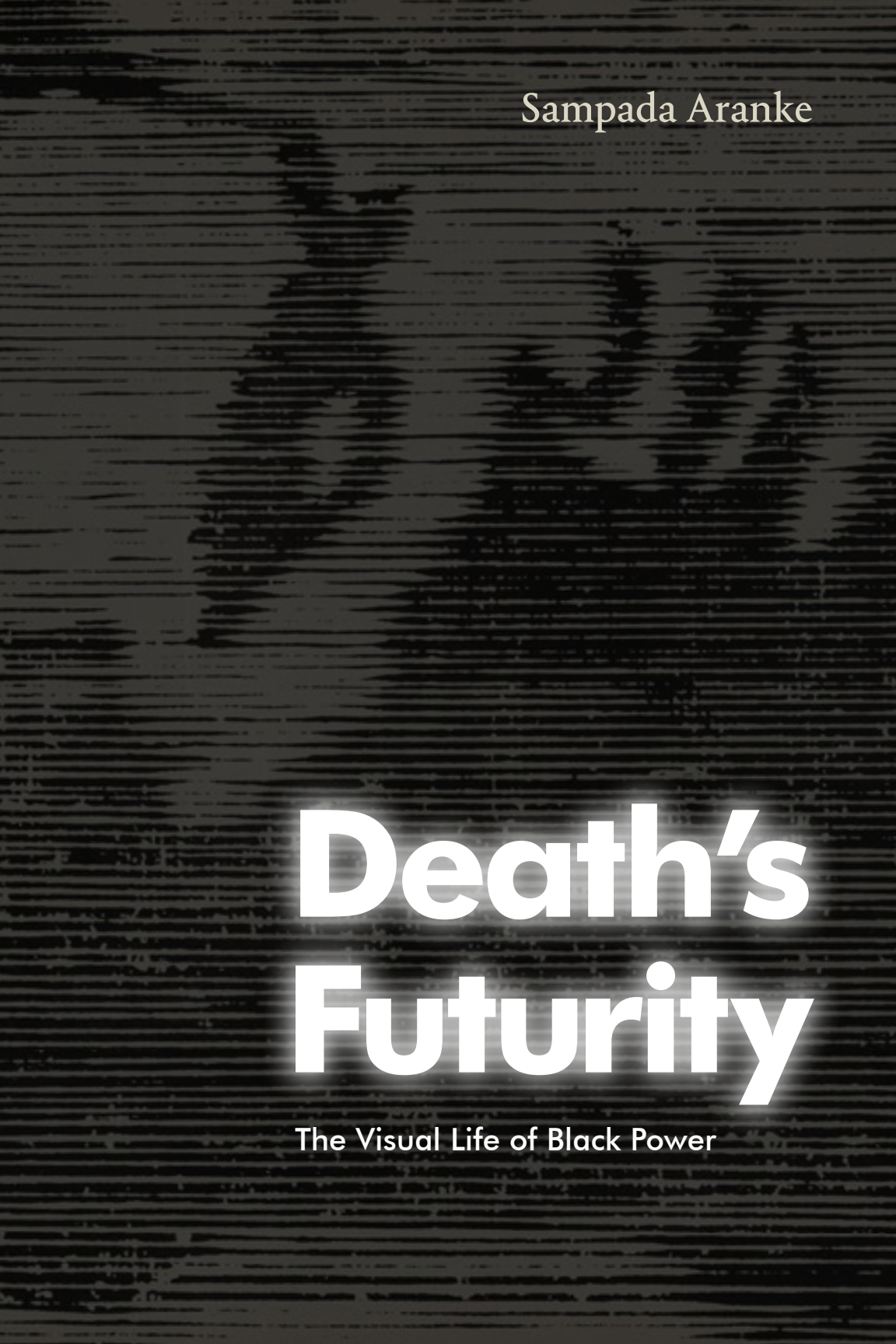
Sampada Aranke
Death's Futurity
The Visual Life of Black Power

THE VISUAL ARTS OF AFRICA AND ITS DIASPORAS

A Series Edited by Kellie Jones and Steven Nelson

The Visual Life
of Black Power

Death's Futurity

Sampada Aranke

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Contents

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Introduction

The Visual Life of Black Power

The Black Panther Party for Self-Defense (BPP) was founded as a response to the sustained and ongoing murders of Black people at the hands of the police. Along with murder were other forms of state and police violence, ranging from racial profiling, economic disenfranchisement, political suppression, lack of access to basic human resources, including funded schools and health care, to name but a few. In fact, the BPP's first public appearance was in Richmond, California, after the April 1, 1967, murder of Denzil Dowell at the hands of the Richmond Police Department. As a follow-up to that rally, the BPP made its first issue of the *Black Panther*, dated April 25, 1967 (plate 1).[1]

This first issue was a four-page broadsheet that included the first appearance of the Black Panther logo, which was an explicit citation of the original 1965 Lowndes County Freedom Organization drawing. The issue also included sections on the BPP's philosophy and proposals, a detailed account of police inconsistencies and explicit lies surrounding Dowell's murder, and a call for

an organizing meeting. This issue would come to embody the future of the *Black Panther* newspaper, which would keep these foundational principles: a commitment to political praxis, exposing and educating the masses on state violence, and engaging in political direct action. The fourth principle is of central concern for this study: the production of radical Black visual culture aimed toward revolution and liberation. From its inception, the BPP was well aware of the political power of visual culture, making room for illustrations, photography, and graphic typesetting in their inaugural publication. This attention to the visual qualities of print media would only expand as the party grew, and, arguably, the development of an iconic aesthetic aided in the growth of the BPP. Indeed, these aesthetics would last, sedimenting the party's legacy as a cultural, as well as a political, icon.[2]

Death's Futurity analyzes how Black radical death was rhetorically and visually imagined as a generative means toward political liberation in ways that responded to state-sanctioned violence during the Black Power era. Mobilizing archival findings that have never been published, I critically analyze the ephemera surrounding the murders of three Black Panther Party members—Lil' Bobby Hutton (1968), Fred Hampton (1969), and George Jackson (1971). I argue that these spectacularized murders mark a transition from Black Power to prison abolition. In order to track this historical and theoretical shift, I focus on how Black radicals transformed these state-sanctioned murders into opportunities to engage political action, primarily through the use of innovative compositional techniques that draw on a broader Black art-historical canon.

Photography, documentary films, journalistic print media, and political posters take center stage during these brief years as a means to produce and catalogue the generative potential death held for Black radicals in anticapitalist and antiracist revolutionary struggle. The proximity between Black life and Black death is of central concern in this book. The cultural productions organized in this book give us images of the dead Black body—photographed, collaged, filmed, and drawn—as a means of contextualizing a long history of anti-Black violence. These images reveal how the role of corporeality—and corpses in particular—played out in efforts to shape visions of a Black future free from white supremacy and capitalism by recomposing Black death as a means for liberation.

This monograph thereby curates a counter-history to understandings of state repression and death as solely destructive in the making of 1960s and 1970s Black radical politics. Instead, my extensive archival re-

search documents how Black radicals' uses and manipulation of figuration, composition, perspective, and narrative took shape around photographic reproduction, visual composition, color saturation, juxtaposition, sequencing, and camera focus—all of which aimed to reimagine death as generative for visions of Black liberation grounded in futurity. This study examines artistic productions from within and outside the party in an attempt to demonstrate broader approaches to a Black radical imaginary, particularly in and through print- and lens-based media. For the purposes of introduction, I want to return to the *Black Panther* as a foundational object of print and alternative media for the BPP and for Black radicals across the country.

By 1969, the *Black Panther* circulated over one hundred thousand copies weekly and by 1970, that number quadrupled to over four hundred thousand.[3] While these numbers might seem astounding, they reflect a popular investment in the newspaper as a leftist resource for critique, coverage, analysis, and visual propaganda. The *Black Panther* was one of many forms of alternative media that emerged out of the 1960s as documents of the social, political, and cultural upheavals of the time. As artist and print media historian Geoff Kaplan insists, "In the 1960s, a media revolution was afoot as explosive as the revolutions taking place in the streets of Chicago and Paris, Prague and Mexico City."[4] Indeed, in the case of the BPP, this media revolution was crucial to the call for Black autonomy and self-determination. A Black radical aesthetic was a foundational element in reflecting and imagining Black life outside of the constraints of mainstream media plagued by white supremacist ideations of Black people, whether covert, mild, or outright in their racist beliefs. In what follows, I focus on lens-based and print media that enacted a Black radical aesthetic prompted by the *Black Panther*.

Emory Douglas took over the design and vision of the *Black Panther* in 1967 and became the minister of culture for the BPP. Douglas insisted that propaganda, or "revolutionary art," was an essential element in building radical culture because it "enlightens the party to continue its vigorous attack against the enemy, as well as educate the masses of black people" by "showing them through pictures—The Correct Handling of the Revolution."[5] Douglas's artistic vision formed the party's identifiable Black radical aesthetic as he appropriated and reinvented forms of illustration, collage, photomontage, and graphic design. Douglas created an aesthetic that could be immediately understood by Black people as undeniably revolutionary, therefore enacting methods of political education at the level of

the image aimed to prepare Black people for revolution.[6] Strikingly, death was central to this mode of instruction for Douglas. Douglas did not emphasize images of Black revolutionary death, however, and instead focused on drawing "deadly pictures of the enemy—pictures that show him at his death door or dead—his bridges are blown up in our pictures—his institutions destroyed—and in the end he is lifeless."[7] The emphasis on depicting Black revolutionaries successfully overthrowing white supremacist and state powers activated Frantz Fanon's notion of anticolonial revolution and visually argued that Black liberation was dependent upon the oppressor's death.[8] These depictions flooded the pages of the *Black Panther* and eventually was oft-cited as fodder for the state to wage its repressive campaign against the party. Along with these depictions, I would argue, images of Black radical death emerged as invocations toward a politics that would also enable Black liberation struggles.

Indeed, a key intervention that this book offers is that the visual life of Black power is activated through Black radical death. In order to undergo such a provocative project, I have turned to formative interventions in Black studies around reconceptualizing how the Black radical body throws into crisis theories of object/subject relations, histories and afterlives of slavery, and revolutionary approaches to reshaping the world. Concurrently, I offer an emergent and provisional set of provocations that I hope will contribute to and challenge performance theories of embodiment. The visual ecologies presented in this manuscript offer alternative forms and compositions of Black corporeality vis-à-vis the corpse. The corpse might best be understood as a political, relational, and aesthetic form in the book and one that might give us tools to understand how Black radical life and Black radical death are lived, activated, and regenerated as vibrant and ongoing mobilizations toward Black liberation.

Anti-Black Violence and Its Visual Reproduction

The images in this book oscillate between degrees of graphic intensity. That this project centralizes images of Black radical death requires an acute attention to the nuances of display, as both an element of documentation and a possible source of reproducing the initial violence in question. While there are glimpses of state violence shown as is, in its barest form, I focus on how these objects deploy creative modes of rendering, photographic

manipulation, and narrative sequencing in order to make meaning of that violence and turn it toward revolutionary ends. When this project started, I knew that these works were not only compelling in their direct, unassailable force but they urgently needed to live in a more public form in order to account for their historical power. However, I was also skeptical of such an impulse in light of the ways in which anti-Black violence often requires an audience, one that delights in the libidinal, social, and political pleasures of partaking in consuming such degradation.[9] As a scholar, I have been concerned with the politics of visual reproductions, taking on how artists and cultural producers directly address the dangers of proliferating scenes of such violence while also making space for the necessary visual confrontations of these realities across audiences. While this political line is delicate, its shape is dynamic. In the same spirit as at the BPP, this project aims to stage encounters with these images that make room for the spectrum of rage to grief, horror to analysis, disaffection to reflection that are required of such violent deaths.

Ever since Fred Moten staged a debate surrounding the reproduction of scenes of anti-Black violence in *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition*, this question has taken center stage as a revisited element of scholarship about the Black body.[10] While Moten was not first in raising these urgent questions, his presentation of a narrative engagement through visual terms has proven to be a significant touchstone for projects like *Death's Futurity.* In the opening pages of the book, Moten invokes and engages Saidiya Hartman's uptake of Frederick Douglass's narrative, specifically surrounding the question of his witnessing Aunt Hester's brutal beating in *Scenes of Subjection*. In a 1999 review of Hartman's seminal text, Moten provides a lucid glimpse at what would become a lasting argument in his book some four years later. Speaking to the "intense dialogue with Douglass that structures *Scenes of Subjection*," Moten notes how the "dialogue is opened by a refusal of recitation that reproduces what it refuses."[11] "The question here," Moten poignantly asserts, "concerns the inevitability of inescapability of such reproduction even in the denial of it."[12] While reproduction ensures a kind of repetition of the initial condition of harm, even if refusing to restage it requires a kind of supplemental form of that initial violence. The relationship here between reproduction and refusal depends upon the responsibilities of the writer and of writing as a practice. Taken as a priority, the outgrowth of these concerns leads to calculations about

how and when such violence must be attended to and how and when it must be directly engaged, dissected, overwrought, and obsessed over and therefore taken as a given in order to engage what comes out of that violence or another kind entirely.

How this violence appears—in what context, shape, degree of intensity, and to what extent this violence reenergizes white supremacist power and retriggers its effects—speaks to the prescient state of violation that accompanies seeing the pained Black body. When it comes to if or how to write about the political repercussions of such violences in the context of the production of aesthetic objects, whether or not those images should be seen, raises the stakes of these debates. The visual consumption of Black pain structures and shadows all images of Black life, as has been extensively noted across eras and lines of study. Looking at these images, coupled with the question of whether or not to write about them, exhausts an already fatigued image-cast that centers anti-Black violence as an everyday visual practice. In his writing for the book that emerged out of the controversial exhibition *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America*, Hilton Als lyricizes the complex relationship between looking and feeling that emerges out of a visual encounter with images of anti-Black violence: "I didn't like looking at these pictures, but once I looked, the events documented in them occurred in my mind over and over again. . . . And it is as one that I felt my neck snap and my heart break, while looking at these pictures."[13] For Als, looking simultaneously invokes a recurrent meditation on the historical specificity of these events while also initiating an embodied, felt transmission that registered such violences at the level of sensation. This kind of looking practice is of key concern for this book as the images in question aim to reconsider the radical Black body as a locus of collective sensation through which revolutionary action may be transmitted.

This book heavily involves an engagement with theories of the Black body as a historical, sensorial, and aesthetic force. While the field's influence might often be concealed from chapter to chapter, performance studies has undoubtedly shaped this book's approach. I have turned to those studies that centralize Black studies approaches to questions of corporeality, sensorial matter, and the historical and contemporary reconceptualizations of the Black body. Two such theories of the Black embodiment prove to be particularly generative for this book: Joseph Roach's account of "surrogation" as a constitute practice of Black aesthetic presence and

Harvey Young's insistence that histories of anti-Black violence are always active within forms of Black embodiment.

Joseph Roach's study *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* of histories of performance grounded in memory and forgetting offers up a compelling set of corporeal possibilities. Roach foregrounds those various anti-Black historical events and practices that give rise to a limited range of possibility for Black people to access and enact those narratives so necessary for self-definition and self-determination. Describing those practices that attempt to retain, enact, and share those histories, Roach offers a theory of "kinesthetic imagination," where a performing body might activate a kind of "displaced transmission" in order to recount a past (in all its incompleteness) for a desired future.[14] Roach goes on to describe these practices of displaced transmission as "surrogation," a dynamic process of substitution where "culture reproduces and re-creates itself" as an act of survival or defiant attempts to fill the "cavities created by loss through deaths or other forms of departure."[15] Roach offers us a process that is incomplete and fails by virtue of its pursuit; who or what is lost can never be fully replaced, and therefore we are left with the kinds of gaps, limitations, or excesses made visible through this failed act of an attempted substitution. For this project, surrogation is another way to account for how Black bodies and objects interplay in moments of flashing juxtaposition or uncanny harmony. Because the process leads us to the incompleteness of substitution as an act and therefore calls attention to the incompatibility and similitude marked by one in relation to the other, Roach's approach to theories of embodiment provides a rich and dynamic language to register the long and violent history of Black bodily objectification while also opening up a space where the object might prove a generative means to account for the Black body's potentials for refusal and resistance.

Harvey Young's study explores the disquieting proximity between Black embodiment and objecthood and opens up a dynamic conversation with Roach's concept of surrogation. His book *Embodying Black Experience: Stillness, Critical Memory, and the Black Body* explores how acts of anti-Black violence appear as constitutive elements in modes of Black embodiment, making the object status of Black life of central sensorial concern. Young's book charts the ways that Black life has been constituted within and against normative access to sensorial and bodily coherence, requiring new methods to think about the Black body as a whole. This corporeal exceptionality mostly takes shape around forms of white supremacist

violence that have adhered understandings of Blackness and therefore constitute modes of looking, embodiment, and cohabitation that fall outside of a reliance upon "the body" as a uniformly assumed and understood category.

Lynching is the most poignant example of a performance of anti-Black violence where white spectators' impulses to gather flesh as souvenirs was fueled by a desire to somehow commemorate their participation in these acts. These collecting practices are, borrowing from scholar Rebecca Schneider's theory, kinds of "performance remains," a noun and a verb that indicates a "temporally ambiguous object that existed in the past (and was saved), exists in the present, and will continue to exist in the future."[16] In the case of lynching, where Black victims' fingers and toes (among other body parts) were often dismembered and pocketed by enthusiastic onlookers as souvenirs, these remains compel a looking practice that can "imagine the hand, and by extension, the body from which it was taken" and "restage (in our minds) the process of its removal"—similar to Roach's notion of kinesthetic imagination.[17] Young offers a visceral description of how the dismembered Black body's remains signal the active presence of anti-Black violence as ongoing and constitutive of how the Blackness is made legible.

Both of these scholars are concerned with how Blackness is formed both via the constitutive logic of violence coupled with the generative uptakes of that violence toward another kind of presence. Their historical studies prove to be crucial in this study, as the events, practices, and cases they examine are also foundational reference points for the murders that take central stage here. This project works with theories of both performance and embodiment in the spirit of these scholars. Performances speak to both state actions of durational violence as well as instances of radical refusal. Embodiment is a category not assumed for the Black radicals here. The weight of picturing the Black body is radically reconstituted to account for modes of corporeality marked by anti-Black violence, and thus fragmentation, abstraction, and surrogation act as indicators of forms of Black corporeality. These approaches to thinking about Blackness in its corporeal form are indeed multivalent and considered. Putting Young and Roach together, my approach to Black corporeality here turns to how Black radicals motivated a way of reading and looking that at once aimed to account for an understanding of the Black body as a site of immense anti-Blackness and of radical possibility.

Camera and Gun: Bullet Hole as Aperture

The camera is key to the material, political, and rhetorical registers of *Death's Futurity*. This book focuses on the photographic image, documentary film, and political posters as its main objects of analysis. The camera operates as a central apparatus in chapters 1 and 2, and even while it does not take center stage in chapter 3, the artworks in question have to deal with its nonpresence as an indication of the state's desire to withhold the conditions behind Jackson's murder.

The camera, as an apparatus that captures both the still and moving image, contributed to the production of radical cultural and aesthetic forms at a rapid speed in the 1960s. Social movements wrenched the gun away from the state's stronghold in order to radically resignify the gun as a tool for revolution. Similarly, the camera's ability to "shoot" made the device an ideological weapon for social movements around the world. Étienne Jules-Marey's 1882 chronophotographic gun is oft-cited as a clear foundational alliance between both the camera and the gun. Inspired by the gun's physical structure, Marey mimicked the rifle's design as a "point-and-shoot" device in order to capture images for scientific animal-motion studies through a mechanism whose line of sight was much stronger than the human eye's.[18] The relationship between hunting and shooting, in Marey's creation, is seamless, as the camera is modeled after the very weapon intended to kill, whose power lies in the ability to capture an image more precisely than can be achieved through the human eye. Critics and theorists of the still photograph have also reflected upon the material and representational relationship between the camera and the gun. Indeed, Susan Sontag's 1977 polemic that the "old-fashioned camera was clumsier and harder to reload than a brown Bess musket. The modern camera is trying to be a ray gun" hardly seems provocative now.[19] Frederich Kittler's insistence that the "history of the movie camera thus coincides with the history of automatic weapons. The transport of pictures only repeats the transport of bullets" offers a concise illustration of the intimacy between both apparatuses as varying mechanisms of capture, violation, and force.[20] Tracking this history's impact on nineteenth-century formations of the Western liberal subject, Jason Puskar has insightfully detailed how the camera gun supplemented the rifle for "camera hunting" and activated "aggressive fantasies of violent capture," which "configures the subject of the photograph as a fugitive that the photographer must

seize suddenly and violently."[21] While the objects of study in Puskar's essay are made circa 1880, their relationship to the sustained modes of capture and captivity for Black people in the wake of slavery's formal end seems particularly relevant. As has been noted, the various afterlives of slavery that continued to index anti-Black violence often oscillated between the physical/psychological and the representational, between criminality and capture, between lynching and the minstrel show.[22] Characterizing the photographic subject as fugitive here bears a particular kind of historical resonance when we think about the eponymous status of Black Americans in the nineteenth century under the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act. The fugitive status of Black Americans legally emerged at the very same moment that Louis Agassiz and J. T. Zealy's experiments in daguerreotype relied upon enslaved peoples, thus making any history of photography inextricable from the ongoing production of capture mobilized by the camera in the nineteenth century and beyond.[23]

The disquieting relationship between photography and anti-Blackness converges most clearly around the lynching photograph, a topic that has been covered extensively.[24] Jacqueline Goldsby's *A Spectacular Secret: Lynching in American Life and Literature* provides a dense and attuned study of how photography's open promise depended upon anti-Blackness, as the populist drives in the technological form (i.e., that the realm of representation was suddenly open to the masses and not solely the property of the elite and wealthy) were quite often weaponized against Black Americans. Key to this book is Goldsby's insistence that lynching "helped shape the experience and meaning of American 'seeing' at the start of the twentieth century, just as those new modes of sight helped make lynching the distinctly visual phenomenon it was," and the images produced out of these acts "inscribe how practices of racial violence were used to cultivate the experience and meaning of sight itself."[25] Goldsby insists on this triad among the production, circulation, and reception of the lynching photograph as a popular and populist form of cultural education that informed questions of citizenship and nation building. Building from this nineteenth- and early twentieth-century tradition, the visual objects produced in the wake of Black radical death in this study also serve as instructive forms of cultural education.

While the lynching photograph is indeed one example of the ways that the photograph circulated as a form of visual culture intended to restrain, discipline, and fundamentally threaten Black life, it is also the case that these photographs were also used as galvanizing objects that could also

open up the possibility of activism, accountability, and alternative modes of sight. Take, for example, Goldsby's uptake of the notion of "what we would call the 'frame narrative'—printing images that depict the mob's victims before and after their deaths; paying empathetic visual care to the victims' bodies—appears to have been a distinctly black tradition in lynching photography. Inviting viewer to imagine the life histories of black lynch victims as they look at the pictures, this aesthetic challenges the popular ideology of the spectacle."[26] Indeed, as Goldsby highlights, Black spectatorial practices were "varied and unpredictable" in ways that encouraged "resistant or oppositional looking" as well as practices of outright refusal to look as a way to protest the repressive force of these images.[27] What is clear nonetheless is that whether explicitly resistant or organized around a refusal to look, the lynching photograph's circulation and reception encouraged a mode of seeing that accounted for the camera's power as a historical agent. In both Goldsby's work and *Death's Futurity*, the camera (and by extension the photograph as the technology's record) is presented as a weapon whose effects were repurposed and reconceptualized to encourage new ways of seeing the violence presented in the photographic capture of the lynching act. This notion of the violence of the camera would never leave the technology's function and would be similarly repurposed by movements for Black liberation.

While rooted in and often commenting upon a history of the development of white supremacy and state power, the camera as gun was reconceptualized in the mid-twentieth century as a revolutionary device that contributed to the cultural development of a global left. With the rise of viable anticapitalist alternatives to the state formation as best represented by successful anticolonial movements globally, such as the former USSR or the People's Republic of China, the camera and the gun were two sides of the same project: the ushering in of a new world that required revolutionary violence *and* revolutionary ways of seeing. In the opening words to her groundbreaking 1978 essay on the documentary form in Latin American leftist movements, Julianne Burton penned,

> The metaphor of the movie camera as gun is as old as the apparatus itself. Étienne Jules Marey, credited with inventing the first motion picture camera in France in 1882, described the instrument he sought to invent before the fact as "une sorte de fusil *photographique*." What he designed was in fact the size and shape of a rifle. The metaphor

acquired renewed currency in the Latin American context. There is a marvelous photograph of Sergei Eisenstein on location for the ill-fated *Que Viva Mexico*! Eisenstein is posed behind a camera on a tripod; draped over him and the camera are the cordage belts made famous by the soldiers of the Mexican revolution. In the sixties, Argentine documentarist Fernando Solanas and Spanish-born Octavio Getino reappropriated the metaphor, sparking a kind of guerrilla cinema movement and declaring, "The camera is a gun which shoots twenty-four frames a second."[28]

The phrase of central concern, "une sorte de fusil *photographique*" translates into "a kind of photographic rifle," thereby seamlessly marking a continuum that positions the movie camera as an apparatus linked to the gun—physically, metaphorically, and ideologically. In this spirit, there is a shared revolutionary spirit between the camera in 1960s Latin America and the United States as a tool for building political consciousness and as an aesthetic device aimed to build radical culture. Black photographers and filmmakers also took up this notion of the camera as an ideological tool. Gordon Parks famously titled his 1967 autobiography *A Choice of Weapons*, chronicling his fight against racism and poverty through his documentary photographs, and Haile Gerima notably reflected on being "happy [he] grabbed the camera as a weapon" in his uptake of the device in filmmaking.[29] This emphasis on the camera as a tool for ideological warfare was compatible with the ongoing call for armed self-defense by Black radicals in the United States. The gun and the camera were both considered revolutionary weapons, and in the hands of Black Americans, these devices would be aimed toward the abolition of racism and capitalism and the creation of a new world composed of Black freedom.

Since its inception, the BPP featured armed self-defense as a centerpiece to their ten-point platform. Coupled with nuanced consideration, control, and engagement with their signature aesthetic, the BPP had a deliberate calculation of the power of images over local and national media coverage of the movement. Kara Keeling's stunning book *The Witch's Flight: The Cinematic, Black Femme, and the Image of Common Sense* accounts for how the armed Black radical image ruptured national consciousness around anti-Black violence and the possibility of Black revolution in the United States. "The appearance of American blacks with guns," writes Keeling, "revealed that those commonly shared memory-images which previously

supported perceptions of a black were inadequate to a present perception of blacks with guns because American blacks with guns was not a component of the common sense through which the black appeared."[30] Working backward from Keeling's insights, images of common sense that shaped how Black Americans were seen did not include self-determined, armed Black revolutionaries committed to the Black freedom struggle. Coming off the heels of the civil rights movement, more common were images of nonviolent activists who endured white supremacist violence and did not fight back. In stark contrast, the images of radical resistance embodied by the BPP cast an image that refused to comply to any notion of nonviolence, thus destabilizing assumptions regarding what forms of anti-Black violence Black Americans would continue to endure. The answer, quite simply, was none. Black Americans would no longer endure sustained white supremacist violence and were broadcasting an aesthetic and material message that linked militancy to armed resistance. Crumbling the previous images of Black Americans that shaped national consciousness, the BPP provided a confrontation at the level of sight, a warning shot that should Black Americans need to defend themselves against white supremacist violence, they will be armed and prepared.

This image of "Blacks with guns" undoubtedly heightened the state's repressive apparatus against the BPP specifically and Black radicals broadly. Abolitionist scholar and radical activist Angela Y. Davis's 1994 essay "Afro Images" suggests the urgency of both the historical conditions that gave rise to such images as well as their impact on contemporary culture. As Davis so poignantly notes in her reflection on the ways her image from the 1960s, as circulated through photographs of the activist, continued to follow her, she said:

> But it is not merely the reduction of historical politics to contemporary fashion that infuriates me. The distinction of being known as "the Afro" is largely a result of a particular economy of journalistic images in which mine is one of the relatively few that has survived the last two decades. Or perhaps the very segregation of those photographic images caused mine to enter into the then-dominant journalistic culture precisely by virtue of my presumed criminality.[31]

Photography, in her analysis, is up for political grabs. We can extend Davis's analysis out to account for productions of images writ large, as they shaped the ways that Black radicals could be seen. While Davis was never

formally a part of the BPP, the organization's visual efficacy undoubtedly impacted her. Davis's image became conflated with her being. The circulation of her photographic image contributed to a groundswell of global solidarity while simultaneously contributing to the policing and surveillance of Black women who wore their hair natural or were self-styled in any manner readily seen to resemble Black militancy. Davis insists that the photographs shaped a public image of her: the "most obvious evidence of their power was the part they played in structuring people's opinions about me as a 'fugitive' and a political prisoner."[32] As in Davis's recollection, the image opened up real consequences in which guns, whether radical or reactionary, would indelibly shape the future of Black radical resistance.

Bullet holes appear throughout this book as shared and consistent causes of death for each slain Panther presented across all three chapters. Reports indicate that Bobby Hutton was shot over twelve times,[33] two deliberate gunshots killed Hampton though police fired between ninety and ninety-nine into his bedroom,[34] and two fatal gunshot wounds are responsible for George Jackson's death, though there are contested accounts of the incident.[35] While the bullet is responsible for the violent tearing through of flesh, muscles, bone, artery, and organ, the gunshot is what activates the deterioration of corporeal integrity. The gunshot exposes the vulnerable elements of the body, now torn apart, to the external environment, forcing the body's protected internal apparatus to release into the outside world through rapid blood loss and other possible escapes through the gunshot's entry and/or exit hole. This vulnerability accumulates with each and every gunshot endured by the victim, thus creating a series of exposures that scenes the brutality of anti-Black violence as well as the spectacular and quotidian nature through which that violence gets articulated at the level of the body. This kind of corporeal exposure is marked by and through the bullet hole. The bullet hole operates in this study as the site where the question of Black corporeal integrity meets the production of a way of looking.

Upon closer examination of the details of each murder, coupled with the insistence in each object to focus upon the bullet holes themselves, I have come to theorize the bullet hole as an aperture and as a way of looking. To understand the bullet hole has an aperture is to suggest that the bullet's violent rupture, which takes the form of the hole itself, does not only point to the devastating emptiness it leaves behind. As aperture, this

hole filters light and composes the interplay of positive and negative space from which an image emerges, whether in focused clarity or as a blur that passes the viewer's eye. This attention to the contours that the aperture helps to expose requires an attention to the body itself as well as the figurations of the body that enable a mode of looking that both contextualizes and politicizes the scene. Bullet holes, particularly their appearance and reappearance, illustrate an attention to one particular photographic portrait of Bobby Hutton as it develops across mediums and media immediately after his death. In chapter 2, I refer to this kind of contextualization as *politicized looking*, in an effort to discuss how the camera lens in *The Murder of Fred Hampton* instructs the viewer to look *for* Hampton's slain body vis-à-vis its absence and through the objects left in his wake. In chapter 3, I suggest a version of this mode of looking as a kind of *fugitive imaginary*, where artists composed visual records of the conditions of Jackson's murder with little or no evidentiary proof and instead turned to Black visual histories in order to picture the scene. These approaches share an assumptive claim around the centrality of the bullet hole as a shared exposure that enables a mode of looking that engages the afterlife of Black radical death as it is pictured in and through mediation.

Looking for and Enacting a Black Future

Key to this development of modes of looking is attention to the relationship between the evidentiary and the imaginative elements of each object of inquiry. Expressing his skepticism of the seeming acceptance and embrace of the medium as evidence, Webster Melcher, in a 1922 think piece for *The Central Law Journal*, questioned the alleged neutrality of the camera, insisting rather that "any photograph is a correct representation of *that which the camera sees, and as the camera sees some*; but this by no means settles it that the camera actually sees *all* that is before it, or sees in a *truthful form* that which is there."[36] This skepticism is central to this study, even while the documentary and photographic uses aim to reconceptualize the evidentiary away from the state and into the people's hands.

This particular utilization of the evidentiary claim does not solely rely upon truth-claims in the legalistic sense but rather these objects centralize the aesthetic as an imaginative device that allows artists and activists to turn to common-sense knowledges that would otherwise be denied, refuted, or ignored by the state. Take, for example, the development of speculative

claims in lieu of governmental transparency regarding the specific conditions of George Jackson's murder. These artists mobilized a visual language that offered suggestive illustrations of the placement of Jackson's fatal wounds and in so doing encouraged a way of seeing that pushed viewers to the limits of evidentiary mandates into a beyond in which Jackson's death required a generative political engagement. These modes of looking encouraged an activation of context, a refusal to accept state narratives, and an active engagement with Black visual histories that cite and sight a long history of the Black freedom struggle. Crucial to this approach was that the viewer not only take stock of the murders presented but invoke the transformative capacities of the image before them toward political regeneration. Recently, Deborah Thomas's *Political Life in the Wake of the Plantation: Sovereignty, Witnessing, Repair* brings together the ethnographic with the visual in order to open onto various sets of embodied knowledge that emerge as a response to systemic violence in Jamaica. The question of reception is crucial to her project. Thomas has provided a useful framework for this kind of viewing practice, which she calls "Witnessing 2.0."[37] An "embodied practice," this form of witnessing "makes visible the ways affects operate in multiple temporalities and across levels of consciousness" and "involves assuming responsibility for contemporary events."[38] While I find Thomas's uptake of embodied practices and divergent forms of affect across temporalities to be a helpful resource, the kind of looking I turn to is not about morality but about a political generativity that recomposes one's subjectivity toward a notion of a future already in motion rather than in relation to moral responsibility. This future takes death as a necessary facet of a radical life and requires a looking practice that strives toward action and activity, an active destruction of all inheritances of white supremacy (from the camera to the gun), and a Black freedom so vibrant and all-encompassing that liberation might mean a collective one after all.

Historians suggest that at its peak in 1969, the BPP had five thousand members.[39] In their comprehensive study on the BPP's internationalist and antiimperialist practices, Joshua Bloom and Waldo E. Martin have noted that despite police violence and state repression, "young black people embraced the revolutionary vision of the Party," which resulted in "many thousands" joining the BPP.[40] So much so that the FBI, CIA, Defense Intelligence Committee, and National Security Agency noted that "43 percent of blacks under 21 years of age" expressed "great respect for the [Black Panther Party]."[41] What this information suggests is an overwhelming support for

and participation in the party by Black youth. Indeed, the BPP's founders themselves were much older than their first recruit, Bobby Hutton, who was sixteen when he joined the party and would soon be one of many others his age. To call the BPP a youth organization is not an exaggeration. While much of the most visible leadership was older, members drew from a demographic between sixteen and twenty-four years old, making the political base of the party radically different from the kinds of movements that preceded Black Power. This links directly to a key concern in this book regarding an orientation toward futurity. As Huey Newton noted in a 1968 interview with members of the Students for a Democratic Society, "The revolution has always been in the hands of the young. The young always inherit the revolution."[42] Newton gives us a nonnormative notion of inheritance here, where one's relationship to politics is what determines what one receives and gives for the future. Guided by youth, those less associated with a reproductive and financial normativity, the kind of futurity at play, prioritized revolution toward the promise of a more egalitarian order of society writ large.

In this direction, Keeling's contributions on the topic of futurity in her second book, *Queer Times, Black Futures*, act as a useful roadmap for *Death's Futurity*. In Keeling's analysis, one of the many ways anti-Black racism operates is through an attempt to forcefully align particular approaches to time:

> Persistent anti-Black racism continues to delimit otherwise visionary movements and possibilities, shaping existing geopolitics and other present realities. In this context, the long arc of Black existence contains vital elements that might be recombined to call forth new relations for all. Black existence has called modernity-as-progress narratives into question since the dawn of modernity during the transatlantic slave trade and the European colonization of African, Asian, Aboriginal and other Indigenous peoples' lands. It carries within it alternative organizations of time in which the future, if there is such a thing, has not been promised; it has had to be created by reaching through and beyond what exists.[43]

Keeling's emphasis on alternative organizations of time in which a future is dependent upon creation resonates with how the BPP engaged a practice toward Black liberation. To create a future, in this vision, depended upon a notion of moving *past* the existing construction of everyday Black life

and toward *enacting* the kinds of future-oriented practices otherwise seemingly impossible under white supremacy and capitalism. In other words, the BPP, as but one of many examples, worked toward living a Black future in their present while also working toward a more comprehensive futurity through revolutionary praxis. My implementation of the term *futurity* is akin to Keeling's seminal engagement. Black futurity is a "political imagination that posits radical socioeconomic and geopolitical transformations."[44] These transformations, as facilitated through revolutionary action, required a commitment to aesthetic forms of creation. Imagination, according to Keeling, "participates in the construction of the present through a combination of past and present elements that are not necessarily attached to a presently perceptible reality."[45] This radical aesthetic practice necessitated a responsiveness to the present while also keeping a robust eye on the future. In sum, death's futurity could be simply identified as revolution itself.

Some of the objects of interest for this study were meant to die, so to speak. Newspapers and political posters especially were meant to be used despite their fleeting status: cheaply produced on nonarchival paper; wheatpasted and posted in public areas; pinned, stapled, glued. Others, like the books and documentary film, were meant to survive. These objects were to be used because of their enduring status: to be read and circulated; screened across the world; shelved, preserved, reproduced. Across their specific forms of media and mediation, all the objects in this study were created with an aim toward Black futurity, toward political regeneration through the deaths they focus on and image. Political regeneration works toward a notion of Black futurity that is facilitated in part through forms of politicized looking, a way of looking at and through the aesthetic object for clues of a future "to be created through and beyond what exists."[46]

Notes on Structure

From wake work to waywardness, my research has been indelibly touched by the stunning and recent contributions of theorists and historians like Christina Sharpe and Saidiya Hartman who have offered innovative and cutting insights into the contours, dangers, and possibilities of Black radical politics in and through the archive.[47] While this project does not explicitly engage these and other more recent vital works, I can say without hesitation that my reading and writing practice has been shaped

and reshaped by these and other scholars whose writings approaching the question of Black radicality will undoubtedly inspire an entire generation of thinkers whose projects more thoughtfully engage the complexities of these scholars' works. Instead, in what follows, I trace the choices I made regarding the inclusions, exclusions, and methodological approaches that characterize *Death's Futurity*.

This book is far from a comprehensive study of the BPP. As such, I take as a formative premise the understanding that "incomplete history remains a worthy pursuit" and as such have compiled a study that will undoubtedly continue to be regenerated and renewed.[48] Instead, it is my hope that this book is offered as a compendium to many of the works cited as predominant scholarship on the party. This is a study of a brief moment in the BPP's history, from 1969 to 1971, roughly marking a transition from Black Power to prison abolition. I offer this project as a way of thinking through a sliver of the BPP's political theory with the aim of expanding our notion of how Black radical deaths have been engaged to insist on and shape the futurity of Black radical life. I have attempted to let particular objects lead this approach in order to keep each chapter focused in its provocation and minor history. This is aimed toward an attempt to retune my approach to Black studies through levels of description, questions of appearance and reappearance, and aesthetic praxis.

Each chapter in this book is self-sustaining—meaning that the theory and history are specific to both the historical conditions of the murder detailed and the aesthetic objects that emerged as responses to those murders. In this way, I have tried to respect the specificity of each case while also opening up broader conceptual and historical avenues so that we can track how each case is related. Secondary texts that appear from outside of the historical moment at hand are included as forays into historical accuracy, key theoretical interventions, and moments of analytic exposition in relation to each case. Central to this approach is an involved attempt to balance storytelling with first-person narratives, archival coverage, and political theory from the era. In an attempt to attend to the specific artistic interventions in each case, each chapter pairs one kind of object with each murder. Chapter 1 focuses on journalistic print media as it created a framework for understanding the political conditions of Bobby Hutton's 1968 death. Chapter 2 considers the documentary film *The Murder of Fred Hampton* and its role as a tool of political education and regeneration in the immediate aftermath of Hampton's 1969 murder. Finally, chapter 3

examines political posters as they reimagine George Jackson's slain body in relation to the political prisoner's writings and an alternative canon of the Black body as posed by artists. The book's epilogue considers how artists and activists turned to the 1971 Attica state prison rebellion as a way to radically centralize prison abolition as an act of Black revolutionary imagination. Ultimately, each chapter shares in its drive toward repositioning the generative capacity of death in Black radical life as a way of working toward the egalitarian promise of Black liberation.

Notes

INTRODUCTION. THE VISUAL LIFE OF BLACK POWER

1. Jane Rhodes, "Power to the People: *The Black Panther* and the Pre-Digital Age of Radical Media," in *The Funambulist: Politics of Space and Bodies: Publishing the Struggle*, no. 22 (March–April 2019): 26.
2. Amy Abugo Ongiri, *Spectacular Blackness: The Cultural Politics of the Black Power Movement and the Search for an Aesthetic* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2010); Jane Rhodes, *Framing the Black Panthers: The Spectacular Rise of the Black Power Icon* (New York: New Press, 2007).
3. Erika Doss, "'Revolutionary Art Is a Tool for Liberation': Emory Douglas and Protest Aesthetics at *The Black Panther*," *New Political Science* 21, no. 2 (1999): 249; Marc Léger, "By Any Means Necessary: From the Revolutionary Art of Emory Douglas to the Art Activism of Jackie Sumell," *Afterimage* 38, no. 5 (March/April 2011).
4. Geoff Kaplan, "Introduction," in *Power to the People: The Graphic Design of the Radical Press and the Rise of the Counterculture, 1964–1974* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013).
5. Emory Douglas, "Revolutionary Art/Black Liberation," in *The Black Panthers Speak*, ed. Philip Foner (New York: De Capo Press, 1995), 16.
6. Doss, "Revolutionary Art," 253.

7. Douglas, "Revolutionary Art/Black Liberation," 16.
8. For more on the BPP's uptake of Fanon's notion that violence is a cleansing force for the colonized subject, see chapters 1 and 2.
9. Key texts that have significantly influenced my understanding of the libidinal, social, and political pleasures of anti-Black violence include Huey Copeland, *Bound to Appear: Art, Slavery, and the Site of Blackness in Multicultural America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013); Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2004); Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (London: Oxford University Press, 1997); David Marriott, *On Black Men* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000); David Marriott, *Haunted Life: Visual Culture and Black Modernity* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2007); Steve Martinot and Jared Sexton, "The Avant-Garde of White Supremacy," *Social Identities* 9, no. 2 (2003):169–81; Robyn Wiegman, *American Anatomies: Theorizing Race and Gender* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002); Frank B. Wilderson III, *Red, White, and Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).
10. Fred Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003); Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*.
11. Fred Moten, "Review of *Soul: Black Power, Politics, and Pleasure* and *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*," *TDR: The Drama Review* 43, no. 4 (1999): 171.
12. Moten, *In the Break*, 170.
13. Hilton Als, "GWTW," in *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America*, ed. James Allen (Santa Fe, NM: Twin Palms, 2000), 38.
14. Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 28.
15. Roach, *Cities of the Dead*, 2.
16. Harvey Young, *Embodying Black Experience: Stillness, Critical Memory, and the Black Body* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010), 186.
17. Young, *Embodying Black Experience*, 188.
18. Marta Braun, *Picturing Time: The Work of Étienne Jules-Marey* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).
19. Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Delta, 1977), 14.
20. Friedrich A. Kittler, *Gramophone, Film Typewriter*, trans. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 124.
21. Jason Puskar, "Pistolgraphs: Liberal Technoagency and the Nineteenth-Century Camera Gun," *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 36, no. 5 (December 2014): 523.
22. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*; Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993); Janet Neary, *Fugitive Testimony: On the Visual Logics of Slave Narratives* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017).

23. Matthew Fox-Amato, *Exposing Slavery: Photography, Human Bondage, and the Birth of Modern Visual Politics in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 37; Harvey Young, "Still Standing: Daguerreotypes, Photography, and the Black Body," in *Embodying Black Experience: Stillness, Critical Memory and the Black Body* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010), 26–76.
24. Allen, ed., *Without Sanctuary*; Jaqueline Goldsby, *A Spectacular Secret: Lynching in American Life and Literature* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006); David Marriott, *On Black Men* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000); Dora Apel and Shawn Michelle Smith, *Lynching Photographs* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008); Shawn Michelle Smith, "Spectacles of Whiteness: The Photography of Lynching," *Photography on the Color Line: W. E. B. Du Bois, Race, and Visual Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004); Amy Louise Wood, *Lynching and Spectacle: Witnessing Racial Violence in America, 1880–1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009).
25. Goldsby, *A Spectacular Secret*, 224, 238.
26. Goldsby, *A Spectacular Secret*, 248.
27. Goldsby, *A Spectacular Secret*, 252.
28. Julianne Burton, "The Camera as 'Gun': Two Decades of Culture and Resistance in Latin America," *Latin American Perspectives: Culture in the Age of Mass Media* 5, no. 1 (Winter 1978): 49, emphasis in original, translation added.
29. Gordon Parks, *A Choice of Weapons* (Minneapolis: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2010); Greg Thomas, "On *Teza*, Cinema, and American Empire: An Interview with Haile Gerima," *Black Camera* 4, no. 2 (Spring 2013): 9.
30. Kara Keeling, "'We'll Just Have to Get Guns and Be Men': The Cinematic Appearance of Black Revolutionary Women," *Witch's Flight: The Cinematic, the Black Femme, and the Image of Common Sense* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 74–75.
31. Angela Y. Davis, "Afro Images: Politics, Fashion, and Nostalgia," *Critical Inquiry* 21, no. 1 (Autumn 1994): 38.
32. Davis, "Afro Images," 42.
33. Steve Everitt, "A Huey P. Newton Story—People—Bobby Hutton," Public Broadcasting Service, 2002, https://www.pbs.org/hueypnewton/people/people_hutton.html.
34. Jeffrey Haas, *The Assassination of Fred Hampton: How the FBI and the Chicago Police Murdered a Black Panther* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 2010); Hans Bennet, "The Black Panthers and the Assassination of Fred Hampton," *Journal of Pan African Studies* 3, no. 6 (2010): 215.
35. Wallace Turner, "Two Desperate Hours: How George Jackson Died," *New York Times*, September 3, 1971, https://www.nytimes.com/1971/09/03/archives/two-desperate-hours-how-george-jackson-died-two-desperate-hours-how.html.
36. Webster Melcher, "Photography and Evidence," *Central Law Journal* (April 1922): 242.

37. Deborah Thomas, "Humanness in the Wake of the Plantation," in *Political Life in the Wake of the Plantation: Sovereignty, Witnessing, Repair* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019), 2.
38. Thomas, "Humanness in the Wake of the Plantation."
39. Michael X. Delli Carpini, "The Black Panther Party: 1966–1982," in *The Encyclopedia of Third Parties in America*, ed. Immanuel Ness and James Ciment (New York: Routledge, 2006), 194.
40. Joshua Bloom and Waldo E. Martin, *Black Against Empire: The History and Politics of the Black Panther Party* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 2.
41. Bloom and Martin, *Black Against Empire*, 3.
42. Students for a Democratic Society, "Huey Newton Talks to the Movement," Kent State University Libraries, Special Collections and Archives, accessed October 13, 2021, https://omeka.library.kent.edu/special-collections/items/show/3176.
43. Kara Keeling, *Queer Times, Black Futures* (New York: New York University Press, 2019), 36.
44. Keeling, *Queer Times, Black Futures*, 32.
45. Keeling, *Queer Times, Black Futures*, 33.
46. Keeling, *Queer Times, Black Futures*, 36.
47. For more on wake work, see Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016). For more on waywardness, see Saidiya Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Riotous Black Girls, Troublesome Women and Queer Radicals* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2019).
48. Laura Helton, Justin Leroy, Max A. Mishler, Samantha Seeley, and Shauna Sweeney, "The Question of Recovery: An Introduction," *Social Text* 33, no. 4 (December 2015): 7.

CHAPTER 1. "1,000 BOBBY HUTTONS"

1. Stephen Shames, email correspondence with the author, February 27, 2019. Emory Douglas thought the original photograph was taken by Shames. Shames insists he did not take the photograph. Adrienne Fields, director of legal affairs, Artists Rights Society, email correspondence with the author, February 18, 2020.
2. Gar Smith, email correspondence with the author, February 25, 2019.
3. I have considered the role of "cool" and "shade" in the BPP's embodied visual practices elsewhere. To do so, I combined Robert Farris Thompson's invocation of an "aesthetics of cool" with Krista Thompson's "sidelong glance." For more, see Sampada Aranke, "Shades of Cool," *AQ/SFAQ/NYAQ*, June 21, 2016; Krista Thompson, "A Sidelong Glance: The Practice of African Diaspora Art History in the United States," *Art Journal* 70 (2011): 7–31; Robert Farris Thompson, "An Aesthetic of Cool," *African Arts* 7, no. 1 (1973): 41.
4. I am developing the term *photographic fugitivity* from Krista Thompson's insightful essay on Ivanhoe Martin's appearance and disappearance through