

SOLIDARITY

Unity in the Community!

Black Power to Black People!

White Power to White People!

Brown Power to Brown People!

Yellow Power to Yellow People!

Red Power to Red People!

These phrases were the cries that emanated from Black communities throughout this nation – they were initiated by the Black Panther Party in 1968. Many organizations were formed after hearing and rallying around those calls, including the Patriot Party, the Young Lords, the Brown Berets, the Red Guard, and the American Indian Movement.

Who were these groups and how did they come into existence?

The Patriots were a group of white working-class and poor young people which originally formed in Chicago and many of them originated from street-turf gangs. Their chapters and Ten Point Program were modeled after the Black Panther Party's and they were strong supporters of the Black Panther Party. They closely followed the Black Panther Party's example and dedicated themselves to serving the basic needs of their communities, such as feeding hungry children with free breakfast programs. Many worked to establish free health clinics and other services in their communities. The Patriot Party, like the Panthers, published a newspaper.

The Young Lords also followed, in purpose and actions, many of the examples set by the Black Panther Party. These young Puerto Ricans formed chapters in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Connecticut, New Jersey, Boston Massachusetts, and Puerto Rico. Their female leadership strongly pursued the fight for women's rights and formed and worked with prison solidarity groups for incarcerated Puerto Ricans. By 1976, the Young Lords had been

all but destroyed by the FBI. However, their impact remained – other groups formed and continued to pursue their goals.

San Francisco's Red Guard was patterned closely after the Black Panther Party. In 1969, the federal government wanted to shut down a Tuberculosis testing center located in San Francisco's Chinese community. At the time, Chinatown had the highest TB rate in the country. The young Asians in the Red Guard organized the community and staged successful protest demonstrations to keep that TB testing center open. Through these protests and the programs that the Red Guard initiated, Chinatown's citizens were enlightened and became open to more progressive politics.

In 1970, members of the Red Guard were part of a delegation that was invited to join Eldridge Cleaver and they accompanied him in a visit to China, North Korea, and North Vietnam. After about two and a half years, due to political and police repression, such as office raids, arrests without warrants, false arrest, and armed stand-offs with police, the organization collapsed.

Cesar Chavez's United Farm Workers brought attention to the plight of Hispanic farm workers in this country. Because of his influence, and that of the Black Panther Party's, young Chicanos from the barrios came to realize that struggle against oppressive conditions was necessary for change, and the Brown Berets organization was formed in 1967. The Brown Berets had a 13 Point Party Platform similar to that of the BPP. In the summer of 1968, the Brown Berets marched with the Rainbow Coalition in the Poor People's Campaign in Washington, DC. Among their many contributions, they organized Vietnam War protests, exposed police brutality, and started the Chicano movement for self-determination. Unfortunately, this organization also met with a similar fate to that of the Black Panther Party.

AIM was organized in the summer of 1968 when approximately 200 members of the Native American community met to discuss various critical issues and developments in their communities. These included police brutality, slum housing, an 80% unemployment rate, and racist and discriminatory government policies. Today, after many legal battles and repressive actions on the government's part, including the imprisonment of leaders such as Leonard Pelletier, AIM has grown and today still continues to serve their communities from a base of Native American culture. In

Minnesota, AIM's birthplace, organizations have developed to institute schools, housing and employment services.

In November of 1969, the world took notice when young Bay Area Native American students and urban Indians occupied Alcatraz Island for 19 months, claiming it as federal land in the name of Native Nations.

In the 1960's and 1970's all of these diverse groups formed strong bonds with the Black Panther Party. They came to understand that we all had common problems; our communities were suffering from many similar social and economic conditions. We were being oppressed and exploited by the same perpetrators. These groups met with the Black Panther Party and discussed and set forth plans to resolve some of these issues. The Black Panther Party's 10 Point Platform and Program was a basic plan of action that spelled out clearly what we wanted and what we believed. This program and platform was so powerful and so on-target that many of those solidarity groups drew up similar programs and tailored them to their communities' needs.

Because of strong solidarity with these many different groups, the Black Panther Party was able to amass great numbers of people to participate in demonstrations such as Free Huey, Stop the Draft, and End the Vietnam War rallies, which occurred all over the country.

Included among these supportive organizations were many splinter groups such as the Gay Liberation Front, the Peace and Freedom Party, the Woman's Liberation Movement, the Yippies, the Grey Panthers and groups that formed for the rights of disabled people. These solidarity groups did not go unnoticed by the FBI and were also subjected to the FBI's dirty tricks and Cointelpro program. Their offices and residences were bugged, they were infiltrated by government spies, and set-up for frame-ups and false arrests. Although they were harassed and brutalized, no other party, except for the Black Panther Party, was singled out for complete extermination.

Many members of the Black Panther Party were tortured, murdered, and/or locked away in dungeons, where many still remain, however, they did not get us all. We, the survivors, have a duty and a responsibility to continue to fight for those same 10 Points, for What We Want and What We Believe.

So, on the occasion of this Black Panther Party 40th Year Reunion and Celebration on October 13-15, 2006, we recognize and invite former members of solidarity groups, especially all those rank and file members, our friends, and all those community workers who continue to struggle for freedom and justice to join us. We will talk about the past, but most importantly, we will look at what we are doing today and explore the possibilities of what we can accomplish in the future. I believe we have much to do, for the struggle does not end with us and, perhaps, by coming together in solidarity again, we can set into motion the birth of a new beginning.

Elbert "Big Man" Howard