

The Black Panther Party

SERVICE TO THE PEOPLE PROGRAMS



The Dr. Huey P. Newton Foundation

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Introduction

Emerging from the tumultuous first half of the 1960s, the founding of the Black Panther Party by Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale in October 1966 marked the beginning of a new era for a tired, troubled, and confused America. One phrase, simultaneously both a flat statement of resistance to impoverished conditions of life and a stirring cry to action to change those conditions, best characterizes and sums up this new epoch. It was a phrase initiated by the Black Panther Party in its early days in Oakland, California, which spread like wildfire across this land—north, east, south, and west—calling forth the emergence of hitherto unknown numbers of Black, poor, and dispossessed people into conscious political activity, in their own name and in their own interests. Five simple words seized America’s soul in an attempt to make it whole: “All Power to the People!”

From its founding, the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense (the phrase “for Self-Defense” was later dropped) has been assailed and vilified in the mass media, its leaders hounded and harassed by local and federal law enforcement agencies, and its membership and supporters threatened and intimidated at every turn. Through it all, the Black Panther Party has survived.

The reasons for this phenomenal resiliency in the face of tremendous obstacles and odds lies, in the final analysis, with the people—the communities served by the Black Panther Party programs and who, in turn, sustain the Black Panther Party through their heartfelt contributions of time and energy, devotion and love. In short, People’s Power: that boundless and bold enthusiasm carefully and cautiously granted to those who serve the people’s interest.

Contrary to misleading stories and scandalous misrepresentations, the Black Panther Party did not originate simply as an armed and violent response to police brutality and murder. The Black Panther Party is not, and never has

been, a group of angry young Black “militants” full of hatred and fury toward the White Establishment.

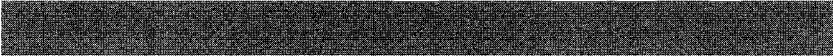
Rather, from the outset in 1966, when Huey P. Newton and other early party members began their historic patrols of the Oakland Police Department armed with law books to explain to members of the community their basic constitutional rights, the Black Panther Party has attempted to provide an example to the community of what is possible and to raise the people’s political consciousness so that we can all step forward with dignity and courage.

Programs and Achievements

Let us turn to the programs and achievements of the Black Panther Party and try to assess them for what they really are. Free Breakfast for Schoolchildren, the most well-known Black Panther Party program, is actually only one of nearly two dozen ongoing community-based activities and programs that the Black Panther Party sponsors. We have also included in this volume poetry, songs, and artwork that together make up the basis for a new, progressive People’s Culture, one that roots itself in the notions of friendship and cooperation between all people. Last, in a section of book excerpts, we present the theoretical analysis that underlies the Black Panther Party and its programs.

Although this does not present the whole story, we, the editors of the fall *CoEvolution Quarterly*, feel confident knowing that task is not ours. The final chapter, yet unwritten, belongs to the people—all humankind—as they forge through their own efforts and lives a world free of the troubles that plague us today. All we can do is record their magnificent achievements.

All Power to the People



Free Breakfast for Schoolchildren Program

I.

The Free Breakfast for Schoolchildren Program was the first survival program to be implemented by the Black Panther Party. Initiated in Oakland, California, the breakfast program provided a free, hot, and nutritionally balanced breakfast for any child who attended the program. By 1969, there were hundreds of breakfast programs throughout the country. A top government official was forced to admit, "The Panthers are feeding more kids than we are."

As was the purpose of the program, many groups, individuals, and organizations have taken the example and initiated programs of their own. Many Panther breakfast programs have been completely taken over by such groups and are functioning on their own. Guidelines for setting up a program in your home or community follow:

Sample Menu for One Week

MONDAY	WEDNESDAY	FRIDAY
Scrambled eggs	Eggs	Eggs
Grits	Home fries	Grits
Bacon	Ham	Bacon
Toast and jelly	Toast and jam	Toast and jam
Juice or milk	Milk or juice	Milk or juice
TUESDAY	THURSDAY	
Hot cakes	French toast	
Sausage	Bacon	
Fresh fruit	Fresh fruit	
Hot chocolate	Hot chocolate	



Charles Bursey, Black Panther Party member, serves food for the Free Breakfast for Schoolchildren Program, Oakland, California, ca. 1970. This program inspired and laid the groundwork for the school breakfast programs that exist today. Other name unknown. Photo by Ruth-Marion Baruch.

ii.

The minimum requirements for facilities and equipment include a building capable of holding at least fifty people such as a recreation center, church, or office building, and each facility must be equipped with kitchen equipment. Kitchen equipment includes a stove with at least four burners and an oven, and an adequate amount of large restaurant-size pots, pans, and serving utensils. For the purpose of serving a large number of children on a rotating basis with speed and efficiency, there must be an adequate amount of paper and plastic eating utensils such as paper cups, plates, and napkins; plastic knives, forks, and spoons. A minimum of 1,600 of each unit should be on hand to start a free breakfast program in any large poverty-stricken area.

The facility must be equipped with tables and chairs to seat fifty children at one time, and also there must be some room for seating children who may have to wait for a short while before eating.

There should be ample space to hang or place the children's cloaks, coat hangers, and so forth.

Party volunteers
prepare food for
the Free Breakfast
for Schoolchildren
Program, Oakland,
California, ca. 1970.
Names unknown. Photo
by Ruth-Marion Baruch.



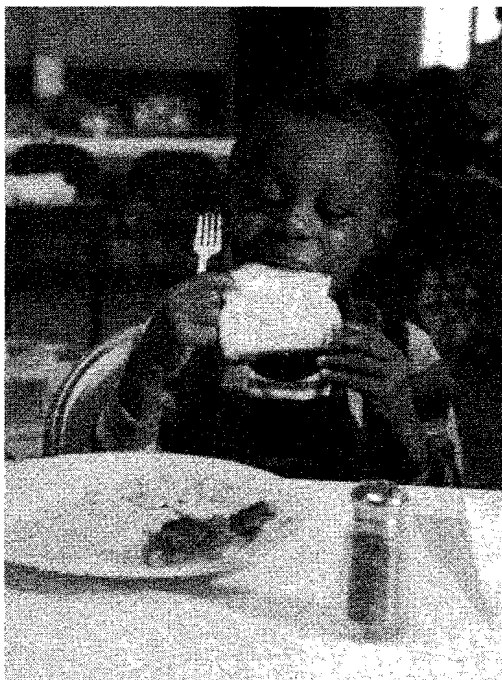
There must be ample waste disposal units on the premises. Usually two or three thirty-gallon garbage pails will be sufficient for each day's operation. Ample refrigeration and/or freezer space must be available for storing perishable foods.

There must also be a reception table set up with a sign-in book in which accurate records may be kept of names, addresses, and ages of the children who participate in the program.

III.

There should be a minimum of ten persons working on a breakfast program. Their duties should be defined as follows:

- 2 persons on traffic control helping the children across the streets
- 1 person doing the sign-in book operation (i.e., receptionist)
- 1 person taking wraps (coats, hats)
- 4 servers and table attendants
- 2 cooks



Participant in the
Black Panther Party's
Free Breakfast for
Schoolchildren
Program, Oakland,
California, ca. 1970.
Name unknown.
Photo by Pirkle Jones.

IV.

Funds for operating a free breakfast program can come from a variety of sources, such as local merchants in a surrounding community, private donors, foundations, churches, and other venues.

Having the program operate out of a church has the advantage of the tax-free status of a nonprofit organization. With the church receiving the donations on behalf of the free breakfast program, letters soliciting funds and goods may be mailed out. People working with the program may openly solicit donations from businesses in the community, giving those who donate a receipt so they can legally claim their donation as a tax exemption.

V.

The best way to involve community members in the program is to let them know about the program and what its needs are. This may be done by contacting the parents of the children who come to the breakfast program. These parents may

be asked to volunteer one day per week to work in the program or perhaps go out and help solicit funds or food for the program. There should also be community meetings held to explain the program and to recruit volunteers.

VI.

The program will raise consciousness in the form of people participating in a program that they put together themselves to serve themselves and their children.

People will come to understand a concept of getting businesspeople in the community to give something back to the community and do so in a way that the businesspeople can understand.

The consciousness of the children will be raised in that they will see someone outside the structure of their own family working in their interest and motivated by love and concern.



Legal Aid and Educational Program

Free Busing to Prisons Program

The Free Busing to Prisons Program maintains the bond between prisoners and their families by providing free transportation to (California) penal institutions. (It was later broadened into the Community Committee for Prisoners, Families, and Friends United. The Free Busing Program includes frequent trips to county jails, state penitentiaries, and other prisons.)

Initiated in southern California in 1970, the Free Busing Program first utilized rented buses, cars, and vans. Due to a massive increase in the number of Free Busing Program participants, a forty-passenger bus had to be acquired in 1972. The number of participants still exceeds the transportation available.

Trips to prisons are made on a regular, in most cases weekly, basis. A schedule comprising several weeks is made up in advance and circulated in the community. It is also published in *The Black Panther* and several local newspapers. Occasionally special arrangements are made at the community's request to take a trip to a prison that generally has few visitors.

The visitors gather at a central location, usually a party facility or church, before boarding the bus. The program also transports people from home to the bus and returns them afterward. Food is provided free of charge during the trip.

A major fund-raising drive is now underway to acquire monies with which to hire disadvantaged youth to work in the free busing program. The purpose is to help the youth learn an employable skill (driving and clerical skills).

Free Commissary for Prisoners Program

The Free Commissary for Prisoners Program is a community program designed to aid sisters and brothers confined in prisons throughout this country.

In the prison community the problem of survival is intense. In addition to

being denied many of the basic necessities for day-to-day survival, prisoners must be on guard against constant physical attacks and abuse. Also, their mail is censored and they must pay for stationery, envelopes, and stamps. Prisoners who have no money are allowed only one free letter per week. Items such as warm underclothing, books, legal material, and other personal items must be purchased by the prisoners. Also, imprisoned women, who have largely been forgotten by the outside prison movement, have a great problem obtaining the items necessary for feminine hygiene (such as cosmetics and alternatives to lye-based soap).

Prisoners comprise a large and varied labor force for the state. The work they are forced to do includes the production of (in California) all state license plates, for which they earn from two to twenty-four cents an hour. With these exceedingly low “wages,” prisoners must purchase items to satisfy their survival needs from a canteen or commissary at exploitative prices.

In addition, there is usually a surcharge or tax (10 percent in California prisons), which goes into an inmate’s “welfare” fund, controlled by the prison administration.

Furthermore, prisoners must purchase their basic necessities only during the specific days on which they have commissary privileges.

The prisoners’ right to live and function like human beings has been cruelly relegated to the level of “privileges” by the state. The basic human right to bathe, to have warm and adequate clothing, books, legal and other reading material, correspondence, and communication with the outside world are all vital to the survival of the oppressed prison community.

We cannot even begin to speak of freedom for all poor and oppressed people without acknowledging and in some concrete way dealing with the oppression faced by our incarcerated sisters and brothers.

The Free Commissary for Prisoners Program provides inmates with basic necessities such as toilet articles, clothes, and shoes. It also provides items requested by prisoners such as radios and record players. The items and funds are solicited from local businesses and the public.

The program consists of an intake system to receive prisoner requests for commissary items and a system to send out the articles. Prisoners generally make their needs and requests known through letters to someone who works with or knows of the program. The items are sent out by mail after they are bought or donated. The program attempts to get individuals and groups to sponsor prisoners by regularly obtaining commissary items for them. Copies

of prison rules and regulations are obtained and consulted for information regarding prison rules that govern receipt of commissary.

Legal Aid for Prisoners Program

This program is maintained primarily through correspondence with prisoners—the sending and receiving of information needed to handle prisoners' legal matters and affairs. Where needed, a referral service to attorneys and other types of legal aid is provided.