

ALL POWER  
TO THE PEOPLE.



THE  
**BLACK**  
PANTHERS  
VANGUARD OF THE REVOLUTION

# Table of Contents

Using this Guide .....	1
From the Filmmaker .....	2
The Film .....	3
Framing the Context of the Black Panther Party .....	4
Frequently Asked Questions .....	6
The Black Panther Party 10-Point Platform .....	9
Background on Select Subjects .....	10
Planning Your Discussion .....	13
In Their Own Words .....	18
Resources .....	19
Credits .....	21

# Using This Guide

This discussion guide will help support organizations hosting Indie Lens Pop-Up events for the film ***The Black Panthers: Vanguard of the Revolution***, as well as other community groups, organizations, and educators who wish to use the film to prompt discussion and engagement with audiences of all sizes.

This guide is a tool to facilitate dialogue and deepen understanding of the complex topics in the film ***The Black Panthers: Vanguard of the Revolution***. It is also an invitation not only to sit back and enjoy the show, but also to step up and take action. It raises thought-provoking questions to encourage viewers to think more deeply and spark conversations with one another. We present suggestions for areas to explore in panel discussions, in the classroom, in communities, and online. We also include valuable resources and connections to organizations on the ground that are fighting to make a difference.



Indie Lens Pop-Up is a neighborhood series that brings people together for film screenings and community-driven conversations. Featuring documentaries seen on PBS's *Independent Lens*, Indie Lens Pop-Up draws local residents, leaders, and organizations together to discuss what matters most, from newsworthy topics to family and relationships.



# From the Filmmaker



---

"I hope this history inspires young people, who may see their own desire for change reflected in the story of the Black Panther Party."

---

## Stanley Nelson

Director, *The Black Panthers: Vanguard of the Revolution*

I was 15 years old in 1966 when the Black Panthers were formed. The Panthers were talking about problems that had to do with our lives in the North, and as a New Yorker, I was naturally attracted to them. Their look, their language, their boldness—it spoke to me.

At age 20, I went to see *The Murder of Fred Hampton*, a documentary about the murder of a Panther leader by the Chicago police. The film gave me even more insight into the Panthers; it also made me look at the power of film to move audiences. It lit a fire inside me to make films, and I've been on this path ever since.

Seven years ago, I finally set out to tell the story that had been in my mind all of those years. No one had documented the rise and fall of the Black Panther Party, and I wanted to shed light on a history that had never been told in its entirety. There is so much we think we know about the party, but I wanted to go beyond the oversimplified narrative of the Panthers being prone to violence and consumed with anger and explore why hundreds of young people joined, what they accomplished, and why it fell apart.

I also wanted to lift up the voices of rank and file members. We often hear about the leadership, but not unlike the foot soldiers of the civil rights movement, the rank-and-file party members were the lifeblood of the organization. They delivered party newspapers, tested people for sickle cell anemia, registered voters, and fed thousands of children through their Free Breakfast programs. These were people

in their teens and 20s who demonstrated an enormous amount of courage, discipline, and organization. And despite their missteps and the FBI's campaign to bring them down, what was so clear to me was that their motivation came from their undying love for their community.

Now, almost 50 years after the founding of the Panthers, we find ourselves at the start of a new movement for justice and equality led, yet again, by young people. We didn't set out to make a film that was about today, but as we began shooting, it became painfully clear that so many things the Panthers were fighting for were things that are still issues today—from police brutality, substandard schools and substandard housing to disenchantment with the political system.

I hope that young people come to see the film and reflect on the Black Panther Party and that they consider the similarities—and differences—between what the Panthers tried to build and the new movement that is taking shape today. I hope this history inspires young people, who may see their own desire for change reflected in the story of the Black Panther Party.

Ultimately, I wanted to bring this vibrant chapter in American history to life so that we can all understand it, learn from it, and make better decisions—personally and collectively.

—Stanley Nelson

# The Film



“We referred to ourselves as the vanguard and we were setting by example a new course that we wanted the entire community to follow.”

– Sherwin Forte, Black Panther Party

***The Black Panthers: Vanguard of the Revolution*** is the first feature-length documentary to showcase the Black Panther Party, its significance to the broader American culture, and the resulting cultural and political awakening for black people that continues today.

Change was coming to America, and the fault lines could no longer be ignored—cities were burning, Vietnam was exploding, and disputes raged over equality and civil rights. A new revolutionary culture was emerging, and it sought to drastically transform the system. The Black Panther Party for Self-Defense would, for a short time, put itself at the vanguard of that change.

This film goes straight to the source, weaving a treasure trove of rare archival footage with the voices of the people who were there: police, FBI informants, journalists, white supporters and detractors, and Black Panthers who remained loyal to the party and those who left it. Featuring Kathleen Cleaver, Elaine Brown, Jamal Joseph, and the many rank-and-file members of the party who made it what it was, ***The Black Panthers: Vanguard of the Revolution*** is an essential history and a vibrant chronicle of this pivotal movement that birthed a new revolutionary culture in America.

# Framing the Context of the Black Panther Party



The success of political and social movements reflect the climate of their times. The Black Panther Party is no different and must be understood within its historical moment. In his autobiography, Huey Newton describes the climate out of which the party grew:

We had seen Watts rise up the previous year. We had seen how the police attacked the Watts community after causing trouble in the first place. We had seen Martin Luther King come to Watts in an effort to calm the people, and we had seen his philosophy of nonviolence rejected. Black people had been taught nonviolence; it was deep in us. What good, however, was nonviolence when the police were determined to rule by force? We had seen the Oakland police and the California Highway Patrol begin to carry their shotguns in full view as another way of striking fear into the community. We had seen all this, and we recognized that the rising consciousness of Black people was almost at the point of explosion. One must relate to the history of one's community and to its future. Everything we had seen convinced us that our time had come." (Newton, 1973)

“We were making history, and it wasn’t nice and clean, it wasn’t easy, it was complex.”

– Ericka Huggins,  
Black Panther Party member

## The Party Emerges

The path of the civil rights movement was not a singular one, although some of the most recognizable actions—the Montgomery bus boycotts (1955), the lunch counter sit-ins in Greensboro and Nashville (1960), the Freedom Rides (1961), the march on Washington (1963), the voter registration drive during Freedom Summer (1964)—addressed issues of denying full citizenship for blacks in the United States. For some, however, these actions did not go far enough to address systemic racism and fundamentally change the entrenched oppression of blacks in America.

In 1966, two college students, Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale, founded the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense in Oakland, California. Cornel West describes the party’s founding as one of the great moments in the struggle for black freedom and deep democracy in the United States. A group of courageous and visionary young black people set out to highlight the fundamental pillar of white supremacy and antidemocratic practice, namely, the repressive actions of white police over black folk. Starting as a local organization that followed and observed police in Oakland in 1967, the Panthers grew dramatically, by 1970 opening offices in 68 cities, from Winston-Salem to Omaha to Seattle. Their growth and appeal spoke to a void in the larger struggle for civil rights.<sup>1</sup>

The Black Panthers also provided effective social programs, raising people’s political and cultural consciousness, dignity and courage. As Breakfast Program participant Rita Williams-Garcia said, “I was taught to be proper, behave yourself... and to always know that the white man was always listening. With the Black Panthers coming to the scene, it was just a completely different message. As a 12-year-old... you had this entirely different portrayal of self, and now I was just digging it!”

“The civil rights movement was basically a Southern movement, so when you had an organization like the Panthers who were taking on things like housing, welfare, and health, that was stuff that people in the North could relate to and rally behind.”

– Jamal Joseph,  
Black Panther Party member

## The Black Panther Party within the Larger Civil Rights Movement

The 1960s was a time of great turmoil in the United States. With the war in Vietnam escalating and Cold War policies shaping our national and international interests, a constellation of civil rights movements within other groups—women, Chicanos, Asians, American Indians—flourished. Coalitions developed among the Black Panthers, these groups and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), and different coalitions adopted different strategies and goals for change. For the Panthers, it was revolutionary change.

With the assassination of Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. on April 4, 1968, the climate of change within the Panther organization shifted. Black Panther leader Kathleen Cleaver recalls, “The effect of the death of Martin Luther King on the Panthers is overwhelming in the sense that once King was assassinated and the way he was assassinated so publicly—it shattered many, many people.”

### Sources:

- » Huey P. Newton, 1973. *Revolutionary Suicide*. (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich)
- » David Hilliard, 2008. *The Black Panther Party: Service to the People Programs*. (University of New Mexico Press)

<sup>1</sup> For the approximate date when the Black Panther Party opened offices in various cities, see House Committee on Internal Security, *Gun-Barrel Politics: The Black Panther Party, 1966-1971*, part 470, 92nd Congress, 1st sess. (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1971), 88-89. Cited in Joshua Bloom and Waldo E. Martin Jr., *Black Against Empire: The History and Politics of the Black Panther Party* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 2.

# Frequently Asked Questions



## 1. Was the Black Panther Party a “terrorist” organization?

One of the main reasons the Black Panther Party was formed was to combat the extreme racism toward the black community by law enforcement in urban areas. The tactics used to combat police violence shocked many across the country. Kathleen Cleaver states:

Oakland’s Black families, like poor working people stuck in other ghettos, felt a deep anger at the way the local police treated them. The Black Panthers initiated patrols to observe and prevent abusive police behavior. Newton believed it was essential to capture the imagination of the people to spark their resistance to oppression. The weapons these disciplined young men and women wearing black leather jackets and black berets openly carried on their patrols immediately drew attention. The bold new organization quickly attracted recruits, and its growth brought the Black Panthers directly into the crosshairs of police sights. Their armed patrols were legal under the laws then in force, but Oakland’s police pressured the state legislature to pass a law to ban their open display of weapons, and by July 1967, the patrols ended. (Baruch and Jones, 2002)

## 2. Was the Black Panther Party an antiwhite organization?

The Black Panther Party was an antiracist and anticapitalist (or socialist) organization. According to Kathleen Cleaver, “Although the Panthers remained an all-Black organization, we forged coalitions with other radical groups, including whites, Latinos, Indians, and Asians. Joining forces with the predominantly white Peace and Freedom Party, founded in Berkeley, became controversial. The necessity of repeatedly explaining the new coalition to crowds energized by Black Power pushed the Black Panther Party into articulating an across-the-board antiracist position. Over and over, I heard Bobby say in his speeches, ‘We don’t hate white people, we hate oppression’” (Baruch and Jones, 2002).



---

## Did you know?

- The Lowndes County Freedom Organization, formed by the SNCC, was the first organization to use the black panther as its symbol.
- The assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. effectively expanded the Black Panther Party from a regional group (with chapters in Oakland, San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Seattle) to a national organization headquartered in New York.
- The international chapter of the Black Panther Party was in Algeria.
- Seattle was the first chapter of the Black Panther Party outside California, established in 1968.
- Kathleen Cleaver was the first woman on the Central Committee, the Black Panther Party's leadership body.
- The first time the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) deployed its special weapons and tactics (SWAT) unit was December 9, 1969, against the Los Angeles chapter of the party.

“We couldn’t be absent and see what we saw. We couldn’t unsee it... The rage was in the streets. It was everywhere.”

– Elaine Brown, Black Panther Party

## 3. Did the Black Panther Party dissolve because of internal dysfunction?

The dissolution of the Black Panther Party was due largely to the intentional attack by the FBI and local police united (“Red Squads,” created for the purposes of counterinsurgency) to destroy it by way of COINTELPRO. It was also due in part to the mistakes of a radical and militant organization composed mostly of people under the age of 25 who were responsible for thousands of members nationwide. As William Calhoun so accurately stated in the film, “The great strength of the Black Panther Party was its ideals, its youthful vigor and enthusiasm. The great weakness of the party was its ideals, its youthful vigor and enthusiasm.”

The Panther tribute page, [itsabouttimebpp.com](http://itsabouttimebpp.com), speaks to the dissolution of the Panthers in the following way:

[I]t is not enough to know that the state smashed the BPP. To these activists, the important question is what the BPP could have done differently to ensure its own survival. Briefly, the internal problems of the BPP that led to its demise all have to do with a failure to adequately prepare for state repression.



## 4. What is COINTELPRO?

One of the most notorious domestic surveillance programs run by the FBI between 1956 and 1971 was COINTELPRO (counterintelligence program). COINTELPRO was a secret FBI program designed to monitor and “neutralize” domestic groups deemed by the FBI to be a danger to national security. Such groups included antiwar groups and civil rights groups and individuals like Martin Luther King Jr. and even Eleanor Roosevelt.

As told in the film, the Black Panther Party became a central target of COINTELPRO. In a section of the final report of the Church Committee, which was the US Senate Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities called “The Panther Directives,” the Senate Committee wrote,

The Black Panther Party (BPP) was not included in the first two lists of primary targets (August 1967 and March 1968) because it had not attained national importance. By November 1968, apparently the BPP had become significantly active to become a primary target. A letter to certain field offices with BPP activity dated November 25, 1968, ordered recipient offices to submit “imaginative and hard-hitting counterintelligence measures aimed at crippling the BPP. (US Senate Church Committee, COINTELPRO Final Report, Book III)

## 5. Does the Black Panther Party still exist today?

The Black Panther Party no longer exists, although many members of the original Panthers strongly believe “once a Panther, always a Panther.” Today, many original Panthers continue their work for liberation in different ways. Some are educators, attorneys, artists, organizers and activists, and some maintain these roles while still incarcerated because of their activities and/or beliefs as members of the Black Panther Party.

The Black Panther Party’s influence spread internationally (chapters developed in the United Kingdom, India, Israel and many other countries). Organizations and movements around the world have been influenced by the Black Panthers’ ideology, strategies, and aesthetics, and some former Panthers are active in contemporary struggles. Many of these current formations borrow from the rich history of the Panthers and are committed to the principles and revolutionary traditions of the Black Panther Party.

## 6. How many Black Panthers are still in prison?

There are more than 20 Black Panther Party members who remain in prison because of charges placed on them during their membership in the party, and many more live in exile outside the United States. A number of organizations work with former Panthers who are still in prison, including the Jericho Movement, a broad coalition of defense campaigns of political prisoners within the United States.

### Sources:

- » Ruth-Marion Baruch and Pirkle Jones, 2002. *Black Panthers 1968*. (Greybull Press)
- » Frank Donner, 1990. *Protectors of Privilege*. (University of California Press)
- » [itsabouttimebpp.com/Chapter\\_History/FBI\\_War\\_LA\\_Chapter.html](http://itsabouttimebpp.com/Chapter_History/FBI_War_LA_Chapter.html), accessed October 2015
- » [archive.org/stream/finalreportofsel-03unit/finalreportofsel03unit\\_djvu.txt](http://archive.org/stream/finalreportofsel-03unit/finalreportofsel03unit_djvu.txt), accessed October 2015
- » [pbs.org/now/politics/cointelpro.html](http://pbs.org/now/politics/cointelpro.html), accessed October 2015



## CONVERSATION STARTER

What words come to mind when you think of the Black Panthers?

# The Black Panthers' 10-Point Program

On October 15, 1966, Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale drafted the 10-Point Program, also known as the 10-Point Party Platform, in response to the social and economic disparities they saw in their community. The 10-Point Program defined the philosophy and goals of the Black Panther Party and served as a model for other activists, such as the Young Lords and Students for a Democratic Society.

## The Black Panthers' 10-Point Program, October 1966: What We Want. What We Believe.

“Through the breakfast program, through the other programs that we had, the health clinics, people would come in and talk about how they can't pay their bills or they need childcare. That teardrop symbolizes that pain that I observed. Even through their pain there was a strength and determination and conviction to still battle on.”

– Emory Douglas, Black Panther Party

1. WE WANT freedom. We want power to determine the destiny of our Black Community.
2. WE WANT full employment for our people.
3. WE WANT an end to the robbery by the capitalists of our Black Community.
4. WE WANT decent housing, fit for the shelter of human beings.
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.
6. WE WANT all black men to be exempt from military service.
7. WE WANT an immediate end to police brutality and murder of black people.
8. WE WANT freedom for all black men held in federal, state, county, and city prisons and jails.
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.
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.

### Sources:

- » [web.stanford.edu/group/blackpanthers/history.shtml](http://web.stanford.edu/group/blackpanthers/history.shtml), accessed October 2015
- » [pbs.org/hueypnewton/actions/actions\\_platform.html](http://pbs.org/hueypnewton/actions/actions_platform.html), accessed October 2015

# Background on Select Subjects

---



## Kathleen Cleaver

Source:

- » [pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/race/interviews/kcleaver.html](https://pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/race/interviews/kcleaver.html), accessed October 2015

“The black power movement challenged all the preconceived notions of blacks not being able to determine their own destiny. It was essentially a very nationalistic self-determination position. And what appealed to me about the Black Panther Party was that it took that position of self-determination and articulated it in a local community structure, had a program, had a platform and an implementation through the statement of how blacks should exercise community control over education, housing, business, military service.”

**Kathleen Neal Cleaver** was the first communications secretary of the Black Panther Party. Prior to joining the party, she worked with the Campus program of the SNCC. During her time as a Black Panther, she spent several years in exile, in Algeria and France with former husband Eldridge Cleaver. She returned with her family to the United States in late 1975.

In 1984, Cleaver graduated summa cum laude with a BA in history from Yale University and was elected to

Phi Beta Kappa, then went on to earn a JD from Yale Law School in 1989. In 1992, she joined the faculty of Emory University Law School.

Cleaver cofounded and produced the International Black Panther Film Festival, based in Harlem from 1999 through 2003. Her path continues to engage her in forums, teaching, writing, and film projects that incorporate human rights concerns both within the United States and across the African Diaspora.



## Emory Douglas

Source:

- » [dailynebraskan.com/arts\\_and\\_entertainment/former-black-panther-party-member-displays-artwork-on-campus-shares/article\\_0c0adb84-5c14-11e5-956a-2b2d70e8ee65.html](https://dailynebraskan.com/arts_and_entertainment/former-black-panther-party-member-displays-artwork-on-campus-shares/article_0c0adb84-5c14-11e5-956a-2b2d70e8ee65.html), accessed October 2015

“The images always reflected the politics of the organization itself, and the concerns of the community were deeply rooted in the artwork itself. It reflected the ideological and philosophical message of the party as well as what the community is expressing in regards to their concerns in the artwork. Sometimes it was straightforward, and sometimes it was more provocative, but it was always based in fact.”

**Emory Douglas** was the Black Panther Party’s minister of culture and was chief art director of the party’s important newspaper for twelve years. In these roles, he gave visual dimension to the party’s revolutionary message and mission, broadening the party’s impact within a larger cultural framework. Douglas attended City College of San Francisco, where he majored in commercial art. He was politically involved with the Black Panther Party, first as revolutionary artist and then as minister of culture, from February 1967 until the early 1980s.

Douglas’s art and design concepts were always seen on the front and back pages of the party newspaper, reflecting both the politics of the Black Panther Party and the concerns of the community. Offering a retrospective look at artwork created in the Black Panther Party, Douglas’s work has been displayed all over the world.

The book *Black Panther: The Revolutionary Art of Emory Douglas* (2007) provides a comprehensive collection of Douglas’s work.



## Ericka Huggins

**Source:**

- » [jconline.com/story/news/2015/09/16/ex-black-panther-lead-race-talk/32528245/](http://jconline.com/story/news/2015/09/16/ex-black-panther-lead-race-talk/32528245/)

---

"I wanted to join an organization that had concern for all of the people of the world."

**Ericka Huggins** was a leader in the Los Angeles chapter of the Black Panther Party with her husband, John Huggins. Three weeks after the birth of their daughter Mai, Ericka became a widow when her husband John Huggins, along with her dear friend Alprentice "Bunchy" Carter, was murdered on the University of California-Los Angeles (UCLA) campus. Ericka brought her daughter to New Haven, Connecticut, for John's burial and stayed on to open the New Haven chapter of the Black Panther Party.

There, in May 1969, Ericka and fellow party leader Bobby Seale were targeted and arrested on conspiracy charges, sparking calls of "Free Bobby, Free Ericka" across the country and around the world.

Currently, Ericka Huggins is a professor of sociology at Laney College in Oakland and at Berkeley City College and of women's studies at California State University-East Bay. In addition, she has lectured at Stanford University, Cornell University, and UCLA and in Lisbon, Portugal, and São Paulo, Brazil.



## Jamal Joseph

**Sources:**

- » *Passin' It On* (documentary), 1993
- » Jamal Joseph, 2012. *Panther Baby*. (Chapel Hill: Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill)

---

"You join the Panther Party and think you're going to learn about weapons and guerrilla warfare. When you go in, someone puts a spatula in one hand and a diaper in the other hand and says, 'I hope you know how to make pancakes because you are going to be feeding children, and I hope you know how to change diapers because you are going to be dealing with children a lot.'"

**Jamal Joseph** (formerly Eddie Joseph) was one of the Panther 21, a group of prominent Black Panther leaders in the New York chapter. While incarcerated for his active participation in the Black Panther Party, Joseph earned two college degrees and wrote five plays and two volumes of poetry.

He is a former chair of Columbia University's Graduate Film Division and is currently a full professor as well as the artistic director of the New Heritage Theater in Harlem. He has been featured in HBO's *Def Poetry*

*Jam*, BET's *American Gangster*, and Tupac Shakur's *The Rose That Grew from Concrete*, Volumes 1 and 2. He is the author of the interactive biography on Tupac Shakur, *Tupac Shakur Legacy*.

Joseph was nominated for a 2008 Academy Award in the Best Song category for his contributions to the song "Raise It Up," performed by IMPACT Repertory Theatre and Jamia Nash in the 2007 film *August Rush*. His memoir *Panther Baby* (2012) was published by Algonquin Books.



## Fred Hampton

**Source:**

» [blackpast.org/aah/hampton-fred-1948-1969](http://blackpast.org/aah/hampton-fred-1948-1969), accessed October 2015

“We’ve got to face the fact that some people say you fight fire best with fire; but we say we best fight fire with water. We gonna fight racism—not with racism, we going to fight it with solidarity.”

**Fred Hampton** was deputy chairman of the Illinois chapter of the Black Panther Party. In high school and college, he became involved in the civil rights movement, joining and leading his local branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).

In 1968, Hampton joined the Black Panther Party (BPP), headquartered in Oakland, California. Using his NAACP experience, he soon headed the Chicago chapter. During his brief BPP tenure, Hampton formed a “Rainbow Coalition” which included Students for a Democratic Society, the Blackstone Rangers street gang, and

the National Young Lords, a Puerto Rican organization. Hampton was also successful in negotiating a gang truce on local television.

During an early morning police raid of the BPP headquarters in Chicago on December 4, 1969, twelve officers opened fire, killing the 21-year-old Hampton and Peoria, Illinois Panther leader Mark Clark.

Years later, law enforcement officials admitted wrongdoing in the killing of Hampton and Clark. In 1990 and later in 2004, the Chicago City Council passed resolutions commemorating December 4 as Fred Hampton Day.



## Wayne Pharr

**Source:**

» Wayne Pharr and Karin L. Stanford, 2014. *Nine Lives of a Black Panther*. (Chicago Review Press, Incorporated)

“I felt free. I felt absolutely free. I was a free Negro. You know I was making my own rules. You couldn’t get in. I couldn’t get out. But in my space I was the king. In that little space I had I was the king and that’s what I felt. You understand? That’s what I felt.”

**Wayne Pharr** became a member of the Los Angeles chapter of the Black Panther Party when he was a teenager. He was 19 years old when the LAPD SWAT team attacked the chapter headquarters. The standoff lasted five hours, and Pharr was wounded in the attack, which involved thousands

of rounds of ammunition, explosives, and tear gas. His memoir, *Nine Lives of a Black Panther*, details his journey as a young activist and Black Panther leader.





## CONVERSATION STARTER

How do current social justice struggles align with what the Black Panthers advocated for in their 10-Point Program?

# Planning Your Discussion

## Overview

*The Black Panthers: Vanguard of the Revolution* captures powerful moments of diverse communities coming together to call for change. We see an array of faces—white, Asian, Latino, black, and Native American—coming together throughout the film, at Black Panther Party rallies, meetings, and events for social and racial justice.

This film can be used for that same level of diverse engagement, promoting discussion and collaboration on today's issues.

## Types of Engagement Events

The film can have a major impact on any viewer and provide an enlightened space for meaningful discussion and sharing. In thinking about how to use the film, consider your intended audience and then determine the appropriate partners and event settings in which to bring people together for dialogue. Events can include:

- community screenings
- campus, youth and educational screenings
- house parties
- faith-based gatherings
- national, state, and local conferences or conventions
- public policy forums

Refer to the [Indie Lens Pop-Up Program Toolkit](#) for additional ideas for planning a screening and discussion.



“We gonna fight racism  
not with racism, we going  
to fight it with solidarity.”

– Fred Hampton, Chairman,  
Illinois Black Panther Party

## Themes and Topics for Film Events

The film *The Black Panthers: Vanguard of the Revolution* offers audiences the opportunity to examine a critical movement for social justice in our nation. The Black Panther Party, its appeal, its effectiveness, and its demise are as relevant today as it was at its peak. The following themes and topics are suggestions for organizing screenings and discussions around the film.

**Black Lives Matter.** This film provides a foundation for discussions on police brutality, mass incarceration, and racial profiling as well as about the growing movement for social justice that the group Black Lives Matter represents.

**Community resiliency.** Examples of community organizing, power building, self-determination, and problem solving are interwoven throughout the story of the Black Panther Party.

**Civic participation.** The Black Panther Party ran one of the most historic voter registration and mobilization campaigns in California, focusing mainly on marginalized communities, and forced a popular incumbent into a runoff election.

**Government surveillance.** As seen in the film, the Black Panther Party was targeted by COINTELPRO in an effort to cripple the organization. This can open up critical discussion about government overreach and surveillance of political activists and dissenters.

**Cultural activism.** Black cultural expression played a central role in fostering the climate of social justice and activism during the 1960s and 1970s. The aesthetics and images of the Black Panther Party challenged and deconstructed negative stereotypes about African American people and communities while promoting powerful models and humanity.

**Coalition building and cross-community collaboration.** The Black Panther Party built alliances across racial, ethnic, and geographic boundaries. Dissecting that aspect of the party is a great launching point for discussing contemporary alliance building.

## Panel Discussions: Questions and Considerations

Post-screening panel discussions are a common type of engagement activity for films like *The Black Panthers: Vanguard of the Revolution*. Here are some sample goals, some tips, and some sample discussion questions to consider in planning your event.

## Suggested Event Goals

- Highlight lessons learned from the Black Panther Party that can be applied to current social movements
- Honor unsung and marginalized activists in your community, especially women
- Understand how current social justice struggles relate to the Black Panther Party's 10-Point Program
- Connect diverse communities working on similar issues
- Understand, celebrate, and encourage youth-led organizing efforts
- Deepen understanding of American history by balancing this story with other social justice movements



## Types of Panelists/Speakers

1. Former Black Panther Party members
2. Members of organizations during the 1960s and 1970s influenced by the Black Panther Party (e.g., Young Lords, American Indian Movement, Students for a Democratic Society, SNCC)
3. Panther Cubs (children/grandchildren of Black Panthers)
4. Scholars of the Black Power Movement
5. Lawyers from the Black Power Movement
6. Contemporary organizers, civil rights lawyers, activists, and youth activists
7. Journalists who have covered the Black Panthers or the Black Power Movement
8. Artists inspired by the Black Panther legacy (for ideas, contact local labor organizations, social justice organizations, local history museums, etc.)

## Sample Questions for Panelists

1. Why was the Black Panther Party critical during its time in history?
2. What impact did it have on its movement contemporaries?
3. How did it influence the cultural aesthetic of that era?
4. What impact has it had on you and your work?
5. How would you define the legacy of the Black Panther Party?
6. Why is its story important?
7. What lessons can we take from the rise and fall of the Black Panther Party?
8. What surprises you most about the history of the Black Panther Party?
9. What preconceptions/assumptions did you have that the film challenged?
10. How did the images and esthetics of the Black Panther Party deconstruct and challenge decades of negative media imagery?



## CONVERSATION STARTER

How would you compare the media coverage of the Panthers to the current coverage of movements like Black Lives Matter?"



“We say ALL POWER TO ALL PEOPLE. White power to white people. Brown power to brown people. Yellow power to yellow people. Black power to black people. We say panther power to the Vanguard party.”

– Fred Hampton, Chairman,  
Illinois Black Panther Party

## Sample Questions for Former Black Panthers

1. What led to you join Black Panther Party?
2. What impact did COINTELPRO have on you? Your family? Your activism?
3. Do you still deal with the effects of COINTELPRO?
4. What is the one lesson you want to share with contemporary activists?

## Sample Audience Conversation Starters

Your Indie Lens Pop-Up screening DVD features two conversation starters: one on the menu screen before the film starts, and one that plays on screen for 30 seconds at the end of the film after the credits. Use the conversation starters before the film begins and at the start of your post-screening dialogue to encourage participants to discuss their responses. For example, ask participants to turn to a person near them to share their answers for two to three minutes. Afterwards, invite a few people to share with the entire group if time permits.

### Pre-screening Conversation Starter

What words come to mind when you think of the Black Panther Party?

### Post-screening Conversation Starter

Describe one item you would want to see on a 10-point program for your community.

Additional questions to consider:

- How does the work of the Black Panther Party relate to activism today?
- What do you think were the biggest factors in the rise and fall of the Black Panther Party?
- What misconceptions about the Black Panther Party did the film clear up?

## Activities for Audiences at Small Gatherings and Post-Screening Workshops

For smaller, more interactive settings, audience members can go deep in linking their own work and personal stories to the stories in the film.

- I. Refer to the Black Panthers' 10-Point Platform and ask individuals to choose one of the points and answer the following questions about it:
  - 1) Is this demand still relevant today?
  - 2) What gains have been made?
  - 3) How does this demand for justice speak to you and your history and experiences? To the history and experiences of your family?
  - 4) If you were to rewrite this particular point to reflect current situations, which words would you change? Would the point remain the same?
- II. Compile answers on a large sheet of paper and discuss as a group. Open up the conversation and invite everyone to comment on the points of the platform and share their stories.
- III. Ask each participant to talk about contemporary campaigns that build on the Black Panther legacy as follows:
  - a. Define your community.
  - b. What are some similarities and differences between the communities organized by the Black Panther Party and your community?
  - c. Reflecting on your answer to question I:1 above, how is the work around that demand being continued?
  - d. Where are there opportunities to collaborate with similarly situated communities?
- IV. Break into small groups of five to 10 people and spend 20 minutes drafting a contemporary 10-point platform that connects different forms of inequality and addresses issues across communities.
- V. Report back: Each group presents its 10-point platform for discussion with the larger group.
- VI. Finally, create a mechanism to stay engaged, for example, a mailing list, an e-group, or a social media platform. Encourage participants to use the film and resource guides to host their own smaller screening and events.



“...there will be no peace in this land until freedom comes through for all. We are going to trample these streets with our feet.”

– Ralph Abernathy, President, Southern Christian Leadership Conference

# In Their Own Words

If audience members are reticent to engage, the following quotes from the film may help to generate dialogue or conversation. Consider printing the quotes on note cards, projecting them on-screen, or writing them on flip-chart paper and posting in your screening room in advance to use for reflection and discussion. Ask participants to form small groups to discuss an assigned quote; explore what it means to them and how it can inform conversation about next steps for their community.

---

*People always talk about freedom and what that means. During that time period being Black in America meant that you didn't walk down the street with the same sense of safety and the same sense of privilege as a white person.*

—Jamal Joseph, Black Panther Party

---

*There was absolutely no difference in the way the police treated us in... Mississippi than they did in California. They may not have called you Nigger every day but they treated you wthe same way they did in Mississippi.*

—William Calhoun, Black Panther Party

---

*Everybody knows that all the peoples don't have liberties; all the people don't have freedom; all the peoples don't have justice; and all the peoples don't have power so that means none of us do.*

—Kathleen Cleaver, Black Panther Party

---

*When Hoover identified the Black Panther Party as the Number one threat to the national security of the United States at a time when they are fighting in Vietnam, of course that was crazy, but it was politically very effective. It says to law enforcement at the local level, "we can take the gloves off now. We don't have to respect civil liberties and we can go after them with everything we've got."*

—Clayborne Carson, Historian

---

*One of the ironies of the Black Panther Party is that the image is the blac k male with the jacket and the gun but the reality is that the majority of the rank and file by the end of the 60's are women.*

—Clayborne Carson, Historian

---

*The Black Panther Party certainly had a chauvinist tone. And so we tried to change some of the clear gender roles. So that women had guns and men cooked breakfast for children. Did we overcome it? Of course we didn't. As I like to say we didn't get these brothers from revolutionary heaven.*

—Elaine Brown, Black Panther Party

---

*We made mistakes. We charged ahead too fast and were too arrogant sometimes. We certainly underestimated the police, and the government, in terms of their response to the Black Panther Party. But I think what remains true is the central guiding principal was an undying love for the people.*

—Jamal Joseph, Black Panther Party

---

*The great strength of the Black Panther Party was its ideals and its, and its youthful vigor and enthusiasm. The great weakness of the Party was its ideals and its youthful vigor and its enthusiasm.*

—William Calhoun, Black Panther Party

This activity has been adapted with permission from Not in Our Town's *Light in the Darkness* Discussion Guide

# Resources

***The Black Panthers: Vanguard of the Revolution*** is a useful starting point to gain deeper, clear, and contextualized knowledge of an important story and time in American history. There are many powerful and important figures, stories, facts, and accomplishments of the Black Panther Party to uncover.

Below is a sampling of suggested books for more study, discovery, and exploration, as well as relevant films. Finally, a sampling of organizations working on civil rights and social justice issues is included as a resource for investigating further opportunities to get involved in your community.

## Books by and about Black Panthers and Cubs

***Agents of Repression: The FBI's Secret War against the Black Panther Party and the American Indian Movement***

by Ward Churchill and Jim Vander Wall

***The Assassination of Fred Hampton: How the FBI and the Chicago Police Murdered a Black Panther***

by Jeffrey Haas

***Assata***

by Assata Shakur

***Between the World and Me: The Beautiful Struggle***

by Ta-Nehisi Coates

***Black Against Empire: The History and Politics of the Black Panther Party***

by Joshua Bloom and Waldo E. Martin

***The Black Panther Party Reconsidered***

by Charles Jones (ed.)

***Black Panther: The Revolutionary Art of Emory Douglas***

by Emory Douglas

***The Black Panthers***

by Steve Shames

***Black Panthers for Beginners***

by Herb Boyd

***Black Power***

by Peniel E. Joseph

***Blood in My Eye***

by George Jackson

***The Classroom and the Cell: Conversations on Black Life in America***

by Marc Lamont Hill and Mumia Abu Jamal

***From the Bullet to the Ballot***

by William Jakobi

***In Defense of Mumia***

by Sam E. Anderson

***Liberation, Imagination, and the Black Panther Party***

by Kathleen Cleaver and George Katsiaficas

***Live from Death Row***

by Mumia Abu Jamal

***Nine Lives of a Black Panther: A Story of Survival***

by Wayne Pharr

***Panther Baby***

by Jamal Joseph

***A Panther Is a Black Cat: An Account of the Early Years of the Black Panther Party—Its Origins, Its Goals, and Its Struggle for Survival***

by Reginald Major

***Seize the Time***

by Bobby Seale

***Soledad Brother***

by George Jackson

***Taste of Power***

by Elaine Brown

***To Die for the People***

by Huey Newton

***Up Against the Wall: Violence in the Making and Unmaking of the Black Panther Party***

by Curtis J. Austin

***What You've Got Is a Revolution: Black Women's Movements for Black Power***

by Ashley Farmer (forthcoming)

## Films

***American Denial***

***The Black Power Mixtape 1967–1975***

***Eyes on the Prize***

***Freedom Riders***

***Spies of Mississippi***

***The Trials of Muhammed Ali***

## Civil Rights & Social Justice Organizations

### National Alumni Association of the Black Panther Party

[naabpp.org/](http://naabpp.org/)

The purpose of the National Alumni Association of the Black Panther Party is to promote and sustain the legacy of the Black Panther Party; to provide information, resources, and linkages to advance and promote community organizing; and to support social and criminal justice, youth development, education initiatives, advocacy, and programs.

### Black Lives Matter

[BlackLivesMatter.com](http://BlackLivesMatter.com)

Founded by Patrisse Cullors, Opal Tometi, and Alicia Garza, #BlackLivesMatter is a forum intended to build connections between black people and allies to fight antiblack racism, to spark dialogue amongst black people, and to facilitate the types of connections necessary to encourage social action and engagement.

### Black Youth Project 100

[BYP100.org](http://BYP100.org)

The Black Youth Project 100 is an activist member-based organization of 18- through 35-year-old black men and women dedicated to creating justice and freedom for all black people through building a collective focused on transformative leadership development, direct-action organizing, advocacy, and education.

### Malcolm X Grassroots Movement

[mxgm.org](http://mxgm.org)

The Malcolm X Grassroots Movement is an organization of Africans in America/New Afrikans whose mission is to defend the human rights of their people and promote self-determination in their community.

### MillionHoodies Movement for Justice

[MillionHoodies.net](http://MillionHoodies.net)

MillionHoodies Movement for Justice is a national racial justice network that empowers young people of color and protects them from mass criminalization and gun violence.

### NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund

[naacpldf.org](http://naacpldf.org)

The NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc., is the NAACP's legal organization that fights for racial justice through litigation, advocacy, and public education.

### Organization for Black Struggle

[obs-stl.org](http://obs-stl.org)

The Organization for Black Struggle's mission is to build a movement that fights for political empowerment, economic justice and the cultural dignity of the African American community, especially the black working class.



# Credits

## WRITERS

**Monifa Bandele**  
**Lumumba Bandele**

## ADDITIONAL WRITING CONTRIBUTED BY

**Fran Sterling**

## ADVISORS

**Robin D.G. Kelly**  
**Fran Sterling**

## COPY EDITOR

**Jocelyn Truitt**

## DESIGNER

**Carole Jeung**

## ITVS ENGAGEMENT & EDUCATION TEAM

**Duong-Chi Do**

Director of Engagement & Education

**Venessa McDonald**

Engagement Coordinator

**Daniel Moretti**

National Community Engagement  
Manager

**Shaady Salehi**

Managing Director, Distribution &  
Audience Development

## THANKS TO THOSE WHO REVIEWED THIS GUIDE

**Sonya Childress**

Director of Partnerships & Engagement,  
Firelight Media

## ITVS

Independent Television Service (ITVS) funds, presents, and promotes award-winning documentaries on public television, innovative new media projects on the Web, and the Emmy® Award-winning weekly series *Independent Lens* on Monday nights at 10 pm on PBS. Mandated by Congress in 1988 and funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, ITVS has brought thousands of independently produced programs to American audiences. Learn more at [itvs.org](http://itvs.org).

## INDEPENDENT LENS

*Independent Lens* is an Emmy® Award-winning weekly series airing on PBS Monday nights at 10 pm. The acclaimed series features documentaries united by the creative freedom, artistic achievement, and unflinching visions of independent filmmakers. Presented by Independent Television Service, the series is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, a private corporation funded by the American people, with additional funding from PBS and the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. For more visit [pbs.org/independentlens](http://pbs.org/independentlens). Join the conversation at [facebook.com/independentlens](https://facebook.com/independentlens) and [@IndependentLens](https://twitter.com/IndependentLens).

