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University of San Francisco

Examining Revolution through Breakfast Politics

A Thesis Project Presented to
The Faculty of the College of Arts and Sciences
International Studies Department

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Masters of Arts in International Studies

By
Zachary Axel Clausen
May 2022

Examining Revolution Through Breakfast Politics

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS
in
INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

by Zachary Axel Clausen
April 30, 2022

UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

Under the guidance and approval of the committee, and approval by all the members, this thesis project has been accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree.

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ABSTRACT

Analyzing the Black Panther Party and its activities, this study develops a framework for evaluating revolution through a process-oriented examination of discourse and practices surrounding the Free Breakfast Program's emergence and operation from around 1968 to 1975. The program began in Oakland and quickly spread to over 36 cities in less than two years. Using a swath of interviews, radio shows, movies, newspapers, magazines, documents, pictures and other forms of media from the time period, I analyze the Breakfast Program to explicate the political terrain of food provision, the unique community-based approach to non-hierarchical resource distribution, and the production of a revolutionary educational paradigm. The analysis finds that food distribution and access forms a tool for communal survival, as opposed to a mechanism of oppression within a complex network of political relationships. It also interprets the organizational practices of the Breakfast Program to develop a new socialistic perspective on community programs, characterized by "power to the people," reciprocal obligations, a proliferation of community-serving horizontal spaces, and the continual return to communal needs and survival. Finally, I find that the operation of the Breakfast Program produces a unique approach to the education of community members about both their circumstances and ability to change them. This investigation also identifies various conflicts and tensions -- such as the teacher/student dynamic, and a controversial politics of inclusion -- which arose within the framework of the Breakfast Program. As a study of the Black Panther Party's Free Breakfast Program in its specificity, these findings serve not only as an important tool for analyzing a past revolution, but also as a suggestion for the constitution of future alternative social orders.

DEDICATION

For ALC -- forever my intellectual comrade.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To my mother, for your unending love and sacrifice; to my father, for your purposeful patience; to my sister, for everything; to Danny, for your lifelong friendship; to Christian, for the chess games; to Peter, for the laughs; to Axel, to Irma, to Peter, to Lillian, with my love; to my family, for your love; to Dr. Pham, for giving me the gift of critique; to Jenny Murphy, for giving me the gift of perspective; to Paolo Biccheri, for giving me the gift of presence; to Thomas, for setting me right; to The Page, for setting me wrong; to the Gleeson Library, for the books I'll never return to you; to Joseph Wolf, for your lasting impact; to Jamie, Dzu, Charlie, and Justin, for helping me achieve the professional as well as the political; to Horsefeather, for my Friday's; to Fool's Errand, for your counter space; to Divisadero Street, my home; to San Francisco, my place; to the people, for the future.

“Hey, that’s what we do. We’re in the business of making people’s dreams come true.”
Jamie Joyce

“The whole world’s a private party, man, and none of us are invited.”
Man at Madrone

“There’s no such thing as a free lunch.”
Milton Friedman

“Everything, as you see, depends on the way things are put.”
Karl Marx

“A reworking of one is a reworking of everything.”
Quynh N. Pham

PREFACE

Throughout my graduate studies, my interests produced a dilemma for me that I sought to address through my approach to writing my thesis. On the one hand, I found the theoretical motivations for radical change to be the most important in shaping my own thought. The more critical theory that I read, the more I began to find myself developing my own framework for examining the world around me. Of course, examining the world around us proves insufficient for creating actual change; “the task, now, is not to merely understand the world, but to change it.”¹ On the other hand, then, I found specific case studies and historical analyses to be the most compelling indicators of the possibility for revolutionary action. Pointing to examples of when people and organizations actually created change in their societies not only provided a font of inspiration for my own thinking, but also helped me to articulate my alternative tendencies by drawing on the rich historical action of people against systems of exploitation. This thesis is an attempt to reconcile these two impetuses: providing a critical analysis of systems of organization through a conceptual framework, while grounding the concepts I employ in exemplary historical action. My writing here aims to investigate the conceptual notion of revolution while providing for the dynamic nature of its action.

This project originally began as an investigation into the Black Panther Party’s revolutionary activities. At first, my research focused largely on the Party’s use of violence and firearms in their revolutionary campaign. In order to properly situate my concepts, I turned to the specific discourse which emerged at the height of the Party’s activities; through this I hoped to provide a complex account of a singular revolution which might inspire contemporary action. Interestingly, the more I read about the Party’s violent enterprise, the more I found references to

¹ Karl Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy* (Paris, France, 1847).

a seemingly unrelated venture: breakfast. The feeding of children, I realized, featured just as prominently in *The Black Panther Intercommunal News Service* as explicitly violent activities. The focus of my investigation of revolution increasingly revolved around this survival program's operation. How could filling the stomachs of hungry black children factor into a revolution so eminently? Much of the scholarship surrounding the Breakfast Program operates on one of two assumptions: either the Party knew that liberation could be achieved through the provision of food, or the provision of food seemed necessary for engaging in actual revolutionary activity. These assumptions frustrated me. I found that even my own interactions with these authors came to accept breakfast within the category of revolutionary activity without accounting for the singularity, that is the unique circumstances, within which food came to operate in such a radical manner. Much of the scholarship demonstrated the breakfast intersected with social reproduction, activism, service, and community survival, essentially focusing on the systemic and structural failures which provided for the vacuum in which the provision of food became an alternative. These analyses, however, stopped short of providing an account for the alternative reality which the feeding of breakfast produced. That is to say, I found that contemporary investigations failed to articulate the reality of an alternative paradigm through the feeding of hungry black schoolchildren. Sure, the economic system created the conditions of hunger, and the Black Panther Party addressed this obstacle in a manner which came to be understood as revolutionary, but at this point much of the scholarship I encountered crushed the dynamic character of the Breakfast Program under wider conceptual notions of radical change.

It was within this context that I began to investigate the Breakfast Program as a paradigm in and of itself. I discovered a teacher's guide to the Program by Mary Potorti, which expounded

on the potential for learning found in an analysis of the Black Panther's survival programs.² This inspired me to begin to consider not only the Breakfast Program as an interesting case of struggle, but also as an exemplary set of actions from which I might be able to better understand revolutionary possibilities. In the spirit of Fanon's framework for revolution provisionally grounded within a specific historical circumstance³, I sought to purge myself of my own concept of revolution and allow for the discourse surrounding the Breakfast Program to provide me with new categories, concepts and approaches to change. My research began to move in new directions, most prominently politics, community, and education. While other scholarship indeed dealt with these concepts, it largely did so through perspectives and lenses which existed previously and outside of the Breakfast Program itself. I aimed to deal carefully with the Panther's discourse, in such a way that would produce a proprietary account of a revolutionary event.

By the end of my first year of graduate school, I began to observe a certain fatalism set in among my peers. The weight of a hyper-critical view of the world crippled many of the more idealistic among us. This pessimism seemed to be shared not only by my colleagues, but as a whole by a world facing a pandemic, war and financial uncertainty. The more that we learned about the systems of oppression in which we found ourselves, the less it seemed we might find an alternative. The Breakfast Program, for me, is that alternative. In moments like this, one must ask oneself what sorts of systems act upon us in such a way that revolution becomes inarticulate, and search for those moments where these limits have been broken. It is my hope that you, the reader, will also think about revolution in new, and importantly: alternative, ways.

² Mary Potorti, "Feeding Revolution: The Black Panther Party and the Politics of Food," *Radical Teacher* 98 (February 27, 2014): 43–51, <https://doi.org/10.5195/rt.2014.80>.

³ Fanon, Frantz, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 2004).

INTRODUCTION

A brief history of the intersection of food and revolution

To transform power one must begin with the world around us; thus is the unavoidable behavior of true revolution. The immense project of world changing begins not with sweeping generalizations but particular actions. How could a shift to an alternative reality begin, but with one alternative circumstance, one small change in the world around us? The most potent of these actions have to do with the mundane, the everyday, the immanent. Power manifests itself in the extremities of our experiences, and so it is there we must begin to manipulate it. Perhaps unsurprisingly, it is exactly around these familiar objects of life where we find historical revolutionary organizing. One such object features prominently in recent radical memory: food.

The Boston Tea Party of 1773 springs quickly to our collective American memories: reacting to increased taxation from a colonial oppressor, American revolutionaries callously destroyed the British's favorite food item.⁴ A few years later, the rising price of bread in France -- the primary component of the working person's diet -- catalyzed the looming French revolution.⁵ After a tax made it illegal for Indians to gather their own salt around the coast, Mahatma Gandhi led 78 other people -- which eventually grew to thousands -- on a journey of protest in March of 1930; it would eventually lead to his arrest.⁶ Emiliano Zapata, responding to the landowning aristocracy's control of land and water resources for sugar-cane production, helped to incite the Mexican Revolution in 1910. His slogan of "tierra y libertad" (land and liberty) referred exactly to the ability of the poor rural masses to grow their own food.⁷ Almost

⁴ History com Editors, "Boston Tea Party," HISTORY, accessed March 15, 2022, <https://www.history.com/topics/american-revolution/boston-tea-party>.

⁵ Una McIlvenna, "How Bread Shortages Helped Ignite the French Revolution," HISTORY, accessed March 15, 2022, <https://www.history.com/news/bread-french-revolution-marie-antoinette>.

⁶ "Salt March | Definition, Causes, History, & Facts | Britannica," accessed March 15, 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Salt-March>.

⁷ Sharon Healey, "'Tierra y Libertad!' A 100 Year-Old Echo for the Maya of Chiapas," *Human Rights & Human Welfare* 1, no. 2 (January 1, 2001), <https://digitalcommons.du.edu/hrhw/vol1/iss2/3>.

80 years later, the Zapatista Army of National Liberation continued the fight for indigenous ownership over land and food production.⁸ In 1952, a new government emerged from the Guatemalan Revolution -- helmed by democratically elected Jacobo Arbenz -- and planned to redistribute agrarian land used for food production to rural workers; two years later, the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, at the behest of the United Fruit Company, armed, trained and organized a reactionary counterinsurgency to topple Arbenz's government.⁹ In many places that one finds revolution, one also seems to encounter food.

Despite its apparent prevalence in the history of radical movements, the scholarship surrounding the revolutionary potential for food as an object or as a category remains scarce.¹⁰ One more likely runs into an article about the advent of an unprecedented nutritional schematic for body builders than an investigation into the oppressive or emancipatory potential of nutrition. The historical intersection of food and revolution, however, sufficiently situates the present analysis, and gives weight to the conclusions contained therein.

What, then, is a revolution?

The functioning of the Breakfast Program reveals a way of interacting with the world, a consummate formation of ideas mediated by and in mediation of the circumstances in which they were produced. The revolutionary need not begin with “imagine that there once was...” for

⁸ “A Spark of Hope: The Ongoing Lessons of the Zapatista Revolution 25 Years On | NACLA,” accessed March 15, 2022, <https://nacla.org/news/2019/01/18/spark-hope-ongoing-lessons-zapatista-revolution-25-years>.

⁹ “June 27, 1954: Elected Guatemalan Leader Overthrown in CIA-Backed Coup - Zinn Education Project,” accessed March 15, 2022, <https://www.zinnedproject.org/news/tdih/jacobo-arbenz-guzman-deposed/>.

¹⁰ Although, I must acknowledge Sidney Mintz's profound work *Sweetness and Power*, in which he studies the relationship between the European empire and sugar. This exception seems to prove the rule, however, as it stands alone in its scope. I also would like to acknowledge the recent works of Ricky J. Pope and Shawn T. Flanigan (Pope, Ricky J., and Shawn T. Flanigan. “Revolution for Breakfast: Intersections of Activism, Service, and Violence in the Black Panther Party's Community Service Programs.” *Social Justice Research* 26, no. 4 (December 2013): 445–70.), Mary Potorti (Potorti, Mary. “Feeding Revolution: The Black Panther Party and the Politics of Food.” *Radical Teacher* 98 (February 27, 2014): 43–51.), and Nik Heynen (Heynen, Nik. “Bending the Bars of Empire from Every Ghetto for Survival: The Black Panther Party's Radical Antihunger Politics of Social Reproduction and Scale.” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 99, no. 2 (April 22, 2009): 406–22.) in carrying the mantle of this important investigation as it relates to the Panther Party.

revolution is no new event! One need not imagine.¹¹ The revolutionary begins by looking to revolution: its examples are manifold. The Breakfast Program provided an incredibly inspiring model of what our politics could look like. It is from this point that this paper continues, not as a thematic underpinning, but a point from which we leap off.¹² If indeed, as countless have claimed, the Breakfast Program was revolutionary, we ask: what was that revolution? And what may we learn from it?

Making an inquiry

For me, what is most important about an inquiry is changing one's perception of what's possible in a society. The Black Panthers did not consider themselves the tacit subjects of oppression; they acted as if they were already free! From the same token that one cannot know something to be possible, one also cannot know it to be impossible. An inquiry into the events of their revolution does two things at once. It first exposes the mechanisms by which power actually works in the world (of which, unfortunately, people are usually unaware). Radical action solicits

¹¹ "Not infrequently, training course participants call attention to the 'danger of *conscientizacao*' in a way that reveals their own fear of freedom. Critical consciousness, they say, is anarchic. Others add that critical consciousness may lead to disorder. Some, however, confess: Why deny it? I was afraid of freedom. I am no longer afraid!" Paulo Friere, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 49. As Friere rightfully acknowledges, the study of consciousness' tendency to disclose paths to freedom consecrates the criticism of it as an abstract method. This contradictory contention attempts to obfuscate the manner by which the understanding of revolutionary consciousness can arise from the study of the specific circumstances of its production.

¹² "Marx treats the social movement as a process of natural history, governed by laws not only independent of human will, consciousness and intelligence, but rather, on the contrary, determining that will, consciousness and intelligence. ... If in the history of civilisation the conscious element plays a part so subordinate, then it is self-evident that a critical inquiry whose subject-matter is civilisation, can, less than anything else, have for its basis any form of, or any result of, consciousness. That is to say, that not the idea, but the material phenomenon alone can serve as its starting-point. Such an inquiry will confine itself to the confrontation and the comparison of a fact, not with ideas, but with another fact. For this inquiry, the one thing of moment is, that both facts be investigated as accurately as possible, and that they actually form, each with respect to the other, different momenta of an evolution; but most important of all is the rigid analysis of the series of successions, of the sequences and concatenations in which the different stages of such an evolution present themselves." *European Messenger*, St. Petersburg, May Number, 1872, pp. 427-436. Here we see, through a criticism of Marx's method, a representation of the place of consciousness within our analysis. If indeed we seek to understand the manner by which one arrives at a revolutionary consciousness, then we must begin with the circumstances which limit and authorize its creation. For that, a variety of 'facts' (understood in a sense not contemporary with modern science's appropriation of the term) must be confronted through the Panther's and their contemporaries' discourse in order to understand *the conditions for the production of a revolutionary consciousness*.

reactionary strategies; in this way, a framework of struggle is revealed. It's not just a matter of exposing the structures of power, however, but also doing so in a way that embodies an alternative. Such a study of the Breakfast Program offers its student a prefigurative politics; a manner by which to approach our human proceedings.

An effective inquiry is a direct intervention. To understand the Breakfast Program is to understand the conditions for its possibility. All movements, institutions and programs emerge not in a desert but within specific implicit systems which condition their production. These conditions are necessarily different across circumstances, but across the board shape our most intimate and familiar behavior with or without us knowing it. By examining the Breakfast Program, we begin to piece together the system of limits, inclusions and exclusions which allow for a revolutionary program to emerge.

The task: to problematize

To provide a theory of revolution is to task oneself with the impossible. A cursory investigation of the notion reveals a diverse terrain of interpretation and history. In this way, revolution presents itself much more clearly as a problem to be engaged than a solution to be excavated. Our investigation must not accept the categories with which it is presupposed, but instead conduct a polemic engagement. That is to say, this analysis will suspend the typical explanations given for activities such as those connected to the Breakfast Program in the late 60's and early 70's. Revolution itself is a process, an ongoing engagement; to consider it as anything other than a problem, then, would be to engage with it in bad faith. A problem persists, a conclusion slips away like a mile marker in the rear view mirror. *The task becomes to problematize revolution.* The work has to do with the processes by which new forms of consciousness arise. The goal is to peel back the candied disfiguration of revolution and present

it in its dynamic, complex form. History shows us that revolution has always been a problem, one at stake in a range of social struggles. Engaging in a study of revolution necessarily involves an exposition of the rich historical action against the system by the people, by which new forms of consciousness can be developed. For the Black Panthers, revolution became a well elaborated internal system of thought. It was through the practical as well as theoretical knowledge produced by institutions like the Breakfast Program that Panthers came to understand the world around them; by examining that program, we too hope to come to a revolutionary perspective. Our critical engagement involves understanding the operation of the Breakfast Program through the discontinuities and relations within the frameworks of power's perception. We pose the question of revolution at the level of the Breakfast Program, so that we might allow for the production and operation of new social movements.¹³

The reader must keep in mind that the positions held within this paper are not meant to be taken as "truth" or "fact". Rather, the stipulations contained here represent observations and connections made about complex processes at a specific moment through an elaborated methodology. To borrow from Bookchin, one might characterize this as a "process-driven dialectical approach".¹⁴ Bookchin insightfully points out how an engagement with the fluidity of events and concepts helps to come "much closer to the truth... than a presumably clearer analytical approach so favored by academic logicians. The nature of dealing with these processes is that, despite our best intentions, they rarely present themselves into the easily distinguishable,

¹³ "These three moments constitute the specificity of the European oppression of African peoples *at the level of methodology*... Yet the specificity of the various manifestations of European oppression of African peoples in particular countries is constituted by *detailed historical analyses* that enact the three methodological moments." Cornel West, "Marxist Theory and the Specificity of Afro-American Oppression". The focus of West's analysis on the specificity of historical phenomenon in contributing to a larger analytical schemata mirrors the approach of this investigation insofar as it recognizes that conceptions of revolution can only be authentically inaugurated by its specific occurrences. A detailed historical analysis of the Breakfast Program enacts specific moments of revolutionary insight.

¹⁴ Murray Bookchin, *The Ecology of Freedom*, 78."

sharp categories of traditional positivist texts. That being said, our investigation is nonetheless useful; these processes require investigation not just in spite of, but exactly because of their complexity.

Making the incision

The following analysis of discourse relies entirely on statements made during the prime operation of the Breakfast Program, mostly from 1968 until 1972. This approach allows us to locate the most significant, the most salient aspects of the discourse which shaped the Program's emergence. The focus on a specific *caesura* of discourse also allows this analysis to elude the typical pitfalls of anachronism, hindsight and political co-option. Rather, the use of a specific slice of discourse develops an image of the Panther's Program as authentically as possible. For that reason, the primary body of this research deals with the specific discourse of the Black Panther Party in the late 60's. Where appropriate, I've offered the reader suggestions for contemporary scholarship which provide further perspectives on some of the themes I discovered through my investigation. Many, if not all, of the theoretical perspectives utilized to develop this framework derive from thinkers contemporary to the Panther Program. I must acknowledge the work of Michel Foucault, and specifically his attempt to elucidate an approach to discursive investigation¹⁵, for providing me with many of the conceptual tools utilized in my research.

The statements provided herein have been assembled from a swath of interviews, radio shows, movies, newspapers, magazines, documents, pictures and other forms of media, all produced within the aforementioned discursive period. The richness of these various materials -- visual, textual, and sonic -- help to provide a fuller picture of the practices and statements which constituted the Breakfast Program during its time of operation.

¹⁵ Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge. (World of Man)* (France: Editions Gallimard, 1972).

BREAKFAST AND POLITICS

“I’m not going to ever stop cursing, not only are we going to curse, we’re going to put into practice some of the s*** that we talk about. Because Richard Nixon is an evil man. This is the motherf***** that unleashed the counter-insurgent teams upon the BPP. This is the man that’s responsible for all the attacks on the Black Panther Party nationally. This is the man that sends his vicious murderous dogs out into the Black community and invade upon our Black Panther Party Breakfast Programs. Destroy food that we have for hungry kids and expect us to accept s*** like that idly. F*** that motherf***** man. We will kill Richard Nixon.”¹⁶

¹⁶ David Hilliard, a speech given in Golden Gate Park, as qtd. in the *Black Panther Intercommunal News Service*, “No Title,” *Black Panther*, April 6, 1969.

The Hungry Schoolchild. Oakland, CA circa 1968

Let us begin with a simple thought exercise. Imagine being an elementary school child. For most of us, it shouldn't be hard; been there, done that. You're just learning about the world, gaining a new independence, developing your social skills. It might be your only opportunity to get away from home. It might be the thing that keeps you out of trouble. Regardless, the experience of school looms large in your juvenile life. Now imagine the monumental task -- really, the biggest task -- of school for that schoolchild: five days a week, for most of the day, it fills their experience. Now, imagine that school child going to school everyday hungry. Imagine yourself, in elementary school, being hungry and having to go through an entire school day. Imagine if your going to school well fed made you an enemy of the FBI. Imagine that every day your arrival at elementary school, well fed, triggers the anger and ire of the media. Imagine the experience of this particular hungry schoolchild. Some need not imagine.

Soul food and empty stomachs

In 1968 the Black Panther Party decided black children shouldn't have to go to school hungry. So, they developed a program with an ostensibly simple goal: feed the schoolchildren. It didn't take a lot of mental gymnastics to understand the obstacle an empty stomach posed for a child attempting to receive an education. The Panther Party simply sought to address this issue through the creation and operation of the Breakfast program. The *Black Panther* Newspaper first advertised the breakfast for schoolchildren as "soul food: grits, eggs, bread, and meat for the stomach of our children."¹⁷ At the time, inadequate discounted school meals and the lack of resources in communities like Oakland meant that many children went to school hungry.

¹⁷ "Richmond Breakfast for School Children," 9. *The Black Panther*, March 31, 1969.

The program began at St. Augustine's Church in Oakland, but quickly spread to over 36 cities in less than two years.¹⁸ A U.S. Senate hearing in 1969 reported that the Breakfast Program fed more school children breakfast than did the entire state of California. And yet, for the simplicity of the endeavor, the discourse surrounding feeding kids grits could not be more complex. Feeding children turned out to be more than just an act of service; *it became an act of politics*. In a similar *Black Panther* article, one finds an image of a black woman spooning eggs onto a plate while a black girl watches carefully in the background. The caption reads: "All party work is political."¹⁹ Even breakfast -- especially breakfast -- is political.

The FBI's political intervention

The FBI has long been an institution with political authority. The organization's intervention on the Black Panthers Breakfast Program reveals an interesting web of political relationships. Why would the most powerful international investigative bureau concern themselves with children being fed grits and hash browns in Oakland? The answer lies in the manner by which food and political power substantiate each other. By examining the competing discourse produced by the FBI, one begins to understand food's broad political scope, implicated through the government's statements and practices.

Of all of the radical political groups in the United States during the 1960's -- and indeed there were many -- FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover considered the Black Panther Party, "the greatest threat to the internal security of the country", which some attributed primarily to the operation of the breakfast program.²⁰ In a 1969 FBI memo, Hoover went as far as to describe the free breakfast program as, "the best and most influential activity going for the BPP and as such,

¹⁸ Potorti, "Feeding Revolution," 46.

¹⁹ "To Feed Our Children," 4. *The Black Panther*, April 27, 1969.

²⁰ "Black Panther Party's Free Breakfast Program (1969-1980) •," February 11, 2010, <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/black-panther-partys-free-breakfast-program-1969-1980/>.

is potentially the greatest threat to efforts by authorities... to neutralize the BPP and destroy what it stands for.”²¹ While the community members considered the program to be a means of addressing the immediate needs of school children, an internal House of Representatives committee found that, “the Panthers use the free breakfast time as an opportunity to indoctrinate the youngsters with their philosophy of hate.”²²

Bobby Seale identifies the year of 1969 as the one where the FBI attempted to wipe out the Party’s community program. He wrote that, “at the time [party members] were arrested they were ready to set up the Breakfast for Children Program... these operations and the way the power structure is moving make it clear to me that it’s a pattern. It’s an attempt on their part to give us a lot of trouble and problems trying to set up programs. This kind of attack is another part of the pattern.”²³ His statement articulates food in conjunction with political power; as the pattern of providing breakfast for children becomes more prevalent, so too do the relations of power begin to shift. This mutual conditioning highlights the broader political relevancy of feeding schoolchildren a free breakfast. The program’s provision of food does more than just provide defense against oppression: it produces a competing political discourse which threatens even the most solvent institutional powers.

Further examples of the struggle for the FBI to destroy the Breakfast Program only helps to emphasize this point. One survey of the persecution of the Black Panther party describes a typical raid on the Party’s operational headquarters: “The arrests were made without warrants. A heavily armed squad of police broke down doors at party headquarters, entered bedrooms where women and children were sleeping, ransacked the office, seizing personal items as well as money

²¹ Edgar Hoover, “FBI Airtel from Director to SAC’s in 27 Field Offices,” May 15, 1969. cited in Huey P. Newton, “War Against the Panthers: A Study of Repression in America” (Ph.D. Diss., University of California, June 1980), 109.

²² Committee on Internal Security, “Black Panther Party, Part 1: Investigation of Kansas City Chapter; National Organization Data.”

²³ Seale, *Seize the Time*, 201.

collected for the children's breakfast programs."²⁴ Raids like these were by no means a rare occurrence. A "Free Breakfast for School Children" rally in Des Moines, in April of 1969, was interrupted when "Des Moines Panthers and Community people [were] viciously attacked at a rally" despite its purpose to solicit support and raise money for the program.²⁵ Many of them were arrested for inciting a riot, despite having been in the process of packing up when approached by police. One raid, declassified FBI documents show, resulted in the police confiscating so much Panther money that, "the [Chapter] is unable to finance a Breakfast for Children Program at this time."²⁶ That same year, A Black Panther News Service issue describes an attack in New Haven, where, "The New Haven Pig Force combined with state, F.B.I. and County Pigs illegally vamped on the Black Panther Office at 1:05 Thursday morning. Wearing bulletproof vests carrying riot shotguns and using gestapo tactics they... totally ransacked the downstairs office and the above apartment, confiscating money that was to be used for the childrens free breakfast."²⁷

The notion of gestapo tactics used to stop children from being fed appears absurd if one fails to consider the political potency of food as previously described. Through the organizational potency of food, with it as an explicit political object, the Breakfast Program discourse competes with the abiding political forces to create new social order; for this reason, the retaliatory and violent practices of the FBI should come as no surprise.

Discourse surrounding the Breakfast Program, then, encompasses much more than just the distribution of food. The intersection of power structures and the children's breakfast produce

²⁴ "The Persecution of the Black Panther Party." *The Black Panther Intercommunal News Service*, February 17, 1970.

²⁵ "Des Moines Breakfast for Children Rally Attacked by Pigs." *The Black Panther Intercommunal News Service*, April 27, 1969.

²⁶ Federal Bureau of Investigation, "Hartford Declassified Documents," 8.

²⁷ "Fascist Federal, State, & Local Pigs Conspire to Destroy New Haven Leadership," *The Black Panther Intercommunal News Service*, June 7, 1969 7.

a unique form of political control. Eldridge Cleaver reflects this phenomenon in his account of the government's response to the breakfast program: "I think the repression has increased markedly, and this means that the effectiveness of the party's attack on the power structure was becoming intolerable to power itself."²⁸ Feeding school children breakfast emerges as a political practice opposed to the existing political power regime. The Black Panther Party didn't attempt to play to or interact with the government; the more typical forms of protest involve appealing to the powers that be to create institutional change where it would be structurally impossible. Instead, the Panthers provided breakfast to schoolchildren in a flagrant repudiation of their political oppression. The government has less of an impetus to provide food, and more of a motivation to show why alternative social orders are not possible. Of course, the moment that the social order begins to be replaced, you have a reaction of panic from the FBI.

Breakfast as a political process

The intervention of the FBI on the distribution of food exhibits its dynamic political character. For black schoolchildren, breakfast is not a static object of sustenance, but rather a diverse terrain on which food and the political intersect. As our introduction to the history of food in revolutions suggests, political structures often articulate themselves through food. The case of the Black Panther Party's Free Breakfast for Schoolchildren program helps provide an exemplary discourse which orders political structures through the object of food; an analysis of it reveals at least three distinct ways in which the political can be articulated in conjunction with food.

The first, and most obvious, articulation of politics and food as mutually constitutive comes in the form of explicit statements regarding the role of government in the management of breakfast. Huey Newton describes how the hunger of schoolchildren within Oakland creates a

²⁸ Foner and Ransby, *The Black Panthers Speak*, 114.

“revolutionary necessity”, because, quite simply, “the government and the board of education won’t do it.”²⁹ By implicating the government and board of education in the failure of children to be well fed, the role of government expands to include the provision of food. Other Panther statements mirror such a shift. As one Party newspaper read, “The schools and the Board of Education should have had this program instituted a long time ago. How can our children learn anything when most of their stomachs are empty?”³⁰ Of course, being unwilling to do something and not having done something one should have are two distinct sorts of action; regardless, both point towards the political nature of the management of food. The intentions or motivations of the government have no effect on the fact that this discourse articulated the provision of food as a task of government. Instead, these statements reveal how the Panther Party submitted breakfast into the arena of governmental organization.

A Panther Newspaper article, titled “Why the Free Breakfast?”, explained the impetus for the program by stating, “Huey P. Newton knew that these conditions existed and that the American school system has not seen fit to alleviate them.”³¹ One Panther Party Newspaper article, detailing the emergence of the Breakfast Program, explains that, “Some people actually believe that we are living in a country that follows the doctrine: ‘Government of the people, for the people, and by the people’. The system of today comes nowhere near this. Do you think that the people would exploit themselves? Obviously there is some discrepancy here between the way this country is supposed to be run, and the way it is being run.”³² The Party discourse identifies the failure of the government to provide food for the children as a point of dissonance within the functioning of government. The government itself, in a congressional hearing held in 1970,

²⁹ “Breakfast for School Children.” *The Black Panther*. April 27, 1969, Vol III No 1.

³⁰ “Breakfast for School Children.”

³¹ “Why the Free Breakfast?” *The Black Panther*. October 4, 1969.

³² “Pigs--Panthers.” *The Black Panther*. November 22, 1969.

identified the free breakfast program as one of the “principal political programs” of the Panther Party.³³ The articulation within statements like these is that the government should be responsible for the feeding of children, that the gaze of politics should include the object of food.

The second intersection of politics and food within this discourse substantiates itself in the form of a long term project of the people towards *survival*, and the type of power contained therein. This fight for survival is articulated by Panther members as a revolutionary political project. One party member states that, “our goal was not feeding breakfast but creating the conditions for revolution.”³⁴ On the one hand, you have statements which describe the impetus for the Breakfast Program as the immediate, salient need to feed children who were going to school hungry, to help them survive. On the other hand, statements like these seem to affirm exactly the opposite: that instead the goal of the program was to foment "revolution". While on the surface these two statements -- and others like them -- might seem like a dissonance in the discourse surrounding the Black Panther Party, one can see how the possibility for such a disagreement comes about through the specific circumstances of the developing paradigm. In fact, the survival of the children becomes a revolutionary political act; these two goals are not, for the Breakfast Program, mutually exclusive.

The previous statement helps to illustrate how the Panther Party understands survival as one of the preconditions for revolution; the Breakfast Program reveals food provision as a method of survival; thereby, food provision becomes a precondition for revolutionary politics. Bobby Seale describes how, “Meanwhile, through the politicians and the media they try to mislead the people about the value of such a program and the political nature of such a program. We say that we want that program, not just right now for some political purpose - we say that the

³³ Staff Study, “The Black Panther Party: Its Origin and Development as Reflected in Its Official Weekly Newspaper The Black Panther Intercommunal News Service,” 86.

³⁴ Williams, *The Black Panther: Portraits from an Unfinished Revolution*, 97.

program should *survive* right into the future for years and years.”³⁵ Survival becomes not just a matter of feeding the people, but of engaging in a long term political struggle. To struggle politically means to survive through the means of feeding children breakfast; Seale continues by stating, “The politics are related to people’s needs, to a hungry stomach.”³⁶ Survival, through the object of food, shifts into the status of an object of politics inasmuch as a well fed stomach becomes a political statement. In one interview, a party member states that, “These programs were the perfect vehicle for the party to address the concrete, immediate needs of the people. They were also a prime example of how the party put into practice our main philosophy... That was what the Survival Programs were about, as was just about everything we did -- transforming a problem into a solution that we created and controlled.”³⁷ The emergence of the Breakfast Program’s discourse shifts the notion of survival from a perennial problem for these communities into a solution, one with new implications for political control. Survival becomes an articulation of power. Even statements looking to aggregate funds for the survival programs affirm their status as political projects: at the end of one of his printed speeches, Huey Newton asks for donations to be sent to the “Political Defense Fund”, which can be earmarked specifically for the Breakfast Program for Children Program. The act of surviving constitutes a form of political defense, and food thereby becomes an object of political projects.³⁸

The final conjuncture between politics and food can be observed in the manner by which discourse surrounding the Food Program suggests the creation of new political institutions. The purposeful lack of action by the existing political actors creates a vacuum of governance. Within this absence of food discourse emerges new political institutions like the Breakfast Program. The

³⁵ Seale, *Seize the Time*.

³⁶ Seale.

³⁷ Dixon and Jeffries, *My People Are Rising*, 190.

³⁸ “You Can Murder a Revolutionary, but You Can’t Murder a Revolution.” *The Movement*. January, 1970.

imposition of the Panther's provision of food in place of the government signals an important political shift, one towards alternative forms of politics. One Party newspaper states that, "For too long have our people gone hungry... we must survive this evil government and build a new one fit for the service of all the people."³⁹ Not only does the distribution of food relate to the government in terms of their lack of action, and in terms of creating a long term project for survival, but it also produces new political possibilities. As Panther member Tommie Carr puts it, the ability to feed children illustrated, "how... a so-called small organization [could] come up with the necessities of life [while] the city, state, and federal governments failed."⁴⁰ The injection of the Breakfast Program's discourse into a previous void of government expands the possibilities of political institutions.

A new sort of power, political in nature, is produced in the absence of government. Newton himself echoes this shift by stating, "Power is the ability to define a phenomenon and make that phenomenon act in a desired manner.... That's what the survival programs were about."⁴¹ The phenomenon of children being hungry, through the operation of a discourse like that of the Breakfast Program, substantiates a new sort of politics centered around food provision. As Phillip S. Foner put it in *The Black Panthers Speak*, they, "[created] alternatives to existing institutions, a process through which they hoped both communities and individuals would be transformed... The Free Breakfast for Children program, held in community centers, schools, and church basements around the country, as [such a] program."⁴² Food now operates as an explicit object of power production, a surface on which new political institutions can be created. Notice how, as opposed to the first connection provided

³⁹ "To Feed Our Children."

⁴⁰ "Panthers Group Holds Giveaway," C7. *Cleveland Press*, March 26, 1971.

⁴¹ Dixon and Jeffries, *My People Are Rising*, 190.

⁴² Foner and Ransby, *The Black Panthers Speak*, XIII.

between food and politics, the Breakfast Program is not simply a matter of governance; it becomes a matter of creating alternative forms of governance, of producing alternative political institutions.

Pictures of the Breakfast Program support such a position. One image, appearing in a Black Panther Newspaper, displayed a “Lil’ brother checking in for breakfast.”⁴³ The child points upwards towards a poster of armed Black Panthers posing in front of the headquarters. Another image, printed three years later in the same publication, depicts a woman with a red bag labeled “free food program” in one hand, and a sign reading “vote for survival” in the other.⁴⁴ Discourse such as this complicitly implicates the political act of voting and survival programs like the Breakfast Program. This conjuncture formulates a framework in which providing schoolchildren with food becomes a political act.

Food’s potential for organizing

At its core, politics represents a complex system of organizing a society. Political discourses shape the way that people behave and think in their everyday lives; family, sex, labor, discipline, and health all find their organizational bases produced through the knowledge and practices of political institutions. The various sorts of systems which political discourse produces manage the frameworks of relations in which individuals find themselves. Subsequently, new tools of organization hold enormous political potential. Those who seek alternative social orders essentially seek a new way of organizing a society, and thereby require tools to do so. The aforementioned discourses have emerged at various points as means for achieving the management of people. To put it bluntly: *the ability to organize individuals is the ability to organize politics.*

⁴³ Image of Lil’ Brother, *Black Panther Intercommunal News Service*, Vol III No 1. April 27, 1969.

⁴⁴ “Image of Woman.” *Black Panther Intercommunal News Service*, Vol 8 No 10. May 27, 1972.

Fundamentally, food organizes people. Whether it be varying cultural culinary styles, the regional availability of local bounty, or the restaurants and mess halls gathered in for consumption, food forms the material basis of a blueprint for the organization of peoples. It comes as no surprise, then, that food also forms the surface of complex relationships of power; moreover, changes in society's relationship with food implies a reorganization of people. A child's relationship to food is a dynamic one, not only casually but functionally. Of course, the introduction of the Breakfast Program changed how the Oakland school children got their food; but it also shifted a complex discourse which manages people through the power of food. If indeed, it can be said that "famines now have *functions* as well as causes"⁴⁵, then free food programs have both functions and causes, too. Undoubtedly, a myriad of analyses could be entertained as to why these schoolchildren could not receive breakfast outside of the Panther's program. Here, however, we are more interested in the productive political power of food than its macro-structural origins. Rather than simply focus on the causes of the children's hunger, a revolutionary engagement must understand the organizational functions of feeding them. The discourse surrounding the provision of food through the Breakfast Program reflects this.

The organizational potential of food enables programs like the Breakfast Program to produce shifts in relations of political power. Eldridge Cleaver remarked in 1969 that, "Breakfast for Children pulls people out of the system and organizes them into the alternative."⁴⁶ Cleaver's statement engages with food as an organizational *tool*, an apparatus which permits the arrangement of a group of people. Organizing the people in a specific manner permits the emergence of alternative discourses; therein lies its political potency.⁴⁷ Panther Flores Forbes

⁴⁵ David Nally, "The Biopolitics of Food Provisioning: The Biopolitics of Food Provisioning," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 36, no. 1 (January 2011): 37–53, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-5661.2010.00413.x>.

⁴⁶ Cleaver, Eldridge, "On Meeting the Needs of the People."

⁴⁷ We have already seen in our introduction how the organizing of people can result in the production of competing discourses. Alternative social orders do not spawn randomly but emerge from a distinct system of organizing.

noted that, “The breakfast program was an excellent organizing tool, helping us make friends and comrades in the projects... the response was overwhelming.”⁴⁸ Discussing attacks by the police on offices operating the Breakfast Program, Seale stated that party members “defended themselves because they realized that the power structure... wanted to prevent the organizing and uniting of the people around revolutionary programs.”⁴⁹ Even those who held political power addressed the organizational potential of food. Across the board, then, food becomes a site of political organization.

A large image published in the *Black Panther* in March of 1972 further helps to illustrate the connection between food and organizing. The full page advert is headlined with “10,000 FREE BAGS OF GROCERIES (with a chicken in every bag)”. This statement of food provision is followed by, in the center of the page, the following message: “ORGANIZING BLACK POLITICAL POWER LIKE IT’S NEVER BEEN DONE BEFORE”.⁵⁰ The 10,000 bags of free groceries serve as a vehicle for political organization. Through the provision of food, new radical politics came to be organized. Interestingly, the statement emphasizes the novelty of this approach. Either bags of groceries have never been used to organize political power, or the use of food has shifted the organization of black political power.⁵¹ Regardless, both of these interpretations of these statements affirm the Black Panther’s use of food -- and especially breakfast -- as a tool to shape their political structure.

The politics formed by the operation of the Breakfast Program manifested itself in a unique body of people. Philip S. Foner describes how the Breakfast Program, “radically and idealistically organized thousands of young Black people and their white supporters”. The notion

⁴⁸ Forbes, *Will You Die with Me?: My Life and the Black Panther Party*, 50.

⁴⁹ Seale, *Seize the Time*.

⁵⁰ “10,000 Free Bags of Groceries,” 9. *The Black Panther*, March 11, 1972.

⁵¹ Chapter two, through its discussion of the communal mode, will support both of these observations. The mobilization of power from members of the community through food constitutes both a new form of black power and a new mode for organizing it.

of an alliance, here a racialized one, is very important; the organizational potential for food spans not only across politics but also across ethnicities.⁵² It also spans across age groups, with this statement among others invoking the youth of the community. One Panther Newspaper describes how, “The program is a success with the maximum participation coming from the youth and volunteers throughout the community.”⁵³ Typically considered subordinate to adult’s political interests, the Panther’s inclusion of youth in their organization around food only increased their program’s political potency. The coalition across race and age built through the Breakfast Program speaks not only to the range of food in organizing people, but also to the strength of the alliances it can build. This strength, of course, inevitably comes to be perceived by the dominant political power as a threat; while black people might form the nucleus of this community around food, the expansion to other groups of people helps to explain the violent reaction of actors like the FBI.

When utilized in a specific manner, Huey Newton, in characterizing the need for his community to “seize the time” for political change, states that, “We recognized that in order to bring the people to the level of consciousness where they would seize the time, it would be necessary to serve their interests in survival by developing programs which would help them meet their daily needs. For a long time we have had such programs not only for survival but for organizational purposes.”⁵⁴ The actual effect of breakfast, then, becomes not only to feed the people but also to organize them in specific ways. By providing food through the Breakfast

⁵² As with all political systems, an implicit politics of inclusion and exclusion emerges alongside the Breakfast Program. When analyzing a system of organization, considering who is included and excluded helps to situate the program’s framework within the context of the affected population. As we will see later on, the Black Panther’s deliberate inclusion of specific groups of people in their concept of alliances and community forms an important characteristic of their political system.

⁵³ “For Too Long Our Children Have Gone Hungry,” *The Black Panther Intercommunal News Service*, October 4, 1969.

⁵⁴ Newton and Morrison, *To Die for the People: The Writings of Huey P. Newton*, Black Capitalism Re-Analyzed, 104.

Program, the Party actualizes new methods of managing and ordering their community. Huey goes on to affirm just this point, declaring that, “the survival programs are not answers or solutions, but they will help us to organize the community around a true analysis and understanding of their situation.”⁵⁵ Implicit within this statement is food’s specific positionality within people’s circumstances; individuals within a community understand themselves and their situations, in part, through their relation with food. Food is a tool through which people organize their own ideas and politics. By managing this tool, the Panthers also organize people’s political ideas.

A revolutionary mode of food organizing

Years later, speaking with French reporters on the party’s ideology, Huey would state that the Breakfast Program, “is not a revolutionary program or a reformist program. It is a strategy through which we are organizing the people for revolution.”⁵⁶ Breakfast, then, becomes an organizational strategy through which political possibilities may be realized. A tension emerges here, between my development of the Breakfast Program’s revolutionary character and Huey’s conception of the Program as a mere tool to prepare for revolution: does breakfast for black children constitute a revolution, or is it simply one tool to organize the coming revolution? As Huey articulates it, the Program serves only as a strategy of preparation. The content of the Breakfast Program -- food -- can be found in a variety of sites, revolutionary and otherwise. Indeed, food existed as a site of politics before the Breakfast Program, for example in its inadequate administration by the government prior to the Black Panther’s campaign. The politics of food organizing does not in and of itself constitute a revolution. What, then, does?

⁵⁵ Newton and Morrison, 105.

⁵⁶ Newton, *Huey Newton Talks to French Reporters/HPN on Party Ideology*.

This chapter discussed how food became a site of a specific politics during the late 1960's, and delineated its potential for organizing. If food indeed is a site of politics, and a tool for organizing, its revolutionary character manifests in the manner by which it is administered. Breakfast, couched in this significant political discourse, presents *the potential for revolutionary organizing*. The outcomes of this potential hinge on the process by which the Breakfast Program manifested itself. Our investigation now turns on a new question: how did the manner by which the Breakfast Program operate on the politics of food create a revolution? Once we understand the significance of food in organizing our politics, the content of the program -- breakfast -- matters much less than the new techniques and procedures of its distribution. The FBI's intervention, and the Black Panther's emphasis, on breakfast provision becomes less absurd with an understanding of its political and organizational potential. The character of this political process, however, is not immediately clear. Only by examining the specific manners by which food becomes a consummate focus of political regimes can its revolutionary -- or reactionary -- potency be ascertained. Here we leave the forceful political surface of food organizing and take a deep dive into the structures, mechanisms and practices which shifted the provision of food into an alternative. There, we find the modality with which the Breakfast Program brought about a revolution.

THE COMMUNAL TABLE

“We wanted to give the community a wide variety of needed programs, and so we began in a way that would gain the community’s support... All these programs were aimed at one goal: complete control of the institutions in the community. Every ethnic group has a particular that they know and understand better than anybody else; each group is the best judge of how its institutions ought to affect the lives of its members. Throughout American history ethnic groups like the Irish and Italians have established organizations and institutions within their own communities. When they achieved this political control, they had the power to deal with their problems. Yet there is still another necessary step. In the Black community, mere control of our own institutions will not automatically solve problems. For one thing, it is difficult to get enough places of work in the community to produce full employment for Blacks. The most important element in controlling our own institutions would be to organize them into co-operatives, which would end all forms of exploitation. Then the profits, or surplus, from the co-operatives would be returned to the community, expanding opportunities on all levels, and enriching life. Beyond this, our ultimate aim is to have various ethnic communities co-operating in a spirit of mutual aid, rather than competing. In this way, all communities would be allied in a common purpose through the major social, economic, and political institutions in the country. This is our long-range objective. Although we are far from realizing it, it is important that the people understand what we want for them and what are, indeed, their natural rights. Therefore, the slogan ‘Power to the People’ sums up our goals for Black people, as well as our deep love and commitment to them. All power comes from the people and all power must ultimately be vested in them.”⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Huey Newton and J. Herman Blake, *Revolutionary Suicide* (Random House, 1973), 167.

Revolutionary work is community work

As we have seen, serving black school children breakfast was not as simple an endeavor as it might first appear. Within the complex political terrain of food provision, the Black Panthers had to struggle to elaborate a modality for delivering the breakfast to the children. The work starts early in the morning: volunteers get out of bed, “at approximately 6:00am every school day” in order to “set tables, clean facilities, cook and prepare the food, [and] direct traffic to see that the children cross the street safely.”⁵⁸ The Panthers, alongside mothers, fathers and teenagers from the neighborhood, would go to churches, public housing projects, and privately owned houses to cook, “eggs, hash browns, sometimes french toast, sometimes pancakes, but always hot chocolate.” After finishing the morning meal, the collection of food and money for the program began anew. The Party would, “send out ten to twelve Black Panthers to convenience stores, supermarkets, dairy suppliers, and restaurants to ask for donations.” Various tactics would be used to secure the donation depending on the type of store, from leafleting the community to encourage boycotting large chains like Safeway, to firebombing stores which fell short of their commitment.⁵⁹

Despite the Program’s variety -- in tactics, food, and more -- a pattern begins to emerge in the operation of the Breakfast Program: *community*. The slew of activities required to operate the program gave, “party members something tangible and relevant to contribute to the community besides the focus on guns and self-defense.”⁶⁰ The Program articulated the revolutionary necessity as one inextricably linked to the community. In large part, the Breakfast Program conceived of the community along racial lines; after all, it was specifically black school children who went to school hungry. It would seem that the racialized politics practiced by the Black

⁵⁸ “Why the Free Breakfast?,” *Black Panther*, October 4, 1969.

⁵⁹ John Hershey, *Letter to the Alumni* (Alfred A. Knopf, 1970).

⁶⁰ Aaron Dixon and Judson L. Jeffries, *My People Are Rising: Memoir of a Black Panther Party Captain*, 2012.

Panther Party suggests that each ethnic community is well situated to judge their own circumstances, providing them with a new vision of self-determination. Feeding these black schoolchildren breakfast became a task of the black community. By serving food through the community, the Breakfast Program produced an alternative social order. Being a revolutionary no longer meant an individual fighting the system, the lone martyr running into battle, a visionary leader delivering an incendiary speech; instead, “a true revolutionary will get up early in the morning and he’ll go serve the Free Breakfast for Children... He’ll do revolutionary work in the community.”⁶¹ By exploring the Panther’s utilization of the communal modality in serving school children breakfast, we begin to develop an image of the manner by which revolution became reality.

You can’t do it alone

The Black Panther party asserted that issues facing the entire community must in turn be addressed by the entire community. Numerous statements emphasize the role of the communal institution in serving as the arbiter of the Breakfast Program. Party member Rafael articulates the necessity of community by stating:

“We’re getting down to the needs of the people, no matter how little they may be and no matter how big... And the main problems right now are food and clothing... So we go out and we tell them, ‘you and I together, we can put food in our children’s stomach and we can put shoes on your children’s feet, if we join together. You alone can’t do it and we alone can’t do it, but both of us together can do it.’”⁶²

⁶¹ Bobby Seale, *Seize the Time: The Story of the Black Panther Party and Huey P. Newton* (Black Classic Press, 1991), 207.

⁶² “Interview with Rafael.” *The Black Panther*, February 17, 1970.

Feeding breakfast to children becomes a communal operation not because of its efficacy, or because of the optics as such, but because it cannot be done otherwise. The necessity of community in the program's operation becomes just as much a precondition for feeding children as the provision of food is a precondition for the Panther's revolutionary aspirations. The Breakfast Program's discourse makes it clear that the only way to overcome these difficulties is tackling them as a community.

Indeed, the problems themselves seem to have originated from the lack of community control, and a lack of community understanding about possible solutions to the issues. A Brooklyn party advert explains that, "The politics in our communities are controlled from outside.", demonstrating how the community must act on political objects like food in order to address the issues which arise from it.⁶³ Responding to a question about change in the United States, Eldridge clever points out the importance of how the Breakfast Program, "was a way for the Party to strengthen its links with the community and to get thousands and thousands of people across the country involved in the program."⁶⁴ The important aspect of the program's operation, then, can be found by examining the people who are serving the food to the children: the community.⁶⁵ One teacher, describing her work with the Breakfast Program in a June, 1970, edition of the *Black Panther*, describes how her participation entailed "finding out the immediate needs of the people by going into the community."⁶⁶ Not only can issues like hungry school children not be addressed without community, they cannot be identified either!⁶⁷ Mrs. Jewel

⁶³ Foner and Ransby, *The Black Panthers Speak*, 180.

⁶⁴ "Eldridge, Discusses Revolution," 12.

⁶⁵ The importance of community control for the Panthers extends beyond breakfast provision: community control of police, for instance, also formed an important pillar in their platform.

⁶⁶ Bird, "I Joined the Panther."

⁶⁷ An interesting tension arises through statements such as this one, between the recognition of issues and their confrontation. As we will see, this tension comes to be largely resolved through the reciprocity of the communal discursive mode; by addressing the problem of hunger through those persons who experience it, the Breakfast Program provides for the concurrent recognition and confrontation of communal issues.

Barker similarly articulated this necessity of community when she chastised the absentee critics of the program, saying, “but you have not walked out of your doors to the Breakfast Centers to see what your children are trying to do. Don’t listen -- walk and find out for yourselves... Support them in their struggle.”⁶⁸ The call to action, the emphasis on the practice of *going out* into the community, shows how this specific type of operation underpins the entirety of the program.

Statements which placed a conflicting emphasis on non-communal actors renew the community’s role in the program. On *Face the Nation*, a moderator asks Hilliard why he doesn’t view his presence on a nationally televised interview as a success for the Breakfast Program:

“Moderator: Mr. Hilliard, is your back really to the wall? Here are you on national television, here are all kinds of moderate black groups who have come to take up your cause...

David Hilliard: I don’t think television is the big payoff (chuckles). We can ask for a lot more things. More so than television I would rather be in our communities feeding hungry children.”

Hilliard here makes two separate statements. First, he responds to the moderator’s perception of a TV interview as success for the revolutionary movement. He asserts that, rather than being in the interview, he would interpret the success of the program by his participation in it as a member of the community. Second, Hilliard brushes off the support of moderate black groups across the nation in lieu of the presence of people participating in the program *in the communities*. Both of these emphasize how the operation of the Breakfast Program cannot be

⁶⁸ Barker, “A Word for Panther Parents.”

understood without a communal perspective. While other commentators might rightfully point out that television presence and the support of moderate groups could bolster the strength of the Breakfast Program, the present statements clearly articulate the functional requirements of the program in terms of communal activity. Hilliard's rebuke of the importance of non-communal actors serves to substantiate the program's communal mode, as does his own insistence that he would rather be feeding the children. In fact, he asserts that instead of being on TV, what the Panthers -- and their program -- are asking for is the participation of the community members in providing breakfast for schoolchildren.

The dissolution of party hierarchy: who serves the food?

The Breakfast Program's communal modality in operating the Breakfast Program suggests a distinct socialistic framework, characterized by communal control. Bobby Seale writes that, "The Party's community programs are the people's programs that we define as revolutionary, community, socialistic program."⁶⁹ Seale specifically describes the Panther's program as revolutionary people's programs. The ownership, or better: the control, over these programs exists with the panthers as much as the rest of the people insofar as both are members of the community.⁷⁰ These programs do not only serve the members of the community, but are owned and operated by them too. The Panthers practices and statements, then, create controlling subjects out of the members of the community; in *Revolutionary Suicide*, Huey Newton writes that: "We wanted to give the community a wide variety of needed programs, and so we began in a way that would gain the community's support... All these programs were aimed at one goal: complete control of the institutions in the community."⁷¹ The communal mode of programs like

⁶⁹ Seale, *Seize the Time*.

⁷⁰ More will be said in the following section on the importance of the subjective limits of community membership (vis a vis business owners). For now, the reader only need consider that discourses such as that of the Breakfast Program produce individuals (in the community) as subjects which imbues them with responsibilities, in this case feeding breakfast.

⁷¹ Newton and Blake, *Revolutionary Suicide*.

the Breakfast Program necessarily results in the people, not the Panthers or anyone else, controlling these new political institutions themselves.

Even during the early days of the program, in March of 1969, the *Black Panther* newspaper declared that, “We want to turn the program over to the community but without your efforts and support we cannot.”⁷² The suggestion here is that, despite their status as the original creators of the program, the Panthers allow themselves no subjective authority over its operation; the hierarchy of ownership and operation dissolves with the embrace of the community. Importantly, the statement contained here within the Black Panther concedes that the acquisition by the community of the program requires their involvement: “without your efforts and support we cannot.” The program cannot be forced onto the community members; a discursive mode requires that it be actualized through practice. Indeed, the community’s role in operating the Breakfast Program grew as the Party, “moved to get as many other people in the community as possible to work on these programs and take over running them.”⁷³ Yet again, the effectiveness of the program becomes not a matter of coercion through hierarchy but consent of the people.

According to one Party captain, eventually, “we were able to get mothers in the community to take over the duties of cooking breakfast and feeding kids, leaving us to make sure the food supplies were there.”⁷⁴ This statement demonstrates the process of the community gradually taking the reins of the program. As the rest of the community fills the various roles required by the program, the Panther Party’s role as adjudicators diminishes.⁷⁵ Newton, in finishing his speech on the programs, declared that, “All power comes from the people and all

⁷² “Richmond Breakfast for School Children.”

⁷³ Seale, *Seize the Time*.

⁷⁴ Dixon and Jeffries, *My People Are Rising*, 178.

⁷⁵ As their subjective role as the Panther Party member lessens, notice how their role as community members grows. The more that the communal mode ingratiates itself as the fundamental operator of the program, the less need there is for Panthers; thus, the Panther Members themselves shift into the subjective role of the community member. This can be observed in the Party members continuing to serve breakfast to the children despite the Party itself explicitly excluding itself from these activities.

power must ultimately be invested in them.”⁷⁶ The way in which the Breakfast Program articulates power is through the people; from them, and to them, its operations must coincide. As one panther, Rafael, put it succinctly: “We don’t relate to ‘Serve the people’, ‘Power to the people’, only in words, we are putting these terms into practice.”⁷⁷

Rafael’s statement provokes an investigation into the practice of actually ‘serving the people’. One of the best ways to properly illustrate this shift into the communal mode is by asking the question: who serves the food? Quite literally, *who is serving the people*, breakfast or otherwise? The theoretical mode of community rings hollow in the absence of discursive practices which manifest it. If indeed the manner by which the children are fed is a communal mode, then we must first examine who is actually feeding the children. A striking aspect of all of the photographs taken of the Breakfast Program is the orientation of the children. They all sit at tables, facing each other while being served. There is no buffet line, no cash register, no EBT counter or school-period bell. Pictures of party members like Bill Whitfield at the program depict them with trays in their hands, putting full plates of food in front of smiling children.⁷⁸ In another image, Bursey, donning a flimsy apron, reaches across a table filled with young children -- their eyes shining with excitement -- as he provides yet another plate of food for the kids.⁷⁹ Even the uniform of the Panther Members changed in recognition of the different discursive mode produced by the breakfast program: rather than their typical berets and military style attire, those Panthers participating in the Breakfast Program donned aprons, a visible example of uniform which suggests the creation and production of things -- like food -- intended and necessary for

⁷⁶ Newton and Blake, *Revolutionary Suicide*.

⁷⁷ “Interview with Rafael.”

⁷⁸ Straeter, “Image of Bill Whitfield, Courtesy AP Photo.”

⁷⁹ Baruch, “Image of Charles Bursey.”

other people's well being. Pay attention to who wears the apron, for they are the person actually serving the food; those who won't even touch a spatula never intended to serve a single plate.

In building the communal mode which underpinned the operation of the Breakfast Program, the Panther Party took care to avoid mechanisms which might alienate their base. We have already seen how the business people -- a group of subjects who might have been otherwise excluded from the communal mode -- came to be articulated through the Breakfast Program discourse as members of the community and thereby participants in feeding children breakfast. Other statements by the Panther Party reflect the same attention to communal inclusion, by addressing practices and techniques which might produce alienation.⁸⁰ One *Black Panther* newspaper explained how, "The exploited... people's needs are land, bread, housing, education,... and the Black Panther Party shall not, for a day, alienate ourselves from the masses and forget their needs for survival."⁸¹ The continual attention to the needs of the people helped the Panther Party remain attenuated and linked to the rest of the community. By virtue of the communal mode, the strength of this link substantiates the ability of the program to feed the children.

The Panther Party also specifically identifies techniques of alienation, such as when Huey Newton explained that, "we will not get caught up in a lot of embarrassing questions or paperwork which alienate the people."⁸² Categorizing or codifying individuals in a community necessarily differentiates them, and erodes horizontal relationships into ones of hierarchy. Paperwork literally introduces a dissociation between individuals through the forms which separate their interactions. The specific operation of the Breakfast Program rejected those

⁸⁰ I use the term alienation here advisedly. In basic terms, alienation describes the severing of ties between two objects which otherwise would have been understood relationally. To alienate a subject would be to articulate the subject as excluded from the system of relationships which produce it.

⁸¹ "No Title," 14. *The Black Panther*, April 6, 1969.

⁸² Newton and Morrison, *To Die for the People: The Writings of Huey P. Newton*.

practices which manifested an exclusive mode. If feeding children is dependent on the ability of a community to mobilize, then there can be no place for mechanisms of division. Even the simple act of payment for a breakfast foments a type of exclusion; for that, Newton declares that, “Survival programs will always be operated without charge to those who need them and benefit by them.”⁸³ By eliminating the various practices which serve to exclude members of the community from participating in the Breakfast Program, the Panther Party’s discourse lubricates the inclusion of a regime posed to provide breakfast to the schoolchildren.

Crucially, the Panther’s community based operation also eschewed, to some degree, typical gender roles in food provision. Images of the Breakfast Program depict men and women in complementary and interchangeable roles; men in aprons, women teaching up front, men cleaning dishes and women carrying large boxes of food.⁸⁴ The revolutionary politics of breakfast provision extend beyond the typical gendered boundaries of action. Indeed, men were expected to fill these formerly gendered roles in the Breakfast Program.⁸⁵ The focus on survival programs like the Free Breakfast helped to give rise to the notion of the revolutionary woman, with Cleaver stating that, “we must too recognize that a woman can be just as revolutionary as a man and that she has equal status.”⁸⁶ As women and men serve food alike, the horizontal character of the communal modality begins to establish itself across identities. What matters less

⁸³ Newton and Morrison.

⁸⁴ Erin Blakemore, “How the Black Panthers’ Breakfast Program Both Inspired and Threatened the Government,” HISTORY, accessed March 8, 2022, <https://www.history.com/news/free-school-breakfast-black-panther-party>; “The Radical Origins of Free Breakfast for Children - Eater,” accessed March 8, 2022, <https://www.eater.com/2016/2/16/11002842/free-breakfast-schools-black-panthers>; Huey Newton and Tony Morrison, *To Die for the People: The Writings of Huey P. Newton* (City Lights Publishers, 2009).

⁸⁵ Tracye A Matthews, “‘No One Ever Asks, What a Man’s Role in the Revolution Is’; Gender and the Politics of the Black Panther Party,” *The Black Panther Party, Reconsidered*, n.d. For a fantastic perspective on how the Black Panther Party dissolved -- and at times, reinforced -- typical gender roles, refer to this work by Matthews in *The Black Panther Party (reconsidered)*, ed. Charles E. Jones (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1998), 307-8

⁸⁶ Huey Newton and David Hilliard, “The Women’s and Gay Liberation Movements,” *Seven Stories Press*, no. Huey P Newton Reader (2002).

and less is the circumstances of the individual, and more the relationship of the person to the community around them.

The formation of community-serving subjects

When considering the difficulty of feeding children en masse, especially with the diminished resources available to many of these people at the time, the call to community doesn't come as a surprise. However, the immediate community of mothers, fathers and party members weren't the only people invoked by the Party in their calls to action. Another important group articulated within the Party's statements is the business community. Even early on, alongside a list of current programs and the number of children they feed, a Panther News Service article appeals to, "the people who live and work in the city's Black Communities, and to all businessmen, merchants and grocers who draw their profits from the Black Communities of Des Moines, to work with us to satisfy the pressing needs of Black People by donating some of your resources to the 'Free Breakfast for Children Program'."⁸⁷ For a resource to be communal, it must be shared by its wielder. Within the capitalist economies of Oakland at the time, black business people held much of the resources within their communities. Rather than produce them as subjects outside or in contradiction to the community, then, the Breakfast Program discourse instead articulated them as holding the same obligations as the rest of the community: to feed the children in whatever way they could.

One sign outside of a boycott of a black business owner reads, "SUPPORT THOSE WHO SERVE THE PEOPLE."⁸⁸ This statement serves at least two different discursive functions. One, it calls on businesspeople to support the Black Panther Party, or those who are serving the people. Of course, the community should lend its support to those who in turn

⁸⁷ "Statement to the Press on the Breakfast for Children Program." *The Black Panther*, Vol III No 1. April 27, 1969.

⁸⁸ "Why Boycott Bill Boyette." *The Black Panther Intercommunal News Service*, Vol VI No 24. August 9, 1971.

support it. A sort of continued motion of return emerges here: the support oscillates between the supporters and the supported, so that they mutually constitute each other. The participation of these black business owners in the survival programs, however, also creates them as the subject who serves the people. The protest called on the members of the community to not only support the Black Panther Party, but also those other members of the community who support the children. In order for black business owners to continue in their role of owning businesses, they must also support the children in their own communities. Without the support of its consumers, a business ceases to function; likewise, without the support of the business people, the Breakfast Program too would cease to function. Signs like the ones outside of this boycott reinforce the limited authority with which the Black Panther Party acts: the actions of the Panther Party in organizing the Breakfast Program are just as important as the actions of the business people in helping to provide the resources. That is to say, the Panthers do not place themselves as the subject of their survival programs and understand everyone else to be its objects. Rather, the business people are just as responsible as the Partymembers themselves for the success of the Breakfast Program, since the subject of these programs is the entire community.

The spatiality and temporality of community

The communal discursive mode employed by the Breakfast Program holds two important characteristics which must be discussed further: its spatial and temporal nature.⁸⁹ In order to describe specific discursive modes, such as that of the Breakfast Program's, we must begin to draw up the limits within which it operates. The articulation of space and time within statements

⁸⁹ I use the term "nature" only insofar as our current language limits my ability to articulate new concepts as they relate to this program. As Parmendies put it so succinctly: "The limits of my language are the limits of my world." My hesitation stems from the typical understanding of the 'nature' of things to be an a priori concept, an Aristotilean form of sorts, which gives rise to phenomenon by virtue of itself as an abstract category. Instead, here nature refers to the particular boundaries which allow us to identify a discourse as unique; *they are shaped by the phenomenon of community just as much as it is shaped by them.*

made about the Breakfast Program provide meaningful limits by which we might further elucidate its mode.

The most obvious location for the provision of schoolchildren's breakfast is the school itself. If a program seeks to ensure that children attending school have food in their stomachs, then it would follow that this food should be provided at the school itself. However, in examining the Breakfast Program's discourse, one notices its operation throughout a variety of unconventional spaces. One congressional hearing notes how, "In its January 4, 1969 issue the Panthers claimed to be distributing breakfasts daily at the Concord Baptist Church, in addition, reported that a program had been started in San Francisco at the Fillmore auditorium."⁹⁰ Churches and music halls become spaces articulated in conjunction with feeding schoolchildren. Elmer Dixon, "continued coordinating the Breakfast Program, expanding it to five locations, mostly in housing projects."⁹¹ Barbara Ransby, another party member, wrote about how the Program was, "held in community centers, schools, and church basements around the country."⁹² John Hershey observed that the Program operated in, "a Panther-owned house on 99th avenue... a nearby Catholic church on Hyde street. They also had a facility at the public housing project, Brookfield Village."⁹³ Rather than just schools, then, the Breakfast Program operated in churches, music halls, housing projects, private homes, basements, community centers, and other locations.⁹⁴ It becomes clear through these statements that the operation of the Breakfast Program occurred within *spaces common to the community*. The use of the community's spaces reflects the communal mode of this discourse. It stretched across a variety of physical locations because the community itself manifested across these spaces. The communal mode of the Breakfast

⁹⁰ Black Panther Party. Hearings, Ninety-first Congress, second session, 87.

⁹¹ Dixon and Jeffries, *My People Are Rising*, 178.

⁹² Foner and Ransby, *The Black Panthers Speak*, XXV.

⁹³ Hershey, *Letter to the Alumni*.

⁹⁴ Not to mention the variety of places requested to host the program who refused, the diversity of the businesses petitioned for donations for the program, and the spread of the program across a national spectrum of cities.

Program included not only a variety of different individuals within the community, but also a variety of spaces in which it operated.

Articulations of the Program's discourse also characterized its operation as having a temporal nature. Business people participated in the program not by a one time donation, but rather donating, "every week, for greater unity in the Black Community"⁹⁵ Huey Newton echoed the importance of support for the Program over time by stating that, "we explained that a continuing trickle of support is more important to the community than a large, once-honly hush mouth gift."⁹⁶ A trickling of support -- that is, a continued investment over time -- proves to be more important to the Party not because it will result in more resources being allocated to the Program, but rather because its discursive mode is one which operates over a *continued period of time*. The March 26, 1969, edition of the *Black Panther* emphasized the temporal aspect of the community's contributions by writing that, "But we need your help, and that means money, food, and time."⁹⁷ The temporal aspect of the Program comes to be articulated in conjunction with the more obvious requirements for its operation, money and food.

The ability to contribute over time extends the operation of the Program indefinitely: Bobby Seale states that, "we say that the program should survive right into the future for years and years."⁹⁸ Seale demonstrates the importance of the community in continuing to operate these programs insofar as their continued survival requires the continuity of the survival programs. These statements elaborate the Breakfast Program through a continued engagement over time, an operation which cannot be understood to occur once but rather extends itself into the future.

⁹⁵ "Why Boycott Bill Boyette."

⁹⁶ Newton and Morrison, *To Die for the People: The Writings of Huey P. Newton*.

⁹⁷ "Richmond Breakfast for School Children."

⁹⁸ Seale, *Seize the Time*.

Time itself becomes an axis along which the Breakfast Program becomes articulated; in this way, these statements imbue the communal mode of operation with a specifically temporal nature.

A new breakfast economy

As the resources of breakfast circulate themselves within the Breakfast Program, they begin to substantiate an economy delineated by this communal discursive mode. This new economy becomes more apparent by way of an analogous observation. David Harvey, in a lecture to a group of students, once asked them to answer a simple question: Where does our breakfast come from?⁹⁹ The answer to such a question, of course, lies concealed under the material relations between the different things which bring our breakfast to the table. It becomes impossible to understand the conditions of labor of the individuals who contributed to the force which produces breakfast. As Harvey puts it, “the social relations between things mediate between us and everything that’s going on out there.” His point about the difficulty in ascertaining the origins of the Breakfast Program still holds true, but the communal mode by which the Panthers actuated the program begins to erode the sort of relations which conceal the true origins of breakfast.

Rather than understanding breakfast as something which appears on their family’s table -- or doesn’t -- the children learn through the program the actual costs¹⁰⁰ of providing such a meal. Much of the labor which goes into aggregating the resources necessary for the schoolchildren’s breakfast is a matter of shared knowledge: the specific mechanisms of the Panther Party are disseminated through publicly shared pamphlets, newspapers and interviews. The communal

⁹⁹ Harvey, of course, is not the first person to pose such a question. He does, however, attempt to arrive at a solution in a manner far more similar to this analysis than others. One only has to think of the Christian religious tradition, still practiced by many families today, of thanking each person who contributed to the meal at a table before taking a bite: rather than organizing the immanent, religious practice contents itself to abstract speculations about the producers of breakfast in order to satisfy its vague moralism.

¹⁰⁰ By costs, we mean here not the monetary value or exchange of commodities required in the production of Breakfast, but rather the collective social labor of varying forms which satisfies the requisite work for putting grits and eggs on the table.

discursive mode of such a program, then, helps to replace the material relations between things which dominates modern economies with specific relationships between people. That is to say, the Breakfast Program emphasizes how it is communities of labor, and not relationships between the commodities which they produce, which actually form the basis of the framework which produces breakfast. Harvey, ironically, brings up how good moral behavior always amounts to face to face relations, being good to one's neighbor or the people one encounters on the street. He tells his students, “well what do you do about all of those people who are putting breakfast on your table? What’s your moral responsibility to all of those people? And the answer is: ‘Well, no, I am not interested in all of that.’” The Breakfast Program, as we’ve observed, is exactly interested in that: the obligations of community members towards each other in putting breakfast on the table.¹⁰¹

While ostensibly socialist in nature, the Breakfast Program stretched beyond more traditional conceptions of leftist politics. Congressional hearings note how Cyril of the Harlem branch stated that: “The Black Panther Party is here to serve the people by putting this socialistic program into practice (*Black Panther*, June 7:1969:20).”¹⁰² Government documents such as these demonstrate how competing discourses across the board began to acknowledge the role of the program in serving the people in a socialistic manner through practice. The merits of this form of socialism are distinct. The *San Francisco Chronicle* took note of the communal emphasis, concluding an article about the Breakfast Program by reporting the unspoken lesson children would learn: “power in a community begins with people who care.”¹⁰³ Power manifesting itself alongside the practice of care stretches the Program’s framework beyond typical models of

¹⁰¹ The previously explicated relationship between the businessperson and the schoolchildren confirms this phenomenon. Personal relationships of dependency have nothing obscure or opaque about them. The obligations of the businesspeople, as such, become apparent in a manner discernible through their communal form (namely, as social rather than individual).

¹⁰² Black Panther Party. Hearings, Ninety-first Congress, second session, 86.

¹⁰³ Findley, “School Kids: The Panther Breakfast Club.”

socialism. The relations of care between members of the community exist outside of, or a priori to, frameworks of governance. Whereas the typical notion of state socialism invokes attentiveness to needs through a theoretical societal contract, the Panthers emphasis on people serving other people suggests a distinct type of socialism, distinguished by the absence of political hierarchies. It also suggests an economy in which relations of people cease to be mediated through commodities, and instead through their obligations to each other as community members. The focal point of the Breakfast Program is not the exchange of money for eggs and grits, but the feeding of the children. The paradigm of mutual aid which emerges here marks the politics produced by the Program as a unique web of social relations, where the responsibilities of individuals originate in the body of the community.

The movement of the business people in response to the discourse of the Breakfast Program illustrates how this new economy renders certain practices inarticulable. The specific discursive mode of the Program designated its subjects -- community members -- as participants regardless of their willingness to participate. Business people in the community now serve a new role: they are the partial providers of breakfast to children. This common thread of communal responsibility runs through the modality utilized by the Breakfast Program. Some business people, however, refuse to engage in such a modality; "Rather than donating to feed hungry kids, they decided to close their doors and move."¹⁰⁴ Instead of participating within the community's Breakfast Program, and acting as resource distributors therein, the businesspeople not participating in the Program decided to move. Here we observe a shift in the economy's embedded structures: for a business person to operate as such, they require customers. If a precondition for the customer's patronage is the communal contributions of the business owner, the relationship between the two changes. The business owner's hold on resources becomes a

¹⁰⁴ Dixon and Jeffries, *My People Are Rising*, 168.

subjective responsibility to the people, and the hungry schoolchildren, in their community. As this new social order emerges, the business owners must either facilitate resource provision through the communal modality, or quite literally find a new space to occupy.

A community in motion

Something does not exist unless it is in motion. All of our institutions, from charities to capitalist economies, are always on the road. When things stop, they become stagnant, and they disappear. *Movement underpins every human endeavor*. Whether it be getting through the day or creating global change, it always begins with a single step, with a single motion.¹⁰⁵ It follows that, if all of our unique endeavors require movement, the motion of each one must be different. If we cannot thus far understand the Breakfast Program as a revolution, we can at least consider it a movement. Indeed, many commentators often use this term to describe unconventional and disruptive programs which emerge in contradiction to other standing discourses.¹⁰⁶ So often does the concept of motion go unscrutinized. In delineating the communal mode through which the Breakfast Program operates, our analysis has often leaned into this vernacular of movement. Feeding school children breakfast requires a diverse array of motion: ideological, conceptual, physical, institutional, and political, to name a general few. To better explain this communal mode, then, it would suit us to investigate the motion of the Breakfast Program.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ “It regards every historically developed form as being in a fluid state, in motion, and therefore grasps its transient aspect as well” Karl Marx, *Capital Vol 1*, Postface to the Second Edition

¹⁰⁶ The civil rights movement, for instance, was a motion towards an alternative social order grounded in civil liberties. It, too, substantiated itself through a variety of movement: the act of marching, as one example, manifested the motion of protest. Moving from one point to another, whether it be from one end of the Capitol Mall to the other, or from segregation to equal rights protections, provides a basis for illustrating a political program.

¹⁰⁷ While my use of the concept of motion to illustrate revolution might seem novel, a variety of scholarship acknowledges the political specificity of movement, e.g. migrant studies, religious diasporas, animal ecology, etc. Here I am particularly indebted to Gerard Kuperus’ study of the politics of Salmon: “A school of salmon is a moving community.” Kuperus, “Listening to the Salmon: Latour’s Gaia, Aboriginal Thinking, and the Earth Community”, p.7.

The Breakfast Program operated through a set of practices and statements; thus far, we have attempted to delineate the character and nature of its functional mode. As this discourse comes into focus, a body of motion emerges. While the movement certainly cannot be considered uniform, the analysis hitherto reveals certain patterns of motion authorized by the Breakfast Program. These unconventional patterns of movement help to provide an alternative illustration to how the survival program disrupted the general motion of society at the time. It is my view that, by considering the movement of a revolutionary program such as this, one can also come to understand a great deal about politics, institutional structures, and the patterns of belief which shape everyday life.¹⁰⁸

Reciprocal Motion: Most immediately, the relationship between community members in operating the Breakfast Program substantiates a reciprocal motion. In subjectivizing individuals in a community as holding social obligations towards each other, a relationship of reciprocity is established: the needs of one become the needs of all, and so too do the solutions. In this way, the participants in the Breakfast Program become drawn to one another through a reciprocal movement; they oscillate between individuals' needs, wants and abilities until the one becomes enmeshed in the reciprocal many. The economy which arises from the operation of the program has a double reciprocal motion. First, the business people provide the resources which they acquire through the business of community members back to this community program. Second, the specific incidence of needs -- one which we previously established as necessary, and not

¹⁰⁸ One might argue that such a view constitutes a reductionist viewpoint, wherein the absence of complexity reveals things which might not have been otherwise. Thus far I have been quite explicit to emphasize that these belief patterns cannot be isolated from the nature of the political circumstances being engaged. The same can be said regarding the patterns of motion within a revolutionary program. To contend that this analysis has reduced anything would grant quite the analytical feat on my part; an investigation this specific produces observations reductive only in the sense that they contend solely with the subject matter at hand. To extrapolate from these conclusions is the task of the reader and not the present investigation.

coincidental -- which begets the economy involves a reciprocal acknowledgement of the ways in which individuals can serve each other.¹⁰⁹

Horizontal Motion: The dissolution of party hierarchy implies a motion which operates on a horizontal plane. While the political spatiality of the program might appear dispersed, its course abstains from vertical motion. This sort of spatial-political maneuvering is not a novel concept.¹¹⁰ However, the coercive downwards motion of policy, resources or guidance remains absent in the discursive mode of the Breakfast Program. When all members of a community become responsible for the operation of the Program, the decisions, materials and practices originate and move across each other; the communal mode does not authorize motion from the top down, insofar as it acts to remove hierarchy whenever possible. As the Program's discourse moves horizontally, it also incidentally moves to exclude those who exist on a different plane; that is to say, those in typical positions of hierarchy either acquiesce to the horizontal plane or find themselves physically displaced by the motion of the Breakfast Program. We observed this sort of a phenomenon in the business owners who did not provide resources to the Program, and instead themselves engaged in a motion to the outside of the community. The horizontal movement certainly is one of inclusion, but also holds the potential for physical exclusion should a particular object or individual authorize a form of hierarchy.

Expansive Motion: The horizontal pattern of motion within the Breakfast Program's discourse also seems to break down barriers which it encounters through its expansion. Members of the community come to be understood as entirely equal, in terms of responsibility and participation within the Program, so the discourse's motion extends itself across a variety of

¹⁰⁹ "There is an old African saying, "I am we." If you met an African in ancient times and asked him who he was, he would reply, "I am we." This is revolutionary suicide: I, we, all of us are the one and the multitude." Huey Newton, *Revolutionary Suicide*.

¹¹⁰ One only has to think of trickle down economics.

surfaces¹¹¹. One party member described how , “the [Breakfast Program] has been growing by leaps and bounds... Although there was some publicity through the usual channels, most of it has been word of mouth, passed on by the children themselves.”¹¹² We see this expansion in the inclusion of the business owners as members of the community; the pattern of motion manifested by the Program razes the conventional obstacles to expansion through its specific communal mode. The spatial axis previously discussed also contributes to this expansive pattern. As the Breakfast Program begins to operate in a wider variety of places, it’s movement expands across more surfaces. The outwards motion is not limited only to the horizontal inclusion of individuals, but also to the expansive proliferation of spaces. Furthermore, the motion of expansion can be observed through the explosive spread of the program across the country to different chapters of the Party and different cities. The expansive motion finally finds the discourse present across a variety of institutions, media and statements; the FBI’s engagement with the Breakfast Program, regardless of its specific practices, shows how its expansive pattern of motion penetrated even the most remote discourses.

Repetitive Motion: Finally, one finds the motion of repetition within the communal discursive mode of the Breakfast Program. This repetition can most obviously be found in statements which situate the previously discussed temporal nature of the Program. When describing donations offered by community members, one article from Oakland emphasizes how the Breakfast Program, “must be supported and donated to by Black Businesses, every week, for greater unity in the Black community.”¹¹³ An image of Bill Boyette, the black business owner in question, frames the article. He is the only one in the picture, sitting on a counter; the caption

¹¹¹ Here, I use Foucault’s notion of *surfaces of emergence* as a helpful conceptual crutch. The surface I refer to is a set of historical conditions out of which a specific set of practices emerge.

¹¹² Federal Bureau of Investigation, “Hartford Declassified Documents,” 256.

¹¹³ “Why Boycott Bill Boyette.”

reads: “Bill Boyette *sits alone* -- he could join the people by donating a small, small minimal amount each and every week to the People’s Survival Program.”¹¹⁴ The picture, alongside the caption, articulates the solidarity of the community through the motion of repetition. Even if Boyette donates once or twice, it is the repetition -- the continual return -- to the community which the Party validates. The Breakfast Program only succeeds inasmuch as it invites members of the community to repetitively engage each other. The temporal nature of the needs of the schoolchildren, needing to eat every day, is reflected in the discourse surrounding the duties of the members of the community. Just as the children return to hunger, the community returns to survival programs. This articulation of community through movement along a repetitive temporal axis supplements *you can’t do it alone* with *we must keep doing it together*.

¹¹⁴ “Why Boycott Bill Boyette.”

THE BREAKFAST EDUCATION PARADIGM

Another Organization (O) Shows its Program to Chairman Fred Hampton (FH)

(FH): “You basically know you can support some of our programs, is that what you’re saying?”

(O): “Why not?”

(FH): “And you believe in programs like the Breakfast for Children Program, and the Free Health Clinics? Right on, brothers?”

(O): “We believe they’re good things.”

(FH): “Uh-huh.”

(O): “As a focal point to organizing mothers and fathers.”

(FH): “Uh-huh. There’s no educational program here?”

(O): “Well we can’t put everything on one piece of paper...”

(FH): “See the thing is for me, I need to know a little more about the educational thing here. Because, we’re concerned with the struggle, that this depends on the educational thing... What we’ve got to understand here, is the educational program that you have, to be able to figure out whether you’re going along the right lines so the people can end up in a situation where they can really control themselves. With no education, the people will take this local foundation and start stealing money because they won’t be really educated to why it’s the people thing anyway. With no education you’ll have neocolonialism instead of colonialism, like you’ve got in Africa now and Haiti. So, what we’re talking about is there has to be an educational program, that’s very important... Why? Because if they don’t have education, then they’re nowhere, you know what I’m saying? Because they don’t even know why they’re doing what they’re doing.”¹¹⁵

¹¹⁵ Howard Alk, *The Murder of Fred Hampton*, Film (Facets Multi-Media Chicago Film Group, MGA Inc, 1971).

What can we learn from breakfast?

The intersections of food and education in the Breakfast Program are at once obvious. When feeding school children, a clear, albeit coincidental, relationship emerges: food acts on education insofar as the children who receive schooling consume it. The deeper our investigation goes into the discourse of the Breakfast Program, however, the more complex the relationship between education and food becomes; the feeding of children seems to be quite productive in the domain of education. Bobby Seale writes that, “The objective of programs set forth by revolutionaries like the Black Panther Party is to educate the masses of the people.”¹¹⁶ Seale articulates the objective of the Breakfast Program not as simply feeding the children but establishing an education. A statement from Newton and Cleaver on the Breakfast Program echoes this productive objective of the Program, stating, “We... must unite with this BLACK PANTHER PROGRAM for BETTER education of our children.”¹¹⁷ This statement, which appeared numerous times early on in the statements printed by the Party about the Program, authorizes the program’s operation not only as one which produces food for the schoolchildren, but also improves their education. The knowledge produced through this education conspicuously transcends only access to food; it was also, “pivotal to educating community members about violence.”¹¹⁸ The Breakfast Program not only serves breakfast, but also a complex education immanent to their circumstances. In this case, the Panthers draw out the siege which their communities endure: the siege of hunger, the siege of violence, the siege of repression. It is these circumstances that the Breakfast Program educates the children -- and

¹¹⁶ Seale, *Seize the Time*.

¹¹⁷ Cleaver, Eldridge and Newton, Huey P, “Breakfast for Black Children.”

¹¹⁸ López, ““We Know What the Pigs Don’t Like.””

indeed the community -- about, not only by highlighting these struggles but also by providing an alternative means forward.¹¹⁹

Posters often explicitly articulated this model of education by advertising the Breakfast Program as a “COMMUNITY POLITICAL EDUCATION.”¹²⁰ Posters like these continue to emerge as the Program comes to be authorized by the Panthers as an educational paradigm. Internal statements among party members also substantiated the educational potential of the Breakfast Program; Seale once chided those without belief in the basic community programs, saying, “They didn’t understand how this educates the masses of people to put more revolutionary political pressure on the power structure.”¹²¹ Indeed, the operation of the program seemed to substantiate a form of teaching by, “setting forth ideology and teaching the people correct methods.”¹²² In addition to serving eggs, the Program also produced a new educational model through its operation.

The consequences of the Breakfast Program extend far beyond simple plates of food served to children. The functioning of free breakfast also substantiated a distinctive method of teaching. The Panther’s original task of feeding children not only operated in a marked manner, but also produced a relatively fixed concept of teaching children.¹²³ As we begin to understand the manner by which the program functioned, we also turn to attempt to understand the sorts of models which it produced. Through an analysis of the educational paradigm¹²⁴ I would like to

¹¹⁹ I intend to address the liberatory aspect of their education later.

¹²⁰ Williams, *Liberated Territory: Untold Local Perspectives on the Black Panther Party*.

¹²¹ Seale, *Seize the Time*, 207.

¹²² Seale, 202.

¹²³ The intersection of different discourses produces new models for understanding their relation. Just as the intersection of race and the law, for instance, produces a new field of education called critical race theory, so too does the intersection of the politics of breakfast and communal modalities produce a new paradigm of education.

¹²⁴ By paradigm, I mean a theoretical framework of mechanisms, institutions and apparatuses which a real proposal hopes to substantiate. The Breakfast Program, as we will see, produced a certain framework for learning and knowledge production which can be replicated across other similar food based programs and even extended to other domains of education.

demonstrate new possibilities for learning, especially as it regards alternative social models like the Breakfast Program.

Needs based education

The Breakfast Program organized itself around meeting the needs of the people, the first being breakfast. As the Program operates, however, it begins to expand its mechanisms into other sites of need. As one Party captain remarked, the program was, “the perfect vehicle for the party to address the concrete, immediate needs of the people.”¹²⁵ The production of a “curriculum designed to meet the needs of the youth” helps to give shape to a new paradigm for educating them.¹²⁶ The needs met through the communal mode quickly expanded beyond food. One *Black Panther* paper depicts a poster for the Free Breakfast for School Children Program with a slogan above that reads: “Serving the People, Body and Soul.”¹²⁷ Rather than just meet the immediate food needs of the children, the Program shifts into an authority on meeting a variety of needs in the community. Simultaneously, statements begin to emerge likening the resolving of needs in the community with providing an education: “They were supposed to meet the concrete needs of the masses of people as well as highlight the inability of the state to resolve these programs, thus providing mass political education.”¹²⁸ One statement by party member Jamal Joseph helps to frame this: “The idea of the breakfast program was certainly to feed kids. Kids were going to school hungry because of poverty in our community, and you could not expect our children to learn if their stomachs were growling. The teacher is standing in front of them saying two apples plus three apples equals five apples -- and their stomachs are growling.”¹²⁹ The Panthers, through their emphasis on food, produce a paradigm of education with needs-based apparatuses.

¹²⁵ Dixon and Jeffries, *My People Are Rising*, 190.

¹²⁶ “Liberation Schools.” *The Black Panther*, July 5, 1969.

¹²⁷ “10,000 Free Bags of Groceries,” 000.

¹²⁸ Spencer, *The Revolution Has Come: Black Power, Gender, and the Black Panther Party in Oakland*.

¹²⁹ EBONY. “PANTHER BABY: Jamal Joseph Talks Revolution • EBONY,” July 22, 2016.

The shift here can be observed in how Joseph recognizes that education necessarily depends on basic needs being met. Education begins to address a variety of needs, articulating well-fed, cared for children as a crucial part of teaching.

Other statements emphasize the importance of meeting needs in producing education: “Why a Breakfast for Children Program?... The majority of Black, Mexican-American, Orientals and poor Whites know from their American experience that it is impossible to obtain and sustain any education when one has to attend school hungry.”¹³⁰ The politics of racial alliances become clear here, and speaks to how the imagined alternative has brought relevance beyond the black community themselves. The Hartford, Connecticut Party Captain Butch Lewis explained that: “A lot of the students go to school without breakfast in the morning and this becomes a very bad disciplinary action and when you’re hungry, you can’t think and you cannot really do anything if you’re hungry.”¹³¹ Educational models, then, must be constructed through needs-based institutions; for this, the emergence of the Breakfast Program as part of an educational paradigm comes as no surprise. The survival programs constitute a new type of education insofar as they provide for the needs of a community. The Breakfast Program produces an education which rests on the circumstances and the conditions of the community in which it operates; in this way it reflects a communal mode of education. The articulation by the Panthers of learning as needs-based helps us to identify the projects which most closely manifest their educational paradigm: ones equipped with mechanisms and apparatuses which address the immanent circumstances of the people which it educates.

¹³⁰ “Why the Free Breakfast?”

¹³¹ Federal Bureau of Investigation, “Hartford Declassified Documents,” 253.

Education through exemplary action

Addressing the needs of the community requires action. Programs like feeding school children breakfast -- and other survival programs -- constitute an educational paradigm through their action; in an interview with the Movement, Huey affirms the importance of action, explaining that the party, “[educates] through action. We have to engage in action to make the people want to read our literature.”¹³² This statement centralizes the active role of the Party’s programs in creating the educational subject. Community action serves as a mechanism to bring the people to read and to learn. Statements by other Panther teachers show how the various actions of the Breakfast Program substantiated education: an issue of the *Black Panther* describes how, “The beauty of socialism is seen through their daily practice while involving themselves in the program. We call upon the people within the community to join the Vanguard Party in putting forth the correct examples for our youth through their active participation in our liberation schools across this country.”¹³³ The feeding of children serves as a demonstrable example from which the education of the same schoolchildren springs. “[Children] know that when they come in, their breakfast is being prepared, because the Black Panther Party knows the importance of having breakfast in the morning. It wakes them up and gives them strength to exert their energy. Being an assistant teacher, I have an opportunity amongst the children and start a conversation, and stimulate their minds to see clearly the state of repression that we are living in.”¹³⁴ Not only does the feeding of children lend itself to the propagation of education through preparing children to learn, it also simultaneously provides an example of actions which address the needs of the community it serves.

¹³² Students for a Democratic Society, Huey Newton Interview with The Movement, 17.

¹³³ “For Too Long Our Children Have Gone Hungry.”

¹³⁴ Douglas, “The Youth Make the Revolution.”

This action came to be authorized as an aspect of the Panther's educational paradigm by means of example; one article in the *Black Panther*, titled, "Why the Free Breakfast", prints that, "The Black Panther Party is a vanguard organization and a vanguard organization educates by example."¹³⁵ Feeding breakfast becomes an exemplary act of education. Teaching occurs when examples are produced; "The people learn from these programs because they're clear examples."¹³⁶ Here we see an important pattern in these statements: that the provision of food provides an example of a communal act, and these examples constitute an educational model.¹³⁷ These models proliferate themselves through the programs which provide actionable examples; their reciprocal movement in this sense betrays their communal production. "They feel that through setting correct examples for the people, and by educating the people, their purpose will be fulfilled. For example, after the Party initiated the Free Breakfast Programs, many communities realized the need and validity of such programs, and moved to establish their own Free Breakfast or Lunch Program."¹³⁸ The productive capacity of education by example extends past just the Free Breakfast Program. Educational models constituted by specific examples of their active role in creating institutions, it would seem, also teach the expansion of those institutions.

Establishment of educational institutions

The production of this educational model is indeed in motion; it spreads and expands across a variety of sites. One teacher observes how, "In the past, colleges, and recently high school students have been voicing their demands and opinions. These children will teach their other brothers and sisters, and even the elementary schools will be expressing their disgust of the

¹³⁵"Why the Free Breakfast?"

¹³⁶ Seale, *Seize the Time*.

¹³⁷ It is, then, the example of communal modality which really drives the expansion of the educational model, in two ways: it first provides an immediate example by which a person can learn, and then proliferates itself throughout the community by virtue of its distinct motion.

¹³⁸ "Pigs--Panthers."

situation they are in.”¹³⁹ The seed of revolutionary education begins to take hold. The sites of this education are manifold; as one decouples education from its traditional paradigms, one also smashes the limits of where it can take place. The Breakfast Program stretched across a variety of physical sites, transforming a diverse swatch of physical spaces into places for learning: clubs, churches, mess halls, and people’s homes.¹⁴⁰ The schoolhouse maximizes its authority over the institution of education by delegitimizing the experience of children learning in other places; the schoolchildren within the Panther paradigm, conversely, experience education as they travel through their lives. As one Panther put it, “I think the one thing we have to hold clear in our minds is that the campus only occupies the teachers and the students 7 or 8 hours a day; and after that they’re back into the community. So that it’s impossible to talk about waging any type of struggle, if the community is not a part of that struggle. So if we have problems, we have to bring the community into the campus. We have to stop isolating ourselves from the community. Because the very people on the campus live in the community. And they come from the community; so therefore, the universities are also a part of the community.”¹⁴¹ Since the community occupies a variety of spaces, and the Panther’s educational paradigm operates through and about this community, it follows that learning substantiates itself across a collection of locations.

The shift from basic breakfast provision to a widespread framework of teaching also shifts the programs which constitute it; breakfast institutions become liberation schools. By 1969, the *Black Panther* regularly printed articles about how the, “Liberation schools will replace.. The Free Breakfast for School Children that was initiated in the beginning of this

¹³⁹ Douglas, “The Youth Make the Revolution.”

¹⁴⁰ We have already covered, at length, the expansive movement of the Breakfast Program’s modality by establishing the multitude of locations in which it operated (see Chapter 2). Here, we turn to the consequences of this expansion as it relates to sites of education.

¹⁴¹ Hilliard, “Black Student Unions.”

year.”¹⁴² The development of this educational model is remarkable.¹⁴³ Within two years, the simple act of feeding school children begins to produce a complex apparatus for their teaching. Our analysis to this point provides some explanation for the explosion of Liberation Schools in educational discourse; the political potency of food around which the Breakfast Program formed, and the patent movement of communal modalities help to show the power of this educational model. Teacher Val Douglas remarked in July of 1969 how, “we are happy to say that in the next couple of weeks, Liberation Schools will be springing up all over the Nation, just like the Breakfast for School Children.”¹⁴⁴ These Liberation Schools shared the fundamental paradigmatic character of the Breakfast Program; the Party described them by way of saying, “Liberation School is the second of the many socialistic and educational programs that will be implemented by the Black Panther Party to meet the needs of the people.”¹⁴⁵ The educational institutions spawned by the Breakfast Program’s communal mode still organize themselves into a needs based framework.

The institutions which constituted the Panther’s educational paradigm were not just limited to the Liberation Schools, however. The framework of needs-based, actionable education extended itself through a variety of manifestations. In an interview with the *Daily World*, one Panther explained that, “Whenever possible, the Panthers will help with the problem, no matter what it is. For example, we discovered that many of the school children, aside from problems like going without breakfast, faced serious strain from the difficulty of finding a place to study or play, safe from the hazards of the street.”¹⁴⁶ In addition to feeding the children, the educational

¹⁴²“Liberation Schools.”

¹⁴³ Although provided for by the Breakfast Program even from its first mention in the *Black Panther*: “We are deeply concerned with the problems of the younger people and we have arrived at the ‘Breakfast for School Children’ as being *just part of the solution*.” (*Black Panther*; May 25, 1969. Emphasis added)

¹⁴⁴ Douglas, “The Youth Make the Revolution.”

¹⁴⁵ “For Too Long Our Children Have Gone Hungry.”

¹⁴⁶ “Daily World Excerpt,” *Daily World*, May 16, 1970.

model began to teach the people about how to create programs to address other imminent issues. The interview goes on to explain how the Panthers established places where the children could, “play quietly, or study, paint or do whatever they wish.”¹⁴⁷ The articulation of the educational model now extends far beyond explicit teaching mechanisms; statements like this authorize a variety of activities which produce sites of learning.

Indeed, the Panther’s discursive authorization of the expansive possibilities of the educational paradigm results in the production of a multitude of institutions. In one article, Cleaver explains how, “Black children who go to school hungry each morning have been organized into poverty, and the Panther program liberates them, frees them from that aspect of their poverty... if we understand breakfast for children, can we not also understand Lunch for Children, Dinner for Children, and Clothing for Children, and Education for Children, and Medical Care for Children?”¹⁴⁸ The Panther’s system of education teaches how to establish similar programs which affect the issues facing the community. The paradigm is such that, as the community learns about their problems, they also learn the programs to solve them. Here we see the real productive potential of a model like the Black Panthers’: a needs-based education which emerged from a group of solution-oriented programs proliferates itself both through a generative type of knowledge and a real set of institutions.

Teaching revolution and indoctrinating hate

Upon arriving at a preliminary notion of the Breakfast Program’s model for education, we encounter a tension. Thus far, the exemplary discourse has uniformly articulated the type of learning at hand with a revolutionary education. However, a competing set statements emerged surrounding the Breakfast Program -- and eventually the rest of the survival programs -- which

¹⁴⁷ “Daily World Excerpt.”

¹⁴⁸ Cleaver, Eldridge, “Running with the Chicanos,” 235.

formulated the Party's paradigm as one of indoctrination: a Congressional record describes how, "In addition to feeding the children, the Panthers use the free breakfast time as an opportunity to indoctrinate the youngsters with their philosophy of hate."¹⁴⁹ The consideration of the Breakfast Program as serving not food or education, but hate, stands in clear competition with the discourse produced by the Panther party. An article in the *Deseret News* in 1970 describes how the Panthers, "happily accept liberal money to feed hungry ghetto children and, indeed, they serve free breakfasts to an estimated 10,000 youngsters each month. But the free food is merely an enticement to attract the children to revolutionary kindergartens where they are taught to hate whites, to commit crimes and to fight the police."¹⁵⁰ While these assertions collaboratively articulate the Breakfast Program as an educational endeavor, they do so by characterizing the model in a much different way.¹⁵¹¹⁵²

Other statements contribute to the emergence of a discourse surrounding the Panther's educational methods. A declassified FBI document notes that: "The Housing Authority stipulated that the Black Panther Party use this community room only for the purpose of serving breakfast and that any indoctrination or education by the Black Panther Party be specifically prohibited."¹⁵³ Clearly, the notion of a revolutionary education for school children came into competition with

¹⁴⁹ Ninety-First Congress, Second Session, "Black Panther Party: Investigation of Activities in Detroit, Mich; Philadelphia, Pa; and Indianapolis, Ind. Hearings Before the Committee on Internal Security, House of Representatives," 2208.

¹⁵⁰ Anderson, "Black Panthers Big with White Liberals."

¹⁵¹ Statements like these are precisely why a lack of good faith Black Panther Party scholarship still continues, albeit to a lesser degree, today. Debunking the biased news coverage which dominated the discourse surrounding the Breakfast Program helps to encourage other thinkers to explore the radical analysis and practices of the Panther Party.

¹⁵² To be fair, Jack Anderson doesn't get much wrong in this statement, although he confuses a minutiae of the content being learned for the model itself. I wonder if the Panthers had the chance to read this newspaper article; revolutionary kindergarten is an enticing name for liberation schools.

¹⁵³ Federal Bureau of Investigation, "Hartford Declassified Documents," 253.

existing paradigms of knowledge sharing. For some, the Panther's did not educate, but merely looked to indoctrinate the children through their role as teachers.¹⁵⁴

The contradiction which arises here has everything to do with the specific implications of the panthers model's emergence in the domain of education. Some interpret the Breakfast Program as indoctrination because it consists of *learning about moving towards an alternative social order*. For the same reason that the FBI viewed the Breakfast Program as a major threat, so too do critics understand the educational aspect of the Program as a form of indoctrination: they both propose that the student be educated as to how to change their social circumstances. The other component which contributes to the view of indoctrination is the responsibility of education *falling on the members of the Party themselves*. This introduces a hierarchical division, wherein the knowledgeable Panther Party members disseminate information to the receptive students. In the October 4th, 1969 issue of the *Black Panther*, an article detailing the liberation schools explains that, "Community Political Education classes will also be starting in the evening for adults. The education of the masses is primary to the Vanguard Party."¹⁵⁵ Here, the Panthers articulate the task of education as falling to the Party itself; this lies in contradiction with the communal mode, which operates through deliverance unto the community. It would seem that, to some degree, typical hierarchical divisions have crept into the Panther's model of education. The instruction of a figure of authority on moving towards a social alternative, then, authorizes the discourse of indoctrination in regards to the Breakfast Program. Our task becomes to provide an account for how the Black Panthers worked within this tension, and moved beyond it.

¹⁵⁴ This indoctrination discourse also helps to provide a better account for the conditions of emergence for Hoover's statement that, "the Black Panther Party, without question, represents the greatest threat to internal security of our country." As the picture of how food helps to educate people to alternative social models becomes clearer, the threat it poses to the dominant class becomes more understandable.

¹⁵⁵ "For Too Long Our Children Have Gone Hungry."

An educational paradigm of liberation

What can be said of indoctrination? The spectre of uncritical knowledge dissemination still haunts the world today. The Black Panthers authorized themselves as the disseminators of alternative knowledge by articulating a model of education aimed at revolution: “the education of the masses is primary to the Vanguard Party. People, take part in this revolutionary program to continue the struggle for freedom in this country.”¹⁵⁶ The education of the schoolchild and the masses is primary to the Panther party itself. Insofar as their establishment as teachers, the Party’s discourse also provides for the articulation of indoctrination within the limit of their education. That is to say, the Panther’s role as disseminators of a new set of political relationships between people serves as the authorization for detractors to call them indoctrinators. As we have seen, the students of this new knowledge -- the schoolchildren -- come to be asserted as subjects of indoctrination.

A revolutionary paradigm of education requires a new notion of teacher.¹⁵⁷ Huey Newton sets the limit as such in an interview with *The Movement* by stating, “They have identified their enemies... They realize that the American system is the real enemy but in order to attack the American system they must attack the ordinary cop. In order to attack the educational system they must attack the *ordinary* teacher.”¹⁵⁸ The Panther’s new education changes the paradigm by producing an unconventional teacher. The radical teacher deals not solely with the issue of hunger for children, but with the abundance of difficulties which face their community: it includes a critique of multiple systems. Thus the charge of indoctrination extends itself to, “[teaching] to hate whites, to commit crimes and to fight the police.”¹⁵⁹ All of these issues face

¹⁵⁶ “For Too Long Our Children Have Gone Hungry.”

¹⁵⁷ “Education must begin with the solution of the teacher-student contradiction, by reconciling the poles of the contradiction so that both are simultaneously teachers and students.” Paulo Friere

¹⁵⁸ Students for a Democratic Society, Huey Newton Interview with *The Movement*.

¹⁵⁹ Jack Anderson, “Black Panthers Big with White Liberals,” *Deseret News*, September 10, 1970.

the community, and so it follows that an educational model functioning through a communal mode would in turn address each of them.

Party member Val Douglas, a teacher at a liberation school, states that, “We know that the children are going to rebel against their teachers and older people, but we know that the most important thing is to get the children to work with each other, because there’s not going to be a Black Panther Party around all the time to set things straight. They’re going to have to depend and relate to each other. We have small fights and arguments, but when they do occur we sit down and discuss the matter and come to a conclusion, *a unity of will*, because we know that if we don’t solve the problem then and there, the children will be holding grudges.”¹⁶⁰ Here, the Panthers address the tension at hand: the acknowledgement of the competition between the teacher-student relationship provides for a distinct response within the educational model. What complicates the matter even more is the relationship of children more generally to adults, inside and outside of the domain of education. The lack of autonomy of children in decision making processes is most commonly accepted as necessary, given the lack of experience and faculties held by individuals at a young age. The Panther’s account for this difficulty in teaching the children through a reconciliation of community regarding shared obstacles and shortcomings. The Panthers acknowledge that they won’t always be around “all the time to set things straight”, so they articulate the community, not themselves, as the teachers within the new program.

A speech given by a Panther member on San Francisco State’s campus characterizes the revolutionary teacher as one relevant to the circumstances of the community: “So that it’s the duty of the teachers to teach revolution: it’s the duty of the teachers to join the revolution. Because they’re not teachers if they’re not teaching something relevant to the community.”¹⁶¹ *A*

¹⁶⁰ Douglas, “The Youth Make the Revolution.” emphasis added.

¹⁶¹ Hilliard, “Black Student Unions.”

person teaches insofar as they illuminate the conditions of their community. A revolutionary education requires that the teacher learn from the students their needs just as much as they demonstrate the possibilities of alleviating them.¹⁶² As this shift occurs, the authoritative hold of the teacher over the schoolchild shifts into an inclusive approach of the community. The ordinary teacher deposits abstractions into the schoolchild's hunger-ridden mind, an occasional dump of alien knowledge through a hierarchy of relationships. The revolutionary teacher deals with the concrete contradictions at hand for the schoolchild: "We don't educate them about historians that are completely rejected, completely removed from their environment. We educate those people and those young people about the conditions in their community. We show them very physically the conditions in the white mother community, as sometimes referred to, and the situation in the black community. We show them and we point out to them the evildoers and the law breakers, supposedly manifested in the peace officers. And we show them very concrete and real contradictions, but we do not indoctrinate them, we educate them."¹⁶³ Education shifts from a removed daydream to an imminent action. To teach requires that one operate through the community in addressing its needs. For the Black Panthers, this meant teachers who addressed the specific issues which faced the black community.

For this reason, the teachers themselves must be members of the community, since only in that way could they be sensitive to specific circumstances like communal hunger: "when you're hungry, you can't think and you cannot really do anything if you're hungry and a lot of teachers don't understand this because they come from outside of the community."¹⁶⁴ The teacher as a subject of the community necessitates not only their membership in the community, but their

¹⁶² "The teacher is of course an artist, but being an artist does not mean that he or she can make the profile, can shape the students. What the educator does in teaching is to make it possible for the students to become themselves." Paulo Friere, *We Make the Road by Walking: Conversations on Education and Social Change*

¹⁶³ Hilliard, *Face the Nation*.

¹⁶⁴ Butch Lewis, *Press Conference at 45 Canton Street* (Hartford, Connecticut, 1969).

understanding of the effects and consequences of the issues facing it. This educational paradigm doesn't teach how to add apples to a starving schoolchild, but shows them how they might too have something to eat. The teacher becomes a conduit of communal survival: “We want education for our people that exposes the true nature of this decadent American society. We want education that teaches our true history and our role in the present-day society.’ We recognize that education is only relevant when it teaches the art of survival.”¹⁶⁵ As the arbiters of solutions relevant to the circumstances of the community, the revolutionary teacher produced by the Breakfast Program ceases to disseminate a static doctrine of abstract idealism. In its place, an alternative educational paradigm operates within an immanent relativity to the people which it serves.

It is my view that this dynamic applicability of this educational paradigm presents itself to members outside of the community as indoctrination. It does so by its production of knowledge specific to a certain site of struggle. Statements linking the Panther Program to indoctrination revolve around the Program's focus on a specific community's needs and actions; they understand the specificity of this program to be a hallmark of its indoctrinative character. Indoctrination becomes a matter of immanence, a lack of generality. Those excluded from this system of education articulate it as indoctrinating through their lack of control over its programming. For me, the specificity of the Panther's educational program is exactly what lends it a revolutionary character. Rather than substantiate the dominant objects of knowledge through its instruction, the educational model produced by the Breakfast Program introduces an alternative specific to a certain set of obstacles. From this conflict we observe the emergence of an indoctrination discourse; the imbalance of power between the dominant system of education and the alternative model leads to the dismissal of the latter as hostile. And indeed, it is hostile:

¹⁶⁵ “Liberation Schools.”

to the conditions and circumstances which lead to the production of the needs of a community, that leads to the creation of hunger for schoolchildren. By this hostility, this attack of the current social order, a new model of learning in competition with another can understandably come to be articulated as indoctrination. Its hostility to the current social order provides an alternative influence. The discourse of these detractors attempts to perpetuate the imbalance of power which oppresses these communities by marginalizing their attempts to provide an educational means to overcome it.

The Panther's subvert this notion of indoctrination by subverting the relationship between the teacher and the student. Whereas traditional vanguards operate as separate from the general population, the Panthers, "call upon the people within the community to join the Vanguard Party in putting forth the correct examples for our youth through their active participation in our liberation schools across this country." The educational paradigm produced by the Breakfast Program addresses needs -- regarding food, security, knowledge, and more -- by calling to action *members of the community* to create examples for the schoolchildren. Whether an educational example is "correct" becomes a matter of ascertaining whether the knowledge addresses issues pertinent to the community. The vanguard party instigates both the feeding of children and the creation of an exemplary educational model, but the communal mode which underpins the continued operation of these programs extends the authority beyond the Panther Party to the entirety of the community. It thus no longer becomes a small group indoctrinating the school children, but an entire community raising them to the level of consciousness. Furthermore, as we have seen with the exemplary character of the educational model, not only do the school children receive the knowledge about improving their own situation, but so too do all members of the community facing the same obstacles and circumstances. More so than anywhere else, it is here

that the revolutionary essence of the Panther's educational model lies: the reconciliation of the teacher/student relationship, in the form of a community teaching each other how to take action against the obstacles which they face.

CODA

The Breakfast Program, no matter how small of a blip on history's radar, constitutes the emergence of an alternative. I cannot emphasize enough the potential for these alternatives to create change. A new way to serve eggs, a new way to feed our children, resolutely refutes the embedded social order of hunger and helplessness. Our continued engagement with this program and others like it bolsters the struggle against oppression by providing examples of how it might be overcome. One of the most common responses I've observed to critical analyses of the issues facing the world today is the "So what?" response. How could we possibly hope to overcome these massive systems of exploitation? Sometimes, it's enough just to sit with the issues and consider them. And with this consideration, we must include an account of when people have overcome these systems with their own alternative frameworks, even if just a blip, even if just a local victory. Too often, I think, we jump to the complex circumstances of global power without for a moment accounting for the immanent possibility for change in our own communities. The graduate student in San Francisco struggles to comprehend how global hunger might be addressed without realizing that possible solutions have occurred just across the bay bridge not too long ago. Sitting with these issues, considering these programs, and discussing the rich history of action against the system provides the revolutionary thinker with a foundation on which to struggle.

These moments in history where the people have attempted to overcome the obstacles facing them also provide substantial educational opportunities. Whether it be a middle school or a graduate course, by including these moments in our curriculum we articulate the possibility for alternative social change. This requires research and scholarship. The violence of the FBI and the

denouncement of the educational model as indoctrination proves not only that the dominant powers seek to stifle these discussions, but also that they view them as a threat. Every time we acknowledge that school children can be fed, and that the community can do it themselves, together, we also acknowledge the possibility for social change in our own circumstances.

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The first chapter emphasized the political and organizational potential of food not only to suggest the importance of this body of research but also to elucidate the specific figure of the Black Panther Party which emerges from this Program. Food, insofar as its role as the sustenance of humanity, can be understood in a universal manner with relatively little difficulty. As the Black Panthers, and the community, come to provide food, they begin to operate within a domain with more global ramifications. The conceptual is truly global. Under this rubric of breakfast provision, which concerns the entire world, the Panthers begin to articulate a social order with a much broader significance. It is in this role, I think, that the Panther Party comes to be the target of political powers, not for its revolutionary statements, but because it began to act on a more universal level. As the Party shapes a new discourse surrounding food, they too wield the political potential of something much greater than the school child or breakfast; they begin to control a discourse with the potential to affect a variety of communities. Hunger, even today, continues to be one of the most fundamental experiences of the oppressed; by politicizing hunger, and the possibility of its eradication, the Panthers come to play a specific position within the political regime. Their ability to feed school children breakfast authorizes them in advocating for a new social order.

The dynamic nature of the educational paradigm produced by the Breakfast Program also lends itself to global application. By creating campaigns which address local issues, we enable

ourselves to transpose revolutionary methods to other circumstances of oppression. Of course, we can observe the historical motion of these movements: the Breakfast Program extended itself across the nation in under ten years, and the tenants of the Black Panther Program became internationally recognized and indeed utilized. A reworking of the one is a reworking of them all. The interconnectedness of these issues further substantiates this claim. The survival programs emerged as a set of responses to a set of conditions by their connection and relativity to each other. The same system of oppression which forced school children to go to school hungry also produced the need for free health clinics, prison bussing systems, clothing drives, and other Black Panther survival programs. A program to address each one of these provides the impetus for addressing the others. The ability of a specific community to subvert the political conditions of its oppression into tools for liberation serves as an exemplary action to radical activists everywhere. By taking into account the historical emergence of these programs, we can plan future programs of the same liberative character.

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It seems to me that, in many cases, the biggest obstacle to alternative social movements is ideology. The belief of people in the current system, or the disbelief in the possibility of an alternative, plagues the reality of social change. The irony, of course, is that the same people who critique the alternative as a simple utopia level their criticism through the lens of a society built entirely upon unanchored utopian ideals. The Black Panthers did not indulge in utopian fantasies, but rather raised to the level of consciousness the possibility of communal management. As one revolutionary put it, “still, if there’s anything the last several hundred years of world history has shown us, it’s that utopian visions can be powerful.”¹⁶⁶ How can we know what’s possible for a society if we never attempt to create change? For me, the profoundly inspirational aspect of

¹⁶⁶ David Graeber, *Debt: The First 5,000 Years* (Brooklyn and London: Melville House, 2011), 354.

feeding school children breakfast lies in the production of an ideology which authorizes these programs as a possibility. If the Breakfast Program demonstrates anything, it's the pathetic fatalism of the notion of impossibility; *impossible! Ne me dites jamais ce bête de mot!*¹⁶⁷

If ideology stands as the biggest obstacle to raising the people to this level of consciousness, the question that stands before us is this: how do we overcome repressive ideology? How might we demonstrate to the community their potential for organizing, their potential for creating an alternative politics? The Breakfast Program provides us with some answers. Ideologies are couched in material circumstances; once you begin to change the material circumstances, so too does the ideology begin to shift. Addressing the immediate needs of a community is the first step in raising a new consciousness. To begin to free ourselves, the first thing we need to do is recognize our ability to affect change in the most fundamental annals of our lives. When we do acknowledge the possibility of alternative economies, or of communal control, or of mutual aid, it's often in a way which minimizes the potential of the operation: a small communal garden, a few community watch people, an annual neighborhood trash clean up.¹⁶⁸ These projects, albeit small, demonstrate that the alternative still lurks behind the monolithic systems of power which dominate today. The movement of the community towards each other, the return to the needs of the people, presents a unique opportunity to develop the campaign of alternative social orders. A politics of care, even if it's just through the provision of breakfast, stands as the greatest threat to our current system of exploitation. Every plant in the communal garden is a revolutionary seed, and the more that we nurture these projects the closer we come to a communal consensus about the alternative way forward.

¹⁶⁷ "Impossible? Never use that ridiculous word to me!" Mirabeau, qtd. In Samuel Arthur Bent, *Familiar Short Sayings of Great Men* (Boston: Ticknor and Co, 1887).

¹⁶⁸ More often, communal control comes to be co-opted by dominant political systems: the home owners association, privately maintained beaches, corporate funded public transit bays. The historical milestone of the Breakfast Program's operation by the community provides examples as to how this sort of maneuvering could be avoided.

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Replacing the state is both a conceptual and material endeavor; to make change, education must be balanced with action. Indeed, one of the most cumbersome discussions which weighs down revolutionary movements lies in the distinction between rhetoric and action; if a social movement is seen to rely on one more than the other, simple accusations often emerge from detractors aimed at the efficacy of the movement. It is my view that the Black Panthers succeeded in wedding these two concepts together through the educational paradigm produced by the Breakfast Program. As Huey P. Newton put it, “No slogan will change the people’s opinion; a change in behavior is the only thing that will do it.”¹⁶⁹ The Panthers recognized the necessity of a communal consciousness in organizing the people towards a revolution, but articulated the conceptual basis as one of direct action. The role of language in building a revolution remained a part of the Panther perspective, but it emerged around direct action, such as feeding school children breakfast.

The intercommunal news service coverage of the Breakfast Program provides the perfect example: the Panther’s primary propaganda machine did not only spew a word salad of abstract concepts, but reported the action taken on the ground. Every mention of the Breakfast Program comes alongside resources for donations, volunteers, and interested children. To divorce the rhetorical language of revolution from its direct action would be to unmoor the social movement from its reality; the Breakfast Program exemplifies the importance of this matrimony in bringing about an alternative social order. In Newton, Hilliard, and others’ statements, one continues to see the return to the dynamic action taken by Party members and affiliates. The calls for the

¹⁶⁹ Newton and Blake, *Revolutionary Suicide*.

*going out into the community*¹⁷⁰ expose the hollowness of other approaches to change, and places the possibility for action at the feet of the oppressed.

The recognition of the party's successes, performed on their own terms, also bolsters the movement towards an alternative society. Rather than let the dominant opposition marginalize the feeding of children, or bequeath the consequences of such practices to a government program, the Panthers frame their success within broader revolutionary concepts, effectively, "[dramatizing] the broader dimensions of their struggle" to build widespread support for their transformative movement.¹⁷¹ The community's claim to feeding the children helps to free consciousness from the cage of possibility, and emphasizes the feasibility of the people feeding the schoolchildren, which had previously been impossible.

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In considering the relationship of alternative social organization to the concept of utopias, it also becomes clear to me that a profound revolutionary aspect of the Breakfast Program was its dynamic organization. It often seems that calls to an alternative are met by incredulity regarding the specifics of the proposed program: "well who would feed the children? Who would educate them?" One of the biggest tasks of creating social change lies in overcoming these objections in such a way that remains attentive to the original goals of the program. Not many examples exist of a socialist community program in Oakland, so providing a precise vision of how one might manifest itself proves difficult. A true revolution, then, informs itself and its practices by the specific circumstances in which it emerges. We observe such a paradigm in the Breakfast Program conducting food service locations in unconventional locations, employing a variety of tactics to accumulate resources, and constantly petitioning the feedback of the community on its

¹⁷⁰ Jewel Barker, "A Word for Panther Parents," *The Black Panther Intercommunal News Service*, December 13, 1969.

¹⁷¹ Mark Engler and Paul Engler, *This Is an Uprising* (Nation Books, 2016), 123.

operations. The dynamic approach of this program accounts for the unknown by according control to the people.

I also observe a certain humility in the manner by which the Panthers yielded the Breakfast Program to the rest of the community. Rather than considering themselves as the ultimate vanguard, they situated the people who faced obstacles in their daily lives as the same ones who could develop programs to overcome them. In this way, the Breakfast Program serves to champion the issues facing the community as the manner by which they might build an alternative. Newton encapsulated this with one of his mantras, that, "Power is the ability to define a phenomenon and make that phenomenon act in a desired manner.... That's what the survival programs were about."¹⁷² The issue of hunger facing the community became not only a rallying point around which the people came to be organized, but a place where power could be wrested from the control of the dominant elite and wielded in alternative manners by the community. The static view of children's hunger is that it could be their undoing, but it was this undoing itself which afforded the community the ability to form Breakfast Programs and other institutions to shift their political communities towards a social alternative.

A quote from another revolutionary text, one written and published here in San Francisco at the same time as the Breakfast Program operated, comes to mind: "The faggots have helped me believe that if we are to ever make it to that next revolution it will be through becoming undone, an undoing that touches ourselves and touches each other and all the brokenness we are. The faggots remind us that to become undone is our greatest gift to ourselves. It is truly our greatest path to being response-able - to feel our feelings authentically makes us able to respond to the conditions around us with an open heart."¹⁷³ While ostensibly concerning a different sort of

¹⁷² Newton and Blake, *Revolutionary Suicide*.

¹⁷³ Larry Mitchell, *The Faggots and Their Friends Between Revolutions* (San Francisco: Nightboat Books, 1977), VII.

oppression, Mitchell's seminal queer text articulates an analysis of fantastical utopian realities through historical realities similar to the investigation present here. Recognition of the issues which face communities is paramount to their liberation; indeed, the acceptance of this reality actually reminds us of the greatest opportunities for our liberation. Mitchell wrote at a time when he considered society to be "in between revolutions", in the interim of the cycles of struggle which mark the history of action against political power. The economy of care suggested in his book parallels the communal attention to the needs of the schoolchildren, emphasizing the importance of building a community whose sensitivity to the issues around it provide the opportunity to alleviate their consequences. The ability to respond to these obstacles comes from the undoing not only of the social order, but of ourselves: of the hierarchies onto which we cling, the authorities to whom we submit, and the institutions on which we rely. By touching on, by educating about, the brokenness which plagues our communities today, we build a culture in which our awareness of these problems drives an impetus to action.

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What is a revolution, anyways? The Breakfast Program was certainly considered as much, by a variety of people in different positions of power. The transformative capability of resource provision, even in the form of breakfast for school children, demonstrated how the question of revolution could be posed at an imminent material level. The production of an educational paradigm from this program demonstrated how this revolution, too, could be posed at a conceptual level. The role of the community in proliferating and operating these programs demonstrated how revolution could be understood as a locally functional endeavor. The account of these events is certainly riddled with tensions and contradictions, beleaguered by conflicts and struggles. Feeding school children breakfast might be a fraught political campaign, but it also

demonstrates a radical path to social change. Revolution comes in a variety of forms, but, for me, the important thing is to remember that its possibilities are all around us. We need not imagine. Revolutionary tools are at our fingertips. Radical movement is within our reach. Liberatory education can, and has, been achieved. The schoolchild didn't care to learn much until she had a full stomach; at that point, the education -- and the revolution -- had already begun. When we see the hungry school child before us today, when we see the issues plaguing our communities, in whatever form, we recall our task to problematize. In a way, it is also to politicize or to re-politicize certain things. How might we break these limits? The Black Panther Party, and their Breakfast Program, certainly provides some guidance.

What is a revolution, anyways? At this point, we really can't say. It's more a question of how we can get to a place that will allow us to find out. To get there, we must move. We must move towards the alternative with our deliberate action, just as we move away from oppression with our careful thinking. At this stage I am sincerely convinced that is the entirety of our task. Not to prescribe or to divulge or to elucidate the future but to make everyone who will listen aware that the future is absolutely and totally in their hands. The alternative could not be more tangible; it's not yet fully developed, but that's exactly why we must turn towards it. Change making is not some herculean task but a concerted community effort towards addressing our problems in new ways. Every alternative really births itself from naivety or courage in the face of the inability to create change. That's the task! Plain and simple. Demonstrating the alternative to the point where it becomes a possibility for the future of our communities.

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