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**We want education for our people that exposes the true nature of the decadent American society. We want education that teaches us our true history and our role in the present-day society.**



By the time the Panther 21 were freed of all charges, the Party's Free Breakfast for School Children Program, first launched at St. Augustine's Church in Oakland, was more than two years old. From its inception it was seen as but one of several survival programs to be initiated by the Panthers. It began with the idea of collecting food and supplies from local merchants, David Hilliard explained in his autobiography. These hot meals were offered at St. Augustine's Episcopal Church under the auspices of a Party friend, Father Earl Neil. "The program grows naturally from our new lives," Hilliard said, "...[the] free food baskets, the need now to feed our own kids, our desire to show the community we do something more than shoot it out with cops."



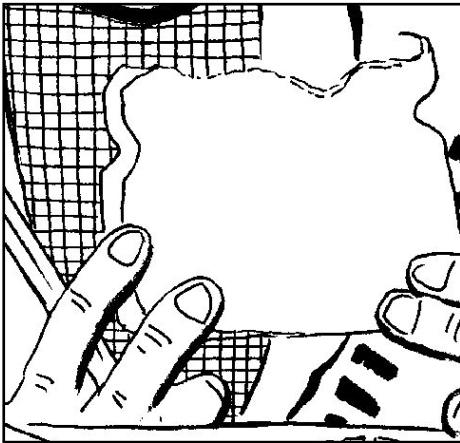
**"The program... show(ed) the community we do something more than shoot it out with cops."**

We call the program a 'survival' program—survival pending revolution—not something to replace the revolution or challenge the power relations demanding radical action, but an activity that strengthens us for the coming fight...."





Much has been made of the free breakfast program, that food and groceries were donated by merchants under duress. “Many took issue not with the idea of feeding free breakfasts to kids,” writes Hugh Pearson in *The Shadow of the Panther*, “but with the idea of trusting the Panthers to feed free breakfasts to kids.”



Nonetheless the program was highly effective, especially that phase of it conducted by college students in the Party. They “read up on price supports, discovering that dairy farmers dumped milk, butter, cheese and eggs, in order to guarantee a certain market price,” Pearson discloses. “The party would send out ten to twelve Black Panthers to convenience stores, supermarkets, dairy suppliers, and restaurants to ask for donations.

A restaurant making french fries everyday would donate bags full of potato skins it would otherwise throw away, which became the basis for the hash browns fed in the free breakfast program. A convenience store, such as the one in West Oakland, would donate a crate of eggs twice per month, while another would donate twenty pounds of bacon per month, and another twenty cartons of milk.”





Assata Shakur, from her autobiography *Assata*, offers these pleasant memories about feeding hungry children: "Working on the breakfast program turned out to be an absolute delight," she said.

"The work was so fulfilling. The Harlem branch had break-

fast programs in three different churches, and I rotated among all three. From the first day I saw those kids, my heart went out to them. They were such bright, open little people, each with his or her own personality. I spent the first two weeks or so just getting my cooking act together."



On the heels  
of this  
thriving  
innovation  
there was  
talk about  
the need  
for other

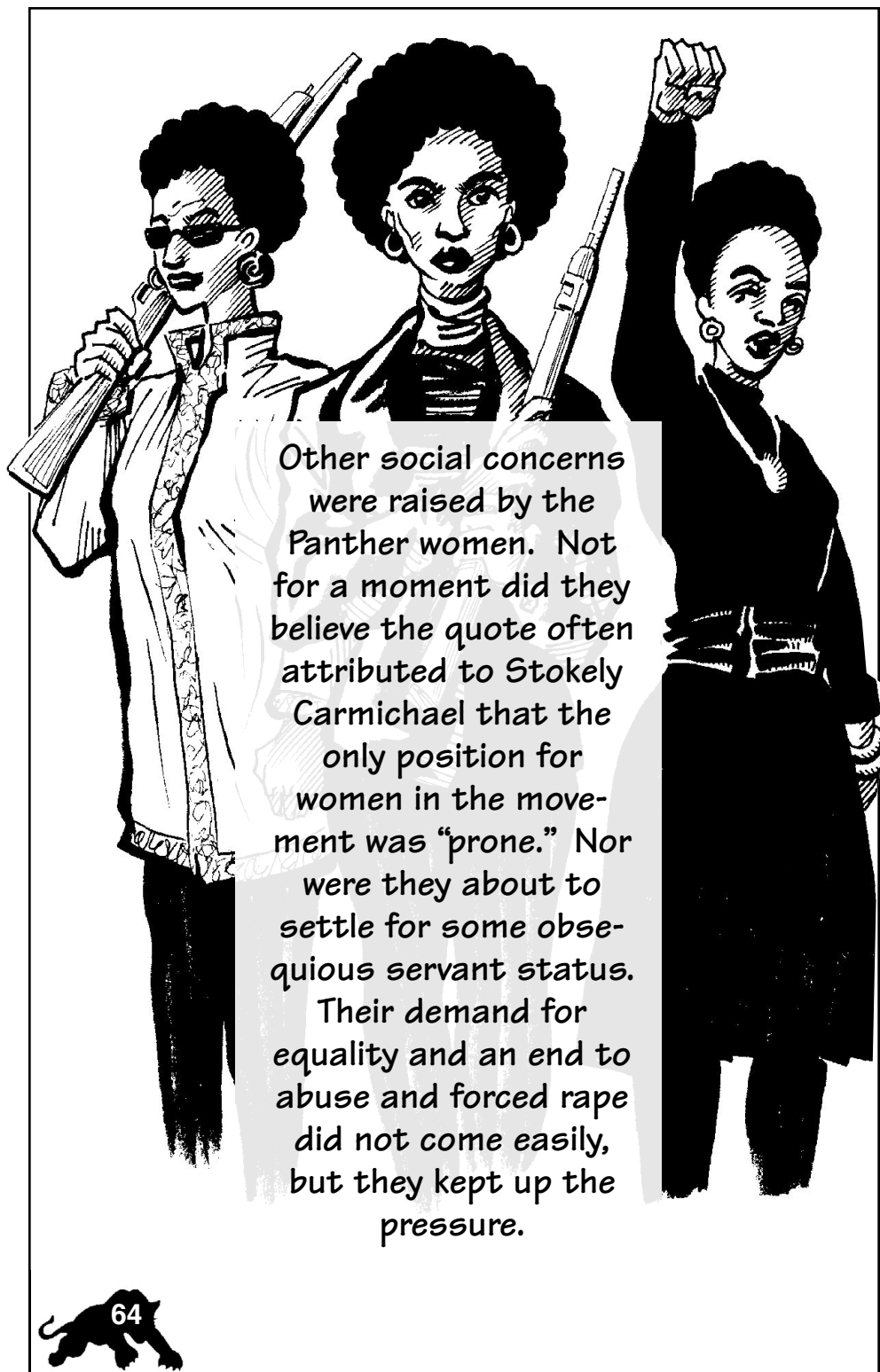
survival programs,  
such as:

- A free medical clinic,  
where tests could be done for  
sickle-cell anemia;
- Free clothing and shoes;
- Free education and assistance for the elderly.

By 1970, the Panthers were involved in a number of pressing social issues. Panther Brenda Hyson led an assault against a state law which made legal abortions available to Black and poor women. From her perspective the "oppressive ruling class will use the law to kill off Blacks and other oppressed people before they are born." To her logic, voluntary abortion would lead to forced sterilization, and Black women had a

political responsibility to oppose any form of "legalized murder." Though unconfirmed, there were reports that the Panthers were responsible for vandalizing Planned Parenthood Centers. Ironically, many of the programs established by the Panthers are currently under the jurisdiction of local, county, state and federal agencies.





Other social concerns were raised by the Panther women. Not for a moment did they believe the quote often attributed to Stokely Carmichael that the only position for women in the movement was "prone." Nor were they about to settle for some obsequious servant status. Their demand for equality and an end to abuse and forced rape did not come easily, but they kept up the pressure.



While there was no specific rule in the Panther bylaws that dealt directly with these problems, the leadership did occasionally address the issues.

**"In the Black Panther Party,"** Bobby Seale proclaimed, **"we understand that male chauvinism is directly related to the class society. In order to explain how the Party deals with male chauvinism, I want to point out how the Party thinks and how the Party understands things."**

At great length, Seale then cited a few anecdotes of how beautiful women in the Panther Party deal with wolves, and in setting them straight entice the young men to join the Party.

**"Personal relations now are based more on knowing people personally and humanly, on people coming and working together and functioning in the Party. Now when men and women meet each other, their relation comes out of common interests, common goals, to function in the Party as revolutionaries."**



Elaine Brown

This idealistic aim, though, was often ignored, and sisters continually complained about aggressive males and their autocratic behavior. Not that the female Panthers harbored any illusion of the males living up to an imposed creed; they knew better.

**"We knew brothers dragged their old habits into the Party,"** Elaine Brown explained in *A Taste of Power*, her absorbing memoir.

**"The Party's role, however, was not limited to external revolution but incorporated the revolutionizing of its ranks. If, however, the very leadership of a male-dominated organization was bent on clinging to old habits about women, we had a problem. We would have to fight for the right to fight for freedom."**

After all of his research, Hugh Pearson concluded that the male Panthers used an assortment of head tricks to have their way with the women of the Party. Pearson noted how one male member of the Panther leadership used his rank to gain favors and sex. "He and many other men in the Party would lay guilt trips on the women they desired, coercing them to bed, applying Marxist-Leninist ideology to the situation if the woman refused their advances:

***'Here I am in the revolution putting my life on the line, and here you are denying me.'***





The woman would be accused of harboring a petit bourgeois idealism that she needed to lose."

For the Panthers the police were the "pigs," but in the eyes of many female Panthers there was no scarcity of male chauvinist pigs limiting their growth within the Party. As usual, the men had a lot to learn. Learning is a lot easier if you're alive. If you must die, it had better be for a cause you believe in.