

## In the Vanguard of the Vanguard:

# THE BLACK PANTHER KILLER ELITE

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*Aided by Time magazine, MacNeil/Lehrer, and the Los Angeles Times, Elaine Brown has managed to sugarcoat her career as a political gangster, presenting herself as a feminist heroine and female victim.*

DAVID HOROWITZ

THE ARRIVAL of Elaine Brown's Black Panther memoir, *A Taste of Power*, in March sent a chill into my marrow. The author's face on the dust jacket was different from the one I remembered, but I could still see the menace I knew so well underneath.

I first met Elaine in 1974, during a summer that had been disastrous for Black Panther Party Leader Huey Newton. Reports had appeared in the press locating him at the scene of a drive-by shooting at an "after hours" club. He was indicted for pistol-whipping a middle-aged black tailor named Preston Callins with a .357 magnum, for brawling with two police officers in an Oakland bar, and for murdering a 17-year-old prostitute named Kathleen Smith. When the day arrived for his arraignment in this last matter, Huey failed to show. Assisted by the Panthers' Hollywood supporters, he had fled to Cuba. With Huey gone, Elaine took over the reins of the Party and seemed to run it until 1977 when, unable to stomach exile any longer, Huey suddenly returned. Elaine left for Los Angeles, never to return.

Elaine Brown emerged from obscurity early this year. She had been living with a wealthy French industrialist in Paris. Now she was back in America promoting *A Taste of Power*, published by a major New York publisher, with all the fanfare of a major New York offering.

With her usual adroitness, Elaine has managed to sugarcoat her career as a political gangster by presenting herself as a feminist heroine and female victim. "What Elaine Brown

writes is so astonishing," croons novelist Alice Walker from the dust jacket, "at times it is even difficult to believe she survived it. And yet she did, bringing us that amazing light of the black woman's magical resilience, in the gloominess of our bitter despair." "A stunning picture of a black woman's coming of age in America," concurs *Kirkus Reviews*. "Put it on the shelf beside *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*." To the *Los Angeles Times*' Carolyn See, it is "beautiful, touching... astonishing ... Movie makers, where are you?" (In fact, Suzanne DePasse, producer of *Lonesome Dove*, who appears to have been a guiding spirit behind the book is planning a major motion picture of Elaine's life.) *Time*'s review invokes Che Guevara's claim that "the true revolutionary is guided by great feelings of love," and comments: "In the end, Brown discovers, love is the most demanding political act of all."

Elaine, who reportedly received a \$450,000 advance from Pantheon Books, toured the book circuit, doing radio and television shows from coast to coast, including a segment of the *MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour*, where she appeared on a panel chaired by Charlayne Hunter Gault as an authority on black America. At Cody's Books in Berkeley, two hundred radical nostalgists came to hear her, flanked by her "bodyguard," Huey's old gunman, Flores Forbes.

I read the book and, jaded though I was, still was amazed by this reception. *A Taste of Power* is, in its bloody prose, and despite the falsehoods designed to protect the guilty, the self-revelation of a sociopath, of the Elaine I knew.

"I FELT JUSTIFIED in trying to slap the life out of her." This is the way Elaine introduces an incident in which she at-



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tempted to retrieve some poems from a radical lawyer named Elaine Wenders. The poems had been written by Johnny Spain, a Panther who participated in Black Panther George Jackson's bloody attempt to escape from San Quentin. Elaine describes how she entered Wenders' office, flanked by two female lieutenants, slapped Wenders' face and proceeded to tear the room apart, emptying desk drawers and files onto the floor, slapping the terrified and now weeping lawyer again, and finally issuing an ultimatum: "I gave her twenty-four hours to deliver the poems to me, lest her office be blown off the map."

Because Wenders worked in the office of Charles Garry, Huey's personal attorney, Elaine's thuggery produced some mild repercussions. She was called for a "reprimand" by Huey, who laughingly told her she was a "terrorist." The reprimand apparently still stings and Elaine even now feels compelled to justify the violence that others considered impolitic: "It is impossible to summarize the biological response to an act of will in a life of submission. It would be to capture the deliciousness of chocolate, the arousing aroma of a man or a perfume, the feel of water to the dry throat. What I had begun to experience was the sensation of personal freedom, like the tremor before orgasm. The Black Panther Party had awakened that thirst in me. And it had given me the power to satisfy it."

The thirst for violence is a prominent feature of this self-portrait: "It is a sensuous thing to know that at one's will an enemy can be struck down," Elaine continues. In another passage she gives one of many instances of the pleasure. It is a revenge exacted, after she becomes head of the Party, on a former Panther lover named Steve, who had beaten her years before.

Steve is lured to a meeting where he finds himself looking down the barrel of a shotgun. While Elaine's enforcer, Larry Henson, holds Steve at gunpoint, Elaine unleashes four members of the Panther "Squad" — an enforcer group that Huey had organized inside the Party to maintain discipline — including the 400-pound "Big Bob," on her victim: "Four men were upon him now ... Steve struggled for survival under the many feet stomping him ... Their punishment became unmerciful. When he tried to protect his body by taking the fetal position, his head became the object of their feet. The floor was rumbling, as though a platoon of pneu-

matic drills were breaking through its foundation. Blood was everywhere. Steve's face disappeared."

The taste for violence is as pervasive in Elaine's account as is the appetite to justify it in the name of the revolutionary cause. She describes the scene in Huey's apartment just after he had pistol-whipped the middle-aged black tailor Preston Callins with a .357 magnum. (Callins required brain surgery to repair the damage): "Callins's blood now stained the penthouse ceilings and carpets and walls and plants, and [Huey's wife's] clothes, even the fluffy blue-and-white towels in the bathroom." This is Elaine's reaction to the scene: "While I noted Huey's irreverent attitude about the whole affair, it occurred to me how little I,

too, actually cared about Callins. He was neither a man nor a victim to me. I had come to believe everything would balance out in the revolutionary end. I also knew that being concerned about Callins was too costly, particularly in terms of my position in the Party. Yes, I thought, f\*\*\* Callins."

Violence was not restricted to the Panthers' dealings with their enemies, but was an integral part of the Party's internal life as well. In what must be one of the sickest aspects of the entire Panther story, this Party of liberators enforced discipline on the black "brothers and sisters" inside the organization with *bull whips*, the very symbol of the slave past. In a scene that combines both the absurdity and pathology of the Party's daily routine, Elaine describes her own punishment under the Panther lash. She is ordered to strip to the waist by Chairman Bobby Seale and then subjected to ten strokes because she had missed an editorial deadline on the Black Panther newspaper.

*A TASTE of Power* inadvertently provides another service by describing how the Panthers originally grew out of criminal street gangs, and how the gang mentality remained the core of the Party's sense of itself even during the heyday of its political glory. Elaine writes with authority, having come into the Party through the Slausons, a forerunner of the Bloods and the Crips. The Slausons were enrolled *en masse* in the Party in 1967 by their leader, gangster Al "Bunchy" Carter, the "Mayor of Watts." Carter's enforcer, Frank Diggs, is one of Elaine's first Party heroes: "Frank Diggs, Captain Franco, was reputedly leader of the Panther underground. He had spent 12 years in Sing Sing prison in New York on

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robbery and murder charges.” Captain Franco describes to Elaine and Ericka Huggins his revolutionary philosophy: “Other than making love to a Sister, downing a pig is the greatest feeling in the world. Have you ever seen a pig shot with a .45 automatic, Sister Elaine? ... Well, it’s a magnificent sight.” To the newly initiated Panther, this is revolutionary truth: “In time, I began to see the dark reality of the revolution according to Franco, the revolution that was not some mystical battle of glory in some distant land of time. At the deepest level, there was blood, nothing but blood, unsanitized by political polemic. That was where Franco worked, in the vanguard of the vanguard ....”

**T**HE PANTHERS were — just as the police and other Panther detractors said at the time — a criminal army at war with society and with its thin blue line of civic protectors. When Elaine took over the Party, even she was “stunned by the magnitude of the party’s weaponry .... There were literally thousands of weapons. There were large numbers of AR-18 short automatic rifles, .308 scoped rifles, 30-30 Winchesters, .375 Magnum and other big-game rifles, .30 caliber Ga-

rands, M-15s and M-16s and other assorted automatic and semi-automatic rifles, Thompson submachine guns, M-59 Santa Fe Troopers, Boys .55 millimeter anti-tank guns, M-60 fully automatic machine guns, innumerable shotguns, and M-79 grenade launchers .... There were caches of crossbows and arrows, grenades, and miscellaneous explosive materials and devices.”

I remember vividly an episode in the mid-’70s, when one of the Panther arms caches, a house on 29th Street in East Oakland, was raided by the police and 1,000 weapons including machine guns, grenade launchers, and anti-tank guns were uncovered. Party attorney Charles Garry held a press conference at which he claimed that the weapons were planted by the police and that the 29th Street house was a dormitory for teachers at the Panther school (which it also, in fact, was). Then Garry denounced the police raid as just one more repressive act in the ongoing government conspiracy to discredit the Panthers and destroy militant black leadership. Of course, all right-thinking progressives rallied to the Panthers’ support.

And right-thinking progressives are still rallying. How else explain the spectacle attending the reception of Elaine’s book? After all, this is not pre-glasnost Russia, where crimes were made to disappear into a politically controlled void. The story of the Panthers’ crimes is not unknown. But it is either uninteresting or unbelievable to a progressive culture that still regards white racism as the primary cause of all ills in black America, and militant thugs like the Panthers as mere victims of politically inspired repression.

**T**HE EXISTANCE of a Murder Incorporated in the heart of the American left is something the left really doesn’t want to know or think about. Such knowledge would refute its most cherished self-understandings and beliefs. It would undermine the sense of righteous indignation that is the crucial starting point of a progressive attitude. It would explode the myths on which the attitude depends.

In the last two decades, for example, a vast literature has been produced on the “repression of the Panthers” by the FBI. The “Cointelpro” program to destabilize militant organizations and J. Edgar Hoover’s infamous memo about the dangers of a “black messiah” are more familiar to today’s college students probably than the operations of the KGB or the text of Magna Carta. In *A Taste of Power*, Elaine Brown constantly invokes the FBI specter (as she did while leader of the Party) to justify Panther outrages and make them “understandable” as the hyper-reflexes of a necessary paranoia, produced by the pervasive government threat. A variation of this myth is the basic underpinning of the radical mind-set. Like Oliver Stone’s fantasies of military-industrial conspiracy, it justifies the radical’s limitless rage against America itself.

## A Taste of Power



A BLACK WOMAN'S STORY  
**ELAINE BROWN**

On the other hand, even in authoritative accounts, like William O'Reilly's *Racial Matters*, the actual "Cointelpro" program never amounted to much more than a series of inept attempts to discredit and divide the Panthers by writing forged letters in their leaders' names. (According to O'Reilly's documents, FBI agents even suspended their campaign when they realized how murderous the Panthers actually were, and that their own intelligence pranks might cause real deaths.)

Familiarity with the Panthers' reality suggests a far different question from the only one that progressives have asked — Why so much surveillance of the Panthers? — namely: *Why so little?* Why had the FBI failed to apprehend the guilty not only in the murder of my friend Betty Van Patter but in more than a dozen others? Why were the Panthers able to operate for so long as a criminal gang with a military arsenal, endangering the citizens of major American cities? How could they commit so many crimes — including extortion, arson, and murder — without being brought to the bar of justice?

These would seem obvious questions to ask, yet no one has. With the exception of a story that Peter Collier and I wrote, and two articles by Kate Coleman and Edward Jay Epstein that appeared 10 and 20 years ago, there has been no investigative reporting at all on the Panther crime wave. Nor has its reality been allowed to enter our understanding of the Sixties as reflected in the growing library of books about the epoch.

Todd Gitlin's *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* is probably the most widely used academic text dealing with the Sixties era. As a 30-year inhabitant of Berkeley's progressive community, Gitlin is familiar with the principles and many of the details of the Panther story (and could easily have become more so by interviewing acquaintances and neighbors). Gitlin's sense of social injustice is so acute that he has been prominent in nearly every left-wing protest during the last three decades. In his book, he even describes his nausea over a commercial billboard which symbolizes to him the alienation produced by market society. Yet, his book does not mention Betty's death, nor any other concrete Panther crime, while its single allusion to possible Panther misdeeds is typically equivocated: "Panther leaders sometimes knew that their cadres were responsible for a good deal of mayhem, but under siege — in a ghetto under siege as a whole — they covered up for their own." Thus the Panther heroes of the New Left — Newton, Cleaver, Brown — are exonerated, while the guilty rank and file are absolved in light of the primary aggressions of the white power structure on the ghetto as a whole. (In fact, the Oakland ghetto was "under siege," but by the Panthers themselves.)

In another performance, that is also typical if marginally better than Gitlin's, Adam Hochschild, the publisher of *Mother Jones*, provides an instructive example of how unable the left is to confront the crimes committed in its midst. Tamar Van Patter worked for Hochschild at *Mother Jones*, yet his magazine — a veritable encyclopedia of American injustice in general — has never investigated her mother's case, or examined the realities of the Panther past. Hochschild has

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published an entire book on South Africa, a country about which he knows next to nothing, in which he freely condemns the injustice he finds everywhere in its social landscape. Yet he has not a scintilla of moral energy to spare for the crimes committed in his own political community.

But it is Hochschild's recent *New York Times* review of a new book by David Hilliard about the Panthers that is most revealing — not least, because its intention is to be critical. "Various party activists went to jail, on charges ranging from drug dealing to murder," he writes, pointedly not making the charges himself. Since progressives like Hochschild have systematically discredited the police view in matters where the Panthers are concerned, this leaves the question of their actual guilt effectively begged. Since Hochschild knows the truth, this equivocation is merely a concession, similar to Gitlin's, that the truth he knows is a truth the left does not want to hear. Therefore, he is silent.

SUMMING UP, Hochschild poses the crucial questions suggested to him by the Panther story: "Was the main reason for the Panthers' failure that Newton and other leaders never broke free of their petty-criminal backgrounds? Or did the vicious FBI destabilization campaign do them in?" Hochschild's fine moral discriminations perfectly define the parameters of political correctness on the Panther issue: The FBI is "vicious" for trying to protect ordinary citizens from a gang

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# San Diego's Government-Sponsored Child Abuse Industry

*An 8-year-old's rape set off a two and one-half year officially-sanctioned reign of terror directed not against the perpetrator but against the victim herself and her parents. And, yes, this happened in America. Similar cases are ongoing today.*

by K. L. Billingsley

CHILD ABUSE is a serious problem and everyone agrees that society must protect children from abuse. But what happens when the abusers turn out to be the very agencies and organizations purporting to protect children? What happens when social workers look upon traditional families as repressive relics of an unenlightened past and see separating children from their parents as a form of liberation? And finally, what happens when anti-family ideological zeal is mixed with cold cash, in the form of massive government funding — funding that flows in direct proportion to how much “child abuse” by parents the social workers manage to “discover”? According to a San Diego County grand jury, *this* sort of abuse occurs much more often than most people realize.

In a series of devastating reports based on extensive research into child abuse cases from 1989 to 1992 in San Diego County, the grand jury found that the County Department of Social Services was running what it termed a highly secretive system characterized by “bias and zealotry” that is “incapable of policing its own.” The reports charge that this system operates without effective checks on abuse and that up to 60 percent of the cases did not even need to be in the system — which, by the way, is the same percentage of false child abuse accusations in the nation as a whole according to Richard Wexler's national study, *Wounded Innocents*. The grand jury found “numerous instances in which social workers disobey court orders” and that social workers “lie routinely, even when under oath,” that these “child protectors” tended to grab children first and ask questions later, and that even the foster-care system had

been corrupted into a “baby-brokering business.” Many people found these and other accusations by the grand jury hard to believe. But then the media discovered stories that made the grand jury charges actually appear understated. One celebrated case that began in 1989 (with related litigation continuing even today) revealed all the defects of the system.

In the spring of 1989, San Diego County child-protection authorities knew that Albert Raymond Carder, a convicted child molester, had been abducting girls through their windows and raping them in a San Diego neighborhood. Yet when 8-year-old Alicia Wade was raped in this way during May of that year, Carder was ignored. Instead, Alicia's father, Navy man James Wade, was charged with having committed the rape. Both father and daughter repeatedly denied the charge. Further, Alicia provided a detailed description of her attacker that pointed to Carder and a footprint left outside Alicia's window also matched Carder's shoe size.

Nonetheless, shortly after the crime was reported, social workers seized Alicia — an act known in the trade as a “parentectomy” — and farmed her out to therapist Kathleen Goodfriend of the La Mesa Village Counseling Group. They needed no warrant or other special authorization to do this. Under provisions of Senator Walter Mondale's 1974 “Family Protection Act,” federal anti-child abuse funds are allocated only to state and local governments that grant immunity to social workers and anyone else involved in child abuse cases. Lured by federal dollars, California duly granted such immunity.

THE PRACTICAL effect of this brilliant provision has been to turn social workers loose to carry on more or less as high-handedly as they please, including seizing

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