Planting the Seeds of Tomorrow… Today
Prefigurative Politics, The Black Panther Party, and Cooperation Jackson

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*This thesis is dedicated to Lena Cohen Kleinberg and Laurence Gerber.*
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Introduction

From the age of slavery to the Black Lives Matter movement, the struggle for Black empowerment has been a central part of America’s history. This struggle has taken many forms, such as slave rebellions, civil disobedience, mass demonstrations, and even viral posts on social media. Sometimes, activists have made demands of those in power to extend some of the privileges afforded to white citizens to African Americans—requesting that the existing system be amended to better serve all Americans. At other times, activists have articulated that they see the current system as unsalvageable, and something that can never effectively empower Black Americans. These activists direct their energies not to reforming the existing society, but to building a new society to meet the needs of Black communities. This is a form of direct action called prefigurative politics. This paper is a discussion of the prefigurative response to Black empowerment.

Prefigurative politics is defined as the process of prefiguring the desired reality. Instead of making demands of existing authorities or reforming existing institutions, a prefigurative organization works to create the future that they want, and does so in a way that embodies the values of this future. Prefigurative politics encompasses the process of means-end equivalence, through which the means used to pursue the ends are equivalent to the ends—they are consistent with and attempt to directly create the ultimate goals of the project. I focus on two Black empowerment groups that use prefigurative strategies: the Black Panther Party and Cooperation Jackson. While neither the Black Panthers nor Cooperation Jackson explicitly discuss means-end equivalence or prefigurative theory, the theoretical framework fits well with these cases, and many of their theories and strategies reflect means-end equivalence, even though they never

1 While the Black Panther Party is no longer in existence and Cooperation Jackson is contemporary, when I discuss both groups in the same sentence I will use the present tense, for the sake of clear grammar and concise sentences.
explicitly call it that themselves.

Both groups envision and pursue Black empowerment with the ultimate goal of creating self-determining communities. Their theories and practices are based on the principle of self-help—the idea that communities can meet their own needs, and in this case, bring about their own liberation. The fact that the Black Panthers and Cooperation Jackson emphasize self-help strategies is particularly significant, given the fact that their ultimate goal is self-determination. This means that both organizations are essentially striving for the community to bring about their own liberation. By having the communities engage in this process themselves, directly constructing programs to meet the people’s own needs, these organizations are prefiguring the reality that they are pursuing for society as a whole.

Ultimately, the central goal of this project is to assess the realizability of prefigurative theory in practice. Specifically, I am determining the extent to which these self-help Black empowerment groups can follow the theories of prefigurative means-end equivalence in practice. This theoretical framework is effective for debating whether the Black Panther Party and Cooperation Jackson can directly translate their theories in practice, or whether they must sacrifice their theoretical commitments for the sake of practical gains under the current conditions. I structure my analysis around four main topics: domination; institutions; mobilization, self-help, and the vanguard; and consciousness-raising. In each chapter, I present the prefigurative theory that aligns with that subtopic, and engage the theory while discussing the cases.

I argue that these groups have not always able to successfully follow their theory in practice, and that they often have had to reform their strategies in order to realize some of their more concrete goals. I examine two main examples of the necessary adapting of means-end
equivalence. In the first, I look at the constraints of working entirely outside of the existing system (particularly capitalism and the state), and the necessity of working with existing institutions to some extent while constructing alternatives. In the second case, I explore the constraints of a purely self-led or self-determining movement and the ultimate necessity of some sort of leadership, and the subsequent challenge of keeping pace with the people while also taking the first step toward this desired end. I argue that the way that these groups must adapt their theory in order to function in practice exposes the constraints of means-end equivalence for prefigurative groups seeking to transform society. I use the comparison between the two groups to better understand each group, and I also use this comparison to draw broader conclusions about prefigurative theory, self-help movements, and the process of generating change in order to transform society.

Ultimately, the question of the realizability of means-end equivalence could be asked about many different kinds of groups and movements with different specific transformative goals. I chose to focus on self-help Black empowerment movements for several reasons. Academia and its institutions are still dominated by whiteness, and there is not enough scholarship—particularly in the field of prefigurative politics—focused on Black Americans. I specifically wanted to focus on community organizing and prefigurative politics, and studying self-help groups focusing on self-determination is a direct way to link those concepts. Furthermore, these Black empowerment groups explore the flaws of the American state in a way I find deeply important. By critiquing and analyzing their own oppression and the state’s role in this, Black activists expose the state’s internal colonization as well as its imperialist power and capitalist practices.

As for my specific case studies, I chose the Black Panther Party and Cooperation Jackson
very intentionally. The Black Panther Party is significant because it is one of the most influential and well-known cases of radical Black self-help, and it operated during a pivotal time in history—immediately on the heels of the Civil Rights movement and during the rise of Black Power. There is bountiful material available on their work in the form of primary and secondary sources, yet I found no research that specifically analyzed the group through the framework of prefigurative politics. This meant that I had ample information and evidence to work with, and a vast uncharted territory to explore.

A comparison case was essential for this project because I wanted to be able to ground my research and conclusions in the present, and to be able to arrive at conclusions that were not specific to a single case. Cooperation Jackson is a useful case study because it has many core similarities to the Black Panther Party in terms of theory and practice, yet there are also many intriguing differences. The most obvious difference is that Cooperation Jackson is a contemporary group and the Black Panther Party peaked almost fifty years ago. The historical contexts are extremely different. The Black Panther Party operated during the time of the Black Power movement and the Vietnam War, as well as during the reign of Richard Nixon and COINTELPRO, and in the wake of the Civil Rights Movement and the War on Poverty programs. Cooperation Jackson is current, operating in the age of the Black Lives Matter movement and Donald Trump, and rose in the aftermath of the financial crash of 2008, the presidency of Barack Obama, and the death of Jackson, Mississippi’s first radical mayor, Chokwe Lumumba, Sr.

The transformational projects of both Cooperation Jackson and the Black Panther Party have political and economic components. However, while Cooperation Jackson focuses on a cooperative solidarity economy, the Black Panther Party used a charity model focused on
redistributing wealth from businesses to the community in the form of free food, clothing, and healthcare. The Black Panthers were more confrontational in their interactions with authority figures. They delivered rousing speeches denouncing the American presidency and followed the police with loaded rifles to ensure that officers did not abuse Black community members. While both groups ran candidates for local office, the Black Panther Party lost their elections, and Cooperation Jackson has had significant victories. The current Mayor of Jackson, Chokwe Antar Lumumba, is an active ally of Cooperation Jackson.

These differences are important to take into account. Clearly, these groups will have differing abilities to work within and outside of the current system, and will have different relationships to authorities, because they have experienced different systems of power. Additionally, the political consciousness of the community is different in each era—the world is in a different place right now than it was fifty years ago. People have different needs, expectations, and biases that inform their participation in Cooperation Jackson’s or the Black Panthers’ projects. The difference in time periods has a particularly concrete implication for my analysis. Because Cooperation Jackson is a new group, there are some informational gaps. I cannot compare the outcomes of Cooperation Jackson to those of the Black Panther Party, because Cooperation Jackson has yet to generate many significant outcomes. However, because Cooperation Jackson is operating in the present, members can study the history of Black self-help movements, and I am interested to see in what ways they may have learned lessons from history in general and from groups like the Black Panther Party in particular.² While this comparison has given some information on the Black Panther Party and Cooperation Jackson, it is important to provide some foundational background on these groups before delving into the

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² Unfortunately, I have not been able to find any statements from Cooperation Jackson discussing the ways in which they have been directly influenced by the Black Panther Party, so while it seems very likely that they have been influenced, I was unable to find any concrete proof.
outline of the rest of this paper.

**The Black Panther Party Background**

The Black Panther Party was founded by Huey Newton and Bobby Seale in Oakland, California, in 1966. The goal of the Party was to act as a lifeline for the Black community by fighting for their needs and attempting to protect them from abuses from the authorities, particularly the police. The first major project of the Panthers that attracted significant attention was their police patrols. In response to police brutality against members of the Oakland Black community, the Black Panthers followed the police around and monitored their confrontations with citizens. The Panthers were armed and dressed in typical Panther garb (all-black, leather jacket, black beret). This directly confrontational practice ultimately proved unsustainable, as a rising number of Panthers were either jailed or killed, and by 1968 the Party shifted their focus to community programs.

The Black Panther Service to the People Programs were a concrete way to implement many of the Party’s objectives as articulated in the Ten Point Program. The Black Panthers operated a vast array of programs, ranging from food banks to alternative schools to providing free transportation for those visiting loved ones in prison. The programs that I spend the most time analyzing are the Free Breakfast for Schoolchildren Program and the Liberation Schools. These two programs were some of the most robust, and aligned the most with prefigurative theory. Both were built largely on the principle of self-help, and contributed to the self-determination project. The Free Breakfast for Schoolchildren Program was started by Bobby Seale in 1968, in Oakland, as a response to reports that Black children were going to school hungry in the mornings, and this was inhibiting their performance in school.³ In order to give

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children the chance to succeed academically, the Black Panthers wanted to ensure that they started their days with breakfast. The program was staffed by Black Panthers, parents of program-beneficiaries, and local community members.\(^4\) In addition to cooking the food, serving the children, and cleaning up afterward, volunteers were responsible for soliciting local businesses for monetary and food donations to sustain the program.\(^5\) At its peak, the program served thousands of children in chapters across the country, and inspired a federal breakfast program that still feeds kids today.\(^6\)

The Liberation Schools began as a response to the frustrating experiences that many Black communities had with their local schools. Black children often did not receive the attention or support they deserved, and Black studies were neglected in the curriculum.\(^7\) The Liberation Schools were staffed by Party members, parents, and community members (particularly college students), and offered free admission and free meals.\(^8\) In addition to covering basic academic subjects, the curriculum focused on the theories of the Black Panther Party and taught African-American history as well as the history of marginalized communities around the world.\(^9\) The schools aimed to empower children and teach them about their own condition, and often experienced great success.

While the Black Panther Party had many successes, transforming communities across the country, and contributing to a general transformation of Black consciousness, the Party faced many steep challenges that contributed to its ultimate demise. The Panthers experienced

\(^7\) Bloom and Martin, *Black Against Empire*.
\(^9\) Ibid.
significant opposition from the federal government, COINTELPRO, and local police forces. In response to the high levels of repression, internal conflict, and dwindling support, Huey Newton called for the closing of chapters around the country and the congregating of all members and Party resources in Oakland in 1972.

This move was coupled with the political campaigns of Bobby Seale, who ran for mayor of Oakland, and Elaine Brown, who ran for the Oakland City Council. While neither candidate won, the election mobilized the Black community: thousands of people registered to vote. After the campaign, Elaine Brown gained power in the Party and in Oakland Democratic political circles. This signified a new era for the Black Panther Party, as Brown used her power to pursue the Panthers’ agenda through more traditional political channels. At the same time, internal conflict in the Party continued to grow, particularly surrounding Huey Newton, whose struggles with mental health and drug abuse had a significant impact on his relationship with the Party and the public at large. Ultimately, the Black Panther Party officially closed down in 1982, though its legacy continues to live on today.

Cooperation Jackson Background

Cooperation Jackson was formed in response to conditions in Jackson, Mississippi that led to the extreme marginalization of the African-American community there. A major trend in Jackson—in addition to white supremacy, capitalism, and extreme conservatism—is the cycle of...
This refers to the fact that the majority of the Jackson economy is based outside of Jackson, meaning that the main flow of capital is to outside the city, leaving city residents with fewer job opportunities and less wealth. When Chokwe Lumumba ran for mayor of Jackson in 2013, he sought to transform the city and return the power to its residents, particularly the highly marginalized Black majority. His victory represented a radical step for Jackson. Lumumba was committed to more sustainable practices, the rise of cooperatives, and the development of people’s capacity for self-governance through people’s assemblies and other programs independent of the state. His sudden death in 2014 was a blow to the city, and particularly to his allies, who saw his term in office as a critical step for the city’s transformation. Cooperation Jackson was founded in the spring of 2014 as a way to keep the self-determination movement alive after Lumumba’s death. The basic goal of the organization is to make the pursuit of self-determination concrete through a variety of programs including cooperatives, mass education, people’s assemblies, and other forms of dual power. In 2017, Chokwe Antar Lumumba, the son of Chokwe Lumumba, was elected Mayor. Today, Cooperation Jackson has allies in office and is building initiatives at the community level, and they recognize that this is both “a good time and a challenging time.”

Now that I have provided basic background on each group, I will delve into an outline of the following four chapters, providing a roadmap of where this journey will take us, and how we

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19 Ibid.
21 Ibid.
23 Ibid.
25 Akuno, “An Evening with Jackson Rising.”
will arrive at our ultimate conclusion that groups attempting to transform society through prefigurative politics cannot strictly adhere to means-end equivalence, and must adapt their theory in practice for the sake of practical gains to transform society.

**Chapter Outline**

My first chapter, *Domination*, explores the societal critiques put forth by the Black Panther Party and Cooperation Jackson, and identifies the changes these groups try to generate, and the antagonistic forces—which I call forms of domination—that they attempt to combat. I analyze prefigurative theory on societal critiques and sources of domination, as well as the specific critiques by my case studies. Both the Black Panthers and Cooperation Jackson identify capitalism and the (American) state as central forms of domination. The Black Panthers extend this discussion to include imperialism (both domestic and international), which, based on their engagement with capitalism and the state, is arguably an outgrowth of capitalism and the state. Cooperation Jackson identifies gentrification as a particularly concrete and threatening spinoff of capitalism and the state—a sort of contemporary and urban-centric form of imperialism. Cooperation Jackson also identifies hegemony as a foundation for all other existing forms of domination, and argues that hegemony must be combatted almost as a prerequisite for engaging in the wider struggle. Understanding how these groups situate themselves in relation to the elements of the current reality that they strive to change is an essential first step in analyzing their methods for generating that change.

The second chapter, *Institutions*, explores a specific part of the relationship between organizations and the current reality: the limited ability of groups to disengage from current institutions (by which I mean established organizations and practices that hold the majority of the power in society) while they construct alternatives. Specifically, I examine how these
organizations attempt to build alternative institutions and programs, and the ways in which they sometimes engage with and sometimes disengage from the existing institutions (with varying degrees of success) while doing so. I argue that engagement is often unavoidable if one is truly committed to the effective construction of tangible alternatives. This exposes the limitations of the application of means-end equivalence to the project of dismantling and working outside of existing forms of domination. The end goal—the construction of alternative forms of power aligning with the principles of self-determination—is necessarily pursued through more nuanced means.

I examine the debate within prefigurative politics about whether working with existing sources of power can be reconciled with prefigurative theory and means-end equivalence, and I explore the ways in which the Black Panther Party and Cooperation Jackson interact with the current system. The two central cases I examine are the ways in which both groups engage with the state and capitalism. Specifically, I look at the ways that the Black Panthers and Cooperation Jackson engage with electoral politics in order to attempt to transform and eventually dismantle the state from the inside, as well as to utilize its resources to build dual power. I also examine how these groups engage with capitalism and business practices in order to access resources to support the construction of alternative institutions. Ultimately, this engagement with existing sources of power requires nuance. The ways in which the Black Panther Party often failed to employ nuance in practice are also reflected in both the initial challenges faced by Cooperation Jackson and in Cooperation Jackson’s immediate recognition that engagement with the current system is unavoidable, yet also must reflect a commitment to non-reformism and dual power.

between the Black Panthers and Cooperation Jackson and the communities that they attempt to work with, yet also lead. I split this chapter into three sections—Mobilization, Self-Help, and Vanguard. In the Mobilization section, I examine the groups’ perception of the people as a dormant force, and their leadership role as the awakeners—catalyzing this existing energy and directing it toward the pursuit of self-determination. The main way in which the Panthers and Cooperation Jackson approach this relationship is by building people’s trust—serving them and fostering open communication. In the Self-Help section, I focus on the nature of the self-determination project as an exercise in capacity-building. By facilitating community participation in self-help programs, the Panthers and Cooperation Jackson develop people’s ability to help themselves, with the ultimate goal of passing control of these programs over to the community. In the Vanguard section, I explore the somewhat contradictory role of the organizations themselves in this self-determination project. Both the Black Panthers and Cooperation Jackson recognize the necessary adaptation of the theoretical commitment to a people-led revolution in order to realize the practical need for leadership. As a response, they emphasize the importance of keeping pace with the people while also recognizing the necessity of taking the first step themselves. The Black Panthers struggled to implement this adapted theory in practice, and their excessive emphasis on their role as the vanguard is often cited as a central weakness. Cooperation Jackson is aware of the somewhat contradictory role of their organization as the leader of a self-help revolution, and it is yet to be seen whether their efforts to keep pace with the people will be successful.

In the fourth chapter, *Consciousness-Raising*, I explore the practice of consciousness-raising as a way to bridge theory and practice through developing the self-determining subjects who can lead this societal transformation, and facilitating the exploration of what the ultimate
goals of the transformation are. Consciousness-raising is a way of making people aware of the flaws in their current reality, developing their belief in their own potential to generate change, and facilitating their imagining of what this new reality would look like. The Black Panthers used spectacle, educational initiatives, and participation in community programs to raise people’s consciousness. For Cooperation Jackson, consciousness-raising is pursued through what they call the exorcising of the ghosts of conformity, a cultural revolution, intentional educational initiatives, and learning through experience. Consciousness-raising is essential for developing self-determining subjects capable of constructing and maintaining these alternative institutions.

These chapters can be seen as the distinct pieces that I describe above, or they can be interwoven into one narrative. When simplified and read together, they can be seen as follows. Chapter One explores what organizations are attempting to change about the current reality. Chapters Two and Three explore the ways in which the groups’ theoretical commitments must be adapted in practice. Groups must be willing to work within the system to some extent while building alternatives, and they must be willing to occupy some sort of leadership position while developing self-determining subjects. Chapter Four explores an essential process for bringing about the alternative reality, which also happens to be a case where the theory aligns more directly with the practice. The groups’ practices contribute to the raising of the collective consciousness, which facilitates every step of this transformative process. The consciousness-raising discussed in Chapter Four is a way for one to process the necessity of departing from the current reality (Chapter One), to foster a belief in that person's ability to complete the journey through specific steps (Chapters Two and Three), and to determine what the destination should be. This final step of consciousness-raising—the determination of the ultimate destination—does not yet, and in fact cannot yet, have its own chapter, because this information does not yet exist.
A group that is pursuing a reality that has never before existed is constantly struggling to imagine what exactly this reality will look like, and it is only through the group's pursuit of this transformation and the direct construction of alternatives that they will determine what works and what does not, and, ultimately, to what they are aspiring. Thus, the only way to reach the destination is to begin the journey, and with that, I begin my own journey to determine the ability of self-help Black empowerment groups to pursue their theory in practice.
Literature Review

In order to assess the work of these self-help Black empowerment groups, I studied three main categories of literature: theory, primary sources, and secondary sources. I mainly focus on prefigurative theory, but I supplement this with Erik Olin Wright’s discussion of an emancipatory social science, and Nikhil Pal Singh’s discussion of Black activism and its relationship to the American state. I also use primary and secondary sources for each of my two case studies: the Black Panther Party and Cooperation Jackson. I categorize as primary sources those that are written by the organizations themselves, or by leaders of these groups. These sources help me understand how the groups see themselves and how they communicate with the public about their theories, strategies, and goals. I categorize as secondary sources those that are written by outsiders about the organizations. The secondary sources that I use on the Black Panther Party are all written in a reflective tone, looking back at the group from decades later. The secondary sources that I use on Cooperation Jackson are contemporary, because the group was founded only four years ago and is still operating today. These secondary sources provide additional evidence and help me put the primary sources in perspective, giving me the chance to learn about these organizations from more objective observers.

Ultimately, the primary and secondary sources come together to paint a vivid picture of the Black Panther Party and Cooperation Jackson, functioning as a foundation for me to analyze both groups and helping me formulate my own arguments. The theory operates as the framework that aided me in building these arguments. The Black Panthers and Cooperation Jackson embody many elements of prefigurative theory, and allow me to examine the viability of means-end equivalency in the case of self-help Black empowerment groups. Thus, I will begin my discussion of my sources with an exploration of prefigurative politics.

Theory

Prefigurative politics has an important place in the discussion of theories of change, movement strategies, and, particularly, in leftist or libertarian discourse. While there are many specific accounts that explore and interpret the nuances of prefigurative politics, there is one
central theme in prefigurative politics: means-end equivalence. This is the idea that the ends of a movement are shaped by the means, so a prefigurative movement should strive to employ means that embody the ends to the greatest extent possible.\textsuperscript{26} This often manifests in the form of participatory self-governance, because many prefigurative movements strive to distribute power from authority figures to communities. This participatory self-governance tends to be democratic, decentralized, and based on some form of the consensus process.\textsuperscript{27}

There is no specific, official definition of prefigurative politics, but most theorists cite the definition put forth by Carl Boggs. In 1977, Boggs wrote an essay called “Marxism, Prefigurative Communism, and the Problem of Workers’ Control.” In this essay, he defined prefigurative politics as “the embodiment, within the ongoing political practice of a movement, of those forms of social relations, decision-making, culture, and human experience that are the ultimate goal.”\textsuperscript{28} This definition reflects the idea of means-end equivalency. The emphasis on the “social relations, decision-making, culture, and human experience” articulates the common argument among prefigurative scholars, (for example, Yates, 2015), that prefigurative politics often transcends specifically “political” structures and also influences participants’ “human experience,” becoming a lifestyle as well as a political practice.

The prefigurative political tradition first emerged as a response to the rise of industrialization and bureaucratization in Europe, and many early instances of prefigurative politics aligned with the anarchist tradition.\textsuperscript{29} Most of the studies of prefigurative politics are case studies, and the dominant trend throughout history has been that, over time, these movements gradually tend to lose their prefigurative character through the centralization of power and cooptation by existing power structures.

There are a variety of limits to prefigurative politics, and in his dissertation, Juuso V.M.  

\begin{footnotes}
\item[27] Leach, “Prefigurative Politics.”
\item[29] Leach, “Prefigurative Politics.”
\end{footnotes}
Miettunen (2015) explored these constraints through two central case studies: the Zapatistas in Mexico, and MTD Lanús in Argentina. He focuses on one central way that these prefigurative movements struggled to embody prefigurative values over time—the gradual centralization of power and perpetuation of forms of hierarchy. He argues that a central focus of prefigurative politics should be to make their practices more accessible, so that more participants can actually make an impact, keeping the power distributed rather than concentrated among a few individuals. Miettunen points out that the excessive emphasis on horizontal, autonomous forms of power can actually become elitist, as there are inevitably some people who are better equipped than others to participate and make their voices heard in collective processes. He suggests that smaller-scale prefigurative projects tend to be better able to avoid these problems and uphold their prefigurative theory in practice, but argues that excessive dogmatism of any kind can lead to conflict in prefigurative organizations because people tend to have different interpretations of the nuances of prefigurative theory and must be willing to be flexible.

In my project, I focus on prefigurative theory, and on my own two case studies, the Black Panther Party and Cooperation Jackson. The prefigurative literature that I use is mainly theoretical, and I apply it to the cases that I am writing about. Throughout this paper I will explore prefigurative theory as it relates to the cases of the Black Panther Party and Cooperation Jackson, and there are short literature reviews on prefigurative theory as it relates to each chapter (Domination; Existing Institutions; Mobilization, Self-Help, and Vanguard; and Consciousness-Raising). I specifically examine the prefigurative theory of Luke Yates (2015), Mathijs van de Sande (2015), Paul Raekstad (2017), Carlie D. Trott (2016), and Uri Gordon (2007). I read these alongside the theory of Erik Olin Wright, who, while not specifically a prefigurative theorist, conceptualizes the transformation of society in a comparable way, and whose work is a useful complement to prefigurative theory.

**Other Theory**

Nikhil Pal Singh (2005) provides an overview of African-American revolutionary thought, including a detailed discussion of the Black Panther Party. He places the Party in this
long revolutionary history, and argues that there are many aspects of American nationalism that are inherently anti-Black. He asserts that the founding principles of the United States will be completely incompatible and irreconcilable with Black liberation until America is thoroughly transformed, and that the struggle for Black liberation is still absolutely incomplete. He emphasizes the importance of wedding the political to the economic, and links global oppression and American imperialism to domestic oppression and racism, building on the theories of Black empowerment activists such as the Black Panther Party.

Singh also comments specifically on the Black Panthers, and focuses on the Panthers’ confrontation with the American state and their use of spectacle. He argues that the Panthers acted as a deep theoretical threat to the (American) state by performing some of the same acts that the state was supposed to be responsible for, such as policing the police, and that they had intentionally dramatic strategies, such as the carrying of large rifles, which Singh refers to as ‘the shadow of the gun.’ Ultimately, the most important contribution of Singh to my research is his discussion of the necessary “Anti-American-ness” of the Black liberation struggle, and his placing of the Black Panthers in this revolutionary tradition.

**The Black Panther Party Primary Sources**

While Singh clearly illustrates the confrontation between the Black Panther Party and the American state, the main method that I used to distill the views of the Black Panthers was to examine their own words. For my research on the Black Panther Party, I used four primary sources: Eric Foner’s compilation of primary source documents (*The
Black Panthers Speak, 1995), the Black Panthers’ Service to the People Programs book put together by David Hilliard and the Huey P. Newton Foundation, Huey Newton’s dissertation (1980), and Brian Shih and Yohuru Williams’s compilation of portraits of and interviews with former Panthers (2016).

Eric Foner (1995) and David Hilliard (2008) are primary sources who give a voice to the Black Panther Party as a whole. The sources are either all official Party rhetoric, or the words of Party leaders communicating with the public. Foner compiles many of the Panthers' writings, speeches, interviews, and other public documents, which together give me an in-depth understanding of how the Party communicated with the public and what type of public image they were creating and maintaining. The Panthers discussed, in their own words, the self-help structure of their community programs, their sense of solidarity with communities abroad, and their criticisms of the state, imperialism, capitalism, and local authorities. I used passages to formulate my arguments for all four chapters and my thesis as a whole. Foner also helped me understand Panther rhetoric and the Party’s tactics for communicating with and mobilizing the people for their own uplift.

The Black Panther Party: Service to the People Programs is also a form of communication between the Black Panther Party and the community, revealing how the Party attempted to mobilize the people for their own uplift through their survival programs. Hilliard compiles the Party’s explanations of all of their different community programs: how these programs worked, how to set up a program in a local chapter, and what the goals of the specific programs were. The Panthers articulate what specific impact these programs were intended to have on the local community, and what the role
of the local community was in the programs. All of this source material is in the Party’s own words, and offers guidance for local Party members or supporters who wanted to set up community programs. This source offers a perspective on how the Black Panther Party understood their community programs, and offers details on the specific programs—where they get funding, and how they work with the local community.

In Huey Newton’s dissertation, he discusses the relationship between the Black Panther Party and the different sources of authority that they struggled with throughout the Party’s existence. The entire book is written in Newton’s voice, giving a direct perspective on the way a central Panther leader perceived society and the Panthers’ relationship to the existing system. Newton articulates some of the Black Panthers’ theories, tactics, and goals, ranging from revolutionary intercommunalism to the local community programs. Newton uses his dissertation as an opportunity to clarify certain elements of the Black Panthers’ theory and practice. He explains that the community programs were intended to strengthen the Black community and facilitate self-help for survival. His discussion of the Panthers’ willingness to work within the existing system to some extent provides critical foundational information for my Institutions chapter. Newton cites the Panthers’ occasional support of Black capitalism for the uplift of the Black community, the legal incorporation of some community programs to obtain more funding, their work with the legal system in court cases to defend prosecuted Panthers, and their participation in the political system through involvement in various elections as examples of the Panthers working with existing institutions and sources of power in the short term, in order to pursue their long-term revolutionary goals. Ultimately, this source
allows me to understand how Newton perceives the Black Panther Party and how the Panthers justify their occasional deviations from their theory in practice.

Brian Shih and Yohuru Williams (2016) give a voice not to the Black Panther Party as a whole, but to the individual rank-and-file members. These members’ voices were rarely heard—between the media, speculating academics, official Party communications, and the words of Black Panther leaders, there was never much room for the perspective of the rank-and-file. Shih and Williams present excerpts of interviews with these people fifty years after they joined the Black Panther Party. They discuss their experiences with and their opinions of the Party, and the most significant part of this new perspective is that these members often discuss their experiences with the community programs and the real impact of this work on the ground, expanding beyond the limited and dramatic representations of the Party in the media and academia. Shih and Williams offer space for these individuals to discuss what their personal relationships to the Party were—why they wanted to join, and what impact the Black Panther Party had on their lives. This source is particularly important for the *Consciousness-Raising* chapter, as it depicts the impact of the Black Panther Party on the lives of individuals—both community members and Party members.

Overall, many of the issues mentioned by the Panthers in these primary sources were discussed in great depth in the secondary sources, yet it was invaluable to read about these same issues in the Panthers’ own words, and to understand how the Party, its leaders, and its rank-and-file members represented themselves.
The secondary sources on the Black Panther Party come together to paint a vivid picture of the Black Panther Party’s community programs, their relationship to the political context, and the ways in which they interacted with the public and the authorities. Many of the authors also offer different arguments for the successes and failures of the Panthers, which gives me a solid foundation for my own arguments. I focus on seven main voices discussing the Black Panther Party: Paul Alkebulan (2012), Donna Jean Murch (2010), Joshua Bloom and Waldo E. Martin (2013), Alondra Nelson (2011), Mary Potorti (2017), Amy Ongiri (2009), and Jeffrey Ogbar (2004). Alkebulan, Murch, and Bloom and Martin offer general overviews of the Black Panther Party from rise to fall; Nelson and Potorti focus on specific Black Panther programs (the medical clinics and the breakfast programs, respectively); and Ongiri and Ogbar both discuss the Party’s relationship to the Black community in general and their supporters in particular. In addition to providing a tremendous amount of background knowledge, historical context, and specific details about the Black Panthers, Murch, Bloom and Martin, and Alkebulan each frame their analysis of the Black Panther Party with a specific argument. Murch discusses the Black Panther Party’s rise, its many achievements, and its ultimate fall, focusing mainly on the Party’s ability to reflect the community’s traditions and values while meeting community needs. Murch argues that the Black Panther Party rose to power in response to the mass migration of southern African-Americans, frustrated by the lack of progress of the Civil Rights movement, to Northern cities, and their continued discontent that the conditions in these cities were not significantly better. She asserts that the Panthers’ main achievements were their ability to
reflect the Black community’s traditions of self-help and mutual aid, and their mobilization of existing frustration and directing of this energy toward programs that directly improved people’s lives while also contributing to a wider transformative project.

Murch argues that the fall of the Party was due to the aging of the membership base, the shifting of the national mood (mainly the declining levels of discontent as certain grievances were addressed), and the vast expansion of the Party. Murch believes that as chapters were started in places all over the country with drastically different local contexts, they were unable to experience the same levels of success as with the original chapters, since the format was ultimately best suited to the original cities’ needs and problems. Murch argues that the excessive centrism of the Party and emphasis on their role as the vanguard also contributed to their decline, as their work to reflect the people’s traditions and needs was ultimately far more important to their successes than their particular leadership.

While Murch argues that the Panthers were able to build community support because of their ability to reflect African-American values and traditions during a time of disappointment with the Civil Rights movement, Bloom and Martin focus on the relationship between the current events and the levels of repression in the Party’s ongoing clash with authorities. Repression alone did not scare people away from supporting the Party. During the late Sixties and early Seventies, when there were high levels of public frustration with the political and economic climate (the Vietnam War draft, the fight to include Black studies in mainstream education, the limited incorporation of the Black community into the electoral system), the Black Panthers received tremendous levels of support. But as some of people’s general grievances were mitigated, support for the Party
diminished, and people were less willing to contribute personal sacrifice for the Black Panthers’ revolutionary goals.

Alkebulan also discusses the fall of the Black Panther Party, but he focuses less on the outside factors and more on the internal decisions and strategies of the Party. He critiques the Black Panthers’ community programs and their general leadership strategies. Alkebulan argues that the survival programs were important not just for supporting the community, but also for the Party itself. These programs gave members more structure, transformed the Black Panthers’ public image, and offered a more sustainable strategy that could involve a wider range of people. Alkebulan laments the Panthers’ excessive determination to work outside of the system. He thinks that their avoidance of capitalist practices and their refusal to focus on the production side of their survival programs led to the ultimate collapse of these programs, which was unfortunate because Alkebulan believes these programs were the most successful and useful part of the Panthers’ legacy. He also critiques the organizational structure of the Black Panther Party, arguing that its centralism eroded support from rank-and-file members and that it was local chapters that had the most profound impact on society, because they were able to mobilize communities and directly meet their needs.

Nelson focuses on the Black Panthers’ People’s Free Medical Clinics, and takes a much less critical view than Alkebulan. She examines the transformational experience of participating in these programs for the community and for the volunteers themselves. She discusses the capacity-building potential of these programs for the volunteers, and the ability of the clinics to decommodify and demystify the medical system for the Black community. Nelson analyzes the ways in which the Panthers worked within the existing
medical system while also attempting to transform it. This is a concrete example of the type of nuanced relationship with the existing system that Alkebulan believes the Panthers should have emphasized more and that Newton acknowledges in his dissertation. Nelson also argues that these medical programs were formulated in response to the disappointment communities experienced with the War on Poverty programs, reflecting Murch’s argument that the Black Panther Party as a whole was formulated in response to disappointment, although she discusses the Civil Rights Movement, whereas Nelson focuses on the War on Poverty programs.

Potorti centers her analysis on the Free Breakfast Programs for Schoolchildren, and, similarly to Nelson, discusses the transformative capacity of these programs for beneficiaries as well as volunteers. She focuses on the consciousness-raising potential of the breakfast programs, describing the powerful relationship between the children of the community and the Panthers who served them a hot meal, and taught them about African-American history and the Black Panthers’ goals. Potorti also discusses the occasional battles that the Panthers fought with local businesses when soliciting donations, illustrating the Party’s perception of these businesses as having a duty to give back to the local community, and their willingness to alienate businesses that refused to cooperate with their agenda.

Ogbar and Ongiri both discuss the Black Panther Party’s relationship to the surrounding community, not through focusing on specific programs as do Potorti and Nelson, but through rhetoric. Ogbar focuses on the Black Panthers’ relationship with the lumpen proletariat, which in the case of the Black Panthers, were the poor, “ghettoized” Black urban underclass. Ogbar studies the Panthers’ use of language and revolutionary
culture (such as music, art, and fashion) as tools for relating to the lumpen proletariat. The Panthers did not want to condescend these people, understanding that if they failed to secure their support, the system would manage to create divides between the lower class and the Panthers. The Panthers attempted to approach the underclass as equals, working to meet their daily needs and to build a relationship based on mutual identification and a celebration of the lumpen lifestyle. Ogbar ultimately argues that despite the benefit of a strong relationship between poor Black communities and the Black Panthers, this nevertheless had drawbacks for the Panthers—it isolated them from the middle class and the Black bourgeoisie and left room for behaviors that eroded the Party’s discipline and public image.

Ongiri also focuses on the Panthers’ public image, but in a more positive light: she sees it not as part of their downfall but as their most significant achievement. She discusses the Panthers’ revolutionary rhetoric and their transformation of Black consciousness. Ongiri discusses the all-Black outfits that many wore, from leather jacket to beret, and the large rifles they carried as creating an image that sharply contrasted with the strategies and aesthetic of the Civil Rights era, signifying the Panthers’ departure from those strategies as well as the aesthetic. She also argues that the main success of the Black Panther Party was:

less in its tactical abilities as a fighting force with the potential to create a mass revolution than in its ability to evoke concrete identification through multiple forms of media with images of revolution that cut widely across divergent constituencies. In creating spectacular images of revolution that tied notions of individual empowerment, independence, and justice together with Black ‘street’ subjectivity, the Black Panther Party helped create the blueprint for notions of Black subjectivity that continue to guide our understanding of race in the United States.33

33 Amy Abugo Ongiri, Spectacular Blackness: The Cultural Politics of the Black Power Movement and the
This subjectivity was specifically developed through the creation of an image of “the African-American urban underclass culture as powerful and beautiful, and the potential object for a powerful identification.” In a similar way to Murch and Alkebulan, Ongiri argues that the main success of the Black Panthers was not actually in their leadership in this fight with the current system. Instead, they emphasize the Panthers’ ability to transform the collective consciousness of the Black community, something that Bloom and Martin and Singh also recognize as a crucial and long-lived achievement of the Party.

**Cooperation Jackson Primary Sources**

Cooperation Jackson is my second case, and functions as both a foil and a mirror for the Black Panther Party. Because Cooperation Jackson is so contemporary, the source material on it is different and ultimately less comprehensive than that on the Black Panther Party. The majority of the content that I was able to access was primary sources—writings from Cooperation Jackson and by one of the main leaders of the organization, Kali Akuno. There is extensive written material—sometimes in the voice of Kali Akuno and sometimes in the voice of Cooperation Jackson as a whole—in *Jackson Rising*, the one published book about Cooperation Jackson, and many interviews with the leaders of Cooperation Jackson are also available for study. These sources come together to illustrate how Cooperation Jackson represents itself, how the group perceives the current reality that it is working to transform, and how it communicates with the public.

The main three primary sources that I use are the writings of Kali Akuno and Cooperation Jackson in *Jackson Rising*; the words of Kali Akuno and Ajamu Nangwaya, a professor and supporter of Cooperation Jackson in an interview with “This is Hell”; and the words of Akuno at

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*Search for a Black Aesthetic*, (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2009), 87.

34 Ibid, 87.
a *Jackson Rising* book talk sponsored by Democracy-at-Work, which I attended in New York City in December 2017. The chapters by Akuno and Cooperation Jackson in *Jackson Rising* are the main foundation for my discussion of Cooperation Jackson. Akuno wrote many of the chapters in the voice of Cooperation Jackson, laying out in great detail the organization’s societal critique, their strategies for generating change, and their general theoretical foundation. Cooperation Jackson articulates their conception of self-determination and a democratic solidarity economy (their main goals), as well as how they perceive their role in bringing about that change. They articulate the nuances of working within and outside of the system, and of leading the people on their own journey to self-determination. The words of Cooperation Jackson and Kali Akuno are also valuable for more than just the content. These sources give me a direct perspective on how Cooperation Jackson communicates with the public, and how they attempt to represent themselves.

In the interview with “This is Hell,” the general argument put forth by Akuno and Nangwaya is that capitalism does not have to be and should not be the norm, and that Cooperation Jackson is striving to imagine and build new norms. Akuno describes the economic and political crisis in Jackson, providing details about the context in which Cooperation Jackson is operating. He also discusses the history of Chokwe Lumumba, Sr.’s relationship to the city of Jackson—how he slowly gained a reputation of trust in the Black community, starting in Ward Two and expanding throughout the city. Akuno articulates Cooperation Jackson’s abstract and concrete goals for the city. He discusses the main threats to their transformational project—of capitalism, the American state, and the Mississippi government—as well as the specific challenges facing the city of Jackson right now, which he calls the seven deadly threats. (These threats range from a plan to flood downtown Jackson in order to be able to build a waterfront
casino, to a plan to privatize public schools, as well as other similar initiatives in which the Mississippi state government strives to seize power from the Jackson government and apply gentrification pressure to the city.

Nangwaya focuses on alternatives to capitalism. He describes the “poverty of imagination” that prevents most people from envisioning alternatives to capitalism, arguing that alternatives such as cooperatives are quite achievable. He says that as long we continue to live in a capitalist society, we can never truly be free of capitalism, even while we build alternatives. This leads Nangwaya to suggest that cooperatives cannot coexist with capitalism indefinitely, and that eventually one form must dominate. Thus, Nangwaya recommends that cooperatives actively work to oppose the capitalist system.

At the Democracy-at-Work book talk, Kali Akuno discussed Cooperation Jackson in a more casual setting. He was less focused on promoting the group or explaining its theories; instead, he was more reflective, mentioning his reservations about Cooperation Jackson’s decisions and alluding to challenges that the group has faced in its early years. Akuno admitted that if he had to do it all over again, he would build up the cooperative initiative before running Lumumba, Senior for Mayor, and he expressed doubts about how much power and influence Cooperation Jackson truly has through the mayor's office. He explained that Cooperation Jackson was started too early, (he used the phrase “born prematurely”)—the original plan was to use Chokwe Lumumba, Senior’s time in office to prepare the city of Jackson for the cooperative project. While Akuno’s wish that they had begun with the cooperatives and his comment that Cooperation Jackson was born “prematurely” seemed contradictory, they both inspired me to speculate about what kinds of challenges Cooperation Jackson has encountered so far, because there is minimal information on any internal problems that they face other than the lack of
adequate funding.

Despite Akuno’s reservations, the majority of the other panelists, such as the leftist economist Richard Wolf and Jessica Gordon Nembhard, the author of Collective Courage, spoke about Cooperation Jackson with a sort of reverence, and it was clear that they all deeply admired what the group has accomplished so far. While there are minimal ways to measure Cooperation Jackson’s achievements at this early juncture, the high regard in which it is held by these experts helps me put the group’s initial progress in perspective.

**Cooperation Jackson Secondary Sources**

An important way to get a more objective understanding of Cooperation Jackson is through secondary sources. Most of the secondary sources available on Cooperation Jackson are news articles, most of which are not particularly rich in content and are somewhat redundant. This is due to the fact that Cooperation Jackson is so new and still not very well-known—there are few academics who have written about it as of yet. However, there are several particularly useful essays in Jackson Rising. Laura Flanders, Kamau Franklin, Katie Gilbert, and Makani Themba-Nixon all make important contributions to the conversation about Cooperation Jackson.

Franklin and Themba-Nixon both discuss Cooperation Jackson’s political project. Franklin focuses on the politics of Black self-determination in the South, illustrating the rising levels of frustration with the trend of moderate Black democratic candidates who do not truly represent the needs of their constituents. This sets the scene for why Chokwe Lumumba and Chokwe Antar Lumumba’s administrations have been so important. Themba-Nixon discusses the Jackson People’s Assemblies. While there is rich information available on the People’s Assemblies from Cooperation Jackson itself, it is helpful to read about it from an objective outside source that explains not the intentions of the institution but the concrete reality of how it works and what is
has achieved.

Flanders and Gilbert focus on the Lumumba mayoral administrations. Flanders discusses the late Chokwe Lumumba’s administration and the immediate aftermath of his death. She talks about his concrete impact in office, what the goals of his administration were, and the effect that his death had on the city. Gilbert gives a general overview of the history of Cooperation Jackson and focuses on the campaign and successful election of Chokwe Antar Lumumba. She discusses some of the details of Cooperation Jackson’s concrete progress so far, which helps put in perspective the theories and goals of Cooperation Jackson as articulated by the organization itself.

**Conclusion**

Overall, the theory, primary sources, and secondary sources make unique contributions to my research. The primary and secondary sources, when placed in conversation with each other, sometimes strengthen and other times challenge the arguments put forth in each specific piece. I use prefigurative theory as the framework for my own contribution to this discussion, focusing on the viability of means-end equivalency in the case of self-help Black empowerment groups. In order to begin this analysis of the transformational projects undertaken by the Black Panther Party and Cooperation Jackson, it is necessary to understand exactly why they are trying to generate this change in the first place. Thus, Chapter One will examine the implications of a societal critique, and the critiques put forth by the Black Panthers and Cooperation Jackson.
Chapter 1: Domination

The Black Panther Party and Cooperation Jackson are both defined in part by the fact that they are trying to generate change—a specific kind of change, from one reality to another. Inherent in this process of generating change is the idea that there are elements of the current reality that the organization wishes to do without—to abolish or significantly alter. Depending on how engrained these undesirable aspects of society are, generating this change can be difficult. Convincing people that there are aspects of their current reality that can and should be abolished or significantly altered requires getting people to question that which they see as impossible to change or unnecessary to change. Self-help and prefigurative organizations share the characteristic of forming their strategies and theories in direct alignment with the change they are trying to generate. This chapter will explore the significance of societal critiques for prefigurative politics, as well as the specific societal critiques put forth by the Black Panther Party and Cooperation Jackson. The societal critiques of the Black Panther Party and Cooperation Jackson both focus on the (American) state and capitalism. The Black Panthers also discuss imperialism, and Cooperation Jackson also identifies hegemony and gentrification. The main theory that I analyze is prefigurative politics, and I supplement this with important parts of Erik Olin Wright’s critique of capitalism and Nikhil Pal Singh’s conception of the Black freedom struggle.

I am drawing on Erik Olin Wright’s framework for the importance of a clear diagnosis and critique of society. Wright is exploring an emancipatory social science, and in his framework he identifies the diagnosis and critique of society as a key process for determining why we want an alternative to our current world. This is a critical step for pursuing his ultimate goal of envisioning and eventually realizing a real utopia. Although he is not specifically working with
prefigurative politics, Wright’s societal critique aligns with prefigurative politics and with the Black Panthers and Cooperation Jackson in particular because of his criticisms of capitalism. Wright positions capitalism as the central problem, and he sees a sound critique of capitalism as essential for getting people to realize the system’s shortcomings and to be open to the idea that alternatives are possible and even desirable.\(^{35}\) Wright organizes his central criticisms of capitalism into a list of eleven key points. These range from the perpetuation of eliminable forms of human suffering, to certain inefficiencies such as the underdevelopment of public services and the erosion of solidarity.\(^{36}\) Many of these points reflect societal problems that are also discussed by both the Black Panthers and Cooperation Jackson.

Although they do not argue that these societal ills are derived solely from capitalism, both the Black Panthers and Cooperation Jackson identify capitalism as a central flaw of society. The Black Panthers identify three main flaws: capitalism; the state; and imperialism, which is, in some ways, an offshoot of capitalism and the (American) state. Cooperation Jackson also identifies capitalism and the (American) state as central forces to be combated, alongside gentrification, which is in the Jackson context closely connected to both capitalism and the state, and hegemony. Hegemony, (by which I mean the way that societal powers dictate people’s norms and values so that people accept these societal powers as the status quo), is arguably the most abstract of the antagonistic forces identified by the two groups. While hegemony is not positioned as a central flaw by Wright or the Panthers in the same way, both groups, along with Wright and most prefigurative theorists, acknowledge the steep challenge it poses for generating change.

For Cooperation Jackson, hegemony bolsters the power of capitalism and the state, making

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\(^{36}\) Ibid, 37.
it difficult to gain support and to effectively visualize and pursue change, because people have internalized the (false) validity and un-changeability of the present reality, such as capitalism and the state. Because the present system is so engrained in people’s consciousness, Cooperation Jackson sees their strategy of growing a network of cooperatives as essential for combatting reality’s hegemonic clamp. They specifically believe that as a result of this hegemony, people “tend to demonstrate behaviors that are not unlike those of [the] oppressors and exploiters…critical education is essential to the process of exorcising the ghosts of conformity within the status quo from the psyche and behavior of the oppressed to enable the development of a cultural revolution.”

Comparing the process of consciousness-raising to combat hegemony to that of “exorcising the ghosts of conformity” demonstrates that for Cooperation Jackson, hegemony is a critical obstacle that must be combatted in order to pursue all the other goals of their organization. They hope that when people experience an alternative and see how it works—in fact, works better than the existing system—this will encourage them to oppose capitalism and perhaps to trust and support Cooperation Jackson. This transformation of views after experiencing an alternative could be seen as a concrete process of exorcising the ghosts of conformity.

While Cooperation Jackson conceptualizes of hegemonic power as an initial obstacle for their cultural revolution, the hegemonic power of the American state is significant for Black activism in general. In his discussion of the relationship between Black activism and the state, theorist Nikhil Pal Singh discusses the importance of articulating a critique of the state in order

to facilitate a desirable alternative:

…the stubborn contribution of black activism may be to remind us of the words of Langston Hughes: that such an American never was. Indeed, the dialectic of race and nation rehearsed by generations of black intellectuals and activists forces critical recognition of the nonidentity of America—the failure of American universalism—both in space and in time. It thus reopens the necessary, radical question of an authentic freedom: what kind of a social world might be that fulfills the diverse and particular needs generated by an unequal history?  

This “stubborn contribution” of reminding people that “such an American never was” in order to “reopen the necessary, radical question of an alternative freedom” is a similar process to Wright’s assemblage of the eleven criticisms of capitalism in order to encourage people to desire and imagine an alternative to capitalism. Both capitalism and the state possess a very hegemonic power, as their existence is intertwined with society as a whole and with each individual’s life and consciousness. This is why formulating these critiques is so necessary—despite people’s recognition of some of the negative effects, it is difficult for people to take the step of questioning the existence of these entities in their current form. They see capitalism and the state as deeply engrained parts of their lives, and it is difficult to imagine life without capitalism, or with a different kind of state. The job of exorcising the ghosts of conformity by raising people’s consciousness through this critique is a basic necessity for a movement that depends on the involvement of the people. (Consciousness-raising will be discussed in much greater detail in Chapter Four.)

These critiques are built around identifying specific ills of society in order to identify the relationship between the criticizer—whether it be a prefigurative politics movement or a radical self-help organization—and the object of critique. Uri Gordon categorizes the range of specific societal ills as forms of domination. Gordon defines domination as capitalism, the state, and all

other “various systematic features of society whereby groups and persons are controlled, coerced, exploited, humiliated, discriminated against, etc.”

He sees the umbrella term “domination” as a way of illustrating the “family resemblance” between the different dynamics, which he borrows from Ludwig Wittgenstein to illustrate the idea that the dynamics have some shared common qualities without erasing the unique distinctions between each different dynamic. Gordon depicts the power of these forms of domination as hegemonic—they influence the macro-dynamics in our society as well as the micro-dynamics in people’s perceptions of the world and their day-to-day interactions. Something significant about the “family resemblance” is that different movements often realize the commonalities they share in their experiences with marginalization and the nature of their oppressors, and this has helped facilitate the rise of solidarity and intersectional movements. Luke Yates (2015) argues that prefigurative movements perceive their opponent to be both the local authorities that they fight against and also the larger societal powers that these local authorities represent. He believes that the conflicts between prefigurative movements and the local authorities can also serve as a proxy for the wider war against societal powers. The range of local authorities and societal powers would likely all share a “family resemblance,” and thus would fit Gordon’s definition of domination.

Singh’s discussion of the history of Black activism and its relationship to the state and related oppressive entities positions these oppressive entities as interconnected forms of Gordon’s domination. Singh’s critique of the state is based in his belief that the literal foundations of America are steeped in racism, and that in order to truly combat this, one would need to reach into the core of the state to change the foundations. This critique of the state has

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extended to other forms of domination:

By refusing to accept the limitations of liberal reform at home, and by challenging the depredations of US imperial politics abroad, black movements consistently advanced more worldly and expansive political conceptions—toward democratic anti-capitalism and anti-imperialism—that were regularly disparaged and rejected as un-American.42

Because America has built much of its power on capitalism and imperialism, a critique of the state and its ills necessitates opposing capitalism and imperialism as well, as all three are mutually reinforcing forms of domination that have had devastating effects on countless individuals. The Black Panthers’ societal critique closely aligns with Singh’s theory, as they identify these three, mutually reinforcing forms of domination as the main targets of their societal critique. An examination of the specific way that the Panthers formulate their critique is a clear next step for understanding how Singh’s theory manifests in practice.

The Black Panthers

The Black Panthers had a firm stance against the American state, capitalism, and imperialism—these three forms of domination are indeed the central pillars of the Black Panthers’ analysis of societal ills. The Panthers’ critiques of the state were bold and fearless. They were not afraid of being perceived as un-American; on the contrary, their loud and aggressive attacks on the state were key to their ideology. David Hilliard said that “the rhetoric of the constitutions was never in the first paragraph meant for people of African descent…the whole damn thing is invalid in regards to Blacks in particular” and that “the American flag and the American eagle are the true symbols of fascism.”43 The Panthers had many problems with America—its practices of capitalism and imperialism, its blatant failure to adequately support marginalized communities, and what Newton called its “limited” democracy.44 Because the

42 Singh, Black Is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy, 54.
44 Huey P. Newton, War Against the Panthers: A Study of Repression in America, (London: Writers &
Panthers recognized the state as an enemy and despised US nationalism, they believed that co-optation by the powers/hegemony was a danger that needed to be avoided at all cost. This positioned them in stark contrast with the Civil Rights movement, as they argued that the goal for Black people was not to integrate with America, but to oppose it. To them, America was “not a beloved community of shared traditions and aspirations, but a coercive state to be overthrown.” This conviction continued to strengthen throughout the Party’s existence, because the state responded viciously to what was perceived as one of the most serious domestic threats to the nation. Through targeted COINTELPRO projects, police raids, false or inflated arrests and convictions, and carefully orchestrated assassinations, most state institutions at the local and national level viciously antagonized the Panthers.

While the state was a form of domination that often actively targeted the Black Panther Party, capitalism was a slightly more abstract form of domination. While capitalism itself could not actively pursue the demise of the Party, its guiding objectives and processes were such that the Party felt that the institution of capitalism might as well be intentionally antagonizing them. The Panthers’ identification of capitalism as a central antagonistic force also signified an opportunity to articulate the Party’s view of White people. While some of the Panthers’ rhetoric, specifically from its earlier years, has been interpreted as anti-White, the Panthers ultimately shifted from seeing White people as the enemy to seeing capitalists as the enemy: “the White racist oppresses Black people not only for racist reasons, but because it is also economically profitable to do so.” The purpose of this shift was to avoid alienating White liberals who might support the Party, and also to specify the criticisms for maximum accuracy. Capitalism’s
suffocating grip on society provided the impetus for people to harm one another in the desperate race for capital. The inequality inherent in capitalism had a particularly profound effect on poor Black Americans, who were the primary concern of the Panthers. They saw the role of capitalists, the human manifestations of capitalism that they encountered every day, as essentially taking the wealth from communities and giving nothing in return.

To describe these capitalists, and the policemen and other individuals and groups who essentially upheld the forms of domination on the daily basis, the Panthers very intentionally used the word “pigs.” This language served the dual purpose of employing the southern vernacular that was familiar to many of the Party’s supporters, while also being racially neutral, so as not to turn off White supporters. Bobby Seale explained what the Party meant by “pig,” saying that, “when we use the term pig, for example, we are referring to people who systematically violate peoples’ constitutional rights—whether they be monopoly capitalists or police.” The Panthers’ definition of the word “pig” reflects Gordon’s concept of domination, and their use of this language for people whom they interact with on a daily basis—police and capitalists, for example—demonstrates that the Panthers antagonized these people precisely because they were protecting the system and perpetrating its violence on a daily basis. The Party’s confrontations with these day-to-day pigs could thus be seen as a proxy for their large-scale, more abstract confrontations with capitalism and the state—a relationship similar to that articulated by Yates.

While pigs are the day-to-day human manifestation of capitalism and the state, imperialism is in many ways the sinister love child of these two central forms of domination. The Panthers perceived imperialism domestically and abroad, and a strong sense of solidarity with other

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oppressed groups grew out of this overlap. By domestic imperialism, they were referring to the ghettoization, policing, and general lack of autonomy experienced by Black Americans. In the 1960s, international imperialism took on a new, in some ways subtler form. The fall of traditional, formal imperialism was coupled with the rise of globalization, and American imperialism was carried out through economic and military policing, as well as the selective support given to newly formed nations.\(^5^0\) The Black Panthers perceived a profound connection between domestic imperialism and the international imperialism experienced by people all over the world. Seale depicts the full range of this when he says that:

\[\ldots\text{you can’t just fight imperialism, the acts of imperialism abroad, without understanding and recognizing community imperialism abroad, without recognizing community imperialism here of Black people, Brown people, Red people and even to the point of protesting students and radicals and progressive peoples here, in America.}\ ^5^1\]

The Panthers argued that fighting imperialism abroad was linked to the fight against imperialism in the heart of the imperial nation itself—neither fight could be truly won without the other. Additionally, the domestic imperialism at home was not limited to the experiences of African Americans. While the Party’s observations about domestic imperialism originated with a focus on the Black community, it extended beyond, to every marginalized community in America, including progressive White folk. The Party’s ideology of intercommunualism captures this solidarity, as they ultimately came to realize that in response to this new form of imperialism and globalization, solidarity was needed between all communities in the world, and that each community deserved its own autonomy.

The Black Panther solidarity rhetoric extends beyond intersectional imperialism, to the acknowledgment that different forms of domination are linked and facilitate each other’s

\(^5^0\) Singh, *Black Is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy.*

\(^5^1\) Foner, ed., *The Black Panthers Speak,* 94.
perpetuation, and to the formation of strategies and alliances to respond to this. In his discussion of male chauvinism, Bobby Seale connects it to “any other form of chauvinism—including racism. In other words, the idea of saying ‘keep a woman in her place’ is only a short step away from saying ‘keep a n***** in his place.” He expresses the belief that the forces oppressing women are in many ways linked to the forces oppressing Black people, and stresses the importance of fighting all of these different forms of domination.

Because the Panthers recognized this intersectionality, they also pursued intersectional strategies that would benefit everyone, not merely Black people, the core focus of their organization. This solidarity is illustrated in an official statement by the Party: “…we will not fight capitalism with black capitalism; we will not fight imperialism with black imperialism; we will not fight racism with black racism…” Their recognition of intersectionality and solidarity extended beyond merely rhetoric. The Panthers forged formal and informal alliances with the Vietnamese, North Koreans, and many newly formed African nations, as well as with the Young Lords (a Puerto Rican organization), the Young Patriots (a group of working class White people), and many other groups, including members of the LGBT movement. The Party even sent a delegation to China, as much of their theory was inspired by Mao and his “little red book;” they were more warmly received there than the official American delegation. This concept of shared fate to facilitate a collective rise reflects Gordon’s description of collective solidarity. As the Party recognized the “family resemblance” between the forms of colonization affecting the ghettoized African-American community and communities abroad, as well as other issues of race-, class-, and gender-based marginalization, they responded by expanding their focus and their support base, at times working with these other communities.

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52 Ibid, 87.
53 Ibid, 220.
54 Bloom and Martin, Black Against Empire.
Cooperation Jackson

Much of what these forms of domination facing different communities had in common was the impact of the (American) state, which served to perpetuate or enable these societal ills. For Cooperation Jackson, the state is also a central form of domination that they seek to oppose, but in a different way than the Panthers. Cooperation Jackson poses similar general critiques of the institution, arguing that it is undemocratic and enabling, but Cooperation Jackson focuses more on the issues of who specifically is in control of the Mississippi and national-level government offices; the current city-level government is actually an ally of Cooperation Jackson. While the practice is less central to their platform than it is to the Black Panthers’, Cooperation Jackson is willing to present confrontational critiques of the state, such as when they call out “the sham of democratic governance” which enables capitalism and many related harms.

This critique is less radical than that of the Black Panthers or what Singh expects for Black empowerment groups. To Cooperation Jackson, the American state as a whole does not fit the definition of domination per se, and so they do not oppose the American state on principle. (To the Black Panther Party, the American state does fit the definition of domination, and so they do oppose the American state on principle.) Cooperation Jackson has an ally in the mayoral office right now—Chokwe Antar Lumumba, the son of the late former mayor Chokwe Lumumba.

However, Cooperation Jackson identifies the state-level and national-level American governments as active opposition right now. Akuno depicts the state-level opponents of Cooperation Jackson as neo-Confederates, and describes the current governor of Mississippi, Phil Bryant, as a Tea Party governor.55 He says that Cooperation Jackson will very likely need more support from people in the coming months, as they expect a slew of right-wing preventative laws to be imposed on Jackson, to inhibit the city’s radical agenda. Cooperation

55 Akuno, “An Evening with Jackson Rising.”
Jackson argues that the state is not only aligned against their goals, it is not even a true agent of democracy. In addition to being excessively centralized, the government is beholden not to its constituencies, but to corporate interests.\textsuperscript{56} This means that in order to effectively pursue their radical agenda, Cooperation Jackson must avoid repression or cooptation by the state.

Despite the fact that Cooperation Jackson sees the state as an enemy, their views translate into a less radical agenda for them than it does for the Black Panthers—and for most prefigurative organizations. Instead of actively denying or directly working toward the demise of the state, Cooperation Jackson acknowledges that “at present, the state is a fact of life that the agents of anti-capitalist and post-capitalist struggle are compelled to contend with and address in their strategic pursuit of liberation.”\textsuperscript{57} Fortunately, they are able to have an ally at the city level, which makes the fact that “the state is a fact of life” slightly more manageable. Because of the racial and economic demographics in Jackson, the Democratic primary election for mayor carries more weight than the election proper, as the majority of the Jackson population decisively leans leftward. In 2013, the city elected Chokwe Lumumba to office, and his presence in office was intended to prepare the city for the inception of Cooperation Jackson. However, when he died suddenly in February of 2014, Cooperation Jackson suddenly came to fruition as an urgent response to keep the radical agenda of Lumumba and his supporters alive. After three years of a more moderate Democratic agenda in office, Chokwe Antar Lumumba then won the 2017 race.\textsuperscript{58}

Having an ally in office means that Cooperation Jackson can work directly with the city, developing what they call a sort of dual power. They define this as power within the system, and


power outside of the system, the latter arising through people’s assemblies and other autonomous systems that do not depend on having allies in government. Cooperation Jackson recognizes the fact that those who oppose them are well aware of the threat posed by this dual power, and that this awareness is being translated into offensive actions to try and hinder the group’s growing power. Cooperation Jackson believes that the rising pressure of gentrification is directly linked to an agenda to de-radicalize the politics of Jackson, a city that is currently seventy-nine percent Black and, (according to Cooperation Jackson), predominantly working class. This is articulated in *Jackson Rising* where Akuno and Nangwaya write that, “the political calculation of the reactionary forces pushing for displacement and seeking profit from gentrification, is that in order to break the bloc of radical political forces in Jackson, they have to reduce the Black population considerably.”

For the city of Jackson, gentrification can be seen as a direct product of capitalism and the state. An antagonistic (toward Cooperation Jackson) political agenda combined with capitalist growth have started to push poor Black people out of Jackson. There are several specific gentrification initiatives contributing to this: the medical corridor initiative, which Akuno described as a multibillion dollar project using eminent domain to seize two predominantly Black working-class communities and build a major hospital complex in its place; the One-Lake Redevelopment initiative, a project to flood downtown Jackson so that a casino could be built on this new waterfront; a plan to build a sports and entertainment stadium in Battlefield Park, a Black working-class community that would have to be in part transplanted elsewhere to make room for the stadium; and the Capitol Complex/Downtown Annexation Bill, a plan to create a

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state-controlled zone in Downtown Jackson in exchange for the state providing funding for the city to repair some of its infrastructure. Cooperation Jackson’s response to this rising gentrification is the development of community land trusts, areas of land held by the community that they have no intention of selling for profit. The focus of this work against gentrification (to be discussed in greater detail in future chapters) is on West Jackson, a predominantly Black, working-class neighborhood. Ultimately, capitalist pressure is a central driving force for gentrification. As everything including land and housing is viewed as an opportunity for profit, prices will continually be driven up whenever the opportunity arises. Cooperation Jackson’s critique of capitalism extends beyond its connection to gentrification, however, and is a core pillar of their diagnosis of society and theory of change.

Cooperation Jackson argues that capitalism provides a definition of development that results in the exploitation of people and the natural world. This exploitation firmly situates capitalism in the category of domination. It has facilitated what Cooperation Jackson identifies as the cycle of extraction, which has resulted in minimal economic opportunities in Jackson and in much of Mississippi. Much of the regional economy has been based on extracting natural resources from the area for production elsewhere, meaning that the people in that region have not been able to adequately develop their means of production. Cooperation Jackson calls capitalism “a monstrosity of a system” and laments the divisive “dynamic of accumulate or die,” which facilitates individualism at the expense of cooperation and solidarity.

Cooperation Jackson’s critique of capitalism reflects that of Erik Olin Wright. Wright

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62 Akuno, “Reclaiming Democracy and Rebuilding Politics at Cooperation Jackson.”
64 Ibid.
66 Akuno, “Reclaiming Democracy and Rebuilding Politics at Cooperation Jackson.”
argues that a sound critique of capitalism is essential for making people aware of the flaws with the current system and motivating them to try and generate change. Wright organizes his central criticisms of capitalism into a list of eleven key points:

1. Capitalism perpetuates eliminable forms of human suffering
2. Capitalism blocks the universalization of conditions for expansive human flourishing
3. Capitalism perpetuates eliminable deficits in individual freedom and autonomy
4. Capitalism violates liberal egalitarian principles of social justice
5. Capitalism is inefficient in certain crucial respects
6. Capitalism has a system bias towards consumerism
7. Capitalism is environmentally destructive
8. Capitalist commodification threatens important broadly held values
9. Capitalism, in a world of nation states, fuels militarism and imperialism
10. Capitalism corrodes community
11. Capitalism limits democracy

For my analysis of Cooperation Jackson, Wright’s first, fifth, seventh, and tenth criticisms are the most relevant. Kali Akuno’s recognition of the fact that capitalism inhibits cooperation reflects Wright’s fifth and tenth criticisms of capitalism. Wright’s fifth criticism, on the inefficiencies of capitalism, speaks to the class warfare and erosion of solidarity due to high levels of inequality and competition, and the undervaluing of public goods. When Wright discusses the erosion of solidarity, he is referring to both the interruptions caused by instances of class warfare (protests, strikes, riots) and the erosion of solidarity caused by the high levels of inequality and competition inherent in capitalism. By highlighting the undervaluing of public goods, Wright is describing the inability of capitalism to accurately capture the true value of public goods, especially the positive externalities associated with many of them, such as a healthy environment, social services such as education, health care, and recreational activities such as sports and the arts. Because they are technically undervalued, they do not receive the resources that they arguably deserve, and thus are highly underdeveloped elements of our society. Cooperation Jackson’s central focus is a cooperative solidarity economy that is oriented

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towards the goal of meeting people’s needs as opposed to generating profit.\textsuperscript{68} This directly works to counteract the erosion of solidarity caused by capitalism. Furthermore, Cooperation Jackson’s community programs revitalize many of the public goods that are neglected under capitalism. Their emphasis on communal living to promote sustainable practices and mass educational practices, as well as their focus on pursuing better health care access for Jackson residents, reflects an attempt to revive the tradition of community living and promote social services and environmental responsibility.

Wright’s tenth criticism, of the corrosion of community, sheds light on what organizations such as Cooperation Jackson are striving for when they discuss community, and what they are lamenting when they discuss the lack of cooperation or solidarity. Wright defines community as “any social unit within which people are concerned about the well-being of other people and feel solidarity and obligations toward others.”\textsuperscript{69} He identifies “reciprocity, solidarity, mutual concern and caring” as various characteristics of community, and argues that we need cooperation in order to thrive.\textsuperscript{70} He worries that the inherent greed and mistrust associated with capitalism, as well as the high levels of inequality, inhibit the formation of meaningful communities. In her analysis of disaster utopias, Rebecca Solnit observes a similar phenomenon. She argues that the reason people feel such solidarity and form powerful support systems during times of disaster is because the restrictive barriers of our contemporary society temporarily fall away, giving people the space and motivation to abandon their individualist tendencies and cooperate.\textsuperscript{71} These divisive barriers associated with a developed capitalist society are part of what Cooperation Jackson is critiquing, and their attempt to build cooperative systems is a way of attempting to

\textsuperscript{68} Akuno and Nangwaya, “Toward Economic Democracy, Labor Self-management, and Self-determination.”
\textsuperscript{69} Wright, \textit{Envisioning Real Utopias}, 79.
\textsuperscript{70} Ibid, 79.
facilitate a sense of community and solidarity similar to that which Wright, Solnit, and others in the conversation about envisioning utopias imagine.

Similar to the Black Panther Party and Wright, Cooperation Jackson also recognizes that capitalism fails to meet people’s needs. Akuno argues that capitalism inhibits self-determination and perpetuates inequality, “because the endless pursuit of profits that drives this system only empowers private ownership and the individual appropriation of wealth by design. The end result of this system is massive inequality and inequity.” Cooperation Jackson also asserts that an alternative to capitalism is needed, because “capitalism is not working for hundreds of millions of people across the globe,” and they list “joblessness, underemployment, poverty, homelessness, limited access to educational opportunities, exploitative and insecure work-life that is closely mimicking the nasty and brutish experience of nineteenth century capitalist and concentrating income, power and wealth in the hands of the ruling class and their enablers (the bourgeoisie).” This directly reflects Wright’s first criticism of capitalism: “that it perpetuates eliminable forms of human suffering.” Through this critique of capitalism, Cooperation Jackson makes a case for why this system fails to effectively meet people’s needs and why the work to create an alternative is important. This process of putting forth a critique of society in order to facilitate the envisioning of alternatives is central to the critiques put forth by Cooperation Jackson and the Black Panthers, as well as by many prefigurative movements.

An additional outcome inherent in this critique is the articulation of one’s position in relation to the forces of domination—the defining of the dominated in relation to the dominator.

In his discussion of the theories of Antonio Negri, Baruch Spinoza, and Mikhail Bakunin,

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74 Wright, Envisioning Real Utopias, 37.
Mathijs van de Sande articulates what this relationship is like between the oppressed and their oppressor, in a way that can shed light on the relationships implied in the case of the Black Panther Party and Cooperation Jackson. Van de Sande describes how Negri utilizes Spinoza’s distinction between potestas, the constituted power, and potentia, the power of the multitude. Negri sees potentia as a creative power that is constantly and necessarily suppressed by potestas, the power “from above.” While potentia is the “power against Power,” potestas is the subordination of this potential. Van de Sande positions Bakunin’s theories as offering a definition of this struggle between those with oppressive power and the multitudes without constituted power as a battle between the elites and the proletariat, the positive and negative. The positive force is that which wants to preserve the status quo, and the negative is the creative, destructive force seeking to destroy the current reality and build a new one. While many people have argued that this conflict can eventually be resolved through finding a middle ground, van de Sande believes that Bakunin’s theories complicate that, instead positioning the positive and negative as mutually exclusive, and necessitating the ultimate destruction of one in order for the other to survive.

Cooperation Jackson’s focus on cooperatives firmly falls into what Erik Olin Wright calls interstitial strategies for change, and at first seems to not fit in Bakunin’s framework of creative destruction. An interstitial strategy for change is one in which the new forms of social empowerment and concrete alternatives are built within the current society, bypassing the current forces of domination yet working within their territory. This strategy, and cooperatives in particular, might seem to contradict Bakunin’s idea of creative destruction because the emphasis is on the construction of an alternative instead of the active confrontation with capitalism.

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76 Ibid.
However, Ajamu Nangwaya, a radical theorist and ally of Cooperation Jackson, argues that the rise of cooperatives is bad news for capitalism, “as it should be.” He points out that the relationship between the domination of capitalism and the slow rise of cooperatives in the niches of society is one in which there are small pockets of liberated practices within oppressive conditions. However, he believes that Cooperation Jackson cannot work in the liberated pockets of society forever. Nangwaya argues that people must be ready to actively undermine the oppressive conditions, because coexistence is not possible—something must predominate, and something must cease to exist. This reflects Bakunin’s theory of the positive (in this case capitalism) and the negative (in this case Cooperation Jackson and the cooperative movement) as ultimately mutually exclusive, and the idea that one must destroy the other.

In these terms, Cooperation Jackson resembles the Black Panther Party. Despite the Black Panthers’ initial uses of direct action to pursue the destruction of manifestations of the systems of power, (such as police controls and confrontations with authorities), these proved unsustainable and were often met with intense responses from the local and national authorities. The development of community programs, which generated alternatives to state services and built solidarity in communities, reflect a different sort of creative destruction, similar to that of Cooperation Jackson’s cooperatives. The interstitial strategy of creating alternatives without yet destroying the existing reality was intended to eventually facilitate the destruction of the existing reality, and to support the community in the meantime. This is why these strategies were called “survival pending revolution”—they were meant to help the community survive within the existing conditions, while building the foundation for a more direct confrontation with existing forms of domination in the future.

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77 Nangwaya, “Reclaiming Democracy and Rebuilding Politics at Cooperation Jackson.”

78 It is important to note that Bakunin was an anarchist, so while Cooperation Jackson reflects his theory of the positive and the negative, their work with the city government in no way reflects Bakunin’s politics.
This willingness to build alternatives to the current system while still existing within this system is an important practice of prefigurative politics and also a central strategy for both the Black Panther Party and Cooperation Jackson. Now that we have established what it is that these movements are attempting to change about the current reality, I will explore the ways in which they attempt to generate that change. In order to combat capitalism and the state, the Black Panthers and Cooperation Jackson build alternative institutions and developed independent sources of power, and their relationship to the existing system in each program or strategy varies tremendously. At times, they attempt to harness some of the power of existing forms of domination through working within them. Other times, they attempt to work entirely separately from these sources of power in order to oppose them and avoid cooptation. Each of these strategies has its successes and shortcomings. Ultimately, the theory of directly opposing and working against the system must be adapted, and an examination of how the Black Panther Party and Cooperation Jackson work with and against these sources of domination is an important next step.
Chapter 2: Existing Institutions

In the previous chapter, I explored what type of change the Black Panther Party and Cooperation Jackson strive to generate through the lens of prefigurative theory. This involved examining their critiques of society, and how they positioned their objectives in response to this critique. The central antagonistic forces of capitalism and the state emerged. These fit under Uri Gordon’s umbrella term of domination; the Black Panthers also focused on imperialism and Cooperation Jackson added gentrification and hegemony. In seeking to change society to liberate themselves from these forms of domination, Cooperation Jackson and the Black Panther Party pursue self-determination.

The central strategy that these groups use is community programs that amount to the construction of alternative institutions and systems controlled by the people and embodying the values that they are pursuing for society as a whole. In addition to providing an alternative in the present, these programs are also intended to weaken existing society and contribute to a wider transformation in the long term. Despite the radical intentions of these programs, both the Black Panthers and Cooperation Jackson are unable to fully work outside of and oppose the existing system while constructing these alternatives—it is in many cases more practical to work with the existing system to some extent in order to access its resources and strategies that better enable these groups to navigate the existing order. Additionally, both groups engage with the system in one particularly significant way—participating in elections, running for local office. This chapter will seek to explore the ways in which the Black Panthers and Cooperation Jackson adapted their theoretical commitment to opposing the system in order to strengthen their concrete strategies and programs; the idea that in order to most effectively transform society in the long term one must be willing to work with the system in the short term.
Theory

This debate over the relationship between transformative projects and the systems that they strive to transform is particularly vivid in the field of prefigurative politics, where scholars debate what the relationship should be between prefigurative organizations and existing institutions. Paul Raekstad argues that despite the biting criticism of the state inherent in many interpretations of prefigurative politics, there is no necessary contradiction between prefigurative politics and working with the state. While he sees the state as an example of “the means of coercion,” against which prefigurative politics is positioned, he believes that “effectively dealing with the[se] means of coercion” does not necessarily contradict the wider aims of a prefigurative movement or organization. The general trend among prefigurative theorists tends to go against Raekstad’s argument, however, as most scholars I encountered argued that prefigurative politics was defined by a refusal to work with existing institutions.

Mathijs Van de Sande identifies a trend of definitive noncompliance among prefigurative movements; a refusal to “speak the language of the regimes or institutions they protested.” Carlie Trott’s distinction between politics of demand and politics of creation highlights this reluctance to “speak the language of the regimes or institutions” that prefigurative movements are working against by making demands of those in power, instead focusing on direct action outside of traditional institutions. This practice of not asking, but doing, typically manifests in a “disregard for political organizations with rigid and centralized power structures that (re)produce power imbalances.” Van de Sande speculates that this reluctance to make demands, this disregard for existing institutions, is derived from people’s belief that these existing institutions

are themselves the problem. If this is the case, then politics of demand, which links the existing institutions to the solution, is rendered ineffective.

An examination of the theories presented by Erik Olin Wright offers a way to reconcile prefigurative theorists’ emphasis on the adamant refusal to work with existing institutions and the argument that working with existing institutions need not contradict prefigurative politics. Wright suggests that movements seeking to transform society can use symbiotic strategies that engage with existing institutions in an attempt to transform these institutions themselves.\(^{82}\) Instead of merely making demands of the state, for example, one could participate in the state apparatus in order to pursue reforms that would alter the distribution of power and give the people more power. Wright cites the example of participatory budgeting, which gives a community the authority to determine how the state allocates its money.\(^{83}\) Participatory budgeting still uses the established state offices and funds, yet redistributes the control over these institutional apparatuses to the citizens of the state.

Interstitial strategies offer a different relationship with the existing system, as they represent a distinct disengagement with current institutions while constructing alternatives. While these alternatives are built within the existing fabric of the current society, these programs operate with an alternative set of values and resources, and are completely disconnected from and independent of the existing institutions.\(^{84}\) The Black Panther Party and Cooperation Jackson both struggle to strike a balance between symbiotic and interstitial strategies. While symbiotic strategies could be seen as less radical, particularly if one agrees with van de Sande’s idea that existing institutions are themselves the problem, interstitial strategies often lack resources and channels to become powerful enough to have a significant impact. Furthermore, while interstitial

\[^{82}\text{Wright, Envisioning Real Utopias.}\]
\[^{83}\text{Ibid.}\]
\[^{84}\text{Ibid.}\]
strategies reflect a commitment to means-end equivalence, as the alternative society is pursued through the direct construction of that society, the use of symbiotic strategies for that same goal signifies a departure from the theory of means-end equivalence, as the end of a completely different system are pursued through the means of working with the existing system. Ultimately, groups like the Black Panther Party and Cooperation Jackson must weigh their theoretical commitment to opposing the existing systems of domination with their practical goals of building sustainable and effective alternatives.

The Black Panther Party

Throughout the rise and fall of the Black Panther Party, the organization had varying relationships with existing institutions. At times, Party members placed themselves and their programs in direct confrontation with institutions and systems of power, but this ultimately had only varying levels of success. As the Party declined, they engaged more with electoral politics and traditional sources of funding for their community programs, and this, too, had mixed results. Ultimately, the Party was most successful when it blended these two strategies, attempting to co-opt existing institutions for their own uses, without being co-opted themselves or lapsing into reformist practices.

With many of their community programs, the Black Panther Party initially adamantly refused to work with existing institutions or to run their programs like businesses. Alondra Nelson captures this when she argues that:

the goal of most of the Black Panther Party programs was to be free in both senses of the word—administered at no cost to the beneficiaries, and also, because all of the support was donated by people as opposed to through official government grants, they could be free in the sense that they were autonomous.  

The Panthers believed that their refusal to demand or accept support from the government or any

\[85\] Alondra Nelson, Body and Soul, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2011), 105.
other existing institutions that could offer grants gave them a greater degree of freedom to run
their programs as they wished. The Panthers were accountable to themselves, and to the
community, and in order to actualize this, they refused to work with any systems of power that
could exert influence over them. One theory of why the Panthers refused to take a more
traditional, business-oriented approach to their community programs was that the programs were
merely a means to an end. The programs were mainly intended to expand support for the
Panthers—through a wider political appeal and a more stable membership base, and thus specific
strategies for how to run the programs were unimportant.\textsuperscript{86} Additionally, the specific Party ban
on receiving government funding reflected the Panthers’ general anti-government stance.
Ultimately, the Black Panthers’ refusal to work with existing powers was a reflection of both
their intentional strategy and a their lack of concern for the long-term sustainability of the
community programs.

An examination of a few specific Black Panther Party programs and their operative
strategies will offer a greater understanding of the Panthers’ more alternative strategy and its
purposes. Because they did not use any official grants or government aid, the Black Panthers
were able to skip the tedious and problematic process of keeping meticulous records for their
programs. This created a stark contrast between their practices and those of the federal aid
programs, which required recipients to demonstrate need, a process that generated a lot of
discomfort. In addition to functioning as a critique of federal programs, this strategy saved the
Panthers a great deal of time, which was important in light of the demanding and time-
consuming nature of running these programs. Thus, the absence of book-keeping represents both
an adherence to Party theory and a strategic practice of efficiency.

The discussion of where Black Panthers got their funding is more complex than merely the

absence of state funding. In certain situations, the Party refused to accept support from capitalist enterprises, yet in other situations, they strategically pursued funding from sources linked to capitalism in order to combat capitalism’s harmful impact on local communities. The *Black Panther* newspaper is one example of the Party's disengagement with capitalism, while their relationship to celebrities and local businesses reflects a strategic engagement with capitalism. *The Black Panther* was one of the most successful, wide-reaching, and generally influential of the Party's programs. It was circulated all over the country and even internationally, and served as a crucial platform for the Party to communicate with supporters. The Party refused, however, to accept any profits in the form of paid advertisements. All of the funding for the paper came from sales, subscriptions, and donations. This decision reflects the Party’s anti-capitalist and anti-commercial stance, which is articulated most clearly by Emory Douglas. In his criticism of commercial art, he calls it “a method of persuasion, mind control; it oppresses Black people. If we look around our community, what do we see? We see billboards, with advertising, that tell us what to buy, how to buy. And we go out and buy—our own oppression.”

He sees commercial advertisements as a sinister tool of capitalism to brainwash Black people into supporting an oppressive system. The Panthers’ refusal to put paid advertisements in their revolutionary newspaper can thus be explained as a strategic, ideological decision to refuse to support capitalism in the form of commercial advertisements.

*The Black Panther* newspaper is a unique program in that the paper generated a sizable profit that was used to continue printing the paper. Most programs simply distributed goods and services to the people at no cost, meaning that they did not generate any resources for their own sustenance. This meant that the Party largely relied on donations from supporters, which Mary

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Potorti (2017) sees as a paradox of sorts:

The need to provision community goods in a capitalist society created a paradox at the heart of Panther service programs, for the Party relied on the goodwill of individuals, groups, organizations, and foundations—beneficiaries of capitalism—for contributions to keep their socialistic programs going. The guiding mission of the survival programs—to provide goods and services free of cost—necessitated incessant fundraising efforts.88

In order to fund other programs that did not generate their own profits, the Panthers employed a wide variety of strategies, most of which did, somewhat ironically, (yet also rather inevitably) rely on capital from people who benefited greatly from capitalism. (In cases such as the intentional soliciting of donations from local businesses for the breakfast programs, this support from capitalist sources had strategic and theoretical significance; in most other cases support from sources linked to capitalism was merely an unavoidable coincidence as most every source of capital is linked to capitalism to some degree.)

As the group became increasingly prominent through rather sensational coverage in the mass media, a variety of celebrities became intrigued and sympathetic to the Panthers’ cause. The Black Panthers hosted a series of fundraising events in the homes of some of these societal elites. At these fundraisers, a handful of celebrities—often actors, artists, and musicians—would perform, and all of the proceeds would go to the Black Panther Party.89 These events created quite the spectacle, because a group of armed Panthers in typical all-black leather attire would often be in stoic attendance.90 These events also embodied the paradox that Potorti describes, as many of the individuals in attendance earned the wealth they were sharing with the Black Panthers through capitalist media, and were often featured in the very “commercial art” which Emory Douglas decries as a tool of the oppressor.

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90 Ibid.
For their free food programs, the Black Panthers sought donations from another inherently capitalist source—community businesses. However, the Party’s framing of this process as a rightful reclamation of community wealth situates it as theoretically significant, not a paradox. To support their free food programs, the Panthers regularly solicited food and monetary donations from local businesses. They initially focused on Black businesses, but subsequently expanded to all businesses supported by the Black community. The Panthers were very assertive in their interactions with these businesses, actively demanding that they support the programs. They saw the capitalist business owners as essentially thieves, collecting the wealth of poor Black Americans without redistributing it to the community. Instances in which a business refused to donate frequently resulted in a stalemate of sorts, with the Black Panthers blacklisting the business and organizing boycotts and protests until the owners relented. Ultimately, the Party believed it was the least that these capitalist enterprises could do—support a program feeding the very people who supported—and therefore fed—the business owners themselves.

While the Panthers’ refusal to engage in typical business practices contributed significantly to their ability to generate change, this strategy had its limits, and attracted criticism both from Party members at the time and from scholars in retrospect. Because they were focused on sharing the wealth, redistributing it from capitalist sources and supporters to the Black community, the Party did not focus on the economics of a sustainable production side. Alkebulan suggests that if the Party had been willing to engage with business models, their programs could have enjoyed great success. For example, the Panthers could have structured some of their programs either as cooperatives, where people pay what they can, or as charities that received grants from the

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91 Potorti, “‘Feeding the Revolution’: The Black Panther Party, Hunger, and Community Survival.”
92 Ibid.
government. Rank-and-file members expressed similar sentiments, regretting that the Party never explored more traditional methods to strengthen the structure of their community programs.

Jimmy Slater, a Cleveland Panther, expresses agreement with Alkebulan’s view when he says:

I still don’t think capitalism works, [but] you need capital to function in a capitalistic system. Upon reflection, this was one of the areas that I thought we were too liberal about during the black movement of the sixties. We wanted to give everything away and we were simply too liberal in our view. We know now that was an error. We had certain things the Black Panther Party had built and established; however, because of our hate for capitalism, we didn’t sustain anything. We had buildings and homes. We owned property. We should have learned how to control the economy and to manage those things. Instead we wanted to fight against capitalism and now we know that we should have established an economic base. In order to keep the movement going you’ve got to have capital.94

Slater laments the fact that the Panthers were “too liberal in [their] view.” The view he was talking about was the Panthers’ prioritization of distribution at the expense of capitalism and economic strategies in general. He points out that the Panthers, at their peak, had great power and tremendous resources. The failure to “sustain anything” reflects the Party’s prioritization of an ideological opposition to capitalism and the economy at the expense of the practical success of their programs, which, while not entirely revolutionary, did have a tremendous positive impact on local communities.

Despite their general rejection of institutions, there are multiple instances in which the Party worked with existing systems of power, which shed light on the dynamic, constantly evolving nature of the Black Panther Party’s theory and practice. In his defense of the Party’s occasional willingness to comply with existing institutions, Huey Newton articulates many of the same ideas as did the critics of the Party’s noncompliance with capitalism in the previous paragraph. He says that “you can’t very well drop out of the system without dropping out of the universe…you contradict the system while you are in it until it’s transformed into a new

94 Ibid, 44.
system. “Newton’s words describe a patient and practical theory to which the Party adhered with varying levels of success. He acknowledged that entirely disassociating with the existing system was essentially impossible, and instead suggests a willingness to contradict it from inside until it gradually transforms into a new system. As for the Panthers’ relationship to existing institutions, this theory would imply that they should be willing to work within these institutions: changing them from the inside instead of attempting to exist completely separately from them.

This willingness to contradict the system through working within it embodies Erik Olin Wright’s definition of symbiotic strategies. The trust that this gradual transformation will eventually lead to a new system poses a stark contrast with a ruptural process of change, whereby the societal transformation occurs through a specific moment of rupture when the old system is destroyed and the new system is introduced. The willingness to work within the system, for example using resources and strategies connected with capitalism while building an alternative to capitalism, constitutes the melding of symbiotic and interstitial strategies. While the programs are intended to function as direct alternatives to existing institutions even as they are built within the existing system, these programs also make use of elements of the existing system.

The Black Panthers’ willingness to use symbiotic strategies and work within the system was mainly a way to make their community programs more sustainable. The Party eventually dropped their ban on government funding in the early 1970s, and subsequently incorporated some of its central community programs as nonprofits, such as the Oakland Intercommunal Youth Institute and the Seniors Against a Fearful Environment. This allowed these groups to

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96 Wright, *Envisioning Real Utopias*. 
accept tax-deductible donations and to receive government benefits. Norma (Armour) Mutume, a former Black Panther Minister of Finance, describes the Party’s evolving willingness to comply more with mainstream business practices:

When I was minister of finance, I really gained some skills: how to write the checks and build the general ledger… At the same time, we were applying for grants and talking with public officials to find out what kinds of programs we could get involved in…we needed to come up with another mechanism to bring in money, and that meant becoming more mainstream so we could start getting grants.

Mtume’s comments illustrate a stark divergence from the practices of the founding Black Panthers who refused to bookkeep for their breakfast programs and proposed strict noncompliance with capitalism. The Party recognized that their current strategies were not bringing in enough money, and they were ultimately willing to become more “mainstream” in order to tap into other sources of funding. While at times the Black Panthers seemed to prioritize wider Party goals and ideology over the immediate success of their survival programs, in this case it was clear that they were willing to talk with public officials and apply for government grants in order to ensure the success of their community programs.

The Oakland Community School was a particular example of the Party’s willingness to prioritize the funding needs of a community program over strict adherence to anti-capitalist and anti-state ideology, and the resulting successes enjoyed by the school were telling. The Oakland Community School (also known as the Intercommunal Youth Institute) started off small, and gradually grew in success and prominence. In addition to receiving private grants and fundraising in the community, the school eventually became eligible for state education funds.

The school even received an award from the California governor (and friend of the Panthers—a

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97 Newton, *War Against the Panthers: A Study of Repression in America*, 35.
phenomenon to be elaborated on later in this chapter) Jerry Brown and the California state legislature for “having set the highest level of elementary education in the state.”

The high levels of success coupled with the degree to which the school was integrated with traditional systems and institutions also contributed to the school’s ultimate fate. While the Black Panthers officially shut down in 1980, the Oakland Community School went on to graduate its final class in 1982, and had left a lasting legacy in Oakland. The fact that the school was able to slightly outlive the organization that started it, and the fact that it enjoyed such great success as measured by the state, the Black Panthers who worked there, and the radical parents and children who were involved, demonstrates that the Black Panthers’ willingness to work within the current system to some extent did not inhibit their ability to make a significant positive impact on the community. On the contrary, this meant that the school was able to succeed by many different measures of success, and could adapt in the dynamic and challenging environment of Oakland in the 1970s and early ’80s.

With the Black Panther health programs, which were called the People’s Free Medical Clinics, the Panthers actively walked the line between drawing support from and working outside of the existing medical system. The medical clinics provided free basic healthcare, ranging from the diagnosis of illnesses, mending wounds, testing for sickle cell anemia, to dispensing free medical supplies, making house calls, and providing advocacy for patients who were struggling to navigate the existing medical system. The programs received critical support from medical professionals who had access to the medical materials and practical knowledge that the clinics badly needed. In addition to helping patients, volunteer doctors provided training for Panthers

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100 Ibid, 35.
101 Ibid.
102 Nelson, Body and Soul.
and community members who volunteered at the clinic. This skills-sharing was critical for empowering the community and demystifying and decommodifying medical services, and many volunteers made use of these skills in their communities for years after the fall of the Party.

The People’s Free Medical Clinics facilitated a positive relationship between Black communities that had historically been disenfranchised—both neglected and abused—by mainstream medicine, and health professionals who were willing to help the communities yet were not previously seen as trustworthy. The health programs created a new structure within the existing healthcare system, and selectively worked with existing parts of the system, finding a way to make these resources accessible to the communities that needed them. Thus, Alkebulan’s critique of the Party for being unwilling to work within the current system is valid not because the Party’s failure to do so represented a blatant oversight, but because when they did work within the system their projects were so successful that it seems obvious that it would have been wise for them to do so more often.

The Black Panthers’ participation in the Oakland political sphere in the 1970s reflects another aspect of the Party’s relationship to existing institutions. Their efforts to win political office were an attempt to seize control of that institution. If the Panthers had practiced the politics of demand in relation to Oakland politics, this would have led to them merely lobbying politicians in office to meet community needs. The Panthers, however, practiced the politics of creation and direct action when they attempted to win the mayoral office and obtain a seat on the city council in order to directly shape Oakland institutionalized politics. The Panthers’ determination to seize control of institutions is reflected in official Party rhetoric that states, “only the residents of a community have a true understanding of its needs and desires…no

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103 Ibid.
104 Ibid.
105 Ibid, 87.
people is free unless it can determine its own destiny.‖\textsuperscript{106} In order to realize this self-determination, the Panthers demanded that the “control of the institutions of the Black community must be turned over to that community.”\textsuperscript{107}

In 1972, in response to dwindling support, and as an attempt to centralize Party operations, the Black Panther Party shut down all of its regional chapters and called for all Party members to come work in Oakland.\textsuperscript{108} The Party devised a plan for how it could gradually take over the city, one which could eventually be implemented on wider scale across the country, in this way preserving the Party's wider revolutionary nature despite their immediate focus on merely consolidating power in Oakland. Bobby Seale, the Chairman of the Party, would run for Oakland Mayor, and Elaine Brown, the Minister of Information, would run for City Councilwoman.\textsuperscript{109} While members of the Party had run for public office before, this attempt was taken more seriously, because this time the main goal was to win, not merely to educate and raise funds.\textsuperscript{110}

This run for office was motivated by the long-standing frustration with the political candidates and Oakland's long history of excluding Black people from local government.\textsuperscript{111} The Black Panthers complained that “many issues are put forward by aspirants to political office. But the problems candidates identify are often not the most important ones to the community, and the solutions they propose are many times vague and superficial.”\textsuperscript{112} The Panthers were frustrated that the candidates did not seem to truly value the needs of the community, and that the discussion of solutions was merely “superficial,” not geared toward actually generating change.

\textsuperscript{106} Foner, ed., \textit{The Black Panthers Speak}, 178.
\textsuperscript{107} Ibid, 178.
\textsuperscript{108} Bloom and Martin, \textit{Black Against Empire}, 380.
\textsuperscript{109} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{111} Ibid, 197.
\textsuperscript{112} Hilliard and Dr. Huey P. Newton Foundation, eds., \textit{The Black Panther Party: Service to the People Programs}, 81.
As their solution to the problems with existing candidates, the Black Panthers put forth a “People’s Candidate.” They defined this as someone who “ha[s] the true interests of the community at heart. His or her candidacy must be motivated by the people’s concrete desires and needs, and by the program, a People’s Program, the result of the community’s actual ideas and suggestions. The people’s platform must promise to improve the people’s quality of life but at the same time be realistic, practical, and realizable.”\(^\text{113}\) The People’s Program with its practical nature was in direct contrast to the “vague and superficial” solutions put forth by typical candidates. The Panthers’ use of the word “people’s” to distinguish their candidate from other candidates implied that most candidates did not belong to or reflect the people. This modifier thus served as both a promotion of the Panthers’ candidate and a commentary on other candidates.

Instead of disengaging with the electoral campaigns in their current, ineffective form, the Black Panthers instead put forth their own candidate in an attempt to transform the institution of government through engaging with it. If they won the election, this transformation would extend beyond the governmental institution and allow them to begin transforming Oakland in ways that were possible only from the top-down. Elaine Brown described this strategy thus:

> We’re talking about liberating the territory of Oakland…the Oakland Police Department has got all the guns. There’s a practical problem, when you talk about liberating territory, or establishing a provisional revolutionary government…We have to start talking about how to win, not how to get killed. We can begin by talking about voting in the city of Oakland, the Oakland elections, in April 1973, for Bobby Seale, and for Elaine Brown.\(^\text{114}\)

The Black Panthers recognized that there was a tremendous power imbalance between the city of Oakland and the Police Department, and the Panthers themselves. The Panthers understood that they would not be able to liberate Oakland by force—instead, they would have to work through

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\(^{113}\) Ibid, 81.
\(^{114}\) Bloom and Martin, *Black Against Empire*, 381.
other channels—that is, work within the existing institutions instead of directly confronting them from the outside. They saw the beginning of this process as voting in the upcoming election, thus connecting the election to the liberation of Oakland. Other, more concrete, goals of the election would be to use the power over Oakland’s trade and wealth to increase Black representation in a variety of public-service initiatives and ultimately to remedy the disappointments of Black Oakland residents.\footnote{Murch, \textit{Living for the City: Migration, Education, and the Rise of the Black Panther Party in Oakland, California}, 194.}

Regardless of whether or not Seale or Brown were to be victorious, the People’s Campaign itself had many transformative elements. These ranged from educating the people about political issues, registering them to vote, and inspiring them by demonstrating to Black voters that the new Black majorities possessed the power to transform cities in their own image through supporting the rise of candidates who represented their needs.\footnote{Ibid, 194.} In order to mobilize historically disenfranchised communities, the Panthers developed new forms of outreach and used their community programs to promote and facilitate voter registration and electoral outreach.\footnote{Ibid, 200.} The Party studied the city of Oakland to identify the barriers to black electoral participation, and devised their strategy in response to these findings.\footnote{Ibid, 205.} They divided the city into eight sections and opened an office in each one, saying of this strategy, “we must first organize the block, then the neighborhood, gradually expanding to the city.”\footnote{Ibid, 206.} In order to broaden the electorate, the Panthers devised many different events and schemes to get people to register to vote. They staged survival conferences with food and clothing giveaways. To be admitted to these events, community members had to show their voter registration cards or get registered.\footnote{Ibid, 200.} This strategy

\begin{footnotes}
\item[116] Ibid, 194.
\item[117] Ibid, 200.
\item[118] Ibid, 205.
\item[119] Ibid, 206.
\item[120] Ibid, 200.
\end{footnotes}
bridged the connection between the Panthers’ longstanding survival programs and their developing electoral agenda.

The Party also reached out to the community through media and at the street level, discussing all of the ways that the current government had been failing them, and explaining how Bobby Seale and Elaine Brown would seek to change that. They campaigned everywhere—at public events, in people’s homes, and on public transit. The campaign teams, which consisted of college students, community volunteers, and Party members, worked incredibly hard.\(^\text{121}\) They held dances, barbecues, rallies, marches, and stump speeches and gave away shoes, free meals, and posters.\(^\text{122}\) Even at the polling places, they offered social services in the form of food and clothing giveaways and healthcare support.\(^\text{123}\)

Despite losing both elections, the Black Panthers were able to register over 35,000 voters in under a year, and to mobilize an even greater number to participate in the People’s Campaign.\(^\text{124}\) These were campaign victories that had an impact on the Black community for years afterward, particularly as the Party shifted in a new direction under the guidance of Elaine Brown, who became Party Chairwoman in 1974. In the 1970s, under her leadership, the Party transformed from a grassroots youth movement to a more traditional urban political party.\(^\text{125}\) Brown took the idea of working within the system to a new level, which, unsurprisingly, had both its victories and its setbacks. An examination of the Black Panthers under her leadership illustrates the final phase of the Panthers’ constantly evolving relationship to existing institutions. It was under Brown's leadership that the community programs started focusing more on applying for grant money. Additionally, she supported Democrat Jerry Brown’s run for

\(^{121}\) Ibid, 204.
\(^{122}\) Ibid, 212.
\(^{123}\) Ibid, 203.
\(^{124}\) Ibid, 202.
\(^{125}\) Ibid, 228.
California governor in 1974, and helped mobilize the Black vote enough so that he was elected.\textsuperscript{126} She orchestrated the appointment of J. Anthony Kline, a Panther ally, to work in Governor Brown's administration, which afforded the governor even more contact with the Party.\textsuperscript{127} She also ran for Oakland City Council again in 1975, and developed strong connections with different Black political networks, Black businesses, and organized labor.\textsuperscript{128}

In the Black Panthers’ effort to help elect Lionel Wilson the first Black Mayor of Oakland in 1977, Elaine Brown pulled a variety of political strings behind the scenes, illustrating the strength and depth of her political power, and also the ability of the Black Panthers during this time period to generate change through such established political channels. Brown orchestrated a new development project in Oakland in the hopes that when Wilson was elected, the Panthers could ensure that a good portion of the new jobs associated with this development would go to the underemployed Black community. In order to secure this development project, she obtained Governor Brown’s approval for a $33 million project to extend a freeway in Oakland in exchange for commitment from multiple large international corporations including Wells Fargo, Clorox and Sears to develop Oakland City Center.\textsuperscript{129} Brown secured endorsements for Wilson from Governor Brown, as well as from other members of the California Democratic party with whom she had established connections through her involvement in Oakland’s Democratic political scene. The Black Panthers also continued their efforts to get more Black Oakland residents registered to vote. This hard work through a variety of institutional channels paid off. Wilson won the 1977 race and became the first Black mayor of Oakland.\textsuperscript{130}

Thus, while the Black Panthers never formally seized control of Oakland or transformed it

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\textsuperscript{126} Bloom and Martin, \textit{Black Against Empire}, 383. \\
\textsuperscript{127} Ibid, 384. \\
\textsuperscript{128} Ibid, 385. \\
\textsuperscript{129} Ibid, 384. \\
\textsuperscript{130} Ibid, 385. \\
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into a “liberated territory,” they were able to have a significant influence over the established political system by working within it. However, this strategy, too, attracted criticism, as scholars probed the limits to this strategy for generating significant change. Bloom and Martin (2013) are ultimately critical of this phase of Elaine Brown’s career, stating that there were significant limitations on what the Party could achieve under her leadership, because they were working primarily through conventional political methods and grassroots strategies for change. They argue that:

…conventional political savvy and community service alone have never been able to mobilize a serious radical challenge to status quo arrangements of power. For insurgent social movements to expand and proliferate, they must offer activists a set of insurgent practices that disrupt established social relations in ways that are difficult to repress.\textsuperscript{131}

They base their critique on the idea that Brown’s strategies were unable to truly interrupt the distribution of power or existing hegemony. This is true. Instead of changing the institutions and systems of power in Oakland, the Panthers mainly attempted to assert influence over the existing powers. This exemplified what many prefigurative theorists identify as the failure to alter the distribution of power itself, and thus a failure to truly position the people as self-determining. However, it is important to recall that academics and former Panthers alike have lamented the Panthers’ refusal to work within the system at other times. It appears that despite the power behind a firm ideological stance, neither working entirely outside of the system nor working within the system were completely effective for the Panthers or went without criticism.

I believe that a dynamic combination of the two strategies offered a more effective solution for the Black Panther Party. The Oakland Community School is the most significant example of what that looked like, and it was arguably one of the single-most successful of the Panthers' programs. The school began as a radical alternative to traditional schools, offering free tuition,

\textsuperscript{131} Ibid, 385.
free meals, and an education extending beyond traditional subjects to include African American history, revolutionary theory, and Panther ideology. However, over time, the Panthers were willing to work within the system in order to sustain this radical educational alternative, incorporating the school in order to receive government grants and other funds. Abandoning some degree of its ideologically radical nature in order to obtain the traditional support necessary to continue to pursue its significant work, allowed the school to enjoy more substantial successes. It seems that limited incorporation is part of the answer to what a prefigurative self-determination movement’s relationship should be to the existing system and its institutions.

This lesson in limited incorporation seems to have been noted by Cooperation Jackson, and I will now examine how they wrestle with this same issue of working within, outside of, and against existing institutions.

**Cooperation Jackson**

When Cooperation Jackson calls its members “students of history” and says that they have studied national liberation and socialist movements of the past, it seems that their pursuit of self-determination and the transformation of society is likely informed by the Black Panthers’ experiences.\(^{132}\) Specifically, their approach demonstrates their awareness of the idea that existing entirely outside of the system and refusing to work with existing institutions is neither possible nor productive. Kali Akuno articulates this realization—in relation to the state in particular—when he says that, “we have learned through our own experiences and our extensive study of the experiences of others that we cannot afford to ignore the power of the state.”\(^{133}\) The ideas that Cooperation Jackson put forth suggest that they have learned from experiences similar to those

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of the Black Panthers. They further illustrate the importance of acknowledging the powers of the state and link this to capitalism when they state that, “at present, the state is a fact of life that the agents of anti-capitalist and post-capitalist struggle are compelled to contend with and address in their strategic pursuit of liberation.” Ajamu Nangwaya suggests a similar view of capitalism when he says that as long as we live in capitalism, we cannot live truly free of capitalism even while we’re developing alternative forms.

Cooperation Jackson lays a clear foundation for their strategies and their relationship with existing institutions. They recognize that working entirely outside of the system is impossible, yet because their ultimate goals are radical and transformative, some sort of middle ground must be established. This section will be an examination of Cooperation Jackson’s relationship to existing institutions, and, in particular, how they attempt to reconcile the need to work with and within existing systems of power to some extent, even while pursuing radical anti-state and anti-capitalist transformative goals.

Cooperation Jackson recognizes that they can pursue transformation through the state, and this is a central component of their strategies for change. They emphasize the potential to influence the state through civilian institutions in order to improve the existing system. This influence comes in the form of “legal justification, incentives, resource allocation, and monitoring and enforcement from operatives of the state and civil society, meaning civilian institutions that monitor the conduct and performance of government.” Attempting to improve the state is important because Cooperation Jackson does need its support in the short term in order to pursue their wider, long-term goals, which they admit to by saying that, “none of the

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135 Nangwaya, “Reclaiming Democracy and Rebuilding Politics at Cooperation Jackson.”
system(s) change processes we aim to make can or will be sustained in a non-revolutionary
contest without structural support and reinforcement from the state."\textsuperscript{137} Thus, if they want to
achieve their more radical, long-term transformative goals, working with the state and attempting
to alter it in concrete, achievable ways to facilitate a better relationship is essential.

A central element of Cooperation Jackson’s critical engagement with existing systems is
their emphasis on “non-reformist reforms,” which offer a way to reconcile the group’s radical
agenda with the necessary strategic component of working with the existing system. They see
these as a way to “bridge [their] short-term engagements for social justice in everyday life to
[their] longer terms vision for an anti-capitalist world.”\textsuperscript{138} The goal of these reforms is to pursue
changes that will improve people’s daily lives, without strengthening the existing system, “but
instead [by] subvert[ing] its logic, upend[ing] its social relations, and dilut[ing] its strength.
These reforms seek to create new logics, new relations, and new imperatives that create a new
equilibrium and balance of forces to weaken capitalism and enable the development of an anti-
capitalist alternative.”\textsuperscript{139} While Akuno is specifically discussing capitalism, this concept of
reforms that gradually construct alternatives and weaken the existing system is significant. It
allows an organization to operate in ways that are perhaps less radical in the short term, yet far
more sustainable, without strengthening the existing system.

The idea of non-reformist reforms aligns closely with the Black Panthers’ idea of “survival
pending revolution,” as both provide an answer to critics who fear that any reforms merely tide
communities over without posing any real threat to the existing system. However, the idea of
survival \textit{pending} revolution implies that there will be an eventual revolution—a rupture from the
current society when the time is right. Non-reformist reforms are instead more symbiotic, as

\textsuperscript{137} Ibid, 17.
\textsuperscript{138} Ibid, 17.
\textsuperscript{139} Ibid, 17.
these reforms themselves will gradually weaken the current system and build an alternative.

A central tool of non-reformist reforms is what Cooperation Jackson calls “reinforcing institutions.”¹⁴⁰ These institutions are independent of existing institutions, but not entirely—they do work within the existing system to some extent. These reinforcing institutions exist in many forms, and the central ones that Cooperation Jackson has established are cooperatives and people’s assemblies. Cooperatives are seen as a radical alternative to capitalism, because they prioritize worker and consumer welfare over profit, and are run in an entirely democratic fashion. However, they are also operated as businesses, and until a wider cooperative network has been developed, they have numerous business-oriented interactions with capitalist businesses. People’s assemblies are a way to facilitate political participation and encouraging a community to determine what its own needs are, and will be analyzed in greater detail later in this chapter.

In addition to developing their own reinforcing institutions, Cooperation Jackson also works with existing institutions, the most notable example of this being their work with the Jackson city government. This is motivated in part by their frustration with the current political climate, which is articulated by Kamau Franklin, a writer and activist who analyzed the Jackson political climate. He has argued that many moderate Black politicians continue the accommodationist legacy of activists in the Civil Rights era, and are too easily strong-armed by authorities. He discusses the difference between “politics of self-determination versus the politics of careerism and moderation,” arguing that most Black politicians in the South are more focused on their long-term political careers, which leads them to be more moderate Democrats instead of meeting the needs of the Black working class.¹⁴¹ It is this phenomenon that explains the minimal

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, 11.
progress in Jackson over the years despite the consistent history of a “liberal” city government. Chokwe Lumumba and his son Chokwe Antar Lumumba, however, have been an exception to this troubling trend. Unlike most mayors of Jackson, the late Chokwe Lumumba focused on urban revival—uplifting the city for everyone, not merely pursuing the moderate goal of reducing the city’s liabilities and building up its assets.\textsuperscript{142} This alternative approach to leadership has been important for driving progress in Jackson and transforming the role of the mayoral office.

Despite the obvious significance of having a radical ally in office, Cooperation Jackson goes to great lengths to downplay the full significance of electoral politics in their wider agenda. Chokwe Lumumba, Sr. laments the problematic trend “for movement groups and protest groups and other activists who are trying to get revolutionary change to put their movement on hold and to rely exclusively on the mayor’s office to get things done for the people.”\textsuperscript{143} This trend reflects an excessive reliance on working within the existing system once radical organizations obtain access to the governmental platform. Akuno and Nangwaya speculate about why this occurs, suggesting that it:

reflected a deep, manufactured bias in bourgeois societies that orients the public toward paying more attention and giving more credence to the illusions of alleged “democratic governance” rather than the real contests for political and social power reflected in the motion of capital and the perpetuation of capitalist social relationships which the sham of democratic governance enables in these societies.\textsuperscript{144}

Thus, this trend seems to reflect the hegemonic power possessed by the existing institution, in the form of the “deep, manufactured bias in bourgeois societies.” People overlook capitalism and

\textsuperscript{142} Flanders, “After Death of Radical Mayor, Mississippi’s Capital Wrestles with his Economic Vision,” 208.
capitalist social relations, as well as the potential power of the community outside of established systems of power. (While not addressed in this quote, community-based sources of power are referenced throughout the discussion of the significance of electoral politics.)

In addition to not being the only important source of power, electoral power also does not always have the capacity to generate the type of change that radical organizations are pursuing in the first place. Sometimes, participating in elections merely legitimizes the current power structure; thus, Cooperation Jackson recommends assessing electoral campaigns “on a case-by-case basis according to the potential for that office to either create more democratic space or advance policies that test the limits of structural change.” In certain scenarios, participation in an election can be a powerful way of working with the existing system to bring about changes that are only possible through such an established institutional platform. In other scenarios with different conditions, however, there might not exist the potential to make significant changes, so participating in an election is fruitless, and may only reinforce the legitimacy of the existing system without successfully altering it.

Even outside the good or bad conditions for electoral participation, there exist inherent limits to the success of electoral involvement due to the structure of the government itself. Chokwe Lumumba argued that while the mayoral office has certain structural forms of control, it lacks true, significant power beyond these technical aspects. The power of the mayoral government is particularly limited in Jackson because there exists a Republican supermajority at the Mississippi state level. In response to their recognition of these different degrees of

146 Sunkara, “Free the Land: An Interview with Choke Lumumba,” 129.
147 Akuno, “An Evening with Jackson Rising.”
control, Cooperation Jackson draws a distinction between their practice of “engaging state power” and the less-achievable practice of “wielding state power.” This is because “the capitalist and imperialist nature of the American constitutional framework limits the agency of any individual office-holder” and, they argue, winning an election is very different from wielding a deeper level of power. Cooperation Jackson recognizes the limits of their ability to generate change through existing state institutions, because the government is so tied to capitalism, imperialism, and hegemony that any one office-holder can only do so much to deviate from this powerful current.

Despite recognizing the limitations of occupying electoral office, Cooperation Jackson does not discount the significance of this opportunity. As has been discussed earlier in this chapter, they see engaging with this institution as somewhat unavoidable. Their recognition of the limitations of electoral victory instead informs their goals during their time in office. Akuno explains that the goal is not to develop a reliance on getting allies of the movement elected to office indefinitely, but instead to make society truly democratic, arguing that, “if there’s a fully engaged citizenry, then the need for a city council and a mayor starts to become fairly moot.” This philosophy closely aligns with the goal of non-reformist reforms. Cooperation Jackson uses the opportunity of having a radical mayor in office to gradually develop alternative sources of political and social power, so that eventually this alternative system of power will overtake the current institutions. Thus, their engagement with the city’s governmental institutions is directly intended to alter the distribution of power, as opposed to reinforcing the existing order.

In order to fully pursue this radical goal of working to alter the distribution of power while
in office, Cooperation Jackson emphasizes the importance of independent political vehicles disconnected from the two “monopoly parties” that dominate American politics.\textsuperscript{151} Cooperation Jackson is making an effort to build up the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party as an independent political party. While both Chokwe Lumumba and Chokwe Antar Lumumba ran for mayor through the Jackson Democratic primaries, both have managed to make a distinct departure from mainstream, monopoly-party politics with their ideologies.

Both Lumumba Senior and Junior have been invested in expanding the power of the Jackson citizenry through developing a cooperative economy and vehicles for participatory democracy. The late Chokwe Lumumba acknowledged his unique position and power as mayor when he said that, “mayors typically don’t do the things we’re trying to do…on the other hand, revolutionaries don’t typically find themselves as mayor.”\textsuperscript{152} The rhetoric of Chokwe Antar Lumumba illustrates his similarly revolutionary stance, when he promised crowds that, “when I become mayor, you become mayor.”\textsuperscript{153} This promise was more than an enticing ideology, however—Cooperation Jackson has been hard at work developing reinforcing institutions of participatory democracy to work with the Lumumba administration. An examination of participatory budgeting and people’s assemblies, two key examples of participatory democracy that are being developed in Jackson, will constitute the next and final part of the discussion of Cooperation Jackson’s relationship to existing institutions.

Participatory budgeting allows the citizens themselves to control their government’s budget in order to pursue a more just allocation of resources. While this radically alters the established state budget system, participatory budgeting still works with the state and its resource. The

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\textsuperscript{151} Akuno, “People’s Assembly Overview: The Jackson People’s Assembly Model,” 75-76.
\textsuperscript{152} Flanders, “After Death of Radical Mayor, Mississippi’s Capital Wrestles with his Economic Vision,” 208.
\textsuperscript{153} Gilbert, “The Socialist Experiment: A New-Society Vision in Jackson, Mississippi,” 269.
people are able to alter the existing institution so it better serves their needs, but they are still working with the state budget itself. This could be seen as a form of reconciling politics of demand and politics of creation. The citizenry obtains control of the state budget as opposed to merely demanding that the people in charge meet their budgeting needs, yet they still work within the established budgetary framework.

A people’s assembly is an autonomous political force that can develop its own political stance and apply pressure to the government and hold it accountable. Cooperation Jackson defines people’s assemblies as mass gatherings of people to make central decisions about their community. While there are many different kinds of people’s assemblies, the Jackson assembly usually operates as a constituent assembly. The assembly is typically composed only of representatives, as most of the community lacks the time to meet on a consistent basis. During what they define as “times of crisis,” however, the assemblies become mass assemblies, including as much of the community as possible. (While the Jackson People’s Assembly does not meet with an established regularity, they strive meet frequently enough that a mass assembly would not be sustainable.) This structure is intended to meet the ideological commitment to participatory democracy in a way that is feasible for a working-class community.

Through their people’s assemblies, the community essentially creates the conditions in which government candidates comparable to the Black Panthers’ People’s Candidates will emerge. Kamau Franklin outlines the process through which people’s assemblies achieve this:

Gathering the community into an organized bloc that is designed to set the agenda for what candidates that are elected should be fighting for as opposed to just hearing what candidates are saying they are going to do, we only support people who run on what the community has determined is in their self interest.

154 Akuno, “An Evening with Jackson Rising.”
155 Akuno, “People’s Assembly Overview: The Jackson People’s Assembly Model.”
156 Ibid.
The community is thus able to set their own agenda, determining for themselves what candidates should be doing in office. This ability to set the agenda further gives people the power to choose which candidates to support, because they are aware of what their community’s needs are, and, thus, they can choose to support only the candidates prepared to meet those needs. In addition to setting the agenda for candidates for office, people’s assemblies also give people the agency to organize and make decisions for themselves, building power in the form of an entity entirely outside of the existing political system. This underscores Cooperation Jackson’s awareness that they will not control the mayoral office forever, and thus their commitment to developing forms of power that can exist independently.

Cooperation Jackson’s dual intention of working inside and outside of the existing system through developing both “People’s Candidates” for political office and people’s assemblies to work outside of the existing political sphere reflects their emphasis on building dual power. They define dual power as “building autonomous power outside of the realm of the state” while also engaging to some extent with electoral politics and radical voting blocs.\(^{158}\) This specifically manifests as autonomous people’s assemblies and intentional engagement with the state through autonomous political parties. The people’s assemblies are such a clear example of dual power because while they are a developing source of power outside of the government, they also are able to exert pressure on the existing government. The community is both becoming more independent and wielding more influence over existing institutions.

Despite Cooperation Jackson’s very intentional relationship with existing institutions, reflected in their focus on independent political parties, people’s assemblies, and dual power, there is always an inherent risk in working with such powerful societal forces, and Cooperation

\(^{158}\) Akuno, “People’s Assembly Overview: The Jackson People’s Assembly Model,” 75.
Jackson continues to emphasize the importance of avoiding cooptation. In his analysis of Cooperation Jackson, Ajamu Baraka argues that there is a “complex and delicate line that must be walked when participating in bourgeois processes from a radical base with the intention of exploiting these spaces to alter power relations.”\(^\text{159}\) Cooperation Jackson recognizes the necessity to engage with care, when they explain that, “to engage is not to be deluded about the discriminatory and hierarchical nature of the system, nor deny its proven ability to contain and absorb resistance, or to reduce radicals to status quo managers.”\(^\text{160}\) In stating this, Akuno seems clearly to be aware of what critics have said about the Black Panthers’ engagement with electoral politics, and what prefigurative theorists say about the importance of working outside of existing systems of power.

For Akuno, engagement is instead a recognition that they “have to fight on every arena to create democratic space to allow oppressed and exploited people the freedom and autonomy to ultimately empower themselves.”\(^\text{161}\) The solution, then, is not disengagement, nor merely engagement, but instead constant critical engagement, a dynamic willingness to constantly adapt strategies in order to avoid being coopted by the existing systems of power and institutions.

**Conclusion**

Both the Black Panther Party and Cooperation Jackson’s relationship with existing institutions exposes a tension between their means and their ends and between their theory and their practice. This tension could be resolved by a critical engagement with the existing system. Both groups at times seem to succeed at critically engaging; examples include the Black Panthers’ work with the Liberation Schools and Cooperation Jackson’s commitment to walking


\(^{160}\) Akuno, “People’s Assembly Overview: The Jackson People’s Assembly Model,” 84.

\(^{161}\) Ibid, 84.
on the “complex and delicate line…when participating in bourgeois processes from a radical base with the intention of exploiting these spaces to alter power relations.”162 The two groups have similar ends—a commitment to transforming society, liberating the community from existing sources of domination, and building alternatives. Despite the fact that these ends position the existing system as something to be opposed, ignored, or some mixture of the two, in practice both groups found that they had to adapt their means and work with the existing institutions to some extent in order for their concrete practices to have a chance at succeeding in the current world. Cooperation Jackson and the Black Panthers found that they needed the resources and structures linked to capitalism and the state, and that it was at times worth abandoning their ideological commitment to opposing these sources of domination in order to access their assets.

The Black Panther Party’s constantly evolving relationship with existing institutions reflected both a dynamic adaptability, encapsulated in their emphasis on dialectical materialism, and their refusal to be dogmatic with any given theory. This constantly evolving relationship was also arguably a challenge for the Panthers, as they frequently seemed to err in both extremes, neither of which was truly effective. Sometimes they adamantly refused to comply with existing institutions and system of power, yet at other times they worked with existing power systems to the point that they attracted criticism for being excessively top-down and compliant with the existing systems without effectively altering the distribution of power, instead just trying to obtain more of that power for themselves. (Granted, the Black Panthers did not win when they ran for political office; this critical analysis is based on their work with elected officials themselves.) As previously discussed, the programs in which the Black Panther Party employed strategies that had some degree of strategic compliance with existing powers, in order to make

162 Baraka, “Home Isn’t Always Where the Hatred Is: There is Hope in Mississippi,” 285.
their alternative systems most effective, were arguably some of the most successful of their initiatives.

This balance can also be observed in Cooperation Jackson’s emphasis on dual power. They do not disengage from the current system and its institutions, but make a point of engaging on their own terms in order to facilitate the development of dual power. This is illustrated with particular clarity in the example of their use of the mayoral office as a way to build people-power that can thrive independently of existing institutions. Cooperation Jackson's patience in slowly growing this power of self-determination and in working with existing institutions in the meantime reflects the Panthers’ rhetoric and occasionally their practices. However, it is clear that when Cooperation Jackson calls its members “students of history” and says that they have “done [their] best to try and assimilate the hard lessons from the 19th and 20th century national liberation and socialist movements,” they have likely learned that the tendency of organizations such as the Black Panthers to either boldly rebel against or fully work within the existing system is less effective. The best way to balance these strategies may be critical, occasional engagement with the system. The Cooperation Jackson experiment is in its early years, however, and only time will determine if their experiment with dual power and participatory democracy will succeed.

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Chapter 3: Mobilization, Self-Help, and the Vanguard

In the previous chapter, I explored the relationship between the Black Panther Party and Cooperation Jackson and the existing system and institutions. I found that these organizations were not able to strictly adhere to their theoretical commitment to opposing existing institutions while building alternatives, and that they instead had to adapt their strategy, sometimes building alternatives within or using some of the resources of these structures and sometimes pursuing more reform-oriented tactics. In this chapter, I will explore another way in which means-end equivalence theory must be adapted in the practice of the Black Panther Party and Cooperation Jackson. I will focus on the contradictory role that these groups have as leading a self-help movement pursuing self-determination. I specifically examine the ways in which the Black Panthers and Cooperation Jackson must reconcile their relationship with the community predicated on of self-help and community self-determination with their own role as a leadership organization.

I focus on three central aspects of the relationship between these groups and the community: mobilization, self-help, and the role of the vanguard. The mobilization of the masses by self-help organizations is mainly directed toward initiatives in which the people, through their own actions, support themselves. This directly creates the reality, on a community-based scale, that they are pursuing for society as a whole, thus prefiguring the self-determining society that drives their movement. The nature of this process is complicated, however, by the role of the organization itself. The emphasis on means-end equivalency and the people taking charge of their own revolution appears incompatible with the existence of a vanguard organization or any form of leadership, and yet, both organizations as well as prefigurative theorists recognize the importance of some sort of leadership for catalyzing a threat to the hegemonic status quo.
Wrestling with the theory and practice of the relationship between the pursuit of self-determination and the role of leadership—different conceptions of what it “should” be as well as an examination of the relationship between the Black Panther Party and Cooperation Jackson and the wider communities they are attempting to empower—will shed light on how these organizations attempt to generate change, and what their role is in their own strategies.

**Mobilization**

The Black Panthers’ and Cooperation Jackson’s strategies are based on the process whereby communities manufacture their own liberation, which necessitates the mobilization of the people for those initiatives. In order to mobilize the people, the Black Panthers and Cooperation Jackson recognize that they must build trust and establish frameworks that position the people to meet their own needs, which they do through a variety of programs that both serve the community and enable the people to serve themselves. The central goal of building this relationship is to enable the groups to act as a catalyzing force, channeling people’s energy and developing their capacities so that they can generate their own change.

**Theory**

There is a definitive agreement amongst prefigurative theorists that this process of mobilization is both essential, and also not particularly difficult, as the masses are a dormant force, ready to be awakened. Mathijs van de Sande articulates this when he argues that exploited people have a large potential to be mobilized—he supports this through an interpretation of Mikhail Bakunin’s theory of revolution, and the idea that the oppressed have the least to lose from the destruction of the current reality and the most to gain from the construction of something new.\(^{164}\)

\[^{164}\] van de Sande, “Fighting with Tools: Prefiguration and Radical Politics in the Twenty-First Century.”
Prefigurative groups employ a variety of strategies in order to tap into this mobilization potential. Uri Gordon argues that people are more likely to join a movement that they believe has the potential to enrich their lives in a direct, immediate way, as opposed to joining a mass movement with controlling leaders.\(^\text{165}\) (The Black Panther Party at times embodied both of these aspects; a discussion of its contradictory nature appears later in this chapter.) This process of facilitated self-liberation—seeking change on behalf of oneself—is, Gordon thinks, key to a people-driven movement.\(^\text{166}\) In order for people to join these organizations and become mobilized, the organizations need to be able to communicate the nature of their practices. Carlie Trott describes this process as performative.\(^\text{167}\) She argues that prefigurative organizations must act as an example to outsiders, the first step in the process of drawing in the community so that the community itself becomes the driving force for change.

**The Black Panthers**

The initial action that made the people aware of the Black Panthers was their armed police patrols, yet this direct confrontation proved unsustainable, and the relatively unsustainable nature of this project attracted only limited participation from the community. The Party’s shift to meeting the daily needs of the community through survival programs was significant because this positioned the Party as a crucial support mechanism for the community, directly improving people’s lives and giving them a role in their own uplift. Huey Newton recognized the centrality of the community programs for connecting the Party to the people:

> The original vision of the Party was to develop a lifeline to the people, by serving their needs and defending them against their oppressors…. We knew that this strategy would raise the consciousness of the people and give us their support… For a time the Black Panther Part lost its vision and defected from the community… The only reason the Party is still in existence at this time is because of the Ten Point Program…our survival program.

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\(^\text{165}\) Gordon, *Anarchy Alive!*

\(^\text{166}\) Ibid.

\(^\text{167}\) Trott, “Constructing Alternatives: Envisioning a Critical Psychology of Prefigurative Politics,” 274.
Our programs would be meaningless and insignificant if they were not community programs.\textsuperscript{168}

Newton defines the central goal of the Party as meeting the people’s direct needs, which in turn secures their support. Newton recognizes that there are aspects of the Party outside of these community programs, yet by arguing that “the only reason the Party is still in existence” is because of the survival program, he positions the Party’s role of serving the people as a critical foundation. Bloom and Martin quote a Philadelphia Panther articulating the extent of the Party’s commitment to serving the community: “people came with every problem imaginable, and because our sworn duty was to serve the people, we took our commitment seriously… In short, whatever our people’s problems were, they became our problems. We didn’t preach to the people, we worked with them.”\textsuperscript{169} Hazel Mack, another former Panther, explains how this commitment to the people built trust, when she says that, “the programs were a means of getting trust from the community in the belief that we were there to serve them. Because of that practice, we got that participation.”\textsuperscript{170} This directly aligns with Gordon’s idea that people are more likely to get involved with a movement that improves the conditions of the community in the here and now. Because people recognized that the Panthers would take on their problems, and would work with the people, facilitating their own uplift, they trusted the Party, thus leading to their participation.

The Panthers saw the building of trust as more than just a way to facilitate people’s participation in the programs—they saw themselves as a mobilizing force with the goal of awakening the masses. Newton argues that, “the main function of the party is to awaken the people and to teach them the strategic method of resisting the power structure, which is

\textsuperscript{169} Bloom and Martin, \textit{Black Against Empire}, 180.
\textsuperscript{170} Shih, Williams, and Joseph, \textit{The Black Panthers: Portraits from an Unfinished Revolution}, 158.
prepared… to totally annihilate the back community.”¹⁷¹ By describing the Party’s relationship to the people as one including “awaken[ing],” this implies that the people have a great potential to become mobilized, reflecting van de Sande’s perception of the masses as a dormant force. Despite their position as a leadership force, they treat this awakening process with care, attempting to reconcile it with their continued goal of reflecting the people’s needs. Jeffrey Ogbar argues that the Panthers “wanted to walk with the people toward revolution, even if this meant that its members must take the first step.”¹⁷² Fred Hampton articulated this when he discusses the role of the vanguard: “So what should we do if we’re the vanguard? What is it right to do? Is it right for the leadership of that struggle to go faster than the followers of that struggle can go? NO…. We say that just as fast as the people can possibly go, that’s just as fast as we can take it.”¹⁷³ Hampton’s statement and Ogbar’s analysis both reflect the Panthers’ objective of truly embodying the needs of the masses, even while mobilizing them, and helping them discover how they can work with the vanguard party to meet those needs.

Cooperation Jackson

Cooperation Jackson also emphasizes its role as a catalyzing force, mobilizing and directing the existing yet untapped potential of the masses (specifically, the working class population of Jackson). Akuno argues that, “the creativity and innovation will come from the genius within our own community. We will stimulate and catalyze this genius by our practice and methodology of participatory and transparent governance.”¹⁷⁴ He recognizes that the project of mobilizing this potential necessitates leadership, yet that this leadership must specifically be

¹⁷¹ Foner, ed., The Black Panthers Speak, 42.
¹⁷³ Foner, ed., The Black Panthers Speak, 142.
“participatory and transparent.” His discussion of the “genius” that already exists in the
community points to the high potential for mobilization discussed by the Panthers and van de
Sande, and the emphasis on participation reflects Gordon’s identification of people’s craving for
direct action.

Despite the channel of city governance playing a central role in Cooperation Jackson’s
work, the organization’s theory and practice speaks of a similar desire to walk beside the people,
as did the Black Panthers. During the late Chokwe Lumumba’s mayoral term, he intended to
focus on engaging the city in its own uplift, something that Laura Flanders describes as
“development together,” and that Bhaskar Sunkara describes as “govern[ing] to inspire
movements from below.” Sunkara further frames Cooperation Jackson’s work as, “less about
spearheading a revolution from above than creating a climate of radical thought and
experimentation that could take on dynamics of its own.” The creation of this “climate of
radical thought and experimentation” could be seen as what Ogbar identifies as the necessary
“first step” that the Panthers had to take. The potential for “dynamics of its own” reflects the idea
that the genius of the sleeping masses needs only be awakened and guided in order for them to
pursue their own collective liberation and self-determination.

Cooperation Jackson also recognizes that in order to successfully mobilize the people, they
need to be able to offer them a way to meet their current needs. Akuno and Ajamu Nangwaya
echo Gordon’s and the Panthers’ emphasis on programs that serve the people in their daily life,
as well as transforming the wider reality, when they argue that, “the people are likely to make
greater sacrifices and commitments to social change projects that respond to their here-and-now
daily needs, but which also offer a vision of how to solve the major issues confronting society

175 Flanders, “After Death of Radical Mayor, Mississippi’s Capital Wrestles with his Economic Vision,” 216, and Sunkara, “Free the Land: An Interview with Choke Lumumba,” 125.
176 Sunkara, “Free the Land: An Interview with Choke Lumumba,” 125.
that limit their freedom and constrain their aspirations.” Nangwaya articulates Cooperation Jackson’s intention for this theory to inform their practice when he says that, “…we need to organize around the material needs of the people. The very projects and programs that we organize with the people should be informed by transformative values; a prefiguring of what will be obtained in the emancipated societies of tomorrow.” The necessity “to organize around the material needs of the people” aligns with the Black Panthers’ determination to act as a lifeline for the people, to truly serve their community. The recognition that these programs prefigure “the emancipated societies of tomorrow” demonstrates the idea that mobilizing people to meet their own needs is more than just a way of securing support for the organizations—it is the core process through which these organizations generate change.

**Self-help**

The Black Panthers and Cooperation Jackson use self-help strategies in all of their programs. The programs build people’s capacity to serve themselves and be self-determining so that stewardship of the programs could ultimately be entirely in the hands of the community. The programs also serve a dual goal of directly improving people’s condition in the present, building the alternative society on a micro-scale that the organizations are pursuing for society as a whole, and gradually organizing and empowering the community to generate the eventual wider-scale change. Ultimately, the most significant attribute of these practices for my purposes is that they directly prefigure the alternative society on a micro-scale by facilitating the process whereby people meet their own needs and develop their own power.

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Theory

An analysis of how the strategies of the Black Panthers and Cooperation Jackson prefigure the change they are pursuing necessitates an exploration of some of the basic strategies of prefigurative politics. Prefigurative politics has many attributes and nuances, and the notion of means-end equivalence and the building of a new society within the shell of the old, are two central elements that are also contained in the self-help strategies of the Black Panther Party and Cooperation Jackson. Carl Boggs defines a prefigurative organization as “an organization or movement that itself embodies ‘those forms of social relations, decision-making, culture, and human experience that are [its] ultimate goal.’”¹⁷⁹ Mathijs van de Sande offers a similar conception of the embodiment of the ultimate goals in the current workings a prefigurative movement when he says that, “the direct experimental actualization of a social and political alternative should be considered as an inherent part of activist practice itself.”¹⁸⁰ This can be summed up as the idea of establishing new bases of power while simultaneously combatting the existing ones, building a new society within the shell of the old.

Uri Gordon creates a similar conception of prefigurative movements when he positions collectively run grassroots projects as the seeds of the future within the present. Luke Yates defines this as the process of the ends being equivalent to the means, as opposed to more traditional movements where the ends merely justify the means. Carlie Trott describes this building of alternatives as the politics of direct action—straightforward, alternative routes to social change aimed at generating this change here and now. She distinguishes this from the more traditional politics of demand, whereby people lobby those in power for the changes they

¹⁷⁹ Boggs, “Marxism, Prefigurative Communism, and the Problem of Workers' Control,” 100.
¹⁸⁰ van de Sande, “Fighting with Tools: Prefiguration and Radical Politics in the Twenty-First Century,” 188.
want instead of generating that change themselves.\textsuperscript{181} It is arguably this practice of direct action in the present that attracted people to both the Black Panther Party and Cooperation Jackson, because they believed that they would have the opportunity to meet their own immediate needs while working for more overarching goals.

The fact that the central focus of programs was to meet people’s daily needs in the present sometimes led people to criticize the Panthers and Cooperation Jackson as more reformist than revolutionary.\textsuperscript{182} However, both organizations, as well as many theorists, offer arguments for why these programs also have the potential to create wider and more long-lasting change. Yates suggests that the purpose of these alternative projects is to develop the capabilities of the communities. The idea is that by participating in the small-scale creation of the reality the movement is pursuing, people develop skills that will enable them to support this reality on a wider scale.\textsuperscript{183} In his discussion of emancipatory social science, Erik Olin Wright positions interstitial strategies as the “building [of] alternative institutions and [the] deliberat[e] fostering [of] new forms of social relations that embody emancipatory ideals and that are created primarily through direct action of one sort or another rather than the state.”\textsuperscript{184} He also emphasizes that these initiatives “differ from the dominant structures of power and inequality.”\textsuperscript{185} Thus, while these programs are designed to improve people’s daily lives, their “embod[iment] of emancipatory ideals” and their contrast to “dominant structures of power and inequality” reflect the fact that they are also a direct form of resistance to existing forms of domination.

\textsuperscript{181} Trott, “Constructing Alternatives: Envisioning a Critical Psychology of Prefigurative Politics.”
\textsuperscript{183} Yates, “Rethinking Prefiguration: Alternatives, Micropolitics and Goals in Social Movements.”
\textsuperscript{184} Wright, \textit{Envisioning Real Utopias}, 324.
\textsuperscript{185} Ibid, 324.
The Black Panther Party

The Black Panthers’ survival programs were constructed as a direct resistance to existing forms of domination, and as a way to mobilize the people for the Party’s wider revolutionary goals, in addition to merely their basic goal of serving the people. Elaine Brown, a central Party figure, articulates the deeper goals of the people’s programs when she says that the Free Breakfast for Schoolchildren “was more of an organizing tool than a social service program. Our goal was not feeding breakfast but creating the conditions for revolution.”  

Certainly, the Party was very focused on feeding children so that they could succeed in school, but Brown recognized that the children were not the only beneficiaries of the programs—Panther Party members and parents of kids, as well as many other community members, were drawn to contribute to the program, and were thus exposed to their own potential to create the changes they wished to see in the world.

Brown further articulates the organizing potential of the Party’s programs when she says that, “our strategy was to inspire and organize the people to fight for their human rights, including the right to have food. If the people could force schools to serve free breakfasts, maybe they would demand that the establishment provide free dinners, housing, health care, and so forth, toward fundamental, revolutionary change.”  

Brown’s emphasis on people’s initial success in the breakfast program as empowering them to extend the purview of their work and pursue more widespread change reflects the capacity-building potential of alternative projects described by Yates. This capacity-building has to do with more than just empowerment, however: people directly developed practical skills through their work with the Party.

This practical skill-development was nowhere clearer than in the Panthers’ medical clinics,

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186 Shih, Williams, and Joseph, The Black Panthers: Portraits from an Unfinished Revolution, 98.
187 Ibid, 98.
called the People’s Free Medical Centers. The Panthers depended on support from volunteers, particularly medical professionals who could skill-share and acquire material medical donations.\textsuperscript{188} Doctors taught the Panthers and community volunteers at the clinics many basic medical skills, which they were able to use on each other and in the community for years to come, long past the official end of the Black Panther Party.\textsuperscript{189}

The central aspect of the health centers and other community programs that facilitated this skill-development for the ultimate goal of self-determination was the fact that volunteers were in positions of responsibility and leadership. The breakfast program and the liberation schools were staffed by Panther members, parents of children in the programs, and young community members, particularly college students. Newton emphasized the self-help nature of these survival programs when he said that, “the purpose of these programs is to enable people to meet their daily needs by developing positive institutions within their communities and to organize the communities politically around these programs.”\textsuperscript{190} Because these institutions were developed within the communities, they were built and supported by the people who needed them, thus developing the skills of participants and ensuring that the institutions would meet the specific needs of that community.

Community support was more than just strategic, however—the programs actively depended on this support. David Hilliard articulates this in his description of the free-clothing-for-people program, when he says that, “people will want to become involved in this program because most of them lack adequate clothing. They should see clearly how the program relates to their survival. It is important to effectively organize the community because their help is greatly

\textsuperscript{188} Nelson, \textit{Body and Soul}.
\textsuperscript{189} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{190} Newton, \textit{War Against the Panthers: A Study of Repression in America}, 30.
needed in all aspects of the program.”^191 Hilliard’s description of the program illustrates that, while the survival programs relied on the support and involvement of the people, thus rendering them self-help programs, it was ultimately the Party that was in the driver’s seat and that organized the community.

The fact that the Party was organizing the community in order for them to help themselves through these programs contradicts the principle of means-ends equivalency to some extent, as the ultimate goal was for communities to be completely independent of any higher power. The Black Panthers recognized this, and frequently discussed their intention of passing control of the programs over to the people once they had learned enough to be in charge. In an official statement in The Black Panther newspaper, the Panthers attempted to recruit more community members to support their free breakfast program, saying, “We want to turn the program over to the community but without your efforts and support we cannot. We have had a few mothers come down to the breakfast in the mornings to cook and serve, but not hardly enough. This is the people’s program, for the people, and we want the people to assist in it.”^192 The ultimate goal is clear: to pass the program over to the community. The Panthers seemed to have a clear standard in mind for what was “enough” community involvement so that they could hand the program over, and in the mean time, they saw it as their duty as to serve the people and gradually develop their capacity to help themselves.

In his analysis of the Panther programs, Paul Alkebulan describes this dual process of serving the people until they can be self-determining, while building community participation and developing people’s capacities, when he says that the objective of the community programs was to “engag[e] members in productive and disciplined activities while serving as a model for

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^191 Hilliard and Dr. Huey P. Newton Foundation, eds., The Black Panther Party: Service to the People Programs, 67.
community development and education for the party’s constituency.”

This process, and capacity-building in general, is closely related to the process of consciousness raising, which will be discussed in depth in Chapter Four. Developing community growth by facilitating peoples’ participation in their own uplift was the main path that the Panthers took toward self-determination, and this manifested in a myriad of specific programs that melded the Panthers’ goals of serving the people and building trust with their devotion to delivering to the people the most important resource of all—the capacity to help themselves.

**Cooperation Jackson**

Cooperation Jackson also emphasized the importance of capacity-building for the ultimate goal of self-determination. Ajamu Nangwaya emphasizes the importance of capacity building in civil society, articulating the need to build the capacities of people to have control over their institutions and communities. He points out the importance of “…developing the capacity of the oppressed to act independently of the structures of domination.” Cooperation Jackson recognizes that self-determination is an ambitious goal, particularly considering that the current reality we live in is so far removed from self-determination—the oppressed masses are highly subjected to the structures of domination. Thus, in order to pursue this ultimate goal, people’s skills must be developed—they do not yet possess the ability to serve themselves and exist outside the powers that be, yet through education and direct participation in programs designed to implement the changes being pursued, they will gain the ability to become revolutionary figures themselves.

In order to pursue this goal through concrete programs, Cooperation Jackson focuses on

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194 Nangwaya, “Seek Ye First the Worker Self-management Kingdom: Toward the Solidarity Economy in Jackson, MS,” 118.
several specific initiatives that revolve around obtaining the means of production, solidarity, and the decommodification of certain goods and services that they see as human rights. A central goal of Cooperation Jackson is to “place the ownership and control over the primary means of production directly in the hands of the Black working class of Jackson.”\(^{195}\) In order to empower the community to be self-determining, Cooperation Jackson recognizes that they need concrete resources, a central one being the means of production, so that they can meet their own needs instead of having to depend on outside forces. In this project, they see Cooperation Jackson as “a grassroots initiative working to build democratic people’s power from the bottom-up and for[m] mutual bonds” with other similar organizations.\(^ {196}\) Akuno’s emphasis on “grassroots” and “people’s power from the bottom-up” reflects the idea that Cooperation Jackson intends to pursue their ultimate goal of self-determination, in a community-driven way—literally building from the bottom-up.

Cooperation Jackson sees collective ownership as a concrete part of this self-determination, and they pursue it through a cooperative solidarity economy, which Akuno and Nangwaya describe as, “collective ownership of the means of production and the emancipation of the working class.”\(^ {197}\) The most concrete manifestation of these goals is worker cooperatives, which give all of the power and ownership to the workers themselves, and prioritize laborers’ and communities’ “self-determined human needs and social bonding” over profits.\(^ {198}\) Cooperation Jackson has wide-ranging plans for their cooperatives: they intend to build a cooperative economy that can sustain itself outside of the capitalist economy, and they hope to expand


\(^{196}\) Ibid, 37.


\(^{198}\) Nangwaya, “Seek Ye First the Worker Self-management Kingdom: Toward the Solidarity Economy in Jackson, MS,” 115.
outside of Jackson, throughout Mississippi, the South, and the nation.

There are a few core areas that the group is focusing on initially, and these areas are those that they see as most imperative for self-determination and human rights: technological democracy, people’s assemblies, housing, and food sovereignty. Technological democracy and people’s assemblies are key tools for capacity-building. Cooperation Jackson cites vast inequality in the accessibility of recent technological developments, particularly what they see as the third and fourth waves—the internet and digital fabrication. In order for people to obtain the means of production, they need the technology that will allow them to create what they need. Cooperation Jackson is currently focusing on raising money to buy digital fabrication tools such as 3-D printers so they can start generating the commodities that their community desperately needs. Their recognition of the power of cooperative technology reflects van de Sande’s argument that cooperation and the spreading of technology make it harder for empire to control everything. When the Jackson working class obtains their own means of production, they will no longer be at the mercy of the capitalists.

Cooperation Jackson also seeks to develop the Jackson community’s own means of producing political power through people’s assemblies. They see this institution based on mass participation outside of mainstream political power as a tool for engaging communities in self-determination and self-governance. A people’s assembly gives a voice to lower income residents, promotes mass engagement, and develops the leadership potential of people from the community. People’s assemblies reflect the values of capacity-building and means-end equivalence, as it is through participating in such a program that the community members

199 Akuno, “Build and Fight: The Program and Strategy of Cooperation Jackson.”
develop the skills to perpetuate such practices without the support of a leadership organization.

Cooperation Jackson’s emphasis on cooperative housing and food programs serves the dual purpose of attempting to decommodify what they see as human rights, in a way that develops the community’s ability to serve themselves. With regard to housing, Cooperation Jackson is pursuing the idea of a community land trust. When the community purchases some of its land together, with the intention of keeping it for the community instead of hoping to develop it for profit, this takes the land out of the capitalist housing market, which treats land and housing as opportunities to make money, driving the process of gentrification and pricing many people out of what Cooperation Jackson sees as the human right to have a roof over one’s head. Within these community land trusts, Cooperation Jackson hopes to build cooperative living initiatives that recalibrate people’s lifestyles in order for them to live in better union with the environment. They recognize that when people live together, the pursuit of sustainable initiatives such as recycling, composting, and communal resources are much more attainable, and that these ideals are being embodied in the direct action of community members—a clear example of means-end equivalence. People are also able to embody the value of self-help when they work together on projects such as sustainable living and the decommodification of community land.

A community living project that has been working particularly well for Cooperation Jackson so far is their Freedom Farms—a program designed to pursue food sovereignty in Jackson. Kali Akuno says that West Jackson is a food desert. He points out that, “residents of the community typically have to travel two to three miles to access quality produce, fruits, and

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201 Akuno, “An Evening with Jackson Rising.”
meats.”

Akuno defines food sovereignty, on the other hand, as “the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agricultural systems. It puts the aspirations and needs of those who produce, distribute and consume food at the heart of food systems and policies rather than the demands of markets and corporations.”

The values linked with food sovereignty reflect the general values linked to cooperatives, and it makes sense, therefore, that Cooperation Jackson pursues food sovereignty through cooperative farms located on community land, and eventually through a cooperative cafe and grocer. The community-based structure of growing and distributing food embodies the eventual goal of self-determination and an escape from the food desert and the capitalism that oppress the community in the present. Cooperation Jackson pursues self-determination through projects based on self-help and capacity-building that facilitate community members’ meeting their own needs in the present, and directly building the reality they are pursuing for the future.

While both Cooperation Jackson and the Black Panther Party have the ultimate goal of self-determination and pursue this through self-help initiatives designed to build people’s ability to serve themselves, the organizations do have an important role to play. They mobilize the people and facilitate this development, offering theories and practices to direct people’s existing energy to productive channels. While the Black Panthers’ and Cooperation Jackson’s work is important and effective, there exists a contradiction between their theory of self-determination and self-help, and their practical role as the catalyzing leadership force for this initiative. How can an organization directly pursue the construction of a self-determining reality for the people, while also occupying a leadership position? (Or, in the case of the Black Panther Party, being the

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204 Ibid, 28.
vanguard of the revolution.) The following section will seek to explore the advantages and disadvantages of this complex position (occupied by both organizations), through an analysis of the theory of the role of the vanguard in prefigurative politics, as well as both organizations’ theories and practices.

**Vanguard**

This discussion of the vanguard will open with an overview of the theory of the role of the vanguard, and prefigurative critiques. I then examine Cooperation Jackson’s relationship with the Jackson community and their perception of their role as a leadership organization. Cooperation Jackson is committed to a people-led movement, and a leadership that ultimately deferred to the community, yet even they have run into challenges keeping pace with the people, particularly in relation to their occupation of the Mayor’s office. The Black Panther Party also strove to keep pace with the people in theory, yet in practice they often overemphasized their role as the vanguard and did not do enough to distribute power to rank-and-file Party members and the community. This section illustrates the idea that while a leadership organization has an important role to play in a self-determination project, it is easy to stray from the theory of self-help and overemphasize the power of leadership at the expense of the community’s autonomy.

**Theory**

I begin with an exploration of the theoretical flaws with a vanguard organization through the framework of prefigurative, means-end equivalence theory. Paul Raekstad’s critique of the vanguard is a helpful foundation for an examination of a vanguard organization’s shortcomings and advantages. He argues that socialist vanguard movements often struggle to bring about their promised reality because their structures deprive participants of the power to generate genuinely
emancipatory change themselves. This power is important to Raekstad because genuinely emancipatory change should involve a redistribution of the power itself, not merely a seizure of this power by one group at the expense of another. In the case of a vanguard organization, Raekstad fears that the separation between the revolutionary process and its desired results will render the revolution unsuccessful in changing the distribution of power. The power will change hands, but will still evade the people themselves.

Carlie Trott and Luke Yates see prefigurative politics as a critique of the vanguard: an attempt to give participants the power to bring about their own revolutionary change and redistribute the power itself. Trott’s three central principles of prefigurative politics articulate her perception of it as a response to the flaws of a vanguard. These principles are the “rejection of hierarchy, disregard for political organizations with rigid and centralized power structures that (re)produce power imbalances, and a ‘commitment to democratization through local, collective structures that anticipate the future liberated society.’” Both the “rejection of hierarchy” and the disregard for “rigid and centralized power structures” directly confront the flaws of an excessively vanguardist organization, and the commitment to collective and democratic structures reflects the principles of self-determination closely linked with prefigurative politics.

While Uri Gordon agrees with the general critique of vanguardism, his solution is anarchism. Although this differs from prefigurative politics, Gordon sees it as serving many of the same purposes as the other theorists see prefigurative politics, and thus his analysis of the relationship between the vanguard and anarchism is still useful for this discussion. Gordon argues that liberation struggles are most meaningful when the people themselves are in charge,

205 Raekstad, “Revolutionary Practice and Prefigurative Politics: A Clarification and Defense.”
206 Ibid.
and when they organize in a decentralized manner without structures or specific leaders. \(^{208}\)

Gordon goes a step further than the other theorists presented in this discussion, as he acknowledges the weighty challenge in sustaining these ideals. He fears that patterns of hierarchy and exploitation may always re-emerge, even in societies that were originally built to avoid them. \(^{209}\) Thus he argues that his solution, anarchism, must be dynamic, always ready to adapt to the present challenges, because any solution that once embodied the principles of self-determination is prone, over time, to devolve back into systems of hierarchy and exploitation. \(^{210}\)

Despite the acknowledgment that excessive reliance on leadership might hinder the core goals of a movement predicated on self-determination and restructuring the distribution of power, it is undeniable that something has to start this movement, to catalyze a shift in inertia and guide the movement in the right direction, and both the Black Panthers and Cooperation Jackson recognize the importance of their leadership as for this purpose.

**Cooperation Jackson**

Kali Akuno laments the fact that the Black working class in the United States has so often been left to fend for itself in terms of self-defense and survival, and a central goal of Cooperation Jackson is to change that. This implies that despite in many ways being a self-help organization, Cooperation Jackson also wants to provide additional support for the Black working class so that they are no longer entirely left to their own devices. Specifically, their goal is to “stimulat[e] the self-organization of the Black working class in Jackson on a mass scale.” \(^{211}\) He recognizes that this stimulation must be done with care, so that the people themselves are still in charge.

The obligation to put the people in charge, however, does not itself nullify the utility of a

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\(^{208}\) Gordon, *Anarchy Alive!*

\(^{209}\) Ibid.

\(^{210}\) Ibid.

group like Cooperation Jackson. Akuno articulates the value of a leadership organization like Cooperation Jackson when he says that:

This does not mean that individuals, organizations, and political forces shouldn’t try to intervene or influence the development of the working class and our communities. We believe that we should openly and aggressively present our best ideas, programs, strategies, tactics and plans to the working class and to our communities in open forums, discussions, town halls, assemblies, and other deliberative spaces, and debate them out in a principled democratic fashion to allow the working class and our communities to decide for themselves whether they make sense and are worth pursuing and implementing.  

Akuno recognizes that groups like Cooperation Jackson do possess ideas and strategies that could be of use to the working class, and that in order to avoid the problems associated with the vanguard, they must be intentional about their “leadership” style—focusing on the sharing of ideas, but leaving the implementation up to the people themselves.

Cooperation Jackson recognizes that the development of a movement from below is essential in order to grow and preserve the power of the community while transforming society and acting as a counter-hegemonic force. Akuno articulates this idea when he argues that:

…in the Jackson context, it is only through the mass self-organization of the working class, the construction of a new democratic culture, and the development of a movement from below to transform the social structures that shape and define our relations, particularly the state (i.e. government) that we can conceive of serving as a counter-hegemonic force with the capacity to democratically transform the economy.  

This reflects Raekstad’s emphasis on the importance of a people-led revolution as the most important way to truly bring about a self-determining society and to ensure that the power is truly redistributed to the people, not merely transferred from one group to another. Akuno recognizes that it is only the activism of the working class that has the capability to transform existing power structures, and that this thorough transformation is necessary to truly counter the hegemonic powers that be.

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212 Ibid, 8.
213 Ibid, 6-7.
Akuno further affirms this when he says that, “… leadership is necessary to help stimulate, motivate, and educate struggling people, but … leaders and leadership are no substitutes for the people themselves and for autonomous mass movement with distributed or horizontal leadership.” Akuno affirms the importance of leadership as a catalyzing and capacity-building force when he discusses its job to “stimulate, motivate, and educate.” However, he ultimately asserts that the leadership must work alongside other forms of power, and that this leadership alone is completely inadequate, and in fact depends on this mass movement of people to achieve its goals.

In many ways, the mayoral administration of the late Chokwe Lumumba successfully embodied Cooperation Jackson’s leadership aspirations. However, it it has also served as a critical learning opportunity, pushing the organization to evaluate its ability to truly keep pace with the people. The main aspect of the Lumumba administration, which enabled it to follow the values of means-ends equivalency and reflect people power, was the fact that Chokwe Lumumba was himself a member of the Jackson community and had close, personal ties to many of the most marginalized working-class citizens. Nangwaya describes the necessity of having central leaders who come from the community that they are trying to lead and serve. In order to truly embody the revolution, leaders must be, or become, one with the working class, and experience the community’s challenges. One problem facing revolutionary radical movements in general is that many radical people don’t live in working-class communities, and thus are neither able to build trust nor possess the kind of understanding necessarily to effectively lead while keeping pace with the people themselves. Ultimately, Nangwaya asserts, any decision that affects the lives of people should be shaped by the people themselves and guided by a truly understanding of their needs.

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214 Akuno, “People’s Assembly Overview: The Jackson People’s Assembly Model,” 84.
215 Nangwaya, “Reclaiming Democracy and Rebuilding Politics at Cooperation Jackson.”
Lumumba originally was elected as a city councilman representing Jackson’s Ward Two. This area had the highest concentration of Jackson’s black middle class, and also included a large housing development complex, which Akuno describes as one of the greatest concentrations of impoverishment in city, and also one of the largest voting blocs. When he arrived in Jackson, Lumumba worked as a lawyer and spent time coaching a local basketball team, building a close relationship with the Ward Two community in particular. He defended hundreds of people in court, often for free. This built many lasting relationships with young people, their parents, and extended families, and meant that the people understood him as person and also his politics. Not only were the people able to develop a much deeper understanding of Lumumba’s politics, but also his politics were arguably developed through working with the community, meaning that his administration would be able to embody the community’s needs.

In practice, it was more difficult for the Lumumba administration to embody these community-centric ideals and to keep pace with the community. The group of people that was soon to create Cooperation Jackson discovered this most acutely when Chokwe Antar Lumumba ran for mayor in 2015 following the death of Lumumba senior, and lost. Akuno explained that during their dissection of the loss, they determined that “the process of mass education and instructional struggle is more important than holding office.” During Lumumba senior's time as mayor, the leadership team put too much focus on governing, but they realized that they “have to constantly engage the base on all critical questions throughout the entire process of any

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216 Ibid.
217 Akuno, “Reclaiming Democracy and Rebuilding Politics at Cooperation Jackson.”
218 Ibid.
219 Ibid.
decision so that they understand all of the choices and their implications and can make sound collective decisions.”221 Akuno realized that the failure to “engage the base” denied the Jackson community the ability to make “collective decisions” which meant that the people themselves would no longer be in a position of power. In addition to not successfully embodying the values of the movement, this also eroded the sense of trust between the community and Lumumba, his administration, and the leaders of what would soon become Cooperation Jackson.

**The Black Panther Party**

The Black Panther Party expressed a similar understanding of their nuanced leadership as does Cooperation Jackson, yet in practice they often struggled to truly hand control over to the community. In theory, they aspired to be in conversation with the people, providing stimulus without necessarily leading. The Party's emphasis on keeping pace with the people is reflected in Fred Hampton’s discussion of the necessity for the Panthers to move at the same pace as the people, when he says that “just as fast as the people can possibly go, that’s just as fast as we can take it.”222 This idea is ultimately reflected in their incorporation of the community in the survival programs with the ultimate goal of handing the programs over to the people, and their recognition that even before the programs were entirely handed over, they depended on community involvement.

Ultimately, despite their goal of pacing with the people, the Black Panther Party still saw themselves as the vanguard party. Hampton distinguishes the role of the vanguard during the period of revolution as a catalyzing, organizing force:

The difference between the people and the vanguard is very important. You got to understand that the people follow the vanguard. You got to understand that the Black Panther Party IS the vanguard. If you are about going to the people you got to understand that the vanguard leads the people. After the social revolution, the vanguard party, through

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221 Ibid, 243.
our educational programs—and that program is overwhelming—the people are educated to the point that they can run things themselves. That’s what you call educating the people, organizing the people, arming the people and bringing them revolutionary political power. That means people’s power. That means the people’s revolution.223

During the revolution, the vanguard emphasizes education and community involvement, in an attempt to prepare the people for the outcome of the revolution—their own self-determination. However, in order for the revolution to occur, and in order for the people to build their capacity for self-determination, the theories and strategies must come from somewhere—and this is where the vanguard party is important.

Hampton explains the irreplaceable leadership role of the Panthers when he says that:

If you get yourself involved in a revolutionary struggle then you’ve got to be serious. You got to know what you’re doing. You got to already have practiced some type of theory. That’s the reason we ask people to follow the leadership of the vanguard party. Because we all theorizing and we all practicing. We make mistakes, but we’re always correcting them and we’re always getting better.224

Hampton’s articulation of the role of the vanguard’s theory in the revolution resembles Akuno’s “present[ation of their] best ideas, programs, strategies, tactics and plans to the working class and to [their] communities.”225 However, unlike Akuno, who suggests presenting these ideas to the people and letting them decide whether or not they wanted to implement them, the Panthers actively “ask[ed] people to follow the leadership of the vanguard party.” Ultimately, the Panthers in many ways failed to keep pace with the people, and could not resist accelerating ahead of them. This elicited criticism at the time from rank-and-file members, and, in retrospect from scholars, about their overemphasis on their role as the vanguard.

The Black Panthers worked through a small body within the central committee called the political bureau, consisting of Huey Newton, Bobby Seale, and David Hilliard, which made the

223 Ibid, 143.
224 Ibid, 143.
majority of the most important decisions for the Party. While discussion was allowed, this mostly amounted merely to a more thorough explanation of the decisions, and not an altering of the outcome itself.\(^\text{226}\) This democratic centralism led to frustration among local party members who felt that they were doing the bulk of the work and wanted more autonomy in their decisions.\(^\text{227}\) Paul Alkebulan suggests that the Party might have been more successful if it had leaned more on the capabilities and knowledge of these local organizers for central decisions, and ultimately acted on their goal of completely handing over the survival programs to the community.\(^\text{228}\) Donna Jean Murch agrees, arguing that the lack of democracy with the national leadership was a fatal flaw of the Party, alongside the lack of inclusivity with the hierarchy of the rank-and-file.\(^\text{229}\) She takes this idea a step further, asserting that the true power of the Black Panther Party was derived from their ability to embody the tradition of education, self-reliance, and collective struggle of the Southern diaspora, more than from their specific leadership.\(^\text{230}\) What is interesting about these proposed solutions is that they reflect the Panthers’ theory, yet not their practice. This reflects how challenging it is to actually walk beside the people, and to pursue the ideal of means-end equivalence.

**Conclusion**

The work of the Black Panther Party and Cooperation Jackson demonstrates the power of means-end equivalence when they engage the community in self-help initiatives in order to serve the community and win their trust, and in order to directly prefigure the reality that the leadership organization is ultimately pursuing by developing people’s capacity to be self-

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\(^{227}\) Ibid, 75.
\(^{228}\) Ibid, 75.
\(^{230}\) Ibid, 235.
determining. Thus, despite the fact that it contradicts the means-end equivalency of an entirely self-help, community-led project, some degree of leadership is necessary to catalyze and guide the process. However, the leadership process must be approached with great care and intention. Both the Black Panthers and Cooperation Jackson have had instances in which they tend to fall back into traditional leadership structures; this tendency is likely engrained in the hegemonic order to which we are all subjected. In response to this tendency, organizations such as the Black Panthers and Cooperation Jackson must constantly be recalibrating their approach in order to ensure that the leadership keeps pace with the people, and that the means reflect the ends to the greatest possible extent. This leads back to Uri Gordon’s recognition of the necessary fluidity of any project pursuing self-determination in order to combat the constantly reappearing symptoms of hegemonic leadership styles and oppression.

Leadership of prefigurative or self-help self-determination projects is both an essential catalyzing and guiding force, and a contradiction to the goals of the project itself. While the theory of self-determination must be adapted because a leadership organization is needed to catalyze and guide this pursuit of self-determination, the leadership organization itself must constantly be reevaluated and recalibrated in order to ensure that it does deconstruct the reality that it is working so hard to create.
Chapter 4: Consciousness-raising

In the previous chapter, I discussed the nuanced relationship between the Black Panther Party and Cooperation Jackson and the wider communities they sought to serve, lead, and, ultimately, mobilize to bring about their own societal transformation. I argued that despite the fact that a leadership organization contradicts the principles of a self-help, community-based revolution to some extent, the leadership of these groups was crucial for mobilizing and building the capacity of the community. Consciousness-raising is important for developing the revolutionary subjects who can take charge of the transformational project, and offers a framework in which the Panthers and Cooperation Jackson can practice means-end equivalence, as their programs and strategies directly contribute to the process of consciousness-raising, and this process enables the community to truly become self-determining.

Consciousness-raising constitutes two main components: it develops self-determining subjects and it facilitates the process whereby these subjects imagine what a transformed society would look like. Consciousness-raising develops these subjects by making people aware of the flaws of their current reality and the necessity of the transformative project, and it enhances their belief in their own ability to generate that change. It facilitates the imagining of an alternative reality through people’s participation in the gradual construction of this reality. Since this transformed society has never before existed, it is only through attempting to construct it that people can begin to imagine what it would look like in its finished form. In this chapter, I examine the consciousness-raising tactics of the Black Panther Party and Cooperation Jackson. There were three main tactics that the Black Panthers used: spectacle, specifically curated educational initiatives, and facilitated growth via direct participation in Panther programs. Cooperation Jackson also prioritizes the process of consciousness-raising in their theory and
practice. They pursue consciousness-raising through critical education and learning through experience, yet they place less of an emphasis on spectacle. I ground these cases in the theory of consciousness-raising, focusing mainly on prefigurative politics and the specific processes of the imagination of alternatives, learning through lived experience, and capacity-building.

**Theory**

For prefigurative theorists, transforming people’s consciousness is a crucial step toward facilitating the imagining of political alternatives. The ability to imagine alternatives is an important foundation for ultimately realizing a different reality. This process of transforming people’s consciousness is linked to making ordinary citizens into potential revolutionary subjects. (Revolution here signifies the process of transforming society, not necessarily through a specific strategy of rupture.) While there are many different ways to transform people’s consciousness, the most direct, flexible, and arguably prefigurative method is through lived experience. Paul Raekstad, Uri Gordon, Luke Yates, and Erik Olin Wright all discuss the centrality of transforming communities’ consciousness through concrete experiences. Their different specific interpretations of this process paint a vivid picture of the full potential of lived experience to also transform people into revolutionary subjects.

Paul Raekstad argues that consciousness-raising is best developed through lived experience, and that prefigurative politics, as a direct and experience-based form of politics, is crucial for building a revolutionary consciousness.231 Uri Gordon elaborates on the potential for lived experience to transform subjectivities when he says that prefigurative politics should focus on the creation of specific spaces to facilitate individuals’ self-realization through lived experience.232 Luke Yates identifies social centers as a key space for consciousness-raising,

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232 Gordon, *Anarchy Alive!*
arguing that they have the potential to engage communities in educational initiatives and
communal living projects.\textsuperscript{233} In some cases, social centers are also an important form of
spectacle, alerting the public to small-scale, radical alternatives to contemporary society.
Alternative institutions can serve a similar role, and Erik Olin Wright argues that these
institutions can be designed to transform the participants themselves as well as the audience.\textsuperscript{234}
The ability of alternative institutions to build and alter the consciousness of participants can be
linked to the process of capacity-building which has been discussed in great detail in previous
chapters. Participating in a small-scale version of an alternative reality that has never existed
before develops an individual’s capacity to sustain the pieces of this reality and gradually build
up these micro-politics until they can slowly become macro-politics.

In addition to building people’s abilities for sustaining these alternatives, participating in
these alternatives also builds a person’s literal conscience—their capacity to imagine a better
future. Raekstad elucidates this idea when he argues that the easiest way for a community to
discern what kind of utopian future they are pursuing is to try to build it in the present and then
live in it.\textsuperscript{235} Wright describes a similar process when he argues that the practice of pursuing
social empowerment through building alternatives is, at its core, experimental. Through trial,
error, and communal collaboration, people construct new realities while developing their own
capacity to do so.\textsuperscript{236} The often-public nature of this process creates a spectacle of sorts,
facilitating the potential for this social experiment to spread like wildfire. What starts as a small-
scale, radical experiment can transform the consciousness of the direct participants and society as
a whole, expanding the scope of the project and involving the surrounding community. Thus, the

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\item[233] Yates, “Rethinking Prefiguration: Alternatives, Micropolitics and Goals in Social Movements.”
\item[234] Wright, \textit{Envisioning Real Utopias}.
\item[235] Raekstad, “Revolutionary Practice and Prefigurative Politics: A Clarification and Defense.”
\item[236] Wright, \textit{Envisioning Real Utopias}!
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process of consciousness-raising articulates the idea that prefigurative and/or self-help organizations not only directly construct the reality that they are pursuing, but also develop the participants themselves.

**The Black Panthers**

For the Black Panthers, consciousness-raising was about this process of developing participants—in their case, they saw these participants specifically as future revolutionary subjects. There were three main ways that the Panthers achieved consciousness-raising: through direct participation in transformative projects and micro-alternatives, through the performatively nature of their actions and the ability to draw attention to specific events, and through educational initiatives intentionally tailored to meet the needs of the Black Panthers’ main subjects—low-income urban Black communities. This chapter will explore what consciousness-raising meant for the Panthers, and how they sought to achieve it. I will closely examine specific educational initiatives: political education classes, the liberation schools, and *The Black Panther* newspaper. I will also engage in a close reading of the Free Breakfast for Schoolchildren program, which was the most central example of transforming people’s subjectivities through direct participation in a small-scale alternative reality. I will conclude with a discussion of the Black Panthers’ impact on the collective African-American conscience.

A central goal of the Black Panthers’ community programs was to highlight the shortcomings of the existing system, particularly capitalism and the state. As community members discovered how effectively the Black Panthers’ alternative programs could meet their needs, this would lead them to question the validity of mainstream initiatives that had been depriving them for so long, and lead them to become invested in the Panthers' project. This would also distinguish the Black Panthers themselves from capitalists and the government. If
businessmen and government officials were unable to effectively serve the people despite controlling most of society's' resources, and the Panthers were able to act as a lifeline to the community despite having no access to mainstream sources of wealth (illustrated by the Party’s initial refusal to accept government funds or operate their community programs in a business-like manner), this could lead people to question the authority of capitalists and the government.\textsuperscript{237} This gradual transformation of consciousness was intended to make more community members realize the origins of their own oppression and the emancipatory capacity of the Panthers’ work.

Having established what the Black Panthers were trying to make people conscious of, I will now examine the three main processes through which they accomplished this task. The first was through generating spectacles: dramatic, performative actions that drew people’s attention to the Party. One anecdote that particularly illustrates the Panthers’ performative nature is the story about when Fred Hampton went to prison for stealing an ice cream truck. In the summer of 1969, Hampton came across an unsupervised ice cream truck in Chicago.\textsuperscript{238} Acting as a sort of Robin Hood figure, he started to distribute the ice cream to neighborhood children.\textsuperscript{239} His famous arrest and subsequent imprisonment were arguably more important than the ice creams that he shared.\textsuperscript{240} His exploits highlighted the role of the state as an oppressive figure that failed to feed Chicago’s children, and then imprisoned a black activist who gave them ice cream. Dramatic spectacles such as these attracted media attention, offered concrete examples of the antagonistic character of the state that the Party was trying to reveal to people, and won the Black Panther Party more supporters.

\textsuperscript{237} Nelson, \textit{Body and Soul}.  
\textsuperscript{238} Bloom and Martin, \textit{Black Against Empire}.  
\textsuperscript{239} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{240} Ibid.
The second main process of consciousness-raising is the development of educational initiatives that were specifically curated to meet the needs of Black Americans—specifically, the Liberation Schools, the political education classes, and the party newspaper, *The Black Panther*. The Liberation Schools were created as a radical alternative to traditional schooling, which particularly underserved poor Black students.\(^{241}\) In addition to offering students a better, more intentional education in traditional subjects, the schools taught students about their own oppression, revolutionary theory, and the Panthers’ transformative project.\(^{242}\) This served to develop students’ awareness of their own condition and taught them specific ways to generate change. In addition to these concrete lessons, the liberation schools altered students’ consciousness through developing their fundamental sense of self. The schools functioned as a collective experience, developing a sense of community and responsibility that would motivate students to act on their newly acquired knowledge.

The Black Panthers described this more abstract consciousness-raising potential of the liberation schools when they explained the ways in which these schools developed the students’ “collective view of themselves as being a part of a BIG FAMILY working, playing, and living together in the struggle.”\(^{243}\) In addition to teaching through specific courses, the liberation schools thus facilitated the students’ lived experience, building a collective sense of their own position in the Panthers’ self-help revolution, and a sense of community and shared responsibility. The schools not only developed the capacity for generating change, but also developed within the students the motivation to act.

An important step in motivating students to take action was building their pride and their


belief in themselves. The Liberation Schools’ intentional focus on developing students’ consciousness in this way is articulated through the personal stories of a parent who sent her two young children to the Oakland Community School, and of a former student herself. Betty Jo Reuben was a young, single mother in the Oakland area. She enrolled her five-year-old son and her two-year-old daughter in the Oakland Community School. She described the profound effect that the school had on her children’s consciousness and the transformation of Black shame to Black pride, when she said that, “my children grew up feeling proud of being Black instead of feeling like it was a curse like a lot of children.” The schools achieved this transformation of consciousness through a mix of direct and indirect methods. Their approach to discipline focused less on punitive measures and instead on alternative practices. For example, students often peacefully enforced the rules on each other through mediated talks, and children who lost their temper were taken aside and given space to reflect. Furthermore, the close connections fostered between teachers who were truly invested in their jobs and the community’s children naturally improved the students’ sense of self—when they went to school, they were made to feel like they truly mattered.

In addition to providing the students with many new skills, the schools also focused on fostering students’ belief in their own potential. Teresa Williams, a former student at the Oakland Community School, describes the effects of her time learning from the Panthers when she says that, “they taught us to see yourself in the future doing what you want to do and just know that the future hasn’t caught up with you yet.” This emphasis on encouraging students to imagine

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245 Ibid.
246 Ibid.
248 Drummond, “Black Panther school a legend in its time.”
their future, and to believe that this future is realizable, aligns closely with the basic theory of consciousness-raising as facilitating the envisioning of a transformed reality and developing people’s belief in their ability to achieve this transformation. The Panthers recognized that it was important to start young, building up children’s sense of self before society had the chance to tear them down.

In addition to educating children, the Black Panthers developed curricula for Party members and adult community members to raise their revolutionary consciousness and counteract the sense of “Black Shame” that often grew out of mainstream society. All members of the Black Panther Party had to attend mandatory political education classes, where they learned not only Panther theory but also revolutionary theory from the likes of Mao Zedong, Franz Fanon, Karl Marx, and others. The Black Panthers were determined that both rank-and-file members and community supporters would understand the theory behind the Panther programs. Their emphasis on classes, reading lists, and constant dialogue reflects the value that the Black Panthers placed on revolutionary consciousness developed through specific knowledge, in addition to lived experience, and they went about this through making revolutionary theory more accessible to the community.

The Black Panthers also generated their own revolutionary material through their newspaper. In addition to being a key platform for the Party, the newspaper also gave a voice to other oppressed communities as well. Publishing stories about people’s experiences with colonization and marginalization around the world facilitated a sense of solidarity and drew

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250 Ibid.
attention to the material that traditional media often blatantly omitted. The writing style in *The Black Panther* was intended to make the truth accessible to marginalized communities with lower levels of education. Journalists wrote clearly and simply and offered built-in interpretations of the material, framing events in terms of their significance to the liberation struggle. The newspaper, the political education classes, and the Liberation Schools thus worked together to directly develop the revolutionary consciousness of the public by providing them with specifically curated material, including the theoretical tools needed to understand their own oppression and their capability to generate change and liberate themselves.

The third and final process of consciousness-raising practiced by the Black Panthers was facilitating people’s direct participation in community programs. This process reflects the emphasis on lived experiences as the best way to build people’s belief in the possibility of alternatives and their own capacity to generate change. The Black Panthers recognized the importance of learning through participation, and Huey Newton’s discussion of the educational significance of activity depicts this:

The black community is basically composed of activists. The community learns through activity, either through observation of or participation in the activity. To study and learn is good but the actual experience is the best means of learning. The party must engage in activities that will teach the people. The black community is basically not a reading community. Therefore, it is very significant that the vanguard group first be activists. Without this knowledge of the black community one could not gain the fundamental knowledge of the black revolution in racist America.

In reality, the Panthers did not rely solely on educating the community through activity. As previously discussed, Liberation Schools, community education classes, and *The Black Panther...

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252 Hilliard and Dr. Huey P. Newton Foundation, eds., *The Black Panther Party: Service to the People Programs*.

newspaper were all crucial parts of the Black Panther Party’s relationship to the community. However, learning through participation or observation was also invaluable for transforming people’s subjectivities by allowing them to experience a slice of the reality that the Black Panthers were pursuing for society as a whole. Newton’s emphasis on “actual experience [a]s the best means of learning” reflects the primacy of direct action and lived experiences for raising people’s consciousness.

While all of the community programs were forms of direct action that raised people’s consciousness, the breakfast program was one of the clearest examples of this process. The breakfast program was transformative for the children who were fed, as well as for the Party members, college students, parents, and community volunteers whose efforts made the program such a success. The breakfast program was, first and foremost, a transformative experience for the students whose day began with a plate of hot food prepared and served by members of their own community and members of the local Black Panther chapter. While they waited in line for their food, and as they sat and ate, they interacted with Party members who taught them about Black history, the Black Panther Party, and current events. Through these conversations and the intimate interaction of being served food by the same group of people every morning, the kids developed a sense of trust and community with the adults who ran the program and the peers whom they dined with every morning. They witnessed the capacity of their own community to provide for them, and grew close to inspirational, revolutionary individuals. The breakfast program raised their consciousness through facilitating a sense of collective identity, community, and trust, as well as a belief in the capacity of the Black Panther Party and their own community to support them in ways that the current system could not.

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254 Potorti, “‘Feeding the Revolution’: The Black Panther Party, Hunger, and Community Survival.”
255 Ibid.
The breakfast program was also a transformative experience for the adults who ran it, as this program was a direct, physical manifestation of many of the Panthers’ theories. The practice of soliciting donations from businesses made the volunteers conscious of the debt that businesses owed the community, and watching these donations go from the shelves of capitalist businesses onto the plates of community children reinforced the validity of this process. Witnessing the success of this program highlighted the shortcomings of existing government programs, and developed in people a belief that a transformed society was realizable, because the breakfast program was essentially a small-scale version of the wider reality the Panthers were trying to create. Lastly, the small-scale victory of feeding hundreds of schoolchildren every morning with their own labor radically transformed the volunteers’ sense of self, as they were able to directly create the solution to one of the central problems plaguing their community. This bolstered people’s belief in their own ability to generate revolutionary change, allowing them to realize what their own role could be in the revolution.

This transformation of consciousness for the volunteers in the Panther programs is articulated vividly in the words of Phyllis Jackson, a former Panther who worked in the Oakland chapter. She describes the way in which the Panther programs turned participants into revolutionary subjects when she says that:

Revolutionaries are made, not born. They have to construct their lives consciously along a set of revolutionary principles. Bringing about change is something all of us can do, or being active in an organization is something all of us can do. We don’t have to be the hero when we join. You become the hero through practice. You have to work against whatever you were born with. That was possible for me through a set of principles that still stands today—the Ten-Point Program and Platform—as a theoretically sound, historically appropriate response to the interlocking systems of domination that construct our lives.256

The fact that one has to “work against whatever [they] were born with,” illustrates the ways in which the Panthers transformed people’s identity as oppressed and marginalized and instilled in

256 Shih, Williams, and Joseph, The Black Panthers: Portraits from an Unfinished Revolution, 96.
them a sense of power when they experienced the change they were able to generate through their work in the programs; the ways in which they “became the hero through practice.”

Jackson’s identification of the Ten-Point Program and Platform as a “historically appropriate response to the interlocking systems of domination that construct our lives” harkens back to the idea in Chapter One that the Black Panther Party directly situated itself in response to the systems of domination it sought to combat. Ultimately, the idea that “revolutionaries are made, not born” reflects the importance of consciousness-raising as a process for making those revolutionaries.

While the Black Panthers focused on this strategy of raising people’s consciousness as part of the process to prepare people for the eventual revolution, in reality, the Panthers were never able to bring about this revolution. However, their powerful presence on the international stage arguably helped to transform the collective Black consciousness, which, while impossible to measure concretely, is identified by many academics as one of the most significant contributions of the Party.257 The Black Panthers’ refusal to be submissive or show fear in their interactions with authorities and different perpetrators of the forms of domination raised Black communities' self-esteem, transforming Black shame into Black pride, and shifting the shame and blame onto the American state.258 The Panthers' tireless faith in the Black community—both in their right to have their needs met and in their capability to meet those needs themselves—was infectious, and provided people with a heightened sense of self and the theoretical vocabulary to keep fighting for themselves.

Cooperation Jackson

Cooperation Jackson expresses a similar level of faith in the Jackson community as did the Black Panthers in the Black American community, and raising people’s consciousness is also a crucial part of Cooperation Jackson’s self-determination project. Cooperation Jackson recognizes the hegemonic grip that the current systems of power have on consciousness, which makes it hard not only for people to identify the sources of the flaws with their current condition but also to question the validity of the current system. Cooperation Jackson explains this hegemonic power when they discuss the idea that, “our character and psychological predisposition have been shaped under undemocratic, authoritarian relations and processes and our possession of the requisite knowledge, skills and attitude of self-management and participatory democracy is uneven.”259 The “undemocratic, authoritarian relations and processes” are essentially the dominating forces such as capitalism and the state, and the fact that they shape people’s psychological predisposition reflects their hegemonic power. As a result, they argue that people “demonstrate behaviors that are not unlike those of [their] oppressors and exploiters.”260 This conforming behavior is a significant barrier to people’s ability to realize the nature of their own oppression and their own potential to pursue self-determination.

To combat people’s tendency to conform and accept hegemony, Cooperation Jackson emphasizes the importance of what they call “critical education” in order to “exorcis[e] the ghosts of conformity within the status quo from the psyche and behavior of the oppressed to enable the development of a cultural revolution.”261 This exorcism is achieved in part through critical education and the subsequent cultural revolution, which are all part of the process of

260 Ibid, 53.
261 Ibid, 53.
consciousness-raising. While they use different rhetoric from the Panthers to define consciousness-raising, they have very comparable approaches. Consciousness-raising essentially fulfills the same two processes—making people aware of the problems with their current reality (“exorcising the ghosts of conformity”) and developing their belief in their capacity to generate change (developing the cultural revolution).

Developing this cultural revolution is important for Cooperation Jackson because it is a necessary prerequisite for a political revolution. Kali Akuno and Ajamu Nangwaya emphasize the importance of the cultural revolution when they say that, “cultural revolutions typically precede political revolutions, as the former creates the social conditions for a critical mass of the people to embrace new social values that orient them toward the possibly of another world.”

Thus, the cultural revolution is what can transform people into revolutionary subjects, because it facilitates their adoption of new norms and values (different from the oppressive, hegemonic ones that must be “exorcised”). These new norms and values specifically facilitate their ability to imagine an alternative system, which is essential, since they are the people who will ultimately bring about this transformation.

The cultural revolution that Cooperation Jackson is seeking to develop has three main components: the raising of people’s individual consciousness as well as a collective consciousness, the development of a sense of solidarity, and a new system of ecological and humanitarian norms. The ultimate goal of this cultural revolution is to prepare people to be self-determining subjects who can then work to change society, so that they can fully exercise this autonomy. In a similar way to the Black Panthers, Cooperation Jackson seeks to raise people’s consciousness through two main avenues: learning through specific educational

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262 Ibid, 53.
initiatives, and learning through experience. Unlike the Black Panthers, Cooperation Jackson does not emphasize the performative, spectacular nature of their project. They are not directly confrontational with authority figures, and are instead more inwardly focused.

While the development of cooperatives and running a radical mayor for election are, to some degree, indisputably spectacular initiatives, Cooperation Jackson does not, for example, engage in forms of civil disobedience like the theft of an ice cream truck in order to highlight the flaws of the current system. Instead, they focus on raising people’s consciousness through “training and development programs, the constant dissemination of critical information, and mass educational initiatives” which they highlight as “central to the goal of preparing the people for self-management and self-determination.”

The mass educational initiatives and dissemination of information are key examples of raising people’s consciousness through education. The educational material disseminated by Cooperation Jackson is similar to that of the Black Panthers in that it is specifically curated to be accessible to their audience. However, Cooperation Jackson has so far approached this project with a less rigid format. They are less dogmatic than the Black Panthers in their teaching approach, as they lack a formally established curriculum or format. Instead, their process is framed more as one of mutual learning, and as the leaders of Cooperation Jackson make progress and obtain new information or make new plans that they want to share with the people, they gather the community together in order to do so.

Cooperation Jackson’s approach to learning through lived experience is similar to the Black Panthers’ in that they are also teaching people through facilitating their participation in community programs. The main two programs that serve this role are the People’s Assemblies and the cooperatives. The People’s Assemblies provide the opportunity for people to learn about

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Jackson’s politics from more experienced participants, and can facilitate the development of new community leaders.\textsuperscript{265} While both Cooperation Jackson’s cooperative model and the Black Panthers’ socialistic charity model facilitate the unlearning of capitalist values, participants in the cooperatives are exposed to a slightly different critique of capitalism and learn different alternative material. Cooperation Jackson recognizes that most people spend the majority of their adult lives in the capitalist workplace, which is often a decidedly stifling and undemocratic environment. They see the cooperative solidarity economy as a powerful alternative to this, and they believe that the only way for people to “unlearn the lessons their economy taught them” and instead learn how to live in a truly democratic manner, is for them to directly experience the cooperative solidarity economy.\textsuperscript{266} Merely reading about or discussing alternatives will not be an adequately transformative experience for people to “exorcis[e] the ghosts of conformity.” It is only through directly participating in the alternative that people will start to let go of their fear that anything other than capitalism is automatically extreme communism or socialism. Far from imposing a new order on the community, the cooperative solidarity model is intended to signify a redistribution of power and an end to the pattern of imposition from the powers that be.

Additionally, it is only through participating in this experiment in radical participatory democracy (founded in the values of self-determination, community-based power, equality, and solidarity) that people will ever learn how to operate in such a society. Because no one has ever experienced this reality before, there is no guide for how to achieve it, no complete picture of what it would look like. Cooperation Jackson acknowledges that there has been, and will continue to be, a lot of trial and error involved. Ultimately, the only way to discover what will succeed and what will fail is through acting on these ideas. The nature of a democratic

\textsuperscript{265} Themba-Nixon, “The City as Liberated Zone: The Promise of Jackson’s People’s Assemblies.”
\textsuperscript{266} Gilbert, “The Socialist Experiment: A New-Society Vision in Jackson, Mississippi,” 272.
consciousness is one such unknown, and thus, the only way to truly achieve this consciousness is to directly pursue it and see what happens.

**Conclusion**

Erik Olin Wright offers a useful analogy for navigating the construction of a future reality that—similarly to the truly democratic consciousness—does not yet exist. He argues that in the process of envisioning real utopias, we must look for a compass, as opposed to a map.\(^{267}\) The possession of a map would imply that we understand the contours and features of the landscape we are navigating, and we know what our destination will be. A map is used to find the best route to get from Point A to Point B, and implies that at least one person (the mapmaker) has a rough understanding of what exists in the liminal space on the rest of the map, because she knows where to situate Point A and Point B. In the creation of a reality that has never before existed, the Black Panthers and Cooperation Jackson are venturing into uncharted territory. No such map exists; instead, they must use a compass in order to get a sense of whether or not they are going in the right direction. The transformation of people’s consciousness is essential to this process. In order to venture out into unmapped lands, people must believe that their destination exists, and furthermore, that it is worth venturing off of the edge of the map as they know it, in order to find they alternative they are seeking. In addition to believing that it is worth leaving behind what they know, and that their destination exists, people must believe that they themselves are capable of making this journey. These three essential beliefs can be nurtured only through developing people’s consciousness and giving them the tools they need to create change. Thus, raising people’s consciousness is an essential aspect of prefigurative or self-help transformative projects.

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\(^{267}\) Wright, *Envisioning Real Utopias.*
Conclusion

The Black Panther Party had a range of ambitious theories and practices, from striving to ensure that no child must attend school on an empty stomach, to “call[ing] for the total elimination of the offices of the president and vice president of the United States of America.” Some of the Panthers’ goals were pursued through direct community programs; others were never actually undertaken and served merely as rhetoric. All of them, however, served as a foundation for the ultimate goal of self-determination for all communities, with a specific focus on urban Black Americans. In comparison, from its inception in 2014, Cooperation Jackson has focused on a particular segment of the urban Black American population—the Jackson, Mississippi, working class. Their ultimate goal is also self-determination, and their aim is to develop a series of strategies and programs to pursue this goal in concrete ways.

Both of these groups began in response to deep discontent in the Black community because of high levels of oppression and marginalization. The needs of African-Americans were not being met in the current society, and the goal of the Black Panther Party and Cooperation Jackson is to give people the ability to meet their own needs, by directly creating alternative systems that facilitate the development of a self-determining community.

In researching these groups, I was most struck by their complex theories as well as by their strategies and programs, and by the overarching relationship between theory and practice. Sometimes, the organizations are able to prefigure the reality they pursue in theory with notable success through their concrete practices. At other times, the theory is impractical to put into practice exactly as envisioned; instead, the groups amend their strategies to pursue the ultimate

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268 Hilliard and Dr. Huey P. Newton Foundation, eds., The Black Panther Party: Service to the People Programs, 92.
goals through more practical concrete means.

A defining aspect of prefigurative politics is means-end equivalence: the idea that the means of a movement or organization—its concrete actions and strategies—directly reflect and create its ends—its wider theories and goals. The pursuit of self-determination would mean that the community itself takes the lead with all of the specific programs. The pursuit of alternatives to capitalism and traditional state institutions, both of which have clearly harmful effects for Black Americans, would mean that the goal of the group’s strategies and programs would be the direct construction of these alternatives, and would exist entirely separately from the antagonistic institutions.

I argue that the Black Panther Party and Cooperation Jackson are unable to operate within the strict principles of means-end equivalence, and must amend their theory in practice. I further assert that this finding exposes the limitations of means-end equivalence for all marginalized groups using prefigurative politics to transform society. These groups must be willing to sacrifice their theoretical commitment to means-end equivalence and work with the existing system to some extent in order to make concrete gains. Because these communities are marginalized, it makes sense that they would seek to prefigure an alternative society because they have minimal access to existing institutions or forms of power. The strong self-help tradition in the African-American community is a key example of this tradition of oppressed communities prefiguring their own alternatives. Self-help strategies have been central to Black empowerment groups and the African-American community as a whole since the time of slavery. This emerged largely out of necessity; constant exclusion from conventional resources coupled with highly oppressive conditions led Black Americans to turn to those they could truly rely on: each other. This phenomenon is not limited to the African-American community. Other examples of marginalized
communities that prefigure alternatives to the traditional resources that they lack full access to include the formation of chosen families in the queer community and tight support networks of immigrants from the same homeland. Instead of waiting to be granted access to societal resources that might never come, these groups create their own alternatives.

When framed this way, prefigurative politics seems like a productive method by which marginalized communities can bring about their own empowerment. The limits of means-end equivalence are exposed when these communities expand their focus from day-to-day, small-scale practices, and pursue a wider societal transformation. When the alternatives are meant not just to improve people’s daily lives, but also to actually replace the existing system and transform society, working entirely outside of the system will not generate the adequate political and capital power to support these alternatives. This is when these marginalized prefigurative groups must be willing to abandon means-end equivalence to some extent in order to access some of the resources of the current society, such as the existing economic and political systems.

Granted, these resources will be difficult to access in a desirable way. The reason that these groups want to transform society in the first place is because they have had a negative, oppressive relationship with it in the past. Thus, their engagement with the system must be intentional. They must be careful not to fall into a pattern of excessive confrontation, as did the Black Panther Party. This leads to high levels of oppression and confrontation with authorities that will wear down the group. They must also be careful not to become too involved with the system, and end up more reformist than revolutionary. Ultimately, it is through meaningful engagement with the intention of building dual power that prefigurative groups can successfully work with the existing system in order to transform society.
The limits of means-end equivalence are significant not just for the practice of building alternative institutions, but also for the mobilization of the community for this purpose. In order for the community to become self-determining and bring about their own liberation, they must be catalyzed and guided at first. The community has likely been oppressed by the current system for decades, if not centuries, and something must change to shift the inertia. A leadership group must be willing to assume some form of leadership and take the first step in order to mobilize people who—no matter how discontented they may be—are still accustomed to existing in the current society.

The two main examples of the limitations of means-end equivalence specifically encountered by the Black Panther Party and Cooperation Jackson are the relationship of these groups to the existing system and its institutions, and the relationship of these groups to the surrounding community. Means-end equivalence would signify the construction of alternatives working outside of and/or against the existing system. The Black Panther Party and Cooperation Jackson have developed alternatives to capitalism, ranging from the Black Panthers’ Service to the People programs to Cooperation Jackson’s cooperative models and Freedom Farms. These groups have also developed alternative forms of political power, ranging from Cooperation Jackson’s People’s Assemblies to the Black Panther Party’s strident rejection of the legitimacy of the American state and the Party’s leadership of the people in opposition to these existing powers.

However, there have been limits to the viability of means-end equivalence and of the ability of these groups to work outside of or in opposition to the existing system. The Black Panthers recognized to some extent that in order for their community programs to succeed, they needed to use resources linked to capitalism. Ultimately, they struggled to amend
their theoretical opposition to capitalism, and in practice, their determination to work outside of
the existing system limited the ability of their programs to succeed in the long term.

Their vocal opposition to state power and traditional sources of authority also posed
problems for the Panthers, as their frequent confrontations with authorities took a toll. They
eventually amended their theoretical opposition to the state by participating in elections and
working with state powers. While they succeeded in wielding influence on Oakland politics, this
came at a time when the Panthers were struggling with excessive centralization of power, and
they ultimately shifted too far in the direction of working with established state powers at the
expense of building community-based alternatives.

Cooperation Jackson appears more committed to amending their original theory in order
for it to be successfully implemented in practice. While they are developing cooperatives as an
alternative to capitalism, with the long-term goal of replacing capitalism with a cooperative
solidarity economy, they recognize that in the short-term they must be willing to engage to some
extent with traditional business models and capitalism in order to access resources for their
alternative project.

Furthermore, they directly participate in existing state institutions with the explicit intent of
harnessing their resources and support for their project of building alternative modes of political
power. While in the short term this willingness to engage with city government structures could
be seen as reinforcing these institutions’ legitimacy, Cooperation Jackson believes that this is a
crucial and practical strategy for building the power of longer-term projects geared toward the
transformation of society.

The comparison between Cooperation Jackson and the Black Panther Party is particularly
illuminating when it comes to their relationships with existing state institutions. Neither
organization sees the existing system as truly legitimate. The Black Panther Party’s constant and taxing confrontations with institutions proved costly, and the Party ultimately had to amend this theoretical commitment. Cooperation Jackson instead has shown a commitment to intentionally engaging with the existing political system with the intent of using its resources to build alternative sources of power, and eventually to eliminate the need to work with the existing state altogether. Thus, Cooperation Jackson’s amending of their means is done with the direct intent of pursuing their ends. In contrast, the Black Panthers initially were too unwilling to amend their means, and eventually did so in a more reactive way less geared toward intentionally pursuing their ends and instead oriented toward avoiding other undesirable ends.

There are also limitations to means-end equivalence for the Black Panther Party and Cooperation Jackson’s relationship with the community. Both groups pursue a reality in which the community achieves self-determination. In theory, they pursue this end through equivalent means: their strategies are based on the principle of self-help and organizing the community to essentially generate their own change and lead the transformation of society. In practice, however, both the Black Panther Party and Cooperation Jackson play a leadership role, mobilizing and organizing people to facilitate their growth into self-determining subjects.

Thus, both the Black Panthers and Cooperation Jackson recognize that their theoretical commitment to a self-help, community-driven revolution must be amended in practice in order for these groups themselves to provide the necessary leadership for this project to begin and proceed effectively. However, they run into different challenges when attempting to amend their theory in practice. The Black Panther Party often overemphasized their role as the vanguard. They frustrated rank-and-file members by keeping the Party’s power centralized, and while they intended to pass the community programs over to the people after the community developed the
capacity to run them itself, this never happened.

Cooperation Jackson also has, on occasion, failed to keep pace with the people, such as when the late mayor of Jackson, Chokwe Lumumba, and his team ultimately failed to put enough energy into mass education and letting the people themselves dictate their own agenda. Cooperation Jackson, however, displays a more intentional commitment to building from the ground up, deferring to the leadership of the people and encouraging the community to take charge to the greatest possible extent. They focus on running their group in the most prefigurative way (as pragmatically) possible, emphasizing that their group must embody the truly democratic structure that they are pursuing for society as a whole. While they recognize that this is difficult to realize in practice, as no one has ever truly experienced the type of true democracy that Cooperation Jackson is attempting to bring about for society as a whole, they assert that the only way to learn what this true democracy looks like, and to bring it into existence, is by experimenting in creating and living in it.

The processes of developing self-determining subjects capable of transforming society, and of discovering what this transformed society might look like by attempting to create it, are essential parts of the process of consciousness-raising. Consciousness-raising is a central aspect of the work of both the Black Panther Party and Cooperation Jackson, and is core to prefigurative politics in general. While there are many ways in which these groups must adapt their theory in practice, consciousness-raising serves as a bridge between the means and the ends, and is arguably the most important process for pursuing self-determining communities.

Consciousness-raising serves as such an effective bridge between the means and the ends because most of the programs and strategies of the Black Panthers and Cooperation Jackson serve to raise the consciousness of participants and to develop their potential to help themselves
and to be self-determining. Consciousness-raising is also a clear strategy for leadership groups to focus on in pursuit of their ultimate goal of diminishing their own leadership role, and developing the power of the community to lead itself.

Both Cooperation Jackson and the Black Panther Party have pursued consciousness-raising through specifically-curated educational processes meant to meet the needs of the community, and through direct participation in programs. The Black Panthers also pursued consciousness-raising through the use of spectacle. Examples of their use of spectacle included their oversight of police patrols and shootouts with the police, their boycotts of local businesses that were unwilling to donate to their food programs, their acts of civil disobedience, and their survival conferences complete with grocery bags for all participants and speeches in which the Panthers denounced the legitimacy of the American state and said things such as, “fuck that motherfucking man. We will kill Richard Nixon. We will kill any motherfucker that stands in the way of our freedom. We ain't here for no goddamned peace, because we know that we can't have no peace because this country was built on war. And if you want peace you got to fight for it.” This use of spectacle attracted attention from the media and communities all around the word.

Many of the Panthers’ most spectacular practices were also the least sustainable. The Panthers were ultimately less focused on the practical success or sustainability of any of their specific programs. They were instead invested in the dramatic dialogue between their group and the existing system, and their ability to capture the people’s attention and direct it to the flaws with the current system and their work to transform society. Ultimately, this emphasis on spectacle often came at the expense of the programs’ sustainability, because the Party too often

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adhered to theory at the expense of practice. The Panthers struggled to reach their ends because of their theoretical commitment to having their means align as closely as possible with these radical ends.

The experiment in Jackson is new enough that it remains to be seen what kinds of concrete successes Cooperation Jackson might have. So far, this organization ultimately displays a greater commitment to concrete programs and results. Cooperation Jackson is willing to amend their means so that they can most effectively bring about their ends, even at the expense of true means-end equivalence.

While the Panthers’ use of spectacle and their greater commitment to their radical theories arguably came at the expense of certain concrete achievements they could have attained, their central impact was elsewhere. Numerous scholars argue that the Panthers were able to generate a transformation of the collective Black consciousness, turning Black shame into Black pride. People all over the world saw the Panthers fearlessly stand up to oppressive forces and assertively demand certain rights that marginalized American communities had been denied for centuries. This transformation of Black consciousness was linked to the rise of Black Power generally, and the impact still stands today. In fact, it is likely that Cooperation Jackson still benefits from the waves of consciousness generated by the Black Panther Party fifty years ago.

Thus, in many ways, Cooperation Jackson is building on the foundation of the Black Panthers’ achievements—the belief in the power of Black Americans and their right to self-determination, and the recognition of the flaws of capitalism and the state. Cooperation Jackson is also building on the understanding that there are limits to the extent to which they can operate outside of, and in opposition to, the system, and the necessity of balancing their leadership role

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with the commitment to a people-led revolution. They formulate their programs and strategies in accordance with this pragmatism, without the degree of spectacle generated by the Black Panther Party.

**Stepping Back, Looking Forward//Looking Back, Stepping Forward:**

Ultimately, there are limits to prefigurative means-end equivalence for marginalized groups working to transform society. Their means must function in the present, a present controlled by the very forces of domination that have oppressed them, and that they are seeking to build alternatives to or to oppose. These groups have limited means at their disposal, as they are denied access to more traditional forms of societal power. An additional challenge of working within the boundaries of the present is that the future, transformed society is necessarily a somewhat abstract construct, an unknown. It has never existed before, and no one who is working to bring it about has ever witnessed or experienced it.

This journey toward an unknown destination brings me back to the map metaphor that I used in Chapter Four. There is no map for this journey, because it is a journey on which no one has ever embarked before, and because the destination, and thus much of the route to that destination, is through unknown terrain. While there is no map, there is a compass, which journeyers can use to determine if they are still following the values of the reality that they are ultimately pursuing. In the case of the Black Panther Party and Cooperation Jackson, the compass is oriented toward their theories of self-determination and their ends.

However, because both their destination and their route toward this destination remain unknown, this implies obstacles along the way that cannot be predicted. In reality, these groups cannot merely follow their compass and pursue their means in the most direct route possible, through means-end equivalence. When they encounter obstacles in their journey, they must find
a way around these obstacles, which requires an alternative route that allows them to circumvent these impediments to their direct path. For groups mobilizing marginalized communities, these obstacles might come in the form of high levels of repression from sources of domination, or inadequate resources to support their alternative institutions. This metaphor seeks to illustrate the way in which they must be willing to amend their theory and use alternative means in order to pursue their ends. Ultimately, in a journey to pursue a transformed society, one cannot take the shortest path to get from point A to point B, from the present to this transformed future. Instead, one must be willing and able to adapt the route in response to real obstacles encountered on their journey. There is no straight course, no perfect theory that can bring about the destination. Thus, what one truly needs in order to transform society is not a theory to follow at all costs, but navigational skills and the willingness to adapt during the voyage.
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