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# *The Black Power Mixtape 1967-1975*

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*The Black Power Mixtape 1967 - 1975* is a curious collection of film stills and ephemera curated by Yona Backer and filmmaker Göran Hugo Olsson, serving as a corollary to the documentary of the same title. Because the exhibition feels more like a loosely gathered time capsule than a concrete or qualitative study, one could infer that the overarching tone of almost disorganized empathy is due to the undeniably “outsider” status of the possessors of the gaze. That white Swedish reporters swooped in to investigate and document the plight of people involved in and around the Black Power Movement and Black Panther Party, in a different country with different socioeconomic and cultural circumstances feels, in certain moments, like saucer-eyed, innocent aliens attempting to digest a situation that is clearly unjust, without quite fully comprehending the actual depth and breadth of its oppression.

In one corner a black and white film clip plays, depicting an uncomfortably fumbling encounter with a police officer. “Are they going to follow us all the time that we are here?” asks a Swedish-sounding voice, almost naively. This footage repeats, with a shaky handheld view of the gum-chewing detective shuffling rather awkwardly in front of the lens while lint collects and tumbles past the camera’s gate. The voice sounds naïve, almost childlike, to any viewer who understands even slightly what undisguised horrors unfolded in the United States before civil rights (and what subtle transgressions and inequities occur to this day in spite of efforts to the contrary). More simply, to quote Angela Davis, “When someone asks me about violence, I just find it incredible, because what it means is that the person who’s asking that question has absolutely no idea what black people have gone through, what black people have experienced in this country, since the time the first black person was kidnapped from the shores of Africa.”

From this brief glimpse of grainy film stills, an evocative moment on 16mm, and a glass display case full of pamphlets, books, and other sundry literature placing the Black Power Movement and its subsequent ripples in historical context, the viewer gains little more than a sense of confused urgency. It is as though even the filmmakers and ephemera-collectors scarcely knew what they sought to accomplish by collecting this material. The film stills are an even-handed mixture of daily life transpiring and intense moments with revolutionaries and icons, from Angela Davis’s stoic face, eyes cast downward, set against the sickly blue walls of her prison cell, to an almost abstract overhead, wide view of children playing basketball on a rain-soaked court at night.

It is as though this exhibition seeks to explain a revolution that was preceded by hundreds of years of anguish by simply presenting paltry souvenirs, wide-eyed reportage, and a few dreamy abstractions. A viewer with some sense of American history might wonder if the Swedish team documenting these pioneers and their surroundings were somehow exempt from the concepts of racism and classism before crash-landing headlong into an epic struggle—this is a portrait of a complicated movement that never actually reveals anything deeper than its jumbled, eye-catching veneer.