

Black Panther Leader Writes

A review of Elaine Brown's new book, *A Taste of Power: A Black Woman's Story*

A Taste of Power: A Black Woman's Story
written by Elaine Brown
Published by Pantheon Books, a
division of Random House
Price = \$31.50 Canadian

by Tony Tracy

Some years ago, I was given an album recorded by Elaine Brown of the Black Panther Party titled *Seize The Time*. While I was familiar, at that time, with the writings of Eldridge Cleaver (such as *Soul on Ice*), Huey Newton, Bobby Seale, Stokely Carmichael, George Jackson (Soledad Brother), Angela Davis (especially books she wrote after leaving the Panthers and joining the Communist Party USA), I was not familiar at that time with the role which Elaine Brown played in the Black Panthers. The album, recorded at a time when Brown was Deputy Minister of Information for the Southern California Chapter of the Black Panther Party, made me somewhat interested in Elaine Brown. Thus, I was pleasantly surprised to have recently come across Brown's book, *A Taste of Power*.

Brown's book is an autobiography which covers much of her life, beginning with her early childhood, and ending with her leaving the Black Panthers as it began to fall apart in the mid-nineteen-seventies. It is an inspiring and very personal book written by a woman who played a key role in one of the most historically important political movements in the United States, a woman whose struggles led her increasingly towards a revolutionary Marxist approach to change.

Brown's struggles begin with a personal struggle against an inherently racist society and state, and continue through a struggle with sexism within the Black Panthers. At the time in which she joined the

Black Panther Party for Self Defense, leadership roles within the party organization were taken up solely by men. In fact, women played a very subservient role to that of men within the organization (Brown recounts anecdotes about party women having to dress in traditional African clothing and serve the men at social events and meetings). However, she battled the sexism which had become so much a part of the party by taking on more and more responsibility within the party over a period of time.

The Black Panther Party was founded on the revolutionary ideas of Malcolm X (and which was in many ways the closest to the organization which Malcolm had hoped to build before his death by assassination) and increasingly moved towards the idea of Marxism, beginning to analyze the struggle of Blacks within the U.S. as a class issue rather than solely a race issue. The party looked beyond narrow Black Nationalist demands and took the Marxist position that unity between black and white workers is required to obtain black liberation in the U.S. However, the Panthers were very influenced by a strain of Marxism which was dominant at that time (late nineteen-sixties and early seventies), that of Maoism. The party's paper began to describe the party as Marxist-Leninist, and instead of the talk of "armed self defense" (popularized by Malcolm X), the party adopted a slogan of "serve the people" (popularized by followers of Mao Ze Dong). However, the Maoist politics which the Panthers adopted led to a "cult of the personality" built around their party leader, Huey Newton, similar to the cult of the personality around Chairman Mao in China.

Brown had to battle the impact of this cult of the personality within the party. As Brown rose within the party organization, she gives intimate details of her personal relationships with many of the male

leadership figures within the party, and especially Newton. Newton had become her lover, friend and comrade, but ultimately it was Newton who led to Brown leaving the party. Newton became increasingly paranoid and somewhat abusive of the power which he had within the organization, largely due to the psychological impact of years of police harassment and the isolation which came from his forced exile in Cuba, as well as the stress which he felt from being revered within the party in an almost god-like fashion.

When Newton was forced in to exile in Cuba due to a murder charge in the U.S., there was a vacuum in leadership in the party organization. Newton supported Brown taking over the leadership of the party during his exile, but there were many hurdles to overcome in order to implement this change in leadership. Although Brown had, by this time, been a key member of the Central Committee of the party, it was feared that many of the militant black men in the party organization would not accept a woman as the party's leader. Brown combated this by calling a meeting of several hundred leading members of the party, at which she announced her leadership of the party by saying "I have all the guns and all the money. I can withstand a challenge from without and from within. Am I right, comrades?" Her leadership was virtually unchallenged for some time to come.

Brown's courage and dedication to revolutionary change are an inspiration to those who seek an end to racism, sexism, oppression and exploitation. However, key lessons are to be learned from the mistakes which led to the demise of the party and its ultimate failure in building a large-scale organization for the black working class of the United States.

Some Prof's Book

"The Atlantic Provinces in Confederation" Reviewed

By Mark Savoie

Monday Morning, 8 o'clock - Alastair asks me to buy him a cup of coffee. Normally I'd say yes - he having bought me several cups in the past - but today I'm broke and have to beg off. Fifteen minutes later he comes and asks me to do a book review. Feeling somewhat guilty about the coffee I agree. Besides, this is the entertainment section. It'll probably be an action thriller or sci fi/fantasy - something halfway interesting. Instead it's a history textbook on Atlantic Canada. Al says it has nothing to with me not buying him a coffee. *Yeah. Right! And Engineers can read too...*

The book is entitled *The Atlantic Provinces in Confederation* and is edited by D. A. Muise and UNB's E. R. Forbes. The objective of the book is to avoid a mere political history of Atlantic Canada, and to write about the more ordinary citizens of the region. This is an admirable task, and one which this effort succeeds in fulfilling.

One of the problems in reading history is that it is often dry and uninteresting (hardly a news flash, I know). Traditional histories all too often deal solely with the doings of the Legislative Assembly. Unfortunately, as Big Bad Brian has been at pains to teach us of late, the doings of government are often out of tune with reality. Take Bernard Valcourt's latest UI blatherings, for example.

The history of a region is more accurately portrayed by discussing how the people lived, not how they were governed. In a large sense, traditional histories have approached history from the latter side of the behavioral vs. ideational argument. This book is most definitely a behavioral history, although admittedly, there are a few smatterings of ideational content.

The book discusses the cultural content of the Atlantic provinces. A quick glance through the book shows the social importance of the Halifax skating rink in the 1880s, the fishing industry in the Bay of Fundy in the 1930s, or the effect of the loss of the Intercolonial Railway to the Canadian National in the 1920s. The chapter breakdowns are by decade, a simple but artificial policy. Everyone knows that a new world order does not begin with the turning of each new decade. The twenties began with the ending of WWI in 1918 and ended with the stock market crash in 1929. The thirties ended when Hitler invaded Poland in 1939 and the forties ended just six years later when Japan surrendered in 1945. The fifties were a long decade, not ending until JFK got his head blown off in Dallas in 1963. However, in music terms the decade breakdown would also be different, as it would be in sports terms, with a subsequent breakdown by individual sports. As a result the artificial breakdown represents a justifiable compromise.

What else can I tell you? It's a good book, but I can't in good conscience tell you to rush out and buy it. If you're really really really interested in Atlantic history and want to know about the people who are the region's inhabitants, then go ahead. It will become, in all likelihood, a text for the Atlantic history courses on campus. If you end up taking one of these course, don't bitch about having to get another textbook. It is a useful book, and it only does only cost 30 bucks. (\$150 for engineers who can read. \$200 for the 90% who can't.) So stop your whining and buy the damn thing.

WHAT'S GWAN ON

EVENING OF OVERTURES

Event Date: Feb. 22, 1993, 8:00 pm
Place: Memorial Hall, UNB
Fredericton Campus

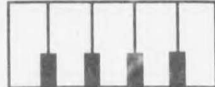
An evening where the old meets the new, as Synthetic Technology present a concert of popular classical music played on synthesizers, as well as a variety of contemporary music written for synthesizers. The production will feature synthesist Alan Edwards, assisted by computers, and other musicians and technicians in a show that includes lights, lasers and computer animations.

Backgrounds: Alan Edwards has been plying synthesizers for choirs and musicals for many years now.

Recent credits include his original score for TNB's 1991 production of *Dracula*, the musical accompaniment to the 1991 Canada Day fireworks show, and the orchestral music for the Fredericton productions of *Brigadoon* (1991), *Into the Woods* (1992), and *Messiah* 200 (1992).

This concert will be his first performance using the Laser Harp, an instrument he recently finished building.

Tickets: \$5.00 Students/\$8.00 everyone else. Available at Tony's Music Box, Queen St., or through the office of the Director of Music in Mem. Hall UNB.



The Hemlock Club

(UNB's Student Philosophy Club)

presents
a lecture by
Dr. Leslie Armour
Professor of Philosophy,
University of Ottawa

Tuesday, Feb. 23, 2:30 pm,
in the philosophy Seminar Room
(C128).

"Descartes' Malign Genie
and the Good God"

*Could there possibly be a world
in which the malign genie could
succeed in confusing every-
body?*

**Coffee and Cookies
will be served**



Presenting

Eric Oland, baritone
Wendy Nielson, soprano
Michael McMahon, piano

Atlantic audiences will be able to enjoy the superb operatic sounds of baritone Erik Oland and soprano Wendy Nielsen as they tour this month with Michael McMahon, Canada's most outstanding vocal accompanist. Both Oland and Nielsen hail from New Brunswick and are two of Canada's finest singers. Nielsen holds a Masters of Music in Opera from the University of British Columbia and is currently a resident artist with Canadian Opera Company. Oland has played many roles

in opera including Guglielmo in Mozart's *Così fan tutte* with Symphony Nova Scotia. McMahon is professor of song interpretation at McGill University in Montreal and has toured this region with other Debut Atlantic artists including Sonia Racine, Kevin McMillan, Lyne Fortin and Richard Margison. The trio will perform works by Haydn, Brahms, & Duparc as they tour throughout Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Newfoundland. The Tour is generously supported by IGA and Northern Telecom.