

Primary Source - Elaine Brown, *Black Panther* (August 1974)

Source: Elaine Brown, *A Taste of Power: A Black Woman's Story* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1992, pp. 3-8.

"I have all the guns and all the money. I can withstand challenge from without and from within. Am I right, Comrade?" Larry snapped back his answer to my rhetorical question: "Right on!" His muscular body tilted slightly as he adjusted the .45 automatic piston under his jacket.

I was standing on the stage, with him at my side. Several of the key Brothers from the security squads were standing just in the back of us. To my left I found feel Big Bob, Huey Newton's personal bodyguard, all six feet eight inches and four hundred pounds of him. In front of me, extending all the way to the back of the auditorium, were several hundred other members of the Black Panther Party, a sea of predominately male faces. They were black men and women from the party's Central Committee and from various local leadership cadres, from the West Side of Chicago, from North Philadelphia, Harlem, New Orleans, Los Angeles, Washington, D.C., and elsewhere. They had come to Oakland this August of 1974 at my command.

I watched them carefully, noting that no one moved in response to my opening remarks. Here I was, a woman, proclaiming supreme power over the most militant organization in America. It felt natural to me. I had spent the last seven years as a dedicated member of the Black Panther Party, the last four at Huey's right hand.

"I haven't called you together to make threats, Comrades," I continued. "I've called this meeting simply to let you know the realities of our situation. The fact is, Comrade Huey is in exile. The other fact is, I'm taking his place until we make it possible for him to return."

I allowed them a moment to grasp the full meaning of my words. "I'm telling you this because it's possible some of you may balk at a woman as the leader of the Black Panther Party... If this is your attitude, you'd better get out of the Black Panther Party. Now. I am saying this also because there may be some individuals in our ranks who have private ambitions and, in Comrade Huey's absence, may imagine themselves capable of some kind of coup." I paused again. No one spoke.

Cocking my head to the side, I continued in the manner I knew was required. "If you are such an individual, you'd better run--and fast. I am, as your chairman, the leader of this party as of this moment. My leadership cannot be challenged. I will lead our party above ground and underground. I will lead the party not only in furthering our goals but also in defending the party by any and all means..."

I watched a few of the Brothers slap their palms together in common recognition. A subdued laughter of agreement rippled through the auditorium. I began to walk up and down the stage, purposely emphasizing my words with the sound of the heels of my black leather boots. I punctuated each sentence with a nod to one or another of the soldiers standing on stage with me, backing me up.

"I repeat, I have control over all the guns and all the money of this party. There will be no external or internal opposition I will not resist and put down. I will deal resolutely with anyone or anything that stands in the way. So if you don't like what we're going to do, here is your chance to leave. You'd better leave because you won't be tolerated."

They began to applaud loudly, then louder, and then suddenly they were standing. The Sisters and the Brothers were on their feet. "Return to your chapters and branches throughout this country with renewed dedication... Let us get busy and prepare a place for the return of Comrade Huey. Let us get busy and prepare a place for