

Distribution had become such a financial crutch. They [the national committee] were pushing paper distribution over any other works for the party. And that was part of the issue that all of the separation turned on. If you were going to call yourself a member of the National Black Panther Party then you were going to have to sell papers. It was a quota kind of thing. I remember that, and that is why [Sam] Napier [representing national headquarters on newspaper sales] came to the mid-west and because we had cut distribution down and he was having a problem with that.³²

For the Des Moines chapter, the national Panther paper was an educational tool for the local population, and the local leadership insisted on thoroughly familiarizing Des Moines cadre members with the information in the paper during education classes, which would not only educate the rank and file but would enable members to become more effective organizers based on revolutionary theoretical principles. For example, the more education the cadres received, the more effectively they could persuade people in the black community about the soundness of the party line. According to Knox, it was that thorough examination of the paper that led to disagreements:

We studied the paper. We didn't just distribute it. And that was the point of being in classes all day. We weren't just trying to sell a paper we felt that if we were going to be serious about this then we need to make sure we studied the articles and had an understanding of what the paper was about. And that created a big risk as it related to [the] national office.³³

The tension with the central committee emerged from the reality that David Hilliard was in charge of the BPP during Huey Newton's incarceration and Bobby Seale's legal problems. The party was having problems raising money in 1969, was increasingly dependent on newspaper distribution, and was immersed in an ideological conflict over the requirement to read and teach Eldridge Cleaver's book *Soul on Ice*.

These internal and external tensions were also occurring at a time when the national organization was under increasing government repression and ideological flux. Some larger issues emerged when the Iowa Panthers examined the political content of the newspaper. For one thing, the issue of drugs sparked a debate; for another, there was the issue of "revolutionary rape."³⁴

The heartland chapters of the BPP were more culturally conservative than their Bay Area counterparts. The rift or ideological difference with the national BPP emerged out of a set of circumstances that included issues of drugs, ideological differences, and a breakdown in communication. Given their work in drug and alcohol intervention, the Heartland members were disturbed by reports of drug use in moderation from the national leadership.³⁴ Andre Rawls recalls,

The brothers on the West Coast were doing drugs. I remember when Pete O'Neal (deputy chairman of Kansas City) went out there we had serious no drug, no alcohol policies and Pete came back and said . . . in Moderation. And that to me was a part of the downfall when people started making exceptions and started augmenting the theory.³⁵

There was also concern that theory was being bastardized and that concepts were being introduced that were not applicable to the reality of the Des Moines social milieu. By the fall of 1970 the central committee, under Huey Newton's influence, was moving away from revolutionary nationalism and adapting Marxism to accommodate changing global conditions of capitalism, and the belief that national borders were increasingly unimportant.³⁶ Also, the required reading of Eldridge Cleaver's book *Soul on Ice* caused tension with the Heartland leadership (Rawls). The book was supposed to be a guide for the psychological transformation of black men into revolutionaries and for the revolutionary potential of the black community. However, for the Des Moines chapter the controversy over Cleaver's book involved his statement on the necessity of raping a black woman to learn how to deal appropriately with a white woman. Des Moines members pointed out contradictions between this notion and other statements of central committee members that endorsed the idea of women's liberation and equality. After some members of the Des Moines cadre read *Soul on Ice*, the question was raised as to why the book was required reading by the national committee. According to Knox:

We thought he [Eldridge Cleaver] was brilliant until when people really read *Soul on Ice* then we banned the book. Because we took a position that this guy talking about raping a black woman to practice on, to deal with a white woman, I mean we thought he was a nut then.³⁷