

KQEK

a different kind of media site



DVD: What We Want, What We Believe -The Black Panther Party Library (2006) - 4-disc set

Review Rating: Excellent

Label/Studio: AK Press / MVD Visual

Catalog #: AKV007

Region: 1 (NTSC)

Released: October 10, 2006

Genre: Documentary / Archival

Synopsis: Massive window into the world of the Black Panther Party, via the Roz Payne Archives.

Directed by: none credited

Screenplay by: none credited

Music by: n/a

Produced by: Roz Payne

Cast: (see Detailed Contents)



Film Length: 720 mins.

Black & White / Colour

Languages: English Mono

Subtitles:

Process/Ratio: 1.33:1

Anamorphic DVD: No

Detailed Contents :

Book Reviews
by Author
by Title

DVD Reviews
by Title

CD/LP Reviews

DVD Film Music

Isolated Scores
on DVD and
Laserdisc

Related Links

Exclusive
Interviews
& Profiles



12-page bopoklet with table of contents, photos, and introduction by Roz Payne

Disc 1 --- 2 Newsreels: "Off the Pig" (14:04) + "Mayday" (13:21) + "Repression" (12:37) / Interview with Field Marshal Donald Cox (110:55) with 9 Chapter Indexes / 35 th Reunion of the BPP Intro (2:42) + Jericho Movement (3:27) + Jericho table (1:18) + Kathleen Cleaver (28:28) + Gail Shaw (2:17) + 'East Coast Panther' (3:39) + Elbert "Big Man" Howard (:41) + Safiya Bukhari (1:10) + Bobby Seale (13:08) + Kathleen Cleaver (9:02) / Audio Only reunion Excerpts: Akua Njeri (10:30) + Betty Powell (9:06) + Althea Francois (5:56) + 'Philadelphia Panther' (5:20) + Kwaku Duren (6:06) + Bob Boyle (8:03 + 1:56)

Disc 2 --- Wheelock Conference Conversation (39:39) + Roz Payne/Agent W.A.C.(24:51) + Audio Only Excerpts: Young Lords (15:17) + Huey/Gay Liberation (14:55) + Ahmed Rahman (19:37) / FBI Agent Interviews: William A. Cohendet (42:40) + Wesley Swearingen (69:10)

Disc 3 --- Movement Lawyers: Bob Boyle (13:44) + Bob Bloom (18:13) + Jesse Berman (20:28) + Beverly Axelrod (27:05) + Jerry Leftcourt (34:17) + Elizabeth Fink (46:54) / Marty Kenner (18:59)

Disc 4 --- Newsreel Members: The Falk Family (7:40) + Gail Dolgin (9:11) + Cindy Fitzpatrick (10:38) + Dozie and Gay (11:52) + Marilyn Buck (2:11) + Roz Payne, John Douglas and Jane Kramer (30:48) + Christine Hanson "Vida" (7:15) / 65 Image Photo Gallery (5:25) + DVD-ROM Content: 217 page Adobe .PDF file + Weblinks

Comments :

Besides images in old newsreels, iconic photos of gun-toting men with berets & leather jackets, a film appearance by Panther member Kathleen Cleaves in the opening credits of Michelangelo Antonioni's **Zabriskie Point**, or Melvin and Mario Van Peebles 1995 docu-drama **Panther**, what else do younger generations know about the Black Panther Party?

In terms of sixties counterculture, the BPP are frequently given short shrift as simply another youthful political faction that, during the late sixties, formed part of the massive changes that the United States was undergoing after the disintegration of the Kennedy dynasty.

This 4-disk set from AK Press and MVD Visual is a bit of a monster to tackle, and requires a bit of a caveat.

First off, the audio and video images come primarily from the collection of Roz Payne, a founding member of a filmmaking collective called Newsreel Films, which operated its own east and west coast offices. During the late sixties and early seventies, the group's goal was to show a kind of reality deemed too gritty, controversial, or subversive by mainstream media outlets. The group was shadowed by the FBI, even though the filmmaking collective distributed films which spanned, according to Payne, a diversity of political ideologies and philosophies, as opposed to a singular anti-government approach.

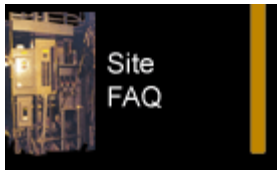
Three of the group's films made for the BPP are included on the DVD, and they show a movement that at one time was capable of massing thousands of supporters to protest the arrest, abuse, or racially motivated assaults on its members. There's profanity, period colloquialisms, and attire that has since been spoofed, and spawned retro fashion designs, but in their day, the leather jacketed members and their verbal salvos symbolized a movement of black and minority empowerment against forces with a history of abuse.

In her written intro to the DVD set – spanning most of the booklet, and mandatory reading before watching a frame of footage - Payne acknowledges that the recent video footage was never meant for a formal DVD release; it's of archival quality, it's sometimes handheld, and the audio is at the mercy of nearby audience chatterboxes, as in the 35 th reunion footage; or awfully bad wind, which affects the exterior Q&As between Payne and Field Marshal Donald Cox, at his home in France.

The content of each disc, however, is a treasure trove of oral histories, discussions, and recollections about and by BPP members, supporters, and friends. The Newsreel collective sought to motivate the global masses and educate, provoke, and empower through community-based film showings in homes and on alley walls; Payne's archives capture that struggle, and the unique problems that later split the party into bickering faction. These increasingly fuming fissures were exploited by the FBI in their desire to disrupt and destroy the group's power through a program called [COINTELPRO](#).

The included .PDF gallery – spanning a massive collection of personal and de-classified FBI documents – supports the agency's disruption tactics, which are further detailed in the interview and conference segments throughout the set. (Roz Payne, who appears in the Newsreel interviews on Disc 4, also elaborates on some of these notorious extracts housed in the .PDF gallery.)

Even from a cursory examination, the BPP's makeup was intriguing: the group attracted ideological members from many levels of society who collectively shared experiences of racism and oppression; members regarded the BPP as more of a family, and it's that union, which bound them together in times of trouble yet fostered familial bickering, the FBI patiently exacerbated. The most insidious tactics were also discreet: like any tight-knit group with close relationships, the implantation of doubt, jealousy, and the furthering existing conflicts had a potent effect through bogus correspondences, and lots of heresay.



Some of the interviews on Disc 4 with former Newsreel members also assess the BPP as being less organized and cohesive than the party's image in person, and in the newsreels: a member of the Falk family also elaborates on the mish-mash of political ideologies that were being snipped and spliced into the Panther's own philosophy; and the resulting image presents an organization that was, unintentionally, ripe with perfect flaws the FBI could exploit.

The BPP's use of 'legal arms' was also cleverly reduced by regional legislation restricting the use of loaded weapons on public land, yet the party's use of guns were part of a darker reaction to the physical confrontations with police; for a while, the show of armed force worked, but the guns became easy symbols local governments and their departments could use to reshape the BPP's media persona to that of terrorists, waiting to take down the government.

The quality of the three newsreels is pretty beat up, and it's evident the collective and the BPP used these films heavily, thereby exposing them to myriad scratches and brutal wear. That they survive at all is perhaps miraculous, as they're time capsules of a kind of public rage that's rarely shown on network news today.

"Off the Pig" begins with a pair of Panther interviews – [Eldridge Cleaver](#) at a Panther headquarter, and [Huey P. Newton](#) speaking from Alameda County Jail. The cross-cut interviews center around armed black men standing up to abusive police, and their equating the police with the soldiers killing Vietnamese locals during the war.

Later scenes include shiny new Panther recruits marching in formation in an outdoor sports court, and Kathleen Cleaver seen addressing a group of supporters and curious listeners. Dressed in a long leather jacket, wearing dark shades, and sporting a huge afro, it's an iconic image that Hollywood also appropriated to tailor films towards a black audience, like Rosalind Cash's character Lisa, in **The Omega Man**, who similarly spouted plenty of voguish argot.

The film's theme and message is liberation, and the final section deals with a public rally to support jailed Panthers (primarily Huey Newton), with women on the soundtrack chanting "the revolution has come, it's time to pick up the gun," and males shouting "off the pig!" as an ongoing chorus. The short then closes with [Bobby Seale's](#) oration of the Panther's 10 Point Program.

"Mayday" essentially covers the mass rally with Kathleen Cleaver as key speaker. A subsequent speaker leads into a montage of dead Panthers, stills and footage of police battling Panthers, all set to a Mingus-like jazz piece; and a witness at the rally tells of the events that led to Donald Cox being shot. The final section is a mix of "Free Huey! Off the Pig!" chants, the distribution and praise of Chairman Mao's Red Book, and a free breakfast program in low income neighbourhoods.

"Repression," the last short, begins with a montage of iconic images of chain gangs, segregated lineups, and cotton picking, set to a mournful free-jazz piece. The print is missing some frames (filled in with blank leader) during an interview, but the short's aim is to address slavery, racism, and repression through the ages, all for the capital gain of rich whites and large corporations. A second montage uses a recurrent song, additional speeches, and stills. The short closes with a speech on the Free Breakfasts For Children Program with related footage, footage of a Panther office after vandalism, and a montage on the unification of oppressed peoples.

Of the three films, only the first two contain the Newsreel logo, which is underscored with machinegun fire. "Repression" is referenced in Disc 4 as a lost film, which lay in a closet for 20 years until a professor interested in Panther ephemera screened the unfinished rough cut before an appreciative audience.

The contemporary interviews on Disc 1 cover the early years and the BPP's current membership (with some rage now re-aligned at what some see as a shrinking, apathetic party still crushed by decades-old fractures), while Disc 2 covers a conference and the eventually declassification of 'nonexistent' FBI documents vetted by Agent Wesley Swearingen.

Disc 3 deals with the legal teams involved with the BPP and its troubled members, while Disc 4 focuses on the Newsreel members who reflect on their work, and their contributions to independent, alternative propagandistic news gathering.

Each interview subject offers an intriguing facet of the collective, its east and west coast branches, and the internal frictions that also fractured Newsreel Films. The collective also distributed films from Cuba and Vietnam, but the collective eventually dissolved as members wanted a more hands-on role in political activism in non-film venues.

The tough challenge for those unfamiliar with the BPP will be retaining all the names in this set, and some might find it worthwhile to check out some online links to get an idea of the party's makeup, its key members, and a timeline of its growth, flourishing, and later disappearance from the international stage.

For film fans, the Disc 4 is probably the most accessible, as the interviews with former Newsreel members describe the era, their collective, and their work in straightforward narratives that don't wholly rely on a familiarity with the era's primary and secondary political figures; it's more film history, focusing on the activities of another group of politically active youths who made and showed movies anywhere, and anyhow.

Regardless of one's political stance, the films produced and distributed by Newsreel are amazing time capsules of an era's conflagrations, and rare examples of independently financed and crafted propaganda. With BPP key works collected in this set, other films by the collective deserve a similarly exhaustive release by AK Press.

More information on the collective and its catalogue can be found at the [Newsreel Films website](#).

© 2007 Mark R. Hasan



[_IMDB Entry](#) [Script Online](#) [Fan/Official Film site](#) [Cast/Crew Link](#)



n/a

[1](#) --- [2](#)

n/a



[_Amazon.com](#) [Amazon.ca](#) [Bay Street](#)

[Video](#) [Comparisons](#)



n/a



[_Soundtrack CD](#) [CD Review](#) [LP Review](#) [Composer](#)

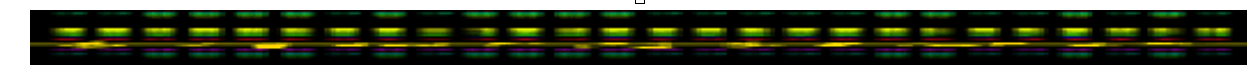
[Filmog.](#)

n/a

n/a

n/a

n/a



[Book Reviews: By Author](#) [By Title](#) [DVD Reviews: By Title](#)

[Music: _CD & LP Reviews](#) [DVD Film Music](#) [Isolated Scores on DVD/Laserdisc](#)

[Related Links](#) [Exclusive Interviews & Profiles](#) [Site FAQ](#)

[Top of Page](#) [DVD Index "V to Z"](#) [DVD Index "A"](#)



Site designed for 1024 x 768 resolution, using 16M colours, and optimized for MS Explorer 6.0. KQEK Logo and All Original KQEK Art, Interviews, Profiles, and Reviews Copyright © 2001-Present by Mark R. Hasan. All Rights Reserved. Additional Review Content by Contributors 2001-Present used by Permission of Authors. Additional Art Copyrighted by Respective Owners. Reproduction of any Original KQEK Content Requires Written Permission from Copyright Holder and/or Author. Links to non-KQEK sites have been included for your convenience; KQEK is not responsible for their content nor their possible use of any pop-ups, cookies, or information gathering.