

The Black Panthers in London, 1967– 1972

A Diasporic Struggle Navigates the Black Atlantic

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The history of Black Power in Britain is the history of the shit class trying to organize themselves.

—Obi Egbuna, *Destroy This Temple*

On March 2, 1970, roughly one hundred people protested outside the U.S. embassy in Grosvenor Square, London, in support of the U.S. Black Panther founder Bobby Seale, who was on trial for murder in New Haven, Connecticut. They chanted “Free Bobby!” and carried posters proclaiming “Free, Free Bobby Seale” and “You Can Kill a Revolutionary but Not a Revolution.” Demonstrator Tony Thomas waved a large red and yellow flag emblazoned with a Black Panther symbol. Claiming that “their joint actions amounted to a general threat to passers by,” London police arrested sixteen of the protestors that day. Police charged these three women and thirteen men with threatening and assaulting police officers, distributing a flier entitled “The Definition of Black Power,” intending to incite a breach of the peace, and willful damage to a police raincoat. At trial, the judge dropped the raincoat charge and found five of the accused, named as “Black Panther Defendants,” guilty of the remaining charges.¹

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Here, the symbols, chants, and demands of the U.S. Black Panther Party (USBPP) crossed the Atlantic, stimulating shared racial and class identifications across national borders and intersecting with these Afro-Britons who identified themselves as the British Black Power Movement from 1967 to 1968 and as the British Black Panther Movement (BBPM) from 1968 to 1972. As the first Black Panther Movement to form independently outside the United States, the British Panthers took their ideological inspiration from the U.S. Panthers. The U.K. Panthers appropriated the U.S. Panthers' revolutionary aesthetic as a model for protest, necessary violence, and for engaging with the state. The "Definition of Black Power" flier that protestors had distributed revealed that its authors thought their plight was part of an international anticapitalist struggle, asserting that

The history of the oppressed peoples of Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, and the Americas over the last four hundred years has demonstrated that the world has been divided into two irreconcilable camps. A handful of western capitalist imperialist nations have mercilessly oppressed and exploited the broad toiling masses and ravaged the material wealth of the three continents. That the well-being of the imperialist nations rests on the hundreds of millions of broken backs in Asia, Africa, the Caribbean and the Americas is the reality.

Black Power, the authors maintained, provided "the political slogan which gives expression to the pent up fury that rages in the oppressed peoples of the world." The authors claimed that a long history of oppression had forced them to take up Black Power as a matter of necessity.² The flier and concomitant protest would be the first in a series of altercations between the BBPM and the City of London Metropolitan Police in 1970.

The literature on internationalism and the USBPP has centered on the party's influence on pan-Africanist movements, revolutionary movements, and anticolonial struggles.³ Kathleen Cleaver charts the development of the first international wing of the Black Panther Party in Algeria in 1969. John McCartney demonstrates the direct influence of the USBPP on the Vanguard Nationalists and the Socialist Party in the Bahamas. Ruth Reitan traces the relationship between Panther leader Eldridge Cleaver and the Castro regime, paying particular attention to Cuba as a haven for revolutionary black exiles from the United States. Most recently, Jeffrey O. G. Ogbar shows how the party influenced the Young Lords, a Puerto Rican nationalist group that was active in the United States from 1966 to 1972.⁴

In this article, I am less concerned with the U.S. party's official activities abroad than with spontaneous Black Panther party formations. Michael Clemons and Charles Jones lay the groundwork for this examination in their identification of several global emulators of the USBPP. Although the USBPP set up few formal international party affiliates, it catalyzed grassroots formations of small, cell-style insurgent groups in Bermuda, Israel, Australia, India, and the United Kingdom

between 1967 and 1987. These groups adopted the party's name and symbol, benefiting from the Panthers' rhetorical power and role "in the global network of the New Left."⁵ In varied local settings, these emulators enacted goals, community programs, and confrontational styles based on the model of U.S. Panther activism, but each international Panther party also developed its own ideologies and political critiques, which will be reflected here in the case of the U.K. Panthers.

An examination of spontaneous Panther group formations opens up several questions. By looking at inflections of racial and political tropes we can learn how transnational, national, and local identifications merged in the U.K. Panthers' constructions of blackness. Although the British definition of "black" differed broadly from the American context (Indians, Pakistanis, West Indians, and continental Africans were all considered "coloured" or black by the government and in political culture), the British Black Power movement grew out of specific racial and class tensions experienced by London's Afro-Caribbean community.⁶ A study of police files allows us to situate the Panthers in the relationship between London's Afro-Caribbean community and city police more generally in the early 1970s. A consideration of the ways that U.K. Panthers identified themselves reveals salient aspects of the global cultural and political influence of the American Panthers—of the "penumbra" of the USBPP.⁷

I argue that the U.K. Panthers represented an initial step in the U.S. Panthers' goal of inculcating a global anti-imperialist struggle that would give race equal attention with class. The hegemony of American capitalism served as the driving force behind this larger network of consciousness. As the historian Davarian Baldwin maintains, "The [U.S.] Panthers' engagement with the U.S. empire of transnational capital took place precisely through their manipulation and production of mass cultural products and ideas at that particular moment. In their hands, blackness became the conduit for a cultural politics of decolonization, connecting black ghettos to the Third World."⁸ The British Panthers adopted the strains of Black Power made accessible through the style and communication strategies of the U.S. Panthers, indicating their class and racial solidarity and their recognition that blackness and diaspora were ultimately modern concepts.⁹

This article also belongs to literatures on the long legacy of black internationalism and its more recent development of Black Power. Historian Peniel E. Joseph defines Black Power as a politics that "trumpeted a militant new race consciousness that placed black identity as the soul of a new radicalism."¹⁰ Black Power activists argued for a fundamental alteration of society, rather than reform. In the United States, the politics of Black Power appealed to a broad range of people and organizations including black nationalists, Marxists, pan-Africanists, trade unionists, feminists, and liberals, as well as to a limited number of conservatives invested in its call for black entrepreneurship. From its beginning as a progressive call for black consciousness in 1966, Black Power evolved into a revolutionary ideology that the

Panthers articulated in 1968. Black Power, not just the Panthers, appeared in varying forms in many international contexts, such as in Trinidad, where several journalists and scholars have focused on the 1970 Black Power Revolution.¹¹

The U.S. Panthers offered the most transnationally appropriable formation of Black Power. This visibility during a moment of global cultural upheaval afforded the Panthers what Baldwin has called “representational legitimacy,” which catalyzed the emergence of Black Panther parties outside the U.S. context.¹² The earliest U.S. Panther ideology consisted of arguments for racial solidarity and black nationalism with elements of Marxism, which evolved by 1968 to a more explicit fusion of Marxism with revolutionary nationalism. After 1970, the USBPP espoused global socialism through Huey Newton’s idea of revolutionary intercommunalism.¹³ The sources to be examined here demonstrate that although British Panthers may not have used the term *intercommunalism*, they supported a global socialist revolution that would expose the nation-state as irrelevant.

The British Panthers acted within a spectrum of organizations, known as the British Black Power Movement, that promoted pan-Africanism, black nationalism, and communism. Taking these organizations into account, I am specifically interested in why and how the British Panthers formed when other options for radical activism associated with Black Power were already available.¹⁴ Utilizing Paul Gilroy’s “suggestion that cultural historians could take the Atlantic as one single, complex unit of analysis in their discussions of the modern world and use it to produce an explicitly transnational and intercultural perspective,” I will show how the U.K. Panthers adapted American Black Power to suit a transnational yet also local struggle.¹⁵ I argue that the U.S. Panthers provided an appropriable ideology through visible cultural markers that melded with the legacy of West Indian radicalism to create a fluid, albeit short-lived, U.K. Black Panther Movement and that the well-traveled “routes” of the Black Atlantic allowed Britain to be the first site at which an international Panther group emerged.¹⁶

The findings in this article are based on an examination of London police files and a collection of essays by the Biafran novelist, playwright, lawyer, and imprisoned Black Power leader Obi Egbuna. In 1971, Egbuna published *Destroy This Temple: The Voice of Black Power in Britain*, in which he reflected on the accomplishments and strategies of Black Power in the United Kingdom. Between 1970 and 1972, the British Director of Public Prosecutions compiled files involving the Panthers and the City of London Metropolitan Police for archiving as “Black Panther cases” at the U.K. Public Record Office. By interweaving Egbuna’s personal narrative with police records from the state archives, I will analyze the ways in which the British Black Panthers engaged in a struggle with the Metropolitan Police over issues of immigration, blackness, violence, anti-imperialism, and social space.

“It Was Not Meant for Us”: Immigration Politics and Black Power in London

Between 1961 and 1964, Britain’s black population tripled from about 300,000 to 1 million.¹⁷ Between 1955 and June 1962, 259,540 people migrated from the Caribbean to the United Kingdom. These immigrants brought with them a tradition of activism that laid the groundwork for the emergence of Black Power.¹⁸ Their notion of Black Power was elastic, drawing on the writings of Marcus Garvey, C. L. R. James, George Padmore, and Frantz Fanon and incorporating cultural consciousness, the politics of decolonialization, and calls for an antiracist, anticapitalist revolution.¹⁹ Some adopted classical leftist formations, represented, for example, by the work of Trinidadian-born journalist-activist Claudia Jones. Younger, second-generation immigrants embraced radical confrontational styles and disapproved of the antiracist politics of the established Left. Another Trinidadian intellectual and activist, James, served as a mentor to these young radicals and to the British Marxist-internationalist journal *Race Today*.²⁰

Despite the popularity of black radical political discourse, figures in the media, politicians, and cultural leaders denied the existence of Black Power in the United Kingdom. These writers and leaders claimed that although race was an international problem, Black Power was an inherently American phenomenon. For example, in 1969, the *Times* critic Irving Wardle characterized the African American playwright Ed Bullins’s *The Gentlemen Caller* and *How Do You Do?* as “two Black Power plays . . . written for the black American community,” saying “there is something absurd in seeing them performed to white British spectators, let alone in treating them as reviewing fodder . . . it seems pretty crude stuff but then, it was not meant for us.”²¹ Wardle separated white Britons from “crude” black arts and portrayed Black Power as alterity, as a phenomenon meant for black Americans but not for “us.”

Afro-British activists, however, believed they had much in common with their African American counterparts. In between the U.K. visits of Malcolm X in 1964–65 and of Stokely Carmichael in 1967, Egbuna flew to America in 1966 where he “tramped the Black ghettos of the United States and delved into the soul of the grass roots.”²² Inspired by this visit as well as by several ideas he found in the media and in black radical literature, Egbuna returned to the United Kingdom ready to develop a Black Power organization.²³ He attended meetings of black organizations at which other activists asked him to explain the significance of the new Panther badge that he wore.²⁴ Gaining support from these interactions, Egbuna and a group known as the Universal Coloured People’s Association (UCPA) launched Black Power from a Brixton flat in September 1967.²⁵ They wrote a fourteen-page credo with a black panther emblazoned on the cover to “explain to the British people what Black Power in [Britain] really [was] . . . [the] totality of the economic, cultural, political, and if necessary, military power which the black peoples of the world must

acquire in order to get the white oppressor off their backs.” These Black Power advocates claimed that they were “no initiators of violence. But if a white man lays his hand on one of us we will regard it as an open declaration of war against all of us.”²⁶ Egbuna, the president of the UCPA, told the *Times* that the movement had recruited 778 members in seven weeks.

Seven months later, Egbuna did an about-face in his vision for Black Power. He called the UCPA annual general meeting six months earlier than planned in April 1968, resigned as chairman, and founded the BBPM, which advertised itself as a revolutionary socialist group.²⁷ Struck by a lack of consensus about the meaning of Black Power within the UCPA, Egbuna struck out on his own, borrowing the term *Black Power* and related symbols from the U.S. Panthers. He insisted that the movement had to be ideologically coherent and masculine because “the secret of the Panthers’ success to date, even if limited, lies in this insistence . . . that the movement must be a fraternity of brothers of strictly identical ideological orientation.”²⁸ This ideology combined a Marxist-Leninist class revolution with an analysis of racial discrimination. Egbuna derived his racial analysis from Karl Marx: “I cannot see how any man who called on workers to unite because they are oppressed as workers could deny men of colour the right to unite when they are victimized as men of colour.”²⁹

The ideological orientation of the British Panthers differed in some ways from that of their U.S. counterparts in terms of relationships with the white Left and of the embrace of cultural nationalism. Egbuna insisted that “the White ‘Marxists,’ with their usual presumption that only they have read Marx, persist in deriding Black Power as narrow, nationalistic, and un-Marxian.” He believed that British Panthers should remain independent from sympathetic whites and claimed that white liberals “enjoy[ed] a certain degree of security from the system of society.” This contrasted with the U.S. Panthers’ view that coalitions with whites formed an essential part of the revolution. As the British Panthers gained notoriety, however, they began to accept the support of some whites. While the U.S. Panthers rejected the central Black Power tenet of cultural nationalism as romantic and inefficacious, the U.K. Panthers aimed to spread what they termed “black consciousness” through meetings that showcased poetry, music, and film from the West Indies and West Africa. Although the black consciousness espoused by the U.K. Panthers did not constitute a full-scale adoption of cultural nationalism in the style of Maulana Karenga and the US Organization, the British Panthers’ interest in the arts mirrored the black arts movement in the United States, showcased an emerging black British identity, and fit well with the founding of the Notting Hill Carnival, an annual two-day street festival celebrating Britain’s West Indian community, in 1966.³⁰

The British Panther movement also formed outside the official auspices of the U.S. Panthers because the latter had not yet internationalized its organizing scope

in 1967. The USBPP had certainly expressed support for international activities and had sent members to parts of Africa, Asia, Cuba, Germany, and Scandinavia. But it lacked the institutional infrastructure necessary to establish an anti-imperialist front or overseas chapters. It was not until 1969, after solidifying its organizational structure and discussing the possibilities offered by Marxism-Leninism, that the U.S. party helped form the Algerian Black Panther Party, its first affiliate abroad. By this time, it had already inspired the formation of the U.K. Panthers, although possibly without knowing it.³¹

The British Black Panther Cases

In the government's eyes, West Indians were the most problematic of Britain's "coloured" immigrant groups. A 1963 Home Office report complained that "the West Indians, while making little effort to accommodate themselves to a different way of life, are demanding equal opportunities and equal treatment generally."³² Furthermore, as James Whitfield has noted, the police believed that West Indians corrupted "traditional" British social values through sexual relationships with white women, participation in the illicit drug trade, and patronage of illegal drinking and gambling clubs. Permanent surveillance in black neighborhoods, particularly in Brixton, the center of the London West Indian community, and a lack of adequate race-relations training led police to see any crime in those neighborhoods as a crime of the entire community. Police then responded with "uncompromising firmness in which the end was not frequently seen to justify the means."³³ Unsurprisingly, the West Indian community and the London police simply did not trust each other.

Three London court cases from 1970 expose the conflicts between police and British Panthers by revealing moments in which police concerns about Black Power and the Panthers' aspirations are laid bare. In the aforementioned embassy protest of March 1970, a Black Panther solidarity demonstration for Seale turned violent when police and protestors clashed, leading to the arrest of sixteen Panthers. In August, police accused the Panthers of distributing a leaflet designed to defame the judge during a high-profile court case known as the Mangrove Nine. Later that same month, a stolen watch allegation led police to a social hall where Black Panthers were holding a dance. The police investigation provoked the Panthers, who attacked the police as they left the building. In two of the court cases, the state criminalized the Panthers for the size of their events, which numbered one hundred reported protestors at the embassy and as many as four hundred dancers at the Oval House social event.³⁴ The judge in the Oval House brawl defined "riotous assembly" as at least three persons assembled together, using his definition to find three of the defendants guilty.³⁵ Most of those arrested in the three cases were West Indian, male, and young. Of the twenty-six named defendants in these cases, twenty-three were male and fourteen of West Indian origin.³⁶ Whitfield identifies black youth

and immigrants as two of the London police's late 1960s "errant scapegoat groups," which suggests that these young West Indian men may have been profiled by the police.³⁷ All of the Panthers arrested in the embassy protest and the Oval House brawl cases were between the ages of seventeen and thirty-five.³⁸

On August 9, 1970, a Black Panther group protested "the white racist system's use of their police force to invade . . . the places where black people frequent." In this case, the Panthers were opposed to the aggressive policing of the Mangrove restaurant in Notting Hill, a popular meeting place for black radicals.³⁹ A group of 150 protestors marched through the community toward Notting Hill, Notting Dale, and Harrow Road police stations to "expose the racist brutality that black people experience[d] at the hands of the police." Police and protestors clashed during the march, and police arrested nineteen black protestors, charging them with assault, possession of an offensive weapon, and incitement to riot.⁴⁰ Ten defendants' charges were soon dropped, but support swelled for the other nine accused, who became known as the Mangrove Nine. C. L. R. James summoned the remaining protestors the day after the arrest and urged them to continue their fight, emphasizing the seriousness of the charges against their comrades.⁴¹ The Mangrove Nine trial began in October 1971 and captured media attention. During the trial, Black Panthers and their allies demonstrated outside the central criminal court, the Old Bailey.⁴²

On the last day of trial testimony, police turned over a leaflet called "Battle for Freedom at Old Bailey" to Judge Edward Clarke, who believed the leaflet might be in contempt of the court.⁴³ Constable Roger Buckley had apprehended the leaflet while on duty in the Notting Dale neighborhood on December 11, 1971. The leaflet charged that a biased judge and jury had colluded to skew the proceedings of the case against the Mangrove Nine, claiming that "the case has been a systematic exposure of police lies, the way in which the prosecution, having no evidence, tries to play on the prejudices of the jury, of the way in which the judge plays the part of chief prosecutor, attacking and obstructing the defence."⁴⁴ After a four-month investigation, the officer P. J. Palmes concluded that the police lacked sufficient evidence to identify the authors of the leaflet, "which in any event might be ill-advised at this stage as likely to exacerbate racial feelings."⁴⁵ This led Judge Clarke to drop the contempt of court charge, and later that year, he acquitted the Mangrove Nine.

The Afro-British community was further empowered by the case of the Oval House brawl, which began at approximately 10 p.m. on August 31, 1970, just three weeks after the Mangrove march. That evening, Peter Pace and David Proberts, two white schoolboys, were leaving Oval Underground station as two black boys approached them.⁴⁶ One of these boys said a girl wanted to speak to Pace and Proberts just around the corner. Pace and Proberts followed around the corner, and one of the black boys allegedly stole Pace's watch. The white boys claimed that the assailants ran into Oval House, a social hall rented out for a Black Panther-sponsored

reggae dance that evening. The boys ran home and told Pace's mother, who returned with them to Oval House.

When Mrs. Pace approached, a Black Panther at the door told her that the event was a wedding and that only private guests could enter. Reportedly, another Panther pushed Mrs. Pace back from the doorway, after which she sent her son to get the police and waited outside. Shortly thereafter, two plainclothes detectives arrived at the hall and showed a warrant card to two men sitting by the door. The two men refused the detectives entry beyond the lobby as they did not have a pass to join the alleged wedding party. Police quarreled with a growing crowd of Panthers and solicited reinforcement before entering the hall. Accompanied by Pace and Proberts, the police stopped the dance music, circulated among the dancing couples, and searched for the stolen watch, but they were unable to find it.⁴⁷

As the officers exited, Panther Keith Spencer (who emigrated from Jamaica in 1957) jumped onstage and chanted through the microphone, "Out with the pigs, fascist pigs, throw them out" and "Kill the pigs, kill the whites." After another song ended, Spencer continued his chant, allegedly to the beat of drums. The police suspected that this was the signal that led dance attendees to hurl objects at them. During the altercation, bottles, cans, and chairs struck seven police officers. Most injuries were not serious, but two officers were knocked unconscious.⁴⁸ As the attack continued, Spencer spat at the police officer Sheppard and shouted, "Don't touch me, white shit." Other attendees shouted, "Get out, fascist fuzzi!" Seemingly threatened, the police refused to reenter the dance and elected not to arrest Spencer and his fellow organizer Edmund Lecointe (who emigrated from Dominica in 1960), on the scene. But they did ultimately arrest four Panther members, accusing them of assault on police, possession of a weapon, incitement to murder, and aiding and abetting in assault. On June 28, 1971, Judge Gillis found Spencer, Lecointe, and Leonard Anderson guilty but elected to give them suspended sentences. The judge told the Panther defendants that they had been shown "a measure of mercy" by the court.⁴⁹

"Acts of Bravery in a Racist State:" Building a Panther Cadre

The Black Panthers channeled their community's resentment of the police into a critique of police violence. In the "Battle for Freedom" leaflet, Mangrove Nine supporters insisted: "The police of that area in London had for years harassed and brutalised the people of Notting Hill. The Mangrove Restaurant, one of the nerve centres of the community, had been raided without reason several times. Evidence in the trial showed how high the resentment of the brothers and sisters, both defendants and witnesses, against this constant unchecked brutality was."⁵⁰ Police also found a flier titled "Organised Action in Self Defence" in Leonard Anderson's pocket after his arrest at the reggae dance that identified two recent cases in which police had used attack dogs against black people. The flier also claimed that over six hundred police

had been present at the Mangrove march and that there, too, they had released dogs on black protestors. In the words of the flier's author, "when over one hundred black youths in the Islington area marched to Caledonian Road police station to inquire about four brothers and sisters who had been brutalized and arrested, fear hit the racist pig police and they let loose dogs on black people."⁵¹

In response to these and other violent incidents, the Panthers emphasized their own preparedness and willingness to confront police when necessary.⁵² They claimed weapons as central to their definition of Black Power: "Only when the most oppressed sections of the world are totally liberated will it be possible for the oppressed peoples to lay down their arms."⁵³ This rhetoric did not essentialize black violence, as the Panthers believed that Black Power allowed all oppressed people to express their extant anger. Like their U.S. counterparts, the British Panthers in some cases also carried weapons. Given stricter gun laws in the United Kingdom and the relative inaccessibility of guns compared to the U.S. context, in the court record Panthers appear to have only carried knives—Spencer carried a knife at the reggae dance, and Lecointe had previously been fined for possessing an "offensive weapon."⁵⁴ Through physical training, Black Panthers also prepared for encounters with the state. Peter Oliver explained in his court testimony how he had lent Oval House to the Black Panthers for karate lessons and other forms of physical training.⁵⁵

The Panthers counterbalanced their preparation for violence by fostering community among London's West Indians. They established community programs as the U.S. Panthers had done, such as organized activities for teenage West Indians held at the Oval House. Oliver stated in court that he was "impressed by the [Black Panthers'] work. The relationship between the 'panthers' and the club has been deepened and strengthened over the last three months." The reggae dance was the third in a series of such dances, and Oliver believed that it was a part of the Panthers' outreach to local youth.⁵⁶ These initiatives mirrored U.S. Panther efforts to draw in the "brothers on the block." U.K. Panther programs sent a message to fellow immigrants that they were concerned about West Indians' social spaces, educational opportunities, and their overall quality of life.

Urban space proved a contested terrain, as the Panthers identified and labeled centers of oppression within the city. The Panthers saw officers outside their events, believed they were under police surveillance, and responded by claiming social spaces rhetorically and physically. In their promotional literature, the Mangrove Nine demonstrators sought to "expos[e] the racist brutality . . . at the three main centres of fascist repression in the area—Notting Hill, Notting Dale, and Harrow Road Police Stations."⁵⁷ The Panthers saw urban space as a battle zone, claiming that protestors committed "act[s] of bravery in a racist state."⁵⁸

The Panthers sought to control this battle zone, as when they confronted the police in the Oval House brawl. After forcing the police out of Oval House, the Panthers used the building as a fortress: they waited inside the doors, swung them open

just long enough to throw cans and bottles at the police, and then quickly pulled them shut.⁵⁹ The superintendent of police barred his officers from returning to the building out of concern for further violence. More important, Panthers believed that their sense of community trumped battles over physical spaces. When Judge Clarke did not allow the Mangrove Nine supporters to enter the courtroom, the Panthers responded that “the courtroom and the dock have not been able to isolate these nine brothers and sisters from the community of struggle of which they are a part.”⁶⁰

“With Iron Hands in Velvet Gloves”:

Confronting American and British Imperialisms

Despite establishment attempts to posit Black Power as an American-only idea, in the three cases discussed here, British Black Power advocates saw the concept as potent and applied it to their activism; they used “Black America” as a rhetorical and stylistic benchmark for oppression and resistance. They compared their social treatment to that of African Americans, demonstrated connections between the two groups, and appropriated aspects of the U.S. Panthers’ resistance. At the embassy protest, Seale supporters claimed that through an interstate conspiracy, the U.S. government was officially plotting to wipe out the BPP and to continue the repression of black and progressive white Americans. The Panthers’ flier stated:

America plots state execution and cold blooded murder of Black Freedom Fighter, Bobby Seale, Chairman, Black Panther Party. . . . Now he is to be handed over to the blood-sucking mad dogs and murdering pig-hangmen in Connecticut to be butchered. . . . Black People and All Progressive People in Britain!! This American Murder Plot, this policy of widespread ruthless suppression against the Panthers is also directly against all of us here in Britain. Therefore all of us must resist it here and now.⁶¹

The leaflet authors called for resistance because they saw themselves not merely as allies of Seale but as the direct victims of American oppression. They saw this oppression taking official state form and believed that the American government was against them as well.

While the Panthers’ flier maintained that American policies oppressed Americans and Britons, Egbuna felt that white Britons exploited the racial situation in the United States to obscure their own race prejudices. Egbuna contended that racial biases in the United Kingdom were more insidious because they were less public than in the United States. He saw the white Englishman’s subtlety as sinister:

In Mississippi, the White man tells you straight that he does not want you in his neighbourhood and you know where you stand with him. In Wimbledon, the Englishman will apologise most profusely when he refuses you accommodation on racial grounds: “Room to let, sorry no coloureds, Irish or dogs.” When you confront him personally, it is never his fault, he of course never has racial

prejudice, it is always the neighbour who is the villain. The American will lynch you and doesn't give a damn who knows it. But the Englishman always has enough residue of subtlety to lynch you with iron hands in velvet gloves.⁶²

Egbuna believed British racism was a silent demon clothed in white middle-class propriety. Using metaphorical bastions of white supremacy (Mississippi and Wimbledon), he delineated what he saw as divergent systems of overt and covert prejudice. Some white Britons' refusal to admit to racist attitudes angered Egbuna the most, further fueling his desire for Black Power in the United Kingdom.

Despite these perceived differences in the ways that racism was expressed in the two nations, the BBPM stressed a shared black identity with the American Panthers. When Spencer was asked why he supported Seale, he responded, "I am always angry as far as black people are concerned."⁶³ British Panthers recognized a shifting transatlantic relationship between the growing American empire and contracting British colonialism. This relationship, characterized by Gilroy as part of the "Black Atlantic," made black American concerns also black British concerns in the minds of the Panthers. Panthers insisted that the imprisonment of Seale formed part of a policy of suppression targeted at blacks everywhere. One of their fliers stated: "Remember: America dominates and so controls Britain economically and even politically! America controls our homelands in Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean. Therefore American suppressive policies, fascism, and international murder plots concern all of us."⁶⁴ From a postcolonial critique of American dominance the U.K. Panthers derived a shared diasporic black identity, asserting that the imperialist United States oppressed black people globally.

The British Black Panthers exposed local audiences to these global networks by promoting a transnational black working-class revolution. Panthers pointed out that the police formed part of a larger framework of oppression. When asked why the embassy protest was directed at the police, Spencer responded that he "[didn't] see why the police in this country should interpret this as being directed to them."⁶⁵ He explained that the demonstration was only against the police in the sense that they were part of the British establishment. By emphasizing the notion of the establishment, Spencer suggested that the need for a revolution was more palpable and urgent than what could be accomplished by a narrow critique of the local police.

The Panthers made clear that "the revolution" must articulate the mutually reinforcing nature of race and class. In their reasoning, all people who worked in an imperialist/capitalist system, including the white working class, and refused to participate in a revolution, were complicit in the oppression of the black working class. The authors of the Mangrove Nine leaflet adapted a white working-class axiom that stated, "One law for the rich, another for the poor," changing it based on the trial to say, "One law for blacks, another for whites."⁶⁶ Despite these racial distinctions,

however, the Panthers encouraged white support at other times, indicating a lack of internal resolution about this issue.

One such group of supporters were middle-class whites, classic participants in the New Left, who marched in the embassy protest, broadening the Panthers' collective base and reinforcing their role as a vanguard party. Protestors included white men and women, such as the American Jane Grant, a film editor living in Regent's Park, a predominantly white middle-class neighborhood. She noted the privileging of her race, gender, and perhaps her nationality when she claimed that Spencer "was probably shouting as I was 'Free Bobby,' [but] I was not arrested."⁶⁷ Additionally, the fliers distributed there called to "all Progressive People in Britain," referring to urban middle-class leftist, and perhaps communist, supporters rather than a majority working-class group.⁶⁸

From the U.S. Panthers to the U.K. Panthers and Back Again

The six emulatory Panther parties identified by Clemons and Jones reveal that the U.S. Black Panthers appealed across ethnic and geographic boundaries to a global network of African-descended people, seeking their solidarity and provoking them to seek power through blackness. The Panthers developed a transatlantic reach due to the dynamic relationship among visual culture, mass production, and politics during this period. The stylistic, iconographic, and rhetorical formations of the Panthers affected those outside the United States in variegated ways and called on specific historical narratives including slavery, class conflict, and state oppression. The historian William VanDeburg maintains that Black Power was an essentially cultural form that captured and inspired people, that "in the words of Lerone Bennett, Jr., it 'made everything political and everything cultural.'"⁶⁹ More than simply making "everything political and everything cultural," Black Power interpolated Black Britons by evoking connections to their experiences of government oppression and to the popularity of African American style during this period. As Jacqueline Nassy Brown has argued with regards to Liverpool, "a nascent American hegemony actually facilitated the development of radical blackness."⁷⁰ But although American cultural and political dominance on the world stage made available the symbols and ideas of Black Power, West Africans and West Indians in London appropriated these concepts for their own purposes and with local constructions of race in mind.

In several ways, the interactions between U.K. Panthers and the City of London Metropolitan Police are familiar to those who know the narrative of the Panthers in the United States. Police watched the Panthers, Panthers defended themselves when attacked, and Panthers invoked particular tropes and icons from the USBPP, symbols that activated powerful connections to radical ideologies already present in London's black community. Ambalavaner Sivanandan, a librarian and later the director of London's Institute for Race Relations, explained, "Black Power,

in particular, spoke to me very directly because it was about race and class both at once. More than that, it was about the politics of existence.”⁷¹

Throughout their existence, the U.K. Panthers insisted on a transnational framework for their struggle. Egbuna claimed, “We do not dream for one moment that the Black people in Britain can organise themselves as a unit totally separate from other Black forces in the world. Black Power is an international concept.”⁷² There were several geographic sites at which Black Power as “an international concept” might have taken hold when it first did in the United Kingdom in 1967. Scholars could use these multiple possibilities and eventual Black Power movements to solidify current historiographical frameworks establishing a transnational black civil rights movement. This potential “Wide Civil Rights Movement” reached places with racial formations as diverse as India, Israel, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom.⁷³ Although the local subjectivities of its emulators always varied along the crossing lines of race, class, and gender, the Black Panther Party provided a desired, selectively appropriated, and malleable group identity in a quest for black global transformation.

Notes

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1. “Persons Charged Following the Black Panther Demonstration on the 2nd March 1970,” London, Public Record Office, Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) 2/4827, 1970.
2. Black Panther Movement, “The Definition of Black Power,” DPP 2/4827 and 2/4889, 1970.
3. One exception to this is Jennifer Smith’s work, which narrates U.S. Panther visits to Halifax and Nova Scotia, Canada. As Smith’s work focuses on the visits of Panther leaders to Canada and not the founding of an indigenous Panther party, I have chosen not to focus on it here. Kathy Lothian presents the first careful study of one of the six parties identified by Clemons and Jones. She finds that from 1968 onward, newspapers, theoretical works, and the state-run Australian Broadcasting Corporation television network exposed Aborigines to African American activism. She concludes that the Australian Panthers “owed their genesis to the Black Panther community survival projects in America” and argues that unlike the U.S. Panthers, the Aboriginal Panthers did not forge alliances with working-class whites. See Jennifer Smith, *An International History of the Black Panther Party* (New York: Garland, 1999); Kathy Lothian, “Seizing the Time: Australian Aborigines and the Influence of the Black Panther Party, 1969–1972,” *Journal of Black Studies* 35 (2005): 179–200.
4. Kathleen Neal Cleaver, “Back to Africa: The Evolution of the International Section of the Black Panther Party (1969–1972),” in *The Black Panther Party (Reconsidered)*, ed. Charles E. Jones (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1998), 211–54; John T. McCartney, “The Influences of the Black Panther Party (USA) on the Vanguard Party of the Bahamas, 1972–1987,” in *Liberation, Imagination, and the Black Panther Party: A New Look at the Panthers and Their Legacy*, ed. Kathleen Cleaver and George Katsiaficas (New York: Routledge, 2001), 156–63; Ruth Reitan, “Cuba, the Black Panther Party, and the U.S.

- Black Movement in the 1960s: Issues of Security,” in Cleaver and Katsiaficas, *Liberation, Imagination, and the Black Panther Party*, 164–74; Jeffrey O. G. Ogbar, “Puerto Rico en Mi Corazón: The Young Lords, Black Power, and Puerto Rican Nationalism in the U.S., 1966–1972,” *Centro Journal* 18 (2006): 148–69.
5. Michael L. Clemons and Charles E. Jones, “Global Solidarity: The Black Panther Party in the International Arena” in Cleaver and Katsiaficas, *Liberation, Imagination, and the Black Panther Party*, 20–39, 26. See also George Katsiaficas, *The Imagination of the New Left: A Global Analysis of 1968* (Boston: South End, 1987).
 6. Dilip Hiro, *Black British, White British* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1973), 253; Ron Ramdin, *Reimagining Britain: Five Hundred Years of Black and Asian History* (Sterling, VA: Pluto, 1999), 269.
 7. The Oxford English Dictionary defines *penumbra* as “a peripheral region of uncertain extent; a group of things only partially belonging to some central thing.” I see the U.K. Panthers’ self-identification and activities as partially belonging to the U.S. Panthers, but the uncertain extent of that overlap suggests that the U.S. Panthers’ influence may be more dynamic and culturally based than analyses of official international Panther activities allow. See “penumbra, n.” *OED Online*, dictionary.oed.com/cgi/entry/50174882 (accessed September 6, 2005).
 8. Davarian L. Baldwin, “‘Culture Is a Weapon in Our Struggle for Liberation’: The Black Panther Party and the Cultural Politics of Decolonization,” in *In Search of the Black Panther Party: New Perspectives on a Revolutionary Movement*, ed. Jama Lazerow and Yohuru Williams (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 295.
 9. On the cultural strategies of the Panthers, see Simon Wendt, “The Roots of Black Power? Armed Resistance and the Radicalization of the Civil Rights Movement,” in *The Black Power Movement: Re-thinking the Civil Rights–Black Power Era*, ed. Peniel E. Joseph (New York: Routledge, 2006), 145–65, 332n67; Jama Lazerow and Yohuru Williams, introduction to *In Search of the Black Panther Party*, 2. I am influenced by Robin Kelley’s argument that ideology resides within representations of style and by Dick Hebdige’s claim that deviation from social norms in the form of style constitutes a subversive refusal of the dominant order. Robin D. G. Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (New York: Free Press, 1996); Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (New York: Routledge, 1981), 2–3.
 10. Peniel E. Joseph, introduction to *The Black Power Movement*, 3.
 11. *Ibid.*, 279n3; Wendt, “The Roots of Black Power?” 332n67; Mahin Gosine, *East Indians and Black Power in the Caribbean: The Case of Trinidad* (New York: Africana Research Publications, 1986); William R. Lux, “Black Power in the Caribbean,” *Journal of Black Studies* 3 (1972): 207–25; Brian Meeks, *Radical Caribbean: From Black Power to Abu Bakr* (Kingston, Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press, 1996); Ivar Oxaal, *Race and Revolutionary Consciousness: A Documentary Interpretation of the 1970 Black Power Revolt in Trinidad* (Cambridge, MA: Schenkman, 1971); Raoul Pantin, *Black Power Day: The 1970 February Revolution, A Reporter’s Story* (Santa Cruz, Trinidad: Hatuey, 1990).
 12. Baldwin, “‘Culture Is a Weapon in Our Struggle for Liberation,’” 290.
 13. Wendt, “The Roots of Black Power?” 332n67.
 14. Hakim Adi, *West Africans in Britain, 1900–1960: Nationalism, Pan-Africanism, and Communism* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990).
 15. Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 15.

16. For more on the history of West Indian radicalism in the United Kingdom, see Trevor Carter, *Shattering Illusions: West Indians in British Politics* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1986); Carol Boyce Davies, *Left of Karl Marx: The Political Life of Black Communist Claudia Jones* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007); Winston James and Clive Harris, eds., *Inside Babylon: The Caribbean Diaspora in Britain* (London: Verso, 1993); Marika Sherwood, *Claudia Jones: A Life in Exile* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 2000).
17. James Whitfield, *Unhappy Dialogue: The Metropolitan Police and Black Londoners in Post-war Britain* (Portland, OR: Willan, 2004), 22. These statistics were government estimates since accurate counting for new immigrants only began in 1955.
18. Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (London: Zed, 1983).
19. E. Patrick Johnson's conception of blackness as a performative yet nonetheless material construct informs this claim. He argues that "'Blackness' does not belong to any one individual or group. Rather, individuals or groups appropriate this complex and nuanced racial signifier in order to circumscribe its boundaries or to elude other individuals or groups." E. Patrick Johnson, *Appropriating Blackness: Performance and the Politics of Authenticity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 2–3.
20. Brian W. Alleyne, *Radicals against Race: Black Activism and Cultural Politics* (New York: Berg, 2002), 29.
21. Irving Wardle, "Black Power Pep Plays," *Times*, March 24, 1969. For U.K. Foreign Office coverage of Black Power in the United States, see London, Public Record Office, Foreign Office (FO) 371, Americas–United States (AU) 1821/6.
22. Egbuna, *Destroy This Temple: The Voice of Black Power in England* (London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1971), 79. Following Carmichael's speech at the "Dialectics of Liberation" conference held at the Institute of Phenomenological Studies in London, Home Secretary Roy Jenkins proposed a successful ban that prevented Carmichael from returning to the United Kingdom. For more on these visits, see "British Ban on Stokely Carmichael," *Times*, July 28, 1967; David Cooper, ed., *The Dialectics of Liberation* (Baltimore: Penguin, 1968), back cover, 7; Norman Fowler, "Stokely Carmichael Recordings for Sale," *Times*, August 5, 1967; "Malcolm X Off to Smethwick," *Times*, February 12, 1965.
23. Cape Publishers in London released Carmichael and Charles Hamilton's *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America* in the United Kingdom in 1967; it is considered to be the ideological treatise of the U.S. movement.
24. See "British Ban on Stokely Carmichael"; and Egbuna, *Destroy This Temple*, 17.
25. The more militant UCPA was among a range of leftist groups organizing for racial change in Britain during this period, including the Campaign against Racial Discrimination (CARD), founded in 1965, and the Racial Adjustment Action Society (RAAS), founded in 1964. As Dilip Hiro argues, CARD and RAAS, respectively, reflected the differences between the styles of Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X in the United States. Also in existence by 1968 were the Black Peoples Alliance (BPA), the Black Unity and Freedom Party (BUFP), and the Black Workers' Movement (BWM). For more on these groups, see Alleyne, *Radicals against Race*; Peter Fryer, *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain* (London: Pluto, 1984); Hiro, *Black British, White British*, 51–53; Ramdin, *Reimagining Britain*; Edward Scobie, *Black Britannia: A History of Blacks in Britain* (Chicago: Johnson, 1972).
26. Rita Marshall, "Black Power Men Launch Credo," *Times*, September 11, 1967.
27. Egbuna, *Destroy This Temple*, 21–22.
28. Marshall, "Black Power Men Launch Credo," 3.

29. Egbuna, *Destroy This Temple*, 148.
30. Egbuna, *Destroy This Temple*, 146, 145–46; Lazerow and Williams, introduction, 2; Hiro, *Black British, White British*, 91. For more on the U.S. Panthers' rejection of cultural nationalism, see Scot Brown, *Fighting for US: Maulana Karenga, the US Organization, and Black Cultural Nationalism* (New York: New York University Press, 2003), 113–20; Jeffrey O. G. Ogbar, *Black Power: Radical Politics and African-American Identity* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 94–95, 195–96. The Notting Hill Carnival is an annual two-day street festival in its eponymous neighborhood that celebrates the West Indian community in Britain. Cecily Jones, "Notting Hill Carnival," and Erin Somerville, "Notting Hill Riots," in *The Oxford Companion to Black British History*, ed. David Dabydeen, John Gilmore, and Cecily Jones (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 344–46, 346–48.
31. Smith, *An International History of the Black Panther Party*, 78; Cleaver, "Back to Africa," 211, 215, 225.
32. London, Public Record Office, Home Office 376/128; Commonwealth Immigration 63412/612/1, undated, but compiled on or before September 26, 1963, qtd in Whitfield, *Unhappy Dialogue*, 23.
33. *Ibid.*, 144, 158.
34. Metropolitan Police Report, "Queen vs. 'Black Panther' Defendants," March 18, 1970, DPP 2/4827, 2; "Summary of Facts," in *Regina v. Rupert Francis et al.*, DPP 2/4889, 1–2; Marshall, "Black Power Men Launch Credo."
35. "Summary of Facts," 2.
36. For statistics on the Mangrove Nine, see Vince Hines, *How Black People Overcame Fifty Years of Repression in Britain, 1945–1995*, vol. 1 (London: Zulu, 1998), 138; there were eleven defendants whose national origin was not listed in the court record.
37. Whitfield, *Unhappy Dialogue*, 48.
38. "Persons Charged Following the Black Panther Demonstration on the 2nd March 1970"; *Regina v. Rupert Francis et al.*, DPP 2/4889; ages of defendants are not provided in "The Mangrove Nine Protest" file.
39. U.K. Black Panther Movement, "Organised Action in Self Defence," London, Public Record Office, DPP, 1971–72.
40. The "Organised Action in Self Defence" flier claims that police arrested nineteen of the protestors, while the "Battle for Freedom at the Old Bailey" leaflet cites thirty arrests.
41. Mike Phillips and Trevor Phillips, *Windrush: The Irresistible Rise of Multi-racial Britain* (London: HarperCollins, 1998), 280–81.
42. Detective Sergeant D. Townley, Central Officer's Special Report, Metropolitan Police Criminal Investigation Department, March 30, 1972, in "Black Panther Movement, 'Battle for Freedom at the Old Bailey': Possible Offences for Contempt of Court during the Course of the Trial of the Mangrove Nine," London, Public Record Office, DPP, 1971–72.
43. "Black Panther Movement, 'Battle for Freedom at the Old Bailey': Possible Offences"; Letter from Leslie Boyd, Clerk of Central Criminal Court to Director of Public Prosecutions, December 16, 1971, in London, Public Record Office, DPP 2/5059.
44. Black Panther Movement, "Battle for Freedom at the Old Bailey," December 10, 1971, 1, in London, Public Record Office, DPP 2/5059.
45. Letter from P. J. Palmes to Clerk of Central Criminal Court, April 19, 1972, in London, Public Record Office, DPP 2/5059.
46. Although they are referred to as "coloured" in police records and testimony, Black Panther

- defendants refer to themselves in the record as “black.” City of London Public Prosecutions, “Queen vs. R. J. Francis, L. Anderson, E. Lecointe, K. Spencer, Black Panther Movement,” London, Public Record Office, Marylebone Magistrates’ Court, 1970.
47. The police record does not suggest how many officers entered the dance to look for the watch, citing the names of four officers and claiming that “other officers” were present.
 48. “Summary of Facts,” 1–2.
 49. “Black Panther Rioters Get Suspended Sentences,” *Times*, June 29, 1971.
 50. Black Panther Movement, “Battle for Freedom at the Old Bailey,” DPP 2/5059, 1.
 51. Black Panther Movement, “Organised Action in Self Defence,” DPP 2/4889.
 52. Huey Newton and Bobby Seale, inspired by Frantz Fanon’s psychoanalytic analysis of Algeria, viewed white police officers as a foreign occupying army. Evidence from Egbuna’s writing suggests that Fanon influenced British Panthers as well. See Wendt, “The Roots of Black Power?” 159; Egbuna, *Destroy This Temple*, 154.
 53. Black Panther Movement, “The Definition of Black Power,” DPP 2/4827; 2/4889.
 54. Madeleine Shaw, “Memorandum of a Conviction Entered in the Register of the Old Street Magistrates’ Court,” January 10, 1973, in *Regina v. Rupert Francis et al.*, DPP 2/4889; Metropolitan Police, “Antecedents of Edmund Lecointe,” in *Regina v. Rupert Francis et al.*, DPP 2/4889.
 55. Peter Oliver, court cross-examination, DPP 2/4889, 1970.
 56. Peter Oliver, “Statement of Witness,” September 7, 1970, DPP 2/4889, 1970.
 57. Black Panther Movement, “Organised Action in Self Defence,” DPP 2/4889.
 58. Black Panther Movement, “Battle for Freedom at the Old Bailey,” DPP 2/5059, 2.
 59. “Case Note,” 10–10A, in *Regina v. Rupert Francis et al.*, DPP 2/4889.
 60. Black Panther Movement, “Battle for Freedom at the Old Bailey,” DPP 2/5059, 2.
 61. Black Panther Movement, “Release Bobby Seale, Black People, and All Progressive People in Britain,” flier advertising March 2, 1970, demonstration, DPP 2/4827.
 62. Egbuna, *Destroy This Temple*, 141.
 63. Spencer, “Notes of Evidence,” recorded by E. Robey, DPP 2/4827, 4.
 64. Black Panther Movement, “Release Bobby Seale,” DPP 2/4827.
 65. Keith Spencer, “Notes of Evidence,” recorded by E. Robey, DPP 2/4827, 4.
 66. Black Panther Movement, “Battle for Freedom at the Old Bailey,” DPP 2/5059, 2.
 67. Jane Grant, “Statements in Case,” DPP 2/4827, 4.
 68. Black Panther Movement, “Release Bobby Seale,” DPP 2/4827. In 1958, *The Listener*, a BBC magazine, reported that “the true progressive was essentially urban and middle class.” A 1955 report titled *The Treatment of British P.O.W.’s in Korea* equated the progressive view with communism and claimed that progressives served as mouthpieces for communist propaganda. Both from “progressive, n.” *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).
 69. William VanDeburg, *New Day in Babylon: The Black Power Movement and American Culture, 1965–1975* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 308.
 70. Jacqueline Nassy Brown, “Diaspora and Desire: Gendering ‘Black America’ in Black Liverpool,” in *Globalization and Race: Transformations in the Cultural Production of Blackness*, ed. Kamari Maxine Clarke and Deborah A. Thomas (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 74. For an extended examination, see also Jacqueline Nassy Brown, *Dropping Anchor, Setting Sail: Geographies of Race in Black Liverpool* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005).
 71. A. Sivanandan, “The Heart Is Where the Battle Is: An Interview with the Author,” in

Communities of Resistance: Writings on Black Struggles for Socialism (New York: Verso, 1990), 10.

72. Egbuna, *Destroy This Temple*, 155.

73. In this suggestion I am inspired by Jacquelyn Dowd Hall's desire to chronicle a "Long Civil Rights Movement" that is "harder to simplify, appropriate, and contain." Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past," *Journal of American History* 91 (2005): 1235.