

BuzzFeed News

Peterson, Pia. "These Photos Will Make You Consider What You Think You Know About The Black Panthers," *BuzzFeed News*, February 24, 2022.



Kwame Brathwaite
"Untitled (Revolutionary Movement)," 1972 c., printed 2021
Archival pigment print, framed
15 x 15 inches

It's hard to overstate the influence that the Black Panthers have had on America since the group came together in Oakland in 1966. Proudly Black in a time when the country was fighting for basic civil rights, Marxist in the time of the Red Scare, and dressed in leather jackets and beatnik berets at a time when Beatles were still wearing matching little suits, they were a part of the revolutionary Black Power movement that was villainized by the mainstream press, the government, and the FBI. And while some of their tactics were controversial, their premise — challenging police brutality against Black Americans and people of color, and promoting community well-being — was astoundingly simple and still resonates today.

"When you consider the work of the Black Power movement, it is founded on many of the same principles of empowerment, building community, and standing up for yourself as a human being," said Kwame Brathwaite, the legendary New York photographer. "They understood and embraced the Black Is Beautiful movement as a foundational piece of their own work. Black Power has always been about finding a way of achieving equity and that has not changed. We are still fighting the same battles to this day."

Brathwaite took iconic images of Muhammad Ali, Nina Simone, and Nelson Mandela along with documenting his friends and family. His work is synonymous with the phrase "Black is beautiful," turning the theme into a movement in the early 1960s. "The community that I was a part of influenced me as well as the work we were doing," he said in comments provided to BuzzFeed News.

A photograph by Brathwaite is currently on view as a part of a group exhibition titled *This Tender, Fragile Thing at The School*, a gallery in Kinderhook, New York. The development, goals, and achievements of the Black Power movement are highlighted with artwork and documentary photography in the show, including both archival and modern works. "The juxtaposition [of the new and the old] allows viewers to consider that what we are seeing is not new and hopefully communicates the frustration with all the work that still so urgently needs to be done," curator and gallerist Jack Shainman said.

"[The painter] Claude Simard and I began collecting Black Panther materials together in the 1980s," Shainman said. "Our hope for the exhibition is just to show the nuance of the Black Power movement, the Black Panthers, and the progress our society has made. There are no simple answers. The Black Panthers, for example, were a multifaceted organization that went above and beyond for its community. It wasn't a group based in violence or hate, but rather one focused on protecting those that were looked at as lesser than due to their race."

For the artists in the show, the work shows a different side of the movement than what was shown in the media at the time. "Revolutionary Movement," Brathwaite's photo, "is a double entendre in that there is actual movement that is captured by the lens and the act of bearing arms and the politics around protecting oneself from oppression," Brathwaite's representative said. "The piece is a play on light and movement artistically and also signifies the changing times of the 1970s when people shifted their mindset from the 1960s and began taking different approaches to their political expression."