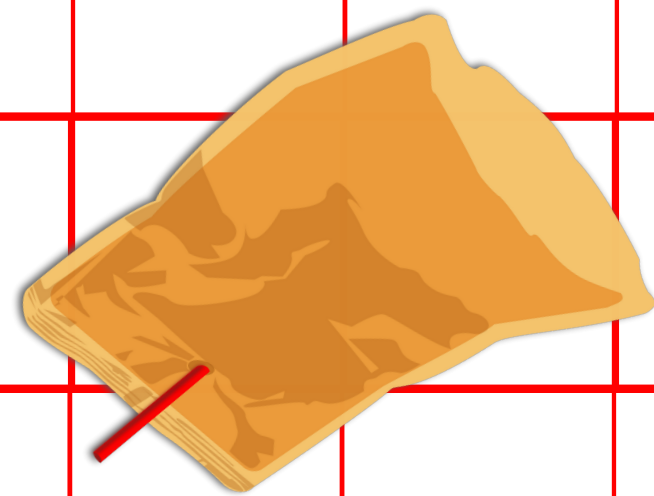


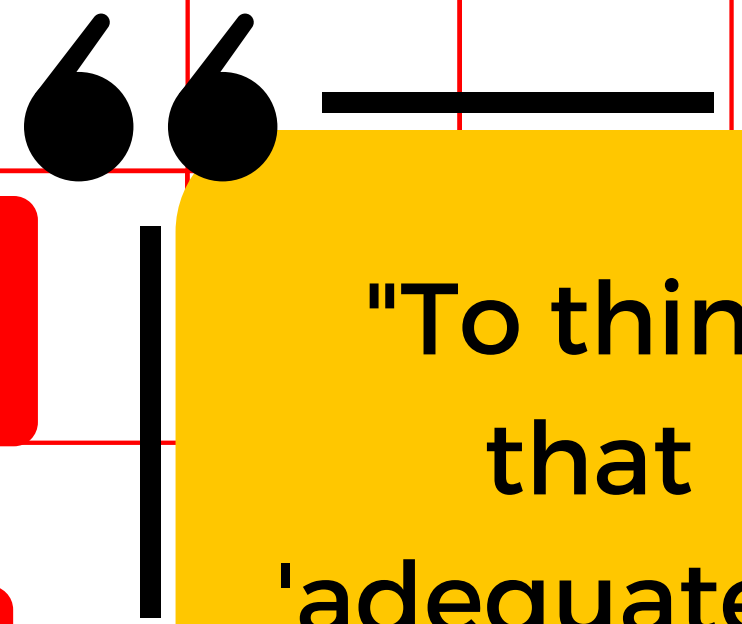
LEFT OVER



EPISODE 2

"The Paradox of Plenty Amid Hunger"

16.8 pounds of food. That's how much less food a 10-year-old child gets per week on the lowest rung of government food assistance, compared to a child in a better-funded program. In this episode, Left Over returns to the roots of our social welfare programs to understand how long-standing racism and classism play a role in limiting what the National School Lunch Program does for school children today.



"To think that 'adequate' is what we should provide to those who are most in need is an injustice."

- Angela
McKee-Brown

**DID YOU
KNOW**

The National School Lunch Program of 1946 was initially designed, in part, to be an agricultural subsidy program. The government purchased surplus crops and goods from farmers to stabilize food prices, and passed those surplus commodities onto schools.

Source: *School Lunch Politics: The Surprising History Behind America's Favorite Welfare Program* by Susan Levine

HOW DO WE DECIDE WHAT OUR CHILDREN DESERVE?



At the center of any debate over the National School Lunch Program lies a simple question: who is this program for? At its founding, the NSLP was conceived as part-hunger relief, part agricultural subsidy program, a way for the US government to buy up surplus crops from farmers and hand them off to schools to bolster nutrition. The public understanding of school lunch as primarily a welfare program for children in need persists today, as districts shift away from the universal free meals common at the height of the Covid pandemic and back to a means-tested, free-and-reduced lunch system.

In episode 2, Jessica speaks with researchers Andrew Ruis and Felicia Kornbluh about the ethos that "people should take care of themselves" that pervaded the early years of the National School Lunch Program. Activist Angela McKee-Brown discusses Richard B. Russell, the NSLP's original architect and a staunch segregationist, whose design enabled widespread discrimination by limiting how much the federal government could regulate school meals.

But these origins don't have to determine where the National School Lunch Program goes next. Scholars and activists like Priya Fielding-Singh and McKee-Brown argue that the NSLP can serve students better when we collectively make universal free school meals a priority for kids of all class backgrounds, not just those most in need. And caretakers like Anita Garrett and student groups like Voces de la Frontera and Rays of Hope are organizing to make sure that feeling shame around school lunch is a thing of the past.

The NSLP and Welfare: By the Numbers

Before the pandemic, the national lunch debt burden was

\$262 million per year.

That comes out to a burden of

\$170 per family.

District attempts to address this burden often put the onus on students, forcing kids with lunch debt to put back or throw away their food or have cheese sandwiches for lunch.

1/3

of World War II army recruits were rejected from service due to poor nutrition, catalyzing a push for nutrition programs as an issue of national security.

A family of four living on

\$37,000 a year

would still not be eligible for free school lunch.

Benchmarks for aid can exclude families who aren't necessarily below the poverty line, but are still struggling to make ends meet.

A child on the government's least generous food assistance plan receives

16.8 fewer

pounds of food

than a child on the government's most generous plan.

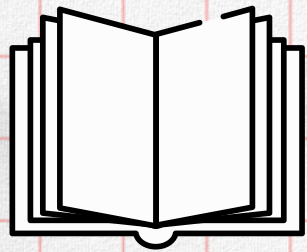
ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



Listen

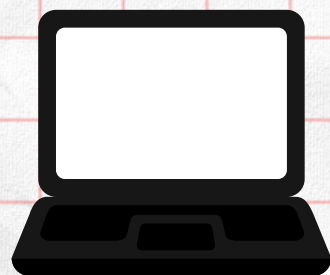
[Hear the full 25-minute audio documentary "Revolution for Breakfast" here.](#) Courtesy of the UC Berkeley Social Activism Sound Recording Project.

[How the Other Half Eats: The Untold Story of Food and Inequality in America](#) by Priya Fielding-Singh



Read

[The Battle for Welfare Rights](#) and [A Woman's Life is a Human Life](#) by Felicia Kornbluh



Explore Organizations

[Voces De La Frontera](#) in Wisconsin and [Rays of Hope](#) in New Jersey

[Read more about Anita Garrett and her work with Feeding America Eastern Wisconsin's Food Leaders Lab](#)

[The Edible Schoolyard](#)

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