

OPINION: A resurgence of the Black Panther Party is what this nation needs

By Lisa White

We as a nation have failed the black community. White supremacy ideologies are woven into every service, department, and system of the United States government. We have created racism, defined it, perpetuated it, and then held the black community responsible for correcting it.

But this is not a problem that can be solved by 12% of the nation. We can't expect the victims of abuse to cure the derangement of their abusers. This is not a problem we can just pass along to our legislators, in the hopes that they will take action on issues that they systematically created. This will only be solved by us, we the people, identifying the problem within each of us, and choosing to make a change. I believe that the white community has done enough talking, legislating and postulating, we've stolen the voice of the black community and replaced it with our own. I think now it's time to listen, to accept, and to understand.

In any free society, the people must have the power to require accountability from their government. The Declaration of Independence reads: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness." It then goes on to say "whenever any form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles, and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to affect their

Safety and Happiness.” It later describes long term government abuses to be, not only the right but the duty of the people, to correct.

So how do we correct this?

The answer may very well be written in our founding documents as well. The second amendment was put in place to help ease the people’s concerns regarding members of the military and local law enforcement having too much power. The original purpose was to allow the average citizen, in his or her home, to match firepower with an average foot soldier – to defend themselves, should the need ever arise, against the actions of a tyrannical government.

If allowing civilians to arm themselves was the balance of power necessary to keep members of the government, specifically law enforcement, from adopting and enacting an authoritarian position, then how have we evolved into a society in which so many of our people feel the system is so unbalanced and unjust? Perhaps because the second amendment was never intended to be fairly executed, and has been withheld from the members of our community who could benefit from it the most.

In 1966, members of the black community, in response to mistreatment from law enforcement in Oakland, CA., began a revolutionary group, known commonly as the Black Panther Party. Originally named the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense, the group used open-carry, armed citizens’ patrols to monitor police interactions. The citizens’ patrols worked to address the growing concern over the mistreatment of people of color by the Oakland Police Department, and that other means of enacting change had been unsuccessful.

The Black Panther Party (BPP) returned a level of power back to the people of the California city, and quickly the party spread across the nation with chapters in every major US city.

Although the BPP was developed to defend against police brutality, that became only one aspect of the benefits the organization provided to the communities they represented.

The BPP can also be credited with community outreach, food pantry services for low-income families, as well as advocates for educational equalities and children's rights and protections. However, shortly after the introduction of the BPP, and the armed citizen patrols began, a CA legislator proposed what is known as the Mulford Act, a piece of California legislation banning the public carrying of loaded firearms. The Mulford Act, a blatant and intensional form of gun control, was deliberately aimed at dismantling the Black Panther Party.

The Mulford Act essentially worked in opposition to the BPP's primary objective in protecting members of the black community from racial inequities and mistreatment by CA law enforcement. The Act, signed by then-Republican California Governor Ronald Reagan, was the only legislative form of gun control to have ever been supported by the National Rifle Association.

Officially ending in 1982, the Black Panther Party received very little political support and was portrayed by media and news outlets as a dangerous group of radicals. But if our nation's founders could identify the second amendment as a means of balancing the power, then it would be un-American and a direct violation of our duties as citizens to not encourage this balance by supporting our neighbors to exercise their second amendment rights.

Perhaps a resurgence of the Black Panther Party is precisely what this nation needs.

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