



# Chicago's White Appalachian Poor and the Rise of the Young Patriots Organization

Martin Alexander Krzywy<sup>1</sup>

Published online: 16 September 2019

© Springer Science+Business Media, LLC, part of Springer Nature 2019

## Abstract

Founded in 1968, the Young Patriots Organization brought together white Southerners living in Chicago's Uptown neighborhood in an effort to confront the poverty and discrimination that they faced in their new urban home. After joining together with the Black Panthers in a class-conscious interracial alliance known as the Rainbow Coalition, the Young Patriots developed an ideology that blended ardent anti-racism and anti-capitalism with a celebration of white Southern culture. Though their ideology failed to spread more widely, their community service initiatives, including a free breakfast program and local health clinic, provided necessary support to an isolated and underserved community.

**Keywords** Young Patriots · Black Panther Party · Chicago · Whiteness · Interracialism · American South

“But, a Chicago pig, he has a loud oink, but let me tell you, you know, the people from the south, the white brothers and the black brothers, we've been to a lot of hog killings in our lives...and I think about ol' Hammerhead Superpig Hoover. You know, he's old. He's an old pig, man. He's so old, I don't even want to eat them chitterlings out of that motherfucker. Fuck it.”—William Fesperman (1969)

## Introduction

The Vietnam War era produced its share of countercultural groups, one of which is the oft-overlooked Chicago-based Young Patriots. Even more than fifty years later, one

---

✉ Martin Alexander Krzywy

<sup>1</sup> Chicago, IL 60615, USA

would be hard-pressed to find more than a few scholarly journal articles on these dynamic activists. Decked out in Confederate flag apparel and speaking in the drawls and twangs of the American South, the Young Patriots Organization (YPO) was inspired by other leftist groups such as the Black Panther Party. Like the Panthers, the YPO offered community services such as health clinics for their community—in this case, the population of white Southerners concentrated in the Uptown neighborhood on Chicago’s North Side—which also provided the Young Patriots an opportunity to spread their more radical, anti-capitalist politics. The YPO saw the impoverishment and social isolation that white Southerners faced in Chicago as an integral part in shaping their own political awakening that allowed them to interrogate conceptions of whiteness and identity in this community, and they aimed to draw their friends and neighbors away from the racism that had enveloped them in both South and North and bring them into a bright new interracial future.

The rise of the YPO spoke not only to the larger trends in radical political action sweeping the nation at the time, but also to the fact that they filled a definite material niche, providing services that the government or other members of civil society could not or would not provide themselves. Though the municipal government of Chicago established some programs in the neighborhood, Uptown residents relied on a patchwork of privately funded organizations to fulfill many of their basic needs, receiving food donations from the Campbell Soup Company (Flaherty 1969) and employment training and placement from the Chicago Conference on Religion and Race (Chicago Tribune 1968), while medical services like the Board of Health clinic maintained limited and inconvenient hours (Kaminsky 1970a). The white Southern community in Uptown also quickly garnered a reputation for knife-fighting, public drunkenness, and other forms of criminal disorder that both impeded integration into the city’s larger social fabric and resulted in a high degree of police brutality and repression, though sociologists determined that Southern migrants committed crimes on a similar scale to native Chicagoans (Backes 1968a).

The fact that the city failed to meet the needs of poor whites from the American South in much the way that they failed to do the same for Chicago’s black and Latino communities explains how the YPO professed their status as an oppressed “people” with a distinct ethnic identity that could serve as a rallying cry (Sonnie and Tracy 2011, p. 74). The broad-based class appeals and anti-racism that the Young Patriots espoused gained enough of a following to suggest there was an audience open to this sort of message in Uptown. However, as with many other groups within the broader American New Left, the government’s successful use of police and FBI intimidation and repression to curtail the growth of the Young Patriots (Sonnie and Tracy 2011, pp. 86-89) also suggests that their base was still a minority in the community and lacked strong connections to more established members of civil society.

## The Founding of the YPO

In the summer of 1968, Jack “Junebug” Boykin and Doug Youngblood (who also went by the surname Blakey) brought together a number of young activists and former gang members from the Good Fellows (formerly known as the Peace Makers) and formed the Young Patriots Organization in Uptown, a neighborhood on Chicago’s North Side

roughly bounded by “Irving Park Road on the south, Clark Street on the west, Bryn Mawr Avenue on the north and Lake Michigan on the east” (Schloss 1957, p. 6), which had become a prime destination in previous decades for white Southerners moving to the city in search of work. Like previous groups in Uptown, the YPO grew out of a desire by neighborhood residents to develop a community-based approach to organizing that stood in contrast to the many middle-class efforts at social uplift. After a chance meeting with Illinois Black Panther Party member Bob Lee later that year, the Young Patriots entered into an alliance known as the Rainbow Coalition with the Panthers and the Young Lords Organization (YLO), a group of Puerto Rican youths based in Lincoln Park. Lee, an experienced community organizer and field secretary for the Black Panthers, helped politically educate the Patriots and introduced them to Deputy Chairman Fred Hampton and other senior Party members. Inspired by their new allies, the YPO developed a socialist platform that paired Southern pride with ardent anti-racism. The Patriots focused their efforts on combatting poverty in their community, opening a health clinic and providing a free breakfast program while also partnering with other local groups like the Uptown Voice of the Poor People—founded to prevent the demolition of housing in the neighborhood to make way for a new Chicago City College campus—to oppose urban renewal measures in the neighborhood.

The work of the YPO and the ways in which it approached community improvement hinged upon their place in a specific cultural and temporal milieu. Just as the lure of new industrial jobs had brought thousands of African Americans northward to cities and out of the former Confederacy during and after the First World War, so too did many poor whites in the era head to places like Detroit and Cleveland after seeing their prospects in Appalachia dry up. As early as 1930, 50,000 white Chicagoans listed their birthplace as somewhere in the South (Berry 2000, p. 8), a number that climbed to 110,000 by 1940 and totaled about 280,000 in 1970 in Chicago and neighboring Gary, Indiana (Gregory 2005, p. 354). By 1960, eighty percent of the Uptown population had been born in the South (Guy 2007, pp. 118–119). Southern whites continued making the journey to the North Side, as the 1960 census identified forty-four percent of the neighborhood’s recent arrivals as living in the South in 1955 (a total of over 10,000 people), and the 1970 census stated that thirty-seven percent of newcomers were living in the South in 1965, a total of close to 7,000 people (Guy 2000, p. 51).

Though American political life may have trended towards poor whites organizing along racial rather than class lines (ignoring alliances with similarly impoverished blacks for ones with richer whites) (Foner 1989, p. 593), examples such as the Progressive and Fusion movements of the late nineteenth century showed that such alliances were possible, even among Southerners. Indeed, the Young Patriots demonstrated a strong grasp on this interracial history, and many of them could trace their ideological roots—and, potentially, their genealogical roots as well—to the Unionists that resisted Confederate rule in many upland counties in the Civil War South (Joye 1970). The cultural othering that white Appalachians faced as outsiders in Chicago destabilized their relative position in a racial hierarchy, and their status as victims of extreme poverty and frequent police brutality meant they shared many experiences with the city’s black and Latino populations. Thus, the Young Patriots were perfectly situated to open up lines of communication and collaboration across racial barriers as the city’s different poor ethnicities tried to help both themselves and one another in the face of an oppressive city government run by a tightfisted political machine. Though

the group attempted to spread its influence and create new chapters in cities like New York, internal disagreement and police intimidation eventually lead to the shuttering of their clinic and the dissolution of the group by 1973, a scant five years after its founding.

The ability of the Young Patriots to build an interracial coalition with groups like the Black Panthers and the Young Lords complicates narratives that paint the radical movements of the 1960s and 1970s as tenuous alliances between middle-class whites and more economically precarious minority groups. Jeffrey Ogbar argues that the Young Patriots “were able to bond with blacks and Hispanics in class terms in ways that...most other white radicals could not,” citing the tenuous and sometimes hostile relationships that the Illinois state chapter of the Black Panther Party developed with more well-known (and more middle-class) groups like the Weather Underground and Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) (Ogbar 2004, pp. 179 & 237). In a few short years, many of the YPO’s members had transitioned from prowling the streets as petty hoodlums to marching in support of Huey Newton and offering Marxist critiques of the police brutality they faced, demonstrating that even young working class whites born in the Jim Crow South had both the capability and the will to reject the racism that permeated society on both sides of the Mason-Dixon Line. Similarly, their identification with a longer tradition of interracial and anti-capitalist alliances in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries demonstrates that while racial animosity and oppression may have been the general societal norm in the history of the United States, attempts to paint the past as uniformly confrontational and racist are both ahistorical and defeatist. In their conflation of Southern and white identities and their embrace of Confederate iconography, the Young Patriots admittedly limited their ability to create a more meaningful and revolutionary movement that fought against a capitalist and white supremacist state while acknowledging their own complicity in propagating that structure. Nevertheless, the short-lived successes of the Young Patriots prove that a focus on the plight of the working-class poor—be they in the urban North, the rural South, or anywhere in between—need not come at the expense of a commitment to broad-based interracial politics.

## **A Hillbilly Heart of Darkness**

The Young Patriots embarked upon a project of raising awareness among the poor white Uptown community about their shared oppression as white Southerners in the urban North, but they were building upon a history of material and rhetorical marginalization that had begun in the community before many of the organizers had even been born. James Gregory notes how in the long run, the migration after the First World War of both black and white Southerners to cities in the North influenced not only culture—spreading Southern musical styles and religious practices throughout other parts of the country—but also politics, helping to develop “institutions and political practices that enabled the modern civil rights movement” while also “contributing to new forms of white working-class and suburban politics” (Gregory 2005, p. *xii* ). However, many of these contributions and achievements would only become apparent to mainstream America in hindsight, as few Southern migrants were welcomed with open arms in their new homes, regardless of their race.

One of the most common derisive epithets lobbed by the popular press at the white Southerners who moved to Chicago was “hillbilly.” Though the term traces its roots only to the turn of the twentieth century, the popular ascent—despite Northern and elite stigma—of what would be later called country music in the 1920s and 1930s also saw the concurrent creation of the hillbilly as cultural archetype, a “consciously constructed image that could be instantly recognized by the audience like any of the other stock characters of vaudeville and the popular stage” and who represented the encounter between rural yokel and modernity (Peterson 1997, pp. 68–69).

A 1958 piece in *Harper's* magazine by Albert Votaw—then head of the Uptown Chicago Commission, an organization “usually regarded as a spokesman for Uptown’s middle class” (Switzer 1958; Flaherty 1972)—helped bring national attention to the supposed flood of hillbillies, a group succinctly described in the article’s subhead as “proud, poor, primitive, and fast with a knife” (Votaw 1958a, p. 64). Though sympathetic in realizing that if “the Southerners are a nuisance to the city, the city is equally hard on them” (Votaw 1958a, p. 66), Votaw repeated much of the sensationalist and paternalistic language employed by reporters such as Norma Lee Browning in her nine-part account of a journey into the “jungles of hillbillies” for the *Chicago Tribune* (Browning 1957a). Browning identified herself as from “the corn-pone country” in an effort to stave off accusations of blanket discrimination (Browning 1957b) yet numerous readers still objected to the series and even debated the proper meaning of the term “hillbilly” (Browning 1957d). Much of the uproar consisted of white southern families in the Chicago area voicing “indignant protests at being placed in the same category with trouble making hillbillies,” documenting a sort of respectability politics that did not deny the existence of a subaltern and criminal element in the community (Browning 1957c), the sort of underclass that would eventually give rise to the feisty and indignant Young Patriots. Similarly, Votaw’s middle class mixture of derision and assistance presaged the battles the Patriots would face a decade later not only against those who wrote off the neighborhood completely, but against well-meaning yet overbearing middle class residents of Uptown and elsewhere as well.

By the late 1960s, print media coverage of the area’s Southern poor had grown more sympathetic, even as it continued to rely upon romanticized notions of life in the rural South. Introducing his two-week feature on the living conditions of the Southern migrants, Clarus Backes noted that “Chicago’s hillbillies are not, by and large, too poor to buy shoes for their babies and too proud to ask for help...are not, by and large, lovers of violence, attacking strangers and one another on the streets and making Uptown a battleground after dark” (Fink 1968). According to Backes, the problems afflicting the migrants lay in the fact that they were “all too often, lonely and frustrated and a little bit confused...yanked, reluctantly, often violently, from a life of fundamental simplicity that has not even existed elsewhere for the last 50 or 60 years, into a life of such tensions and complexity that even people born to it must often seek professional help” (Fink 1968).

Local academics also spilled a lot of ink investigating the problems facing the white migrants, offering their own analyses of why so many Southerners struggled to break the cycle of poverty that kept them on the margins of society. In the years following the First World War, sociologists at the University of Chicago developed a research style that looked at “society in terms of groups and interaction rather than in terms of independent individuals with varying characteristics,” examining points of “organization and disorganization, conflict and accommodation, social movements and cultural

change” (Abbot 1990, p. 6). Many works from the Chicago School—such as Charles Johnson’s *The Negro in Chicago* and W. I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki’s *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*—focused on how African American and Eastern European migrants to Chicago made from the adjustment from rural life to the hustle and bustle of the big city (Chicago Commission of Race Relations 1922; Thomas and Znaniecki 1927), echoing currents in reporter Clarus Backes’s 1968 pieces on the situation in Uptown (Backes 1968a, b). These works attempted to document the lives of Chicago’s newest residents through their habits, behaviors, opinions, histories, and demographics, exploring the “general patterns of life in the city, including the relations among its inhabitants and what factors influence those relations,” (Farber 1997, pp. 218-19).

While the white Southern migrants shared this story of transition from rural to urban life, their seemingly contradictory demographic profiles required new critical lenses for studying their role in Windy City society. Though the measured scholars of the University of Chicago would not go as far as popular writers to say that the Southern migrants represented a “disgrace to their race” (Votaw 1958a, p. 67) they still viewed the group as a racial anomaly. Bert Schloss, in his 1957 report for the Chicago Commission of Human Relations on the congregation of white Southerners in the Uptown neighborhood, noted,

The southern white migrant is both “native and white.” His native tongue is English which is sometimes alleged to be the purest in America. By descent, he is likely to be of stock which is described as 100 per cent Anglo-Saxon. Although a migrant, he is a migrant in his native land. In language, customs and descent, he is neither “alien” nor “colored.” He has one thing in common with both the Negro and the foreign immigrant – he too is a newcomer to the northern big city. (Schloss 1957, p. 9)

Yet, for all the ways in which the transplanted Southerner fit the mold of the prototypical white American as developed over the previous few centuries, the scholarship that arose during the 1940s suggested that this figure did everything but fit in. The ways in which Eastern and Southern European immigrants and even marginalized black Americans had begun to create cohesive communities that integrated into the larger social fabric only made the Southerners stand out more. Rosemary Deyling identified “clannish, anti-northern, and anti-urban” sentiments among Southerners and a hostility from existing Chicago communities as major factors in the marginalization of white Southerners in the Steelville neighborhood, which was an early settlement site for many white Southerners before Uptown was (Deyling 1949, pp. 50-51).

Later students would come to criticize the earlier sociologists’ overreliance on “cultural factors in explaining the personal disorganization of immigrant newcomers” rather than focusing on more material factors like migration patterns that impeded “solidary and affective personal ties” (Harwood 1966, p. 190). However, many rural Southern whites did feel culturally isolated in the urban North. Sociologist Lewis Killian interviewed many former Southerners who expressed a feeling that Chicago was not their city and “that it was not incumbent upon the individual [S]outherner to support and enforce an etiquette of race relations” (Killian 1953, pp. 68-9). Though white migrants often felt it “unsafe to assert their ideas of superiority” because of a “fear of physical retaliation” and the “lack of

consensus regarding “the Negro's place” in the impersonal and heterogeneous white population (Killian 1953, pp. 68-9), this lingering hostility seemed to preclude any hope of cooperation or mutual understanding between black and white Southerners.

## Hoodlums and Activists

In this milieu of white poverty and antipathy to Northerners sprang two different social circles—youth gangs and local activist groups—that would each play an influential role in the development of the Young Patriots Organization. Though reports on the Uptown community had often exaggerated the violence and depravity of the neighborhood's residents, during the 1950s and 1960s a number of distinct youth gangs developed among the transplanted Southerners. The city as a whole, like much of the urban United States, saw a culture of young people's clubs and juvenile delinquency emerge among the post-war generation. Chicago's various gangs often coalesced around the racial and ethnic divisions that marked the settlement patterns of both foreign and domestic immigrant communities, operating “not only along the color line, but also along interfaces between different European American groups—between, for example, communities of Irish and Poles, Poles and Italians, Swedes and Italians, Jews and Poles” (Diamond 2009, p. 5). These violent clashes at neighborhood borders—especially when African Americans began moving into new parts of the city—served as a precursor to the riots and white flight that would characterize the next few decades of urban history in Chicago and elsewhere, while also demonstrating that white unity was not always a given in street- or city-level politics.

Many community leaders saw the rise of gang activity in Uptown as an impediment to poverty alleviation, functioning not only as a symptom of the area's economic realities but also a factor in preventing many families from making better lives for themselves and a deterrent to investment from government bureaus and welfare organizations. In 1958, Albert Votaw of the Uptown Chicago Commission warned members of the Welfare Council of Metropolitan Chicago about the “renewed activity by teen-age gangs in the Uptown area,” with nocturnal vandalism, knifings, and loitering by groups of young number up to seventy-five at a time all prompting Votaw and others to call for increased police presence in the neighborhood. Votaw specifically mentioned the “heightened participation” of new Southern migrants—as well as the influence of older teens and youths—as key factors in the recent increase in gang activity (Votaw 1958b). Groups like the Playboys, the Romans, and the Peace Makers (later known as the Good Fellows), all contained a sizable proportion of white Southern youths, and members of the Peace Makers, whose territory around Margate Park and Sheridan Road encompassed the YPO's future clubhouse and health clinic, would go on to play important roles in the foundation of the Young Patriots (Tracy 2016). Even as the group disavowed much of its street-fighting past, outsiders continued to characterize the YPO as a gang in order to either downplay its commitment to actual politics or to paint them as violent and dangerous radicals; even sympathetic observers liked to emphasize the group's past as the combined product of an Uptown street gang and the “Lincoln Park Patriots, a gang of bikers” (Joye 1970).

Though the Young Patriots may have drawn membership and a rebellious masculine culture from a gang phenomenon that took different forms throughout the city during

the twentieth century, their ideology differed in significant ways from the local scene. Though many aspects of the youth culture explosion of the 1950s were seen as a major threat to the complacent post-war status quo,

Chicago's working-class subcultures tended not to challenge the way things were. If youths within this milieu sought at times to carve out a safe space from the workaday world for social experimentation, they seldom took seriously the idea of escaping the normative trajectory prescribed to them...Ultimately, empowerment in the world of working class Chicago youth subcultures rested on a reaffirmation of the values prevailing in the adult world—in particular, those that circulated around notions of manhood, which, in the context of racial transition, quite often played out in racial forms. (Diamond 2009, p. 170)

The Young Patriots remained a predominantly male organization during its existence (Joye 1970), but their stated opposition to both racism and sexism in their eleven-point platform symbolized at the very least a desire to harness youthful rebellion for a much more constructive and collaborative cause that simultaneously sought to remake the prevailing political, economic, and social order of Chicago and the United States as a whole. The Young Patriots' recognition that “[d]ivisions of race and sex serve the interests of the rich, ruling class and not of the people” (Young Patriots Organization 1970b) remains an impressive and notable divergence from the norm, even if the organization did not always live up to its stated goals.

The other main influence on the Young Patriots came from the community organizing scene that developed in the Uptown area to deal with the issues of poverty and unemployment that plagued many of the neighborhood's new and minority residents. Several members of the YPO, including co-founders Jack “Junebug” Boykin and Doug Youngblood, had been involved during the early to mid-1960s with the Jobs or Income Now (JOIN) community union, an offshoot of Students for a Democratic Society that attempted to teach Uptown residents how to organize their community, emphasizing local control and involvement in activist measures (Sonnie and Tracy 2011, p. 72). Indeed, Youngblood's mother, Peggy Terry, was one of JOIN's most active and influential leaders. She played a major role in steering the organization's leadership into the hands of community members rather than SDS activists and served as editor for the JOIN newsletter *The Firing Line* (Sonnie and Tracy 2011, p. 45). Terry would later go on to more national fame as Eldridge Cleaver's running mate during the Black Panther leader's unsuccessful and—for the most part—ceremonial 1968 presidential run as the Peace and Freedom Party candidate (Sonnie and Tracy 2011, pp. 60-1).

Though JOIN was just one of a dozen or so similar programs initiated by SDS members in Northern cities during the mid-1960s, its members demonstrated a commitment to their adopted community, enduring police harassment as they attempted to deal with the crushing poverty that plagued the neighborhood (New Republic 1965). In 1965, Mayor Richard J. Daley had created the Urban Progress Center to implement the city's duties under the national Economic Opportunity Act from the previous year, the main legislative framework behind President Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty. However, as JOIN members pointed out in their own report to the Center, the mayor's poverty commission counted no poor people in its membership, and JOIN lambasted the dangers of poverty policy drafted by civic leaders with heavy ties to big business. As an



organization made up of many Uptown residents, the leadership of JOIN emphasized in their report that “only poor people know poverty well enough to be able to fight it,” citing social scientists on the need for poverty programs to be democratic in order to be successful (JOIN Community Union 1965). The emphasis on intra-community organizing came to be a core feature of the Young Patriots, as their free breakfast program and health clinic—while often relying on donations from outside of Uptown—attempted to address the basic material needs of the neighborhood’s poor in order to allow them to seek their own empowerment and economic betterment.

The Young Patriots also understandably developed a close relationship with another one of the Uptown community’s loudest advocates, Chuck Geary. A native Kentuckian who had moved to Chicago in the early 1950s and slept on the beach when he first arrived because he was too poor to afford anything else (Gaber 1968), Geary worked as head of the Tri-Faith Employment Agency’s branch in the neighborhood, helping white Southerners to find gainful work that extended beyond the day labor that many took on to make ends meet (Chicago Tribune 1968). Though Geary was an effective employment counselor and had placed close to three thousand people in stable jobs within the agency’s first eighteen months, his passion for the community pushed him to seek additional opportunities for Uptown empowerment (Chicago Tribune 1968). By May of 1968, Geary had helped to organize the Uptown Voice of the Poor People group (alternately known as just the Voice of the People), largely as a response to plans by the city government and its Model Cities commission (which counted no members of the Uptown community among its membership) to demolish a great deal of blighted housing in the neighborhood and build a new Chicago City college campus (Casady 1968; McLaughlin 1969).

While Geary and others recognized the dilapidated condition of much of Uptown’s housing stock and the dangers it posed to the health of the community, the Voice of the People had an alternate plan for the college site—a cooperative community in the form of an ersatz Southern hamlet in the heart of Uptown, to be named “Hank Williams Village” after the late, great country singer (Guy 2016). This ambitious project, which was to include a job center, grocery store, pharmacy, medical facilities, and a hotel for newcomers, would set aside eighty percent of the new residences for low-income housing, with all decisions for the community being made cooperatively at town hall meetings (Gaber 1968). Though Geary saw the previous social work and community investment by outsiders to Uptown as well-intentioned, in his mind successful community uplift would come only through measures which allowed residents to make their own decisions and control their own capital flow; the “millions of dollars thrown into Uptown in poverty programs never worked,” but the village would put the Southerners back on their feet (Gaber 1968). Like JOIN and the YPO, Geary and the appropriately named Voice of the People were not averse to outside investment but adamantly supported the idea of local control over the spending and administration of community programs.

## Politicizing the Patriots

The continued hardships faced by many Southern residents even after decades of welfare spending and work by middle-class groups like the Uptown Chicago

Commission underscored the need for a different approach to poverty alleviation. The potential to have a voice in a city that was so often hostile to their pleas unsurprisingly rallied many Uptown residents to these causes and organizations. The opposition that groups like JOIN or the Voice of the People faced in bringing their demands to city hall demonstrated to the politically-oriented youth of Uptown that there were still gaps in the social safety net that warranted perhaps more militant responses. The increasing radicalism of the political left in the late 1960s provided an ideological lens for organizers like Junebug Boykin and Doug Youngblood to apply to their own material situations, leading the two former JOIN members to lay the groundwork for the Young Patriots Organization in 1968. The Uptown residents in JOIN persuaded the SDS organizers to pull out from the community union earlier that year, but the increase in local control brought a concurrent decrease in funding, as JOIN “soon faded to a pale shadow of its former self” (Backes 1968b).

The most direct predecessor of the Young Patriots was Youngblood’s National Organizing Committee (NOC), later known as the National Community Union (NCU). Building on his experiences working with JOIN, Youngblood—along with future Patriots Junebug Boykin, Bobby McGinnis, Hy Thurman, and Andy Kenniston (National Community Union 1968a)—sought to build a movement based on interracial working-class solidarity that advocated for free daycare and medical care, as well as higher corporate tax rates, rank-and-file control of unions, and an end to the draft (National Organizing Committee 1967). The NCU in particular espoused a nascent version of the Young Patriot’s white identity politics. In an interview with Texan alternative newspaper *The Rag*, Youngblood identified executed labor activist and songwriter Joe Hill as a model of an “early poor white organizer” while also pushing back against narratives that saw community activists as “some kind of super-human being with a computer for a brain and incredible charismatic power that enables him to influence, sway or change the direction of another person’s thoughts and ideas at the drop of a hat,” leading a life that was “terribly romantic and filled with great adventure (Youngblood 1968a).

The NCU also organized a letter-writing campaign to the segregationist governor of Alabama George Wallace during his 1968 presidential campaign, presaging the Young Patriots’ controversial adoption of the Confederate flag as one of their symbols. The NCU maintained that Wallace was “the only politician in American has been smart enough to junk the old, worn-out campaign slogans [and] tried to identify himself with working people” (National Community Union 1968b). However, they also accused Wallace of not understanding the heart of the problems facing the nation in 1968, pushing back against his explicit racism and endorsement of states’ rights rhetoric, as well as the “scarce jobs that pit workers against the unemployed and black workers against white” (National Community Union 1968b). Youngblood asserted as well that for all of Wallace’s efforts to paint himself as a true political rebel, in reality, he was “no different [from] Humphrey or Nixon” and merely “serv[ed] different interests of the ruling class” (Youngblood 1968b).

In organizing their new community group, Boykin and Youngblood brought in disenchanted former members of the Peace Makers and the Good Fellows gangs, like Dayton, Tennessee natives and brothers Hy and Tex Thurman (Tracy 2016), but many credit the arrival of North Carolinian and Chicago Theological Seminary student William “Preacherman” Fesperman as the pivotal moment in the development of the

group's unique political blend of Southern pride and radical anticolonial thinking (Fesperman 2008; Sonnie and Tracy 2011, pp. 74-5). Serving as the group's field secretary, Fesperman played a crucial role in articulating the Patriots' nascent ideology and disseminating it to a larger audience, touring the city to rail against the entrenched power of the political machine of Democratic Mayor Richard J. Daley. Fesperman, often dressed in sunglasses and a beret emblazoned with complementary Black Panther and Confederate flag patches, offered himself up as an example of how working with other groups like the Panthers "helped people end the paralysis that racism imposed on them" while also voicing a frustration with police brutality that many rebellious Uptowners could appreciate (Williams 2013, p. 141). Fesperman later partnered with Panther member Bob Lee (named, in an ironic turn, after the Confederate general) for a national tour during much of 1969, calling for "an end to capitalism and an end to fa[s]cism" (Slaughter 1969) and advocating for Rainbow Coalition-style alliances even in the Jim Crow South (Williams 2013, p. 165).

In fact, Fesperman proved such an effective spokesperson for the YPO and the incipient Rainbow Coalition that the Black Panthers reprinted his speech from the 1969 United Front Against Fascism Conference in Oakland in their newspaper, a major platform for the Young Patriots as *The Black Panther* boasted a circulation around 100,000 nationwide (Ogbar 2004, p. 121). After bemoaning the unjust incarceration of Panther leaders Fred Hampton and Huey P. Newton, Fesperman launched into a simultaneously profane and poetic indictment of police repression and racism. Summarizing the YPO's commitment to a radical politics, Fesperman stated, "A gun on the side of a pig means two things: it means racism and it means capitalism. And the gun on the side of the revolutionary, on the side of the people, means solidarity and socialism." (Fesperman 1969) As the Young Patriots saw it, the "jaws of the monster in Chicago [were] grinding up the flesh and spitting out the blood of the poor and oppressed people, the blacks in the Southside, the Westside; the browns in the Northside; and the reds and the yellows; and yes, the whites—white oppressed people" (Fesperman 1969). While Fesperman's phrasing indicates that conference attendees would have been surprised to hear a group of whites—especially white Southerners—posit themselves as a colonized or oppressed people, the Young Patriots saw both their suffering at the hands of the capitalist state and solidarity with other racial groups as obvious and concomitant facets of life under the present societal conditions. Pushing his pig metaphor to its logical conclusion, Fesperman alluded to the cultural and culinary practices that linked whites and blacks together as Southerners, reminding the audience that "the people from the south, the white brothers and the black brothers, we've been to a lot of hog killings in our lives" (Fesperman 1969).

## Finding the Rainbow Connection

The nationwide scrutiny and notoriety that leftist groups in Chicago and elsewhere faced in the wake of the highly-televised Democratic National Convention held in the city during August 1968 offered the Young Patriots an opportunity to both increase their profile and raise money to support their social projects through fundraiser screenings of the three-part film *American Revolution 2* (Dalkoff 1970, p. 10). Released the following year (Greenspun 1969), *American Revolution 2* offered viewers not only

more intimate footage of the protests at the convention as captured by the members of the Film Group collective but also a look at some of the wider issues that precipitated the violent clashes the previous summer. The film's first segment, "Battle of Chicago," supplemented *cinéma vérité* footage of marches led by activists from the Youth International Party and comedian and activist Dick Gregory with interviews featuring Chicagoans as diverse as a National Guard private, the Executive Director of the Chicago Convention Bureau, and assorted South Side community members, exploring a history of police brutality and racism in Chicago that many saw only for the first time through news coverage of the DNC (Alk 1969a).

However, the film's two other segments—"What We Have" and "Right On"—shifted focus and spent most of the eighty-minute runtime documenting the emerging collaboration between the Young Patriots and the Black Panthers (Alk 1969b; Alk 1969c), the unintentional result of a scheduling error that invited Panther member Bob Lee and the YPO to speak at the Church of the Three Crosses in Lincoln Park on the same night (Williams 2013, p. 132; Church of Three Crosses 2016). The footage shows the Patriots and Lee discussing not only the problems affected the city's Southern poor, but also the relation of poverty in Chicago to the war in Vietnam, to say nothing of the similarities between the experience of whites in Uptown and blacks in the South and West Sides. Lee at one point commented to a gathered crowd, "We're all niggas it seems like" (Alk 1969b). The footage captured by the Film Group documents this first meeting between the Young Patriots and the Illinois chapter of the Black Panther Party (Bruckner 1969), and thus the seeds of what would be announced by Deputy Chairman Fred Hampton as the Rainbow Coalition in the spring of 1969 (Diamond 2009, p. 305), with the Young Lords (a Puerto Rican street gang turned political organization based in Lincoln Park) eventually rounding out the alliance (Ogbar 2004 pp. 177-178). Rising Up Angry, a group of middle-class whites from Logan Square with ties to JOIN as well, also played a supporting role in the later years of the coalition (Williams 2013, pp. 150-51). While the Young Patriots would continue their focus on the Uptown area and the white Southerners in the city, most of the group's public appearances and mentions in the press would place them alongside at least one of these two larger organizations. By their own accounting, the Patriots constituted a diverse bunch of young people, including Italians, Latinos, and even some members of the neighborhood's significant American Indian community (Alk 1969b); nevertheless, the image of the hillbilly hood turned revolutionary would dominate outside perceptions of the group.

The influence of the Black Panther Party on the Young Patriots was apparent both in the development of their political ideology and in their methods of community outreach. The Black Panther Party represented a blend of "mainstream progressive politics" and confident black nationalism, wrapped in a rhetorical and sartorial package that many white Americans found frightening and dangerous (Lewis 2009, p. 219-220). The Illinois state chapter of the BPP, which was founded in 1968 largely by Fred Hampton and Bobby Rush (Ralph 1993, p. 230) and hewed to a more community-focused approach, represented one side in the growing schism in the national Black Panther network, as other members throughout the country sought to emphasize the need for armed struggle and immediate revolution as advocated for by co-founder Huey P. Newton (Joseph 2006, p. 252). Though Hampton had not originally been a gang member (as several Young Patriots were), early on he saw the potential for introducing revolutionary politics to local black gangs and other dissident groups like the Black

Disciples and Conservative Vice Lords, successfully bringing them into the Black Panther fold (Churchill 2001, p. 90) and leading to a “reinterpretation of Black Power by...charismatic gang leaders [that] became the gospel of the street” (Diamond 2009, p.272).

The Panthers distilled their beliefs and objectives into a ten-point platform and program, which they often printed in the back of their national newspaper. Calls for full employment, reparations for slavery and Jim Crow, fair housing, education, military service exemption, and an end to police brutality and mass incarceration represented an anti-racist and anti-capitalist vision for the future of black America. The last point summarized the previous nine, saying, “We want land, bread, housing, education, clothing, justice and peace. And as our major political objective, a United Nations-supervised plebiscite to be held throughout the black colony in which only Black colonial subjects will be allowed to participate, for the purpose of determining the will of black people as to their national destiny” (Black Panther Party 1969) Though their focus was often hyperlocal, the Black Panthers endorsed an international solidarity and recognition that the ultimate solution to black oppression would require control of the arms of state power.

Following in this mold, the Young Patriots developed their own eleven-point corollary, while the Young Lords had their own thirteen-point version (Ogbar 2004, p. 179). Like the Panthers, the Patriots declared their opposition to the Vietnam War, police oppression, and capitalist exploitation, as well as a desire for welfare measures like education, housing, medical care, and clothing, tacking on a critique of racist and ineffective unions. Arguably the most interesting and developed part of the Patriot platform came in the final two points, which addressed cultural nationalism and revolutionary solidarity. The former stated,

We believe that to fight only for the interests of your close cultural brothers & sisters is not in the interest of all the people, and in fact perpetuates racism. We understand that our struggle is a class struggle. All power to the poor and working people! Cultural nationalism does not solve the political problems of the oppressed peoples, but only perpetuates exploitations. Capitalism makes millions on love-beads, afro-shirts and cowboy hats. Cultural nationalism is a tool of capitalist exploitation (Young Patriots Organization 1970b).

The point on revolutionary solidarity furthered this concept, arguing that “[r]evolutionary solidarity with all oppressed peoples of this and all other countries and races defeats the divisions created by the narrow interests of cultural nationalism. We support all wars of national liberation and demand an immediate end to the war in Viet Nam. Monopoly capitalism and Corrupt Russian socialism are enemies of the interests of the oppressed peoples throughout the world” (Young Patriots Organization 1970b).

The Black Panther Party had earlier developed its own critique of cultural nationalism, having seen firsthand the zealous commercialization by businesses that “used the symbols of black consciousness to push tobacco and liquor and promote problematic gender roles in the black community” (Ogbar 2004, p. 120). But as with any large national organization with strong local chapters, many branches, such as the ones in New York and Chicago, tempered the West Coast BPP’s harsh opposition to cultural nationalism and allowed their members more

leeway in integrating black cultural products and practices with Marxist politics. Indeed, despite their stated opposition to the sentiment, the Young Patriots Organization's "celebration of their Appalachian and southern heritage" constituted a form of cultural nationalism in itself, turning the aspects of their identity that mainstream white Chicagoans derided into points of pride and glorifying a "poor southern white ethos that jettisoned the racism that typified the white South" (Ogbar 2004, p. 179). Symbols like cowboy hats and Confederate flags could seem like incongruent and even ironic symbols of anti-racism, but the Patriots saw them more as artifacts of a repressed culture and people in urban Chicago; their class-based politics told them that no matter what they dressed like or where they came from, they would always have more in common with the city's black population than with any middle- or upper-class whites that lived in Chicago's tonier neighborhoods.

Yet at the same time, in focusing so much on their cultural heritage as an organizing principle within their community, the Young Patriots tended to conflate Southernness and whiteness, to the exclusion of both poor white ethnics in Chicago and black Southerners who had moved to the city and shared many folkways with the Uptown residents. In an early draft of a funding proposal, the YPO stated that its members were "Southern whites, Spanish, Indian, and Italian" (Young Patriots Organization 1970e), and the group maintained strong relationships with the Uptown American Indian community and groups like the Chicago Indian Village, in addition to the other Rainbow Coalition members (Young Patriots Organization 1970a). However, the background of the group's leadership and the iconography they used all pointed to the primacy of white Southern identity as what set the Young Patriots apart from their counterparts in the Rainbow Coalition. The condescension that white ethnics in Chicago displayed toward the Southern migrants made them less than ideal political allies. Additionally, white ethnic opposition to the Civil Rights Movement and the ties of the city's Irish, Slavic, and Italian populations to the Democratic Party machine first organized by Mayor Anton Cermak in the 1930s and solidified under the rule of Richard J. Daley in the midcentury decades helped propel the Patriots towards a more interracial and class-based politics (Diamond 2017, pp. 52-53 & 193).

The geographic segregation that dominated Chicago and kept the Young Patriots and Black Panthers based in opposite ends of the city also meant that local, neighborhood organizing was the more efficient model. At the same time, instances like Fesperman's speech at the United Front Against Fascism Conference offer a look into a coalition where the Panthers and Patriots stressed both their class and cultural similarities. Even as 280,000 residents of the Chicago-Gary region identified as white Southerners in 1970, over 417,000 black Chicagoans also claimed Southern heritage (Gregory 2005, p. 354). But for the most part, in Young Patriot parlance, 'Southern' and 'white Southern' functioned almost equivalently in defining the group's identity and their place in the Uptown community. The class-conscious alliance that formed the bedrock of the Rainbow Coalition demonstrated that cultural differences could build intragroup solidarity without compromising intergroup cooperation, but the potential to strengthen those bonds through identification as not only as economic outsiders in Chicago but as geographic and cultural outsiders as well, represents a missed opportunity to build a more organizationally and socially integrated coalition.

The Panthers' acceptance of Southern and Puerto Rican cultural nationalism as practiced by the Young Patriots and the Young Lords also exhibits another ideological

influence of the BPP, namely their rather hands-off approach to dealing with the problems of non-black Chicagoans. Jakobi Williams contends that

Rainbow Coalition members understood that their coalition succeeded—despite failing to eradicate the deeply ingrained patterns of residential segregation—because of the organization’s advocacy for neighborhoods to control the political, economic, and social dimensions of their own communities. Appalachian whites in Uptown, middle-class progressive whites in Logan Square, and Puerto Ricans in Lincoln Park and Humboldt Park accepted the guidance of the ILBPP in the late 1960s primarily because the Panthers made it clear that the group did not want to lead or control the aforementioned communities. The ILBPP’s method was to train these communities how to be self-sufficient and develop empowerment; then the Panthers left the area for the residents to evolve on their own, understanding that the Panthers would return to assist the residents if and when the neighborhood needed their input and support. (Williams 2013, p. 198)

The Young Patriots Organization’s decision to focus so intently on their neighborhood and the problems afflicting Uptown residents not only represents the influence of Black Panther ideology and a recognition of the YPO’s limited resources but also reflects to a degree their history as a street gang. As a neighborhood organization, the Peace Makers, like gangs throughout the nation in the midcentury period, controlled a specific geographic territory and would have been responsible for protecting its members and their friends and families from incursions by rival groups from adjacent zones. These sorts of territorial allegiances were further strengthened not only by initial immigrant settlement patterns and racial segregation and redlining but also by the fact that many of the city’s European newcomers were Roman Catholic. In explaining the tenacity Polish, Italian, and Irish communities often exhibited in opposing efforts at integration, John T. McGreevy sees classic American racism operating alongside a quintessentially Catholic understanding of lived space. The establishment of ethnic churches serving specific cultural and language groups, when coupled with canon law that “stressed that the parish served all of the souls living within its boundaries” (McGreevy 1996, p. 11), resulted in a patchwork of highly segmented and largely self-contained “urban villages” that, while practicing the same creed, were often entirely and exclusively homogenous (McGreevy 1996, p. 28). Parishioners were fiercely loyal to their neighborhood and deeply suspicious of outsiders who might threaten the sacred space that extended beyond the church doors and encompassed the homes that many pastors commanded their parishioners to purchase within the pastoral boundaries (McGreevy 1996, p. 19). If the Eastern and Southern European-descended gangs with whom the Peace Makers skirmished had internalized such an intense connection to physical space, it stands to reason that non-Catholics like the Uptown Southerners would have adopted a similar commitment to maintaining their boundaries and protecting their territory.

Nonetheless, the influence of the Black Panthers on the Young Patriots remains clear in the parallels between their respective programs, and the footage of Bob Lee in *American Revolution 2* speaking with the YPO and their white Southern neighbors demonstrates that the BPP helped give the Uptown residents a language through which to articulate their grievances and an ideological lens through which to analyze their

structural disadvantages. The Young Patriots maintained a strong commitment to anti-racism and interracial coalitional politics, but for the most part, their focus remained inward, with priority given to the problems facing their friends, families, and neighbors in Uptown.

### **“Medical Care by the People for the People”**

The most lasting outward expression of the Black Panther Party’s influence on the Young Patriots came in the YPO’s decision to offer social services directly to their community, as exemplified by the free Uptown health clinic that became the Patriots’ primary focus during the group’s short lifespan. The Black Panthers in Chicago as well as nationwide made free breakfast programs and other community services a crucial part of their outreach to the black communities in those cities, a way to demonstrate their benefit to black society that also provided the opportunity to promote more radical politics than many would have endorsed otherwise (Churchill 2001, p. 87). Recognizing the needs of the Uptown community, the Young Patriots quickly organized to provide medical services and sought a space to house a local clinic. Related groups like the Young Lords and Rising Up Angry also mirrored much of the social outreach on the Black Panther Party’s tactics, offering their own clinics and food programs (Rising Up Angry 1970); Rising Up Angry even adopted the Panthers’ strategy of offering coordinated prison visits, giving activists and community members alike the opportunity to maintain ties with the incarcerated throughout the state of Illinois (Rising Up Angry 1971).

The Patriot clinic began humbly enough, opening its doors in October of 1969 and offering medical and dental service to around 150 during the next couple of months (Chicago Tribune 1970). However, by the end of December, the clinic had been forced to close its location at 1140 Sunnyside Avenue. The Young Patriots blamed the closing squarely on the continued police harassment they had suffered during the clinic’s first few months, harassment that may have intimidated and scared away clients or support staff who were not as fully committed to the Patriots’ cause (Cromie 1969). The legal reasoning for the closure came in the form of a noise complaint lodged against the group by other tenants in the building they were using as the clinic space on weekends; while the landlord alleged that he had no problem with the Patriots subletting the space for the clinic, the noise complaints compelled him to take action against them (Chicago Tribune 1970).

As few members of the Young Patriots or Black Panthers had proper medical training, the two groups relied on outside help and volunteers to staff their clinics, a fraught relationship between poor radicals and middle-class professionals. Upon the closing of the original YPO clinic, volunteer doctor Bruce Douglas, DDS made sure to clarify to both police and reporters that he “had no connection with the Young Patriots’ political views, only with the medical center,” but confirmed that he would continue to help even after the closing (Cromie 1969). Similarly, Dr. Richard Gardiner, who worked at the BPP’s Spurgeon “Jake” Winters Free Peoples Medical Clinic, admitted that he “profess[ed] some sympathy for the Black Panther policy but maintain[ed] that he [was] interested in the clinic only as a medical professional” (Shaffer 1970).

The clinic model that the YPO borrowed from the Panthers saw the Young Patriots as “liaisons between the community people and the medical personnel,” with each



patient assigned to both a specific medical professional and a patient advocate from among the Patriot ranks (Young Patriots Organization 1970d). The advocate would follow up with home visits and accompany patients to future appointments, a “comprehensive medical service” alternative to what Black Panther member Ralph Bostick saw as the “assembly-line” too many Uptown whites and South and West Side blacks were used to (Shaffer 1970). The YPO maintained that their advocates did not preach their philosophy to Uptown patients. Director of Health Marcelle Warden stated, “There isn’t any politicking by us. We let the pigs and the other side do all the politicking because that keeps us common people, the poor people together” (Shaffer 1970). However, not everyone saw this sort of lower-class solidarity as an inherently apolitical project. *Chicago Tribune* columnist Terri Schultz’s scathing profile of the health care effort in early 1970 described the clinic as a “dumping ground for the poor, an incubator for the angry,” plastered with posters espousing anti-establishment clichés and allegedly long ago abandoned by the Young Patriots after they had gotten “their free publicity and made their point” (Schultz 1970).

Undeterred by bad press and legal intimidation, the Young Patriots set about relocating their clinic, this time at 4408 Sheridan Road. Despite his earlier assurances of support for the clinic, Dr. Douglas declined to return once the center reopened, and YPO chief of staff Bobby McGinnis noted that many other former volunteers declined to return to the clinic after the initial closure (Chicago Tribune 1970). Trouble continued, as the city’s Board of Health now came after the clinic, claiming that because they lacked a license, the Young Patriots were operating illegally and could potentially use the center to “treat gunshot wounds, hand out drugs irresponsibly, perform abortions or give shots with unsterile needles” (Kaminsky 1970a). The Patriots saw a license application as the first step to ceding local control of their facility to nosey government bureaucrats and potentially compromising the privacy of the thousand or so Uptown residents who had visited the service since its reopening. Additionally, given that the Board of Health’s own nearby clinic closed its doors on Saturdays, the YPO health center provided a safe, confidential, and convenient location for Uptown’s poor to deal with medical conditions that may otherwise have gone untreated (Kaminsky 1970a).

While fighting for the continued necessity of their own clinic, the Young Patriots also sought to pressure the Board to adjust the operations of their health center, even as they contended that efforts to shut down the office at 4408 Sheridan Road were motivated by fear of the group’s radical politics and jealousy of their supposedly excellent care (Kaminsky 1970a). Various YPO members, including head of the health service project Katherine Komatsu, faced arrest for protesting the limited hours and inadequate services of the government clinic, eventually winning some major concessions from the Board of Health (Mount 1970). By the end of the year, the Young Patriots clinic largely rebounded from its earlier setbacks, even as Red Squad harassment continued and newspapers repeatedly referred to the organization as a gang. The YPO alleged that the police repeatedly seized prescribed medicines from patients leaving the clinic and arrested them for possession of dangerous narcotics, and officers supposedly broke into meetings between Young Patriots and medical professionals, arresting YPO members for trespassing in their own buildings or for allegedly assaulting their comrades (Young Patriots Organization 1970c). A surprise decision on July 10 in the legal battle with the Board of Health allowed the clinic to maintain operations without the need for a license, since the “ordinance covering dispensaries

was so vague as to be unenforceable,” and estimates now placed the number of people treated at close to two thousand by November (Kaminsky 1970b).

The clinics were set up with the express purpose of treating the medical problems that the Young Patriots saw afflicting their families, friends, and neighbors, mirroring their ideological commitment to a form of interracial solidarity that saw dealing with intraracial issues as the first priority. Contact information for the YPO Health Center and others—such as the Benito Juarez Community Health Center and the Black Panthers’ Spurgeon “Jake” Winters Free Peoples Medical Clinic—appeared regularly in the *Chicago Seed*, an alternative newspaper that included everything from coverage of the Vietnam War to recurring reports on drug varieties and prices available in the city. These listings were often accompanied by the caveat that

[t]hese clinics are set up primarily to serve the community in which they operate. All of them are understaffed, overworked and broke. If you haven’t got any money for a doctor, then call the clinic nearest to you for information. But if you CAN afford a doctor, then don’t go to a clinic just because you want something for free. These centers are run to provide decent medical care for people who might not otherwise even SEE a doctor. Don’t fuck them up, nobody needs freeloaders.” (Chicago Seed 1971)

The free clinic eventually eclipsed the organization’s other work and in the minds of many in the Chicago left became metonymic of the Young Patriots in general. The *Chicago Seed* placed the Young Patriots Uptown Health Service at 4403 Sheridan Road under the heading for health organizations, clinics, and service in its “Good Numbers” section (Chicago Seed 1972b) or in the “Free City Directory” (Chicago Seed 1971), while groups like the Black Panthers and Rising Up Angry—both of whom offered similar services—were listed under the “Organizations” heading, with succinct accounts of their breakfast programs, newsletters, and other community outreach and political education efforts (Chicago Seed 1971). News about the Young Patriots in Chicago began to fizzle out in 1971, but well into the next year their health clinic was listed in the *Seed* as still “operated by the Young Patriots Organization in Uptown for the people of Uptown” on Mondays, Tuesdays, and Thursdays for regular needs and with special hours on Saturdays for children only (Chicago Seed 1972a). In a June 1972 piece advocating for periodic check-ups as a way to stem the spread of sexually transmitted diseases in the black community, the *Chicago Defender* listed the Young Patriots clinic, along with the Juarez and Winters centers, as resources for free testing (Shakespeare 1972). However, the tenuous state of the clinic—and the YPO as a whole—was apparent in the near-weekly reminder that the clinic “needs money to operate—supplies and drugs cost \$\$\$” (Chicago Seed 1972a).

## Lowering the Battle Flag

In the end, the Young Patriots succumbed to the same ailments that plagued many of the 1960s leftist groups—police repression and ideological and geographic splintering. Charismatic leader William “Preacherman” Fesperman decamped to New York City during the middle of 1969, and a new branch, also known as the Patriot Party, made

headlines a few months later, supporting local black activists and disrupting a meeting of the Regional Plan Association (New York Times 1969). Fesperman, along with eleven other New York-based Patriots, eventually faced arrest in February 1970 when detectives observed them unloading weapons from a car; seized literature identified the branch's commitment to self-defense by "any means necessary," echoing their allies the Black Panthers (Phillips 1970) and reflecting the new offshoot Patriot Party's continued commitment to a Rainbow Coalition approach to the revolution (Robinson 1970, p. 47). Franchises of the Young Patriots appeared soon after in several other cities, but in most cases lacked the power to maintain their initial momentum or avoid becoming subsumed into other radical organizations (Sonnie and Tracy 2011, pp. 88-9).

The Young Patriots also suffered from the dissipation and dispersal of their support network in the Windy City. The US Senate internal security subcommittee released testimony in late 1970 that charged the North Side Cooperative Ministry (NSCM)—a consortium of twenty-six churches in the Lakeview and Lincoln Park areas—with funding the Young Patriots and the Young Lords, painting their activities as violent and revolutionary methods threatening the very existence of the nation (Freeburg 1970). In his own press conference in the early days of 1971, Rev. James Reed of the NSCM admitted supporting the free breakfast programs and legal defense funds operated by the YPO and their allies, but countered that the Ministry had only given two to three thousand dollars in monetary support. Despite this and Reed's statement that his group had "never taught revolution and oppose[d] violence," the redbaiting (media coverage of the Senate hearings also consistently painted the YPO and YLO as "street gangs") was enough to chill outside support for community uplift services run by the Young Patriots and other leftist groups (Chicago Tribune 1971).

Likewise, Uptown's most vocal activist, Chuck Geary, left the city after seventeen years in early 1971 in order to help build a network for his Project Promised Land endeavor and fight for federal job-hunting closer to his Appalachian homeland, mirroring the expansion of the Patriot Party network on a multi-state basis (Wiedrich 1971). By 1973, he was asking former political opponents for employment references to become a security guard for the Burns Detective Agency in Louisville, Kentucky, an ironic and tragic reversal of a career spent fighting the established order on behalf of those in poverty (Wiedrich 1973).

The 1969 murder of Black Panther leaders Fred Hampton and Mark Clark by Chicago Police officers assigned to the Cook County State's Attorney's Office understandably dealt a major blow to the organizational capabilities of the YPO and the Young Lords, given their smaller memberships and lower national profiles. The uproar over the killings and subsequent investigations into the city's police department demonstrated that the "Red Squad resources and agenda were similar to those of the FBI's COINTELPRO," as officers were "able to infiltrate the BPP not only in Chicago but also in California via undercover policemen and confidential informers—some of whom were officer's wives" (Williams 2013, p. 189). The public also learned that the "media, more specifically journalists and editors at the *Chicago Tribune*, collaborated with the Red Squad as a propaganda tool to sensationalize, tarnish the reputation and image of, and ultimately destroy the ILBPP" (Williams 2013, p. 189). The Illinois chapter continued much of its work after Hampton's death, and the Black Panther Party's legacy extended throughout the country, with government-administered school nutrition programs developing as a direct response to Panther efforts. Similarly, the

eventual fall of the Daley machine and the rise of interracial Democratic politics in Chicago had roots in the original Rainbow Coalition that Hampton as Deputy Chairman and Lee as field secretary and chief community organizer had orchestrated with the Young Lords and Young Patriots (Williams 2013, p. 194).

Nevertheless, the YPO was largely defunct by 1973 (Tracy 2010, p. 220). Though the group made their way into newsprint fairly soon after their incorporation in 1968 and received extensive coverage during the heyday of the Uptown clinic, the drop-off in media attention suggests that even if the group was still engaged in community outreach, their ability to effect change was diminished. Uptown slowly lost its Appalachian identity as more and more immigrants from elsewhere—especially Southeast Asia and Mexico—moved into the neighborhood and white Southerners moved back home or into other parts of the city. Geary's plan for Hank Williams Village also never materialized, and the construction of Harry S. Truman College in the neighborhood saw the destruction of hundreds of apartment buildings, drastically changing the face of a neighborhood where in 1960, eighty percent of the population had been born in the South (Guy 2007, pp. 118-19). For all the promise and energy the Young Patriots expressed at their founding, the group lasted barely five years, and the Uptown of twenty-first century Chicago is a far cry from the hillbilly slums the YPO sought to organize and remake into an empowered and economically uplifted exclave of the South in the heart of the industrial urban North.

## Conclusion

The coalition the Young Patriots developed with the Black Panthers and the Young Lords seems in many ways to be a *sui generis* product of the social and political upheaval that characterized the late 1960s in American political and cultural life, a brief glimmer of interracial hope snuffed out by internal disagreement, police intimidation that diminished the support BPP and YLO could afford to give the YPO, urban renewal, and a simple lack of material resources. Yet despite the enduring legacies of chattel slavery and Jim Crow, the history of the Southern United States is littered with examples of interracial cooperation even after the downfall of Reconstruction, such as the Independent and Greenback parties which “flourished in parts of the Southern upcountry in the late 1870s and early 1880s [and] received substantial black support,” and the integrated Populist alliance that took control of North Carolina in the last decade of the nineteenth century (Foner 1989, p. 592). Likewise, the upland region to which many Young Patriots and Uptown Southerners traced their roots were hotbeds of Unionist support and resistance to the Confederacy during the Civil War (Foner 1989, pp. 13-14), even if their claim that North and South alike had fostered exploitative political, social, and economic regimes throughout United States history were overly simplistic (Sonnie and Tracy 2011, p. 75).

But by focusing so much on contemporary material conditions as an obvious sign that poor blacks and poor whites share a common cause, the Young Patriots failed to reckon with the long history of anti-black racism in the United States or recognize their own part in the history. This emphasis on current and future solidarity and disregard of past conflict as a way to build an interracial alliance was not unique to the Young Patriots and the Rainbow Coalition. In describing the conditions necessary to unite

agricultural and industrial workers in Hawai‘i during the 1940s, Moon-Kie Jung emphasizes the active suppression of memories of historical racial animosity among the archipelago’s Filipino, Japanese, and Portuguese laborers in a process of “erasing racial lines” (Jung 2006, p. 191). Organizers “wove together the fate of all non-haole [non-Anglo American] workers into a single story” so that “each worker could identify with the *entire* history of labor in Hawai‘i rather than a particular strand of it,” creating a historically inaccurate ideology that Jung credits with allowing the distinct groups to cooperate effectively (Jung 2006, p. 163). In their 11-point program, the Young Patriots explicitly denounced racism in the eighth section of the platform, stating, “Racism is a tool of capitalism to make people fight among themselves, instead of fighting together for their freedom. Divisions of race and sex serve the interests of the rich, ruling class and not of the people” (Young Patriots Organization 1970b).

Any fair analysis of the Young Patriots would conclude that they were not ahistorical thinkers. New York Patriot Party members in 1970 demonstrated a desire to “to remind ‘their people’ of America’s radical tradition, especially in the South: the mountain counties that opposed slavery and sent troops to the Union army, for example” and expressed familiarity with works such as W. E. B. Du Bois’s *Black Reconstruction in America* and *Tom Watson: Agrarian Rebel*, C. Vann Woodward’s biography of the Populist leader (Joye 1970). Yet their use of the Confederate flag as a primary symbol emphasized too strongly the popular and ahistorical connotations of the “rebel” without interrogating the group’s complicity in the existence of a white supremacist state, even as the YPO demonstrated a recognition that structures shaping contemporary inequalities in the 1960s and 1970s had deep historical roots. Nevertheless, the dire circumstances facing many poor Southern whites in Uptown helps explain any short-term focus the YPO may have had during their brief existence, as issues of unemployment and inadequate health and housing resources skewed their agenda towards immediate alleviation rather than intensive political reeducation.

As a result, the Young Patriots could be frustratingly vague in explicating how their social outreach programs tied into a larger struggle against a racist, capitalist carceral state. Calls for “Red Power to Sittin’ Bull, to Geronimo, Kathy Riteger in Uptown...[Y]ellow [P]ower to Ho Chi Minh and Mao and the National Liberation Front...Brown Power to Fidel and Che and the Young Lords and La Raza and Tijerina...Black Power to the Black Panther Party...[W]hite [P]ower to the Young Patriots and all other white revolutionaries” indicate that the Young Patriots clearly saw themselves as one piece in a larger interracial struggle (Fesperman 1969). Yet unlike many other prior instances of inter-racialism, the Rainbow Coalition and its broader affiliates were highly political without being strongly electoral or based in a labor movement. The high unemployment rates afflicting both Uptown in particular and Chicago as a whole, the relative youth of many coalition members, and their commitment to a truly revolutionary platform undoubtedly played a large part in pushing the Young Patriots and their allies away from these more traditional venues for organizing across racial lines. Understandably, this disconnect from many of the traditional sites of leftist organizing in the United States—as well as the efforts of Chicago’s well-funded and zealous police department and Red Squad to intimidate and repress the YPO’s stronger coalition partners—left the Young Patriots with a tenuous network of liberal allies who only supported the organization’s community service projects—such as the free health clinic and breakfast programs—and were quick to disavow the YPO when

pressured by outside forces. Their use of protests and boycotts to demand more accountable and effective governance from elected officials in agencies like the Board of Health or the Model Cities Commission garnered plenty of media coverage and local support while delaying several urban renewal measures, but the Uptown community was a small and electorally weak base from which to challenge the city's entrenched political machine.

However, the fact that the most visible or enduring legacies of the Young Patriots might be mistaken for the work of a particularly liberal neighborhood coalition or church group does not necessarily invalidate their importance as an ardently anti-racist and anti-capitalist organization. The Vietnam War era spanning the decade between 1965 and 1975 is a graveyard of countless short-lived and hyper-localized leftist and countercultural groups that, in aggregate, loom large in the collective memory but, individually, left few meaningful effects. For all their failures and flaws, the Young Patriots surpass this fate, and not merely by being a junior partner to the much more powerful and long-lived Black Panther Party and its militant Illinois Chapter. Their commitment to interracial politics came from a Marxist analysis of their status as impoverished and marginalized migrants in Chicago and drew from a history of interracial alliances in both North and South that many then and now ignore or simply have never learned. While their roots were firmly planted in the mountain and upland communities of Kentucky, North Carolina, Tennessee, Georgia, and other parts of the South, the Young Patriots developed a community activist strategy that drew from and adapted to a quintessentially Chicago brand of political and social organization. Their origins as a local street gang, along with their non-competitive coalition with the Black Panthers and the Young Lords, allowed them to effectively focus on the problems closest to home without having to buy into the city's corrupt machine politics, even if their narrow focus prevented a more organizationally integrated—and potentially more resilient—style of community activism. Though the YPO dissolved soon after its founding, the sheer number of people offered free medical care and food through their outreach programs would leave a lasting—if not totally visible—impact on the Uptown community for years to come.

## References

- Abbot, A. (1990). *Department and discipline: Chicago sociology at one hundred*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Alk, H. (Director). (1969a). *American Revolution 2: battle of Chicago (part 1)* [Motion picture].
- Alk, H. (Director). (1969b). *American Revolution 2: what we have (part 2)* [Motion picture].
- Alk, H. (Director). (1969c). *American Revolution 2: right on (part 3)* [Motion picture].
- Backes, C. (1968a, September 22). Uptown: the promised land. *Chicago Tribune*, pp. F24–F33.
- Backes, C. (1968b, September 29). Poor people's power in Uptown. *Chicago Tribune*, pp. I46–I56.
- Berry, C. (2000). Southern white migration to the Midwest, an overview. In P. J. Obermiller, T. E. Wagner, & E. B. Tucker (Eds.), *Appalachian odyssey: historical perspectives on the Great Migration* (pp. 3–26). Westport: Praeger.
- Black Panther Party. (1969, August 9). Black Panther Party platform and program: what we want, what we believe. *The Black Panther*, p. 26.
- Browning, N. L. (1957a, March 3). Girl reporter visits jungles of the hillbillies. *Chicago Tribune*, pp. 1–9.
- Browning, N. L. (1957b, March 10). Charges upset feudin' brand of hillbillies. *Chicago Tribune*, pp. 1–2.
- Browning, N. L. (1957c, March 14). A lot of solid citizens from South resent 'hillbilly' tag. *Chicago Tribune*, p. 21.

- Browning, N. L. (1957d, March 16). Is “hillbilly” fighting word or a kind one?. *Chicago Tribune*, p. 14.
- Bruckner, D. J. R. (1969, June 15). “American Revolution” causes stir. *Los Angeles Times*, pp. O26–O27.
- Casady, J. (1968, May 19). Uptown poor stage “march.” *Chicago Tribune*, pp. A1–A8.
- Chicago Commission on Race Relations. (1922). *The Negro in Chicago: A Study of Race Relations and a Race Riot*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Chicago Seed. (1971). Free City Directory. *Chicago Seed*, 7(1), 12–13.
- Chicago Seed. (1972a). Good 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9. *Chicago Seed*, 8(7), 23.
- Chicago Seed. (1972b). Good numbers. *Chicago Seed*, 8(9), 19.
- Chicago Tribune. (1968, April 25). New job center opens. *Chicago Tribune*, p. N8.
- Chicago Tribune. (1970, January 15). Evicted group reopens free medical center. *Chicago Tribune*, p. N2.
- Chicago Tribune. (1971, January 1). North side ministry admits some aid went to street gangs. *Chicago Tribune*, p. 8.
- Church of Three Crosses. (2016). Celebrating Our Heritage: A Brief History of Church of the Three Crosses. *Church of Three Crosses*. Retrieved March 11, 2018 (<http://www.churchofthethreecrosses.org/pdfs/Celebrating-Our-Heritage-50th.pdf>).
- Churchill, W. (2001). “To disrupt, discredit and destroy”: the FBI’s secret war against the Black Panther Party. In K. Cleaver & G. Katsiaficas (Eds.), *Liberation, Imagination, and the Black Panther Party: A New Look at the Panthers and Their Legacy* (pp. 78–117). New York: Routledge.
- Cromie, B. (1969, December 31). Why did the free clinic close?. *Chicago Tribune*, p. 16.
- Dalkoff, M. (1970, February 24). “Revolution 2” comes this week. *Daily Illini*, p. 10.
- Deyling, R. J. (1949). *Hillbillies in Steelville: a study of participation in community life* (Unpublished master thesis). University of Chicago.
- Diamond, A. J. (2009). *Mean streets: Chicago youths and the everyday struggle for empowerment in the multiracial city, 1908-1969*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Diamond, A. J. (2017). *Chicago on the make: power and inequality in a modern city*. Oakland: University of California Press.
- Farber, N. (1997). Charles S. Johnson’s The Negro in Chicago. In K. Plummer (Ed.), *The Chicago School: critical assessments, vol. III: substantive concerns – race, crime and the city* (pp. 209–220). New York: Routledge.
- Fesperman, W. (1969, July 26). Young Patriots at UFAF conference. *The Black Panther*, p. 8.
- Fesperman, W. (2008, August 15). Remembering the 1968 Democratic Convention. *Salisbury Post*. Retrieved July 23, 2018 (<https://www.salisburypost.com/2008/08/15/bill-fesperman-remembering-the-1968-democratic-convention/>).
- Fink, J. (1968, September 22). “Trip into another generation.” *Chicago Tribune*, p. F3.
- Flaherty, R. (1969, December 16). Food for hungry scarce. *Uptown News*, pp. 1–2.
- Flaherty, R. (1972, March 5). First step for city college: education aimed at poor. *Sunday Star*, p. 1.
- Foner, E. (1989). *Reconstruction: America’s unfinished revolution, 1863-1877*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Freeburg, R. (1970, December 30). Church “influence” on new left told. *Chicago Tribune*, p. 6.
- Gaber, A. (1968, October 9). Hank Williams ‘Lives’ in Uptown. *Uptown News*, p. 4.
- Greenspun, R. (1969, October 21). The screen: “American Revolution 2,” story of Chicago ’68. *New York Times*, p. 40.
- Gregory, J. N. (2005). *The southern diaspora: how the great migrations of black and white southerners transformed America*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Guy, R. (2000). A common ground: urban adaptation and Appalachian unity. In P. J. Obermiller, T. E. Wagner, & E. B. Tucker (Eds.), *Appalachian Odyssey: Historical Perspectives on the Great Migration* (pp. 49–66). Westport: Praeger.
- Guy, R. (2007). *From diversity to unity: southern and Appalachian migrants in Uptown Chicago, 1950-1970*. New York: Lexington Books.
- Guy, R. (2016). *When architecture meets activism: the transformative experience of Hank Williams Village in the Windy City*. New York: Lexington Books.
- Harwood, E. (1966). *Work and community among urban newcomers: a study of the social and economic adaptation of southern migrants in Chicago* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Chicago.
- JOIN Community Union. (1965). *JOIN challenges Chicago’s war on poverty*. Uptown Chicago Commission Papers, 1945-1986 (Mss Lot U/43/9). Chicago: Chicago History Museum Research Center.
- Joseph, P. E. (2006). *Waiting ‘til the midnight hour: a narrative history of black power in America*. New York: Henry Holt & Company.
- Joye, B. (1970, March 3). Young Patriots. *The Great Speckled Bird*, pp. 5–6.
- Jung, M. (2006). *Reworking race: the making of Hawaii’s interracial labor movement*. New York: Columbia University Press.

- Kaminsky, M. (1970a, May 19). Patriots defy attempt to close health center. *Uptown News*, pp. 1–2.
- Kaminsky, M. (1970b, November 3). Patriots' health center treats 1,700 after a year. *Ravenswood Lincolnite*, p. 2.
- Killian, L. M. (1953). The adjustment of southern white migrants to northern urban norms. *Social Forces*, 32(1), 66–69.
- Lewis, A. B. (2009). *The shadows of youth: the remarkable journey of the civil rights generation*. New York: Hill & Wang.
- McGreevy, J. T. (1996). *Parish boundaries: the Catholic encounter with race in the twentieth-century urban north*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- McLaughlin, J. (1969, February 23). Uptown model cities plan approved. *Chicago Tribune*, p. N5.
- Mount, C. (1970, November 7). 41 are arrested in protest of Uptown clinic's 5-day week. *Chicago Tribune*, p. 1.
- National Community Union. (1968a). *Provisional list*. Peggy Terry Papers, 1937-2004 (Mss 1055/6/5). Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society.
- National Community Union. (1968b). *Stand Up for America*. Peggy Terry Papers, 1937-2004 (Mss 1055/6/5). Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society.
- National Organizing Committee. (1967). *Program of the National Organizing Committee*. Peggy Terry Papers, 1937-2004 (Mss 1055/6/5). Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society.
- New Republic. (1965). The apparatchik. *The New Republic*, 15(4 & 5), 7.
- New York Times. (1969, November 19). 60 chanting militants break up luncheon of 1,500 on master plan. *New York Times*, pp. 1–43.
- Ogbar, J. O. G. (2004). *Black power: radical politics and African American identity*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Peterson, R. A. (1997). *Creating country music: fabricating authenticity*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Phillips, M. (1970, February 23). 12 are arrested in weapons raid. *New York Times*, p. 1.
- Ralph, J. R., Jr. (1993). *Northern protest: Martin Luther King, Jr., Chicago, and the civil rights movement*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Rising Up Angry. (1970). Young Lords Organization. *Rising Up Angry*, 2(2), 16.
- Rising Up Angry. (1971). Angry programs to stop the pig and help the people. *Rising Up Angry*, 2(7), 23.
- Robinson, D. (1970, February 24). Militants protest at arraignment of 12 seized in weapons raid. *New York Times*, p. 47.
- Schloss, B. (1957). *The Uptown community area and the southern white in-migrant*. Chicago: Chicago Commission of Human Relations.
- Schultz, T. (1970, January 7). Our Town. *Chicago Tribune*.
- Shaffer, T. (1970, March 7-8). The story of 2 storefront health clinics. *Chicago Daily News*.
- Shakespeare, R. (1972, June 3). Periodic check-ups help fight v.d. *Chicago Defender*, p. 10.
- Slaughter, T. (1969). Coalition attacks training of "pigs." *The American University Eagle*, p. 3.
- Sonnie, A., & Tracy, J. (2011). *Hillbilly nationalists, urban race rebels, and black power: community organizing in radical times*. Brooklyn: Melville House.
- Switzer, E. (1958, February 6). [Letter to Albert N. Votaw]. Uptown Chicago Commission Papers, 1945-1986 (Mss Lot U/49/1). Chicago: Chicago History Museum Research Center.
- Thomas, W. I., & Znaniecki, F. (1927). *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* (Vol. 1). New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Tracy, J. (2010). Rising Up: poor, white, and angry in the new left. In D. Berger (Ed.), *The hidden 1970s: histories of radicalism* (pp. 214–230). New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.
- Tracy, J. (2016). "Revolutionary hillbilly: an interview with Hy Thurman of the Young Patriots Organization." *James Tracy: writings on cities, hidden histories & social movements*. Retrieved July 3, 2018 (<https://jamestracybooks.org/2016/01/28/revolutionary-hillbilly-an-interview-with-hy-thurman-of-the-young-patriots-organization>).
- Votaw, A. N. (1958a). The hillbillies invade Chicago. *Harper's*, 216, 64–67.
- Votaw, A. N. (1958b, October 24). [Letter to Kay Richards]. Uptown Chicago Commission Papers, 1945-1986 (Mss Lot U/49/1). Chicago: Chicago History Museum Research Center.
- Wiedrich, B. (1971, May 31). "Tower Ticker." *Chicago Tribune*, p. 14.
- Wiedrich, B. (1973, March 1). "Tower Ticker." *Chicago Tribune*, p. 14.
- Williams, J. (2013). *From the bullet to the ballot: the Illinois chapter of the Black Panther Party and racial coalition politics in Chicago*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Young Patriots Organization. (1970a). "Chicago Indian Village leads the way! Poor people seize apartment building!" Peggy Terry Papers, 1937-2004 (Mss 1055/6/15). Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society.



- Young Patriots Organization. (1970b). *11 point program of the Young Patriots Organization*. Peggy Terry Papers, 1937-2004 (Mss 1055/6/15). Madison, WI: Wisconsin Historical Society.
- Young Patriots Organization. (1970c). *Medical care by the people for the people*. Social Action Vertical File, c. 1960-1980 (Mss 577/59). Madison, WI: Wisconsin Historical Society.
- Young Patriots Organization. (1970d). *The Young Patriots Organization Medical Service*. Peggy Terry Papers, 1937-2004 (Mss 1055/6/12). Madison, WI: Wisconsin Historical Society.
- Young Patriots Organization. (1970e). *Young Patriots Organization*. Peggy Terry Papers, 1937-2004 (Mss 1055/6/11). Madison, WI: Wisconsin Historical Society.
- Youngblood, D. (1968a, March 18). Youngblood on organizing. *The Rag*, pp. 6-7
- Youngblood, Doug. (1968b). *You got the right string but the wrong yo-yo, Georgie baby*. Peggy Terry Papers, 1937-2004 (Mss 1055/6/11). Madison, WI: Wisconsin Historical Society.

**Publisher's Note** Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

Journal of African American Studies is a copyright of Springer, 2019. All Rights Reserved.