

- 1) How did you become involved in the BPP?  
-What motivated you to do so?
- 2) What was unique about the bpp in philadelphia?
- 3)What challenges have you faced or seen women face in this line of business?  
-how did you go against these struggles?
- 4)How did having a past in activism affect your everyday life? Is it still affecting you now?
- 5) How important do you think women were in the bpp?
- 6) What would be your advice to young women trying to go into activism?
- 7)Have you seen any changes with how people go about activism. For example the Black panther party and black lives matter movement. How are they similar how are they different?

## NOTES

Rosemari:

1. Challenges - we don't view struggle as a business. You might want to rephrase this question as challenges in their involvement in the struggle or the liberation of Black people. It's a commitment.
  - a. **How did you become involved?** It goes back to my origins as a black woman. I grew up in the south with segregation which was horrible. I hated not having the same access as white people and being called a nigger. My father encouraged me to speak up. My parents said go wherever you want. I was studying black history. We studied about black folk for one week. I was in all black schools. I had a spirit from my family. We had to struggle to be better. We had to achieve in spite of the racism and ugliness of the environment. It was a transition (joining the BPP). It didn't just happen in 1970. I was involved in the civil rights movement. I worked at Children's Hospital struggling to make sure black women had health care. That contributed to me understanding I had to make a contribution to the struggle. I couldn't sit on the sidelines. We were being beaten by the police, and our housing was terrible. Meanwhile in my political activism I became involved (when I say "I," I mean the movement)...We realized we had to plug into something. This was the time when Frank Rizzo was police chief and he was very hostile. Cracked heads. Went after young Black youth. The Panthers had an office not far from where we lived. The house we lived in was a commune where a whole lot of people were living. In Philadelphia people were resisting the war in Vietnam and people were struggling with housing. I was aware that the BPP existed in Philadelphia. We provided clothing and gave donations. In 1969 in Chicago something terrible happened. Fred Hampton, the chairperson of Illinois BPP was assassinated by the police in his bed. His wife was pregnant at the time and was wounded. The BPP in Philadelphia wanted to pay tribute to him. He was outspoken and a great organizer. He brought together whites and Latinos. The panthers asked us to drive them out to Chicago. I was with them and also Mumia Abu Jamal, who is now in prison on death row. When we got to

Chicago we went to the BPP headquarters. The people in Chicago were so outraged that people were coming out in the thousands. They organized it so you could go to the house where he was assassinated. I saw a blood stained mattress and bullet holes and I was traumatized. When I got home I left my job and joined the BPP. I didn't necessarily agree with everything but after I saw what was happening I decided I had to become involved.

**Challenges:** Women have always paid a price in any struggle, and especially black women. How to take care of our children was a challenge. During that period there was a challenge about whether you would live or die. We were at war. This country was at war with this group. How do you, as a woman come forth and show leadership and take care of children at the same time? You do that collectively by bonding with other women. You find that the issues were the same for poor women and other black women. When the party broke up and I wasn't a member, the challenge was how to continue to carry out the commitment. You found other organizations to become a part of.

The other challenge was emotional. Sometimes you are separated from your children. I sent my son to live with my parents for his protection. When we got back together he didn't trust me right away.

The ultimate challenge was when I got my degrees and went into the world of work. I had an FBI file. When I interviewed for a job they would say they loved me but then someone else would get the job. How do you overcome this history? I could have gone back into the world or the corporate world. But I became a teacher and ended up going to law school to find another way to make a commitment to the struggle. Sisterhood was very powerful.

It's still affecting me in a very positive way. I still do political work. I teach immigrant rights. I go into prison to work with Africans seeking asylum. I do work around Cuban and Palestinian solidarity.

**Advice to young women:**

Having the kinds of discussions and listening to women who were involved in the struggle is important. We emerged as leaders. Women were the backbone of BPP but you rarely hear about them.

Select an issue that you think is important. For example climate change, charter schools, education, not having money for college. Find what you have a passion for and then link up with other young people. Don't fear it. Talk to other young people and create a community. Find adults who will support you. Frederick Douglass said power will never be achieved without struggle. Things are really bad now on all levels. Select an organization or form one. History is so important. You have to know where we were so you don't make the same mistakes we made.

Use your pen as a weapon if you like writing. Don't depend on social media to organize. People need face to face contact. We have a challenge to get a fascist president out of office. And look at what the senators just did. We need young people to register to vote. Use social media but people also need physical contact and need to talk to you and understand your passion.

## Possible questions

1. You are highlighting Black women in the Black Panther Party (BPP) across the country. Since Rosemary Mealy was an important person in PHILADELPHIA, you might want to ask her what was unique or important to the story about the BPP in Philadelphia.
2. You might want to find out, directly from her, why she chose to join this group as a way to address the racism and inequality she saw in Philadelphia and in America.
3. You might want to ask her, in her own words, what particular challenges WOMEN faced as members and leaders. How did she try and make things better for women and how did she help recruit more women?
4. And, finally, since you have information about her (and the other women) and how they went on with their lives, you might want to find out how being in the BPP had an impact on the career that she chose (she got a law degree and a PhD, and still teaches courses at a university).