The scope of the Chinese Cultural Revolution was not limited to Chinese society and culture. This 1968 poster, one of a series of fifteen, depicts a squad of young Red Guards leading the oppressed people of the Third World in rebellion against the enemies of global communism, celebrating the global nature of the revolution.

(Image courtesy of the Center for Chinese Studies at the University of Michigan.)
“But if you go carrying pictures of Chairman Mao, 
You ain’t going to make it with anyone anyhow...”

When the Beatles released their August 1968 single “Revolution,” many Americans praised the pacifist tone of the song, which called for an end to unplanned, chaotic revolution. However, there were those among the American New Left who felt differently. Both the New Left Review and Ramparts, two leading left-of-center magazines, published caustic reviews of the song, labeling it a “betrayal” and a “lamentable petty bourgeois cry of fear” for its criticism of violent protests against the establishment. Some compared “Revolution” with the Rolling Stones’ single “Street Fighting Man,” released just months earlier, and claimed that the Stones’ interpretation of the mass protests of 1968 favored the radicals while the Beatles’ song was an attempt to suppress revolutionary thought.

Regardless of their political intent, John Lennon and Paul McCartney used Mao Zedong’s name to conjure up the image of violent demonstrations breaking out around the world. Why did these songwriters single out this Chinese communist, when he was hardly the only revolutionary leader active in world politics in mid-1968? Lennon and McCartney had a long list of names to choose from, among them Che Guevara, Ho Chi Minh, and Malcolm X. They also might have chosen to sing about other movements, using the image of a bloody fist to evoke the chaos that had occurred a few months earlier in Paris, or the image of teargas to conjure up the student riots on college campuses in Berkeley, Madison, and New York City. Instead, they chose an image that addressed the more violent reaches of the New Left. An attentive listener would have noted that the lyrics do not refer directly to Mao. The Beatles were not castigating Mao but the protester who was holding Mao’s picture, using it as a tool to advocate bloody revolution. Although Mao’s Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution was not the only radical movement that influenced the American New Left, this Beatles song reflects the fact that it was one of the most significant.

2 The New Left represented a current of revolutionary thought that approached activism with the mindset of a vanguard party during the 1960s and 1970s.
At the bottom of a poster promoting the Cultural Revolution (see p. 132), a bold exclamation reads, “我国无产阶级文化大革命震撼全世界， or “Our nation’s Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution is shaking the whole world.” At its center, a strong young man stands firmly with a spear-sized pen in one hand to symbolize the re-education of Chinese youth and a book of quotations from Chairman Mao in the other to symbolize his commitment to Mao Zedong Thought. Forming a cordon of support around him is a group of seven Red Guards, both boys and girls, one of whom holds a flag declaring, “Long Live the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution!” In the path of the troupe of Red Guards stand five lesser figures, an Imperialist (帝), a Revisionist (修正), a Capitalist (资本), a Feudalist (封), and a Reactionary (反), all cowering at the robust ranks of Chinese. Behind the Red Guards stand an Arab, an African, a Native American, and a Latin American, all soldiers of the Third World, all holding guns and Little Red Books. In the background a giant, red sun rises over the globe. The poster claims that China’s Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution shook the whole world. This essay examines whether there is any truth to this propaganda.

The Cultural Revolution was arguably the most turbulent period in the history of the People’s Republic of China (PRC). In the forty years since its conclusion, scholars have attempted to understand it in Manichean terms that portray its participants as either villains or innocents. Furthermore, though the Cultural Revolution was a distinctly Chinese event, scholars have not considered its impact beyond China. This essay begins to fill that

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4 In 2011, the staff of the Center for Chinese Studies at the University of Michigan was sorting through an old storage room when they discovered a rare set of Chinese propaganda paper cuts from the Cultural Revolution era. In all, the collection contained fifteen pieces, each of which tell a different part of the story of the Cultural Revolution in the ancient art form in which the artist crafts a detailed, complex image from a single sheet of red paper. To see the complete set, visit http://quod.lib.umich.edu/c/ccslic.

5 Most Western scholars use some variant of the term “Maoism” to describe the ideology of Mao Zedong. However, this word has only appeared on rare occasions in China since 1949. Mao made it clear that his philosophy was a set of ideas as opposed to an –ism, or philosophical system. This was more than likely some form of forced humility, as it would be pretentious to refer to one’s own theories as a zhuyi. In Chinese, the word 主义 (zhuyi) is a suffix that denotes a certain type of doctrine, whereas the word 思想 (sixiang) is indicative of an ideology. The difference between the two is almost too subtle to notice, but it is significant all the same. The doctrine of Karl Marx is known as 马克思主义 (makesi zhuyi), or Marxism, and the doctrine of Lenin is similarly known as 列宁主义 (liening zhuyi), or Leninism. Mao did not want his followers to think of his ideology within the same framework as Marx and Lenin. Therefore 毛泽东思想 (Mao Zedong sixiang), or Mao Zedong Thought, became the official term for Mao’s ideology. For these reasons, in this paper I will use the term Mao Zedong Thought to refer to the ideology of Mao Zedong.
gap by examining the effect of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution on the American New Left, arguing that it produced a current of revolutionary theory that emphasized the notion that everyday violence had the potential to alter the consciousness of the entire world.

A Brief History of the Chinese Cultural Revolution

The decade between 1966 and 1976 saw violence and factionalism shake China’s domestic political, social, and economic structures to the brink of collapse. The primary instigator of the tumult was Mao Zedong, the founder of the PRC and leader of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Mao’s theoretical, political, and social perceptions, his unrivaled status among China’s elite, and his intense personality were essential to the Cultural Revolution. It would not be a leap to suggest that had anyone other than Mao Zedong been at China’s helm, the Cultural Revolution would not have occurred. In carrying out this massive campaign, Mao demonstrated his ability to mobilize China’s oppressed against their oppressors, his commitment to the concept of a Marxist-Leninist revolution, and his willingness to affect millions of lives in order to accomplish his aims.

Mao’s most basic goal was to revitalize the nation’s revolutionary spirit and alter the consciousness of the Chinese people. His second goal was to eradicate the influence of the bureaucratic class that had come to power since the founding of the People’s Republic in 1949. In his theoretical framework, government officials had a predisposition for displaying pretentious, selfish, and elitist behavior. Therefore he called for the masses to criticize and humiliate influential members of the CCP at the local, provincial, and even national levels. The third of Mao’s goals was to inspire China’s youth to embrace his revolutionary spirit. To this end he called on students from high schools and universities to put down their books and rise up against any elements of society that could be understood as anti-revolutionary or revisionist, in the certainty that such a movement would

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6 In other words, the CCP did not contain any elements that were inherently capable of instigating the Cultural Revolution other than Mao. Though this sentiment is present in nearly all literature on the Cultural Revolution, the work of Barbara Barnoun and Yu Changgen explicitly centers itself on this premise. See Barbara Barnouin and Yu Changgen, *Ten Years of Turbulence: The Chinese Cultural Revolution* (New York: Routledge, 1993), viii; Barbara Barnouin and Yu Changgen, *Chinese Foreign Policy During the Cultural Revolution* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), ix.
produce a generation of worthy successors to the revolution. His fourth goal was to change the policies of the CCP to reflect his desire to see the Chinese masses embrace collectivism. He reformed the examination system, eradicated pay raises and bonuses for urban employees, simplified the military’s ranking system, and reassigned urban doctors to serve in the countryside. Mao expected the masses to follow his directives to create a new, more revolutionary and collectivized China. However, Mao massively underestimated the chaos his call to revolution would create.

The first three years of the revolution were its most tumultuous. On May 16, 1966, the CCP issued a notice to the party’s leadership officially declaring the beginning of a Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. Nine days later students at Beijing University put up the first dazi bao, or big character poster, disparaging the school’s leadership and committing the students’ loyalties to Mao. After a summer of rising tensions in which students across the country began to roam the streets wearing red armbands and criticizing their elders, on August 5 Mao created a dazi bao of his own, titled “Bombard the Headquarters,” that cast Liu Shaoqi, his number two, and any of his followers as enemies of the party. Less than two weeks later, a crowd of an estimated one million students gathered in Tiananmen Square to receive their Chairman in the first of many public rallies to unite the Red Guards. Following Mao’s commands, groups of Red Guards in most big cities moved swiftly to launch vicious campaigns against perceived revisionists. Their mission was to destroy the “four olds” of Chinese society: old ideas, old culture, old customs, and old habits.

It was not long before Mao’s followers exceeded his expectations for revolutionary fervor. When Mao spoke of destroying the “four olds” in his writings and speeches, he intended this process to be slow and gradual, but the Red Guards saw no reason to delay, raiding family homes, destroying antiques, and beating anyone who stood in their way while the military and police stood by. In 1976, a troop of Red Guards occupied a local government

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office in Shanghai, seized the seals of office, and established a revolutionary committee to temporarily oversee government proceedings.\(^{11}\) This power grab soon became a model for Red Guard groups throughout China. Despite backlash from older leaders, the violence of the Cultural Revolution only gained momentum in late 1967 and early 1968. In this atmosphere, friends indicted friends, sons accused fathers, and spouses turned on each other in order to demonstrate one’s own innocence.

The violence on display was rudimentary, in contrast to the sophisticated, strategized violence that defined the earlier Chinese Revolution. Most beatings occurred when a troop of Red Guards singled out individuals to ridicule.\(^{12}\) Though the physical nature of this treatment did not always lead to death, the psychological torment often drove victims of the revolution to attempt suicide. Reports indicated the violence reached such a level that some Red Guards practiced cannibalism as a way to both punish counter-revolutionaries and test the loyalty of their own members.\(^{11}\) In the spring of 1968, some Red Guard factions obtained firearms and began to compete amongst themselves, and China became the scene of what looked like civil war. In Mao’s eyes, the Red Guards had lost the ability to work together for the benefit of the revolution, so he ordered the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) to intervene. He then sent almost eighteen million Red Guards to rural areas to learn lessons of the proletariat from the peasantry.\(^{14}\) By 1969, the Red Guard phase of the Cultural Revolution, and with it the worst of the violence, was over.

The chaos of the late 1960s brought China’s government and economy to a crippling halt. The country’s youth had beaten and humiliated leaders at all levels of the CCP and had weakened China’s infrastructure, making transportation unpredictable. The period between 1969 and 1976 was primarily a time in which China’s masses recovered from the disruption while the political elite vied for Mao’s favor as the Chairman’s health gradually decayed. The suspicious circumstances of Lin Biao’s death

\(^{11}\) Lieberthal, 114.


\(^{14}\) Lieberthal, 115.
in 1971 disillusioned many who had so fervently backed him during the initial phase of the Cultural Revolution.\textsuperscript{15} As Mao’s health deteriorated, competition surged between Jiang Qing, Mao’s wife and head of the more radical faction, and Zhou Enlai, the symbolic head of the PRC who headed the more moderate faction. By the time of Mao’s death in September 1976, the moderates had come to prominence despite the death of Zhou Enlai in January of the same year. This created an atmosphere in which Hua Guofeng, Mao’s immediate successor, oversaw the arrest of the radical Gang of Four and proclaimed an end to the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution.

A New Perspective on the Cultural Revolution

Countless scholars, both in China and the West, have attempted to understand the phenomenon of the Cultural Revolution since its conclusion in 1976. In general, Chinese scholars have produced a body of work that leans heavily on official policy, while Western coverage of the Cultural Revolution is largely theoretical due to the distance, both physical and relational, between China and the West.\textsuperscript{16} Both Chinese- and English-language scholarship tends to be marked by an undertone of judgment, either defending the Cultural Revolution as an honest attempt to revive China’s spirit or attacking it as a rash, poorly planned power grab on the part of a megalomaniacal dictator. With only a few exceptions, these scholars have disregarded how the Cultural Revolution tapped into global trends and

\textsuperscript{15} According to the CCP, Lin Biao had hatched a scheme to kill Mao and succeed him as head of the party. Mao discovered this and managed to escape danger. Subsequently, Lin attempted to flee to the Soviet Union in an airplane, but it crashed over Mongolia, killing Lin and everyone else aboard. Barnouin and Yu, \textit{Ten Years of Turbulence}, 237-242.

had a meaningful impact all over the world. Over the years, less scholarly writing on the Cultural Revolution has produced a burgeoning genre of victim literature in which disillusionment with Mao Zedong Thought has emerged as a prominent theme. This study neither condemns nor defends Mao and the Cultural Revolution and seeks to avoid the Sino-centric narrative found in many extant sources, instead initiating a discussion of the role of the Cultural Revolution in the evolution of global communism.

Specifically, this essay focuses on the effects of the Cultural Revolution on the American New Left, examining the manifold ways in which Huey Newton, the founder of the Black Panther Party (BPP), used Mao Zedong Thought to cultivate and adapt the idea of “justified violence” in the civil rights movement on the United States West Coast in the 1960s. This essay also considers other contemporary fringe groups that used Mao Zedong Thought to justify violence outside of the African American narrative. These currents demonstrate the appeal of Mao in the lives of revolutionary figures far from China. On the surface, China’s Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution was a massive effort to force the Chinese people to revive the fading spirit of collectivism, but as an unintended result, people from all over the world heard Mao’s rallying cry and adapted it to their own situations.

Using Mao to Rationalize Violence in the American New Left

During the 1950s, the American Left drifted slowly toward the middle of the political spectrum, becoming bureaucratized as it aged. By the late 1960s, the “New Left” emerged as a movement radical enough to wholeheartedly embrace the teachings of Mao Zedong. What occurred in the interim? On January 1, 1960, the League for Industrial Democracy (LID), founded in 1905 by American socialists Upton Sinclair and Jack London, morphed into Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). Due to what younger members viewed as a stagnating, bureaucratic structure, the group took on a much more radicalized stance, upsetting senior members and creating a divide that resulted in what eventually became known as the “New Left,” in which SDS played a large role. In the early 1960s, groups within the New

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17 Though Barnouin and Yu’s 1998 work and Ma Jisen’s 2004 work both break ground on China’s international goals during the Cultural Revolution, they both focus chiefly on China’s diplomatic relationships and disregard the tangible effects of the Cultural Revolution across the globe.
Left, freed from their ties to the previous generation, began to put effort into reforming American society. At first, most participants were young, college-educated, middle-class Americans. These students, having grown up in post-World War II America, felt vexed by issues like racism and the Vietnam War. Despite having been warned of the evils of Mao’s Red China, young students of this generation learned about a different version of Mao. One such student was Anita Hoffman, the wife of Abbie Hoffman, the founder of the Youth International Party. Hoffman later claimed to have discovered that Mao was not the brute tyrant she had read about, but rather that he “wrote poetry and eliminated poverty in his country.”

Revelations such as this inspired a new enthusiasm for activism from the left, which had grown dissatisfied with the performances of President John F. Kennedy and his successor, Lyndon B. Johnson. The optimism accompanying the initial months of the Kennedy presidency waned as the policies and initiatives of both Democratic presidents contradicted their campaign goals. Kennedy’s handling of the Bay of Pigs incident and the Cuban Missile Crisis, his ambivalence toward the civil rights movement, and Johnson’s decision to allow the slow but steady buildup of military personnel in Vietnam made the New Left feel that the liberal leadership had abandoned them.

This rift gave the leaders of the New Left no choice but to take an alternative route to accomplishing fundamental change. At the 1964 Democratic National Convention in Atlantic City, New Jersey, members of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP) urged the party to supplant long-time Democratic incumbents who had been elected under a system that repressed the voting rights of African Americans. Party leaders said no. In September 1964, a student strike on the campus of the University of California-Berkeley protested the university’s decision to ban political writings amongst student groups. The spirit of the Berkeley strike, the first of many such protests, would eventually spread to college campuses across the United States in the following years. The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) began to radicalize as the idea of black separatism became more and more popular within its ranks. As the promise


19 R. David Myers, Toward a History of the New Left: Essays from Within the Movement (Brooklyn: Carlson Pub., 1989), 4-5.
of peaceful integration between whites and blacks began to disintegrate, violence became the mode by which the movement would either operate or be operated upon. It was on these grounds, in late 1966, and only months after Mao proclaimed the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, that Huey Newton and Bobby Seale founded the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense in Oakland, California.

The role that Mao and the Cultural Revolution played in the formation of New Left ideology in the United States can only be understood within the tradition of communism as a whole. By 1966, a long line of revolutionaries had analyzed and reanalyzed the Communist Manifesto. Vladimir Lenin’s interpretations of Engels and Marx helped him to found the Soviet Union, while Joseph Stalin reinvented Lenin’s ideas to consolidate his position as Soviet premier and lead the USSR through the Second World War. Mao Zedong in turn used Stalin’s theories to create a brand of Marxism that catered to the specifics of his People’s Republic of China. Along the way, different voices added their perspectives, but in the 1960s era of post-de-Stalinization, Mao arguably had become the flag bearer for the Marxist cause. In the United States—where communism and its variants, while occasionally enjoying minor fits of popular support, had never been a serious political contender—the leaders of any groups wanting to call themselves communist in the 1960s necessarily held Mao in high regard. His position at the top of the CCP, his role in the Chinese Revolution, and his outspoken critique of US imperialism all worked together to make his ideology attractive to young American communist leaders during the 1960s.

It was within this context that Mao’s Cultural Revolution had a meaningful impact on the American New Left, specifically within the groups defined by racial goals. Due to the combination of a desperate need for a radical, relevant example and a frustrating history of repression, several groups within the New Left movement used the imagery and ideology of the Cultural Revolution to conceive of a new brand of Third World Marxism within the United States that supported violence and working-class action to achieve a successful people’s revolution. The New Left was an umbrella

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20 Myers, 6.

21 On May 16, 1966, the CCP put out six notifications, one of which Mao wrote personally, that proclaimed the beginning of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. Most scholars mark this as the official beginning of the Cultural Revolution. For more see MacFarquhar and Schoenhals, Mao’s Last Revolution, 38-40.
organization that included numerous groups with varying worldviews revolving around a socialist center, including groups like the Young Lords, the Red Guard Party, the Brown Berets, the American Indian Movement, the New Communist Movement, and the Weather Underground Organization. However, the actions of the most radically violent group, the BPP, merit the closest inspection.

Members of the BPP, under the influence of SDS, looked to China for guidance and inspiration as well as a sense of continuity within the international communist movement. They saw the Cultural Revolution as Mao’s commitment to the concept of continual revolution, or the notion that a truly successful revolution was one that never stopped. From a racial perspective, they heard Mao’s call to rise up against the bourgeoisie as a reinvigorating push toward the use of violence in the campaign for racial equality. The African American community had experimented with radicalism before, but the BPP represented a tipping point. Throughout the late 1960s and early 1970s, the BPP, along with several organizations under its influence, would come to use the rhetoric of Mao’s Cultural Revolution primarily to justify violent action and even to raise capital. Mao Zedong himself offered his support to revolutionary violence in the United States in

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a 1968 statement. However, after the violence of the late 1960s died down, one BPP leader began to see the same writings of Mao that had roused him to violence as evidence that violence should not have had such a prominent role in BPP operations. In this case the effect of Mao Zedong Thought was to restrict violence. This multifaceted use of Mao Zedong Thought helps to explain both the rapid rise in popularity and the subsequent failure of violent action in the United States during the 1960s and 1970s.

The Role of Mao Zedong Thought in the Formation of the Black Panther Party

The Black Panthers were hardly the first African Americans to look to China for inspiration. In the 1930s, Langston Hughes, the great American poet and social activist, wrote the poem “Roar China!” in which he extolled the tenacity of China’s revolutionary spirit in the face of foreign oppression. Paul Robeson, the African American singer, actor, and athlete who rose to fame as a Broadway star in the 1920s and became a civil rights activist in the 1940s, learned Qi Lai, the national anthem of the PRC, and made it part of his repertoire. In 1959, the African American intellectual W.E.B. Du Bois travelled with his wife to the Soviet Union and China, where he met with Mao Zedong in person and later praised the conditions of the proletariat in both communist nations. In 1965, Robert Williams, president of the Monroe, North Carolina, chapter of the NAACP and an influential supporter of armed self-defense, left Cuba, where he had been in exile for four years, and made his way to China, where he raised his two sons and Chinese leaders treated

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23 Officially, the statement made clear Mao’s support of the African American struggle against violent repression as opposed to support of violence as a means to an end. However, it contained statements such as, “Only by overthrowing the reactionary rule of the US monopoly class and destroying the colonialist and imperialist systems can the Black people in the United States win complete emancipation.” Words like “overthrow” and “destroy” indicated Mao’s support for violence in this struggle. See Mao Zedong, *Statement by Comrade Mao Tse-tung, Chairman of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, in Support of the African American Struggle Against Violent Repression* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1968), 3.


his family as respected guests. It was Williams who urged Mao to put out the 1968 “Statement in Support of the African American struggle against violent repression.”27 Throughout the twentieth century, there was tension between the men whose more radical views often resulted in controversy and the more conventional thinkers who argued for peaceful methods of attaining racial parity under the law. The Black Panthers continued on the path of Hughes, Robeson, Du Bois, and Williams.

Early in its existence, the BPP was based more on intellectual interests than violent activities. The party evolved out of study groups that drew on the appeal of the Marxist perspective for understanding their sociological condition. The BPP’s education programs were designed to examine the United States from a Marxist perspective and to reveal the greedy, materialistic nature of American capitalism, thus forming a basis for revolution in the minds of their pupils. In addition to these more didactic classes, the party also implemented programs aimed at the less educated that were intended to teach the lumpenproletariat its role in the revolution.28 In order to supply these classes with instructors, the party first had to educate its members. While taking these political education classes, which were mandatory starting in 1966, party members studied the written works of Malcolm X, Mao Zedong, Frantz Fanon, Che Guevara, and Robert Williams.29 These names revealed the party’s dependence on anti-colonial, Marxist literature in its ideological activities.

The party emphasized the application of Marxist revolutionary thought while letting the traditional rhetorical voices of African American history fall by the wayside. This emphasis frustrated those in the African American community who did not find these foreign influences helpful to the struggle. Some of the more educated students, such as JoAnne Chesimard, the brash

27 Ho, 158.
28 In Marxist nomenclature, the term lumpenproletariat refers to the lowest, most subjugated classes in society. Though they lacked political consciousness, Fanon saw this group of social outcasts as the largest potential source of spontaneous and radical revolutionary will. For more, see Karl Marx, The German Ideology: Including Theses on Feuerbach and Introduction to the Critique of Political Economy (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 1998) and Frantz Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth (New York: Publishers Group West, 2004), 81-88.
young activist who would in 1970 change her name to Assata Shakur and earn herself a reputation for violence among Black Liberation activists, were concerned about the BPP’s failure to connect the lessons of Mao Zedong Thought to the specific history of African American communities. From her perspective, the party leaders teaching political education classes focused too much on Mao’s Little Red Book and not enough on figures who were essential to African American history, like Harriet Tubman, Marcus Garvey, and Nat Turner.\(^3\) She feared that the party was attracting too many members who expected to be handed a gun and orders to go out and shoot policemen, and not enough members who wanted to be a part of the class struggle. She related to Mao’s ideas, but was convinced that they would be of better use if contextualized within the situation of the African American community of the late 1960s.

In an attempt to become involved at the grassroots level, the BPP eventually set up the Liberation School for the sole purpose of inculcating a Marxist education to children aged two to thirteen. According to Bobby Seale, a co-founder of the BPP, teachers at the Liberation School showed children that skin color was unimportant and that the primary struggle going on was “a class struggle against the avaricious businessmen and the small ruling class” who wanted to exploit racism.\(^3\) This sort of teaching appealed to mainstream black leaders such as Roy Wilkin of the NAACP and Whitney Young of the National Urban League. Whereas others had urged African Americans to work hard and gradually assimilate into the middle class, or to peacefully protest their way to equal rights, the Panthers used Marxism to create a new narrative wherein African Americans were not regular members of society but instead a group of colonized subjects who, unlike the Chinese, the Cubans, the Vietnamese, and the North Koreans, could fight United States imperialism from within. These party members viewed Mao as the leader of the struggle to upend the power

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\(^3\) Assata Shakur, *Assata: An Autobiography* (Chicago: L. Hill Books, 2001), 221-22. During the 1960s historian Herbert Aptheker rejected the widely accepted notion that the response of the average African American to his or her suppression at the hands of white elites was that of passivity and docility. In one of his more well-known works, Aptheker offered several accounts of slave revolts in order to prove that the treatment of slaves was inhumane, as many slavery apologists thought otherwise. His analysis placed these slave revolts in a Marxist context. See Herbert Aptheker, *American Negro Slave Revolts* (New York: International Publishers, 1963).

structure that placed whites at the top. Mao had led a successful people’s revolution and had opposed the United States along the way. The vast majority of Americans viewed Mao as a threat to the country. However, it was members of the New Left movement, specifically in the Black Panther Party, who viewed this threat as a moment of opportunity and hope. In this way, the Great Proletariat Cultural Revolution, though often portrayed by western media as a chaotic power grab, came to be viewed as the front line of a struggle that the Black Panthers wanted to be a part of in order to take down the machine of American imperialism from within.

While cofounder Huey Newton’s vision for the party contained these broad ideological elements, the distinguishing trait of the Black Panther Party during its heyday was its willingness to use violence as a means to an end. With the party’s founding in the autumn of 1966, Newton and Seale put out the Ten-Point Program outlining the basic principles and demands of the party. Violence, though originally referred to as “self-defense,” was one of the basic tenets of the original Black Panther Party, and could be found in the party’s founding document. The seventh point stated that, in order to “defend our Black community from racist police oppression and brutality,” the party would invoke its Second Amendment rights to say that “all Black people should arm themselves for self-defense.”

Shortly after the official launch of the BPP on October 15, 1966, Newton and Seale obtained their first weapons from Richard Aoki, a self-proclaimed revolutionary of Japanese descent. Aoki gave the pair two guns—one M-1 rifle and a 9-mm pistol—free of charge after they persuaded him that it was what a “real revolutionary” would do. Soon afterward, they brought their weapons in plain sight to a community gathering, where they told partygoers that they were forming a new revolutionary organization. This first outing had the effect that Newton and Seale had been hoping for. In January of the next year the two co-founders, along with their first recruit, an eighteen-year-old drop-out named Bobby Hutton, used funds from their antipoverty paychecks to open an office in a vacant building in North Oakland, where they offered young black men political education classes and weapons training. Soon the party had a fair number of members and, thanks to Aoki’s donation of a .357 magnum and two more pistols, a growing

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32 Huey Newton, To Die for the People: The Writings of Huey P. Newton (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2009), 4-5.
arsenal. Guns were not the only tools of revolution that the Panthers carried. When patrolling the streets of West Oakland, they frequently carried law books, tape recorders, and cameras, hoping to capture evidence of the racist brutality they wanted to end.

The notion of a group of African Americans wielding firearms in public was extremely worrying to the Oakland police. On one occasion, an officer stopped Huey Newton outside of the BPP office and asked for his driver’s license. There ensued the following exchange:

“Is this your true name, Huey P. Newton?” the officer asked.
Newton nodded.
“Is this your true address?” the officer asked. Newton nodded again.
“What are you doing with the guns?” the officer asked once more.
“What are you doing with your gun?” Huey answered.

Thus began the street war between the armed Black Panther Party and the Oakland police. The Panthers continued to carry their weapons openly, thinking of themselves as the guardians of the African American community against a racist police force, while the police became increasingly anxious about the spread of weapons on the streets. Party members became known for displaying their guns in public and threatening police officers with chants like “the Revolution has co-ome, it’s time to pick up the gu-un.” The Panthers’ gun toting was, on the surface, a fundamentally American phenomenon. As long as they followed local gun laws, they could not be prosecuted. Symbolically speaking, however, the Panthers’ dedication to the image of the gun was a result of Mao’s influence. The gun allowed the BPP to turn rhetoric to action, and in doing so fueled a brand of violence that claimed several lives.

The party relied on Mao not just for ideas, but for capital as well. As the party grew, the demand for new additions to its arsenal increased. In a

34 Ibid., 114.
shrewd manipulation of the capitalist system, Newton recalled having come into contact with a potential market that he could exploit. When hordes of UC-Berkeley students bused en masse into Santa Rita prison during the Free Speech Movement, Newton pounced. To Newton, these students gave the Panthers the opportunity to both spread Mao Zedong Thought and turn a profit. Newton, Seale, and Hutton made a habit of going to San Francisco’s Chinatown, where they would purchase Mao’s Little Red Book in bulk. The three BPP members would then stand in the busiest part of the UC-Berkeley campus selling Little Red Books for one dollar apiece, sometimes accompanying each sale with an the exhortation to “read the

This 1968 poster, one of many made by Emory Douglas, the Black Panther Party’s resident artist, is emblematic of the pugnacious self-image that the Panthers worked so hard to promote in the late 1960s. Its representations of (left to right) Africans, African Americans, Southeast Asians, Latin Americans, and American Indians demonstrate that the Panthers felt they were part of a movement that was both violent and global in nature. The placement of the quotation from Chairman Mao, as well as its content, provides evidence of the central role of the Chinese Cultural Revolution in Black Panther ideology. (Image reprinted from Black Panther: The Revolutionary Art of Emory Douglas.)
Red Book and do it like the Red Guards did it!” The scheme was successful, resulting in the acquisition of even more guns and ammunition. In this way, the BPP marketed Mao’s ideas to other leftists so that they could put those ideas to work in the streets.

On the night of April 6, 1968, fourteen members of the BPP crowded into a couple of vans stocked with guns and rode into the streets of Oakland. What followed were some of the bloodiest and most catastrophic hours in Black Panther history. The BPP Chief of Staff, twenty-five-year-old David Hilliard, was among those fourteen. Under Eldridge Cleaver’s leadership, he had agreed to go along on this ride, despite knowing that blood would be spilled and arrests made. Hilliard was not the kind to back down from a fight, but the circumstances made the idea of a raid appear ludicrous. Two days earlier, James Earl Ray had gunned down Martin Luther King, Jr., in Memphis, Tennessee. Across the United States, racial tensions surged to the point of national emergency. Nowhere was the tension between activists and the police higher than in Oakland, the home of the BPP. Hilliard knew that each side was looking for any excuse to pull the trigger and inflict maximum damage. He was certain that the night would end in disaster, but still he got in the van.

What could have given Hilliard such conviction in the face of guaranteed arrest, or worse, death? By early 1967, the Black Panther Party had been active for only a few months. Hilliard, who would eventually become a prominent member of the BPP, spent those first months on the sidelines of the movement. Huey Newton and Bobby Seale, fresh from the action, would stop by Hilliard’s place and share stories over drinks. Though they were contemporaries, Hilliard considered himself every part Newton’s student, sensing something different about Newton and the BPP. “[The party] isn’t fronting,” he wrote in his memoir, “they’re for real. They put on guns, load their ammunition, and don’t back down when they find trouble.” Yet for all the admiration Hilliard expressed toward Newton’s tenacity, it was the founder’s intellect, his “brilliant, mischievous, fascinating ideas” that really drew Hilliard in. When he asked Newton how and why he knew so much about revolutionary thought, he got a simple answer: “Reading. You can do

36 Pearson, 113.
Hilliard’s Panther education was informal. As a teacher, Newton stayed away from lecture halls and podiums, opting for the interior of his girlfriend’s Volkswagen to serve as the setting for Hilliard’s education. With Newton driving and Hilliard gazing out the window, the two would cruise the streets discussing the Cuban Revolution, Crowley’s *The Greatest Beast*, China, and Frantz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth*. Initially, Hilliard was doubtful about the relevance of an Algerian psychiatrist’s writings on revolution to the situation of African Americans in the 1960s. To counter this doubt, Newton applied the lessons of worldwide revolution to the situation of African Americans, equating the revolutionaries behind the new socialist society of Algeria to the “lumpen field niggers, the oppressed, the implacables” of the United States. As Newton spoke, Hilliard listened and watched the pavement of San Pablo Avenue roll by. It was during these conversations that Hilliard began to see things differently. Where he once saw the familiar streets and people of Oakland, he now saw “battlegrounds and revolutionaries.”

In February of 1967, the Black Panther Party of Northern California (BPPNC) invited Betty Shabazz, the widow of Malcom X, to speak at an event that would commemorate her husband’s legacy and the anniversary of his assassination. The Los Angeles Police Department had forced Shabazz’s security team, the US Organization, to stay away, leaving Shabazz without protection at a time when it was desperately needed. This security vacuum prompted the leaders of the BPPNC to recruit the up-and-coming Oakland Panthers to serve as Shabazz’s protection. True to the beliefs of the Party, the Panthers, supported by the Oakland contingent, arrived at the airport carrying shotguns, displaying them openly. They boarded Shabazz’s plane and escorted her out of the terminal, risking the wrath of the police and a bloody shootout in the process. Days later, it was revealed that Jon George, the lawyer for the BPPNC, had advised the Oakland Panthers not to load

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38 Hilliard, 119.
39 Ibid.
40 Ibid., 118-120.
41 Though they went by this name, the Oakland Panthers were not officially connected to the BPP.
their guns.\footnote{Donna Jean Murch, \textit{Living for the City: Migration, Education, and the Rise of the Black Panther Party in Oakland, California} (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 142-143. See also Pearson, 120-26.}

Huey Newton was livid. If a shoot-out had occurred, the presence of the Oakland Panthers would have been useless. At this moment of intra-party struggle in which violence and “the gun” was central, it was Hilliard the student, not Newton the teacher, who drew from Mao and the Little Red Book in order to provide an analysis of the situation. “They’re not panthers,” said Hilliard, “they’re paper panthers.”\footnote{Hilliard, 119.} Hilliard was directly quoting Mao’s statement made in 1956 about US imperialism, when he declared that the United States was “in appearance very powerful but in reality ... nothing to be afraid of ... nothing but a paper tiger.”\footnote{Mao Zedong, \textit{Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-tung} (Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 1966), 141.} Hilliard’s use of Mao Zedong Thought to critique another segment of the revolutionary body marked a turning point in his development as a member of the party. It was just one step in his journey from intellectual and moral contemplation to the real world of revolution on the streets. Hilliard summed it up best when, after receiving Newton’s praise for his revelation, he concluded, “Maybe I have a gift for revolution after all.”\footnote{Hilliard, 119.}

The writings of Mao continued to have a significant influence on Hilliard’s life as he rose to become the BPP’s Chief of Staff. If not for his devotion to the study of Mao Zedong Thought, he might not have taken part in the violence of April 6, 1968. At 4:00 p.m. that day, the BPP held a meeting at Hilliard’s home where they debated what action should be taken in light of the recent events in Memphis. The room was divided. On one side was Eldridge Cleaver, who had become the BPP’s de facto leader due to Huey Newton’s prison sentence on charges of killing a police officer. Cleaver hoped a raid on the police swarming the streets of West Oakland would provide a spark that might ignite the whole city, the whole state, even the
whole country into a revolutionary fury. Hilliard made efforts to counter Cleaver’s more extreme ideas by claiming that the Black Panthers were a disciplined party with an ideology rather than a gang of “crazies going around shooting up the town like a bunch of drunken cowboys.” He even went so far as to remind the entire group that Newton had expressed his disapproval from jail. Despite Hilliard’s protests for a more reserved plan of action, Cleaver’s bid for violence spoke louder to the group whose hunger for action outweighed its capacity for caution. So why did Hilliard, who opposed the attack, get into the van?

In the hours between the meeting and the violent events later that evening, Hilliard pointed to Mao Zedong Thought to resolve the dilemma, recalling the influence of Mao’s idea that “the guerrilla should lose himself in the sea of the people.” This was a rough paraphrasing of a well-known line from Mao’s 1937 work, *Mao Zedong on Guerrilla Warfare*, which stated that the relationship between the people and the troops should be like that between water and “the fish who inhabit it.” Concluded Mao, “How may it be said that these two cannot exist together?” Finding himself at a crossroads, Hilliard used the words of Mao to decide that nothing could justify turning his back on the party. He had faith that the people, in this case the community of West Oakland, sympathized with the party. Though he was in the minority, he had to support the party’s decision. He wanted to say no and stand down, but he couldn’t do that to his party or to his family.

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46 Though Hilliard’s account doesn’t include a direct quotation of Mao, references to the notion of a “revolutionary spark” are scattered throughout. This is almost surely a nod to a 1930 letter written by Mao in criticism of certain pessimistic views that existed within the Chinese Communist Party. The title of the letter comes from a Chinese proverb, 星星之火，可以燎原, which translates as “a single spark can start a prairie fire.” Mao used this saying to cast aside doubt from within the party as to whether or not the people were capable of rising up in numbers great enough to overthrow the Nationalists. Whether intentional or not, that Cleaver used a quotation of Mao in an attempt to create a revolutionary moment speaks to the prominence of Mao Zedong Thought in the inner sanctum of the BPP. For more see Mao Zedong, *Selected Works of Mao Zedong v. 2* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1967), 117-128.

47 Hilliard, 184.

48 Ibid., 185.

49 That this quotation comes from a source outside of the Little Red Book speaks volumes about the study habits of the Black Panther Party. *Mao Tse-tung on Guerrilla Warfare* was not even part of Beijing’s Foreign Press’s five-part *Collected Works of Mao Tse-tung*. This demonstrates the great effort made by party members to examine Mao Zedong Thought inside and out. For the full quotation, see Mao Zedong, *Mao Tse-tung on Guerrilla Warfare* (Baltimore: Nautical & Aviation Publishing Company of America, 1992), 83.
When the shooting was over, two police officers were heavily wounded, David Hilliard and Eldridge Cleaver were in jail, and Bobby Hutton, a junior member of the BPP, was dead. Though there was backlash from civil rights groups over police brutality, the spark that Bobby Hutton’s death ignited on the night of April 6, 1968, eventually fizzled out over the contradictory claims of the Panthers and the police. Each group framed the other as the instigator of the violence. Despite knowing that the raid would provoke a hard-hitting response from the police and despite his doubt over whether or not the moment was right for an attack, Hilliard’s commitment to the BPP, which he owed to Mao’s views on party-people relationships, guided his actions. In this instance, he used his commitment to the party and the desire to create a revolutionary spark to justify the use of violence. Without the writings of Mao buried in the ideology of the BPP, both Cleaver’s arguments supporting violence and Hilliard’s commitment to the party would have been significantly weaker. The writings of Mao amounted to more than abstract ideas in the minds of BPP members.

Hilliard was not the only member of the BPP to struggle with the role violence played in the party’s operations. Huey Newton, BPP founder, was very clear in his initial support of violent activism, yet later came to admit that the party’s use of violence should never have been as cavalier as it was, most notably under the temporary leadership of Eldridge Cleaver. This ideological transformation can be traced by examining two instances, one in 1967 and one in 1971, in which Newton used Mao quotes to discuss violence. In these two cases, Newton used a deeper interpretation of Mao’s rhetoric to signal a softening in the BPP’s advocacy of violence.

In June of 1967, Newton put out a two-part essay titled *In Defense of Self-Defense*, in which he rationalized the reputation that the BPP had earned in the year since its founding. By way of a campaign to lawfully challenge what they viewed as a racist police force, the Panthers had become synonymous with guns, confrontation, and violence. Aside from a certain set of obvious critics, there were some within the African American community, most notably the Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM), who were not pleased with the BPP’s willingness to carry firearms openly. Leaders of the RAM rejected the Ten-Point Program of the BPP and called the policies of armed
self-defense and patrolling the police “suicidal.”\textsuperscript{51} It was in this context that Newton released \textit{In Defense of Self-Defense}. In part one of this essay, he compared the situation of African Americans in the 1960s to the American colonies under British rule. He recognized that the people who once rebelled against an oppressive ruler had created their own form of oppression. But most importantly, he argued that:

The Black people in America are the only people who can free the world, loosen the yoke of colonialism and destroy the war machine. As long as the wheels of the imperialistic war machine are turning there is no country that can defeat this monster of the West. But Black people can make a malfunction of this machine from within. Black people can destroy the machinery that’s enslaving the world. America cannot stand to fight every Black country in the world and fight a civil war at the same time. It is militarily impossible to do both of these things at once.\textsuperscript{52}

Newton was confident that the role of African Americans in the global struggle between communism and capitalism was to antagonize the most dominant capitalist power from within. With this belief, he spelled out the contradiction between a large African American population and its lack of real power. In Marxist theory, the only road to eliminating contradictions was class struggle. And the only way to carry out class struggle, or in the case of the BPP, race struggle, was through violence.

Finally, in his conclusion, Newton claimed that the revolutionary masses were in need of the proper tool, and that the gun was the tool needed to do the job. Without the gun, he asserted, the world would never experience a transformation into the “earthly paradise dreamed of by the people from time immemorial.” In the very next sentence, Newton described “Brother” Mao Zedong as a “successful practitioner of the art and science of national liberation and self-defense,” before quoting Mao’s famous line about the gun: “We are advocates of the abolition of war, we do not want war; but war can only be abolished through war, and in order to get rid of the gun it

is necessary to take up the gun.” Thus, Newton had essentially called for a unique kind of street war on the political structures of the United States. Yet Newton remained vague about whether or not the African American masses should wait for police instigation to act or if they should act preemptively.

Newton celebrated the use of the gun without offering a clearer purpose for what the gun meant in the hands of BPP members. He employed the brand name of Mao Zedong as a way to advertise violence. This was evidence of the pervasiveness of Mao Zedong Thought in the ideology and practices of the BPP. First, Newton applied Mao Zedong Thought to make sense of the African American dilemma. Once he came to understand the struggle in this way, he turned the words of Mao into rhetoric as a means to incite a

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53 This logic was similar to that of the US and USSR regarding nuclear weapons during the Cold War. Both superpowers justified building up massive nuclear arsenals by claiming that such proliferation was actually a gesture toward mobilizing for peace. For Newton’s essay, see Newton, *The Huey P. Newton Reader*, 134-141. For Mao’s views on war, see Mao Zedong, *Selected Works v.2*, 219-225.
revolution. Though in his essay he referred to the party by its early name, the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense, Newton’s message to the people did not contain any sense of caution, but sought instead to change the consciousness of the African American community and bid the oppressed to attack the oppressor. Using the words of Mao, he let slip the dogs of war.

In the years following the publication of In Defense of Self-Defense, the streets of Oakland became the site of several instances of violence between police officers and BPP members. In 1971, after being released from prison and acquitted of the murder of Officer John Frey on grounds of self-defense, Huey Newton made a speech explaining the party’s stance on the defection of Eldridge Cleaver. According to Newton, the original intent of the party was to serve the people by defending them from oppression, in order to develop a relationship of support between the party and the people. However, he admitted that under the influence of Cleaver, the party had lost its vision and “defected from the community.” By this time, Cleaver had escaped the United States and fled, first to Cuba and then to Algeria, after his role in the raid that left Bobby Hutton dead. All personal feuds aside, Newton did not like what the BPP had become since his imprisonment. In his view the BPP’s willingness to participate in violence had distanced the party from the very people it sought to protect and liberate. “The only time an action is revolutionary,” he said in his speech, “is when the people relate to it in a revolutionary way.”

Because the violence of the BPP had done more to harm than good for local communities, people on the ground felt neither protected nor liberated. Instead they felt more vulnerable and oppressed. With the benefit of hindsight, Newton recognized that the lumpenproletariat could not use the BPP’s violence as an example, so he discounted the use of the gun. This time, he regretfully admitted that various “so-called” revolutionaries had failed to understand Mao’s viewpoint. He was adamant that when Mao said “political power grows out of the barrel of a gun,” these “so-called” revolutionaries had mistakenly thought that the Chairman meant that “political power is the gun.” Newton was quick to point out that the entire meaning of the sentence emanated from the word “grows.” At that point in the speech, Newton referenced the same quotation from Mao on war as he did in his 1967 essays.

54 Newton, 48.
55 Ibid., 48-49.
In 1971, however, Newton made clear his belief that Mao’s ultimate goal was to rid the world of guns. In a nod to his earlier essays, he again described the gun as a tool of the party, but instead of glorifying it as the only possible method of revolution, he de-emphasized its role, citing the party’s Ten-Point Program and reminding his audience that the gun was not mentioned until the seventh point for a reason. Seale and Newton founded the BPP as a vehicle to help the people end oppression. However, under Cleaver’s temporary leadership, the BPP had become a cult group and had alienated the people in the process. Newton denounced Cleaver and enunciated an altered interpretation of Mao Zedong Thought. In doing so, he discontinued the BPP’s support of reckless violence with the hope that the party could create a community structure that could more accurately represent the voice of the people.

The Little Red Book was not Mao’s only contribution to the African American struggle for civil rights in the 1960s. In the spring of 1968, two years after Mao had urged Chinese youth to bombard the headquarters of the CCP, the Great Proletariat Cultural Revolution still dominated political, social, and cultural life in the People’s Republic of China. The Red Guards were still in power, comrades regularly carried out struggle sessions on one another, and Mao remained at the helm. Five years earlier, the Chinese leader had issued his “Statement Supporting the African Americans in Their Just Struggle Against Racial Discrimination by U.S. Imperialism,” in which he vaguely addressed the situation of millions of African Americans and bid them to join the revolution.\(^ {56}\) In April 1968, Mao issued another statement that was markedly different, both in content and context.

Mao’s second statement came at a time when the United States was experiencing a nationwide racial crisis. Twelve days earlier, the death of Martin Luther King, Jr., had sent the nation into a frenzy that led to the death of Bobby Hutton. Mao recognized this moment as one filled with revolutionary potential and sought to use his influence to push the lumpenproletariat of the United States closer to revolution. “At present,” Mao claimed, “the world has entered a great new era” in which the African American struggle for emancipation would play an important role in what he envisioned as the coming “world revolution.”\(^ {57}\) He went on to note that

\(^{56}\) Ho and Mullen, 91-93.
\(^{57}\) Mao Zedong, Statement in Support, 1-5.
the violent death of Dr. King, a man who preached non-violence, had woken up the masses and exposed the power they possessed. Without using the word “violence,” Mao voiced his support for all types of reactions to King’s death, both violent and non-violent. While Mao had ended his 1963 statement by confidently declaring that the capitalist system would fall once the emancipation of African Americans came to pass, the conclusion to his 1968 statement went a step further. The final lines of the second statement came with a sense of expectancy that those of the first statement lacked. “It can be said with certainty,” Mao insisted, “that the complete collapse of colonialism, imperialism, and all systems of exploitation and the complete emancipation of all the oppressed people and nations of the world are not far off.” By giving his prediction a sense of imminence, Mao demonstrated his increased desire to use his influence to promote revolution abroad. This statement was translated and printed in Beijing’s Foreign Language Press and sent across the world as a five-page pamphlet that could be inserted into any Little Red Book, serving as a kind of “live transmission” of Mao Zedong Thought. This demonstrates that Mao actively supported violence in the African American struggle for civil rights. However, African Americans were not the only leftist group to be influenced by Mao to form a coalition with violence at its core.

The Red Guard Party, I Wor Kuen, and the Weather Underground

The Chinese-American community of the 1960s was sharply polarized, with supporters of the old Nationalist Party and those faithful to the ruling Communist Party both extremely vocal in their mutual disdain. For the youth within this community, the Cultural Revolution came at a time in which the influence of active communist movements in Asia coincided with the formation of a new Chinese-American identity that sympathized with those speaking out against war and racism. As a result, many Chinese-American youths were pushed leftward and eventually embraced Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought. The first two groups of real significance,

58 Ho and Mullen, 93.
60 Max Elbaum, Revolution in the Air: Sixties Radicals Turn to Lenin, Mao and Che (New York: Verso, 2002), 77-78.
the Red Guard Party of San Francisco and I Wor Kuen (IWK) of New York City, both formed out of the more peaceful Asian American Movement (AAM) in 1969 and began to look directly to the PRC as an example of a successful revolution. In terms of organization, however, the primary example they looked to was the BPP, a fact highlighted by the groups’ acceptance of violence.

The BPP held a significant amount of sway over the Red Guard Party. This influence extended to the naming of the group. The founders wanted a name that was inherently Chinese, so they came up with the Red Dragons. The Panthers thought this was absurd. They wanted to use the group’s name to establish a more politically provocative reputation, so Bobby Seale convinced the founders to draw the name of their organization from the brigades of youth patrolling China’s cities and countryside—Mao’s famous Red Guards.61 In later writings, members of the Red Guard Party would admit to making many errors during the early development of the party. A failure to fully grasp the meaning of Mao Zedong Thought resulted in the members of the party viewing themselves as a military group with weak political and ideological convictions.62 The resulting violence was met with equal and sometimes greater force from the San Francisco police.

There are a few possible reasons for the Red Guard Party’s overtly militaristic position. The first lies in the role of Mao in the lives of the party’s members. Dolly Veale, whose parents fled Shanghai for San Francisco in 1955, was not supposed to look favorably on Mao. Her antipathy toward Mao was based on family history alone. It was due to this acquired aversion that she didn’t read any of Mao’s works for the first few months of her party membership. Then she heard a Red Guard quote from the Red Book on the streets of San Francisco’s Chinatown, and afterwards felt disturbed by the mere mention of Mao’s name.63 Once students like Veale became more educated on the version of Mao that they had never heard about from their parents and from the anti-communist US press corps, they read Mao on a deeper level. It was only after this kind of reconciliation that a more Mao-centric doctrine became the norm within the party. Yet this transformation only partly explains the violence and chaos of the

61 Antonio and Ho, 284.
63 Antonio and Ho, 185.
organization’s founding period. More important was the influence of the BPP, a group whose popularity within the Asian-American community was enormous due to the Panthers’ defiance of the US political structure.

Much like the Oakland-based group, the Red Guard Party’s violence emanated from its claim to promote self-defense. The fifth point of the Red Guard’s founding document stated the party’s belief that “all Yellow people should arm themselves for self-defense,” while rule number seven succinctly forbade party members from “using, pointing, or firing a weapon of any kind at any one except the Enemy.” To support the organization’s army-like status, a shooting range was set up in the basement of a member’s home in which trainees would hold target practice, though the police eventually raided and destroyed the range.

The Red Guard Party fed off the BPP’s vitriol and came to be recognized for the same brand of violence that had marred both the Panthers’ image and its relationship with the people. In a way, these radical Chinese Americans, by replicating the violent rhetoric, insistence on self-preservation and determination, and even the visual symbolism of their African American colleagues, were performing their own version of Black Nationalism.

This “mirroring” of ideology and violence in which ethnically Chinese people used a Mao-inspired African American group as a model was perhaps the most complex instance of the use of Mao Zedong Thought to promote violence. A group of Chinese Americans with links to China came to Mao through the influence of an outside group of African Americans. First, the Cultural Revolution prompted the BPP to join in the struggle against oppression. Then, such was the strength of the nexus between Mao Zedong Thought and BPP ideology that the BPP passed on its ideology to Chinese Americans.

IWK also took a page out of the BPP’s book when its leaders used a “Twelve-Point Platform and Program” to signify the official creation of their party. Much like the Panthers’ founding document, the IWK’s version set out a list of demands its members wanted to see met, among them “self-determination for all Asian Americans,” “liberation of all third world

64 Ibid., 404.
65 It was not a rarity for the Red Guard Party to directly quote the Ten-Point Program of the Black Panther Party. For the full list of Red Guard Party Rules, see Antonio and Ho, 401-404.
peoples and other oppressed peoples,” and an “end to racism.”67 This list suggested a set of goals based not on the protection of one group but on the cooperation of all Third World peoples, reflecting the same dedication to self-preservation found in the seventh of the BPP’s own Ten-Point Program. IWK maintained its right to defend the Chinese-American community, but went further than the Panthers by stating its members’ preparation for “revolutionary armed war against the gangsters, businessmen, politicians, and police.”68 Despite the strongly worded statement in support of revolutionary violence, IWK never became a symbol for violence in the way the BPP had, however. Instead, the group campaigned for bilingual service at hospitals, provided health care services to all Asian-Americans free of charge, and helped to fight for Asian New Yorkers’ right to affordable housing.69 Unlike their West coast counterparts, IWK created the potential for violence without ever actually carrying it out.

The final radical leftist organization that merits consideration in this discussion differed from the three previous groups in that it lacked any racial motivations for carrying out violence. The Weather Underground Organization (WUO) was born in 1969 at a meeting of SDS when a group of separatists from the Revolutionary Youth Movement (RYM) produced a document titled “You Don’t Need A Weatherman To Know Which Way The Wind Blows.” This manifesto of sorts signaled the formation of a new underground movement dedicated to using violence, primarily in the form of homemade bomb strikes, to promote a revolution on behalf of the “oppressed peoples of the world.”70 Though this group represented yet another faction within SDS, its leaders claimed to have the most revolutionary principles. The only surprising aspect of the WUO was the makeup of its members. These revolutionaries were well-off, college-educated sons and daughters of white middle-class America. Why did these privileged young people go to such extremes to end racism and imperialism? After witnessing the rise of such ethnicity-based groups as the BPP, they had come to recognize the

68 Ibid., 251.
role white America could play in revolutionary change and began four years of underground operations that resulted in some of the most damaging domestic bombings in the history of the United States.\footnote{Berger, \textit{Outlaws of America}, 272.}

In rationalizing this violence, the founders of the WUO made a critical error in judgment. They saw the events of the 1960s, including race riots and war protests across the United States, student riots in Paris and Mexico City, the Cuban Revolution, colonial wars of independence in Africa, and perhaps most significantly, the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution in China, as a sign that the world was united in a common struggle against what they viewed as US imperialism. In the organization’s manifesto, there was a clear lack of empathy for the group’s former colleagues in SDS and RYM, whose positions were criticized as those of a “traditional revisionist mass base of sympathizers.” In other words, the WUO was not interested in merely raising awareness of Marxist contradictions, but wanted to end them. They wanted a movement “akin to the Red Guard in China, based on the full participation and involvement of masses of people in the practice of making revolution; a movement with a full willingness to participate in the violent and illegal struggle.”\footnote{Ayers et al., “You Don’t Need,” 28.}

The system that the New Left had set out to change became the system that the WUO aimed to destroy by “bringing the war home.”\footnote{The WUO used this phrase often as a way to justify its violence. By framing its violent style as a domestic version of the Vietnam War, it sought to connect with the masses of Americans who opposed the war.} Their key misstep was a misinterpretation of world events that grossly overestimated the strength of unity among the “oppressed” people of the world. Instead of making the organization the symbol of mass revolution as they had hoped, the WUO’s acts of violence alienated its members from SDS and RYM, who were once the WUO’s closest allies. The WUO used the Cultural Revolution and Mao Zedong Thought to carry out a campaign that would bring down US imperialism from within. In the end, however, the spark that Bill Ayers, Bernadine Dohrn, Jeff Jones, and Celia Sojourn wanted to ignite never
became a prairie fire.\textsuperscript{74}

\section*{Conclusion}

In the final lines of his introduction to \textit{To Die for the People}, a collection of Huey Newton’s writings published in 1972, Franz Schurmann claims that the Black Panther Party had “come through its own Long March” and was ready for a “period of building, survival, and protracted struggle.”\textsuperscript{75} That Schurmann, then a professor of sociology and history at the University of California, Berkeley, would allude to the formative years of the Chinese Communist Party in an introduction to a text concerning the writings of Huey Newton is no coincidence. His ten-page introduction quickly traced the origin of revolution from America, Britain, and France, to theories developed by Marx, Engels, and Lenin. He then devoted space to a more drawn-out history of China under the Communist Party, detailing the destruction of “oppressor classes” and “alien empires” within China, before citing the Cultural Revolution as a manifestation of Mao’s realization that “revolution is a process and not a conclusion.”\textsuperscript{76} Of all the nods to Mao’s China, this was the most significant. Though Schurmann acknowledged the importance of the Communist victory over the Nationalists in 1949 as an essential part of the evolution of communist thought, he also recognized the significance of \textit{continuing} revolution among Mao’s contributions. While Schurmann never directly weighed in on whether the Communist Revolution (1946-49) or the Cultural Revolution (1966-7) was more central to Mao Zedong Thought, he referred to Mao as a party leader who “carried on the revolution.” In doing so Schurmann seemed to glorify the continuing nature of Mao’s vision and thus highlighted the significance of the Great Proletariat Cultural Revolution to the cause of the Black Panther Party.\textsuperscript{77}

The men who formed the BPP were fed up with the cards they had

\textsuperscript{74} In 1974 the WUO leaders published an official manuscript that laid out their goals in greater detail. Its title came from Mao Zedong’s oft-quoted line, “A single spark can start a prairie fire,” thus proving the symbolic rather than profound impact Mao had on the WUO. For more see William Ayers, Bernadine Dohrn, Jeff Jones, and Celia Sojourn, \textit{Prairie Fire: The Politics of Revolutionary Anti-Imperialism} (Brooklyn: Communications Co., 1974).

\textsuperscript{75} Newton, xxii.

\textsuperscript{76} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{77} Ibid., xiii-xiv.
been dealt. In Mao, they saw a hero who had bested US imperialism. Following his example seemed a possible avenue for racial liberation and equality. The Chinese Americans in San Francisco and New York City, the men and women across the country who sided with the WUO, and even Mao himself wanted to see a violent people’s revolution in the streets of America. However, both in his ideology and his political influence, Mao proved to be too distant to have the effect desired. The groups discussed above all used his words and his image to rally for a revolution that was too extreme to connect with mainstream American society. Viewed in this way, the Cultural Revolution was more than just a domestic affair that altered the fabric of Chinese society. It created the potential for great change in the United States just as it did in China. In both cases, however, the potential for progress was lost when violence entered the equation.

The fervor emanating from Beijing during the Cultural Revolution changed the world. While the Red Guard invasion of the Foreign Ministry changed the international landscape, the ideological currents of the Cultural Revolution also reached an audience on the ground level of the global communist movement. Huey Newton devoted his life to translating the Cultural Revolution from its Chinese roots to the specific needs of his communities. He appreciated Mao Zedong’s vision for permanent revolution and concluded that it centered on an everyday sort of violence, the role of which was to end the oppression of the lower classes and emphasize the value of the people as a collective body. Newton, the founder and leader of the Black Panther Party, observed the ability of violence to affect change in the Cultural Revolution and subsequently molded the Panthers into a revolutionary group willing to use violence as a means to secure protection and, if possible, liberation. The leaders of the Black Panther Party looked at the Cultural Revolution and saw an opportunity to better the lot of oppressed Americans from Oakland to Memphis, from San Francisco to New York. On this evidence, Mao’s words were far from empty rhetoric.

Mao demanded an uprising in his own nation and attempted to show the rest of the world how to effectively complete a revolution in the true fashion of Marxist-Leninist-Mao Zedong Thought. Mao’s visions encountered many obstacles such as corruption, greed, odium, excess, and impulsiveness. In the final analysis, the Cultural Revolution failed to accomplish Mao’s initial goals. For those Chinese who experienced it, the revolution was either
gravely traumatizing or temporarily liberating. For those scholars who have studied it, it was either a sinister power grab or a genuine attempt at political and ideological reform. There is a certain degree of truth in each of these interpretations. However, scholars should consider the global nature of the Cultural Revolution. Any conversation that attempts to analyze the event in a balanced manner should at some point determine the degree to which the Cultural Revolution affected the world at large. Some might argue that the ultimate failures of the revolutionary groups mentioned in this article serve as evidence that Mao Zedong Thought created nothing of value for the global proletariat outside of China. But a failed movement is a movement nonetheless. Though the Black Panthers were unable to use the violence of Mao Zedong Thought to achieve their goals, their members on the ground had a significant impact on the communities in which they worked.

Returning to the piece of propaganda that began this essay, one might ask whether the Third World actually united behind the Red Guards. Did they work together to crush imperialists, capitalists, revisionists, feudalists, and reactionaries? Did a red sun rise over a liberated globe? The short answer is no. In China, the Red Guards were only successful in bullying their parents and their teachers. The reeducation of youths constituted no education at all, setting back an entire generation. Furthermore, the use of Mao Zedong Thought did more to divide than it did to unite. Finally, though the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution failed to eliminate imperialism, capitalism, and revisionism, it led China to question the Soviet Union’s authority, to engage the United States in peaceful negotiations, and to shake up a racially divided American society. On the ground, the spirit of the Cultural Revolution inspired the leaders of the Black Panther Party to adapt Mao Zedong Thought to the cause of racial equality in the United States. Along with the Red Guard Party and the Weather Underground Organization, they justified the use of violence in the face of oppression and discovered the inherent difficulty of this task.