

GRADE 12**HISTORY****IF. THE BLACK PANTHERS**

How effective was the Black Panthers Movement in bringing about awareness for social and political change in America in the 1960s and 1970s?

What was the origin of the Black Panthers Movement?

This was a group formed by two black students; Bobby Seale and Huey Newton in 1966. It was formed for self-defense. They were young and angry and identified with the teachings of Malcolm X. The Black Panthers were a militant group within the Black Power Movement. They believed that the moderate leaders of the Civil Rights Movement had failed the black people of America. They chose the panther as their symbol because 'the nature of the panther is that he never attacks. But if anyone attacks him or backs him into a corner the panther comes up to wipe the aggressor or that attacker out'. The panther also symbolised power. The Black Panthers made their largest impact in the urban areas of California and major northern cities, such as New York, Chicago and Boston. Many young black people, living in poverty and with no hope for future employment, were attracted to the Black Panthers. Other members were college students and graduates who had an understanding of the law. They were armed, well trained and very determined in their fight



Bobby Seale



Stokely Carmichael

What were the driving people and ideologies behind the Panthers?

Like the Nation of Islam, they taught black pride and acceptance. They wanted black people to define their own goals, lead their own organisations, recognise their heritage and build a sense of community. They aimed to make American society more politically, economically and socially equal. They emphasised class unity, and criticised the black middle class for acting against the interests of other, less fortunate African Americans. They wanted to improve the life of ghetto-dwellers. They also wanted to expose the brutality of the police against black people. They wanted to make African Americans aware of their right to carry guns. They talked of the armed struggle and revolution. They argued that black people in America and the Vietnamese people (during the Vietnam War) were waging a common struggle against a common enemy; the US government.



The Panthers gained support, but also offended, a large section of American society. How did they do this?

In order to improve the life of ghetto-dwellers, the Black Panthers established ghetto clinics which provided health care and legal aid. They also provided free food to school children. The leaders argued that violence was necessary to bring about change. They used both the guns and the law to make their point. California law allowed a person to carry a rifle as long as it was not hidden and it was not loaded. One of the Black Panthers' tactics was to 'police the police'. They followed the police around and when they found the police harassing or arresting a black person, they would approach them. Dressed in black and carrying a camera, a law book and their guns in full view, the Black Panthers would make sure that the police operated within the law. They informed the police: 'So long as we remain the proper distance from you, we can observe what you do. This is not interfering or disorderly conduct.' They were regarded as the greatest threat to internal security of the United States. Towards the end of the 1970s, a combination of the continued activities of the FBI and internal conflict led to the end of the Black Panther Party.



BLACK PANTHERS TEN STEP PROGRAM

The Black Panther Party first publicized its original Ten-Point program on May 15, 1967, the *Black Panther* newspaper.

- 1) "Freedom; the power to determine the destiny of the Black and oppressed communities.
- 2) Full Employment; give every person employment or guaranteed income.
- 3) End to robbery of Black communities; the overdue debt of forty acres and two mules as promised to ex-slaves during the reconstruction period following the emancipation of slavery.
- 4) Decent housing fit for the shelter of human beings; the land should be made into cooperatives so that the people can build.
- 5) Education for the people; that teaches the true history of Blacks and their role in present day society.
- 6) Free health care; health facilities which will develop preventive medical programs.
- 7) End to police brutality and murder of Black people and other people of color and oppressed people.
- 8) End to all wars of aggression; the various conflicts which exist stem directly from the United States ruling circle.
- 9) Freedom for all political prisoners; trials by juries that represent our peers.
- 10) Land, bread, housing, education, clothing, justice, peace and community control of modern industry."



SUMMARY

BLACK PANTHERS

AIMS

- Improve economic conditions of blacks in ghettos
- Fought for:
- Equality: wages, jobs, schools
- For an end to racial discrimination
- For an end to police brutality
- For an increase in legal representation in courts
- To improve living conditions by implementing feeding programmes and self-help schemes

BLACK PANTHERS

METHODS

- Adopted violence as a method of defence and intimidation, “policed the police”
- Got black business to give back to the communities
- And black professionals to provide free legal, health and feeding schemes
- Established kitchens and day-care centres
- Advocated a separate nation, totally independent of whites
- They fought the draft, refusing to be sent to Vietnam.
- They allowed women to join the ranks on equal footing.

BLACK PANTHERS

OUTCOMES

POSITIVE:

- Greater self pride and ethnic identity
- Greater unity
- Mobilized voters behind black politicians
- Organized the Black Political Convention (1972) and produced a black political agenda

NEGATIVE:

- Internal fighting and discord
- Leaders in jail, lack of leadership
- Ultimately failed, fell apart and disbanded