

1. This is the tale of two Panthers, both created in 1966: a radical group founded in Oakland California by Huey Newton and Bobby Seale; and a comic-book hero invented in New York City by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby. The political party took shape a few months after the hero's first appearance in *Fantastic Four*, but Newton and Seale were actually inspired by the panther emblem of one of SNCC's political groups in Alabama.
2. Both the Party and the Hero proved popular, as suggested by this graph. The Hero returned in a special Annual issue of the *Fantastic Four* and a year later he fought alongside Captain America for an extended story arc before joining the Avengers. Meanwhile, the Party became a byword for radicalism: two dozen Panthers, dressed in paramilitary outfits and carrying rifles, entered the California State Assembly.
3. Lee and Kirby introduced the Black Panther as T'Challa, the ruler of an African tribe that amalgamates animist tradition with technological wonders. But unlike the movie version from a few months ago, this Wakanda only achieved scientific prowess science under T'Challa's leadership. Like an English settler landed at Plymouth, T'Challa faces the challenge of building a civilization in a wilderness.
4. The story T'Challa tells of his youth is a familiar one: a prince who swears vengeance after his father's death at the hand of vicious colonial invaders. So familiar, in fact, that Ben Grimm, the Thing, claims he knows it already: "Look Kiddo, Why don'tcha save yerself the trouble. I know the rest by heart! Everything wuz hunky dory until the greedy ivory hunters made the scene!"
5. But in this version, the white invaders sought Vibranium, not ivory. Which is to say that Lee and Kirby were trying to update the familiar colonial narrative for a post-colonial age, a period when Britain, France and other European nations were giving up their colonies to local rule. Ulysses Klaue is a modern take on a fifty-year-old stereotype: the rapacious Kurtz from Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*.
6. At the end of the story, the *Fantastic Four* encourage the Black Panther to dedicate himself to the service of all mankind. While outwardly anti-racist, this credo calls on third-world nations to side with the US in maintaining the liberal international order—or, to phrase the point in terms of domestic politics, it calls on historically disadvantaged minorities to voice their support of the liberal consensus.
7. Notably, working within the system is precisely what with the founders of the Black Panther party rejected. Stokely Carmichael said that asking Alabama blacks to participate in Democratic Party primaries as "like asking a Jew to join the Nazi party." So, too, Seale and Newton believed that the best way for Oakland blacks to cope with the hostile police force was armed neighborhood patrols.
8. Two years later, the hero teamed up with Captain America in a story that placed new focus on T'Challa's natural ability as a leader. Thus the story reveals a striking parallel between Cap and the Panther, both graceful fighters who lead through inspiration. But where Cap's costume displays his national colors, the Panther's denotes his ethnicity.
9. If Cap admires the Panther, so too does the Panther admire Cap: "There is no man I will be prouder — to die with" declares T'Challa. In the context of the late 1960s, as black activists turned away from racial cooperation, the Panther's words sound a bit like wish-fulfillment, fan service, but in a political sense.
10. That same summer black athletes on the American Olympic team objected to participating in a similar sort of mutual back-slapping, refusing to shake hands with the president of the Olympic Committee, an American who four years earlier had resisted calls to expel the openly racist

South African regime from the event. What's more, when they stood on the awards podium, they didn't put their hands over their hearts during the US National Anthem but instead raised their fists in the "Black Power" salute.

11. This gesture caused a great deal of consternation. One black reader wrote in to *Life* to pledge her allegiance to America, grouping the Black Panthers alongside the KKK as groups furthering "the cause of hate." Indeed, she went so far as to remind her fellow readers that blacks in Africa had played a key role in the slave trade.
12. For his part, Captain America encouraged the Black Panther to take his own place in the ranks of the Avengers. But T'Challa arrived to find the Avengers mansion locked and dark. To solve the mystery, he had to enter from the roof, like a cat burglar. This plot betrays the interests of the Avengers' young writer, Roy Thomas. Whereas Stan Lee had used the Panther to present an idealized version of international politics, by relocating the character to New York City, Thomas could highlight the plight of ordinary Black Americans.
13. Just as you might expect from that set-up, when the Avengers inside turn up dead, the Black Panther is arrested on suspicion of murder. Of course, he has to break free from the police to clear his name. That's a familiar trope, but the cliché of the falsely accused man takes on a new resonance when the hero is a black man being fired on by police.
14. The ensuing plot is way too crazy to go into here, but let's focus on the symbolism: having recovered a electrified scythe, the Black Panther returns to police headquarters and is nearly gunned down while using it to revive the Avengers from their deathlike trance.
15. Whereupon the Avengers spring into action to teach the police the error of their ways. All quite gratifying—both today in the era of Black Lives Matter, but no less so in the 1960s, when the Black Panther party was patrolling the streets of Oakland in an effort to curb police excesses.
16. In subsequent years, relations between the Black Panthers and the Police became poisonous. In February 1970, *Life* ran a feature article detailing the group's history and describing them as less a literal threat to American society than "a symbol of militant black rage," the conviction that " 'the black man will never get his just dues without the force of violence' "
17. *Life's* 1970 feature article on the group presented a yearbook-layout spread of Black Panthers "murdered" by the police, alongside police "killed in gunfights with the Panthers."
18. The Black Panther Party claimed to "want the same things King wanted" only with "different" tactics. The appeal of those tactics can be heard in the way activists describe the actions of Huey Newton, their charismatic founder: "Armed with an M-1 and a law book, Newton had faced down seven cops in front of a black street crowd. 'Huey did what those people had wanted to do for a long time.'"
19. There's a striking kinship between Newton's style of heroism and the stiff-necked virtue shown by T'Challa. Nonetheless, as the *Life* reporter went on to note, "Newton is now in prison. So is Bobby Seale." And this news coverage was likely the reason that Marvel retired Black Panther active duty in the Avengers in 1971, claiming the need to serve his people in Wakanda. Notably, on this cover he's identified by his real name, not his heroic identity.
20. A year later, the character returned, once again with the emphasis on T'Challa. In the pages that follow, he even announces he's now going by the name "Black Leopard", explaining that his prior moniker has taken on political baggage in the US. Yet, even with his name partly effaced, Marvel's increasingly young and hip writers enjoyed using BP as a means of referencing American racial politics, even if obliquely.