During the counter-demonstrations in Charlottesville, Va., last summer, [left-wing] protesters opposing white supremacists wore "black bloc" -- an all-black uniform of sorts, meant to show a unified hard stance against anti-Black racist discourse. (para. 7-8)

Through their "black bloc" or donning black-dominant clothing, left wing protesters push the message that their efforts are in service to the black community. A singular clothing color riles up enough reaction to be noteworthy thus illustrating the political power that fashion holds. This "black bloc" discussion presented lives embedded with the message that black lives matter and black plight must be noted and, most important, eradicated. Additionally, this coordination exists as an important notion due to the sheer historical imaginings the mode of dress evokes: images of the Black Panther Party fitted with their all black uniforms, of their revolutionary nature, of the ideology that fashion is revolutionary.

Maoism Designed: Mao Zedong Thought

Chairman Mao believed that his methodologies illustrated how not only China but the world should undertake the task of revolution, a task the Black Panther Party did not shy from and bravely adopted. Mao Zedong Thought or Maoism as it is known in the western world, is a complex amalgamation of Marxist-Leninist principles paired with established fundamentals of Chinese culture and larger ideals. Specifically, Maoism is the set of ideals and strategies utilized by Mao Zedong for the purpose of creating a world morally, economically, politically, philosophically, and socially run on Marxist principles with power vested in the revolutionary classes in overlooked, non-industrialized Third World countries; countries such as the now People's Republic of China, which Mao helped erect as the helm of the Chinese Communist Party. These revolutionary classes include the peasantry; small merchants also known as the petty bourgeoisie as well as the proletariat as defined by classical Marxism, those who hold a negligible position in the groups who own of the means of production.

The foundations of Maoism lie in the fact that the institution of thought exists as the third stage of Marxism, the third stage that defines this present era of Marxist thought (Røed, 2019, para. 2). This belief is rooted in the assertion by contemporary Maoists and their display of commitment to this ideal: “Maoism’s distinction as the Marxism of our time is of utmost importance in the journey to understanding the historical formations of the institution and the reasons why the Black Panthers fondly committed themselves to the ideology.

This Marxism of today differs from classical Maoism, however, in specific ways. The institution of thought is in reality a clear and concise amalgamation of Marxism, Leninism, and Stalinism. Karl Marx’s ideologies on revolution set the stage for Maoism’s core principle of a world free from class stratification. Marx and Engels’ respective concepts of scientific

socialism as well as an unmitigated focus on dialectical materialism frame and contextualize Maoism's focus on the peasantry of the world leading the revolution to overthrow their imperialistic oppressors. Specifically, Marxism's dialectical materialism as envisioned by Engels was simplified by Holubnychy (1964):

External reality (nature, society, etc.) exists independently of its knowledge by man. Whether man is aware of it or not, reality exists. Therefore, reality ("being") precedes and dominates consciousness and thinking. The process of knowledge goes from reality into the mind and then back to reality as a reflected thought of it. (p. 7-8)

Holubnychy (1964) continues and illustrates the fact that Mao demonstrated an immense commitment to the dialectics, which reflected through his insistence that Russian philosophers and communists should implement it into their discussions and renderings of communism:

So much have the Russians neglected dialectics that it was Mao Tse-tung personally who reminded them of it at the 1957 world Communist conference and instituted that it be practised. It was only "as a result of the common efforts of the delegations of the CCP² and the other fraternal parties," that the Russians draft of the 1957 Moscow Declaration was changed; the "main additions" included "the formulation on the importance of applying dialectical materialism in practical work." (p. 9)

This commitment to dialectics was reflected in the political theory employed by the Black Panther Party:

From the tenets of Maoism they set the role of their Party as the vanguard of the revolution and worked to establish a united front, while from Marxism they addressed the capitalist economic system, embraced the theory of dialectical materialism, and

² Chinese Communist Party

represented the need for all workers to forcefully take over the means of production.

(para. 2)

Categorically, one of the overarching principles present in Maoism is the strategy of “Protracted People’s War”. This “war” was to take shape in the form of “long term guerilla warfare wherein the communist party bases itself mainly in rural areas of a country to set up liberated ‘red bases’ where it provides education, healthcare and implements land reforms. As these ‘red areas’ grow they eventually surround and take over cities, if not the entire country” (“Goutham Asked”, 2019, para. 5). The Black Panther Party generously utilized this concept of a “Protracted People’s War” as a guiding principle in their strategies against the racism and imperialism they faced as Black citizens of the United States. This is reflected in the fact that social welfare projects and programs were the core focus of the work the Black Panthers created and implemented for their communities. Programs such as “Free Breakfast for Children Program, distribution of shoes and clothing, and community health clinics” (Peterson, 2015, para. 31). Continuing, another one of the sociopolitical institution’s central focuses rests in Chairman Mao’s belief that in every society--including socialist/communist societies-- there can be found two contradictions as summarized by researcher of sociohistoriography of Henri Chambre (n.d.):

(1) antagonistic contradictions—contradictions between us (the people) and our enemies (the Chinese bourgeoisie faithful), between the imperialist camp and the socialist camp, and so forth—which are resolved by revolution, and (2) nonantagonistic contradictions—between the government and the people under a socialist regime, between two groups within the Communist Party, between one section of the people and another under a communist regime, and so forth—which are resolved by vigorous fraternal criticism and self-criticism. (para. 2)

Maoism exists as a theory and institute based in material dialects, a belief that situates the tangible realities of the world we live in in conversation with the strategies on how to shift this reality with respect to the present. In the tangible reality, according to Mao and his teachings, antagonistic contradictions deem that the class conflicts and stratifications found between the proletariat and peasant classes are deep and unresolvable without a violent revolution. This notion of a violent revolution makes great sense as the bourgeoisie class, the class with political, social, and economic power will not freely relinquish their privileges-- a reality seen in the Cuban Revolution-- and they must be ripped away from them in service to the collective. Maoism believes that even a theoretical compromise between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat and the peasantry exists as an impossibility due to the aforementioned reasons or what Maoists name as antagonistic contradictions. Nonantagonistic contradictions on the other hand dictate that certain conflicts show characteristics of contentions that can be resolved through dialogue. The key component of this theory of contradictions subsists of the notion that in order for a society to truly define the realities they live in, great distinction must be made between the aspects of one's society that require antagonistic actions or nonantagonistic actions to resolve.

Essentially, Maoism is the framework with which third world nations and peoples can use to effectively reach liberation as the institution of Maoism is built around the needs of the peasantry--a tailormade handbook. In order to reach this liberation, the material conditions of societies in question must be assessed to decide if said societies need direct combative action or rather interpersonal dialogue to resolve their oppressions.

History of the Black Panther Party

The history of the Black Panther Party exists as a tale of adversity, warriorship, victory, and artistic expression. The Party emerged in the late 1960s and early 1970s during the mass exodus of youths to radical ways of thought amidst the resistance against the Vietnam War. At the same time, revolutions erupted against colonial forces in the continents of Africa and Asia whilst guerilla warfare defined Latin American countries in tandem with Stalinism and Maoism appealing to the sensibilities of the people of the world. In the United States, in the home of the Black Panther Party's emergence, police brutality defined the time along with massive protests against racial hegemony in the country or what was then dubbed as "race riots" (Peterson, 2015).

Through all of these happenings, in the mid-1960s, the Black Panther Party found its footing in the widespread Civil Rights Movement that sought to propel the United States from its grip on racial capitalism to simply basic and widespread democratic equality amongst the country's populus. Interestingly, before finding this footing to create an official movement, the roots of the party, "stretched back to the post-World War I struggles of returning veterans³, and the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters (BSCP), the first labor organization led by blacks to be accepted into the American Federation of Labor (AFL)" (Peterson, 2015). Specifically, the revolutionary and radical group emerged on October 15, 1966 by Huey Newton and Bobby Seale.

³ After fighting in World War I, Black soldiers returned home to racism, racialized violences, and segregation despite laying down their lives for a country that did not value them. Additionally, Black soldiers returned to the United States to take on menial work as those were the jobs unrestricted to them (Clark, 2020, para. 5-11).



Photo of Bobby Seale (left) and Huey Newton (right) in Oakland, California. Elan (2020)

The founders of the party saw the importance of connecting and engaging with the everyday person or, as Eveline Chao (2016) of Chinafile explains, “‘brothers on the block’, as Newton put it--poor people who had not gone to college” (para. 5). Newton, a once illiterate young man who was forced to teach himself how to read in order to attend university, saw the importance of outreach to disadvantaged communities as they were the communities he and his comrades lived within. He had vested interest in procuring a liberated and educated future for him and his people. Due to his affinity for justice as well as the justice-minded orientations of his fellow party comrades, the Black Panther Party adopted *Mao's Little Red Book* as a major guiding text for the party; specifically, the Black Panthers assigned the book as required reading for members as well as employed the Maoist mission to serve the oppressed populace. The Panthers even sold copies of the book of quotations with the purpose of using the profits to purchase firearms (Peterson, 2015) to better protect their communities. Chao (2016) elaborates stating that “Mao was a hero to Newton, who co-founded the Black Panther Party 50 years ago on October 15, 1966, the same year Mao kicked off the Cultural Revolution in China” (para. 6) further illustrating the inevitability and cause for the Party's adherence to Maoist principles, Newton in line with his co-founder and party members, surrounded by revolutionary activity were undoubtedly in the position to absorb the influence the Cultural Revolution in China inspired. The Revolution marked a time where Chinese civilians donned military clothing made out of khaki textiles. This mode of dress emblazoned the Revolution and coincided with the mission to serve one's community as these fashions were worn in solidarity and in sympathy to the proletariat class (“The Cultural Revolution”, n.d.). The Maoist principles found in *Mao's Little Red Book*, teachings the the Black Panther Party utilized to guide their organization, reflected the community care and thought to the collective that highlighted the left-wing political

movements of their time. The needs of the individual were not to supersede the needs of the populace with increased attention to the disadvantaged and disenfranchised members of their society.

This sentiment of community care translated to the arts movement and Black Arts Movement found in the mid-1960s to the mid-1960. This milieu was stamped with intense and widespread contestation of the dominant consumerist cultures believed to be mankind's sole, possible reality. The 1960s and 1970s gave way to increasing radicalism from worldwide student protests to countercultural revolutions with special focus on imaging and cultivating a new world through the lens of art. Influence for the arts created within these movements and their missions stem from arts created in the eastern and southern regions of the world, regions whose arts were in conversation with western trends and ways of living as they directly affected the trends and ways of living in the aforementioned regions. Although the sociopolitical concerns of the eastern and southern hemispheres severely differed as seen through oppositional stances on the Cold War and rising communist sentiments, the arts created in the west during these cultural revolutions reflected the anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist, anti-consumerist views the east and south held (Julie Baumgardner, 2015, para. 1-2). This production of counterculture defined itself by the creation of never-before-seen aesthetics, languages of connection, and dress styles most of which depicted a world oppositional to the conventional way of life found in the 1960s and 70s. Marxism and communism lead the way for new modes of knowledge production, new products of knowledge production, new ways of life directly focused on community care and thought to the collective's wellbeing. These Marxist, revolutionary sentiments echoed in the Black Arts movement, born in 1965 and dissipated in 1975. According to Hannah Foster (2014) of BlackPast, the movement comprised of "politically motivated black poets, artists, dramatists,

musicians, and writers who emerged in the wake of the Black Power Movement” (para. 1).

Additionally, Black Nationalists, which include Revolutionary Nationalists--the Black Panther Party for example--and Cultural Nationalists, found in the Black Power Movement illustrated the revolutionary power of the arts. Although, Cultural Nationalists participating in the Black Arts Movement specifically and solely worked to create revolution through the arts; Foster (2014) states:

Cultural Nationalists...called for the creation of poetry, novels, visual arts, and theater to reflect pride in black history and culture. This new emphasis was an affirmation of the autonomy of black artists to create black art for black people as a means to awaken black consciousness and achieve liberation. (para 2)

This cultural milieu showcased itself in the collective embrace of African diasporic cultures and translated “Africanness” into afros and Black Power fists which defined the 1960s and 1970s.

The black community and their countercultural sects of the time called for their people to challenge the ways in which they had been prescribed to live. There existed a call to do away with perms, hot combs, and white fashion trends and usher in “African⁴” visuals which included dashikis and afros (Bryd, 2001, 53). There existed a push to fight back against the imperialist; racist; sexist; capitalist notions and nations that dominated society; politics; economics; history; domestic, everyday life; and fashion. There existed a push towards utilizing each and every means possible to achieve the creation of a new, more equitable and equal world; a world in which Black Liberation exists as the theme of the era--freedom for all and not solely for the few. One of those means included the arts and the dress aesthetics produced within the larger arts

⁴ Africa is the second largest continent in the world and houses 54 countries. There is no cohesive African identity as there is no cohesive North American identity.

movements of the time as well as within the Black Arts Movement, a vehicle for change that proved excellent for broadcasting revolutionary sentiments.



Drawing by Emory Douglas, the Black Panther Party's minister of culture, echoes the messages of collectivism as the text calls for the black community to stand in arms with the struggles of other oppressed peoples. McKinley and Russonello (2016)

Militarism Made Chicly Anti-Imperialist

The Black Panther Party achieved an unlikely feat through their adherence to Maoist principles, seemingly redefining the concept of United States militarism as well as the appearance and physical attributes of militarization conducted by and in service to the United States. In order to grasp the scope of the Black Panther Party's redefining of militarism and militarization, these two concepts must be defined with respect to the United States. US militarism and militarization are defined by the willful construction of threats in other nations as well as within the United States. The purpose of constructing these narratives of threat is resource extraction and overall political, economic, and social control. These efforts as stipulated by the United States are used to justify increased military spending, general military interventions, and the formation of militaries in regions and arenas of life that were once devoid of them (Gusterson & Besteman, 2019, p. 54). United States' militaristic efforts embody nothing more than aggression with the purpose of spreading US political ideals. Two ideals that define this spread by the US are capitalism and imperialism.

Through their fashions, the Party created chic-anti-imperialism. Chic-anti-imperialism employs fashion as a framework for creating a symbiotic global community in service to the oppressed classes of the world by any means necessary. Rather than weaponizing military forces to bend other regions to the economic, political, and social wills of a hegemonic power, fashion works as a guiding force to usher in liberatory economics, policies, and societies. The Panthers' chic-anti-imperialism appealed to the revolutionary masses due to the youthful presentation and alignment with the Black Arts Movement occurring in the 1960s. This new framework of chic-anti-imperialism still preserved the Black Panther Party's focus on a nation free from Black

oppression and general revolutionary sentiments--the fashions did not deter from the purpose of the party and rather amplified the messages.

The presentation and choice of uniforms employed by the Black Panther Party stayed true to the message presented by Bantu Stephen Biko (2013), the spearhead of the Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa, that ““any black government is likely to be socialist”” (Biko, 2013). These uniforms intentionally symbolized the fact that a microcosmic socialist state of being can exist within, alongside, and eventually superseded the greater capitalist nation that is the United States, a socialist state that intertwines normative and positive economics to create a level, more equitable playing field for the Black populus. Specifically, as analyzed by writer Tara Donaldson (2021):

They took it to another level of very military-oriented, Black power, black clothing, black leather, very much sending a different message...[it] was using appearance to help tell a message that change was being demanded,” Sanders said. “It definitely wasn’t assimilation into the culture, it wasn’t trying to parallel the appearance with cultural norms. It was a direct way of pushing back against the cultural norms visually, through body, dress, appearance”. (para. 20)

The Black Panther Party showed no mercy in loudly and proudly professing their demands for the constitutional rights of life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness; they, through their uniforms effectively redefined United States militarism and militarization outside of an imperialist and colonial framework, a framework integral to sustaining mass control in the United States. The Panthers shaped an army of people not to encourage further exploitation as is a staple of US militarism but to fight for freedom from the chains of capitalism that defined the everyday person’s life. Fashion acted as a means of resolving nonantagonistic issues such as uniform

presentation in this larger fight for liberation. They visually enforced their will and embodied Chairman Mao's (1966) words:

Communists must use the democratic method of persuasion and education when working among the labouring people and must on no account resort to commandism or coercion. The Chinese Communist Party faithfully adheres to this Marxist-Leninist principle. (p. 62)

In line with the Chinese Communist Party as dictated by Chairman Mao, the Black Panther Party shifted military occupation to embrace nonantagonistic policies of coercion: cultural appeal and respect through adoption of clothing and dress norms of the time.

They redefined militarization in the way that provided evidence that imperialism does not have to exist; the people of the world can establish change through dialogue and collectivist violent or nonviolent action, not solely through evolving degradation and individualistic violence. Carol Tulloch; a professor of dress, diaspora, and transnationalism at University of Arts London, recounts that the uniforms implemented by the Party, through its "strong messaging 'helped to create what Seale called 'good visuals' to 'capture the imagination of the people'" (Elan, 2020, para. 9). The party in their military agendas down to their clothing prioritized uniting the people, fulfilling the needs of the people, warring in the interest of the people not for resources unowned to them as is customary for the United States military during the pique of the Black Panther Party and in our modern era.



Photo by Stephen James depicting the Panthers in formation at a 1968 Free Huey rally in Oakland. von Reynolds (2016)

Additionally, in the fight against imperialism, the Black Panthers fashioned weaponry into an aspect of their mode of dress thus creating a new form of US militaristic policing. The Party illustrated the component of chic-anti-imperialism that calls for the protection of the oppressed against their oppressors. To protect their oppressed countrypeople, the Panthers utilized shotguns as an accessory and a permanent fixture of their uniforms. In doing so, the Black Panther Party reflected Chairman Mao's (1966) views on policing:

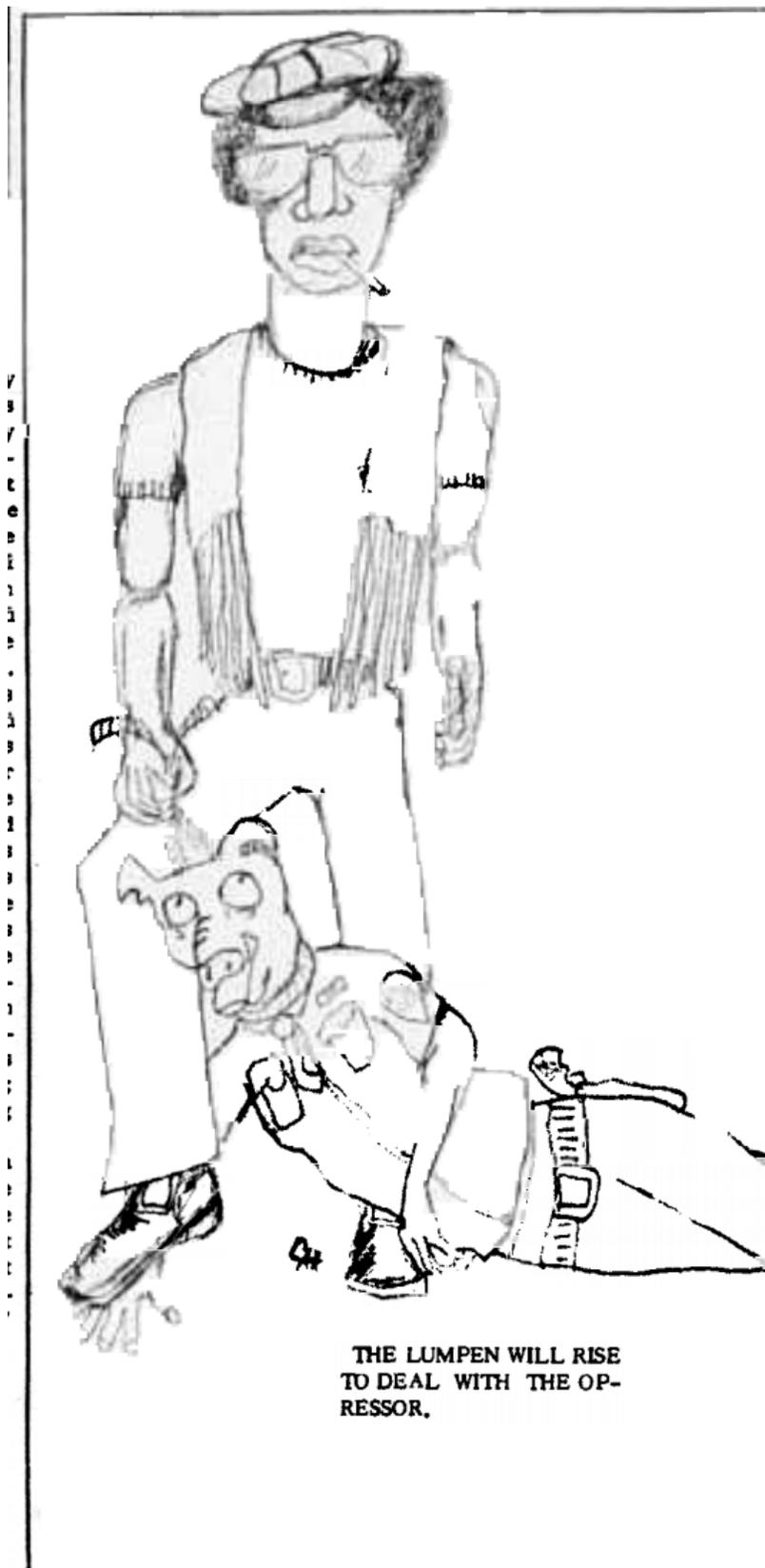
"Don't you want to abolish state power?" Yes, we do, but not right now; we cannot do it yet. Why? Because imperialism still exists, because domestic reaction still exists, because classes still exist in our country. Our present task is to strengthen the people's state apparatus - mainly the people's army, the people's police and the people's courts - in order to consolidate national defence and protect the people's interests." (p. 24)

Mao challenged the idea that a police force is solely capable of upholding imperialistic interests. He understood, in the same way that the Black Panthers did, so long as hegemonic nations stand, the people must be protected from their forces. This allowed the Black Panthers to include shotguns as a marker of their uniforms thus redefining militaristic policing as a tool for fighting against the machine that is capitalist states.



Photo of the Panthers holding shotguns on the steps of a courthouse. Jones (2018)

While, yes, the end goal of Maoism is to eliminate this need for such abrasive, statewide policing, the material realities had and have to be accounted for, the reality in which police brutality existed and persists to uphold racism, capitalism, imperialism, sexism, and other ideologies and institutions that work for the state to retain their hegemony. To fight back against these individualistic efforts, the Panthers, according to Eveline Chao (2016) of ChinaFile, “settled on the gun; they would ‘patrol the police’: when they saw police questioning someone, they would hover nearby, carrying shotguns and often reading loudly from law textbooks, promoting the right to arm oneself against the oppressor” (para. 5). The Black Panthers deemed policing their current police state as an issue requiring antagonistic actions. These antagonistic reactions and addition of shotguns as a staple to their uniforms reflected the fact that police forces worked in service to US imperialistic interests, interests that characterized US militarism.



An imaginative drawing of a Black Panther fitted in their military uniform constituting a berat, slacks, and a fringed vest dominating a pic caricature of a police officer. Ministry of Information (1970)

Furthermore, dressed in their blue shirts, black pants, black leather jackets, and black berets, the Panthers incorporated fluffy, kinky, Black-Power-minded afros into their uniforms. In doing so, members of the party reflected an embrace of their African roots in line with the missions of the Black Arts Movements and Mao Zedong's ideas on cultural preservation. Chairman Mao stated that "an army without culture is a dull-witted army, and a dull-witted army cannot defeat the enemy" (Mao, 1966, p. 138-139). The presentation of afros by the Panthers highlighted an aspect of militarization not known to US militarism; these afros encouraged a connection with one's roots rather than creating an identity detached from ancestry and engulfed with white standards of hair and what types of hair are seen as clean-cut and ruly. This subversion of the norms of their time begs to be recognized as at the time, permed hair amongst the black masses lives as a staple of life in the United States, a standard that translated to the United States military and their presentation.

The Panthers through their addition of an afro to their military dress dedicated themselves to encouraging social change that celebrated the differences found within the United States' populous populace. Tara Donaldson (2021) comments on the impact of the Black Panther's use of afros:

The color black, in the Panther era of the '60s and '70s, was being reclaimed as power and pride, as beauty, refuting the stigma of black as bad. That's when the mantras "Black power" and "Black is beautiful" began to surface. And that's when the natural hair movement got underway, with the afro becoming a statement of its own. Rules dictating that only certain looks or behaviors were "right" were abandoned.

“To say ‘Black is beautiful’ was disruptive, to say ‘Black power’ was disruptive and their look reflected that. Those beautiful afros; shiny, glowing, radiant skin; hoop earrings — was very intentional, not overdone, not complicated. It was chic,” Davis said. “Often people think all Black people look alike, so if you dress alike, it’s harder to also single you out, pick you out, pick you off. So there was power and protection in those black trenchcoats, in those black A-line dresses, in the turtlenecks — the silhouette is iconic. And then you put a beret on top of an afro...they were promoting that they were organized, that they were powerful and it was badass.” (para. 21-22)

The Black Panther Party created a military that praised and rewarded counterculture and not assimilation to the white, racist standards their people had lived subjugated under. These afros existed as a symbol of this era of Black Power, of Black Nationalism, of Black Radicalization. They sought, through their kinks and curls, to bring about Black Liberation. The Panthers stood on their belief that black people possessed the capacity to harness power, the capacity to utilize power to form a world in which they received the liberty they so rightfully deserved. Additionally, their afros uniquely took on the dual role of protecting their people by playing into the heinous stereotypes that plagued the Black community while spewing chic-anti-imperialism from every hair follicle. These stereotypes that asserted that all black people looked the same, though black people’s shades range and fluctuate and meander, created an impenetrable force of unity. Alongside the excellent attack of the notion of similarity imposed on black people, the Panthers utilized their afros to signify the strength and beauty found in black culture thus exemplifying Mao’s thought that an embrace of culture is integral to a fortified army, a principle that evades US militarism then and now.

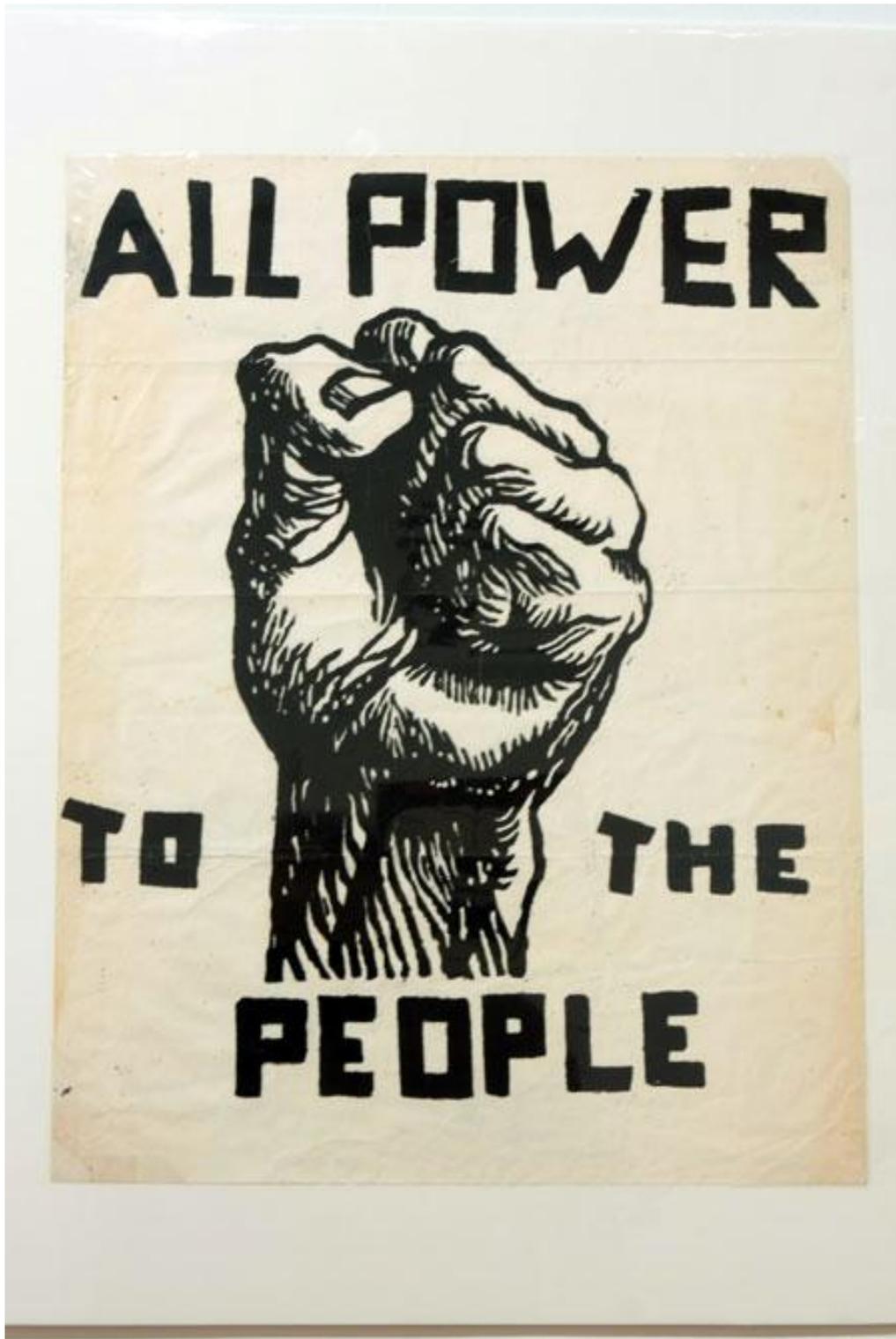


Photo by Pirkle Jones depicting Black Panthers from Sacramento at a 1968 Free Huey Rally in Oakland. White (2017)

Conclusion

The Black Panther Party founded by Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale led an army of revolutionaries and Black-Liberation-minded warriors. This army was tasked with leading not only the black citizenry of the United States to freedom but aimed their scope on the freedom of the entire black diaspora. Their small but mighty army's liberatory mission itself differed greatly from the history of militarism practiced by the United States government. The Panther's form of militarism and militarization called for a cultural overhaul in line with the Black Power Movement and the Black Arts Movement that defined their time. In utilizing fashion and a unique framework of chic-anti-imperialism, which challenged the imperialist, colonialist, racist practices known to the United States' military forces, the Party of Black Nationalists revolutionized and redefined militarism, redefined what a military can do for its people, redefined what true freedom looks like for the black community. Through their uniform of afros, berets, sunglasses, dress shirts, slacks, leather jackets, and shotguns, the Black Panther Party crafted militarism to serve the people of their nation and outside of their nation, to emblazon the practice with a liberatory mindset. Beautifully, the Black Panther Party achieved this new imagining of militarism and militarization through the lens of Mao Zedong's Marxist interpretations that aided in forming the communist institution of Maoism. The Party bravely illustrated the power we all hold to change our communities, and in service to them and the art, culture, and political influence the Panthers left for the people of the world, we owe our continued fight for Black Liberation and liberation for all oppressed peoples.

I leave you all reading this culmination of my four years of survival as the only black person in a multitude of my undergraduate classes with this:



Print of a Black Power fist surrounded by text reading All Power to the People.
A Colby Community Web Site (n.d.)

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