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### **“Yes, Separation! No, Integration!” A Historical Analysis of Black Nationalist Groups Across the Decades: From the Civil Rights Era to the Contemporary Era**

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**“Yes, Separation! No, Integration!” A Historical Analysis of Black Nationalist  
Groups Across the Decades: From the Civil Rights Era to the Contemporary**

**Era**

John McGee

Reviewed by: Dr. Jonathon Hooks

History 499: Capstone

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As tens of thousands of protesters have taken to the streets with the chants of “Black Lives Matter!” Or “hands up, don’t shoot” issues such as police brutality and institutional racism have once again been thrust into the national spotlight. The strength, longevity, and occasional violence associated with these protests have made Americans from all backgrounds aware of the demands of the protestors. Unsurprisingly, these recent protests, often concerned with issues of race and justice, have drawn comparisons to the powerful protests of the civil rights era. As a result of the success of the civil rights movement and leaders such as Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr., the Black Power and Black nationalist movements took root in America hoping to unite the invigorated spirit of many African Americans. Like the civil rights era, the recent protests have had a radicalizing impact on some African Americans, as membership of contemporary Black nationalist groups has exploded in recent months. This paper examines four Black nationalist groups: the Black Panther Party (BPP) and the Republic of New Africa (RNA), both of which were a product of the civil rights era, as well as the New Black Panther Party (NBPP) and the Not F---ing Around Coalition (NFAC), two extremist groups that are leading the charge of the most radicalized African Americans in today’s society. Although the time-period in between the four groups stretches nearly 55 years, the core tenets of Black nationalism have stayed the same. While the four groups have clear differences in politics (from Marxism, to African socialism, to left-wing paramilitarism), ideology, and areas of influence, they all believe that the United States and its institutions are unreformably racist and the only way for Black people to become truly liberated is through the creation of an independent Black nation or, at the very least, self-determination for the Black citizenry in America.

## Background

Before a thorough examination of the aforementioned groups can occur, it is first necessary to establish the definitions that this paper will use to describe Black nationalism and to provide background information and the historical contexts of the four Black nationalist groups.

Solidifying a definition of Black nationalism is no easy task. Intense debate exists amongst scholars and Black nationalists alike as to what it means to be a “Black nationalist” or what characteristics a group must possess in order to be considered a “Black nationalist” group. However, for the purpose of this paper, Black nationalism will be defined by four key criteria as introduced by Dr. Melanye T. Price. Dr. Price is an expert in Africana studies, having written several leading books and academic articles on the subject. Currently, Price is an endowed professor of African-American politics at Prairie View A&M University. According to Price,

First, all Black Nationalists support Black self-determination. Second, a self-determining Black community is also one that has a clear plan for independence and self-sustenance by virtue of its own financial, political, and intellectual resources in the form of self-help programs. Third, there is consensus that Blacks must sever any ties with whites that foster notions of Black inferiority and white superiority.<sup>1</sup> Last, there is a focus on fostering a global view of Black oppression that connects African American oppression to that of people of African descent cross-nationally.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Note: According to the [Associated Press' stylistic guidelines](#) Black is appropriately capitalized when referenced “in a racial, ethnic or cultural sense, conveying an essential and shared sense of history, identity and community among people who identify as Black” However, white when referenced in a racial sense is not capitalized because “white people generally do not share the same history and culture, or the experience of being discriminated against because of skin color.” The author understands that the use of this grammar is controversial and he wishes to not alienate any reader. He is, instead, simply following stylistic guidelines.

<sup>2</sup> Melanye T. Price, *Dreaming Blackness: Black Nationalism and African American Public Opinion* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 19.

The most important takeaway from Price's definition is that Black nationalists *must* strive for the independence of Black people from an already existing nation or aim to destroy the existing political infrastructure of a nation and replace it with a government run for and by Black people.

Furthermore, before this paper can adequately present the similarities and differences between the four Black extremist groups examined, the historical contexts and backgrounds of the groups must be explained, beginning with the two Black nationalist groups of the late civil rights era, the BPP and the RNA.

The Black Panther Party, officially known as the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense, was founded in the late summer of 1966 in North Oakland, California by two Merritt College classmates Bobby Seale and Huey P. Newton.<sup>3</sup> Before the founding of the party, the two co-founders were active in civil rights era student political groups such as the Afro-American Association (AAA) and the Soul Students Advisory Council (SSAC).<sup>4</sup> In these groups, Seale and Newton worked towards engaging Black students in the political process and incorporating Black studies and the "correct history of African Americans" into the college's curriculum.<sup>5</sup> However, Seale and Newton became increasingly more radicalized after seeing the instances of police brutality during the civil rights era protests and in their own community in Oakland. The BPP was founded, therefore, with the original goals of encouraging Black people to take up arms for self-defense against police and racist whites, patrolling of the streets to protect Black people in Oakland from police brutality, and holding the police force accountable. While these goals remained at the center of the party's ideology, the group quickly radicalized and broadened the

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<sup>3</sup> Bobby Seale, *Seize the Time: The Story of the Black Panther Party and Huey P. Newton* (New York: Random House, 1970), 60.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, 24 and 27.

<sup>5</sup> David Bliven and Alan Maass, "The Revolutionary Legacy of the Black Panthers", *International Socialist Organization*, <https://socialistworker.org/2016/11/03/revolutionary-legacy-of-the-black-panthers>.

scope of its message. By early 1967, the group released its famous “Ten-point platform” which included calls for “an end to the robbery by the CAPITALIST of our Black community” and “freedom for all Black men held in federal, state, county and city prisons and jails.”<sup>6</sup> By 1969, the BPP had a weekly newspaper that “had a circulation of a quarter-million copies”<sup>7</sup> and over 5,000 members across the country with chapters in Seattle, New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, Oakland, and Los Angeles.<sup>8</sup>

The other defining Black nationalist group of the civil rights era was the RNA. The Republic of New Africa was founded in March of 1968 in Detroit, Michigan<sup>9</sup> by brothers Richard and Milton Henry. (Shortly after the founding of the RNA the Henry brothers adopted new names, Imani [Richard] and Gaidi [Milton] Obadele. They will be referenced by the latter names throughout the paper.) Since its inception, the RNA was a revolutionary and nationalist group. In fact, during the RNA’s first official meeting, group members chartered and signed a Declaration of Independence and made plans to elect officials for its provisional government. From 1968 to 1970, the group was headquartered in Detroit and actively lobbied the United States government for land and reparations to be given to Black members of the RNA.

The Obadele brothers and other representatives traveled to Tanzania in late 1968 as an attempt to gain international support for the organization. The group met with representatives from the Communist Party of China and the First Secretary for the U.S.S.R. The group also met with the administration of Tanzanian President Julius Nyerere, who was a prominent member of the

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<sup>6</sup> Huey P. Newton, *To Die for the People: The Writings of Huey P. Newton* (New York: Random House, 1972), 3-5.

<sup>7</sup> Bliven and Maass, “The Revolutionary Legacy of the Black Panthers”

<sup>8</sup> Arianne Hermida, “Mapping the Black Panther Party in Key Cities”, *The University of Washington*, [https://depts.washington.edu/moves/BPP\\_map-cities.shtml](https://depts.washington.edu/moves/BPP_map-cities.shtml).

<sup>9</sup> The Background of The Republic of New Africa, 1972, Series 3, Box 1, Folder 4, pg 1, Tougaloo College Civil Rights Collection, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson, Mississippi, accessed October 16, 2020.

“African socialism” movement.<sup>10</sup> This trip proved incredibly influential for the RNA as the Obadele brothers returned to the United States with a newfound doctrine of African based socialism and calls for a global socialist revolution.

By 1970, the two Obadele brothers had disagreements over the best course of action for the organization. Because of this, the RNA was split along brotherly lines, with those loyal to Gaidi (formally Milton Henry) staying in Detroit, while those who supported Imani (formally Richard Henry) moving to Jackson, Mississippi to start what they called the liberation of the “southern Kush region.”<sup>11</sup> In the remainder of this paper, RNA refers to the post-1970 southern branch of the RNA and their attempts to establish an independent nation-state in the Black Belt .

Moving across eras, the two contemporary Black extremist groups studied in this paper the NBPP and the NFAC each have relatively unknown histories and backgrounds.

The New Black Panther Party was founded in Dallas, Texas by radio talk show host Aaron Michaels<sup>12</sup>, in either 1989 or 1990.<sup>13</sup> While conflicting reports on the foundations of the group exist, experts agree that Michaels was influenced by controversial Milwaukee city Alderman Michael McGee who on multiple occasions proclaimed the necessity for using urban guerilla warfare tactics to solve issues of poverty, drugs, and police brutality in the inner-city.<sup>14</sup> However, unlike the BPP and the RNA, the group struggled for traction and notoriety as “the

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> The Mississippi Kush District, 1970, Series 2, Box 1, Folder 3, Tougaloo College Civil Rights Collection, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson, Mississippi, accessed October 16, 2020.

<sup>12</sup> D.J Mulloy, “New Panthers, Old Panthers and the Politics of Black Nationalism in the United States,” *Patterns of Prejudice* 44, no. 3 (2010): 219-21. <https://eds-b-ebSCOhost-com.libprxy.muw.edu/eds/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=3&sid=3f55479e-6464-41ed-92c8-13385a42d45c%40pdc-v-sessmgr02>

<sup>13</sup> Conflicting reports exist as the Southern Poverty Law Center and the Anti-Defamation League say 1990, but the Official National NBPP Black Power Manual gives the date as 1989. This information was obtained in the above source.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 220.

NBPP spent the immediate years after its formation attempting to build itself up into a national organization.”<sup>15</sup>

The group spent much of the early 90s confined to the Dallas Metropolitan area fighting so-called instances of racism involving the City of Dallas’ government and the Dallas Metropolitan School Board. However, that changed in 1997 when the former spokesperson for the Nation of Islam, Khallid Abdul Muhammed, became National Chairman of the NBPP.<sup>16</sup> Under Muhammed’s leadership the group began to radicalize, as Muhammed proclaimed anti-white and anti-Semitic rhetoric from the helm of the organization<sup>17</sup> and individual members began to heavily arm themselves as a response to a murder of a Black man by three white men in Dallas, Texas in 1998.

Muhammed’s rhetoric, while controversial, gained the group a national following. Shortly after the start of his tenure, NBPP chapters began to emerge in urban areas throughout the country, most notably in Philadelphia and the northeast.<sup>18</sup> A rising number of chapters increased notoriety also brought the group under the attention of several civil rights organizations such as the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) and the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) who listed the NBPP as a designated hate group. While the NBPP attempts to brand itself as the successor to the defunct BPP of the 60s and 70s by wearing similar uniforms, using the Black Panther insignia, adopting a Ten-Point Program, and brandishing weapons for self-defense, the Huey P. Newton Foundation swiftly denounced the organization by stating “There is

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<sup>15</sup> Idid, 220.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 221.

<sup>17</sup> New Black Panther Party, *The Southern Poverty Law Center*, <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/group/new-black-panther-party>

<sup>18</sup> “There Is No New Black Panther Party”: The Panther-Like Formations and the Black Power Resurgence of the 1990s,” *The Journal of African American History* 104, no. 4 (2019) 623. <https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/full/10.1086/705022>

no New Black Panther Party... [Muhammed and the NBPP promote] concepts absolutely counter to the revolutionary principles on which the Party was founded.”<sup>19</sup> Following Muhammed’s death in 2001, the group has continued to expand under the leadership of Malik Zulu Shabazz and currently the NBPP has chapters in many states and cities; arguably the most influential and fastest growing region is in the Deep South ranging from Louisiana to Georgia.

While the history of the NBPP is complicated due to a lack of exact records and data, the history of the NFAC is further complicated by its very recent inception. According to records and news reports, the NFAC made its first appearance as counter-protestors to a Ku Klux Klan rally in Dayton, Ohio in 2019.<sup>20</sup> The group is headed by Supreme Commander, John “Grandmaster Jay” Johnson. Not much is known about Grandmaster Jay as he conceals information about his personal life and employment to the news media. However, Grandmaster Jay has a very active and influential YouTube channel that he uses to announce news and future plans for the NFAC, as well as lectures on his political and social philosophy and reactions to current news.<sup>21</sup> The NFAC and its Supreme Commander have consistently used social and news media as a recruiting tool and to broadly showcase the accomplishments of the group. Because of its successful social media messaging, the group has exploded its membership over the past year. While the group features support and membership from all across the country, the NFAC is most active in the South.

The Great Unifier: Armed Resistance and Guerilla Warfare

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<sup>19</sup> Huey P. Newton Foundation, “There Is No New Black Panther Party: An Open Letter from the Dr. Huey P. Newton Foundation.” <http://web.archive.org/web/20140106051514/http://blackpanther.org/FAQs.htm>.

<sup>20</sup> Shane Paul Neil, “What Is the NFAC, and Who Is Grandmaster Jay?” *Complex*, September 4, 2020, <https://www.complex.com/life/not-fucking-around-coalition-grandmaster-jay-explainer>

<sup>21</sup> “The Official Grandmaster Jay”, *Youtube*, [https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCh4s1\\_\\_5WWRSnurVdhDejcw](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCh4s1__5WWRSnurVdhDejcw).

While the four Black extremist groups examined in this paper may differ in membership, political ideology, geographic location, and time period, they are all unified in holding the necessity for armed resistance as a centerpiece of their group's doctrine. These groups' use of arms can be broken down into three categories: arms as a form of self-defense, arms as a form of political protest, and using arms as a means of achieving a political agenda such as toppling American capitalism, achieving Black independence, or advancing the global socialist revolution.

First, all four Black nationalist groups encourage the use of weapons as a means of self-defense. The Black Panther Party for Self-Defense was the first Black nationalist organization to achieve national media attention for its use of weapons and its encouragement of Black people to take up arms in self-defense. While the Black Panthers are historically known for their Marxist-Leninist ideology, the party was first and foremost established as a force to regularly patrol the streets of Oakland to reduce police brutality and to protect Black people from racially motivated police harassment and profiling.<sup>22</sup> By 1967, Newton and Seale had called for Blacks to arm themselves not only for protection from police, but “to arm themselves against this terror [of fascist America].”<sup>23</sup> It is clear that the BPP saw not only the police as threats but the American political system as a whole, and the best way to hold these institutions accountable was by the Black masses taking up arms in self-defense.

The RNA viewed armed self-defense in another light. While the group was undoubtedly concerned with police brutality, the RNA's major concern was the struggle for land in the Deep South. The overarching doctrine for the RNA was to hold independence plebiscites of all

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<sup>22</sup> Dean E. Robinson, *Black Nationalism in American Politics and Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2006) 58.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, 58.

counties in the Deep South with majority Black populations and pressure the federal government into honoring the results of the independence referendums and ceding all “legally obtained” land to the RNA to establish a Black nation.<sup>24</sup> In order to solidify this newly formed nation, the RNA knew that it needed weapons to protect its borders against its enemies. In January 1971, the RNA reached a deal with a Black Mississippi farmer named Lofton Mason to buy 20 acres of his land pending a successful independence plebiscite in Bolton, Mississippi.<sup>25</sup> Almost immediately after this decision was announced,, enraged whites and the KKK threatened to harm Mr. Mason and members of the RNA.<sup>26</sup> Because of these threats, members of the RNA formed a protective barrier of armed militants around the property to protect themselves and Mr. Mason. This decision proved to be consequential for the group as Hinds County District Attorney, Jack Travis, successfully argued that the land transaction could not take place due to the fact that the RNA were an “armed insurrection” and an “invasion” to the United States.<sup>27</sup> While the RNA ultimately failed in purchasing land for a new Black nation, the message they sent was clear. “Free the land!”<sup>28</sup> by any means necessary.

In the contemporary era, the NBPP has carried the torch for Black extremist groups promoting the use of arms for self-defense. According to official social media posts from the Golden Triangle branch of the NBPP, militia members attend regular trainings that include

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<sup>24</sup> Imari Abubakari Obadele I, “Republic of New Africa: The Struggle for Land in Mississippi”, 1973, Series 1, Box 1, Folder 1, pgs 1-2, Tougaloo College Civil Rights Collection, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson, Mississippi, accessed October 16, 2020.

<sup>25</sup> “The Background of the RNA”, 2.

<sup>26</sup> “Yes, Separation - No, Integration!”, 1971, , Series 1, Box 1, Folder 1, pgs 1-2, Tougaloo College Civil Rights Collection, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson, Mississippi, accessed October 16, 2020.

<sup>27</sup> The Background of the RNA, 2-3.

<sup>28</sup> The Republic of New Africa: Where is our Land?, 1971, Series 1, Box 1, Folder 1, pg 4, Tougaloo College Civil Rights Collection, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson, Mississippi, accessed October 16, 2020.

martial arts and self-defense, as well as, target shooting at a gun range.<sup>29</sup> These trainings are designed to teach and protect Black members of the NBPP against police brutality and violent racism.

Additionally, the NFAC and their Supreme Commander Grandmaster Jay encourage the use of weapons for the self-defense of Black people against what he calls “racially motivated acts of violence.”<sup>30</sup> The Supreme Commander’s comments come at the heels of the Ahmaud Arbery incident where a group of white men shot and killed Ahmaud while running because he thought Arbery was the perpetrator of a robbery. According to the leader of the NFAC, if Black people carry weapons in mass, white people will think twice before inciting violence.<sup>31</sup> These examples illustrate that Black extremist groups consider using arms as a form of self-defense necessary because the current American society, whether through its local or federal police force or through its citizenry, are actively racist towards Black people. For many of these groups, the creation of an independent Black nation is the solution to the problems of racism in America, and an immediate solution is to take up arms to prevent instances of racism whilst participating in the American system.

Second, being armed while politically protesting was an ideology that gained widespread support during the civil rights era. Arguably the two most important leaders of the time, Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X, differed on the best ways to bring about change. King and other political leaders such as John Lewis and Medger Evers strictly participated in non-violent

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<sup>29</sup> Southern Region Starkville, MS New Black Panther Party, *Facebook*, <https://www.facebook.com/straightgame.kennel/posts/3254750471312805>

<sup>30</sup> The Black Armed Militia Speaks On Ahmaud Arbery, Self-Defense, And Protection At A Murder Scene, *YouTube*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wdIJWRBMRWE>

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

protests. However, Malcolm X and his supporters favored a different approach. Liberation and freedom for the Black people in America by “any means necessary.”<sup>32</sup> Malcolm X and his ideology have been and continue to be a cornerstone message of Black nationalist groups.

Following Malcolm X’s assassination in 1965, the BPP and the RNA began to use his name and likeness as a symbol of martyrdom. As his legacy was described “[in both parties] Malcolm X loomed large.”<sup>33</sup> Both groups took Malcolm X’s support of self-defense and used it to support their own ideologies by arming themselves to politically protest.

The most notable instance of the BPP using arms as a form of political protest was when two dozen members “invaded”<sup>34</sup> the California State Capitol in Sacramento in response to an act of legislation that repealed a law allowing the public to carry loaded firearms.<sup>35</sup> This law, according to the BPP, was signed as a direct response to the Black Panthers brandishing weapons on regular patrols of the Oakland streets.

The Black Panther Party for Self-Defense calls upon the American people in general and the Black people in particular to take careful note of the racist California Legislature which is now considering legislation aimed at keeping the Black people disarmed and powerless at the very same time that racist police agencies throughout the country are intensifying the terror, brutality, murder, and repression of Black people.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Malcolm X, “By Any Means Necessary”, June 28, 1964, accessed at *The Washington Post*, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/video/national/malcolm-xs-by-any-means-necessary-speech/2015/02/20/16fec00-b955-11e4-bc30-a4e75503948a\\_video.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/video/national/malcolm-xs-by-any-means-necessary-speech/2015/02/20/16fec00-b955-11e4-bc30-a4e75503948a_video.html)

<sup>33</sup> Robinson, *Black Nationalism in American Politics*, 65.

<sup>34</sup> David Carracio, “From the pages of The Bee, 1967: Armed Black Panthers invade Capitol,” *The Sacramento Bee*, <https://www.sacbee.com/news/local/history/article148667224.html>.

<sup>35</sup> California Legislature 1967 Regular Session Assembly, <https://clerk.assembly.ca.gov/sites/clerk.assembly.ca.gov/files/archive/FinalHistory/1967/Volumes/67ahr.PDF>

<sup>36</sup> Seale, “Seize the Time”, 47-8.

The RNA also carried the message of Malcolm X and his platform of self-defense and protesting by “any means necessary” into their own doctrine. This is best exemplified by the group’s decision to name Betty Shabazz, the widow of Malcolm X, as the RNA’s second Vice-President.<sup>37</sup> Under Shabazz, the group continued to incorporate Malcolm X’s philosophy of using violent resistance when necessary. Additionally, the RNA planned on naming their aforementioned land purchased from Mr. Lofton Mason as “El Malik” in memorial to Malcolm X’s adopted name of el-Hajj Malik el-Shabazz.<sup>38</sup>

In the contemporary era, the NFAC is the most prime example of brandishing weapons as a form of political power. The paramilitary group has roamed the streets of Louisville, Stone Mountain, GA, and Lafayette, LA in mass brandishing weapons in order to protect Black people and to protest the deaths of individuals, such as Breonna Taylor, who died, according to the group, at the hands of police brutality.<sup>39</sup> Additionally, the NFAC brandished weapons during its protest in Louisville over the verdict in the Breonna Taylor case, in response to a group of alt-right militant counter protesters, called the Three Percenters<sup>40</sup>, displaying arms and threatening the group.<sup>41</sup> While tensions between the groups were high, violence was ultimately avoided. However, the two opposing groups were split along racial lines, which saw NFAC Supreme Commander Grandmaster Jay reiterate the call for Black people to take up arms in self-defense

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<sup>37</sup> Davenport, “U.S. Government against the RNA”, 124.

<sup>38</sup> “Where is our Land?”, 5.

<sup>39</sup> Sarah Ladd and Ben Tobin, “Black Militia Leader”, *The Louisville Courier-Journal*, <https://www.courier-journal.com/story/news/local/2020/07/27/louisville-protests-nfac-leader-explains-accidental-discharge/5520115002/>

<sup>40</sup> Note: According to the ADL, the Three Percenters are a predominantly white alt-right paramilitary organization that has ties to anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim rhetoric. <https://www.adl.org/resources/backgrounders/three-percenters>

<sup>41</sup> Chris Kenning, Phillip M. Bailey, et. al, “Opposing armed militias converge in Louisville, escalating tensions but avoiding violence”, *The Louisville Courier-Journal*, July 25, 2020, <https://www.courier-journal.com/story/news/local/2020/07/25/louisville-protests-nfac-three-percenters-expected-demonstrate/3288198001/>

against groups who are anti-Black. The NFAC's actions ultimately align with the third clause in Dr. Price's definition of Black nationalism, which states "that Blacks must sever any ties with whites that foster notions of Black inferiority or white superiority."<sup>42</sup>

#### When Politics and Militarism Meet

Finally, this paper examines the use of arms by Black nationalist groups to achieve their political goals. As previously mentioned, the BPP were one of the first Black nationalist groups to receive national attention due to their rapid growth and radical ideology. What started as a street surveillance squad designed to highlight and stop police brutality, quickly turned into a group with a global agenda. By May 1967, the group had transcribed the first of its famous "Ten-Point Platforms" which called for "[the] power to determine the destiny of our Black Community. Full employment for our people. All Black men to be exempt from military service. Land, bread, housing, education, clothing, justice, and peace for all people,"<sup>43</sup> amongst others. The most notable demand was the call to end capitalism in America. Newton and the Panthers believed that even after the successes of the civil rights movement than a "new racism" still existed. According to Newton, this new form of racism was caused by "post coloniality, and global capitalism" that resulted in Black people and other groups of color "lagging behind other groups in housing, schools, and job opportunities."<sup>44</sup> The BPP argued that capitalism, and by extension slavery and colonialism, were white supremacist institutions. The party's justification for this claim was the fact that slavery, driven by Euro-centric capitalism, has sought to erase the African American ethnicity by suppressing African traditions, language, culture and instead forcing assimilation to whiteness. Therefore, the only way for Black culture and traditions to

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<sup>42</sup> Price, "Dreaming Blackness", 19.

<sup>43</sup> Newton, "To Die for the People", 3-5.

<sup>44</sup> Patricia Hill Collins, *From Black Power to Hip Hop: Racism, Nationalism, and Feminism*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006), 75.

survive and thrive is if American capitalism was abolished and replaced with a system where Black people determined the destiny of their own communities.

As a response, the BPP advocated for a Marxist-Leninist government that recognized the power and strength of the people, the Black people. This ushered in the Black Power era, which sought to strengthen and protect Black and African culture and tradition from the American capitalist system, which sought to take it away. The Black Power movement in itself states that Blacks make up a “cultural nation” and the movement is a way to reclaim the “Black culture” and the “Black identity.”<sup>45</sup> Only under a communist government, could the downtrodden and neglected people be seen and heard. To the BPP, the Black nation had been suppressed by white colonialism, and destroying capitalism and replacing it with communism was the way for Black people to finally shed their chains of oppression.

As a result, the BPP branded itself as the defenders of the Black lumpenproletariat population.<sup>46</sup> The term “lumpenproletariat” is a term coined by Karl Marx to describe “the unorganized and unpolitical lower orders of society who are not interested in revolutionary advancement.”<sup>47</sup> As the defenders of the Black lumpenproletariat, the Black Panthers described themselves as a “vanguard party” in which through armed uprising, or massive protests, would lead the Black masses into power and establish a government that was ruled by the Black people for the Black people.<sup>48</sup>

In order to achieve success, the BPP believed that the Black people would need to destroy the system from the inside by causing the “destruction of the oppressor’s [white capitalist]

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid, 99.

<sup>46</sup> Cornel West, “The Paradox of the African American Rebellion” (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), 32.

<sup>47</sup> Dictionary. Com, <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/lumpenproletariat>.

<sup>48</sup> Newton, “To Die for the People”, 18.

machinery.”<sup>49</sup> In the final stages of the revolution, according to the BPP, “the guns, hand grenades, bazookas, and other equipment necessary for defense must be supplied by the power structure.”<sup>50</sup> This, in effect, meant that the BPP believed in stealing the tools of the American system to destroy it from the inside-out. One potential reason the BPP branded itself as the vanguard party for the Black underclass could be the fact that both co-founders of the BPP, Newton and Seale, were both highly educated and they therefore believed that they could organize and direct the poorly educated Black lumpenproletariat.

In addition to the call for the armed overthrow of American capitalism, the BPP also supported a global socialist revolution. Under the direction of party elite, Eldridge Cleaver, the BPP began actively supporting armed communist revolutions and governments across the world. The party focused on communist leaders around the world, who like themselves, described themselves as the defenders of the underclass. The first of these leaders was Kim Il Sung of North Korea. According to Cleaver and the BPP, Kim Il Sung and the North Korean regime were “reshaping Marxism-Leninism for the benefit of national liberation struggles of Third World peoples.”<sup>51</sup> According to this wing of the BPP, the North Koreans successes in the Korean War proved that Marxist-Leninism could defeat capitalism on a global scale. Much like the ideology of the North Koreans under Kim Il Sung, the Panthers saw the “Black community as a colony with an inherent right to self-determination.”<sup>52</sup> Cleaver and a group of Black Panthers visited North Korea twice to learn the fundamentals of the North Korean communist ideology, Junche.

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Robin D.G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002), 94-95.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, 95.

The Panthers also threw their support behind other communist leaders of the time such as Fidel Castro in Cuba, Mao Tse-tung in China, and Ho Chi Minh in North Vietnam. This wing of communist revolutionaries came to power via guerilla warfare tactics against a common enemy of colonialism and capitalism. At this point in time, the BPP saw self-determination as the “means of community control within the urban environment, not necessarily the establishment of a Black nation.”<sup>53</sup> Therefore, in order for the Black people and the BPP to advance their doctrine of Black self-determination they had to have control of the streets. An extreme wing of the BPP, led by Cleaver, believed that the way to control the community was to engage in urban guerilla warfare, much like the revolutions of Mao, Fidel, and Minh. However, this radical push within the party was met with resistance by Newton who sought to support the global communist leaders in theory and political support but not through military agreements.

One way that Newton sought to gain support for the Panthers in the mainstream Black community was by establishing community programs. These programs, which proved quite successful, included the Breakfast for Children program and the establishment of “Liberation Schools.”<sup>54</sup> These programs aimed to fill the gap that was left in many underserved communities by providing free food to children in need and providing after school programs and educational opportunities to children in the affected communities. The BPP also provided legal aid, transportation assistance, and medical testing to affected communities.<sup>55</sup> While the party received substantial support from the urban Black community, its downfall began due to heavy FBI surveillance and police altercations.

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid, 95.

<sup>54</sup> Robinson, “Black Nationalism in American Politics”, 59.

<sup>55</sup> Black Panther Party, *Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Black-Panther-Party>.

In 1968, the FBI led by J. Edgar Hoover classified the BPP as a “communist organization and an enemy to the U.S. government.”<sup>56</sup> Because of this official classification, the FBI was legally able to devote resources to the destruction of the party and prosecution of its members. The FBI COINTELPRO program began raiding BPP headquarters, arresting and heavily prosecuting members, and accusing members of the BPP as being enemies of the United States. The downfall of the organization was solidified when co-founder Huey Newton was charged with murdering a police officer in 1967, and the raiding of BPP headquarters in Sacramento, Seattle, Chicago, and New Orleans resulted in prolonged firefights between the Panthers and the FBI and the eventual arrests and deaths of many prominent members.

The other prominent Black nationalist organization at the time, the Republic of New Africa founded in 1968, also advocated for the destruction of American capitalism, but unlike the Panthers called for an independent Black nation within the borders of the United States. The ruling ideology of the RNA was the forced cession of land from the United States to Black populations in the South and the case for reparations to be paid to Black descendants of slaves in the United States. Much like the BPP, the RNA described the American system as “white-supremacist capitalism.”<sup>57</sup> According to Imari Obadele and the RNA, the capitalist system under slavery, colonialism, and conquest has “historically deprived people of color, as a group, of billions or even (globally) trillions of dollars of wealth.”<sup>58</sup> Because of this belief in deprived wealth, the RNA advocated that Black people in America were entitled to self-determination, independent land within America, and reparations to pay back Black people for the labor and suffering of their ancestors.

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Charles W. Mills, *From Class to Race: Essays in White Marxism and Black Nationalism* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003), 173.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, 188.

The first efforts of the RNA came in the early 1970s when they petitioned the United States government for control of five states with high black populations (LA, MS, AL, GA, SC) and an annual payment of \$3 billion dollars of which one third would go to Black individuals, one third would go the government of the RNA, and one third would go to a “national congress of organizations” that included Black churches and civic groups that worked to end drugs and crime in Black communities and supported programs that advanced Black people economically.<sup>59</sup> The RNA was also optimistic in winning reparations due to the recent payment of reparations from the United States government to Japanese-Americans who were interned during the war. The RNA lobbied the government for independence plebiscites in majority Black counties in the Deep South. The RNA believed that since Black slaves were involuntarily brought to America, and after their emancipation were forced into taking American citizenship instead of being given the option to return home to their ancestral homes of Africa; therefore, their current descendants should be able to vote for independence from the United States.<sup>60</sup> The RNA demanded the United States government honor the results of these plebiscites and any county that voted for independence be immediately handed over as sovereign territory of the RNA.

The fertile soils and the heavily Black areas of the Deep South were named the “Kush District” by the RNA and they targeted this region due to the large Black populations already existing in the area and “with very little immigration we can overwhelm these states with our people.”<sup>61</sup> After the plebiscites, the RNA planned to establish a socialist Black nation-state in

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<sup>59</sup> William L. Van Deburg, *Modern Black Nationalism: From Marcus Garvey to Louis Farrakhan*, (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 333.

<sup>60</sup> Imari Abubakari Obadele, “The Struggle for Land.”

<sup>61</sup> ‘Nation’ Places Sites in Mississippi, “Republic of New Africa Subject File 1970-71”, Tougaloo College Civil Rights Collection, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson, Mississippi, accessed October 16, 2020.

their newly acquired lands. This new nation-state, named the Republic of New Africa, would operate on a political and economic system called “ujamaa” or African socialism.<sup>62</sup>

The RNA’s support for ujamaa came from Tanzanian President Julius Nyerere, who coined the term and attempted to establish the system in his country. The ujamaa system resorts back to a traditional African style of society where “the major means of production and trade are placed in the trust of the state to assure the benefits of this earth and man’s genius and labor to society and all its members.”<sup>63</sup> Under ujamaa, all revenue was shared and the production of food and the cultivation of land was based on a co-operative system, meaning the “members” of the co-op own the land, the equipment, and the crop together.<sup>64</sup> Additionally, all necessities including food, housing, industry, and health services would be collectivized.

While the RNA hoped the land would be given by the federal government in recognition of the independence plebiscite of Black counties in the South, the RNA believed that all industry and services would be financed by the payments of reparations from the US government. These reparations would be used to create “housing factories” that would build an estimated 100,000 homes to be given for free to all Black people wishing to live within the borders of the Republic of New Africa. Additional money would be stored in the newly created “Black National Bank,” which would provide monetary services for Black people in the RNA.

While the RNA called for communal living and a socialist Black republic within the United States, they also called for an armed “global revolution” aimed to free all oppressed people across the world.<sup>65</sup> In addition to the call for an armed global revolution the RNA used

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<sup>62</sup> Free the Land! Letter to MS Black Leaders, Series 3, Box 1, Folder 4, Tougaloo College Civil Rights Collection, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson, Mississippi, accessed October 16, 2020.

<sup>63</sup> “Where is our Land”, pg. 8.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid*, 9-10.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid*, 13.

weapons to protect their land and members in Mississippi from racist white people and threats from the KKK. Calling for an armed revolution, as previously mentioned, resulted in the RNA facing legal ramifications for being deemed an armed insurrection and an enemy to the United States.

The RNA ultimately failed for two reasons, the first being their extreme demands from the United States. While the provisional government of the RNA attempted to legally petition the United States for land and reparations several times, the government never seriously considered the group's demands. In 1971, Congressman John Conyers met with President Nixon to attempt to legitimize the proposals of the RNA; however, Nixon and his administration did not seriously consider the RNA's proposals.

Secondly, like the BPP, the RNA faced intense scrutiny and violence from the FBI's COINTELPRO division. By 1973, the FBI had jailed the RNA's President and Vice-President, along with their Minister of Information, Southern Regional Interior Minister, and forced several members to exile to Cuba. The conflict culminated on August 27, 1971 when the FBI and the Jackson Police Department raided the headquarters of the RNA in Jackson, Mississippi. The heavily armed RNA group engaged in a firefight with the officers, killing one and wounding another. This ultimately resulted in the arrest and conviction of eleven RNA members and rendered a serious blow to the morale of the remaining group.

While the NBPP remains officially separate from the BPP and the RNA, it appears in many ways to be a continuum of their revolutionary ideologies. The most notable reference to the BPP is the NBPP's 10-point platform.<sup>66</sup> The NBPP's 10-point program, which was adopted

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<sup>66</sup> "New Black Panther Party for Self-Defense 10-Point Program and Platform," *The New Black Panther Party*, <https://nbpp.org/>.

in the early 2000s, specifically references objectives from the 1966 BPP platform such as the call for full employment of Black Americans, exemptions of military service, and reforms to Black education. The contemporary group goes beyond the original platform by making a unique suggestion calling for tax exemption for all Black Americans, “as long as we are deprived of equal justice under the laws of the land.”<sup>67</sup>

The NBPP also adopts the far-left economic and political ideologies of the Civil Rights Era Black nationalist groups but tailors them to fit the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Like the RNA, the NBPP advocates for the use of ujamaa, or African socialism, in order to consolidate Black economic power.<sup>68</sup> The NBPP also calls for reparations to be paid by the federal government as another stimulus of the Black economy that the group states is long overdue. The group’s most visible mantra “POWER IN THE HANDS OF THE PEOPLE! WEALTH IN THE HANDS OF THE PEOPLE! ARMS IN THE HANDS OF THE PEOPLE!”<sup>69</sup> not only exemplifies the group’s belief in ujamaa and far-left politics but also the party’s mission to be the vanguard for Black self-determination. The group’s “warrior code” clearly states that the struggle for liberation will be revolutionary and an armed and dedicated vanguard is what’s needed for success.<sup>70</sup> The group not only wishes to be liberate the Black population within the United States but also adopts Marcus Garvey’s call for pan-Africanism and the belief in the true liberation of all Black people. This militarization is seen on the local level as the Starkville area NBPP chapter holds bi-monthly shooting and self-defense trainings for its “militia members.”<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> “New Black Panther Party for Self-Defense 9 Local Objectives,” *The New Black Panther Party*, <https://nbpp.org/>.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> “Warrior Code,” *The New Black Panther Party*, <https://nbpp.org/>.

<sup>71</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/straightgame.kennel/posts/3418410004946850>.

While the group calls for an end of global capitalism and colonialism of African nations and “oppressed peoples everywhere,” it furthers this message by using racist anti-white and anti-Semitic rhetoric. For example, the NBPP cites “Zionism”<sup>72</sup> as a form of capitalist domination over Black people worldwide. In addition, the group specifically states that they are “all-Black, [and] not integrationist.”<sup>73</sup> This is further exemplified in the NBPP’s “9 Local Objectives” memorandum in which they advocate for the “retaking of Black neighborhoods” from gentrification and the “white takeover.”<sup>74</sup>

On the other hand, the NFAC, in large part due to their recent creation, has not fully formulated a political and economic doctrine. However, based on their actions and coordination in recent months, it is clear that the group’s core ideology is left-wing paramilitarism. As previously stated, the group has gathered in mass, up to several hundred militants, at some of the country’s most visible protests against police brutality and Confederate symbolism and monuments. In Louisville, group members armed themselves and took to the streets to “support Black Lives Matter protestors” and to demand justice for Breonna Taylor.<sup>75</sup> Additionally, the group sought to protect Black Lives Matter protestors from armed right-wing militias, such as the Three Percenters, that were also present.

Much like the NBPP, the NFAC also brands themselves as proudly “all-Black.”<sup>76</sup> Most notably, the group’s Supreme Commander, Grandmaster Jay, has stated that the group’s

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<sup>72</sup> “NBPP 10-Point Program,” <https://nbpp.org/>.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> “NBPP 9 Local Objectives”, <https://nbpp.org/>.

<sup>75</sup> Ladd and Tobin, “Black Militia Leader”

<sup>76</sup> Nicole Chavez, Ryan Young, et. Al, “An All-Black Group is Arming Itself and Demanding Change. They are the NFAC.” CNN, <https://www.cnn.com/2020/10/25/us/nfac-black-armed-group/index.html>

membership is completely comprised of Black people and the group is not willing to partner with white allies or other groups of color.<sup>77</sup>

### Looking Forward

A question that remains unanswered is *where will these groups go from here?* The year 2020 has undoubtedly changed the course of racial relations within the United States and has prompted conversations nationwide about the necessity of policing and criminal justice reform. However, while the conditions that fueled the modern rise of Black extremism such as instances of police brutality widely distributed over social media and a nation heavily divided over politics continue to rage on, it is possible that the messages of these Black extremist groups are beginning to fade. This is due to the fact that despite months of heated protests and civic unrest, the United States government has refused to support the solutions proposed by contemporary Black extremist groups such as the NBPP and the NFAC. If this is the case, it is likely that we will see these groups reform their ideology and shift their tactics in the hopes of achieving widespread success and maintaining relevancy.

As discussed, two of the main reasons the Black nationalist groups of the 60s and 70s failed in achieving success were due to overwhelming FBI interference and ideologies that featured policies that were nearly impossible to achieve. As the BPP and the RNA learned, a group of several thousand dedicated members is not nearly enough support to topple a world order and an economic hegemony. Therefore, in order to achieve immediate success, will the NBPP and the NFAC tailor their messages to focus on smaller, and possibly more achievable,

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

reforms such as defunding the police, demanding the retrials of Black men held in jails, and the removal of Confederate monuments? The answer remains unclear.

Additionally, the figure of the late Malcolm X is a substantial influence and icon to the four Black extremist groups examined in this paper. However, as Malcolm X was assassinated nearly 55 years ago, it is possible that his influence, especially amongst the ever increasing youth populations of contemporary Black nationalist groups, is waning. Therefore, as an effort to increase membership modern groups might need to include a more historically relevant and contemporarily well-known figure to serve as the inspiration of the groups moving forward.

Finally, while the four Black extremist groups examined in this paper have obvious differences, most notably membership demographics, geographical reach, and political philosophy, it is clear that they are more similar than different. Common to all of the groups examined across eras is the necessity for Black people to arm themselves in order to self-protect and combat opposing forces; the belief that the United States, its government, and its police force, are racist and unfairly target Black people; that Black people should be in charge of decisions involving themselves; and the belief that widespread economic and political change is needed in order for Black people to finally break the chains of oppression. While tactics and strategy for Black nationalist groups have changed over the course of 60 years, it is clear that the core values of Black nationalism have remained largely unchanged.

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