Urban Geography, Gentrification, and Memory of the Black Panther Party: An Essay in Photographs

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“Urban Geography, Gentrification, and Memory of the Black Panther Party: An Essay in Photographs”
By: Mikayla Kraus
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California State University, Monterey Bay
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Abstract: This creative project is a magazine which focuses on and highlights the politics and contributions of the Black Panther Party to the Black Liberation Movement in Oakland. The magazine is titled “Black Panther” as a homage to the Panthers’ newspaper that published 537 issues during the time they were active. Divided into five sections, the magazine includes the political profiles of Panther leaders in Oakland, a walking photo tour of significant and historical sites related to the Black Panther chapter in Oakland, a dissection of the anti-imperialist and Black Marxist theories practiced by the Panthers, a highlight of the Panthers’ part in healthcare and outreach in Black communities, and a magnified look at gentrification in historically Black Oakland communities. All photos were taken by the author on a 35mm Canon AE-1 to mirror the aesthetic of the times.
Urban Geography, Gentrification, and Memory of the Black Panther Party: An Essay in Photographs

Image by Mikayla Kraus

Mikayla Kraus
Senior Capstone
Journalism and Media Studies
Creative Project
Stephanie Spoto
Division of Humanities and Communication
Spring 2018
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Project Proposal

1. Mikayla Kraus, Human Communications — Journalism and Media Studies
2. I would like to do a creative project from a journalistic perspective featuring profiles on either past or present Black Panther Party members. I will either go down the path of getting in contact with current Panthers who are imprisoned, or I will do a deep study and analysis of Panther leaders during the 1960s and 1970s, and do a series of profiles on these members, highlighting their anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist foundations.
3. My project is in direct alignment with the course theme because it is focusing on the politics and real-life members involved with the Black Panther Party movement and the mobilization for Black liberation. I will hopefully be in communication with members, hearing firsthand stories about what the US was like during the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements. I would also like to briefly tie in similarities between the media and government portrayal of the Black Panther Party and the Black Lives Matter movements.
4. The purpose of my project is a combination of informing and enlightening the reader. I’d like to inform about the realities of life being active in such a historical civil movement. I’d like to enlighten the reader by providing personal stories and in depth analysis's of important characters of the Black Panther Party. I hope that my project will give a more personal analysis of the portrayal of the Panther members and their personal reasons for joining the Panther motive.
5. I’m unsure about if I’d like to do a magazine-style spread featuring the profile articles and other small activities and columns centered around the Party. If this is not cleared, I will do a journalistic style long-read article featuring the profiles throughout.
6. “Voices Behind the Black Panther Party”
7. I will be using the CSUMB Library’s resources for biographies and autobiographies of Black Panther members. I will also possibly be in touch with members in prison to get primary sources. There are a few documentaries I have in mind that I’d like to watch and take notes from. I would also like to go up to Oakland myself to take photos to feature in my article.
8. The expectations I have of this project are to personally gain a deeper understanding of the impact of the Black Panther Party on the history of the struggle for equal civil rights between races in the US. I would also like to expand my journalistic skills by doing feature-type articles of someone with a story.
9. I have written countless amounts of articles for classes at CSUMB. I have studied under and gotten to know Estella Porras, the head of the Journalism and Media studies department, and she has helped me develop my journalistic voice as well as given me opportunities to showcase my work. Last semester, in her Reporting course, our class put together a magazine publication composed of feature articles with the audience being students at CSUMB. I was the editor in chief of the magazine and was given the opportunity to oversee a mock magazine operation, as well as edit articles and article page spreads. Coming up, I will be featured in CSUMB’s alumni/donor magazine as the student voice for the school. I was presented the opportunity to write for the magazine by Professor Porras and was selected by the President of Communications to write an article for the magazine. I’m hoping that my capstone project will also help in both strengthening my journalism and interviewing skills as well as help me add a special piece to my portfolio.
10. I need to meet with my capstone professor to discuss further the possibility of writing to Panther members in prison, as well as finalize the format for my project. I will also need to research and find more readings and articles specifically featuring members of the Panthers.

11. I will follow the class timeline which is as follows:
   1. February 26 - Revised Project Proposal (iLearn)
   2. March 5 - Progress Report #1 (iLearn)
   3. March 26 - Annotated Bibliography (iLearn)
   4. April 2 - Draft #1 (iLearn)
   5. April 9 - Revised Annotated Bibliography (iLearn)
   6. April 16 - Draft #2 (iLearn and hard copy in class)
   7. May 7 - Capstone Portfolio and Poster (in class)
BLAC K PANTHER

URBAN GEOGRAPHY, GENTRIFICATION, AND MEM ONY OF THE BLACK PANTHER PARTY: AN ESSAY IN PHOTOGRAPHS

BLACK POWER

BLACK PANTHER LEADERS

HUEY NEWTON, BOBBY SEALE, AND ERICKA HUGGINS ARE AMONGST THOSE WHO LED THE BLACK PANTHERS TO A SUCCESSFUL REVOLUTION. HOWEVER, THERE ARE STILL MANY PANTHERS WHO ARE STILL IMPRISONED FOR CRIMES COMMITTED DURING THE REVOLUTION.

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ANTI-IMPERIALIST AND BLACK MARXIST THEORIES

HEALTHCARE AND COMMUNITY OUTREACH

GENTRIFICATION IN OAKLAND
Reflection Essay

Photography is something I grew up with a passion for. I have poured years of my life into perfecting my craft, using everything from polaroid cameras, to film cameras, to digital cameras. My grandfather was a contracted photographer with National Geographic and I spent a lot of time learning everything I could from him. Upon hearing that there was a creative option for completing Capstone, I immediately knew I wanted to bring in photography somehow. My major being Human Communications with an emphasis on journalism and media, it only made sense to tie together all of the skills I have obtained and strengthened throughout my college experience.

My Capstone project is a magazine centered around the Black Panther Party and the advances it made in the Black Liberation movement of the 60s and 70s, as well as a focus on the way it supported the Black community in Oakland, California. The photos used in the magazine are all my own, with the exception of the photos of Huey Newton, Bobby Seale, Ericka Huggins, Mutulu Shakur, and Ed Poindexter. Although I did not personally take the photos of these leaders, each photo was specifically chosen to best portray each person and the impact of their involvement in the movement. The Canon AE-1 is a 35mm camera that was manufactured by Canon in the 70s. I chose to take the magazine’s photos on a 35mm camera because it would add to the aesthetic of the time being discussed. I also used a specific level of exposure in taking each photo to ensure a calm, reflective aesthetic that puts the reader in the setting of the harsh realities that the Black Panthers faced.
Before studying Black Marxist theory in the Capstone course, I did not know much about the Black Panther Party. My education about them was that they were a violent group of Black rebels led by Malcolm X. This is the little I had picked up from the two minutes of lesson plans dedicated to the Panthers’ in high school. None of my assumptions were correct and I was quickly educated. I decided to ask around to see what family, friends, coworkers, and customers at work knew about the Panthers and many of their responses mirrored my sad premonition. I decided immediately that I wanted to educate an audience about the side of the Panthers that not many talked or knew about. I also had never realized that it was started right here in the Bay Area in Oakland, one of my favorite cities to visit growing up. I believe that the Black Panther Party is an integral chapter of the Bay Area’s history, especially because it is such a diverse area. Not many people living here know much about the great historical happenings so my purpose was to spread awareness to them.

All together, I would say I spent about 30 hours working on putting the actual magazine together, aside from the time taken to travel and take the photos as well as create text for it. I used Canva, an online program that allows you to create your own templates and use graphic design to create posters, invitations, brochures, etc. In the fall semester of 2017, I used Canva to create and put together a magazine for a reporting course. I was familiar with the program and figured this would be the best tool in creating a magazine to my liking. I wanted my magazine to be aesthetically pleasing and pretty to look at, and this program gave me full creative control of that. I also spent a lot of time in Oakland getting to know the community. I was hesitant at first to jump in and write about a culture I was not a part of because, to put it plainly, I’m not Black. I did not want to overstep my boundaries as the non-black, middle-class girl coming in to “study”
the history of a Black community. However, the community welcomed me and my inquiry with open arms. I spent time walking around homeless communities, speaking with people who have been hit the hardest by gentrification. I met a girl who’s grandfather was a Black Panther and grew up with Bobby Seale. I quickly learned how proud this community was of its history, and saw how gentrification is slowly destroying and erasing it. Many of these people believed in the Panthers and their vision, and often mentioned their own opinion of what the Panthers would be doing for them today. My choice to put the Black Panther Party in a positive light was a direct response to the people I’ve met who have been directly impacted by their action.

My Capstone course was a focus on praxis and the social and political theories that have led to mass movements. For the first eight weeks, we spent time studying and discussing different social and political theories through student-led discussion, including Black Marxism and Black Liberation. My week to lead discussion focused on selections from “Black Against Empire” by Joshua Bloom and Waldo E. Martin, Jr., a book that dissects the politics and impact of the Black Panther Party. This is what inspired the focus of my project. I also noticed many similarities between the Black Panther Party and how it was attacked by the federal government and the newer Black Lives Matter movement and how it has been portrayed and seen by the media and society. Though I did not include a section in my magazine focusing on the Black Lives Matter movement, I made a huge connection between the two movements when I learned of the way the media and government had tried so tirelessly to put the Panthers in a negative light.

In the time that the Black Panther Party was active, they produced a newspaper titled “The Black Panther” which put out information and updates about the Panthers’ recent activity.
There were 537 issues published and were priced at 25 cents a copy. Those who sold the papers were required to study each issue and learn it inside and out, even having the entire Ten Point Program memorized. I titled my magazine “Black Panther” as an homage to the newspaper because the purpose of my magazine was to take a journalistic approach to spreading fact and awareness about the side of the Black Panther Party that is not talked about or taught. If I was alive and actively involved with the Party during the time, I know I would have been working on that newspaper and I believe it was a key factor in spreading awareness about the ideology and mission of the Black Panther Party. I also believe that a photograph can sometimes convey a message that words can not. In the 60s and 70s, it was rare that people had the means and privilege to walk around with a fancy camera on them at all times. Today, we all keep a camera in our back pocket - on our phones. I felt that having the ability to capture the remaining history of the Black Panther Party would convey a different kind of message, one that the reader could look at and get lost in. I take pride in my artwork and writing and knowing that other photographers and journalists feel the same way about the way in which I chose to spread my message just solidifies my entire purpose of the project.
Final Synthesis Essay

The Black Panther Party seems to have a biased description depending on whom you speak with. Before beginning this course, I knew little to nothing about their movement. To me, it blended in with what I’ve been taught about the Civil Rights Movement, Martin Luther King Jr., and Malcolm X. To someone who has not actually studied much about the group, the picture I had was a group of violent Black men who were fed up with the “peaceful” approaches that Martin Luther King Jr. took during the Civil Rights Movement. They were the violent version of King’s peaceful protests. The word “violence” was what directly correlated to the topic. Upon asking around about what others knew, I quickly learned that I was not alone in my miseducation. I also learned that they were either praised or looked down on, depending on the person’s background of whom I was asking. The readings in the course for the week that we examined Black Marxism educated me in a way I was not aware I needed to be educated, and sparked a passionate fire in me to dig deeper into the topic. The political and social theory that stood as the foundation for the Black Panther Party was completely centered around praxis. Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale grew tired of other Black nationalist groups during the Black Liberation movement, because these groups lacked the ability to put their theory into action. Practicing their rights to the full extent, these two men sparked an entire movement based on their strong dedication to the saying, “practice what you preach.” The first time I visited Oakland for research, I noticed something. It was actually something that my heart immediately recognized and broke for. I was walking around West Oakland taking photos, quietly observing the many homeless communities I passed by. What stood out most to me was not the homeless people themselves, but what I often saw when I turned the corner down the next street over. One
minute, I’d be walking down the street or alleyway lined with tents and belongings, and the next minute, I’d be surrounded by trendy businesses like Whole Foods and Starbucks. I’d walk down a street with deteriorating infrastructure and apartment buildings, but one block over would be a beautiful and brand new luxury apartment building, advertising leases starting at $1600 a month for a studio. I was hit with the sad realization of gentrification in Black communities like West and North Oakland. This realization played into one of my most critical questions: what would the Panthers say about all of this? More importantly, what would they do?

Most of this project was spent working independently. It felt it was important to be alone through the process of research since it was all hands-on. I spent hours walking around the city of Oakland, visited a few different museums, listened to podcasts while walking, and got to talk with a lot of people from the communities I was writing about. It left a lot of time for reflection and thought to develop my own connections between the Panthers and the course theme. Also, the time spent working on my magazine was mostly spent alone. I wanted to be able to tap into my own creativity without the influence of others. This was important to me because personally, I have never had a positive view of my own abilities and have always heavily relied on the opinion and approval of others in my creative work, especially photography. Working alone and not allowing others to see much of my project before completing it was a way for me to showcase myself and my own personal taste. That being said, I also consulted with a couple of my classmates constantly throughout the semester. While I didn’t really want the influence of others on the creative side of my project, I did consult with both peers and my professor about the content. I wanted to make sure completely that I was on the right track to meeting requirements. I found it very helpful to be put into groups with other classmates doing similar
projects. I found myself texting them often to get their opinion on new ideas or content to add to my project and their support and input helped create a complete project.

Praxis is a process and so was the entirety of the capstone project. I have never spent so much time studying into one specific topic, and I have never cried so many tears over an assignment. Tears of disbelief fell down my face when realizing what the city of Oakland has allowed to be done to poor Black communities. Tears of astonishment and grief fell upon learning about the great sacrifices that were made in order to advance the liberation of Black people. Tears of joy and pride filled my eyes when I learned that much of the Black Panther Party was made up of women, and many of them are still actively working today. Tears of relief fell when I shared my final, completed magazine with the father of a friend who was a Black Panther, and he was moved to tears. I have gained such a deep appreciation for the ideology that the Panthers held and what they did for so many people. From the Free Breakfast Program to providing ambulance rides for those without healthcare or the money to pay for it, the Panthers clearly put into practice what they preached. This is what set them aside from other Black nationalist groups, in my developed opinion. I was even able to make a connection between the Black nationalist ideology and the Black Panther movie that was released in early 2018, in that the villain challenged the viewer with his goal to free the Black people around the world who have been enslaved and oppressed. I’ve been able to use the knowledge and understanding I’ve gained about the Black Liberation movement and connect it to current, modern day situations.

My senior project is something I’ve thought about since coming to CSU Monterey Bay. I was unaware that there would be a creative option but once I found out, I knew exactly what I wanted to do and how I wanted to incorporate my skill set to meet the requirements for the
project. At first, I was a little worried because doing a magazine was never approved or denied with a solid “yes” or “no.” I hoped that in turning in the required drafts and progress reports, I would gain a clearer sense of direction for my project. After meeting with my professor and discussing adding the element of gentrification to my magazine, I knew it would be a solid project. I had a few issues with drafts because I was working from so many different programs that it was difficult to produce something that showed what I was working on, but I was continuously encouraged to keep going on the path I was on, by both my peers and professor. I take a lot of pride in this project because I feel that up until now, it’s been the most thorough way that I have been able to express myself artistically and creatively. When you get to do what you love, the end product is never anything short of perfect in the eyes of its creator. I also feel that producing a magazine would be a fantastic addition to my professional portfolio since I have hopes of entering a career in the print and digital magazine industry. This project has been a stressful one, but I’ve realized that we grow the most when we are stressed. Although it’s been a long semester working on this, I am grateful that it was a requirement. I feel that I have grown and developed my skills more in this one semester than I have during my entire time at CSU Monterey Bay. The Black Panther Party has inspired me to mobilize myself and stand up for what I believe in, especially during the conflicting political times we are currently living in. In the words of Black Panther legend Angela Davis, “I am no longer accepting the things I can not change. I am changing the things I cannot accept.”