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**The Oakland Community School, Oakland, CA / The Hope Is Our Young People
In Struggle Spotlight
By Larry Pinkney
BlackCommentator.com Editorial Board**

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The following is Part 1 of an interview in late June 2008, with Ericka Huggins, former national Minister of Education for the Black Panther Party. Sister Ericka was quite inspirational as she talked about the Oakland Community School in which she was a major influence.

Please allow me to begin by reminding all readers of *BlackCommentator.com* that there will be a school reunion and pot luck picnic on Saturday, July 19, 2008, beginning at 11 a.m. at 3860 Hanly Road in Oakland California. If you are in California, *be there!*

Perhaps the most impressive thing to me about my interview with Ericka Huggins was and continues to be her deep commitment and excitement about the youth, which reminded me of what inspired me to join the (Black Panther) Party, and why our young people have been and *remain* so very important today.

Sister Ericka Huggins began the interview by telling me that she is "very busy doing research and teaching classes" at California State University East Bay and at Laney College in downtown Oakland, Ca., and she also takes loving care of her elderly mother.

For my part, I began the interview by asking Sister Ericka what her motivation was / is with respect to "the [founding of] the liberation schools in *general* and the Oakland Community School [OCS] in *particular*."

She answered by telling me that she "loves history" and "that my [her] mind and heart immediately go back generations to the enslavement of Africans and I [she] think[s] of how *brutal* [conditions were if] we wanted or were found to be *learning to read, to write, to think critically*...and I know you know what happened if we did...It hasn't changed much..." Indeed.

I was immediately entranced by the intensity and obvious love for the people, and especially the youth, of Ericka.

Ericka went on to point out that today "there is a whole system that segregates children *and* adults by race in education. It's systemic; and I knew that when I was in college before I joined the Black Panther Party. I was a teenager, but I *knew* it...and I knew it when I was *in* the Black Panther Party..."

She reminded me about Tommy Smith, a well known member of the Black Panther Party in Los Angeles, who was miseducated and not taught how to read by the so-called educational system; but for whom Sister Ericka served as a "mentor" before he was "killed by the police." As Ericka said of Brother Tommy Smith, "He was one of the most *brilliant political analysts* I met during that time in that chapter, but he could not read and it was *not* his fault."

As I listened to Sister Ericka, I trembled with memory and recognition, as she expounded upon why she had and continues to have such a love for our youth and *true* education.

This is but a beginning taste of the inspiring words of a Black Panther warrior sister who fought and fights, based upon the her love of the people. Stay tuned for Part 2 in *BlackCommentator.com*, and remember that if you are in, or anywhere near northern California, on July 19, 2008, beginning at 11 a.m. at 3860 Hanly Road in Oakland, California; join the Oakland Community School Reunion and be not only a part of history but also of ongoing struggle.

BlackCommentator.com Editorial Board Member, Larry Pinkney, is a veteran of the Black Panther Party, the former Minister of Interior of the Republic of New Africa, a former political prisoner and the only American to have successfully self-authored his civil/political rights case to the United Nations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. In connection with his political organizing activities in opposition to voter suppression, etc., Pinkney was interviewed in 1988 on the nationally televised PBS NewsHour, formerly known as The MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour. For more about Larry Pinkney see the book, [Saying No to Power: Autobiography of a 20th Century Activist and Thinker](#) , by William Mandel [Introduction by Howard Zinn]. (Click [here](#) to read excerpts from the book). Click [here](#) to contact Mr. Pinkney.

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