



PBS

Presents

THE BLACK PANTHERS: Vanguard of the Revolution

A film by Stanley Nelson



****OFFICIAL SELECTION – Sundance Film Festival 2015****

Release Date: September 2, 2015 at Film Forum in NYC

Run Time: 116 minutes

Rating: Not Rated

Language: English

Official Web Site: <http://theblackpanthers.com>

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SYNOPSIS

Change was coming to America and the fault lines could no longer be ignored—cities were burning, Vietnam was exploding, and disputes raged over equality and civil rights. A new revolutionary culture was emerging and it sought to drastically transform the system. The Black Panther Party for Self-Defense would, for a short time, put itself at the vanguard of that change.

THE BLACK PANTHERS: VANGUARD OF THE REVOLUTION is the first feature length documentary to explore the Black Panther Party, its significance to the broader American culture, its cultural and political awakening for black people, and the painful lessons wrought when a movement derails. Master documentarian Stanley Nelson goes straight to the source, weaving a treasure trove of rare archival footage with the voices of the people who were there: police, FBI informants, journalists, white supporters and detractors, and Black Panthers who remained loyal to the party and those who left it. Featuring Kathleen Cleaver, Jamal Joseph, and many others, THE BLACK PANTHERS: VANGUARD OF THE REVOLUTION is an essential history and a vibrant chronicle of this pivotal movement that birthed a new revolutionary culture in America.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

Seven years ago, I set out to tell the story of the rise and fall of the Black Panther Party, a little known history that hadn't been told in its entirety. In particular, I wanted to offer a unique and engaging opportunity to examine a very complex moment in time that challenges the cold, oversimplified narrative of a Panther who is prone to violence and consumed with anger. Thoroughly examining the history of the Black Panther Party allowed me to sift through the fragmented perceptions and find the core driver of the movement: the Black Panther Party emerged out of a love for their people and a devotion to empowering them. This powerful display of the human spirit, rooted in heart, is what compelled me to communicate this story accurately.

It is essential to me as a filmmaker to try and give the viewer a sense of what it has meant to be black in America and consider this within our contemporary context. The legacy of the Black Panther Party had a lasting impact on the way black people think and see ourselves, and it is important that we look at and understand that. As a great lover of music, I wanted to capture this sentiment in the music we used to give audiences a sense of the time and the undercurrents of change and revolution.

I knew that archival footage would be just as important as interviews when telling this story. The Black Panther history cannot be encapsulated in sound bytes and stills; the movement continues to live and breathe in the hearts and minds of those who endured. I had to dig deeper for footage that captured an authentic portrayal of the Party and which was not distorted by mainstream media. What I found was a treasure of personal records from former members and allies across the globe. These rarely seen images became an important character in the film, telling the story of how the Black Panther Party impacted all communities. There is something incredibly powerful in seeing an array of faces - white, Asian, Latino, black, and native - together at a Black Panther Party rally calling for the reform of corrupt and unjust state institutions.

Nearly half a century later, we find our voices in a renewed chorus for justice and equality. We continue to witness a state apparatus that perpetuates a culture of fear and aggression with frequent and unwarranted displays of racial violence and oppression. As we consider the similarities between the injustices of yesterday and the tragedies of today, it is important to understand that the Panthers were energized largely by young people - 25 and under - who started as small group of actively engaged individuals that collectively became an international human rights phenomenon. My hope is the film reveals itself to be more than just thought-provoking observations of our past. The parallels between pivotal moments within the movement and events occurring in our communities today are undeniable. To better understand the Black Panther Party is to be able to better reflect on our own racial climate and collective responsibility to ensure basic rights are fulfilled, not diminished, and that voices of justice and dissent are celebrated, not silenced.

—*Stanley Nelson, Director*

FILMMAKERS

Directed, Produced, and Written By **STANLEY NELSON**

Producer **LAURENS GRANT**

Editor **ALJERNON TUNSIL**

Associate Producer **NICOLE LONDON**

Assistant Producer / Researcher **SAM ALESHINLOYE**

Assistant Editor **REBECCA SHERWOOD**

Cinematographers **ANTONIO ROSSI**
RICK BUTLER

Composer **TOM PHILLIPS**

Sound **JT TAKAGI**

Animators **MOLLY SCHWARTZ**
GARRY WALLER

FEATURING

Kathleen Cleaver
Elaine Brown
Emory Douglas
Ericka Huggins
Elbert "Big Man" Howard
Jamal Joseph
Clayborne Carson
Tarika Lewis
Rita Williams-Gracia
Sherwin Forte
Wayne Pharr

Roland Freeman
Ronald Freeman
Flores Forbes
Landon Williams
Mohammed Mubarek
Jeff Haas
Dennis Cunningham
Yohuru Williams
Jeffrey Ogbar
Mark Kurlansky
Donna Murch
Scot Brown

FILMMAKER BIOGRAPHIES



STANLEY NELSON—Director/Producer/Writer

Stanley Nelson is an Emmy Award-winning documentary filmmaker, MacArthur ‘Genius’ Fellow, and member of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. He was awarded the National Humanities Medal by President Obama in August 2014. *THE BLACK PANTHERS: VANGUARD OF THE REVOLUTION* is Nelson’s 8th film to premiere at the Sundance Film Festival. It will premiere in theaters this fall. Nelson has directed and produced numerous acclaimed films, including *FREEDOM SUMMER*, *FREEDOM RIDERS*, *JONESTOWN: THE LIFE AND DEATH OF PEOPLE’S*

TEMPLE and *THE MURDER OF EMMETT TILL*. He is also co-founder and Executive Director of Firelight Media, which provides support to emerging documentarians. With numerous industry awards to his credit, Nelson is acknowledged as one of the preeminent documentary filmmakers working today. Currently in production is *TELL THEM WE ARE RISING: THE STORY OF HISTORICALLY BLACK COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES*, which is the second in a series of three films Nelson will direct as part of a new multiplatform PBS series entitled *America Revisited*.

LAURENS GRANT—Producer



Laurens Grant is a Peabody and 3-time Emmy award-winning producer and director who has been making films for more than a decade. Her latest documentary, *JESSE OWENS*, won an Emmy for Outstanding Research and received 2 Emmy nominations for Outstanding Historical - Long Form and Outstanding Music and Sound. The film is the first full-length documentary about the life and legacy of the African-American sprinter whose four gold medal wins at the 1936 Berlin Olympics defied Hitler’s Aryan beliefs. Grant also produced the documentary *FREEDOM RIDERS* which premiered at

Sundance, won a Peabody, 3 Primetime Emmys, was featured on Oprah, and clips are featured in Lee Daniels’ film, *THE BUTLER*.

ALJERNON TUNSIL—Editor



Aljeron Tunsil is an Emmy-winning editor who has been editing films on a range of topics from civil rights, Native Americans and political issues for more than a decade. His latest film, the critically-acclaimed *FREEDOM SUMMER*, premiered at Sundance. His other films include the Emmy-winning films *JESSE OWENS* and *FREEDOM RIDERS*; and *THE ABOLITIONISTS*, a 3-hour documentary film about a brave multiracial abolitionist movement that banded together to end slavery in the United States.

BIOGRAPHIES OF SUBJECTS



KATHLEEN CLEAVER

Kathleen Neal Cleaver, who currently holds an appointment as a senior lecturer and research fellow at Emory University School of Law, has spent her life participating in the human rights struggle. She started alongside her parents in the 1950s civil rights protests in Alabama. By 1966, Kathleen Neal dropped out of Barnard College in New York to join the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) where she served in its Campus Program based in Atlanta. She then moved to the San Francisco Bay Area and from 1967 to 1971, she was the first Communications Secretary of the Black Panther Party. After sharing years of exile, in Algeria and France with former husband Eldridge Cleaver, she returned with her family to the United States in late 1975.

In 1984, Cleaver graduated *summa cum laude* with a B.A. in History from Yale College and was elected to Phi Beta Kappa, then went on to receive a J.D. from Yale Law School in 1989. In 1992 Cleaver joined the faculty of Emory University Law School.

Cleaver has received fellowships from Radcliffe College's Bunting Institute, the W.E.B. Du Bois Institute of Harvard University, the Center for Historical Analysis at Rutgers University, the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, and the Center for Scholars and Writers of the New York Public Library and Alphonse Fletcher Sr. Fellowship from Harvard University to complete *Memories of Love and War*, a memoir still in progress.

Her writing has appeared in numerous magazines and newspapers, including Ramparts, The Black Panther, The Village Voice, The Boston Globe, and Transition, and more recently edited a collection of writings by Eldridge Cleaver, *Target Zero: A Life in Writing* (Palgrave, 2006). *Memories of Love and War*, slated for completion in 2015, will be published by Random House.

Cleaver co-founded and produced the International Black Panther Film Festival based in Harlem from 1999 through 2003. She has participated in international forums and study programs at the American University of Beirut in 2006, in Rio de Janeiro in 2007, and in 2009 at a U.S. law school consortium's summer law and policy program. She was a delegate to the Third International Book Fair (FILVEN) in Venezuela during November 2007, and was an honored participant in the American delegation to the 2nd Pan African Cultural Festival held in Algiers, Algeria in July 2009. Kathleen Cleaver's path continues to engage her in forums, teaching, writing, and film projects that incorporate human rights concerns both within the United States and across the African Diaspora.

EMORY DOUGLAS



Emory Douglas was the Black Panther Party's Minister of Culture and chief art director for the party's important newspaper for twelve years. In these roles, he gave visual dimension to the party's revolutionary message and mission, broadening the party's impact within a larger cultural framework. Douglas attended City

College of San Francisco where he majored in commercial art. He was politically involved as Revolutionary Artist and then Minister of Culture for the Black Panther party from February 1967 until the Early 1980's. Douglas's art and design concepts were always seen on the front and back pages of the Black Panther Newspaper, reflecting the politics of the Black Panther Party and the concerns of the community. Offering a retrospective look at artwork created in the Black Panther Party, Douglas's work has been displayed all over the world. Published In 2007, *Black Panther: The Revolutionary Art of Emory Douglas* provides a comprehensive collection of Douglas's work.

ERICKA HUGGINS



Ericka Huggins is an African American activist, educator, poet and member of the Black Panther Party. Ericka's political activism began in 1963, when she attended the March on Washington and committed to moving from the sidelines to the frontlines in the global human rights movement. In 1969, at age 18, she became a

leader in the Los Angeles chapter of the Black Panther Party with her husband John Huggins. Three weeks after the birth of their daughter Mai, Ericka became a widow, when her husband John Huggins, along with her dear friend, Alprentice "Bunchy" Carter, was murdered on the U.C.L.A campus. Ericka brought her daughter to New Haven, Connecticut for John's burial, and stayed on to open the New Haven chapter of the Black Panther Party.

There, in May 1969, Ericka and fellow Party leader Bobby Seale were targeted and arrested on conspiracy charges sparking calls for "Free Bobby, Free Ericka" across the country and around the world. The resulting trial, one of the longest and most celebrated of the era, spawned several books including *Agony in New Haven: The Trial of Bobby Seale, Ericka Huggins and the Black Panther Party* by Donald Freed.

Currently Ericka Huggins is a Professor of Sociology at Laney College in Oakland and at Berkeley City College, and of Women's Studies at California State University, East Bay. In addition, she has lectured at Stanford, Cornell, and UCLA and in Lisbon, Portugal and Sao Paulo, Brazil. A mother of three, grandmother of two, she lives in Oakland, California.

JAMAL JOSEPH



Jamal Joseph (formerly Eddie Joseph) is a U.S. writer, director, producer, poet, activist, and educator. One of the Panther 21, while incarcerated for his active participation in the Black Panther Party, Joseph earned two college degrees and wrote five plays and two volumes of poetry.

He is a full professor and former chair of Columbia University's Graduate Film Division and the artistic director of the New Heritage Theater in Harlem. He has been featured on HBO's "Def Poetry Jam," BET's "American Gangster" and on Tupac Shakur's "The Rose That Grew From Concrete" Volumes 1 & 2. He is the author of the interactive biography on Tupac Shakur, *Tupac Shakur Legacy*.

Joseph was nominated for a 2008 Academy Award in the Best Song category for his contributions to the song "Raise It Up", performed by IMPACT Repertory Theatre and Jamia Nash in the 2007 film August Rush.

His memoir Panther Baby was published in February 2012 by Algonquin Books.

ABOUT FIRELIGHT

Firelight was founded in 2000 by MacArthur “genius” Fellow Stanley Nelson and award-winning writer and philanthropy executive Marcia Smith as an independent production company dedicated to harnessing the power of story-driven media as a platform for education and action.

Best known for producing high-quality powerful productions for PBS and creating dynamic community engagement campaigns, Firelight is committed to making films about pivotal events, movements, and people in American history and in doing so has produced a number of award-winning films including *Freedom Riders*, *Jonestown: The Life and Death of Peoples Temple*, *The Murder of Emmett Till*, *A Place of Our Own*, and *Freedom Summer*.

Firelight’s upcoming releases include *The Black Panthers: Vanguard of the Revolution*; *Tell Them We Are Rising: Historically Black Colleges & Universities*; and *The Slave Trade: Creating A New World*.

In 2008 Firelight expanded its mission and created the Producers’ Lab, a flagship mentorship program that seeks out and develops emerging diverse filmmakers. The Lab provides filmmakers with one-on-one support, funding, professional development workshops and networking opportunities. More than just a workshop, the Producers’ Lab is unrivaled in its representation of diverse producers, creating an exclusive network of talented unique storytellers that receive ongoing support from a project’s conception to its completion.

In addition to a focus on excellence in filmmaking, Firelight has a long history and is one of only a handful of media organizations that has a permanent community engagement division. Firelight has two proven community engagement strengths — reaching and engaging diverse audiences and using historical film to support contemporary social justice organizing. By collaborating with local and national organizations that are committed to a range of social justice issues, Firelight has successfully impacted diverse audiences for well over a decade.