



CONSENT CALENDAR

January 19, 2021

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council

From: Councilmembers Terry Taplin (Author) and Ben Bartlett and Mayor Jesse Arreguin (Co-Sponsors)

Subject: Urging the National Parks Service to Establish a National Parks Unit in the San Francisco Bay Area to Honor the Black Panther Party for Self Defense.

RECOMMENDATION

Adopt a resolution calling on the National Parks Service to conduct a Reconnaissance Survey to assess the suitability of lands in the San Francisco Bay Area to honor the Black Panther Party in Berkeley, Oakland, Richmond, and the surrounding Bay Area; send letter to the National Parks Service, and President[-elect] Joseph R. Biden, Jr with resolution.

BACKGROUND

The Huey P. Newton Foundation's President Frederika Newton, widow of Party founder Dr. Huey P. Newton, has requested that the City of Berkeley support national recognition of the Black Panther Party for Self Defense. Formally recognizing their struggle would also be a way of reaffirming the City Council's mandate as public servants.

In the late 1960s, the Nixon Administration embraced white supremacy with renewed vigor and began dismantling President Lyndon B. Johnson's Great Society and War on Poverty programs almost immediately upon inauguration, heralding a new era of targeted disinvestment and systematic discrimination of Black people, and violent repression of Black activist groups. But even during the preceding Democratic administration, sympathetic government officials made limited progress in a society that systematically excluded Black communities from access to capital, civic institutions, and basic necessities while enforcing geographic segregation. It was the policy of the U.S. government to condemn Black people to the poverty trap of urban ghettos and blame them for their own poverty.

The Black Panther Party for Self Defense was founded in 1966 in West Oakland, a historically Black working-class community literally being torn apart by urban renewal and the construction of BART, to organize in the revolutionary struggle for Black Power. White liberal society had failed to deliver on its promise of opening up the economy and

civic institutions to Black people. The East Bay's African diaspora remained excluded from most of the region's labor market, capital investment, and political representation, while bearing a disproportionate burden of police brutality and dispossession of property. The Black Panthers resisted hostile white institutions through what historian Robert Self described as "the political imagining of a nation within a nation."¹ Through its Community Survival Programs, the Black Panthers provided free breakfasts for children, medical clinics, self-defense trainings, emergency ambulance transportation, and education, among other services that the U.S. government regularly withheld from its Black constituents. In Berkeley, the Black Panther Party distributed free groceries at San Pablo Park, established Black Panther Office #3 at 3106 Shattuck Avenue, and held rallies at Sproul Plaza on the UC Berkeley campus.

Mired in violent reprisals, members of the Black Panther Party were routinely persecuted, imprisoned, and murdered by law enforcement agencies. Although the Party formally disbanded in 1982, they left an indelible mark on our body politic. Many of our civic leaders inherited their struggle for justice and Black power.

RATIONALE FOR RECOMMENDATION

The City of Berkeley is joining in a nationwide reckoning with persistent systemic racism as an economic, moral, and public health crisis. It is long past time for a National Monument to accompany this reckoning. We are in the process of developing new policies to redress racial inequities in public safety, education, housing and transportation. We join cities across the country in renaming schools originally named after slave owners. Our City Manager is partnering with civil rights groups to reimagine public safety. We must commit ourselves to building civic institutions that affirmatively include people of all backgrounds and actively redress historic injustices. To that end, the East Bay should honor the legacy of the Black Panther Party and the bravery of the Black Power movement—local residents who stepped up and took the wellbeing of their community in their own hands when the government failed them.

Many of our Black political leaders in the East Bay can trace the history of their activism directly to the unparalleled organizing feats of the Black Panther Party. Our city and nation should honor this heritage. While racism persists in our society, so, too, does the inspiration of those who fought back, fed their families, clothed their children, and healed the sick. Memorializing their struggle for freedom is one way we can ensure their unfinished work continues.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

None—Contingent on National Park Service action.

FISCAL IMPACTS

None.

¹ Self, Robert O. *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland*. (Politics and Society in Twentieth-Century America.) Princeton: Princeton University Press. 2004. p. 217.

CONTACT

Councilmember Terry Taplin, ttaplin@cityofberkeley.info

ATTACHMENTS/SUPPORTING MATERIALS

Attachment 1: Resolution

Attachment 2: Letter from Frederika Newton

CITY OF BERKELEY RESOLUTION URGING THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE AND PRESIDENT BIDEN TO ESTABLISH A NATIONAL PARK UNIT TO RECOGNIZE THE HISTORY AND CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE BLACK PANTHER PARTY FOR SELF DEFENSE

WHEREAS, originally called the Black Panther Party for Self Defense, the party was founded in 1966 by Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale in response to the wide-spread poverty, lack of economic and educational opportunities, and police oppression experienced by the African American community in Oakland, California; and

WHEREAS, pervasive and unrelenting police terrorism directed at communities of color during the 1960s made necessary the formation of the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense; and

WHEREAS, Numerous dedicated and courageous young people of African ancestry enlisted in the ranks of the Black Panther Party to monitor and deter police violence, and to staff community service programs called “survival programs” aimed at providing food, health care, legal assistance, transportation and other services to Black and other poor people living in poverty; and

WHEREAS, Promoting the idea of “All Power to the People”, the Panthers took action themselves to force change and bring about liberation from all forms of human exploitation and oppression; and

WHEREAS, 3106 Shattuck Avenue, San Pablo Park and Sproul Plaza in UC Berkeley was the location of numerous Black Panther Party activities including speeches, meetings, rallies, and free grocery giveaways; and

WHEREAS, As the Panther influence grew nationwide, J. Edgar Hoover, then-Director of the FBI, proclaimed that the Black Panther Party was “the greatest threat to the internal security’ of the United States in 1968; and

WHEREAS, The FBI commenced an illegal campaign of terror against the Black Panther Party that came to be known as “COINTELPRO’ (Counter Intelligence Program) to monitor, obstruct, undermine and neutralize the Party and its members; and

WHEREAS, Despite this opposition by the authorities, throughout the 1960’s and 1970’s the Panthers became a national force for social change, empowering a new generation of African Americans to seize political power, partnering with other disenfranchised communities around the country, and demonstrating that the legacy of slavery and racial oppression still prevented so many from experiencing the promise of prosperity and equality that is the foundation of the American dream; and

WHEREAS, The United States of America has yet to provide national recognition or a publicly accessible space for citizens and visitors to gain educational awareness about the history of the Panthers, one of the most influential groups of freedom fighter in recent history; and

WHEREAS, National recognition would also acknowledge the thousands of people that laid their lives on the lines to feed families in their communities, educate their children, provide free medical services, train a generation of organizers, academics and politicians, and fight for a freer world; and

WHEREAS, The public has demonstrated an interest in unbiased information and interpretation of the history of the Panthers which was illustrated by the overwhelming success of the “All Power to the People: Black Panthers at 50” exhibit at the Oakland Museum of California in 2016/2017; and

WHEREAS, The Party was founded in Oakland, California and had a significant presence with offices, activities and important sites throughout Berkeley and the San Francisco Bay area; and

BE IT RESOLVED, That the City Council for the City of Berkeley calls upon the National Park Service to initiate a Reconnaissance Survey to analyze the appropriateness of the establishment of a National Park or National Monument in Oakland, CA and throughout the Bay Area; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That the City Council for the City of Berkeley urges President Joseph R. Biden to utilize the results of the Reconnaissance Survey to establish a Black Panther Party National Monument through the Antiquities Act (16. U.S.C. 431-433) in the appropriate locations in the San Francisco Bay Area and beyond.

December 8, 2020

Councilmember Terry Taplin
Berkeley City Council
2180 Milvia Street
5th Floor
Berkeley, CA 94704

Re: Local and National Recognition for the Black Panther Party in Richmond, San Francisco Bay Area and throughout the United States

On behalf of the [Huey P. Newton Foundation](#), the nation's largest repository of Black Panther Party-related material, I, Fredrika Newton, the widow of Dr. Huey P. Newton and President of the Huey P. Newton Foundation asks that the City of Berkeley support the national recognition of the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense (Black Panther Party). The Foundation urges the City of Berkeley to pass a resolution requesting the National Park Service to perform a Reconnaissance Survey to assess the suitability of establishing portions of the City of Oakland, Berkeley, Richmond, San Francisco and other San Francisco Bay Area locations as a unit of the National Park Service in recognition of the Black Panther Party. We believe that the result of the survey will clearly indicate the need to establish a National Park Service Historical Site or Monument. Despite the groundbreaking function of the Party, there is no national recognition for the thousands of men, women, and young people who served within the Black Panther Party or for the social programs that were created by the Party, many of which, such as the free school breakfast program, still exist today as governmental programs. The Foundation therefore seeks formal recognition as follows.

Specifically, the Foundation believes that sites such as, but not limited to, would showcase the Party's historic role in advancing African American civil rights in Berkeley and in the San Francisco Bay Area. Among these sites are: the Black Panther Party Office #3, 3106 Shattuck Avenue, location of numerous speeches and Black Panther Party activities, Sproul Plaza, UC Berkeley, location of free grocery giveaways and other Black Panther Party activities, San Pablo Park¹.

In addition, there are numerous locations in the nearby cities of Oakland, Richmond and San Francisco worthy of acknowledgment such as: the Black Panther Party Office #1 (currently the home of It's All Good Bakery) 5622 Martin Luther King Jr. Way; Black Panther Party Office #2, 4419 Martin Luther King Jr. Way; Black Panther Party Office #4, 1048 Peralta Street; De Fremery Park (aka Little Bobby Hutton Memorial Park), 1651 Adeline Street; the Alameda County Superior Court House, 12th and Fallon Street; St. Augustine's Episcopal Church (site of the Party's first free breakfast program, now St. Andrews Baptist Church), 2624 West Street; 5500 Market Street (the Party's 10 Point Program was written at this site in 1966); the traffic signal, corner of Market and 55th Street; Merritt Junior College, Martin Luther King Junior Way and 57th Street; and the site of Black Panther Party co-founder Huey P. Newton's Murder, 1456 Center Street; Free Breakfast Program, Fifth and Chesley St, Richmond, CA; Numerous locations in San Francisco, CA.

¹ <https://www.berkeleyside.com/2017/08/24/east-bay-food-justice-black-panther-party>

The Huey P. Newton Foundation also requests a reauthorization of the \$98,000 grant previously approved from the National Park Service to conduct the Black Panther Party Research, Interpretation & Memory Project². This grant was approved under the Obama administration and was subsequently withdrawn abruptly by the Trump administration³. This technical assistance intended to “memorialize a history that brought meaning to lives far beyond the San Francisco Bay Area,” and the overarching goal was to implement a National Park Service model for bringing diverse voices and communities together to understand their collective past and inspire a better future. Technical assistance will also provide interpretive functions, including preservation and display of artifacts and oral histories from former Party members.

While the City of Oakland is the birthplace of the Black Panther Party, the City of Berkeley played an important role in the establishment, growth and popularity of the Black Panther Party and there were countless Berkeleyans that were members of the Black Panther Party as well as allies. The Foundation believes the locations and resources listed above are worthy of National Park Service designation, interpretation and preservation. In order to be considered for a reconnaissance survey, resources shall meet the following National Park Service criteria. The Foundation has provided the necessary findings that we believe meet the criteria to begin the reconnaissance survey:

“It is an outstanding example of a particular type of resource.” The National Park Service currently operates several Historic Sites, Historical Parks, and Historic Monuments such as the Rosie the Riveter/World War II Home Front National Historical Park, Port Chicago Naval Magazine, Cesar Chavez National Monument, and the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial, all of which acknowledge historic contributions to our nation. A Black Panther Party memorial site would similarly honor the historic contributions of a movement that advanced social change for African Americans everywhere.

1. **“It possesses exceptional value or quality illustrating or interpreting the natural or cultural themes of our Nation’s heritage.”** The Black Panther Party sites named above possess exceptional value in interpreting cultural themes of our Nation’s heritage in that history literally unfolded at each of these sites. Further, these sites are intact much as they were forty years ago and therefore offer a firsthand look at select locations that served as turning points in Civil Rights Movement history. In addition, De Fremery Park (aka Little Bobby Hutton Memorial Park) and the recreation center are owned and operated by the City of Oakland which would make a future transition to Federal ownership more feasible.
2. **“It offers superlative opportunities for recreation for public use and employment, or for scientific study.”** Since the majority of the sites are located within central and North Oakland, they offer perfect opportunities to create a walking and bicycling tour for public recreation and education, particularly for young adults who live in these same neighborhoods but may not be aware of the local history. These sites are currently being

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<https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/search-grants.html?keywords=Black%20Panther%20Party%20Research%2C%20Interpretation%20%26%20Memory%20Project>

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<https://www.dailycal.org/2017/10/29/backlash-national-parks-service-pulls-98k-grant-black-panther-party-research-project-uc-berkeley/>

promoted by numerous organizations such as Visit Oakland⁴, as locations for residents, visitors and tourists to experience historically significant sites.

3. **“It retains a high degree of integrity as a true, accurate, and relatively unspoiled example of the resource.”** As the Black Panther Party’s chief educational advocate, the Foundation attests to the accuracy of the Party’s history as enacted at each of these sites. Although in some instances new entities exist in old Party offices and worksites, the original buildings remain. In the case of De Fremery Park, the space is virtually unaltered since the 1960s when the Party first served the community through free social services. As such it, among other sites, is a **“living history” for Oakland**. The San Francisco Bay Area was the launching point for the Black Panther Party movement that eventually included as many as forty chapters around the world. Oakland is to the Black Liberation Movement what Montgomery, Alabama, is to the Civil Rights Movement, and the Foundation consequently requests formal recognition of that historic role. Only by understanding the Black Panthers’ historic roots can we adequately understand the impact of Black Liberation on Americans of all races.

Lastly, in 2016, the Foundation pursued the establishment of a National Park Service Monument by the outgoing Obama administration and received letters of support from numerous San Francisco Bay Area elected officials which are attached for your reference. In addition, the City of Oakland recently named 9th Street Dr. Huey P. Newton Way and Congresswoman Barbara Lee honored the 50th Anniversary of the Black Panther Party provided at the House of Representatives.

Thank you in advance for your consideration of this request. Please contact Fredrika Newton, Co-Founder and President of the Huey P. Newton Foundation at 1fredrika@gmail.com for further discussion. We look forward to working with the City of Berkeley and the National Park Service on this matter and welcome all queries.

Sincerely,



Fredrika Newton
Huey P. Newton Foundation, President

CC: Huey P. Newton Foundation Board
Berkeley Landmarks Commission

A: Draft Resolution

⁴ <https://www.visitoakland.com/blog/post/black-panther-party/>