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J. L. Jeffries. *The Black Panther Party in a City Near You.* Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2018. 218 pp. $32.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-8203-5197-1.

J. L. Jeffries, ed. *On the Ground: The Black Panther Party in Communities across America.* Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2011. xvi + 301 pp. $30.00, paper, ISBN 978-1-61703-200-4.

J. L. Jeffries, ed. *Comrades: A Local History of the Black Panther Party.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007. 310 pp. Ill. $28.00, paper, ISBN 978-0-253-21930-5.

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In 1969, three years after its formation in Oakland, CA, FBI director J. Edgar Hoover announced that the Black Panther Party (BPP) "without question, represents the greatest threat to internal security of the country."[1] When the party disbanded in 1982, former Seattle member Bobby White noted "a lot of folks thought we were just into 'kill whitey,' but nothing could be further from the truth" (*On the Ground*, p. 62). Were the Panthers, as Vice President Spiro Agnew claimed, "completely irresponsible [and] anarchistic," or, as Baltimore recruit Nana Njinga (Conway) Nyamekye recalled, "dedicated to moving the Black community forward?"[2]

Opinions about the Black Panthers range widely, lending them an image at once heroic, tragic, and mythic. Yet much of what is known about the party centers around the celebrity of its founders and its bitter (if not deadly) entanglements with law enforcement. Judson L. Jeffries, professor of African American and African studies at the Ohio State University, asserts that this reductive Oakland focus leaves the BPP radically misunderstood. While lawmen viewed the Panthers with disgust and the silent majority cowered in fear, their accomplishments on the local level, such as clothing drives, free breakfast programs, political education, health clinics, and street gang outreach receded to the background. Equally obscured was the sense of duty and belonging the BPP inspired in its recruits. Many party members shaped their identity within the group, with some later parlaying their experiences into political office or community activism. As Jeffries writes of the Baltimore branch, its members joined not due to a "fascination with the gun" but because they "believed in the cause" (*Comrades*, p. 21). What then, is the deeper history of the revolutionary group that commanded perhaps the largest following of its time? More specifically, what lies beyond the Bay Area?

For nearly a generation, scholarship on the Black Panthers and the broader Black Power movement has moved past participant-observer studies into realms previously unexplored.[3] After penning a 2002 Huey P. Newton biography, Jeffries sought new territory, hoping to excavate unsung Panthers who worked at the local level.[4] Begin-

ning with ***Comrades*** (2007) and followed by ***On the Ground*** (2010) and ***The Black Panther Party in a City Near You*** (2018), Jeffries and his contributors offer readers a sprawling, sympathetic view of the BPP.[5] Comprised of oral testimonies and academic research and engagingly written, these volumes contain case studies of branches from across the United States. No two branches were identical, nor was any one singularly representative of the group as a whole. Each chapter shows the Panthers' regional workings, where members found varying degrees of support from the party's Central Committee and success in their respective communities. Yet the BPP often fell victim to repressive law enforcement tactics. Few police departments exhibited any tolerance of BPP activities and in the context of the law-and-order politics of the late 1960s and early 1970s, the Panthers' revolutionary potential made them enticing targets for raids and arrests. The Nixon Administration and the FBI, preoccupied with dissent at home, were only too eager to assist from the federal level.

In ***Comrades***' introduction, Jeffries and Ryan Nissim-Sabat explain that for too long, a Nat Turner-reincarnate image and their national leaders routinely denouncing the United States as an imperialist Mother Country tarnished the Black Panther's true nature. Many of the branches considered in ***Comrades*** formed in mid- to late 1968, by which time Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination and subsequent rioting left black communities nationwide seething. Black Power as espoused by the Panthers' leadership resonated with many young blacks, especially students and Vietnam War veterans. Indeed, many branches incubated on college campuses, in student unions, or among people disaffected by US policies in Southeast Asia. Still others felt that nonviolent philosophies yielded too few results. While violence and resistance remain integral to Panthers' history, ***Comrades*** unearths dozens of obscure actors and developments, such as Larry Little and Nelson Malloy, former members later elected aldermen in North Carolina; the successes of the Cleveland branch's liberation schools; or how Philadelphia congressmen accused the Panthers of preaching hate. Compelling chapters include Jeffries's and Tiyi M. Morris's take on Indianapolis, where conservative blacks in "America's heartland" balked at the BPP's charged rhetoric; Andrew Witt's work on Milwaukee, whose police department's "Red Squad" sought to eliminate the local BPP; and Malcolm Foley's study of Los Angeles, a branch funded in part by Hollywood celebrities but with the unwanted distinction of having an FBI informant as cofounder.

In the early 1970s, the BPP's leadership splintered. Many branches closed, their members ordered to consolidate in Oakland and prepare for the ill-fated political campaigns of Bobby Seale and Elaine Brown. Law enforcement's continual infiltration and harsh treatment further pushed the Panthers to the margins. In conclusion, Floyd W. Hayes III notes that despite more than fifteen years of commitment to community service and social betterment, the BPP had by 1980 collapsed against the rise of conservatism, the Reagan revolution, and the abandonment of the Great Society. More, the liberal coalition of the 1960s, while always fragile, gave way to what Hayes terms a "new Morning in America" for white supremacy (***Comrades***, p. 295). Surely, in the racially polarizing climate of the Trump administration and the prominence of the Black Lives Matter movement, the stories in ***Comrades*** have particular relevance.

As with ***Comrades***, ***On the Ground*** maintains no specific geographical or chronological order. But the cases (Houston, Seattle, Kansas City, Detroit, Des Moines, and New Orleans) add greater complexity to the Panthers' story. The authors find these BPP branches considerably fluid, with many plagued by organizational woes. Houston, for example, opened and closed several times between 1968 and 1974 due to infighting and jealousies among local leaders. In Kansas City, members of the Black Vigilantes formed a BPP branch in 1969, only to succumb to police repression and internal

dissent the following year. Challenges confronted the BPP in Detroit, where an array of groups including the Republic of New Africa (RNA), New Detroit Committee (NDC), and the Detroit Urban League (DUL) vied for the attention and participation of that city's black population. Nonetheless, Detroit's branch briefly flourished, especially among young, middle-class blacks until the early 1970s, when its guerrilla tactics led to police raids and harassment by COINTELPRO. Jeffries's and Orissa Arend's chapter on New Orleans is especially intriguing, describing in part the city's unique racial mixture and the BPP experience for women. Former Panthers such as Marion Brown, Betty Powell, and Linda Greene cite their zeal for the BPP's addressing of gender equality but explain how when called to Oakland after a 1971 shootout with New Orleans police, it was "sexual open season" with the founding chapter's members, an experience they found disillusioning (*On the Ground*, p. 265).

Similar to *Comrades*, *On the Ground* provides readers with well-researched local studies. The chapters contain general histories of the civil rights movement in each city while contextualizing the appearance and dissolution of the Black Panthers within those histories. Omari L. Dyson's closing remarks show that the wreckage of the Great Recession disproportionately affected black Americans and that such fallout hailed from governmental policies predating the formation of the BPP. In many cases, the lack of access to decent and affordable housing and education provided an awakening for many who later joined the Panthers' crusade for social justice. Regarding the subprime mortgage crisis, Dyson finds that financial institutions deliberately targeted black (and Latino) people in order to profit. Moreover, poor students of color continue to perform at rates far below their white counterparts. From this recessionary standpoint, Dyson looks back on the BPP, stating that once its media packaging is removed, the group's purpose emerges: "[to offer] a form of education that exposed America's contradictions and its insatiable appetite for materialism at poor people's expense" (*On the Ground*, p. 278).

The Black Panther Party in a City Near You offers the four case studies of Atlanta, Boston, Washington, DC, and Dallas. This installment is especially glowing in its treatment of the Panthers, describing them as charitable and patriotic veterans who, despite their best efforts, fought and lost a war with police and federal government. True, the group was militant in its ideology, but its war was, according to Jeffries and Duncan Maclaury, "fought for a country that was just as much theirs as anyone else's" (*Black Panther Party*, p. 8). Once more, the contributors introduce the foot soldiers beyond Oakland, New York, and Chicago, places where by 1969 the BPP had its heaviest presence. The chapters here vary in length, indicating that research materials and survivors' accounts are more extensive for certain cities than others.

As the first sanctioned southern chapter, Atlanta appealed to the BPP's leadership due to its large black electorate. The branch received immediate approval for its charter in 1970 after a successful fundraising rally at Georgia Tech, which also introduced Black Power to a city that claimed it was "too busy to hate."[6] Intense political repression wore on the chapter and after four years, albeit with some success in the popular free breakfast program, the chapter folded. John Preusser, examining the DC chapter, states that in the nation's capital, the party "had little chance for success" (*Black Panther Party*, p. 52). Police brutality and de facto segregation created anger in DC's black community, and following King's assassination, former Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) member Robert Rippy founded the Black Defenders, a forerunner to the city's Panther chapter. From the outset, recruiting difficulties and conflicts with the Central Committee hindered the branch. Yet Preusser finds that DC's was not a particularly militant chapter, instead focusing on implementing political and social programs; many surviving members continue in activist roles in the

present day. SNCC members established a Panther foothold in Boston in 1968, which made its first public appearance alongside the United Farm Workers (UFW) and the Massachusetts Catholic Peace Committee for a "Free Huey" rally. According to the authors, Boston hosted one of the BPP's most politically conscious chapters, whose "guns were silent" and whose members sought ties with other social justice groups and backed causes ranging from occupying Brandeis students to summer film festivals (***Black Panther Party***, p. 96). Dallas, the final case study, at first seemed unlikely to host a Panther chapter. It experienced no significant urban unrest in the 1960s and at least one attempt by police to incite a riot failed. But SNCC was active in the metropolitan area and its local leaders were by 1969 largely in prison or on the run. In 1970, the Central Committee approved a chapter, in part on the success of its free breakfast program. But following the unlawful flight arrest of Geronimo Pratt that December, and with some members accused as informants, the Dallas chapter was expelled in 1971.

These works ably demonstrate that the full story of the Black Panthers stretches well beyond the Bay Area and the now-household names who founded the party in 1966. Jeffries's trilogical effort not only uncovers the Panthers' forgotten history but also shows how each branch interacted with the party leadership in Oakland. As Curtis Austin notes in the final volume's conclusion, using a localized view in cities across the country allows readers to see that the BPP was, "rhetoric notwithstanding, one of the most non-violent groups of the Black Power era" (***Black Panther Party***, p. 199). Much of the evidence and testimony in these works shows how branches devoted energies not toward armed insurrection but to programs and services designed to empower those on the margins of urban America. That almost all branches faced violent reprisals surely, as the authors note, did little to burnish the group's image. But by showing how rank-and-file members engaged their community and persisted despite formidable challenges from within and without, the BPP emerges as a benevolent phenomenon amidst extreme discontent.

Notes

[1]. DeNeen L. Brown, "'I have all the guns and money:' When a woman led the Black Panther Party," ***Washington Post***, January 10, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/retropolis/wp/2018/01/09/i-have-all-the-guns-and-money-when-a-woman-led-the-black-panther-party/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.4edc329465a0.

[2]. Charles E. Jones, "The Political Repression of the Black Panther Party, 1966-1971: The Case of the Oakland Bay Area," ***Journal of Black Studies*** 18, no. 4 (1988): 415-35; 416.

[3]. Valerie C. Johnson, ***Black Power in the Suburbs: The Myth or Reality of African American Suburban Political Incorporation*** (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002); Peniel E. Joseph, ed., ***The Black Power Movement: Rethinking the Civil Rights Black Power Era*** (New York: Routledge, 2006); Jama Lazerow and Yohuru Williams, eds., ***In Search of the Black Panther Party: New perspectives on a Revolutionary Movement*** (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006); Joshua Bloom and Waldo Martin, ***Black against Empire: The History and Politics of the Black Panther Party*** (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012); Kate Quinn, ed., ***Black Power in the Caribbean*** (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2014); Kerry Pimblott, ***Faith in Black Power: Religion, Race, and Resistance in Cairo, Illinois*** (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2017); and Jeffrey O. G. Ogbar, ***Black Power: Radical Politics and African American Identity*** (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2019).

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

[5]. For additional local perspectives on the BPP, see Yohuru Williams, ***Black Politics, White Power: Civil Rights, Black Power, and the Black***

Panthers in New Haven (New York: Wiley, 2000); Andrew Witt, *Black Panthers in the Midwest: The Community Programs and Services of the Black Panther Party in Milwaukee, 1966-1977* (New York: Routledge, 2007); Orissa Arend, *Showdown in Desire: The Black Panthers Take a Stand in New Orleans* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2010); Jakobi Williams, *From the Bullet to the Ballot: The Illinois Chapter of the Black Panther Party and Racial Coalition Politics in Chicago* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013); Omari L. Dyson, *The Black Panther Party and Transformative Pedagogy: Place-Based Education in Philadelphia* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2014); and Lucas N.N. Burke and Judson L. Jeffries, *The Portland Black Panthers: Empowering Albina and Remaking a City* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2016).

[6]. Kevin Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013), 3.