

Press Kit: Long Bio

Ericka Huggins is a human rights activist, poet, educator, Black Panther leader and former political prisoner. For the past 37 years, she has lectured throughout the United States and internationally. Her extraordinary life experiences have enabled her to speak personally and eloquently on issues relating to the physical and emotional well-being of women, children and youth, whole being education, over incarceration, and the role of the spiritual practice in sustaining activism and promoting social change.

As a result of her 14-year tenure as a leading leader of the Black Panther Party (the longest of any woman in leadership), she brings a unique, complete and honest perspective to the challenges and successes of the Black Panther Party and, its significance today.

Ericka's desire to serve humanity began in 1963, when she attended the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. There, she committed to moving from the sidelines to the frontlines in the global human rights movement. In 1968, at age 18, she became a leader in the Los Angeles chapter of the Black Panther Party with her husband John Huggins.

Three weeks after the birth of their daughter in 1969, John Huggins was killed and Huggins was widowed. After returning to New Haven, Connecticut to be with John's family, Ericka was invited by community members and Yale University students to open a party chapter there. She accepted the invitation.

In May 1969, Huggins and fellow Party leader Bobby Seale were targeted and arrested on conspiracy charges sparking "Free Bobby, Free Ericka" rallies across the country. The resulting trial, one of the longest and most celebrated of the era, spawned several books.

While awaiting trial for two years before charges were dropped, including time in solitary confinement, Huggins taught herself to meditate as a means to survive incarceration. From this time on, she would incorporate spiritual practice into daily life, her community work and teaching as a tool for change - not only for herself, but for all people.

A lifelong writer and poet, upon release from prison in 1971, Ericka became writer and editor for the Black Panther Intercommunal News Service. In 1974, her book of poetry chronicling her experience of imprisonment and liberation, *Insights and Poems*, co-authored with Huey P. Newton, was published. Her poetry and writings have appeared in numerous magazines and books.

From 1973-1981, Huggins was Director of the Oakland Community School, a groundbreaking community-run child development center and elementary school

founded by the Black Panther Party. She created the vision for the innovative curriculum for the school, which became a model for and predecessor to the charter school movement.

In 1976, Ericka Huggins became both the first woman and the first Black person to be appointed to the Alameda County Board of Education.

In 1979, ten years after her release from prison, Huggins returned to California state, county and federal prisons and jails to share her experiences of yoga and meditation. A focus of her volunteer effort was her work with incarcerated youth. She has continued this work with adults and, in addition, has continued to teach in homes for foster and adopted children and pregnant teens. For the past 25 years, she has also taught relaxation and mindfulness in California youth correctional facilities in addition to many Northern California public school districts and community colleges.

In 1990, at the height of public awareness of HIV / AIDS, Huggins was the first woman practical support volunteer coordinator at the world-renowned Shanti Project. She also developed a unique volunteer support program for women and children with HIV in the Tenderloin and Mission districts of San Francisco. During her time at Shanti Project, Huggins helped develop citywide programs for the support of gay, lesbian, bi-sexual, transgender and questioning youth with HIV / AIDS.

From 2003-2011 I was a professor of Women and Gender Studies at San Francisco State University and California State University-East Bay. From 2008-2015 I was professor of Sociology and African American Studies in the Peralta Community College District.

Currently Ericka is a facilitator with World Trust. An Oakland-based organization, World Trust uses films that document, through story, the impact of systems of racial inequity. These films are tools that foster conversation about race, and other structural inequities.

In addition Ericka Huggins is available as a keynote speaker through The Institute for Democratic Education and Culture, Speak Out Now.

Ericka is also available for events that feature the documentary film, *Black Panthers: Vanguard of the Revolution*, to lead a lively and engaging post-screening discussion. You can contact her through her website [here](#).

Press Kit: Short Bio- Ericka Huggins

Ericka Huggins is an educator, former Black Panther Party member, and political prisoner, human rights activist and poet.

For 37 years Ericka has lectured in the United States, and internationally on human rights, Restorative Justice and, the role of spiritual practice in sustaining activism and promoting social change. She highlights the importance of inclusive grassroots movements that honor the voices of the marginalized, especially youth.

Ericka's work as a speaker and facilitator is based in her belief in the greatness of each human heart. She believes that each of us has the ability to look there for the answers to questions about the future of our world.