

# Black Panthers: the

**A**ccording to government estimate, the Black Panthers number only about 1,200 members. They are scattered across the U.S. in two dozen chapters, some tightly organized, others so unstable that a single arrest could bring about their collapse. Yet the Panthers have emerged as the symbol of militant black rage, the hard edge of confrontation with the police. "They are convinced," says a senior Justice Department official, "that the black man will never get his just dues without the force of violence. Whitey just won't give in. So someone has to overthrow the system, and they're it."

The Panthers spout the rhetoric of revolution ("Seize the time! All power to the people!") and in chilling, specific detail exhort their membership ("Guns, baby, guns. Kill the racist pig cops. Kill Richard Nixon"). They have armed themselves heavily in the name of self-defense and they have used their weapons—not only in self-defense. So far, in the running guerrilla war of rooftop sniping, midnight ambush and mass shoot-outs that the Panthers and police have been waging in a number of cities, four policemen have been killed and scores more wounded. In turn at least 19 Panthers are dead (pp. 22, 23) and many have been wounded. (The Panthers claim 28 dead, but it is uncertain that more than a dozen have died of police bullets.)

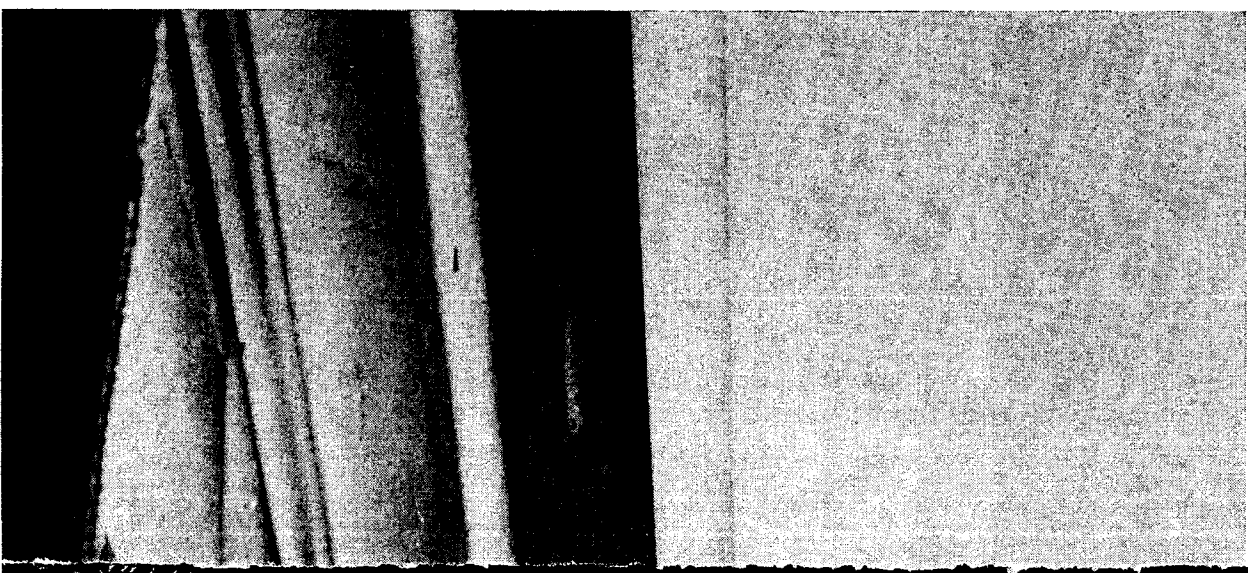
The Panthers charge that law officers are conducting a nationally coordinated campaign to exterminate them. The police deny it, but a Chicago sergeant speaks for many when he argues, "I don't say cops should have a hunting license

to shoot people, but when anybody—I don't care what his color—starts screaming 'Kill the pig cops' or tries to start a revolution, he belongs in jail. And when they start shooting police, they sure as hell are going to get shot back."

In December the street war intensified when police raided Panther headquarters in Los Angeles and Chicago. In the latter raid two Panthers were killed, and there is evidence that the police did virtually all the shooting. The events gained the group so much public sympathy that a Los Angeles police official suggested, "Maybe we're playing the Panthers' game." Hitherto stand-offish black moderates gave statements of support, and some white liberals gave fund-raising parties and pledged money—especially welcome because the Panthers are chronically short.

But the crackdown will continue. "I don't see the Panthers snowballing enough to succeed in overthrowing the government," says a federal official. "But they're not too small to kill police, and maybe others. We can't allow it."

LIFE asked the noted black photographer and author Gordon Parks, a man respected in both the black and white communities, to report on the Panthers and their leaders, especially Eldridge Cleaver, the Panther minister of information. After serving a term for rape and assault, Cleaver was on parole when authorities ordered him back to prison because of his involvement in a Panther-police incident. Afraid that he would be killed in jail, he fled the country and is now living in Algiers. Parks's interview with him begins on the next page.



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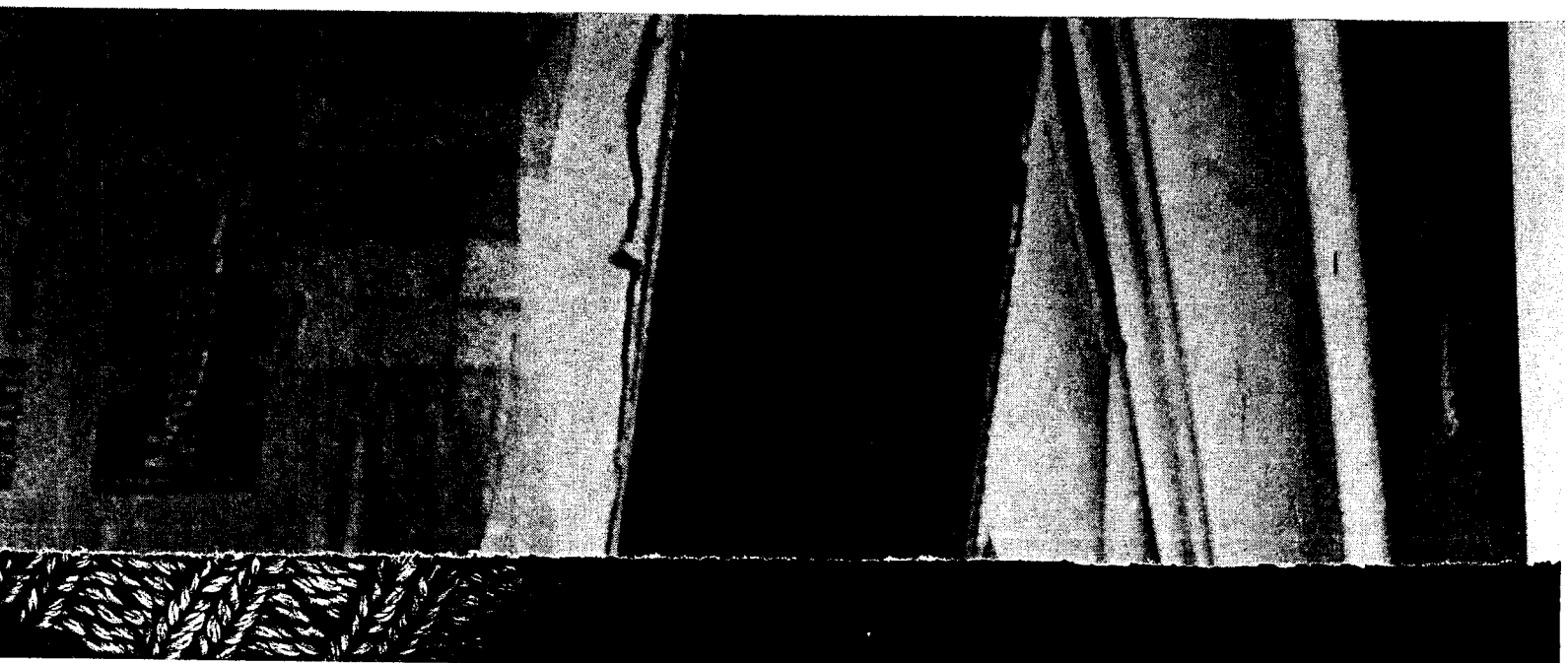
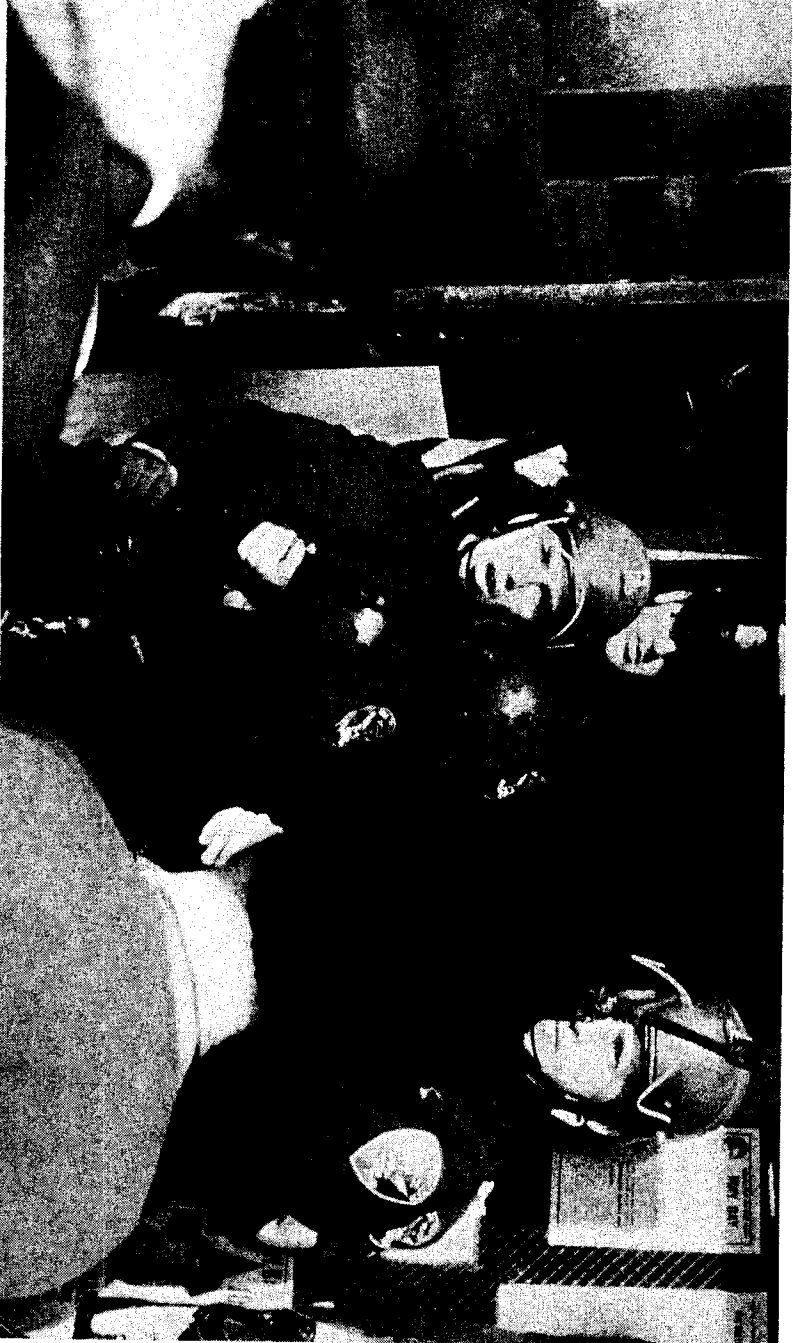
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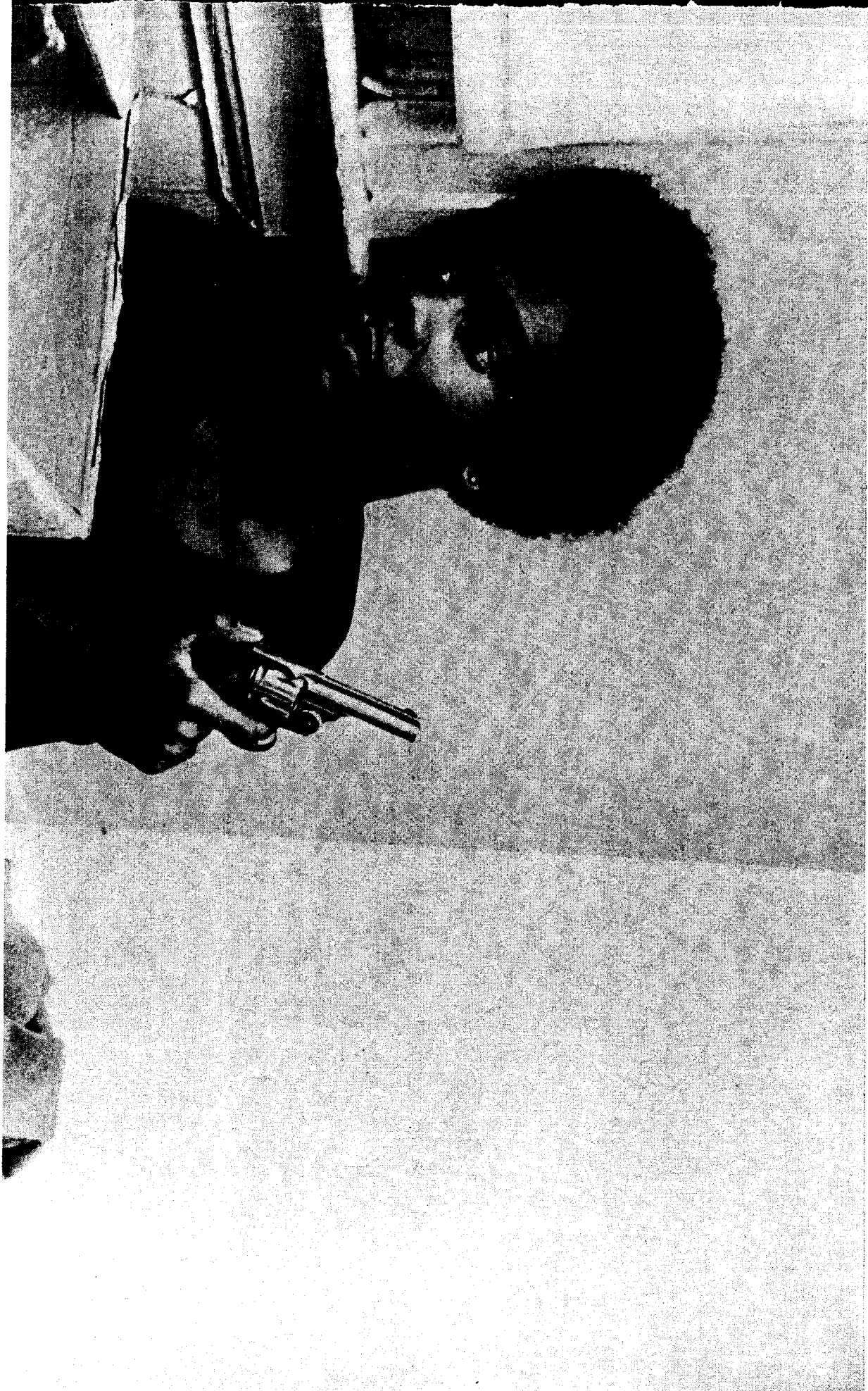
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Weapons poised, San Francisco riot police (below) face a taunting crowd outside Black Panther headquarters last spring after they had broken up

a Panther street rally. At right, a Panther in Detroit kept a trigger-ready vigil in December following a report that a police raid was imminent.



# hard edge of confrontation





# Eldridge Cleaver in Algiers, a visit with Papa Rage

by GORDON PARKS

**O**ne night, just before I left New York to see Eldridge Cleaver in Algiers, a squad car eased alongside me and stopped. Two policemen jumped out. The older one carried a walkie-talkie and the younger one blocked my path and demanded some identification. I was walking briskly from my East Side apartment, late for the theater. Despite the fact that I, like many other black people, experience this type of harassment constantly, I was impatient. When I asked why I had to identify myself, the younger one warned me that he would run me in if I didn't. "I'd prefer that," I said. He copped out, assuring me that things could be worked out there on the street. Then he informed me I was in a wealthy neighborhood where there had been several robberies lately.

"Do I look like a robber to you?"  
"All robbers don't go around wearing little black masks," he said.  
"And all robbers don't go around wearing black faces," I countered. As I reached for my wallet to prove once again that I wasn't a criminal, his hand inched toward his gun.  
"You two are pretty jumpy," I said, pulling out my LIFE card.

I have always tuned out at the term "pig." But when those two fat faces reddened at the sight of that card, I too got the image—very clearly. I turned and walked off.

"Sorry, Mr. Parks." I kept walking. "Just doing our job. Trying to protect you. Merry Christmas." I

went on without answering, shocked at my thoughts of rifles with silencers, of rooftops—and pigs.

Several days later I told Cleaver about my experience. He smiled easily and spoke softly. "Things haven't changed much back in Babylon since I've been on vacation." To him my incident must have seemed like absolutely nothing. His last encounter with the California police ended with 17-year-old Bobby Hutton shot to death, one Black Panther and two policemen injured, and Cleaver being hustled off to jail with a bullet-shattered leg.

Cleaver was now living with his wife Kathleen and their 5-month-old son, Maceo, outside of Algiers in one of those yellowish-white concrete houses that line the Mediterranean coast. It was wet, windy and unusually cold for Algiers. He was slumped in a chair; his legs stretched out, the infant slung across his shoulder. He gently massaged the boy's back. In the soft, rain-filtered light from the sea, he looked like any other father trying to burp his child. But his mind was on a tragic, more violent thing—the killing of his fellow Panthers, Fred Hampton and Mark Clark, by Chicago police. "It was cold-blooded murder," he said in a low, caustic tone.

I handed him some clippings from the American press, most of which, I felt, condemned the police action in the killings. Cleaver started to read and I watched for some type of reaction. As his eyes moved over the print his dark face was immo-

ble. Maceo finally burped. Eldridge called Kathleen. "Come get this Panther." As she took Maceo away, Eldridge frowned. "That little cat will give them hell one of these days." He lit a cigarette, took a healthy swallow of Scotch and started reading again. I got up and looked about the house.

There were five rooms, counting a tiled kitchen that also faced the sea. Emory Douglas, the Panthers' minister of culture, and his wife Judy occupied one room. Connie Matthews, an attractive girl who represented the Panthers in Scandinavia, had the other room. Off a dark hallway was the "workshop," littered with typewriters, mimeograph machines, printing materials, Emory's posters and party leaflets in several languages. The large living room-bedroom in which I had left Eldridge was the gathering point.

There was very little laughter in that house. Too many brothers were in coffins or prisons. The cold evenings were spent talking of friends, revolution and death, thinking and planning to Otis Redding's blues, to Elaine Brown's protest songs and to the soul-stirrings of Aretha Franklin and James Brown. It was the cluttered, temporary shelter of a black man in exile—where bags stay packed and all precious things are made portable.

Cleaver had finished reading the clippings when I returned. "Well, what do you think?" I said.

"Crap. Unadulterated objective

In their home outside Algiers, Parks photographed Cleaver and his wife Kathleen beneath a picture of Huey P. Newton, founder of the Black Panther Party, who is now in prison for manslaughter.

"Right on," she repeated. Maceo began to cry. Eldridge picked him up. "He's angry. He was born angry—like a real Panther."

When Maceo quieted I mentioned that Arthur Goldberg and Roy Wilkins were forming a committee to do some investigating of their own.

"And what are those dudes going to investigate?"

"The killing of Hampton and Clark."

Eldridge scratched his beard and smiled for the first time. "And they will wind up saying the police were justified in shooting the brothers."

"They might find just the opposite."

"It doesn't make much difference what they find. It's too late for their concern. The brothers are dead. All that is left is the problem. The Panther is the solution."

"Are you aware of the great amount of sympathy that has sprung up among even the black moderates since the Chicago incident?"

"Sympathy won't stop bullets. And we can't defend every black person in Babylon. Right now it's a big job just to keep ourselves alive. It's the brother's job, and right, to defend his own home. And there's only one way for him to do that. When cops bust through your door, put a gun in their faces and say, 'Split, mother!' There's alternatives. Call the U.N., or the civil liberty boys, or the police station, and tell them you're being shot up. Then wait."  
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"Crap. Unadulterated objective crap. So we have to be shot up and murdered in our homes before people become indignant. We have charged the police with ambush and murder over and over again. Now, after 28 murders, people are taking a look. What are we supposed to do, pray for deliverance?" He asked the question in a soft, dispassionate voice, then answered it himself. "Their deaths will have to be avenged. The cops who murdered them must be punished in the same way they committed the crime."

"Right on, Papa Rage," Kathleen snapped. Her blue-green eyes were smoldering beneath a great copper-colored bushy Afro. Her face, pale, strong and intense, revealed a fearlessness equal to her husband's.

Wounded in a 1968 Oakland police ambush in which another Panther was killed, Cleaver was taken away in a police ambulance. State authorities then revoked his parole.

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"What do the Panthers have to offer black moderates other than violence, or a fight to death?"

"Nothing. Not even condolences, for they will bring about their own deaths through their own apathy." He got up and moved across the room. He is big, well over six feet, broad-shouldered and powerfully built. He moves with the brutal grace of a fighter. "Violence? Our people are programmed into worse violence by Uncle Sam. Tell me, why should black boys have to go fight Koreans and Vietnamese boys, instead of the Maddoxes, Reagans and Wallaces at home? A crazed white lunatic can attack a black man on the street. But when the cops come they first club the 'violent nigger.' Violence? We hate it. But is it violent to shoot a cop who breaks into your home bent on killing you? If so, the Panthers are violent."

I remembered that right after the murder of Martin Luther King, Black Panthers spread through the ghettos cautioning angry young blacks against violence and rioting.

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# Nineteen men the Panthers list as 'murdered'



Spurgeon Winters, 19, shot by police, Chicago, November 1969. Inquest ruled it "justifiable."



John Huggins, 23, shot to death, UCLA lunchroom, January 1969. Rival black militants convicted.



Walter Pope, 20, shot by police, Los Angeles, October 1969. Inquest: "justifiable homicide."



Alprentice Carter, 26, shot, UCLA lunchroom, January 1969. Rival black militants were convicted.



Welton Armistead, 17, shot by police, Seattle, October 1969. Inquest ruled it "justifiable homicide."



Fred Hampton, 21, shot by police, Chicago, December 1969. Inquest termed it "justifiable homicide."



Sidney Miller, 21, shot by storekeeper, Seattle, November 1969. The storekeeper was not charged.



Mark Clark, 22, shot by police, Chicago, December 1969. Inquest called it "justifiable homicide."



Tommy Lewis, 18, shot by police, Los Angeles, August 1968. Inquest ruled it "justifiable homicide."

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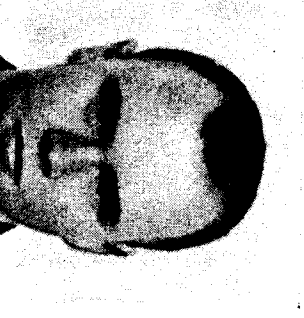
It only gives the cops a chance to kill more of us, they warned. And I thought it significant that after a study of violence, the Lemberg Center at Brandeis University reported that "of 381 racial disorders occurring between January and August 1969, only 17 involved Black Panthers and of those 17 only eight were violent confrontations between police and Black Panthers."


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There he wrote *Soul on Ice*, a powerful and remarkably frank insight into himself. He had been in and out of jail since he was 16, and when he left prison, at 31, he got involved in the black revolution, politics and the Black Panther party.

"And from then on," he said wistfully, "the parole authorities gave me more trouble than they did when I was a robber. The cops tried to kill me one night in a planned ambush. They murdered little Bobby Hutton instead. They slammed me into Va-

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But the police have demanded the Panthers' heads, and the Panthers proudly tell the police to come and get them. As I sat there with Cleaver, I thought that to avoid the even greater tragedy, all of us would have to become more than idle witnesses. The police must be urged not to provoke the black revolution into a ferocious blindness; the Panthers must realize that they have emerged as a vital part of our fight, but that reason, more than tough rhetoric, is the order of those thousands, black or white, who would support us. Surely, I thought, somewhere in our history of hatred and death for one another, there must be an even greater place for courage and love.


"What is the future of the young black man in America?" I said.

"Right now their future is in the hands of the Wallaces, Agnews, Nixons, Reagans, McClellans and their cops. The black youths in Babylon won't have a future unless they have the guts to fight for it."

So many times during his own life, I thought, Cleaver has appeared to have had no future. He had found himself while behind prison walls.



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"And from then on," he said wistfully, "the parole authorities gave me more trouble than they did when I was a robber. The cops tried to kill me one night in a planned ambush. They murdered little Bobby Hutton instead. They slammed me into Vancouver with a shot-up leg and revoked my parole without a hearing."


I was in California when Superior Court Judge Raymond J. Sherwin freed him on a writ of habeas corpus, observing that Cleaver had been a model parolee. I told Cleaver that I was surprised at this ruling—since the authorities from Reagan on down had lined up against him.

"That didn't stop them," he went on. "They trumped up some more charges and ordered me back to prison. I knew that if I went back to prison I would be killed. So I split." Now, despite suggestions that, for his own safety, he prolong his "vacation from Babylon," Cleaver told me, "I'm going back home to San Francisco. Two-seven-seven-seven Pine is my address. Nobody is going to keep me away from it."

I asked him if he couldn't do the party more good by writing from Al-giers, citing as an example the tremendous sale of his books back in the States. He bristled. "You can't



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John Frey, 23, shot arresting Huey Newton, Oakland, 1967. Newton was convicted of manslaughter.



Francis Rappaport, 32, in Chicago gun battle, November, 1969. A Panther charged with murder.

fight pigs with eloquence. I've got to physically commit myself."

If he comes back, and I am sure he will, I believe it is to avoid another kind of death. The death inside him in exile is as bad as the other kind of death I fear awaits him back here. Cleaver is armored with the brutal truth of Panther history, of hard streets and tough prisons. Yet a basic naiveté makes him vulnerable at times. "Do you think Reagan and his cops really want me back?" he asked me with all seriousness, "or do you think they would sleep better if I stayed lost?"

I didn't know. "But do you want them to sleep better?" I asked.

"I want them in a constant state

of nightmare," he answered icily. He sat down, lit another cigarette and crossed his legs. Then, eyeing me closely, he told me that the Black Panthers would like for me to join their party. "You could serve as a minister of information." I spent an uncomfortable moment thinking that one over. "A lot of young cats would be glad to follow you in."

"I'm honored," I finally said, "but—"

"We need you more than the Establishment does."

"I'm honored," I repeated, "but you must realize that as a journalist I'd lose objectivity." Objectivity, I thought, the word he hated so much. "I have things I want to report to



# gunfights with the Panthers

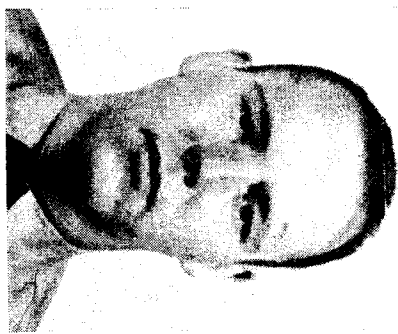
Nathaniel Clark, 19, shot by wife, who Panthers say is police agent, in Los Angeles, September 1969.

Larry Roberson, 20, shot by Chicago police, July 1969, died in September. Judged "justifiable."

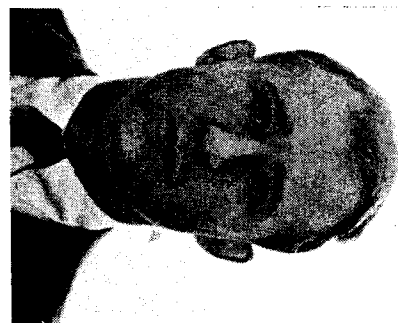
Robert Lawrence, 22, shot by police, Los Angeles, August 1968. Inquest ruled it "justifiable."

Arthur Morris, 28, shot in 1968 Los Angeles gun fight not involving police. No one was charged.

Alex Rackley, 24, tortured, shot, New Haven, Conn., May 1969. Panthers are charged with murder.



John Githooly, 21, shot gun battle in Chicago, November 1969. A Panther charged with murder.



Nelson Sasser, 24, shot, Santa Ana, Calif., June 1969. Panther was accused, is still awaiting trial.

as big an audience as possible." "I'm more concerned about young strongcats following you into the party." He had me thinking—back to the inflexible Malcolm X. Cleaver was proving to be even more intransigent—the most uncompromising individual I ever met.

I explained that my interests go beyond those of the Black Panthers, to other minorities and factions of the black movement who want change. He eased off, suggesting that we leave it open. I wondered whether he felt my position was a creditable one. Looking back to that moment I find that I am displeased with my answer. I should have said: Both of us are caught up in the truth of

on my terms. I prefer to change things without violence—providing violence is not thrust upon me. If this is your position, too, then your weapons and mine are not as irconcilable as you might think.

Cleaver went on: "Black people are afraid to join a militant group. They're afraid the cops will shoot them. That's just why we made the cops our political target—to prove to the brother that cops are just fat, gristle and blood."

I asked him what chances the Panthers had against the overwhelming police power. "If we worried about the odds, we would be defeated from the start," he said.

It was dusk. Kathleen brought in a bowl of lamb stew. Cleaver reached over and spooned a mouthful, talking all the while. "We won't be alone. A lot of whites relate to the same issues that we do. They're just as uptight. The Establishment will have to deal with them as well. Enough tear gas and head whipping will establish the common enemy." "Do you welcome whites to the fight?"

"Of course. There has to be some interconnection. We hope through some sort of coalition to bring a change for everyone. I just don't believe that most whites will stand by and see a minority wiped out without trying to put a stop to it."

"And the Communists? There are a lot of reports that they are trying to infiltrate your party."

"Black people don't need Com-

munist to teach them about trouble. The jails in Babylon produce more rebels and revolutionaries than the Communists could dream of producing back there. An incredible number of those rebels are black, and their numbers are growing by the hour. We are out to tear down the system not with fire, not with guns—but with solid political and scientific know-how. If it comes to guerrilla warfare, individuals will die. But individual tragedy can't block liberation for the masses."

"And what will you build in the rubble?" "Social justice. If the blacks took power tomorrow and treated the whites like the whites have treated us for 400 years, I'd try to crush them too. We promise to replace racism with racial solidarity. There are no better weapons. We are disciplined revolutionaries who hate violence. That's why we aim to stop it at our front and back doors. Then we won't have to worry about our children dying in blood-drenched beds."

That night I left Cleaver on a wet, wind-swept street. It was strange that his last words were about social justice, the kind that is irrespective of a man's color. I thought about other brilliant young black men like Stokely Carmichael, Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, one self-exiled, two long since gunned down. I couldn't help but feel that Cleaver's promise, like their dreams, would go unfulfilled. Social justice, it seems, is much more difficult to come by than martyrdom. ■



Sylvester Bell, 34, beaten and shot, San Diego, August 1969. Rival black militants have been accused.



Bobby Hutton, 17, shot by police, Oakland, April 1968. Grand jury ruled it "justifiable homicide."



Steve Bartholomew, 21, shot by police, Los Angeles, August 1968. Inquest ruled it "justifiable."



John Savage, 21, shot on San Diego street in May 1969. Rival black militant is awaiting trial.



Frank Diggs, 40, found shot to death in Long Beach, Calif., December 1968. Assailant unknown.



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Inside Black Panther national headquarters in Berkeley (left), Panther Lauryn Williams frisks a white girl visitor for arms, or dope that might be planted to provoke a police raid.

In a San Francisco warehouse, volunteers work on *The Black Panther*, the party's newspaper and propaganda organ. Each week 100,000 copies are distributed nationally and overseas.





him a battle plan drawn up by the Berkeley police for an assault on the national Panther headquarters: "Assign two-man squad to front with shotgun (solid slugs) and armor-piercing rifle to blast armor plate off upper windows. . . . Use buckshot to shoot out all lower windows. Use rifle slugs to try and knock open main front door. . . . Assault squad (three men) armed with sub-machine guns. . . . enter building. . . . Two men. . . fire 30 rounds each through second-story floor and reload. . . . The entire building should be flooded with tear gas. The entire upper floor should be covered with intense fire. . . . Assault squad will then proceed upstairs and bring down the wounded and/or dead." Berkeley Police Chief Bruce Baker said he had not seen the plan, but admitted it was "probably the work of our sergeants." So far that attack hasn't come. "But," says Parks, "it was so much like the one in Chicago that did happen—except for the tear gas—that I couldn't get it out of my mind. I sat in the Panthers' headquarters and looked at floors where 60 rounds were to burst through, at



Attorney Charles Garry, whom the Panthers call "the White Panther," because he has defended so many of them in court, confers with Bobby Seale in a San Francisco jail. Above, Seale's wife Artie and their son Malik, 3, visit Berkeley headquarters, where Mrs. Seale remains an active Panther.

says Parks, "you have to understand racism as a black man knows it. Their enemy is the police. And if you are part of that silent majority that wants the police to wipe them out, then you are their enemy too."

Less than four years old, the Panther organization is already rich in legend. In Berkeley, David Hilliard described to Parks the first confrontation between police and Huey Newton, the Panthers' charismatic founder. Armed with an M-1 and a law book, Newton had faced down seven cops in front of a black street crowd. "Huey did what those people had wanted to do for a long time. He told a bunch of cops that he was through being kicked around by them. The black brothers got the message. So did the cops."

Newton is now in prison. So is Bobby Seale, a Panther leader who, as a defendant in the Chicago conspiracy trial, was sentenced to four years for contempt and at one point, was ordered bound and gagged in court by Judge Julius Hoffman. Seale also is fighting extradition to Connecticut where there is a murder charge against him.

Parks interviewed Seale in a San Francisco jail. "Our goals," Seale told him, "are the same ones the white man fights for. A decent education for our children, good jobs, good housing. We have a breakfast program to feed poor kids. We work for voter registration so that eventually we can wrest control of black communities from the police. In fact we want just about the same things Martin Luther King wanted. It's only our tactics that differ. There are some street crossings in black neighborhoods that need traffic lights. Our kids have to run like hell to keep from getting hit. We'll help them get across safely even if we have to use guns."

Parks found the same contrast between vicious rhetoric and earnest goals in all the groups he visited. He also noted that Panther influence is spreading in the black community. "At first I thought my son James was just infatuated with the black leather jacket and beret," Mrs. Dorothy Wood, the middle-class mother of a recruit, told him. "But after he explained about the breakfast program and some of the other aims it was easier for me to accept. Naturally I worry for his safety. He's been arrested three times, just for selling the Panther newspaper. They dropped the charges, but it'll probably happen again next week."



## 'We want the same things King wanted. Our tactics are different'

Returning from Algiers, Parks sought out Panthers in the U.S. to see how the organization works and to get a sense of why young blacks join it. In California David Hilliard, the Panther chief of staff, showed him a battle plan drawn up by the Berkeley police for an assault on the national Panther headquarters: "Assign two-man squad to front with shotgun (solid slugs) and armor-piercing rifle to blast armor plate off upper windows. . . . Use buckshot to shoot out all lower windows. Use rifle slugs to try and knock open main front door. . . . Assault squad (three men) armed with sub-machine guns . . . enter building. . . . Two men . . . fire 30 rounds each through second-story floor and reload. . . . The entire building should be flooded with tear gas. The entire upper floor should be covered with intense fire. . . . Assault squad will then proceed upstairs and bring down the wounded and/or dead." Berkeley Police Chief Bruce Baker said he had not seen the plan, but admitted it was "probably the work of our sergeants." So far that attack hasn't come. "But," says Parks, "it was so much like the one in Chicago that did happen—except for the tear gas—that I couldn't get it out of my mind. I sat in the Panthers' headquarters and looked at floors where 60 rounds were to burst through, at

windows that buckshot would blast out." The fear of surprise attack is a fact of life for the Panthers and helps explain their conviction that the whole white world is against them. "To understand these kids," says Parks, "you have to understand racism as a black man knows it. Their enemy is the police. And if you are part of that silent majority that wants the police to wipe them out, then you are their enemy too."

Less than four years old, the Panther organization is already rich in legend. In Berkeley, David Hilliard described to Parks the first confrontation between police and Huey Newton, the Panthers' charismatic founder. Armed with an M-1 and a law book, Newton had faced down seven cops in front of a black street crowd. "Huey did what those people had wanted to do for a long time. He told a bunch of cops that he was through being kicked around by them. The black brothers got the message. So did the cops."

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In their chapter headquarters in San Francisco, five Panthers stare straight into Parks's camera. "After 400 years of struggle and death," says Chief of Staff David Hilliard (center), "revolution is the only thing left." The Panthers are careful to distinguish between riot—which they feel the white community will accept, so long as it occurs in the ghetto—and revolution, which implies a far more sweeping and violent, but peculiarly American, change. "It won't be a revolution like those in China, Russia, Cuba or Africa," Bobby Seale told Parks. "Just a Yankee Doodle kind of revolution."

