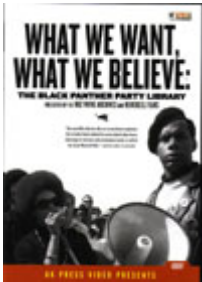


<http://www.hanginghex.com/hexmain.html>

"WHAT WE WANT, WHAT WE BELIEVE: THE BLACK PANTHER LIBRARY" DVD



This was something that most definitely piqued my interest. The Black Panther Party For Self-Defense is always an intriguing subject to study and gain inspiration from. So imagine my excitement when this 4-disc set arrived at my doorstep. Yet it is with great difficulty that I state that this really didn't do it for me. I was really hoping to see plenty of old footage from the 60's, from rallies, demonstrations, and day-to-day activities of the Panthers. Sure, you get some of that. And what you get is cool, primarily a rally held outside a Bay Area court house in support of Huey Newton. But it's miniscule in comparison to the bulk of the library. Most of the material on here is face-to-face interviews with people involved with the Panthers, many of them not Panthers themselves, but involved with them through support, documentarians, lawyers for the Panthers, and (interestingly enough) a couple retired FBI agents involved in COINTELPRO who tapped their phones, followed them around, and built cases against them. There is an extensive interview with exiled former Field Marshall Donald Cox, an important member of the Panthers who discusses his life with the BP, but seriously, the guy is impossible to understand. He mumbles his way through the interview, smokes a lot of pot, and seems to have lost a bit of his memory. There is another very long segment involving a reunion where many former Panther leaders talk to an audience, but once again, the audio leaves something to be desired. Additionally, many of these lectures given are strictly audio with no visual complement. Yet another segment, which if you have the patience is quite interesting, is a panel discussion in which a number of Panther supporters past and present discuss their involvement and police repression.

I'd say overall it's very thorough, but not in a very interesting way. There could be so much more footage to complement the stories all these people have to contribute. And while the stories are what make history, being passed down from one person to the next (in this case, eyewitnesses) it's something you'd rather hear from a person sitting with you, rather than a person starring blankly through a television screen. Bobby Seale, quite possibly the most important living Panther is barely included, and so much more could have been added from his perspective. While the admissions from lawyers and cops on the outside helped establish an 'outside looking in' perspective it doesn't seem to be enough. This was a very important time, when repressed peoples were fighting back not only with guns, but with knowledge and bettering their community; and the glaringly obvious harassment (and, often times, murder) they received in kind. It's an inspiration for the here and now especially, which I think could have been driven home more through actual footage rather than just verbal storytelling. (Newsreel/ AK Press, www.akpress.org)