

# VIEWPOINT MAGAZINE

MENU ▼

## Intercommunalism: The Late Theorizations of Huey P. Newton, 'Chief Theoretician' of the Black Panther Party

Delio Vasquez June 11, 2018



*Black Panther leader Huey Newton holds a press conference in San Francisco after returning from a meeting with Chinese Premier Chou En-lai in China. Newton is facing his third trial on charges of killing a police officer. October 8 1971*

On September 5, 1970, Huey P. Newton, co-founder of the Black Panther Party (BPP), introduced his theory of intercommunalism at the Revolutionary People's Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia. <sup>1</sup> He later expanded on this theory before an audience at Boston College in November of that year, and then again in February 1971 during a joint talk he gave with psychologist **Erik Erikson** across several days at Yale University and later in Oakland. <sup>2</sup> Newton's opening remarks at Yale lasted over an hour but were

reduced to about ten pages in the subsequently published *In Search of Common Ground*.<sup>3</sup> As a philosophical foundation for his remarks on intercommunalism, that introductory speech included an engagement with the work of Hegel, Marx, Freud, Jung, Kant, Pierce, and James, among others.<sup>4</sup> Portions of the material of this main speech, the subsequent Q&A, and other writings of Newton's were later combined, recomposed, and expanded upon under the title of "Intercommunalism" in 1974, the same year that he completed his bachelor's degree and fled temporarily to Cuba. This text had until now been available only through access to the Dr. Huey P. Newton Foundation Inc. Collection (1968-1994), held in archive in Stanford University's Special Collections.<sup>5</sup> It is now reproduced [here](#), available to the public at large for the first time, accompanied by this introduction.

\*\*\*

*"The logic of the thesis of intercommunalism is: imperialism leads to 'reactionary intercommunalism' to 'revolutionary intercommunalism' to pure communism and anarchy. Each of the concepts is in need of definition and redefinition."*<sup>6</sup>

The Black Panther Party was the last and perhaps most significant, domestically-based left revolutionary political organization to challenge American imperialism. At its height, the BPP encompassed 68 chapters in the United States, it established an international branch in Algeria and trained with operatives in the Congo, and it formed coalitions with political organizations in Zimbabwe, Mozambique, South Africa, North and South Vietnam, North Korea, Japan, the People's Republic of China, India, Uruguay, Peru, Nicaragua, Cuba, Palestine, Iraq, Israel, Australia, and throughout Europe.<sup>7</sup> Ultimately, the Black Panther Party's influence and power provoked a frenzied effort by the U.S. federal government and local law enforcement to destroy its structure and either assassinate or immobilize its members—an effort that continues to the present day, with dozens of former Panthers still incarcerated.<sup>8</sup>

Huey P. Newton, co-founder of the BPP with Bobby Seale, was raised in poverty in Oakland and attended Oakland public schools. He later described his schooling as a humiliating experience that eliminated any confidence he had in his own ability to learn, leaving him with feelings of "despair and futility." "We not only accepted ourselves as

inferior; we accepted the inferiority as inevitable and inescapable.”<sup>9</sup> After graduating high school, he finally gained functional literacy at age 17 through the memorization of poetry and by reading Plato’s *Republic* several times consecutively.<sup>10</sup> He then threw himself into the study of ancient, early modern and modern philosophy; Enlightenment Era, Marxist, Third World and Black Radical political theory; foundational sociology, psychology, and positivist philosophy; and modern European, American, and Black literature.<sup>11</sup> During the existence of the BPP, Newton was the party’s primary political strategist and tactician, responsible for both the early armed patrols of Oakland police which he conducted with shotgun and lawbook in hand and for the diplomatic envoy made to Premier Zhou Enlai of the People’s Republic of China in 1971. Despite his erudition and aptitude, Newton rarely tested to an IQ much above 74—which would have classified him as “borderline mentally deficient”—neither when he was tested in high school or college, nor when he was tested again in 1968 while in prison. In the latter instance, he consciously refused a genuine engagement with the tests, rejecting them on principle for their role in perpetuating structural racism.<sup>12</sup>

Newton developed his theory of intercommunalism in the fall of 1970, two months after his release from solitary confinement, penned in response to his deep disappointment with the backlash from the Black community following the BPP’s pledge to offer troops in support of the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam.<sup>13</sup> Many simply could not grasp what the liberation of Black people could possibly have to do with the Vietnamese Communists against whom the U.S. was waging war. The theory of intercommunalism was Newton’s attempt to lay out a political and economic account of how he understood the world to be structured at the time—under a new type of imperialism—but it was also his attempt at forming a political strategy for how the BPP could expect to move forward in the decades to come as the revolution advanced. According to Newton’s own admission, the theory of intercommunalism nonetheless proved perplexing and difficult for most, though it is now clear that this was more an effect of the counterintuitive character of what he was arguing rather than how he argued it, as Newton’s writing style reads as refreshingly clear compared to much other leftist writing of the period.<sup>14</sup>

He was able to expand on his theorizations later while completing his PhD in the History of Consciousness at UC Santa Cruz, an interdisciplinary department for philosophy,

cultural theory, and political theory. Indeed, from 1972 through about 1980, Newton worked on a wide range of theoretical problems, including a series of studies into the global “decentralization of production” and the feasibility of revolutionary expropriations in “The Technology Question” and “Technology vs. Land.” He accumulated writings and annotations on anthropology, evolutionary biology, and human psychology for a “Proposed Book on Deceit and Self Deception” that never came to fruition, though he would later publish a related article in collaboration with evolutionary biologist Dr. Robert Trivers for *Science Digest* in 1982.<sup>15</sup> Among his most philosophical writings are included: a metaphysical inquiry into the possibility of a utopian politics drawing from dialectics, psychoanalysis, and intercommunalism in “Utopia: Universal Life Energy”; a sprawling engagement with mind-body dualism in “The Mind is Flesh”; and a speculative psychoanalytic essay on gendered domination in “Eve, the Mother of all Living.”<sup>16</sup> In the late 1970s, he also produced a critique of theological approaches to history grounded in a reading of the epic of Gilgamesh entitled “The First Hero of Literature,” a materialist historicization of early Christian history presumably for use in relation to the BPP’s late ‘70s Black community-oriented “Son of Man” Temple, and other writings on political theology, as with the aptly titled “Politics and Myth.”<sup>17</sup>

Regrettably, Newton’s intellectual productivity both during and after the height of the BPP has too often been dismissed out of hand. Even mainstream narratives that purport to celebrate and legitimize the Panthers simultaneously depict Newton as a “thug,” maligning through obviously racialized terms not only the Black Panther Party’s “chief theoretician” but also the Black, inner-city poor that Newton sought to organize and died trying to liberate.<sup>18</sup> There have been great historiographic and theoretical strides made in the last decade and a half to better account for the wide political-strategic range of the BPP as a social movement, from a renewed focus on their social programs to their partial origins in university-based study groups.<sup>19</sup> At the same time, however, the apparently increasing unwillingness of historians and theorists to honestly square the illegality, violence, and lumpenproletarian character of Panther members, politics, and strategy with the Panthers’ perceptive intellectual insights has served to further divorce academics and leftists alike from realistic conceptions of what significant political contestation actually looks like and who it includes. That is, the move to “save” the

history of the Panthers from the simplistic demonization to which it was almost unilaterally subjected between the 1960s and the 1990s seems to have come hand in hand with a watering down of their militancy and a dismissal of the poor, street-based culture that produced the Party in the first place. <sup>20</sup>

Other accounts fail to engage with the *uniqueness* of the political theory produced by Newton and the Panthers, often conflating the Party with other movements from the era. It is also the case that much of the political “left” today simply refuses to read theory produced by the BPP, to say nothing of other Black radical thought. Still others even urge that we move on beyond the Black Panther Party precisely as they are finally being treated with nuance by scholars and the public alike. <sup>21</sup> And yet, what are we to make of an organization that has long been considered the paragon of the Black Power movement, but was not only often at odds with the very person who coined the phrase “black power” but actively developed alliances with both white Hollywood celebrities and poor Appalachian migrants, with the Palestinian Liberation Organization and Mizrahi Israelis alike? <sup>22</sup> More to the point, what are we to make of Newton’s own insistence that—when they have done the job that has to be done—“the Black Panther Party will no longer be the *Black Panther Party*”? <sup>23</sup>

\*\*\*

This essay is meant to serve as an introduction to “Intercommunalism” (1974) and as a contextualization of Newton’s theory of intercommunalism as a whole. Those in search of theory to inform their political practice will find value in Newton’s treatment of the problems of race, nationalism, and internationalism, his speculations on the future of surplus populations and questions of class composition, and the role of information technology in future possibilities for struggle. Through the rest of this essay, I (1) outline Huey Newton’s political-economic account of global empire, (2) contextualize Newton’s philosophical method—dialectical materialism—within his personal intellectual history, and (3) trace the progression of the Black Panther Party’s “official ideology” from Black Nationalism to Revolutionary Intercommunalism, informed by historical debates within the Black Liberation movement. In the second half, applying Newton’s theory, I (4) offer a new interpretation of the BPP’s shift in strategy from “self defense” to “survival



pending revolution,” (5) give an account of the political import of the BPP’s Oakland commune, and (6) reflect on some connections to political struggles today.

### 1. Reactionary Intercommunalism

*“We see then that the United States controls other countries thousands of miles away and uses their resources to benefit the ruling circle in America. The same situation holds for the many communities of the oppressed within the United States. Therefore the evidence shows very clearly that the United States is not a nation for its boundaries are extended into every territory of the world. The United States is an empire.”<sup>24</sup>*

Newton’s theory of intercommunalism seeks to provide an explanation for the dominating and ultimately determining political force of American capitalist empire on the world stage, the corresponding decline of the political influence of nation-states, and the deterioration of nationalism as a potentially liberatory political ideology. He refers to this condition and phase of capitalism as *reactionary intercommunalism*. According to Newton in 1970, nation-states can no longer meaningfully be said to exist. Instead, global capital has, through U.S. empire in particular, reduced the world to a collection of communities that lack control over their local conditions of life and which can at most only become autonomous “liberated territories” within that larger empire. These communities can, however, by seizing the material structures that allow for production, technology, and information media, fight to build an interconnected and “cooperative framework” among themselves in a global dynamic that he calls *revolutionary intercommunalism*.<sup>25</sup> In the words of Elaine Brown, chairwoman of the BPP from 1974 to 1977, Newton’s notion of reactionary intercommunalism is an early conceptualization of what is today “casually euphemized by the capitalist class as ‘globalization.’”<sup>26</sup> The theory of intercommunalism as a whole is an attempt to both describe how revolutionary change might be expected to unfold going forward given these conditions of global empire but also to prescribe how one might go about playing an agential role in such a project. Dialectical materialism is Newton’s preferred method for understanding how one might come to derive what that role is, given that it is not static and pre-established, but must be assessed from an analysis of material conditions as they develop. “The concept of intercommunalism not only accurately describes and defines the situation, it also implies our obligation to unify and share with these

dispersed communities the wealth which has been stolen from them and centralized here in the United States.”<sup>27</sup> During the particular turning point in the history of the Black Panther Party when he developed the theory, Newton was also deeply concerned with how Black people in particular might attain liberation without relying upon a state that purports to represent them as a people or nation. According to Newton, any efforts by Black people to gain national sovereignty or independence while global capitalism still exists could only lead to alternate forms of subjugation under American empire.

The text of Newton’s “Intercommunalism” (1974) begins with a long (and surprising) excerpt from David Horowitz’s *Empire and Revolution: A Radical Interpretation of Contemporary History*.<sup>28</sup> Horowitz was a New Left Marxist who in the 1980s converted to hardline conservatism. In this excerpt from 1969, however, he argues that as capitalist competition inevitably tends towards monopoly capitalism and the consolidation of power in the hands of a few, it expands in reach from the domestic to the global in the form of imperialism. Newton is concerned with theorizing a form of imperialism which is increasingly tied less to the interests of the nation-state that deploys its military abroad than to the interests of the businesses that benefit from that deployment. As “the centralization and concentration of economic power increasingly divorce[s] legal ownership from [actual] control,” (Horowitz) an ever smaller number of capitalist enterprises make use of the military strength of a small set of imperialist nation-states to exert de facto economic, political, and military control over all other enterprises, territories, and people.<sup>29</sup> Corporations might be said to increasingly develop sovereignty *through* and then *over* nation-states. As Elaine Brown has pointed out, in the 1970s, “numerous corporations openly argued... that as they controlled greater wealth than most of the member states of the United Nations, they should be seated accordingly.”<sup>30</sup> Newton quotes Horowitz further: “capitalism unified the nation state only to [later] herald the transcendence of the nation-state and emergence of international relations on a truly global scale.”<sup>31</sup>

John Narayan’s recently published “Huey P. Newton’s Intercommunalism: An Unacknowledged Theory of Empire” is invaluable for its closer examination of the economic aspects of Newton’s theory. Narayan does the necessary work of comparing and contrasting Newton’s theorizations to subsequently developed Marxist accounts of

the relationship between imperialism, globalization, and the nation-state, particularly those of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri.<sup>32</sup> In “The Wages of Whiteness in the Absence of Wages: Racial Capitalism, Reactionary Intercommunalism and the Rise of Trumpism,” Narayan also convincingly argues that Newton was apparently correct to be concerned that these economic dynamics might, to the detriment of an ideal class solidarity, create the conditions for a strengthening of xenophobia, racism, and newer populist nationalisms in the United States.<sup>33</sup> Ultimately, Narayan concludes that “Newton’s narration of the effects of reactionary intercommunalism on the revolutionary potential of the multitude holds more empirical validity than the narration of empire offered by his successors.”<sup>34</sup>

In his 1974 essay “Who Makes U.S. Foreign Policy?”, Newton speaks at length about the ideological relationship between U.S.-based corporations and the overseas military activity of the U.S. government.<sup>35</sup> In “Intercommunalism” (1974), Newton directly quotes President Woodrow Wilson, who in 1907 stated: “Since trade ignores national boundaries and the manufacturer insists on having the world as a market, the flag of his nation must follow him and the doors of the nations which are closed must be battered down.”<sup>36</sup> To Newton’s point, it is hard to imagine that U.S.-based corporations would have the power that they do today, accumulating profit in 188 of 193 countries, with S&P 500 “growth” increasingly being disconnected from U.S. GDP “growth,” if active duty U.S. military were not simultaneously deployed in 170 of those countries, with about 800 military bases in over 70 of them, in order to protect those corporations’ interests in the case of unrest.<sup>37</sup> Newton states that “we can even refer to this army as the intercommunal police force. They control communities they do not live in and have no interest in, and they are controlled by the ruling clique for the purposes of profit and personal and military might.”<sup>38</sup> In 1950, as justification for entering Korea, the United States executive branch under President Truman first started using the term “police action” to refer to military actions pursued without a formal and constitutional congressional declaration of war.

But the political economic dynamics that define “reactionary intercommunalism,” Newton insists, also create the conditions for revolutionary possibility. Most specifically, as more and more of the daily efforts of the global working poor are dictated by a smaller



set of corporations and states, more of the global population is brought together by their shared relationship to those workplaces and the technologies that hold them together: “the centralization of production” produces the “socialization of production: the development of an increasingly interdependent and cooperative basis of social labor.”<sup>39</sup> This interdependence and connectedness creates the conditions for a greater shared lived experience and therefore a possibly greater level of solidarity among the employed, underemployed, and unemployed of the world. For Newton, an awareness of this dynamic possibility follows from a conception of reality grounded in the philosophy of dialectical materialism.

## 2. Dialectical Materialism

*“Power is the ability to define phenomena and make them act in a desired manner”<sup>40</sup>*

*“Young people generally feel that the role of the revolutionary is to define a set of actions and a set of principles that are easy to identify and are absolute. But what I was trying to explain to them was the process: revolution, basically, is a contradiction between the old and the new in the process of development. Anything can be revolutionary at a particular point in time, but most of the students don't understand that. And most other people don't understand it either.”<sup>41</sup>*

Consistent with the ancient Greek approach according to which philosophy is pursued always for a practical purpose—to understand better how to live “the good life”—for Newton, no ethical, social, or political goal can be adequately pursued without a philosophical examination and understanding of the world in which that pursuit might occur. For this reason, Newton begins his explanation of intercommunalism first by engaging with a series of inquiries concerning how knowledge of reality might be attained.<sup>42</sup>

In Newton's 1970 presentation at Boston College, he begins this epistemological pursuit first through an explanation of the structure of empiricism, identifying its basis in subjectivity and its resultant limits, the strengths and shortcomings of observation, and the scientific method's dependence on a priori assumptions, which are treated as unexamined truths.<sup>43</sup> Drawing then from Kant, he argues for the advantages of analytic

reasoning—conceived of as internally consistent and independent from the external world—and then asserts that a Marxist philosophy of dialectical materialism attempts to draw from the strengths of both empiricism and rationalism (pure reason) to better account for how phenomena in the world are constituted and transformed. “Marx, as a social scientist, criticized other social scientists for attempting to explain phenomena, or one phenomenon, by taking it out of its environment, isolating it, putting it into a category, and not acknowledging the fact that once it was taken out of its environment the phenomenon was transformed.”<sup>44</sup> In his 1971 presentation at Yale University, he begins this portion of his talk by instead contrasting idealism and materialism.<sup>45</sup> In the 1974 text that we are reproducing here, he subjects both idealism and materialism to an approximately Cartesian-style series of skeptical doubts, and from this skeptical ground then informs us that the Black Panther Party has ideologically chosen to be materialist, and specifically has taken up dialectical materialism, which accounts for reality by identifying the “fundamental internal contradictions” in all things.<sup>46</sup>

It is not possible here to defend this thoroughly, but I believe that a closer tracing and analysis of Newton’s epistemological arguments across the span of his writings should reveal a shift over time from a younger Newton consumed with skepticism and doubt<sup>47</sup>—compelled often to question the nature of reality and the purpose of human life—to one who later instead embraces affirmational philosophies that assert a positive ontology and thereby offer clearer political possibilities. This strategic shift away from skepticism and even partial nihilism<sup>48</sup> is evident especially after his release from solitary confinement<sup>49</sup> and culminates in his embrace of dialectical materialism, which would be his guiding philosophy thereafter.

Dialectical materialism structured Newton’s conceptions of what the world is and what kinds of activity are possible in it. For him, dialectical materialism makes clear that nothing is static, that nothing is isolated, that the world is transformed through constant flux and antagonisms, and that some form of knowledge of these turning points can be acquired through a combination of observation and rational reflection. Dialectical materialism also serves as a method that makes it possible to identify how the key center of conflict in any situation may have shifted. Accordingly, the BPP as an organization was constantly adapting both their strategy and their tactics as they experienced

struggle and reflected on it. Their most prominent shift early in the Party's history, from black nationalism to revolutionary nationalism, was formally codified in their Ten Point Program, which changed from insisting on an "end to the robbery by the white man of our Black Community" in 1966, to, by 1969, instead calling for "an end to the robbery by the capitalist of our Black and oppressed communities." <sup>50</sup>

Fred Hampton, Chair of the Illinois chapter of the BPP, explained the Party's use of dialectical materialism through metaphor:

Did you ever see something and pull it and you take it as far as you can and it almost outstretches itself and it goes into something else? If you take it so far that it is two things? As a matter of fact, some things if you stretch it so far, it'll be another thing. Did you ever cook something so long that it turns into something else? ...That's what we're talking about with politics. That politics ain't nothing, but if you stretch it so long that it can't go no further, then you know what you got on your hands? You got an antagonistic contradiction. <sup>51</sup>

Under Newton's dialectical materialist conception of the world, contradictions exist everywhere, but only certain ones are *antagonistic contradictions* and, when pushed, these by definition will inevitably transform the whole dynamic at hand. Newton's conception of dialectics, which is observably deeply Maoist, is perhaps most fleshed out in "Utopia: Universal Life Energy." <sup>52</sup> Following from this approach, Newton asserts that reactionary intercommunalism has necessarily created the conditions for its own potential destruction—in the form of revolutionary intercommunalism.

### 3. Revolutionary Intercommunalism

*“When the people seize the means of production, when they seize the mass media and so forth, you will still have racism, you will still have ethnocentrism, you will still have contradictions. But the fact that the people will be in control of all the productive and institutional units of society—not only factories, but the media too—will enable them to start*

*solving these contradictions. It will produce new values, new identities; it will mold a new and essentially human culture as the people resolve old conflicts based on cultural and economic conditions. At some point, there will be a qualitative change and the people will have transformed revolutionary intercommunalism into communism. We call it "communism" because at this point in history people will not only control the productive and institutional units of society, but they will also have seized possession of their own subconscious attitudes toward these things; and for the first time in history they will have a more rather than less conscious relationship to the material world—people, plants, books, machines, media, everything—in which they live. They will have power, that is, they will control the phenomena around them and make it act in some desired manner, and they will know their own real desires. The first step in this process is the seizure by the people of their own communities.”*<sup>53</sup>

Newton used his conception of dialectical materialism to both respond to and lead the BPP's ideological and strategic turns. According to Newton, the Black Panther Party began as a *black nationalist* organization. Having observed that “most people in the past had solved some of their problems by forming into nations,”<sup>54</sup> they invested their efforts in pursuing a politics concerned with defending and empowering Black people as a distinct community. That said, from the start, they also critiqued *cultural nationalist* approaches, noting both their ineffectiveness for significantly changing the lives of most Black people and their popularity among more educated and affluent African Americans.<sup>55</sup> Some Afrocentric approaches to cultural nationalism in the 20th century seemed at times to imply that liberation might come simply from dressing differently or changing one's name—by asserting a newly produced identity as an individual or as part of a community.<sup>56</sup> At the same time, however, the Panthers deeply valued political education, aware of its profound psychological impact on youth especially, and they made learning about African and African diasporic history a requirement for membership. Among Panthers on the East Coast especially, changing one's name was a common practice, drawn from a religious tradition that was central to Black Islam and was epitomized through the figure and life of Malcolm X, a.k.a. El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz, who served as a symbol of reinvention and personal transformation for countless radicals in the 1960s and beyond.<sup>57</sup> However, the BPP also always regarded cultural nationalism as only a stepping stone in a dialectical process, insufficient on its own for bringing about revolution. They were deeply critical of African or Black-led states that



were nonetheless authoritarian, or capitalist, or within which Black people were still poor. To be for Black liberation meant then necessarily also to be against capitalism. Newton recounts how he came to his position, years before the Party was established:

“It was my life plus independent reading that made me a socialist—nothing else. I became convinced of the benefits of collectivism and a collectivist ideology. I also saw the link between racism and the economics of capitalism, although, despite the link, I recognized that it was necessary to separate the concepts in analyzing the general situation. In psychological terms, racism could continue to exist even after the economic problems that had created racism had been resolved. Never convinced that destroying capitalism would automatically destroy racism, I felt, however, that we could not destroy racism without wiping out its economic foundation. It was necessary to think much more creatively and independently about these complex interconnections.”<sup>58</sup>

For these reasons, and many more, the Black Panther Party quickly shifted towards *revolutionary nationalism*, grounded in the need to transform the economic organization of society in order to transform it politically.<sup>59</sup>

Within a year of the BPP's founding, however, Party leadership would come to the conclusion that the Black community in the U.S. could not, practically speaking, become a nation-state—secure, with their own territory and with full control over their economic, political, and cultural life—after all. “It is an endless circle, you see: to achieve nationhood, we needed to become a dominant force; but to become a dominant force, we needed to be nation.”<sup>60</sup> More to the point, if African Americans were indeed ever able to establish a separate nation-state, *even if it were socialist*, Newton argued, there would be little to stop the U.S. from invading and turning it into a colony in the traditional imperialist fashion, or, more likely, from asserting economic control over it in the contemporary “neo-colonial” manner.<sup>61</sup> Given the immense power of the United States, the solution could only be then for the BPP to ally themselves with other oppressed peoples, domestically and abroad.

According to contemporary genetic science, racial categories as people popularly believe in them today are demonstrably invalid. However, racial categories are not mere fantasy either, nor can they be used as an easy means for individual self-expression. Modern

racial categories are not chosen but rather are imposed, their most important function is to dehumanize, and they are made real through processes of political domination and exploitation. Huey Newton's thought often reflects an awareness of the social and political constructedness of blackness as a category. In his words: "I knew the difference between white people and black people, of course, but the cue was always the way white people treated us, not the color itself."<sup>62</sup> Of course, situated in a historical context, Newton considered the category of blackness still a necessary one for recognizing certain material dynamics (eg. genocide, the racialized character of colonization, lumpenization, etc.) and also as a ground for political solidarity. It was a category that received extra emphasis in the later years of the Oakland-based BPP, not as a hindrance to international alliances but as a way to strengthen them. That said, Newton ultimately considered it politically necessary to eventually establish a "universal identity," disconnected from "cultural, racial, and religious chauvinism."<sup>63</sup>

Aiming to build alliances with oppressed people against capitalism wherever possible, the Black Panther Party officially became *internationalist*, forming political bonds across six continents with other revolutionary organizations and oppressed people. Historically, this was unremarkable, as non-Western socialists and communists of all stripes had throughout the 20th century worked to build alliances with each other and against European and American capitalism and imperialism. Indeed, in many ways internationalism was already part of the background for the Black Panther Party, which formed in 1966, the same year that The Organization of Solidarity with the People of Asia, Africa and Latin America was founded in Cuba, followed soon after by the publication of the *Tricontinental* magazine. The literature and social movements from which BPP members drew inspiration were consistently internationalist, from Kwame Nkrumah's autobiography to Carlos Marighella's *Minimanual of the Urban Guerrilla*. At the same time, the willingness of Newton to reconsider the Black Panther Party's relationship to Black American identity was in many ways a continuation of a gesture that other U.S.-based Black revolutionaries had already made—from Malcolm X to the League of Revolutionary Black Workers—in using the word "Black" to refer not just to people of partial African descent but as a revolutionary catch-all category, so that the "Black revolution" could include revolutions in Asia and Latin America, and "Black

people” could include all “people of color who are engaged in revolutionary struggle in the United States and all over the world.” <sup>64</sup>

And yet, by 1970, Newton came to reject even internationalism as a flawed revolutionary strategy. The reasons for this rejection are based in at least two problems or “contradictions,” one external to the BPP and one internal to it.

The first problem is grounded in Newton’s understanding of the world under reactionary intercommunalism and what kind of resistance is even possible within it. As Brown has put it, “Huey concluded that the capitalists of the United States had succeeded in reducing the rest of the world to a collection of communities, no different in terms of territorial sovereignty or control over resources than oppressed communities inside the United States.” <sup>65</sup> Since there were no more nations, one could not have true internationalism, much less among oppressed people. Put more strongly, “the people and the economy are so integrated into the imperialist empire that it’s impossible to ‘decolonize,’ to return to the former conditions of existence”; and “if colonies cannot decolonize and return to their original existence as nations, then nations no longer exist. Nor, we believe, will they ever exist again.” <sup>66</sup> Instead, for Newton, there can only exist liberated territories within the larger expanse of the global American empire. As long as that empire still exists, these liberated territories must constantly struggle to maintain their autonomy from capitalism and imperialism both. Already by 1974, we see Newton question the extent to which the Soviet Union and The People’s Republic of China could be considered truly independent, communist nation-states:

“By whom are the Chinese, for instance, forced? They are forced by the actions of the United States. Instead of putting their money into the schools, the hospitals, and into institutions in their community, they are forced to maintain a large military. So their liberated territory is very similar to what happened in the riots and rebellions in Detroit where, for about 4 or 5 days the blacks there held about 8 blocks and they drove the local police and the national guard out and the peace was not restored... They only held their territory for 4 days, they could have had a revolutionary provisional government and we would have recognized it just as we recognized the People’s Republic of China... We do not recognize them as a nation but

as a liberated territory and a community that is somewhat free, but it can only maintain its freedom through a constant fight.”<sup>67</sup>

The second problem Newton encountered had to do with how internationalism was received by the Black community. Immediately upon his release from prison in 1970, Newton announced an offer of troops on behalf of the Black Panther Party to the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam, a material expression of internationalist solidarity. The backlash from Black elites<sup>68</sup> was less of a concern than the backlash that came from the mass base of the Party:

“...Our offer of troops to the Vietnamese received negative reactions from the people, truly oppressed people. Welfare recipients wrote letters saying, ‘I thought the Party was for us; why do you want to give those dirty Vietnamese our life blood?’ I would call this a contradiction, one we are trying to solve. We are trying to give some therapy, you might say, to our community and lift their consciousness but first we have to be accepted. [...] We try to do whatever is possible to meet the patient on the grounds that he or she can best relate to, because, after all, they are the issue.”<sup>69</sup>

Newton’s critique of internationalism was influenced by the need to address the ideological relationship of the Black community in particular to American nationalism. As Americans—even for the most marginalized, poor, and recently immigrated among us—we are inclined to uphold the false belief in our exceptionalism and superiority, if not at least our social difference. The vitality of nationalism is in part maintained by the state’s dispensation of certain material privileges and a symbolic status unto a population based off of the mere and arbitrary facts of their birth. The defensive retort that “we” must take care of “our own” serves to obscure the active role that we play in disconnecting ourselves from the suffering of the rest of the world, even when it is in fact deeply connected to our own suffering.<sup>70</sup> I would forward that Newton was able to identify that this reactionary tendency necessarily reasserts itself through the nationalism that is *presumed within* internationalism.

Several theorists in recent years have tackled the matter of the historically unique position that diasporic African people have been forced into under modernity—arguably one of incommensurable subjection, and even abjection. For these thinkers, the forced

“social death” of diasporic Africans, as a continued effect of slavery, is an indispensable feature of western society, or perhaps of capitalism. In some ways, Newton might be said to agree with the basic intuitions behind some of these views, but, informed by his intercommunalist perspective, he comes to opposite conclusions.

For Newton, *all* oppressed people within the bounds of American Empire are in some sense colonized.<sup>71</sup> Furthermore, though, because “Black people” in America compose a *uniquely* colonized community, comparable to colonized communities in other parts of the world while simultaneously located within the very center of the empire, the community is in a uniquely privileged position *to destroy that empire*. Specifically, Newton considered Black people in the U.S. to be in the ideal position to act as the vanguard for a global revolution against reactionary intercommunalism. “We believe that black Americans are the first real internationalists; not just the Black Panther Party, but black people who live in America... We have been internationally dispersed by slavery, and we can easily identify with other people in other cultures. Because of slavery, we never really felt attached to the nation in the same way that the peasant was attached to the soil in Russia.”<sup>72</sup>

According to official Black Panther Party ideology, African diasporic people in the Americas are not a minority, but rather members of the colonized majority, imported over centuries to build the foundational wealth and heart of the empire.<sup>73</sup> This means that we, like other oppressed groups in the U.S., “reap benefits” from the exploitation of the rest of the world but are also in a strategic position to uproot that empire at its base.<sup>74</sup>

“If we believe we are brother with the people of Mozambique, how can we help? They need arms and other material aid. We have no weapons to give. We have no money for materials. Then how do we help? ... They cannot fight for us. We cannot fight in their place. We can each narrow the territory that our common oppressor occupies. We can liberate ourselves, learning from and teaching each other along the way. But the struggle is the same; the enemy is the same.”<sup>75</sup>

Within a reactionary intercommunalist world, intercommunal solidarity and revolutionary struggle is to fight locally for one’s own freedom as well as the freedom of



those far away. Intercommunalism is therefore Newton's *non-statist* theoretical frame—a frame that insists that one's political vision must be able to see past the limits of border ideology.

#### 4. The Long Durée of the Black Panther Party: A New Reason to Exist

By 1970, the federal government and many state and municipal governments had already escalated the harassment of the BPP to the level of open war, using assassinations, military-style SWAT deployments, undercover operatives, and psychological warfare to dismantle the movement. However, contrary to typical narratives and conceptions about the sudden decline of the party at this time, the period between 1971 and approximately 1982 in fact encompasses *the majority* of the BPP's history, whether we take this to refer to the increasingly commune-like Oakland chapter or to the guerrilla activities of the Black Liberation Army and affiliated cells based on the East Coast, in the Midwest, in the South and elsewhere.<sup>76</sup> While total membership dramatically contracted, an effect of both state repression and purges, various iterations of the Black Panther movement persisted for another decade.

For what has come to be called “the Newton faction” (or, more misleadingly, the “West Coast faction”) there was a sharp strategic turn away from openly violent political contestation with the state and a shift instead towards the development of autonomous institutions and social service programs—what has historically since then been described critically by many as reformism. Newton's stance on this matter is plain, though perhaps still poorly understood: “A Ten Point Program is not revolutionary in itself, nor is it reformist. *It is a survival program.* We, the people, are threatened with genocide because racism and fascism are rampant in this country and throughout the world.”<sup>77</sup> I offer that Newton's analysis of conditions at the time led him and the Party towards a renewed focus on social reproduction as a primary terrain of political struggle, shifting to a strategy oriented towards developing local, autonomous organs of power, ideally tied to land. That is, the fact of the severe poverty of Black people made clear that the Party had to play a more prominent role in sustaining the people themselves, while simultaneously also working to establish institutions that would allow *all* people to eventually disconnect from capitalism and connect instead to the Party organization as their primary means to life.<sup>78</sup> In contrast to the BPP's Free Breakfast programs, which in 1969

were initiated under the motto of “serve the people” and were designed to provide resources to the black and poor, enhance recruitment of members, and build legitimacy within the community at large, the period after the middle of 1971 marked the expansion of a strategy that Newton called “survival pending revolution.”<sup>79</sup> Before Newton’s release from prison, this shift was already partially underway through the grassroots efforts of regional chapters, headed by the initiative of mostly female rank-and-file members, and through the program-building of David Hilliard in particular. For the Black Panther Party, the very survival of Black people was a political question and the very thing to struggle over.

Early in the BPP’s formation, the organization was deeply influenced by Frantz Fanon’s argument that the unemployed, underemployed, and criminalized third world *lumpenproletariat* would be the group that would most likely bring about revolution, rather than the traditional waged “working class.”<sup>80</sup> The Party’s concern with survival was both inspired by their focus on this population, which through dispossession, poverty, and criminalization is continuously exposed to death, but also by an analysis of the effects of increasing rates of unemployment and underemployment for all people globally, with the loss of jobs understood as an effect of automation and the increasing vitality of capitalist empire.<sup>81</sup> The BPP’s analysis of this process of lumpenization shares affinities and was contemporaneous with that of James and Grace Lee Boggs who, in *Racism and the Class Struggle: Further Pages from a Black Worker’s Notebook*, argue that urban Black youth experience first and perhaps most acutely what is to be increasingly experienced by more and more of the global workforce in general. In the U.S., because Black wage-workers have historically been among “the last hired and the first fired,” they have long been well-acquainted with the psychological feeling of abandonment and the material exposure to death that large portions of the 21st “white working class” have only more recently been forced to confront.

Newton’s theory of intercommunalism is accordingly grounded in the question of what is to happen to a proletarian “working class” that is increasingly no longer useful to capitalism *as workers* and is likely to be eventually “transformed out of existence” altogether.<sup>82</sup> Newton argues that these conditions make it necessary—if we are to survive—to come up with a different conception of ourselves. That is, both the material

opportunities for waged work will dwindle, but also perhaps the 'worker identity' as such may cease to exist, requiring a new self-conception or form of "class" consciousness to be established. No longer can the figure of the class-conscious worker with a waged relationship to production, idealized within capitalist society as a 'productive member of society,' be assumed to be the central actor in a revolutionary narrative, a tenuous claim in the first place. However else one might gain access to the means to consumption, with or without the wage, may come to be the primary mode of survival and political struggle, Newton and the Panthers thought:

"Today's capitalist has developed machinery to such a point that he can hire a group of specialized people called technocrats. In the near future he will certainly do more of this, and the technocrat will be too specialized to be identified as a proletarian. ...In fact that group of technocrats will be so vital we will have to do something to explain the presence of other people; we will have to come up with another definition and reason for existing."<sup>83</sup>

To be made part of the surplus population under capitalism is to be allowed or even actively made to simply perish; this process has always gone hand in hand with racialization and dehumanization.<sup>84</sup>

The reality of genocide under capitalism, whether intentional or brought about by governmental abandonment, has been largely self-evident to the Black radical left for a long time, however. In 1951, the Civil Rights Congress, an organization led by Black Communists, submitted a petition to the United Nations titled "We Charge Genocide: The Crime of Government Against the Negro People," accusing the U.S. of multiple acts of genocide over the preceding century and drawing from the U.N.'s Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide signed just three years prior. In the year before his assassination in 1965, Malcolm X revived this pursuit, seeking support from multiple foreign heads of state for the prospect of bringing a case against the United States for having violated the human rights of African Americans.<sup>85</sup> Malcolm sought to shift the struggle from one focused on civil rights, appealing to the state to address grievances, to one for human rights, appealing instead to the Third World-dominated United Nations of the time and humanistic principles in general. George Jackson's *Blood in my Eye* also makes genocide a central theme in 1971, his concerns

grounded in the then quite-common fear that fascism was on the rise within the United States. All that said, Newton was particularly concerned with the more daily and normalized instantiations of genocide; he wrote at length, for example, about Black children in the South who, merely for lack of shoes, are regularly exposed to parasites that hinder cognitive development, a problem which still **continues today**.<sup>86</sup>

If we consider one of Newton's most Maoist maxims—"War is politics with bloodshed; Politics is war without bloodshed"—then we can understand how matters of everyday health, social organization, and governance are indeed matters of life and death, and ergo political struggle. Newton wanted the BPP to "put up obstacles against annihilation on a local level," by contending politically over the control of resources, territory, commodity flows, and popular legitimacy.<sup>87</sup> Crucially then, while Newton's analysis of capitalist imperialism (reactionary intercommunalism) can be described as "non-territorial," his prescription for how to resist it—how to bring about revolutionary intercommunalism—emphasizes the importance of territorial control, alongside economic and ideological power.<sup>88</sup> This analysis guided the Black Panther Party Oakland chapter's decision to attempt to transform itself from the Central Committee of an international movement to a local, self-sustaining commune and bulwark against capitalist control.<sup>89</sup>

*Newton earned his Ph.D. in History of Consciousness from the University of California, Santa Cruz on June 15, 1980*

## **5. The Oakland Commune and Liberated Territories**



In 1971, the Oakland-based Central Committee began forcibly closing regional BPP chapters and recruiting leaders from each locale to bolster the Oakland-based chapter as it was restructured. Under Newton's increasingly singular and authoritarian leadership, the Oakland chapter made dramatic shifts to expand the breadth and impact of their social service-oriented programs, including developing more medical clinics, free clothing programs, free food distributions, and opening several liberation schools.<sup>90</sup> Less well known, the BPP also consolidated control over twenty-one properties mostly in the Bay Area, developed plans to operate their own factories, and even made an effort to take control of the Port of Oakland which at the time was the second largest port in the world in terms of container tonnage.<sup>91</sup>

They also began reengaging with institutions they had previously rejected altogether, such as Black businesses and Black churches.<sup>92</sup> These new strategies were informed by Newton's dialectical materialist logic, according to which the Party analyzed the conditions of the time and sought to reassess who might be friend or foe by pushing at the population in question until they were forced to choose sides through their actions. In this fashion, the BPP leveraged the Black identity of Black business owners to acquire not just resources for the party, but a regularized tribute, first requesting or insisting on their support by appealing to Black solidarity, and then organizing boycotts with the community to exert economic pressure as necessary.<sup>93</sup> If these means failed, then the BPP chose to extort—by threats or violent means—any businesses that refused to consent until they either gave in to BPP demands or revealed themselves to be “enemies of the people.” In this instance the BPP simultaneously understood and asserted themselves as “the people,” but also as the vanguard acting on behalf of “the people's” interests.<sup>94</sup> The BPP aimed to leverage these relationships with capitalists while nonetheless maintaining that, ultimately “there is no salvation in capitalism.”<sup>95</sup> Newton's position was that under reactionary intercommunalism, relative to the dominant power of elite global capitalists, the Black bourgeoisie is in fact mostly powerless—“a fantasy bourgeoisie, and this is true of most of the white bourgeoisie too”—and so they can be recruited or made of use of accordingly.<sup>96</sup>

In March of 1972 the BPP held a three-day “Black Community Survival Conference” to strengthen relationships with the National Welfare Rights Organization, churches, and

local gangs towards the goal of cultivating community control with an explicitly intercommunalist praxis.<sup>97</sup> This conference also featured both the participation of Shirley Chisholm, the first African-American major party candidate for president, and, significantly, BPP Chairman Bobby Seale's announcement that the BPP would begin running candidates for office, ranging from community boards to the office of mayor.<sup>98</sup> As far as I am able to discern, the BPP's electoral campaigns between 1972 and 1975 should perhaps indeed be best understood as explicitly reformist, less oriented at establishing "dual power" in the Leninist sense than with making the Party more politically legible and with improving conditions of life for the residents of Oakland in general.<sup>99</sup> These campaigns appear at odds with Newton's explicit statement, made as late as April 1971, that the BPP would never run candidates for office.<sup>100</sup> Most resonant in this discussion however is the fact that this period in the BPP's history remains still woefully undertheorized by mainstream scholars.

By 1974, after the most prominent of these electoral campaigns had failed, Party membership contracted dramatically to about 100 members, not including students enrolled in the Liberation Schools, and the organizational structure had been fully transformed. Concerning "the communal life of the Black Panther Party," Newton stated:

"The closeness of the group and the shared sense of purpose transform us into a harmonious, functioning body, working for the destruction of those conditions that make people suffer. Our unity has transformed us to the point where we have not compromised with the system; we have the closeness and love of family life, the will to live in spite of cruel conditions. Consciousness is the first step toward control of a situation. We feel free as a group; we know what troubles us, and we act."<sup>101</sup>

For all its strengths, the weaknesses of the Oakland chapter between 1974 and 1982 in many ways mirrored the weaknesses typical of other 20th century leftist communes.<sup>102</sup> All members were required to engage in regular "self-criticism and re-education," to attend the BPP's Son of Man Temple, to meet work quotas, and the liberation school featured mandatory communal dorming for all students. Particularly sexist polygamy and gendered violence was not uncommon, and physical violence of all sorts was often used to create internal discipline.<sup>103</sup> In one of Newton's least theoretically disciplined

but perhaps most audacious texts, “On the Relevance of the Church,” written near the peak of the public feud between him and Eldridge Cleaver, Newton explains matter-of-factly that the survival programs would face minimal labor costs because the Party would be forcing its members to work for free.<sup>104</sup> In a notably Maoist gesture consistent with this approach, a cover page from Newton’s first published collection of writings states simply: “The Black Panther Party is an ox for the people.”<sup>105</sup> Needless to say, the fact of a progressive or revolutionary organization developing such internally oppressive dynamics is typically and rightfully enough to provoke denunciations. Importantly, however, moralistic criticisms typically do little to further an analysis of the political realities that produce such dynamics. In the following footnote, I offer a series of speculative gestures towards how we might begin to analyze the Oakland commune’s coercive dynamics in light of larger structural conditions.<sup>106</sup>

It is also the case that, despite forceful writings against sexism, Newton as an individual spent much of his life before and towards the end of the Party both produced by and reproducing the dynamics of inner-city violence and harmful masculinism that many men in the U.S. experience as a series of limits and requirements for the fulfillment of their gender.<sup>107</sup> These dynamics have been conflated with the illegalist politics of the Black Panther Party by detractors, in part because the modern concept of ‘criminality’ functions largely to obscure powerful forms of political contestation and struggle by the poor, and in part perhaps because the material conditions that allow illegalist politics of resistance to flourish today depend on some of the structures that prop up oppression in modern society in the first place. In 1974, after allegedly murdering Kathleen Smith, Newton fled prosecution and sought self-exile in Cuba, remaining there for three years. Upon his return and acquittal, he then sought refuge within academia, studying until he earned his doctorate in 1980. However, the government-fostered draw of narcotics that struck the Black community as a whole during this time period would haunt Newton through the 1980s as well. Already in 1971, Newton’s growing paranoia—intentionally conditioned by the crushing effects of solitary confinement and the FBI’s finely calibrated psychological harassment—and his resultant political authoritarianism were increasingly evident and would gradually worsen with time.<sup>108</sup> Though the decline in Newton’s health would become fully clear only later, it is not presumptuous to suggest

that Newton's mental state likely influenced the BPP policy decision to purge the Party and contract the national chapters in 1972.

Despite Newton's extraordinary commitment to theoretical consistency, I would argue that in some ways Newton failed to apply his own theory of intercommunalism to its full logical conclusion. As Black Panther Party members and allies nationwide increasingly suffered assassinations and military attacks at the hands of the state, the Central Committee and Newton came to the conclusion that the movement had over-extended itself and had started aboveground military operations "too early."<sup>109</sup> For this reason, among others, the Oakland chapter put considerable effort into contracting national chapters, forcibly closing them, reassigning leaders from across the country to work in Oakland, and ending support for chapters that had refused to shut down. However, it is important to understand that few BPP chapters were, strictly speaking, simply offspring of the Oakland chapter. Many BPP chapters were autonomously run with little material support from the Oakland chapter; some had historically preceded the BPP itself and had simply taken on the Panther name and symbols while pursuing local goals; some organizations shared political affinities and sold the BPP paper but did not explicitly join the party; and one chapter—New York City's—had a larger total membership than even the original branch in Oakland.<sup>110</sup> If one conceives of these organizations not as chapters of one national organization but as distinct local movements seeking to become liberated territories against reactionary intercommunalism, then for the Oakland chapter to insist on authority over all of these disparate organizations would be akin to the BPP insisting on authority over the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam with whom they had expressed solidarity in 1970. The on-the-ground conditions in the Midwest were distinct from those in Oakland, which were further distinct from those in New York City, and presumably they would have all required differentiated strategies and tactics.

One might charge then that, by asserting authority over all "national" chapters, Newton was falling into the very belief in the bounds and borders of the nation-state that he had fundamentally criticized through his theory of intercommunalism. This is not to argue that any of these local sites of conflict would have otherwise become liberated territories had the Oakland chapter not "interfered." Nor should it be assumed that any of these

local organizations thought of their own struggles in terms of intercommunalism. However, according to Newton's theory, neither did they necessarily have to. There is also the question of whether Newton's theory would have necessitated a particular or differentiated strategy of struggle for those (inter-)communes that happened to be located closest to the heart of the global empire. What is clear, however, is that the Oakland chapter ended up in practice functioning as yet another political body, in addition to the FBI and local police, that some local chapters found themselves pitted against.

## 6. Today

*"Revolutionary intercommunalism and the good anarchy that Marx spies afar off at the 'end' of History are worldly, of this world."*<sup>111</sup>

While Newton's body of thought on intercommunalism is extensive, much of it is scattered across various speeches, interviews, and contributions to the Panther newspaper, whose name was changed from the "Black Community News Service" to the "Intercommunal News Service" in February of 1971. In her under-cited "Long Live Third World Unity! Long Live Internationalism: Huey P. Newton's Revolutionary Intercommunalism," Besenia Rodriguez begins the work of drawing from the newspaper, as well as from other archival materials not engaged with here. Still, what is available currently offers much to those thinking about contemporary struggles for liberation. For one, Newton's insistence on strategizing beyond the nation-state in a way different from that of the older generation of internationalists should resonate for those today struggling with the limitations and problems of pursuing "democratic socialism" within the bounds of the nation-state. Newton might urge us to reconsider whether organizations or movements based in, say, San Diego, might be able to develop more productive solidarities with organizations and movements based in Tijuana rather with ones in New York City. While San Diego and New York City might share some political beliefs and perhaps also material limitations imposed by federal laws, other dynamics such as economic flows, community composition, and major language might be more significant for determining political possibilities, rather than whether or not two organizations exist on the same side of a legal border.



Newton's theory might also help us make more sense of the kinds of non-statist and proto-statist political movements that have arisen and somehow persisted in recent decades—such as with the Zapatistas in Mexico or Kurdish Rojava—while national revolutions have increasingly failed. A conscious shift towards the pursuit of a kind of politics of autonomy *within* or *across* nation-states can be also identified across the political spectrum, from Michoacan and Hezbollah to transnational gangs and ISIS. In other moments, movements have articulated themselves in terms of explicit secessionism against or within a nation-state. In a recent **piece** written in its own seemingly “dialectical” mode, Robin D. G. Kelley praises the strategic approach of the Mississippi-based Cooperation Jackson, an outgrowth of the **Jackson-Kush Plan**, where municipal elections are being used as a way to funnel funds towards local movements seeking to build a base of autonomous power.<sup>112</sup> Kelley's language seems to echo some of Newton's: “In other words, concern with survival *and* the creation of new democratic institutions can consolidate power and move the city toward a sustainable future.”<sup>113</sup>

And yet, while material practices or “forms of life” may indeed be the only practical grounds for radical solidarity under current global conditions, the matter of how to cultivate “class consciousness” through a mass base remains a question. The question of how people might be motivated to pursue radical change and how ideas might circulate under reactionary intercommunalism did not escape Newton either, however. In the foreword for *To Die for the People*, Elaine Brown explains: “Though he did not live long enough to know of the Internet, Huey argued that as technology was bringing the world ever closer together, the world's people were poised to recognize their common oppressor and unite around their common oppression.”<sup>114</sup> David Kilcullen, senior counter-insurgency advisor to General Petraeus and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, identifies information itself as a particularly “soft target” that non-state actors can exploit in a contemporary world where war, crime, and the politics of resistance have become both blurred together and transnational.<sup>115</sup> He notes how otherwise improbable “solidarities” were developed through social media in the years preceding the Tunisian Revolution between sports hooligans and radical leftist hackers, helping to establish and spread forms of political consciousness that brought massification, riots, and violent clashes to the streets and intensified attacks on the state. This is also to say nothing of the increasing vibrancy of the digital terrain as a site of contestation over currency and

resources. In the 1960s, the counterintuitive solidarities that the Black Panther Party fostered between Black religious communities, college students, Vietnam veterans, and unemployed street youth and gang members irked many on the left that insisted on a more limited conception of what properly constitutes a class. For Newton, in accordance with dialectical materialism, classes arise and disappear in history as an effect of material conditions of exploitation and oppression, and as antagonistic contradictions divide and re-divide populations in new ways.

## References

---

- 1 The strengths of this piece are in large part due to the support and critique of Tyson Amir, Anna Cruz, Vanessa Dunstan, Kiran Garcha, Maya Gonzalez, Asad Haider, Lani Hanna, Patrick King, Zhandarka Kurti, Ben Mabie, and Rosa Petterson. I also extend my sincerest thanks to Frederika Newton and [the Dr. Huey P. Newton Foundation](#) for their support.
- 2 Besenia Rodriguez, "[Long Live Third World Unity! Long Live Internationalism: Huey P. Newton's Revolutionary Intercommunalism](#)," *Souls* 8:3 (2006), 119-141. Huey P. Newton, "[Speech Delivered at Boston College: November 18, 1970](#)," *To Die for the People: The Writings of Huey P. Newton*, ed. Toni Morrison (New York: Vintage, 1972), 20-38. Erik H. Erikson and Huey P. Newton, *In Search of Common Ground: In Search of Common Ground: Conversations with Erik H. Erikson and Huey P. Newton* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1973).
- 3 Judson Jeffries, "Introduction," *Huey P. Newton: The Radical Theorist* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2002), xxvi.
- 4 Erikson and Newton, *In Search of Common Ground*, 16.
- 5 Huey P. Newton, "Intercommunalism" (1974), Dr. Huey P. Newton Foundation Inc. Collection, Box 50, Folder 2-3. Collected in this dossier. Much of this material has in fact been prior published elsewhere, though in pieces across a variety of texts, including Huey P. Newton and Erik H. Erikson's *In Search of Common Ground*, Newton's *Revolutionary Suicide*, and in "Who Makes U.S. Foreign Policy?" (1974).
- 6 Newton, "Intercommunalism," 1.
- 7 Joshua Bloom and Waldo E. Martin, Jr., [Black Against Empire: The History and Politics of the Black Panther Party](#) (University of California Press, 2013), 2. Elaine Brown, "[Foreword](#)," *To Die for the People*, xviii. Bloom and Martin, *Black Against Empire*. Robyn Spencer, [Revolution Has Come: Black Power, Gender, and the Black Panther Party in Oakland](#) (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016). Eldridge Cleaver, *Target Zero: A Life in Writing*, ed. Kathleen Cleaver (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006). Rodriguez, "[Long Live Third World Unity! Long Live Internationalism: Huey P. Newton's Revolutionary Intercommunalism](#)."
- 8 Safiya Bukhari. "Building Support for Political Prisoners of War Incarcerated in North America," [The War Before: The True Life Story of Becoming a Black Panther, Keeping the Faith in Prison, & Fighting for Those Left Behind](#), ed. Laura Whitehorn (New York: Feminist Press, 2010).
- 9 Huey P. Newton, with J. Herman Blake, [Revolutionary Suicide](#) (New York: Penguin, 1973), 17-20.
- 10 *Ibid*, 54.

- 11 In his autobiography, *Revolutionary Suicide*, Newton directly discusses or explicitly references the original works of Aristotle, Renée Descartes, David Hume, John Locke, Søren Kierkegaard, Karl Marx, Mikhail Bakunin, Fyodor Dostoevsky, Friedrich Nietzsche, James Joyce, V. I. Lenin, Mao Zedong, Ho Chi Minh, Martin Delany, Frantz Fanon, Robert Williams, and Malcolm X; Émile Durkheim, W. E. B. Du Bois, Ivan Pavlov, John Watson, B.F. Skinner, Herbert Hendin, Eric C. Lincoln, A.J. Ayers, and Bertrand Russell; Ecclesiastes, William Shakespeare, Edgar Allen Poe, Victor Hugo, Franz Kafka, Albert Camus, Jean-Paul Sartre, T.S. Eliot, Ralph Ellison, Richard Wright, Langston Hughes, Claude Brown, James Baldwin, Julian Bond, and Angela Davis. See also: Judson Jeffries, *Huey P. Newton: The Radical Theorist*.
- 12 Newton, *Revolutionary Suicide*, 53, 268-269.
- 13 Erikson and Newton, *In Search of Common Ground*, 133.
- 14 Erikson and Newton, *In Search of Common Ground*, 38-39. In response to a question from a student about the “problem of simplifying your ideology for the masses,” Newton replied, “Yes, that’s our big burden. So far I haven’t been able to do it well enough to keep from being booed off the stage, but we are learning. I think one way to show how dialectics works is to use practical example after practical example. The reason I am sometimes afraid to do that is that people will take each example and think, ‘Well, if this is true in one case, then it must be true in all other cases.’”
- 15 Robert L. Trivers and Huey P. Newton, “[The Crash of Flight 90: Doomed by Self-deception](#),” *Science Digest*. (Nov 1982). For more on their collaboration, see: Erika Lorraine Milam, “[A Field Study of Con Games](#),” *Isis* 105.3 (The History of Science Society, 2014), 96-605.
- 16 For a subset of these essays, see: Huey P. Newton, *The Huey P. Newton Reader*, ed. David Hilliard and Donald Weise (Seven Stories Press, 2002).
- 17 Robyn Spencer, *The Revolution Has Come: Black Power, Gender, and the Black Panther Party in Oakland*, 118-119. An excerpt from the introduction to “The Son of Man”: “Mytho-religious and socio-political value systems are historical functions of each other. The dialectic of myth and politics, in fact, is history. [...] Our argument is that the modern tradition of a messianic duality of sovereignty and humility is a very crude explanation for the dynamic of a politico-mythic dialectic.” Dr. Huey P. Newton Foundation Inc. Collection, Box 50, Folder 2.
- 18 Stanley Nelson, *The Black Panthers: Vanguard of the Revolution*, 2015.
- 19 For more on the BPP’s university-based origins, see Donna Jean Murch, *Living for the City: Migration, Education, and the Rise of the Black Panther Party in Oakland, California* (The University of North Carolina Press, 2010).
- 20 Newton, “Scoring,” *Revolutionary Suicide*, 78-90.
- 21 Cedric Johnson, “[The Panthers Can’t Save Us Now](#),” *Catalyst*, 1.1 (Spring 2017).

- 22 Amy Sonnie and James Tracy, *Hillbilly Nationalists, Urban Race Rebels, and Black Power: Community Organizing in Radical Times* (Melville House, 2011). Alex Lubin, "[The Black Panthers and the PLO: The Politics of Intercommunalism](#)," *Geographies of Liberation: The Making of an Afro-Arab Political Imaginary* (North Carolina Scholarship Online, 2014).
- 23 Newton, "Intercommunalism," 54. Emphasis in original.
- 24 Newton, "Intercommunalism: A Higher Level of Consciousness," Dr. Huey P. Newton Foundation Inc. Collection, Box 48, Folder 4, pp. 6-7.
- 25 Garrett Epps, "[Huey Newton Speaks at Boston College, Presents Theory of 'Intercommunalism'](#)," *Harvard Crimson*, Nov 19 1970.
- 26 Brown, "[Foreword](#)," *To Die For the People*, xxi.
- 27 Newton, "Intercommunalism: A Higher Level of Consciousness," Dr. Huey P. Newton Foundation Inc. Collection, Box 48, Folder 4, pp. 11-12. See also, *In Search of Common Ground*, 73.
- 28 Newton cites pp. 29-45 from Horowitz's 1970 text. Horowitz was a Marxist theorist associated with the Monthly Review school until he became repulsed by the specter of violent revolution, a shift precipitated by the unresolved murder of his friend Betty Van Patter in the mid 1970s. He thereafter became an apologist for Reagan, an extreme conservative, and now devotes his efforts towards mounting attacks on Muslims, liberals, and leftists in education and academia.
- 29 Newton, "Intercommunalism," 11-12.
- 30 Brown, "Foreword," *To Die for the People*. For more on this history, see *United Nations Centre on Transnational Corporations: Corporate Conduct and the Public Interest*, ed. Khalil Hamdani and Lorraine Ruffing (Routledge, 2015).
- 31 Newton, "Intercommunalism," 2.
- 32 John Narayan, "[Huey P. Newton's Intercommunalism: An Unacknowledged Theory of Empire](#)," *Theory, Culture & Society* 0.0 (Nov 27 2017), 1-29. Note especially fn. 6 for Narayan's suggestions regarding the relationship between Newton's conceptions and Immanuel Wallerstein's as articulated in "The Rise and Future Demise of the World Capitalist System: Concepts for Comparative Analysis" (1974).
- 33 John Narayan, "[The Wages of Whiteness in the Absence of Wages: Racial Capitalism, Reactionary Intercommunalism and the Rise of Trumpism](#)," *Third World Quarterly* 38.11, *Special Issue: Whatever Happened to the Idea of Imperialism?* ed. Narayan and Sealey-Huggins (Routledge, Aug 2017), 2482-2500. Newton, as quoted by Narayan: "Here in America racism is rampant and we will have to do something about that... increasingly our objective class brothers act in a way, which will harm Black people, in other words they are subjectively our enemy. And I would use the hard-hat as an

example. The hard-hats are exploited, they're becoming seasonally employed in other words, they're well on their way to becoming unemployables and instead of blaming their master, they blame us for it." Narayan continues: "As the impact of reactionary intercommunalism took effect, and the wages of whiteness became ever absent, Newton believed that communities in the US would often 'feel more and more that it's a race contradiction rather than a class contradiction,'" (2487-2488).

34 Narayan, 21.

35 This essay, published in the *The Huey P. Newton Reader*, appears to be an edited excerpt from Newton's original "Intercommunalism" (1974).

36 Newton, "Intercommunalism" (1974), 6.

37 "**America's Forever Wars**," *The New York Times*, Oct 22 2017. "Number of Military and DoD Appropriated Fund (APF) Civilian Personnel Permanently Assigned By Duty Location and Service/Component," Defense Manpower Data Center, Mar 31 2018.

38 Newton, "Intercommunalism: A Higher Level of Consciousness," Dr. Huey P. Newton Foundation Inc. Collection, Box 48, Folder 4, p. 9.

39 Horowitz as quoted by Newton, "Intercommunalism" (1974), 12.

40 Newton, "Black Capitalism Re-Analyzed I: June 5, 1971," *The Huey P. Newton Reader*, 227.

41 Newton and Erikson, "Discussions with J. Herman Blake, Erik H. Erikson, Kai T. Erikson, and Huey P. Newton," *In Search of Common Ground*, 103.

42 Newton, "Part Two," *Revolutionary Suicide*, 53-98.

43 Newton, "**Speech at Boston College: November 18, 1970**," *The Huey P. Newton Reader*, 162-164.

44 Newton, "Speech at Boston College: November 18, 1970," *The Huey P. Newton Reader*, 163.

45 Newton, "Intercommunalism: February 1971," *The Huey P. Newton Reader*.

46 Newton, "Intercommunalism" (1974), 32: "The Black Panther Party has chosen materialist assumptions on which to ground its ideology. This is a purely arbitrary choice. Idealism might be the real happening; we might not be here at all. We don't really know whether we are in Connecticut or in San Francisco, whether we are dreaming and in a dream state, or just whether we are awake and in a dream state. Perhaps we are just somewhere in a void; we simply can't be sure." Newton's skeptical speculations bear a strong similarity to Descartes' three doubts in *The Meditations*: the possibility that his own senses may deceive him, the possibility that his experiences are simply part of a dream, and the possibility that he is awake but being deceived by an external force (Descartes' evil



demon). Newton follows that by suggesting a final possibility that resembles solipsism. For more on the Panthers turn to dialectical materialism, see Newton, "Intercommunalism" (1974), 33.

- 47 Newton, *Revolutionary Suicide*, 57-58: "The religious beliefs acquired in childhood also troubled me. After struggling through some of Socrates' works, as well as those of Aristotle, Hume, and Descartes, I began to question what I had always taken for granted. The ideas in the philosophical works that Melvin was studying spilled over into my confused mind... I identified very strongly with Stephen Dedalus in James Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* because he went through a similar experience. He felt great guilt when he first questioned Catholicism, believing that he would be consumed by the fires of hell for his doubt." See also Chapters 8, 10, and 11 ("Moving On," "Learning" and "The Brothers on the Block") in *Revolutionary Suicide*.
- 48 See: Jeffries, "Newton's View of People and the State," *Huey P. Newton: Radical Theorist*, 42-52. Newton, "Revolutionary Suicide: The Way of Liberation," *Revolutionary Suicide*, 1-6.
- 49 Robin D. G. Kelley and Betsy Esch, "**Black Like Mao: Red China and Black Revolution**," *Afro Asia: Revolutionary Political and Cultural Connections between African Americans and Asian Americans*. ed. Fred Ho and Bill V. Mullen. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 126: "Shortly after his release from prison in August 1970, Newton proposed the creation of an "Ideological Institute" where participants actually read and taught what he regarded as the "classics"—Marx, Mao, and Lenin as well as Aristotle, Plato, Rousseau, Kant, Kierkegaard, and Nietzsche. Unfortunately, the Ideological Institute did not amount to much; few Party members saw the use of abstract theorizing or the relevance of some of these writings to revolution." For Newton, the intention was to redistribute and decentralize the work of producing Party theory away from himself (Newton, *Revolutionary Suicide*, 323-324).
- 50 Joshua Bloom and Waldo E. Martin, Jr., *Black Against Empire*, 312.
- 51 Fred Hampton, "**Power Anywhere There's People**," Speech Delivered Olivet Church, Chicago, 1969.
- 52 Newton, "Utopia: Universal Life Energy" (1974), Dr. Huey P. Newton Foundation Inc. Collection, Box 39, Folder 1. Newton read all four volumes of the then available *Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung* (Newton, *Revolutionary Suicide*, 70). For more on the distinctly Maoist approach to dialectical materialism, see Mao Zedong's "**On Practice**," "**On Contradiction**," and "**On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People**."
- 53 Newton, "Intercommunalism" (1974), 52-53.
- 54 Newton, "Intercommunalism" (1974), 37.
- 55 Newton, "College and the Afro-American Association," *Revolutionary Suicide*, 60-66.
- 56 Huey Newton, "**To the Black Movement: May 15, 1968**," *To Die For the People*. Huey Newton, "**To The Republic of New Africa**: September 13, 1969," *To Die For the People*.



- 57 In a manner similar to how the Nation of Islam and Moorish Science Temple had prior rejected the term “Negro” and instead took up the terms “Black” or “Afro-American,” many Panthers who joined the Black Liberation Army and Republic of New Afrika chose by 1968 to identify themselves as New Afrikan, designating a collective identity inclusive of the currently 180 million members of the formerly enslaved African diaspora in the Americas.
- 58 Newton, *Revolutionary Suicide*, 70. The above quote is preceded by the following passage: “When I presented my solutions to the problems of Black people, or when I expressed my philosophy, people said, “Well, isn’t that socialism?” Some of them were using the socialist label to put me down, but I figured that if this was socialism, then socialism must be a correct view. So I read more of the works of the socialists and began to see a strong similarity between my beliefs and theirs. My conversion was complete when I read the four volumes of Mao Tse-tung to learn more about the Chinese Revolution.”
- 59 Huey P. Newton, “Huey Newton Talks to the Movement About the Black Panther Party, Cultural Nationalism, SNCC, Liberal sand White Revolutionaries,” *The Black Panthers Speak*, ed. Philip S. Foner (Chicago: Haymarket, 1970). Newton, “To the Black Movement: May 15, 1968,” *To Die for the People*. Also central to the BPP’s early Marxism and Maoism was the ideological leadership of LA-based Panther Ray “Masai” Hewitt (Bloom and Martin, “International Alliance,” *Black Against Empire*, 311-312).
- 60 Newton, “Intercommunalism” (1974). 38.
- 61 Newton, “To the Republic of New Africa: September 13, 1969,” *To Die For the People*. Newton, “On Pan-Africanism or Communism: December 1, 1972,” *The Huey P. Newton Reader*, 253.
- 62 Newton, “Discussions with J. Herman Blake, Erik H. Erikson, Kai T. Erikson, and Huey P. Newton,” *In Search of Common Ground*, 135-136. In this discussion, Huey Newton narrates a series of examples that point to contradictions in how blackness and whiteness are constructed.
- 63 Newton, “Intercommunalism” (1974), 46.
- 64 Malcolm X, “**Message to the Grassroots**,” Nov 10 1963. “What is the difference between a black revolution and a Negro revolution? ...The only revolution based on loving your enemy is the Negro revolution. The only revolution in which the goal is a desegregated lunch counter, a desegregated theater, a desegregated park, and a desegregated public toilet; you can sit down next to white folks on the toilet. That’s no revolution. Revolution is based on land. Land is the basis of all independence. Land is the basis of freedom, justice, and equality. The white man knows what a revolution is. He knows that the black revolution is world-wide in scope and in nature. The black revolution is sweeping Asia, sweeping Africa, is rearing its head in Latin America. The Cuban Revolution — that’s a revolution. They overturned the system. Revolution is in Asia. Revolution is in Africa. And the white man is screaming because he sees revolution in Latin America. How do you think he’ll react to you when you learn what a real revolution is? You don’t know what a revolution is. If you did,

you wouldn't use that word." James Boggs and Grace Lee Boggs. "[The City Is the Black Man's Land](#)" (1966), *Racism and the Class Struggle: Further Pages from a Black Worker's Notebook* (Monthly Review Press, 1970).

- 65 Elaine Brown, "Foreword," *To Die for the People*, xx.
- 66 Newton, "Intercommunalism" (1974), 41.
- 67 Newton, "Utopia: Universal Life Energy," 8-9. Newton continues, likely drawing from discussions from his visit to China in 1971, adding, "Because they have a worldview, they quickly agreed that they can only call themselves liberated territory because they said the world belongs to the people and they have a universal identity with all of the oppressed people of the world." In "The Technology Question: 1972," he also offers a more severe critique of the Soviet Union, which he says became a "satellite of the United States" when they formed the "United States-Soviet Union Trade Agreement of 1972" and also as a result harmed Third World resistance movements: "Russia's first mistake came in the form of an incorrect analysis: that socialism could co-exist peacefully with capitalist nations" ([The Huey P. Newton Reader](#), 259-265). For more of Newton's criticisms of the Soviet Union, see also his critique of George Padmore's *Communism and Black Nationalism* in "On Pan-Africanism or Communism: December 1, 1971," *The Huey P. Newton Reader*.
- 68 Newton, "[Reply to Roy Wilkins re : Vietnam: September 26, 1970](#)," *To Die For the People*.
- 69 Newton, "Intercommunalism" (1974), 54.
- 70 Newton, "The Technology Question: December 1, 1972," *The Huey P. Newton Reader*, 262-264.
- 71 As John Narayan points out (fn. 5), already by 1969, in writings published while he is still incarcerated, Newton is trying to rethink the relationship between race, colonization, and forms of empire: "At one time I thought that only Blacks were colonized. But I think we have to change our rhetoric to an extent because the whole American people have been colonized, if you view exploitation as a colonized effect. Seventy-six companies have exploited everyone. American people are a colonized people even more so than the people in developing countries where the military operates." Newton, "On the Peace Movement: August 15, 1969," *The Huey P. Newton Reader*, 152. This point is articulated again one month later in Newton's "To the Republic of New Africa: September 13, 1969" with regards to indigenous people, but even as far back as 1967 Newton insists on identifying the first waves of European immigrants, many of whom were poor, criminalized, and in bondage, as colonized people: "Now these same colonized White people, these bondsmen, paupers, and thieves, deny the colonized Black man not only the right to abolish this oppressive system, but to even speak of abolishing it." Newton, "In Defense of Self Defense I: June 20, 1967," *The Huey P. Newton Reader*, 134-135.
- 72 Newton, "Intercommunalism" (1974), 49. See also, "Uniting Against a Common Enemy: October 23, 1971," *The Huey P. Newton Reader*, 234-236.

- 73 Eldridge Cleaver, “**On the Ideology of the Black Panther Party (Part 1)**” (1969). Newton affirms this thesis again during his “Speech Delivered at Boston College: November 18, 1970,” *To Die for the People*, 26.
- 74 Newton, “Intercommunalism: A Higher Level of Consciousness,” Dr. Huey P. Newton Foundation Inc. Collection, Box 48, Folder 4, p. 13. Newton, “In Defense of Self Defense I,” *The Huey P. Newton Reader*, 135. Newton, “The Technology Question: 1972,” 264.
- 75 Newton, “Uniting Against a Common Enemy: October 13, 1971,” *The Huey P. Newton Reader*, 239-240.
- 76 For a starting point on the history of the Black Liberation Army, especially as based on the East Coast, see Akinyele Omowale Umoja’s “**Repression Breeds Resistance**: The Black Liberation Army and the Radical Legacy of the Black Panther Party,” 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). For more on guerrilla struggles in the Midwest, see Yohuru Williams and Jama Lazerow’s *Liberated Territory: Untold Local Perspectives on the Black Panther Party* (Duke University Press, 2008). I also have material forthcoming on the Black Liberation Army.
- 77 Newton, “Speech at Boston College: November 18, 1970,” *The Huey P. Newton Reader*, 160.
- 78 For more on the BPP’s focus on the home, the school, and the commune as a site of struggle, see: Kiran Garcha, “**Bringing the Vanguard Home**: Revisiting the Black Panther Party’s Sites of Class Struggle,” *Viewpoint Magazine* (Oct 31 2015).
- 79 Huey Newton, “Black Capitalism Re-Analyzed I: June 5, 1971,” *The Huey P. Newton Reader*.
- 80 Frantz Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth* trans. Constance Farrington (Grove Press, 1963).
- 81 From Newton’s “Speech at Boston College: November 18, 1970,” 166: “In this country the Black Panther Party, taking careful note of the dialectical method, taking careful note of the social trends and the ever-changing nature of things, sees that while the lumpen proletarians are the minority and the proletarians are the majority, technology is developing at such a rapid rate that automation will progress to cybernation, and cybernation probably to technocracy.” For more on the historical debates concerning automation and “technocratic society” within the communist and Black left, from Alex Bogdanov to Martin Luther King Jr, I highly recommend R.L.’s forthcoming “Communi-sation: Dystopian or Scientific.” It is also important though to consider here the alternate argument that automation is less a cause of increasing underemployment than a symptom of the greater structural crisis within capitalism and what Marx identified as the tendency of the rate of profit to fall. For more on this, see Aaron Benanav’s “**Automation and the Future of Work**.”
- 82 Newton, “Speech at Boston College: November 18, 1970,” *The Huey P. Newton Reader*, 167
- 83 *Ibid*, 29.

- 84 Michel Foucault, "**Lecture 11**", *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the College de France 1975-1976*, trans. Robert Hurley (Picador, 1992). See also: Mbembe, Achille (2003). "**Necropolitics**," *Public Culture*. 15.1, 11–40.
- 85 Clayborne Carson, *Malcolm X: The FBI File* (New York: Skyhorse Publishing, 1991).
- 86 Newton, "On The Relevance of the Church: May 19, 1971," *The Huey P. Newton Reader*, 219.
- 87 Newton, "**A Functional Definition of Politics**: January 11, 1969," *The Huey P. Newton Reader*. Huey P. Newton, "A Functional Definition of Politics: Conclusion," Dr. Huey P. Newton Foundation Inc. Collection, Box 50, Folder 2. Mao Zedong, "**On Protracted War**," in *Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung* Vol. 2 (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1967), 153. For more on the genealogy, import, and influence of Newton's conception of politics, see Brady Thomas Heiner's "**Foucault and the Black Panthers**," *City: Analysis of Urban Trends, Culture, Theory, Policy, Action*, 11.3 (2007). Newton, "Utopia: Universal Life Energy," 10.
- 88 For more on the the debates around this matter, see Sakellaropoulos and Sotiris' "**From Territorial to Nonterritorial Capitalist Imperialism: Lenin and the Possibility of a Marxist Theory of Imperialism**" (in *Rethinking Marxism: A Journal of Economics, Culture & Society*, Jan 2017). Increasingly through the 1970s, Newton's analysis of capitalist imperialism seems to echo a close reading of Lenin's stance, including its many vacillations. Discussing the struggle to establish "liberated territories" in Vietnam, Newton states: "...the United States does not need their territory. That is not the question. The people of the oppressed territories might fight on the land question and die over the land question. But for the United States, it is the technology question, and the consumption of the goods that the technology produces!" (Newton, "The Technology Question: 1972," 259-260). Another point to acknowledge here is that, by 1974, Newton's his heavy citation of David Horowitz seems to also indicate a shift in position away from the view that capitalist imperialist expansion is caused primarily by the capitalist's need to find a consumer base and instead is caused by the inherent tendency of capitalist dynamics towards both the elimination of competitors and the creation of economic dependence for all social ecosystems that it comes into contact with: "The notion that excess savings or a deficiency of investment demand in domestic markets (in classical Marxist terms-the difficulty of "realizing surplus value") is *the* mechanism that drives capitalists abroad and makes imperialist expansion indispensable to capitalism *generally* is one properly associated with Rosa Luxemburg and the liberal J.A. Hobson, but explicitly repudiated by Lenin and other Bolshevik theorists. This is a fundamental point, for the Hobsonian thesis, as a theory of the general phenomenon of imperialist expansion, can be faulted on empirical grounds and then used, as it has been, to discredit the economic theory of imperialism as such. It is not possible to argue, of course, that the insufficiency of domestic markets and the problem of disposing of surplus capital play no role or even and insignificant one in producing the phenomenon of imperialist expansion. Indeed, in the events of the turn of the century, it is recognized even by critics to have been a very important factor, while its place in the ideological perspective of the imperialists themselves often give it a greater weight and significance than its objective reality may warrant. But to identify

it as *the* fundamental cause of the *general* expansionist drive of capitalism is both empirically unjustified and theoretically wrong headed. ...At the most basic level, therefore, *imperialism is capitalism which has burst the boundaries of the nation state* even as it first overcome the seclusion of the village community of the feudal epoch. It follows from this that the two phenomena are inseparable: there can be no end to imperialism without an end to capitalism and capitalist relations of production." (Newton citing Horowitz, 8-10, "Intercommunalism," 1974). The extent of my engagement with these questions is fully indebted to discussions with and the guidance of Viewpoint editor Ben Mabie. For more, see Viewpoint's [Issue 6: Imperialism](#).

- 89 Narayan offers what appears to be a largely compatible interpretation, arguing that the BPP's "survival pending revolution" could be described as a shift to a Gramscian "war of position."
- 90 Joy Ann Williamson, "[Community Control With a Black Nationalist Twist](#): The Black Panther Party's Educational Programs," *Counterpoints*, 237 (2005).
- 91 Spencer, [The Revolution Has Come](#), 120. Huey P. Newton, "On The Relevance of the Church: May 19, 1971," *The Huey P. Newton Reader*, 229. Spencer, *The Revolution Has Come*, 153. Robert O. Self, *American Babylon Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (Princeton University Press, 2005).
- 92 Huey P. Newton, "Black Capitalism Re-Analyzed I: June, 5, 1971," "Black Capitalism Re-Analyzed II (Practical Application): August 9, 1971," "On The Relevance of the Church: May 19, 1971," *The Huey P. Newton Reader*. Spencer, *The Revolution Has Come*, 118.
- 93 Spencer, *The Revolution Has Come*, 149, 123-132
- 94 Jeffries, *Huey P. Newton: Radical Theorist*. 9. See also Flores A. Forbes' *Will You Die with Me?: My Life and the Black Panther Party* and David Hilliard's *This Side of Glory: The Autobiography of David Hilliard*.
- 95 Newton, "Black Capitalism Reanalyzed I," *The Huey P. Newton Reader*, 232-233. "There is no salvation in capitalism, but through this new approach, the Black capitalist will contribute to his own negation by helping to build a strong political vehicle which is guided by revolutionary concepts and serves as a vanguard for the people... So we will heighten the contradiction between the Black community and corporate capitalism, while at the same time reducing the contradiction between the Black capitalist and the Black community."
- 96 Erikson and Newton, *In Search of Common Ground*, 39.
- 97 Spencer, *The Revolution Has Come*, 145-146.
- 98 Spencer, *The Revolution Has Come*, 147.
- 99 Lenin, V.I. "[The Dual Power](#)," *Pravda*, 28 (April 9, 1917). Lee Lockwood, "[Interview: Huey Newton](#)," *Playboy*, 20.5 (Playboy, 1973), 75.



- 100 Newton, "On the Defection of Eldridge Cleaver from the Black Panther Party and the Defection of the Black Panther Party from the Black Community," *The Huey P. Newton Reader*, 205. It is also worth clarifying that the aims behind this campaign differed sharply from those motivating the 1968 Presidential campaign of Eldridge Cleaver under the People's Freedom Party ticket. That prior campaign was clearly and explicitly aimed at acquiring publicity for the Party and its program on a national scale rather than the actual acquisition of political office. Spencer, *The Revolution Has Come*, 147-156.
- 101 Newton, *Revolutionary Suicide*, 97-99.
- 102 In 1973, Newton explicitly says that Party members "live in communes" (Lee Lockwood, "Interview: Huey Newton"). The most extensive discussion of this history is found in Robyn Spencer's invaluable "[Communalism and the Black Panther Party in Oakland, California](#)," *West of Eden: Communes and Utopia in Northern California*, ed. Iaian Boal, (Oakland: PM Press, 2012), 92-121. As far as I am aware, Newton's published remarks on other communes of the 1960s are mostly limited to a critique of shortsighted or idealistic attempts to 'disconnect' from the impacts of expanding technology under capitalism. For these brief comments, see 116-117 in *In Search of Common Ground*.
- 103 Spencer, *The Revolution Has Come*, 114-177. See also Elaine Brown's *A Taste of Power: A Black Woman's Story* (First Anchor Books: 1994).
- 104 Newton, "On the Relevance of Church: May 19, 1971," *To Die for the People*, 66. Newton here actually uses the word "exploit" but puts the term in quotation marks, denoting a euphemistic use. In practice, however, this is arguably exactly what happened, as members faced labor quotas that only intensified as the Party increasingly struggled financially in the late 1970s. See also: Spencer, *The Revolution Has Come*, 195-201.
- 105 Newton, *To Die for the People*, 1.
- 106 Presciently, Newton also warned in his writings of the dangers of "revolutionary" parties becoming disconnected from reality and from the people, becoming subcultural affinity groups composed of "people who withdraw," a tendency that Newton identified as "revolutionary cultism (Newton, "On the Relevance of the Church: May 19, 1971," *The Huey P. Newton Reader*, 221-222). At the same time, it is necessary to consider that arguably all political movements, and perhaps all human social formations, rely on some level of control—either physical or psychological—to maintain the level of intragroup cohesion needed to achieve collective goals. Indeed, it seems that the less physically coercive a group's internal dynamics are, the more likely that particularly powerful—even if subtle—intragroup ideological mechanisms overlap with "structures of feeling" and internal cultural homogeneity to ensure submissive behavior. Often, this seems to be the case despite the presence of rhetoric about anti-hierarchical, democratic, or collectivist decision-making. Anthropologist Harold Barclay's notion of "diffuse sanctions" is useful here for speculating on the ways that decentralized forms of authority arise as a form of social control within largely egalitarian communities (*People Without Government: An Anthropology of Anarchy*, 1982). Since the 1970s, as group co-

hesion in the U.S. has apparently become increasingly harder to come by (see Robert Putnam's *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*), most of the few social-political formations with any degree of autonomy from the state that have persisted until the present day indeed appear to be some of the most internally coercive, such as with gangs and cults. That is, I am not sure that the late BPP's cult-like dynamics are best understood as dysfunction, but rather perhaps as structurally predetermined by what autonomous social organization may be inclined to look like under 'globalization' or "reactionary intercommunalism." This does not mean that individuals cannot organize themselves and successfully develop forms of group cohesion with less coercive dynamics, but rather perhaps that contemporary material conditions are making groups with less coercive practices more difficult to sustain without a high degree of intentionality going into their formation. Crucially, of course, the most structurally significant political goals (however it is that they are decided upon) can only be attained through collective struggle.

- 107 Newton, "**The Women's Liberation and Gay Liberation Movements**: August 15, 1970," *The Huey P. Newton Reader*. Newton, "Loving," *Revolutionary Suicide*, 93-98. Tracye Matthews, "**No one ever asks what a Man's Place in The Revolution Is**: Gender and the Politics of the Black Panther Party 1966-1971," *The Black Panther Party Reconsidered*, ed. Charles E. Jones (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1998).
- 108 The severe impact of the state's efforts to destroy Newton psychologically are profoundly underestimated. For a close treatment of this, see: Joe Street, "**The Shadow of the Soul Breaker: Solitary Confinement, Cocaine, and the Disintegration of Huey P. Newton**," *Pacific Historical Review*, 84.3 Aug 2015, 333-363.
- 109 Huey P. Newton, "On the Defection of Eldridge Cleaver from the Black Panther Party and the Defection of the Black Panther Party from the Black Community: April 17, 1971," *The Huey P. Newton Reader*.
- 110 Bloom and Martin, *Black Against Empire*. Yohuru Williams and Jama Lazerow, *Liberated Territory: Untold Local Perspectives on the Black Panther Party*. Russell Maroon Shoatz. *Maroon the Implacable: The Collected Writings of Russell Maroon Shoatz* (PM Press, 2013).
- 111 Newton, "Utopia: Universal Life Energy," 10.
- 112 Kali Akuno and Ajamu Nangwaya. *Jackson Rising: The Struggle for Economic Democracy and Black Self-Determination in Jackson, Mississippi* (Daraja Press, 2017).
- 113 Robin D. G. Kelley, "**Coates and West in Jackson**," *Boston Review*, Dec 22, 2017.
- 114 Brown, "Foreword," xx.
- 115 David Kilcullen, *Out of the Mountains: The Coming Age of the Urban Guerrilla* (Oxford University Press, 2015), 180-188.



**Delio Vasquez** is a PhD candidate in the History of Consciousness at the University of California-Santa Cruz where he studies criminality, political theory, and philosophy. He is an educator and was born in the Bronx.

## Older Articles

### [Recording the Complexity of Struggle: An Interview with the COLA Agitation Committee](#)

May 27, 2020

We were attempting to find other ways to exert pressure, formulate our positions, and establish contact with different strata of the university. The news sheets ...

### [The Mesh of Power](#)

September 12, 2012

How may we attempt to analyze power in its positive mechanisms? It appears to me that we may find, in a certain number of texts, ...

### [Between the Ivory Tower and the Assembly Line](#)

March 27, 2014

As academics began to debate Nicholas Kristof's recent attack on their profession, I was interviewing a few of the literally thousands of American radicals who ...

### [The Revolutionary Task of Self-Activity: A Note on Grace Lee Boggs](#)

January 4, 2016

Because of her political longevity, Grace Lee Boggs leaves as a legacy a corpus of ideas and revolutionary practices linked to the shifting dynamics and ...

### [Seven Theses on Workers' Control \(1958\)](#)

September 9, 2014

In the workers' movement there has been for a long time, and in successive periods, a discussion of the question of the modes and temporalities ...

### [How Not To Skip Class: Social Reproduction of Labor and the Global Working Class](#)

October 31, 2015

The key to developing a sufficiently dynamic understanding of the working class, I will argue, is the framework of social reproduction. In thinking about the ...

## The NEP of Classe Operaia (1980)

January 28, 2016

The errors to which Sbardella sees Tronti falling prey are, on the one side, an uncritical acceptance of immediacy and spontaneous action, and on the ...

## Letter 2: Castoriadis to Pannekoek

October 25, 2011

Where in contrast there is, in fact, a real difference of opinion between us, is on the question of knowing if, during this revolutionary period, ...

---

## Menu

- [About](#)
- [Current Issue](#)
- [Archives](#)
- [Essays](#)
- [Dossiers](#)



[Back to Top ▲](#)