

A History of Solidarity

What Can We Do Now?

By Elbert “Big Man” Howard

We are the surviving elders of history. As such, we are often asked this question: “What can we do now about some of the problems in our communities?” There are no quick fixes or easy answers to this question. Although we need to seek out and discover ways of addressing problems the way we did in those years past, we need to remember what did not work for us and be willing to discuss and apply new analysis and approaches. That is why conferences like this one are so important for it brings us together and focuses our attention collectively on these concerns and issues.

So here we are – the survivors of decades of racism, oppression and what is now the early stages of open American fascism. We know that in the past highly organized governmental groups were able to destroy our programs and everything that many of us had worked so hard to achieve. This fact indicates that we definitely need to be much more organized this time around.

We formed friendships and alliances in those years past. We developed programs that served and educated our communities. We were effective in these efforts. We know this because we faced and suffered extreme repression from governmental agencies as a result. We willingly and continuously faced the challenges and hardships of repression because of several reasons: 1) will and determination, 2) our love for the people and communities which we were committed to serve, 3) a fierce belief in what we were doing, and 4) our youth, which embraced both a lack of fear and limitless energy.

What we still believe is that networking and basic grass root organizing works. However, we have learned that to achieve success we must set aside our individual egos and selfish ambitions and be willing to really work and communicate with others. We must communicate with people in the community and organizations in the community. We must get to know them and let them know us. We must not let our differences stop us from connecting as human beings. We must demonstrate ways to gain their respect and earn their trust. We must be able to teach as well as learn from others.

Networking means that no individual in our communities has to face or fight an issue alone. When a citizen from our community has a problem, he or she should be able to place one phone call that would start a chain of calls throughout the network, activating group support.

The community must arm its members with legal arms for self-defense. No one should have to live in fear because law enforcement can't or won't protect and serve the people who pay their salaries. **OUTLAWS MUST BE DRIVEN OUT OF OUR COMMUNITIES.**

No member of our community should go hungry, homeless or suffer illness because of a lack of opportunity, a job, or medical insurance. Working together we can address and solve these problems.

Because poverty, hunger, joblessness, illness, crime and racism are so pervasive, make no mistake in thinking that what we achieve will be looked at as isolated events. 42 years ago the Black Panther Party initiated programs that demonstrated problem solving that worked on a very basic and understandable level. Their efforts were examined and then followed by groups that formed and implemented similar programs all over America and in other countries of the world.

As we begin to take these steps toward solving what seems like a giant abyss of problems such as lack of health care, the Aids crisis, declining opportunities for education and employment, environmental issues, the human cost of undeclared wars, and wanton murder and drug addiction in our communities, we must remind ourselves that we are not alone. Support is out there - millions more care about these same issues than don't. No matter what the rich empire-builders and their controlled news media propagandizes, the people still recognize the truth and they know who the real enemies of the people are.

People all around the world despise the American government and its leaders, yet most of them have very different views about the American people. The rest of the world sees how the American government persecutes its own citizens who disagree, criticize and abhor their policies, murdering, imprisoning, and/or driving them into exile.

I must state that while the government continues to expend seemingly endless supplies of money and American lives on undeclared wars in the Middle East, we have now passed the 3rd anniversary of Hurricane Katrina, which occurred on Aug 21, 2005. The national media appear to have forgotten it, as have the politicians in Washington, D.C. But we have not – 1/2 of the people from New Orleans remain dispersed across the country, many living in sub-human conditions, as are many of the Louisiana residents who stayed or have returned. Suicide rates have tripled. Most schools and hospitals are still closed. Up until recently, the National Guard was still patrolling the streets. This is the way the American government treats “the American people” – we would be better served if we elected a group of savage animals. This world-leader among nations performs so badly and outrageously it is an embarrassment and a disgrace to its own people. We need to join in unison to formulate and share our ideas and work for change – our lives and those of the generations to come depend on us.

So, in conclusion, as I challenge all of you to unite and move forward, I ask you to think about and remember how a small group of dedicated youngsters with such limited resources, greatly impacted the lives of so many people. I think I know why - it was due to an uncompromising, powerful belief in ALL POWER TO THE PEOPLE.