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Prefigurative Politics of the Black Panther Party

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Prefigurative Politics of the Black Panther Party

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of Social Studies
of Bard College

by
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To the future of grassroots organizing and the raising of consciousness.

Thank you to my project advisor, Mie Inouye, for your instruction, patience, and encouragement.

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Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Brief History of the Survival Programs.....	1
Discourse on Programs and Prefigurative Politics.....	5
Chapter 1: Ideology and Revolution.....	17
The Diagnosis.....	20
The Cure.....	24
Revolution as Both Event and Process.....	33
Chapter 2: Practices and Prefigurative Politics.....	40
Community Programs.....	41
Theory and Raising Consciousness.....	52
Conclusion.....	58
Bibliography.....	60

Introduction

The Black Panther Party is often conceived in the American imagination as a gang of militant black men in leather jackets, brandishing guns and ready for violence. While there is some amount of truth to this image, it is far from the whole picture. The Black Panther Party was a revolutionary organization, and believed in the importance of arms in revolution. However, they were not simply interested in killing police and disrupting order. The party had a political agenda based on the human needs of their community, a complex political ideology, and a wide variety of strategies and tools for social, economic, and political change. In this project, the most important of these tools were the community services the party provided, called the survival programs.

A Brief History of the Survival Programs

To begin the discussion, a brief history of the survival programs will serve to give the reader some basic context. The Black Panther Party was founded in 1966 by Bobby Seale and Huey Newton. Although it was first a self-defense group determined to challenge police brutality with armed protection, they soon became a revolutionary group and branched out into community activism. Bobby Seale is credited with initiating the BPP's survival programs in 1969 (Alkebulan, 2007, 30). According to Paul Alkebulan, the programs were inspired initially as a way of improving the party's image in response to undisciplined behavior of party members affecting public reception (p. 30). Of the many survival programs, three main projects around which the party would organize were the breakfast program, free health clinics, and black

liberation schools (p. 28). The programs were mainly sustained by volunteers and donated resources because all the programs were intentionally designed to be completely cost free to the communities they served. Because of their association with the party, and their function to increase support for the Panthers' revolutionary cause, the survival programs attracted a great amount of government repression (p. 45). The Free Breakfast for Children program was the first to be implemented and is the most famous of the survival programs (p. 30).

The Black Panther party's first Free Breakfast Program for schoolchildren opened on January 20, 1969, at St. Augustine's Episcopal Church in Oakland, California (p. 30). Following a decree of Newton and Seale in 1969, all chapters of the BPP across the country were to enact the program. Planning for the program began in winter the previous year, advertising for volunteers and equipment in the party newspaper. The programs coordinator claimed over 20,000 meals served in the first year (p. 32).

The breakfast program in particular received negative attention from the FBI as a way for the BPP to spread their ideology to children and community members. FBI and local police engaged in repression against the program (Potorti, 2017, 98). The programs were often hosted in churches, so government agents pretended to be parishioners and made complaints about priests who supported the program, trying to have the sympathetic removed from their post. Police also warned ministers and community members against engaging with the program, and some police even went so far as to ruin food intended for needy children by destroying it (p. 98).

While the law enforcement tactics were brutal, their fears were not completely unsubstantiated. The Breakfast program quickly became the party's most popular program, serving twenty thousand meals by November 1969 (Alkebulan, 2007, 32). While it varied from

chapter to chapter, the breakfast program was used as an opportunity to share the party's message with the children it served, and their families. In addition to eggs, bacon, sausage, grits, and toast, the program came with party members singing political songs or engaging the children in conversations about revisionist history (Potorti, 2017, p. 94). They were criticized for propagandizing to children. The degree to which the children were exposed to the party's messaging varied from minor incidents in the form of casual conversation to call and response chants about how the BPP would liberate black people from oppressive "pigs" (Williamson, 2005, p. 144). However, the more explicit opportunity for political education or party indoctrination was the Party's liberation school programs.

The liberation schools also began in 1969, although they followed the breakfast program's initial success (Alkebulan, 2007, p. 33). The party instituted liberatory education programs for both children and adults. According to Alkebulan schools mostly covered basic academic skills (p. 34). In the children's liberation education subjects included black and revolutionary history and culture, and applying the teachings to current events. Children learned how to recite and explain the party's ten-point program (p. 33). Some of the education programs emphasized lectures and memorization, and some emphasized critical engagement in analyzing historical and contemporary events (Williamson, 2005, 143). These programs were staffed by community volunteers, including college students (Alkebulan, 2007, p. 34). The most successful of the Panthers' liberation schools was the Intercommunal Institution (established 1971) later to change names to Oakland Community School in 1975. The school required no tuition, provided three free meals per day, medical referrals, and transportation to and from the school. The OCS

would later accept government funding, marking a shift in party rules against government association (p. 34). The school lasted until 1982, two years after the end of the BPP.

Education programs for adults consisted of both basic literacy and study of revolutionary theory. The political education courses were criticized by participants with higher education for a lack of critical discussion, painting the classes as merely reading over the texts (Williamson, 2005, p. 144). Less educated participants were learning about philosophies of Mao and Marx but still had extremely simplistic and whitewashed understandings of American history (Alkebulan, 2007, p. 39). For all the flaws in the BPP's educational programs, they were effective in their primary goal of spreading the party's anti-capitalist revolutionary ideology. In addition to political education, the Panthers also wanted to educate people about their bodily health while simultaneously giving them access to healthcare.

Panthers began working with sympathetic members of the medical community in 1969 to provide services and information primarily in preventative health care. The BPP established free medical clinics in cities across the country (Seattle, L.A., Chicago, Boston, Philadelphia, New York, etc.) (p. 35). Volunteer doctors and nurses trained party members. The party health cadre was responsible for providing the primary care for their comrades as well as distributing basic medical information to the community. One of the most famous aspects of the party's health programs is their Sickle Cell Anemia Project. The free clinics tested over a million black people for sickle cell anemia (p. 36). That project was responsible for raising awareness about sickle cell which had previously been an understudied issue. The reason for the need for the clinics also caused issues for the clinics themselves. One issue the health clinics faced was finding locations to work from.

Part of the issue of location was because the affected communities were geographically removed from hospitals and health centers, it was difficult for the volunteer medical experts to be at the party's free health clinics on time (Nelson, 2011, p. 100). This caused issues of long waits and a lack of adherence to predicted schedules. Some health workers associated with the Black Panthers faced consequences from their employers who opposed the party (p. 102). However, when the clinics did function, the expertise of the volunteer doctors and nurses was shared with the lay volunteers, as well as directly treating the patients who had long been medically neglected (p. 105). The health clinics brought free healthcare to impoverished communities in a way which heightened the medical literacy of both volunteers and patients (p. 100). The survival programs as a whole, helped countless impoverished members of exploited and forgotten communities, and improved public reception of the BPP.

Discourse on Programs and Prefigurative Politics

Here, an overview of authorship serves to familiarize the reader with some of the relevant writings on the topic. In the discourse surrounding the Black Panther Party and their survival programs, attention has been paid to the direct functions of the programs as tools for addressing the material needs of impoverished and oppressed black Americans. However, there has been little writing on how the survival programs were functionally prefigurative politics, and the implications of this function to the Panther theory of revolution. Next, I will summarize and discuss some of the written works about the Black Panther Party and their survival programs, and conclude with a discussion of prefigurative politics.

To begin discussion the Black Panther programs, Huey Newton's 1973 book *Revolutionary Suicide* is an autobiographical representation of Newton's early life and his perspective on the origins and early years of the Black Panther Party. He describes growing up poor and hungry, like many black people in the community he was raised in (Newton, 1973, p. 14). He says his father instilled in him the value of standing up for oneself to those who would take advantage of vulnerability, and attack unprovoked (p. 30). Although a great portion of the book is dedicated to his legal trials and the political strategy organizing around his freedom, in some choice moments he mentions the survival programs and gives explanations as to their goals and functions. According to Newton, the goals of the survival programs were to keep the people afloat until the time for revolution came, to raise the consciousness of the people, to discipline the organization, to find a way of organizing that did not alienate them but instead ingratiate them to the community, and to bring the local institutions under the control of the party and community (p. 356). These claims are generally reflected in the academic literature and will be substantiated in this project.

Echoing Newton's claims, much of the literature emphasized the strategic function of the survival programs to be the raising of societal consciousness of the systemic contradiction in the American capitalist system. That is, showing that hunger, illness, nakedness, and ignorance could be solved with very few resources, and thus it was contradictory that the extremely wealthy US seemed unable to do so. Mary Potorti, Nik Heynen, and Ryan Kirkby focus mainly on the impact the Free Breakfast Program had on "raising consciousness" of hunger as a political issue.

In Mary Potorti's article "Feeding the Revolution" she discusses the ways in which the Black Panther's survival programs worked to bring attention to the inherent systemic distributive

injustices of capitalism. She writes, “Such efforts afforded the Party a vital means of heightening the consciousness of the hungry poor and working classes to the various forms of their oppression, demonstrating that they, too, had the power to affect the conditions in which they lived” (Potorti, 2017, p. 86). While she acknowledges the Black Panther Party’s revolutionary goals, her emphasis is on how the food programs functioned to feed the hungry and raise awareness. She offers a few other similar effects of the programs like integration with and building rapport with the community (p. 92-93). She dedicates a good portion of the article to the lengths to which the party went to pressure businesses to donate, including the leading of boycotts and the printing of derisive articles in the press about those businesses which would not donate (p. 100).

While Potorti emphasizes the Black Panther’s success in raising awareness of hunger politics, Nik Heynen’s article “Bending the Bars of Empire from Every Ghetto for Survival: The Black Panther Party’s Radical Antihunger Politics of Social Reproduction and Scale” illustrates the use of the Free Breakfast program in building political power in a scalar analysis of the Panthers’ theory of intercommunal revolution (Heynen, 2009, p. 406). He demonstrates this through interpretation of Party leaders’ use of the phrase “black community” as referring on one level to the individuals directly benefited by the survival programs when explaining how the programs sustain the black community (p. 416). On the next level, he used it to refer to all black Americans across the nation (p. 416). Ultimately, the phrase would also be used to refer to all colonized black people globally, fighting the cruelties of the empire (p. 416). Heynen demonstrated how on the national level, rhetoric of the “black community” and intercommunalism were able to connect the local politics to a nationally and even internationally

scaled community, building a formidable political force. This article is useful in showing how the Free Breakfast Program, as a highly visible direct action (relying on one's own power to promote one's interest, in contrast to actions which appeal to others for a desired result), functioned in the party's greater scaled theory of building revolutionary power (p. 419).

Like Potorti and Heynen, Ryan Kirkby discusses the function of raising revolutionary consciousness, but broadens the scope from only the Breakfast program to the survival programs generally, including the health care and education initiatives. Kirkby's article "The Revolution Will Not Be Televised," emphasizes the importance of viewing the Black Panther Party in its full image, that is a revolutionary party which engaged in both violence and community activism as a path toward a socialist revolution (Kirkby, 2011, p. 29). In discussing the survival programs, he makes sure to contextualize them as working within the party's theory of violent revolution, characterizing the function of violence as symbolically important for recruitment. Of Newton and Seale, Kirkby writes, "Both men believed revolutionary violence was necessary to transform society, but they took a protracted two-step approach to revolution, first securing the support of the masses via consciousness-raising programs (the survival programs), and then once the political conditions were right, wage an armed struggle against the ruling class" (p. 33). Noting a distinction between a Newton's perspective and Eldridge Cleavers, he characterizes Cleaver as advocating for restrained guerrilla war immediately, targeting the the ruling class (p. 35). According to Kirkby, the greatest difference between the Newton and Cleaver factions was their perspective on the functions of the survival programs. Cleaver saw them as a short term strategy for recruitment and financial support immediately preceding armed rebellion, while Newton saw them as part of a longer process of raising consciousness (p. 36). He discusses how the survival

programs functioned to raise the consciousness of the black community, exposing to them the issues of the capitalist system and the possibility of something better (p. 50) The education programs were a more explicit way the party's survival programs raised revolutionary consciousness, by teaching in a classroom setting the issues of the racist American capitalist system.

One author who focuses on the education programs is Joy Ann Williamson, who, in “Chapter Six: Community Control with a Black Nationalist Twist: the Black Panther Party’s Educational Programs” contextualizes the programs within a greater context of community control and black liberation in the American History of education (Williamson, 2005, p. 138). The goal of the article is to offer inspiration for educators interested in community control and liberation as elements of a quality education (p. 138). The article discusses the party’s relations to education generally, including its leaders' origins on college campuses, the party’s continued participation on college campuses, and the party’s educational programs for both children and adults. It discusses the party’s ideology as including both race and class, colonization and exploitation, and how the party used its educational outreach to disseminate their analysis of the U.S. imperial social structure and encourage revolutionary action (p. 142). It also discusses pros and cons of the party’s educational initiatives: pros being that it levied hard hitting criticisms of the US educational system, and cons being overtly political to an inappropriate degree for children (p. 144).

While the above mainly discuss the services as a way to raise revolutionary consciousness, Paul Alkebulan’s book, *Survival Pending Revolution*, brings attention to how they were meant to improve the party’s reputation so that the party itself could survive (Alkebulan,

2007, p. 29). He argues that the survival programs were a way of organizing that was nonviolent and therefore less likely to provoke government repression and community rejection (p. 29). They were a tactical adjustment in response to the negative reaction of government and community to their initial gun oriented practices and undisciplined behavior (p. 28) He also criticizes the efficacy of the programs for a lack of theoretical accuracy and strategic sustainability (p. 41) The idea that the programs were socialism in action, he says, is wrong because it was simple redistribution with no emphasis on ownership or production. If the programs had been more strategically organized along such principles, they may have been more sustainable and increased the party's influence (p. 44).

Like Alkebulan, Alondra Nelson is well aware of the function of the programs to improve the party's reputation. However, her emphasis is more on the ways health clinics enriched the knowledge and control of volunteers and patients Nelson's book, *Body and Soul*, discusses the free healthcare programs of the party. Nelson gives a three pronged analysis of why health programs were instituted: institutionally they responded to a real issue of neglect and malpractice, tactically they were a strategy to improve the party's image and community relations, and ideologically the party's influences of Che Guevara and Fanon as physicians themselves might have inspired the programs (Nelson, 2011, p. 51). She goes on to implicitly show the ways the healthcare program not only improved the reputation of the party and brought community members for a common cause, but gave some medical education to the community and brought the locus of control closer to the long medically neglected community (p. 99).

While these articles emphasize the strategic aspects of the survival programs as they raise revolutionary consciousness and gain support for the Black Panther Party, there is little explicit

discussion of the programs as a form of prefigurative politics. In all the above sources, only Nik Heynen mentions in passing the fact that these Black Panther programs seem to be an example of prefigurative politics (Heynen, 2009, p. 419). Why does Heynen refer to the programs this way? Understanding how the survival programs fit under the theory of prefigurative politics informs understanding of the raising of consciousness in the context of the Black Panthers theory of revolution. So, from here, I will continue with a focus on writings on prefigurative politics. The discussion is based on *Prefigurative Politics: Building Tomorrow Today* by Paul Raekstad and Sofa Gradin, *Community and Organization in the New Left: 1962-1968 (The Great Refusal)* by Wini Breines, *Hegemony How-To: a Roadmap for Radicals* by Jonathan Matthew Smucker. These writings illustrate varying perspectives by which to inform and refine an understanding of prefigurative politics.

Firstly, in their book, *Prefigurative Politics*, Raekstad and Gradin argue for a broader definition of the term than had previously been used in discourse surrounding the term. They define prefigurative politics as the “*deliberate experimental implementation of desired future social relations and practices in the here-and now*”(Raekstad & Gradin, 2020, p. 10). This is the definition which will be used primarily in this project. It differs from previous definitions of the term in its openness. That is, as Raekstad and Gradin recognize, this definition leaves open the potential for any political ideology, right or left, to be expressed in a prefigurative form (p. 10). This is notable because the practice is most historically associated with the left, and more specifically forms of participatory democracy. This book references the Black Panther Party’s survival programs explicitly as an example of prefiguration, but does not go into depth (p. 7). The reason for this claim will be explicated in greater detail in the second chapter of this project.

They write on the use of prefigurative politics for raising consciousness and shaping drives and motivations of participants which will bring new and deeper meaning analysis of the survival programs functions of raising consciousness and community cohesion. However, while they advocate for their own new and more open definition, they acknowledge the history of the discourse as referring largely to decision making structures, particularly ones with aspirations of participatory democracy. As they take it on themselves to discuss criticisms of prefigurative politics, they too focus on prefiguration of democratic decision making structures (p. 52). Next, furthering understanding of the discursive origins of prefigurative politics, and thus clarifying understanding of the new definition against older ones, the conversation will turn to Wini Breines.

Breines wrote about the prefigurative politics of the 1960's new left movement, particularly Students for a Democratic Society, in her book, *Community and Organization*. She discusses the criticisms that were levied against the new left (incoherent ideology and a lack of demands) and argues that far from such chaotic and aimless character, the new left was engaging in prefigurative politics of direct democracy (Breines, 1982, p. 10). While she is also critical of the movement for many reasons (including the inclination to ignore the existence of leadership to create the image of horizontal decision making, instead of making the leadership visible and thus able to be held accountable) she also has admiration for the movement as an experiment in prefigurative politics (p. 51). She includes an anti-organizationality as intrinsic to her definition of prefigurative politics. She writes, "The term *prefigurative politics* is used to designate an essentially anti-organizational politics characteristic of the movement, as well as parts of new left leadership, and may be recognized in counter institutions, demonstrations and the attempt to

embody personal and anti-hierarchical values in politics” (p. 6). Breines’ characterization of prefigurative politics as inherently anti-organizational is a result of the subject from which she derives it. That is to say that because she was studying the movement which focused on anti-organizational participatory democracy, she saw this as a part of prefigurative politics. While that anti-organizational aspect is inconsistent with this project’s use of the term, the core of the practice is present in her writing. That core of prefigurative politics which is realized in counter-institutions which embody one’s values will be crucial for this project’s analysis. She goes on to say, “The crux of prefigurative politics imposed substantial tasks, the central one being to create and sustain within the live practice of the movement, relationships and political forms that ‘prefigured’ and embodied the desired society” (p. 6). Her definition of prefigurative politics includes an aspect of strong sense of community and attempts to show what is possible by enacting their goals in the moment, as opposed to a strategic politics which works within the established systems to make change, for instance organizing voters to influence pre-existing institutions (p. 45). As a whole, Breines appreciates the prefigurative politics of the free speech student movement of the 60s as a purposeful manifestation of the youth’s values and frustration with the status quo.

In contrast to Breines, Jonathan Smucker philosophically disenfranchises prefigurative politics by constructing a definition in contradistinction to strategic politics which engage in systems of power for the purpose of changing them (Smucker, 2017, p. 120). However, he does recognize that the practice can be used with other strategies (p. 122). Smucker’s book *Hegemony How-to* is a discussion of the common issues movement organizers face, mainly focussing on his own experience in Occupy Wallstreet movement, as he was a leading voice there (p. 71). From

his experience there, he is highly critical of prefigurative politics as a kind of ineffective political performance, more concerned with the personal fulfillment of the participants than with affecting lasting change (p. 122). This effectively categorizes any kind of prefigurative politics which is informed by or used strategically as strategic and not prefigurative. Smucker's definition of prefigurative politics as non-strategic differs from Raekstad and Gradin, who see prefigurative politics as a strategy in itself, although they concede that it is most effective when combined with other strategies (Raekstad & Gradin, 2020, p. 10).

Although the literature on prefigurative politics is closely linked to the history of a decentralized decision making structure, which was not a component of Black Panther politics, the broader definition provided by Raekstad and Gradin offers an opportunity for a new interpretation of the Panthers' survival program and their function in Panther ideology. While the literature on the Black Panthers survival programs does generally address key aspects of prefigurative politics, such as Potorti's and Heynen's emphasis on the way in which the Breakfast Programs were important in raising consciousness about the politics of food, and the construction of a community, they do not use the language of prefigurative politics. Thus this project is differentiated from previous literature on the survival programs in that it will assess characteristics of the survival programs as prefigurative. In order to do so, this project utilizes the first chapter to identify and interpret key concepts and values within Black Panther Party ideology. This analysis of Panther ideology will make it possible to identify the way in which the Panthers manifested their values and vision of the future in the prefigurative politics of their survival programs. I will demonstrate that prefigurative implementation of the Panthers' envisioned future social practices functioned to engender a sense of ownership over the future

and raise consciousness in a practical way. By the end of the project, the reader should understand why prefigurative politics were an important component of the Panther's ideology and theory of revolution.

As the project continues, Chapter 1 will investigate key concepts in Panther ideology. The chapter begins with a discussion of the functioning definition of ideology, with the intersections between capitalism, racism, colonialism as the political theories they used to explain the poverty they saw around them. From there follows a discussion of the Panther's flexible utilization of Marxism-Leninism as a mode of interpretation for their own experience, by which they developed their own ideology. I identify two main values which deeply influenced Panther ideology to be used as solutions to their stated issues: community control and self-defense. Finally, I conclude Chapter 1 with a discussion of the Panthers' conception of revolution as being a transformative process which necessitates education. This discussion of Panther ideology is necessary to show how it was operationalized in a prefigurative political style.

Chapter 2 will investigate the ways in which the survival programs embodied the value of community control, and functioned in the theory of revolution with the value of self-defense, interpreting this embodiment as prefigurative politics. The chapter begins with a discussion of prefigurative politics, then moves on to examine the ways in which the survival programs integrated Party and community. From there I will return to some theorizations of prefigurative politics. An explication of Raekstad and Gradin's philosophy of powers, drives, and consciousness will bring a deeper meaning to the way in which the survival programs raised consciousness. Finally, I recontextualize the survival programs within the Panther's conception

of the revolutionary process. Thus, in its entirety the project demonstrates that prefigurative politics played a critical role in the Black Panther Party's theory of revolution.

Chapter 1: Ideology and Revolution

This chapter discusses the ideology of the Black Panther Party based on primary sources, largely speeches and interviews given by leaders of the Party. This explication of stated ideological values serves to later show the practical expression of their ideology. Before discussing the Panthers, however, a brief discussion of the meaning of ideology is here to clarify the intention of this chapter. Ideology as a word has a history of use in a derogatory sense. Many political thinkers have conceived of ideology as something to be avoided. However, this discussion of the term will clarify its use in this project, as a neutral if not universal political phenomenon.

The word “ideology” has a variety of meanings throughout its use. In striving to understand the Black Panther Party’s ideology we must first determine what ideology refers to in the context of this project. To define ideology, I will discuss two articles. One is Hannah Arendt’s “Ideology and Terror: A Novel Form of Government” and Mie Inouye’s article, “Starting with People Where They Are: Ella Baker’s Theory of Political Organizing.” Arendt offers a view which presents ideology as something dangerous to be avoided, while Inouye gives a review of various perspectives and ultimately understands ideology to be an unavoidable and universal phenomenon.

Firstly, let’s discuss Hannah Arendt’s (1956) perspective. Arendt’s writings in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* were deeply influenced by her experience and time, reflecting the fear of totalitarianism in the wake of Hitler and Stalin. As a result of her goal of understanding totalitarianism and how ideology functions for totalitarianism, her definition

of ideology is one which portrays it as something with inherent potential for totalitarian results. She sees ideology as the logic from a single premise. When people take their ideology too its extreme, attempting to become agents of this premise results in dividing society into victims and executioners (p. 315). Examples she offers as evidence are Hitler's racist ideology based on the single premise of Darwinian law of nature, and Stalin's communist ideology based on the Marxian law of History (p. 319). For Arendt, totalitarianism functions with a potent combination of ideology and terror. Terror keeps people from discussing openly, and thus people are unable to be confirmed in their own experience in conversation with others. Thus, as one has been separated from others in this way, one acts out ideology because of its logic, despite its potential contradiction with one's own experience. For Arendt, ideology obscures the reality of experience by substituting it with reasoning from a single premise.

Arendt's definition is insightful to the dangers of ideology and its totalitarian potential. It may be useful to look for what the most fundamental premises of Panther reasoning was. However, this definition seems inherently derisive. In searching for understanding of the Panthers ideology, I don't presuppose that they were out of touch with reality or were a totalitarian party. I am interested in their values and beliefs, and how they translated that perspective into political action. So, I turn to another understanding of ideology.

In Mie Inouye's article "Starting with People Where They Are: Ella Baker's Theory of Political Organizing" she offers a discussion on ideology and organizing. She argues that there is a common belief in the discourse of political organizing that ideology is an obstacle to good organizing. To challenge this prejudice, Inouye demonstrates Stuart Hall's understanding of ideology as practical, neutral, and dynamic (Inouye, 2021, p. 3). It is

practical in that it is manifested in action (p. 3). It is the framework through which a subject interprets the world and chooses what action to engage in. Ideology is neutral in that it does not connote truth value but instead is merely one of many possible ways of interpreting the world (p.3). Finally, it is dynamic, as opposed to static, meaning that it incorporates new ideas and changes in response to changing circumstances (p.3). Here, in contrast to Arendt's understanding that paints ideology as an obstacle to engaging with reality, it is portrayed as a necessary component of engaging with reality.

Both of these understandings have valid and important perspectives to offer in understanding ideology. Arendt shows the dangerous potential of ideology, and like Inouye, recognizes the way ideology is expressed in action. However, Arendt's definition is narrow, and seems in line with those Inouye discusses who see ideology as negative, obstructing access to truth. This project uses a definition of ideology more in line with Inouye's in that it will not connote truth value, but merely present interpretation. Ideology is behind the actions one takes or the beliefs one holds and voices. So, to fully understand it one cannot merely collect stated beliefs or goals, but see what the terms used mean to the speakers and how the terms correspond to practice. Although the *dynamic* character of ideology is important, tracing the development of Panther ideology over time is beyond the scope of this project. While Arendt paints a one dimensional picture of ideology as logic from a single idea, more commonly ideologies consist of a wide variety of beliefs and values, sometimes contradictory, which are applied at different times and in different areas of life. Documenting the beliefs and values does not reveal an ideology if the documentation is not accompanied by analysis of the way those beliefs and values interact with each other and express in action.

For this project, ideology refers to the beliefs and values that motivate a political group's actions. That includes their perspective on the contemporary condition of the world, and the vision of aspiration, what they were working towards. What are the problems with the world and what are the solutions? Conversely, what would a better world look like to them and how do they plan on achieving it? This is part of how I will get at the practicality of Panther ideology, by collecting and comparing various ways Panther leaders express their frustrations and goals. Understanding what certain terms mean to the ideologue is one way of analyzing it, as for socialists, freedom means equality of condition, while for neoliberals freedom is associated with individualism and markets (Inouye, 2021, p. 3). I will study the ideology of the Black Panthers by surveying speeches, interviews, and newspaper articles by leaders in the group. This survey is to understand what the Panthers criticisms were and what solutions they offered. As an important aspect of ideology is the way the entity implements their values in their action, this will be explored more in Chapter 2. This chapter shows that the Black Panthers' ideology was an interpretation of revolutionary Marxism-Leninism with strong emphasis on community control and self-defense as guiding principles.

The Diagnosis

This section explains the theoretical criticisms the Panthers had for the American status quo. The purpose of this is to give context to their solutions to these issues. The Panther's analysis and diagnosis of the systemic issues of America which were oppressive to their constituency consisted of key concepts of capitalism, racism, and colonialism.

Capitalism was shorthand for all behaviors which relied on private profit as the fundamental motivation. Influenced by Marx, they saw surplus value being extracted from the black community and funneled into the white power structure. In a speech, Fred Hampton stated, “We have to understand very clearly that there’s a man in our community called a capitalist. Sometimes he’s Black and sometimes he’s white. But that man has to be driven out of our community because anybody who comes into the community to make profit off of people by exploiting them can be defined as a capitalist” (“Fred Hampton Speaks, 2018, p. 4). Their appreciation for the economic exploitation of the masses by capitalists led them to use the phrase “avaricious, greedy, businessmen” meaning that those who run the economy were greedy, taking more than they needed to the detriment of both those who had jobs and those who didn’t (UCLA CommStudies, 2014, 8:00).

In Panther analysis, racism was an outgrowth of capitalism. Hampton said plainly “capitalism comes first and next is racism” (“Fred Hampton Speaks, 2018, p. 5). He gives a historical explanation for this conclusion, explaining, “when they brought slaves over here, it was to make money. So first the idea came that we want to make money, then the slaves came in order to make that money. That means, through historical fact, that racism had to come from capitalism. It had to be capitalism first and racism was a by-product of that” (p. 5) Although some may argue that the economic system in the original days of American slavery was mercantalism or colonialism, as explained above, the Panthers used capitalism to refer to all economic activities motivated by profit. First came the desire to increase one’s wealth through the exploitation of another, then came racism as a method and justification for accomplishing that goal of profit.

Initially, the Panther's analysis was not so refined and they essentialized and conflated capitalism and racism. This conflation led them to use more racially focused rhetoric wherein they called for the end of exploitation of black people by the white man. However, by 1969 they began to place more emphasis on economic classes than racial classes. Fred Hampton explains, "Our ten point program is in the midst of being changed right now, because we used the word 'white' when we should have used the word 'capitalist'. We're the first to admit our mistakes. We no longer say Panther Power because we don't believe the Panthers should have all the power. We are not for the dictatorship of the Panthers. We are not for the dictatorship of Black people. We are for the dictatorship of the people" ("Fred Hampton Speaks, 2018, p. 15). This excerpt shows how the Panther's ideology was dynamic and changing as they developed. Initially they stated a desired goal of ending exploitation by the white man, but upon further experience and analysis, they saw that they did not want to be exploited by black capitalists either. Thus they moved away from racial essentialism and toward class as the fundamental cause of societal disharmony. That is not to say that they did not engage in rhetoric of racialism.

One slogan of the Panther's became "Power to the people: Yellow power to yellow people, red power to red people, black power to black people, and white power to white people" ("Fred Hampton Speaks," 2018, p 17). This was one way they expressed their values of self-determination and community control for people of all races, not only their own. Eldridge Cleaver at UCLA State, said, "You can get uptight and say 'White power!?' but what you're reacting to is pig power" (UCLA CommStudies, 25:42). Here, Cleaver is drawing a distinction between white people and the function of whiteness in American capitalism.

The Panthers viewed races as communities. This is because that is largely how they have been organized, and that systems of power led to people of a certain race generally having shared experiences and interests. So he is saying that it is not people with white skin that are inherently oppressive, but those white people who “own the world,” the “avaricious businessmen” who dominate the rest of the earth and people are oppressive. White power here means white people have a right to self governance just as all other racial groups do, but the “pigs” have all the power. If white people organize in solidarity with the Panthers and the rest of the revolution they are not the enemy of the Panthers. This shows that while the Black Panthers are often characterized as a black nationalist, more fundamental to their philosophy than their love of black people in particular was their value of community control and self-determination for all. This value of self-determination was made particularly necessary in light of the diagnosis of a colonial condition of the black community.

The history of capitalism and racism led to the condition of colonization of black people in America and around the world. Newton laid out in an interview in 1968 why he saw black people in America as a colonized community. In an interview with Newton while he was jailed in 1968, he stated “We are assaulted because we are black people and because the power structure finds it to their advantage to keep us imprisoned in our black community as a colonialized or colonial people are kept by some foreign power” (AfroMarxist, *An Interview with Huey*, 2018, 11:11). He further explains the conditions of colonial character, stating, “police are used to occupy our community just as a foreign troop occupies territory. They don’t live in our community and the police don’t. And they have no respect for black people who live in the community but they occupy the community. And

they are not occupying the community for the welfare and the benefit of the people who live there. They're occupying it to make sure that the businessman who are systematically robbing our community are safe." The fact that police are not community members but outsiders and that police are present in the community not to increase the safety or empowerment of the community members but to protect outside interests which makes it comparable in character to colonization. As the problem the Panthers' identified was that a foreign force was controlling and exploiting the community, they looked for solutions.

The Cure

Responding to these conditions of capitalism, racism, and colonization, the Panthers sometimes used the label of Marxism-Leninism. As Marxist-Leninists they were convinced by Marx's analysis of society's contradictions. They saw that the system of capitalism (a system in which economic action is motivated by profit) used violence to enforce an order of exploitation. Thus to be liberated people must become conscious of this system they were a part of and so be able to change it for their own benefit. They saw Marxism-Leninism as their framework of interpretation. David Hilliard on Face the Nation, 1969, said, "Well, we see Marxism-Leninism as being a science, a very advanced science. And that we recognize that Marxism-Leninism is not a dogmatic ideology, but rather its a guide to action. So that the philosophy of the Black Panther Party is not a philosophy that reflects the history of China or Russia or Korea or Cuba for that matter. But it's the historical experience of blacks right here in this country interpreted through Marxist-Leninism" (Hezakya News & Film, 2019, 23:30). Here, when Hilliard says that Marxism-Leninism is not a dogmatic ideology, he

is stating that while they are using the same source material as other communist revolutionaries, the party is not trying to turn America into those countries, but create a uniquely American communism, one that works for the people of America. This can be contrasted with Arendt's conception of Marxism under Stalin, because the party is choosing the ideology because it addresses issues with the community's experience instead of beginning the thought process in the abstract and then applying it in action without examination of its correspondence to experience.

A similar sentiment in relation to the Party's use of Marxism-Leninism is expressed by Huey Newton on Firing Line with William Buckley in 1973. Newton states:

"I am not a Marxist. I think the whole concept of what Marx tried to lay down as a scholar, historian, a philosopher, was distorted and people became priests of Marx and of other people. I am not. I think that Marx was a scientist and he tried to point out a very advanced method of analyzing phenomena what's called dialectical materialism. And you can't usher in dialectical materialism because that's the whole order and process that the universe goes through. In other words, I'll explain, one of the principles is that contradiction is one of the ruling principles of the universe. It gives motion to matter and contradiction is based upon eternal strife. And that eternal strife inside of any physical thing seems to give it the ability to be moved and to be transformed. And Societies of people, my fellow revolutionaries, who think that you can usher in a social order through any sort of ideological proclamation they're very wrong. The society itself strains to fight against colonialism such as America did with England, and then after that you get a situation where workers, the unions, they struggle against the owners of the factories, and then you come up with some other sort of order. And it's much different than the formalities of the ballet. You don't know where its really gonna land until you become such a scientist til the people—til they can harness the forces in operation and set them in a direction that's most desirable" (Firing Line with William F. Buckley, *How Does It Go with the Black Movement*, 2017, 27:14).

Here, it seems Newton is using the word "Marxist" here to connote those who instead of learning from Marx to interpret the world for themselves, believe that Marx's or Lenin's prescriptions apply regardless of context He is also implicitly encouraging people to read Marx themselves by gently belittling "priests of Marx." What Newton took from Marx was

the idea of dialectical materialism as a tool of analysis. Although Hilliard affirmed the status of the Black Panthers as Marxist-Leninists and Newton denied for himself the label of Marxist, they both refer to their understanding of Marx as “scientific”. From this, I gather that the Panthers were not reading Marx or Lenin as direct instructions for revolution so much as textbooks on certain theories of social change from which to gain insight into their own experience. At the end of this quote, Newton references “the people” harnessing the “forces in operation and set them in a direction that’s most desirable.” In the context of his frustration with “priests of Marx” and his later statement that he thinks of himself as an organizer rather than a leader, (“I’m not a leader, I view myself as somewhat of an organizer. I’ve learned how to start organizing people so that they can protest and somehow get what they want”(35:30)) it seems that Newton envisions social change that is grassroots. Likewise, when he says, “the people—til they can harness the forces in operation,” which places the people in the position of power. This idea that it is the people and not the party who will have control over the machinery of politics is related to the need for mass political education, to be discussed later. Currently, this shows that Newton does not prefer a top down approach to social change. While the Vanguard Party seizing control of the government is generally thought to be part of Marxism-Leninism, it seems for the Panthers the Vanguard was there to first educate and inspire the masses to grassroots self-liberation.

The Panthers were using Marx and his philosophy of dialectical materialism inspiration, borrowing what they liked from revolutionary Marxist movements like Lenin and Mao to develop their own ideology instead of adopting such views rigidly. An example of this flexibility in adapting Marxism-Leninism to their own ideology is given by Bobby

Seale in an interview in 1993. He describes the logic of how the party adopted a belief in community control, saying, "I'm talking about community control of economic frameworks that retail and produce services and goods. 'No, the workers must control the means of production!' I said no, definitively I'm right. 'No you're not!' I said yes I am. I said because Every worker lives in a community. Community control." (AfroMarxist, *Bobby Seale*, 1993, 16:00). Even though in orthodox Marxism the revolution is carried out by the proletariat, the workers, by and for the workers, the Panthers did not take this as gospel but instead wanted what was best for everyone including those outside the proletariat. Instead of control being in the hands of the workers exclusively, they wanted everyone in the community empowered. This is one reason why, despite the Black Panther Party being strongly influenced by Marxism, one cannot understand Panther ideology by only reading Marx or Lenin. The Panthers had their own vision of communist revolution that was based in community control.

Community control was also key in the Panthers' origins in countering police brutality. While the Panthers engaged in "policing the police" action to prevent the ever present threat of police harassment, the Panthers' systemic solution was community control. Bobby Seale stated in a speech in 1968, "We want our own black police force chosen by black people, ... controlled by black people and we're going to make one specific rule that while he's going to be a member of the police department chosen from our black community, he's going to have to live in our black community in the areas that he patrols because of this here" (Bobby Seale, 1968, *Kaleidoscope*). The idea that the individuals policing a community should live in and be part of the community was the

Panther's solution to police brutality. Seale continued, "If he have to live there, he ain't going to be murdering and committing no police brutality 'cause he's got to come back home and sleep that night." The idea was that if the police lived in the community there would be ways that the community could hold law enforcement accountable. The idea of the black community controlling the police in their community was only one facet of community control in Panther ideology. They wanted complete community control.

Seale used the term in the context of economic frameworks as well. The community should decide what the rules to function under in all institutions. He states, "community control of economic frameworks, you see what I'm getting at—community control of education, institution and culture, frameworks that affect our very lives, reinstitutionalizing some economic, political, social, and economic frameworks that make some human sense, is the essence of what our liberation is all about" (AfroMarxist, *Bobby Seale*, 1993, 14:37). The application of community control to all institutions that affect the functioning of the community was intended to empower the people and result in more humane distributions of power and resources. This was the Panthers' solution to colonialism. Because they saw government presence as foreign occupation, community control was their vision of a better alternative. Instead of having an outside political group making decisions about how the community should distribute resources according to what is profitable to the outsider, the Party envisioned the community taking power over itself. This idea was influenced by the idea of socialism and was in a way the spirit of socialism rebranded. Seale continued, saying, "I'm not even calling it socialism. I'm talking about community control of economic frameworks that retail and produce services and goods" (15:58). So, although it is

not dogmatically socialist, Seale saw community control as a path toward a socialistic distribution of resources and power.

While some people were worried about giving self control to communities known for poverty and crime, the Panthers saw community control as a solution to those issues. David Hilliard argued that when control is returned to a community in a way that makes life sustaining needs available, crime and poverty would decrease as a result, saying, “We could not imagine a society without authority, we do not say that. What we do say is that as long as the people have some self control, as long as the people are getting three meals a day, as long as they are employed, then I think that would put an end to the many robberies and to the killings” (Hezakya, 2019, 22:52). Here Hilliard is drawing on the idea that crime is a result of poverty and desperation, which were themselves results of exploitation and colonialism. Thus, if the community were empowered to self-determination, they would employ, feed, and house its members and thus crime would decrease.

One example of how community control worked in principle was an anecdote about the origins of the party told by Fred Hampton. He explained that there was an intersection at which children were being endangered by cars speeding through. Community members went to government and asked to have traffic regulation installed but the bureaucrats were uncooperative, “The government told them to go to hell : ‘We are not going to put no stoplights down there UNTIL WE SEE FIT’” (Fred Hampton Speaks, 2018, p. 9). So in the fashion of community control, Newton and Seale went and installed a stop sign regardless of government approval. “What did Huey P. Newton do? ... He gave Bobby the shotgun and told him if any pig motherfuckers come by blow his mother fuckin brains out. What did he do?

He went to the corner and nailed up a stop sign. No more accidents, no more trouble” (p. 9-10). This quote shows the common sense rationale behind the idea of community control. That rationale is that the people who are experiencing a problem should be empowered to solve the problem themselves, and not be subordinated to an authority that is alienated from their concrete human experience. Decisions about how a community should be run ought to be made by that community, not an outside occupying force. This is only possible when the community decides to take on this responsibility of self-determination. However, even when the community does choose to metaphorically hammer in their own stop signs, the occupying government will see this as a defiance of its sovereignty and respond with reactionary repressive violence. This is why Bobby held the shotgun while Newton planted the stop sign--defense of self and self-determination.

Self-defense was another centrally motivating concept from the beginning of the party. Newton explained the inspiration for the Party name, “I was very impressed by the political party in Lowndes county. They call themselves a freedom organization and they use the black panther as their symbol. And they use the Black panther because the nature of a panther, the panther will not attack anyone, he will back up first. But if the assailant is persistent then the black panther will strike out and wipe out his aggressor thoroughly, wholly, absolutely, and completely. So we thought that the symbol would be very appropriate for us.” (AfroMarxist, *An Interview with Huey P. Newton*, 2018, 25:14) This metaphor of the party as a black panther is functional in understanding the party’s perspective on the use of violence. They were not interested in political aggression or domination in the way that they saw the US government behaving. The Panther’s did not

want to occupy communities and force them to act against their own interests or cause harm to people minding their own business.

Reflecting the same sentiment, Bobby Seale likewise explained that the Party's use of guns and violence were motivated by self-defense. In response to mass perception of the Panthers as a violent organization Seale argued, "Have we went into your [white] neighborhood and intimidated you with any guns? No. Racists, pigs, cops and racists have come in and intimidated and brutalized and murdered us. Did we design this racist power structure system here that exploits and maims black people? No. They designed this to put it against us; we didn't put it on you" (Bobby Seale, 1968, Kaleidoscope). Seale is pointing out the violence of the white power structure against the black community which the Panther's were defending themselves against. The fact that he does not only discuss the brutalization and murder, but goes further and includes systemic exploitation and oppression shows how the philosophy of self-defense motivated the revolutionary political ideology. The system was harmful to the many communities it controlled and exploited, thus the communities should revolt and construct their own form of government as an act of self-defense.

While the Panthers saw violence as a necessary condition of liberation, it was only circumstantially the case. Hilliard stated, "We could have our freedom without a shot being fired. But we know that there are imperialists, that the fascists on the very local level will not withdraw from the arena without violence. They have proven themselves very violent and thus far they haven't done anything to ensure us our freedom. We do not ask for violence" (Hezakya, 2019, 10:18). It was only because of the violence of the state that the Panthers believed violence was necessary to be free. "So we do not advocate violence. Our

slogan is that we want an abolition to war but we do understand that in order to get rid of the gun it'll be necessary to take up the gun" (11:00). This almost cliché and apparently contradictory idea of using violence to end violence is rhetoric used to emphasize the Panther's employment of self-defense as a moral justification for their belief in revolution.

While the Panther's had a principled understanding of the justification for violence, many people were frightened by their rhetoric and image. They were often criticized for their use of violent rhetoric. David Hilliard stated, "We will kill anyone who stands in the way of our freedom" (Hezakya, 2019, 6:58). Cleaver said he would beat Ronald Reagan to death with a Marshmallow (UCLA CommStudies, 2014, 5:10). Hampton said that the only culture worth holding onto was revolutionary culture which meant "guns, guns, guns" and engaged in the infamous rhetoric about police, "If you kill a few, you get a little satisfaction. But when you can kill them ALL you get complete satisfaction" (Fred Hampton Speaks, p. 14). The fear it inspired increased government repression and alienated the party from many who were sympathetic to their goals. Newton said as much in 1973, ("The media, they enjoyed the sensationalism of the gun this the gun that. So in many ways we set ourselves up for the murder that we received and the violations we received upon our person and the people that were afraid 'no this is not what we want' when we were not about that anyway" (Firing Line, *How Does it Go*, 2017, 32:35). The use of guns as props, symbols of revolution, and the rhetoric of violent revolution was effective at getting media attention, but ineffective at gaining mainstream support, "[The emphasis on the gun diminished] the effectiveness in organizing community because only the people make change that sometimes I call revolution" (33:49). Because the fundamental goal of the party was to increase wellbeing,

when the use of violence and violent rhetoric failed to be effective it was dropped. When Newton says “that was not what we were about anyway” he is not denying the use of guns and violent rhetoric the Panthers engaged in but recalling the motivation that led them to believe violence was necessary--the improvement of living conditions for systematically oppressed and exploited by returning the locus of power to those communities.

Revolution as Both Event and Process

Now that we have covered two main values of the Party, we will go on to explore their conception of revolution. For the Black Panthers revolution was both a process and an event. David Hilliard said as much in a news piece on the death of Cleaver, saying “Eldridge was an exponent of the whole idea of revolution now. Huey Newton saw revolution as being a process” (Vinmoonsu, 2020, 4:38). This double referent caused internal conflict between Newton and Cleaver as the different meanings led to different courses of action. This conflict is an example of how ideology is expressed in the meaning of words, and shows that group ideology is complex and dynamic in its comprisement of multiple individual ideologies that can diverge. It also shows some of Arendt’s issues with ideology, as the definition of revolution takes the place of premise from which to work from. From Cleaver’s destructive understanding of revolution as the *event* of the death of the oppressor, the logic of the idea ended him thinking that guns and guerilla war should be emphasized and used immediately (Kirkby, 2011, p. 33). Newton holding a more positive conception of revolution as a primarily creative *process* instead of a primarily destructive event, led him to see survival programs as paramount for the revolution.

Cleaver was pushed out of the Party because of conflict with Newton. This was potentially incited by forged letters from the FBI as part of the COINTELPRO operation to destabilize the Black Panthers. Bobby Seale later stated that the FBI used the egos of Newton and Cleaver against each other (AfroMarxist, Bobby Seale, 1993, 20:26). While this may be the case, it also seems that the two had their own valid ideological conflicts based around this very duality in the conception of revolution. Cleaver believed that the party should be preparing for war against the US government, and Newton wanted to emphasize education and survival programs for longer (Kirkby, 2011, p. 33). Newton stated in the Firing Line interview in 1973 that Cleaver's influence was heightened when Newton went to jail and the gun became synonymous with the revolution. In discussing his disagreement with Eldridge Cleaver, Newton says "We realized it wasn't a principle of revolution or a principle of the party that you pick up the gun now and the gun was the only thing that defined revolution. So, it was a strategy that was mistook after I went to prison, with Eldridge's influence, that the gun was not only the symbol of revolution, but was the revolution" (Firing Line, *How Does it Go*, 2017, 31:40). Newton bemoans the fact that the understanding of revolution as the event of violence became the dominant understanding under Cleaver's influence. Newton goes on to say, "So the rhetoric then only pointed not to our programs where we attempted to organize the communities, the black community in particular, so that we could create what was destroyed through slavery so many years ago. And that's that comprehensive collection of institutions that we call community. We had to establish this and take care of the issues people were most concerned about" (32:00). Here Newton brings the attention back to the more constructive process based understanding of revolution. Newton evidently

prefers a conception of revolution which includes the building of institutions which radically differ from the status quo to transform society.

Although Newton is here pointing out that the Black Panther Party was much more than a group that promoted only violence, this should not be taken as evidence that he thought guns were unnecessary in revolution. However, this moment in the interview demonstrates the more holistic conception of revolution as radical change in a process of building a new kind of society which necessitates the death of the old order, as opposed to the conception which puts the destruction of the old as the core of revolution which has positive change as a result. Certainly both sides of revolution are necessary but the conflict seems to have been which precedes which. Newton's preference for emphasizing the survival programs as revolutionary action, indicates he thought that cultivating consciousness and institutions would lead to the death of the old regime, whereas Cleaver thought that the death of the old regime by violence would make room to build better institutions. When discussing failed revolutions Newton offers that it be called insurrection, rebellion, or riot (*Firing Line, How Goes it*, 6:15). These too have connotations of event. So in this instance it seems Newton is thinking of revolution as an event of violence against the system. Whether physical violence or the quiet violence of the dissolution of the system in the hypothetical shotless revolution, there is some inherent violence against the old order that is inherent in revolution.

Newton's preferred understanding is apparent when David Hilliard says on *Face the Nation* that the revolution could be accomplished without a single shot being fired: "We could have our freedom without a shot being fired. But we know that there are imperialist

that the fascists on the very local level will not withdraw from the arena without violence. They have proven themselves very violent and thus far they haven't done anything to ensure us our freedom” (Hezakya, 2019 11:00). It is only the aggression of the US government in its attempts to violently harass and disrupt the Panthers that makes revolutionary violence necessary. Thus revolution is the creation of a new order, a new way of life that escapes from the rules of another government.

Sharing a similar conception of revolution, Fred Hampton, as an influential leader in the party, compared revolution to a medicinal cure, stating, “A lot of people get the word revolution mixed up and they think revolution’s a bad word. Revolution is nothing but like having a sore on your body and then you put something on that sore to cure that infection”(Fred Hampton Speaks, 2018, p. 3). Revolution is radical changing for the better, a process of healing: so radical that it is a cure and not a treatment. It abolishes the disease, rather than managing symptoms and avoiding the root cause of trouble. In another speech Hampton declares, “So what should we do if we’re the vanguard? What is it right to do? Is it right for the leadership of that struggle to go faster than the followers of that struggle can go? NO! We’re not going to be dealing in commandism, we’re not going to be dealing in no tailism. We say that just as fast as the people can possibly go, that’s just as fast as we can take it” (Fred Hampton Speaks, 2018, p. 14). This idea of a people’s revolution conforms to Newton's statements on Firing Line where he argues with Buckley over their differing definitions of revolution. Newton draws a distinction between a coup d'état as “changes in authority” and a revolution, saying that “a revolution cannot really succeed without the people’s support”(Firing Line, *How Goes it*, 6:37). He also states that the only revolution

worth fighting for is a humane revolution. Revolution is not simply the shifting of power from one authority to another. It is not replacing one master with another. Revolution is a change in societal organization that is supported by and empowered by and for the people.

Likewise, Bobby Seale described a shift in frameworks of organizing society as revolutionary: “We must evolve, step by step, to a political revolutionary organizational framework, more and more community control of economic frameworks and all the political institutions, social justice institutions etc.” (Bobby Seale, 1993, 16:18). Here, although Seale’s use of the word revolutionary could be taken as referring to the never-before-seen character of the organizational framework, it is still relevant that he is describing the process of radical change in a “step-by-step” fashion. This indicates that Newton’s conception of revolution as a process of radical change was shared by Seale. As co-founders, it seems appropriate to use the understanding of revolution from Newton and Seale as primarily a transformative process of community empowerment.

One of the main characteristics of the process based conception of revolution was education. Hilliard stated in 1969, “As far as I’m concerned, I see the revolution still at the educational level [...] What we’re trying to do is we’re trying to wage a mass educational campaign. And we recognize that before any revolution there’s gotta be education. But I would like to say that there’s no blueprint for the revolution, we were prepared to struggle forty fifty years however long it takes” (Hezakya, 2019, 17:40). In this quote, Hilliard uses the word revolution to seemingly refer to two different ideas. Firstly, he states that the revolution is at the educational level. This implies that revolution is a process that begins with education. However, almost immediately he states that revolution must be preceded by

education. This latter statement implies that education is separate from revolution and that revolution may be the event of liberation, the abolition of the old regime. This demonstrates that revolution refers to both the process by which radical political change occurs, and the event, the moment of realization of liberation. While this internal conflict over revolution is evident here, what is more important is the fact that for the Panthers, the revolutionary process began with an educational campaign. What this educational campaign looked like will be further elaborated upon in the next chapter.

In summation, Panther ideology consisted of interpretation of the political character of the US government as a racist capitalist occupying colonial state. This was the cause of inequitable distribution of resources and violence against the poor and racially oppressed. Their solution was a revolutionary movement following the guiding principles of community control and self-defense. Disagreement on what revolution entailed led to the defection of Eldridge Cleaver and a divide in the Party (“Newton–Cleaver Clash,” 1971; “NEWTON HUEY On the Defection, 1973). Colonial bureaucracy would be replaced with community controlled institutions, reclaiming power through organizing and direct action (“NEWTON,” 1973). This reclamation of power and self-determination was motivated by self-defense from the exploitation by the US racist capitalist power structure. According to the process based conception of revolution, violence would only be used for self-defense when provoked by aggressive violence of the police as the occupying force. While the conception of revolution as an event led to more liberal uses of violence, as Newton and Seale were the founders and Cleaver was expelled for his calls for violent revolution and his critiques of the process of revolution, this project uses the Party founders’ understanding of revolution as a process.

First by leading an educational campaign to gain community investment in the Party's vision, and then using defensive violence to protect themselves from the occupying force of the American government. Thus, the value of self-defense was fundamental to the Panther's plan for revolution. With pillars of Panther thought identified as community control and self defense, these concepts will be analyzed in the next chapter in the context of the practical expression of ideology, using the theory of prefigurative politics.

Chapter 2: Practices and Prefigurative Politics

While in the last chapter I explored explicitly stated values of the Black Panther Party's ideology, this chapter will connect the stated values of community control and self defense to their actions. Additionally, the conception of revolution as an educational process can be seen in the prefigurative characteristics of their survival programs. These programs were life-lines for the survival of both the Party and the Black community, both of which were experiencing violent state repression and economic disenfranchisement. By organizing to supply the community with free life-sustaining resources including food, clothing, education, medical care, and security, the party made itself a valuable asset to the community. Thus the name of the survival programs was appropriate as it functioned to achieve longevity of life and health in both the Party and Community with a symbiotic relationship of material support for social and political support which flowed both ways. This chapter will investigate aspects of prefigurative politics the survival programs engaged in, particularly in the free food programs and education programs. By showing how the programs were a form of prefigurative politics the idea that the programs "raised consciousness" is given a deeper meaning than simply increasing awareness.

To begin, a discussion of prefigurative politics is necessary as this is a key concept for this chapter. Prefigurative politics is defined by Paul Raekstad in the book "Prefigurative Politics: building tomorrow today" as "The deliberate experimental implementation of desired future social relations and practices in the here-and-now" (Raekstad, 2020, p. 10). This definition of prefigurative politics differs from other theorists such as Smucker and Brienes in that it is open to the possibility of prefiguring any vision of a political future right or left, horizontal or

vertical, egalitarian or hierarchical. Breines and Smucker focus on prefigurative politics specifically in the context of democratically minded movements where the prefiguration took the form of open participation in decision making meetings. All three of these theorists agree on some aspects of prefigurative politics, such as its use in the construction of a community within the prefiguration (Breines, 1982; Smucker, 2017; Raekstad & Gradin, 2020).

They also all recognize the central tenet of prefiguration as being the enactment of desired future social relations in the here-and-now. While the Black Panthers were not focused on democracy specifically as their vision, but the meeting of basic human needs in their interpretation of socialistic community control, their prefigurative tendencies may not be as evident in their decision-making structures as in their survival programs. Raekstad and Gradin discuss the Panthers briefly but explicitly, writing, “While kids ate their breakfasts cooked by volunteers using ingredients that local supermarkets had been persuaded to donate, the Panthers gave Black History lessons and read out Party messages. These breakfasts were a preview of the kind of society the Panthers were fighting for: a communist society where nobody went hungry, where black people’s history was not forgotten or marginalised, and where neighbors came together to help each other and socialise, for free” (Raekstad, 2020, p. 7). This chapter will accept Raekstads definition of prefigurative politics, and explores and expands their claim in collection of primary sources as evidence.

Community Programs

Next, I will discuss the Breakfast and education programs, drawing attention to the ways in which they reflect the common characteristics of prefigurative politics. The Free Breakfast for

Children Program began in 1969 and was designed to directly address the needs of the people. As education was an essential component in Panthers' theory of revolutionary process, they saw hunger as a barrier to education as well as survival. Many articles published in the Party newspaper contained the sentiment of, "How can our children learn anything when most of their stomachs are empty!" (The Berkeley Revolution, "Suffer Not, Little Children," 1969). The program was thus responding to the dire need in the community for a solution to hunger. Additionally, it advanced the party's interest in increasing the capacity in the community to learn generally, and learn specifically about socialist distribution of resources. The Breakfast Program itself was a tool to simultaneously feed the people, and teach them to feed themselves.

The purpose of the program as an educational tool can be seen when Fred Hampton explained in a speech he gave in 1969, stating "We have breakfast for children because we teach the people through practice, through observation and participation, that the people can be there free. That's the people's thing! Socialism is the people! You're afraid of yourself—if you're afraid of socialism, you're afraid of yourself." (AfroMarxist, *Fred Hampton on Revolution and Racism*, 2017, 1:45). The program functioned as an example of the party vision of socialistic community control. The idea that socialism is the people, will later be expanded on in the ways the party integrated the community into the programs through the solicitation of volunteering and donations. Here, however, it is clear that the programs were seen as more than addressing the material needs, but a political tool for education of the community about socialistic modes of action.

The party put special attention on the fact that the Free breakfast program was a political program and not simple charity or community service cause. This idea that the survival programs

were political was reflected in the way they were represented in the party's newspaper. In the April 27 1969 Black Panther Newspaper, there is a picture of a woman cooking breakfast with the caption "All party work is political" ("Black Panther Party Newspaper", Vol. 3, No. 1, p. 4). On the next page, an article notifies the readership of newly established Breakfast Programs made a point of using it as a counter-institution to the US state, flaunting its efficient use of time and resources and its ability to address the dire needs of the community in comparison to the oppressive "pig power structure." The Program was thus political in the sense that it was meant to expose the ineffectiveness, or even malicious disregard of the racist capitalist system to distribute resources as they are needed. In the previously mentioned article, "Suffer Not, Little Children," the author humorously uses the following phrase to describe the preparation for the program: "a group of panthers are loading the trunk of a beat-up Cadillac with weapons of all kinds—milk, bacon, eggs, bread." (Berkeley Revolution, "Suffer Not, Little Children," 1969). This joke, referring to breakfast foods as weapons, emphasizes the political nature of the program by recognizing the importance of feeding the children and community to the success of the revolution. It also pokes fun at the intense police disruption of the program, and at the idea that it was dangerous in light of its revolutionary nature. One major aspect of what made the programs political was its visibility.

The program's visibility was not limited to the local, but through its promotion in the party newspaper. In an article in the party newspaper from May 4 1969, it states plainly, "We are showing the people that their children can be fed for free" ("Black Panther Party Newspaper," Vol. 3. No. 2, p, 13). This teaching through visibility is one side of how prefigurative politics can function to raise awareness when combined with other strategies such as a newspaper to increase

its visibility. This use of the program as an example of what is possible as the Panther vision of desired social relations is what makes its prefigurative character so compelling. The program showed that the Party's goals of uplifting the community were positive and possible. It increased awareness of both the problem of hunger, and the party's effective solution to it: community control. The Breakfast program implemented such a vision of community control in the moment by integrating the community into the programs functioning through the recruitment of volunteers and solicitation of donations.

The donations and volunteers were solicited in the Party Newspaper.. They often ran articles in the party newspaper soliciting donations and volunteers from the local community. In the publication of the Party's newspaper from April 27, 1969, an article reads "The local advisory Cabinet and Church Members are calling on all mothers and other interested people who would like to work with this revolutionary program of making sure that our young have full stomachs before going to school"(p. 4). The party commonly appealed directly to the women in the community to participate in the Breakfast programs, apparently based on cultural association between women and domestic work and a nurturing effect, however gender roles were also challenged as men volunteered for the breakfast program and participated in similar capacities to women and vice versa. Thus the call for "mothers and other interested people" shows both the bias and simultaneous openness of the parties gender expectations. The newspaper featured many pictures of children eating breakfast, and both men and women serving them (Berkeley Revolution, "Breakfast Programs," 1969). Regardless, this is one of many articles requesting volunteers and donations of time and resources. The fact that donations were solicited from the community and business within the community show prefiguration of the world the Panthers

envisioned in which food was distributed for free according to community needs, not based on profit incentive and private property, as is consistent with the ideology explicitly stated by leadership in the previous chapter. This enactment of community control and anticapitalist values in immediate direct action is one main reason these programs are identifiable as prefigurative politics. Another aspect that adheres to prefigurative political action is the sense of community which enveloped the participants.

There was a sense of community shown in the Breakfast program. Articles written about the program often emphasized the warmth and sense of community created in the Breakfast Program. This sense is expressed when in the newspaper it says, “The ‘little brothers’ are treated like part of the family, and the service includes both food and soul” (Berkeley Revolution, “Suffer Not,” 1969). This phrase captures the strong familial community that was created and emphasized in the operations of the program. This sense of community and the previously mentioned enactment of community control are key aspects of prefigurative politics which are present in both the food programs and the liberation school programs.

As education was a vital component of the Panthers’ theory of revolution, it is important to pay attention to the liberation schools to further explore these prefigurative aspects of the survival programs. Explaining the origins of the Oakland Community School (OCS), Panther leader Ericka Huggins stated, “In 1970, in Oakland, David Hilliard created the idea for the first full time liberation day school. This school, and its attendant dormitories in Oakland and Berkeley, was simply called the Children’s House. This school ... became the way in which sons and daughters of BPP members were educated. Staff and instructors were Black Panther Party members.” (Huggins, “The Liberation Schools,” 2007, p. 1-2). This education of the children by

members of the party is reflective of the Party's ideology of community control. Eventually the Children's School would expand as liberation schools across the country "staffed by volunteer party members, opened in storefronts, churches and homes." Dealing with limited resources, the Panthers utilized any spaces they were permitted to. The programs took place after school and were intended to provide academic support to struggling young students of color in the local community.

In September of 1973 Oakland Community School (OCS) opened. Located at 6118 International Boulevard in East Oakland, starting with 90 children, the school's enrollment had soon increased to 150 and "maintained a daunting waiting list"(p. 2). From that time until 1982 the school was directed by Ericka Huggins and Donna Howell. Describing the school, Huggins says, "Serving the extended community and its children, the educators and staff of the OCS represented a mixture of individuals: Black Panther Party members, former Oakland, San Francisco and Berkeley Unified School District teachers, as well as new teachers looking for an innovative and culturally rich learning environment to work in"(p. 2). Here, we see the party developing a program which includes non-party-members into its functioning, taught not only by party members but by interested and sympathetic members of the community. This shows, like the Breakfast Program, how the survival programs integrated the party with the non-party members of the community.

According to Huggins' testimony in, "An Oral History of Ericka Huggins," the school did not charge tuition and the workers of the school were not paid, though the party subsidized their living expenses as necessary. Huggins explains, "We didn't charge tuition. We didn't pay ourselves. I was on welfare most of the time that I was the director of the school until later on in

time when we started some grant writing”(p. 82). Grant writing and the acceptance of government funds began to become more accepted by the party in the later years. This lack of tuition and pay indicate both the Panther’s ideological commitment to their principles that profit is less important than responsibility to one’s community.

The fact that community was a goal in itself in the operation of the schools is explicit. Huggins wrote, “These community school programs created a forum for young people to explore a factual history of America and a sense of connection, community” (Huggins, “The Liberation Schools” 2007, p. 1). Note that the sense of community is mentioned along with the factual history, implying relatively comparable importance. When talking about the sense of community she wrote, “The family, the kinship formed of the children and the staff and the teachers and the parents through the Oakland Community School. There was nothing like it. It really was like this gigantic family and I’ve never experienced anything quite like that since in a school setting” (Huggins, *An Oral History*, p. 82). The sense of community was something Huggins emphasized, remarking many times on it. She continues, “All of them say, the ones I’ve talked to, that that experience transformed their understanding of family, of community, also of education and its purpose” (p. 82). This is corroborated in an interview with a student of the OCS, who affirms, “My most lasting memories are those of belonging and community. Being together 24 hours a day and knowing everyone was family regardless of genetics” (Williams, Email Interview, 2020, p. 4). These programs were not only education in academic fields and methods of thinking, but also an education in the experience of community and one’s responsibility to others.

The experimentation with desired social relations as clear prefigurative expressions is shown in a flier for the Samuel L. Napier Intercommunal Youth Institute in Oakland. This flier

emphasizes the schools commitment to treating the students' perspectives with dignity, stating, ““At the Samuel L. Napier Intercommunal Youth Institute the youth are regarded as developing human beings, whose ideas and opinions are respected” (The Berkeley Revolution, ‘The Samuel L. Napier,’ p. 2). This is reflective of a correction to Huey’s experience he described in the OCS documentary interview where he said that his ideas were shut down and he was accused of trying to be smart. (LIFE, 2015, 5:25). This teaches the children through experience that they are worthy of respect and dignity through experience.

The flier also criticizes the contemporary school system, as a system which produces people who are incapable of critical thinking (Berkeley Revolution, “Samuel L. Napier,” p. 2). The philosophy of the school is explained as teaching students to examine concepts in both their positive and negative attributes, assessing objects and issues from many sides (p. 2). This can be seen as a reflection of their interpretation of dialectical materialism, which they took from Marx, and its idea that all things have contradictions in them.

However, the flier also states that the social relations experienced are also important components of the school, saying, “Our concentration is not only on exchanging basic skills and an analytical way of thinking, but we seek to transform the way the youth interrelate to each other” (p. 3) This does not only emphasize the importance of the social relations, but references an “exchanging of basic skills” which will be seen more concretely later. Once again, the intentional engagement in desired social relations is asserted; “The youth participate (in a democratic fashion) in planning many school activities”(p. 3). It is evident here that the programs were designed to give the children an experience of the desired social relations of the Panthers in order to internalize the values through the practice in the here-and-now. One sentence gives the

impression that if the term had been coined in time, the Panthers would have described their own programs as prefigurative politics: “Everything is done collectively in order to develop an understanding of solidarity and socialism in a practical way” (p. 3). Some specific practices in the OCS which prefigure the Party’s values of responsibility for community control, as well as self-defense, are evident in a documentary on the school from 1977.

The school engaged in prefigurative political action in the many activities of the school, encouraging peers to hold each other accountable, treat everyone with respect, and engaging in lessons that instilled values of solidarity and communal responsibility in the participants. In a video documentary titled, “Oakland Community Learning Center [founded by the Black Panther Party] 1977” (LIFE, 2015) a glimpse of both what the school is like and the reasoning behind its chosen practices is offered. The first half of the documentary follows a young girl named Kelita, a eight-year-old student at the OCS, who interviews Huey Newton about the school and describes some of her experiences. Newton differentiates the school from his experience in schools which he says only taught white history, while this school teaches about black history as well (1:50) He also says that in his experience children who could afford it were served milk and cookies but children who could not afford it were forced to wait. His view that this was harmful and unfair gives context to his appreciation for the OCS which provides three meals a day. (3:45). Teachers were often also lunch servers at the OCS, showing the willingness to go beyond the responsibilities of titles for the sake of responsibility to the community (4:23). However, the more interesting implementations of prefiguration are for the students.

One example of the prefigurative experience of children is revealed when an adult reminds Kelita that she is supposed to be at a Justice Board meeting (6:16). Justice Board

Meetings were student run meetings where the students held each other accountable for their performance in school. The video shows six children at a table, five of them apparently discussing the insufficient focus of their class mate. Kelita explains in a voice over, “The Justice committee gives you a method correction if you don’t do your homework, if you play in class, if you talk back to teachers or try to fight teachers” (6:40). The young defendant explains that she just forgets about her homework, and her peer offers a suggestion that she should lose her TV privileges and restricted free time. Kelita explains that when these “method corrections” occur it is out of love. This is an example of how the schools organized to encourage practices which reflected and instilled the value of community control. This practice of students holding each other accountable in these meetings teaches the children through practice how to engage with one another in a communal fashion of accountability. The narrator of the documentary comments, “Now you have to admit that the learning center certainly has a new approach to discipline. I’ve never been to a school where the students are the judges when another student breaks the rules. I think this system might help the students learn about responsibility” (12:15). It specifically taught them responsibility and accountability to the community.

The second half of the documentary follows a 17-year-old boy named Fred who is also a student at the OCS. He is shown with his classmates outside with a white instructor. The students are instructed to work together in groups to climb up trees and on top of a shed. These group exercises create camaraderie among the students and instill with the value of reciprocal communal responsibility. Fred explains in voice over, “The object of the games we play is, more or less, not to just try and get yourself out of the jam. You have to try and get everybody else out

of the jam too” (13:25). Thus, the school instilled the party’s value of responsibility for communal success, not only individual success.

The Party’s values of self-defense and communally motivated sharing of resources were taught through practice of martial arts. Kelita is shown attending a karate class. She explains that she learns karate because if she is attacked she can attack back (9:30). This reflects Panther philosophy of self defense, and again shows how their ideology is reflected in the organization's schooling program. Fred studied Taekwondo and received his black belt. So he taught Taekwondo at the OCS. This falls into the idea of “each one: teach one” which is an example of the above mentioned “exchange of basic skills” (Berkeley Revolution, “Samuel L. Napier,” p. 3). It shows that the sharing of knowledge or dissemination of expertise is an aspect of one’s responsibility to the community, and it is necessary for the implementation of community control. Fred notes that he helps a friend of his learn Taekwondo and that friend helps Fred improve his literacy. It comes out of a value for shared resources, including knowledge. Those with expertise should share their knowledge with the community for the community's benefit. While the school seems a wonderful communal experience, it is important to remember that it was a tool for change.

Ericka Huggins informs how the program fit into the Panthers theory of change when writing “The school was a critical formulation of the Black Panther Party vision that students would use their education as a stepping-stone to become world changers.”(Huggins, “The Liberation Schools,” 2007, p. 2) This conforms to the idea that education is the first stage to revolution and liberation. “A guiding and global principle of the school was The World is Our Classroom. This principle sprung from the school’s philosophy that children at OCS “will learn

how, not what, to think”(p. 2). Superficially, it seems this is meant to lessen worries of indoctrination. However, in light of the last chapter’s discussion, if one considers ideology to be made up of values and beliefs, the implemented social relations which instilled panther values mean that teaching how to think is similarly important to ideological indoctrination as teaching what to believe. The education was intentionally designed to inform students to the history of imperialism and slavery, develop their creative and critical modes of thinking, as well as individuals with strong senses of community control and self-defense.

Theory and Raising Consciousness

Before concluding this analysis of the Breakfast and liberation school programs, a theoretical exploration of the effects of prefiguration gives a deeper understanding of how these programs raised consciousness. As conveyed in the introduction, the raising of consciousness is a widely recognized function of the Party’s survival programs. It is generally used to refer to increasing the visibility of issues and support for the Panthers revolutionary cause (Potorti, 2017, p. 86). While this is a useful definition, utilizing theorizations on the role of prefigurative politics in social change deepens our understanding of the ways in which the Panther’s prefigurative politics raised consciousness.

For this purpose, Raekstad and Gradin, proponents of prefigurative politics, write about the function of prefigurative politics for the intertwined development of powers, drives, and consciousness (p. 40). Powers here refers to “powers -to” in contrast to “powers over” (p. 41). Elaborating, they write, “Powers-to include both possibilities to affect the external world ... and possibilities to be affected by it... This will be important later on, because our powers to be

affected by and to appreciate different things - from different kinds of music to different social relations - affect what we are driven to do and experience” (p. 41). This means that what one is capable of doing and is *driven* to do is shaped by one’s experience and environment. Likewise, drives “include all forms of wishes, desires, goals, values, or concerns,” which motivate one to act” (p. 46). Finally, consciousness is that which “enables us to reflect on, deliberate on, direct, and alter our activity as needed”(50). Powers, drives, and consciousness are all in constant states of development and interaction. What is most interesting is the idea that drives are shaped by the experience of their own fulfillment. These authors demonstrate this interaction and development with a quote from Marx when they write, “The process Marx describes is one where a group of people initially gather together and organise in order to achieve some certain extrinsic ends - say better wages... As a result of doing this, they acquire a new drive.”(p. 47). Here, out of the drive to make social connections the drive to eat together and develop camaraderie develops. They relate the interaction and reciprocal influences of powers, drives, and consciousness to prefigurative politics in that “it suggests the importance of developing *both* our powers to understand, appreciate and construct free and equal social relations, *and* our drives to implement, improve, deepen, and extend them” (p. 49-50). This has the ultimate implication that engaging in prefigurative politics raises consciousness by “extending” powers, drives, and consciousness which are all interactively developed. In total, “one important aspect of prefigurative politics involves changing participants’ operative values so that they come to function in ways that better suit ... forms of organising both here and in the future” (p. 52). Prefigurative politics is thus a strategy for the development of that which Raekstad and Gradin break down as powers, drives,

and consciousness to better operationalize the values of the desired social future. It does so by giving the participants experience practicing such social relations.

This theory of reshaping of consciousness in the purposeful development of drives and environment applies to the prefigurative politics of the Black Panther Party. In assessing the survival programs, this development of powers, drives, and consciousness, seems to fit what is referred to more broadly as the “raising of consciousness” in the literature surrounding the survival programs. The way in which the programs were designed to operationalize the values of community and community control shaped the drives in the participants through experience, in the way that increased their powers and drives to engage in the Party’s envisioned socialistic community control. It seems from the strong sense of community which was fostered in the enactment of the programs, that the sense of community became its own drive. The drive for community developed out of the initial drive for the Panther leaders and members to show what was possible and expose the contradictions in the American political economic system.

For those who participated in the program out of need, the drives might develop inversely, beginning with hunger. Once, participating in the programs for the purpose of getting food, one experiences with the sense of community, one would develop a drive to engage for the sense of community for its own sake. The sense of community would eventually develop the drive for revolution because that is the initial purpose for which the community was organizing. With the development of each drive so too would the powers to envision the desired world and engage in that kind of world. This shaping of powers, drives and consciousness are even more apparent in the justice meetings with Kalieta and the climbing and teaching activities with Fred (LIFE, 2015). They develop the consciousnesses of participants by showing them what

community control is like and how to do it. Additionally, the sense of community and the desire to operationalize their values can be seen as a drive used to substitute the drive of profit and capital which they so detested and denounced. Thus the engagement in prefigurative politics of the survival programs functioned to “raise consciousness” in the sense that it introduced the practice

To provide a critical perspective, Jonathan Smucker’s critique of prefigurative politics is that it is often engaged in non-strategically. He characterizes it as a practice not-inherently political, because it does not inherently function to shift the balance of power or create lasting impact on hegemony (Smucker, 2017, p. 120). This critique is reasonable. Even Raekstad, a proponent of prefigurative politics, writes that it is a strategy which is often most effective when combined with other strategies (Raekstad & Gradin, 2017, p. 35). Indeed, Smucker concedes that his definition is merely designed with the purpose of criticizing the practice when it is used without any other political strategy (p. 124). The Panther’s were far from engaging in the survival programs without political strategy. They used the programs as a way to publicize their message by advertising them in their newspaper often.

This use of their newspaper to publicize their programs is an example of using prefigurative action in tandem with another strategy. In this way they combined the on the ground activism with an educational campaign, raising consciousness both in terms of awareness on the broader scale, and reshaping the minds of those people who participated in the survival programs in any capacity. Indeed, the Black Panther Party engaged in many other strategies, including registering voters and engaging with electoral politics. A 1972 video documents Bobby Seale distributing groceries. Seale explains that they expect over 6000 people to come to collect

“free bags of groceries, and also to register to vote” (AfroMarxist. *Black Panther Party Distribute*, 2018). This is to make the point that the Panthers’ were not naive in their employment of prefigurative politics, and used it within their greater political strategy (which itself contained a wide variety of strategies) for revolution, which included engaging within the United States electoral system. While it is important to remember that the Black Panther Party did not only engage in prefigurative politics as the only strategy for social change, this is exactly why they can be looked to for inspiration for effective ways of utilizing it.

To finally recontextualize the prefigurative survival programs within the Panthers’ ideology and theory of revolution, I return the focus back to the ways in which prefigurative politics raises consciousness. The development of consciousness with these driving values of community control and self defense was crucial to the Panthers’ vision of revolution. This reciprocal influencing of powers, drives, and consciousness was critical to how the programs functioned under Newton and Seale’s understanding of the revolution as a process. The plan was that the people, through the practice of socialistic community control programs, would learn how to engage in such work effectively and gain ownership of the programs. This was said explicitly in their newspaper, “We are trying to involve the community to the point where they can take over” (“Black Panther Party Newspaper. Volume 3, No. 2, 1969, p. 13). They would develop the drives and consciousnesses which would function in their envisioned future of community control. Thus they would have a sense of ownership of this future, and be willing to employ defensive violence when, as they predicted, the colonial power, the racist, decadent, capitalist American empire machine, would come and initiate violence against its colonial subjects. Huey Newton voices this clearly in *Revolutionary Suicide* when he writes, “we were working toward

our long-range goals of organizing the community around programs that the people would come to believe in strongly. We hoped that these programs would come to mean so much that the people would take up guns for defense against any maneuvers by the oppressor” (Newton, 2009, p. 176). Thus, the revolutionary violence would be yet another principled operationalization of the Party’s value of self-defense. In this way prefigurative politics was an essential part of the Black Panther Party’s ideology and theory of revolution.

Conclusion

In this project, I set out to explain the function of prefigurative politics within the ideology and theory of revolution of the Black Panther Party. By referencing speeches of and interviews with major Panther leaders, I distilled some of the Party's core values as community control and self-defense. These values can be seen as representing the process-based constructive and event-based destructive sides of the Panther theory of revolution. From there, I demonstrated how the survival programs enacted their desired future social relations and practices in the moment, and how these were reflective of the identified values. By demonstrating this, I showed that the programs were a practice of prefigurative politics so that they influenced the powers and drives, as laid out by Raekstad and Gradin, of those who saw, interacted, and volunteered with the programs. Not only did the prefigurative politics increase the visibility of the issues of poverty and subordination which the Panthers aimed to combat, but it introduced a sense of community and ownership for the program participants over the Panthers' envisioned future. Once these drives were instilled, the hope was that the people's investment in the programs, developed through prefigurative politics, would inspire the people to take up arms in the spirit of self-defense when the US state engaged in repressive violence. It is important to remember that this was only one of many strategies the Panthers engaged in for social change. But as prefigurative politics remains popular in left wing movements, the Panthers can function as a model for the practice of prefigurative politics within and combined with other strategies for impacting hegemony. Likewise, it is important to recognize the role of the Black Panthers in the

development of prefigurative politics and reflection of their movement in contemporary movements.

In today's political and social tumult, tensions are high and many previously disinterested people are open to, and even seeking out, radical critiques of the American system. The issue of racially disproportionate poverty and police brutality and the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement have increased the visibility of racism and the violence of the state. Concomitantly, the 2016 Bernie Sanders presidential campaign increased popularity for socialist politics in America, leaving many inspired people disappointed and frustrated with electoral politics at his defeat. Simultaneously, Donald Trump's presidency has polarized society, galvanizing both right and left. Most recently, many on the left, especially the youth, want fast and tangible political change, but do not believe in the United States government to address their concerns of social justice. Additionally, the Covid-19 pandemic has exposed many to the harsh neglect of the government for the poor and working classes, with lay-offs and evictions. With the economic and environmental concerns of the younger generations' future, many have a desire for alternative models of political thought and action. The Black Panther Party reminds us change does not only come from opposing our political enemies, but building the world in which we wish to live.

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