

“Beating eggs never makes the evening news”:
Politics and Kitchens in Rita Williams-García’s *One Crazy Summer*

Food plays a major role in Rita Williams-García’s *One Crazy Summer* (2010). The Gaither sisters’ experience of visiting their estranged mother Cecile in Oakland, California is marked by distinctive foods and foodways that reflect the revolutionary historical moment of African American culture when the novel is set: the Black Power movement in Oakland in 1968.

The girls have grown up with the rural foodways of Alabama, “slow food” methods imported to Brooklyn by their grandmother who has raised them in their mother’s absence. Delphine, the protagonist, has developed highly traditional ideas about proper food practices and her perception of their inherent tie to mothering. In California, the girls experience radically different foods and kitchen practices. Their mother, Cecile has deconstructed and remade the kitchen and her relationship to it. Cecile’s profound rejection and revision of the “yoke” of women’s service to men and family lies at the heart of Delphine’s critique of Cecile’s mothering techniques, yet Cecile’s kitchen-cum-art studio serves as the place where mother and daughter negotiate the nature and limits of their fundamentally new relationship in the present moment of the novel, a relationship that does not fit the conventions of the mother-daughter relationship as conceived by a conservative character like Big Ma.

An essential component of Cecile’s rejection of the traditional kitchen lies in her relationship to the Black Panthers and the Free Breakfast for Children program, which Williams-García incorporates (slightly anachronistically) into her story. These daily food-based customs form the background against which the remaking of the urban power structure of Oakland is captured in *One Crazy Summer*.