



<http://gdc.gale.com/archivesunbound/>

BLACK LIBERATION ARMY AND THE PROGRAM OF ARMED STRUGGLE



The Black Liberation Army (BLA) was an underground, black nationalist-Marxist militant organization that operated from 1970 to 1981. Composed largely of former Black Panthers (BPP), the organization's program was one of "armed struggle" and its stated goal was to "take up arms for the liberation and self-determination of black people in the United States." The BLA carried out a series of bombings, robberies (what participants termed "expropriations"), and prison breaks.

Date Range: 1970-1983

Content: 8,452 images

Source Library: The Federal Bureau of Investigation Library

Detailed Description:

If one were to examine African American history, one would be surprised to find a long history of militant armed struggle. Slave rebellions, urban "guerilla" activities in the 1960s, rural defense leagues, were all part of a tapestry of black militancy. An icon of black armed struggle, the Black Liberation Army, was a linchpin in understanding the development of the "armed rebellion" phenomenon in the late 1960s through early 1980s. The idea of the Black Liberation Army emerged from conditions in African American communities: conditions of poverty, indecent housing, massive unemployment, poor medical care, and inferior education. The BLA arose because of the political, social, and economic oppression of felt by African American people in the urban areas.

The Black Liberation Army gained strength as Black Panther Party membership declined. By 1970, police and pressure from the FBI's COINTELPRO program, infiltration, sectarianism, the criminalization of the Black Power movement (including long prison sentences and the deaths of key members) had crippled the Black Panther Party. This convinced many former party members of the desirability of an underground existence, including the assumption that a new period of violent repression was at hand. BLA members operated under the belief that only through covert means, including but not limited to violent acts, could the movement be continued until such a time when an above-ground existence was possible. In this sense, the BLA's reasoning was similar to that of the Weather Underground.

The conditions under which the Black Liberation Army formed are not entirely clear. It is commonly believed that the organization was founded by those who left the Black Panther Party after Eldridge Cleaver was expelled from the party's Central Committee. Others, including black revolutionary Geronimo Pratt, asserted that the BLA "as a movement concept pre-dated and was broader than the BPP", suggesting that it was a refuge for ex-Panthers rather than a new organization formed through schism.

The clandestine nature of the BLA does not mean it was marginal or fringe. Nothing could be further from the truth, according to some, throughout the 1970's — its highpoint of activity — the BLA was involved in numerous clandestine actions. Heavily influenced by Marxist-Leninist philosophies and Fanonian readings on anti-colonialism, the Black Liberation Army saw "revolutionary violence" against the state as a necessary response to what their members deemed an imperialist nation fixed on exclusivity and racism. White radicals were also involved in clandestine activity, in many cases collaborating with black radicals. The best-known group of this era, the Weather Underground, actively participated on the side of black activists.