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The Shadow of the Soul Breaker: Solitary Confinement, Cocaine, and the Decline of Huey P. Newton

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The article probes the impact of prison on Huey P. Newton, founder of the Black Panther Party. Incarcerated for three years in various locations in California, Newton descended into cocaine addiction and criminality soon after his 1970 release. The current literature fails to account for the impact of solitary confinement on Newton's life and consequently misinterprets his descent into criminality. The article suggests that the immense pressures placed on Newton in prison and after freedom were related to the decline of the rehabilitative experiment in California's prison system. It reveals the psychological effect of prison on Newton before linking his fragile mental state to his drug addiction. It concludes by demonstrating how FBI surveillance unwittingly took advantage of Newton's fragility to compound his psychological stress, indicating the extent to which prison successfully prevented Newton reclaiming his position as a significant force in the African American political struggle.

Key words: Huey P. Newton, Black Panther Party, prison, solitary confinement, cocaine, Black Power

In the early hours of August 22, 1989, Dr. Huey P. Newton was smoking crack cocaine with his friend of twenty years, Willie Payne, in Payne's West Oakland apartment. After their supply ran out, Newton headed outside to procure more. He met three local drug dealers and attempted to cajole them into providing him drugs for free. The dealers were familiar with this tactic. Newton was renowned for loudly announcing his storied past as the founder of the Black Panther Party (BPP) before demanding drugs in tribute. The dealers he stumbled upon that night rejected this ploy, however; and one of them began to beat Newton around the head with his gun. The beating was ferocious enough to break the gun, prompting the dealer to borrow his colleague's pistol and take aim at Newton's head. Newton was apparently unmoved by this threat and allegedly delivered these final words: "You might as well kill me.

Go on, nigger, make history. Go on. Kill me, motherfucker! I'm not afraid of death! You can kill the body but not the spirit, motherfucker! Go on!"¹ A shot to the jaw felled the middle-aged former revolutionary. Two more to the temple ended Newton's turbulent life.

The co-founder and leading theoretician of the BPP (originally the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense), Newton was an icon of rebellion against a corrupt and racist U.S. government. He founded the BPP with his close friend Bobby Seale in 1966 and issued a Ten-Point Platform and Program, which became a classic of 1960s radicalism. Newton and Seale spent much of their first few months as the BPP following police vehicles in Oakland. They openly displayed shotguns and rifles while observing civilian-police interactions within the community. On May 2, 1967 the BPP entered the American national consciousness when they invaded the California State Capitol in protest against a bill that threatened to remove their right to carry loaded weapons in public.² The BPP's central position in the history of the 1960s was cemented shortly after 4:00 a.m. on August 28, 1967. Oakland Patrolman John Frey stopped Newton, who was driving his girlfriend's car, on Oakland's Seventh Street. After requesting backup, he approached Newton. The two engaged in a scuffle during which Frey was killed by a gunshot, although it is unclear who fired the fatal shot. Newton also suffered a gunshot wound to his lower abdomen and was arrested and charged with Frey's murder not long after he arrived at Oakland's Kaiser Hospital. Once he had recovered sufficiently, he was removed to the medical unit at San Quentin prison to await trial. Soon afterward, Newton became the focus of an international "Free Huey" campaign. The trial and its attendant campaign brought the BPP acres of press coverage, rendered it a world-renowned protest group, attracted thousands of new recruits, and swelled its coffers to unprecedented levels.³ Found guilty of Frey's voluntary manslaughter, Newton remained in prison until

1. Hugh Pearson, *Shadow of the Panther: Huey Newton and the Price of Black Power in America* (Reading, Mass.: Da Capo Press, 1994), 69, 312, 314–16; David Hilliard and Lewis Cole, *This Side of Glory: The Autobiography of David Hilliard and the Story of the Black Panther Party* (Boston: Lawrence Hill Books, 1993), 9.

2. Curtis K. Austin, *Up Against The Wall: Violence in the Making and Unmaking of the Black Panther Party* (Fayetteville, Ark.: University of Arkansas Press, 2006), 165–68.

3. Joshua Bloom, Waldo E. Martin Jr., *Black Against Empire: The History and Politics of the Black Panther Party* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 99–102; Austin, *Up Against the Wall*, 86–87; Huey P. Newton with the assistance of J. Herman Blake, *Revolutionary Suicide* (London: Penguin Classics, 1973), 193, 198.

August 5, 1970 when his conviction was formally quashed. With the BPP at its peak, Newton was an international celebrity. Yet four years later he fled the United States for Cuba to escape a murder charge for allegedly killing a young prostitute in Oakland. In 1977, he returned to a vestigial BPP and presided over the organization's demise amid allegations of financial irregularities. By the summer of 1989, his prodigious drug use was an open secret in Oakland, and his finances were in such a sorry state that he planned a garage sale of his personal BPP memorabilia.⁴

Despite the burgeoning historiography of the BPP in the years since Newton's death, there has been no sustained examination of Newton's decline. General surveys of the Black Power era, in which Newton looms large, merely record his post-1970 failures.⁵ Critical studies of Newton, most notably the negative character studies from Hugh Pearson and David Horowitz, simply attribute his downfall to his latent criminal tendencies.⁶ Friendlier studies, such as Judson L. Jeffries's intellectual biography, tend to deemphasize Newton's personal failings and turn a blind eye to the entire era after 1971.⁷ In their biography, David Hilliard, Keith Zimmerman, and Kent Zimmerman accept at face value Newton's insistence that prison merely allowed him to practice and perfect his ability to control his own thoughts.⁸ Of the recent BPP monographs, Josh Bloom and Waldo Martin link Newton's declining mental health with the decline of the Party and suggest that an unfriendly media focused overwhelmingly on his increasing criminality.⁹ For Donna Murch,

4. Lise Pearlman, *The Sky's the Limit: People v. Newton, The Real Trial of the 20th Century?* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 640.

5. The prison issue is ignored in Joe Street, "The Historiography of the Black Panther Party." Jeffrey O. G. Ogbar, *Black Power: Radical Politics and African American Identity* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 88–9; Peniel E. Joseph, *Waiting for the Midnight Hour: A Narrative History of Black Power in America* (New York: Holt Paperbacks, 2006), 250, 252–54, 261–69, 287–88; Joe Street, "The Historiography of the Black Panther Party" *Journal of American Studies* 44 (2010): 353, 354–55, 358–362, 363–64.

6. Pearson, *Shadow of the Panther*, 219–20, 222–23; Peter Collier and David Horowitz, *Destructive Generation: Second Thoughts about the '60s* (New York: Summit Books, 1989), 141–65, esp. 143–44, 150.

7. Judson L. Jeffries, *Huey P. Newton: The Radical Theorist* (Jackson, Miss.: University Press of Mississippi, 2002).

8. David Hilliard with Keith Zimmerman and Kent Zimmerman, *Huey: Spirit of the Panther* (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 2006), 14–15, 159–67; Newton with Blake, *Revolutionary Suicide*, 105, 107, 273, 274, 277–79, 282.

9. Bloom and Martin, *Black Against Empire*, 382.

incarceration served to alienate Newton from the BPP's rank-and-file, a disorientating experience that was compounded by the transformation of the Party in his absence.¹⁰ Curtis Austin simply states that, after his release, Newton abused drugs and "mistreated and abused" his comrades.¹¹ Nor do the autobiographies of other Panthers—in which Newton plays as large a role as the authors—reveal much about the impact of prison. Bobby Seale, who compiled his autobiography while Newton was imprisoned, is more interested in granting Newton heroic status; Elaine Brown, who did not meet Newton until after his release, accepts Newton's insistence that he triumphed in prison. Brown, Flores Forbes, and Hilliard all present Newton's drug addiction as the key factor in his mental decline, exacerbated by loneliness, his struggle to live up to his myth, and constant pressure from the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI).¹²

Yet Newton spent a considerable portion of his life in prison and experienced numerous periods of solitary confinement. The journalist Gilbert Moore argued that "[p]robably no prisoner in Oakland's penal history was held in tighter security."¹³ Newton claimed to have spent at least five months in solitary following a 1964 conviction for assault with a deadly weapon, eleven months in solitary confinement prior to his conviction for voluntary manslaughter in 1968, and a further twenty-two months in solitary afterward.¹⁴ His interactions with the prison population during his 1967 to 1970 stretch were severely restricted and always took place within

10. Donna Jean Murch, *Living For The City: Migration, Education, and the Rise of the Black Panther Party* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 187–88.

11. Austin, *Up Against the Wall*, 287, 339; Ollie A. Johnson III, "Explaining the Demise of the Black Panther Party: The Role of Internal Factors" in ed. Charles E. Jones, *The Black Panther Party [Reconsidered]*, (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1998), 406–8.

12. Bobby Seale, *Seize the Time: The Story of the Black Panther Party* (London: Random House, 1970); Elaine Brown, *A Taste of Power: A Black Woman's Story* (New York: Doubleday Press, 1992), 239–40, 243–44, 252, 256, 266, 272, 285, 298, 299, 347, 365, 439; Flores Forbes, *Will You Die with Me?: My Life and the Black Panther Party* (New York: Washington Square Press, 2006), 91, 110–11; Hilliard and Cole, *This Side of Glory*, 299, 310, 329, 340, 350, 353, 365.

13. Gilbert Moore, *A Special Rage* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), 87–88.

14. Newton was arrested Oct. 28, 1967; his trial began July 15 and concluded Sept. 8, 1968. His conviction was overturned May 29, 1970 and bail was posted Aug. 5, 1970. Newton trial testimony [for the murder of Kathleen Smith], March 13, 15, 16, and 19, 1979, 13–14 The Dr. Huey P. Newton Collection microfilm (Northumbria University, Newcastle; hereafter cited as "Newton collection") reel 8 folder: Court of Appeals; Newton with Blake, *Revolutionary Suicide*, 103–4, 107, 108; Charles Garry and Art Goldberg, *Streetfighter in the Courtroom: The People's Advocate* (New York: Dutton Adult, 1977), 98, 151.

the physical and psychological context of prison oppression and tension. It is inconceivable that incarceration had no impact on Newton. Thus, there is a vast gap between our understanding of Newton's life and its implications for our understanding of the decline of the BPP and black radicalism in the 1970s.

This inattention to Newton's prison experience reflects the wider historical approach to the issue of incarceration among African American activists during the Civil Rights–Black Power era, which has relatively little to say regarding the mental impact of prison on African American activists. Civil rights historians tend to link the negative experience of incarceration directly to the physical pain of police brutality rather than psychological suffering. Zoe Colley, for example, argues that prison was a “liberating and honorable” experience that was often “transformative” for civil rights prisoners.¹⁵ This position stems from a number of factors, including the close personal bonds that developed among jailed protesters, the relatively short time that they spent in jail, and the insulating aura of righteousness that accompanied their protests.¹⁶ Instead, the mental burnout experienced by many civil rights activists in the 1970s is attributed to the overwhelming pressure of taking part in a long-term, dangerous and physically, and mentally draining protest movement.

Newton's prison experience is also illustrative of the fallout from California's quest to use prison to rehabilitate rather than merely punish its inmates and the readjustment of the penal system to one of punishment and control. During the 1950s, work programs and group and individual therapy were often offered to prisoners in a liberal and possibly naïve attempt to prepare them for life after their sentence. These programs encouraged prisoners to become active participants in the prison regime by participating in rehabilitative experiments.¹⁷ California sought to transform prisons such as San

15. See the work of Taylor Branch for information on the 1963 arrest and beating of Fannie Lou Hamer in Greenwood, Mississippi. Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954–1963* (New York: Simon and Schuster Paperbacks, 1988), 819–20; Zoe A. Colley, *Ain't Scared of Your Jail: Arrest, Imprisonment, and the Civil Rights Movement* (Gainesville, Fla.: University Press of Florida, 2013), 4, 118.

16. Colley, *Ain't Scared of Your Jail*, 6, 47–48, 70–71; Joe Street, *The Culture War in the Civil Rights Movement* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2007), 44; John Lewis with Michael D'Orso, *Walking with the Wind: A Memoir of the Movement* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1998), 100–102.

17. Eric Cummins, *The Rise and Fall of California's Radical Prison Movement* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1994), 8, 10–11, 13, 21, 26; Jonathan Simon and Malcolm

Quentin from the “Big House,” where confinement was the only goal, to rehabilitative oases designed to remodel their prisoners. Here, the notion that hard labor and boredom would reform prisoners gave way to a belief that prison could be the place where prisoners would embark on a journey of self-discovery and reformation.¹⁸ As the historian Eric Cummins has revealed, this plan inadvertently resulted in the rise of a radical political movement among California prisoners. The future Black Panther Eldridge Cleaver was perhaps the prime example of an unrepentant Californian convict who became a political and cultural icon in part because of his criminal background.¹⁹ By 1970, however, these rehabilitative experiments were in decline. Newton entered a prison regime that was defined more by strict control: prison authorities prevented him from leading, joining, and even informing any political movement among his fellow prisoners.²⁰ His experience, and its consequences, offer insight into the effect of prison on the decapitation of an African American radical movement that defined the lives of many of Newton’s comrades including Geronimo Pratt, Mumia Abu-Jamal, Assata Shakur, and numerous other jailed Panthers. While Newton protested that he had prevailed over his captors, his post-release behavior exhibited many of the symptoms that characterize those who have become damaged by prison. These symptoms indicate that his descent into crime and drug addiction was firmly enmeshed in his prison experience. Newton’s prison experience, then, must be acknowledged as a defining period in his life and as a key moment in the transformation of California’s prisons into locations for the punishment rather than rehabilitation of its prisoners.

Feeley, “True Crime: The New Penology and Public Discourse on Crime,” in *Punishment and Social Control: Essays in Honor of Sheldon L. Messinger*, ed. Thomas G. Blomberg and Stanley Cohen (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1995), 161; Rosemary Gartner and Candace Kruttschnitt, “A Brief History of Doing Time: The California Institution for Women in the 1960s and the 1990s,” *Law and Society Review* 38 (2004): 273.

18. Joshua Page, *The Toughest Beat: Politics, Punishment, and the Prison Officers Union in California* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 16–17; Jonathan Simon, “From the Big House to the Warehouse: Rethinking Prisons and State Government in the 20th Century,” *Punishment and Society* 2 (2000): 221–22; Cummins, *The Rise and Fall of California’s Radical Prison Movement*, 15; Volker Janssen, “When the ‘Jungle’ Met the Forest: Public Work, Civil Defense, and Prison Camps in Postwar California,” *Journal of American History* 96 (2009): 710.

19. Cummins, *The Rise and Fall of California’s Prison Movement*, vii, 3, 4.

20. Rosemary Gartner, Anthony N. Doob, Franklin E. Zimring, “The Past as Prologue? Decarceration in California Then and Now,” *Criminology and Public Policy* 10 (2011): 297, 299–301, 312.

Newton and the California penal system

Newton's prison experience was defined by three major outcomes of the rehabilitative experiment and the resultant turmoil that affected the prison system.²¹ Firstly, the experiment underestimated the nous of the prisoners, who developed the wherewithal to subvert the process for their own ends. As one prisoner commented:

I go to my counselor and he wants to know am I guilty of my crime. I told him I was, and he gets out this Bible and asks me if I'd like him to read from it. I figure that's his trip, so I shine him on and let him do it, man, because I'll do anything that will help me get out of here.²²

Many others applied the program's suggestion that they fully deserved rehabilitation to their immediate surroundings. They pushed for increased rights to communication and free association within and without the prison, for wider reading materials, and for more opportunities to write about their experience. This dynamic, Cummins notes, enabled San Quentin prison's inmates to create a political movement within the prison. This ultimately influenced events outside and became the second major influence on Newton's experience.²³ Thanks in part to the radical literature that flowed into San Quentin courtesy of supporters outside, African American prisoners of the 1960s developed a critique of their condition. They argued simply that they did not need rehabilitation and concluded that the U.S. justice system and white American society were at fault. Prisoners argued that rehab itself was a front for a more sinister plan to crush crime and the social chaos that were direct consequences of a corrupt and repressive political and social regime that worked to impoverish the African American population.²⁴ Third, an unintended consequence of prison rehabilitation programs—programs in which socialization bred group identity—was the emergence of the Nation of Islam among California's African American prison population in

21. John C. Burnham and Joseph F. Spillane, "Editors' Introduction" in William Richard Wilkinson, *Prison Work: A Tale of Thirty Years in the California Department of Corrections* (Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1995), x–xvi; Wilkinson, *Prison*, 62–66, 32; Steven V. Roberts, "Lawyers Draw Attention to California's Prisons," *New York Times*, Aug. 29, 1971, 53.

22. Cummins, *The Rise and Fall of California's Radical Prison Movement*, 19; Page, *The Toughest Beat*, 20.

23. Cummins, *The Rise and Fall of California's Radical Prison Movement*, vii, 2, 19, 28, 33–62.

24. *Ibid.*, 63, 74.

the 1950s.²⁵ U.S. prisons were fertile grounds for Nation of Islam organizers.²⁶ With the percentage of African Americans in California prisons rising from 23 percent to 30 percent in the 1960s, recruitment was relatively straightforward given the Nation's promise of rehabilitation and reform.²⁷ These three influences coalesced in the figure of future BPP leader Cleaver. By 1963, Cleaver was the leading Nation of Islam Minister at San Quentin and was working assiduously to add a political edge to the prison's educational program.²⁸ For Cummins, Cleaver became a centripetal force of the diverse protest movements of the Bay Area, whose leadership and charisma moved "sizable portions of the California Left" to consider prison itself as a key component of their opposition to Amerika.²⁹ Cleaver's rise to prominence was a salutary lesson to California's prison guards about the ability of politicized African American prisoners to aggravate broader tensions inside and outside the prison system. Within months of his December 1966 release, Cleaver had become one of the BPP's most valuable and media-friendly orators. He played a key role in the elevation of the organization to international notoriety.³⁰

Because Newton was the leader of the BPP and a Black Power icon, it was important for the authorities to ensure that he was not able to use jail for political purposes. That he had killed a police officer also ensured that prison wardens would have been keener than normal to punish rather than rehabilitate. Newton was consequently refused any of the privileges accorded Cleaver, and he spent much of his jail time in solitary confinement. Normally, solitary was used only in the short term, either for violation of rules or to protect

25. Volker Janssen, "From the Inside Out: Therapeutic Penology and Political Liberalism in Postwar California," *Osiris* 22 (2007): 131.

26. Cummins, *The Rise of California's Radical Prison Movement*, 65, 69; Jonathan M. Metz, *The Protest Psychosis: How Schizophrenia Became a Black Disease* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2009), 141–42; Eldridge Cleaver, "Prisons: The Muslims' Decline," in *Prison Life: A Study of the Explosive Conditions in America's Prisons*, ed. Ramparts Magazine and Frank Browning, (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), 101; Malcolm X, with Alex Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (London: Penguin Books, 1973), 255–87.

27. Cummins, *The Rise of California's Radical Prison Movement*, 65, 70–73.

28. *Ibid.*, 73; Janssen, "From the Inside Out," 132.

29. *Ibid.*, 93. Many 1960s radicals used this German-influenced spelling to indicate their belief that the United States was akin to Nazi Germany.

30. Eldridge Cleaver, "The Courage to Kill: Meeting the Panthers," in *Eldridge Cleaver: Post-Prison Writings and Speeches*, ed. Robert Scheer (New York: Random House, 1969), 23–39; Jane Rhodes, *Framing the Panthers: The Spectacular Rise of a Black Power Icon* (New York: The New Press, 2007), 100–101, 104.

vulnerable prisoners. This policy was in part because authorities were aware that solitary confinement had an impact on the mental health of the prisoner that intensified as the period of solitary continued. Indeed, current scholarship accepts that even inmates in regular prisons are at least twice as likely to experience mental illness as the general population.³¹ Newton's experience cannot have been pleasant.

By 1967 Newton was no stranger to the California legal system. His first arrest was at age sixteen for assaulting another youth with a hammer, following a fight on the previous day. In 1964 he was convicted of assault with deadly weapon. Newton used a steak knife to stab Odell Lee at a party, claiming self-defense—Lee had reached into a pocket that Newton suspected contained a gun.³² Not long before the BPP was founded, Newton was arrested after a scuffle with a police officer in Berkeley.³³ These incidents were noted by

31. For a further discussion, see the work of Dorte Maria Sestoft, Henrik Steen Anderen, Tommy Lillebæk, and Gorm Gabrielsen, as well as Jeremy Travis, Amy L. Solomon, and Michelle Waul. Sharon Shalev, *Supermax: Controlling Risk through Solitary Confinement* (Cullompton, Eng.: Willan, 2009), 12–20; Tracy Hresko, “In the Cellars of the Hollow Men: Use of Solitary Confinement in U.S. Prisons and its Implications under International Laws against Torture,” *Pace International Law Review* 18 (2006), 11, 13; Dorte Maria Sestoft, Henrik Steen Andersen, Tommy Lillebæk, Gorm Gabrielsen, “Impact of Solitary Confinement on Hospitalization among Danish Prisoners in Custody” *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry* 21 (1998), 99–108; Jeremy Travis, Amy L. Solomon, Michelle Waul, *From Prison to Home: The Dimensions and Consequences of Prisoner Reentry* (Washington D.C.: Urban Institute, 2001), 29.

32. According to the a 1964 prior felony conviction, Newton was sentenced to six months in prison for assault with a deadly weapon and placed on probation for three years. Newton B-17121, “Social Evaluation,” Oct. 23, 1968, 7–8, *Huey P. Newton Inmate Record*, Reception Guidance Center, Vacaville, Calif. in California State Archives, Sacramento; Kate Coleman and Paul Avery, “The Party’s Over,” *New Times*, July 10, 1978, 30; Garry and Goldberg, *Streetfighter in the Courtroom*, 139; Edward M. Keating, *Free Huey!: The True Story of the Trial of Huey P. Newton for Murder* (Berkeley: Ramparts Press, 1971), 160–61; *People of the State of California v. Huey Percy Newton*, 4908 transcript, 2–4, Appendix A, 1–3, 8–9; Newton collection reel 10 folder: “1964 Prior felony conviction” (Newton speculates on p. 9 of his testimony that Lee might have been retrieving a hand grenade or even an atomic bomb, a somewhat unlikely possibility).

33. Bobby Seale, *A Lonely Rage* (New York: Times Books, 1978), 190; Eugene P. Sabatini, oral testimony at *People of the State of California v. Huey P. Newton*, C-11738 Preliminary Examination, April 19, 1966, 3, Newton collection reel 7 file “Huey’s Miscellaneous Appeals”; James D. Callahan, “Record of Arrests,” 4, 10, Newton collection reel 7, unnamed file. Hilliard with Keith Zimmerman and Kent Zimmerman, *Huey: Spirit of the Panther*, 13–14, 20; Reginald Major, *A Panther is a Black Cat* (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1991), 201; Keating, *Free Huey!*, 183–85; Drew McKillips “Berkeley Cop Incident used against Newton,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, July 22, 1971, Newton collection reel 26 file: “Miscellaneous Newspapers.”

a prison correctional counselor who argued in an October 1968 assessment that Newton's previous criminal activities were likely "situational in nature" and not indications of a "criminal orientation."³⁴ Newton was particularly suspicious of attempts by white authorities to analyze his mind. He also tended to consider conversations with antagonists as a battle of wits that, coupled with his high intelligence and resolve, rendered attempts at analysis hugely challenging. Numerous cultural factors would also have come into play, ranging from Newton's status as a repeat offender, to his race, his belligerence, and his media notoriety.³⁵ The counselor suggested that Newton was passive-aggressive; lacked emotional control, particularly when frightened or threatened; and that he responded to "authority, stress and imposed obligation" with "passive resistance unless personally threatened when he reacts with violence."³⁶ The counselor hypothesized that the BPP's adoption of the self-defense philosophy was "a projection of his personality."³⁷ As Jonathan Metzl has suggested, such diagnoses were hugely culturally contingent. Masculine rage, and particularly that of African Americans, increasingly became linked to mental illness as the 1960s progressed. In May 1968 the American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, the primary tool for the evaluation and classification of psychiatric disorders, was updated and republished. According to Metzl, the DSM "foregrounded masculinized hostility, violence, and aggression as key components" of schizophrenia.³⁸ Meanwhile, the psychiatrists Walter Bromberg and Franck Simon declared that African American males

34. Newton B-17121 "Social Evaluation," 9.

35. Note, for example, a 1968 Pacifica Radio interview with Newton. A 1978 probation report states that psychological and psychiatric reports between 1968 and 1970 concluded that Newton was not suffering from psychosis "or any serious psychopathology," although he suffered from "a paranoid feature to his personality. Denny Smithson, Karen Wald, Joe Blum, "A Visit with Huey P. Newton at Vacaville Prison Facility," Oct. 18, 1968, Pacifica Radio Archives online at <http://archive.org/details/prc-BB2438> (accessed April 25, 2013); Newton trial testimony, March 1979, 25; Newton with Blake, *Revolutionary Suicide*, 76-78, 79-80; Dan Kataoka, "Probation Officer's Report and Recommendation" c. Sept. or Oct. 1978, 10, Newton collection reel 38 file "Legal Briefs."

36. Newton B-17121, "Social Evaluation," 7.

37. For another account, see the character reference by Thomas Broome. Newton B-17121 "Social Evaluation," 7; Thomas Broome, written character reference, 1968, attached to James D. Callahan, "Record of Arrests," Newton collection reel 7, unnamed file.

38. Hannah S. Decker, *The Making of DSM-III: A Diagnostic Manual's Conquest of American Psychiatry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 95; Metzl, *The Protest Psychosis*, xiii-xv, 97, 105, 143.

were susceptible to a so-called “protest psychosis” that drove them to insanity.³⁹ Although he was not diagnosed with a mental illness, the pathologizing of the BPP’s political platform offers a suggestive insight into the prison’s construction of both Newton and his organization. As important, the diagnosis reflects Newton’s responses to Odell Lee and the Berkeley police officer. His behavior highlighted his suspicion of the intentions of others and his resentment whenever he was placed in a position of weakness. These factors converged in the early hours of October 28, 1967 in downtown Oakland.

Newton’s prison

As the criminologist Sharon Shalev points out, “Prison architecture sustains great power in regulating lives . . . the apparently passive building becomes an active, powerful force in shaping the daily lives of those who inhabit it.”⁴⁰ On a very simple level, prison isolated Newton. His solid steel cell in Oakland’s Alameda County Jail, where he remained for much of the period between arrest and his September 1968 conviction, measured roughly four feet by six feet. What privacy he had was controlled by the warders. When his family visited they were able to see Newton only through a small glass window and converse through a speaking tube that muffled their speech. He was permitted visits from his lawyer, conducted a number of media interviews during this period, and was in the courtroom during the trial; but he was otherwise cell-bound.⁴¹ Almost immediately after conviction, Newton was transferred to California State Prison at Vacaville, roughly fifty miles north of Oakland. Other than during visits to the library and exercise yard, he could communicate only through a hole drilled in his cell wall. The four-by-six cell was so oppressively hot and poorly ventilated that Newton spent a considerable time naked, struggling to breathe. Every time he exited and entered the cell, he was strip-searched. Within a month, he was transferred over two-hundred miles south of Oakland to San Luis Obispo, where conditions were similar and where he remained until release in August 1970.⁴²

39. Metzl, *The Protest Psychosis*, 100.

40. Shalev, *Supermax: Controlling Risk through Solitary Confinement*, 97.

41. Keating, *Free Huey!*, 63.

42. Wilkinson, *Prison Work*, 37–38 n. 2, 112–14; Smithson et al, “A Visit with Huey P. Newton at Vacaville Prison Facility”; Newton with Blake, *Revolutionary Suicide*, 208, 267, 270, 279; Keating, *Free Huey!*, 244; Brown, *A Taste of Power*, 243.

With San Quentin as the focal point of both the prisoners' political movement and the protests against the prison authorities from Bay Area radicals, it was not surprising that Newton spent only a short time in the prison's medical unit before being removed. The reverberations from San Quentin also ensured that Newton faced severe constraints on his freedom of thought, expression, and association while at Vacaville.⁴³ By the time of his murder trial, the *Berkeley Barb*, perhaps the most important underground magazine of the time, was giving great prominence to the prison issue and was wont to depict Newton as a political prisoner.⁴⁴ Authorities wished to isolate him from the general prison population to prohibit him from organizing them politically. Given that he identified his occupation as "community organizer" to Vacaville's Reception Guidance Center, authorities probably feared he would have used any interaction to politicize his peers and perhaps foment protest against the prison authorities.⁴⁵ Newton further isolated himself by refusing to work unless he was paid the minimum wage. There consequently was no reward system that might have encouraged greater interaction with the prison authorities.⁴⁶ His cell was frequently ransacked. His social interaction was limited to the twice or thrice weekly visits from family members and legal representatives, and toward the end of his stretch, the University of California, Santa Cruz sociologist J. Herman Blake, with whom Newton collaborated on his autobiography.⁴⁷ Newton thus spent considerable time alone and under considerable pressure. For Newton, prison was not an opportunity for reform or rehabilitation.⁴⁸

Newton later insisted that he proved his indestructible spirit while in prison. His autobiographical account of his time in the Alameda County Jail recalled other men begging and screaming to

43. Cummins, *The Rise and Fall of California's Prison Movement*, vii–viii; Cleaver, "Prisons: The Muslims Decline," 100–103.

44. Another underground press account of Newton appeared in "Stop!" in *The Berkeley Tribe*. "Huey Political Prisoner," *Berkeley Barb*, Nov. 10–16, 1967, 5; Cummins, *The Rise and Fall of California's Prison Movement*, 114, 117; "Stop!" *Berkeley Tribe* 1, 18 (no date).

45. "Case Summary Newton B-17121," October 23, 1968, *Newton Inmate Record*.

46. J. Herman Blake, "The Caged Panther: The Prison Years of Huey P. Newton," *Journal of African American Studies* 16 (2012): 238–39; L. S. Topper, untitled document, March 3, 1969 in *Newton Inmate Record*; "Report of Violation of Institution Rules," April 1969, Newton collection reel 10 unnamed file.

47. Topper, untitled document; Blake, "The Caged Panther," 237–240; J. Herman Blake, "Blake v. Stronghold," oral deposition, (Nov. 26, 1974) in *J. Herman Blake v. Stronghold Consolidated Productions Inc.* No. 438716, 7–10 Newton collection reel 30 file.

48. Newton trial testimony, March 1979, 12–14.

be let out of solitary soon after entering what was colloquially known as the “soul breaker.” He, however, lasted fifteen days, his success confirmed by a positive psychiatric assessment.⁴⁹ His celebrated 1970 article “Prison, Where Is Thy Victory,” argued that prison was not capable of confining him because it could only hold his body and not the “ideas and beliefs which . . . motivated him and which sustain[ed] him.”⁵⁰ This insistence on unequivocal victory characterizes many of Newton’s recollections. His autobiography maintains that, amid the nightmarish unreality of prison, he was able to perfect the control of his thoughts.⁵¹ When placed in the so-called “hole” at San Luis Obispo, which Newton described as a “torture chamber” with no sanitation facilities or furniture, he refused the unidentified “green substance” that passed for food until he was moved to a single cell that had a bed.⁵² “I looked upon lock-up not as punishment but as liberation from servitude,” he declared. “Once a month I was called before the disciplinary board and asked if I was ready to cooperate with them and come off lock-up. Every month I refused.”⁵³

49. Newton with Blake, *Revolutionary Suicide*, 103–5, 289; Digby Diehl, “West Q&A: Huey Newton,” 16–17, Newton collection reel 15 file: “Magazine Interview with Huey P. Newton by Digby Diehl *LA Times*.” An edited version appeared as Digby Diehl, “The Black Panther Party is not a Separatist Party”: An Interview with Huey Newton,” *Washington Post*, Aug. 16, 1972, A22.

50. There was no mention of solitary confinement in Elsa Knight Thompson’s 1968 interview with Newton. For another conversation, see Alex Hoffman’s interview with Newton. Huey P. Newton, “Prison, Where is Thy Victory?” in *The Black Panthers Speak*, ed. Philip S. Foner (New York: De Capo Press, 1970), 74; Interview with Huey Newton by Alex Hoffman, June 7, 1968, online at University of California–Berkeley Library Social Activism Sound Recording Project: Black Panthers (hereafter UCB: Black Panthers,) <http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/MRC/pacificapanthers.html#1968> (broadcast May 29, 1970; accessed Feb. 19, 2013); Interview with Newton by Colin Edwards, KPFA Radio, Sept. 10, 1968 (Pacifica Radio Archives BB1782) UCB: Black Panthers <http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/MRC/pacificapanthers.html#1968> (accessed Feb. 19, 2013); Interview with Newton by KPIX Eyewitness News, Jan. 11, 1968, online at *San Francisco Bay Area Television Archive* (hereafter SFBATA) <https://diva.sfsu.edu/collections/sfbatv/bundles/190417> (accessed Feb. 19, 2013). Interview with Elsa Knight Thompson, KPFA Radio, May 21, 1968 UCB: Black Panthers <http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/MRC/pacificapanthers.html#1968> (accessed Feb. 19, 2013).

51. See the work of Craig Haney for observations on projections of toughness. Craig Haney, “The Psychological Impact of Incarceration: Implications for Postprison Adjustment,” in *Prisoners Once Removed: The Impact of Incarceration and Reentry on Children, Families, and Communities*, Jeremy Travis and Michelle Waul eds. (Washington DC: Urban Institute Press, 2003), 33–66; Newton with Blake, *Revolutionary Suicide*, 268, 273; Haney, “The Psychological Impact of Incarceration,” 44, 47.

52. Hoffman interview June 7, 1968.

53. Newton with Blake, *Revolutionary Suicide*, 274.

“I was prepared to stay in isolation for the entire fifteen years,” he concluded. It was “the easiest solitary confinement I ever pulled.”⁵⁴ Later, when Lee Lockwood suggested to Newton that solitary confinement “shakes a lot of men very deeply,” Newton demurred, “Not me.”⁵⁵

Academic studies of solitary confinement almost unequivocally state that even short stretches of isolation have numerous negative effects on prisoners, ranging from short-term discombobulation to severe psychosis.⁵⁶ Research had been conducted on the psychological strain of solitary confinement since the nineteenth century but it was not until after Newton’s release that the debilitating impact of prison became widely accepted. Symptoms reported by solitary prisoners include perceptual distortions, problems with memory and concentration, hypersensitivity to sensations, anxiety or panic attacks, an impaired ability to control impulses, and the development of violent fantasies extending to “uncontrollable anger, hallucinations, emotional breakdowns, chronic depression, and suicidal thoughts and behavior.”⁵⁷ According to the psychiatrist Stuart Grassian, whose study of the psychiatric impact of solitary confinement is widely accepted as definitive, even “[o]rdinary stimuli become intensely unpleasant and small irritations become maddening.”⁵⁸ Importantly, most prisoners experience multiple symptoms.⁵⁹ Other

54. *Ibid.*, 278, 279.

55. Lee Lockwood, “Playboy Interview: Huey Newton,” *Playboy*, May 1973, 88; Brown, *A Taste of Power*, 243.

56. Christine Rebman, “Eighth Amendment and Solitary Confinement: The Gap in Protection from Psychological Consequences,” *DePaul Law Review* 49 (2000): 576; Thomas Hilliard, “The Black Psychologist in Action: A Psychological Evaluation of the Adjustment Center Environment at San Quentin Prison,” *Journal of Black Psychology* 2 (1976): 80, cited in Stuart Brodsky et al, *Psychological Impact of solitary confinement: Brief of professors and practitioners of psychology and psychiatry as amicus curiae in support of respondents*, submitted to the Supreme Court of the United States, Reginald S. Wilson et al. v. Charles E. Austin et al., 2005, 4, 6, 18, at <http://www.clearinghouse.net/chDocs/public/PC-OH-0001-0009.pdf> (accessed Feb. 19, 2013); Newton with Blake, *Revolutionary Suicide*, 198; Stuart Grassian, “Psychiatric Effects of Solitary Confinement,” *Journal of Law and Policy* 22 (2006):327; Terry A. Kupers, “What to Do with the Survivors?: Coping With the Long-Term Effects of Isolated Confinement,” *Criminal Justice and Behavior* 35 (2008): 1006.

57. Hresko, “In the Cellars of the Hollow Men,” 11–12; Grassian, “Psychiatric Effects of Solitary Confinement,” 335–336; Craig Haney, “Mental Health Issues in Long-Term Solitary and ‘Supermax’ Confinement,” *Crime and Delinquency* 49 (2003): 132; Rebman, “The Eighth Amendment and Solitary Confinement,” 576.

58. Grassian, “Psychiatric Effects of Solitary Confinement,” 331.

59. Haney, “Mental Health Issues in Long-Term Solitary and ‘Supermax’ confinement,” 137.

effects of prison include heightened paranoia and permanent impairment of the ability to tolerate social interaction. For Craig Haney, many prisoners develop “social pathologies” in which their “patterns of thinking, acting, and feeling” become irrevocably changed in order to survive the mental onslaught of a period in prison.⁶⁰ Long-term problems include chronic hypervigilance, ongoing problems with social interaction and possibly “prolonged or permanent psychiatric disability.”⁶¹ These patterns significantly reduce the prisoner’s ability to reintegrate into civilian society, thus increasing the probability of recidivism (and hence a life of crime).⁶² It is highly significant that most prison inmates are reluctant to admit to any psychological impact on themselves, reinforcing their isolation and often preventing their requesting specialist help.⁶³ For those with pre-existing problems, the prognosis is even grimmer.⁶⁴ Confinement thus exerts a lasting impact on the psyche of the individual and has the potential to exacerbate underlying and possibly undiagnosed problems.

Close examination of Newton’s statements suggests that his supposed victory over solitary came at some cost.⁶⁵ “It’s living hell,” he told the lawyers Fred Hiestand and Jim Smith; to the journalist Digby Diehl he said it was “terrifying.”⁶⁶ Some twenty years later, Newton told his friend Robert Trivers that when he was in solitary, he felt as though “his whole mind was going to fly apart.”⁶⁷ His autobiography also offers glimpses of the psychological devils that solitary could produce:

60. *Ibid.*, 138.

61. Grassian, “Psychiatric Effects of Solitary Confinement,” 353, 354; Craig Haney, “The Psychological Impact of Incarceration,” 41.

62. Haney, “Mental Health Issues in Long Term Solitary,” 138, 140, 141.

63. Grassian, “Psychiatric Effects of Solitary Confinement,” 332–33; Nick de Viggiani, “Unhealthy Prisons: Exploring Structural Determinants of Prison Health,” *Sociology of Health & Illness* 29 (2007): 118, 123; Haney, “The Psychological Impact of Incarceration,” 41, 43.

64. Grassian, “Psychiatric Effects of Solitary Confinement,” 329, 333, 348, 349–50.

65. An anonymous prisoner told researcher Nick de Viggiani, “If you serve six months bodily, you’re doing twelve months mentally, because your mind works twice as fast in here . . . and I don’t think that’s good.” de Viggiani, “Unhealthy Prisons,” 121; Newton with Blake, *Revolutionary Suicide*, 278–79; Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Vintage Books, 1991), 200–202.

66. Fred Hiestand and Jim Smith, “Of Panthers and Prisons: An Interview with Huey P. Newton,” *National Lawyers’ Guild Practitioner* 29 (1972): 3–4, 57, 61; Diehl, “West Q&A: Huey Newton,” 17; Newton with Blake, *Revolutionary Suicide*, 274.

67. Trivers quoted in Hilliard et al, *Huey*, 255.

If you are not disciplined, a strange thing happens. The pleasant thought comes, and then another and another, like quick cuts flashing vividly across a movie screen. At first they are organized. Then they start to pick up speed. . . . The pleasant thoughts are not so pleasant now; they are horrible and grotesque caricatures, whirling around in your head. Stop! I heard myself say, stop, stop stop.⁶⁸

Elaine Brown quotes Newton telling her: "The minute I stepped inside, I wanted to beg them to let me out. I was ready to do anything they wanted me to do. I didn't care about being tough. I just wanted out. I was shaking with fear."⁶⁹ In 1978 he wryly recalled that solitary taught him the "value of meditation."⁷⁰ This, it seems, was not so much a choice as a necessity. As he pointed out, "I had to achieve some insight into myself or get crushed by the experience."⁷¹ Such statements indicate that, beneath the bravado, Newton was deeply shaken by his experience of solitary confinement.

These recollections raise important questions about Newton's prison experience. Newton's interviews and his autobiography, *Revolutionary Suicide*, were opportunities for him to cultivate sympathy among a mainstream audience. A melodramatic description of the horrors of prison would generate sympathy and burnish Newton's reputation when linked to his declaration of his victory. It is therefore likely that a degree of artistic license taints Newton's account of prison. J. Herman Blake's role as amanuensis adds a further layer of authorial interference to Newton's autobiography. Yet Newton's statements and recollections describe in almost uncanny detail a number of the medically recognized symptoms of mental distress that only later received widespread acknowledgement. It is unlikely that Newton or Blake were aware of the specialist literature that existed on this subject in the early 1970s.⁷² Yet their account describes very similar

68. For further discussions of Newton's psychological condition, see the works of Brown, Diehl, and Lockwood. Newton with Blake, *Revolutionary Suicide*, 106; Brown, *A Taste of Power*, 244; Diehl, "West Q&A: Huey Newton," 17-18; Lockwood, "Playboy Interview: Huey Newton," 88, 90.

69. Brown, *A Taste of Power*, 243.

70. According to the interviewer, Newton was high on cocaine at the time his 1978 interview with *Oui* magazine. "A Conversation with Huey P. Newton," *The Black Panther*, Feb. 18, 1978, 15 (a reprint of a Newton interview in *Oui* magazine). Ken Kelley, "Huey: I'll Never Forget" *Oakland East Bay Express* Sept. 15, 1989, 16.

71. "A Conversation with Huey P. Newton," 16.

72. Sally Mann Romano, "If the SHU Fits: Cruel and Unusual Punishment at California's Pelican Bay State Prison" *Emory Law Journal* 45 (1996): 1096-97, 1109-115;

feelings and experiences to academic findings that only received widespread acceptance years later. Blake recalls learning a great deal about Newton's prison experience and remembers them "digging deep" into Newton's memories once their conversations turned to the material that would be included in the forthcoming book.⁷³ He conducted extra research into Newton's life after Newton's release, which mostly involved interviews with friends and family. He does not mention interviewing any other prisoners or researching the wider issues pertaining to prison and solitary confinement.⁷⁴ If Blake embellished Newton's memories without using other research, how is it that these embellishments so closely resemble the specialist findings? Additionally, given the intensity of Newton's account, surely this experience was memorable enough for him to recount with a degree of accuracy. Newton was clearly affected deeply by the prison experience. He suffered from anxiety and hallucinations. He experienced problems with his memory and perceptual distortions. His recollections certainly suggest that he found prison a harrowing experience, and one that had the potential to exert a long-term impact on his mental health.

Newton's penthouse prison

On August 5, 1970 Newton was led from the Alameda County Jail into a frenzied crowd of Panthers, supporters, and gawkers before holding court at a packed press conference in Charles Garry's law office.⁷⁵ The acclamation that surrounded his release indicates that the BPP leader was expected to resume his duties without delay or disruption. Yet the themes that emerge from his

Grassian, "Psychiatric Effects of Solitary Confinement," 345–46, 367–72, 380–81; Blake, "The Caged Panther," 239, 242, 245.

73. Blake, "The Caged Panther," 245.

74. It is possible that Newton read David Rothman's *The Discovery of the Asylum*, which revealed the impact of asylums on their inmates. However, the fact that no parallels are made between prison and the asylum in *Revolutionary Suicide* suggests he did not. David J. Rothman, *The Discovery of the Asylum: Social Order and Disorder in the New Republic* (Chicago: Aldine Transaction, 1971); Blake, "The Caged Panther," 236–48; Blake, oral deposition, 11–14.

75. Newton with Blake, *Revolutionary Suicide*, 312–13; Huey Newton comments at San Francisco press conference, c. Aug. 5, 1970, UCB: Black Panthers <http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/MRC/pacificapanthers.html#1970> (accessed Feb. 19, 2013). Television footage at 'Huey P. Newton's Release from Prison' SFBATA <https://diva.sfsu.edu/collections/sfbatv/bundles/208428> (accessed Feb. 19, 2013).

recollections suggest that Newton was experiencing severe dislocation. “I was bewildered,” he later confessed to the journalist Lee Lockwood. “I was disoriented. Life seemed jerky and out of synchronization.”⁷⁶ When recalling the car ride from San Luis Obispo to Oakland, Newton remembered only sensory overload. His brain had been so affected by prison that he could not even process the simple sights of fields, houses, trees, and people. “[I]t was just too much for me to take in,” he lamented.⁷⁷ His first few days of freedom were similarly confusing:

I had to make an attempt to remain calm, to keep the action and unpredictability [of everyday life around me] from exciting my nervous system. Even the sight of ordinary activities, such as cars stopping for traffic lights, some going in one direction, some in another, people in the street, was too much.⁷⁸

“During the first few days out of jail, I wondered when reality would come again. . . . I had literally forgotten how to live outside” he recalled.⁷⁹ This sense of unreality and over-stimulation suggests that prison continued to exert a hold on his psyche. Like many recently released prisoners, he had become so institutionalized that he struggled to remember what he should eat and when he should retire to bed:⁸⁰

I had to develop all over again my old reflex actions to avoid being startled. . . . All the sounds, movements, and colors coming on simultaneously—television, telephone, radio, people talking, coming and going, doorbells and phones, ringing—were dizzying at first. Ordinary life seemed hectic and chaotic, and quite overwhelming.⁸¹

This hypersensitivity to sensations—and the associated stress—has been identified as a clear indication of psychological damage wrought by solitary confinement. Newton’s struggle to cope was likely exacerbated by his lack of engagement with any rehabilitative system. As Craig Haney observes, many prisoners become profoundly

76. Lockwood, “*Playboy* Interview: Huey Newton,” 90.

77. Newton with Blake, *Revolutionary Suicide*, 298.

78. *Ibid.*, 300.

79. *Ibid.*, 314.

80. Lockwood, “*Playboy* Interview: Huey Newton,” 90; Travis et al, *From Prison to Home*, 18; de Viggiani, “Unhealthy, Prisons,” 117, 122, 124; Haney, “The Psychological Impact of Incarceration,” 38–39, 40, 41.

81. Newton with Blake, *Revolutionary Suicide*, 314–15.

“uncomfortable and disoriented” when “previously cherished freedoms, autonomy, and choices are finally restored.”⁸² The trauma of prison often re-manifests itself in anxiety, an inability to concentrate or sleep, feelings of isolation and depression. Furthermore, Haney points out that those who return to “stressful circumstances” without the correct support structures are more likely to experience problems.⁸³ There is no evidence that this lack of attention to Newton’s reintegration to society formed part of a conspiracy to undermine his return to the BPP. Even so the simple fact that Newton was left to his own devices demonstrates a lack of interest in his overall rehabilitation.

Yet still greater pressures faced Newton. According to the BPP historian and journalist Reginald Major, Newton the man and Newton the myth were by this point “completely intertwined”⁸⁴ “When he emerged from prison,” Elaine Brown wrote, “thousands were waiting for deliverance. He was David with a stone in hand, Perseus with sword raised. . . . He had become a kind of homegrown messiah.”⁸⁵ Strangers sometimes approached him, just to confirm that he was not merely a poster on the wall, a slogan, or a myth. “If I had a piece of bubble gum in my mouth and started to blow a bubble,” he said, “two or three people would come running up and say that it was the biggest bubble they’d ever seen in their lives.”⁸⁶

Elaine Brown suggests that Newton became a “misfit” both in Oakland and in the BPP itself.⁸⁷ More disturbingly, he was advised not to appear at large gatherings without significant protection.⁸⁸ Fearful that he would be assaulted or assassinated, his friends and lawyers encouraged him to remain out of the public eye. Newton’s insecurity would likely have been intensified by the realization that

82. Haney, “The Psychological Impact of Incarceration,” 40. John R. Hipp, Joan Petersilia, Susan Turner, “Parolee Recidivism in California: The Effect of Neighborhood Context and Social Service Agency Characteristics,” *Criminology* 48 (2010), 950.

83. Haney, “The Psychological Impact of Incarceration,” 46, 47; Hipp, Petersilia and Turner, “Parolee Recidivism in California,” 952.

84. Major, *A Panther Is a Black Cat*, 126.

85. Brown, *A Taste of Power*, 251–52; Don Cox, “The Split in the Party” in *Liberation, Imagination, and the Black Panther Party: A New Look at the Panthers and their Legacy*, ed. Kathleen Cleaver and George Katsiaficas (New York: Routledge, 2001), 121.

86. Newton quoted in Collier and Horowitz, *Destructive Generation*, 150.

87. Brown, *A Taste of Power*, 252; Major, *A Panther is a Black Cat*, 125–27; C. Gerald Fraser, “Black Panther Fugitive in Algiers Charges That Huey P. Newton is Seeking to Split the Party,” *New York Times*, March 12, 1971, 43.

88. Newton with Blake, *Revolutionary Suicide*, 313.

Oakland's police had initiated twenty-four-hour surveillance of his movements. During the first few weeks of freedom he lodged at the Berkeley house of one of his lawyers, Alex Hoffman. Soon after, undercover police posing as telephone engineers took up posts on nearby telegraph poles. Newton was followed everywhere by unmarked cars and people who would track his every move. The BPP gave him twenty-four-hour protection and a search was initiated for a suitable permanent residence. The home of Sonny Barger, the former head of the Hell's Angels, was scouted but considered unsuitable because a police helicopter buzzed overhead throughout the visit.⁸⁹

In October 1970, Newton moved to a two-bedroom penthouse suite at 1200 Lakeshore Avenue on the banks of Lake Merritt. Police helicopters would not dare come close due to Newton's neighbors in the complex who included the owner of the Oakland A's baseball team, a powerful man who would not tolerate such irritations. Yet this new home was a gilded cage. A doorman warded off undesirables. An internal video security system linked to the main entrance allowed Newton to monitor comings and goings via closed-circuit television.⁹⁰ More curiously, the apartment's windows and balcony overlooked the Alameda County Jail. When told of this exclusive view by Brown, Newton whispered, "You mean I can see the Soul Breaker, where I nearly died."⁹¹ Within days of settling in, Newton installed a telescope on the viewing balcony, perpetually focused on the jailhouse. He claimed to gaze through its lens as many as twenty times per day.⁹² Meanwhile, the FBI bugged Newton's apartment. Adding to his problems, the address was soon published on the *San Francisco Examiner's* front page, allegedly at the behest of the Oakland Police Department. Widespread outrage at Newton's luxurious address prompted the BPP to increase Newton's personal protection.⁹³

89. Brown, *A Taste of Power*, 256, 258; Hilliard, et al, *Huey*, 173; Hilliard and Cole, *This Side of Glory*, 296; Huey P. Newton, "4. The Penthouse," 31, Newton collection reel 30 file "War against the Panthers Manuscript"; Newton testimony, March 1979, 18–20, 60, Newton collection reel 8 file "Court of Appeals."

90. "Playboy Interview: Huey Newton," 74; Diehl, "West Q&A: Huey Newton," 2.

91. Brown, *A Taste of Power*, 258.

92. Hilliard et al, *Huey*, 177, 195; Brown, *A Taste of Power*, 258, 297; Tim Findley, "Huey Newton: Twenty-Five Floors from the Street," *Rolling Stone*, August 3, 1972, 30; Walt Thompson, "What's Left of the Black Left?" *Ramparts*, June 1972, 52; Kelley, "Huey," 15.

93. Hilliard et al, *Huey*, 179, 180–81; Hilliard and Cole, *This Side of Glory*, 297; Brown, *A Taste of Power*, 266; U.S. Congress, Senate, Book III, Final Report of the Select

Indeed, the journalist Walt Thompson stated that security at Lakeshore became so tight that it had been easier to meet Newton in jail.⁹⁴

A 1969 study of the impact of maximum security prisons on inmates confirmed that the adjustment to freedom from a tightly controlled environment was particularly unsettling, often leading to “anxiety, restlessness, sleeplessness and irritability” that could become so intense that the only perceived response was to seek a return to prison.⁹⁵ Newton’s response to freedom involved a similar retreat behind the door of a penthouse.⁹⁶ Shutting out the world might have improved his physical security and perhaps recreated the familiar surroundings of prison but it did little for his mental health. Ericka Huggins recalls Newton resembling “a caged animal that didn’t want out of the cage and didn’t want anybody in the cage with him. He had hyper vigilance for everybody in the room . . . You could get knocked over or slapped, depending upon the mood he was in.”⁹⁷ In August 1972, *Rolling Stone* sent a reporter to interview Newton. The interviewer’s impression of the apartment demonstrates the parallels between Newton’s prison and post-prison life:

Newton still serves a sentence, perhaps more solitary now than he was in the state’s cubicle. The much talked-about penthouse apartment . . . is like a two-bedroom, two-bath cage in which Newton paces almost constantly, seldom going out. . . . It is a characterless apartment, devoid of clear personality and almost sterile, not unlike an opulent prison cell.⁹⁸

Newton himself confessed, “I’ve become very lonely. . . . [S]ometimes I feel like I’m suspended in a kind of void.”⁹⁹ Although he was ostensibly free, his movements were constantly monitored; his social interactions were fleeting and often secretive, and his ability to

Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities, Supplementary Detailed Staff Reports on Intelligence Activities and the Rights of Americans, 94th Congress, 2nd Session, 1976, 219–20 (hereafter cited as Church Committee); Newton, *War against the Panthers*, 61, 62.

94. Thompson, “What’s Left of the Black Left?” 52.

95. G. Scott, P. Gendreau, “Psychiatric Implications of Sensory Deprivation in a Maximum Security Prison,” *Canadian Psychiatric Association Journal* 14 (1969): 340; Shalev, *Supermax*, 200.

96. Brown, *A Taste of Power*, 266; Forbes, *Will You Die with Me*, 88–89; Lockwood, “Playboy Interview: Huey Newton,” 74.

97. Hilliard et al, *Huey*, 194.

98. Findley, “Huey Newton,” 30.

99. *Ibid.*

roam was severely circumscribed. Just as prison warders had been wont to suggest that other prisoners wished to assault him, BPP members reminded him that the general public would not respect his privacy and personal safety. This atmosphere reinforced his sense of isolation and encouraged him to remain vigilant at all times, a mental state that became increasingly stressful. Hypersensitivity and vigilance are two debilitating symptoms that are closely associated with traumatic experiences such as solitary confinement. Meanwhile, Newton's seclusion in the penthouse hindered his ability to lead, and the exposure of his limitations as an orator and inspiration further isolated him from the BPP rank-and-file.¹⁰⁰

Social interaction, drugs, and paranoia

The prison experience undoubtedly affected Newton's interpersonal relationships. Many former inmates confess to problems with social interaction, impulsive behavior, paranoia, and hypersensitivity. Newton suffered from these very same traits in the years following his release, suggesting that prison had a major long-term effect on his mental health. A 1970 prison evaluation concluded that Newton exhibited "extensive evidence of paranoid thinking" and a "lack of control."¹⁰¹ His release did nothing to stop these symptoms. Piling further pressure on Newton, it was also apparent that the BPP had changed substantially since 1967. Many of his friends from the Party's early days had either been killed or were in jail. Newton knew all the Panthers personally at the time of his arrest. By 1970, however, the BPP was unrecognizable: it had grown to a national organization and was filled with strangers.¹⁰² Eldridge Cleaver, who had become skeptical of Newton's leadership, now possessed a significant power base that called into question both the loyalty of the rank-and-file and Newton's authority.¹⁰³

100. Pearson, *Shadow of the Panther*, 226–27; Hilliard and Cole, *This Side of Glory*, 302, 318, 321; Rowland Evans and Robert Novak, "Huey Newton's Tour Falls Flat," *Washington Post*, Dec. 6, 1970, C7.

101. "Evaluation at Time of Adult Authority Hearing," c.1970, 1, *Newton Inmate Record*; Major, *A Panther is a Black Cat*, 79.

102. Cynthia Gorney, "Mistrial Declared in Newton Murder Case," *Washington Post*, March 25, 1979, A7; Brown, *A Taste of Power*, 272, 282, 298, 352; Hilliard and Cole, *This Side of Glory*, 3–6, 303–5, 310–11, 369–70.

103. Rhodes, *Framing the Panthers*, 303; Austin, *Up Against the Wall*, 299–300, 303–5.

Within months of his release Newton was disciplining BPP officials and, according to the FBI, was prepared to “respond violently to any question of his actions or policies.”¹⁰⁴ By 1972, he was convinced that assassins were lurking around every corner. His lawyer Charles Garry alleged that members of Oakland’s criminal underground had taken out a \$10,000 contract on Newton’s life. Newton’s suspicions that the police knew his every move were cemented when he discovered that Oakland’s Chief of Police passed this information to Garry.¹⁰⁵ Between 1972 and 1974, Newton was involved in numerous violent episodes, which included a widely-reported pistol-whipping of a tailor and allegedly the murder of Kathleen Smith, a teenager who worked as a prostitute.¹⁰⁶ What united these events were innocuous comments by the victims that Newton considered insulting, indications that he had developed hypersensitivity, a hair-trigger temper, and a tendency towards violence.¹⁰⁷ Newton’s paranoia could only have been exacerbated by his isolation in the penthouse, by the constant monitoring of comings-and-goings at Lakeshore and by two further factors: his increasing abuse of cocaine and the constant drip-feed of misinformation from the FBI.

104. FBI headquarters memo to Boston, Los Angeles, New York City and San Francisco field offices, Jan. 1971, 28, cited in Church Committee, 204.

105. Charles R. Garry to Dan Kataoka, Oct. 4, 1978, 3 in Newton collection reel 11 file: “Huey’s Columbia Contract”; Special Agent Stephen Lee Kies memo to SAC, San Francisco, Oct. 11, 1973, Newton collection reel 31, illegible file name; Forbes, *Will You Die with Me*, 81; “Oakland Police Continue Search for Huey Newton,” *Lodi News-Sentinel*, Feb. 8, 1975, 2; “The Odyssey of Huey Newton” *Time*, November 13, 1978, 38; Evans D. Hopkins, *Life after Life: A Story of Rage and Redemption* (New York: Free Press, 2005), 77.

106. David Harris’s important article was submitted to but never published by *Rolling Stone*. Harris email to author, February 22, 2013. David Harris, “Huey’s Last Stand: An Inquiry into the Disappearance of the Black Panther Party’s Founder and Original Minister of Defense” manuscript, 1–3, 5, 8–11, Newton collection reel 40 file: “Huey’s Last Stand file”; “Sweet Sounds of Forgiveness,” *Oakland Tribune*, Aug. 18, 1978, 1; Brown, *A Taste of Power*, 6–7, 356; Coleman and Avery, “The Party’s Over,” 33–35; David Weir and Dan Noyes, *Raising Hell: How the Center for Investigative Reporting Gets the Story* (Reading, Mass.: Addison Wesley, 1983), 270.

107. Newton was not convicted of the crimes, but it is noteworthy that he fled the United States in the wake of Smith’s murder. After his return BPP members attempted to murder a witness before the case came to trial. Newton later privately confessed to Smith’s murder. “Key Witnesses Discredited in Huey Newton Frame-Up,” *I Am We: Newsletter of the Committee for Justice for Huey P. Newton and the Black Panther Party* 6 (Winter 1977–78): 1, 3; Hanev, “The Psychological Impact of Incarceration,” 53; Forbes, *Will You Die with Me*, 147, 150, 163, 167–70; Coleman and Avery, “The Party’s Over,” 41–43; Kelley, “Huey,” 15; Pearson, *Shadow of the Panther*, 7; “Huey P. Newton,” FBI summary document, 9, between July 31 and Aug. 16, 1974.

An assessment of these factors helps contextualize Newton's decline and offers further evidence of the impact of prison.

Newton's impulsive behavior was exacerbated by spiraling substance abuse that can be attributed to his difficulty adjusting to life outside prison and the pressured circumstances of police and FBI intimidation. According to Elaine Brown, constant surveillance prevented Newton sleeping well, leading him to use Ritalin pills to ward off tiredness.¹⁰⁸ Ritalin, the brand name of the psycho-stimulant drug methylphenidate, is most commonly prescribed to children who suffer from Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). In controlled doses it heightens intellectual focus and the ability to learn. Higher doses can make users feel less tired, happier, talkative, alert, and occasionally euphoric.¹⁰⁹ These effects appealed to Newton, who suffered from daily exhaustion and who desired to demonstrate his intellectual prowess to both interviewers and his inner circle. Ritalin soon became a regular addition to Newton's brain chemistry, joined by regular and increasing doses of his favorite alcoholic drink, cognac.¹¹⁰

Ritalin was eventually superseded by the pharmacologically similar cocaine. Newton often received the drug in tribute from members of Oakland's criminal underworld and from decadent Hollywood radicals such as the film producer Bert Schneider.¹¹¹ Cocaine was fully enmeshed in the criminal underworld of Oakland that he prowled with his coterie of bodyguards. It had a major impact,

108. Hilliard claims that Newton merely enjoyed the high. Hilliard and Cole, *This Side of Glory*, 299; Brown, *A Taste of Power*, 256.

109. Laurence L. Greenhill, "The Science of Stimulant Abuse," *Psychiatric Annals* 35 (2005): 210–11.

110. Brown, *A Taste of Power*, 271, 274, 293; Pearson, *Shadow of the Panther*, 266; T. J. English, *The Savage City: Race, Murder, and a Generation on the Edge* (Edinburgh, 2011), 292, 298; Coleman and Avery, "The Party's Over," 32.

111. Helen Keane, "Pleasure and Discipline in the Uses of Ritalin," *International Journal of Drug Policy* 19 (2008): 401–9, accessed February 15, 2013, <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0955395907001533>; Scott H. Kollins, Emily K. MacDonald, and Craig R. Rush, "Assessing the Abuse Potential of Methylphenidate in Nonhuman and Human Subjects: A Review" *Pharmacology, Biochemistry and Behavior* 68 (2001): 611–27, accessed February 15, 2013, <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0091305701004646>; Greenhill, "The Science of Stimulant Abuse," 213; Johnson, "Explaining the Demise of the Black Panther Party," 394, 406–7; Brown, *A Taste of Power*, 271, 282, 285, 298, 347–48, 353, 365; Forbes, *Will You Die with Me*, 91; Hilliard and Cole, *This Side of Glory*, 340, 350, 352, 353, 365; Hopkins, *Life after Life*, 77; Peter Biskind, *Easy Riders, Raging Bulls: How the Sex-Drugs-and-Rock 'n' Roll Generation Saved Hollywood* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1998), 185–86; Newton, *War against the Panthers*, 48–49.

ameliorating his shyness, boosting his ego, energizing his brain and body, and offering relief and refuge from his regular self.¹¹² It offered release from the pressures of being Huey P. Newton, the near-mythical leader of the BPP, and allowed him to forget about the BPP's political agenda.¹¹³ The cocaine high was a mental state where Newton could feel good and let his mind roam freely, without the fetters of his myth, his stature, and his criminal record:

Ingestion of cocaine induces euphoria and a state of mental and sexual arousal in a high lasting up to one hour.¹¹⁴ During the high users tend to be more talkative, lively, spontaneous, and purposeful. As important, these effects themselves can resemble the body's normal physiological response to external threats, heightening anxiety or even paranoia, which are commonly experienced when the drug is taken at higher doses. It is also more effective than Ritalin, not least because Ritalin's pill form is less open to abuse than powdered cocaine. Ominously, according to the addiction psychologist Arnold Washton, it is 'malignantly compelling and attractive' to users experiencing poor mental health.¹¹⁵ As important, its positive effects are transitory. Long-term use leads to greater tolerance of the drug's positive effects, accompanied by an intensification of its negative impacts, which include irritability, volatility, and a propensity towards violence, leading to dysphoria and often depression.¹¹⁶ This leads to greater desire for the drug in order to ameliorate these negative effects. The highs become shorter, less intense and more difficult to attain, and the long-term user almost inevitably enters a self-destructive cycle of compulsion. As Washton observes, long-term cocaine use alters the cellular metabolism of the brain, leading to 'distortions in thinking, reasoning, perceptions and emotions,' which combine to perpetuate the use of the drug.¹¹⁷

112. Newton refers to shyness in "A Conversion with Huey P. Newton. "A Conversation with Huey P. Newton," 16; Hilliard et al, *Huey*, 195, 260, 261, 195; Brown, *A Taste of Power*, 299, 438, 439–40.

113. It is not entirely coincidental that Mario Puzo's *The Godfather* became essential reading for Newton's inner circle at this time. Hilliard and Cole, *This Side of Glory*, 339; Forbes, *Will You Die with Me*, 93, 110–11.

114. Arnold M. Washton, *Cocaine Addiction: Treatment, Recovery, and Relapse Prevention* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1989), 21.

115. *Ibid.*, 22, 25 (quote).

116. *Ibid.*, 12, 32 (quote).

117. *Ibid.*, 22, 24 (quote), 44–45, 53–54.

Once Newton became a habitual cocaine user he developed a cycle of negative behavior in thrall to a drug that represented both remedy and poison.¹¹⁸ He later claimed to feel oppressed by the Party's insistence that he inform members of the Party core whenever he wished to leave his home and that bodyguards accompany him.¹¹⁹ Yet these precautions did not increase Newton's restraint. He achieved further notoriety for his frequent forays into Oakland's nightclubs in the months before his 1974 exile and after his return in July 1977. Brandishing a "swagger stick," often announcing himself with his grandiose honorific title, the "Supreme Servant of the People," insisting that he was the lord-and-master of downtown Oakland, Newton would hold court, dispensing lengthy speeches and beatings while his bodyguards prevented patrons from leaving. High on cocaine, he would barricade visitors inside his apartment and harangue them at great length.¹²⁰

This erratic behavior was certainly abetted by drugs but was exacerbated by the behavior of the Oakland Police Department and the FBI. The former had a long tradition of abusing Newton and the latter spent considerable energy attempting to undermine him. Newton testified in 1968 that police had stopped him roughly fifty times between the formation of the BPP and the October 1967 shooting.¹²¹ After he was shot, police officers maintained a vigil at his hospital bedside, preventing him sleeping, abusing him verbally, threatening violence, and punctuating this abuse with regular reminders that the gas chamber awaited.¹²² By September 1968, the

118. Joel Dreyfuss, "On Trial with Huey Newton," *Village Voice*, March 12, 1979, 23.

119. Newton trial testimony, March 1979, 169.

120. The title "Supreme Servant of the People" was derived from Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*. Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1967), 147; Brown, *A Taste of Power*, 331, 353, 439; Forbes, *Will You Die with Me*, 82; Hilliard and Cole, *This Side of Glory*, 318, 363, 365; Hopkins, *Life after Life*, 83-84; Cynthia Gorney, "Huey Newton, Ex-Legend," *Washington Post*, March 12, 1978, C2; Coleman and Avery, "The Party's Over," 30, 47; Pearl Stewart and Lance Williams, "More Attack Reports," *Oakland Tribune*, May 12, 1978, 1; Paul A. Lee, "Huey Newton: The Most Hounded Man in the History of the Human Race Documented by the Hounders," accessed on March 26, 2013, <http://ecotopia.org/huey-newton/>; Harris, "Huey's Last Stand," 41; Lance Williams, "Newton Jury Deadlock, Judge Declares Mistrial," *Oakland Sunday Tribune*, March 25, 1979, 1; Gorney, "Mistrial Declared in Newton Murder Case," A7.

121. Garry and Goldberg, *Streetfighter in the Courtroom*, 98, 136; Keating, *Free Huey*, 161, 164, 166-72.

122. Newton testimony March 1979, 10, 11-12; Newton with Blake, *Revolutionary Suicide*, 190, 192-93, 195; Garry and Goldberg, *Streetfighter in the Courtroom*, 97-98, 137, 138;

FBI's focus was on intensifying mutual suspicion among the BPP's leadership. One month later, with Newton imprisoned, the FBI noted that circumstances were appropriate for it to "create the situation in Newton's mind that he is being exploited by the Party leadership."¹²³ Within days of his 1970 release, the FBI instigated a misinformation campaign designed to "demythicise [*sic*] Newton, to hold him up to ridicule and tarnish his image among BPP members . . . and insinuate that he has been cooperating with police to gain his release."¹²⁴ Newton received numerous forged memos and letters from both within and without the BPP, which declared widespread dissatisfaction with his leadership. "It appears," claimed an FBI agent in early 1971, that "Newton may be on the brink of mental collapse . . . we must intensify our counterintelligence."¹²⁵ In order to please their superior officers and ultimately J. Edgar Hoover himself, FBI agents were wont to overstate the impact of their operations. Declarations of failure would impinge on their career prospects, so agents tended to exaggerate the FBI's role whenever possible. The agents attached to Newton, however, were justified in lauding their disinformation campaign.¹²⁶ Wiretaps revealed the extent of Newton's paranoia. The occasional burglary ensured that he always felt hounded by the FBI, a situation the FBI facilitated and intensified through occupying the apartment next door to Newton's residence.¹²⁷

Keating, *Free Huey*, 30; Interview with Huey P. Newton, 1, Newton collection reel 10 folder: "Letters to Newton."

123. FBI Airtel, April 4, 1968 cited in "Counterintelligence Program against Huey P. Newton," FBI summary document, n.d., 1 Newton collection reel 1 folder: "Freedom of Information Counterintelligence Program against HPN"; FBI letters, Sept. 30, 1968; Oct. 10, 1968 (quote), 2, cited in "Counterintelligence Program against Huey P. Newton," FBI summary document, n.d., 1 Newton collection reel 1 folder: "Freedom of Information Counterintelligence Program against HPN".

124. Newton, *War against the Panthers*, 57.

125. Handwritten note appended to FBI airtel Jan. 28, 1971 quoted in "Counterintelligence Program against Huey P. Newton," 13. See also FBI airtel Feb. 2, 1971 quoted in *ibid.*, 13.

126. Hilliard and Cole, *This Side of Glory*, 317; Church Committee, 200–206, 207; Ward Churchill, "'To Disrupt, Discredit and Destroy': The FBI's Secret War Against the Black Panther Party," in *Liberation*, 112; Coleman and Avery, "The Party's Over," 28, 33; Hopkins, *Life after Life*, 83, 86.

127. FBI articles June 17, Aug. 10, 11, 12, 19, Oct. 20, Dec. 16, 1970; FBI letter Aug. 23, 1970 cited in "Counterintelligence Program against Huey P. Newton," 9, 10–11, 12; Newton, *War against the Panthers*, 58, 61–64; Church Committee, 201–3, 205; Wallace Turner, "Huey Newton Denies Murder and Assault," *New York Times*, Nov. 22, 1977, 11; Newton testimony, March 1979, 52, 85, 103–5; "Huey P. Newton" FBI summary document Nov. 22, 1974, 1–10, Newton collection reel 30 file: "HPN Legal Brief"; Schofield Coryell,

The 1976 publication of the Church Committee Report offered further proof of the state's complicity in the decline of the BPP. Newton read the report among other FBI materials while researching his UC Santa Cruz Ph.D. dissertation, "War against the Panthers."¹²⁸ His dissertation concluded that the BPP had been subjected to an extensive and largely successful counterintelligence program. Consequently, even Newton's academic studies confirmed the feeling that his every move was being monitored.¹²⁹ His increased use of cocaine following his return from exile in 1977 would simply have served to deepen this suspicion, as would the July 1978 appearance of "The Party's Over" in *New Times*. The journalists Kate Coleman and Paul Avery spent years researching the BPP and Newton. Their conclusions were devastating: criminality was rife in the BPP, and Newton was central to the organization's decline.¹³⁰

The evidence suggests that Newton lived in a state of high vigilance while in Oakland, treating the world around him as a constant threat. The limited evidence that remains from Newton's exile in Cuba between 1974 and 1977 suggest that his symptoms diminished when he was removed from the Bay Area.¹³¹ There, he said he

"Huey Newton: Panthers Are Still There," *Mainstream* c.1979 32 Newton collection reel 3, folder: "News Clippings and Magazines"; Cynthia Gorney, "Newton Trial: Slow Battle over One Man's Image," *Washington Post*, March 19, 1979, A3; "Declaration of Huey P. Newton," 108–16 and "Declaration of Gwen Fontaine Newton," 139–40 in *People of the State of California v. Huey P. Newton*, 64624A and 65919 Newton collection reel 8 file: "Court of Appeals"; Diehl, "West Q&A: Huey Newton," 8–9; "He Comes Not as an Avenger, But as a Healer" *The Black Panther* Aug. 20, 1977, 14–15; "A Conversation with Huey P. Newton," 13.

128. The BPP alleged that the Church Committee released a tiny fraction of the FBI's BPP files. "Lawsuit Uncovers Massive Files on Black Panther Party," Newton collection reel 6 file: "Committee for Justice for HPN folder 1."

129. "Huey P. Newton Defense Fund Drive Takes Shape," *The Black Panther*, February 11, 1978, 1, 6; *Black Panther Party v. Levi* No. 76–2205; "Huey P. Newton: 'The D.A. Has Bribed the Prosecution Witness,'" *The Black Panther*, July 23–August 5, 1979, 1.

130. By 1978, numerous local journalists had enough credible information to write similar pieces. Fear was a primary factor in maintaining the code of silence. Weir and Noyes, "Behind the [Party's Over] Story," 261, 266, 268; Paul Grabowicz, "Huey's Reign of Terror," *Berkeley Barb*, July 7–13, 1978, 3; "Press Statement for Immediate Release" Newton collection reel 6, folder: "Letters from Institute Speakers New Times Magazine Suit"; Coleman, "The Party's Over."

131. William Lee Brent, *Long Time Gone: A Black Panther's True-Life Story of His Hijacking and Twenty-Five Years in Cuba* (Lincoln, Neb.: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 233; "A Conversation with Huey P. Newton," 13; Stewart Brand, "Sanctuary in Cuba: Recollections and Snapshots of Huey P. Newton," *The CoEvolution Quarterly* Fall 1977, 27; Hilliard et al, *Huey*, 235.

“felt free and safe and comfortable for the first time.”¹³² Although Elaine Brown details a small number of incidents in which Newton’s “madness” returned, the lack of cocaine and surveillance contributed to a marked decline in his level of agitation.¹³³ Ominously, however, drugs continued to occupy his thoughts. He outlined a plan to smuggle drugs through Oakland’s port and use the profits to benefit the BPP. The plan, which would be facilitated by the BPP’s control of the municipal political system, did not come to fruition. Yet it foreshadowed Newton’s reintegration into Oakland’s seedier side. Soon after gushing tributes to Castro’s revolution and promising to beat the criminal charges from which he fled, Newton resumed his familiar nocturnal habits and intimidating behavior.¹³⁴ The resumption of his cocaine use, which precipitated the return of his paranoia and macho tendencies, was almost inevitable.¹³⁵ By the end of the 1970s it was clear that Newton was a drug addict with significant problems. Writing to his long-term friend and benefactor Bert Schneider, Newton confessed:

I feel very ashamed of my inexcusable, self-induced insanity. I would not tolerate such behavior in anyone and certainly don’t expect anyone to tolerate it from me. When the white witch can take such control as to destroy your most valued relationships, it’s time to quit, so for all it’s worth to you, I vow never again to indulge.¹³⁶

The catalyst for this unusually self-aware epistle will likely remain unknown. The letter, however, reveals the extent to which cocaine corroded even Newton’s long-term friendships. Nevertheless, like many promises from confirmed addicts, Newton’s regretful pledge was valueless. He continued to abuse cocaine and to brush

132. “Huey Newton on Panther Tactics,” *Seven Days*, February 24, 1978, 8; Newton collection reel 3, folder: “News Clippings and Magazines”; see also “A Conversation with Huey P. Newton,” 13; Interview with anonymous interviewer, Cuba c. March 1976, 10, 11–12, Newton collection reel 12, folder: “Servant: Post Exile”; Tom Snyder interview with Huey P. Newton transcript c. Oct. 1977, 8–9 Newton collection reel 4 folder: “General Letters not Answered.”

133. Brown, *A Taste of Power*, 382, 383–84, 399.

134. *Ibid.*, 388–89, 439; Robert Trumbull, “Newton Plans to Resume Control of Black Panthers,” *New York Times*, June 28, 1977, 17; Les Ledbetter, “Violence Not Needed to Bring Socialism to U.S., Newton Says,” *New York Times*, July 17, 1977, 26; Lionel Martin, “Huey Newton to Return to U.S. to Face Charges,” *Washington Post*, June 25, 1977, A12.

135. Brown, *A Taste of Power*, 438, 439.

136. Newton to Bert [Schneider] and Greta [Ronningen], Jan. 16, 1979, Personal File Huey, reel 45, Newton collection.

against the law through the 1980s.¹³⁷ By then, even he accepted that his drug addiction had ruined him: “I’m tapped out, guys,” he reportedly lamented, “I have no more energy. I just want to get high.”¹³⁸ His compulsive appetite for crack cocaine, which by 1989 had supplanted powdered cocaine as Newton’s drug of choice, and his abrasive attitude toward Oakland’s drug dealers proved his final undoing.

Conclusion

Huey P. Newton was hugely intelligent, able to converse with ease in the company of eminent academics, film producers, newspaper reporters, and others.¹³⁹ Yet he was also short-tempered, prone to violence and temptation, and was surely a damaged individual by August 1970. If his subsequent life is assessed, there are almost certainly a number of long-term symptoms that resulted from his confinement, suggesting that Newton had adopted a mask in order to conceal any weakness. He became hypersensitive and hypervigilant, he had increasing problems with social interaction, and he developed a drug addiction that exacerbated these very symptoms. These problems, combined with constant police surveillance and harassment, rendered Newton a violent, paranoid shell of his former self.

Newton’s prison experience anticipated that of prisoners convicted after the repeal of California’s indeterminate sentencing policy. There was no attempt to rehabilitate him, either in prison or afterward. His incarceration followed a period in which African American prisoners exploited and subverted an attempt to remold them into model citizens. Their success at using this scheme to educate themselves about the corrupt society around them, and in particular, Eldridge Cleaver’s politicization of the experiment,

137. “Ex-Black Panther Chief Arrested on Fraud Charges,” *New York Times*, April 17, 1985, A17; “Ex-Leader of Black Panthers Is Being Held on Gun Charge,” *New York Times*, Nov. 7, 1986, D18; “Huey Newton to Begin Term,” *New York Times*, March 14, 1987, 9; “Ex-Radical Leader Sentenced,” *New York Times*, March 17, 1989, A19; Pearson, *Shadow of the Panther*, 299–300, 309–10.

138. Pearson, *Shadow of the Panther*, 296.

139. The noted psychologist Erik Erikson, for example, commented that Newton’s opening statement at the BPP’s February 1971 conference was so complex that Erikson did not understand it. Erik H. Erikson and Newton, *In Search of Common Ground: Conversations with Erik H. Erikson & Huey P. Newton* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1973), 44, 103; Coleman and Avery, “The Party’s Over,” 31.

convinced prison authorities that future prisoners should not be given the same opportunities. Newton was among California's first high-profile African American prisoners to witness a return to the "Big House" concept of incarceration, an experience that doubtless exerted a defining influence on his later life, and that helped prevent, in the words of the FBI, the "rise of a messiah" who might "unify and electrify" black Americans.¹⁴⁰ Newton's case is consequently significant if we are to understand the long-term outcome from the rehabilitative experiment for African American prisoners. It demonstrates the authorities' acute awareness of the importance of prison in the development of African American radical political movements, and their successful attempts to ensure that Newton could not catalyze a second generation of inmate activists. His inability to resume effective leadership of the BPP was undoubtedly linked to his personal flaws, but the efforts of the authorities to isolate and then undermine him played a key role in the BPP's decline after his release. The recreation of a carceral environment in the penthouse, coupled with the pressures emanating from his near-mythological status and FBI surveillance simply intensified the problems that he faced. It is impossible to disentangle Huey P. Newton's later life from his prison experience, indicating that he, and possibly the entire African American radical political movement, lived in the shadow of the soul breaker.

140. FBI Director airtel to SAC Albany "re: Counterintelligence Program Black Nationalist-Hate Groups" March 4, 1968, 3 in *COINTELPRO Black Extremist* part one at *FBI Records: The Vault*, accessed February 10, 2014, <http://vault.fbi.gov/cointel-pro/cointel-pro-black-extremists/cointelpro-black-extremists-part-01-of/view>.