

# Look for Me in the Whirlwind

From the Panther 21 to 21st-Century Revolutions

Sekou Odinga, Dhoruba Bin Wahad, and Jamal Joseph

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Foreword: Imam Jamil Al-Amin • Afterword: Mumia Abu-Jamal

In the tumultuous year of 1969, amid music festivals and moon landings, assassinations and million-person antiwar mobilizations, twenty-one members of the militant New York branch of the Black Panther Party (BPP) were rounded up and indicted on multiple charges of violent acts and conspiracies. They were charged with plans to blow up a variety of sites—from a police station in Manhattan to the Queens offices of the Board of Education and the Bronx Botanical Gardens. Though some among the New York Panther 21 (NY 21) had hardly even met one another, the group was gathered together as an obvious attempt by the FBI, in cooperation with city and state authorities, to discredit, disrupt, and destroy the organization which was attracting so many young people across the world. In the ensuing preparation for a trial that would become the longest and most expensive in New York's history at the time, information came out about the FBI's illegal Counterintelligence Program (COINTELPRO), as members of the BPP were assassinated, forced into exile, framed, and set against each other.

In the case of the NY 21, splits between the California-based Huey Newton and Bobby Seale, and the New York-based Panthers, who had a more internationalist and clandestine approach, became hostile and murderous. At the same time, solidarity for the 21 extended well beyond predictable Black Liberation circles, including a cocktail party fundraiser hosted by Leonard Bernstein which was infamously derided in mainstream media reports. Support for the 21 also included publication of the collective autobiography *Look for Me in the Whirlwind*, which is reprinted for the first time in this volume.

At a moment when the burgeoning Black Lives Matter movement recites a daily "We Have a Duty to Win" affirmation penned by exiled revolutionary Assata Shakur, the membership of the NY 21—which includes the mother of Tupac Shakur, two of those charged with assisting in the prison escape of Assata, and one Panther who, at age eighty, remains in prison despite having served more than forty years—is largely forgotten and unknown. Their legacy, however—reflected upon here in this special edition—provides essential truths which have remained largely hidden, even in the myriad books and movies of Black Panther nostalgia and mythology. The voices of the Panthers contained in these pages resonate today because they boldly confront, with creativity and candor, both their own history and our deepest challenges today.

## ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

**Matt Meyer** is a New York City-based educator, organizer, and author who serves as War Resisters International Africa Support Network Coordinator, and who represents the International Peace Research Association at the United Nations Economic and Social Council.

**déqui kioni-sadiki** is the chair of the Malcolm X Commemoration Committee and was a leader of the Sekou Odinga Defense Committee, which waged a successful campaign for the release of her husband. She is a radio producer; an educator with the NYC Department of Education; and a member of the Jericho Movement to Free All Political Prisoners.

**Sekou Odinga** was a member of Malcolm X's Organization of Afro-American Unity, a founding member of the New York chapter of the Black Panther Party as well as the Black Panther International Section, and was a member of the NY Panther 21. Sekou was captured in October 1981 and spent the following thirty-three years behind bars.

**Dhoruba Bin Wahad** was a leading member of the New York Black Panther Party, a Field Secretary of the BPP, and a member of the Panther 21. He continues to write and work promoting Pan Africanism, an uncompromising critique of imperialism and capitalism, and freedom for all political prisoners.

**Jamal Joseph** was a member of the Black Panther Party and the Black Liberation Army and was prosecuted as one of the Panther 21. He earned his BA from the University of Kansas while at Leavenworth. He is a full professor and former chair of Columbia University's Graduate Film Division and the artistic director of the New Heritage Theatre Group in Harlem.

**Imam Jamil Al-Amin**, also known as H. Rap Brown, was chairman of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee in the 1960s, and during an alliance between SNCC and the Black Panther Party he served as their minister of justice.

**Mumia Abu-Jamal** is probably the best-known political prisoner in the Western world. While behind bars he has written a series of widely read books, including *Live from Death Row* (1995), and a history of the Black Panther Party entitled *We Want Freedom* (2004).



## SUBJECT CATEGORY

Political Activism/African American Studies/Autobiography

## PRICE

\$26.95

## ISBN

978-1-62963-389-3

## PAGE COUNT

648

## SIZE

9x6

## FORMAT

Paperback

## PUBLICATION DATE

08/17

## DISTRIBUTED BY

Independent Publishers Group  
(312) 337-0747  
[www.ipgbook.com](http://www.ipgbook.com)

## DISTRIBUTED IN THE UK/EUROPE BY

Turnaround Publisher Services Ltd  
t: 020 8829 3000  
[orders@turnaround-uk.com](mailto:orders@turnaround-uk.com)

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