PART ONE: IN THE BEGINNING

The Black Panther Party's legacy is eternal. It will live on, always, in the hearts and minds of those who stand for the truth, of those who stand for justice and are willing to do whatever is needed to create the world we all deserve to live in: a world free of poverty, hunger, greed, fear, and hate—a world full of love and abundance.[1]

Aaron Dixon, Chairman, Seattle Black Panther Party

CHAPTER 1

CRUISIN'
HUEY
BOBBY
A LONG FREEDOM STRUGGLE

CRUISIN'

In the dark, anything can happen. Blackness, darkness, has a power unto itself. Faces reside there: strong, determined, and proud. Unapologetic in their blackness. A large afro. A halo of power. Dark sunglasses, glinting in the half-light. Crisp leather jackets and cocked berets. A uniform with meaning. Figures cutting across the frame—Black and proud.

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It was late at night. Huey Newton, Bobby Seale, and Lil' Bobby Hutton were cruising around in Bobby's car. The year was 1967. The place, Oakland, California.

As Huey drove, they noticed a police car patrolling the area. Huey sped up to tail the car, keeping him in his sight.[2] They glided behind, silent and watchful.

What the officer couldn't see was Huey's shotgun. Or Seale's .45 caliber handgun. Or Lil' Bobby's M1 rifle.

When the officer turned right, Huey turned right. When the officer turned left, Huey turned left. After a while, they all pulled up at an intersection, side by side.

The three men turned, looking into the police car. Bobby held Huey's gun. Their weapons were clearly visible. Huey's law book lay waiting, across the backseat.

They paused, waiting for a breath. Then they accelerated, moving ahead of the officer. His high beams started flashing, but Huey refused to stop. A flashing light meant nothing to him. When the officer put on his siren, Huey finally pulled over, right across the street from Merritt Community College. Huey knew the area well. Merritt was a mostly Black school, where both Huey and Bobby were students.

The officer burst out of his car, yelling. Young Black men and women stood, having just come out of class, observing the scene. Quickly, a crowd began to gather.

The officer came closer, screaming. "Get out of that car!"

Huey turned, cool and collected. "You ain't putting anybody under arrest. Who the hell you think you are?"

The officer snapped. He pulled open the car door and stuck his head inside, reaching across Huey to grab the barrel of the shotgun that Bobby was holding. Bobby pulled back.

Huey sprang into action. He grabbed the officer by the collar, slamming his head against the roof of the car. Huey then turned in his seat, kicked the officer in the stomach, and threw him out of the car.

Huey jumped out, holding his shotgun. Standing tall, he jacked a round of ammunition into the chamber. He spoke loudly, for all to hear. "Now, who in the hell do you think you are, you rotten fascist swine, you bigoted racist? You come into my car, trying to brutalize me and take my property away from me?" Bobby and Lil' Bobby Hutton jumped out of the passenger side of the car. Bobby pulled back the hammer on his .45.

The officer lifted his hands from his own gun, backing away.

The crowd was in awe. People began to stream out of their houses, their excitement growing. Huey and Bobby encouraged the people to observe, to witness what was happening. The people listened. They were captivated by these Black men, standing up to the police.

Bobby told the crowd just what was on his mind. That the police were "occupying our community like a foreign troop that occupies territory. Black people are tired of it."[3]

Several more police cars arrived. An officer walked up to Huey, yelling, "Let me see that weapon!"

The men refused to surrender their weapons. They weren't under arrest and didn't have to comply with the officers' orders. They invoked the Second Amendment to the Constitution, which supported their right to bear arms. They cited the California law that allowed them to carry guns publicly, as long as they were visible and in the open. Huey, Bobby, and Lil' Bobby did not submit to the police.

The gathered crowd could feel the tension rising like a thick smoke, covering them all, ready to envelop them in violence. Someone would have to back down. Huey, Bobby, and Lil' Bobby refused to do so. The crowd held its breath while the police circled, looking for reasons, anything to take these men down.

Finally, the police lieutenant called his men off. He couldn't find sufficient grounds for arrest. One officer, frustrated, noticed Bobby's license plate attached by a coat hanger. The officer stopped and wrote Bobby a ticket for the license plate. This action was a last-ditch attempt at saving face. In that moment, the police were ineffective. Their power had been stripped.

The question on everyone's mind, police officers and civilians alike, was the same. Who were these people?

HUEY

In Huey Newton's young world, family came first. He was the youngest of seven children born in Monroe, Louisiana, in 1942. From early on, Huey understood the importance—and the power—of the group. His parents set an important example. When you put family first, when you put the needs of others before your own, you can achieve great things.

Huey's father, Walter, was a charismatic and powerful man, who worked several jobs to support his large family. Throughout his childhood, Huey saw his father stand up to White men. Once, when Walter got into an argument with a particular White man he worked for, the White man told him that if a "colored" person disputed his word, he whipped him. Walter replied that no man would do such a thing to

Huey Newton

him, unless he was a better man. Shocked by this uncharacteristic response, the White man backed down.[4] Walter's example encouraged Huey to stand up for himself, no matter the circumstances.

Huey's mother, Armelia Johnson, stayed home to take care of her home and children. At that time, many Black women were forced to work as servants in White households to make ends meet. Unlike Armelia, they were unable to spend that precious time with their own children. For Huey's family, Armelia's time at home was an act of rebellion. Both Armelia and Walter subverted the stereotypes that sought to confine them.

In 1945, when Huey was just three years old, his family moved to Oakland, California, looking for better opportunities. But just a few months later, World War II ended and most Black people lost their wartime jobs. Even though the Newtons fared better than many others, they still lived on the edge.

Huey's oldest brother, Walter Newton, Jr., became a hustler, working illegally to keep poverty at bay. Lee Edward joined the military, after gaining a reputation as a street fighter. Melvin took a different path, finding his purpose in books and learning, eventually teaching sociology at Merritt Community College in Oakland.

Huey became all of these things and more: a hustler, a fighter, and a scholar.

From a young age, Huey was small. He was light-skinned like his father, who was half-White. Huey had a reedy, high-pitched voice too. In many ways, he was the type of kid that bullies picked on. They looked at Huey and thought he would be an easy target. They were wrong.

Huey never backed down from a fight. He didn't believe that anyone was better than him and he refused to let anyone break him down.

When Huey reached high school, he still couldn't read. As a result, his teachers didn't consider him intelligent. They overlooked Huey, not bothering to get to know him. During all his time in the Oakland public schools, Huey didn't have a single teacher who taught him anything relevant to his own life experience. Instead, they tried to rob him of his self-worth.[5] As Huey said, "At the time, I did not understand the size or the seriousness of the school system's assault on Black people. I knew only that I constantly felt uncomfortable and ashamed of being Black."[6]

But Huey refused to let others define him. He knew that to find a healthy, powerful understanding of himself, he would have to rely on himself. He knew that he was the only one who could protect his basic humanity. Huey would nurture his own curiosity. He would

question life as it was and he would work to change it, to make the world a better place for all Black people.

When his high school counselor told him he was "not college material," Huey set out to prove him wrong. Huey taught himself to read, graduated from high school, and in 1959, enrolled in Merritt College.[7] When he was unable to afford his tuition, Huey supported himself through theft and fraud. When he was caught, he defended himself in court, impressing the jury and defeating several misdemeanor charges.

Huey was an unusual combination: an intellectual and a man of action. In the years to come, he became the principal theoretician of the Black Panther Party, applying his knowledge and intelligence in ways his teachers never could have imagined. Huey always looked for real-world solutions to the injustice in his community. He fought for true freedom for Black people.

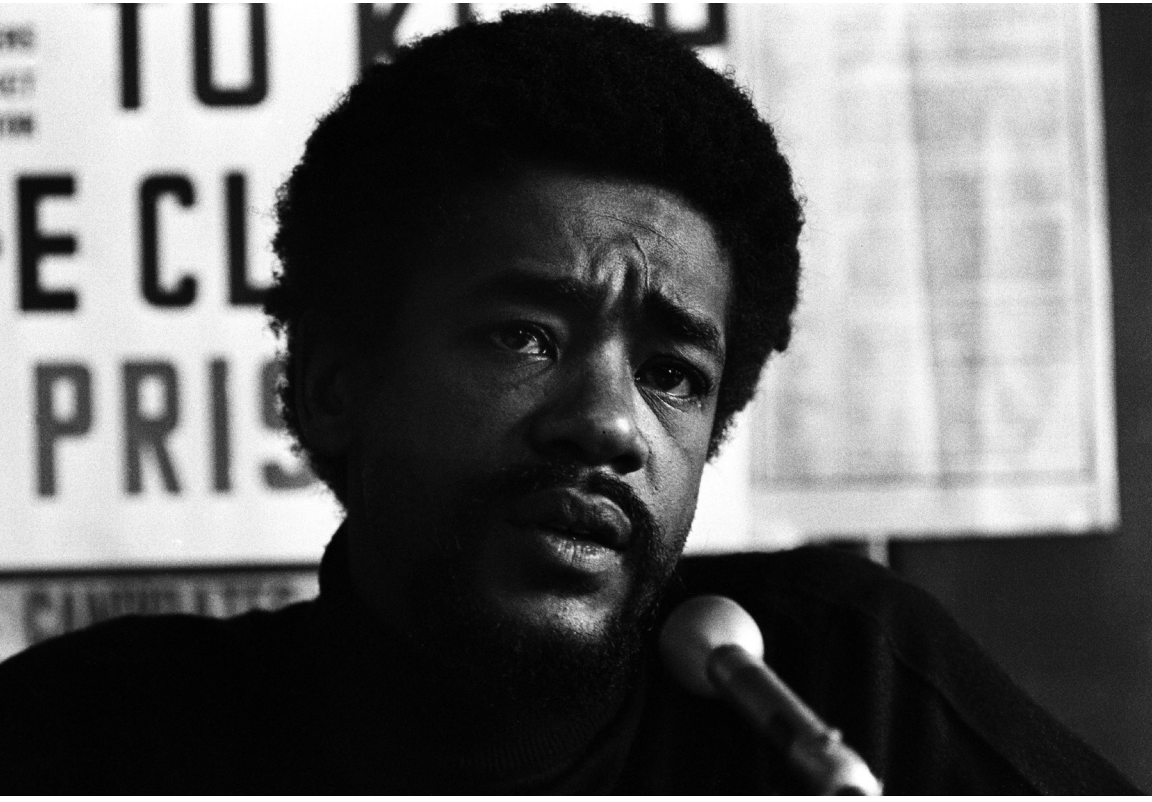
Whenever something got in the way of his goal, Huey removed the obstacle. Throughout his life, Huey refused to take no for an answer. He became a person that, in time, would go on to do what others thought impossible.

BOBBY

Bobby Seale was born in 1936 in Dallas, Texas. He was the oldest of three siblings and five years older than Huey.[8] Bobby was raised in Oakland by his mother, Thelma, and his father, George. Bobby's father was a carpenter by trade, who taught Bobby how to hunt and to fish. His father also taught Bobby about injustice.

From an early age, Bobby experienced random beatings from his father that filled him with a rage he didn't have an outlet for. But instead of becoming a bully, Bobby stood up for the underdog.

When Bobby's family first moved to Oakland, his sister Betty was pushed off the swing on the neighborhood playground. Even though



Bobby Seale

Bobby was the new kid, and outnumbered, he knocked the bully out of the swing, proclaiming that all the kids could use it. Bobby would go around the neighborhood taking on bullies twice his size, many times being beaten badly. But he never stopped standing up for himself, or for others.[9]

As Bobby grew, he learned how to channel his rage. And as he got older, he helped others channel their own anger, hurt, and frustrations, in a way that would change the world.

When he was fifteen, Bobby befriended another loner named Steve Brumfield. They would spend hours running through the nearby Berkeley Hills, dreaming and practice-fighting in the semiwilderness.

They communed with nature as a way to better understand themselves in the present and to dream of who they could be in the future. As a result, Bobby became faster and stronger and the bullies began to stay out of his way. It was the happiest time of Bobby's young life.[10]

But after high school, Steve joined the military and moved away. Bobby felt adrift without his best friend. He wandered from city to city, unable to hold down a job or have a meaningful relationship. Eventually he wound up back at home. But Bobby knew he couldn't stay there, where he would have to constantly defend himself against his father.

So, Bobby joined the U.S. Air Force. There he mastered the use of firearms, improved his metalworking skills, and worked on ways to channel his anger in a calculated fashion. When three soldiers refused to pay back a debt they owed Bobby and threatened to beat him if he mentioned it, Bobby bottled his anger and waited. Later that week, when the main soldier was least expecting it, Bobby attacked him.[11]

Bobby had multiple run-ins with officers. He broke the rules that he felt unjust. He returned after curfew and he spoke back to his superior officers. As Bobby said, "I cussed Colonel King out for what he was. I cussed him all the way down the streets. I had a whole big crowd of cats jiving and watching me cuss him out while they were taking me down in front of the barracks and all the way back across the lawn in front of the squadron headquarters."[12]

The Air Force put Bobby in jail and court-martialed him, letting him go with a bad conduct discharge. His colonel tried to threaten Bobby even as he was leaving, telling him that now, with this mark on his record, Bobby would never get a job.[13] Bobby didn't let that stop him. He worked as a sheet-metal mechanic, performer, and various other jobs.

Bobby had played jazz drums while he was in the military and now, at night, he performed in plays and comedy clubs. During the day, Bobby took college courses, an experience that helped him expand his mind. He began by studying engineering, but he soon shifted his

focus toward what began to interest him most: African American history and politics.[14]

In time, Bobby would become the Chairman of the Black Panther Party. He would persevere amidst great pressure, unwavering. He would organize the Party and keep it running day to day, giving speeches that inspired countless people.

Once Bobby believed in something, he would never back down from his beliefs, regardless of the consequences.

A LONG FREEDOM STRUGGLE

Both Huey and Bobby grew up in Oakland in the 1960s. What they experienced was particular, but also part of a shared experience of being Black in America. Huey and Bobby had to deal with other people's prejudices and opinions of them, based sometimes purely on the color of their skin. They worked to prove people wrong, to stand up to stereotypes and embrace the best, most beautiful version of themselves. But, at every turn, they faced the reality of being a Black man in America.

Huey and Bobby were a part of a long Black freedom struggle in the United States, stretching back across the centuries to the first enslaved Africans that battled to free themselves.

After the American Revolution (1776–1783), the freedom struggle led by enslaved Africans increased. In ways large and small, the enslaved struggled to become free. They faked illnesses. They slowed the pace of work. They destroyed crops and tools. They torched buildings and crops and poisoned their masters and mistresses. Untold numbers ran away to freedom. In the Nat Turner Insurrection in Virginia in 1831, Turner led a band of slaves in an ill-fated yet extraordinary revolt to destroy slavery.

There were also Black people who were either born into freedom or successfully gained their freedom. These free Black people led the Abolitionist movement, which worked to end slavery. Together with

a small but important group of White people, these free Black freedom fighters agitated for freedom for all Black people. Eventually, those who were enslaved led the movement that ultimately ended slavery during the Civil War (1861–1865).

Emancipation did not mean true freedom for those who had been enslaved. Even though they were technically free citizens, in practice Black people in the United States were far from free. From the 1890s down through Huey's and Bobby's childhoods, Jim Crow laws were common. These laws legalized the practice of racial segregation, keeping Black and White people apart. They were also created and used to oppress Black people—to keep them down and keep them from reaching equality.

These were just some of the conditions that shaped Huey and Bobby.

Now, the year was 1962. The Civil Rights Movement was gaining traction. During the twentieth century, the Civil Rights Movement became the largest and most powerful political movement in the United States. Those who agitated within this movement would successfully fight to abolish Jim Crow and to win voting rights for Black people. Important moments would include the 1941 March on Washington; the World War II Double Victory Campaign, which demanded victory over racism at home as well as over fascism and racism abroad; the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision (1954), which declared school segregation unconstitutional and, as a result, illegal; and the Montgomery Bus Boycott (1956–1957). The movement also used widespread economic boycotts, sit-in movements, voter registration campaigns, and desegregation campaigns throughout the nation, especially in the South.

The majority of people who fought during the Civil Rights Movement used a tactic called nonviolent civil disobedience. This kind of protest required people to literally put their bodies on the line to advance freedom. Instead of physically fighting back, protesters turned the other cheek, even when faced with violent retaliation. They were willing to suffer the penalties from their resistance to oppression—including being jailed, beaten, and killed—to advance the long Black freedom struggle.

Members of the Civil Rights group SNCC, including John Lewis on the left, protest a Whites-only swimming pool in Cairo, Illinois, 1962.

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Lincoln Lithograph Company

new world together

OORDINATING COMMITTEE 8½ RAYMOND STREET, N.W. ATLANTA 14, GEORGIA

The raised fist became a prominent symbol of the Black Power movement.

In the early 1960s, the Black Power movement was also beginning to make strides. This movement worked to create pride in being Black and sought economic independence for Black people. It worked to create new social and cultural institutions for Black people. It did not seek necessarily to integrate with White society. Instead, the Black Power movement worked to advance the interests of the Black nation within the larger White American nation.

These movements overlapped in their struggles and their ideas. And of course, their ultimate goal—freedom for Black people—was the same. But at times these movements disagreed on the necessary methods. Some believed that freedom could be gained by operating within the system, by working within the current power structure to change it.

Others believed that, for true liberation, the system had to be overthrown and something new put in its place.

This was a time of great transformation. It was a time when people increasingly believed that change was possible. In campaign after campaign, Black activists and their allies put their bodies on the line, crossing the color line. They were brutally repressed by local White authorities. These Black activists drew the attention of the federal government, and, in many cases, the federal government intervened. Still, the movements continued, escalating and growing in numbers.

It was 1962. This was the year that Huey met Bobby.

Malcolm X speaks at a gathering of African American Muslims, 1961.