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From left: the New York-based activist Gaïana Joseph — a co-founder of Fuel the People, a nonprofit that serves foods at demonstrations — her mother, Louisena Dufleurant Joseph, and the writer Klancy Miller created their ideal meal of the resistance for T, including, from left, a vanilla-rose cake from the Williamsburg bakery Luckybird, Dufleurant Joseph's *Creole chicken with pikliz (pickled cabbage slaw), beef and lentil sambusas from the West* Harlem Ethiopian restaurant Massawa, Dufleurant Joseph's Haitian-style braised oxtail with pikliz and Miller's jalapeño-watermelon salad alongside her vegan pesto-and-tomato pizza. Photographs by Joshua Kissi. Prop styling by Beth Pakradooni. Digital tech: Faisal Mohammed. Photo assistant: Fela Raymond

Today's Chefs Are Honoring a Vital Tradition: Feeding the Revolution

As Americans have taken to the streets demanding racial justice, restaurants and nonprofits have provided meals for them, building upon a long legacy of food as resistance.

By Ligaya Mishan

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THE KITCHEN IS an arsenal. Bring out the pots and pans and bang them like drums, clash lids, whack spoons. That the weapons are so humble is the point: everyday essentials, available to all. Orchestras equipped like this once paraded through medieval Europe, in the traditions of the French charivari and its English equivalent, "rough music," descending on the homes of those believed to have betrayed social mores — what the English folk historian Violet Alford called "the beginning of popular justice." This took on a more political tone in the mid-19th century, with housewives in Paris bashing pans outside their landlords' windows, demanding relief from rent. Today, such disruptive noisemaking has been borrowed as a form of collective action around the world, often under the name *cacerolazo* (from the Spanish for "casserole"), popularized by a 1971 demonstration against food shortages in Chile in which more than 5,000 women took to the streets rattling pots, the emptiness of which gave testament to their cause.

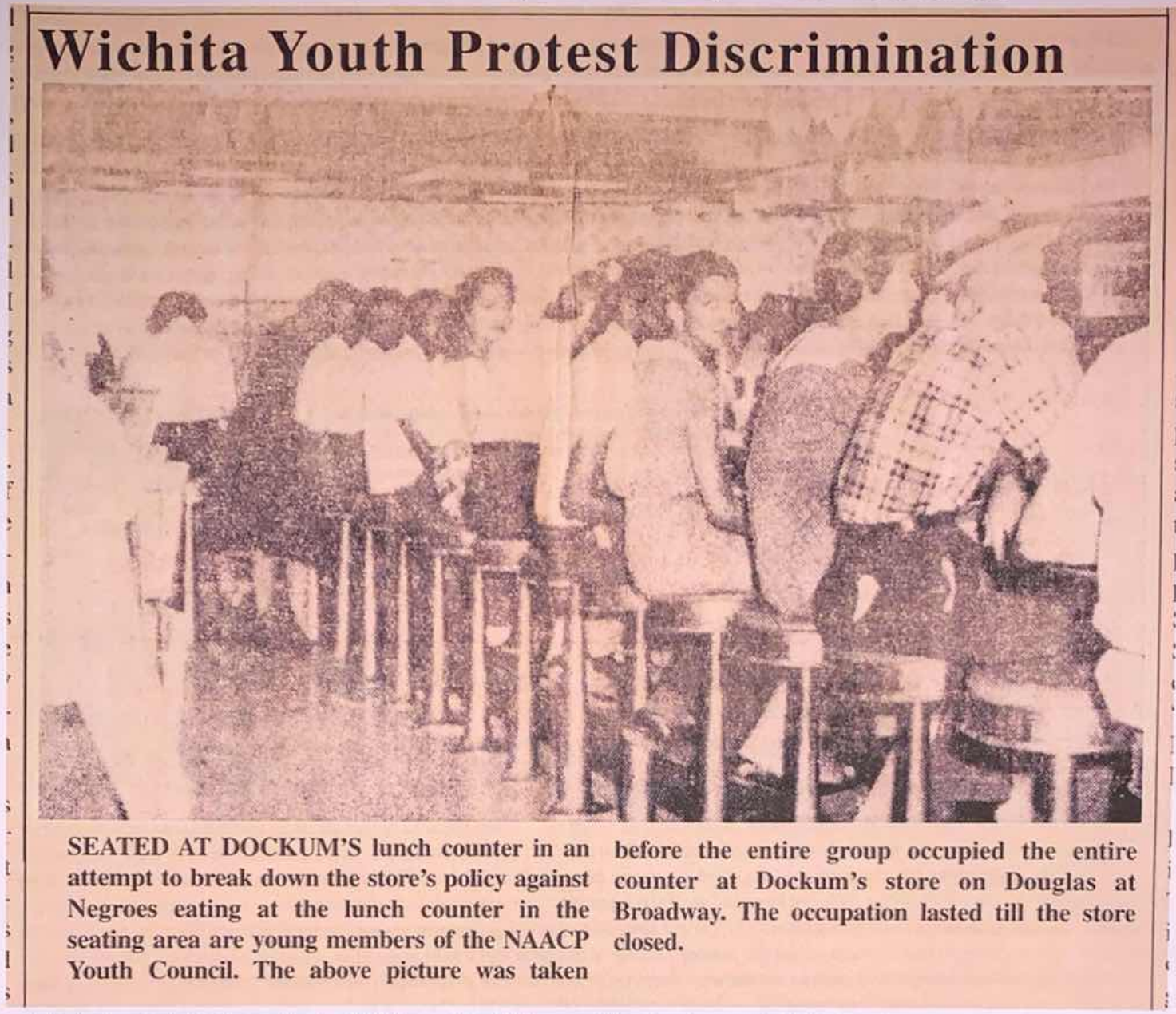
Food has always been central to resistance, because its lack is the most fundamental of inequities. What kind of society lets its own people starve, whether by negligence or knowing exploitation? When global food prices spiked in 2008 and again in 2010, due in part to rampant, unregulated speculation in agricultural commodity futures as well as droughts and desertification of arable lands brought on by climate change, more than a hundred million people were pushed into poverty, leading to civil unrest from Senegal to Uzbekistan, Nepal to Peru. Against this backdrop, the Arab Spring started, arguably, with an apple — two baskets of them, to be exact, confiscated by a market inspector in December 2010 from Mohamed Bouazizi, a 26-year-old fruit-and-vegetable vendor in the small town of Sidi Bouzid, Tunisia. This was just the latest offense in a longstanding pattern of corruption, but this time the young man said: *No more.* He set himself on fire in front of a government building and died in a hospital three weeks later, inspiring protests across the country that within a month had ended the rule of the president of 23 years.

Chilean women in the streets with pots and pans in the early 1970s. via Dsausa.Org

Mahatma Gandhi on the 1930 salt march in Dandi, Gujurat, India, a protest against the monopoly of the British colonial government's salt production. Rühe/Ullstein Bild/Getty Images

No food is too small to tip the balance. Consider the machinations surrounding an ingredient as basic and imperative as salt, which the Indian leader Mahatma Gandhi described as "perhaps the greatest necessity of life" after air and water. In the first century B.C., Emperor Zhao of the Western Han dynasty in China convened a debate between bureaucrats who favored a state monopoly on salt, enabling them to inflate the price, and Confucian scholars who questioned the government's elevation of gain over righteousness. "Never should material profit appear as a motive of government," the scholars argued, to which the worldly emperor replied with a sniff: "You put all your faith in the past and turn your backs upon the present." For centuries, this dominion proved so lucrative — at one point during the Tang dynasty (A.D. 618-907), cash income from salt yielded over half of all government revenue, and during the Yuan (1279-1368), up to 80 percent — that it survived the fall of multiple dynasties and the rise of the Communist Party and was not abolished until 2014, the longest-lasting monopoly in history. China was not alone: The much-despised gabelle, a tax first imposed on salt in France in the 13th century and at times soaring to 10 times the cost of producing salt in the first place, became a rallying cry for the French Revolution and likely contributed to the deaths of dozens of tax collectors at the guillotine; and in 1930, Gandhi defied the British Raj's monopoly on what he called "the only condiment of the poor" by stooping to grasp a fistful of mud and salt on the tidal flats of a coastal village in the western state of Gujarat.

In a revolutionary context, food is at once literal and symbolic, a totem of power and its usurpation. For Black Americans in the late 1950s, Coca-Cola was at once ubiquitous and forbidden: At segregated soda fountains and lunch counters, it was accessible only to white people until the civil rights activist Carol Parks Hahn and 30 fellow students took seats in Dockum Drug Store in Wichita, Kan., in 1958 and ordered the soft drink. They were denied but remained, sitting in shifts, returning day after day, asking for a Coke — that icon of Americana, that badge of belonging — until the owner capitulated and agreed to serve everyone.



A clipping from the the front page of the Aug. 7, 1958, issue of The Enlightener, an African-American paper in Wichita, Kan., showing the sit-in at Dockum Drug Store. Courtesy of the Wichita-Sedgewick County Historical Museum

Again, it's the mundanity of the food, its theoretical availability to all, that reveals how exclusion and oppression are built into the everyday, tacitly permitted by those who benefit from the system. Marie Antoinette, the 18th-century Austrian archduchess later executed as the queen of France, never said, "Let them eat cake" — the French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau attributed a similar phrase to another, anonymous royal in his "Confessions," written before she even married the dauphin — but we want to believe she did because it so perfectly captures our sense of a world in which the haves blithely or willfully disregard the constraints on the have-nots. The slogan "Eat the rich," itself falsely credited to Rousseau and newly popular as a battle cry among agitators for change, gleefully turns this notion around: *When we run out of sustenance, when our cupboards are bare, the Marie Antoinettes of the world will be our feast*, the frivolous thing we will be forced to consume.

TO EAT THE RICH is of course mere rhetoric, a fantasy of vengeance. The terrible irony is that for those in extremis, one of the most radical forms of protest is to shun food entirely — to visit violence on oneself, turning it inward, internalizing the crime of the oppressor so that its corrosive impact is made manifest to the world. The history of hunger strikes is long, going back to the age-old Indian custom of dharna (historically, sitting at the threshold of a debtor and fasting until the debt was cleared, and today a more general term for a sit-in) and the Celtic troscad, which predated Christianity's arrival in Ireland in the early fifth century. This was not mere ritual: Troscad was a legally sanctioned means of extracting justice from someone of higher rank and a rare tool of the poor "against the mighty," as the late 19th- and early 20th-century Irish nationalist Laurence Ginnell wrote. Once all other avenues of redress had been attempted and exhausted, you would wait publicly at the doorstep of the wrongdoer and refuse to eat until reparations were made. The act of self-

starvation so disrupted the social order, some thought it took on a supernatural aura, with the intimation that the damage done to the victim's body would redound upon the offending party, exacting a spiritual price. (There were legal consequences to fear, too, including, in some circumstances, a doubling of the amount of reparations required.)

If the potency of troscad rested in part on the bonds and expectations of a small community, where refusing hospitality to a guest at your door was a mark of dishonor, the modern hunger strike has had to rely on a broader sense of outrage. Sometimes this is achieved by exposing the callousness of the oppressor, as in the case of imprisoned suffragists in early 20th-century England, who were subject to brutal force-feedings that broke teeth and caused internal injuries, drawing widespread public condemnation. In 1981, 10 members of the Irish Republican Army were allowed to starve to death over months in a paramilitary-style prison in Northern Ireland, their troscad — and request to be recognized as political prisoners instead of common criminals — unanswered; some in the British press greeted their deaths as a victory ("I will shed no tears," one newspaper editor wrote), but the world spoke out against such indifference, and across Ireland, the dead were mourned and celebrated as martyrs — the leader of the protest, Bobby Sands, had been elected to Parliament while on strike, and upward of 70,000 people attended his funeral — pressuring the British government to improve prison conditions.

A 1981 poster of imprisoned Irish Republican Army members to raise awareness of the 1980-81 Irish hunger strike, distributed by the Irish Prisoners of War Committee, New York City.
Stuart Lutz/Gado/Getty Images

To have moral force, the hunger strike had to be a last resort. For the Irish nationalists, as outlined in a statement released on the day of the strike, it was a "demonstration of our selflessness" — as opposed to the selfishness of criminals out for personal gain — "and the justness of our cause." The student activists who occupied Tiananmen Square in Beijing in the spring of 1989 explicitly framed their decision to stop eating as a sacrifice on behalf of their country: "Although our bones are still forming, although we are too young for death, we are ready to leave you. We must go; we are answering the call of Chinese history." In keeping with the exalted language, the hunger strike was orchestrated as spectacle, with more than 3,000 students eventually joining the fast and some even rejecting water, accelerating their decline in Tiananmen's midday sun. Hundreds of thousands of supporters crowded the square, and doctors and desperate parents hovered, ratcheting up the anxiety against a backdrop of throbbing ambulance sirens as strikers lost consciousness and were hauled off to the hospital. It wasn't simply the students' youth but their privilege as part of the educated class that made their willingness to risk everything so persuasive; by starving themselves, they earned credibility and galvanized the country — until the government declared martial law and troops opened fire on the protesters. In the aftermath, thousands were detained, and, decades later, all references to the massacre continue to be censored within China.

Gandhi, who endured 17 fasts in his resistance to British imperialism, cautioned that, even when successful, a hunger strike could be merely coercive rather than persuasive: Your opponents might make concessions but not actually believe they'd done anything wrong. The result is a temporary fix, a slapped-on bandage, rather than lasting change.

PERHAPS THE MOST direct use of food as a weapon is its co-opting as ammunition. Eggs once launched as projectiles at maudlin actors in 18th-century England are now wielded against politicians and masters of the universe, along with milkshakes, custard pies and, in Greece, yogurt. This isn't flippant but strategic, for eggs, even if rotten and foul, don't wound like stones or grenades, instead delivering a dose of humiliation that falls just shy of a proper felony (and its legal consequences). Mockery likewise calls attention to unfair structures of power: "Every joke is a tiny revolution," the British writer George Orwell wrote in 1945. "Whatever destroys dignity, and brings down the mighty from their seats, preferably with a bump, is funny." And throwing the ingredients of what would otherwise make a meal both revokes their promise of nourishment and subverts the notion of sharing food as an act of hospitality and community, laying bare the lie behind our supposed commitment as a society to take care of one another.

But food can also be used to mend a broken social contract — to reaffirm our bonds despite the failures of the system. In this, it may be the stealthiest of weapons. To help fund the 1956 boycott of city buses in Montgomery, Ala., the civil rights activist Georgia Gilmore raised thousands of dollars — enough to keep the boycott going for 381 days — by recruiting women to cook and sell meals and desserts (fried chicken sandwiches, poundcake, sweet-potato pie) as part of an underground network she named the Club From Nowhere, kept secret so

that the women involved wouldn't get fired by their white employers. In a modern correlative, the writer Klancy Miller's forthcoming magazine, For the Culture, dedicated to Black women in the world of food and drink, was funded in part by North Carolina bakers, who donated proceeds from roasted-sweet-potato scones and peach doughnuts sold online this past June and July. The Florida-born chef Kia Damon took Gilmore as a model for her own Supper Club From Nowhere, which began in 2017 as a dinner series showcasing her interpretations of ancestral recipes, working to rectify the neglect and erasure of Black American heritage.

Understand the George Floyd Case

- On May 25, 2020, Minneapolis police officers arrested George Floyd, a 46-year-old Black man, after a convenience store clerk claimed he used a counterfeit $20 bill to buy cigarettes.
- Mr. Floyd died after Derek Chauvin, one of the police officers, handcuffed him and pinned him to the ground with a knee, an episode that was captured on video.
- Mr. Floyd's death set off a series of nationwide protests against police brutality.
- Mr. Chauvin was fired from Minneapolis police force along with three other officers. He has been charged with second-degree murder and second-degree manslaughter and now faces trial, which begins on March 8.
- Here is what we know up to this point in the case, and how the trial is expected to unfold.

There is a step beyond this: acknowledging that cooking is inevitably political, from the dishes we choose to make to where our ingredients come from, but also, at the most basic level, in who gets to eat. Nourishment is a prerequisite to equity. In June, Damon began fund-raising to build a community kitchen and co-op grocery in Downtown Brooklyn with a mission to distribute fresh produce and pantry goods to people living in food deserts, which the United States Department of Agriculture has historically defined as areas where residents have little access to affordable, healthy food because of low income and limited transportation options. (Some prefer the term "food apartheid" to underscore that these deserts don't exist by chance — that the market forces that give rise to them are part of a larger system of imbalance.)

Two young boys eating during a free-breakfast-for-children program sponsored by the Black Panther Party, New York City, 1969. Bev Grant/Getty Images

"Hunger is one of the means of oppression," the editors of the Black Panther Party's official newspaper wrote in 1969, when its members began providing free breakfast to schoolchildren in Oakland, Calif. "How can our children learn anything when most of their stomachs are empty?" Soon the program expanded to party chapters from Milwaukee and New Orleans to Brownsville, Brooklyn. At the time, J. Edgar Hoover, the director of the F.B.I., called this act of charity "potentially the greatest threat to efforts by authorities to neutralize the BPP and destroy what it stands for," without clarifying which he feared more: the boost it would give to the Panthers' image or the prospect of Black youth gaining greater access to nutrition and education. Despite this animus, the federal government eventually followed the Panthers' lead; its own school breakfast program, which had launched in limited form for around 80,000 students in 1966, was made permanent and national in 1975, and now feeds more than 14 million children each day.

The issue of food insecurity in the United States is more urgent than ever: Since March, the Covid-19 pandemic has cost tens of millions of Americans their jobs, including nearly 40 percent of those with household incomes under $40,000 a year. Food banks have seen up to a 200 percent increase in requests for help, with lines of cars and waits that stretch for miles and hours. In the absence of a functional government safety net, mutual-aid networks have sprung up — ad hoc, mobilized by volunteers and buoyed by small donations, eschewing hierarchy in favor of collective decisions — to deliver meals and food supplies to health workers and families in need. Instead of accepting a failed system, you build a new one.

Donated pizza is passed out in Zuccotti Park for members and supporters of the Occupy Wall Street movement, Oct. 1, 2011. Mario Tama/Getty Images

SINCE THE DEATH of George Floyd at the hands of the Minneapolis police in May, protesters have filled the streets across the country, marching for hours. How to feed them? A number of restaurants along the routes have opened their doors, their whereabouts posted on crowdsourced online maps, doling out provisions and in some cases turning their dining rooms into rudimentary clinics for those caught in tear gas or hit by rubber bullets. Community organizations hand out water and snacks. Often, the food is astonishingly plentiful, as if transformed from a few loaves and fishes — as when out-of-town donors from as far away as Greece arranged to have pastrami sandwiches and pizzas sent by the dozen to Zuccotti Park during the Occupy Wall Street protests in 2011, or when newlyweds dropped off slices of wedding cake for the environmentalist group Extinction Rebellion in London's Trafalgar Square in 2019.

Fuel the People provided over 1,000 meals for Juneteenth protesters in Washington, D.C.

Courtesy of Fuel the People

But Gaïana Joseph and Allegra Massaro — who with their brothers Roodharvens Joseph and Lorenzo Massaro founded the nonprofit Fuel the People, which fed over 10,000 protesters in the first few weeks of demonstrations in New York and Washington, D.C. — see another opportunity: "to redistribute wealth back into the community," Joseph said. Cash donations, solicited on Instagram and contributed online, are used to buy food from Black- and immigrant-owned restaurants, businesses that have been struggling during the pandemic; when the restaurants pack meals for protesters, Joseph and Massaro make sure that their logos are affixed so that the protesters in turn might seek out the establishments as future diners. They hope, too, to bring a wider audience to cuisines outside the American mainstream by offering the likes of Ethiopian sambusas and Haitian patties. "People are getting very good food," Massaro said with a laugh. Their volunteers — equipped with megaphones, hand sanitizer, tear-gas repellent and the Legal Aid Society hotline number in case of conflict with the police — ride bikes, some hauling wagons, and pick up trash and recyclables along the way. At each protest, they have hot food ready at the march's end, kept warm in insulated bags and served in a kind of mass communal dinner. Often, everyone sits down — "they've done this work," Joseph said, and they've earned this rest, this chance to talk, look around and share, for a moment, the possibility of change.

There is anger in resistance, but also jubilation. "Giving food to other people is an act of love," Joseph said, "an act of compassion." And even when the government set curfews, trying to quell the protests, people still found a way to make themselves heard. They stood at their windows, banging their pots and pans, clamoring for a better world.