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Kristen Hoerl

Butler University, khoerl@butler.edu

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Race and Hegemonic Struggle
in the United States

Chapter Three

Remembering Radical Black Dissent

Traumatic Counter-Memories in Contemporary Documentaries about the Black Power Movement

Kristen Hoerl

Contemporary rhetoric about race and racism has been shaped, in part, by popular films. Since the late 1980s and 1990s, Hollywood has provided a variety of what Kelly Madison refers to as “anti-racist-white-hero” films.¹ Movies including *Amistad*, *Cry Freedom*, *The Long Walk Home*, *Mississippi Burning*, and *Ghosts of Mississippi* have routinely positioned white protagonists as civil rights heroes who win justice for the black community by punishing or humiliating white antagonists. Each film frames racial injustice as the consequence of closed-minded individuals, rather than as the outcome of the U.S. economic and political system. More recently, the motion pictures *The Blind Side* and *The Help* have featured white Southern women advocating on behalf of individual black people despite the racial prejudices of their friends and neighbors. These films are part of a broader collection of texts that have remembered the civil rights era in terms of progress toward racial justice.

Commemorations of black struggles have tended to foreground the successful efforts of civil rights icons such as Martin Luther King and Rosa Parks; but the efforts of later activists such as Stokely Carmichael, Huey Newton, and Angela Davis have receded to the background. In contrast to earlier civil rights icons, the latter highlighted ongoing racial injustices with law enforcement, housing, businesses, education, and the prison system.

By deflecting attention from the devastating consequences of institutional racism, such narratives and commemorations ultimately reaffirm the legitimacy of hegemonic whiteness.² They also contribute to postracial interpretations of contemporary social life that feature the successes of individual black Americans as evidence of progress toward racial justice despite ongoing racial disparities in income, health, and education.³ Postracial portrayals of race relations in Hollywood's anti-racist-white-hero films illustrate Marita Sturken's observation that films often smooth over and give new meaning to "uncomfortable histories of traumatic events."⁴

In contrast to Hollywood's white-washed accounts of civil rights victories, a series of documentary films have portrayed the Black Power Movement that questioned the efficacy of the civil rights movement for achieving racial justice.⁵ These include *Eyes on the Prize II: America at the Racial Crossroads 1965–Mid 1980s*⁶ and *The Black Power Mixtape 1967–1974*.⁷ Directed by Henry Hampton, the six-part documentary *Eyes on the Prize II* appeared in 1990, three years after the first series *Eyes on the Prize: America's Civil Rights Years*. The first series led audiences through the trajectory of the more mainstream civil rights movement, from the Montgomery bus boycotts through the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1965. *Eyes on the Prize II* dealt with the more controversial topics of black struggles that followed civil rights into the 1980s, and featured the rise and decline of the Black Power Movement and of the Black Panther Party in two hours of their series entitled "Power" and "A Nation of Law?" The second half of the series also covered the emergence of black leadership in electoral politics by highlighting the elections of black mayors Carl Stokes in Cleveland and Harold Washington in Chicago.

In 2011, *The Black Power Mixtape 1967–1975* portrayed the Black Power Movement in the United States from the perspective of Swedish journalists. The film's director Goran Olsson organized archival footage that was shot over the course of the Black Power Movement's lifetime and edited it together to tell a narrative about the movement's emergence and demise. This documentary focused on the Black Power Movement in three separate parts: the first part documented the emergence of the movement with footage of Stokely Carmichael's speeches before a variety of black and white audiences; the second documented the state suppression against the Black Panther Party and Angela Davis's arrest and acquittal on charges of terrorism; the last third of the documentary looked at the emergence of the drug culture in Harlem in the mid-1970s.

These documentaries are remarkable because popular culture rarely depicts Black Power activism with substantive discussion about the movement's motivations, goals, or aftermath. *Eyes on the Prize II* and *The Black Power Mixtape 1967–1975* foregrounded conditions of economic inequality and brutal violence against the black community that motivated the move-

ment's call for complete separation from white institutions and self-defense "by any means necessary." They also provided vivid depictions of state-sanctioned violence against black radicals that contributed to the movement's downfall. Black Power activists sought revolutionary and fundamental changes in American politics and economics. Movement members routinely condemned institutionalized racism and promoted the self-determination of black communities; however, their appeals were consequently ignored or rebuked by mainstream culture.⁸ Even at the height of their activity during the late 1960s and early 1970s, the mainstream press distorted the movement's goals by characterizing Black radicalism as menacing, violent, and unreasonable.⁹ By providing images of black political empowerment and collective efforts by and on behalf of members of the black community, these documentaries disrupt Hollywood's ability to smooth over or ignore uncomfortable histories of racial injustice that do not fit neatly into postracial civil rights narratives. As musician and activist Erykah Badu asserted at the conclusion of the *Black Power Mixtape 1967-1975*, "We have to write and document our own history, otherwise we get written out."

By featuring radical black activists who vocally condemned injustices embedded within the U.S. economic and political system, these documentaries are compelling examples of critical or counter-memory. George Lipsitz writes that counter-memory supplies new perspectives about the past by attending to the "hidden histories excluded from dominant narratives."¹⁰ An assumption underlying the study of counter-memory is that popular culture contributes to shared understanding about the past. As William Romanowski posits, motion pictures provide powerful expressions of "knowledge, history and culture."¹¹ Films provide resources for shared remembrance that offer social lessons about the role of the past and its implications for the present.

By focusing on groups and individual experiences with oppression, counter-memory reframes "dominant narratives purporting to represent universal experience."¹² Drawing from Gramsci's theory of hegemony, Lipsitz acknowledges that films predominantly "engender accommodation with prevailing power realities," but he asserts that they also "create conditions of possibility" that "expand the present by informing with memories of the past and hopes for the future."¹³ As argument theorist Robert Cox notes, critical theorists have long considered the emancipatory potential of memory; recollection of ideals that have been deformed by contemporary ideological discourses may be a primary means for inspiring radical social change. Working from Marcuse, Cox theorizes critical memory as an historical argument capable of resisting a presentist or reified consciousness to recover what has been left out of or excluded from current public debate.¹⁴

For audiences born after the 1960s, or for those who have limited knowledge about historic struggles for racial justice, *Eyes on the Prize II* and *The Black Power Mixtape 1967-1975* provide resources for understanding the

role that radical black activism has played in the history of social change in the United States. These documentaries challenge hegemonic race relations by highlighting the injustices and brutal violence that white communities and law enforcement inflicted on black people. The films' sympathetic depictions of radical black activists invite viewers to draw connections between historic and contemporary injustices facing the black community. *Eyes on the Prize II* aired on PBS stations on Martin Luther King Day in 1990 and received positive reviews in many national print news sources including *Time* magazine, *The Washington Post*, and *The New York Times*.¹⁵ The series also won four Emmys for achievement in writing, the George Foster Peabody Broadcasting Award for Distinguished Service, and a Du Pont-Columbia University Silver Baton for excellence in broadcast journalism.¹⁶

The Black Power Mixtape 1967–1975 is a more recent resource of counter-memory for U.S. audiences. Although the footage for documentary was initially archived in Sweden, Danny Glover's New York-based Louverture Films co-produced the film for distribution in the United States. Glover explained that he wanted to disabuse audiences—particularly young black audiences—of the misconception that struggles for democracy and racial justice ended with the civil rights movement.¹⁷ He may have reached a segment of his ideal audience when PBS aired the documentary in honor of Black History Month in February 2012. Print news media reception of the film suggests that the documentary also circulated among college students and left-leaning audiences. In addition to positive reviews from the *New York Times* and the *San Francisco Chronicle*,¹⁸ *The Black Power Mixtape 1967–1975* was featured in left-of-center and alternative publications *Mother Jones*, *The American Prospect*, and *Utne Reader*.¹⁹ Scholarly and trade journals specializing in library holdings (*Video Librarian*, and *Library Journal*)²⁰ and film studies (*Film Comment*, *Film Quarterly*, and *Sight and Sound*)²¹ also made note of the film. The documentary won an award for best editing at the Sundance Film Festival during its release year. Given their more limited circulation and promotion, these documentaries cannot fully counter the preponderance of texts that constitute postracial memory in contemporary popular culture. Nonetheless, their emphasis on systemic racial injustices in the years after the civil rights era provide relatively unique resources of counter-memory that contradict hegemonic constructions of race relations articulated by mainstream media.

In the rest of this chapter, I critically analyze and interpret *Eyes on the Prize II*, and *The Black Power Mixtape, 1967–1975* to theorize the relationship between counter-memory and hegemony in documentary film. Despite their sympathetic depictions of radical black activism, these documentaries may not actually provide resources for resistance. Drawing from Dominick LaCapra and Ron Eyerman, I interpret these documentaries as forms of cultural trauma.²² I argue that these films function intertextually to enact a form

of cultural trauma that inhibits political agency by repeatedly articulating radical political dissent with experiences of social violation and loss. In the following analysis, I explain how each documentary provides a sympathetic depiction of the Black Power Movement. Then, I describe how the narrative and propositional arguments constructed across these documentaries enact central features of cultural trauma. These films position audiences as second-generation witnesses to historical traumas that disrupt ideological beliefs about the justice of the U.S. political and legal system. By focusing on the martyrdom of black leaders and movement members' despair in the early 1970s, these documentaries suture radical black agency to the traumatic past. I conclude by considering alternative forms of counter-memory more amenable to the goals of social change and racial justice.

SYMPATHETIC PORTRAYALS OF BLACK POWER

Eyes on the Prize II (hereafter referred to as *Eyes*) and *The Black Power Mixtape, 1967-1975* (hereafter referred to as *Mixtape*) challenged mainstream press attention to Black Power activism by providing sympathetic depictions of the movement's goals and motivations. Both documentaries explained the rise of the Black Power Movement in the context of Southern violence against civil rights activists and economic deprivation within black communities. *Eyes* relied on talking-head interviews, voice-over narration by Julian Bond, and archives of American television news footage to construct a seemingly coherent narrative of black political struggles for racial equality. *Mixed* supplemented chronologically organized archival footage with more recent voice-overs from prominent black scholars and artists including Erykah Badu, Harry Belafonte, Angela Davis, Robin Kelly, Kathleen Cleaver, Talib Kweli, Questlove, and Bobby Seale.

According to these films, black radicals were victims of state-sanctioned repression rather than perpetrators of violence. The murders and brutal beatings of nonviolent protesters was a consistent theme in both *Eyes on the Prize I* and *II*. In volume 4 of the second series, an episode entitled "The Time Has Come" suggested that ongoing threats of violence against racial justice activists and limited protection from law enforcement prompted growing support for Black Power activists' more radical approach to dissent. Archival footage of the March against Fear is a case in point. As the documentary explained, both the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee led a march through the state of Mississippi after James Meredith was shot by a sniper during his attempt to complete the walk alone. After a reporter asked Stokely Carmichael to defend his rejection of nonviolent civil disobedience, Carmichael explained, "No one in this country is asking the white community in the

South to be nonviolent and that in a sense is giving them free license to go ahead and shoot us as well." Minutes later, the film presented video footage of Mississippi police throwing tear gas canisters at peaceful marchers and kicking activists lying on the ground. In the next shot, a talking-head interview with a white man who witnessed the events first hand told the filmmakers, "It was like a scene of hell."

Eyes' volume 5 episode, "The Promised Land," painted a particularly bleak picture of Martin Luther King's efforts to promote economic justice. After the documentary described King's assassination at the Lorraine Hotel in Memphis, Bond's voice-over explained that the Poor People's Campaign ultimately fizzled out because the activists' spirits were dampened by a rainstorm and the assassination of U.S. Senator Bobby Kennedy, who had championed their cause. The episode ended with archival footage of police officers dragging activists by their legs across the paved streets of Washington, DC. Segments such as this one invited audiences to sympathize with Black Power activists in their condemnation of state-sanctioned violence against black protest.

Mixtape provided more virulent statements about economic injustice and political repression in the United States. An early segment of the documentary highlighted Stokely Carmichael's critique of nonviolence. In one scene, Carmichael received rousing applause when he asserted that "the U.S. has no conscience." In an interview with British reporters, Carmichael explained that he is not afraid of being arrested for avoiding the military draft because he was "born in jail." By shining a spotlight on violent repression of radical black dissent, these films underscored the position of black radicals as victims of the state rather than as perpetrators of violence. As Erykah Badu insisted in *Mixtape*, "It's right to defend yourself against anything and anyone. . . . We weren't the ones who inflicted pain and harm on people. We weren't the ones who kidnapped a whole culture of people and brought them to do service for us. . . . To say that we're wrong to defend ourselves is idiotic. Seriously twisted. Shame on America for that."

Mixtape provides a rationale for Black Power's militancy that aligns with several scholarly interpretations of black power rhetoric. Robert Scott insists that Black Power rhetoric was consistent with democratic ideals and was justified as a response to white violence and global racism.²³ Several rhetorical scholars have understood Black Power rhetoric, not as an effort to force white organizations to adjust to radical black demands, but as a means of constructing an empowered black community capable of challenging systemic racism in the United States. Karlyn Kohrs Campbell interprets the movement's threat of violence as a "self-transforming act of symbolic violence" that asserted Black auditors' equality and dignity.²⁴ Focusing more specifically on the Black Panthers, Amanda Gatchet and Dana Cloud argue that that the Panthers' militant stance allowed Black audiences to define

themselves as “an oppressed but put potentially powerful group” capable of affecting social change.²⁵

In addition to highlighting violent oppression of nonviolent black activists as the rationale for the movement’s radical rhetoric, both documentaries provided sympathetic portrayals of prominent Black Power leaders. *Eyes* included a talking-head interview with Malcolm X biographer Alex Haley, who explained that his working relationship with the leader began when Haley asked X about his mother. Haley reported that X told him, “‘I remember the kind of dresses she used to wear. They were old and faded and gray. . . . She was always bent over the stove, trying to stretch what little we had.’” *Eyes*’s interview with Haley bore some similarities to *Mixtape*’s archival footage of a Swedish journalists’ interview with Stokely Carmichael and his mother Mable. As his mother described the family’s struggle with poverty and discrimination, Carmichael pushed his mother to finally admit that they had fewer opportunities because they were black. As *New York Times* reviewer A.O. Scott observed, this scene demonstrated that Black Power’s “inflammatory rhetoric . . . had its roots in bitter struggle.”²⁶ By giving audiences a glimpse into the personal lives of prominent black radicals, these films humanized movement leaders and invited audiences to sympathize with their struggles for economic justice and self-determination.

These films also provided positive depictions of the Black Panther Party’s efforts to nurture and empower black communities. Each film focused on the Panthers’ contributions to racial and economic justice as they recounted the organization’s founding origins in Oakland, California, in 1966 by Huey Newton and Bobby Seale. According to *Eyes*, the Black Panther Party grew in size and political power through members’ organizing efforts, community service programs, including the Free Breakfast for Children Programs, and armed patrols of police to protect the black community from police beatings and arbitrary arrests. *Mixtape* presented the Panthers as a militant organization that taught revolutionary education and arranged social activities for poor people in the ghettos. In the latter documentary, Kathleen Cleaver explained that the Black Panther Party was the first radical organization to provide services such as free food and free health clinics in the ghettos. Both films characterized the Panthers as individuals committed to improving their communities and to establishing self-sufficiency to break from an oppressive social system that marginalized them.

CRITICAL PORTRAYALS OF STATE SUPPRESSION

While these documentaries emphasized the positive contributions of the Black Power Movement to black communities in the United States, they vividly depicted state-sponsored oppression against the movement. *Eyes*’

volume 6 episode, "A Nation of Law?" offered a dark portrait of the government's crackdown on the Black Panther Party and the prisoners' protest at the Attica State Correctional Facility in 1971. FBI director J. Edgar Hoover singled out the Black Panther Party as the single biggest threat to the internal security of the United States and led a covert campaign to disable the organization. Both *Eyes* and *Mixtape* explained that Hoover targeted the Black Panthers' Free Breakfast for Children, conducted multiple raids on party offices, and falsely arrested several Panthers.

Eyes highlighted the 1969 murder of Chicago chairman Fred Hampton as an extraordinary case of state repression of black radicalism. According to the film, twenty-year-old Fred Hampton founded the Chicago chapter of the Black Panther Party and became the chapter's first president in 1968. On December 4, 1969, Chicago police broke into Panther headquarters and shot Hampton and his colleague Mark Clark to death. Both films suggested—tacitly if not explicitly—that Hampton's death was part of a premeditated effort by local and federal officials to silence the Black Panther Party. The depiction of Hampton's assassination was followed by a discussion of the massacre at Attica. According to *Eyes* and *Mixed*, inmates took over the prison, taking many guards and prison staff hostage in an effort to receive better living conditions at the prison. Four days later, New York governor Rockefeller declared an end to attempts at negotiations. State troopers and prison guards dropped tear gas and opened fire into the prison yard, killing twenty-nine inmates and ten hostages. *Mixtape's* treatment of Attica complemented *Eyes's*.

LEGACIES OF TRAUMA IN BLACK POWER COUNTER-MEMORY

By foregrounding the persecution and murders of radical black activists, counter-memories of the Black Power Movement in these two documentaries constructed the movement's meaning in terms of trauma. In a literal sense, *Eyes* displayed the physical and psychological traumas that activists experienced at the hands of white supremacists and white state officials. Archival photographs and videos provided visual evidence of physical violation of black bodies. In addition to scenes of police beating nonviolent protesters, *Eyes* provided a close-up image of a photograph of Martin Luther King's body after he was shot at the Lorraine Hotel, photos of Fred Hampton's assassination, and photos of the Attica prison massacre.

Displaying the Physical Trauma of Violence Against Black Bodies

Images of the crime scene of Hampton's murder were particularly arresting. *Eyes* provided extensive legal and physical evidence implicating the FBI's role in Hampton's death and reassuring audiences that the Panthers did not instigate the attack. Extreme close-ups of the outside wall and door leading into Hampton's bedroom pointed to the paths the bullets took toward Hampton's bed as Bond's voice-over explained that Hampton had likely been shot in his sleep. This film also provided footage of the crime scene, including an image of Hampton's blood-soaked bed that was used as evidence in a series of trials against the state police and justice department. In a photograph of his lifeless body, Hampton's head lay face down in the center of the shot and a pool of blood oozes past the foreground. Elizabeth Alexander points out that images such as these are part of a larger history of representation of "black bodies in pain" in the United States.²⁷ According to Alexander, the legacy state-sanctioned violence against blacks has manifested itself in "collective counter-memory of trauma" among African Americans. Alexander explains that stories about violence against blacks terrorize black viewers, they are also necessary for their survival. "Black people have paradoxically had to witness their own murder and defilement and then pass along the epic tale of violation."²⁸ Both *Eyes* and *Mixtape* contributed to this traumatic narrative of racial exploitation by exposing the lynching of a black man that had occurred by the hands of law enforcement officials. Contrasting with the lessons of postracial narratives in more mainstream Hollywood dramas, these documentaries indicated that the state had still not provided black communities with the same legal protection as whites even after the end of the civil rights era.

Sharing Psychological Trauma of Survivors' Testimony

In addition to providing visible evidence of black radicals' physical trauma, these films highlighted the traumatic memories of those who survived. Talking-head interviews with former activists who witnessed murders of black dissidents recalled painful experiences of loss. Civil rights leaders Andrew King and Ralph Abernathy described their last conversations with Martin Luther King at the Lorraine Hotel on the night of his assassination. Deborah Johnson, who was pregnant with Hampton's son and was asleep in the same bedroom at the time of the shooting, recalled sounds of gunfire and police officers discussing whether or not Hampton was dead.

These witnesses attested to feelings of grief and shock. Former Chicago Panther member Marion Stamps recalled her feelings of bewilderment after Hampton's death, "Why? Why? This brother has done nothing to none of

you all. The only thing that this brother has done was to instill a sense of pride in the communities and self-determination in people." After describing the police shootings of prisoners at Attica, *New York Times* journalist Tom Wicker expressed a similar inability to understand the police assault on the prison yard. "I don't know what the hurry was. They didn't have to kill them all, but they did." Stamps' and Wicker's statements exemplified Shoshana Felman's description of testimony as "a crucial mode of our relation to events of our times." Felman defines testimony as "bits and pieces of a memory" that have been "overwhelmed by occurrences that have not settled into understanding or remembrance . . . events in excess of our frames of reference."²⁹ By relaying the incomprehensibility of Hampton's death and events at Attica, *Eyes* articulated memory that is beyond comprehension, a hallmark of post-traumatic experience.³⁰

Surviving Attica inmate Frank "Big Black" Smith's interview with *Eyes* filmmakers illuminated another aspect of traumatic experience: the imperative of testimony. Smith described the inhumane treatment he and other inmates received at the hands of prison guards in the aftermath of the prison takeover. "It was very barbaric . . . very very cruel. I really feel it, what they really did. . . . Ripped our clothes off. They made us crawl on the ground like we were animals. They snatched me and laid me on the ground and they beat my testicles and they burned me with cigarettes." Smith's voice broke several times, and he choked up in the middle of his interview. His emotional reaction to describing his recollections illuminates Dori Laub's point that presence of others is central to a person's process of coping with traumatic memory. Smith's teary-eyed interview suggests an intimate scene between the interviewee and the unseen interviewer who is ostensibly behind the camera during shooting. As a surrogate for the camera itself, the viewing audience is similarly positioned as one who listens. Dori Laub notes that "bearing witness to a trauma is, in fact, a process that includes the listener. For the testimonial process to take place, there needs to be a bonding, an intimate and total presence of an other—in the position of one who hears."³¹ By articulating an intimate relationship between the viewer and the eyewitness to violent repression of black dissent, these films position audiences as second-generation witnesses to historical trauma. Dominick LaCapra argues that such witnesses have a tendency to act out an "affective response" to trauma survivors, and become emotionally implicated in the events described.³² In remembering with those who suffered, interviewees are positioned to bear psychological scars themselves.

Mixtape also established an intimate relationship between survivors of white racism and film viewers. This intimacy was heightened by its footage of a Swedish journalists' interview with Angela Davis while she was facing charges in prison. After the journalist asked for her position on the Black Panther Party's violence, Davis responded that the question didn't make any

sense to her at all. Then, the camera zoomed in for an extreme close-up of her face. In an extended take, Davis described her childhood background in Birmingham, Alabama. She explained that her family was close with several of the girls who were killed by the 16th Street Baptist Church bombing.

When the bombing occurred, one of the mothers of one of the young girls called my mother and said, "Can you take me down to the church to pick up Carole?" . . . And they went down and what did they find? They found limbs and heads strewn all over the place . . . That's why when someone asks me about violence, . . . I just find it incredible, because what it means is that the person who is asking the question has absolutely no idea what black people . . . have experienced in this country.

This scene is a marked departure from more routine depictions of Black Power activists because it frames Davis's own radicalism (and by extension the radicalism of other black activists) as a response to a traumatic event from her childhood. As the camera records Davis from behind the journalist's left shoulder and gradually zooms past it, this scene places film audiences in the vantage point of the individuals interviewing Davis who ostensibly do not share her background, and who ostensibly have "absolutely no idea" about the violence that black people experienced in the United States. By zooming in on Davis, the documentary instructs audiences to attend closely to her narrative in order to gain fresh insight. Rather than remember the infamous Birmingham bombing as one among many events in the history of white repression against civil rights activists, Davis's narrative in the documentary calls upon audiences to remember the infamous Birmingham bombing as second-generation witnesses to personal tragedy. By bearing witness to Davis's childhood trauma, the documentary emotionally implicates viewers in the traumatic events that prompted the Black Power movement.

Constructing Cultural Trauma through the Rupture of U.S. National Identity

A predominant theme across both films is that injustices committed against black radicals are part of the fabric of American politics and society. By providing vivid images of violence committed against members of the black community, these films are forms of cultural trauma. Eyerman defines cultural trauma as "a dramatic loss of identity and meaning, a tear in the social fabric, affecting a group of people that has achieved some degree of cohesion."³³ Eyerman's definition bears some similarity to Dominick LaCapra's definition of trauma as an "open wound" that resists being healed in the present.³⁴ Working from a historical materialist perspective, LaCapra uses the vocabulary of psychology to theorize traumas rooted in socio-political

events. Eyerman departs from LaCapra's conceptualization by exploring cultural trauma in terms of its mediated construction. "How an event is remembered is intimately entwined with how it is represented. Here the means and media of representation are crucial, for they bridge the gap between individuals and between occurrence and its recollection."³⁵ LaCapra and Eyerman suggest that, insofar as traumatic events are rooted in socio-political phenomena, they come to have social meaning through their articulation in popular media.

Drawing from Eyerman and LaCapra, I understand cultural traumas as the rupture of dominant ideological belief systems. Cultural traumas disrupt the common sense of narratives foundational to national or cultural identity as they portray the experiences of people who have been silenced and ignored. A specific brand of counter-memory, cultural trauma poses an ideological challenge to cultural hegemony by exposing contradictions between narratives of national identity and experiences of subordinated groups.

By revealing premeditated acts of violence against defenseless and marginalized people in the black community, these documentaries disrupted ideological beliefs about the justice of the U.S. political and legal system. *Eyes* explained that the release of classified FBI documents in 1973 disclosed that Hampton's head of security, William O'Neal, was a paid FBI informant who provided agents with a detailed map of Chicago Panther headquarters days before the police raid. The segment on Hampton concluded with remarks that all charges against the Panthers were ultimately dropped and that no police officers were indicted. The families of Clark and Hampton and other Panthers injured in the raid won a civil suit against the city and local government years later, winning a total of 1.8 million dollars.

Mixtape also suggested that the treatment of the Attica prison protests was a clear injustice. Archival footage of journalists' interview with civil rights attorney William Kunstler challenged the idea that law enforcement acted responsibly to put an end to the prison takeover. Kunstler asserted that the deaths of prisoners constituted "murder by any civilized standards by any country." Elsewhere, *Mixtape* explicitly suggested that the deaths of Black dissidents were intentionally arranged to secure the stability of liberal capitalism in the United States. Many of the voice-overs of prominent black artists and activists, including Harry Belafonte and Questlove contended that the assassinations of black leaders, including Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, and Fred Hampton, were orchestrated by the government. During its segment about the assassination of King, a voice-over by Questlove insisted, "You are really naïve if you think Martin Luther King just happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time." Questlove explained that the government decided that King had to go when he became a vocal opponent of the war. A voice-over by Harry Belafonte concurred that King's concern about endemic

poverty in the black community "put a huge bull's eye" on him. Belafonte elaborated, "He was now tampering with the playground of the wealthy."

Mixtape featured other egregious cases of state repression against black radicals between 1967 and 1975 including Angela Davis's arrest on unfounded charges, George Jackson's assassination at the San Quentin prison in California, and the introduction of drugs into Harlem, New York. According to Talib Kweli, drugs were intentionally flooded into the community in order to stop revolutionary thinking and black pride. Angela Davis concurred that, "the CIA was involved with the distribution of drugs [that were] responsible for the receding of militancy and revolutionary impulses all over the country." *Mixtape's* central message was that, in Angela Davis's words, "the state . . . would suppress any efforts at . . . revolution." Davis was similarly quoted in *Eyes*, "We had not really understood the extent to which the whole criminal justice system . . . is very much intertwined with the economic oppression of black people."

CULTURAL TRAUMAS THAT CONSIGN RACIAL JUSTICE MOVEMENTS TO THE PAST

Recurring portrayals of police arrests, beatings, and political assassination across these documentaries constructed narratives of frustration and loss for radical groups seeking economic and political justice for black people. These films concluded their narratives with images of death and sentiments of despair over emancipatory politics in the mid-1970s. Confluences across these documentaries articulate an ideological rupture that resists being healed. This construction of counter-memory as ongoing cultural trauma may ultimately reaffirm political hegemony; by recreating the traumatic experiences of the Black Power Movement, these documentaries sutured radical black agency to the traumatic past. Thus, cultural traumas may forestall political agency of those seeking radical change.

One way in which these documentaries constrain black political agency is by reinforcing the iconic status of radical black leaders. Charismatic figures including Malcolm X, Huey Newton, Bobby Seale, Fred Hampton, and Angela Davis, are sources of admiration and identification for audiences. However, by foregrounding them in films about black activism more broadly, the films articulated activist movements themselves to dynamic figures in the movement. As the narrative of their life histories becomes a synecdoche for the life-span of the movement itself, individual deaths and defeats thus came to stand in for the deaths of the movements themselves.

One scene in *Eyes* made an explicit appeal to young blacks' potential identification with slain activist Fred Hampton. In this scene, Reverend

George Clements described several Chicago area children's identification with Fred Hampton after his assassination.

I just burst into tears and the next thing I knew here was one of our eighth grade boys. He jumped up and said, "I am Fred Hampton." And then a girl, 6th grade, she jumps up, "I am Fred Hampton." Another kid in 1st grade, "I am Fred Hampton." And before you knew it the whole church, kids were all shouting, "I am Fred Hampton" and wow! I just felt so wonderful. I just felt, gee whiz! His death was not in vain at all because these kids are saying that they are willing to get out there and speak out for liberation, for first class citizenship.

As the documentary framed Chicago's struggle for black empowerment around the traumatic death of one of its most charismatic leaders, Hampton came to embody black power activism itself.

In its morbid construction of shared identification, *Eyes* exalts young children who have united in solidarity with their fallen hero. *Eyes'* portrayal of children as identified with the tragic icons of Black Power's past calls for a revision to Lauren Berlant's conception of "infantile" citizenship in which political subjectivity is based on the suppression of critical knowledge and a naïve faith in the nation.³⁶ *Eyes* and *Mixtape* evoke a different kind of crisis of knowledge in which hegemony of liberal capitalism is neither sustained nor actively challenged; rather, the critical questioning of national ideology is enshrined within traumatic cultural memory. The subjectivity of would-be activists is thus grounded in past political action.

Ultimately, the lesson in both of these documentaries is that radical dissent is likely to end in loss and defeat. Despite providing positive portrayals of activism, these films offered no vision of a sustained collective activism to challenge the types of injustices that the films highlight. *Eyes* articulated the limits of radical black agency by reinforcing the powerlessness of activists who survived the FBI campaign against the Black Power Movement. A quote by Chicago civil rights activist Nancy Jefferson suggested that there was little that the black community could do to save Hampton: "It can happen to any of us. That was fear, shame, you know, sorry. What could we do? How could we have protected Fred?"

Eyes' concluded its episode "A Nation of Law" with archival footage of a walking funeral procession. Throngs of people, mostly black, carry caskets of inmates killed at Attica. Bond's voice-over noted, "In a country troubled by unrest, the call for law and order remained popular. But many wondered, 'was the nation well served by law enforcement used to silence voices of dissent? And was America willing to maintain order no matter what the cost?'" The final two episodes of the series focused on the history of affirmative action and Harold Washington's election to mayor in Chicago. One inference that might be drawn from this shift in emphasis is that black politi-

cal agency can only succeed in the form of electoral politics and reforms to the system. Ostensibly, there is no safe space for revolutionary black activism to challenge the legitimacy of dominant political and economic institutions that affirm hegemonic whiteness in the United States.

Mixtape also highlighted the limitations of radical black political agency. Archival footage of the black community's reactions to Robert Kennedy's assassination suggested that black youth had a dire outlook on the future. Several teenagers commented that there was not much of a future for black people or for the nation itself. One of them explained, "They killed Kennedy. They killed King. They killed Evers. . . . They killing all the people that stood up for the black man." A later segment about the Black Panther Party reinforced this bleak perspective. During an interview with Black Panther members in New York City, one Panther instructed prospective members to "Be prepared to go to jail or die." This unnamed Panther explained, "They got too many of us in jail now. And they don't want any more of us in jail, so they got to kill us."

Mixtape foregrounded the tragic demise of the Black Power movement caused by the pervasive drug culture in Harlem in 1974. Toward the film's conclusion, one narcotics recovery doctor lamented, "I look out on the world and I see people who have lost their awareness of being committed to any kind of cause at all. There's no unity in the world. . . . The result is the chaos we live in." Minutes later, footage depicted Louis Farrakhan explaining the philosophy of Black Nationalism from his desk. Farrakhan explained that the philosophy was designed to combat the evils of white culture and asserted that, "Now we are in a literal hell in America." Mirroring *Eyes*' own tragic conclusion, *Mixtape*'s final archival images presented a message of despair. Ostensibly, state suppression and illegal drug activity had obliterated the once-dynamic and potentially empowered black community.

Envisioning the Future of Black Radicalism

As resources of counter-memory, narratives of personal and collective trauma certainly merit our attention. *Eyes* and *Mixtape* point to ongoing racial inequities and injustices that disproportionately affect people of color. Indeed, economic inequality has become more pronounced in the decades following the 1960s. A year after the release of *Eyes on the Prize II*, the 1991 Rodney King beating in Los Angeles attested to continued racial profiling that once drove the formation of the Black Panther Party. Those who screened *Eyes on the Prize II* might have been reminded that King's beating was not an isolated event but symptomatic of broader structural inequities.

Mixtape's depiction of injustices committed by the FBI sharply contrasts with earlier Hollywood depictions of the FBI's role in struggles for racial justice. For example, the acclaimed police drama *Mississippi Burning* de-

picted the FBI as determined to apprehend the murderers of three civil rights activists and bring them to justice. This depiction distracts attention from the FBI's ongoing efforts to suppress dissident movements. Since 2008, the FBI has infiltrated antiwar organizations and raided homes of several activists in Los Angeles, Chicago, Minneapolis, and Grand Rapids, Michigan. In 2011, the FBI and Los Angeles police raided the home of antiwar and immigration rights activist Carlos Montes and charged him with providing material support for terrorism, a charge that Montes denies. Notably, Montes helped to organize the Brown Berets during the 1960s and was involved in the 1968 walkout by high school Chicano students in East Los Angeles to protest academic prejudice.³⁷ Counter-memories of political repression point to the consequences that activists continue to face when they radically challenge mainstream politics and economics in the United States.

The uses of traumatic memory notwithstanding, cultural trauma may also delimit the role of counter-memory as a force for social change. *Eyes on the Prize* and *The Black Power Mixtape* offer few avenues for channeling this knowledge into productive means for achieving racial justice. Recurring images of trauma and loss articulate pessimism and doubt about the possibilities for fundamental social change. By focusing on the loss of movement members to assassinations and drugs, these films foreclose possibilities for envisioning a long history of racial justice struggles that have persisted beyond the lifetimes of particular leaders or specific organizations. These documentaries are part of a body of films since the 1990s that have foregrounded the traumatic legacy of the Black Power movement. Included among them are Spike Lee's 1992 biopic *Malcolm X*, Mario Van Peebles 1995 action-thriller *Panther* (loosely based on the founding chapter of the Black Panther Party in Oakland, California), and the 2007 DVD release of Mike Gray's documentary *The Murder of Fred Hampton*.

By consigning activism to a tragic and traumatic past, these films may implicitly discourage audience members who question the justice of mainstream economic and political institutions from engaging in activism. The articulation of radical protest to trauma contributes to an environment in which progressive causes for racial justice are channeled into electoral politics. For example, news media hailed the 2008 presidential election of Barack Obama as the culmination of Martin Luther King's dream, thus linking the two black leaders as civil rights icons.³⁸ President Obama has been depicted among many in the political left-of-center as a symbol of racial justice and social change despite ongoing racial disparities in areas such as housing, education, and health care. This contradiction may be overlooked in a context in which radical forms of democratic engagement are regarded as irrelevant, trivial, or dangerous. However, Frances Fox Piven argues that democratic social change in the United States has historically occurred when people have organized protest movements outside of electoral-representative politics.³⁹

She concludes that "the mobilization of collective defiance and the disruption it causes have always been essential to the preservation of democracy."⁴⁰ By containing activism to the memory of traumatic deaths of movement leaders, most of these films have obscured how the Black Power Movement was advanced due to the collective efforts of activists throughout the United States. Indeed, radicalism among people-of-color in the United States has evolved and continues respond to different exigencies and goals.

Counter-memories capable of effecting instrumental political change might avoid the incapacitating effects of cultural trauma by looking forward, even as they grapple with the past. Possibilities for such counter-memory were suggested obliquely in the last five minutes of *Mixtape*. *Mixtape* concluded with voice-overs of Angela Davis and Sonia Sanchez. Davis called for activism that will "allow us to imagine a future without war and without racism, and without prisons." Sanchez's voice-over followed Davis, "This is a lifetime job. . . . You don't really get a reward. The point is knowing that . . . when you die, if you have children, there's a better world for them." During Davis's final voice-over, captions below the screen mentioned that she is now the chair of the National Alliance Against Racism and Political Repression (NAARPR) a "leftist organization" dedicated to the "common struggle for political prisoners." These uplifting voice-over remarks in the last minutes of the film speak to the liberatory potential of counter-memories; however, such potential is drowned out by the documentary's litany of injustices and violation of black people who challenged the status quo. *Mixtape*'s final image is from video footage of a black boy with his head down, walking away from the camera down a city street littered with broken glass.

An alternative counter-memory that connects past, present, and future, might also have mentioned the NAARPR's current campaigns to end racial injustice within the prison system.⁴¹ In order to counteract the affect constructed by the cultural traumas of racial justice, counter-memories of racial justice activism might also have described Sanchez's more recent involvements, including her participation in MADRE, a human rights organization that embraces many of the goals and principles articulated by the Black Panther Party: building health clinics, nutrition programs, and education centers to empower women in communities around the world experiencing discrimination and violence. A counter-hegemonic counter-memory of Black Power might also explain that Erykah Badu, informed by the history of the Black Power Movement, has founded Beautiful Love Incorporated Nonprofit Development, or B.L.I.N.D., an organization that promotes leadership development by providing resources for inner city youth to get involved in the performing arts. Since 2008, the Committee to Stop FBI Repression has also been organizing members to draw attention to and defend activists falsely arrested on charges of supporting terrorism. These contemporary efforts by Davis, Sanchez, Badu and the Committee to Stop FBI Repression are exam-

ples of living, breathing activism. They reveal productive means of responding to violation and injustice. Further elaboration of these efforts in documentary film might celebrate the potential for activism in the present and open-up possibilities for achieving racial justice in the future.

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