

## Arts & Leisure Cruise ships are plying the California Sports Jackets boys basketball team holds on to league

### A LOOK BACK AT 'SERVING THE PEOPLE'



JOANNA JHANDAL

**BILLY X JENNINGS** is the curator of the Black Panthers photo exhibit at the Berkeley Public Library, where he stands Tuesday next to a photo by Jeffrey Blankfort of Huey Newton in jail in 1968. The exhibit recalls the party's heyday in the 1960s.

## Exhibit focuses on Black Panthe

■ A photo archivist for the show who was Huey Newton's personal assistant keeps the memory of the Panthers alive

By Martin Snapp  
STAFF WRITER

Billy X Jennings remembers the first time he ever heard of the Black Panthers.

"It was May 1967; I was 16 years old. I was coming home from a track meet, and I knew I was in for a scolding because I had missed my curfew. But my father had fallen asleep in front of the TV set, so I was safe. The 10 o'clock news was on, showing a

### IF YOU GO

■ **WHAT:** "Serving the People — Body & Soul," a photo history of the Black Panther Party.

■ **WHERE:** Berkeley Public Library Main Branch, 2090 Kittredge St.

■ **WHEN:** Now through March 19. The symposium with Billy X Jennings and others will take place Feb. 26 at 2 p.m.

■ **COST:** Free

■ **INFORMATION:** 510-981-6233

story about some black men with rifles on the steps of the state Capitol in Sacramento. I was so thrilled, I woke my father up. And he was as

moved by the moment as I was. I completely forgot I was supposed to get a scolding, and so did he."

In 1968 Jennings graduated from high school in San Diego. Right after the ceremony, he caught the first train to Oakland, clutching the graduation present from his favorite teacher, Ms. Daniels: a copy of "The Autobiography of Malcolm X."

He soon joined the Panthers, working in the party's free food program until 1970, when he became Huey Newton's personal assistant. He grew quite close to the entire Newton family, especially Huey's parents. (Incidentally, they named him after Huey Long, the "Kingfish" of Louisiana politics, whose election was

"Share the wealth.")

In 1973 Jennings ran the campaign headquarters during Bobby Seale's race for mayor of Oakland, which shocked the political establishment by registering 100,000 new voters, winning 40 percent of the vote.

The Black Panther Party has been gone for almost 20 years, but Jennings is making sure it isn't forgotten. As party historian, he has spent the last decade collecting thousands of historic photographs, some of which are on display in an exhibit at the Berkeley Public Library: "Serving the People — Body & Soul."

"When I was Huey's assistant I

See E

# Panthers

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to know all the photographers who were covering him, so I knew exactly who to call when I started the archive. Then other people started sending me memorabilia, including copies of the Black Panther Party newspaper. More keeps coming in every day, faster than I can catalog it."

The bulk of the archive can be viewed online at Jennings' Web site, [www.itsabouttimebpp.com](http://www.itsabouttimebpp.com).

The exhibit at the Berkeley Library runs until March 19; then Jennings will take it on the road. He is in constant demand as a speaker from church groups, colleges, and high schools.

"Young people have some funny ideas about those days," he says. "They think it was all about the guns, but the guns were just a symbol. It was the right to carry them — and use them to defend yourself — that was important. I tell them the Panthers were really about serving the people."

The exhibit reflects that viewpoint. One photo shows the free food program, with a caption pointing out, "Part of the appeal of the BPP's programs was that needy community members could receive assistance without the hassle of filling out forms or the embarrassment of answering questions."

Other photos show the free ambulance program, free breakfasts for kids program, free medical clinics, and the free busing-

**"Young people have some funny ideas about those days. They think it was all about the guns, but the guns were just a symbol. ... I tell them the Panthers were really about serving the people."**

— Billy X Jennings,  
Black Panther Party historian

to-prison program.

But other photos show the flip side of the Panthers' existence: their running war with law enforcement agencies, which left many dead on both sides.

The tension is still evident in one photo showing two Panthers being pulled over by Oakland police on their way to the funeral of one of their comrades, Bobby

Hutton, who was 17 when he was killed in a shootout.

Another shows Jennings himself when he was 19, leading a delegation of Panthers at the funeral of George Jackson, the "Soledad Brother" who was killed during an alleged prison escape attempt in 1971.

The highlight of the exhibit will come on Feb. 26, when Jennings and other veterans of the era conduct a symposium at the library about the party's historical legacy. The participants: James Buford, who helped create the free breakfast program; Sister Sheba, who worked in the George Jackson Free Medical Clinic; Richard Aoki, who helped found the ethnic studies department at UC Berkeley; and Cec Levinson, one of the party's earliest white supporters.

The Black Panther Party was founded Oct. 22, 1966, by two students at Merritt College: Huey Newton and Bobby Seale. Their first recruit was Bobby Hutton.

Guns were front and center from the start, partly because self defense resonated in the black

community due to a series of alleged police brutality incidents, partly because all that hardware got people's attention fast.

That became evident in May 1967, when the Panthers exploded out of obscurity as news cameras filmed them on the steps of the state Capitol in Sacramento, carrying rifles to protest a bill that would have restricted gun ownership.

In October 1967 Newton was wounded in a shootout with police; he was later convicted of manslaughter in connection with the event. After his release from prison he split with Eldridge Cleaver, who had been running the party in his absence. Newton wanted to abandon violence in favor of social programs; Cleaver wanted "revolution now."

Ironically, Newton, who renounced violence, was shot dead in the street in 1989. Cleaver, the apostle of revolutionary violence, died of natural causes — but not before he became a Reagan Republican.

Piling irony upon irony, last year the California Art Museum

in Sacramento asked Jennings to curate a historical retrospective about the Panthers, just a few blocks from the state Capitol where they burst upon the public consciousness almost 40 years ago.

Says he: "It's about time."







Sister Sheba



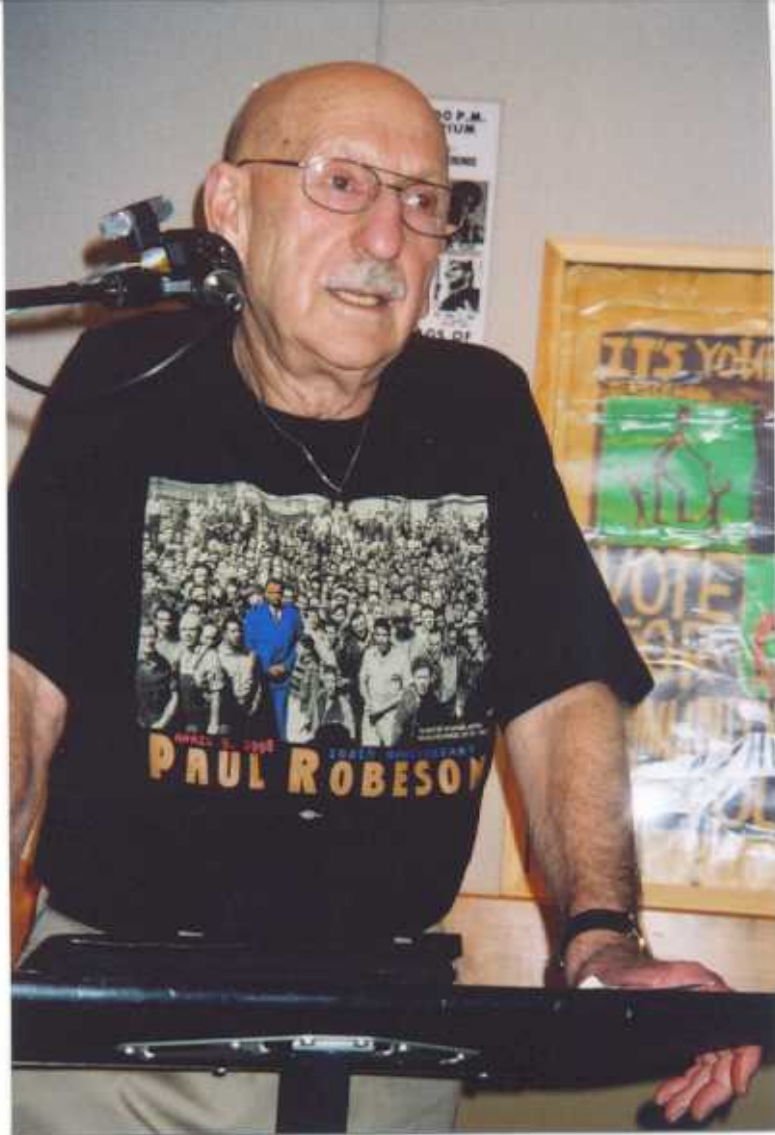
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DAVID  
LEVINSON



James Buford



Saul LEVINSON



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**FRIDAY**

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**Managing editor**

Leanne McLaughlin

(510) 208-644

Fax: (510) 208-647

lmclaughlin@angnewspapers.com

# Photos reveal Black Panthers' community spirit

■ Berkeley library exhibit of black-and-whites from '60s, '70s chronicles gentler side

**By Kristin Bender**

STAFF WRITER

BERKELEY — Former FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover once called the Black Panthers the "greatest threat to the internal security of the country."

But a collection of black-and-white photographs on display at the Berkeley Public Library shows a softer and more philanthropic side of the militant or-



## eye on the arts

ganization that came of age in the 1960s and 1970s.

In tandem with Black History Month and next year's 40th anniversary of the Black Panthers, "Serving the People: Body & Soul" will run through March 19 at the main library in downtown Berkeley.

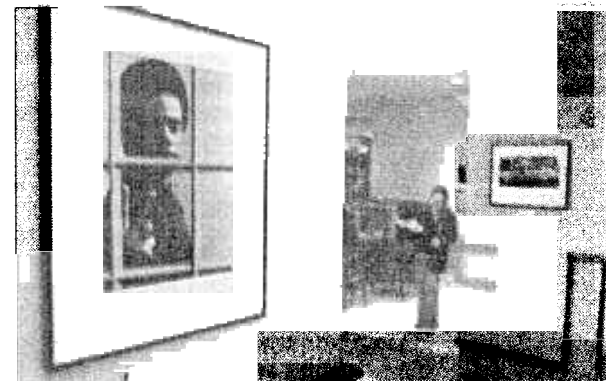
"When people see these photo-

graphs, they say, 'I didn't know the Black Panther Party was doing these things in the community,' " said Billy X. Jennings, the party historian who set up the photo exhibition.

Jennings has been collecting the photos on display and will host a talk Saturday with other former Black Panthers.

The Black Panther Party was founded by community college students Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale in October 1966. Though the party was based in

Please see **EYE**, Local 6



## AN EXHIBIT

of photographs chronicling the activities of the Black Panther Party is on display at the Berkeley Public Library through March 19.

**D. ROSS CAMERON**

— Staff

# Photos show softer side of Black Panthers

## ► EYE, from Local 1

Oakland, soon there were chapters in other cities. Jennings claims a membership of at least 5,000 at one point during the '60s and '70s.

Jennings said the party did good for the community that was not widely publicized.

By the end of 1969, the group's free breakfast program for schoolchildren was feeding thousands of youngsters nationwide before they went to class each day.

The group also registered thousands of people to vote, distributed free bags of groceries to thousands more and ran urban medical clinics, Jennings said.

"This is something we are not given a lot of credit for," said Jennings, who was Newton's personal assistant and Seale's campaign manager.

The Black Panther Party was a multifaceted organization. Members advocated for people's rights to bear arms, and members patrolled Oakland's streets to ensure citizens' safety, Jennings said.

The founding members — Newton and Seale — penned the Black Panther Party Platform and Program, which sought freedom, fair and decent housing, education and an end to police brutality against African Americans.

The 22 photographs, shot between 1967 and 1975, capture

party members in their roles as community leaders and volunteers.

They were shot by Stephen Shames, Lauren Williams, "Ducho" and Jeffrey Blankfort, most of whom now live out of state and were not available for comment, Jennings and library staff said.

The photographs are getting a lot of attention from patrons just "bumping into (the exhibit) and really becoming absorbed with it," said library staff member Pat Mullan.

The pictures are varied and include one of Maya Angelou teaching at the Oakland Community Learning Center, a young child eating a free breakfast and a free shoe program.

There's a photo of Newton behind bars flashing a peace sign following his arrest in connection with the slaying of Oakland police Officer John Frey.

The collection also includes a picture of sickle-cell anemia testing in Berkeley and one of George Jackson's funeral at St. Augustine's Church in Oakland in 1971. Jackson was gunned down in prison by a San Quentin guard in August 1971.

The library hosts a free talk and video screening by former members of the Black Panther Party at 2 p.m. Saturday in the library's community room, 2090 Kittredge at Shattuck Avenue.

## Listings

► Tonight — **Final Fridays Microcinema; "Chisholm '72 — Unbought & Unbossed"** documentary on Shirley Chisholm's historic run for president, 7 to 9 p.m., Eastside Arts Alliance, 2587 International Blvd., Oakland, donations requested, 533-6629.

► Tonight — **Josh Workman Quartet, with Nicole Vigil**, 9 p.m., downtown restaurant, 2102 Shattuck Ave., Berkeley, free, 649-3810.

► Tonight — **Noise Show: Sixxes, Xome, Stimbox, Portland Bicycle Ensemble, Microse and the Mau Maus, Skullcaster**, 8 p.m., 21 Grand, 449B 23rd St., Oakland, \$5-\$10, 444-7263.

► Saturday — **Art, Jazz, Jam to remember the Scarab Club and celebrate Black History Month; "Deep Color" abstract art print sale and exhibit by Rocky Jones**, 4 to 8:30 p.m.,

Adeline Artists Lofts, 1131 24th St., Oakland, free.

► Saturday — **Black Rock Expo: Stone Vengeance, Omissa, 12 Inches, A Band Called Pain, Love Infinity, Damond Moodie**, 7 p.m. to 2 a.m., Oaklandish, 411 2nd St., Oakland, \$7-\$10, 451-2677 or [www.oaklandish.org](http://www.oaklandish.org).

► Saturday — **The Art of Living Black Art Tour**, 11 a.m. to 5 p.m., various Bay Area locations, 620-6772 or [www.therichmondartcenter.org](http://www.therichmondartcenter.org) for artist locations and information, free, also Sunday, and March 5 and 6.

► Sunday — **Friends of Negro Spirituals presents a Black History Month celebration of Jester Hairston: a Worldwide Ambassador for Spirituals**, 2 p.m., general meeting, 3:30 to 5:30 p.m., educational forum, West Oakland Senior Center, 1724 Adeline St., Oakland, free, 238-7016 or (415) 563-4316.