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**Emory Douglas & Billy X Jennings:
Keepers of the Flame & Guardians of the Legacy
Keeping it Real
By Larry Pinkney
BlackCommentator.com Editorial Board**

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Grasping what has been achieved in the past is an important foundation upon which to build for the present and the future. Without this foundation we are but directionless leaves, blowing in the wind.

The Black Panther Party awakened a radicalized political consciousness in the United States and throughout the world, whose impact is multi generational and continues down to this very day. Two veterans of that era and of "the [Black Panther] Party" are today utilizing both art and history as a means of linking the not-so-distant past with the pressing concerns and ongoing political struggle of the present. These two persons are artist *extraordinaire* and former national Minister of Culture of the Black Panther Party, Emory Douglas, and *premier* historian and former Black Panther Party member, Billy X Jennings.

Brothers Emory and Billy X both made it quite clear to this writer that they have been, and are continuing, to work in concert with *many* other sisters and brothers to educate and "inspire" the generations of today *and* the future. It is in this vein that the *ongoing* stories of Emory Douglas and Billy X Jennings are presented to you, the reader. May you too be inspired...

No successful political movement, party, or organization can effectively function in a vacuum. There are various components needed to sustain, nurture, and spread it. Art is one of those components that plays a significant role in this regard. With respect to the Black Panther Party and beyond, the art of Emory Douglas shaped and crystallized the imaginations and political consciousness of an entire generation of Black, Brown, Red, Yellow, and White peoples, nationally and around the world. The relatively recently

released book titled, [*Black Panther: The Revolutionary Art of Emory Douglas*](#) [Edited by Sam Durant and Published by Rizzoli Publications], presents 225 images that definitively illustrate the power and increasing significance of Emory's art. There is an adage which says that 'the proof of the pudding is in the taste.' Indeed, this book makes that point poignantly clear in the case of the art work of Emory.

Complementing Emory's art is the stalwart work of Billy X Jennings, whose visionary understanding of and commitment to preserving the enormously important legacy of the Black Panther Party is manifested on the [*It's About Time*](#) website at www.itsabouttimebpp.com of which Billy X is the primary architect. Virtually any and everything of significance, pertaining to the sisters and brothers of the Black Panther Party and its continuing legacy today, is to be found on the [*It's About Time*](#) website. Among his many tasks in the Black Panther Party, Billy X served as the assistant to the late Brother Huey P. Newton, and is now and has for many years been, putting former [Black Panther] Party members and/or their families in touch with one another while researching, sharing, and spreading the true legacy of the Black Panther Party nationally and internationally. *Notwithstanding* the hard work of the former national *leadership* of the [Black Panther] Party, Brother Billy X correctly emphasizes that there would have been no Black Panther Party without the brothers and sisters of its "*rank and file*," many of whom made the ultimate sacrifice in the struggle by giving their very lives, while others *still* today are languishing in U.S. prisons.

Nevertheless, the legacy and enormous impact and relevance today of the former Black Panther Party and the ongoing struggle for justice are, in fact, inseparably *intertwined*. This is why, for example, the 'George Jackson Lives' Photo & Mixed Media Exhibit, which will be on view from September 21 - October 19, 2008 at the New Black World in West Oakland, California, [sponsored by [*It's About Time*](#) and Marcel Diallo] is already causing much excitement and anticipation. It is very important to note that the aforementioned exhibit is "the *first* George Jackson exhibit in America." It will include videos, numerous photos, and period articles from the *Oakland Tribune*, the *San Francisco Chronicle*, *The San Francisco Sun Reporter*, *The Black Panther Paper*, *The Berkeley Barb*, *The Berkeley Tribe*, *LIFE Magazine*, *TIME* etc. The late George Jackson was an internationally known member of the Black Panther Party and the author of the two best selling books titled, [*Blood in My Eye*](#), and [*Soledad Brother: The Prison Letters of George Jackson*](#). He was ultimately murdered by prison guards at San Quentin prison in August of 1971. [Reference the It's About Time website for more information on the exhibit and George Jackson].

Also, on October 17 & 18, 2008, in Atlanta, Georgia, there will be an 'Arts & Culture Conference of the Black Panther Party' where, among other things, there will be an art exhibit of *Emory Douglas*. The exhibit will be located at the Southwest Arts Center, The Auburn Library, of Georgia State University. However, it must be reiterated that 'the impact and relevance *today* of the former Black Panther Party and the ongoing struggle for justice are in fact inseparably *intertwined*.' Thus, at the conference, there will be workshops including one wherein former U.S. Congresswoman & current 'Power To The People' U.S. Presidential candidate - Sister [*Cynthia McKinney*](#), along with noted author, law professor, and former national Secretary of Communications for the Black Panther Party - Sister *Kathleen Cleaver* will be discussing the *infamous* [and no doubt *ongoing* U.S. Government program to "neutralize, frame, discredit, imprison" and/or "murder" political activists] known as COINTELPRO i.e. the Counter Intelligence Program. The *current* cases of the "SF8" (San Francisco), the "Angola 3" (Louisiana), and the "Omaha 2" (Nebraska) are three cases of imprisoned veteran Black Panthers *today* that are related to infamous U.S. Government COINTELPRO activities. [Reference the It's About Time website for further information].

The international dimensions and impact of the Black Panther Party, are further highlighted by the fact that poet, musician, activist, and former member of the Black Panther Party - Sister *Charlotte O'Neal* will be traveling to the conference from where she lives in *Tanzania*, East Africa. Additionally, it should be noted that the week after the Atlanta conference, there will be a major exhibit on the Black Panther Party in Manchester, England from the 30th of October into March, 2008. Subsequently, Brother Emory Douglas will be making a presentation in London, England, at the London School of Economics, prior to traveling to Cologne, Germany, where he will make an additional presentation.

It is noteworthy that October is *Black Panther History Month* and it will be observed by persons not only in the United States, but also in Africa, Europe, and elsewhere on the globe. The legacy lives and is embodied in today's *ongoing* struggles for social, economic, and political justice.

In conjunction with today's ongoing struggle and the legacy of the Black Panther Party, Brother Billy X noted that, "People don't realize that [for example], the [Black Panther] Party also worked with and supported [labor] unions" including "the MUNI [transportation] union of municipal drivers in San Francisco, the [automobile workers] union in Fremont [CA], the ATF [American Teachers / Association Federation]", etc. There continue to be many unknown and positive dimensions to the legacy of the Black Panther Party that relate directly to the struggles of the present day 21st Century. These are being shared and delineated to people far and wide by de facto Black Panther Party historian Billy X.

Both Brothers Emory Douglas and Billy X highlighted that they were and continue to be "inspired" by the Black Panther Party. Brother Emory put it this way: "I was inspired by what was going on [in the 1960s and 1970s] and fortunate enough to have the desire to want to do something and be a part of the movement, particularly the Black Panther Party, and my art work is a reflection of the ideology and the politics of the [Black Panther] Party. This art work would not have existed the way it was had it not been for the Black Panther Party." In fact, the young people of today who are doing with some of the same and/or similar issues that were being addressed when the Black Panther Party existed can, as Emory stated, draw upon his art work "to be inspired, not necessarily to duplicate it." In this, the 21st Century, the art of Emory Douglas continues to be in service to the people, young and old alike.

Brother Billy X Jennings commented that: "Many of the social programs that exist in the United States today are *watered down* versions of programs started by the Black Panther Party, including medical programs, programs for prisoners, seniors programs, and community police review board programs as well as numerous other programs. They began with the Black Panther Party." Indeed, an example Brother Billy X noted is a dental program, originally started in Portland, Oregon, by the Black Panther Party, though no longer staffed by Black Panther Party members, "*still* functioning today." Thus, even though the Black Panther Party was ultimately physically "neutralized" and decimated, its accomplishments are nonetheless in many ways indelibly stamped on the political and social landscape and ongoing struggles of today. For a certainty, the true legacy of the Black Panther Party continues to "inspire."

The misconception held by some that the Black Panther Party was strictly a male political organization is forthrightly dispelled by historian Billy X on the *It's About Time* website with a huge section (including subdivisions) devoted to '[Women of the Black Panther Party](http://www.itsabouttimebpp.com/Women_BPP/salute_women_index.html)' [http://www.itsabouttimebpp.com/Women_BPP/salute_women_index.html]. There could have been no viable Black Panther Party

without the many women who were an integral part of the rank and file *and* of its national leadership. Indeed, as Brother Billy X stated, "The [It's About Time](#) website of the Black Panther Party Legacy and Alumni serves a *multitude* of functions." Another of those functions was in evidence when, in the aftermath of hurricane Katrina, it served as a *communications link* putting storm victims in touch with each other, be they former [Black Panther] Party members or not.

From the poignant, incomparable, and inspirational art work of Emory Douglas to the diligence and integrity of Billy X Jennings in preserving the true legacy of the Black Panther Party; the essence of our struggle - the struggle of Black, Brown, Red, Yellow and White peoples - continues to be that of attaining *real* economic, social, and political justice in our communities, our nation, and our world. Billy X Jennings and Emory Douglas, along with so many other sisters and brothers, remain true to the embodiment of this continuing struggle. They continue to inspire and challenge us. Can we do any less?

Onward then brothers and sisters! Onward...


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The BlackCommentator Readers' Corner Blog


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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