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Wed, 12/02/2009 - 02:55 — Bruce A. Dixon

Black Panther Party [1] | branding the movement [2]

 fakin_de_funk.jpg [3]

Every movement has its symbols and icons. But when these are separated from their context and content they are nothing but brands, to be employed for whatever commercial or political purpose anyone has in mind, even purposes opposite those of the movement which gave birth to them.

Plundering the Panthers, Manipulating the Movement: Re-Branding the Black Panther Party

by **BAR** managing editor **Bruce A. Dixon**

Founded in 1966 and dissolved a little more than a decade later, the Black Panther Party is history. But a few thousand graying participants in what we always called “the Party” are still very much alive. Most of us still look for and find ways to contribute to the struggle for human liberation. But the sixties are a long way off. 1969 is as far distant from us today as the world of the Great Depression was from our youth. 1969 is a full quarter of the way back to the Emancipation Proclamation.

While the Black Panther Party is long dead, its symbols, slogans and icons, like those of the broader Freedom Movement live on as ripe targets for commercial, historical and political manipulation. The manipulators have grown incomparably more sophisticated since the sixties. The practitioners of modern marketing are able to separate the slogans, the symbols, the iconography of yesterday's movement movement for change from their historic context and wave them in front of audience to evoke the feeling, the smell, the memories of a previous generation's struggle for freedom. Even the memories are usually imaginary ones, since not much of the audience has any direct experience of the social and political atmosphere out of which the symbols, the language and the icons arose.

The marketing people have a name for this. They call it branding. A brand is a symbol used to evoke manufactured desires, to elicit real or imagined chills, thrills, memories or convenient attitudes in an audience. In the black community, branding electoral campaigns from dog catcher to mayor to congress with the stamp of the Freedom Movement is old stuff that's been done for decades. The 2007-2008 Obama campaign carried this about as far as anybody could, declaring that it WAS “the movement” so often and insistently that many folks who'd never experienced such a thing --- along with a few who really should know better --- seemed to believe it. But Advertising Age, the journal of the multibillion dollar marketing industry knew the truth. It awarded the Obama campaign its 2008 Brand of the Year Award [4].

You can buy Che Guevara's face on T-shirts, and Dr. King's family members have sued some people for the unauthorized use of his words and images with one hand while allowing giant corporations to use “I Have A Dream” in some of their commercials.

The Black Panther Party's symbols and language, its potent icons and images are not immune from this kind of thing. While nobody is making big money off any of it, a small group of political pretenders, paper panthers as we used to call

them, have seized the Black Panther Party's name and symbols, and grabbed a few corrupted bits of its language and style to push a political agenda pretty much the opposite of the long dead Black Panther Party. The largest group of these folks call themselves the "New Black Panther Party", and that's pretty much where the similarity ends. To illustrate how far these pretenders have carried the stolen iconography of the Black Panther Party from its actual context, I have reproduced below the 1966 and 1971 versions of the BPP's Ten Point Platform and Program along with what the so-called "New Black Panther Party" calls its Ten Points.

Founded in 1966, the year after Malcolm X's death, the Black Panther Party viewed itself as his ideological successor. Malcolm X had just emerged from the NOI and its almost purely race-based view of the world into an anti-colonial, anti-imperial world view, one that acknowledged the necessity of seeking white allies began to think in terms of class and race rather than race alone. This was not the position of the BPP so much as it was its trajectory. Just as Malcolm himself had been an unfinished work in progress, evolving from petty criminal to the NOI to something else afterward, the BPP seems to have viewed itself as obliged to evolve. It too was a moving target, tending steadily leftward for most of its existence integrating a Marxist and anti-imperialist analysis into its critiques of American white supremacy.

The old BPP appears, from the evidence of the 1966 and 1971 platforms, to have been moving in the direction of socialism. The organization which calls itself the NBPP on the other hand, appears to be aimed in a quite different direction, lifting phrases, concepts and a purely race-based world view from Ron Karenga's and his US organization. Members of that organization were implicated and some were convicted in a series of murders and assaults on Panthers at the behest of federal and local authorities in California and elsewhere. But the pretenders who parade themselves in near-authentic Panther regalia are spouting verbatim the work of people who murdered members of the Black Panther Party on behalf of the US government.

Everything comes from somewhere, and origins do often mean something. It means something that the so-called New Black Panthers chose to call themselves that. It means that the NBPP want to be taken seriously as the moral or spiritual or political or ideological heirs of the people whose symbols they have appropriated. They're not anything of the sort. They are a distorted and cartoonish reflection of what the BPP was, racist, religious and nationalistic where the party was anti-racist, internationalist and secular; addicted to inflammatory rhetoric and posing in leather jackets, berets and with guns.

Where the real Black Panther Party accepted functional alliances with whites, the new imitators are frankly racist. Where the old Black Panther Party was beginning to recognize the significance of patriarchy, the oppression of women and homophobia, the so-called New Black Panther Party is baldly homophobic and male-centered. Where the Black Panther Party was secular and had a strong socialist current, the imitators are holier-than-thou, and blacker too. I offer as evidence the table below, in which the 1966 and 1972 Ten Point Platform of the BPP is reproduced alongside the 1990's version put forth by the so-called New Black Panthers. They are evolving backward, not forward.

David Hilliard, the BPP's former chief of staff points out that many of the so-called New Black Panthers are former members of the Nation of Islam. Although their beliefs are still quite close to those of the NOI, he says, it's easy to see why they don't call themselves New Black Muslims, or the New Nation of Islam. Although never especially large, the NOI has quite a few young men in its ranks who would take vigorous exception to what they would see as the misuse of their name and symbols. The Black Panther Party on the other hand, has been gone for decades, and the youngest former Panthers are nearly sixty. So borrowing our name and symbols is probably a lot safer.

The old Black Panther Party is long dead. The New Black Panthers and pretenders like them don't seem to have an original bone in their bodies. Nobody looks to these pretenders for original analyses of current happenings. They cannot and do not fill rooms with ordinary people anyplace in the country. This so-called New Black Panther Party was never alive. They are undead, zombies living off the remnant symbols of a previous generation. The real movement that is to come in this country, and in our communities, will arise from some other quarter.

I know it's coming. I just hope, like the rest of us graying ex-Panthers, to stick around long enough to see, and maybe take some part in it..

**BLACK PANTHER PARTY 10
POINT PLATFORM AND
PROGRAM, OCTOBER 1966ⁱ**

1. We want freedom. We want power to determine the destiny of our black community.

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

**BLACK PANTHER PARTY 10
POINT PLATFORM AND
PROGRAM, 1971ⁱⁱ**

1. We want freedom. We want power to determine the destiny of our black and oppressed communities.

We believe that black and oppressed people will not be free until we are able to determine our destinies in our own communities ourselves, by fully controlling all the institutions which exist in our communities.

**NEW BLACK PANTHER PARTY 10
POINT PLATFORM AND PROGRAM,
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1. We want freedom. We want the power to practice self-determination, and to determine the destiny of our community and the black nation.

We believe in the spiritual high moral code of our ancestors. We believe in the truths of the Bible, Quran, and other sacred texts and writings. We believe in Maat ^[5] and the principles of Nguzo Saba ^[6]. We believe that black people will not be free until we are able to determine our divine destiny.

The Black Panther Party as I knew it was a determinedly secular organization, that while generally respectful of religious claims, held itself apart from affirmations of religious piety, lest it be seen as favoring one religion over another, or for that matter privileging those who were religious over those who were not.

2. We want full employment for our people.

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

2. We want full employment for our people.

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

2. We want full employment for our people and we demand the dignity to do for ourselves what we have begged the white man to do for us.

We believe that since the white man has kept us deaf, dumb and blind, and used every "dirty trick" in the book to stand in the way of our freedom and independence, that we should be gainfully employed until such time we can employ and provide for ourselves.

We believe further in: power in the hands of the people! Wealth in the hands of the people! Arms in the hands of the people!

The so-called New Black Panther Party formulation of this point is widely at variance with that of the BPP. Its line about "begging the white man" simply has no place except to name "the white man" as villain, something the BPP

quickly moved away from as early as 1968 and 69. The inclusion of a bit of Nation of Islam doggerel is also a nod to a worldview utterly opposite that of the BPP. The “arms in the hands of the people” is also nothing but radical posing, and has no educational value. The BPP viewed its ten point platform and program as an educational tool.

3. We want an end to the robbery by the white man of our black community.

3. We want an end to the robbery by the capitalists of our black and oppressed communities.

3. We want tax exemption and an end to robbery of the black nation by the capitalist. We want an end to the capitalistic domination of a

Africa in all of its forms: imperialism, criminal settler colonialism, neo-colonialism, racism, sexism, Zionism, apartheid and artificial borders.

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

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

We believe that this wicked racist government has robbed us, and now we are demanding the overdue debt of reparations. A form of reparations was promised 100 years ago (forty acres and a mule) as restitution for the continued genocide of our people and to in meaningful measure and repair the damage for the african holocaust (maangamizo/maafa).

We believe our people should be exempt from all taxation as long as we are deprived of equal justice under the laws of the land and the overdue reparations debt remains unpaid. We will accept payment in fertile and mine rally rich land, precious metals, industry, commerce and currency. As genocide crimes continue, people’s tribunals must be set up to prosecute and to execute.

The “Jews” were given reparations. The Japanese were given reparations. The black, the red and the brown nations must be given reparations. The American white man owes us reparations. England owes us reparations. France owes us reparations, Spain and all of europe. Africa owes us reparations and repatriation. The Arabs owe us reparations. The “Jews” owe us reparations. All have taken part in the African holocaust and the slaughter of 600 million of our people over the

past 6,000 years in general and 400 year in particular. We know that this is a reasonable and just demand that we make at this time in history.

The BPP moved from identifying “the white businessman” to “the capitalist”. But the NPP moves in the opposite direction, further back than where the BPP started as Malcolm's successors. Again with “The white man”, “the Jew” and “the Jews”. As units of political analysis these don't make the grade, and don't allow us to tell Mordecai Vanunu from Ariel Sharon. Worse than useless, they are destructive to a correct understanding of where we are and who we walk among.

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

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

4. We want decent housing, fit for shelter of human beings, free health-care (preventive and maintenance). We want an end to the trafficking of drugs and to the biological and chemical warfare targeted at our people.

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

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

We believe since the white landlords will not give decent housing and quality health care to our black community, the housing, the land, the social, political and economic institutions should be made into independent Uuamaa “New African communal/cooperatives” so that our community, with government reparations and aid (until we can do for ourselves) can build and make drug free, decent housing with health facilities for our people.

The “ujaama” reference is straight out of Ron Karenga's work. The NBPP are followers of the man who, at the FBI's behest, was complicit in the murder of several members of the Black Panther Party.

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

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

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

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

We believe in an educational system that will give to our people a knowledge of the self. If you do not have knowledge of yourself and your position in the society and in the world, then you will have little chance to know anything else.

We believe in an educational system that will give our people "a knowledge of self." If we do not have knowledge of self and of our position in society and the world, then we have little chance to properly relate to anything else.

"Devilish?" This is simply inflammatory rhetoric with no purpose other than to strike a provocative pose. It's the language of a cult, not the analysis of a political organization.

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

6. We want completely free health care for all black and oppressed people.

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

We believe that black people should not be forced to fight in the military service to defend a racist government that does not protect us. We will not fight and kill other people of color in the world who, like black people, are being victimized by the white racist government of america. We will protect ourselves from the force and violence of the racist police and the racist military, by whatever means necessary.

We believe that the government must provide, free of charge, for the people, health facilities which will not only treat our illnesses, most of which have come about as a result of our oppression, but which will also develop preventive medical programs to guarantee our future survival. We believe that mass health education and research programs must be developed to give all black and oppressed people access to advanced scientific and medical information, so we may provide our selves with proper medical attention and care.

We believe that black people should not be forced to fight in the military service to defend a racist government that holds us captive and does not protect us. We will not fight and kill other people of color in the world who, like black people, are being victimized by the white racist government of America. We will protect ourselves from the force and violence of the racist police and the racist military, "by any means necessary."

This is just plain laziness. The old BPP existed when there was a military draft to fill the ranks of an army fighting in Southeast Asia, an era when combat units like the 82nd and 101st Airborne were about half black. Since the late seventies the US Army has become a "volunteer" force and the combat arms are lily white. The NBPP, formed in the late 1980s, has not yet taken any of this into account.

7. We want an immediate end to police brutality and murder of black people.

7. We want an immediate end to police brutality and murder of black people, other people of color, all oppressed people inside the united states.

7. We want an immediate end to police harrassment, brutality and murder of black people. We want an end to black-on-black violence, "snitching," cooperation and collaboration with the oppressor.

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

We believe that the racist and fascist government of the united states uses its domestic enforcement agencies to carry out its program of oppression against black people, other people of color and poor people inside the united states. We believe it is our right, therefore, to defend ourselves against such armed forces and that all black and oppressed people should be armed for self defense of our homes and communities against these fascist police forces.

We believe we can end police brutality in our community by organizing black self-defense groups (black people's militias/black liberation armies) that are dedicated to defending our black community from racist, fascist, police/military oppression and brutality. The second amendment of white America's constitution gives a right to bear arms. We therefore believe that all black people should unite and form and "African united front" and arm ourselves for self-defense.

Again, this is simple parroting of what others did a generation earlier. Real movements for change are creative, and evolve new explanations for new phenomena that come to the fore. The NBPP seems to have nothing new to offer.

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

8. We want an immediate end to all wars of aggression.

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

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

We believe that the various conflicts which exist around the world stem directly from the aggressive desire of the united states ruling circle and government to force its domination upon the oppressed people of the world. We believe that if the united states government or its lackeys do not cease these aggressive wars it is the right of the people to defend themselves by any means necessary against their aggressors.

We believe that all black people and people of color should be released from the many jails and prisons because they have not received a fair and impartial trial. 'released' means 'released' to the lawful authorities of the black nation.

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

9. We want freedom for all black and oppressed people now held in u. S. Federal, state, county, city and military prisons and jails. We want trials by a jury of peers for all persons charged with so-called crimes under the laws of this country.

9. We want all black people when brought to trial to be tried in a court by a jury of their peer group or people from their black communities, as defined by white law of the constitution of the united states.

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

We believe that the many black and poor oppressed people now held in united states prisons and jails have not received fair and impartial trials under a racist and fascist judicial system and should be free from incarceration. We believe in the ultimate elimination of all wretched, inhuman penal institutions, because the masses of men and women imprisoned inside the united states or by the united states military are the victims of oppressive conditions which are the real cause of their imprisonment. We believe that when persons are brought to trial they must be guaranteed, by the united states, juries of their peers, attorneys of their choice and freedom from imprisonment while awaiting trial.

We believe that the courts should follow their own law, if their nature will allow (as stated in their constitution of the united states) so that black people will receive fair trials. The 6th amendment of the united states constitution gives a man/woman a right to an impartial trial, which has been interpreted to be a "fair" trial by one's "peer" group. A "peer" is a person from a similar economic, social, religious, geographical, environmental, historical and racial background. To do this, the court will be forced to select a jury from the black community from which the black defendant came. We have been and are being tried by all white juries that have no understanding of the "average reasoning person" of the black community.

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

10. We want land, bread, housing, education, clothing, justice, peace and people's community control of modern technology.

10. We demand an end to the racist death penalty as it is applied to black and oppressed people in america. We demand freedom for all political prisoners of the black red and brown nation!

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

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed; that, whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute a new

We want land, bread, housing, education, clothing, justice and peace. And, as our political objective, we want national liberation in a separate state or territory of our own, here or elsewhere, "a liberated zone" ("new africa" or africa), and a plebiscite to be held throughout the black nation in which only we will be allowed to participate for the purposes of determining our will and divine destiny as a people. Free the land! "up you mighty nation! You can accomplish what you will!" Black

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

government, laying its foundation on such principles, and organizing its powers in such form as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and, accordingly, all experience hath shown that mankind are most disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But, when a long train of abuses and usurpation, pursuing invariably the same object, evinces a design to reduce them under absolute despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such government, and to provide new guards for their future security.

power! History has proven that the white man is absolutely disagreeable to get along with in peace. No one has been able to get along with the white man. All the people of color have been subjected to the white man's wrath. We believe that his very nature will not allow for true sharing, fairness, equity and justice.

Therefore, to the red man and woman, to the yellow and to the brown, we say to you

"the same rabid dog that bit you, bit us too!" All power to the people!

i From "The Black Panther" newspaper, (DATE)

ii From the Huey P. Newton Foundation at <http://www.blackpanther.org/TenPoint.htm> [7]

iii From the web site of the New Black Panther Party at <http://www.newblackpanther.com/10pt.pdf> [8]

Bruce A. Dixon is managing editor at Black Agenda Report and can be reached at [bruce.dixon\(at\)blackagendareport.com](mailto:bruce.dixon@blackagendareport.com)



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