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The year 2016 marks the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Black Panther Party and their revolutionary approach to urban Black suffering in America. However, like many other social welfare contributions of the Black American community, the Black Panther Party's social programs remain largely unexamined within the social work literature. To reclaim the social welfare contribution of the Black Panther Party, this paper examines the Free Breakfast for Schoolchildren Program and discusses its relevance to contemporary social work. Key aspects of the Free Breakfast Program are reviewed, including the historical context of the formation of the Black Panther Party and the breakfast program's mission and funding, as well as reactions to the program. In conclusion, implications are presented for how social work can best support contemporary movements for Black community empowerment and social justice.

Key words: Black Panthers, Free Breakfast Program, Social Welfare, Afrocentric social work, food security, community practice

Contemporary social work overemphasizes the contribution of White individuals and communities to social welfare. In comparison, the contributions from individuals and communities of color remain under-represented. For Carlton-LaNey (2001), the lack of engagement with Black American contributions to social welfare stems from social work's historical silence on the inequalities that affect Black Americans and their legacy of community-based solutions. This article seeks to overcome this unevenness by highlighting a historical case study of a Black American social welfare program. To accomplish this, this article examines the Black Panther Party's Free Breakfast for Schoolchildren Program and discusses its relevance to contemporary social work.

The Free Breakfast Program is analyzed in terms of the historical context of the formation of the Black Panther Party and the program's mission, funding, and staffing. Also discussed is how the program reshaped the perspective of the Black Panther Party's leadership, the community reactions it provoked, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) response to those efforts. This paper provides a corrective to the imbalance of the historical record on social welfare by highlighting this innovative community-based program and its legacy for Black American responses to social need, hunger, and oppression. By acknowledging and honoring the contributions of communities of color to social welfare, social work can become a more inclusive and respectful place for diversity, thereby strengthening contemporary social work practice. In the current era of heightened awareness of police brutality against Black Americans, widespread dissatisfaction with both the status quo and gradual change, the need to highlight innovative Black American community-based solutions to contemporary problems of food insecurity and oppression is especially important.

Context of the Black Panther Party

The Black Panther Party formed in direct response to the specific social context of Black Americans in the 1960s. The passing of the 1965 Voting Rights Act was a key accomplishment of the Civil Rights Movement and played a central role in

defeating legal segregation for Blacks living in the U.S. South. However, for many Black Americans living outside of the southern United States, such as those in California's ghettos, the Civil Rights Movement did not significantly change their economic or political situation (Bloom & Martin, 2013). Many urban Black communities during the 1960s remained as ghettos due to concentrations of poverty, unemployment, crime, substandard housing conditions, racist housing practices (such as redlining), and overcrowded public schools.

In spite of the growing poverty in urban Black communities, local governments failed to address issues of unemployment and housing discrimination and instead focused on increasing law enforcement, leading to increased police brutality (Abu-Jamal, 2004). Numerous police killings of unarmed Black men were reported as justifiable homicides, which left Black communities across the nation in rage (Bloom & Martin, 2013). One turning point in the Black community's response to police brutality was the beating of Rena Frye, who in 1965 was pulled over by a California highway patrol officer. Rena Frye was beaten with a police club, and had her arms twisted behind her back; this event led to the Watts Rebellion of 1965 in Los Angeles, California (Johnson Jr, & Farrell Jr, 1992). The growing decay of urban Black communities, police brutality, and political exclusion despite the passing of the Civil Rights Act caused many younger Black Americans to abandon the nonviolent protest tactics of the Civil Rights Movement, seeing them as inefficient at achieving real change in their communities. A generation of younger Black Americans began to seek the more revolutionary ideas of Black liberation from America's systemic racism, expressed by Black thinkers such as Malcolm X (Newton, 2009).

Founding of the Black Panther Party (BPP)

The formation of the Black Panther Party (BPP) in 1966 by Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale came after years of engagement with other politically-based organizations, which ultimately helped them refine the BPP's philosophy. Newton and Seale would both obtain their first serious experience of engaging in politics and Black liberation when they joined the Afro-American Association founded by Donald Warden during

his days as a student at the University of California, Berkeley. During the meetings of the Afro-American Association, Warden led discussions on Black identity, culture, and the use of capitalism by the Black community to bring about community change (Bloom & Martin, 2013). Later, Newton and Seale joined the Soul Student Advisory Council and proposed that it conduct an armed rally on campus demonstrating the group's opposition to police brutality (Bloom & Martin, 2013).

Another significant influence for Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale was the Lowndes County Freedom Organization (LCFO) founded in 1965 in Lowndes County, Alabama. Supported by the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee with the leadership of Stokely Carmichael, LCFO directly responded to the lack of White politicians' receptiveness to the needs of the majority Black county of Lowndes (Carmichael, 1997). The formation of the LCFO met the resistance of the community's White residents, who formed an all-White Democratic party, with their slogan being "White Supremacy for the Right" (Bloom, & Martin, 2013). The LCFO selected on the black panther being as their symbol, which John Hullet, chairperson of the LFCO, described as "an animal that when pressured, it moves back until it is cornered, then it comes out fighting for life or death. We felt we had been pushed back long enough and that it was time for Negroes to come out and take over" (as cited in Murch, 2012, p.123). Although neither Newton nor Seale were involved with the LCFO, both were inspired by the grassroots activism strategies of the LCFO, which they translated into a philosophy of social action for the BPP. Huey P. Newton would later recount in his autobiography that he read about the LCFO's voter registration, and how the organization had armed themselves to defend against the violence they experienced, and used a black panther as their symbol. Newton further recalls that after discussing it with Bobby Seale, it was decided to name their organization the Black Panther Party of Self-Defense and use the LCFO's symbol of the black panther for their organization (Newton, 2009).

The Free Breakfast Program

The Black Panther Party developed an array of community programs, including free clothing, free ambulance services, free health clinics, and free shoes (Hilliard, 2008). However, the Free Breakfast Program for Children became its most influential social welfare program. In September of 1968, the Black Panther Party announced its plan to begin a Free Breakfast Program for children in Oakland and began serving breakfast by late January of 1969 at Father Earl A. Niel's St. Augustine's Episcopal Church in Oakland (Bloom & Martin, 2013). Two months later, in March of 1969, the Black Panther Party opened its second Free Breakfast Program for Children in San Francisco at the Sacred Heart Church (Bloom & Martin, 2013).

Instrumental to the growth of the Free Breakfast Program was the BPP's chief of staff David Hilliard. By August of 1969, when the first two Free Breakfast Programs for children were in full operation, both co-founders Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale were in prison. Newton was imprisoned for allegedly killing an Oakland police officer during a traffic stop, while Seale was arrested for an alleged conspiracy to incite riots and for the murder of a suspected police informant within the BPP. They both would be later acquitted for these charges. However, during their imprisonment, leadership for the BPP fell to Hilliard, who unlike Newton and Seal, focused more on developing the Black community's natural tendency towards self-reliance. Hilliard identified his sense of "dignity as an independent people" and "the communal ideal and practice that informed our programs" as drawn from the culture established by rural Black communities in the South (as cited in Newton, 2004, p. 55).

Police and federal agents sought to disrupt and repress the BPP Breakfast program by harassing community participants, donors, and supporters through police raids and intimidation (Bloom & Martin, 2013). However, despite the ongoing repression efforts, not only did the BPP's membership grow, its breakfast program did also. Many local Black community activists across the United States who heard about the BPP contacted their headquarters in Oakland, California to join the organization and obtain support and guidance to start local chapters. Recounting this, David Hilliard notes, "We get calls

all day long. Des Moines, Virginia Beach, Atlanta. Since we're three hours behind the east coast, the requests often start as early as eight a.m." (Hilliard & Cole, 1993, p. 159). Growth of the BPP chapters meant the growth of the Free Breakfast program. By November of 1969, the Black Panther Party had established Free Breakfast Programs for children in 23 cities across the U.S.; this grew to 36 cities at its peak in 1971 (Bloom & Martin, 2013).

Logistical Guidelines

Great care was taken by the Black Panther Party to ensure their breakfast program achieved a level of operational integrity that demonstrated their commitment to the well-being of the children they served. The initial BPP breakfast program in Oakland created guidelines on how to set up a breakfast program for children, which included a sample weekly menu specifying meal options for operation Monday through Friday. For example, on Wednesday, children were recommended to have eggs, home fries, ham, toast with jam, and milk or juice (Hilliard, 2008).

Other logistical aspects the Black Panther Party addressed were the building and equipment needs for the program. The BPP detailed the minimum building requirements for establishing a breakfast program to be a space able to shelter 50 people (Hilliard, 2008). As a result, the BPP recommended breakfast programs that opened to use locations already available to Black communities, such as recreation centers or churches. Moreover, within the building, the BPP directed that suitable kitchen equipment must be available (e.g., cooking stove) for food preparation. Breakfast programs were mandated at the minimum to be equipped to seat 50 children at one time to eat and have an area large enough for children waiting to eat (Hilliard, 2008). Additional needs included space for children to hang coats, space for waste disposal near the building, refrigeration/and freezer space for food storage, and items such as gallon garbage pails, paper cups, plates, and spoons (Hilliard, 2008).

Recruitment and Staffing the Breakfast Programs

The Black Panther Party mandated a minimum of ten persons needed to run a breakfast program. For traffic control, two persons were needed to help children cross streets coming and going from the breakfast program, one person was needed to manage the reception desk, one to help hang coats and sweaters, four to serve food, and two to cook the food (Hilliard, 2008). Remarkably, the staffing of the breakfast programs of the BPP was entirely based on the volunteer work of members, students, and residents of the community being served.

The guidelines established by the Black Panther Party for recruiting community members were: (1) community outreach and education to let community members know about the program and their staffing needs; (2) making requests of parents to volunteer at least one morning a week; and (3) organizing community forums to recruit volunteers (Hilliard, 2008). Forbes (2006) identified further organizing strategies that the BPP employed to mobilize parents, kids, community members, and local business owners in Black neighborhoods such as door-to-door canvassing, distributing leaflets, and recruitment through explaining the purpose of the Free Breakfast Program: "to help kids grow and intellectually develop because children can't learn on an empty stomach" (p. 50). They reported an overwhelming response (Forbes, 2006).

Funding the Breakfast Program and Rethinking Capitalism

Originally, funding for various BPP programs came primarily from donations from wealthy White philanthropists, humanitarians, and corporations (Newton, 1995). In its early stages, the BPP had originally openly criticized Black people who engaged in capitalism, such as small storeowners in Black neighborhoods, for their role in promoting oppression and marginalization of the Black community (Newton, 1995). However, the day-to-day needs of the Free Breakfast Programs and other BPP community service programs prompted a new understanding of how to best work within capitalism in order to benefit the community. For the BPP, this new philosophy

meant the creation of a symbiotic relationship between Black-owned businesses and their community patrons. Black-owned stores were expected to demonstrate their support for the communities they benefited from financially through in-kind or money donations for community-based initiatives of the BPP, such as the Free Breakfast program (Newton, 1995). In return, the BPP carried advertisements of these businesses in their paper and urged the community members to support them.

By applying this reciprocal model of engaging capitalism, the BPP believed the community members (who were considered to be victimized by society, in general) and the Black capitalist storeowners (who were deemed to be victims of corporate capitalist monopolies) would achieve greater unity. Moreover, long term, the proposed model of engaging in capitalism was envisioned to increase the positive qualities of capitalism until they outweighed the negative qualities, such as community exploitation (Newton, 1995). This change in perspective about how Black Americans could use capitalism was instrumental to the success of the Free Breakfast Program. However, participation by Black businesses varied. Some businesses feared the Black Panther Party's wrath if they failed to support the BPP help the community (Bloom & Martin, 2013). The BPP was quick to protest and denounce local businesses within the community they did not feel had an urge to support the community's well-being through the Service to the People Programs.

Politics of the Free Breakfast Program

The Free Breakfast Program, along with all the Black Panther Party's Service to the People Programs, were part of a political agenda. The BPP articulated their political agenda in a Ten Point Program crafted after the Ten Point Program of the Nation of Islam, known as "What the Muslims Want" (Marsh, 2000). However, unlike the Nation of Islam's Ten Point Program, which emphasized a separatist solution to the problems facing the Black America, the BPP's Ten-Point Program emphasized radical internal change within America as the solution for Black liberation. The BPP Ten Point Program addressed self-determination, full employment, decent housing, education, peace and development, capitalist

exploitation, military conscription, police brutality, incarceration, and discrimination in the judicial system.

The BPP's Ten-Point Program emphasized the place of government in the lives of people as ensuring that every member of its society has a fair share in that society. In the case of Black Americans, the BPP perceived that the American government had failed this responsibility and obligation, using examples taken from the institution of slavery, police brutality that continues to claim the lives of Black citizens across the country, and the overrepresentation of Black men within the criminal justice system. Consequently, the establishment of the Free Breakfast Program for school children, and other community-based service programs established by the BPP, were intended to serve as what co-founder Huey P. Newton termed "survival programs":

> All these programs satisfy the deep needs of the community but are not solutions to our problems. That is why we call them survival programs, meaning survival pending revolution. We say that the survival program of the Black Panther Party is like the survival kit of a sailor stranded on a raft. It helps him sustain himself until he can get completely out of that situation. So the programs are not answers or solutions, but they will help us to organize the community around a true analysis and understanding of their situation. (Newton, 1995, p. 104)

The Free Breakfast program met the essential survival needs of the Black communities through direct assistance. At a time when the U.S. government spent less than one million dollars providing breakfast for children, the BPP addressed poverty and hunger among the nation's children (Bloom & Martin, 2013). However, feeding children was not the sole purpose; the Service to the People Programs also educated Black communities on the nature of their oppression in American society (Newton, 1995). The community programs educated members of the community about new conceptual frameworks, thinking about themselves as Black people who emphasized pride and dignity (Newton, 1995). Moreover, the BPP Service to the People Programs sought to increase Black communities' self-determination and empower

Black Americans to take control of their lives to ensure the best interest of their families and communities (Newton, 1995).

Reactions to the Free Breakfast Program

The response from community members served by the Free Breakfast Program often varied from suspicion to support. Safiya Bukhari, a former member of the BPP's New York chapter, was originally critical of the BPP's politics. However, she was drawn into the organization through her support for the Free Breakfast Program. Bukhari explained how the Free Breakfast Program met a genuine community need by reducing hunger and food insecurity. "There were a lot of people who were eating out of garbage cans … indecent conditions that they were living in" (Arm the Spirit, 1992, p. 3). She accepted the need for the community-based Program, but not the political agenda of the BPP. "I still didn't believe in what the Panthers were saying. I didn't think that the violence was happening. I didn't think that the conspiracies were going on" (Arm the Spirit, 1992, p. 3).

Once she witnessed the police resistance to the Free Breakfast Program, she reevaluated her position. She saw a conspiracy, "police started putting out rumors … the police kept telling [the parents] that we were feeding the children poisoned food" (Arm the Spirit, 1992, p. 4). This had a dramatic effect, as children's attendance in the Free Breakfast Program declined. Bukhari knew this was a lie. "I was cooking the food and we were eating it right along with the children" (Arm the Spirit, 1992, p. 4). At this point, she understood the connection between direct assistance and a political agenda, realizing that the police "were not making an effort to feed the children, but they didn't want us to feed the children" (Arm the Spirit, 1992, p. 4). In this way, Bukhari's participation in the Free Breakfast Program raised her consciousness on the nature of oppression of the Black community and the role of the police in maintaining this oppression.

Resistance to the BPP was not limited to local law enforcement agencies. The FBI also sought to destroy the Service to the People Programs. FBI Director Hoover established a Counter Intelligence Program known as COINTELPRO. Originally developed to disrupt the activities of the Communist Party of the United

States, it was expanded to include domestic groups such as the Black Panther Party, among others working for social justice (FBI, n.d.b). Hoover described the long-term goals of COINTELPRO as preventing coalition building among Black organizations, which was energizing the Black movement, and the recruiting of youth into Black organizations (Bloom & Martin, 2013). Of all the Services for the People Programs, Hoover considered the Free Breakfast Program to be the most dangerous. Hoover described the Free Breakfast Program as the greatest threat to the FBI's effort to destroy the BPP (FBI, n.d.a). This was the rationale behind such efforts as falsely claiming that the Free Breakfast Program food was poisoned.

Implications

The Free Breakfast Program demonstrates the legacy of self-determination, community empowerment and development, and political advocacy within the Black American community. An important lesson to be taken from this legacy is that Black community empowerment and advocacy does not equate to being anti-American, anti-police, or anti-White. The conflation of these sentiments with the Black Panther Party is at least partly due to the Party being mistakenly associated with the New Black Panther Party. In fact, the New Black Panther Party is a separate organization, distinct from the original Black Panther Party, which was founded in 1987 and does hold many anti-American and anti-White attitudes.

Commenting on this, co-founder Huey P. Newton openly condemned the New Black Panther Party as an organization and its usage of the BPP's name in attempts to manufacture an affiliation. Moreover, Newton explained the BPP he and Bobby Seale founded in 1966 did not operate on hatred for any group of people but instead on an affectionate love for the Black community's well-being (Newton, 1995). For them, this love translated into developing an organization to confront police brutality against the Black community with the Services to the Peoples Programs aimed to address the symptoms of oppression in U.S. society. Additionally, they envisioned the BPP to raise the consciousness of Black Americans, which furthered their political agenda of strengthening the Black community's

capacity for self-sufficiency and working towards liberation from oppression.

The year 2016 marks the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Black Panther Party and their revolutionary approach to relieving Black suffering in urban communities through direct assistance combined with consciousness-raising. Yet, the BPP's engagement of urban Black communities is largely absent from the literature of social welfare history. Popular perception of the BPP is largely negative, undoubtedly influenced by its classification as a hate group and conflation with the New Black Panther Party.

The ideological struggle and evolution of the Black Panther Party's relationship with capitalism during the Free Breakfast Program in many ways overlaps with the social work profession's struggle to balance social justice with professionalization. Like the BPP's Service to the People Programs, social work provides direct assistance to vulnerable populations which is critical to their welfare, or survival, as the BPP put it. However, both the Free Breakfast Program and the social work profession often are dependent upon the financial and political support from the very institutions and systems they critique and seek to reform. Similar to how the BPP reassessed the role of capitalism in general and Black entrepreneurs in particular, social work could incorporate a social development perspective to advance social welfare within a globalized capitalistic system (Midgley, 2013).

The Free Breakfast Program has implications for social work practitioners in direct service, community practice, and those working for racial justice and criminal justice reform. Social workers could apply the example of direct assistance to address contemporary parallels of child hunger, food insecurity, and food deserts. Community practitioners and macro social workers could employ capacity building and organizing skills to facilitate community-based programs, recruit volunteers and train leaders, and build support from local businesses. This would be complementary with consciousness raising and political advocacy interventions. Such efforts would support social workers advocating against police brutality, racial disproportionalities in the criminal justice system, and mass incarceration (Pettus-Davis & Epperson, 2015).

The profession's commitment to human rights should guide social workers to support organizations and movements that seek to improve the conditions of the Black community within American society (Androff, 2016). Social workers should help the public and political leaders to understand the value of such movements and organizations and how they are distinct from hate groups. A contemporary example to which social work can make this contribution is with movements such as Black Lives Matter (BLM). Much like the Black Panther Party of the 1960s, BLM addresses the disproportionate killings of Black American citizens by law enforcement through political advocacy and consciousness-raising (Copeland, 2016). However, unlike the BPP, which maintained a central headquarters in Oakland, which provided guidance to other chapters on program development and organizational activities, BLM is a decentralized organization. While this approach presents many opportunities to allow communities to focus on the issues most relevant to them, it also seems to have created unevenness in the delivery of services to the communities they seek to assist. This is an area of need in which social work as a profession may prove useful as an ally by helping community organizations like BLM put into practice important theoretical ideas.

Conclusion

This analysis of the Black Panther Party's Free Breakfast Program reasserts the legacy of Black American community-based empowerment, highlights the positive contributions of Black social movements to social welfare, and points to the relevance of this program to contemporary social movements for racial justice, such as Black Lives Matter. The BPP's Services to the People Programs were designed to translate Black liberation theory into practice for changing the lives of oppressed peoples (Bloom & Martin, 2013; Hilliard, 2008). Unfortunately, due to infiltration and destabilization by the FBI, the self-declared vanguard of the Black community, along with its free breakfast program, ended in 1982 (Abu-Jamal, 2004). FBI director J. Edgar Hoover explained that the long-term goal of COINTELPRO was to prevent the rise of a "Messiah" who could unify, electrify, and excite the Black community to begin a second American revolution. Because of this primary objective, none of

the BPP's services, like the Breakfast for Children Program, or their Messiah-like leaders, Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seal, were spared from the FBI's attempts to undermine them.

Despite the federal government's success in disrupting the program and ultimately undermining the BPP, it has not extinguished the flame of liberation within the Black community in the struggle against oppression and for human rights. The example of the Free Breakfast Program is an inspiration for contemporary social movements within the Black community. Additionally, the BPP has inspired many Black social work practitioners, academics, and organizations to take action and demand changes for the benefit of the Black community and society at large. Consequently, the BPP has been successful in consciousness-raising, despite being disbanded, by inspiring new generations to fight for human rights, liberation, and equality and justice for all people.

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