Acknowledgements:

Layout & Text by:

Clarence "Stretch" Peterson

Cover Photo:

Stephen Shames

Photographs by:

Philadelphia Inquirer

Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives

Black Panther Intercommunal Newspaper

C. Peterson
Dedicated to all the Panthers who have died and gone on to our ancestors, with special thanks to Larry Robbins and Clarence Farmer.

Panther Chant

Well I read it in the papers
Lah dah dee dah dee dah
just the other day
Lah dah dee dah dee dah
that the Black Panther Party
Lah dah dee dah dee dah
was headed this way.
Lah dah dee dah dee dah
They’re coming by bus
Lah dah dee dah dee dah
they’re coming by plane
Lah dah dee dah dee dah
And if they have to walk
Lah dah dee dah dee dah
they’re coming just the same
Foreword

The story of the Black Panther Party and the story of the Philadelphia Chapter of the BPP are based on many individual people and the times they grew out of. Born in the 1940’s or early 1950’s young people growing up in the inner cities of the United States surrounded by racism, discrimination, police harassment and murder, inadequate education that hardly recognized our existence or contribution to the nation.

Some young people saw the need to counter the fear that the police fostered on us through their hostile patrols in our communities while also trying to organize and inform people of the power they have to transform their lives and communities.

In Philadelphia we had some of the best and committed young people this country has ever produced. It’s impossible to tell all of the individual stories of each Panther or community worker that helped in the formation of the Philly Chapter, but it must be said that each of them should be proud of themselves for how they turned their lives around to serve the people body and soul.

Party members came from many backgrounds, some from colleges, some gang members, some workers who put their careers on hold, some Vietnam vets and some professionals, and all making that sacrifice when it wasn’t at all certain what the future would be or even if they would survive. The breakfast programs, food programs, free health clinic, political education classes, panther paper sales and being an all around implacable advocate for the people were the duties of party members. To transform community, society, a nation was our goal.

We had a few party members from Philly who gave the ultimate sacrifice in service to the people, Nassadeen died in Pittsburgh, Bruce “Deacon” Washington was killed in Oakland, Ca... In later years, Mumia Abu-Jamal would become a political prisoner of the state, Billy “O” Overton, Bogey “O” Overton, Rolando “Montae” Hearn, David “Solo” Banks, Joseph “Joe Breeze” Ballard, Madeline Coleman, Candi, Brad Jones, Margaret Turner, Linda Brickhouse, Anthony “Tony” King, and Marsha Pelson passed on to our ancestors.
Many young people have asked us at different reunions and cultural conferences around the country how we started and survived day end and day out. Once you have the desire and find the commitment, everything else will fall into play. Seek and you shall find.

*All Power to the People*

William Brown

Sultan Ahmad

Clarence “Stretch” Peterson

Figure 1(Wm. Brown, Sultan Ahmad, Stretch Peterson)
Brief History of the Philadelphia Chapter BPP

In the late summer of 1968 I found myself running around the city searching for members of the Black Panther Party. I had heard that there was a chapter of the Party somewhere in the city.

Earlier that summer I had been a part of the Black Coalition, a parent organization consisting of many groups of black youth. I had just turned 20 years old and working as a sheet metal worker. I had a meeting at the end of that summer with Terry McHarris and Reggie Schell in South Philly, McHarris described himself as a captain of the Black Panther Party. Early fall we heard of some young guys in North Philly calling themselves Panthers, so McHarris sent me and Reggie to investigate and meet with these Panthers. At this meeting, we met with about 12-15 young boys from Ben Franklin High School, their leader was Louis “Kentu” Kearney and a deep voiced young man named Wes Cook. They had been selling Panther papers obtained from Robbins Book store, located in center city. We decided to join forces and it was suggested that we contact National Headquarters to have the Panther papers sent directly to us. Now Kentu’s group consisted of teenagers between the ages of 14-16 and in our little group I was 20, Reggie was 25 and Terry McHarris was between 25 and 27 years old, Kentu’s group felt threatened by us somehow.

While Reggie and I were trying to find a storefront from which to open an office somewhere in the city, though I was partial to North Philly because I knew that most of the impetus for recent civil rights struggle took place in North Philly, Kentu sent one of his guys, Bill Crawford, to Oakland, Ca., Black Panther Party Central Headquarters. Reggie and I were shocked because we weren’t consulted about the move. A couple of days after Crawford was there Reggie got a call from Central Headquarters demanding to know if we were crazy in Philly sending this crazy young boy out there. Cursing over the phone and telling us they would send some panthers out here and shut us down, that we weren’t authorized to open a chapter in Philly.
Reggie and I were embarrassed and bewildered, we tried to contact Kentu but he wasn’t responding to our calls, so we put together some money to send Reggie out to the coast. By the end of the year we were visited by Donald Cox, Field Marshal of the Party, along with Sharon and Mitch from the New York Chapter sent to investigate and determine whether to establish a chapter office in Philly. We received our instructions on how to operate a chapter and what was expected of us as members of the Black Panther Party, such as opening a breakfast for school children program and how to obtain donations of food for the program. We began receiving Panther papers, first through Robbins Book store, then on our own at the airport. We held a protest rally at the State Building, in support of the Minister of Defense, Huey P. Newton, on Broad Street.
Of the young guys who were with Kentu’s Panthers, only Wes Cook, aka Mumia Abu-Jamal, would be there when we were actually accepted as Panthers.

Mumia was highly intelligent, charismatic, idealistic and very committed to the plight of our people. His tall stature and serious outward demeanor belied his inner sense of humor.

When it came to who would be our Defense Captain, I pushed for Reggie Schell and he was appointed same. Craig Williams was named Field Lieutenant, I was named Lieutenant of Finance, Mumia named Lieutenant of Information, Lynn Smith: Communications Secretary, and so we began. Right off the bat sisters joined the Party, (Gladys Anderson, Martha Madeline, Saundra & Agnes). Montae Hearn became our first breakfast program coordinator, William Brown was section leader for West Philly, Big Herman took over as breakfast program coordinator, and many people joined the Party. Soon we had four sections of the city being served by breakfast programs, clothing programs and Panther paper distribution. We were holding political education classes around the city. Celia Turner became one of the first sisters to be in staff leadership.

Figure 3|Milt McGriff organizing around his political campaign|
In 1969, we ran some Panthers for political office, Milt McGriff and another brother ran for City Council. We lost but we were able to put across our platform and programs to the people in a large way.

1969 was a very active year for Police assaults on Panthers and our offices. We were arrested one evening after work, the office was closed and we were across the street at the neighborhood bar mingling with the people. Upon leaving the bar we stood on the pavement when someone uttered that it looked like Fencil, Police Inspector, was in the car that had just passed us. Then, about 8-10 unmarked cop cars stopped in front of us and a small army of police jumped out telling us to get up against the wall with our hands up. They tried to bust open the front door to the office but they didn’t know that we had reinforced it with wood and sheet steel plate. The cop picked for the job, jumped into the door feet first and bounced off that door and onto the ground, which made my day. Around this time, our comrades in Chicago, Fred Hampton and Mark Clark were assassinated by the Chicago police, our comrades in Los Angeles were besieged for nine hours in a pre-dawn raid by the L.A. police.

Figure 4(North Philly Panther protest rally)
Other chapters across the country were being attacked also, the New York 21 trials were going on, New Haven, Ct. chapter was on trial, and Chairman Bobby Seale was on trial in the Chicago 8 travesty of justice.

During this time many of us were being sent to different cities where we were requested by persons from that city either to help them organize a branch or a support group for the movement. I, Stretch Peterson, was sent to Harrisburg and Erie in Pennsylvania to help some young people open support offices. Other comrades were sent to help man the offices in New Haven and Washington, D.C...

These were some hectic and dangerous days, we were young and dedicated, not getting very much sleep and certainly not receiving the daily nourishment we needed. We would get up at 5 a.m. to prepare breakfast for the children, then go on to sell Panther papers till the evening, come back to the office for political education class or deal with the daily contradictions of the day which went on until around 10 p.m., if you were assigned to an office you may have had other office duties to attend to. The daily life of a Panther was routine, for the most part.
A sister called “Sister Love” was sent to Philly from Central Headquarters to work with us, she was beloved of us all, and the hardest worker and finest example of a Panther.

By the middle of 1970, we, in the Philly chapter of the BPP, had offices in N. Philly, W. Philly and Germantown; with breakfast programs running throughout north, south, west Philly and Germantown plus a medical center on 16th & Susquehanna Ave... On a national level, the Party was promoting a challenge to the Constitution of the United States to redress the injustices of our society. We were to host a Plenary Session to the National Constitution Convention. This plenary session would be held in Philadelphia at Temple University in the beginning of September.

Figure 6(Interview at Temple University: standing, Montae Hearn, Bunchy, Mojo, Robert Webb, William Brown) seated, (“Big Man” Howard, Afeni Shakur, Ray “Masai” Hewitt, Zayd Shakur)

While preparations were being made for the plenary session, J. Edgar Hoover’s COINTELPRO program was at work through the armed might of the Philly police force, which attacked our offices in late August to disrupt our efforts to organize. The attack which they hoped would destroy our plans had the opposite effect. We were able to get our comrades out of jail with the assistance of many community groups and church ministers. Although police closed and
ransacked three of our offices and would not allow any Panthers to approach the offices, the people who lived on the block opened the offices on their own. Our Panther children were already in the care of our neighbors and after foolishly attacking us police chief Rizzo didn’t want to openly attack the community. The attack also boosted membership and added more community workers to our rolls.

Some time after the plenary session Big Herman Smith was placed in charge of the Philly chapter. The Constitutional Convention for a new constitution was held in Washington, D.C. in December without a hitch.

The Philly chapter under the stewardship of William Brown, because Big Herman was out on the coast at Central Headquarters, continued to serve the people with our programs and held some big events like giving out thousands of bags of groceries at the Church of the Advocate, conducting sickle cell anemia testing, and forging alliances with many community based organizations.

Around sometime in 1972 Huey P. Newton, leader of the Black Panther Party had an idea of bringing all of the chapters and branches out to Oakland, Ca.
gradually, first because the Party was running the Chairman, Bobby Seale for Mayor of Oakland, then eventually making that city our base sphere of influence.

This last decision was disastrous for the Party. Of all the police attacks, internal contradictions or so-called splits within the Party, bringing everyone out to the coast was the straw that broke the camel’s back. Many comrades felt they were abandoning their respective communities and people, so they left the Party. The offices were eventually closed by the end of 1973 and everyone sent to Oakland.

Those of us, who continued on with struggle inside the BPP, found life on the west coast a whole new set of challenges. While on the coast we lost one of our most dedicated comrades, Bruce “Deacon” Washington, he was killed while we were chaperoning a dance for our youth.

At one time, on the coast, we had a Movie theatre, Bar & Grill, a singing group called the “Lumpens”, church choir, the adopted son of W.E.B. Dubois was the editor of the Black Panther newspaper and we still had our programs.
But the contradictions within the Party were too great to overcome, by this time Chairman Bobby Seale had left and Huey was in Cuban exile. Elaine Brown had pronounced that she was in charge of the Party, as it was, and the Party as an organization without chapters or branches continued for a few more years.

It’s not easy trying to tell the story of the Black Panther Party because there were many stories not one. Each chapter must tell their own story, their road to the Party and their hardships and travails.

All Power to the People
Some Pictures of Comrades

Figure 10 (friend, Bobby Scale, Elaine Brown, Huey Newton, John Seale, Bobby Rush, Big Herman)
Figure 14 (Robert Bay, East Coast Coordinator)
In memory of our fallen comrade Bruce "Deacon" Washington, a man of uncompromising fortitude and dedication to his family and people.

Figure 17 (Honor Guard: Left-right, Allen Lewis, Henry Smith, Stretch Peterson, and William Brown)
Philadelphia Chapter BPP

Roll Call

Terry McHarris
William “Bill” Crawford
Clarence “Stretch” Peterson
Lynn Smith
Cecelia Turner
Madeline Coleman
William Brown
Margaret Turner
Harold Jamison
Agnes & Marvin Minatay
Henry Smith
Rita Gay
Toni Harper
Rene Johnson
Belva “Sister Love” Newsome
Candi
Jennifer
Reggie Hyler
J. T. Saunders
Brad Jones

Louis “Kentu” Kearney
Craig Williams
Reggie Schell
Wes Cook “Mumia Abu-Jamal
Martha
Saundra Dickinson
Herman Smith “Sultan Ahmad”
Gladys Anderson
Rolando “Montae” Hearn
Herbert Hawkins
Barbara Cox Easley
Milt McGriff
Ethel Paris
Jonathon Pinckett
William “Billy O’ Overton
Belle
Jinx
Joseph “Joe Breeze” Ballard
Danny Howell
Solomon Jones
Norman "Tick" Lowry
Bruce "Deacon" Washington
Leslie Wayman
Glenn Lomax
Lydia Andrews
Nassadeen
Tony Turner
Beverly Johnson
John Broaddus
Ernie Jones
Doc
Rodney
Fish
Howard McBride
Dante
Doug
Kenny
Barbara Pelson
Big Gerry
Billy King
Peanut King
John Axsom
Pat Evans

Country
David "Solo" Banks
Rosemari Mealey
Fast Eddie
Dee Shontell
Sam Cooley
Tina Allen
Bobby McCall
Bernard Turner
Paula Robertson
Byrd
Rab
William "Cookie Man" Bowler
Allen Lewis
Gus Lynch
Linda Brickhouse
Rick Jones
Marsha Pelson
Bill Broadwater
Anthony "Tony" King
Bogey "O" Overton
Sandra "Moochie" Brooks
Tyson

22
Many comrades were omitted from the rolls because we couldn’t remember their names, please forgive us.

Free Mumia Abu-Jamal