The Ideological Impetus and Struggle in Praxis for Multiracial Radical

Alliances in the San Francisco Bay Area, 1967-1980

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the history of multiracial alliances among internationalist radical activists in the San Francisco Bay Area from the late 1960s through the 1970s. Using the approaches of social movement history and intellectual history, I critically assess the ideological motivations radicals held for building alliances and the difficulties they encountered with their subsequent coalitional work in four areas of coalescence—the antiwar movement, political prisoner solidarity, higher education, and electoral politics. Radical activists sought to dismantle the systemic racism (as well as economic exploitation, patriarchy, and the intersections of these oppressions) that structured U.S. society, through the creation of broad-based movements with likeminded organizations. The activists in this study also held an orientation toward internationalist solidarity, linking the structural oppressions against which they struggled in the United States to the Vietnam War and other U.S. militaristic interventions overseas and viewing these entanglements as interconnected forces that exploited the masses around the world.

Scholarly and popular interpretations of Sixties radical movements have traditionally characterized them as narrowly-focused and divisive. In contrast, my research highlights the persistent desire among Bay Area radicals to form alliances across these decades, which I argue demonstrates the importance of collaborative organizing within these activist networks. Scholarship on coalitional politics also tends to emphasize “unlikely alliances” between “strange bedfellows.” In contrast, this project illuminates how sharing similar ideological principles predisposed these radical organizations to creating alliances with others. Coalitions remain integral to contemporary social and political movements, and excavating the possibilities but also problems within previous
broad-based organizing efforts provides a usable history for understanding and confronting societal issues in the present day. At the same time, the multifarious manifestations of racism and other systems of inequality demonstrate the need to first understand how these oppressions affect minority groups uniquely, before we can understand how they affect groups in comparison to each other.
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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

The 1960s and 70s marked the apex of visible radical activism in the history of the United States, an era that carried reverberations into the present day. Perhaps the most prominent rallying cry to arise during this time was, “All Power to the People.” This phrase embodied one of the distinguishing characteristics of radical activism from more mainstream contemporary forms: the shift from primarily focusing on securing minorities’ civil rights and protections under the law to a more immediate attainment of control over the social, economic, and political institutions and systems that structured their lives.

Former Black Panther Party (BPP) spokesperson Kathleen Cleaver expounded on this idea at a 1998 Howard University symposium on the edited volume *The Black Panther Party Reconsidered*, an early contribution within the emergent scholarship of the Panthers over the past twenty years. Reflecting on her activist history in her “Women, Power, and Revolution” speech, Cleaver discussed the mid-1960s shift within her first activist organization, the Student Nonviolent Committee (SNCC). SNCC transitioned from fighting for “Freedom Now” to advocating “Black Power” in the struggle to eradicate the “legal, social, psychological, economic, and political limitations” Black Americans experienced.¹ By the time she joined the Oakland chapter of the Black Panther Party in November 1967, Cleaver continued, her generation of activists increasingly

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fought to end other oppression intertwined with the racism they experienced, particularly U.S. military interventions overseas, class domination from the “capitalist powers” of the world, and gender discrimination.  

Cleaver also touched briefly on the multiracial nature Sixties-era anti-racist activists, emphasizing the efforts of the Black Panther Party to create connections with organizations from a diversity of backgrounds:

In a world of racist polarization, we sought solidarity. We called for Black power for Black people, Red power for Red people, Brown power for Brown people, Yellow power for Yellow people, and, as Eldridge Cleaver [former BPP Minister of Information and late husband of Kathleen Cleaver] used to say, White power for White people, because all they’d known was “Pig power.”

Across the country in the late 1960s through the 1970s, the Black Panther Party created alliances with activists ranging from the Chicana/o Brown Berets and Chinese American Red Guard Party in the urban US West to the Puerto Rican Young Lords and the Appalachian migrant Young Patriots Party in Chicago. Through these alliances, these radicals sought to create a world liberated from the oppressive limitations Cleaver discussed for all people within and outside of the United States.

Yet this explanation of “All Power to the People” highlighted potential problems in the application of this phrase. For one, it implied a similar societal position among all working-class people struggling against capitalism, erasing the ways that white supremacy worked in conjunction with capitalism to perpetuate itself. Cleaver’s analysis also glossed over the differences among racial minority groups and the unique histories

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3 Ibid., 125.
and problems that differ from other racial groups. As feminist scholar Andrea Smith articulates, white supremacy oppresses different racial minorities based on different logics; in the context of the 1960s and 1970s, this manifested in divergences in strategies and mobilizations among racial minority activists along with the convergences. In addition, as often with radicals during this era, Cleaver’s rhetoric presupposes an inclination toward unity among racial minorities and the working class. Such alliances, however, often were characterized by a seemingly contradictory ubiquity and unsustainability, as coalitions and solidarity movements abounded while rarely lasting beyond a few years. It is this point from which this study departs in exploration of this seemingly contradictory dynamic.

This dissertation explores the creation, maintenance, and dissolution of multiracial radical alliances in the San Francisco Bay Area from 1967 to 1980. Using the approaches of intellectual history and social movement history, I examine the ideological underpinnings of Bay Area radicals’ desire for alliance-building endeavors while also

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4 Andrea Smith, “Indigeneity, Settler Colonialism, White Supremacy,” in Racial Formation in the Twenty-First Century, ed. Daniel Martinez HoSang, Oneka LaBennett, Laura Pulido (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2010), 68-69. Smith identifies “three primary logics” of white supremacy: slavery (Blackness as synonymous with “slaveability”), genocide, resulting in the erasure of Indigenous people and traces of their histories and cultures; and orientalism, or the believed perpetual “otherness” of those deemed as outside threats of US society. Smith also clarifies in a later interview that other logics might exist that constitute white supremacy, with the central idea remaining that white supremacy “operates through multiple logics...are related to each other...and oppress you [racial minorities] by making you think that the way to survive is to take part in the other pillars,” such as people of color serving in the military against Orientalist enemies. Andrea Smith, quoted in Sharmeen Khan, David Hugill, and Tyler McCreary, “Building Unlikely Alliances: An Interview with Andrea Smith,” Upping the Anti, 10, <http://uppingtheanti.org/journal/article/10-building-unlikely-alliances-an-interview-with-andrea-smith/>.

5 I use “alliance” as an umbrella term under which “coalition” and “solidarity” fall. I define “coalition” as a formal merger, temporary or permanent, between two or more organizations or other contingents, working actively in tandem toward common goals. I use the term “solidarity” in reference to any public proclamations of support from an individual or organization to another.
delineating the difficulties of living out this revolutionary praxis. The Bay Area served as
a locus for radical activism throughout the 1960s and 1970s, as the anti-war and peace,
Black Power, Asian American, feminist and women’s, American Indian, various
Latina/o, New Communist, gay and lesbian liberation, environmental, and other
movements found a base throughout Bay Area communities. In turn, many of these
radicals and radical organizations sought to forge alliances with others, envisioning
themselves as combating common enemies, particularly racism, class oppression, and
patriarchy. Indeed, as I demonstrate throughout this study, multiracial alliances
comprised a central yet understudied aspect of the history of postwar radicalism in the
United States, both in the Bay Area and beyond.

Radicalism, for the purposes of this dissertation, refers to ideas and actions aimed
toward creating fundamental changes within (or in some cases, the complete dismantling
of) the structures, institutions, and systems that oversee societies. What exactly
constitutes “radicalism” remains difficult to pin down, since determining whether
someone or something is “radical” or not is subject to specific historical contingencies.
To narrow the subject base for this study, this dissertation will examine activists who
organized around three symbiotic ideological currents that ran throughout radical leftist
activism in the context of the post-World War II Bay Area.

Internationalism comprised the first and most encompassing of these currents.6
This dissertation defines internationalism as the orientation of an individual or group
toward envisioning themselves as part of a larger global community beyond the

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6 Although many anarchists have historically been both internationalist and radical, their history in the
Bay Area during this time is beyond the scope of this dissertation.
boundaries of their locales and countries. Bay Area radicals drew their internationalist inspiration from two interrelated developments in the postwar world: the continual growth of communism around the world and the decolonization and national liberation movements in the Third World of Africa, Asian, and Latin America. Although international unity among communists faltered as the Cold War era progressed, particularly with the Sino-Soviet split of the 1950s, the political critiques and strategies for social change outlined by theorists such as Karl Marx, Vladimir Lenin, and Mao Zedong sustained the veracity of communism as a vision for societal reorganization throughout the world. In addition, people of color radicals in the United States drew upon the ideologies of Third World liberation revolutionaries such as Franz Fanon and Che Guevara in theorizing their strategies for societal change.

Yet these radicals did not typically just try to rigidly apply these theories of revolution to their work in the United States; rather, Bay Area radicals incorporated these theoretical insights into analyses of their local conditions and national developments, dialectically formulating dynamic new theories of capital, the state, and the intersections of racial, class, and gender oppression in a U.S. context that would serve to mobilize the U.S. masses. From anti-war activism and political prisoner movements to the building of a U.S. vanguard party and the eventual shift toward electoral politics, radicals within the Bay Area sought and often found allies in these struggles throughout different “sites” of alliance. Bay Area radicals oriented themselves (at the very least, rhetorically) toward the

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7 In the United States, the Communist Party USA and other communist entities faced government repression throughout most of the early twentieth century, particularly from the 1930s through the McCarthy era of the 1950s. By the 1960s, however, the country saw a resurgence in the prominence of communist ideologies among activists on the left, particularly with Marxism-Leninism and Maoism.
collective liberation of all oppressed peoples, and forming alliances with other activists across the lines of race (as well as class, gender, and other social divisions) served as a viable and desirable strategy in the struggle against multiple, often intersecting forms of oppression. Not only did the ideological underpinnings of these organizations stress the need for radicals to advance their causes across racial lines; these radicals also saw the benefits and fruits of multiracial organizing and thus placed this at the heart of their revolutionary praxis.

Historian Jason Ferreira has conceptualized internationalist radicalism in San Francisco during this time as a “polycentric Third World movement” and an “imagined political community.” Situating oneself within a broader Third World or other internationalist imaginary necessitated the negotiation of these radicals’ subjectivities. People of color radicals also simultaneously negotiated new multi-/pan-ethnic racial identities that served to unify historically-disparate ethnic groups into larger political entities that also tended to have internationalist orientations. This process of negotiation at times caused issues. Historian Judy Tzu-Chun Wu has noted that a form of “radical Orientalism” developed among U.S. Third World radicals during this time, where instead of creating an East-West binary that denigrated the East, U.S. radicals held the

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revolutionaries in China, Viet Nam, and other parts of Asia as inspirations and models for what revolution in the United States could be, thus creating romanticized and idealized visions of these revolutionaries, who were essentially above reproach.\(^{10}\) Despite this and similar pitfalls, radicals’ situating themselves within the broader global context of national liberation struggles formed a critical element of their ideological development toward alliance-building endeavors.\(^{11}\)

Anti-imperialism comprised the second major ideological current within the larger Bay Area internationalist radical community in the 1960s and 1970s. I define anti-imperialism as a political orientation against the militaristic, political, economic, and cultural imposition of one country or other entity over another. The application of ideas regarding imperialism and colonialism differed among activist organizations. Because of their unique history as the Indigenous people of what became the United States, American Indians activists struggled with issues stemming from the legacies and continuing realities of US settler colonialism. For Black radicals and other non-Indigenous people of color, the rhetoric of “internal colonialism” served as a metaphor for the structural and institutional racism they faced in their lives, particularly the segregation and discrimination they faced within urban America. In line with their internationalist orientation, radicals articulated racism and other forms of oppression they experienced in the United States as domestic forms of imperialism connected with U.S.


\(^{11}\) This dissertation will also sporadically discuss various transnational radical organizations, such as the Union of Democratic Filipinos (Katipunan ng mga Demokratikong Pilipino, or the KDP), who bridged the divide between imaging themselves as part of the Third World struggle and formally becoming part of a Third World revolutionary movement.
interventions overseas. This articulation strengthened these radicals’ understanding of themselves as part of global revolutionary and liberation movements, since their resistance to U.S. domestic imperialism connected with anti-colonial resistance movements against traditional empires of the West, particularly the United States’ interventions into Southeast Asia and Latin America. That these imperialist interventions in the Third World was rooted in the perpetuation of what sociologist Howard Winant has called the “social fact” of racial inequality that the West had implanted into their colonies only provided further motivation for US radicals to support Third World national liberation movements.\textsuperscript{12} And this solidarity between US activists and Third World revolutionaries also fostered solidarity among self-proclaimed Third World peoples (racial minorities) within the United States.

Self-determination comprised the third major ideological current among Bay Area internationalist radicals. For the purposes of this study, I define self-determination as the capacity for a commonly-identified people group to control the governance, institutions, and systems of production within their community or society. The definition of “self-determination” varied among Bay Area radicals; while radicals such as the Black Panther Party, Los Siete de La Raza, and the Red Guard Party/I Wor Kuen viewed self-determination as community control of local institutions and governance, American Indian radicals viewed the struggle for self-determination in terms of gaining recognition and fulfillment of treaties between indigenous nations and the United States federal government, along with increased sovereignty in land-use and other rights. Although

\textsuperscript{12} Howard Winant, \textit{The World is a Ghetto: Race and Democracy since World War II} (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 1.
these specific conceptualizations of self-determination differed, Bay Area radicals understood the importance of oppressed peoples gaining autonomy away from their oppressors. Working in conjunction with likeminded oppressed peoples provided one avenue toward realizing the goals of the struggle for self-determination.

These three ideological currents pushed radical activists to create organizations and movements that addressed a broad range of issues. Bay Area radicals articulated the connections between different forms of oppression, most commonly the intersection between racism and the economic exploitation of the working class, with these activists often including women’s oppression as tied to the former two. Male-dominated organizations frequently subordinated anti-patriarchy to anti-racist and anti-capitalist endeavors within their agendas. Much of the Left at this juncture also did not consider homophobia and heteronormativity important enough to warrant central opposition like racism, economic exploitation, and sexism and patriarchy until the late 1970s or beyond. Venceremos Brigade member and later Third World Women’s Alliance leader Miriam Ching Yoon Louie recalls her organization’s internal debates over this question for the better part of the 1970s, finally accepting anti-homophobia as an integral part of their activism in the 1980s after they had transformed themselves into the Alliance Against Women’s Oppression. More surprisingly, some organizations like the Socialist Workers Party and the Revolutionary Communist Party (previously the Bay Area Revolutionary Union, then just the Revolutionary Union) considered homosexuality to actually be counterrevolutionary, whether because they argued it attracted another form of negative attention to the organization like the former or because they believed male homosexuality
led to the oppression of women like the latter. As feminist political scientist Wendy Brown theorizes, movements and political projects oriented toward liberating oppressed peoples often replicate society’s unequal power dynamics within these constituencies.\(^{13}\) The persistent marginalization of women and LGBTQ communities during the 1960s and 70s thus stunted an even greater potential toward social change within US society.

In addition, for all their ideological reformulations and desires to form alliances, Bay Area radicals found alliances difficult to sustain over long periods of time, with most lasting no more than a few years. Earlier alliances formed the foundation for later ones, creating what I term “genealogies of alliance”\(^{14}\) from one organization to others from the late 1960s through the 1970s. Although certain alliances might have fallen apart, they often laid the foundation for future collaborations, often spearheaded by individuals who moved from organization to organizations. I argue that these persistent efforts to form alliances across different mobilizations, issues, and organizations demonstrated the importance radical activists placed in coalitional politics, even though maintaining a united front against all forms of oppression proved elusive. Despite their shortcomings, these alliance-building efforts (along with others across the country) comprise an important chapter of Sixties radicalism that historians only recently have seriously engaged.


\(^{14}\) Although she does not use the specific phrase “genealogies of alliance,” Emily Hobson describes this idea in part in her recent study of LGBTQ radicals in San Francisco and Los Angeles from the mid- to late 1960s. Emily Hobson, “Imagining Alliances: Queer Anti-Imperialism and Race in California, 1966-1990,” PhD diss., University of Southern California, 2009.
Parameters and Methodology

This dissertation focuses on a subset of the multitude of organizations comprising the Bay Area internationalist radical community, focusing on what sociologist Philip Selznick has termed the “grass tops” of this community.¹⁵ Put another way, I emphasize the leadership among these grassroots organizations, since leadership most often steer organizations’ ideological course. The organizations I examine were primarily based on similar racial or ethnic identities, such as the Black Panther Party, Brown Berets, Asian American Political Alliance, and La Raza Unida Party, but at times also were multiracial in composition, such as with the Venceremos organization, the Third World Women’s Alliance, and the April Coalition. While not representative of the entirety of the Bay Area radicals, the subject base I have chosen for this study exhibited broad visions of what their liberation from oppression would look like and were eager in their endeavors toward building alliances.

Although alliances among radicals occurred at the state and national level as well, this dissertation hones its scope to a local study in order to more clearly illuminate the intricacies and exigencies of the process of forging alliances during this time. Rather than looking solely at one city or region, this paper defines “local” as the San Francisco metropolitan area as a whole, focusing primarily on Oakland, Berkeley, and San Francisco, while including cities south of these ones, such as East Palo Alto and San Jose. The growing interconnectedness of the Bay Area via improvements in public

transportation, the highway system, and communications technologies provided radicals greater ease in regularly meeting and organizing with each other. Historian Quintard Taylor has recently noted the need to write histories using the metropolitan area as a unit of analysis, and while Taylor characterizes “metropolitan” as “urban and suburban,” his central point about examining urban areas as larger interconnected entities remains pertinent for this dissertation project.16

Numerous factors provide the rationale for the periodization in this dissertation. Although the early and late parts of the dissertation will delve into the years before 1967 and after 1980, the bulk of the dissertation will occur within this timeframe. This dissertation resists easy periodization of the “Sixties” versus the “Seventies” and seeks to bridge these two broader periodization schemes. 1967 serves as an ideal starting point for this dissertation for two reasons. First, the Spring Mobilization to End the Vietnam War—a nationwide mobilization with a western United States rally point in San Francisco—in April of this year marked one of the first antiwar protests that prominently featured radicals in a multiracial setting. Although the Spring Mobilization as a whole was not radical, comprising primarily of reform-minded and U.S. home front-oriented activists, radicals such as future Black Panther Party leader Eldridge Cleaver played a central role in planning and speaking at the mass rally. The Spring Mobilization steering committee also featured a separate Black Caucus and a Mexican Caucus, thus demonstrating an understanding of the differential experiences of different activists in

resisting a common oppressive force.\textsuperscript{17} 1980 marks a suitable ending point for this dissertation, since virtually all of the core organizations examined within this project disbanded by this date, and the few that remained, such as the Black Panther Party and the Bay Area Revolutionary Union, by then recast as the Revolutionary Communist Party, had seen their public support and appeal all but vanished.

Methodologically, this study relies on research and analysis of archival materials, newspapers and other periodicals, audio recordings, photographs, video film, organizational pamphlets, newsletters, flyers, and other publicity literature, along with internal memos and correspondence, and government documents. I also employ the methods of oral history research, particularly to fill the gaps in the archival record. Oral histories prove particularly necessary to highlight the experiences of women radicals, as men often dominated the leadership and decision making of mixed-sex organizations and marginalized women’s voices and perspectives in the process. Although at times discrepancies existed between written and oral efforts, I avoided privileging one medium over the other and instead weighed the sources against each other and other sources, marshaling the evidence until I could come to a conclusion or presenting the discrepancy when unable to do so.

\textbf{Scholarly Literature and Contribution}

The extant scholarly literature on radicalism in the 1960s and 1970s is voluminous, with a particular upsurge of publications since the turn of the millennium.

\textsuperscript{17} “Steering Committee for Spring Mobilization” Box 2, Folder 3, Phillip Shapiro Papers, Special Collections, Stanford University
Much of this scholarship over the past fifteen or so years has centered the experiences of radicals of color, highlighting their heretofore underappreciated centrality during this historical moment. In addition, this recent scholarship has sought to disabuse the previously-dominant dichotomy of the “good Sixties” versus the “bad Sixties.” At times, the “good Sixties”/“bad Sixties” divide contrasts the non-violence of African American civil rights activists, the Students for a Democratic Society, and other white “New Left” organizations with the violent rhetoric and actions of organizations such as the Black Panther Party, the Weather Underground, and the American Indian Movement. More commonly, this dichotomy either neglects to include much discussion of the more “identity-politics” organized groups and movements of the late 1960s and early 1970s within the Black Power, Chicano, American Indian, Asian American, women’s, LGBTQ, and other movements or casts these groups as being too divisive with other leftist activists and impeding the creation of a unified U.S. Left in the political and social arena. Yet as scholars such as Elizabeth Martinez and Robin D.G. Kelley have noted, these alleged “bad Sixties” organizations formed because other organizations did not adequately advocate a broad enough platform for collective liberation and failed to integrate the struggles against racial, class, gender, and sexual orientation oppression into their agendas; these allegedly “more divisive” organizations actually tended to have

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broader and more comprehensive critiques against these intertwined forms of oppression and sought to eradicate them simultaneously.\footnote{For more criticisms and deconstructions of the “good Sixties”/“bad Sixties” dichotomy, see Elizabeth Martinez, *De Colores Means All of Us: Latina Views for a Multi-Colored Century* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 1998); and Robin D.G. Kelley, *Yo’ Mama’s Disfunktional!: Fighting the Culture Wars in Urban America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998), especially Chapter 4.}

The current scholarship tends to examine radicalism in the 1960s and 1970s within one racial or ethnic group. Yet whether with the Black Power Movement and the Black Panther Party, the Brown Berets within the Chicano Movement, other Latina/o organizations such as the Puerto Rican Young Lords, the Asian American movement, American Indian radicals and Red Power, or predominantly-white organizations like the Weather Underground, scholars tend to leave traces and hints of multiracial coalitions and solidarity within their work. Some scholars, such as historians Jeffrey O.G. Ogbar and Daryl Maeda, have devoted chapters of their larger monographs to multiracial alliances among radicals during this era. Yet overall, much of the recent literature confines itself to this narrower scope.\footnote{Ogbar, *Black Power*; Daryl Maeda, *Chains of Babylon: The Rise of Asian America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), and *Rethinking the Asian American Movement* (New York: Routledge, 2011). For other studies with varying levels of discussion about multiracial alliance-building, see Peniel Joseph, *Waiting ’Til the Midnight Hour: A Narrative History of the Black Power Movement* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 2006); and Joshua Bloom and Walton E. Martin Jr., *Black against Empire: The History and Politics of the Black Panther Party* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2013).}

The past fifteen or so years, however, has also seen the slow development of the historiography of multiracial radicalism in the 1960s and 1970s. Max Elbaum provides one of the earliest treatments of this subject in this recent historiography in his 2001 *Revolution in the Air*. Elbaum explicitly works against the “good Sixties”/“bad Sixties”
dichotomy and provides a broad overview of the New Communist Movement in the United States, primarily throughout the 1970s, of which the Bay Area Revolutionary Union and Venceremos eventually became a part. Jason Ferreira’s 2003 dissertation, “All Power to the People,” marked one of the first studies to place Third World radicalism as central to radicalism within San Francisco at large and demonstrates the complex and complicated nature of multiracial alliances and radicalism during this era.\(^\text{21}\)

Recent studies from Laura Pulido and Jakobi Williams have demonstrated the significance of multiracial radical alliances in the 1960s and 1970s in Los Angeles and Chicago, respectively. Pulido emphasizes the differential racialization and thus differential activism of the radicals she examines, while Williams’ work proves valuable in showing how a multiracial radical alliance of the late 1960s and early 1970s—the original “Rainbow Coalition”—formed the standard organizing strategy within Chicago city politics thereafter, even leading eventually to Barack Obama’s appropriation (yet as Williams stresses, not fulfillment) of the vision of the Rainbow Coalition for his 2004 U.S. Senate campaign.\(^\text{22}\) Thus, past multiracial radical alliances have permeated into the mainstream of the political landscape of the United States.

Other recent historiographies provide much needed context for this dissertation. Historians such as Mark Brilliant and Shana Bernstein have shown how multiracial activism also grew within more mainstream civil rights struggles in California.\(^\text{23}\) A


\(^{22}\) Pulido, *Black, Brown, Yellow, and Left*, 4, 19-21; Williams, *From the Bullet to the Ballot*, 205-212.

burgeoning historiography on Black-Latina/o coalitions particularly has emerged that has complicated scholarly understandings of the relation between these two groups, with some scholars such as Lauren Araiza also including radical organizations like the Black Panther Party. The historiography of the “Seventies” has grown exponentially, delineating the multiple developments during this time that explain the rightward shift of the country by the 1980s and other difficulties within the political economy of the 1970s that radical activists encountered. Studies from historians such as Vijay Prashad about the broader Third World national liberation and anti-colonial movements after World War II elucidate the development of multi-lateral cooperation among these different countries and movements, along with the abrupt end to many of the revolutions within Third World countries by the end of the twentieth century.


This study makes several key interventions into this existing scholarship. First and most importantly, in contrast to the dominant view of radicalism during this era as divisive, this dissertation will demonstrate the importance radicals placed on forging and maintaining alliances with likeminded activists during these two decades. Many radical groups emerging out of the late 1960s and early 1970s received criticism for being too identity-politics-oriented and thus divisive to the broader US Left. Yet, although divisiveness existed among radicals, examining their genealogies of alliance counters this criticism and shows that the ideological motivations for collective forms of activism remained constant throughout the tumult of the 1960s and 1970s, even if the alliances themselves did not sustain themselves over the long term.

In addition, rather than emphasizing the common trope of seemingly “unlikely” alliances that scholars such as Lauren Araiza and Sherry L. Smith use, I argue that the alliances examined within this study were likely, although not inevitable. In the words of geographer Laura Pulido, connections between various radical contingents “had to be carefully articulated and cultivated by political activists and leaders.”27 Yet because of their ideological orientations and at times similar experiences within US society, internationalist radicals in the Bay Area were more inclined toward alliances than not with other likeminded activists.

Ultimately, this dissertation will serve as a usable history of social movements, alliance-building, and the difficulties of sustaining alliances for collective liberation. Alliance-building endeavors and coalitional politics remain significant within social and

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political movements in the present, and understanding the promise and problems of alliance-building in the past provides a usable history for understanding how societies might better work together in the present toward making a more just and equitable world. At the same time, the multiple manifestations of racism, economic exploitation, patriarchy, and other oppressions signals the need to understand oppressed minority groups on their own terms, before examining them in relation and comparison to each other.

Chapter Overview

Chapter Two lays the backdrop for the rest of the dissertation by establishing the broader contexts and developments of the early post-World War II period through the mid-1960s. I examine the role of migrations and migrant experiences in the reconfiguration of the urban landscape of the postwar Bay Area, focused primarily on the creation of the postwar urban crisis, and its relationship to the resurgence of radicalism in the 1960s. Although they differed in place of origin and size, numerous migrant streams poured into the Bay Area during World War II and the subsequent two decades, and many radicals’ experiences as im/migrants from the rural U.S. South, Central America, Native American reservations, internment camps, and other places contributed to their radicalization. This chapter also considers more deeply the formation of racially-diverse urban spaces, such as the South Berkeley/North and West Oakland corridor and the Mission District in San Francisco, in the development of the Bay Area as a unique place for multiracial radicalism (and activism in general) later in the postwar period. Migrants
of color experienced similar strictures under the urban crisis, particularly with residential
discrimination, and this chapter explores how Sixties and Seventies radicals’ earlier
cross-cultural commingling in these urban spaces caused by the urban crisis was
formative in shaping their future orientation toward multiracial activism. Finally, this
chapter concludes by examining civil rights activism during the postwar era and its
limitations in addressing the root causes of racial and class inequality embedded within
the Bay Area’s postwar urban landscape, leading many to turn toward more radical
ideologies and tactics to combat this oppression.

The remaining chapters center on one or two events or institutions, with other
similar events or institutions discussed in a broader context to the central one for the
chapter. Chapters Three through Six also demonstrate the existence of genealogies of
alliance from one mobilization or cause to another. Chapters Three and Four focus on
two different aspects of anti-imperialism within Bay Area internationalist radicalism.
Chapter Three examines the changes in the nature of radicalism within the Bay Area
during the 1960s and how it contrasted with earlier radicalism within the Bay Area
through the 1967 Spring Mobilization against the War in San Francisco. This chapter will
posit the development of a “Vietnam turn” in postwar Bay Area radicalism, based not just
on the war in Vietnam per se but more so with how the international context, especially
with communism and the Third World movements of the postwar era, shaped the
contours of this zeitgeist of radicalism in the Bay Area. Although the Mobilization was
more liberal or even moderate, prominent radicals contributed key roles in its planning
and subsequent rally. In addition, the steering committee for the Spring Mobilization had
specific African American and Mexican American leadership caucuses, thus illustrating the growing understanding among leftists in the Bay Area that not only was anti-racism connected to the antiwar movement, since people of color disproportionately served and died in the military, but also that people of color had their own unique experiences and issues needing to be addressed within the larger landscape of social movements as a whole.

Chapter Four examines anti-imperialism as a form of domestic struggle by focusing on two interrelated political prisoner movements within the late 1960s and early 1970s Bay Area internationalist radical community as expressions of anti-imperialism at the local level, especially as it involved mobilizing multiracial alliances. The Free Huey Movement, lasting from 1967-1971 and organized around the trial proceedings of Black Panther Party co-founder Huey P. Newton, became a cause de jure for leftists nationwide and particularly in the Bay Area. Numerous allies approached the Black Panthers during this political prisoner movement, with Latinas/os, Asian Americans, American Indians, whites, and other Black organizations with varying degrees of involvement, and many of the alliances forged during the early mobilization of the movement, especially in 1968, laid the foundation for future alliances and solidarity, such as the 1970-1972 movement to Free Angela Davis and All Political Prisoners, which also carried local, national, and international resonance. Examining the Free Angela Movement broadens the scope of ideological motivations behind Sixties and Seventies political prisoner movements; while the main political critiques within the Free Huey Movement centered on the connections between racism, class oppression, and U.S. imperialism overseas in relation to political
prisoner movements and the justice system, the Free Angela Movement incorporated a critique of the justice system as inherently patriarchal, thus illustrating another aspect of intersectionality absent within critiques emanating from the Free Huey Movement.

Chapters Five and Six examine the politics of self-determination through two different models. Chapter Five examines the attempt to gain self-determination while trying to remain separate from the broader apparatus and grasp of the state by looking at two self-proclaimed Third World independent community colleges: Nairobi College in East Palo Alto and Venceremos College in Redwood City. Unlike the Third World Liberation Front strikes at San Francisco State College and the University of California, Berkeley, which aimed to carve out existing space within an existing institution of higher education, Nairobi and Venceremos embedded themselves within working-class communities of color to signify their belief that self-determination in higher education was tied to the struggle for self-determination among communities of color as a whole. While the activists at San Francisco State and UC Berkeley also articulated this belief, these Nairobi and Venceremos believed that this praxis could only be achieved independent of existing institutions, with pamphlets from the Colleges articulating the slogan of “The community is the campus.” This chapter will examine the histories of Nairobi College from 1969 to 1979 and Venceremos College from 1970 to 1973, with a particular emphasis on their struggles in day-to-day operations and making these two institutions, which were predominantly Black and Latina/o, respectively, truly Third World institutions that were accessible and comfortable for all people of color.
Chapter Six examines self-determination “within the system” through the history of the April Coalition (later Berkeley Citizens Action) within Berkeley and the efforts of the Black Panther Party and former Brown Berets now organizing within La Raza Unida Party in Oakland. As the 1960s turned to the 1970s, radical activists in the United States increasingly wrestled with the meaning of radicalism, with no issue proving more divisive than the entrance of many radicals more seriously, rather than symbolically, into the realm of electoral politics. This chapter will explore various dilemmas Bay Area radicals experienced while engaging with electoral politics, such as facing two fronts of opposition from conservatives and moderate liberals and experiencing the breakdown of preexisting multiracial alliances as a result of supporting different politicians at the local level. This dissertation ends with a conclusion that discusses briefly the decline of internationalist radicalism in the San Francisco Bay Area by the 1980s before summarizing the study and its main analytical points.
CHAPTER TWO

Migrations, Urban Crisis, and the Roots of the Multiracial Radical Sixties and Seventies in the San Francisco Bay Area

This history of internationalist radicalism and the multiracial alliances therein emanated from the transformations that the early postwar San Francisco Bay Area. The breadth and prevalence of radical activism in the San Francisco Bay Area was perhaps unmatched by any other U.S. metropolitan area during the 1960s and 70s. The area has also long served as key locus of migration for people within and outside the borders of the United States. Few scholars, however, have probed the interplay between radicalism and migrations in a Bay Area context, particularly in relation to the reconfiguration of the area’s urban landscapes throughout the first two decades after World War II. I argue that understanding the interplay between these phenomena is central to understanding the roots of Sixties and Seventies Bay Area radicalism. Indeed, prominent Bay Area radical activists came of age in the midst of these postwar transformations, often politicized by the structural impediments established during these decades.

Much of the extant scholarly literature on radicalism and migrations in the United States frames this relationship around immigrating radicals influencing politics and social movements in their new locales, with the state and dominant society working to counteract their influence and restrict their entry. These studies also overwhelmingly focus temporally on the years before World War II. In contrast, recent scholarship has demonstrated the transformative power of migrations themselves, emphasizing how
migrants’ experiences with the state and broader society politicized, then radicalized them, including those among the numerous postwar migrant streams to and within the United States.¹

In line with this recent scholarship, I argue that postwar migrations to the Bay Area and Bay Area migrants’ experiences influenced and shaped the later radical activism of numerous migrants, while also instilling a predisposition toward multiracial activism, in a multi-part dialectical process. First, the Bay Area experienced immigration during and after World War II that was unprecedented in its history. Migrant streams differed significantly in size and places of origin, but the majority of these migrants were working-class people of color. Internal migrants ranged from Black Southerners like Black Panther Party (BPP) co-founders Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale to post-Internment Japanese Americans like BPP and Asian American Political Alliance (AAPA) member Richard Aoki, and included white migrants like Armenian American Bay Area Revolutionary Union (BARU) co-founder Robert Avakian. Immigrants who made the

Bay Area their new places of settlement often came from areas with U.S. significant influence, such as El Salvadorans Rodolfo Antonio “Tony” and Mario Martinez and Honduran Danilo “Bebe” Melendez of Los Siete de La Raza, but also included those fleeing places without much immediate U.S. influence, such as Shanghai native Ying Lee (later Ying Lee Kelly), who immigrated to San Francisco at the tail end World War II. The Bay Area also served as a notable site of migration for American Indians, who migrated from within the confines of the North American continent yet whose migrant experiences were complicated by their often coming from (semi-)sovereign, federally-recognized tribal reservations, and at times from federally-terminated tribal lands in the 1950s and 1960s.

Second, in response to the racial composition of the migrants in these waves, white Bay Area residents throughout its regions devised a number of social calculations to spatially segregate themselves from these migrant populations. Some of these strategies were longstanding practices, most commonly through racially-restrictive housing covenants. Buoyed by the availability of favorable, government-secured home loans from the Federal Housing Administration beginning in the 1930s, the Bay Area also experienced mass suburbanization for the first time during and after World War II. Housing developments boomed on and beyond the periphery of San Francisco, Oakland, and other urban cores while also transforming longtime farmlands like those in the Santa Clara Valley south of San Francisco. White neighborhood organizations, bank lenders, and realtors worked, often in concert, to deny racial minorities (especially those of the working class) access to this new housing. With the mass exodus of whites from the Bay
Area urban cores came the divestment of the tax base from those areas, with some companies also moving their sites of operation to these new suburbs. Put together, spatial segregation and capital flight to suburbia created what I term “multiple urban crises.”

Multiple, in that the contours of this spatial segregation varied throughout the Bay Area; and multiple, in that racial minorities experienced the strictures of the urban crisis in different ways, even if some of their experiences were similar. With the formation of these multiple urban crises came inequities between the suburbs and urban cores in education, employment opportunities, treatment under the law, and other areas of society.

Yet concurrent with the formation and entrenchment of the urban crises was the formation of new panethnic racial identities, primarily among people of color. Although tensions initially existed between wartime and postwar migrant groups with their corresponding extant racial and ethnic communities, the strictures—or in the case of white migrants, the benefits—of the urban crises pushed co-ethnics into similar situations, with few racial minorities of any income level having access to new suburban housing and its attendant upward social and economic mobility. Moreover, because spatial segregation operated along a white/non-white binary, urban spaces such as San Francisco’s Mission District and the border along West and South Berkeley and West and

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North Oakland became sites of what I term “constricted commingling” among communities of color. Although they had their own unique experiences throughout these decades, people of color also faced similar strictures under the urban crises, especially limited housing opportunities, which caused increased exposure between and among these communities as the postwar era progressed.

Lastly, as common with marginalized migrant groups, the Bay Area’s communities of color would grow increasingly politicized during the postwar era in the face of the Bay Area’s multiple urban crises. Continuing in the longer activist traditions of the area, these activists and their white allies employed a number of strategies toward reforms that would alleviate the urban crises’ ill-effects, including legal battles and new legislation passed to protect the civil rights for racial minorities, such as the passage of local and state fair housing laws in the mid-1960s. Activism extended beyond the legal and legislative realms and into the streets, with organizations like the Community Service Organization (CSO) and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) increasingly organized public protests against the segregation and discrimination they experienced. Yet these reforms were limited in the changes they could bring and failed to address the root causes of the inequalities racial minorities faced. In light of these limitations, these activists turned to other avenues for societal change, with many turning toward more radical ideologies and praxis by the late 1960s and early 1970s.

This history holds significance for understanding Bay Area radicalism in the Sixties, particularly the multiracial alliances therein. The liberal reforms of the 1950s and 60s could not undo the inequalities derived from the spatial segregation and wealth and
resource disparities ingrained within the multiple urban crises, which arose as part of the World War II and postwar liberal state, and thus necessitated more complex and broad-ranging activism that sought to restructure society. Moreover, while proximity did not guarantee affinity, understanding the migrant experiences of future radicals of color, along with some white radicals, explains part of the orientation toward organizing across racial lines that so many Bay Area radicals held through the Sixties and Seventies. Sharing similar struggles in relation to the dominant society helped activists understand and envision themselves as being in similar oppressed positionalities within society, which predisposed them toward coalitional organizing later in their activist lives.

**Migrant Waves**

With the arrival of the first Spaniards and their subsequent colonization of most of the region’s Indigenous people came the onset of punctuated migration for the region. Even after California came under Mexican, then U.S. imperial control, and became a state in 1850, migrations to the Bay Area tended to be sporadic, particularly within the borders of the United States. In addition, the passage of increasingly restrictive, racially-discriminatory federal immigration legislation from the mid-1870s through the 1920s decreased the number of immigrants coming from Asia and Europe, and the area’s relatively far distance from the country’s borders meant that its migrant populations were smaller than those in the northern and southern borderlands.³

World War II and postwar migrant waves, however, eclipsed prior ones in size and scope, with a number of catalysts bringing disparate groups to the Bay Area. The entrance of the United States into the war brought the onset of round-the-clock wartime manufacturing to the area, on a much grander scale than the similar but smaller boom in manufacturing during World War I. An abundance of employment opportunities through wartime industries made urban America, particularly in the North and West, proved compelling for migrants within and outside of the U.S. looking for work. The early postwar era also saw a gradual opening up of U.S. immigration policy. Yet the migrations during and especially after the war were often the result of more than just “pull” factors; numerous “push” factors would force migrants from their homelands, with many not having much choice about whether or not to migrate.

Perhaps the largest and most noticeable migrant group into the Bay Area was the influx of Black Americans from the U.S. South. Hailing from across the region, but particularly from Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Oklahoma, and other western Southern states, Black migrants to the Bay Area comprised part of the Second Great Migration to the urban North and West. Black Southerners migrated to escape multiple crises; not only did they flee the white supremacist terror of the Jim Crow South, but the Great Depression-induced and New Deal-funded mechanization of the cotton industry forced hundreds of thousands of sharecroppers off tenant farming lands by the end of the 1930s. In addition, the economic opportunities in the West and North’s wartime industries outpaced those for wage laborers in the South, and the Bay Area long held a reputation as

a liberal metropolis where Black-white race relations existed with less hostility than in the urban North and especially the South. These combined factors combined caused a boom in the Black Bay Area population, from an estimated 18,000 in 1940 to almost 150,000 in 1950, then 240,000 in 1960; in Alameda County, which experienced the largest population boom of any local county, the Black population grew from a little over 12,000 in 1940 to over 111,000 in 1960.⁴

Included among these Black Southerners were future radical leaders like Black Panther Party co-founders Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale and San Francisco State College Third World Liberation Front striker and future Nairobi College president Donald Smothers. Newton, Seale, and Smothers were but a few of the many 1.5 generation Black migrants who moved as children with their families from the South to the Bay Area. Housing opportunities varied for these migrants. Texas-born Seale and Smothers were among those who lived in the handful of government housing projects in the Bay Area, with the former’s family initially settling into an apartment in Berkeley’s Codornices Village upon arrival in mid-1945 and the latter’s into Channel Projects near Hunters Point in San Francisco. Black migrants found housing from private renters or

realtors, although often with extended families living under the same roof, as did Black Panther Party founding member David Hilliard when he arrived in Oakland in 1952. A smaller percentage were able to secure their own homes. Nairobi College founding president Robert Hoover, who arrived at Stanford University in 1959 to begin graduate school after briefly visiting parts of California on his way back from military service during the Korean War, purchased a home with his wife Mary in unincorporated East Palo Alto three years after his arrival. Despite their disparate origins, Black Southern migrants tended to be optimistic about new opportunities within their new places of settlement.

Other internal migrant groups of varying circumstances settled in the postwar Bay Area, often displaced similarly to Black Southern migrants or in pursuit of more substantial economic opportunities. Large waves of white Southern migrants came alongside Black Southerners, often from similar economic circumstances. Longtime Mexican American migrant farm workers like the parents of Brown Beret Alex Gonzalez joined the extant Mexican communities in Oakland, San Francisco, and throughout the Bay Area. Many came from California’s Central Valley as former farm workers displaced by the construction of freeways like U.S. Highway 99 and the new network of canals wrought by the Central Valley Project. White rural Californians also increasingly migrated to the Bay Area, taking part in the general urbanization wrought by the postwar era. These rural-to-urban migrants included previously-marginalized white ethnic

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minorities, such as the Armenian American father of Bay Area Revolutionary Union co-founder Robert Avakian.6

Some internal migrant waves had not been displaced, but rather coercively removed by the federal government, and were comprised of former residents returning to the Bay Area, largely the case with people of Japanese descent (Nikkei) after internment during World War II. Of the over 120,000 Nikkei living in U.S. western states, approximately 20,000 lived in the San Francisco Bay Area in rural and urban communities alike and across multiple sectors of the economy. Unlike other western urban centers like Seattle, Washington, that saw significant Nikkei postwar population loss to the Midwest and other regions, the vast majority of Nikkei internees returned to the Bay Area. Yet the area to which they returned changed significantly, most noticeably with the influx of Black Southerners who often found residence in former Japanese enclaves throughout the Bay Area, such as the Western Addition neighborhood in San Francisco and West Oakland, along with areas like the housing projects in Hunters Point. Moreover, aside from rare cases like the family of Richard Aoki—whose grandfather managed to retain ownership of his house and noodle factory in West Oakland—Bay Area Nikkei returnees experienced between $203 and $251 million of income and property loss because of internment.7


Displacement was also prominent with immigration to the Bay Area as U.S. immigration policy gradually opened up from the mid-1940s until 1965. April Coalition and later Berkeley Citizens Action member Ying Lee recalls her family moving via chain migration away from her hometown of Shanghai beginning in 1937 with the Japanese invasion of the city. Migrating elsewhere in China, then Hong Kong and Kowloon City, then India, Lee’s family reunited with her father in May 1945 when she was thirteen years old. Although San Francisco had long been a hotbed of Sinophobic sentiment and public policy, China’s emergence as a U.S. ally toward the end of World War II had slightly opened up opportunities for Chinese Americans in the city, with an accompanied decrease in outward manifestations of Sinophobia.\(^8\)

In other instances, migrations to the Bay Area and the U.S. more broadly came as a result of U.S. interventions overseas. Brothers Rodolfo Antonio “Tony” and Mario Martinez, who would comprise two of six defendants in Los Siete de La Raza, migrated with their families from a barrio in San Salvador, El Salvador, in 1961. Their father had been a rural farmworking campesino in various parts of El Salvador, including large-

\(^8\) Interview with Ying Lee, August 4, 2015, in possession of the author.
scale coffee plantations, who, because of the country’s economic recession in the 1950s (wrought in part by U.S. capitalist interventions), migrated to San Salvador and found a position as an auto shop worker. As the country experienced increasing turmoil in the aftermath of a 1960 U.S.-supported right-wing coup and limited economic and educational opportunities, the Martinez brothers’ parents set themselves on migrating to the United States, living initially in San Francisco’s Mission District and later moving to Daly City just south of San Francisco, even as the brothers frequented the Mission into their high school years.\(^9\)

American Indian migrants to the Bay Area after World War II also felt displacement and exile in their unique migrant situation. Although commonly thought of as internal migrants, scholars such as Rachel Buff and Reyna Ramirez have demonstrated that American Indian urban migrations are transnational in nature, since most migrants come from (semi-)sovereign Indian reservations under U.S. settler colonial control and especially did so in the postwar era. Indians migrated to urban areas, primarily for economic reasons, before the implementation of federal Termination policy in 1953. Before Alcatraz Island occupation spokesperson Richard Oakes (Akwesasne Mohawk) migrated to San Francisco in the 1960s, for instance, he first took part in a longer tradition of Iroquois Confederacy peoples migrating to New York City in pursuit of economic opportunities, especially within the city’s ironwork industries. Pre-Termination migrants to the Bay Area added to the Indian population of the Ohlone and other Native groups indigenous to the area, as American Indian Movement leader Russell Means

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(Oglala Sioux) did with his family upon arrival in 1942 for wartime employment, then again a few years after World War II had ended.\(^\text{10}\)

Yet Termination and its parallel program of Relocation would bring larger migrant streams to the urban United States, under more dire circumstances. Termination ended federal recognition of dozens of tribes, and with it, any obligations the federal government held with these Indians. Moreover, because of the federal government’s continual treaty violations with federally-recognized tribes and underdevelopment or exploitation of most Indian reservation lands, American Indians experienced widespread unemployment with relatively few educational opportunities. United Native Americans leader and Alcatraz activist LaNada War Jack (Shoshone-Bannock; formerly Means, Boyer) saw the gamut of these experiences growing up the daughter of a former tribal chairman on the Fort Hall Reservation in Idaho. While her father and other Natives on the reservation succeeded in resisting federal infringement on their waterways and lands, they faced difficulties in convincing government officials for assistance to alleviate the poverty most experienced. Relocation served as one of the few avenues of relief Indians on reservations had in the postwar era, and from the 1950s to the mid-1960s, over 200,000 Indians relocated from reservations to urban areas throughout the United States. Even with its opportunities, however, Relocation operated in the assimilationist tradition that had grounded federal Indian policy since the late-nineteenth century. Among the

logics undergirding Relocation was that moving Indians from their home reservations and placing them in urban centers would cause Indians to lose their tribal cultural values and traditions and assimilate into the fabric of U.S. society, including the broader structures of the economy. Housing provided by or found through the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) stemmed from this assimilationist logic, as the BIA dispersed Indians throughout urban areas, rather than settle them in enclaves. Relocated American Indians in the Bay Area were dispersed around San Francisco, Oakland, and San Jose, and throughout different neighborhoods of those cities, adding another impediment in their transition into urban American life.11

Making Multiple Urban Crises

In response to the growing numbers and visibility of racial minorities, the majority white population reacted in a variety of ways to the non-white migrant streams that poured into the Bay Area during and after World War II. Visceral reactions toward racial minorities were relatively rare, especially in comparison to the Jim Crow South from which African Americans arrived. At the same time, the white majority counted racial minorities as undesirable in most societal domains and worked to separate themselves in these manners. Although residential segregation and discrimination existed before the postwar era, most notably with Chinese in San Francisco’s Chinatown, the

prevalence of segregation would come into stark relief after World War II. The specifics of each urban crisis, however, would vary by each region of the Bay Area.

Some discriminatory practices were common throughout the Bay Area. Most ubiquitous and longstanding of these practices were racially-restrictive housing covenants, a prominent feature of urban life on some scale throughout the urban West and North since the early 1900s. Often placed within the deed for a house or a contractual agreement with a neighborhood homeowners’ association, housing covenants explicitly barred homeowners, landlords, and realtors from selling a house in a neighborhood to prospective buyers who did not fit the desired homeowner criteria, in this case by racial group. One 1946 neighborhood association flyer from the Portola Heights district of San Francisco read, “The master deed of this area states that only members of the white Caucasian race are allowed to reside in this district, except as servants.”12 Housing covenants throughout the Bay Area persisted even after the Supreme Court ruled them unconstitutional in Shelley v. Kraemer (1948). Not all homeowners and landlords upheld housing covenants fully or sometimes at all. Richard Aoki recalled renting an apartment in Berkeley after his honorable discharge from the military in the late 1950s from a fellow military veteran who had excluded Blacks from his housing complex but accepted Aoki’s rental application and later “showed [Aoki] the restrictive housing covenant.”13 Robert and Mary Hoover found an apartment to rent in Palo Alto after repeatedly being rejected in their pursuit of purchasing a home in the city, although they stayed in the unit

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12 Quoted in Miller, “The Interplay,” 76.
for less than six months after the apartment owner found out the manager had rented to Black tenants, against the terms of the building’s housing covenant.¹⁴

Each region of the Bay Area, however, developed unique aspects of its urban crisis. Most similar to the urban crises that developed in other U.S. metropolitan areas was the suburban boom the Bay Area experienced, especially in the East Bay. The manufacturing hubs of the region like Oakland and Richmond had experienced a housing crisis during World War II, as available housing failed to keep pace with the booming population. While federally-subsidized housing projects formed one source of assistance, residents would not experience widespread relief until the mass availability of federally-backed and -secured home loans from the Federal Housing Administration. FHA loans drove the development of single-tract houses in and beyond the periphery of established cities, and for the East Bay, these developments largely sprang up in the Berkeley and Oakland hills and cities south of Oakland, such as San Leandro and Fremont. The FHA, however, left the administration of these loans to local authorities, who were overwhelmingly white throughout the country and gave preference to white applicants over non-white ones. Moreover, when applying for private loans, racial minorities often experienced redlining by banks, the practice whereby bank officials would draw red lines on city maps around neighborhoods they deemed undesirable for potential loan applicants, thus constricting racial minorities in the private sector as well As East Bay suburbs boomed, so did capital follow, such as the relocation of the Ford production plant from Richmond to Milpitas in the mid-1950s. Suburbs also sprung up in Marin County

¹⁴ Interview with Hoover
north of San Francisco and around San Jose in the South Bay. Yet while pockets of racial minorities gained access into suburbs throughout the Bay Area—such as Asian Americans in the North Bay and African Americans in the Sunnyhills housing development of Milpitas—the vast majority remained relegated to housing within overcrowded urban cores.\(^{15}\)

San Francisco received relatively few FHA home loans, since those loans facilitated the purchase of new houses. Yet the city’s majority-white residents and government still managed to spatially segregate racial minorities through housing covenants and unequal distribution of government housing assistance. The San Francisco Housing Authority operated five housing projects in the city, and by the early 1940s began assigning recipients on the basis of “neighborhood patterns.”\(^{16}\) This policy placed tenants in one of the five projects that matched the applicants’ race with the racial composition of the neighborhood, in an explicit attempt to curb the settlement of non-whites into white-dominated neighborhoods. Virtually all Black applicants for public housing were placed in the Westside Courts project in the now predominantly-Black Fillmore District while the other four projects remained virtually all-white. The neighborhoods in the postwar era marked a break from the ethnic succession of previous decades whereby one migrant group like Irish Americans would achieve upward social and economic mobility and move out of working-class neighborhoods and into more


\(^{16}\) Miller, *The Postwar Struggle*, 24.
affluent neighborhoods around the city. Although Italian Americans and a number of white ethnic groups experienced this reality in the immediate postwar era in San Francisco, with a number of residents also moving out into the suburbs north and south of the city, new migrants of color were denied such opportunities. San Francisco’s urban crisis thus laid largely within its city limits, as upward mobility remained elusive for its predominantly non-white working class and impoverished residents.17

In some regions, postwar spatial reconfigurations resided not along an urban-suburban divide or between neighborhoods, but rather throughout a suburban landscape. Such was the case most notably with the Peninsula, the area along the San Francisco Bay stretching southward from San Francisco to San Jose. The onset of round-the-clock wartime manufacturing and its subsequent demobilization did not reorganize the area as it did in San Francisco and the East Bay. Rather, the Peninsula’s white power brokers reconfigured the area toward promoting and supporting the Cold War through scientific and technological research, creating what historian Margaret O’Mara has termed “cities of knowledge.”18 Deliberate planning was at the heart of this reconfiguration, which included: suburban tract homes replaced longtime farmlands in the area; corporations modeling their business sites after university campuses by separating buildings for different stages of planning and production; and the expansion of transportation


infrastructure between San Francisco and San Jose, particularly with the Bayshore Freeway (Highway 101) in the early 1950s. As a result, the Peninsula did not have urban cores like their Bay Area counterparts.\textsuperscript{19}

Similarly to other parts of the Bay Area, however, the Peninsula saw uneven development related to the demographic changes of the area. Before World War II, ethnic Japanese comprised the largest ethno-racial minority group in the Peninsula, along with Mexican Americans, Chinese Americans, Filipinas/os, and a handful of Black Americans and American Indians. Nikkei internment in the early 1940s and a wartime and postwar migrant population boom of primarily Black Southerners and Mexican migrants soon made the latter communities the largest communities of color in the Peninsula. White society, however, shut communities of color out of the planning and decision-making processes of the postwar Peninsula, and the reconfiguration of the Peninsula marginalized these communities. Similar to the East Bay, Federal Housing Administration loans almost exclusively were made available for white residents. In addition, the spatial reconfiguration of the Peninsula—spearheaded by the 1956 Federal Highway Act and other state of California infrastructural legislation—underdeveloped the public transportation in the area and often isolated people of color across class lines into unincorporated areas like East Palo Alto, East Redwood City, and East Menlo Park.

Between 1959 and the mid-1960s, East Palo Alto changed from a majority-white area to nearly ninety percent Black. Thus, although the Peninsula did not have an urban

landscape like San Francisco and Oakland, its communities of color experienced similar forms of spatial segregation as elsewhere in the area.\textsuperscript{20}

With the reconfiguration of the Bay Area’s urban landscapes came multiple impediments for people of color, particularly in the working class. With masses of East Bay white residents moving to suburbs and the subsequent relocation of many employers came the divestment of the tax bases for urban cores like Oakland and Richmond. In San Francisco, governance of the city’s neighborhoods often came from the city council and other municipal offices, dominated by middle- and upper-class white politicians and officials. The unincorporated areas of the Peninsula had no formal governance of their own institutions and instead were under the purview of the County of San Mateo and the other counties of the region. Tax divestment, perpetual discrimination, and unequal governance resulted in the widening of disparities between the white and non-white populace. The relatively small or unequally-distributed tax bases to which communities of color had access meant their cities or neighborhoods had underdeveloped educational opportunities and transportation infrastructure. East Palo Alto, for example, had less than half of its roads properly paved. Along with continual hiring discrimination, the location of manufacturing and scientific research and development industries away from urban cores and unincorporated areas wrought mass unemployment and underemployment for people of color throughout the Bay Area, with some areas like the predominantly-Black

East Palo Alto experiencing an unemployment rate twice that of the national average by the 1960s.\textsuperscript{21}

One markedly different institution throughout the Bay Area was law enforcement, growing more punitive toward communities of color as the postwar era progressed. Huey Newton and Bobby Seale were among the East Bay Black residents who regularly witnessed the largely-white police departments of the area harass and brutalize of people of color. Further south, one longtime East Palo Alto Black resident recalled, “The Sheriff’s department [of the County of San Mateo] was just racist...people were getting beat up, and people were being arrested for nothing,” even for merely being seen driving outside of East Palo Alto.\textsuperscript{22} Because of East Palo Alto’s unincorporated status and relatively low influence within county politics, the Sheriff’s department met little accountability or recourse for their treatment of the county’s people of color. Law enforcement agencies did not always react to communities of color in this fashion. In 1962, San Francisco Police Chief Thomas Cahill established the Community Relations Unit with Lieutenant Dante Andreotti as its head. Andreotti hoped to build and maintain trust between the San Francisco Police Department and the city’s communities of color, in contrast to Cahill’s desire to maintain “law and order” at all costs. But after the September 1966 Hunter’s Point rebellion—in response to the police killing of Matthew Johnson—Andreotti was forced to resign, and the subsequent year would see Cahill sign


\textsuperscript{22} Interview with Robert Hoover.
General Order 105 to establish a “Tactical Squad” for paramilitary, allegedly riot-patrol operations, but also to quell political protests like that in Hunter’s Point. Further militarizing the department was the establishment of the Crime Prevention Headquarters Squad, which escalated racial profiling throughout the city. Punitive policing added to the economic and social strictures of the multiple urban crises, resulting in an overall bleak and precarious situation for most people of color, particularly wartime and postwar working-class migrants.⁴³

Panethnic Racial and Multiracial Formations

In the midst of the Bay Area’s multiple urban crises came the development of panethnic racial identities and multiracial affinities. Scholars have noted how later politicization shaped racial formation. For Huey Newton, Bobby Seale, and other Black Power activists who joined the Merritt College chapter of the Revolutionary Action Movement, “Blackness” transformed from a U.S.-centered identity into an identity based on internationalist solidarity with others in the African diaspora, particularly African anti-colonial revolutionaries of the post-World War II era. Although activists like Richard Aoki grew up among other Asian Americans and some like Chinese and Korean American Third World Women’s Alliance member Miriam Ching Yoon Louie were

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themselves multiethnic, Asian American panethnic racial formations, as Yen Le Espiritu notes, largely arose from similar historical experiences with discrimination.24 Yet earlier cross-cultural relations under the urban crises —what I term “constricted commingling”—also shaped these identity formations. As sociologists Michael Omi and Howard Winant note, historical circumstances and contexts have shaped racial formations throughout U.S. history, particularly during moments of structural upheaval.25 Confinement to limited spaces throughout the metropolitan areas facilitated the growing association of disparate people groups with each other under various panethnic identities. Because the urban crises operated along a white-non-white binary, constricted commingling also increasingly, though not inevitably, facilitated the formation of affinities across racial lines primarily among people of color, but also including white residents, in multiracial “borderhoods” such as San Francisco’s Mission District and the North/West Oakland-West/South Berkeley corridor.26

Panethnic racial formations occurred on small and large scales. For example, tensions often existed between established Black residents and wartime and postwar Black Southern migrants. The latter held regional and rural cultural distinctions from the former and was largely working-class or working-poor, in contrast to the more middle-

24 Murch, Living for the City, 84-86; Seale, Seize the Time; Aoki, in Fujino, Samurai Among Panthers; Interview with Miriam Ching Yoon Louie, August 18, 2015, in possession of the author; Yen Le Espiritu, Asian American Panethnicity: Bridging Institutions and Identities (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992).


class established populace. Established Black residents at times blamed Black migrants for the eruptions of blatant racism by the white majority after World War II, pejoratively referring to the Southerners as “suitcase Negroes.” Yet as disparities widened as a result of the urban crises and predominantly-Black places like West Berkeley and East Palo Alto had residents across socioeconomic class, the established/migrant divide began to break down among Black residents, especially when engaged with political activism.

In a similar situation, although there were initial divisions between established white Bay Area communities and white Southern migrants, the latter soon found themselves integrated into the former, even as they often retained some distinct characteristics. More significant among white residents was the growing inclusivity of “whiteness” in the postwar era. As historian David Roediger has noted, World War II and the early postwar era broke down the racial hierarchies between Northern and Western Europeans and heretofore “inbetween” Southern and Eastern Europeans. As the country built a “civic nationalism” that moved away from biological conceptions of race (and its related racism), Southern and Eastern Europeans and white western Asians like Armenian Americans gained full inclusion into numerous spheres of society, including labor union organizing and national electoral politics. Bob Avakian noted the contrast between his


childhood and teenaged years compared with his father Spurgeon’s. Spurgeon experienced ethnic discrimination because of his Armenian surname, from his childhood in Fresno, California, through his years at Boalt Hall, the law school of the University of California, Berkeley. This discrimination ranged from other students innocuously using terms like “hungry as a starving Armenian” to being denied positions in law firms because of his surname (and Spurgeon’s refusal to change it). By the time Bob was growing up in Berkeley, such intra-white hierarchies had receded. Yet as Roediger demonstrates, this inclusive whiteness relied on the continual exclusion of non-whites, particularly African Americans. Housing marked one of the starkest manifestations of this reality; while Southern and Eastern Europeans easily obtained FHA loans, FHA public housing was the extent of government housing subsidization that most racial minorities received. Thus, for some postwar migrants, new panethnic racial formations came not from under the strictures of the Bay Area’s multiple urban crises but rather as the beneficiaries of these postwar transformations.30

Some panethnic racial formations followed in a longer tradition of identity formations among migrant groups with shared cultural backgrounds. The Bay Area had been site of multi-ethnonational relations among migrants from Latin America since at least the 1848 California Gold Rush, with the influx of Chilean, Peruvian, and other South American migrants joining the extant Mexican population. During the late nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, some urban spaces fostered a growing multi-ethnonational affiliation as “Spanish-speaking” peoples, such as La Iglesia Guadalupe in

30 Roediger, Working Toward Whiteness, 156, 158-160; 223-230. Bob Avakian, From Ike to Mao and Beyond
San Francisco that served Mexicans, Guatemalans, and other Spanish-speaking peoples, including some Filipinas/os. Migrations from Latin America during and after World War II largely came from Central America and grew to the point where they surpassed the ethnic Mexican population in certain cities, including San Francisco. These growing postwar migrant communities developed a new sort of *latinidad*, or Latina/o identity, from their lived experiences in the constricted commingling of the Bay Area’s urban crises. As historian Jason Ferreira explains, calls for “La Raza” in the Bay Area beginning in the 1960s included more than solidarity among ethnic Mexicans, as was the case through much of the U.S. West during this era. Rather, “La Raza” in the Bay Area was an inclusive identity that included all Latinas/os. Los Siete de La Raza member Danilo “Bebe” Melendez identified himself as “strictly ghetto property” who held an affinity with other Latinas/os in the Mission District because of their shared experiences of oppression.  

Third World Women’s Alliance Member Cheryl Perry-League recalled the mixed Mexican and Central American composition of the Latinas within the Bay Area chapter of the TWWA, with most coming from Oakland and San Francisco. While retaining their ethnonational and cultural identities, Latinas/os across the Bay Area developed *latinidad* based on their similar societal positions within the area, which would serve them later in organizing around these lines.

Similar processes ran parallel with American Indians in the Bay Area. Because relatively few Indians resided there and most had been dispersed throughout the region,

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31 Heins, *Strictly Ghetto Property*, 34.

32 Summers Sandoval, *Latinos at the Golden Gate*, 77; Ferreira, “All Power to the People”; Interview with Cheryl Perry-League, January 7, 2015, in possession of the author.
Indians tended to gravitate toward any other nearby Indians, despite different tribal membership. Or as LaNada Boyer articulated, “On the reservations, it was easy to divide Indians against Indians; but in a major city, we are so glad to see other Indians, we don’t care what tribe they are. They are natives, and that’s all that counts.”\(^{33}\) The process of migration also helped some Indians develop panethnic (or what historian Kent Blansett calls “intertribal”) identities.\(^{34}\) For instance, when Richard Oakes first migrated from the St. Regis Reservation in upstate New York to New York City, he experienced some intertribal relation. But it was not until his secondary migration to California in 1967 that Oakes began understanding more deeply the plight of American Indians across the country. While driving across the country, Oakes visited a number of reservations about whom he had read while growing up and in his spare time from working. In contrast to what he read “about love and friendship for your fellow man,” Oakes saw “bickering and barroom fights between Indians.”\(^{35}\) When he arrived in San Francisco, Oakes saw similar occurrences, along with limited and poor housing conditions, economic exploitation, and a general inaccessibility to their tribal and cultural practices and customs. Yet American Indians also fought resiliently to create intertribal cultural spaces, establishing places like the Oakland Friendship House (later Intertribal Fellowship House), the San Jose Indian Center, and the San Francisco Indian Center. The latter served as a site for intertribal powwows and other community events; its burning down in 1969 even provided a

\(^{33}\) Boyer, “Reflections of Alcatraz,” 76.

\(^{34}\) Blansett, “Journey to Freedom”

\(^{35}\) Oakes, “Alcatraz is Not an Island,” 36.
catalyst for local American Indian activists toward more radical forms of protest like the
Occupation of Alcatraz, since neither the BIA nor the city of San Francisco would
provide enough funding to replace the building. Similar to Latinas/os in the Bay Area,
American Indian migrants their unique cultural identities while creating new ones from
their current circumstances and lived experiences.36

In addition to the emergence of new panethnic identities after World War II,
migrants who would later be radicalized often developed interethnic and interracial
affinities earlier in their upbringings. Proximity did not guarantee affinity. For example,
Samoan migrants and American Indian migrants in the Mission District often clashed
with each other, even though they all experienced displacement wrought by U.S.
colonialism.37 Yet intercultural interactions within the constricted commingling under the
Bay Area’s multiple urban crises often led to cross-cultural friendships and an
understanding of similar societal problems people of color experienced.

In West Oakland and other nearby neighborhoods, Black Southerners constituted
the majority by the early 1950s. Yet longtime and newcomer Mexican American
communities also formed a significant part of those neighborhoods. Alex Gonzalez
recalled growing up around African Americans and playing sports with many other
Latinos and African Americans at the local recreation center run by Rockwood Education
Department. Latinas/os and African Americans also attended the same public schools,

36 Boyer, “Reflections of Alcatraz”; Paul Chaat Smith and Robert Allen Warrior, Like a Hurricane: The

37 Joan Ablon, “Retention of Cultural Values and Differential Urban Adaptation: Samoans and
American Indians in a West Coast City,” Social Forces, 49, no. 3 (March, 1971): 385-393.
including the local district community college, Merritt College. Oakland chapter Brown
Beret co-founder Jorge Gonzalez first met Huey Newton and Bobby Seale while at
Merritt in struggles for a diverse and relevant curriculum for people of color.38

Neighborhoods throughout San Francisco and the Peninsula also fostered this sort
of interaction. San Francisco State College striker and later Nairobi College President
Donald Smothers “always seemed to have a bond with minorities.”39 After migrating
from Texas as a child, Smothers attended Irving M. Scott School, which held regular
“international days” that celebrated the cultures of African Americans, ethnic Mexicans,
Filipinas/os, Samoans, and many other people groups that constituted the school’s
demographics. When he moved to East Palo Alto during his junior high school years, he
found a significant Latina/o populace at Everett Junior High School. LaNada Boyer had
friendships with Latinas/os and African Americans in the Mission District, and Tony and
Mario Martinez made friends with other people of color in the Mission as well.40

Some migrants’ unique circumstances within their migrant groups facilitated
these cross-cultural relations. While Richard Aoki grew up with some Chinese Americans
and Filipinas/os and lived among Japanese Americans, he largely gravitated toward
African Americans in West Oakland. Part of this stemmed from their predominance in
the area. Yet Aoki’s family history also played a role in this development. Aoki’s
grandfather retaining ownership of his noodle factory in West Oakland after Internment

38 Interview with Alex Gonzalez
39 “Don Smothers Interview”
40 “Don Smothers Interview”; Boyer, “Reflections of Alcatraz”; Heins, Strictly Ghetto Property
defied the odds; that he had the means to open the factory in the first place indicated that Aoki’s family immigrated to the United States with more capital and means than most Japanese immigrants of that time. In addition, Aoki and his brother were often excluded in Japanese American social circles because of their father, who other Nikkei called dorobo (meaning “thief” or “troublemaker” in Japanese) because of his propensity toward fighting, robbery, gambling, and other activities viewed unseemly by the broader society. As a result, Aoki and his brother experienced social isolation from Japanese Americans, meaning the majority of their social circle in West Oakland would be Black.41

Bob Avakian also came to cross-racial friendships through somewhat unique circumstances. Avakian regularly traveled to Fresno to visit his father’s family, and two things continually stuck out to him. First, his father’s family held racist views about the African Americans and other racial minorities in the area, despite Armenians facing discriminatory treatment within his older relatives’ lifetimes. But more startling for Avakian was the spatial segregation of Fresno by race, where “Blacks and the Latinos and Asians lived on the other side of the freeway in Fresno, where the conditions were markedly and dramatically much worse.”42 Such was also the case in his hometown of Berkeley, where the Berkeley Hills in which he grew up were virtually all-white. Like Alex Gonzalez in Oakland, Avakian socially mixed with African Americans in local sports activities, like at the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA) center in

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41 Aoki, in Fujino, “Samurai Among Panthers”

42 Avakian, From Ike to Mao and Beyond, 3-4.
Berkeley. Through these activities, Avakian realized that he and Black Berkeleyans had vastly different experiences in the same city. As he started playing in the city’s school leagues, Avakian noticed that schools in predominantly-Black neighborhoods were often in disrepair compared to the schools he attended. His matriculation at Berkeley High School marked the first time he attended a white-Black integrated school, and through sports, Avakian took an affinity to his Black classmates. Avakian learned about the plight of Black Berkeleyans through these classmates, especially on long bus rides to and from sporting events where they would discuss the issues of the day. Although much of Avakian’s childhood was segregated, his interactions with his Black peers helped him become aware of racial inequalities and would be instrumental in his later activism.\textsuperscript{43}

Some migrants developed multiracial affinities even within the more punitive facets of the urban crises. With the escalating militarization of local police departments came an accompanied rise in the number of juvenile delinquents apprehended, particularly youth of color. Gary Lescallett, the son of a Nicaraguan mother and a white American father, spent time in the local Youth Authority prison on charges stemming from a burglary charge in Pacifica, south of San Francisco. While Lescallett “stuck with La Raza” while in prison, he also began understanding the similar struggles that Latinas/os and African Americans faced in their local communities.\textsuperscript{44} When volunteering to speak with a group of “at-risk” youth with a Black fellow prisoner, Lescallett was struck by his fellow prisoner’s proclamation that there was no difference “between black

\textsuperscript{43}Avakian, \textit{From Ike to Mao and Beyond}

\textsuperscript{44}Lescallett, quoted in Heins, \textit{Strictly Ghetto Property}, 40-42.
and brown people” and racial difference were “just a trick the Man has made to make us go at each other’s throats.” Through experiencing similar manifestations of oppression, Bay Area youth could envision themselves as part of a similar struggle, even if they could not yet fully articulate these connections.

The Limits of Liberal Reform

The urban transformations and identity (re)formations communities throughout the Bay Area experienced generated an insurgency of political protests and other forms of activism. As Omi and Winant note, “Since race and racism involve violence, oppression, exploitation, and indignity, they also generate movements of resistance and theories of resistance.” The strictures of the Bay Area’s multiple urban crises pushed both migrant and established communities of color toward activism, joined by white allies throughout the area.

Postwar activism reflected the wide-ranging nature of previous eras of Bay Area activism. Black protests in the 1940s Santa Clara Valley against ongoing minstrel shows, for example, hearkened back to the 1910s when the San Francisco NAACP organized to stop screenings of the film *The Birth of a Nation*. Some protests in the Bay Area lent solidarity for those in struggle elsewhere in the country, such as the mid-1960s lunch counter sit-ins in San Jose organized by Black activists—despite these businesses not

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45 Lescal lett, quoted in Heins, *Strictly Ghetto Property*, 40-42.

excluding them from eating in the restaurants—that demonstrated Black Southern migrants’ continual observance of social issues from their places of origin.⁴⁷

Older civil rights organizations like the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the Mexican American Legal Defense Fund (MALDF) engaged with newer organizations like the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the Community Service Organization (CSO) in numerous local struggles against housing, educational, and employment discrimination through the 1950s and 60s. Direct-action protests became more commonplace, with left-leaning leaders like Dr. Carleton B. Goodlett organizing a series of anti-discrimination protests in 1964 against the Sheraton-Palace Hotel in San Francisco. Some activists also worked to provide community uplift in their local neighborhoods through local Offices of Economic Opportunity and other federal War on Poverty programs beginning in 1964. Huey Newton and Bobby Seale worked in one such office in Oakland in 1966, and members of Los Siete de La Raza worked in a similar office within the Mission District. American Indian activists advocated continually with Bureau of Indian Affairs officials, while also taking part in some War on Poverty programs.⁴⁸

In response to ubiquitous housing and employment discrimination, liberal politicians fought to enact government-backed protections against the racism of the local housing industry and employers. Most prominent in these battles was for fair housing

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⁴⁷ Ruffin, “Uninvited Neighbors”; Broussard, Black San Francisco.

⁴⁸ Ibid.; Stephen Pitti, The Devil in Silicon Valley; Miller, The Postwar Struggle for Civil Rights, 17, 24-25, 79-81; Murch, Living for the City; Ferreira, “All Power to the People”; Chaat Smith and Warrior, Like a Hurricane; Daniel Cobb, Native Activism in Cold War America: The Struggle for Sovereignty (Lawrence: The University Press of Kansas, 2008).
legislation and legal protections. Court cases beginning in the early 1950s desegregated certain exclusionary areas, such as Chinese American Sing Sheng and his family gaining access to the Southwood suburban development in South San Francisco through the court’s ruling in *Sheng v. Southwood* (1952). As the 50s turned to the 60s, broader housing protections became an integral activist issue throughout the Bay Area. While observing his parents’ activism for fair housing protections, Bob Avakian learned how much of a touchstone issue housing discrimination became by the 1960s. The city of Berkeley created statutes in 1962 that extended anti-discrimination protections to prospective homebuyers and tenants. The next year, Byron Rumford, the state assemblyman from Berkeley, introduced the Fair Housing Act to the California legislature. Upon its passage, the 1963 Rumford Act marked one of the first of its kind in the country and scored a significant victory to local activists.49

Yet activists’ efforts to undo the ill-effects of the urban crises were hamstrung in two ways. First, civil rights reforms met continual resistance from conservative and even some moderate liberal political forces, particularly with fair housing legislation. Soon after the passage of the Rumford Act, for instance, opposition mounted in the form of a campaign for the passage of a California ballot initiative that would undo many of the gains instituted by the act. Proposition 14, which passed in 1964, defended the legality of private citizens’ discriminatory housing practices under the guise of protecting the “rights” of property-owners, even though the latter themselves had mostly gained their homes through exclusion and discrimination. The actions of private organizations and

citizens exacerbated this situation, as homeowners who did not abide by racially-restrictive covenants or neighborhood association mandates risked legal and social retribution. The case of one white homeowner who rented and later sold a house to a Black family on Berkeley’s Linden Street in 1958 illustrates the extent to which retribution could occur. Not only did the local Federal Housing Administration office sanction this homeowner; a minister who attended the “house blessing ceremony” for the Black family received an immediate transfer to Palo Alto; the bank manager of the branch that provided the family’s loan received a reprimand and transfer to predominantly-Black South San Francisco; and a white neighbor who befriended the family lost his job after regular harassment by his employer.  

Second, most civil rights activism focused on future protections against discrimination while not addressing the root causes of these racial inequalities. In the struggle for fair housing, for example, proponents for anti-discriminatory legislation did not always connect this issue with the broader issues of under- and unemployment for communities of color, meaning that even with the passing and enforcement of fair housing legislation, the majority within these communities did not even have the means to. Ultimately, the reforms of liberalism could never undo the systems and structures of oppression that the liberal state helped create; for liberalism’s prescriptions were often race-neutral and colorblind and thus did not address the underlying conditions and logics that perpetuated the Bay Area’s multiple urban crises. By going through legislation, legal challenges, and other established channels for social and political change, activists from

the 1940s through the mid-1960s could only achieve piecemeal progress, not large-scale changes for the masses of people of color, particularly working-class people of color.

Conclusion

By the late 1960s, the San Francisco Bay Area’s multiple urban crises had entrenched racialized and class-inflected hierarchies throughout its regions. The confluence of numerous social calculations in response to the predominantly non-white migrant streams flowing into the Bay Area during and after World War II spatially reconfigured the area. White residents within local governments, the real estate industry, banks, and neighborhood associations were all complicit in segregating the vast majority of people of color from the virtually-all-white suburbs that continued to expand as the postwar era progressed, from higher-quality neighborhoods within a few urban cores like San Francisco, and into unincorporated areas like East Palo Alto and East Redwood City in the Peninsula. With the entrenchment of the urban crises came inequalities not only in the availability and quality of housing, but also within employment opportunities, education, governance, and treatment under the law. This situation cast an overall dire shadow over the majority of people of color.

As these urban crises persisted, so too did the Bay Area see an increasing in political and social activism, as migrants’ experiences within these postwar transformations pushed them toward fighting for societal reform. Coming of age in one of the Bay Area’s multiracial communities and developing cross-cultural affinities also instilled a predisposition toward organizing across racial lines that would manifest
themselves later in the 1960s and 70s. Yet this predisposition alone would not create multiracial alliances, and multiracial radicalism was not inevitable. Instead, there also had to be ideological developments toward multiracialism to develop these alliances. This would need to occur both on the individual level but also within the changing political landscapes within the Bay Area as the 1960s progressed, especially with the increasing prominence of Third World internationalism, a growing dissatisfaction with the limits of liberal reform, and the escalating involvement of U.S. troops in Vietnam. And with this growing internationalism came a growing radicalization on the part of Bay Area social and political activists toward bringing not just reform, but revolution to the area, the country, and the world at large.
CHAPTER THREE

The “Vietnam Turn”: The Bay Area Radical Tradition, Anti-Imperialism, and the 1967 Spring Mobilization against the War

On April 15, 1967, an estimated 60,000 people packed into San Francisco’s Kezar Stadium, the longtime home of the San Francisco Forty-Niners franchise of the National Football League. This crowd, however, did not gather to watch a football exhibition. Rather, Kezar Stadium hosted one of the largest assemblies of protesters in the Bay Area’s history for the Spring Mobilization against the War. Serving as the Western US venue for the National Mobilization against the War, this rally capped a week of protests, teach-ins, and arts performances that culminated in a 40,000-person march through the streets of San Francisco to the stadium. Although US interventions into Vietnam would not cease until 1975, the Spring Mobilization in San Francisco and its 100,000-person counterpart in New York City would represent a shift in the nature of protest against the war in the US. Liberal activists did not only unite with radicals across racial lines to voice opposition to the war with the interests of US citizens in mind. They also rhetorically situated the United States as an empire looking to expand its militaristic and economic grasp into Southeast Asia through Vietnam, emphasizing the oppression of the Vietnamese people themselves as a motivation for opposing the war.¹

This chapter examines the 1967 Spring Mobilization as a case study of anti-imperialist protest within the broader antiwar movement in the Bay Area. The Spring Mobilization marked the convergence of developments that by the mid-1960s had swept up the area while its communities of color coped with and struggled against the postwar urban crisis in its various forms (Chapter Two). Intertwined with the transformations of the Bay Area’s urban landscapes was the expansion of the Bay Area’s radical tradition from primarily being focused around labor union organizing to the growth of organizations not formally aligned with socialist or communist entities from around the world. The US rose to preeminence on the global stage in light of the destruction World War II visited upon most of the industrialized world. During the early Cold War, the country positioned itself as the world’s champion of democracy and capitalism against the spreading communist influence of the Soviet Union. During the three decades after World War II, national liberation movements permeated European colonies throughout Africa, Asia, and Latin America. At times, these movements operated with the support of the Soviet Union; in general, however, they worked as part of a general “Non-Aligned Movement” of “Third World” people working to create their own countries apart from the influence of the United States or Soviet Union. As historian Vijay Prashad notes, part of this Non-Aligned Movement was internationalist solidarity with other Third World nations fighting for decolonization and against interference from traditional imperialist powers from the West. This “internationalist nationalism” resonated with activists in the United States, especially among self-proclaimed Third World radicals, who found new
inspiration and systems of thought within these national liberation movements throughout the world.²

The Spring Mobilization embodied much of what I argue was significant about how the Vietnam War marked a break from previous war efforts, particularly among people of color. The “Vietnam turn” involved a growing opposition of racial minorities (and US citizens at large) to the war. Whereas racial minorities heretofore tended to view military service as a way to prove one’s patriotism and deservingness of full equality within U.S. society, the Vietnam War marked the first mass dissent among people of color against a war, as they comprised ranks in the armed forces disproportionate to their percentage of the general population and continued to experience racism within the military. In addition, the “Vietnam turn” saw not only a mass movement away from this rationale for serving in the military but also toward an anti-imperialist orientation as the motivation for antiwar opposition. Anti-imperialism in the United States predated the 1960s, particularly among the Black Left. From W.E.B. Du Bois’ 1900 proclamation of support for the independence of the “darker races of mankind” from their Western European colonizers to the emergence of groups like the Council on African Affairs in the 1940s and particularly with the Communist Party USA (CPUSA) and other communist and socialist organizations, the affairs of other oppressed peoples around the world drew the attention of activists in the US. Even more mainstream activist organizations like the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) under the leadership of Walter White voiced similar support. Yet the entrance

of protests like the Spring Mobilization into the mainstream of US society set this era of anti-imperialism apart from prior ones.\(^3\)

The Spring Mobilization similarly bridged liberal and more radical contingents that now comprised the broader 1960s antiwar movement. Indeed, one of the core goals for the National Mobilization was to foment more public opposition against the war, particularly among white middle-class liberals. Liberal luminaries like civil rights leaders Coretta Scott King and Julian Bond joined organized labor representatives including Paul Schrade and Morris Evenson from the United Auto Workers Union and Painters Local #4, respectively, along with representatives from radical organizations like Eldridge Cleaver of the Organization of Afro-American Unity and Robert Scheer of the Community for New Politics as the featured speakers at the rally.\(^4\) This collaboration between liberals and radicals, especially across racial lines, generated red-baiting from opponents, including from the federal Committee on Un-American Activities. In a March 31st report published just a few weeks before the Mobe, the Committee accused the National Mobilization organizers of working “to advance the world Communist movement” within the United States.\(^5\) Rather than giving “honest and legitimate dissent” and debate—through which, according to the Committee, protesters would eventually

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\(^4\) “To All Americans Whose Lives Are Twisted By This War” Spring Mobilization flyer, New Left Collection, Box 67, Folder “Vietnam War,” Hoover Institution Archives.

come to agree with the government’s foreign policy—the National Mobilization organizers were working “to do injury and damage to the United States and to give aid and comfort to its enemies.”

The Committee’s accusations were not completely without merit. Although many communist and socialist organizations did not join the Mobilization, some sectors of the CPUSA and other Marxist organizations like the Young Socialist Alliance (YSA) took active roles in promoting the National Mobilization. Some on the Left, such as the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), criticized this decision by YSA and other similarly-minded activists. SDS viewed the YSA’s involvement as a contradictory alliance with liberal activists who shared neither the Left’s anti-imperialist orientation nor the desire to work toward the “general radicalization of the American working class” toward revolution in the United States, which was one of the central tenets of the YSA.

In response, the YSA framed their alliance as part of a resurgent “united front” strategy popular within the Marxist tradition, arguing that the broader US Left should unite behind the banner of the National Mobilization, despite the dominant involvement of liberals, because they all had the common goal of the withdrawal of the US military from Vietnam. Moreover, the YSA argued that, rather than become usurped by the liberals within the Spring Mobilization, radicals could use the Mobilization as part of the general

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6 Communist Origin and Manipulation., 1, 2.

radicalization of the American public, particularly targeting liberals.\textsuperscript{8} Indeed, the Spring Mobilization highlighted the moment of flux U.S. radicalism experienced in the late 1960s and signaled the nature of radicalism in the Bay Area for the next decades.

The Bay Area Radical Tradition and Global Post-World War II Contexts

Although the late 1960s through the mid-1970s marked perhaps the apex of radicalism in the Bay Area’s history, multiple lineages in the area’s longer radical tradition predated this era. Most of this radical activism flowed through labor unions, such as the International Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters and the International Longshore and Warehouse Union, and comprised part of the labor uprisings of the 1930s that led to reforms under President Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s New Deal like the passage of the Wagner Act in 1935. Momentum for organized labor grew through World War II, culminating in the December 3-5, 1946 General Strike in Oakland. Spearheaded by predominantly-female downtown department store workers, the General Strike grew to include most of the city’s American Federation of Labor (AFL)-affiliated unions, ranging from the Teamsters to the Transit Workers. Not only did the General Strike arise in solidarity with the downtown department store worker, but it also marked the dissatisfaction organized labor had with the direction of the postwar political economy of the East Bay, particularly with the demobilization of many wartime industries and conflicts with the vision that Oakland’s downtown business elite held (as further articulated in Chapters Two and Six). A number of Oakland strikers had participated in

\textsuperscript{8} Jenness, “How Socialists Should Fight,” 3-7.
the 1934 San Francisco General Strike and took initiative with specific tactics stemming from the lessons of the San Francisco strike, such as Oakland strikers cutting off local (negative) news coverage of the strikers and encouraging mass rallies and picketing downtown, instead of strikers simply staying home. The General Strike and the furor it caused among Oakland’s economic elites demonstrated the power that labor unions within the Bay Area had developed by this point.9

Included within this radical labor organizing were Marxist organizations, most notably the Communist Party USA. From the early 1900s through the early 1940s, the CPUSA grew alongside and largely within this tide of organized labor—forming part of the leadership for the 1934 San Francisco General Strike—even as it periodically experienced government repression. By the 1940s, other Marxist organizations had arisen separately from the CPUSA or from expelled or splintered factions, often stemming from ideological differences regarding the nature of revolution in the U.S. and the manner in which U.S. communists and socialists should work toward an international revolution. The Socialist Workers Party and its affiliated Youth Socialist Alliance, for example, adhered to the ideologies of Leon Trotsky instead of the Marxism-Leninism of the Soviet Union at the time, largely because the former focused more on internationalist solidarity than the latter. While these ideological foundations created fissures among the Marxist

U.S. Left, these Leftist organizations shared enough points of overlap to generally against similar opposition, even when not formally allied with each other.¹⁰

Yet the power of labor unions and the radicalism therein would soon recede in the face of stiff Cold War opposition. Through the early postwar era, many gains organized labor made saw a rollback, such as with the Taft-Hartley Act of 1947 that weakened the power of workers to collectively bargain, strike, and boycott. The power of organized labor also grew limited in the mainstream unions affiliated with the AFL, since the AFL’s leadership was less radical than the rank-and-file and found more compromised solutions with management, rather than gaining clear victories over them. Even the 1946 Oakland General Strike ended when many union leaders called off the solidarity strikes, leaving the department store workers largely isolated. Anti-communist sentiment also began to mount as the 1940s and 50s progressed; not only did the Taft-Hartley Act contain provisions meant to root out communists among the ranks of organized labor, but a fervent anti-communist wave swept throughout the country in the 1950s and into the early 1960s. The House Un-American Committee (HUAC) led much of the federal government’s Red Scare, targeting individuals ranging from government officials to college professors and even popular culture figures. HUAC held numerous hearings and investigations in the Bay Area during the 1950s and 60s, and although Leftists won a

number of these legal battles with HUAC, the general repression of the time wreaked havoc on the Bay Area Left as a whole.\textsuperscript{11}

The fissures among Leftists also mounted as the 1950s and 60s progressed, especially among Marxists of various stripes. The CPUSA particularly felt the effects of these fissures, as the organization fell from its preeminence among the Left as more groups splintered from them or were expelled. Part of this fall from preeminence stemmed from the CPUSA’s aligning with the Soviet Union, even with the Soviet Union’s continued imperialistic interventions into Eastern European countries like Hungary and Czechoslovakia. U.S. Marxists increasingly repudiated the Soviet Union and its accompanying Stalinism in favor of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) and the ideologies of Mao Zedong and other Chinese communists after the 1957 Sino-Soviet split. The broken relationship between the Soviet Union and the PRC also led to a mass exodus from the CPUSA, with the Progressive Labor Movement (later Progressive Labor, then the Progressive Labor Party) being one such faction that left or was later expelled from the CPUSA for the latter’s continual support of the Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{12}

Other ideological divisions plagued the Left. The AFL, its affiliated unions, and other mainstream organized labor entities historically excluded large swaths of the working class, namely racial minorities and women. Black Panther Party co-founder


\textsuperscript{12} Elbaum, Revolution in the Air, 63-64.
Bobby Seale, for instance, recalled that his father could not find steady work upon his family’s arrival from Texas to Berkeley because of his exclusion from joining a carpenters’ union. Only a handful of major unions in the Bay Area, such as the International Longshore and Warehouse Union, had desegregated their ranks before World War II, which saw the opening up of many unions’ memberships. This opening up, however, stemmed largely from the result of wildcat strikes by excluded workers or through court rulings mandating desegregation, such as the California Supreme Court decision in *James v. Marinship* (1944) against the Boilermakers Local No. 6 in Marin County. Even into the early 1960s, mainstream labor unions favored the interests of white (male) workers over others, such as diverting almost all the resources for a taxpayer-funded training program for high-wage labor toward this group. Then-Socialist Workers Party member and future field general of the Black Panther Party Richard Aoki recalled similar issues the day after the 1965 Watts uprising in Los Angeles within the predominantly-white, unionized factory where he worked. When Aoki arrived to work, he noticed almost half of his coworkers were absent from work that day. He later learned from the foreman that his missing comrades stayed home out of fear that Black rioters from Watts were making their way to the Bay Area to ransack their (suburban) homes, and this racially-charged paranoia illustrated to Aoki the need to address anti-racism within the working class. Although not the sole or even primary reason for the decline in its political and social clout, mainstream organized labor’s lethargy in fully incorporating
racial minorities and women or supporting other unions that did divided the U.S. working class at a moment where unity and cooperation was needed.\textsuperscript{13}

Inclusion among Marxist radicals also often proved to be an issue. Two of the most significant points of conflict among U.S. Marxists throughout their history were the “National Question” (specifically the “Negro Question” when focused on Black Americans) and the “Woman Question” that centered on the relationship between the struggle against racial and gender oppression, respectively, with the struggle of the working class. As historian Robin D.G. Kelley notes, this conflict plagued Marxists since their advent in the United States in the mid-nineteenth century. Before the 1960s, both Marxist-Leninists and Trotskyists predominantly theorized that since racial and gender oppression stemmed from capitalism, the former would wither away after the working class’ revolution against the latter. Yet in practice, this meant that many Marxists who were neither racial minorities nor women typically ignored the immediate and material effects of racism and sexism. Moreover, since both racism and sexism predated capitalism, the abolition of the latter did not ensure the abolition of the former. By the early 1960s, people of color who identified as Marxists or drew from Marxist theories turned more toward the writings of Chinese Communist Party leader Mao Zedong and identified increasingly with the People’s Republic of China (PRC). The PRC influenced many Third World national liberation movements and through the 1960s voiced

solidarity and at times gave military support to other Third World revolutionaries. For activists of color in the U.S. who turned to more radical ideologies, Maoism provided a coherent system of thought that held anti-racism and women’s liberation as intertwined with the international working-class revolution, holding the latter unachievable without the former. While some joined multiracial radical organizations, many established new organizations or chapters of existing national ones, such as the Northern California chapter of the Revolutionary Action Movement, a Marxist-leaning Black Power organization originally founded in Cleveland, Ohio, from which Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale would split in 1966 to form the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense. Although many U.S. Marxists incorporated racial and gender oppression into their political analyses and movement work by the early 1970s (as further explained in Chapter Five), their general inability to do so throughout most of their history only inhibited the working-class revolution they worked toward fomenting in the United States.\footnote{Robin D.G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001), 39-43, 73-75; Robin D.G. Kelley and Betsy Esch, “Black Like Mao: Red China and Black Revolution,” *Souls: A Critical Journal of Black Politics, Culture, and Society*, 1, no. 4 (Fall 1999): 6-41; Elbaum, *Revolution in the Air*, 48, 51-52, 63.} This shift in U.S. Marxism was influenced by the changes occurring on a global scale. The heightened anti-communism of the 1950s and 60s not only resulted from the growing international influence of the Soviet Union but also because of the Third World anti-colonial national liberation movements in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Although the roots of this wave of decolonization were planted early in the twentieth century, these revolutions would not erupt until after World War II. Third World peoples under the colonial rule of Western European countries (and a few under US rule) agitated for their
independence in the aftermath of the war, pointing out the contradictions between the rhetoric of the Allied countries about the need to make the world free for liberty and democracy while continuing to exploit and oppress their colonies. These national liberation movements often included leadership from Marxist or Marx-inspired revolutionaries, taking their lead from either the Soviet Union or the People’s Republic of China.

Third World revolutionaries at times held conferences to discuss their movements’ strategies and progress and show solidarity for each other. The April 1955 Bandung Conference in Indonesia between primarily African and Asian countries symbolized this solidarity. The “Bandung Spirit” that arose from this conference constituted not only “a refusal of both economic subordination and cultural oppression” that European imperialism brought, but also a commitment to “cultural cooperation” that included learning about the cultures of the other twenty-nine Bandung countries.\(^\text{15}\) Other conferences, such as the 1966 First Solidarity Conference of the Peoples of Africa, Asia, and Latin America in Havana, Cuba, carried on the “Bandung Spirit,” even in the midst of growing ideological disagreement among Third World revolutionaries about the proper strategies for gaining liberation and building their subsequent decolonized societies. These Third World countries would at times serve as havens for U.S. radicals in exile, such as Black Power and armed self-defense proponent Robert F. Williams in Cuba beginning June 1960 or Kathleen and Eldridge Cleaver in Algeria beginning in late 1968 (Chapter Four). They also hosted delegations of U.S. allies, such as the late 1960s and

\(^{15}\) Prashad, *The Darker Nations*, 45, 46.
1970s Venceremos Brigades to Cuba or the Eldridge Cleaver-led pilgrimage to the People’s Republic of China, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, and the Democratic Republic of North Vietnam. This preferential treatment by Third World leaders would at times contribute to U.S. activists creating romanticized versions of the former and overlooking issues within those countries, such as the persistence of racial discrimination against Afro-Cubans. Yet because of Third World leaders’ outreach to and vocal support of the struggles of internationalist radicals in the United States, the latter only grew to reciprocate this solidarity to the Third World movements from which they drew inspiration.16

The most renowned and internationally-captivating of these Third World revolutionary movements was the Vietnamese struggle for self-determination. In the aftermath of World War II, Vietnam agitated for independence from France, who refused to allow this for Vietnam or any of its remaining colonies, now referred to as “overseas territories,” despite Vietnamese national movement leaders using arguments for their freedom modeled after those from revolutions in the West, including the French Revolution.17 On September 2, 1945, communist leader Ho Chi Minh declared Vietnam sovereign and independent from France, leading to a war that lasted until the Northern Vietnamese Army defeated the French military at the Battle of Dienbienphu on May 7,


17 Prashad, The Darker Nations, 3.
1954. That the United States financed much of France’s decimated military during this attempted suppression of the Vietnamese independence movement heightened tensions between the US and the newly-independent Democratic Republic of (North) Vietnam, especially after Vietnam’s partitioning at the seventeenth parallel as part of the Geneva Accords peace treaty between the Vietnamese and the French. The United States constantly intervened with the affairs of South Vietnam, unwilling to allow the South turn communist like the North, to the point of supporting the totalitarian Ngo Dinh Diem regime after Diem gained office as chief of state in a rigged election in October 1955 and subsequently filled the South Vietnamese legislative assembly with his supporters in another rigged election in March 1956. The US also financed and trained Diem’s military; in turn, Diem used military forces to suppress dissent and democratic reforms, incarcerating thousands of dissidents and executing a multitude of them.18

Despite the continual repression Diem inflicted upon the South Vietnamese people, President Dwight D. Eisenhower, then President John F. Kennedy maintained support for South Vietnam as a bulwark against the spread of communism throughout Southeast Asia. Diem’s regime, however, soon grew untenable and uncooperative. Kennedy supported a Central Intelligence Agency-backed coup against Diem in November 1963, which launched South Vietnam into further disarray and subsequent civil conflicts among different military factions. With chaos in the South and the growing presence and support of communist revolutionaries therein, President Lyndon B. Johnson

(after the assassination of Kennedy in late November) escalated US involvement in South Vietnam. Johnson subsequently mischaracterized the nature of the August 1964 Gulf of Tonkin incident—a small skirmish that erupted between a US naval destroyer and two North Vietnamese patrol boats, followed by a likely-falsified retaliatory attack by the two patrol boats—in order to ask Congress to declare war on North Vietnam and formalize US military involvement in the region. By the end of 1966, almost 400,000 US troops had been sent to Vietnam for the war effort, with nary a trace of the end of the war in sight.19

Anti-Imperialism and the Spring Mobilization

As US interventionism in Vietnam escalated during the Johnson administration, so too did the antiwar movement. At a November 26, 1966 nationwide conference for antiwar organizations in Cleveland, Ohio, a national Spring Mobilization Committee to end the Vietnam War formed and selected its national leadership, with A.J. Muste, one of the most prominent socialists in US history, serving as the founding chairman. The national committee comprised a mix of radical and liberal activists, such as Liberation editor David Dellinger, foreign policy specialist Professor Robert Greenblatt, and Ramparts editor Edward Keating, who also served as the West Coast Chairman for the Mobilization.20 The national committee set its sights for an April mobilization, and


20 “Spring Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam” informational letter [ca. January 1967], Box 1, Folder 8, M0928. Dept. of Special Collections, Stanford University Libraries. Stanford, Calif.
organizing for this event began soon after the conference dispersed. The subsequent Student Mobilization conference in Chicago, a few weeks later to organize a student campus strike counterpart to the National Mobilization found radicals and liberals among their ranks, especially Marxists like the Young Socialist Alliance. The Spring Mobilization Committee aimed not to usurp or compete with those already within the antiwar movement but instead to “stimulate increased activity everywhere” in opposition to the war, echoing the sentiments of Young Socialist Alliance’s “united front” strategy.²¹

The Steering Committee for the Spring Mobilization in San Francisco reflected the united front strategy with the large umbrella they built in seeking out participants for the April 15th rally. Although white radical and liberal men comprised much of the leadership for the Steering Committee, numerous subcommittees formed that centered around different communities in the Bay Area. The subcommittees ranged from those with activist orientations like the Afro-American, women’s, labor, and religious committees to logistics- and financing-oriented ones. One subcommittee unique to the West Coast Mobilization was the Latina/o subcommittee, featuring leaders such as longtime labor organizer Bert Corona.²² This subcommittee focused its efforts within the Bay Area’s Mexican American and other Spanish-speaking communities, including bilingual publicity and recruiting. They also emphasized the anti-imperialist nature of the Spring Mobilization. One such flyer featured a photograph of a Vietnamese woman with

²¹ “Spring Mobilization” informational letter; Student Mobilization Committee letter from Carl Frank, Box 2, Folder 4, M0928, Dept. of Special Collections, Stanford University Libraries, Stanford, Calif.; Jenness, “How Socialists Should Fight,” 5.

²² “Steering Committee for Spring Mobilization” Box 2, Folder 3, Philip Shapiro Papers M0928. Dept. of Special Collections, Stanford University Libraries, Stanford, Calif.
an infant in her arms and another child by her side weeping and mourning over the death of a male family member. The flyer proceeded to highlight the catastrophe the war produced for the civilians of Vietnam, which protesters argued largely existed to promote the interests of American corporations ahead of both the Vietnamese and everyday U.S. citizens. Moreover, the English side of the flyer characterized U.S. intervention in Vietnam as “a racist war against a colored people,” demonstrating the Latina/o subcommittee’s envisioning of the Vietnamese as engaged in a similar struggle against white supremacy as minorities in the United States.23

Other racial minorities within the Bay Area Steering Committee made this connection between white supremacy in the United States and the Vietnam War, most prominently the “ Afro-American Committee.” Among the members of this subcommittee were local leaders within various civil rights and Black Power organizations, such as Dr. Carleton B. Goodlett of the 1964 Sheraton Hotel strike (Chapter Two) and Eldridge Cleaver, who also would serve as one of the speakers for the April 15th rally. Goodlett represented the growing convergence of some Bay Area Black civil rights activists with Black radicals. Although he organized protests more in line with mainstream civil rights activism, such as the Sheraton strike, Goodlett also increasingly spoke out in support of Black Power activists and other radicals, even circulating copies of the communist People’s World at local NAACP meetings, to the chagrin of other leaders.24

23 “VOZ DE ALARMA...” flyer, Box 1, Folder 8, Phillip Shapiro Papers, M0928. Dept. of Special Collections, Stanford University Libraries, Stanford, Calif.

Other Black civil rights activists with the mainstream by joining the Mobilization. By the end of 1966, the National Committee counted civil rights organizations among its constituents, installing Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) member James Bevel as the National Director for the committee in December. In addition, Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee leader Julian Bond and SCLC leaders Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Coretta Scott King lent their support as speakers for the Mobilization, with Bond and Scott King scheduled for the San Francisco rally and King for its New York counterpart. The Kings’ and Bond’s decision to support to anti-war movement reflected a growing trend among Black activists that advanced this cause in conjunction with civil rights activism. The NAACP and other mainstream organizations had voiced solidarity with the anti-colonial national liberation movements in Africa and the rest of the Third World in the aftermath of World War II. During the Red Scare of the 1950s, however, most turned away from this political orientation, because most of these Third World movements emanated from communists and socialists, often with the support of the Soviet Union or the People’s Republic of China.25

For Bevel, the Kings, Bond, and others like them, however, the Black struggle for equality in the United States expanded beyond the country’s borders, as they viewed their oppression as stemming from the same source as the oppression that Third World revolutionaries faced. Coretta Scott King first became involved with internationalist

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25 “SPRING MOBILIZATION COMMITTEE TO END THE WAR IN VIETNAM” informational letter, Box 1, Folder 8, Phillip Shapiro Papers, M0928. Dept. of Special Collections, Stanford University Libraries, Stanford, Calif.
solidarity efforts as a student at Antioch College in Ohio during the mid-1940s. Scott King matriculated at Antioch after moving from her hometown in Alabama yet was first surprised, then frustrated at the persistent prejudice and de facto segregation she faced within the college and the surrounding areas. Seeing the prevalence of anti-Black racism in the North, Scott King dove into activist organizations, such as the Antioch chapters of the NAACP, Race Relations Committee, and Civil Liberties Committee. Further spurred by this activism, she also entered into international peace work through the Quaker peace groups she found at Antioch. After meeting and marrying Martin Luther King, Jr. and moving to Atlanta in the 1950s, Coretta Scott King joined the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, with whom she remained in contact even as she began centering her activism against the Jim Crow apartheid system in the South and other Black struggles. In March 1962, Women’s Strike for Peace invited her to serve as a delegate for an international conference for the burgeoning anti-nuclear movement. King’s internationalist solidarity intertwined with her civil rights and women’s movement activism, believing that “the women of the world, united without any regard for national or racial divisions, can become a most powerful force for international peace and brotherhood.”


27 Ibid., 41-44.
backlash relating to his anti-war position, as the Georgia Legislature refused to seat him after he gained election in June 1965. Bond was then the Communications Director of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) who in January 1966 issued a statement regarding the connections between the Vietnam War and their civil rights struggles within the U.S. The SNCC position paper emphasized the country’s history in deceiving or showing bad faith in their interventions or support of Western colonizers in the Third World, such as with the Dominican Republic and South Africa. Identifying themselves as a people struggling for liberation and self-determination, SNCC recognized the right for all people to determine their own futures, free of oppression, and saw the Vietnamese struggle as part of their fight for self-determination. Bond himself publicly supported this position paper because of his self-identification as a pacifist and because of the hypocrisy he saw in the United States allegedly fighting for freedom overseas when they could not even provide the same for all of its citizens at home. Bond disavowed communism and warfare altogether yet also recognized that he needed to oppose “things that...are wrong if they are in Viet Nam or New York, or Chicago, or Atlanta” or elsewhere, even if it meant critiquing the government. Bond eventually gained his seat in the Georgia legislature after the state of Georgia received a late-1966 mandate from the United States Supreme Court in Bond v. Floyd, with their decision centering on the Georgia legislature’s action violating Bond’s First Amendment rights. Yet even with his victory, Bond’s ordeal demonstrated the consequences that could arise from linking civil rights activism with an antiwar critique.

King laid out his rationale in his April 4, 1967 “Beyond Vietnam” speech, given in New York eleven days before the Spring Mobilization. King pointed to his and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference’s realization that their goal to “save the soul of America” could not “ignore the present war. If America’s soul becomes totally poisoned, part of the autopsy must read ‘Vietnam.’”

In other words, part of saving the United States from destruction stemming from the oppression that it held over Black Americans and other minority groups included ending U.S. oppression overseas. King emphasized the early revolutionary history of Vietnam, noting how they claimed their independence from Japanese and French colonization, even as the U.S. supported the latter’s efforts despite it conflicting with the will of most Vietnamese people. King also emphasized how the destruction from U.S. bombings during the war most often damaged non-combatants, particularly women, children, and the elderly, arguing that the bombings and other horrors of war only detracted from the country’s fight to contain communism and ability to make allies internationally. King emphasized the struggles of the Vietnamese people in his appeal for peace, tying their struggle to the fate of America itself.

Eldridge Cleaver served as one of the few Black Power movement representatives on the Afro-American Committee for the West Coast Mobilization Committee and the only one who spoke at the April 15th rally. Cleaver would gain most of his prominence (and notoriety) as a leader for the Black Panther Party later in the 1960s and early 1970s.

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30 Ibid.
At this point, however, he was involved primarily with the Organization of Afro-American Unity, originally founded by Malcolm X in 1964, and writing on the staff of Ramparts alongside West Coast Mobilization chairman Edward Keating. Cleaver risked the revocation of his parole with his political activism but remained a prominent figure within the Bay Area’s Black Power and antiwar scenes. Cleaver laid out his analysis of the relationship between Black America and the Vietnam War in a 1966 essay that he would later publish as part of his renowned *Soul on Ice* in 1968. Cleaver drew out connections between Black Americans’ struggles with those of the Vietnamese and other Third World peoples overseas, pointing to Bond’s ordeal in gaining his successfully-won seat in the Georgia legislature as one indicator of the cross-current of Black America and the Vietnam War. Like others, Cleaver emphasized the commonalities between the oppressed status of Black Americans in the United States with the oppression of Third World revolutionaries, arguing that because of the history of broken promises by both the Republican and Democratic Parties toward Black Americans, Black Americans could not continue to rely on the Parties to secure their liberation. Instead, the only guarantee that “the future of their people is secure” was to cultivate an international revolution against U.S. oppression.\(^{31}\) In Cleaver’s analysis, “The relationship between the genocide in Vietnam and the smiles of the white man toward black Americans is a direct relationship. Once the white man solves his problem in the East he will then turn his fury again on the black people of America, his longtime punching bag.”\(^{32}\) In addition, he argued that the


\(^{32}\) Ibid.
white supremacist and capitalist foundations of the U.S. empire were at their most vulnerable in U.S. history, pressing the urgency of this moment and making it imperative for Black Americans to join this anti-imperialist struggle. Although not stemming from the pacifist orientation of the Kings and Bond, Cleaver’s critique still demonstrated a similar line of critique against the United States and an explicit connection between Black Americans and those oppressed peoples overseas.33

Although based in San Francisco, Bay Area activists based in other cities worked feverishly to promote the Spring Mobilization. The Berkeley-based Community for New Politics (CNP) was one such organization and also worked to promote the accompanying Campus Mobilization. Although the CNP focused geared itself toward electoral politics, the organization’s base largely came from local antiwar and other activist communities. With CNP leader Robert Scheer serving as one of the speakers for the April 15th rally, the CNP took an active role in promoting the Spring Mobilization. One CNP newsletter emphasized the broad appeal of the Spring Mobilization, listing some of the nationally-renowned speakers like civil rights leaders Julian Bond and Coretta Scott King. The newsletter also played up the uniqueness of the Spring Mobilization, including attracting labor organizations, which they noted “had not previously been engaged in war protests” and “represented in the Bay Area by Santa Clara County Central Labor Council,

AFL-CIO, and the Northern California District Council of the International Longshoremens’ and Warehousemen’s Union.”

The Spring Mobilization efforts west of the Mississippi River also flourished outside of the Bay Area, particularly in the U.S. West. Mobilization Committees formed in major urban areas such as Los Angeles, Seattle, and Denver, who arranged local demonstrations leading up to the April 15th rally and also arranged bus rides and other logistics for protesters traveling to San Francisco. Some activists like Los Angeles-based Japanese American union organizer Karl Yoneda had long been active in anti-imperialist solidarity mobilizations, with Yoneda’s organizing largely coming within Los Angeles’ multiracial communist circles. Yoneda’s labor union networks connected him with the labor union efforts within the Bay Area and helped him recruit other labor union activists from Southern California to the Spring Mobilization. Others had more recently become involved with activism in general. With many of the Bay Area’s activist communities engaged and mass support pouring into San Francisco on April 15, the Spring Mobilization generated numbers and publicity that could not be ignored.

However, vestiges of the Old Left remained in stark visibility for the rally, most notably with the issue of representation. Male activists dominated planning and steering of the Spring Mobilization, ranging from the all-male National Committee to the vast

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majority of the San Francisco Steering Committee being men. Moreover, white men specifically comprised the majority of these leadership roles, including at the April 15th rally in San Francisco, where Bond, Cleaver, and Coretta Scott King served as the only non-white prominently-advertised speakers for the day. Not all the subcommittees for the West Coast Mobilization Committee received representation at the rally itself. Most surprisingly, Mexican American or other Latina/o leaders had been announced to speak, and bilingual translation was not readily available, in contrast to the Mexican American subcommittee’s efforts in the Bay Area’s Spanish-speaking communities. King’s inclusion in drew particular attention, as publicity documents for the Kezar Stadium rally referred to her as “Mrs. Martin Luther King, Jr.” Even her introduction at the April 15th rally did not include her name. Such reference as only the wife of her more renowned husband masked the reality of Coretta Scott King’s internationalism actually predating and shaping her husband’s, particularly with her work with Women Strike for Peace during her college years in the 1940s and solidarity efforts with the Ghanaian national liberation movement during the 1950s. Thus, even as the Spring Mobilization marked part of the turning tide of Leftist politics in the Bay Area progressed, certain inequalities in the power dynamics of this coalitional organizing remained. As the decade progressed and turned to the 1970s, racial underrepresentation and the marginalization of women continue to cause problems in alliance-building endeavors among Leftist activists throughout the Bay Area.36

Conclusion

The 1967 Spring Mobilization Against the War did not mark the turning point of U.S. popular support from the Vietnam War. The Northern Vietnamese’s Tet Offensive in 1968 would serve as this watershed moment, as their offensive during the Vietnamese New Year demonstrated to the American public the extent to which the Northern Vietnamese would fight to gain victory in this war. The Spring Mobilization, however, was significant in the way that it represented the shift toward anti-imperialism within the anti-war movement, considering not only how the war affected the lives of Americans but also those overseas. The Spring Mobilization also represented the convergence between some liberal and radical contingents on the Left, along with some of its persistent issues in terms of representation and leadership.

Anti-imperialist protests would continue to be the most visible form of resistance against the Vietnam War, with an increase of draft resistance sweeping the Bay Area by early 1968. Activists would continue to organize various regional and national mobilizations annually through the early 1970s, echoing the rhetoric of the 1967 Spring Mobilization. Bay Area radicals continued to voice and work toward anti-imperialist solidarity for Third World peoples after the 1960s as well, ranging from Cambodia in the early 1970s to the Sandinistas in Nicaragua in the 1980s and the national liberation of the South African and Palestinian peoples throughout these decades.

Anti-imperialist resistance also manifested itself within the United States in forms other than solidarity for Third World peoples and protest against U.S. interventions

overseas. As some activists who were part of the Spring Mobilization noted, the struggle against oppression at home was tied to the struggle against oppression abroad. The political prisoner movements of the 1960s and 70s echoed this sentiment, as the court proceedings of these activists on trials generated mass support and critiques of the justice system that extended beyond the courtroom or jailhouse. And with these political prisoner movements, some alliances from the Spring Mobilization reconstituted themselves, while others arose within the anti-imperialist zeitgeist the April 15th rally represented.
CHAPTER FOUR

Anti-Imperialism at Home: The Political Prisoner Movements to Free Huey P. Newton and Angela Y. Davis

On August 5, 1970, a multiracial crowd numbering in the hundreds waited in anticipation outside Alameda County courthouse in Oakland for Black Panther Party co-founder and Minister of Defense Huey P. Newton. Released on bail ahead of a retrial, Newton’s nearly three-year-long incarceration stemmed from charges of assault with a deadly weapon against an Oakland police officers. Local KQED Channel 2 news footage captured the frenzied scene outside the courthouse, joining the Black Panther Party in chants of “Free Huey” and “We Want Huey, Off the Pigs,” and as Newton walked out of the courthouse and toward a waiting automobile, the crowd swarmed him to congratulate him on his release.¹

Just two days later, approximately twenty-five miles northwest at the Marin County courthouse in San Rafael, a shootout occurred between several Black Panthers sprung free in the middle of their trial and local police officers. Among the death toll in the shootout were three of the four Panthers and Judge Harold Haley, one of the hostages the Panthers took and killed during their attempted escape. Soon after, a warrant was released for Angela Y. Davis in connection with Haley’s kidnapping and murder. Davis was a Panther associate, an outspoken member of the Communist Party USA (CPUSA),

and a professor of philosophy at the University of California, Los Angeles, whose 1969 dismissal from UCLA for being a communist thrust her into the media spotlight and brought criticism against the state of California, particularly Governor Ronald Reagan. Police authorities tied Davis to the Marin County courthouse shootout because Jonathan Jackson, the Panther who led his indicted counterparts in their escape, possessed firearms registered under Davis’ name. Many of those who supported Newton’s innocence would soon support Davis, as their supporters connected these two trial proceedings not only because of membership or association with the Black Panther Party but how these political prisoner movements spoke the liberation of these two radical activists to the liberation of oppressed people at large.²

This chapter examines the domestic theater of anti-imperialism through the alliances and solidarity garnered for Huey Newton and Angela Davis, two of the most prominent Bay Area radicals on trial during the turn of the 1960s to the 1970s. These political prisoner movements bridged activists not only across racial lines but across ideological lines as well. Along with likeminded radicals, the Free Huey Movement drew in mainstream activist organizations and Black communities at large, who sympathized with Newton’s plight as a wrongfully-accused Black activist. The movement to free Angela Davis unified disparate leftists around a common goal during a time when many Marxist-inspired radicals had rejected the CPUSA for a number of reasons, such as continuing to align with the Soviet Union even after its 1950s and 60s invasions of Eastern European countries. In addition, support for Davis stretched to activist

communities who tended to be hesitant or uncomfortable with communism, such as mainstream Black civil rights organizations.  

Throughout the late 1960s and 1970s, Bay Area radicals articulated a number of domestic struggles as different “fronts” of anti-imperialist resistance, invoking the image and rhetoric of the post-World War II Third World national liberation movements. Anti-imperialism permeated Bay Area internationalist radicalism so extensively that some organizations adopted the term into their name, such as the Bay Area Anti-Imperialist Coalition. At times, these mobilizations centered on protesting diplomatic meetings in the Bay Area that facilitated U.S. military and economic incursions overseas, such as the 1969 Japan Week protests led by a coalition of Asian American and white activists, including the Asian American Political Alliance (AAPA), the Maoist- and Black Panther Party-inspired Red Guard Party, and local chapters of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS).  

More commonly, domestic anti-imperialism engaged with the everyday struggles of oppressed people in the United States. Although seemingly unrelated to anti-imperialist resistance globally, U.S. radicals drew parallels between their struggles and those of Third World revolutionaries and other anti-imperialists overseas. Most ubiquitous for U.S. radical activists were mobilizations against the state in the form of

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political prisoner solidarity movements. Dozens of legal defense committees formed in the Bay Area during the 1960s and 70s around activists on trial for charges stemming from a range of activities, including labor strikes, student campus protests, resisting the draft, opposing evictions, and their alleged involvement with murders or conspiracy to murder. So numerous were political prisoner movements during these decades that organizations like the San Francisco-based Movement Liberation Front published legal advice booklets detailing the trial process.\(^5\) Activists indicted on charges relating to the murder of public officials such as police officers and judges carried additional legal burdens and gained broader exposure than other political prisoners, since a guilty verdict brought the probability of the death penalty.\(^6\)

Rather than solely focusing on the release of an indicted or incarcerated activist, political prisoner movements served as vehicles for organizing against and critiquing broader systemic issues. Some critiques were more immediate to the situation, such as prevalent police brutality against racial minorities and the working poor, along with racial inequalities within the conviction rates and punishments meted for those convicted. Yet political prisoner movements also linked their cause to systemic and structural oppression within the broader society and overseas. Within the Free Huey Movement, activists articulated the intertwined nature of racism, economic exploitation, and U.S. militaristic interventions. Newton himself drew parallels between the Black freedom struggle in the


United States with the Vietnamese national liberation movement, articulating in 1967 that, "Because Black people desire to determine their own destiny, they are constantly inflicted with brutality from the occupying army, embodied in the police. There is a great similarity between the occupying army in Southeast Asia and the occupation of our communities by the racist police." Thus, the Free Huey Movement provided Bay Area radicals another front in the worldwide struggle against U.S. imperialism.

Similar critiques arose from the movement to free Angela Davis, highlighting the intertwined oppressions of racism, capitalism, and militarism within the United States and overseas. Activists emphasized Davis’ status as a Black political dissident, which they argued caused governmental figures to indict her in a frame-up for the Marin County shootout. In addition to these oppressions, allies in Davis’ movement also focused on the patriarchal aspects of the justice system, which often intersected with racism and economic exploitation within the United States. Women allies articulated a number of gendered analyses, with an emphasis on the disproportionate representation of working-class women, particularly women of color, among the female prison population and how desperate economic and social circumstances often led women to commit the crimes for which they were most commonly arrested.

Genealogies of alliance would manifest themselves across these two mobilizations. Eldridge Cleaver and other organizers within the Spring Mobilization Against the War (Chapter Three) would prove integral in the early Free Huey Movement, and some allies the Panthers gained during the Free Huey Movement would continue

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7 Newton, quoted in Bloom and Martin, *Black Against Empire*, 7.
their solidarity by extending support to Angela Davis during her trial proceedings, as Davis herself also voiced solidarity with Newton and other incarcerated Panthers. Maintaining active alliances, however, proved difficult for many activists, both within these two mobilizations and after the exonerations of Newton and Davis.

**The Roots and Early Mobilization of the Free Huey Movement**

The Black Panther Party emerged as a manifestation of Bay Area’s transformations as a result of its post-World War II urban crises (detailed in Chapter Two). Co-founders Huey Newton and Bobby Seale intimately experienced these changes as World War II-era Black Southern migrant youth who felt the brunt of the capital and tax divestment from Oakland and found themselves caught up within the Sixties activist zeitgeist. Newton and Seale also grew dissatisfied with their involvement in federally-funded War on Poverty programs and activist groups such as the Revolutionary Action Movement and the Soul Students Advisory Council, viewing the former as inadequate for alleviating the problems of Black urban plight and the latter as lacking the desire and ability to mobilize the Black masses. Inspired by a litany of theorists, especially Malcolm X, Robert F. Williams, Frantz Fanon, Mao Zedong, and Che Guevara, Newton and Seale founded the Black Panther Party as an alternative to mainstream Black activism, advocating for Black self-determination through control over their local governments and community institutions.⁸

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Yet the BPP’s politics were often overshadowed by their association with violence. The Panthers openly brandished firearms, advocated citizens’ right to armed self-defense from police brutality, and at one point even openly called for “guerrilla warfare methods” to liberate Black communities. This association with violence came to a head on October 28, 1967 when John Frey, an Oakland police officer with a local reputation for harassing Black civilians, stopped the automobile that Newton was driving and ordered him out of the car. Although the exact details of the subsequent events remain unclear, a shootout ensued that ended with the death of John Frey and the severe wounding of Newton and officer Herbert Heanes. Newton managed to make it to a local hospital before losing consciousness, and police authorities arrived to arrest him shortly afterward. Newton faced felony charges of first degree murder, attempted murder, and kidnapping; if found guilty, he would receive the death penalty. Newton’s subsequent trial proceedings dramatically changed the trajectory of the Black Panther Party, and in this moment of crisis, the Panthers would need to seek support outside the party.

Upon hearing the news of Newton’s detainment, the Panthers mobilized for action. Beyond acquiring the greatest legal expertise they could find in lead attorney Charles Garry—a socialist who defended other high-profile radicals like the Oakland

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10 Murch, Living for the City, 148-149; Peniel Joseph, Waiting ‘Til the Midnight Hour: A Narrative History of the Black Power Movement (New York: Macmillan, 2007), 210-211; Austin, Up Against the Wall, 113-114.
Seven—the Panthers turned their attention toward gaining public support for the Free Huey Movement. The Panthers received vocal but fleeting support from other Black Power organizations across the ideological spectrum, such as the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the Los Angeles-based US Organization. Community outreach posed a difficult task for the Panthers, whose membership heretofore remained miniscule because of the prevalence of other Black activist organizations locally and the Panthers’ association with violence. Yet sympathy for Newton as a wrongfully-accused Black activist presented an opportunity for the Panthers to reach out to the Bay Area’s Black communities, and the Panthers capitalized on this sympathy through the various strategies they employed. The BPP staged rallies and informational sessions about the case throughout an array of venues in the Bay Area, such as public parks, auditoriums, and college campuses, and devised multiple kinds of fundraising events, ranging from garage sales to a Free Huey rally in February on Newton’s birthday. As important as monetary donations were to the Free Huey Movement, however, the active support shown by other activist organizations proved as important in garnering public support for Newton’s cause.11

With Seale serving time in prison until late 1967, Eldridge and Kathleen Cleaver, who had joined the BPP earlier that year, provided the early organizing leadership for the Free Huey Movement. Since his release from prison in 1966, Eldridge Cleaver had forged ties with the local white Left, particularly through his position as a staff writer for *Ramparts*, a radical periodical and press based in San Francisco. He also held previous experience in multiracial organizing, most notably with the April 1967 Spring Mobilization against the Vietnam War, a nationwide antiwar rally with its local extension in San Francisco. Eldridge would draw on these earlier mass-mobilization experiences and the ties he maintained among activists in the Bay Area as he and Kathleen navigated the planning and execution of the Free Huey Movement.\(^\text{12}\)

These seeds of earlier multiracial organizing yielded fruit early in the movement, as the Panthers did not always need to actively seek support. Sometimes, organizations such as the Peace and Freedom Party (PFP) sought them out first. This largely white,

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\(^{12}\) Bloom and Martin, *Black Against Empire*, 78 - 79; Eldridge Cleaver, *Soul on Fire* (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1978). 95; *People’s World* article, April 22, 1967, Box 1, Folder 1, Phillip Shapiro Papers, M0928. Dept. of Special Collections, Stanford University Libraries, Stanford, Calif.; “Steering Committee for Spring Mobilization” Box 2, Folder 3, Phillip Shapiro Papers, M0928. Dept. of Special Collections, Stanford University Libraries, Stanford, Calif. The steering committee for the 1967 Spring Mobilization included leaders specifically from “the Negro Community,” as well as local Mexican American community leaders, demonstrating the committee’s understanding of the unique experiences of Blacks and Mexican Americans and thus needing their unique perspectives on the antiwar issue.
middle-class, California-based third party emerged locally in San Francisco in June 1967 out of numerous organizations, most notably the Community for New Politics (CNP), that comprised the peace movement within the Bay Area. With a political platform based around ending the Vietnam War, the PFP sought to establish itself as a viable third party alternative to the political hegemony of the Democratic and Republican Parties. By January 1968, the Peace and Freedom Party had registered over 100,000 voters and secured a place on November’s ballot.\(^{13}\)

But the PFP’s platform included more than antiwar activism. As articulated in their party policy guidelines, the party aimed to draw in members from oppressed groups throughout U.S. society. Not only did this involve voicing solidarity with “the Black Liberation movement… Mexican-Americans, Indians, and other [racial minorities]” but it also included supporting “poor people, workers, students, and other groups in their struggle for economic justice.”\(^{14}\) Rather than seeing the antiwar movement as separate from race- and class-based struggles, the PFP saw all three as linked together; racist attitudes against Asians overseas and the possibility of new economic markets in Asia provided the motivation for U.S. involvement in this war, and those in the poorest sectors of society (disproportionately racial minorities) were more prone to be drafted into or enlist in the military because of a paucity in educational and employment opportunities.\(^{15}\) The PFP also understood that larger societal problems (such as racial inequality and class

\(^{13}\) Bloom and Martin, Jr., *Black against Empire*, 107; Wilson, “Free Huey,” 5.


\(^{15}\) “THE IMPORTANCE OF DEMANDING THAT HUEY P. NEWTON BE SET FREE,” Reel 16, Social Protest Collection, BANC FILM 2757, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.
oppression) affected different groups of people in different ways, with their maintenance of a “Black and Brown Caucus” within the party demonstrating their awareness of this reality.\textsuperscript{16}

Despite adopting an official anti-racist platform, however, the PFP experienced difficulties in generating a large-scale political base within Black communities. These difficulties particularly resonated with PFP leaders Robert Scheer and Bob Avakian, who had also adopted anti-racism as a CNP position, attempted to form a CNP-BPP coalition earlier that year, and even penned an article in solidarity with Newton in the \textit{Communiqué for New Politics} soon after his arrest. As the Free Huey Movement began to mobilize, the PFP seized upon this opportunity to demonstrate to Black America at large their commitment in the struggle against racial and class oppression. Scheer, a colleague of Eldridge Cleaver’s at \textit{Ramparts}, and Avakian, a longtime Panther sympathizer and friend of Bobby Seale, led the PFP leadership in working with the BPP leadership to organize a formal coalition between the organizations. Kathleen Cleaver also mediated between the BPP and the Peace and Freedom Party; in particular she called on the PFP to demonstrate their support of the Panthers by running Newton as their candidate for the seventh congressional district and selecting a Black anti-capitalist radical instead of a Black candidate from the Democratic Party establishment for their 1968 presidential candidate.\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{16} “Proposal on Bicameralism from the Black and Brown Caucus,” New Left Collection, Box No. 49, Hoover Institution Archives.

\textsuperscript{17} Bloom and Martin, Jr., \textit{Black against Empire}, 81-82, 108-110; \textit{Communiqué for New Politics} Nov. 20, 1967 newsletter, Reel 52, BANC FILM 2757, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley; Joel Wilson, “‘Free Huey’: The Black Panther Party, the Peace and Freedom Party, and the Politics of Race in 1968” (PhD diss., University of California, Santa Cruz, 2002), 128-134; “Position of the Black Panther
Yet the formation of this alliance generated conflict within the Peace and Freedom Party. Disagreement over the nature of the coalition arose among PFP members who supported a BPP-PFP coalition. Eldridge Cleaver assured the PFP at their inaugural convention in March 1968 that the coalition would exist narrowly on the issue of freeing Newton, yet many were still wary that the Panthers might eventually control the PFP agenda.\textsuperscript{18} Dissention also existed within the party over whether or not they and the Panthers should even create this alliance. Some doubted Newton’s innocence and found protesting the alleged injustice (or in the words of one member, “immorality”) of Newton’s imprisonment as separate from and less justifiable than protesting the war.\textsuperscript{19} More commonly, party members like Barbara Israel argued that the PFP should work only toward their own specific endeavors, since a coalition detracted energy and focus away from their larger goal of ending the Vietnam War.\textsuperscript{20} Yet because of the opportunity to appeal to a national Black voting constituency, along with the persistence of the Radical Caucus within the party (especially Scheer and Avakian), the PFP maintained their position in the Free Huey Movement through the November elections of 1968.\textsuperscript{21}


\textsuperscript{19} “Pitfalls of the ‘Free Huey’ Motion and An Alternative Proposal,” New Left Collection, Box 56, Hoover Institution Archives.

\textsuperscript{20} “Arguments against Passing the Motion that ‘We Endorse the Panther’s 10-Point Program,’” New Left Collection, Box 56, Hoover Institution Archives.

Along with officially voicing their solidarity, the Peace and Freedom Party showed their commitment to the Free Huey Movement by working with the Panthers to stage joint rallies, distribute flyers, and fundraise. PFP members like Jackie DiSalvo also took it upon themselves to educate local white communities about Newton’s case in the context of the racism Blacks and other minorities faced. Activists of color often implored their white allies to conduct antiracist education and awareness in their home communities, largely to no avail; the PFP’s commitment to this organizing work within white, especially white middle-class communities, was therefore notable. Although dissent over the Free Huey Movement persisted within the Peace and Freedom Party, the party remained one of the Panthers’ staunchest allies throughout most of 1968.22

Connections with the Peace and Freedom Party also factored into the Black Panther Party’s alliance with the Asian American Political Alliance. Yuji Ichioka and Emma Gee, the founding organizers of AAPA, formed this largely middle- and working-class student organization in Berkeley in early 1968 primarily from Asian Americans they found on PFP membership rolls and Berkeley college campuses. Although some interethnic organizations predated it, AAPA emerged as the first pan-ethnic Asian political organization in U.S. history.23

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23 Although rhetorically and ideologically pan-ethnic, AAPA’s membership was primarily Chinese Americans and Japanese Americans. For one example of an early interethnic Asian American organization,
Like much of the broader Asian American movement of the 1960s and 70s, AAPA, in the words of Daryl Maeda, drew from “the discourses and ideologies of the Black Power and anti-war movements in the United States, as well as decolonization movements around the globe.”

One early AAPA position paper reflected this confluence of internationalist, antiracist, and anti-imperialist thought by arguing that “American society is historically racist and is one that has systematically employed social discrimination and economic imperialism both domestically and internationally to exploit all people, but especially non-whites.”

A later AAPA Newspaper editorial echoed this sentiment, affirming themselves as Asian Americans who “oppose the imperialist policies being pursued by the American Government,” calling the United States a “White Racist Society” since its inception, and admonishing Asian Americans to work with other minorities to create “an American Society which is just, humane, equal and gives the people the right to control their own lives.”

AAPA thus did not represent a complete break from the Peace and Freedom Party, since like the PFP, AAPA voiced anti-imperialist solidarity with Third World peoples both within and outside of the country.

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25 “AAPA IS,” AAPA Newspaper, Nov.-Dec. 1968, 4;

26 “AAPA Perspectives,” AAPA Newspaper, Vol. 1, No. 5 (Summer 1969), 2, Steve Louie Asian American Movement collection (Collection Number 1805), Department of Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, University of California, Los Angeles.
AAPA also aimed to distance themselves from the “model minority” myth that had emerged after World War II. This stereotype held that people of Asian descent, particularly Chinese and Japanese Americans, had experienced racism throughout their histories yet had still gained upward social and economic mobility and assimilated into the fabric of American society through hard work and perseverance. White scholars and policymakers used the model minority myth against African Americans, Latinas/os, and other racial and ethnic minority groups who had not achieved the same levels of upward social mobility that Asian Americans were perceived to have experienced, ignoring or denying the existence of systemic and structural racism throughout the country. In contrast, AAPA positioned itself as a group of racially-marginalized people in support of other racially-oppressed peoples, both in the United States and internationally. As stated in their “AAPA Perspectives” editorial, AAPA “refuse[d] to cooperate with the White Racism in this society” and rather worked to “support all oppressed peoples and their struggles for Liberation.”

The Free Huey Movement provided AAPA an opportunity to demonstrate this multiracial solidarity. Although AAPA, like the Peace and Freedom Party, contained both a radical and a more moderate liberal contingent, establishing an alliance with the Black Panther Party went virtually uncontested within the organization. One of the organization’s founding members and emerging spokespeople, Richard Aoki, was actually an official member of

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27 “AAPA Perspectives,” 2.

the BPP and helped bridge the alliance between AAPA and the Panthers. A third-generation Japanese American who grew up in the predominantly-Black West Oakland neighborhood, Aoki met Huey Newton and Bobby Seale while enrolled at Merritt College. Aoki also was involved with other multiracial organizing, such as the Tri-Continental Students Committee at the University of California, Berkeley. Reflecting years later on the rationale behind Black-Asian American solidarity, Aoki articulated the position that “the struggle for freedom, justice, and equality transcends racial and national boundaries,” and thus necessitated interracial resistance. Because comrades in past organizations balked at his membership in the BPP, Aoki initially hid this part of his life from AAPA, yet his concerns over his status as a Black Panther subsided after AAPA voted unanimously in favor of joining the Free Huey Movement.

While public support for Newton proved to be no issue for Aoki, Yuji Ichioka initially waivered on this issue. He fundamentally disagreed with parts of the Panthers’ ideology, viewing them as practicing “suicidal politics” because of their willingness to wield and use firearms. At the same time, Ichioka believed that all U.S. citizens deserved due process and the full extent of their rights and protections under the law. Furthermore, as the Free Huey Movement garnered widespread local and national media attention, voicing solidarity with Newton provided a platform for AAPA to gain public

29 Richard Aoki, quoted in Fujino, Samurai among Panthers, 150.

30 Ibid., 114-115, 133, 144-150, 170. Recent findings based on FBI files obtained by investigative reporter Seth Rosenfeld strongly indicate that Aoki served as an FBI informant during much of his activist years, from the Socialist Workers Party through an early part of his career as working for the Peralta College district in Oakland. A further discussion of the implications of Aoki’s informant status can be found in the Conclusion of the dissertation.

31 Ichioka, quoted in Kang, “Heritage Hero Scholarship,” Los Angeles Times
exposure and increase their membership. AAPA would thus show their solidarity through frequent participation in public demonstrations in the “political theater” of the Free Huey Movement, receiving publicity to grow their own political base.\textsuperscript{32}

Although they have not received as much scholarly attention as the PFP and AAPA within the Free Huey Movement, the Brown Berets served as another radical organization that dedicated themselves to Newton’s cause. Founded in Los Angeles, California, in May 1966 as the Young Citizens for Community Action (YCCA) before their transformation in January 1968, the Berets spread rapidly to other Mexican American communities throughout the U.S. West, drawing heavily from the rhetoric and aesthetics of the Panthers, such as modeling their political platform off the latter’s Ten-Point Platform and wearing military-style outfits with berets.\textsuperscript{33}

The Berets formed an alliance with the Los Angeles chapter of the Black Panther Party soon after their 1968 transformation. Not only did they and Los Angeles Panthers experience a common struggle against police brutality in their communities, but the Berets themselves became increasingly multiracial and internationalist. David Sanchez, who orchestrated the YCCA’s transformation into the Berets, articulated this position in


an April 1968 radio interview. Sanchez favored “a closer alliance between brown and black,” arguing that the white capitalist power structure in the United States “was exploiting the fighting capabilities of young Chicana/o and young African Americans by sending them to fight against the Vietnamese.” Furthermore, according to Sanchez, Chicanas/os and the Vietnamese shared a common ancestry, since he believed that Chicanas/os’ indigenous ancestors migrated from Asia across the Bering Strait land bridge thousands of years prior, and thereby making Asians and Chicanas/os allies, not enemies. The problems with this historical interpretation aside, Sanchez conveyed the Berets’ growing commitment to the struggles of Third World peoples around the world.

The Berets’ participation in the Free Huey Movement demonstrated how alliances developed in one locale could emerge in others. Behind the organizing direction of Aaron Manganiello, the Berets had established a number of Northern California chapters by the summer of 1968, most notably in San Francisco’s Mission District and in Oakland. The Berets never gained much of a foothold in the Mission; although this neighborhood held a heavily-Latina/o population, many were of Nicaraguan, Salvadoran, and other non-Mexican ancestry, meaning the Berets’ appeals to ethnic solidarity often fell on deaf ears.

34 David Sanchez, quoted in Lorena Oropeza, ¡Raza Sí, Guerra No!: Chicano Protest and Patriotism during the Viet Nam War Era (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005), 89.


36 Marjorie Heins, Strictly Ghetto Property: The Story of Los Siete de la Raza (Berkeley: Ramparts Press, 1972), 51-53
Throughout the East Bay, however, and particularly in Oakland’s increasingly multiracial Fruitvale neighborhood, Chicanas/os gravitated toward the Berets. Jorge Gonzalez and other Oakland Beret leaders had previously connections with Newton and Seale, working toward diversifying curricula and campus life while students at Merritt College, and the horrors Gonzalez witnessed during a tour of service in Vietnam pushed him into antiwar activism upon his return to the United States.37 Early recruit and eventual Chairman and Minister of Information Manuel Gomez—a former member of the Peace and Freedom Party drawn into anti-police brutality activism after three police officers shot and killed unarmed Mexican American Gilberto Garza in Hayward in 1967—explained the Berets’ attractiveness as an activist organization.38 The “symbols of the Berets…the jacket, the beret, the patch, the rituals, the gathering, the discipline,” according to Gomez, stirred up the East Bay’s Mexican American youth, and the organization’s focus on education and activism against police brutality as the “defenders of La Raza” provided additional appeal that swelled the Oakland chapter’s ranks.39

Echoing Sanchez and the Los Angeles Berets, the Oakland Berets voiced internationalist solidarity with the Vietnamese people. In the words of Gomez,

37 “Brown Berets,” Oakland Wiki, accessed August 28, 2015, https://oaklandwiki.org/Brown_Berets; “Merritt College,” “Merritt College,” Oakland Wiki, accessed August 28, 2015, https://oaklandwiki.org/Merritt_College; interview with Alex Gonzalez, March 18, 2015, in possession of the author; Alex Gonzalez disclosed to me in unrecorded conversations that the Oakland Wiki articles on the Brown Berets, the Fruitvale Neighborhood, and other aspects of Oakland’s Mexican American and Chicana/o history were written largely by his brother, Jorge Gonzalez, and other Mexican American veteran activists.


39 Interview with Manuel Gomez.
Chicanas/os and the Vietnamese people were “brothers involved in the same struggle for justice against a common enemy” of U.S. imperialism.\textsuperscript{40} The Oakland Berets also demonstrated their commitment to multiracial organizing with the composition of their membership, as Gomez and early member Alex Gonzalez recall that the Berets counted American Indians and Filipinas/os among their ranks in the early years of the organization. Their many parallels and points of intersection in terms of ideologies and lived experiences thus made an alliance between the Panthers and Oakland Berets mutually-beneficial and appealing.\textsuperscript{41}

The solidarity voiced by more nationally-prominent organizations such as SNCC and SDS demonstrated the national support Newton received during his trial ordeal. Support from public figures such as film stars Marlon Brando and Jane Fonda and writers James Baldwin and Norman Mailer showed the growing mainstream appeal of the Free Huey Movement and the Black Panthers. Kathleen and Eldridge Cleaver and other BPP leaders traveled abroad over the next few years to cultivate international solidarity, not only in Cuba, Algeria, Vietnam, and other Third World countries but also to Japan, Western Europe, and Scandinavia. Yet it was the efforts of local radical allies, working alongside the Black Panther Party, which contributed most directly to the Free Huey Movement. Moreover, although Newton’s trial proceedings took an unexpected turn and old alliances weakened or even dissolved, inter-organizational solidarity from the early

\textsuperscript{40} Gomez, quoted in Oropeza, ¡Raza Sí, Guerra No!, 89.

\textsuperscript{41} Interview with Manuel Gomez; interview with Alex Gonzalez, March 18, 2015, in possession of the author.
mobilization of the movement would manifest itself again in later activist efforts throughout the Bay Area.\textsuperscript{42}

\textbf{Weakened Alliances, Sustained Solidarity}

After nearly four days of deliberation, the jury presented a mixed verdict on September 8, 1968, finding Newton guilty of voluntary manslaughter for shooting Frey and not guilty of the lesser charge of assault with a deadly weapon against Heanes.\textsuperscript{43} The verdict was based on faulty logic—in the words of Charles Garry, “Either [Huey] had a gun or he didn’t”—but the end result spared Newton of the death penalty.\textsuperscript{44} In addition, the inconsistent verdict allowed Newton’s defense team to appeal to higher courts for a retrial. Yet the mixed verdict muddled the movement’s future. The appeals process moved slowly, and Newton’s sentencing two weeks later led to his transfer over two hundred miles away to the California Men’s Penal Colony in San Luis Obispo, California, which brought further impediments to the local mobilization. While occasional “Free Huey” rallies occurred in both 1969 and 1970, Newton’s absence from the Bay Area made it difficult to generate the same level of fervor for his cause. Indeed, by the day of Newton’s sentencing, the daily crowds outside the Alameda County

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\textsuperscript{43} Joseph, \textit{Waiting 'Til the Midnight Hour}, 237.

\textsuperscript{44} Quoted in Philip S. Foner, “Introduction,” in \textit{The Black Panthers Speak} (New York, 1970), xxxv.
courthouse had dwindled from hundreds and even thousands on some days to a few dozen. The Free Huey Movement remained a *cause célèbre* among Bay Area radicals yet increasingly faded away from its position as a *cause de jure.*

As the local movement lost steam, so too did these early alliances. The Brown Berets remained allies with the Black Panther Party, often appearing at rallies alongside each other. At the same time, the Berets experienced increasing internal turmoil, particularly along ideological lines, as the fault line between cultural nationalism and Marxist, Third World internationalism grew increasingly polarized. Such divisiveness grew to be so acute that Aaron Manganiello left the organization by the time the Berets disbanded nationally in October 1972. Moreover, tensions mounted between and among numerous East Bay Black and Chicana/o organizations, with issues ranging from the personal to disagreements about the feasibility of armed revolution. Relations deteriorated to the point where some activists like Manuel Gomez left the Bay Area, concerned that these simmering tensions would erupt.

The Asian American Political Alliance remained nominally allied within the Free Huey Movement. As its membership grew, however, AAPA shifted their main focus to issues within Asian American communities, ranging from the anti-eviction movement for impoverished Filipinas/os and Chinese Americans at the International Hotel in San Francisco to supporting striking Chinese garment workers. AAPA also continued to

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45 Joseph, *Waiting 'Til the Midnight Hour*, 238; “Newton Given 2 to 15 Years,” *Oakland Tribune*, Sept. 27, 1968, 9. This article tallied about thirty Newton supporters outside of the courthouse on the day of his sentencing.

46 Heins, *Strictly Ghetto Property*, 52-53; Chavez, “¡Mi Raza Primero!,” 57, interview with Manuel Gomez, Aug. 12, 2014, in possession of the author. Bay Area Chicanas/os “Marxist orientations” were typically Marxism-Leninism and Maoism.
engage in internationalist, multiracial organizing, including their September 1969 Japan Week protests against the U.S. military presence in Japan and Asia more broadly and as part of the Third World Liberation Front (TWLF) strikes at San Francisco State College (SFSC) and U.C. Berkeley throughout 1968 and 1969. Yet AAPA’s new endeavors dictated a decline in regular, active involvement within the Free Huey Movement.  

The Panthers’ coalition with the Peace and Freedom Party, unlike their alliances with the Brown Berets and AAPA, dissolved soon after Newton’s sentencing. The PFP leadership never could bring the rank-and-file members to consensus regarding the coalition with the Panthers. Furthermore, the PFP leadership decided to run Eldridge Cleaver as their candidate in the 1968 presidential election as a way of showing further support for the Panthers. This decision, however, proved to be the unmaking of the BPP-PFP alliance. During that summer, Cleaver published his commercially-successful and popular *Soul on Ice*, a collection of biographical essays and social critiques. While some critics and activists hailed its anti-establishment and Black masculine empowerment orientation, other activists—predominantly Black women—blasted the rampant misogyny in the book. One of the many shocking passages included Cleaver’s discussion of his past rapes, which he described as “an insurrectionary act” that

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48 Joseph, *Waiting ’Til the Midnight Hour*, 212.
“delighted” him, since he viewed it as “defying and trampling upon the white man’s law.”

In addition, Cleaver led a contingent of Panthers in an attempted ambush of Oakland police officers in April 1968. Partially in response to the recent assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. but also as a form of support and revenge for Newton, this ambush ended with the killing of Bobby Hutton and the arrest of the other Panthers. Despite Cleaver’s insistence at the time that the police had attacked first, his flight from the country later that year suggested otherwise. These events destroyed the PFP’s credibility as a “peace” party, alienating their voting base to the point that the Cleaver ticket garnered fewer than 27,000 votes nationwide in the November election. The Peace and Freedom Party never returned to the heights they reached in January, and little cooperation existed between the PFP and the Panthers thereafter.

Yet while active support of Newton declined, the Free Huey Movement generated solidarity in new forms. Radicals who participated in the early movement continued to espouse support for Newton in their new endeavors. Prominent participants from the early mobilization of the movement also took part in the Third World Liberation Front

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49 Eldridge Cleaver, *Soul on Ice* (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1968), 14. In another essay criticizing social critic James Baldwin, Cleaver called homosexuality “a sickness” and compared it to “baby-rape or wanting to become head of General Motors.” Cleaver, *Soul on Ice*, 110. However, fewer leftist radicals took Cleaver to task over his homophobia than his sexism and misogyny, reflecting the overall attitude of the Left at that time.

50 Cleaver initially maintained that Oakland police officers attacked the Panthers contingent first but eventually admitted to initiating the shootout later in his life. See Henry Hampton and Steve Fayer, with Sara Flynn, eds., *Voices of Freedom: An Oral History of the Civil Rights Movement from the 1950s through the 1980s* (New York: Bantam Books, 1990), 514-517.

strike at San Francisco State College from November 1968 to March 1969. The TWLF encompassed the student of color organizations at SFSC and “included the Black Student Union (BSU), the Asian American Political Alliance (AAPA), Intercollegiate Chinese for Social Action (ICSA), Philippine American College Endeavor (PACE), Latin American Student Organization (LASO), and the Mexican American Student Confederation (MASC),” along with American Indian students who did not yet have an independent campus organization.52 Through the strike, the TWLF struggled to gain educational self-determination, not only through the diversification of curricula but also through an increase in admissions of students of color, the establishment of an autonomous “School of Third World Studies,” and control in hiring faculty for the school.53

Early allies of the Free Huey Movement involved in the TWLF strike included: AAPA, now with a San Francisco chapter; Donna James and Roger Alvarado, two radical Latinas/os influenced by the Brown Berets’ work in the Mission District and who continued to take part in Free Huey rallies; and George Murray, director of the SFSC undergraduate tutorial program and the Minister of Education of the Black Panther Party. Murray himself served as a catalyst for the strike, as his firing at the end of October stemmed partially from his organizing a Free Huey rally on SFSC’s campus and provided one of the sparks for the subsequent strike.54

52 Ferreira, “All Power to the People,” 78.

53 Ibid., 110-111, 120-123, 171.

54 Maeda, Chains of Babylon, 52; Fujino, Samurai among Panthers, 211; Heins, Strictly Ghetto Property, 52; Bloom and Martin, Jr., Black against Empire, 269-274
Furthermore, the trials of the over seven hundred strikers ("the San Francisco 700") arrested by January 1969 paralleled the Free Huey Movement in distinct ways. The 700’s defense team used similar legal defense tactics, relying heavily on communities throughout the Bay Area for solidarity and monetary support. But more telling than shared tactics was the 700’s defense team’s explicit linkage of Newton’s struggle with the 700’s, invoking his name on flyers they sent out and the rallies they held. One such flyer tied the racism involved in Newton’s imprisonment and the imprisonment of the 700 to the economic oppression faced by the working class in the United States; specifically, it argued that capitalists and American leaders worked to maintain racial inequalities, particularly with circumscribed education opportunities, in order to keep the working class divided. As they mutually-identified with each other as racially-oppressed peoples in the United States, so too did the TWLF strikers view themselves as fighting the same struggles as Newton.55

Earlier ties within the Free Huey Movement also produced a new alliance between the Panthers and Los Siete de la Raza. Los Siete emerged from the trial proceedings of seven Latino youth accused of murdering a San Francisco police officer and wounding another in the Mission District in early May 1969. Los Siete came from working-class upbringings, had previously engaged in community work, and almost all had been politicized in part by local Brown Berets like Aaron Manganiello. As

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community support grew in the cause to “Free Los Siete,” activist colleagues in the Mission established an eponymous organization that channeled this popular support into other forms of community-oriented social activism that lasted after their acquittal in November 1970.56

The Los Siete case mirrored Huey Newton’s case in multiple ways. Both Newton and Los Siete grew up experiencing urban plight within the Bay Area and faced racial oppression from society and the state in their everyday lives. Newton and Los Siete had each also worked within government-supported programs in their local communities before growing disillusioned with their slow pace and inadequate scope and starting their own community-improvement endeavors. Most significantly, Newton and the members of Los Siete were accused of killing one police officer with a history of racial profiling and brutality and injuring another, with the defendants facing the possibility of the death penalty if found guilty.

These similarities did not escape Bobby Seale, now the de facto leader of the Black Panther Party after Newton’s imprisonment and Cleaver’s flight from the country. Seale felt more comfortable about forming alliances with Los Siete, the Puerto Rican Young Lords in Chicago and New York, and other Third World organizations, particularly those with working-class backgrounds, than white, largely middle-class organizations like the Peace and Freedom Party. Since “the brown American people

56 Research Organizing Cooperative, Basta Ya!: The Story of Los Siete de la Raza (San Francisco: Research Organizing Cooperative, 1969), 2-3; Heins, Strictly Ghetto Property, 51-53, 141; Ferreira, “All Power to the People,” 245, 349-360, 357. Despite the name “Los Siete,” only six of the seven were arrested. While Tony and Mario Martinez, José Ríos, Nelson Rodríguez, Danilo Meléndez, and Gary Lescallet stood on trial, Gio López evaded arrest and disappeared until after the case had ended.
[we]re suffering from the same things black American people [we]re,” and it was “the poor oppressed people who have to dictate their political desires and needs, and explain what should be done and what should not be done,” Seale felt Third World organizations better understood the complexities of how racial and class oppression reinforced each other in the United States. Seale saw solidarity with Los Siete as a way to gain another Panther ally; that several of the accused were present at a Free Huey rally in San Francisco on the day of their arrest only added to Seale’s support. The families of Los Siete also sought allies, and Oscar Rios, the brother of José Rios, traveled to Oakland to discuss the prospect of an alliance between the Panthers and Los Siete.

After hearing from Rios about the ordeal that Los Siete faced, Seale pledged the Panthers’ support to the “Free Los Siete” movement. Along with giving Los Siete space in the BPP’s newspaper, Seale also promised to ask Charles Garry, whom the Panthers and Los Siete shared as lead counsel, to temporarily stop working on the Panthers’ court cases and devote his time to the Los Siete case. The Panthers and Los Siete subsequently held joint rallies for their respective political prisoners, and Huey Newton even attended several sessions of their court proceedings after his release from prison in August 1970. In an interview with the San Francisco-based The Movement newspaper, Tony Martinez expressed gratitude to the Panthers not just for their monetary support and other acts of solidarity but also for the Panthers’ political critiques and tactics, many of which Latina/o activists could adopt. The Panthers and Los Siete de La Raza remained in solidarity until

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57 Seale, Seize the Time, 210, 211.

58 Ibid.; Heins, Strictly Ghetto Property, 161-162
the slow dissolution of Los Siete de La Raza throughout 1973 and the relocation of its remnants, now called La Raza Workers Collective, to San Jose and Los Angeles. Along with the Third World Liberation Front strikes, the BPP-Los Siete alliance demonstrated the continual importance of solidarity between radicals of color within the Bay Area as the 1960s turned into the 1970s.59

Even the Peace and Freedom Party, with its acrimonious breakup with the Panthers, saw some of its former constituency continue to voice solidarity with Huey Newton. In particular, Bob Avakian continued to support Newton and the work of the Panthers more broadly. Drawing from the writings of Karl Marx, Vladimir Lenin, and Mao Zedong, Avakian envisioned the formation of a revolutionary communist party that would end class- and race-based systems of oppression in the United States, then all over the world. Avakian formed this party out of the Bay Area Revolutionary Union (BARU), a peace and anti-racist organization he co-founded in 1968. Avakian’s role as one of the primary PFP coalition negotiators translated into his later establishment of BARU as an explicitly “multinational” organization where “people of all races, or nationalities—Black, Latino, Native American, white, Asian—would all be united in this one vanguard party.”60 As BARU morphed into the Revolutionary Union, then the Revolutionary

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60 Bob Avakian, From Ike to Mao and Beyond: My Journey from Mainstream America to Revolutionary Communist (Chicago: Insight Press, 2005), 192.
Communist Party in 1975, Avakian consistently linked the plight of African Americans and other people of color to the struggles of the working class around the world.\textsuperscript{61}

A BARU flyer for a May Day 1970 rally conveys the congruent motivations that Avakian held in establishing solidarity with Newton in both the Peace and Freedom Party and the BARU. This rally involved more than celebrating the revolutionary efforts of the working class around the world; the flyer asserted that “...the masses of Black people in [the United States]... stand shoulder to shoulder with the Vietnamese people and all those oppressed people who are waging heroic struggles of liberation against the vicious system of U.S. Imperialism.”\textsuperscript{62} This statement echoed Panther critiques and the PFP platform through its linkage of racial inequality, economic oppression, and U.S. imperialism in Southeast Asia. Newton’s picture appears prominently throughout this flyer, as BARU identified Newton’s wrongful imprisonment as an example of Black oppression in the U.S. and an opportunity for the working class to coalesce around a cause that would disrupt the ruling capitalist order. While neither as prominent nor as influential as the Peace and Freedom Party, the Bay Area Revolutionary Union provided Avakian the opportunity to continuously support Newton and the Panthers within multiple organizations over the lifespan of the Free Huey Movement and thereafter.

Newton’s release from police custody in August 1970, and his exoneration in December 1971 marked the end of the Free Huey Movement. Yet the genealogies of alliance that ran throughout the movement would soon manifest themselves again in


\textsuperscript{62} “May Day rally flyer,” New Left Collection, Box 61, Hoover Institution Archives.
perhaps the most high-profile political prisoner case of the 1970s. The movement to free
Angela Davis transcended ideological conflicts, even more so than the Free Huey
Movement, momentarily unifying divisive factions within the Marxist-inspired Left.
More importantly, the solidarity espoused by allies—particularly radical women—
incorporated a gendered critique of the police, the justice system, and the state as a
whole. In other words, the Free Angela Movement not only critiqued racism, capitalism,
and militarism as part of U.S. imperialism but also identified sexism and patriarchy as
inextricably intersected with these other forms of oppression.63

The Origins of the Angela Davis Trial

Unlike Huey Newton, Angela Davis did not spend her formative years in the San
Francisco Bay Area, nor did she experience her political transformations in the midst of
the area’s radical political traditions (as discussed in Chapter Three). By 1970, however,
she had experienced a few formative, radicalizing moments that would place her on a
similar trajectory as Newton, toward her own political prisoner movement as well. Davis
was born in Birmingham, Alabama, in 1944, into a middle-class family embedded within
the city’s Black activist circles. Her mother, Sallye Bell Davis, had organized
mobilizations alongside both Black and some white Communists during the 1930s, such
as the defense case for the Scottsboro Boys, while a national officer and leading activist
in the CPUSA-affiliated Southern Negro Youth Congress. Davis witnessed the violent
white supremacist manifestations of the Jim Crow South at an early age, recalling in her

autobiography fights she witnessed as a child and noting that “bombings were such a constant response that soon our neighborhood became known as Dynamite Hill.”

During these early childhood experiences, Davis grew to resent white people, despite her mother’s admonitions about the potential good within them, including their capacity for allied activism. As she progressed into her teenaged years, she grew increasingly discontent with her middle-class social circles in Birmingham, resolving to leave when she was fifteen to an American Society of Friends (Quaker) program that placed Southern Black teenagers into Northern white homes to attend high school. Through the Society of Friends, Davis relocated to Brooklyn, where her hatred toward white people started to subside.

Davis’ political radicalization began while reading the writings of Utopian socialists, then The Communist Manifesto, which, although not explicitly discussing Black liberation, led Davis to draw linkages between Black liberation and the abolition of capitalism. During these early forays into this literature, Davis began attending meetings of Advance—a Marxist-Leninist youth organization where she met Bettina Aptheker, Mary Lou Patterson, and other the children of prominent Black and white Communists—and working in rallies for the Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy. After graduating high school, Davis spent her collegiate years at Brandeis University, studying under the Marxist philosopher Herbert Marcuse and spending a few years in Germany and France, where she encountered anti-Black racism and began to more fully understand the

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international dimensions of white supremacy and the legacy of colonialism. Davis
returned to the United States to study under Marcuse at the University of California, San
Diego, briefly joining southern California chapters of SNCC, then the Black Panther
Party. Needing to find a new cadre after the dissolution of SNCC locally and put off by
the hypermasculinity of the BPP, Davis officially joined the Communist Party USA in
1968.66

Although historically the largest and most renowned Marxist and radical Left
organization in the United States, the CPUSA had fallen out of favor among many radical
activists in the 1950s and 60s (Chapter Three). By the late 1960s, however, parts of the
CPUSA began to focus more on giving antiracist struggles the same importance as anti-
capitalist ones. Perhaps the most influential of these cell groups was the Che-Lumumba
Club, through which Davis joined the CPUSA in July 1968. Named after the
Argentinian-born co-leader of the Cuban revolution Che Guevara and the Congolese
national liberation movement leader Patrice Lumumba, the primarily-Black Che-
Lumumba Club not only focused its efforts on campaigns against police brutality and
other antiracist issues but also incorporated women into positions of power, such as
nominating Che-Lumumba founding chairperson Charlene Mitchell as the CPUSA
presidential candidate for the 1968 general election. Through the Che-Lumumba Club,
Davis could pursue the intertwined goals of Black liberation and the end of capitalism
without needing to prioritize one struggle over the other.67


67 Elbaum, Revolution in the Air, 63-64, 124-125; Davis, Autobiography, 188-191; James,
“Introduction,” 8-9. One reason for naming the Che-Lumumba Club after its namesakes was the continual
Davis’ early CPUSA activism included political education for Black youth in Southern California, first briefly as an affiliate of the Black Panther Party in Los Angeles, then with the San Diego-based Black Student Council (BSC) and the Mexican-American Youth Association (MAYA). Even after she was hired as professor of philosophy at the University of California, Los Angeles, for the 1969-70 academic year, Davis continued her activist work, with political prisoner movements becoming her primary cause.

One of Davis’ earliest forays into political prisoner solidarity was for a Black prisoner by the name Hekima who subpoenaed her to testify on his behalf in court. Although she did not know who he was, Hekima hoped to enlist Davis’ support in creating a “political case” to defend himself for his retrial of a first-degree murder charge. He stressed two points to Davis: first, that Hekima himself did not kill anybody himself but was part of a group of Black men who robbed a white man who was pushed, fell and hit his head on the pavement, and later died of head injuries; second, and more importantly, that he was driven to desperate measures by the racism that caused rampant poverty throughout society. Although Hekima was again convicted of first-degree murder, this episode convinced Davis that if radicals, particularly Black radicals, “did not begin to build a support movement for [their] sisters and brothers in prison, [they] were no revolutionaries at all.”

Of most immediate concern to Davis were Huey Newton, Bobby Seale, Ericka Huggins, and other Panther leaders imprisoned in the late 1960s. In a November 1969 alignment between the Third World countries of Cuba and Congo with the Soviet Union after the Sino-Soviet split.

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speech at a rally for the Panthers in Oakland’s DeFemery Park (referred to as “Bobby Hutton Park” within the circle of Panther allies), Davis specifically named Newton, Seale, and Huggins throughout her speech and identified the BPP as the foremost target of government repression as she related their incarceration with the Black and Latina/o liberation movements, the workers’ movement, and the antiwar movement. In contrast to the idea the Vietnam War was a “single issue movement” geared solely on formally ending U.S. combat in Vietnam, Davis echoed the commonly-articulated connections between the Vietnam War and racism and capitalism. The war was “a symptom of something that's happening all over the world,” argued Davis, “And in order for the anti-war movement to be effective, it has to link up with the struggle for black and brown liberation in this country with the struggle of exploited white workers.” Against the common enemy of “American Imperialist aggressive policies throughout this world,” Davis continued, “only this kind of united force [could] be victorious.” Davis explicated the consequences of narrowly-focused activism during this era:

[I]f the anti-war movement defends only itself and does not defend liberation fighters in this country, then that movement is going to be doomed to failure…if we in the black liberation movement and the liberation movement for all people in—all oppressed and exploited people in this country, defend only ourselves, then we too will be doomed to failure…There ought to be victory for the Vietnamese. There ought to be also recognition of the revolutionary government in South Vietnam and I think this is perhaps most important, we ought to demand the release of political prisoners in this country…it is our responsibility to fight on all fronts, to fight on all fronts simultaneously to defeat and to humiliate the US

70 Ibid.
Government and all the fascist tactics by which it is repressing liberation fighters in this country.  

As Davis continued developing her activism for political prisoners, she became increasingly focused on the cases against George Jackson, Fleeta Drumgo, and John Wesley Cluchette. Taken together, they were known as the Soledad Brothers and stood accused of the January 16, 1970 killing of a white Soledad State Prison guard in Monterey County, just south of the Bay Area. While the three had been imprisoned on charges relating to robbery or burglary, a murder conviction against a prison guard would bring upon the death penalty for the Soledad Brothers. Drawn to Jackson’s writings about Black struggle and revolution, Davis joined the Soledad Brothers Defense Committee in February 1970 and eventually became the co-chairperson for the southern California division. In a June 27, 1970 interview with a documentary filmmaker, Davis expressed the urgency of supporting the Soledad Brothers and other political prisoners. Although not all Black people would be incarcerated, all should have an investment in freeing Black political prisoners, Davis reasoned, because without the liberation of political prisoners, there could be no liberation of the masses.  

By late 1969, however, Davis’ activism and political affiliations would have her embroiled in national controversy. After UCLA hired Davis, the Board of Regents for the University of California system discovered her Communist Party membership and

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71 Davis, “Speech by Angela Davis”.

72 “Save the Soledad Brothers” pamphlet, Folder 9, Box 38, 20th Century Organizational Files, Southern California Library for Social Studies and Research; “Soledad Brothers” informational packet, Folder 9, Box 38, 20th Century Organizational Files, Southern California Library for Social Studies and Research; Davis, Autobiography, 250-259; Aptheker, The Morning Breaks, 9; “Her revolutionary voice cries damnation on the system,” Life, September 11, 1970, 26-27.
proceeded to unilaterally fire her in October 1969. Campus-wide protests, organized primarily by Kendra Alexander and other Che-Lumumba Club members, followed Davis’ firing, as did a subsequent campus hearing, then Davis taking her firing to court and winning an injunction against the Regents. Throughout the rest of the 1969-70 academic year, tensions mounted between Davis and her allies and the Regents and Governor Ronald Reagan. When on June 19, 1970 the Board of Regents declined to renew her contract—stemming partially for her public support of the Soledad Brothers—Davis continued to fight these simultaneous struggles.73

Yet the events that unfolded at the Marin County courthouse on August 7, 1970 would change the direction of both Davis’ personal employment and academic freedom struggle and her work for the Soledad Brothers Defense Committee. During the trial of Black Panther Ruchell Magee, Jonathan Jackson, a fellow Panther and younger brother to George, unfurled firearms he had snuck into the courtroom, freed Magee and fellow Panthers James McClain and William Christmas in custody in the courtroom, and took Judge Harold Haley and a handful of other hostages in an attempted getaway. Local police officers and San Quentin prison guards at the courthouse that day opened fire on Jackson’s getaway vehicle, eventually killing him, McClain, and Christmas. Before dying, however, Jackson had shot and killed Haley, and since a few of the firearms he used were registered under Davis’ name, the Marin County Superior Court issued a warrant for her arrest seven days later for the charges of aggravated kidnapping and first degree murder of the judge. Although Davis fled California, fearing for her life, and

73 Aptheker, The Morning Breaks, 2-4; Davis, Autobiography, 216-221.
evaded the police for several months, she was eventually apprehended in New York City in mid-October and extradited back to San Rafael in late December. Like Newton and the Soledad Brothers before, Davis faced the prospect of the death penalty if found guilty of the murder charges against her.74

With this being their most high-profile court case since the McCarthy Red Scare of the 1950s, the Communist Party USA led Davis’ legal defense efforts. Among the numerous members of Davis’ legal team were chief counsel Howard Moore Jr., and longtime CPUSA lawyer Leo Branton Jr., both Black attorneys who had represented Black activists on trial from within and outside of the CPUSA. National chairman Henry Winston, recently ascending to that position in 1966, also traveled to California to personally meet and support Davis, both as a CPUSA member and as a Black American. Moore, Branton, and the rest of Davis’ legal team eventually secured a change of venue for the trial—from the Marin County courthouse in San Rafael to the Santa Clara County courthouse in San Jose—while also securing bail for Davis after a long arduous ordeal. From the onset of her political prisoner struggle, Davis and her supporters emphasized the need to make her trial proceedings about more than just her own personal freedom. Instead, they would focus on the structural inequality within the justice system and how it tied into the inequalities oppressed people in the United States and internationally. Thus, the solidarity movement around Davis would not just be the “Free Angela Movement” but rather the movement to “Free Angela Davis and All Political Prisoners.”75


On the heels of her arraignment, Davis received an outpouring of solidarity from across the country and stretching across the globe. In a November 1970 interview about the connections between the civil rights movement in the United States and the struggle against European colonialism internationally, James Baldwin ended his discussion by reading excerpts from an open letter he wrote to Davis, echoing her own political analyses when he said that “her fight for freedom and justice here in America is part and parcel of the international fight against the same enemy, the same enemy that promotes racism within these boundaries is the one that is exploiting and subjugating people around the world.”

Sympathizers overseas—within Communist Parties and otherwise—staged protests outside U.S. embassies in countries ranging from Finland to Australia to India. Women’s organizations like the Women’s International Democratic Federation in Germany called on “all women to take up the cause of Angela Davis,” advocating within their own countries and to the U.S. federal government for her release. In one March 1971 letter signed by “the oppressed and struggling women of the liberation movements

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76 “James Baldwin on Angela Davis” interview on compact disc, Pacific of Program Services, CD 582, Freedom Archives, San Francisco, California.

77 “Freedom for Angela Davis!” document; October 8, 1971 letter from the Australian Campaign to Free Angela Davis and All Political Prisoners, Box 50, Folder 4, Bettina Aptheker Papers. MS 157, Special Collections and Archives, University Library, University of California, Santa Cruz; September 24, 1971 letter from Delhi University faculty and students to the Prime Minister of India, Box 50, Folder 4, Bettina Aptheker Papers. MS 157, Special Collections and Archives, University Library, University of California, Santa Cruz.

of the Portuguese Colonies in Africa, and Southern Africa,” women revolutionaries criticized the contradiction between the United States’ claim of moral and just superiority to the rest of the world while continuing to oppress Black Americans, assuring Davis that they were “obliged by human feelings, and by our own conditions prevailing in our respective countries to associate our struggle with yours” and that Davis’ ordeal was not “an isolated one” but rather “part of the international struggle for justice and peace.” These women revolutionaries and others from Third World liberation movements particularly reciprocated the internationalist solidarity toward which Davis worked prior to her imprisonment.

Similarly to the Free Huey Movement, solidarity for Angela Davis relied heavily on local allies, in addition to national and international support, and drew in both radical and mainstream activist organizations. Local chapters of national women’s organizations voiced solidarity with Davis, including the most prominent one, the National Organization for Women (NOW). NOW often historiographically and popularly stands in as the embodiment of “second-wave” (white) feminism in the mid-twentieth century United States, since their national leadership was middle-class, heterosexual, white, able-bodied women and main political platform mostly discussed issues pertaining to this group of women. This narrow scope oftentimes caused conflict with women whose issues extended beyond this scope, initially including Angela Davis. Black women’s liberationist Frances Beal recalled one such incident during NOW’s August 26, 1970 March for Equality that commemorated the fiftieth anniversary of (white) women’s

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79 March 6, 1971 letter, Box 50, Folder 4, Bettina Aptheker Papers. MS 157, Special Collections and Archives, University Library, University of California, Santa Cruz.
suffrage. The New York chapter of the Third World Women’s Alliance joined with NOW and other women in this march, yet some white NOW members took issue with Beal’s carrying a sign that read “Hands Off Angela Davis,” believing that “Angela Davis has nothing to do with women’s liberation,” even as Davis was actively evading capture. This conflict between Beal and NOW members embodied the struggle women of color, particularly radicals, faced with mainstream, moderate-liberal white feminists.

However, by the early 1970s, the San Francisco chapter of NOW had begun to expand the scope of their women’s liberation activism, even appointing their first Black officer, Aileen C. Hernandez. A former union organizer with the International Ladies Garment Workers Union, Hernandez was later elected National President of NOW in late 1970. Soon after Davis’ extradition back to California, Hernandez visited her at the Marin County jailhouse. Under her presidency, NOW had developed a statement in support of Davis that Hernandez shared, calling on the U.S. justice system to give Davis a just trial instead of the unequal treatment she faced as a woman, a Black person, and someone who “espoused an unpopular political cause.” Despite her initial surprise and skepticism about Hernandez and NOW’s statement, Davis appreciated Hernandez and NOW’s solidarity and conversed with Hernandez for the brief time the guards allowed,

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80 Frances Beal, interview by Loretta Ross, transcript of video recording, March 18, 2005, Voices of Feminism Oral History Project, Sophia Smith Collection, 46.

with Davis talking mostly about the deplorable conditions and worse treatment of women prisoners within the jail.82

The Genealogy of Solidarity from “Free Huey” to “Free Angela”

As Angela Davis voiced solidarity for the Soledad Brothers, Erick Huggins, Huey Newton, Bobby Seale, and other Black Panthers, so too did the BPP reciprocate solidarity with Davis. Newton offered up support for Davis during numerous times, the first being in the October 17, 1970 issue of The Black Panther newspaper. Newton accused the U.S. state of using Davis as a “scapegoat” with a murder charge to cover up its own crimes of murdering Black Americans without recourse.83 Newton showed his appreciation for Davis’ prior solidarity, saying that she “exemplified the highest expression of concern for the people” and admonishing the masses to “rise up and do whatever is necessary to free Angela Davis.”84

Perhaps the closest ally of the BPP by the end of the Free Huey Movement, Los Siete de La Raza extended their solidarity to Davis and Magee. Members of Los Siete regularly helped organize the early Free Angela rallies at Marin County Courthouse, where relatively sparse crowds initially formed. Los Siete also published articles in solidarity with Davis and Magee in their bilingual newspaper. These articles accused the


84 Ibid.
state of California of framing Angela Davis with her murder and kidnapping charges; furthermore, Los Siete rhetorically placed the state on trial for orchestrating Davis’ frame-up and for its inability to administer true justice, rather than target movement activists. Los Siete also used Davis and Magee’s trial proceedings to critique mass incarceration of Black and Brown people, echoing George Jackson’s critiques regarding the political prisoner status of all incarcerated Black people in the United States.85

Similarly to Los Siete, the multiracial Venceremos organization—comprised of former members of both the Brown Berets and the Bay Area Revolutionary Union, along with other Bay Area Maoist cadre—showed support through attending rallies for Davis and dedicating space within their newspaper for Davis and Magee’s cases. Venceremos mirrored Los Siete’s critiques by dismissing the charges presented against the defendants as frame-ups and highlighting the political nature of the cases. One newspaper article argued that the state of California was not prosecuting Davis because of her alleged connection to the Marin County shootout but because she was “a revolutionary Black women dedicated to the liberation of all oppressed people.”86 Venceremos was one of the most vociferous critics of the CPUSA among internationalist radicals in the Bay Area; founding Central Committee Chairperson Aaron Manganiello even publicly referred to the CPUSA as a “right-wing communist party” that needed to give way to Venceremos

85 “Where Were You?” flyer, Series 2, Box 41, Folder 17, Dr. Huey P. Newton Foundation Inc. collection, M0864, Dept. of Special Collections, Stanford University Libraries, Stanford, California; “Marin Frameup – Magee & Davis,” p. 11 ¡Basta Ya! March 1971 issue, Box 1, Latino Periodicals Collection, CEMA 155, Special Collections and Archives, University of California, Santa Barbara.

and other organizations who could form a mass-based communist movement. In spite of this visceral division with the CPUSA, Manganiello and the Venceremos organization maintained their solidarity with Davis through her exoneration in 1972, even as the organization itself experienced internal ideological and structural fractures (as detailed in Chapter Five).

“All Women Are Political Prisoners” – Women’s Liberationists in Solidarity with Davis

The political prisoner solidarity mobilizations for Angela Davis expanded their anti-imperialist critiques beyond that of the Free Huey Movement. Still central was the nexus of anti-racism, anti-capitalism, and anti-militarism that marked the mobilizations for Newton. Yet, as Davis herself noted in a letter of solidarity to Ericka Huggins while the former was imprisoned, the political prisoner movements of the day often overlooked the staggering numbers of and unique struggles that women faced while incarcerated; this oversight, in Davis’ words, was “an inevitable byproduct of a male-oriented society,” and “the vast majority of women prisoners—who are Black, Chican[a] and Puerto Rican” suffered in conditions comparable or worse to male prisoners. Anti-imperialist women


88 I use the term “women’s liberationists” instead of “feminists” to reflect the views of many radical women of color during this era, who often viewed the term “feminist” as representing primarily white, middle-class, heterosexual women. For a further discussion of this issue, see Frances Beal, interview by Loretta Ross, 42, 44-46.

liberationists, particularly women of color, would thus incorporate anti-sexism/patriarchy into their critiques of the U.S. justice system.

An editorial published during Davis’ trial proceedings in the People’s World, the periodical of the CPUSA, laid out the inherently patriarchal aspects of the prison system. Despite the heteronormativity of the editorial—which reflected the overall attitude of the broader Left during the 1960s and 70s—and the bare discussion of the sexism women faced while working outside the home, this editorial shed light onto how sexism and patriarchy were embedded within the justice system and connected to the sexism and patriarchy of society at large. The editorial, entitled “Women: The Political Prisoners,” began with a quotation from leftist women’s liberationist Marilyn Salzman-Webb, who argued, “In the U.S. all women in jail are political prisoners because their alleged crimes are actually acts of survival necessitated by our political and economic system.”

The editorial continues this line of societal critique, identifying five major areas of crime for which women were most frequently arrested and explaining how those crimes fit within society’s patriarchal structure. Larceny and prostitution—the former identified as the crime for which women were most commonly arrested and the latter as “the only ‘crime’ automatically connected with women”—often resulted from dire financial situations caused by capitalist societies’ polarized economic structure; poverty disproportionately affected women of color, and arrests related to prostitution largely ignored the men

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90 “Women: The Political Prisoners” editorial, Series 2, Box 41, Folder 17, Dr. Huey P. Newton Foundation Inc. collection, M0864. Dept. of Special Collections, Stanford University Libraries, Stanford, California.
involved. Murder, another of the five main crimes, most commonly occurred in the home against a woman’s “husband or lover” and stemmed from “the desperation that comes from monotonous, repetitive physically and emotionally exhausting work” of homemaking and ensuring the happiness of her husband, children, and the rest of her family. This desperation also provided the grounds for “Drug Addiction and Drunkenness,” the final two major crimes for which women were arrested. In short, the editorial argued that women’s crimes largely stemmed not from individual criminality but as a result of oppressive societal situations caused by racism, economic exploitation, sexist cultural expectations of women, and the policing of women’s bodies.

Davis also received solidarity from women of color organizations in the Bay Area, most prominently from the Third World Women’s Alliance (TWWA). The TWWA’s origins stemmed from women involved in formation of the Black Women’s Liberation Caucus (BWLC) of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee in and around New York City in 1968. Fed up with their marginalized position within SNCC’s ranks, the BWLC split from SNCC in 1969 and reformed into the Black Women’s Alliance (BWA), focusing explicitly on women’s liberation issues and growing increasingly internationalist. As the BWA began incorporating Puerto Rican and some Asian American women into their ranks, they changed their name to the Third World

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91 “Women: The Political Prisoners.”
92 Ibid.
93 Ibid.
Women’s Alliance, signifying their commitment to multiracial struggle and solidarity with the Third World liberation movements of the time.94

The TWWA’s political platform exhibited what Black feminist and legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw would later term “intersectionality,” or the interconnectedness of different types of oppression.95 Intersectionality in the context of the TWWA resided at the nexus of racism, sexism, and capitalism, used interchangeably with imperialism, which the organization articulated in one of their early organizational platform papers. After recounting their development from SNCC to the TWWA, the organizational paper laid out the need for independent Third World women’s organizations. “The rulers of this society,” the paper continued, “would like us to continue thinking that racism is the only problem, or that men are inherently the enemy, thus diverting our attention from the economic basis of our oppression.”96 Third World women’s organizations, therefore, would serve as a reminder about the continual multiplicity of oppressions and the ways radicals needed to be mindful of how their activism would work liberation from racism, economic exploitation, and sexism and patriarchy simultaneously. Furthermore, the TWWA argued for the necessity of a worldwide socialist revolution to dismantle oppression overseas; not only should U.S. radicals focus on bringing equality and justice


96 Third World Women’s Alliance: Smash! Capitalism, Racism, and Sexism, Folder 1, Box 7, Third World Women’s Alliance Records, MS 697, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College.
to the United States but to also live “in a society that does not exploit and murder other people and smaller nations.”

Among the many specific areas of society where the TWWA platform specified the need for liberation were the family structure, sex roles and gendered expectations of women, employment, women’s health, social services, and education.

The TWWA expanded this analysis to prisons and the criminal justice system in their next publication, the first issue of their periodical, *Triple Jeopardy*. Similar to the *People’s World* editorial, an article in this issue critiqued the structurally-oppressive nature of the justice system. “The prison system in America,” read the article, “has historically been nothing less than concentration camps for Third World people”; and, rather than try to rehabilitate prisoners, the conditions within the prison system and their lack of opportunities after prison made them “develop the need for more so-called ‘crimes’” to survive.

The article also argued that jails were becoming impounds for political prisoners, who the white power structured treated as “enemies of the state” and “P.O.W.’s.” Because of these continuing realities of the prison system, Third World peoples and their allies needed to support political prisoners materially and emotionally.

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97 *Third World Women’s Alliance*, Third World Women’s Alliance Records.

98 The term “triple jeopardy” was an elaboration of Frances Beal’s discussion of the “double jeopardy” that Black women faced (i.e. racism and sexism) in her 1968 “Black Women’s Manifesto.” “Triple jeopardy” added “imperialism” (which encompassed capitalism) to this analysis. Springer, *Living for the Revolution*, 116; Cover page, *Triple Jeopardy*, 1:1 (Nov. 1971), Folder 1, Box 7, Third World Women’s Alliance Records, MS 697, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College.


100 Ibid.
while also working to liberate all political prisoners by dismantling the prison system as is. In other words, the Third World Women’s Alliance recognized political prisoner solidarity movements as part of their anti-imperialist struggle toward collective liberation.

The Bay Area chapter of the Third World Women’s Alliance was born out of the TWWA’s anti-imperialist endeavors, forming out of a group of women activists who met during the Venceremos Brigade (not to be confused with the Venceremos organization from Chapter Five). Marxist-inspired cadre from across the United States organized three Brigades in the late 1960s and early 1970s that traveled to Cuba to donate their labor for a variety of state tasks, such as political education and agricultural work. Through the Venceremos Brigade, Bay Area activists including Linda Burnham and Miriam Ching Yoon Louie met and had discussions with TWWA members from New York City, and when TWWA-NYC member Cheryl Perry League moved to Oakland in 1971, these discussions led to the formation of the Bay Area chapter of the Third World Women’s Alliance, eventually headquartered in Berkeley.101

The Bay Area TWWA’s composition and solidarity work expanded beyond the New York City chapter’s scope. While the latter was almost entirely Black and Puerto Rican in membership, the Bay Area chapter included Black, Chinese American, Japanese American, Mexican American, Filipina, and Central American women among their ranks.

101 Springer, Living for the Revolution, 49; Interview with Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, August 8, 2015, in possession of the author; Interview with Cheryl Perry League, January 7, 2015, in possession of the author; Interview with Miriam Ching Yoon Louie, August 18, 2015, in possession of the author; and Triple Jeopardy 2.2 (Jan.-Feb. 1973), Folder 1, Box 7, Third World Women’s Alliance Records, MS 697, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College.
in varying numbers. This greater diversity partially reflected the growing diversity of the East Bay and San Francisco, particularly among Asian Americans, and partially reflected the ideological influences the Bay Area TWWA held, including the Chinese Communist Party, the Filipino Communist Party, and its U.S. counterpart, Katipunan ng mga Demokratikong Filipino (KDP; translated as the Union of Democratic Filipinos).

According to Ching Yoon Louie, the Bay Area TWWA held a particularly close relationship with the KDP, whose primary purpose was to aid the Filipino Communist Party in toppling the dictatorship of Philippines President Ferdinand Marcos. The TWWA extended their coalitional activism to the issues that Filipina/o Americans faced, ranging from aiding with the building of the Paolo Agbayani Retirement Village in Delano, California, for Filipino Manong farmworkers to joining AAPA and other activists in opposing the eviction of longtime Chinese and Filipino occupants of the International Hotel in San Francisco.¹⁰²

Even before they formally constituted the TWWA-Bay Area, however, members demonstrated solidarity for Davis, regularly driving to San Jose to attend rallies and sit in on her trial. Perry League recalled that even though these women supported a wide range of political causes, “…as women, we all gravitated toward Angela’s case.”¹⁰³ Davis’ case represented the internationalism and “triple oppression” that the TWWA worked to inculcate as central to women’s liberation. When Davis’ trial began, TWWA members


¹⁰³ Interview with Cheryl Perry League
continued their solidarity by organizing support for Davis alongside and appealing to other women’s organizations, such as holding a 1972 luncheon with a multiracial, multi-class group of women in San Jose to discuss ways to further draw in Bay Area women’s organizations and publicize Black women’s and other women of color organization’s support for Davis. *Triple Jeopardy* often published articles with updates about Davis’ case and occasionally included letters describing her experiences and reflections on her time in the prison system. Even after her exoneration in June 1972, Davis and the TWWA maintained a reciprocal supportive relationship, with Davis holding rap sessions with TWWA members about political prisoners and the justice system and being featured frequently within *Triple Jeopardy*.104

**Conclusion**

The political prisoner solidarity movements for Huey P. Newton and Angela Y. Davis demonstrated the ability for leftist radicals to traverse racial lines and ideological disagreements and rally around common causes. These movements reflected the rise of anti-imperialist politics as a way to articulate forms of oppression in the late 1960s San Francisco Bay Area, along with the proliferation of alliances that radical activists formed in their anti-imperialist struggle. The coalitions and solidarity in the Free Huey Movement explicitly connected his trial ordeals to the struggles against racism, capitalism, and U.S. militarism overseas. Incorporated with these three forms of oppression was antisexist and anti-patriarchal solidarity from fellow women’s

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104 “Luncheon in San Jose in Support of Angela Davis” report, Folder 5, Box 5, Third World Women’s Alliance Records, MS 697, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College; *Triple Jeopardy* 2.2.
liberationists within the movement to free Angela Davis. The genealogies of alliance from the early mobilization to the later parts of the Free Huey Movement demonstrated how solidarity could persist despite organizational upheaval and the breakdown of formal alliance. Solidarity for Davis from allies within the Free Huey Movement showed how alliances from one mobilization could continue with another, and the reciprocity between Davis and the Panthers illuminated the value internationalist radicals placed on mutual support for other activists.

Although both Newton and Davis were eventually exonerated, however, political prisoner movements tended to be quasi-pyrrhic victories for radical organizations, especially as the number of activists on trial escalated into the early 1970s. Trials drained time, money, and energy away from other functions of their organizations. In addition, political prisoner movements could critique but ultimately could not attack the root causes for the movements that both solidarity mobilizations identified: the unequal meting out of punishments by the justice system, the prison-industrial complex, and the structural oppressions embedded within society that caused desperation among working-class and poor people, especially people of color.

Political prisoner movements and other manifestations of anti-imperialism within the United States ultimately signaled the need for oppressed peoples to transform the institutions and systems of their society toward eliminating the inequalities and injustices they faced. Internationalist radicals, particularly people of color, framed this societal transformation as a struggle for self-determination similar to the Third World liberation movements of the era. Yet organizing toward self-determination proved more difficult
than anti-imperialist organizing. While the latter involved so-called “oppositional politics” where disparate radicals could coalesce against the advancement of a common enemy, struggles for self-determination often manifested the differences in visions for a liberated society that circulated among different radical organizations. As the next two chapters demonstrate, these divergences in visions could also produce conflicts that split previously-secure alliances.
CHAPTER FIVE

To Liberate Campus and Community: Nairobi College, Venceremos College, and the Struggle for Self-Determination in the Southern San Francisco Bay Area

The September 1969 transformation of 805 Runnymede Street in unincorporated East Palo Alto, California, seemed inconspicuous from the outside. Little fanfare accompanied this occasion, nor did local media coverage descend upon the location. This moment, however, marked a significant shift within the history of higher education in the San Francisco Bay Area, particularly among self-proclaimed “Third World” people. The Runnymede house served as the central administrative building of the new Nairobi College; more precisely, it served as the only building of the college that did not serve another function within the community. Nairobi’s library consisted mostly of books donated by local residents, a local hamburger stand functioned as their de facto cafeteria, and Nairobi students held their classes in churches, the local teen center, and homes throughout East Palo Alto. Community volunteers and the students themselves staffed, resourced, and operated the college, with the latter also engaging in work-study initiatives to the benefit of local residents, such as tutoring for schoolchildren and drug rehabilitation centers.¹

Nairobi College’s structure and organization contrasted with to the Third World Liberation Front strikes at San Francisco State College (SFSC) and the University of

California, Berkeley in 1968-69 that carved out spaces for students of color within the university. Nairobi—and Venceremos College, its sister school in Redwood City, established in January 1970— theorized that Third World peoples could only achieve educational self-determination outside the apparatus of existing state institutions. Moreover, after the TWLF strikes at both SF State and UC Berkeley, numerous student activists returned to or started working within local communities of color as a way to connect their newly-established and hard-fought institutional spaces on campus with those communities. Nairobi and Venceremos also believed that Third World educational institutions should connect with and serve local communities of color; yet the Colleges believed they could accomplish this only by embedding themselves within and attuning themselves to the needs of their communities. They thus envisioned each institution to be “truly a college without walls,” adopting the slogan, “The community is the campus.”

Yet the Colleges could never evade the grasp of the state. Even as Nairobi and Venceremos attempted to bend state funding and resources to their will, state institutions and constituents influenced the direction of the Colleges. In negotiating the state’s influence, Nairobi and Venceremos developed alternative strategies toward gaining self-

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2 Although many media reports and public announcements list Redwood City as the site of Venceremos College, many of the major community institutions were located in East Redwood City, an unincorporated area which, like East Palo Alto, was under the jurisdiction of the County of San Mateo.


determination for their communities, which ultimately shaped their divergent trajectories in this history.⁵

This chapter reconsiders the interplay of Third World education and self-determination through an examination of the histories of Nairobi College and Venceremos College. I analyze the ideological motivations the Colleges held for establishing their own institutions and the struggles they faced in implementing their ideas. Driven by the activist zeitgeist of the era, the late 1960s and the 1970s saw the massive diversifying of higher education in terms of race, class, and gender, as students from traditionally-marginalized communities saw attending college become more accessible.

Along with this diversification came the proliferation of alternative institutions of education, particularly within communities of color. Part of this growth came from schools like the Mid-Peninsula Free University in Palo Alto that dabbled in new forms experiential Alternative community schools marked one way that people of color could carve out more autonomous spaces within society, and Bay Area radical activists were prominently involved with local manifestations of this phenomenon. Some institutions, like the Black Panther Party’s Napier Institute (later Intercommunal Youth Institute, then Oakland Community School), were similar to the Colleges in that they provided alternatives to state-run public schools. Others, like the Chinese community school in San Francisco’s Chinatown, provided supplemental linguistic and cultural instruction to the

⁵ Miner, “Nairobi College: Education for Relevance,” 4. I define “the state” as the institutions of governance in a polity. In this context, the state included federal, state, and county entities, including the Office of Equal Opportunity, police and sheriff departments, boards of education, and city councils.
city’s public schools, with members of the Wei Min She radical organization playing a role in its maintenance. And a handful of schools like the Thunderbird University—devised by the Indians of all Tribes during their 1969-71 Occupation of Alcatraz Island—never materialized on ground but provided a conceptual space where activists could envision the possibilities and structures of Indigenous-controlled education. Similar institutions emerged across the nation, including: the Corky Gonzales-led auxiliary Chicana/o schools in Denver, Colorado; the Chicana/o Colégio César Chávez outside of Portland, Oregon; and—perhaps the most similar institutions to Nairobi and Venceremos—tribally-controlled colleges and universities on Indian reservations, such as Sinte Gleska College in Mission, South Dakota, and Navajo Community College in Arizona.6

Using educational institutions as vehicles toward self-determination, however, produced dilemmas and contradictions, as the examples of Nairobi and Venceremos Colleges demonstrate. A lack of financial self-sufficiency loomed over the Colleges throughout their histories. Ideologically, Nairobi and Venceremos had limited or contradictory conceptions of who and what constituted “Third World” people in the

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United States. Nairobi never fully developed ideas of how to fully eradicate poverty in East Palo Alto, and at times its vision of self-determination fixated too narrowly on local control of public schools. Conversely, while Venceremos theorized ways in which they could take control of their local political economy, toward the elimination of economic exploitation, they struggled to remain relevant to local Mexican American communities, particularly as they clashed with local police authorities with increased frequency.

Despite their shortcomings, the Colleges’ history remains significant in signaling the need for scholars to analyze and critique the relationship between higher education and society at large. The Colleges were one of many constituents engaged in debates and struggles in the postwar era over the purpose of higher education, especially as college campus protests escalated through the 1960s and early 1970s. Some took the position of New York Times editor William V. Shannon, who in an April 28, 1969 editorial for the Times described the university as a place “to transmit knowledge and wisdom…not a forum for political action.”7 “The university,” Shannon continued, “is a quiet place deliberately insulated from the conflicts and pressures from the larger society around it” that should not be asked “to be deliberately ‘relevant’ to today’s crises of cities and races.”8

Yet contrary to Shannon’s assertions, U.S. colleges and universities were inextricably linked to society at large, particularly during the Cold War. This reality applied to Stanford University, with whom Nairobi and Venceremos had the most

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8 Shannon, “One Man’s View,” 40.
frequent contact among local institutions, perhaps more than any other institution. Politically, the Red Scare of the 1950s wreaked havoc on the campus’ academic freedom. As historian Rebecca S. Lowen argues, Stanford University was also one of many institutions that moved higher education “from the periphery to the center of the nation’s political economy” after World War II, with the federal government pouring “approximately $10 billion annually on research and development” for military use by the 1960s, including war technologies used in the Vietnam War.9

Such ties to federal mandates and eventual private industry interests permeated into all levels of education. Under the restructuring of California’s public higher education system through the passage of the Donahoe Education Act of 1960 (“the Master Plan”), community colleges shifted its focus to vocational training, often building programs based on the funding they received from airlines, law enforcement, and other local corporations and state institutions that invested in community colleges.10 These new realities led Stanford University professor and future Venceremos Central Committee member H. Bruce Franklin to conclude in a 1969 debate that “American universities…are essential sources of power within our society, and thus throughout the world” but were currently controlled by the ruling capitalist class.11

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10 Jason Ferreira, “From College Readiness to Ready for Revolution!: Third World Student Activism at a Northern California Community College, 1965-1969,” Kalfou, 1, no. 1 (Spring 2014), 119-120.

But even with the growing influence of the federal government and hegemony of capitalist leaders, government and private industrial interests alone did not dictate the entire operation of colleges and universities. Liberal reformers like University of California President Clark Kerr and College of San Mateo President Julio Bortolazzo—often inspired by the civil rights and other movements of the era—worked to make their institutions into vehicles of social change. Students on campus, especially students of color like those during the SF State and UC Berkeley Third World Liberation Front strikes, pushed their administrators to implement changes; the legacy of these protests include increased admissions, increased resources for retention, and the diversification of curricula for students of color through the establishment of ethnic studies departments that offered more culturally-relevant courses and research. Although Nairobi and Venceremos Colleges viewed transforming institutions from within as a limited course of struggle, they too are part of this legacy and history. The Colleges demonstrated that Third World self-determined education went beyond diversifying curricula and broadening admissions for people of color; their history conveys how we might theorize a university that not only resists complicity in militaristic and economic exploitative systems but also directs institutions to serve the needs of those on the margins of society.

**Origins of the Colleges**

While the Peninsula did not experience mass urbanization as a result of the World War II manufacturing buildup that San Francisco and the East Bay experienced (Chapter Two), spatial and demographic reconfigurations did transform the area, and along with it,
the exacerbation of racial and class inequities. As the postwar era progressed, so too did the tide of activism in the struggle to overturn the segregation and discrimination. Peninsula communities of color endured. The civil rights zeitgeist of the 1960s swept through institutions of higher education, inspiring leaders such as Julio Bortolazzo, the president of the College of San Mateo (CSM). Bortolazzo spent his professional career resuscitating community colleges throughout California, beginning this endeavor at CSM by focusing on improving transfer and retention rates among the college’s students, particularly students of color. Social upheaval stemming from the inequalities found in urban America particularly concerned Bortolazzo, especially in the aftermath of the 1965 Watts uprising. Believing that education held the key to the door out of poverty, Bortolazzo implemented the College Readiness Program (CRP) at the beginning of the 1966-67 academic year. The CRP provided tutoring assistance and other resources for the retention of Black CSM students, who heretofore experienced an approximately ninety percent dropout rate. Moreover, rather than focus on academic tracks leading to transferring to four-year colleges and universities, the bulk of CSM students of all races entered into vocational work, particularly through programs funded by local entities like United Airlines and law enforcement agencies. Through the College Readiness Program, Bortolazzo aimed to expand the educational and career options for students of color while giving them the resources to pursue their chosen career paths. Over the next two years, the CRP expanded recruitment to other students of color, hired more staff, and eventually experienced an almost complete inverse in the dropout rate.12

Much of the achievement turnaround among CSM students of color stemmed from the efforts of its two earliest staff members. Among the extant faculty and staff at the College of San Mateo, Bortolazzo could only recruit counselor and English instructor Jean Wirth to the CRP. Born in New York City and raised around the country before finishing high school in Baltimore, Maryland, Wirth arrived in the Bay Area in the early 1950s to attend Mills College, first for a bachelor’s degree, then for her master’s. Her father’s falling gravely ill in 1958 and needing financial support for his treatment pushed Wirth to withdraw from her doctoral program at the University of California, Berkeley, and begin teaching English courses at the College of San Mateo. That same year, Wirth met Ed Roberts, a CSM student with polio dependent on an iron lung, for whom she began serving as a student services counselor. Wirth helped devise strategies for Roberts to more easily join other students in her English class and his other classes, including situating her classroom to accommodate his wheelchair and arranging his on-campus meetings in rooms only on the ground level of buildings. Through her work with Roberts, Wirth demonstrated her willingness to aid students outside of the classroom, ability to understand student needs and find solutions to those problems, and orientation toward social justice, on which she would draw in her new role with the College Readiness Program.13


Along with the recruitment of Wirth, the hiring of East Palo Alto Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee organizer Robert Hoover served as the second instrumental CRP staff member spearheading this achievement turnaround among CSM’s students of color. Born and raised in North Carolina, then Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Hoover’s activism extended back to his undergraduate education at Penn State University when he first experienced housing discrimination and joined Entre Neu, a campus organization for Black Penn State students. After graduating from the university in 1959, Hoover enrolled in a master’s program at Stanford University, where white Palo Altans refused to sell him a house. Moreover, the apartment owner attempted to evict him and his now wife Mary, enrolled in a PhD program in education at Stanford, because the apartment manager had violated the racially-restrictive policy the owner had placed for tenants. The Hoovers eventually settled into a house in East Palo Alto, with this episode of racial discrimination pushing them into civil rights activism through SNCC.  

Wirth, Hoover, and the volunteers they recruited expanded the focus of student services beyond tutoring to address what they called “the whole student.” Not only should the College of San Mateo focus on students’ needs within the classroom, they argued; the college also needed address the external factors that shaped students’ classroom success, such as the cost of room, board, and textbooks and the reliability of transportation to and from the campus. As student and later leading CRP volunteer Aaron Manganiello explained in a 1969 interview, CSM moved its campus in the early 1960s.

from its former location in Coyote Point to its current College Heights location, farther away from the concentration of the Peninsula’s communities of color and bereft of public transportation options and affordable nearby housing options for those students. The college’s relocation reflected its inaccessibility to students of color, as the college became, the words of Manganiello, “inaccessible geographically,” along with already being “inaccessible philosophically, academically, intellectually” with its lack of culturally-relevant curriculum.\textsuperscript{15} Thus, the CRP would go beyond offering tutoring and other student support services and would provide the means for students of color to attend.\textsuperscript{16}

For some CRP students and tutors, developing “the whole student” also included political education and activism. The CRP grew increasingly politicized through the work of Aaron Manganiello, Warren Fujitani, Pat Sumi, Tony and Mario Martinez, and other leftist radicals who joined the program. Among the organizations and movements from which these activists came or would eventually join included the Brown Berets in Oakland and San Francisco, Los Siete de La Raza in San Francisco’s Mission District, the Free Huey Movement, the movement to Free Angela Davis and all political prisoners, and the Third World Liberation Front strike at San Francisco State College. These radical activists gravitated toward the CRP because of the program’s resources in aiding students of color that radicals thought would be inclined toward activism outside of campus. The growing radicalization of the College Readiness Program, however, did not escape the


\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 4-5, 10.
purview of the CSM administration, who soon acted upon their concerns after Bortolazzo’s departure in 1968.17

After filling their vacant presidency with Robert Ewigleben, the CSM Board of Trustees defunded the CRP before the 1968-69 academic year, misallocating their resources to another part of the budget in spite of the successes of the program. By this point the CRP grew so prominent that the program not only attracted students from San Mateo and surrounding Peninsula cities, but also from communities as far as San Francisco’s Chinatown and East San Jose. The CRP staff had independently raised some of their own external funds before this crisis, including a $150,000 federal grant contingent upon matching funds, yet the Board rebuffed all efforts to meet the CRP’s budget. The CRP also grew increasingly frustrated with Ewigleben. Rhetorically, Ewigleben postured himself as a mediator between students and the Board, yet his slow response to the CRP’s budget shortfall and CRP student inquiries in general. This conflict culminated in the formation of CSM’s own Third World Liberation Front, a series of protests against administration, and clashes with non-sympathetic (predominantly white) students that ended with local police intervention on campus. This situation alienated virtually all CRP students, and most departed the College of San Mateo in early 1969.18

Disappointed but empowered by their CSM experiences, former CRP students took the initiative in building a new institution that would meet their own needs while simultaneously addressing those of local communities of color, recruiting Bob Hoover,
Jean Wirth, and other former CRP staff to help facilitate this process. The students especially drew on Hoover and his wife Mary for their earlier experiences in helping to launch the independent Nairobi Day Schools in East Palo Alto for K-12 students. East Palo Alto also served as the ideal site to launch the new college, since the former CRP students were predominantly Black, and Hoover and other former CRP staff had familiarity with the community and its needs. In September 1969, Nairobi College opened its doors, and the predominantly-Chicana/o Venceremos College launched in the predominantly-Mexican American East Redwood City the following January. While the accreditation process would take a few years to achieve, Nairobi and Venceremos students thought it necessary to begin creating their own infrastructure of self-determined education, leading to the Colleges launching despite taking courses at other nearby institutions to receive transfer credits.

Despite their unity at the College of San Mateo, however, and Aaron Manganiello’s assurance that “It’s still the same college – just two campuses now,” the establishment of Venceremos College away from Nairobi represented more than serving two different demographic constituencies. Even as the colleges shared course offerings, funding, and broader ideas regarding educational self-determination, the separation of campuses would manifest divergent ideological orientations and priorities, with Nairobi becoming more locally-focused and Venceremos more nationally and globally.

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19 Interview with Hoover; “Venceremos College,” *Vocations for Change*, 24.

**Ideological Orientations and Development**

Nairobi and Venceremos did retain a few shared core philosophies. Both continued the CRP’s emphasis on developing “the whole student” beyond the classroom and placed control of the direction of the college, including hiring and firing faculty, onto the students themselves. The Colleges also willingly accepted outside sources of funding but stated they would not work with donors who would seek to control the College in any way. Nairobi and Venceremos also emphasized the need for strong connections with their local communities, not just in terms of education and curriculum but also the everyday needs they lacked. Inspired by the Black Panther Party’s recent shift toward their “survival programs” (Chapter Six), the Colleges dedicated their energies in running community outreach programs focused on healthcare, food distribution, and other things to which many Peninsularans of color did not readily have access. Aside from these commonalities, however, the Colleges diverged from each other ideologically.

Nairobi drew from a few international sources in planning the college, borrowing their name from the capital of Kenya, which had recently gained political independence after over eighty years of formal British colonization. They also developed the Nairobi College Code with “Seven Principles of Blackness” adopted from Swahili words. The principles included *Umoja* (unity), *Ujima* (collective work and responsibility), and *Ujamaa* (cooperative economics) and revolved around generating collective visions and

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22 Ibid.
efforts toward self-determination for the people of East Palo Alto, who would serve as a model for other Black communities in the United States. Throughout their promotional materials, Nairobi sprinkled in quotations from other luminaries of the African diaspora, such as Marcus Garvey and Patrice Lumumba. The rhetoric and imagery of historical and contemporary Black revolutionaries provided not only a holistic organizational structure but also aimed to develop a consciousness toward issues embattling Black people around the world.

As important as international influences would be symbolically and aesthetically, domestic influences proved more important for Nairobi College, especially the influence of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. The Hoovers and other East Palo Alto former and current SNCC members comprised the majority of the college’s support system. SNCC leader Stokely Carmichael also had provided the catalyst for the formation of the earlier Nairobi Day Schools. Carmichael regularly visited East Palo Alto during and after SNCC’s heyday in the mid-1960s, and during one visit in 1966 attended a meeting of East Palo Alto community organizers in their struggle for integration and greater control of the local Sequoia High School district. According to Hoover, when asked his thoughts on the integration plan, Carmichael replied, “I don’t understand why you would be so eager to turn over the minds of your children to the people who’ve oppressed you for four hundred years. Why do you think they’re going to give you an education that will liberate you?”


24 Interview with Hoover.
Alto organizers, who founded the Nairobi Day Schools in the following days. Nairobi College formed an extension of the vision laid out by the Nairobi Day Schools through their adoption of SNCC’s ideas regarding Black Power and self-determination through community control of its institutions.

Coupled with Carmichael and SNCC’s influence was an ethos that echoed Black scholar and activist W.E.B. Du Bois’ formulation (later revised and repudiated) of the “Talented Tenth.” According to Du Bois, Black Americans needed highly- and broadly-educated leaders in their community who would use their education and accompanying skills to improve conditions for the entire race. Nairobi College emulated the “Talented Tenth” ideal through their rejection of vocational education for the Black masses, toward which the College of San Mateo steered Black students before the establishment of the College Readiness Program. They instead favored a curriculum focused on a classical liberal arts education; the college’s primary focus was to help create Black leaders that would transfer to four-year colleges and universities, gain skills and expertise there, then return to East Palo Alto as doctors, lawyers, engineers, businesspeople, and others who would help the community’s economic and political development. Although some Nairobi students remained activists and community organizers, the college believed, in the words of Hoover, “You can’t have all Stokely Carmichaels.”

Although Nairobi would eventually eschew this position and open the Nairobi Vocational Maintenance Program under the presidency of Donald Smothers, steering students toward and

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preparing them for futures in white-collar professions became the primary emphasis of Nairobi’s education.26

In this regard, Venceremos College’s ideological underpinnings did not completely depart from Nairobi’s. Aaron Manganiello—one of the early leaders of Venceremos—explained a similar concept they called “revolutionary technicians.”27 Although trained similarly to other doctors, engineers, lawyers, and other professionals, revolutionary technicians distinguished themselves in where they applied their work. Rather than use their knowledge and skills to advance the will of private capitalists or the state, revolutionary technicians would return to the oppressed communities from which they came to use their skills toward fomenting revolution within the United States. Although Nairobi was oriented around community development and Venceremos around revolution, both initially highlighted the importance of educating young leaders to gain skills and expertise as seen throughout the rest of society yet with an ethos that would serve their respective community.

Aside from this commonality, Venceremos shared little with Nairobi College’s ideologies. Venceremos College—the “ideological arm” of their eponymous organization—believed in the imminence of armed revolution in the United States and drew their ideological influences primarily from international theorists.28 The organization took their name from a rally cry popularized by Che Guevara (Venceremos

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28 Ibid.
being Spanish for “we will overcome”) and drew primarily from Marxism-Leninism for their political thought. The college’s initial leadership consisted of five current or former Oakland Brown Berets, marking a departure from the Berets at large and much of the Chicana/o Movement as a whole. It would not be until the mid- to late 1970s when Marxism (or at least Marxist analysis) in general would be commonly accepted within the Chicana/o Movement. Venceremos, however, reconciled Marxism-Leninism and cultural nationalism early on, believing that adherence to both formed resistance against imperialism in its capitalist and racist manifestations.29

Toward the end of 1970, Venceremos underwent an ideological transformation after the organization merged with a splinter group from the Bay Area Revolutionary Union. The reasons for this split within BARU were contested. According to founding BARU member Steve Hamilton, a faction within Venceremos, led by H. Bruce and Jane Franklin, became increasingly “adventurist” and foresaw immediate armed revolution within the United States via “urban guerrilla warfare” and an “armed propaganda” struggle.30 Others contested that the Franklin faction wanted the predominantly-white BARU to become fully multiracial, whereas BARU leader Bob Avakian preferred non-white radicals to join allied BARU organizations like the Black Panther Party and Wei Min She. According to Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, an American Indian activist who was recruited into the Revolutionary Union, Bob Avakian also “questioned women’s liberation,” despite his alleged adherence to Marxist-Leninist-Mao Zedong Thought.


(MLMZT) with its emphasis on the importance of. The situation within BARU became untenable, and the Franklins led a mass exodus out of the organization, merging with and transforming the Venceremos organization.

After the merger, Venceremos officially adopted MLMZT, as evidenced by two key ideological shifts. First, Venceremos developed a position on the “National Question.” Venceremos aimed to be multiracial—or as they called it, “multinational”—to represent the Chicana/o, Black, and white working-class populations of Redwood City and to serve as a vanguard organization for what they viewed as the impending multinational revolution in the United States, which would spread to fight imperialism throughout the world. The “National Question” focused on how ethnic, racial, and national minorities should relate to the dominant ethnic/racial/national group in a communist country. While Venceremos hoped to maintain a multinational United States after revolution, they also argued that the colonized peoples of the United States—specifically Black people, Chicanas/os, American Indians, Native Hawaiians, and Puerto Ricans—held nationhood status and thus had the right to secede and form their own nation-states.

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32 Interview with Katarina del Valle Thompson, August 13, 2014, in possession of the author.


Furthermore, Venceremos firmly advanced the “Woman Question” of MLMZT by demonstrating their commitment to women’s liberation, which formed one of their core “Principles of Unity.” Because male chauvinism and patriarchy impeded full proletarian revolution, Venceremos worked to root out all sexism and misogyny within their ranks. They further demonstrated their commitment to women’s liberation through their selection of Katarina del Valle as their chairperson on what would be their final Central Committee and through their operation of serve-the-people programs such as the People’s Medical Center, a childcare center, and community education classes on prenatal care.

Implementation of Ideologies

In putting their theories into practice, Nairobi and Venceremos retained a focus on developing “the whole student” beyond the classroom. The Colleges charged no tuition, had a primarily-volunteer staff and faculty, and provided books, transportation, and employment opportunities for their students. The Colleges’ student body also held the power to hire and fire faculty and for the most part controlled the teaching within classes alongside faculty. The students also held sway over the curriculum for the Colleges. While many classes looked similar to those at other colleges and universities, such as mathematics and English composition, the content within those classes tended to differ significantly. History classes tended to focus on understanding the history of capitalism


36 Venceremos: Colegio de Aztlán, 17-20
and imperialism or that of oppressed peoples in the United States and throughout the world, while literature classes often read political tracts instead of common selections like the poetry and plays of William Shakespeare. Although classes had assigned teachers, students most often took the lead in classes, most of which were no more than a dozen people and focused on developing rhetorical and critical thinking skills as much as the content of the curriculum. Reflecting a cross-section of their communities, Nairobi and Venceremos did not only have “college-aged” students but included community members ranging from their early teens who faced frequent disciplinary measures within the public school system to working people in their Forties and Fifties who never finished their formal education, and even some formerly-incarcerated people. Both institutions also ensured connections between themselves and their broader communities through a variety of strategies, including only having one office building for each school and holding classes in houses and other places throughout the community. Nairobi and Venceremos also administered community programs similar to the Black Panther Party, such as health clinics, childcare centers, food co-ops, and rehabilitation facilities for those facing drug or alcohol abuse, all staffed mostly by the Colleges’ students as part of their “whole student” education. Both institutions also emphasized the need to enjoy community building; Venceremos organized baseball games and dances, and Nairobi aiming to show its students that “it’s fun to help other people.”

Community and campus for each college would thus work together as one.

37 Miner, 8.

Venceremos continually worked to keep the National Question at the forefront of its mission by holding Third World people and their struggles at the center of the organization, in contrast to many other multiracial leftist organizations of the time. One way that Venceremos ensured this was to structure its Central Committee to always have approximately two-thirds people of color. They further demonstrated their commitment to women’s liberation through their selection of Katarina del Valle as the chairperson on what would be the final iterations of the Central Committee. Venceremos also showed their commitment to the “Woman Question” within their local communities through their operation of serve-the-people programs such as the People’s Medical Center, a childcare center, and community education classes on prenatal care. In their resolutions with the “National Question” and the “Woman Question,” Venceremos demonstrated ways they connected their goals of global revolution to the act of meeting community needs locally.

Contradictions and Dilemmas

Despite their best efforts, Nairobi and Venceremos Colleges also experienced contradictions and dilemmas throughout their existence stemming from both their theoretical foundations and the praxis of their ideologies. Nairobi and Venceremos never solved the issue that arose early on in the Colleges’ history regarding the hiring of staff, who received regular wages for their work. Although students held some of this hiring power early on, they did not fully control the process for hiring and firing staff. As the

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39 Interview with del Valle Thompson.

40 Venceremos: Colegio de Aztlan, 17-20.
decade progressed, students would receive less and less control over this vital part of the Colleges.⁴¹

Nairobi’s ideological trajectory steered them away from being a fully Third World college in either demographics or ideological orientation. Although always predominantly Black in enrollment, Nairobi College initially had a small but noticeable group of white, Latina/o, and Asian American students, staff, and faculty. Nairobi enlisted the help of Black and white Stanford students as well. Yet Nairobi never recruited students beyond local Black communities and maintained their limited Third World orientation, even after Donald Smothers from the multiracial San Francisco State Third World Liberation Front strike succeeded Hoover as Nairobi College President. By 1973, Nairobi had alienated non-Blacks to the point of being solely Black-populated and -operated.⁴²

Moreover, despite borrowing from Kenyan culture and society, Nairobi did not adopt the same anti-imperialist and revolutionary orientation as the Kenyan independence movement. Nairobi focused instead on helping Blacks in East Palo Alto gain upward social and economic mobility through educational attainment. Part of this focus stemmed from the college’s desire to garner the support of the broader East Palo Alto community toward incorporation into their own city; the organizers around Nairobi believed that the community would not accept a revolutionary platform in the movement toward incorporation. But just as pressing was Nairobi’s financial situation. Aside from the

⁴¹ *Venceremos: Colegio de Aztlan*, 17-20.

federal Office of Education, the college’s funding sources came almost entirely from white elite luminaries around the Peninsula, such as David Packard of the Hewlett-Packard company and Richard Lyman, the president of Stanford University.\footnote{Interview with Hoover.} Hoover particularly raised funds through the Mid-Peninsula Urban Coalition, of which many of the Colleges’ donors were a part. Cyril Bolden, the business manager of Nairobi College in the early 1970s, bemoaned their reliance on white money, reminding the College’s leadership that, “If they are going to accept white money, then they have got to expect white accountability.”\footnote{Coombs, “The Necessity of Excellence,” 44.} Despite their pronouncements to the contrary, Nairobi operated in a way that balanced their need to appeal to the broadest swath of the greater East Palo Alto community while also not appearing threatening to their donor base.

In contrast, Venceremos was unabashed in its criticism of all they deemed to be agents of oppression, including Packard and Lyman. They viewed donors within the local technological industries like Packard, formerly in Richard Nixon’s Department of Defense, as complicit in the military-industrial complex and U.S. economic and military imperialism overseas. Richard Lyman increasingly became a target of Venceremos’ rhetorical attacks, since they argued he stifled anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist critiques from Stanford student activists and made an example of this after firing H. Bruce Franklin for allegedly inciting a riot at an anti-war rally.\footnote{“War Criminal Comin’ to Town!,” Pamoja Venceremos, Feb. 21-Mar. 6, 1972. 28.}
More so than Nairobi, however, Venceremos struggled to remain relevant to their local community and dealt with numerous internal contradictions. Manganiello, who served as chairperson of Venceremos’ Central Committee for most of its existence, admitted that their general lack of bilingualism hindered their ability to recruit within local Mexican communities, who continued to experience an influx of new migrants throughout the 1960s and 70s. Similarly to the majority of East Palo Altans, Mexicans and Mexican Americans in Redwood City and throughout most of the Peninsula tended to disfavor radical politics, particularly armed revolution.

Like Nairobi College, Venceremos espoused a limited understanding of the relations between Third World peoples, in their case specifically regarding indigeneity. Venceremos recognized American Indians and Indigenous Hawaiians as indigenous colonized peoples with the right to their own nation-states within their vision of a post-revolution United States. Indigenous Alaskans, however—who they called “Eskimos”—did not fall under this category; Venceremos instead designated them another “oppressed minority group” akin to Chinese and Japanese Americans and other racial minorities, thus denying their indigeneity and the right to sovereignty within the organization’s theoretical formulations.

Venceremos’ limited understanding of the conditions that the Bay Area’s American Indian and Asian American communities materialized in their inability to

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46 Venceremos, Colegio de Aztlán.


fulfill their Third World revolutionary vanguard visions. The organization originally planned developing a network of Third World independent colleges, stretching from Naribo College and Venceremos College upward through the Peninsula, with prospective campuses in Daly City, South San Francisco, San Francisco’s Chinatown, the Mission District, and all the way to Alcatraz Island. Venceremos eventually tabled these plans after a number of blunders; for example, lacking an established community member from San Francisco’s Chinatown, Venceremos sent Japanese American Tim Aoki in the failed attempt to garner support for a Chinatown Third World college. Venceremos periodically provided supplies to the Alcatraz Island occupiers and later voiced solidarity with the American Indian Movement’s Siege at Wounded Knee in 1973, even sending Central Committee member Bob King to serve as a medic for AIM during the Siege. Yet despite their solidarity, Venceremos never maintained formal relations with American Indian activist organizations, whether locally or nationally.\(^49\) Other issues would arise, however, that would bring Venceremos’ demise before their contradictions manifested themselves.

### Split and Demise

Their operation of separate campuses notwithstanding, Nairobi and Venceremos Colleges initially remained amicable with each other. Disagreements periodically arose between the two based on their different ideological orientations and end goals, but the

Colleges, according to Manganiello, “settled them through collective criticism/self-criticism” that held each party accountable and equal to each other. The irreconcilable rupture between the two did not emerge until after the late 1970 merger and reconstitution of Venceremos. After the merger, Venceremos increasingly focused their theory and praxis on how to expedite armed revolution in the United States while Nairobi became more involved with its incorporation movement and securing more donors from the Peninsula and around the country.

The Colleges’ ideological disagreements eventually came to a head. Although Nairobi did not formally articulate a position on the “Woman Question,” women served in central roles for their vision and leadership throughout the college’s existence, a dynamic that reflected the operation of the Nairobi Day Schools. On the “National Question,” however, Nairobi departed from Venceremos. Hoover and other leaders at Nairobi College disagreed not so much with the validity of the “National Question” but with the viability of building a separate Black country within North America, based on their current circumstances. More immediately viable and necessary, in their view, was helping local communities with their immediate needs in whatever form they could. And although Nairobi College’s staff kept firearms in their offices for self-defense against raiding police officers, they always opposed Venceremos’ pursuit of armed revolution.

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52 Egerton, “Success Comes to Nairobi College,” 26-27.
53 Interview with Hoover.
As the 1971 fiscal year approached, Nairobi moved to officially sever their relationship with Venceremos College, leaving Venceremos without a reliable funding source. Nairobi accused Venceremos of not adequately trying to address their community’s needs. This criticism was somewhat unfounded, since Venceremos ran community programs similar to Nairobi’s. Yet Venceremos did neglect their college and spent more time on other college campuses as the 1970s progressed, especially with various struggles on Stanford University’s campus. In turn, Venceremos accused Nairobi of being too close and uncritical of their white donors and political partners. Manganiello even accused Nairobi of “eating steak every night,” embracing the comforts of middle-class life while neglecting the plight of the working class.54

Yet in the midst of their criticisms of Nairobi College, Venceremos also tried to salvage the relationship. The organization changed the name of its newspaper from Venceremos to Pamoja Venceremos, incorporating the Swahili word for “together” (pamoja) to symbolize their continuing desire to work with Nairobi College. In an early issue of the new Pamoja Venceremos, one of Venceremos’ closest allies, the Black Liberation Front (BLF), penned an article urging Nairobi to reconsider its position. The BLF operated in communities throughout the Peninsula, including East Palo Alto, and some BLF members formerly attended Nairobi College and worked in its accompanying community programs. The BLF did not blame Nairobi entirely for their decision; they instead emphasized the pressures Nairobi faced within the broader white supremacist

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capitalist structure and how it caused fissures among different people of color organizations. The BLF also implored Nairobi to focus on the dire situation their impending funding withdrawal would have on Venceremos students, who did not have any other accessible options for higher education. Yet their pleas and criticisms ultimately were not enough to persuade Nairobi College from cutting ties with Venceremos, and the two official split on July 1, 1971.55

Venceremos continued their pursuit of revolution after their split with Nairobi College. The organization maintained regular protests on Stanford’s campus, in support of Franklin, Stanford workers, and other campus dissidents and in opposition to the university’s ties to military industrial development. Yet around this time, the small internal fissures Venceremos had after subsuming so many different cadre during their 1970 merger began to expand and crack the organization’s foundation. In mid-summer 1971, approximately half of Stanford campus’ Venceremos cadre split from the organization and reconstituted itself as the Intercommunal Survival Committee (ISC), associated with the Black Panther Party. Miriam Cherry, one of the leaders of the ISC, laid out the reasoning for the ISC’s departure from Venceremos in an article ran in the *Stanford Daily*, arguing that the latter’s fixation on the Franklin case detracted from the community work on which Venceremos needed to focus. In response, Manganiello and other Latina/o members of the Central Committee criticized the ISC—a virtually all-white organization—as “racist sissies” and “oppressors” who left Venceremos because they could not follow the leadership of a Third World people-led organization like

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55 Johnston, “Political Style Splits Venceremos, Nairobi Colleges.”
Venceremos. The organization had also released a position paper earlier that year condemning recent shifts in the Panthers’ platform that separated the “political work” of the survival programs with the “military work” of forming “guerrilla units” of oppressed peoples who would bring about revolution to the country. In Venceremos’ view, “political” and “military” work inherently tied together, and the recent shifts in the Panthers’ platforms signaled their continual slide toward “reformism” instead of revolution.56

Venceremos also faced an ideological crisis after the People’s Republic of China and the United States began to officially normalize diplomatic relations in mid-July 1971. The shock of these developments reverberated throughout the MLMZT community throughout the Bay Area. Similar to the split of U.S. communists over the issue of the Soviet Union’s invasion of Hungary in 1957, Venceremos and other organizations associated with the New Communist Movement within the Bay Area and across the country split over the issue of whether or not to continue supporting China, especially after the PRC welcomed President Richard Nixon to visit in 1972. A smaller contingent of the New Communist Movement began to reconsider their rejection of Stalinism for Maoism, which affected Venceremos’ rank-and-file and leadership. Del Valle recalls the Communist League, a Stalinist NCM organization, secretly recruiting some of the Venceremos cadre and encouraging them to stir up ideological divisions within Venceremos. Moreover, despite Venceremos’ avowedly Maoist orientation, H. Bruce Franklin himself revised his conception of Stalin, culminating in his 1972 edited volume.

The Essential Stalin. While formerly believing Stalin to be an imperialist and tyrannical dictator, Franklin now argued that Stalin was instead a misunderstood but brilliant military, political, and economic leader whose chief failure was underestimating the power of bourgeois forces within the Soviet Union. Franklin bent certain facts to arrive at many of his conclusions, such as arguing that the People’s Republic of China carried on Stalin’s work while downplaying the differences that Mao and other Chinese Communist Party leaders made with the Stalin ideologies from which they drew. These ideological uncertainties weighed on internal dynamics in the organization, as Venceremos leaders struggled to maintain unity among its ranks.57

These internal divisions went up to the level of the Central Committee, beyond Franklin’s revision of Stalin. Feeling that Manganiello had become too egotistical in his role as Chairman, the rest of the Central Committee asked him to step down from his position while remaining in an advisory role, with Katarina Davis del Valle installed as Chairwoman for the rest of the organization’s history. Manganiello’s leadership at times alienated the women on the Central Committee, as his bravado and swagger with which he carried himself bordered on an imposing hypermasculinity. In her role as Chairwoman of the Central Committee, Davis del Valle focused on creating a more level power dynamic among the Central Committee members rather than dominating the decision-

making process. Yet even with Davis del Valle’s change in leadership, the Central Committee fought to maintain a united group for the organization.  

Venceremos also had numerous conflicts, provoked and unprovoked, with local and federal police authorities. These conflicts escalated after the 1972 prison escape of and murder of a police officer by Venceremos member Ron Beatty from Chino state prison in Southern California, something that the Venceremos Central Committee vigorously disavowed. Acts of arson and bombings around Stanford campus and throughout the Peninsula were often tied to Venceremos or the Black Liberation Front, although few arrests occurred. As the San Mateo County Sheriff’s Office and the Federal Bureau of Investigation increased surveillance, so too did Venceremos’ distrust of each other grow. The Stanford protests, however, continued to take precedence over Venceremos College, which was neglected until it went defunct by the end of 1972.  

In early October 1973, Venceremos officially disbanded, with its cadre scattering throughout the country and often into other communist organizations or labor union activism.  

Nairobi College operated without the same internal conflicts or state repression that plagued Venceremos throughout its short history. Yet being at the whims of federal

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58 Interview with del Valle Thompson.


60 Interview with Katarina del Valle Thompson.

and private funding left Nairobi in a continually-precarious situation. The beginning of the end of Nairobi College began when Robert Hoover left East Palo Alto in 1975 to earn his PhD in Education at Claremont Graduate School and spent the subsequent seven years doing similar work for predominantly-Black colleges in Chicago and Jacksonville, Florida. Although he stepped down as Nairobi College President in 1971, Hoover remained the primary fundraiser for the college; yet Hoover’s departure created a void in fundraising expertise that no one else could fill. By the end of 1976, Nairobi College’s default rate on government NDSL loans had reached 55% (compared to the national average of 10.2%); along with regularly submitting late and incomplete applications for funding opportunities through the federal Office of Education. In a letter to the college, Danny Wilks—the son of Gertrude Wilks who also worked for Congressman Paul McCloskey, a supporter of the Nairobi schools—raised concerns from various federal program administrators about the staff of Nairobi not having Wirth and especially Hoover anymore. The college’s stream of funding soon dried up. Nairobi College closed its doors in 1979, four years before East Palo Alto incorporated.

Conclusion

From their mutual starting point, Nairobi and Venceremos Colleges traversed two different trajectories toward gaining self-determination for their communities. Ultimately,

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62 Letter from Danny Wilks to Donald Smothers, October 14, 1976, Paul N. McCloskey Papers, Box No. 284, Nairobi College Folder, Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford, California.

although Robert Hoover, Donald Smothers, and other Nairobi leaders framed their split with Venceremos as an inability of people of color to sustain alliances, the divisions between the Colleges stemmed primarily from ideological differences, their implementation, and the various contradictions, limitations, and dilemmas that those ideologies and their attendant praxis manifested.

Nairobi focused on securing East Palo Altans’ and white donors’ support for the college, which later translated into support for their movement toward incorporation. Yet Nairobi was too narrowly fixated on education and did not seriously orient themselves around gaining control of their local political economy, particularly the development of their own economic base. Hoover, among others, pegs the relative lack of economic organizing as Nairobi’s greatest shortcoming.\textsuperscript{64} Even Nairobi’s activism outside the college and its community programs aimed primarily to give themselves more control over their local education system. In short, Nairobi developed an avenue for upward social and economic mobility, not a comprehensive strategy for attaining self-determination. And while this created new opportunities for the residents of East Palo Alto, an emphasis on mobility could never bring political and economic liberation for all.

Although initially rooted in Redwood City, Venceremos spread its efforts to communities throughout the Peninsula. But in spreading themselves so far, Venceremos neglected their college and eventually their relationship with the majority of Redwood City residents. Venceremos also became increasingly insular as they pursued their imminent armed revolution within the United States and could not handle the mounting

\textsuperscript{64} Interview with Hoover.
internal instability and external repression they faced. Venceremos ultimately failed to keep their local communities connected and central to their global visions of revolution and liberation.

In their local and temporal contexts, however, Nairobi and Venceremos Colleges were unprecedented and thus revolutionary in their own ways. The Colleges connected their students’ aspirations of higher education with a focus on working toward justice and the creation of self-governed communities. Their integration of academic learning with community service and organizing demonstrated an ability to connect higher education with communities of color in a way that benefitted the latter. They wrestled with the seeming contradiction of remaking the state while depending on its financial support, and the pragmatic approach of Nairobi College eventually secured greater political power through the incorporation of East Palo Alto. Even while falling short of their ultimate goals, the Colleges found that through dedicated struggle, they could improve the conditions for the oppressed masses around them, both within and outside of educational systems. In other words, working toward reforming existing societal structures and institutions provided some revolutionary potential in itself.

The history of Nairobi and Venceremos illustrate that institutions of education—like the courts, police departments, legislative bodies, and the other institutions that comprise the state in the United States—were not neutral entities in the postwar era nor since then. Their operation tied into the local, national, and international political economies with which they connected. The history of Nairobi and Venceremos also illustrates the near-impossibility of completely disengaging with the state, whether in
education or otherwise, in the pursuit of self-determination for communities of color. Nairobi’s move toward incorporation and eventually electoral takeover of their local school boards demonstrated their understanding of this reality, as did Venceremos with their handful of campaigns for city council seats and the sheriff’s office. Other internationalist radicals understood this reality by the early 1970s as well; rather than try to completely separate themselves from the state or bend it to match their visions, radicals instead worked to transform their local systems of governance from within via electoral politics. This move, however, posed major problems for radicals. For one, many other radicals denounced and decried this move, even though many of them would head in that direction by early 1980s. More immediately concerning was the fragility of alliances among radicals within municipal and county politics, the limited jurisdictional scope they had, and the pushback by conservatives, moderates, and many liberals to their policies. And similar to the history of Nairobi and Venceremos Colleges, the history of local electoral politics discussed in the next chapter demonstrates how ideological differences could cause once-solid coalitions to fall apart in a short period of time.
CHAPTER SIX

Self-Determination within the System?: The Dilemmas of Internationalist Radicals
Entering Local Electoral Politics in 1970s Berkeley and Oakland

As the tumult of the 1960s spilled into the 1970s, radical activists in the San Francisco Bay Area experienced a growing divergence among their ranks. Although not always discrete, three general trajectories emerged from this divergence. Least common was the taking up of arms toward fomenting revolution in the United States. Despite organizations like the Black Panther Party and Red Guard Party publicly brandishing firearms and advocating armed self-defense as part of their political platforms, most radical organizations did not see directly confronting the state through open warfare as a viable avenue toward dismantling the systems of oppression that structured the United States. The second trajectory emphasized labor organizing, with radicals dispersing among unions throughout the area. Many radicals believed that working within the system, including engagement in electoral politics, would be futile in dismantling the racism, economic exploitation, sexism, and other oppressions that structured U.S. society. Taking up arms and labor union organizing provided avenues to pursue revolution without trying to work within the state.

The third trajectory, however, involved Bay Area radicals who turned their efforts primarily toward electoral politics at the local level. Radical activists viewed this strategy as a viable avenue of struggle in their pursuit of self-determination, with the goal of gaining control over their communities’ institutions, governance, and political economy.
While Nairobi College and Venceremos College and its accompanying organization pursued self-determination through creating institutions separate from existing state ones (Chapter Five), radicals who engaged with electoral politics viewed separation from the state as virtually impossible, thus leading them to try and transform the state toward the just and equitable governance of their communities.

This chapter examines this foray into local electoral politics by Bay Area internationalist radicals in the 1970s, focusing on the April Coalition (later Berkeley Citizens Action) in Berkeley and the Black Panther Party and the Brown Berets in Oakland. By the 1980s, internationalist radicals had largely embraced electoral politics, most notably exemplified by their efforts in Jesse Jackson’s national Rainbow Coalition presidential campaign.¹ During the 1970s, however, internationalist radicals met resistance among others on the radical Left for these efforts. Radicals had previously created symbolic gestures through electoral politics, such as nominating Eldridge Cleaver as the Peace and Freedom Party presidential candidate despite his not being the eligible age (Chapter Four). In the 1970s, internationalist radicals entered into electoral politics more seriously instead of symbolically, whether a radical activist was a candidate her/himself or working in the campaign for an allied Leftist politician.

Although not counted among the April Coalition candidates like in Oakland municipal elections later in the decade, the Panthers played an integral ideological role in their shift toward electoral politics, specifically with BPP co-founder Huey P. Newton’s

¹ For more on Jackson’s appropriation of the “Rainbow Coalition” name from Chicago radicals without acknowledging them or paying heed to their full radical visions, see Jakobi Williams, *From the Bullet to the Ballot: The Illinois Chapter of the Black Panther Party and Rainbow Coalition Politics in Chicago* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), especially Chapter Six.
concept of intercommunalism. By the 1970s, Newton argued, the world no longer was comprised of nation-states but rather an amalgamation of disparate communities under the economic, political, and military control of the U.S. empire and other global capitalist elites. Since nation-states could not experience full revolution under U.S. empire, oppressed peoples would need to struggle toward self-determination first within their communities, before consolidating power as a united front among communities around the world and causing this empire to collapse. Electoral politics served as one avenue through which radicals could gain control of their local communities.

First elected to the Berkeley City Council in 1967, then as Representative for the 7th Congressional District in 1970, Ron Dellums also became a touchstone figure among Bay Area radicals working in electoral politics. Although he did not have formal membership or even affiliation with a local radical cadre, Dellums lent his support to radicals in struggle, such as Huey Newton during his 1967-1971 trial proceedings, and ran on platforms that echoed those of the Panthers, the Peace and Freedom Party, and other local radicals; Dellums stressed the need to end racism and economic exploitation in all their institutional forms and voiced internationalist solidarity for the Vietnamese and other Southeast Asian peoples in “the right of other people to determine their own lives.”

Dellums’ platform was largely left of the Democratic Party establishment of the

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2 “April Coalition Platform,” Folder 42, Box 4, Berkeley Free Church Collection, Accession number GTU 89-5-016, Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, California.


time, and his anti-imperialist orientation helped him unseat incumbent Jeffery Cohelan in June 1970, who shared party membership but consistently voted to escalate the Vietnam War. This internationalist orientation continued to resonate through the 1970s, even after the end of the Vietnam War in 1975, with efforts like the anti-apartheid movement in support of the South African national liberation movement. Dellums would support the April Coalition and Berkeley Citizens Action throughout the 1970s, along with the Black Panther Party and later Councilman Joe Coto, whose success stemmed largely from the efforts of Brown Berets.

The April Coalition would find most of its success early in the 1970s, while the efforts of the Black Panther Party and Brown Berets would largely come to fruition later in the decade. Radical activists met stiff resistance within Berkeley and Oakland, from conservative politicians but also at times from liberal ones as well. Within the coalitions internationalist radicals forged, dissention would arise, leading to the splintering of some coalitions. Moreover, in the case of the Black Panther Party and the Brown Berets, radicals would go their separate ways before converging again toward the end of the decade. The history of internationalist radicals within electoral politics was thus one of tenuous alliances that radical activists worked to maintain while they negotiated the limitations of the existing government systems and the counter mobilizations of both conservative and moderate liberal constituencies.

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5 "Jeffery Cohelan is NOT a peace candidate" flyer, Ron Dellums folder, Reel 72, Social Protest Collection, BANC MSS 86/157 c, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.
The April Coalition Mobilizes

Berkeley electoral politics before the 1970s proved contentious, with strong liberal and conservative wings of the city government struggling for control of the city council and mayor’s office as the main avenue of reform (or rejection of reform) for the city. By the 1960s, liberal activists had gained a stable majority of the city council, buoyed by popular politicians such Byron Rumford. Yet, with the escalation of the Vietnam War and the continued plight of Berkeley’s racial minorities and working class, these communities and the radical activists among them looked to make the Berkeley city council and local government as a whole work more in line with the oppressed masses of Berkeley residents.

The multiracial April Coalition—named for the month in which Berkeley’s municipal elections were held—was born from the merging of various anti-imperialist, anti-racist, and other activist constituencies. The April Coalition predominantly attracted Black and white radicals, particularly students from UC Berkeley, along with members of the local counterculture and a handful of Asian Americans and Latinas/os. The April Coalition included much of the Berkeley Coalition, which had been integral in Dellums’ campaigns. The now-Congressman officially lent his endorsement to the April Coalition for the city council on which he once served. Moreover, the April Coalition gained a significant boost on the campaign trail when sitting councilmember Warren Widener agreed to break from Berkeley’s liberal establishment and run for mayor (which was part
of the city council) on the slate, demonstrating the ability of the April Coalition to move some establishment politicians leftward in their policy agendas.⁶

The April Coalition’s platform represented their broad base, incorporating people from a large swath of the city’s communities. Included among their mid-January 1971 platform-drafting workshops were white Berkeleyans, Black Berkeleyans, other racial minorities, including recent immigrants, feminists and women liberationists, gays and lesbians, elderly citizens, children and youth, disabled peoples, labor unions, university students, environmentalists, and religious leaders. Although disparate, these groups found much overlap in a variety of issues, such as anti-poverty programs, rent control, land-use regulations, more equitable taxation, improvements in education, and internationalist solidarity through ending U.S. militarism overseas.⁷ The bulk of the April Coalition’s targeted voting base lived in South and West Berkeley—where racial minorities experienced less housing discrimination—and the University of California, Berkeley campus. These two constituencies held the keys to success for the April Coalition. For the former, the Coalition proposed a more extensive and impactful set of policies to alleviate poverty and fight against racial discrimination and segregation; for the latter, the April Coalition’s anti-war and anti-imperialist messages resonated with the mood of the campus. The passage of the Twenty-Sixth Amendment in 1970 only encouraged the April Coalition’s outreach to UC Berkeley students, as the new amendment lowered the voting


⁷ “April Coalition Platform,” Folder 42, Box 4, Berkeley Free Church Collection, Accession number GTU 89-5-016, Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, California.
age from twenty-one to eighteen and created a previously-untapped part of the electorate.\textsuperscript{8}

The most pressing and controversial plank of their platform, however, centered on Police Charter Amendment No. 1 (more commonly known as “community control of police”), which provided a plan to restructure the Berkeley Police Department.\textsuperscript{9} The April Coalition identified this as “the primary issue of the April Coalition...because it exemplifies the concept of neighborhood government” whereby Berkeley residents would have more decentralized and thus more self-determined governance within their communities.\textsuperscript{10} Endorsers of community control included liberal organizations like the Berkeley Black Caucus, but support stemmed mostly from local radicals from whom the Coalition adopted this issue, including the Black Panther Party (particularly co-founder Bobby Seale), the National Committee to Combat Fascism, and the Red Family, who drew up a fifty-page pamphlet outlining the case for community control. This pamphlet detailed the numerous problems and controversies within the Berkeley Police Department throughout the 1960s, such as mounting operating costs, which had ballooned from a budget of approximately $1.6 million at the end of 1965 to over $3.6 million in 1971, with no evidence of more effective or efficient policing. In addition, community control proponents argued that since the police were beholden to the city council yet the city

\textsuperscript{8} “CRS Annotated Constitution: Twenty-sixth Amendment,” Cornell University Law School, accessed October 24, 2016, \url{https://www.law.cornell.edu/anncon/html/amdt26_user.html#amdt26_hd1}.

\textsuperscript{9} “April Coalition Platform,” Folder 42, Box 4, Berkeley Free Church Collection, Accession number GTU 89-5-016, Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, California.

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid., 2.
council was largely comprised of economic elites or those tied closely to them, the police were held accountable by only a small portion of Berkeley’s residents.\textsuperscript{11}

More damning than this, however, were the myriad ways that policing had grown more militarized and punitive, particularly toward racial minorities, women, gays and lesbians, and Berkeley’s youth. The department purchased or received as donations an increasing number of weapons from the military, such as grenade launchers, chemical mace, and even a helicopter. As was the case throughout the United States, Black and other racial minority residents regularly experienced police harassment and brutality, particularly those in the working class, and the recent police killings of unarmed thirty-four-year-old Charles H. Hansen in 1967 and sixteen-year-old Oswald Sanders in 1969 had particularly disheartened Black Berkeleyans, as none of the officers involved were held accountable for these killings. Lack of accountability was also on display with Berkeley PD’s handling of rape cases, as the department investigated only around thirty percent of all reported cases, placed exceedingly high burdens of proof on the women bringing the charges, and proved generally apathetic in their response to this crime. Berkeley police officers routinely targeted gay and lesbian residents, with one group of officers patrolling Berkeley’s Aquatic Park—a known public place where gay men would meet—in order to harass and arrest gay men under the guise of their being prostitutes. In one April 1969 incident, plainclothes Berkeley police officers shot and killed unarmed Frank Bartley, who attempted to flee the scene after being set up, without any punishment from the department. And in addition to their repressive practices against protesters on

\textsuperscript{11} To Stop A Police State: The Case for Community Control of Police pamphlet, 30, New Left Collection, Box 2, Folder 13, Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford, Calif.
UC Berkeley’s campus, the police bloated the number of juvenile detainees they apprehended throughout the 1960s.12

These and the other numerous abuses and wasteful expenditures by Berkeley police prompted community organizers to pursue the community control of police amendment. Rather than having one centralized police department patrolling the whole city, the community control amendment would create three police departments for different parts of the city: West and South Berkeley would have one police department, North Berkeley and the Berkeley Hills would have another department, and the University of California campus and surrounding area would have the third. These police departments would be under the control of and accountable to a Neighborhood Police Council of fifteen elected members, who themselves could be subject to recall by residents in their own jurisdictions. Moreover, all Berkeley police officers would need to be residents of the city, in contrast to the early 1970s situation where less than thirteen percent of Berkeley’s over two-hundred-seventy-person police force lived there. These changes, proponents argued, would de-escalate growing tensions and foster more familiarity and trust between Berkeley’s communities and its police departments.13

Yet the community control charter amendment was met with stiff contestation. The shrinking conservative political bloc remained invested in the status quo, largely seeing no major issues with the Berkeley Police Department. More influentially, a Black

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12 *To Stop A Police State: The Case for Community Control of Police* pamphlet, 18, 20, 23-27, New Left Collection, Box 2, Folder 13, Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford, Calif.

13 “Berkeley Petition for Community Control of Police” flyer, New Left Collection, Box 2, Folder 13, Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford, Calif.; *To Stop A Police State: The Case for Community Control of Police* pamphlet, 4, 30, New Left Collection, Box 2, Folder 13, Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford, Calif.
and white moderate liberal coalition named “One Berkeley” opposed the amendment on a few different grounds, such as the amendment creating a difficult bureaucratic transition for the city and increasing the police budget. More politically expedient was the argument that community control of police would reify segregation in Berkeley. This argument, however, ignored the reality of continual residential and employment discrimination and that racial minorities received harsher treatment under the law than white Berkeleyans. Moreover, One Berkeley took up the predominant civil rights discourse championing “integration” that stemmed from the Jim Crow South’s movements but did not have the same applicability in the urban West that the politics of self-determination had. At the same time, One Berkeley’s framing of racial inequalities in Berkeley focused on the individual, rather than the institutional, mirroring the rhetoric of moderate and conservative activists who opposed the Rumford Fair Housing Act and other similar government interventions, under the guise of individual rights. In essence, One Berkeley advocated a colorblind approach to working toward racial justice that instead downplayed how deep-seated racial inequalities were in the city and thus did not address the root causes of those issues.

By the April 6, 1971 municipal election, the community control of the police charter amendment had failed to generate enough support to pass. For the rest of their electoral hopes, the April Coalition proved exceedingly successful. Of their four candidates for city council—Black Caucus lawyers D’Army Bailey and Ira Simmons, white Berkeley Coalition member Ilona “Loni” Hancock, and white UC Berkeley

14 “One Berkeley Community For Who?” flyer, New Left Collection, Box 2, Folder 13, Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford, Calif.
graduate student Rick Brown—Bailey, Simmons, and Hancock gained seats on the council, and Warren Widener gained the mayor’s office. As they had planned for, a growing number of racial minorities and an overwhelming majority of university students turned out to vote for the Coalition. But the gains the April Coalition made would prove short-lived, as turmoil would overtake the city council and the coalition soon after they entered office.

A Turbulent First Cycle and Counter-Mobilization

Much of the turbulence for the April Coalition members on the city council stemmed from a seemingly unlikely source. Although part of the same slate, D’Army Bailey held animosities against Loni Hancock. Part of this stemmed from Bailey’s uncompromising advocacy of affirmative action policies for racial minorities over women in hiring for Berkeley city government jobs, without answering the question of how these policies would be equitable toward women of color, then white women. But Bailey also had personal antipathies toward white people in general and eventually cut off all support for Hancock and any resolutions she introduced to the council. Ira Simmons, who had been friends with Bailey years prior to election, was torn between Bailey and Hancock but largely sided with Bailey on issues, leaving Hancock isolated among the city council members.16

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16 Interview with Ying Lee, August 14, 2015, in possession of the author.
The hostilities Bailey directed toward Hancock, however, paled in comparison to
the hostility the council directed toward the April Coalition. While the Coalition
candidates did not hold a majority in the council, they held a plurality on the nine-person
council with Widener and could thus block any conservative or liberal resolutions.
Moderate liberal councilmembers such as Wilmont Sweeney and Susan Hone quickly
grew frustrated at the Coalition’s general unwillingness to compromise, particularly with
Bailey, who at times also insulted and berated other councilmembers. Indeed, by the next
election cycle in 1973, Bailey’s brashness and generally combative demeanor had
alienated Berkeleyans across the political spectrum, from conservatives who virulently
fought against him to members of the Black Panther Party. With this growing antipathy
against Bailey came the emergence of another coalition, one comprised of unlikely allies
in moderate liberals and conservatives, despite their public claim of being a progressive
force.17

Rallying around a slate they dubbed “the Berkeley Four,” this political group set
out to undo the power of the April Coalition through two major strategies. First, the
Berkeley Four set out to draw in moderates from both conservative and liberal
constituencies, both in terms of the electorate but also establishment politicians. The
Berkeley Four—whose composition with incumbents Sweeney, Hone, and new
candidates Henry Ramsey, Jr. (a Black lawyer) and Joe Garrett (a white UC Berkeley
graduate student) mirrored that of the original April Coalition slate—received

17 Tracy Johnson, “‘Playing the Dozens’ ~ the Recall Election in Berkeley,” San Francisco Magazine,
August 1973, 56-60, D’Army Bailey folder, Reel 72, Social Protest Collection, BANC MSS 86/157 c, The
Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.
endorsements from local Republican politicians Tom McLaren and Wallace Johnson and scored a major coup when Warren Widener broke from the April Coalition to endorse the Four.¹⁸

Both competing coalitions shared much overlap in terms of the issues they broached and critiques of the current state of Berkeley governance, including anti-poverty measures, police brutality, and reforms for racial equality. Five out of the seven initiatives on the April 1973 ballot passed, with the initiatives being either advocated for by the April Coalition or compromised versions of April Coalition positions, such as an independent Police Review Commission in lieu of community control of the police. In terms of actions to take to rectify these inequalities, however, the Berkeley Four retreated to the now-standard individualistic perspective and largely colorblind racial ideologies that permeated most of the Berkeley liberal establishment by the mid-1970s. For example, Hone and Sweeney declined the enforce the rent control initiative Berkeley voters passed in 1972, highlighting their emphasis on promoting class- and race-neutral policies that failed to alleviate the increasingly dire circumstances that Berkeley’s lower-income constituencies—which were largely people of color and students—faced as real estate property values rose in the 1970s. The April 1973 election was a resounding

¹⁸ Henry Ramsey, Jr., for Berkeley City Council” flyer, Bay Area elections folder, Reel 73, Social Protest Collection, BANC MSS 86/157 c, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley; “Sue Hone Candidate for City Council” flyer, Bay Area elections folder, Reel 73, Social Protest Collection, BANC MSS 86/157 c, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley; “Joe Garrett Candidate for City Council” flyer, Bay Area elections folder, Reel 73, Social Protest Collection, BANC MSS 86/157 c, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley; “The Berkeley 4 can get it done!” letter to Berkeley citizens, Bay Area elections folder, Reel 73, Social Protest Collection, BANC MSS 86/157 c, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley; “A Challenge to the Berkeley 4” flyer, Bay Area elections folder, Reel 73, Social Protest Collection, BANC MSS 86/157 c, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley
victory for the Berkeley Four, who added three out of their four candidates to the city council. Of the April Coalition slate that year—Chinese American schoolteacher and activists Ying Lee Kelley, sociology professor and Berkeley Black Caucus member Margot Dashiell, white graduate student Peter Birdsall, and white economics professor Lenny Goldberg—only Lee Kelly gained a seat on the council, leaving the April Coalition in a decided minority on the council in light of Widener’s defection and one split between Bailey and Simmons on the one hand and Hancock and Lee on the other.¹⁹

Yet even this minority stake on the council would be weakened in the aftermath of the April 1973 election, as the moderate liberal-conservative coalition’s second strategy began to gain steam. This strategy more directly targeted at the April Coalition’s power by launching a recall bid against D’Army Bailey. The official recall petition to the state of California, filed in mid-February earlier that year, charged Bailey with “obstructionism, filibuster, racism, and vilification” in bringing the city council to a halt on passing their city budget while also, they argued, working against the interests of Black Berkeleyans.²⁰ In flyers and pamphlets they distributed, the coalition around the Berkeley Four framed their recall campaign through Bailey’s obstructionism and often

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highlighted the existence of an unknown sources of income for him, occasionally implying that communists were funding Bailey’s political aspirations.\textsuperscript{21}

In response, Bailey denied these charges while also emphasizing his continual push for affirmative action policies and enlarging city aid for childcare and other services for low-income families. The April Coalition and their allies fought vigorously against the recall, highlighting the high percentage of conservative white corporate interests backing the campaign and arguing that the recall was not about Bailey per se but about targeting the April Coalition and radical and progressive politics as a whole. National activist leaders such as Julian Bond and Jesse Jackson voiced their solidarity for Bailey. Local radicals echoed this sentiment, including the New American Movement and Communist Party USA member and recent political prisoner Angela Y. Davis, who characterized the recall as “fundamentally racist and anti-democratic” and sheer hypocrisy when compared to the lack of a recall for earlier Berkeley City Council members who supported the Vietnam War and its escalation or blatantly racially-exclusionary policies like Proposition M in the 1960s.\textsuperscript{22} Despite their struggles, however, Bailey lost the recall election and was replaced by William Rumford, who shared the last


\textsuperscript{22} “Statement by Angela Y. Davis on the attempted recall of black city councilman D’Army Bailey,” Bay Area elections folder, Reel 72, Social Protest Collection, BANC MSS 86/157 c, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.
name of his Berkeley political luminary father Byron but leaned right of the elder Rumford’s liberal tendencies.  

Although the original April Coalition dissolved soon after 1973, its core constituencies reorganized themselves into other organizations, most notably Berkeley Citizens Action, with an eye toward electoral politics throughout the rest of the 1970s. Winning Ying Lee Kelley’s seat at the very least ended Loni Hancock’s isolation on the city council, and as a sitting councilmember, Lee Kelley proved a viable candidate for the 1975 mayoral election, although still losing that race by a mere six hundred votes. Berkeley Citizens Action counted a handful of successes in electoral politics throughout the rest of the 1970s, such as re-electing Hancock in 1975 and electing Gus Newport for Mayor in 1979, yet also suffered significant setbacks, such as the loss of Lee Kelley’s seat in 1977. Even one of Berkeley Citizens Action’s major victories around rent control, passed in 1978 and stemming from the original April Coalition slate, was largely gutted by subsequent California state legislation and lack of enforcement. Moreover, changes in the structure of elections made by the city council moderate majority of the late 1970s and early 1980s fundamentally weakened Berkeley Citizens Action, with election dates moved to June—thus hampering student turnout, which was still one of Berkeley Citizens Action’s largest constituencies—and city council elections separated by districts instead of having city-wide elections. The district system rendered broad city-wide slates.

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irrelevant, and while Berkeley Citizens Action remains alive in the city today, it has long been a shadow of its former self.24

The 1973 Elections and the Divergent Mobilizations of Anti-Establishment Candidates

Concurrent with the rise and descent of the April Coalition was the rise of racial minorities vying for office within Oakland’s city government. While the April Coalition experienced an unlikely counter-mobilization from temporarily-allied liberals and conservatives, Oakland’s political Left faced an entrenched conservative force in the downtown business establishment (Chapter Two). Whereas the April Coalition found most of its success early in the decade, radicals engaging with electoral politics in Oakland found its success toward the end of the 1970s. Like with the April Coalition and Berkeley Citizens Action, the influence of Ron Dellums and the Black Panther Party shaped the trajectory of this history; yet unlike the April Coalition, individuals from organizations explicitly intent on bring revolution served as some of the candidates for these municipal offices, most notably with Black Panther Party leaders Bobby Seale and Elaine Brown. Oakland Panthers had previously run for office in more symbolic gestures, most notably on the Peace and Freedom Party’s 1968 slate headline by presidential candidate Eldridge Cleaver and featuring Huey P. Newton as the candidate for California’s 7th Congressional District (Chapter Four).

24 Interview with Ying Lee, August 19, 2015, in possession of the author.
These efforts in the 1970s, however, marked a shift in the general approach the BPP took toward their struggle for self-determination. Whereas the Panthers’ aesthetics and rhetoric through the late 1960s focused heavily on the use of armed self-defense (and sometimes preemptive violence), during the early 1970s, the Party began de-escalating their violent imagery. Part of this rationale stemmed from the continual harassment the Panthers faced from the Oakland Police Department at their headquarters, on the streets, and while driving throughout the city. A public image that focused less on or absent of armed self-defense and violence would draw less attention from the state, and the Panthers would have fewer legal battles and expenses as a result. The defection (or in the view of some Panthers, expulsion) of Eldridge Cleaver from the Black Panther Party while in exile in Algeria in early 1971 symbolized this shift, as Cleaver had steered the Panthers rhetorically toward armed conflict with the state, most notably with the April 1968 shootout with Oakland PD. As Cleaver left or was removed from the party, so too did many members who agreed with Cleaver’s emphasis on armed struggle.²⁵

More important than lessening tensions between the BPP and the police was the Panthers’ new focus on their community-oriented “survival programs.” The organization initiated the survival programs in January 1969 with the free breakfast for children program and would soon expand them to include a free shoe program, a community food bank, alternative elementary school, and medical clinics, particularly for the testing and treatment for sickle-cell anemia, a condition that disproportionately affected African

Americans. As Newton argued, the survival programs were not a revolution in and of themselves but served “the practical needs of the people” in their current intercommunal phase while the Panthers and other revolutionaries around the world worked toward the end of U.S. imperialism and all its attendant oppressions. Yet although Newton provided much of the rhetorical direction for the survival programs, it was the work of Bobby Seale, Elaine Brown, and other Panthers who provided most of the organizing acumen and leadership for the implementation and expansion of the survival programs, particularly with Newton in prison from October 1967 to August 1970. While seemingly “reformist” in nature, Seale differentiated the Panthers’ programs as “revolutionary community programs” because they were “set forth by revolutionaries, by those who want to change the existing system to a better system” and constituted more than just “an appeasing handout” set up by the state to placate the oppressed masses. Revolution would come not from imminent armed resistance but rather through the process of community-based organizing and mobilization through the survival programs and other avenues toward gaining control of their local community institutions.

These newfound efforts toward community-oriented programs fit hand-in-hand with an entrance into electoral politics. While local businesses and the Panthers’ fundraising efforts supported the survival programs, the Panthers eventually turned to local, state, and federal opportunities for financial assistance. In keeping with their

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27 Bobby Seale, *Seize the Time*, 413.

28 Bloom and Martin, *Black Against Empire*
emphasis on self-determination politics, the Panthers, particularly Seale, viewed using the
state toward achieving their ends as part of the revolutionary process. Late in his 1973
mayoral campaign, Seale articulated this shift in philosophy from the Panthers’ early
years, arguing that he could transform the system from within and “boot out the corrupt
politicians who were responsible for that oppression” of the local Black community, if
elected.29 At the same time, the Panthers’ earlier reputation for violence proved difficult
for Seale and Elaine Brown to shake during their 1970s electoral campaigns, even with
their de-escalation in rhetoric and conflicts with the police and although Seale envisioned
the Panthers eventually phasing out as an organization but whose work would be usurped
and expanded by the Black community. After failed campaigns in 1973 and 1975, the
Black Panther Party saw a breakthrough in this strategy when judge Lionel Wilson—the
candidate they endorsed, even though he was not a Party member—won the 1977
mayoral race for Oakland.

Yet Wilson’s victory came at the expense of Joe Coto, a member of the GI Forum
and a sitting City Councilmember whose campaigns also owed a debt to radical activists,
in this case former Brown Berets. In contrast to the April Coalition and reflecting
Oakland’s demographics, Latinas/os played a more prominent role in these political
mobilizations, especially Mexican Americans and including radicals like the Berets. By
the 1973 municipal election, the Berets nationally officially had disbanded, and the
Oakland chapter split into two factions. A small but stringent group of Berets formed
themselves into El Partido Revolutionario Chicano (Chicano Revolutionary Party, later

Raza Revolutionary Party), a militant organization focused on armed revolution whose central thrust was highlighted with their adopted logo: “Dare to Struggle, Dare to Win, Shoot to Kill.”\(^{30}\) More commonly, Berets still active in local organizing worked within the Northern California chapter of El Partido de La Raza Unida (The United Race Party; more commonly referred to as La Raza Unida Party or RUP). Founded in southern Texas in early 1970, RUP formed out of a resolution penned by José Angel Gutierrez that he proposed at the late December 1969 national conference for the Mexican American Youth Organization. Arguing that “Democrats and the Republicans are all alike…neither party has ever delivered for the Chicano,” Gutierrez urged and successfully persuaded a majority of the delegates at the conference to adopt this resolution for a new political party and spent much of the next few years organizing and recruiting across Texas, then across the rest of the U.S. Southwest. La Raza Unida’s influence spread so rapidly that within a few years, longtime Mexican American activist Bert Corona declared in a widely-circulated pamphlet that “Only through the establishment of our own strong national La Raza Unida Party can we Chicanos put an end to tokenism and dependency” with the Democratic and Republican Parties and toward self-determination for Chicana/o communities throughout the country.\(^{31}\)

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Within Oakland’s electoral politics, former Berets now in La Raza Unida Party would prove instrumental to Coto’s successful 1973 bid for Oakland’s District 6 city council seat. Although he was not himself a radical activist or politician, Coto had shown solidarity with a number of Beret struggles and with other Chicana/o organizations at large. As historians Juan C. Herrera and Robert Self note, Mexican American intra-ethnic umbrella associations like the Mexican American Unity Council and broader Latina/o ones like the Spanish Speaking Unity Council had begun consolidating disparate political actors like the Mexican American Political Association and the Community Service Organization into a more unified and cogent political force in the 1960s. While much of this coalescence crystalized around directing War on Poverty programs toward Mexican American neighborhoods and organizations, the growing legibility of the Mexican American community as a political force in Oakland lent itself to campaigning as well.32

The 1973 municipal election cycle did not constitute the first leftist foray into electoral politics in the endeavor to break up the downtown business hegemony. It did, however, present the most formidable challenge to this hegemonic governance heretofore in the city’s history. Although Black Panther Party candidates did not comprise the entirety of anti-establishment candidates for the 1973 elections, Chairman Bobby Seale and Minister of Information Elaine Brown’s announcement of their candidacy for mayor and 6th District city council seat, respectively, at the May 13, 1972 Black Community Survival Conference in Oakland garnered the most media attention of the candidates.

challenging downtown. Dedicated to their incarcerated Chief of Staff, David Hilliard, the Panthers organized this conference to exhibit gains made through and future plans for their survival programs and included the distribution of bags of groceries, shoes, and Sickle Cell Anemia tests for the approximately 4,000 Black attendees. In line with the survival programs’ mantra to “serve the people,” Seale and Brown articulated the platform of the “Community Survival Ticket” that would focus on grassroots mobilization—by June 1972, the Black Panther Party and its volunteers had already registered over 11,000 voters, primarily during BPP-sponsored events in Alameda County but also in Contra Costa County to the north and San Francisco County to the west—to help improve the “slum conditions” that poor and working-class people lived in and alleviate the many problems these communities faced, including skyrocketing unemployment, poor and limited housing, underdeveloped public transportation infrastructure, uneven quality of education, and living “under the threat of a misguided and brutal police force.”

Similarly to the April Coalition, the BPP also advocated community control of the police and instituting rent control throughout Oakland. The Party envisioned winning the Oakland’s mayor office and seats on the city council as an avenue toward what Seale described as “increasing the [survival programs] on a massive, quantitative scale,” especially in between election cycles. Moreover, by the time of his run-off election the next year against incumbent Mayor John Reading, Seale himself


envisioned the Black Panther Party eventually phasing itself out as more and more of the Black community in Oakland mobilized and organized toward their collective self-determination. By the end of summer 1972, Seale and Brown had positioned themselves as grassroots champions poised to take on Oakland’s downtown business establishment.35

An integral part to the Panthers’ campaigns for the 1973 elections was their outreach to Oakland’s Latina/o communities, which had risen to 7.6 percent of the city’s total population by 1970. The Panthers had voiced solidarity with the struggles Latina/o activists engaged with locally since the BPP’s inception, especially with issues related to the state like police brutality and the criminal justice system (Chapter Four). Integral for the Panthers toward this endeavor was their alliance with Cesar Chavez and the United Farm Workers (UFW). Initiated in 1968 with the Panthers publishing an article in their *The Black Panther* newspaper supporting the UFW’s international grape boycott, the BPP and UFW had collaborated coordinated a number of solidarity actions in the Bay Area and throughout the U.S., including picketing at Safeway stores for the grape boycott and canvassing across the area in the campaign to defeat the anti-labor California ballot initiative Proposition 22. With the help of UFW workers in the Bay Area, the Panthers’ 1973 campaigns became a bilingual endeavor, as the BPP printed flyers in Spanish and English and advocated for Oakland to provide election literature and ballots in Spanish while also offering Spanish language classes through its Oakland Community School. Chavez announced the UFW’s official endorsement of the Panthers on March 29, 1973, particularly for Seale’s mayoral campaign, stating that the UFW supported his “approach

to gaining political power for his people and all poor people in the city of Oakland” for the upcoming April 17th election. Gaining the endorsement of the most nationally-renowned Latina/o activist bolstered the Panthers’ visibility within and efforts to reach out to Oakland’s Latina/o communities for their electoral campaigns.36

Conspicuously absent from Seale and Brown’s campaign organizers, however, were large numbers of the Panthers’ most visible longtime Oakland allies, the Brown Berets. Before they founded the Black Panther Party, Huey Newton and Bobby Seale had met Jorge Gonzales and other future Berets while attending Merritt College. The Berets also marched with the Panthers at rallies for Huey P. Newton and other BPP members on trial (Chapter Four). Yet the Berets, who by early 1973 had disbanded, did not lend large numbers of support toward Seale and Brown. Rather, former Berets who had shifted their efforts toward La Raza Unida Party predominantly worked on the campaign for Joe Coto, a member of the Mexican American G.I. Forum and public school administrator running for the same District #6 city council seat for which Elaine Brown was also vying. According to former Beret Alex Gonzalez, Coto’s work to reach out to Mexican American Oaklanders and a sense of ethnic solidarity led to Oakland La Raza Unida Party supporting Coto, despite their previous history with the Panthers. Moreover, despite the similarities between the Community Survival Ticket’s platform and Coto’s—

particularly their emphasis on Oakland’s skyrocketing unemployment rate—Coto joined a slate of Democratic Party candidates headlined by councilman John Sutter for the Mayor’s office and endorsed by the East Bay Teamsters Political Club, whose union was fighting against the UFW for which of the two could organize farmworkers. Coto’s personal politics aligned more with the Democratic Party ticket, and the Coto campaign wagered that a more moderate liberal slate stood more of a chance to gain election than a slate featuring the Panthers. Although Brown would change her candidacy to the District #2, then #3 seat, former Brown Berets’ support of Coto and his slate demonstrated the divergence that had occurred between them and the Black Panther Party by the April 1973 election cycle.\(^{37}\)

The April 17\(^{th}\) Nominating Municipal Election chipped away the first cracks in the foundation of the downtown business establishment’s hold on Oakland’s city governance. As incumbent and a heavy favorite, John Reading received 55,434 votes out of 110,983 cast, dwarfing the vote counts of his opponents. Seale received less than forty percent of Reading’s total, coming in at 21,329 votes, with Otho Green—another Black candidate who ran with the Democratic Party and garnered more moderate liberal votes than Seale did—and Coto slate ally John Sutter the only other candidates receiving a significant number of votes at 17,469 and 15,354 respectively. Because he failed to win the requisite majority to gain election, however, Reading would square off with Seale, as

runner-up, on May 15th in a run-off during the General Municipal Election. Despite this temporary step toward entering Oakland’s halls of power and receiving twice as many votes during the General Municipal Election (43,710), Seale lost in a decidedly one-sided election, garnering approximately 36% of the votes, giving Reading a third term as Mayor of Oakland. Seale’s loss, coupled with Brown’s loss in the District #2 city council seat to downtown-backed Joshua Rose in the April election, meant that no radical activist would gain office in Oakland in 1973, with many speculating that many voters could not bring themselves to vote for a Black Panther because of the BPP’s earlier history.  

Yet the success of other anti-establishment candidates would signal a turning of the tide within Oakland’s city governance. Joe Coto’s strategies in defeating establishment-backed Paul Brom during the General Municipal Election demonstrated his and his campaigns’ commitment to multiracial organizing toward breaking up the hegemony of Oakland’s downtown business establishment. As Coto explained to a private foundation researcher after the election, he and Carter Gilmore, a Black East Oaklander who was President of the Alameda Branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), both ran for the District #6 city council seat to prevent Brom from gaining a majority of the votes. Then, according to their pre-election plans, whichever of the two was not part of the May run-off election would channel his support to the other in a unified effort toward gaining the council seat. Indeed, although Coto only gained approximately thirty-three percent of votes compared

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to Brom’s forty-five percent during the Nominating Municipal Election, he usurped virtually all of Gilmore’s electorate on May 15th, garnering 62,740 votes (54.63%) to Brom’s 52,095 (45.36%). Coto attributed his victory not only to his and Gilmore’s planning but also to the Black community support that Gilmore brought, along with allied middle- and working-class Filipinas/os, Japanese Americans, white Oaklanders, organized labor locals associated with the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO), and Chicana/o activists, who helped him gain approximately 10,000 Mexican American votes. While the 1973 elections marked a divergence between former Brown Berets and the Panthers, former Berets still found themselves within multiracial organizing circles while engaged with electoral politics.39

The 1975 Elections and a Growing Leftward Electorate

Even with Seale and Brown’s inability to gain elected office in 1973, the Black Panther Party found success in organizing a political base for their future campaigns. The BPP would experience external and internal turmoil over the subsequent year. A joint-OPD/San Francisco Police Department raid on the Panthers’ Oakland campaign offices in mid-April 1974 hearkened back to the BPP’s early history and their multiple run-ins with the police and disrupted their political organizing temporarily. Soon after this, Huey Newton expelled Seale from the Party, causing discord among its leadership and rank-and-file, particularly since most viewed Seale’s expulsion as unjustified and largely as

the result of, in the words of Brown, “a cocaine-boosted rage” by Newton, who himself fled to Cuba shortly thereafter. 40

Despite these internal fractures, Brown managed to hold the BPP together as the new Chairperson of the Party. Brown expanded the efforts of the Panther-led New Oakland Democratic Committee, which she and Seale had formed during the 1973 campaigns, to bolster political involvement among Oakland’s Black communities. Brown also made inroads with mainstream Black leaders in other sectors of Oakland, including some Democratic Party organizations and the Urban League, and even pledged some Panthers’ support. Brown drew upon this new support during her 1975 District #3 City Council campaign. Among those organizing alongside Brown and the Panthers were leaders within Ron Dellums’ congressional campaigns, Black businesspeople rooted in West Oakland, and Ortho Green, the second runner-up in the 1973 mayoral election.

Although Brown again met defeat against a downtown business establishment-backed candidate, Raymond Eng, she drew over forty-one percent of the votes cast, improving upon her 1973 showing by almost nine percent. Brown’s improvement, coupled with Coto ally John Sutter’s election in the at-large councilmember race, demonstrated that both liberal and radical opposition was mounting against Oakland’s downtown business establishment for control of the city’s governance.41


The mid-1970s also saw the converging of certain policy issues for liberal and radical contingents in the city, most notably with economic issues. One of Seale’s central planks in his 1973 mayoral campaign platform was greater community control by and higher employment of racial minorities for the Port of Oakland, noting how the Port by the 1970s had become arguably the most important pillar of Oakland’s economy while Black Oaklanders and other racial minorities were drastically underrepresented throughout the Port. At an early May 1975 city council meeting, Joe Coto formally proposed to the city council that they make the Port’s hiring practices the utmost priority, with a heavy focus on increased anti-discrimination hiring measures and greater racial diversity for the Port, particularly racial minorities who were also Oakland residents. Coto argued that making Port jobs more accessible and fair for racial minority Oaklanders would reduce unemployment and improve the city as a whole, since the Port was connected to many of the city’s institutions and other industries. Although phrased differently, Coto’s proposal contained similar core elements to Seale’s.42

Radicals also influenced some of the affairs within Oakland’s city council as the decade progressed, most notably with their efforts in solidarity with the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa. As part of the international struggle against the white supremacist policies of the minority Afrikaner population in South Africa against the Black majority, the anti-apartheid movement partially involved a boycott, divestment, and sanction campaign where international governments, corporations, private citizens, and other entities would withdraw investments within South African corporations.

Similar to the April Coalition in Berkeley, radicals in Oakland worked to convince the city council to divest the city’s pension funds from South Africa. At one city council meeting in late March 1977, radicals representing the Socialist Workers Party and the Black Panther Party, along with a handful of liberal Black community activists, made their case to the city, focusing on the ways that Oakland’s investments in South Africa contributed to the oppression of Black South Africans, particularly as workers. In a motion made by John Sutter and seconded by Joe Coto, the council brought the resolution to request the city’s municipal employees, including the police and fire departments, to a vote, with Sutter and Coto casting the lone supportive votes in a 5-to-2 defeat. On May 31st, however, Sutter made another motion to vote on this issue, which passed with a 4-to-2 vote, even with Coto, ironically, being absent from that meeting. This demonstrated that although the convergence of radical and liberal allies often brought policy suggestions closer to the liberal side, sometimes these alliances could foster a leftward shift in policy.43

The 1977 Mayoral Race, an Electoral Split, and Re-convergence of Allies

The momentum the Black Panther Party had gained through Seale and Brown’s 1973 campaigns and Brown’s 1975 campaign continued to swell heading into the 1977 election cycle. Brown herself would not run for election a third time; however, she was instrumental in organizing grassroots support for Lionel Wilson, the candidate who

gained the Panthers’ endorsement. A leader on the Oakland Economic Development
Council and a judge for the Alameda County Superior Court since 1960—the first Black
person in the county’s history—Wilson embarked on his campaign in early January 1977
as a newcomer to electoral politics but a veteran of local affairs. Similar to Seale and
Brown’s 1973 platform, Wilson centered his platform on economic issues, particularly
the unemployment crisis afflicting the city, with estimates as high as thirty percent
unemployment for Oakland’s communities of color and a rate of forty percent for Black
youth. At his announcement for his campaign, Wilson declared his would provide
“leadership that will listen and respond to the concerns of all sectors of our city—
minority groups, women, working class citizens, industry and business, you and senior
citizens.” Wilson had previous connections with the Black Panther Party when he
appointed Brown to the OEDC the previous year and gained endorsements from various
Panther sympathizers, including Congressman Ron Dellums, and mainstream
organizations and politicians, including the United Democrats. With a base including the
Panthers’ grassroots mobilization support and the mainstream Black community leaders
and organizations, Wilson was primed to mount a campaign that would finally break
through the downtown business establishment’s decades-long hold on the mayor’s
office.

44 “Lionel Wilson Announces Candidacy for First Black Mayor of Oakland,” The Black Panther
History Room, Oakland Public Library.

45 Jerry Burns, “Judge Formally Enters Oakland Mayor Race,” San Francisco Examiner, Jan. 7, 1977, 2;
Self, American Babylon, 236; “Committee to Elect Judge Lionel J. Wilson,” Oakland Elections 1977
folder, Oakland History Room, Oakland Public Library; Bill Martin, “Wilson’s Planks: More Jobs, Less
Coalitions and Political Power in Oakland; “Committee to Elect Judge Lionel J. Wilson, Mayor of
In line with his endorsements of Bobby Seale and Elaine Brown in their earlier municipal campaigns, Cesar Chavez officially backed Wilson for the mayor’s office. At a late March 1977 press conference, Chavez and Wilson highlighted their points of commonality and mutual admiration. Chavez pointed to Wilson’s commitment to solving Oakland’s unemployment crisis as an issue behind which organized labor should stand, with Wilson adding that “Attitudes which would ignore the rights of laborers in the fields are the same attitudes which would tolerate high unemployment in Oakland.” Similarly to the Panthers’ 1973 electoral campaigns, Chavez pledged the help of UFW staff and volunteers in the Bay Area toward Wilson’s campaign, including outreach to Mexican American communities. Although never a Black Panther himself, Lionel Wilson demonstrated the ability to rally the campaign infrastructure the Panthers had created earlier in the decade.

Just a few weeks after Wilson announced his candidacy, Joe Coto announced he would forgo re-election as a councilmember. Instead, he decided to run for mayor, with Carter Gilmore seeking election to take Coto’s city council seat. Some pundits had speculated that Coto might run for the mayor’s office as early as the summer after his successful 1973 city council bid, and rumors swirled midway through his city council term that Mayor John Reading might endorse Coto to run as his successor after his retirement from office in 1977, though Reading quickly disavowed these rumors. Despite

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this, Coto’s entry into the mayoral race still surprised many within Oakland’s different political circles. Former Brown Berets working within La Raza Unida Party mobilized heavily for Coto’s campaign, with Coto emphasizing the need for a bilingual campaign and eventually garnering the support of El Mundo, the most esteemed Spanish-language newspaper in the East Bay. Yet Coto’s candidacy also concerned those rallied around Wilson and the Left in Oakland in general. Although other left-leaning racial minorities would run against them, Wilson and Coto represented two of the most prominent faces on the Left in Oakland. Since Coto and Wilson were both racial minorities with similar jobs-oriented platforms and the support of multiracial, anti-establishment mobilizations, those on the Left worried that they would split the Left vote in an inverse of the Coto-Gilmore plan in 1973, leaving an easier path for David Tucker, the candidate representing the downtown business establishment, toward the Mayor’s Office.47

The 1977 Nominating Municipal Election pitted Wilson, Coto, and Tucker, among other candidates, against each other. Other racial minorities would be counted among the candidates, including African American Laney College professor Victor James, Jr., and Mexican American businessman Hector Reyna, with the latter threatening to potentially split Oakland’s Latina/o vote. Yet when the final votes were tallied, only Wilson, Tucker, and Coto received more than ten percent of the votes, garnering 31,297 votes.

(44.22%), 25,727 (36.35%), and 9,806 (13.86%) respectively. Similarly to 1973, the 1977 mayoral election would require a run-off election between a downtown establishment candidate and a Black Panther Party-endorsed candidate. As the May 17th election approached, Wilson picked up perhaps the most significant endorsement imaginable: Joe Coto’s. On April 28th, Coto formally announced his and his campaign’s official endorsement for Wilson and their organizing strength toward his election on May 17th. Similar to his prior efforts with Carter Gilmore, Coto worked to elect Wilson, since he and Wilson shared more in common with their platforms and policies than he did with Tucker. Not all of Coto’s campaign leaders joined Coto in this endeavor; members of the business establishment like Laurence Bolling, Sally Sprague, and C.J. Patterson threw their support behind Tucker, with whom they aligned much more closely in terms of policy than they had with Coto. Yet the majority of Coto’s campaign supporters redirected their support toward Wilson, who won the General Municipal Election with 42,961 votes (53.69%) to Tucker’s 37,060 (46.31%), making him the first Black mayor in Oakland’s history. With the election of Wilson to the mayor’s office and Gilmore and fellow Democrat Mary Moore joining seated councilmember John Sutter and left-leaning re-elected Republican George Vukasin, the Left secured a majority on the city council, also for the first time in Oakland’s history.\(^\text{48}\)

Four weeks after defeating David Tucker in the run-off election, Lionel Wilson named the members of his “transition team,” ahead of his July 1st inauguration for the

\(^{48}\) “Elections, 1852 to the Present,” 103-105, Oakland History Room. Reyna, the other Mexican American candidate, drew the fewest vote of any candidate, with a paltry 103; \textit{The United Democrat of Oakland, 1977}, 1, Oakland History Room, Oakland Public Library.
Mayor’s office. Although Wilson stated the transition team was “not a representative body” and was tasked first to form a Mayor’s Advisory Committee that would represent interests of all parts of Oakland, its twenty members represented many of Oakland’s racial groups, community institutions, and interest groups, including clergy, college educators, women’s organizations, organized labor, businessmen, and attorneys. Standing or former political officials or recent candidates constituted a plurality on the transition team, including Black Panther Party Chairperson Elaine Brown, outgoing City Councilman Joe Coto and his successor Carter Gilmore, and former Mayoral candidate and current City Councilman John Sutter. The presence of these members of their respective 1973 slates, along with Coto’s endorsement of Wilson following April’s Municipal Nominating Election, demonstrated the sizeable overlap between the platforms and political views of BPP-backed candidate and those endorsed by the majority of former Brown Berets working within La Raza Unida Party. Thus, although they traversed separate paths within Oakland’s electoral politics, the Panthers and Berets re-converged within this largely non-radical political formation after the 1977 election cycle.49

Conclusion

Radical activists in Berkeley and Oakland built formidable oppositions toward their respective local political establishments during the 1970s, with the April Coalition finding immediate success in 1971 and Black Panther- and Brown Beret-affiliated politicians finding growing success until their 1977 crescendo. Yet, even in the early

aftermath of their successes, radicals in Berkeley and Oakland faced mounting challenges to their gains. While the early decade seemed to beckon a new era in Berkeley politics, internationalist radicals had suffered a staggering run of defeats by the end of the 1970s. Their broad-based aspirations and visions toward a more democratic and self-determined governance were stifled from the moment they took a trace of power, with continual resistance by conservatives and most liberals. D'Army Bailey’s unrelenting conflicts with Loni Hancock and the Berkeley City Council, coupled with his alienation of much of the rest of his constituency, demonstrated how interpersonal tensions could derail a common struggle. In addition, Warren Widener’s defection from the liberal establishment to the April Coalition then back again highlighted the tenuous nature of political alliances during this era, especially between liberal and radical politicians, who, although shared similar concerns over social, economic, and political issues, often disagreed with their root causes and prescriptions to fix these issues. Ultimately, while Berkeley radicals gained some victories in the 1970s, ideological divisions between and within different electorates and structural impediments within political channels limited and overturned much of what they had fought for.

The leftward shift in Oakland politics also would soon encounter its own resistance. Similarly to Berkeley, Oakland city council elections began operating at the district level, rather than city-wide, beginning in the early 1980s. Whereas this change undercut Berkeley radicals’ ability to mobilize city-wide campaign slates, district elections hampered the electoral power of Oakland’s racial minorities, who by 1980 constituted over sixty percent of Oakland’s citizenry, with Black communities
constituting a plurality at approximately forty-seven percent and Latinas/os nearly ten percent. Ironically, liberal and leftist activists pushed for this change in the attempt to gain more leverage in the electoral process. Yet, even as housing barriers gradually broke down within Oakland’s historically exclusionary neighborhoods, the status quo of spatial segregation left some of Oakland’s districts predominantly white and affluent. Although racial minorities overwhelmingly leaned leftward, whether liberal or radical, white (and especially white conservative) Oaklanders retained political power disproportionate to their population size through the district system. And Oakland’s poverty rate remaining stagnant between 1980 and 1990 suggested that even with racial minorities in Oakland’s city governance, widespread progress would not come easily.  

The arena of electoral politics rendered multiracial coalitions prone to divisions. The nature of elections focused on vesting power within a handful of individuals, with divergences between politicians causing more immediate splits than when disagreements arose among organizations in coalitions. Self-proclaimed radicals found gaining office difficult, particularly if they continued to carry the stigma of violent imagery and rhetoric of their previous incarnations. Moreover, radicals running for office often tempered or repackaged their platform, struggling to articulate their ideologies and principles in a way that made them understandable and appealing in a mainstream political context. While self-determination remained the central goal, working through electoral politics would bring slow and incremental changes, often wrought with constraints within the political process and with convincing a majority of those within city governance or the local

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citizenry the desirability of their policy proposals. At the same time, organizations like the Black Panther Party and the Brown Berets found success in registering voters and mobilizing toward candidates they backed. While unable to steer policies to the exact alignment of their political philosophies, radical activists could still affect local elections and left reverberations that would be felt long after the end of this era. Ultimately, however, whether pursuing self-determination by trying to evade the state’s grasp or working to use the state’s systems and resources to their advantage, radical activists remained encumbered by obstacles difficult to overcome. And while alliances and coalitions helped with this endeavor, these connections only went so far in radicals’ work to eradicate oppression from society.
CHAPTER SEVEN

Conclusion: The Decline and Legacy of Internationalist Radicalism in the San Francisco Bay Area

1968 has long signified both the end of “the Sixties” and the zenith of radicalism in the history of United States. Arguments for this periodization often hinge on interpretations advanced by Todd Gitlin, Maurice Isserman, Michael Kazin, and similar scholars who argue for the growth and increasing unity of the US Left until 1968, when the proliferation of people of color and women’s organizations allegedly fractured this unity. Some historians have located the apex of radical protest in 1968 by relating US radicalism to related global events, pointing to government repression in the West like Charles de Gaulle’s crushing the Paris Commune. Others like Jeremi Suri argue that the rise of détente between the United States, the Soviet Union, the People’s Republic of China, and others involved in the Cold War after 1968 served not so much to lay a path toward peace among these countries but rather as a way for their governments to focus more on quelling dissent within their respective populaces. Yet as this dissertation has shown—in line with recent scholarship—the United States experienced an insurgence of radical activism during and after 1968, particularly among those who identified as Third World peoples and other radicals who worked in solidarity with them.¹

For a number of radicals during the 1960s and 70s, the end of these decades signaled not a “declension” in radicalism, but rather a transformation. The League of Revolutionary Struggle (LRS) perhaps signified transformation more than any organization. The LRS formed in 1978 from a merger between the predominantly-Chicana/o August Twenty-Ninth Movement and I Wor Kuen, originally a Chinese American organization that absorbed the San Francisco-based Red Guard Party earlier in the 1970s and eventually other Asian Americans among their ranks. By late 1979, the LRS incorporated the Amiri Baraka-led Revolutionary Communist League into its organization, marking the first time a Marxist organization had Black, Chicana/o, and Asian American members among its ranks with equal representation and power within the organization. Despite their adherence to Marxism-Leninism, the League of Revolutionary Struggle also engaged with issues they might have earlier deemed “reformist,” including electoral politics. Joining the Union of Democratic Filipinos and other radical organizations, the LRS organized nationally for Jesse Jackson’s 1984 and 1988 Rainbow Coalition campaigns, the name for which Jackson appropriated from the late 1960s and early 1970s Rainbow Coalition organized by the Illinois Chapter of the Black Panther Party and other Chicago-based radical organizations. Other organizations who underwent transformations included the Third World Women’s Alliance, who became the Alliance Against Women’s Oppression in 1980. The AAWO expanded its visions of liberation to include anti-homophobia and anti-heteronormativity as oppressions against which women should struggle and incorporated white women into their organization for the first time. Whether campaigning vigorously for an unabashed
capitalist like Jackson or broadening their goals toward the dismantling of other forms of structural oppression, some prominent radical organizations of the 1970s remained invigorated with their activism into the 1980s.²

At the same time, radical politics permeated the mainstream of US society during the 1960s and 70s in a manner unlike the decades prior or since, begging the question of why this fall from prominence occurred. One reason for the diversity within the League of Revolutionary Struggle was the reality that as its previous organizations continued to shed members, they needed to merge with other organizations to sustain themselves. Other merger organizations similar to the LRS like the Communist Party (Marxist-Leninist) and the Democratic Workers Party met their demise by the early 1980s, as did virtually all the organizations I have examined in this study.³ A multitude of factors contributed to the general falling out of favor of radical politics and activism within mainstream society by the early 1980s, from shifts in the political economy of the United States to numerous issues within the Left itself.


³ Elbaum, Revolution in the Air, 281-283.
The advent of deindustrialization within the United States marked one of these factors. As stated toward the beginning of Chapter Six, one of the trajectories along which internationalist radicals followed during the 1970s was labor union organizing. Although labor organizations such as the League of Revolutionary Black Workers existed before the 1970s, radical organizations previously involved with labor unions in marginal or non-existent ways invested more of their energies and resources into this endeavor. Organized labor made significant gains during the 1970s, albeit not to the heights of political and economic power organized labor reached from the mid-1930s to the mid-1940s before the passage of the Taft-Hartley Act in 1947 (Chapter Three). Yet this decade also saw the beginnings of corporations involved with manufacturing closing many sites of production in the United States and the movement of production overseas, to Mexico and other countries in Latin America and spreading to Africa and Asia as the decade progressed. The hemorrhaging of production jobs weakened organized labor, leaving its constituents in a state of continual economic precariousness in the decades thereafter.⁴

The rise of mass incarceration also contributed to the decline of radical activism in the 1970s. Urban, working-class communities of color—who comprised the primary bases for radical organizations in the Bay Area—felt the brunt of punitive policing and unequal treatment under the law before this decade, disproportionately comprising the prison population within the United States. Beginning with the presidency of Richard

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Nixon, however, the federal government’s “war on drugs” amplified police attention to these communities while subjecting those convicted of drug-related offenses to more severe sentencing. Quelling dissent underpinned the changes Nixon’s administration brought, as former Nixon domestic-policy adviser John Erlichman laid out in a 1994 interview:

The Nixon campaign in 1968, and the Nixon White House after that, had two enemies: the antiwar left and black people. You understand what I’m saying? We knew we couldn’t make it illegal to be either against the war or black, but by getting the public to associate the hippies with marijuana and blacks with heroin, and then criminalizing both heavily, we could disrupt those communities. We could arrest their leaders, raid their homes, break up their meetings, and vilify them night after night on the evening news. Did we know we were lying about the drugs? Of course we did.\(^5\)

Historian Heather Ann Thompson notes that mass incarceration magnified the problems within the urban crisis and growing unemployment caused by deindustrialization. Moreover, federal and state legislation barred citizens with criminal records from voting, meaning that the “war on drugs” that targeted racial minorities became a tool to disenfranchise these groups in the aftermath of progress gained from federal civil rights legislation in the mid-1960s. Thus, even though the crime rate in California peaked in 1980, California’s prison population boomed to over 160,000 after the 1970s, with the majority of those incarcerated coming from the urban, working-class communities of

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color from which internationalists in the 1960s and 70s garnered the bulk of their membership and support.\(^6\)

Growing economic precariousness among the white working class and mass incarceration contributed to the overall rightward political shift the United States experienced in the 1970s. Conservatives had mobilized since the mid-1960s against what they perceived as the threat to their political power (and its attendant economic, cultural, and social influence) from left-leaning racial minorities, women, LGBTQ-identified people, and other marginalized groups in society who had made social progress in the 1960s and early 1970s. This conservative influence also permeated the Bay Area. As historian Robert Self explains, the dominant political discourse in Oakland and its East Bay suburbs shifted from a focus on the benefits of public services and assistance to the costs thereof. As mentioned toward the end of Chapter Six, East Bay white suburbanites mobilized at the forefront of the campaign for California Proposition 13 in early June 1978. With its passage, Prop. 13 limited state and local regulations on property taxes. Since property taxes in Alameda County were collected on the county level, white suburbanites in the East Bay in the aftermath of Prop. 13’s passage continued to reap the benefits from the postwar suburban boom they and their parents’ generation had fashioned (Chapter Two) while continuing to decimate the tax base that would allocate public benefits for communities near its urban cores. Later that month, the Supreme

Court of the United States put forth their decision for *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke* (1978). Despite opposition from both liberal and radical legal scholars and activists like the Third World Women’s Alliance, the Court ruled as unconstitutional the guaranteed minimum number of admissions slots the School of Medicine at UC Davis set aside for racial minority applicants. Conservative victories such as Prop. 13 and the *Bakke* decision highlighted the conservative counterinsurgency that stemmed the tide of liberal and radical activism of the prior two decades.⁷

Internationalist radicals in the Bay Area also experienced more immediate threats to their organizations’ survival. The Federal Bureau of Investigation’s Counterintelligence Program (COINTELPRO) continued to monitor and at times disrupt activist organizations. Activists often sensed when COINTELPRO surveillance occurred, such as the heyday of the Black Panther Party in the early 1970s or with the explicitly-militant Symbionese Liberation Army that engaged in open armed conflict and guerrilla warfare tactics with police officers. Yet organizations could also experience infiltration from the most unlikely of sources, as recent discoveries from FBI records attained by journalist Seth Rosenfeld attest. Rosenfeld discovered that Black Panther Party and Asian American Political Alliance member Richard Aoki had served as a paid informant for the FBI during much of the 1960s and 70s. Rosenfeld first released one set of these FBI records to the public in August 2012, partially to promote his forthcoming book

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Subversives. Heavily redacted to the point of indecipherability and containing numerous errors in identifying Aoki, these records still left questionable the allegation of Aoki as informant. This uncertainty changed, however, when Rosenfeld released a second set of FBI records in June 2015. Although the specifics of the nature of Aoki’s informant work—merely as a surveillance agent or also as a saboteur and provocateur—remain unclear from Rosenfeld’s released records, the allegation that Aoki worked for the FBI turned virtually indisputable. Thus, although radicals’ suspicion of each other at times could seem paranoid, the Aoki revelations demonstrate just how pervasive COINTELPRO surveillance could be.8

In addition, activists themselves exacerbated divisions within their networks. After the end of the Vietnam War in 1975, internationalist radicals found themselves without a prominent unifying cause that also made inroads with mainstream society. Some organizations at times supported regressive political positions or policies, such as the Revolutionary Communist Party’s homophobic party line or their reaction against Black students’ attempts to secure equitable public education opportunities during the Boston “busing” crisis. Internal ideological conflicts continued to produce splits within organizations, as did more mundane conflicts, as when the Black Panther Party central

leadership in Oakland ordered (usually without success) its chapters across the country to prioritize selling the Panthers’ newspaper over the local problems that rooted those chapters’ activism. Interpersonal relationships within these organizations also caused members to leave, ranging from substance abuse issues such as Huey Newton’s cocaine addiction to the continual marginalization of women in organizations like the Black Panther Party and Los Siete de La Raza. Elaine Brown and Donna Amador, respectively, left these organizations during the 1970s because of certain gender-related issues, such as continual male chauvinism within the BPP for the former or the unwillingness for the organization’s leadership to understand her need to take maternity leave from organizing. Although occurring within the broader contexts of changes within the local and national political economy and external surveillance and pressures, discord and unequal treatment within organizations also played a key role in the decline of this era of radicalism in Bay Area history.9

Certain themes have permeated throughout this study. Most centrally, I have endeavored to demonstrate the importance that internationalist radicals placed on building and maintaining alliances with likeminded activists. I argued that highlighting these “genealogies of alliance” through their formation, dissolution, and reconstitution

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across different mobilizations and issues illustrates their significance within this history. Although not my initial intent, I discuss the tensions and also points of unity between “liberal” and “radical” activists, emphasizing the dilemmas that radical activists faced in supporting more liberal types of reforms and noting that most divisions found within this study existed not because of racial divisions but because of ideological and strategic ones. Finally, I endeavored to broaden the framework surrounding each of the central issues within the two anti-imperialism and two self-determination chapters, ranging from how anti-imperialism politics within the Vietnam War moved beyond the mainstream antiwar movement of the mid-1960s to discussing electoral politics and community control as an avenue toward gaining self-determination for local communities of color and other marginalized populaces.

The feasibility of alliances and how they manifested varied among issues and mobilizations. Internationalist radicals often found anti-imperialist alliances easier to create and maintain than alliances toward self-determination. While differing in critique and rationale for opposing common enemies still allowed room for anti-imperialist alliances, divergent visions of what constituted self-determination and how oppressed peoples might achieve this limited and at times precluded alliances of these sorts. Put another way, uniting against common enemies proved more sustainable and less discordant than rebuilding communities and their institutions toward the liberation of the people therein. The subjects of this study demonstrate that alliances by and in themselves will not create social change and dismantle systems of inequality and oppression. Yet informal and formal coalitions and solidarity remain necessary for social and political
activists in the present. Historical movements provide organizers with lessons with which they can navigate contemporary issues toward successful outcomes. In recent years, movements and organizations like Black Lives Matter, (formerly) the DREAMers, APIs 4 Black Lives Matter, the Standing Rock Sioux and their anti-Dakota Access Pipeline protests, and Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) in solidarity with the Palestinian people have all given and answered calls for solidarity among each other. And while movements can gain progress on their own, alliances among movements still provide the potential toward a more just world for all oppressed peoples.
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