

Black Panthers, White Power: Violent Confrontation on Coast

By WALLACE TURNER

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SAN FRANCISCO, July 19—From the window, Eldridge Cleaver could see across the roofs of San Francisco, across the blue of the bay to the carpet-like spread of houses on the hills to the east.

The East Bay cities shimmered in the distance—Piedmont, the hill sections of Oakland, upper Berkeley, El Cerrito, Albany. White people live there, white people and those black people who have succeeded in "whitey's" world.

Cleaver could not see the flatlands through the window. The flatlands at the bottom of the hill are where the Negroes live, the poor Negroes, the slum dwellers, the masses the Black Panthers want to lead.

Eldridge Cleaver, 32 years old, is a Black Panther, the "Minister of Information" of a

group of gun-carrying Negroes who have become the effective voice of the extreme militancy of Oakland's Negro slum.

He is an ex-convict, an anti-capitalist, a bitter critic of the police, a Black Nationalist, a very effective leader, a brilliant writer.

Across the bay, in an eight-story building beside the Nimitz Freeway at the edge of Oakland's business district, a tall, lean, intense man works in an office where the view is of a tangle of slums, pawnshops, empty store fronts and cheap bars.

From the streets below this window, Charles R. Gain, the Oakland Chief of Police, can hear belligerent curses and whining complaints as the slum

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NEGRO MILITANTS
CHALLENGE POLICE

Clashes on Oakland Streets
Have Led to Two Deaths—
Group's Backing Grows

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dweller clash and quarrel, seeking more room to live and breathe, seeking ego satisfactions, pleasures, hope.

A few blocks away, in the heart of downtown Oakland, stands the Oakland Tribune building, a building with a tower and a tight, closed look to its ground floor.

An office suite on the fourth floor has windows outlined in blue draperies lined in red. The windows disclose nothing but the vacant stare of other windows across the street, and they look as if they are seldom used.

The office is that of William F. Knowland, publisher of The Oakland Tribune, former Republican leader of the United States Senate, natural spokesman for the Oakland Establishment.

These three—Cleaver, Gain and Knowland — hold leading roles in the drama of the Black Panthers, a drama whose taut, violent acts are still unfolding.

Rise to National Stature

Since their formation in October, 1966, by Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale, two young Negro activists, the Panthers have become part of the national Negro revolt. There are chapters in New York, Detroit, San Francisco, Los Angeles and San Diego and Rap Brown (honorary "Minister of Justice"), Stokely Carmichael (honorary "Prime Minister") and James Foreman (honorary "Minister of Foreign Affairs") are proud to accept titles in the Panther hierarchy.

The last year has brought great changes. In May, 1967, the Panthers invaded the state Assembly chamber in Sacramento, guns in hand, in what appears to have been a publicity stunt. Still, they scared a lot of important people that day.

An interviewer looking for Huey Newton in those days found him picking his fingernails with a dagger and surrounded by armed bodyguards in a sun-bathed street in the Oakland slums. The atmosphere was one of "tease whiteny," but the Panthers had almost no following.

Now, however, their leaders speak on invitation almost anywhere radicals gather, their weapons are stored, little Negro children use their word—pigs—as an epithet for the police, and many whites wear "Honkeys for Huey" buttons, supporting the fight to free Newton who has been in jail since last Oct. 28, of the charge that he killed a policeman.

Cleaver Emerges as Leader

With the 26-year-old Newton locked up and Seale, 31, under a restrictive probation sentence imposed for conviction of a gun law violation, Eldridge Cleaver has become the leading spokesman for the Panthers.

He urges Negroes to resist white authority and he speaks forcefully, often using brutal language as when he told a rally in Oakland that "from now on we niggers have got to stop killing other niggers and start killing police."

He exploits the potential martyrdom of Newton, whose murder trial opened Monday, and he exploits the distaste of many liberal and leftist whites in the East Bay for the Oakland police, a feeling that stems from charges of brutality leveled at the police when they used clubs and chemical Mace to break up anti-draft demonstrations last October.

He has maneuvered the Panthers into a coalition with the Peace and Freedom party, taking command of a group of Negroes and Mexican-Americans that forced the new political grouping to make the release of Huey Newton one of its platform planks.

And he has become a hero in the aftermath of a gun battle between the Panthers and the Oakland police on April 6. In that encounter, two policemen suffered minor buckshot wounds in their backs. Eight Panthers were arrested on charges of assault to murder. Two were wounded, and one, 17-year-old Bobby Hutton, was killed.

Denies He Carries Gun

Cleaver, who denies that he carried a gun that night, was wounded in the ankle, arrested and sent back to prison as a parole violator the next day.

But his lawyer, Charles Garry, a white man, won his release at a habeas corpus hearing during which the judge accused the state of revoking Cleaver's parole because of his political views. And after two months in jail, Cleaver returned to the Panthers, the man of the hour.

Cleaver, who was born in Little Rock, Ark., has spent most of his adult life in prison. He was first convicted, when he was 15 years old, of possession of marijuana. Then he went back to jail in 1958 on conviction of assault to kill and rape. He drew 14 years and served nine.

In prison, Cleaver became a Black Muslim. His hero was Malcolm X, and when Malcolm left the Muslims, Cleaver left them too. He was in Folsom



THE ISSUE: Black Panthers with "Free Huey" banners picketing the Alameda County Courthouse in Oakland, Calif., during the trial of Huey P. Newton, a co-founder of the Panthers. Newton is accused of slaying

an Oakland policeman. The "Free Huey" campaign has become the focal point of the Panthers' crusade against the Oakland police force and has won support from some whites as well as from other Negro militants.

Prison when Malcolm was killed.

"For a moment the earth seemed to reel in orbit," he wrote in his book, "Soul on Ice." "The skin all over my body tightened up."

When Newton and Seale founded the Panthers, Cleaver was still in jail. He had heard many stories about them, however, and after his parole began, on Dec. 12, 1966, he was drawn to them because they were the only Negro organization that responded to the plea for a protest meeting by the mother of a young Negro who had been killed by a deputy sheriff in Richmond.

That was in April, 1967, and in May Cleaver went to Sacramento when the Panthers took their guns to the Assembly chamber. But he, as an ex-convict, had no gun, just a note pad and camera—he had gone to work for Ramparts magazine—and he was released soon after his arrest.

The other day, sitting easily in an overstuffed armchair in a San Francisco office, Cleaver explained during a lengthy interview some of the reasons for the Panthers' positions on issues.

'Dominated by Racists'

"We couldn't support anyone in the Democratic party," he said. "With this whole thing like the seniority system in Congress, the Democratic party is dominated by racists who are openly involved in the oppression of black people. We don't see any reason to strengthen the Democratic party here in California because that would only be strengthening it in Mississippi."

"So our position," he continued, "is that the Democratic party and the Republican party are both criminal organizations and they should both be destroyed."

In May, pickets demanding that policemen be indicted in the death of Bobby Hutton appeared suddenly at the Housewives' Market in Oakland. The Oakland Tribune exploded in a series of editorials that spoke of the picket line as the beginning of anarchy. The Panthers were not there, however, and Cleaver was asked why.

"There are a lot of people not in the party who wanted to do things and they wanted it to be known that there were other people concerned about these things than members of the Black Panther party," he said.

Cleaver hesitated to describe himself as a revolutionary, but found the root word, "revolt," acceptable. "Well, I quite definitely consider black people as a whole in this country in revolt against the system," he said.

Declaring that he thought American Negroes were a "colonized people," he said: "We don't fit into the system as it's organized."

Can that be changed within the governmental system of the United States?

"I don't believe that it's possible for black people to have a good life under a capitalistic system," he said.

Colored people of other races in other countries have known oppression by white people, he said, and they will help the American Negro win liberation. He continued:

"This economic system cannot endure. It can't last because there are people moving against the system both here, within the country, and abroad, because of the exploitative nature of this system, and its need for controlling populations for the purpose of having markets to export goods."

His views on the Vietnam war were quickly expressed. "I think the Vietcong are 100 per cent right and the United States is 500 per cent wrong," he said.

Turning to the Panthers' antagonism toward white authority, Cleaver said that in the beginning Newton and Seale had had no intention "to have the entire program of the party focus on the police."

"It just happened," he said. "that we learned by experience that when you challenge the police and their behavior and the tradition that they are operating out of, you have little time for anything else."

He would not answer questions about the events leading up to the death of Hutton for fear that the authorities would "build the prosecution" around his story if they knew it in advance.

The police told the grand



Jim Ball
SPOKESMAN: Eldridge Cleaver the Black Panther "Minister of Information," is a bitter critic of the police.



Associated Press
CRITIC: William F. Knowland, the publisher of The Oakland Tribune, is a vocal opponent of the Panthers.



Ted Streshinsky, Pix
ACCUSED: Huey P. Newton, now on trial for murder, has become a potential martyr for the Panthers.

jury that indicted Cleaver and seven other Panthers that two officers had been fired upon with a shotgun when they stopped to investigate a shadowy figure behind a car. Other policemen were called by radio, and they traced Cleaver and Hutton in a basement. At that point, Cleaver picked up the story.

"While we were inside that house, I got shot in the foot, you see. I got hit in the chest with a tear gas cannister, which knocked me out. Bobby thought I'd been shot. He took all my clothes off to try to find where I'd been hit, to feel for the blood in the dark."

"When the cops allowed us to come out, I couldn't stand very well and Bobby helped me out. I put my arm around his shoulder and he carried me out. As we came through the door, I think it was a kind of step down on a high threshold or something, and we tripped and we fell down."

"Then all these cops came in from the street and they started, like, hitting and kicking us. With guns and their feet, you know. Cursing at us and a lot of stuff. For two or three minutes."

Cleaver said Hutton helped him up and the police told them to run to the police car. Cleaver said he told them he could not run with his ankle wound. He said the police shoved Hutton, who was blinded by the tear gas that had driven them from the basement hiding place.

"So Bobby was just like stumbling from that shove and they shot him," Cleaver said. "They try and say that he was running and all that..."

(The Oakland police testified that they shot Hutton when he sprang to his feet and started to run after he and Cleaver had fallen.)

'Anything Within our Power'

"I think they would have shot me," Cleaver said, "but there were a lot of people who were attracted to that scene, hearing all that shooting. When they shot Bobby, then these people started screaming and yelling at them, you see."

Cleaver sees the police department and the courts as tools to maintain that "ruling clique."

"We say we'll go down with Huey and we mean that," Cleaver said. "We will not allow them to murder Huey. And that means doing anything, within our power to see that it does not happen."

He thought that a publicity campaign had created an atmosphere in which Newton stood a better chance of acquittal.

"If that fails, there are obviously other avenues that we have to explore," he said, adding when questioned: "I'm not prepared to talk about them."

(The case against Newton, as reflected in grand jury minutes, is this: On Oct. 28, an Oakland policeman stopped a car with two Negro men in it. He was joined by another patrolman in a few minutes. The other patrolman told him the driver of the car was Huey Newton. The first policeman told Newton he was under arrest and began to walk him to a police car.

(Shooting began. The second policeman was wounded, and has said he did not see Newton shooting. He fired his gun at Newton. The first policeman was killed. A Negro parked in the neighborhood was forced

at gunpoint to drive Newton to a hospital. Newton came into the hospital alone, with a bullet wound in his stomach. Newton's trial opened Monday)

William F. Knowland, now 60 years old, is one of the leading citizens of Oakland and of Northern California. He was born in Alameda, one of the Oakland suburbs.

His conservative political career ended in 1958 when he ran for Governor of California, hoping to build a springboard for a possible Presidential campaign, and lost.

To the Black Panthers and other radicals of the East Bay cities, Mr. Knowland has come to personify forces that these people believe control political and economic life to their disadvantage.

Mr. Knowland is aware of his position and accepts it as a burden of his station in life. The door to his locked suite has a peephole in it.

"Oh, that's been in since sometime after that group went up to the state legislature of California with its shotguns and rifles," he said.

"For what purpose do you go into a legislative body armed with shotguns and rifles?" he asked. "This is not the right to petition the government for a redress of grievances. This is a form of an attempt at intimidation."

Mr. Knowland thought the Black Panthers were wrong to take their guns to the legislature, and wrong to get involved in the April gun battle.

"Regardless of what race or background they come from, they would still be subject to criticism if they followed those practices," he said.

Of the Panthers' main theme, he said:

"Well, there's only one way to free Huey and that is—speaking of Huey Newton—and that is to have the trial proceed, and the jury will determine his guilt or innocence as charged."

"But if you mean the community should abdicate or the court should abdicate their responsibilities merely because of pressure or a threat to burn the city down unless he is freed, I don't think the community is going to yield to that kind of coercion or pressure."

Mr. Knowland became personally and editorially furious over the picketing of the Housewives' Market.

He said some of the 11 demands made by the picketing organizations would have been satisfactory.

"Some of them the Chief of Police and City Manager and Mayor would fully concur with," he said, "namely more Negro policemen on the Oakland police force."

"Or participating in different youth programs," he went on. "The police department has been doing that for years, and undoubtedly if they weren't considerably undermanned at the present time, would do more of it."

But other demands were unacceptable, he said. Certainly, the city was not going to seek indictments against the police who killed Bobby Hutton. Nor was it going to assign more policemen to walking beats.

"It's utterly unrealistic to say that you ought to take all your policemen and put them on foot when the criminal may be in a high powered car in

a bank holdup or whatever the situation may be," Mr. Knowland said.

Nor could an elected police commission be created. Oakland has city manager government, Mr. Knowland pointed out, "so it would require an altering substantially of the governmental structure here."

(Mr. Knowland, it seemed to those at the Housewives' Market that day, failed completely to understand that the non-Panther Negro activists were saying in effect to the city: "Look at us. We don't have guns. We believe the Oakland Police Department has unduly oppressive to black people. Here's a list. Pick something. Talk about it. Move to accommodate us.")

Referring to the picketing, Mr. Knowland said: "Well, this I felt was in effect coercion—a form of extortion—you either accept our political beliefs or we close you up. And this is the thing that I think brought down democratic free governments under the Nazis, under the Fascists, under the Communists."

"I felt that unless this was challenged at the Housewives' Market, which had been singled out for no particular reason except that they had a predominant Negro clientele, that it would spread like a cancer through the community."

What racial relations in Oakland need, he said, are better lines of communication. Asked whom he would talk to if he needed information from the Negro community, he said:

"People who are active in some of the major groups like the N.A.A.C.P., which I think is basically a constructive group and certainly not made up, as the activist group say, of Uncle Toms, but is made up of people who were fighting for civil rights before most of these activists were born."

The walk from the Tribune building to police headquarters passes through declining downtown Oakland.

Chief Gain is a slender, intense man of about 6 feet. He has been a policeman for 21 years and grew up in Oakland. He became chief last September.

'Repetition of Words'

Chief Gain has developed the tactic of dealing with general questions about allegations of racial bias against his department by asking for specific instances.

He did so when asked to answer allegations of the Panthers and other Negroes about police cruelty. "All general," he asked, "or any specifics?"

"They say you fellows murdered Bobby Hutton," he was told.

"Oh, I see," Chief Gain replied. He would not discuss the gun battle or the Panthers as an organization.

"If any individual feels they have a grievance against the police, any misconduct, what I would like to see is some specification, either to the Police Department or to some other agency," Chief Gain said. "So that we can get some documentation to perform an investigation to determine what the facts are."

"I am concerned that what we can have is a repetition of words," he said. "This can become a part of a belief system, within a city or within an area, or perhaps even nationwide. It does concern me that

you can have an issue like this that becomes somewhat self-perpetuating."

He acknowledged that policemen conduct themselves badly sometimes, but he added: "When it does occur I take immediate action. I just will not tolerate it."

"What we're talking about here is image," he said. "Image is very, very important. It can be one thing so far as substance is concerned, and another so far as image is concerned."

Chief Gain did not see how a situation could be created in which investigations of routine complaints of police misconduct could be taken out of police hands.

The procedure now followed is for a complaint to be investigated by the police themselves. If Chief Gain thinks the punishment of an officer is merited, he recommends it to the City Manager. During June, he recommended that three officers be dismissed, one for mistreating a Negro.

He was asked about assigning Negro officers to Negro districts, as some black activists have proposed.

"Right now it's a policy in this department to assign Negroes without a regard to their being Negroes," he said. "If I had a sufficient number of Negroes — I might have to have 50 to do it — I think it would be perhaps a good thing to do."

Chief Gain is described by his fellow officers in Oakland as a liberal policeman. This exchange occurred in the interview.

Q. Don't you think the sole reason the Black Panthers have any support is that their supporters look on them as standing between Negroes and the police?

A. I haven't discerned that.

Q. How else would you explain the growth and the ability to acquire followers of the Black Panther organization?

A. I don't know. Of course I couldn't give you another explanation that might be more plausible or even more acceptable. I don't know that much about it. I do know this, that there are numbers of dissatisfied persons in this city and that when you have persons with some charisma, as the leaders of this organization have, and they do make statements, they would be looked upon by many as an authority.

A recent issue of Ramparts magazine reviews the Panthers' history under the title "The Persecution and Assassination of the Black Panthers as performed by the Oakland Police Under the Direction of Chief Charles R. Gain, Mayor John Reading, et al."

It was pointed out to Chief Gain that Ramparts said Newton's lawyers feared that the police would fabricate prosecution evidence if they knew his defense in advance.

"That's ridiculous," said Chief Gain. "The Oakland police department will not fabricate."