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# The Symbolism Of Black Panther

## Introduction

“Black Panther, a colloquial term used to refer to large felines classified in the genus Panthera that are characterized by a coat of black fur or large concentrations of black spots set against a dark background”. The Black Panther is an animal that is intelligent, beautiful and very cunning. The panther is found in Asia and Africa and it is actually different types of cats. They are mostly leopards and jaguars and they are not really found in America. In addition, the Black Panther was adapted into a superhero “Black Panther” by Marvel, and in 2018 made a huge difference in society when the movie hit the screen. Therefore, today when we hear about Black Panther it’s either the animal or the superhero. However, before the superhero made his debut there were other heroes’ in history that took on the name “Black Panther” and they made a difference in history.

The Black Panther Party as it was known used the animal as their symbol because it symbolized the strength and dignity of black people and it was to show that black people had the courage and determination to oppose racism and oppression. In this essay I would be talking about the Black Panther Party, who created it and why, if the meaning have changed over time, and what other groups besides the Black Panther Party adopted the concept and ideas. In addition, I would be discussing ideas from Zerubavel and O’Brien to help understand the symbol.

The creation of the symbolBefore the Black Panther Party got its name it was known as the Lowndes County Freedom Organization in Alabama. This group was a political party that would allow African Americans to be part of a political office. However, in order for the organization to run they needed to have a logo to go with their organization. Therefore, this was the creation of the Black Panther symbol. Ruth Howard, Dorothy Zellner, and Lisa Lyons were the women that created the Black Panther logo for the organization. They were sought out to be able to bring such a powerful symbol to a community that was determined to fight for their freedom and rights. O’Brien (2017) states “Without symbol systems, human experience and culture would not be possible”. That is true on what O’Brien is saying about symbol systems, and that without them we cannot embrace inexperience and other cultures. The Black Panther symbol has its social significance in the African American society and is still a major part of the culture today. Even after the party disbanded in 1982, their legacy lives on in many movements following in their footsteps.

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## The legacy and changes of the Black Panther

Founded in 1966, by Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale in Oakland following the assassination of Malcolm X, who had a huge influence on both of them with his ideas and concepts about the mistreatment of African Americans. The Black Panther Party was originally a group that was made as a self-defense force to help African American neighborhoods stay safe from the police that was brutalizing them. The Black Panther didn't only tackle issues with the police, but within their own communities they have done things from providing for others and even help with educational purposes and even aiding in those that needed clothes and shelter. As time went on the party took on a different perspective and started to revolutionize their movement. The party became more violent than peaceful and started to hate Whites for the mistreatment they have faced. O'Brien (2017) says that "We interact with each other by observing ourselves and steering our behaviors according to our interpretations of the expectation of others". This behavior of violence was triggered and it became a problem that put many African Americans into jail and even killed. This was not what the Black Panther party was about. The Black Panther Party stopped the violence and focused on the meaning they had in the first place and that was to help the African American community with things such as health problems, poor living conditions, providing jobs, and fighting for their rights. The Black Panther party over the years made connections with other groups and form alliances with these groups. The party became a national session when they began their march on to stop the brutality of African Americans. They caught the eyes of many people and those people were not happy about it. Those that weren't happy with this group showing up and making a name for themselves were groups such as white supremacy groups and even the FBI. However, even with these issues at hand, the Black Panther Party became an international organization that spread over 40 states in the United States and even around the world took part of this organization and help support the Black Panther Party. Even with all the support they had all things must come to an end, so in 1982 on the party dissembled and the Black Panther Party was no more. Even though the party ended its operation the legacy lived on in many African-Americans and the influence pushed African-Americans to stand up for themselves and form groups with the ideas and motivation they got from the original Black Panther Party.

Out with the Old, in with the New Even though the party disbanded in 1982, their legacy continues in others to do what they couldn't and started their own organization. The group that adopted the symbol was known as The New Black Panther Party founded in 1989 by Aaron Michaels and was supposed to be a party to help engage black citizen to be activists. However, this group used the symbol of the Black Panther in the wrong way and it angered the old member of the original party. Even if the symbol of the Black Panther was known for Black's strength and dignity, the new party used that to its full power. Zerubavel (1991) proclaims "Human behavior can vary over an enormous range, but each community draws a symbolic set of parentheses around a certain segment of range and limits its own activities within that

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narrower zone. The behavior of this new group used the symbol to encourage hatred towards Whites, Jews, and law enforcement. This new party has no connections to the original party, and it is just taking the name and the symbol and turning it into a supremacy group. Even if the new party still abides by the old rules they made changes to the “10 Point Platform” that was from the original Black Panther Party and started demanding many things be done for the Black community. The group became well known as time went on and have come across many problems that have caused this group to be known as the “black racist hate group”.

The New Black Panther Party is still active today and even have their own podcast on the radio so that the members can listen to them. Even though the New Black Panther party is nothing like the original concepts their motives is still to help African Americans achieve freedom. Furthermore, many other African American movements have been formed through the ideas of the Black Panther Party as well. A movement known as Black Live Matter was one of these African America movements. This movement didn't adopt the symbol or name of the Black Panther Party but adopted the ideas and concepts forming around the injustice for African Americans. This movement was seen as the same as the Black Panther Party because they are fighting for the freedom and equality through peaceful protesting and through their words. The Black Panther party was a powerful organization and it brought many people and cultures together to embrace in such a tremendous part of history. The symbol that was chosen for this group is seen in history as a meaning for all African Americans to remember and to see how hard their people have fought. Conclusion I, therefore, conclude that I have discussed the symbol and legacy of the Black Panther Party, who created the symbol, how the meaning changed over the course of time, and what other groups adopted the symbol and name.

The Black Panther Party was a strong symbol of resistance during its time, and it aimed to do what was right. The group has made a powerful national impact on many either through force or violence. The Black Panthers were a group to be feared as well, and they made sure of that. Their symbol of the animal is what gave this group the determination and courage to fight for their freedom in politics, society, and even the economy. This group has changed history for the good and the bad, and they have become a big part of the African American culture through their hardships and pain. This organizational party has surprised many Americans to see how much of an impact they have made with everything they wanted to be done. By holding riots, speeches, and marches to let their voices be heard was a shock to many Whites during the time. The Panthers have come a long way, and they were successful in many things that they fought for. This group inspired many African-Americans today to fight for their own rights and freedom, and that is something to be amazed about.

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