

● Oct. 15, 1966: In response to police brutality against African-Americans, the Merritt College students Huey Newton and Bobby Seale create the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense. The organization, declared an enemy of the government by J. Edgar Hoover's F.B.I., holds that ending the economic exploitation of black people is central to achieving racial equity.



*With a line from Tavia Nyong'o*

Anything that wants to be can be a panther. The black lion or ocelot, the black cheetah or cornrowed uptown girl sprinting up her neighborhood block just like one, in dogged pursuit of the future world. In this frame, I imagine Huey and Bobby as boys in the sense of gender and genre alike, an unbroken line reading: *my life is an armor for the other*. Before black berets or free breakfasts, then, there is friendship. Before gun laws shifting in the wake of organized strength, leather jackets shimmering like gypsum in the Northern California twilight — or else magazine covers running the world over, compelling everyday ordinary people across the spectrum of context or color to sing *who wants to be a panther ought to be he can be it* — there is love. The panther is a virtual animal. The panther strikes only when it has been assailed. The panther is a human vision, interminable refusal, our common call to adore ourselves as what we are and live and die on terms we fashioned from the earth like this. Our precious metal metonym. Our style of fire and stone.

By Joshua Bennett