Revolution for Breakfast: Intersections of Activism, Service, and Violence in the Black Panther Party's Community Service Programs

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Revolution for Breakfast: Intersections of Activism, Service, and Violence in the Black Panther Party's Community Service Programs

Ricky J. Pope · Shawn T. Flanigan

Abstract   While there is a small body of research on service provision by groups that espouse a willingness to use violence, this research often is based on a presumption that service provision is used solely as a utilitarian tool to recruit members for political or violent activities. Through an examination of service provision by the Black Panther Party (BPP), the authors seek to problematize the utilitarian notion of service provision by reframing political activism, service, and violence as parallel acts of resistance serving similar purposes of countering oppression and healing communities. During field research in Oakland, California, extensive information was collected through interviews with former BPP members and recipients of BPP social services, as well as archival documents and audiovisual materials produced both about and by the BPP. The analysis explores several examples of the BPP offering free healthcare, breakfast, and education services. The data provide evidence that an organization that has been traditionally framed as militant not only acted rationally, but also provided an important defense for their community. Both their social service provision and their commitment to bear arms were viewed locally as acts of compassion, protection, and love.

Keywords   Black Panther Party · Social services · Violence · Community activism

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Introduction

While there is a small body of research on service provision by violent groups (and/or groups that espouse a willingness to use violence), this research often is based on a presumption that service provision is used solely as a utilitarian tool to assist with recruiting additional members for political or violent activities (see for example Levitt, 2004; Ranstorp, 1998). We argue that in many cases this dynamic is much more complex. While some organizations may use service provision as a tool for recruitment, prior evidence shows that service provision can also be an expression of religious calling, cultural or ethnic solidarity, or activist resistance against oppression and disenfranchisement (Fairfax, 1995; Fawaz, 2000; Flanigan, 2006, 2008; Flanigan & Abdel-Samad, 2009; Franklin, 1992; Harik, 1996, 2004; Hilliard, 2008; Hilliard & Cole, 1993; Smith, Shue, Vest, & Villarreal, 1999).

Through an examination of the case of the Black Panther Party (BPP),[1] this article seeks to problematize the utilitarian notion of service provision by reframing political activism, service, and violence as parallel acts of resistance serving similar purposes of countering oppression and healing communities. Despite varied opinions about the BPP, little is known from the perspective of the rank and file members who carried out everyday tasks, or from people living in the community who may have received services. We address this gap with qualitative, contextual data. During field research in Oakland, California, extensive information was collected from archival documents and audiovisual materials produced both about and by the BPP. In addition, employing a contextualized humanistic perspective (Johnson, 2006) in interviews with former BPP members and recipients of BPP social services allowed us to understand local perceptions of an organization that has been traditionally framed as militant. An analysis of these data provides us with a critical lens to explore the intersections of class, poverty, and inequality in the Oakland community.

The content analysis explored several examples of the BPP offering free healthcare, breakfast, and education services. We find that the militant imagery generated by the BPP allowed people to recapture a sense of personal and community agency, while the BPP's service provision provided concrete resources that were otherwise unavailable. The data provide evidence that an organization that has been traditionally framed as militant not only acted rationally, but also provided an important defense for their community. Both their social service provision and their commitment to bear arms were viewed locally as acts of compassion, protection, and love.

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[1] In this article we make an effort to refer to the Black Panther Party in the ways in which our data indicate its members referred to it. Therefore, we use "the Party," "Panthers," and the abbreviation "BPP" interchangeably to refer to the Black Panther Party.

Service Provision by Armed Groups: Utilitarian Tool Versus Fulfillment of Mission?

Relationships between charitable service provision and violent activities within the same organization can be conceived in at least two ways. Some consider the relationship between these two different types of activities to be utilitarian (Levitt, 2004; Ranstorp, 1998). Within this vein, organizations involved in violence and political uprising provide social services as a tool to increase support for their activities from members of the community at large. However, an alternative argument is that, because charitable organizations and violent resistance organizations each are created in response to political and social exclusion, charity and violence are simply two activities along a spectrum of possible actions that are used to address identical political and social concerns (Flanigan, 2006). We explain both of these perspectives, and later in the article indicate to what extent our data support each depiction.

Service Provision as Utilitarian Tool

One way of conceptualizing the service activities and violent activities of a single organization is that violent organizations use social service provision as a tool to gain the acceptance of their community. The degree to which communities accept the violent activities of insurgent or revolutionary organizations is variable, even when groups claim to be fighting to address community members' social and political concerns. Service provision can be a useful tool for generating genuine acceptance and active participation in an organization's violent and/or political activities; short of that, dependence on services may at least silence community dissent (see Fig. 1). This is because of the power dynamics at play in social service settings, particularly when individuals served are poor and marginalized (Handler, 1973, 1979). Relationships between social service providers and recipients are governed by the amount of power each can bring to the exchange; the amount of power a social service provider has over the recipient is a direct function of the recipient's ability to obtain aid elsewhere (Hasenfeld, 1987). Thus, in communities neglected by the state, reliance on a single service provider makes charitable service provision a powerful tool. Sole service provision makes community members very dependent on the organizations that provide for their most basic needs. Since forgoing access to services is not a realistic option, economic and social conditions oblige individuals to consume services from whoever provides them, and individuals may become beholden to the providers' political demands (Flanigan, 2006).

Service Provision, Politics, and Violence: Different Means to the Same End?

There is a wide literature in political science regarding the ways in which violence often organizes around shared group identity, such as ethnicity or religion see for example Cronin, 2002; Fearon & Laitin, 2003; Hoffman, 1998; Juergensmeyer, 2003; Stern, 1999; Tilly, 2003; Treverton, Gregg, Gibran, & Yost, 2005. However,

Continuum of Community Acceptance of Violent Activities by Terrorists and Political Insurgents

Lack of acceptance and active resistance	Passive acceptance due to silencing/ coercion	**Genuine acceptance/ widespread favorable opinion**	**Active participation by community members**

Fig. 1 Continuum of community acceptance of violent activities by terrorists and political insurgents

group identity in and of itself does not motivate violence; exclusion and grievance often serve as a catalyst for violent activities. Much political violence originates from the fact that groups are excluded from political and social participation in mainstream society (Gurr, 2000). What may be less recognized is that charitable activity by minority groups often is motivated by similar exclusion. Asian immigrants began to form associations similar to those in their native countries as they found themselves denied access to the social and political life of the United States, and their willingness to participate in community-serving activities remains positively correlated to the level of racial tension in the community (Chan, 1991). Shao (1995) attributes the growth of a complex and self-supporting network of Chinese–American charity organizations to the aggressive and retaliatory response Chinese initially encountered in the United States. Latinos in the United States create mutual assistance associations "to enable community survival in politically, socially, or economically hostile environments" (Cortés, 1995). American Jewish philanthropy primarily has been targeted toward rescuing threatened and oppressed Jewish communities around the world, and a reduction of exclusionary practices toward the Jewish community in the United States is cited as one factor that has decreased Jewish philanthropy, with American Jews becoming more likely to donate time and money to secular causes (Kosmin, 1995).

Community service and political resistance also are not so easily separated; one may be the basis for the other, or charitable activities and political resistance may be considered one and the same (Flanigan, 2006; Flanigan & Abdel-Samad, 2009). Social welfare and political struggle have traditionally been linked in the African-American community, and many Black nonprofit organizations pursue these projects simultaneously (Smith et al., 1999). As Fairfax (1995) notes, African-American philanthropy has been used overtly as an instrument for social protest. Vigilance committees were created to assist fugitive slaves, and mutual aid societies have played an important role in stimulating protest movements (Fairfax, 1995; Franklin, 1992). Community organizations serving migrant farm workers in the southwest were incubators for the Mexican–American civil rights movement, producing political activists like Cesar Chavez (Joseph, 1995).

Seen from this perspective, the ideological leap between charity and political violence may not be as far as one would think. These examples demonstrate how charitable activity can transition into contentious politics, and it is well established that political activity at times becomes violent. Early urban Native-American service providers were political in nature; once their ambitions for pan-Indian armed resistance proved fruitless, organizations began to focus on policy advocacy and social protest (Joseph, 1995). Similar religious beliefs and social concerns inspire the varied activities of Christian faith-based family planning programs, right-to-life political action committees, and abortion clinic bombers such as Eric Rudolph. Similar social and political grievance motivated African-American mutual assistance committees, the non-violent protest movement inspired by Martin Luther King, Jr., and the armed resistance of the BPP. Viewed in this light, it is not difficult to imagine charitable service provision simply as another means of addressing the same problems that violent activities intend to address.

The Black Power Movement

Often the 60s are remembered as an era of non-violent protest in the struggle for civil rights; however, in many pockets of the U.S. the appeal of non-violent discourse began to wane in the face of police brutality and differential enforcement of the law. For many, the philosophy of non-violence was an untenable position and the call for Black empowerment was the next step (Austin, 2006; Joseph, 2010). As Austin (2006) explains, "Police brutality, lack of opportunity, and the realization that opportunity was not forthcoming in the near future led many Blacks to conclude that armed self-defense coupled with self-help was the only way to end the despair" (p. 69). Situating the Black power movement in a larger historical view orients one to see Black power politics as a logical step in Black American calls for self-determination. When contrasted with the civil rights movement the Black power movement is often reduced to an immoral aberration, featuring hoodlums burning down cities and threatening the safety of good law-abiding citizens with guns. Recent scholarship, however. recognizes that civil rights and Black power movements emanate from a centuries-long Black freedom struggle. Although these two movements represent divergent paths, they often parallel and intertwine in the larger struggle for Black liberation (Joseph, 2010).

The Black power movement can be defined as a collective movement for self-determination and reclamation of humanity. The promotion of Black power as a political strategy was first articulated by Stokely Charmichael in June of 1966 (Jones & Jeffries, 1998; Joseph, 2010). Charmichael spent a year organizing local residents to secure Black political and economic power. For instance, The Lowndes County Black Panther Party organized several political candidates to run in a local election (Joseph, 2010). Lowndes County BPP first used the emblem of the Black Panther that was later adopted by the founders of the Oakland, CA Black Panther Party for Self-Defense.

The Local Context: Oakland, California

Prior to the founding of the BPP the city of Oakland witnessed several transitions as Black families migrated from the southern states to relocate in northern and western cites to gain economic opportunity and to escape racial prejudice. Self (2003) explained that post-1945 Oakland was a site of urban transformation that saw the weakening of unions and working class consciousness. During the 1950s and 1960s, the city of Oakland was faced with the problem of racial transition, leading city officials to create new administrative programs and layers of bureaucracy in order to manage social problems and reassert public authority (Rhomberg, 2004). The modernization of the Southern economy and subsequent migration of Black Americans changed the landscape of cites (Murch, 2010). This lead to what Piven and Cloward (1977) refer to as a transvaluation, where institutional upheavals usher people to reappraise their situation and thus simulate mass arousal. As Black Americans living in the Bay area vied for social mobility, integration became inevitable. However, the city's initial response to racial and social change came not through a process of electoral incorporation or political bargaining, but from public administrative authorities responsible for social control. The police acting as authorized agents of the state carried out discriminatory policies (Alkebulan, 2007; Austin, 2006; Murch, 2010; Self, 2003). The fact that these processes victimized Black communities more than White communities led Self (2003) to challenge existent discourse to move beyond the trope of the Black ghetto paradigm of crisis. Instead, Self suggested that future research theorize how African-American communities responded in creative, productive, and at times even halting and unsuccessful ways to the structural changes brought on by migration and metropolitan re-organization.

The Black Panther Party for Self-Defense

The Black Panther Party for Self-Defense was founded in Oakland, CA in the year of 1966 by Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale. During this period Oakland, California had one of the highest unemployment rates in the country, and the lack of employment opportunities and the number of families on welfare was the second highest in California (Newton & Morrison, 2009). The ideology that would come to shape the organization grew out of rising class and racial consciousness, as well as the belief that non-violence was an inadequate political strategy to address the needs of the Black community (Newton & Blake, 1973/2009). The founders were also concerned with police harassment in the Black community and were driven to take up arms as advocated by the Lowndes County Freedom Organization, the body of work left by Malcolm X, and the stance of Robert Williams (Bloom & Martin, 2013). Robert Williams, a former NAACP chapter president, was committed to both desegregation and civil rights but argued that non-violence was not the only route to Black liberation. Rhodes (2007) explains this assertion was an act of resistance that served to empower Black Americans, further supporting the claim that Black Power politics was a shift in a larger movement rather than a "spontaneous" creation. The

assassination of Malcolm X and urban riots happening throughout the nation's cities were significant contributors to a prevailing angst. When coupled with limited economic opportunities, local government suppression of Black political participation, and police harassment, the need for the BPP manifested itself (Austin, 2006).

In Bloom and Martin's (2013) political analysis of the BPP, they assert that the power of the BPP grew out of their politics of armed self-defense; their capacity to sustain a challenge to state agents; and their ability to draw broad legal, political, and financial support from allies, making them difficult to repress. Armed confrontation with police was an early stage in the BPP's growth. The BPP also engaged in non-military organizing activities such as promoting community control of the police, lobbying for installation of traffic lights, teaching Black history classes, promoting tenant and welfare rights, and investigating incidents of police brutality. As the BPP continued to respond to the evolving political landscape, they forged a cross-racial alliance with the Peace and Freedom Party and Huey Newton authored a paper in support of a strategic alliance with the LGBT community (Jones & Jeffries, 1998). Next, BPP members provided a variety of survival programs designed to meet the needs of the community. According to Jones and Jeffries (1998), survival projects served as an organizing tool with which to expose inequities and contradictions with the United States. In 1969 the Party instituted "serve the people programs." These services became a focus of their national agenda (Jones & Jeffries, 1998; Bloom & Martin, 2013), helping the Party to resist repression and garner allies while advocating armed self-defense. However, according to Bloom and Martin (2013), the politics of armed self-defense became impossible to sustain when the U.S. political landscape again changed during the Nixon administration with unveiling of affirmative action programs, normalized relations with revolutionary governments abroad, roll back of the draft, and increased Black electoral representation.

Given the rich and complex history of the BPP, space does not permit an in-depth account of the Panthers' political work here (for a comprehensive review see Bloom & Martin, 2013). The remainder of this article will focus on the conflux of violence and social service provision in the activities of the BPP.

The BPP as a Social Movement Organization

McCarthy and Zald (1977) present an inclusive view of Social Movement Organizations (SMOs), which can be defined as any civil society organization that aligns its goals with the preferences of a social movement or countermovement and attempts to implement those goals. Early explanations of social movements relied on a collective behavior approach that sought to explain social movements as irrational and used solely by members of marginalized groups. Resource mobilization theory challenged this view by suggesting that collective action is a rational response occurring when adequate resources are available (McCarthy & Zald, 1977). Scholarship from this perspective focuses on organizational bases of mobilization, resources related to SMO strategy, and the SMO structure (Cangilia & Carmin, 2005).

SMOs or what Gamson (1975) calls challenging groups are special kinds of actors with a unique set of problems. They are located outside of the polity and lack resources otherwise available to political actors located in the polity. Thus, challenging groups are unable to draw upon existing relationships or vested interests available to other political actors. Instead, they must activate loyalty on the basis of mass support or bring allies to their cause, enabling them to enter the bargaining arena in ways favorable to protest (Gamson, 1975). We argue that both the BPP's use of violence and their provision of health and social services provided an organizational basis for mobilization and activated loyalty, which allowed them to mount a challenge to U.S. government policy. Violent rhetoric influenced the BPP's growth by serving as a magnet for disaffected youth in America's ghettos (Austin, 2006). According to Austin (2006), "The political violence the Panthers symbolized made them extremely popular among those who had experienced—personally or to relatives, friends, neighbors—police brutality" (p. 154.) At the same time, many of the people who volunteered in the BPP survival programs did not support carrying weapons but were adamant supporters of the party due to the real empowerment brought by the programs (Alkebulan, 2007; Murch, 2010). The Party attracted thousands with its advocacy of community control of education, economics, and politics, and the survival programs attracted a "different and more disciplined membership" (Alkebulan, 2007, p. 28).

Violence in the Party

As a SMO the BPP presented a multifaceted challenge to the U.S. government outlined in the Ten-Point Party Platform (see Appendix 1). This platform presented an ideology that would undergird the survival programs that would later be offered nationwide in local communities. Point ten discusses the Panthers' insistence that society meet the community's need for basis sustenance such as food, clothing, and housing. Yet it was point seven that was first addressed by the BPP; according to Jeffries (2006), the Panthers implored Blacks to exercise their Second Amendment Rights to bear arms to protect themselves from violence.

"Although the group almost immediately delved into teaching Black history, the importance of African culture, political awareness, and economic self-sufficiency, it knew none of this knowledge was useful without first securing Black bodies," explains Austin (2006, p. 147). Point seven highlighted a request for an immediate end to police brutality and murder of Black people, a proclamation that was in direct protest against the police brutality taking place in the Black community and the U.S. government's failure to enforce civil rights legislation. As Austin notes, "The civil rights movement had failed miserably in persuading the police that beating Blacks was a bad idea" (p. 152). Baldwin (2006) explains that the BPP was able to conceptualize the U.S. constitution as giving legality to their armed struggle in manner similar to the colonial resistance to British occupation in the 1760s. She proposes that a "reconsideration of the meaning and significance of the Ninth Amendment suggests a striking paradox: the militant and revolutionary demands of the BPP were legitimate, reasonable, and within the bounds of the U.S. constitution" (Baldwin, 2006, p. 78.)

According to Austin (2006), "The primary thing to understand about violence in regard to the BPP is that much of it was rhetorical flourish" (p. 112). Nonetheless, the BPP's paramilitary orientation included weapons training classes, close combat drills, guerrilla warfare propaganda, and armed confrontations with police officers throughout the nation (Jones & Jeffries, 1998). During the initial building of the organization, Huey Newton spoke about both political education and classes on the safe use of weapons for new members. Another example of paramilitary training is the work of John Sloane, who lived in the local community and had prior military training. He was able to teach members field stripping and shooting of the M-1 rifle (Seale, 1970/1991).

The BPP's use of violence was not irrational. Rather, it was intentional, though dependent on the changing social context as discussed earlier. Newton referred to the police as a military arm or occupying force in Black communities, and discussed failed attempts to organize civilian review boards to supervise the behavior of the police (Newton & Blake, 1973/2009, p. 127). Often Black Americans were unable to gain access to safe policing strategies, and so the BPP's initial defiance was aimed at the police (Austin, 2006). People cannot defy institutions to which they have no access and to which they make no contributions (Piven & Cloward, 1977), and in this case the police, acting as state agents, compromised the state's legitimacy. Black communities' inability to procure just community policing and their larger exclusion from the polity created opportunities for defiance. According to Gamson (1975), violence should be viewed as an instrumental act aimed at furthering the purposes of a group, and used when they have some reason to think it will help their cause. In Newton's memoir, *Revolutionary Suicide*, he explains that:

> We recognized that it was ridiculous to report the police to police, but we hoped that by raising encounters to a higher level, by patrolling the police with arms, we would see a change in their behavior. Further, the community would notice this and become interested in the party. Thus our armed patrols were also means of recruiting (Newton & Blake, 1973/2009, p. 127).

The BPP's armed patrols were aimed at changing police behavior within the confines of the law, and they were a means of recruitment. A typical Panther recruit was a young adolescent still in search of adulthood who was likely a high school or college student (Heath, 1976; Jones & Jeffries, 1998). Individuals who joined the Party were usually between the ages of eighteen and twenty-three, and those with some college training often became leaders. The BPP police patrols would translate into a sense of militancy that would resonate with Black youth. O'Reilly (1989) explains that most authors tend to describe the BPP's proclamations as threats or "grandiose claims," but the Panthers self-consciously presented individuals and images whose revolutionary representation would provoke the possibility of radical social change by creating identification between the visual image and the viewer (Ongiri, 2010).

An additional way to understand violence and the BPP is presented by Singh (1998), who argues that the Panthers exercised Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence, supporting the claim in three ways. First, the Panthers were a threat not only because they espoused willingness to engage in armed self-defense, but also more importantly because they challenged the state's monopoly on legitimate use of

violence. Next, by policing the police, the Panthers signaled the eruption of a non-state identity into the everyday life of the state. Finally, by disrupting the official performance of the state through pursuing the political strategy of building foreign relationships with other revolutionary states (i.e., BPP journeys to China, Cuba, and North Korea), Singh (1998) argues that the Panthers were in fact a real threat.

In challenging the police the Party disrupted state functioning by employing disruption as a tactic of influence (Piven & Cloward, 1977). The impact of political disruption depends on electoral conditions, and given the widespread social change taking place during the period, the BPP's threat was significant. Piven and Cloward (1977) argue that protest movements are shaped by institutional conditions and not by the purposive efforts of leaders and organizers, meaning that strategies must be pursued that escalate the momentum and impact of disruptive protest. For the Black community police brutality was an institutional condition worthy of redress, and the disruptive protest of the armed patrols provided this effect.

To further explain the use of violence by SMOs, Gamson (1975) argues that it is not the weakness of the user but the weakness of the target that accounts for violence. He suggests that violence grows from an impatience born of confidence and rising efficacy occurring when hostility toward the victim renders it a relatively safe and costless strategy. Violence is best viewed as a special case of constraints which Gamson defines as the addition of new disadvantages to the situation or the threat to do so, regardless of the particular resources used. In the end unruly groups that use violence, strikes, and other constraints have better-than-average success in gaining acceptance for new advantages than groups who use no constraints but are subject to receive either violence or arrest. For the purpose of our argument aggrieved groups who challenge their social and political exclusion and are likely to face arrest or violence from their agonist are rational actors utilizing available means when they engage in constraints likely to confer acceptance or new advantages.

The Black Panther Party's Social Services

According to Jeffries and Nissim-Sabat (2007) there are three major voids in scholarly examinations of the BPP's activities: (a) the mundane grunt work done by local Panther activists has been lost in the literature; (b) there has been an over-emphasis on the Panther's clashes with law enforcement, which resulted in a missed opportunity to showcase the substantial community programs offered by the Panthers at the local level; and (c) the experiences of rank and file members as well as less celebrated branches should be studied in a critical analysis which situates them in the larger context of the BPP as an organization.

Social Services

The BPP offered a wide range of health and social services as part of its survival programs, including free breakfast programs for school children and food aid for families; schools, adult education, and childcare; medical care, medical research, and ambulance services; cooperative housing; employment assistance; free shoes

and clothing; free plumbing, home maintenance, and pest control; and protective escort for the elderly (Alkebulan, 2007; Hilliard, 2008; Nelson, 2011; Witt, 2007). One of the earliest academic accounts of social services provided by the Panthers is the work of Abron (1998), who explains how Party members understood that in order to maximize one's potential, personal safety, nourishment, and adequate health care were paramount. In more recent work, Jeffries' edited text *Comrades* (2007) documents the community works of the Baltimore, Winston-Salem, Cleveland, Indianapolis, Milwaukee, Philadelphia, and Los Angeles Black Panther Parties. Jeffries (2010) examines Panther activity in Seattle, Detroit, Kansas City, New Orleans, Houston, and Des Moines, detailing the construction of survival programs designed to improve the lives of African-Americans across the nation. Dyson, Brooks, and Jeffries (2007) and Dyson (2010) explains that the Panther's community survival programs provided a form of education that exposed America's contradictions and insatiable appetite for materialism at the expense of poor people. As Newton writes in *To Die for the People*, "So the survival programs are not answers or solutions, but they will help us organize the community around a true analysis and understanding of their situation. When consciousness and understanding is raised to a high level then the community will seize the time and deliver themselves from the boot of their oppressors" (as quoted by Hilliard, 2008, p. 4).

Methodology

This research utilizes a contextual-narrative design in an effort to add to the comparatively small body of research on service provision by groups who espouse a willingness to use violence. Our case study draws upon formal and informal interviews, visits to multiple sites of importance in and around West Oakland, California, and content analysis of video footage, narrative and personal accounts, and news articles published by the BPP. Eight individuals were interviewed who were former Party members and individuals who had received services from the BPP. These interview participants were guaranteed confidentiality as part of human subjects protocol. Videos analyzed included a documentary about Richard Aoki showing Asian involvement with the Party, and unreleased black and white footage showing students in the Panther Schools. In addition to reviewing scholarly accounts of the BPP, we examined multiple narrative and personal accounts by Party members, including books published by founder Huey Newton, and more than 100 articles published by the BPP in their self-published periodicals.

   This analysis intentionally focuses on interviews, videos, news articles, and other documents that are generated by members of the BPP themselves, rather than items created by those without close links to the Party. This inevitably results in a biased body of data since the information comes from the movement's perspective. These sources may present a strategic account of the movement, and the Panthers' own news media is likely to propagandize on behalf of the Party. However, these sources are appropriate for our analysis for two reasons. First, mainstream media coverage of the BPP was overly focused on the Party's violent imagery (Rhodes, 2007), neglecting the health and social service work of the BPP (Nelson, 2011). As Nelson (2011) notes of

the Party's self-published periodical the *Black Panther*, "the paper- even in its most propagandistic moments- provided the most complete record of the Party's health-related activities" (p. xiii). Second, information that comes from the movement's perspective is appropriate for our analysis because it is exactly this strategy and propaganda we seek to examine critically. The literature on service provision by militant groups argues that service provision occurs primarily for strategic purposes with the intention of indoctrinating service recipients and recruiting them to engage in more militant activities. Analyzing these data sources created by those who were members of or closely tied to the party allows us to better engage with the question of strategic motivations. For an in-depth discussion of other media's coverage of the BPP, readers should see Christian Davenport's (2010) book *Media Bias, Perspective, and State Repression,* and Jane Rhodes' (2007) book *Framing the Black Panthers.*

Jeffries (2006, 2007, 2010) suggests that there has been too much focus on the Oakland organization and not enough exploration of the community programs carried out by local BPP chapters nationwide. While we were able to draw some information from southern California, we acknowledge that our examination is also heavily Oakland based. We strongly agree that a focus on the Black Panther organization outside of Oakland, such as the work of Witt (2007) and Jeffries (2006, 2007, 2010) is needed and valuable. However, we also believe that the Oakland BPP is not fully understood, and for our purposes, the Oakland organization offered an abundance of rich data not necessarily available at other sites.

Community Services as Recruitment in the BPP

As we mentioned earlier, one construction of social service provision by organizations that engage in violence is that these organizations provide services as a tool to increase support for their activities from members of the community at large, and to recruit individuals to fight for their cause. The idea that services may serve as a tool for recruitment was neither alien to the Panthers nor to local government officials according to this account in the Panther's self-published periodical *The Black Panther*,

> Once the program was under way, however, we did receive a visit from an official from the Los Angeles County Human Relations Board. He suggested that he was merely checking the breakfast program out in terms of legitimacy; that is, whether we were feedings kids because they were hungry, or because we wanted to "indoctrinate" them with Panther ideology (Southern California Chapter, Black Panther Party. June 14, 1969. P.3)

Ironically, in the same article the authors discuss the value that the breakfast program has for educating students about the Party's ideology, and the students' potential for fueling the movement in later years.

> The children we feed are beautiful and really relate to the breakfast and to the Party. They want to know all about Huey, Eldridge, Bunchy, and John and the party and its programs. They wear our buttons and ask about the paper daily. They energy and enthusiasm they show after breakfast when we occasionally

drive them to school makes us appreciate "that if it weren't for Huey, there wouldn't be Free Breakfast for Children." THE YOUTH WE ARE FEEDING WILL SURELY FEED THE REVOLUTION. ALL POWER TO THE PEOPLE (Southern California Chapter, Black Panther Party. June 14, 1969. P.3)

In their writings, BPP leaders are clear about the role they believe their survival programs will have in generating an almost Freirean consciousness-raising among service recipients regarding oppression, injustice, and the need for revolution. This dynamic is well-documented in Nelson's (2011) book *Body and Soul: The Black Panther Party and the Fight against Medical Discrimination*, in which Nelson explains that an individual who visited a BPP-operated health clinic might also be encouraged to attend a political education class discussing the writings of thinkers like Franz Fanon. The link between the survival programs and political awareness is apparent in the organization's imagery and publications. At the bottom of Fig. 2, for example, we see a young boy checking into receive free breakfast before school. Above, we see the same boy pointing to an image of Black Panther members holding guns, making it clear that revolutionary imagery and ideology is available to students receiving food from the free breakfast program. Both of these images appeared next to an editorial about the BPP's free breakfast program, and the publication of the images next to one other seems to indicate that the Party wants to advertise the political education of youth who participate in its social programs. In fact, in Fig. 3 we see that several months later the Party uses one of the images again on the front page of *The Black Panther*, overlaying the image with text stating, "Youth makes the revolution," and "Liberation schools revolutionize the youth."

Images combining social programs, political orientation, and militant ideology abound. A typical example would be Fig. 4, a poster with drawing of a female recipient of free food and free shoes that also promotes specific political candidates. Of course, politicians of all stripes capitalize on their "good deeds" to gain political support. Such activity does not necessarily characterize a utilitarian strategy of coercing support from people who are dependent on one's programs. For example, President Obama, who certainly hoped to gain some political points from the Supreme Court's upholding of the Affordable Care Act, certainly was not operating under a strategy that assumes those with newly realized access to healthcare would feel forced to vote for him or fear losing health benefits. However, this example also illustrates the power of sole service provision. In a community neglected by the state where residents have few options and opportunities, service recipients may feel a different degree of pressure to participate in the political or militant activities of their providers. The extent to which BPP service recipients felt such pressure cannot be truly understood until research is conducted with a large sample of former service recipients.

Still, the evidence of coercion in an explicit form, as opposed to more typical political activity, appears weak. Stated differently, there is a difference between providing services solely for the strategic purpose of gaining support, and happening to generate support because you provide needed services. In our assessment, evidence indicates the Panthers fall more so in the latter category. When asked if the Party offered services in order to increase its membership, one former Party member describes it thus:

Lil' brother checking in for breakfast

From: April 27, 1969, *The Black Panther*, Vol. III No. I, p. unknown

> That is the goal of any organization; you want your organization to grow. For example, before Coke introduced Coke Zero they assumed that they already had a superior product in Coke, but they still had to promote Coke Zero and now Coke Zero is surpassing Pepsi. Coke's media campaign, commercials, and propaganda to sell Coke Zero worked. The BPP was similar, they had a product and they felt that if you taste some of this product you would like it. So they tried to promote their product. There is nothing wrong with that…the masons do it all the time! The BPP had a product that they thought would benefit the black community and would represent black people. And they did have a good product, but they didn't realize how much power the government had to stop them. So going into a program primarily of caring for people and love, then having the government say that they are militant organization, kind of contradicts what their purpose is.

In fact, when interview participants provide evidence of having been "recruited," they have been recruited to doing community service. As one former BPP service recipient explains,

Fig. 3 The Black Panther.
From: August 2, 1969, *The
Black Panther*, Vol. III No. 14,
p. 1
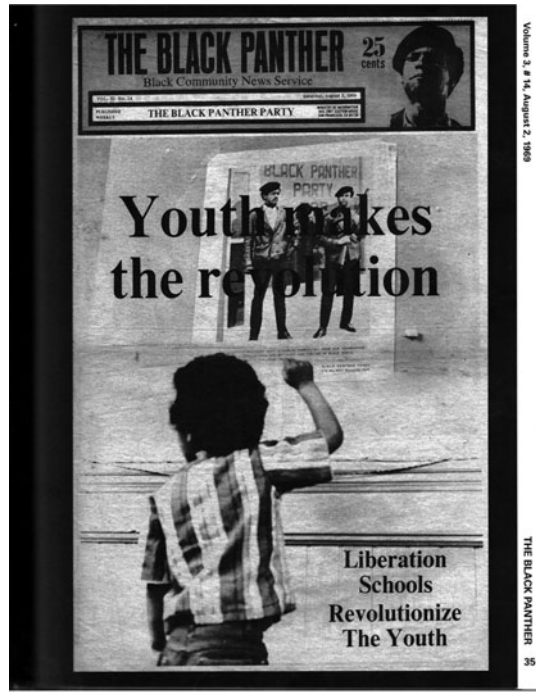
From: August 2, 1969, *The Black Panther*, Vol. III No. 14, p. 1

I wouldn't be the person I am today if I can't go back and see the values that were instilled in me. I mean, I got a militant side, but I feed people every day at the school. I go and buy 4 or 5 cases of Top Ramen because the kids do not eat at the school. It's kind of a microcosm of what the BPP was about, but I know that sometimes this is the first thing that they ate since lunch time yesterday. Even now, students are dependent on free breakfast and lunch because their families can't afford to feed them.

Social Problems as Oppression: Social Services as Revolution

What seems prevalent in the data we have gathered is evidence that social services are not used as a utilitarian tool of recruitment, but rather are constructed by the community and the Party as a form of activism, not unlike political activism and violent activism. We find a fusion of concepts of violence and services as two means of reaching similar ends. Craig Rice writes in *The Black Panther*,

> The Panthers held to a very detailed agenda that embraced a militant-style defense of the minority communities, not just against the U.S. government as was promoted by the mainstream press, but against all negative forces in the world. They promoted self-defense against hunger, self-defense against

Fig. 4 The Black Panther.
From: May 27, 1972, *The Black Panther*, Vol. 8 No. 10, p. 77

From: May 27, 1972, *The Black Panther*, Vol. 8 No. 10, p. 77

addiction, self-defense against poverty. They established programs to address critical issues like the breakfast program for school children and the free health clinics, and gave a voice to those who had never been heard before. It made us think and see in a panoramic vision (p. xvi–xvii.).

This theme of self-defense is ubiquitous in BPP depictions of social services, political activity, and militant activity alike. As authors of the *The Black Panther* note in an article seeking volunteers for the free breakfast program, "Hunger is one of the means of oppression and it must be halted. POWER TO THE PEOPLE." (Sunday April 27, 1969, p. 3). In fighting social problems, the Panthers and their communities saw the Party as fighting a state that at best neglected the community and at worst, oppressed and victimized the community. Caring acts of service provision are framed as radical, openly referred to as a step in the process of revolution, as seen in this text following a list of services provided by the BPP in *The Black Panther*:

All these programs satisfy the deep needs of the community but they are not solutions to our problems. That is why we call them survival programs, meaning survival pending revolution. (*The Black Panther*, April 5, 1975. P. 27)

Social services are portrayed as a tool that can build the strength necessary to survive and overthrow the current state, and then build a better one. The depiction of basic services such as food provision as integral to the revolution can be seen in the excerpt below.

> These Breakfasts include every nutrient that they (the children) need for the day. For too long have our people gone hungry and without the proper health aids they need. But the Black Panther Party says that this type of thing must be halted, because we must survive this evil government and build a new one fit for the service of all people. (*The Black Panther*, April 27, 1969, page 3.)

Similarly, acts by armed cadre that an outsider might frame as militant are viewed by the community as acts of kindness and love. Consider the following story told by an interview participant:

> I can remember personally that it was a big white cop named "Big Red." He came in and kicked in my mom's door looking for my dad…I was probably 7 (years old) when they kicked in the door. Then no less than ten minutes later there were about 15 Black Panthers that came to take pictures of the door. They had weapons back then and it was okay to carry weapons as long as they weren't concealed. From that point that's when I saw it as an organization that was really helping the community because they would march from Peralta Street down to the Village all the time to handle the needs of the community.

The Panthers were a presence that helped this interviewee gain a sense of safety as a child. Feeling safe in the community in which you live is pertinent to sound mental health, especially during a child's developmental years. Safety is the second step on Maslow's hierarchy of needs; however, it has been argued that it could be considered as a primary basic need. This may in part explain why, although the ten-point program as a political statement did not address police brutality until point number 7, in actuality patrolling the police was one of the first programs undertaken by the BPP. This point is further explained by a former BPP service recipient,

> Most of the police did not live in the community in which they worked. They do not know our culture and they treated us like we were less than human. Black people really needed to stand up for themselves and I think the BPP encompassed all of that. It gave us power; it gave us a sense of pride, cultural pride, and sense of community. With all of those aspects the bonus was that we knew we had somebody to protect us.

The need for protection was a reoccurring theme for some residents as encounters with the police became a part of daily life. This story told by a former BPP service recipient captures the everyday "ordinary" acts that may be taken for granted in communities untouched by the effects of poverty:

> The BPP helped people to feel a sense of pride and belonging. Here is an organization that would fix doors and windows. The stuff that we saw them do was totally different then how they were portrayed in the media. In the Village one weekend we had a stage built. The Party had singers and performers come

into the community to put on a show. Then one time they got a couple of buses and took us all to the beach. They were doing stuff in the community that we never expected. We stayed in West Oakland; we never really got out of the area. Not until I was grown did I know the world was bigger than west Oakland. Not too many of us can say that we've been out of California.

Accounts of generosity, service, and violence are interwoven with one another in service recipients' narratives, as integrated and congruous parts of the same story,

We would walk from the Village right across the street and eat breakfast. The breakfast was hot food: bacon, eggs, and grits. We were eating nice. And then you look around and you see leather coats everywhere. …The breakfast program. There were times when my dad used to get up early in the morning and head out. I did not know where he was going but he would have on his Party Uniform and be gone. As I got older they started having a lot of activities at Bobby Hutton Park. We used to walk from here go to the park and go swimming…Back the other way was the railroad. The older guys used to go hit the trains and it was crazy sometimes because the train used to pull up and somehow the doors on the train would be open and people would find weapons. It makes you wonder how a train carrying weapons just be open and people would just take the weapons. In hindsight, looking back it was a set up to steal the weapons.

The BPP used multiple ways to discern the needs of the community. Information could be gathered and shared by promoting community events. The needs of the community were also explained through everyday exchanges with members and individuals in the community. In this story, a former Party member describes how they assessed the needs of the community:

In surveying the community we were able to discern what people needed and people would tell you what they needed. Sometimes it was far-fetched and sometimes it was common sense stuff. Just like the breakfast program. Why did we have to be the ones to start the breakfast program? There was people way before us doing this but we merged education and nutrition together. Why didn't anyone else do that? There was no self-interest in that because it was dealing with black people. Why didn't the government deal with sickle cell anemia before the BPP? Because there was no self-interest in that. There was no self-interest in having free medical clinics. We had free medical clinics for the community, we did not ask you who your daddy was, or if you have the same last name as momma, or how many people were in your family. If you were hurt or injured you would come on down to the clinic as we had nurses, doctors, who would treat you if they could, and if not, we had a referral service. So out of the 11 free medical clinics, there are two still open to this day: Seattle Washington and New Orleans are still serving the community to this day.

In contextualizing the experiences of these interviewees, we have an additional lens to see the ways in which poverty and oppression touched communities as well as individual lives. The BPP created a multi-structured format to address the unique problems of a marginalized community. These narratives capture the essence of the

Party's ability to impact individual lives in a meaningful way. This is evidenced by those who joined the Party and found a sense of purpose, and also those living in the communities who may have benefited simply from not having to worry about where their next meal would come from. In the shadow of the complex historical analysis, individual needs are often lost; yet, it is these individuals who make up the history, society, and organizations that we study and write about.

Government Failure: Service in the Context of State Neglect and State Oppression

Weisbrod's (1977) theory of government failure is an oft-cited explanation for the rise of non-state service providers. This theory is an extension of economists' discussions of inability of markets to supply sufficient public goods, with "market failure" often cited as the chief explanation for the emergence of government. Weisbrod (1977) follows upon this by explaining that while government meets the median voters' demands for public goods, in communities with a diversity of preferences (particularly minority communities), a large number of demands for public goods will remain unmet (Rose-Ackerman, 1996). This "government failure" causes non-state actors to emerge in order to supply these goods and services (Weisbrod, 1977). In a context of state neglect and even state oppression, one can imagine this gap would lead to non-state actors emerging to provide goods and services needed by the population. The importance of state neglect and state oppression in the Panther's service provision is often described in the Party's writings.

The absence of police protection and the presence of police oppression is a common theme reported in relation to provision of services by the BPP. In a story about the Seniors Against a Fearful Environment (S.A.F.E.) program, the authors report,

> On the days that seniors go to the banks to cash their social security and pension checks, they are sometimes mugged. Since the police department does not do its job, we have initiated S.A.F.E. …When seniors asked the Oakland Police Department for more protection, they received only suggestions: "Walk closer to the curb, away from buildings." Recently, the Oakland City Council gave the police department over 455,000 for another police helicopter that will patrol the city from the air while senior citizens are being mugged on the ground. These acts show the gross unconcern the city government has for the aged. (*The Black Panther*, Dec. 16, 1972. p.3).

The prevalence of police abuse and brutality is cited repeatedly as the impetus of the BPP taking up arms, and the arms are depicted as allowing the Panthers to provide an additional service of protection. One former BPP member explains,

> The BPP did not start primarily because of police. From what I remember, the BPP started out of necessity. …The BPP set out to help blacks. Where the militant part came in was when they found out that it was legal to carry a weapon as long as it was not concealed. They took that and ran with it. If you have ever held a gun in your hand there is just so much power you get. … You

start thinking about who was messing with you, whoever did you wrong…this is the equalizer. I think that was how the BPP looked at it, as an equalizer. The weapons were not an excuse to go and blast people, but need be we have something to make us just as equal as the police. They were causing harm to us so the BPP marched around with their weapons out to let the community know that they were protected.

Panther reports about other types of service provision that are also replete with accusations of government neglect. In an appeal for volunteers for the school breakfast program, authors write, "The Board of Education should have had this program instituted a long time ago. How can our children learn anything when most of their stomachs are empty?" (*The Black Panther*, Sunday April 27, 1969 p. 19). An former BPP member interviewed reports, "For example, we tested over a million black people for sickle cell anemia. The government had been aware of the disease but did nothing about it." Similar examples abound. In a scathing critique of the public education system, the Party reports,

The (Intercommunal Youth) Institute was initiated in direct response to the public school system, which has systematically produced individuals totally incapable of thinking in an analytical way. The failure of the public school system to educate Black and poor youth has caused generation after generation of our people to be inadequately prepared to participate and survive in our highly technological society. In order to begin to break this seemingly endless cycle of oppression, the Black Panther Party established the Youth Institute (Hilliard, 2008).

The numerous examples of government neglect and oppression reported by the Panthers and widely recognized historically are well-aligned with Weisbrod's theory of government failure, which would support the development of alternative non-state institutions of meet local needs. Given this, it seems that the threat to the state posed by the BPP was one of the government's own creation.

Conclusion

Understanding the role of service provision in general and the BPP specifically is not a clear-cut endeavor. In many ways state neglect acted as an incubator to birth a revolution, as in the case of the Oakland BPP. For example, one might consider the earlier example presented by an interview participant about an unlawful entry into a residential home where children live by the officer known as "Big Red." As the account is relayed here, there was no warrant for entry and no place to later file a grievance for a perceived wrong. What choices do such situations leave for individuals living in that community who *want* to participate as citizens vis-à-vis legitimate state actors? Very few perhaps, as one of the former Party members interviewed attempted to explain,

We made a lot of mistakes with some of the tactical aspects of the Party but the goals, principles, and platform are still relevant today as they were back then. Every racial group needs to grab them a ten point program. I mean, the system is not going to recognize peoples' human rights, especially working class folks. If

you want human rights you have to be able to afford them…and they cost money. We have to understand the bigger problems to be able to do anything about it.

Talking about the BPP was not easy for all of the participants, and the emotions came across in the interviews. Many recalled fallen comrades and those held as political prisoners. For some, the Party was an assertion of manhood, providing a place to reclaim a lost sense of self, while others joined the Party in their youth as they were still developing a sense of identity. As such, we believe it is important to represent this perspective of the interview participants as well.

The mission was to empower the Black community thorough love, community values, through breakfast program, anything that they did to bring us together. Their mission was to protect us, and our rights as human beings. Today, you don't feel like you belong to this country. Our country was educated by middle class White people, and those people who founded the education system did not have Blacks in mind when they created it. Thus, anything that you are taught does not have us in it. As a result, we were always seen as less than them. The BPP to me was an organization that said we mean something to the world. The BPP taught the people that our ancestors made contribution to the world, we are valued, and we are somebody. And that was too powerful for the establishment to accept. That was too much power to give to Blacks. Until this day we are still divided, some people think we are militant and the people who know the truth know what the movement was all about.

For some, the Party engendered a sense of pride and for others, confusion and fear. What is clear, however, is that the BPP offered social services in local communities nationwide and made a rational attempt to provide protection given the context of the communities in which they lived.

Our study's strengths and its limitations stem from the strong focus on the California Black Panther Party. The Oakland BPP created the 10-point platform as an ideological tool that would further complicate the understanding of politics and culture. While the history of the BPP has received some exploration, we have attempted to show that it is often from an one-dimensional view that is incomplete. The Black Panthers deserve further study, and the Oakland, BPP specifically provides particularly fruitful ground for further study of the intersections of culture, violence, social services, and politics. Second, an empirical survey that explores the experiences of individuals living in local communities who may have received services would be useful. Additionally, it will be valuable to explore other historical and contemporary resistance organizations to shed light on the complex relationship between state neglect, the experience of poverty, and the revolution that may ensue.

In the end, the revolutionary ideology and political pursuits of the BPP were a mixture of rhetorical political statements and symbolic imagery that attempted to synthesize ideas from a variety of sources, including socialism, Cold War politics, and the thinking of Ernesto "Che" Guevara, Franz Fanon, Malcolm X, and Mao Zedong (Alkebulan, 2007; Murch, 2010; Nelson, 2011). While violence and social services may seem on the surface to stand in opposition to one another, both these served as mechanisms to protect the community, engage in resistance, and serve the revolution.

Appendix 1: October 1966 Black Panther Party Platform and Program (often referred to as the "Ten-Point Program" or the "Ten-Point Plan").

1. We Want Freedom. We Want Power To Determine The Destiny Of Our Black Community.
   We believe that Black people will not be free until we are able to determine our destiny.

2. We Want Full Employment For Our People.
   We believe that the federal government is responsible and obligated to give every man employment or a guaranteed income. We believe that if the White American businessmen will not give full employment, then the means of production should be taken from the businessmen and placed in the community so that the people of the community can organize and employ all of its people and give a high standard of living.

3. We Want An End To The Robbery By The Capitalists Of Our Black Community.
   We believe that this racist government has robbed us, and now we are demanding the overdue debt of forty acres and two mules. Forty acres and two mules were promised 100 years ago as restitution for slave labor and mass murder of Black people. We will accept the payment in currency which will be distributed to our many communities. The Germans are now aiding the Jews in Israel for the genocide of the Jewish people. The Germans murdered six million Jews. The American racist has taken part in the slaughter of over fifty million Black people; therefore, we feel that this is a modest demand that we make.

4. We Want Decent Housing Fit For The Shelter Of Human Beings.
   We believe that if the White Landlords will not give decent housing to our Black community, then the housing and the land should be made into cooperatives so that our community, with government aid, can build and make decent housing for its people.

5. We Want Education For Our People That Exposes The True Nature Of This Decadent American Society. We Want Education That Teaches Us Our True History And Our Role In The Present-Day Society.
   We believe in an educational system that will give to our people knowledge of self. If a man does not have knowledge of himself and his position in society and the world, then he has little chance to relate to anything else.

6. We Want All Black Men To Be Exempt From Military Service.
   We believe that Black people should not be forced to fight in the military service to defend a racist government that does not protect us. We will not fight and kill other people of color in the world who, like Black people, are being victimized by the White racist government of America. We will protect ourselves from the force and violence of the racist police and the racist military, by whatever means necessary.

7. We Want An Immediate End To Police Brutality And Murder Of Black People.
   We believe we can end police brutality in our Black community by organizing Black self-defense groups that are dedicated to defending our Black community from racist police oppression and brutality. The Second Amendment to the Constitution of the United States gives a right to bear arms. We, therefore, believe that all Black people should arm themselves for self- defense.

8. We Want Freedom For All Black Men Held In Federal, State, County And City Prisons And Jails.
   We believe that all Black people should be released from the many jails and prisons because they have not received a fair and impartial trial.

9. We Want All Black People When Brought To Trial To Be Tried In Court By A Jury Of Their Peer Group Or People From Their Black Communities, As Defined By The Constitution Of The United States.
   We believe that the courts should follow the United States Constitution so that Black people will receive fair trials. The Fourteenth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution gives a man a right to be tried by his peer group. A peer is a person from a similar economic, social, religious, geographical, environmental, historical, and racial background. To do this the court will be forced to select a jury from the Black community from which the Black defendant came. We have been, and are being, tried by all-White juries that have no understanding of the "average reasoning man" of the Black community.

10. We Want Land, Bread, Housing, Education, Clothing, Justice, And Peace.
    When, in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume, among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the laws of nature and nature's God entitled them, a decent respect of the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. That, to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed; that, whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or abolish it, and to institute a new government, laying its foundation on such principles, and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and, accordingly, all experience hath shown that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But, when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same object, evinces a design to reduce them under absolute despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such government, and to provide new guards for their future security.

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