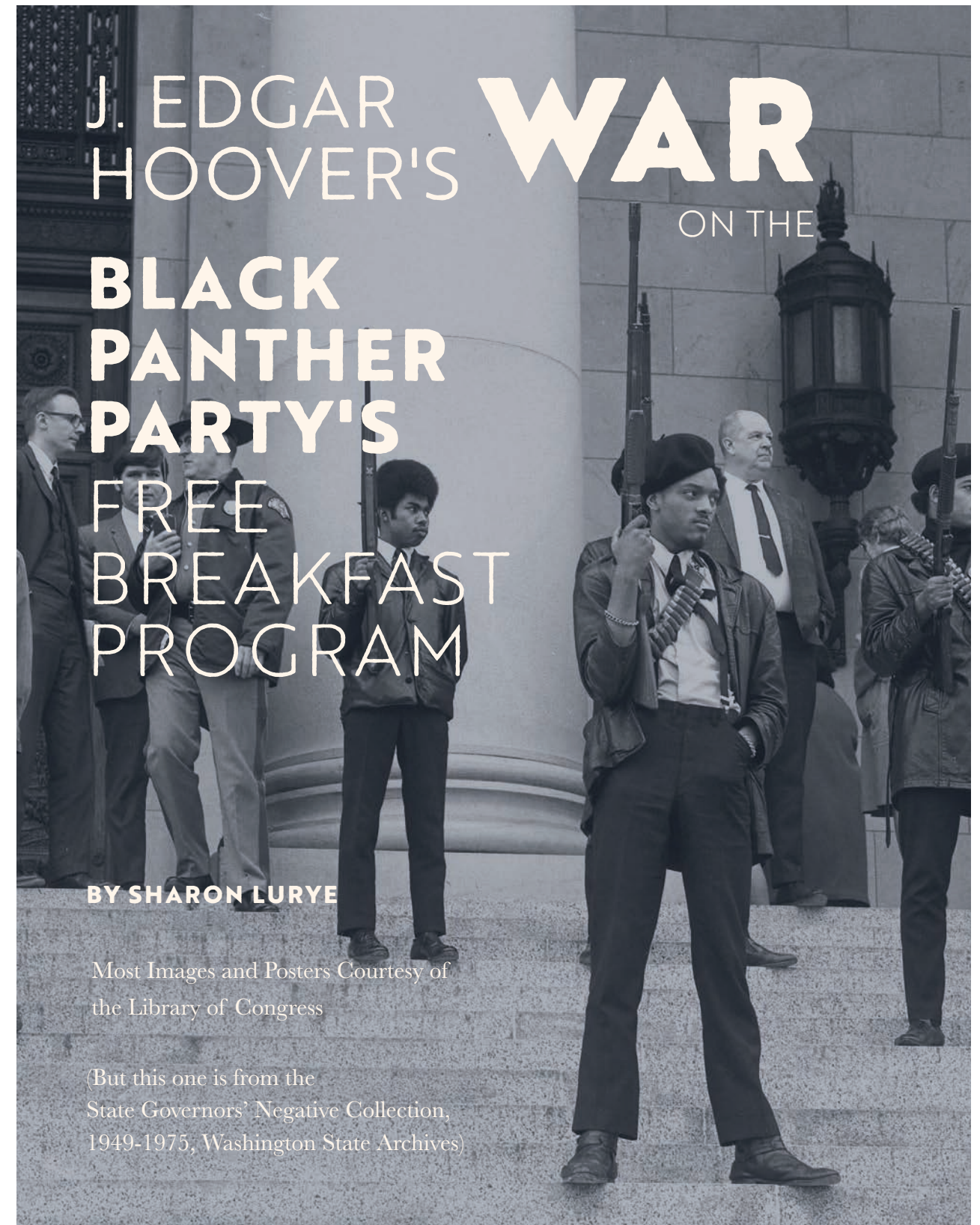


富嶽三十六景 諸人登山
Groups of Mountain Climbers

worship of purity and refinement, a sacred function at which the host and guest joined to produce for that occasion the utmost beatitude of the mundane. The tea-room was an oasis in the dreary waste of existence where weary travellers could meet to drink from the common spring of art-appreciation. The ceremony was an improvised drama whose plot was woven about the tea, the flowers, and the paintings. Not a colour to disturb the tone of the room, not a sound to mar the rhythm of things, not a gesture to obtrude on the harmony, not a word to break the unity of the surroundings, all movements to be performed simply and naturally—such were the aims of the tea-ceremony. And strangely enough it was often successful. A subtle philosophy lay behind it all. Teatism was Taoism in disguise. ■



J. EDGAR
HOOVER'S **WAR**
ON THE

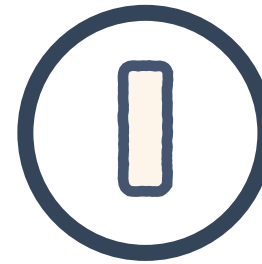
**BLACK
PANTHER
PARTY'S
FREE
BREAKFAST
PROGRAM**

BY SHARON LURYE

Most Images and Posters Courtesy of
the Library of Congress

(But this one is from the
State Governors' Negative Collection,
1949-1975, Washington State Archives)

FREE YOURSELF
FREE THE PANTHER 21
FREE THE STREETS
FREE FOOD
FREE HOUSING
FREE MEDICINE
FREE BOBBY SEALE
FREE EDUCATION
FREE THE WOMEN
FREE ART
FREE MAIL
FREE SUBWAYS
FREE TOILETS
FREE THE PEOPLE
FREE AMERICA



In May 1969, J. Edgar Hoover, Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), wrote a note to Charles Bates, the special agent in charge of an FBI unit in San Francisco, excoriating him for failing to clamp down aggressively on what Hoover saw as a major threat to American security interests.

The threat in question: a program to give out free breakfast to children before school, organized by the Black Panther Party (BPP). Bates had suggested that the FBI should leave the program alone, focusing its efforts counterintelligence program (CIP) efforts elsewhere. Hoover set him straight:

"You state that the Bureau under the CIP should not attack programs of

community interest such as the BPP Breakfast for Children," he wrote, as reprinted in *The COINTELPRO Papers*. "You state that this is because many prominent 'humanitarians,' both white and black, are interested in the program as well as churches which are actively supporting it. You have obviously missed the point."

The fact that the program appealed so widely to communities who might otherwise not support the Panthers, the FBI director explained, was exactly the problem. He scolded the special agent for failing to realize that one of the FBI's "primary aims" in combating the Black Panthers was keep it a radical fringe group, isolated from the wider support of "uninformed whites and moderate blacks." In Hoover's mind, the breakfast program had no humanitarian purpose at all: its purpose was "to create an image of civility, assume community control

of Negroes, and to fill adolescent children with their insidious poison."

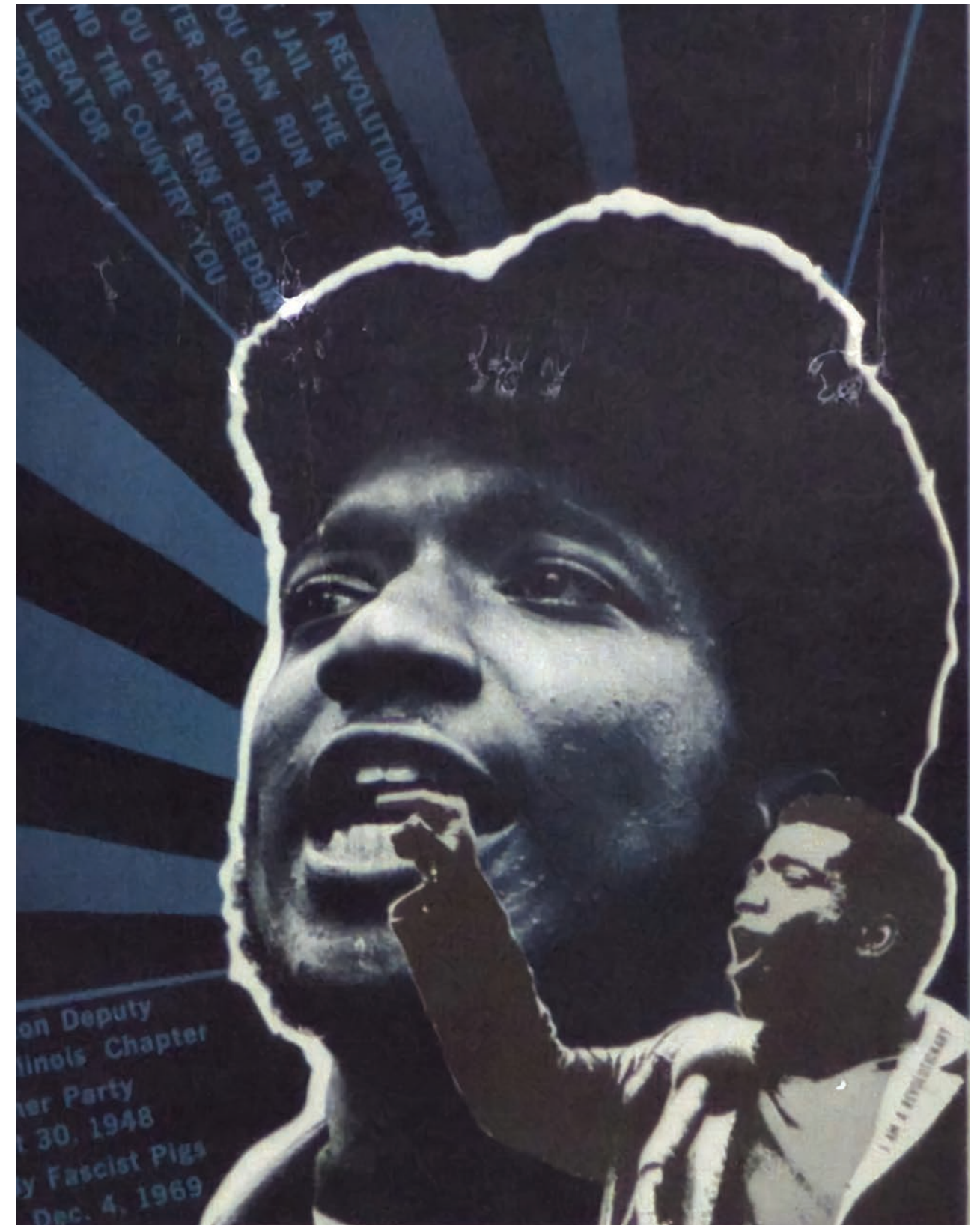
Hoover's acid dress-down of the special agent made it clear that tolerance of the free breakfast program would not be tolerated. But the backlash against the program also made it clear how powerful it had become. At their peak, the Black Panther Breakfast programs fed over 20,000 children nationwide during the 1968-69 school year, and as Hoover sensed, the program *was* about more than just feeding children. It was also about laying the groundwork for a revolution.

"Hoover had, in a manner of speaking, hit the nail on the head," wrote Panther Chairwoman Elaine Brown in her memoir, *A Taste for Power*. "The more the party sharpened the contradictions between the haves and the have-nots, between the powerful and the powerless, the oppressor and the oppressed, the more the people would seek to resolve them."

FROM FREE BREAKFASTS TO FREEDOM

The Free Breakfast for Children program was born only a few years after the Black Panther Party itself and quickly became its cornerstone endeavor. Bobby Seale and Huey Newton founded the Black Panthers in 1966 in Oakland as an anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist party that viewed African-Americans as a colonized people within the United States and the police as the occupying army. The party's goal was armed self-defense against the police and, eventually, revolution. By 1970, the party had chapters in 68 cities across the United States, from the coastal metropolises of Los Angeles and New York to the heartland cities of Omaha and Des Moines.

Towards the end of the 1960's, the Panther's main focus started to slide away from preparing for an armed uprising, and more towards what were deemed "survival programs" or volunteer-led efforts to provide for the most



WOMEN! FREE OUR SISTERS



SIX of our black sisters, members of the Black Panther Party, are imprisoned on trumped-up charges in Niantic State Woman's Farm in Conn.

THREE are pregnant;
TWO will give birth before the end of 1969;
NONE HAVE BEEN TRIED OR FOUND GUILTY OF ANY CRIME

YET THEY ARE:
isolated from other prisoners;
kept awake by constant bright lights and noise;
denied their LEGAL right to choice of counsel;
denied their CIVIL right to choice of doctors;
denied their PHYSICAL right to exercise, fresh air and proper clothes;
denied their HUMAN right to their children;

And what these women are suffering is an extension and reflection of the conditions forced on all women, especially those of us who are black, brown, and poor and who say NO to THE MAN.
WE DEMAND freedom and self-determination for ALL women

WE REJECT: the State's definition of "fit" mother, family unit and "suitable" home.
the State, by its torturous treatment of our Panther sisters has proven itself to be an "unfit" guardian for these children.

WE INSIST: that a mother in NOT "unfit" because she does not conform to repressive political, social, marital and cultural codes;
A FIT MOTHER WOULD MOVE AGAINST THESE CODES
AS OUR PANTHER SISTERS HAVE DONE!

What these women are suffering is part of the repression the State is bringing down on the Black Panther Party;
The State is making sure that these children will be born into a hostile, brutal and racist environment;
The State is making sure that the Black Panther Party will not produce another generation of Panthers;

Since we recognize the Black Panther Party as the true representative of the people;
WE DEMAND with the mothers, that the Black Panther Party be allowed to care for these children as is the desire of the Black Panther men and women.
WE DEMAND immediate freedom for the Connecticut Panthers and for all political prisoners.
WE DEMAND an end to the isolation and sleepless nights.
WE DEMAND adequate diet, exercise and clothing.
WE DEMAND their right to choose counsel.
WE DEMAND their right to prenatal and maternity care by doctors of their choice.
WE DEMAND their right to give birth without armed guards.

Because the U.S. is waging a genocidal war of aggression against the Vietnamese people;
Because the U.S. is waging a similar war, with different means, against the black, brown and poor people;
Because the Vietnamese are fighting back and WINNING on their home front;
Because the black, brown and poor people are RISING UP on the domestic front;
Because women are STRUGGLING for the same things that all oppressed peoples are fighting for--

WE WILL SHOW THE PRISONS, THE COURTS, AND THE STATE THAT WE WILL NOT TOLERATE THE OPPRESSION OF OUR SISTERS ANYWHERE IN ANY WAY, SHAPE OR FORM

Sat. Nov. 22, NEW HAVEN

N.E. WOMEN's Liberation and the Black Panther Party of Conn. are calling for a massive demonstration to pretest the "preventative detention" of the Conn. Panthers and in support of all political prisoners.
DOCTORS WILL BE WITH US TO DEMAND IMMEDIATE ENTRY INTO THE PRISON TO CARE FOR OUR SISTERS.



For further information please contact: N.E. Women's Liberation (749-5971 or 227-2617) The Black Panther Party of Connecticut, (203) 562-7463
please send contributions to: N.E. Women's Liberation, c/o Room 7, 2700 Broadway, NYC 10025 The Connecticut Panther Defense Fund, P.O.B. 7117, New Haven 06159

pressing needs of each community that had a party chapter. Panthers set up schools, opened health clinics, organized ambulance services, gave away clothing, food, and shoes, and even set up a sickle cell anemia research foundation.

"First you have free breakfasts, then you have free medical care, then you have free bus rides, and soon you have freedom!" said Fred Hampton, the Deputy Chairman of the Black Panther Party in Illinois. (Hampton was later assassinated by the police and federal agents at the age of 21.)

Of all these survival programs, Free Breakfast for Children was "the most respected and popular," as Detroit Panther JoNina Abron described it. Volunteers, most of them women, started prepping meals at 6 AM, served breakfast from 7-8:30 AM, drove the kids to the breakfast site if they needed it, and spent the rest of their time soliciting local businesses for donations. The menu was simple but filling, with donated items like bacon and sausage, eggs, grits, hotcakes, juice and milk.

The Panthers served their first breakfast plates in January 1969 in St. Augustine's Episcopal Church in Oakland. It was an area that desperately needed more food. A 1967 study from the University of California found that 1 in 10 poor people in East Oakland reported going several days in a row without eating. The Party targeted schoolchildren in part because they viewed hunger as a root cause of educational failure, which in turn continued the cycle of poverty. "How can a person be expected to pay attention and learn about history, math, science and other subjects that are abstract to his reality," the *Black Panther* newspaper asked, "when his mind is concentrating on a very real and concrete problem? Where is the next meal coming from?"

Eleven children ate breakfast at St. Augustine's on the first morning of the program. By the end of the week 135 children had shown up. By that summer, the Party claimed to be feeding around 10,000 children per day. According to Joshua Bloom and Waldo Martin's *Black Against Empire: The History and*

Politics of the Black Panther Party, at least 36 breakfast programs opened nationwide between 1969 and 1971, from Seattle to Kansas City to New York.

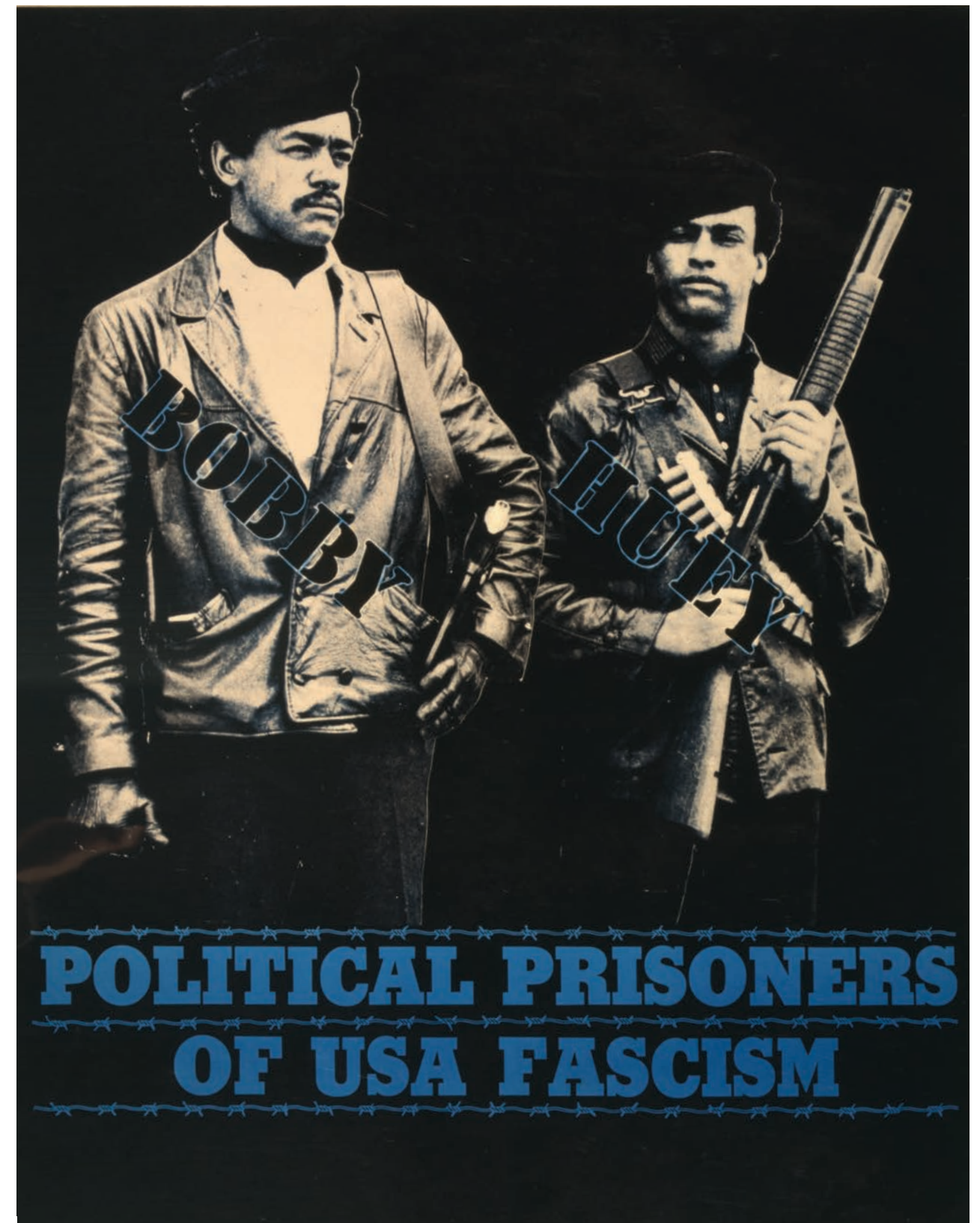
While “the desire to temporarily alleviate the pain of poverty” was the main reason for giving away free breakfasts, as Elaine Brown wrote, the programs also fit into the Panthers’ broader aim to practically prepare for revolution. “If you’re gonna talk about a revolutionary situation you have to have people who are physically able to wage revolution, who are physically able to organize, and physically able to do all that is done,” noted Black Panther Angela Davis in a 1972 interview.

What’s more, the social programs helped change the Panthers’ image in local communities. “When you think of the Black Panther Party, you think of men in black leather jackets and berets, carrying guns around,” said Judson L. Jeffries, a professor of African American and African Studies at Ohio State University. What the breakfast program did “was soften their image to such an extent that Black folks said not only are they

serious about protecting the Black community, they’re serious about the Black community’s well-being. One minute they could be confronting a police officer; the next minute they could be in the kitchen cooking up eggs and bacon and stirring up oatmeal.”

Finally, the free breakfast programs served ideological aims as well, helping to spread the Panthers’ message to young people. Panthers taught kids lessons about Black history during breakfast and went over the basics of the party’s 10-point platform, which demanded the end of police brutality and called for “land, bread, housing, education, clothing, justice and peace.”

As Ed Buryn wrote in a 1969 article for the *Black Panther* newspaper, “As some kids wait for the meal, they get an impromptu lecture about where it’s at for Black people today—watch out for the pigs, dig the injustice of capitalist society, see the strength of the Panthers in combatting it....what they hear is true, and they get to think about it over breakfast. Can’t knock it.”



Portrait of Huey Newton
Blair Snapp



"The sacred dog possesses spirit without immediately being our commander, since their words murder and brutality and torture of black people, or face the wrath of the armed people."

Huey P. Newton, Minister of Defense



Black Panther Party for Self Defense
P.O. Box 3641, Emeryville, California

Moreover, the very existence of a truly free breakfast program held its own implicit lessons. First, Black people could empower themselves to help their own community. "We are trying to show them they can feed their family without having to go begging to the white establishment," a Panther spokesman told the *Hartford Courant* in 1969.

Second, the breakfast program highlighted the U.S. government's own failings. According to *Feeding the Revolution* by political scientist Mary Potorti, while the Child Nutrition Act of 1966 gave \$2 million for a two-year pilot breakfast program, the amount given to states was largely insufficient. The entire state of California only got enough funding to sponsor breakfast programs in three schools, and kids still had to pay 10 cents for the meal. A 1970 report from the Southern Christian Leadership Conference found that the U.S. government spent its entire food stamps and school lunch budget in the Vietnam war every week. As party co-founder Huey Newton reasoned, "The people will undoubtedly start asking themselves why the party

can do so much with so little, and the capitalists so little with so much."

Under the leadership of David Hilliard, who took over the BPP after Newton and Seale were jailed, the Panthers accelerated their focus on the community survival programs, particularly the breakfast program. This shift away from the Panthers' militant origins underscored what would soon explode into a bitter rift within Party leadership, between those who emphasized addressing the people's material needs and those who wanted immediate, armed insurrection. Eldridge Cleaver, who fled the United States after a shoot-out with police following the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr., complained that "the vanguard party has become a breakfast-for-children club." Elaine Brown recalled in her memoir how Cleaver had railed to an audience in Moscow: "Pigs are comfortable. Why? Because the vanguard is cooking fucking breakfasts instead of drawing guns!"

Yet in some ways, the breakfast program functioned at a level above the fractured factionalism of the party's leadership.

These were community-led efforts, and volunteers did not even have to be a member of the Party to join: "The people who did things like the free breakfast program in individual neighborhoods were the people in that neighborhood," said Jetta Grace Martin, co-author of forthcoming young adult book *Freedom! The Story of the Black Panther Party*. "These were the people in the party where we do not know their names."

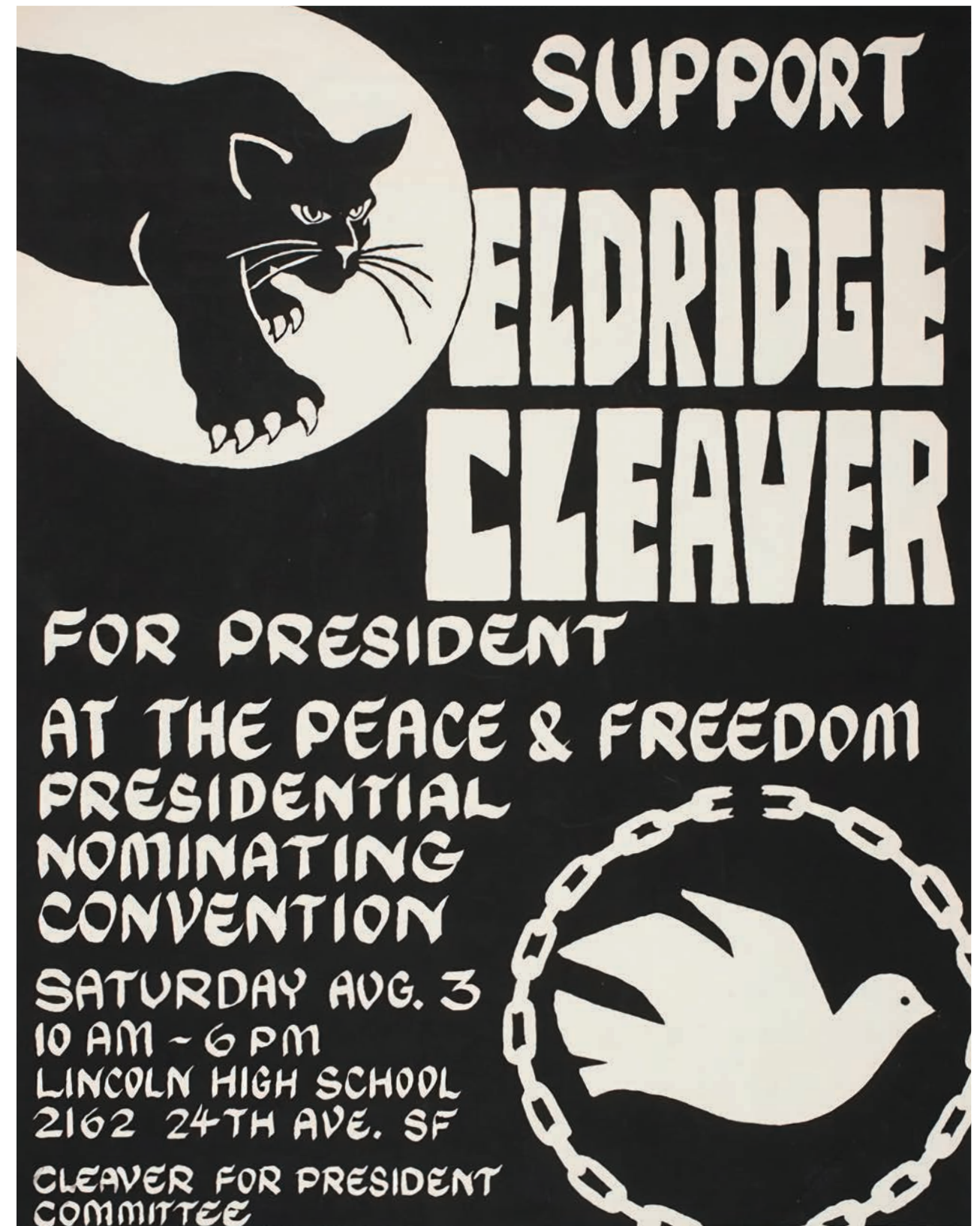
RAIDS AND RUMORS

"There's not a businessman nor a demagogic politician around who can deny a breakfast for children program and get away with it," Bobby Seale had argued. J. Edgar Hoover replied: try me.

Hoover believed that the Black Panthers were "without question, the greatest threat to the internal security of the country." It particularly worried the FBI that a poll found that 43% of Black people under the age of 21 expressed great respect for the Party.

The FBI's battle against free breakfast, therefore, was swift and brutal. As described in *Racism and Resistance* by Franziska Meister, Black Panther members were arrested on trumped-up charges of robbery and extortion for soliciting food donations from local businesses. Vandals broke into a church in San Diego that had hosted the free breakfast program, and the program there was temporarily suspended after FBI agents placed an anonymous phone call to the bishop. San Francisco evicted a woman from public housing for hosting breakfasts in her apartment. Armed police raided breakfast sites in front of children in Los Angeles and Baltimore.

Misinformation was the FBI's most oft-used weapon in this war. Agents spread rumors that the food was poisoned, that the people serving it were infected with venereal diseases, and that they were teaching children racism and inciting them to riot. The Bureau printed a violent coloring book, which they claimed the Party had endorsed, and mailed copies of it to companies that donated to the breakfast program.



*Black Panther Convention,
Washington, D.C.
June 19, 1970*



Agents also put pressure on church leaders to stop hosting the programs and tried to get offending priests reassigned to different states. Father Eugene Boyle, the white Catholic priest of the Sacred Heart Church in San Francisco, was willing to publicly defend the breakfast programs, where he said both Black and white children ate meals together peacefully. "The Panthers are obeying an older law, one as ancient as Christianity," he said, "which urges [the] compassionate man to feed the hungry and to open his ears, his resources, his heart, to the needy around him."

But the government's attacks achieved their aim: more and more breakfast programs shut down, and the Party eventually closed its last office in 1982. Yet these programs left an impact that lasted for far longer than the Party itself did. Professor Jeffries recalled from his own childhood in the 1970's and 1980's the numerous people he met who were inspired by the Panthers' survival programs to create their own community service programs. Jetta Grace Martin considered the collective

impact of having thousands of children better able to focus in school after getting a hot meal. "The first school year, they fed 20,000 kids. When you think of all those people who grew up... I would say that's a lasting impact," said Martin.

Most ironically, even while the U.S. government fought against the Panthers, it also adopted their signature program. The government ramped up its own breakfast program and was feeding over a million children per year by 1972.

It is unclear whether the Panther breakfast program directly influenced the government's decision to fully fund school breakfasts nationwide. Still, said Mary Potorti, a professor at the Massachusetts College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences, "The permanent authorization of a National School Breakfast Program in 1975 represented in some ways an official acknowledgement of the need the Panthers had insisted be recognized, but that critics claimed the Party manufactured or exploited."

Today, the National School Breakfast Program feeds nearly 15 million children per day. As the Panthers believed, a hot breakfast is not just a meal, but the key to growing and empowering young bodies and young minds. Perhaps the greatest testament to that vision is the fact that the U.S. government, for all its efforts to destroy the breakfast program, ended up copying it. ■

SHARON LURYE

is a reporter based in New Orleans, Louisiana, where she spends most of her time looking for the next place to eat.