This book may appear to be a traditional biography; it is not. While I use biographic material to present a case study of radical women’s spiritual wellness practices and the emerging carceral state, this book is as much a history as it is an oral memoir. Sister Love uses historical scholarship to substantiate Ericka’s memories. What emanated from the vast oral history archive I created via interviews and the numerous primary source materials was deep and wide. The coupling of archival collections with oral histories readily embodied not only an interdisciplinary approach to historical research as it relates to biography but also shed light on the distinctness of Black women’s biography. The writings and letters of Ericka and her peers, court and prison records, newspaper articles, photographs, FBI documents, unpublished material, and internal memos on the Panthers’ Oakland Community School, only begun to scratch the surface of Ericka’s life. I was privy to rare documents including an archive of never published letters she penned in prison and a log kept by correctional officers on her activities and movement in prison. These materials coupled with my long-term research engagement with Ericka, allow me to tell a deeper story about the inner workings and intricacies of her life and the profound impact of feminist organizing in the BPP and in prisons. So, although this book begins with oral history and memories, these elements are always in conversation with archival documents from the past. This approach is ultimately a dialogue between past and present, memory and meaning making, what is [fill in the blank] and what is forgotten.

Ericka’s desire to feel included as part of this storytelling and oral history repositions women as historical objects to historical subjects. In our ongoing conversations, she emphasized the importance of primary sources in telling the experiences of BPP members. She wanted to ensure I had read, really read, what BPP members wrote about their lives: “I just want you to understand how it feels to be written about while we are still alive.”[[1]](#footnote-43) Ericka recognized the power dynamic within the research process. Inasmuch as she recognized the power I held as a historian of Black women she also owned and exerted her agency as [fill in the blank]. Her language demands attention to feelings in the past, feelings that came up in our conversations, and feelings about being a part of history by making them a precondition to the interview. Expressing her commitment to affective relations, she stresses, “I care about your work.”[[2]](#footnote-44) Empathy, for Ericka, is crucial to human connection and political action. For me, it is important to both activism and the process of making history. [maybe insert a sentence here that connects the two previous sentences] Her insistence on honoring her humanity and feeling integral to the historical record [insert how that impacted your and/or your work].

Ericka’s personal account serves as political and historical intervention. This BPP intervention, which included the development of an alternative analysis in understanding intellectual work, departs from Eurocentric models of scholarship. It requires that scholarship promote intercommunal solidarity to legitimize the power of the community. Ericka and I were one in the same - she does not make distinctions between who can be a scholar based on their level of formal education.[[3]](#footnote-45) The ideas of BPP co-founders, Huey, Bobby Seale, and former Chairperson Elaine Brown tell a powerful narrative, but what is that narrative? Ericka forces us to wrestle with the questions of who controls the narrative? Who has voice, volume, and value? Whose words have power and meaning?

1. Ericka Huggins, author interview, February 20, 2010. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
2. Ericka Huggins, author interview, February 20, 2010. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
3. My use of terms intellectual and scholar are synonymous. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)