

Kennesaw State University
DigitalCommons@Kennesaw State University

Master of Arts in American Studies Capstones


Interdisciplinary Studies Department

Spring 5-2017

Revolutionary Every Day: A Dramatic Exploration of Women and Their Agency in The Black Panther Party.

Kristen Michelle Walker
Kennesaw State University

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/mast_etd

 Part of the [African American Studies Commons](#), [American Studies Commons](#), [Playwriting Commons](#), [Women's History Commons](#), and the [Women's Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Walker, Kristen Michelle, "Revolutionary Every Day: A Dramatic Exploration of Women and Their Agency in The Black Panther Party." (2017). *Master of Arts in American Studies Capstones*. 12.
http://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/mast_etd/12

This Capstone is brought to you for free and open access by the Interdisciplinary Studies Department at DigitalCommons@Kennesaw State University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master of Arts in American Studies Capstones by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@Kennesaw State University. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@kennesaw.edu.

REVOLUTIONARY EVERY DAY: A DRAMATIC EXPLORATION OF WOMEN AND
THEIR AGENCY IN THE BLACK PANTHER PARTY

A Creative Writing Capstone

Presented to

The Academic Faculty

by

Kristen Michelle Walker

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in American Studies

Kennesaw State University

May 2017

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	4
Literature Review.....	8
Black Power Through Reclaiming Manhood.....	10
Intersectionality, Feminist Critiques, and Revolutionary Action.....	12
Artistic and Media Representations Exploring Women in the Black Panther Party.....	17
Reflections by Panther Women.....	20
Conclusion.....	23
Proposal.....	24
Play: <i>10 Steps Towards Revolution</i>	28
Evolution of a Play Through Research: A Reflection.....	98
Creating Characters as Politically Charged Actors through the Ten Point Program.....	99
Women and their Agency.....	104
Female Roles and Leadership.....	105
Destiny.....	107
Brenda.....	107
Leigh.....	108
Donna.....	109
Monica.....	110
Valerie.....	110
Male/Female Relationships.....	111
Brenda and John.....	111
Monica and Zeke.....	112
Donna and Keith.....	112
Valerie and Tommy.....	113
An Informal Play Reading.....	115

Conclusion.....	120
Future Endeavors.....	121
Final Thoughts.....	124
Bibliography.....	125

INTRODUCTION

My interest in the Black Panthers began in 1993 when I first heard about the Black Panther Party in my 8th grade Social Studies class. Instantly I connected to Huey P. Newton and the Panthers' efforts in the community. Additionally, the Panthers' ability to exude power and control with a look, physical presence, and words intrigued me. Although I knew my teacher's Civil Rights Movement lesson referred to the efforts of the Black Panther Party in the 1960's, I assumed the Party was still actively striving to achieve their goals in 1993 Oakland. I knew this because the *Wants* of the Panthers' Ten Point Program had not been achieved. Many people still lived in impoverished communities without access to goods and services. Several Panthers still lived behind prison walls and in exile, and visions of Rodney King's beating and the Los Angeles riots were etched in my mind.

Living in Cobb County, I had not personally experienced the level of activism and demonstration that I saw in the Bay Area. Due to this, I became obsessed with everything from the Bay Area: the music, the people, and the sports teams—yes, I rocked a Raiders Starter jacket and skull cap. In some way, this grew from a desire to be closer to the people, places, and action I wanted to be a part of. I began furthering my interest in the Panthers by reading *The Writings of Huey P. Newton* and watching documentaries and movies about the Party. Three years later, I posed in a 1996 replica trading card as an Olympic gold medalist with my fist raised. The photographer urged me to smile at the camera. Conflicted, I eventually gave a big smile, although I truly wanted my image captured with a raised fist and head down like Tommie Smith and John Carlos. Black Power was everything to me.

As a young student, I heard stories about Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Rosa Parks but wondered why the Panthers were only briefly mentioned in the national struggle for Civil Rights.

Was it because the Panthers looked, sounded, and acted differently than Southern Civil Rights leaders? Or was there another reason? The Panthers' work in the community, especially the Free Breakfast Program, and their words of Black Power and liberation piqued my interest. I wanted to see and hear people, who looked like me, doing the same work in my community.

It was important that my classmates know about the Panthers, so for my next English writing assignment, I wrote a paper on the Black Panther Party. Through their actions the Panthers made a statement, and I wanted to do the same.

As I reflect on these memories, which are now infused with perception, current knowledge, and opinion, I must acknowledge the seed of activism the Panthers instilled in me. At twelve, I was unaware of my proximity in age to one of the youngest Panthers, Bobby Hutton.¹ Responding to an educational need, I chose to enlighten others about the Panthers, hoping to spark change in my fellow classmates. Now I strive to inspire others through the arts, education, and history, which has led to my career in performing arts and a bachelor's degree in Theatre.

In Summer 2014, I began my Master in American Studies journey in Dr. Robbie Lieberman's Social Movements course. Here I was reintroduced to the Panthers but from a scholarly standpoint. For my final project, I chose to develop a one-act play, exploring a "What if" scenario surrounding continuing the Panthers' revolutionary work but under the helm of female leadership. Unbeknownst to me, this play would lead to my Creative Writing Capstone project. In 2015, I expanded my research to include Panther narratives, scholarship, images, and artwork in addition to scholarship on Black Feminism. I hoped to engage audiences about the knowns and unknowns of the Party and inspire others to expand their knowledge of the Panthers.

¹ At 16, Bobby Hutton became the first member of the Black Panther Party in 1966. Two years later, during a standoff with Oakland police, he was murdered while surrendering unarmed.

In my Capstone, I felt the need to address the social conditions that further impacted female Panther activism and agency to present a commentary on power, gender relations, and society in and around the Black Panther Party. With this approach, I sought to answer the following: *How does one recount the life of a female revolutionary? What stories does, or should, one tell? And, more importantly, in what manner should one tell them?*

Centering my research on Panther women, my Capstone project seeks to present a narrative that highlights their achievements and realities as revolutionary women. As such, my research delves into the politics of gender and power as seen by both men and women within and outside of the Black Panther Party. Building upon research, I wanted my American Studies and Theater background to inform how I would convey the stories of female revolutionaries for current and future audiences.

My Literature Review begins with a brief overview of female Panthers' commitment to liberation alongside current scholarship on female Panther activism. Shifting to an exploration of terminology, I examine meanings and associations of Black Power and how it informed revolutionary practices. Blending Intersectionality and Feminist Critique, the next section delves into politics and gender issues impacting African American women. Offering a glimpse into three artistic examinations of the Panthers, I explore how these representations address women in the Party. Finally, I conclude with my proposal.

In the next section, I embark on an examination of Panther women through a fictional play inspired by my research. Situating the action during the height of the Black Panther Party, *10 Steps Towards Revolution* deals with issues of gender and power in Panther relationships. Integrated into this narrative, I also explore how internal and external pressures and conflicts impact Panther women's agency.

Concluding with a reflection on the Capstone creative writing process, I assess how the research informed my approaches to character and scene development. In addition, I examine the evolution of the play. Recognizing how the play contributes to the conversation surrounding Panther Women, I close with providing insight into my future goals with the project.

A woman in the Black Power movement was considered, at best, irrelevant. A woman asserting herself was a pariah. A woman attempting the role of leadership was, to my proud black Brothers, making an alliance with the “counter-revolutionary, man hating, lesbian, feminist white bitches.” It was a violation of some Black Power principle that was left undefined. If a black woman assumed a role of leadership, she was said to be eroding black manhood, to be hindering the progress of the black race. She was an enemy of black people.²

—Elaine Brown, *A Taste of Power*

For black women committed to radical change through revolutionary action, the path towards obtaining liberation included traversing tense political climates. In response to the strongholds of capitalism and racism, many black women joined the Black Panther Party. Forging its’ efforts through black empowerment, self-determination, and armed resistance, the Black Panther Party rose to become a central figure committed to combatting police brutality and the impact of capitalism on black lives and their communities. Although the media and government mainly focused on male Panthers, throughout the life of the Party and beyond, Panther women used their bodies, words, revolutionary work, and activism as forms of political education to organize and activate the minds of men and women around the world.

In addition to holding positions as rank and file members, Panther women were “chairmen,” educators, program developers, and visionaries. Although female Panthers placed their lives on the line for their beliefs, in some instances, their male counterparts and the media looked upon them as non-existent or secondary in the Black liberation struggle. In a push to elevate female Panthers’ narratives, recent scholars have criticized the previous scholarship on the Panthers for its lack of attention to female members’ efforts. Mumia Abu Jamal deconstructs Hugh Pearson’s limited viewpoint concerning sexism and abuse within the Party, Tracye A. Matthews extends her work across ideology and practice to engage in a conversation about

² Elaine Brown, *A Taste of Power: A Black Woman's Story* (New York: Anchor Books, 1994), 357.

scholars who write about the Black Panther Party yet underrepresent the impact of gender politics and language on the Party's sustainability, and Charles E. Jones and Judson L. Jeffries tackle myths and misunderstandings that further discredit the Party's efforts and diminish their global influence and impact on civil rights.³

In the last twenty years, scholars have sought to resurrect female Panthers' activism, legacy, and agency. Scholar Joy James notes Panther women "displayed an agency that (re)shaped American politics, although their stories recede in popular culture before the narratives of elites or icons."⁴ She further attributes the invisibility of Panther women to the ways revolutionary action and leaders are remembered.⁵ Additionally, scholar Tracye A. Matthews' research on the Panthers elevates the complexities of gender and gender politics as a key issue impacting the operation and sustainability of the Black Panther Party. Matthews contends female invisibility, like James' assessment of recession, is due to what previous scholars have left unchallenged: the issues surrounding race, class, and gender *within* the Party.⁶ Recognizing an opportunity to address societal impacts on the Black Panthers, this literature review seeks to explore how scholarship has addressed the ways rhetoric, gender politics, and race shaped Black

³ See Mumia Abu-Jamal's "A Life in the Party," in *Liberation, Imagination, and the Black Panther Party: A New Look at the Panthers and their Legacy*, editors Kathleen Cleaver and George Katsiaficas (New York: Routledge, 2001), 40-50; Tracye A. Matthews, "'No One Ever Asks, What a Man's Role in the Revolution Is': Gender and the Politics of The Black Panther Party 1966-1971" in *Sisters in the Struggle: African American Women and the Civil Rights-Black Power Movement*, edited by Bettye Collier-Thomas and V.P. Franklin, (New York: New York University Press, 2001); and Charles E. Jones and Judson L. Jeffries, "'Don't Believe the Hype': Debunking the Panther Mythology," in *The Black Panther Party Reconsidered*, ed. Charles E. Jones, (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1998).

⁴ Joy James, "Framing the Panther: Assata Shakur and Black Female Agency," in *Want to Start a Revolution? Radical Women in the Black Freedom Struggle*, eds. Dayo F. Gore, Jeanne Theoharis and Komozi Woodard (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 140.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 139.

⁶ Tracye A. Matthews, "'No One Ever Asks, What a Man's Role in the Revolution Is': Gender and the Politics of The Black Panther Party 1966-1971" in *Sisters in the Struggle: African American Women and the Civil Rights-Black Power Movement*, edited by Bettye Collier-Thomas and V.P. Franklin (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 231.

women's lives within the Black Panther Party during a time of global, collective, and personal transformation.

Black Power Through Reclaiming Manhood

In the 1960s and 1970s, cultural identification and political action evolved for African Americans in the United States. Historian William Van Deburg argues “Black Power was a revolutionary cultural concept that demanded important changes in extant patterns of American cultural hegemony.”⁷ In *A New Day in Babylon*, Van Deburg further elaborates on Black Power's connection to nationalist and pluralist origins with goals of mobilizing towards liberation through cultural identity and self-definition.⁸ For the Panthers, adopting Black Power rhetoric and direct action was key to reclaiming self and power from capitalistic entities. Their efforts also inspired global organizations to adopt Black Power as means to obtaining their own liberation. In Angelique Stastny and Raymond Orr's research on the Australian and New Zealand Panthers, they conclude “Black Power broadened the spectrum of articulations within black consciousness from a domestic American political geography to that of international exploitation while simultaneously making the consciousness more racially conscious and exclusive.”⁹ For Van Deburg, Stastny and Orr, Black Power resided in a consciousness that redefined approaches to agency and power for oppressed people around the world.

However Black Power is complex in its meanings and associations. For black men, years of systemic racism motivated them to reclaim black manhood. In *Black is a Country*, Nikhil Pal

⁷ William Van Deburg, *New Day in Babylon: The Black Power Movement and American Culture, 1965-1975* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 27.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 26-27.

⁹ Angelique Stastny and Raymond Orr, “The influence of the US Black Panthers on indigenous activism in Australian and New Zealand from 1969 onwards,” *Australian Aboriginal Studies*, February 2014, 61.

Singh argues that racism impacted the construction of nation and citizen, which in turn disenfranchised African Americans in the United States.¹⁰ During the Black Power Movement, black males adopted Black Power rhetoric as an avenue to achieve their liberation from racism and capitalism. Yet, in instances noted by Frances Beal, Anonymous Panther Woman, Angela D. LeBlanc-Ernest, and Ericka Huggins, female Panther ability and liberation were compromised when Black Power was linked to black manhood.

In “Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Female” Frances Beal argues the process in which black manhood is evoked to force women into submission is counter-revolutionary.¹¹ As Beal intricately ties the fate of the black man and black woman to the legacies of capitalism, which construct male/female relationships and contribute to “destroying the black race,” the connection to Panther women’s oppression is linked historically.¹² Additionally Beal states black women “are not resentful of the rise to power of Black men” and embrace it as a movement towards collective liberation.¹³ However, the Anonymous Panther Woman highlights a different approach, arguing it is “important that black manhood is not dependent on subordination of black women, but rather his manhood, is in fact, dependent on his revolutionary relationship.”¹⁴ For this anonymous Panther woman, the efforts towards liberation should rest upon the goals of collective liberation that addresses differences and similarities equally, without

¹⁰ Nikhil Pal Singh, *Black Is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 22.

¹¹ Frances Beal, “Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Female,” in *The Black Woman*, edited by Toni Cade Bambara (New York: New American Library, 1970), 93.

¹² *Ibid.*, 90, 99.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 90, 93.

¹⁴ “Panther Sisters on Women's Liberation,” in *Off the Pigs! The History and Literature of the Black Panther Party*, ed. G. Louis Heath (Metuchen: The Scarecrow Press, Inc, 1976), 343. “Panther Sisters on Women’s Liberation” was also printed in the Party’s newspaper, *The Black Panther*.

additional oppressions due to gender. The assessments of Beal and Anonymous Panther woman also highlight Ericka Huggins and Angela D. LeBlanc-Ernest's argument that "Black Power [was] often associated with reclaiming black masculinity in a society that denigrated African Americans," which captures how "masculine" notions of Black Power both informed and complicated female Panthers' approaches to revolutionary action.¹⁵

Intersectionality, Feminist Critiques, and Revolutionary Action

A revolution cannot be successful simply with the efforts of the men, because a woman plays such an integral role in society even though she is relegated to smaller, seemingly insignificant positions.¹⁶

—Anonymous Panther Woman, "Panther Sisters on Liberation"

Delving into politics surrounding how racism and sexism are experienced by women of color, Kimberlé Crenshaw uses the term Intersectionality to explain the ways in which women of color still face multiple types of oppression that extend beyond race to include gender and class. For Crenshaw, women of color reside at the intersection of oppressions leading to their victimization.¹⁷ Because racism, sexism, and classism are interconnected and cannot be separated from each other, black women remain disenfranchised in movements that address one oppression as central for the collective without addressing the others. Crenshaw's assessment also provides a framework for Margo Natalie Crawford's approach in "Must the Revolution Be a Family

¹⁵ Ericka Huggins and Angela D. LeBlanc-Ernest, "Revolutionary Women, Revolutionary Struggle: The Black Panther Party's Oakland Community School," in *Want to Start a Revolution? Radical Women in the Black Freedom Struggle*, eds. Dayo F. Gore, Jeanne Theoharis and Komozi Woodard (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 167.

¹⁶ "Panther Sisters on Liberation," 341.

¹⁷ Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence of Women of Color," *Stanford Law Review*, July 1991, 1244.

Affair.” Here Crawford notes that black women became invisible within the black male’s struggle “because black male conscious-raising was not extended to black women.”¹⁸ With a focus on gender and race and how they impact individuals emotionally, physically, and psychologically, Crawford builds upon intersectionality to explore how it has been addressed in political, scholarly, and media conversations.

As revolutionaries, Panther women’s approaches to activism extended from political and black feminist origins. In *Black Feminist Thought*, Patricia Hill Collins attributes black women’s oppression to the exploitation of black women’s labor through capitalism, the controlling of their rights due to oppression, and the impact of demeaning and sexual ideology on the images of black women.¹⁹ In their approaches to critiquing black relationships with attention on how societal hierarchies and gender relations’ impact progress and visibility of black women, Tracye A. Matthews, Joy James, and Angela D. LeBlanc-Ernest each provide analyses of how problematic language surrounding Black Power contribute to black women’s oppression and black female activism within and outside the Party.

Presenting an in-depth look into gender politics of the Party is Tracye A. Matthews’ “No One Ever Asks What A Man’s Role in the Revolution Is.” Matthews argues that the experiences of men and women along with issues surrounding gender and language within the Party are not one-sided and should be examined in the context of the Party and its members.²⁰ In her exploration of ideology, she takes gender politics and places it in the forefront, examining how

¹⁸ Margo Natalie Crawford, “Must Revolution be a Family Affair: Revisiting *The Black Woman*” in *Want to Start a Revolution? Radical Women in the Black Freedom Struggle*, eds. Dayo F. Gore, Jeanne Theoharis and Komozi Woodard (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 185.

¹⁹ Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, Revised 10th Anniversary, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2000), 4-5.

²⁰ Matthews, 233.

Panther experiences differ across chapters, time, and individuals. Matthews cites the Panthers' survival programs and community initiatives, in which women were central to maintaining their sustainability, as integral to understanding the Party's execution of its goals and the manifestations of its political campaign.²¹ Additionally, she contends that gender issues must be examined through the lens of historical accuracy without present-day theory.²² This attention on historical accuracy is also noted in former Panther and Black Liberation Army member, Safiya Bukhari's *The War Before*.

In *The War Before*, Bukhari contends “[t]he error everyone—Black Panther Party supporters and detractors alike—seems to make is to look at the Party in a vacuum, separating it from its time and roots.”²³ She further elaborates that “the Party came out of the Black community and its experiences. In order to understand the issue of sexism in the Party, it is necessary to review the historical experience of Black people in this country as well as the climate in which the Party came into being.”²⁴ Her essay “On the Question of Sexism Within the Black Panther Party,” takes historical experience a step further to engage in a conversation examining how terms such as *comrade*, *brother*, and *sister*, impacted revolutionary work and relationship.²⁵ Similar to Bukhari's concerns with language association, Margo Natalie Crawford notes how terms such as “brother” and “sister” inhibit black relationships due to rhetoric that assumes a more familial relationship rather than a domestic partnership. Crawford concludes,

²¹ Matthews, 246.

²² *Ibid.*, 245-246.

²³ Safiya Bukhari, *The War Before: The true life story of becoming a Black Panther, keeping the faith in prison and fighting for those left behind* (New York: The Feminist Press, 2010), 53.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 53.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 44.

“Black Power feminists had to separate ‘black womanhood’ from a patriarchy-defined type of sisterhood.”²⁶ As both Bukhari and Crawford note, Black Power’s transformative language included gaps that eventually led to women experiencing sexism and chauvinism. Eventually this behavior infiltrated relationships and organizational practices, proving to be detrimental to both personal and collective goals of women in the Party.

Adding a critique on how masculine thought and perceptions of male leadership structured narratives surrounding political prisoners and activism is Joy James’ “Black Revolutionary Icons and Neoslave Narratives.” For James, the evolution of black revolutionary action is impacted and shaped by gender and memory, and as a result, associations of female revolutionaries “as appendages to male initiatives and endeavours” permeated history.²⁷ James singles out Elaine Brown, Kathleen Cleaver, and Ericka Huggins, noting their revolutionary action was coupled to their relationship with a male Panther leader, which therefore relegated them to a complementary status. Additionally, her conclusion that many revolutionary women reached iconic status due to the “militancy of their racial not their gender politics—and their real or symbolic connections to armed struggle,” presents an alternative view of Panther women leaders.²⁸ James continues her argument that the complicated position of revolutionary women who face constant comparisons and associations to men results in “their very appearance coming[ing] in the conventional mind with that of the male revolutionary.”²⁹

²⁶ Crawford, 189.

²⁷ Joy James, “Black Revolutionary Icons and ‘Neoslave’ Narratives,” *Social Identities* 5, no. 2 (June 1999): 140, <http://proxy.kennesaw.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=slh&AN=2067385&site=eds-live&scope=site>.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 139.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 139-140.

Creating a sense of ownership and collaboration through the exploration of revolutionary work, Angela D. LeBlanc-Ernest's "The Most Qualified Person to Handle the Job" traverses a history of female Panthers' activism as an extension of education through revolutionary, civil rights, and women's suffrage movements.³⁰ LeBlanc-Ernest examines the contributions of Tarika Lewis, the first female Panther, and Audra Jones, whose critical assessment of birth control practices and education enlightened Panther leaders to address the inconsistencies in family planning and the control of women's bodies.³¹ Illuminating their stories on a public level, LeBlanc-Ernest seeks to provide an untold narrative of female contributions that extended the longevity of the Party.

Continuing her examination of revolutionary work, LeBlanc-Ernest's collaboration with former Panther Ericka Huggins, "Revolutionary Women, Revolutionary Education" offers an additional perspective on silences due to representations. Concluding that "recovering BPP [Black Panther Party] women's history and lived experiences invariably requires consideration of the seeming silence," LeBlanc-Ernest and Huggins call attention to scholars who solely focus on male Party members and misrepresent the role of women.³² Suggesting the work performed equally by women and men in the Oakland Community Schools provided "Resistance with education [which] equal[ed] revolutionary work," their effectiveness in recounting the impact of the Party's youth educational programs highlights the process in which the Black Panther Party transformed lives and society internally and externally.³³

³⁰ Angela D. LeBlanc-Ernest, "The Most Qualified Person to Handle the Job" in *The Black Panther Party Reconsidered*, ed. Charles E. Jones (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1998), 308.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 320.

³² Huggins and LeBlanc-Ernest, 167.

Artistic and Media Representations Exploring Women in the Black Panther Party

During the height of the Party, the Panthers utilized the media as an avenue to extend their message internationally. At the same time, the media sought to capitalize on their symbolic and iconic style of armed black males with black berets, leather jackets, and sunglasses, to perpetuate the idea that the Party was a male-dominated organization.³⁴ Presenting examinations of the Black Panther Party through cinematic and theatrical expression are Stanley Nelson's documentary, *The Black Panthers: Vanguard of the Revolution*, Rachel Perkins' *Black Panther Woman*, and T.V. Reed's chapter in *The Art of Protest*, "Scenarios for a Revolution: The Drama of the Black Panthers." In their endeavors, Nelson, Perkins, and Reed acknowledge the multiple viewpoints and untold stories of the Party and its members. By utilizing dramatic storytelling as a way to dispel myths while complementing and completing the Party's collective story, their works enhance the written narrative and bridge historical movements.

In *The Black Panthers: Vanguard of the Revolution*, Stanley Nelson provides a narrative beyond representations of Panther experiences typically seen in media. Nelson situates his cinematic discourse within the racial climate in which the Party was organized to address voices marginalized by laws, mindsets, and behaviors.³⁵ By incorporating a collection of male and female voices directly involved with the movement, he captures the audience and places them in the political and emotional conversation. Juxtaposing the Panthers' plight against the historical

³³ Ibid., 164.

³⁴ *The Black Panthers: Vanguard of the Revolution*, directed by Stanley Nelson (Firelight Films, 2015), DVD (PBS Distribution, 2016). Also see Charles E. Jones and Judson L. Jeffries, "'Don't Believe the Hype': Debunking the Panther Mythology."

³⁵ Stanley Nelson, "Director's Statement," *TheBlackPanthers.com*, last modified 2015, Accessed October 5, 2016, <http://theblackpanthers.com/press/#module2>.

narratives, photographs, news reels, archives, music, and police footage, *The Black Panthers: Vanguard of the Revolution* finds success in connecting the past to the present. In highlighting the Panthers, Nelson's documentary also echoes the efforts of present-day movements that are focused on activism and education surrounding black lives within society.

Highlighting the transnational impact of Panther activism in Australia, Rachel Perkins' *Black Panther Woman* documents the first-hand accounts of Marlene Cummings, who was a founding member of the Australian Black Panther Party.³⁶ Perkins' reflection of Cummings highlights a previously untold story of Panther women in Australia. In *Black Panther Woman*, Cummings states "...black women made a sacrifice: seeing black men already demonized by the media, they knew that, if they 'pointed the finger' at one black man, all would be tarred with the same brush."³⁷ Presenting individuals with flaws who are leading a life of personal and collective transformation, Perkins' documentary juxtaposes the lasting effects of abuse, addiction, and sexual violence alongside male and female activism in the Australian Panther Party.

Placing the Panthers and the Black Power Movement in conversation with Black Arts, T.V. Reed's chapter seeks to solidify the connections between performance and activism. Reed argues, "The Black Panther Party can be understood as a kind of theatrical performance," based in visual representations and associations with violence.³⁸ According to Reed, Black Panther

³⁶ Julia Scott-Stevenson, "Struggling with silence: Rachel Perkins' Black Panther Woman," *Metro Magazine* no. 183 (2015) (accessed November 2, 2015), <http://proxy.kennesaw.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edsggo&AN=edsgcl.403049784&site=eds-live&scope=site>, 84.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 86.

³⁸ T.V. Reed, "Scenarios for a Revolution: The Drama of the Black Panthers" in *The Art of Protest: Culture and Activism from the Civil Rights Movement to the Streets of Seattle*, 1st ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 44.

theatre operated as a “vital political tool” that “must remain connected to social movement groups with a clear, explicit agenda for structural economic and political change.”³⁹ Nikhil Pal Singh also analyzes the Party in a similar fashion in *Black is a Country*. Here Singh argues the Panthers “might be better understood as practitioners of an insurgent form of visibility, a literal-minded and deadly serious kind of guerrilla theater, in which militant slogan-eering, bodily display, and spectacular actions simultaneously signified their possession and yet real lack of power.”⁴⁰

In comparison to Nelson’s and Perkins’ documentaries, Reed’s summation rarely addresses women. For Reed, the physical demonstrations by the Panthers operated as theatrical performances. In his focus on the visual displays of male armed resistance and action as performance, he also supported the idea that male leaders were the major contributors to Panther activism. Thus, Reed’s analysis, albeit insightful, leaves the Panthers static in history, due to the limited account of women’s involvement.

As Nelson’s cinematic narrative places the audience in a space that both reminds and reflects the current situation of African Americans living in the United States, his images evoke beauty in blackness and power. Through a central focus on Panther members’ experiences, Nelson highlights revolutionary participation as fulfilling and deadly. This is also where Reed’s analysis of the Panthers operates in the same manner, but on the written page. Reed highlights the Panthers’ actions and transforms them into a visual picture of resistance echoing theatrical performance that breaks the “fourth wall” (the confines of the setting and/or performance space) and ventures out into the streets. Interestingly enough, Perkins merges the two approaches by

³⁹ Ibid., 67.

⁴⁰ Singh, 203.

connecting the global legacy of Panther women while speaking to the actuality and commitment of revolutionary women linked by gender and experiences.

Reflections by Panther Women

The essays and autobiographies written by Panther women operate as avenues where they can challenge the narrative surrounding their activism. Reflecting on their experiences, the words of Assata Shakur, Elaine Brown, Kathleen Cleaver, and Ericka Huggins establish both written and unwritten connections to other female Panthers. While scholarship about their experiences offers some insight, their personal observations provide in-depth perspective.

Assata Shakur, a Black Panther and Black Liberation Army member, assesses her experience as a revolutionary in her autobiography, *Assata*. She states “any black person in amerika, if they are honest with themselves, have got to come to the conclusion that they don’t know what it feels like to be free.” Continuing her statement, she moves into the personal, “We aren’t free politically, economically, or socially. We have very little power over what happens in our lives.”⁴¹ For Shakur, the connections between power and freedom are controlled by systemic entities, including but not limited to capitalism and racism. Shakur’s autobiography contains chapters of physical incarceration, juxtaposed against chapters of “assumed” freedom under a capitalistic rule. In this manner, *Assata* transforms into a commentary on society from the viewpoint of a black female. Shakur’s return to experiences that defined and/or redefined her vision of agency and self in the United States, move beyond the page through her use of poetry, song, written correspondence, and reflections. In Joy James’ analysis of Shakur in “Framing the Panther,” she observes Assata’s ability to position herself outside of the limiting conditions of

⁴¹ Assata Shakur, *Assata* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 2001), 60.

other female Panthers through her “hybridity.”⁴² For James, Shakur’s “hybridity” refers to her ability to operate outside of traditional (and as James notes, stereotypical) gender circles.⁴³ Building upon her work on “Revolutionary Icons and Neoslave Narratives,” James states, “In some ways the men’s status as icons does not compare favorably with Shakur’s, for she has longevity as a living political figure...Shakur’s narrative marks her flight as a revolutionary act itself.”⁴⁴

The three female Panthers James singles out as complementary to male Panther leaders in “Revolutionary Icons and Neoslave Narratives,” Elaine Brown, Ericka Huggins, and Kathleen Cleaver, use their personal reflections and writings to expose the impact of Black Power principles on their agency. In her autobiography, *A Taste of Power*, Brown, former “Chairman” of the Party, reflects on the paradox that female Panthers faced making revolutionary change through leadership positions. By “not tolerat[ing] any raised fists in [her] face or Black Power handshakes, or even the phrase ‘Black Power’, for all of it symbolized to [her] the denial of black women in favor of the freedom of the ‘Black Man,’” Brown positioned herself as a vanguard to combat the social norm.⁴⁵

In an interview about her involvement in the Party coinciding with the release of Stanley Nelson’s *The Black Panther: Vanguard of the People*, Ericka Huggins reflects “the women who were drawn to the Black Panther Party were all feminists, not in the way that feminism is looked at today, in which you have to go step by step in order to claim yourself as a feminist. But we

⁴² James, “Framing the Panther...”, 140.

⁴³ Ibid., 140-141.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 141.

⁴⁵ Brown, 398.

generally believed in the political, social, economic and sexual equality of women and girls.”⁴⁶

Huggins’ awareness of the evolution of activism addresses a truth behind how feminism was adopted and perceived by individuals from diverse backgrounds as well as how it operated in the 1960s and 1970s. Additionally her work with LeBlanc-Ernest exemplifies her continual commitment to providing accurate portrayals of Panther experiences.

As for former Communications Secretary Kathleen Cleaver, her Panther involvement provided opportunities to think critically about the world and break the assumption that revolutionary involvement was only relegated to men.⁴⁷ She concludes that highlighting Party problems through a lens of gender should focus on ways the Party worked to address the gender issues in the world.⁴⁸ Cleaver urges society to place Panther women in “the longer tradition of freedom fighters like Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman and Ida Wells-Barnett, who took on an entirely oppressive world and insisted that their race, their gender, and their humanity be respected all at the same time.”⁴⁹ In Cleaver’s assessment, the legacy of female activism reaches from the past, to the present, and extends into the future. Though James critiques Brown, Cleaver, and Huggins as unable to achieve the “hybridity” of Shakur, she notes the impact of Brown and Cleaver as “historians of black radicalism,” who operate in spaces that challenge the norm and redirect conversations across identity.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Salamishah Tillet, “The Panthers’ Revolutionary Feminism,” *New York Times* (New York, NY), October 2, 2015, accessed October 6, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/04/movies/the-panthers-revolutionary-feminism.html?_r=1 and Stanley Nelson’s *The Black Panthers: Vanguard of the Revolution*.

⁴⁷ Kathleen Cleaver, “Women, Power, and Revolution” in *Liberation, Imagination, and the Black Panther Party: A New Look at the Panthers and their Legacy*, eds. Kathleen Cleaver and George Katsiaficas (New York: Routledge, 2001), 124.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 126.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 126.

⁵⁰ James, “Framing the Panther...,” 152.

Conclusion

From 1967 and beyond, Panther women found ways to maintain ownership of their revolutionary action and commitment to impact communities and contribute to radical change. Because of recent scholarship on the Panthers, society's understanding of revolutionary work is informed by the "conditions in the wider political economy [which] simultaneously shape Black women's subordination and foster activism."⁵¹ Through their research, scholars have answered Safiya Bukhari's question "What is the Black experience?" in addition to exploring what it means to be a black woman dealing with politics in both private and public spaces in the 1960s and 1970s.⁵² Although early narratives surrounding the Panthers highlighted the efforts and actions of Panther men, Joy James concludes "How [society] imagine[s] transformative black political leadership is very much influenced by how we think of gender and agency."⁵³ Here James attests to the importance of highlighting both represented and underrepresented voices involved in the collective struggle towards change. In the end, her words linger as a reminder to activists, researchers, critics, and supporters as she remarks, "To die for the revolution is a one-shot deal; to live for the revolution means taking on the more difficult commitment of changing our day-to-day life patterns."⁵⁴

⁵¹ Collins, 8.

⁵² Bukhari, 52.

⁵³ James, "Framing the Panther . . .," 138.

⁵⁴ Beal, 99.

Proposal

A challenge to the next phase of struggles is to reveal those painfully learned lessons of the past to future activists who will attempt to transform existing social orders, neither unduly glorifying our accomplishments nor falsely deprecating them.⁵⁵

—George Katsiaficas, “Introduction”

In their examination of the Black Panther Party, many scholars have sought to develop a narrative that includes the experiences and actualities of Panther women. Throughout my research process, Safiya Bukhari’s statement “Revolution is internal first” inspired me to contemplate the psychological, physical, social, and political impact of activism on a revolutionary.⁵⁶ Reflecting on the culture during the rise and fall of the Black Panther Party, which at times both encouraged and inhibited black women’s ability to create, maintain, and evolve over time, I cultivated an interest in creating a play about their experiences.

Adjusting the lens on the internal life of a revolutionary through a unique application of research, thought, expression, and creativity, a significant part of my Capstone Project will include creating an original work of theater inspired by the experiences of women in the Black Panther Party. In its artistic form, the theater is both an intimate and public space where audiences and actors can explore the personal relationships of individuals and reflect on what they experience. As such, I will use this platform to explore what is and is not necessarily known about the Party. Expanding on ideas stemming from political, artistic, and poetic language, my completed play will heighten the awareness of female Panther experience for current and future audiences through a fictionalized narrative approach inspired by historical accounts.

⁵⁵ George Katsiaficas, “Introduction” in *Liberation, Imagination, and the Black Panther Party: A New Look at the Panthers and their Legacy*, eds. Kathleen Cleaver and George Katsiaficas (New York: Routledge, 2001), xiv.

⁵⁶ Bukhari, 13.

Throughout the writing process, I will embark on a journey similar to the process of Stanley Nelson, who sought to use his film to “give the viewer a sense of what it has meant to be black in America and consider this within our contemporary context.”⁵⁷ By examining a complex layer of issues impacting the lives of revolutionaries, I will present the daily struggles, commitments, and contributions of Panther women. Because my research stems from an interest in how Panther women are interpreted and viewed by the public, the play will operate on the same premise but from a standpoint that engages the senses and transforms perceptions. Through my writing, I hope to shed light on the voices left in the shadows, the voices that have been silenced by the attention placed on “political celebrities” whose race garnered them attention over their gender.⁵⁸ By exposing the intricacies of race and gender in the United States, I seek to assess revolutionary action as it pertains to women of color, borrowing and connecting them to Kathleen Cleaver’s premise of thinking about Panther women in conversation with other widely known revolutionary women who fought daily for individual and collective liberation.

My original work will follow a young girl named Destiny, who joins a chapter in the Black Panther Party in an unnamed city. The actual Party chapter is left ambiguous, however the situations she and her comrades experience will be representative of other major chapters, such as Oakland, Chicago, and New Haven. Over the course of the play, Destiny, through the help of her comrades, transforms the Party and herself through activism. Divided into two acts, the play will creatively traverse two significant time periods in the Black Panther Party, 1968 and 1971. In 1968, the Party experienced an increase in female membership, and in 1971, the Party was divided due to conflicts between Huey P. Newton and Eldridge Cleaver. To address how Destiny

⁵⁷ Nelson, “Director’s Statement”.

⁵⁸ James, “Black Revolutionary Icons and 'Neoslave' Narratives”, 139.

and her comrades would handle the political limbo they faced, I will create a “what if” scenario that positions female Panthers as successors who lead the Party into a new era.

Although men were central to the creation of the Panthers’ Ten Point Program of “What We Want” and “What We Believe,” I began to note how the women I researched also embodied the Program on their own terms. This research provided a unique opportunity to explore female Panther approaches to activism, and as a result, several of my characters’ names, overall goals, and actions will reflect points of the Program. In addition, there will be some characters who will harbor secrets, while others will represent people and entities that impacted the Party’s sustainability. As a playwright, the adoption of the Ten Point Program and its transformation into characteristics, personalities, and behaviors will provide a grounded foundation to explore how Panther women and men operate in private and public spaces. In addition, this creative adventure will allow the actors an opportunity to cultivate an idea of who the Panthers wanted to be and who they were while exploring the internal life of female revolutionaries.

To complete my Capstone Project, I propose to organize a staged reading with a talk back session during the first or second week of November. The performance/reading will be a space where critical thinking can exist through immersion and conversation. In this space, participants will experience the Black Panther Party and contribute to conversations across identity markers to examine the experiences of Party members outside of a formal lecture. Inviting the audience to participate in a post-show talk back will provide additional opportunities to explore questions and concerns, including but not limited to “What structures within society shaped (and continue to shape) how black women interact with the world?”; “How are your personal stories/experiences intertwined with the legacy of women of color’s activism?”; “What do you think are some of the new avenues or questions that arise by examining history through

performance?"; "How does tackling history through creative endeavors inform or impact the audience and/or the actor?" and, as a result of our exploration, "Where do (and can) we collectively go from here?"

10 Steps Towards Revolution
By KMW

10 Steps Towards Revolution is a fictionalized play inspired by the events surrounding women and their experiences in various chapters of the Black Panther Party.

Time: September 1968-Spring 1971

Place: Any Party chapter outside of Oakland

Characters

The characters range in age from 14 and 27, except for UNSEEN FIGURE 1 and 2, who are in their thirties.

DESTINY

DONNA

JOHN

BRENDA (“B. FREE”)

ZEKE

TOMMY also plays UNSEEN FIGURE 1

MONICA

KEITH also plays UNSEEN FIGURE 2

VALERIE

LEIGH

The PANTHER OFFICE sits C and extends UL, UC, and UR. It is full of Panther paraphernalia. Two desks are tightly situated within. There are several chairs lining the upstage wall. The front of the OFFICE (DS) includes a bay of windows. A partition (SL) separates a windowless file/storage room. The contents of the storage room are visible to the audience. The entrance to the OFFICE is SR. People can walk around the OFFICE from the front and right side. Additional acting areas include DL, DC, and DR. SL of the OFFICE is a payphone and an apartment building, where DONNA lives.

There should be some consideration for a location to project images. The final location is left up to the director, but it should be viewable from the audience.

Throughout the play, the actors should enter and exit throughout the entire Theater (including the audience).

Prologue

At the top of the play, the Office is dimly lit. DESTINY stands C, addressing the audience. One at a time, the other characters enter from various directions, speaking their lines with purpose. The words on the projection screen correspond with each spoken point of the Ten Point Program and build as time passes.

DESTINY

“Black Power!” That’s all I hear in the streets.

BRENDA

Ten. We Want land, bread, housing, education, clothing, justice and peace.

DESTINY

“The time is now!” But how do I know if I’m ready? I’ve been on the move since I was 15, so I’ve seen some things—

LEIGH

Nine. We want all Black people when brought to trial to be tried in court by a jury of their peer group or people from their Black communities, as defined by the Constitution of the United States.

DESTINY

...things that made me question my place in this country. And one thing I do know is that the system ain’t workin’. Folks getting’ jailed every day and my brother was one of them.

ZEKE

Eight. We want freedom for all Black men held in federal, state, county and city prisons and jails.

DESTINY

Some say “Non-Violence is the way! They will see your suffering and be changed—”

JOHN

Seven. We want an immediate end to police brutality and murder of black people.

DESTINY

But ain’t nobody just gonna sit there and take a verbal beating. Ain’t nobody gonna change just ‘cause they see a black man suffer. Police didn’t protect my brother and they ain’t gonna protect me.

TOMMY

Six. We want all black men to be exempt from military service.

DESTINY

Then I see a war going on. We can’t fight in Vietnam, we fightin’ a war on our own land against a government that don’t care about us.

VALERIE

Five. We want education for our people that exposes the true nature of this decadent American society. We want education that teaches us our true history and our role in the present-day society.

DESTINY

Folks say it's time to pick up the gun. Be a reflection of what I want to see...

DONNA

Four. We want decent housing, fit for shelter of human beings.

DESTINY

But all I see is my family livin' in spots with the walls comin' down. Landlord don't fix anything. Say the government got his hands ties.

KEITH

Three. We want an end to the robbery by the Capitalist of our black community.

DESTINY

Where's our forty acres and a mule?

MONICA

Two. We want full employment for our people.

DESTINY

It's time for us to get some power.

On "want", the screen becomes consumed with various images. Music plays. It's a sampling of James Brown's "Living in America." The images span the two-year period from 1966 to 1968 and increase in intensity over time to overload the screen. Several images include News Flashes from various sources-highlighting US events and Global issues, The Black Panther newspaper, Malcolm X, Tommie Smith and John Carlos with raised fists at the 1968 Olympics, Huey P. Newton, Assata Shakur, COINTELPRO, The Black Panther Party symbol, The balcony at the Lorraine Motel, Fred Hampton, Various Social and Political Rallies, Protests, Panther Survival Programs, Female Panthers (both widely known and unknown), Mass gatherings in the streets, Vietnam, etc. During the video, the characters watch and reflect. At various times, they leave the stage. When the video ends, DESTINY is left standing alone. The final point is on the screen.

ALL except DESTINY

(Offstage)

One. We. Want. Freedom. We want power to determine the destiny of our Black community.

BEAT.

DESTINY

Alright, "D." It's time...Time to become revolutionary.

BLACKOUT.

Scene 1

The screen reads: 1968. LIGHTS UP on the office. TOMMY is selling newspapers on the corner. DESTINY enters, dressed in a black leather jacket and pants. She moves towards office. A telephone RINGS three times.

DONNA

(Answering)

Black Panther Party. How may I help you?

TOMMY

The Panther! Only 25 cents! Get your daily breakfast! Read it and be informed.

DESTINY

(Entering the office)

Hello?

DONNA

That's right. Thanks for returning my call. Yes. We're looking to set up some community programs on Third and Crescent. We'll bring everything to set up. We just need the space... Yes, I'll hold.

DONNA beckons DESTINY to speak.

DESTINY

Um...I was lookin' for some information—

DONNA

Right on. But you look young.

DESTINY

I'm 17. I'll be 18 in October.

DONNA

Take a flyer. *(Into the phone)* Yes, I'm here. Do you think this is something you would be interested in? It wouldn't start until next year, but we're trying to get the word out. Build a network, ya dig? Okay, I'll put you down.

DESTINY takes the flyer and sits in a chair UL. DONNA hangs up the phone and it rings again. TOMMY enters reading The Panther.

TOMMY

Man, this cat is bad ass this week. We gotta get everyone to read this piece.

DONNA

(To TOMMY)

Got a few more in the back. Take them down to Third and Crescent.

TOMMY

Third and Crescent? We pickin' them up too?

DONNA shoos TOMMY away. BRENDA enters from the street with boxes.

BRENDA

We've got six more boxes.

DONNA

(While answering the phone)

Just set them down in the back. Black Panther Party—

BRENDA exits to the backroom. JOHN enters with a box, crosses to the backroom and speaks—

JOHN

Donna, wasn't Zeke supposed to be here by now?

DONNA shoots him the "I'm on the phone look."

JOHN

(To DESTINY)

Welcome to the hardest working chapter in the US— Well, outside of Oakland, that is.

BRENDA

(Returning)

You looking to join?

JOHN

She's dressed for it.

DESTINY

Something wrong with the way I'm dressed?

BRENDA

You're fine. So, you want to join?

DESTINY

Well, I...I'm not sure if this is the right time.

JOHN

Sister, it's always the right time.

BRENDA

Sister, it's always the right time.

DESTINY

Look, I just came to get some information, maybe some help, but she's busy. Gave me a flyer and told me to fill it out. You're busy. He's busy. The only guy that's not busy is the one selling papers. Naw, he's busy too.

JOHN gives DESTINY a look and exits the office.

Seems like everybody got somethin' going on but me.

BRENDA

You'll have something soon enough. Hey, you probably got something right now, that's why you're here. And don't worry about Donna, you just caught her at a bad time. She's been working the phones since six this morning.

DESTINY

That early?

BRENDA

Yeah, the quest for liberation never stops.

A moment. They take each other in.

DESTINY

So, what do you do?

BRENDA

What don't I do? Sisters are making an impact.

DESTINY

Sisters?

BRENDA

Yeah, that's what we call ourselves.

DESTINY

I don't have any sisters.

BRENDA

(laughing)

That's alright. As black women we are united as sisters in the struggle for civil rights.

DESTINY

Right, right. I got it.

MONICA walks by the OFFICE and taps on the window. She raises her fist; BRENDA does the same.

BRENDA

See Sis, things are changing. The chapter's growing and we're moving into our own. So, you being here—is right on time.

DESTINY contemplates.

You want something. I get it. I wanted something too, that's why I joined the Party. And, if you're down, we could use you. I'm Brenda, by the way, but you can call me "B. Free".

DESTINY

Destiny.

BRENDA

Destiny? Hmmm. Your name speaks for itself.

DESTINY

What do you mean—

JOHN

(Re-entering)

Just got another shipment in. Someone needs to take some of these home.

He hands a box to DESTINY.

You ready?

DESTINY is caught off guard.

BRENDA

She's still figuring that out.

JOHN

Humph.

TOMMY runs into the office.

TOMMY

The Pigs just stopped Zeke! Charles said someone was shot!

DONNA

What!??

TOMMY

And Zeke is being arrested! Donna, call Brother Keith. John, Brenda- Let's go!

Everyone exits except DONNA and DESTINY. DONNA starts dialing Keith. DESTINY stands with the box in her hand.

DESTINY

Well...I guess it's now or never.

DESTINY drops the box in a chair and runs out of the office towards the direction of the group. She stops at the edge of the stage. Everything goes dark. A spotlight shines on DESTINY. On the screen, ZEKE's attack is shown. DESTINY reacts. At the end of the attack, DESTINY runs to catch up with the group.

Scene 2

The Screen reads: Later that night. JOHN paces outside of the office, still reeling from the day's activities. He's trying to let off steam, but it's not going too well. BRENDA enters from the back of the theatre, making her way towards the stage. The lights in the office are at half. ZEKE sits in a chair inside with his head wrapped in a white bandage. DONNA tends to him. KEITH is on the phone. TOMMY keeps watch. As DESTINY runs in after BRENDA, she speaks

DESTINY

Hey, B. Free!! Hold up... How'd ya'll do that? Stand up and take that from them cops? They could've arrested you...Not one, but ALL of you—

BRENDA

Being arrested is secondary. We must be willing to put our bodies on the line to obtain our freedom.

DESTINY

—Yeah but there was that one guy.... he was the leader, I guess. He knew the law and was tellin' the police what they could and couldn't do. Oooh, brother was super baaadd—

BRENDA

Keith has that effect on people. He's not our leader, but he can tell it like it is.

DESTINY

—I've only seen y'all on T.V.—

BRENDA

T.V. ain't the half of it. Pigs knew they were wrong and our brothers stayed true.

DESTINY

Oh, I didn't mean—

BRENDA

That shooting occurred three blocks over.

DESTINY

Wait. What?

BRENDA

Zeke had just walked out of his cousin's church and got to his car—

JOHN

(Mumbling)

Zeke...He's got two little kids.

BRENDA

His aunt was standing on the steps and saw the police comin' up the block.

JOHN

(Getting louder)

His kids...They were in the car screaming... Screaming their heads off for them to stop.

DESTINY

They beat him in front of his kids?

JOHN

(Getting worked up again)

If it was me, I would have...

DESTINY

What happened to the kids?

BRENDA

His Aunt took them.

JOHN

Those cubs had to see their father beaten. And then the Pigs just let him go.

BRENDA

It's alright John. Zeke is safe now.

DESTINY

I'm glad—

JOHN

YOU GLAD?!? We face that every day and you glad?!? You sure you want to be a Panther? You have no sense of reality. People are dyin', 'cause the Pigs aren't playing. This is real life.

John...

BRENDA

DESTINY
I didn't mean....

JOHN

Don't "John" me Brenda. She's not taking this seriously. She's living in a fantasy world and she needs to know this is real life. Every day. We put our lives on the line for what we believe.

DESTINY

I'm sorry. I didn't know what to do. I just stood there and watched it happen...

BRENDA

It's okay, John, calm down. I think Destiny knows that.

JOHN

No it's not. She ran away. How does that look? The Panthers can't have no half-steppin'.

DESTINY

I didn't run away. I stood there...

JOHN

Behind a wall. In shock. Looking lost. Every day brothers and sisters are—We just saw another brother attacked on the street just 'cause he was black. Pigs don't care about us. This is not the time to be standing there, trying to figure out what to do!!

DESTINY

I didn't know what to do. It's my first day—

JOHN

We've got to act!

BRENDA

John.

BRENDA has a way of calming JOHN down with a simple touch or look. JOHN slowly begins to cool.

That's why she's here. She needs our help and I know we need hers.

JOHN

But—it's not going to happen if....

BRENDA

John. Don't underestimate her dedication. She might not have jumped right in, but she came back to us. And right now, we need to be supportive and help her on her journey. Remember, it took you some time.

JOHN

But she made us look—

BRENDA

Look how?

JOHN is silent. Now, he can't figure out what to say.

DESTINY

John, seeing the Panthers tonight helped me see us, Black people, standing up in ways I never thought I could, we could. I couldn't do that on my own—

JOHN

We do more than that.

DESTINY

But for me, that's what Black Power means—being able to determine your own destiny.

BRENDA

Right on, Sis.

DESTINY

I saw your friend, and the police, and the Panthers, and I was changed. And although I couldn't move, I knew that I needed to see that. Feel it. Be affected by it. Do something because of it. I ran away one time before, I wasn't gonna do that again. John, Like B. Free said, I don't know everything, but I know we need a revolution and I'm down to help take the man down.

BRENDA

That's all we need. We can build from there.

JOHN looks at DESTINY. He says nothing, but his demeanor has softened. He crosses to the door and enters the office.

BRENDA

Don't worry about John. Sometimes he feels as if new members need to prove themselves.

DESTINY

Guess it's three strikes you're out.

BRENDA

Naw, it's two strikes, you get back up, take a swing an' knock it out the park. And that's what you just did. You got him thinking.

DESTINY

Good.

BRENDA

Oh and just so we're clear—not all men are like him. He's of the “A man's gotta do what a man's gotta do” breed, but he's coming along.

DESTINY

Reminds me of my Daddy.

They share a laugh. BRENDA enters the office with DESTINY following behind. The conversation inside has been going on for a while.

ZEKE

We have to stop these attacks.

TOMMY

And it's not only here. It's all over the country. Y'all remember Lil' Bobby. They were held up in a spot. Everyone came out naked but Lil' Bobby didn't want to take off his pants. Pigs thought he was hiding something. So they shot him. Killed him dead.

KEITH

That's why I talked to HQ. I'm trying to add a story on Zeke to this week's paper. We can't wait. The revolution is now.

JOHN

I dig it, comrade. We must continue to arm ourselves. Protect our communities. Stand up against a corrupt government and fight our own war.

BRENDA

Right on, Brother.

MONICA enters in a rush and starts checking ZEKE's face and body.

MONICA

Babe? You alright?

ZEKE

I'm fine. Kids good?

MONICA

Yeah, They're with my Mom. Let me see you.

She holds ZEKE's face and looks directly into his eyes. A moment. Then MONICA kisses him.

I don't know how much longer I can take this.

ZEKE

I know.

MONICA

Know? You just make sure you come home to me, alive. Every night.

KEITH

Damn, this is a constant reminder that Black is under attack. Not just the individual but the family.

TOMMY

That's 'cause the Pigs got 3 powers: information, communication, and mobilization. We need to do the same.

JOHN

Let's up our policing cadre.

KEITH

I can get started on that tomorrow.

DONNA

I'll get to planning.

BRENDA

I can train them.

KEITH

Right on. We need all the help we can—

ZEKE

It's more than that.

JOHN

What do you mean?

ZEKE

I think we're being targeted.

DONNA

Targeted?

ZEKE

Yeah. Every time I go out, I've been followed.

DONNA

Every day?

ZEKE

I feel like I'm a prisoner in my own skin.

MONICA

That's why I want someone to be with you all the time.

KEITH

I got him.

DESTINY

Well, my friend's cousin works for the government and he said there's been a lot of talk about the Panthers. They're threatened by the Panthers and trying to discredit the Party.

KEITH

Now that should be front page news. We can add it to Zeke's story.

MONICA

You're writing a story on him?

KEITH

Got to.

DONNA

Wait a second, now let's figure this out.

TOMMY

That's right—we don't know her.

BRENDA

But she has the right mindset.

JOHN

If Keith wants to put it on the front page, let him. I think it would be good.

ZEKE

Yeah, Donna. We must inform the people. It's our duty.

DONNA

Okay but let's get all the facts first. I'm sorry, sister, but you just arrived here. And we don't know if your information—

TOMMY

Tell it, Donna!

KEITH

But everybody's reading *The Panther*! Black, White, Puerto Rican, even the Pigs looking at the pictures. We gotta use it!

MONICA

I agree, this may be our best info yet.

BRENDA

And I believe she's telling the truth.

DESTINY

I am. I want to help the Panthers any way I can.

BRENDA and JOHN share a look. JOHN nods.

JOHN

Donna, this girl might be the key to some of our problems.

A moment.

DONNA

Alright. Alright. Here. Fill out this short info form. We'll get you started tomorrow.

DESTINY takes the form, pulls up a chair next to ZEKE and starts filling it out.. DONNA begins to tidy up. TOMMY looks out the window.

ZEKE

You're doing the right thing.

KEITH

This sister's going to be our new comrade. Welcome to the hardest working chapter in America.

JOHN

She knows, I said that this morning.

BRENDA AND MONICA

Welcome to the Party, Sis.

They hug.

DONNA

Alright now, it's been a long day. Time to lock up. We need to get up bright and early in the mornin'.

There are sounds of confirmation from all. BRENDA, TOMMY, JOHN, ZEKE, MONICA, and DESTINY exit. KEITH waits for DONNA as she turns out the lights, locks the door, and walks outside.

KEITH

See you at six, Donna.

DONNA

Right. That's what happens when you live next to the office. First to arrive, last to leave.

They share a laugh.

DONNA enters the building next door. KEITH exits in the opposite direction. A few moments pass. DONNA exits the building and heads for the payphone. She looks around. When the coast is clear, she places a call.

DONNA

They know...Someone mentioned a program...No, I didn't get what— And there's this new girl. Says she knows someone in the government.... What's her name? Well, um...why do you need to know? *(BEAT)* Look, I can't keep this up—someone's going to figure me out. I gave you enough— I know... it's just... I can't keep doing this for you... Everyone here is like a family. They look out for each other— A bonus? For more information? No, you've got your information... Jail? I can't go to jail... Look, if I tell you, will anything happen to Keith? Will anything happen to him? You just need a little more information...then you'll let me go?

DONNA contemplates. Then she takes a piece of paper out of her pocket.

Destiny Aldridge. Age 17. 228 Stevens Court. Just moved here. She has— Hunh? What did you say?... Thank you for your service to this country?

DONNA looks at the phone. The line is dead. She hangs up and rushes inside her apartment. Lights fade.

Scene 3

The screen reads: Two weeks later. BRENDA enters the office with a flyer in hand. DESTINY sits in the corner.

BRENDA

You see this?

DESTINY

Saw it this morning.

BRENDA

And what did you think?

DESTINY is unsure of how to respond.

A'right, you understand that as black women, we face certain oppressions, right? We can't separate gender from class and race struggles to join a movement (*indicates the flyer*) that excludes or does not acknowledge the reality of those oppressions. Cause if we do, then some brother will think we are putting ourselves in front of the liberation fight. But that's not true. Panther women are committed to the cause. We provide critical care. We take over when our men are imprisoned. We hold leadership positions. We educate the youth, the community, and ourselves. We work in solidarity.

DESTINY

Calm down, B. I hear ya.

BRENDA

And the class struggle is the most significant. We must work towards ideological change.

DESTINY

You don't have to convince me.

BRENDA

But that's all I've been doing! Convincing people of what's right or wrong.

DESTINY

Ain't that the fight?

MONICA enters.

BRENDA

It's more than that. Have you read any of the readings? Mao, Fanon?

MONICA

Morning.

Sees BRENDA.

Why is she pacing?

DESTINY

She's tryin' to get me to see what's going on.

MONICA

On the floor?

BRENDA

No! In the world.

MONICA

I know, Brenda. I was—

BRENDA

See Destiny you have to be fired up about something. What are you fired up about? I remember you said we need a revolution, but what have you done to start it?

DESTINY

I've only been here two weeks.

BRENDA

And that's fourteen days of work. Change started when you joined the Party, recognize your position in the fight.

DESTINY

I do but—

BRENDA

And it's your turn. Do something!

MONICA

Brenda—

DESTINY

I KNOW!

BRENDA

There she is!—

DESTINY

—but it's hard for a black woman to do somethin' out of the norm—

BRENDA

Wait. It's hard for a black woman to do something out of the norm? What about the black women who fought for justice, led slaves to freedom, and questioned mistreatment? Hunh? Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, Ida B Wells? These women committed their lives to the fight.

DESTINY

But they were different. I—

BRENDA

Just a few weeks ago, you said you were affected by seeing Zeke and the Pigs.

DESTINY

I was—

BRENDA

And now—

DESTINY

But how do you continue to stand up when folks keep tellin' you that you are less than them? Hunh?!? How do you do that?

BEAT.

BRENDA

Destiny. What's going on?

A moment.

DESTINY

Today I was called a nigger—

BRENDA

What?

MONICA

When?

DESTINY

I was selling papers on Figaro and this lady walked by and said “You and your nigger Mommas and Daddies need to get off our streets and go back to Africa.”

MONICA

Little does she know the streets don't belong to her.

DESTINY

When she said that, it brought me back to my Momma.

BRENDA

What happened to her?

A moment.

DESTINY

My Momma was a god-fearing woman. She believed in the best in people—although some folks didn't treat her right.

BEAT.

MONICA

Take your time.

DESTINY

She never wanted anything in her life except to have a table full of her children, food on the table, and clothes on our backs. Ever since I was young, she worked for the Hillgroves, taking care of their house and kids. I never thought that was right, working all your life for someone else and gettin' next to nothin' in return.

DESTINY stops again. BRENDA sits next to her. After a moment.

One night, when my Momma was working late at the Hillgroves, my older brother was arrested for a crime he didn't commit. When my Momma found out... it hurt her somethin' bad. The next day she asked Mr. Hillgrove to help her get my brother out of jail. Mr. Hillgrove said he would... but Miss Hillgrove said she didn't want to help a nigger woman who couldn't take care of her own children.

The Office is silent.

When my Momma returned home that night...she cried. I saw my Daddy trying to console her. He... she...

Another moment passes.

Later that night, she passed away in her sleep.

BRENDA

I'm sorry, Destiny, I didn't know.

DESTINY

That three years ago, today.

MONICA hugs Destiny.

MONICA

You can't let them win.

DESTINY

But that's only the half of it. Come to find out, my brother was arrested on lies.

BRENDA

That's always the case.

DESTINY

Miss Hillgrove's brother thought he saw my brother talking to his daughter but white folks made that story up. That was the day I said I would never work as a maid in nobody's house. I hid my feelings and two days after the funeral I left so my Daddy would have one less mouth to feed.

DESTINY

So...uh...since then, I moved around for a while, livin' with some family. That was until I saw the Panthers on TV, takin' no mess. Watching y'all I thought I found my permanent home. And in that moment, the Panthers saved me.

BRENDA

And you saved us.

DESTINY

How?

BRENDA

By being here. Sharing your story, talents, and passion. Don't hide. We welcome you, your history, and everything that comes with it.

MONICA

Yes, we will help you on your journey.

DESTINY

I want liberation.

MONICA

Right on, but you can't think that you're only a woman and you can only do certain things. Any person, regardless of their sex can be a revolutionary.

DESTINY

That sounds good, but how do I do that?

MONICA

Approach education through revolutionary principles.

BRENDA

Expose the realities of America.

MONICA

Empower the people.

DESTINY

Again, how do I do that?

MONICA

You're doing it now. Recognizing that you are not free is the first step. The next is education. Brenda asked you about the readings, right?

DESTINY nods.

Okay. Then after that, there's action. Action is taking the appropriate steps towards achieving what you have come to know as the truth. Now, this is not going to happen all at once. Being a revolutionary is a process.

BRENDA

That's right, people are going to attack you for your choices. Just like that lady today. She was threatened by you because you are black and a female and a Panther. You've got to be ready.

DESTINY

And that's what I have a problem with. The attack. I can't talk about my feelings without folks—it's...I...everything's a complex system that I can't seem to follow.

MONICA

That's how it's intended to be. They want to keep us oppressed.

BRENDA

Destiny. Sister, look at me. Today you took a step towards your liberation.

DESTINY

I did?

BRENDA

Yes, you realized you're affected by the world. See Sis, you're taking steps, even if they are small ones, towards liberation.

DESTINY

(exhales)

I feel like I just went through a Political Education class.

BRENDA

A class and much more.

DESTINY

No, it's the truth.

MONICA

Destiny, this is the day of your new beginning.

DESTINY

And I'm on the right path.

Lights fade.

Scene 4

The screen reads: A month later. DESTINY enters and starts setting up for the day. She moves one of the desks, which creates an open sitting area. A few seconds later, TOMMY rushes in, hoping to be the first to arrive. He sees DESTINY and his demeanor changes.

DESTINY

Yesterday's reports, please.

TOMMY

Yeah, yeah.

DESTINY

And the day before—

TOMMY

What?!?

DESTINY

Brother, we ain't got time for this today.

TOMMY

I don't have to answer to you.

DESTINY

Yes you do.

TOMMY

You think just 'cause they gave you a little power—

BEAT.

Pshhh. Alright.

DESTINY

Thank you.

TOMMY takes a seat and begins filling out the reports. JOHN enters with The Panther in hand. TOMMY stands and adjusts his Panther uniform.

JOHN

These jive turkeys out here acting like they the Party. Somebody needs to stop these imposters. They givin' the Panthers a bad rap.

TOMMY

When I become Section Leader all that's gonna have to stop.

DESTINY

Tommy, I need those reports.

TOMMY sulks while JOHN takes a seat.

JOHN

You think you're next in line?

TOMMY

Yeah, I ain't serving a country that don't care about me. Therefore, it is imperative that I lead the men here.

DESTINY

Imperative? *(laughs)* Man, you got a ways to go. *(to JOHN)* He didn't even finish his reports.

JOHN

What? Tommy you have to read *Wretched of the Earth* and write a report.

TOMMY

Man, I get punished for reports with a report? Just give me a minute.

DESTINY

Sorry, it's done.

TOMMY

But—

JOHN

Brother, I had to do the same thing. Just be glad you don't have to clean the toilets, do overnight security for the week, read the book and all your other tasks.

TOMMY

I got it, brother.

Tommy returns to the reports.

(mumbling)

Y'all don't know nothin'. I've got my hand in the pot.

ZEKE

(entering with KEITH in tow)

And the water's boiling telling you to get out.

All greet ZEKE with various affections and sayings. BRENDA enters. DONNA exits her apartment and makes a call.

DONNA

I want out.

DONNA exits.

ZEKE

Alright. Alright,

BRENDA

Welcome Back, Zeke!

ZEKE

Hey, Brenda, slap me some skin.

They do and end with a hug.

So, what's the skinny?

KEITH

Numbers are up.

BRENDA

I've been leading the P.E. classes. Donna's working on building the Community programs.

JOHN

Destiny's been getting good with the guns.

DESTINY

Nothing to it.

TOMMY

Aannndd we've got some new recruits that I'm gonna have to set straight.

ZEKE doesn't give in to TOMMY's boasting. TOMMY backs down.

So, you know, um, we've been.... How are you, Brother? How was your trip?

ZEKE

Let me say this.... I am enlightened.

TOMMY

Enlightened?

ZEKE

When the Pigs attacked me, I believe they were trying to stop my trip to Oakland...but God had different plans.

KEITH

Man, you gotta spread some of that enlightenment over here!

ZEKE

I will, but we gotta let Charles know about it too.

BRENDA and JOHN exchange looks.

JOHN

Well, I didn't want to say this, but, while you were gone, Charles got arrested.

ZEKE

What? When?

JOHN

Three days ago. Something 'bout a broken taillight and driving an unlicensed car. Then they said you and him look alike.

ZEKE

Here we go again—

TOMMY

That's what I said.

JOHN

It's like it's a game to them. They keep messing with us and if they can't have one of us they're going to try and get another.

ZEKE

I don't have to ask, I know he hasn't had a fair trial.

BEAT.

We should go and see him.

JOHN

Brenda and I saw him yesterday. He's maintaining, spite the circumstances.

BRENDA

Don't worry, we got it, Zeke.

DESTINY

We're working on getting him out.

KEITH

Plus, lawyers say those are trumped up charges. Shouldn't be no more than a day or two.

ZEKE

That's almost a week! He shouldn't have been there in the first place. We've got to get that Soul Brother out. He's critical to our Organization.

TOMMY tries to ease the situation.

TOMMY

We got you, Zeke. So, um, tell me... how's the Party holding up out there? We heard about Huey and Eldridge givin' speeches at Berkeley and how David is running things.

DESTINY

(clearing throat)

What Tommy means is what can we take from the way they're running things?

ZEKE

Well, they're putting together additional survival programs as we speak, so were on the right track.

TOMMY

And...

ZEKE

Folks out there know how to protest.

TOMMY

And...

ZEKE

Organization is growing.

TOMMY

Aaand...

ZEKE

A couple of Pigs shot up their office—

TOMMY

Man, when you gonna tell me 'bout, Wait...they got shot up?

ZEKE

Yeah. California isn't that much different.

JOHN

It's a damn shame.

ZEKE

And we're seeing this every day. All around the world, the system—

TOMMY

—ain't workin'. That's why I need to be in charge, ya' dig?

ZEKE

Bro, come on. I just got back and you “Anding” me and talking ‘bout how you’re going to be in charge—

TOMMY

But I’m interested in—

ZEKE

And I’m trying to hold back from knockin’ some sense into—

JOHN moves ZEKE away from TOMMY. KEITH goes to TOMMY. MONICA enters.

MONICA

Brenda, can I speak with you?

BRENDA

Yes.

As MONICA and BRENDA exit, the lights dim on the office but the action continues. KEITH talks with TOMMY for a bit and at some point during the exchange, TOMMY returns to his report, KEITH begins to clean his gun, and JOHN and ZEKE talk about the details of ZEKE’s trip.

MONICA

My granddad just gave me his shop.

BRENDA

Right on, Ms. Business owner!

MONICA

It’s a big step but we’ve still got a lot of work to do. Being a business owner is not the only goal. We must overtake the capitalistic structure at hand and redistribute the wealth.

BRENDA

Tell it, Monica. But you’re prepared. Everyone in the community knows you and your family.

MONICA

I know.

BEAT.

BRENDA

What?

MONICA

Zeke and I decided I would run it for a year, then we’d move to Philly or Illinois and start our own chapter.

BRENDA

Philly? I didn't think you wanted to move.

MONICA

Zeke and I always talked about having revolutionary action in many cities. We believe this is the way to affect the masses. Last night we talked about it and thought you would be the right person to take over when we leave.

BRENDA

Me? I...um...I'm honored.

BRENDA falls silent.

MONICA

Are you alright?

BRENDA

I never thought this day would come.

MONICA

Well it's on its way. And you know you'll have support. John will do anything you say.

DESTINY exits the office and joins the two.

DESTINY

And you'll have me—

BRENDA

You knew about this?

DESTINY

Monica told me yesterday, Captain.

BRENDA

Quit, jivin'. It hasn't happened yet.

DESTINY

B, you're perfect for the position. Doesn't matter if you're a woman. You know this Organization inside and out. You could be Chairwoman one day.

BRENDA

You got that right.

MONICA

So, you accept?

BRENDA

Let's just work on getting these new members, and some of the old ones, in line and then we'll talk.

DESTINY and MONICA look at BRENDA.

BRENDA

What? You know I can't have them cats messing up what y'all started.

The women laugh and continue their conversation as the lights dim and rise on the office.

JOHN

So, I was thinking about starting a family with Brenda.

KEITH

Awe man! Congratulations, Slick!

ZEKE

Cool, Daddy-o. Another cub in our mist.

JOHN

Nothing is set in stone, but we wanted to do it the right way.

ZEKE

That's what I'm talking about.

KEITH

You're a model brother.

JOHN

We discussed it and decided we want to wait until the time is right.

KEITH

That's the way to do it. Have a conversation with your woman.

TOMMY

Yeah, then we slip up and women will be runnin' things.

KEITH

They've already been. Brenda's been putting in the work. She should be on the Central Committee.

TOMMY

Over my dead body.

JOHN

You got a problem with the Sisters?

KEITH

Why'd you go and ask him that?

JOHN

'Cause we gotta get this straight.

TOMMY

See, they want their own "liberation." We've got to move forward as a united group and they messin' up our forward progress. I've been puttin' in the work as a man and should have certain things offered to me.

ZEKE

Tommy, Panther women are brave, committed and determined—

TOMMY

I'm not sayin' they ain't, but this ain't the place for them if they want things run their way.

KEITH

Tommy, what are you talking about? When I joined we only answered to men. Things have changed. The Party now has female officers. You've got to be on the same page.

TOMMY

Here's the deal. The movement has and always has been for Black empowerment. Black men need to be in power and the women are stoppin' us, standin' on our necks while our backs are against the walls.

The women reenter.

BRENDA

Sorry to break up the reunion, but we've got to get started on today's activities.

JOHN

Before we go—Brenda, can you tell Tommy what women's roles are in the Party.

BRENDA smiles.

BRENDA

We're the backbone. We keep things running, even when the Brothers are in jail. And anyone who has anything different to say, can come and talk to me personally.

Silence. A Beat.

KEITH

Nuff said.

Everyone exits leaving TOMMY standing in the middle of the office. Lights fade.

Scene 5

The screen reads: Two months later. A rally is going on. During the scene, the cast moves throughout the theater. As indicated, they will speak to their "Neighbors" (the audience) and interact with them accordingly. KEITH stands at the podium. MONICA and DESTINY stand in the background.

LEIGH and BRENDA

(chanting)

U-N-I *(clap, clap)* TY! U-N-I *(clap, clap)* TY!

DONNA

Sign up here for People's Free Medical Center. We have a testing site at the Community Center! Be informed: Sickle Cell and Asthma have hit our communities hard!

KEITH

We, the Black Panther Party, see how this capitalistic society has continued to disenfranchise us. Exploit us. Repression is real. And we will not rest until we rid this country of its oppressors. Comrades, the Panther does not back down. The Panther attacks. And our actions must reflect our mindset, our behavior. Recognize the Panther in you!

EVERYONE

Right on!

DESTINY approaches the podium.

DESTINY

Brothers and Sisters, I am here to remind you to not let your friends sit idly by. Take note of how the labor pains increased to give birth to a revolution. You, the people, were conceived in the right moment at the right time. You grew up in the shadow of Jim Crow and were transformed through Black Power and armed resistance. It is imperative that you envision yourself as a part of the revolution. You must act upon it. We are not the same. Radical change is our mission. We must focus, have conversations, and produce action. Do the groundwork and move in solidarity!

EVERYONE

Right On, Right On.

Applause is heard. BRENDA steps up. LEIGH stands at the side of the podium.

BRENDA

Everyone turn to your fellow comrade and say “Comrade.”

EVERYONE

Comrade.

BRENDA

We are in this fight together!

EVERYONE

We are in this fight together!

BRENDA

Thank you for continuing the fight.

EVERYONE

Thank you for continuing the fight.

BRENDA

Power to the People!

EVERYONE

Power to the People!

BRENDA

Let us welcome Sister Monica to the stage.

MONICA

All Power to the People. As owner of Al’s Grocery, I would like to thank you for supporting black businesses. Your purchases help the Panthers run our Free Breakfast Program.

Applause is heard.

However, we still need to address the unequal distribution of wealth in this country. It is a problem that continues to control our lives. They are robbing oppressed communities: Black, White, Latino, and Chinese. It is time for us to seize control of our communities and how goods are produced. Employ our people. Give them the means to liberate themselves and others. All around the world the fight for liberation continues. Join us. Let us give power back to the people!

The group responds.

KEITH

Thank you, Sister Monica.

MONICA

All Power to the People.

EVERYONE

All Power to the People.

KEITH

In five minutes, Zeke, our Field Marshal, will take the stage.

BRENDA and LEIGH

(chanting) Say it loud. I'm Black and I'm Proud.

The chants of the women continue under the rest of the scene but in sotto voice unless indicated by actual dialogue. VALERIE enters and greets DESTINY as she walks off the podium.

TOMMY

'ey brother. Give me five on the black hand side.

JOHN

Hey watch out there now. Do it riiii'ttttee.

TOMMY

The place is packed today.

JOHN

Yes, it is. We've done good with this one.

Donna walks up.

DONNA

Voter Registration is up. We gave out over 100 pairs of shoes and clothes.

TOMMY

(to JOHN)

You see all these beautiful cocoa brown, choc-o-latte, mocha colored bodies up in here?

JOHN

(ignoring TOMMY)

Thanks, Donna. *(to TOMMY)* Man, this is the second event this month. The community is really falling in line with the Party.

TOMMY

Afros and black fists everywhere. Just listen to us, we got soul.

LEIGH and BRENDA

Black Power! It's the hour.

DESTINY and VALERIE

Black Power! It's Ours!

DONNA

See you later. Gotta get some more sign ups. *(to a passerby)* Lois, do you need—

TOMMY

'Ey, ey... John, I even see a few "brothers" of the white persuasion up in here.

JOHN

We don't discriminate. We're for the liberation of all oppressed people. Black, White, Vietnamese, Latino. You know we partnered with the Young Lords, right?

TOMMY

Yeah, yeah.

JOHN

Tommy, you haven't changed. You've moved up in ranks but you still got some growing to do. These women got you—

ZEKE approaches the men. TOMMY quickly changes his demeanor.

TOMMY

I see you, my man. Do your thang, brother.

ZEKE

There is a time and a place for everything, Brother.

KEITH

(Moving towards the men from the audience) Aww, let the Brother have some fun. He's growing up...but it's not going to happen today.

They laugh.

Today is your day Zeke. We're moving into a new era and you're the one taking us there.

ZEKE

Thank you, Keith and I know you know it's important that we free ourselves from behaviors that seek to keep us in an oppressed mindset. But some of us—

TOMMY

I'm not oppressed mentally. I've got all my capabilities. My mind is set.

TOMMY looks at a few ladies in the audience.

KEITH

That's not what Zeke means.

TOMMY

Well, he said oppressed mind and I'm pressin' my mind on findin'—

ZEKE

Brothers, this is the challenge we face as a community. It's hard finding good help... *(to TOMMY)* and Brother, you need help.

The men break out in laughter.

TOMMY

Alright, Alright. I get it. The oppression is about the system. The man.

ZEKE

You're on the right track. Stick around, I'm sure my speech will assist you in many ways.

KEITH

Yeah, Zeke will be talkin' about race, class, and relationships.

TOMMY

Hunh?

ZEKE

I saw you eyein' the sisters.

TOMMY

Oh right, right. I see what you talkin' bout.

ZEKE and KEITH leave and move towards the front of the rally.

THE WOMEN

(chanting in between handclaps)

Black is Beautiful! Black is Beautiful!

TOMMY

Hey, you check that Sister over there? She is foxy.

JOHN

Oh, that's Val. She's Destiny's friend.

TOMMY

I wouldn't mind conversatin' with her for a minute.

JOHN

Did you just hear what Zeke said?

TOMMY

Oh did he mean me?

ZEKE

(at the podium)

It is a glorious occasion that we can come together to talk about the origins of black oppression and how they impact black relationships...

ZEKE continues as TOMMY prepares to make his move. JOHN notices.

JOHN

(Beat) Alright then Tommy, go on then.

TOMMY heads over to where the female Panthers were chanting. He approaches VALERIE. DONNA moves through the crowd.

TOMMY

How do you do? Name's Tommy.

VALERIE

Valerie.

DONNA approaches VALERIE.

DONNA

Valerie, I've got you and Jo signed up for the Health drive tomorrow.

VALERIE

Thanks, Donna.

TOMMY

So, Valerie, I wanted—

MONICA, BRENDA, and DESTINY

“Fight for liberation (Oh Yeah) each and every nation”!

TOMMY

I was saying—

DONNA

Oh and Tommy you're on Breakfast duty with Destiny and Big Rich.

TOMMY

Okay. See you then.

DONNA

No, I'm not gonna be there. Destiny and Big Rich are.

TOMMY

(trying to shoo DONNA away)

Ok, ok. I got it.

DONNA

I just want to make sure you know it's an aaaarrrrly meeting time.

TOMMY

Yessss, Mama D. I got it!

DONNA

Well, you don't have to get all uptight about it.

Donna leaves.

TOMMY

Soooo, the rally is wrappin' up and, ah Zeke, ain't really talkin' 'bout nothin' different. Um, so you wanna grab a shake?

VALERIE

Uh, sure.

TOMMY

I know this great Burger Joint down the way.

VALERIE

I can dig it. Hey Destiny? You wanna go grab a shake? This brother says he knows a groovy spot.

TOMMY is caught off guard.

TOMMY

Yeah, uh, I do. You wanna join us?

DESTINY

I'm in. Hey, B.Free, you want to grab a shake?

BRENDA

Yeah. Thanks for inviting us, Tommy.

TOMMY

(Sulking)

Sure.

BRENDA

Oh, sisters this is Leigh, she's visiting from Texas.

LEIGH

That's right. My cousin Jay said the Panthers are some smooth revolutionary cats and I believe everything he says, so I decided to come down and see what's goin' on.

VALERIE

Welcome Leigh. Won't you join us?

LEIGH

Me? Join you? Yes! I will, I mean... Whew...get it together sister, you're just joining them to get a shake ...Alright...I...um...Yes. Thank ya, Soul Sister!!!

The women laugh. BRENDA and DESTINY leave the group and whisper to each other looking back at TOMMY and VALERIE. LEIGH stands there. After a moment.

LEIGH

Ohhhhh. Right On. Sorry...

LEIGH heads off to find BRENDA and DESTINY.

VALERIE

You didn't think I was gonna go off with you just 'cause you asked me, now did you.

TOMMY

Naaaw, Nope. I didn't think that at all.

VALERIE

And we're staying until Zeke finishes. Catch you in 15.

As the women walk off, JOHN has a laugh at TOMMY's expense. TOMMY looks at him. JOHN returns to the rally. A BEAT.

TOMMY

Humph. They just gonna invite themselves and tell me what they're gonna do. Shit, they don't know who they messin' with. But that Valerie...ooohhh she's somethin' sweet. Damn, I'd probably do anything for her, long as she knows her place.

Lights fade.

Scene 6

The screen reads: Three months later. VALERIE and TOMMY enter the Office and move towards the Storage Room. They begin placing the leftover materials from the meeting into boxes.

VALERIE

I enjoyed that meeting. Sister Monica spoke the truth. I loved hearing her speak—

TOMMY

It was alright.

VALERIE

Tonight, I learned so much from her. She was on another level—I wish I got to know her before she left.

TOMMY

Oh, I knew her.

VALERIE

What did you learn from her? Did she teach you revolutionary skills? Procedures? Legal rights?

TOMMY

You can't learn that from her.

VALERIE

Right...well, she is making revolutionary change—

TOMMY

Humph.

VALERIE

You don't feel the same way?

TOMMY

About having a woman say all of that stuff about liberation—

VALERIE

Well you know she started as a rank and file member, then rose to a section leader and then she and Zeke opened their own chapter—

TOMMY

—seems counter-revolutionary to me.

VALERIE

That is one bad sister. I wish I trained under her. And what she said about relationships. Relationships as a partnership.

TOMMY is silent.

Did you hear me?

TOMMY

Humph.

VALERIE

Well, I just think that for women to take those steps they are leading—

TOMMY

Sheeiittt. Women as leaders?

VALERIE

You got a problem with that?

TOMMY

Yeah, I said it's counter-revolutionary, but you didn't hear me.

VALERIE

Why? They are committed to serving the community just like any man.

TOMMY

Well, it's your duty as a woman to serve a man.

Beat. A longer moment.

VALERIE

Hold on. You think I should serve you or any man for that fact?

TOMMY

Is that a problem?

VALERIE

Tommy, you just crossed a line.

TOMMY

And you're gonna put me back in place?

VALERIE

Check your attitude, brother. I'm just telling you how I feel. I have a right to that.

TOMMY

And you keep throwin' that in my face.

VALERIE

So if it was your sister or Mother saying the same thing, you would treat them the same way?

TOMMY

Don't bring my Mama into this.

VALERIE

Do you even hear what you are saying Tommy? That's not what the Panthers preach.

TOMMY

Yes it is. Look at the Ten Point Program. Men are all over that! We're fighting a system that keeps Black men down. So, it's YOUR job as a black woman to support me.

VALERIE

Hold on, my *JOB* is to support the revolutionary cause. Sisters are doing major things. Look at Kathleen Cleaver, Ericka Huggins, Elaine Brown—

TOMMY

Okay, but they got their men runnin' things for them.

VALERIE

Alright, then what about the women who are fighting against male chauvinism? Do you even think about that?

TOMMY

Naw, I don't and why should I?

VALERIE

Wow. You're not the Brother I thought you were.

TOMMY

And you're a Sister that needs to know her place.

VALERIE begins to move to the storage room door.

VALERIE

I think I should leave—

TOMMY

You keep talkin' that mess—

TOMMY closes the door of the storage room and grabs VALERIE by the arm. She struggles to keep her footing.

TOMMY

If y'all start takin' over, what do I got? Nothing?

VALERIE

It's not like that, Tommy—

TOMMY

I am a man!

VALERIE

I know that—

TOMMY

And can't nothing happen to me! This is a Black Man's Organization. And you ain't shit.

VALERIE

Tommy! You're hurting me. Calm down.

Outside the Office, JOHN and DESTINY walk up.

DESTINY

(Entering)

I'll be right back John, I'm going to grab some more papers for tomorrow.

TOMMY

I can't 'splain nothin' to you.

TOMMY's anger escalates and he becomes more physical. Overhearing a struggle in the storage room, DESTINY opens the door. TOMMY has begun yelling "It's Your Job!" among other things, while he has VALERIE in a choke hold. Once TOMMY sees DESTINY, he lets VALERIE go. VALERIE runs out of the room and into the arms of DESTINY.

VALERIE

(In between gasps)

I tried... to get him...to stop. He... kept telling me it's my job. He doesn't think women—

TOMMY

Oh, we were just relatin'.

DESTINY

Relatin', Tommy? Putting your hands on a woman is how you relate?

JOHN

(entering)

Destiny, can you grab— Hey, what's going on here?

TOMMY

Brother, do me a solid. Tell them how it's done 'round here?

JOHN

'round here?

TOMMY

Yeah, let them know that women have a place in the movement.

JOHN

A place? Tommy your wrong—

TOMMY

No, they have a place, serving a man.

VALERIE

(between gasps)

No...he...

DESTINY

He thinks he can put a hand on a woman and it's alright.

JOHN

Brother, that's not how we treat our women.

TOMMY

But if they disrespect you, you've got to put them in their place.

VALERIE

Disrespect? How? I call you my brother, my comrade, and you do this to me?

TOMMY

See!!See!! This is what I'm talkin' 'bout. I can't be the man I need to be if she standin' in my place!

VALERIE

I'm standing with you not against you.

TOMMY

You betta keep your mouth shut.

DESTINY

Calm down Brother. You are misguided.

TOMMY

You betta stay out of this. You've been walkin' round with your nose up in the air, like you better than everybody.

DESTINY

You must have me mistaken with somebody else. I don't have to walk around with my head any kind of way. I have a right to be—

TOMMY takes a step towards DESTINY. JOHN moves in.

JOHN

TOMMY! You need to leave right now. Naw. you can leave the Party.

TOMMY

So you takin' their side?

JOHN

I'm takin the right side. As Panthers we are equal. Men and women can do any job. We are about empowering the People. Not just men now and women later.

TOMMY

Man, this ain't even worth it. Y'all some jive talkin' fools.

TOMMY storms out of the Office. He picks up a trash can and tosses it at the window. It doesn't break. JOHN rushes outside.

JOHN

So you're a big man now, hunh?

TOMMY

Man, you ain't—

TOMMY spits at JOHN' feet and stands there taunting him. JOHN stands his ground. After a few moments, TOMMY exits. Back in the office, DESTINY is consoling VALERIE.

DESTINY

I'm so sorry, Valerie. What Tommy did to you wasn't right.

VALERIE

I didn't join the Party for this.

DESTINY

I know. Believe me, I—

VALERIE

But he was so nice—

DESTINY

Val, this is my fault, I brought you to the Party.

VALERIE

No. Don't do that—

DESTINY

Val, a Brother, a supposed Comrade attacked you. Someone we allowed into our family. He betrayed you, our trust, our space. And I... That's not how we run things here.

VALERIE

I told him that.

DESTINY

It's in our rules, the 8 Points of Attention.

VALERIE

Destiny, Tommy thought he was above all that. I see that now. He thought he was better than what the Panthers are trying to do here.

DESTINY

I know brothers like him. They feel like they've lost their manhood due to slavery and racism and they see Black Power as the only way they can reclaim it.

VALERIE

But why does it have to come at the expense of women.

DESTINY

It doesn't and it shouldn't. Beginning tomorrow, we are going to address sexism and chauvinism head on. Don't worry, Val. We are here for you.

VALERIE

I appreciate it.

JOHN

(Re-entering)

Valerie, are you alright?

VALERIE

I'm fine. I just, don't know what would have happened if you two didn't walk in when you did.

DESTINY

Don't even think about that.

JOHN

I'm glad we were here. No one should have to experience that.

DESTINY

That brother was messed up.

VALERIE

Is he...

JOHN

Tommy's gone.

DESTINY

And if he ever comes back here, he's going to have to answer to me and Brenda.

JOHN

And me.

VALERIE

Thank you.

DESTINY

John, can you start locking up?

JOHN

Sure.

VALERIE

(To DESTINY)

I want to help you, find ways to tell others about what happened, but I can't, right now. I...I can't, I can't... go home. He knows where I live.

DESTINY

You don't have to. You can stay at the pad with me.

VALERIE

I appreciate it.

JOHN

I'm walking y'all there.

VALERIE

Thank you, John.

The three exit out of the office.

JOHN

When we get there I'll call everyone and let them know Tommy is no longer allowed here or at any of our events.

DESTINY

That's right. And anything you need, Val, we got you.

Lights fade.

Scene 7

The screen reads: A month later. In the dark, a shadow moves throughout the office. Moments later, a car approaches. The car's headlights flash across the windows. The shadow freezes. The car stops and turns off its lights. A car door slams and voices can be heard. The shadow quickly drops behind a desk.

UNSEEN VOICE ONE

Boss said this is the place.

UNSEEN VOICE TWO

This piece of shit? Humph. They act like they was guardin' Fort Knox with all 'em guns and black hats. *(He laughs)* I fig'ur they would've had 'bout five of 'em camped out 'round this place.

We see two figures approach the stage but their faces and distinguishing features are unseen to the audience. They both stop as they think someone is approaching. Then they continue to the office door.

UNSEEN VOICE ONE

(Fumbling with the door)

Looks like were in luck. We can get in and out real quick.

After a moment, they enter the office. As they ransack the place...

UNSEEN VOICE TWO

Look at all this Black Panther crap! "Fight the Power!" "Black is Beautiful"? No wonder Hoover wants them gone.

UNSEEN VOICE ONE

Not just gone. Eliminated. "Prevent the rise of a Black Messiah" he said.

UNSEEN VOICE TWO

We stoppin' Jesus now?? I better get paid extra for this.

UNSEEN VOICE ONE

(Shakes his head)

Boss told me that informant only got \$50 for their information. We gettin' \$200.

UNSEEN VOICE TWO

Ooohhh weeee! With \$200 I can take the wife out for a fancy dinner. Buy her a new dress or somethin'. And put a little somethin' away for Jimmy's education. Shit, we could take a vacation.

UNSEEN VOICE ONE

Yeah, this is a nice pay day. And all we have to do is mess up the place.

UNSEEN VOICE TWO

If that's the case, I could do this all day.

UNSEEN VOICE ONE picks up the phone.

UNSEEN VOICE ONE

Echo 4981.

He listens.

Still works.

UNSEEN VOICE TWO starts going through the filing cabinets. UNSEEN VOICE ONE puts the phone back on the hook and starts moving around the office.

UNSEEN VOICE TWO

I betcha those FBI and CIA boys getting more than us.

UNSEEN VOICE ONE

What? You wanna be one of those stiffs wearing a suit and tie? I thought you liked our uniforms.

UNSEEN VOICE TWO

I do, I just think they get paid better. This roughin' up the place is for the birds. I wanna be where the action is.

UNSEEN VOICE ONE

Maybe we'd get paid better if we captured one of their leaders.

UNSEEN VOICE TWO

(under his breath)

Or kill one.

Right before the storage room door, UNSEEN VOICE ONE trips over something.

UNSEEN VOICE ONE

Well lookie here.

UNSEEN VOICE TWO

What?

UNSEEN VOICE ONE

Looks like we got ourselves Our Own Blackie Panther. Let's make an example of it.

UNSEEN VOICE TWO

Hey, maybe you could get a new car with this one?? Or a boat!

UNSEEN VOICE ONE

Now what would I do with a boat?

UNSEEN FIGURE starts to move.

Whoa. Hold your horses. You just might be worth a pretty penny.

UNSEEN VOICE ONE takes a closer look.

Oh, you're the one we've been looking for. They've been talking about you for a while.

UNSEEN VOICE TWO

You here alone?

UNSEEN FIGURE is silent.

UNSEEN VOICE ONE

Oh you one of them uppity ones. Hold them down while I check out the backroom.

UNSEEN VOICE TWO

Got it.

A scuffle ensues. Shouts are heard. Words become inaudible. Then— A Gunshot.

BLACK OUT.

Scene 8

The screen is blank. Lights slowly rise on the OFFICE. DESTINY stands, unable to move, in the middle of the Office. DONNA and VALERIE surround her. A body lies on the floor. At this point, all the audience can see is the bottom half of the body. As the lights rise, VALERIE speaks.

VALERIE

Donna, what happened?

DONNA

It, it, was like this when we arrived. I noticed the door was slightly open. When Keith and I entered, I went behind the desk and noticed...

She starts to break down.

VALERIE

It's alright Donna.

DONNA

I, I, I'm sorry, I, just, didn't know who to call.

VALERIE

You did the right thing.

DONNA

I...can't believe they—

VALERIE

Good thing Keith was with you.

DONNA

It's...just...that...

VALERIE

I know Donna.

DONNA

I was out with Keith. We stopped for some ice cream. If I'd been home, I could've stopped it or done something—

VALERIE

But where would that have put us? Where would you be?

DONNA

But...it's my fault. I was the one—

KEITH enters.

KEITH

Donna, babe. Take a breath.

VALERIE

What was she doing here alone?

KEITH

She was hiding this for me.

He reaches in the desk and produces a ring.

I was going to propose to Donna.

DONNA breaks down.

DONNA

She was here for me? Keith—you had her hide this for me? Why?

KEITH

I wanted to surprise you.

DONNA

And now she's dead. She wasn't supposed to be—

DESTINY

...Brenda.

Everyone turns to DESTINY.

DESTINY

Someone...should...get...her...a blanket. To... cover her up. She wouldn't want to be found...like this—

DONNA

I got it. I need to get some air.

She exits and runs to her apartment. ZEKE and JOHN run into the OFFICE from SR.

ZEKE

What happened?

JOHN

(seeing the body)

Brenda?!!! Brenda!!!

KEITH

John...

JOHN

Nooo!!! Noooooooo. My queen...my beautiful queen.

VALERIE

(to ZEKE)

Donna and Keith found her like this.

ZEKE

What was she doing here?

JOHN

DAMN THESE PIGS!!!

DESTINY

John—

DONNA exits her building with a blanket. She stops at the pay phone and makes a call.

DONNA

You didn't tell me someone would be killed. I thought you were just going to send a message.

She hangs up and runs into the office.

DONNA

Here, Destiny.

DESTINY takes the blanket and moves to cover BRENDA.

JOHN

Don't cover her up! I want to see her!

He bends down and cradles BRENDA, we now see she has been shot in the head.

Oh, my queen. My love. I'm sorry I wasn't here, baby. I...I was supposed to protect you. I'm sorry, I'm sorry... It should have been me... We were meant to protect each other...

DONNA

(Placing her hand on JOHN's shoulder)

John—

JOHN

Don't!

ZEKE

Let's give him some privacy.

Everyone exits and stands outside the front door. As he is leaving, KEITH grabs a shotgun.

KEITH

I got it.

While the group talks, KEITH canvases the area, keeping watch. VALERIE, gun in hand, checks the front.

VALERIE

I can't believe she's gone.

KEITH

Somebody had to tip them off.

DONNA

And tomorrow is the chapter's one-year anniversary.

DESTINY

That's right. And we would've still been here prepping for the celebration if you hadn't organized the community to help us out.

ZEKE

One year. Even more ammo for them to do this.

VALERIE

What are we going to do?

DESTINY

We're going to mobilize and we're going to keep fighting. Set up a 10-10-10 and get the community involved and organized. *(to VALERIE)* You think you can find a way to add what happened here into the classes? We've got to get the badge number of every Pig we see policing our people. Make sure we stay civil but know the law.

VALERIE

Right on, I got you.

KEITH walks by. VALERIE takes his route.

DESTINY

Keith, get with those lawyers working on the New York case. We need them down here this week. *(to ZEKE)* You and Monica talk to the business owners in the area. And Donna, let's get the community on this. Arm them with action.

KEITH

Right on, Sis.

DESTINY

I'll talk to John.

As DESTINY re-enters the OFFICE, the group continues talking and watching the area.

John.

JOHN

Lil' D?

DESTINY

Yeah, John. I'm here.

JOHN

She put up a fight.

DESTINY

That's B for you.

A moment.

Let's cover Brenda.

JOHN obliges. Another moment passes.

I'll make sure we have a big memorial for her and when you're ready, I'll need your help with mobilizing—

JOHN

Help?!? There's no point! They take what they want.

DESTINY

There's always a point.

JOHN

You think they care 'bout us? That's the war we're fighting! And now one of ours has been murdered.

DESTINY

We must continue—

JOHN

Continue, what?

DESTINY

We need justice for Brenda.

BEAT.

How we respond will dictate our future.

A Moment.

JOHN

You're the only one who can do it.

DESTINY

That's right. Sis trained me right.

JOHN

Yeah, yeah she did. *(As he kisses BRENDA)* Don't worry, baby, we've got it. We'll live for you.

DESTINY

Every day.

Lights fade as DESTINY hugs JOHN and BRENDA.

Scene 9

The office is dark and remains dark during the scene. On the screen is a black and white photo of BRENDA. Each character stands in a line and stares directly out into the audience. When they begin speaking, a spotlight rises to only illuminate their face and chest. Additionally, each character's arms are handcuffed or chained in some sort of fashion (either behind or in front of them). The handcuffs or chains should not be visible to the audience (possibly hidden by clothing or by body position). To do this effectively, it will require some creativity.

To clarify, Scene 9 is a transition. The characters are in separate spaces both physically and intellectually. The dialogue jumps across time to evoke the present, memory, and forward progress over the course of ten months. The photographs on the screen switch over time. What each photo reflects are the director's choice, but should be black and white photos of the actors in character over ten months.

JOHN

We buried a woman of great influence today. Sister was baaadd, she kept me on track. I see her in everything Destiny is trying to do here. We started changing things after Brenda was killed. Some members became fearful, some turned combative, while others proved their dedication. The chapter is on the right track, but it's still a work in progress.

ZEKE

Unfortunately, our efforts to free Charles took longer than we anticipated. Two weeks ago, Charles died in jail. The news said it was an uprising. I don't believe that. Freeing our political prisoners that are unjustly held in prison cells around the world has always been my mission and today I am announcing that I am running for political office.

DONNA

After Brenda was killed, they never asked me for information again. She's dead because of me. If they only knew the truth...

Keith walks by and tries to touch DONNA. She cringes.

KEITH

Donna? She's been distant. I've taken over some of the office work, but it's not the same. A new year has come and things haven't been the same. Things are shifting in Oakland and chapters across the country are feeling it. I think it might be time to move on...

TOMMY

I thought about going to Brenda's funeral, but it wouldn't have been right. John told me not to come back. If I'd have gone, what would I have said? Who was I to say what a revolutionary should or should not look like? I realize now that I was wrong, but there's nothing I can do. I can't go back to the chapter. I wish I could take everything back.

VALERIE

I didn't know Brenda as well as the others but she always showed me love. That's one thing I remember about her. I wanted to find ways to love again and help other brothers and sisters in their relationships, so I created and implemented additional Political Education classes on healthy relationships.

A Moment.

Tommy? I don't dwell on the past. I'm working towards my revolutionary future.

LEIGH

I've been thinking about leaving my chapter. I thought the Party would help me belong. But yesterday, I, I couldn't even look at the Brother outside my chapter. I thought he was going to attack me, just like the others. *(BEAT)* Before I joined the Party, I saw these beautiful black men, dressed to the nines and I was in awe. I loved the physical things they represented. Strength, power and determination. I wanted to submit, yield to their every command. When I joined some of the men were nice but others...were...

MONICA

Zeke and I stayed with our plan: we ran the shop for a year and then left to start our own chapter. After that, Destiny was appointed to Deputy Chairman. A few weeks ago, I received an invitation from her. It said "Women. Redefine and join us at New Haven." I love it. That's one down Sister.

DESTINY

She left me a note. That's Brenda for you. *(BEAT)* I didn't find it until two months... later. "Think of how you can redefine and be free," she wrote. She was an inspiration. Even though she would test you. How do you say thank you to someone that helped you see you? *(BEAT)* You continue the work.

A moment.

After becoming Deputy Chairman, I decided to get a group of women together from different chapters so we could discuss the Party's future. We've got to be smarter. We must talk about our experiences so we can move forward. The good and the bad— Although we haven't achieved all our goals, I don't believe sitting and waiting for something to happen to be my destiny. The time has come for us to tell our story in our own words. Without Romanticizing it. Tell it aloud for others to hear. Or we may—

Forget— JOHN

Lose— MONICA

Ignore— TOMMY

Die— ZEKE

Suffer Abuse— VALERIE

Live a lie— DONNA

Give up— LEIGH

Leave— KEITH

DESTINY
—without finding and claiming our path and “BE FREE”!

*On DESTINY's “FREE”, the screen goes black and a large set of keys on a key ring is thrown across the stage from SL to C. Everyone watches. They wait. They wait a bit longer. DESTINY steps forward and pulls her hands out of her shirt/ jacket. It is only now that we see she is handcuffed. DESTINY picks up the keys, tries them, finds the correct one and removes her handcuffs. Once free, she tosses the keys to VALERIE. The chain of unlocking continues. We won't see when the final person is freed, but we remain hopeful that freedom is coming...
Fade to Black.*

Scene 10

During the previous scene, the office has disappeared. The space now looks like a large classroom with the chairs in the shape of a half-moon. At the top of the scene, DESTINY, VALERIE, and MONICA are moving around the room. The time is now Spring 1971. The screen reflects the same.

DESTINY

Lookin' good. A few more things and we'll be set.

MONICA

Destiny, you are one righteous sister. You've done a wonderful job putting this together.

DESTINY

Thank you.

VALERIE

Sister Monica, I can't wait to hear about your chapter—

LEIGH enters. She looks as if she has been traveling for days.

LEIGH

Hi, um. I'm not sure if this is the right place. Or if I am too early, or—

VALERIE

Nope, you're right on time.

LEIGH

The flyer said one o'clock. But it's 11:30.

VALERIE

You're fine. Come on in and have a seat.

LEIGH contemplates.

DESTINY

Don't worry, you don't have to do anything, unless you want to. We're just glad you're here.

LEIGH

Thank you.

LEIGH moves to a chair near the back. She puts down her bag and takes off her hat.

DESTINY

Wait— I know you. You came to the rally a couple of years ago. You're Leigh.

LEIGH

You remember me?

DESTINY

I do. You were only fourteen when you came to the rally. And at the soda shop, you helped the waitress after she spilled her tray of food.

LEIGH

I remember that white lady was shocked to see all of us.

VALERIE

In our full Panther uniforms!!

They share a laugh. DESTINY hugs LEIGH.

DESTINY

You are welcome here.

VALERIE

Sisters, I've got some news. I'm opening a school.

DESTINY

Right On.

MONICA

That's wonderful.

VALERIE

Over the next couple of months, I'll be creating the curriculum and I'd love your input.

DESTINY

I'm there, whatever you need, Val. Monica, how's things with you?

MONICA

Wonderful. Zeke's running for political office.

DESTINY

He's got my vote. And the chapter? How's it going?

MONICA

It's going. We took our time and focused our efforts on adopting principles and reading books that united us as men and women in the revolutionary fight. One was understanding the ideas laid out in *The Panther* to the point where we could recite and expand on the articles. It was not

only our duty to sell *The Panther*, but to live it. Approaching it in this manner took us to another level.

DESTINY

That's what I'm talking about.

LEIGH

—And what about the deaths? Not physically but mentally. How do you avenge them?

The women stop and turn to LEIGH.

MONICA

It's alright. You didn't say anything wrong.

LEIGH

I'm sorry, I shouldn't have spoken out of turn.

DESTINY

Leigh, it's fine. You're among friends.

VALERIE

This is a safe space.

LEIGH

Safe, humph, I don't know where I feel safe anymore.

DESTINY

Why is that?

Silence.

Do you want to tell us about it?

LEIGH

Anything I say will stay between us?

MONICA

You have our word.

DESTINY and VALERIE agree.

LEIGH

When I left the rally, I said to myself "I'm going to be a Panther". I felt the love you had for the people and each other and I wanted to feel it too. It...there was something about that feeling...Unfortunately, I had to wait. You see, I come from a line of ministers and I guess you could say that was their form of activism. They mainly followed the Non-Violent principles of Dr. King, but, I wanted something different.

The women share their agreement.

So, on my sixteenth birthday, I joined the Black Panthers. But...I...

A moment.

I thought being a Panther would enlighten me...but from what I've seen...it doesn't enlighten me....it only scares me.

DESTINY

What do you mean?

LEIGH

Men have constantly tried to control me. I thought being a Panther would change that, but nothing ever changes.

VALERIE

Not all men are like that—

LEIGH

They said they would make an example of me if I spoke out.

VALERIE

Leigh, I know what you're going through. I was a victim of violence.

LEIGH

You were?

VALERIE

Yes, and if it wasn't for Destiny and John, I don't know where I would be.

LEIGH

John? A man helped you?

VALERIE

Yes.

LEIGH

I don't believe you, you look so "together."

VALERIE

That's on the outside. It took a while for me to reclaim what I had lost.

DESTINY

And we all helped her.

LEIGH

But what if men continue to take advantage of you?

VALERIE

You have to speak up.

DESTINY

Find someone within the Party you can talk to.

LEIGH

I don't know who I can talk to.

MONICA

You're talking to us. You shouldn't have to suffer in silence.

VALERIE

Our bodies are ours. Not any man's.

LEIGH

I wish that was true.

VALERIE

Leigh, do you think it was your fault? That you were abused?

LEIGH

That's what they said. So I believed them.

MONICA

Oh, honey.

LEIGH

They didn't want me there. They kept saying "You can't be a Panther. You're just a girl. This is men's work. This ain't no place for you. Get in the kitchen and do your job." But I stood strong. I held my own... I showed them what a woman could do. I truly wanted to be a Panther. I needed to be a Panther. I kept it up, until...

VALERIE

You don't need to say anything else until you're ready.

LEIGH

I am ready. When I saw you three here, I knew you would help me.

VALERIE

Let us bring you into a new understanding and help you heal.

The women gather around LEIGH in a ritual of love, patience, and surrender. After a moment, JOHN taps on the door. DESTINY exits and the two move DL to talk. Then DESTINY re-enters.

DESTINY

Sisters, I'll be right back.

The conversation inside continues. Lights go down on the classroom as DESTINY exits. DONNA enters carrying a tray of sandwiches.

DONNA

Afternoon.

JOHN takes the sandwiches and places them on a box outside the room.

What's this?

DESTINY

We're putting you on trial.

DONNA

Trial? For what?

JOHN

Crimes against the Party.

DESTINY

We know you gave the Pigs information.

DONNA

No—

KEITH

Donna, please don't lie anymore.

DONNA

What lies?

JOHN

Donna.

DONNA

You're going to do this here? Right now?

DESTINY, KEITH, and JOHN wait.

DONNA

I, I, I made a mistake.

DESTINY

It wasn't just a mistake.

JOHN

Let her talk.

DONNA

I, I made a mistake.... A few years ago. I gave them some information and— I told them about our internal organization. I had to.

DESTINY

Why?

DONNA

They had information on me, my family. Things I did before I joined. I couldn't lose all of that.

DESTINY

You couldn't lose—

DONNA

They would've put me in jail. It wasn't my fault. I was young, my boyfriend at the time—

DESTINY

They used you, Donna. And you gave them what they wanted. You turned on your own people.

DONNA

No... it wasn't like that. I thought, if I just help them out a little, it would be all over.

DESTINY is silent.

But then I got attached to the Party, the People. Keith, Brenda, Zeke, Monica, John... You. And I couldn't end my surveillance. They wanted more.

DESTINY

And you gave it to them.

DONNA

I had to.

DESTINY

Thank you.

DONNA

I knew you would understand.

DESTINY

(to JOHN and KEITH) You can take her.

DONNA

What??

DESTINY is unfazed.

KEITH

You think this is the best way?

JOHN

Destiny said “Donna has to be brought to trial.” We’re holding her until then.

KEITH and JOHN move DONNA into the audience. DESTINY follows.

DONNA

DESTINY!! Please, don’t do this. I see how you’ve impacted our chapter. The Party. You’re doing things that make all of us proud. Brenda would’ve been proud.

DESTINY

Don’t bring Brenda into this.

DONNA

I didn’t mean—

DESTINY

You can’t be trusted.

DONNA

But I’ve changed. They haven’t contacted me in over a year.

DESTINY

Who knows how long you’ve been doing this. How many lives you’ve impacted. (BEAT) Was Brenda killed because of you?

DONNA is silent.

DONNA

I don’t know. I, I, I think so, but I can’t say for sure.

DESTINY

You can’t say?!?

DONNA

Destiny, please. I came clean.

JOHN

You only came clean when we approached you.

DONNA

I wanted to say something, but I couldn't. But I said something now.

DESTINY

It was a year too late.

DONNA

Keith, honey. Don't let her—

KEITH

I don't know who you are. I don't think I ever did.

DONNA

But I knew you. I wasn't lying when I was with you.

KEITH

I loved you—

DESTINY

Take her away.

DONNA

Destiny—

DESTINY

Take her—
We can't trust you.

DONNA
Destiny, please!

DONNA

I'm sorry!!

DESTINY

I am too.

As DESTINY leaves DONNA turns eerily quiet. After a moment, KEITH and JOHN take her away.

Epilogue

It is now Summer 1971. The screen is blank. A lot has changed. Lights slowly rise on a podium. DESTINY steps up to the podium out of the shadows. As each woman or man speaks their first line, they become illuminated as well. DONNA and TOMMY are here as well, but they are separated from the main speakers.

DESTINY

I am honored to be here today. Not just for the Party but...

MONICA

For our women.

VALERIE

For our children.

KEITH

For our men.

DESTINY

Earlier this year a group of women met to discuss our collective futures. Our meeting proved fruitful and we, as a united organization, will move forward in a way that we feel will continue the legacy laid by our founders and revolutionaries before us.

LEIGH

We fight—

JOHN

For those we lost along the way.

DESTINY

For those who are unknown.

KEITH

For those who laid the foundation.

ZEKE

For those continuing the fight. Our political prisoners.

VALERIE

We will always speak your names—

JOHN

your contributions

LEIGH
your sacrifices.

ALL
We remember you.

VALERIE
The voices that were unheard.

MONICA
Stifled.

DONNA
Lost.

TOMMY
Misinformed.

DESTINY
We will not forget you.

ALL WOMEN
We fight for you every day.

LEIGH
We won't turn our backs.

DESTINY
We must reexamine our lives. Our relationships.

TOMMY
Our misunderstandings.

DONNA
Our mistakes.

MONICA
To move forward—

TOMMY
to educate—

JOHN
and approach our differences and similarities within the Party.

KEITH

And although the issues we face in society are still the same.

LEIGH

We remain vigilant—

VALERIE

That all oppressed people must be given the power and freedom to make their own decisions.

JOHN

They must be able to lead without fear or resentment.

ALL

We can't fail our people.

BRENDA (V.O)

The fight continues....

ALL

We (*indicating the audience*) cannot fail.

BRENDA (V.O)

The fight continues...The fight continues... The fight continues...

LEIGH

With you.

MONICA

With us.

ALL

Together.

BRENDA (V.O.)

And as we progress, we must proclaim—

DESTINY

I am. You are. We are. Revolutionary. I AM A REVOLUTIONARY!

DESTINY raises her fist in a Black Power Salute. The rest follow.

BLACKOUT.

End of Play

The Evolution of a Play Through Research: A Reflection

In developing a new work, the process of trial and error, editing and revamping, consumes the playwright, much like the process the Black Panther Party's co-founders, Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale, experienced as they revisited philosophies and ideas to find the right approach to obtain revolutionary change. As I reflect on my process, developing revolutionary characters, the forms of female leadership, and male/female relationships were key elements I wanted to explore in *10 Steps Towards Revolution*. Informed by my research and a previous play, *A Fictional Meeting of the Female Minds*, I began writing a narrative that I believed could operate in academic and performance spaces.

In 2014, I wrote a short one act, *A Fictional Meeting of the Female Minds*, for Dr. Robbie Lieberman's Social Movements course.⁵⁹ Drawing inspiration from the Black Panther Party, in its beginning stages *A Fictional Meeting* followed six female Panthers debating how they might continue Party work in 1971, but under female leadership. Because the six women were from different chapters within the Party with varying views on approaching the future, it quickly becomes apparent that they must first deal with the facts and reality of their situations and experiences as Panther women before they can move forward. Over the course of the play, the women seek to tackle their differences and the lingering effects of sexism, chauvinism, and abuse, so they as Panthers can collectively focus their efforts toward liberation.

My Capstone research in 2015 shifted this approach and I decided to develop a new play that followed the day-to-day lives of Panther women between 1968 and 1971. As *A Fictional Meeting* provided the opportunity to explore a "what-if" scenario set in 1971, *10 Steps* was

⁵⁹ From this point on, I will refer to *A Fictional Meeting of the Female Minds* as *A Fictional Meeting* and *10 Steps Towards Revolution* as *10 Steps*.

structured to traverse several years and follow a female protagonist during the height of the Black Panther Party. Exploring a new premise, it was important to incorporate female voices from various Panther chapters, as I did in *A Fictional Meeting*. This would serve the play and provide another avenue to highlight both known and unknown female Panthers' experiences and contributions for multiple audiences. Advancing *10 Steps* in this manner, I also sought to merge the two plays together, ending with the fictional meeting between Panther females. However, the transition did not prove as fruitful as I had hoped. For me, the plays operated on their own. As a nod to *A Fictional Meeting*, I retained some references and some interactions in Scenes Nine and Ten of *10 Steps*. By doing this, it opened the possibilities of creating *A Fictional Meeting* as a companion piece in the future.

Creating Characters as Politically Charged Actors Through the Ten Point Program

Recognizing additional writing possibilities (due to my previous work and current research on the Panthers), I placed my attention on allowing the characters' relationships to drive conflict. To develop strong characters and their relationship to others and their environment, understanding how the characters' social, political, emotional, and intellectual states were influenced by internal and external forces that impeded Party progress was fundamental. Additionally, it was important to find creative ways to incorporate what scholars noted about the internal and external conditions, without being overly didactic in my approach. I wanted to avoid recreating "talking heads", characters who delivered information (or regurgitated facts) with little dramatic action and/or tension.⁶⁰ The characters needed to be affected by the environment, other characters, and/or their realities which produces the tension, conflict, and drama I needed.

⁶⁰ Dr. Lieberman noted, in some sections, *A Fictional Meeting* contained "talking heads".

While taking Dr. Aaron Levy's Advanced Playwriting course, I began centering the story around a young female Panther named Destiny. Below is that proposal:

The play surrounds a young woman at a crossroads, who joins the Party. As the play delves deeper into the impact of gender and agency on the life of a revolutionary (which is linked to and rests outside of the male-dominated narrative), this young female Panther undergoes a private and public transformation alongside other Panthers who embody the Ten Point Program.

Combining my Capstone research with this premise, I set out to explore the following:

- Character embodiment of the Ten Point Program and how it is presented in the play
- The experiences of Panther women, including social conditions and interpersonal relationships
- How Panther Women contributed to the Party's narrative and legacy

Solidifying these approaches provided the foundation for creating ten characters, establishing the given circumstances of the play, and connecting my work to scholarship on the Black Panther Party.

After completing Dr. Levy's course in 2016 and while working on the current version of the play in Spring 2017, I decided on the title. I arrived at this conclusion after I noticed the play's direction and evolution involved a process of defining and redefining approaches. In the title, I saw a connection between the evolution of the Panthers' ideology and revolutionary work, which includes recognizing the need for change and acting upon it, and my process of researching, writing, and editing a story based on Panther experiences. I concluded that *10 Steps Towards Revolution* served the play as it contained a multi-layered meaning.

The “Ten” signifies the Ten Points in the Black Panther Party’s Program and Platform in addition to the number of characters and scenes.⁶¹ Because one of my original ideas surrounded the ways Panther women exemplified qualities of the Ten Point Program and Platform, which, as the character Tommy believes, was developed for men, I chose to have ten characters, six women and four men.⁶² Choosing to have six women was a way to acknowledge the rise in the Party’s female membership and I wanted the play’s fictional Chapter to reflect the same.

The word “Steps” refers to the characters in the play and obstacles they must overcome. In every scene, at least one character encountered a “step.” Approaching the characters in this manner, I hoped the play would assist the audience in viewing the characters as a step. “Steps” also represent forward progress. As time passes, the audience sees the characters overcoming, avoiding, resting on, slowly traversing down, or quickly running up a step(s) towards a goal of revolutionary change.

In a speech on the origins of the Black Panther Party’s ideology, Huey P. Newton clarifies “A Ten Point Program, that is not revolutionary in itself, nor is it reformist. It’s a ‘Survival program’ and for the Program to become revolutionary, it must involve people.”⁶³ After reading Newton’s assessment of the Program, I noted the connections to my idea of creating ten characters as a physical manifestation of a survival program. The characters, *the ten steps*, become *revolutionary* as they, the people, represent the necessary means to achieve (and move *towards*) liberation. Further deconstructing this idea and relating it to the play, if the

⁶¹ For more on The Ten Point Program and Platform see “Appendix A” in Jones and Jeffries’ *The Black Panther Party Reconsidered* and the website *It’s About Time: The Black Panther Party Legacy and Alumni*.

⁶² KMW, *10 Steps*, Scene Six.

⁶³ Huey P. Newton, “Let us hold high the banner of Intercommunalism and invincible thoughts of Huey P. Newton, Minister of Defense and Supreme Commander of the Black Panther Party,” *It’s About Time: Black Panther Party Legacy and Alumni*, Accessed February 28, 2017, http://www.itsabouttimebpp.com/Huey_P_Newton/pdf/Huey.pdf.

characters do not address Tommy's chauvinism, Donna's betrayal, Destiny's needs, Valerie's abuse, Zeke's attack, Brenda's death, Keith's distance, John's pain, Monica's leaving, and Leigh's fear alongside acknowledging their successes as activists and the contributions of Panther women, they, the "Survival Program," will remain a static means to achieve revolution. Therefore, envisioning the characters as "works in progress"—whose patterns of behavior are influenced by their interactions in and with the world around them, I created the following ten characters (*In parentheses are their corresponding points from The 10PP*):

Destiny- A girl at a crossroads. She hopes the Panthers will help her achieve personal goals. Over time, she eventually becomes a pivotal figure within the Party. (*Point One*)

Monica- Mother, committed revolutionary, and future business owner. Monica supports the seizure of production and expanding it in multiple locations. (*Point Two*)

Keith- A charismatic writer. Keith utilizes his position to inform the masses about the realities of the hegemonic control over the oppressed and what they, as the oppressed, are owed and how they should obtain it. (*Point Three*)

Donna- Manages the Panther office. Critical of outsiders. Before joining the Party, her boyfriend implicated her in a crime. Threatened by the police, she became an undercover informant. However, her work garnering community support and implementing Community Programs helped grow the Party's chapter. (*Point Four*)

Valerie- Friend of Destiny. Valerie joins the Party because she is interested in female leadership. Unfortunately, she becomes a victim of an attack. Later she uses her experience to help future Panthers by creating education programs and lessons. (*Point Five*)

Tommy- Multi-faceted. Harbors feelings of chauvinism and fear due to the rise in female membership. Critical of the military. Desperately wants to be in a position of power.

(Point Six)

John- A man's man with a soft side for Brenda. His transformation from the lumpen, a brother from the street, is a work-in-progress. Passionate and loyal. *(Point Seven)*

Zeke- Captain of the chapter. Visionary. Husband of Monica and father of two. An imprisonment of a fellow Panther affects Zeke and he eventually runs for political office.

(Point Eight)

Leigh- A sixteen-year-old who recently joined the Party and unfortunately experiences abuse soon thereafter. *(Point Nine)*

Brenda- A driven individual who is positioned to become the next National Party Chairman. *(Point Ten)*

Given the large cast, a few characters appear underdeveloped. Currently, Leigh and Keith do not completely reflect their *Points* in the Ten Point Program. I incorporated Leigh's embodiment of Point Nine by shifting the audience's attention to Donna's interrogation in Scene Nine. Because Point Nine deals with having a trial with a jury of peers, I wanted the audience to bridge the gap between how Destiny, John, and Keith handle the interrogation of Donna (and the subsequent trial) and the possible solution Monica and Valerie may suggest to Leigh. While this may not accurately define Point Nine, it is how I creatively chose to explore the Point within the play. As for Keith, his dialogue and writings in *The Panther* mainly reflect what his Point seeks to accomplish. However, at times, it may seem that his character does not fully embody it.

Towards the middle of the play, Keith moves into a supportive role, providing protection and

manpower. In this shift, Keith, and Point Three's focus on reparations, become an underlying motivation (or support) to the other characters as they seek to achieve their goals. While the play provides a glimpse into this Party's chapter and the lives of its members, it is not all inclusive. This is also reflective of the Black Panther Party. Not all chapters are alike. Therefore, having more defined female characters that influenced or impacted the other characters assisted in supporting my research goals.

Women and Their Agency

As a playwright, I wanted the play to inform the artists and audiences about the realities of being a female revolutionary actor. This began with exploring the words *actor* and *work* as they pertain to both revolutionaries and artists. As revolutionaries, the Panthers' action involves work and total commitment to their cause. In acting, the work is a process involving the actor rigorously applying him/herself to the text and preparing to take on the demands of a role. Connecting the revolutionary actor to the theater actor, I began asking the following questions: What is a Revolutionary Woman? How does a Revolutionary Woman look? How do they envision themselves? And how similar or different is their perception from the way society views them? What liberties could I take with their portrayals?

As stated in the proposal for *10 Steps*, the play's main action would revolve around Destiny and her transformation. A key text that provided creative inspiration was the 1969 leaflet/interview "Panther Sisters on Women's Liberation." Transforming this interview into text, I chose to highlight the differences in the Panther Sisters' responses to how liberation could be achieved. In this text, I noticed that the women remain nameless unless another female refers to them. The absence of naming prompted me to know more about the Sisters' ranks, the anonymous interviewer, the intended focus of the piece, and if the final text was edited or altered

to project a specific message. To answer these questions, I sought to explore the following:
Female Roles and Leadership and *Male/Female Relationships* through dramatic action.

Female Roles and Leadership

Accessing the action in *10 Steps* and how it centers around one chapter, I began to wonder if audience members might perceive that all chapters of the Black Panther Party operated in this manner. Until this point, events taking place in other chapters were conveyed through male eyes.⁶⁴ Shifting the narrative to female experiences, Scene Ten includes the first direct mentioning of their experiences. However, their experiences and contributions are integrated into the action and dialogue throughout the play in the discussion of the following topics:

- “Black manhood is not dependent on the subordination of women, but rather, his manhood is, in fact, dependent on his revolutionary relationship.”⁶⁵ (Anonymous Panther Woman “Panther Sisters on Women’s Liberation”) as seen in Scene Six.
- “The women who were drawn to the Black Panther Party were all feminists, not in the way that feminism is looked at today, in which you have to go step by step in order to claim yourself as a feminist. But we generally believed in the political, social, economic and sexual equality of women and girls.”⁶⁶ (Ericka Huggins in the article “The Panthers’ Revolutionary Feminism”).
- Female leadership or activism viewed as counter-revolutionary (Elaine Brown, *A Taste of Freedom*) as seen in Scene Four, end of Scene Five, and Scene Six.

⁶⁴ See Tommy’s story about Bobby Hutton and Zeke’s return in Scene Four of *10 Steps*.

⁶⁵ “Panther Sisters on Liberation”, 343.

⁶⁶ Tillet, “The Panthers’ Revolutionary Feminism”.

Expanding on the diversity across Party chapters including approaches to Black Panther ideology, Scene Ten explores this diversity when Monica and Leigh attend Destiny's organized meeting. In a discussion of chapter practices, Monica's dialogue reflects Ronaldo Anderson's research on the Des Moines, Iowa chapter and Jon Rice's research on the Illinois Panthers. Anderson tackles how the Des Moines Panthers dealt with required texts, such as Eldridge Cleaver's *Soul on Ice*, and how they saw it as detrimental to the progress and unity of their chapter.⁶⁷ Rice explores the impact of the Black Panthers and Fred Hampton on Chicagoans and their approaches to building relationships with the community, which resulted in motivating the community to continue the work after Hampton's death.⁶⁸ Incorporating both Anderson and Rice's research in Monica's discussion about how she operates her new chapter, I created the following dialogue:

MONICA: We took our time and focused our efforts on adopting principles and reading books that united us as men and women in the revolutionary fight. One was understanding the ideas laid out in *The Panther* to the point where we could recite and expand on the articles. It was not only our duty to sell *The Panther*, but to live it.⁶⁹

This elicits a response from Leigh, who uses an analogy to talk about her experience:

LEIGH: —And what about the deaths? Not physically but mentally. How do you avenge them?

⁶⁷ Reynaldo Anderson, "Practical Internationalists: The Story of the Des Moines, Iowa, Black Panther Party" in *Groundwork: Local Black Freedom Movements in America*, eds. Jeanne Theoharis and Komozi Woodard (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 293.

⁶⁸ John Rice, "The World of the Illinois Panthers" in *Freedom North: Black Freedom Struggles Outside the South, 1940-1980* eds. Jeanne F. Theoharis and Komozi Woodard (New York: Palgrave Mcmillian, 2003), 52.

Leigh further reveals what she sees as “deaths”—the physical, psychological, and emotional effects of abuse. In this moment, the audience becomes aware that Leigh’s experience differs widely from her attendance at the rally two years before. Because men viewed her as a vessel only created to satisfy a need and/or to be controlled in the other chapter, her ability to determine her path was impacted by men asserting their power due to perceptions of manhood.

In exploring the creation of characters as politically charged actors, I sought to focus my attention on developing female characters that would inspire audiences to perform their own research on Panther women. During this process, I focused on finding ways the female characters would represent some of the experiences of Panther women while exploring the “What ifs” of their interactions with other characters.

Destiny. Throughout the writing process, one issue that remained at the forefront of questioning was how I would evolve Destiny into a protagonist. Her transformation was intended to be the guiding force of the play, therefore, it was important to find a way to develop her own voice, in addition to clearly defining the impact of Panther women on her life. This led to the creation of Scene Three, where Brenda, passionate about understanding black female positionality and the pursuit of goals, encourages Destiny to take the same approach. Here, to redirect the focus of the play back to Destiny, I began to address how she experiences acceptance, indifference, abuse, and betrayal. During Scene Three, she reveals how she came to join the Panthers. For Destiny, sharing her story with her new Sisters will prove taxing, as she is unsure how she will handle it and how they will respond. However, by confessing, she begins her transformation into a leader within the chapter.

Brenda. Taking inspiration from Joy James’ assessment of Assata Shakur’s hybridity, I focused on creating Brenda as a woman with the ability to traverse multiple spaces without her gender

being a factor.⁷⁰ Although Brenda is romantically linked to John, their relationship does not define how she is perceived within the chapter, as she is recognized for her own contributions. For me, Brenda is the only character who is aware of how the intersections of race, class, and gender impact Black women during this time. In Scene Three, while referring to a flyer encouraging all women to join the Feminist Movement, Brenda educates Destiny on how the mainstream Feminist Movement does not address the actualities of Black women. Intertwined in Brenda's short passage about female activism, I incorporated Elaine Brown's experience ascending to Chairman of the Party. Brown discusses how some men viewed "A woman asserting herself [as] a pariah" and Panther women seeking their own liberation as counter-revolutionary action.⁷¹ Later, when audience sees Tommy grappling with the idea of a woman obtaining authority through a leadership position, Brenda seizes the moment to highlight the ways Panther women are both committed and integral parts to the Party. Additionally, in Scene Four, when Monica informs Brenda she will be the future Captain of their chapter, Brenda must process what the position means for her. Brenda's actions and response reflect Brown's words and the emotional toll involved with being a female and a leader. When Brenda is killed, her death impacts the group. However, her legacy of activism, female leadership, and responsibility lives on through other chapter members, connecting them across space and time.

Leigh. When building Leigh's character, I incorporated research and firsthand accounts of Regina Jennings and Marlene Cummings. Both were victims of verbal, emotional, and physical abuse and I sought to explore the lasting effects of abuse on an individual with Leigh.⁷² In

⁷⁰ For more information, see Joy James, "Framing the Panther: Assata Shakur and Black Female Agency".

⁷¹ Brown, 357.

⁷² See Regina Jennings, "Why I Joined the Party: An Africana Womanist Reflection," in *The Black Panther Party Reconsidered*, ed. Charles E. Jones and Judson L. Jeffries, (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1998), 257-265 and

Jennings' reflection in "Why I Joined the Party: An Africana Womanist Reflection," she recounts her desire to be a soldier and having to fight off her Captain's advances.⁷³ When Leigh is first introduced in Scene Five, she is enamored with the Panthers and the power they represent. The combination of Jennings' experience with Marlene Cumming's explanation of female hesitancy and forced silence due to the fear that if "they 'pointed the finger' at one black man, all would be tarred with the same brush," also informed the writing of Leigh's internal conflict due to abuse in Scene Ten.⁷⁴ When Leigh reconnects with the Panther women that inspired her, she begins a new journey towards healing and a new outlook.

Donna. Creating Donna as an informant was challenging as I did not want to present Panther women in a negative light. Yet, I wondered if the government might have threatened and/or lied to women, turning them into informants. Because the play is a work of fiction, based on historical accounts, I chose to explore the possibility of the Black Panther Party being infiltrated by a female informant since much of the scholarship surrounds male informants. In the film, *The Black Panthers: Vanguard of the Revolution*, director Stanley Nelson explores how informants were designed to achieve J. Edgar Hoover's plan to discredit the Party and eliminate the "rise of [a] Black Messiah."⁷⁵ Developing the impact of an informant on the Panther chapter in my play, I pondered the government's possible reasons for utilizing women as informants during this era: 1— Race and gender hierarchies listed black women at the bottom; 2— Panther women may have been overlooked due to perceptions of gender and ability; and 3—It was another way to

Rachel Perkins' documentary, *Black Panther Woman* about the experiences of Australian Black Panther, Marlene Cummings.

⁷³ Jennings, 262.

⁷⁴ Scott-Stevenson, 86.

⁷⁵ Nelson, "The Black Panthers: Vanguard of the Revolution".

further victimize black families. With this explorative and creative foundation, I further developed Donna.

Before joining the Party, Donna was forced to become an informant to save her life and her family. As she struggles with operating in dual spaces, Donna hides her fear behind her work ethic. When Destiny mentions a government program and Brenda is killed, the pressure of maintaining her cover takes a major toll on her and her relationship with Keith. At the end of the play, I wanted to leave the audience guessing about Donna. Was she genuinely sorry or has the “job” as an informant transformed her perception of her actions, furthering her victimization?

Monica. Initially I created Monica as a scholar, a student of the Party who understands that change is required for the Party to be inclusive. This is exhibited in how she approaches educating Destiny in Scene Three, the community during Scene Five, and the women before the meeting in Scene Nine. As I developed Monica, I began to explore how her relationship with Zeke is an equal partnership. Expanding her character, I added scenes highlighting how she supports and develops women in the Party.

Valerie. Valerie represents a new woman on a journey to claiming and reclaiming what she knows is her right. As she begins a relationship with Tommy, she sees it as an opportunity for them to grow together in revolutionary understanding and male/female relationships. In Scene Five, hoping to build her relationship and educate Tommy on how to approach thinking about female activism, Valerie unfortunately becomes the victim of physical abuse. However, she transforms a negative situation into a positive one by placing her efforts on educating others about healthy relationships. She also helps Leigh in her time of need. Valerie’s passion for education and people is reflective of Audrea Jones’ work around developing the Party’s Birth

Control policy and education for men and women and Erika Huggins' work with the Oakland Community School.⁷⁶

Male/Female Relationships

To present an additional narrative surrounding Panther women's experiences, it was necessary to explore their relationships with men. In the works of Joy James, she highlights how the narrative surrounding the Black Panther Party is framed around male contributions. James analyzes how men are recognized by their speeches, while females are typically seen as connected to a male.⁷⁷ I wanted to explore variations on the realities James presents and highlight through my plot how women were seen separately and alongside men. As my research scope widened, it created an opportunity to explore female Panther relationships with men in the Party. This exploration led me to include scenes, dialogue, and action surrounding women and men sharing the work load and performing the same duties. The research also informed how I wrote the play's action to engage in a conversation about differences and similarities between Panthers based on their understanding of Panther principles, society, and gendered roles.

Brenda and John. Brenda and John's relationship was the first of the four I created. Their relationship is a partnership, yet, Brenda seems to stand on her own even though she is romantically linked to John. In the first scene, the audience watches Brenda affect John with a simple look, word, or touch. This silent exchange/connection between the two displays her power and their collective understanding. Additionally, they both allow the other to stand on their own, yet look for verbal and non-verbal agreement from the other as seen in scenes Two

⁷⁶ LeBlanc-Ernest, "The Most Qualified Person to Handle the Job": Black Panther Party Women, 1966-1982", 319-320 and Huggins and LeBlanc-Ernest, "Revolutionary Women...".

⁷⁷ James, "Black Revolutionary...", 139.

and Three. When Brenda is killed, John's response to her death reflects their partnership and his understanding of their relationship:

JOHN: Oh, my queen. My love. I'm sorry I wasn't here, baby. I...I was supposed to protect you. I'm sorry, I'm sorry... It should have been me...We were meant to protect each other...

Monica and Zeke. I created Monica and Zeke as a seasoned couple—the one with the most time invested in each other and the Party. While I did not base them on a historical Panther couple, I wanted to explore a couple in leadership with a supportive relationship. During the play, their love for one another conveys their dedication to and support of liberation for all. When Monica becomes a business owner, her conversation with Brenda reflects how she and Zeke view female agency.

MONICA: Zeke and I decided I would run it for a year, then we'd move to Philly or Illinois and start our own chapter.

BRENDA: Philly? I didn't think you wanted to move.

MONICA: Zeke and I always talked about having revolutionary action in many cities.

We believe this is the way to affect the masses. Last night we talked about it and thought you would be the right person to take over when we leave.

Donna and Keith. Although their relationship is on a path towards lifelong commitment, Donna is fighting against both internal and external pressures in her position as an informant. To maintain her cover, she must wear a mask in her personal relationships to appear normal. Because of this, her relationship with Keith cannot thrive. Later, when Brenda is killed, Donna is

consumed with guilt, which further exacerbates her problems and creates distance between her and Keith. By having Donna as an informant and romantically linked to Keith, I sought to explore how being an informant further victimized her. Being forced into the role of an informant and the “job” was a way governing entities sought to undermine black relationships.

Tommy and Valerie. With a relationship that starts and ends during the play, Tommy and Valerie’s relationship explores my research findings surrounding abuse, male chauvinism, and sexism. It also explores an experience of a rank-and-file male and female. In the beginning of their relationship, Valerie sees Tommy as a work-in-progress and wants to help him on his revolutionary journey. He has been in the Party longer than she has, therefore she feels he should have a greater understanding of Panther practices. However, the opposite is true, and Valerie experiences it in Scene Six. Here Tommy utilizes Black Power as an avenue to display and enforce his power upon others, especially women. This exchange shows Tommy’s misguided approaches and Valerie’s efforts to help him:

VALERIE: Do you even hear what you are saying Tommy? That’s not what the Panthers preach.

TOMMY: Yes, it is. Look at the Ten Point Program. Men are all over that! We’re fighting a system that keeps Black men down. So, it’s YOUR job as a black woman to support me.

VALERIE: Hold on, my *JOB* is to support the revolutionary cause. Sisters are doing major things. Look at Kathleen Cleaver, Ericka Huggins, Elaine Brown—

TOMMY: Okay, but they got their men runnin’ things for them.

Additionally, Scene Six is the scene that encompasses most of Tommy and Valerie’s onstage interaction. I wrote their interaction in a manner that would also address Safiya Bukhari’s

examination of the words Brother, Sister, and Comrade. Bukhari notes these words have dual meanings and can impede forward progress, create confusion, and distance when members using the terms display behaviors uncharacteristic of those meanings.⁷⁸ When Tommy resorts to violence to exert his control, his behavior is opposite of how a brother, sister, or comrade would treat another Panther member.⁷⁹ This results in Tommy's removal from the Party and Valerie's eventual move to create education classes for members on healthy relationships.

While the four couples provided insight on a few of the male/female relationships within the Party, the exploration of their relationships led me to include scenes where men and women held the same positions and/or shared the work load, regardless of gender. Below are a few instances of this:

--In Scene One, we see Brenda and John performing the same work, while Tommy sells newspapers, and Donna works the phones.

--In Scene Two, the group, except for Tommy and Donna who have their own agenda, agree on including Destiny's information with Zeke's attack in *The Panther*.

Additionally, the same group agrees on Destiny joining the Chapter.

--In Scene Three, Destiny has taken over selling newspapers.

--In Scene Four, Destiny oversees the daily reports and Brenda oversees the Chapter in her position as Acting Captain, while Zeke is in Oakland.

⁷⁸ Bukhari, 44.

⁷⁹ Unfortunately, several incidents of female mistreatment have been recorded in several reflections of Panther members' experiences. See Regina Jennings, Elaine Brown, Assata Shakur, and Safiya Bukhari's works for more information.

--In Scene Five, Destiny and Monica have the bulk of the speeches while Zeke provides the closing speech at the rally. Informing members of their duties, Donna lists the names of both men and women doing the same work in the Survival Programs.

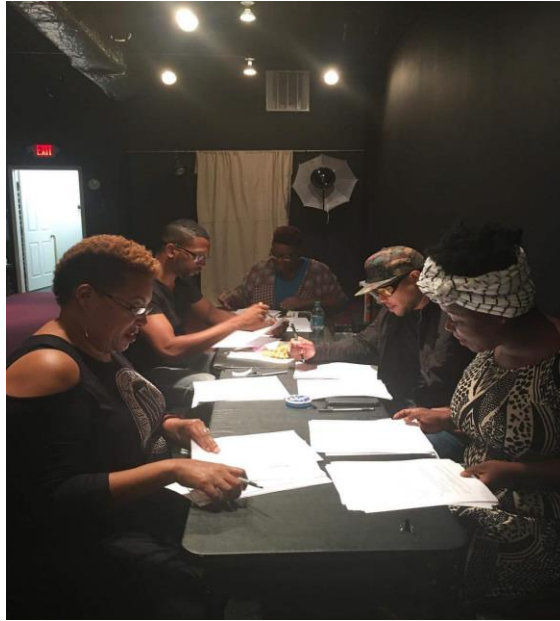
--In Scene Eight, Keith and Valerie operate guns and patrol the perimeter. While organizing after Brenda's death, each person takes a leadership position.

--In Scene Ten, Valerie expands the educational classes and will open a school in the future.

An Informal Play Reading

Testing the play on a group of actors would be a proving ground for my work as an artist, researcher, and scholar. Luckily, I had a core group of actors whom I had worked with on a production of Lynn Nottage's *Intimate Apparel*. Knowing their acting backgrounds, I knew they would be able to enhance the narrative and offer critical feedback on the process. Conducting a reading was an important part of the writing and editing process as the actors would provide details on the play's construction, the types of stories that engage them as actors, and which characters they would want to perform and/or watch on stage. On November 6, 2016, the six of us gathered at The Company Acting Studio to read and discuss the October draft of the play.⁸⁰ For this reading, I decided to limit the amount of information the actors received before our meeting. This approach allowed them to experience the work as it was read, without any preconceived notions.

⁸⁰ Since this reading, the play has evolved into the one included in my Capstone.



(Informal Play Reading, Atlanta, November 6, 2016)

During our table reading, we clearly heard pace, story, and relationship. I began our post-reading conversation with a discussion of “What’s working, what’s not, and the areas in need of clarification.” Whilst the group understood the play operated on several levels, they also felt the more poetic or symbolic scenes would serve the play better as Act endings. This observation was profound as it reflected my original idea of a two-act format. Thus, I explored the option of moving those sections and placing them in scenes where the shift in action covers a large section of time in the current draft.⁸¹

Another successful concept was the symbolic action of unlocking chains and breaking strongholds that impede progress in Scene Nine. This scene also led to discussing the use of single word statements and phrasing such as Forget, Lose, Ignore, etc. When spoken by specific characters, these words reflect their understanding of their current individual and collective situation.⁸² The use of isolated words and physical isolation was intended to evoke a feeling of

⁸¹ Informal Play Reading and Discussion with playwright, Atlanta, November 6, 2016.

distance and progression over time. In addition, the dialogue and staging was designed to parallel the physical and intellectual prison cell and the characters' separation created by their imprisonment. For the characters to be "released", someone had to "unlock" them. The unlocking begins when Destiny picks up the keys. She is the first person to realize her situation and ability to lead others from their current state. By connecting to Monica's urging in Scene Three, Destiny begins a series of "releases" for the characters left on the stage.⁸³ In this moment, Destiny realizes what Assata Shakur acknowledges as key to a revolutionary activist— "It's our duty to fight for our freedom. It is our duty to win. We must love each other and support each other."⁸⁴ In order for Destiny to obtain freedom, she must pick up the keys (her tools that she obtained by being a revolutionary) and begin the series of unlocking. In this moment of "freeing," I envisioned Destiny's echoing of Karl Marx's words. Beckoning others to join her in liberation, Destiny subtext conveys "we have nothing to lose but our chains."⁸⁵

Additional feedback focused on how the story was being conveyed. The group concurred that the love and support between the characters and their relationships, whether beneficial or detrimental, was apparent, however the use of "Black Power" and colloquialisms in Scene Five (The Rally) felt disconnected from other scenes. The group understood this language was necessary to situate the characters in the time and environment but the play had not explored this level of terminology and Panther ideology until this point. Addressing this issue, I implemented additional dialogue where the characters utilized this terminology outside of the rally as well as

⁸² *10 Steps*, Scene Nine.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, Scene Three.

⁸⁴ Shakur, 52.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 52.

in the poetic/transition/forward progress scenes (Prologue, Scene Three, Nine, and Epilogue). Transforming the dialogue provided avenues to incorporate research without separating it from the characters' identities. If I forced characters to speak revolutionary phrasing and ideology only in certain circles, the audience would question the characters instead of watching the action unfold upon the stage. Because the characters are inspired by revolutionaries, their public and private conversations would include revolutionary language coupled with supporting action.

Towards the end of our discussion, one actress mentioned she had issues understanding when and why certain things happened and missed some information during the reading of the stage directions. Including critical information about the characters and visual elements of the play in the stage directions was an avenue to enhance the dialogue and contribute to the overall theme of the play. When the group addressed this confusion, it was concluded that conveying this information would be fleshed out when the play was directed and performed.

Focusing on the characters, the group agreed the strongest characters were Brenda, John, Tommy, and Donna. Destiny, unfortunately, became a background character. This was not something I intended to do as it would recreate female invisibility noted in previous scholarship— which was something I had sought to expose and challenge. One actor suggested to have the action told through Destiny's eyes. Another suggested having Destiny experience the same abuse, frustration, and fear the others experienced.⁸⁶ This would help center the play around Destiny and focus the audience on her journey.

For the actor reading, I also integrated Dr. Rebecca Hill's suggestion to have the group mobilize after the death of a character. I chose Destiny as the person who would deliver orders and console John. As Destiny organizes the group, she becomes a leader by applying action. The

⁸⁶ I attended to some of these suggestions in the current play, as mentioned in earlier sections of this essay.

actors understood this, but they mentioned they did not see where the text supported this transformation. This also led to a discussion about expanding the relationship between Destiny and Brenda. While the actors heard about Brenda's influence after her death, the group wanted to be privy to their relationship's evolution, which also contributed to the creation of Scene Three after the reading.

\

CONCLUSION

Revolutionaries are made, not born. They have to construct their lives consciously along a set of revolutionary principles. Bringing about change is something all of us can do, or being active in an organization is something all of us can do. We don't have to be the hero when we join. You become the hero through practice.⁸⁷

—Phyllis Jackson, *The Black Panthers...*

As an artist, I strive to create moments, engage in conversations, and breathe life into characters and stories for audiences. In this exchange of ideas, a collective journey begins, moving us towards education and an understanding of a play's message and ourselves. Writing a purpose driven play, I sought to extend conversations beyond one encounter. I hoped the stories within would prompt additional research, further the play's impact, and invite audiences to return to it with informed eyes.

Reflecting on my Capstone, I was reminded of my first introduction to the Panthers, in 1993. At the time, I could only use a class paper to convey my ideas. Now, reconnecting to Panther stories through American Studies approaches, informed how I could extend educational possibilities through history and art. This is something I always wanted to achieve as a performer and educator. Inspired by interdisciplinary learning, I remained conscious of my intended audience while maintaining focus on the roles the playwright, actors, designers, audience, and director collectively play in executing an original piece of theater. Exploring this idea further, I paralleled their roles to the contributions of Black Panther women which led to viewing *10 Steps* as a partnership between history, research, the present, and the future. The Panthers saw the

⁸⁷ Phyllis Jackson, "Phyllis Jackson" in *The Black Panthers: Portraits from and Unfinished Revolution*, eds. Bryan Shin and Yohuru Williams (New York: Nation Books, 2016), 96.

world as a revolutionary stage upon which they could enact change and I envisioned *10 Steps* as another avenue to expand the scope of their efforts.

Future endeavors

Approaching my Capstone as an avenue to spark conversations about revolutionary women in social movements, I hope to continue exploring the play's dual operation as a theater and educational tool after receiving my Master in American Studies degree. To fully achieve my intended goals, I will incorporate the following during the next stages of the project:

1- Revisit the play's construction and Destiny's role as a protagonist.

As noted in "Evolution of a Play Through Research: A Reflection," I received several notes on the second half of the play concerning how Scene Nine and the Epilogue might serve the play better as act endings. In addition, it was noted that the second half of the play loses dramatic tension. As such, I look to flesh out ideas concerning the progression of time in poetic transition scenes. While my intention was to reflect the decline of the Party and a shift in momentum, I need to write additional material which exposes the characters to conflict and drives the action further. This may help to focus the second half of the play and provide an avenue to incorporate *A Fictional Meeting* as a companion/continuation piece.

Additionally, I need to find a few more ways to justify Destiny's transition into leadership. In the second half of the play she evolves, however much of this is projected through her actions in Scene Eight along with photographs and a monologue in Scene Nine. The current play includes areas where I sought to further develop her character through her experiences, which include her reveal and realization in Scene Three and her responses to Valerie's attack and Brenda's murder. However, she remains a point of concern. In the future, I will expand on the

play's earlier scenes and incorporate areas where she displays her potential leadership qualities, which I hope will clearly define how these events impacted her and her development.

2- Direct a stage reading of *10 Steps* with an audience talk-back

Further developing the play by testing its accuracy in conveying ideas and realities is an important part of the writing process. Advancing the findings of the November 2016 reading, I will conduct another reading of the play, this time with blocking and essential visual elements. My expectation is that the second reading, with blocking and visual elements, will clarify the previously mentioned issues surrounding the progression of time and dramatic tension. In addition, I will conduct working rehearsals before the reading that include character exploration exercises with the actors, environment work, and research sessions.

Concluding the reading, I will invite the audience to an interactive talk-back with me and the actors. Together we will explore how the play informed their understanding of Panther women. My hope is that this conversation extends to exploring larger connections, as mentioned in my Proposal:

“What structures within society shaped (and continue to shape) how black women interact with the world?”; “How are your personal stories/experiences intertwined with the legacy of women of color’s activism?”; “What do you think are some of the new avenues or questions that arise by examining history through performance?”; “How does tackling history through creative endeavors inform or

*impact the audience and/or the actor? ”; and “Where do (and can) we collectively go from here?”*⁸⁸

3- Explore the play’s impact on actors.

Because of my theatre and performance background, I plan to develop activities and exercises to study how actors are impacted by playing characters based on revolutionaries and history.⁸⁹ Shifting from playwright, I would actively participate in the actors’ exploration of the characters and given circumstances in *10 Steps*.⁹⁰ By exploring the text from intellectual, emotional, and physical standpoints, I am interested to see if, and how, the play impacts actors’ view of themselves as activists.

Through this endeavor, my hope is to engage the actors in a conversation about their work as forms of activism. As active participants, building upon the characters’ embodiment of the Ten Point Program, my goal is for the actors to see their own parallels to a revolutionary actor. By helping actors to view themselves as a vessel, conveying ideas which elicit response both inside and outside theater walls, I will extend the play’s evolution and impact.

4- Expand the scope of the play.

From the beginning, I viewed my plays as enhancements to History and Civil Rights lessons. Building upon approaches in *A Fictional Meeting*, I kept issues surrounding sexism, racism, and female revolutionary work and situated them alongside betrayal, loss, and the

⁸⁸ Walker, Kristen Michelle, “Revolutionary Every Day: A Dramatic Exploration of Women and Their Agency in The Black Panther Party” (2017) *Dissertations, Theses, and Capstone Projects*.

⁸⁹ This would require additional research on Social Justice and Feminist Theater, Theatre of the Oppressed, Didactic Theatre alongside acting methods and techniques that explore this type of explorative process.

⁹⁰ This exploration could be in conjunction with a staged reading rehearsal or a future workshop of the play.

evolution of revolutionary relationships in *10 Steps*. Situating the play with lessons would bring awareness to Panther Women's actualities and expose audiences to the women behind the photographs and textbook narrations. In addition to expanding curriculums, my play would highlight additional avenues through which history can be explored within the classroom.

Final Thoughts

Through research and practical application, I became a revolutionary. Transforming Panther women's experiences into dramatic narrative exposed the way stories are both viewed and told. Yet, deciding how to tell their stories was both simple and complicated. Theatre director and critic Harold Clurman contends "Theatre is a particular mode of expression through which a community realizes itself."⁹¹ Here Clurman addresses an exchange between the audience and the elements of theatre which furthers the collective's understanding of themselves and the world around them. Inspired by his statement, I began to consider the play through an elevated lens.

Viewing characters in the play, the actors portraying them, and the audience as a community—who, through my writing, realize themselves, others, and the world around them contributes to the continuum of ideas and conversations across communities. While *10 Steps* does not cover the full extent of Black Panther women's experiences, it contains innovative approaches to exploring how they dealt with challenges due to perceptions about their abilities. As the play evolves, I foresee it reminding us, every day, to see a Panther woman as a leader, friend, organizer, overcomer, achiever, sister, visionary, lover, and Revolutionary.

⁹¹ Harold Clurman, *On Directing* (New York: Fireside, 1992), 155.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- “Panther Sisters on Women's Liberation,” in *Off the Pigs! The History and Literature of the Black Panther Party*, editor G. Louis Heath. Metuchen: The Scarecrow Press, Inc, 1976.
- Abu-Jamal, Mumia. “A Life in the Party,” in *Liberation, Imagination, and the Black Panther Party: A New Look at the Panthers and their Legacy*, editors Kathleen Cleaver and George Katsiaficas, 40-50. New York: Routledge, 2001.
- Anderson, Reynaldo. “Practical Internationalists: The Story of the Des Moines, Iowa, Black Panther Party” in *Groundwork: Local Black Freedom Movements in America*, editors Jeanne Theoharis and Komozi Woodard, 282-299. New York: New York University Press, 2005.
- Beal, Frances. “Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Female,” in *The Black Woman*, edited by Toni Cade Bambara. New York: New American Library, 1970.
- Brown, Elaine. *A Taste of Power: A Black Woman's Story*. New York: Anchor Books, 1994.
- Bukhari, Safiya. *The War Before: The true life story of becoming a Black Panther, keeping the faith in prison and fighting for those left behind*. New York: The Feminist Press, 2010.
- Cleaver, Kathleen. “Women, Power, and Revolution” in *Liberation, Imagination, and the Black Panther Party: A New Look at the Panthers and their Legacy*, editors Kathleen Cleaver and George Katsiaficas, 123-127. New York: Routledge, 2001.
- Clurman, Harold. *On Directing*. New York: Fireside, 1992.
- Collins, Patricia Hill. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, Revised 10th Anniversary, 2nd ed. New York: Routledge, 2000.
- Crawford, Margo Natalie. “Must Revolution be a Family Affair: Revisiting *The Black Woman*” in *Want to Start a Revolution? Radical Women in the Black Freedom Struggle*, editors Dayo F. Gore, Jeanne Theoharis and Komozi Woodard, 185-204. New York: New York University Press, 2009.
- Crenshaw, Kimberlé. “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence of Women of Color,” *Stanford Law Review*, July 1991.
- Huggins, Ericka and Angela D. LeBlanc-Ernest. “Revolutionary Women, Revolutionary Struggle: The Black Panther Party’s Oakland Community School,” in *Want to Start a Revolution? Radical Women in the Black Freedom Struggle*, eds. Dayo F. Gore, Jeanne Theoharis and Komozi Woodard, 161-184. New York: New York University Press, 2009.
- Jackson, Phyllis. “Phyllis Jackson” in *The Black Panthers: Portraits from and Unfinished Revolution*, eds. Bryan Shin and Yohuru Williams, 92-96. New York: Nation Books, 2016.

- James, Joy. "Black Revolutionary Icons and 'Neoslave' Narratives," *Social Identities* 5, no. 2 (June 1999),
<http://proxy.kennesaw.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=slh&AN=2067385&site=eds-live&scope=site>.
- . "Framing the Panther: Assata Shakur and Black Female Agency," in *Want to Start a Revolution? Radical Women in the Black Freedom Struggle*, eds. Dayo F. Gore, Jeanne Theoharis and Komozi Woodard, 138-160. New York: New York University Press, 2009.
- Jennings, Regina. "Why I Joined the Party: An Africana Womanist Reflection," in *The Black Panther Party Reconsidered*, ed. Charles E. Jones and Judson L. Jeffries, 257-265. Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1998.
- Jones, Charles E. and Judson L. Jeffries. "'Don't Believe the Hype': Debunking the Panther Mythology," in *The Black Panther Party Reconsidered*, ed. Charles E. Jones, 25-55. Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1998.
- Katsiaficas, George. "Introduction" in *Liberation, Imagination, and the Black Panther Party: A New Look at the Panthers and their Legacy*, editors Kathleen Cleaver and George Katsiaficas, vii-xiv. New York: Routledge, 2001.
- LeBlanc-Ernest, Angela D. "The Most Qualified Person to Handle the Job" in *The Black Panther Party Reconsidered*, ed. Charles E. Jones, 305-336. Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1998.
- Matthews, Tracye A. "'No One Ever Asks, What a Man's Role in the Revolution Is': Gender and the Politics of The Black Panther Party 1966-1971," in *Sisters in the Struggle: African American Women and the Civil Rights-Black Power Movement*, edited by Bettye Collier-Thomas and V.P. Franklin, 230-256. New York: New York University Press, 2001.
- Nelson, Stanley. "Director's Statement," *TheBlackPanthers.com*, last modified 2015, Accessed October 5, 2016, <http://theblackpanthers.com/press/#module2>.
- Newton, Huey P. "Let us hold high the banner of Intercommunalism and invincible thoughts of Huey P. Newton, Minister of Defense and Supreme Commander of the Black Panther Party," *It's About Time: Black Panther Party Legacy and Alumni*, http://www.itsabouttimebpp.com/Huey_P_Newton/pdf/Huey.pdf.
- Reed, T.V. "Scenarios for a Revolution: The Drama of the Black Panthers" in *The Art of Protest: Culture and Activism from the Civil Rights Movement to the Streets of Seattle*, 1st ed., 40-74. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005.
- Rice, John. "The World of the Illinois Panthers" in *Freedom North: Black Freedom Struggles Outside the South, 1940-1980*, editors Jeanne F. Theoharis and Komozi Woodard, 41-64. New York: Palgrave Mcmillian, 2003.

- Scott-Stevenson, Julia. "Struggling with silence: Rachel Perkins' Black Panther Woman," *Metro Magazine* no. 183 (2015) (accessed November 2, 2015),
<http://proxy.kennesaw.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edsggo&AN=edsgcl.403049784&site=eds-live&scope=site>.
- Shakur, Assata. *Assata*. Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 2001.
- Singh, Nikhil Pal. *Black Is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004.
- Stastny, Angelique and Raymond Orr. "The influence of the US Black Panthers on indigenous activism in Australian and New Zealand from 1969 onwards," *Australian Aboriginal Studies*, February 2014.
- The Black Panthers: Vanguard of the Revolution*, directed by Stanley Nelson (Firelight Films, 2015), DVD (PBS Distribution, 2016).
- Tillet, Salamishah. "The Panthers' Revolutionary Feminism," *New York Times* (New York, NY), October 2, 2015, accessed October 6, 2015,
http://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/04/movies/the-panthers-revolutionary-feminism.html?_r=1.
- Van Deburg, William. *New Day in Babylon: The Black Power Movement and American Culture, 1965-1975*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992.